

## **Causes and Consequences of Child Marriages in South Asia: Pakistan's Perspective**

**Sofia Naveed**

*Government College University, Lahore.*

**Khalid Manzoor Butt**

*Government College University, Lahore.*

### **Abstract**

The problem of Child Marriages is quite common and pervasive practice and an instrument of gender based violence against women and high population growth rate in South Asia including Pakistan. Though Child Marriages Restraint Act, 1929 (CMRA) got reformed in India and Bangladesh, but remained toothless and out-dated in Pakistan. In fact Pakistan had accepted UNCRC way back in 1990 but the law on child marriage has not been harmonized with it. Child marriages take place mostly in the pretext of poverty, illiteracy and gender inequality. The physical, social, psychological and economic consequences of child marriage are severe on girls, who are generally pulled out of primary/secondary education and more likely confront physical, emotional and sexual violence. Pakistan is in the midst of demographic transition and a big portion of the population comprises of children. This 'youth bulge' without ample opportunities poses a threat to the social fabric, if not tackled appropriately. A serious attention is needed to transform this bulge into a productive future resource of the country only if this portion of the population is properly guided and educated in a healthy and constructive environment.

**Keywords:** Child marriage, human rights, child rights, gender based violence, poverty, gender inequality, social problems, youth bulge, illiteracy, legislative reforms, environment.

### **Introduction**

Child marriage is one of common practices in South Asian region generally and in Pakistan particularly. Numerous young girls are married in this region in the pretext of social, cultural and religious traditions and they remain disadvantaged physically, educationally, psychologically, and economically thus keep on suffering for whole of their life. Child Marriage is defined where both or one of the couple is under the age of 18, "Child marriage disproportionately and negatively affects girls who are more likely to be married as children than boys" (Khanna,

## **South Asian Studies 30 (2)**

Verma, & Weiss, 2011). The UNCRC defines child, “every human being below the age of eighteen years” (UNGA, 1989). It is stated, “While attaining the age of maturity under national law may give additional rights to the individual, it cannot take away the protection of the CRC for individuals below the age of 18 years” (Brett, 2009, p. 231). Moreover, the CRC Committee strongly recommended that

“the minimum age for marriage with and without parental consent be set at 18 years, regardless of the sex of the individual involved” (UNCRC, 2003, Para. 20). Child marriages are not confined to South Asia this has been practiced in most developing countries. According to an estimate, “over 60 million girls and women are affected by child marriage globally” (Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2011). Child marriage is in traditional norm and practice passed across generations which have debilitating impacts on the lives of the girl, her family and society at large. Most studies say that child marriages are generally practiced in economically marginalized families. Khanna, Verma, & Weiss described the causes, “occurrence of child marriage is greater in poorer families and those with lower levels of education, and is also high in fragile states hit by natural catastrophe”. It is pertinent to mention that the problem of child marriages does not end with marriage yet it caused gender based violence and obviously females remain at the receiving end. A UNICEF (2011) report ‘Realizing the Rights of Adolescent’ indicates, “Complications related to pregnancy and child-birth are among the leading causes of death worldwide for adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 19.” Another report discloses, “Almost 50% of all sexual assaults globally are against girls 15 years old and younger” (UNICEF, 2012). According to a study, “14 million girls under the age of 18 are married off each year” (UNFPA, 2005). Child marriage has adverse physical, psycho-social and health effects on girls, impeding their overall development and well bring and it ends girls’ childhood, as well as education and employment opportunities. Moreover, it increases their risk to violence and abuses. Despite these adverse consequences, child marriages continue unabated. This is indeed a matter of grave concern and it requires legislations and serious actions.

