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### Beyond the father and family

*A feminist ethnographic study on early marriage decision-making, women's empowerment, and gender equality in rural Pakistan*

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# BEYOND THE FATHER AND FAMILY

A FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON  
EARLY MARRIAGE DECISION-MAKING,  
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, AND  
GENDER EQUALITY IN RURAL PAKISTAN

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SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

**BEYOND THE FATHER AND FAMILY:  
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IN RURAL PAKISTAN**

**NASHIA AJAZ**

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Rural Pakistan

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Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Gedragwetenschappen

*“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles  
are very different from my own”*

Audre Lorde

I dedicate this dissertation to

**My Father- Ajaz Ahmad**

And all the fathers who believe in their daughters and give them confidence to dream big!

**My Mother- Rukhsana Ajaz**

And all the mothers who help their daughters follow their dreams and who bribe their daughters to do their homework...

**My Sisters- Warda, Abeera, Vaniya**

And all the sisters who fight with, and fight for each other...

**Sajjal, Ilhan**

And all the daughters who give their mothers a reason to be stronger!

And all the girls, who have a dream to do something

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| CBO:  | Community Based Organization                           |
| CCM:  | Consanguineous Child Marriage                          |
| CO:   | Community Organization                                 |
| CPC:  | Child Protection Committee                             |
| EST:  | Ecological Systems Theory                              |
| FST:  | Family Systems Theory                                  |
| EM:   | Early Marriage   |
| FGD:  | Focus Group Discussion                                 |
| GDI:  | Gender Development Index                               |
| HDI:  | Human Development Index                                |
| IDI:  | In-depth Interviews                                    |
| IPV:  | Intimate Partner Violence                              |
| LHW:  | Lady Health Worker                                     |
| NEP:  | National Education Policy                              |
| NGO:  | Non-Governmental Organization                          |
| NRSP: | National Rural Support Programme                       |
| OECD: | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PCSW: | Punjab Commission on the Status of Women               |
| PPC:  | Pakistan Penal Code                                    |
| SDG:  | Sustainable Development Goals                          |
| SFT:  | Standpoint Feminist Theory                             |
| SIGI: | Social Institutions and Gender Index                   |
| SRH:  | Sexual and Reproductive Health                         |
| UC:   | Union Council  |

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**Nashia Ajaz**  
Islamabad

## Executive Summary

**The Problem:** The practice of child marriage takes place worldwide, but particularly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Statistics of 2020 reveal that approximately 21 percent of young women globally were married before they were 18 years old, 12 million girls marrying below the age of 18 years each year, with one girl getting married every three seconds. The Corona Virus Pandemic has reportedly reversed the efforts to stop the practice of child marriage, and the trend continues, 163 million more girls will marry before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday by the year 2030. Research shows that when women marry before the age of 18, they are more vulnerable to poverty, health-related issues, and Intimate Partner Violence and tend to discontinue their school education. While early marriage is an issue for both girls and boys, the practice is far more prevalent among young women than young men, and the negative effects of an early marriage are felt more strongly by women due to their biological and socio-economic differences.

**The gap in knowledge:** Existing research on decision-making about early marriage has primarily been carried out by civil society organizations or multilateral agencies. There is a scarcity of scholarly literature that seeks to generate in-depth qualitative data on the nature of these processes and who is involved, when, and how. Very little is known about (i) the decision-making process leading to child/early marriage, (ii) the roles that different stakeholders play in this process, and (iii) recommendations for policy and practice based on in-depth field research.

**Research Question:** Hence this thesis focuses on the question: **How do relevant state and non-state women's empowerment and gender equality policies and programmes relate to early marriage decision-making processes within families, and across different caste groups?** This question is answered by undertaking a case study of child marriage practices in Pakistan. At the macro-level, the research explores the links between programmatic interventions of a selection of Pakistan-based non-state organizations including *Bedari* and the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), and relevant state policies geared towards women's empowerment and gender equality. At the micro-level, the research focuses on three generations and four social caste groups in a remote village in Punjab. The first generation refers to grandmothers (roughly 60 years and above), the second generation means mothers (31-60 years), and the third generation are (unmarried) girls (16-30 years). I selected the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as a case study as it has high rates of child marriage. I selected a village called *Abadnagar* as it also has high rates of child marriage, is comparatively less industrialized and is safer to stay in and commute to. The choice of both has consequences for the ability to extrapolate the findings.

**Methods:** The research started with a semi-systematic review of the literature. To do so, a search was performed on scholarly databases using relevant keywords. From an initial list of 280 papers, I identified and reviewed the papers most relevant to this thesis. After the initial review, more literature was accessed using backward referencing, followed by an analysis of nine relevant state policies (seven policies and two amendments), and projects of two non-state organizations working in the village. The criteria for selecting the documents were: (i) the presence of relevant keywords, and/or (ii) potential relevance to child/ early marriage. The analysis was conducted using a Feminist Critical Frame Analysis methodology, which is a combination of a Critical Frame Analysis and Feminist Policy Analysis.

Epistemologically, my research departs from standpoint feminism, asserting that women and girls themselves are best equipped to understand the issues affecting them, including early marriage and family decision-making around it. At the same time my research intends to offer recommendations for policy and practice at multiple levels of governance and I use the notion of strategic essentialism to do so. This research uses a qualitative empirical inquiry approach. The field study included (non)participant observation conducted during an intensive ethnographic fieldwork for a period of nine months, where a total of 162 individuals participated in the research. Twenty-three semi-structured In-Depth Interviews (IDI) with female family members, Lady Health Workers (LHW), NGO representatives, lawyers, and policymakers, two Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with married and unmarried men, spatial mapping, and transect walks were the means of data collection. The fieldwork was conducted between April 2018-December 2018. The methodology was designed based on the experience of a previously conducted exploratory research by the researcher. The data collected were then coded using a closed-coding method followed by open-coding, and a discourse analysis method was used to analyse the data.

**The Lessons Learnt from the Literature:** The literature on child/ early marriage shows that the reasons or drivers include social, cultural, religious, economic, and political factors. A critical issue is that every time a family decides to marry their child (with or without consent), they do so to reduce their own responsibilities and/or costs associated with respect to the child in question. While they often do so in the best interest of the child, the literature shows that the negative consequences are borne by girls. However, the literature also suggests that girls are not always passive victims of the practice of early marriage; rather, they have a degree of agency in such decisions. However, the thinness or thickness of their agency depends on their socio-political environment including formal and informal anti-discriminatory laws, and whether there is profoundly rooted misogyny in the social norms and traditions, perpetuated by situations of extreme poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment.

**Theoretical Framework:** Three bodies of scholarship inform this research. These are Standpoint Feminist Theory as the meta-theory, building on the micro-theories of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems and Bowen's Family Systems. In addition, the chapter engages with the notions of patriarchal bargain, strategic essentialism, women's empowerment, gender equality, and *Ijtihad*. My central theoretical points of departure are: (i) An individual's standpoint is determined by their understanding of the contextual social and power relations, (ii) all standpoints are socially created; therefore, they are partial, (iii) the standpoints of dominant or ruling classes tend to be constructed as the "truth," which harms subordinate set of actors, and (iv) dominant groups mostly have the power to structure life around them, and they usually structure life in a way that does not hinder their choices and opportunities, but hinders the choices and opportunities for subordinate set of actors. Finally, according to Standpoint Feminist Theory, the process of struggling to achieve their vision of social life gives subordinate actors a unique standpoint, which makes them powerful in terms of the epistemic advantage they have, because dominant actors are not likely to have this standpoint.

The Ecological Systems Theory (EST) posits that a person is placed within five different direct and indirect layers of context. The direct layer or micro-system is the environment she/he regularly deals with, for example, parents, friends, caregivers, siblings, family members, teachers, and religious leaders. The second layer is the meso-system, which includes the actors just beyond those in the microsystem. The third layer is the exo-system, which consists of the environment that poses indirect influences on a person's development, for example, law, politics, and media. The fourth layer is the macro-system, which comprises of a person's overarching values and beliefs, and environmental conditions surrounding them. The fifth layer is the chrono-system, which includes time, specifically the timing of significant events in an individual's life, for instance, the death of an individual's father. In my research, this theory is applied to make the methodological choices, particularly related to the recruitment of research participants. By applying this theory, I have examined the different layers of influence on (early) marriage decisions within a family, and then using the Family Systems Theory (FST), I zoom into how decision-making related to early marriage takes place within the family.

FST asserts that in a family, each member has a different role to play. While performing the given roles, family members interact and respond to each other, predictably, according to their role, which defines the relationship between different family members. Therefore, the acts, behaviours, and decisions of one family member also affects the lives and well-being of other family members. The malfunctioning of one family member may lead to an increased burden on another family member, which disturbs the family equilibrium.



The Islamic notion of *Ijtihad* is also an important part of the theoretical underpinnings of my research. With the expansion of *Islam*, an absolute need for a systematic legal thought emerged, resulting in the form of *Ijtihad*, which serves as the medium for deducing rules from the *Quran* and *Sunnah* to provide solutions for the needs of the modern world. Therefore, *Ijtihad* is a key element in the growth of Islamic law and jurisprudence.

**Findings:** My research shows that in the first generation, paternal grandmothers are very active. They initiate and take further steps to arrange the marriage of their grandchildren. The grandfathers only intervene: (i) if they are unhappy with their wife's decision, or (ii) if there is no "right match" in the paternal family. In the second generation, the father's role is like that of the grandfather, i.e., they only intervene when, in addition to the grandfathers' reasons, there are disputes with the proposed groom's family or debts need to be settled. Mothers, even when they disagree with the choice of groom, seem to have a low influence on (early) marriage decision-making of their daughters possibly out of the fear of facing intimate partner violence or divorce. Only those mothers who are financially independent and contribute to household finances appear to actively participate in marriage decision-making or dare to oppose a marriage proposal. From the same generation, the girl's potential parents-in-law also have a critical role in deciding the time of marriage, which is based on the "readiness" of the groom.

In the third generation, young girls seem to romanticize an early marriage; however, they cannot communicate their eagerness or readiness to their family due to the "shame" felt in discussing marriage. However, boys can tell their parents that they are ready to be married. The role of the elder and younger brothers of girls is to "protect" their sisters from other (young) men so that they do not bring shame and dishonour to the family by, for example, falling in love with a boy. The role of elder sisters is to set an example of being a "good girl" for their younger sisters and making sure that their younger sisters also behave like good girls.

The pattern of marriage decision-making is highly similar across the four caste groups within the studied village, however, an important side finding of my research is the way family "honour" is treated. Families belonging to lower caste groups seemed to be more flexible about issues of honour in comparison to upper caste families. For example, the families belonging to lower caste(s) do not mind sending their women out to work and earn money. Women belonging to lower caste families also appear to be less afraid of taking a stand against a decision taken by their husband, possibly because: (i) they understand the flexible treatment of honour, and/or (ii) some are financially independent and contributing to household expenditures.

The vast majority of my interviewees argued that the idea of gender equality is irrelevant in Pakistan, being an Islamic country, as gender equality is "Un-Islamic." However, many showed their goodwill for women's empowerment, which, they believed can be attained by sending girls to schools and allowing them to do (paid) jobs (outside the house), but within "Islamic limits." Interestingly, few participants could give a clear definition of these Islamic limits, which leads me to argue that religion was used quite flexibly to delimit opportunities and space offered to women.

Feminist Critical Frame Analysis of state policies shows that while there is a law specifically designed to control the practice of child marriage in Pakistan, there is a lack of (i) cohesion in design; (ii) implementation; and (iii) societal support. In terms of cohesion, different laws offer varying definitions of what constitutes a child, thereby creating confusion. For example, the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), defines a girl child as below 16 years (Clause 2 (A)), a boy child as below 18 years (Clause 2 (A)), and a minor as below 18 years (Clause 2 (D)). In terms of implementation, certain lacunas were identified: for example, incident reporting mechanisms in many policies are culturally insensitive. For instance, it is not feasible for a girl to go and report her parents' intention to marry her to the police, which, in theory would lead to the arrest of her father, as doing so would mean she would not be able to go back to her house. The policies, which were aimed to "empower" women, seem to be rather blind to the ability of women to access and use the institutions provided for them. These gender-blind policies perpetuate gender-biased norms in society.

Finally, in terms of societal support, the research shows that policies do not sufficiently align with the family decision-making process and outcomes related to early marriage, as they lack empirical grounds by excluding specific stakeholders who have a vital role in early marriage decision-making, for example, the grandmother. Moreover, participant narratives are reflective of a similar confusion related to the definition of a "child" as was apparent in state policies, which is perhaps another reason for lack of implementation.

My research furthermore shows that non-state interventions have somewhat touched the early marriage decision-making processes in families, and the outcomes of these processes. The two non-state organizations—*Bedari* and National Rural Support Programme—which were part of my research, have brought a positive change in the community through their projects, and have raised awareness about early marriages and other critical problems relating to early marriages including Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) issues. However, they, (i) like the state policies, seem to undermine some critical stakeholders in early marriage decision-making, for example men, and over-emphasize the others, for example (young) women, by over-estimating their agency and decision-making power; and (ii) ignore the power dynamics of the caste system in the community, which benefits some groups, while

further marginalizing others. In local communities, these non-state organizations are perceived by all the three generations of female and male participants as pushing a Western agenda, aimed to destroy the values and culture of Pakistani Muslims.

While reflecting on my theories, I note that each of the five layers of Bronfenbrenner's EST had an influence on decision-making related to early marriage. However, the intensity of the influence varied across factors and layers. For example, "family" in the micro-system has fully influenced early marriage decision-making in terms of whom and when to marry, followed by norms, culture, beliefs, and (interpretation of) religion in the macro-system, and non-state organizations in the exo-system. "Extended family and caste" in the meso-system, and "time" in the chrono-system, were the third-most influencing factors on early marriage decision-making. A "peer group" in the meso-system also seemed to have an influence on decisions related to "when" to marry, but for boys only. State policies including the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) in the exo-system, appeared least likely to influence early marriage decision-making. Furthermore, no influence of the neighbours was observed. While certain specificities of my research might not be generalisable to other villages of Pakistan or other parts of the world, however, what can be extrapolated is that early marriage decision must be seen beyond fathers and brothers, who are usually presented as the culprits in most of the academic and programmatic literature, and beyond family, which is the mostly targeted unit in NGO project interventions.

**Conclusions:** My research draws four key conclusions. (i) Early marriage decision-making need to be seen beyond father and family, (ii) gender equality is perceived as a Western idea by my participants and considered irrelevant to the context of Pakistan, however, women's empowerment is perceived as a positive notion, which according to the participants, can be achieved by, for example, providing education and paid jobs to women, (iii) confusion related to the definition of "child" and "early" hinders the implementation of policies, and (iv) there is the need for collective *Ijtihad* to build a consensus on minimum age of marriage.

**Policy Recommendations:** Based on the findings of my research, my first recommendation is to use the term "minor marriage" to refer to child and early marriages. I make this recommendation given (i) the word "child" has emotional connotations, (ii) there appears to be confusion related to definitions of a "child," and (iii) the notion of "early" is too subjective to define and measure. Additionally, I make the following recommendations:

In relation to the Sustainable Development Goals, I recommend (i) setting a target on implementing the minimum age of marriage as 18 years, and (ii) using the term "minor" marriages. I agree with United Nations' definition of "child" marriage is a marriage taking place when either of the spouses is under 18 years of age, universally. Although my research is not on the phenomenon of forced marriages, I contend that marriage below the age

of 18 years needs to be regarded as 'forced' since minor are not permitted to enter into a legal contract such as required for marriage. Further, I recommend (iii) emphasizing college education to delay the possibility of minor marriage.

In relation to Pakistani policies, I recommend (i) unifying the definition of a child to 18 years for all genders, which is also the universally agreed definition; (ii) including women and female pronouns in the revision process of policy, and in the policy documents, to increase women's involvement and relatedness with the policy; (iii) simplifying the procedures for reporting child marriage by, for example, making use of the existing human resource deployed in "Women Protection Centres" present at the district-level in Punjab; and (iv) greater emphasis on access to school and college education as this empowers girls and delays early marriage.

For non-state organizations, my first recommendation is to make culturally sensitive projects to yield better results. For example, my findings show that projects designed to reduce early marriages seem to over-emphasize the agency of (young) women, whereas their agency, most of the time, is very thin. Instead, they should emphasize participation of all the family members, especially the grandmothers in their project activities. Second, non-state organizations could consider "practical" and "strategic" gender needs of the community while designing and implementing their projects so that more people relate to the projects. Concretely, this implies that practical gender needs, for example, the need for water, sanitation services, electricity, gas, and education, need to be frequently referred to in their project activities, so that the participants do not feel that interventions are irrelevant or that their ideologies are threatened by externally funded interventions. Addressing practical needs may smooth the way towards meeting women's strategic gender needs, such as those related to decision-making power. Third, non-state organizations should consider caste variations while designing and implementing community projects, to consciously ensure that people of all the caste groups benefit from their projects.

My recommendation for other Islamic contexts is to form an *Ijma*<sup>1</sup>, and based on the principles of *Ijtihad*<sup>2</sup>, build a consensus on the ideal minimum age of marriage in 21<sup>st</sup> century Islam, and convince their member countries to reconsider their interpretations of "Islam." I also recommend these Islamic organizations to bring forward solutions based on the principles of *Ijtihad* on other inter-relating issues such as (i) intra-family marriages, (ii) intimate partner violence, and (iii) "Islamic" limits of women's empowerment and gender equality.

