

Barriers and resilience: The impact of early marriage on girls' education in Balochistan

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Abstract

Early child marriage is still prevalent in many parts of the world today, especially in areas like Balochistan, where this paper found cultural and socioeconomic factors play an influential role in early marriage. The purpose of this qualitative research is to examine the effect of early marriage on the education of young girls in Balochistan. Guided by the intersectionality framework and gender role theory, this research explores the educational disruption and psychosocial implications, as well as the community and family pressures undergone by these girls, with 10 participants interviewed. The evidence presented shows that regardless of the education achieved prior to marriage, girls drop out of school at the moment they get married and, depending on the custom, continue their education either sparingly or not at all, as their responsibilities shift to housekeeping and child raising. On self-perceived psychosocial impact, participants mentioned isolation, loss of self-esteem, and increased psychological stress as some of the major effects. The challenges were, however, compounded by social and cultural dictating that education for married girls was unnecessary as they were already expected to be wives and future mothers; in-laws also added to this by rejecting the girl's education. Still, in these circumstances, the participants' spirit and desire for change remained high; most of them wanted to go back to school if only they had a chance. Such findings underscore the importance of developing the appropriate programs and services that would facilitate the removal of barriers educationally and psychologically facing young married girls. This study has established the need to educate married girls and supply all the necessary encouragement they need to combat the difficulties that early marriage brings.

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Introduction

Child marriage is a persistent global issue with far-reaching consequences, disproportionately affecting the education and future prospects of girls. It undermines individual empowerment, perpetuates cycles of poverty, and stifles societal development (Delprato et al., 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2024a). Annually, approximately twelve million girls are married before the age of 18, with South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa accounting for the majority of these cases

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(UNICEF, 2020). Early marriage also denies young girls an opportunity for education, Development, and other important aspects of their lives that would help transform them into productive citizens. However, global and regional campaigns, including the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Agenda, which seeks to end child marriage by the year 2030, still, traditional and economic pressures keep alive the vice that robs millions of girls children advantage (Bexell & Jönsson, 2016).

Girls in South Asia, especially India and Bangladesh, are forced into early marriage as a result of tradition and economic challenges. Early marriages are seen by families as one way of protecting their female children's future (Ahmad et al., 2014). This results in higher school dropouts, lower literacy levels, and restricted employment opportunities for married girls (UNICEF, 2024a). Pakistan, too, faces this issue where 21% of girls marry before 18 years of age legal marriage age (Iqbal et al., 2022). Collective folk ends and financial pressures dictate not education but marriage, even in Balochistan (Anwar et al., 2023). According to the UNICEF (2020) report, Balochistan province, the largest province in Pakistan, also has an experience of the highest prevalence of early marriage, with 45.3 percent of the girls being married before their adulthood. These constraints include cultural values, whereby specific cultural practices undermine girls' educational aspirations, economic factors, and geographical factors that worsen the situation for girls. Early marriage is just a reflection of gender and socio-cultural discrimination that violates opportunity and makes people poorer (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Kamal & Ulas, 2021). Unfortunately, while early marriage is common in Balochistan, there is still relatively little research on the educational barriers that married girls face. This work fills this research niche by studying the effects of early marriage on their education by only ten respondents. This includes an evaluation of disruptions, such as educational disruption, psychosocial problems, and social pressure, despite showcasing their education and dreams.

Employing the intersectionality and gender role theory, the study explores how these girls are doubly or triply vulnerable by gender, status, and culture. Intersectionality shows multiple forms of oppression, and gender role theory shows the expectations wherein women must prioritize the home over schooling. The research results shall contribute to the development of culturally competent practices and programs relevant to female offenders, focusing on their reintegration and returning to education initiatives. The findings of this study provide useful implications for educationists, policymakers, and non-governmental organizations interested in the advancement of women in Balochistan. Finally, the conclusion will highlight the broader implications of this study for policy and practice, emphasizing the need for urgent and coordinated efforts to address the barriers faced by these girls and unlock their potential.

