MOTHERS' HEARTS SPEAKING: EDUCATION ENLIGHTENS, EMPOWERS AND PROTECTS GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

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This small-scale phenomenological interview study explored how seven poor, illiterate mothers in five different slum areas in a bigger city in the Punjab province of Pakistan, viewed the significance of education for their daughters with disabilities. The mothers' views were influenced by cultural aspects and behaviour patterns in the families' context, as well as by individual interpretations of religious and social values. Their views were coloured by previous experiences with an educational system and by their assumptions about the girls' situation when the parents are no longer there. The categories enlightenment, empowerment and protection emerged from the data as perspectives that contributed to an understanding of the mothers' views. In a process of change from a traditional to a more modern society, mothers' feelings of security and trust towards the world out there *will influence their views and efforts regarding education for their daughters with disability. Mothers may need support and help in their encounters with the educational system. Although mothers have a central role, there is a need to bear in mind the complete family and the context when planning and implementing educational programs for girls with disabilities.*

Introduction

It is not only your child with a disability who has problems. Your other children may have as extensive needs. So what can you do? You are the mother of five children, one of whom has a disability. Should you leave your work as sweeper to look after this child? Then you lose your income and perhaps your shelter. Perhaps you have to sacrifice this child in order to prevent the other four from dying from starvation. If this child is a girl, that it may be difficult to get her married, and she will be an economic burden to the family.

This is a field note from a meeting that the second author had with a CBR (Community Based Rehabilitation) worker in a slum area in a bigger city in the Punjab province of Pakistan. The field note illustrates the multifaceted and complex life experienced by families who have daughters with disabilities. In spite of their challenging situation, some families in the slum areas had invested substantial economic and human resources in giving their daughters with disabilities education. This observation motivated a study of how mothers viewed the significance of education for their daughters with disabilities, and of conditions that influenced their views.

Until the end of the 1960s, the possibilities for education for people with disabilities in Pakistan represented *an area, which was not attended to by any agency either on government or non-government level* (Shazadi, 1999, p. 32). Lari (1996) characterizes the educational situation for children with special needs as *neglect and apathy* and as *one of the most unsatisfactory features of the educational system in Pakistan* (p. 344). The situation for girls can be expected to be more critical, since fewer girls than boys have been enrolled in school in Pakistan (Haq, 2000; UNESCO, 2008). Girls' education is especially sensitive to poverty (Jilani, 2001) and they have been the first to be taken out of school if the family needs some of their children to work. *In situations of extreme poverty, people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable* (Ingstad & Whyte, 1995, p. 18). The Western world has presented and sustained the misconception that people with disabilities in developing countries are neglected and isolated to avoid stigmatizing their family members. However, a family's care or lack of care may be a function of household resources rather than a function of attitudes towards disabled family members (Ingstad & Whyte, 1995).

Expectations for behaviour, skills and roles in society define what is considered normal and what is considered a disability. To be able to fulfil family roles and duties, to behave and show respect towards guests, to build affectionate relationships were among the parameters of normality found in a study about *mental retardation* in Bengali families (Rao, 2006).

Studies of parents' and siblings' attitudes towards children with intellectual impairments in Pakistan during the 1990s have found an increase of families in support of education rather than medical treatment. Education may be regarded as a means of empowering the children to become more independent, learn practical skills and general knowledge (Shazadi, 2000; Sulman & Zaidi, 1999).

To understand culture and societal changes

The Pakistani society is primarily characterized by gender complimentarily, meaning that men and women have different roles that are clearly defined and strictly followed (Stang Dahl, 1997; Gilani, 2001). Women are expected to move into the husband's family and take responsibility for the home, care and upbringing of children as well as for the care of the parents-in-law and other family members (Maqbool, 2000). In Pakistani society, large sections are functionally segregated according to gender (purdah). Purdah consists of three elements: *seclusion of women, the separation of sexes and the veiling of women in public* (Klein & Nestvogel, 1992, 37). Papanek (1973) has emphasized that purdah, as it has been practised in South Asia among Muslims, Hindus and Christians for centuries, manifests itself as a *symbolic shelter* as well as gender-separate worlds. The concept *symbolic shelter* is based on the notion that someone needs protection, due to lack of *maharam,* which means that the relationship is not through blood, milk or marriage (Mirza, 2002) and evolves from a basic understanding of sexual tension between women and men that are not *maharam* (Papanek, 1973).

