

Problems of Early Married Female Students in Continuing Education: A Multiple Case Studies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract

This paper highlights major reasons and effects of early marriages from the perspective of early married female students. The study was descriptive in nature, qualitative method and a multiple case studies design has been selected. The population for this research consists of all the girls that are early married at school/college level and are able to continue their studies as a regular attendee. For this study, Purposive sampling and convenience sampling was used for the selection of accessible population. The sample of the study comprised of 30 early married girls who were married before age 22. Total 23 girls from Public Higher Secondary Schools/Colleges and 7 girls from Private colleges were purposively selected. To investigate the views of school authorities regarding early marriage of girls, one principal and two teachers were conveniently selected from each school of both sectors. So total 10 heads of schools and 20 teachers were included through focus group discussion methodology and semi-structured interviews. The major reasons and effects of early marriages of girls were found to be social pressure, childhood engagements, and fathers/elders' decisions. Teenage pregnancy, household chores, lack of in-laws and spouse support, time management, absenteeism and strict rules and rigid time-table are found to be major effects hurdles in their education that affects their education negatively. This study recommended special focus maybe paid to develop awareness among fathers, awareness programs may be arranged for girls as well in schools and colleges, Involved religious scholars, double shifts classes in both sectors, use of social media, day-care facility and transport facility, uniform and proper documentation of polices, teachers training, scholarships/stipends or fee concessions, relaxation in maternity leaves, book banks and photocopy facilities and seeking public health sector help in providing food supplements for pregnant female students.

Keywords: early marriage, regular attendee, household chores, uniform policy, Absenteeism

Introduction

In any society, marriage is an agreement on which all people share same view and think essential for maintaining family interconnection of responsibilities (Bankole et.al, 2004). However, marriage is not limited to

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marriages to adult but even girl may be married at an early age which have sometimes costs on her physical, intellectual, social and educational consequences (Ijeoma et.al, 2013). In Pakistan specially, girl education facing many challenges comprising of socio economic, cultural and environmental issues but most challenging of them is early age marriages of girls which keeps majority of girls away from schools or to restricted them to continue further education. Whereas education not only improves livelihood but also empowers women and bringing them to the mainstream to take their right place and contribution in the society.

Early Marriage

Early marriage is defined under United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, as couple's marriages in which one party come under the age of eighteen is considered to be early/child marriage (UNICEF, 2011). In Pakistan among provinces, Baluchistan has great number of early marriages before age of fifteen and eighteen, come after Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to Nasrullah et.al. (2014), 50 percent of 20-24 age of Pakistani women in 2007 have described that they are facing domestic violence and spousal controlling behavior due to the marriage occurred before 18 years of age.

Why at a Young Age, Girls get into Marriages?

In many countries especially among underage girls, early age marriages are still considered as a common practice. Approximately world-wide one third of women aged 20-24 years get married. The practice of early age child marriages especially of girls is carried on in South Asia, where before the age of 18, more than fifty (50) percent and before the age of fifteen (15), about twenty (20) percent get into nuptial knot. (Corno & Voena 2016). Also highlighted that social and cultural norms and values also make worse the situation of continual of early age marriages of girls. Additionally, the economic condition of a family also inflames the issue even more.

There is a preference for young age brides for marriages, found on the basis of their studies by Field and Ambrus (2008). The reasons behind that young age considered to be more fertile and child bearing age and can be easily controlled.

Another study carried out by Plett (2005) explored the same reason of promoting early age marriages to believed that due to young age the one would have the young son before getting too old, thus provide a

financial support to the family as the father grow weaker with age. And also younger age is said to be fertile and better for child bearing for girls.

Similarly, in another research studies conducted by Chowdhury et.al. (2020) and Hoogeveen et.al. (2011) came into light the fact that from economic point of view in a family girl are perceived to be a burden. Due to Patrilocal custom, the daughter leaves off the parents' home, thus leading to lessening the number of dependents, economically.

Related to the prevailing situation and fact that why early marriages are preferred and practiced in Pakistani society, another study conducted by Ali (2001), explored same as found in many previous studies the main reason is to save the honour and dignity of family at any cost because in today's fascinating environment, the chances of immature minds getting to be involved in unacceptable emotional and sexual situation are quite higher.

So to secure lives of kids, parents compel to take the decision of marrying off their daughters at a very young age to handover in safe hands of husbands and to safe from social and moral evils.

