



## Determinants of Female Early Marriages: A Case Study of District Lodhran, Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

Early marriage refers to child marriage before the age of 18. It is a global issue of grave concerns about teenagers' health, social well-being, and human rights. Early marriages are disproportionately more common among poor women of less developed nations. Almost half of child marriages take place in South Asia. It requires designing effective local community interventions to avoid poverty, poor health, nutrition deprivations, and other adverse consequences. While Pakistan homes about 19 million underage brides, until recently, it has not paid enough attention to evidence-based policy development. Particularly, the research on child marriages in less developed regions like South Punjab is limited. This study has explored the factors inducing early marriages from the perspective of child brides in a local community setup. Data is collected through a self-administrated and regionally representative survey from March to April 2020 using snowball sampling. Descriptive statistics, association measures, and binary logistic regression are used for analysis. The reliability and validity of the instrument are checked by confirmatory analysis. It is observed that literacy levels reduce the odds of early marriages among females. However, poverty and mass media exposure are likely to induce underage marriages of females positively. Disparities in gender and region are also significant factors for females' early marriages. For instance, the ratio of early marriages in rural areas is higher than in urban areas. In addition, the employment status and parental perception about early marriage also adversely affect child marriage. These findings suggest that the primary education of girls should be made compulsory. Policies must consider increasing and improving the media exposure and employment opportunities in South Punjab to provide support and empower vulnerable females.

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## 1. Introduction

Marriage is the fundamental institution that sets the basis of family units in any society. This relationship plays a decisive role in the physical, psychological, and social development of humans and their communities. Norms and customs of this ancient social institution vary with ethnicity, culture, religion, and communal interactions of people across the globe. In general, the marital age of a person is related to their adolescence, and marriage before puberty is considered an early marriage. However, the marriage age varies in different parts of the world due to cultural and religious reasons. The United Nations (1998) has declared early marriage one that commenced before 18. Child marriage is rooted in gender inequity and furthers its adverse outcomes in society. Female adolescents are far more vulnerable and face this issue disproportionately higher frequency than their male counterparts. According to a Unicef (2022)

report, about 720 million women worldwide were married earlier than 18. Among those, nearly 250 million were married even before they turned 15. Child brides are generally more susceptible to abuse and exploitation for their entire lives (Raj, 2010). Early marriages force women to live in an already biased atmosphere against them in favor of male members. Therefore, this issue is gaining increasing global attention in addition to goals of better health and notions of sustainable development.

The importance of healthy and well-nourished women in the competitive world is undeniable. Early marriages create grave concerns about teenage girls' health, social well-being, and human rights. They deprive women of their fundamental rights and burden them physically and psychologically due to marital and maternal responsibilities at an immature age. They heighten the risk of morbidity and mortality among young girls and their offspring. This situation further deteriorates for women in each country's deprived regions and classes. It is observed that economic, cultural, and religious barriers increase vulnerabilities associated with fertility and maternal health of women multifold.

Studies report a significant association between early marriages and gender-based oppression like violence and lack of empowerment. Women's empowerment is the path to balancing the gender divide and reducing pressure (Abbas, Isaac, Zia, Zakar, & Fischer, 2021). However, this path is desirable but paved with many barriers. The best possible way for women empowerment is to allow a woman to thrive in the ambitious life of her dreams. It can happen only if women are allowed to play, get well-educated, sufficiently nourished and enjoy all possibilities that are rights of every human. It enables them to achieve success and dignity in all spheres of life. Such women are more empowered to contribute to their married life and society.

Girls' education is a great tool to empower them in their different roles in families and society. Education makes them more productive, earn respectfully, and improves their households' living standards. Educated women are more likely to develop smaller, healthier families and contribute to sustainable human capital development in the economy. In addition, a well-educated woman guarantees well-behaved and well-trained future generations that bring balance to the world (Bayeh, 2016). A world where individuals not only share better socioeconomic opportunities but also build relationships with mutual respect. Age and mental parity are vital in realizing these benefits (Gove, 1972). That is possible only if a harmonious relationship is established between mature life partners.

