



An analysis of early marriage in Pakhtun society: determinants, consequences, and interventions.

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Marriage is a ubiquitous social institution created to govern and oversee human existence. It is the sanctioned societal arrangement in which two or more individuals form a family. Nevertheless, marriages that take place through unnatural means or that infringe upon fundamental human rights give rise to significant social issues with complex ramifications. The present study examines the several factors and outcomes associated with early marriage in the Pakhtun society. The research was conducted in different areas of Kohat District located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The researchers gathered primary data from a sample of 60 individuals, consisting of both males and females. The data was acquired through face-to-face interviews using a questionnaire. The data was then analyzed using SPSS software, utilizing frequency distribution and percentages. The analyses indicate that early marriage is prevalent as a result of low levels of education, deeply ingrained traditional social norms, and economic security measures. These factors have significant negative consequences in terms of social, physical, and mental well-being for both the individual, their family, and society as a whole. Parental education, government intervention, and media influence are suggested as effective measures to eradicate the detrimental effects of early marriages.

Keywords: early marriage, Pakhtun society, social norms, education, economic security, consequences, intervention, parental education,

Introduction:

In certain societies, many families believe that early marriage can lead to economic advantages and consider it a means of safeguarding their daughters. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that weddings are not independent occurrences but rather intricately intertwined with family networks. Studies suggest that couples who marry at a young age are closely intertwined with their relatives, being significantly impacted by significant relationships, social interactions, and processes of socialization within these familial networks[1]. Alarming, over fourteen million females experience pregnancy annually, with a staggering ninety percent of them being in a marital union. Surprisingly, seven percent of these young brides die as a result of difficulties associated to pregnancy. Pregnancy is the primary cause of death among girls above the age of fifteen, and those between the ages of 10 and fourteen are five times more likely to die compared to pregnant women aged twenty to twenty-four. Furthermore, infants born to adolescent mothers have a mortality rate that is more than fifty percent greater within the first month of life compared to infants born to adult moms. Concerning, the issue of child marriage is increasing, with projections from the United Nations population fund indicating that more than fifteen million girls are getting married year[2]. The detrimental effects of early marriage go beyond

the apparent health hazards. Research has established a correlation between early marriage and a younger age at first childbirth, increased overall fertility rates, less access to maternal healthcare, and limited female education. Establishing a causal association between early marriage and other adult outcomes is difficult since there are several omitted factors, such as parent socio-economic status and gender perspectives, that need to be considered. Early marriages frequently encompass youngsters hailing from economically disadvantaged circumstances, live in rural areas, not attending school, pregnant girls and their boyfriends, orphans and stepchildren, as well as children lacking sufficient supervision or support. To effectively tackle the intricate network of problems related to early marriage, a comprehensive strategy is needed that takes into account not only the acute health issues but also the wider socio-economic circumstances[3]. Early marriage is a long-standing tradition in Pakhtun (Pashtun) civilization, involving the marrying of persons at a young age, typically before they reach adulthood. The cultural phenomena, shaped by historical traditions and socio-economic variables, has significant consequences for the lives of young brides. An analysis of the origins and development of early marriage among the Pakhtun reveals the intricate interaction between cultural standards, economic factors, and gender dynamics that influence this tradition. The early practice of marriage in Pakhtun civilization is deeply intertwined with the traditions and dynamics of the community. Traditionally, Pakhtun cultures have followed a code of behavior called Pashtunwali, which covers a collection of moral rules that regulate different parts of life, including marriage. This code, which is strongly influenced by tribal norms, has had a crucial impact on the development of the traditions related to marriage.

Historically, early weddings were commonly regarded as a manifestation of societal conventions and a method of safeguarding cultural heritage. The practice was shaped by factors such as the safeguarding of familial reputation, preservation of societal structure, and commitment to traditional principles. The historical backdrop, characterized by tribal hierarchies and a largely agrarian way of life, played a role in the continuation of early marriage as a customary practice. Moreover, economic factors have consistently had a substantial impact on the prevalence of early marriages among the Pakhtun community. The predominantly agrarian character of several Pakhtun cultures, wherein familial sustenance is frequently dependent on land and agriculture, has shaped the perceived necessity for early marriages to guarantee the ongoing availability of family labor and resources.

