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Demographic Determinants of Educational Exclusion among Children of Nomadic Communities: A study of Jaranwala, Pakistan.

Muhammad Usman

Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad

Dr. Abdur Rehman Shahzad

Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad

Email: Shahzad.rs@uaf.edu.pk**Munazzah Manzoor**

Lecturer, University of Agriculture, Sub Campus, Burewala, Punjab, Pakistan

Ayesha Riaz

Associate Professor, Institute of Home Sciences, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad

Kanwal Asghar

Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad

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ABSTRACT

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Corresponding Author:**Dr. Abdur Rehman Shahzad**Email: Shahzad.rs@uaf.edu.pk

In this research, factors of demographics affecting educational exclusion of children in nomadic "Gypsy" population living in tents in District Faisalabad, Pakistan, are considered. The survey conducted on 100 participants found very low parental education—84% parents without any education—as well as low household incomes and high rate of marriage (92%). Seven out of seven factors of educational exclusion included in the study are distant schools, problems with safety and high frequency of moving because of mobility, and respect of cultural traditions, respectively. Bivariate analysis was done on five demographic variables and showed that only gender variable is significantly associated with educational exclusion. Contrary to assumptions, girls reported much higher educational exclusion compared to boys. Other demographic factors such as age, parental education, marital status, and income were not significantly associated with educational exclusion. Educational exclusion of children in this population is affected mainly by structural factors, such as distant schools, safety problems, and mobility. It is recommended that the interventions be gender-focused and community-wide.

Introduction

Education is universally regarded as one of the basic human rights and the primary means of social mobility; but in developing countries, many children are denied access to formal education owing to the effects of poverty, alienation, and cultural distinctions (Young, 2026). The nomadic and semi-nomadic people have remained marginalized, and they are often described as "Gypsies" in South Asia. This is because of the migratory nature and demographic characteristics that have been observed among these people (Engelhardt & Rogers, 2026). In Pakistan, these people live in makeshift tents that are situated on the outskirts of urban areas, frequently moving from place to place in order to earn a living through seasonal work, crafts, or business. This mobility, combined with the absence of a fixed address and other identification papers, causes various problems that keep Gypsy girls out of school (Ali et al., 2025).

The district of Faisalabad, which is known for its industries and agriculture in Pakistan, consists of many Gypsies living in makeshift camps. Although these camps are located very close to urban schools and colleges, the Gypsies are deprived of their

benefits. Findings from the field research carried out by Ali et al., 2025 reveal that Gypsy children residing in Jhang, which is another district adjacent to Faisalabad, rarely join public schools and, where they join, the majority drops out after the first year. According to Suliman et al., 2017, this is not an arbitrary process but the result of a complex set of socio-cultural, economic, and administrative processes at play. In the view of Safder et al., 2024 culture within Gypsy communities usually gives preference to early employment, early marriage for females, and the suspicion of formal institutions. However, Siddique et al., 2019 claim that the structural challenges such as the lack of birth certificate and CNIC, discriminatory attitudes of established citizens and school officials, and expenses of education marginalize them further.

Whereas there has been a significant amount of scholarly focus on school drop-out and obstacles to educational access within Pakistan's rural poor communities, less has been done on the nomadic and semi-nomadic Gypsy communities. The current policies on education make certain assumptions about a settled community that lives permanently and attends schools regularly (Jameel, 2026). In turn, this results in the marginalization of the nomads (or Gypsy) population in social security policies and educational plans, and their continued underrepresentation in terms of enrolment figures. The lack of relevant evidence and policy concern highlights the importance of undertaking a focused study of this specific problem on the community level.

Purpose of the Study:

This current research is aimed at addressing the knowledge gap in the existing literature regarding the factors influencing educational deprivation amongst Gypsy families in Faisalabad district. The research aims at not considering only economic reasons for lower enrolment but considering cultural values, mobility practices, documentation difficulties, and discrimination that influence the way in which Gypsies approach the formal education process. The main goal of this research is to obtain information from the community itself – to conduct interviews and get opinions from Gypsy parents and their children in order to create grounded evidence.

