

## COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GENDER PARITY IN EDUCATION AMONG REGIONS/AREAS OF PAKISTAN: AN ANALYSIS OF MICS HISTORICAL DATA

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### ABSTRACT

Fulfilling Gender Parity (GP) in primary education concerning MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 remains a consistent challenge throughout Pakistan and its regions/areas. The research uses MICS 5&6 data and deploys SPSS-26 and MS Excel to compute GP at the urban/rural, division and district levels. MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 are attainable targets with governmental determination and societal aid; however, numerous regions in Pakistan do not meet the standard. AJ&K and Punjab got MDG 3.1 in 2008 and 2014, respectively, before the deadline of 2015. Sindh attains a GPI of 0.86 and Baluchistan (0.83), while KP (0.69) observes the most severe gender inequalities, having 31 girls out of school for every 100 boys. In attaining the SDG 4.5.1 target, a GPI of 1.00, Punjab (0.99), Sindh (0.89), Gilgit-Baltistan (0.86), Baluchistan (0.85), and KP (0.80) still have a considerable number of girls out of school. However, AJ&K is the only entity in Pakistan's 6 regions/areas that achieves the SDG 4.5.1 target with an exact GP score of 1.00, indicating remarkable performance. Besides, out of 36 divisions and 149 districts in Pakistan, only 3 divisions (8%) and 10 districts (7%) achieved the SDG 4.5.1 target (GPI 1.00). In terms of UNESCO's GP values (0.97-1.03), AJ&K again leads with 100% and 80% success at the division and district level respectively while the other 5 regions/areas perform relatively poorer: Punjab (60% and 36%), GB (33% and 30%), KP (14% and 16%), Baluchistan (14% and 6%), and Sindh (0% and 7%). Both poverty and the illiteracy of mothers widely limit GP realization in all 6 regions/areas. AJ&K's advantage, however, stems from a strong government commitment, better educational access, community involvement, greater availability of girls' schools, and female teachers. Other regions, on the other hand, are struggling with limited funds, lethargic community, strict cultural norms and social taboos, son preference, patriarchy, a patriarchal mindset, lacking transport, early marriages, lacking security, few female teachers and schools with missing facilities, and restricted access along with slower progress towards gender equality in education.

**Keywords:** Gender Parity (GP), Primary school Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), Net Attendance Rate (NAR), Gender Parity Index (GPI), Gender Disparities, Regions, Urban and Rural Areas, Divisions and District.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is the key determinant of human capital (HC) formation and a vital instrument for economic progress and the overall welfare of the people. Having a pivotal role in enhancing social inclusion, dignity and respect, it pays a significant dividend in the economic growth and social progress. It builds up individuals' knowledge, skills, and abilities critical for accelerated economic growth and a prosperous economy, along with socio-economic progress desired by individuals, nations, and humanity (Kazmi, 1995 & 1998; Imran, 2017; Kazmi et al., 2023b; Akram, 2024). Nevertheless, the historical illusion postulates education with some poor returns on its investment. Therefore, it remained ignored until 1970, presuming indirect benefits via the trickle-down effect of investment in physical capital but the failure of this postulation led to direct investment in social sectors – health and education – for economic development. Education growth promotes economic prosperity and well-being by suppressing gender bias, harming women in developing countries, including Pakistan. However, the women's share on education in Pakistan and its region/areas' remains small since independence (1947) but later policy interventions help to even out the gender disparities disadvantaging girls (Yusauf, 2013; Shabbir & Wei, 2014; Aila Ailaan, 2015; Farooq & Kai, 2016; Baran & Bend, 2023; Noreen, 2023; Kazmi, et al., 2023a&b; Kazmi, et al., 2024).

Gender Parity (GP)<sup>1</sup> is a vital measure to gauge the educational performance of a country/region/area in the Primary school education level. While GP Index (GPI), on the other hand, is a common tool for measuring any gain/loss in GP, determining the education ranking of an area and making inter/intra country or regional/area's comparison (World Bank, 2012 & 2018; UNESCO, 2005, 2010 & 2022; Swenson, 2017; UNICEF 2020; PAGE, 2021; Kazmi, et al., 2023a&b; Kazmi, et al., 2024; WHO, 2023). UNESCO (2010, p. 2) describes GPI 1.00 as gender parity and also accepts values from 0.97 up to 1.03 as equivalent to parity standards. The GPI below 0.97 refers to gender

disparities harming girls, while  $GPI > 1.03$  demonstrates the prevalence of gender discrimination against boys.

A small women's share widely prevails in most sectors of Pakistan's economy along with its regional/areas' set-up since 1947. The education sector is the prime victim of gender discrimination and thus too weak to make any difference in GP attainment (Farooq and Kia, 2016; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b). The negligible female share in primary schools is virtually a denial of female education that aggravates the gender disparities affecting girls in Pakistan and its regions/areas. Financial paucity, small budget allocations, austere sociocultural norms/bindings, an un-conducive education environment, limited access, schools and faculty, weak institutional capacity and delayed development process taxed any optimistic move towards regional/areas' GP at the primary school level education (CEIET, 1997; Yusauf, 2013; Farooq and Kai, 2016; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b). However, the development process initiated in the early 1970s<sup>2</sup> helped reduce girls' denial of education and thus improved GP favouring girls (GoPak, 1970 & 1971; Kazmi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, empirical research on comparing GP performance in the regions/areas is either non-existent or too rare. This primary initiative is designed to bridge this research gap. Using MICS waves (5-6) data, it investigates and compares GP attainment in the regions/areas, referring to MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 targets. It also compares and identifies outperforming and low-performing entities at the urban-rural, divisional, and district levels. It also enlists factors limiting low-performing units and helping outshining entities in attaining MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 targets.

### Statement of Problem

A wide gender inequality disfavours girls in educational opportunities exists across Pakistan's regions/areas since its independence. Gender parity remains unattained in the regions/areas due to numerous challenges such as financial limitations, institutional weakness, inactive

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter GP refers to Gender Parity Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) or Net Attendance Rate (NAR),

<sup>2</sup> After the separation of East Pakistan\*

government and community, limited access, cultural resistance, etc. (Farooq and Kai, 2016; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b; Kazmi et al., 2024). The initiatives launched through development projects during the 1970s aided in improving girls' educational opportunities, yet some substantial differences persist in GP. The lack of evidence-based research about gender parity gaps between Pakistani regions/areas remains a big concern. This first-ever research effort through MICS wave (5-6) data analysis determines how GP performance aligns with MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 across Pakistan's region/area with a comparison at urban-rural, divisional, and district levels. It also enlists factors enabling some regions/areas to outperform in GP restricting some others to fall behind in it.

**Methodology:** This research study uses Secondary data from the provincial/areas Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey waves 5 and 6 - Punjab, Sindh, KP, Balochistan, AJ&K, and GB - held during 2008 - 2022. It deploys well-known packages - SPSS-26 and MS Excel to undertake data analysis and compute GP at the regional/areas, urban/rural, division, and district levels. Different graphical tools are also used to exhibit the prevalence of gender parity or disparity in the provinces/areas with segregation of urban/rural, division, and district domains. In particular, the GP is examined from a regional/area perspective to determine outperforming and underperforming units in Pakistan.