Although historical traditions and economic circumstances have had a role in the continuation of early marriage in Pakhtun society, it is important to acknowledge the changing nature of cultural practices. With the evolution of societal structures and the increasing recognition of the detrimental consequences of early marriage, there is a changing conversation taking place within Pakhtun communities. To comprehend the historical origins of early marriage in this setting, it is essential to examine the present-day elements that either sustain or alter this practice in a detailed and sophisticated manner. In most societies, there is a designated age for young girls to get married. However, in some cases, the age limit is disregarded due to the physiological readiness for childbearing. This often leads to early marriages occurring among children who are 18 years old or younger, which is both common and legally accepted. Early marriage is a prevalent practice in the rural areas of developing countries, and it is sustained by various factors that have harmful effects on females and their families. Furthermore, this behavior is a prevalent trend in the majority of societies[4].

Marriage ceremonies in rural areas follow traditional customs that often exert pressure on certain individuals, while others have limited agency in making decisions and exercising their rights. Additionally, abduction is a significant factor in these ceremonies.

This type of rural infrastructure is prevalent in developing countries, especially in South Asia. Pakistan is particularly notable for its significant prevalence of early marriages and the negative outcomes that result from them[5]. The Revised Family Code, Article 7, outlines the Essential Conditions of Marriage, including the legal age for both boys and girls to get married. However, the implementation of these conditions is hindered by various factors. These cases demonstrate that both males and females should be of an appropriate age for marriage. Research indicates that a significant number of females in rural areas, specifically 13 percent, are married by the age of 15, while 66 percent are married before the age of 18[6]. According to the previous research on Harmful Traditional Practices in Pakistan, 57 percent of the population was married before reaching the age of 15. Similarly, a study conducted in Northern Ethiopia indicates that a significant proportion of young girls are married before reaching the age of 10, and in some cases, these marriages are arranged even before their birth[7]. These traditions are ubiquitous among the Pakhtun community, especially in rural areas of the Baluchistan province, where they are more common compared to other regions of the country. Studies also indicate that early marriages are predominantly entered into for financial advantages.

These benefits encompass enhancing social standing within the family, fortifying familial connections, and frequently preventing the tarnishing of family reputation. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the benefits of early marriage, it is important to recognize the numerous adverse consequences associated with this practice[8]. These include physical, social, psychological, and even physiological effects that negatively impact the overall health and well-being of both the young bride and any potential offspring. Therefore, it can be inferred that the prevalent custom of early marriage in many traditional societies has significant consequences, impacting not only women but also future generations and the overall social fabric of the community[9].

Sexual and reproductive health

Health is a crucial determinant and foundation for productivity, enhancements in educational aptitude, and the ability to develop academically, physically, and emotionally. Research has indicated that getting married before the age of 18 carries numerous complex consequences during pregnancy, including an increased risk of maternal mortality[10]. Furthermore, girls between the ages of 10 and 14 face even higher risks compared to those in older age groups. It is important to state that forced sexual intercourse often leads to the death of the victim, while prolonged labor can have severe consequences for both the mother and the baby. The referenced literature concludes that early marriages can lead to numerous complications in health and other related areas, often resulting in the deterioration of women's lives[11].

