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Abstract: Millions of girls are married as children in developing countries. They are denied fundamental rights like access to education, health and economic opportunities. Early marriage is a significant socio-cultural obstacles to female in access to education. Parents consider female education a burden in developing countries. Thus majority of parents in rural areas marry off their children as soon as possible. The physical, social, psychological, and economic costs of early marriage are harmful to girls. This study highlights the influence of early marriage on female education in the study area. Data were collected from a sample of 384 respondents through structured interview schedule. The study made use of binary logistic regression and bivariate cross tabulation tests in statistical analysis to determine the association between early marriage and female access to education. The study concluded that prevalence of early marriage factors have negatively affected girls' education, bearing significant effects not only on the educational outcomes but also on the development of the girls and the overall community. It recommends strict implementation of legal marriage age, awareness sessions and effective monitoring and evaluation systems to review progress and identify opportunities for educational improvement.

Introduction

Although early marriage (child marriage) is prohibited by both national and international law, gender norms and marital systems in many countries encourage this practice. As a result of these practices, girls' fundamental rights are violated, and they are victims of discrimination. Girls are often seen as wives and mothers by social custom, rather than as children with potential and opportunities in their lives. This mindset allows female to take on responsibilities and challenges for which they are not ready physically and psychologically, meanwhile their ability to access education and work is obstructed. The practice of early marriage affects not only girls themselves, but also families, children and society (Malhotra, 2003).

A World Bank study of 25 countries with high rates of child marriage found that out of three girls, more than one marries before age 18, and nearly one in five girls has their first child before age 18 (Wodon et al., 2017). Similarly, as per the World Population Report (2012), about 48 % of South Asian women and 42 % of African women aged 15-24 years were married before turning 18 years of age (UNFPA, 2012). Most countries have developed a consensus that the age of majority should be 18 years. In this context, various international agreements and governments have set the legal age for marriage at 18 years. The consensus indicates that both are aware of the negative consequences of having children at a young age

and a growing realization that secondary education and economic opportunities are necessary for young people to prosper in life and make contributions to society. According to recent statistics, more than 51 million girls aged 15 to 19 are married globally and have family responsibilities. Similarly, South Asia, East, West and Central Africa have the highest rate of early marriage, where almost 30 per cent of girls aged 15–19 are married (Mathur, 2003). Thus, a lack of education leads girls to early marriage and child labor.

The world's highest rate of child marriage is found in the Sub-Saharan African region, followed by South Asia, where approximately 4 out of 10 young girls were married before turning 18 years of age, whereas 3 out of 10 girls were married off before turning 18 years of age in South Asia (UNESCO, 2014). The normative pressure to protect girls' sexuality in an environment where young girls are frequently sexually harassed and abused leads to early marriage, ultimately reducing the chance of completing her education (Kamal & Hassan, 2015). According to the literature, girls who marry young are more likely to have a lower level of education. An analysis carried out in Bangladesh stated that child marriage reduces a girl's chances of completing secondary education by 4 to 6 percentage points annually (Field & Ambrus, 2008). If current rates of child marriage continue, 14.2 million girls will be married as children each year, or 39,000 child marriages per day (UNFPA, 2012). The fight against child marriage is fundamentally a human rights issue (Wodon et al., 2017).

Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are considered inferior; they cannot access economic resources due to their social subordination (Naz et al., 2012). Females get married at an early age and move out of their fathers' home to live with their husband's family with limited financial resources (Kassa, 2015). In most parts of Africa, including Congo, it is very common for girls to marry before they reach puberty. Early marriage puts girls' education at risk, contributing to gender inequality. Consequently, millions of girls are thereby compelled to be second or third-class citizens and live in poverty their whole lives (Edwards, 2019).