### **South Asia Scenario**

More or less South Asian countries are having the same environment and factors like poverty, illiteracy, backwardness and religious fundamentalism which are considered congenial for child marriages. Though some initiatives for the prevention of this practice have been taken by states and development organizations in South Asia yet high rates of child marriages in the region require a review of the problem, and more meaningful efforts are needed for its elimination. It is estimated, “Child marriage rates in South Asia are the second highest in the world, behind only West Africa. Nearly half (46 per cent) of young women in South Asia aged 20-24 in 2010 were married before they turned 18. And if present trends continue then 130 million girls in South Asia will be married

as children by 2030” (UNFPA, 2010). So South Asia is a hub for high population growth as well as Child marriages. “The prevalence of child marriage varies substantially between and within countries in South Asia. Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriages in the region (66 per cent) followed by Afghanistan (57 percent), Nepal (51 percent) and India (46 percent). These four countries are considered the region’s ‘hot spots’ due to their high child marriage prevalence. Girls living in rural areas are victims of child marriages, and the problem is worst in rural Bangladesh with 70 percent of girls married early, followed by India with 56 percent. Approximately 30 percent of girls in the country are married as child brides. Similar to other countries, the prevalence of child marriage in Pakistan is higher among rural girls (37 per cent) than urban ones (21 percent)” (Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2011). Report of ICRW says, “The Maldives has the lowest rate of child marriage in the region with just about 4 percent followed by Sri-lanka (12 percent) and Bhutan (14 percent)” (Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2011). According to the report, “Many Maldivians travel to Pakistan or India to carry out illegal child marriages” (OHCHR, 2013). It is noted that “Except for Afghanistan and Pakistan the legal age at marriage for girls in the other six countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bhutan) is 18. Afghanistan and Pakistan follow the Sharia law which allows girls to legally marry at the age of 15 and 16, respectively” (Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2011).

### **Child Marriage - Legal Perspective**

The UNCRC obligates to adopt measures prohibiting harmful practices against children and similarly ‘Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women’ (CEDAW) emphasizes that “States parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulation, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women” (UNGA, 1979). It further states, “States parties are therefore obliged to work towards the modification of social and cultural patterns of individual conduct in order to eliminate prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women” (UNGA, 1979, Article 5). Child marriage is a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and International Human Rights law. There are certain articles in the UDHR which conflict the practice of child marriage. For instance, it says, “individuals of full age can marry and that such marriage shall be entered into with free consent.” It should be understood, “The notion of full age is not made clear in the text, and commentary on this suggests that while it is possible to conclude that full age only implies a physical fitness of the intending spouses, this view should be criticised as physical maturity (i.e. the ability to have children) does not make an individual capable of meeting family responsibilities” (Eriksson, 1992, p. 244) It further stated, “the preparatory documents of the UDHR show that article 16 is designed to prevent child marriages, in particular through the use of the words men and

women.”It is the responsibility of the State to implement these obligatory laws for the rights of children and to ensure that they are protected. Pakistan being the signatory of the ICCPR, ICESCR and UNCRC, is under obligation to ratify these legal obligations particular relevant to child marriage. Vienna Convention states, “Under international law, reservations to treaties are permitted provided that they are not expressly prohibited by the treaty in question (they are neither prohibited nor are a permissible form of reservation mentioned in the ICCPR) and that they are not incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty” (UN, 1969, Article 2(1)d).

UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) entrusted with supervising State policies compliance with their obligations under ICCPR. The aim of HRC is, “to create legally binding standards for human rights by defining certain civil and political rights and placing them in a framework of obligations which are legally binding for those States which ratify; and to provide efficacious monitoring mechanism for the obligations undertaken” (UNHRC, 1994, para 7). It further clarifies, “The Human Rights Committee specifies any reservation that offend peremptory norms of international human rights law or international customary law will be incompatible with the ICCPR” (UNHRC, 1994, para 8). The right to marry and making a family is given in the ICCPR as well as ICESCR. The language of both the Covenants is identical with the UDHR. Similarly, the ICCPR describes, “the right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to found a family shall be recognised and no marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses”(UN, 1966, Article 23). Therefore, being signatory of the CEDAW, Pakistan under obligation, “to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices, which constitute discrimination against women” (UNGA, 1979, para 16). Article 5 of the same Convention says, “all appropriate measures shall be taken by States parties so as to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles of men and women”. Article 4 of Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women reiterates, “States should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination” (UNGA, 1993). It is quoted, “The Beijing Declaration also emphasized to eliminate discrimination against women and raise efforts in order to guarantee equal enjoyment of human rights for women and girls” (UN Women, 1995, Annexure I para 9). It has been recognised internationally, “women and girls face numerous barriers to their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their ... culture” (UNGA, 1979, para 44 & 45). Pakistan should reform CMR Act through legislation because its certain provisions are contradictory to the rights of girls and women. Same time, as revelry to the

CRC, Pakistan is under obligation, “to protect adolescents from all harmful traditional practices” (Nilsson, 2013, p. 115).

