



Early Marriage –A Barrier to Girls’ Education at Secondary Level In Tribal District Mohmand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the factors responsible for early marriage in tribal district Mohmand of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The main objectives of this study were to assess factors responsible for early marriage in tribal district Mohmand, to identify the effects of early marriage on girls’ education in tribal district Mohmand, to propose the strategies which can mitigate this practice of early marriage in tribal district Mohmand. Single-method design was used. Qualitative approach was used. Semi-structure interview was used for data collection. Population was all the female students who were studying in schools and at the meantime, they were married in early age and due to this marriage, they left the school in tribal district Mohmand. Purposive sampling was used. Sample contain thirty female students was taken from three tehsils of tribal district Mohmand for this study. Data were analyzed by thematic analysis. Findings shows that majority of the girls responded that the main factors of our early marriage were poverty, socio-cultural norms and illiteracy of parents. Similarly, majority of the girls responded that after marriage, they were compelled to leave school. They proposed that parents and community may be given awareness in this regard and early marriage may be banned. It was recommended that government and other non-government organizations should take steps for convincing them to stop early marriage so that these girls may complete their education.

Keywords: *Marriage, Mohmand, Secondary level, Poverty, Girls’ Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Mohmand is one of the merged district which has its specific characteristics. It is Pashtun area and Pashtunwali is the code. Pashtunwali is the Pashtuns’ behaving and acting code. It is a customary code. There are certain elements of Pashtunwali. These include Melmasteya, Nanawatey, Badal, Tarboorwali, Siyali, Nang, Namus and Jirga. Child marriage is comes from gender inequality and usually child is a person below the age of 18 years. Early marriage is not only a health issue but also a human right violation. Early marriage has the potential to deprive adolescent girls of their sexual reproductive health rights and decrease their capacity to gain full potential in life. Forced sexual relations, violence and abuse are caused by early marriage. Early marriage threatens girls’ rights of education. As new brides forced out of school to reproduce and provide household labor. Similarly new brides have little social connections, little mobility and no power in their new households. About 14 million girls marry in early age every year in the world. In developing countries, every 5th girl is married in the age of 18 years and every 9th girl is married below the age of 15 years. In some developing countries, the rate of early marriage is more than 60%. In South Asia, this rate is 46% and in sub-Saharan Africa, this rate is 38%. In Europe in some countries like Georgia, Turkey and Ukrain, this rate is 10%, in Britian and France, this rate of early marriage is 10%. In conflict affected regions of the world, the rate of early marriage is high. According to Girls Not Brides in 2018, one out of every five girl is married before the age of 18 years. Similarly, this rate of early marriage is high in those areas where education, employment and health care opportunities are less. Child marriage is a legal or informal union of two people before they reach the age of 18 years. Early marriage is prevalent in rural and less developed areas. According to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, child marriage is a public concern around the world. In these goals, no.5 is gender equality which may be achieved by 2030 (Thelma, Chitondo, Mumbi & Christian, 2023). This study explores the factors responsible for early marriage, its effects on girls’ education and to propose the strategies that can mitigate this menace.

Rationale of the Study

Every society observes some customs and traditions in which some are beneficial to society while some are harmful. Beneficial customs may be strengthened while harmful customs may be discouraged. In Pakistani society, early marriage or child marriage is one of the harmful practice which may be curbed. As this study is an attempt to end that practice which causes health issue as well social issue so this study is of great value.