Literature Review

Child marriage, defined as marriage before the age of 18, continues to affect millions of girls worldwide, particularly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where the prevalence is alarmingly high (Kidman, 2016). This practice has profound implications for nearly every aspect of a girl's life, including her health, social status, and education (Chachar, 2023). In regions such as Balochistan, entrenched social and cultural norms play a pivotal role in sustaining early marriage, significantly hindering the educational prospects of young girls. This review synthesizes the existing literature on early marriage and its impact on education, with specific reference to Balochistan, while identifying gaps and proposing a framework for further exploration.

Global, early marriage is an impediment to girls' education, as UNICEF (2024b) noted, such as a higher likelihood of dropping out of school or poorer educational outcomes among married girls compared to boys. Education, once one gets married, comes as a package equal to domestic and parental duties, thus practically negating the option (Mehtap et al., 2017). This disruption means that poverty is cyclic because education is essential for improving one's status in society (Bretos & Marcuello, 2016). Both in India and Bangladesh, other important causes that are related to economic factors or cultural expectations promote early marriage and provide it with a higher priority than education (Islam, 2022). It cannot be denied that methods such as conditional cash transfers bear promise, with Balochistan being more apt to need localized solutions to address the issues that reach systemic levels.

According to UNICEF, 45.3% of girls are married before the age of 18 in Balochistan, which is amongst the highest in Pakistan. According to the World Health Organisation, Pakistan Balochistan has a high percentage of child marriage. Child marriage is defined as marriage before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2020). Traditional practices used to support early marriage include looking for economic security and social status and education being set aside to raise a family (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Jafarey et al., 2020). Education faces significant challenges once girls are married, such as household chores and childbearing, which act as barriers to completing primary school education and would imply limited future employment prospects (UNICEF, 2022a). These difficulties are made worse by factors such as geographical accessibility, facility development and deployment, and cultural misunderstandings and prejudices, which star extraordinary educational injustices in rural regions (UNICEF, 2020).

Early marriage not only leads to school dropout but also has a profound impact on the psychosocial development of young girls. Various studies have shown that the social suffering of EMG includes feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and increased psychological pressure, which decreases her desire to carry on with her education (WHO, 2023). Besides social pressure, stigma within society also plays a discouraging factor for married girls to return to school (UNESCO, 2016). Research in similar cultural contexts characterizes high incidences of anxiety and depression amongst these girls because of sudden conversion to wife and mother duties (Fan & Koski, 2022). To tackle these psychosocial difficulties along with their academic needs, it is possible to promote the development and further employment of these children.

The Pakistani government has initiated numerous policies and launched several programs to address early marriage and the education of girls, but these efforts do not appear to extend to Balochistan (Government of Pakistan, 2024). Conditional cash transfers and other awareness raising have been, to some extent, successful in other provinces of Pakistan. However, raising awareness through such campaigns faces stiff cultural resistance and logistical constraints in Balochistan province (Government of Pakistan, 2021). A lot of them have limited practice, and many of them only exist on the policy level, thus weakening their impact. The information about the successes as well as failures of community-based education programs in Ethiopia and financial incentives encouraging delayed marriage in Bangladesh is aimed at underlining the differences between cultural and economically supportive approaches to fighting early marriage.

The intersectionality framework is adopted in this study to understand the multiple forms of vulnerability faced by early-married girls in Balochistan. This theory is introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw and highlights how gender, class, and other systems of oppression interconnect to form unique barriers and challenges (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality

focuses on the various ways in which gender, poorness, and other systems perpetually interconnect to form special barriers. In Balochistan, girls' education is highly restricted because of societal customs and poverty, and students are geographically distant from schools. Gender Role Theory, as articulated by Eagly and Wood, also enshrines how society has put women in a basket of obedience to provide and tend to households while education is ignored (Eagly, 1987). This view helps explain why early marriage continues to be practiced despite the relevant policies, especially putting into consideration the fact that cultural competency may be required to address these practices.

