

**Drivers of Child Marriages among Girls: A Sociological Study in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Pakistan is the home to nearly 19 million child brides today. Statistics show that 18.7% of women aged 18-22 marry as children in the country. It is argued that social and cultural factors are the leading factors behind girl child marriages in rural settings in Pakistan. This study investigates the social and cultural factors as causes of girl child marriages in district Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province of Pakistan. A cross-sectional research design was applied to conduct a household survey of women respondents aged 15-49 years. The researchers used a questionnaire as data collection tool, and a sample of 384 married women was selected. The researchers took informed consent from all the respondents, and female research assistants were engaged to collect data from women in traditional cultural settings. Descriptive statistics were used to explain the dependent and independent variables, while a Pearson correlation test was applied to draw the correlation of girl child marriage and social factors as drivers of girl early marriage in the study locale. The results explained that girl child marriage is a harmful practice which is socially approved. It is also explained that family elders are the key decision makers of girl child marriage in their family ( $r = .202$ ,  $p$  value 0.001). It is also explained that Pakhtunwali is considered a code of life where girl child marriage is regularised in the social structure of Pakhtun society ( $r=204$ ,  $P$ . value 0.001). The research study recommends a behavioural change programme at the community and school levels to prevent girl child marriage in the country.*

**Keywords:** Girl, Child Marriage, Decision Making, Patriarchy, Pakhtunwali, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

**INTRODUCTION**

Human Rights Watch reports that two out of five girls are married as child in South Asian nations (Godha, 2013), while one in seven girls are wed before the age of 15 in underdeveloped countries. In Pakistan, child marriage of girls constitutes a violation of human rights and a detrimental societal practice that adversely impacts women and girls physically, psychologically, emotionally, and socially. The United Nations Women Report (UN WOMEN, 2024) indicates that Pakistan currently has approximately 19 million child brides. Feminists contend that child marriage is entrenched in gender inequality and the exclusion of women from decision-making processes in both private and public domains within patriarchal social structures (Efevbera, 2020). Behavioural scientists have demonstrated that women's voices are suppressed in male-dominated societies when their mate selection is determined by male family members (Zaidi, 2002; Sanday, 1981).

In Pakistan, various social and cultural factors promote child marriage among girls, especially in the rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Ullah, 2025). Studies show that the factors influencing girl child marriage include poverty, societal stigma linked to families with unmarried adolescent girls, religious justifications for early marriage, gender inequality in decision-making, and socially accepted harmful traditions, such as girl child marriage, which is viewed as an honour for families aiming to marry off their daughters. The presence of illiteracy within families, especially among girls, contribute to the prevalence of child marriage. An uneducated girl is often viewed as a liability to her family and is seen as a lifelong member of her husband's household (Naghizadeh, 2021). The studies indicate that parents desired their daughters to marry early, viewing this as a reflection of the family's social standing within the community. In patriarchal society, men act as the decision-makers, while the resolution of child marriage for girls mainly depends on parents and other elder family members (Nasrullah, 2014). In addition, societal stigma and worries about the harassment of girls lead parents to pursue early marriages for their daughters (Mirzaee, 2021; Raj, 2019).

In many disadvantaged households, the education of girls is often discouraged, leading to early marriages without the chance for individuals to choose their partners autonomously.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakhtunkhwali functions as a societal code that confines women to the domestic sphere, necessitating permission from their husbands or other male members of the family for any outdoor activities (Ali, 2024).

