

Hina Iqbal

Hina, my name is Hina.

I plan to teach but I've also learnt to do beauty parlour work. So I might go into that field too.

My age, I'm 17, I think.

NARRATOR

He now lives in Korangi, an industrial area in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi. As in the rest of the country, many people here don't like women to go outside the home and consider it unnecessary for girls to get a higher education.

Hina Iqbal

People often don't want to educate their daughters. Others want to but can't afford to.

NARRATOR

But the times and necessity are bringing changes.

Hina is the youngest of five sisters. Her mother, Sahrina, never attended school but her sister studied 'til the eighth and tenth grades. The family's circumstances have led to Hina becoming the first girl in her family to go to college.

Hina Iqbal

Education teaches you the difference between right and wrong. You become more aware of people's problems. If a poor girl goes to school, she knows what financial problems she may face and how she can cope. She notices other girls like her and wants to help them, support them.

NARRATOR

Hina's only brother and one sister died young. Some years ago, her father, a bus conductor, was fatally electrocuted while installing some wiring outside their house. Sahrina, her mother, has never had a job before. She had four young daughters at home. At that time, Hina was still at school.

Hina Iqbal

When my father died I was in eighth grade. My mother couldn't afford the fees. Since then, children have been coming to our house to study, so we can pay the fees.

NARRATOR

Sahrina thought it necessary for Hina to continue her education, to ensure a better future. But her in-laws were also pressurising her to move in with them.

Hina Iqbal

They wanted her to sell the house. They said we'll get you a house, we'll look after you. But we thought if they never helped us while we were here, what would they do there? My mother refused to sell the house. She said to them, you can even take the girls away.

NARRATOR

The eldest uncle took Sahrina's four older daughters away but Hina stayed with her mother.
HINA (Translator)

Within a year by sisters came back home. Mother was very ill and I couldn't look after her alone. Before I could manage.

Sahrina is still often unwell but she is thankful that they own their house and manage to get by.

All the girls make their own clothes and they also make clothes for their neighbours to earn money. They also teach children the Koran but without any charge.

Hina pays for her college fees by tutoring school children. She earns some extra cash by occasionally making up brides and applying henna for festive occasions.

Bride

When she finishes it will look prettier. You can't tell what it is right now.

NARRATOR

The sisters also earn money by preparing clips for purses and shoes. They get four rupees. About 14 cents for every 250 clips.

The eldest sister, Suvara works in a factory. This is a first for the family. But instead of providing moral support, their relatives began gossiping.

Sahrina Iqbal

They'd say, look, Iqbal's daughter is working. His wife is working. She's working in people's homes. I listened and listened. I kept quiet. Then I said, if you cover our daily expenses, I'll keep my daughters at home.

Hina Iqbal

My mother wanted at least one daughter to have a higher education. Before, to be honest, I wasn't so interested. But when I saw how keen she was, I also felt I must continue. At least up to twelfth grade. I wouldn't be able to study further if my father was here. Definitely not at college level. He was very strict about purdah. He wouldn't even let my sisters go out of the door, only I would come and go. Now, it's essential. Obviously I have to study, otherwise how will we manage? When father was here, he took care of all the expenses, there were no worries.

My sisters weren't that interested in studying. I mean they knew he wouldn't let them study further so they thought why bother.

NARRATOR

In this conservative society, it is considered more important for girls to marry than to be educated or have a job.

Hina Iqbal

When my sisters marry, someone will have to stay with mother.

She's often ill as I've already told you. I love my mother very much, so I'm not keen to marry.

NARRATOR

Sahrina hopes that at least Hina's education will be useful if she does not marry.

Sahrina Iqbal

If she gets a good job, the two of us, we'll manage.

NARRATOR

Hina and her sisters have little opportunity for fun.

But sometimes they go to the beach with their friends.

Hina Iqbal

I want to do something which will be of benefit to me and others. Like teaching or doing some beauty parlour work. I mean so I can save up and open a school.

Even now there are some children I don't charge.

NARRATOR

When they are given the chance, girls often do better academically than boys.

Hina Iqbal

The girls I teach are much keener than the boys. Some boys are but only one or two.

In college too, most boys aren't that keen to study.

NARRATOR

But the girls who venture out face many problems.

Hina Iqbal

Obviously as I go to college, on the way, people talk. Let them. You should feel OK about yourself. I don't take these things too seriously. But the route, it's difficult, it's quite a distance. Once, two boys started following me. I told them off myself.

NARRATOR

When she gets the chance, Hina sometimes watches TV.

Hina Iqbal

There's a drama that I like called Kum-kum now that the character, Chanda, has come into it. Actually I didn't like it so much before but now. Look at Chanda's courage. She has no-one. But she does everything for the sake of her brother.

NARRATOR

Hina and countless other girls like her in Pakistan face their problems with courage.

For them, obtaining an education or getting a job is itself an act of courage. In the long run it is not just they and their families who benefit, but all of society.