



Contents list available <http://www.kinnaird.edu.pk/>

Journal of Research & Reviews in Social Sciences Pakistan

Journal homepage: <http://journal.kinnaird.edu.pk>



EXPLORING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS RELATED TO CHILD/EARLY MARRIAGE IN PATRIARCHAL CULTURE OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The present study aimed to explore the psychosocial factors related to early age/child marriages in Patriarchal Culture of Pakistan. The present research has been performed with qualitative method consisting of Interviews of professionals from different walks of life, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with young adults from all provinces of Pakistan. The objective was thus to comprehend the phenomenon of early marriage in roots of patriarchal bases. Child marriage persists in South Asia because administrations have not done enough to end the occurrence of early age marriages. Early age marriage is rooted in and perpetuates existing patriarchal power structures that have led to women's subordination to and dependence on men in society. By exploring the psychosocial consequences guidance can be provided for developing the practices to prevent child marriages, this research can work in collaboration physical and psychological health professionals to initiate positive steps for betterment of child brides within Pakistan by providing professional help to people who have been married young. This research paper is an initial phase of the main research, the main research will be in quantitative in nature and will be conducted on actual stakeholders, who have been married young. Present research concluded that people in Pakistan have mix feedback regarding early/child marriages. Positive psychological impacts like adaptability and fulfillment of sexual needs whereas negative impacts like forced responsibilities and dysfunctional emotional growth has been identified through thematic analysis of interviews and Focus Group Discussions.

Keywords

Child Marriages; Patriarchal Culture;
Psychosocial Factors; Qualitative Research;
Thematic Analysis; Pakistan



1. Introduction

Traditional practices encompass acts of extreme brutality that have predominantly targeted individuals of the female gender within specific populations and cultures for an extended duration, to the extent that they are regarded, or presented by the perpetrators, as inherent to their cultural customs (Bunch, 1997). However, it should be noted that men are not exempt from such practices within certain families and cultures (Rabaan, Young & Dombrowski, 2021). These practices encompass a range of offenses, including crimes related to dowry, honor killings, disputes over female inheritance and property, early marriages, preferences for male offspring, female genital mutilation, mistreatment of women, acid attacks, and virginity tests (Saranya, Vijaya & Priyadharshini, 2017). Among these, child or forced marriages and violence based on honor are particularly pervasive (Denov, 2017). When above mentioned harmful traditional practices are explored with local context, we came to know that all of these practices prevail in Pakistan as well. First, it is not concern of Government of Pakistan or any NGO, so the occurrence of FGM is hardly get reported. In Pakistan, mostly in Sindh's Capital Karachi, the occurrence of FGM is common in Bohra Community, Bohri young ladies becomes the victim of this brutal act (Julios, 2018). Like remainder of South Asia, Pakistan has an exceptionally man centric culture that means it has patriarchal society. Thus, the wish for having son is a predominant and generally pervasive traditional value that is reinforced by feudal frameworks, which saturate multiple parts of country (UNFPA 2019). Girl child is viewed as a burden by parents in both cities and villages,

particularly when the price of dowry is increasing day by day (Royan and Zaidi 2011). Indeed, the discriminatory practice of prenatal sex selection has already taken root elsewhere in the region, leading to unequal Sex Ratio Births and child sex ratios (CSRs) in several South Asian societies. The preference of having sons has been indicated in the research that took place in Pakistan. Gender discernment can be decreased by effectively talking son preference at all tiers (Atif *et al.*, 2016). Child marriage, is defined to be a legal union before reaching to the age of 18, portends minor's psychological health and creates numerous defilements of their constitutional and human rights (UNICEF, 2005). In many circumstances all over the world, the practice has been made known to have deep physical, rational, psychological and affective influences, for female children as well as male children (Baylies, 2000). It is most prevalent in Asia and Africa and least prevailing in North Africa and the Middle East (Birech, 2013). Internationally, those progenies most influenced by early age marriage are financially underprivileged people, residing in country sides, and could not attend schools and have no access to participate in labor force (Delap, 2013). Females under age of 18 years are suggestively more likely than boys to be married as child (Joireman, 2018). The matter of Child Marriages is fairly communal and persistent practice and tool of violence and exploitation against female's members in society on the basis of gender and it is considered to be one of core reason of growing population in the region of south east Asia as well as Pakistan (Naveed & Butt, 2015). To some extent countries from South East Asia are having the

