



Changing Attitudes towards Dowry and Marriage Practices Among Young Adults in Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the evolving attitudes of young adults in Punjab, Pakistan, toward dowry and traditional marriage practices, examining the influence of socio-economic, educational, cultural, and media-related factors. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with 400 respondents (200 males, 200 females) aged 18–30, drawn from urban (Lahore and Faisalabad) and rural (Bahawalpur and Sargodha) districts. Results indicate a marked shift toward progressive perspectives, with high agreement on statements such as “Marriage should focus on compatibility rather than material exchange” ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.61$) and “Dowry creates unnecessary financial burden on the bride’s family” ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.79$). Gender-based analysis revealed females exhibited stronger opposition to dowry than males (e.g., “Dowry should be completely abolished” (Mean) female = 4.35 vs. (Mean) male = 4.05, $t = -3.25$, $p = 0.001$). Multiple linear regression identified cultural pressure ($\beta = 0.330$, $p < 0.001$), education level ($\beta = -0.243$, $p < 0.001$), social media exposure ($\beta = -0.212$, $p < 0.001$), and household income ($\beta = -0.152$, $p = 0.002$) as significant predictors of attitudes toward dowry. Pearson correlations confirmed strong positive relationships between media exposure, globalization, urbanization, and progressive marriage views ($r = 0.596$ – 0.654 , $p < 0.01$). The findings highlight the essential influence of education, media, and urbanization in questioning entrenched practices and fostering fair marriage systems among young adults in Punjab.

Keywords: Dowry, Marriage Practices, Young Adults, Punjab, Gender Differences, Media Influence, Cultural Norms, and Urbanization

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is regarded as one of the most crucial social institutions in South Asia that extends beyond the union of two individuals to a profound amalgamation of families, customs and social networks. Dowry is a common but controversial marital custom deeply rooted in our society. It is grounded in cultural, religious, and socio-economic realities. Conventionally, dowry was provided to guarantee economic stability for the bride and help her to build a new family. But over the years, it has become a social construct that imposes a significant cost on the bride's family (Khanal and Sen, 2020). It has been attributed as a practice of gender disparity, the reinforcement of patriarchy. It is the cause of delayed marriages, family-related conflicts, and family violence in society at large (Fakhar, 2020).

However, higher education, urbanization and exposure to various cultural discourses through social media have triggered a shift in perspectives among the youth. Young people, especially in urban settings, regard marriage as a matter of mutual consent, emotional appropriateness, and lifelong commitment rather than monetary transactions (Ali, 2023; Rofiq, 2022). This tendency is a general shift in society, including the increase in the awareness of women rights, mainly due to the influence of progressive attitudes prevalent in the media campaigns and advocacy activities (The Nation, 2019; Zai et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, dowry systems remain very powerful in the rural setup and well as in certain urban societies. Understanding the perceptions of young adults about dowry is crucial, as they can play a significant role in driving social transformation.

A few studies are available on the frequency and financial cost of the dowry practices however, the study on the

attitudinal transformation in young adults about dowry is scarce (Ramzan et al., 2023; Ali, 2021). The current study sought to bridge this gap by addressing the following objectives: to determine the disposition of young adults toward dowry in Punjab and to identify socio-economic, educational, cultural, and media-related factors that affect perceptions of dowry. The study's findings will recommend guidelines for awareness programs and policy frameworks in order to promote gender equality and discourage exploitative social norms.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design

The study design was the quantitative and cross-sectional because it allows collecting measurable data and obtaining statistical results by collecting data at one single time (Lakens, 2022).

