

Article

# Azad Jammu and Kashmir Outperforms Pakistan's Regions/Areas in Gender Parity at the Primary School Level: An Empirical Evidence from MICS Data

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**Abstract:** Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) faces challenges in improving gender parity (GP) in primary education, with limited empirical research on its progress. This study evaluates AJ&K's performance in achieving gender equality using MICS, PLSM, WEF, and ASER datasets, analyzed via SPSS-26 and MS Excel, complemented by graphical tools. AJ&K surpassed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG 3.1) in 2008 with a GP score of 0.97 and achieved the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4.5.1) target of a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 1.00 by 2021, outperforming other regions of Pakistan and some South Asian countries. Key factors include strong governmental commitment, community support, increased female representation in schools, and efficient resource utilization. The findings suggest that economic and socio-cultural factors have minimal influence on GP in AJ&K, providing actionable insights to address gender disparities in underperforming regions of Pakistan. The study emphasizes the importance of targeted interventions to achieve equitable education.

**Keywords:** Primary school level education, Net attendant rate, Gender parity, Gender parity index, Gender disparity/bias, Regions/areas, Quality education

## 1. Introduction

Human capital being a vital determinant of accelerated growth is strived for the overall well-being of the masses. The nations with large human capital mostly enjoy the status of advanced countries (Imran, 2017). Therefore, investing in Human Resource Development (HRD) is vital for the development and prosperity of the people while education and health are the prime constituents

of human capital formation. Education is vital in accelerated growth by equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for a thriving workforce. It also fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, and critical thinking crucial for socioeconomic development esteemed by every nation and society (Carrin, 1984; Kazmi, 1995 & 1998; Rehman and Uddin, 2009; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b). Historically, education remained unheeded until 1970 presuming to be passive in returns.

The inference was on getting indirect benefits of investment in physical capital via the trickle-down effect. However, the trickledown postulation went unproductive and therefore, the development approaches shifted their focus on investing directly in education and health for HRD. The education upgradation, particularly at the primary level contributes to the economic prosperity and overall well-being of the masses. It enhances individual productivity, reduces dependency on social resources, and thus paves the way for improved financial success and overall well-being.

It also ensures greater gender equality and women empowerment allowing females to play a more vital role in developing countries/areas including Pakistan and its regions/areas including AJ&K. Nevertheless, female participation in education at the AJ&K level remained limited from 1947 to the early 1970s. Since then, it [education] has been making good strides but has rarely been empirically examined (Carrin 1984, Kazmi, 1995, 1998, 2005; 2010; GoPak, 2010 & 2013; Shabbir & Wei, 2014; Alif Ailaan, 2015 & 2019; Farooq and Kai 2016; PAGE 2021; Kazmi, et al., 2023a &b).

Alternative tools commonly measure the education sector's work in an area/country. Among these, the Gender Parity (GP) at the primary school level in Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) or Net Attendant Rate (NAR) are a widely used measure to assess education performance and make inter/intra-country comparisons. GP itself is measured by the Gender Parity Index (GPI), a vital instrument for determining education gains and ranking of an area/region or a country. It facilitates instant regional/area comparisons (World Bank, 2012 & 2018; Swenson, 2017; UNESCO, 2022; UNICEF 2020; WHO, 2023).

GP refers to a "Ratio of female to male values of a given indicator" attained by dividing the female value over the male values of a selected indicator (UNESCO, 2022). GPI "1" or within 0.97 and 1.03 refers to a precise Gender Parity while  $GPI < 0.97$  indicates gender disparity disadvantaging girls and  $GPI > 1.03$  shows a gender bias stinging boys instead (UNESCO, 2010). The prevalence of GPI "1.00" or between 0.97 - 1.03 shows better female access and profile vibrant for their healthier social standing leading to greater women empowerment (Kazmi, 1998; GoAJ&K 2020-21 & 2022; WEF, 2022; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b).

In AJ&K, a wide deficiency in female representation across all sectors of the state economy is an obvious reality. Among these, the education sector has remained a prime victim since independence (1947). The inherited education system in the area under the present state of AJ&K was poorly defined, weak, and inadequately managed thus hosting a fragile school network of 296 schools with only 4 girls' primary schools (GoAJ&K, 1977 & 1997; Farooq and Kia, 2016; Kazmi et al. 2023 a&b). A small share of girls' schools further reflects a wide female deprivation and inclusive gender disparity austere disadvantaging girls in the state. The absence of girls' schools beyond the primary level further exacerbates the gender bias hurting girls in the state.

Small budgetary provisions, a poor education environment, and weak institutional capacity further taxed the happening of any positive GP change in AJ&K. The deficient development processes also toll the improvement of girls' education implying the gender parity in AJ&K (Alif Ailaan, 2015 & 2019; ASER, 2019 & 2020; Shabir and Wei, 2014 & 2015; Farooq and Kai, 2016; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b). However, with the onset of development initiatives backed by the government's determination and community support in the early 1970s, a transformational change began to address the longstanding issues including GP at the primary school level in AJ&K (GoPAK, 1970 & 1971; Kazmi et al., 2023a & b).

These initiatives, mainly inducing the development process, were found vital in improving education indicators including GP benefiting the female segment in AJ&K. However, empirical research is scarce on GP at primary school level education in AJ&K. It is also deficient in highlighting AJ&K as an outperformer in Pakistan and its regions/areas. Therefore, this research study is an opening effort to bridge this research gap by examining AJ&K's standing in the regions/areas in terms of GP in NAR and quality education. It ascertains that AJ&K outshines in GP in Pakistan, its regions/areas and neighbouring countries. It is also an opening effort that enlists prospective factors enabling AJ&K to outdo in attaining GP, MDGs 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 targets in Pakistan's regions/areas.

#### Statement of Problem

AJ&K has encountered numerous challenges in establishing a robust education system, mainly due to a financial crunch and a few girls' schools with poor infrastructure set up. Natural and manmade catastrophes also hinder the education sector in achieving targets, particularly in AJ&K. This study, therefore, aims to fill the research gap and examines AJ&K's efforts to remove gender bias harming girls in the state. Additionally, it seeks to assess whether AJ&K outperforms regions/areas/neighbouring countries in getting GP.

The study using MICS different Waves - provincial/area/state, PSLM, ASER, and WEF data also determines whether AJ&K leads Pakistan's regions/areas in timely getting gender parity targets – MDGs 3.1& SDGs 4.5.1 and quality education. Analyzing the current situation, this research endeavour also aims to highlight the progress made by AJ&K as an out-stripper. It is also inclined to identify factors enabling it to outdo the regions/areas - Punjab, KP, Sindh, Balochistan, and GB - in Pakistan.

Data Source: This research effort benefits from Secondary data including provincial/areas/ AJ&K's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys Waves & 6 held during 2008 - 2022, Pakistan Social Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) 2010-11, World Economic Forum (WEF) 2022, and ASER, 2020, etc.

## 1. Methodology

The data analysis is carried out using well-known statistical packages - SPSS-26 and MS Excel. Different graphical tools are also deployed to exhibit the prevalence of gender parity or disparity in the provinces/areas. In particular, the GP is explored from a regional/area perspective to discover outperforming regions/areas in Pakistan.

