

THE EFFECTS OF TRADITIONAL GENDER NORMS ON THE FATE OF GIRLS'  
EDUCATION IN TAJIKISTAN

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**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tajikistan is the only post-Soviet republic that went through a civil war after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which negatively impacted all aspects of the country as well as education, particularly girls' education. The limitations on Tajik girls' education are due to economics and gender norms that are critical factors. This paper highlights the girls' education condition in the period from 1995 to 2019, which is the post-war period, in the capital city, Dushanbe, and rural areas of the country. The review answered why girls most likely choose family life (marriage and children) rather than pursuing higher education in their life. In order to study this issue, the study used primary data. This paper studied the traditional culture (gender norms) factor as a barrier to keep girls out of school while providing the context of the social and occurred political changes during the post-war to the present time.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my parents who supported me remotely and because they are in my life and who taught me to be challenge resistant when needed. It is also dedicated to my son who showed me to be a better graduate student and mom. I received encouragement from him that give me the power to accomplish the task, that seemed impossible in the beginning.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the powerful tools for ending gender discrimination in all the countries of the world. The problem of educating girls continues to be a problem in many developing countries. The developing countries are struggling to solve this (Ancess, 2003; Bloom et. al., 2007; Herz, 2004; Maton, 2008; Wiersch, 2014). As Herz (2004) states “education improves the women’s earning capacity roughly as it does men’s” (Herz, 2004, pp. 1910-1911). In addition, I would like to mention the famous saying: “If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation” (Kadam, 2012, pp. 1).

One of the main factors which affects females in all cultures is gender norms. Gender norms interpret appropriate behavior for both males and females and are socially constructed. The effects of changing gender norms have been documented in Nepal, Vietnam, and Ethiopia in relation to girl’s education and marriage age. Studies show that in these countries the girls are more likely to gain education and the age for marriage is increasing, which is a positive indicator of the social norms (Overseas Development Institute, 2014).

Similarly, gender norms in Tajikistan are very strong in relation to the female role in family life of society instead of work or career, which hinders many females from obtaining education. Initially, gender inequality is the ideology that the girls are responsible for the house chores and nurturing. Girls aged 13-15 spend most of their time on housework because the social norms require the girls to undertake all the housework such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, caring, which results in less time for studies or schoolwork (European Training Foundation, 2011).

Introducing the importance of obedience as a cultural foundation: Female obedient and male constraint behavior causes tension around the female’s education gain or job desire (Falkingham, 2000). The kind of behavior is closely connected to their gender identities where

the parents, in order to increase the chances of marriage of their daughters, deprive them from getting education.

The civil war and collapse of the Soviet Union wrecked the economy of Tajikistan, leaving many people unemployed. For those females that do get some level of education, the level of employment among females was and is low in Tajikistan. There is a strong prejudice against female employment makes the females less involved in employment. To some people, it is considered a sin to work outside of home. The people who think that working outside is a sin for females, consider that this kind of belief is according to Islam. However, Islam gives freedom to female's employment or education (Harris, 2006).

Because marriage and family life are the most important role for females, the historical trend continues today where girls marry around 18 years of age, which coincides with the completion of secondary education (high school). Young married couples live with the husband's parents and the women become integrated into a multi-generational household where younger females are expected to do much of the caregiving work for the household. Thus, women's employment and further education depends on the husband family. Even if a woman finishes more education and marries later, may still be prevented from entering employment by their husband or husband's family (Harris, 2006). Among Tajiks, it is believed that the husband is responsible for supporting their wife and family after marriage and the wives have to be housewives and child bearers, this way the women are also prevented from meeting other men. According to the ideology, the woman who enters employment and works outside the home shows that her husband failed to perform his responsibility (Harris, 2004). However even if a husband does not comply with his masculine duties of providing for the household, the wife must

still comply her marital duties. This kind of situation makes the female be obedient to the male of the family, mostly to husbands no matter what he does (Harris, 2006).

Traditionally, the daughter-in-law's (kelin) responsibility is childbearing and providing domestic services; however, if the mother-in-law favors her daughter-in-law's education or employment, then she facilitates the process (Harris, 2006). The mother-in-law's role is to decide if her kelin either enters employment or not. If the kelin of the family is educated, then she might show a desire to work outside of the home, which not all mothers-in-law would like. This may serve as a reason why families marry their sons to uneducated girls because uneducated girls show little or no desire to work outside of home and are therefore more helpful at home to ease the work of the mother-in-law. The kelin who has an education and job outside of the home still has to do all the domestic tasks that the kelin of the family is supposed to perform. This adds more responsibility to this kind of kelin and leaves less time for the domestic tasks than the traditional kelins who do not work outside of home. Another reason for the in-laws not supporting an advanced education or job is that the job of the kelin outside of home is perceived as beneficial for their kelin only. Instead, in-laws consider they are making favor by letting the kelin of the family enter employment, and the kelin has to be thankful that they are allowing her to continue her job (Harris, 2006).

Like education and employment, mobility is tightly constrained through cultural gender norms. Historically, women have been considered nurturers at home for family members, and she was not allowed to enter the workforce outside of home or obtain education to enter the workforce. More recently, due to economic difficulties more females are made to enter the workforce. Nevertheless, the constraint over females' mobility often keeps girls from attaining education and entering the workforce for the purpose of developing economically. However, due

to an increase in male migration to the Russian Federation in recent years, more females are to enter employment in order to earn their living (Harris, 2006). The male migration in addition to bringing income increases the number of female's headed households is increasing too which forces the females to enter employment. However, to earn qualification to enter employment, the women are rarely given. Nevertheless, the consistent lack of opportunities to gain educational and employment qualifications makes women less mobile (Harris, 2006).

The control over mobility is vital because it, in the end, attempts to control female sexuality.

1. This is because all the gender norms of employment and education are based on a person having female genitalia—thus, female sexuality.
2. Losing control of a female's education, employment, and mobility also means losing control of a female's sexual nature.

As Harris (2004) states, Tajikistan is a long way from modernity because the gender norms still are prerogatives of males to have strict control over female's sexuality besides all other their masculine qualities. Many men wish for a semi-illiterate woman from the old days because an uneducated woman was considered to be submissive, tolerant, and under control.

However, since independence, the role of women was introduced in a kind of traditional way due to the civil war which reintroduced traditions of Muslim society for building national identity of women to some extent. These traditions and values make the extended multi-generational and patriarchal families the norm which limits females' involvement in secondary and higher education (DeYoung et al., 2018).

These slowly changing gender norms inspired me to study this issue and to discover what concepts of gender norms affect the advanced education of girls in Tajikistan. My own

experience as being a Tajik woman from Tajikistan, who went through the challenges that each Tajik woman goes through to become economically independent, inspired me to study the issue of girls' education in Tajikistan. I went to school the year when the Civil War (1992-1997) started in the country. The civil war brought more challenges in the lives of females where gender norms were strengthened, and school infrastructures deteriorated as a result of conflicts in the country. As the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (2005) states the civil war negatively affected the school attendance of girls, poverty, and a return to traditional Islamic values defining the place of a woman at home, further creating a disparity in education.

As a child, there was not much pressure against me being seen in the street every morning going to school or having less responsibility. However, when I grew up, I felt more pressure. I had to conform to gender norms, such as not often to be seen in public or to be ready to live with the family where I go as a kelin (daughter-in-law), or wife. As a future wife, I had to be ready for being a subordinate to the husband or other members of his family (marital family), which might hinder me from obtaining an education. I am the youngest child in our family, and I have sisters who are older than me. I learned from my older sisters the gender norms that I have to go out when I have school or not to play or talk with boys even if they are my classmate on the streets. However, it is luck, or I might be privileged to be allowed to continue my education because most of my peers that I studied with at secondary school were not allowed to continue education after grade ninth and eleventh. They were not allowed by their parents because they thought that it is a waste of time and money to educate the girl child. Since girls can get married right after graduating from secondary school and this way they go to their marital family. Nonetheless, I went beyond secondary school education; I could not pass this road without challenges.

Studying at secondary school, I always dreamed of continuing my education, and that gave me more motivation to study hard to gain the necessary knowledge, which helped me see my next step at university. Many of my peers attended school only to finish 9<sup>th</sup> grade because they knew that they would not be allowed by their parents to continue education after 9<sup>th</sup> grade. There were many reasons why the parents of my peers did not let their daughters continue after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. One of those reasons was because the parents could not afford a university education for their daughters. Therefore, they did not want to waste money for two years for upper secondary education at school. Another reason served the marriage market where girls have to be married at a young age. When they finish the ninth grade, the parents try to find their daughters any good candidate to marry them. These one or two years serve as the years for girls to get ready for married life, learn house skills, and become a good candidate for her marital family. In addition, after 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the girl is considered a grown-up. For the marriage market and their future life, chastity is important for grown-up girls.

Below I review the educational system in Tajikistan and include statistics to demonstrate the trends in girls' education since 2000. This is followed by information about the context of Tajikistan. I then introduce my main research questions.

### **Girls' Education in Tajikistan**

In Tajikistan, basic education starts at age seven and lasts for nine compulsory and two optional years of upper secondary education for both boys and girls. The nine compulsory education years, known as basic secondary education, are primary (grades 1-4) and lower-secondary (grades 5-9) and are provided free of charge. Upper-secondary education for 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades is also provided free of charge by the government. However, the decision to attend upper-secondary depends on the will of the parents and the pupils. At this stage, many students



decide not to continue their education, although girls do begin dropping out as early as 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades. The law of Tajikistan does not allow the children to drop out of school before grade 9<sup>th</sup>. In case of children's drop out the parents will be prosecuted or fined. Majority of the students who do not want to continue education are girls. The parents try to find ways to run away from prosecution by justifying themselves (Shemyakina, 2011; UNICEF, n.d.). According to the education system of Tajikistan, students may enroll at a vocational education training institution after graduating from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but to enroll in university education, students must graduate in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. According to UNICEF only 4% of those graduating 11<sup>th</sup> grade, both boys and girls entered universities in 2010 ("UNICEF Tajikistan - Overview - Basic Education," n.d.).

The Islamic revivals which took place in the 1980s to 1990s gave rise to radical discourses on the women's role and place in the society. During the 1990s and 2000s, the role of women in the country deteriorated day by day, making the women more like a chattel at home. Newspapers started publishing articles with titles such as "Tajik girls are disappearing from classrooms," "Teenage girls dropping out of school," "Tajik girls drop the school to marry," "Women's education in Central Asia," and a number of other articles related to the issues of girls not only in the country but in the territory of Central Asia. In the 1990s, there was a noticeable drop in enrollment of girls at all levels of education in the country. Reasons were due to the cost of education, limits in grants which the country received, and general family income (UNICEF Transmonee, 2008). Post-Soviet transformation process negatively affected education access especially for girls' enrollment to non-compulsory education such as upper secondary education (10-11<sup>th</sup> grades) and higher education. In 1998 the ratio of girls' enrollment was 89 per 100 boys at lower secondary education and 63 girls per 100 boys at upper secondary education (ADB, 2000).

This research targets data starting from the postwar period of Tajikistan. However, due to unknown reasons, the earliest data that I found and presented in tables and figures below start from 2000. Records about education prior to 2000 were not available to the author probably due to a transition period in the country.

Table 1 below indicates that the enrollment of boys and girls was 88.3 % in 2001 for grades 1 to 9<sup>th</sup>, which improved over the 5-years period to 2006 where secondary compulsory school enrolment was 95.6%. There is not much disparity between boys' and girls' enrollment from grades 1 to 9. This table reports fewer children enrolled in the 10th and 11th grades in general, where there is a disparity when we analyze enrollment of girls and boys. Upper secondary education gross enrollment for girls in 2001 comprised 35.9%, with little improvement of 36.2% in 2006, while for boys, enrollment was 55.8% in 2001 and 56.2% in 2006. Further, it is evident from the table that disparity in education increases between boys and girls. Moreover, enrollment of girls' education deteriorates by levels of education and fewer girls continue education after 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Table 1. Net secondary education enrollment percentages for all children<sup>ab</sup>

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Grades 1-9 (age 7-15)</b>	88.3%	91.1%	94.4%	95.3%	95.3%	95.6%
<b>Grades 1-9 Females</b>	83.9%	87.1%	90.3%	91.4%	91.6%	91.7%
<b>Grades 1-9 Males</b>	92.6%	94.8%	98.4%	99.2%	98.9%	99.4%
<b>Grades 10-11 (ages 16-17)</b>	46.0%	42.3%	37.6%	41.8%	45.8%	46.4%
<b>Grades 10-11 Females</b>	35.9%	32.2%	29.2%	33.5%	36.3%	36.2%
<b>Grades 10-11 Males</b>	55.8%	52.2%	45.8%	50.0%	55.1%	56.2%

<sup>a</sup>**Source:** Retrieved and Translated from the Russian language into English from Gosudarstvennyy komitet statistiki Respubliki Tadjikistan (2006).

<sup>b</sup>Primary (grades 1-4), lower secondary (grades 5-9), and upper secondary (grades 10-11) education in Tajikistan relates to elementary, middle, and high school in the United States, respectively.

Enrollment of girls is still a problem in Tajikistan. The data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics estimated the percentage of girls' and boys' secondary education gross enrollment ratio and found that females in secondary education comprised 77.6% in 2008 and in 2013 it increased to 82.6%. From chart 1, it is evident that fewer females enroll in secondary education than males with a ratio of 82.6 to 91.9 in 2013.

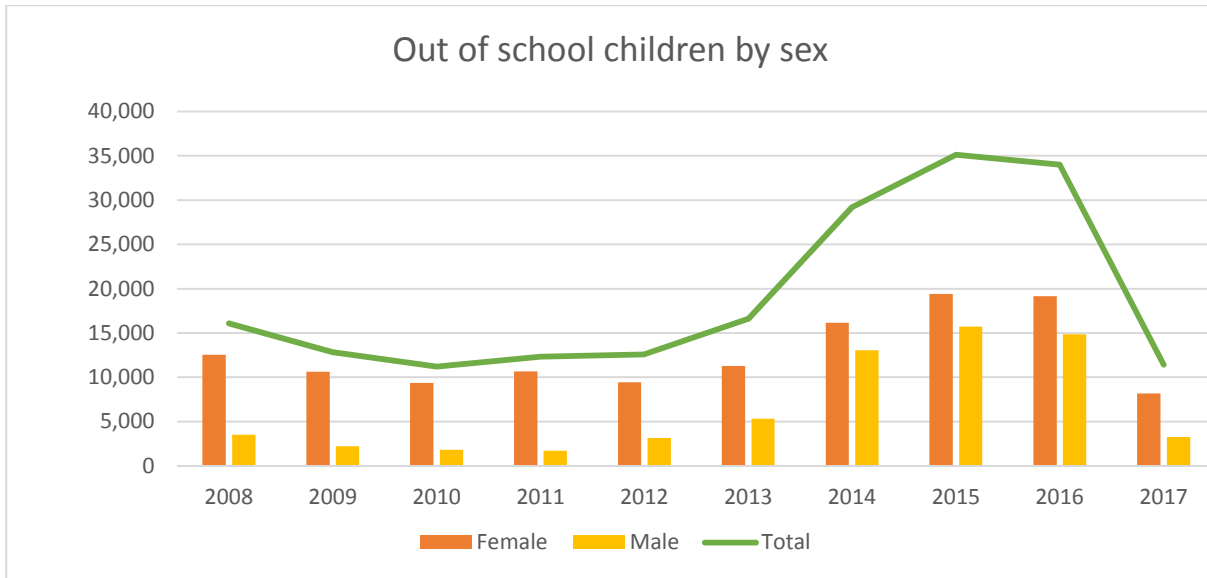


Figure 1. Out of school children by sex  
 Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, (2019)

Even if there is an improvement in enrollment and participation of children in Tajikistan in last decade, the number of children out of school is high. (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019). Over the years there were more girls out of school than boys. For example, in 2008, 12,555 of girls were out of school compared to 3,512 boys. Starting from 2014 this indicator heightened. The total number of children out of school in 2014 comprised 29,192 from which 16,139 were girls and 13,053 were boys. By 2017, the situation improved, and it was estimated that in total 11, 435 children were out of school - 8,176 were girls, and 3,259 were boys. The data shows that the level of girls out of school remains high in comparison with boys.

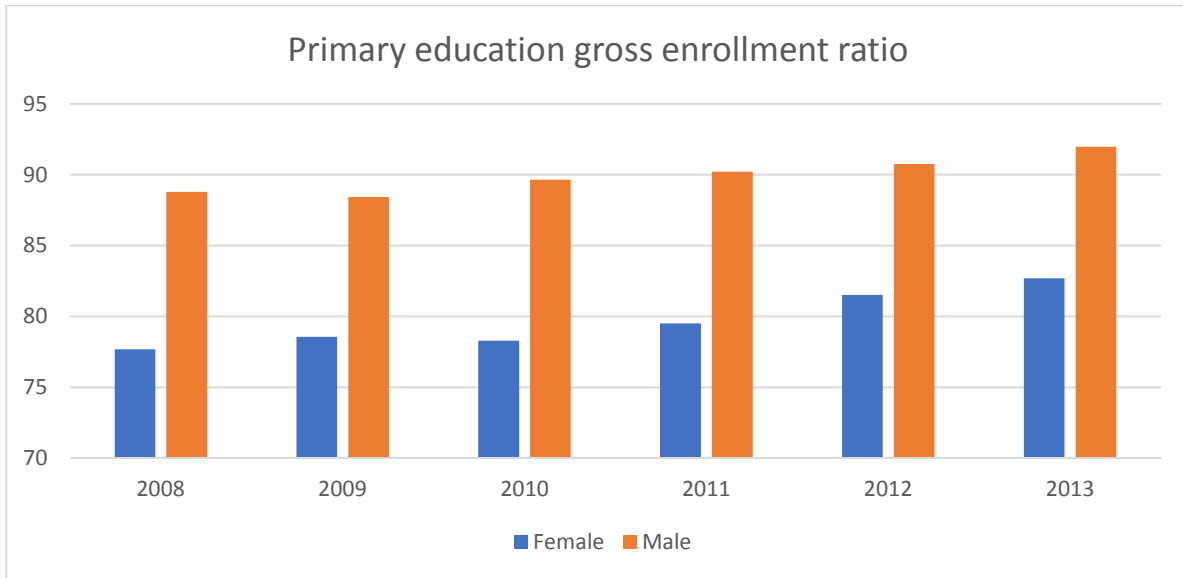


Figure 2. Primary (grades 1-11) education gross enrollment ratio  
 Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, (2019)

According to UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the female enrollment to higher education institutes including vocational schools remained low until 2012 (15.5 %) where it began to improve with tertiary education gross enrollment among females increasing to 26.4% by 2017. Further, it worth mentioning that the level of enrollment to higher education continues to remain low not only for females but also for males. However, the males' enrollment is higher than females' enrollment to higher education (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019).

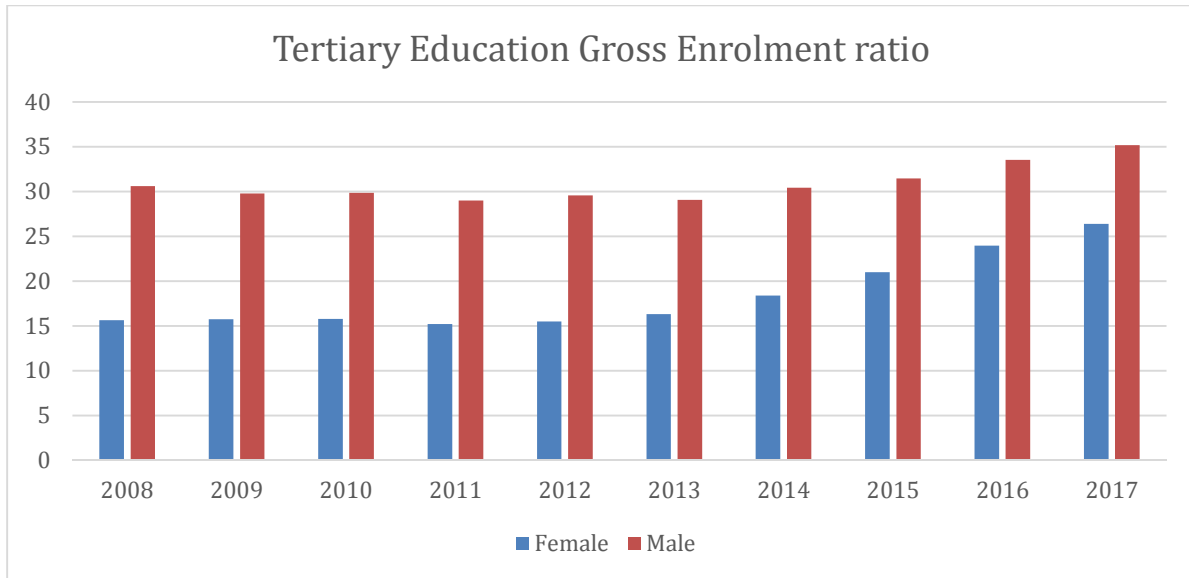


Figure 3. Tertiary education gross enrollment ratio  
 Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, (2019)

The country addressed the issue of women and her status in society after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It started when Tajikistan confirmed CEDAW (UN Convention) in 1993 to raise the status of women in the society together with 81 other countries of the world and changes were added to the Constitution of Tajik Republic. Noticing the low enrolment of female students to higher education, in 1997 the quotas for girls was introduced by Ministry of Education of Tajikistan to solve the problem of girls' education which later was advanced by accepting the law by the president of Tajikistan for improving the role of women in society in 1999. Furthermore, the Law on Gender Equality was accepted in the country in 2005 (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009).