#### Objectives of the Study:

- Examine regions/areas education performance in the GP at the primary school level
- Compare regions/areas' working to determine regions/areas' GP profile over time
- Examines/compares regional/area standing in terms of MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 targets
- Identify outperforming and underperforming regions/areas in urban-rural domains and at the division and district level in accessing Gender Parity
- Solicit factors supporting some regions/areas while containing others in attaining GP targeted MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 scores in Pakistan

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The miscarriage of trickle-down postulation in the early 1970s led to shift invest in Human Resource Development (HRD) and basic needs via education and health for accelerating economic growth and improving HR quality leading to better life of the masses (Carrin, 1984; Hicks, 1989; Kazmi, 1995, 2005 & 2010; Rahman and Uddin, 2009; Umar and Asghar, 2107; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b; Kazmi et al., 2024). Education development implies economic growth and is thus instrumental for a happy, prosperous, and peaceful life (Knowles and Maddison, 2002; Singh, 2018). Investing in education, therefore, improves the socioeconomic profile of an individual and a society (Kazmi, 1995; Johnson, 2005; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b)

Gender parity (GP) in primary school education attendance/enrolment is a vital matrix to measure and compare the education sector's performance. The developing world mostly suffers from gender disparity harming girls but Maldives, Sri Lanka, Kerala in India, Somalia, Cuba, and Vietnam enjoy healthy GP scores even with their fragile fiscal and economic standings (Khan, 2011 & 2017; WEF, 2022; Iqbal, 2022; UNESCAP, 2017 & 2018; Kazmi et al., 2024). Pakistan's education is an ignored area with persistently low allocations of 2.5% of GDP (UNESCAP, 2018), restricting the attainment of MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1. It positions 2<sup>nd</sup> last in GP (GPI 0.841), leaving Afghanistan (GPI 0.44) behind (UNICEF, 2020; WEF, 2022; Kazmi et al., 2024). However, some gradual improvement occurs in GP despite numerous difficulties - earthquakes, floods, political instability, COVID-19, refugees' influx, and persistent conflict on borders - in Pakistan and its regions/areas (Baran and Bend, 2023; Kazmi et al., 2024). The World Economic Forum (WEF, 2022) refers to Pakistan ranking 153<sup>rd</sup> out of 156 countries in the global GP ranking. It is 7<sup>th</sup> in 8 South Asian countries with a GPI of 0.841, leading only to Afghanistan having GPI 0.441 but lags behind Iran GPI 0.92, India GPI 0.962 and Sri Lanka GPI 0.998 (WEF, 2022; Iqbal, 2022). WEF (2022) predicts 132 years to bridge the overall gender gap, while Baran and Bend (2023) consider 30 to 50 years for bridging the gender disparities in education in Pakistan. Iqbal (2022) stresses realigning policies, standards, and strategies helpful in

getting various domains such as economy, health, and education with a precise focus on GP at the primary school level, while Baran and Bend (2023) suggest improving public-private partnerships (PPP), more girls' schools and female teachers, > GDP allocations (4.5%) for education, family support, female security and better transport to reverse the situation. The regional/areas' GP accounts in Pakistan also demonstrate slow gains in GP and thus mostly lack in MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 targets. The next paragraphs provide a brief overview of the regional/areas' working in GP in Pakistan.

Yusauf, Saher (2013), using MICS 2007-8 Punjab data, examines the Gender Gap in primary school education in the province and its urban-rural areas. She finds a strong pro-male bias in primary school enrolment in total. In disaggregated terms, the urban areas have a marginal pro-female bias against rural areas. The cultural attributes are strong factors behind the GP matrix in Punjab. The mother's education and family opulence are also strong and positive associates of GP, while family size is a negative associate of it. Umar, Maida and Asghar, Zahid (2017), using 18-year time series data, identify some gender gaps in getting SDG 4.5.1 at national, regional, and district levels, along with rural areas lacking SDG 4.5.1. To them, SDG 4.5 could not be achieved by Pakistan until 2030 without bridging the gender gap in provinces, districts, and rural areas with a special focus on Baluchistan. Attainment of the SDG 4.5.1 target in provinces/areas needs policy realignment, financial and other inputs escalation, better government commitments, and healthier community support. Imran, Mohammad (2017) computes the district-wise gender disparity index in Punjab and finds that not a single district thrives in bridging the gender gap due to a lack of mothers' education, government spending, along soaring poverty. A Punjab Govt. study (2021), "Punjab Gender Parity Report (PGPR) 2021", finds no gender gap in Punjab against Pakistan in 2019-20. However, the PAGE study (2021), "Status of Girls Education in Punjab", does not find a single district in Punjab getting UNESCO's (2010) earmarked GP score (0.97-100), exhibiting wide gender disparity harming girls at the district level as Lahore district leads with a GPI of 0.798 while Lodhran district is at the bottom with a GP score of 0.353.

In **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's (KP)**, Haq (2016) finds females a marginalized segment suffering from a big gender gap in all education indices due to financial paucity, strict socio-cultural norms, son preference, and restricted access to schools. He suggests more money for girls' education, enhance parents' and community roles, undertake additional poverty-eradicating measures, and initiate extra girls' girls-favouring education policies, along with more spending for female education backed by a wider campaign for girls' education to bridge the gender gap. UNWOMEN's (2020) study in KP observes that the overall education system in the Selected Merged Districts (Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan) of KP is in shambles. This study refers to FATA Development Indicators Household Survey - (FDIHS) 2013-14 and cites women's literacy rate as 13%, which is lower than KP (30%) and Pakistan (47%), and is due to many thousands of out-of-school (OOS) girls with extremely high dropout rates. It enlists five major challenges daunting girls' education, including son preference, early girls' marriages, restricted mobility, and a few schools with limited access and lacking female faculty. PAGE's (2021) similar study for KP also finds a big gender gap at primary school level with a GPI of 0.76 in 2020-21. Only Abbottabad district leads with a GP score of 0.97, while Hangu is at the tail with a GPI of 0.38. Noreen, Amna (2023) finds gender inequality a social evil deterring the socio-economic progress in KP implying to females' development even in 2023, mainly because of hostile trends - patriarchal mindset; cultural norms, strict social bindings, restricting females in homes; missing female role in public life; restricted girls access to education, health, and job openings; illiteracy; and deficient awareness. She infers that averting these pitfalls needs instant handling via collective efforts by individuals, the government, and society.

In the **Balochistan** region, Abdul Rashid and his colleagues (2012) investigate MDG 3.1 attainment in the district of Quetta. They find gender disparity harming girls due to high dropout rates resulting from a lack of school facilities. They suggest more funding and allied inputs to bridge the gender gap in the Quetta district. Balochistan PAGE report (2021) also finds a wide variation in GP as district Sohbatpur

leads with a GPI of 89.23, while district Sherani is the lowest performer with a GPI of 39.93. Mohsin's study (2023) finds Balochistan as the lowest entity in the world's standing, having only 27% of literate women, with only 2% in rural areas. He finds 83% out-of-school (OOS) girls, indicating a big gender gap at the regional, divisional, and district levels due to restricted domestic life, limited access, cultural norms, traditions, early marriages, etc.

CIET International **Sindh** Report (1997) detects a wider gender gap with 59% NER in total, 73% boys and 68% girls in urban areas, against 66% boys and 47% girls in rural areas. To avert this situation, it suggests more mother education, mother say in the family, more parent education, reduce number of children in the family (<6), family status (farmer), community support, children help in homework, improved infrastructure (missing facilities), better income-generating activities, more girls' schools and female teachers, and special policy interventions for free Books, Meals, and Uniforms, ensuring judicious distribution. Brohi and Kakepoto's (2013) study "Gender Differential Treatment in Social Development: A Sociological Study in Rural Sindh" finds gender bias hurting girls in the country and rural areas of Pakistan, including Sindh province, which witnesses gender discrimination harming girls in all walks of life. They suggest some quick policy measures to deal with the financial scarcity, socio-cultural binding, weak education system, missing government commitment, and inactive community roles. Zulqurnain and Hussain (2016) examine the contrast between Pakistan and provinces, focusing on Sindh to grasp the dynamics of the provincial primary school education. Among 100 girls enrolled in public sector primary schools in Pakistan, Sindh shares 13%, KP 24%, Punjab 51%, and Balochistan 3%, referring to a huge gender gap disadvantaging girls in three provinces with an alarming female dropout rate of 27% in 2015-16, emerging mainly due to the missing facilities in schools, along with limited access, etc. The PAGE Sindh Report (2021) finds that Sindh lacks GP in all districts with some district-level variations - district Dadu (GPI 90.39) leads while Sajawal is at the tail (GPI 69.91).