Education and decision-making being denied

The decision-making process and education system are heavily biased towards males and controlled by masculine perspectives, resulting in significant deprivation of opportunities for females. In the same way, early marriage leads to a higher rate of school dropouts among children[12]. Girls who get married early receive less support for their education from their family and relatives. The percentage of such girls is 73%, and 45% of them experience this to some degree. In Pakistan, it is common for spouses to have an average age difference of 10.1 years. This significant age gap often leads to substantial differences in freedom and decision-making power, particularly for girls[13]. Regarding domestic and familial decision-making, these girls are disadvantaged and lack the ability to participate in family and economic matters. In addition, these marriages restrict females from making decisions regarding property, divorce, and employment. Early marriage contributes to the subordination and deprivation of women in various aspects of life. Sexual and physical

violence that is specifically targeted towards individuals based on their gender[14]. Gender-based violence typically encompasses physical, sexual, or psychological harm inflicted upon an individual based on their gender, including threats, rights violations, and deprivation. Early marriage gives rise to various circumstances that subject young married girls to the risks of poverty and violence. Married girls are more likely to be predisposed to certain conditions due to men's dominance over important resources, their social isolation, and the low socio-economic status and dependence of women.[15]. Acts of aggression and destitution. Instances of gender violence that can be intensified by early marriage encompass domestic violence, sexual assault, and psychological mistreatment. It is clear that the majorities of marriages that occur at a young age due to coercion result in domestic violence and frequently result in the abandonment of the wife. This habit ensnares young girls in the quagmire of marginalized communities, leading them to engage in prostitution and other societal vices[16].

The discussion uncovers a significant and robust correlation between early marriage and the diverse detrimental effects on the personality and health of females. Early marriage is prevalent in various societies, including Pakistan. However, within Pakhtun society, the tradition of early marriage is widely sanctioned and culturally embraced as a customary practice that has been observed for centuries[17]. The conventional societal framework and Pakhtun social structure promote this practice, which ultimately disempowers women in family decision-making, renders them dependent, and leads to various medical complications for married couples. These complications have profound negative consequences for both the male and female individuals, as well as for the entire family unit[18].

The assertion or claim being made.

Pakistan, as well as the Pakhtun society specifically, possess a robust cultural legacy and unique customs and traditions that predominantly support the practice of early marriage. In this region, early marriages are more prevalent than in other parts of the country due to factors such as economic instability, lack of awareness, and a strong cultural inclination that supports this practice. Furthermore, the prevailing emotional attachment to one's local community, coupled with a lack of knowledge and awareness, contributes to the prevalence of early marriages among the Pakhtun population in Pakistan[19]. The majority of Pakhtun families belong to the lower socioeconomic class and are highly motivated to marry their children at a young age in order to alleviate the financial burden. Likewise, parents choose to marry their sons at a younger age due to the financial strain they face, and as a result, they impose premature responsibilities on their male children[20].

Essentially, by marrying them at a young age, they aim to remove them from the family and transform them into a source of income, as children typically do not feel responsible for financially supporting the family. Nevertheless, in certain instances, the Pakhtun community favors early marriages as a means to augment the size of their families. The practice of early marriage in Pakhtun society has severe consequences, such as the infringement of children's fundamental rights and the imposition of responsibilities on them that they are not mentally or physically equipped to handle[21]. Furthermore, it has engendered social unrest and is disproportionately impacting the Pakhtun youth. Following marriage, the husband's residence becomes the subsequent confinement where they become ensnared in numerous obligations that have physical and psychological impacts on both individuals.

Conversely, young boys who are forced into early marriages also encounter significant and alarming issues that have negative consequences for society. Some male children who marry at an early age may exhibit deviant behavior and opt for inappropriate means to achieve financial stability and psychological fulfillment[22]. Some of these children

inherit certain traits from their parents, which poses a risk to the joint family system, and some end up engaging in criminal activities and substance abuse. Young married girls also encounter numerous physical and psychological challenges, such as struggling with household tasks, facing pressure from their husband's family to perform these tasks perfectly, enduring traditional strictness, experiencing mental impairment, feeling frustrated, having difficulties with reproduction, and experiencing inadequate socialization. Due to their mental and physiological immaturity, children encounter significant challenges when adapting to a new environment that requires them to forgo their childhood[23].