Parents consider female education a burden in developing countries. The majority of parents in rural Bangladesh marry off their children as soon as possible. The physical, social, psychological, and economic costs of early marriage are harmful to girls (Sarkar et al., 2014). Similarly, Child marriages occur owing to gender inequality, illiteracy and poverty (Butt & Naveed, 2015). Early marriage and social norms are closely related in rural India, which restrict female education and overall development (Maertens, 2013). However, early marriage for girls is still favored in rural areas of Pakistan and Africa, compromising their education. Early marriage is always practiced in poor and less educated families, who cannot afford the cost of education (Erulkar, 2013).

A girl's age at marriage depends on social and cultural norms, including religious beliefs and customs (McLeary et al., 2015). Early marriage rates are highest in poorer countries and are more common among low-income families, which have less money and fewer opportunities for girls (Malhotra et al., 2011). As a result, low-income families see teenage girls as a financial burden. Parents and guardians believe that marriage has more benefits, so they marry off their daughters at a young age, especially when they are children (Sekhri & Debnath, 2014).

Girls' access to formal and non-formal education after marriage is severely limited due to social norms, family responsibilities and child rearing that view education and marriage as incompatible (Mathur et al., 2003). Education is extremely limited for young girls due to childbearing, domestic responsibility and societal customs that consider education and marriage as contradictory (Ara, 2012; Mathur et al., 2003). Early marriage contributes to low female higher education (Nargis, 2012). To reduce the financial burden on each other, parents found early marriage as the most suitable way to secure their daughter's

future (Myers & Rowan, 2011). Girls' secondary school enrolment is restricted by early marriage (Ara, 2012). Similarly, females confront several barriers while attempting to pursue higher education, including restricted access due to early marriage (Jamshaid, 2022). Early marriage and pregnancy limit female enrollment at the secondary level (Rihani, 2006). Thirty percent of women cannot attend higher education because they marry relatively young (Erulkar, 2013). 39% of Pakistani women who are of childbearing age marry before turning the age of 18 (PDHS 2017-18). Likewise, early marriage limits women's opportunities for economic empowerment and education (Sekhri & Debnath, 2015; Yount et al., 2022). The biggest obstacles to attaining universal primary education for females are the marriage of school-aged girls (Myers & Harvey, 2011). Early marriage decreases educational opportunities. Dropout is significantly associated with early marriage (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2019).

Various studies show that newlyweds who participated in the study expressed regret for not continuing their education or achieving their career goals (Schuler, 2006; Barr, 2015; Mitra, 2015; Taylor, 2015). In many cultures, a woman's sexuality is not her own, but rather it belongs to her father, husband or family. Therefore, the decision on marriage rests with family members and not with the woman. In Bangladesh, parents feel pressure to marry off their daughters as soon as possible because they worry that the girl will find an unsuitable partner of her own or that nasty rumours will hurt her chances for a good marriage. Early marriage significantly diminished girls' educational opportunities, and the expectation of early marriage sometimes hinders access to education (Huq & Amin, 2001). Moreover, in most cultures, girls leave their fathers' homes when they marry, so parents are often less willing to invest in their daughters' education, because this will benefit their husbands' families and the investment will be lost. Similarly, after marriage, due to domestic burdens, childbearing, lack of mobility, and social norms, married girls' access to education is highly restricted. The majority of families consider marriage and education as incompatible. Early marriage is in direct opposition to the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially child survival and the promotion of basic education. Girls who marry young miss out on opportunities for education and work (Schuler, 2006; Mitra, 2015).

In large families where resources must be shared among several family members, early marriage of girls can be an important survival strategy to meet the needs of many children regarding continuing education, transportation, shelter, clothing, and food (Abdallaoui et al., 2015). Early marriage causes girls to drop out of school. This, in turn, leads to early marriage and girls who do not go to school are considered marriageable (Chae S., 2013). Out-of-school females are more likely to experience early marriage (Price et al., 2018). Moreover, various studies show that educating females in one generation might lead to a delay in marriage in the daughters' generation. Child marriage is mainly driven by harmful customs and patriarchal norms (Choe, 2005; Magadi, 2009; Erulkar, 2013; Glick, 2015).

