



RESEARCH PAPER

Understanding the Role of Patriarchy in Perpetuating Child Marriages in Pakistan: A Qualitative Exploration

¹Maria Muzaffar Janjua* and ² Professor Dr. Anila Kamal

1. Lecturer, Department of Psychology, University of Wah, Wah Cantt. Punjab, Pakistan
2. Vice Chancellor, Rawalpindi Women University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author: mariamuzaffar1592@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the means in which patriarchal structures influences child marriage practices in Pakistan and comprehend how gender-based power dynamics contribute to the continuation of this problem. Pakistan is one of the top six nations in the world for child marriages, which poses a serious societal issue with detrimental effects on the education and development of females. Social scientists, religious scholars, medical professionals, and people from the community participated in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews as part of the study's qualitative research design. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data. The study showed that child marriages are perpetuated by oppression based on gender and hierarchical social structures. A recurring topic that strengthened patriarchal beliefs was son preference. The idea of "patriarchy derived from matriarchy," in which mothers unintentionally perpetuate traditional gender norms, was a novel discovery. Implement community-based programs that address patriarchal beliefs and empower women, especially mothers, to challenge traditional practices.

KEYWORDS Child Marriages, Matriarchy, Patriarchal Beliefs, Psychological Health

Introduction

Traditional practices against female gender, including FGM, son preference, abortions, forced marriages, bride kidnapping, honor crimes, stoning, flogging, forced pregnancy, wife inheritance, maltreatment, dowry violence, acid attacks, and virginity tests (Rabaan et al., 2021; Saranya et al., 2017). Pakistan's patriarchal society values fatherhood, with sons more prevalent in rural areas and daughters seen as economic burdens. Son preference influences childcare and child sex ratio Asia (UNFPA, 2013)

Literature Review

Child marriage, a legal or customary union before age 18, negatively impacts minors' well-being and violates their constitutional and human rights. It is prevalent in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, with the most affected being poor, rural, and unable to attend school or participate in the labor force. Females under 18 are more likely to be married as children (Muzaffar, et. al., 2018; Joireman, 2018; Naveed & Butt, 2015). South Asian countries face similar challenges to the global average for child marriages, including poverty, illiteracy, and religious fundamentalism. Despite some initiatives, the region's high rates, which are the second highest globally, suggest a need for more significant efforts to eliminate this issue (UNFPA, 2013).

The South Asian region is a hub for population growth and child marriages, with Bangladesh having the highest prevalence (66%), followed by Afghanistan (57%), Nepal (51%), and India (46%). Pakistan has a higher incidence in rural areas (37%). The legal age for marriage in other countries is 18 (UNICEF, 2017). The significance of gender roles and the value of personal autonomy and choice have been investigated in relation to Pakistan's changing child marriage situation in recent years (Javed & Mughal, 2021). This paper critically examines the impact of gender roles on child marriages in Pakistani households,

emphasizing the need for reevaluation of traditional gender roles and empowering individuals.

Child marriage in Pakistan persists due to socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors, despite attempts to regulate it during British colonial rule and the 2013 Sindh Child Marriage Restriction Act. Pakistani culture is deeply rooted in traditions and customs, often prioritizing child marriages, especially for females, even without their consent. Traditions often assign female roles within households, relying on male family members, and early/child marriage is common to maintain ancestral approval and avoid social ostracization (Naveed & Butt, 2015; Ahmed, et. al., 2015). Honor, a value-system, is crucial in child marriage, often used to maintain power and control, with young women often not consulted in decisions (Hadi, 2017). Early marriages often lead to girls' education being limited due to illiteracy and societal expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities over education (Muhanguzi et al., 2018).

Child marriage is prevalent in poor countries, often among poor households, due to poverty, low economic development, and illiteracy, with young brides often unable to afford education (Elder, 2018). Child marriages, often secret or unrecorded, are linked to human trafficking, hindering understanding of prevalence and hindering the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (Mikhail, 2002). Son preference in Pakistan significantly influences family dynamics, decision-making, and child marriages, contributing to gender inequality and influencing parental decisions (Javed & Mughal, 2019). Javed and Mughal (2020) research on son preference patterns in Pakistan highlights the significance of understanding son preference for comprehending child marriage issues.

Additionally, Javed and Mughal (2022) added to the body of literature. The study explores how Pakistani girls' life choices and educational opportunities are influenced by their son preference, potentially leading to early and forced marriages. Chaudhry et al. (2020) studied son preference in Pakistan, highlighting its relationship with child marriage and its impact on sociocultural norms.