identical atmosphere and influences like religious following, rigidness, economic disparity and low levels of education which are considered congenial for child marriages. Though these countries are taking some steps to diminish this practice of child marriage but still a lot efforts are required to end it completely. Researchers quote that South Asian region is second top region with the highest rates of child marriages (UNFPA, 2010). Therefore South Asian region is a pivot for great populace progression as well as early age marriages. The pervasiveness of early age marriage has considerable difference in south Asia between and within countries. Bangladesh is said to have the maximum incidence of early marriages in the constituency (66 per cent) and then followed by Afghanistan (57 percent), Nepal (51 percent) and India (46 percent) (Zhang, 2017). Alike to other nations, the incidence of child marriage in Pakistan is greater in rural areas (37 per cent) as compare to urban areas (21 percent) (Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2011). Testimony of International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) says, “The Maldives has the lowest rate of child marriage in the region with just about 4 percent followed by Srilanka (12 percent) and Bhutan (14 percent)” (Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2011). One of the report on human rights quoted that Maldivian families often went to India and Pakistan to carry out the practice of early age marriage because it is prohibited in their own country (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2013). It has been reported in past that except for except for Pakistan and its neighboring country Afghanistan, above mentioned six states (countries) has the permissible age of marriage as 18 years. Sharia Law

has been followed by Pakistan and Afghanistan which permits the girl to marry at age of 15 and 16 (Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2011). According to recent reports, however, the age of marriage in Pakistan is 16 for women and 18 for men due to the Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) of 1929. The second revision of the Child Marriage Restraint Act was rejected by the National Assembly in May 2017. The proposal would have raised the national marriage age from 16 to 18. A change to the Penal Code that will make the punishment for child marriage more severe was approved by the Parliament in February 2017. Lawbreakers risk a minimum of five years in prison and a maximum of ten. A punishment of up to one million rupees is also an option (UNICEF, 2017). Child marriage continues to be a prevalent issue in various parts of the world, with Pakistan being one of the countries deeply affected by this harmful practice. Child marriages not only violate the rights of children but also have severe psychosocial consequences. To tackle this complex problem, research aimed at exploring the psychosocial factors related to child marriages in Pakistan is crucial. This article delves into the significance of such research, highlighting its potential to inform targeted interventions and policies to mitigate child marriages and improve the well-being of young individuals in Pakistan.

1.1 Determinants of Child Marriages

Pakistani culture has been intensely entrenched in civilizations and cultural practices. These cultural practices and norms stress the early age marriages specifically of girls and that too even without their consents (Nydell, 2018). Because in that kind of social settings, females are bounded to stay in their

houses and to be dependent on their male members of family. But that does not save the male members from the practice of early marriages, men suffer equally from this practice. Child grooms are almost as much common as child brides (Gaston, Misunas, & Cappa, 2019). In Pakistan, monetary, religious factors and social cultural practices are considered to be core drivers of prevailing practice of early marriages.

1.1.1 Preserving Traditions

The key aspect motivating the occurrence of early/child marriage is safeguarding of the cultural norms by people who are in favor of such practices for the sake of their so called societal positions in certain localities. Recognized as a habitual norm, early age marriage is typically nowhere in on to social analysis or research (Morgan, 2007). Commonly, it is well-thought-out a everyday issue in order to preserve ancestral and communal approval, furthermore, early age marriage is in exercise to sidestep any aberrant actions that might result in stigmatization and being socially disliked (Naveed & Butt, 2015). Traditional practices such as early marriage can both shape and be held in place by social norms. More specifically, norms surrounding early and forced marriage can allow people to coordinate the marriage 'market' such that it adheres to religious and traditional customs. Keeping Pakistani perspective in mind, these traditions include watta satta, vani, karokari etc (Veen, Moorten, & Durani, 2018). Child marriages are culturally affected by deeply ingrained conventions and traditions. Early marriage is frequently prioritised by patriarchal ideals, gender inequity, and cultural expectations as a way to safeguard family honour, restrict female

libido, and perpetuate traditional gender roles. Poverty and economic considerations also play a role, as families may see child marriage as a way to relieve financial difficulties or secure family bonds (Arora, 2022).