Although early marriage is a key issue in many countries, there is a scarcity of qualitative studies of early-married girls in Balochistan. Much of the past research aims primarily at stating the number of children enrolled or not enrolled in school, dropout ratio, and the like without considering the social and psychological factors that these girls come across. The purpose of this study is to address this gap by examining the educational and psychosocial experiences of early-married girls using qualitative methods. With respect to the experiences of the participants and implemented through specified theory, its central purpose is to enhance the understanding of the problem and guide the development of culture-appropriate intervention in the province of Balochistan.

Method

Research Design

The present research utilizes a qualitative research paradigm, specifically a phenomenological approach, to investigate the lived experiences of young girls in Balochistan who married before the age of 18 and its impact on their education. This approach is appropriate as it provides an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences and the socio-cultural environment shaping these experiences. Qualitative methods were chosen because they allow for nuanced insights that would likely be obscured in formal or statistical research. Thus, this research seeks to produce thick descriptions of cultural discourses and girls' subjective experiences of early marriage that are likely to be obscured by more formal and statistical approaches to research.

Participants and Sampling

The proposed study is qualitative research that includes 10 participants who are young girls from Balochistan who got married before they reached the age of 18. These participants were recruited through purposive sampling because purposive sampling is frequently used in qualitative research studies to identify and recruit people who have been through a particular phenomenon. It was considered the selection of girls who were married for at least one year and were 15-25 years old at the time of the research. It gives the researchers the advantage of covering the early marriages of relatively new and those that have been in existence for some time in order to compare the effects of the practice across the duration.

This study aimed to recruit 10 participants in order to get depth and richness of the data collected during the study, even though this is one of the central barriers to using qualitative research due to the limited number of participants. In qualitative research, smaller sample sizes are used since they allow the researcher to study multiple processes systematically. Here, the emphasis is placed on the collective perception of the participants' specifics, not the generalization of the data (Cresswell, 2013).

Participants were young girls from Balochistan who were married before their 18th birthday; at the time of the study, their ages were between 15 and 25 years. This range enabled the researcher to get an array of views and compare between newly married girls and girls who had been married for several months. These participants comprised individuals of different ethnic groups and social classes, which would be expected from Balochistan. This variability provided a broad range of experiences on early marriage and its effects on education, and it was invaluable to the study.

The sampling technique used was purposeful sampling, a common method in qualitative research that selects participants who have firsthand experience with the phenomenon of interest. The eligibility criteria for the selection of the participants included the following: the women participants should be married for more than one year, have married below the age of 18, and should be residing in Balochistan. Participants were recruited through community heads, NGOs, and word of mouth to ensure that those best placed to answer the research questions were recruited into the study.

Data Collection

Information was collected through face-to-face, tape-recorded, and largely unstructured interviews in participants' home languages; hence, the interview format was flexible, allowing the participants to express themselves fully while helping them respond to key areas of focus like education, early marriage, and their own future. All of the interviews were conducted face to face, and they took 60 to 90 minutes to discuss. These interviews were done by the female researcher or with the help of a local female research assistant by considering cultural sensitivity. Antecedents implemented during the study included initial meetings to orient the participants on the study and provide an opportunity to curb any fears that may hinder candidature. Consistent with good qualitative research practices, all interviews were conducted with the participant's consent and recorded in audio before being transcribed aetiologically. A sample interview was administered prior to the main study in order to fine-tune the interview guide in terms of orientation and applicability. These steps ensured enhanced credibility of the data collection process and increased its credibility and reliability.

Ethical Considerations

Taking into account that the subject of research was rather social and sensitive, extensive measures were provided to ensure the safety of the participants. Participants agreed on the informed consent form, and they had the right to confidentiality and anonymity. To ensure anonymity, participants were given aliases in all paperwork, and where needed, participants were given contacts to seek counseling.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews, as adapted from Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. This method was selected based on its findings, which show that it can provide a far more detailed and flexible understanding of the participants' experiences. The process first included the successive reading of scripts and audiotapes to achieve intermediate familiarisation. Initial codes were derived from line-by-line analysis and through the use of qualitative data analysis tools to obtain precision. These codes were then merged to

form larger categories; for instance, ‘Family expectations’ and ‘Drop out of school’ were merged to form ‘Societal and family expectations;’ ‘Early marriage and education’ gave an all-round view of the topic.

