

COMMUNITY PERCEPTION TOWARDS DOWRY PRACTICE AND ITS ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated community perception towards dowry practice and its economic consequences in District Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. A total of 230 respondents were selected through simple random sampling technique to portray information. Chi square (χ^2) and Gamma (γ) test statistics were used to determine the level of association and strength and direction between variables. The results indicated that 86.6 percent respondents viewed that sufficient dowry is considered as symbol of honor and respect, dowry payment is essential for marriage was disclosed by 60.9 percent respondents and 96.6 percent respondents considered dowry practice an evil. Furthermore, respondents perception about dowry practice was found significant ($P < 0.05$) and positive ($\gamma = 1.000$) with dowry is paid in cash. Similarly, community perception about dowry practice was found significant ($p < 0.05$) and positive ($\gamma = 0.999$) with dowry payment in material shape like jewelry, land, cattle. Moreover, a significant and positive association was found between community perception about dowry practice and due to demand of huge dowry the poor girls remain unmarried ($P < 0.05$, $\gamma = 1.000$). In addition, the association of community perception about dowry practice was found significant and positive with sufficient dowry help women in problematic situation ($p < 0.05$, $\gamma = 1.000$) and with dowry is paid to ensure economic stability of daughter and sister in future ($P < 0.05$, $\gamma = 0.898$). The results concluded that community considered dowry as an evil which leads to so many problems like the poor girls remain unmarried due to demands of huge dowry and make poor families economically indebted.

Key Words: Dowry, Community perception, Economic consequences, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

The South Asian region, particularly Pakistan and India, is known for its widespread traditional practice of dowry. More than a custom, it is viewed as an economic liability. Discussions about women's rights appear to be merely false progressiveness or pseudo-modernization, which hinders the development of women. The continual loss of power that results in the devaluation of women's gender and the lack of societal advancements has an impact on the process of advancement. In a patriarchal culture, women are confined to the home and their autonomy is suppressed by social conventions from birth. From a cultural standpoint, Dowry is the most widely



observed practice among society standards. A male child is valued higher and raised properly according to the societal ideal of "Male as Assets," whereas a female child is viewed as a liability due to dowry. This is how gender inequality begins at birth. This could lead to a significant gender imbalance that would primarily affect women (Yasmeen et al, 2021).

Dowry is described in the dictionary as "money, goods, or estate that a woman brings to her husband in marriage." When a couple gets married, the bride's family gives the bridegroom's family a transfer of material goods, primarily tangible and intangible assets (Makino, 2021). The requirement for dowry from the bridegroom and his family has changed over time to the point where it can now include a variety of items, including gold, a car, a motorcycle, clothing, crockery, furniture, spoons, pillows, bedcovers, clothes, for in-laws and other relatives, and clothing. (Ali et al, 2013).

There are a number of dowry-related elements that differ between rural and urban places as well as between high and low socioeconomic classes. The main purpose of dowries is to help newlyweds transition into a new stage of life by giving them some financial support, making them independent for the future (White, 2017). According to another theory, bride's parents typically give higher dowries so their daughter will be able to enjoy her status, well-being, and power over marital decisions after they get married and will also be shielded from any hardships, violence, or unfavorable treatment by in-laws. In affluent nations in particular, when there is a dearth of social and legal support for women, injustice can continue (Saeed et al, 2021). According to a study, dowry is highly connected with the ability of women who are not subject to the amendment to make decisions (Makino, 2019).

Some cultures also hold the view that large dowries help the parents of the bride to find better matches for their daughters in terms of the money, caste, or social standing of the prospective husband. Unfortunately, this mentality has negatively impacted marriage's fundamental purpose to the point where it is now a dowry hunter game. Better-off, more affluent, or financially secure grooms frequently expect extravagant dowries from the bride's parents. (Anderson, 2003), consequently, the bride's families would face a tremendous financial hardship. According to the New York Times, dowry provision is a severe issue for women from low-income backgrounds since they are unable to make arrangements for presents and financial support for the groom's family, which prevents them from getting married. (Ali, 2018). The desire of families to have female children is being negatively impacted by these circumstances. Instead, it strengthens the preference for male children, who not only provide for the parents' financial needs in old age but also provide dowry for marriage. In many cases, household problems after marriage result from the bride's parents' failure to pay hefty dowries and/or the in-laws' increased thirst for more money and material goods. As a result, women become more susceptible to physical abuse, torture, dowry burns, and even murder (Shah, 2019).