Hadi (2017) argued that child marriage in Pakistan is a result of patriarchy, cultural norms, and social expectations, reducing girls' opportunities and control over their sexuality. Pakistan's patriarchal society perpetuates gender discrimination, leading to child marriages, limited education, and perpetuating female dependency on male partners (Kabeer, 2016). Child marriage in South Asia and Pakistan is influenced by patriarchal norms, poverty, and family disputes, posing health risks and perpetuating a cycle of abuse (Hossain, 2018). UNICEF highlights the detrimental effects of child marriage, economic dependency, and sexual exploitation on mental health, particularly among girls, particularly those married before age 15. Satisfaction enhances adaptability, reduces tension, and promotes home harmony. Child marriages negatively impact girls' health due to early sexual activity and pregnancy (Hampton, 2010).

Material and Methods

Phase I: Literature Review

A focus group and interview guide based on the literature was prepared to inquire the participants' opinions and experiences to explore the concept of child/early marriage and indigenous conceptualization of patriarchal beliefs.

Phase II: Interviews and focus group discussions

The study utilized a qualitative approach, including semi structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions, to explore a phenomenon.

Six interviews with professionals were conducted, including psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, lawyers, religious scholars, and doctors, based on their expertise in child and gender rights. The study also utilized Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to analyze child marriages in Pakistan, involving 5-9 participants aged 25-45 from all four provinces of Pakistan. The methodology aimed to ensure gender-sensitive perspectives and comprehensive insights from culturally diverse regions.

Phase III: Extraction of Psychosocial factors

Psychosocial factors regarding child marriage practices were extracted from interviews and FGDs conducted for patriarchal beliefs through thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

The study utilized thematic analysis to analyze interviews and focus group discussions on child marriages, identifying common themes and developing an indigenous theory (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The following text presents sixteen major themes and their categories based on data from FGDs and Interviews.

Male Dominance

Male dominance, a 20th-century concept, refers to unequal power dynamics between men and women, with Pakistan being predominantly male-dominated, with male members dominating institutions and familial agendas (Evans, 2020).

Competitiveness: in the patriarchal society, women are less competitive than men (Carlsson et al., 2020).

"It is embedded in our thinking pattern that; men are more competent and better in everything" (Interview with Anthropologist no. 1).

High sexual needs: Men's desire to control female sexuality remains the underlying cause of patriarchy in the Twenty-First century. Men dominates women with expressing that they have higher sexual needs and women's sexuality is led by that myth in Pakistani society:

"There is this one aspect in our society regarding sexuality, that men have higher sexual urges and if the wife is not fulfilling their sexual needs, then they can marry another one to fulfill his needs" (Interview with Anthropologist no. 1).

Traditions and Customs are long-standing practices and beliefs in societies, considered important and righteous in specific cultures, surviving for centuries and becoming part of daily living standards.

Societal Norms/Local values: Pakistan is constituted of people with multiple ethnicities so does its traditions and customs. People from different geographical regions have different set of traditions that they follow:

"There are traditions in sindhi culture, like marrying the girl with Holy Book of Quran, so that she cannot claim her share in inheritance" (Sindh FGD participant no. 2).

Wadera system also known as Feudalism or feudal system is a social system in which land belonged to powerful lords:

"The jirga system in Sindh involves influential feuds ruling over low-status individuals, indicating that males from high social classes dominate not only women but also men of low status". (Sindh FGD, participant no. 7).

Molvi system: The Molvi system refers to cultural expectations that preachers shape into religious value, making people feel obliged to follow that practice:

"Pakistan's culture is deeply intertwined with customs, values, and social procedures in South Asia, making basic practices social customs, but religious scholars interpret them as religious practices" (Interview with anthropologist no.2).

Female Oppression: Pakistani society is considered as male oriented society and females are oppressed.

Honor: women are considered to be equal to the honor (izzat) of family. the concept of honor linked with women's sexuality and restrictions on women's mobility.

"In society, honor of the home and family is often associated with women, who are expected to be pure and pure to maintain stability within the family" (Interview with Gender Studies Specialist).

Importance of female virginity: Pakistan's patriarchal society values women's virginity, leading to fears and myths, resulting in negative consequences like divorce and death for women:

"Society prioritizes girl virginity, fearing societal honor and preventing girls from engaging in sexual relationships outside of marriage " (KPK FGD, participant no. 3).