With subthemes, this paper has maintained thematic coherence with the research objectives, as well as the overall objectives of the study. For instance, “emotional stress” was classified under a section referred to as “psychosocial impacts,” as was “lack of motivation.” Deliberate themes that emerged in the last studies were such: Educational disruption, which focused on the interruption of schooling by early marriage; psychosocial impacts, which explored the impacts on emotions; societal and family expectations on the impacts due to culture; resilience and aspirations, which highlighted the ability for the early marriage brides to hope again. Quotes were traced as direct representations of participants’ opinions and ideas for all identified themes. To replicate the analysis, both nominal and ordinal variables were precisely described in a codebook that included code names, definitions, criteria, and examples. Triangulation was useful to ensure the generated hypotheses were consistent with literature and reports from NGOs. Besides, member checking ensured that the obtained results were consistent with participants’ observations. Written reflections were used to ensure reflexivity of the study, while peer debriefing augmented the reliability in that the coding and themes were reviewed independently by another researcher. The analysis generated a meta-synthesis and developed a conceptual model for barriers, including societal norms, psychosocial factors, and financial issues; consequences, including school dropout and emotional stress; and protective factors, including coping strategies and aspirations. Despite the limited number of participants and the use of self-assessment questionnaires, the study reveals relevant information about how early marriage affects education in Balochistan. From these analyses, further research and policy understandings are derived from the larger debate on education and early marriage.

Findings

This research tries to present the realities of early marriage in girls’ education in Balochistan. Educational disruption, psychosocial effects, societal and family expectations, resilience, and aspirations are key themes identified. I illustrated these themes with examples and participant quotes to demonstrate the lived experiences.

Educational Disruption

It was found that early marriage became a major disruptor of education, meaning that education came to an end immediately after marriage or upon getting pregnant. Total and often irreversible educational interruptions resulted from household responsibilities, which took precedence over academic pursuits. This ties in with the “Gender Role Theory” that the education of women is devalued by social norms, which place women in the roles of domestics. The intersectionality framework further explains the way in which gender, marital status, and cultural traditions intersect and cause educational barriers in conservative regions (Human Rights Watch, 2024b; UNICEF, 2023). You can see how these challenges come out in Participant B’s experience. She shared how her educational ambitions were dismissed by her husband and in-laws, stating: *After marriage, “I had to drop out because the family of my husband did not want a wife attending school. We all wanted to become teachers, but they laughed at us; they called those childish dreams.”*

“Gender Role Theory” likely sought to underline societal norms of which married women were to be confined to domestic and reproductive duties. For further context, we contextualize her identity as a young married woman in a patriarchal society, which, combined with these challenges, bars her from following any sort of education. The results highlight the immediate need for interventions to break through cultural, societal, and structural barriers to girls’ education in Balochistan. Participant E explained how her educational and professional ambitions became stifled due to deep-seated cultural expectations. She recounted: *“I was in the tenth year of my life when I got married.*

Meeting the women of this clan meant that after that, it was simply impossible to go to school as I had to handle the household and take care of my new family. I wanted to be a nurse, but then responsibilities and my in-laws’ wishes killed that dream. They thought that you should not work as a proper wife and should instead be in the family.

This account focuses on the systemic importance of the domestic over education, a foundational premise of Gender Role Theory. The cultural norms and socioeconomic constraints further show how they congregate together to limit opportunities for women and tend to create new opportunities for dependence and inequality. Participant A also shared the emotional impact of being denied the chance to continue her education:

My mother-in-law would always tell me that my duty was to the family, not to education, and when I tried to tell her I wanted to go back to school, she would just say, ‘But it is your duty.’” That frustrated me because while I wanted to try to elevate my status and help society, their reasoning for holding me back was that education was a waste of time for a woman involved in household chores and raising children.

