

The Consequences of Early Matrimony: A Qualitative Inquiry into Women's Mental Health and Socio-economic Challenges

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History: Received: May 11, 2024 Revised: June 28, 2024 Accepted: July 07, 2024 Published: August 01, 2024</p> <p>Keywords: Early Marriage, Mental Health, Socio-Demographic Factors, Women's Health, Delayed Marriage, Qualitative Research</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: aftabf2018@gmail.com</p> <p>DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13147547</p>	<p>This study examines the complex relationship between early marriage and its effects on the mental health of young married women in Pakistan. Defining early marriage as a union in which at least one of the parties is under the age of 18, this research sheds light on the multifaceted consequences of such marriages, particularly for women's mental health and subsequent child development. Using qualitative research methods, in-depth interviews with a carefully selected sample of women served as the basis for this study. People in this category are those who were married between the ages of 16 and 17 and are currently older than 30. By examining the social, physical, emotional, and economic ramifications of early marriage throughout the course of their lives, this demographic sample offers a longitudinal view on its consequences. A great deal of attention is paid to women who were married in the 1990s, and the difficulties they faced are examined in light of various sociodemographic characteristics. Wealth index, occupation, education level, resource management in the home, freedom to make health-related decisions, geography, media exposure, and health insurance coverage are some of these variables. According to the study, these variables are linked to early marriage's prevalence and the long-term consequences it has on women's social, emotional, and physical health. The study also emphasizes the part postponed marriage and sociodemographic traits plays in reducing the prevalence of early marriage like greater education levels and better employment possibilities are crucial in lowering the incidence of early marriage.</p>

INTRODUCTION

Marriage constitutes a legal union between males and females, often seen as the foundational unit for family formation through biological processes. It is recognized universally as a practice steeped in social, religious, and cultural significance. Commonly held beliefs posit that the success of a marriage, involving a male and female partnership, is traditionally measured by the birth of a child (Spouses, 2001).

Early marriage, a prevalent practice in South Asia, especially in developing countries, is typically defined as a union where at least one individual is under the age of 18. This practice disproportionately impacts girls more than boys, with significant adverse effects. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports that annually, approximately 14 million girls under 18 are married. Further emphasizing this concern, Burgess et al. (2023) notes that in Pakistan, 3% of girls are married before 15, and 21% before reaching 18.

Pakistan's societal structure is predominantly patriarchal, with males often holding greater power over social relationships and assuming a dominant role over women and children. This gender hierarchy influences various social practices, including marriage. The study 'Demography of Early Marriage in Pakistan' reveals that early marriage is more common in rural areas. Between 2011 and 2020, over 140 million marriages involving individuals under 18 were

recorded. Notably, in Sindh, the region with the highest prevalence of early marriage, 72% of girls and 25% of boys are subjected to early marriage. Intriguingly, in ethnic areas of Pakistan, a staggering 99% of girls married before legal age are perceived as legally wedded by local communities (Ernawati et al., 2023).

A multitude of factors contribute to either strengthening or diminishing a girl's resilience against early marriage. Rajeswari & Maheswari (2018) highlight key determinants such as educational attainment, the nature of the family's housing (rented or owned), and the overall financial background. These elements collectively influence whether a girl marries at an early age or later in life. They argue that higher educational levels and an educated family background are likely to result in compliance with legal marriage age and deferment of marriage. Conversely, families characterized by lower education levels, poverty, and limited income are more prone to engage in the practice of early marriage.

Geographical location plays a significant role in determining the prevalence of early marriage. Syeda Zainab Shabbar and Asma Manzoor (2022) assert that metropolitan locations have greater access to basic services like hospitals, schools, and universities. These places are often characterized by a diversified population and higher levels of education. There is often less early marriage in these places in correlation with accessibility. On the other hand, early marriage rates are significantly higher in rural regions where these services are less common.