1.1.2 Notion of Honor

In many communities, the concept of family honor is tied to female modesty and sexual purity. Early marriage is perceived as a way to safeguard the family's reputation and prevent premarital or extramarital relationships. The fear of social stigma or gossip can pressure families into arranging child marriages to protect their perceived honor (Brandt, 2020). Honor denotes a value-system with norms and traditions (Begikhani, Gill & Hague, 2015) wherein its meanings in various societies are constantly subject to contestation (Pope, 2004). Having male friends, having boyfriend, making decision of marriage by their own self and going out of house being alone are some behaviors and actions considered to be shameful (Begikhani *et al.*, 2015; Sen, 2005). Out of the social edifices that prompt early age marriage, the conception of 'honor' (izat) seems to be the very vital aspect of the treatise. There is typically a noticeable stress on parents to get their female offsprings marry in early age so that they do not have sexual relationship without marriage. Same goes for boys, parents fear of child being involved in any kind of illicit relationship and end up marrying them early (Robles, 2018). Early age marriage consequently, turns into easy way for parents to get rid of their burden of safeguarding the honor of family. It is a habitual conception that early age marriage is an easy way through to stop

contravening sexual activities among youngsters (Naveed & Butt, 2015).

1.1.3 Preserving Authority and Control

Early age marriage is frequently used as a mechanism to preserve gender based power and authority. There is general observation that girls when young can be tamed easily in the ways elders want them to. It has been observed that Watta satta (exchange marriages) is one of the tradition that helps families to uphold the balance among their exchanged relationships in marriages of their daughters' in-law and daughters. In exchange marriages, one set of couple has been observed to child or minor at least. The male heads of the families take decisions of marriages in families and youngsters need to be obedient and submissive to those decisions (Hadi, 2017). Because the vast number of early age marriages are minor females to aged males, the imbalance of age difference in these relationships is often linked to physical exploitation. This exploitation can also have prolong devastating impacts on girl's mental health (Elder, 2018).

1.1.4 Illiteracy or Lack of Education

Early marriage and lack of education are directly related (Liere & Bhutta, 2017). Since a girl must leave her parental house when she gets married and any investment in her is seen as a waste, parents are unwilling to fund a daughter's education. A girl's chances of continuing her education after marriage are also very poor because of her limited mobility, domestic responsibilities, childrearing, and social norms that prohibit marriage and education (Muhanguzi, Bentebya, & Watson, 2018). The likelihood that their children, particularly girls, will pursue an education is further limited by the

illiteracy or lack of education of their parents. In contrast to boys, girls' education has no value, which frequently prevents them from attending school (Naveed & Butt, 2015). Thus, early marriages become the most coveted method for initiating females into taking on domestic obligations, which will be their future (Tahir, 2017). According to a number of surveys, the majority of females who do have the chance of enrolling in school, drop out before the eighth grade. Due to the fact that females must get married and undertake duties inside the marriage, parents generally do not see the value in investing in their education. Due to this fact and other factors, several societal constraints appear to be involved and have formed a significant barrier to girls' education. These goals appear to be reliant on the family's capacity and resources to fund the girls' education, as well as on enabling variables such school accessibility and safety (UNICEF, 2011).

1.1.5 Socioeconomic Status of Family

Child marriage is generally common in economically poor nations and this practice in most frequent in most under privileged families. It is very much related to the low economic development and poverty. In families with restricted assets, child marriage is frequently seen as an approach to accommodate their girl's future. Yet, young girls who are wedded young are bound to be poor and stay poor. Families who are under privileged, fathers do not have finances to school their children so they find it easy to get them marry as soon as possible to get rid of burden and responsibility (Elder, 2018). They do not see their future anywhere else except tying the children into burden of responsibilities, because they think that when the children will have

to tackle with their responsibilities they will automatically begin to have stress regarding doing something to handle their financial constraints. So, one noticeable causal reason for early age marriages is insufficient finances. A penurious parents may consider a child financial stress and that must be detached by marrying them early. Around the world, it is considered more feasible to marry the kids at younger age because it costs lower expenses. Especially when we consider child brides, the price of dowry is lower when the girl is young in many countries. When rural Pakistan comes under consideration, poverty is also one of major reason for early marriages. In case of females, parents most often marry their daughters early by claiming that it is better decision for her well-being, as her expected husband would satisfy her financial requirements in more meaningful way. So it can be concluded that poverty, Lack of financial support, and lack of literacy are key causes of early age marriages in Pakistan (Nussbaum, 2001). Families tend to attach the phenomenon of less financial status with females due to their incapability to get jobs and give to the family finances. So they are taken particularly in villages as a person with no financial perks (Case & Deaton, 2003). Child marriage is considered as escape gate for poverty, evidence from other rising states from the world discloses that in fact it deteriorates the cycle of inter-generational poverty (Khawar, Sohail & Shariq, 2010). Poverty and economic factors play a significant role in perpetuating child marriages. Families living in poverty may view marrying off their daughters at a young age as a way to reduce the economic burden, secure resources, or form alliances with wealthier

families. This perspective stems from the belief that early marriage will transfer the responsibility of the girl's well-being and livelihood to the husband's family (Satiadi, 2021).

