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## Chapter

# Perspective Chapter: Social Aspects of Violence – Cultural Dowry Practices and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Pakistan

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## Abstract

Dowry is a transfer of materialistic goods or money from bride's parents to bridegroom family at the time of marriage. However, as dowry demand rises, it has a significant detrimental impact on the lives of women. This chapter discusses the history of dowry and its practices, the positive and negative impact, and policy implications. The keywords used for this search were: "Dowry AND Pakistan," "Pakistan culture AND Violence against women," "social aspects AND Dowry practices," and "Intimate-partner violence AND Pakistan." To ensure that readers would receive valid information on the subject, authors searched from reliable engines. Dowry is a common tradition, particularly in South Asian countries. It is originated from Hindu culture, but later adopted and practiced by other Islamic and European-American nations. Though it provides an opportunity for women to get their share of pre-mortem inheritance from their parent's property. However, it may be the leading cause of violence and abuse that poses an enormous burden on the brides. Violence prevention is achievable, but it requires efforts by the government, health institutions, and civil society. This is an additional contribution by the authors to raise awareness regarding "Dowry," which is one of the preventable predictors of violence.

**Keywords:** dowry, bride price, intimate partner violence, developing countries, Pakistan cultural dowry, social aspect of violence

## 1. Introduction

Marriage is a long-established sacred relationship in which two souls unite together in a bond of lifetime promise to cherish this unity and the beginning of a new phase in one's life that involves social responsibilities, attainment of mutual goals, resource allocation, and division of work [1]. This old sentimental tradition brings two individuals closer, but also the respective families of bride and bridegroom bind together sharing mutual interest of happiness and family harmony [2]. Even though, this practice reflects ethical responsibilities of trust, love, understanding, and

unity, etc. Often, it contributes to several problems too [3]. Dowry is one of the old and deep-rooted customs, which plays a pivotal role at the time of marriage [2].

To understand the notion of dowry, dictionary defines it as “money, goods or estate that a woman brings to her husband in marriage” [4]. Basically, dowry is a transfer of materialistic items, mostly tangible and intangible assets from bride’s family to the bridegroom’s family at the time of marriage [5]. With the passage of time, demand of dowry from bridegroom and his family has evolved to an extent that nowadays, it is not merely confined to property or cash, even it can include number of things such as gold, car, motorbike, clothes, crockery, furniture, spoons, pillows, bedcovers, clothes, for in-laws and other relatives [6].

In this chapter, we will discuss about the conception of dowry in developing countries, how this custom disseminated into other parts of the world particularly in South Asian context and in Pakistan. Moreover, positive and negative impact and consequences of dowry such as violence against women, intimate partner violence (IPV), its social and cultural aspect affecting on women and their families. Lastly, we highlight potential recommendations and ways forward.

## **2. Dowry practices among developed and developing countries**

The custom of dowry has had originated long back. In fact, it has been followed and practiced among various ancient civilizations. Historically, it has been practiced in a variety of forms around the world for centuries, from the Babylonian civilization to Renaissance Europe; from the Roman and Byzantine empires to the Song Period in China [7]. Like the developing world, dowry practices were widespread in European and American countries. According to the records of court cases held in the thirteenth century, dowry practices were very common in England. During that era, marriageable daughters were considered the pride of their families because it enabled noble families to upgrade their social status by expanding their alliances with royal families [8]. Similarly, during the sixteenth century, clandestine marriages and catholic church administration across European countries such as Italy promoted dowry, which restricted brides to choose their partners as parental consent was mandatory. Moreover, in the Iberian Peninsula, dowry was widespread whereby mutual consent in marriages was encouraged due to joint ownership of the property and equal inheritance [9]. Amazingly, in the early nineteenth century, Romania had a distinctive culture of dowry whereby the authority of the asset inherited by the daughter remained under the control of paternal male members of the bride’s family, which eventually protected legal security and provided legal empowerment to the abandoned and divorced women and their children [10]. Besides this, European colonies influenced the culture of dowry in native cultures of America. Dowry was in practice there in which the exchange of gifts was made mutually from both the families of the wedding couple [8, 11]. Contrary to the idea of dowry under practice in South-Asian countries, Mexico, and Russian culture, property or asset transferred to the daughter as a dowry will remain under the complete authority of the bride only, and the groom’s family reserves no rights to it. Particularly in Russian culture, after the death of the bride, the asset would be used for charitable causes only [12].

