Religious Influences on Marriage Expectations: Lived Experiences of Newly Married Women in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

In Pakistan marriage is most valued occasion in both culturally and religious context. For newly married women, religious and societal norms shaped her marital duties, gender roles, and family responsibilities. As religion provides a moral and spiritual framework, along with cultural practices, these create a tension between tradition and personal aspirations. Understanding these lived experiences is vital for addressing marital adjustment and gender equity within culturally and religious bounded societies. The current study explores the lived experiences of newly married Muslim women in Mianwali, Pakistan, focusing on how religious beliefs influence their marital expectations. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, having a purposive sample of twelve women (N=12) aged 22 to 28, married in last three years. Thematic analysis of the data shown six master themes: (i) Self-governance, reflecting negotiations for autonomy within religious and cultural boundaries; (ii) Harmony, focusing on marital unity and spiritual companionship; (iii) Faith Integration, demonstrating the centrality of Islamic guidance in defining roles and responsibilities; (iv) Normativity, emphasizing the influence of cultural and religious norms on marriage; (v) Stewardship, signifying the responsibility to maintain the sanctity of marriage and the family's honor; and (vi) Social Labeling, emphasizing the impact of social perception on women's marriage roles. The findings show that religion acts as a source of support and a arena within which individual and traditional aspirations negotiate. There are marital counseling, policy advocacy, and gap advocacy programs to promote balance religious obligations and equality among marital partners.

***Keywords:** Religion, Marriage Expectations, Islamic Teachings, Phenomenology, Gender Role*

INTRODUCTION

In almost all societies of the world, marriage is highly influenced by culture and religion. Religious teachings view marriage not just as a social contract but as a sacred covenant that fosters emotional, moral, and spiritual unity. Islam emphasizes peace, love, and mercy between spouses, shaping expectations and roles within marital life. Faith-based practices help resolve conflicts, maintain harmony, and strengthen long-term commitment. Cultural norms, especially in countries like Pakistan, often blend or clash with religious ideals, affecting women's autonomy and marital satisfaction. Modern Muslim women face the challenge of balancing traditional roles with contemporary ideals of

equality. Overall, religion remains a central force guiding marital expectations, experiences, and outcomes.

Most people believe that religion is a positive and powerful influence that generates marital happiness and stability (Hussain et al., 2019). This is corroborated, and it is evident that religious practice and belief are important factors in shaping modern societies. Religious activity and the duration of marriage have been researched and found to go hand in hand (Latifa & Amelia, 2021). This shows that religious teachings not only solidify marital unions but also provide principles that help hold them together in the long run. Religious teachings establish marital roles, duties, and moral codes, and act as a force that directs couples through marital issues (Lakatos & Martos, 2021).Religious organizations offer couples spiritual direction, moral instruction, and social support that foster long-term unions. Religious activity among the majority of couples increases trust, shared values, and long-term commitment, which improves overall marital satisfaction. Besides religious belief, communal religious activities and social support systems also contribute to strengthening marital relationships through the development of belonging and shared identity (David & Stafford, 2015).

The Quran teaches that marriage is meant to create *sakinah* (peace), *mawaddah* (love), and *rahmah* (mercy) in relationships between spouses (Quran 30:21). These are the pillars of a successful Islamic marriage and the expectations people have when they enter this lifelong covenant.

The Role of Faith in Enforcing Marital Bonds

Religiousness contributes to marital satisfaction and stability. Research indicates that couples who practice religion regularly, either in terms of prayer, Bible study, or attending church, are more compatible and resilient in their marriage (Mahoney et al., 2001). Islam instills in both wives and husbands an attitude of encouragement and support toward the spiritual development of the spouse and overall growth, as the model for tolerance, forbearance, and patience in marriage is set by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Another key element of successful marriages is the use of relationship maintenance strategies. These are conscious behaviors or actions geared toward building and sustaining relationships, often referred to as the building blocks of a healthy relationship (Ventura-León et al., 2023). Such strategies include effective communication, mutual understanding, shared goals, conflict resolution, and emotional support systems, all of which help sustain long-term partnerships (Dainton & Stafford, 2000).

Marriage, as a universal institution, is also influenced by cultural, racial, and ethnic factors. Religious beliefs shape expectations of marriage that emphasize roles, responsibilities, and objectives. Islamic law stresses the necessity of love, mercy, and respect, as well as prescribing economic arrangements, family structures, and gender roles (Dudziak, 2024). In Pakistan, knowledge of marital expectations is especially significant because it helps explain why some marriages dissolve or why individuals remain in unfulfilling unions (Ali, 2022). Social expectations, economic pressures, and religious instruction all influence marital experiences. Research shows that economic security, family involvement, and compliance with religious observances significantly shape marital satisfaction in Pakistan (Aman et al., 2019). The rationale for this practice is to ensure compatibility in religion, ethnicity, and social background. Islamic theology, however, stresses *ikhtiyar* (choice) in marriage, and both men and women have the right to accept or refuse a proposal (Afshar, 2018). Islamic doctrine places a strong focus on the fact that marriage is not merely a legal agreement but also a spiritual and emotional union. The Quran refers to spouses as clothes for each other (Quran 2:187), symbolizing protection, comfort, and closeness. This creates an expectation that marriage should be emotionally secure and spiritually companionate, not merely economic or social.

