

BELIEFS AND PRACTICE OF EARLY MARRIAGE AMONG PAKHTOONS IN HAZRO, ATTOCK

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Abstract: Practice of early marriages among women is a chronic social problem in the rural areas of Pakistan and is most prevalent among *pakhtoons*. Centuries old customs and traditions are stimulating factors for this practice due to which firm beliefs and practices are legitimized by the community. The study sheds light on the socio-economic gains of this practice perceived by the people of the community, simultaneously highlighting the devastating effects of early marriage on young females. The study was conducted in *Waisa, Nartopa, Bangi* villages in tehsil *Hazro, Attock* among the *pakhtoon* families residing there. A sample of 128 households was drawn using purposive and snowball sampling technique in order to get a qualitative and in-depth understanding of the issue. Various qualitative research techniques such as in-depth interviews, open ended questionnaires and participant observation were used. The analysis of the data revealed that the practice of early marriage of female is deeply rooted in the traditional social structure which leads to physiological and psychological problems among females.

Key Words: Beliefs, Practices, Marriage Patterns, Early Marriage, Pakhtoons

INTRODUCTION

“Early marriage, better known as child marriage, is defined as marriage carried below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physiologically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and child bearing”(Ras-Work 1989). “Early marriage affects millions of children throughout the world. It is widely practiced in the countries of South Asia where every year millions of girls; preteens, and teens become the wives of older men” (UNICEF 2005).

Pakistan is also included in those countries where practice of child marriage is undertaken. “According to economic survey of Pakistan, 2012-13, Pakistan is the sixth populous country in the world having an estimated 184.35 million people with 2% growth rate”(UNICEF 2001). “Marriages in traditional structures are often practiced below the homogeneous pattern proclaimed age limit, which usually and legally accounts in the pattern of early marriage that is ensued among children at the age of 18 or less” The quotation of (Somerset 2000) is quoted by (Daraz, et al. 2014).

“The custom of early marriage is common in most of the rural belt of the developing countries and prevailing due to certain causative factors which lay

down negative effects upon females and families” (Kabir 1999). Early marriage has very harmful effects on the fitness, physical, psychological and socio-economic comfort of young girls (as well as for the newborns)” (Ababa 2006). The practice of early marriage deprives them from freedom, chances for self-development, education and health. “The possibilities of early pregnancy and childbearing are well recognized: increased risk of dying, increased risk of premature birth, problems during delivery, low birth-weight, and maximum chance that the newborn will die” (IPPF 2000).

There are many causes of early marriages in Pakistan. The first and the foremost cause is illiteracy. It appears to play an important role in the decision of girls getting married early. “Uneducated girls are at more risk of early marriage than the educated ones” (Jehan 2014). Further, poverty is recognized be another major cause leading to early marriages. “Where poverty is acute, a young girl may be considered as a burden. Thus, parents look at marriage as a way of decreasing their burden.” (Adlakha, et al. 1991).

Pakistan in common and *Pakhtoon* society in particular has a strict custom and tradition supporting early marriages. “Early marriages are practiced here

at a higher proportion as compared to other parts of the country on the basis of financial insecurity, absence of awareness and strong cultural trends that encourage such norms, customs and traditions”(UNICEF 2005).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in villages; *Nartopa, Waisa, Bangi* situated in *Hazro* tehsil of, *Attock*. The sample size was 128 which were selected from the targeted population through snowball sampling technique to identify the relevant cases of early marriages. The tools used included open ended questionnaire and in-depth interviews which provided the detailed information about beliefs and practices of early marriage practices among *Pakhtoon* families living in these villages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to explore the causes and consequences of early marriage among *pakhtoons*. The present study revealed that there is a higher tendency of early marriages among them particularly the girls are given in marriage at a very early marriage age. The analysis of the results showed that 46 percent of the females were married before 18, 38.2 percent females married between 19-25, 9.3 percent females were at the age of 26-30 at the time of marriage while only 6.2 percent girls got married when they were above 30.