1.1.6 Patriarchy (dominancy of males on females)

Hadi (2017), explained another reason of the prevalence of early age marriages in Pakistan. Patriarchy supports male control and decreases substitute chances for females. In developing countries the role of girls is portrayed according to the societal norms, rules and societal expectancies of being a respectable women, wife, sister and daughter. It is considered that only married women can have status and value in families and society. The main reason of marrying girls at very young age is to control their sexuality and their mobility. Young girl's sexuality is controlled by his husband. It is considered important to uphold women's sexuality to preserve the honor of family (Constantinides, 2017). Gender discrimination is not completely off the table as a cause of child marriages. Pakistan is a patriarchal society where women are mostly expected to undertake domestic tasks (Kabeer, 2016). When married young, girls' mobility is limited to the household so she loses her opportunity to have education and career. Early age marriage continues the phenomenon of gender discrimination and girls are continued to be dependent on their male superiors. Sadiwa (2007) disclosed, the core reason for prevalence of early age marriages and other alike traditional practices is gender discrimination, and these practices actually letting patriarchy survive and bloom (Sadiwa *et al.*, 2007, p. 24). In Pakistani tradition, fathers pick where and when their children

will get married. In Pakistan, "pervasive patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted traditional and cultural stereotypes regarding the roles and accountabilities of males and females in the family, at the job, and in the social circle at large, that create severe difficulties to women's satisfaction of their human rights," the UN Committee on CRC expressed grave concern (UN Committee on CRC, 2009, para 28). Pakistani society is largely patriarchal, with entrenched gender roles and power dynamics. The belief that men are superior and have authority over women persists, resulting in the subordination and control of girls and women. Child marriage, in this context, is seen as a means to protect family honor, maintain male dominance, and control female sexuality (Zulfiqar 2022).

1.2 Psychosocial Consequences of Harmful Practice of Child Marriages

1.2.1 Personal Development and Inadequate Socialization

UNICEF (2001) explained that child marriage, alongside practically no schooling, financial reliance, no power of decision making in family, and sexual abuse negatively influence the emotional wellbeing. A girl child is considered to be emotionally more attached to her parents as compared to son. She is more inclined to mental pressure and strain due to separation from parents after marriage. Numerous young girls get distressed after the occurrence of their early marriage. They experience the aversive effects of a powerlessness to appreciate things, think that it's hard to rest and eat, face fixation issues, and experience sensations of blame and diminished confidence. Child marriage

usually let girls be isolated leaving her support groups and friends (Santhya & Jejeebhoy, 2003).

1.2.2 Violence and Abandonment

It has been observed in a study from South Asia that girls who have been early are extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation and physical violence by their partners and in-laws (Sen, 1997). UNICEF (2005) stated in their report that among the girls who have been married before the age of 18, domestic violence is more prevailing.

1.2.3 Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a psychological state where an individual communicates positive inclination about what he has done or has had the option to accomplish. Whatever one does, its legitimacy is resolved as far as satisfaction it brings to the doer. A satisfied and fulfilled girl can improve change and adjust the interior and outer environment, lessen the pressure and increase concordance at home. A satisfied girl gives due respect to others' sentiments, is caring and lenient to other people and when all is said in done is more careful, less tricky, less touchy and less critical (Narang, 2011).

1.2.4 Health

The health conditions of a married girl will decline. Health is one among the foremost important aspect to worry about in life but in child marriages girls face such devastating health consequences. Earlier sexual intercourse and pregnancy can harm the physical health of a woman. At this young age, their bodies still developing where they didn't have any idea about their sexual and reproductive health. This will make different sorts of medical conditions to them, for example, hormonal imbalances, HIV/AIDS, infections relating genitalia etc

(Hampton, 2010). More than that, they likewise face higher pace of deaths during child birth. Usually the victims are the girls in between the age range of 15 to 18 because it is a hard and complicated process for them to give birth in this age. They vulnerable to face pregnancy related injuries such as obstetric fistula (Lee & De Swlet, 2006). When they get married, serious prevailing burden constrained them to prove their fertility by getting pregnant as soon as possible. It makes them get pregnant frequently which can cause a long-term health issues. They even cannot negotiate with their partner for safe and consensual sex practices or family planning. This thing not only harm to them but also give suffers to their children as well. The 50% of newborns of a mother under 20 often die during child birth or die within the first week. Even they born safely, they will tend to face health issues too because of the unhealthy gene of their young mother (Drew, 2022).