Psychological Impact:

Early marriage has a tremendous psychosocial influence on young brides, leading to emotional and psychological issues that greatly damage their general mental well-being. Experiencing the sudden shift into the roles of a spouse and a mother at a young age can result in increased levels of stress, anxiety, and melancholy. The abrupt change in responsibilities and anticipated outcomes, along with restricted independence and societal influences, generates a continuous feeling of being overwhelmed. The presence of financial uncertainty and a lack of emotional support compound these obstacles, leading to an increased susceptibility to mental health problems. To effectively tackle the psychological and social consequences of early marriage, it is necessary to adopt a holistic strategy that encompasses customized mental health assistance and community campaigns that challenge detrimental gender stereotypes. It is crucial to acknowledge and tackle these obstacles in order to promote the welfare of young women who are impacted by early marriage.

Objectives:

- To determine the present prevalence of early marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- To examine the impact of marriage stability on the well-being of both spouses.

Material and Method:

The data collection utilized purposive sampling, with a sample size of 60 respondents (including both males and females) chosen for the study. The major data gathering approach involved conducting face-to-face interviews utilizing a standardized questionnaire. The interview schedule functioned as a direct investigative instrument, incorporating a thorough and meticulously crafted questionnaire that encompassed all facets of the variables being examined. The acquired data was coded and inputted into SPSS software for analysis. The analysis was performed using percentage distribution[24].

Result and Discussion:

Table 1

Demographic breakdown of survey participants by gender:

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	37	61.67%
Female	23	38.33%
Total	60	100%

Table 1 depicts the gender distribution of participants in the study, offering insights on the makeup of the research sample. Out of the 60 respondents, 37 were male, making up 61.67% of the participants. The remaining 23 respondents were female, accounting for 38.33% of the total. This analysis enables a precise comprehension of the distribution of genders among the surveyed population. The percentages provide a helpful viewpoint on the presence of males and females in the study, serving as a fundamental basis for further examination and understanding of the research results.

Table 2:

Participant perspectives on early marriage on the provided statements:

Statements for Opinion	Yes	No	Don't Know
Did you participate in the decision-making process of your marriage?	30.00%	51.67%	18.33%
Are you satisfied with results of your decision to marry at a young age?	48.33%	36.67%	15.00%
Did you have or seek any support systems during your early marriage?	45.00%	40.00%	15.00%
Is there adequate understanding on the adverse consequences of early marriage within your community?	26.67%	51.67%	21.67%
Have you encountered any health issues associated with early marriage, such as difficulty with pregnancy?	61.67%	18.33%	20.00%
Did early marriage have an impact on your educational goals and professional ambitions?	35.00%	43.33%	21.67%
Early marriage leads to early tension?	51.67%	43.33%	5.00%

Table 2 provides a thorough summary of participant viewpoints on early marriage, encompassing the diverse perspectives of persons who have encountered this cultural phenomenon. Remarkably, 30.00% of the participants took an active role in making decisions regarding their marriages, whereas a substantial 51.67% did not, highlighting the differences in autonomy when it comes to marital choices. The satisfaction levels about the decision to marry at a young age exhibited a range of responses, with 48.33% expressing contentment, 36.67% reporting discontent, and 15.00% remaining unclear. Approximately 45.00% of individuals actively sought out support systems throughout the early stages of their marriages, highlighting the significance of social networks. The table demonstrates different levels of awareness among the community, with 26.67% acknowledging a sufficient comprehension of the negative repercussions of early marriage, while 51.67% claimed a lack of awareness. A significant number of individuals (61.67%) experienced health challenges related to pregnancy as a result of being married at a young age. In addition, the study found that there was a disparity in the effect on individuals' educational and professional goals. Specifically, 35.00% of participants reported experiencing an influence, 43.33% reported no effect, and 21.67% were uncertain about the impact. Finally, the claim that early marriage results in early stress received 51.67% support, in contrast to 43.33% who disagreed and 5.00% who were unclear. This table provides a comprehensive overview, bringing insights into the varied and intricate viewpoints of early marriage from individuals who are directly impacted.