#### Top of Form

The objective of the Study:

1. Examine AJ&K Education sector's working in Gender Parity at the primary school level;

2. Investigate AJ&K and regions/areas functioning in getting MDG 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 targets;
3. Compare AJ&K's performance with provinces/areas of Pakistan and its neighbouring countries
4. Ascertain whether AJ&K outperforms the regions/areas in Gender Parity and quality education
5. Enlist potential factors helping AJ&K to outstrip regions/areas in Pakistan

## 2. Literature Review

The adversity of trickle-down belief in the early 1970s triggered a shift to investing in Human Resource Development (HRD) and basic needs via education and healthcare to improve the quality of HR, accelerate economic growth and ensure better life for the masses (Carrin, 1984; Kazmi, 1995, 2005 & 2010; and Rahman and Uddin, 2009; Maida and Zahid, 2017; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b). Education improvement impacts economic growth and thus surges in the developing world as well (Knowles and Maddison, 2002). Growing education - literacy, gender parity, etc., - in Singh's view (2018) is virtually a vehicle for achieving the goals of a happy, successful, and peaceful life. Therefore, pouring money into social sectors - education and health - enhances socio-economic development leading to better individual and family life esteemed by every individual/society and nation (Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b).

Gender parity (GP) at the primary school level stands as a vital gauge for the quality of life indicators. It is a vibrant measure widely used to appraise education sector performance in an area/country to determine its standing in the region. Instead, the gender disparity disadvantaging girls is widely prevailing in developing nations with a few exceptions like Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Kerala in India, Cuba, Somalia, and Vietnam, which enjoy better GP scores despite their weak fiscal and economic status (Khan, et al., 2011; Khan 2017; WEF, 2022; Iqbal, 2022; UNESCAP, 2017 & 2018; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b). In Pakistan, education remains a neglected sector with consistently low allocations of GDP - 2.5% (UNESCAP, 2018) and thus it failed to achieve MDGs 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 targets. Pakistan stands 144th in 159 countries with 55% literacy and 2nd last after Afghanistan (0.44) with a GPI of 0.841 (UNICEF, 2020; WEF, 2022; Iqbal, 2022). A brief overview of AJ&K's GP working in Pakistan's regions/areas is deliberated in the next paragraphs.

Mohammad Imran (2017) finds the human capital profile of Pakistan as the lowest in 2013. It ranked 112 in 122 countries in the world and the lowest performer among South Asian countries after Afghanistan. The World Economic Forum's - WEF (2022) report "Global Gender Gap Report 2021" finds Pakistan having slight progress in the global GP Index but still facing significant challenges in getting gender equality at the primary school level. It ranks Pakistan 153rd out of 156 countries in the world and 7th in the South Asian region where Pakistan leads Afghanistan only. Iqbal (2022) also notices significant weaknesses in addressing gender gaps in the education sector of Pakistan. He finds it the last 4th country on the world gender parity ladder while the 2nd last in eight South Asian countries.

With a 0.814 GP score, it leads only to Afghanistan (0.44) but lags behind India (0.962) and Sri Lanka (0.998). Pakistan may need many decades to bridge this gender gap (WEF, 2022) and therefore, Iqbal (2022) stresses the need to redesign policies, strategies, and standards helpful in getting to various domains - economy, health, and education, precisely focusing on GP in primary education. Baran and Bend's study (2023) endorses Pakistan's decent progress in increasing the enrolment of girls and boys. Pakistan enhances 10 percentage points of boys' net enrolment but suffers from quality issues with 75% of

children failing to read a simple text which, increased to 79% during COVID-19 and flood 2022. Girls are greater sufferers in accessing quality education and are far behind boys. Thus bringing the boys and girls to schools in Pakistan may take 30 and 50 years respectively. To elevate girls' education in Pakistan, they stress on Sindh introducing Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), augmenting the quality of rural public schools, spreading financial assistance to families, increasing number of schools, eliminating insecurity (transport for female students and staff as in KP), constructing boundary walls, enhancing inadequate GDP share not less than 4.5 %.

A delicate research account points out that the situation is more critical at the regional/area levels due to the limited gains in Gender Parity referring to MDGs 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 (Khan, 2023; Farooq and Kia, 2016; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b). Saher Yusuf (2013) benefiting from MICS Punjab 2007-08 data explores the Gender Gap at the School Level in Punjab with urban and rural segregation. She finds a strong pro-male bias in all areas of primary school enrolment in the total term. In disaggregated terms, she finds marginal pro-female biases in urban areas against the rural domain. The study finds cultural characteristics as the strong determinants of enrolment in Punjab for both girls and boys. The mother's education and wealth level were also strong and positive associates of GP while the family size was found an important determinant but negatively associated with it. Maida and Zahid (2017) using time series data for 18 years identified some gender gaps while assessing the probable time frame for SDGs 4.5 at national, provincial/regional, and district levels.

Punjab and urban areas in Pakistan witness some gains in GP at the primary school level while the other regions/areas and rural areas lack in GP referring to SDGs 4.5.1. They anticipate the attainment of SDGs 4.5.1 by Pakistan and provinces would rarely be materialized without realigning policies, increasing financial and allied inputs, enhancing government commitments and augmenting community support. Mohammad Imran (2017) computes the gender disparity index of education achievements in Punjab reflecting that no district succeeded in redressing gender disparities harming girls in the province. Only one in 36 districts has > 75% gender parity while 35 districts remain below it and thus fail to remove wide gender disparities harming girls in Panjab. He finds mothers' education, quality of education, multiple deprivations, and government expenditure significant and positive associates of GP but poverty is negatively linked with it.

The size of the household, district economic standing, education of the family head and unemployment have no role in education attainment in Punjab. Another study "Punjab Gender Parity Report (PGPR) 2021" by Govt. of Punjab (2021) finds a 56% NER in Punjab in 2019-20 for both boys and girls indicating no gender gap as compared to Pakistan having 56% and 48% NER for boys and girls respectively with 6% gender gap. Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education (PAGE)'s study (2021), "Status of Girls Education in Punjab" points out that gender disparity is widely prevailing at the district level. Lahore is in leads with a GPI of 0.798 while Lodhran district stands as the lowest performer with a GPI of 0.353. None of the 36 districts of Punjab attains gender parity (0.97-1.03) and thus suffers from gender disparity disadvantaging girls. Ijaz ul Haq (2016) examines the Gender Gaps in enrollment in KP and finds females as a deprived segment, widely lagging in all education indices.

In total public school enrolment, boys' share is 66% against 34% of girls. In private schools, boys' share is 68% against 32% of girls referring to a wide gender gap in KP. This colossal gender gap occurred due to financial paucity, son preference, socio-cultural norms, and limited access to schools. He suggests investing more money in girls' education, enhancing parents' and community roles, eradicating poverty, and launching girls' supportive education policies, along with increasing girls' favouring spending backed by a substantial campaign for extra girls' education to bridge the gender gap in KP.



UNWOMEN's (2020) study finds education system in the Merged Districts of KP is shambling with an austere image. It mentions FDIHS (2013-14) that literate Women's share is 13% lower than KP and Pakistan with 36% and 47% rates respectively.

The study cites many hundreds of thousands of out-of-school girls and boys with a high dropout ratio in primary school. Five major challenges are identified in restricting girls' schooling/access to education including intra-household discrimination, the practice of early marriage, restricted mobility, lack of girls' schools, and lacking female faculty. PAGE's (2021) similar study for KP identifies a big gender gap at primary and secondary levels in the province. GP score of 0.60 at the secondary level in 2019-20 declined to 0.58 in 2020-21 but it retained at 0.76 at the primary level in this period.