Target population and sampling

The research was conducted in the province of Punjab, Pakistan, which is the most populous province with diverse cultural practices and socio-economic variations. Punjab was chosen due to the prevalence of dowry practice and the prevalence of both pro-gender and traditional mindsets on dowry. The study was conducted in both urban and rural areas, to capture a complete picture of contextual factors that define attitudes accordingly. The population was consisted of young adults aged 18 to 30 years. To ensure representativeness, a multi-stage stratified random sampling method was used. The size of the sample in the initial phase was deliberately selected from four districts (two urban (Lahore and Faisalabad) and two rural (Bahawalpur and Sargodha), see figure1. In the next phases, certain groups within these districts were selected at random and people were picked respectively in the third stage. This was done to compare on the basis of gender and there were 400 total respondents surveyed (200 males and 200 females).

Research tool and data collection

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. 30 respondents were used to assess the clarity, relevance, and reliability of the questionnaire. The reliability test was performed using Cronbach's alpha, and all scales have values exceeding 0.80, indicating a high level of internal consistency. The information has been gathered in a period of six weeks by using the services of trained enumerators.

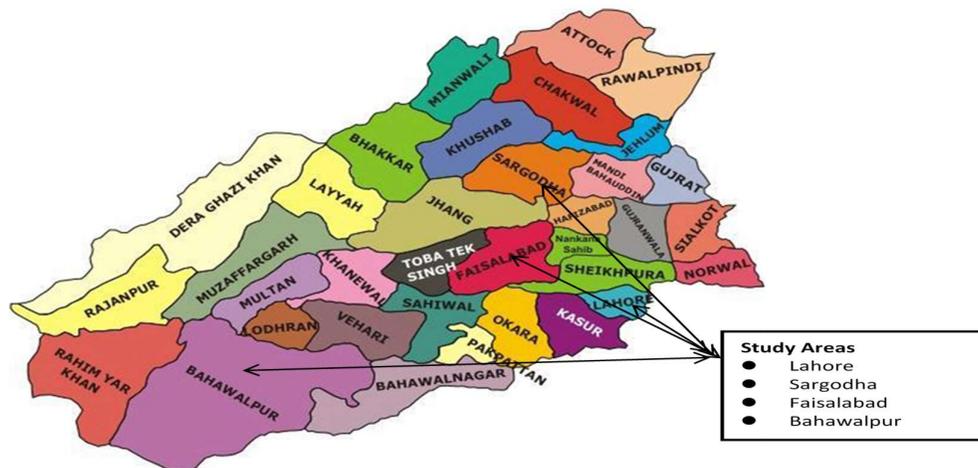


Fig. 1: Study area

Data analysis

SPSS version 26 was used to collect, analyze, and code data. Descriptive statistic frequency, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to summarize the demographic characteristics and the general attitudes. To examine gender-based differences in attitudes, independent sample t-tests were conducted.

$$t = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}}$$

Where:

- t = t-test statistic
- \bar{X}_1 = mean of group 1 (e.g., male respondents)
- \bar{X}_2 = mean of group 2 (e.g., female respondents)
- S_1^2 = variance of group 1

- S_2^2 = variance of group 2
- n_1 = sample size of group 1
- n_2 = sample size of group 2
- Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to identify key socio-economic, educational, cultural, and media-related factors influencing perceptions of dowry and marriage practices. Additionally, Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the relationships between media exposure, globalization, and changing attitudes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Young Adults' Attitudes towards Dowry and Marriage Practices

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of young adults' attitudes towards dowry measured on a five-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicate stronger agreement with the given statement.