In addition another compelling factor relating to norms, of early age marriages of girls is considered safe and protective in environment where abuse and harrasing cases of girls especially are increasing day by day. As described by Kamal and Hassan (2015) in their study that besides environmental factors other contributing reasons that leads to marriages at tender young age is said to be family social status, wealth and reputaion, availability of suitable proposals and good terms with other families.

In one of the studies conducted by Lodhi and Haroon (2011) argued that due to early age marriages the girls are forced to drop out or quit studies of school or colleges and propeled them into a ever difficult and busy cycle of managing household affairs and children responsibilities.

Effects of Early Marriage

Denial of Education

Continuing education is almost become impossible for early married girl. Similarly, educational institutions (schools) refuse married girls to attend and continue studies due to their strict policy. Schools rules and rigid time table make it very difficult to attend classes and to handle household and educational activities at the same time. (Fairaa, 2007)

Furthermore, the huge age differences between spouses that inversely affects girls' freedom and decisional empowerment. With regard

to domestic and familial decision making, such girls are deprived and have no such say in familial as well economic affairs (Khan, & Naz, (2012).

Child Marriage Impedes Girl's Education.

Bayisenge, (2009) on the basis of her study that some schools and colleges also have policies of not allowing married or pregnant girls and not girls with their babies married at an early age to return and continue studies as a regular attendee. They have bad impression on other unmarried students as what authorities believe and also parents make objections of allowing such cases of married girls to schools. And if girls somehow manage to or permitted by families to attend and go to schools and colleges regularly, the strict rules and regulations, rigid time table, behavior of teachers and students towards them and also physical conditions can make difficult for girls to manage her studies and duties at home as a wife, mother and student at institution with ease and balance.

Similarly, as mentioned that attitude, teasing and insulting behavior of some teachers and students can make situation more difficult for girl to deal with and may reduce self-confidence and may develop sense of insecurity in girls making them to quit their studies.

Lee-Rife et al. (2012) concludes that early marriage of young girls hampers way of education and in most cases leave schools to focus on household chores or raising of children.

Playfulness of Childhoods

It is found by Charsley (2007), in her study that early married boys and girls are themselves in their childhood phase of life and upon it becoming parents at this young age make them lost their childhood innocence and they feel chained in a relationship imposed on them by elders. It takes a time for them to settled in marital life and seek pleasure and peace of mind from this life.

Teenage Pregnancy

Due to marring at an early age, majority children due to additional household responsibilities, suspended further education and are run-down on developing life skill by depriving of making choices due to heavy responsibilities of marriage that are prove to be beyond their capacities and are imposed by them. Girls are often become defenseless due to early marriage and because of less constructive opportunities provision. (International Center for Research on Women, 2011)

In view of the above-mentioned review of literature, it becomes evident that majority of the studies were carried out on drop-out of girls due to early/child marriages. The reasons and impacts lead to in most of the cases to compel girls to quit their studies. In this study, the researcher however tried to find out that besides major reasons responsible for dropouts of early married girls, there are some cases of early marriages who continue their studies or education with much difficulties as a regular attendee.

Nature of the Study

The aim of the study is to analyze the impact of early marriage on continuation of girls' education, so the study was descriptive in nature and qualitative method has been selected as a tool for gathering more detailed and in-depth information rather than selecting quantitative method.

This study consists of several cases in order to explore a certain phenomenon, a multiple case study type has also been selected.

Population of the study

The population for this research consists of all the girls that are early married at school/college level and are able to continue their studies as a regular attendee.

Access Sample of the Study

For this study, Purposive sampling and convenience sampling was used for the selection of accessible population.

The sample of the study comprised of conveniently selected seven Government and five Private colleges from urban area of Peshawar district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. From the private colleges total 22 interviews were conducted i.e. 5 Heads, 10 Teachers and 7 early married female students. Similarly, 38 total interviews were also conducted including 5 Heads, 10 Teachers and 23 early married female students. So total sample includes 60 respondents.

