

Trapped in Tradition: Gender Norms and the Cost of Marital Survival for Women in Rural Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT: In rural Punjab, Pakistan, deeply rooted gender norms strongly shape women's roles and determine their status within marriage and society. These rigid expectations confine women to traditional roles of wife and mother, limiting their autonomy and restricting their capacity for self-determination. As a result, many women remain caught in persistent cycles of inequality. The burden of preserving marital stability often comes at a significant cost to their socio-emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. This burden is intensified by social pressures and entrenched patriarchal authority within families, where women are frequently expected to sacrifice their health, happiness, and personal agency in order to protect family honor and maintain the appearance of a successful marriage. This qualitative study examines how traditional gender norms influence the continuation and survival of marriages among women in rural Punjab, focusing on four districts: Gujrat, Sargodha, Multan, and D.G. Khan. Using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and document analysis, the research explores how gender expectations, cultural rituals, discrimination, and socioeconomic factors shape marital relationships. The findings indicate that many women remain in unhealthy marriages due to the social stigma associated with divorce, community pressure to preserve family honor, and economic dependence on their spouses.

KEYWORDS: Gender Norms, Marital Survival, Rural Punjab, Women's Autonomy, Patriarchy, Emotional Well-being, Socio-cultural Constraints

Introduction

Women across the world have always been dictated by gender norms which determine their place in the house, community and even in society. These standards tend to limit the autonomy and freedom of women, which leads to a situation in which their rights are compromised (Alvi et al., 2023; Fatima et al., 2025). Such norms are reinforced by the patriarchal institutions common in most societies, such as in rural Pakistan which entrenches gender inequalities into a deep-rooted system. In other nations such as Pakistan, women are always supposed to be a wife

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and a mother, thus, they can hardly defy societal norms. There is some improvement in urban centers across the world, but rural communities are still stuck in the rut of the old, and thus, the marginalization of women is a common occurrence (Din et al., 2023).

The rural regions and especially the province of Punjab in Pakistan is a region that has a very strong patriarchal society (Afzal et al., 2024). Examples of gender inequality in these aspects are many, such as early marriages, lack of educational opportunities, and economic independence of women (Kiani et al., 2021). The survivability of women in a marital context, in this case, is closely connected to the capacity to comply with the gendered expectations. The need to preserve the family honor and the traditional norms can be very expensive to the mental and physical health of women. Society and often-oppressive authority of male members of the family add more weight to the burden of marital survival (Afzal et al., 2024).

Empirical data on gender norms in Pakistan has pointed out that females in rural Punjab are highly restricted in terms of autonomy and more social control is applied to them, and their survival in marriage depends on their compliance with the patriarchal authority. These stereotypical views of the genders are also applicable to both their experiences in marriage and, in general, their access to education, health, and opportunities to earn a living (Hasan et al., 2022). In addition, when it comes to marital survival, women in rural Punjab tend to experience marital struggles, which include emotional and physical abuse, to save the family.

Divorce is very stigmatized and even many women are stuck in unhealthy relationships. The culture shock of the sanctity of marriage also makes the agency of women an even more complicated matter because their nonconformity to marital norms is often perceived as a show of disrespect (Inam et al., 2025). However, recent efforts in Pakistan have been undertaken to change the situation with rural women (Afzal et al., 2021). Such initiatives can take the form of legislative processes that will help prevent child marriage and advance the rights of women, educational and health accessibility. Nevertheless, these attempts encounter strong opposition because of the power of the traditional values. Despite these obstacles, female agency has been figured out by women in rural Punjab, but at a high cost, in most cases. The combination of gender, class, and rurality sets a specific situation of marital survival of women in rural Punjab. The dynamics of power involved in these areas make the existence of women not only a personal one, but also a socio-political issue (Tahira et al., 2023). As the international structures tried to handle the issue of gender equality, the cultural peculiarities of rural Punjab help to realize the fact that the changes made are challenging to introduce, considering the well-established traditions.