In **Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan, AJ&K** outshines in education indicators in all the provinces/areas (Farooq and

Kai, 2016; Shabbier and Wei, 2015; Kazmi et al., 2024). Farooq and Kia (2016) find AJ&K's work better even under federal [Pakistan] education policies/systems. Missing facilities and several similar risks resulting in slow gains in GP (0.95), which to them is close to 1.00, indicating a state-level GP with some small district-level variations. The Alif Ailaan "Pakistan District Education Rankings Report 2015" finds AJ&K as the best performer in the district ranking. The Annual Status of Education Report 2019 observes the highest enrolment in Pakistan for boys (95%) and girls (85%) at the Primary school level in AJ&K (ASER, 2019). Another ASER report (2020) places AJ&K in the lead in Quality Education - reading in Urdu and English, and simple Mathematics, in the provinces/areas. PAGE's (2021) study on AJ&K and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) offers district-wise education data, along with population profiles and budgetary allocations, with a biased distribution mostly (2/3) for infrastructure. It finds AJ&K Net Attendance Rate (NAR) for boys (98%) and girls (89%), considerably higher than the national figures. The study witnesses some gender disparities at the division and district levels in AJ&K against a big gender gap at both these levels in GB. Kazmi et al., 2023a study uses MICS AJ&K 2020-21 data and found AJ&K proactive in mitigating gender disparities by attaining the SDG 4.5.1 target (GPI 1.00) with its poor economic position and fragile education system. It also gains UNESCO (2010) earmarked GP score (0.97 - 1.03) at the state, division, and district levels, along with urban-rural areas, with a minor skip in 2 districts. This triumph occurs due to government pledges, the community's role, female education, relaxed socio-cultural norms, easy access, more girls' schools, deployment of female teachers, optimal use of scarce funding and provision of co-education. However, girls with illiterate mothers or residents of the poorest households are persistently victims of gender discrimination, disadvantaging them even in 2021. Kazmi et al., 2023b study also builds a historical account of GP in AJ&K using MICS AJ&K 2008 and MICS AJ&K 2020-21 data. They find AJ&K's vibrant progress in getting GP referring to MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 as well as at the division, district, urban, and rural levels. These gains are linked to the steady progress induced by the above-cited factors. Another study

by Kazmi et al., 2024 finds that AJ&K, with a GPI of 1.00, outstrips Pakistan, having a GPI of 0.84, and its neighbouring/South Asian countries – Afghanistan, Nepal, Iran, and Sri Lanka with a GP score of 0.44, 0.87, 0.92 and 0.98, respectively. Its GPI (1.00) is at par with India, Bangladesh, and the Maldives, each having a GPI score of 1.00. Moreover, AJ&K also outstrips regions/areas in quality education - reading comprehension (Urdu & English) and numeracy skills - in Pakistan. **Gilgit Baltistan**, unlike other regions/areas, witnessed extreme scarcity of literature on GP. Only the PAGE study (2021) reports a wide variation at the Division and district levels in GB. Gilgit Division takes the lead, leaving the other 2 divisions behind, wherein Dairer stands as the least performer. Among the districts in GB, Nagar and Hunza take the lead, scoring a GPI of 0.96 each, while Diamer, with a GPI of 0.54, is the lowest performing district. This study does not compare GB with AJ&K/regions in terms of GP.

The literature review provides valuable insight into Pakistan's regional/areas' efforts to mitigate the gender disparities harming girls. However, the historical account mainly fails to make any GP's regional/area comparison at different points in time since the inception of the MICS survey in provinces/areas, particularly during 2008-2022. It fails to compare and identify the outperforming and low-performing regions/areas in Pakistan. It also ignores the regional, urban-rural, divisional, and district-level comparisons. This research work, "Comparative Study of Gender Parity in Education Among Regions/Areas of Pakistan: An Analysis of MICS Historical Data", is an opening effort to fill this research gap using data from MICS, different Waves (5&6) held in the last 1.5 decades. The study examines and compares the provinces/areas' work towards international commitments - MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1. It also determines the outdoing or slow-moving entities in Pakistan, determining the GPI as per UNESCO (2010) criteria (GPI 0.97-1.03). The study also lists potential factors, enabling some regions/areas to outperform and keeping the others deficient in GP as per MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 targets.

### 3. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The comparative analysis of MICS data (2008-2002) under this first-ever research effort observes that the regions/areas steadily work for redressing gender disparities disadvantaging girls at the primary school level even under numerous hardships – socio-cultural norms, economic problems, sluggish community role, difficult access, lacking girls' school and female faculty, and delicate education system, mainly relying on federal policies/plans (Yousaf, 2013; Farooq and Kia, 2016; Taj, 2019; Mohsin, 2023, Noreen, 2023; Kazmi et al., 2024).

#### 3.1 Historical Comparison of Gender Parity in the Regions/Areas

Historical comparison of GP under MICS waves 5 and 6 data confirms the existence of gender disparities harming girls in most of the regions/areas of Pakistan. The analysis of MICS-05 data reveals that KP, Balochistan, and Sindh suffer from Gender disparities disadvantaging girls with a GPI of 0.69, 0.83, and 0.86, respectively. AJ&K and Punjab, each with a GPI of 0.97, attain GP as per UNESCO's (2010) given GP range (0.97-1.03). MICS-06 data also demonstrates that AJ&K gains GPI "1.00" in 2020-22, leaving all other 5 regions/areas behind with a GP score of < 1.00, indicating a gender bias harming girls, wherein KP (GPI 0.80) is the least performer and prime victim of Gender Bias harming girls (Table 3.1 and 3.2).

The comparison further reveals that in terms of MDG 3.1, only AJ&K and Punjab (GPI 0.97) meet the target in 2008 and 2014 respectively, leaving all other regions deficient until its closing date 2015 (Table: 3.1). In terms of SDG 4.5.1, the MICS's wave 6 (2017 to 2022) data also reveals that AJ&K again becomes the only entity in Pakistan's regions/areas that attains the agreed target in 2021, well before the stipulated time (2030). Punjab (GPI 0.99) lacks in accessing SDG 4.5.1 targeted GP score 1.00, though it reaches UNESCO's (2010) assigned GP score 0.97-1.03. KP, Balochistan, Sindh (except urban areas), and GB suffer from gender disparities disadvantaging girls at all levels. Sindh's urban areas gain a GPI of 1.03 but lose the SDG 4.5.1 targeted GPI "1.00" (Table 3.2). On the whole, most of the regions/areas in Pakistan remain slow in gaining the stipulated GP score, while a few entities work well even with similar inputs, environment, and

education policies and programs/plans. Nevertheless, the extent of girls’ deprivation declines over time in all the regions/areas, indicating their prudent efforts towards GP. A detailed interregional/area’s GP comparison with segregation at regional, area, urban, rural, division, and district levels is offered in the next sub-sections.