Statement of the Problem

This study is aimed to explore the variable responsible for early marriage in tribal district Mohmand of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Early marriage deprives girls of the chance to grow personally. Formal marriage or informal union between a child underage and an adult or another child is known as child marriage or early marriage. Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and typically involves a child who is under the underage. Early marriage is not only a health issue but also a violation of human rights. All societies around the world view marriage as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. There is no reason to celebrate an early marriage. Girls who marry young are deprived of the chance to grow personally. Child marriage, often known as early marriage, is the formal or informal union of a child less than eighteen years old with an adult or another kid. A child is typically someone under the age of eighteen, and child marriage is a result of gender inequity. Early marriage is a violation of human rights as well as a health concern. The causes of early marriage in the tribal territory of Mohmand were also evaluated in this study. It also shows how early marriage affects girls' education in Mohmand, a tribal district. The goal of this study is to suggest ways to lessen the early marriage practice in the tribal area of Mohmand.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the factors that are responsible for early marriages in tribal district Mohmand.
2. To find out the effects of early marriage practice on girls' education at secondary level in tribal district Mohmand.
3. To recommend strategies to end/curb early marriage practice on girls' education in tribal district Mohmand.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors that are responsible for early marriages in tribal district Mohmand?
2. What are the effects of early marriage practice on girls' education at secondary level in tribal district Mohmand?
3. What strategies you propose to end/curb early marriage practice on girls' education in tribal district Mohmand?

Delimitations

This study has been delimited to three tehsils of tribal district Mohmand namely Halimzai, Ekka Ghund and Safi.

Theoretical Framework

Barriers to girls' education can be explained on the basis of several theoretical frameworks. Feminist theory, Human Capital Theory and Social Ecological Theory are the theories that provide a foundation for understanding the barriers to girls' education. Based on this theoretical framework, the conceptual framework will be to consider the factors responsible for early marriage and its effects on girls' education.

Factors responsible for Early Marriage

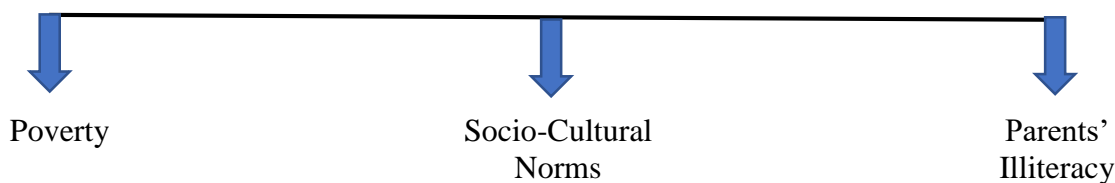


Figure: 1 Conceptual Framework

LITERATURE REVIEW

Formal marriage or informal union between a child that is underage and an adult or another child is known as child marriage or early marriage. Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and typically involves a child who is under the age of 18. Early marriage is not only a health issue but also a violation of human rights; it can deprive adolescent girls of their sexual and reproductive health rights and reduce their ability to reach their full potential in life; it can lead to violence, abuse, and forced sexual relations; it also jeopardizes girls' rights like education because new brides are compelled to leave school to have children and perform household chores. A child is typically someone under the age of eighteen, and child marriage is a result of gender inequity. Early marriage is a violation of human rights as well as a health concern. Adolescent girls who marry young may lose their rights to sexual and reproductive health and be less able to reach their full potential in life. Early marriage leads to abuse, violence, and forced sexual intercourse. Girls' rights, including the right to an education, are threatened by early marriage. New brides are compelled to drop out of school in order to procreate and work around the house. In a similar vein, new brides have minimal mobility, few social ties, and no authority in their new homes. Every year, almost 14 million young girls are married worldwide. Every fifth girl in developing nations gets married at the age of 18, and every ninth girl gets married before turning 15. Over 60% of people get married young in several developing nations. This rate is 38% in sub-Saharan Africa and 46% in South Asia. In some European nations, such as Georgia, Turkey, and Ukraine, the rate

of early marriage is 10%; in Britain and France, it is 10%. Early marriage is common in areas of the world affected by violence. In 2018, Girls Not Brides reported that one in five girls get married before turning eighteen. In a similar vein, early marriage rates are higher in places with lower access to health care, work, and education. A legal or informal union of two individuals before they become eighteen is known as child marriage. In rural and underdeveloped areas, early marriage is common. The Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations state that child marriage is a global societal problem. Gender equality ranks fifth among these objectives and could be accomplished by 2030 (Thelma, Chitondo, Mumbi & Christian, 2023).

