

## **Dowry System in Pakistan: A Case Study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

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### **Abstract**

In Pakistan, the dowry system is still a deeply ingrained social issue with significant ramifications for gender equality and social cohesion. It is especially prevalent in areas like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). The dowry tradition, which date back to ancient traditions, is the transfer of money, assets, or presents from the bride's family to the groom's family after marriage. A substantial financial and psychological burden is placed on families, particularly those from lower socioeconomic origins, by dowry demands that continue despite legal bans and changing socioeconomic landscapes. This study of the dowry system in Pakistan, with a particular focus on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), is important because it examines a deeply ingrained socio-cultural practice that has ramifications for gender dynamics and the general well-being of society. This study attempts to provide a thorough knowledge of how the dowry system influences families, particularly women's families, and to suggest policy strategies for minimizing its negative consequences using qualitative and quantitative analysis, including surveys, case studies, and interviews. The finding of the current study highlights the strong social disapproval of dowries and highlight how they negatively impact women's autonomy, marriage relationships, and social justice. Legislative changes, public awareness campaigns, and economic empowerment programs that work to change cultural norms and advance gender equality in marriage customs are some of the policy actions that are advised to lessen these consequences.

**Keywords:** KPK, marriage, culture norms, economic empowerment, equality

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**Introduction**

In South Asian nations, the dowry system is a long-standing custom that entails giving a daughter's parents' assets, money, or gifts upon her marriage. This practice has major socio-cultural and economic ramifications in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). This study investigates the history, continuation, and effects of the dowry system in KPK, focusing on issues related to the institution's contribution to family financial hardship and gender inequality. The institution of marriage is essential to the survival of humankind. Since this is a critical juncture in life. Although it creates a lot of problems in the postmarital life, the Pakistani dowry system has a big impact on it prior to marriage.<sup>1</sup> The term "dowry system" refers to the assets, property, or cash that a woman gives to her spouse or his family upon marriage.<sup>2</sup> Most South Asian countries have some form of customary dowry system. The culture of Pakistan is being gravely harmed by this practice, which is still commonly employed in Pakistani society today. The dowry was once given to the daughter of the bride as a gift by her parents, but these days the husband wants money to protect the bride's standing with their in-laws. Because their parents cannot afford to give the husband the money he demands, most girls marry later than they should or are never able to get married.<sup>3</sup> For parents in the lower middle class, this is a horrible curse. That's why most people aren't happy that a girl was born. In today's world, most individuals are looking for well-to-do, well-established families with daughters-in-law who can meet their sons' dowry requirements. More hardship is being caused in society by the rising trend of these marriages in a country where the vast majority of people live below the poverty line and lack access to basic amenities like power, water, and sanitary facilities in addition to health and education.<sup>4</sup> The dowry system can have a serious psychological impact on females and their families. Given that the majority of women are subjugated by dowries and that most husbands treat their wives with respect and honor based on them, dowries play a significant role in marital discrimination against women. Furthermore, dowries are often the cause of divorce and separation. Poorer households are usually more affected than wealthy households when it comes to dowries. Dowry is not an Islamic rite, despite its Indian origins.<sup>5</sup>

**Review of Literature**

In the 2007 Journal of Economic Perspectives essay "The Economics of Dowry and Bride Price," Sarah Anderson explores the historical continuity and significant economic ramifications of marriage payments in both industrialized and developing nations. It measures the size of these payments, which can often exceed a married couple's yearly household income, and looks at how institutions, societal structures, family dynamics,

and the state of the economy affect payment patterns. The study emphasizes the intricacy of marriage payments as a socio-economic phenomenon by highlighting the history of these practices across time, from changes in property rights to transfers in payment obligation between the families of the bride and groom. In order to provide an explanation for these patterns, the second section explores economic literature. It looks at theories pertaining to legal frameworks, cultural norms, economic incentives, and broader socioeconomic trends that influence marital practices around the world.