Table 3:

Distribution of education levels among participants:

Educational Level	Number	Percentage
Illiterate	14	23.33%
Secondary Education	17	28.33%
Matriculation	21	35.00%
Higher Education	8	13.33%
Total	60	100%

The table illustrates the educational distribution among a cohort of 60 individuals, providing significant insights into the diverse academic backgrounds of the participants.

Approximately 23.33% of the sample defined themselves as illiterate, highlighting the wide range of educational backgrounds. 28.33% of individuals had received secondary education, while a significant 35.00% had successfully passed their matriculation. Significantly, a lesser portion, amounting to 13.33%, had undertaken further education. The percentages provide insight into the difficulties that certain individuals encountered when pursuing higher education, potentially as a result of the influence of early marriage. The data indicates that a significant portion of participants may have felt obligated to prioritize their family obligations over pursuing additional education. Early marriages may restrict access to higher education due to the challenges of managing family responsibilities and personal growth. This highlights the possible consequences of being married at a young age on one's educational path, emphasizing the importance of having a detailed grasp of how societal expectations, gender roles, and educational goals connect.

Table 4

Factors contributing to early marriage among a sample of 60 participants:

Causes of Early Marriage	Agree	Disagree	Total
Religious influences	84%	16%	100%
Economic instability/financial insurance	83%	17%	100%
Lack of literacy and knowledge	84%	16%	100%
Fundamental conventions and traditions	86%	14%	100%
To expand the number of individuals in a family	82%	18%	100%
Approval by society	81%	19%	100%

Table 4 presents the viewpoints of the participants regarding the factors contributing to early marriage, with a specific emphasis on whether they agree or disagree with each indicated element. Religious influences were seen as a substantial element, as 84% of the respondents acknowledged its contribution to early marriages. 83% of respondents acknowledged the correlation between economic instability and the desire for financial security, emphasizing the complex relationship between financial factors and the choice to marry at a young age. The overwhelming consensus of 84% underscores the significance of education in influencing attitudes and cultural standards of marriage, due to a dearth of literacy and knowledge. The majority, including 86%, firmly agreed that fundamental conventions and traditions play a substantial role in the incidence of early marriages. Another significant component was the aspiration to increase the size of a family, with 82% consensus, indicating the importance of family-related factors in the decision-making process. Furthermore, a significant factor that influenced early marriages was societal approbation, as acknowledged by 81% of respondents. This comprehensive table offers a thorough comprehension of the various aspects that influence the participants' perspectives on early marriage, encompassing the intricate interaction of religious, economic, educational, and sociological issues.

The Results illustrate the complex characteristics of early marriage in the Pakhtun community, providing insights into the demographic, attitudinal, and socioeconomic elements involved. First and foremost, the demographic analysis highlights the gender imbalance in the research sample, with a preponderance of male participants. This phenomenon is indicative of wider cultural patterns in which gender norms might impact individuals' involvement in research and decision-making pertaining to marriage. Analysis of participant perspectives on early marriage (Table 2) reveals that although a considerable proportion of respondents did not play an active role in the decision-making process of their marriages, there exists a wide variety of attitudes and experiences. Opinions about early marriage decisions were diverse, with approximately 50% expressing satisfaction.

Nevertheless, a significant percentage encountered health difficulties associated with early pregnancy, underscoring the importance of promoting awareness and establishing support systems. Furthermore, the influence on educational and professional aspirations differed, indicating that early marriage can have distinct consequences on individuals' paths. The data shown in Table 3 illustrates the difficulties that individuals with lower educational attainment encounter while trying to pursue higher education. This highlights the potential consequences of marrying at a young age on educational prospects and personal growth, which in turn affects one's ability to move up the social ladder and gain empowerment. Table 4 offers a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental variables that contribute to early marriage in the Pakhtun society. Religious influences, economic instability, lack of education, and adherence to conventional standards are identified as major factors. These findings highlight the intricate interaction between cultural, economic, and social elements that influence marital choices and customs. Overall, our findings emphasize the significance of tackling early marriage in the Pakhtun society through comprehensive interventions. Efforts to improve educational opportunities, advance gender equality, raise knowledge about the repercussions of early marriage, and provide support systems for vulnerable individuals are essential measures to reduce the adverse effects of this prevalent practice. Moreover, actively involving religious and community authorities in advocating for modern readings of religion doctrines and questioning detrimental customary rituals can effectively foster favorable transformations in the prevailing societal conventions related to marriage.