1.2.5 Social Isolation and Dependency

Child brides are isolated from their peers, families, and support networks. They are thrust into adult roles prematurely, lacking the necessary skills and autonomy to navigate their lives independently. This dependency perpetuates a cycle of disempowerment and limited opportunities for personal growth (Qureshi, 2022). Addressing these negative outcomes and understanding the complex interplay of legal, cultural, and socio-economic factors is essential to developing effective strategies to prevent child marriages and safeguard the well-being of children in Pakistan.

2. Rationale of the Study

The purpose of the research is to achieve in depth understanding of early age marriage, about how such a phenomenon can exist and how to make life better for those who have been married in their early age. Thus, understanding the early marriage happening in the context of patriarchal grounds is the goal. South Asian legislatures haven't done enough to stop child marriage because the practice still occurs there. According to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 2016 early marriage has its roots in and maintains the patriarchal power systems that have caused women to be subordinate to and dependent on men in society. In order to combat early marriage, authorities must take significant action to eliminate the discriminatory patriarchal norms and labels that are prevalent in South Asia, especially those that are reflected in the law and encourage early marriage (True, 2016). So, the next objective of present study will be that to provide basis for initiating policy for ending child marriages. By exploring the psychosocial consequences guidance can be provided for developing the practices to prevent child marriages, this research can work in collaboration physical and psychological health professionals to initiate positive steps for betterment of child brides within Pakistan by providing professional help to girls. Early marriage is linked to ideas, values, and routine behaviours in Pakistan. Sometimes it entails the resolution of real estate issues, the repayment of debts, and exchange weddings (Shah & Cheema, 2017). 21% of Pakistani females are reportedly married before they are 18 (Mustafa, Zakar, Zakar, Chaudary & Nasrullah, 2017). The currently

available research on child marriages in Pakistan is quite contradictory. As the researchers have identified the causes but no one has explored the alarming consequences of this harmful practice that leaves a mark on delicate minds of children. On the other hand most of the work in current domain is available in respect to reproductive and maternal health ignoring psychosocial consequences/factors that are resulted from practice of child marriage. Also it is aforementioned that root cause of child marriage is patriarchal culture, in past patriarchal cultures have been studied with gender based violence (Hadi, 2017), but not with child marriages. So, there is pressing need to investigate the phenomenon of child marriages with reference to patriarchy in Pakistan. Child marriage is a pressing issue with significant implications for the psychosocial well-being of children, particularly in countries like Pakistan. Research focused on exploring the psychosocial factors associated with child marriages in Pakistan holds immense importance in understanding the underlying dynamics and developing effective strategies to address this problem.

3. Method

3.1 Objectives

The current study aimed at exploring the phenomenon of child marriages with reference to psychosocial determinants and consequences connected to it specifically in Pakistani culture. The purpose of investigating the phenomenon of child marriages is that it is one of common traditional practice with which certain forms of psychosocial factors are connected but not fully explored. Another aim of investigating the present phenomenon is to

develop the standardized measure of patriarchal beliefs, as the concepts are very much interrelated but there is no culturally relevant scale available to measure it among participants.

3.2 Method

The qualitative method was used to explore the phenomenon with the help of interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). On the basis of literature review, interview guide (Annexure A) was prepared to probe the participant's opinions and experiences about the phenomenon of interest. It contained questions mainly designed to explore the nature of phenomenon, its determinants and consequences. Open ended questions were formulated in the interview guideline and was updated after initial interviews. Questions included were like, "in your opinion who is child?" The interview guide was initially developed in English Language and afterwards translated into Urdu. The reason behind translation of interview guide was to obtain culturally relevant information and opinions regarding the phenomenon. After each interview and FGD, any new issue raised by the participants, that seemed to be very relevant to our research objectives, the interview guide was revised and questions regarding latest categories were added. Likewise questions that seemed to be irrelevant or repetitive in nature were deleted after initial interviews. So in the end we had refined our interview guide into questions regarding broad categories that almost cover all aspects of the phenomenon was finalized. There was no harm caused to any living being in this research so this research exempt for approval institutional ethical committee.