Pakistan being the member state of SAARC obligates to uphold the CRC, with article 3(3) stating, “States Parties consider the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a comprehensive international instrument concerning the rights and well-being of the child and shall, therefore, reiterate their commitment to implement it”. It further elaborates, “States Parties shall ensure that appropriate legal and administrative mechanisms and social safety nets and defences are always in place to ensure that their national laws protect the child from any form of discrimination, abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture or degrading treatment, trafficking and violence. ...States Parties shall make civil registration of births, marriages and deaths, in an official registry, compulsory in order to facilitate the effective enforcement of national laws, including the minimum age for marriage” (SAARC, 2002, article 3).

The other significant ‘SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution’ (the Anti-Trafficking Convention) describes persons subjected to trafficking in its article 1(5), “women and children victimised or forced into prostitution by the traffickers by ... fraudulent marriage, child marriages... ” (SAARC, Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution). These conventions are quite clear about children’s rights and Pakistan should observe and take responsibility for preventing harmful traditional practice like child marriages. The Convention places Pakistan with the following obligations vis-à-vis protection of children’s rights without any discrimination.

- “to ensure that every child is registered immediately after birth” (Article 5) Indeed, it would help to reduce the number of child marriages as it would provide a data about the ages of the spouses.
- “to take all steps necessary to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, and sexual exploitation and sexual abuse” (Article 14 & 21). If government will show willingness to observe this clause then it will stop child marriages in real sense to avoid the harms of girls.
- “to the highest attainable standard of health and the obligation of the government to take appropriate measures to diminish infant and child mortality, to ensure pre-natal and post-natal care for mothers and to provide information on preventative health care”(Article 28). It would be an acceptance of right of health for young mother and her newly born baby, effected by early marriage.
- “Making primary education free and available for all and encouraging attendance at higher levels of education, in particular for young girls, is a necessary and extremely important step in combating child marriage” (Article 17). It is agreed that education can delay the marriages of young girls so this could be an effective tool.

To protect women's and children's rights, Pakistan took some steps to show seriousness with international human rights laws. After the ratification of the ICCPR yet various provisions of Pakistan domestic law and its active enforcement are often deficient. It is pertinent to note that Pakistan has not signed or ratified the 'Convention on Consent to Marriage' (Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages-1962) yet unable to align its domestic law provisions, required for minimum age for marriages for both the sexes. It goes without saying that Pakistani laws regarding child marriages are not compatible with the non-discrimination provisions of international instruments as well as the provisions of its Constitution. The Child Marriage Restraint Act-1929 particularly and other relevant laws of Pakistan generally have been carrying very mild and tokenistic punishments for child marriage offences, which reflect no deterrent effect. So, keeping in view all international conventions and covenants, Pakistan should present itself as a responsible state and take some measures to stop cultural practices like child marriage, which is clearly against females and encourages the norms that they are inferior and subordinate to males.

### **Child Marriages -Key Drivers and Prevailing Scenario**

Pakistan society has been deeply rooted in traditions and customs. Most of the traditions put emphasis on child marriages particular of females even without their consent. In such traditions, specific roles have been assigned to females where they are confined in houses, resultantly; they largely depend on their male family members. Following is an account of socio – cultural, economic and religious perspectives related to child marriage as key drivers in prevailing situation in the country.

#### **Socio-cultural perspective**

##### **a) Preserving Traditions**

The main factor driving the phenomenon is preservation of the traditions by people which are in favour of man. Accepted as a customary practice, child marriage is usually not privy to social scrutiny. Generally, it is considered a routine matter in order to maintain familial and community acceptance, moreover, child marriage is in practice to avoid any deviant behavior that might be resulting in stigmatization and being socially ostracized.

##### **b) Notion of Honor**

Of all the other social constructions which instigate child marriage, the notion of 'honour' (*izzat*) appears to be the most important factor of the discourse. There is usually a marked pressure on parents to marry their daughters at an early age in order to lessen the risk of dishonour attached with the sex without marriage. Child marriage therefore, becomes a convenient way to off the burden of protection and

responsibility of preserving the honor. It is a common notion that child marriage is an effective way to prevent transgressing sexual behavior among young people particularly girls.