In rural patriarchal family structures, a harmful social practice persists that place significant emphasis on a woman's honour and dignity, which in turn fosters the encouragement of child marriage due to prevailing fears (Saeed, 2012). A multitude of international studies has pinpointed several factors that lead to girl child marriage; however, a deeper examination and clarification of the specific context within the studied region is necessary. This study investigates the social and cultural elements that clarify the connection between girl-child marriages and societal influences in Pakhtun society. This study employs feminist theory to clarify women's social standing within the patriarchal societal structure and to investigate gender discrimination in various social contexts.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakhtunkhwali serves as a societal code dictating that women are restricted to the domestic realm and require authorisation from their husbands or other close male relatives to venture outside (Ali, 2024). Numerous studies indicate that societal stigma and concerns regarding the harassment of girls prompt parents to seek early marriages for their daughters (Mirzaee, 2021; Raj, 2019). In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the predominant population adheres to Islam, which promotes the practice of child marriage for girls. In the province's rural regions, individuals adhere rigorously to Islamic teachings and arrange marriages for their daughters during their first menstruation. In rural patriarchal family structures, a detrimental social practice exists wherein a woman's honour and dignity are emphasised, leading to the encouragement of child marriage owing to fear (Saeed, 2012). Numerous global studies have identified various factors contributing to girl child marriage; nevertheless, the specific context of the studied area requires further analysis and elucidation. This research study examines the social and cultural factors that elucidate the relationship between girl-child marriages and societal drivers within Pakhtun society. This research use feminist theory to elucidate women's social status within the patriarchal societal framework and to examine gender discrimination in social contexts.

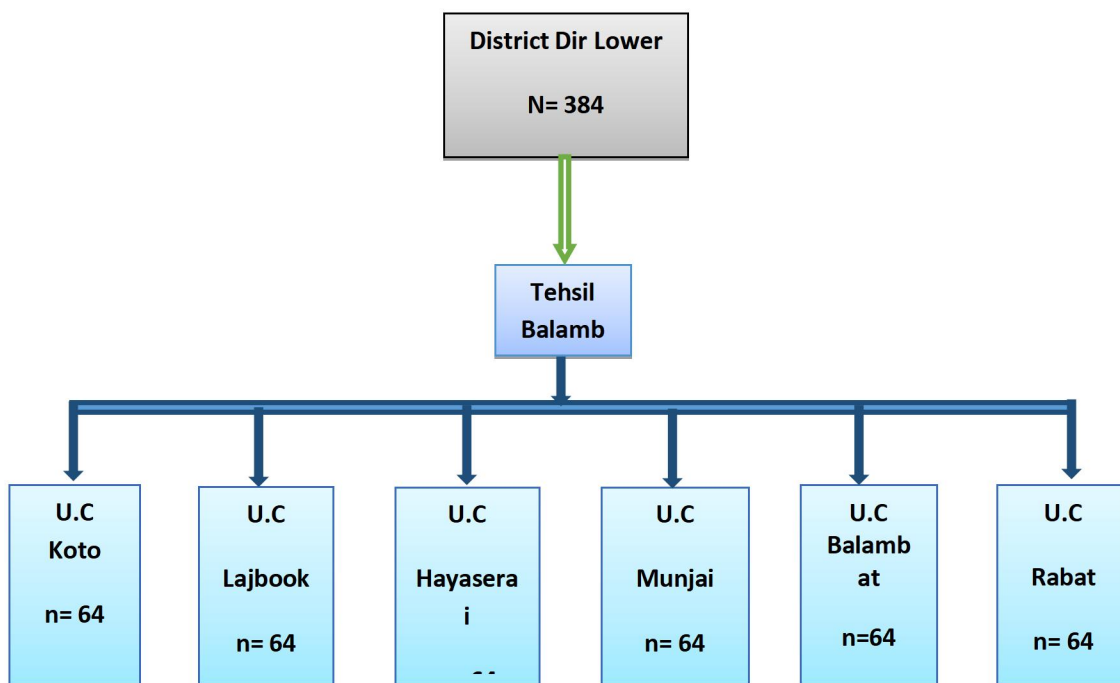
According to Human Rights Watch, two out of five girls are married as child in South Asian countries (Godha, 2013), while 1/7 girls married before 15 years of age in developing countries. In Pakistan, girl child marriage is the violation of human rights and a harmful social practice that affects women and girls physically, psychologically, emotionally and socially. According to United Nations Women Report (UN WOMEN, 2024), Pakistan is home to nearly 19 million child brides today. Feminists argue that girl child marriage is deep rooted in gender inequality and women no involvement in decision making process both

