

## **Qualitative Research**

# **EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON OF CHILD MARRIAGES IN SOUTH PUNJAB: A CASE STUDY OF THESIL RAJANPUR**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present study explores the socio-cultural causes behind the practice of child marriage and its impact on adolescent girl's life in a certain era. Pushing factors behind this cultural trend are based on unawareness about the hazardous effect of early marriage, inflexible cultural values, rigid mentality, lack of education and influence of punchaiti decision by the practice of watta Satta and pait likhi. All these factors have a bad impact on preadolescent girl's life as psychologically torched, physically frail by miscarrying pregnancy, economical crises, socially disorder, maladjustment in spouse family and faced spousal violence. The researchers have used an interpretive scientific approach to explore the phenomena in its all sense through in-depth interviews, empirical observation and case study method. The study's outcome is that the custom of child marriage among girls is a most practiced and civilized societal act. It has a hazardous impact on young married girl in their whole life in each domain and even female is being deprived of their basic human rights in this era.

**Key Words:** Marriage, Pregnancy, Adolescent

**doi:** <https://doi.org/10.51127/JAMDCV4I1QR01>

### **How to cite this:**

Abid A, Hussain M, Asghar A. Exploring the phenomenon of child marriages in south punjab: a case study of thesil rajanpur. JAMDC. 2022;4(1): 42-46  
doi: <https://doi.org/10.51127/JAMDCV4I1QR01>

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many societies have irrelevant customs that are ever harmful in practice silently and haphazardly and early marriage is one of them. It is a condition in which the victim is not psychologically torched but also physically harassed by her married family. According to Pakistan, the legal age of marriage is 18 years for females. Still, in the most milieu, not just in the Pakistani context but also globally marriage less than 18 years of adolescence girl have become a customized value which gives rise to many social and mental problems and maladjustment of the girl in a new setup and adaptation to the new environments and norms.<sup>1</sup>

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In developing countries, the female who marries at a premature age lack their autonomy, are less aware about their social life, are fully deprived of their fundamental human rights and bear domestic violence by their mate.<sup>2</sup> In a country like Africa, early marriage is also a complicated issue that harms the physical and mental growth of a child and has possessions on her education and free will. And the countries with a high rate of early marriage have a high rate of poverty and population.<sup>3</sup>

In Pakistan, females face the risk of mental health problems, disability, death, risk problems of newly born babies, and loss of confidence in building a healthy relationship due to early marriage. They cannot hold up their responsibilities entirely and are psychologically depressed. It is often due to rigid religious beliefs, cultural norms, lack of education, low economic status, and residence in rural or backward areas.<sup>4</sup>

Most parents marry their daughters at an early age due to the poor economic

conditions<sup>5</sup>, ignorance of the negative consequences of early marriage; the girls could be the cause of disgrace to family and parents<sup>6</sup>, cultural and traditional issues of honor and poverty.<sup>7</sup> They have low decision-making power, so females cannot resist early marriage.<sup>8</sup> Prejudiced traditional and religious norms<sup>9</sup>, parental misconception, and revision of their cultural and family norms<sup>10</sup> also become the cause of early marriages of the adolescent girls. Low level of education and parents' willingness to keep away the girls from schooling is also the push factors to marry the girls at their premature age.<sup>11</sup> Panchiati's decision on girl's marriage<sup>12</sup> and exchange marriage<sup>13</sup> are the strong influential elements in early marriage. Male dominancy is another factor that urges the female to marry at an immature age.<sup>14</sup> The major consequences of early marriage are the instability in homes<sup>15</sup>, a large number of children, less well-being of children and their low level of education<sup>16</sup>, women's inequality<sup>17</sup>, physiological immaturity of sexual organs<sup>18</sup>, health-related issues about pregnancy<sup>19</sup> and increase in poor fertility.<sup>20</sup> Early marriage does not lead to better socioeconomic status and prosperity in spouse life.<sup>21</sup>

The researchers conducted the present study in the Southern Punjab context of District Rajanpur to determine the causes and effects of early marriage life on females in Pakistan. The area of district Rajanpur is underdeveloped and rural to a great extent. Most people are illiterate, and the family system is followed through the Biradri system having strict cultural values very strictly. The current study explores the pushing factors behind early marriage and its effect or consequences on the spouse, especially on female life. It also aims to check the understanding level of marital relationships among spouses.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method was used in this exploratory study. Data was collected through the case study method; data was collected about a person's previous