In government sector, Age at the time of marriage of girls ranges from 15 to 20 years. Furthermore, classes in which girls got married ranges from 9th to 3rd year. Division of the married students studying in each class at the time of conducting of research given below:

Early Married Female Students	Government Sector
Respondents	Studying in Class

Problems of Early Married Female Students	Dur E Nayab, Arshad
Respondent 1	Class 9 th
Respondent 2 and 3	Class 10 th
Respondent 4 to 10	Class 11 th
Respondent 11 to 16	Class 12 th
Respondent 17 to 21	3 rd year
Respondent 22 and 23	4 th year

In private sector, at the time of marriage girls age ranges from 15 to 17 years. The division of the married students studying in each class at the time of conducting of research given below:

Early Married Female Students Private Sector	
Respondents	Studying in Class
Respondent 1 to 4	Class 11 th
Respondent 5 to 7	Class 12 th

Instruments of Data Collection

For this study, besides focus group discussion methodology, the researcher also opted for semi-structured interviews with heads, teachers and students as well to obtain the required information.

Data Analysis Process

As stated by Miles & Huberman (1994) analysis of data in qualitative research starts at the time of collection of data with becoming apparent themes and explanations, leading by research objectives or questions and review of literature.

Starting codes were allocated after every three to four interviews to each part of the data. After summarization of responses, main points were recorded besides the scaling down of large amount of data. The process of coding, summarization and refining of data goes on continuously in analysis process. Related quotes were word to word written by the researcher. In the following steps, the interview analysis is supposed to be arranged:

At first, all the interviews were interpreted in English Language. Before translating, the researcher listened to recording two to three times in order to minimize any vagueness and bring more refinement to the questions asked. And this translation was done even on the same day when data were collected/recorded.

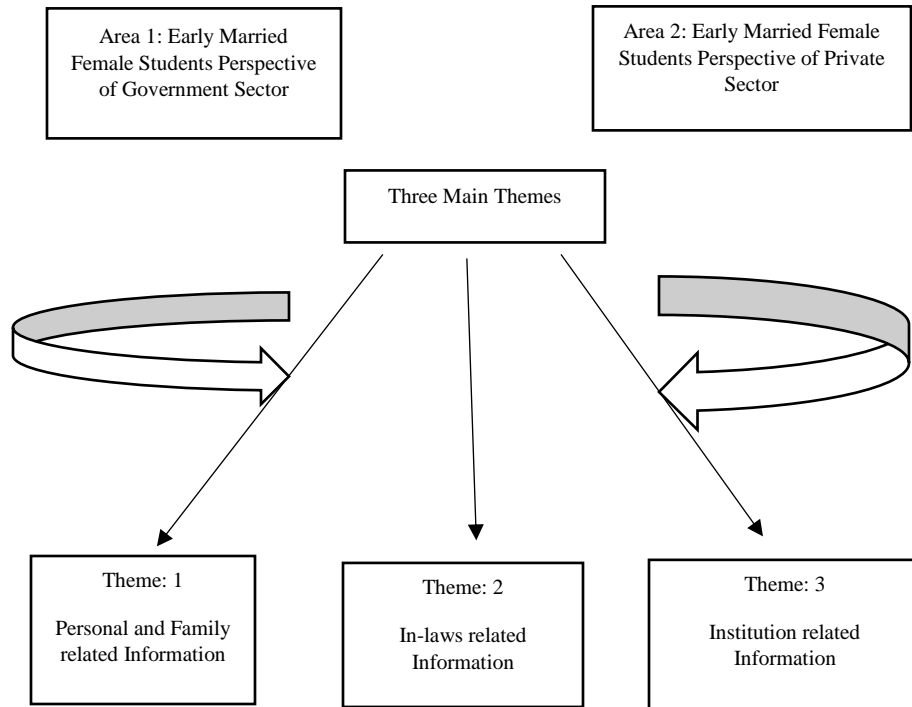
Findings and Discussions

The discussion covers the two main objectives of the study as to investigate the reasons of early marriages and effects on female students in continuing education. Secondly to highlight the schools/educational institutions related policies and problems of early married female students in continuing education. In total the study has been divided into 6 main areas including perspective of both government and private sector educational institutions students, teachers and heads.

The obtained data from early married female students of both government/private sectors have been arranged into three main themes. Each theme is further divided into sub-themes. Interview questions has been made to gather information from related each main theme.

