

## Exploring the Consequences of Dowry Practices on Women's Prestige in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to explore dowry's consequences on women's prestige in District Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The nature of the current study was qualitative. Data were collected from 13 respondents by using a purposive sampling technique through the interview guide. The collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The results show that women with a high amount of dowry are treated respectfully by their in-laws while females with low dowry are often tortured, insulted, disliked and sometimes even thrown out of their homes. The payment of a high dowry may influence the decision about whether to delay marriage for girls. People's perception showed that dowry no longer remained a custom or tradition in our country. The study recommends that the government should educate the people who can play an important role in reducing adoption and subsequent dowry practices. Religious scholars should emphasize the factual teachings of Islam regarding dowry practices and discourage all traditional practices. This will directly improve the status of Pakistani women despite the patriarchal nature of Pakistani society.*

### Introduction

In human life marriage plays a key role. It is a permanent bond between husband and wife. It is a turning point in life because after marriage sometimes it leads to numerous problems. In Pakistan, dowry is a big issue that has many impacts on the life of the bride after marriage (Ullah et al., 2020; Gulzar & Nauman, 2012).

The dowry is an old tradition in Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the bride's parents pay cash, jewelry, kitchen tools, clothes and various valuables to the groom's family as dowry during the marriage. Dowry and the poor economic condition of the bride's parents badly affect the life of the bride after marriage. If she goes without a dowry, it will create an honor issue for the bride as well as produce a lot of social and psychological problems for the bride in the groom's house (Khattak & Bezhani, 2021). Dowry is the transfer of money, goods, kitchen tools, clothes, and some other form of wealth from the bride's parents to the groom's parents at marriage time (Singh, 2013).

Dowry is very common in Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which has created so many social and economic issues with very serious outcomes. Moreover, the bride's family is under pressure to ensure more and more dowry. (Shah et al., 2016; Sachdeva, 1998).

In Pakistan, which is a Muslim state, the dowry system is still present in almost all parts of the country. According to Islamic law, a woman gets an inheritance portion from her father. While at marriage, the dowry is considered a substitute for that inheritance (Ali et al., 2013). Dowry culture has existed in our society for centuries. Not only the illiterate but also the educated people of Pakistan are involved in this practice. In Pakistan, it has filtered from the upper class of the society to

the lower class. The dowry system has been exploited the rights of women and due to it, women remain unmarried in many cases and faces various psychological and social pressures. About 95 percent of rages in Pakistan are conducted under the dowry culture, with very bad consequences.

As a result, about 2000 deaths occur in Pakistan every year, and the rate is increasing day by day. Therefore, most the people cannot fulfil the demands of dowry, so they commit suicide. However, many laws, such as the Acts of 1996, 1997, and 1998, have been passed in Pakistan against the practice of dowry. Finally, the bill of 2008 was passed, according to which marriage gifts should be between 30,000 and 50,000 maximum (Tonmoy, 2017).

In District Dir Lower, KP, Pakistan's marriage mostly takes place with a cousin and very close relatives, where the dowry is considered the symbol of establishing marriage, which is a very common practice. Most of the people in District Dir Lower observe the practices of dowry. Nowadays, "Mahr" has become one of the most important symbols to establish a marriage, and only a very small amount of Mahr is written in the marriage agreement (Nikah Nama). This Mahr is a little less shameful for the bride's parents to consider it the sale of their daughter (Momoe, 2014).

### **Objective of the Study**

1. To explore the consequences of dowry practice on women's prestige.

### **Methodology**

The nature of this study is qualitative. This study was limited to and conducted in the Tehsil Timergara, District Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In this study, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique. Since the nature of the current study was qualitative, therefore the researcher used in-depth interviews with the respondents through an interview-guide. Data collection, processing, gathering and organizing the data are the objective of a research to draw a clear picture about a phenomenon. After the recording of the interviews the researcher transcribed the data and relevant themes and subthemes were organized through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a type of analysis which is commonly using in qualitative research.

### **Results**

#### **Theme: To know about the consequences of dowry practice on women's prestige**

#### **Subtheme: Impact of dowry practice on social standing of women with reference**

Dowry is considered a source for honor and prestige of a bride in the eyes of her husband. The female with a high amount of dowry are treated respectfully by their in-law while female with low dowry are often tortured, insulted, disliked and sometimes even thrown out of homes. However, the low dowry is a major cause of degradation of women's prestige in our society. Furthermore, high dowry is a custom and tradition in our society. Losing a marriage proposal is detrimental to the status of bride's family in society (Ahmed, R & Talukder, E. 2019).