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1 *Ijma* that refers to an agreement or consensus of different Islamic scholars on an issue of Islamic law (Taslima Julia & Zainab Belal Omar, 2020).

2 In Islamic law, *Ijtihad* refers to the independent or original interpretation of problems not precisely covered by the Quran, Hadith (traditions concerning the Prophet Muhammad's life and utterances), and *Ijma* (Makhlouf, 2020).

**Research Recommendations:** My recommendations for further research include: (i) research into how men from different generations make decisions with respect to minor marriage, including local religious scholars, (ii) research into the factors influencing the agency of young women in Pakistan, (iii) research exploring how birth order shapes girls' vulnerability to minor marriage and affects their decision-making possibilities more broadly, (iv) research on mitigating the impact of minor marriage in relation to education, health, and poverty, and (v) research into intra-family marriages, especially with first cousins, and birth defects in children due to such marriages.

## Samenvatting

**Het probleem:** kindhuwelijken komen wereldwijd voor, maar vooral in Zuid-Azië en Afrika bezuiden de Sahara. Wereldwijd is tot 2020 ongeveer 21 procent van de jonge vrouwen voor hun 18e jaar getrouwd, en elk jaar trouwen 12 miljoen meisjes onder de 18 jaar, oftewel één meisje per elke drie seconden. De Covid-19 pandemie schijnt inspanningen om de praktijk van het kindhuwelijken te stoppen te hebben teruggedraaid, en als deze trend zich voortzet dan zullen tegen het jaar 2030 nog eens 163 miljoen meisjes voor hun 18de verjaardag trouwen. Uit onderzoek blijkt dat vrouwen die voor hun 18e trouwen, kwetsbaarder zijn voor armoede, gezondheidsproblemen en intiem partnergeweld en de neiging hebben hun schoolopleiding af te breken. Hoewel een vroegtijdig huwelijk een probleem is voor zowel meisjes als jongens, komt de praktijk veel vaker voor bij jonge vrouwen dan bij jonge mannen, en de negatieve gevolgen van een vroegtijdig huwelijk worden door vrouwen sterker gevoeld vanwege hun biologische en sociaaleconomische verschillen.

**De kloof in kennis:** Bestaand onderzoek naar besluitvorming over uithuwelijking op jonge leeftijd is voornamelijk uitgevoerd door maatschappelijke organisaties of multilaterale agentschappen. Er is een schaarste aan wetenschappelijke literatuur die tracht diepgaande kwalitatieve gegevens te genereren over de aard van deze processen en wie er bij betrokken is, wanneer, en hoe. Er is zeer weinig bekend over: (i) het besluitvormingsproces dat leidt tot kind/vroegtijdige huwelijken, (ii) de rol die verschillende belanghebbenden spelen in dit proces, en (iii) aanbevelingen voor beleid en praktijk op basis van diepgaand veldonderzoek.

**Onderzoeksvraag:** Vandaar dat dit proefschrift zich richt op de vraag: **Hoe verhouden het beleid en de programma's voor empowerment van vrouwen en gendergelijkheid van de overheid en van andere organisaties zich tot besluitvormingsprocessen over uithuwelijking binnen gezinnen, en tussen verschillende kastegroepen?** Deze vraag wordt beantwoord aan de hand van een casestudy van kindhuwelijken in Pakistan. Op macroniveau bestudeert het onderzoek de verbanden tussen de programmatische tussenkomsten van een aantal in Pakistan gevestigde niet-gouvernementele organisaties, waaronder Bedari en het National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), en het relevante overheidsbeleid dat gericht is op empowerment van vrouwen en gendergelijkheid. Op microniveau richt het onderzoek zich op drie generaties en vier sociale kastegroepen in een afgelegen dorp in Punjab. De eerste generatie verwijst naar grootmoeders (ruwweg 60 jaar en ouder), de tweede generatie naar moeders (31-60 jaar), en de derde generatie zijn (ongehuwde) meisjes (16-30 jaar). Ik heb de Islamitische Republiek Pakistan als casestudy gekozen omdat het percentage kindhuwelijken er hoog is. Ik koos een dorp, Abadnagar, omdat het ook een hoog percentage kindhuwelijken kent, relatief minder geïndustrialiseerd is en veiliger is om te wonen en naar toe te reizen. De keuze van beide heeft gevolgen voor de mogelijkheid om de bevindingen te extrapoleren.

**Methoden:** Het onderzoek begon met een semi-systematisch overzicht van de literatuur. Daartoe werd een zoekactie uitgevoerd in wetenschappelijke databanken met gebruikmaking van relevante trefwoorden. Uit een eerste lijst van 280 artikelen heb ik de voor deze dissertatie meest relevante artikelen geselecteerd en beoordeeld. Na de eerste beoordeling werd meer literatuur geraadpleegd met behulp van achterwaartse verwijzingen, gevolgd door een analyse van negen relevante beleidsmaatregelen van de staat (zeven beleidsmaatregelen en twee amendementen), en projecten van twee niet-staatsorganisaties die in het dorp werken. De criteria voor de selectie van de documenten waren: (i) de aanwezigheid van relevante trefwoorden, en/of (ii) potentiële relevantie voor kind/vroegtijdig huwelijk. De analyse werd uitgevoerd met behulp van een Standpunt Feminisme methode, die een combinatie is van een Kritische Kaderanalyse en een Feministische Beleidsanalyse.

Epistemologisch gezien vertrekt mijn onderzoek vanuit het standpunt feminisme, waarbij wordt gesteld dat vrouwen en meisjes zelf het best in staat zijn om de kwesties te begrijpen die hen zelf aangaan, met inbegrip van het vroegtijdige huwelijk en de besluitvorming binnen het gezin daaromtrent. Tegelijkertijd wil mijn onderzoek aanbevelingen doen voor beleid en praktijk op verschillende bestuursniveaus en ik gebruik daarvoor het begrip strategisch essentialisme. Dit onderzoek maakt gebruik van een kwalitatieve empirische onderzoekbenadering. Het veldonderzoek omvatte (niet-)participerende observatie tijdens een intensief etnografisch veldwerk gedurende een periode van negen maanden, waarbij in totaal 162 personen deelnamen aan het onderzoek. Drieëntwintig semi-gestructureerde diepte-interviews met vrouwelijke familieleden, Lady Health Workers (LHW), NGO-vertegenwoordigers, advocaten en beleidsmakers, twee focusgroepsdiscussies (FGD) met getrouwde en ongehuwde mannen, ruimtelijke kartering en transect wandelingen vormden de middelen voor de dataverzameling. Het veldwerk werd uitgevoerd tussen april 2018-december 2018. De methodologie werd ontworpen op basis van de ervaring van een eerder uitgevoerd verkennend onderzoek door de onderzoeker. De verzamelde gegevens werden vervolgens gecodeerd met behulp van een gesloten coderingsmethode, gevolgd door open codering, en er werd een discoursanalysemethode gebruikt om de gegevens te analyseren.

**De lessen die uit de literatuur kunnen worden getrokken:** Uit de literatuur over kindhuwelijken en vroegtijdige huwelijken blijkt dat de redenen of drijfveren sociale, culturele, religieuze, economische en politieke factoren omvatten. Een cruciaal punt is dat telkens wanneer een familie besluit hun kind uit te huwelijken (met of zonder toestemming), zij dit doet om hun eigen verantwoordelijkheden en/of kosten met betrekking tot het kind in kwestie te verminderen. Hoewel zij dit doen in het belang van het kind, blijkt uit de literatuur dat de meisjes de negatieve consequenties dragen. De literatuur suggereert echter ook dat meisjes niet altijd passieve slachtoffers zijn van de praktijk van een vroegtijdig huwelijk; integendeel,

zij hebben een mate van “agency” in dergelijke beslissingen. De “dunheid” of “dikte” van hun “agency” hangt echter af van hun sociaal-politieke omgeving met inbegrip van formele en informele anti-discriminatie wetten, en of er diepgewortelde vrouwenhaat is in de sociale normen en tradities, bestendigd door situaties van extreme armoede, analfabetisme, en werkloosheid.

**Theoretisch kader:** Dit onderzoek is gebaseerd op drie bronnen van wetenschap. Dit zijn het standpunt feminisme als meta-theorie, voortbouwend op de micro-theorieën van Bronfenbrenner's Ecologische systemen en Bowen's Familie systemen. Daarnaast houdt het hoofdstuk zich bezig met de begrippen patriarchale onderhandelingen, strategisch essentialisme, vrouwenemancipatie, gendergelijkheid, en Ijtihad. Mijn centrale theoretische uitgangspunten zijn: (i) het standpunt van een individu wordt bepaald door haar/zijn begrip van de contextuele sociale en machtsverhoudingen, (ii) alle standpunten zijn sociaal gecreëerd; daarom zijn ze partieel, (iii) de standpunten van dominante of heersende klassen hebben de neiging te worden geconstrueerd als de “waarheid,” wat ondergeschikte groepen actoren schaadt, en (iv) dominante groepen hebben meestal de macht om het leven om hen heen te structureren, en zij structureren het leven gewoonlijk op een manier die hun keuzes en kansen niet belemmert, maar wel de keuzes en kansen van ondergeschikte groepen actoren belemmert. Tenslotte, volgens feministisch standpunt theorie, geeft het proces van worstelen om hun visie op het sociale leven te bereiken ondergeschikte groepen actoren een uniek standpunt, dat hen machtig maakt in termen van het “epistemisch voordeel” dat zij hebben, omdat dominante actoren dit standpunt waarschijnlijk niet zullen hebben.

De Ecologische Systeemtheorie (EST) stelt dat een persoon binnen vijf verschillende directe en indirecte lagen van context wordt geplaatst. De directe laag of het micro-systeem is de omgeving waarmee zij/hij regelmatig omgaat, bijvoorbeeld de ouders, vrienden, verzorgers, broers en zussen, familieleden, leraren en religieuze leiders. De tweede laag is het mesosysteem, dat de omgeving omvat van de mensen in het microsysteem van het individu. De derde laag is het exosysteem, dat bestaat uit de omgeving die indirecte invloeden uitoefent op de ontwikkeling van een persoon, bijvoorbeeld de wet, de politiek en de media. De vierde laag is het macro-systeem, dat bestaat uit de overkoepelende waarden en overtuigingen van een persoon, en de omgevingsomstandigheden daaromheen. De vijfde laag is het chronosysteem, dat tijd omvat, in het bijzonder de timing van belangrijke gebeurtenissen in het leven van een individu, bijvoorbeeld de dood van de vader van een individu. In mijn onderzoek wordt deze theorie toegepast om de methodologische keuzes te maken, in het bijzonder met betrekking tot de werving van onderzoekdeelnemers. Door deze theorie toe te passen, heb ik de verschillende lagen van invloed op (vroeg) huwelijksbeslissingen binnen een gezin onderzocht, en vervolgens met behulp van de Familie Systeem Theorie (FST) ingezoomd op hoe besluitvorming met betrekking tot vroeg huwelijken binnen het gezin plaatsvindt.

FST stelt dat in een gezin elk lid een andere rol te spelen heeft. Bij het vervullen van de gegeven rollen, reageren de gezinsleden op elkaar, voorspelbaar, in overeenstemming met hun rol, hetgeen de relatie tussen de verschillende gezinsleden bepaalt. Daarom hebben de handelingen, gedragingen en beslissingen van één gezinslid ook invloed op het leven en het welzijn van andere gezinsleden. Het disfunctioneren van één gezinslid kan leiden tot een grotere belasting van een ander gezinslid, waardoor het evenwicht in het gezin wordt verstoord.

De Islamitische notie van Ijtihad maakt ook een belangrijk deel uit van de theoretische onderbouwing van mijn onderzoek. Met de uitbreiding van de Islam ontstond een absolute behoefte aan een systematisch juridisch denken, wat resulteerde in de vorm van Ijtihad, die dient als het medium voor het afleiden van regels uit de Koran en de Soennah om oplossingen te bieden voor de behoeften van de moderne wereld. Daarom is de Ijtihad een sleutelement in de groei van de Islamitische wet en jurisprudentie.

**Bevindingen:** Uit mijn onderzoek blijkt dat in de eerste generatie de grootmoeders van vaderskant zeer actief zijn. Zij nemen het initiatief en ondernemen verdere stappen om het huwelijk van hun kleinkinderen te regelen. De grootvaders grijpen alleen in: (i) als ze niet gelukkig zijn met de beslissing van hun vrouw, of (ii) als er geen “juiste match” is in de vadersfamilie. In de tweede generatie is de rol van de vader gelijk aan die van de grootvader, d.w.z. dat zij alleen tussenbeide komen als er, naast de redenen van de grootvaders, geschillen zijn met de familie van de aanstaande bruidegom of als er schulden moeten worden vereffend. Moeders lijken, zelfs wanneer zij het niet eens zijn met de keuze van de bruidegom, weinig invloed te hebben op de (vroeg) huwelijksbeslissingen van hun dochters, mogelijk uit angst voor intiem partnergeweld of echtscheiding. Alleen moeders die financieel onafhankelijk zijn en bijdragen aan de financiën van het huishouden lijken actief deel te nemen aan de besluitvorming over het huwelijk of durven zich te verzetten tegen een huwelijksaanzoek. In dezelfde generatie spelen ook de potentiële schoonouders van het meisje een cruciale rol bij de beslissing over het moment van het huwelijk, dat gebaseerd is op de “bereidheid” van de bruidegom.

In de derde generatie lijken jonge meisjes een vroeg huwelijk te romantiseren; zij kunnen hun gretigheid of bereidheid echter niet aan hun familie kenbaar maken vanwege de schaamte die zij voelen bij het bespreken van een huwelijk. Jongens kunnen hun ouders echter wel vertellen dat zij klaar zijn om te trouwen. De rol van de oudere en jongere broers van meisjes is hun zusters te “beschermen” tegen andere (jonge) mannen, zodat zij geen schande en oneer brengen voor de familie door bijvoorbeeld verliefd te worden op een jongen. De rol van oudere zussen bestaat erin hun jongere zussen het voorbeeld te geven van een “braaf meisje” en ervoor te zorgen dat hun jongere zussen zich ook als “brave meisjes” gedragen.

Het besluitvormingspatroon bij huwelijken vertoont grote overeenkomsten tussen de vier kastengroepen in het bestudeerde dorp, maar een belangrijke nevenbevinding van mijn onderzoek is de manier waarop met familie-eer wordt omgegaan. Gezinnen uit de lagere kasten lijken flexibeler om te gaan met kwesties van “eer” in vergelijking met de hogere kasten. De families die tot lagere kasten behoren vinden het bijvoorbeeld niet erg om hun vrouwen erop uit te sturen om te werken en geld te verdienen. Vrouwen uit gezinnen van lagere kasten lijken ook minder bang te zijn om stelling te nemen tegen een beslissing van hun echtgenoot. Dit is mogelijk omdat: (i) zij de “soepele” behandeling van “eer” begrijpen, (ii) zij meer gewend zijn aan partnermishandeling, en/of (iii) sommigen financieel onafhankelijk zijn en bijdragen aan de uitgaven van het huishouden.

De overgrote meerderheid van de ondervraagden voerden aan dat het idee van gelijkheid van mannen en vrouwen in Pakistan, een Islamitisch land, irrelevant is omdat gelijkheid van mannen en vrouwen “on-Islamitisch” is. Velen toonden echter hun goede wil voor vrouwenemancipatie, die volgens hen kan worden bereikt door meisjes naar school te sturen en hen toe te staan (betaald) werk te doen (buitenshuis), maar binnen “Islamitische grenzen.” Interessant genoeg konden weinig deelnemers een heldere definitie geven van deze “Islamitische grenzen,” wat mij ertoe brengt te stellen dat religie gebruikt wordt op een flexibele wijze om mogelijkheden en ruimte die vrouwen geboden worden te beperken.

Feministisch Critical Frame Analysis van het overheidsbeleid laat zien dat er weliswaar een wet is die specifiek bedoeld is om de praktijk van het kindhuwelijk in Pakistan te controleren, maar dat er een gebrek is aan (a) samenhang in het ontwerp; (b) uitvoering; en (c) maatschappelijke steun. Wat de samenhang betreft, wordt de leeftijd van een “kind” in verschillende wetten verschillend gedefinieerd, waardoor verwarring ontstaat. De Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) bijvoorbeeld definieert een “meisje “kind als jonger dan 16 jaar (clause 2 (A)), een “jongen “kind als jonger dan 18 jaar (clause 2 (A)), en een “minderjarige” als jonger dan 18 jaar (clause 2 (D)). Wat de uitvoering betreft, werden bepaalde lacunes geconstateerd: zo zijn de mechanismen voor het melden van incidenten in veel beleidsmaatregelen cultureel ongevoelig. Het is bijvoorbeeld moeilijk voor (jonge) vrouwen om aangifte te doen bij de politie dat haar ouders haar wensen uit te huwelijk omdat zij dan niet meer terug kan naar haar huis. De beleidsmaatregelen, die bedoeld waren om vrouwen “mondiger” te maken, lijken tamelijk blind te zijn voor het vermogen van vrouwen om toegang te krijgen tot en gebruik te maken van de instellingen die hun ter beschikking zijn gesteld. Dit gender-blinde beleid bestendigt op zijn beurt de vooringenomen gender normen in de samenleving, in plaats van de vrouwen in staat te stellen hun eigen veranderingen te bewerkstelligen.