Child marriage is a crisis of human rights occurring on an alarming scale in South Asia. Almost half of all child marriages happen globally in South Asia, and this ratio is the highest among all regions worldwide. In South Asia, nearly 45% of all women are married before the age 18 (E. UNICEF, 2018). Child marriage violates children's rights and places them at a high risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse. India has the most significant number of brides globally, almost one-third of the global total. Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage in South Asia, with the fourth-highest rate in the world. Nepal, Afghanistan, and Pakistan also have high rates of child marriage in South Asia.

**Figure 1: Global Overview of Child Marriage Across Regions**

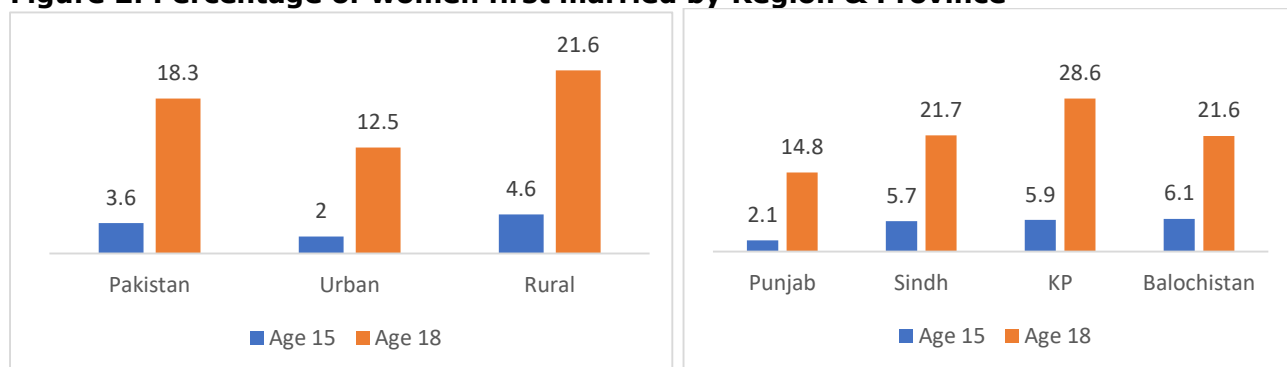


Source: UNICEF (2018)

Pakistan is the sixth highest in the world according to the absolute number of early marriages. It homes nearly 19 million women married before the age of 18. It is recorded that almost 18.5% of women between 20 to 24 years of age get married before puberty. One in every 2285

six married women was a child bride (*Pakistan Demographics and Health Survey Key Indicators Report 2018*; E. UNICEF, 2018). The prevalence of child marriage varies across provincial territories of the country. Currently, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K.P.) has the highest rate of girls marriage under 18 years, and Balochistan has the highest number of girls marrying under age of 15 years. Early marriage disparity widens in rural areas and lower-income households. In rural Pakistan, 21 percent of girls marry before adolescence. This rate is about 9 percent higher than the urban area.

**Figure 2: Percentage of women first married by Region & Province**



Source: National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) [Pakistan] and ICF. 2018. *Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18*. Islamabad, Pakistan, Rockville, Maryland, USA: NIPS and ICF.

Pakistan is a country where a girl child's situation is already unpleasant. Only a few families allow and support their girls to pursue an ambitious life of their own choice. Most women are still waiting to escape the shackles of culture and traditions like child marriage. By marrying early, women remain incapable of having good health, education, and consciousness of their rights. In Pakistan, child marriages are deeply rooted in socioeconomic deprivations and outdated cultural biases and have a lifelong devastating effect on girls. It elevates the risk of health complications and makes girls more vulnerable to abuse. It is observed that poverty, ethnicity, and regional marginalization are at the heart of child marriage in the popular culture of Pakistan. The girl child is considered an economic and social burden to a family that must fulfill her typical social role.