Early marriage has consequences, including a higher incidence of domestic violence, especially in rural areas. Livesey (2017) points out that women who are married before turning 15 or 18 are more vulnerable to rape, psychological abuse, acid assaults, and other types of domestic violence, all of which have a terrible effect on their life. Conversely, metropolitan areas tend to have lower rates of early marriage, particularly among the upper and middle classes, because of better educational attainment and more understanding of the law. Nevertheless, early marriage is still encouraged in the lowest socioeconomic strata, regardless of urban location, for reasons including low educational attainment, poverty, extended family dynamics, low father income, and financial concerns.

Premature marriage is seen as safeguarding women's sexuality in Pakistani society, both in rural and urban places. The national practice of watta satta, which is a tradition, exemplifies this in particular. Under this arrangement, a guy marries a girl from one family, and in exchange, the girl's family agrees to marry the boy off to one of their members. Along with preserving money and property inside the family unit, this practice helps to fortify family bonds. As noted by Herliana et al. (2018), however, this tradition can have deadly repercussions if either the girl or the guy opposes it in the interest of "honor."

The financial burden of large families, particularly in environments with low socioeconomic status, can be made worse by the size of the family. Early girl marriage is often viewed as a tactic to lessen family size and financial load when the father's salary is insufficient to satisfy household demands. Given that dowry expectations are sometimes smaller in early marriages, this practice also touches on dowry issues.

Not only is early marriage common among lower socioeconomic groups a socioeconomic problem, but it is also deeply ingrained in culture. It is frequently viewed as a means of preventing premarital sex in order to regulate the sexual conduct of young females and save family honor, or "izzat" in Urdu (Ahmed et al., 2013). There may be significant societal repercussions from this cultural demand. For instance, a girl who defies her family's wishes on marriage can flee to the man of her dreams, incurring societal disdain and jeopardizing her family's dignity.

Furthermore, compared to women who married later, those who marry young are more vulnerable to domestic abuse. Their lack of knowledge and life experience might leave children open to several kinds of maltreatment. Young females are occasionally married off to much older men. Following their marriage, problems like the husband's drug consumption may result in

more abuse and exploitation of these young brides, such as forced labor, physical abuse, or even more severe acts of violence like burning, murder, or acid assaults. These males are more dangerous since they are under the influence of narcotics and frequently behave without thinking clearly. These young married women may experience rape, sexual harassment, and acid assaults as forms of domestic abuse, particularly in public places (International Women's Research Center, 2016).

Certain cultural views maintain that intra-familial property and wealth exchange—a practice frequently inspired by the caste system—is the greatest way to attain financial stability and asset protection. The watta satta marriage ritual, which is common in rural regions and among lower socioeconomic levels, serves as an example of this. Two families intermarry their children under this reciprocal agreement; one family offers a girl for marriage to a son from the other family, and vice versa. Property and riches are kept inside the family network because to this practice.

In these situations, dowries become a major source of worry, especially for females from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. One of the biggest challenges the bride's family has is the dowry, which is a demand made by the groom's family. It can be difficult to meet these dowry requirements, and if you don't, the groom's family may reject the marriage proposal and look for another match (Le Strat et al., 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Early marriage is frequently viewed in society as a means of addressing a range of cultural and social difficulties, including the treatment of mental health disorders. The idea behind early marriage is to marry inside one's own family or caste in order to uphold cultural standards, honor, and family boundaries. Additionally, this practice is seen to be a means of restricting female libido and avoiding intercultural unions.

Early marriage is common because families, especially those in low-income environments, confront a number of difficulties. These include of poor socioeconomic position, poverty, low income, the pressures of extended family responsibilities, and restricted educational prospects. Getting married young is sometimes viewed as a calculated financial move meant to maintain money and property inside the family.

This practice, which is deeply ingrained in tradition, exposes females disproportionately to domestic and sexual abuse in addition to being a cultural norm. The Child Marriage Restriction Act of 1929, which established the minimum age of marriage at 18 for men and 16 for women, makes early marriage illegal. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2018 made additional changes to this statute, increasing the minimum age for women to 18. If these marital regulations are broken, there might be a 1000 rupee fine, a one-month jail sentence, or both.