Significance of the Study:

The current study is expected to have practical implications for various stakeholders. The first audience comprises policy makers who receive insights on the inadequacies of the present educational policy in tackling the challenges faced by the nomads, hence the need for a dynamic and culturally relevant mode of schooling. For NGOs and educators involved with marginalized communities, the study provides evidence to develop tailored programs. In an academic sense, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on inclusive education and social exclusion through extending the present theory on inclusion to a group that has received minimal attention in the Pakistani context. In essence, the study is anchored on the belief that the process towards achieving inclusive education requires an understanding of exclusion not only as an economic gap but also as a demographic issue.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the demographics of the nomad community and the factors affecting their children's access to education.
2. To examine and analyze the connection between demographic aspects and factors hindering education, so that possible correlations and predictors for social exclusion could be identified.

Literature Review

There has been a gradual increase in the number of studies conducted on the topic of education exclusion of nomadic and marginalized groups; however, there has not been much study done regarding the education exclusion of South Asian Gypsies (Sahu, 2026; Shashikumar V, 2025). International research on migrant and ethnic groups indicates that discrimination, lack of stability, and lower levels of parental education contribute to intergenerational cycles of school absenteeism. This academic work reveals that exclusion is seldom caused by one factor alone, but results from the combination of discrimination and particular cultural processes within a given community (Chudgar et al., 2010; Dayasiri et al., 2025; Kearney et al., 2026; Shihab, 2018).

The research related to out-of-school children within Pakistan has mainly focused on issues such as rural poverty, gender differences, and poor infrastructure, along with family income and education levels, without distinguishing between nomads and semi-nomads (Ahmad et al., 2026; Shah et al., 2026; Soomro et al., 2026). With respect to nomads, they have been largely included in the category of extreme poverty, thereby hiding the role played by movement and lack of identification in limiting their access to schools. The link between migration and education shows that movement is an impediment to consistent schooling because of the difficulties in enrolling at schools (Safder et al., 2024).

Attitudes held by parents have also been identified as an important factor for the choice of enrolment by marginalised communities. Studies conducted in artisan and nomadic communities have found that formal education does not always coincide with their traditional means of livelihood and their early engagement in income-generating tasks (Chudgar et al., 2010; Dayasiri et al., 2025; Kearney et al., 2026; Shihab, 2018). Discrimination from the established community and school employees further increases these attitudinal barriers to discourage involvement in the system (Zahra Orakzai et al., 2026).

From the literature overall, it can be concluded that exclusion from education among the Gypsies cannot be solved only through economic means; it requires measures addressing issues related to mobility, documentation, and sociocultural aspects. The recent research pertaining to Pakistan proves this point and reveals that high costs, child labor, and parental denial, all due to sociocultural factors, prevent children from attending schools (Ahmad et al., 2026; Shah et al., 2026; Soomro et al., 2026). However, there seems to be a dearth of empirical community studies pertaining to Pakistani Gypsies, especially those residing near urban areas like Faisalabad. The following hypothesis, which is derived from the literature review conducted for this study, are:

H1: Men have a stronger feeling of social exclusion.

H2: Younger parents have a stronger feeling of social exclusion.

H3: Highly educated parents have a stronger feeling of social exclusion.

H4: Married people have a stronger feeling of social exclusion.

H5: Wealthier parents have a stronger feeling of social exclusion.

Methodology

The research design used in this study was cross-sectional in nature, with the aim of exploring the demographic hurdles for formal education among the Gypsies staying in District Faisalabad, Pakistan. The target population comprised of Gypsy families living in temporary tent colonies, whose population was estimated to be around 150 tents in the study location. In order to select a sample of 100 respondents, the research applied random sampling with the help of area enumeration technique; an enumeration of all tents was done in the pre-testing stage to form the sampling frame. Where in case of non-availability of selected tent, sampling with replacement method was adopted to keep the sample size intact. In light of low literacy rate in the target population, structured interview was adopted for the data collection process. For data analysis, univariate techniques (i.e., frequencies and percentages) and bivariate techniques (i.e., cross-tabulation with attitudinal statements and chi-square) were used to determine any possible relationship among key variables. This study is a part of the M.Phil research carried out in May-June 2026.