3.3 Sample

Interview participants were selected through purposive sampling technique. Interviews were conducted with professionals belonging to the professionals who are directly or indirectly somehow relates to the experiences with people who have been married as child. Six interviews were conducted. Sample included 2 *psychologists* ($n=2$ female) 2 *anthropologist* ($n=2$ males), 1 *gender study expert* ($n=1$ female), 1 *sociologist* ($n=1$ male), 1 *lawyer* ($n=1$ male), 1 *Religious Scholar* ($n=1$ female), 1 *Doctor* ($n=1$ female). The participants of the study were selected based on their experience with child and gender rights in their professional capacity. Focus group Discussions (FGDs) on the other hand were conducted on provincial level to get the culturally relevant information regarding the phenomenon from each province of Pakistan. Each FGD consisted of five to nine participants. Inclusion criteria for FGDs participants was to be a graduate or higher level educated with age between 25-45 years old. From Sindh province there were 9 participants ($n= 9$, 7 Female, 2 Male). In FGD of province of Punjab, there were 8 participants ($n=8$, 6 Female, 2 Male). The sample of FGD conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was consisted of 5 participants ($n=5$, 4 Female, 1 Male). The FGD conducted with people from Baluchistan comprised of 6 participants ($n=6$, 2 Female, 4 Male). Although the region of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) is not declared province but the customs and traditions of its people are unique in its own way, so we considered it necessary to note down the opinions of people belonging to that specific vicinity. So one additional FGD was

performed with participants from G-B, there were 5 *Female* participants who participated.

3.4 Procedure

At first semi structured interviews were conducted with professionals and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with people from four provinces of Pakistan and from region of Gilgit-Baltistan. After getting their consent they were assured of confidentiality and informed that the data provided by them and their names will not be disclosed anywhere in the dissertation. The information will only be used for research purpose. Rapport building was done with the participants so that they will easily share the information and their personal view points about the child marriage practice. All the interviews were recorded by taking their prior permission and participants were briefed that recording is only for transcribing the data.

4. Results and Discussion

The data drawn by interviews was then analyzed by using thematic analysis in order to gain an in-depth perspective about the phenomenon of child marriages. In the social sciences, thematic analysis is a common method of systematic analysis. In a thematic analysis, the researcher carefully analyses the data to find recurring themes, subjects, concepts, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly. In the current study the approach of Braun and Clarke (2012), were adopted. Thematic analysis proposes a handy and tentatively supple method to analyzing qualitative data. Therefore, interviews were carefully transcribed initially and later on through open coding (line by line) transcription were done. Line by line coding is the process of naming each line on each page of the written data. In next phase

of axial coding subcategories were formulated; codes which are similar in nature or show certain relationship with each other are integrated. This technique is convenient as it allows the researcher to cluster similar coded data into categories because of some common features. In the last phase of the analysis process selective coding was done with an Table 1 shows themes and its subsequent categories that have emerged out of professionals' interviews. The analysis resulted in the identification of sixteen

aim is to draw a core category by grouping the subcategories of similar nature or concept. Similar categories were then clustered, and themes were drawn out. Core categories helped to generate an indigenous theory on the phenomenon of child marriages.

4.1 Results

major themes and subsequent category of each theme.

Table 1: Indicating the themes, categories and sub categories of Psychosocial Factors extracted by thematic Analysis of Qualitative data

Serial no.	Themes	Categories	Sub-Categories
1	Psychological Impacts	Positive impacts	Premature wisdom Adaptability Fulfilment of sexual needs Prosperous life in consensual marriage
		Negative impacts	Forced responsibilities Coerced sexual relationships Post-Traumatic Stress Dysfunctional Emotional Growth Deteriorating physical health Issues arise with pregnancies Peripartum-Postpartum depression Social pressures

4.1.1 Psychological Impacts:

Psychosocial impact is defined as the effect caused by environmental and/or biological factors on individual's social and/or psychological aspects. The data from interviews and Focus group Discussions (FGD's) in current study comprise of two types of psychological impact on individuals:

4.1.1.1 Positive Psychological Impact:

Positive Psychological impact or affect can be defined as one's tendency to practice constructive emotions and interrelate with others and with life's encounters in a positive way (Diener, Thapa & Tay, 2020).

- a. *Premature Wisdom:* it was observed in interviews and FGDs that people think, when a child is married early, they tend to develop prematurely. It is believed in south

Asian including Pakistani cultures that kids become wiser and more responsible, if they get married in their early age:

“To me, I think there are positive impacts of early marriage as well, both girl and boy becomes prematurely wise and intelligent with their experiences of life” (Sindh FGD, participant no. 2).