The higher education quotas for girls were first articulated in 1997 which led to the adoption of the law of admission of girls from remote districts to universities of the country every year without entry examination (Ministry of Education, 2007). Later it led to the resolution of the government of Tajikistan of Presidential Quotas from 2001 to 2005. Starting from 2008, 15 out of 34 higher education institutions in Tajikistan offered quotas for girls from

remote districts of the country to enter higher education institutions. The number of female students who entered universities from 2001-2005 based on Presidential quotas comprised 5448. The first period of the State Program did not result in an increase in female students (Mago et al., 2004; DeYoung et al., 2018). In the 2007-2008 academic year, it was observed that the female higher education enrolment rate was even lower than the Soviet periods' and the Presidential quotas were not showing any results. In 2007 female enrollment to higher education decreased to 26.8%. The State program of the Ministry of Education planned to admit 6719 female students in higher education institutions of the country through Presidential quotas in a period of 10 years. Hence, they could enroll only 5448 female students based on the state program.

### **Country Context**

Tajikistan, with a population of more than 8 million, is the only former USSR satellite country that went through a civil war after its separation from the USSR's collapse. During the time of its inclusion in the Soviet Union, all Tajikistan's systems were under the control of Russians. Then in 1991 when the country received its independence, the power vacuum caused by the departure of the Soviet control resulted in a civil war that divided the country along regional, religious, and political lines (Fennell & Arnot, 2007). This civil war added increased difficulties to the newly independent country because most disciplinary professionals and specialists left the country. After occupying the positions that brokered the power from Moscow for many years, the Russians that lived in Tajikistan left taking with them their professional knowledge and experiences. The country entered a period of intense economic decline, resulting in the deterioration of trading markets and the end of the financing that the country received from the Soviet Union. The civil war which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union also disrupted

civil society by damaging infrastructure, creating high unemployment, and losing the ability to provide people with services such as education (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009).

Yet, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan used the same educational system that it was using while a part of the Soviet Union because it was impossible to change it immediately (Kolsto, 2018). Indeed, the country needed to educate and develop its own educational specialists that understood the unique Tajik educational demands and goals.

### **Education System**

The education system in Tajikistan has a strong foundation in the Soviet period. Before the Soviet collapse, over 95% of people were literate and majority of people finished secondary education. The gender gap between male and females narrowed during the Soviet period, but was not erased (Whitsel, 2014). Although Tajikistan made use of Soviet structures and traditions since 1991, it has adapted its practices to meet its own current cultural needs. Before the Soviet period (1929-1991), Tajikistan did not have a formal system of secular education. People, mainly men, and boys, received their education from religious schools known as madrasas. Madrasas were designed for Quranic education as well as geography, geometry, algebra, and astronomy.

After the establishment of Soviet rule in Tajikistan in 1929, an education system was established to address the need for a literate workforce. This system of education evolved to require ten years of compulsory education and a merit-based system of higher education offered five years of higher education. While the pre-Soviet Tajik society provided primarily a religious education for males, Soviet-era education was secular in nature and required females to also attend school. While there is almost no information about girls' education before the Soviet Union, the Soviet education system sought to educate women by liberating them from the veil (DeYong et al., 2018; Rather, 2013). During Soviet period women were involved in the



workforce, working equally with men in the fields because Soviet ideal was that men and women would be completely equal in both the fields and the classroom (Falkingham, 2000).

After the Soviet takeover in 1929, compulsory education was for seven years; this was called “incomplete” secondary education. Ten years of education was considered “complete.” By 1950, compulsory education was extended to eight years and later to ten years, which meant all the children must complete ten years of education (Inkeles, 1953). After compulsory education was extended to ten years, the number of females increased both in specialized and higher education institutions. But, interestingly, women chose to study in either educational-cultural branches or health branches of higher education institutions, a gender norm that dominated women’s education choices (Janigan, 2012).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the establishment of Tajikistan’s independence, the Tajik people experienced hardships in politics, economics, and especially in education. For the first time, the Tajik government as an independent country had to manage its own education system by running free primary, secondary, vocational, and higher education schools. The primary education was set up to be from grades 1 to 4, secondary education from grades 5 to 9, and upper secondary education from grades 10 to 11 (Ministry of Education, 2012). The basic secondary education, which was ten years during the Soviet Union, was extended to 11 years. Thus, compulsory education changed from 10 years during the Soviet Union to 9 years during independence with two years of optional schooling (Janigan, 2012).

The source of control of school infrastructure transferred from the Ministry of Education to the local government authority, which allowed schools to charge students informal fees for obtaining textbooks, school repairs, and other fees for seasonal classroom equipment. It also included gifts to teachers to help with the very low pay they received. This tradition of individual

support for teacher salary became an effective avenue for bribery. Even if the education (primary and secondary) continued to be free as it was in the Soviet period, the informal fees increased the cost of sending children to school (Janigan, 2012; Niyozov et al., 2006).

Moreover, education in Tajikistan faced a shortage of teachers due to many qualified teachers leaving the profession because many were ethnically Russian and during the civil war many migrated to Russia. After Tajikistan received independence, the civil war and shift in the social position of Russians from majority to minority put pressure on ethnic Russians to leave the country and return to Russia. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the Tajik language replaced Russian, which resulted in a shortage of textbooks in the Tajik language at schools operating in Tajik language. As UNESCO (2008) states, only a few pupils in the classroom had textbooks, all the rest studied subjects without books.

The structure of education in Tajikistan has not changed much since 1991. Tajikistan's education system is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Each region has its own Ministry of Education and all these regional Ministries of Education are under the control of Tajikistan's main Ministry of Education. The primary, secondary, and higher education institutions are under the management of the regional ministries and their agencies. As stated above, all children must complete nine years of compulsory education. The education system offers pre-school training and education for ages 1-6; primary education for four years, grades 1 to 4; general basic education for five years, grades 5 to 9; and upper secondary education for two years, grades 10 to 11. Professional education consists of 4 years of education equal to a bachelor's degree and post-diploma education, such as masters and doctorate courses (Fallkingham, 2000; Shemyakina, 2011).

However, there was a decrease in female enrollment in education, due not only to social and cultural factors but also to the role of women in the newly established state. Its independence gave rise to the traditional role of a Tajik woman as a Muslim woman, negatively affecting her mobility and access to education. In 2006, in an effort to bolster enrollment, the government took responsibility to involve girls in education by providing Presidential Quotas for girls from rural areas to enter the universities without entrance exams. However, this solution did not work well since there was not seen an increase in the number of females' enrollment at education (DeYoung et al., 2018; Magno et al., 2004).

### **Research Question(s)**

This thesis is intended to identify and understand the factors influencing and hindering girls' education attainment behavior. The main focus is to learn why the girls in Tajikistan, like many girls from other most developing countries, drop out of school or do not continue after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009).

These factors begin to point to issues to consider as I address my research question:

*RQ 1:* What factors affect the girls in attaining secondary and further education in the country?

## **CHAPTER 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I will introduce you to the theories that influence my view of the project. In addition, I will cover the literature on factors that influence girls' education in developing countries and Tajikistan.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Standpoint theory was developed by feminist theorists, and it argues that individuals produce knowledge according to the position that they have in society. The theory was established to give a chance for the marginalized group, such as women, to be heard. Standpoint theory points to how people produce knowledge and how this knowledge affects the understanding of the world in day to day life (Harding, 2009). The theory relies on the Marxist argument that marginalized and oppressed groups of people have and use an approach in accessing knowledge that is alien to the privileged group of people (Harding, 2009). In this study, I use the standpoint theory with the aim that participants tell their own stories of their education experiences from the position that they possessed or possess in their society.

The position of the researcher in the research is important and is foundational to standpoint theory. The standpoint of the researcher matters because the researcher is the one who shapes and organizes the research by finding the problem to study, developing the research questions, and analyzing and drawing conclusions. I do not want to bring bias to the research, but I might bring to the research some of the experiences that I was exposed to as a female coming from the same society as do the participants. Since finding the topic to study, thinking of the research questions, and coming to any conclusions requires the researcher to use the knowledge that was produced as a result of exposure to the issue and using that knowledge to develop their own standpoint, my own knowledge of the issue will help me to create my own standpoint as a

standpoint researcher (Adler & Jermier, 2005). According to the origin of the theory, a person's words and perceptions depend on his or her standpoint. Furthermore, that standpoint depends on the position that one has in society, which differs from person to person based on situation and position. This theory is based on the experience and perspective of individuals that are shaped by those experiences gained within social groups (Byrd et al., 2013).

In this research, I divided my population into two groups according to their age range, because the research focuses on two different times to compare education experiences that the participants have and what social stratification or class to which they belong. This is because, based on the theory, a person's social stratification and class structure forms and limits one's perceptions of social relations. The person's standpoint forms his worldview, as well as a different standpoint, affects one's acceptance of the social construct.

### **Standpoint Theory Origins**

Nancy Hartsock introduced standpoint theory in 1983. This well-known feminist's works developed the theory, which defined the growing success of famous feminist studies in a variety of projects. Hartsock called the standpoint theory a feminist standpoint theory with the aim to make women's standpoint present in knowledge creation. This is why it was suggested as a method for feminist studies (Byrd et al., 2013; Hartsock, 1983). Standpoint theory focuses on issues related to gender and studies gender subjects such as how women view those issues from the standpoint of women themselves. The theory was developed purposefully for addressing the gaps in the women's issues to take into account the experiences of women and the dominant theoretical frameworks in which they function (Keller & Longino, 1996). This is another reason why the standpoint theory is helpful in this research. This research also studies the females'

education experiences, so standpoint theory was chosen to address the issue of girls' education and, as we mentioned above, to explore the gaps in the females' issues.

According to Smith (2005), various standpoints produce knowledge. As a researcher, I use the standpoint of research participants to explore other social issues, which will let me produce knowledge and then make it clearer from this or that standpoint. Women's standpoint focuses on ideas about women; it explores how knowledge about women and their surroundings was produced. Therefore, lived experiences of different gender groups that is gathered in the research belong to the various racial, ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic backgrounds are often overlooked. I want to observe and capture the full picture of inequality among these gender groups and address those various types of inequalities that exist within systems using standpoint theory.

Moreover, this research targets the females' education experiences and standpoint theory the right tool that gives guidance to me as the researcher of this study of where and how to start researching and how to investigate particular issues. The primary step that this theory recommended was to focus on the marginalized social group of people, such as females who are most of the time under oppression and exploitation. With this theory, I try to identify how the "dominant institutions and their conceptual frameworks create and maintain oppressive social relations" (Adler and Jermier, 2005, p.943). While Smith (1987), states that standpoint theory makes space available for the subjects that are abstract, which allows the neglected voice to be heard and to be considered important (Keller & Longino, 1996; Wood, 2005). It also is a unique theory because it gives importance to the voice of people that are in non-dominant positions and by this, these people are given an important standpoint (Harding, 1991). Adler & Jermier (2005) states that the primary goal of the standpoint researcher is to listen to the voice of those who are

oppressed and least advantaged. The end product makes their voices heard through the research and shows that the issue of oppression and exploitation exists in society, which, in turn, must be addressed in society to give these groups freedom. The particular functions of the theory mentioned earlier will be to let me give the voice of marginalized people as females to be heard while they share their lived experiences.

In the above paragraphs, I mentioned how I lived and how the idea of studying the issue of girls' education came to my mind from my own experience as a woman from Tajikistan. I bring to this project my understanding of the situation and my bias. I will be seeking the voices of women by conducting interviews where the women will tell me their own story about their educational attainment. The standpoint theory, as I have shown above, guided me in the collection of my data from the standpoint of the group of people who shared with me their knowledge as females.

### **Factors Affecting Girls'**

Several studies were conducted on the topic of education of girls, and the factors that impact them and act as barriers to an education that they might need in the future. This literature review presents factors influencing why girls drop out of school in Tajikistan. It discusses previous works on a girl's educational conditions worldwide, as well as literature from Tajikistan.

Based on my experience and in reviewing the literature, I emphasize facts and findings related to three main barriers to girls' school participation and employment which are: 1) cultural barriers; 2) economic barriers, and 3) marriage.

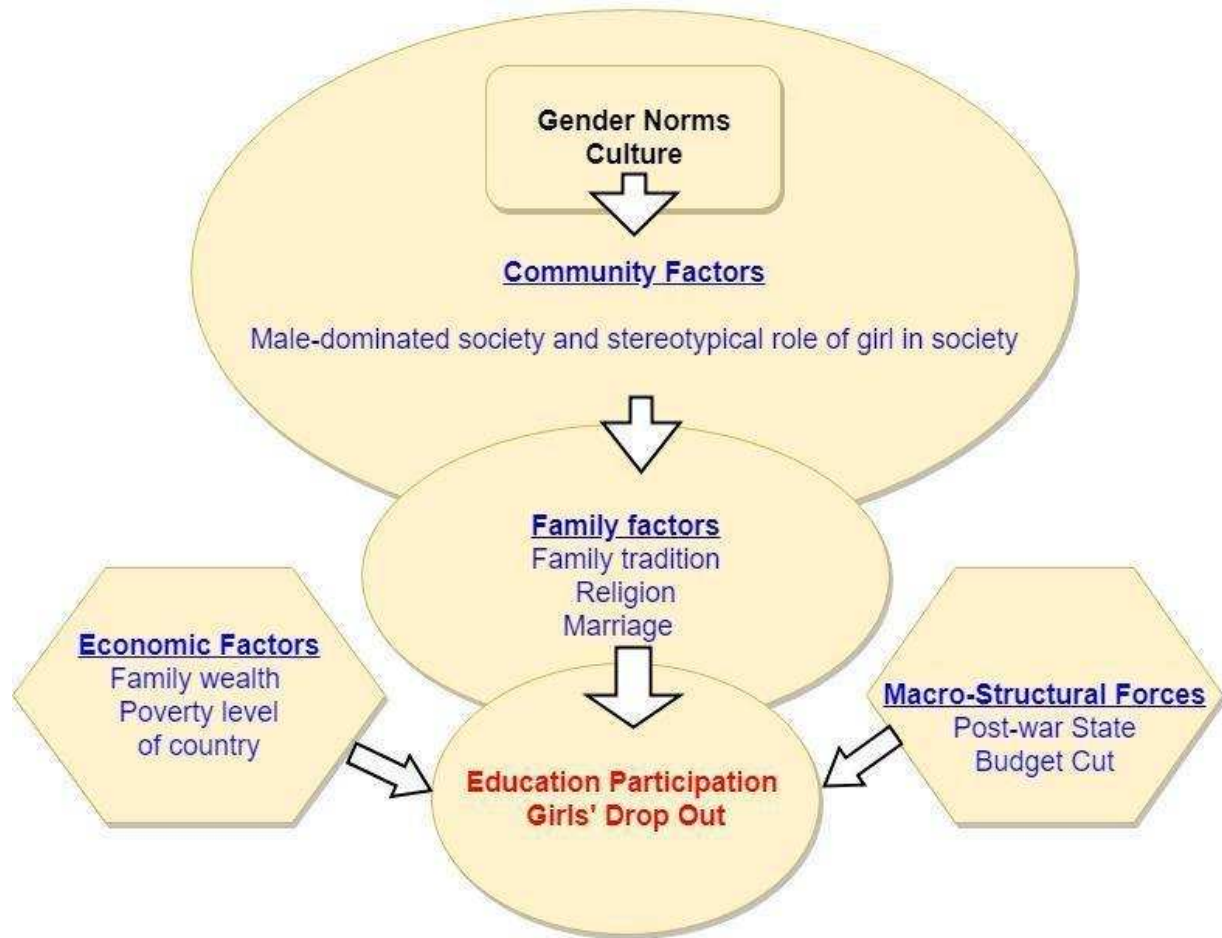


Figure 4. Family, macro-structural, community, economic, cultural determinants of girls' education participation

Author's adaptation of Whitsel's (2017) model

In order to study community, economic, family factors and macrostructural forces, a model (Figure 4) was adapted from Whitsel's (2017) model of girl's education attendance in Tajikistan. In his model, he described the family, community, and state determinants of educational attainment. In his model, family factors play a central role in relation to educational attendance where the community factors: culture, schools' resources, and job opportunities have a direct influence on family factors such as family resources and family structures in the education outcomes of children in families. Whitsel (2017) states that the macro-level forces have an impact on both the family and community factors and to some extent heighten the issue.



In the adapted model, I argue that culture and gender norms are the leading causes of girls' poor attendance while Whitsel (2017) states that primary causes are family resources, secondary are community factors, and finally macro-structural factors. I modified Whitsel's model because I wanted to observe and study the issues of girls' education in Tajikistan from the angle of gender norms.

In the model used in this paper, culture is interpreted to affect the perception of education, particularly girls' education. Regarding Tajikistan, culture has a huge impact on how female students receive education in general and what careers they choose. In most cases, females choose teaching or health, which are considered to be more appropriate for females. Culture has the power to influence the females' choice of area of education and years of education, and as Whitsel (2017) states, culture additionally influences parents' decisions on female children's education (Kantor, 2002).

The model that I created shows the central role of culture and gender norms and how gender norms and culture influence community factors such as a male-dominated society and the stereotypical role of a girl. In addition, it shows how the community factors and family factors such as family tradition, religion, and marriage impact girl's education participation and cause her to drop out of school in the early stages of education.

Two other factors in the model that affect the issue of girls' education participation and dropping-out are macro-structural and economic factors. Macro-structural forces, such as the post-war state of the country and budget-cuts as a result of the separation from the former Soviet Union, brought hardship and deterioration of Tajikistan's infrastructure as well as education. On the other hand, the poverty level of the country and family wealth impact the decision of parents

to decide who should receive an education, a boy or a girl, and in most cases, they prioritize boys' education, rather than girls, because boys bring more benefit to the family.

The literature review below is written based on data gathered by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the Statistics agency of Tajikistan on education shows that even after that education system in the country improved, the issue of girls' education remained. I believe that the effects of gender norms on education were heightened by the economic situation of the country and civil war. During the Soviet period, the Soviet Union conducted a number of campaigns to educate the population and the emancipation of girls and women played a key role. (Janigan, 2012). The gender roles of females and males were changed during this period to some extent, which resulted in an increase in girls' participation and enrollment in education (Falkingham, 2000). In the sections below I discussed the effects of gender norm, civil war, and poverty on girls' education attainment processes.

### **Gender Norms and Context of Culture**

Culture is the combination of behaviors that the human being learns throughout life. Culture, tradition, and customs have a colossal impact on civilization and the character of citizens within a society. This creates a balance in dealing with society's issues. Tajik traditions and customs persisted, and people carried them through their lives even while under Soviet rule.

If we look at the history of Tajikistan, traditions were formed early on and through different transitions and regimes these traditions changed, but the overall lifestyle has not changed (Northrop, 2004, 27). Tajikistan has different cultural periods starting from the Samanids' and Tahiri's empire through the Soviet reign ultimately to a sovereign nation. At times, these traditions have been hidden because Tajiks have lived under regimes that banned specific traditions.

As Giddens (1990) argues, the traditional society is a society where people function according to traditions and values that their ancestors built or lived. An outsider may not notice that the Tajik people live according to traditions, but within families, traditions persisted (Akbarzadeh, 1999, 157). These traditions link the past with the future. Traditions become the norm-making means through which the group forms behaviors that provide a feeling of safety within a society (Giddens, 1990).

In most countries of the world, culture is biased toward males and gives more advantage to them than females. According to Brock and Cammish (1997), males are the main characters in deciding whether to send their daughters to school or not. Similarly, Thapa (2012), in her study “community perspective on girls’ dropout in Tajikistan,” found that male family members impact the female member's educational attainment. She states that because fathers and brothers are more outside of the household sphere, they are more aware of the community perspectives toward the girls. Thus, in the male-dominated society, the girl child (daughter, sister) has come to see these decisions as a normal part of her life. Brock and Cammish (1997) reported that influential males, such as religious and political leaders, may have a huge impact on promoting the issue of girls’ education (Brock & Cammish, 1997). While another study states that for a girl to obtain an education, she has to go against the social and cultural attitudes (Ramanaik et al., 2018).

According to Whitsel (2009), one reason for keeping girls from school is so they do not become overeducated. Overeducation is a negative factor for girls in the marriage market. The marriage market of Tajikistan requires the husband to be more educated than the wife. When studying the perspective of girls’ education in Tajikistan, Thapa (2012) found that marriage is the final destination for girls in Tajik society, and parents put emphasis on girls to learn

household skills, which helps them find a good partner in marriage. In addition, this emphasis excludes girls from attaining education, and marriage makes girls temporary members of the family.