In the *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, (2019), Ali, S., M. Shah, N. Khan, F. Hanan, and M. Tariq explore the intricate dynamics of dowry within Pashtun culture, specifically in District Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, and explore its relationship with religious beliefs and customs. It uses a sample of 331 respondents and a quantitative methodology, collecting data using a Likert scale and analysing the results using Chi-square tests. Significant links have been found between religious interpretations and dowry behaviors. These interpretations emphasize difficulties such as the dowry being viewed as a religious duty and religious experts unable to distinguish between Islamic teachings and local norms. This article highlights how Islamic principles do not require traditional practices like dowries, but they still persist in Pashtun society. It also highlights the socio-cultural complexities of these practices and the need for legal and social reforms to correct misinterpretations and lessen the social distress they cause.

Habiba, U., and A. Kamal, in his article "A Study on Marital Satisfaction among Pakistani Women; Role of Dowry and Demographics." *Human Nature Journal of Social Sciences*, (2022), indicates how dowry demands negatively impact marital satisfaction and fuel conflict. The socioeconomic impact is emphasized by studies, which also point out how family support and work status affect the results of relationships. Age differences between spouses have a negative correlation with relationship pleasure, but factors like age at marriage and educational achievement have varying effects on marital satisfaction. In cultural contexts where dowry traditions remain, the assessment emphasizes the necessity of using legal enforcement to decrease dowry practices in order to safeguard the well-being of married couples.

In the *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 2023, Ch, S. N., S. I. Chand, and C. A. U. H. Dhariw al. present a critical analysis of the legal implications of the Pakistani dowry system. The article delves deeply into the system, highlighting its ancient origins and enduring influence on modern society. Utilizing qualitative research methodologies, it examines dowry customs in both rural and urban contexts, highlighting the grave

ramifications, including fatalities. The legislative landscape is critically analyzed for its efficacy in preventing dowry-related atrocities and empowering women, with a focus on the 1976 Dowry and Bridal Gifts (Restriction) Act and its 2016 modifications. The article suggests a variety of approaches to address this deeply ingrained social issue, such as increased police enforcement, public awareness campaigns, education programs, and media interventions. Efficiently navigating through historical background, societal norms and impacts, legislative frameworks, and proactive methods for societal transformation, this essay is divided into four well-organized sections. It gives a thorough examination of the nuances underlying Pakistan's dowry system and practical advice for resolving this enduring social issue.

Ali, N., A. Khan, S. Ali, Y. Khan, A. Khan, U. Niaz, and R. Ullah, in his research "Community Perception Towards Dowry Practice and Its Economic Consequences." *Russian Law Journal*, (2023), investigated relationships between community views of dowries and dowry practices in District Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, using statistical tests. The study revealed that although a considerable proportion of participants regard having a substantial dowry as a mark of respect, almost all of them perceive the act of dowry as bad. The perceptions of monetary or material dowries and social issues like as the financial strain on low-income families and the continuation of single status among females were found to be strongly positively correlated. Furthermore, dowries, according to the community, might give needy women and future generations financial stability. The study presents a nuanced picture of dowries, noting both their cultural importance and their negative impacts on social cohesion and economic justice in the area.

Khan, M. I., R. Ullah, L. Ullah, A. Ullah, and S. Khan investigate the socioeconomic effects and prevalence of dowries in female marriages in a particular region of Pakistan in their article "Unveiling the Intriguing Impact of Dowry on Female Marriage: Evidence from Lower Dir, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan." published in the *International Journal of Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences* in 2023. The research, which involved 327 respondents and was quantitative in nature, shows that dowries are strongly rooted traditions, with the amount of dowry serving as a barometer of social position and regard for women. While women with lesser dowries frequently experience abuse and social stigma, those with bigger dowries are held in high regard within their married families. The study emphasizes how dowry amounts affect marriage proposals and cause girls from lower-class families to put off getting married. Furthermore, it notes a worrisome tendency of rising dowry prices over time, which worsens

family financial strain and lowers marriage rates. The results highlight the necessity for media, elders, and community leaders to take aggressive measures against dowry practices in order to protect women's well-being and dignity, especially those who come from underprivileged homes.