- a. *Adaptable*: for girls it is supposed that at young age they are easy to be trained and they get trained as per rules and systems of their in-laws household. If they get supportive spouse, they feel fulfilled with respect to their wishes and desires:

“When we live with somebody from childhood, we become used to either ignoring their bad habits or by accepting the fact of their personality. So it becomes easy to tolerate each other and be accepting as well. So the life becomes harmonious and adjusted well for spouses” (anthropologist no.1). They get this sense of security and protection by their spouse.

- b. *Fulfillment of Sexual Needs*: it is believed that marrying children early leads them to be sexually satisfied in legal and acceptable way:

“We belong to society where we are taught that marriages can be delayed until an individual becomes financially stable. However marriage has no link with finances rather it has connection with sexual needs. So in my point of view if an individual gets married early, he/she can satisfy his/her sexual needs in legal way through their spouse rather being involved in illicit sexual activities. As our religion and society does not permit us to be in sexual relationship out of wedlock” (anthropologist no.1).

- c. *Prosperous Life in Consensual Marriage*: If both male and female are married with their consents even in early age marriage, they will end having prosperous and happy life:

“I got married at the age of 26 or 27, to me it was a late marriage. Because if I have been married young, I might able to be more involved in physical games with my kids and spend more quality time with them. So there is nothing bad in getting married earlier if both spouses give their consent” (anthropologist no.1).

4.1.1.2 Negative Impacts:

Negative affect or impact includes feeling the world in a more adverse way, feeling undesirable emotions and more unconstructiveness in relationships and surrounds (Young & Mikels, 2020).

- a. *Forced responsibilities*: both male and female who are locked into early age marriages tend to be enforced by responsibilities which are not aligned with their interests that leads them to kind of severe distress. Because those responsibilities are being forced and individuals are being burdened by them:

“Burden of responsibilities on young couples lead them to experience low self-esteem, they loss their sense of identity and at certain age they fight with identity crisis. Especially in case of girls, they get confuse about which living style they to opt, either one they brought up with or the one with which they have been burdened by their in-laws” (Interview with psychologist no. 2).

“Child marriage is prohibited under law of Pakistan, but people freely violate it. At the age of playing

with their toys, people marry them off” (interview with Lawyer).

- b. *Coerced Sexual Relationships:* in Pakistani society, it is not considered important to educate children about their sexuality, it is supposed that they will learn by their own. So when marrying young, the dilemma is that the relationship and sexuality cannot be placed on hold for such potentially long periods of time that leads to coerced sexual relationships:

“Our Society is hypocrite, when we are young nobody allows us to even speak word sex. There is no sex education at all and when a child gets married, they do not have a clue about what they have to do actually and how to take it forward. After marriage specially girls are being forced into sexual relationship that in turn is very dangerous for her mental health as well as physical health” (Sindh FGD, participant no. 4).

- c. *Post-Traumatic Stress:* Most of times the sexual activity is forceful for young girls in this process that leads them to sexual trauma:

“As there is no sex education in our society, the sexual intercourse act as a traumatic event for a child rather than pleasing one. I am not specific about girls, it can be as traumatic for boys as well because they don’t know about the thing exactly” (Punjab FGD, participant no. 4). That sexual trauma in turn leads them to post traumatic stress.

- d. *Dysfunctional emotional growth:* In Pakistan, cultural, religious, and ethnic practices that have been the subject of this study have resulted in extreme

marginalization of people who marry young in a variety of arenas of life, which has had a detrimental psychological effect. These detrimental psychological effects result in personality deficits and abnormal emotional development:

“Although a child hits puberty and their physical growth seems to be perfect, they still needs to be psychologically and mentally mature. I will talk about girl child here, their mobility and socialization is very restricted along with no exposure to external world in our social system. They have always been dependent on their parents but all of sudden they get burdened by new responsibilities and decision making that leads them to experience adverse psychological impacts like personality disorders in later life” (anthropologist no.2).

- e. *Deteriorating physical Health:* specifically female children who are married in early age face physical health issues due to the issues of early and unintended pregnancies, sexual trauma, sexual transmitted diseases, having no knowledge regarding birth control methods and infant mortality etc:

“Our children has no know how of their reproductive health and married life. Out of shame they do not even ask anyone to guide them, which in turn leads them to experience certain infections and diseases” (Interview with Doctor).