Results and Discussion

The results of Gypsy's demographic characteristics were summarized and shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic and Personal Characteristics of Gypsy Families

Sr. No	Demographic Characteristics	Count	Percent %
1	Age		
	Young	46	46.0
	Middle	49	49.0
	Older	05	05.0
	Total	100	100.0
2	Gender		
	Male	61	61.0
	Female	39	39.0
	Total	100	100.0
3	Marital Status		
	Single	08	08.0
	Married	92	92.0
	Divorced	00	00.0
	Total	100	100.0
	Parents' Education		

4	No Formal Education	84	84.0
	Primary	13	13.0
	Middle	03	03.0
	Matric	00	00.0
	Above	00	00.0
	Total	100	100.0
5	Monthly Household Income		
	Below 15000	14	14.0
	15001-25000	39	39.0
	25001-35000	32	32.0
	Above 35001	15	15.0
	Total	100	100.0

The following analysis of Table 1 is done to provide information on the demographic features of the sampled Gypsy households. Out of the 100 participants, 61.0 percent were men while 39.0 percent were women. With respect to age, most of the participants were either young (46.0 percent) or middle aged (49.0 percent), and only 5.0 percent were old. Almost all of the participants were married (92.0 percent). As Jones & Yeung, 2014 pointed that it is also important to mention the fact that such widespread marriage pattern correlates with the generally conservative and family-oriented social system of Gypsies.

Educational status of the parents was considerably low: 84.0% of the subjects responded that their parents were illiterate, 13.0% were educated till primary level, while 3.0% were educated till middle level, with no one having matriculation or above education. This pattern points as in Moreira et al., 2022 that to a strong intergenerational educational deficit within Gypsy households, which is likely to reinforce, rather than counteract, the barriers to formal schooling faced by their own children. Based on monthly household income, 14.0% of families earned below Rs. 15,000, 39.0% earned Rs. 15,001-25,000, 32.0% earned Rs. 25,001-35,000 and 15.0% earned above Rs. 35,001. The high percentage of households in the lower and middle income groups is indicative of the generally precarious economic situation of Gypsy families, and suggests the affordability constraints that may be associated with decisions about children's schooling.

Table 2

Barriers to Formal Education

Sr. No	Intentions	Categories	Count	Percent %	Mean	S.D
1	Cultural Traditions and Customs	Disagree	10	10.0	3.43	1.2
		Strongly Disagree	12	12.0		
		Neutral	22	22.0		
		Agree	37	37.0		
		Strongly Agree	19	19.0		
2	Discrimination with children in Schools	Disagree	09	9.0	3.06	1.1
		Strongly Disagree	21	21.0		
		Neutral	39	39.0		
		Agree	17	17.0		
		Strongly Agree	14	14.0		
3	Poor treatment of Schools for unhygienic Children	Disagree	6	06.0	3.31	1.2
		Strongly Disagree	18	18.0		
		Neutral	36	36.0		
		Agree	19	19.0		
		Strongly Agree	21	21.0		
4	Language Differences	Disagree	7	07.0	3.01	1.0
		Strongly Disagree	21	21.0		
		Neutral	47	47.0		
		Agree	14	14.0		
		Strongly Agree	11	11.0		
5	Safety Concerns	Disagree	4	04.0	3.52	1.2
		Strongly Disagree	17	17.0		
		Neutral	28	28.0		
		Agree	25	25.0		
		Strongly Agree	26	26.0		

6	Frequent Dislocation	Disagree	5	05.0	3.50	1.0
		Strongly Disagree	15	15.0		
		Neutral	21	21.0		
		Agree	43	43.0		
		Strongly Agree	16	16.0		
7	Distant Schools	Disagree	5	05.0	3.55	1.1
		Strongly Disagree	15	15.0		
		Neutral	24	24.0		
		Agree	32	32.0		
		Strongly Agree	24	24.0		

