

Forced Marriages in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

Outline.

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- b. Elders marry off their children without their consent
- c. Crude and rudimentary understanding of Islam
- d. Lack of education access makes women unable to understand their rights
- e. Forced marriages are the result of

- of settling disputes among clans
- f. A way of keeping children close to parents
- g. Victims of rape are forcibly married off to their violator.
- h. Prevents reduction in ancestral land

4. Consequences of Forced Marriages in Pakistan

- a. Subjugation of wives by their aggressive husbands
- b. Physical assault of wives
- c. Unhappy marriages
- d. Neglected children lead to life of crime
- e. Reinforcement of trend of forced marriage in their children
- f. ~~Prevents harmony in next generation~~

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- a. Awareness campaigns that empower women to know their

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Essay

The difference in the lives of a happily married couple and an unhappily married couple is easily recognizable. The former couple is more understanding, respectable, and loving to each other whereas the latter couple is fueled by hatred, animosity and disrespect for each other. The latter couple is often the result of forced marriages; a concept which is an intrinsic evil of Pakistani society. Its causes are entrenched in the social setting of Pakistani society: patriarchal, parochial and highly intolerant. Unmarried young women are still considered to be a stigma and elders remain to be the veto power when it comes to deciding the matrimonial fate of their adult children. Moreover, a misunderstanding or deliberate crude understanding of Islam further perpetuates forced marriages. Very frequently, victims of sexual violence end up becoming the wife of her abuser. Coupled with these causes are the deleterious consequences of forced marriages: subjugation of wives, physical

abuse, spousal violence and the concomitant reduction in the quality of life of next generation. Certain drastic measures are required to curb this menace. This essay would discuss how societal norms perpetuate forced marriages and how they affect the mental and social well being of the ~~couple~~ married couple. In the end, a way forward would also be discussed.

Before embarking on the main discussion, it is essential to understand the concept of forced marriages. Forced marriages can be described as socially recognized matrimonial unions between two non-consenting adults. Such marriages are officially recognized and are legally binding. However, the consent of the participating adults is ~~is~~ forced and consequently it is morally wrong. Regardless of such marriages are frequently organised in Pakistan. The participating adults have to agree to this setting due to the social and familial pressures. According to a leading contemporary feminist and organizers of women awareness campaigns,

Naila Obaid, nearly half of all marriages in Pakistan and three quarters of those in Pakistani rural societies are forced marriages.

~~These~~ Unmarried young women are considered a stigma in Pakistani society. If they reach their twenties and are still unmarried, their parent begin to worry about social backlash. To escape from the social backlash, they ~~are~~ frequently agree to getting her betrothed without her consent. For instance, in the movie, 'Lahore sai Aagai,' the lead Pakistani actress depicts the portrayal of a young girl who escapes her family when they agree to get her married off without her consent. As young women like this actress are considered a liability, ~~forced marriages in Pakistan~~ the toxic concept of forced marriages exist in the country.

Similar to this cause ~~is~~ ^{is} the completely negligent attitude of elders towards their children. This becomes more pronounced when the time for their marriage approaches. In many rural settings of

Pakistan, girls are not even asked for consent for their marriage. In the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), girls are almost never engaged in marriage discussions (South Asian Voices, 2020). Therefore, the unwavering attitude of adults is a major cause of forced marriages.

Along with this social reason, a major cause of forced marriages in Pakistan is the crude and rudimentary understanding of the religion, Islam. Many clergymen overtly and many families discreetly misattribute the teachings of Islam to condone the menace of forced marriages. On the contrary, consent of the individuals (to be married) is of paramount importance in Islam. In a tradition of Holy Prophet, consent was so vital that he called off the marriage of a young girl who ~~did~~ had not consented to her marriage. It can, thus, be inferred that Islam places a very heavy weightage on the consent of adults to be married. A poor understanding of Islam has been

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used by the society at large to marry off youngsters without their consent.

Another very serious cause of early marriages is the dearth of educational access that ultimately hampers social mobility of women. Education equips a woman with the tools that would empower her. One of the ways of being empowered is knowing and understanding your rights. However, the poor education infrastructure in the country where eighty percent of girls are out of school in Balochistan (UNICEF, 2020), prevents children in general, and girls in particular to know about their rights. Hence, women fall prey to ~~er~~ forced marriages because they do not know their rights due to poor education.

Moreover, forced marriages are a means to settle disputes among clans. Families resort to this way and youngsters suffer as collateral damage. The two individuals that are to be married ~~do~~ agree to the arrangement simply to end bloodshed.

between their respective clans. This method is particularly common in the tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Very often, girls ~~who~~ sisters of an aggressor are given off in marriage to the aggrieved party (Tehmina Durrani, My Feudal Lord). Therefore elders give away their daughters ~~to settle~~ in forced marriages to settle their tribal disputes.

Furthermore, another reason of increased forced marriages is the affinity of elders for their daughters. Parents in general marry off their daughters to the children of their daughters' uncles and aunts. By doing so, the daughters tend to remain in the same vicinity of their parents. As the concept of patrilocal families still persists in Pakistan, the children of parents move in with their wives to their own homes that they share with their parents. ~~Consequently~~ Very often, the marrying partners do not have a strong affection for each other, but they agree to this arrangement for the sake of their respective parents. Thus, forced marriages are a way of keeping the children ~~-clan~~ particularly daughters close to their parents; this practice flourishes in

our society.