in the domestic and public sphere in patriarchal social structure (Efevbera, 2020). Behavioral scientists revealed that women voices are oppressed in male dominant society where their mate selection decision is made by the male family members (Zaidi, 2002; Sanday, 1981). In Pakistani rural settings the menstruation is considered the puberty of a girl, and the family decide her marriage whatever the age of the girl at the time of her first menstruation (Ali, 2006). Many social and cultural drivers are explained which encourage girl child marriage in Pakistan and particularly in the rural settings of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Ullah, 2025). Studies explained that drivers to girl child marriage are poverty, social stigma on family with unmarried adolescent girls, religious supportive argument to early marriage, gender inequality in decision making, and traditional harmful practices which are socially approved like girl child marriage is considered an honor for family as people want to marry with their daughters. It is also argued that illiteracy among family members and girls is a driver to girl child marriage because a girl without an education journey is considered burden on family and she is considered the permanent member of her husband's family (Naghizadeh, 2021). In a study it is also explained that parents desired that their daughters marry young, which is considered a sign of social acceptability of the family in the social settings. It is explained in many studies that in patriarchal structure of societies men are the decision makers and settlement of the girl child marriage is the primary responsibility of parents and other elder family members (Nasrullah, 2014). In many poor families' girls' education is discouraged which causes early marriage among girls with no mate selection self-choice. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, *Pakhtunkhwali* is a code of life for all family members where women are confined to domestic sphere, and they are not permitted to visit outside without the permission of husband or other close male family members (Ali, 2024). It is discussed in various studies that due to social stigma and fear of girls' harassment the parents want early marriage of their daughters (Mirzaee, 2021; Raj, 2019). In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, majority of the population follow *Islam* as a code of life which encourages girl child marriage. In rural areas of the province people strictly follow *Islamic* teaching and they arrange their girl's marriage with the first menstruation of their daughters. It is a harmful social practice that in rural patriarchal structure of families the honor and dignity is attached with a woman and due to this fear, they encourage girl child marriage in their families (Saeed, 2012). Many studies around the world explained various drivers of girl child marriage while in the study locale it needs investigation and its explanation. In this research study social and cultural causes are investigated to explain the correlation in girl child marriage and social drivers in *Pakhtun* society. In this research feminist theory is applied to explain the women social status in patriarchal structure of society and the gender discrimination in social settings.

## **METHODS**

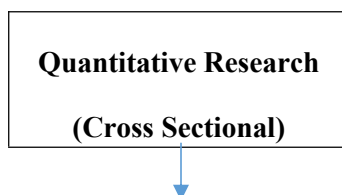
The present research study is developed from the MPhil thesis of the principal author of this article. To explain the relationship between dependent and independent variables a quantitative research design is used (Bloomfield, 2019). Cross-sectional research is used to look at the relationship between the contributing factors and the desired outcome. In the present research study researchers used quantitative research design with cross-sectional study approach. In the present study all married women aged 14-49 years in District Dir Lower Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were the study population. In the study district the total population of women are 7,10,335 (Idrees, 2019) and with Uma-Sekaran sample selection table a sample of 384 married women are selected as a sample population. The sample women are selected through simple random sampling technique in probability sampling method (Ishtiaq, 2019). The study locale is divided into administrative unit's tehsil and union councils through multistage sampling technique and then through proportionate sampling formula all the study sample is divided into selected villages and union councils.

