

Marriage Preferences and Girls Education in Rural Baluchistan; A Sociological Assessment Study

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Received: November 9, 2016

Accepted: February 2, 2017

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to understand the preferences and trends of marriage in relevance with girls' education in Baluchistan. In Baluchistan women have many limitations and boundaries; female education is discouraged even in this modern age. Married girls are bound to housework, respect all family members and follow cultural values. The qualitative approach was adopted for the study. The primary data was collected from different rural areas of Baluchistan. Total 22 key informant interviews were conducted 8 with tribal leaders, 6 with Gender activists and 8 with unmarried working women/women with jobs. The key findings of the study revealed that women in Baluchistan are subordinate to men family members. Educated girls in the rural set up have a very less preference or choice in their marriages.

KEYWORDS: Marriage preferences; girl's marriages; girls' education; marriage market, an acceptance of educated female

INTRODUCTION

This study discusses, understands and highlights the Marriage trends and preferences in Baluchistan with the association for girl's education. Baluchistan is the largest province of Pakistan, but the least populated province. In Baluchistan, two major tribes Pashtun and Balochs are living from centuries. About 80% of the population are residing in small and scattered rural setups and remained deprived of the advances of the modern age [1]. Baluchistan stands the most deprived province of Pakistan; since independence Baluchistan is ignored by the central government. Marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock, is a socially or ritually recognized union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws. In different cultures the definition of marriage is different, but it is principally an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually sexual, are acknowledged. In most cultures, before pursuing any sexual activity marriage is compulsory [2]. Getting to a certain age, individuals search for companions and choose partners with specific age, ethnicity, education and income. The behaviour and process of choosing partners for life are different as per cultural and societal sets. Limitations and boundaries in every society for choosing partner are defined and in practice since ages. Marriage preferences are defined as degrees of attraction between males and females from certain age, educational, racial, ethnic (or other type of) groups and the availability of partners within these groups[3]. Marriage is a mutual commitment between males and females. Every Individual has many potential partners in the society. There is competition over the potential gains from marriage and each man and woman knows the potential gains from marrying any potential partner. Marriage between persons of similar class-origin is partly an unconscious result of a process in which many individuals attempt to achieve the best possible bargains for themselves or for their children by weighing marital resources and alternatives. A central assumption in a stable marriage is that every agent knows all agents it can match to. In reality, however, agents often have limited information about their matching possibilities[4].

Each person expresses a strict preference ordering over the members of the opposite sex. The goal is to match men to women so that there are no two people of the opposite sex[5]. Major benefit of marriage is the husband's specialisation in market activities and the wife's specialisation in non-market

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rules. The advantage of marriage may be different for the two partners, but with mutual understanding both can gain advantages[6]. Highly qualified and women with high-income have always had trouble finding mates. That's because men were always expected to be of higher status than their wives, or at least equal in status to them. Hypergamy – the act of marrying up – has traditionally only gone one way. The female secretary can marry her male boss, but the female professor rarely marries the plumber. Not so long ago, it was thought that too much education would ruin a girl's marriage chances, and that was not untrue [7]. As for Pakistani women, education is the ultimate key to their success and an escape from male-dominated society, the tyranny and the cruel cycle of ignorance. By gaining education, they are able to raise their standard of living, support their family, and ensure better chances of survival in this male-dominated society. Through education, women gain confidence and courage to face the world and to stand against injustice. Therefore, educated women in rural setups are not preferred considering them disobedient to family member and social norms. In fact, man utilizes woman for its comfort and treat her as subordinate whereas educated women demand for equal rights and equal treatment according to Rashi, “a woman from a more distinguished family than her husband may consider herself superior and act haughtily toward him[8]. In the major cities of Pakistan, especially in the province of Punjab, the parent's behaviour towards their daughter's education is positive, they consider education will help them in a better life and looking for best mate for their daughters. Similarly, families/parents of boys have more acceptance and preferences looking for educated girls for their sons/boys. Whereas the situation In Baluchistan is very different, in Baluchistan women are treated inhumanely in their homes by the male members. They have been deprived of very basic human rights as gender discrimination is deeply rooted in Pashtun and Baloch societies of Baluchistan. Female education in rural areas of Baluchistan is discouraged even in this modern age and educated women mostly remain unmarried in rural Baluchistan. Baluchistan is one of the most deprived parts of the world, where gender and educational disparities are very high. According to traditional culture in Baluchistan, men begin influencing a girl's life at an early age, exerting authority on issues ranging from education to selection of a husband. After marriage, a woman's husband and in-laws may take control of her life. They could decide issues such as the number of children she will have, what her role in the community will be, and what her limits are in seeking education or employment. Guiding such decision making is the centrality of the chastity and honour of women, which are the most sensitive issues in Pashtun and Baloch societies of Baluchistan. Violation of a woman's honour brings disastrous consequences to a society rooted in tribal bonds. In the Rural setup of Baluchistan female education has many limitations and boundaries, education and women with the job have been isolated. They have very fewer opportunities for finding suitable partners. Man has the perception that after marriage girl has to do housework, respect the cultural norms and values and remain as a subordinate of all male members of the family. In Baluchistan, the best marriage pair is that formed between first cousins. It is widely believed that consanguineous marriages offer the best opportunity for compatibility between the husband and wife, and the bride and mother-in-law [9]. The process of marriage is usually initiated by women. An elder woman of the family searches for a bride-to-be. It could be for her son or any other male member of the family. After a recommendation, the matriarch of the household visits the girl's house to offer a proposal and meet her parents. Although it is women who look for a suitable wife for any male member of the family. It is a serious decision for them as they decide and choose the newcomers to the family network.