Culture and traditional values can be additional barriers to girls' education worldwide, not just Tajikistan. Numerous studies revealed that “girls of marginalized families are mostly deprived of education and their parents rather pay more attention to marry off their daughters as early as possible because of varieties of factors linked to socio-cultural gendered norms” (Sarkar, Reza & Hossain, 2014, p.350; Chege & Sifuna, 2006). For example, Haridarshan (2015) studied maternal expectations with respect to boys’ and girls’ education in India. She argued that gender-related issues were rooted in problematic gender and culture interactions, stating that “[t]he fears that if women are educated, they will begin to challenge some of the societal inequalities and concerns, condemns millions of girls to a life without education” (Haridarshan, 2015, p.196). Furthermore, she found that girls belonging to marginalized groups suffered greatly in terms of education compared to the mainstream population as well as to boys within their own linguistic groups. The correlation between culture and gender issues, particularly girls' education related to culture, remains identified, but not addressed due to the shortage of data and unknown ways of measurement (Haridarshan, 2015). In a report that focuses on a broader look worldwide, UNESCO (2011) says that even though some girls receive a form of formal education, again due to cultural stereotypes, they will not benefit from this formal education in their rural communities. These are not new observations. In 1996 Bruner pointed out that “[c]ulture shapes the minds of individuals,” but it is the individuals’ job to make the “meaning-making, which involves situating encounters with the world in their appropriate cultural context” (p.2).

Like Haridarshan (2015), who focused on gender and education in India, Harris (2006) also states that girls in Tajikistan with a high level of education or financial independence will challenge the norm of becoming a subordinated member of their families. Due to this, many Tajik families do not allow their daughters to get an education. The daughters' level of education also presents their parents with challenges in finding marriage opportunities for those educated daughters. Even though some of the Tajik girls receive some formal education, again due to cultural stereotypes, they will not benefit from it in their rural communities (UNESCO, 2011). They come from the regions to get higher education in the city, and after finishing school, they go back to their villages where female employment is still not accepted as normal according to the ideologies of that area. Or, after getting back to their region, a shortfall in employment opportunities does not allow them to benefit from their education.

Religion is a force that influences peoples' behavior, values, and attitudes (Erdogan et al. 2004). Csapo (1981) in his study of factors affecting girls' education attainment in Northern Nigeria found that there are several factors that affect the Muslim girls in attaining education such as the opposition standpoint of parents between western and Qur'anic education. According to Csapo (1981)'s study, the parents in the 1840s in Northern Nigeria considered that the girls do not need an education which gave them occupation since the marriage occupation is out of use. Similar to the above study Thapa (2012) states that religion, with major support from the established patriarchy, is the affecting influence in the Tajik society. The males in the family prefer girls to get a religious education, which is important for marriage life. The hijab, which the females wear in honor of their faith helps them in maintaining the honor. By wearing hijab, the girls show themselves as if conforming to societal norms.

Thapa (2012) states that females in Tajik society are not safe. Male family members are worried about the female member's self-respect and honor which is due to the lack of safety in the village and the rumors that spread around the female's name while sending the girls to school. The families are concerned about female's behavior because girls' respect and dignity come with conformity to honorable behavior and religion puts some behaviors as honorable and others as shameful. Similar to this, Ramanaik et al. (2018) state that safety and sexuality purity is important for parents in India. However, Ramanaik et al. (2018) also state that girls' participation in school tarnishes their reputation, especially when they are seen in public places. Society judges the girl's character, which affects the girl's reputation, showing her as neglecting the proper gender roles.

### **Context of Marriage**

As has been argued, patriarchal or man-dominated societies and countries with lower economic status place minimal importance on girls' education. In such societies, it is believed that girls' abilities to take care of their siblings and help parents with household chores are more important than education attainment (Banerjee, 2011). Additionally, women are not considered successful in their professional lives if they have been unsuccessful in managing the domestic front (Singh & Devi, 2015; Sonowal, 2013). Indeed, in the literature review on the subject numerous studies that are mentioned below have revealed that "girls of marginalized families are mostly deprived of education and their parents would rather pay more attention to marrying off their daughters as early as possible because of varieties of factors linked to socio-cultural gendered norms" (NIPORT, 2005; Baden, et al., 1994; Baden, 1996, as cited in Sarkar et al., 2014, p.350). For example, a study conducted by Prakash et al. (2017) correlates school dropout among girls in India to marriage. They found that of the 2275 girls who participated in the

survey, 8.7% had dropped out of school due to being engaged or married. This correlation was also found in a study of Roma girls in Bulgaria by Selcuk (2011) who states that early marriage in Bulgaria is an obstacle among Roma girls. The girls in Bulgaria marry early which does not allow them to complete even secondary education. In a recent study, Ramanaik et al. (2018) found that girls miss school in India due to spiritual ceremonies, in addition to other factors such as family functions, illness, and monthly menstrual periods.

More specifically, a study that concentrated on Tajikistan focused on...Some societies treat boys and girls differently. It is most evident in the way the girls and boys are raised. The girls are raised for the end product which is marriage. Focus on education for the female child is limited as families train them well to be married and move to another family and for her to bring a good image to the family by becoming an exemplary wife, mother, and daughter-in-law, (Whitsel, 2009). This study is important because it lets the reader see the effects of family, community, and macro-structural factors on girls' education attainment from two angles, first from collected surveys by international agencies and second from fieldwork conducted by the author.

Furthermore, Whitsel (2009) also found that Tajik girls preferred religious classes to other academic classes because it is more relevant to their future married life. Also, Thapa (2012) states that religious studies serve as an alternative education that teaches the girls the skills that fit for marriage life. This belief is also supported by the male members of the family who consider religious education necessary for the girl child. Similar to this study, Baschieri and Falkingham (2009) found that girls do not consider the value of education as they do not see any benefit from education, so they choose to attend 'Bihutan' which is an alternative kind of education for girls where they receive religious education for free.

## **Context of Poverty**

When Tajikistan received its Independence in 1991, Tajikistan was the poorest country among the Soviet Republics with a GDP of \$2000 per capita. Today, poverty continues to be a problem. Data from Asian Development Bank shows that in 2015, 32 percent of the population of Tajikistan lived below the national poverty line and after investigation, it was found that 3,7 percent of people in the country live on less of \$2 a day (ADB, 2019). Due to the scarcity of secure employment opportunities within the country, thousands of Tajik citizens migrate to other former Soviet republics to work and make money. About 90 percent of Tajik people migrate to Russia to work and send remittances home. The main source of income in Tajik families has comprised of money that labor migrants send to their families (Janigan, 2012).

In addition to be a poor country, Tajikistan's educational system significantly suffered due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the civil war. Before independence, the Soviet Union financially supported Tajikistan's infrastructure. Funding for education decreased when Tajikistan became an independent republic. In addition, the five-year civil war negatively affected education because it destroyed many schools and brought the education system of the country to a precarious position (1992-1997), which affected attendance in all levels of education due to the deteriorated quality of schools and education (World Bank, 2005). According to Falkingham (2000), after suffering financial pressure, education expenditure is gradually increasing. In 2007 financing for education was equal to \$127.0 million and increased to \$473.6 million in 2015.

Besides the factors mentioned above, the family wealth level also leads to frequent absenteeism and drop out of school (Prakash et al., 2017). Similar to this Ramanaik et al. (2018) state that the economic and social realities at home restrict girls' willingness and desire both at



home and school. When the family has difficulties financially, the girls sacrifice their desires of getting an education but instead help at home.

Adato et al. (2016) conducted a study on the child's support grant and found out that the parents have to motivate the children to attend school. The obstacles related to school attendance that they found were financial factors associated with the school costs. The economic factor leads to other financial constraints that affect the girls' schooling decisions such as early pregnancy, abuse, pressured by their peers, and the desire to earn money to fulfill the financial gap that the families miss to fulfill. The peer pressure as a result of different material constraints that the children have, affect their attendance. The children feel uncomfortable when they lack the right clothes and old unfashionable clothes which makes them feel not being the same as other kids whose parents can afford to provide fashioned clothes and school supplies (Adato et al., 2016).

According to Cemalcilar and Gökşen (2014), the drop out is more among female students in Turkey. They drop because of several factors such as being from a larger household, from migrant families, their mothers are mostly illiterate, and their fathers do not have education and stable jobs with permanent income. As the students who drop out of school usually worked during school time to earn money and bring income to the family, they were more likely to drop out of school or stop attending school constantly in Turkey (Cemalcilar & Gökşen, 2014). Not only the economic capital may be the barrier for sending girls to school but also the human capital as a family's level of literacy may affect the issue. According to Prakash et al. (2017), family level of education affects girls to drop out of school. It showed that if the education level of the head of the household is low or has siblings who had dropped out in most cases, it leads to school dropouts of other children of the family.

Much of the literature has focused on the costs and benefits of schooling and its effects on girls' education (Becker, 1993). Families' economic difficulties affect both girls' and boys' education (Tansel, 2002), particularly school-aged girls have fewer education opportunities when their families rely on them as domestic or wage labor providers (McMahon, 1999). Children from low social-economic status families are forced to work and support their families financially (Alat and Alat, 2011). Parents in such families make decisions for their children's education based on costs and benefits calculations. Studies revealed that socio-economic difficulties place girls' schooling more at risk than boys because parents invest more in boys' education. Girls move to their husbands' families after marriage and investment into their education is not beneficial for economically unstable parents. Boys' education investment is beneficial for such families since they stay with them and support parents into old age (Greenhalgh, 1985).

### **Context of Civil War**

After a year of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan faced a civil war that lasted five years (1992-1997), which destroyed the just taken into control infrastructure. There were many reasons why the war took place at that moment. Various scholars deduce different reasons for why the civil war occurred. Hohman et al., (2010) state that it happened due to two reasons: 1) the collapse of the Soviet Union; and 2) revitalization of traditions, which were demolished during the Soviet Union regime. Before the Soviet regime, Tajikistan belonged to the Emirate of Bukhara, which was colonized by the Russians as part of the USSR by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hohman et al., 2010).

According to Lynch (2001), the main reasons leading to civil war in May 1992 were “the weakness of Tajik institutions, limited central control over Tajik territory, and a state 'idea'

unable to link disparate components of Tajik people into a cohesive community” (p.55). After a century being under the control of the Soviet regime and its collapse, the people lost cohesiveness, and every other small group wanted to own the power of the state which was left without control. Similar to Lynch, another source by Yakubova (2014) states that conflict in Tajikistan was linked to the identity of Tajiks and Tajikistan as a country. Everyone claimed that he is a true Tajik and has the right to be in power. In addition, Hansen (1999) blamed the emergence of anarchy for the civil war outbreak in Tajikistan. Tajikistan has been under the control of the USSR for about a century, and the sudden collapse of the Soviet regime allowed the anarchy to emerge, which ended with fatal civil war. However, Shemyakina (2011) claims that “civil war erupted as a result of a weak Tajik national identity, combined with disintegrating institutions in circumstances of economic collapse and political mobilization” (p.52). Of course, factors differ, but we cannot ignore the external interference from the side of Uzbekistan and Russia. Lynch (2001), states that both Uzbekistan and Russia tried to return to the previous structure, which existed during the Soviet regime, where the state was under the dominance of Leninabad and Kulob regions (two big regions of Tajikistan).

The war was considered fatal and unexpectedly long in Central Asia (Hansen, 1999). There were 50,000 men killed, 55,000 children lost parents, and 20,000 women become widows. In addition, many people were displaced inside the country, which comprised about 600,000 (Falkingham, 2000). The displaced people were returned to their homes by 1995. During the years 1992-1995, about 100,000 became refugees who were returned to their communities after the General Agreement was signed between Tajik government and the United Tajik Opposition in 1997 (Shemyakina, 2011). According to Shemyakina (2011), about 50,000 Tajik people fled

to northern Afghanistan in this period and were returned home after the General Agreement with the support of international organizations for security.

Dushanbe, Khatlon, Regions of Republican Subordination, and GBAO were the most affected regions of the country. Since these areas were considered war-affected, the people became internal refugees and looked for refuge in Sughd region, Dushanbe city, and GBAO. Among the refugees are those who fled to Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. Those who were not ethnic Tajiks left the country forever and searched for refuge in other countries where they had friends or relatives (Shemyakina, 2011).

The human cost during the war was significant such that the war considerably weakened the infrastructure of the country, especially the educational system. According to UNDP (2000) analyses, about 20% of schools were destroyed, and those schools had to be repaired after the war, some of which were not repaired for many years after the war. Many of the schools' properties were even impossible to restore after the war, such as heating, sanitation, water system, and studying materials (Yakubova, 2014).

In addition to the physical infrastructure deterioration, the war affected the aptitude of children of school age. Literature sources studying human development indicate that before the war the literacy was equal to about 100%, which was deteriorated due to many reasons such as a shrinking budget for education, lack of specialists, and studying materials that were followed with low attendance of children (Yakubova, 2014).

The war took place in the capital city Dushanbe and a few areas and broke the central government. As Whitsel (2009) states “not all communities experienced the threat of violence and destruction of homes and schools, the entire nation suffered a disruption in educational provision because of the severely reduced capacity of the central government” (p.34). The

government disruption severely affected the economy of the country and led the schools to depend more on parents' budgets in most cases.

The study conducted by Shemyakina (2011), who studied the effect of armed conflict on the education of Tajikistan, states that the armed conflict had a negative effect on the education of girls. As a result of war, many girls dropped out of school, and less continued their education. Older girls ages 12-15 during the war years were more likely not to attend school anymore due to their vulnerability and reputation as an adult girl, such as being exposed to rape or harassment. The adult girls were reluctantly married due to their unsafe fate during the war. It was found that only 12% of girls from war-affected areas completed secondary schools in comparison to boys (Shemyakina, 2011; Whitsel, 2009; Yakubova, 2014).

Conflicts and war are major obstacles to girls' education. "In the last two decades, continuing cycles of war and conflict, extremism, and the introduction of strict cultural and religious ideologies have further complicated and magnified the issue of girls' education" (Jamal, 2015, p.274). Civil wars and other military conflicts not only introduce a long period of political instability but also exacerbate the poor economic situation, which has devastating consequences for the education system, particularly impacting girls' education negatively wherever they happened (Whitsel, 2014). Since girls are more vulnerable than boys and are the main target in most conflict situations, the conflict situation such as violence, destruction, poverty, risks, and unsafe situations make parents weigh the advantages and disadvantages of their children's education over their safety, which usually ends up by not allowing girls to go to school. According to Whitsel and Mehran (2010), in Tajikistan, which reported to reach close to 100% literacy level before the civil war eruption, secondary school enrollment rates have significantly fallen, especially for girls, after experiencing the civil war. Although the war is over and since

then there has been significant economic development and improvement in political stability, secondary school enrollment rates still remain lower than before the conflict time. Shemyakina (2011) argues that the conflicts have gender impacts where the girls are favored better than boys. The first step that the parents commit is to withdraw the girls from school and marry them off to lift the burden from themselves. The girls face sexual assault and harassment when going to school in the war situation and to avoid this they stay home. Also, the girls do not complete schools in war-affected countries because of two reasons, first there are few opportunities to work outside of the home, and second, the society will look at the girls' outside employment negatively. The study also found that school factors such as poor school learning conditions, harassment at school is linked to the girls' school dropout. Another issue that was associated with their dropout was that the girls found it difficult to complete secondary school in their villages (Prakash et al., 2017). Similar to Prakash et al. (2017), Baschiery and Falkingham (2009) in their study found that as the school quality deteriorated after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it affected in decreasing the number of girls to attend school. The collapse led to poor school infrastructure and the need for supplementary teaching. They also found that the distance between the girl's house affects them to attend or drop out in the middle of schooling.

### **CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

This paper studies the factors related to gender norms that act as barriers to keep girls out of school while providing the context of the social and political changes that occurred during the early post-war years to the present. In my project, I implemented a qualitative approach. In qualitative studies, the researcher tries to explain how and why the inquired issue happened and how this issue affected other processes (Pasick et al., 2009). The stance and the meaning that the participants hold is important for the researcher, who is disclosing and learning the occurred phenomena (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). In this chapter, I explained my methodological approach, recruitment, and methods of analysis.

My stance also influenced the interviews. I am a Tajik woman and was educated in Tajikistan. I was at secondary school from 1993 to 2004 and experienced education after the civil war. While I was studying, the country faced a shortage of teachers and school supplies such as books and equipment for learning subjects. As a female, I experienced socially determined gender norms in my day-to-day life. All these experiences guided the questions that I wrote.

#### **Participants**

I had three different criteria in mind when recruiting participants, including a period of study, school experience, and region of education. I used data collected from in-depth interviews with females aged 18-25 and 35-48. My original intention was to study change over time, so I interviewed 10 women who attended schools during the early postwar years (1995-2000) and 10 women currently studying or those who are currently school ages. I recruited females both in school and out of school (Figure 7).

The participants were recruited by a female recruiter who was partially familiar and could better tell which female fits the study requirements. The recruitment was conducted in two

phases. The first phase included recruiting those females that the recruiter is partially familiar with regarding their characteristics and the second phase started when according to requirements of the study more participants were needed in order to have 19 participants of two different generations that believed to be enough to reach data saturation. Snowballing sampling was used for the second phase and I was referred by participants to other females who had required characteristics and was able to participate. The requirement included the participants, in the study, to be females of particular age range and have educational experiences in Tajikistan as my research focuses on females' education experiences within Tajikistan regardless of their ethnicities and level of education.

The purpose of recruiting females of different age ranges is to collect detailed information about their own experiences at school and out of school. I focused on information regarding factors that have affected or currently affecting their education experiences that differed from females who are from a different education generation. Recruiting participants from different generations offered a richer understanding of how factors have changed through the decade and what the barriers were at the moment that still confronts girls and makes them drop out and not continue their education.

The recruited females were from Dushanbe city, regions of republican subordination: Varzob, Vahdat and Rudaki regions, city districts of Dushanbe: Shohmansur and Sino regions, Khatlon province: Temurmaliq region, and from Gorno-Badakhshan Mountainous Province: Darvoz region (Figure 6).



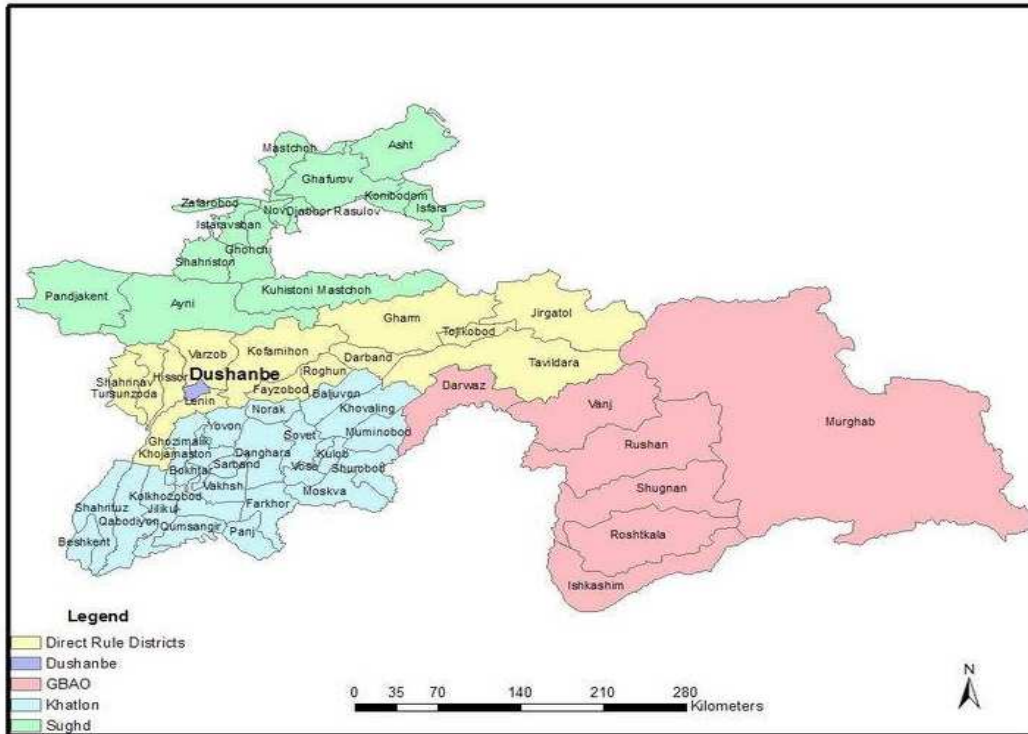


Figure 5. Map of districts of Tajikistan

Table 2. Participants age, educational level, and region

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education level</b>	<b>Address</b>
P1	1983-36	6th grade	Varzob region
P2	1996-22	Higher Education	Vahdat
P3	1975-44	Secondary education	Shohmansur region
P4	1974-45	Secondary education	Sino region
P5	1999-20	University	Rudaki region
P 6	1984 -35	8th grade	Sino region
P7	1997 -21	Vocational school education	Shohmansur region,
P8	1974-45	University	Sino region
P9	1976-43	Vocational school education	Sino region
P10	1993-36	Lower secondary education (9th grade)	Sino region
P11	2001-18	Secondary education	Rudaki region,
P12	1995-26	Asperantura (postgraduate)	Sino region
P13	1996-23	University	Dushanbe city
P14	1995-20	Secondary school education	Darvoz region
P15	1997-24	6th grade	Darvoz region
P16	1997-23	Secondary school education	Sino region
P17	1995-24	University	Darvoz region
P18	1998-20	University	Temurmalik region

### **Interviews**

In-depth interviewing allowed me to collect rich and detailed knowledge on the background information of the educational experiences of females. The interviews were conducted through different online communication applications such as What’s App and Viber that allowed me and my informants to have clear conversations because I gathered data from Tajikistan while being in the USA.