"In Baluchistan, dowry demand varies by girl's age, leading parents to seek early marriage to avoid expensive dowry burdens" (Baluchistan FGD, participant no. 3).

Hierarchal and sexualized structure of society: Caste inequality in Pakistan significantly impacts the lives of the elite class, landlords, and economically poor, as well as the sexual structure, with elites expected to have better lives.

"Urban residents are aware of early marriage, while rural low-income individuals often marry early, assuming responsibility for their children's earnings" (Punjab FGD, participant no. 6).

Exchange Marriages (Watta Satta): Watta-Satta, a taboo practice in Pakistan, involves the exchange of wives between siblings, often between brothers or sisters, and occasionally between uncles or cousins.

"Exchange marriages, also known as watta satta, are prevalent in central Punjab, particularly in cities like Jhang and Kasoor, often involving underage couples" (Punjab FGD, participant no, 4).

Sawara: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa people follow a tradition called sawara, where parents marry off their daughters in exchange for debt, regardless of the age of the groom.

"In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the tradition of sawara involves families marrying off their young daughters to repay loans, regardless of age, from 8-10 years old to 60 years old" (Interview with Gender Studies Specialist).

Son Preference: Son preference in Asia leads to discriminatory practices against girls and women, affecting their status, health, and development, which is reinforced in Pakistan's patriarchal society (Nisar et al., 2020).

For Generational Expansion: In Pakistan, it is believed that sons are the primary source of generational expansion, as they are believed to uphold the family name:

"In our society, it is assumed the only sons can move the family to next generation, so for fulfilling their wish to have a son, people often give birth to huge number of daughters." (Baluchistan FGD, participant no.1).

Preference of Son as Last child: In Pakistan, the majority of people believe that having a complete family, with more sons than daughters, is a common and desirable concept.

"There is another tradition that is followed in our society, that last child born into a family must be a boy" (Anthropologist no.2).

"Low socioeconomic status individuals believe having more sons will improve their economic conditions, while those from higher socioeconomic classes prioritize having more bread earners over educated children" (anthropologist no. 1).

Right to kin: Pakistani society's patriarchal kinship system, influenced by traditional customs and gender roles, heavily influences couples to have at least one son.: *"do not treat their daughters as human beings, marrying them with the Holy Book Quran, and preventing them from claiming property rights"* (Sindh FGD, Participant no. 5).

Social pressure: Society expects a woman to give a son. Giving birth to a son raises a woman's standards apparently:

"Parents often find satisfaction in their girl children, but their environment can pressurize them to have a male child as well" (Gender studies Specialist).

Exchange of Minor Girls in disputes: exchange of minor girls is used to resolve land or property disputes between two parties:

"Family disputes often result in minor girls being given to older grooms in marriages to regain property, leading to conflict between opposing families (Punjab FGD, Participant no. 5)".

"Central and south Punjab families often avoid marrying their daughters off due to property ownership issues, preventing the transfer of property to another family" (Punjab Province FGD, Participant no. 3).

Religion: Religion, primarily Islam, involves the service and worship of God, commitment to religious faith, and living norms, forming a local tradition in the studied country.

Islam: Islam, a monotheistic faith revealed through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah, is the religion of the majority population in Pakistan (Abubakar & Maishanu, 2020).

Misconceptions: Misconceptions about child marriage in Pakistan are based on Islamic perspectives, but early or child marriage is not considered part of Islam:

Marriage before puberty is considered unacceptable and violates Shari'ah, while after puberty requires maturity and adult judgement. Islam ensures equal consent, protection of human life, and safeguards girls' rights.

“Our problem/issue is that we value religion very much but no one realizes that our social values are actually adopted from Hindu culture, so we could not adopt our religion properly and completely” (Interview with anthropologist no.1).

Lack of in-depth Knowledge: often lead people to follow misrepresented and mythical religious information that is not authentic:

“Our society lacks Islamic values, and religious scholars lack knowledge. Early marriage is recommended for both girls and boys, as it fulfills sexual needs and ensures education” (interview with Religious Scholar).

Use of Religion as per Convenience and for personal benefits:

“Society's belief in puberty marriage is often shaped by religious practices and social norms, rather than personal preferences” (Interview with Psychologist no. 2).

Criminal Acts are concealed under the veil of religious practices: In Pakistani society is concealing heinous crimes like rape and paedophilia through religion, settling victims for legally married marriages with offenders:

“News reports reveal men often rape or buy girls from families, defending their actions by doing Nikah, and victims often marry their abusers” (Sindh FGD, participant no. 1).

