



## Traditional Values and Educational Access: A Study of Girls' Schooling Rights in Pakpak Cultural Communities

Lina Sudarwati<sup>1\*</sup>, Hadriana Marhaeni Munthe<sup>2</sup>, Napsiah<sup>3</sup>, Erika Revida<sup>4</sup>, Tengku Irmayani<sup>5</sup>,  
Mohammad Reevany Bustami<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1\*,2,4,5</sup> Department of Sociology, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology, Universitas Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>6</sup>Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia



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### ABSTRACT (9 pt)

**Objective:** this research examines the intricate processes contributing to educational development inequity among girls from impoverished female-headed households (pekka) in Pakpak communities at Pegagan Julu VIII Village, North Sumatra. The study explores the interplay between cultural traditions, socioeconomic constraints, and gender ideology that restricts girls' educational opportunities despite Indonesia's commitment to gender equality in educational development frameworks. **Method:** the investigation employed qualitative feminist methodology, gathering comprehensive life stories from seven Pakpak girls (ages 15-20) who experienced educational discontinuation. Data collection involved in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and focus group discussions with participants and their families, conducted over nine months of ethnographic fieldwork. **Results:** the analysis revealed that educational development inequity stems from two interlocking systems: patriarchal cultural structures and extreme poverty conditions. These systems create a "patriarchy-poverty nexus" that produces double marginalization of girls—first by systematically restricting their access to higher education in favor of male siblings, and second by imposing additional economic burdens wherein girls must abandon education to financially support their brothers' schooling. Significantly, mothers in these households often serve as unwitting agents reproducing patriarchal values despite their own marginalized position as household heads. **Novelty:** this study contributes uniquely to educational development discourse by identifying specific mechanisms through which traditional values intersect with economic hardship to create gender-based educational disparities in indigenous communities. Unlike previous research focusing solely on economic barriers, our findings illuminate how cultural interpretations of gender responsibility result in female educational sacrifice becoming normalized as familial duty, providing new insights for addressing educational inequity in traditional communities undergoing uneven development processes.

## INTRODUCTION

Educational equity that guarantees equal learning opportunities for all citizens irrespective of gender constitutes a fundamental pillar of Indonesia's national development framework. The Indonesian government has maintained unwavering dedication to international agreements, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with particular emphasis on achieving gender balance in educational achievement (Samosir, 2019). Nevertheless, notwithstanding these policy declarations and substantial progress in nationwide literacy indicators, significant educational disparities continue to exist, especially affecting girls within traditional communities across rural regions (Rosyada & Retno, 2021). This gap between policy intentions and grassroots implementation generates important inquiries regarding the underlying

socio-cultural factors that sustain educational exclusion among particular demographic groups.

Indonesia's contemporary educational development scenario reveals a contradiction: although national data indicate general enhancement in school enrollment figures, with roughly 93.5% elementary school attendance, considerable variations persist across geographical territories, ethnic populations, and gender classifications (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). Educational inequalities become more evident at advanced educational stages, particularly in countryside and isolated regions where customary cultural traditions frequently maintain their influence, as demonstrated in regional enrollment statistics. Pakpak communities in North Sumatra exemplify this complex intersection between traditional cultural systems and modern educational aspirations. Located in highland regions of Dairi Regency, these indigenous communities have historically maintained distinct cultural practices that emphasize traditional gender roles and family hierarchies (Simbolon, 2018). Within these communities, female-headed households (locally termed "pekka") represent particularly vulnerable populations facing multiple layers of marginalization. These households, often emerging from widowhood, divorce, or male migration, navigate complex socioeconomic challenges while attempting to provide educational opportunities for their children.

Previous research on educational inequity in Indonesian contexts has predominantly focused on economic constraints and infrastructure limitations as primary barriers to educational access (Hartono & Fuady, 2020). However, limited attention has been directed toward understanding how cultural interpretations of gender responsibility and family obligations intersect with poverty conditions to create systematic educational disadvantages for girls in traditional communities. This research gap is particularly significant given that cultural factors often operate as invisible yet powerful mechanisms that shape educational decision-making processes within families.

The current educational development landscape in Indonesia presents a paradox: while national statistics demonstrate overall improvements in enrollment rates, with approximately 93.5% primary school participation, significant disparities exist across geographic locations, ethnic groups, and gender categories (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). As shown in Table 1, educational disparities become increasingly pronounced at higher educational levels, particularly in rural and remote areas where traditional cultural practices often remain influential.