This qualitative research required internet interviews to be used in the data gathering process. According to Rubin & Rubin (2012), the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the problem of interest from the standpoint of a subject, to describe or reveal the meaning of their experiences, and to unfold their lived experiences before it is explained scientifically. In order to explain the issue accurately, a series of in-depth interviews will be conducted with females recruited for the study. Since I collected data for my research while I was in the US, I used the internet interview via What's Up and Viber applications that allowed me to communicate via voice call conversations with the population that I recruited for my study from Tajikistan. Internet interviews are conducted with participants that are hard to reach according to Rubin & Rubin (2012). Even if Rubin and Rubin (2012), states that an internet interview is for participants that are hard to reach, in my case, it was not only hard to reach the participants but also was hard to find that particular time that works for both researcher and the participants. For this, the early mornings were chosen to have the interviews proctored, which best suited the participants and the researcher.

Internet interviews were modeled on open-ended questions about their involvement at school and the issues they faced or currently face that make it difficult to go to school or what made it difficult for them resulting in them discontinuing going to school. In recruiting the participants, their age and timeline that they were involved in or are involved in the education process attainment were taken into account.

There were created a number of main open-ended questions that focused on learning the issues of girls' education in Tajikistan. The follow-up questions were asked besides the main question during the interview with participants in order to better elaborate on the points that

participants brought up. My own experience influenced the content of questions that were created in advance for the interview in this study.

### **Coding**

The internet interviews were conducted via phone calls and audio recorded. As the interviews were in Tajik language, I transcribed and translated into the English language with the aim of analyzing collected data. I began coding after having transcribed and translated the excerpts of interviews about the educational experience from participants' descriptions. I coded with an inductive approach without using predefined code frames.

Coding was done in two stages. The first stage consisted of creating a codebook and dividing the data set into smaller samples that helped to analyze each sample separately and give them code labels. Taking into account the characteristics of the divided samples and paragraphs, I wrote sentences describing the general meaning of the paragraphs that were the initial level for developing topics that covered the samples. The sentences and sometimes the whole paragraph that had similar context were coded and given the same label. Some examples of the initial coding of interviews and the revealed topics are given below:

Table 3. Examples of the initially revealed topics

<b>Labeled Codes</b>			
1	Female-headed household	15	Education to be independent
2	Family size	16	National Testing Center
3	Nuclear family	17	After marriage education
4	Family care	18	Time of education
5	Marriage context	19	Early marriage
6	Male members in education	20	Financial difficulties
7	Individual agency	21	To be married
8	Family bias	22	Late marriage troubles
9	Lack of literacy	23	Family belief
10	Family care and village life	24	Marriage family barrier
11	Education for future life	25	Neighborhood girl forced marriage
12	Family support	26	Suitable major
13	Family financial support	27	Future med for girl
14	Small school population	28	Follow steps

In the second stage, I combined the labeled codes that had similar meanings or belonged to one group and divided them into different categories and subcategories. As a result of the second stage of coding, topics that included subtopics were developed. I brought a piece of the final list of the topics and the codebook that below here:

Table 4. Some examples of the final table of developed themes

Themes	Initial codes	Sentences describing the samples
<b>Financial difficulties</b>	Family finance	Sister's education is supported by all the family member with financially/ Brothers send me money after marriage Girls cannot study and work to earn their expenditure Dropped out at age 15 as father left the family Financial difficulties in the family Boarding school could make it easier to enter university Blue-collar job to feed the family. Lack of finance to visit the doctor
	Rural area	Family size, only 6 grades Uncle's children do not have education Parent don't work My parents do not have an education and they do not work too. My brothers are the breadwinners of our family. Difficult life condition no university
<b>Role model</b>	Success of others	daughters want to follow their aunts' steps -journalism Lack of college preparation courses makes the students follow the steps of other's Educated grand family member motivated me to follow in their footsteps Role model- No family member education Heard from neighbors about sewing course Journalism from childhood and journalist's role model
	Teachers as the first role model	role model instead of college prep role model prep to college
<b>Marriage – a measure of success</b>	Arranged marriage	Neighbor girl was not allowed to get education but was married off but divorced quickly Education and future if divorced and independence Marriage preserves girl's reputation Mother married at age 16 -marriage ease the single mom's job
	Age of marriage	Sisters have elementary education and lower secondary education married at 18/Marriage at age 25 old maid for some Will be late to marry off the girl after university Late marriage- second wife Early marriage Marriage as the measure of success in the village right after graduating from high school
	Marriage market	Men prefer educated girl to marry Villagers don't prefer educated wife for son Father's side relatives do not let the girl receive education and work Girls with a nursing degree are good for the marriage market Nurse daughter-in-law are allowed to work after marriage
<b>Cultural expectation</b>	Family care	Aunts got married I took care of grandma dropped school As a daughter was responsible to help my mom with house chores Sister elder child was responsible for house chores Sister as a caregiver if mom works Cultural view of girls' education in rural areas

As you see in Table 3, I always kept all the analysis results together in one document, starting from transcripts to direct quotes, to review the selected labeled codes. This helped to

analyze what each quote means and the theme it describes best. The inductive approach allowed me to label codes on the base of the collected data and then to compare them with categories brought up in the literature review, that was written prior to data collection, and developed model. Thus, all analyses resulted in developing the findings of the themes that included Cultural expectation, Marriage, Community factor, Education system factor, Family factor, and Individual agency, where each of them is divided into subcategories.

During the write-up phase, I paid attention to the regional differences and the age of participants, which describes the two divided cohorts. Moreover, the stance of the participant was taken into account as a framework for the study Standpoint Theory. After analysis, all the recordings were destroyed. The collected data provided a series of perspectives on female education drop-out opinions from their own experiences and standpoints.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The goal of this study is to investigate the factors that affect girls' education in Tajikistan. This chapter presents the factors that came from the interviews. The interviews conducted were focused on girls' education from the standpoint of females themselves. As described above when discussing coding, I first labeled larger themes. Some categories are divided into subcategories that worked together in contrasting the females educational experience and the factors affecting females' early dropping out of school or not receiving higher education.

I present the findings based on the model above that I developed from the literature review and my own experience. First, I present issues related to the cultural context named as cultural expectations. This includes family care, patriarchy, parental discrimination, female child upbringing, and early childbearing. Second, I present the marriage context that was found out from the interview related to educational constraints of females and this category includes arranged marriage, marriage age, and marriage market. Third I bring up issues related to community that include several categories such as the role of gossip on girls' educational attainment, role model for females to receive education, education for future. The category of community factors is divided into subcategories such as education in case of unforeseen future life issues, education as a means of a better family establishment, and education within a female-dominated field of study. Fourth, I present the education system category where I discuss factors related to school and the National Testing Center (NTC) to attain higher education. Fifth, I bring up issues related to family factors. This includes family's and spouse's family support, family's socioeconomic status, and family's financial difficulties. The category of financial difficulties is divided into subcategories of family finance and rural areas in relation to female financial constraints. Last but not least, I present the category of individual agency that is about a female's



ambition, such as lack of knowledge and laziness, and how these issues are related to or changed during wartime. The categories that are covered in this paper are discussed in relation to each interviewee's fear and violence, poverty, school supplies, teachers, and gendered differences effects of the war subcategories. The quotations are labeled based on interview code in the oral history archive, the gender of the interviewee, and the region where the interview with study participants took place.

### **Cultural Expectations**

This study investigated several aspects of Tajik culture that affects women's educational opportunities. First, women are regarded as caregivers who are responsible for childbearing and raising children. In addition, in Tajik society men's education is prioritized due to parental discrimination and patriarchal decision-making. These three aspects that can affect a woman's education are focused on in this study and are discussed below.

### **Family Care**

Females in Tajik society and culture are considered to be care-givers who are responsible for caring for family members and children, whereas males are breadwinners and protectors of their wives, daughters, and mothers. Female children are brought up and taught skills to make them future caregivers when they build their own families. The typical family is multi-generational, often with extended family nearby. The caretaking starts with the family when an older daughter takes care of younger siblings, cousins, and elderly members of the family. Results of this study showed that in a society that prioritizes caregiving by women, that caregiving will act as a barrier for females to receive an education.

An example of how the caregiving interfered with education is seen in the case of participant 1, who is 36 years old with a 6th grade education. She grew up in her grandparent's

house because her grandmother needed to be taken care of due to her inability to walk. As a result, the girl dropped out of school to take care of her grandmother because other members of the family were not able to. Her sister was also removed from school because she was responsible for the care of her other younger siblings. Furthermore, her sister was encouraged to learn sewing skills instead of receiving any formal education. In the quote below participant 1 described how caregiving took the place of any formal education.

I grew up with my grandparents and uncles (my mom's brothers). I had two uncles and each of them had 4 children. I had 6 aunts and 4 uncles but two of my uncles passed away. I was brought up in a big family in the village, this is why I could not receive an education. By the time when I grew up a little bit, my [younger] aunts got married and my grandma needed someone to look after her because she was sick, could not walk so she needed constant care. I left school and took care of my grandma for several years until I was 18 years old. When I got married, her sons took care of her. When my grandmother took me with her, there was nobody to take care of my other younger sisters and brother. My father worked far from home in 1986, so my other sister was not allowed to go to school but had to look after my younger siblings. But my other sister was allowed to learn sewing, but she did not want to. (Participant 1; 36 years old).

As mentioned above, a female child usually serves as a caregiver for younger siblings, especially when the family is large. For participant 14, the caregiving responsibility was assigned due to the fact that her mother had passed away. Because she was an older child, although only 12 years old, she was the only person after her mother to take care of her five siblings. Because she took on the burden of caregiving, she dropped out of school in the 6th grade. As a result, she was left without an education and accepted the role that was given to her by the culture. In the following quote participant 14 described her life as an oldest daughter responsible for her siblings.

I am 24 years old and was born in 1995. I live in Darvoz region. There are six of us in the family, 3 girls, and 3 boys. I am an elder child. My mother passed away when I was 12 and I dropped out of school after sixth grade because my siblings were little. My mother passed away in 2015 and at that time my youngest sibling was three years old. I took care of my siblings and my uncle's wife who lived in another street but in that village helped us with baking bread because I could not bake bread. Those days that my mother felt bad,

I didn't go to school for a couple of days and then returned back to school. (Participant 14; 24 years old)

Less attention is paid to the education of girls, especially for rural girls, who not encouraged to receive an education at all. If a girl says that she would like to pursue education, that will go against the many socially determined gender roles. Regarding these widely accepted gender roles, participant 18, who is 20 years old, stated that there are people who believe that education is only for men.

There is such an understanding among the Tajik people that the girl does not have the right to receive education or she does not need education at all, and the men have to receive an education, but it is wrong. Everybody needs education in spite of one's gender, they need to receive an education. (Participant 18; 20 years old)

Besides the fact that there are people who believe that education is not for females, financial constraints heighten the difficulty of the decision to give a female child education or assign her to the task of caregiver for the rest of her life. To be assigned a caregiver is common in rural areas for females. Participant 24 commented that her sister stayed to help at home and learn the skills that a caregiver will usually learn as socially determined skills needed for her to survive.

We did not have enough budget to give my sister an education in Dushanbe city. This is why she helped at home with my mom and learned how to sew at the time when I came to Dushanbe to university. (Participant 17; 24years)

Parents usually stress the female children to learn the work around the house along with sewing skills. As female children, they have to be good at cooking and taking care of the home, not just for themselves but for being a good wife in the future and to make her parents feel proud of her. As marriage is the top priority in Tajik society, education is secondary for marriage life after those skills that each female child has to learn from her own mother. Participant 10 describes this emphasis on homemaking skills to detriment of all other education.

Yes, parents told me to learn how to do the house chores. They said that I should not do anything else but to learn house skills like making cakes, salads, different food instead. We lived in the apartment and we did not do anything else besides cooking, cleaning and again cooking and cleaning. (Participant 10; 36years)

Although many families do not support education for their daughters, some families, often families located in urban settings, will somewhat support their daughters' education. From the interview with participant 7, who is 21 years old, it was found that in the capital, Dushanbe City, parents valued and encouraged their daughters to receive education besides just stressing the caregiving qualities. At home, the female child is still responsible for the household chores, but parents do not restrict female children from attaining education beyond secondary education. However, the elder daughter is still the one who serves as a caregiver along with her mother, and often must disregard her education in favor of younger siblings.

I live in Dushanbe city. As a female in the family, I did help around the home besides my schooling. To help my mom with house chores was my responsibility. As an elder daughter in the family, my sister was responsible for all the house chores at home as she was the elder daughter in the family and as she did not go to university she spent more time than me at home and helped my mom with the work around the house. As I studied, I could not and did not do the work around the house much. I had some responsibilities at home, but I did them after school and after I did my homework, but my sister did most of the work around the house. I did not have much time left for house chores. My father was very supportive and as he saw that I was interested in studying he always let the others know that I have to study and not care much about house chores (Participant 7; 21years).

The research studied females as caregivers under the culture section because the base comes from the moral life of Tajik people. Overall, these participants indicate that culture plays role in their family life, and education. They also comment that social norm for families is that of a patriarchal norm, this means that what women's education looks is based on what the head male in the family deems appropriate. The next subcategory of patriarchy-decision making is also under the culture section that I discuss below.

## **Patriarchy-Decision Making**

The family structure in Tajikistan is patriarchal and the oldest male member of the family is the decision-maker. The oldest male member decides the future of younger members of the family, and especially controls the mobility of female members of the family.

The young couples usually start their marriage life by living with the husband's family as the marriage structure in Tajikistan is patrilocal. The father of the husband is the main decision-maker and sons are the secondary decision-makers. The father of the husband will decide for the daughter-in-law. When the son separates his household with his family then he becomes the initial decision-maker and decides the future of his own children and wife and decides who continues or receives education.

The man as the decision-maker decides the future of the female child and if the girl shows reluctance to the girl's education, she finishes compulsory education but does not go for further education. The reluctance of participant 10's father was based on his traditional point of view on the traditional designation of a female as a wife and mother.

Our family is not conservative, we have a modern point of view, but my father did not support girls' education at all. He believed that the only designation for a girl child is to get married and become wife and mom. My father was the decision-maker in the family. He was a very strict person, and nobody tried to change his mind. (Participant 10; 36years)

Even if the mother and father have equal rights in raising the children, the decision-making role regarding the female child's education attainment belongs to the father and the mother cannot change his decision. The mother's role in the family is to raise children and take care of the household. Regarding the role of mother and father in deciding the education of female child participant 9, who is 43 years old stated as follows:

My mother did not decide such issues, but she did whatever my father said. As we did not have a boy in the family, they called me not their daughter but their son (Participant 9; 43years).

Traditionalism is common mostly among elderly people, and as stated above, elderly male members of the family decide the mobility of daughters-in-law. The father-in-law decides if to allow the daughter-in-law to receive education or even show up in the public. This kind of relationship is inherent in rural areas among older generations who follow old traditions. This way the older male members of the family safeguard any immoral behavior of the young girl who became their daughter-in-law. When the daughter-in-law has children and ages, she will obtain freedom to decide with her husband if she can receive education or work outside of the home. The quote below from participant 4, who is 45 years. She lived with her large marriage family, although she did not have much to do around the house, she was not allowed to receive an education due to the traditional point of view of her father-in-law, the decision-maker of the family.

It is not because of work around the house. We were four daughters-in-law in that family, my father-in-law (the head of the family) did not allow me to receive an education or to go out. However, my husband had a university degree. I don't know why, but as the head of the family did not like we did not show opposition. Then, when we came to the city and became independent, I worked. They had such an understanding or view that the daughter-in-law of the family should avoid public places as well as appearing on the street. Not only he, but other heads of the family did not like their daughters-in-law to appear often in the street. It is like a traditional view that they followed. I do not know, but I worked right after I separated from them. I worked for three years as a janitor at the hospital in the Darvoz region. It is always like this that when one comes to a new family, the head of the family, usually in-laws, will decide what the new daughter-in-law will do. After the young families build their houses and live separately from their marriage family, then the husbands take responsibility to decide for their wife and their whole family. I aged and then I could work. When we lived with my in-laws, they decided what I had to do, my husband never said that I should not work. When we separated our household and lived with my husband and children, my husband allowed me to work (Participant 4; 45years).

The male decision maker-husband decides not only to allow his wife and daughters to receive an education but to work outside of the home in particular careers. No matter whether rural or urban areas, the men have traditional views of wife's labor. The husband decides what area his wife has to work and does not let her to work in the area that she received a degree

before marriage if he considers that his wife will work in a place where she has exposure to the male community. Regarding wife's work area of interest participant 7 stated as follow,

My husband does not want me to work as a telephone operator. He says that it is hard for me to work as a telephone operator with my children. He is really supportive, but he understands that my children are still young, and I cannot do it (Participant 7; 21years).

Thus, the oldest male decides the wife's mobility and labor. Due to that, they do not see any priorities in having an educated wife and allowing the female member of the family to attain education because anyway, the wife will be at home. This quote from participant 10, shows uneducated wives were taken under control by husbands; they did not see any benefit or need to educate or have an educated wife.

I never asked why they prefer uneducated wives or daughters-in-law. Maybe they do not want their wives to work. Their wives are all housewives. Men in my marriage family do not allow their wives to work or go out much if we need to go to visit our parents, they take us and bring us back by car (Participant 10; 36years).

Overall, one can see that female education governed by the societal expectations as the male member of the family decides what and when to receive education or what career choose in case she will be allowed to work after marriage. This means that the girls in order to receive education have to get the permission of the male head of household. She has, at the same time, to consider what majors may give her guarantee that she might get benefit of her chosen area in future. Due to this the parents better educate their sons instead of daughters because the sons may do what they decide to. The next section discusses another part of the culture that is about how the parent prioritize the education of sons in comparison of their daughters' education.

### **Brother's Education -Parental Discrimination**

Parental discrimination toward the education of girls' education is inherent in many families in Tajikistan. There are many reasons why the parents will educate their sons and not their daughters. One of the reasons is financial (Whitsel, 2009) and another is the traditional role

of the female as a child bearer for the large family (Harris 2004), as was mentioned in the literature review of this study. From interviews conducted among the females, who were mostly from the capital city with a few from other rural areas of Tajikistan, it was found that there are families that give priority to educating sons and preferred daughters to be married off as soon as the girl reaches puberty.

The large family is a common family in the country. In the families where they have both boys and girls, the parents will opt to educate primarily the boys of the family. For example, when there are four girls and four boys, in most cases four boys will receive an education but only one or two of girls will be allowed to or will receive education themselves. The family's discrimination toward the girls' education in society is quite common, the girls will be brought up in a way focused on gendered roles and will be encouraged to learn skills like sewing and cooking. These skills let the girl practice them at home for the benefit of her and her future activity. The participants from the country related a common story of brothers being educated and sisters staying in the home:

Three of my brothers and one of my sisters have a bachelor's degree. One of my brothers finished technical school as a welder after ninth grade. My second brother has a university degree as an electrician. And my third brother graduated from the State Institution of Law, Business and Policy of Tajikistan. We are four girls in the family and the other two of my sisters also do not have an education. My younger sister is studying at the Tajik National University of Tajikistan in the Journalism department. (Participant 1; 36years)

The girls in our family did not go to university but all my brothers did. Only one of my sisters has completed a tailoring certificate course. (Participant 3; 45years)

There were 10 of us in the family, 6 girls and 4 boys. All my brothers are educated. But none of my sisters have any university degree. Only one of them learned sewing in front of a lady in our neighborhood. (Participant 4; 45years)

From the above, it is obvious that all the participants are talking about their brothers' education at the same time that they and their sisters remain uneducated girls. All of these



participants are more than thirty years and the ages tell that fewer girls in this age range received an education. Participant 9, who is 43 years old noted that she received education and worked even if at that period people looked awkward to the female's employment. However, the times and people changed. She states that:

When I worked as a bookseller, everybody said that why I worked as a bookseller as a female. But now everybody works, and it is okay, and nobody says what one does. It was not common for the female to work as a seller. Before only a few people were religious but now women have developed, and more females receive education and work no one cares or says anything. (Participant 9; 43years).

The parental discrimination is heightened by the conventional rules of traditional life, all which cast the girl child as a future obedient wife. This quality is changing in the city and parents are trying to challenge the values of traditional life by encouraging and supporting girl children education. As participant 5 noted, all the children in their family receive education beyond secondary school. She stated that:

My sister, who is older than me, graduated from Tajik State Medical University this year, and my brother studies at college (Participant 5; 19 years).

This comment also reflects that medical education is famous and required major for females. Overall, one can see that due to financial constraints and future financial returns to the family the families opt to educate the boys of the family primarily that is in addition as a result of traditional beliefs. This means that not only financial difficulties make the parents to not equally educate the children but how in future when the girl gets married the education serves her. However, if the parents can afford, they try their daughters to have a skill or education that she will be allowed to work after marriage, therefore, in case not being allowed or not affording the best option will be handcraft like sewing skills or learn to learn housekeeping chores, that are related to their upbringing and we discuss in the next section

## **Female Child Upbringing**

A female child in Tajik families is brought up to value the family submissively and respect the decision of her parents. Tajik girls show desire to be able to receive education or job to support themselves as an independent person, however, the development of the interest depends on older members of the family. One participant mentioned of her interest to receive an education but stated that she felt fine if she was not allowed, and she described it as follows:

If I was not allowed, I would learn any skills like cooking, sewing, or any other skills that I can do at home at least to make a living this way (Participant 13; 23years).

