

UNICEF Topic 2: Girls' Education

In 2009, the Taliban, an Islamic militant group, announced a ban on girls' education in the Swat Valley region of Pakistan. They declared that girls receiving an education conflicts with the tenets of Islam. Girls were forced to drop out of school out of fear of the Taliban. Their fears escalated as attacks against girls' schools began¹. Insurgents strategically attacked teachers and students alike, doing whatever they could to deter both girls from going to school and adults from teaching them. They gained universal attention in 2012, with the attempted murder of schoolgirl and activist Malala Yousafzai². Although the Taliban has quieted down over the past two years, girls' education is still suffering in Pakistan, and around the world.

Gender disparity is a prevalent issue in both primary and secondary education. In the realm of primary education, 37% of countries do not give boys and girls equal education opportunities. In the year 2014, one in ten girls were not enrolled in primary school, as opposed to one in twelve boys. Of the 32 million girls who were not enrolled in school in 2014, 47% are expected to never begin. The gender disparity only gets worse in secondary education. Only a third of the world offers equal education opportunities for upper secondary education³. In a world that has progressed so much in women's rights, girls' education is still lacking.

In many areas of the world, girls' education is not a value. Groups such as the Taliban oppose the education of women based on religious grounds. If a family is poor, it may choose to invest in their son's education over their daughter's. They may marry off their daughter for money or make her work, forcing her to quit school⁴. In areas with humanitarian crises, girls are 2.5 times more likely to not be educated since their education is less of a priority⁵. Because girls' education is not a universal value, girls' education is not a universal phenomenon.

One of the Sustainable Development Goals that the United Nations must achieve is to give all people equal educational opportunities⁶. Not only will a full education allow girls to receive better jobs and promote economic growth, but it will also reduce mortality rates and lead to healthier families⁷. However, the concerns of religious practice, affordability, and family traditions must also be considered. At UNICEF, it is our mission to protect the rights of children around the world, so in researching this topic, be sure to know what your country's stance is on whether girls education is a right that must be protected .

Here are questions to consider:

¹ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jan/05/taliban-bans-education-for-girls-in-pakistans-swat/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/21/world/asia/bacha-khan-university-attack-charsadda.html?mcubz=0>

³ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002460/246045e.pdf>

⁴ https://www.unicef.org/education/bege_61718.html

⁵ https://www.unicef.org/education/bege_70640.html

⁶ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

⁷ <https://www.malala.org/brookings-report/the-worlds-best-investment-girls-education>

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- How can UNICEF achieve equal educational opportunities for girls?
- What will keep girls in school through 12th grade?
- What steps can be taken to make girl's education a universal value?
- How can UNICEF educate girls in rural and crisis-ridden areas where there are no schools nearby?
- How should UNICEF respond to religious or ethnic groups who are against educating women? Should education be limited out of respect for these groups?
- What can be done to ensure that the education girls are provided is quality education?
- How can young girls be empowered to fight for their education?

Best of Luck,

Yael Blau

Chair, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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