**3.2 Inter-Regional/Area Comparison:**

The data in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 provide a detailed account of GP attainment by the regions/areas during 1.5 decades (2008 – 2022), demonstrating their success and failure in reaching the MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 targets. In terms of MDG 3.1, AJ&K takes the lead by gaining a GPI of 0.97 in

2008, followed by Punjab attaining a GPI of 0.97 in 2014. The other 4 regions/areas - Sindh and GB (GPI 0.86 each), along with Balochistan (GPI 0.83) and KP (GPI 0.69) - remained deficient in it until 2015. In aggregated terms, AJ&K cherished early excess in achieving MDG 3.1 in 2008, almost 6 years earlier than Punjab (2014) and 7 years before its closing time (2015). Sindh (GPI 0.86) leads the deficient regions, while KP (GPI 0.69) is the lowest performer, hosting 31 girls out of school (OOS) against 100 boys in schools (Table 3.1). These research findings are endorsed by subsequent survey data (PSLM, 20211-12) reflected in Figure 3.1 is a visual demonstration of slow work in getting GP at the

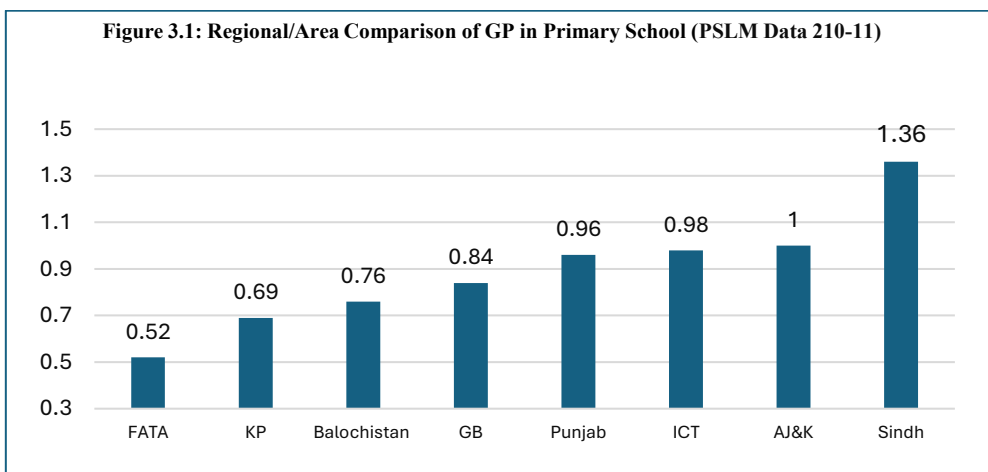
**Table 3.1: Comparison of GPI in Provinces and AJ&K MICS 5**

Indicator	Pakistan MDG Set Target 3.1	MICS AJ&K 2008*	MICS Balochistan 2010*	MICS Punjab 2014*	MICS Sindh 2014*	MICS KP 2016-17*
GPI at the Primary School level	1.00	0.97**	0.83	0.97**	0.86	0.69

**Source:** \*Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) AJ&K 2008, “Key Finding Report (KFR)” Bureau of Statistics (BoS), P&DD GoAJ&K,2009; MICS Balochistan 2010, “KFR”, BoS, P&DD, Go Balochistan, 2010; MICS Punjab-2014, “KFR, BoS, P&DD, GoPunjab 2015; MICS Sindh – 2014, “KFR” Planning and Development (P&D) Board Sindh, Govt. Sindh. 2015; MICS KP-2016-17, “KFR” BoS, P&DD, GoKP 2018  
 \*\* GPI varied between 0.97 and 1.03 (UNESCO, 2010, p.2)

provincial and area levels, except Punjab, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), and AJ&K, gaining notable dividends in GP scores before 2015. It also endorses AJ&K’s (GPI 1.00) and ICT’s (GPI 0.98) success in accomplishing MDG 3.1 earmarked targets at the earliest. It confirms AJ&K’s upright work towards MDG 3.1 even with its weak economic standings and fragile education system hosting many schools with missing facilities (Farooq and Kai, 2016; Kazmi et

al., 2023a&b; Kazmi et al., 2024). Figure 3.1 also visualizes that AJ&K attains a GP score of “1.00” in 2011 before **conceiving/envisioning** the idea of SDG 4.5.1 target - GP 1.00 (Kazmi et al., 2023b; Kazmi et al., 2024). The visual description also reveals a big gender gap harming boys in Sindh, implying child labour, child abuse or trafficking, etc. (Guarcello et al., 2014; Kazmi et al., 2024).



The study makes further comparisons deploying data from the provincial/areas' MICS-06 surveys held during 2017-2022 in Punjab, KP, Sindh, Balochistan, AJ&K and GB.<sup>3</sup>. AJ&K again outstrips all the provinces/areas with a GPI of "1.00". It also attains the SDG 4.5.1 target (GPI 1.00) before the stipulated time of 2030 (Table 3.2). Punjab (GPI 0.99) is next to AJ&K but lacks the SDG 4.5.1 target by 0.01 percentage point. Sindh (GPI 0.89) tracks Punjab and is followed by GB (GPI 0.86), Balochistan (GPI 0.85) and KP (GPI 0.80), indicating 11, 14, 15 and 20 girls, respectively, OOS against 100 boys in the school. In aggregate terms, AJ&K leads the whole scenario by outdoing all the regions/areas in achieving SDG 4.5.1 precise target. Overall, a comparison of the MICS6 results maintains that AJ&K attains an advanced level of precision by gaining a GPI of 1.00 compared to Punjab, Sindh, GB, Baluchistan, and KP (Table 3.2). It further endorses that all the regions/areas except AJ&K lacked in attaining SDG 4.5.1. AJ&K

gains it despite suffering from numerous hazards – Earthquakes in 2005, Floods in 2010, COVID-19, Firing on Line of Control (LOC), etc.

### 3.3 Urban-Rural Areas Comparison

Prevalence of GP at urban and rural levels also reflects quality of life and female profile in both developed and developing countries, including Pakistan (Kazmi et al., 2023a & b). This research effort compares the occurrence of GP in the regions/areas with segregation in urban and rural domains. Generally, urban areas host enormous educational facilities to serve bureaucrats, the elite segment, etc. Table 3.2 displays that none of the 5 region/area attains SDG 4.5.1 target (GPI 1.00). However, Punjab and Sindh enjoy GP (UNESCO, 2010) in urban areas with a GPI of 1.02 and 1.03, respectively, while Balochistan (0.95), KP (0.90) and GB (0.87) suffer from gender disparities disadvantaging girls with variant extent. AJ&K, on the other hand, is an

**Table 3.2: Comparison of Gender Parity at Primary School Level with Provinces/Areas as per MICS6 Survey**

Indicator Province/Areas MICS6	Punjab MICS 2017	Sindh MICS 2020	KP MICS 2021	Balochistan MICS 2022	AJ&K MICS 2021	GB MICS 2017
Total	0.99	0.89	0.80	0.85	<b>1.00</b>	0.86
Urban	<b>1.02</b>	<b>1.03</b>	<b>0.90</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>1.01</b>	<b>0.87</b>
Rural	0.97	0.71	0.80	0.77	<b>1.00</b>	0.85