According to population dynamics, the age of marriage is a decisive factor and a health problem as it affects mortality, productivity, and health of women and children. Girls who get married at an early age face several psychological, social, and biological issues. Often, they have less social dignity in their husbands' families, attain lower schooling, and report less reproductive suffering from malnutrition, resulting in higher maternal mortality rates. The rapid increase in disease, higher population growth, and a greater prevalence of orphans further indicate more considerable adverse social consequences (Dahl, 2010; Wodon, 2016).

### 1.1. Research Objective

Given that child marriage is one of the most pressing challenges in marginalized regions of Pakistan, this study aims to find the factors of early marriages in South Punjab. The South Punjab region of Pakistan has several socioeconomic issues, and people here mostly follow their customs and cultural values. These increase the rate of early marriage and exacerbate the consequences more than in other areas of Punjab. Therefore, this study investigates the socioeconomic determinants of early marriage in South Punjab. Specifically, the impact of education, occupation of household heads, poverty, dwelling, and employment are analyzed for their effects on the early marriage of a girl. In addition, the role of perceptions, media exposure, and local culture in such marriages is researched.

District Lodhran is a reference case in this study to understand the region's situation. Like other districts of South Punjab, this district also possesses a mix of urban-rural features. Detailed questionnaires and interviews are conducted to gather all relevant information on variables of interest. For insightful analysis, influences of important socioeconomic variables such as education, poverty status, the effect of media exposure, gender inequality, employment status, occupation, location of residence, and parental perception of early marriages are incorporated in our representative model of early marriage.

## 2. Literature Review

Early marriage is a severe form of violence against the human rights of children. It continues to defraud millions of girls below 18 years of age worldwide. It is a forcing factor for girls to say bye to their education and get into poor living prospects, with a higher risk of abuse, violence, and inadequate health with early death.

In the present phenomenon, a household head's occupation has a more significant effect on the practice of early marriage than a person's age. Because parents are responsible for feeding their children in every circumstance, Early marriages are greatly affected by the occupation of the head of a household (Umemoto, 2001). Early marriages of children and educational attainment have a strong correlation for girls, which is also vital. Each year a girl is married, it reduces the likelihood of her completing a higher school education by 4 to 10 years, which depends upon the country or region (Fitrasyah et al., 2019).

Early marriage is strongly associated with lower levels of economic growth and poverty. Parents reduce their expenses by marrying a little girl, as one person is less *to clothe, educate, and feed* Agtikasari, Soemanto, and Murti (2019). In developing countries, poverty is viewed as the primary motivator for early child marriages. There exists a significant relationship between employment and early marriages. There is a negative effect of employment on early marriage. Women who work before getting married have a lower risk of experiencing an earlier marriage. Women who never earned or have been sufficiently empowered to earn are more likely to get married at a young age (Grijns & Horii, 2018).

The rural locality is an affecting factor for early marriages in the present study, possibly because of the rural area's poverty and low economic condition, which leads the parents to search for an alternative situation for them rather than their home (Nahar, Zahangir, & Shafiqul Islam, 2013). Local culture is the cause of early marriage and affects it significantly. The local culture has an enhancing effect on early marriage. Girls exposed to a local culture that supports early child marriage are more likely to get married early. The local culture has a positive effect on early marriage (Nahar et al., 2013; Rajwani & Ali Pachani, 2015).

Parental perception about their daughters is an influential factor in early marriage. Females who get a good impression from their parents have a lower risk of early marriage. (Montazeri, Gharacheh, Mohammadi, Alaghband Rad, & Eftekhar Ardabili, 2016). Mass media campaigns such as radio, television, and other communication methods are essential, especially for rural communities. Moreover, it has a negative relationship with early marriages (Marshan, Rakhmadi, & Rizky, 2013). Gender inequality is the difference in perceptions, treatment, and giving rights between the male and female gender in life, affecting the early marriage. Gender inequality positively affects early marriage (Kamilda, Nurhaeni, & Adriani, 2019).

Hence, the empirical literature needs to build consensus about Pakistan's determinants of early marriage. In particular, the study finds a theoretical gap in Pakistan because some variables that significantly affect early marriage, such as awareness and religiosity, need to be included in Pakistan's studies. Moreover, there is a wide contextual gap because no study has been done in South Punjab.