The females' upbringing affects their decision to receive an education and improve themselves because they rely on their parents' decisions completely, and they are even ready to give up their dream without explaining their standpoint. The girls say that if they are not allowed to receive an education, then they will repeat the life of their mother as a housewife. Regarding this point, participant 5 noted that:

If I wanted to study but were not allowed by parents to make it to 11th grade or enter university, I think, I would learn any skills for myself to try to work and if my parents told me to get married, I would agree because I listen to my parents no matter what they say. Fewer and fewer people listen to their parents and parents' decisions nowadays, but yes, most people in Tajikistan follow what the parents want them to do even if they are more than 18 years old especially girls (Participant 5; 19years).

The parents' standpoint of traditional upbringing of female children results in withdrawing girls from school at an early age and marrying them off. The female child upbringing allows her to take it easy and agree with whatever the parent decides no matter what age. Participant 5 noted this from the experience of her classmates as follows:

I know it from one of my classmates, who was married after graduating from 9th grade at the age of 18. But she was fine with that decision and did not even have much interest in continuing her education. (Participant 5; 19years)

Overall, one can see that females' upbringing also affects their decision to receive education or admit the traditional life of being housewives. This means that child will act

according what she is encouraged for. However, there are some differences between rural and urban. The rural area people follow the tradition stronger in comparison to urban area and upbringing from the interviews shows that females admit if the parents decide them not receive educations and married off early right after graduating secondary school as a means of respect. Many participants mentioned that due to marriage right after graduating secondary school and not being able to receive education as a result of early marriage and childbearing that is discussed in the next section.

### **Early Childbearing**

Interviews with some of the participants showed that when the girls are married off early, the children are born early. The childbearing appeared to be a determinant affecting girls' schooling that could be classified as a factor. In regard to a childbearing barrier, participant 7 who is 21, married, and already has two children, mentioned that she received only vocational-technical school education after ninth grade. However, due to having young children, she postponed her education, even though her mother-in-law is in favor of her receiving an education, and she described that as:

My children are still young, three and two years old. I think I will not work according to my vocational-technical degree, but my mother-in-law wants and says that I have to enter university to receive an education next year. (Participant 7; 21 years)

Regarding education after marriage, other participants noted that since the family decides on behalf of girls to receive education, some families just believe that the girl's education is not their responsibility but rather the responsibility of the marriage family. However, the problem is that the girl does not receive education even if the marriage family encourages her because of her responsibility to her young children. Further, the girl gives up and does not want to go out of her comfort zone that she finds herself in. Participant 16, who is only 23 years old, already considers

that she will never receive an education even if she has the opportunity. In the quote below she stated as follows:

They say that girls should get married. It is up to their husbands to decide and allow them to go to university or not. But none of them went to university after marriage. My mother-in-law told me a couple of times that she will support me if I go to university, but I did not want anymore. Done with me I wish my children to receive education but now they are still little. If I go to university, it will not be difficult for me because I live with my children and husband in our own apartment. I have my mom to look after my children. (Participant 16; 23years)

To the above, regarding education after marriage, participant 7 added that she was 17 years old when she got married, and when she should have entered university to receive an education, she was not able to because she was giving care to her newborn. She noted about her education that:

I was 17 years old when I got married. I took “vocational-technical” courses after ninth grade, I got married at age 17 and had my daughter at age 18. Marriage age is 18, but as I knew my husband before we got married. My husband was born in 1989, and he was older than me. He was 25 or 26 years old. He said that he already reached the age to get married, so I agreed. I wanted to continue my education at university, but I could not do it because I was already busy with my child. (Participant 7; 21years)

Overall, this section shows that the females who marry early are left without education because they did not receive before marriage and are not able to receive after marriage because of their young children. The childbearing makes the young females, even whose marriage family support them to receive education, procrastinate their education and usually end up with no education.

### **Marriage Context**

The collected data shows that marriage also acts as a barrier for girls to attain education. The marriage age in Tajikistan is defined as 18 that can be reduced to 17 upon written request of marrying couples due to several familial factors. The research found that females in the study treated marriage as the destination of each girl in order not to break the traditional role of a Tajik

woman. They move according to the marriage market requirements that are acceptable in that particular period of time. Of course, the marriage market has its own requirements that are followed by females. The data collected for this research found marriage as a constraint for the educational attainment of females because of marriage prioritization in society. Marriage context in this research is divided into an arranged marriage, age of marriage, and marriage market that will be discussed below.

### **Arranged Marriage**

Arranged marriage is the type of marriage where the parents or other close relatives select the partner for their sons and daughters. In Tajikistan, this type of marriage is common. When children reach puberty, parents begin to think about a candidate for them. In the case of boys, the parents choose a girl that the parents prefer according to a range of characteristics that match their family, and in the case of girls, the parents wait for someone to ask for their daughter's hand to marry her off to whom they think is the best match. The age of 17-18 is the standard age for girls to be married off, and it is the age when most complete secondary school. When the girl completes secondary school, the parents are tempted to arrange their marriage as soon as any good candidate asks for her hand. Typically, no matter if the girl wants this marriage or has any other plans, like receiving education, she will be married off.

As a Tajik woman, I know that arranged marriage is considered a safe and proven type of marriage through the centuries in Muslim families and Tajik society. However, I have seen how it sometimes brings divorce of young families when girls who were married at a young and physically immature age. Participant 2 who is 22 years old herself brings an example of a neighbor girl who was married off right after completing upper secondary school. She divorced and that put her in a situation where she is left without any achievements in life and no education

that could provide a base to build her future. The quote below shared by participant 2 is regarding the marriage at an early age of a girl in her neighborhood:

I can bring an example from my neighbor. A girl who is younger than me and lived in our neighborhood, after graduating from 11th grade, her parents did not let her continue her education. She got married and soon, after a few days, the marriage family returned the girl to her parents' home due to some family issues which I don't know about. If she was educated, she could continue her studies, she could prove to her marriage family, that she can be better even without them. She could create a better future for herself. She should not have relied on others. In my opinion, girls should always rely on themselves. (Participant 2; 22years)

The nature of arranged marriage is changing because the government is trying to decrease the divorce level and require the parents to introduce the young people before the wedding is organized in order for them to see each other at least. In addition, young couples are required to be checked by the doctor to make sure that they are physically a match and can make a healthy family and children (Avesta.Tj, 2016). In addition to the marriages being arranged, forced marriages took place, which is recalled as an experience in the past by participant 5, who is 19 years old and is from the capital city, Dushanbe. She mentioned that nowadays most girls decide themselves to continue their education or get married, in the quote below.

In the past, I think the girls were forced to get married at an early age after 9th grade [incomplete secondary education] but now it is not like that. Most of them decide what is better for them to do. Nowadays, most girls enter universities and continue their education. (Participant 5; 19years)

Participant 17, who is from the remote region of Tajikistan situated in Mountainous Badakhshan oblast, has received university degree despite many family difficulties such as being raised by a single mom and coming from a large family. From my observation, regarding education, the people of Badakhshan oblast have always had different opinions and have been supportive of girls' education that let more girls from the region receive an education. The experience of participant 17 is proof that even if her marriage was arranged by her mother, she first received a university degree that became her weapon to build a nice family and grow as an

educated mother and daughter-in-law, breaking all stereotypical roles of females from rural regions, and she is quoted as saying:

When I graduated from university, I got married and have a daughter at the moment. My husband was handsome, and my mother knew him, and she thought it would be a nice match. I saw him before getting married and agreed. (Participant 17; 24years)

I believe that all these improvements are the result of peace in the country. In 1992, for rural area girls to continue their education was challenging due to the armed conflicts in the country that put the life and reputation of females living far from their homes in danger. The unsafety made the parents withdraw their daughters from school and marry them off at an early age. Participant 3 mentioned in the quote below that they did not have any difficulties besides the civil war but none of her sisters received education after secondary school.

At that time, the school [secondary education] was 10 years. I do not remember which year I went to school and what year I graduated secondary school. After graduating secondary school, I came to the city and entered medical college. That year (1992), the war started, and my mother did not permit me to continue my education at the medical college. I got married and left college. I got married in the village, and my marriage family lived in a neighboring village in the Darvoz region. I was 17 when I got married. I don't remember any difficulties that we had at that moment but as we were female, and we grew up in an incomplete family and at those years the girls were married as they reached puberty. (Participant 3; 45years)

Girls from villages have a bit different educational experiences in comparison with city girls in regard to gender norms and socialization differences. Therefore, girls from the city describe their access to education differently. The females from the city have some freedom in deciding and expressing their interest because of the urbanized style of living and access to education. But as development in the villages is low the females also act according their existing conditions. For example, Participant 9 who is 43 years old and was born and grew up in the city was from the family of four girls and is the eldest daughter. She described that she went to vocational school after graduating from 10 years of high school and was married off right after completing one year at vocational school. As her experience shows, she at least received

vocational school education before marriage that acted as an aid for her life living in the 90s (Participant 9; 43years).

Girls quit schooling after being married off while still being a student at university or college because of taking on the responsibilities of being a daughter-in-law, wife, and very shortly mother in a patrilocal society. As the girls are not quite ready for these responsibilities in addition to being busy with university studies, they feel that by dropping out from the university they will be able to spend more of their time at home as a good daughter-in-law or wife.

However, city girls do not quit after marriage because school is still accessible and easy to commute. Participant 16 described the situation, in the quote below, as follow:

I knew a girl who was my neighbor and she worked with me. She got married and continued her education after the wedding. She always said that it is difficult for her in her marriage family's home and she did not know if she would finish university because it was her last year of university. She got married and her morning sickness started. She decided to drop out of school, but her mom did not let her because she was raised by her mom alone and her mom wanted her to have an education. (Participant 16; 23years)

Over time, traditions have changed toward arranged marriages. The parents keep the tradition of arranged marriage for their children but try to provide education before arranging a marriage. As participant 5 mentioned, her sister is 24 years old and recently graduated from university, their parents waited until her sister graduated from university to arrange her wedding and agreed with the partner that their daughter found, which is contrary to traditional arranged marriages.

Sister is 24 and she is not married at the moment. She recently graduated from the university. My parents are planning already. She is already engaged. She chose her partner. They know each other from the university. He is also educated. (Participant 5; 19years)

The government is working to improve the role of women in society. Many encouraging programs are being conducted to improve the role of women, which will lead to females to prove their positions in education. Overall, one can see that arranged marriages are the type of marriage



that parents arrange in order to make sure that their daughter is going to a nice family and marrying the young man that the parents choose for her. As parents arrange it, sometimes they withdraw girl from school when any good candidate appears to marry her. However, there happening some differences in the city because families that afford girl's education first let the girl to receive education and then arrange wedding. Yet, the arrange marriage usually takes place at an early age, which I discuss in the next section.

### **Marriage Age**

The marriage in Tajik society is universal. The marriage age is defined as 18 and in some cases at age 17 if the marrying partners file the case and agree to do so. The government is taking measures to stop early marriages, which are working and it is very rare that the marrying partners get married at age 16. In the past, particularly during the war, young girls were married off at an early age in order to protect their reputation. Currently, sometimes a girl is married off early as a result of the girl reaching puberty and not being involved in school.

From the conducted interviews it was found that sometimes among those who drop out of school after ninth grade, which is compulsory for all the children, some girls will not be involved in any other type of schooling, and as a result will be married off early. When girls are withdrawn from school after ninth grade they will serve as caregivers at home for younger siblings. As it is brought in the following quote, participant 11 's mother was withdrawn due to the need to take care of her siblings. Her single mom was the only breadwinner, and the girl saved other siblings from not going to school to receive an education. In the below quote, participant 11 described her mother's condition and experience that did not allow her mother to receive an education:

She got married when she was 16 years old. She did not even finish ninth grade. She could not because my grandfather passed away early, my grandmother worked to feed her

family, children, and my mother looked after her siblings when my grandmother was at work. My uncles and aunt who were younger than my mother, they have education, they received education. (Participant 11; 18years)

Analyses show that the understanding of education for girls varies among those who are from rural areas and those who mostly live in the city. In the case of participant 1, who is 36 years old and is from the rural area, she still thinks that in the community those who do not value education of girls, and even girls who go to university are called an old maid because of getting married late at the age of 24-25. Participant 1 stated that girls usually did not receive an education and dropped out of school at an early age in her family. She described it in the quote below as follows:

One of my sisters finished the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and after did not go to school and another sister went to a school of design after ninth grade. She studied there a year and after a year she got married. There are some people who are not educated and did not receive education at his/her time, will say that this or that girl is an old maid to be married. Some of the parents do not allow their daughters to go to university because they say that until the girl graduate university it will be late for them to get married, and they might be the second wife (polygamy). People have different opinions. Some of them do not think that it is useful for the girl child to receive an education for her own future and it is never too late for them to get married. (Participant 1; 36years)

In addition, participant 2 mentioned that in the rural areas, people's misunderstanding relates to their religious understanding toward girls' education. In the rural areas, some people believe that Muslim girls should not receive an education because education will spoil the girl and give the mobility that the Muslim girl-child is not supposed to have. This kind of view results in early marriage and impedes girl-child education, leaving the girl in a vulnerable position in case of divorce. Below is the quote by participant 2:

There is a misunderstanding with religion in rural areas which led to not letting the girls get an education but push them to get married. Some families even force girls to get married at a young age. When the girls get married at a young age most of them do not know how to be among their husband's families, which consequently brings to divorce or creates problems for them. This is not a problem only for the family, but as well as in society and the country. (Participant 2; 22years)

In the society, as the marriage is prioritized, parents follow this value and attempt to marry the girl-child off as soon as they reach age 18. As soon the prioritization changes due to the time and life experience, these values might change too. For example, participant 4 is the mother of four daughters, she married off her daughters following a socially determined way of life but allowed her youngest daughter to receive education beyond secondary school education. When she was asked if her daughters have any kind of education, she replied as follows:

I married my daughters off at an early age and they already have three and four children each. They were 18 and 19 years old when I married them off. My youngest daughter is studying at university and is not married, and my younger son is getting married soon. (Participant 4; 45years)

Following the socially determined values are heightened by family financial resources. The children usually attend high school with limited financial resources because public schools are free and mandatory for each child to attend. However, as the children graduate from secondary school, in order to ease their burden, the parents marry girl children off and raise sons as breadwinners of the family. This is demonstrated in the upcoming quote:

I am married and have a five-year-old daughter. I am married in the Darvoz region in the neighboring village at age 18. I was engaged at age 16 and got married as soon as I reached 18. I married my brother's friend. Most parents prefer to marry their daughters off because it makes their job easier. They marry their daughters off and their sons work and feed their families... As soon as girls finish secondary school, they get married the same summer. They engage at the beginning of that year and by the time they finish school, they get married (Participant 14; 24years)

As the above quote suggests, the girls even get engaged at age 16 and will be immediately married off when they reach the marriage age of 18. Sometimes they will marry at age 17 if the marrying couples agree, or there are any emergencies. The patrilocal arrangement of families is the main rule according to which the young couples live. This is why when the girls graduate from secondary school at age of 17, the relatives and neighbors ask for her hands to make her a candidate for their son. When the girl graduates from 11th grade, they wed. Of course, after the

wedding, the girls almost never continue education. Regarding the girls' marriage right after secondary school, participant 15 stated the following:

I am 20 years old and am married, but don't have children yet. I live with my marriage-family in Darvoz in a neighboring village from my parents' home. I graduated from school, got engaged immediately, and got married. (Participant 15; 20years)

The practice of early marriage still persists in the country despite the tough legislation to manage early marriage. Early marriages mostly persist in rural areas, because in rural areas females' mobility is usually restricted more than in the city. Even many parents who are originally from rural areas but have moved to the city to live do not let their daughters receive education, following the values which they grew up with. Regarding early marriage in the rural area, participant 10 stated her father is originally from Kulob city of Khatlon region, and he is against girls' education and marries the girl child off early. The reluctance persists among all the males of their family because they think that education spoils the girl-child. Participant 10 described her experience in the quote below as follows:

My uncles have one daughter each and all of them got married at age 17 and dropped out of school after ninth grade because my uncles are also very strict like my father. They did not even allow their daughters to go to school and one of my uncles married off her daughter after 8th grade. Our Kulobis are very strict towards the female child and they believe that it is not safe to let the girl go out often. They worry about the purity of their daughter (Participant 10; 36years).

Amendments were made to the law of family about the age of marriage, which was raised from 17 to 18, and the law of parental responsibility was created (Karimova, 2014). The new law of parental responsibility is to enhance the girls' school attendance because parents who withdraw their daughters from school to marry off early can be prosecuted. The goal of the newly adopted law is to make the parents more responsible for children's, especially girls', education. Furthermore, participant 8, who is 48 years old, believes that as the marriage in Tajikistan is patrilocal, the girls often have difficulty getting along with members of her spouse's

family. The girls need to get married at age 25, after they receive a university degree, because underage marriage leads to divorce.

It was 10 years. After 10th grade, I went to university and got married before graduating from university...The main reason for divorce among young families is marrying the girls early at ages 15-16. It is the age when the girls still are children and do not understand anything in life and it's the time, they need to spend it in learning and gaining skills. As a part of our tradition, the daughter-in-law believed to become not only a daughter in the marriage family but as well as a helper for her mother-in-law and other members of the family. This unpreparedness will bring to the divorce in the family of those girls. She will tell every small misunderstanding in her marriage family to her parents that will cause misunderstanding between the families. Or the girl will get mad at her marriage family members and go back to her parents' home. All of these are because she is very young. She has to grow up. If someone asks me at what age the girl has to get married, I would say that at age 25. At 25 she will do good. She can get along with her mother-in-law and other members of her marriage family, as well as better, take care of her own children. (Participant 8; 48years)

It is obvious from the standpoint of the participants that underage marriage affects the educational attainment of girls. The government has taken several measures to tackle underage marriage because of later consequences of underage marriage to the girls' mobility, especially their educational attainment. The age of marriage is 18 in the country, and it is also the time when the children graduate from 11th grade. The girl children are deprived of schooling and are married off in case of any difficulties in the family or society. However, early marriages before the age of 17 are very rare among the younger generation, and it can be said that it is the past practice.

### **Marriage Market**

In the study, I also looked at the marriage market and its connection to girl educational attainment. As part of the Tajik culture, the female has to be married when she matures, and the marriage market has its rules that overlap with their educational attainment. From the collected data, it was found that one of the issues with the marriage market was that the girls are married off as soon as they reach puberty. When the girl reaches puberty, the parents try to find an

appropriate candidate to marry her off, which usually happens at age 18 and sometimes earlier than the defined marriage age because of the marriage market requirement. The reasons for the early marriage are twofold. It is easier to marry off the girl young because she has less demands about marriage conditions, and the younger daughter-in-law will be more submissive in the marriage family. Below, as participant 10 mentions, educated girls do not agree with parents' choice of partner for her but might choose by herself whom to marry and when.

If the girl grows and becomes independent, she might say that she does not care much about having a family because she can make her own living being. Therefore, they marry their daughters early to ease for themselves. If the girl receives an education, she will say why she needs a husband if she chooses a career instead of family life. This is why they marry their daughters early without education. If the girl becomes mature it will be hard to marry her off easily because she will choose herself whom to marry (Participant 10; 36years).

When the girl is married off before receiving or even starting their education at colleges and universities, they give up, marriage families will not prefer the daughter-in-law to go to college or the girl will lose interest to go for education due to new responsibilities that the marriage life grants them. As the marriage market requires marrying off at an earlier age, sometimes the parents do not wait for their daughter to graduate from college to arrange her marriage. When parents find any suitable candidate to marry their daughter off, they marry their daughter off in the middle of college and the girl will not be allowed by the marriage family to continue college. One of the reasons for not allowing the daughter-in-law to continue college after marriage is not to prefer the young girl to show up often in public or not preferring an educated daughter-in-law. Regarding the marriage in the middle of studies, participant 15 commented the following:

One of my classmates entered college and did not finish college because she got married and she was not allowed to continue. She was a second-year student at medical college and her marriage family promised them that they would let her continue her college, but they did not allow her after the wedding. And she quit college. Education should be first.

In our village, some marry their daughters and some of them go to university. Some families do not like to have an educated daughter-in-law (Participant 15; 20years).

The practice of not preferring an educated wife or daughter-in-law is decreasing in the cities according to results of the interview, and mostly happens in villages and rural areas. As the marriage arrangement is patrilocal, getting married in a village further from the college or university that the girl was going to makes the girl drop out of college or the marriage family does not let the girl continue education. Nowadays in Dushanbe, the capital city, the educated girls are preferred in the marriage market as participant 6 noted in the below quote:

Nowadays most young men prefer to marry an educated girl. I noticed many young men in Dushanbe look for an educated girl to marry (Participant 6; 35years).

However, the preferences are not to all the educational backgrounds. In the marriage market the girls with nursing or medical degrees are preferred. Even if the families do not much prefer an educated daughter-in-law, the girl with medical education is in high demand no matter if for rural areas or cities. The marriage families say that it is good to have a daughter-in-law in the family who will serve as a family nurse. The daughters-in-law with medical degrees are even allowed to work outside of the home in the nearby clinics to help spouse in family and make money.