**Source:** MICS Punjab 2016-17 "Survey Finding Report (SFR)", BoS, P&DD Govt. of Punjab, 2018 (p-197); MICS Sindh 2018- 19, "Survey Finding Report (SFR)", BoS, Planning & Development Board Govt. of Sindh, 2021 (p-184); MICS KP 2017-18 "Survey Finding Report (SFR)", BoS P&DD Govt of KP, 2021 (p-290); MICS Balochistan 2018-19 "Survey Finding Report (SFR)", BOS, P&DD Govt. of Balochistan, 2022 (p-199); MICS AJ&K 2020-21, "Survey Finding Report –SFR", BoS, P&DD Govt. of AJ&K, 2022 (p.240); and MICS GB 2017-18, "Key Finding Report:", P&DD Govt. of Gilgit, 2018 (p-181)

outperformer entity in the urban domain with a more precise GP score of 1.01. It also enjoys a lead at the urban level in the regions/areas with 0.01 percentage points above the target (GPI 1.00) against 0.02 and 0.03 percentage points in Punjab and Sindh respectively (Table 3.2). Besides, rural areas in most of the regions/areas of Pakistan experience the worst conditions in Gender Parity. Figure 3.2 exhibits AJ&K and Punjab's thriving performance in gaining Gender Parity with a GP score of 1.00 and 0.97, respectively. AJ&K is the best performer and the only entity that gets the SDG 4.5.1 target in 2021 in Pakistan's rural areas, while Punjab (GPI 0.97)

along with regions remains deficient in the SDG 4.5.1 target by 0.03 percentage points.

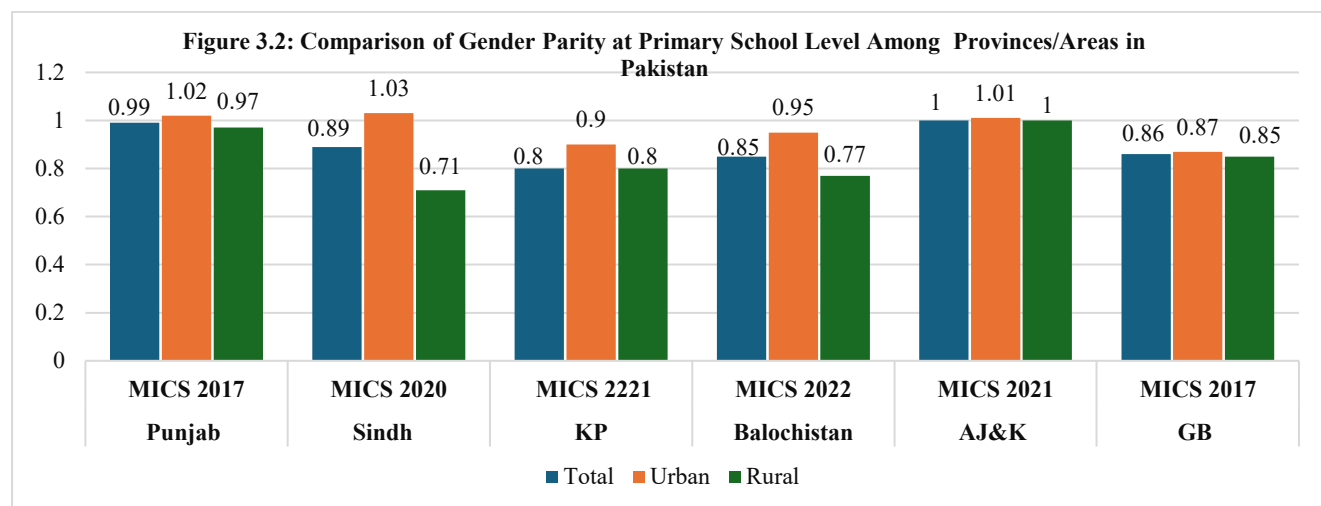
In overall rural level comparison, AJ&K (GPI 1.00) is the only entity in the regions/areas that achieves the SDG 4.5.1 target (GPI 1.00) in 2020-21 well before the stipulated time (2030). Punjab, with a GPI of 0.97, though attains GP as per UNESCO (2010), yet lacks the SDG 4.5.1 target. The rest of the four regions - GB (0.85), KP (0.80), Balochistan (0.77) and Sindh (0.71) - not only fail to achieve the SDGs 4.5.1 target, but also persistently suffer from gender disparities harming girls (Table: 3.2). Punjab with only 03 girl OOS is relatively better than GB, KP,

<sup>3</sup> GB MICS happened in 2017 was MICS5 instead

Balochistan and Sindh in turn having 15, 20, 23 and 29 OOS girls against 100 boys in school. In total terms, AJ&K in Pakistan is the best performer in the regions/areas. It outstrips the these [regions/areas] in total and urban-rural vicinities with a GP score between 1.00 and 1.01, a nightmare for many other entities in Pakistan. It is a pioneer in getting the MDG 3.1 target in 2008 and the SDG 4.5.1 target in 2021. While all other regions/areas remain deficient in these goals, except Punjab, which attained only MDG

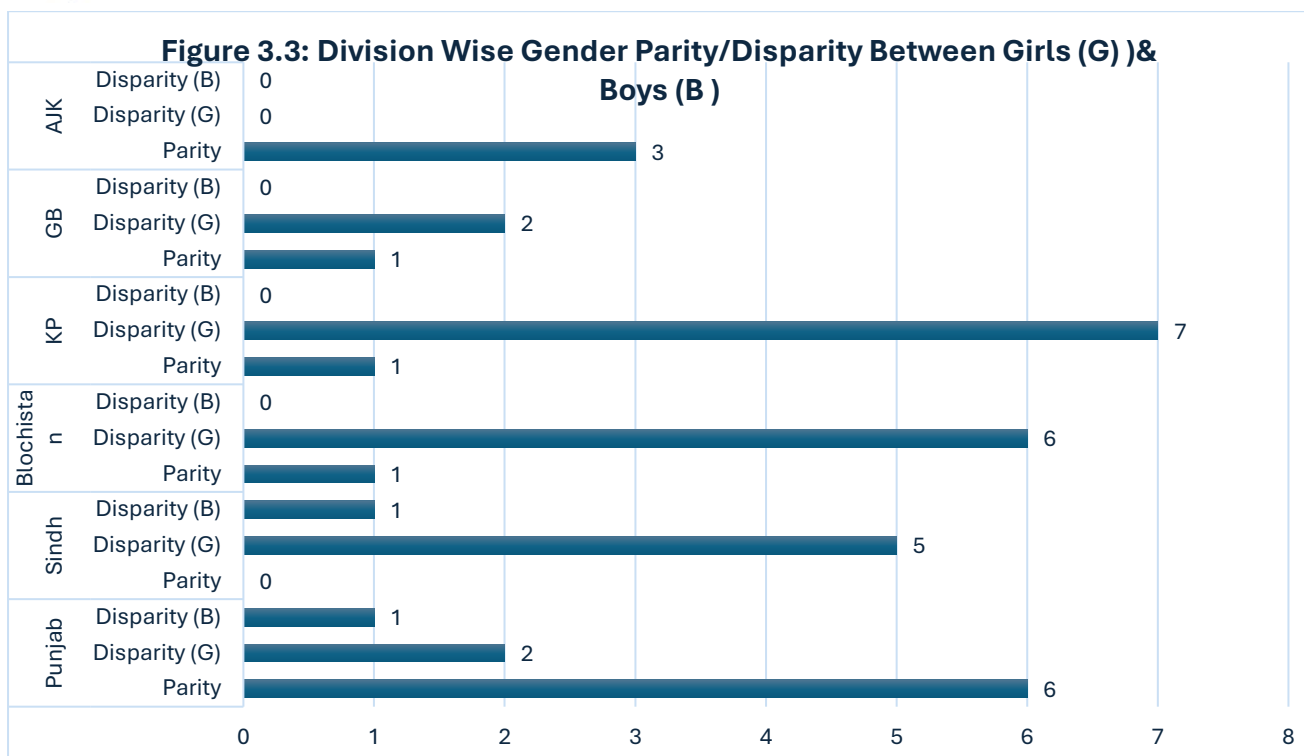
3.1 in 2014. In urban areas, AJ&K leads Punjab and Sindh, which are performing better than Balochistan, KP and GB, but missing the SDG 4.5.1 target. In rural domains, only AJ&K attains the SDG 4.5.1 target while the rest of the 5 regions/areas lack it and thus suffer from gender

disparities harming girls to a varying extent (Tables 3.1 and 3.2).