## 3. Data and Methodology

### 3.1. Data

One of the most integral parts of research is data collection. The data generated for this study is solely obtained from primary data collection. For this study, they used questionnaires to collect the data and also conducted interviews to gather more information. For this research, 427 questionnaires were conducted on early-married women to obtain the required responses. The survey was conducted randomly from March 13th, 2020, until April 30th, 2020.

The target population for this study is women who got married at an early age. The reason is that these women can answer better. The questionnaire forms were conducted in several areas, considering the geographical distribution of Lodhran, using a snowball sampling technique. The snowball sampling method is extensively used where a population is unknown and rare, and it is tough to choose subjects to assemble them as samples for research. This sampling technique can continue, just like a snowball increasing in size (in this case, the sample size), until the researcher has enough data to analyze the results.

### 3.2. Methods

Data analysis has been carried out to obtain meaning from the collected data. The analysis is done through several data analysis techniques, including frequency analysis, correlation analysis (VIF), normality analyses, reliability and validity analyses, and binary logistic regression analysis. A statistical package (SPSS version 22.0 for Windows) was used to analyze the data for this study.

### 3.3. Model

The study analyses the factors of child marriage in Pakistan: A Case Study of Lodhran City. In this study, early marriage, measured by age, is the dependent variable. In contrast, explanatory variables are the household's occupation, education, poverty, employment, mass media exposure, local culture, parental perception of early marriage, gender inequality, and locality. The functional form of the model is given below.

$$EM = \beta_0 - \beta_1 EDU + \beta_2 POV + \beta_3 HOCC - \beta_4 EMP + \beta_5 LOC + \beta_6 MME + \beta_7 LC - \beta_8 PPE + \beta_9 GENDER \quad (1)$$

Here, EM is Early Marriage, HOCC is Household's Occupation, EDU is Education, POV is Poverty, EMP is Employment, LOC is Locality, MME is Mass Media Exposure, L.C. is Local Culture, P.P. stands for Parental Perception of Early Marriage and GENDER stands for Gender Inequality.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Frequency Analysis

This study uses frequency analysis to determine the essential characteristics of respondents. The profile frequency analysis comprised respondent age, education, occupation, employment status, fathers' income, family economic status, and mass media use of their local culture and their parental perception about early marriage. The analysis involved a statistical test for frequency.

**Table 1: Frequency Analysis**

	Em	EDU	EMPLOY	RESI	OCCU	Pov	MME	PPet	GENDER
<b>Mean</b>	2.92	2.34	1.00	1.49	2.78	3.43	2.62	23.6464	2.17
<b>Std. Deviation</b>	1.167	1.206	.000	.710	.990	.960	1.173	2.50989	.680
<b>Minimum</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20.00	1
<b>Maximum</b>	4	4	1	3	4	4	4	28.00	3

The table shows that data is widespread. There is dispersion in the data from the mean or average value of the data. Data can be used for regression analysis.

### 4.2 VIF Test

The VIF test is also used to check for the problem of collinearity. It has a maximum value of 10. The value of this test should be less than 10. If the value exceeds 0, then there exists the problem of collinearity.

**Table 2: The VIF Values**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardize Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std.Err	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	-2.298	.365		-6.290	.000		
EDU	-.810	.042	-.837	-19.404	.000	.216	4.631
RESI	1.229	.077	.748	15.913	.000	.182	5.489
OCCU	1.044	.046	.886	22.766	.000	.265	3.769
Pov	-.245	.033	-.201	-7.356	.000	.538	1.860
MME	1.249	.041	1.256	30.153	.000	.232	4.311
PPE	.085	.011	.183	7.416	.000	.660	1.516
GENDER	-.953	.074	-.556	-12.926	.000	.218	4.596

a. Dependent Variable: EM

VIF value is 4.596, which is far less than 10. So, there is no problem with collinearity.