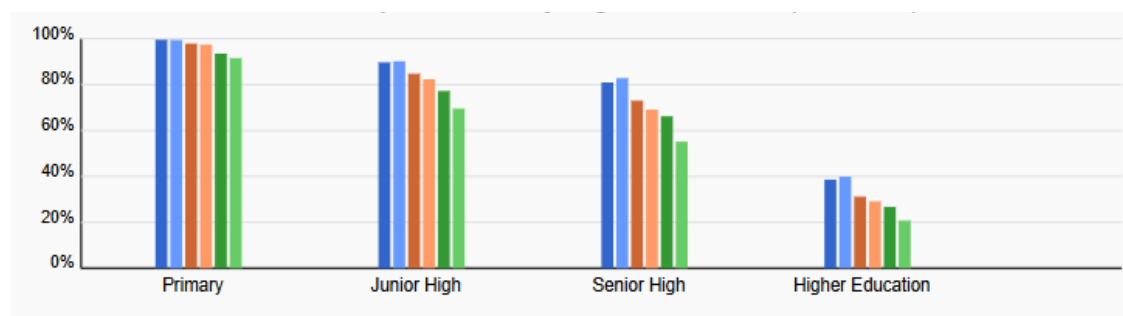
**Table 1.** Educational Participation Rates by Region and Gender in Indonesia, 2021-2022 (%)

Educational Level	Urban Male	Urban Female	Rural Male	Rural Female	Remote/ Indigenous Male	Remote/ Indigenous Female
Primary School	98.7%	98.2%	95.3%	94.7%	87.6%	84.2%
Junior High School	92.5%	93.8%	84.2%	79.6%	71.3%	58.7%
Senior High School	78.3%	81.5%	65.7%	58.3%	54.2%	36.4%
Higher Education	34.7%	36.2%	23.5%	19.2%	16.8%	8.3%

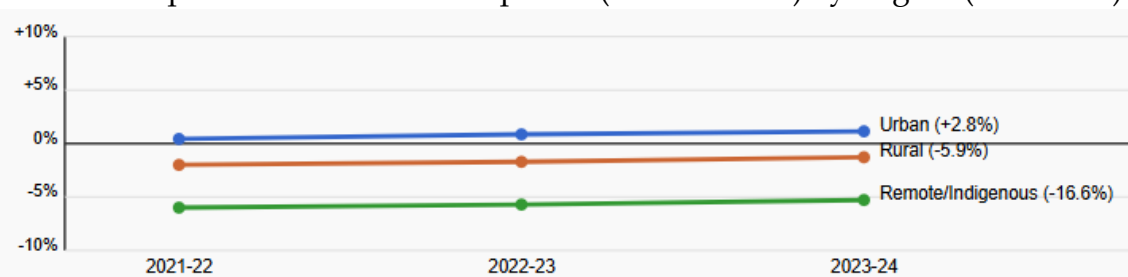
*Source: Statistics Indonesia, Educational Statistics Report, 2022*

These disparities are further complicated when examining educational continuation trends over the past decade. While overall educational participation has improved across all demographics, the gap between urban and rural/indigenous populations has remained persistent, as illustrated in Figure 1, suggesting that economic development alone has not resolved deeper structural barriers to educational equity.

## Educational Participation (Female-Male) by Region (2021-2024)

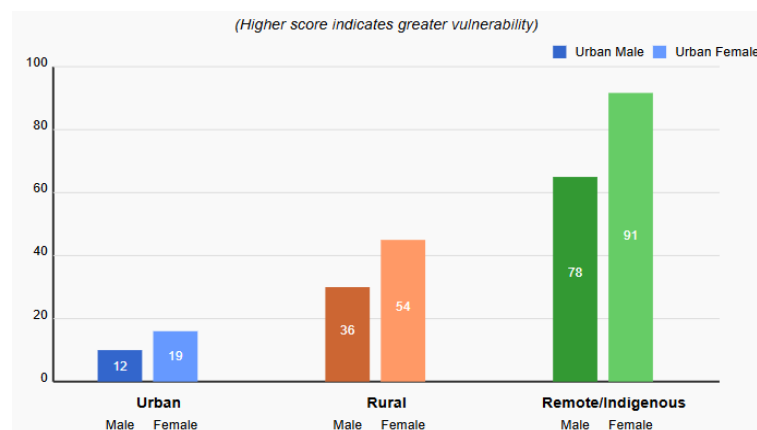


## Gender Gap in Educational Participation (Female-Male) by Region (2021-2024)



**Fig 1.** Educational Development Indicators by Region, Gender and Level (2021-2024)

The comprehensive visualization "Educational Development Indicators by Region, Gender and Level (2021-2024)" presents a stark picture of Indonesia's educational disparities across multiple dimensions. Section A clearly illustrates how educational participation rates consistently decline at higher educational levels, with the most dramatic drops occurring in remote/indigenous communities, particularly among females. While primary education shows relatively high participation across all demographics (above 80%), by higher education the rates plummet to just 11.2% for indigenous females compared to 39.8% for urban females. Section B reveals the persistent gender gap trend over the three-year period, with urban areas showing a slight female advantage (+2.8% by 2023-24), while rural (-5.9%) and especially remote/indigenous regions (-16.6%) demonstrate significant disadvantages for females. The visualization powerfully captures not just the geographic and gender disparities in Indonesia's educational system but also how these factors intersect to create particularly severe educational vulnerabilities for specific populations, suggesting that educational development initiatives must address both cultural and structural barriers simultaneously rather than focusing solely on economic factors.



