

Forced Marriages in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

Outline:

1- Introduction

- a) Definition and Distinction between arranged and forced marriages.
- b) Global context and situation in Pakistan
- c) Thesis statement

2- Causes of forced marriages in Pakistan

- a) Cultural tradition and Patriarchal norms
 - Concept of family honor
 - Control over women autonomy
- b) Economic factors
 - Poverty and bride price
 - Dowry expectations
- c) Illiteracy and lack of awareness
 - Limited education among rural women
 - Ignorance of legal rights
- d) Weak law enforcement and judicial

gaps

e) Social pressure and family reputation

3- Consequences of forced marriages

a) Psychological and emotional trauma

- Depression, anxiety, PTSD

b) Violation of human rights and personal freedom

c) Domestic violence and abuse

- Physical, emotional and sexual violence

- Suppression of female voice in household affairs.

d) Unhealthy spouse relationship

e) Health and maternal consequences

f) Social Backwardness and Gender Inequality

Conclusion:

— A forced marriage is one in which both parties are married without their free or full consent, often under threat, coercion, or social compulsion.

It differs from arranged marriages, where both individuals consent to

a match proposed by families. Forced marriages occurs due to high illiteracy and lack of awareness, cultural tradition, certain economic factors that ultimately results in psychological and emotional trauma, violation of human rights and personal freedom, unhealthy relationships between spouses. Forced marriages in Pakistan are rooted in socio-cultural, economic, and religious misinterpretations, leading to severe consequences for individual rights, gender equality and social progress.

- Pakistani society remains deeply patriarchal, where family honor is often tied to women's behavior and obedience. Many families consider female autonomy a threat to reputation and lineage control.

Practices such as Watta Satta (exchange marriages) and vani or smaran (giving girls in marriages to

settle disputes) are particularly prevalent in rural areas of Sindh, Punjab, KPK. According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP, 2022) dozens of girls are still married off annually as a part of tribal conflict settlements.

- In poor household a marriage becomes a tool for financial settlements.

Families marry off daughters early to reduce economic burdens or review walwar (bride price). Consequently, in urban areas dowry expectations of greedy families forces girls to marry with aged persons. The commodification of marriage as a transaction reinforces the idea that women are economic assets rather than individuals with rights. A UNICEF report (2021) noted that early marriages are strongly correlated with poverty, especially in rural Sindh and Balochistan.

- Illiteracy among women is one of the greatest predictors of forced marriage. According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2023), female literacy remains below 50% in rural districts. Without education, girls are unaware of legal protections or the concept of consent. Furthermore, families often consider silence as consents, ignoring emotional well-being. This cultural conditioning perpetuates a cycle of ignorance and submission.

- Although Pakistan has enacted several laws - like section 498-B of the Pakistan Penal Code (criminalizing force marriages) - implementation remains poor. Police often dismiss such cases "as family matters". The child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) sets 16 as the minimum marriage age for females, but enforcement is

inconsistent across provinces. Sindh has raised the age to 18, yet prosecutions remain negligible due to weak monitoring systems and community pressure.

Forced marriages often result in mental health issues - depression, anxiety, and ~~so~~ suicidal tendencies.

The absence of emotional connection and the presence of coercion create chronic psychological distress.

A 2021 Aurat Foundation study reveals that women in forced marriages reported higher levels of emotional abuse and psychological breakdowns compared to those in consensual unions.