Wat ten slotte de maatschappelijke steun betreft, blijkt uit het onderzoek dat het beleid onvoldoende is afgestemd op het besluitvormingsproces binnen het gezin en op de resultaten in verband met vroegtijdige huwelijken, omdat het empirische gronden ontbeert doordat specifieke belanghebbenden die een vitale rol spelen in de besluitvorming over vroegtijdige huwelijken, zoals bijvoorbeeld de grootmoeder, worden uitgesloten. Bovendien blijkt uit de verhalen van de deelnemers dat er met betrekking tot de definitie van een “kind” dezelfde verwarring bestaat als in het overheidsbeleid, wat misschien een andere reden is voor het gebrek aan implementatie.

Mijn onderzoek toont verder aan dat niet-staatsinterventies de besluitvormingsprocessen in gezinnen over uithuwelijking, en de resultaten van deze processen, enigszins hebben beïnvloed. De twee niet-gouvernementele organisaties - Bedari en National Rural Support Programme - die deel uitmaakten van mijn onderzoek, hebben met hun projecten een positieve verandering teweeggebracht in de gemeenschap, en hebben het bewustzijn verhoogd over vroegtijdige huwelijken en andere kritieke problemen in verband met vroeg huwelijken, met inbegrip van kwesties rond seksuele en reproductieve gezondheid (SRH). Echter, (i) net als het overheidsbeleid, lijken ze sommige kritieke belanghebbenden in de besluitvorming rond vroegtijdige huwelijken te ondermijnen, bijvoorbeeld mannen, en de anderen, bijvoorbeeld (jonge) vrouwen, te benadrukken door hun agency en beslissingsmacht te overschatten; en (ii) negeren ze de machtsdynamiek van het kastensysteem in de gemeenschap, die sommige groepen bevoordeelt, terwijl andere groepen verder worden gemarginaliseerd. In de lokale gemeenschappen worden deze niet-gouvernementele organisaties door alle drie de generaties vrouwelijke en mannelijke deelnemers gezien als organisaties die een “westerse” agenda nastreven, die erop gericht is de waarden en de cultuur van de Pakistaanse moslims te vernietigen.

Bij het overdenken van mijn theorieën merk ik op dat elk van de vijf lagen van Bronfenbrenner's EST invloed had op de besluitvorming rond uithuwelijking. De intensiteit van de invloed varieerde echter tussen factoren en lagen. Zo heeft “familie” in het microsysteem de besluitvorming rond uithuwelijking volledig beïnvloed in termen van “met wie” en “wanneer” te trouwen, gevolgd door normen, cultuur, overtuigingen en (interpretatie van) religie in het macrosysteem, en niet gouvernementele organisaties (NGOs) in het exosysteem. “Uitgebreide familie en kaste” in het mesosysteem, en “tijd” in het chronosysteem, waren de factoren die het meest van invloed waren op de besluitvorming over uithuwelijking. De “peer group” in het mesosysteem leek ook van invloed te zijn op beslissingen met betrekking tot “wanneer” te trouwen, maar alleen voor jongens. “Staatsbeleid” met inbegrip van de “Child Marriage Restraint Act” (1929) in het exosysteem, leken het minst van invloed op de besluitvorming over een vroegtijdig huwelijk. Verder werd er geen invloed van de bureaus waargenomen. Al zullen sommige specifieke bevindingen van mijn onderzoek misschien niet kunnen worden geëxtrapoleerd naar andere dorpen in Pakistan, of naar andere delen van de wereld, maar

wat wel kan worden geëxtrapoleerd is dat de beslissing om vroeg te trouwen verder moet worden beschouwd dan vaders en broers, die gewoonlijk als de boosdoeners worden voorgesteld in de meeste academische en programmatische literatuur, en verder dan de familie, die meestal het object is van interventies van NGO-projecten.

**Conclusies:** Mijn onderzoek trekt vier centrale conclusies. (i) De besluitvorming rond vroegtijdige huwelijken moet verder gaan dan de vader en de familie, (ii) gender gelijkheid wordt gezien als een westers idee door de onderzoeksdeelnemers, en gezien als irrelevant in de context van Pakistan. Dat gezegd hebbende, wordt “empowerment” van vrouwen als een positief idee gezien, welk volgens deelnemers bereikt kan worden door, bijvoorbeeld, onderwijs en betaald werken aan vrouwen te bieden, (iii) verwarring in verband met de definitie van “kind” en “vroegtijdig” belemmert de uitvoering van beleid, en (iv) er is behoefte aan collectieve Ijtihad om tot een consensus te komen over de minimumleeftijd voor een huwelijk.

**Beleidsaanbevelingen:** Op basis van de bevindingen van mijn onderzoek is mijn eerste aanbeveling om de term “minderjarig huwelijk” te gebruiken om te verwijzen naar kindhuwelijken en vroegtijdige huwelijken. Ik maak deze aanbeveling aangezien: (i) het woord “kind” emotionele connotaties heeft, (ii) er veel verwarring lijkt te bestaan met betrekking tot de definitie van een “kind,” en (iii) het idee van vroegtijdige huwelijken te subjectief zijn om te definiëren en te meten. Los hiervan doe ik de volgende aanbevelingen:

Met betrekking tot de Duurzame Ontwikkelingsdoelen, beveel ik aan: (i) een doelstelling vast te stellen voor de implementatie van de minimumleeftijd voor het huwelijk als 18 jaar; en (ii) de term “minderjarige” huwelijken te gebruiken. Ik ben het eens met de definitie van de Verenigde Naties van een “kind” huwelijk: een huwelijk dat plaatsvindt wanneer een van de echtgenoten nog geen 18 jaar oud is, universeel. Hoewel mijn onderzoek geen betrekking heeft op het fenomeen van gedwongen huwelijken, ben ik van mening dat een huwelijk onder de leeftijd van 18 jaar als een gedwongen huwelijk dient te worden beschouwd, aangezien de minderjarige die in het huwelijk treedt geen wettelijk contract mag sluiten, zoals ook vereist is bij een huwelijk. Verder beveel ik aan: (iii) de nadruk te leggen op universitair onderwijs, hetgeen de mogelijkheid van een kind/ vroegtijdig huwelijk zal vertragen.

Met betrekking tot het Pakistaanse beleid, beveel ik aan: (i) de definitie van een kind gelijk te trekken naar 18 jaar voor alle geslachten, wat ook de universeel aanvaarde definitie is; (ii) vrouwen en vrouwelijke voornaamwoorden op te nemen in het herzieningsproces van het beleid, en in de beleidsdocumenten, om de betrokkenheid van vrouwen en hun verbondenheid met het beleid te vergroten; (iii) vereenvoudiging van de procedures voor het melden van kindhuwelijken door bijvoorbeeld gebruik te maken van de bestaande personele

middelen die worden ingezet in “vrouwenbeschermingscentra” op districtsniveau in Punjab; en (iv) meer nadruk op toegang tot school- en universitair onderwijs, aangezien dit meisjes mondiger maakt en vroegtijdige huwelijken uitstelt.

Voor NGOs is mijn eerste aanbeveling om cultuurgevoelige projecten te maken die betere resultaten opleveren. Uit mijn bevindingen blijkt bijvoorbeeld dat projecten ter vermindering van vroeg huwelijken te veel de nadruk leggen op de zeggenschap van (jonge) vrouwen, terwijl hun zeggenschap in de meeste gevallen zeer gering is. In plaats daarvan zouden zij de nadruk moeten leggen op de deelname van alle familieleden, met name de grootmoeders, aan hun projectactiviteiten. Ten tweede zouden NGOs bij het opzetten en uitvoeren van hun projecten rekening kunnen houden met de “praktische” en “strategische” genderbehoeften van de gemeenschap, zodat meer mensen zich betrokken voelen bij de projecten. Concreet betekent dit dat de “praktische” genderbehoeften, bijvoorbeeld de behoefte aan water, sanitaire voorzieningen, elektriciteit, gas en onderwijs, in hun projectactiviteiten benadrukt dienen te worden, zodat de deelnemers niet het gevoel krijgen dat de interventies irrelevant zijn of dat hun ideologieën door extern gefinancierde interventies worden bedreigd. Door aandacht te besteden aan praktische behoeften zal de weg naar het voldoen aan de strategische genderbehoeften van vrouwen, b.v. beslissingsbevoegdheid, worden geëffend. Ten derde zouden NGOs bij het ontwerpen en uitvoeren van gemeenschapsprojecten rekening dienen te houden met kastevariëaties, om er bewust voor te zorgen dat mensen van alle kastengroepen van hun projecten profiteren.

Mijn aanbeveling voor andere “Islamitische” contexten is om een Ijma<sup>3</sup> te vormen en op basis van de principes van Ijtihad<sup>4</sup> een consensus te bereiken over de ideale minimum huwelijksleeftijd in de Islam van de 21ste eeuw, en hun lidstaten te overtuigen om hun interpretaties van “Islam” te heroverwegen. Ik beveel deze Islamitische organisaties ook aan om op basis van de principes van de Ijtihad oplossingen aan te dragen voor andere onderling samenhangende kwesties zoals (i) huwelijken binnen het gezin, (ii) geweld binnen het gezin, en (iii) “Islamitische” grenzen van vrouwenemancipatie en gendergelijkheid.

**Aanbevelingen voor onderzoek:** Mijn aanbevelingen omtrent verder onderzoek betreft zijn: (i) onderzoek naar hoe mannen van verschillende generaties beslissingen nemen met betrekking tot minderjarige huwelijken, inclusief lokale religieuze geleerden, (ii) onderzoek naar de factoren die de agency van jonge vrouwen in Pakistan beïnvloeden, (iii) onderzoek naar de relatie tussen geboortevolgorde, en kwetsbaarheid van meisjes om vroeg te

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3 Ijma dat verwijst naar een overeenkomst of consensus van verschillende Islamitische geleerden over een kwestie van Islamitisch recht (Taslima Julia & Zainab Belal Omar, 2020).

4 In het Islamitisch recht verwijst Ijtihad naar de onafhankelijke of oorspronkelijke interpretatie van problemen die niet precies worden behandeld door de Koran, Hadith (overleveringen over het leven en de uitspraken van de Profeet Mohammed), en Ijma (Makhlouf, 2020).

trouwen, en hun mogelijkheden om beslissingen te nemen in het algemeen, (iv) onderzoek naar het minimaliseren van de gevolgen van een vroegtijdig huwelijk in relatie tot onderwijs, gezondheid en armoede, en (v) onderzoek naar intra-familiale huwelijken, met name met volle neven en nichten, en geboorteafwijkingen bij kinderen als gevolg van dergelijke huwelijken, en de gevolgen daarvan in de context van een vroegtijdig huwelijk.

# Chapter 1

## **The Challenge of Early Marriage**



## 1.1 Introduction

This dissertation engages with the issue of, what in the field of international development is referred to as, “child marriage,” that is, the (formal) union when one or both parties are below the age of 18 (United Nations, 1989).

This dissertation was developed within the context of the five year (2016-2020) “Her Choice: Building Child Marriage Free Communities” programme that is funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Her Choice was an alliance made up of four organizations based in the Netherlands: *Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland* (lead organization), International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI), The Hunger Project (THP), and the University of Amsterdam (UvA). The University of Amsterdam was the research partner, and was tasked with conducting an impact analysis of the Her Choice programme and conducting additional in-depth qualitative research. The other three implementing organizations worked with 30 local partner organizations in 10 countries in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa with a view to creating child-marriage-free communities.

This chapter introduces my dissertation. Section 1.2 details the research problem, highlighting the societal problem that child marriage is seen to pose and clarifying the gaps in existing knowledge about child marriage. Section 1.3 details my research question and the sub-questions. Section 1.4 introduces the overall approach of my research. After this, I discuss the policy relevance of my research in section 1.5, with the final section (1.6) detailing the structure of this dissertation.

## 1.2 Research Problem

The practice of child marriage takes place worldwide, but particularly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Hodgkinson, Koster, and Miedema, 2016). Statistics of 2020 reveal that globally, approximately 21 percent of young women were married before they were 18 years old. 12 million girls below the age of 18 years are married each year, with one young girl getting married every three seconds, and 650 million women alive today were married as children (UNICEF, 2020).

UNICEF (2020) claims that because of the Corona Virus pandemic, the efforts to reduce child marriage have reversed, resulting in an estimated increase of 13 million in child marriage cases across the world by 2030. The report warns that if the efforts to stop the practice of child marriage are not increased, 163 million more girls will marry before their 18th birthday by the year 2030.

While early marriage is an issue for both girls and boys, multiple scholars have described how early marriage is far more prevalent among young women than young men, and how the negative effects of an early marriage are felt more strongly by women due to their biological and socio-economic differences (Efevbera et al., 2017; McCleary-Sills et al., 2015; Nguyen & Wodon, 2012; Warrington & Kiragu, 2012). For this reason, this research focuses on early marriage of young women.

### 1.2.1 Societal Problem

The practice of early marriage poses a critical problem given the numerous negative consequences, particularly in the lives of girls. Some of the critical consequences have been well documented in the existing literature and are briefly discussed below.

#### **Early Marriage and Lack of Education**

Research shows that there is a relationship between early marriage and (lack of) education, with girls who marry early being less likely to go to or complete school (Hicks & Hicks, 2019; Wodon, Nguyen, & Tsimpo, 2016; Raj, McDougal, Silverman, & Rusch, 2014). In the Global South, few young women are given the opportunity to make a choice between marrying early and their education. Otherwise, most of the time, it is the parents or guardians who decide when a girl should get married and if she will continue her education after marriage (Bayisenge, 2010; McCleary-Sills et al., 2015). Research reveals that women with more years of formal education are less likely to be married by force or at an early age because education gives them more opportunities to shape or negotiate their own decisions (Jones et al., 2015; Lee-Rife et al., 2012).

Research also shows that women, when married at a young age, do not usually get the opportunity to continue their education due to combinations of lack of financial resources and increased responsibilities related to household chores and reproduction. Research in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Kenya, and Mozambique found that when young married women continue their education, household chores and early pregnancies constitute considerable barriers in terms of their educational achievements when compared to unmarried young women (Bartz & Nye, 2006; Field & Ambrus, 2008; King, Massoglia, & Macmillan, 2007; Lloyd & Mensch, 2008; Parish & Willis, 2006; Parkes & Heslop, 2013).

#### **Early Marriage and Feminization of Poverty**

Pearce (1978) was the first one to note that poverty is “feminized.” Recent statistics show that by 2030, for every 100 men between the ages of 25 to 34 years living below poverty line, there will be 121 women (UN Women, 2020). Drawing on longitudinal data from the United States (US), Pearce argues that feminization of poverty means that with time, when more women enter into the labour force, female-headed households tend to form a huge percentage of

the poor. Taking inspiration from Pearce's (1978) definition, Chant (2006) coined the notion of "feminization of poverty" as the phenomenon whereby among the world's poor, women tend to be the poorest.

Arshed and Ajaz (2018) argue that women bear most of the *burden* of poverty, in the sense that the negative consequences of poverty affect women more than men, increasing women's marginalization and dependence on men. The authors argue that the feminization of poverty is common in the Global South, which, is not only due to low income and poverty in the region but also due to gender-biased policies; obstructing women from using their financial capabilities to its maximum. Poverty is not just a lack of financial resources but includes other social elements. The World Bank's (2001) World Development Report - Attacking Poverty explains that women's poverty is different from men's poverty due to social inequalities among women and men. These social inequalities include differences in livelihood skills, education, health problems, and men and women's social networks.

The feminization of poverty is also affected by early marriage. Research conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa by Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi (2003), for example, indicates that early marriages and related gender inequalities promote and perpetuate the feminization of poverty because gendered expectations prevent young married women from developing and utilizing their skills to become financially independent. The consequences of early marriage, including a lower level of education, health issues, and intimate partner violence, tend to perpetuate existing gender inequalities in society, which further increases poverty among women (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi 2003).

Figure 1.1 shows a see-saw displaying the similarities between the indicators of poverty among women (World Bank, 2001) and the above-discussed consequences of early marriage, both of which perpetuate the feminization of poverty.

#### **Early Marriage and Exposure to Violence**

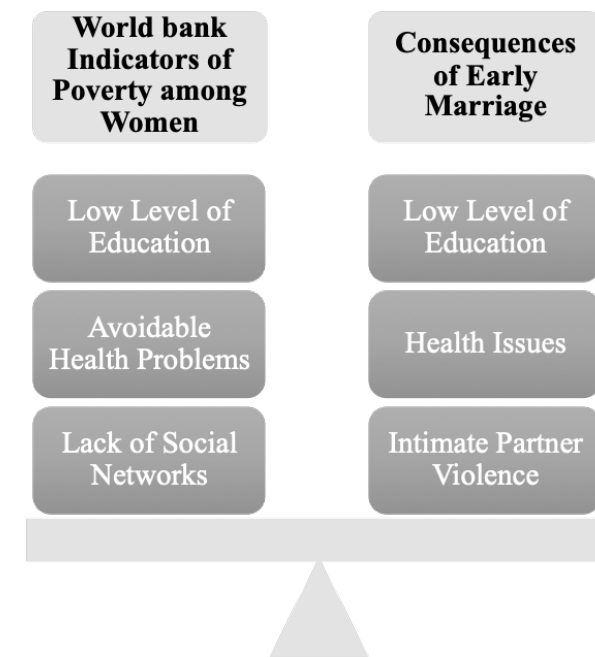
The practice of early marriage increases the risk of intimate partner violence. In India, approximately 35 percent of the women who married early have experienced physical, emotional and sexual violence by their intimate partner (Raj et al., 2010). In general, women who are married early are more likely to face marital violence as compared to women who married later (Ahmed, 2005; Bates et al., 2011; Speizer & Pearson, 2011; Yount et al., 2016).

