

Forced Marriages in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

Outline:

1. Introduction

- A severe violation of human rights
- These are caused by several factors and have serious consequences for women and girls, especially.

2. Overview of Forced Marriages in Pakistan

- Difference between forced marriages and arranged marriages
- Prevalence in rural areas mostly
- Cultural context of Forced marriages

3. Causes of Forced Marriages in Pakistan

3.1. Poverty

- Rate of poverty in FY2024 was 40.5% (World Bank)

3.2. Lack of female education

- 13.71 million girls remain out of school (UNICEF)

3.3. Misinterpretation of religious teachings

- Maulana Fazal ur Rehman says fixing 18 as minimum age of marriage is unislamic. (Express Tribune)

3.4. Weak legal enforcement of relevant legislations

- 1 out of every three girls is forced to marry before the age of 18 despite local and international laws in place. (UNFPA).

4. Consequences of Forced Marriages in Pakistan

4.1. High health risks: Maternal and infant mortality

- As of 2024, maternal mortality rate was estimated at 155 deaths per 100,000 and infant mortality rate at 37.6 deaths per 100,000 live births. (WHO)

Date: ___/___/20___

MON TUE WED THS FRI SAT
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

4.2. Intergenerational poverty

- Children take up same job status as parents (PSLM 2012-13)

4.3 Emotional and Mental Distress

4.4. Domestic violence

5. Recommendations to Prevent Forced Marriages in Pakistan

5.1. Encourage female education

5.2. Empower women economically

5.3. Improve legislations and strengthen their enforcements.

6. Conclusion

- Forced marriages create serious trouble for women's freedom and future in Pakistan.
- With effective measures, the issue can be resolved.

Essay

Marriage is a complicated subject globally, it always has been. With some progress been made in recent decades due to campaigns and movements for human rights, especially women's rights, the issues concerning marriage have also been addressed to a large extent. However, one of the troubling aspects of forced marriages remains prevalent, especially in developing nations. Pakistan is one of the countries that still struggles to completely eliminate this problem. Forced marriages are a recurring problem, especially affecting women and girls in the country. The poor population of the country finds forcing young children and people into marriages a way to deal with poverty. Coupled with a struggling education system for women, women are forced into marriages easily. With a Muslim majority population, people turn to certain interpretations of religious teachings to justify forced marriages. Even though some legislations exist, their enforcement remains very weak in

Date: ___/___/20___

MON TUE WED THS FRI SAT
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

preventing and punishing forced marriages. Such circumstances resulting in forced marriages risk women's health, both physically and mentally. When young people are forced into ^{early} marriages, they fall into a trap of intergenerational poverty. Women often have to face physical violence too. Such troubling conditions require effective measures such as empowering female population with good quality education. Once women are educated, they should also be empowered economically. The government also needs to take appropriate legal and judicial measures to address the issue.

Forced marriages in Pakistan is a deeprooted and complex issue with ~~for~~ severe consequences. There is a need for effective measures to prevent it.

It has been established the forced marriages in Pakistan are a serious trouble, especially for women. The next section of this essay will provide an overview of forced marriages in the context of Pakistan. After that, major causes that lead to forced marriages will be discussed. The essay will then shift the

focus to the various consequences of forced marriages. In the end, the essay will conclude after providing some recommendations to prevent forced marriages in Pakistan.

As a developing country, Pakistan has been facing certain issues in different domains: socio economic, political, religious, etc.

One such issue is of forced marriages which is bred due to the country's ongoing struggles in these different domains and at the same time it further exacerbates the troubles faced by the country.

Forced marriages are however often confused with arranged marriages, when in reality they are different. Arranged marriages require and entail the consent of all parties involved, which include the groom, bride, their families, and any third party such as a matchmaker.

In forced marriages, however, the consent of one, some, or many of the involved parties is not involved, especially of the groom or bride. This forced relationship often puts women at a disadvantage as their freedoms

Date: ___/___/20___

MON TUE WED THS FRI SAT
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

and rights are breached. Pakistan's rural areas such as rural Sindh, Punjab, KP, and Balochistan see the most cases of forced marriages due to many socio-economic, religious, and cultural reasons. Reports from UNDP, UNHRC, and Amnesty International report troubling amounts of women being forced into marriages.