Table 2 shows respondents' agreement with seven potential barriers to their children's formal education, on a five-point scale, along with the mean scores and standard deviations. The most strongly endorsed barrier was distant schools (Mean = 3.55, SD = 1.1) with 56.0% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the distance to school deters enrollment. Safety concerns (Mean = 3.52, SD = 1.2) supported by 51.0% and frequent dislocation (Mean = 3.50, SD = 1.0) supported by 59.0% were closely followed. This is attributed to the semi-nomadic, mobile lifestyle that interrupts continuous schooling for many Gypsy children. Cultural traditions and customs were also rated highly as a barrier (Mean = 3.43, SD = 1.2), with 56.0% of respondents agreeing, suggesting that community norms and practices continue to compete with formal schooling for children's time and priorities. Moderate but still notable barriers were poor treatment of unhygienic children by schools (Mean = 3.31, SD = 1.2) and discrimination against Gypsy children in schools (Mean = 3.06, SD = 1.1) indicating issues of stigma and unwelcoming school environments. Language differences was the least influential barrier (Mean = 3.01, SD = 1.0). The biggest portion of respondents (47.0%) stayed neutral. Overall, these findings suggest that structural and logistical barriers, namely distance, safety and mobility, play a more important role in Gypsy families' educational choices than linguistic barriers, while social barriers, including discrimination and cultural expectations, remain important barriers.

Table 3: Testing of Hypotheses

Demographic Characteristics	Barriers to Formal Education			Total	X ²	P Value	Gamma (λ)	P Value
	Low	Medium	High					
1 Gender								
Female	10 25.6%	11 28.2%	18 46.2%	39 39.0%	9.701	.008	0.46	0.178
Male	29 47.5%	21 34.4%	11 18.0%	61 61.0%				
Total	39 39.0%	32 32.0%	29 29.0%	100 100.0%				
2 Age								
Young	15 32.6%	15 32.6%	16 34.8%	46 46.0%	2.25	.068	-0.14	0.595
Middle	17 47.2%	11 30.6%	8 22.2%	36 36.0%				
Older	7 38.9%	6 33.3%	5 27.8%	18 18.0%				
Total	39 39.0%	32 32.0%	29 29.0%	100 100.0%				
3 Education								
Uneducated	31 36.9%	29 34.5%	24 28.6%	84 84.0%	1.669	.434	-0.116	.810
Educated	8 50.0%	3 18.8%	5 31.2%	16 16.0%				
Total	39 39.0%	32 32.0%	29 29.0%	100 100.0%				
4 Marital								
Married	36 39.1%	30 32.6%	26 28.3%	92 92.0%	0.355	.837	0.102	.872
Unmarried	3 37.5%	2 25.0%	3 37.5%	8 8.0%				
Total	39 39.0%	32 32.0%	29 29.0%	100 100.0%				

Total	39.0%	32.0%	29.0%	100.0%				
5 Income	6	5	3	14	1.58	.953	-0.018	.943
Upto 15000	42.9%	35.7%	21.4%	14.0%				
Upto 25000	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	39.0%				
Upto 35000	43.8%	31.2%	25.0%	32.0%				
+35000	40.0%	26.7%	33.3%	15.0%				
Total	39.0%	32.0%	29.0%	100.0%				

Table 3 shows a cross-tabulation of the demographic characteristics of respondents and their overall perceived level of barriers to formal education (low, medium, high). The chi-square and Gamma statistics are reported to test each hypothesis.

Regarding the first hypothesis, the bivariate analysis in Table 3 shows a statistically significant association between gender and the perceived level of barriers to formal education ($X^2 = 9.701$, $p = .008$). However, the Gamma statistic was not statistically significant (Gamma = 0.46, $p = .178$). Crucially, the relationship was in the reverse direction to that predicted, with female respondents reporting a significantly higher sense of exclusion than male respondents. Among females, 46.2% reported a high level of perceived barriers compared to only 18.0% of males, and 47.5% of males reported a low level compared to only 25.6% of females. Therefore, H1, which proposed that males would report a greater sense of social exclusion, is not supported. The evidence as in Ahmad et al., 2026 suggests that girls in Gypsy families experience greater barriers to formal education than boys, which may be a result of increased safety concerns, mobility restrictions, and cultural expectations that are imposed on girls.

The second hypothesis, which posited an association between age and the perceived level of barriers to formal education, was not supported by the data ($X^2 = 2.25$, $p = .068$; Gamma = -0.14, $p = .595$). The youngest cohort also had a somewhat higher proportion of high-barrier category (34.8% vs older groups) but the overall pattern was not at conventional significance levels. Therefore, H2 is rejected.

The third hypothesis was not verified. The results showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between parental education and perceived barriers to formal schooling ($X^2 = 1.669$, $p = .434$; Gamma = -0.116, $p = .810$). Low, medium and high barrier categories distribution were similar between uneducated and educated parents. Therefore, H3, which proposed that educated parents would report more social exclusion, is not supported.