#### **Early Marriage and Health**

Young women's health and well-being is also adversely affected by early marriage. For example, a large-scale research in Bangladesh, Nepal, India, and Pakistan highlights the adverse consequences of early marriage on sexual and reproductive health, fertility, and maternal health of (young) women (Godha, Hotchkiss, & Gage, 2013). Girls who are

married below 12 years of age have been found to be particularly vulnerable to these health problems, as compared to those who are married between the ages of 12 and 15 (Santhya, 2011; Santhya et al., 2010; Palermo & Peterman, 2009; Bearinger et al., 2007).

**Figure 1.1** Similarity in Indicators of Female Poverty and Consequences of Early Marriage



Source: Author

The pressure on women to bear sons all over the world is well documented (Das Gupta et al., 2003; Haughton & Haughton, 1995; Pande & Malhotra, 2006). Due to this pressure, many young women go through multiple pregnancies before their reproductive systems are mature (Hampton, 2010). An early marriage followed by multiple pregnancies not only negatively affects young women's health, but also the health of children born from young mothers, leading to higher infant and maternal mortality. Such children are also more likely to be suffer from malnutrition because of their mothers' poor health (Speizer & Pearson, 2011; Rahman & Chowdhury, 2007).

Besides physical health, early marriage also affects young women's mental health. For example, research in Ethiopia and Norway – two very different contexts and periods in time – has revealed that girls who are married, engaged, or have received requests for marriage are more likely to have suicidal thoughts compared with those who are not yet considered "marriageable" (Gage, 2013; Mastekaasa, 1995). Studies in Pakistan indicate that the

incidence of suicide attempts among married girls and women is double that of unmarried girls and women (Niaz, 2004; Khan & Reza, 1998). In addition to suicidal thoughts, early marriage has also been found to lead to depression and other psychiatric disorders in the US (Le Strat, Dubertret, & Le Foll, 2011; Horwitz, White, & Howell-White, 2006).

### 1.2.2 Scientific Problem – Gaps in Knowledge

In South Asia, and particularly Pakistan, marriage decisions are made by families and not by individuals. Girls, in particular, have very little say in these decisions (Charsley & Shaw, 2006; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Hussain, 1999). Existing research on decision-making about early marriage has primarily been carried out by civil society organizations or multilateral agencies, for instance, the Girls Not Brides network, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). However, there is a scarcity of scholarly literature that seeks to generate in-depth qualitative data on the nature of these processes and who is involved, when, and how. Little is known about (i) the decision-making process leading to child/early marriage, and (ii) the roles that different stakeholders play in this process, and (iii) implications for policy and practice based on in-depth field research.

#### **Gaps 1 and 2: Child/Early Marriage Decision-Making Process and Role of Stakeholders**

Examining the contexts of Pakistan, India, and Ethiopia, McDougal et al. (2018) and Veen, Moorten, and Durani (2018) point out that early marriage decisions do not simply occur because of being a cultural practice. Instead, the process of decision-making related to early marriage within families is complex, with different families having different reasons for encouraging early marriage and various family members, particularly parents, negotiating marriage terms before and during the decision-making process. These two sets of authors argue that it is crucial to understand this complexity when designing intervention policies and strategies. My research builds on this argument by studying the decision-making process leading to child/early marriage and what roles various stakeholders perform in such decision-making. By doing so, my research fills the above-mentioned first and second gaps in literature.

#### **Gap 3: Recommendations for Policy and Practice Based on Field Data**

Over time the government of Pakistan and non-state actors in Pakistan have developed interventions geared towards the empowerment of women and gender equality more broadly. The interventions also take into account and address the known negative consequences of early marriages (Hanson, Spain, & Bianchi, 2006), which gives hope that these projects may influence the practice of early marriage in the Global South, including Pakistan, as well as the decision-making process around it (Carmichael, 2016). However, there is not enough academic research that offers recommendations for policy and practice to the government and non-state actors. My research seeks to fill this gap by providing multi-level recommendations to various stakeholders, including state and non-state actors of Pakistan.

### 1.2.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To understand the decision-making processes related to early marriage in families belonging to different caste groups in rural Pakistan.
2. To provide policy input to relevant state and non-state actors in Pakistan who seek to reduce early marriage, promote women's empowerment and improve gender equality more broadly.
3. Beyond the context of Pakistan, this research is expected to offer policy input towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and other Global Southern countries who seek to reduce the incidence of early marriage.

## 1.3 Research Question

To fill the gaps in knowledge stated above, the research engages with the following main research question:

**How do relevant state and non-state women's empowerment and gender equality policies and programmes relate to early marriage decision-making processes within families, and across different caste groups?**

This question is answered by undertaking a case study of early marriage practices in Pakistan. At the macro-level, the research explores the links between programmatic interventions of a selection of Pakistan-based non-state organizations, specifically Bedari and the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), and relevant state policies geared towards women's empowerment and gender equality. At the micro-level, it focuses on three generations and four social caste groups through research carried out at the community level in a remote village in Punjab.

To begin with, I present a semi-systematic review of the literature to examine how the literature defines the concept of early marriage and how it is distinguished from the more commonly used term child marriage. The literature review also details what is known about the drivers of early marriage, the role of family in decision-making, the role of social caste in early marriage practice, and (inter)national interventions on early marriage. The review also includes specific literature on the socio-cultural and historical description of early marriage in Pakistan. The review will answer the following sub-question:

**1. How is the concept of early marriage defined in the literature and in practice by different sets of actors in Punjab, Pakistan, and how is the term “early marriage” similar to and different from “child marriage?”**

While some scholars agree with biological determinism of gender, claiming that gender and sex are coextensive and determined by birth (Slapikoff, 2019; Rogers, 2001), others argue that gender is socially determined, and emphasize the process of socialization in shaping gendered expectations, roles and relations in decision-making practices (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008; Moschis & Moore, 2002). Building on the latter conceptualisation, I explore the gendered norms prevalent within families of different social caste groups and generations, focusing in particular on views regarding who is allowed to speak, when, how, and on what kinds of issues. Doing so enabled me to answer the second sub-question:

**2. How do family members of different generations engage in decisions about early marriage, and how do these processes vary across social caste?**

While literature suggests that achieving women’s empowerment and attaining gender equality is not possible without reducing the prevalence of early marriage and vice versa (Megan, 2018; McCleary-Sills, Hanmer, Parsons, & Klugman, 2015), it is also important to unpack my research participants’ perceptions of women’s empowerment and gender equality concerning the practice of early marriage. In so doing, I will be able to answer my third sub-question:

**3. How do different family members’ views on women’s empowerment and gender equality help explain early marriage decisions, and how do these views differ across social caste groups?**

There are laws and policies to control the practice of early marriages worldwide; that includes broader level policies, for example, the Sustainable Development Goals (UNGA, 2015), and national level policies which are different for different countries. Non-state actors such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) also play their role to control the prevalence of early marriages. To better understand the role of policy and programmes in the conceptualization of early marriages, the fourth sub-question is formulated as follows:

**4. How do relevant state and non-state policies and programmes conceptualize early marriage and relate to the family decision-making processes about early marriage?**

## 1.4 Research Approach

Feminist Constructivism forms the ontological foundation of my research (Cresswell, 2003). My research is based on feminist ontology, which holds the idea that women and men matter equally in (inter)national politics, and that gendered power relations are deeply rooted in social structures and institutions, thus permeating policies and interventions as well (Elson & McGee, 1995; Hall et al., 2006). My research is grounded in standpoint feminist epistemology, which serves as my meta-theory, and I combine Bronfenbrenner’s (2006) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) and Bowen’s (1966) Family Systems Theory (FST) to construct the applied theoretical approach to this research (Chapter 4).

Constructivist approach implies that in qualitative research, the only “reality” is the reality that has been constructed by research participants. I use ethnographic research methods that build on similar conceptions of reality (Abu-Lughod, 2000; Pawluch, McLuhan, & Shaffir, 2017; Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). While there are common assumptions between feminism and constructivism, their views about gender and power relationships differ. For example, traditional constructivists such as Detel (2015) consider power to be external, whereas feminist constructivists such as Locher and Prugl (2001) see gender and power as integral elements in the process of social construction.

I depart from a standpoint feminist epistemology, asserting that women and girls are well equipped to understand the issues affecting themselves, including early marriage and family decision-making around the practice. A standpoint feminist epistemology asserts that marginalized communities of society have an “epistemic privilege,” which means that they have a better understanding of their world when compared with dominant set of actors (Fricker, 2015; Rolin, 2010). In the context that formed the locus of my research, young women and people belonging to lower social caste groups can be considered to be marginalised when compared to men, elders, and people belonging to upper social caste groups, who may be considered as “dominant.” Standpoint feminists argue that the “standpoint” is not about a subject’s (biased) perspective, instead it is about the “subjective realities” that structure the power relations in society (Crasnow, 2010; Dallimore, 2003; Harding, 1993, 1991; Hekman, 2005).

Standpoint feminist epistemology is significant in my research because it aims to avoid the “androcentric bias” that is prevalent in research and data. An androcentric bias in a research means that theories, concepts and frameworks are defined according to the position and perspective of male research objects and subjects (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004; Scheper-Hughes, 1983). Furthermore, avoiding the androcentric biases means that in my research, the assumption that the male view is the norm for all people, has been consciously denied in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the topic

of early marriage and early marriage decision-making as a context-specific socio-cultural phenomenon, which is another reason why Standpoint Feminist Theory (SFT) (see 4.2) is the most appropriate choice of theory in context of my research.

In line with the epistemological stance of my research, detailed in Chapter 2, I have adopted a qualitative mixed-method approach for data collection and analysis. To ensure data triangulation, data were collected from women and men belonging to three generations and four social caste groups, representatives of non-state organizations working in the village, Lady Health Workers (LWH), practicing lawyers, and policymakers. Relevant state and non-state policy and programmatic documents provided further sources of data. Furthermore, methods triangulation was achieved by deploying In-Depth Interviews (IDI), (non)participant observation, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), spatial mapping, transect walks, and applying “Feminist Critical Frame” analyses to relevant documentation (Verloo, 2005; McPhail, 2003).

## 1.5 Policy Relevance and Sustainable Development Goals

My research can be deemed relevant to policymakers in the sense that it includes elements of both “ex-ante” and “ex-post” indicators (Bensing et al., 2003). The ex-ante indicators of a policy-relevant research are:

- (i) Relevance of the policy problem (1.5),
- (ii) Translation of the problem into research questions (see 1.3),
- (iii) Feasibility of a research design (see 2), and
- (iv) Expected contribution to problem solution, which, in my research, is mainly in the form of the (inter)national level policy recommendations (see 9.5).

Furthermore, the ex-post indicators are (i) knowledge production, which is the primary purpose of this dissertation, (ii) dissemination of knowledge, which has been done through participation in different (inter)national level conferences and peer reviewed journal publications, other than this monograph, (iii) cooperation between research and policy, which has also been established in the form of policy recommendations (see 9.5), (iv) mobility of the researcher, which is unobstructed, and (v) funding of research.

Besides the relevance for national-level policy, this research also has international level policy relevance, as it relates to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNGA, 2015). For example, under Goal 5 - Gender Equality, target 5.3 refers to the elimination of all harmful practices such as early, child, and forced marriages, and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). In line with the UNICEF and UN General Assembly (1989) definition, the indicator set to measure the achievement is the number of 20 to 24 years-old women, who were married or in an (in) formal union before 15 and 18 years.

My topic also relates indirectly to other SDGs, for example, Goal 1 - No Poverty, Goal 2 - Zero Hunger, Goal 3 - Good Health and Well Being, Goal 4 - Quality Education, Goal 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10 - Reduced Inequalities, and Goal 16- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. Figure 1.2 shows that almost half of the SDGs are directly and indirectly relevant to my topic; that means these goals are affected by and affect the prevalence of early marriages. Therefore, this dissertation concludes with policy recommendations on both national and international levels (see 9.5).

**Figure 1.2** Sustainable Development Goals Relevant to Early Marriage



Source: Author

## 1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 2 explains the research methodology employed in the research, that is, mixed-method qualitative research that draws on ethnographic methods. Chapter 3 is based on an extensive review of scholarly literature about early marriage theories and concepts, the role of family and social caste in decision-making, and the influence of gender equality policies and programmes. Chapter 4 discusses the theoretical points of departure of the research which are SFT, EST by Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1977), and FST by Bowen (1966) and presents a conceptual framework. Chapter 5 engages with the prevalence, forms, and shapes of early marriage in Pakistan; detailing the research setting, providing background information regarding the evolution of policies on child marriage, women's empowerment, and gender equality in Pakistan in general and in the Punjab in particular.

Chapter 6 is the first empirical chapter where I present a Feminist Critical Frame Analysis of nine relevant policy and legal documents of the government of Pakistan and Punjab, all relating to themes of women's empowerment and gender equality. The Critical Frame Analysis presented is supported by IDIs with lawyers, policymakers, and the representatives of selected non-state organizations. Chapter 7 draws on primary data, IDIs, observations, spatial mapping, and transect walks. The chapter offers discussion on when a marriage is "early" according to the participants, what role do grandparents, parents, siblings, and the individuals getting married play in early marriage decision-making, and how the decision-making processes vary across social caste groups. Chapter 8 builds on data from IDIs, FGDs, and observations. The chapter details the findings and discussion about the relationship between early marriage and gender equality, including the men's perspective about the relevance of women's empowerment and gender equality in Pakistan. Chapter 9 concludes the research by answering the main question, and by offering a reflection on the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the research. The chapter also highlights the contributions of this dissertation to scholarly debates globally. This final chapter concludes by providing a series of recommendations for research, policy, and practice.

# Chapter 2

## **Research Methodology**

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a synthesis of the methodological decisions made in this dissertation, and the connection of these decisions with the epistemological and theoretical framing of this research. Section 2.2 presents the process of conducting a semi-systematic review of the literature (Chapter 3). Section 2.3 details the mixed-method qualitative design. Section 2.4 explains the choices made concerning the study location and the sampling strategy used to select participants. Section 2.5 discusses different research methods employed in the research for empirical data collection. Section 2.6 details the Feminist Critical Frame Analysis method used to analyse relevant state and non-state policies, which forms a crucial aspect of my research (Chapter 6). Section 2.7 explains the quality criteria of my research, Section 2.8 discusses the ethical concerns. Section 2.9 reviews the focus and limits, and section 2.10 concludes the chapter.

## 2.2 Review of the Literature

The first step was to conduct a semi-systematic review of the literature (Mullins & Spence, 2003; Pawar & Spence, 2003). While a systematic literature review requires a detailed and comprehensive assessment of all the scholarly literature, a semi-systematic literature review is less rigorous than a systematic review but provides more space to include other relevant literature as well (Mullins & Spence, 2003). The literature review assesses the state-of-the-art knowledge on child and early marriage (see Chapter 3); identifies the gaps in the literature (see 1.2.2); and assesses the state-of-the-art literature on the relevant theoretical frameworks and how best to combine them (Booth, Papaioannou, & Sutton, 2012). The literature review also helped in designing the research methodology and instruments. The review process started by searching relevant keywords<sup>1</sup>. The databases used were Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Scopus. The search revealed 280 peer reviewed academic articles. After reviewing the abstract and conclusions of the articles, relevance to the topic was re-determined, and if relevant, the full text was reviewed.

To increase the reliability of the literature review process, a backward and forward method of referencing was also used (Triyanti, 2019; Levy & Ellis, 2006; Webster & Watson, 2002). While the backward review of literature includes a review of the articles from the keyword

<sup>1</sup> Searched keywords included child marriage, early marriage, teen marriage, adolescent marriage, under-age marriage, child/ early marriage in Pakistan, child/ early marriage and health, child/ early marriage and poverty, child/ early marriage and education, effects of child/ early marriage, child/ early marriage and religion, causes of child/ early marriage, justifications of child/ early marriage, marriage in Pakistan, marriage decisions, family in Pakistan, family decision and marriage, arranged marriage, women's agency, and *Ijtihad*.

search (Levy & Ellis, 2006), the forward review of the literature refers to reviewing various additional pieces of literature cited in the scientific literature, and other relevant sources of grey literature. The additional literature was derived from, among other sources, the library of the University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam Central Library, and Pakistan Higher Education Commission digital library, organizational websites including UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, Plan-International, UNFPA, and Her Choice, and news sites such as Huffington Post, The Independent, The Express Tribune, Geo News, and Africa News. Chapter 3 offers a synthesis of the review of available literature broadly related to early marriage, including definitions, drivers, and role of family and caste in decision-making. The literature review partly answers my sub-question 1. I also conducted a literature review on the theoretical concepts used in this thesis, which include standpoint feminism, agency, patriarchy, strategic essentialism, family systems, ecological systems, and *Ijtihad*<sup>2</sup> (Chapter 4).