In addition to the individual who marries a child, same penalties also apply to individuals who assist in the marriage, such as parents or guardians who neglect to forbid such partnerships. The practice of early marriage continues despite these legal frameworks, which raises serious questions regarding its effects on society, culture, and the law.

Research Questions

1. What psychological problems do females who marry young face down the road?
2. How does early marriage affect women's mental health?
3. How is early marriage affected by socioeconomic status?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the causes and consequences of early marriage.
2. To examine the factors that contribute to the emergence of psychological violence.

3. To look at the connection between women's mental health and early marriage.
4. To investigate the impact of early marriage on women's mental health.

Significance of the Study

An extensive examination of early marriage's impact on women's mental health is given in this study report. It chronicles the evolution of early marriage customs across history and investigates their continued prevalence. Examining the origins, effects, and complex effects of early marriage on women's psychological, social, emotional, and economic well-being, the research tackles important facets of this phenomenon.

Readers will obtain understanding of the complex elements that distinguish women's experiences in early marriage and their influence on health behaviors via this study. The survey provides further insight into the opinions and experiences of women who were married between the ages of 16 and 18 as well as those who were married after the age of 30, in particular. Policy, social work, and community initiatives that attempt to address the issues of early marriage and its long-term impacts on women's health and social responsibilities would benefit greatly from the knowledge gained from this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pakistan has a startlingly high rate of early marriage, particularly between 1990 and 1991. 32% of women in the 20–24 age range got married young at this time, and 11% married by the time they were 15 years old. Between 1950 and 1970, early marriage rates were greatest in South Asian nations, including Pakistan. Pakistan has not succeeded in lowering the prevalence of early marriage, according to an analysis of this trend that is further broken down by gender, ethnicity, and religion using data from the US Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). Pakistan has a higher rate of early marriage than other South Asian nations (Noor et al., 2021).

Poverty emerges as a primary driver of early marriage. In lower-income families, early marriage is often strategized as a means to alleviate financial burdens. This trend is particularly evident in extended families and rural areas. Post-marriage, young girls are frequently expected to conceive, with the number of pregnancies and surviving children directly impacting household labor contributions. The health implications for these young mothers are significant. Teenage mothers face increased health risks during childbirth, contributing to a higher mortality rate for both mothers and infants. Globally, it is estimated that each year one million infants born to young mothers die due to complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Moreover, children born to younger mothers tend to have poorer health outcomes and face nutritional challenges, partly due to inadequate feeding practices by these inexperienced mothers (Sezgin & Punamäki, 2020).

Globally, approximately 12 million girls under the age of 18 are subjected to child, forced, or early marriage each year. Regions such as South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa exhibit particularly high rates of these practices. UNICEF (2022) reports that 40% of young women in these areas are married before the age of 18. Notably, early marriage is not confined to developing regions; it also occurs in developed nations like Canada and the United States, primarily among the impoverished and those residing in rural regions.

Moreover, the situation is not limited to young women; new statistics indicate that young men are increasingly being coerced into early marriages; 4.5% of males between the ages of 20 and 24 married before turning 18 (Suyanto et al., 2023).

In a recent comprehensive worldwide evaluation spanning two decades, 21 research studies on early marriage and mental health were included. An increasing amount of evidence shows a link between mental health conditions including anxiety, sadness, and PTSD with early marriage. Research indicates that females who marry young are twice as likely to attempt suicide

and to engage in unhealthy habits including drug and alcohol addiction and alcohol use. The Sudan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of 2014 recorded that 34.3% of women in Sudan were married early. In Ethiopia, the Amhara region showed a 73% prevalence rate of early marriage, significantly higher than other areas.

Various socio-demographic factors have been identified as influential in the persistence of early marriage. Studies across different nations have examined the impact of household size, parental education levels, geographic location, and marital age. For instance, research in Sudan indicates that 45.9% of women experience early marriage, with a notable decrease among women aged 20 to 24. Factors such as education level, media exposure, family size, and geographic location are intricately linked to the occurrence of early marriage (Jayawardana, 2022).