Marital survival among women in Punjab rural areas is very expensive and it includes sacrificing their emotional, psychological and physical well-being. The desire to achieve marital stability, in most situations, is interchangeable with individual sacrifice and women are denied the opportunity to maneuver through a sea of societal, familial, and gendered demands (Afzal et al., 2022). It is not the case that exists in Pakistan, but it is especially acute in the country's rural regions, where the loyalty to norms usually prevails over individual well-being. Against this backdrop, the paper explores the intricate connection of gender norms, marital stability, and the existence of women in rural Punjab. These dynamics are important to understand so that they can come up with a specific set of policies that cater to the exact needs of these women and thus empower them and enable them to prosper.

Objectives of the Study

- ▶ To discuss how the traditional gender norms affect the roles of women in the rural Punjab marriage.
- ▶ To determine the cost of marital survival of women in rural Punjab in terms of emotional, psychological and physical cost.

- To investigate how socio-economic factors affect the marital choices by women and their survival.
- To explore the stigma about divorce and its impact on female autonomy in rural Punjab.

Materials and Methods

The aim of this qualitative research was to determine the connections between gender norms, marital survival, and the experiences of lived life of the women in the rural Punjab region in Pakistan, specifically, Gujrat, Sargodha, Multan, and DG Khan districts. The research was done using a multi-method, incorporating in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), participant observation, and document analysis as a way of getting a sum total of the challenges the women had to go through in these rural areas. A purposive sampling approach was used to sample out 39 women with diverse backgrounds such that they represented various demographic features and were of different age, education, marital status and socioeconomic statuses. The research was particularly aimed at women, who had married at least five years, and it was possible to focus on their experiences in terms of managing gender roles, social expectations, and marriage relationships.

Semi-structured interviews to obtain personal experience on the issues of marriage, gender expectations and emotional burdens, and FGDs to investigate communal views of the societal demands and marital survival were the way of data collection. Participant observation also documented the gendered relationship within the community, such as weddings, and family get-togethers. At the same time, the document analysis gave the background of the local policies and legal climate of gender norms and the rights of women. These approaches allowed to have a better insight into how women living in rural areas of Punjab managed their well-being and the requirements of maintaining family honor and social expectations in the marriage.

The thematic analysis was used to analyze data, and it found patterns and themes concerning marital survival, emotional costs, and social stigma of divorce. The entire procedure was guided by ethical considerations and made sure to guarantee informed consent and confidentiality and sensitivity to the culture of rural Punjab. Because the study was very sensitive, emotional support resources were availed to the participants where necessary. To reduce bias in the researcher and improve the validity of the findings, the use of triangulation as a type of data sources was utilized. The anticipated results were a deeper knowledge of the socio-cultural constraints that curtailed the autonomy and the welfare of women in rural Punjab. The research was an important source of policy debate that would improve gender equality, female empowerment and marital health in such areas. The results were used to make recommendations on community-based, legal, and social support systems that could be used to help rural women in Gujrat, Sargodha, Multan, and D.G. Khan.

Results and Major Findings

Descriptive Analysis

The findings of this paper provide a detailed analysis of how gender norms, marital stability, and the lived experience of women in rural Punjab, Pakistan intersect. Interviews held in the four districts of Punjab province in the areas of Gujrat, Sargodha, Multan, and D.G. Khan among 39 women have given an intricate picture of experiences that are mediated by both traditional gender roles and expectations as well as personal coping mechanisms in marriage. This is the section where the important findings of the study are presented, which demonstrate the important tendencies in the regions, the emotional cost of the marriage survival, and the social processes which affect the lives of women. The descriptive analysis highlights how women in varying districts respond and decipher the cultural demands and expectations that are imposed on them especially in matters of marriages, family honor, and divorce.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of participants from the district of Gujrat