- f. *Peripartum-Postpartum Depression:* For most women, having a baby is a very exciting, joyous, and often anxious time. But for women with peripartum (formerly postpartum) depression it can become very distressing and difficult. Peripartum

depression refers to depression occurring during pregnancy or after childbirth. The use of the term peripartum recognizes that depression associated with having a baby often begins during pregnancy. In girls who are married in their early age, sexual trauma usually leads to peri and postpartum depression that make girls experience anxiety, isolation, guilt and shame:

“The trauma from sexual intercourse stays with girls lifelong. Early marriage leads them towards early pregnancy. Then for proving their fertility they get pregnant with short intervals that makes them mentally exhausted and depressed. That stress and depression is projected by them to their kids then” (Interview with Psychologist no. 2)

g. Social Pressures: Compared to adult women, early married girls are more likely to seek out and use health care. This kind of physical, emotional, and social abuse results in more severe psychological traumas like immobility, loss of self-confidence, and even among girls who were in school, early marriage impeded their education and caused severe depression and complexes from other girls who had good educational backgrounds and career opportunities that they lost:

“Early married couples develop lifelong issues that makes them anxious and depression. All those anxieties of always being dominated by other decisions in their life lead them to generational crisis” (Gilgit-Baltistan FGD, participant no. 4).

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings of this study that there are both positive and negative psychological impacts of child marriages. On one hand, early marriage was associated with notions of premature wisdom, adaptability, and fulfillment of sexual needs within the boundaries of a legal union. Some individuals expressed the belief that consensual marriages, even at a young age, can lead to prosperous and harmonious lives. These perspectives highlight the cultural and contextual factors that influence perceptions of child marriages in certain societies. On the other hand, the negative impacts of child marriages were significant and far-reaching. The forced responsibilities imposed on young couples often led to distress, loss of identity, and low self-esteem. Coerced sexual relationships, stemming from a lack of sex education and awareness, resulted in trauma, post-traumatic stress, and compromised mental and physical health. The restricted mobility, socialization, and educational opportunities experienced by child brides contributed to dysfunctional emotional growth, including personality disorders and abnormal emotional development. Moreover, social pressures and the societal marginalization of those involved in child marriages created additional psychological burdens, such as anxiety, depression, and a sense of generational crisis. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies and interventions to address the complex and detrimental consequences of child marriages. Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners must prioritize the well-being, rights, and empowerment of individuals affected by this practice. Efforts should focus on

promoting education, raising awareness about sexual and reproductive health, providing access to support systems, and challenging the social norms that perpetuate child marriages. By addressing the root causes and supporting the affected individuals, it is possible to mitigate the negative psychological impacts and create a pathway towards a healthier and more equitable society. In conclusion, this study has provided a nuanced understanding of child marriages by examining the psychological impacts associated with this practice. The identified themes and categories offer valuable insights for guiding future research, policy development, and intervention strategies aimed at eradicating child marriages and safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable individuals. It is crucial to work collectively towards creating a society that respects the rights and dignity of every individual, ensuring their safety, empowerment, and freedom from the harmful consequences of child marriages.

6. Implications

The findings of this study on child marriages in Pakistan have specific implications for various stakeholders involved in addressing this issue. Based on the research, the following precise implications can be drawn for the article:

6.1 Policy and Legal Reforms:

Policymakers should prioritize the enforcement of existing laws and develop comprehensive legislation that addresses the root causes of child marriages, such as poverty and gender inequality. Efforts should focus on implementing and monitoring the legal framework to protect children, ensure access to education, and empower girls and women.

6.2 Education and Awareness:

Comprehensive sex education programs should be integrated into school curricula and community initiatives. Awareness campaigns targeting children, parents, community leaders, and religious institutions should be developed to challenge traditional beliefs and norms surrounding child marriages.

6.3 Health and Support Services:

Healthcare professionals should receive training to provide culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care to child brides. Accessible health services, including reproductive health and mental health support, should be made available to address the specific needs of individuals affected by child marriages.

6.4 Empowerment and Skill-building:

Efforts should be made to empower girls through education, vocational training, and economic opportunities. Creating an enabling environment that supports girls to stay in school, acquire skills, and access income-generating activities can help break the cycle of poverty and increase their agency in making decisions about their lives.

6.5 Community Engagement and Collaboration:

Collaborative efforts involving government agencies, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and community members should be initiated. Community engagement programs should promote dialogue, challenge harmful practices, and foster awareness and acceptance of alternatives to child marriages.

6.6 Research and Monitoring:

Further research is needed to understand the contextual factors contributing to child marriages in

different regions of Pakistan. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of interventions and policies will help assess their effectiveness and inform future initiatives aimed at combating child marriages. By addressing these precise implications, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners can work together to combat child marriages in Pakistan and create a society that upholds the rights and well-being of children and adolescents, ensuring their protection and empowerment.

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