

# Parental Concerns During their Children Aptitude Test and Professional Education in a Medical College of Balochistan: A Qualitative Study



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**OBJECTIVES:** To investigate the parental experiences during their children Aptitude Test and professional education (MBBS and BDS).

**METHODOLOGY:** Ethical approval was obtained from Bolan University of Medical and Health Sciences (BUMHS) and a qualitative study was conducted during the month of May 2025. Data was collected from parents of 10 students studying in different years of professional education (MBBS and BDS) in Bolan Medical College, Quetta through structured interviews (education, safety measures, language barriers, financial constraints, accommodation, transport and accessibility to educational resources) to investigate their concerns regarding challenges and obstacles they experience during their children Aptitude Test and professional education.

**RESULTS:** Parents cited illiteracy and Language barrier as the prominent challenges during the Aptitude Test, accommodation and financial constraints were the second most alarming challenge faced by the parents living in rural area or periphery. However, parents living in Quetta city were satisfied with educational resources and recognized the coaching center as a source of good academics for their children, on the other hand, those living in rural areas reported limited access to educational resources. The highest obstacles presented by the parents were safety measures during the Aptitude Test and to pursue professional education (MBBS and BDS).

**CONCLUSION:** Parental concerns recognized considerable challenges both during the Aptitude Test and pursuing their children's professional education (MBBS and BDS). Those living in rural areas and/or the periphery face difficulties due to the lack of accessibility of educational resources and coaching centers in their areas and transport, accommodation, safety measures and financial constraints when they move for education to urban areas. The study emphasizes the need for targeted measures to satisfy parental concerns by supporting their children during Aptitude Test and in academics to address these challenges.

**KEYWORDS:** Parental Experiences, Challenges, Obstacles, Children, Aptitude Test, Professional Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Though each child possesses unique abilities, temperaments and propensities that play a central role in forming and reforming their behavior,

aspirations and achievements.<sup>1</sup> However, parents also play a pivotal role in their child's academic and personal development".<sup>1</sup>

Although several national and international studies have explored the challenges faced by medical students during aptitude tests and professional education, parental perspectives on the challenges their children face during the Aptitude Test and subsequent professional education have not been adequately explored in the existing literature.<sup>2,3</sup> Studies focused marital difficulties on their child's professional education, lack of facilities and awareness about education,<sup>4,5</sup> limited resources, shortage of colleges and non-availability

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of transport problems for providing graduate level education to their children.<sup>5,6</sup>

In the past challenges during the Aptitude Test and professional education (MBBS and BDS) of students were assessed and discussed.<sup>2</sup> However, parental concerns regarding challenges and obstacles faced during the Aptitude Test and professional education of their child were not discussed before. Discussing their views in this research work in return provides an understanding of the challenges and obstacles faced by parents of students during Aptitude Test and in pursuing medical and dental education and will give valuable insights for policymakers and educational institutions in developing targeted interventions and support systems to solve these challenges and obstacles to satisfy parents, ultimately fostering a positive atmosphere with a healthier workforce.

## METHODOLOGY

After obtaining ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of Bolan University of Medical and Health Sciences, Quetta (IRB No. 1061/BUMHS/25, Dated: 26th May 2025) a qualitative phenomenological approach was used to assess the parents' experiences during their child Aptitude Test and professional education (MBS and BDS).

The interview questions were already applied in a study done in 2024 on female students of the Bolan Medical College, Quetta, due to cultural similarity and the parents belong to the students of this college.<sup>2</sup> The validity (face and construct) of this questionnaire was acceptable whereas the reliability index was 0.75. Ten parents of successfully get admission in MBBS and BDS students from Bolan Medical College, Quetta, after clearing Aptitude Test and who consented to participate, were interviewed to explore during the Aptitude Test and professional education. While those who regret to participate or are unable to provide informed consent were excluded. Questions were asked orally and were audio-recorded by the trained staff from the participants.

**Data Collection Tool:** An interview guide (Annexure I) including Parental Literacy, Financial Constraints, Language Barriers, and issues related to Transport and Accommodation during Aptitude Test and in professional education (MBBS and BDS) was used.