Families prefer to prepare girls for marriage and motherhood, but do not invest enough in their education (Archambault, 2011; Henry, 2015; Petroni, 2017; Ahmed, 2019; Cislighi, 2019). Marriage frequently appears to be the best option for families battling long-term poverty to secure their daughters' future and ease their cost of living. Due to the high cost of higher education and relatively low earning potential, girls are forced to drop out of school and marry at a younger age. Thus, child marriage is advancing gender inequality, a primary obstacle for attaining higher education for girls (Harvey, 2011).

Early marriage directly affects the educational performance of the young bride and also limits her social circle of friends. In addition to providing formal and informal education, schools enable many girls to gain support and social skills that allow them to be mobile and freely participate in community activities. Similarly, when newly brides leave school, they lose this support system and are confined behind four

walls (UNICEF, 2014). If the marriage age of children is raised from 15 to the minimum legal age of 18, women's education and literacy rates will increase by more than 20 percent and 10% completed fertility will decline as well (Field, 2004). Compared to late marriage, children born in early marriage had lower educational attainment and such couples have a poor standard of living in South Asia (Jahangir et al., 2011).

Methodology

The current study was conducted in District Bajaur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with the primary purpose of identifying the association between early marriage and female education. A cross-sectional research design was chosen because it allows for data collection from a larger population. The sample was selected through stratified random sampling technique and data were collected from 384 out of 121,487 household by using a structured interview schedule. Binary logistic regression and cross-tabulation tests were employed. Moreover, the statistical association in bivariate analysis was measured by the confidence interval value, P value and odds ratio. As a study outcome variable, female. Female access to education as a study outcome variable was measured using dichotomous categories: Influence and No influence.

Results and Discussion

The researcher investigated the relationship between study variables by using binary logistic regression and cross-tabulation tests as part of bivariate analysis.

Table 1: Early marriage associated to access to education

Early Marriage	Female Access to Education		OR, 95% C.I	P. Value
	No Influence Frequency, %	Influence Frequency, %		
The poor socio-economic status of Pashtun families compelled them to marry off their daughters at an early age.				
Agree	23 (67.6%)	230(65.7%)	1.084(0.482-2.439)	0.845
Neutral	02 (5.9%)	37 (10.6%)	2.006(0.413-9.743)	0.388
Disagree	09(26.5%)	83(23.7%)	1.00	
Early marriage is a barrier to education.				
Agree	12 (35.3%)	224 (64%)	4.533(2.065-9.951)	0.000
Neutral	05(14.7%)	56 (16%)	2.269(0.949-7.829)	0.064
Disagree	17 (50%)	70 (20%)	1.00	
Parents do not educate daughters because it benefits their husbands' families.				
Agree	07 (20.6%)	182(52%)	4.117(1.679-10.09)	0.002
Neutral	08(23.5%)	48(13.9%)	.950 (.390-2.316)	0.950
Disagree	19(56%)	120(34.3%)	1.00	
Early marriage places heavy responsibilities on young girls, limiting their access to education.				
Agree	06 (17.6%)	163(46.6%)	4.563 (1.797-11 581)	0.001
Neutral	06 (17.6%)	56 (16%)	1.567(0.603-4.075)	0.357
Disagree	22 (64.7%)	131(37%)	1.00	

An educated female is not preferred for marriage in the Pashtun tribal community.				
Agree	08(23.5%)	179(51.1%)	3.762(1.594-8.881)	0.003
Neutral	07 (20.6%)	58(16.6%)	1.393(0.554-3.505)	0.481
Disagree	19(55.9%)	113(32.3%)	1.00	
Early marriage of a schoolgirl reduces the chances of completing school.				
Agree	13 (38.2%)	217(62%)	5.080(2.239-11.526)	0.000
Neutral	07(20.6%)	87(24.9%)	3.783 (1.427-10.029)	0.007
Disagree	14(41.2%)	46(13.1%)	1.00	