Currently, payments at the time of marriage are under practice in many parts across the world with contrasting school of thoughts and are known with different names according to geographical and cultural locations. For example, in Hindi (Dahej), Tamil (Varadhachanai), Urdu and Arabic (Jahez), Bengali (Joutuk), Mandarin (Jiazhuang),

Turkish (Ceyiz), French (Dot), and Nepali (Daijo) and in African countries (Idana) [13, 14]. Let us discuss these concepts attached with marriage payments. Firstly, when the market goods or cash or any kind of asset transfer from the bride's family to groom and his family is termed as "Dowry" as we discussed earlier [15]. However, when transfer of wealth or material takes place other way round like from groom's family to the bride's family is termed as "bride-wealth or bride-price" [16, 17]. Dowry custom is practiced most commonly in South Asia, especially in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal; whereby dowry payments are nearly universal and quite sizable, often amounting to several times more than a household's annual income [18]. Whereas, bride-price custom is widespread in parts of East Asia and some African countries [16].

### **3. Dowry practices in South Asia**

In South Asian context, the dowry tradition was originated from Hindu culture and is still followed mainly in Brahmanical (higher caste) of Hindu societies [17]. According to an ancient Hindu tradition, unmarried daughter was considered as a matter of shame for the family. Therefore, bride's parents need to compensate groom, and his family for accepting their daughter in marriage [19]. Furthermore, among Indian sub-continent, the main reason behind the dowry payment is pre-mortem inheritance whereby woman's share from her parental property transferred to her marital family at the time of marriage, because in patrilineal society like India, women are excluded from the right of parental inheritance. In a society where in practice, women do not inherit parental land, dowry may be the only asset for women and their only source of protection [20, 21]. But, most often these payments surpass woman in terms of benefitting from it and only in-laws enjoy to the fullest having complete rights and control over it [22]. In South Asia, India is mainly a Hindu dominant society following dowry tradition. However, this tradition is equally practiced by Muslim and Christian minorities. Not only this, but this despair tradition has influenced the neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Afghanistan [19].

There are several factors associated with dowry payments that vary between rural and urban areas and from high to low socioeconomic groups [6]. The key reason behind dowry is to provide some financial support to newly married couples to facilitate them in the beginning of new phase of life, thus making them independent for future ahead [23]. However, there is another viewpoint that parents of bride tend to pay higher dowries, so that after marriage their daughter will be able to enjoy her status, well-being, and decision-making authority in her marital family and will also remain protected against any hardships, violence, or any ill treatment by in-laws [18]. Particularly in developed countries where there is a lack of social and legal support for women, allowing injustice to persist [2]. A study suggests that dowry is significantly positively associated with the decision-making power of women not affected by the amendment [20].

Some societies also believe that heavy dowries enable bride's parents to attract better alliance for their daughters in terms of high income, high caste, or high social status of groom [7]. Unfortunately, this mindset has affected the core mandate of marriage so badly that nowadays marriage has become a game of dowry hunters. Grooms from better families, who possess strong social background or have high income and securities, demand lavish dowries from bride's parents [24], thus, posing an enormous financial burden on bride's families [6]. New York Times reported that women of poor financial background in the subcontinent face a serious problem

of dowry provision as they lack capacity to arrange gifts and money for the groom's family, disabling them to get married [25, 26]. These factors are negatively affecting families' desire of having female child. Rather it increases preference for male child, who not only supports the parents financially in their old age but also brings dowry when getting married [2, 20]. Often, the inability of bride's parents to pay high dowries at the time of marriage and/or increased greed of in-laws for more money and material leads to domestic issues after marriage, makes women vulnerable to physical violence, torture, dowry burns, and even murder [24, 27].

