

Forced Marriages in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

Outline

1. Introduction

1.1. Hook

1.2. Background

1.3. Thesis Statement.

2. Causes of Forced Marriages in Pakistan

2.1. Patriarchal Traditions and Family Honor

- Control over daughters and emphasis on family reputation
- Marriage as a tool to preserve lineage and social alliances
- Practices like Wari and Swara to settle disputes.
- Weak enforcement of Section 310A (PPC)

2.2. Poverty and Economic Pressures

- Marriage used to ease financial burden
- Dowry and bride price influence family decisions
- Economic dependency leading to coercive marriages.

- 2.3. Lack of Education and Awareness
- Illiteracy and ignorance of legal rights
 - Girls withdrawn from schools at early age.
 - Lack of awareness about consent and choice.

- 2.4. Social Conformity and Fear of Stigma
- Pressure to obey family elders and customs
 - Fear of dishonor or rejection by community
 - Emotional manipulation and silence of victims.

3. Consequences of Forced Marriages in Pakistan.

3.1. Physical and Psychological Harm

- Early pregnancies and health complications among young brides
- Domestic violence and marital abuse due to lack of consent
- Emotional trauma, depression, and loss of self-worth.

3.2. Stunted Education and Economic Dependency.

- Dropout from school or college after marriage
- Limited access to employment and financial independence
- Perpetuation of poverty and gender inequality

3.3. Unstable Family Structures

- Marital conflicts and high rates of separation or abuse
- Absence of emotional compatibility or mutual respect
- Transmission of unhealthy family dynamics to next generation

3.4. Violation of Human Rights and Legal Principles

- Breach of constitutional right to free consent in marriage
- Contradiction with international human rights conventions
- Weak legal recourse for victims

3.5 Societal Backwardness and Gender Disparity

- Reinforcement of patriarchal control over women

- Hindrances to national development and social progress
- Weak representation of women in decision-making spheres

4. Conclusion

The Essay

In a society where marriage is celebrated as a sacred union of love and companionship, it becomes a tragedy when the same institution turns into a tool of oppression.

In Pakistan, countless women are married not by choice but by compulsion, traded, pressured or emotionally blackmailed into relationships that deny them agency over their own lives. Behind closed doors and under the pretext of family honor, daughters are often silenced and sacrificed to preserve reputations or settle disputes. From tribal practices such as Wari and Swara to forced unions orchestrated by relatives, the concept of consent is frequently ignored. Despite constitutional guarantees of personal liberty and the existence of laws like Section 310A of the Pakistan Penal Code, weak enforcement and deep-rooted patriarchal norms have allowed this practice

to flourish. Forced marriages are not mere cultural remnants; they are violations of human dignity that perpetuate poverty, sustain gender inequality, and hinder the nation's social and moral progress.

Pakistan's patriarchal social structure grants men dominant authority over family decisions, particularly regarding marriage. Within such setup, daughters are often treated as extensions of family honor rather than individuals with independent will. Marriage is used as a tool to control female sexuality, preserve lineage, and forge alliances between families.

In tribal and rural region, customary practices like Wani and Swara continue to exist, where girls are married off to settle disputes or compensate for male crimes. Although Section 310A of Pakistan Penal Code criminalizes such acts, weak enforcement and social acceptance enable their persistence. The notion of family honor thus

becomes an instrument through which coercive marriages are legitimized. Widespread poverty and economic instability further fuel forced marriages in Pakistan. Families facing financial hardship often view daughters as economic burdens and resort to marriage as a means of reducing expenses or gaining monetary benefit through *haq mehr* or bride price. In some cases, marriages are arranged with wealthier families in hopes of improving social and financial status. This transactional approach strips women of autonomy and reinforces economic dependency. The inability of poor families to educate their daughters or provide them with alternative life choices makes them more vulnerable to coercion.

