

[BATCH: 74]

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## [MOCK EXAM]

### "Forced Marriages in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences"

## [OUTLINE]

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

#### 1.1 Hook

#### 1.2 Background

#### 1.3 Thesis Statement:

Forced marriages in Pakistan continue due to entrenched socio-cultural norms, economic hardships and inadequate law enforcement, producing severe physical, psychological, educational, and social consequences while undermining gender equality and nation development.

### 2. Causes of Forced Marriages:

2.1 Patriarchal Mindset - Male dominance and control of female sexuality

2.1.1: Case Report

2.2 Poverty - families marry off daughters to reduce financial burden or gain economic advantage

2.3 Illiteracy and lack of awareness - limited understanding of rights, legal protections, and health risks

2.4 Weak law enforcement - Inconsistent

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minimum marriage age laws and poor prosecution  
2.4.1: Case Report on early marriage (from Dawn newspaper)

2.5 Customary practices - traditional dispute-settling marriages remain prevalent

2.5.1: Case Report: In KPK a 14 years old girl was handed to a man in "Vani" style arrangement

2.6 Religious/cultural misinterpretations - faith misused to legitimize coercion

2.7 Gender inequality - low female education and limited employment reduce autonomy

### 3. Consequences of Forced Marriages:

3.1 Health Impacts - early pregnancies, maternal/infant mortality, domestic abuse

3.1.1 WHO Case Report on Maternal Mortality due to early pregnancies

3.2 Psychological trauma - depression, anxiety, emotional distress

3.3 Educational deprivation - school dropouts, inter-generational poverty

3.4 Human Rights violation - breach of constitutional and international obligations

3.5 Economic repercussions - reduce female workforce participation, lower productivity

3.6 Domestic Instability - forced divorce, honor-based violence

3.7 Hindrance to SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) Particularly SDG 3 (Health) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality)

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#### 4. Legislative and Institutional Framework:

4.1 Existing Laws - Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, Sindh Act 2013, ICT Amendment 2025.

4.2 Implementation gaps - weak enforcement, inconsistent provincial application, low awareness

4.3 Institutions - Council of Islamic Ideology, NGOs (Aurat foundation, Bedari)

4.4 Challenges - Police/judiciary lack training, victim protection inadequate, cultural pressures persist

#### 5. Measures to address the issue:

5.1 Legal reform - harmonise minimum age nationwide (18 years)

5.2 Effective enforcement - train police, judiciary and registrars; increase prosecution

5.3 Education and awareness - female education promotion, legal literacy campaigns

5.4 Economic empowerment - micro-credit and vocational programs for vulnerable families

5.5 Community engagement - work with religious leaders and elders to reinterpret harmful norms

5.6 Protection Services - shelter, helplines, legal aid

5.7 Media campaigns - TV, radio, and social media to raise awareness

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## 6. CONCLUSION

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## "THE ESSAY"

Imagine being a child, dreaming of school and friends, only to be told that your life has already been decided - that you must marry a stranger years older than you. For thousands of girls in Pakistan, this isn't imagination but **harsh reality**. Forced marriages, often involving children under **18**, are widespread in both rural and urban areas, fueled by **patriarchal traditions, poverty**, and lack of education. Families may see early marriage as a way to protect honor, secure dowries or reduce financial burdens. Despite legal provisions like the Child Marriage Restraint Act and recent regional reforms, many girls continue to fall victim to **coerced unions**. Forced marriage isn't merely a private family matter; it violates **fundamental human rights**. Forced marriages in Pakistan continue due to entrenched socio-cultural norms, economic hardships and inadequate law enforcement producing severe physical, psychological, educational, and social consequences while undermining gender equality and nation development.

Firstly, patriarchal norms and gender inequality play a fundamental role. Pakistan's society remains predominantly **male-dominated**, with familial decisions particularly regarding **marriage** - frequently controlled by male members.