### **c) Maintaining Power Control**

Child marriage is often used as an instrument to perpetuate power relations and maintain gender based control. It is generally believed that the younger girls can be easily tamed the way male-elders want. It becomes *Watta satta* (exchange marriages) also serves to maintain the balance of power between families by ensuring that their girls are exchanged in marriages for daughters-in-law. Invariably, the exchange involves at least one if not both to be child marriages. These marriages are mostly arranged by fathers or elder male members of the family. Young people particularly females are not consulted in decisions pertaining to their marriages. In fact, it is considered 'shameful' to take opinion of a female regarding her marriage.

### **d) Male Domination over Female**

Another reason of the practice of child marriage in Pakistani society is that it strengthens male domination and reduces alternative opportunities for girls. The role of a girl and woman in many developing countries is shaped and framed by the institution of marriage and associated with cultural norms and social expectations of being a good wife, sister, daughter and mother. Some say that marriage is a tool which gives girls or women little status in families and society. To put control over women's sexuality is a common reason to marry girls at a young age. A girl's sexuality is perceived to be the property of her husband once married. The control of a girl's sexuality is essential to protect the honour of her father, family and community.

### **e) Illiteracy or Lack of Education**

Early marriage has correlation with illiteracy or lower levels of education particularly for girls. Parents are not willing to invest in a daughter's education since girl has to leave her parental home at the time of marriage and thus any investment on her is considered as a waste. In addition, a girl's prospects for education after marriage are extremely grim due to her lack of mobility, domestic burdens, child bearings and social norms that make marriage and education incompatible. Early marriage limits a girl's development of skills, resources, knowledge, social support and mobility, which limit her negotiating power with her husband or in-laws. Subsequently, the increased vulnerability exposes girls to a likelihood of violence, abuse, divorce or abandonment

Illiteracy or lack of education among parents perpetuates the practice as it is often accentuated by poverty and limited economic opportunity, lack of awareness about the consequences of child marriage on teen-aged girls also reinforce the

trend. Illiteracy or lack of education of parents also limit the chances of their children precisely on girls to acquire education. Girls are often kept out of school because no value is associated with their education, compared to boys. Child marriages, thus, become the most 'desirable' solution to set girls off in taking up domestic responsibilities, destined to be their future. Various studies describe that girls who do get the opportunity to enroll in schools, most of them drop out before 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Parents generally do not see prospects in investing on girls' education because they have to be married and will be taking responsibilities in their matrimony. Some social pressures also appear in to play at this point and become a key hurdle in the way for education of girls. "these aspirations appear to be dependent on family's ability and means to support the girls' education as well as conditional on supportive factors like distance of a school and safe means to reach the school" (UNICEF, 2011).

#### **f) Gender Discrimination**

It cannot be ruled out that gender discrimination is another factor that leads to child marriages. Pakistan is a patriarchal society where females are given mostly domestic duties to perform. In child marriages, girls are confined at houses which force them to leave their education and other opportunities. So child marriage perpetuates gender disparity and consequently females remain dependents on their male partners and keep on suffering for whole life. Sadiwa disclosed, "Gender discrimination is at the root of harmful traditional practices done against girls and young women and such practices are perpetuated in order to maintain the dominant position of men and boys over women and girls in a patriarchal society" (Sadiwa et al., 2007, p. 24).

In Pakistani society, by and large father decides when and where his children will be married. However, daughter mostly be married off earlier than a son because of economic factors. In fact, daughters are considered social and economic burden on the family contrary to boys, who are expected to contribute in the family's income. The UN Committee on CRC expressed strong concern for Pakistan, "pervasive patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted traditional and cultural stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family, in the workplace and in society, which constitute serious obstacles to women's enjoyment of their human rights" (UN Committee on CRC, 2009, para 28).

#### **e) Poverty – Shifting the Economic Burden**

In poor families, parents do not have resources for the schooling of their girls so they wish to marry their daughters as early as possible to be relieved from the responsibility. They don't see their future anywhere else except sending them to their husband's house. So, one pronounced contributing factor for child marriages is poverty. An impoverished family may regard daughter as economic burden that must be removed through marriage at her young age. In many countries, it is



economically more feasible to marry daughters at a younger age since the expenses of marriage are lower. Similarly, the expenses of dowry may also be lower for younger girls in many areas.