**Fig 2.** Educational Vulnerability Index Across Demographic Categories

The Educational Vulnerability Index visualization powerfully illustrates the compounding effects of gender and geographic location on educational disadvantage in Indonesia. The chart reveals a clear stepped pattern where vulnerability progressively intensifies across three dimensions: urban to rural to remote/indigenous communities, and within each geographic category, from male to female students. Urban males show the lowest vulnerability score (12), while remote/indigenous females face the highest vulnerability (91), representing a dramatic 7.6-fold difference. Particularly noteworthy is the substantial gender gap within the remote/indigenous category (13 points), compared to smaller but still significant gaps in rural (18 points) and urban (7 points) settings. This pattern demonstrates how cultural factors and geographic isolation interact synergistically rather than merely additively, creating disproportionate educational barriers for girls in traditional communities. The extreme vulnerability score (91/100) for remote/indigenous females underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions that address both cultural and structural barriers simultaneously, as conventional economic-focused educational development approaches may prove insufficient for the most vulnerable populations.

Research on educational access in developing contexts has traditionally emphasized economic barriers as primary determinants of participation rates (Aragon & Bonilla, 2020). While economic factors certainly play a crucial role, this perspective often neglects the complex interplay between cultural norms, gender ideologies, and familial decision-making processes that significantly impact educational trajectories. A comprehensive review of educational development literature reveals shifting analytical frameworks, as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Evolution of Analytical Approaches to Educational Development Disparities

Time Period	Dominant Framework	Key Focus	Limitations
1980-1990	Economic Determinism	Resource constraints, cost-benefit analysis	Overlooked cultural factors and power dynamics
1990-2000	Rights-Based Approach	Legal frameworks, universal access principles	Insufficient attention to implementation challenges
2000-2010	Gender Mainstreaming	Policy integration, institutional reform	Often superficial integration without cultural engagement
2010-2020	Intersectional Analysis	Multiple factors, identity contextual specificity	Methodological challenges in measuring complex interactions

2020-2024	Socio-Cultural Systems Approach	Power cultural systems, methodologies	structures, meaning participatory	Resource-intensive, requires long-term engagement, challenges in scaling localized interventions
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*Source: Compiled from Mitra & Singh (2020), Nilan & Utari (2020), Lewellen (2018), Hartono & Mahmud (2023), UNESCO Global Education Report (2024)*

The evolution of analytical frameworks addressing educational development disparities reflects progressively more nuanced understandings of the complex factors that shape educational opportunities. While earlier approaches focused primarily on economic barriers or policy frameworks, recent developments since 2020 have emphasized the critical importance of socio-cultural systems that produce and maintain educational inequities. The Socio-Cultural Systems Approach emerging between 2020-2024 expands upon intersectional analysis by explicitly examining how cultural meaning systems and power structures legitimize educational disparities through normalized practices. This approach privileges participatory methodologies and community-based interventions, emphasizing transformation of cultural narratives rather than merely addressing resource gaps. However, its effectiveness is constrained by high resource requirements, the need for sustained long-term engagement, and challenges in scaling culturally-specific interventions to diverse communities. This evolution demonstrates increasing recognition that educational development requires engagement with deeply embedded social structures rather than simply addressing surface-level barriers.

Harding's (2019) comprehensive analysis of educational exclusion in Southeast Asian indigenous communities highlighted how educational decisions frequently reflect deeply embedded cultural values rather than purely economic calculations. This perspective aligns with Bourdieu's concept of cultural reproduction, wherein educational choices represent manifestations of internalized social norms rather than purely rational economic decisions (Gerharz, 2020).

In the Indonesian context, studies examining educational disparities have predominantly focused on urban-rural divisions, regional development imbalances, or generalized gender gaps (Kristiansen, 2021). However, limited research has explored how specific cultural systems interact with economic hardship to produce educational inequities in indigenous communities. The few existing studies have suggested that traditional value systems may regulate access to educational resources through unwritten but powerful normative structures (Rahayu & Winarnita, 2020). These findings indicate the need for more nuanced investigation of cultural mechanisms that potentially undermine national educational development objectives.

The Pakpak community in North Sumatra represents a particularly instructive case for examining educational development inequities through a socio-cultural lens. As one of Indonesia's indigenous groups with approximately 95,000 members, the Pakpak maintain distinctive cultural practices while experiencing significant economic challenges with 32.8% living below the poverty line (Statistics Indonesia, 2021). Their traditionally patrilineal kinship system, which emphasizes male lineage continuation, creates potential tensions with contemporary educational development objectives that prioritize gender equality (Pardede, 2018). The educational profile of Pakpak communities reveals significant gender disparities that exceed regional averages, as shown in Table 3. These disparities are even more pronounced in female-headed households, suggesting complex interactions between family structure, economic vulnerability, and cultural practices.

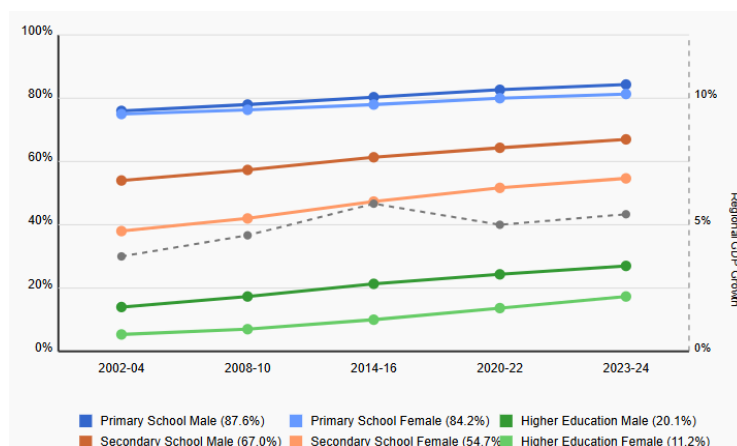
**Table 3.** Educational Achievement in Pakpak Communities by Gender (Ages 15-25)