Rationale of the Study

It is very common in most rural areas of Baluchistan that male members of the family finalize the decision on their gain as per their economic and political interests. Early marriages of girls and bride price (walver; the bride price) have been serious problems pertaining to women marriages in Baluchistan, especially in Pashtun society. A girl being married is seldom asked to her opinion and option regarding marriages, instead, if a girl has any say in her marriage decision, it is considered dishonors for her family, particularly the male members. Early marriages of girls are a common practice in many Pashtun families where girls are forced to quit education and prepare for marriage by involving her in the domestic works of housewives. Regarding the authority of marriage for women, another serious problem that Pashtun society is faced with is ‘Walver’ the bride price. Male members of the family take in return large amount from the groom's family for the girl being married.

In rural areas of Baluchistan, Marriage Proposals are given on the basis of obedience to the family members and strict obedience to cultural values. A girl who did not obey and serves her family all the times or stepped out of the home is considered worth killing. Once married, another set of code of conduct is waiting for her [10,11,12,13].

In Baluchistan girls with a good education and jobs are rejected and they have very limited chances of Marriage among their relatives or families living in the rural areas. Educated girls are considered becoming aware of their basic rights hence they would resist and demand the rights. It is a common

practice and tradition that women in Baluchistan are considered as subordinate to men they have only access to those rights which their husband and other family members her husband allow her. The honor of a woman is closely linked to that of a man. If a woman earns a bad reputation, her whole family members, especially male are dishonored. According to traditional Pashtun and Baloch cultures, men begin influencing a girl’s life at an early age, exerting authority on issues ranging from education to selection of a husband. After marriage, a woman’s husband and in-laws may take control of her life. They could decide issues such as the number of children she will have, what her role in the community will be, and what her limits are in seeking education or employment. Guiding such decision making is the centrality of the chastity and honor of women, which are the most sensitive issues in the tribal areas of Baluchistan. Violation of a woman’s honor brings disastrous consequences to a society rooted in tribal bonds. There is a strong perception about educated girls/women that they are disobedient to the husband and his family members, hence has very low demand to marry an educated girl. The objectives of the study are to assess marriage preference in relation to girl’s education in rural Baluchistan to understand the acceptance level of educated women in society in rural Baluchistan

METHOD AND MATERIALS

Methodological Approaches

The methodology of this study was designed by following the approaches of inclusiveness encompassing the wide range of viewpoints in multiple dimensions of the issue under study, qualitative approach by using the quantitative methods of data collection. Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were conducted by selecting respondents from the population.

Geographic Scope of the Study

The geographical scope of the study Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the target groups was conducted in the Quetta city as Quetta is the major city of the Province with diverse population and groups.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

To get more relevant primary data for the study Tribal leaders, gender activists and working women in different sectors were selected as the target groups for conducting Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) randomly. Total 22 key informant interviews were conducted 8 with tribal leaders, 6 with Gender activists and 8 with unmarried working women/women with jobs. The details of sample size for primary data along with target groups are tabulated in Table. 1

Table 1. Sample size and target groups

Data Collection Tools	Tribal Leaders		Gender Activist		Working Women Unmarried	Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female		Male	Female
Key informant interview	8	0	3	3	8	11	11
Focus group discussion	2	0	1		1	2	2

Techniques and Tools for Data Collection

Following techniques were used for retrieving information from secondary literature and collecting primary data from the selected sample of the population

- Desk review of relevant literature;
- Conducted Key Informants Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) for collecting the data for getting in-depth understanding and insight of the issue under study

Interview Guides and list of discussion issue were constructed and used for collecting the data by conducting Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Key Informant interview and Focused group discussions were conducted in different areas of the Province.