I know one of our relatives who had a nurse degree got married, she was allowed by her marriage family to work in the local clinic which was nearby. Not all the families in Tajikistan look for educated girls as their future daughters-in-law, but it is getting better than past years (Participant 2; 22years).

Only one of my sons is married and her wife does not have an education more than ninth grade. She is a housewife, but I want her to enter medical college and receive medical education (Participant 9; 43years).

Parents say that their job is to marry their girl off. As a rule, for most people girls should not be spoiled and the husband should be the first man for her. Parents following this rule of the marriage market, which is religiously determined to value virginity, limits a girl's mobility to keep her safe because of any rumors of her behavior that will hurt her reputation in the marriage

market. Fear of not being able to control their daughter's behavior if sent to college far from family, makes the parents focus on marrying her off as soon as she reaches puberty and leave the task of educating her to the marriage family. However, it is very rare that girls are be sent to college after getting married.

My parents arranged my marriage at age 20. And as people say when the girl matures, she has to get married this way my father found me a partner I got married. ...My father's friend's daughter got married after marriage. She was blamed that she was not a virgin and was returned home. My father was afraid that if he would not marry me early something like that will happen to me which will shame him. My father quickly found me this candidate and I got married. Now I am married and have two children. I didn't try to continue education anymore after marriage. I gave up. Before my parents allowed me, everything and didn't limit me from anything. They started to limit me from freedom after that event with my father's friend's daughter. It was hard for my father because when that girl was brought back home, his friend was ashamed and could not stand the shame and got a heart attack and died. Before, my father always told me to study and become a lawyer but changed his mind at once (Participant 16; 23years).

Participant 12 believes that it is possible for a girl to receive education beyond upper secondary education if her marriage family is not big. Big families have more tasks for the daughter-in-law to do that makes it difficult to go to college. Participant 12 described the above mentioned as follows:

The girl can receive education after marriage if she has a small family and does not have much work to do at home. But if the girl gets married and goes to a big marriage family, it will be a problem for them and difficult to continue education if they get married in the middle of her schooling or to enter university to study or work outside of the home (Participant 12; 26years).

As for the education of girls after marriage, participant 14 suggested that if girls finish their education before getting married, it will save them from having to quit or not receiving education at all. Regarding this, participant 14, who is 20 years old, stated as follows:

Education should be first. One of my classmates entered college and did not finish college because she got married and she was not allowed to continue. She was a second-year student at medical college and her marriage family promised them that they would let her continue her college, but they did not allow her after the wedding. And she quitted college. (Participant 14; 20years)



Another female who participated in this study also noted difficulties after marriage life that serve as a barrier for girls to receive or continue an education, and she described that it is hard to continue education and then when you have children it will become even harder. For example, the girl marries and after a while, she gets pregnant and cannot study well and misses class a lot and as a result, hardly graduates and sometimes drops out of university (Participant 13; 23years). This note is based on previous experiences of girls that left school in spite of being promised that they will be allowed to continue their education after marriage.

Overall, one can see that marriage market rules impact the people's conduct toward girls and their educational attainment, or in other words, the people try to act according to society's determined rules of marriage market such as age, college education, societal expectation of marrying female, and education after marriage. However, the rules affect the educational attainment of females because as a result of marriage the females are withdrawn from school to be eligible for marriage especially in the rural areas. Yet, the marriage market allows females to receive an education according to the requirements of the marriage market in order to be successful both in marriage and education that are connected to the community as well. In the next section the community factor is discussed where I discuss how community has effect on educational attainment of females.

### **Community Factor**

During the interviews with participants, it appeared that the community has a high impact on people's educational attainment decisions and choices they make regarding girls' education. As for girls' educational attainment, analysis indicated that the community in which each girl lives serves as a role model, and gossip shapes the behavior of both the parents and the girls.

## **Gossip and Girls' Education**

The females in Tajik communities try not to show up in public much, because of the gossip of other people in the neighborhood. The gossip in the community is used as a means to force conformity to social norms (Harris, 2004). In regard to females showing up in public places, participant 11, who is 18 years old, commented that girl's appearance on the streets with the aim of commuting to school causes gossip among the adults and she described it as follows:

In our neighborhood, people say bad things about girls and gossip the young girls a lot, therefore my father didn't want me to go outside often. He always said that he doesn't want to hear any gossip about me. I talked to him and said that I will not do anything bad, and I just go to school and back home. But he said that he doesn't want me to go to school even. It is because the men in their groups in our neighborhood said bad things about girls (Participant 11; 18years).

The gossip can change the parents' decision on allowing or not allowing the girl to receive higher education or even complete upper secondary school due to the girl appearing to mature in the eyes of society. To avoid the gossip of neighbors, the girls even avoid often showing up outside of their home. Participant 7 described her experience of her commuting to school as follows:

There was gossip about girls, but as I did not go out often only went to school or college I was not aware of what they usually said about me or girls Also, there were some girls whose parents were against them to go out, therefore they did not go out. I usually went out with my group mates from college but not with anyone from my neighborhood (Participant 7; 21years).

Parents are afraid of disgraceful comments about their daughters that sometimes serve as a means to not let the girl attain an education. This kind of attitude toward girls is even higher in the rural areas of the country. Participant 4, who is 45 years old, noted that at her time when she had to go to college, she was not allowed to because in the community that she lived, people said disgraceful words as if the girl from the village would go astray if goes far from home and she stated that as follows:

The people gossip about the girls in the rural areas; therefore, she did not let me go to university and receive an education. They said that girls from rural areas cannot live in the city properly and may do something that spoils themselves and their families' reputation. The village girls were not supposed to live in the city by themselves and mom was concerned about my' honor and purity (Participant 4; 45years).

The gossip is used as a means of female control especially when it is applied by men in the Tajik society. Through the gossip the social pressure is performed that will be addressed not on a female child but as well as on the whole family of that girl (Harris, 2004).

### **Role Model**

Females in this study mentioned that community serves as the role model for the parents to let the children receive education or for the girls to continue education after secondary school. The participants, who are 43-48 years old, noted that as in the area that they lived the neighbors were people who had a different mentality. They all valued education that resulted in young girls to follow their counterparts. Participant 8 remembers at her teenage age in the block that they lived mostly lived Russians and as the Russian neighbors were for education, it affected the community also to strive for education and she noted as follows:

In the block that we lived only two Tajik families lived and the rest all were Russians, Tatars, and some other nationalities. As we Tajik families lived among them, we tried to catch up with them. There wasn't anyone in that block that was far from education or did not have an education. Almost all of them left Tajikistan during the war and they even regretted that they left Tajikistan (Participant 8; 48years).

Another participant also mentioned the effects of the community on her when was to receive an education. She described it as follows:

All of my classmates were from families that appreciated education. They were originally from Sughd regions and Badakhshon regions and they mostly received an education. People from Faizobot, Romit, or Vahdat region, for example, did not try to receive an education before but nowadays they enter universities and receive an education (Participant 9; 43years).

She went on to say that the neighbors who were originally from the northern and the eastern part of the country even during early times understood the importance of education to their children

and did not restrict them from school or universities. This kind of attitude served other people living in the neighborhood to strive for education.

Overall, one can see that the females see those who have education and was successful as a role model in their educational attainment experiences. The community is the place which encourages them as an example to move forward and receive education.

### **Education for Future**

When talking with participants I found out that most of the participants mentioned education for the future. Through education for the future, they meant the future of girls' education and its benefits to girls and society. When analyzing the data, it was found out that the theme education for the future talks of different subtopics that education can serve for girls. It was mentioned that the girls need education first in the case and building a better family, to earn independence and what and who can serve the girl as a role model.

### ***Education in Case***

Lack of education makes the female child even more submissive and dependent on the support of others such as male heads of the family. The family value is high in Tajik culture and society, that makes the female child also to follow the tradition to less choose to attain education. In this part, the females mentioned that the girls need education in case of different difficult life conditions. In the interviews conducted participant 4 who is 45 years old noted that the girl who does not have an education will always depend on her husband even for daily allowance. She who could not let her daughters attain education considers education important for girls and she stated as follows:

I mean, when the girl does not have an education and any job will always ask the husband for money for any needs that she has and mostly the husband will not always give or have money to give her. And when she has an education and job, she will manage her life and even help the family financially by supplying things in need of the family and herself.

An uneducated girl sometimes is in need of 5 somonis but cannot find it. I know from my daughters' life experiences because they don't have an education. I wanted my daughters to receive an education, but they did not because I married them without education and now, they always rely on their husband financially for a miserable amount of money that they need for their day-to-day needs. I want all the girls to receive college or university education because higher education is necessary for them. (Participant 4; 45years)

In addition to the above-mentioned statement, participant 15 in her 20th years, stated that the education is more important for girls because if the man does not have education, his physical power helps him earn for a living, but the female cannot, and she commented as follows:

From my life experience, I can say that the girl definitely needs to receive an education. It doesn't matter what condition is there and what condition she has, she needs education. The man can work as a builder, but the woman can't and has to have an education in order to work anywhere. (Participant 15; 20years)

Education, of course, if received requires put in practice and starting the job according to the received degree. However, the females, who participated in this research, believed that if education is not received before marriage, after marriage only a few females can go to university due to various factors. Also, there is such an idea among the people that a girl should not receive an education because anyway she gets married and will not need education. Regarding this participant 7 commented in the below quote as follows:

The girl/woman has to receive an education. Some people think that the girl does not need education since she will not need it in the future, but it is the wrong idea. Life does not stay in one place and there will be many misunderstandings in the family. If the girl has an education, she can manage her life, her future and even can provide herself with finances. (Participant 7; 21years)

The participants in this study were females, they all mentioned that no matter what, but the female need to receive an education for to help them to improve their life condition or an education serve as a means of better family in case of their divorce. The next section discusses the benefits of education on girl's familial experiences.

### ***Better Family***

Besides that, there are some people still who consider that education is not important for girls, most of the participants in this study commented that education helps the girls to build a better family where there is equality in the family and independence in life. Regarding education role for helping the girls to build a better life, participant 5 commented in the below quote as follows:

I think that an educated girl is able to build her own life and will not depend on others because she has education to support her after building a family. (Participant 5; 19years)

Moreover, educated girls are believed to raise educated children, therefore, a better family also connected with successfully educated children. As a mother is supportive of girl children, it is logical that she will educate her daughter (Participant 1; 36years) and will try to have an educated family.

Even if the woman becomes a housewife, she needs to have education in order to be able to help children with school's homework. Participant 6, who is 35 years old, noted that she as a mother wants to help her children, however, she is not able due to her uneducatedness. This is why she commented that education is necessary for girls and stated as follows:

It is better for girls to receive an education. For instance, my daughter is going to school and she is in the third grade, but I do not understand her classes and am unable to help her even if she asks me. Being a mom, I cannot explain to her how to solve any of her exercises at this early age, what I have to expect from her in the future. Therefore, I want the girls to receive education at least to help their own children to grow. I have children and definitely will support my children no matter boy or girl to receive an education. Both men and women need education no matter what kind, but any level of education will help them develop personally. This will help them both to be more understandable to each other in the family and girls' value and respect their own parents or their in-laws, to support parents. (Participant 6; 35years)

Besides wellbeing of the family, the participants noted that education helps the girl to receive financial independence. As for patriarchal society, a woman is defined to be just a caregiver, which does not bring money to the family and the husband is the head of the family

and breadwinner, education is the tool to break these socially determined roles and to become independent. Regarding this participant 4 commented as follows:

Education allows the girls not to be dependent on their husbands but relies on their own education. When the girls work and make money, they would raise their children with their own money better. If the girl does not have an education and any profession will always ask for money and will depend on the husband's or son's financial support. I want every girl to receive an education and return to their own family. (Participant 4; 45years)

Another problem in Tajikistan in the last decade is men's labor migration to Russia to earn a living for months and even years. When a man is at migration, the wife has to take care of children and it happens that the wife has to provide. Girl's education can help the family to attain well-being together with male members as participant 9 and 18 stated in the below quotes as follows:

Education is very important for girls because many males in Tajikistan do not study because they go to Russia for labor migration and if the girl has the education, they will provide their family together... The woman needs to have any profession or skill it doesn't matter what, for example, she has to be a teacher, a doctor, or a tailor. For example, if the woman has a job she can work and make money when her husband cannot provide for their family financially. (Participant 9; 43years)

As for better family and financial independence, education always contributes a lot especially in implementing one's family. (Participant 18; 20years)

### ***Dominant Field of Study among Females***

There are a number of professions that the girls or their parents choose for their daughters to study if receiving education. The females in this study mentioned a number of specialties such as journalism, foreign languages, medicine, and teaching. Medical education for females is the first choice if they can afford it. In this study the participants were asked the question of what they would like to study if they received a university degree and participant 6 stated that she does not have any degree and if she has a chance to receive a degree she would go for medical education. She described it as follows:

I would like to go for medical education. I hope I can do it when my children grow up. I hope to go for certificate courses which will allow me to get basic knowledge in medicine. I have to do two years of upper secondary school education and then to continue education with the received certificate. The condition (sharoit) of life is improving and it is better than a couple of years ago (Participant 6; 35years).

Medical education is a desired education not only for girls' but also the parents' desire.

Participant 10, who is 36 years old, stated that in the below quote as follows:

I have a son and a daughter. My son is in the 4th grade and my son is in the 3rd grade. I want my daughter to become a doctor and my son to follow his father and become a military worker. (Participant 10; 36years).

About the dominant fields of study participant 5 also mentioned that girls mainly opted fields of study are philology, languages, and medicine. She described it as follows:

I am studying at the university, majoring in Translator of English-Tajik languages. It was my own choice because I liked this profession from childhood, therefore, I went for it. I think most girls choose medicine, philology, linguistics, and translation because of the job market; I think but it is possible to find a job with any major (Participant 5; 19years).

She also mentioned that the reason why girls in this study noted that usually girls pick the mentioned majors is due to the job market in the country.

## **Education System**

### **School Factor**

Very little was said about the factor related to school that could result in girls drop out of school. The girls mostly mentioned satisfaction with the existing school conditions. Commenting on the difficulties that the girls faced during their schooling and how the existing condition is related on their missing, dropping, or even not being allowed by parents, participant 14, who is 20 years old, noted that as follows:

everything was good at school but only we did not have good conditions at home. If we wanted to drop out of school before ninth grade, they came from school and talked to our parents and returned us to school (not allowed to drop out of school before ninth grade). I worked on the missed classes with my classmates who lived in our neighborhood and tried to catch up with them because I liked learning. The students were from different



villages. We did not have a school in our village and went to the neighboring village school. (Participant 14; 20years)

From the above quote she went on to say that she went to the school that was situated in another village, however, the school administration worked well and encouraged the girls not to drop out of school after ninth grade. Participant 7 also mentioned that the school administration and especially class teachers tried to tackle the problem of girls dropping out of school after ninth grade, however, most girls still dropped after ninth grade that was compulsory for them. She described it as follows:

The classroom teachers of each group usually are responsible for making the students catch up with others. The classroom teachers usually conducted group meetings where they talked to each student about their achievements or problems. Or the classroom teacher invited the parents for a teacher parents conference and talked to parents to fix it but still there were students who showed indifference to education. And consequently, the students studied till ninth grade and did not go for the 10-1. (Participant 7; 21years)

The 10-11th grades are not compulsory, due to this the girls drop out of school after 9th grade. Noticing the problem of the girl dropping out of school, the educational institution takes responsibility to encourage them to continue to the upper secondary level. Especially in rural areas, fewer girls can go to university due to the distance, finance, and gender norm that is stronger in the villages. Participant 17, who is 24 years old and is from rural area noted that after receiving higher education, she returned to her village she works as a teacher at secondary school, and they as a teacher are required by the ministry of education to work on involving the girls to upper secondary school. She described it as follows:

In fact, 10th and 11th grades are optional but due to the fact that most of the girls did not make it to 11th grade and set at home, they made them complete these two years too. Nowadays, the requirements are even higher, and the girls are required to go to school for 10th and 11th grades. But nowadays, at the school where I work, the administration requires us to encourage the girls to go for 10-11th grades. The ministry of education in Darvoz region requires educators and schools to insist on girls going for 10-11th grades instead of sitting at home. For example, we talk to their parents and encourage them to let their daughters receive an education because they have a crucial role in their future family and raising better children for society. The girls are not forced to attend 10-11th

grades, but we encourage them to finish these two optional years. (Participant 17; 24years)

She also stated that the schools are not interested in weak students, however, as they are told by the Ministry of Education to involve the girls to school, the school will accept students with any passing exams to the upper secondary school. She noted as follows:

In most cases, the schools try to get rid of weak students as soon as possible. But as the schools try to encourage the girls to attend the 10-11th grade, this is why they allow them and there is not any kind of required passing grade that they have to receive in order to be enrolled in 10-11th grades. (Participant 17; 24years)

The schooling conditions in the villages are a bit challenging because of the lack of good teachers and school supplies such as books for different subjects and uniforms that not everybody can afford. Regarding these issues participant 15 who is one of those girls that dropped out of school after ninth grade, mentioned that in the village that she lived not all the girls continued schooling after ninth grade and commented that school conditions were not satisfying. She described it as follows:

When we studied, in our village the girls studied until 9th grade and boys until 11th grade but did not usually continue their education at university. Most of our girl classmates dropped out of school in ninth grade. The schools lacked teachers and one teacher taught several subjects. We did not have books from many subjects. Also, we could not afford school uniforms. We were two groups of 6 graders and each group had 11 students. The students were from different villages therefore usually there was one group for each grade but only we were divided into two groups. Our school was not far from our home and we crossed a river in order to get to school. The school was not far but the conditions were not good. The parents tried to send their sons to school but not their daughters because the girls' destination is only marriage. It is mandatory for everybody until ninth grade and 10 and 11th grades are optional. The children were not allowed to drop out of school before ninth grade. If they missed school the parents were warned that they would be charged if they did not send their child to school. They also came to our house when I dropped out of school but as they saw my condition, they did not say or do anything to return me back to school. At the end of the year, I went and took the exam than did not go to school the next year. One of my classmates was our neighbor and I studied with her that year and then did not study together. (Participant 15; 20years)

She went to confirm that schools even if they lack resources, they try to involve the children to school. Another female in this study also commented on difficulties related to school.

She noted that they lacked science teachers and other foreign languages that were necessary for her to major in any other field that she wished to major in. Commenting on the above-mentioned factors she stated that there was one school for children of several villages, which means that the villages besides lacking teachers and school supplies, lacked schools close by. She stated that as follows:

Difficulties existed such as teacher shortage of some subjects because the school which I finished is situated in the mountainous oblast of the country. We did not have a teacher of chemistry, English and Russian language teachers. Due to this, we could not enter the universities that we wanted to enter, and we faced challenges while studying at University as well. Our school was close to our house. Our school was situated in the village which we lived in. Children from other neighboring villages, such as Zingrov and another small village Dashti Kuluch which was situated next to our village, also came and studied with us. We could not enter universities or majors that we wanted to study but did the degrees which we were able to do. (Participant 17; 24years).

The girls as the group of people that do not have much mobility have difficulties in choosing the school and field of study. Participant 2 noted that the schools, in general, lack college preparation courses where the students could get information on how and where to apply, she believes that if the students particularly girls got college preparation courses at their schools it could assist them in choosing different other areas instead just following the word of mouth on how and where to go to (Participant 2; 22years).

Along with the above said, the older participants of this study who were at school during the Soviet period noted that the school was ten years at that time. All ten years of schooling was compulsory, and all the girls completed secondary school together with their male counterparts.

Regarding this participant 9, who is 43 years old noted commented that as follows:

In 1983 I went to elementary school and in 1993 I graduated from secondary school and the same year entered vocational school number 43 with specialization in bookselling. I graduated from a vocational school in 1994 and the same year I got a job as a bookseller in the bookstore of the World of Books in Dushanbe city. The vocational school was a year and it was after 10th grade. It was like 11th grade and was called special education. (Participant 9; 43years)

To add to the above-brought quote, participant 4, who is 45 years old, also mentioned that at her time she did well at school and schools had intelligent teachers. The good conditions at schools resulted in most of the girls to continue their education after secondary general education, which was ten years (Participant 4; 45years).

During the interview with females, several of them mentioned that after the adoption of the law on parental responsibility for the education and upbringing of children in 2011, the situation of girls' education in the country has improved. If earlier fewer girls received an education, nowadays more girls continue their education at universities and colleges. The law changed the parents' attitude toward children's education attainment especially the girls (Participant 8\_48years). Moreover, participant 17 who works as a teacher at school commented that the mentioned law put the parents in charge of children's education and decrease parental discrimination. Schools on their term will work with parents on involving the girls to school and continuing their schooling after secondary school. She described it as follows:

We invite the parents to school as a reminder to warn them that if they do not send their children to school other actions will be taken. Then, we report them to the attorney's office. If the student missed the classes for more than 42 hours, the parents will be charged. The newly enacted law first put the parents in charge of children rather than the school and the parents have to try to provide conditions that let their child receive necessary school education in spite of the difficulties in the family. The law mostly makes parents more responsible for their children (Participant 17; 24years).