The study observes Abbottabad as an out-performing district with a GPI of 0.97 while district Hangu is the lowest performer with a GPI of 0.38, indicating a big gender gap in KP districts. Amna Noreen (2023), finds gender inequality a critical issue and social evil hindering the socio-economic progress in KP, Pakistan. The reasons for this happening are the patriarchal mindset; conservative cultural/social norms or values/bindings; restricting females with no/limited female role in public life; minimal access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities; and illiteracy along with excessive unawareness. The dearth of education makes girls more vulnerable and easily prey to exploitation and abuse. Averting this odd situation to her may need a multi-faceted approach through better education and awareness as well as strict law enforcement to protect women's rights.

Abdul Rashid and his colleagues (2012) analyzed the attainment of GP referring to MDGs 3.1 in Quetta district in Balochistan and found gender disparity harming girls in accessing educational opportunities. They anticipate a decline in GP in the primary enrollment ratio and therefore, achieving the targeted NER may be challenging due to the high dropout occurring because of lacking facilities in schools. They suggest more funding and other inputs for primary education to redress the gender gap harming girls in the district. Tahir Taj (2019) considering education as a driver of development and basic rights of children in Pakistan investigates female education in Balochistan. He finds that poverty, missing facilities, limited access, early marriages and cultural norms are likely stimulants for a low female share in schools.

He suggests public support via community participation, payment of fees, stipends, and free school books and student uniforms to promote girls' education in the province. Mohsin (2023) study finds Balochistan at the lowest level in the world ranking with only 27% literate women in the province whereas rural areas share only 2%. He finds 83% of out-of-school girls in Balochistan, mainly due to a restricted domestic life. He also identifies cultural tradition/norms, limited/no access to education, and early female marriages as the impetus for huge gender disparity in education at provincial, divisional, and district levels in Balochistan.

He suggests supporting quality female education in Baluchistan for their [females] brighter future. The PAGE report (2021), "Status of Girls Education in Balochistan" also deliberates on GPI and finds a wide variation in GPI at the district level in Balochistan. District Sohbatpur takes the lead with a GPI of 89.23 while Sherani district is the lowest performer with a GP score of 39.93. CIET's International Sindh Report (1997) witnesses a wider gender gap with 59% NER in total terms.

Gender disparity also prevails in urban areas with 73% and 68% enrolment for boys and girls respectively. In rural areas, the gender bias disadvantaging girls is more prominent with 66% enrolment of boys against 47% of girls. The study enlists factors helpful in removing the gender gap in Sindh including greater mother say in the family and her education, parents' education, number of children in the family (< 6), family status/farmer, children help with homework, community support, improved

infrastructure (< missing facilities), more girls schools and female teachers, better income-generating activities and special policy interventions for student support via free books, meals, and uniforms with their judicious distribution. Brohi and Kakepoto's (2013) study "Gender Differential Treatment in Social Development: A Sociological Study in Rural Sindh" finds big gender bias disadvantaging females in Pakistan, particularly in rural areas.

The study also observed the same dilemma in rural Sindh needing effective policy measures to deal with financial scarcity, fragile education system, socio-cultural norms, passive community role, and lacking government commitment. Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education (PAGE) Report (2021) "Status of Girls Education in Sindh" also finds Sindh lacking in attaining GP at Primary school level education with wide variations at the district level. District Dadu leads with a GPI of 90.39 while Sajawal is the lowest performer having a GPI of 69.91.

Azad Jammu & Kashmir and GB also contain scanty research work on GP but a wide perception prevailing about AJ&K is that it outshines in the education indicators. However, this assertion has to be confirmed through sound evidence based on statistical analysis (Farooq and Kai, 201; Shabbier and Wei, 2015; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b). Farooq and Kia (2016) observe that the AJ&K education sector is mainly governed by federal [Pakistan] education policies and systems and therefore, is the victim of several similar risks like a low priority, inadequate funding, biased feudal system, unfair politicians, dishonest bureaucracy and dictatorial regimes along with limited access, poor basic facilities, lacking accountability, excessive political maneuvering, etc., implying too slow gains in addressing Gender disparities disadvantaging girls AJ&K.

They assert that manipulation by so-called democracy champs and development gurus is adding to the verse in AJ&K. However, they believe that the weak education setup even with a meagre share (1.6%) of the primary section in development outlays (9%) is a better performer in literacy, enrolment, and gender parity. Using PSLM (2010-11) data, they find a female-to-male enrolment ratio of 0.95, which to them is close to GPI 1.00 indicating gender Parity in AJ&K with some district-wise gender gap wherein Muzaffarabad gains GPI 1.17 harming boys against Neelum Valley the least performer harming girls instead. The Alif Ailaan study (2015) "Pakistan District Education Rankings Report 2015" confirms AJ&K as the best performer in the District ranking in Pakistan with some district-level variations in education performance wherein Sudhnoti is in the lead while District Kotali is the lowest performer.

The "Annual Status of Education Reports – 2019", ASER Pakistan 2020 (ASER, 2019) using "Alif Ailaan Data 2014/2015" observes 95% and 85% enrolment at the Primary school level for boys and girls respectively. It is higher than any other region/area in Pakistan and places AJ&K as the best performer in the District ranking in provinces even though AJ&K suffers from poor teaching-learning environments and mainly lacks basic facilities i.e. missing facilities. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER Pakistan, (ASER 2020) focuses on gender gaps in quality education measured by student's performance in reading comprehension in Urdu and English, as well as numeracy skills. It finds no difference in boys and girls in Urdu reading skills but a slight 1 percentage point disadvantage for girls in English reading and numeracy skills. The Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education –PAGE (2021) study titled "Status of Girls Education in AJK & GB" also provides district-wise education data for AJ&K and Gilgit Baltistan (GB) along with their population and budgetary allocations.

The study refers to a low education budget with unfair distribution mainly (two-thirds) for infrastructure. It also observes primary school NAR for boys and girls 98% and 89% respectively in AJ&K, which is higher than the national figures. The study also refers

to existing gender disparities harming girls at the division and district levels with wide variations as the Poonch division leads with a GPI of 98.00 while the Muzaffarabad division is the lowest with a GPI of 91.58. It also observes inter-district variations wherein Sudhnoti district leads with a GPI of 98.07 while Kotali district is the lowest performer with a GPI of 88.75. In GB, the study also reports wide variations at the Division and district level wherein Gilgit Division leads leaving the other two divisions behind in which Daimer is the least performer. Among the districts in GB, Nagar and Hunza are leading with a GPI of 0.96 while Daimer having a GPI of 0.54 is the lowest performer in the GB. This study does not compare AJ&K/provinces and GB's work in terms of GP.

These above-cited studies point out that AJ&K succeeded in getting GP at the primary level even in unfavorable conditions including financial constraints, low budgetary provision for the primary section, and missing basic facilities – only 55 schools get buildings, and 18% of schools have electricity, 51.3% student toilets, 34.7% drinking water, 35.5% boundary walls, 6% playground, and library and only 1% computer lab (ASER, 2020; Shabbir and Wai, 2015; Farooq and Kia, 2016; Kazmi et al., 2023a). Kazmi et al., (2023a) conducted a first-ever research study using MICS AJ&K 2020-21 data to observe AJ&K's work in addressing gender disparity at the primary school level along with middle and secondary schools in the state.

