



Vol. 3 No. 7 (July) (2025)

## **Exploring the Socio-Cultural Determinants of Dowry Practice: A Qualitative Study of Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

**Yousaf Khan**

MPhil Scholar, Department of Sociology, AWKUM, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

**Dr. Ahmad Ali**

Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, AWKUM, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

**Dr. Sameer Ul Khaliq Jan\***

Lecturer, Department of Social Work, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sheringal, Dir Upper, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Corresponding Author  
Email: [sameer@sbbu.edu.pk](mailto:sameer@sbbu.edu.pk)

### **Abstract**

Dowry is a common tradition in South Asian countries, especially in Pakistan. Dowry refers to jewelry, kitchen utensils, clothes, gifts, cash, and other items given by the bride's family to the groom at the time of marriage. Dowry has become a serious problem in our society today. This research study aims to investigate the determinants of dowry in female marriages in District Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The nature of the current study was qualitative. Data were collected from 13 respondents using a snowball sampling technique through an interview guide. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results show that dowry has deep roots in society because the family setup itself encourages the practice of paying a substantial dowry. Dowry is considered a source of honor and prestige for the bride in the eyes of her husband. Women who bring a large dowry are treated respectfully by their in-laws, while those with a small dowry are often mistreated, insulted, disliked, and sometimes even thrown out of their homes. The payment of a large dowry may influence the decision to delay marriage for girls. People's perceptions indicate that dowry is no longer just a custom or tradition in our country—it has become a trend that people follow. The study recommends that the government educate the public, as awareness can play an important role in reducing dowry practices. Religious scholars should emphasize the true teachings of Islam regarding dowry and discourage all harmful traditional practices. This will directly improve the status of Pakistani women, despite the patriarchal nature of Pakistani society. Moreover, based on the findings of the study, community elders, NGOs, social workers, and social mobilizers must play their roles in minimizing dowry demands. These efforts can help make the practice manageable or eliminate it entirely, thereby addressing this serious issue.

**Keywords:** Socio-Cultural Determinants, Dowry Practice, Perception, Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



Vol. 3 No. 7 (July) (2025)

## Introduction

The dowry is an old tradition in Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the bride's parents pay cash, jewelry, kitchen tools, clothes and various valuables to the groom's family as dowry during the marriage. Dowry and the poor economic condition of the bride's parents badly affect the life of the bride after marriage. If she goes without a dowry, it will create an honor issue for the bride as well as produce a lot of social and psychological problems for the bride in the groom's house (Khattak & Bezhani, 2021). Dowry is the transfer of money, goods, kitchen tools, clothes, and some other form of wealth from the bride's parents to the groom's parents at marriage time (Singh, 2013). Dowry is very common in Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which has created so many social and economic issues with very serious outcomes. Moreover, the bride's family is under pressure to ensure more and more dowry. (Shah et al., 2016; Sachdeva, 1998).

In Pakistan, which is a Muslim state, the dowry system is still present in almost all parts of the country. According to Islamic law, a woman gets an inheritance portion from her father. While at marriage, the dowry is considered a substitute for that inheritance (Ali et al., 2013). Dowry culture has existed in our society for centuries. Not only the illiterate but also the educated people of Pakistan are involved in this practice. In Pakistan, it has filtered from the upper class of the society to the lower class. The dowry system has been exploited the rights of women and due to it, women remain unmarried in many cases and faces various psychological and social pressures. About 95 percent of marriages in Pakistan are conducted under the dowry culture, with very bad consequences (Ullah & Ali, 2025).

In District Dir Lower, KP, Pakistan's marriage mostly takes place with a cousin and very close relatives, where the dowry is considered the symbol of establishing marriage, which is a very common practice. Most of the people in District Dir Lower observe the practices of dowry. Nowadays, "Mahr" has become one of the most important symbols to establish a marriage, and only a very small amount of Mahr is written in the marriage agreement (Nikah Nama). This Mahr is a little less shameful for the bride's parents to consider it the sale of their daughter (Momoe, 2014).