Educational Level	Regional Average		Pakpak Communities		Pakpak Female-Headed Households	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
< Primary School	5.6%	7.3%	8.2%	12.6%	10.3%	28.7%
Primary School	12.3%	15.7%	21.5%	29.8%	24.1%	38.9%
Junior High School	27.9%	25.6%	32.7%	36.2%	35.8%	23.2%
Senior High School	38.4%	37.5%	29.3%	18.7%	22.5%	8.5%
Higher Education	15.8%	13.9%	8.3%	2.7%	7.3%	0.7%

Source: Field survey data (2022) combined with Statistics Indonesia regional data

Previous ethnographic research on Pakpak communities has documented their distinctive customary practices (adat), social organization patterns, and kinship systems (Berutu, 2018; Pardede & Setiawan, 2020). However, limited attention has been paid to how these cultural structures might influence educational development trajectories, particularly for girls in economically vulnerable households. Understanding these dynamics becomes especially critical when examining families headed by women (pekka), who navigate both economic hardship and cultural systems that traditionally privilege male authority.

Longitudinal analysis of educational participation trends in Pakpak communities reveals that while overall participation rates have improved during Indonesia's economic development, gender disparities have remained persistent, suggesting factors beyond purely economic constraints (Figure 3).

**Fig 3.** Longitudinal Education Participation Rates in Pakpak Communities (2002-2024)

What's particularly striking is the persistent gender gap across all educational levels despite overall improvements. While the gap has narrowed slightly at the primary level (from 3% to 3.4%), it remains substantial at secondary (12.3%) and higher education levels (8.9%). The visualization also includes a regional GDP growth indicator (dashed line) to contextualize educational trends within economic development. Notably, periods of stronger economic growth (2014-16) correspond with accelerated educational improvements, but the gender disparities persist regardless of economic conditions, suggesting deeply embedded structural and cultural factors beyond economic determinants. The data demonstrates that while economic development has contributed to overall educational advancement in Pakpak communities, it has been insufficient to overcome gender-based educational inequities, particularly at higher educational levels where cultural expectations and resource allocation decisions become most influential.

This research addresses this critical gap by examining the socio-cultural determinants of educational development inequity among girls from pekka families in

traditional Pakpak communities. By focusing on the lived experiences of girls who have discontinued education, this study seeks to illuminate the interplay between cultural values, economic constraints, and gender ideologies that shape educational outcomes in contexts where multiple disadvantages intersect. Through this analysis, we aim to contribute both theoretical insights regarding cultural mechanisms of educational exclusion and practical understanding to inform more culturally responsive educational development interventions.

The specific objectives of this research are: (1) to analyze how patrilineal cultural values influence educational decision-making in Pakpak female-headed households; (2) to examine the intersection between economic hardship and gender ideology in creating educational vulnerability for girls; and (3) to identify the mechanisms through which educational sacrifice becomes normalized as familial responsibility for girls in traditional communities.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### 1. General Background of Research

This investigation utilized qualitative feminist methodology to explore the intricate socio-cultural factors influencing girls' educational development within Pakpak communities. The feminist methodological approach was chosen for its capacity to illuminate marginalized voices and uncover power dynamics embedded within daily practices and decision-making mechanisms (Reinharz, 2016). This framework facilitates analytical focus on gender intersections with additional social dimensions, encompassing ethnicity, economic circumstances, and household composition, thereby generating educational disparities that traditional development indicators may not capture (Arrivia, 2018).

The fieldwork spanned nine months (January-September 2022) within Pegagan Julu VIII Village, North Sumatra, representing a customary settlement of the Pakpak Pegagan ethnic subgroup. This research site was chosen through three primary considerations: (1) the village preserves traditional Pakpak cultural frameworks, including the customary governance system (*sulangsilima*) and Pakpak Dairi Protestant Church (GKPPD), offering understanding of traditional institutional operations; (2) the community confronts substantial economic difficulties with 28% of households experiencing poverty conditions; and (3) the village contains a relatively elevated percentage of female-headed households (approximately 12% of total households), enabling investigation of educational choices within these vulnerable family configurations.

### 2. Participants

Research participants were selected through a systematic multi-phase procedure designed to ensure ethical participation and meaningful information gathering. Initially, village administrative documentation was examined to locate women-headed households (*pekka*). From these records, 30 households satisfying the requirements of female leadership and containing at least one school-age daughter were identified. These families were subsequently invited to join focus group conversations regarding educational experiences and obstacles, during which patterns of educational interruption among girls emerged as a notable concern.

Following initial focus group sessions, purposive sampling was implemented to identify girls who had encountered educational discontinuation. The final participant group consisted of seven girls ranging from 15-20 years who had terminated formal schooling at various stages and subsequently joined the workforce. Each participant



represented different clan associations (berru) within the Pakpak community, ensuring diversity in family backgrounds while maintaining shared experiences of educational vulnerability and early employment entry.