Her experience makes her case that existing norms encourage women not to be educated. In particular, the Intersectionality Framework provides a more in-depth understanding of how overlapping factors of gender, marital roles, and cultural expectations combine to exacerbate these barriers and make women feel trapped and undervalued. The story of these accounts shows how systemic barriers intervene in young girls’ marriage and education in Balochistan. Domestic responsibilities above aspirations have been one preferred thing to be done by cultural norms and traditional roles, stabilizing gender inequality and restricting socioeconomic mobility with additional cycles of poverty. The need for interventions that respond to the cultural sensitivity of women and help empower and educate them is underscored by Participant E’s unfulfilled dream to become a nurse and Participant A’s frustration over lost opportunities.

A comprehensive and multi-faceted approach needs to be taken to address the educational disruption experienced by young married girls. Available pathways for them to continue their studies are flexible learning opportunities, such as distance education, evening classes, and community-based programs. Since the first task of advocacy initiatives is to encourage the families and communities to fight the social norms, these will advocate for the education of married girls so as to counter such factors as Gender Role Theory indicates. Enabling access to education requires legal reforms, increased enforcement of child marriage laws, and the provision of some forms of financial support: scholarships, stipends, or school meals. It can also, in addition, entail gender equity education in school curricula and setting up workshops in communities as a way of changing cultural norms. The source of these disruptions is not only educational but also cultural and structural. Gender Role Theory in that these

expectations limit women to traditional roles, while the Intersectionality Framework that both gender and marital status magnify these handicaps. It takes collaborative efforts with policymakers, educators, and community leaders to break down these barriers. It's not just crucial for individual empowerment of young married girls to get educated—empowering young married girls to get educated is a requisite for attaining broader social and economic equity.

Psychosocial Challenges

In this study, participants described a variety of psychosocial challenges experienced following marriage, including social isolation, reduced self-esteem, increased psychological stress, and resulting in severe mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. In the midst of these challenges, the transition from student to wife (and sometimes mother) stalled each in their own educational and personal development. Support for these findings is also consistent with Gender Role Theory's argument that women are the victims, as society imposes upon them duties that keep their aspirations forming. The Intersectionality Framework also suggests that young married girls are faced with compounded disadvantages from overlapping factors, including gender and marital status and social expectations, rendering their oppressions more difficult.

Social Support and Isolation

One of the most mentioned problems was social isolation. Participants often lost their peer support networks, typical for their age group, and their friendship circles were often severed through marriage. Participant D shared:

After my marriage, I could hardly call myself a wife. Besides my husband, I had no friends left; all were in college having fun and studying, and I was idle and not able to study or do anything else. I missed college, my friends, and the empty houses all around me, and I had lost any desire to study.

The fact that isolation was used to deprive Participant D of providing her social purpose and interaction only makes Participant D's feelings of loneliness and abandonment worse. Gender Role theory reveals the extent to which children growing up in a society tend to be locked in specific roles determined by society. Further using the Intersectionality Framework, her gender and marital status also worked to further isolate her from spaces that her peers were also able to access. This matches what the global literature says about links between social isolation in young married girls and depression and anxiety (UNICEF, 2023).

Erosion of Self-Confidence

Participants explained how cultural and familial expectations eroded self-confidence. Participant F shared how her identity as a motivated student changed after marriage: I was happy before marriage.

I always loved going to school and felt that I could be a doctor or maybe a teacher. But after marriage, I detached from those dreams. That included the culture of women serving their husbands and children. The tone was constant; now, I no longer had to learn; I had to serve.

Again, participant F's account illustrates how society conditions married women according to Gender Role Theory as a priority to familial duties over ambitions: The Intersectionality framework added detail to how cultural traditions and marital expectations multiplied the pressures she faced until she no longer viewed herself as worthy of achieving her dreams. This conclusion agrees with studies demonstrating the adverse effects of imposing strict gender roles on young women's aspirations and self-worth (WHO, 2023).

Mental Health Struggles

Participants also said unrealistic domestic expectations field exacted a toll on their mental health. Participant G vividly described:

I was often stressed and anxious. I was so pressured to be a perfect wife and daughter-in-law. I'd never cooked for a family before and had been tasked with so much that my breathing was out of control. Not studying, eating, sleeping, and thinking were affected. For some reason, the thought of the mental pressure made me feel powerless and exhausted completely.