The present study was conducted among Christians, a religious minority group in Pakistan. They interact at various levels with the mainstream culture. It is, however, an oversimplification to talk about *a Pakistani culture* (Miles, 1992). Within an historical and sociocultural context, each individual's pattern of behaviour is unique. Each individual interprets and relates to an environment as *a positioned subject* and *observes with a particular angle of vision* (Ingstad, 1995, p. 247). Life experiences *both enable and inhibit particular kinds of insight* (ibid, p. 247).

One may find different combinations of traditional and modern life styles and understandings in a single society. Traditional habits and customs may be valued as a continuation of previous generations' experiences, and as a means of placing an activity in the continuity from the past, through the present, towards the future (Giddens, 1990). Giddens' (1990) theories about the consequences of modernity and his discussion of individuals' experience of trust, risk and fear when meeting the *advanced world out there* may contribute to an understanding of the transition from more traditional towards more modern societies. Abstract expert systems, such as for example a modern school system, a new economic system and professional medical services, undermine pre-existing forms of local control. Giddens (1991) describes them as *disembedding processes* and *processes of loss* (p. 138) that influence individuals and groups' feelings of security in daily social activity. *Attitudes of trust, in relation to specific situations, persons or systems, and on a more generalised level, are directly connected to the psychological security of individuals and groups.* (p. 19). Parents' perspectives on the importance of education for persons with disabilities must be expected to be influenced by such processes of change and by multiple cultural discourses in a society (Ghai, 2002).

The study

A small-scale phenomenological interview study was conducted with the purpose to understand how mothers view the significance of enrolling their daughters with disabilities in educational programs, and of factors that influence their views.

A qualitative design was chosen in order to investigate the phenomenon *personal meanings* that mothers of girls with disabilities had concerning the significance of education for their daughters and to identify conditions that influenced their views. The research approach was guided by a hermeneutic phenomenological framework (Gall, Gall & Borg 2003). In this perspective, reality is an individual's interpretation of what is perceived as a reality. *To study what something means is to study what it implies to those who understand it* (Shweder, 1984, p. 2). In attempting to grasp the mothers' *meaning as a whole* through examples of their meanings about specific issues, and in order to understand the significance of each specific example in light of the ascribed *meaning as a whole*, the individual's decisions and priorities were interpreted in relation to the sociocultural context.

Identifying issues and preparing for data collection

Over a period of four months, daily visits to the various education programs in five different slum areas in a bigger city in the Punjab province of Pakistan were carried out. Ten employees in a CBR programme for children with disabilities were interviewed in order to identify issues and problems that the employees, the girls themselves and their families were concerned about and in order to decide criteria for the sample of informants.

This preparatory phase also facilitated the interviewer's *inner dialogue* of preconceived ideas, prejudices and emotional reactions to the field of study, an aspect of a hermeneutic approach (Gadamer, 1960). It became clear that one would have to deal with a close confrontation with substantial poverty and with situations illustrating basic injustice concerning access to resources. Feelings of guilt when confronting one's own affluence with others' acute material situations were also to be expected.

The interviewer became aware of issues that might be highly sensitive among the informants and gained experience about how to talk about these issues in an interview situation. The interviewer prepared mentally for possible negative reactions from parents who, in spite of having given their consent to participate, might feel that a foreigner had no reason to look into their family's priorities.

The mothers

The phenomenon was investigated through studies of seven mothers' meanings. The mothers were selected from approximately one hundred Christian families with children with disabilities in different slum areas in a bigger city in the Punjab province, in areas where the inhabitants were very poor and men and women worked mainly sweeping roads, cleaning public buildings and private homes and in other low status jobs.