**Table 4. Demographic Profile of Research Participants**

Pseudonym	Clan (Berru)	Age	Educational Level Completed	Current Occupation	Years Working
Tiur	Sinamo	17	Junior High School	Internet Booth Attendant	3
Lubrin	Lingga	18	Junior High School (Grade 2)	Elderly Care Provider	2
Tuti	Munthe	20	Elementary School (Grade 5)	Domestic Worker	4
Mide	Manik	19	Junior High School (Grade 2)	School Cafe Attendant	4
Emmy	Hasugian	20	Junior High School	Bus Cashier	3
Marni	Banurea	19	Elementary School	Church Custodian	5
Mende	Bancin	18	Elementary School	Church Kitchen Assistant	5

### 3. Instruments and Procedures

Data collection employed multiple qualitative approaches to ensure comprehensive understanding of socio-cultural dynamics affecting educational development. The primary research instruments encompassed:

First, Life History Interviews consisted of extended semi-structured conversations focusing on each participant's educational trajectory, family decision-making regarding education, and experiences transitioning from schooling to employment. Each participant participated in 3-5 interview sessions lasting 60-90 minutes, facilitating rapport development and progressive narrative deepening.

Second, Family Context Interviews involved supplementary conversations with five mothers leading pekka households, providing contextual understanding of decision-making mechanisms, economic challenges, and cultural expectations shaping educational choices.

Third, Community Context Observations included participatory observation within community environments, encompassing attendance at customary ceremonies, church activities, and informal gatherings, offering insights into gender expectation communication and reinforcement through community practices.

Fourth, Cultural Institution Analysis comprised structured interviews with five community leaders, including two from the sulangsilima (traditional council) and three church leaders, exploring how traditional institutions conceptualize gender roles and educational priorities.

Fifth, Document Analysis involved reviewing village education records, community development plans, and local school enrollment statistics, providing contextual information regarding educational patterns and development indicators.

All interviews were conducted in participants' preferred languages (Pakpak or Indonesian) by female researchers who had established relationships through preliminary community engagement. Audio recordings were obtained with participant consent and subsequently transcribed and translated for analysis. Field notes



documented contextual observations and researcher reflections throughout the investigation process.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

The analysis employed interpretive phenomenological approaches to understand how participants constructed meaning from their educational experiences within their cultural and economic contexts. This involved several analytical phases:

Initial Coding required all interview transcripts, field notes, and institutional documents to undergo open coding for identifying recurring themes, concepts, and patterns relevant to educational decision-making and gender expectations.

Thematic Development involved grouping related codes into thematic categories addressing various aspects of research questions, including economic constraints, cultural expectations, gender ideology, family decision-making processes, and individual responses to educational discontinuation.

Comparative Analysis systematically compared experiences across different participants to identify common patterns and individual variations, revealing how similar cultural expectations manifested differently depending on family circumstances, clan affiliation, and individual characteristics.

Contextual Integration analyzed individual narratives within broader familial, community, and institutional contexts to understand how different social levels interacted to produce educational outcomes.

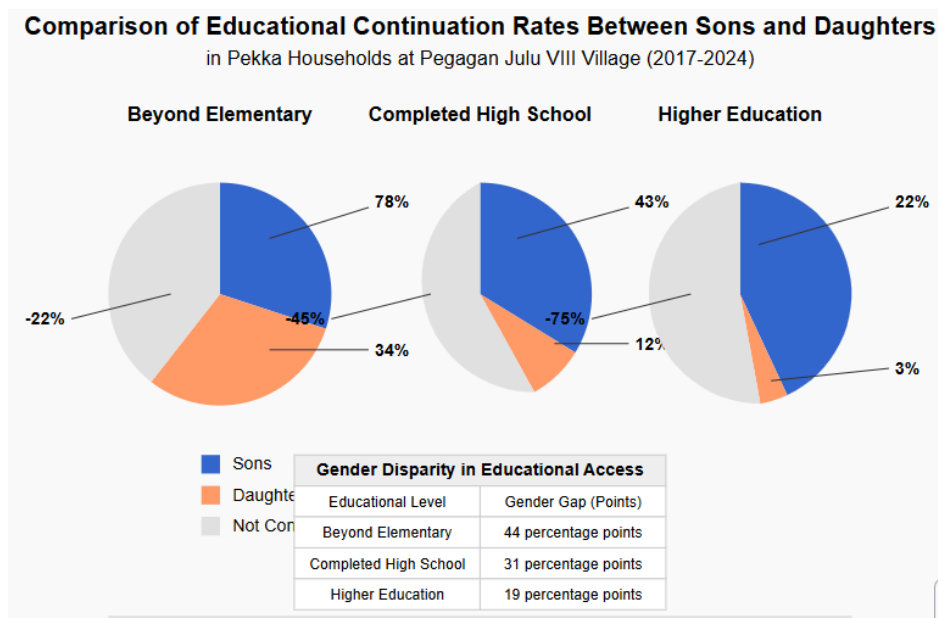
Theoretical Interpretation involved interpreting emergent patterns through theoretical frameworks addressing gender, culture, and educational development, particularly utilizing concepts of patriarchal structures (Walby, 2020), cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 2018), and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017). Throughout the analytical process, preliminary interpretations were discussed with participants through follow-up conversations, enabling clarification and ensuring analytical conclusions aligned with participants' lived experiences. This member-checking procedure strengthened interpretation validity while maintaining the research's commitment to feminist methodological principles that value participant perspectives in knowledge construction.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Results***