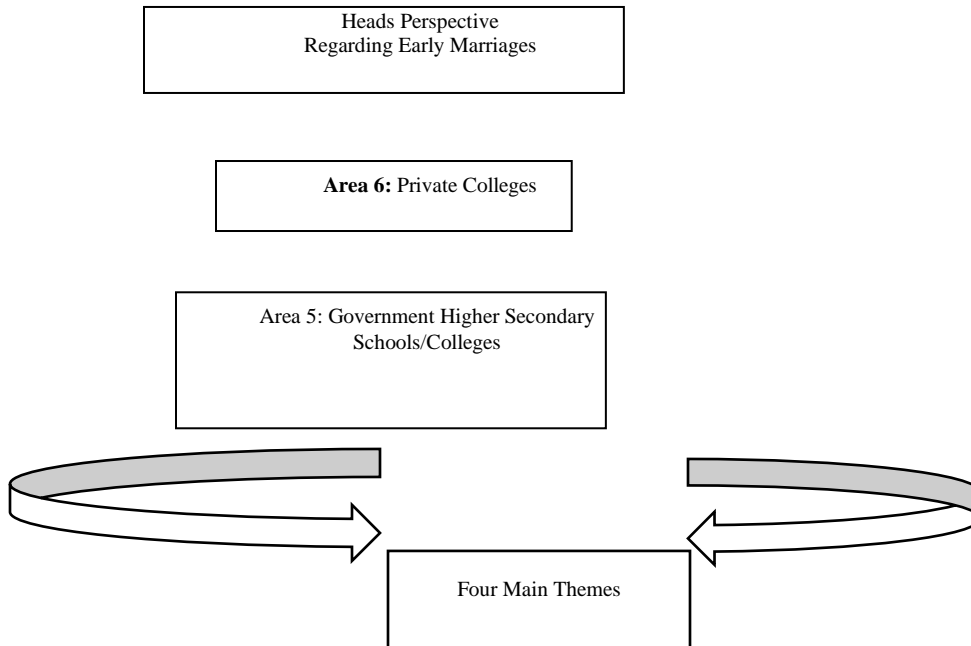
Area 1: Early Married Female Students Perspective of Government Sector

Area 2: Early Married Female Students Perspective of Private Sector



Existence of early marriage cases
Dealing by teacher
Parents' attitude
Big reasons of early marriages
Families Perceptions
Role of social media (Internet)
Drop-out or Continue Studies
Behavioral changes in married girls
Institutional Administration response

Second part introduced the data obtained, have been arranged into Four main themes representing the area related to Heads' perspective regarding early marriage in government higher secondary schools and Private Colleges.



Early Marriage Cases in professional career
Students Request for continuation of education
Separate policy for married students
Policy Documentation for married students

Discussion and Analysis

Causes and Effects of Early Marriages of Female Students

The main causes of early age marriages are single parenting, either in a form of separation/divorce or death of one parent, social environment and pressure, childhood or long-term engagements traditions in a families, security and safety of girls, traditions of Pathan families, and luck as well.

One of the major reasons given by the respondents in reply of causes of early marriages are good/suitable proposals.

Beside other reasons, economic conditions of families and large family sizes also found to be the main reasons to married their children's especially girls to reduce the burden on parents' shoulders.

The main impact of early age marriage is that the overall percentage in exams of married girls have greatly impacted that attended schools and colleges as a regular student after being married at an early age. Lack of spouse support and household chores listed by in-laws, getting less sleep, Managing time, loss of childhood, early age pregnancies and more liabilities in joint family system as the major hurdle in way of continuing education regularly.

Dealing of teachers and no relaxation of any kind includes fee related concession, leave permission/maternity leave policy, any scholarships/stipends exams/tests, assignments and in attendance, facility of day-care lack of photocopy facility in educational institutions especially at government colleges.

Teachers Perspective Regarding Early Marriage

One of big reasons given by parents are In-laws or social pressure, poverty, childhood and relatives/cousins proposals, boys over-age factor or that he is moving abroad, elapsing girl-age, parents economic factor, old age of parents, social taboos and girl as burden, social restrictions on girls, for dignity and honour of families, female security, reproductive age and also single parenting. And regional customs and to develop relationships between powerful families. Suitable/desirable proposals is major factor that parents opted for early marriage of girls.

Internet and social has creating fantasies for immature minds leading depression, distraction and lack or losing of interest in studies and time keeping. Added more lack of support from educational institution, teachers or in-laws. Similarly, house hold and kids' responsibilities, grades

dropped, practical work suffers, absenteeism, health issues, sleepy and exhaust, shy and reserved, irregularity in attendance.