Another major factor contributing to the persistence of forced marriages is illiteracy and lack of awareness about legal rights. In many rural and

semi-urban areas, girls are withdrawn from school at an early age, leaving them uninformed about their rights under Islamic and state law. As a result, families themselves often remain unaware that consent is a legal requirement in marriage. Therefore, social norms rather than legal principles continue to dictate behavior. The absence of education also restricts women's capacity to resist coercion or seek institutional support, thereby perpetuating a cycle of ignorance and subjugation.

In the same vein, social conformity and fear of stigma further entrench the practice of forced marriages in Pakistan. In tightly knit ~~social~~ traditional communities, obedience to elders and adherence to customs are deeply ingrained values. Those who challenge arranged or coercive unions risk social ostracism and accusations of dishonoring their families.

Moreover, fear of being emotionally manipulated, disowned, or publicly

shamed compels many women to remain silent. Families, too, dread the loss of social respect if their daughters assert independence in marital matters. Consequently, this collective mindset sustains a culture where silence is mistaken for consent and compliance is glorified as virtue.

The causes of forced marriages are deeply embedded within its social fabric, but their implications extend far beyond individual suffering. Once a girl is coerced into marriage, the consequences ripple across her physical, psychological, and economic well-being, ultimately weakening the moral and development foundation of society. Understanding these outcomes is crucial to realize the true cost of a practice that continues to rob countless individuals of their agency and dignity. One of the most immediate

consequences of forced marriages is the physical and psychological toll on victims. Many women trapped in such unions face domestic abuse, sexual violence, and reproductive health complications arising from repeated pregnancies without consent. Moreover, the absence of emotional compatibility between spouses often leads to mental distress, depression, and a profound loss of self-worth. In extreme cases, the inability to escape abusive marriages results in suicidal tendencies or self-harm. Thus, forced marriages not only violate bodily autonomy but also leave deep psychological scars that persist for a lifetime. Another serious consequence is the interruption of education and long-term economic dependency that follows. Once married, most women are compelled to abandon their studies or professional aspirations, reinforcing cycle of illiteracy and dependence. Consequently,

they are deprived of opportunities for financial independence and personal growth. Furthermore, this educational deprivation limits their ability to make informed decisions about health, family planning, and child-rearing. The result is a generation of women who remain economically disempowered, unable to challenge patriarchal structures or contribute meaningfully to the workforce. Forced marriages also destabilize family structures by undermining the very foundation of mutual respect and understanding upon which healthy relationships are built. Over time, children raised in such environments internalize toxic family dynamics, perpetuating the same dysfunction in their own relationships. Equally alarming is the violation of human rights and legal principles inherent in forced marriages. Pakistan's constitution guarantees the right to liberty

equality, and free consent in marriage, yet these rights are routinely denied in practice. The country is also a signatory to several international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which obligates the state to ensure women's autonomy and protection. However, weak implementation of laws and the reluctance of victims to pursue legal recourse continue to perpetuate impunity. Thus, each case of forced marriage represents not only personal injustice but also a collective failure of governance and law enforcement.

Ultimately, the persistence of forced marriages hampers Pakistan's social progress by reinforcing gender disparity and perpetuating patriarchal control.

When women are denied the right to choose their partners, they are also denied the opportunity

to become equal participants in national development. This exclusion translates into weaker economy, limited innovations, and a society that struggles to achieve gender justice. Hence, the consequences of forced marriages are not confined to households alone; they collectively hold back the moral and developmental advancement of the entire country.

Forced marriages in Pakistan continue to bind countless women in chains of obedience disguised as honor. What begins as a family decision often ends as a lifetime of silent suffering. Beneath this practice lies a society still reluctant to let its daughters live as free and equal beings. Yet, the same society holds the power to change its course. When families begin to see consent not as rebellion but as a right, and when the state enforces justice without fear or favor, the

cycle of coercion can finally be broken. Education, awareness and empathy must replace control, ~~ing~~ ignorance, and silence. True progress will come not from economic growth alone, but from the liberation of thought, when a girl's "no" carries the same weight as her "yes". Only then will Pakistan rise as a nation that values dignity over dominance and choice over compulsion.