## 2.3 Research Design

The nature of my research questions (1.3) demands an in-depth empirical inquiry; therefore, a mixed-method qualitative approach was applied which enabled an in-depth study of early marriage decision-making processes within families, and the influence of state and non-state policies on these decisions. A mixed-method qualitative inquiry not only improves the quality and depth of data due to the variety of methods and data sources used (Terrel, 2012; Östlund, Kidd, Wengström, & Rowa-Dewar, 2011), but also makes the data more reliable and trustworthy because of the possibility of triangulation (Zohrabi, 2013; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Mingers, 2001).

Qualitative research design is diverse and pluralistic, as it includes elements from different schools of thought and different paradigms that have been integrated within one single research design (Sarantakos, 2005: 36–37). Using qualitative methodology to explore the designed research questions opens an array of different approaches, each of which is internally coherent (Jacob, 1987). Qualitative research has the potential to generate deep philosophical insights and has a rich epistemology enabling the study of people, their ideas, motives, attitudes, and intentions, and the way these elements interpret our social world. Cooper and White (2012:XII) explain:

“The Post-colonial/ Postmodern era has generated diverse understandings of equality, initiating a renewed focus on plurality, equity and inclusion as opposed to modernist concepts of division and binary oppositions [...] thus [...] qualitative

<sup>2</sup> In Islamic law, *Ijtihad* refers to the independent or original interpretation of problems not precisely covered by the Quran, Hadith (traditions concerning the Prophet Muhammad's life and utterances), and *Ijma* (Makhlouf, 2020).



research has evolved in the wake of Postmodernity and its aftermath, changing ways in which research is conducted and interpreted. A consequence of this plurality has been richness in epistemology and philosophical thought.”

Data and methods triangulation refers to combining different research methods and different types of participants in research (Hussein, 2015; Miller, Anderson, & Keala, 2004; Jick, 1979). In this technique, various methods are employed, and a variety of participants are involved, and both may overlap. The different methods and participants may complement or contradict each other; therefore balancing each other to give a richer insight into the problem (Olsen, 2004).

The methodology of this research has drawn on my previous exploratory research conducted between June and August 2017, in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. This exploratory research was based on five individual interviews with adult married women and men, and one group discussion with young unmarried female students (see Annex 1). My findings indicated that there were important differences in terms of understandings about the practice of (early) marriage of people belonging to different socio-economic classes as well as different age groups.

This doctoral research is an ethnographic field study framed within a qualitative methodological framework that has utilized the tools of (non)participant observation, semi-structured IDIs, FGDs, spatial mapping, and transect walks. Ethnographic research, used mostly in anthropology, emphasizes studying a specific culture, which is generally tied to the notion of ethnicity and geographic location (Pelto, 1987). Although there are many methods of ethnographic research, I focus on participant observation (O’Reilly 2004; Brennen, 2018; Fine, 2015; Atkinson et.al., 2012; Prus & Jorgensen, 2006; Kawulich, 2005; Gans, 1999). In participant observation, the researcher becomes a part of the culture, actively participates in the surroundings, and takes extensive fieldwork notes. Here, there is no limit to what shall be observed and what shall not be observed (Fine, 2015).

Many feminist scholars prefer ethnographic research because it gives them the liberty to attend to differences between women and men, and give due consideration to their unique standpoints, and different sources and perceptions of knowledge and reality that they may have. Therefore, many feminists use qualitative methods and ethnographic research arguing that doing so allows them to generate theory that offers a balanced viewpoint, and to challenge biases in existing theories and the tendency in much academic scholarship to build on and advance one-sided, usually male, viewpoints (Letherby, 2011). Ethnographic research is unique in that it can help the researcher to break new grounds of knowledge, get new answers to a problem, and yield insights into topics that are sensitive (Rubin & Babbie, 2008: 447). The highly contentious nature of achieving gender equality (or even talking

about it) in relation to marriage within the “Islamic” framework of Pakistani laws, were further critical reasons for adopting a qualitative research design and an ethnographic research method.

## 2.4 Study Location, Sampling Strategy, and Sample

The geographical focus of the present research is a village called *Abadnagar*<sup>3</sup>. It is located in district *Chakwal*, in the province of Punjab. I selected this location because, (i) unlike other villages in the Punjab, it is not industrialized and technologically modernized, (ii) it is safe for research work from a security perspective, and (iii) it is convenient to travel to and live in. Table 2.1 shows that the average household size in the village is six people, and there are 96.7 men per 100 women, which means that there are approximately three to four women and two to three men in a household. In the village, households are usually defined as family members living under the same roof, cooking, and eating together from a shared pool of resources.

### 2.4.1 Village *Abadnagar*, context, and scoping activities

I now describe the context of the case study village *Abadnagar*. Figure 2.1 shows the map of the village.

The map shows that *Abadnagar* is a small agricultural village of approximately 0.11 square kilometres, full of fertile green land. Table 2.1 sums up relevant information about *Abadnagar*.

As mentioned in Table 2.1, 58 percent of the 171 household units reportedly had a water connection. However, my fieldwork showed that water availability is a major problem, and only two of my five participant families had access to the government managed water supply, and for only two hours a day. Photo 2.1 gives an idea of what an average village house and street looks like.

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym

Figure 2.1 Map of Village Abadnagar



Source: Google Maps

Table 2.1 Summary Information Village *Abadnagar*The following are the demographic details of the village as per the 2017 census<sup>4</sup>:

|                                  |  |   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Total Population:</b>         | 1029   | Male: 506<br>Female: 523                                |
| <b>Male to Female Ratio:</b>     | 96.7 men per 100 women                       |   |
| <b>Total Housing Units:</b>      | 171  | With Gas: 0<br>With Water: 58%<br>With Electricity: 86% |
| <b>Average Household Size:</b>   | 6  |   |
| <b>Average Household Income:</b> | 15,000 Pakistani Rupees (105 Euro) per month |   |
| <b>Literacy<sup>5</sup> Rate</b> | 77 percent                                   | Male: 65 percent<br>Female: 44 percent                  |

Information Source: (Government of Punjab, 2015)

Photo 2.1 An Average House in the Village



Source: Author

- 4 This information has been obtained personally from the relevant Union Council office on 28th June 2018. Euro rate conversion is also of the same date.
- 5 "Literacy" in Pakistan is defined as "the ability to read and understand simple [Urdu] text from a newspaper or magazine and write a simple letter" (Iqbal, 2019: Page 1).

Although the house in Photo 2.1 belongs to a *Khokhar* family, who are the second-lowest caste in the village according to the participants, I refer to it as an average village house because, during the transect walk, 102 of the 171 houses in the village looked like this, i.e., they had more or less the same size, were made of bricks, and were not cemented and painted. Most of such houses belonged to the families of the *Bhatti* and *Khokhar* caste groups, constituting 30 and 20 percent of the village population, respectively. Some comparatively better-off *Mussalli* families and some poor *Chaudhary* (the most influential caste in the village) families also had such houses. According to the participants, *Mussalli* constituted approximately 20 percent of the village population, whereas *Chaudhary* approximately 30 percent. Usually, *Chaudharys* were known as very hospitable and welcoming people, and they had houses bigger than the one in the photo, and a separate *bethak*, which is a small guest house to entertain male guests. The *bethak* is always an all-male space, and women only go there to clean up when it is empty. Photo 2.2 is from my FGD conducted with married men, in the front yard of a *bethak*. It shows that the FGD was conducted by a male researcher due to reasons specified in section 2.5.2.

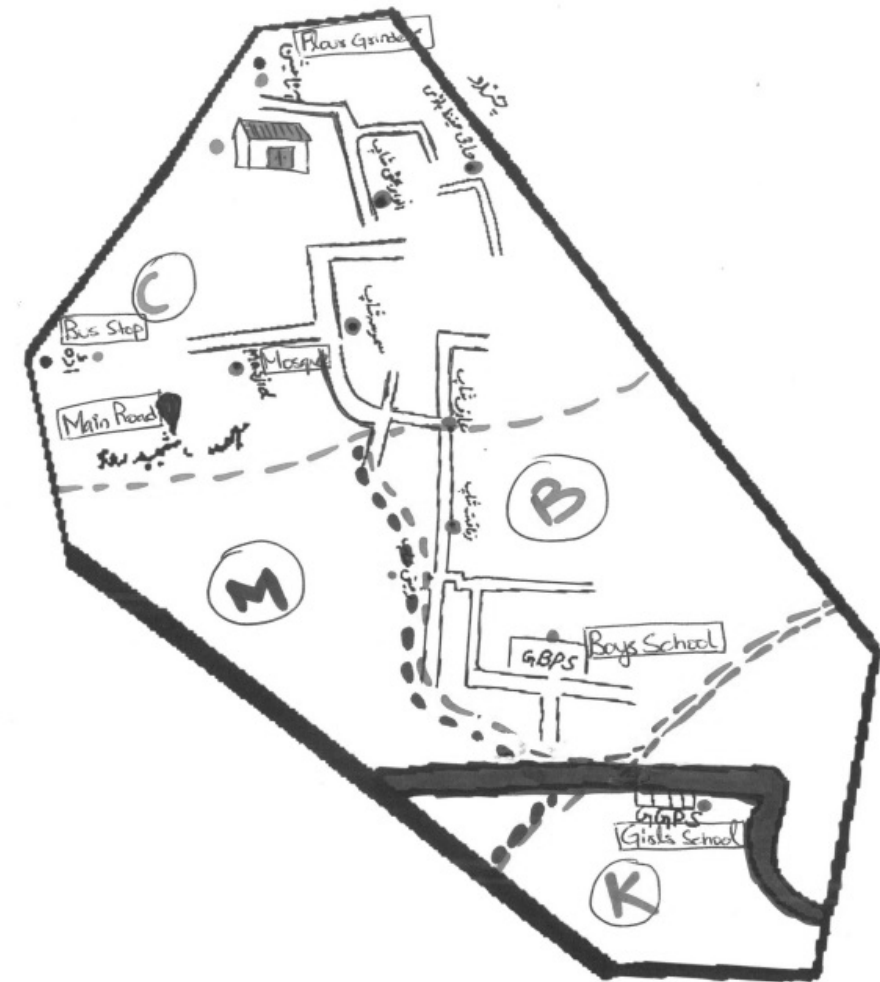
**Photo 2.2** Focus Group Discussion with Married Men



Source: Author

To explore the caste system and differences, I conducted a spatial mapping activity followed by a transect walk (section 2.5.4). Figure 2.2 is a map of the village suggested by the participants, which distributes the village according to social caste.

**Figure 2.2** Spatial Mapping of Abadnagar



Source: Author

In Figure 2.2, the top area bordered by a dotted line is mainly *the Chaudhary* community, marked by a “C,” whereas the area bordered by a dotted line is that of the *Bhatti* community, marked by a “B.” Adjacent to them is the *Mussalli* community, bordered by a dotted line, marked by “M,” whereas the area in the lower corner is mostly occupied by people of *Khokhar* community, bordered by a dotted line, marked by “K.” The distribution is marked with the dotted line because not all the families of one caste group necessarily lived in their area; rather, the distribution is based on the majority of a particular caste group in a particular area.

Figure 2.2 shows that most of the area is occupied by the *Chaudhary* community, and most shops (marked with green dots), the bus stop and the main road connecting the main mosque, and the flour mill (at the top, marked with a red dot) are in the same area, easily accessible to the *Chaudhary* community. The figure also shows that there are some shops in the area where the *Bhatti* community is in the majority. The separate primary schools for girls and boys are also in the same area. For the *Mussalli* and *Khokhar* communities, there are no shops, but the girls’ school is located close to the *Khokhar* community. It is also important to mention here that there are no colleges, hospitals, or police stations in the village. A basic health-care hospital is at 34 km, the police station is 18 kilometres away, and the union council office is at approximately 17 kilometres.

Apart from the participants’ varying access to different resources and facilities, there were also specific problems faced by participants belonging to a specific caste group. For instance, Box 2.1 tells about the birth defects due to intra-family marriage, which are more common in *Khokhar* caste. I offer this brief account of this matter here in order to illustrate one of the ‘side-findings’ of my research.

Box 2.1 shows the problems arising out of intra-family marriages, and the motivations behind the norm of intra-family marriages in the village. While intra-family marriages were the norm across all the caste groups in the village, birth defects were a problem only mentioned by, and observed in, the families belonging to *Khokhar* caste group.

Box 2.2 is an excerpt from my journal, written at a very initial stage of my fieldwork, which illustrates the struggle of finding an entry point to the village, but at the same time, the excerpt gives a glance into how a dominant set of actors (men in this case) present their knowledge as the “truth.” Instances like the one presented in Box 2.2 formed further reasons for deploying SFT in this research, where it is very important to look at decision-making processes within families through the standpoints of all dominant and non-dominant sets of actors in the village (4.2). This journal entry has been translated from Urdu and pseudonyms have been used to protect the participants’ identity.

### Box 2.1 Birth Defects in Children Due to Intra- Family Marriages

While there is a global consensus that children born within (repeated) first-cousin marriages are more prone to mortality, birth defects, and (heart) diseases (Bhopal et al., 2013; Mustafa et al., 2017) which has not previously been explored, either globally or locally. Methods: We analyzed secondary data from a series of cross-sectional, nationally representative Pakistan Demographic and Health Surveys 1990–91, 2006–07, and 2012–13. A total of 5406 mothers with 10,164 children were included in the analysis. Child health was assessed by variables such as history of diarrhea, acute respiratory infection (ARI), people in the village seemed to be unaware of the potential risks of first-cousin marriage. I observed at least 23 people (more than two percent of the village population) including children, with birth defects, and they all belonged to the families of the *Khokhar* caste. One of the participating *Khokhar* families had five children with disabilities, possibly due to the marriage constituting the fourth generation of marriage with first paternal cousin. The reasons mentioned by participants for intra-family marriages included it being the “tradition of fore-fathers” (38, *Khokhar*, IDI on 12/08/2018), “to make the family stronger [i.e., more (male) family members]” (female, 57, *Bhatti*, IDI on 16/08/2018), “to keep the property and resources within the family” (female, 63, *Chaudhary*, IDI on 24/07/2018), “to keep girls of the family within the family” (male, 42, *Khokhar*, FGD on 26/12/2018).

Explaining the motivation behind keeping the girls of the family within the family, a 47 year-old married man belonging to the *Chaudhary* caste confirmed what Baxi, Rai, and Ali (2006) argued about not giving their “weak point,” i.e., girls, because they are associated with the family’s honour to other families and social castes through intra-family marriages.

Source: Author



**Box 2.2** Excerpt from Fieldwork Journal (1)14<sup>th</sup> May 2018

3:45 pm

Somewhere on the highway between *Abadnagar* to *Islamabad*, Pakistan

Fourth day of selecting a village... second village in the day. My father, Sajjal, and I are sitting in a drawing room of one of the most important people of the village, who has political affiliations as well. Uncle *Dadu* seems to know everyone in the village, and he never fails to show it. It is a huge room with chairs and *charpayees* (traditional woven beds) all around. Uncle *Dadu's* family including his brother, nephew, daughter-in-law, and grandson, and a granddaughter, are also sitting with us, but none of us is getting a chance to speak... Despite the fact that we have met for the first time, I can now write a full book on uncle's childhood, education, problems he had to face while going to school, his love and regard for his mother, his deceased wife, etc., because he assumed, we are here to conduct an interview with him, and never tried to confirm his assumption.

My father interrupts and tells him that we are here to see the village, meet people, and get an idea of how life in this village is, because his daughter (myself) wants to live in a village and write a book on the lives of women of three different generations... -interrupted again- "okay, I understand this. Do you have a notebook with you, or shall I give you a paper? *Beta* [calling his grandson] go and bring *api* [Urdu word for an elder sister, which was me in this case] a piece of paper. Okay you can start the interview now."

Confused me... not knowing what to say, takes out her notebook and pen from the bag, "Uncle, but I mainly want to do interviews with women, because I want to know about the problems in their lives, and how they overcome them..." -interrupted- "[laughing] First thing is that you will not find an old woman in this village. Here, the average age of women is 45 or maximum 50. Even if you are lucky enough to find an old woman, she will not be mentally sane enough to tell you about her life. Because women remain very busy throughout their lives taking care of the children and family, they don't know what is happening around or even what they are feeling. You can start asking me the interview questions because I personally know everybody in the village, and I can tell you everything about their lives."

Me and my father exchange awkward smiles... "Uncle, I am still working on my interview questions, and I thought I can complete the questions when I am already in the village because I don't want to miss the important questions which I don't know yet. Do you know of a place where I can stay in the village to do my research safely with my daughter?" A few seconds of silence- my father adds to make them comfortable, "My other daughters go to school and university in Islamabad, so it is not possible for all of us to move to the village. Her husband also goes to office, so he never has holidays [we had already decided to "fake a husband" because we could foresee that revealing the divorced status will make it difficult in the field in terms of acceptability and access to families]."

This is the first time anybody else from his family could speak, because uncle *Dadu* was still trying to digest the information--- a girl living alone in a far-away village to write a book--- lighting his cigarette and going out for a smoke. *Ahmed bhai* (Uncle *Dadu's* nephew), "Uncle [i.e., my father], you don't need to worry. She is like my sister too. She will be very safe here. I can take her to the *Chaudhary's* house, they always welcome guests. His daughters are also educated so they can help you better, and they have a big house. I will take you there once you finish the tea."