### 4.3. Reliability and Validity Analyses

Reliability and validity are concepts used to evaluate the quality of research. They indicate how well a method or technique measures something. Reliability is about the consistency of a measure, and validity is about the accuracy of a measure. There are two variables in this research study: parental perception and gender inequality, which are not directly measurable. To check their validity and reliability, the researcher applies a test to these two variables.

**Table 3: Case Processing Summary**

		N	%
Cases	Valid	450	94.9
	Excluded	0	5.1
	Total	450	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

**Table 4: Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
.63	.659	8

Table 4 shows that the value of Cronbach's Alpha is 0.63, which is acceptable as, according to Uma Sekaran, the Cronbach's Alpha value between 0.60 and 0.70 is fine.

**Table 5: Factor Loading Analysis (Validity)**

Component Matrix	Component	
	1	2
PPE	.597	.659
GENDER	.472	.783

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 2 components extracted.

According to factor analysis, if the absolute value of factor loading is more significant than 0.3, it is highly loaded or highly correlated. In our table, PPE (parental perception on early marriage) states that the factor that leads your parents towards early marriage has an absolute value of 0.659, greater than 0.3, and is considered a loaded factor. Likewise, gender inequality shows a loaded value of .783, which is also more significant than the standard value of 0.3.

### 4.4 Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

The binary logistic regression analysis aims to analyze whether the independent variables (i.e., mass media exposure, parental perception of early marriage, locality, employment, poverty, education, household occupation) influence the dependent variables (early marriage). Hosmer and Lemeshow's test shows the goodness of fit of the model. We have a hypothesis to test with the data. The results of this test show a significant value that accurately describes the model's fit to the data.

Regression results show a negative relationship between education and early marriage. The probability of early marriage has been reduced as the family education level increases. Regarding the base category, illiterate, the probability of getting an early marriage is 0.5 times less in respondents with a primary education. And those with a secondary education have a 0.4 times lower chance of getting married, while those with higher education have a 0.25 times lower chance of getting married early.

Results also indicate that the risk of early marriage is greater in deprived areas than in urban areas. This variable also has a significant effect on early marriage. Concerning the base category, a village, the practice of early marriage is 0.2 times lower for respondents who live in towns. And the respondents who live in the city have a 0.08 probability of early marriages compared to village respondents.

The parents' inferior occupation and lowest earnings consider their daughters an economic burden and marry them at a young age. In contrast, a person with a strong passion and a large sum of money would instead educate their daughters than marry them. In our results, concerning the base category, which is no occupation, the respondents who are farmers have 0.9 times less practice of early marriage. And the respondents who are government employees have 0.4 times

less probability of early marriage than the base category. There is 0.2 times less practice of early marriage among those respondents who are businessmen.

**Table 6: Results from Binary Logistic Regression**

		<b>B</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	<b>Education</b>			10.385	3	0.05	
	Primary	-2.256	1.075	4.405	1	0.04	.543
	Secondary	-3.737	1.235	9.163	1	.002	0.489
	Higher	-1.012	.944	1.149	1	.004	.250
	<b>Residence</b>			6.294	2	.043	
	Town	-3.475	1.401	6.152	1	.013	.299
	City	-2.519	1.677	2.257	1	.003	.081
	<b>Occupation</b>			.640	2	.026	
	Farmer	-.080	.649	.015	1	.002	.923
	Govt Employ	-.699	1.017	.472	1	.0092	.497
	Businessman	-.603	3.320	2.848	1	.031	.227
	<b>Employment</b>			7.468	1	.026	
	Employed	-3.134	1.147	7.468	1	.006	2.957
	<b>Poverty</b>			20.532	3	.060	
	31000-40000	-4.097	1.058	15.009	1	.000	.017
	21000-30000	-2.244	1.651	1.848	1	.004	.206
	10000-20000	-3.086	1.615	3.649	1	.056	0.46
	<b>Mass Media E</b>			.469	1	.033	
	Television	-.810	1.182	.469	1	.009	.445
	Radio	-2.348	1.313	3.198	1	.074	.766
	No Media	-.840	.595	1.990	1	.158	2.315
	Gender Inequality	1.659	.542	9.379	1	.020	3.190
	PPE	-.840	.595	1.990	1	.158	3.15
	Constant	2.782	1.289	4.654	1	.031	.062

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: q10, RESI, OCCU, POVERTY, MME.