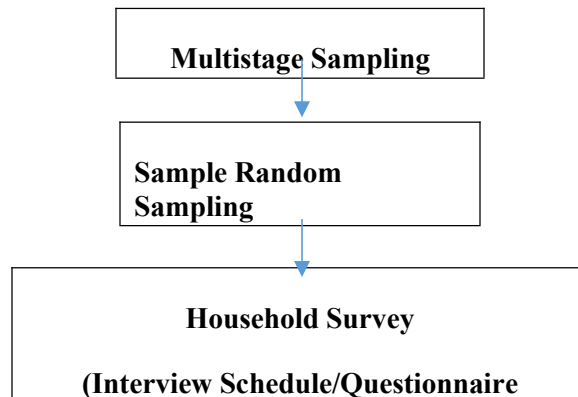
**Figure 1** Sample population selection in the study area in District Dir Lower



Source; Author, 2022.

**Figure 2** Research design and sampling techniques





*Source; Author, 2022*

In the study locale most of the married women are illiterate and uneducated therefore the researchers used self-administered interview schedule and questionnaire for data collection (Marshall, 2005). The data collection tool was developed after extensive literature review and observation of marriage ceremonies in the local area. The principal researcher also visited health facilities and village council offices to get information about the marriage registration and early pregnancies of married women. Data collection process refers to the method by which a researcher collects data from a specific population (Blackstone, 2018). The study is conducted in District Dir Lower where men are mostly the headed household and women are restricted from outer mobility and interaction with other men family members. Family members prohibited the women from sharing any information with other people. In the study area women interaction with other men is considered the matter of honor. Data collection process is one of the essential and important steps in field research (Mack, 2005). In the present study, due to culture sensitivity, norms, patriarchal social structure of the authority unknown male members are not allowed to interact with women. This sensitive issue makes the data collection process more difficult for the researcher and his team members. For this purpose, the researcher hired four women research assistants for data collection process to conduct and collect data and responses from early married women in the selected union councils of the study area. At first stage, researchers organized a two days' orientation session with women research assistants to orient them about the nature and scope of the study. The researchers also defined the terms and contextual meaning in the statements. On the second day, the researchers performed practical exercises of filling questionnaires and interviewing illiterate respondents. The researchers find out some of the mistakes in introducing the study objectives and introducing the purpose of the study. The principal researcher guides the women research assistants that what is the suitable way to collect correct and accurate responses from married women. After completion of two days' orientation session the principal researcher and women research assistants started data collection process in the study area. The data collection timing was from sunrise to sunset. The principal researcher visited different schools, colleges and universities to take appointments from the authorized persons and heads of the institutions. The principal researcher discussed the aims, objectives and purpose of the data collection to the head of the institutions and got their consent for data collection and allowing the assistants to visit the selected places. The principal researcher had hurdles and barriers in visiting and consenting them due to culture sensitivity, female staff and any other social or religious threat. Some of the people agreed to allow the research assistants while few of them refused the data collection team. After getting the consent of schools, colleges and university authorities the women research assistants visit already selected institutions for filling questionnaires. The researcher and women research assistants also visited to different households to collect data from early married women in selected union councils. This was one of the challenging and difficult process for researcher and women research assistants. As compared to schools, colleges and university to consent the women members at home was more difficult