S. No	Age	Qualification	Family System	Living Area	Income (PKR)	Years of Marriage	Children	Family Members	Reasons for Conflict
1	30	Primary	Joint Family	Gujrat	20,000	7	3	8	Financial issues, decision-making
2	26	Primary	Nuclear Family	Gujrat	25,000	6	1	4	Financial issues, emotional neglect
3	45	Secondary	Joint Family	Gujrat	35,000	20	5	10	Emotional neglect, interference in decisions
4	29	Graduation	Nuclear Family	Gujrat	22,000	7	2	5	Husband's temperament, emotional neglect
5	27	Graduation	Joint Family	Gujrat	28,000	5	2	7	Financial difficulties, household duties
6	30	Primary	Nuclear Family	Gujrat	25,000	7	2	4	Financial strain, marital communication
7	40	Secondary	Joint Family	Gujrat	40,000	15	4	9	Family pressure, lack of support
8	35	Graduation	Nuclear Family	Gujrat	45,000	10	3	6	Husband's work stress, household issues
9	31	Primary	Joint Family	Gujrat	22,500	8	3	7	Financial struggles, lack of emotional connection
10	33	Secondary	Nuclear Family	Gujrat	30,000	12	4	6	Marital disagreements, role expectations

Table 1 demonstrates an in-depth description of the socio-demographic background of the 10 women living in the district of Gujrat, including their education, family stability, income, and sources of matrimonial conflict. The participants aged between 26 and 45 years belong to both Joint and Nuclear family systems with the monthly incomes differing between 20,000 and 45,000 PKR. Their married life is based between 5 years and 20 years old and the number of children can vary between 1 and 5. The table has depicted these challenges that these women are going through, which comprise of financial issues, emotional neglect, family pressure, and household chores, leading to marital disagreements. Women in joint families are usually exposed to further conflict because of family intrusion whereas women in nuclear families have to cope with work stress and emotional desensitization. The table indicates the interplay between socio-economic factors, family system, and individual struggles in surviving a marriage in a rural area in Punjab, which is an interesting insight into the complicated nature of marriage survival in rural Punjab.

Table 2*Demographic characteristics of participants from the district of Sargodha*

S#	Age	Qualification	Family System	Living Area	Income (PKR)	Years of Marriage	Children	Family Members	Reasons for Conflict
1	32	Primary	Joint Family	Sargodha	22,000	8	4	9	Household duties, financial issues
2	28	Secondary	Nuclear Family	Sargodha	30,000	6	2	5	Husband's work stress, emotional neglect
3	40	Graduation	Joint Family	Sargodha	38,000	15	3	8	Family interference, lack of support
4	35	Graduation	Nuclear Family	Sargodha	28,000	10	2	4	Husband's temperament, financial instability
5	29	Primary	Joint Family	Sargodha	24,000	7	3	7	Emotional neglect, family pressure
6	33	Secondary	Nuclear Family	Sargodha	26,000	9	1	5	Financial stress, communication issues

S#	Age	Qualification	Family System	Living Area	Income (PKR)	Years of Marriage	Children	Family Members	Reasons for Conflict
7	38	Graduation	Joint Family	Sargodha	42,000	13	4	9	Marital disagreements, household responsibilities
8	41	Post-Graduation	Nuclear Family	Sargodha	48,000	17	3	6	Work-life balance, lack of quality time
9	36	Primary	Joint Family	Sargodha	20,000	5	2	7	Financial instability, emotional neglect
10	34	Secondary	Nuclear Family	Sargodha	27,500	12	3	6	Role expectations, disagreements over the child

In Table 2, the review of 10 women of Sargodha shows general information about their socio-economic and family relations. The age of the participants is between 28 and 41 years with different educational backgrounds including Primary and Post-Graduation. They have Joint and Nuclear Families and their earnings lie between 20,000 and 48,000 PKR. The women are aged between 5 to 17 years and have children ranging between 1 to 4. The table shows an assortment of causes of marital conflicts among them being financial struggle, emotional abuse, family intrusion, husband work stress, as well as expectations of roles. The other difficulties experienced by the participants in Joint Families tend to include family pressure and the absence of support. Simultaneously, individuals in Nuclear Families have to deal with such problems as communication struggles and work-life balance. The table unveils some meaningful information about the overlapping of the socio-economic status, family formation, and the individual woes of these women in their marital relationships.