Religious Scholars in Public Space

Male Religious Scholar: most public space is given to male religious scholars in Pakistan, so selective knowledge and information is communicated:

“Our society values men more due to patriarchal culture, which oppresses women and allows them to share and pass on limited religious knowledge” (Psychologist no.1).

Female Scholars are oppressed: *“Very few females are knowledgeable of religious orders, and they do not possess any public platform to share that knowledge” (Punjab FGD, participant no. 5).*

Capitalist Patriarchy: Capitalist patriarchy is a system of oppression closely linked to capitalism, with patriarchy being the primary system of power.

In Pakistani society representation of men as dominant and women as subordinates or their slaveries as a natural part of existence and as normal:

“Despite laws and punishments, social inequalities persist, with children taught from birth that males are superior and need improvement” (interview with lawyer).

Internalization of oppression: women in Pakistani society accept the fact that they need to be oppressed and believe it to be right:

“TV dramas often portray women as poor and oppressed, leading to automatic internalization and perpetuating the perception of oppression” (Baluchistan FGD, participant no. 2).

Gender Discrimination: Gender discrimination refers to unequal or disadvantageous treatment based on gender, with sexual harassment being an illegal form of such discrimination. Pakistan ranks second lowest globally in gender equality, despite its significant role in development.

Sexism: Sexism is discrimination based on sex or gender, primarily affecting women and girls, often linked to stereotypes and gender roles, implying inherent superiority (Kirkman & Oswald, 2020).

Hostile Sexism: Hostile sexism is an antagonistic attitude towards women, often influenced by male dominant ideologies and manipulation, resulting in societal attitudes towards women in various fields:

“Girls are often denied the right to education due to the misconception that increased education leads to greater awareness of their rights” (Sindh FGD, participant no. 3)

Benevolent Sexism: Benevolent sexism reflects evaluations of women that are seemingly positive but actually that is something men take advantage of:

“In society, girls are often perceived as fragile, and elders and males indirectly control their sexuality, as seen in Baluchistan, where men often appear protective” (Baluchistan FGD, Participant no. 1).

Assets and Burden: in Pakistan, male children are considered to be assets however female children are considered to be financial burden by parents:

“Society views girls as household-bearing, while boys are seen as precious and heirs, leading to a belief in investing in male children” (Sindh FGD, participant no.6).

Gender Based Violence: Violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex or gender identity.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a form of domestic violence affecting over one-third of Pakistan's population, causing significant harm to women, adolescent girls, and the wider community:

“It is very common in interior Sindh, to marry off very young girls with old men. And if they do not fulfill their desires, girls are being victimized with physical and psychological abuse” (Sindh FGD, participant no. 6).

Physical exploitation: Physical abuse involves intentional bodily injury, such as slapping, pinching, choking, kicking, shoving, or inappropriate drug use or physical restraints. Younger women exhibit greater resentment towards physical abuse and patriarchal culture compared to older women:

“Physical abuse of girls occurs not only by husbands but also by in-laws, punishing them for minor issues like dowry inadequacy” (Sindh FGD, Participant no. 6).

Sexual exploitation: Sexual abuse refers to any unwanted sexual contact, including unwanted touching, rape, sodomy, coerced nudity, and explicit photographing.

Rape: Rape is unlawful sexual activity, often involving force or threat, against the victim's will, or with minors, mental illness, or deception, often subsumed under sexual assault in many jurisdictions:

“ The speaker advocated for early marriages to reduce societal issues of rape and harassment, stating that people are not only victims of such practices but also males and transgenders” (anthropologist no. 1).

“A married girl without knowledge of her rights and sexual education experiences psychological damage due to her inability to give consent and traumatic experiences during sexual activity” (interview with Psychologist no. 1).

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment involves unwelcome sexual behaviour, often hidden due to shame and cultural restraint, lacking redress at organizational and government levels, and victimization upon reporting.

Incest: Incest is a legally prohibited sexual intercourse between closely related individuals within the same family, such as father-daughter, father-son, brother-sister, or uncle-niece:

"The law prohibiting marriage for individuals under 18 exposes a harmful practice called "incest," where individuals seek resources within their family to fulfill their sexual needs. This common practice, which affects girls and young males, is not discussed or addressed" (anthropologist no.1).