to agree upon participating in the household survey. They were not easily agreed to participate in interviews and to fill in the questionnaire. Mostly they refused to share their perceptions and opinions about the statements. After a convincing discussion with their male family members and women respondents they were agreed to participate in the study. During data collection process as the principal researcher faced challenges and hurdles the women research assistants also faced various obstacles in the study area. the respondent women were worried about the confidentiality and worried if they shared their thoughts about the ideas, weather it does not increase the socio-health consequences of already happened early marriage. It was one of the obstacles for research assistant to make sure illiterate married women that their shared information will be kept confidential and only used for research purpose. The principal researcher and women research assistants collect data in the period of two months, (from 10<sup>th</sup> September to 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021). On the weekly basis the principal researcher collected data from women assistants and to check out every questionnaire. After two months of field work the data collection process was completed successfully. The process of analyzing, cleansing, manipulating, and modelling data with the objective of identifying usable information, informing conclusions, and assisting decision-making is known as data analysis. Descriptive statistics describe the relationship between variables in a sample or population to summarize data in an organized manner (Kaur ,2018). The researcher employed descriptive statistics and percentages of replies in this investigation. Inferential statistics were utilized to draw a link between the dependent and independent variables. To put it another way, creating a sample that is representative of the population is one of the components of data analysis. If this is the case, the sample's conclusions can be extrapolated to the complete population from which the sample was taken. The goal of doing the computations is to gather enough information about the sample (and thus the population) to arrive at a level of familiarity (Barclay, 2008). By evaluating a sample, inferential statistics are used to derive inferences about a population. Researchers can use inferential statistics to test hypotheses, answer research questions, and interpret the results (Allua, 2009). Pearson A measure of a monotonic link between two variables is correlation. A monotonic relationship between two variables is one in which (1) as the value of one variable rises, the value of the other rises as well.  $r = 0$  implies that there is no linear relationship between the variables, and as the absolute value of  $r$  increases to positive or negative, the link becomes stronger or weaker, eventually approaching a straight line as the coefficient approaches  $-1$  or  $+1$  (Schober, 2018). In the present study researchers used descriptive statistics to explain the simple frequency and percentages of variables, while Pearson correlation test was applied to draw a correlation between social factors and its relationship with the practice of girl child marriage in the study locale. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, each questionnaire sheet was given a unique reference number and date (Petrova, 2016). Field research assistant makes sure the confidentiality and privacy of the early married women. Researchers kept all the raw data and questionnaire in his own custody with no access to anyone else. In the present study researcher is not going to share any information of respondents as in verbal consent. It is demanded by the respondents not to share it with anyone except the faculty. In study area women are not allowed to sign any documents, therefore a verbal consent is taken from respondents. In the study area due to cultural sensitivity women research assistants wear the culturally accepted dress including *Borka* to interacted with women respondents during visits.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 01 shows the socio-cultural causes of girl child marriages in the study area among 284 respondents. Among the total respondent's majority (67.4%) are strongly agreed that girl child marriages are a social practice among *Pashtuns*. Similarly, nearly one-fourth (24.0%) of the women respondent agreed that girl child marriages occurred in *Pashtun* families.

The table described that girl child marriage is a social phenomenon. It is explained that girl child marriage is socially approved practice among *Pashtuns*. Among the 384 respondents, half of the respondents (50%) strongly agree with the statement that girl child marriages are a socially approved practice among



*Pashtuns*, while 39.8 percent of the women respondents is agreed that girl child marriage is a socially approved practice among *Pashtuns*.

It is explained in this table that girl child marriages is not settled with the consent of the girls, it is revealed that the families settle and agree on it. Statistically it is shown that 45 percent women respondents agree with the statement that families settle the girl child marriages and 41 percent of the women respondents are strongly agree with the statement in *Pashtun* society. While only 1.8 percent women show their disagreement with the statement in the study locale.

Patriarchal structure is the main feature of *Pashtun* society. The statistical data explains that due to male dominancy in domestic sphere girl child marriages is widely practiced in all joint and extended families. Among 384 women participants 58 percent agree with the statement while one forth (25.3%) are strongly agree with the statement.

*Pakhtunwali* is a code of life in *Pashtun* society. There are many traditional practices which are approved and prevailed in society. The majority (44.0%) of the participants agree as shown in statistical data that *Pakhtunwali* is a way of life encouragement for girl child marriages and 32.6 percent strongly agree with the statement. *Jirga* is a traditional entity with the representation of only elderly male members of society. In disputes *Jirga* plays his role to settle any dispute among aggrieved parties. The majority (42.4%) women respondents statistically agreed, and 28.4 percent women are strongly agreed with the statement that *Jirga* is a traditional dispute resolution system, and they also settle the issues of girl child marriages among *Pashtun* families.