There were four criteria for the selection of the mothers. 1). The mothers and their husbands were to be illiterate and not having attended school. 2). They were to have daughters with various disabilities who were enrolled in different educational programs, such as special schools and CBR programmes. 3). The daughter's age should be in the range between eight and sixteen. During this age span, girls and boys start to be segregated and must live in *separate worlds* (Papanek, 1973, p. 292). Some girls start to cover their bodies when they are outside their home; their freedom of movement becomes restricted and this may interfere with their access to school sites. 4). Some mothers should also have sons with disabilities.

Interview issues

Each mother was asked to describe her experiences of having a daughter with a disability. The issues covered the support they received, their awareness of educational programs, their views about their daughters' educational and developmental potentials, their views about the purpose of education for children in general and for their daughters with disabilities and the experiences they had with attitudes towards disabilities within their extended families and in their community. The two mothers who also had sons with disabilities were asked about how expectations towards and possibilities for education were the same or differed according to gender. Furthermore, all the mothers were asked to describe experiences relating to the care of their children in general and of their daughters with disabilities. They were asked about their thoughts about the future for their children, across gender and ability/disability.

The daughters

Shakila had a hearing impairment. She went to a governmental special school. One of her brothers also had a hearing impairment. *Nusrat* also had a hearing impairment. She participated in a CBR educational programme. The family had just decided not to accept enrolment in a private special school. *Angela* had a visual impairment. She went to a governmental special school. She had a younger brother with the same impairment. *Saba* had a physical impairment that restricted her mobility. She participated in a basic education group in her local environment and in the CBR educational programme. *Mariam* had an intellectual impairment. She participated in the same programmes as *Saba* did. *Gulnaz* had mobility impairment. It was unclear whether she also had an intellectual impairment. She participated in the CBR educational programme. *Anila* had unusual facial features. It was unclear whether she also had an intellectual impairment. At the time of the first interview, *Anila* stayed at home; half a year later she attended a private school.

Data collection

The second author carried out two in-depth interviews with each of the seven mothers in 2001 and 2002, as part of her Master's thesis at the Department of Special Needs Education at the University of Oslo, Norway (Olsen, 2004). In order for the informants to be at ease, the interviews were conducted in the families' homes whenever possible. During the interview sessions, guests sometimes arrived and siblings were often present. Care was taken to treat all with respect and attend to the usual rules of hospitality while at the same time making arrangements that enabled completion of the interviews and secured sufficient confidentiality**.**

The interviewer had sufficient competence in Urdu for everyday purposes. Nevertheless, a female Urdu-speaking CBR worker with good competence in English served as an interpreter for all interview sessions. Soon it became clear that the majority of mothers preferred to use their mother tongue, Punjabi. So, two additional female CBR workers who were fluent in both Punjabi and Urdu were included as interpreters. All the interpreters were familiar with the issues in focus, since they had sons with disabilities. The interpreters were repeatedly reminded that their role was to translate exactly what the informants said, so the interviewer could discover whatever needed to be clarified. The interpreters sometimes contributed to further clarification and to casting light on certain aspects of the issues under scrutiny.

Translation and transcription

The interviews were audio taped, translated orally from Urdu or Punjabi to English, and then transcribed in English. In order to strengthen the validity of the study, all translations were done by a professor in Urdu, whose mother tongue was Punjabi. The interviewer and translator together studied and interpreted every interview, sentence by sentence. The translator elaborated and explained connotations.

Analysis

The analytical process was inspired by the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the interview sessions, ad hoc interpretations of the informants' expressions and views were made and an attempt was made to verify them by reading them back to the informants during the first or the second interview. The challenge was to continue to have an open mind for alternative interpretations, as described by Miles and Huberman, (1984, p. 26) by first holding *conclusions lightly, maintaining openness and scepticism* and by making them *increasingly explicit and grounded*. After transcription, the material was broken down according to themes and sub themes, sorted and regrouped. By toying with words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and segments, the material gradually developed into interpretations of meaning.