### **National Test Center (NTC)**

The distance and lack of information on how to apply to university is the problem that confronts many girls that decide to receive higher education. The girls followed word of mouth for receiving information on university admission that not always appear to be reliable. The universities as well do not always have updated information on their websites for interested girls, to apply to university. After the word of mouth, the girls had to go to the university, which might be situated far from the place that the girls live. This type of admission process involved a high

level of corruption that did not allow many good candidates to receive higher education.

Noticing these problems, the National Testing Center was established in 2013, that partially solved the above-mentioned issues. Regarding the National Testing Center (NTC)'s effects on girls' education, many participants of this study commented that I brought a number of those quotes here.

The National Testing Center's mission is to enhance the quality of education and provide equal opportunity to all the people, who want to receive higher education (World Bank, 2013). There were many disputes that in order to be admitted to university one has to go through corruption. Participant 1 noted that NTC already has affected the girls' education and many girls are being admitted to colleges and universities with their knowledge (Participant 1\_36years). The enrollees pass the entrance exam by choosing about 12 courses from different universities and after some time the National Test Center will calculate the scores and notify them of their admission to the most matched major, that the enrollee selected, and university she/he can go (Participant 2; 22years). Moreover, before in order to apply to university the girls had to, physically, visit the university that she wanted to enter. Nowadays the enrollees apply from the NTC offices from their regions to many universities in the country, which was not possible through the traditional way. Regarding this, participant 13 stated that many girls will enroll in colleges and universities that they are interested in and will be notified of results without commuting to the city because the results will be mailed directly to their home (Participant 13; 23years). Confirming the above said, participant 18 the situation as follows:

There were conducted conferences to inform the students about the National Test Center and the ways how to apply to university and how to choose the majors. They motivated us to apply to university and receive education after secondary general school. Before it was difficult to enter the university because one had to find someone or pay illegally to someone to be admitted to a university, but the National Testing Center resolved this problem. The National Testing Centre allows the person to check her knowledge.

Nowadays, each person pays 220 somonis to the National Testing Center legally and chooses several majors and will see what major most fits her. The students will be admitted to different universities and type of education according to the received score from her past entrance exam. It gives you a chance to enter university with your knowledge. The National Testing Center makes the students work hard to be admitted to the university for free education. If the student does not receive enough score, she/he will be admitted but to contractual education and has to pay tuition. I entered university through NTC and got a tuition waiver to study at this university. (Participant 18; 20years)

The enrollees were mostly concerned about the illegal payment and using their connections when applying to university. According to the World Bank (2015), the higher education enrollment and completion comprise less than 30 percent of students admitted to the university which increases to 41 percent in 2014. Although few females apply to university through NTC, they are more successfully passing the entrance exams in comparison to their male counterparts.

### **Family Factor**

Several factors affecting girls' schooling that is related to the family was mentioned by the females involved in this study. The mentioned factors were parental family/marriage family support and parental socioeconomic status and the influence of them on the female child's schooling.

### **Family/Marriage Family Support**

Commenting on the parents who support their daughters to complete secondary school and allow them to go to university to receive higher education and those that do not, participant 5 stated that the reasons why girl do not receive education vary because some girls themselves opt to get married right after graduating from secondary school, however, the role of parents is essential to encourage or support the girls to receive an education (Participant 5; 19years). Another female who is 18 years old also mentioned the importance of family support on her

education. She commented that although her mother encourages her to receive education, her father is not in favor of girls' education at all and she described it as follows:

My mother wanted me to study well but my father didn't want me to go to school or continue my education. My father does not like it and says that the girl does not need education and he didn't like it when the girl goes out often. My mother also said that she wants me to continue my education and even receive education after secondary school. Even if my father did not support my schooling, I continued going to school and finished 11th grade. My grandmother provided me financially and she bought all my school supplies. (Participant 11; 18years).

Another female also mentioned that her father was not in favor of girls' education and show indifference toward girls' education and send their daughters to secondary school because secondary school is compulsory to finish. However, this kind of relationship of parents to girls' schooling brings to missing school for house chores. Regarding this participant, 10 stated that as follows:

Father did not prohibit me from going to school but if we had any guest or work at home no matter how important it wasn't, he told me to miss school because anyway I will get married and don't need school. I mean he never cared about my schooling. I missed school a lot because nobody supported my education and schooling (Participant 10; 36years).

Family support will result in the girl's doing better at school and be encouraged to continue education. Regarding the girls' success at school participant 2 commented on the experience of a neighbor girl, who lacked support from family that caused her to fail in the entrance exam, which she wanted and took trying to break the steroidal opinion of her family that the girl does not need education beyond secondary school education and described it as follows:

She took the exam to enter university, but she could not pass the exam, I think it was due to lack of support from her family. She got upset and agreed that she does not have enough knowledge. Because if she did, she would experience any support from her family, she could pass the exam successfully. Her mom knew that she was planning to enter university, but her brother did not know about it even if her mom did not support her, she agreed and let her achieve her dream. But her brother and her father (males of the

family) were family decision-makers and she could not do anything if the males of the family were against it. (Participant 2; 22years)

Family lack of support is based on making the girl determine that her education is not appreciated but instead she has to get married to ease parents' work. As participant 12 noted in the following quote, she observed a girl who wanted to continue education, however, her father is against and she stated that,

I know a girl whose father told her that if she will not be admitted to university the second time, he will marry her. We hope she will be admitted to university this time. Her father does not want her to receive an education. She has the desire, but her father is not supporting her. Her father just wants to see her give up when she does not get into university the second time (Participant 12; 26years).

From the interviews conducted, it was found out that almost all of those, who could continue education or receive education, mentioned some kinds of support from family in order to go for education. If the family values education even when it lacks finance, it cannot always be the case of girls not going for education. For participant 17, who is 24 years old, considers the role of parent initial in her receiving education in spite of difficulties in the family and she described it as follows:

When I studied in 8th grade, my father passed away and my mom brought me up. She worked hard to give us all an education. My uncles also helped us too. We are 2 girls and 2 boys in the family. I majored in Tajik philology and am working as a teacher at school. My mom's role is great in that we all received some education not to have difficulties in our life because of not having an education. (Participant 17; 24years)

In addition to the above mentioned, participant 18, who is continuing her education at university, stated that even if she grew up separate from family, she sees her success in being allowed to reach her goals and entering university (Participant 18; 20years). Parents always were interested in her receiving education because they themselves were part of academia. Participant 9, who is 43 years old, also believes that one's education decision and mobility depend on the family environment and she noted that as follows:



It depends on the family's environment. If your family understands and supports your choice it is easy, and one will not care what others think or say. (Participant 9; 43years)

There is a fear among the girls and girls family sometimes that education will make it hard for them to marry the girl off due to the marriage market's demands as well as after finding a good candidate in the middle of her schooling, probably will not be allowed to continue her school after marriage. This issue in the case of participant 7 existed but she stated that she is lucky that her parents were always supporting her with her schooling. In addition, her marriage family did not show opposition and let her finish college after marriage and described it stating as follows:

My parents were all for my education. I had an interest in schooling and they also encouraged me and supported me. They wanted me to receive education for my future and they never showed opposition. We had freedom in the family and my parents tried to live in a way that did not deprive family members of what they liked to do. I never missed school because of house chores because my mother never let me miss school. My marriage family was aware that I am a student and I am going to college at the moment, therefore, they never showed opposition. They agreed from the beginning of my education and we had never had a problem with this. I went back to college after two months of staying at the home of my marriage family. They never were against and did not say anything about my college. (Participant 7; 21years)

The fear of parents is based on the socially determined role of females in society that many men do not prefer their wives to receive education or work while in marriage. Even if the marriage family feels fine about girls' education, they do not prefer the wife to study or work outside of the home. Regarding this statement participant 10 who is married and was not allowed to receive higher education noted that as follows:

My marriage family is very supportive of girls' education. For example, my husband does not want his wife to be educated but is very supportive of our daughter's education. All the members of his family have education, but his sisters-in-law do not have any education besides secondary school education. (Participant 10; 36years)

Of course, the family never wants for their child anything bad, however, their decision usually is based on the society's determined way of life, that does not always stay in one place

and will change as time passes. The next piece will focus on factors related to the family's socioeconomic status and its impact on girls' education obtaining decisions.

### **Family Socioeconomic Status**

When asking the females, in this study, what the family's impact is on their education, they usually noted their parents' and guardians' socioeconomic status and the environment that they grew up in. The educated parent will encourage the education of children and will provide the environment at home that children grow up appreciating education.

Parents' education will result in children's future educational attainment and making schooling experience easier to choose and do well about their education. Educated parents will insist and encourage children to receive an education (Participant 5; 19years). Participant 8 also mentioned that the grandparent's family that she grew up encouraged her to do well even if her family broke in part. She described her experience as follows:

I grew up with my grandparents together with my uncles, instead of my own parents due to my parents' divorce. My uncles are intelligent people. My elder uncle is a professor and is a wise man. My aunts are educated too. One of them was a teacher of English, another one was a doctor, and my mother the alumna of Tajik Agricultural University as an agronomist. She worked as an agronomist. Lately, she worked as a deputy director in Lohuti library. (Participant 8; 48years)

She also commented that her own education experience helped her to grow the daughters that also received higher education and described it the below quote as follows:

My husband passed away making me a widow at age 27. I have two sons and three daughters Both my daughters have a university education and both of them are married. Only my younger daughter is not married and studying. (Participant 8; 48years)

From the above-mentioned quote, one can guess that for her parents' socioeconomic background is an inspiring source to complete secondary school and receive higher education. Another participant in this study also mentioned that even if she grew up without a father, as her mother was an educated woman and even worked, she did not feel any difficulties and was able

to successfully complete secondary school and receive higher education as well as work after even being married (Participant 12; 26years). Further, she stated as follows:

I am married. We live in our own apartment separate from my in-laws. My in-laws live in the village and my father-in-law is a teacher at elementary school there, but my mother-in-law does not have a university or college degree and she works as a janitor at the local clinic. My in-laws supported me morally even if we lived with my husband separately from them. (Participant 12; 26years)

Coming from an educated family and being a daughter-in-law to an educated family means a lot to further continue the started higher education. Regarding education after marriage participant 7 stated as follows:

It was not difficult for me to continue college after marriage because my marriage family was small. My mother-in-law works and understands me very well. All the members of my marriage family are educated, and they never showed opposition and they were always for my education. The educated family understands you better in comparison to the uneducated family, who less understand the daughter-in-law that wants to receive an education. I do not want to say that all the uneducated families are the same and do not want their children and daughter-in-law to receive an education. Maybe there are some who will allow it but educated families have different visions about it. (Participant 7; 21years)

As was mentioned above, the few men prefer their wives to receive education or work outside of the home after marriage especially when they live in the village in comparison with the city. Furthermore, most of the women will become housewives. When the father has education mostly will end up in children receiving education, even if the mother has no education besides lower secondary education. Regarding her educational experience participant 13 stated as follows:

My father has a university degree, but my mother doesn't. My parents always support me with my education. My father understands that education is important to us. My father has majored in Russian philology and he works as a teacher. Only my father has a university degree among my uncles and aunts. My mother is a housewife. (Participant 13; 23years)

In rural areas, the number of parents with education is very few. That also impacts the further education experience of the females and results in decreased number of females receiving

higher education. Participant 14, who is from the remote region of Tajikistan described it as follows:

I am 20 and live in Darvoz. There three of us in the family me and my two brothers. I am the only girl in our family. My parents do not have an education and they do not work too. My brothers are the breadwinners of our family. (Participant 14; 20years)

In the cities, the situation of girls' education attainment is improving but, in the villages, still very few girls receive an education and very few parents have higher education. The tradition of marrying off daughters or getting married right after completing secondary school. Participant 7 elaborated in the below quote as follows:

My cousins, my uncle's daughters have not received an education because they lived in the village and none of their parents are educated. My cousins only went to school until ninth grade. They are from the village and they got married right after they finished school at age 17-18. (Participant 7; 21years)

Another participant in this study, participant 17, who is also from the remote region of the country, one more time confirmed that socioeconomic background of parents' serve as a mean of the daughter of that parent to go against many impossibilities and reach her goal and obtain higher education even if was brought up by a single parent. Her mother after the death of her husband, who was educated, did everything to provide everything that her daughter might have needed to receive higher education. (Participant 17; 24years)

### **Financial Difficulties**

Financial difficulty is a challenge that each participant experienced but in a variety of contexts. It differed by its nature and how and when each girl went through school. As the study's conceptual framework is Standpoint Theory, this research looked at the financial barriers from the participants' standpoint. It was mostly shown at the level of the family Further, the study includes females' experience from different generations starting from the first days of the

country's independence following the civil war and after 25 years of independence. They told the family poor living conditions.

### ***Family Finance***

As in previous research (Harris, 2004, Janigan, 2012, Thapa, 2012, UNICEF, 2011, Whitsel, 2009), participants' responses showed the connection between family size and family resources. In Tajikistan, like many other Asian countries, large families are common. When it comes to financial difficulties and providing better living conditions as well as providing education to the children, not all the children in these large families have the same chance to continue their education beyond compulsory because advanced education requires financial investment. However, the participants in this study did not mention the larger household to be the barrier for their education even when they mentioned the difficulties associated with a lack of family wealth.

Participant 14, 24 years, who was from a rural area of the country, said that their family is big and consisted of 6 children where none of them received education after compulsory 9th grade. Secondary school and the girls of the family were even withdrawn from school after 8th and 9th grades due to family financial resources. The family had financial difficulties because of their mother's death and father's miserable wage earnings (Participant 14\_24years). As I observed from the interviews, a big family causes poverty that leads to a lack of finances for children to receive an education, but small families also can experience financial difficulties.

One of the participants who was an only child also could not continue education due to family finances. In the case of participant 16, who is 23 years old, in order to go to university, she chose to go to a boarding school for people with disabilities even though she did not have a disability because alumni of the boarding school qualify for a benefit for easier admittance to

universities. However, when she graduated from boarding school she could not go to university because the family could not afford her education, and she was married off.

Participant 4, 45 years old, sees the problem of not letting her daughters go to university in momentary financial difficulty that was as a result of moving from the Darvoz region to the capital city Dushanbe as mentioned in the next quote.

I do not know why, but I think it was because of a lack of finance. We had recently moved to Dushanbe and could not afford the schooling of girls. Second, my sons continued their education and worked part-time to earn money for themselves' needs. It was impossible for girls, they stayed at home and I married them off. (Participant 4; 45years)

Cultural reasons intersect with financial difficulties at the key decision point of university attendance. When it comes to the time to apply to university, girls are 17-18 years of age, and this is when the parents usually marry the girls off when there are financial difficulties in the family. The marriage age, according to the law of family and marriage, is defined to be 18, and it is the time when they complete secondary school and graduate from high school. However, the parents can file papers to marry their daughter off at age 17 in the case of financial difficulties or other circumstances. At this moment they are left to choose to receive an education or create their family. In order to go to university, the family has to save finance to send the girl to university however the parents opt to marry off the girl child once an appropriate candidate appears. Cultural norms are that Tajik females are considered to be and are submissive and will act submissively. Girls are brought up to be obedient to elders and parents in the family, this is why when it comes time to go to university, they rely on family and will not show opposition to the roles that they are assigned.

In addition, participant 4 brought up that the sons were able to go to university because they are able to work while studying at university, which will allow them to make money for their needs, but females do not have that mobility. Once the family faces the momentary

(periodic) financial difficulties the female children will be withdrawn from school to minimize family financial expenditure. Participant 6 aged 35 also experienced momentary financial difficulties at the time when she was still in 8th-grade when her parents divorced, and children were left with only their mother. Separation causes financial difficulties for the mothers of many children. Of course, the sudden changes need time which will affect the lives of children and especially female children of the family. Regarding the effects of momentary financial difficulties on girls' education participants 6 and 12 stated as follows:

I dropped out of school in 8th grade, but I don't remember what year. My father left us when I was in 8th grade and died in 2004. He did not live with us for the last 5 years before he passed away. Time passed and our life condition stabilized, and my sister could enter university. My brother grew up and made money to send her to university. (Participant 6; 35years)

It was hard for us because my father passed away and my mother was left alone to raise us. At that time my mother worked as a teacher and did not earn much. My mother became director of school after several years and my sister got married in 1999 or 2000. As she was the elder child in the family, she was responsible to take care of us to do the work around the house when my mother was at work. My mother did not make much money as a teacher and it was difficult to enter university without money and people gave money illegally and entered university. But the National Test Center solved this problem and now people enter university with their knowledge. (Participant 12; 26years)

The burden of momentary financial difficulties as a result of sudden changes fall on the elder child of the family especially the female child that makes them act the role of a caregiver while single mom earns for the living of the family. It is always difficult for a single mom to manage the family and at the same time to be able to send children to university, especially a female child due to their immobility. Boys' mobility is less restricted in the family and society. Mobility lets them become independent and serve their role as breadwinner. Once the males of the family grow up and the condition of family resources stabilizes the male siblings help their younger female siblings to go for education. Participant 1 described her brother support in the below quote as follows:

Besides my sister's efforts, my brothers and father always suggest that she study hard because it is useful for her future life. My brothers help me and her financially. They even bought a house for me in 2014, because my husband does not have a nice job and their family is big and hardly makes ends meet. My brothers send me money every 2-3 months to spend on our family and kids. (Participant 1; 36years)

The female girls' education attainment is improving day by day in the country which is visible in the quote from participant 1 which is brought above. The elder daughters in the family could not receive an education where the younger daughter is encouraged and supported financially by elder siblings and father to continue her education beyond high school education at university.

### ***Rural Area and Females' Financial Constraint***

The financial constraints affecting female's education differ between the families living in urban and rural areas. The rural area's financial difficulties are combined with other constraints like family structure, the value of education in society, parents' human capital, and low social-economic status of the community that heighten the financial constraints of families. The rural areas are less developed parts of the country and rural areas have a different structure of living in comparison to urban areas. The people put stress on the value of family, elders, and at the same time on female child-raising.

Each participant has her own anecdote of the way they experienced financial difficulties that restricted them from being adequately educated. As for rural areas, one reason is less valuing education that is obvious from parents' human capital. In the case of participant 15, she said that they are from the rural area of Tajikistan, Darvoz and neither of her parents has an education more than high school and they hardly make ends meet. In addition, she shared that besides uncle being educated none of his children received education more than high school or even lower secondary education. Due to the less value of education in the village that they live in, the financial difficulties reinforced the lack of education of her and her relatives from her father's



side who also lived in her neighborhood. Participant 15 described not going to school due to the lack of finance in below quote as follows:

The lack of finance and difficult life conditions did not allow me to go to university. My mother was sick. My father just made money by gathering wood and selling it to people. My parents do not have an education and they do not work too. My brothers are the breadwinners of our family. Nobody will help you. If the person has money and “sharoit” [circumstances], they will go to university. Neither aunt nor uncle helps you. My uncles and aunts have education and their children received an education. Also, they live in the center of the region close to colleges that are there. (Participant 15; 20years)

The urban areas such as cities and centers of the regions provide more opportunities for families to send the children as well as female children to receive an education because they have colleges and universities nearby. There are fewer chances of finding a job in a rural area. This is why the females also will choose to learn the sewing skills, which aids them to earn for living in case their husband is not able to. Regarding to learning sewing skills, participant 15 stated as follows:

I was planning to study after 11th grade and become a seamstress but as I saw that my parents do not work and we did not have money to study, I did not push my parents, and I gave up. (Participant 15; 20years)

Participant 14 brought examples of her not being allowed to receive an education because of lack of finance. Further, she said that her uncle’s daughters did not adequately receive an education because in their village few girls continue education after high school.

Uncle’s daughters did not receive education and his son made it to 11th grade and did not go to university. (Participant 14; 24years)

Nowadays with all those constraints, people try to find ways to send their daughters to receive education in case.

### **Individual Agency**

Individual agency was also a factor in girls’ education. The model above does not currently include a way for individuals to advocate or affect their own education. However, from

the interviews, it was found that the females also can be game changers regarding the girls' education, which means if the females want to receive education, they will do it despite the constraints. They only need to prove that they are the advocates of their own life and education decisions. This section discusses two subcategories that relate to the category of individual agency, which discusses the aspect of the girls' ambition towards educational attainments such as lack of knowledge and desire.

### **Lack of Knowledge**

Along with other factors affecting girls' education, the participants made comments about the factor that does not relate to anyone or anything but to the self. Some participants in the study mentioned that they studied but their sisters could not due to several factors, but as participant 1 mentioned, that she would receive an education if she could read and write. She didn't do well at school that made her feel shy in front of her classmates and she noted that as follows:

I wanted to receive education at some points but because I did not have a basic knowledge of reading and writing, I never tried to continue education. I felt shy and ashamed in front of my peers because I could not even read. It is not because of schools but because I lived with my grandmother and she was in need of help and care. Also, as we lived in the village, we had farm work which we usually were busy with instead of going to school. (Participant 1; 36years)

This factor can also be related to the motivation or encouragement of family toward the children. The parents' attention and encouragement are very important to motivate the children to do well at school or feel the importance of education.