AJ&K stands proactive in fixing the gender gap and achieving SDGs 4.5.1 having a GPI of 1.00 even with her poor economic status and weak education system, mainly based on federal education policies and system. It gained precise gender parity (GPI 1.00 -1.03) at the state division, district, urban, and rural levels in AJ&K with a slight deviation in 2 districts. The study associates this success with government commitment and proactive community role. The role of mother education and family economic standup are also found helpful in achieving gender parity leading to MDGs 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 targets. However, girls with illiterate/no-education mothers or living in the poorest households remain victims of gender disparity even in 2021. The study also found gender disparity disadvantaging boys and girls at the middle and secondary levels respectively. It also enlists some deficiencies in the education system and infrastructure setup tolling the education environment in AJ&K.

Another study by Kazmi et al., (2023b) makes a historical comparison of GP in AJ&K using MICS AJ&K's 2008 and 2020-21 data. The analysis finds vital progress in attaining GP regarding MDGs 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 with a GPI of 0.97 and 1.00 respectively. It also attains GPI (0.97-1.03) at all levels - state, division, and district along with urban-rural areas in segregation. GPI improved at state, rural, and urban levels from 0.97, 1.05, and 0.96 in 2008 to 1.00, 1.01, and 1.00 in 2021 respectively indicating the absence of gender bias in AJ&K at all levels. AJ&K also gained GP in 8 out of 10 districts (80%) in 2021 against 4 in 8 districts (50%) in 2008. This achievement is associated with steady progress over time induced by government commitment, better access, greater community role, and improved student-teacher ratio, along with more girls' primary schools and female teachers.

However, the gender bias harming girls retained in 2021 for girls with mothers having no education or residents of the poorest households. A small (almost 1%) share for primary education in the development budget of AJ&K may also imply GP in NAR and quality education. Moreover, GPI > 1.03 and < 0.97 at middle and secondary levels respectively may instigate child exploitation and thus, needs quick policy interventions to avoid any threat of child labour, child trafficking, and child abuse of Out Of School Children (OOSC).

An overview of the literature in the above paragraphs provides insight into AJ&K's work in redressing gender disparity from a historical perspective. However, the research mainly failed to examine AJ&K's working as an outperformer in attaining GP at various



levels, especially using MICS data obtained during the last 1.5 decades. It also disregards AJ&K's working as an outperformer in accessing gender parity at the primary school level well before the provinces/areas. The literature review fails to ascertain AJ&K's regional standing as an outstripped entity in Pakistan that timely gains MDGs 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 targets. It does not enlist potential factors supporting AJ&K in outstripping regions/areas in Pakistan even under similar education policies and programs, mainly relying on the Federal govt. Initiatives.

This study, therefore, is an opening endeavour to bridge the prevailing gap in the existing literature by examining AJ&K's working in GP as an outshining entity. It also ascertains that AJ&K is an outdoer in Pakistan and provinces/areas in attaining MDGs 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 targets. It determines AJ&K's standing in Pakistan and its neighbouring countries in education attainments. It also confirms whether AJ&K outshines in quality education among the regions/areas. Moreover, it enlists prospective factors making AJ&K an outdoer in the regions/areas in Pakistan.

## 2. Results and Discussion

This first-ever research study examines and compares AJ&K's standing in terms of Gender Parity in Pakistan and its regions/areas using data from credible national and international sources including Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) – i.e. MICS different waves for AJ&K, Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Gilgit Baltistan (GB) – PSLM (2010-11), WEF (2022), ASER (2020), etc. Comprehensive data analysis reveals that AJ&K made a good stride in redressing the gender disparities disadvantaging girls at the primary school level despite its poor economic profile and weak education setup, mainly governed by federal education policies and system (Farooq and Kia, 2016; Kazmi et al., 2023 a & b). Data analysis of MICS different waves' (2008 and 2020-21) for AJ&K and the region/areas confirms the prevalence of Gender Parity in AJ&K with a GPI of 0.97 and 1.00 respectively. It ranks AJ&K as an outperformer in Pakistan's regions/areas that could hardly access the desired GP score.

The results further reveal the absence of gender bias at the primary level while the occurrence of gender disparities harming boys at the middle level but disadvantaging girls at the secondary level. However, the magnitude of deprivation declines over time at middle and secondary levels. The GPI dropped from 1.10 to 1.05 indicating a GPI gain of 0.05% in favour of boys at the middle level and improved from 0.77 to 0.95 with a GPI gain of 0.18 points favouring girls at the secondary level. This happening speaks for AJ&K's determined efforts to remove the gender gap in primary, middle, and high school education. It [AJ&K] also successfully attained the desired GP score of 1.00 maintaining its sustainability.

This persistent attainment of the Gender Parity score makes AJ&K a pioneer in Pakistan, spearheading regions/areas in achieving MDG 3.1 and SDG 4.5.1 even before the stipulated time as reflected in Table 3.1. AJ&K gained GP in 2008 at the state level (GPI 0.97) along with its urban and rural areas with a GPI of 1.05 and 0.96 respectively, which in Farooq and Kai's (2016) view are close to the earmarked GP score (0.97-1.03) and thus indicate the prevalence of gender parity at all levels in the state. AJ&K also improved GP with a 0.03-0.04 percentage point gain in 2021 to get a GPI of 1.00 in both the state and rural areas. It also witnessed a 0.04 percentage point drop in obtaining a GP score of 1.01 in 2021 for urban areas. This positive change happened in AJ&K even in a hostile environment – numerous natural and manmade catastrophes like deadly earthquakes (2005), firing on line of control, floods (2010 and 2022) and CO-VIDE-19 (Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b).

The data in Table 3.1 refers to AJ&K's cherished progress in attaining GP at the primary school level in the state and urban-rural areas by achieving committed milestones well before the end time. It endorses AJ&K's efforts to redress the gender bias prevailing in 2008 at the Middle and High school levels and thus validates its' [AJ&K] commendable performance. It highlights that AJ&K is the only entity in Pakistan that fulfils international commitments regarding GP. It [AJ&K] gains

Table 1. Areas Wise Historical Comparison of Gender Parity Index (GPI) AJ&K

Azad Kashmir		MICS 2008			MICS 2020-21		
Level	Area /	Prim ary*	Mi ddle	Sec ondary	Pri mary*	Midd le	Seco ndary
	AJK	0.97	1.10	0.77	1.00	1.05	0.95
	Urban	1.05	1.22	0.69	1.01	1.14	1.03
rea	Rural	0.96	1.06	0.78	1.00	1.03	0.85

\*AJ&K attained GP's MDGs 3.1 & SDGs 4.5.1 targets 2008 & 2020-21 respectively before the stipulated time in 2015 and 2020-21  
Sources: MICS AJ&K 2008 and 2020-21

\*AJ&K attained GP's MDGs 3.1 & SDGs 4.5.1 targets 2008 & 2020-21 respectively before the stipulated time in 2015 and 2020-21

Sources: MICS AJ&K 2008 and 2020-21

A precise gender parity (GPI 1.00) at the primary level and effectively redresses the gender bias harming boys at the Middle level and bitterly stinging girls at the secondary level with a GP score of 1.10 and 0.77 respectively. Big gains in GPI are observed at the secondary level at AJ&K level (0.18) and urban areas (0.33). At the Middle school level, AJ&K witnesses GP (1.03) in rural areas while at the secondary level GP (1.03) in urban areas. It also highlights approaching GP at AJ&K level in Middle school with a GPI of 1.05 and secondary school education with a GPI of 0.95, which to Farooq and Kai (2016) is gender parity.