**3.4 Divisional and District Levels Comparison**  
 The divisional and district level scenario is almost similar to the urban-rural segregated results. Although some divisions and districts in Pakistan gained GP but rarely attained the desired GP score “1.00” under the SDG 4.5.1 target. This

section focuses mainly on the best and the lowest performing divisions and districts in all 4 **Regions**; Punjab, Sindh, KP, Balochistan and 2 **Areas**; AJ&K and Gilgit Baltistan (GB).



### 3.4.1 Divisional Comparison:

The segregated divisional account of 6 regions/areas portrayed in Figure 3.3 reveals that out of total 36 divisions in Pakistan, only 3 (8%) met the SDG 4.5.1 target GPI “1.00”, while 5 (14%) attain GP UNESCO’s (2010) assigned scores (0.97-1.03) but missed SDG 4.5.1 target. In the provincial/area segregation, Punjab attains alternative degrees of GP index at the divisional level. Only Sahiwal division in its nine divisions meets the SDG 4.5.1 target (GPI.100). The other five divisions; Sargodha and Multan divisions each (GPI 0.97), Faisalabad (GPI 0.98), Lahore (GPI 1.02), and Rawalpindi (GPI 1.03) - though attain UNESCO (2010) agreed GP score, yet missing the SDG 4.5.1 target. In the rest of the 03 divisions, Bahawalpur (GPI 0.94) and Dera-Ghazi-Khan (GPI 0.87) suffer from gender disparities disadvantaging girls with a bitter sting in the latter, while the Gujranwala division (GPI 1.04) is a victim of gender disparities harming boys, instead.

Sindh region observes mixed results as none of its 06 divisions achieves the SDG 4.5.1 target as well as the UNESCO (2010) given GP score. Of its 6 divisions, 5 suffer from gender disparities harming girls, while one division suffers from gender disparities harming boys. Shaheed Benazir Abad Division (GPI 0.92) leads while Sukkur Division (GPI 0.72) stands as the lowest

performer with 08 and 28 girls OOS respectively against 100 boys in the school. Balochistan is a backwards region with a scattered population living in remote and hard areas. In its 7 divisions, the Kalat division (GPI 1.01) attains UNESCO’s (2010) assigned GP score (0.97-1.03) but fails to achieve the precise SDG 4.5.1 target (GPI 1.00). The rest of the 6 divisions suffer from gender disparities harming girls. Nasrabad and Sibi (GPI 0.68 each) are slow-performing divisions, while Zhob (GPI 0.56) is the least-performing division, indicating 32 and 44 girls OOS, respectively, against 100 boys in the school.

In KP’s 8 divisions, only the Mardan division meets the SDG 4.5.1 prerogatives GP score “1.00”. The other 7 divisions suffer from gender disparity harming girls. Among these, six divisions get a uniform (GPI 0.80), while Bannu (GPI 0.60) is the lowest performer, demonstrating 40 girls OOS against 100 boys in school.

In Pakistan’s areas (AJ&K and GB), AJ&K leads the regions/areas in every aspect of GP. All three divisions; Muzaffarabad, Poonch and Mirpur witness Gender Parity with a GPI of 1.00, 0.99, and 1.01, respectively. In these, Muzaffarabad division attains the SDG 4.5.1 target with GPI “1.00” while the other two divisions are about to grasp it (GP) with 0.01 percentage points addition in Pooch division and the same (0.01)

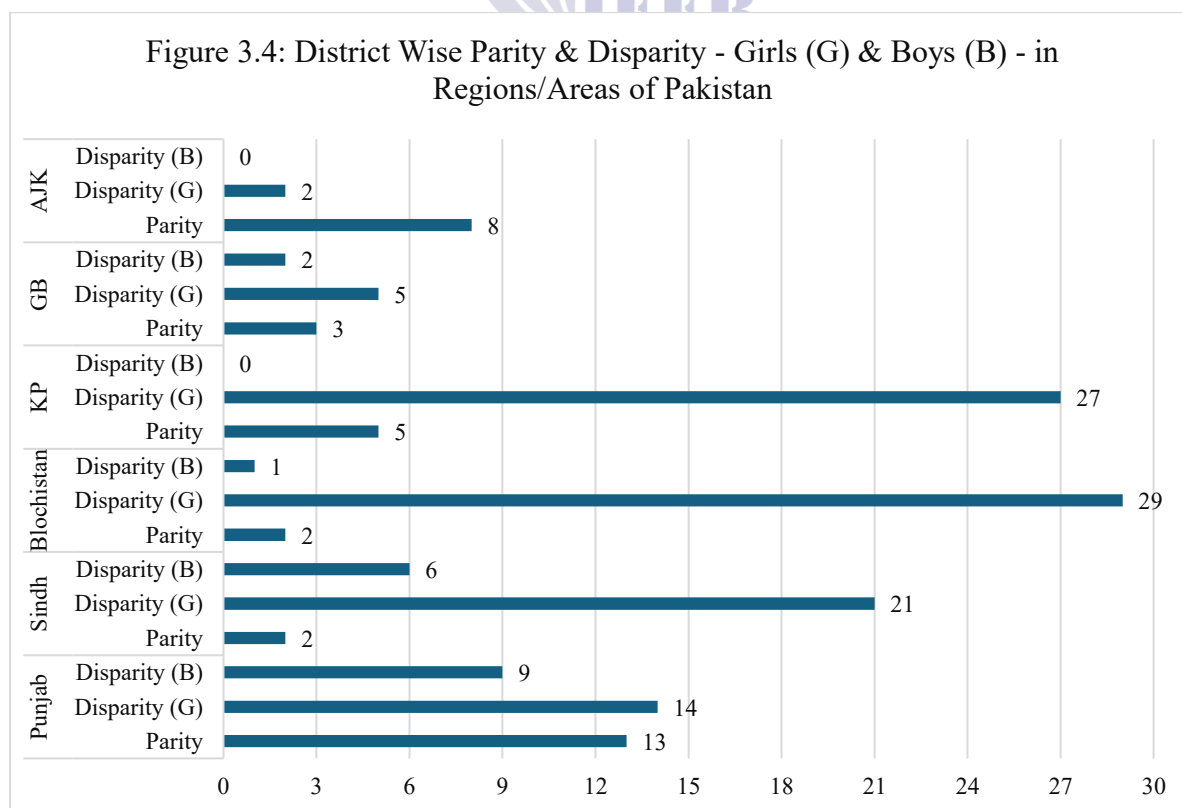
deletion in Mirpur division. AJ&K is the only entity in the regions/areas of Pakistan that enjoys gender parity in all 3 divisions as per UNESCO (2010) GP range (0.97-1.03). Gilgit Baltistan, on the other hand, is a slow performer compared to AJ&K. Among its 3 divisions, only the Gilgit division achieved a GP score of GPI 1.01, slightly (0.01 percentage point) above the assigned SDG target of 4.5.1, while the other 02 divisions; Baltistan and Diامر lack GP with a GPI of 0.89 and 0.60, respectively. Diامر is the lowest performer, throwing 40 girls OOS against 100 boys in schools.