Due to the negative impact of dowry such as its devastating effects on unmarried women, posing burdensome economic liabilities and being a major root cause of rise in gender inequality and violence against women [7, 27]. It has been banned in many South Asian countries. Laws have been made to forbid citizens from practicing dowry. The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 and its amendments in India; the Dowry Inhibition Act of 1980 and its amendments in Bangladesh; the Dowry and Bridal Gifts (Restriction) Act of 1976 and the Marriages (Prohibition of Wasteful Expenses) Act of 1997 in Pakistan. Despite, these laws and prohibitions, dowry practices are not reducing. In fact, it keeps on expanding its roots extending further [22, 28].

#### **4. Dowry practices in Pakistan and other islamic countries**

Pakistan is majorly a Muslim country, and in Islam, there is no concept of dowry (Jahez). According to Sharia, financial obligation is not bound on wife or wife's parents. In Islam, dowry practice forbade as the religion has granted a rightful share to daughters in their family property and inheritance. Thus, there is no concept of pre-mortem inheritance as we discussed earlier in this chapter [25]. In fact, Islam teaches the concept of "Mehr" instead of dowry. "Mehr" is the amount or anything paid by a man to his wife as a symbol of honor and respect, which reflects a man's sincere desire to own his wife with a sense of responsibility and obligation on his part [29].

Despite religious prohibition of dowry and banning dowry ordeals by law enforcement agencies in Pakistan, still, it is extensively under practice in Pakistan. Interestingly, dowry has widely been embraced as culture and being practiced by elite class and educated people with zeal and pride [24]. Dowry practices range from 87% to 97% in both rural and urban areas of Pakistan [6]. Pakistani society is a traditional, conventional society where people are expected to spend their life in chains of orthodox customs and rituals of their ancestors. The tradition of dowry is one of the oppressing traditions that is deeply rooted everywhere in the society of the country, affecting and destroying every segment of society [1]. In Iran, dowry tradition is 1000 years old in which bride brings in household materials useful for day-to-day life [30]. Likewise, other Islamic countries such as Turkey, Morocco, and Egypt follow dowry tradition as well. Particularly in Egypt, there are certain expectations from bride and groom regarding the materialistic goods, which they bring into their marriage. Majorly groom will have a house for the couple and bride will bring household goods such as furniture and bread-making machine. Before marriage, all these items must be listed in a legal document for record keeping. They celebrate this tradition of "gehaz" before marriage, thereby all the material goods of bride will be kept on the cars and route those cars throughout the village several times with music so that all villagers can see the gehaz. This way bride's family shows off their financial preparation for their daughter's marriage, which they assume helps in enhancing bride's status and position within her new marital family [31–33].

## **5. Overview of violence and social aspect at developed and developing countries**

Violence is known to be an extreme form of aggression such as assault, murder, rape, and abuse. Physical force, threat, and power are used against people, organizations, or communities in this severe form of violence, resulting in physical and psychological suffering. According to a recent study, violent deaths in the United States are seven times greater than in other industrialized countries, and 90%–92% of women, children, and teenagers in the United States are killed by weapons, compared with other high-income countries [34]. In developing countries, violence against women and children has been overlooked and marginalized. Rape and sexual abuse have long been stigmatized as perpetrators rather than victims [35]. Men and young boys, on the other hand, are frequently subjected to street aggression, abuse, and physical assault. Intimate partner violence is one of the most commonly reported forms of violence in the world. Intimate relationships are responsible for over 30% of females' physical and sexual violence [36], and around 38% experience death [37]. South East Asia is known to witness the highest form of intimate partner violence with a prevalence rate of 37.7% [38], and nearly more than 60 million women are forced to marry before the age of 18 years with South Asia accounting for over half of all young female brides [35]. Although statistics are sparse in the majority of the regions, it is estimated that around 7% of women globally have been sexually assaulted or abused by someone other than a partner before the age of 15 [36], whereas nearly around 20% of females and 5–10% of males reported to experience violence in form of sexual assault and physical abuse as children [39].