## Objective of the Study

1. To investigate socio-cultural factors responsible for dowry practice in the research area;

## Methodology

The nature of the current study is qualitative. This study used a snowball sampling technique. The logic behind this technique was that the researcher doesn't know the respondents due to the sensitivity of the issue and culture. The researcher collected the data from the 13 respondents. The researcher stopped further collecting of the data when it was observed a repetition in the interviews. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with the respondents through an interview-guide. In-depth interview is one of the types of qualitative research in which the research collects a wide range of information from respondents, such as behaviours, perceptions and attitudes (Guion et al., 2001). Data collection, processing, gathering and organizing the data are the objective of a



## Vol. 3 No. 7 (July) (2025)

research to draw a clear picture about a phenomenon. In this study, the researcher recorded the interviews from the respondents through a mobile phone recorder, after the recording of interviews, the researcher transcribed the data and the relevant themes and subthemes were organized through thematic analysis. according to Clarke and Braun's (2013) six steps for data analysis i.e. (process familiarization of data, generation of codes, combining codes into themes, reviewing themes, determine significance of themes and reporting of findings.

### Results and Discussion

#### Theme 4.1: Socio-Cultural Factors Responsible for Dowry Practice

##### Subtheme 4.1.1: Cultural or Traditions Contribution to the Practice of Dowry with Reference

Dowry has been its roots in Pukhtoon society since long because family setup itself encourages the practice of rich dowry due to its foundations in the customary laws in Pukhtoon society. Cultural norms and values are always given preferences and often superseded in day-to-day affairs. This may reflect the truth that customary law is the main contributory in the rules and regulation which are given heed while contracting a legal and valid marriage. The practice of dowry is considered one as of the tradition of Pukhtoon society, but in reality, it is an old-age ritual of Hindu society that was not only adopted by Muslim society but also given semi-legal status during the early period of the development of Muslim personal law (Ali & Gul, 2020).

The researcher asked a question to know cultural elements or traditions that contribute to the practice of dowry in Timergara One of the respondents told that;

*“New customs have developed furniture trend early time was the trend of tools and clothes. Now it become a tradition to have clothes for the relatives of husband if you do not have it. The people tell this she brought clothes for plana and do not bring for plana so by this way (dowry) adopted a form tradition and culture and still continue” ( Respondent NO 4; dated: 06/01/2024).*

Other participants said that;

*“Yes, in early time the people were dealing the dowry in Islamic point of view. now there is competition with the sister-in-law that she has these things so I must have the same things that kind of thinking developed a form of tradition, custom and culture” (Respondent NO 5; dated: 10/01/2024).*

Another respondent explained that;

*“Yes, day by day the trend is improving and the people are demanding for huge dowry. On the basis of this the relation become disturbed between the families. In early time it was a very simple form of dowry was. But now it become a tradition that you people must do the current dowry” (Respondent NO 8; dated: 16/01/2024).*

Another respondent stated that;

*“Yes, most of people they financially afford it. They give this system to those who are financially strong and financially afford it. They do to develop this custom they do the gold in dowry, sir, they dowry was done by our Holy Prophet SAW for his daughter Hazrat Fatima. But she was given only the specific tools for her needs not more than the need now it*



Vol. 3 No. 7 (July) (2025)

*become a form of custom and culture which is not good job” ( Respondent NO 12: dated: 22/01/2024).*

*Another participant said that;*

*“Yes, it increases day by day. Those who can afford the dowry for daughters they are rich due to these rich people the dowry system is developing because in early time the dowry was simple but now the people made it a form of custom and culture” (Respondent NO 13: dated: 22/01/2024).*

## **Subtheme 4.2: What do you think? Are there any Social, Psychological, Physiological and Economic Factors of Dowry on Women in the Community?**

### **Subtheme 4.2.1: To Understand the Social, Psychological, Physiological and Economic Factors of Dowry on Women with Reference**

The status of a bride in her husband’s family typically depends on the amount of dowry she brings along with her at the time of marriage. A bride, whose family fulfills the dowry demand at the time of marriage, usually enjoys better status in her husband’s family and better treatment from her in-laws. Consequences faced by the bride if dowry demand is not met include social, mental (psychological) and physical abuse of young wives, ill-treatment and neglect. Suicide of the bride as a reaction to dowry related abuse and accidental burning of the bride is also common (Menski, 1998).