### 3.4.2 Districts Wise Comparison:

Figure 3.4 reflects a district-level segregated comparison and shows that out of 149 districts in Pakistan, 10 (6.7%) attain the SGD 4.5.1 target (GPI 1.00) while the rest of the 139 districts lack it. In segregation amongst 36 districts of Punjab, only 4 districts (11%) attain SDG 4.5.1 target, 13 meet the UNESCO's (2010) GPI between 0.97 and 1.03, 14 districts having GPI between 0.77 and 0.96 demonstrate gender disparities disadvantaging girls, and 9 districts with a GPI between 1.04 and 1.11 suffer from gender

discrimination harming boys. District Rajanpur (GPI 0.77) is the lowest performer, indicating 23 OOS girls for 100 boys in schools against 2 in the province and 3 in rural areas. It is led by the district Muzaffargarh (GPI 0.87), Dara Gazi Khan (GPI 0.88) and Layyah (0.95), pushing the whole division [Dara Gazi Khan] as the lowest performer in the Punjab.

Sindh district-level disaggregation demonstrates varying degrees of GP score, demonstrating none of the 29 districts attains the SDG 4.5.1 target "GPI 1.00". Malir and Hyderabad districts, though, get a GPI of 0.99 and 1.03 respectively, yet lack the SDG 4.5.1 target. Gender disparity disadvantaging boys prevailed in six districts of Sindh, including Karachi, with a GPI of (Centre 1.17, East 1.05, West 1.19, South 1.09), Korangi with a GPI of 1.13 and Naushahro Feroze with a GPI of 1.04. All other 20 districts attain a GPI between 0.61 and 0.94, displaying gender disparities disadvantaging girls to a different extent. District Dadu gets a GPI of 0.94 while Badin and Tharparker gain a GPI of 0.61 each, confirming 39 OOS girls against 100 boys in school.



Baluchistan's district-level segregation also provides Gender parity/disparities details in its 32 districts. Among these, only the Lasbela district gets a distinction by achieving the SDG 4.5.1 target GPI 1.00. Sibi and Kalat (GPI 1.02 each) get a UNESCO (2010) GP given score (0.97-1.03) but lack in SDG 4.5.1. The rest of the 29 districts underperform in terms of GP - Gawader and Kech (Turbat) attain the highest (GP 0.92 each) while Sheerani gets a GPI of 0.27 only, confirming 73 girls OOS against 100 boys in school, which stands the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest number of OOS girls at district level in Pakistan.

In KPs 32 districts, only 5 districts - Abbottabad, Chitral, Haripur, Malakand, and Swabi - enjoy GPI "1.00", confirming SDG 4.5.1 target realization. KP attaining 16% SDG 4.5.1 target at the district level leads all the 6 regions/areas, including Punjab (11%) and AJ&K (10%). On the other hand, the Mohmand and Bajaur districts gained a GPI of 0.40 each, followed by North Waziristan with a GPI of 0.21, demonstrating 60 and 79 OOS girls, respectively, against 100 boys in school. North Waziristan is the lowest-performing district in Pakistan that needs focused interventions to avert the harmful trend disadvantaging girls (CIET, 1997; Brohi and Kakepoto's, 2013; Iqbal, 2021; Baran and Bend, 2023). In 27 deficient districts of KP, only eight get GPI 0.90, while the rest of the 19 districts attain GP scores between 0.40 and 0.80. The worst situation prevails in the newly developed districts, formerly part of the ex-FATA. AJ&K, like in divisions, outstrips Pakistan's regions/areas by attaining UNESCO's (2010) the

Gender Parity (GPI 0.97 - 1.03) in its 8 out of 10 districts, confirming 80% district-level success, along with one district (Poonch) with a GPI of 1.00 meeting the SDG 4.5.1 target successfully. The analysis of MICS6 data flags AJ&K as an outperformer in getting GP at the district level among the 6 regions/areas in Pakistan. Only 2 districts - Haveli (GPI 0.93) and Neelum (GPI 0.91) - suffer from gender disparities, harming girls with only 9 girls OOS against 100 boys in school. This indicates that the lowest performing district Neelum holds the smallest number of OOS girls among poor performing districts of all 6 regions/areas of Pakistan. In the Areas, Gilgit Baltistan (GB) has unique characteristics and is a weak performer like the other regions. Among its 10 districts, Gazer is the best performer with a GPI of 1.00, referring to the GP score endorsing the SDG 4.5.1 target. Districts Gilgit and Ganache attain a GPI of 1.01 and 0.99, respectively, indicating the prevalence of Gender parity in these districts with a slight (0.01 percentage points) deviation from the SDG 4.5.1 target. Hunza and Nager, in turn, having a GP score of 1.04 and 1.05, observe that the gender disparity disadvantages boys instead. District Shigar, Skardu, and Diamer witness the gender bias harming girls with a GP score of 0.92, 0.80, and 0.77, respectively. Diamer is the prime victim of the gender disparity, harming girls with 23 girls OOS against 100 boys in school, which is similar to Punjab (district Rajanpur) but better than Sindh, KP and Balochistan regions.

**Table 3.3: Percentage Achievement in Gender Parity at Primary School Level (%)**

Region/Area	AJ&K	Punjab	GB	KP	Balochistan	Sindh
Division	100%	60%	33%	14%	14%	0%
District	80%	36%	30%	16%	6%	7%

**Source:** Prepared from MICS Waves 5&6 Regional/Areas' Data

In overall divisional and district level comparison, AJ&K stands ahead in gender parity attainment in all 6 regions/areas with 100% and 80% success, respectively (Table 3.3). It is followed by Punjab with 60% success in divisions and 36% success in districts. Gilgit Baltistan is next to Punjab, getting a GP earmarked score in 33% divisions and 30% districts. In terms of GP, it stands 3<sup>rd</sup> in the regions/areas, followed by KP with 14% success in the Divisions (1) and 16% in

districts (5). Balochistan is next to KP with 14% and 6% success at the division (1) and district (2) levels, respectively. Sindh, in terms of GP at the divisional level, is the lowest performer as none of its divisions attain Gender Parity. With 7% success in districts, it again stands as the lowest performer after Balochistan, having 6% attainment, the lowest accomplishment in all 6 regions/areas.

#### 4. Factors Implying Gender Parity in Regions/Areas in Pakistan

Pakistan's educational progress is steady despite persistent apathy since 1947. Some areas have reached gender parity and accomplished the MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 targets (ASER 2020, PAGE 2021, Kazmi et al., 2024). However, the gender disparities are still disadvantaging girls who have illiterate mothers and are victims of extreme poverty in all regions/areas. Gender disparities persist in most of deficient regions/areas due to insufficient government support, inactive community, resource constraints – fiscal and physical strict sociocultural norms/traditions, son preference, patriarchal mindset, female say in the family, restricted female role, difficult access, scanty girls' schools and female teachers, poor infrastructure with missing facilities, early marriage, lacking transport and security, unemployment, family size, etc. These predominant factors appear throughout all regions except AJ&K, where these obstacles manifest less severely. AJ&K's achievement of MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 targets stems from government support, community backing, combined with girls' schools (46%) and almost 50% female teachers, improved access (km<sup>2</sup> per school), better student teacher ratio (20:1), and pouring more money to ensure its optimal utilisation. The provision of co-education in AJ&K also made a difference in accessing targeted GP in the state (Yusuf, 2013; Brohi and Kakepoto, 2013; Farooq and Kia, 2016; Haq, 2016; Zulqurnain and Hussain, 2016; Madia and Zahid, 2017; UNWOMEN, 2020; Kazmi et al., 2024).