They are accounts of how married girls are constrained by observation of society's norms into not having access to education. Such experience, combined with cultural and marital pressures, is in line with global evidence that correlates with higher levels of anxiety and depression (UNICEF, 2023). The suffering of such young brides is the story of Participant G, who comes from a poor background and has no mentors. Gender Role Theory is helpful in understanding how cultural norms dictate a caretaker role for women who are often overlooked because of their own — and, in many cases, acquired capacity. The Intersectionality Framework further illustrates how these challenges are further compounded for girls who are both young and married while bearing household responsibilities, resulting in cycles of stress and absent, or few, opportunities for growth. These results are consistent with a worldwide body of research associating early marriage with increased anxiety and stress as a result of the swift shift to roles involving excessive domestic responsibilities (Le Monde, 2024).

Broader Implications

Participants D, F, and G share their experiences of early marriage, which had a profound psychosocial impact. Giving young married girls the space to become isolated from crucial social and academic networks denies them emotional security and confidence. The same factors, such as unrealistic domestic expectations, only make mental health problems worse, and they do it by reinforcing the systemic barriers identified by Gender Role Theory and the Intersectionality Framework. Raising awareness and building community support to educate on the importance of mental health are equally powerful mental health education and outreach initiatives to answer that call to action. Integrated psychosocial resources can help girls balance responsibilities and pursue aspirations in flexible educational programs.

Societal and Familial Expectations

Participants' educations were shaped profoundly by societal and familial norms, which called for narrow traditional gender expectations, which in turn greatly defined the roles they were expected to assume after marriage. According to participants, these norms meant that their

obligations as wives and mothers came before their usefulness to the family; it acted as a way to effectively stifle their personal and academic growth. According to Gender Role Theory, these experiences fit with general societal norms that restrain women from upward mobility, and that limit them to domestic and reproductive duties but that marginalize those ambitions for education and professional advancement. The Intersectionality Framework also points out how overlapping identities (being female, married, or living in a patriarchal society) compound the disadvantaged. Participant C vividly described the dismissal of her educational goals:

Education becomes unnecessary for a girl in our culture after marriage. My in-laws didn't want me to go to school. They just wanted to know when I was going to get pregnant. Every piece of advice was to find me a grandson or granddaughter. *They only wanted me to be a good wife and mother, not care about my dreams or goals.

This narrative portrays the way in which gender role theory posits societal norms limit married girls to domestic and reproductive roles, making them inapplicable for pursuing academic or professional success. By further contextualizing her struggles within the Intersectionality Framework, we can see how cultural and familial expectations layered on top of them made it exponentially harder to overcome. Similarly, Participant J recounted how marriage curtailed her ambitions:

My parents married me at a young age for security and didn't know that meant I was throwing away my dream of becoming a doctor." They didn't care about my education at all, my husband and his family. But they expected me to stay home and stay indoors to fulfill domestic duties and prepare for motherhood.

But these stories also point to how deeply rooted norms work in service of systematically suppressing the aspirations of young married women and, consequently, their ability to do their best. As Participant J's story clearly demonstrates, early marriage, so often held up by stories of protecting a girl's future, is actually anything but embedding dependency and stifling personal growth. Her family and inlaws didn't share her dreams of becoming a doctor because they placed her family obligations over her career. This correlates with Gender Role Theory, which provides societal norms of restricting women to a more conventional life but failing to manifest their wishes. Finally, the Intersectionality Framework shows that her gender, marital status, and socioeconomic background circumscribed her within a sequence of scarcity and refused her equal opportunity.

As Participant C's account does, it also illustrates how cultural norms devalue women's education and redefine them as primary caretakers without a future ambition. These stories show how the very forces of systemic barriers both uplifted and limited young married girls' pursuit of education due to expectational placement into domestic roles based on society and family. They not only keep such barriers, but they also create emotional and psychological strain that leads them to abandon their aspirations. This means that addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach. In addition to such campaigns, communities must be educated about the value of girls' education through marriage and that local leaders need to be challenged to change harmful cultural norms around working with families. Child marriage needs to be penalized, and married girls should have the right to education, and that requires legislative reform. Scholarships and stipends are financial incentives to get families to do what is best for education.