In the article "Pattern of Marriages and Family Structure in Pashtun Tribes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Under Islamic Context.," published in 2023, Akhter, N., S. ur Rahman, M. S. Rauf, M. I. Aziz, and S. Rafiq examine how Islamic teachings affect gender roles, family dynamics, and social harmony among Pashtun tribes in KP. It highlights the ways in which Islamic principles influence marital customs, such as forced, transactional, and romantic weddings, and it looks at the obligations that spouses, parents, and kids have in Pashtun society. The purpose of the study is to illustrate how Pashtun families manage to preserve their religious and cultural identities in the face of globalization, foreign cultural pressures, and socioeconomic shifts. It highlights the relationship between traditional ideals and modern issues in an effort to improve understanding of these dynamics from an Islamic perspective. Through a comprehensive literature analysis and data collection from multiple sources, this research adds to the body of knowledge regarding Islamic perspectives on extended families, particularly in Pashtun communities. It also seeks to educate researchers, educators, and politicians on the value of cultural sensitivity when tackling family-related problems in the area.

In "Critical Analysis of Dowry Culture Through the Lens of Dowry-related Laws and Policies in Pakistan," published in 2023, Ghani, M. U., M. N. Akbar, and M. Naushahi critically examine the continued use of dowry practices in Pakistani society, emphasizing the legislative framework and policy interventions meant to address this cultural phenomenon. Using national and international surveys, reports, and academic articles, it emphasizes descriptive and exploratory analyses while utilizing qualitative methodologies. The study emphasizes how little Pakistani legislation is implemented, even though it is acknowledged that dowries are a discriminatory practice against women and have negative socioeconomic effects. The research analyzes how urgently strong laws and strong enforcement practices are needed to address dowry-related problems like domestic abuse and the financial exploitation of brides' families. According to the referenced scholars, dowries are tangible presents, cash, and property that are important during marriage rituals but also have a major role in gender inequality and marital difficulties. To lessen the negative consequences of dowry culture on Pakistani society, the study promotes thorough legal reforms and strict enforcement. There remains a significant knowledge gap on workable solutions that are appropriate for the cultural

and geographic features of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), despite a great lot of research having been done on the socio-economic effects and legal aspects of the dowry system in Pakistan. Most of the prior research has focused on the prevalence and consequences of dowry practices; however, it has not offered any practical measures to mitigate their detrimental effects on gender equality and family dynamics in KPK.

### **Methodology**

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative methods like surveys, case studies, and interviews to give a thorough knowledge of how the dowry system affects families, particularly women's families. Through an analysis of the socio-economic ramifications and cultural foundations of dowry customs, the study seeks to reveal the structural disparities that are sustained by dowry demands and to provide practical policy solutions. These kinds of initiatives are essential to reducing the negative consequences of dowries, advancing gender parity, and creating more equal marriages in Pakistani society. The methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of the intricate problems surrounding dowries in KPK and offers practical suggestions for social change by ensuring a nuanced examination of both the quantitative data from surveys and the qualitative insights from interviews and case studies.

### **Dowry System in Islam**

The term "dowry" refers to the things and presents that parents give their daughter in preparation for marriage. It represents kindness and affection.<sup>6</sup> In such a situation, the daughter is free to accept the dowry and will become the legal owner of it. Islam is a religion that provides the most concise explanations of all topics, and its teachings permeate every element of life and society.<sup>7</sup> It is unfortunate that we must now depart from these teachings. As a result, there are several facets and perspectives inside our society where we blindly adhere to outdated norms and traditions. A rigid dowry ritual exists. The practice of dowries is a product of our society's adoption of Hindu customs and traditions, which is subordinate to the goals of Islamic teachings.<sup>8</sup> The Hadith, the Quran, or the practices of any Sahabi do not include any proof of dowry rituals. Nevertheless, the girl's parents give her dowry and deny her inheritance because Hindu society lacks a religious or legal framework for inheritance and property partition. Our society has followed suit.<sup>9</sup>

Some believe that dowries are acceptable in Islam. However, it is currently encouraged in shariah and is not mentioned or encouraged in any other faith.<sup>10</sup> Regarding Hazrat Fatimah (may Allah be pleased with her), the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave his daughter Fatima Al-Zahra (may Allah be pleased with her) a sheet, a pillowcase, and

a pillow filled with azkhar grass as a dowry. This is explained by Hazrat Maulana Manzoor Nomani Sahib in "maarif-ul-Hadith": Most scholars interpret this Hadith to mean that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave these items as a dowry on his daughter's wedding, but the truth is that during that time in Arabia, the custom of giving some goods as a dowry was not even a concept, nor was the word "dowry" used.