According to a report by the United Nations Population Fund, the Covid-19 pandemic is projected to contribute to approximately 13 million early marriages between 2020 and 2030. During this period, around 200,000 girls in South Asia are expected to become child brides. In India, there was a 78% increase in early marriages, with over a thousand reported between March and June 2020 across various provinces of Bangladesh, coinciding with the pandemic's first wave. The economic crisis triggered by Covid-19 has particularly impacted the lower socio-economic classes, pushing many to marry off their daughters below the legal age (Goel et al., 2022).

In southwestern regions like Bangladesh, it's reported that school-going girls are often forced into marriage to alleviate household economic burdens, especially in the poorest communities struggling to meet basic expenses. Early marriage has a multifaceted impact on individuals. Girls married at a young age experience various form of violence, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Teenage pregnancies and forced sexual relations within these marriages often lead to severe health complications and even death (Abdallah et al., 2023).

Researchers have found that girls from diverse geographical locations who are victims of early marriage endure harmful experiences, including psychological disorders and marital instability. This leads to increased incidences of suicidal thoughts and loneliness. A major contributing factor to early marriage is the lower level of educational attainment, which adversely affects national literacy rates (Ambrus and Field). The prevention of early marriage, and in turn the reduction of domestic violence, especially physical violence against women, appears to hinge on the promotion of delayed marriage. Longitudinal data from Bangladesh indicate that gender-stereotypical norms are further perpetuated in societies with prevalent early marriage practices (Abd-El-Kareem Hegazy & Nasr-El-Deen Elsadek, 2019).

Adolescent pregnancy, closely linked to early marriage, significantly increases the risk of low birth weight. A study involving 23 low and middle-income countries across three continents found higher risks of cesarean sections, low birth weight, miscarriages, and abortions. An epidemiological study in Ethiopia, with a population size of 1,671, revealed that women married before 18 faced marital rape, beatings by their partners, and communication challenges. Consequently, approximately one-third of these women have experienced sexual, mental, and physical abuse over the last decade (Uzma Ashiq et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This study's methodology is grounded on qualitative methodologies and makes advantage of the richness and nuanced knowledge that these approaches provide. In-depth interviews, the cornerstone of qualitative research, are at the focus of data collecting. The semi-structured character of these interviews for a flexible and guided investigation of the viewpoints and experiences of the participants.

This method works especially well for this kind of research since it makes it easier to comprehend the intricacies involved in early marriage and its consequences. Through semi-structured interviews with participants, we are able to explore individual stories in greater detail and get comprehensive understanding of the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of early marriage. This approach gives participants the chance to freely share their opinions and experiences in their own words while offering the option to go further into particular areas of interest.

Such qualitative techniques provide rich, comprehensive data that may be difficult to get using more quantitative ways, making them ideal for examining the intricate and sometimes personal nature of the issues at hand.

Population and Sample

Married women make up the target population for this study, with an emphasis on those who were married young. Ten of the women in our sample are over 30 years old and were married between the ages of 16 and 17. This particular age range was chosen in order to shed light on the long-term consequences of early marriage. For the purpose of investigating the long-term impacts of early marriage on women's social, physical, emotional, and financial well-being, women over the age of thirty were chosen.

This study attempts to identify the long-lasting consequences of early marital partnerships by looking at their experiences from the beginning of their marriages to the present. Despite the limited sample size, comprehensive qualitative data are anticipated to greatly advance our knowledge of the long-term consequences of early marriage.

Tool for Data Collection

A newly created interview guide was used to collect data for this investigation. With its open-ended questions, this guide gave participants the freedom to articulate in their own words how they understood and experienced the phenomena. The questions' open-ended format helped to effectively capture the variety and depth of viewpoints expressed by the participants.

The interview guide was thoughtfully designed to encourage an open and honest conversation in order to maximize the efficacy of the interviews. To guarantee clarity and foster an atmosphere where participants felt at ease giving their subjective viewpoints, certain questions were rewritten and rephrased several times.