RESULTS AND KEY FINDING

From the data collected from KIIs and focus group discussion, below results and findings have been retrieved. Most commonly in the modern world, the marriage is defined as a legal contract between spouses and a mutual commitment between male and female, but in Baluchistan especially rural setups, the marriage is very cultural and it develops linkages and relationships between the two families.

- The research revealed that in the Baluchistan family background is given more importance than beauty, expertise and education of the girls and boys.
 - The families with more inclined towards cultural followings are the most acceptable.
 - Families with good economic status are preferred than the education of boy or girls.
 - Having a relationship with Influential/elders is considered as a great sign of honor and superiority.
- In the rural setup of Baluchistan, good education, status and occupation of the boy is more preferred whereas girls with good education and jobs are rejected and they have very limited chances of marriage.
- The low preference of educated women with Job in the marriage market has discouraged the female literacy and increased the dropout female students in these areas.
- First cousin marriage and marriage within the same community is more preferred as girls are well aware of the cultural norms and values. Further, families of both girls and boys have the same level of understanding of the cultural values.
- Most of the decisions regarding the marriages of boys and girls are taken by the elder of the family (the most aged women start looking for a girl, makes a selection and then the most aged people of the family mostly man takes the final decision) without the consent of the boy and girl.
- Marriage proposals are given on the basis of a girl's obedience to the family members, husband and strict obedience to cultural values.
- In the tribal setup of Baluchistan, families are more cautious about their cultural values and lifestyle. They are always afraid that the educated girls may challenge these values and living style.
- Most of the families are extended families in tribal areas of Baluchistan, where the girl/bride has to respect the entire family members and has to remain in the limitations of the family. Where there are fair chances that educated girls may not accept these limitations and she may force/provoke her husband for separation from the family.

DISCUSSION

Female education is more important for a sustainable development of a country. Women empowerment can prove to be a strong weapon in fighting off poverty, starvation, epidemics and tyranny, etc. unfortunately Pakistan's performance has remained highly unsatisfactory in achieving the goals especially that of gender equality.

Women are the most deprived segment of the society in rural areas of Baluchistan. They have been kept deprived mostly from their rights and incentives. They have been considered to keep the honour of her male kin and the whole community. The rapid changes and modernization in the structure of society is not only bringing positive impacts, but is affecting and damaging constructive values, traditions and norms, prevails in the society of Balochs and Pashtuns from the centuries. There is need of incorporation and promotion of constructive values, traditions and norms with recent rapid changes and protection of the status women in the light of the historical role and importance of women.

In rural Baluchistan, girls have no say in choosing their partners. Selecting mates are fully at the disposal of the family elder members. In this setup there is a little space for males who can resist and may inform his family about his choice for selecting a partner for marriage, whereas girls have no options resisting the decision of the family elders regarding her marriage and choosing partners if any girls reject/oppose the decision then she may have to remain single for the whole life. In the case of the first cousin marriage nor male or female could resist or reject the decision of the elders. In this case, there is the matter of family relations is involved. Boy and girl both are strictly bound to stay with the decision of the family elders. In cousin, marriage girls have the advantages of fewer family restrictions after marriage, i.e. (Pardah) she has not to hide her face from other members of the family she can more openly talk and sit with the family members.

A participant shared that (A girl Safurabibi) who rejected /opposed the decision of her family elders 25 years ago, as she wanted to get marry with an educated man, due her this decision and wish for marriage with educated man 25 year before, she still remains unmarried at the age of 51 years.

During the discussion it was shared that Maira Baji, from Village of District Killa Saifullah, Baluchistan who completed her in early eighties since then she is a teacher but remained unmarried despite she was ready to marry in the same community unconditionally.

In rural areas of Baluchistan educated women have very limited acceptance in the society. Such girls are kept isolated, they have been considered as a character against the social and cultural values even if she lives in the same community after getting the education they are some how accepted by her own family but not by the other community members.

Limitation of the Study

- The study is limited in scope because of qualitative research methodology. Therefore, quantitative research is needed for more findings
- The target group for Primary data was very hard to find and get their time for data collection.
- Baluchistan, the largest Province of Pakistan in Term of area coverage, were the universe for the study, Hence physical approach to the target groups was very challenging.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that because of rigid cultural values in Pashtun and Baloch societies of Baluchistan, boys and girls both don't play any role in selecting a partner for marriage. In Pashtun and Baloch cultures a married girl has to obey and work for the whole family members and kin of her husband. In rural areas of Baluchistan, the community has very strong perceptions that there are very high chances that educated women will not accept the customary cultural laws and avoid obeying family members and their kin. Hence educated girls/women have very rare acceptance in Pashtun and Baloch society for marriages. In Pashtun and Baloch societies of Baluchistan gender discrimination in education and other human rights do exist from very long rather from centuries, as a result, women remain with low status, subordinate to men and have very fewer human rights than men and limited access to education.

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