No dowry of any type was mentioned in relation to the marriage of other daughters, with the exception of Hazrat Fatimah (may Allah grant her peace and blessings). The word "jahz" in the hadith, however, refers to arranging the necessity rather than providing the dowry. With the money of Hazrat Ali (RA) and on behalf of Hazrat Fatimah (AS), the Holy Prophet (SAW) had made these arrangements. It was not a dowry, though, because these necessities were not in his house, even if they accepted it as a dowry. It is referred to as a gift more often than not in the Hadiths, although it is never called dowry. It was the Holy Prophet (SAW) who looked for Hazrat Ali (RA). That implied that the Holy Prophet (SAW) was in charge of both the daughter and the son-in-law, and that some kind of equipment was given.

### **Types of Dowry Seekers**

Different individuals in society request dowry in different forms. Here are three types of dowry seekers

1. The first are those who ask shamelessly and arrogantly at the time of establishing a relationship and refuse to take the girl at the time of marriage if they get less than the demand they ask for, as long as their money and belongings are not enough so they do not agree to take the bride.
2. The second are those who present themselves as religious and polite in front of the girl's family when they are in a relationship. They pretend that they need a girl and don't need anything else. That they will have a traditional marriage but at the time of marriage, if the parents send their daughter away with a small baggage, then they come back to their original and take the bride away in front of the people but with more baggage or she is ridiculed from time to time for not bringing dowry and in such case the girl has to face mental and sometimes physical problems.
3. The third type of people are those who are spectators in the society who do not beg from the mouth nor accept the relationship of a poor girl but accept rich girl so that wealth can come in hand and also give respect to her in the society.<sup>11</sup>

### **Dowry System in Pakistan**

We are living in 21<sup>st</sup> century but still many social evils existing in Pakistan and dowry is one of them. Dowry is a custom or culture of many

S. No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Is it permissible to give dowry?	18.2%	7.3%	20%	9.1%	45.5%
2	Are women oppressed because of dowry?	40%	18.2%	14.5%	10.9%	16.4%
3	Did he honor the woman because of dowry?	37%	18.5%	16.7%	7.4%	20.4%
4	Do you personally have the right to receive or give dowry?	14.5%	3.6%	25.5%	9.1%	47.3%
5	Do you think dowry is a barrier to marriage?	63.6%	9.1%	9.1%	3.6%	14.5%
6	Are poor families more affected by dowry?	80%	5.5%	1.8%	1.8%	10.9%
7	Rich people are less affected by dowry?	60%	18.2%	7.3%	5.5%	9.1%
8	Does not giving dowry affect the married life of women?	41.8%	16.4%	14.5%	12.7%	14.5%
9	Do you consider dowry as an obstacle in marriage of girls?	60%	16.4%	14.5%	5.5%	3.6%
10	Does the dowry cause girls to feel deprived?	54.5%	20%	9.1%	7.3%	9.1%
11	It is obligatory to take dowry in marriage?	7.3%	5.5%	7.3%	14.5%	65.5%

countries including India and Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> Taking and giving dowry is not an Islamic act, we adopted the dowry as a custom from Hindu society. Most of families do not imagine marriages without dowry and some of families consider it mandatory.<sup>13</sup> This is a demonstration of targeting unmarried young women, whose qualities are characterized depend on specific price of their dowry. Dowry has many effects on the society; especially many negative consequences of the dowry were cited in Pakistani society including separation, violence, over-age marriages, source of comparison, mental issues or depression, domestic issues and feuds, suicides.<sup>14</sup> Dowry is sometimes used by in-laws as a source of comparison between daughter-in-laws.