Thematic analysis, a technique best suited for finding, examining, and reporting patterns within the data, was used to the data that was gathered in this manner. This analytical method started with the creation of a coding sheet. The creation of several themes was then based on this code sheet. In order to arrange and analyze the data in a way that effectively addressed the goals and research questions, these themes were crucial. This methodological approach made it possible to thoroughly and methodically analyze the data gathered, which resulted in a sophisticated comprehension of the phenomena being studied.

Ethical Considerations

Strict ethical guidelines were followed during the study process to protect the confidentiality and dignity of each participant. Getting informed permission was the most important factor to take into account. Participants received comprehensive information about the study's objectives and methods before to each interview. Not only was consent secured for interview participation, but it was also gained for recording these sessions. In cases when participants declined to have their voice comments recorded, their answers were carefully noted in written notes.

Another essential component of our ethical framework was anonymity. Participants were never requested for personally identifiable information, like names, phone numbers, CNIC numbers, or residential addresses. Rather, non-identifiable demographic data, such as age, religion, education level, dwelling location, and husband's employment, were the main emphasis of the data collection. Using this method allowed us to create participant profiles while maintaining their privacy.

In addition, participants were guaranteed freedom of speech and movement, which made the interview process relaxed and stress-free. In keeping with the confidentiality agreement with research participants who gave their consent for audio recording, all voice recordings were erased completely when the study was completed. Furthermore, there were no constraints based on profession imposed by the research. The participants included professionals, unskilled laborers, housewives, and people from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. While upholding ethical research guidelines, this variety enhanced the data and offered a more comprehensive picture of the topic under investigation.

Table 1. Participant's profile

No. of participant	Age	Education of women	Occupation of women	Education of husband	Occupation of husband
P1	38	F. A	Housewife	Matric	Business
P2	40	Matric	Housewife	Inter	Policemen
P3	43	Till 6 th	Housewife	Till 7 th	Skilled
P4	44	B. A`	Housewife	Diploma	Medical store
P5	41	Till 8 th	Maid	Till 9 th	Sanitary worker
P6	37	Matric	Sewing	Till 11 th	Sale man
P7	46	B.com	Receptionist	Inter	Clerk in office
P8	39	F.Sc	Housewife	M.com	Cashier in bank
P9	33	Till 9 th	Maid	Till 5 th	Labor
P10	42	F. A	Housewife	Till 8 th	Security guard

Two reasons were exposed by the researcher to support the conduct of the ten interviews: first, a large majority of women did not fit the research's inclusion criteria, and second, the majority of women declined to engage in interviews if they were to take place at home. So, interviews were conducted on the convenient places suggested by the participants. Firstly, they were contacted by telephone calls and secondly, researchers requested for the time and place of their ease. These interviews were conducted in Urdu language and were recorded with the participants consent. After 10 interviews, data saturation point has been perceived where the same codes and themes emerge from interviews, hence, no more interviews are required. Later on, all these recorded interviews were translated and transcribed in English language.

RESULTS

Theme 1: Workload and Early Marriage

The study found that home tasks make up the majority of a woman's effort, both before and after an early marriage. These chores include cooking, cleaning, laundry for the spouse and kids, and dishwashing. Although these duties were identical before and after marriage, participants observed that the main distinction was similar to moving from one home to another. Following marriage, they have extra obligations in their lives, such daily cooking and kid care. A number of participants stated that in addition to handling domestic responsibilities, the type of

part-time work held by an individual is frequently determined by their educational background (P1–P10).

Most participants said that these duties have not altered over time and continue to represent wider society standards. This emphasizes the gendered divide of work that still exists in our culture, with women often handling household chores like cooking, cleaning, and laundry. This trend, which is linked to society's patriarchal structure, is a prime example of the "triple shift" burden, which holds that women bear the majority of the responsibility of taking care of the home and the children, regardless of whether they work full- or part-time.