Poverty is an essential factor in early marriage. It significantly affects the age of marriage for girls. There is a direct relationship between child marriage and poverty. As poverty increases, the parents cannot feed all their children, especially their daughters. Therefore, they prefer to get married. A poor person with a low income considered his daughters an economic burden and married them early.

In contrast, as poverty decreases, early marriage continues to decline. Because a person with a good income and economic status can better care for all their children, they therefore, avoid the practice of early marriage. Families with a monthly income ranging from 31000–to 40000 have a 0.1 times higher likelihood of practicing early marriage than the base category, which is more than 40000. And respondents with incomes ranging from 21,000 to 30,000 have 0.2 times the prevalence of early marriage. In addition, respondents with incomes ranging from \$1,000 to \$20,000 are 0.4 times more likely to marry young.

The results show that as we move on from people who have access to advanced mass media, such as the Internet, to those who have access to local media sources, such as radio, the practice of early marriage continues to increase. The respondents with access to television are 0.4 times more likely to practice early marriage than to reference the mobile category. As we move further, the probability of getting an early marriage increases 0.7 times among respondents with a radio. And the chances of early marriage are 2.3 times higher among respondents with no media at home.

Parental perception of daughters has a positive effect on early marriage. Women with a good perception of their parents have a lower risk of early marriage. Parents who perceived their ideal marital age as less than 18 were 3.1 times more likely to practice early marriage than those who had a perception of a perfect marriage age of eighteen and above. On the other hand, parents who know the ideal marital age for girls were less likely to practice early marriage than those who perceive the perfect married age as less than eighteen.

Gender inequality has also had a significant effect on early marriage. It has a positive relationship with early marriage. As gender inequality increased, early marriages increased; as



gender inequality decreased, early marriages continued to decrease. We take three different categories to measure gender inequality (i.e., 1. economic context, 2. women's empowerment, and 3. gender script), and then, in this study, we generate an index for gender inequality. The higher the value of this index, the greater the degree of gender inequality. The lower value shows lower gender discrimination in society. Families that practice gender discrimination are 3.1 times more likely to have an early marriage.

Employment is an essential determinant of early marriage. It significantly affects early marriages and has a negative relationship with early marriage. Early marriage was hurt by employment. Women who worked before marriage have a lower risk of experiencing early marriages. Girls employed have a 2.9 times lower probability of getting an early marriage than the base category of girls who are not used.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Early marriage is a pressing issue faced by numerous children from the developing world. This issue adversely affects girls from rural areas of lower-income households. Pakistan is one of the countries striving to overcome this problem and provide females with a conducive and secure life experience. Investigating the driving factors of early marriages is necessary to devise appropriate policy steps in the right direction. This research is based on a case study of South Punjab District Lodhran. This district provides a reference to the situation of child brides in a less developed and culture-bound region. Data is collected through a semi-structured instrument using the snowball sampling method. Responses are analyzed descriptively and by using the binary logistic regression model. It is observed that education, parental perceptions, and the occupation of the household head are the most critical factors for the early marriage of a girl. Girls from less educated families and poor households are at higher risk of getting married before mature age. This risk lessens with parental perceptions and media exposure.

Based on our findings, some suggestions are discussed here. Steps to provide education to girls must be made consistent and more efficient. In this regard, every girl must have equal access to educational opportunities. Similarly, providing better employment opportunities and proper support to poor households is required to reduce their economic burden and improve their social status. Since media exposure plays an essential role in combating the issue of child marriage, popular media, such as social media, should be aligned to create awareness about the devastating outcomes of early marriages. Campaign about the harmful consequences of child marriage is also desirable to educate the communities. Above all, reducing early marriage rates depends on implementing legislative reforms. The government must adopt strategies in collaboration with local communities that support bringing the required social change without compromising cultural values.

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