Silence... the daughter-in-law serves tea... uncle *Dadu* never returned... I, trying to recall seeing old women in the village... at least three of them while on the way... Why were they invisible to him? Why do some men not let women speak... or they just think they know everything, and women don't know anything, even about themselves... or maybe it is just me who sees this as a problem?

Source: Author

### 2.4.2 Sampling Strategy and Sample

In line with my research question (see 1.3), which focuses on understanding the contribution of different family members in decision-making processes regarding early marriage, I have combined different non-probability sampling techniques. Djamba and Neuman (2002: 142) note that while the research which focuses on individual attributes requires probability sampling, generating socio-economic data and exploring the lived realities of people calls for non-probability sampling methods. Therefore, participants of my research were recruited through the non-probability reputational sampling technique, that is, the sampling technique in which participants are selected based on their knowledge, reputation and prominence in the field (Mohd Ishak & Abu Bakar, 2014; Teddlie & Yu, 2007; TenHouten, 2017). The reputational sampling technique was then followed by the snowball sampling technique, i.e. the sampling method in which the initial participants are requested to refer to other people who might be relevant to the research (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The combination of these methods has helped me recruit participants for IDIs with family members.

In ethnographic research, the sampling method initially proposed might not be the final sampling method. Ethnographic researchers may at first propose the broad category of potential participants, which they may amend, add, or extract from when conducting field research (Bogdan & Knopp, 2003; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Likewise, in my research, the purposive sampling technique and convenience sampling technique has also been used in combination with reputational and snowball sampling.

Purposive sampling technique refers to when participants are selected based on their unique characteristics or knowledge base relevant to the research (Teddlie & Yu, 2017; Robinson, 2014; Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Tongco, 2007). This technique was used to recruit, for example, the lady health worker and NGO representatives for IDIs. Moreover, convenience sampling technique refers to where participants are selected based on easy access and availability (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2014; Ferber, 2002; Sedgwick, 2013; Marshall, 1996). This technique has been used in my research to recruit, for example, young single men and adult married men for FGDs, participants in the transect walk, and spatial mapping, lawyers, and national level policymakers. However, while selecting the lawyers, it was assured that the lawyers have a specialization in family law and more than five years of work experience. Given that state and non-state projects are primarily geared at middle and lower classes, my research also focused on these groups. Table 2.2 shows an overview of participants who have participated in the research through various methods. The table only contains the number of participants who have participated in formal research activities, and not those who have been observed or involved in informal conversations.

**Table 2.2** Overview of Research Participants

| Method                         | Sex     | Participant Type | Number of Participants | Age      | Total               |   |
|--------------------------------|---------|------------------|------------------------|----------|---------------------|---|
| <b>In-Depth Interviews</b>     | Female  | Family members   | 15                     | 16-30    | 5                   |   |
|                                |         |                  |                        | 31-60    | 5                   |   |
|                                |         |                  |                        | Above 60 | 5                   |   |
|                                | Male    | Policymakers     | 1                      | 40-60    | Lady Health Workers | 1 |
|                                |         |                  |                        |          | NGO Representatives | 2 |
|                                |         |                  |                        |          | Lawyers             | 2 |
| Female                         | Lawyers | 1                | 35-50                  |          |                     |   |
|                                |         |                  |                        |          |                     |   |
| <b>Focus Group Discussions</b> | Male    |                  | 9                      | 18-29    | 9                   |   |
|                                |         |                  |                        | 60-81    | 10                  |   |
| <b>Spatial Mapping</b>         | Female  |                  | 20                     | 18-30    | 20                  |   |
|                                |         |                  |                        | 31 above | 20                  |   |
|                                | Male    |                  | 20                     | 18-30    | 20                  |   |
|                                |         |                  |                        | 31 above | 20                  |   |
| <b>Transect Walk</b>           | Female  |                  | 21                     | 9-47     | 21                  |   |
|                                |         |                  |                        | 6-59     | 19                  |   |
| <b>Total</b>                   | Female  |                  | 81                     |          | 81                  |   |
|                                |         |                  |                        | Male     | 81                  |   |

Source: Author

## 2.5 Research Methods

For over a period of nine months (April 2018-December 2018), five research methods were used to gather data, namely IDIs, FGDs, (non)participant observation, spatial mapping, and transect walks. The interview and observation schedules, FGD topic guides, and a combined guideline for spatial mapping and transect walk were designed based on the review of relevant literature, exploratory research, and preliminary observations and informal conversations in the field. The guidelines were translated into Urdu and reviewed by other local researchers who were fluent in both languages (see Annex 2 – Annex 10).

The translated instruments including the observation schedule, interview guidelines, and FGD guidelines, were piloted before actual data collection to ensure the quality of the instruments and improve their reliability (Litwin, 2014; Hassan, Schattner, & Mazza, 2006). Piloting the instruments also helped with verifying the (cultural) appropriateness of the translated terms. A few changes related to re-wording certain phrases and including and

omitting some questions to make them culturally appropriate were made in the instruments. Before piloting the instruments, the opinion of some local experts was also sought to make them better.

Individual interviews with the family members were conducted in two private sessions, and each of the interview sessions and FGDs generally lasted between one to one-and-a-half-hours. The interviews with the lady health worker, NGO representatives, lawyers, and policymakers were held in single sessions, each lasting approximately one hour. As the need for conducting interviews with lawyers and policymakers became apparent only after I had completed my initial fieldwork and had left Pakistan, interviews were conducted via telephone. After seeking verbal consent from participants, interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded. All the interviews with family members were conducted at participants' houses, either in a separate room or in kitchen. I made sure that the conversations could take place uninterrupted and in privacy so that the participants could talk without any interference or external influence. Interviews with the lady health worker were conducted in her clinic, whereas the interviews with NGO representatives were conducted in their offices. FGDs were held in the *bethak* (drawing room for men only) of the *Chaudhary* family that I was living with.

The data were then analysed using discourse analysis method. Discourse analysis method is used to analyse qualitative data concerning interactions between people, and it helps analyse the social context and power relations between the researcher and participants. Discourse analysis takes into account the participants' day-to-day environment in the analysis (Lwin, 2019; Williamson, Given, & Scifleet, 2018; Fairclough, 2013; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2012; Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2008). Feminist ethnographic researchers, for example, Naples (2013) likewise agree that discourse analysis is an appropriate method to analyse participants' standpoint in relation to their setting, including poverty, and sexual and power relations. To do the discourse analysis, I regarded my four sub-questions as the broader themes. I referred back and forth to my data to identify relevant themes and patterns under each of the broader themes. Since broader themes in the form of sub-questions were already there, I did close-coding followed by open-coding. Coding was done manually as software such as ATLAS.ti were not fully compatible with the *Urdu* superscript. Below are the description and processes of each of the methods employed in the research.

### 2.5.1 Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

My formal data collection started with semi-structured IDIs, after staying in the field for more than two months to build rapport and trust. Semi-structured interviews offer the flexibility to conduct a conversation with a participant during which new ideas and topics that arise can be pursued, while at the same time, the interviewer has a guideline of themes to be discussed (Adams, 2015; Livesey, 2010; Longhurst, 2009; Cohen et al., 2006). Semi-structured interviews helped to explore the viewpoints of people because such interviews give the space for

incorporating verbal and non-verbal communication in a speech during the conversation (Cohen et al., 2006). Since my research was based on participants' standpoints, using a semi-structured interview method was the best choice because it allowed me to not only ask the participants what was important to me, but also to know and observe what was important to them.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic, interviews with the family members were split into two separate sessions with a gap of a few hours to a day. While the themes discussed during the initial session were quite general, specific questions about early marriage and other relevant themes were discussed in the second session. In some cases, specifically with young unmarried girls, (part of) the initial sessions were held in the presence of other female family members to build comfort and trust of the participants and their families.

I sought to ensure that interview participants comfortable by seeking their prior, informed, and full consent, and telling them that they are free to stop the conversation whenever they want. I also ensured that my participants feel free to speak their minds by avoiding asking leading questions. I also made a conscious effort to refrain from sharing my thoughts on the subject matter through words or body language. I practiced these skills during mock interviews with colleagues and during pilot interviews. When closing an interview, I always asked participants for feedback regarding the interview and the questions, and I took their input on-board to improve subsequent interviews. The recorded interviews were then transcribed verbatim in Urdu language to keep the essence of the conversations. I hired an assistant to help with the transcription but transcribed almost 75 percent of the recordings myself. IDIs were mainly used to partly answer my sub-question 1, and fully answer my sub-questions 2 and 3.

### 2.5.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Following the IDIs, two FGDs with men were conducted as a part of the data collection. A FGD refers to the gathering of a group of people who share similar characteristics with a view to discuss their opinions and ideas on a specific topic (Masadeh, 2012; Manoranjitham & Jacob, 2007; Parker & Tritter, 2006; McLafferty, 2004; Powel & Single, 1996). In this research, similar group characteristics were their sex, age, and marital status, while the topic was their ideas about early marriage, women's empowerment, and gender equality. One FGD was conducted with ten married adult men, while the other one was conducted with nine unmarried young men (see Table 2.2). Nine to ten participants falls within the bracket of about the right group size (Manoranjitham & Jacob, 2007; Powel & Single, 1996).

Due to cultural restrictions, as a woman, I was not supposed to talk to the male community members (see 2.9). For this reason, I hired the help of a well-experienced and trained man who was working on similar topics in similar settings. I developed and translated the FGD

topic guide (see Annex 8) and prepared the hired moderator well in advance. The discussions were audio-recorded, and observation notes were also taken by the moderator with the prior verbal consent of the groups. The moderator sought to ensure that participants felt comfortable throughout the discussion and provided every participant an equal chance to speak their minds. FGDs were mainly used to partly answer my sub-question 1 and fully answer my sub-questions 2 and 3.

### 2.5.3 (Non)Participant Observation

Participant and non-participant observation have always been a hallmark of ethnographic research. Here, observation is defined as “systematic descriptions of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study [...]” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999: 79). Using observation in research makes a researcher use their five senses to see the surroundings and describe them in the form of a “written photograph” of the situation (Erlandson et al., 1993). In my research, it was very important to know the context, understand the surroundings, informal conversations, and body language of my research participants, therefore, my research called for both participant and non-participant observation methods.

Participant observation is the primary data collection method used by ethnographers and involves data collection through involvement in or exposure to the routine activities of research participants in natural settings (Atkinson et al., 2012; Adler, Kless, & Adler, 2006; Prus & Jorgensen, 2006; Kawulich, 2005; Gans, 1999). DeWalt and DeWalt (2010:VII) state that participant observation involves “actively looking, improving memory, informal interviewing, writing detailed field notes, and perhaps most importantly, patience.” Contrary to participant observation, the degree of the researcher’s participation in the observed situation is minimal in non-participant observation (Thorpe & Holt, 2015; Blackshaw, Crawford, & Crawford, 2012; Cooper, Lewis, & Urquhart, 2004). I used both types of observation depending on the situation; for instance, participant observation method was used during informal conversations with the participants, their families, and other people in the village, lunch and dinner gatherings, and marriage ceremonies. In contrast, non-participant observation method was used in settings including family conversations and day-to-day decision-making. Using (non)participant observation helped me examine the consistency of participants’ interview responses with their day-to-day settings and behaviour.

The observation schedule (see Annex 9) was prepared in a way that it provided space to record both types of observation. In addition to using the observation schedule, I also kept and maintained a daily fieldwork journal. I tried to reduce the possibility of the Hawthorne effect (Levy & Ellis, 2006), that is, a change in behaviour when the participants are aware that they are being observed. For example, I did not take notes while observing to make the setting less formal for the participants, and I sought to control expressions and body language especially during family discussions where decisions, for example, which crops to

plant for the next season were being made. I reflect on the possibility of changed behaviour and responses due to the Hawthorne effect in section 2.9 on study limitations. Participant and non-participant observation helped answering my sub-questions 1, 2, 3, and 4.

### 2.5.4 Spatial Mapping and Transect Walk

Spatial mapping serves as a pathway to get greater insight into the lived realities of participants (Schwartz, 1977). Using spatial mapping techniques in combination with ethnographic methods of research enhances the findings of ethnographic research (Brennan-Horley et al., 2010; Matthews, Detwiler, & Burton, 2007). Transect walks refer to the practice of the researcher walking with local research participants on pre-defined pathways, for instance, mud-trails, way to the well, fields, etc., to get a better understanding of the locality (Gabriel et al., 2013; Dongre, Deshmukh, & Garg, 2009). Spatial mapping, transect walks have been used by various scholars in combination (Porter et al., 2010; Nyanzi et al., 2007). Using spatial mapping and transect walks were not initially planned for, but whilst in the field I discovered that the social caste system was a crucial determinant of power-relations in the community. Spatial mapping and a transect walk allowed me to further explore the system of social caste and power relations originating from such a system.

I used spatial mapping and transect walk in combination to yield the maximum benefit from these methods. The semi-structured instrument prepared for these methods is attached as Annex 10. To start-off, I outlined the map of the village using Google Maps. In consultation with the family that I was living with, I marked some locally well-known locations in the village on the map, including the road, mosques, flour mill, and schools. The spatial mapping activity was conducted with 80 participants divided into four groups; the first group of unmarried men aged between 18-30 years, the second group was of married men above 31 years of age, the third group was of unmarried women between 18-30 years of age, whereas the fourth group was of married women above 31 years (see Table 2.2). The participants were requested to mark the maps through different colours in term of certain areas in which people belonging to certain caste groups live, work, can go, and cannot go. The research participants were also requested to arrange the different caste groups (living in the village) in the order of most to least influential/ resource-rich caste. Different problems faced by the members of different castes and different resources owned by each of the castes was also explored with participants.

The responses which were similar were subsequently categorized into groups. As a result of this categorizing, I arrived at three draft maps. It was noteworthy that the groups of single men, married men, and married women had the same responses, while the group of young girls had different responses. To further study the maps, I started walking through the village with a few neighbours. The group kept inviting all the villagers they met along the way, and I explained to them the purpose of the walk, i.e., confirming the draft maps.



The group became larger and larger with more people including children joining along the pathways, and we kept confirming (and marking) the results of spatial mapping through this transect walk, besides hearing and making other informal conversations about the power structure in the village. The participants in the walk also included some of the spatial mapping activity participants. At the end of the transect walk, we agreed on one final map that marked the (non) presence of certain caste groups in certain areas, different resources owned by different caste groups and different problems faced by them (see Figure 2.2). Spatial Mapping and Transect Walk helped with my answers to sub-questions 2, 3, and 4.

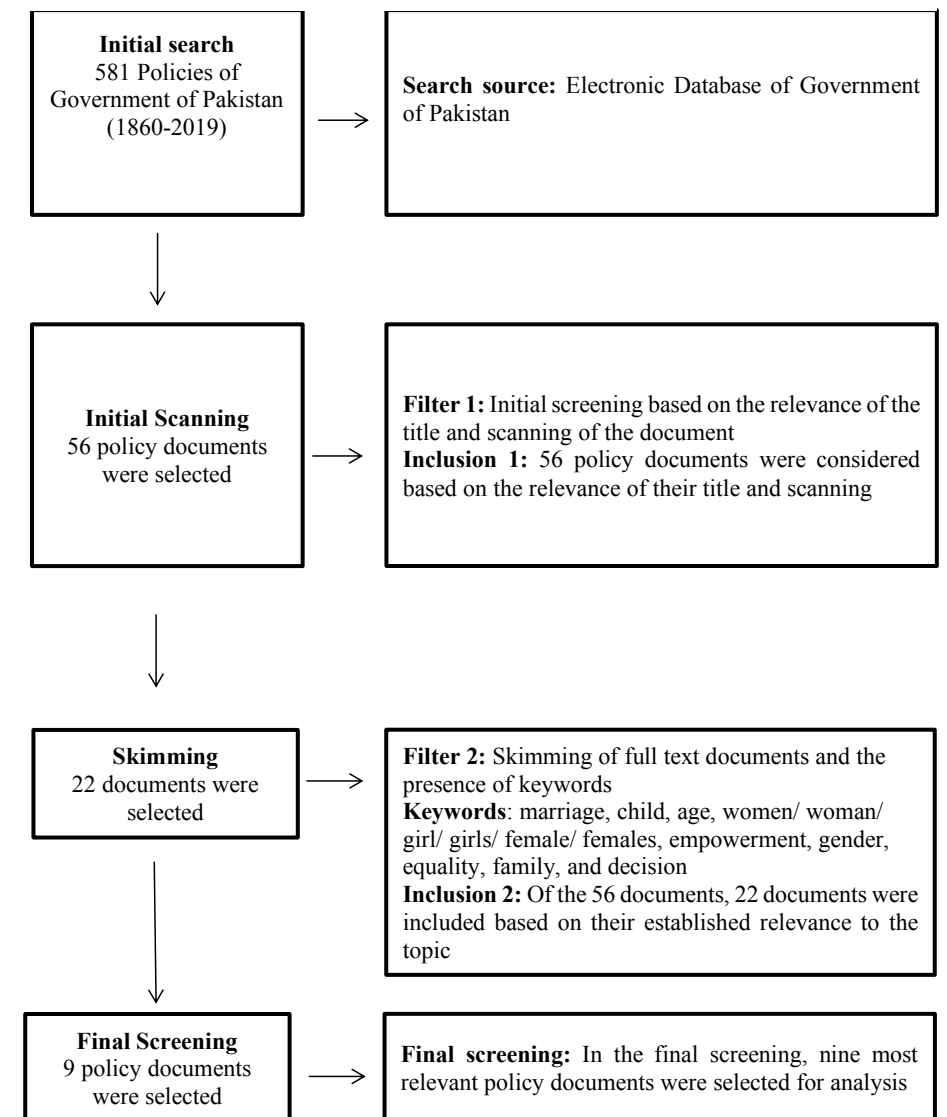
## 2.6 Policy Analysis - Feminist Critical Frame Analysis

Policy analysis forms an important aspect of my research in that I sought to examine how relevant state and non-state policies and programmes conceptualize early marriage and relate to the family decision-making processes about early marriage (see Chapter 6). I selected nine state policy documents (seven policies and two amendments) based on their relevance to the topic of research, that is, early marriages, and their relationship with women's empowerment and/or gender equality. After reviewing all 581 policies of the government of Punjab, Pakistan, from 1860 to 2019, I selected those 56 policies which had direct relevance to (early) marriage, women's empowerment, and gender equality. These 56 policy documents were then scanned to determine their actual relevance with the topic. After the first scanning, 22 policy documents were shortlisted, which were then skimmed to know the presence of relevant keywords<sup>6</sup> in them. After this initial review, the nine most relevant documents were selected for the analysis. Figure 2.3 shows the process and the selection criteria for each of the steps. I drew on Verloo's (2005) and McPhail's (2003) Feminist Critical Frame Analysis methodology to develop a series of sensitising questions to look for in the policy documents, and in the targets and indicators of all the eight SDGs relevant to my research (Figure 1.2).