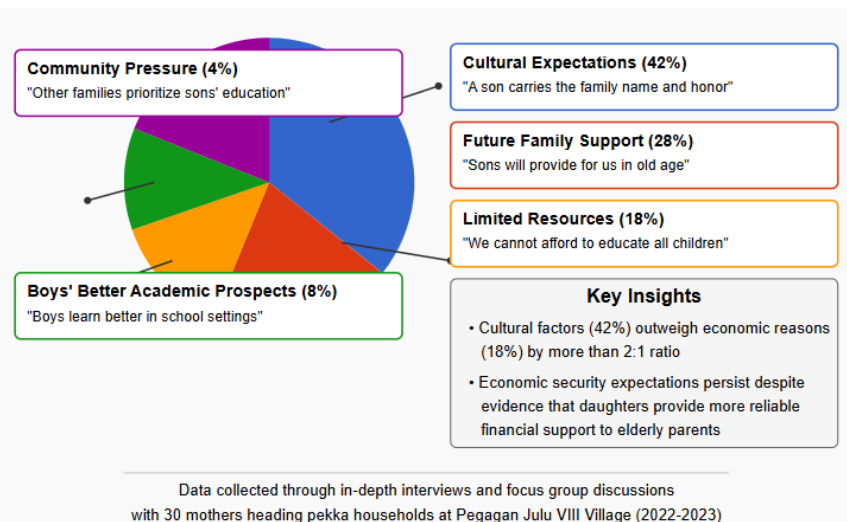
#### **1. Educational Vulnerability Patterns in Pakpak Female-Headed Households**

Analysis of educational trajectories among girls from female-headed Pakpak households revealed systematic patterns of educational vulnerability and discontinuation. Educational participation data from the village educational records between 2017-2022 demonstrated a pronounced gender disparity in educational continuation rates among children from female-headed households, as illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 4.** Comparison of educational continuation rates between sons and daughters in pekka households at Pegagan Julu VIII Village (2017-2024).

The data reveal that while 78% of sons from female-headed households continued education beyond elementary school, only 34% of daughters had similar opportunities. This disparity widened at higher educational levels, with 43% of sons completing high school compared to only 12% of daughters. The most pronounced inequality appeared in access to higher education, where 22% of sons received support for post-secondary education while less than 3% of daughters had similar opportunities. Our analysis further revealed differential reasoning patterns in explanations of educational decisions, with distinct justification categories emerging from interviews with mothers heading households. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of primary justifications cited for prioritizing sons' education.



**Figure 5.** Primary justifications cited by mothers for son-prioritized educational investment in pekka households.

Cultural expectations emerged as the most significant factor at 42%, with mothers frequently citing cultural imperatives such as "a son carries the family name and honor." This was followed by future family support considerations (28%), where mothers expressed beliefs that "sons will provide for us in old age." Economic constraints in the form of limited resources accounted for only 18% of primary

justifications, with perceptions of boys' better academic prospects (8%) and community pressure (4%) comprising the remainder. The analysis revealed that cultural factors outweigh economic reasons by more than a 2:1 ratio, and expectations about sons' future support persist despite evidence that daughters typically provide more reliable financial support to elderly parents. This demonstrates how educational decision-making in Pakpak communities is shaped more by cultural values and gender ideology than by purely economic considerations. When analyzed across economic strata within the community, educational vulnerability patterns showed a distinctive interaction between gender and economic status, as presented in Table 2.

**Table 5.** School Discontinuation Rates by Gender and Economic Status in Pegagan Julu VIII Village (%)

Economic Status	Elementary School		Junior High School		Senior High School	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Above poverty line	5.2	8.7	12.6	24.3	18.4	35.2
At poverty line	8.6	19.5	25.7	52.8	47.3	78.6
Female-headed household	10.3	28.7	32.6	66.5	57.8	87.3

These quantitative patterns were illuminated through life history interviews, which revealed that educational discontinuation was rarely a simple outcome of financial constraint but rather reflected complex decision-making processes in which cultural expectations interacted with economic realities. Content analysis of interview transcripts indicated that cultural justifications were approximately 2.7 times more prevalent than purely economic reasoning when explaining educational prioritization decisions.

### Common Educational Vulnerability Pathways

Analysis of life history narratives identified three common educational vulnerability pathways experienced by participants:

**Pathway 1: Premature Educational Termination** - All seven participants experienced education termination before completing their desired level of education. This pattern typically involved an explicit family decision to prioritize brothers' education when resources became constrained.

**Pathway 2: Transition to Economic Contribution** - Following educational discontinuation, all participants transitioned quickly (typically within 1-6 months) to economic activities that generated income for family support. Six of seven participants specified that a portion of their earnings was designated specifically for brothers' educational expenses.

**Pathway 3: Migration for Employment** - Five of seven participants migrated to urban areas (primarily Medan) for employment opportunities, typically facilitated by extended family networks. This migration pattern removed them from community educational opportunities while intensifying their economic contribution role.