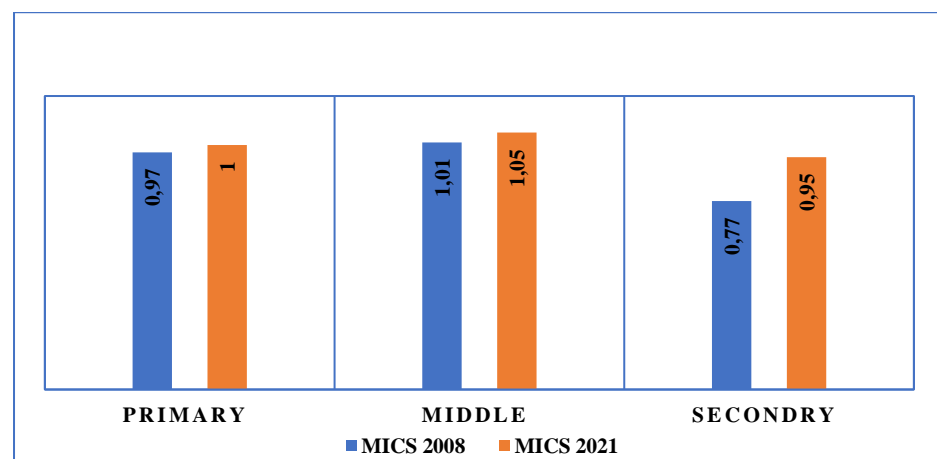


Figure 1. Historical Account of AJ&K's GPI At Primary, Middle and Secondary School Level using MICS Data

Figure 1 visually demonstrates AJ&K's substantial success in achieving GP at the primary school level in the state and across urban and rural areas in the last 2 decades. It endorses the AJ&K's concerted efforts for timely attaining MDGs 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 targets

as an outdoorer in Pakistan. AJ&K attains this with a weak inherited education system having only 4 girls' schools in 1947 and a fragile economic position relying on federal generosity (GoAJ&K, 1977; Farooq and Kai, 2016; Kazmi, et al., 2023 a&b). It also stands as a testament to AJ&K's commitments to promoting education activities, precisely for exhausting the gender gap prevailing since independence with a significant lead in Pakistan and regions/areas. The Analysis also reveals gender parity (1.03) with a 0.03 percentage point drop at the middle level in rural areas and a 0.34 percentage point gain at the secondary level in urban areas (MICS AJK-2008 and 2021).

**AJ&K Outperforms Pakistan's Regions/Areas' in Gender Parity**

AJ&K outperforms Pakistan and regions/areas in terms of education indicators, especially in Gender Parity at the primary level. This assertion needs its validation through research-based evidence attained by analysing credible statistics. This pioneering study, therefore, scrutinizes AJ&K's standing as an outperformer by analyzing MICS regional/areas' data for almost 15 years (2008-2022). It also uses PSLM (2010-11), and WEF (2022) data to substantiate research findings.

Tables 2 endorse AJ&K's substantial work for attaining GP at the primary level signifying MDGs 1. It also helps to determine AJ&K's upright standing among the regional/areas. The statistical information in Table 2 demonstrates that AJ&K outshines in the regions/areas in gaining GP. Therefore, it stands pioneer and the only entity in Pakistan that attained MDG 1 in 2008 well before the stipulated timeframe (2015). The data analysis also endorses that most of the regions/areas in Pakistan remain deficient until 2015, the earmarked deadline. Only Punjab gained a GP stipulated score of 0.97 in 2014, almost 6 years later than AJ&K.

Table 2. GP Index in Regions/areas and AJ&K MICS Wave 4 & 5

Indicator	Pakistan MDGs Set Target 3.1	Punjab* (2014)	Sindh* (2014)	Gilgit Baltistan* (2017)	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* (2017)	Balochistan* (2010)	J&K* (2008)
GPI at the Primary School level	1.00	.97	.86	0.86	.69	0.83	.97

Source: \* Key Finding Reports MICS: AJ&K 2008, Punjab-2014, KP -2016//17, Sindh -2014; Balochistan 2010; and GB 2017

Figures 2 based on PSLM 2010-11 data (Farooq and Kai, 2016 p-43) endorse the MICS (Wave 4&5) results and also validate AJ&K as an outshining entity in Gender Parity in Pakistan. Improving a GP score from 0.97 in 2008 to precisely 1.00 in 2011 (PSLM 2010-11) and retaining it further (MICS AJ&K 2020-21) endorses AJ&K's consistent efforts in attaining a 0.3 percentage point dividend in acquiring a GP Index of 1.00 earlier than any other region. It also achieved this target before the agreed timeframe (2015) MDGs.3.1 (Kazmi et al. 2023 a&b).

It is worth noting that AJ&K superbly gets a GP score of 1.00 even before the envisioning of SDG's 4.5.1 target. The figure also shows that none of the regions/areas accessed the Gender Parity's desired score (0.97) except Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) with a GP score of 0.98 but it stands next to AJ&K in getting MDGs 3.1. AJ&K outstrips the regions/areas suffering from gender disparities disadvantaging girls except Sindh where

gender bias harms boys instead which may imply child abuse/trafficking (Guarcello and others, 2016).

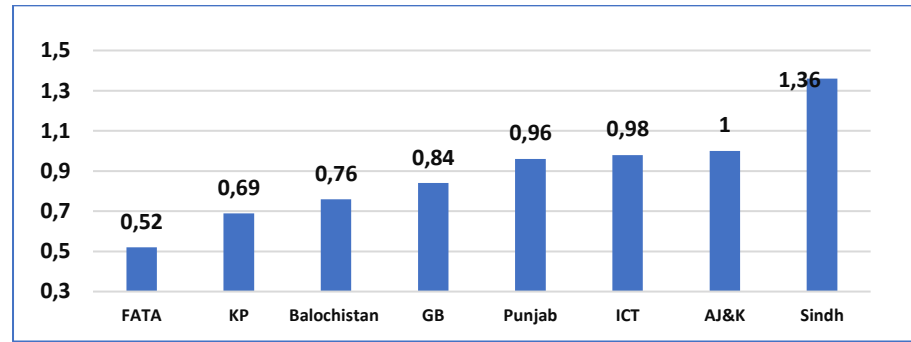


Figure 2. Figure 3.2: AJ&K Oustrips Regions/Area's in GP-PSLM Data 210-11

Figure 3 also grades AJ&K as the best player in the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) at the Primary School Level. AJ&K outstrips ICT, GB, Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and FATA by gaining the highest score of 91.5 in NER. The analysis also validates the previous findings and confirms AJ&K as an outperformer

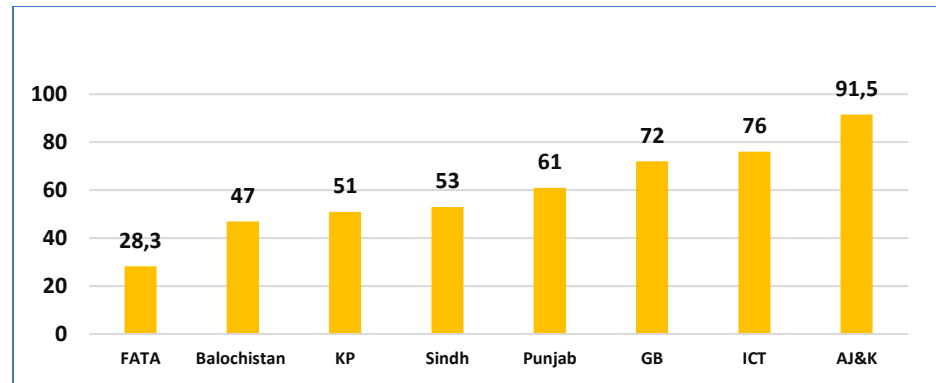


Figure 3. Net Enrollment Ratio At Primary School Level in Regions/areas of Pakistan