**Data Collection Procedure:** Data was collected in May 2025. Ten parents were recruited from BMC in the oral pathology department and half an hour was given for each participant to give their concerns about challenges and obstacles as factors during the Aptitude Test and professional

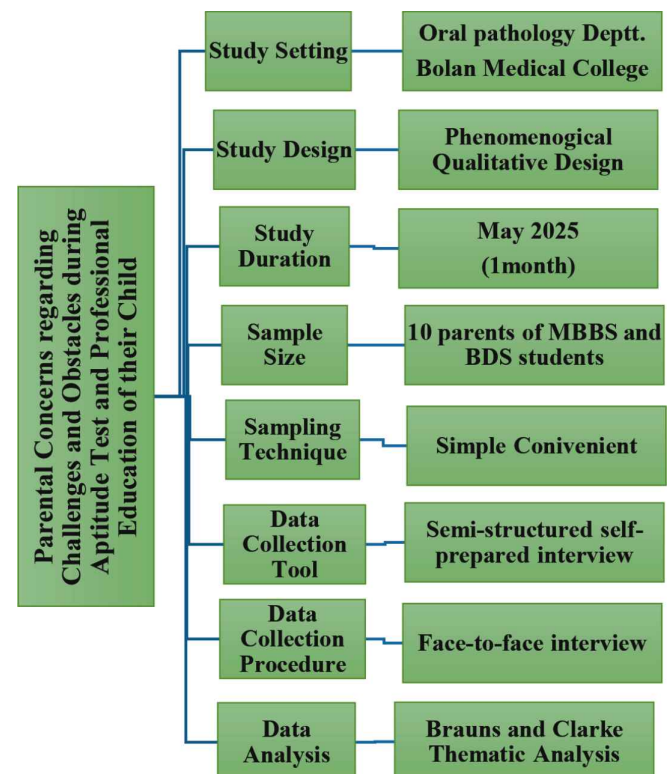
education of their children. Before starting interviews participants were sensitized about challenges and obstacles and then their concerns were categorized into themes and subthemes.

The interview questions from Khan NF (2025) study were further refined using expert validation and pilot testing of the content for clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness. Further modifications and revisions were done in interview and discussion guides based on expert feedback. The interview was done in the local language (Urdu). To ensure its credibility it is translated by a bilingual Expert and then translated back by another expert. confidentiality was confirmed and informed consent was taken from all recruited participants.

**Analysis:** Interview responses were carefully heard and transcribed by the researcher, and the transcriptions were randomly checked for correct use of wordings by hearing the interviews again. The transcript was formatted and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to admission challenges.

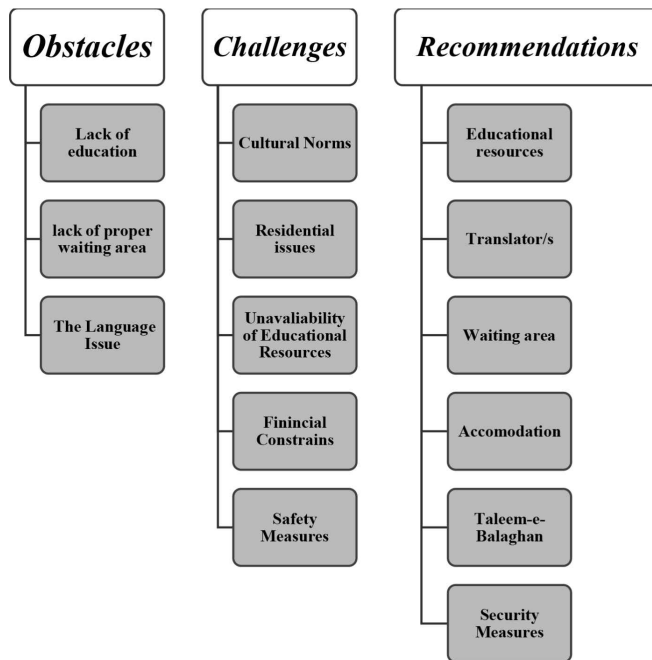
Two researchers carefully converted the audio recordings and field notes into written text, which was subsequently reviewed by the principal investigator for quality assurance. The data was manually coded according to thematic areas

**Figure 1:** Step-by-step guide for Methodology  
Designed by Author Nabiha Farasat with SmartArt of Microsoft Word



and descriptions that surfaced during the analysis phase. The analysis primarily utilized an inductive coding approach, allowing themes and patterns to arise directly from the data, with open coding techniques applied to ensure a comprehensive examination of the dataset. Tables were employed to organize the substantial amount of information collected. Related codes were consolidated to create overarching ideas or themes within the database. Figure 1 presented the step-by-step guide for methodology. Thematic analysis was used to examine interview responses, aiming to uncover recurring themes associated with admission

**Figure 2:** Demonstrates Themes (obstacles and challenges and recommendations) and sub-themes



challenges, Figure 2 presented themes and subthemes. There were themes including a. Obstacles during Aptitude Test and admission in professional education b. Challenges during primary data collection, c. Recommendation.