The results statistically explained that at the time of disputes among *Pashtun* families some time girl child marriages are arranged to resolve the issues. Majority (43.5%) women respondents agree with the statement and 26.8 percent are strongly agreed with the statement that this is prevailed practice in *Pashtun* families. It is explained that family elders like father, elder brothers, and other close male family members arrange girl child marriages in their families. Majority (49.2%) women agreed with the statement and one-third (33.3%) are strongly agreed with the statement. *Pashtun* society is follower of *Islam* and *Islamic* teaching encourage girl marriages when they experience their puberty for the 1<sup>st</sup> time. Among the women respondents, 41.7 percent agreed with the statement and 30.7 percent are strongly agreed with the statement.

In *Pashtun* families' women decision making is discouraged and male family members decide the mate selection of girls. Women are not involved in decision making process and they itself recognized the decision of their male family members important. Majority (40.6%) women are strongly agreed with the statement and almost same (39.8%) agreed with the statement as shown in the descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics explained that women mobility is restricted in *Pashtun* society and due to restriction girl child marriages prevailed and practiced in the society. 38.3 percent women respondents agreed, and 33 percent are found strongly agreed with the statement. In *Pashtun* society women interaction with male family members is minimal and only in some matters they discuss it otherwise male are the key decision makers without consulting their women. Majority (45.3%) of the women agreed as per the given descriptive statistics and one-third (33.6%) are found strongly agree with the statement. In *Pashtun* society gender roles are assigned to women and men. One of the gender expectations in *Pashtun* families is women obey their male family members in all decisions and household matters. It is explained statistically that 45.3 percent women are agreed, and 39.6 percent are strongly agreed with the statement given in descriptive statistics. It is general perception in *Pashtun* society that girls are honor entity in their families and in most of the social matters dignity and honor is attached with girls and women. It is a cultural practice that girl marriages are considered an honor for families while delayed marriage is a social stigma for a girl and her family. The results explained that majority (48.4%) women respondents agreed, and one-third (33.1%) are strongly agreed with the statement. In *Pashtun* society premarital sex

relations is strongly prohibited and in case of such relationship the girl should be killed by her close family members. Due to the risk of such relationships in society, families preferred girl child marriage. This is a safe way to protect the family dignity and honor in *Pashtun* society. Among the women respondent's majority (40.4%) agreed, and 34.4 percent are strongly agreed with the statement in the cultural context of *Pashtun* society. *Pashtun* society has prevailed from thousand years ago and from beginning they preferred large family size. In this modern world families still prefer large family sizes with early child births. To achieve their desire, they prefer child marriages to reproduce more children and families get more hands to earn.

Majority (40.6%) of women respondents agreed, and more than one-third (34.4%) are strongly agreed with the statement.

In inferential statistics, Pearson correlation tests are applied to draw the correlation of girl child marriages with social and cultural factors which prevailed in *Pashtun* society. The correlation established the significance of variables in the study setting. The Pearson correlation indicates a strong positive relation between prevalence of girl child marriages in *Pashtun* families and girl child marriages are socially approved practice among *Pashtun* families in the study locale ( $r=.509$ , P. Value= 0.01), these statistical findings are also supported by a study conducted in 2020 that girl child marriages is socially approved practice in many parts of the world particularly in traditional tribal societies (Abera, 2020). It is also explained that if a girl is not married earlier, it is considered a social stigma in many poor families.