Hypothesis four was not supported. Data analysis did not find a statistically significant association between marital status and perceived severity of barriers to formal education ($X^2 = 0.355$, $p = .837$; Gamma = 0.102, $p = .872$). Married and unmarried respondents reported very similar patterns on these obstacles. Therefore, marital status does not seem to be a predictor of the extent to which families in this sample perceive barriers to their children's schooling.

The fifth hypothesis suggested parents with higher household incomes would experience more social exclusion but this was not supported. There is no significant association between household income and perceived barriers to formal education ($X^2 = 1.58$, $p = .953$; Gamma = -0.018, $p = .943$). Low, medium and high levels of barriers were fairly similar across all income categories of respondents. The only significant association found was between perceived barriers and gender, and this was contrary to the original prediction. This suggests as in Soomro et al., 2026 that the barriers to Gypsy children's access to formal education are less a function of the demographic characteristics of parents, such as age, education, marital status, or income, and more a function of structural and social factors—distance, safety, mobility, and discrimination—that are widespread in the community as a whole and affect girls disproportionately.

Limitations

The present study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design captures perceived barriers at one time point and cannot determine causal direction between demographic characteristics and perceived exclusion as stated in Wang & Cheng (2020). Second, the sample was drawn from one district (Faisalabad) which may limit the generalizability to nomadic communities in other regions of Pakistan with different livelihood patterns, mobility routes or local school infrastructure. Third, Muscat et al., 2016, relied on a systematic interview schedule with the under-discussed illiterate population, which may be subject to social desirability or memory bias. Finally, the composite barriers index should be reported with its basic composition (cut points and, ideally, a measure of internal consistency) so that the results can be compared in future studies.

Ethical Considerations

At the University of Agriculture in Faisalabad, the Department of Rural Sociology supervised the data collection and consent procedures as requirements for the first author's MPhil. Since the literacy level of the population participating in the study was generally low, the team did not use written forms. Instead, interviewers informed adult participants in the local language about the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, and confidentiality, and then obtained verbal consent, which was recorded immediately before each interview.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to understand why it is difficult for Gypsy families to enroll their children in regular schools, and whether factors such as gender, age, parents' education, marital status, and household income influence the perceived intensity of this difficulty. The families we interviewed had very low levels of education – 84% of parents had never attended school at all. Most households had a moderate income, and almost all respondents were married. In this context, three issues repeatedly emerged: schools being too far, concerns about children's safety, and the constant mobility associated with a nomadic lifestyle. Maintaining cultural traditions and customs was also a significant factor. Other issues were also important, though somewhat less so: discrimination in schools, poor treatment of children because they appeared 'unclean,' and language barriers.

When we tested the five hypotheses, only gender genuinely influenced how much families perceived barriers – and this was not what we had expected. Girls from Gypsy families reported feeling more deprived of formal education compared to boys. Age, parental education, marital status, and household income did not indicate how significant the perceived barriers were. This suggests that the issue is not actually about the individual parents' backgrounds. The major drivers are those found at structural and community levels: distance to schools, safety concerns, frequent relocation, and cultural and social attitudes toward education. For marginalized and mobile communities like Gypsy families, typical demographic predictors explain very little. The findings indicate that gender-sensitive and community-level broad solutions are more useful than targeting only specific groups of parents.

Recommendations

Based on these results, some practical measures are evident. Local authorities and NGOs should bring schools closer to Gypsy settlements, for which satellite classrooms or transportation arrangements can be made, and include safety measures such as accompanied travel for young children and girls, as distance and safety were the primary concerns. Since families often move, the education system also needs to be flexible – this includes transferable admissions, mobile or seasonal schooling, and portable educational records that move with the children. To remove stigma, teachers need training to better understand the real situation of Gypsy children, and schools should provide basic necessities such as uniforms, soap, and hygiene kits so that children are not isolated. At the same time, working with respected members of the community to show how education aligns with cultural values, rather than posing a threat to them, will build trust. Girls also require special attention, such as scholarships, female teachers, transportation exclusively for girls, and community dialogue, as they face higher exclusion compared to boys. Finally, since age, parental education, marital status, and income do not predict barriers, support should be broad and community-wide, rather than limited, so that it can reach Gypsy families comprehensively.

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