*The researcher asked a question from respondents to understand the social, psychological, physiological and economic factors of dowry on women in the community. one of respondent stated that;*

*“Yes affected because when a female is married and she will not have the dowry. She has no value in that house she is telling that you have not bring the dowry. What you will do more. she not involves in decision making it is a social effect of dowry. She will go to depression and when she go to depression she will become weak physiological, economically if the sister-in-law tells her what you have brought from your father home? You are talking here. So this is economic factor on woman and our family the father not engaged his daughter they have a field near the house they are having ladyfinger in the field and caring own life. But still the sister-in-law tells them you peoples are Burdon on my husband” (Respondent No 1: dated: 02/01/2024).*

*Another respondent said that;*

*“Yes, definitely having impacts. If she has full dowry, she will have the right of decision the people obey her command compare to this if a girl have low dowry, she has no right of decision to take she cannot do her own choice. She becomes depressed and taking tension and she became weaken physically and her life is affected. If a girl is the daughter of a poor person the people not engage her because he cannot afford the dowry so it is the economic factor on woman” (Respondent No 4: dated: 06/01/2024).*

*Another participant told that;*

*“Yes, having impact when a woman is married to husband house the people there in house are not treating her well because of low dowry due to poorness.*



## Vol. 3 No. 7 (July) (2025)

*All the peoples such as father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law even her husband not daring her properly, psychologically she becomes depressed developed tension and cannot expressed her view. Physically she becomes weak by beating sometime it also has economic impacts” (Respondent No 5: dated: 10/01/2024).*

Another respondent stated that;

*“Yes, why not it is in our front has done. It self with my friend who had not full dowry while the other sister-in-law had full dowry both were in the same home. The one who do not have the kitchen tools totally when told to her to bring the kitchen tools she says that I was entered to room and I was weeping because she could not have the tools and the people were demanding her for tools, as a result she divorced by not having full dowry and the rest of her two sisters still unmarried due to this huge dowry system. Socially she was not treated well she was not giving good respect in the house even in the neighbour she had no respect when there were any Gham or khadi it was telling her that she does not have this thing in front of him it was telling while the other who had the full dowry, she was having good respect. The husband also was not*

### **Discussion**

Majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the dowry is good if this is normal kinds of dowry which can easily afforded by the parents. The results of the current study shows that when the bride takes all the house hold accessories which includes; kitchen set, furniture, refrigerator, gold/Jewelry and washing machine to husband house at marriage. According to Jejeebhoy (2000), dowry is usually the transfer of clothing, furniture, jewelry, livestock, household items, cash and other valuables from the parent house to husband house at the time of marriage (Jejeebhoy, 2000).

Furthermore, the present study also found that the perception of the people is negative to the current dowry system, as it is a huge dowry system which cannot fulfilled by poor peoples for their daughters. Furthermore. If the dowry demand is unsatisfactory then the bride will have to face many issues in the husband house. As she is mistreated, tortured, dis honoured, harassed and violated by the husband's family sometime this situation leads to disturbed the relationship between the two families. Sometime if a person has more daughters, they remain unmarried throughout life and no one is willing to marry with his daughter because of poor family background and will not be able to fulfil the dowry for the daughters. Compare to this if the bride has more dowry enjoying the happy life in the husband's house. According to Singh, 2005 and Haveripeth, 2013, they explain that in many cases, brides are often harassed, ill-treated and tortured when the dowry amount is considered insufficient (Singh, 2005; Haveripeth, 2013). Violence against women Dowry-related and bride-burning are only a phenomenon are happening in our country. In addition, his relatives also unite to persecute the bride, because dowry related customs provide them with a good excuse to embarrass, humiliate and even beat of women (Haveripeth, 2013).