Forced marriages in Pakistan have reportedly been happening persistently. To fully understand the severity of the issue, it is essential to explore the root causes. The next section will shed light on some of the main causes of this issue.

One of the biggest causes of forced marriages in Pakistan is the prevalence of a high poverty rate. Majority of the population lives in poverty or poor conditions. People cannot afford to support good living conditions for all their children. They, thus, try to look for alternative ways to deal with their circumstances. One such way turns out to be forcing young girls into

marriages as it is believed to take their burden off the parents' shoulder. Many of these girls are under the age of 18 and have no intentions of getting married. But the circumstances of their family which is suffering from poverty forces them into marriage. This has become a norm in low income and poor households where questioning the idea of forcing girls into marriages is not acceptable anymore. This is evident in the 40.5% poverty rate for FY2024, as reported by the World Bank. Thus, a high poverty prevalence results in young girls being forced into marriages in Pakistan.

Moreover, the lack of female education is another cause of forced marriages in Pakistan. The country's education system is very weak. The government has failed to make education affordable and accessible to all. In such a situation, families have to decide which of their children, if any, can be sent to schools. Unfortunately, and unsurprisingly, girls and women are held

Date: ___/___/20___

girls more often than boys or men. This is due to the opinion that men can have better chances of utilizing that education to earn later to support the family. Girls, on the other hand, are deemed more useful for household chores. When deprived of education, women not only lose out on economic freedom but also the awareness that empowers them to say no to forced marriages. By looking at the number of girls that are kept out of school, which is reported to be around 13.71 million by UNICEF, it is evident how many women are deprived of this source of empowerment. Thus, women's deprivation of education makes the way for forced marriages easier in Pakistan.

Another widespread reason for forced marriages in Pakistan is the misinterpretation of religious teachings. Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country, making the population influenced by religious teachings of Islam. However, there are some interpretations by local leaders and preachers that are contradictory to Islamic teachings. One

of the such teachings is about rulings about marriage. Cultural and patriarchal influences have convinced many people that Islam encourages, or even orders, early marriages as soon as girls reach puberty. People also believe that elders should decide the matters of marriage and that women deciding who to marry is inappropriate. Such interpretations result in families forcing the girls to marry at an early age to men they personally might not want to marry. Manifestation of such influences and interpretations is seen in Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman's outright criticism of National Assembly's efforts to fix 18 as the minimum age for marriage. He termed this move as unislamic, drawing widespread ^{the} debate among public, as reported by Express Tribune. Hence, it is clear that misinterpretation of religious teachings influence people and normalize forced marriages in Pakistan.

A multitude of causes have been discussed. To fully gauge the urgency of this issue, it is pertinent to have a comprehensive look at the impacts it has on the country.

Date: ___/___/20___

MON TUE WED THS FRI SAT
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

The next section will elaborate some of the consequences of forced marriages.

Among the various ~~causes~~ consequences of forced marriages, a major one is high health risks for women and children. As many girls are forced to marry at very young ages, their bodies are not fully developed and strong enough to ~~bear~~ pregnancies. The cases where girls get pregnant at young ages lead to risks for their bodies. This results in complications in the pregnancy and difficulties when giving birth. Many girls die during ~~for~~ birth. The pregnancy proves fatal for not only the girls but also the child that either gets aborted or miscarried, or dies during birth. Premature ~~per~~ births are also common if the mother is young. This puts the life of ^{both} the mother and child at risk. This is evident in the maternal mortality rate at 155 deaths per 100,000 live births and infant mortality at 37.6 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2024 as per WHO. Thus forced marriages ~~is~~ endangers the lives of mothers and their newborn children.

Date: ___/___/20___

Another major consequence of forced marriages is the intergenerational poverty trap. When young people are forced into marriages, they face a lack of opportunities to escape poverty. Boys are burdened with family responsibilities and have to work hard to provide for them. This forces them out of education into unskilled and low paid jobs mostly. Girls are also deprived of education necessary to contribute financially & educate her kids to escape the poverty trap. So while it may seem that early marriage of girls helps escape poverty, it actually just shifts the burden from parents to the husband. So, both the girl and the boy forced into early marriage find it extremely hard to make their ends meet and consequently empower their children. This is evident in Pakistan Social and Living Measurements (PSLM) 2012-2013 findings that children often end up with the same job status as their parents, with little upward mobility. Hence, forced marriages at an early age perpetuate a cycle of intergenerational poverty.