

## EARLY AGE MARRIAGE: A BARRIER FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

*The term child marriage and early age, marriage both are interrelated with each other. Early age marriage in Pakistan is considered a major barrier to the nation's development. Early age, marriage is not a new phenomenon of our society; it has been in practice from generations to generation as the result of social and cultural traditions. So, we can say that early age, marriage is one of the most challenges practices in the globe. The present study was conducted to investigate the various causes and multifaceted consequences of early marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa society in the District: Bannu-Pakistan. For this purpose, 100 respondents were randomly selected, among those respondents both male and female were included. After this, the required data were collected through structured interview schedule and then descriptive approach was utilized for analyzing the data. Results reveal that the early marriage is practiced due to certain reasons, i.e. poverty, illiteracy and deeply rooted social customs, which laid overwhelming impacts on the individual, family and the whole society in terms of social, psychological and physiological problems. Finally, some suggestions are given at the end of paper through which we can minimize this social evil.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Early Age Marriage, Its Root Causes and Consequences, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Society*

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social institution that legally united the people and it is the basic forms of the family formation. So we can say that marriage is a social, religious and traditional practice acknowledged by the society. Bankole et al. (2004) said that **“Marriage as an institutional pattern is specialized for bringing unanimity and interdependence for maintaining the familial affairs”**. Nair (2006) also reflects the same point of view that **“marriage is a universally practiced pattern that is instilled through citizenly acts and cultural and traditional ceremonies of the society”**.

Early age, marriage is considered that both spouses are below the age of 18 years. According to the Bhanji & Punjani (2014) that **“The terms child or early marriage are used interchangeably to describe a legal or accustomed union between two people, of whom one or both spouses is below the age of 18 years”**. Currently, **“one-third woman in Pakistan get married before the age of 18, while about 12 to 13 percent get married before their 15th birthday”** (Nadia, 2013). Another place Machel, Pires, and Carlsson also strengthen this point that **“34% of girls globally, are married by the age of 18 years and 11% marry before the age of 15 years”**. Early age, marriage is not only the violation of girl's rights but also a serious crisis for the humanity. Khanna et al. (2013) said that **“It is a harmful practice that significantly undermines the best interests of the girl child”**. Subramanian (2008) also reflected the same point of

view that **“Early marriage is a part of the wider practice of female seclusion through their subordination to men and deprivation of equal access to social and material resources”**.

Secondly, most people prefer this think that their life Partner should be young as compared with him. Bhanji & Punjani (2014) elaborate this point and said that **“wives should be several years younger than their husbands seemed to be a strong contributing factor for early marriage of young girls”**. Therefore, the most parents prefer to fulfill this responsibility of handing over their daughters in a marriage relationship as soon as possible.

Early age, marriage is seen throughout the world in different countries and regions the phenomenon of early age, marriage is not new as it has been in practice from generations to generation especially in developing countries of South Asian like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and many others. Farooq & Deen (2016) elaborate the same point of view that **“In many regions of the world, especially in developing countries, marriage in a very early age is widely practiced and most females are married off at a very young age without considering their physiological ability of bearing a married life as well as bearing a child”**. Khanna et al. (2011) said in his paper that **“over 60 million girls and women are affected by child marriage globally”**.

Pakistan is underdeveloped country and more than its half population are living in rural areas. Among those, a huge majority of the people is illiterate and has no idea of the importance of education in this modern age. So they believe in old customs and those customs and social norms are in the favor of early marriage. Khanna et al. (2013) said that **“The occurrence of child marriage is greater in poorer families and those with lower levels of education”**.

In Pakistani society, especially in rural areas most parents give more importance to their boys instead of the girls because they consider that boys will be the family head in the future. Bhanji and Punjani (2014) point out that **“In Pakistan like other South Asian countries, men have more control and power and thus are considered as the decision makers of the family”**. So they treated the female child as a secondary or as a guest in her parents' house. Nadia (2013) & Subramanian (2008) said that **“the parents think that their daughters as someone else's ‘property’ (i.e., husbands) that they have to look after and nurture only until she is married off”**. The parents married off their girls in early age, which lay-down shocking impacts upon the girl's life. Kabir (2007) also point out that **“The custom of early marriage is common in most of the rural belt of the developing countries and prevailing due to certain causative factors, which lay-down devastating impacts upon females, and families”**. The early age marriage's ratio of is higher as compared to the rural area especially in developing countries. Daraz, Naz & Khan (2014) elaborate is a point of view that **“many females in rural areas i.e. 13 percent are married at the age of 15 while 66% before that age of 18”**. Another place Ahmed (1969) said that **“Early age, marriage is likely to be higher in rural areas due to less development as compared to more developed urban areas”**. The main reason of early marriage is that most parents are afraid of sexual violence and exposure to sexual abuse so they considered that early age marriages are the protection for the girls from society illness like poverty and violence and the final destiny or permanent place of the girl is her husband's house. That's why the parents married off their girls as soon as possible.