I deployed Critical Frame Analysis because it has the potential to uncover various hidden dimensions related to factors such as women's empowerment and gender equality (Verloo, 2005), and shows that a document can be interpreted in multiple ways (Meier, 2008). Moreover, Critical Frame Analysis allows the researcher to look not only for what is "said" in the document, but what is implied and also for what is "not said" (Meier 2008, Spencer et al., 2018). While Critical Frame Analysis is used in social movement theory (Buechler, 1995), gender theory (Butler, 1988), and policy theory (Hoogerwerf, 1990), I have only used ideas from the latter two approaches, which I found more relevant to this research.

<sup>6</sup> Keywords included marriage, child, age, women/ woman/ girl/ girls/ female/ females, empowerment, gender, equality, family, and decision

Figure 2.3 Flow Chart of Selection Criteria for Policy Documents



Source: Author

In combination with the Critical Frame Analysis method, I used Feminist Policy Analysis framework because it helps to (i) draw insights about the question of equality, (ii) identify special treatment and protection given to some groups in the society, (iii) explore the myth of gender neutrality, (iv) understand multiple identities, (v) understand the context of policy documents, (vi) analyse the language used in the documents, (vii) explore equality/care and

rights/responsibilities, (viii) differentiate symbolic versus material meanings and implications of policies, (ix) analyse role equality and role change of various groups of the society, including women, men, girls and boys, and (x) analyse the dynamics of power.

Building on elements from the Critical Frame Analysis framework of Verloo (2005) and from the Feminist Policy Analysis of McPhail (2003), a guideline with critical questions to be looked for in the document was prepared (see Annex II). This merger of these two analytical frameworks, will be further referred to as “Feminist Critical Frame Analysis.” A series of questions were developed in the guideline to help identify, among other aspects:

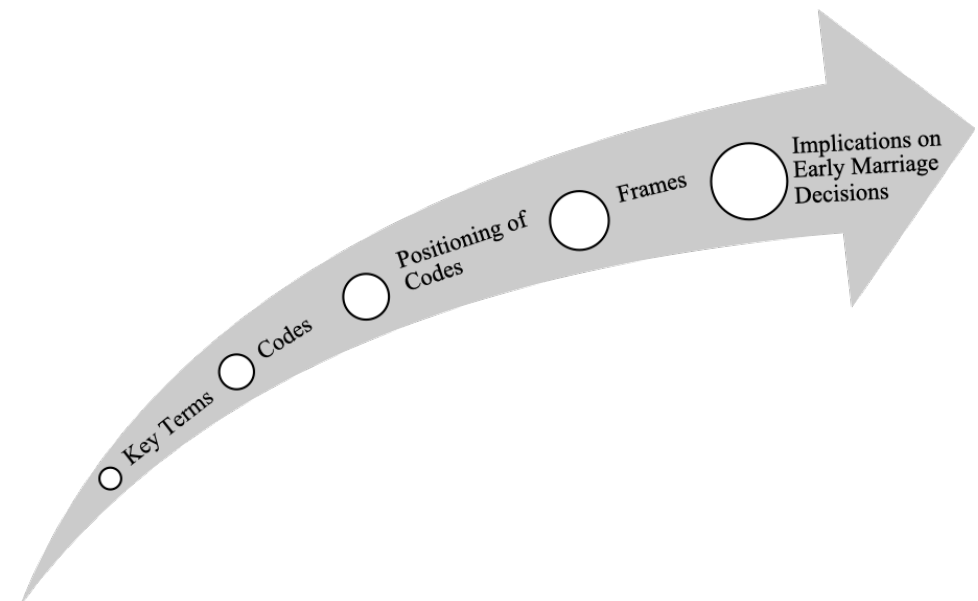
1. How is early marriage defined and framed within the policies?
2. How are the concepts of women’s empowerment and gender equality framed in the policies?
3. What are the strategies used for the implementation of selected policies?
4. How is the implementation monitored?
5. What are the possible implications of these framings for decision-making processes related to early marriage within families?
6. How does the policy mediate relationships between the state and the family? For example, does it increase women’s dependence on the state or the family?
7. Does any special treatment to women cause unintended or restrictive consequences?
8. Does presumed gender neutrality hide the reality of the gendered nature of the problem or solution?
9. Does the language infer male dominance over female invisibility?
10. Is the social construction of the problem recognized?
11. What issues is the document silent about?

In addition to examining the documents in relation to the above questions, the (non) presence and positioning of key research terms – including (early) marriage, women/ girls/ females, women’s empowerment, gender equality, and family – were also systematically noted (Spencer et al., 2018; Verloo, 2005). Feminist Critical Frame Analysis was used to answer sub-question 4.

The process of policy analysis took place in three stages (Spencer et al., 2018; Verloo, 2005). As a first step, nine policy documents were arranged, read, and annotated to identify necessary codes and to organize principles. As the second step, the documents were screened, and the identified codes were interrogated concerning the (already identified) key terms. The (non)presence and positioning of codes within the document were also considered during this stage. The third step involved identifying the main concepts and overarching frames, which enabled me to consider the implication of the (identified) frames

on the decision-making process of early marriage (see Figure 2.4). In the international policy context, I have analysed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNGA, 2015), using the same three-step process.

**Figure 2.4** Feminist Critical Frame Analysis Process



Source: Author, on the basis of (Spencer et al., 2018; Verloo, 2005)

## 2.7 Quality Criteria

Quality criteria are different in qualitative and quantitative research. A good quality quantitative research has internal and external validity, which is established through three criteria namely: (i) establishing the “truth” of research findings, (ii) determining the applicability of research findings to other contexts, and (iii) determining the consistency of research findings if the research is repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Scholars argue that while the same indicators might also be appropriate to determine the quality of qualitative research, the criteria are different (Cohen et al., 2006; *ibid*). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest an alternative set of criteria to determine the quality of qualitative research, that is, (i) in-depth authentic data, and (ii) transferability of research findings. Brewer and Crano (2014) suggest that ecological validity is another form of validity, which refers to establishing the extent to which research findings represent real-life situations.

My research fulfils these three quality criteria of qualitative research. I have gathered in-depth data by using methods (i.e., IDIs and FGDs) and developed authentic data and verified that by triangulation (see 2.3). While the biases occurring due to my positionality were unavoidable, I used a reflexive approach to research (see 2.8.4) reflecting on how my personal life and experiences might have influenced the participants of my research, the data, and analysis (O’Leary, 2004; Yardley, 2000).

The second quality criteria as mentioned above is transferability of research. I have drawn on Miedema (2013), and Finfgeld-Connett (2010) to ensure the transferability of my research, which means generalizing or transferring the findings to other settings or contexts. In qualitative research, adequate transferability is the responsibility of the researcher doing the transfer (Trochim, 2016). In the case of my research, the specific findings might not be transferable, but the broader findings may be transferable.

I have tried to promote the ecological validity of my research by keeping the research setting natural. I have inter-changed participant and non-participant observation methods depending on the situation. For example, in situations where I felt that my participation would make the participants behaviour unnatural, I kept myself at a distance, whereas in situations where I felt that the participants were comfortable, I participated actively. I also inter-changed formal and informal research settings to make participants feel comfortable and respond naturally; for example, formal interview sessions were mostly done at participants’ homes, whereas I continued informal conversations in informal settings such as in the fields, or while walking in the streets.

For rapport building and to make participants feel comfortable, formal data collection methods were only used after living in the village for approximately two months. Living with the *Chaudhary* family made it easier for me to meet and speak to the potential research participants a couple of times before the formal interviews were conducted. At the same time, living with the *Chaudhary* family was a threat to the ecological validity of my research (see 2.9).

In Pakistan, it is customary to give small non-monetary gifts as a token of thanks to people taking part in research, and I followed this custom.

## 2.8 Ethical Considerations

Before the fieldwork, ethical approval was sought and granted from the ethics board of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Amsterdam. To obtain the ethical approval, I had submitted a summary of the proposed research including

the process of recruiting the participants, data collection methods and process, research consent, permissions and access, the safety of the participant and researcher, as well as managing the research data, which will be detailed as follows:

### 2.8.1 Participant Safety

As the topic of my research is sensitive, and people might feel hesitant talking about issues such as their intimate marital relationships, or issues such as sexual harassment, using the snowball technique was helpful. While there is always a chance that social science research may—directly or indirectly—harm participants, I did my best to minimize this eventuality. The expected potential harms in my research were mainly related to (fear of) social criticism and disputes in families due to differing opinions and disagreements, but those potential harms were minimized by maintaining the confidentiality of participants and data.

To keep the confidentiality of the participants, it was mutually agreed between the participants and myself before the interviews that no names would be recorded on the recorder. I also signed an agreement of confidentiality with the assistant hired to help with the transcription.

### 2.8.2 Informed Consent, Permission, and Privacy

I carefully considered ethical issues pertaining to gaining informed consent of research participants before starting any (formal) research sessions. Given only 44 percent of women in the village were literate (see Table 2.1), obtaining written consent was often not possible. Therefore, I obtained verbal consent informally before recruiting the participant families and formally before starting each of the research sessions.

Since most of my participants were above 18 years of age, there was no need to seek additional permission from parents or guardians before conducting interviews. However, in the case of one family, the youngest participant was 16 years old. In this case, verbal consent was sought and granted by the mother and the grandmother, in addition to the girl herself. Likewise, all participants of FGDs were over 18 years of age. Although many children accompanied me during the transect walk activity, except in the one case mentioned above, only participants who were above 18 years old were formally recruited.

One of the themes addressed during interviews was related to sexual harassment. Keeping in mind the culture of associating women of the family with “honour,” and the practice of victim-blaming, I re-sought participants’ consent to audio-record the conversation related to sexual harassment. Two women expressed their concern for recording this sensitive conversation; in those cases, I turned the recorder off and took some written notes instead to ensure participant safety.

Throughout the data collection, documentation, and analysis process, the confidentiality of participants has been respected. The identity of the Village, Tehsil, and District, as well as the research participants, has been protected using pseudonyms. For the two policymakers, I have used policymaker A and B to refer to them. It has been verified that no individual responses can be traced back to the participants.

### 2.8.3 Transparency of Data

Following each interview, I made a verbatim transcript of the conversation and showed or read the transcript to participants to make sure that there had been no miscommunication. Some of the participants, particularly girls, enjoyed reading the transcript of our conversation and elaborated their points further, while other women, especially grandmothers, showed the least obvious interest. Similarly, I shared interview notes that I held with NGO representatives and the lady health worker, and their comments on the notes were incorporated in the transcripts. The audio recordings and soft copy of transcripts are only in my password-protected personal computer, while the hard copy of the notes of observations are in my personal possession. The (unidentifiable) raw data can only be made available upon request to myself and my supervisor(s).

### 2.8.4 Researcher's Safety and Positionality

In my research, there is a potential of bias due to my positionality, that is myself being a South Asian educated, working woman. Initially there was still a fair amount of excitement among villagers about an educated “free” woman staying in the village — it seemingly being unimaginable to most community members that a woman could be permitted to live alone in an unknown village and to do so for work-related reasons. There is a possibility that this culturally strange encounter influenced their responses and behaviour to me and the research, for example, it may have led them to alter their responses or behaviour due to the Hawthorne effect (Levy & Ellis, 2006). For example, some of the respondents appreciated me for continuing my education with a child but discouraged other women around them from doing so. Additionally, I am a divorced single mother, and this status is likely to have elicited a negative response given that divorce is a stigma in Pakistan, and always considered to be the mistake of the woman. Revealing my divorcee status was also expected to affect potentially negatively my (and my daughter's) safety in the village. For these reasons, I decided against revealing my marital status in the field.

## 2.9 Study Limitations

One limitation of my research is that it does not equally focus on responses from men, as it was culturally not acceptable and safe for me, as the researcher, to have one-to-one personal interactions with male members of the community. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of this

research to conduct in-depth conversations with the male family members as well as other influential male members of the community, for instance, religious and political leaders. To mitigate this limitation, two FGDs with single young men and married adult men have been conducted, moderated by an experienced male researcher working with *Bedari* in the area.

Another possible limitation of the study is that most of the interviews, participatory activities, informal conversations, and the FGDs were conducted in *Punjabi*. *Punjabi*, being my second language, is easily understandable for me, but because it has a different script, it was complicated to take notes in *Punjabi*. Therefore, the observation and interview notes were translated on the spot and were made in Urdu or English, which might have brought limitations due to translation issues.

During the research, I usually stayed with a family in the village belonging to the *Chaudhary* caste group (see 5.4). Another limitation of my research can be a possible influence on the behaviours and responses of my research participants because of my stay and close linkages with the most influential and resource-rich social caste of the village. To deal with this limitation, before and during all the (in)formal interactions with the participants, they were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they could refuse to participate anytime they wanted to.

This research was started in March 2017, and all the planning and fieldwork was completed before the emergence of the Corona Virus pandemic. Although the pandemic has affected a lot of practices around the world, including the practice of child/early marriage, it is beyond the scope of my research to study the relationship or influence of Corona Virus pandemic on the practice of early marriage.

Since my research takes place in the “Islamic” Republic of Pakistan, where more than 95 percent of the population is Muslim (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017), and since a lot of respondents mentioned doing and not doing certain things being Muslims, it was very important to interrogate, for example, the notions of women's empowerment and gender equality in Islam. However, due to safety concerns — keeping in mind the religious extremism in Pakistan and in the world — and due to the fact, that within Islam there are several sects and subsects having their own interpretations of the religion, it was not possible to add this section in this dissertation. Similarly, engaging with *Jihad* is not exhaustive as (i) it is beyond the scope of this research, and (ii) it might become controversial.

## 2.10 Conclusion

This chapter provided the details of the methodology adopted in my research. Furthermore, this chapter mentioned the concepts from literature that will be analysed in chapters Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, including definitions, drivers, and role of family and caste in early marriage decision-making, standpoint feminism, agency, patriarchy, strategic essentialism, family systems, and ecological systems.

# Chapter 3

## **State-of-the-Art Review of Child/ Early Marriage Scholarship**

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a synthesis of an extensive semi-systematic review of the literature on child marriage and early marriage. In so doing, the chapter answers the following two questions: (i) What are the gaps in the literature about early marriage? and (ii) How does the present research contribute to the existing literature?

This chapter defines the key terms (3.2), and assesses the underlying factors driving early marriage, including social, cultural, religious, economic, and political drivers (3.3). The chapter also reviews the role of the family in (early marriage) decision-making (0), and assesses the role of caste in early marriage practice as social caste is a crucial element of identity especially in South Asia (3.5). Section 3.6 concludes the chapter.

### 3.2 Defining “Child” and “Early” Marriage

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) defines a “child” as a person below the age of 18 years. In keeping with this definition, child marriage is commonly understood as referring to the formal or informal union taking place when either one or both of the parties are below the age of 18 years (UNICEF, 1989). Archambault (2011: 643) adds that beyond child marriage, “early marriage” refers to marriage that takes place at a contextually “inappropriate” age and time, that is, when those getting married are at an age when they are expected to be doing something else, such as complete a particular level of education.

While the term “child marriage” is used to describe a marriage in which one or both spouses is a “child,” as authors such as Bakhtibekova (2014) and Bunting (2005) have argued, “childhood” is not a natural and universal category. Instead, the discourse of the child and childhood is socially constructed, and is specific to cultures and periods in time. Childhood and the expectations of this period in life differ across time, place, culture, family, and even among different family members, childhood experiences are different. For instance, the role of elder siblings in a family (as children) is different when compared to younger and youngest siblings (Bunting, 2005). Moreover, the economic status of families also affects the roles of children, where low-income families ask their children to work for money, and children from wealthier families spend their childhood studying and playing (Holloway & Valentine, 2007).