#### 5. FINDINGS:

Even with persistent disregard since 1947, the education sector in Pakistan observes some improvement in accessing Gender Parity as well as the MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 at the regional/area level (ASER 2020, PAGE 2021, Kazmi et al., 2024). AJ&K (2008) and Punjab (2014) gained the MDG 3.1 target before 2015. AJ&K stands as a pioneer in obtaining it [MDG 3.1] almost 6 years earlier than Punjab and 7 years earlier than its closing time. The SDG 4.5.1 remains an inaccessible target in most regions/areas of Pakistan except AJ&K that achieves the SDG 4.5.1 target (GPI 1.00) in 2021 much before the stipulated time (2030) at the

state, urban, rural and divisional levels with a small (0.01) deviation in urban areas and 2 divisions (Table 3.2). Punjab (GPI 0.99), Balochistan (GPI 0.85), GB 0.86), Sindh (0.89) and KP (0.80) lacked in the SDG 4.5.1 target, wherein KP is the poorest performer in all 5 deficient regions/areas, hosting 20 OOS girls against 100 boys in school. The urban areas, on the whole, lack the SDG 4.5.1 target. Sindh, Punjab and AJ&K, even with a GP score of 1.03, 1.02 and 1.01 respectively, stand deficient in it. AJ&K is a better performer in these 3 entities with the closest score to the stipulated target. The rural areas, on the other hand, are prime victims of gender disparities disadvantaging girls in all the regions/areas except AJ&K, attaining a GPI of 1.00, referring to SDG 4.5.1. Only AJ&K achieved the SDG 4.5.1 target in all 6 regions/areas. Moreover, the sting of gender disparities harming girls is hard in Sindh, Balochistan, KP and GB as 29, 23, 20 and 15 girls are still OOS respectively, against 100 boys in schools. Furthermore, 12 out of 36 divisions (33%) in Pakistan enjoy gender parity (UNESCO, 2010), 22 divisions (61%) suffer from gender disparities disadvantaging girls, while 2 (6%) divisions are victims of gender bias hampering boys. AJ&K stands as the best performer by gaining GP (0.97 -1.03) in all 3 divisions and SDG 4.5.1 target (GPI 1.00) in one division. KP is the lowest performer, after Balochistan, Punjab, Sindh, and GB, where 21 divisions suffer from Gender disparities, harming girls against 2 divisions in both Punjab and Sindh (one each), suffering from gender disparities disadvantaging boys. Similarly, most of the districts in the regions/areas are victims of Gender Disparities disadvantaging girls, except AJ&K, which lacks in only 2 (20%) out of 10 districts. Punjab suffers from gender disparities in 23/36 (64%) districts (Girls 14 and boys 9), GB in 07/10 (70%) districts (girls 5 and boys 2), KP in 27/32 (84%) districts (all girls), Sindh in 27/29 (93%) districts (girls 21 and boys 6) and Balochistan in 30/32 (94%) districts (girls 29 and boys 01). The girls Having illiterate mothers and living in poverty-ridden households persistently suffer from gender disparities in all regions/areas, including AJ&K despite its notable success towards MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 targets (Yousaf, 2013; MICS Punjab, 2016-17; MICS6; MICS AJ&K, 2020-21; Kazmi et al., 2024). AJ&K's

advantage stems from strong government commitment, better educational access, adequate funding, community involvement, and more girls' schools and female teachers along with provision of Co-education. Other regions/areas, on the other hand, are struggling with multifaceted hindrances - limited funds, lethargic community, strict cultural norms and social taboos, difficult access, lacking security, restricted female say/role in family/society, few girls' schools and female teachers, missing facilities; early marriage, unemployment, patriarchy, son preference, patriarchal mindset, family size, etc., demanding focus interventions by policy designers, planners and development experts, especially in KP Balochistan and rural areas, (CIET, 1997; Umar and Asger, 2017; Baran and Bend, 2023; Noreen; 2023). Urban bias education policies and interventions favouring elites, bureaucrats, and the business community, along with mushrooming private institutions in the big cities of Punjab and Sindh, foster gender disparities harming boys in urban areas (Kazmi et al., 2024). The problems in regions/areas require instant attention, along with educational support for girls in every area (Madia and Zahid, 2017; UNESCAP, 2018; Baran and Bend, 2023; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b; Kazmi et al., 2024).

## 6. CONCLUSION

education access, teaching-learning environment, infrastructure, and girls-focused interventions – free books, school uniforms, security, transport, launch, etc., ensuring early attainment of SDG 4.5.1 (Haq, 2016; Umar and Asghar, 2017; Iqbal, 2022; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b; Kazmi et al., 2024). Communities in the sluggish regions/areas should be persuaded to play their proactive role in suppressing gender disparities (Kazmi et al., 2023a&b; Kazmi et al., 2024). Judicious budgetary provision ensuring optimal utilisation is critical for improving the teaching-learning environment with more girls' schools and female teachers, and better infrastructure (Tahir, 2017; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b; Baran and Bend, 2023; Kazmi et al., 2024). Special measures focusing on the least performed areas/divisions/districts could pay dividends in averting the prevailing gender gap restricting the SDG 4.5.1 target attainment in the regions/areas of Pakistan. The insight gained from previous studies could help ameliorate the sting of gender disparities

The MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 are achievable targets with sincere efforts backed by zeal and commitment at all levels, even with resource constraints (Kazmi et al., 2023a & b). Managing financial paucity through optimal utilization of scarce means helps in early attainment of GP targets (Tahir 2017; Kazmi et al., 2024). A special focus on female education, targeting illiterate mothers and the poorest households, could pay dividends in improving gender parity across regions/areas, including AJ&K (Saher, 2013; Zulqurnain and Hussain, 2016; Imran, 2017; Kazmi et al., 2024). Cultural norms and social bonds need quick handling in distressed regions/areas for earlier attainment of the SDG 4.5.1 target (Yousaf, 2013; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b; Noreen, 2023; Kazmi et al., 2024). Strong government commitment and community support should be ensured for removing the gender gap harming girls in deficient units of Pakistan (Kazmi et al., 2024). More concentrated efforts in rural areas help fulfil international commitments regarding SDG 4.5.1 in most of the regions/areas. Growing gender disparities disadvantaging boys in urban areas need a special focus to bring boys into schools and avoid child labour, child abuse, or child trafficking (Guarcello et al., 2014; Kazmi et al., 2024). Quick policy realignment, trusting on steady interventions, is mandatory for improving disadvantaging girls in slow-performing regions/areas. Gender-focused education and economic policies are essential for regions/areas (Haq, 2016; Umar and Asghar, 2017; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b; Kazmi et al., 2024). Moreover, gender-specific interventions should be diverted to remote and secluded parts, particularly rural areas and ignored districts (CIET, 1997; Brohi and Kakepoto, 2013; Umar and Asghar, 2017; Kazmi et al., 2024). Strict law enforcement to protect women's rights could also make a difference in the regions/areas. Provision of co-education could pay an instant dividend in gaining requisite gender parity and SDG 4.5.1. Redressing political manoeuvring, augmenting female roles in family and society, and escalating monetary and physical inputs also repay towards gender parity attainment in deficient units (CIET, 1997, Yousaf, 2013; Brohi and Kakepoto, 2013; Umar and Asghar, 2017; Kazmi et al., 2023a& b; Kami et al., 2024).

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