Community-focused initiatives focus on the imperative of girls' education post-marriage. To address gender bias, we need to engage local leaders and influencers. Supporting girls through things like scholarships combined with stronger laws to fight child marriage can help make sure these girls get educated. There is room for practical paths for young brides to continue their studies through flexible educational opportunities — such as evening classes and vocational training. It's also important that there are counseling services for people's emotional needs, and we push for gender equity programs in schools and communities to break down stereotypes. It's fundamental to championing a more equitable and inclusive society to empower married girls and give them an opportunity to receive education.

Discussion

This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the multilayered consequences of early marriage for the education of young girls in Balochistan by articulating disruption of education, psychosocial burden, and expectations in society together with resilience and aspiration. The participants' narratives are grounded with findings and are consistent with the Gender Role Theory as well as the Intersectionality Framework, where systemic barriers work collectively to limit educational opportunities for young married girls (Connell, 2002; Crenshaw, 1989).

The findings speak to a global and regional body of evidence about the dramatic impact of early marriage on girls' education (UNICEF, 2023). According to the participants, they were forced to leave their studies because of marital duties, societal norms, and the absence of family support. The story shown for Participant B shows how established norms serve to prioritize domestic responsibilities to the point of undermining educational hopes in married women. Gender Role Theory puts this: Women's education usually comes second to social expectations (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Participant E also discovered that cultural attitudes that define the education of married women as unviable expressed systemic gender bias. Such a result aligns with previous work from South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where early marriage is associated with high school dropout rates and impedes access to education (Islam, 2022; WHO, 2023). Research in Pakistan shows that when women are married and put to work to do domestic chores for the family, this not only increases dependency but confers little, if any, socioeconomic mobility (Habeb & Kiazai, 2022). Disruptions of such processes not only hamper academic progress but preserve intergenerational poverty, which continues to depend, in many cases, on education as a cornerstone of economic empowerment (UNESCO, 2022).

It also encompasses very heavy psycho-social envelopes such as isolation, stress, and low self-esteem for the women. Participant G described the experience of anxiety and exhaustion during the period of being charged with pursuing demanding domestic roles without preparation. In line with the Intersectionality Framework, these combined disadvantages result from gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural expectations (Crenshaw, 1989). Ethiopia and Bangladesh research similarly networks early marriage with mental health problems such as depression and anxiety due to exclusion and unrealistic expectations (Mbamba et al., 2023). The global finding of lost self-confidence among young married girls (UNICEF, 2022b; WHO, 2023) highlights the need to target interventions such as counseling

services —to support young married girls. In rural areas of Pakistan, if married girls are only expected to focus on household chores, it perpetuates dependency and locks them into a lower socio-economic status (Habeeb & Kiazai, 2022). However, it is even worse when there is little mental health care accessible in some parts of Pakistan or developing countries like Baluchistan. The World Health Organization (WHO)'s guidelines for 2023 will stress the importance of integrating cultural requirements to delivering mental health care services to vulnerable populations, including young married girls.

Protagonists spoke loudly and clearly about societal and familial expectations to be wives and mothers instead of learners. While talking about the cultural perception of education, participant 'C' pointed out that education for married women is unimportant, so they remain impaired for life, and their liberty will not be allowed. This is seen from the existing literature from Pakistan and other neighboring countries, where the dominant culture suppresses the education of women after getting married (Mbamba et al., 2023). According to theoretical perspectives, such as Gender Role Theory, women are Restricted to Domestic Roles and thus cannot move around or have many opportunities, according to Eagly and Wood (2012). Challenging these deep-rooted perceptions and beliefs will require a multi-pronged intervention, including community mobilization, advocacy, and the engagement of community leaders to redirect culture (Stromquist, 2015). Participant J's story highlights how early marriage is perceived as a form of security, yet it often comes at the expense of education and personal growth. This narrative is echoed in studies from India and Nepal, where cultural practices surrounding early marriage prioritize familial honor over girls' autonomy, further marginalizing their access to education (Human Rights Watch, 2024b; UNESCO, 2022).