Credibility of the study

The second author's frequent and long-lasting contact with inhabitants in the area where the study was conducted helped to create an atmosphere of trust and confidence during data collection. It also added to an understanding of the sociocultural context and in doing so, to the credibility of the analysis.

Nevertheless, being a well educated, and in this context, resourceful foreigner may have influenced the informants to present views that they assumed the interviewer would appreciate. This may especially be the case in a society where it is considered important to show respect and be polite towards guests.

Two of the interpreters were involved in the CBR program. This may have influenced some informants to not share views that could be interpreted as criticism of CBR workers. On the other hand, the informants may have felt free to express their views in the presence of a person they knew and who already knew *everything* about them, as one mother expressed it.

The data collection phase lasted for one and a half years. The interviewer met the informants informally several times between the two interview sessions, using the opportunities to check the interpretation of what the mothers had said.

Ethical reflections

Prior to data collection there was serious consideration as to whether participation in the study could be expected to have a negative influence on the life situation of the informants and their families. These families had already experienced humiliation through poverty, illiteracy, low-status work and poor housing conditions. All mothers were given information orally about the project. Respect for the families' struggles and appreciation for how they mastered their situation in vulnerable and difficult circumstances was communicated during the interview. Furthermore, this respect has served to guide the analysis. Through the translation and transcription process, no hurtful or derogatory comments were discovered in the interviews. At the time of data collection, there was no reason to fear sanctions towards the families due to the mothers' meetings with a foreigner from a Western country.

Findings

Through examples, metaphors and life stories, the mothers described why and how they considered education to be valuable for their daughters with disabilities. The three categories enlightenment, empowerment and protection emerged as perspectives that contributed to an understanding of their views on the significance of education for their daughters. Certain contextual factors in a society in transition also emerged as descriptions of conditions that influenced their views and decisions about their daughters' education.

Knowledge Enlightens

A new light is shining now, - the light of knowledge (Gulnaz's mother)
The seven mothers emphasized that their positive attitudes towards education for children with or without disabilities, were influenced by a development that had taken place in their society, especially in more urban districts, during the past ten to fifteen years. Gulnaz's mother said, *A new light is shining now. We look at the world*" said Mariam's mother, *and absorb this idea that children should go to school*. Angela's mother explained that a majority of parents now send their sons and daughters to school and that people would talk if their children did not attend school. Shakila's mother claimed that the general development in their society gives their children *more inspiration* to go to school.

If all mothers in the world sent their daughters with disabilities to school, they could live a better life. (Shakila's mother)
The mothers believed that knowledge would enlighten their daughters and have an impact on their quality of life.

> *She herself feels so depressed because of her blindness. (...) I send her to school with the hope of giving her a better life in the future. And do not think that I will send her to the countryside to plough the fields*. (Angela's mother)

Some mothers expressed a hope that their daughters would get a job, while others had no such expectations. *Knowledge, and especially to learn to read and write, is a good idea*, said Saba's mother, *because then Saba will at least live an enlightened life*. The mother used the verb *sawerna* that comes from the word *sawera* that means dawn. They wanted their daughters' lives to be *roshen hona*, which literally means enlightened.

Knowledge empowers

The mothers were more worried about the future lives of their daughters with disabilities than about the future of their sons with disabilities after the parents had passed away. The mothers wanted to empower their daughters as preparation to meet *the fate only God knows*, whether it would be as married women, as mothers, as unmarried sisters or as daughters-in-law living on charity in another family.

Education is for Shakila's own good, since one day she will no longer be ours. (Shakila's mother)
Those mothers, who hoped to arrange marriage for a daughter, were worried about how she would be treated by her future family-in-law. When daughters get married and move in with *strangers in the next house*, parents cannot help or intervene. *We pray: Oh God, give her a good fate (naseeb). Because we never know if we will get a good or bad marriage proposal for our daughters*, said a resource person in the CBR programme. Education was considered the best dowry, especially for their daughters with disabilities.