Table 3

Demographic characteristics of participants from the district of Multan

S. No	Age	Qualification	Family System	Living Area	Income (PKR)	Years of Marriage	Children	Family Members	Reasons for Conflict
1	31	Primary	Joint Family	Multan	25,000	7	3	8	Financial stress, marital communication
2	27	Secondary	Nuclear Family	Multan	32,000	5	2	4	Husband's work pressure, lack of emotional connection
3	43	Graduation	Joint Family	Multan	40,000	18	4	9	Family interference, emotional neglect
4	36	Graduation	Nuclear Family	Multan	35,000	10	2	5	Financial instability, lack of support
5	30	Primary	Joint Family	Multan	22,500	6	3	7	Emotional neglect, household duties
6	32	Secondary	Nuclear Family	Multan	27,000	8	1	5	Financial pressure, role expectations
7	37	Graduation	Joint Family	Multan	45,000	12	3	8	Marital disagreements, child-rearing issues
8	40	Post-Graduation	Nuclear Family	Multan	50,000	15	2	6	Work-life balance, family expectations
9	34	Primary	Joint Family	Multan	21,000	4	2	6	Financial struggles, emotional neglect
10	39	Secondary	Nuclear Family	Multan	30,000	14	3	7	Role expectations, financial instability

No. 3 is a table which contains the information about 10 respondents of Multan and demonstrates different features of their socio-economic and family life. The participants vary in terms of education, with some having a Primary education up to Post-Graduation. They have both joint and nuclear families with their income levels varying between

21,000 and 50,000 PKR. The women are between the ages of 4 to 18 years who were married and had 1 to 4 children. The causes of conflict are diverse, such as monetary strain, emotional negligence, professional strain, family responsibilities, and expectations. Joint families also expose women to more problems such as family interference and marital communication problems. On the contrary, nuclear families are affected by work-life balance issues and economic instabilities. It can be considered that this table represents the intricate relationship among family structure, economic issues, and individuality in the marital life of women in Multan.

Table 4

Demographic characteristics of participants from the district of D.G. Khan

S. No	Age	Qualification	Family System	Living Area	Income (PKR)	Years of Marriage	Children	Family Members	Reasons for Conflict
1	30	Primary	Joint Family	D.G. Khan	23,000	6	3	7	Financial struggles, marital communication
2	28	Secondary	Nuclear Family	D.G. Khan	28,000	5	2	5	Husband's work pressure, lack of emotional connection
3	42	Graduation	Joint Family	D.G. Khan	38,000	18	4	8	Family interference, lack of support
4	34	Graduation	Nuclear Family	D.G. Khan	32,000	9	2	5	Financial instability, emotional neglect
5	30	Primary	Joint Family	D.G. Khan	25,000	7	3	7	Emotional neglect, household duties
6	31	Secondary	Nuclear Family	D.G. Khan	26,500	8	2	5	Financial stress, communication issues
7	37	Graduation	Joint Family	D.G. Khan	42,000	12	3	8	Marital disagreements, child-rearing issues
8	40	Post-Graduation	Nuclear Family	D.G. Khan	47,000	15	2	6	Work-life balance, family expectations
9	35	Secondary	Joint Family	D.G. Khan	22,000	6	3	6	Financial struggles, emotional neglect

Table 4 presents the marital and socioeconomic dynamics of women from D.G. Khan, aged 28 to 42 years. The participants have varying educational backgrounds, from primary to post-graduation, and come from both joint and nuclear family systems. Their monthly income ranges from 22,000 to 47,000 PKR, and they have been married for 5 to 18 years, with the number of children ranging from 2 to 4. Common reasons for marital conflict include financial struggles, emotional neglect, work pressure, household duties, and family interference. Women in joint families often face challenges like family interference and household responsibilities, while those in nuclear families struggle with issues like financial instability and work-life balance. This table highlights the significant impact of family structure, financial stress, and emotional dynamics on the marital lives of women in D.G. Khan.