We conduct questionnaire-based survey for the research which consists of 11 questions with the options from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The responses of the respondents are given in the percentage in the table below;



**Table-1.** Description of Research Questions**Source: Self**

Different respondents' perspectives of dowry practices are shown in Table 1 of the survey data. 18.2% strongly agreed that providing dowries is permissible, compared to 7.3% who agreed with the first question. Of those who strongly disagreed with this idea, 45.5% did so, demonstrating a strong anti-dowry position. Concerns regarding the effect of dowries on women's rights were evident from the 18.2% who agreed and the significant 40% who strongly agreed responses to the second question concerning whether or not dowries oppress women. On the other hand, 16.4% strongly disagreed with the statement. 37% of respondents strongly agreed and 18.5% agreed that husbands revere women because of the dowry, demonstrating the widespread perception that dowry dynamics play a role in marital dynamics. A substantial 47.3% strongly disagreed, indicating suspicion about personal involvement in dowry transactions. Just 3.6% agreed and 14.5% strongly agreed on the issue of personal entitlement to pay or receive dowry. Regarding the idea that dowries prevent people from getting married, a startling 63.6% strongly agreed, indicating that this is a common belief. Furthermore, 80% of respondents felt that dowries have a disproportionately negative socioeconomic impact on disadvantaged families. These results show that different people in the studied population had different opinions about dowries, which reflects the complicated societal perspectives and worries about the ramifications of dowries.

Responses to a series of questions about attitudes toward dowry practices are shown in Table 1 and are divided into four categories: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Within each category, these answers can be understood as percentages or proportions. For example, 18.2% strongly Agree, 7.3% Agree, 20% Neutral, 9.1% Disagree, and 45.5% Strongly Disagree were answered to the question "Is it permissible to give dowry?" Every question follows the same pattern, which represents the range of viewpoints held by respondents.

Assigning numerical scores to these categories (e.g., Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, strongly Disagree = 1) would allow us to potentially evaluate this data in a regression framework. The impact of these views on the total perception score pertaining to dowry practices might then be investigated using a regression model. Through statistical testing, the impact of each question on perceptions might be evaluated to determine whether particular points of view had a substantial influence on the general opinions toward dowry. This methodology yields a quantitative comprehension of the ways in which various influences influence the perceptions of the population under study.

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**Conclusion**

In Pakistan, the system of dowries, which is especially prevalent in areas such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), continues to be a deeply ingrained social problem that has significant consequences for both women equality and regional unity. Table 1 of the survey results presents a startling picture of the situation: although a sizable majority feels negatively about the practice of dowries, a minority has positive opinions about it. This is a reflection of larger worries about the cost it places on families, the systematic subjugation of women due to dowry requirements, and how it contributes to the continuation of inequality in household dynamics. The necessity for stricter enforcement of current laws is highlighted by the continued use of dowry-related behaviors in spite of legislative restrictions. Legislative changes should not only target the punishment of dowry seekers but also provide women with legal protection from abuse and coercion resulting from dowry demands. Simultaneously, extensive public awareness initiatives are necessary to subvert ingrained cultural practices that sustain dowry expectations. These efforts ought to prioritize gender parity, draw attention to the detrimental effects of dowries on women's independence and welfare, and advance alternative marriage values such as respect for one another and cooperation. Initiatives for economic empowerment aimed at underprivileged families are essential to reducing the financial strains that fuel dowry demands. Families can become less dependent on the dowry as a source of financial security by increasing women's access to jobs and education. It may be possible to change public perceptions of dowries by working with religious leaders to clear up misconceptions and harmonize local customs with Islamic principles that do not support them. The dowry system necessitates coordinated action in the legal, social, cultural, and economic spheres. Pakistan may mitigate the negative impacts of dowries and promote a more equitable and inclusive future for all its residents by putting these multifaceted measures into practice and creating a society where marriages are founded on mutual agreement, respect, and equality.

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