> *Education is much more important for girls than for boys. Because knowledge will strengthen girls' position in a marriage and they will more likely listen to her and show her respect*. (Anila's mother)

Respect was a word often used by the mothers when they described the importance of education and knowledge.

> *Through knowledge Shakila will be better at keeping her household, she will know how to behave in all situations and for this she will be met with respect in her family-in-law. And what is more important than respect?* (Shakila's mother)

The mothers hoped that if their daughters acquired more knowledge, they would be better equipped when they entered *the next door*. Competence in arithmetic could help a married daughter to be able to keep a household account. *Then the family-in-law cannot accuse you of having put aside money for your own family.* (Saba's mother)

Nusrat's and Shakila's mothers, whose daughters primarily communicated with signs, emphasized the importance of learning to write as a way to communicate with their future family members who could not be expected to master sign language. All the mothers emphasized the importance of being able to write letters back home when their daughters had moved to a family-in-law.

> *Then they can tell us how they are doing*. (Anila's mother)

When we are dust, she can manage her life alone and not be a burden to others. (Saba's mother)
The mothers believed that, through negotiations in their extended families, they would find a wife for their sons with severe disabilities, since their wives would move to join the family of their husband. Angela's mother, for example, expected it to be difficult, but not impossible, to find a wife for her son who was blind. For her daughter who was blind, *it is up to God to decide*.

Physical and intellectual disabilities were especially disabling for women in their traditional roles. *Which mothers-in-law would get up early and serve a daughter-in-law breakfast in bed?* one of the CBR workers asked when she explained the limited possibility for marriage for girls with substantial physical disabilities. Regarding the role of a woman, a girl with hearing impairments like *Nusrat would be able to adapt to the expectations and demands in the environment and in the family. Nusrat can wash, sweep, iron clothes and she can care for herself. [...] She can let others understand what she wishes from them and she is very clever with house work.* She *fetches water for tea, cleans the kettle and makes tea for us. There are no problems, no burden for us.* (Nusrat's mother)
Mothers who expected it to be difficult or impossible to arrange marriage for their daughters wanted them to acquire skills that enabled them to support themselves. *For what can Gulnaz otherwise do when she gets older? [...] We want her to learn sewing and handicraft in the CBR group.* Mariam's mother taught her daughter simple housework skills, since Mariam *will have to spend much time indoors.*

> *We will not be able to arrange a marriage for Saba because she cannot cater for a household and therefore nobody in our family would like to marry her. She cannot live together with her brothers either. So, she needs to learn something. I wish that she would learn to sew. Because she could sit here at home and sew.* (Saba's mother)

Many of the informants feared that their unmarried daughters would be a burden on their family members, all of whom had few economic and material resources.

> *If Anila must leave her family-in-law, she will manage better on her own if she has some education.* (Anila's mother)

... She can read about one hundred ways of doing things. (Shakila's mother)
While Nusrat's mother wanted to take over the training of Nusrat and her older sister herself, primarily wanting them to learn sewing and house work, Shakila's mother wanted her daughter also to learn from others.

> *I have not gone to school. I teach my children through being a model. I wash the pots and tell them to do the same. If a girl is educated, however, she can read about one hundred ways of doing things. I myself can only show her one way*. (Shakila's mother)

Knowledge Protects

These Christian families observed purdah just as the Muslim families in the area did. They referred to purdah as their Punjabi tradition rather than a Muslim tradition. *We live our lives according to purdah*, said a CBR worker. The mothers claimed that knowledge could contribute to giving their daughters protection, just as purdah does. Girls with knowledge about what is right and wrong would be able to take better care of themselves and avoid being abused. *Such girls know how to behave in order not to bring shame upon themselves and us,* said Miriam's mother.

Education motivates more education

Mothers in families that had prioritized education for all their children (Mariam's, Angela's Shakila's and Gulnaz's) referred proudly to educated female family members who were educated and had jobs.