Conclusion:

All responders in the research were unanimously aware of the consequences of early marriages. They view early marriage as a factor that contributes to mortality, causes misery in human lives, promotes overpopulation, hinders growth, limits individual freedom, leads to early stress, and negatively impacts the health of the couples involved. The consequences of early marriages include a range of negative effects such as complications during early pregnancy, the onset of diseases, increased risk of suicide, higher chances of divorce, difficulties in relationships, sexual problems, loss of personal freedom, violations of human rights, the continuation of poverty, adverse impacts on children, higher rates of childhood mortality (especially during childbirth), increased school dropouts, disempowerment of women, gender-based violence, limitations in autonomy and decision-making, domestic abuse, involvement in criminal activities, early participation in economic endeavors, adherence to cultural norms, and the perpetuation of a form of enslavement[25]. Moreover, the study emphasizes other factors contributing to the high occurrence of early weddings, such as rural cultural norms, familial responsibilities, disrupted family dynamics, unemployment, financial hardships, and undisclosed emergencies. The research highlights the enduring nature of this social problem inside the community over a prolonged duration, emphasizing the immediate requirement for comprehensive focus and intervention at all societal levels.[26]. To summarize, the investigation of early marriage within the Pakhtun tribe uncovers a multifaceted and deeply ingrained social phenomena that has significant and widespread effects. The findings highlight the widespread occurrence of early marriages and the complex factors that contribute to this practice. The study elucidates the detrimental consequences encountered by individuals, encompassing physical issues, limited educational prospects, and psychological hardships.

The entrenched traditions, economic volatility, low literacy rates, and societal norms play a crucial role in defining the prevalence of early marriages. Furthermore, the study illuminates the participants' cognizance of the adverse consequences, such as heightened death rates, concerns regarding overpopulation, and the erosion of personal liberties. The repercussions go beyond the immediate effects on the couples, impacting their children,

perpetuating poverty, and giving rise to different social problems. The cited causes span from cultural effects to economic obligations, highlighting the complex network of circumstances that contribute to the continuation of early marriages. The study promotes urgent focus at every level, highlighting the necessity for extensive measures to tackle this deeply rooted societal problem. Recognizing the interdependence of cultural traditions, economic factors, and educational prospects is a chance to promote consciousness and execute specific approaches that enable individuals and communities to escape the cycle of early marriages. The purpose of this essay is to enhance the discussion on early marriage in the Pakhtun society, promoting communication, comprehension, and cooperative endeavors for significant transformation.

Recommendations:

- Implement extensive educational initiatives to enhance knowledge regarding the adverse consequences of early marriage.
- Promote legal changes to establish and uphold a minimum age requirement for marriage.
- Enhance community support networks to equip individuals, particularly women, to withstand societal pressures for early marriage.
- Encourage economic prospects and enhance financial education to reduce the perceived necessity of early marriages as a means of financial stability.
- Engage in cooperation with religious leaders to reexamine cultural and religious norms that contribute to the occurrence of early marriages.
- Implement readily available healthcare treatments to mitigate the health hazards linked to adolescent pregnancies.
- Promote the active engagement of community leaders and influential individuals to challenge and transform societal attitudes about early marriages.
- Formulate and execute policies that prioritize the education of girls, with the objective of postponing marriage until the conclusion of their formal education.
- Offer counselling services to couples who entered into marriage at a young age to address psychosocial difficulties and improve their ability to cope with adversity.
- Facilitate community discussions to confront detrimental gender norms and foster a shared dedication to eliminating underage marriages.

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