## RESULTS

Ten parents were recruited to assess their concerns regarding the challenges and obstacles they faced during the Aptitude Test and the professional education (MBBS and BDS) of their children. Eight parents (80%, 8/10) children were MBBS students and were from rural areas and they visited Quetta for their child's Aptitude Test. The majority (70%, 7/10) of parents (both mother and father) come with their child to heighten their motivation, stamina and courage, father of only 2 (20%, 2/10) students come with their child and only 1 (10%, 1/10) of the female students was brought

**Table 1:** Demonstrating demographic view of study participants

Participants details	N= (%)	Participants Details	N= (%)
Participants from periphery	6 (60)	Participants from Urban area	4 (40)
Educated participants	3 (30)	Uneducated participants	7 (70)
Parents of MBBS Students	8 (80)	Parents of BDS students	2 (20)
Students come for Aptitude Test with both mother and father	7 (70)	Students with their father only	2 (20)
Students with her brother	1 (10%)		

**Table 2:** Presents Obstacles and Challenges faced by Parents during Aptitude Test and Professional Education of their children.

Perceptions of Parents of both Urban and Rural Areas face		
Themes	Subthemes	Participants Quote
Obstacles	<u>Language Barrier</u> Parents use Pashto, Brahvi, Balochi and find it difficult to convey their perspective to others	They said, "I was worried about my daughter because the test was too late, I felt very uncomfortable, so I asked another parent about this delay, but he was unable to understand my language." Others confirm this barrier as a major factor in the connection between persons. They said "We were thirsty and tired but a nearby person was unable to understand my words. I was in great trouble."
	<u>Illiteracy:</u> Parents were illiterate. Some are, matric pass.	Parents believe that their illiteracy affects their children's academics. They recognize education as an essential component that plays a crucial role in children's academic success.
	<u>Waiting Area</u> Parents complain lack of sitting area.	They said "we in the meantime didn't have any specific area for waiting and the road was blocked due to over-crowding of vehicles (cars, motorbikes, etc.) we were very tired, there was no water for drinking no shop for snacks.
	<u>Cultural Norms</u> Social life of residents of rural area is limited with no communication between females with males	Parents accepted that "We were confused when we saw a huge crowd, we belong to rural areas and were not used to such crowded and mix-gathering, nor our children were used to these situations which makes a big problem for both of us." Some disclosed that "our communication skills are weak, we speak our mother tongue and during Aptitude Test we face language barrier to contact
	<u>Concerns of Parents residing in Rural Areas or Periphery:</u>	
Challenges	<u>Lack of Coaching Centers</u> There is absence of coaching centers in periphery which negatively affects the academics of children's	Parents complained that "our children were strained during Aptitude Test preparations, as we are living far away from Quetta and have issues in accommodation." Some parents stated that "we are poor and we didn't afford hostel accommodation for our children, our children didn't have much money to buy two meals a day for themselves. As many of us are unable to afford the Aptitude Test fee that's why many children miss out on medical and dental admission." They said that the "majority of us are from outside Quetta and our children faced difficulties in coaching.
	<u>Safety Measures</u> Parents recognized deficient safety measures that didn't match the cultural norms during the Aptitude Test	One of them said "During the Aptitude Test we were asked to stay outside the premises of the test center. There were too many students, all boys and girls were gathered in one place which is against our cultural norms <sup>10</sup> which made tense atmosphere between us. There was a lot of rush. We were getting nervous because of this unexpected situation. We stayed here for too much time without eating anything and we were tired as there was no place for sitting the ones who came with students. When asked about their perspectives on the most significant hindrances during the Aptitude Test, they recognized "safety measures as major concerns, followed by financial issues."
	<u>Faced by Parents of both Rural and Urban areas during their children's professional education (MBBS, BDS)</u>	
	<u>Parental illiteracy</u>	Parents accept that their child suffers due to their illiteracy. They said; "If I was educated I can help my child in her education and learning and can understand his problems but as I am uneducated I am unable to solve his problems."
	<u>Financial Constraints:</u> Parents recognize financial barriers in their children's academics.	They informed us that "there are deficient rooms in girls and boys hostel and we were asked to accommodate our children's in hall or private hostels till they get space in college hostels. Our children's belongings in the hall are not safe, other children use their things without permission and sometimes things get lost. Living in a private hostel is not feasible for us, this is against our cultural norms, we feel unsafe for our daughters and financially burdened to the parents of both boys and girls. Many of us moved back to our homes as we were unable to afford private hostel fees and we are unable to allow our children especially daughters to live alone in private rooms/hostel, we are scared and it is against our cultural norms." <sup>12</sup>
	<u>Safety Measure:</u> Parents of hostilities recognize safety measure as a main concern during their children's professional education	They declare that; "during their stay in a hostel when there is strike administration asked their children to vacate the hostel." it is very difficult for our children to vacate their rooms and leave the hostel as they didn't have much money to pay for private rooms. We belong to a poor family and are unable to pay private room fees."