The results show positive and progressive attitudes, in which the participants stressed personal matching and independence, rather than monetary dealings, in the case of marriages. The highest rated statement is that marriage is founded on compatibility and not on exchanging something material ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.61$) shows that there was a very strong agreement that marriage is founded on emotional compatibility and mutual understanding rather than on issues connected with dowry (Kumar Mahato and Das, 2023). Similarly, the participants were strongly agreed that Dowry is an unnecessary financial burden on the family of the bride ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.79$) and Dowry should be absolutely eliminated in modern society ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.92$). Studies also found similar results and argued that attitudes against dowry are growing among young adults (Ali, 2023; Rodon, 2023). The statement that Social pressure is a major factor in the persistence of dowry practices ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.68$) indicates that the complex of social norms and family demands is one of the major factors behind dowry, as indicated by Makino (2021). The consensus on statement that decisions on marriage are influenced by the family elders is quite central ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.86$). Overall, results showed that young adults are in support of the new ideals, but elders still have the power of making decisions about marriage, which keeps dowry predominant. Dowry a compulsory constituent of marriage to retain family honour ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.08$) and Dowry forms relationships between families ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.12$) are ranked lowest in Table 1, indicating respondents disagree. It appears that education plays a very important role in developing progressive perspectives, and the fact that educated people have lower chances of condoning dowry practices has a high mean score ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.69$), which can be aligned with the previous research indicating the importance of education in shattering the social norms that were established before (Kundu, 2023; Chouhan, 2024). These results reveal that there is a certain change in the generation of leaving dowry and in advising on equal marriage practices. However, there are deeply rooted cultural beliefs and social pressure impacting marriage and dowry choices. Such results are consistent with the studies by Kumar Mahato et al. (2023) and Kutub (2023), which found that education and urbanization are sources of progressive opinion, and that persistent traditions remain a barrier to social change.

Table 1: Young Adults' Current Attitudes towards Dowry and Traditional Marriage Practices in Punjab (n = 400).

Statement	Mean	SD	Rank
Marriage should focus on compatibility rather than material exchange.	4.55	0.61	1
Social pressure is a key factor in the continuation of dowry practices.	4.45	0.68	2
Dowry creates unnecessary financial burden on the bride's family.	4.40	0.79	3
Educated individuals are less likely to support dowry practices.	4.35	0.69	4
Young adults should have the freedom to choose their marriage partner.	4.30	0.74	5
Dowry should be completely abolished in modern society.	4.20	0.92	6
Marriage decisions are primarily influenced by family elders.	3.90	0.86	7
Traditional arranged marriages are more stable than love marriages.	3.75	1.00	8
Dowry is a necessary part of marriage to maintain family honor.	3.15	1.08	9
Providing dowry strengthens relationships between families.	2.85	1.12	10

Table 2: Independent Sample t-Tests for Gender-Based Differences in Attitudes Towards Dowry and Marriage Practices (n = 400).

Statement	Male (n = 200) Mean ± SD	Female (n = 200) Mean ± SD	t-value	p-value
Dowry is a necessary part of marriage to maintain family honor.	3.40 ± 1.05	2.90 ± 1.08	4.12	<0.001**
Dowry creates unnecessary financial burden on the bride's family.	4.25 ± 0.84	4.55 ± 0.72	-3.87	<0.001**
Dowry should be completely abolished in modern society.	4.05 ± 0.97	4.35 ± 0.87	-3.25	0.001**
Traditional arranged marriages are more stable than love marriages.	3.90 ± 1.02	3.60 ± 0.96	2.98	0.003**
Young adults should have the freedom to choose their marriage partner.	4.20 ± 0.80	4.40 ± 0.68	-2.79	0.005**
Marriage decisions are primarily influenced by family elders.	4.00 ± 0.85	3.80 ± 0.87	2.37	0.018*
Providing dowry strengthens relationships between families.	3.10 ± 1.15	2.60 ± 1.05	4.38	<0.001**
Social pressure is a key factor in the continuation of dowry practices.	4.35 ± 0.72	4.55 ± 0.63	-3.02	0.003**
Marriage should focus on compatibility rather than material exchange.	4.45 ± 0.64	4.65 ± 0.55	-3.60	<0.001**
Educated individuals are less likely to support dowry practices.	4.25 ± 0.74	4.45 ± 0.64	-3.00	0.003**