Analysis from Focus Group Discussion (SDGs) and Observational Perspectives

The women of the study were chosen through four districts of rural Punjab and the sample participants were aged between 22 to 55 years with most aged between 25 to 45 years. The participants were all married persons with a minimum duration of five years of marriage with most of them spending more than 15 years in a marriage. The vast majority of participants were homemakers, some of them were engaged in working in the fields or small enterprises in the communities. The participants were a diversity of socioeconomic income levels, and a large proportion of them were in lower-middle-class or working-class families. In the four districts, there were themes which were common as far as the role of women in marriage is concerned.

In Gujrat, the participants were interviewed on the pressure of preserving family honor through family stability through marriage. Most women added that divorce was perceived as a failure and disgrace to their families and this was one of the reasons why they were willing not to leave abusive or unhappy marriages. They also talked about lack of education or experience of personal growth after getting married, as they were confined by gender roles. The sentiments that were resonated in Sargodha were the focus of women on the culture of women being submissive to their husbands and subjected to a period of suffering in marriage in the name of family honor. Yet, some of the women in Sargodha were more vocal about their experiences of emotional and physical abuse and the psychological cost of having such marriages.

In Multan, some of the effects of religious and cultural conservatism were felt. In this case, women explained that they always felt pressure to perform the roles of an ideal wife and mother. They talked of how isolated they were, sometimes with no support systems and resources to face the situation they were going through in their marriage. Nonetheless, a few of the female Multani mentioned that they were becoming increasingly conscious of their rights and became resilient to seek indirect means of asserting their agency in the home. Lastly, in D.G. Khan the participants took a more conservative approach to the concept of marriage wherein the role of women was highly connected to the principle of obedience, submission, and sacrifice. Women in this district explained how they would never divorce, and they suffered extreme marital hardships to escape the label of a divorcee.

Family honor was also proved to be a factor that dominated throughout the districts as it influenced the choices of women to stay in the marriage (Kandiyoti, 1988). Participants also disclosed that divorce or separation would be a source of disgrace to the family and most of the women were ready to suffer emotionally and physically to preserve the image of the family and keep the family as a stable marriage. Another important discovery was the cost of marital existence, which is the emotional one. Women often talked of having depressed moods, being isolated and helpless, and many of them said they did not get the emotional support of their husbands or families. Many of the women in each district said that their voices were a taboo in the house as well as being a source of powerlessness. The study also discovered even with the heavy pressures that some women were more vocal about their dissatisfaction, and some of them considered divorce as an option albeit the stigma was still very high in Sargodha and Multan. These women were more prone to seeking the assistance of informal circles that included close friends or women in the community to go through the process of coping with marital problems. Interestingly, the women of Gujrat and D.G. Khan were less prone to open dissatisfaction or even divorce thinking of doing it, that means that the traditional outlines were followed more.

All in all, the description of these 39 respondents in the four districts shows an important regional difference in the experiences of marital survival, and similarities of emotional and psychological burden, the presence of family honor, and the lack of women to escape the conventional gender roles. The results indicate that gender pressures in society, individual strengths, and cultural norms significantly contribute to the life of rural Punjabi women.

Analysis from In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews

Socio-cultural Constraints for Women in Rural Punjab

Thematic analysis of the socio-cultural restrictions of the women in rural Punjab, as realized in the study within the districts of Gujrat, Sargodha, Multan, and D.G. Khan, depicts the role of traditional practices and gender rules on the lives of women in the marriage, especially on the practices of dowry and son preference. These themes are very influential in the marital life of women, their socio-economic life and their roles in the family set up. In all the four districts, dowry practices and son preference were cited as the key socio cultural limitations that greatly affected the emotional, psychological and physical lives of women. Dowry customs resulted in the economic imposition of

women families creating instability in marriage and gender inequality. Son preference also ensured the continuation of patriarchal family system in which the value of women was undermined depending on their capability to bear a male child and as a result marital conflict, emotional neglect and influence of society ensued. Such socio-cultural norms did not only influence the experiences of women in their marriages but they also supported gendered power dynamics, inhibiting their freedom and well-being.