In rural Pakistan, poverty is pervasive and is the most important cause for the practice of child marriage. “the headcount poverty in Pakistan was 22.3 percent for the 2005-2006 financial years, with some 27 percent of those living in rural areas being below the poverty line, as compared to 13.1 in urban areas” (Ministry of Finance Pakistan, 2011, p. 216). It is stated that about Pakistan poverty situation it has been quoted, “The Economic Survey for the outgoing financial year ... revealed that if the poverty line is \$2 per day in line with international standards for middle-income countries, then 60.19 percent of the population falls below poverty line in Pakistan” (“Half of Pakistan lives below poverty line”). Mostly parents marry their daughter off by claiming her wellbeing in her expected husband’s house as he will fulfil her requirements.

It goes without saying that poverty, lack of economic opportunities and illiteracy are the most articulated reasons for child marriages in Pakistan. For many parents, particularly in the rural communities with limited means for livelihood, child marriage often serves as a strategy to off their liability in terms of daughters. Moreover, limited repository of skills, and be short of self-confidence, most girls are left with very few alternatives to be economically useful, thus, accelerating their trajectory in to early marriages. Generally in rural communities girls and women are engaged in informal sector or home based works with negligible earnings. These include primarily seasonal works in the agriculture sector requiring little or no skills like cotton picking, sowing etc. Other types of income generating activities are home-based works including stitching, embroidery and handicrafts. Families tend to associate low ‘economic value’ with girls or women due to their inability to earn and contribute to the family income. So they are taken particularly in rural setting as ‘non-earning’ individuals in economics terms. “Child marriage is seen as a way to escape the cycle of poverty, evidence from other developing countries reveals that in fact it worsens the cycle of intergenerational poverty. On the other hand where income generation by women is seen as a poverty mitigating strategy (particularly in urban areas) early marriage may be delayed because of the incoming earning” (Khawar, et.al., 2010).

#### **f) Religious Perceptions**

Varying interpretations of religious leaders exist on child marriage, age of spouses and circumstances of marriage have made this problem more complex. It goes without saying that approximately 97 percent of Pakistanis are Muslim and they are quite sentimental about their religion, therefore, role of religion and religious leaders in the society is very significant. “The Quran does not stipulate a minimum age for marriage and does not outrightly prohibit child marriage” (Wyller & Nayer, 2007, p. 62). In the view of, It is said, “Although there is nothing in Quran about child Marriage, pre Islamic Arab customs that allowed child marriage played a

major role in introducing child marriage to Islam.” (A. Syed, 2004, p. 40) Therefore, religious leaders have a cushion to interpret the age for marriage in varying ways. They enjoy influence on government as well as followers of their respective sects. So their supportive interpretation about child marriage influences the parents thus they do not hesitate marrying their children at an early age. Those who seek to justify child marriage on religious grounds argue that an Islam emphasizes early marriage of children and it is considered a sin not to marry off a daughter who has reached puberty. A sizable section of religious leaders also propagates this view by justifying that it would reduce the corruption in the society. On the other hand, few religious leaders are of the view that the mere onset of puberty is not a sufficient marker signaling marriage for girls and that psychological and physical maturity are also relevant factors in assessing the age for marriage. This view is also supported by the Al-Azhar University, “child marriage caused significant damage to children and that parents should spare their young from such repercussions” (UNICEF & Al-Azhar University, 2005, p. 9). It is pertinent to understand that due to economic dependency and socio-cultural obligations young boys generally and girls particularly are unable to raise their voices against their marriages. The notion that a good child does not refuse his/her parents’ decision, which is quite common in Pakistani society.

As far as a girl’s consent for marriage is concerned the Prophet (PBUH) said, “A matron should not be given in marriage except after consulting her and a virgin should not be given in marriage except after her permission” (Karim, 2013). It is noted, “almost all Islamic schools of thought on the question of obtaining the bride’s consent insist that it be obtained from those seeking to marry her off and that they must also take into account by a court” (Hallaq, 2009, p. 275).