In the majority of Muslim societies, the deen (religious devotion) is at the center of the marriage decision making processes. Hadith is well documented and tells us that a woman can be wedded on four fronts namely, wealth, family, beauty and religion; nevertheless, the finest criterion is religious

piety (Sahih al-Bukhari 5090). This explains the significance of religion in shaping expectations of a partner. Both men and women are taught to marry people who will help them develop religiously and uphold Islamic practices in their homes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marriage in the Islamic societies is a contract of necessity as well as religious obligation and stability in addition to moral order. The research discussed in this review is how the Islamic teachings influence marriage expectations, choice of partners, roles, and responsibilities and how marriage changes in modern Muslim society. Marriage among Muslims is founded on love, mercy and respect. Quran and the Hadith clearly define what marriage entails and what is expected. According to the Qur'an:

One of His signs is that He created to you mates among yourselves, that you may live in peace with them, and He has placed love and mercy between your hearts (Qur'an 30: 21).

This verse brings out the religious and emotional value of marriage which is centred on companionship, peace and love. Marriage in Islam is a social obligation and an individual duty, which is aimed at achieving peace and compliance with the religious teachings in the society. It gives a structure to family life and prevents the immoral life. Results indicate that, although religious compatibility is important, the contemporary Muslim societies also appreciate education, financial success, and freedom of choice in selecting a partner (Kamran and Iftikhar, 2023). The clash between the old Islamic values and the new demands is different with the culture.

According to research by Yusuf (2015), although traditional gender roles are still practiced, most Muslim couples are negotiating their duties according to practicality and not strict expectations. This is an expression of constant discussions between modernity and religious teachings (Kiram, 2025). Parenting is a shared responsibility in the Islamic religion and both parents have a role to play in imparting religious and moral teachings to their children. The elements of globalization and exposure to other cultural norms have influenced the Muslim different perceptions towards marriage. Despite the fact that the majority of population continue to embrace the Islamic ideals, modern values like gender equality, love marriages, and individuality are becoming more and more acceptable (Szarota et al., 2021). In Islamic societies, family is very crucial when making marital decisions. Arranged/family arranged marriage is still common and the families will do compatibility basing on religion, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Safdar et al., 2021). The young Muslim especially in the western setting find it hard to balance between religious demands and the ideals of equality and friendship. According to research by Ali and Khalid (2020), social media, education, and migration have contributed to modern patterns of marriage among the Muslims considerably. Islamic marital expectations are usually influenced by the culture although there are specific religious teachings (Giuliani et al., 2018). The experiences of Muslims indicate a pressure-release effect on both religious values and the contemporary social forces. There is need to conduct more research on the interaction between these forces within various cultural setting.

Rationale

Marriage in Pakistan is a deeply valued institution, strongly influenced by both Islamic teachings and cultural traditions. For newlywed women, expectations surrounding marital duties, gender roles, and family responsibilities are shaped by religious instruction and social pressures. Empirical studies show that religiosity and religious practice are significantly associated with higher marital satisfaction and commitment among Pakistani couples (Perveen & Malik, 2020; Aman, Saima, Nosheen, Hussain, & Adiba, 2024). However, there is limited qualitative research exploring how these religious and cultural influences are experienced by women immediately after marriage.

This study seeks to examine:

1. The Islamic teachings and moral principles that guide Muslim women's understanding of marriage, including dowry, financial responsibilities, consent, and respect.

2. How local cultural traditions and family practices shape or modify those expectations.

3. The way contemporary factors like education, exposure to the media and changes in the social norm inform the desire to have companionship, share responsibilities and emotional satisfaction.

4. The stresses arising new women experience when their personal ambitions do not align with family or social demands in terms of career engagement, financial sufficiency, choice of partners, and gender roles.

Through these intersections, the study will address a knowledge gap on the negotiation between religious identity, cultural tradition and personal agency in the early marital stage of Muslim women in a collectivist society.

Theoretical Framework

Epigenetic Model, Family System Theory of Bowen.

To examine the impact of religious factors on the marriage expectations of Muslim women, the study employs a synthesis methodology that joins both Erikson and Bowen models in which Erikson developed the Epigenetic Model way back in 1963 and Bowen the Family Systems Theory way back in 1978. This strategy illustrates the interaction between family emotional processes, self-awareness, and relationship behavior with the life stage of a person, more so, the Intimacy vs. Isolation stage, to determine what they desire of marriage.

According to the model by Erikson, the dreams of marriage of a Muslim woman are conditioned by her childhood life experiences in the areas of close communication, emotional attachments, and social expectations.