Socio-economic Challenges and their Impacts on Women

The socio-economic challenges aspect was an important result of the entire study, which showed that the lack of employment opportunities and the inequality of resource access only enforced the secondary role of women in marital relations. Most of the women at Gujrat, Sargodha, Multan, and D.G. Khan had the feeling of being dependent economically on their husbands thus limiting their freedom of choice and decision making ability in marriages to a large extent. The low workforce among women, more so in the rural regions, was augmented by the fact that women were not supposed to work outside the home as it was the society that restricted them to home chores leaving them financially dependent on their counterparts. This economic dependency also resulted in a sense of power imbalance in the marriages where the women could not challenge the problems in marriage or make their own decisions and this further subjugated them. The women in Sargodha and Multan claimed that their husbands were the breadwinners as they made major decisions on how money could be spent on the family and they could not have much say on spending money. This financial management caused frustration and emotional pain since most of the women found themselves helpless in their marital relationships. In addition, the second limiting factor was unequal access to resources and property rights.

All the districts were found to have no access to the financial resource in terms of inherited, land possession as well as access to credit thus hampering their participation as well as benefit in the family wealth. In D.G. Khan, women stated that property and assets were usually controlled by male relatives, and the name of a woman was often not mentioned in the documents or legal agreements, which once again restricted their possibilities to become independent in terms of financial issues. Such unequal allocation of resources continued to perpetuate gender inequality so that women can hardly enhance their socio-economic position, which reinforces their subordinate role in marriage relationships. These economic pressures did not only cause strain in the marriage but also did not lead to empowerment and freedom of women in rural Punjab.

Psychological and Physical Health Implications

Psychological and physical health theme was one of the salient themes in this research because women in all districts reported having experienced considerable emotional and physical stress due to the demands and restrictions their marriages placed on them (Afzal et al., 2013). Most of the women complained that they had constant stress and anxiety because of financial difficulties, on expectations and lack of autonomy in their marriages. Women were inadequate and emotionally exhausted by the daily pressure to fulfill dowry requirements, bear male offspring and adhere to the gender stereotypes. It caused depression, low self-esteem, feeling of helplessness with those in joint family systems showing greater family interference. Other than the mental health challenges, physical health implications were also observed. Women are likely to ignore their health to meet domestic responsibilities and childcare needs which leave them exhausted and with chronic health conditions like headache, backache and sleeping problems. The physical ailments were further worsened by the emotional neglect and support by their husbands. To the women in rural regions who had a low access to healthcare, these psychological and physical health complications

were further fueled by lack of resources and support mechanisms, which provided a deep insight into the extent to which socio-cultural and economic factors affect the health and well-being of women.

Quality of Life and Satisfaction among Rural Women of Punjab

Quality of life and the theme of satisfaction in this paper shows how socio-cultural, economic, and marital issues have significantly contributed to the low level of life of women in Gujrat, Sargodha, Multan and D.G. Khan, as they were seen to be largely dependent on men and gender expectations. The stress associated with the traditional roles like bearing male offspring, household chores, and the strain of meeting the dowry demands tended to emotionally and physically drain them thus lowering their life satisfaction. Most of the women said that they were trapped in their marital circumstances where the family and the society restricted them in the decisions they made. Besides emotional pressure, the financial inability to decide on their lives seriously affected their determination to follow their personal desires, such as receiving healthcare services and education, or their personal interests. In joint families, women were subjected to constant intrusion and lack of space in which they could express themselves which reduced their self-esteem even more. Although women in nuclear families were somewhat freer, they were still encountering a lot of problems concerning financial instability and work-life balance. All in all, the study shows that although there were certain differences in family structure and financial conditions, the quality of life of women in rural Punjab was strongly dependent on their subservient role in the marriage, and as such, there would be long-term effects on their mental, emotional, and physical health.