### **Socio-Culture Set Up of the Locality is Responsible for Dowry Practices**

The participants of the study are of the view that in early times the dowry system was very simple and could be fulfilled by the parents easily for their daughters.



## Vol. 3 No. 7 (July) (2025)

But now due to social patron and cultural norms the dowry demand has improved, if a person has more daughters, then the dowry demand is much more difficult for him to fulfil it as a result the girls remain unmarried at home or if they married with unsatisfactory dowry then women will have to face a lot of social, psychological and physical issues in the husband house. So, it concluded that the social and cultural pattern is responsible for the dowry system in the research area. However, according to Srinivas 1994, he said that the modern dowry now popular in South Asian countries should not be considered the same as the traditional dowry (Srinivas, 1994). Dowry practice in recent times are more lavish than their original modest forms and may be expected by the groom and his family, and the practice is often removed from inheritance upon death (Billing, 1992) has argued that modern dowries should be referred to as "groom price" rather than Not "groom price" rather than "dowry".

According to Perween, in 2020, the custom was responsible for multiple atrocities against women, including dowry-related violence; bride burning and wife murder, often leaving them vulnerable to neuroses and emotional problems that affect women's dignity impact (Perween, 2020). According to Ali et al., (2021) the custom of dowry is a common traditional practice in South Asian countries and is usually a gift given to a daughter in the belief that she will be cared for by her parents-in-law and earn an income. respect. The negative impact of dowry is related to women's status and decision-making power in the family. Additionally, dowry culture has a negative impact on brides and their families. In recent years, it has been found that the dowry system is closely related to the status of the bride's family. If the dowry system is not provided, it will cause the bride to lose decision-making power because she has no opportunity to express her opinion (Ali et al., 2021). These are the effects of dowry on the main influence of women. In contrast, if the bride has a good dowry, it will have a good impact on her life because she will be able to live a good and happy life.

Baker's concept for the explanation of dowry, this theory consists of two models (1) the price model and (2) the bequest model.

(I) According to this model, dowry is actually compensation from the woman's parents to the man's family, because the woman does not participate in market labour and does not contribute financially to the family income. Therefore, dowry is given to the bride as compensation to the groom.

(II) Bequest model: this model was also presented by Baker (1991).

According to this model the daughter has no right and do not inherit their parents' assets, thus the dowry can be given at the time of marriage. However, the dowry concept is not same everywhere in the world as explained by baker (1991). But this concept varies society to society and culture to culture and religion on the basis of social pattern and culture values. This concept is very common that there should be a dowry for the bride and it is considered a kind of honour and respect given to bride at marriage as our holy prophet (PBUH) also given some kind of things to his daughter Hazrat Fatima at marriage as dowry. In early time the dowry system was simple which could manage by each and every person easily for the daughter. But with passage of time due to social pattern and culture values the dowry system improved and become difficult for poor parents to manage. As it has created so many social, psychological and physical issues for girls and women if the dowry is unsatisfactory



Vol. 3 No. 7 (July) (2025)

## Recommendations

In the light of the above study, the following suggestions and recommendations are put forwarded for further improvement and considerations;