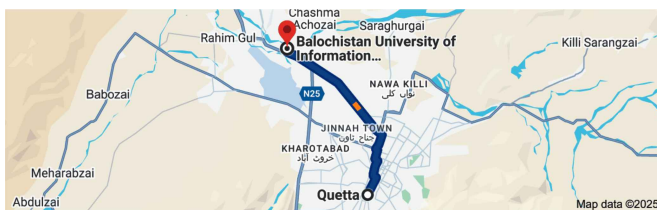
to the center by her brother for this test. Table 1 demonstrates demographic details of participants whereas Table 2 present themes, subthemes and views of participants.

## DISCUSSION

The study was among the first to explore the parental concerns on challenges encountered during the Aptitude Test for medicine and dentistry and professional education in Balochistan. The analysis of the study revealed main challenges faced by the parents were cultural norms, residential issues, unavailability of educational resources, financial constraints and safety measures whereas lack of waiting areas with proper management of daily requirements of the washroom, water and snacks shop, illiteracy and language barriers were most prevalent obstacles during Aptitude Test.

BUITMS is an engineering university situated 9 kilometers away from Quetta city (Figure 3).<sup>7,8</sup> Administration of Bolan University of Medical and Health Sciences (BUMHS) and Bolan Medical College Quetta (BMC), combined select BUITMS for Aptitude Test due to its huge intra-structure and availability of multiple halls that merge a big crowd of students appear in Aptitude Test every year.<sup>8</sup> In previous years it was conducted at University of Balochistan

**Figure 3:** presents the distance of Takatu Campus BUITEMS from Quetta city i.e. 25 min (13.2 km) via Baleli Road.<sup>7</sup>



but it caused a rush and roadblock as UoB is located within the city and student's late arrival at the test center makes it difficult to start and conduct the test on time. Therefore, in the last few years, the Aptitude Test has been conducted in BUITMS, situated at Baleli Road. Due to its feasibility, it's preferred by the administration of BUMHS and BMC. The parents sat the whole day in sunlight without any basic facilities (waiting rooms with separate male and female washrooms, water and snacks shop). Taking some essential steps in favor of stake holders including providing waiting area along with separate male and female wash rooms and snacks shop make it easy to the parents to pass the time during their children test. Another obstacle faced by the parents was the language barrier which enabled parents to express their issues/requirements and/or concerns to others. Providing assistance and or a translator at the test center can resolve this obstacle.

Parental education,<sup>9,10</sup> financial constraints<sup>11</sup> and cultural norms<sup>12</sup> are the factors that often hinder student's higher education supported by Khan NF in 2018 and 2022.<sup>13,14</sup> Geographically, Balochistan has a vast and resourceful landmass. The population is small, scattered, and poorest as compared to other provinces of Pakistan due to a lack of employment opportunities.<sup>14</sup> Rural accommodated areas are seventy-three percent,<sup>16</sup> with a large number of poor<sup>14</sup> and unemployed population without formal education, training or skills.<sup>13</sup> A illiterate father and/or mother, lack of financial resources and lack of awareness are the factors that hinder parent's positive attitude and unavailability to participate actively in their child's education.<sup>3</sup> For illiterate parent's government started a program Taleem-e-Balighan in the past which should be restarted. For employment private and government sectors (central and/or provincial level) should generate productive employment opportunities.<sup>13</sup>