Discussion

This qualitative research gives a detailed analysis of the lived-in life of women in rural Punjab and the study was carried out in four districts that include Gujrat, Sargodha, Multan, and D.G. Khan. The main purpose was to examine the complex interconnections between gender norms and marital survival and the experiences of women in rural Punjab of Pakistan. It was aimed at finding out the way socio-cultural limitations, economic difficulties, and psychological and physical health consequences influence the experience of marriage and the general well-being of women in these regions. The main aspects on which the study was carried out included dowry, preference to sons, lack of employment opportunities, and unequal access to resources among others, which lead to the subordinate position of women in their marital lives. The main aims were to test the effect of socio-cultural and economic factors on the autonomy of women, stability of marriage, and quality of life and provide an insight into the overall consequences of the gender inequality. Finally, the purpose of the research was to offer the recommendations of the policy changes and social interventions that will empower women in rural Punjab and improve their well-being.

It was a qualitative study that employed a multi-method methodology employing semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), participant observations and document analysis to capture the different experiences of 39 women in rural Punjab. The sample was chosen purposely so that there could be diversity in terms of age, education, socioeconomic status, and marital status. Research was conducted in Gujrat, Sargodha, Multan and D.G. Khan where women were interviewed on their personal experiences in terms of marital relations, economic factors, and social requirements. The thematic analysis was used to define patterns and themes, which revolved around the emotional, psychological and financial issues that women encounter in marriage. The methodology enabled an in-depth study of the intersectionality of gender, culture, and socio-economic situations in the determination of the experiences of women in rural Punjab.

Findings of this research showed that there were serious socio-cultural, economic, and health-related issues to women in rural Punjab especially in the sampled districts. The continued preference of male children was a contributor to inadequacy and neglect by women particularly in joint family systems. Women in all the districts were

economically dependent and their husband and access to employment opportunities and resources meant that women had little control and power over their own choices and decisions in marriages. Their subpar status was further reinforced by unequal access to property and financial resources. The paper has also mentioned the psychological and physical health issues as many women have been affected by the long-term stress levels, depression and physical illnesses like fatigue and sleep disturbances because of the demands of performing the traditional roles and handling the household workload. On the whole, the authors discovered that women had their quality of life undermined severely by such socio-cultural and economic constraints, which confirms the necessity of structural changes to facilitate gender equality and empowerment of women in rural Punjab.

Conclusion

To sum up, I would highlight that the results of the current study are relevant to the fact that a multi-dimensional approach is required to deal with the multi-faceted problems of women in rural Punjab. The socio-cultural restraints combined with such economic factors as the lack of job opportunities and accessibility to resources unequally leads to the impediments of the independence of women, their welfare, and their marriage stability. Not only do these continuity gender norms prevent women to grow personally and socially, but also this has long term psychological and physical health effects. The paper points out that despite some improvements, the cultures ingrained in society still influence the lives of rural women especially in joint family setups whereby traditional roles are more strictly defined.

To overcome these obstacles, one will need a complex solution that will involve community-based programs, legal changes, and educational programs that will help to alter the gender norm and drive equality. The community-based programs ought to aim at increasing awareness on gender equality as well as empower women to claim their rights in the family and society. The reforms in the law are essential in making sure that the women are equally accorded the property, finances and access to protection of the law so that they are not so dependent on the male counterparts. Moreover, educational programs to disrupt traditional gender roles and encourage women participation in the economy are very crucial to encourage long-term change. With a collective effort, the social, financial and cultural barriers can be overcome allowing women in rural Punjab to gain more autonomy, equality and general well-being.

Recommendations

- ▶ Promote female education at all levels, with a particular emphasis on rural areas, to provide women with the knowledge and skills needed to challenge traditional gender norms.
- ▶ Vocational and skills-based training programs should be established to help women gain economic independence through entrepreneurship, employment, or income-generating activities.
- ▶ Enforce and strengthen laws related to dowry, inheritance, and property rights to ensure women have equal access to resources, rights to property, and financial resources to reduce their dependence.
- ▶ Promote community-based programs that challenge traditional gender norms, such as workshops or awareness campaigns focusing on the adverse effects and the importance of women's autonomy.
- ▶ Encourage men and boys to participate in gender equality initiatives, promoting a supportive environment at home and in the community.

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