It can be said that Islam is not precise about the age of a girl’s marriage which gives leverage to the religious leaders to interpret this matter in different ways. So many Pakistanis in their perceptions believe that child marriage is not prohibited in Islam. Indeed, there is a need to take these two important aspects into account: the physical and psychological maturity of the child involved.

### **Consequences of Child Marriage**

In the practice of child marriages girls and boys confront different consequences. Within a rights perspective key concerns associated with child marriages are: the renunciation of childhood and that of emotional well-being; less personal freedom; reproductive health growth and educational opportunities. As found by various studies, education has a correlation with age of marriage. “The interaction between the number of years of a girl’s schooling and the postponement of marriage is firmly established by demographic and fertility studies. On average, women with seven or more years of education marry four years later and have 2.2 fewer children than those with no education” (UNICEF, 2001). So practice of child marriages is a source of high population growth rate.

There are generational consequences of marrying children at very young age like weak infants, mother / children's health issues and higher chances of mortality. A young aged mother has physical and emotional vulnerabilities and lack of reproductive health services in the country place them in high-risk group. Besides, physical problems some psychological disturbance may also result, when instead of attending school or playing, a young girl is confined in house and kept waiting her husband and undertaking domestic duties and looking after new-born babies. The prevalence of child marriages in many developing countries becomes an impediment to the realisation of almost every development goal – eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, protecting children's lives, improving health and control over population growth.

In fact most parents do not aware of the negative impacts of the child marriage on both the spouses and ineffective implementation of laws stimulates this practice. So if the parents are sensitised and made aware of the harms, caused by child marriage and eventually they will check the practice favourably. Moreover, a legislation is required having tough penalties and imprisonment. The fear of tough penalties and imprisonment could be a tool to reduce the practice of child marriages. The negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of young girls and boys of child marriages are astonishing when considering physical and psychological damage associated with the practice.

This lack of knowledge or no knowledge about contraception and family planning result in a large family size which means overly extended reproductive life for the girl-involved. A report says, "one in three Pakistani women have expressed a desire to delay or avoid her next pregnancy but is not using a suitable method of contraception" (Population Council, 2010, p. 27). SPARC (2009, p. 90) disclosed, "the maternal mortality rate of 320 per 100,000 live births in Pakistan means that some 15,000 women die each year due to pregnancy-related causes". Reproductive health, maternal and infant mortality are serious problems confront by the girls getting marriages at young age. A boy mostly faces social and economic challenges as generally he is not in a position to bear the expenses of his newly-established family. So he and his wife become totally dependents on the parents which cause family disputes and quarrelling on daily basis. Indeed, such happenings give lots of mental stress to the newlywed girl. In young aged marriage, a girl suffers shocks and stresses as she leaves her family and is sent to a new family in shape of her in-laws where she has to undertake responsibility of domestic works. In the traditionalist society, these circumstances are taken as fate of the girl and she is supposed to adjust herself. All her happiness like leisure, childhood, freedom of playing with siblings went away when she gets marriage for which she is not prepared mentally, emotionally and physically. This transition from her family to a new family (in-laws) hampers her self-confidence and personal development which put negative psychological effects on the young girl. Forced sexual relations and early motherhood also undermine her psychosocial condition and development. Staying away from her dear ones like parents and

siblings creates a strange situation for her which also effects mental state of the girl. In some cases daily family quarrelling leads to separation, expulsion from in-laws house and divorce resultantly she passes through serious situation which is indeed harmful for her psychological and physical health. So she becomes further vulnerable and remains at fringes of the society and there is a remote chance the she will recover and settle in life otherwise her suffering will continue for whole life. It is pertinent to mention that not only social and physical but some psychological problems can also surface for both girl and boy in child marriage.