Note: $p < 0.05$ = Significant, $p < 0.01$ = Highly Significant

Gender based differences in attitudes towards dowry and marriage practices

Table 2 presents the results on gender based differences in attitudes towards dowry and marriage practices. Males were far more affirmative of dowry as a tradition. The statement that dowry is an imperative prerequisite of marriage in order to hold the family dignities had a stiffer mean value (M = 3.40, SD = 1.05) among the males (t (398) = 4.12, p < 0.001) than among the females (M = 2.90, SD = 1.08). Similarly, men were more consistent with the statement: Traditional arranged marriages are more stable than love marriages (M= 3.90 vs. 3.60, t(398) = 2.98, p= 0.003) and Providing dowry strengthens relationships between families (M= 3.10 vs. 2.60, t(398) = 4.38, p= 0.001), showing that men were more inclined to follow the traditions of patriarchy. Dowry creates unnecessary financial burden on the family of the bride, M = 4.55 vs. 4.25, t(398) = -3.87, p = 0.001), and Dowry should be completely abolished in modern society, M = 4.35 vs. 4.05, t(398) = -3.25, p = 0.001, attained affirmative responses from both males and females.

Both genders confessed that social pressure is one of the aspects contributing to the practice of dowry. Still, the female gender scored higher on the aspects of Social pressure is a key factor in the continuation of dowry practices (M = 4.55 vs. 4.35, t(398) = -3.02, p = 0.003) which illustrates that the female gender is more consciouss of the requirements that the society places on their decisions related to marriage (Guterres and Dewi, 2024; Ramzan et al Education has also played an important role in the attitudinal shaping. Females gave more responses of education as progressive change, which was reflected in the statement of less educated people with dowry practices: Education M = 4.45 vs. 4.25 t (398) = -3.00 p = 0.003) and it was consistent with the previous studies where higher education levels were related to the opposition to traditional dowry norms (Jhangir, 2025; Tabassum, 2024; Khan, 2023; Siddiqui, 2019). Overall, the findings show that females are more liberal on the subject of marriage and dowry compared to men. These patterns are aligned with Yasmeen et al. (2021) and Mahoney and Tang (2024), who have concluded that women are more resistant to practices that are financially unfair and put emotional strain on them, whereas men stick to status quo practices.

Factors of Dowry and Marriage Practices: the cause of perception

Tabular 3 shows the results of the multiple lines regression model that was applied in identifying the socio-economic, educational, cultural, and media-based determinants on the perceptions of the young adults about dowry and traditional marriage practices in Punjab. The analysis has been categorized into four different models in order to provide a clearer picture of the role the individual category of variables plays in the formation of the attitudes. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the four categories were significant predictors of perceptions, but the effect and direction of influence varied.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Socio-Economic, Educational, Cultural, and Media Factors Influencing Perceptions of Dowry and Marriage Practices (n = 400)

Category / Predictor Variables	B	SE B	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Socio-Economic Factors					
Monthly Household Income (PKR)	-0.098	0.032	-0.152	-3.06	0.002**
Urban vs. Rural Residence (Urban = 1)	-0.142	0.055	-0.104	-2.58	0.010*
Occupation of Household Head (1 = Govt, 0 = Others)	-0.110	0.050	-0.095	-2.20	0.028*
R ² (Socio-Economic Model)	0.228				
F-statistic (df = 3, 396)	38.95				<0.001
Educational Factors					
Education Level of Respondent	-0.218	0.044	-0.243	-4.95	<0.001**
Education Level of Parents	-0.125	0.040	-0.118	-3.13	0.002**
Awareness of Dowry Laws (1 = Yes, 0 = No)	-0.155	0.052	-0.121	-2.98	0.003**
R ² (Educational Model)	0.309				
F-statistic (df = 3, 396)	58.99				<0.001
Cultural Factors					
Cultural Pressure Index	0.302	0.049	0.330	6.16	<0.001**
Family Expectations	0.182	0.046	0.165	3.95	<0.001**
Peer Influence	0.127	0.042	0.139	3.02	0.003**
R ² (Cultural Model)	0.402				
F-statistic (df = 3, 396)	88.92				<0.001
Media-Related Factors					
Social Media Exposure (hrs/day)	-0.195	0.045	-0.212	-4.33	<0.001**
TV/Print Media Awareness	-0.130	0.041	-0.143	-3.17	0.002**
Exposure to Campaigns Against Dowry	-0.112	0.037	-0.120	-3.02	0.003**
R ² (Media Model)	0.354				
F-statistic (df = 3, 396)	72.23				<0.001