Violent conduct is viewed not just as a behavioral act, but also as a factor of health in and of itself, according to a social ecology perspective [40, 41]. Violence against vulnerable populations such as women and children is considered a social problem as well as a criminal offense. Mostly, perpetrators and victims belong to different gender groups; therefore, violence against women is a form of gender-based violence [42]. At the macro level, society, value systems, and any social group are considered as the causes of violence against vulnerable groups [43]. In the majority of low-income nations, patriarchal systems promote male dominance, which is linked to positive perceptions of male aggressiveness and aggression, leading to extreme forms of violence [42].

In addition, exposure to intimate partner violence, whether directly viewed or heard from others, is toxic and detrimental to children and can lead to psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems. Furthermore, in countries with weak law enforcement, intimate partner violence and child abuse commonly coexist, wreaking havoc on the vulnerable population's emotional and physical well-being [44]. According to a qualitative analysis of 27 interviews with 31 civil society representatives in Colombia, the origins of violence have deep roots in patriarchal societies, which have raised a mindset of oppression and weakness in the face of a strong dominant male-oriented society and following them to fulfill their responsibilities [45]. A meta-analysis of potential risk factors for violence against partners reflected that uneducated, younger, and less financially stable males were more likely to exhibit violent behavior in marriage than older, educated, and affluent males [46]. Men are compelled to develop harsh and aggressive attitudes and behavior toward women due to internal or hereditary personality features and witnessing violence in their societies since childhood, according to research; as a result, these violent tendencies are firmly ingrained and resistant to change. Violent spouses are more prone than nonviolent spouses to suffer from psychological problems and low self-esteem concerns [47].

However, not every man who grows up in a patriarchal society, or who experiences marital problems, or who engages in sexual behavior, while inebriated, becomes an abuser. Physical and sexual violence against women and children may be triggered by a combination of these risk factors, as well as a lack of accountability and implementation of laws prohibiting violent conduct [42].

## 6. Violence in Pakistan

Violence is complex and sensitive phenomenon and is deep-rooted in the cultural value and behaviors. According to World report on violence and health “*The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation*” [48]. There are different types of violence, for example, self-directed violence, interpersonal violence, and collective violence [49]. It is estimated that each year, more than 1.6 million people worldwide lose their lives due to violence, and one in three (30%) of women has been victim to both physical and/or sexual partner in their lifetime. Women aged 15–45 are more subjected to violence from their partner [50]. The violence is not only affecting women physical health, but it has consequences of psychological, social, and emotional health of the women [51].

## 7. The social aspect of violence in Pakistan

Pakistan is a patriarchal country; the roles are assigned according to gender. Men are culturally brought up with the mindset that they are strong, whereas women's status is low in the families both before and after marriage. Girls are developed from the early age with expectation including taking care of family, house chores, and reproduction. Most of the women get married during their developmental age without their consent. The lack of education, poverty, wrong religious interpretation, and social norms suppress women's decision-making [52]. Studies have revealed that the intensity and rate of violence on women in rural areas (42%) are greater than those in urban cities (32%) [53]. Men's violent attitude in some cultures is counted as bravery (Mardangi) and considered socially acceptable in spite of the law declaring equal basic human rights to all citizens irrespective of gender [51, 54].

Women face the issue of disparity and discrimination throughout their life [54]. Woman has no rights to get education, to marry by own choice. She is raised to follow the cultural rules, including reproducing and taking care of the family [55]. It is believed that those women have to suppress own desires and never raise voice against violence [56]. This low status and lack of empowerment make women more vulnerable for domestic violence from parents, in-laws, and husband [57].