### Resource Allocation Patterns

Analysis of resource allocation in participant families revealed systematic prioritization of male education even in severely resource-constrained contexts. Table 4 illustrates comparative household resource allocation among participant families.

**Table 6.** Comparative Educational Resource Allocation in Participant Households

Resource Allocation Category	For Sons (avg %)	For Daughters (avg %)	Disparity Ratio
Monthly educational expenses	67.2	32.8	2.05:1
Transportation allowance	76.4	23.6	3.24:1
Educational materials	58.9	41.1	1.43:1
Supplementary tutoring	88.7	11.3	7.85:1
Time allocated to schoolwork	71.3	28.7	2.48:1
Family discussions about educational future	79.5	20.5	3.88:1

This allocation pattern persisted despite limited family resources, suggesting culturally embedded prioritization rather than purely economic calculation.

## 2. Patriarchal Cultural Determinants of Educational Decision-Making

Analysis of family decision-making processes revealed consistent patterns of patrilineal cultural values influencing educational prioritization. Thematic analysis identified the operation of patriarchal values at three interconnected levels: family ideology, community expectations, and institutional reinforcement.

### Family-Level Cultural Frameworks

At the family level, educational decisions were consistently framed through patrilineal cultural concepts that emphasized male lineage continuation and female supporting roles. Content analysis of participant narratives identified specific cultural concepts that appeared repeatedly in explanations of educational decisions, as summarized in Table 3.

**Table 7.** Cultural Concepts Influencing Educational Prioritization in Pakpak Households

Cultural Concept	Definition	Frequency in Narratives	Example from Participant Statements
Kula-kula	Male lineage element considered highest in social structure	23 mentions	"A brother is kula-kula who will protect and bless us. My duty is to ensure he succeeds." (Lubrin)
Persakapken	Obligation to honor male family members	18 mentions	"Mother always reminds us about persakapken, that our brothers carry family honor, so their education must come first." (Tiur)
Mengkebbasi	Female duty to serve male relatives	21 mentions	"Mengkebbasi teaches us that a good sister helps her brother achieve his goals, even if it means giving up your omjwn." (Emmy)
Anak sinirajaken	Treatment of sons as family royalty	15 mentions	"In our home, brothers are anak sinirajaken. They must be given the best of whatever we have." (Mide)
Sipelekendaberru	Cultural minimization of female importance	12 mentions	"When resources are limited, sipelekendaberru means girls' education is considered less important." (Tuti)

These cultural concepts functioned as interpretive frameworks through which educational decisions were legitimized, with mothers and daughters alike employing them to explain educational discontinuation. The concepts operated together to create a

coherent ideological system that normalized female educational sacrifice as cultural duty rather than discriminatory practice.

### Community-Level Reinforcement Mechanisms

At the community level, social expectations reinforced these patterns through informal monitoring and evaluation of family decisions. Observational data documented community members frequently praising families where girls discontinued education to support brothers as exhibiting "proper Pakpak values," while questioning families that allocated equal resources to sons and daughters as potentially "wasting resources."

### Institutional-Level Validation

The institutional level analysis revealed how traditional governance structures indirectly reinforced educational inequity. Interviews with *sulangsilima* (customary council) members demonstrated minimal concern with female educational discontinuation, with four of five leaders explicitly stating that a brother's education should take precedence over a sister's when resources are limited, citing *adat* (customary) principles. These multi-level reinforcement mechanisms created a powerful normative environment that naturalized educational inequity.

### 3. The Dual Burdens of Education Discontinuation and Economic Responsibility

Life history analysis revealed that girls who discontinued education consistently experienced a dual burden: loss of educational opportunity combined with assumption of economic responsibility for family support, including brothers' education. This pattern manifested in two distinct but related dimensions: work burden and family responsibility.

#### Early Workforce Entry and Employment Patterns

The work burden dimension was evident in the early entry of participants into formal and informal labor markets. The average age of workforce entry among participants was 15.7 years, significantly below the legally permitted working age of 18 in Indonesia. Work responsibilities typically involved migration to urban areas, separation from family support networks, and engagement in low-wage, often precarious employment.

#### Economic Contribution Patterns

Economic data collected from participants revealed a significant proportion of their earnings was directed toward family support, as illustrated in Figure 3.



**Figure 6.** Distribution of earnings from participants' employment (average percentages)

The analysis revealed that participants retained only 28.4% of their income for personal needs, while directing 42.3% toward general family expenses and 29.3% specifically financing their brothers' education. This distribution pattern demonstrates the "dual burden" experienced by these young women, who not only lose their own educational opportunities but must also financially subsidize the system that privileges their brothers' education.

**Key findings from economic analysis include:**

- Participants enter workforce at average age of 15.7 years (below Indonesia's legal working age)
- Over 70% of earnings directed to family needs
- Explicit financing of male siblings' educational advancement
- Economic inequality framed as cultural duty rather than exploitation

As Mide articulated: "This is my way of fulfilling my duty as a proper Pakpak daughter," illustrating how deeply patriarchal values are internalized and reproduced through economic practices that normalize female sacrifice in service of male educational advancement.