Her spiritual guidance and the way she develops in faith impact on the way she passes the stage which impacts how she perceives commitment, companionship and emotional satisfaction in marriage.

The Family Systems Theory by Bowen examines the family structures, emotional attachments and individuality which influences the choices taken on marriage.

In community and family oriented cultures such as in most of the Muslim societies, individuals tend to strike a balance in what they want and what the family desires. The level at which a woman is able to articulate her marriage aspirations is based on the emotional encouragement a woman receives at a familial level, the anticipations of the society, and the doctrines of her religious beliefs. The manner in which beliefs and values are transmitted between generations is also exhibited by this theory that determines the way of building relationships and balancing between tradition and modern thoughts in Muslim marriages.

Applications of Theory

Religious and family effects are significant in determining what Muslim women expect out of marriage. Their socialization, beliefs, and family customs define norms of a proper conduct of wife and husband in a marriage union. More emotionally independent women can be in a better position to reinforce the demands of religious regulations and their personal objectives. But still, women who are

not as emotionally independent might find it difficult to pick one partner or to cope with the roles of marriage under the influence of outside factors. Marriage expectations are also influenced by the process of communication and emotional connections that fulfill the family.. Families that have strong, open relationships tend to have healthier views on marriage, while families that are too emotionally close may impose strict or conflicting expectations on their daughters regarding marriage. The balance between traditional Islamic teachings, societal norms, and modern ideas about gender roles creates a space where Muslim women can redefine their marriage goals while still staying true to their faith. This study uses both Erikson's theory of development and Bowen's systems theory to explain how religion, family, and society together shape the experiences and marriage expectations of Muslim women

METHODOLOGY

The chapter of research methodology allows ensuring the notion of data collection and analyzes the pattern of collected data to generate the lived experiences of Muslim women. Using a qualitative method, the researcher examines how religious beliefs and values influence the expectations and decision- making processes of Muslim women in the context of marriage.

Research Design

Qualitative research was conducted to explore the lived experiences of religious beliefs, practices impact on marriage expectancies using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). For investigating subjective, individual experiences and meanings, IPA is the perfect methodology to gain detailed information. To find patterns and themes, semi-structured interviews was conducted and then subjected to a methodical analytical approach.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sample strategy used in order to pursue an exploratory IPA research design for the qualitative study.

Sampling Size

A sample size of 12 (N=12) newlywed women is anticipated to be used to reach data saturation.

Inclusive criteria

- Women between the ages of 22 to 28 who recently got married.

- The sample of this research belonged to Punjab, Pakistan

- The inclusion is limited to only married Muslim women.

Exclusive criteria

- Men of all ages were not be allowed.

- Females aged 29 to so on not allowed.

- Every other religion is disregarded.

Procedure

Initially, all participants were given a written document that explained the study's purpose, what would happen during the research, and their rights as participants. The document helped clear the fact that they were joining at their own will and could leave this time at any time without any inconveniences and that the information they would provide would remain confidential and anonymous. The interviews were conducted in compliance with the ethical standards of qualitative research because the participants had signed a written consent form before the process started (British Psychological Society, 2021; APA, 2020).

The data collection was carried out using face to face interviews which were guided by a loose structure to enable the subjects to express their subjective experiences in regards to the extent to which religion influences their expectation in marriage. The interview was conducted in the language preferred by the participants, and was ranging between 45 to 70 minutes. They were held in places that the participants selected to make sure they felt comfortable and private. Most of the interviews (N = 12) happened in the Punjab province of Pakistan. With the participants' permission, all interviews were recorded on audio and also written down by the researcher in field notes. Following data collection, interviews were transcribed verbatim, anonymized, and checked for accuracy. Transcripts were then subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which involved iterative reading, coding, and the development of emergent themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2022). The analytic process emphasized reflexivity and transparency to ensure rigor and credibility in capturing participants' lived experiences.

Measures

Semi Structured Interview

For the purpose of this study, firstly design the interview protocols that contains total 12 questions, these questions cover all aspects of research. During the interview cross questioning was also done where ever necessary.

Data Analysis

To investigate the lived experiences of religious influence on marriage expectations in Mianwali, this study was use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The sub-ordinate themes were generated from the interview, then super-ordinate themes and master-themes were created respectively.

Ethical Consideration:

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), ensuring respect for human dignity, autonomy, and the protection of participants' rights. Prior to data collection, all participants were provided with a written information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their rights, including the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the commencement of interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants and removing any identifying information from transcripts. Data were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the research team. Given the sensitive nature of marital and religious discussions, participants were assured that their responses would not be shared beyond the research context and would be used solely for academic purposes.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board/Ethics Committee of University of Mianwali (UMW). The study adhered to principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, ensuring that participants were not exposed to harm or coercion, and that their contributions were

valued with sensitivity and cultural respect.