Effects of Child Marriage

In developing regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa (37%), South East Asia (30%), and Latin America (21%), child marriage has been an alarming issue. Although there has been a reported decline in the rate of child marriage, it still persists in some places. To understand the specifics, one may know the factors that drive and accelerate it, as it is evident from previous studies. Early marriage has been a public health concern worldwide because it deprives adolescent girls of their sexual and reproductive health rights as generated by several international treaties. Early marriage prevents girls from realizing their full potential and exercising their human rights as guaranteed by a number of international treaties. In developing nations like sub-Saharan Africa (37%), South East Asia (30%), and Latin America (21%), child marriage is still a concerning problem. Despite reports of a decrease, child marriage is still common in some areas. Knowing the elements that propel and accelerate it might help one understand the specifics. It is evident from earlier research that some factors influence it. These factors are context-specific, socially complex, interdependent, and have varying degrees of significance between countries. These factors include pregnancy, gender norms, forced school exclusion, domestic obligations, stigma, and more (Thelma, Chitondo, Mumbi & Christian, 2023).

Why Child Marriage Persists

Young people's marital and reproductive health behavior is greatly influenced by their environment. Some factors, such as residence, age at first sex, education level of girls and their partners, and family size, have a significant impact on the prevalence of child marriage. Child marriage is a global and complex issue that affects both girls and communities. Although various organizations are working to end this harmful practice, it still exists, and if it is not decreased, it will accelerate and the Sustainable Development Goal 5 of gender equality will not be achieved by 2030. Early marriage decision-making is influenced by a number of elements, especially those related to girls' circumstances, beliefs, and social environment. The prevalence of child marriage is significantly influenced by a few factors. such as place of residence, age at first sex, females' and their partners' educational attainment, and size of the family. Child marriage is a complicated, worldwide problem that affects communities and girls alike. The Sustainable Development Goal 5 of gender equality will not be achieved by 2030 if this detrimental behavior is not curbed, despite the efforts of several groups to do so. (Thelma, Chitondo, Mumbi & Christian, 2023). Early marriage, also known as child marriage because it involves people under the age of 18, has been a major obstacle to girls' education. It is more common in developing nations like Nigeria. Early marriage is caused by a variety of factors, including socioeconomic, cultural, and religious factors; in some communities, it is seen as a way to uphold family honor; in others, it is seen as a way to protect their daughters from premarital sexual relationships or social deviance. Because it involves people under the age of 18, early marriage is also known as child marriage. Early marriages frequently result in dropout rates, limited educational options, early pregnancies, and serious health and psychological problems. In poor nations like Nigeria, child marriage is more prevalent.

Numerous variables, including socioeconomic, cultural, and religious ones, contribute to early marriage. While some communities view early marriage as a means of maintaining family honor, others view it as a way to lessen financial strain. Some claim that marriage shields their daughters from social deviance or premarital sex. These kinds of perspectives have a negative impact on girls' education and general well-being. Some people believe that early marriage is a way to alleviate the financial burden on the household. It is frequently noted that early marriage truncates girls' education at the primary or secondary level; early marriage makes school attendance impossible due to domestic responsibilities, pregnancy, and in some cases, social isolation; early marriage reinforces girls' gender roles more because of their reproductive and domestic roles than because of their intellectual development and personal aspirations; this reinforces girls' gender roles, which leads to low self-esteem, increased reliance on spouse, and limited participation in public or economic life. Early marriage is seen by some as a way to ease the financial strain on the home. Early marriage is known to shorten girls' elementary or secondary schooling. Due to household duties, childbearing, and perhaps social isolation, early marriage makes it impossible to attend school. Due to their reproductive and household responsibilities rather than their intellectual growth and personal goals, early marriage reinforces females' gender roles more. Early marriage reinforces a girl's gender role, which lowers her self-esteem, increases her reliance on her spouse, and limits her involvement in public or economic life. Early marriage reduces the likelihood of formal employment, making them more likely to rely on their husbands or other family members for financial support (Tosin & Paul, 2025). Early marriage has structural and cyclical impacts since family beliefs can either help or impede academic advancement. Girls who grow up with low educational aspirations and little support for learning are more likely to repeat the cycle with their own daughters when communities prioritize early marriage above education. Ecological System Theory states that peers, family, institutional policies, and community norms all influence a child's educational opportunities and developmental trajectory (Tosin & Paul, 2025). Early marriage, or the union of a girl under the age of eighteen, continues to be a worrying global issue with far-reaching effects on young girls' physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Nearly every nation on earth has a high rate of early marriage. The girls suffer as a result of this early marriage, which is against human rights. Early marriage perpetuates the cycle of poverty and has a detrimental impact on girls' educational possibilities. The practice of early marriage is influenced by various variables. Early marriage is a custom that varies by culture and geography. These elements fall into four categories: social, economic, cultural, and legal. One of the economic causes of early marriage in low-income and emerging areas is poverty. Early marriage is seen in many areas as a means of lessening their financial load. Dowry payments may be required in some places. Girls' responsibilities in civilizations with gender inequality are linked to their capacity to perform traditional gender roles, which results in early marriage. The continuation of early marriage is also significantly influenced by cultural norms. Early marriage is also motivated by the concept held by some societies that it protects girls' honor and their families' reputations. Early marriage is also influenced by a lack of access to high-quality education. The occurrence of early marriage can also be influenced by conflict and humanitarian disasters, since parents may choose to marry off their daughters as a coping strategy in these circumstances. (Kombat et al., 2023).