Pakhtun society' cultural is different from the other societies, which are in the favor of early age marriage due for certain reasons like, economic instability, lack of awareness and strong cultural trend etc. Farooq & Deen (2016) said that **“Poverty and cultural barriers put constraints on women from having their say regarding their marriage decisions”**. So, their parents never give any rights regarding their marriage decisions.

Taylor (1993) said that **“Traditional Practices in Pakistan assert that 57 percent of the population got married below that age of 15. Such practices are also very common among Pakhtuns with different ration i.e. in rural areas of Baluchistan region are much higher than the other parts of the country”**. Another place Senderowitz (2010) said that **“Most of the Pakhtun families are lower class families and are very keen to marry their children at early ages in accordance to decrease the financial burden”**. Similarly, in an underdeveloped society like the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Society mostly parents married off their children at an early age due to economic burden. They think that this activity decreases their economic burden because after the marriage mostly children are responsible for their own life. So, most parents prefer to hand over their daughters in a marriage relationship as soon as possible. Schuler et al. (2006) also strengthen this point of view that **“Parents engaging their young daughters in marriage while they are still children are of hope that marriage will profit them economically and it is taken as a ‘protection’ for their daughters”**. In a Khyber Pakhtunkhwa society, most parents considered that early age, marriage economic stability for them.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study was designed to explore the causes and factors of early age marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Society. After that, the author gives some recommendations and draw policies on the basis by the study to illuminate this social evil from the society.

## **HYPOTHESES**

- Strict customs and traditions are caused of early age marriage in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Society.
- Early age marriages create social, economic, physical and psychological abuses among the new generation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study was concentrated to inquire about the early age marriages in Tehsile & District: Bannu-Pakistan. In this Tehsile, the custom of early age, marriage is main dominant, which creates social, psychological and physical problems for the society. The total population of the mention Tehsile was 1,073,000 (District Survey Report, 2014). After selection the study area, the author selected quantitative research methods because it is an exploratory research and then takes 100 samples from the age group of 14-18 years of acquiring the main causes of early age marriage and its consequences. The data was collected by two sources (field information and theory). After collection the finalized data, the author analyzed it with the help of two-point scale categories (Agree and Disagree). Moreover, the author also gives some suggestions for improvement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Society.

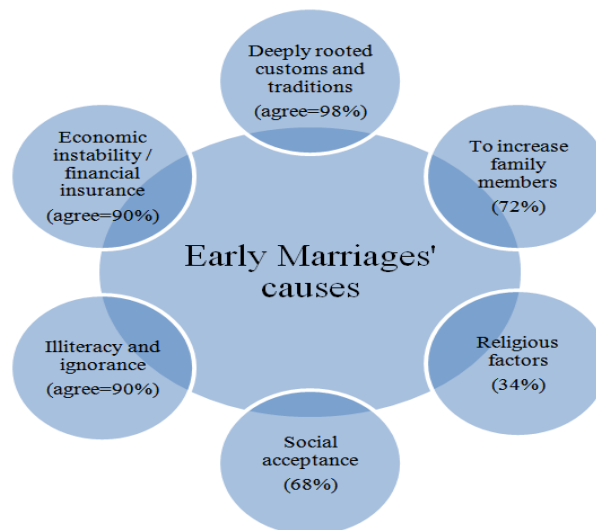
## Data Analysis

**Table 1: Demographic Analysis of the Causes of Early Marriage**

Causes of Early Marriage	Level of agreement				Total	
	Agree		Disagree			
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Deep rooted Customs and traditions	98	98	02	02	100	100
Economic instability/financial insurance	90	90	10	10	100	100
Illiteracy	90	90	10	10	100	100
Social acceptance	68	68	32	32	100	100
Religious factors	34	34	66	66	100	100
To have more family members	72	72	28	28	100	100

The table no.1 explained the causes of early age marriage. A huge majority of the respondents (98%) give comments that deeply rooted customs and traditions are the main causes of early age marriage. Similarly, (90%) each respondent said that economic instability / financial, insurance and illiteracy are also major contributed in early age marriage.