In spite of a plethora of different barriers, many participants still expressed major desires to continue their education and accomplish their goals. Many young married girls, even more so than their older counterparts, demonstrate resilience and hope, which encourages some participants to overcome challenges and become teachers, like Participant A. This resilience demonstrates the positive implication for transformational change in the event of appropriate support mechanisms: flexible learning opportunities, scholarships, and mentorship programs (Herald Sun, 2024). Participant D's case is one in which alternative models can assist married girls in minimizing the tradeoffs between completing domestic chores and attaining an academic goal with distance education. Studies from Kenya and Bangladesh show this to be the case, too, where distance learning programs successfully reinserted married girls into an education system (Coşkun, 2023), and hence there is a need to intervene at the system level and support young married girls to release their potential.

Implications

The findings from this study highlight several critical implications for policymakers, educators, and community leaders. Priority should be given to programs of a tailored nature, such as distance learning, evening classes, and vocational training. Flexible models showed evidence from Ethiopia and India to bridge educational gaps for married girls (UNESCO, 2022). Schools and community centers must integrate counseling services and peer support groups to address the psychosocial challenges faced by young married girls. In research, it is documented clearly that acquiring resources for dealing with mental diseases helps increase retention and outcomes in education (WHO, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). Shifting cultural attitudes falls on advocacy to parents, inlaws, and community leaders. In Bangladesh and Nepal,

examples of community engagement in promoting gender equity and education show its success (Coşkun, 2023). Government policies should include financial incentives, such as scholarships and stipends, to encourage married girls to return to school. Additionally, enforcing stricter penalties for child marriage can reduce its prevalence and protect girls' educational rights (Nawaz et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This study has done a thorough and nuanced study of the deep effects of early marriage on the education of young girls in the province of Balochistan. The results show that there are enormous barriers to academic achievement for married girls—barriers rooted in educational disruptions, psychosocial challenges, and unbreakable cultural realities that mandate a life of domesticity. Poverty, dependency, and constriction of personal development such cycles are propelling, and urgent and indistinguishable interventions are required. However, the resilience and aspirations that participants showed give us a hopeful spin. The presence of regular support systems should enable these young girls to, with time, negate adversity and fulfill their educational and personal goals.

The findings bring into sharp relief the need to adopt culturally sensitive, context-specific, and multi-dimension, among others, to address the very special needs of married girls. To accommodate young brides' dual responsibilities, flexible educational programs, such as distance learning, evening classes, and vocational training, must be given the highest priority. In terms of mental health, some key services to encourage are accessible counseling services and peer support groups to mitigate the psychological disabilities of early marriage. Community-driven awareness about the lack of harmful cultural norms that prevent girls from education and slow action for the promotion of the value of girls' education in families and in societies is essential. Policymakers must act urgently to recognize the – often transformative – potential of these interventions in relation to married girls, including as active stakeholders in their futures in educational policies and programs. However, longitudinal research will be needed to understand the long-term impact of educational and psychosocial support interventions on married girls' lives. Such research can provide an important understanding of what works and what doesn't with interventions, which will inform the development of evidence-based policies and programs. Also, comparing differences in this practice across diverse social-cultural environments would indicate the best practices as well as the adjectives to be deployed to aid girls married in different areas in their battling the negative consequences of early marriage. Future work stands to fill these gaps systematically to vastly improve the global understanding of how to mitigate the effects of early marriage on education and well-being.

Finally, this study concludes that it considered the urgent urgency of systemic and sustained actions so that married girls in Balochistan and similar contexts have access to education and opportunities for personal and social growth. Early marriage and its impacts must be broken through recognition of education as a fundamental right, universal, and an important instrument in breaking the circle of early marriage and its bad outcomes. From an investment in the educational and mental well-being of married girls, stakeholders can unlock their potential to contribute in meaningful ways to their families, their communities, and society at large. These efforts will quickly lay out a more equitable, inclusive, and empowered future for girls everywhere, and for all girls, no one is left behind.

Declarations

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