#### AJ&K Outshines in Gender Parity in Primary School Education As Per MICS6 Data:

Table 3.4 contains data from the MICS survey wave 6 held in Punjab, KP, Sindh, GB, and AJ&K. Regional/areas. The comparison of the MICS data once again endorses AJ&K as the best performer in Pakistan's regions/area. It obtained Gender Parity at primary school level education in the state, urban, and rural areas with a GP score of 1.00, 1.01, and 1.00 respectively. The data in Table 4.3 also demonstrate that AJ&K in total term achieves a higher level of precision with a GPI of 1.00 compared to Punjab's 0.99, Sindh's 0.89, KP's 0.80, Baluchistan's 0.85 and GB's 0.86. A similar trend is apparent at urban and rural levels as AJ&K gains a precise GPI of 1.01 and 1.00 followed by Punjab with a GPI of 1.02 and 0.97 respectively while other regions deviate from it except Sindh Urban areas (GPI 1.03). MICS6 results also confirm AJ&K as the out-striper at the state and urban-rural level concerning GP at primary school level and SDGs 4.5.1 targets.

Briefly speaking, there are wide variations in GP scores regarding rural areas in Sind, Balochistan, KP and GBs' with a GPI of 0.71, 0.77, 0.80 and 0.85 respectively demonstrating a widespread gender crimination disadvantaging girls as compared to urban areas. It is worth noting that AJ&K also surpasses Punjab, albeit with a slight margin

(0.01 and 0.03) in all three areas as displayed in Table 3 and Figure 4. The Sindh urban areas on the other hand enjoy GP (GPI 1.03) while Balochistan

Table 3. Provinces/Areas Comparison of GP at Primary School Level with MICS Data

Indicator Province/area	Punjab MICS 6 2017	Sindh MICS 6 2020	KP MICS6 2021	Balochistan MICS6 2022	AJ&K MICS S6 2021	GB MICS S5 2017
Total	0.99	0.89	0.80	0.85	1.00	0.86
Urban	1.02	1.03	0.90	0.95	1.01	0.87
Rural	0.97	0.71	0.80	0.77	1.00	0.85

**Source:** SFR Punjab MICS 2016-17 Survey Finding Report (SFR) Provincial Report, BOS, P&DD Govt. of Punjab; Sindh MICS 2018-19, SFR BoS, P&D Board Govt. of Sindh (p-184); KP MICS 2017-18 SFR, KP P&DD, (p-290); AJ&K MICS 2020-21, SFR BoS, P&DD GoAJ&K (p-240); and FR GB MICS 2017-18, KFR P&DD, P&DD Govt. of Gilgit Baltistan (p-181)

observes slight gender disparity (i.e. GPI 0.95) harming girls followed by KPK and GB with a GPI of 0.90 and 0.87 respectively, reflecting a greater gender bias disadvantaging girls in both areas. The findings of this preliminary study further confirm the prevalence of Gender Parity in AJ&K at all levels.

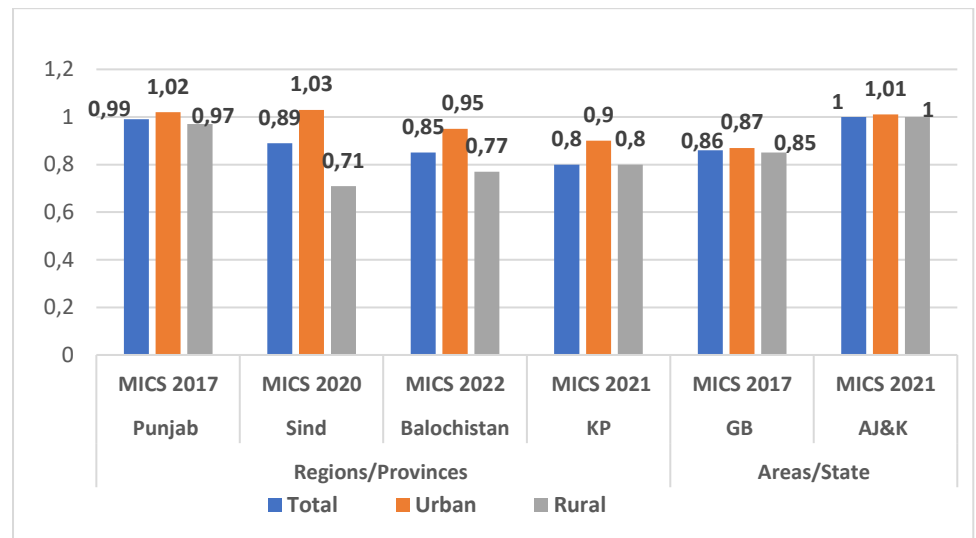


Figure 4. GP Comparison of AJ&K and Regions/Areas

It also ascertains the state [AJ&K] as the best performer in regions/areas in getting GP at the Primary School level even in unfavorable circumstances (resource scarcity, delicate education budget/facilities, natural, manmade hazards including COVID-19, etc.). It also confirms that the concentrated efforts initiated in the 1970s by GoAJ&K pay dividends in eliminating gender gaps at the primary level and counterbalancing these at the middle and secondary levels as reflected in Fig. 3.4 (Farooq and Kia, 2016; Kazmi et al. 2023).

#### AJ&K Outperforms in Gender Parity in Reading (English & Urdu) and Numeracy Skills

The data in Table 4 is sourced from the ASER-2019 report of January 29, 2020, which sheds light on the gender gaps in quality education at the regional levels in Pakistan's rural areas. It also compares reading comprehension in Urdu and English, along with the numeracy skills of both girls and boys. The analysis reveals that both the sexes in AJ&K



enjoy almost similar status in reading comprehension and numeracy skills with a slight deviation reflected in the subject Table. AJ&K also leads the regions/areas in terms of quality education in all three areas. To provide context and determine AJ&K's standing similar data for provinces/areas is also added in Table 4, which clearly allows one compare the education sector working

Table 4. Gender Gap (Rural) in Reading and Numeracy Skills in Pakistan, Provinces/Areas & AJ&K (%)

Proficiency/Area	Gender	Pakistan	CT	Punjab	Sindh	P	KP New Districts	Baluchistan	B	AJ&K
1. Reading one sentence in Urdu	Boys	46	8	60	33	6	37	39	0	66
	Girls	38	7	59	25	4	19	26	7	66
2. Reading at least English word	Boys	48	2	63	32	7	40	36	3	70
	Girls	39	9	62	24	3	21	23	9	69
3. To do at least subtraction	Boys	43	7	57	28	4	39	33	1	64
	Girls	36	8	56	22	4	20	22	8	63

**Source:** Annual Status of Education Report – ASER-PAKISTAN 2019, Provisional, January 29, 2020

towards GP in Quality Education in Pakistan and its regions/areas. The analysis of subject data (Table 3.4) again endorses AJ&K as an outperformer in GP in all referred three tasks – reading (Urdu and English) and numeracy skills - in Pakistan and provinces/areas. AJ&K also outstripped Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) enormously. It outnumbers the provinces/areas in attaining.