Moreover, another major cause of forced marriages is the flawed concept of punitive justice. In the alternate dispute resolutions of our country, the victims are married off to their ~~as~~ violators. Women who have been raped are forcibly wed to their rapists. This is thought to alleviate the suffering of the victim and is considered punitive for the rapist. Consequently, women are forcibly wed to their rapists and this is a very major cause of forced marriages in Pakistan.

Lastly, forced marriages are in practise to prevent reduction in ancestral land of a family. The Islamic inheritance system is such that daughters are destined for a share in the property of their parents. This share, albeit being half of that of men, is still of a significant value. If a girl is forced to marry a paternal cousin, she will keep the land of her father after his demise, and this will then remain in the family. If she were to be married off outside the family, her share of property would also be given away. As a result, feudal practices are in abundance and forced marriages are a

way to preserve ~~ancestral~~ ancestral land.
All of the aforementioned causes of forced marriages are coupled with the harmful consequences. Almost all forced marriages result in the subjugation of wives by their aggressive husbands. The patriarchal Pakistani society endows uncountable advantages to husbands. They frequently belittle their wives due to the little affection they have for them. A report of United Nations Human Rights Watch depicted the psychological trauma of women at the hands of their husbands (60% reported daily abuse by husbands, 2021). Therefore, women are subjugated by husbands in forced marriages.

Similarly, this psychological assault aggravates into physical abuse in extreme cases. A couple that has little mutual respect for each other does not ~~see~~ view the other as a significant other. Such cases are on the rise in tribal settings. ~~Some~~ 95% of women in ex FATA reported that their husbands beat them regularly. Almost all of these incidents were attributed to indifferent husbands on account of their forced marriage with their

wife. Therefore, physical assault with impunity is a serious consequence of forced marriages.

Such an indifferent attitude results in unhappy marriages. Forced marriages are alien to the concept of mutual growth of a couple. Neither partner is available for the emotional needs of the other. Both are living like two strangers under the same roof. It is a marriage only in name and not in spirit. These practices are on the rise in the rural settings of Pakistan. The combined essence of this is an unhappy marriage secondary to forced marriage.

Forced marriages often lead to the devastation of children whose neglect manifests itself in the form of crime. Parents do not cooperate with each other in the upbringing of their children. The children feel neglected and come under extreme stress. For instance, children make hasty decisions like falling prey to drugs. This transcends into a downward spiral of gloom, hopelessness, and crime as a coping mechanism. Resultantly, the

children in such marriages bear the brunt of their parents' marriage decisions.

Furthermore, victims of forced marriages continue the trend in their next generations. Instead of absolving the problem, they just throw the problem to the next generation. As the will of the parents was not taken into consideration, ~~strongly~~ the consent of their children is not taken into account when the time of their marriage arrives. For example, an unhappy mother is unaware of the liberty one attains in a happy marriage; therefore, being alien to this idea, she puts the lives of her children in a similar downward spiral. Therefore, the life of next generation is similarly destroyed.

In order to solve this issue of forced marriages and its hazards, ~~more~~ certain remedies should be taken. These include arranging awareness campaigns that empower women to know their rights. If women are privy to their matrimonial rights, they can fight for them. By doing so, the empowered woman would not fall victim to the trials and tribulations of an unhappy marriage. Television

dramas that portray women as resilient and that denote the hazards of unhappy marriages need to be produced. Such an approach would enable Pakistani society to rid itself of this marriage of convenience.

Similarly, there is a dire need for a strict enforcement of marriage laws. Legally, women have to consent before signing their marriage document. Practically, this step is viewed as a mere formality. This practise needs to change. The marriage should only be solemnized after a clear approval from the bride. In this way, forced marriages can be eradicated at the ~~initi~~ very initial level.

Furthermore, the government should utilize the clergy and draft laws strictly in accordance with Islam vis a vis marriage. The existing Muslim Family Law Ordinance of 1962 was drafted for the conditions of that time. The recent advancement in women rights awareness due to feminism has created confusion among the masses. Neither a strict orthodox approach or a very progressive ~~lan~~ liberal way, but a balanced approach in conjunction with Islamic teachings needs to be developed. Such an approach will settle the issue of

the heterogeneous and patriarchal Pakistani society. Lastly, there are a lot of hurdles in the way of attaining a divorce for women in Pakistan. If a woman is being emotionally, psychologically, and physically tortured in her marriage, it is only rational for her to take a divorce. Forced marriages keep women a prisoner at the whims and caprices of her husband. This is not only ~~immoral~~ immoral but also unethical. By being able to liberate herself from the invisible clothes of an unhappy marriage, she can prove to be a better individual and more active member of society. Therefore, the red-tapism of divorce for women needs to be rectified to enable them to live happily.

To sum up the discussion, the structural and societal norms have increased forced marriages in Pakistan. Its causes include social stigmas associated with unmarried young women who must be wed off to meet societal expectations. Elders play a significant role in perpetuating forced marriages for their own objectives. Religion is misused to accept forced marriages as

Islamically valid. Rape victims are frequently forcibly married to their rapists. These couples are coupled with the consequences of physically and psychologically abusive husbands. The children of such unions are themselves neglected and often resort to criminal endeavours. Moreover, they themselves are confined to getting forcibly married; the curse runs in the family. In order to solve this social menace, awareness campaigns to empower women are needed. Similarly, a promulgation ~~of~~ and implementation of strict marriage laws is required. Lastly, lesser complication in divorce method would enable society to improve itself. Forced marriages are a cause of concern not only for the married couple but also for their children. Consequently, the society suffers from a misplaced union. Mutual respect, affection and trust are considered benchmarks of a happy marriage. These qualities are essential to be reciprocated by all future generations to make family peaceful and hence more prosperous.