**4. Mothers as Agents of Patriarchal Reproduction**

A particularly noteworthy finding emerged regarding the role of mothers heading households in reproducing patriarchal educational priorities despite their own marginalized position within the patriarchal system. Thematic analysis of interviews with mothers revealed a complex positioning wherein they simultaneously experienced patriarchal disadvantage while enforcing patriarchal expectations on their daughters.

**Internalization of Patriarchal Values**

The internalization of patriarchal values was evident in mothers' articulation of educational priorities, with recurring themes of son preference justified through cultural concepts rather than economic calculation. Linguistic analysis of mothers' statements about educational decisions showed frequent use of adat terminology to legitimize differential treatment, with phrases like "this is our way" and "as Pakpak people, we know" appearing regularly to frame decisions as cultural imperatives rather than situational choices.

**Cognitive Dissonance in Future Support Expectations**

This pattern was particularly pronounced in discussions of future financial security, where mothers consistently expressed expectations that educated sons would provide future support, despite empirical evidence within the community that daughters were more reliable sources of ongoing family assistance. This cognitive dissonance between stated expectations and observed reality suggests powerful cultural narratives operating independently of experiential evidence.

**The Paradox of Female Agency in Patriarchal Reproduction**

The analysis revealed that mothers, despite being victims of patriarchal structures themselves, became active agents in perpetuating these same structures through their educational decision-making. This paradox highlights the complex ways in which patriarchal systems maintain themselves through the participation of those they marginalize, creating what can be termed "complicit agency" wherein marginalized actors participate in their own subordination while believing they are acting in their families' best interests.

## **Discussion**

The findings illuminate the complex mechanisms through which educational inequity is produced and sustained in traditional Pakpak communities, revealing that educational disadvantage among girls results not from simple economic constraints but from sophisticated cultural systems that legitimize and normalize gender-based educational discrimination. The identification of the "patriarchy-poverty nexus" as a central mechanism demonstrates how cultural and economic factors interact to create systematic educational disadvantage that is more severe than either factor would produce independently.

The role of mothers as both victims and agents of patriarchal reproduction represents a particularly important theoretical contribution, challenging simplistic understandings of patriarchal systems as imposed entirely from outside marginalized groups. Instead, the findings suggest that patriarchal systems maintain their power through the active participation of those they subordinate, creating complex dynamics of complicit agency that must be understood for effective intervention strategies.

These findings have significant implications for educational development policy in Indonesia, suggesting that purely economic interventions (such as scholarships or infrastructure development) may be insufficient to address gender-based educational inequity in traditional communities without accompanying cultural transformation initiatives that challenge underlying gender ideologies and power structures.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research illuminates how educational inequity among girls in traditional Pakpak communities results from what researchers term a "patriarchy-poverty nexus"—the synergistic interaction between patriarchal cultural systems and economic constraints. This nexus operates through three mechanisms: cultural values legitimizing male educational prioritization, economic scarcity forcing explicit resource allocation decisions, and a self-reinforcing cycle where girls' educational discontinuation leads to workforce entry that financially supports their brothers' education. The study reveals a pattern of dual marginalization: girls face both systematic restriction of educational access and imposed economic responsibilities to subsidize their brothers' education. These findings challenge purely economic explanations of educational disparity, demonstrating how cultural meaning systems normalize gender-based educational sacrifice as proper cultural practice rather than discrimination. Notably, mothers heading households often serve as agents reproducing patriarchal educational priorities despite their own marginalized position. The researchers conclude that effective educational development interventions must simultaneously address economic barriers and engage with cultural frameworks, creating spaces for communities to reimagine educational priorities in ways that enhance capabilities for all members.

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**Lina Sudarwati (Corresponding Author)**

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,  
University of North Sumatra, Prof. A. Sodian Street No.1 USU Medan Campus 20155  
Email: [lina@usu.ac.id](mailto:lina@usu.ac.id)

**Hadriana Marhaeni Munthe**

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of North Sumatra,  
Prof. A. Sodian Street No.1 USU Medan Campus 20155  
Email: [corresp-author@mail.ac.id](mailto:corresp-author@mail.ac.id)

**Napsiah**

Department of Sociology, Universitas Sunan Kalijaga, Jl. Marsda Adisucipto Yogyakarta  
Email: [napsiah@uin-suka.ac.id](mailto:napsiah@uin-suka.ac.id)

**Erika Revida**

Doctoral Department of Regional and Rural Development Planning, graduate school of the  
University of North Sumatra,  
Jl. Prof. T. Maas, Padang Bulan, Kec. Medan Baru  
Email: [erika@usu.ac.id](mailto:erika@usu.ac.id)

**Tengku Irmayani**

Majoring in Development Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,  
address TM Hanafiah street no 1 USU Campus  
Email : [tirmayani@usu.ac.id](mailto:tirmayani@usu.ac.id)

**Mohammad Reevany Bustami**

Head of Nusantara Malay Archipelago Research, Centre for Policy Research, Universiti Sains  
Malaysia  
Jl. Level 1, Bangunan E42, Chancellory II Universiti Sains Malaysia 11800 USM, Pulau Pinang,  
Malaysia  
Email: [reevany@usm.my](mailto:reevany@usm.my)

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