The inferential statistics explained the Pearson correlation between girl child marriages and agreement of both families. The correlation is statistically found positive relation between girl child marriages and both families agreed on girl child marriages in study locale ( $r=.413$ , P. Value= 0.01), it is also explained in another study that in families with women subordinate position the girl marriages are decided and agreed by the families not the girl child (Agege, 2018). The study locale is patriarchal in its nature of power distribution where male are key decision makers in women affairs. The Pearson correlation revealed a strong positive relation between girl child marriages and patriarchy as one of the dominant factors to arranging girl marriages ( $r=.204$ , P. Value= 0.01). in another study it is revealed that patriarchal structure women are not permitted to take decision of her mate selection and to choose her partner or to continue her education despite marriage (Singh, 2016). *Pakhtunwali* is a code of life in *Pashtun* society. In *Pashtun* society families are mostly run on traditional practices and women are bound to obey the order of her male family members. This is a code of life that women should accept all the decisions of their male and observe strict *Purdha* from childhood which is a code of *Pashtun* life. It is statistically explained in Pearson correlation that a strong positive relation prevailed between girl child marriages and *Pakhtunwali* ( $r=.298$ , P. Value= 0.01), the same relation is also explained in another study conducted in 2016, that there is a positive correlation between girl child marriages and *Pakhtun* code of conduct (*Pakhtunwali*) (Fazi, 2016). *Jirga* is a traditional composition of elders in *Pashtun* society where local disputes are discussed and resolved. The girl child marriages are also settled in the *Jirga* when it is disputed between the families. The Pearson correlation explained a positive relation between girl child marriages and the of *Jirga* ( $r=.385$ , P. Value= 0.01), the same findings are also supported in a study conducted in the same locale that *Jirga* is the entity to resolve family disputes and women are dependent on the decision of *Jirga* whatever in their favor or against their well and rights (Naz, 2012). In *Pashtun* society mostly the people are living in joint families and the elders in family enjoy the prestige and traditional authority to made decisions. The decision of elders is considered final, and no one is permitted within the cultural setting to challenge or refuse the decision of their elders. In the correlation results a positive relation is shown between girl child marriages and the decision of family elders ( $r=.114$ , P. Value= 0.05), the same results are explained in a study that elder's decision is considered good for other family members due to which it is acceptable to the family members. It is also discussed that elders are considered experienced and always positive to their family members (Bhandari, 2019).



**Table 01** Socio-cultural causes of girl child marriages among *Pashtuns* in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (N=384)