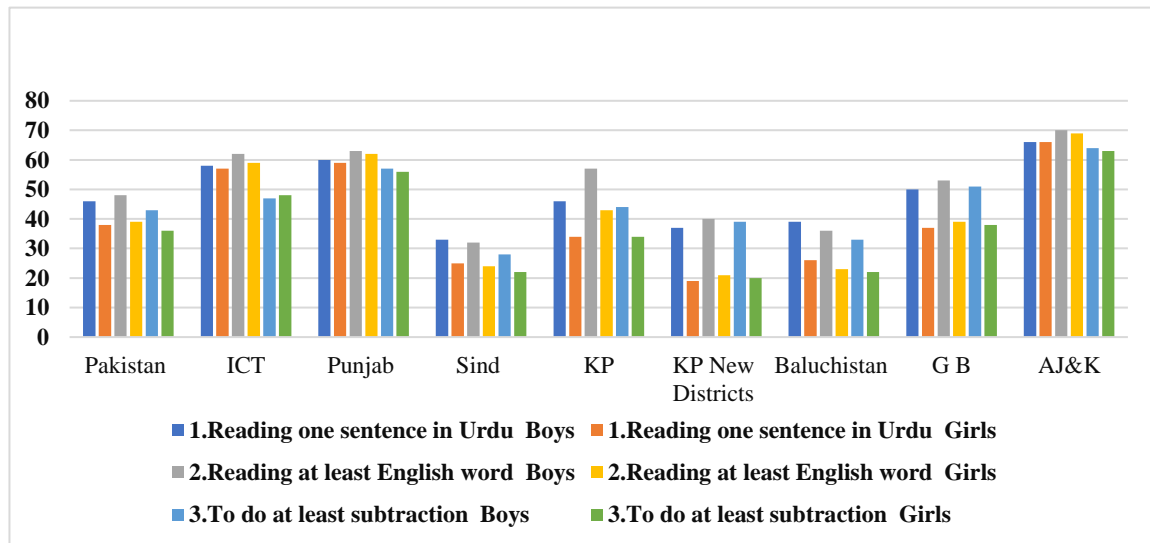


Figure 5. Gender Gap (Rural) in Reading and Numeracy Skills

GP in reading proficiency in Urdu. AJ&K also maintains this pace in getting GP in English reading proficiency and numeracy skills in mathematics with a minor 1% variance. AJ&K again leads in these tasks and outpaces Pakistan and its regions/areas out-rightly.

### **AJ&K Standing in Education Attainment in Pakistan and Neighbouring/ South Asian Countries**

The data in Table 5 is sourced from the World Economic Forum “Global Gender Gap Report 2021”, Insight Report July 2022. In terms of education net enrollment at the primary level, Pakistan (GPI 0.841) leads Afghanistan (GPI 0.44) only while lagging behind all other Neighbouring and South Asian countries (Imran, 2017; WEF, 2022; Iqbal 2022). The data further allows us to compare AJ&K with Pakistan and its neighbouring counterparts in South Asia. Unfortunately, Pakistan (0.841) ranks 144th outdistancing Afghanistan only having a GP of 0.44. It stands as the least performer in terms of education attainment (GP) in the South Asian region after Afghanistan.

On the other hand, AJ&K gains a much better score within the same environment, and under the same education policies and systems along with numerous challenges. Figure 3.6 also depicts a clear picture of AJ&K's standing in Pakistan and neighbouring countries/in the South Asian region. It signifies AJ&K as an outdoer in Pakistan as well as its neighbouring

Table 5. Comparison of AJK's Education Attainments and Ranking with Pakistan's Neighbouring/South Asian Countries

Country	Afghanistan	Pakistan	Nepal	Siri-Lanka	Iran	India	B Desh	Maldives	AJ&K
Gender Parity in Enrolment at the Primary Level	0.44	0.841	0.87	0.979	0.922	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Sources: World Economic Forum (WEF), “Global Gender Gap Report 2021”, Insight Report July 2022									

South Asian countries. This achievement is particularly impressive given its fragile human base and weak financial standing (Farooq and Kai, 2016). In terms of gender parity at the primary level of education, AJ&K outstrips Pakistan, its regions and some neighbouring countries - Afghanistan and Iran. It also outstrips some of other South Asian counterparts like Nepal and Sri Lanka and stands at par with Maldives, Bangladesh, and India, really commendable (WEF, 2022; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b).

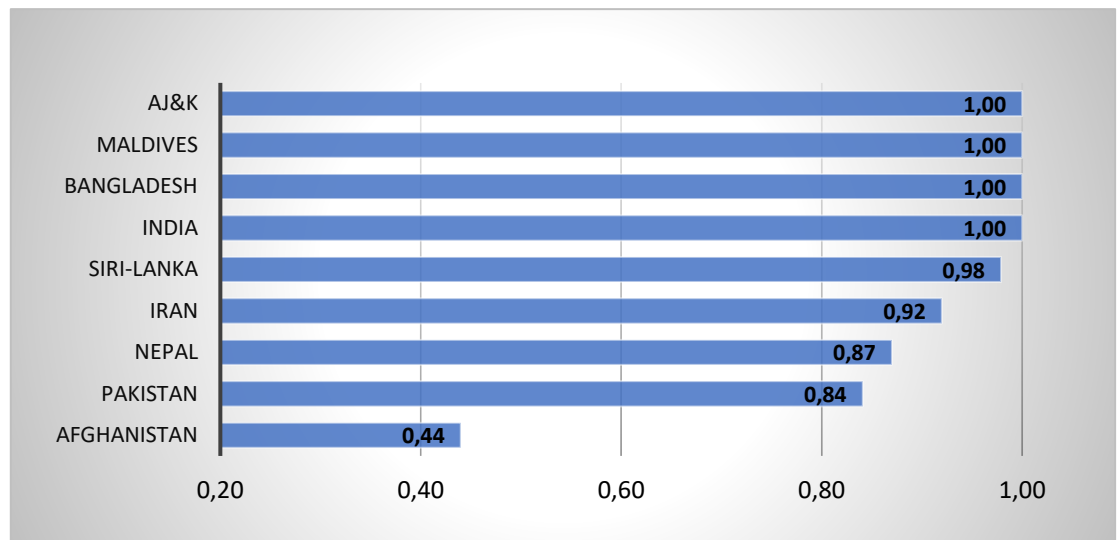


Figure 6. Gender Parity in Enrolment at Primary level in AJ&K, Pakistan and Regional South Asian Countries

Overall, the data in Tables 1 to 5 and Figures 2 to 6 highlight AJ&K's noteworthy progress in the education sector compared to Pakistan's and neighbouring/South Asian counterparts. The analysis of the data further confirms AJ&K's good stride in attaining GP at primary level education in Pakistan, its regions/areas, and South Asia, even in a punitive environment.

#### Factors Contributing to Gender Parity in AJ&K

Education in AJ&K has remained a neglected area since independence in 1947. However, the state [AJ&K] witnesses some significant improvements with the start of focused efforts for development processes in the early 1970s (GoPAK, 1977). Nevertheless, the frequent challenges like financial paucity, weak infrastructure setup, a few girls' schools, and lacking female faculty have implications for education sector working in AJ&K. Natural and manmade catastrophes - deadly earthquake in 2005, uninterrupted firing on the Line of Control, COVID-19, and limited financial and institutional capacity make the situation even more complex (GoAJ&K 1997, Shabbir and Wei, 2014; Farooq and Kia, 2016; and Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b). Despite these critical bottlenecks, AJ&K has made significant strides in education indicators, particularly in attaining GP.