Explanation

Association of early marriage with female access to education: Among the selected respondents, 230 (65.3%) agree that early marriage affects access to education, while 23 (6.7%) disagree. The odd ratio (OR) for influence on access to education is 1.8 times higher than those who disagreed. The poor socio-economic status of Pashtun families compelled them to marry off their daughters at an early age, which is statistically insignificant with the dependent variable. The value of the confidence interval is (0.482-2.439). Out of the sample size, the majority, 201 (57.4%) of the respondents agreed on the influence over access to education, whereas 06 (17.6%) did not agree. The odd ratio for influence on access to education is 04 times greater than for the disagreed respondents. Early marriage is a significant barrier to education is significant to dependent variable. The result shows a significant confidence interval value at (2.065-9.951). Moreover, after adjusting the Patriarchal structure of Pashtun society, family honour (ghairat), rooted in Pashtunwali and the strict code of the purdah system (veil), early marriage is a barrier to education, which is statistically significant in accessing education. Their adjusted odds ratio (AOR) is 3.178, while the 95% confidence interval values are (1.262-8.003). Furthermore, 182 (52%) agreed to inserting influence, while 07 (20.6%) representatives agreed that they did not influence access to education. The odd ratio for their influence on education is 02 times greater than those who disagreed. Parents do not educate daughters because it benefits their husband's family, which is statistically significant in terms of access to education. The value of the confidence interval is (1.679-10.09) indicating a significant association. Furthermore, after the adjustment of the Patriarchal structure of Pashtun society, family honour (ghairat) rooted in Pashtunwali and a strict code of the purdah system (Veil), Parents do not educate girls because they will benefit their husband's family, which is found statistically significant in access to education. Their adjusted odd ratio is (AOR, 95% CI 3.126 (1.182-8.263)). The majority of 163(46.6%) respondents agreed on influence on access to education, while 11 (32.4%) agreed for no influence. Early marriage places heavy responsibilities on young girls, limiting their access to education, and has a statistically significant association with the dependent variable. The odd ratio for influence on access to education is 04 times higher than disagreed. The confidence interval value (1.797-11.581) indicates a significant association. Moreover, after adjustment of key terms, the patriarchal structure of Pashtun society, Family honour (ghairat) rooted in Pashtunwali and strict code of purdah system (veil), Early marriage places heavy responsibilities on young girls, is found statistically significant having adjusted odd ratio as (AOR, 95% CI. 2.90 (1.042-8.125)).

Furthermore, 179(51.1%) majority of the respondents were agree with influence whereas 08(23.5%) of the respondents were agreed with no influence. The odd ratio for influence on access to education is 03times higher than those who disagreed. Educated females are not preferred for marriage in the Pashtun tribal community, which is statistically significant with the dependent variable. The result shows

a significant confidence interval value at (1.594-8.881). Moreover, after adjusting for key terms, the patriarchal structure of Pashtun society, family honour (*ghairat*) rooted in Pashtunwali, and the strict code of the *pardah* system (veil), the preference for an educated female in marriage in the Pashtun tribal community is statistically significant. Their adjusted odd ratio ((AOR, 95% CI. 2.990 (1.19-7.46)). In addition, 217(62%) respondents agreed on influence on access to education, while 13 (38.2%) of the respondents agreed with no influence. The odd ratio for influence on access to education is 05 times greater than those who disagreed. Early marriage of a schoolgirl reduces the chances of completing school, which is statistically significant with the dependent variable. The result shows a significant confidence interval value at (2.239-11.526). Moreover, After adjustment of key terms patriarchal structure of pashtun society, family honor (*ghairat*) rooted in Pashtunwali and Strict code of *pardah* system (veil), early marriage of a school girl reduces the chances of completing the schools is found statistically significant having adjusted odd ratio as (AOR, 95% CI. 3.76 (1.189-11.923).