The researcher asks a question from respondent that how does the dowry impacts the social standing of women in Timergara? one of the respondents stated that;

*"Yes, affected the social standing in both cases if she is married with low dowry she is tortured, dishonoured and disrespected in the husband's house and her social standing is disturb and if she remains unmarried at home. She also affected socially because her Sister-in-law saying her that you are burden on my husband in the absence of parents" (respondent no 1; dated 02/01/2024).*

Another respondent stated that;

*"Yes, having impact on life. If a female has no proper dowry the peoples taunt up her that you have not bring this thing as dowry at marriage. Also, the sister-in-law the mother in law and brother-in-law also taunt up her and the husband takes the side of sister and mother against wife. The husband come in the aggression and fight with his wife due to which she become in tension and depression which is the impacts of dowry on social standing of women" (respondent no 4: dated: 06/01/2024).*

One of the respondents stated that;

*"Yes, having impacts on social standing of woman, for example when a female having good dowry she has good value in the house she is giving good respect and honour. While the female having low dowry, she is badly treating in the home. She is not involved in important*

*activities and ceremonies, even she has no value in the eye of husband family” (respondent no 5: dated: 10/01/2024).*

One of the respondents explained that;

*“Yes, having impacts on social standing of woman in case if she has low dowry. Then she is dishonoured, having no respect in house. While that one who has good dowry. She is treating well, she has good respected. Even her opinion is given importance. Therefore, the dowry has impacts on social standing of woman” (respondent no 7: dated: 10/01/2024).*

Another respondent stated that;

*“Yes, due to dowry the social standing of female is affected the social standing of woman is related to dowry. If a girl has more dowry she will be more respectable and valuable and if a female has low dowry she is given no respect and prestige in the house. Therefore, the dowry has impacts on the social standing of woman” (Respondent No 10: dated: 16/01/2024).*

**Subtheme:** with example where dowry practice has affected the women’s dignity with reference.

When rural women can't fulfil the demands of their husbands and his family member in dowry, they face physical and mental tortures in the most cases. We see husbands beat their wives without thinking about her feelings. These tortures turn to mental tortures in the long run. Women feel afraid about their future. They can't think to punish their husband with the help of the court. They can't share their feelings with anyone. Ultimately these tortures lead to suicide (Salim, S. 2017).

The researcher asked a question from respondents about the Examples where dowry practices have affected women's dignity or social status.one of the respondents stated that;

*“One example that in our village there was a girl she had engaged by loving both each other. Mean it was a love-based engagement. The husband family told them that you people must have the car in dowry. The girl father could not afford it and he told the husband parents I cannot afford the car in dowry. Due to this reason the Nikah is broken and the girl done the suicide. So, it is the impact of dowry on social dignity and social status of woman” (respondent no 1: (dated: 02/01/2024).*

Another respondent said that;

*“Yes, I have an example that my cousin has married to a high status’s people. She has a sister-in-law who is from very high-status family. She has much more furniture in the dowry. Compare to my cousin who was belonging to a poor family and they could not provide such a good furniture in the dowry. Now my cousin she is considered very low in the eye of everyone and having disrespect in the home even she is doing all home work. But the one who has more dowry is setting every time and having no interest the house work. Her order is obeyed in the home but not working herself. So, this is the impact of dowry practice on social dignity and social status of woman” (respondent no 3: dated: 06/01/2024).*

One of the participants explained that;

*“Yes, in our village there was female her mother has gone to purchase the dowry things. When they came back the girl ask them what you purchased for dowry. They show the list of things they bought. She again asked you people did not buy the frige and washing machine they told not because, they could afford that.so after that she eaten the poison and attempted suicide. It is the impact of dowry on social standing and social status of women” (respondent no 8: dated: 16/01/2024);*

Another respondent said that;

*“Yes, sir near to my maternal uncle’s house there was a female she had engaged 5 to 6 years back. After engagement her husband become a doctor and belongs to stable family and the female family was simple and poor. They could not afforded the dowry for their daughter both the families become against each other on dowry things the Nikah broken and the female sets at the father house because they could not affording dowry”( respondent no 12: dated: 22/01/2024).*

**Subtheme:** in your opinion, how does the pressure for dowry influence the decision-making power of women in the community?

**Subtheme:** pressure for dowry influence the decision-making power of women with reference Dowry system has given rise to many socio-economic problems with very serious consequences. Numerous incidents of bride burning, harassment and physical torture of newlywed women and various kinds of pressure tactics being adopted by the husbands/in-laws pressurizing for more dowry have compelled the social reformers and the intelligentsia to give serious thoughts to various aspects associated with the institution of dowry. In many cases, when dowry amount is not considered sufficient, the bride is often harassed, abused and tortured even she lost the decision-making power (Salem, S.2017).

The researcher asked a question from respondents understand the dowry influence on the decision-making power of women in the community?

*“Yes, why not, anything she says not accepted, therefore she does not take any interest in decision making because she knew that my decision and opinion will not be accepted. So, she considered herself inferior due to having no dowry” (respondent no 1 dated: 02/01/2024).*

Another respondent told that;

*“Yes influenced. Those who have good dowry is asking for everything in the home and those who has low dowry is not asking even about one small opinion. They think about her that she has no power of decision they ignored her because she did not bring the dowry. She does not any ability as she did not bring the dowry. She doses involve even in a small opinion for doing something” (respondent no 3: dated: 06/01/2024).*

One of the respondents stated that;

*“Yes influenced, if a female with good dowry she has the decision power. She can take good decision and the other female with low dowry or having no dowry due to poorness. She cannot express her view because of low dowry. She does allow having the opinion about something even no one is asking her for opinion. Those who have dowry they can put their point of views” (respondent no 5: dated: 10/01/2024).*