One participant (P3) brought attention to disparities in the pay and workload experienced by women employed as maids. Their labor frequently consists of physically taxing duties including washing bulky bedding and infant care products, which can have a negative impact on their physical well-being. This observation confirms the widespread misconception that hiring maids excuses overly demanding tasks. The social separation between the high and lower classes is shown in the participant's comment, where women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds frequently work as maids. These women are exploited in a number of ways, including as financial, physical (due to their workload), and occasionally sexual.

Theme 2: Violence and Early Marriage

The accounts of the participants point to a troubling pattern of violence connected to young marriage. One woman (P2) told of the verbal abuse she received from her husband, who berated her for her poor social standing and the dowry she had received. Another participant (P4) suffered physical abuse while she was pregnant, which led to the loss of her unborn child. Additional participants disclosed instances of domestic violence, encompassing physical assault (P5), verbal mistreatment during gestation (P7), and psychological maltreatment concerning the fetus's gender (P9).

One participant (P10) provided a particularly horrific experience of how her spouse constantly declared divorce and required excessive care during a protracted sickness that ultimately led to his death. Another (P3) described being physically abused and being kicked out of her house for a while for not contributing enough money. Participant (P6) related a very distressing story of being misdiagnosed as her husband's neurological condition's cause, experiencing emotional abuse, forced sex, being accused of being infertile, and receiving the incorrect medication, which resulted in diabetes.

These accounts highlight the strong correlation between early marriage and abuse in all its manifestations, including emotional, psychological, and physical assault. Numerous participants noted that undereducated women's attitudes in society are a contributing factor to this kind of violence. They revealed a troubling part of society standards by reporting that abuse acts are occasionally carried out without concern for the repercussions and are even received with a sense of satisfaction.

The study also considers the larger social environment in which such violence is sustained by myths and illogical beliefs that lack any basis in science or religion. In Pakistan, where men predominate and are frequently the main providers of income and decision-makers, there is a propensity for power abuse. For the victims of early marriage, this dynamic frequently leads to different types of violence against women, causing serious psychological, emotional, and physical suffering.

Theme 3: Socio-economic Challenges

The experiences that research participants provided shed insight on the socioeconomic difficulties that young married women endure. One participant (P4) talked about how her spouse had placed limitations on her travel, and she blamed it on being young and feeling naive.

In a similar vein, another (P1) related how immediately after marriage, family standards on modesty and attire were enforced, particularly outside the home. Participant (P7) described how her hopes for an education were dashed by assurances that she would study more once her kids entered school.

Financial deprivation and economic control were other recurring themes. Participant (P8) stated that her spouse only gave her a small amount of money, not enough to cover even the most basic necessities. (P5) provided an especially startling tale in which her husband sold her dowry things to pay the rent, claiming that she was unemployed and that the items were out-of-date. A third participant (P3) took began concealing her pay from her spouse as a result of his practice of obtaining money without authorization.

According to (P2), who described how having a kid increased financial burden, her family was solely responsible for covering the costs of delivery and related expenses because it was the cultural norm. Her husband's input was restricted to expecting pricey presents for the infant. These stories highlight pervasive problems with women's basic human rights and the application of the law. Challenges remain despite a plethora of governmental and non-governmental initiatives, including the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, Police Khidmat Markaz, women protection apps by Punjab Police, and efforts by NGOs such as the Aurat Foundation, aimed at improving women's status and access to resources.

There is still a big gap between the lived experiences of women in early marriages and the projects' beneficial social impact, which promotes sustainable development and the accomplishment of SDGs, especially gender equality and justice.

Theme 4: Mental Health Complications in Early Marriage

The participant narratives illuminated the mental health issues that young married women experience. Participant (P4) talked about her battle with depression, which she linked to years of living in a harsh atmosphere and hearing her spouse verbally attack her. She was told by a psychiatrist that, in addition to medicine, a change of surroundings may help her symptoms. Another participant (P1) related how she experienced familial violence during her second pregnancy, which she felt had a detrimental effect on her child's conduct and academic standing.