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As a result, women and girls often lack the autonomy to make life-changing decisions, with family honor and societal expectations outweighing personal choice. For example: In 2021, Reena Meghwar, a Hindu girl from Badi, was allegedly abducted, forcibly converted, and married off to a Muslim man without her consent. She later pleaded to be returned to her family as she had been threatened and coerced. This illustrates how forced marriage is used as a tool to control women's bodies, religion and social identity, especially in rural and marginalised communities.

Secondly, **economic** factors significantly contribute to this practice. In regions afflicted by poverty, families may perceive daughters as **financial burdens**. Consequently, forced early marriages become a mechanism to alleviate economic pressures. Furthermore, **downy related practices**, though formally illegal, persists, incentivizing families to marry off daughters in exchange for **material gain**. Moreover, environmental factors such as climate-induced crop failures exacerbate this problem, compelling financially struggling families to marry daughters early to secure dowries for survival. Hence, financial considerations intertwine with social customs to perpetuate early and forced unions.

Another factor responsible for early

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and forced union is the inadequate legal enforcement and lack of institutional support. Although the Child Marriage Restraint Act sets the minimum marriage age at 16 for girls, weak enforcement and limited awareness of legal rights allow the practice to continue unabated. A Dawn report emphasizes that "laws would continue to sit idle while girls would be dragged into marriages they neither understand nor consent to". Therefore legal gaps combined with societal pressures create an environment in which forced marriages remain pervasive.

Similarly in many parts of Pakistan, particularly in rural and tribal areas, traditional **dispute settling** marriages remain prevalent. Traditional mechanisms like: Vani, Swara, and Jirga based dispute settlement often treat women as bargaining tools to restore honor or settle feuds. These practices upheld by informal justice systems and patriarchal norms, violate basic human rights by denying women free and informed consent in marital decisions. For example:- In KPK; a 14 years old girl was handed to a man in "Vani" style arrangement to settle family dispute. Another example is from Sindh's Shikarpur district, where a tribal jirga ordered the marriage of three minor girls - aged six & eight - to resolve a local conflict clearly illustrating how cultural traditions can override legality and morality.

In the same course of events, Gov

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female education also plays an important role in forced marriages. An educated woman is literate enough to know the basic legal and religious rights she has. She knows that a marriage can be commenced only if she gives her consent and it can't be coerced. Similarly, limited employment reduces her autonomy as she's financially dependent on others. According to the Pakistan demographic and Health Survey, women who marry before the age of 18 are significantly less likely to complete secondary education or join the workforce. This exclusion results in a low female labour force participation rate which stood at 21% in 2023. Thus the cumulative effect is a shrinking of the productive base particularly in rural areas where early marriage is most prevalent.

Having examined the underlying causes that drive forced marriages in Pakistan, it is equally important to understand the far reaching consequences of such unions. The socio-cultural pressures, economic hardships, and legal gaps that compel girls into forced marriages trigger a cascade of adverse effects on their physical, emotional, educational, and social well-being. By exploring these consequences it can be deduced that forced marriage is one of the most pressing social challenges requiring urgent interventions.

The consequences of forced marriages

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are profound, beginning with health related challenges. Early pregnancies, common among young brides carrying significant risks for both mother and child, including maternal mortality, malnutrition, and complications during child birth. According to WHO, girls aged 10-14 are 5 times more likely to die in child-birth compared to women aged 20-24. In addition, psychological trauma also results from domestic violence, unwanted pregnancies, and the abrupt transition into adult responsibilities. These physical and mental issues have long term repercussions.

Another critical consequence is the disruption of education. Forced marriages often compel girls to drop out of schools, severely limiting their opportunities for personal and professional development. This lack of education perpetuates the cycle of poverty, leaving women economically dependent on their families or spouses. Education, which could empower girls to resist coercion, is instead sacrificed, entrenching gender inequality. Their dependence on spouses and families leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and further marginalization.

Forced marriages aren't merely a social or cultural issue. They constitute a clear violation of fundamental human rights. Every individual has a right to freely choose a spouse and to live with dignity, autonomy and personal security.