experiences to understand their behavior with the help of in-depth interviews and participant observation. Different sampling methods were used while conducting research, i.e., the purposive sampling technique was used just to focus on special informative cases. The snowball sampling technique was used because registered data was not found in District Administration offices. Information was collected from the Nikah registrar about the persons who married at an early age, i.e. below 18 years. By using this sampling technique, researchers have found 12 cases of child age marriage as samples who were married in their teenage. As a tool for data collection, structured, unstructured questionnaires and in-depth interviews have been used. Photography and recording have also been used using modern technology. The researchers conducted this research for five-month from March 2021 to July 2021.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Marriage is a social, religious, spiritual, emotional, and/or legal union of individuals that creates kinship. Civil marriage is the legal concept of marriage as a governmental institution following marriage laws of the jurisdiction. If recognized by the state, by the religion(s) to which the parties belong, or by society in general, the act of marriage changes the personal and social status of the individuals who enter into it. Child marriage is a gross human rights violation that puts young girls at risk and keeps them mired in poverty. The current study elaborates on the pushing factors behind early marriage customs in rural areas and how it affects girl life. According to respondents, interview pushing factors behind this early marriage system in this era is that most parents are illiterate and unaware of the destructive results after early marriage and another leading cause of early marriage is that there is a binary system based on ethnocentrism with strict cultural norms early marriage is a custom and prevailing in this society and all their custom and cultural values are different from modern societies and due to solid

social forces people of that era cannot evade themselves by societal pattern. The major cause behind this custom is; the Panchaiti system in which all the decisions of this area are done by feudal, landlords, and those who have political power, so in many cases of panchaiti decisions, mostly girls are given as a 'Chatti'to another party which is a great loss for adolescent girl life and another cause of early marriage are Watta satta; exchange marriage system, Pait Likhi; marriage agreement of juvenile before their birth, a matter of honor; girl should have to marry in her early age so that she may avoid from any illegal sexual relation which may not cause dishonor of family status. In society Another cause of early marriage in that era is poverty. Most parents consent themselves to early marriage behind this subject that they cannot afford expenditures about necessities of life of their child so they marry them at an early age as they feel less burden of expenses and their child will live smooth life in her spouse family. According to a respondent, Hina from Basti Mashori "My spouse often quarrels with me because I cannot fully participate in domestic work or agriculture work, and he often beat me on suspicion that you are involved in the illegal affair". This indicates that due to early marriage, girls have to face many hardships related to domestic work and alarm that due to a lack of understanding and rational maturity, these types of early marriages lead to divorce. From another interviewee, it was asked, "In the start of your marriage, which sort of problems was you encountered"? According to Fiza, "I often visit hospitals to keep my health level. Initially, I felt disturbance socially after marriage because my friends took me on the suspected way that she was now a girl and became a lady then. I feel shy. I feel neglected by my mother. This is why I cannot afford domestic responsibilities fully so she often quarrels with me. Due to early marriage, all my dreams vanished and I feel like a puppet with nothing her willingness and desire". In this era, girls are facing many critical conditions and there is a great need for

awareness among the masses in this era about the consequences of early marriage, which become causes of hazardous health, social, psychological and economic problems.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The period was very short; therefore, it was difficult to cover all possible aspects and deeply investigate the problem due to a shortage of time and assets. Most people in the study area were illiterate, so it was difficult for the researchers to convince them. While conducting the study, researchers faced a lot of complications due to their rigid cultural norms and values. Most males did not allow the researchers to communicate with their females due to their stiff cultural norms.

## **CONCLUSION**

Through in-depth interviews, it was determined that this system was completely antisocial, ethically repugnant, and particularly hostile to the rights of young boys and girls. Despite this, an entire population arranges such marriages to adhere to their evil traditions and customs. The majority of residents in the study area were illiterate. They had a very low literacy rate. Due to their low literacy rate, their economic situation was precarious, and another significant factor was that most people were ignorant of fundamental human rights. They were completely oblivious to children's rights. Male dominance was another factor that dominated tribal areas according to these standards. In every aspect of life, women are less respected than men. Their parents have even decided on mate selection. Father's decision is considered final and conclusive. Through in-depth interviewing and observation, it was determined that women were more victimized than men. Sometimes it appears impossible to change harmful traditions. Attempts to alter or eradicate them will require the cooperation and understanding of

community leaders, policymakers, and those who have personally experienced or witnessed the hardships caused by these practices. Community education is critical for raising public awareness of these practices' negative consequences and altering societal norms. Legislation prohibiting harmful practices must be enacted and enforced. When done with respect for tradition, advocacy has the potential to unite communities by reinforcing practices that benefit all members while confronting those that undermine the integrity and humanity of girls and boys. Despite this, society has criticized females more harshly for being compelled to engage in such actions that are completely harmful and have negative consequences.

### AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

- AA: Principal contributions and acquisition of the conception and design of the present study, i.e. Methodology, construction of a tool for data collection, and Literature review.
- MH: Verified the analytical methods and critically reviewed the work, i.e. Data collection, Data Analysis, and Interpretation of findings.
- AA: Drafting the manuscript for important intellectual content & literature citation and referencing and assisted the principal author with Data Collection.

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