Note: p < 0.05, p < 0.001 indicate statistical significance; SE B = Standard Error of B

The socio-economic model explained the attitude toward dowry practices (R² = 0.228), 22.8%. The association between dowry support and monthly household income (β = -0.152, p = 0.002), urban life (β = -0.104, p = 0.028),

and having a head of household with government service (0.010) was negatively correlated, which indicates that liberal attitude increases with the rise in income level, urban population condition and having a formal working environment. It aligns with the current body of literature, which shows that economic stability and urbanization lead people to no longer be attached to traditional dowry practices (Micheletto, 2021; Alwulaii, 2022). The education model described 30.9 percent variance ($R^2 = 0.309$). The education level of the respondents ($\beta = -0.243, p < 0.001$), the education level of parents ($\beta = -0.118, p = 0.002$) and the awareness of the dowry laws ($\beta = -0.121, p = 0.003$) played an important negative role in predicting dowry support. It sheds light on how education is a major source of attitudinal change in line with the results of the issue, raising the level of literacy and legal awareness reduces the attraction to harmful traditional practices (Amna, 2022; Anderson, 2024).

Cultural effects were the strongest positive predictors of dowry support, with 40.2 percent of variance that was captured ($R^2 = 0.402$). The cultural pressure ($\beta = 0.330, p = 0.001$), family expectations ($\beta = 0.165, p = 0.001$), and peer influence ($\beta = 0.139, p = 0.003$) supported the traditional practices. They indicate that despite the socio-economic and educational forces, an expectation in the norms of dowry is firmly fixed and strong in the society, which is consistent with the findings of Dar and Lone (2020) and Illouz (2023). Media model could explain 35.4 percent of the variance ($R^2 = 0.354$). Individuals who were exposed to more social media ($\beta = -0.212, p < 0.001$), those perceived through the TV/print media ($\beta = -0.143, p = 0.002$), and those who were exposed to anti-dowry campaigns ($\beta = -0.120, p = 0.003$) were all negatively associated with support of dowry practices. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the modern media is particularly applicable to the development of progressive attitudes, which is consistent with other researchers who emphasize the transformative nature of media in the presence of the conventional norm (Appel et al., 2020; Malarvizhi et al., 2022; Mandal, 2023; Pellegrino, 2024).

As shown in Table 3 results, though the most effective forces in sustaining the practice of dowry are cultural, aspects of education, media exposure and socio-economic development are very vital in changing the practice. Some variables which have reduced the acceptance of dowry but have not brought about any substantial changes will be urbanization, increased incomes and legal awareness; the most crucial actions will have to be taken in relation to the forces of culture which are long-rooted and the necessity to penetrate the expectations of the families which are still maintaining the tradition of dowry. This is a signal that multifaceted (education, media campaigns, and cultural reforms) interventions are required to implement long-term changes in society.

Role of media exposure, globalization and urbanization towards marriage practices

Table 4 presents the results of a Pearson correlation test that was conducted to examine the correlations between media exposure, globalization and urbanization and the ideas of young adults towards marriage practices in Punjab. The results reveal a strong positive correlation among all variables: an increase in the value of one variable is associated with an increase in the other, with a considerable effect on attitudes towards marital practices.