Emotional/Psychological Abuse: Emotional abuse involves using emotions to control, criticize, embarrassment, shame, blame, or manipulate others, often resulting in a consistent pattern of abusive words and behaviours:

"Girls of young age do not have an idea about their rights, so they tend to tolerate every type of violence on themselves, that later on leads to so many issues such as personality issues and identity crisis" (Interview with Psychologist no. 1).

Gender Stereotypes: Preconceived ideas whereby females and males are arbitrarily assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their gender.

Negative Female Portrayal: As a Patriarchal and man-oriented society, authority is in hands of men in Pakistan and influence as well, so they tend to portray women and girls who fight for their rights as negative and bad.

"In KPK, daughters are often seen as burdens by parents, leading to them marrying off their daughters in 8th-9th standard, avoiding investment in education" (KPK FGD, participant no.2).

Adaptable: young girls are more adaptable, and they can easily be adjusted in in-laws home:

"In Memoni family, girls are often married off at an early age due to traditional living standards and expectations of boys' mothers" (Sindh FGD, participant no. 5).

Homemakers: females are considered to be working inside their houses like cooking, washing and clothing etc.:

"For girl children, people have typical thinking that whatever she learns, ultimately she has to do household chores" (Punjab FGD, participant no. 2).

Importance of fertility age: Females are expected to have numerous children, and grooms often seek younger girls to ensure fertility and succession for their family:

"Gender perceptions vary, with men in their 40s-50s having higher chances of marriage proposals, while women are considered "too old for marriage" after 20s, leading to earlier marriages" (Sindh FGD, participant no. 2).

Objectification: Social philosophy defines objectification as treating a person as an object or thing, a part of dehumanization, which disavows the humanity of others.

Patriarchy directed by Matriarchy: Patriarchal cultures prioritize women's power, while non-patriarchal systems may be considered matriarchal. However, patriarchal systems are largely influenced by matriarchy, with men following their mothers' guidance:

“Despite societal male-orientedness, men are often influenced by their mothers, leading them to behave in ways they were taught, despite their perceived helplessness” (Interview with Sociologist).

“90% of domestic violence on wives is attributed to the husband's mother, who influences their behaviour under specific conditions” (interview with sociologist).

Belief in Submissiveness: although women are in position of authority, they still believe that their gender is meant to be submissive, and men need to rule and are superior:

“Society often conflates social values with religion, assuming girls must be submissive, leading to abuse and mistreatment. However, the Quran emphasizes men as protectors, not masters” (interview with Anthropologist no. 2).

Conforming: conforming is to behave according to socially acceptable rules, conventions or standards.

Social Acceptability: Men may not always exhibit power and authority, but they must act accordingly to adhere to social rules and be accepted by their society:

“Men often conform to societal expectations, despite being soft-hearted and not always dominating, to maintain their status and avoid questioning their masculinity” (interview with Sociologist).

Social standards of manhood: men are forced to behave as society want them to so that their manhood is not get questioned:

“A man's lack of strictness and arrogance can lead to societal rudeness, questioning of masculinity, and societal rejection of discussions about wife rights” (Gilgit-Baltistan FGD, participant no. 5).

Family Structure: Family structure in Pakistani culture involves marriage or bloodline connections, with sons playing a significant role in decision-making, while daughters' opinions are less valued.

“Family structure plays a crucial role in shaping male domination and patriarchal culture, as parents often prioritize sons' suggestions in decision-making, affecting daughters' upbringing and socialization” (Interview with Gender Studies Specialist).

Too many girl children: Parents feel burdened by having too many girl children, deciding to marry them off early to relieve their responsibility of guarding their chastity.

“Parents with multiple girl children often marry them early, as the eldest may have the opportunity to marry at the right age” (Sindh FGD, participant 7).

Parents expect their daughters to be obedient and submissive, accepting their parents' decisions for their lives:

“In social customs and cultures, girls who remain silent and accept decisions made by their parents demonstrate good family and good habits” (Punjab FGD, Participant no. 2).

“In some Central Punjab areas, parents force their children to marry cousins at birth, often causing them to accept their decisions” (Punjab FGD, Participant no. 6).

Honor: Izzat, or honor, is a cultural concept in North India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, encompassing prestige and dignity of family across religions, communities, and genders.

Female chastity: Honor culture values family honor through social and sexual behaviour, with virginity determining acceptable norms. Immorality and insults arise from unwed lock relationships, leading to murders and strict punishments:

“Society often views girls as family honors, preventing them from engaging in illicit activities that could harm their parents” (Sindh FGD, participant no. 3).