Heads Perspective Regarding Early Marriages

Government sector heads discussed the dealing of early age marriages cases differently. The policies found as not cleared as some allowed even during mid studies, or not entertained totally. The matter of dealing from allowing to not allowing of early married female students, depends on the decisions of the institutions Heads. Even every institution follows their own rules especially for married girls.

Almost, all private sector Heads responded differently. Some Private colleges entertain while the majority simply denied such requests coming from married girls and didn't grant admissions to them and a clause in the undertaking signed by parents as well when they came to get admissions for their daughters here.

The main contribution of the study has also been highlighted along with suggestions for further future research. While the chapter ends with suggestions for further future research in this area.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The major reasons of early marriages of girls were concluded to be social pressure and environment, childhood engagements, fathers/elders' decisions, economic factors, large family size, suitable proposals, cultural values, religious obligations, girls' security, family honors.

The major effects were found to be responsible as teenage pregnancy, household chores, kids' responsibilities, lack of in-laws and spouse support, time management, sleep deprivation and stress, absenteeism, teachers' rude behavior, strict rules and no clear policy documentation at administrative level and rigid time-table as well.

The following recommendations are made.

1. That special focus maybe paid to develop awareness among fathers regarding importance of education and early marriages impact on girls' continuation of studies as most the decisions are taken by them, especially in Pathan culture. For this at school or college level seminars, workshops and awareness campaigns maybe arranged by inviting parents.
2. It may also be suggested that awareness programs may be arranged for girls as well in schools and colleges to develop in them a sense of confidence and to say their will.

3. A day-care for the children of female students may be made available especially at college level in government sectors educational institutions as the number of early married female students are higher than in private sector educational institutions. Similar steps should be taken in private sector as well to make uniform educational system.
4. Education policies maker may use social and electron media to bring awareness relating early marriages and its impact on education of girls among people of society.
5. Involved religious scholars to bring awareness among people the true concept of marriages and importance of education in Islam.
6. Make/develop social platform to deal and solve problems and issues of early married female students relating education.
7. It may also be advised to start a separate shift at school and college of both private and government sector educational institutions to equip or facilitate early married female students.
8. A uniform policy may be introduced for both private and government sector educational institutions to deal with early married female students in continuing education without any discrimination and facing hurdles.
9. Similarly, proper written policy documentation for early married female students made available at provincial and then national level as well.
10. It is also suggested that a proper training of teachers is required to equip them in a sense to how to deal early married female students and with their parents.
11. Introduce stipends/fee concessions or transfer of cash to early married female students by the government in both private and government sectors educational institutions.
12. Parents and teachers' meetings may be frequently arranged to keep them informed about the academic progress of their daughters and to bring into light any issue facing by parents.
13. Community based programs may be arranged by involving youth in a positive way.
14. Improve transportation system especially for girls' schools and colleges.
15. It may also be suggested that proper medical care facility for married female students' especially pregnant girls and discounted meal may available in colleges specifically.

16. By engaging community based religious scholars and with their cooperation by governmental support, projects may be initiated providing financial support in a form of cash based on a condition that their daughters will remain unmarried and enrolled in schools for the duration of at least program.
17. A book bank with sufficient supplies of stationary and the needed books may made available free or on a low price especially at government sector schools and colleges for just early married female students so if any of them face financial issue may benefited from this service.
18. Provision of food supplements for pregnant female students may encourage them towards continuing studies with health. For this health practitioners through public health sector help may seek for the matter.
19. In case of teenage pregnancies, maternity leaves may be allowed without a compromise on strict rules for attendance for married regular female students.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study further paved the way for further research on this specific topic by changing the area of study. As this research study tried to highlight problems faced by early married female students only. Another possible area for further investigation could be how early marriages of males' students' impact on their studies and what are the educational polices practices for them as a regular attendee in both private and government sector educational institutions.

The present study has found not to be contradicted to Islam in case of marriages however for better understanding of the teachings of Islam related early age marriages and right of education both for male and female in its true sense, further research must be needed in this area. As the present study found that educational institutions have not clear rules and policy to deal such cases. Also, early age marriages are prevailing in society and parents are using religion as the main factor but on the other hand both on social and educational level the right of education has been found to be denied badly.

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