> *I become so inspired when I see the interest and enthusiasm my husband's eldest brother and his family demonstrate when it comes to education even for the girls*. (Mariam's mother)

In the families where children without disabilities attended school for fewer years, where the mothers emphasized the importance of acquiring practical skills like sewing, housework and handicraft, plus Biblical knowledge, there were fewer educated role models (Saba's and Nusrat's).

Mothers need their families' support

It was often the family's oldest member, the father-in-law or the eldest brother, who made the decisions about the enrolment of female family members in school. It was probably Nusrat's grandfather (the father's father) who finally decided that Nusrat should not attend the special school that had accepted her for enrolment. The CBR employees later realized that they had made a mistake in not involving the grandfather in the discussion.

Anila's and Saba's mothers experienced their husbands as less concerned about their daughters' situations. During the last interview session, Saba's mother whispered, *my husband does not know how much I do for this daughter of mine. For her I am the only one who breathes*.

Several mothers had argued with their husbands about their daughters' education. *It is to throw money out of the window,* Anila's father had said. *She will not learn anything this time either*. Her mother had insisted that Anila was able to learn. Later the father admitted that the mother was right. *It looks good*, he said. Shakila's mother emphasized that the entire family had supported her daughter's participation in an educational programme. *We quarrelled a lot*, Shakila's mother said, *but then he* [the husband] *joined me to visit the CBR group and watched the work they did with our children and since then he has supported me one hundred per cent*.

Mothers' care and fear

Gulnaz's mother expressed a fear that all the mothers and other family members seemed to have.

> *My husband could say: You are at home all the time and still you cannot control Gulnaz? Why are mothers at home? It is to look after and watch their daughters*. (Gulnaz's mother).

Saba's mother said that all families lived in fear of what could happen to their daughters. Saba's and Nusrat's older sisters, who were in puberty, mainly stayed indoors in their homes. Although these mothers were Christian, not Muslim, they referred to purdah and izzat (honour). *They said This is our Pakistani culture* or *Punjabi culture* or just *our traditions*.

Nusrat's parents withdrew her from a school for girls with hearing impairments because no one could accompany her to and from school.

> *Because we do not have an older family member who can accompany girls to and from school. And suppose the school bus did not come to take her one-day. Then she would be left to herself on the road. And something could happen to her out there*. (Nusrat's mother)

When Saba's sister reached puberty, she could no longer accompany Saba to the CBR group a few hundred meters from their home. Her nine-year-old brother and some female CBR workers stepped in.

> *In our Pakistani culture it is inappropriate that a man who is not a family member comes to fetch a girl for school or here to the group. He cannot hold her hand or lift her in and out of a bus*. (CBR worker)

Angela's mother explained that presently her oldest daughter was Angela's right hand, giving her practical help, indoors and outdoors. Family members or neighbours that the family trusted accompanied Angela to and from the school bus. *When my oldest daughter gets married and moves away from home, Angela will probably be much more isolated.* Soon Mariam would not be allowed to move around in the local area, and this would be an obstacle to her continued education. Mariam's mother considered her daughter to be not so clever and she expected the knowledge she acquired not to be sufficiently protective, not *a good enough shield*.

Proactive facilitators

The mothers had no knowledge about existing CBR or educational programs for children with disabilities, until CBR workers in the slum area where they lived contacted them. *A woman came*, said Gulnaz's mother *and she said let your daughter come to us and we will educate her*.

> *When she was a child, I often thought about what would happen. If she would ever learn anything. But Mariam has, with God's help, grown up, started to talk and later to walk. And with the help of the CBR workers and ourselves, she behaves very well*. (Mariam's mother)

Resource persons from the CBR project had also helped the parents of Shakila, Angela and Nusrat to apply for enrolment in special schools. They had accompanied the parents to their first meetings with the educational system, and continued to give those who needed it help with homework and financial support for prostheses, glasses and hearing aids.

Discussion

The mothers' views about the importance of education for their daughters with disabilities were related to the aspects enlightenment, empowerment and protection. Each mother's decision in relation to each of these aspects was influenced by the nature of the daughter's impairment, by the need for ensuring the girl's protection and by the support received from the extended family. Moreover, aspects related to mothers' risk-taking in meeting the outside world influenced their views.