RESULTS

This study examined the lived experiences of Muslim women in Punjab Province related to religious influence in their marriage expectations and norms. An interpretative phenomenological analysis carried out with 12 participants using semi structured interviews with women, who share their experiences about marriage expectations. The various responses of respondents were analyzed on the basis of various themes.

Table 1

Demographic Table

Participants	Age	Family Type	Marriage Duration
P1	23	Nuclear	9 months
P2	22	Join	2.5 months
P3	25	Join	7 months
P4	22	Nuclear	5 months
P5	24	Join	8 months
P6	25	Nuclear	7 months
P7	24	Joint	8 months
P8	25	Nuclear	8.5 months
P9	22	Joint	7.5 months
P10	23	Nuclear	7 months
P11	24	Joint	8 months
P12	25	Nuclear	7.5 months

Note. N=12

Table 2

Subordinate Themes, Super-ordinate Themes, and Master Themes.

Subordinate Themes	Super-ordinate Themes	Master Themes
Personal preference versus parental pressure.		
	Autonomy	
Family endorsement in choosing mates	Independence	
Gender roles according to slam	Responsibility	**Self -governance**
Companionship expectations	Support	
Emotional support within marriage. Simplicity within religious rituals.	Intimacy	
	Minimalism	
Parental approval in marriage	Consent	
Honesty's role in relationships		
Perseverance and commitment in marriage		
Expectations of emotional support		**Fidelity**
Marriage as a partnership		
Struggle to balance expectations		
Value of shared understanding	Attunement	
Adjusting expectations with time	Marital adaptation	
	Faith	
Religious identity shaping decisions	Social conformity	**Harmony**
Managing societal expectations	Balance	
Equity in marital values	Sincerity	
Honesty and truthfulness		

Religious practices above social customs	Internalization	
	Consecration	
Religious self-empowerment in marriage		
Religious influence changing on	Faith Reframing	**Faith Integration**
	Sanctity	
perspective and marriage as a duty		
Religious Significance of Nikkah and Waleema		

Simplicity vs. extravagance in marriage		
	Materialism/minimalism	
Islamic responsibilities of spouses	Role Expectation	
Social norms versus religious	Conflict/Normative dissonance	**Normativity**
teachings	Guidance	
Islamic counsel on marriage roles.		

Financial and emotional accountability	Answer ability	
	Financial stability	
Financial security in marriage		
	Pragmatic	**Stewardship**
Balancing economic realities		

Impact of religious background	Schema	
Divorce fear	Social stigma	
Social pressure and criticism	Judgment	
Impact of religious and cultural identity	Tradition	**Social Labelling**
	Stigmatization	
Social criticism and malicious		
gossip.		

Master Themes

This Qualitative study subsumed seven master themes on father experiences on inter- family marriages. Following are the mater themes of these findings.

Figure 1

Master themes of marriages expectations
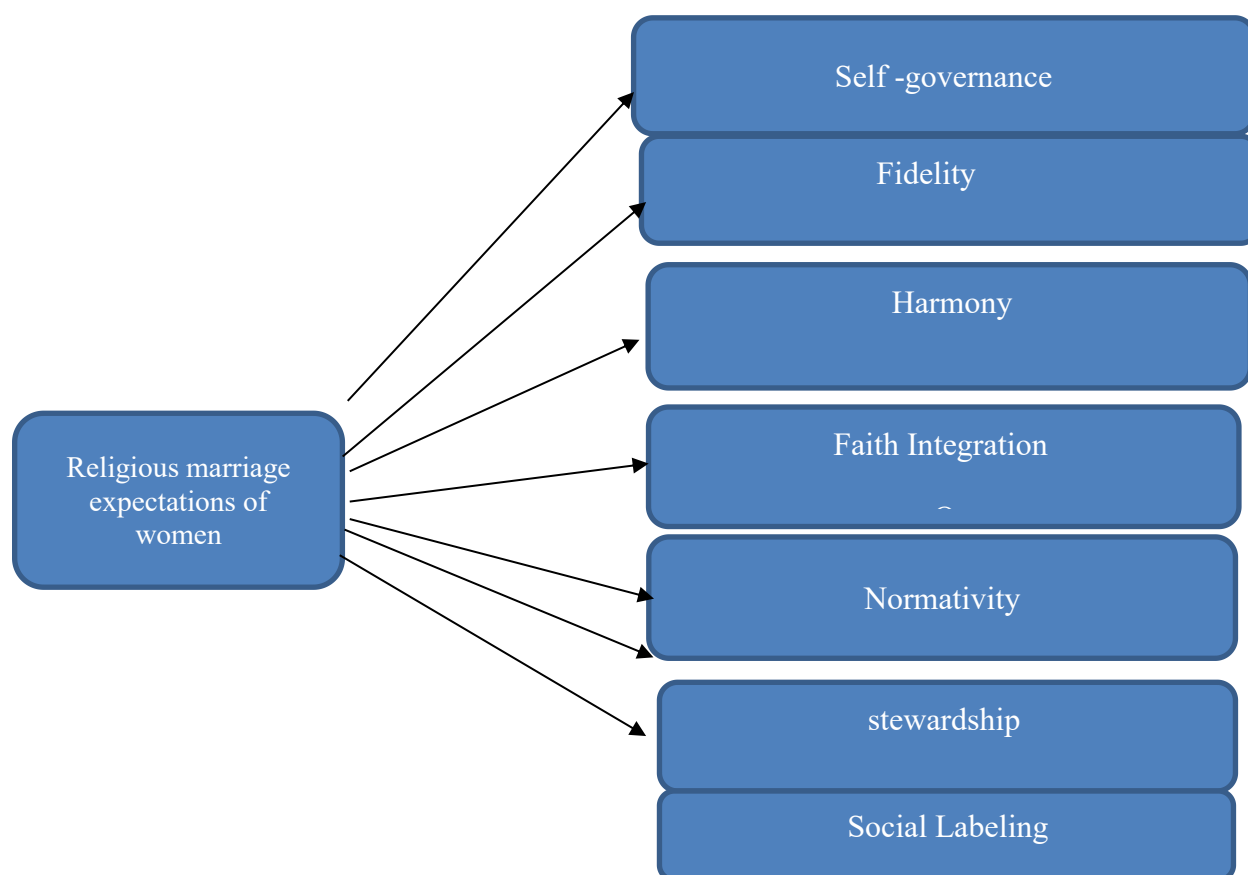
A detail discussion of the themes, along with a verbatim statement, has been given below:

Theme 1: Self-Governance

This thee refer to the Individuals' ability to make independent decisions about their lives and relationships, particularly in marriage. In many traditional communities, especially those with strong religious or familial values, self-governance frequently clashes with collective decision-making.

Religion can either empower self-governance through moral clarity or constrain it through prescribed norms. Parents' approval is still culturally significant, but it can also challenge one's sense of independence. People may want to choose their spouse based on emotional connection or compatibility, but they are frequently under pressure to follow family decisions.

People frequently battle internally with balancing their desire for self-governance with their respect for religious and familial authority. A person may, for instance, feel spiritually empowered to refuse an arranged marriage yet be tormented by guilt or fear of social rejection at the same time.

"According to Islam, marriage is a sunnah, which means it is a sacred connection that completes a person's beliefs."

In this situation, self-governance becomes a negotiation with inherited ideals as well as a personal position. Self-governance becomes a well-rounded kind of moral agency when it is backed by religious teachings that place an emphasis on understanding and consent between parties (such as Islamic teachings on nikah).

"My expectations and experiences in marriage have been influence by my personal decision, cultural background and religious identity"

Having the freedom to choose a life mate on one's own. The women also right to accept or reject a proposal of marriage and want financial and emotional independence in making decisions in life.

"The Muslim women today feels that marriage should be performed with the approval of the parents, in contrast to the old believe that marriage should be one's own choosing."

Striking a balance between religious and familial obligations and personal desires. Accepting religious advice as a personal decision that is in line with one's spiritual beliefs rather than as a result of outside pressure.

" My culture and religious upbringing have aided in my understanding of my duties and in harmonious marriage, and also maintaining the religious component to prevent any rifts in our relationship. "

Theme 2: Fidelity

In a married relationship, fidelity is defined as emotional commitment, sexual exclusivity, and loyalty. In addition to being a personal commitment, it is also a moral and spiritual requirement that is closely linked to social standing and religious principles.

"I have discovered the marriage is a partnership that demands love, respect and compassion in addition to being a duty. society criticize on household matters can leads to miscommunication between husband and wife."

Trust and faithfulness are based on openness and honesty. Resilience and moral fortitude are demonstrated by maintaining faithfulness in the face of adversity. These create the emotional foundation for faithfulness to flourish. Fidelity is demonstrating constant dedication and emotional stability in addition to abstaining from treachery.

"Marriage will success and more relationship will be formed if more Islamic custom ae followed. Allah Talla will so safeguard the partnership and the couple."

The determination to maintain a relationship despite obstacles Strong emotional ties that encourage exclusion essential characteristics that guard against treachery and concealment. The way in which faithfulness is framed spiritually as a holy vow.

"from a religious perspective a Muslim lady wants to her husband to be a supportive, compassionate and straight forward. our faith is that our husband ought to be super hero who will always be there for us and emotionally connected with us."

It's interesting to note that emotional availability—not just refraining from adultery but continuing to be emotionally involved—was also brought up in relation to faithfulness. The urge to maintain

faithfulness is increased by the dread of divorce stigma and societal judgment, which can occasionally transform it from a true commitment to a show of loyalty. However, faithfulness becomes a source of identity and strength inside the marriage relationship when it is based on mutual trust and spiritual purpose.