- Society needs to take seriously the practice of paying dowry as immoral to poor families.
- The government must pass a bill or law to eradicate this practice and ensure the safety of the victims and the perpetrators will be heavily fined/charged.
- Local Mashraans (community elders) rationally decide whether the custom of dowry is rooted in the foundation of our religion.
- Dowry is gradually becoming a common practice in civilization. Therefore, parents must stop asking for dowry.
- There should be NGOs making honest efforts to control the system.
- The government needs to formulate strict policies to restrict dowry for all classes in Pakistan.
- Expand this study to all provinces of Pakistan to generalize the findings. At the same time, the sample should be large. It is also recommended to obtain data from both urban and rural areas.
- Governments and other social fabric builders have a responsibility to work towards banning this evil practice.
- It is the duty of lawyers to explain the practice of dowry in the light of legal principles so as to stop the practice of dowry.
- Modern media such as television, radio, movies, newspapers, and the Internet should carry out anti-dowry propaganda and launch various anti-dowry programs to make people believe that dowry is not only illegal but also immoral. There is a need to create awareness in society about the ill effects of the dowry system.
- Religious scholars should emphasize the factual teachings of Islam regarding dowry practices and discourage all traditional practices. This will directly improve the status of Pakistani women despite the patriarchal nature of Pakistani society.

## References

- Ali, T. S., Árnadóttir, G. and Kulane, A. 2013. Dowry practices and their negative consequences from a female perspective in Karachi, Pakistan—a qualitative study. *Health*, 5(7D), 84.
- Banerjee, P. R. 2014. Dowry in 21st-century India: the sociocultural face of exploitation. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, 15(1), 34-40.
- Basias, N. and Pollalis, Y. 2018. Quantitative and qualitative research in business and technology: Justifying a suitable research methodology. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, 7, 91-105.
- Goody, J., 1976. *Production and reproduction: a comparative study of the domestic domain* (No. 17). Cambridge University Press.
- Guion, L. A., Diehl, D. C., and McDonald, D. 2001. Conducting an in-depth interview (pp. 1-3).
- Gulzar, S., Nauman, M., Yahya, F., Ali, S., and Yaqoob, M. 2012. Dowry system in Pakistan. *Asian Economic and Financial Review*, 2(7), 784-794.



## Vol. 3 No. 7 (July) (2025)

- Khattak, D., and Bezhan, F. 2021. Terrible Tradition': Pakistan's Crippling Dowries Put Huge Burden On Poor Brides. Retrieved February 20, 2022, from <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-dowry-tradition-poverty/31116294.html>
- Makino, M. 2014. Dowry and women's status in rural Pakistan. Interim report for institutional empowerment. IDE-JETRO.
- Masrat Musavi, Fatima- The Ideal Model for Women of All Time, Imam Reza 2003. McCarty Hall, FL: University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, EDIS.
- Parker, C., Scott, S., Geddes, A., Atkinson, P., Delamont, S., Cernat, A., ... and Williams, R. 2019. SAGE research methods foundations.
- Ragab, M. A., and Arisha, A. 2018. Research methodology in business: A starter's guide. *Management and organizational studies*, 5(1), 1-14.
- Rao, V. 1993. Dowry 'inflation' in rural India: A statistical investigation. *Population Studies*, 47(2), 283-293.
- Saravanan, S. 2000. Violence against women in India. A Literature Review. Delhi, Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST).
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. 2009. Research methods for business students. Prentice Hall.
- Singh, M. 2013. Dowry as a factor of violence in Marriage: A study of Women seeking help in Family Counseling Centers in Chandigarh. *International Journal of Advancements in Research and Technology*, 2(6), 40-52.
- Tambiah, S. J. 1973. Dowry and bridewealth and the property rights of women in South Asia. *Bridewealth and dowry*, 59, 166.
- Tertilt, M. 2005. Polygyny, Fertility and Savings. *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol.
- Ullah, A., Liqat Ali, H. A., Ali, H., Gul, S., and Tariq, M. 2020. The Ubiquitous Phenomena of Dowry Practice and Its Relation with Women Prestige in District Swabi Pakistan. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17(6), 14176-14189.
- Ullah, Q., & Ali, A. (2025). Social Stigma: An Association of Social Exclusion of Women with Disabilities in Kohat Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy*, 3(1), 243-252.