Deleted: also

Important aspects of enlightenment, empowerment and protection

The mothers in the present study valued several aspects of enlightenment, empowerment and protection through education. Aspects of enlightenment included acquiring general knowledge, being able to read and write, increasing the prospects of getting a job and *having a better life*.

Aspects of empowerment included being better equipped for a future life either as wives in another family, as divorced or as unmarried sisters. As in a study by Weiss (2001), this study found that many mothers regarded education to be the most important dowry for their daughters. In-laws in the case of divorce cannot take knowledge, as opposed to for example gold, TV sets and furniture, away. The mothers hoped that educated daughters would be met with more respect in a family-in-law, that literacy, numeracy and writing would enable them to communicate with their own family and manage their household economy in their new family, that skills in sewing and other handicrafts would lessen the burden of having them in a household. The protecting aspect included reducing the chance that a daughter could bring shame upon herself and her family and preventing her from being abused.

Some impairments are more disabling than others

Whether impairment represents a substantial disability for an individual depends on a complex relation between the individual's impairment and the needs and expectations of the family, neighbourhood and society. An intelligent and resourceful girl like Saba could be considered seriously disabled even if she only had *lame legs*, as they phrased it, while a girl like Nusrat who has a hearing impairment was expected to be perfectly capable of taking care of a household.

This study has shown that in a society with extensive gender segregation, escort to and from school plus a need for practical help and support represent special challenges for girls with movement and visual impairments or with intellectual impairments. Practical support has to be given by people that the families trust or by family members. Otherwise, access to education after puberty would be difficult or impossible.

Hiding or caring?

Several researchers have drawn attention to the stigma and feelings of shame that families with daughters with disabilities may experience. Stigma may lead to isolation of girls in the family's home (Miles & Miles, 1993; Maqbool, 2000; Shazadi, 1999, 2000). However, as also observed by Ingstad (1995), the isolation or segregation may be interpreted as concern and care. Unmarried women, with or without disabilities, are vulnerable in public in the geographical area of the present study. Girls with developmental disabilities were especially vulnerable. Mothers could not accept practical support from a non-*maharam* male. Miles also notes that many families of girls with developmental disabilities in Pakistan expressed anxiety that their daughter could cause shame on the family's honour, *especially when izzat (honour) is bound up with the sexual innocence of daughters* (1992, 247).

An issue for the extended family

As in Crabtree's study from UAE (2007) and Cavkaytar, Batu, & Cetin's study from Turkey (2008), the mothers had an important task in making their husbands and their families accept the child with a disability. At the same time the mothers had to show due respect to their own roles as females in the families. Grandparents or other heads of the families had to agree and cooperate about necessary economic and practical priorities. Haq claims that *in South Asia it often seems that the interaction between, on one hand, religious and cultural beliefs and practices ("tradition") and on the other, contemporary, globalized social and economic forces ("modernity"), occurs in such a way that structures of patriarchy are reinforced* (2000, 30). Based on experience from research and daily life, Weiss claims that *there is one domain where men wield power over women within a family: in their absolute control over women's mobility* and that men have stopped girls from going to school, from applying for jobs, from travelling, or when to *enter purdah* (2001, 68). The findings in the present study show that mothers' positive attitudes were important, but insufficient, for ensuring that a family decided to have a girl with a disability enrolled in an educational programme.

Taking the risk

The educational system in Pakistan has neglected children with special needs (Lari, 1996). When the mothers in this study prioritized education for their daughters with disabilities, they were not supported by tradition. The mothers showed varying degrees of reluctance, skepticism and trust towards modern life styles. Parents' perspectives on the importance of education for persons with disabilities are influenced by processes of change and by multiple cultural discourses in a society (Ghai, 2002).

The mothers who prioritized education for their children with disabilities expressed more trust and faith in what one mother called *the world out there* than the other mothers did. They were less concerned with tradition as the main guide for making decisions about education for their children. They had tried to influence their husbands to have more positive views on education also for their daughters with disabilities.