Theme 3: Harmony

The emotional and relational balance that people and couples aim for in their married lives is encapsulated in harmony. To foster understanding and peace, it entails negotiating and integrating several levels of expectations, including societal, cultural, religious, and personal ones.

"Women preferences and religious percepts shapes Islamic marriage custom. according to Islamic traditions and arrange marriage makes for a happier and more powerful union. since love, respect and trust are the guiding principle of a traditional Muslim family."

This goal is reflected in subordinate themes like mutual understanding, changing expectations over time, attunement, balance, honesty and candor, sincerity, and marital adaptability.

The ability to balance cultural expectations with room for personal and collective ideals is necessary to achieve peace. Struggle to strike a balance between demands from religion, family, and personal preferences.

"Religious beliefs made me realize that the duties if husband and wife is not only fill full the responsibilities but also the respect each other families."

Equality in domestic duties and emotional work are two aspects of marriage as a partnership.
Being emotionally sensitive and receptive to one's spouse is known as attunement.
When the practical, spiritual, and emotional aspects of a marriage are in harmony, it represents the ideal condition. When expectations are not met or are not dispersed fairly, tensions can result.

Theme 4: Faith Integration

These ideas firmly establish marriage as a spiritual practice. Religious attendance actively impacts marital expectations, roles, and perseverance through adversity; it is not only symbolic.

The Prophet (PBUH) says that if servant has a right to prostrate to someone then it is only to a women husband. So, I say that if a woman doesn't respect her husband then this is a big downfall in his marriage.

Marriage rites and intentions are sacred. Reframing difficulties from a spiritual perspective is known as faith reframing. Marriage as a relationship approved by God.

"Allah has declared the husband and wife to be the comfort for each other and men is saved from other sins as well."

"Marriage complete a person faith. I think marriage is a good practice it gives respect and dignity in the society."

Religious occasions that represent social and spiritual validity are Nikah and Waleema.

Islam views marriage as a moral and spiritual need. Religious obligations to one another. Implementing Islamic precepts in daily married life. Deep personal beliefs shape conduct.

"Marriage has been done according to the Islamic shariah, first Nikah was done with simplicity and the second day the Waleema was done. I didn't have so much expectation about marriage custom but it has been fulfilled."

Making decisions based on spiritual convictions. Decisions based on religious consciousness. Conflict arises between Islamic moderation and societal aspirations. Using religious knowledge to establish marital duties. Integration is concerned with the congruence of beliefs and practices. These topics demonstrate how people negotiate between internalized religion and external demands in their marriage.

"Islamic teaching provides clear guidance on marriage and the role of spouses that shape expectations as a Muslim woman I believe wife has a duty respect her husband and husband should also be affectionate with his wife."

Theme 5: Normativity

This theme centers around the social and religious standards and norms that define appropriate roles, behaviors, and values within marriage. Includes equity in marital values, role expectation, social norms versus religious teachings, and Islamic counsel on marriage roles.

"In my experience, the religious identity, cultural background and personal choices happed my marriage expectations and experiences."

It reveals the ongoing negotiation between tradition and evolving interpretations of norms within both social and religious frameworks. Conflict/normative dissonance emerges when individual beliefs or practices do not align with dominant cultural or religious standards. Normativity shapes perceptions of what is "right," "expected," or "acceptable," impacting how individuals structure their marital choices and self-conceptions.

What is required of the community and tradition? Gender and culturally specific tasks are outlined. Tensions arise when values conflict with norms. Culturally inherited habits are typically strict.

"My expectations have changed a lot since i got married, and society criticism and meddling in household matters lead to miscommunications between husband and wife."

Materialism/minimalism is the contradiction between social display and religious restraint. When customary customs diverge from religious rules. Advocated in Islam but frequently undercut by culture.
Normativity illustrates how culture influences behavior—sometimes in ways that go against Islamic ideals. Navigating cognitive dissonance is a significant problem in modern partnerships.

Theme 6: Stewardship

This subject is about a sense of duty and accountability in marriage, particularly for financial and emotional well-being.
Subthemes include financial and emotional accountability, pragmatic answerability, financial security in marriage, reconciling economic reality, and financial stability.

"Islam teaches us to live a simple life because I am a simple girl so I didn't expect much from my marriage but my husband should be responsible for my expenses and be gentle with me, they should fulfill each other's rights and support each other. "

It also addresses ethical issues like as consumerism against simplicity and couples' Islamic duty to be caretakers rather than providers. Stewardship necessitates a deliberate approach to managing resources and duties, aligning them with both spiritual and practical living demands.

"I found fulfillment in my marriage against the expectations of my parents because my husband provides all necessities and adheres to the Rasool's principle in life and place a high priority on praying and worshiping Allah Almighty."

Theme 7: Social labeling

Social Labeling reflects how societal perceptions, stereotypes, and judgments shape individuals' experiences in marriage and beyond. The subthemes include societal pressure and criticism, divorce dread, schema, judgment, stigmatization, tradition, and malicious gossip.
Labels are frequently assigned based on marital status, religious beliefs, or deviance from social norms.
The fear of being branded or misunderstood can push people to comply to normative norms, even if they contradict their personal or religious beliefs.
Social labeling frequently overlaps with social conformity, determining how marriages are perceived and recognized by the community.