Effects of Early Marriage

Early marriage exposes young girls to a number of health risks: they are not yet mature enough to handle the physical strain of childbirth, which can result in complications; early marriage can cause pregnancy-related complications; early marriage can cause psychological distress due to the abrupt transition into adulthood; early marriage restricts girls' freedom, autonomy, and ability to make decisions; early marriage forces young girls into situations for which they are not emotionally

prepared, which can cause feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety; and early marriage can isolate young girls from their families, friends, and communities. Girls are not yet mature enough to handle the physical strain of childbirth, which can cause problems. Pregnancy-related issues may arise from early marriage. Due to the sudden shift into adulthood, early marriage may result in psychological anguish. In a similar vein, early marriage restricts girls' autonomy, freedom, and capacity for making decisions. Early marriage forces young females into circumstances for which they are not emotionally ready, leading to emotions of loneliness, despair, and worry. Young females may become isolated from their families, friends, and communities as a result of early marriage. Opportunities for intellectual growth are limited by early marriage. Additionally, girls' economic prospects and financial freedom are hampered by early marriage (Kombat, et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

It was qualitative study. Collected data answered questions through interviews from the girls (students) about the factors responsible for their early marriage, its effects on their education and strategies regarding its mitigation (Gay & Mills, 2000). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. This ensured the respondents' original language and expressions. Recurring patterns, themes and insights were identified by thematic analysis. Coding and themes were developed for ensuring accuracy and depths of the findings. Criteria of transferability, conformability, credibility and dependability were followed for ensuring the trustworthiness of the data and findings.

Research Design

This was single-method design and only qualitative approach was used (Gay & Mills, 2000; Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

Population

The population of the study was all the girls who were studying in schools and were married in the age less than 18 years and then after marriage, left the schooling. These girls belonged to the three tehsils of tribal district Mohmand.

Sample

For qualitative study, 1-60 sample size is enough (Clark & Braun, 2016). Thematic analysis was used and for this a sample of thirty respondents was taken (Clark & Braun, 2016). The sampling technique was purposive sampling for selection of girls (Creswell, 2012; Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

Research Instrument

The data were collected by semi-structured interview from the girls who were studying in secondary classes and were married before the age of 18 years and after marriage, their education was continued or discontinued.

Data Collection

In the tribal district of Mohmand, the researcher personally visited the girls and collected data from them. To ensure the girls understood the statements, the researcher translated them into Urdu, which required the assistance of experts. The researcher translated the statements into Urdu so that girls might understand them, and specialists were consulted.

DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data were analyzed with the help thematic analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. In thematic analysis, themes were categorized from these interviews (Clark & Braun, 2016). The researcher conducted interviews from thirty girls who were studying in secondary classes and were married before the age of 18 years and after marriage, their

education was discontinued. Out of thirty girls, only three girls continued their education due to the support of their husbands.