Males are Defenders: Men are often seen as defenders of the family, assuming they are responsible for protecting and guarding the honor and reputation of the family:

“Honor killings occur when men view themselves as bodyguards of family honor, punishing extreme female actions to demonstrate their power and decision-making power in society” (KPK FGD, Participant no. 3).

Fear: Fear is a powerful, primitive human emotion that alerts us to physical or psychological danger, with its current nature being psychological.

Parents develop a fear of kids getting into bad company and getting into bad habits as soon as they hit puberty:

“Parents fear children's bad habits and bad company during puberty, leading to early marriages to minimize responsibilities and lessen time for bad behaviour” (KPK FGD, participant no. 2).

Fear of kids having illicit sexual relationship: Pakistani parents fear bad habits and illicit sexual activities, leading to early marriages, due to concerns about their daughters' sexuality:

“Issue is that our society has become so bad and corrupt, people tend to think, if we do not marry off kids in early age, they will get involved in bad habits or illicit relationships” (interview with Lawyer)

“Common societal issues, such as immoral activities and moral disengagement, have led parents to feel overwhelmed and burdened with child protection, leading to early marriages” (Punjab FGD, participant no.1).

Collectivist culture: Pakistan's collectivist culture values ancestors' footsteps, promoting social status and societal inferiority, with men leading women in all aspects of life:

“In Asian cultures, early marriages are preferred due to ancestors' belief that it reduces children's financial and responsibilities, leading to more offspring and reduced financial burdens” (Balochistan FGD Participant no.3).

Psychological Impacts: The study explored the psychological impact of environmental and biological factors on individuals as well.

Positive Psychological Impact: Positive Psychological impact or affect refers to one's propensity to experience positive emotions and interact with others and with life's challenges in a positive way.

Premature Wisdom and Adaptability: Early marriage in South Asian cultures, including Pakistani ones, is believed to lead to premature development, wisdom, and responsibility:

“Early marriage can lead to a wiser couple as they learn from their elders, which is considered a positive impact” (Sindh FGD, participant no. 2).

“Early marriages are long-lasting and protect against divorce and conflict, as habitual individuals become part of their spouse's bad habits, preventing misunderstandings and fostering conflict resolution” (anthropologist no.1).

Fulfillment of Sexual Needs and Prosperous Life in Consensual Marriage: it is believed that marrying children early leads them to be sexually satisfied in a legal and acceptable way:

“Society often delays marriages for financial stability, neglecting their connection to physical health and sexual needs, ignoring the potential benefits of early marriages.” (anthropologist no.1).

Negative Impacts: negative impact involves experiencing the world in a more negative way, feeling negative emotions and more negativity in relationships and surroundings.

Forced responsibilities and Coerced Sexual Relationships: Early-age marriages often lead to responsibilities that are not in line with individuals' interests, causing distress and burdening them:

“Child marriage is illegal under law, yet people still practice it. Marriage is a responsibility, and maturity is required for fulfilling it” (interview with Lawyer).

“Society's hypocrisy prevents discussing sex education before marriage, leading to forceful sexual relationships and psychological harm for girls” (Sindh FGD, participant no. 4).

Post-Traumatic Stress and Dysfunctional emotional growth: Most of the time sexual activity is forceful for young girls in this process that leads them to sexual trauma:

“Girls are not adequately informed about their future sexual experiences, leading to shameful discussions and inadequate sex education, ultimately causing traumatic experiences” (Punjab FGD, participant no. 4).

“Physical growth is crucial for children's psychological development, especially for girls who lack socialization and independence due to limited exposure and mobility” (anthropologist no.2).

Deteriorating physical Health: Society's hypocrisy prevents discussing sex education before marriage, causing forceful relationships and psychological harm for women, leading to physical health issues, sexual trauma, and infant mortality:

“Lack of awareness about reproductive health and disease-related issues leads to girls dying due to early pregnancy, miscarriages, and physical damage for boys” (Interview with Doctor).