One of the most pervasive evils in Pakistan is the dowry system. In reality, this is not a problem that people are only now experiencing; it has been a problem for generations. The dowry system has been used as an excuse to violate women's rights. Due to their parents' inability to pay the obligations, so many ladies in Pakistan choose to remain single (Tertilt, 2005). Due to dowry's detrimental impacts on unmarried women, its financial constraints, and its role as a key contributing factor to the rise in gender inequality and violence against women. In many South Asian nations, it has been outlawed. The practice of dowry among citizens is prohibited by law. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and its modifications, the Dowry Inhibition Act of 1980 and its modifications, the Dowry and Bridal Gifts (Restriction) Act of 1976, and the Marriages Act (Prohibition of Wasteful Expenses) Act of 1997 in Pakistan. Despite, these laws and prohibitions, dowry practices are not reducing. In fact, it keeps on expanding its roots extending further (Jaggi, 2001; Sultan, 2021).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research study has two main objectives (1) to examine community perception about dowry practice and (2) to assess the economic consequences of dowry practice



METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

The research design for this study was a “Cross-Sectional” or one-shot or status design based on both times of exploration and study population. This study design is most appropriate for knowing the existing phenomenon, problem, attitude, perception, or issue, by taking a cross-section of the population (Babie, 1989).

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLE SIZE

The study was conducted in Union Council (UC) Thana Khas of District Malakand KhyberPukhtunkhwa Pakistan. Total numbers of families in the Thana Khas Union Council are 449 (population census report, 1998). Therefore, a sample size of 230 is appropriate for 449 populations as per criteria devised by Uma and Sekaran (2003). Data was collected through simple random sampling technique from heads of 230 families.

INDEXATION

In social sciences, indexation is used for assessment of the respondent’s attitude about the study variables. For indexation purposes, the statements (items) in a variable must be two or more than two. Thus, index construction is combining two or more items in a variable (Nachmias and Chava, 1992). For measuring the association between the independent and dependent variables at the bivariate level, the independent variables were indexed and cross-tabulated with the dependent variable (economic attributes of dowry).

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data was coded and entered in SPSS software for its analysis. The Chi-square (χ^2) and Gamma (γ) tests were applied to determined association, strength and direction between variables (Nachmias and Chava, 1992). Moreover, Fisher’s Exact test was introduced as an alternative to the Chi-square test where the condition of the Chi-square test (sufficiently large sample size that no expected frequency is less than five) was violated (Baily, 1982).

LIMITATIONS

The study was limited only to one union council of District Malakand Pakistan due to financial and time limitation. As the data was collected from only 230 respondents (family heads) so the results of the study are not generalize-able.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS DOWRY PRACTICE

Table 1 indicated that 3.4% of the respondents agreed that dowry system is good practice, while, 96.6% were disagreed. Furthermore, 86.6% of the respondents viewed that sufficient dowry is considered as symbol of honor and respect, while 13.4% negated the former statement. Also, 60.9% of the respondents opined that dowry payment is essential for marriage; while, 39.1% had negated that dowry payment is essential for marriage. Furthermore, 65.2% of the respondents emphasized that dowry is paid to help the groom family to some extent, while, 34.8% of the respondents rejected the former statement. Moreover, 87% of the respondents stated that dowry is a gift from parents to their daughters, while, 13% were not agreed. In addition, 24% of the respondents emphasized that dowry payment is the girl right in the family assets, while, 76% of the respondents viewed that dowry payment is not the girl right in the family assets.

Table 1; Community perceptions towards dowry practice

Attributes	Agreed	Disagreed
Dowry system is good practice	8(3.4)	222 (96.6)
Sufficient dowry is symbol of honor and respect	199(86.6)	31(13.4)
Dowry payment is essential for marriage	140(60.9)	90(39.1)
Dowry is paid to help the Groom family to some extent	150(65.2)	80(34.8)
Dowry is a gift from parents to their daughters	200(87)	30(13)
Dowry payment is the girl right in the family assets	55(24)	175(76)

ASSOCIATION BETWEEN COMMUNITY PERCEPTION TOWARDS DOWRY PRACTICE AND ITS ECONOMIC ASPECT

Table 2 highlighted a significant ($P < 0.05$) and positive ($\gamma = 1.000$) association between community perception towards dowry practice and dowry is paid in cash form. In addition, dowry typically consists of jewelry, clothing, household goods, livestock, cash, and other items; as a result, determining a specific dowry value at the time of marriage is challenging. Contrary to cash and gold/jewelry, which can be easily converted into cash and may be taken by the husband or his parents even if not intended to be part of the groom price, some dowry components, such as furniture and kitchenware, are more easily considered assets brought into marriage (Jejeebhoy, 2000; Makino, 2019).

Also a significant ($p < 0.05$) and positive ($\gamma = 0.999$) association was found between community perception and dowry payment in material shape like jewelry, land, cattle etc, and impacts of dowry. Moreover, Gamma ($\gamma = 1.000$), also indicated a highly positive relationship. These findings are supported by Jolly (2018) that dowry is arranged in various forms such as jewelry, money, property, and other valuable items to support bride in the new family.