Another respondent told that;

*“No, do not have the decision power if a female has low dory. To some extent with good families partially having the decision power but if family is not good she does not have the decision power, and no one involve her in the opinion neither share the things with her even the important things do not discuss in front of her” (respondent no 8 dated: 16/01/2024).*

One of the respondents explained that;

*“Sir those who has good dowry her decision is 100% acceptable and her opinion is considered ok. But the one who have no proper dowry her opinion is not given any attention. However, if she is telling right and having good value still she cannot express her views. Because of tension” (respondent no 12: dated: 22/01/2024).*

**Subtheme:** The efforts or initiatives within the community that address the negative consequences of dowry on women's prestige with reference.

The dowry system is become a social practice that perpetuates the oppression, torture and murder of women. The practice of dowry is an expected part of marriage in cultures where arranged marriages are the norm. Violence can occur when the dowry or bride-price is deemed unsatisfactory by the recipient (Priya, 2014).

The researcher asked a question from respondents to understand about the efforts or initiatives within the community that address the negative consequences of dowry on women's prestige? One of the respondents stated that;

*“Yes, the husband not looking in good eyes, the mother in law and the father in law and the brother-in-law even all are not looking her with good eyes. in short, the whole family members disrespect her due to low of dowry. Compare to it those who have good dowry having good respect in house. The one who has low dowry consider like a servant which is not good with her. It is not good to treat her like animal. Because, she is a human and should be treated like human. She has the dowry according to the worth. it is the negative consequences of dowry on women prestige” (respondent no 2: dated: 02/01/2024).*

Another respondent explained that;

*“Yes, influenced on the women prestige in the sense that she is living in the home like servant. Because the family member giving no value to her. She is not considered like a human and she is using for work purposes only. She does not involve in decision and neither opinion. Therefore, dowry has influence on women prestige” (respondent no 3: dated: 06/01/2024).*

One of the participants said that;

*“Yes, why not no one take opinion nor she taking to any function or death occasion instead of this female other female taking who has more dowry and she is rich female also, therefore dowry has influenced and has more impacts on female prestige” (respondent no 7: dated: 10/01/2024).*

Another respondent stated that;

*“Yes of course having consequences such as if a female belongs to poor family and having low dowry due to which the husband family members disrespected her. Because the dowry now a day becomes a tradition and custom without it definitely there would be negative consequences on the prestige of the women” (respondent no 11 dated: 22/01/2024).*

### **Discussion**

Consequences of dowry practices on the bride's family explained by respondents they say that' it is cleared that the dowry practice have the consequences on the woman if the parents is unable to fulfil the dowry demand for the daughters.it will have many impacts on the bride's life. As she is facing many problems such as disrespect, torturing, mistreating, harassment, loss of dignity, loss of decision-making power, degraded social standing, psychological issues, such as tension, depression, physical issues such as beating, weakness, breakdown of nikaah, broken relation between the two families and sometime bride attempted suicide and get rid of life.

According to Jamatia (2022), a significant number of families in India pay dowries to allay their fears that their sons-in-law may abuse their daughters after the wedding. The provision of dowry often became a matter of social status. It is now a common practice in Indian society to judge a person's status based on how much he spends as dowry for his daughter when he gets married. The impact of dowry on women's social status is more common (Jamatia, 2022).

According to Perween, in 2020, the custom was responsible for multiple atrocities against women, including dowry-related violence; bride burning and wife murder, often leaving them vulnerable to neuroses and emotional problems that affect women's dignity impact (Perween, 2020). According to Ali et al., (2021) the custom of dowry is a common traditional practice in South Asian countries and is usually a gift given to a daughter in the belief that she will be cared for by her parents-in-law and earn an income respect. The negative impact of dowry is related to women's status and decision-making power in the family. Additionally, dowry culture has a negative impact on brides and their families.

In recent years, it has been found that the dowry system is closely related to the status of the bride's family. If the dowry system is not provided, it will cause the bride to lose decision-making power because she has no opportunity to express her opinion (Ali et al., 2021). These are the effects of dowry on the main influence of women. In contrast, if the bride has a good dowry, it will have a good impact on her life because she will be able to live a good and happy life.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of the current study was to explore the dowry's consequences on women's prestige in District Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The study concluded that women with a high amount of dowry are treated respectfully by their in-laws while females with low dowry are often tortured, insulted, disliked and sometimes even thrown out of their homes. The payment of a high dowry may influence the decision about whether to delay marriage for girls. People's perception showed that dowry no longer remained a custom or tradition in our country.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the above study, the current study recommended the following;

- Government should educate people which can play an important role in reducing adoption and subsequent dowry practices because education plays a vital role in stopping all evil practices by replacing them with healthy and viable social norms.
- Religious scholars should emphasize the factual teachings of Islam regarding dowry practices and discourage all traditional practices. This will directly improve the status of Pakistani women despite the patriarchal nature of Pakistani society.
- Local and religious leaders should play an active role in raising awareness among residents of the area.

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