Seeking information in order to make educated, ethical judgments. Islamic counsel is advice based on the Qur'an, Hadith, and academic interpretations. Understanding one's roles and duties in religion.

Table 3

Themes and related quotes

Themes	Citations
Self-governance	*"The care of the self is a practice by which the subject—through reflection and discipline—constitutes himself as an ethical being."* *(Westerink, H. (2020)*
Fidelity	*"Fidelity is the moral glue that holds trust together, rooted in our awareness of the other's value and unwavering commitment to them."* *(Yack, B. 2019)*
Harmony	*"Harmony is the dynamic balance of varied forces that occurs when individuals and society align in mutual respect and order."* *(Lewicki, R. J., et al 2006)*

Faith Integration	*"A truly Christian college is one where every academic field is explored through the lens of Christian faith."* — *Arthur F. Holmes.* *(Kaak, P., 2016)*
Normativity	*"Normativity is the ability of living organisms to create and assess their own standards of existence, discriminating between what ought to be and what just is."* *(De Waal, F. B. M. 2014).*
Stewardship	*Stewardship is choosing service before self-interest and taking responsibility for the resources with which one is entrusted."* *(Pierce, J. L., 2001)*
Social Labeling	*"Deviance is not a property of the act that the individual does, but rather the result of others applying rules and consequences to a 'offender.'"* *(Kirk, D. S., & Papa Christos, A. V. 2011)*

Note: This table shows the master themes of this research, and also shows the related supportive quotes.

The study revealed that Islamic teachings play a dominant role in shaping the marital expectations and lived experiences of Muslim women in Mianwali, Pakistan. All participants viewed marriage as a divine obligation, deeply internalized since childhood as an essential aspect of faith. Religious doctrine influenced not only their understanding of marriage but also their daily roles, often placing spousal and familial duties above personal ambitions. This framework, where tradition, faith, and culture intersect, fostered resilience but also constrained women's agency by reinforcing rigid gender roles and limiting individual growth. While participants expressed devotion to religious values, the findings also showed that rigid interpretations of Islamic teachings could restrict autonomy and reinforce inequality. Thus, the results call for a balanced approach that upholds religious commitment while promoting gender equity and personal empowerment within the framework of Islamic principles.

DISCUSSION

The paper examined how faith influenced the newlywed Muslim women in their marital expectations in Mianwali. The results indicated that the role of religion played a very strong impact on their understanding of marriage, and it combined their individual agency, family roles, and social norms. All of the themes were standards of the Islamic marital life, yet the women were reducing them to cultural and social limitations. Most of them pointed out that they felt stronger after getting married but their independence was usually constrained by the norms of patriarchy. Nuclear families emphasized the significance of being independent and respecting and communicating with each other. Nevertheless, a significant number still had to have an agreement with their husbands to make certain decisions, which showed that there was still a conflict between individual agency and cultural demands. This dynamic corresponds to the theory of differentiation by Bowen according to which people bargain their identity in the system of the family, and according to Erikson, in the relations couples need both a sense of intimacy and independence. Love, forgiveness, and loyalty were the common themes that were played using the religious values. The expectation of the marital life focused on faith. The fidelity and trust that women stressed on were spiritual requirements that echo the Islamic teachings that marriage was a covenant. Similarity in religious practices was regarded as the key to stability and peace, loyalty and bonding of marriages.

Rate Value of Love

Love was the key aspect of marriage that was constantly mentioned by the participants and was interconnected with faith and loyalty. Mutual respect, trust and common values were considered as the key to the stability of marriage. Females considered open communication and covenant-building practices as a means of maintaining permanent peace. Their stories left no doubt that religious faith did not only offer moral guidance but also helped to reduce emotional distance so that love did not oppose spiritual and cultural obligations.

Harmony

Respondents imagined marriage as a partnership full of peace and caring. They referred to prophetic principles of love and mercy (e.g., Quran 30:21) when discussing a peaceful marriage. The women anticipated that the domestic disputes were to be solved fast since there was no third party (mother in law) and hence the Islamic principle of reducing the conflict between husband and wife. This indicates the cultural trend where couples in nuclear family are likely to experience better bonds and less interruptions by the aged. The issue of harmony is further connected to that of sacrifice and compromise in the intimacy stage of Erikson as a way of establishing a constructive relationship despite the individual pride. Practically participants mediated assertiveness and tolerance; as an example, one bride remembered how her mother told her, do not talk loud: remember that house is your last one, and it is your responsibility to protect your house. Through this, preservation of harmony in the house turns into a religious laden expectation, since the wives internalize social reproach to be patient and forgiving in the marriage.