Peripartum-Postpartum Depression: Peripartum depression, a distressing and difficult condition affecting women during or after childbirth, often stems from sexual trauma, leading to anxiety, isolation, guilt, and shame:

“Early marriages and pregnancies in girls cause trauma, leading to generations of depression and stress, which can be passed down to their children” (Interview with Psychologist no. 2)

Discussion

Patriarchal belief systems in Pakistan perpetuate patriarchy by allowing men to exploit women through socialization and assimilation of standards, rooted in perceptions of competence, strength, sexual needs, and decision-making abilities (Madhani, et al., 2017). The research revealed Pakistan's complex societal landscape, with male dominance and customary social norms, influenced by the wadera system, allowing women to marry with the Quran (Bhanbhro, et al., 2013;). In patriarchal societies, men dominate in various spheres, with women often subservient. The eldest male assumes family head, controlling female sexuality to assert dominance.

Pakistan's traditions, such as wadera and molvi systems, perpetuate social hierarchies and female oppression. Son preference is deeply ingrained, leading couples to have more children for male offspring. This patrilineal kinship system limits women's rights and calls for social and cultural change.

The study revealed that Pakistani social structure, influenced by socioeconomic status, education, and living style, promotes patriarchal beliefs, favoring the rich and oppressing the poor (Hadi, 2017; Masood, 2018). Media portrayals in TV dramas perpetuate female oppression, highlighting geographical ethnicity, property disputes, minor girl marriages, and Islam's influence on society, leading to harmful practices and bias.

Capitalist Patriarchy in Pakistan perpetuates gender disparities, with men expected to be breadwinners and women limited to homemaking. These social inequalities reinforce male dominance and female subordination, often accepted without question. The study identified patriarchy derived from matriarchy, highlighting dominant power dynamics in matriarchal cultures, where women significantly influence men's behaviors and beliefs, emphasizing the need for gender equality and empowerment (Goettner-Abendroth, 2017).

Conclusion

The research revealed a deeply ingrained patriarchal belief system in Pakistan, where male dominance is emphasized through societal norms and traditional practices. This system, influenced by feudal systems and patriarchy directed by matriarchy, perpetuates gender-based violence, stereotypes, and internalized lower status for women, necessitating urgent action for gender equality and all of these factors contribute in perpetration of child marriages.

References

- Abubakar, Z., & Maishanu, I. M. (2020). Adherence to Islamic Principles of Success and Academic Achievement. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 9(2), 401-406.
- Ahmed, Z., Muzaffar, M., Javaid, M. A., & Fatima, N. (2015). Socio-Economic Problems of Aged Citizens in the Punjab: A Case Study of the Districts Faisalabad, Muzaffargarh and Layyah, *Pakistan Journal of life and Social Sciences*, 13(1),37-41
- Begikhani, N., Gill, A. K., & Hague, G. (2015). *Honor-based violence: Experiences and counter strategies in Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK Kurdish diaspora*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bhanbhro, S., Wassan, M. R., Shah, M., Talpur, A. A., & Wassan, A. A. (2013). Karo Kari: the murder of honour in Sindh Pakistan: an ethnographic study. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 3(7), 1467-1484.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Hayfield, N. (2022). 'A starting point for your journey, not a map': Nikki Hayfield in conversation with Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke about thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 19(2), 424-445.
- Carlsson, F., Lampi, E., Martinsson, P., & Yang, X. (2020). Replication: Do women shy away from competition? Experimental evidence from China. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 81, 102312. DOI: 10.1016/j.joep.2020.102312
- Channon, M. D. (2017). Son preference and family limitation in Pakistan: A parity-and contraceptive method-specific analysis. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 43(3), 99-110.
- Chaudhry, T. T., & Khan, M. (2020). Effects of birth order and son preference on utilization of pre-and post-natal health inputs in Punjab. *Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association*, 70(1), 110-115
- Constantinides, P. (2010). 'Women Heal Women: Spirit Possession and Sexual Segregation in a Muslim Society', *Social Science and Medicine*, 21, pp. 685-92 (1985). *The library of essays on sexuality and religion: Indigenous religions*, 229-238.
- Delap, E. (2013). *Protect My Future. The Links Between Child Protection and Population Dynamics In the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. Better Care Network.
- Diener, E., Thapa, S., & Tay, L. (2020). Positive emotions at work. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 7, 451-477.
- Elder, G. H. (2018). *Children of the great depression*. Routledge.
- Ferrari, S., Hill, M., Jamal, A. A., & Bottoni, R. (Eds.). (2021). *Routledge Handbook of Freedom of Religion Or Belief*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Goettner-Abendroth, H. (2017). Matriarchal studies: Past debates and new foundations. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 23(1), 2-6.
- Hadi, A. (2017). Patriarchy and gender-based violence in Pakistan. *European Journal of Social Science Education and Research*, 4(4), 289-296.
- Hampton, T. (2010). Child marriage threatens girls' health. *Jama*, 304(5), 509-510.