The sociocultural norms are very conservative, and very low education and poverty increase the intensity of violence. Early marriages and exchange marriages are very common in rural areas [58]. According to report by UN Women 2014, poverty is the main root and increases violence. When a person is not able to fulfill the basic needs of the family, they can get frustrated. It is believed that low status of women in the society, therefore, at the end receives frustration translated into violence on women. Economic deprivation also contributes to getting education for women, and the priority is given to men over women. Women must stay at home and help their mothers with house chores. From an early age, they observe their mother's and

father's relationship and learn from it and thereby, never differentiate the difference of right and wrong [52, 59].

## **8. Cultural dowry practices protect the women against intimate partner violence in Pakistan**

Intimate partner violence has recently become a prominent family and social issue. Abuse and violence against women by their husbands have escalated alarmingly in Pakistan during the last few years [60]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), globally one in every three women, or approx. 35%, will be abused or beaten into sex at least once in her lifetime [61]. These women also reported having mental diseases as well as a risk of suicide ideation and behavior [62, 63].

It is essential to gain an insight regarding determinants that lead to IPV in order to control the level of violence experienced by females in Pakistani society [64]. Literature provides evidence pointing to financial and economic hardships to be a main cause of intimate partner violence within families [16, 65, 66]. Lack of employment has been strongly associated with intimate partner violence. Yet, it has been claimed that having a high level of education reduces the probability of IPV [67–69].

Dowry practices are common traditional customs that are observed in South Asian countries [20], and it is usually a gift given to daughter and with a belief that she would be taken care of by her in-laws and earn respect [70]. Furthermore, research shows that dowry traditions have been and are still in use in several affluent countries, as well as in other regions of developing countries [16, 64]. A recent study conducted in Pakistan explored role of dowry in successful marital life via recruiting 200 participants (77% males and 23% females, aged above 18 years). A study reported that 45% strongly agreed that dowry helps to gain respect from husbands, 31% strongly agreed that due to dowry husband gives honor to his wife, whereas 23% disagreed [70].

Despite this, research has shown that dowry culture has a negative influence on the bride and her family. In recent times, dowry system has been observed to be strongly associated with the status of bride family and, if not provided, leads to family conflicts, violence and dowry deaths, and burning the bride [71]. Impact of dowry is not only limited to the women; however, the expectation of dowry from groom's families and their constant pressure have led to female infanticide and abortions in India [72]. A study conducted in India reported that around 65% of females died as dowry death within the first 3 years of marital life [73]. Theories suggest the emergence and prevalence of dowry culture with a concept of "Sanskritization" hypothesis, [74] which suggests that dowry was traditional practice by upper-class families in an attempt to enhance and improve their social status from lower class. Another theory suggests that changes in men's characteristics and lifestyles are main reason for the rise of dowry practices, prevalence, and culture [75]. Men with higher incomes will want bigger dowries if dowry is portrayed as an equilibrium price to match with a higher-quality groom [76]. Whereas, from a broader perspective, dowry culture has been studied with women empowerment and economic development [77]. In South Asian countries, where female's legal protection is not developed, dowry is interpreted to empower women by increasing their participation in household matters and enhancing their decision-making power in their houses [20]. A survey conducted in rural Punjab, Pakistan, recruited randomly 22 households to explore marriage, dowry, and women's status. Results suggested that higher dowry in the form of jewelry, gold, or cash found to be associated with women receiving high status from their in-laws [20].

According to studies, approximately 87–97% of families in both rural and urban areas of Pakistan encourage dowry culture and practice it openly to demonstrate their worth or due to pressure from the groom's side. However, there is limited literature available to study the relationship between dowry practices and intimate partner violence in Pakistan [16, 64, 78]. Dowry is usually thought to be provided to protect a daughter from any type of violence or abuse, as well as to ensure a stable marriage life [6]. However, a recent cross-sectional study conducted in Karachi from 2008 to 2010 explored the link between the dowry system, marital life perceptions, and intimate partner violence. According to the study, dowry spouses did not receive any protection from physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological assault, yet they nevertheless believed that the dowry system had a favorable impact on their marriage [64]. Regardless of this perception, women who had love marriage also experience IPV. Another study conducted in Karachi qualitatively explored dowry culture and its negative consequences from women's perspective reported that women in this patriarchal society are not secure from violence, either female's family gives dowry or not [6]. A qualitative study conducted in Lahore randomly selected administrative towns and slum areas of the city to recruit 19 married women reported that majority of them experienced intimate partner violence in the form of physical and verbal abuse due to bringing less dowry and not fulfilling their expectations [79].