There are some vital inputs/factors letting AJ&K outstrip Pakistan and provinces/areas out rightly that include: a) Induction of a large army of 1700 untrained teachers along with placement of middle-pass female teachers in the early 1970s paid dividend in early attainment of GP in the state (GoAJ&K 1977 & 1997; Kazmi et al., 2023); b) Proactive involvement of the wakeful community found instrumental in AJ&K in promoting GP by providing free land/room for opening primary schools (> 4000) throughout AJ&K (Rahman and Uddin, 2009; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b); c) Resources scarcity though not matter in articulating GP in an area (Maida and Zahid, 2017; Imran, 2017; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b) yet pouring of extra money in education sector by AJ&K from its scarce means i.e. 30% to 33% from overall budget and almost 9% from development outlays widely support opening of girls' schools in remote areas that helps achieving desired GP score 0.97 & 1.00 even before the stipulated time (Tahir, 2017; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b); d)

Limited access to schools is tolling education attainments in the regions/areas in Pakistan or elsewhere (Chaudhury and Parajuli, 2006; Brohi, 2013; Haq, 2016; Mohsin, 2023). However, the improved access in AJ&K from 45 km<sup>2</sup> in 1947 to almost 2.23 km<sup>2</sup> per school in 2020 is instrumental in attaining GP at the earliest in AJ&K (Farooq and Kai, 2016; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b); f) Growing number of schools for girls helps reducing gender bias in AJ&K (CIET, 1997; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b). Opening more girls' schools (i.e. > 45% in total) and permitting co-education pay dividends to AJ&K in gaining MDGs 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 target much earlier than the regions/areas in Pakistan (GoAJ&K 2020 & 2021; Kazmi, et al., 2023 a&b); g) Improved faculty and the student-teacher ratio is also vital in ameliorating GP score favouring girls in AJ&K. The student-teacher ratio in AJ&K improved from a trivial level (1947) to 16.04, 18.11, and 25.63 for schools, colleges, and universities respectively in 2019 (GoAJ&K, 2020; Kazmi et al., a&b); h)

The mother's education and household economic standing were found supportive (except the illiterate mothers and the poorest families) in making AJ&K the outperformer among the regions (MICS 2020-21); i) Cultural norms/biddings are big hindrance in female education/movement in the regions (CIET, 1997; Brohi, 2013; Haq, 2016; Taj 2019; Mohsin, 2023). However, relaxation of Cultural socio-cultural biddings in AJ&K pays instant dividends in gaining GP enabling it to outperform the regions/areas in Pakistan (Kazmi et al., a&b).

### Findings:

AJ&K is the only entity in Pakistan that achieves gender parity at the Primary school well before the time. It outstrips provinces/areas in Pakistan at all levels - state and urban-rural levels (Shabbir and Wei, 2014; Farooq and Kai, 2016; Kazmi, et al., 2023a&b). AJ&K outperformed the region/areas in meeting the MDGs 3.1 target in 2008 almost 7 years before closing time in 2015 and 6 years before Punjab attained it in 2014. AJ&K also outstrips regions/areas in achieving a GP score of precisely 1.00 in 2011 during the period earmarked for MDGs 3.1, which occurred prior to the envisioning of the SDGs 4.5.1 target GPI 1.00 (PSLM, 2010-11; Farooq and Kai 2016; Kazmi et al 2023a&b). AJ&K also outshines in meeting international commitments regarding SDGs 4.5.1 and retains the targeted score of GP "1" even in 2021 (MICS 6; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b).

AJ&K outstrips not only Pakistan's regions/areas but also to Afghanistan, Iran, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. It stands at par with Maldives, India, and Bangladesh (WEF, 2022). In quality education - Reading English & Urdu and Numeracy skills - AJ&K outstrips Pakistan's regions/areas and Islamabad Capital Territory (ASER, 2020). The regions/areas except Punjab and Sindh (urban areas) failed to bridge the gender gap harming girls (MICS6; Saher, 2013; Haq, 2016; Maida and Zahid, 2017; Taj, 2019; Moshin, 2023; Kazmi et al., 2023a). AJ&K gained Gender Parity with weak economic standing and a small budgetary (1.6%) share for primary school education ensuring optimal utilization of scarce means. The wakeful community has a pivotal role in articulating the contour of GP in the state by providing free room/land for opening primary schools all over AJ&K (Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b).

The growing share (from 1.6% to 47%) of girls' schools (primary and middle) is also vital input for outnumbering the regions/areas in GP (GoAJ&K 2022; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b). AJ&K's efforts to improve girls' access to education pay dividends in redressing gender bias disadvantaging girls at the primary level (Kazmi et al., 2023). Growing female

faculty from a negligible level to 48% in AJ&K is also instrumental in confirming quick improvements in GP. The sociocultural norms/biddings are a decisive factor in determining GP regions/areas but are found irrelevant in structuring GP scores in AJ&K (Saher, 2013; Brohi, 2013; Haq, 2106; Farooq and Kia, 2016; Imran, 2017; Maida and Zahid, 2017, Imran, 2017; Kazmi et al., 2023 a&b). The government of AJ&K's strong commitment plays a pivotal role in expanding female education and redressing gender disparities harming girls in the state (Farooq and Kai, 2016; Kazmi et al., 2023a&b).

Mother education and family economic standing are also supportive in redressing gender disparity disadvantaging the female segment in AJ&K like in regions/areas (Kazmi, et al., 2023a&b). The poverty and illiterate mothers are also tolling efforts of AJ&K towards GP like in other regions/areas (Kazmi, et al., 2023a&b). The factors including women's restricted role, son preference, family status (as a farmer)/ size (number of children), unemployment, and female say in the family are less relevant in structuring GP in AJ&K than in the regions and areas in Pakistan (Haq, 2106, Farooq and Kia, 2016, Imran, 2017, Taj, 2019; Kazmi et al., 2023; Moshin, 2023). Missing facilities though imply GP attainment but have little/no role in structuring GP in AJ&K (Kazmi et al., 2023).

### 3. Conclusion

The study finds primary education as the least priority area therefore, most of the regions/areas in Pakistan remain passive in accessing the GP score assigned under international commitments. The MDGs 3.1 and SDGs 4.5.1 are not over-ambitious targets for developing countries and thus could be achieved in poor regions/areas by ensuring optimal utilization of scarce financial means and physical inputs. Strong government commitment and awesome community support are prerequisites for attaining Gender Parity. Cultural bindings and social norms restricting regions/areas from accessing GP need instant handling by seeking insight from their successful counterpart. Rural and underdeveloped areas need a more specific focus to redress wider gender disparities disadvantaging girls. Better access and an improved number of girls' schools and female faculty could pay dividends to the least performing regions/areas in Pakistan. Poverty and illiterate mothers having a bitter sting need instant combat to deal with. A special focus should also be on altering the key challenges - patriarchal mindset, family size, son preference, early marriages, female restricted movement, mother education and her say/role in the family, etc. Seeking insight from a better-performing entities may help to alter the policy initiatives favouring underperforming regions/areas in Pakistan and elsewhere. A comprehensive study of the best-performing unit would be beneficial for restructuring region/areas' specific policy interventions. Multidimensional policy initiatives and focused action plans have to be built involving the government, local community, education department and philanthropists. A wider campaign for female education may also help to bridge the gender gap harming girls in the regions/areas.



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