Moreover, the student's interest in learning may be encouraged by school, teachers, and peers easier when the child has an interest in learning and developing further. There was observed that the girls give up their interest easily when parents do not value the child's effort at school. According to participant 4, she was doing good at school and even participated in the school's different events. She noted as follows:

I graduated from high school in 1980. region. I applied to the University of Agriculture and got admitted. But as my mother was a widow and I did not have a father; my mother did not allow me to go to university. The school was 10 years in that period. I graduated from school with high scores. I took part in all the school Olympiads. I was good at all the subjects at school. Our teachers were very intelligent and knowledgeable, and we also tried to learn. When I came to the city, I worked for 16 years as a chef in the boarding school, and after it is already one year that I am working in kindergarten #43 as a caregiver/teacher's assistant and look after the kids at kindergarten. (Participant 4; 45years).

The mobility, which was not allowed being young, the females will show by working outside of the home when they age. The uneducated females will work with miserable salary jobs that do not require university degrees such as janitor, cook assistant, or the seller at the market. The momentary desire to receive an education will disappear after some time. Regarding this participant 6 who is 35 years old mentioned as follows:

in the beginning, I wanted to receive a university degree, but when I worked myself and earned some amounts of money, I changed my mind and did not try to receive an education. I worked as a janitor and cook assistant at different coffee shops and other places. (Participant 6; 35years).

The above-mentioned quotes show that education receiving desire lasted not so long for females. As a result of any barriers at the time when they have just graduated from school, the females give up and choose to live life without education.

The parents are responsible to marry off the female-child when she reaches puberty, in Tajik society. The parents hurry to complete their responsibility to marry off their female child when a good candidate appears. However, not always the parents but the girls choose the stereotypical life of a woman as an uneducated housewife because, in order to choose to live differently, for example, participant 12 commented on the experience of the girl whose father did not support her on receiving education. She noted as follows:

Some of the girls' parents want their daughters to study but the girl does not have enough knowledge or desire to study or vice versa. And sometimes it happens that the girl wants to enter university and cannot pass the entrance exam and has to wait a year to apply again and until she waits her parents organize her wedding and she gets married. I know a

girl whose father told her that if she will not be admitted to university the second time, he will marry her. We hope she will be admitted to university this time. Her father does not want her to receive an education but as she has desires, her father is not supporting her but just wants to see that she will give up if she is not admitted the second time. (Participant 12; 26years)

The female child being submissive at home needs support along with the desire and goal. According to participant 12 her neighbor who even if was not supported by her father is trying to enter university in order to receive education and then to get married to change her future. Also, as participant 4 noted, her daughter wanted and had the knowledge to continue her education at university and as aunt supported her daughter her younger daughter is receiving education. She stated as follows:

My younger daughter desired to study and her aunt, my husband's sister, supported her a lot to receive education both at high school and university. (Participant 4; 45years)

The factor of knowledge of the child is not only related to family support or school but the girls' participation. Due to various facts, the girls miss school that affects their future decision to receive education after graduating from secondary school. The low participation of the girl of participant 7's sister was due to the sickness from childhood. Participant 7 described her sister's situation as follows:

My brother graduated from the University of Languages of Tajikistan, the English department but my sister does not have a university degree because she was sick most of the time when she was young. She missed the classes at school a lot due to spending most of her time at the hospital while being in secondary school. (Participant 7; 21years)

The other participant also mentioned that her sister missed school due to sickness. When she missed school and was not able to continue education, she improved her skills of sewing, which is common among females without education to make for living and she noted that,

One of my sisters is a tailor. Sewing is a skill that was given to her by nature. She got sick a lot and missed school a lot. Due to this, she could not go to university to receive a professional education instead. She sews dresses and curtains at home and this way makes money. (Participant 9; 43years)

Even if the factors play a role in choosing not to receive education, the girls' efforts mean a lot in order to struggle for their future. As participant 36 mentioned, she as a woman needs the education to avoid reproaches, due to which she wants her children to receive education regardless of their sex and she stated as follows:

Of course, women need education and I wish I received an education. You never know, one day your husband says that if you had an education, you could work somewhere. I also don't want my children to be uneducated. I want them to receive an education and be educated. (Participant 10; 36years)

Nothing can affect the girl's decision if she sees her future in education and will go through difficulties and will receive education. It is impossible for a girl to picture her future in anything. Some having a dream to become a doctor will learn and get ready for that career from childhood to be closer to their dream job. (Participant 13; 23years)

Participant 12, who is 26 years old, no matter that it is difficult to receive education for a female who is married and has children to take care, she could continue her education at university. She thinks that her success is due to her high agency and she described it as follows:

It is always difficult to study. I both studied and worked as a teacher at school. I worked at school as a teacher for 2nd and 4th graders when I was the first-year student and later I was given to teach in middle school and teach English to the 6th and 7th graders. There were difficulties because I am married and have children, we usually have guests at home, and in addition, I am working as a teacher in kindergarten but all of them are tolerable and I try to move forward and catch up with all of my tasks. I get tired. For example, I often have guests at home and often have to come from work and meet guests and do work around the house for meeting the guests. (Participant 12; 26years)

### **Lack of Desire**

Factor related to self-individual agency in the study showed that females had low interest in developing themselves. In order to prove female equality in society, they have to struggle for their future instead of being indifferent to their future. It depends on each girl to go against any kind of difficulties they face in society or family (Participant 2\_22years). Fewer females want to go through the path of self-development. It is more comfortable for some girls to conform to the form of life that their grandmothers lived or in other words socially determined roles of females

in Tajik society. Participant 7, who is 21 years old, also noted that females' desire and efforts to go for education as follow,

There were girls who did not have enough knowledge to go to university, and since they did not go to university, they got married early. They themselves were not interested in studying. They did not even study well at school, they just came to school only. One of the reasons is that girls themselves were not interested and did not want to study in the future even. (Participant 7; 21years)

When the girls know that they will not continue education after secondary school, they show indifference to classes and do not try to do well at school. Participant 15, who is 18 years old has observed it and stated as follows:

As I observed from my peers the main reasons are either they cannot afford education, or those girls do not want to receive education or continue their education. (Participant 11; 18years)

The children either go by the steps of their mother or father. The daughters' agency forms under parents' form of life and agency and the daughter chooses to live like her mother.

Regarding following the parents' steps, participant 9 noted that her sisters did not receive education but got married opting to become a housewife. She described her sister's experience in the below quote as follows:

My father was a teacher and my mother were a housewife. I have two sisters and do not have any brothers. Our family was not big. My two other sisters got married right after they graduated from high school and they are housewives. (Participant 9; 43years)

The girls choose not to go for education even if they do well at school but get married right after graduating from secondary education that as a result cannot receive an education when already married. Regarding girl's decision to get married early instead of receiving education participant 18 noted as follows:

My sister studied well at school, but she did not want to continue her education at college. She regretted that she did not make it to university but instead got married. (Participant 18; 20years)

Unfortunately, those girls, who do not make it to university education, regret not receiving education. All the females that were interviewed, no matter if they have received education or not considered that education is necessary for women. However, those who did not receive education, beyond secondary school education, even if regretted, do not try to receive education after having a family. After having family, they do not try to go to university or college, but instead give up saying that, they better try to insist on educating their children (Participant 10; 36years).

### **War Context**

During the interviews, the participants who were ages 35 older were asked questions about their school experience during the civil war in the country in 1991-1995 and its effect on their later educational experience. It was mentioned that even if they encountered war less in their districts at that moment, the war changed their way of education attainment.

The participants noted that they were in different stages of schooling at that moment and described their situation and their agency. Those who were at secondary school and lived in the areas that mostly were affected by arm conflicts, the war caused them not to fully attend school. The parents who were interested in the children's schooling provided conditions for their female children to attend school. The war is dangerous for everybody but as for the reputation of children the parents try to protect girls and most cases withdraw the girls from school when arm conflicts occur and protect them by keeping them at home or marry them off if they are ages 15 above. Participant 3, 45 years old shared that she just was admitted to college when the war started in the country and she was a young female from Darvoz region whose mother did not let her go to college in the capital city. Mother married her off instead to protect her reputation. She described it as follows:

I am 45 years old. I was born in Darvoz and live in the Darvoz region. I have only a secondary school education. At that time, the school was 10 years. After graduating from secondary school, I came to the city and entered medical college. That year (1992) the war started, and my mother did not permit me to continue my education at the medical college. The same year, in 1992, I got married and left the college. In 1991-1992 as the war started, I could not continue my education because of the difficult times in the country. I don't remember in detail that moment. As I lived in the village, it was impossible to come to the city (Dushanbe). The people escaped to different places, especially to the Darvoz region. After the war started, most girls were taken from school and did not continue their education. Till that time, we had the freedom to choose to enter universities. (Participant 3; 45years).

However, as for individual agency, the females reacted toward the difficulties of war differently. Those who were already at university, continued their education more than those who just applied to university or just graduated from secondary schools to go for university education. As was mentioned above, participant 3 who is from a distant region was withdrawn from college due to war, participant 8, 48 years old noted that when the war started, she was a student and as she lived in the city she continued her schooling despite difficult days. But the girl that was from the mountainous region of the country was not able to continue university that year when the arm conflicts just started. The war caused difficulties for females from distant areas to come to universities in the city. Regarding the mentioned, participant 8 stated as follows:

There were six of us in our group. None of them left university. Together with us, we studied a girl from GBAO. She got academic leave for a year and continued after a year. There was chaos in the city, as well as racism and regionalism, and the people divided into different groups. This is why she took academic leave and went back to the Badakhshan region then she came back and continued education. At that time as I said there was regionalism not only for people who were from Badakhshan but as well as other regions' people. (Participant 8; 48years)

She also commented that as a result of arm-conflicts and demonstrations on the streets of Dushanbe city the girls missed classes because it was not safe to go out and they avoided going out. The universities operated partially, and the students returned to school even if it was stressful when the arm conflicts moved to the other rural areas of the country. She noted that her groupmates could not freely make their choices or wear what they want but tried to find a



solution less to attract attention and graduated in spite of those hardships and some teacher's shortage due to the teachers' escape (Participant 8; 48years). The war caused other problems in the families. People lost sons or youngsters lost fathers that brought to the family's other difficulties that the children were left without care or attention that resulted in dropping out of secondary school, especially for female children. Regarding the mentioned comments, participants 6, 35 years old, noted that she lived in Dushanbe city during the war her mother was that person who did everything to protect her and her siblings. However, due to the problems caused by the war, she and her siblings dropped out of school in ninth grade (Participant 6; 35years). Similar to above-mentioned participant 9, 43 years old, commented as follows:

We did not experience war much, there were some arm conflicts in our territory in 1991 at the beginning of the war and in 1993 we went to school without any problem because there was no arm conflict going on in our place. In 1991 I was in a secondary school in 9th grade. We missed school for some time because of conflicts. That moment was called Fevral'skie Sobotie and the schools were closed for some time. People escaped to different places to regions of Tajikistan. When the condition became better and the schools opened, we went back to school and continued schooling. The arm conflicts started in Dushanbe city and then continued in the rural areas. Demonstration and Maidans (Ozodi and Shahidon squares) were far from our place so we did not experience anything ... (Participant 9; 43years).

### **General Summary of the Findings Chapter**

The goal of the research was met and interviews with females from a multi generation revealed the categories such as cultural expectation, marriage context, community factor, education system, family factor, and individual agency. These categories included the subcategories factors related to family, culture, community, school, and self that aid educational attainment and dropout rate of girls. Results showed what hardships the different generations overcame and the educational experiences during the postwar period of Tajikistan till present time and to what consequences all the affected factors led. Findings also revealed different standpoints about the effects of traditional culture and gender norms on girls' educational attainment.

The revealed categories and subcategories are ordered hierarchically due to their role in educational attainment of females. The context of culture is determined in terms of traditional culture within the family observed for female child upbringing, parents' decision to educate their sons over their daughters, and patriarchy tradition. The family as a medium initially reinforces the traditional culture in the life of children as a foundation that shapes the behavior of children. Later the children confirm to the traditional culture of community where they are usually brought up. The intersections between different parts of traditional culture that form in the base of family traditional culture further erode the educational participation and attainment of girls. The traditional culture defines the place of girls at home to be family caregivers and are brought up in that particular behavior from childhood. In addition, patriarchy tradition reinforces the role of caregiver and gender roles that is as a result of parental discrimination that usually happens when it comes to decide who from the children will receive education where priority is given to sons initially and then daughters.

Marriage is also an aspect of family that follows the cultural traditions with some governmental interference. The culture of marriage is arranged marriage that involves several traditions including the behaviors that are shaped to confirm to cultural traditions of marriage and not to miss the marriage age that erodes girl's educational participation. The situation improved a bit in the present even if the marriage market is the same where the girls with their upbringing have to manage their education and be the exemplary daughters-in-law confining their role to the marriage market related to their community.

Analysis showed that community reinforces the factors that exist outside the home affect the people through the family and neighborhood. Community has both positive and negative effects on individuals and in this case females' education participation and attainment. The

positive effect included that community acted as a role model due to its residence socioeconomic status and the negative effects include that people in a community use gossip as a means of control that make the girls conform to the role of housewives. Even if the females who participated in this study believe that girls have to receive education to improve their life, n the girls need support from family or their spouse's family in order to do this. Finally, the role of the family's socioeconomic status was found to be crucial in resolving many other problems that lead to parental discrimination towards the girls' educational attainment.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of this study confirms that the cultural life of the Tajik people acts as a barrier for girls to attain an education, and the culture even heightens other factors that affect the girls' education issue. Two different generations were studied that included females aged 36-48 and 18-35 who were in some level of schooling during the postwar period and independence years of 1995-2019 in Tajikistan to study intergenerational changes of females' schooling. Based on the literature review in this study, a model was adopted that showed the culture's initial effect on the community; however, the findings revealed a slightly different model that showed more emphasis of family culture on girls' educational attainment rather than community that the adopted model emphasized.

Standpoint theory was chosen to frame my research question, and the results that were obtained from the data collected. The theory allowed me to focus on issues from the standpoint of my participants that were recruited for this research, explore the subject, and produce new knowledge about or explain the issues. As a female with similar experiences, I relied on my own knowledge as the point to begin the inquiry. Further investigation generated knowledge about this topic and revealed the factors affecting the girls' educational attainment and educational experiences. The inquiry studied the girls' educational experiences as a group of marginalized people whose education decisions depended on others, and the study allowed the voices of girls to be heard. By sharing their educational experiences, I could study the individual agency of each female with the aim of learning the topic from a different angle, which revealed how the females themselves felt responsible for their education.

The research question focused on the description that the participants shared about their educational experiences because the question was explanatory. The question was created based

on standpoint theory and the nature of this research. Standpoint theory was expressed in two ways, first, I am a Tajik woman and second to gain a viewpoint of the girls' educational experiences. The research question focused on revealing all the factors that might affect the girls to attain education and how those factors form the girls' perspectives on education.

The literature review discussed a number of themes that are mostly similar to the findings of this research. The theme discussed in the literature review was the gender norms that introduced the contexts of culture, marriage, poverty, and the civil war as relevant aspects affecting the girls' education. Based on the literature review, a model was adopted that described the hierarchical order of the factors of gender norms that heighten the culture and affect the community factor in the male-dominated society where a female has a stereotypical role. Family factors along with family tradition, religion, and marriage come secondarily by an order in the original model that usually results in girls' dropping out of school and not receiving higher education. The other two factors, economic and macrostructural factors, have side effects that along with primary and secondary factors, mentioned previously, will heighten the issue of girls' school dropout rate and educational attainment.

The findings revealed similar results with partial changes that changed the model. The first key finding to come from the questionnaire was cultural expectations like family care, patriarchy-decision making, brother's education -parental discrimination, female child upbringing, and early childbearing were the main themes that resulted from the interviews that addressed the research question. The key findings were consistent with studies conducted by Brock and Camishe (1997), Harris (2006), Thapa (2012), and UNESCO (2011). The findings revealed early childbearing that was not mentioned in the literature review was part of the cultural context. However, I believe early child bearing is an important factor because, as the

participants commented, early marriages often resulted in early childbearing that acted as a barrier for many of the females that either drop out of college or do not wish to attain education after finishing secondary school and being married off.

The second key finding was marriage context like arranged marriage, marriage age, and marriage market. The result is consistent with the studies conducted by Singh & Devi, 2015; Sonowal, 2013, Selkuk (2011), Thapa (2012), and Whitsel (2009) besides the arranged marriage that was not mentioned in the literature review. The questionnaire was followed by follow up questions to better study the effect of marriage on education as well as to see how the marriage markets requirement overlap with the educational attainment's one. The third finding is community factors like gossip and girls' education that was studied by Janigan (2012) in her study defining the gossip in the Tajik society as a means of control of young girls. As a female from the rural, I experienced the effects of the gossip and reading that section of Janigan's (2012) about the role of gossip and its relation to girls' education made me more interested and in the questionnaire about the community factor, I included follow up questions to learn how the gossip shaped the females' behavior in regard of educational attainment. It revealed that females relate it to the factor that affects their family decision on a girl's education. Another category under the community factor that the findings revealed is a role model that was not mentioned in the literature review. The role model discusses how the females and their parents seeing others' educational experiences will decide what and where to study to become the specialist that is more relevant in the community where they live. For future plans on educational attainment education for the future which revealed how the females see their future with higher education. This category goes under the category of community factor and is subdivided into other

subcategories such as education in case, better family, and dominant field of study among females.

To gauge the changes and improvements in the system of education and its practices in the experiences of females the factor of the education system was revealed that focuses on the school factor as the main factor that is studied in other researches and the national testing center as a new policy in system of education, established in 2013 (World Bank, 2013). The result revealed in the finding of the school factor is consistent with the study conducted by Whitsel (2017). The revealed finding showed the females experienced textbooks and teacher shortage in rural areas; however, not in the city schools.

One of the popular factors affecting the girls' education, among researchers that researched girls' education in Tajikistan, like Whitsel (2009, 2011, 2017), Thapa (2012), and Janigan (2012) is the family factor. These researchers studied the shortage of the family affecting the girls' education enrollment and attainment which is also studied in this study. However, this study, in addition to the mentioned factors, includes family/marriage family support and family socioeconomic status. The reason why the family support was included under the family factor is that females mostly described themselves as a submissive group of people whose educational attainment depends on their family's decision-maker. Furthermore, the findings revealed family socioeconomic status that was included under the family factors. It showed how the parents' socioeconomic status affected the educational attainment of females.

The last factor that the findings revealed is Individual agency. This is the unexpected category that was revealed because along with other factors affecting the educational attainment of the females there was mentioned that some females themselves opt not to receive an education due to the lack of knowledge that happened due to not receiving the basic knowledge as a result

of missing school and sickness, which makes them lag behind. There was also mentioned that some females, in this study, are not even interested in receiving education at secondary school and beyond and are satisfied with their choice. Here was also included a war context that talks about how the war affected their educational attainment and their life as a young girl of the war period after the war. The findings revealed the result of the war context that is consistent with studies conducted by Yakubova (2014), Whitsel (2009), and Shemyakina (2011). The results showed that the armed conflicts affected mostly girls' educational attainment; the girls were withdrawn from school due to the unsafety and married off instead. Furthermore, as Prakash et al. (2017) stated completing school in the villages became difficult which the result of the study revealed the same issue.

Based on the revealed results, I want to more broadly study the topic involving more females than the restricted number of females. The process of recruiting has to include a strict age range in order to study the changes in the chosen periods of time. The study was successful; however, the geographical participant recruitment was less paid attention, which I wanted to enhance if the study conducted or study in the future.

More needs to be done to shed light on the issue of the girls' education in Tajikistan and the factors that act as barriers for them to get an education and develop economically. This can be done by inquiry on how knowledge is reproduced by adolescents and the community at large. All these factors combined create a complex structure of gender imbalance in education. Girls' education is mainly an issue of developing or underdeveloped countries.

Decreasing this gap is possible with the improvement of many other factors of the social life of women in developing countries. The education gender gap can be eliminated if many social, economic, situational, and political issues in the developing countries are solved. One of



the issues or reasons for the gender gap in girls' missing/completing basic education. Women are unable to pursue higher education at a basic level. Offering girls basic education gives power to women and enables them to make genuine choices over the kinds of lives they wish to lead. The education gaining hardships are accompanied by poverty, social and economic difficulties along with cultural and traditional beliefs that have further complicated the issue of girls' education.

Girls' education is crucial for the development of all societies because, first of all, getting an education is basic human rights. It is not a luxury. Secondly, women are equal members of society and should take an equal part in the development of society. Finally, women have a big power and opportunity to educate others- their children. "Women are at the heart of most societies. Regardless of whether they are working or not, mothers are very influential people in children's lives. Educating girls is one of the most important investments that any country can make in its own future" (UNICEF, 2004. para. 3).

Some strategies to combat the gender gap in education would be: Firstly, develop strategic and national plans to eliminate gender disparity in education and achieve universal education. Everybody should be given the opportunity to obtain basic skills, so he/she then could decide to continue it or not but have to receive basic survival knowledge. Secondly, education policy must be implemented in a governance structure of the countries where there is a significant gender gap in education to address the issue. Thirdly, policy strategies to increase girls' education must address demand-side obstacles such as high opportunity costs, low returns, cultural constraints, and poverty (Schultz, 2004). Finally, "parents need to be enlightened on the importance of girl-child education and to be discouraged in engaging girl child to early marriage and hawking of goods while teachers should handle girl child with cares in school for enrolment and retention purpose in other to achieve the set objective" (Singh and Devi, 2015, p.171).

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