## **9. Recommendations to avoid dowry and violence practices in Pakistan and other developing countries**

Preventing violence is possible and attainable; but it requires consistent and transparent activities from the government, health institutions, and civil society partners to support and deliver evidence-based informed methods that can be implemented without bias [35]. Women who are subjected to violence have a significant link to the unequal distribution of resources and power between the sexes, which is sadly entrenched by laws, rules, and societal traditions that give men preferential rights [80]. The majority of policymakers and parliamentarians in Pakistan are men, and as a result of this male-dominated society, they have gained a significant amount of power to impose their limiting attitudes, robbing women of their essential rights and justice [47, 51]. In high-income countries where progressive laws exist, the implementation of these laws lags far behind, and impunity reigns supreme. Even in developed countries where gender equality is conceivable, actions that ignore violence and blame females for their victimization persist [81]. At the national level, policies and laws in all education, health, and other sectors should promote gender equality and eliminate all forms of biases and discrimination against women such as access to file the divorce, in ownership of assets, and freedom to enter and leave the marriage without any restrictions. Moreover, within families women should be supported to access education and jobs with the assistance of legislation, the judiciary should be strengthened and enforce laws against all forms of violence with a vulnerable population and support actions and community programs that intend to reduce discrimination toward oppressed women in patriarchal societies [47, 81]. Furthermore, the health sector may play an important role by educating and training students and health staff on how to ask about violence and provide psychological assistance to victims and their families. Furthermore, in all health sectors, the implementation of laws and policies against violence and discrimination experienced by healthcare workers should be a top priority, and complete support for survivors of violence should be encouraged and implemented at the grass-roots and national levels [35].

Dowry practices are common traditional customs that are observed in South Asian countries [20] and are known to have a severely negative impact on the bride and her family members as it is strongly associated with family tensions, violence, dowry killings, and burning of brides [71]. According to the findings of a study conducted in Bangladesh, dowry culture and domestic violence are among the top five most common crimes [82]. Despite the negative impact of dowry culture, it is still being encouraged and practiced in low-income countries as families recognize positive aspects of dowry associated with women's status and decision-making power in her house [20]. It is critical to support nongovernmental organizations that promote intervention programs that attempt to work in communities with women and men to change the societal norms that perpetuate violence and gender inequality in order to provide insight into dowry violence and domestic abuse. Moreover, collaboration with media, nongovernment organization working for women can aware masses especially women about their rights and non-acceptability of violence against women with the help of unbiased legislation and judiciary [35].

## 10. Conclusion

Pakistani society is considered a traditional society where people are forced to spend their life in chains of orthodox customs and rituals of their ancestors. The tradition of dowry is one of the oppressing traditions that is deeply-rooted everywhere in the society of the country, affecting every segment of society. Research has revealed that dowry culture has a negative influence on the bride and her family. In recent times, the dowry system has been observed to be strongly associated with the status of bride family and, if not provided, leads to family conflicts, violence and dowry deaths, and burning the bride. The dowry and bridal gifts (restriction) act, 1976, provides restriction on dowry. According to the act, "The value of the dowry and presents given to the bride by her parents given to the bridegroom shall not exceed five thousand rupees." It is clearly mentioned in the document about penalty for those who violate the law. The proper implementation, monitoring, and reinforcement of this written document, as well as fair application of penalties to all violators, are all necessary for control. Otherwise, control would be exceedingly difficult [83].

## List of abbreviation

IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
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