

Forced Marriages in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

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The Essay

Marriage, in its truest sense, is a sacred and voluntary union built on mutual consent, respect and understanding. However, in Pakistan, this noble institution is distorted by the practice of forced marriages where individuals, mostly women, are compelled to marry without their free will. "According to UNICEF, nearly 21% of Pakistani girls are married before the age of 18 many without their consent." Despite legal prohibitions and religious condemnations, forced marriage persists due to deep-rooted cultural traditions, patriarchal values, and socio-economic pressure. This social evil not only violates fundamental human rights but also leads to ~~the~~ psychological trauma, domestic violence, and long-term social instability. Forced marriages in Pakistan are a violation of human dignity and fundamental rights, rooted in cultural traditions, illiteracy and patriarchal control. Addressing this issue requires legal enforcement, social reform, and education to ensure every individual's right to choose their life partner freely.

A forced marriage occurs when one or both partners are married without their free and full consent. It differs from an arranged marriage, where families may facilitate the union but both individuals agree voluntarily. Forced marriage is not merely a social issue

it is a violation of human rights, condemned by international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 16). In the context of Pakistan, the practice continues under various forms and justifications, often hidden behind cultural and religious misinterpretations.

Forced marriages are prevalent in both rural and urban parts of Pakistan, though they are more frequent in conservative and tribal societies.

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan thousands of women become victims of forced marriages every year. Practices such as Watta Satta (exchange marriages), Vani and Swara (marriage to settle disputes), and child marriages are socially sanctioned forms of forced unions. Many cases go unreported due to social stigma, family pressure, and weak law enforcement.

Centuries old customs often override individual rights. Families consider forced marriage a way to strengthen social ties, preserve family honor, or settle disputes. In Pakistan's male dominated society, women are often treated as property rather than autonomous individuals. Decisions about their marriage are taken by male guardians. Ignorance of women's rights especially in rural areas, perpetuates forced marriages. Education could empower individuals to make informed decisions, but its absence sustains oppression.

Poor families may marry off daughters early to reduce financial burden or gain dowries. Some even treat marriage as an economic transaction rather than a personal choice. Practices like Vani and Swara where girls are given in marriage to settle disputes, are prevalent in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Families often force girls into marriages to protect or restore family "honor." Refusing a proposal is seen as rebellion or disobedience. Although law exist, weak implementation and corruption allow offenders to go unpunished. Many police officers treat forced marriage as a "family matter." Some exploit religion to justify forced marriages, despite Islam's clear emphasis on mutual consent in marriage.

Forced marriage deprives individuals of freedom, dignity, and equality rights guaranteed by both the Constitution of Pakistan and International law. Victims often suffer from depression, anxiety and loss of self worth. Many live in constant fear and hopelessness. Lack of mutual consent leads to conflicts, abuse and unhappy relationship. Divorce, separation or even suicide are common outcomes. Young brides, forced into early marriages, face complications during pregnancy and childbirth, increasing maternal mortality rates. Forced marriage prevents women from ~~pursuing~~ pursuing education.

and careers, reinforcing gender inequality and dependency. Children raised in abusive or loveless household often suffer emotional distress and continue cycle of violence and oppression. This persistence of forced marriages tarnishes Pakistan's reputation regarding women's rights and human development.

Pakistan has several laws aimed at curbing forced and child marriages. The Prevention of Anti-women Practices Act (2011) criminalized forced marriages, Vani and marriage to the Quxan. Pakistan Penal Code includes penalties for coercion and unlawful confinement related to marriage. However despite these legal provisions, implementation remain weak due to corruption, social influence, and lack of awareness among citizen and law enforcement agencies.

From a religious standpoint, Islam strictly forbids forced marriages. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) declared that women's consent is essential for a valid marriage. "A woman who is married without her consent her marriage is invalid." (Sahih Bukhari). Unfortunately many in Pakistan conflate cultural norms religious values, leading to practices that contradict Islamic teaching. Religious scholars and community leaders must play a greater role in spreading awareness about the true spirit of Islam regarding consent and equality.

Ensure strict implementation of anti-forced marriage laws, with dedicated unit for women's protection and victim support - Promote girls education and awareness campaigns to inform families about the legal and ethical implication of forced marriages - Empowering women economically can reduce their vulnerability to family pressure and dependence - Engage local elders and councils to discourage harmful customs such as Vani and Watta Satta - Media campaigns and NGOs should raise awareness and provide rehabilitation for victims - Establish shelters, counseling centers, and legal aid for individuals escaping forced marriages.

Forced marriages in Pakistan are not just personal tragedies they are social injustices rooted in ignorance, poverty and patriarchal control - They violate basic human rights, undermine women's empowerment, and hinder national progress - True reform lies in combining law enforcement, education, and cultural transformation - ~~then~~ A just and progressive Pakistan can only emerge when every individual man or woman is free to choose their life partner without fear or coercion.