| Statement of socio-cultural causes                                                                | S.A<br>F (%)  | A<br>F (%)    | N<br>F (%)   | D.A<br>F (%) | S.D<br>F (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Girl child marriages are in practice among <i>Pashtuns</i>                                        | 259<br>(67.4) | 92<br>(24.0)  | 9<br>(2.3)   | 9<br>(2.3)   | 15<br>(3.9)  |
| Girl child marriages is a socially approved phenomenon                                            | 192<br>(50.0) | 153<br>(39.8) | 15<br>(3.9)  | 24<br>(6.3)  | --           |
| Both parties agree on girl child marriages                                                        | 159<br>(41.4) | 173<br>(45.1) | 45<br>(11.7) | 7<br>(1.8)   | --           |
| Girl child marriages are practiced due to patriarchal structure of society                        | 97<br>(25.3)  | 223<br>(58.1) | 33<br>(8.6)  | 27<br>(7.0)  | 4<br>(1.0)   |
| Girl child marriages are practiced due to <i>Pakhtunwali</i> a code of life among <i>Pashtuns</i> | 125<br>(32.6) | 169<br>(44.0) | 56<br>(14.6) | 28<br>(7.3)  | 6<br>(1.6)   |
| <i>Jirga</i> plays a vital role in girl child marriages settlement                                | 109<br>(28.4) | 163<br>(42.4) | 60<br>(15.6) | 42<br>(10.9) | 10<br>(2.6)  |
| Girl child marriages are practiced resolving family disputes                                      | 103<br>(26.8) | 167<br>(43.5) | 66<br>(17.2) | 32<br>(8.3)  | 16<br>(4.2)  |
| Girl child marriages are settled by family elders only with no consent from girl                  | 128<br>(33.3) | 189<br>(49.2) | 44<br>(11.5) | 21<br>(5.5)  | 2<br>(0.5)   |
| <i>Islamic</i> interpretation plays an encouraging role in girl child marriages                   | 118<br>(30.7) | 160<br>(41.7) | 64<br>(16.7) | 34<br>(8.9)  | 8<br>(2.1)   |
| Women minimal decision-making participation encourage girl child marriages                        | 156<br>(40.6) | 153<br>(40.6) | 34<br>(8.9)  | 25<br>(6.5)  | 16<br>(4.2)  |
| Women confinement to domestic sphere encourage girl child marriages among <i>Pashtuns</i>         | 127<br>(33.1) | 147<br>(38.3) | 64<br>(16.7) | 33<br>(8.6)  | 13<br>(3.4)  |
| Women interaction with male family members are discouraged                                        | 129<br>(33.6) | 174<br>(45.3) | 45<br>(11.7) | 27<br>(7.0)  | 9<br>(2.3)   |
| Gender stereotyping is one of the key factors in girl child marriages                             | 152<br>(39.6) | 174<br>(45.3) | 23<br>(6.8)  | 26<br>(6.0)  | 9<br>(2.3)   |
| Girl child marriages are practiced maintaining family honor and dignity                           | 127<br>(33.1) | 186<br>(48.4) | 42<br>(10.9) | 12<br>(3.1)  | 17<br>(4.4)  |
| Girl child marriages is practiced in <i>Pakhtun</i> families to prevent girl from premarital sex  | 132<br>(34.4) | 155<br>(40.4) | 33<br>(8.6)  | 30<br>(7.8)  | 34<br>(8.9)  |
| Girl child marriages are practiced due to desire for large family size                            | 132<br>(34.4) | 156<br>(40.6) | 40<br>(10.4) | 32<br>(8.3)  | 24<br>(6.3)  |

**Table 2** Pearson correlation matrix of girl child marriages and socio-cultural factors (N=384)

| Variables | GCMP   | GCMSAP | BPAGCM | GCMPDP | GCMPP  | JPRGCM | GCMSF |
|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| GCMP      | 1.000  |        |        |        |        |        |       |
| GCMSAP    | .509** | 1.000  |        |        |        |        |       |
| BPAGCM    | .388** | .413** | 1.000  |        |        |        |       |
| GCMPDP    | .064   | .066   | .204** | 1.000  |        |        |       |
| GCMPP     | .045   | .052   | .113*  | .298** | 1.000  |        |       |
| JPRGCM    | .272** | .267** | .140** | .221** | .385** | 1.000  |       |
| GCMSF     | .200** | .120*  | .202** | .181** | .119*  | .114*  | 1.000 |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Denotation:** GCM= *Girl Child Marriages Practice*, GCMSAP= *Girl Child Marriages socially approved practice*, BPAGCM= *Both parties agreed in Girl Child marriages*, GCMPP= *Girl Child Marriages practice due to Patriarchy*, GCMPPD= *Girl Child marriages practice due to Pashtunwali as code of life*, JPR= *Jirga plays a vital role in Girl Child Marriages*, EMSF= *Girl Child Marriages settled by family elders*

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender roles are defined in *Pakhtun* society with women confinement to domestic sphere and no decision making in mate selection in rural areas of the province. It is concluded that parents and other male family members take the mate selection decision of girls in the family which is acceptable to girls without any reservations. It is also concluded that girl child marriage is a socially approved practice and due to *Pakhtunwali* girls are required to obey the decision of their elders. The honor of the family is attached with women and late marriage of girls, or no marriage of a woman is considered social stigma in *Pakhtun* society. It is concluded that women confinement to domestic sphere and restrictions on girls' higher education is also a driver to girl child marriage in the study locale. The study results recommend community sensitization on girls higher education and strict implementation of laws against child marriage in the province to prevent girls from child marriage.

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