Domestic violence is one of the concomitants of child marriage, particularly where there is difference of ages between the spouses and joint family system. Girl is not supposed to leave her husband house, no matter if he is abusive and undertake violence with his wife. In many cases girls have fearin their minds that if they leave their husbands' house their own families would not help or accommodate them due to certain socio-cultural pressures. As the girls have been groomed with a notion that the real homes for girls is their husbands' house. Economic reasons are quite pronounced in such situation as girl involved in child marriage, remains illiterate and, consequently unable to support herself. So leaving her husband for good would make her insecure financially and socially which is a big question for her. Thus she prefers to stay with her husband, no matter what kind of abuses and violence she confronts but is compelled to live in a slave-like environment. Besides economics, honour is also involved when parents turn eyes for their daughter if she wants to come back to them. Indeed, the effects of domestic violence have severe and long lasting effects on the girl-involved. Various studies endorse that girl's experience a greater vulnerability due to domestic and sexual violence in child marriage. This practice brings in premature pregnancy, childbearing (when body is weak), and loss of opportunities for her personal growth. And, if the girlis younger, it is more likely that she will consider that the violence inflicted upon her is warranted.

## **Conclusion**

Due to deep rooted causes and difficult conditions of child marriage, it is not possible to address it easily or swiftly. Issues of poverty and illiteracy cannot be eradicated instantly and require persistent and comprehensive planning and policy. No doubt a big investment is needed to tackle the culturally enriched perceptions of people about established gender role and dependency of women on men. The problem of child marriage is an outcome of gender inequality and stereotyping societal traditions which resulted as a source of gender based violence against girls and women make it a complex problem. So to tackle it systematically promotion of education for all can be very useful to prevent child marriage in Pakistan. Indeed, education provides stimulated environment for individuals to improve their abilities and quality of life. They can acquire knowledge about their rights and responsibilities. In fact, schooling of a girl can delay her marriage because both the

variables have correlation. So government and NGOs should invest more on education and give attractive incentives to the parents to keep their girls in schools.

Government should sponsor a comprehensive media campaign to make the parents aware about the harms inflicted upon their young children by the child marriages. Another reason for the continuity of this practice is that the laws in this regard are out-dated and toothless. It is urgently needed that laws should be amended to punish those who put the children in wed-locks or facilitate such happenings.

Government and civil society should create economic opportunities particularly for the girls to make them earning individuals which would reduce their dependency. For that matter, special skills learning programmes like cottage industry, handicrafts may be introduced in rural areas particularly. An earning hand girl would have say in family matters and would reduce her economic dependency to some extent. It could give a cushion to delay her marriage.

### Recommendations

To address the problem of child marriages the government of Pakistan, NGOs, political and religious leaders should play their roles.

1. Amend the existing laws to ban the marriage of any individuals under the age of 18 and tough penalties and punishment should be placed for those who act in contravention.
2. Ensure the all child births should be registered immediately after the birth takes place and data should be computerised to verify the age of any individual.
3. Make a mechanism to register all marriages without fail.
4. Make law to take consent of both the individuals involved in marriage.
5. Laws should be made to checkexchange marriages(*Watta-satta*), *swara* or *vani*, *vulver*, and the marriage with the *Koran*.
6. Ratifythe international human rights instruments to discourage menaces like child marriage and child labour andgovernment should show commitment with the international community.
7. Government should provide training to the officials and other stakeholders tomake people aware about the provisions of national law regarding child marriage.
8. In primary and middle schools of Government or NGOs,attendance of studentsshould be ensured.
9. Teachers should report about school drop-outs to authorities on regular basis.Make the teachers motivated who work in rural and remote areas by financial incentives.
10. Government and NGOs should open girls' schools having female staff as many parents are not more comfortable in co-education.

11. Provide economic incentives for parents / guardians who send their girls to school. These incentives immediately attract them and resultantly they may delay marriages of their daughters.
12. Include leaders, sports heroes, celebrities and reputed social workers to highlight the negative effects of child marriages. They should promote the use of contraceptives and aware people about reproductive health matters for family planning.
13. Parents should be given adequate pre and post-natal health care education for the safeguarding the child.
14. Media should play a role to aware parents and other stakeholders about harms of child marriages.

This ages old problem cannot be checked and eliminated with a short term policy. Child marriage is caused by various social, cultural, religious, economic and political factors. Therefore a consistent, comprehensive and well-designed policy with short and long term plans required to be implemented with a strong political will behind it. Otherwise this menace will continue and give a slave-like life to the girls-involved and keep crushing their childhood.

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## Biographical Note

**Sofia Naveed** is Ph.D Scholar from Department of Political Science, Government College University, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt** is Chairperson, Department of Political Science & Director Centre of Excellence China Studies, Government College University Lahore, Pakistan.