Table 1

Summary of Respondents

S.No.	Tehsil Name	Respondents
1	Ekka Ghund	10
2	Halimzai	10
3	Safi	10
4	Total respondents	30

This table: 1 indicate that ten girls have been taken as sample from each of three tehsils thus making thirty as the total sample of the study.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The analysis gave several important themes. Three of these are very important. These are poverty, socio-cultural norms and illiteracy of parents. Some interviews excerpts are given below.

Respondent1:R1: “As I was married in the age of 14 years, I was dropped out of school in order to safe myself and to know about the role of a wife. My position in class was very bright and teachers expected me to get more education. The main cause of my early marriage the poverty and my parents wanted to reduce the financial burden. This early marriage should be banned”.

Respondent2:R2: “I have been forced to marry early in the age of 15 years. After marriage, my husband stopped me to go to school due to social norms (Pashtunwali).The main reason of my early marriage was the illiteracy of my parents. Girls should be involved in decision-making process regarding their marriage. This early marriage should be stopped”.

Respondent3:R3: “I was married in the age of 14 years. After marriage, my husband was not agreed to send me to school. My education was stopped and my dreams have been shuttered. The main reason of this early marriage was poverty, illiteracy of parents and social norms (Pashtunwali).Awareness campaign should be launched for educating the community regarding early marriage”.

Respondent4:R4: “I was married in the age of 12 years. After marriage, my husband was not agreed to continue my education. So my dreams have been shuttered. The main reason of this early marriage was poverty, illiteracy of parents and social norms (Pashtunwali).Awareness campaign should be launched for educating the community regarding early marriage. Long-term policy may be formulated”.

Respondent5:R5: “I was married in the age of 13 years. After marriage, my husband was not agreed to continue my schooling. My education was stopped and my dreams have been abolished. The main reason of this early marriage was poverty, illiteracy of parents and social norms (Pashtunwali).Awareness campaign should be launched for educating the community regarding early marriage. Moreover, constitutional amendment may be made”.

This study found out that the practice of early marriage is a real problem in tribal district Mohmand. Different factors have been found responsible for this problem. Among these, poverty, social-cultural constrains, parents, illiteracy are the main factors. Different effects of this early marriage on girls’ education have been found as the result of this early marriage. Among these effects, the discontinuation of girls’ education is the main one. Different strategies have been found as proposed by girls for the mitigation of this practice. Among these strategies, parents’ awareness campaign, involvement of girls in decision-making process regarding their marriage are the prominent. On the basis of thematic analysis of data collected through interviews, findings received were: Out of total thirty respondents, twenty four replied that poverty was the main reason

of their early marriage. Similarly, from the same number of respondents, twenty six respondents answered that due to community pressure, their early marriages were arranged. In the same way, twenty seven respondents replied that traditional norms were the main reason of their early marriage. Similarly, twenty four respondents answered that due to lack of education of their parents, their early marriage were arranged. On the other hand, out of total thirty respondents, twenty six respondents replied that after marriage, due to household responsibilities, their education was discontinued. In the same vein, twenty three respondents replied that after marriage, due to husband pressure, their education was discontinued. Twenty respondents replied that after marriage, due to childbirth responsibilities, their education was discontinued. Nineteen respondents replied that after marriage, due to reproductive role, their education was discontinued. On the mitigation side, twenty six respondents replied that this early marriage should be discontinued. Twenty seven respondents replied that girls should be involved in decision making process about their early marriage. This study is in line with study conducted by Kombat et al. (2023).

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the aforementioned data, it was determined that the majority of students believed that financial issues, social pressure, traditional norms, and parents' lack of education were the primary barriers to girls' secondary education in district Mohmand. This indicates the area's backwardness in financial matters, social matters, and parents' education. Therefore, it is suggested that the government may take significant action in this regard. The government may set up scholarships, monthly stipends, and financial assistance for the girls' secondary education; NGOs may also make the necessary arrangements for the community's social development and parents' awareness campaigns. The government may set up financial aid, monthly stipends, and scholarships for the girls' secondary education. NGOs may also set up the necessary arrangements for the aforementioned aid. Additionally, initiatives for the community's social development and a campaign to raise awareness among parents, may be started.

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