- Javed, R., & Mughal, M. (2019). Have a Son, Gain a Voice: Son Preference and Female Participation in Household Decision Making. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 55(12), 2526–2548.
- Javed, R., & Mughal, M. (2020). Preference for Boys and Length of Birth Intervals in Pakistan. *Research in Economics*, 74(2), 140–152.
- Javed, R., & Mughal, M. (2021). Girls not brides: Evolution of child marriage in Pakistan. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 21(3), e2582.
- Javed, R., & Mughal, M. (2022). Changing patterns of son preference and fertility in Pakistan. *Journal of International Development*, 34(6), 1086-1109
- Joireman, S. F. (2018). Intergenerational land conflict in northern Uganda: children, customary law and return migration. *Africa*, 88(1), 81-98.
- Kabeer, N. (2016). Gender equality, economic growth, and women’s agency: the “endless variety” and “monotonous similarity” of patriarchal constraints. *Feminist Economics*, 22(1), 295-321.
- Khanna, T., Verma, R., & Weiss, E. (2011). *Child Marriage in South Asia: Realities, Responses, and the Way Forward*. Bangkok: ICRW Report.
- Khawar, M., Sohail, W., & Shariq, I. (2010). Age of Marriage: A Position Paper. Committee For Standardization of Female Age of Marriage. Final Draft.
- Kirkman, M. S., & Oswald, D. L. (2020). Is it just me, or was that sexist? The role of sexism type and perpetrator race in identifying sexism. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 160(2), 236-247. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/00224545.2019.1634505>
- Madhani, F. I., Karmaliani, R., Patel, C., Bann, C. M., McClure, E. M., Pasha, O., & Goldenberg, R. L. (2017). Women’s perceptions and experiences of domestic violence: An observational study from Hyderabad, Pakistan. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 32(1), 76-100.
- Masood, A. (2018). Negotiating mobility in gendered spaces: case of Pakistani women doctors. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25(2), 188-206.
- Mikhail, S. L. B. (2002). Child marriage and child prostitution: Two forms of sexual exploitation. *Gender & Development*, 10(1), 43-49.
- Muhanguzi, F. K., Bantebya, G. K., & Watson, C. (2018). The paradox of change and Continuity in social norms and practices affecting adolescent girls’ capabilities and transitions to adulthood in rural Uganda. In *Empowering Adolescent Girls in Developing Countries* (pp. 103-121). Routledge.
- Muzaffar, M., Yaseen, Z., & Ahmad, A. (2018). Child Marriages in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences. *Journal of Indian Studies*, 4 (2), 195-207
- Naveed, S., & Butt, D. K. M. (2020). Causes and consequences of child marriages in South Asia: Pakistan’s perspective. *South Asian Studies*, 30(2). 161-175.
- Nisar, N. A., Latif, Z., Khan, S., & Ishrat, D. S. (2020). The Early Marriage Origin of Domestic Violence and Reproductive Health Challenges. *Journal of History and Social Sciences*, 11(1), 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.46422/jhss.v11i1.105>
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2013). Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) Survey 2012-13. Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.

- Pope, N. (2004). Honour killings: Instruments of patriarchal control. In S. Mojab & N. Abdo (Eds.), *Violence in the name of honor: Theoretical and political challenges* (pp. 101–112). Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press.
- Rabaan, H., Young, A. L., & Dombrowski, L. (2021). Daughters of men: Saudi women's sociotechnical agency practices in addressing domestic abuse. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 4(CSCW3), 1-31.
- Shah, A. S., & Tariq, S. (2013). Implications of parallel justice system (Panchyat and Jirga) on society *people*, 2, 200-209
- Tabassum, S., Ferdoos, A., & Ahmad, A. (2020). Gender, Family, and Politics of Inheritance in Pakistan. *Research Journal of Social Sciences and Economics Review*, 1(4), 368-377. [https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol1-iss4-2020\(368-377\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol1-iss4-2020(368-377))
- UNFPA. (2013). The Role of Data in Addressing Violence against Women and Girls. United Nations Population Fund
- UNICEF. (2017). *UNICEF Annual Report 2017*. UNICEF
- Zhang, C. (2017). South, Southeast, and East Asia-Specific Characteristics of HIV/AIDS Epidemic. *Encyclopedia of AIDS*, 1-14