It is seen that the positive relationship is the strongest between the media exposure and the opinion regarding the current trend of marriage ($r=0.654, p<0.01$). This implies that the more time the young adults have been exposed to the media outlets like television, social media sites and the online campaign, the more they will be progressive in their thinking process, like denouncing dowry practices and promotion of equality in matrimonial practices. The discovery coincides with the research above that defines the transformational implementation of the media in the process of constructing social norms (Jafree, 2023; Darulhuda et al., 2023). Likewise, perceptions of marriage practices have also been found to be closely related to exposure to globalization ($r=0.621, p<0.01$), that is, exposure to global cultures, ideas, and values, which leads to the current changes being experienced regarding dowry systems. The new wisdom of globalization might require international learning, travelling, and an online approach, which will result in a heightened level of acquaintance with human rights and the equality between men and women (Auhad et al., 2024; Arya-Bhattacharya et al., 2023; Azad, 2021).

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Analysis: Relationship Between Media Exposure, Globalization, Urbanization, and Marriage Practice Views (n = 400)

Variables	Media Exposure	Globalization Exposure	Urbanization Level	Marriage Practice Views
Media Exposure	1.00	0.612**	0.587**	0.654**
Globalization Exposure	0.612**	1.00	0.605**	0.621**
Urbanization Level	0.587**	0.605**	1.00	0.596**
Marriage Practice Views	0.654**	0.621**	0.596**	1.00

Note: $p < 0.01$ indicates strong statistical significance.

The degree of urbanization and the marriage attitudes are very positively related ($r=0.596, p<0.01$). The semi-urban citizens and urban residents have more friends at their disposal and are exposed to more experiences that nullify the old values and advance the new outlooks of the marriage institution. This confirms the previous research works that city places expedite the social transformation (Ch et al., 2023; Jamatia, 2022; Al-Suwaidi, 2020). In addition, the level of correlation between the independent variables in the table is high. The relationship between globalization and media exposure is high ($r=0.612, p<0.01$), which means that media is one of the sources of international thoughts and

the young population of Punjab can be exposed to international discourses related to gender equity and the modern way of marriage. In this regard, the correlation between urbanization and globalization ($r=0.605$, $p<0.01$) is quite strong, indicating that cities may be treated as sources of cultural exchange and cultural modernity. In general, the facts indicate that the interdependent social change factors included the media exposure, globalization and urbanization, which were all involved in the triggering of the attitudes towards dowry and marriage in the modern world. These findings suggest the significance of media-based campaigns and interventions of urban policies to oppose the traditional norms and to ensure the progressive and more liberal forms of marriage in Punjab.

Conclusion

The results demonstrate that a shift in generational values is evident, as most of the interviewed individuals extend their marriages based on compatibility, consent, and equality rather than money or dowry deals. Although the traditional norms and social forces are still in place especially in rural and male society, issues including education, urbanization, socio-economic status and media exposure are influencing liberal attitudes. The education proved to be a highly potent variable as it had a near alliance with rejection of dowry amongst the respondents and their families. On the same note, the media and exposure to the world cultural discourses have been transformative, hence providing young adult people with alternative perspectives and reinforcing the values of gender equity. Gender based differences have also been determined in the analysis when it was discovered that women were more opposed to dowry and accommodating to the freedom of choice in marriage, as the main contradiction between the social norms and their patriarchal orientations. In general, the article demonstrates the interactive roles of cultural, economic, educational, and media factors in shaping the current attitude towards marriage. The observations highlight the significance of multi-dimensional interventions such as educational campaigns, media campaigns, and community-based interventions in an effort to combat the current practice as well as introduce fair marriage systems and a lasting cultural change in Punjab.

Declarations

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This study didn't receive any funding from any agencies in the public, commercial, or non-profit sector.

Conflicts of Interest

Authors have no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

Data will be available from the corresponding author upon request.

Ethics Statement

The Institute of Agricultural Extension, Education, and Rural Development at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, gave its approval to the human subjects' study. The studies were carried out in compliance with institutional norms and local laws. To take part in this study, the subjects gave their written informed consent.

Authors' Contribution

Nadir Hussain Shah; Conceptualization, Data Curation, Methodology, Writing Original draft, Urva Yousaf; Formal Data Analysis, Writing, Shiza Hussain; Writing, Review and Editing

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