Table: Age of the Respondents at the Time of Marriage

Response	Frequency	Percentage
18 and below	59	46%
19-25	49	38.2%
26-30	12	9.3%
Above 30	8	6.2%
Total	128	100

The findings indicate that the practice of early marriage is very common among *Pakhtoons*. 32 percent respondents affirmed poverty as the primary cause for early marriages as majority of them are poor and cannot afford the expenses of a girl who cannot be a earning hand. They seemed to be less inclined towards educating their girls as only 7 percent were educated up to high school, 22 percent respondents were school dropouts right after middle school while the rest did not attend school at all. Hence, female education is perceived to be useless and an additional economic burden on the family. Comparatively, the parents emphasized on educating their male children as they are promising economic

support for the families in future. There was no trend to educate their girls as they deem it useless spending money on an individual who can neither be any support in bringing an income nor will be living with them forever. “Girls are thought to be an economic burden to their family, although education of women is the key to reduce poverty” (Rehman 2010). The respondents were of the view that their economic limitation is a major impetus for early marriages of girls. Another more influencing factor for early marriages of girls is their old age customs and traditions. “The people living in villages strictly follow approved religious rituals and the stress created by the society forces the parents of young children to marry them off”(Vanni 2013).

The respondents shared that marriage is a social act which helps them to strengthen their kinship bonds. It is a very common trend among them to fix marriage of female children right after their birth. Most of the time parents betroth their girls at a very young age. “In the realm of social and cultural issues, family proposals are found enhancing the trend of early marriage” (Rehman 2010).

There are multiple factors responsible for early marriage of females pointed out by the locals. There are economic as well as social incentives that make this practice more promising for the parents. The locals narrated that it is their ultimate desire to get their daughters married as soon as possible because this according to them gives social security to the females and a substantial relief to the parents. Marriage of daughters becomes economically beneficial to the poor families in such a way that they receive a bride price in exchange of their daughter. They told that they make dowry for their daughters by using this money.

“There is an exchange of a great deal of money in the form of a bride price for the bride’s family for the bride, the use of resources must be carefully managed to ensure the family’s sustainability”(Barth 1965). Mothers of boys share their view that early marriage of their sons unburdens them from household chores as their young daughter-in-laws look after everything at home. Apart from describing social and economic significance of early marriage, they justify this practice through religious laws. “According to *Sharia* Law puberty /menstruation for girls and facial hair for boys to signify the time when they can get married” (Nasrullah, et al. 2014). They support this practice giving different justification. Respondents said that in earlier age it is easy for the

girls to adjust with their affinal kins as compared to others who were married late.

Early marriages are not devoid of negative consequences despite being socially advantageous for the locals. The respondents agreed with the idea that young females face many physiological and psychological problems as a result of getting married in early age. They were of the view that females under 18 suffer from mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. "Early married girls are at high risk of psychological disorder as these girls are deprived of freely expressing their views and the right to defend themselves against devastating traditional practices that in turn will increase risk of lifetime psychiatric disorders" (Le, et al. 2011).

70.3 % of the respondents said that early marriages have negative implication on the girl's health. According to them, both mother and child face these impairments. 45.5 % respondents said that reproductive health of mother is affected and infant is at high risk too. Marriage occurring before the age of 18 has many difficulties and consequences during pregnancy and may sometimes leads to maternal mortality (Whitehead 1995). There were 27 females who had miscarriages because of early age marriage, several of the females had premature deliveries and had to face severe medical issues.

"Maternal mothers are more likely to experience pregnancy concerning complications, delivery concerns as well as maternal mortality, in shot increases risk for neonatal death, premature or low-weight infants and poor health effects" (UNICEF 2005).

CONCLUSION

The study was a qualitative analysis of early marriage practices of females among *Pakhtoons* families in *Hazro, Attock*. The research explored multifaceted repercussions of early marriage in view of the respondents. The study revealed that they marry their daughters at a very early age even before their puberty age. Poverty and lack of education are the most significant factors responsible for this. On the other hand, they legitimize it under the name of tradition and custom. Early marriage generates various physiological and psychological problems among females.

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