The mothers that expressed more scepticism, invested in fewer years of education for all their children and they arranged for earlier marriages. The mothers viewed an exposure to the public outside the slum area as risky. Only when they had confidence and trust in the expert system did they choose to *take the risk anyway*. According to Giddens (1990), trust as a form of confidence, or confidence in something, has a certain pragmatic character, and this is illustrated in the present study.

Research from Arab societies has also shown that women are especially vulnerable in processes of change in societies (Ibrahim & Hopkins, 1977). They live closest to value conflicts and tensions that result from such processes. They are often given the role of managing values and perceptions linked to tradition and at the same time are expected to adapt to changes where old and new values are in conflict (Ibrahim & Hopkins, 1977).

As found in recent studies from South India (Jacob, 2005) and from the UK (Cole, 2005), the mothers in the present study were concerned that their daughters were cared for, treated well and respected within the educational system and by their neighbours on their way to and from school. Another concern was whether the results were worth the risk, meaning that the education was of relevance for their daughters' future life. This study showed that family members, and particularly mothers, need sufficient support and help in their encounters with the expert systems of modernity.

Giddens (1990) describes access points as points of connections between lay individuals and representatives of abstract systems. The CBR program functioned as an access point for these families. CBR employees, teachers, administrative personnel and school bus drivers were especially important. The CBR workers' facilitation helped the mothers to take the risk, to establish trust and open the path towards educational programmes for the girls with disabilities.

Conclusion

The study illustrates the interaction between, on one hand, cultural aspects and behaviour patterns in their context, and on the other hand individually positioned actors within this context, as described by Ingstad & Whyte (1995). The complexity of values, attitudes and choice that was found within a single neighbourhood, illustrates this. Weiss's (2001) studies of society and gender in Pakistan, especially in Punjab, support these findings of diversity in family interpretations of religious and social values, own preferences and traditions – factors that affect, for example, whether or not daughters are sent to school. The mothers who already had children in school were most eager to get their daughters with disabilities into school. They had already met the school system, and this may have reduced the feeling of risk and fear that Giddens (1990, 1991) describes, and may have contributed to building some trust in meeting the outside world and letting someone outside their family take care of their daughters. Some had also experienced that a modern school system may contribute to more knowledge than one mother may, or to read about *one hundred ways* as one mother in this study phrased it. In a process of change from traditional to more modern societies, mothers' feelings of security and trust towards professionals and the school system will influence their views and efforts regarding education for a daughter with a disability. Some mothers will need assistance from proactive facilitators, such as CBR workers in this study had done.

The mothers' views about the value of education, as enlightening, empowering or protecting, were influenced by their assumptions regarding the future roles of their daughters. All mothers hoped that education would protect and empower their daughters when the parents *are dust*. They were concerned that the girls would learn something that would enable them to either support themselves or contribute in a future extended family or family-in-law, whether they would stay unmarried, would marry or become divorced. A hearing impairment was expected not to interfere with the ability to do housework and with the possibility of being married, while a visual impairment or mobility impairment would. Some mothers emphasized the value of being able to read and write letters as a means for a married daughter to keep in touch with her family and for a girl who is deaf to communicate with family members. The mothers expected an educated girl to be met with more respect in a family-in-law.

The consequences of a specific kind of impairment may differ depending on contextual factors. In order to protect a girl's and family's honour, transportation or escort to and from school may be needed for girls who cannot walk alone or who, for example due to an intellectual impairment, do not know how to behave in a way considered acceptable in that specific socio-cultural context. The transport or escort must be given by a family member or by another person that the family trusts.

Strategies and programmes aiming at achieving Education for All, must ensure that girls with disabilities are targeted. Mothers' voices should be listened to, as they have a central role concerning their children's education. Unless mothers experience that education meets real needs of their daughters with disabilities and unless they trust that their daughters with disabilities will be protected and be met with respect in school, families may not prioritize education for their daughters with disabilities.

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