After adjustment of all the key impediments (*Pashtunwali*) at the last model, various barriers were statistical significant to access to education, early marriage is a barrier (adjusted OR, 95% CI. 3.178 (1.262-8.003)), parents do not educate girls (adjusted OR, 95% CI. 3.126 (1.182-8.263)), early marriage places disproportionate responsibilities (adjusted OR, 95% CI. 2.90 (1.042-8.125)), educated female is not preferred for marriage in pashtun community (adjusted OR, 95% CI. 2.990 (1.19-7.46)) and early marriage of a school girl reduces the chances of completing the schools (adjusted OR, 95% CI. 9.45, 3.76 (1.189-11.923), whereas the remaining variables have no statistically significant association with the outcome variable. A Multivariate logistic regression analysis was carried out to obtain the AOR after controlling for Pashtunwali.

Table 2: Multivariate association of Pashtunwali, early marriage, and access to education

Early marriage	M1		M2		M3		M4		M5		M6	
	AOR,	95% CI	AOR,	95% CI	AOR,	95% CI	AOR,	95% CI	AOR,	95% CI	AOR,	95% CI
Patriarchal structure of Pashtun society Agree	4.254	(1.551-11.671)	4.087	(1.441-11.594)	5.192	(1.83-14.69)	5.123	(1.82-14.37)	5.05	(1.78-14.33)	2.40	(.723-8.005)
Family honor (<i>ghairat</i>), rooted in Pashtunwali, Agree	12.00	(2.596-55.472)	10.613	(2.76-49.484)	11.583	(2.47-54.18)	9.42	(2.001-44.41)	10.79	(2.31-50.28)	9.65	(2.085-45.73)
Strict code of the <i>Purdah</i> system (Veil) Agree	2.942	(1.073-8.068)	3.059	(1.142-8.197)	2.962	(1.10-7.92)	2.89	(1.08-7.69)	2.93	(1.09-7.83)	3.58	(1.31-9.79)
Early marriage is a barrier. Agree			3.178	(1.262-8.003)								
Parents do not educate girls because they will benefit their husbands' families. Agree					3.126	(1.182-8.263)						

Early marriage places disproportionate responsibilities. Agree				2.90 (1.042- 8.125)		
An educated woman is not preferred for marriage in the Pashtun tribal community. Agree					2.990 (1.19- 7.46)	
Early marriage of a schoolgirl reduces the chances of completing school. Agree						3.76 (1.189- 11.923)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Early marriage is a major problem in rural areas and tribal communities in Pakistan. Numerous studies have found that the majority of people aged 15-19 in Asia and Africa were married before reaching the age of 18. Early marriage compromises the female education in Pakistan, India, Africa and Bangladesh. This causes poverty, domestic violence, illness, high population growth, domestic burdens, and missing life opportunities with education and economic empowerment. Furthermore, early marriage, parents do not educate daughters, heavy responsibilities, educated female is not preferred for marriage and early marriage of a female reduces the chances of completing the schools were found statistically significant to hinder female access to education. Family play important role in deciding female education. Female are dependent on respective male family members to go for education. This study concludes that female need support of family for their access to education. Parent support is very important in this regard because family and parents avoid discouraging attitude of people. It was found that government lack interest in female education. Human capital theory supported this study with different perspectives with respect to gender inequality in access to education. Assessing human capital theory, researchers found that females are neglected in education. As education is considered human capital, families invest in education based on their expectations of the economic returns. Long-established gender roles dictate that men earn money while women take care of the home. In tribal patriarchal societies, sons are expected to be the family's future breadwinners and daughters are expected to marry off to other families. Investments are made in sons' education while girls are discriminated against. This further promotes the practice of early marriage, which in turn leads to the discontinuation of girls' education and strengthens patriarchy. It was concluded that female need sensitization about their educational rights. The study recommends strict implementation of legal marriage age, awareness sessions and effective monitoring and evaluation systems to review progress and identify opportunities for educational improvement.

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