Faith Integration

The role of Islam was directly incorporated into the marriage expectations of women. Many of them talked about the fact that they practiced gender roles in accordance with their religion which meant that religion was not distinct to them and instead it was central to their married life. An example is the reflection of a Quranic worldview as one of the respondents echoed the idea that men are Qawam... leader[s] of the house, whereas women complement one another in marriage- a view that is based on religiously specification of gender models. Other people even defined marriage as half their religion, based on the hadith, that whoever marries, safeguards half his religion. In this manner, the participants anticipated religious practices and direction (prayer, charity, moral instruction) to persist or even to increase once they get married. This combination implies that marriage is a social contract as well as a

religious one to these women: a promise that not only serves as a response to the divine commands (as literature on Islamic marriage insists) but also as a source of spiritual development.

Normativity and Stewardship

Religious norms prescribed distinct spousal roles and responsibilities that women accepted, albeit sometimes uneasily. Consistent with Islamic doctrine, participants expected husbands to be providers and protectors, and wives to offer respect, affection, and sexual fulfillment. For example, Islamic sources portray wives as obliged to "beautify themselves for the husband" and "be loyal," and many respondents echoed such beliefs. Similarly, the concept of stewardship—being entrusted with the well-being of home and family—emerged strongly. Quranic exhortations that wives "protect their property and chastity" were paraphrased by women as a sense of guardianship over the household, including finances and children. In their expectations, women saw themselves as caretakers of both family harmony and faith, responsible for rearing children with Islamic values. At the same time, most acknowledged internalizing a patriarchal norm: as one put it, religion taught that "men are one rank higher" and act as family leaders. These norms dovetail with cultural patriarchy documented in Pakistani contexts (Iftikhar et al., 2025). The study found that women generally accepted this gender hierarchy as religiously sanctioned, even as they envisioned a compassionate form of male leadership.

Social Labeling

Society was also affected by the interests of religion in influencing social image in women. Lots of subjects were painfully mindful of the tags that were attached to marital roles. They observed that the stories of the community (as well as religious proverbs) help to foster submission of the bride, one had been told that she should not speak high, otherwise, she will not be able to fulfill her role of saving the house. This kind of counsel indicates the strong social stigma of the so-called disobedient daughters-in-law. Prior to marriage, women tend to formulate great expectations and negative feelings about meeting in-law expectations and dreading any wrong move to be impious or dishonorable. Through this the social labeling serves as a force of unenforced religious and cultural rules: women will do anything to not be labeled as promiscuous or disobedient. The theme is also associated with the concept of mahram (family honor) in South Asian Muslim communities; the inclination of the participants to portray a religious image helps to support the family image in the religious context.

The results expand the past literature by demonstrating that using religion to influence the expectations of marriage even within smaller Pakistani cities, such as Mianwali, is actively practiced by young brides, as they integrate their own hopes with the ideals of the scriptures. This highlights to scholars and practitioners the significance of taking religious worldviews into consideration in terms of marital counseling and gender programs. As an example, it is important to be aware of the fact that women perceive marriage as a religious obligation, so that, it would be possible to use faith-based messages to encourage healthy communication and equity. Such interventions may be informed by Bowen family therapy which focuses on family roles and Bulut (2020) which focuses on spirituality.

Suggestions and Implications

These results have practical and theoretical implications. Clinicians and counselors working with Pakistani couples should engage with clients' faith context; for instance, incorporating Islamic concepts of marriage into therapy may resonate with couples' values. Marriage education programs might highlight egalitarian interpretations of religious texts to ease the tension between autonomy and duty. At a policy level, empowering newlyweds, especially in joint families, could involve workshops on rights and decision-making that respect cultural-religious norms while promoting women's agency. Theoretically, the findings invite integration of Eriksonian and systems perspectives: supporting healthy identity formation (per Erikson) and promoting differentiation of self (per Bowen) could

strengthen marital bonds under Islamic norms. Future research could explore how varying levels of religiosity or education influence these themes or compare urban and rural dynamics.

LIMITATIONS

This qualitative IPA study has limitations. The sample was small and regional, so findings may not generalize to all Pakistani or Muslim populations. Participants were all women; including husbands' perspectives would offer a fuller picture. The analysis focused on overt religious references and may understate more nuanced or dissenting views. Social desirability and the sensitive nature of marital topics might have influenced responses. As a phenomenological report, the discussion intertwines participants' voices with literature, but further quantitative work is needed to test these insights on a larger scale.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, newly married Muslim women in Punjab province shape their marital expectations through a deeply religious lens. Seven master themes emerged, reflecting how Islam informs notions of autonomy, fidelity, harmony, normativity, and social standing in marriage. Women saw marriage as both a sacred covenant and a social contract: they aspired to fulfill Islamic ideals of loyalty, love, and family stewardship, while also accommodating cultural norms of gender hierarchy. By placing faith at the center of marital meaning-making, these brides reinforce theoretical calls to integrate cultural-religious frameworks.

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