The study further explored the association between community perception and phenomena that dowry is paid to ensure economic stability of daughter and sister in future. A significant ($P < 0.05$) and positive ($\gamma = 0.898$) association was found between variables. Similar results highlighted that mostly bride families' arranged dowry for daughters and sisters in order to ensure social security of them in grooms' family. Srinivas and Bedi (2007) dowry is essential for the bride's security and status after her marriage, as explained. Additionally, they mentioned that dowry raises the groom's social standing. As a result, the bride had more authority and control over her household, which ultimately resulted in a decrease in marital violence.

Similarly, the study highlighted the relationship between community perceptions that due to demand of huge dowry the poor girls remain unmarried. The results disclosed a positive and significant and positive association between variables ($P < 0.05$, $\gamma = 1.000$). Families must bear the burden of dowry, which occasionally forces them to take out loans in order to meet their obligations. Daughters in poor families occasionally stay single because their parents are unable to provide dowries, even though parents usually give dowries to their daughters based on their financial situation. Sometimes, dowry is demanded continuously after the wedding as well as at the time of the wedding. If parents are unable to meet those demands, their daughter might suffer negative effects (Ali et al, 2013).

Moreover, a significant ($p < 0.05$) and positive ($\gamma = 1.000$) association was between community perception and sufficient dowry helps women in problematic situation. It is detected from the findings that dowry has got the shape of cultural norms which is obligatory in nature. These findings are in line with the results of Diamond-Smith et al. (2008) that women having sufficient dowry can help family economically in any kind of turbulent situation like disasters,

inflation, disease etc. similarly, it was found that dowry as a symbol of prestige for a family and something that can improve the wife's security in the husband's home (Bates et al, 2004).

Furthermore, a significant ($P < 0.05$) and positive ($\gamma = 1.000$) association between community perception and dowry payment make poor families economically indebted was detected. It could be easily ascertained from the results that dowry is an economic burden for genera and for poor in particular. These results are in consonance with the findings of Naved (2010) that in order to marry a daughter or sister, family member had to borrow money from someone. This system is practice in South Asian countries from centuries which ultimately ruins the family economically. Poor families are frequently forced by dowries to take out high-interest loans, sell off land to raise money, promise to pay dowries in installments, and engage in other actions that can result in crippling debt. Parents frequently sell their farmland to raise money for a dowry (Joe, 2017).

Table 2; Association between community perceptions towards dowry practice and its economic aspect

Economic impacts of dowry	community perception towards dowry practice	Statistics
Dowry is paid in form of cash	community perception towards dowry practice	$\chi^2 = 188.644$ (0.000) $\gamma = 1.000$
Dowry is given in shape of material objects like granting land, jewelry and cattle to bride family	community perception towards dowry practice	$\chi^2 = 191.297$ (0.000) $\gamma = 0.999$
Dowry is paid to ensure economic stability of daughters and sisters in future	community perception towards dowry practice	$\chi^2 = 131.841$ (0.000) $\gamma = 0.898$
Due to demand of huge dowry the poor girls remains unmarried throughout their lives	community perception towards dowry practice	$\chi^2 = 162.855$ (0.000) $\gamma = 1.000$
Huge amount of dowry helps women to properly educate their offspring	community perception towards dowry practice	$\chi^2 = 167.450$ (0.000) $\gamma = 1.000$
Women having sufficient dowry support their families in problematic situation economically	community perception towards dowry practice	$\chi^2 = 389.196$ (0.000) $\gamma = 1.000$
Dowry payment makes poor families economically indebted	community perception towards dowry practice	$\chi^2 = 440.500$ (0.000) $\gamma = 1.000$

CONCLUSION

The present study focused on determining the relationship of community perception towards dowry practice and its social economic impacts. It was concluded from the study findings that majority of the community were against dowry practice. People also consider dowry is gifts from parents to their daughters and not considered it as girls' right in family assets. Moreover, It


was depicted from this study that dowry is being considered a sort of social security for bride in the groom family and as essential for a long and in ending relationship. Dowry is arranged in different types such as providing cash, jewelry and cattle to bride family. The dowry system is considered a social evil by the community, as dowry arrangements leads to the indebtedness of families, mostly the poor and non-marrying of girls as the clearest reality in the study area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Religious leaders/scholars play proactive role to aware people about the Islamic guideline about the phenomena of Haq Meher and aware people about the worse impacts of dowry.
- Public awareness campaign is the very essential, special seminars, symposium and talk shows need be arranged both on print and electric media to highlight the gruesome picture of dowry system.
- To broaden the scope of this research and to generalize its findings across the country. A large sample should be taken at the same time. At the same time, it is recommended that data from both towns and villages are collected.

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