Participant (P5) saw her kid exhibit neurobehavioral signs, such distrust and repetitious speaking, that were comparable to those of her spouse. Within three months of marriage, (P7) talked of having anxiety problems that were made worse by an abusive atmosphere, the demands of taking care of children, and domestic chores. Despite her repeated requests for mental assistance, her illness went untreated for a considerable amount of time.

(P3) emphasized the value of social support and diet in preserving mental health, particularly during pregnancy. On the other hand, (P10) documented how common it is for women from early marriage backgrounds to be admitted to mental health facilities and rehabilitation centers, where they frequently experience severe emotional and physical abuse. A case in point occurred when a pregnant lady was tragically battered by her husband, highlighting the grave implications of domestic violence.

(P2) highlighted the necessity of pre-marital mental health assessments, particularly for males, as a viable remedy to enhance the mental well-being of women after marriage. Collectively, the participants brought attention to the fact that early marriage has serious and enduring consequences for the children of the women involved, in addition to the women themselves. Early marriage has been linked to a number of problems, including immunological system difficulties, delayed maturity, and genetic illnesses like thalassemia. These issues are especially prevalent in rural Pakistan where caste-based weddings are customary. Thus, the long-term effects of these early marriages go beyond mental health to include the physical health and developmental consequences of the progeny.

Discussion

According to this study, there is a direct link between women's long-term mental health consequences and their early marriage. Early marriage dramatically raises the risk of developing long-term mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and other psychiatric disorders. Moreover, these negative consequences affect not only the mothers but also the cognitive and social growth of their offspring.

The study shows that the difficulties faced by women who were married in the 1990s and are currently in their 30s and 40s are closely related to sociodemographic variables. These results are significantly influenced by variables including province, geographic location, educational attainment, employment position, autonomy in health care decision-making, emotional coping methods, and household resource management. In addition, elements like media exposure, wealth index, and health insurance coverage have a significant role in reducing the incidence of young marriage and improving women's physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. Contrasting viewpoints favor overspending on daughters' education and everyday living expenditures, viewing early marriage as a protective precaution for them. This idea is especially common in lower socioeconomic groups and in some areas, such the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit Baltistan, Balochistan, and Southern Punjab. The shockingly high prevalence of child or early marriage persists in many places. In these situations, the custom of being married young frequently places newlyweds in roles more akin to slavery than equal partnership, which feeds into a cycle of abuse and exploitation (Uzma Ashiq et al., 2020).

This conversation highlights the intricate interactions between cultural, economic, and societal elements that support early marriage customs, emphasizing the necessity for comprehensive approaches to address and lessen these practices' widespread and harmful effects on women and children.

CONCLUSION

This study clarifies the complex issue of early marriage, pinpoints important factors that contribute to its occurrence, and highlights the significant negative effects it has on young married women's mental health. It demonstrates that early marriage has long-lasting consequences on children's cognitive and social abilities in addition to the acute mental health issues that affect mothers. Children of these marriages may experience a wide range of health issues, such as musculoskeletal discomfort, migraines, motor difficulties, seizures, and headaches, all of which can seriously hinder their development and capacity to carry out a range of duties.

Reducing early marriage is aided by the passage of the Child Marriage Restriction Act of 2018, which establishes the legal marriage age for both sexes at 18. One of the most important ways to reduce the frequency of early marriage is to delay marriage. Delaying marriage has been increasingly linked to improved socio-demographic characteristics including greater educational levels and better work possibilities.

The conventional wisdom that says getting married young is a good way to curb extramarital sex is also refuted by the study. Despite popular notion, marriage at a young age presents a number of difficulties; women who married in the 1990s have reported more unfavorable than good results. Therefore, in order to prevent early marriage, both governmental and non-governmental groups must step up their efforts to raise awareness and enforce laws. By taking such steps, the negative impacts of early marriage can be lessened and a culture where delayed marriage is the norm due to greater chances and educated decision-making can be fostered.

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Author's contribution

AF contributed to the introduction, statement of problem, research questions, research objectives and significance of study. MA led the literature review, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion. AF edited the professional English services of manuscript.

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