Likewise, (72%) respondents have the viewed that mostly Pakhtun families do early marriages to increase their family members in order to safeguard their families in different aspects and (68%) said that social acceptance of the society and family members are the major cause of early age marriage. However, a small ratio of the respondents (34%) explained that religion factor is contributed to early age marriage.

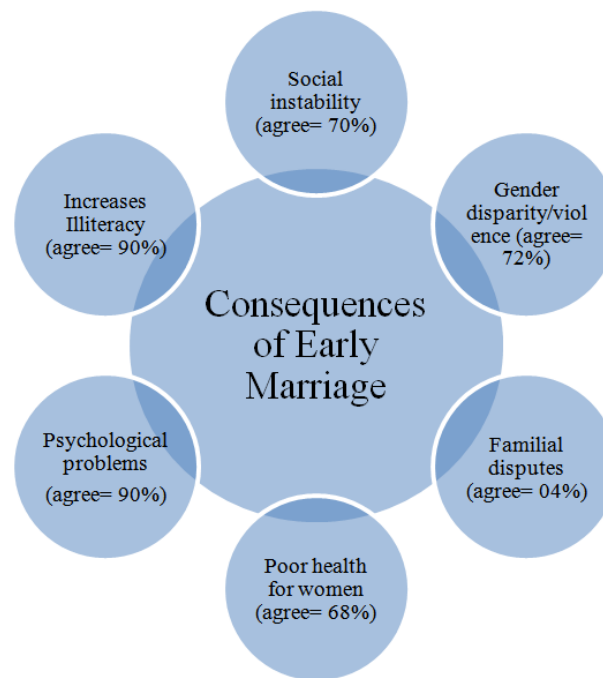


**Figure 1**

**Table 2: Demographic Analysis of the Consequences of Early Marriage**

Consequences of Early Marriage	Level of Agreement				Total	
	Agree		Disagree			
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Social instability	70	70	30	30	100	100
Increases Illiteracy	90	90	10	10	100	100
Psychological problems	90	90	10	10	100	100
Poor health for women	68	68	32	32	100	100
Familial disputes	04	04	96	96	100	100
Gender disparity/violence	72	72	28	28	100	100

The table 2 explained the consequences of early age marriage. From the total respondents, a huge majority of the respondents (90%) each said that early age, marriage increases Illiteracy and also create psychological problems in the term of tension, depression, and anxiety etc. for the society, due to their familial affairs. In addition, more than two third respondents (72%) argued that early age marriage creates gender disparity/violence, which is inversely affected women's empowerment and also caused social instability. Similarly, (68%) of the respondents said that early age, marriage is the threat to women's health, which bring a variety of health complications as the teens are rarely capable of reproduction. Moreover, a small ratio of the respondents (04%) said that early age, marriage is the cause of familial disputes.



**Figure 2**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

“Women are the pillar of every society” but our data and literature show that early age, marriage among Pakhtun families is associated with Deep-rooted Customs and traditions and even sometimes with religious misperceptions propagated by religious persons. Similarly, the economic position of the family is another reason for early age marriage. This information and its analysis showed that mass illiteracy and ignorance are the major causes to the compelling Pakhtun for early marriage of the daughters and son. Thus, this information shows that the custom of early marriage produces a variety of negative impact upon the male and especially female, which deprived them of their early rights.

## CONCLUSIONS

Pakistan is underdeveloped country and 6<sup>th</sup> populated country of population 177 million among the world. Its growth rate is very high as compared to other developing countries. Its main cause is early age, marriage; because mostly parents marry their children at a lower age due to economic burden.

Early age, marriage is not the only challenge for Pakistan, but it is also a global challenge with a severe impact. It has many causes like poverty, illiteracy and deeply rooted social customs etc. Gangadharan & Maitra (2001) said that

“Early age marriages are more prevalent in the province of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) because of low education and cultural set up”. Early age marriage does not only deprive both girls and boys of their childhood and educational opportunities but also makes them vulnerable to the brutal cycle of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and poverty. According to a study, “14 million girls under the age of 18 are married off each year” (UNFPA, 2005), which is a crucial situation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There are some recommendations through which we can elimination / resolve early child marriage system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Society.

- Early age, marriage is caused by various social, cultural, religious, economic and political factors. So our Govt. should make comprehensive and well-designed policy to resolve this problem.
- Govt. should provide economic incentives for parents/guardians, so that they send their girl child to school. These incentives immediately attract them and resultantly they may delay of their daughters’ marriages.
- Media and other stakeholders should play their role for aware parents and the community people about the harms of early age marriages.
- A Government should provide training to the officials and other stakeholders to make people aware of the provisions of national law regarding child marriage.

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