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rights enshrined in international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Pakistan is a signatory. By coercing young girls into marriages against their wills, families and communities strip them of their basic freedoms undermining their right to education, health, and protection from violence. Thus, forced marriages represent not only a personal tragedy but a structural violation of human dignity and legal rights that demand urgent attention.

Along with Human Rights violation, forced marriage also hinders Sustainable Development Goals especially SDG-3 and SDG-5. SDG-3 aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Forced and early marriage jeopardize this goal by significantly increasing the risk of maternal and infant mortality, malnutrition, obstetric complications and psychological trauma. Similarly SDG-5 focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Forced marriages are a direct violation of gender equality because they strip girls of agency, autonomy and decision making power. It reinforces patriarchal norms and deprives women of equal participation in social, economic, and political life. Thus forced marriage obstructs the progress towards achieving the respective targets of SDG-3 and SDG-5.

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respectively.

Recognizing the dangers of forced marriages, Pakistan has implemented several legislative measures. The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 initially set the minimum marriage age at 16 for girls while recent amendments in regions like Sindh and Islamabad have raised it to 18. These reforms demonstrate governmental acknowledgement of the issue and provide a legal framework aimed at protecting minors.

However, implementation of these laws is weak. cultural resistance and societal norms frequently undermine legal provisions, and lenient judicial decisions allow offenders to escape consequences. UNFPA and Population Council studies show that child marriages in Sindh increased between 2014 and 2019, highlighting the gap between legislation and implementation.

Institutions and Non-governmental organizations play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between legal enforcement and societal resistance. NGOs provide critical support services including awareness campaigns, legal aid, safe shelters and counselling for victims. Organizations like: Aurat Foundation, War Against Rape and Sindh Child Rights Forum have been instrumental in educating communities about the danger of child and forced marriages, empowering girls to assert their rights and the stricter enforcement of existing laws.

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Thus these institutions not only protect individual victims but also work to shift societal norms, thereby addressing both the immediate and structural dimensions of the problem.

After discussing causes and consequences of the forced marriages in Pakistan, it is also important to shed light on the necessary measures to combat the challenge of forced marriages.

A key strategy is the creation of consistent laws across all regions, setting the minimum marriage age at 18 without exceptions. Moreover, stronger penalties must be imposed for anyone involved in facilitating or conducting forced marriages to serve as a deterrent.

Secondly, robust support systems including helplines, safe shelters, and accessible legal aid are vital. These resources can help in escaping abusive situations. Effective support mechanisms provide both immediate protection and long-term opportunities for empowerment. Similarly, community engagements can play a pivotal role by working with local leaders, religious scholars, and parents to challenge harmful social norms, promote awareness about the legal age of marriage and emphasize the value of girls' education.

Additionally, media campaigns play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and reaching wider audiences; television programs, social media platforms and

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Print media can highlight the danger of child and forced marriages. For example: Media played an important role in the Dua Zahra case and the girl was safely found and handed over to her parents. Thus, coordinated efforts across these three domains not only protect individual victims but also foster societal change, gradually reducing the prevalence of forced marriages in Pakistan.

In a nutshell, forced marriages in Pakistan represent a great violation of human rights, perpetuated by entrenched socio-cultural norms, economic hardships and weak legal enforcement. The consequences of such practices are far-reaching, encompassing severe health risks, psychological trauma, educational deprivation, and social and economic marginalization. These marriages also obstruct Pakistan's progress towards Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG-3 on health and wellbeing and SDG-5 on gender equality. Addressing this issue requires a multi-dimensional approach, including robust legal frameworks, active enforcement of existing laws, and the intervention of institutions and NGOs that provide protection services, legal aid, and community awareness programs. Media campaigns and local engagement can help shift societal attitudes, while education empowers girls to resist coercion and make informed choices.

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Ultimately, eliminating forced marriages demands collective action from the state, civil society, and communities to safeguard the rights, dignity, and future of young girls in Pakistan.