In the province of Balochistan, a big gap existed between the urban and rural areas. In rural areas a large number of the population (73%)<sup>14</sup> has no basic opportunities for obtaining education consequently rural areas development is progressively slow.<sup>11,17,18</sup> Ishfaq (2018),<sup>5</sup> Habeeb R (2022)<sup>11</sup> and Chachar ZA (2023)<sup>16</sup> recognized the lack of facilities in rural areas including resources of schools/colleges, incompetent/low qualified teachers,<sup>19</sup> socio-cultural influences and lack of coaching center deficient graduate level education. Parents of students residing in rural areas are not satisfied with these limited facilities. There is a need for quality education with qualified and skilled faculty, and technical facilities (multimedia and projector) to enhance quality education. Skilled and competent teachers produce and heighten cognition and change agents that's why a trained skilled and competent teacher is a pre-requisite to student's development and best learning.<sup>11</sup> Along with allocation of a good amount of budget to run the educational process smoothly. Teacher training programs should be initiated to polish the skills of teachers according to the latest trends in education. Parents should be taken as stakeholders in forming educational policies to compensate for the requirements of student's education.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding the availability of educational resources, the findings demonstrated a lack of educational resources<sup>19</sup> and limited access to coaching facilities in rural areas highlighting a geographical disparity that may hinder Aptitude Test aspirants from these regions, exacerbating the educational resources in rural gap.<sup>2</sup> This gap can be filled by providing coaching facilities in rural areas, appointing highly qualified teachers in rural areas in government sector to help those unable to pay fee to coaching centers or to move towards urban areas for better education.

The mindset of the people is dominated by the culture

of the area they live as cultural values didn't change. In rural areas of Balochistan and KPK people have limited social life and males and females don't communicate with each other and if so they struggle a lot to cope.<sup>20</sup> That's why it was a main concern of the parents that boys and girls were gathered in the same place. However, not all of them admit it seriously and didn't like it. They said "Mix gathering is out of our norms and culture that boys and girls gathering is not our culture. Our daughter does parda and due to a huge crowd and students sitting mixed in test it is not possible to continue their cultural norms." For such conditions, the administration should prepare a hall for those who feel uneasy in a mixed environment.

Transport was another obstacle<sup>21</sup> during the Aptitude Test. Parents belong to rural areas and those of low income feel it difficult to reach the test center at times. Rickshaws ask for too much charges for this route, they take unfair advantage of parent's compulsion. The government, administration BUMHS and BMC combinely provide transport buses for those who didn't have access to reach the center. The administration should announce specific locations where parents and/or students reach the time to come to the test center free of cost. This will reduce the parental pressure on reaching timely at the test center and many of them send their children by bus by sure.

It was the first study that assessed parental concerns regarding challenges and obstacles during the Aptitude Test and professional education of their children. It also provides recommendations to stakeholders (BUMHS, BMC and Government) to solve the obstacles and resolve challenges faced by parents. This study assesses parental experiences of a large population (around 5000, in 2024)<sup>22</sup> of the students appear in Aptitude Test.

### LIMITATIONS

However, as the study was qualitative it focused on a very small group of participants in a single institution (BMC) which may limit the generalizability of results. For more reliability in results, views of parents from other provinces of Pakistan may be included. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from parents introduces the possibility of response bias.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Further studies could explore the impact of suggested initiatives and limitations including i. financial, ii. language and iii. literacy variables by incorporating data from multiple centers where the Aptitude Test will be conducted by PM&DC, broadening the sample size and implementing of

quantitative study design to include a more diverse representation of participants to reduce parental concerns. Expanding the study to incorporate qualitative methods, such as focus groups or interviews, would deepen understanding of parental perspectives on societal and institutional barriers.

### CONCLUSION

The study highlights parental concerns regarding challenges and obstacles including illiteracy, lack of waiting areas, availability of basic human needs during Aptitude Test and language as a barrier. Financial constraints, lack of educational resources in rural areas and safety are the major obstacles parents face during the Aptitude Test and in the professional education of their children in MBBS and BDS at BMC. Notably, illiterate parents living in periphery face more challenges as compared to those living in urban areas of the city. The findings underscore the need for targeted measures, such as enhancing safety measures and transportation options and promoting education programs in periphery and/or rural areas, to address the structural barriers.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *During Aptitude Test:*
  - i. Translators to overcome the language barrier
  - ii. Waiting Room along with Wash Rooms availability (separate for males and females), water coolers and snacks shops.
  - iii. Transport for students and parents
2. *Parental Illiteracy:*
  - a. Educational programs for the elderly (Taleem-e-Balghan) and primary schools for each district and tehsils
3. *Financial Issues and Safety Measures:*
  - a. Low-cost educational resources at the periphery, free Education with scholarship for Poor Candidates
  - b. Proper safety measure within the center of the Aptitude Test.
4. *Teachers Training Programs for Rural Areas*

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None

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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