Moreover, the definition of a “child,” “minor,” and “adult” may be contradictory in different contexts even in the same policy document (Figure 6.2), making it challenging to agree on one single definition of “child” marriage. In this way, “child” marriage can be used

counterproductively by policymakers who may define “childhood,” for example, as ending with the onset of puberty (Agbényiga DeBrenna Lafa, 2011). Due to the reasons mentioned above, I use the term “early” marriage in my dissertation.

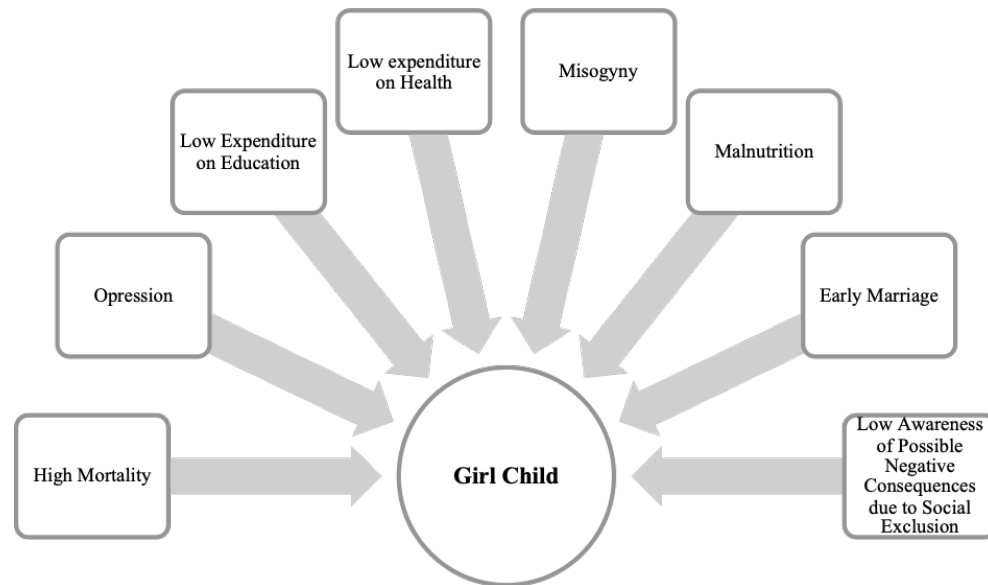
### 3.3 Drivers of Early Marriage

While in some parts of the world, the practice of early marriage has been controlled through useful policy interventions and programmes, in other parts of the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the practice still exists. According to Giaquinta (2016), a key reason why the prevalence of early marriage in many parts of the world remains high is due to the process and practice of early marriage not having been understood and its origin and root causes have not been unpacked (Giaquinta, 2016). Understanding the root causes of any problem is a crucial step of problem-solving, so in order to solve the “problem” of early marriage, I need to de-construct the underlying reasons of this practice (Giaquinta, 2016) in different parts of the world.

#### 3.3.1 Social Drivers

There exists broad consensus that unequal gender relations under patriarchal systems form a central underlying reason for the practice of early marriage (Harris, 2012; Spakes & Smart, 2006; Moghadam, 2002; Whitehead, 1995). Walby (1989) defines patriarchy as a social system in which men are dominant over women, which often leads to oppression and exploitation of women, less powerful men, and other vulnerable groups. Under patriarchy, girls and women are accorded a lower status in society, which leads to practices that often harm them. Early marriage is also a part of this vicious circle revolving around the neglect of the girl child. Figure 3.1 illustrates a circle of girl child neglect, and the issues girls face due to this neglect based on gender inequality and son preference identified through the review of literature.

In South Asian cultures, marriage, particularly early marriage, can be seen as a transfer of patriarchal rights over girls from the father to the husband, and marrying a young girl secures the dominance and control of a man over his wife (Sev'er & Yurdakul, 2001). Men's desire to control and dominate their wives is a key reason why men marry young girls as they are more likely to be obedient and submissive (Sev'er & Yurdakul, 2001). Moghadam (2002) argues that submissive brides are not only desired by men, but also by the parents of the groom so that the bride can be “moulded” accordingly.

**Figure 3.1** Circle of Girl Child Neglect

Source: Author

In addition, the practice of early marriage is not only prevalent in the Global South but also in the communities that migrated from the Global South to the Global North. In such cases, besides the reasons present elsewhere, an important underlying factor leading to the decisions about early marriage is social pressure (Gangoli et al., 2009). Among migrant communities, the practice of early marriage is more due to the social and economic expectations from the country of their origin, and felt pressures on them to maintain certain gendered norms. Also, immigrants living in the Global North may feel threatened by Western values and norms related to marriage and relationships, and thus decide to give their daughters into marriage at an early age (Raley, Durden, & Wildsmith, 2004).

### 3.3.2 Cultural Drivers

The onset of menstruation symbolizes the physical and hormonal changes in the body of girls, but it may also mark adolescence and brings with it many restrictions for girls. For example, in some cultures, girls are not allowed to go out alone after puberty, so that they remain sexually inactive or “pure” and protect the honour of their family (Raley, Durden, & Wildsmith, 2004). There is a positive correlation between early onset of menstruation and early marriage, Raj and colleagues (2015) calling for greater awareness that while the onset of menstruation is indicative of a girl’s maturing reproductive system, it is not an indicator of a girl’s readiness for childbearing (Raj et al., 2015). The association of girls with family

honour does not only affect their mobility due to risks outside (Conolly & Parkes, 2012), but also makes girls more vulnerable to early marriage in conflict-affected areas, because of the perceived threats of rape, sexual violence, and sexual harassment (Spencer, 2015; Schlytter & Linell, 2010; Ouis, 2009; Cahill & Seed, 2006; UNICEF, 2005; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001).

Jones and colleagues (2015; 2014) discuss gender stereotypes that influence the lives of young women. According to the authors, a critical factor leading to the practice of early marriage is the social norm focusing on the “sexual purity” of girls. Being sexually pure refers to not even thinking of engaging in sexual intercourse or any other sexual acts until marriage, and not engaging with someone other than your spouse.

The tradition of giving dowry<sup>7</sup> in South-East Asia also has a significant relationship with parents’ decisions about marrying their daughter at an early age. White (2014) and Cohen and Goitein (2006) argue that arranging for the dowry is often an economic challenge for most parents, especially during economically hard times. Therefore, parents may seek to ‘rid’ themselves of the responsibility of giving dowry as soon as they have the resources to do it.

The tradition of a groom or his family paying a bride price to the bride’s family in parts of Africa, also plays a crucial role in determining the age of marriage for a girl. For example, Pratt (2012) and Nour (2006) have discussed that in some parts of Africa and South Asia, the bride price is paid according to the age of the bride. The younger the bride, the higher the price will be for her. This practice makes marriage a business proposition, where the girl is supposed to be given into marriage by her family at an early age to the highest bidder (Tremayne, 2007).

### 3.3.3 Subjectivity of Age as a Driver of Early Marriage

Galambos et al. (1999) frame their discussion around the idea that personal age or absolute age of individuals is often different from their “subjective age,” which is defined by Siegel and Laslett (2006) as an individual’s “experiential age.” Deaton and Stone (2015) and Galambos et al. (1999) have argued that the subjective age of individuals is based on the indicators of an individual’s age, education, self-esteem, health, financial status, and job security. Thus, the literature suggests that the individual’s age at marriage should not merely be decided based on their chronological age; instead, their subjective age also needs to be considered.

Both recent and ancient pieces of research show that religion has a link with the practice of early marriage. Since, the advent of religion, religions have influenced the age of marriage among its followers (Tremayne, 2007). Within all major religions, the marriageable age for girls appears to be related to the start of puberty and perceived sexual maturity.

<sup>7</sup> Money, property, or goods brought by a bride to her groom on their marriage.



### 3.3.4 Economic Drivers

The literature shows that early marriage is sometimes used as a strategy to cope with poverty in poor and low-income families, as giving the girl in marriage relieves the financial burden of the girl from her parents' shoulders (Yarrow et al., 2015). The tradition of giving dowry also puts an economic burden on girls' parents, and most parents want to get rid of this "burden" as soon as they are able to (White, 2014; Cohen & Goitein, 2006). In Islamic contexts, the amount of *Mahr*<sup>8</sup> has also shown to influence decisions of parents who are not financially stable, about when and with whom they marry their daughters (Moors, 2018, 1994, 1991). Additionally, in conflict situations, people give their young daughters into marriage for economic survival and social security (Spencer, 2015; International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2007; Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi, 2003).

While the literature shows that an early marriage might be perceived as "the solution" to economic problems faced by the families, Wodon et al. (2017: 47) claim that child marriages have an economic cost, and ending child marriages by 2030 would globally save approximately "\$1.7 billion in welfare, \$327 million in education budgets, \$34 million in reduced infant mortality, and \$8 million through reduced child stunting." Furthermore, Jones (2017: 29) argues that reducing the childbirths associated with child marriage would "lead to a global welfare benefit saving of \$566 billion in purchasing power parity by the year 2030."

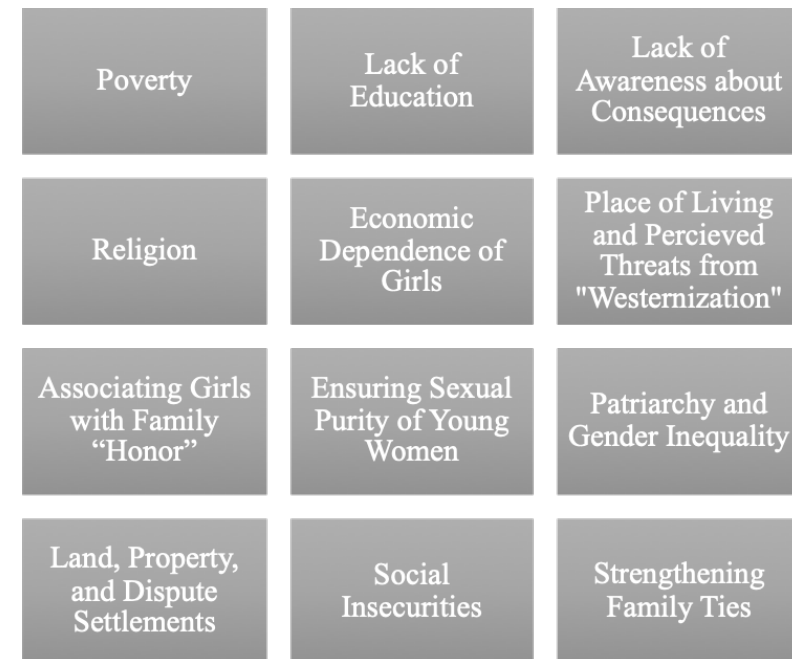
### 3.3.5 Policy Agenda

Most of the reasons discussed above are also political; had they been on the policy agenda, the frequency of early marriage would probably have been reduced. However, a critical political reason behind the practice of early marriage is lack of investment in education and unequal access of girls to formal education.

The lack of formal education among young women and their parents increases the likelihood of early marriage, whereas, increased levels of education among young women decreases the prevalence of early marriage and the likelihood of economic participation (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014; Brown, 2012; Jensen & Thornton, 2003; Nour, 2009). Moreover, educated mothers of girls and boys are likely to marry off their children at a later age, as compared to uneducated mothers, because they are better aware of the negative consequences of early marriage (Bates et al., 2011). Figure 3.2 shows the driving factors of early marriage, as identified through the review of the literature.

<sup>8</sup> In Muslim marriages, *Mahr* is a mandatory payment, which may be in the form of cash or possessions, which is to be paid (or promised) by the groom (sometimes his father) to the bride at the time of marriage; and it becomes her legal property (Ahammad, 2016).

Figure 3.2 Driving Factors of Early Marriage



Source: Author

## 3.4 Role of Family in Marriage Decisions

While in much of the Western world, marriage and the choices of marriage partner are commonly based on individuals' preferences, in Asia — more particularly in South Asia — marriage is more about the family and the community, and less about the individual choices of intended spouses (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). For example, in Pakistan and India, decisions regarding marriage are made more "interdependently" as a rational family choice (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). Marriages, which tend to be planned and agreed on by parents, guardians, or family elders of the bride and groom, are usually referred to as "arranged marriage" (Martínez & Ruiz, 2014; Ghimire et al., 2006; Gupta, 1976).

Although there is a vast body of literature on the trends and consequences of love and arranged marriages, there is a scarcity of scholarship dealing with the decision-making processes related to (early) marriage, and who contributes in what way. Existing research on decision-making about early marriage has primarily been carried out by civil society organizations or multilateral agencies.



The practice of arranged marriages may be a sensible choice, as compared to relying solely on the decision of the intended spouses. For instance, Hortaçsu and Oral (1994) refer to the practice of arranged marriages as “pragmatic marriages” and such marriages are common worldwide because of the idea that depending on the family regarding spouse selection is an advantage, as the parents and elders have more wisdom and experience. Moreover, the parents or elders make an intentional effort to choose a family, which matches their socio-economic status, background, education, and lifestyle and may thus have a higher chance of a successful marriage (Batabyal, 2001). The same interests underpin the intra-family/consanguineous marriages and intra-caste marriages (Batabyal, 2001).

However, some arranged marriages may be a euphemism for “forced” marriages. For example, Anitha and Gill (2017), Bravo et al. (2014), Conway (1999), and Ouattara, Sen, and Thomson (1998) contend that although the concepts of arranged marriage and forced marriage are different theoretically, in practice, they may be similar. The authors argue that the difference between both is the difference between coercion and consent. However, in most cases of arranged marriages, the free, full, and informed consent of both the parties are not given due importance. There may be a fragile boundary between coercion and consent (Enright, 2009). Therefore, sometimes, the marriage may not be framed as “forced,” but in case of arranged marriages, the marriage might be forced on one of the parties with no or thin agency to say “no.” Intended spouses may not have the liberty to refuse, due to pressure from their family and society (Phillips & Dustin, 2004), may not see themselves as capable or experienced enough to decide for themselves (Ertem & Koçturk, 2008), or may not have other choices. Besides the binary of love and arranged marriages, there are also hybrid arrangements where a combination of love and arranged marriage occurs, where the intended spouses fall in love with each other, and take the help of their family to arrange the marriage. This kind of marriage is increasingly gaining acceptance in Pakistan (Marsden, 2007).

Marsden (2007) has argued, early marriage may also amount to forced marriage by default, when young adults are being married-off without their “free” consent (i.e. without any apparent or hidden pressures), “full” (i.e. without any conditions or apprehensions), and “informed” (i.e. keeping in mind the possible consequences) consent. Even if the decision-makers are courteous enough to ask for the consent, the adolescent cannot be expected to give an informed consent without any pressure, because of her or his limited knowledge and experience (Ouattara et al., 1998).

### 3.5 Role of Social caste in Early Marriage Practice

While caste is defined as a system of social stratification, whereby individuals and families are grouped into different socio-economic strata by society (Das, 2015; Scott & Marshall, 2009), the institution of marriage is the binding force, which usually keeps this historical grouping and transmits through heredity (Davis, 2004). In some parts of the world, for instance, India, the caste system is based on religion. However, elsewhere, including Pakistan, social caste exists which classifies people into groups with specific lifestyles, occupations, status, a way of social interaction, and (in)exclusion (Bidner & Eswaran, 2015; Davis, 2004).

Although the social caste system has existed worldwide, including in Europe (Metcalf & Rolfe, 2010; Thomas, 2008), America (Warner, 2002), Africa (Watson, 2016; Obinna, 2012; Tamari, 1991), Middle East (Pham, 2010), South-East Asia (The Telegraph 2012; Batten, 2006; de Vos & Wagatsuma, 2006), at present, it is most widely present in South Asia (Kuper, Barnard, & Spencer, 2006).

In arranged marriage settings, when families are looking at different marriage proposals, caste is a critical consideration in South Asia (Kuper, Barnard, & Spencer, 2006). Other considerations including religion, age, socio-economic status of the family, and education. In certain social caste groups, there is reportedly enormous social pressure on families to give their girls into marriage at the time of puberty, due to – among other reasons – the fear of becoming corrupted by men of other social castes (Girls Not Brides, n.d.).

Intra-caste marriages are often linked to early marriage because when people of one social caste are not allowed to marry people of another social caste, people wish to avoid a situation where young people fall in love with people from another social caste (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). To ensure this, early marriages are practiced so that the social caste system continues (ibid).

In South Asia, the practice of early marriage became legitimate due to caste and religion (Madan, 2012). To protect blood purity amid then ongoing situation of war and hatred among different ethnic and religious groups until the mid-19th century, the practice of early marriage became widespread. To ensure that children are born to a woman from the same social caste and religion, girls were commonly given into marriage somewhere between their infancy to puberty (Keyfitz & Heimsath, 2010). While the social caste system is currently not as rigid as it used to be, it still counts when marriage decisions are taking place. Therefore, my research also addresses social caste to answer sub-question 2.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides the following answers to the questions asked in the beginning of this chapter: (i) Three gaps were identified through the review of literature, detailed in 1.2.2, and (ii) my research contributes to the existing literature by filling all the three identified gaps through answering my research question and sub-questions (see 1.3). In the following chapter, I will look at the concepts of agency, decision-making, and empowerment in detail.

# Chapter 4

## **Theoretical Framework**

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework that guides this research. It aims to address: (i) What are the feminist assumptions of this research and the researcher? (ii) How are empowerment and gender equality conceptualized? (iii) Which combination of theories provides the most appropriate analytical tools to guide this research?

This chapter starts with an overview of the meta-analytical lens SFT, and a discussion about the “patriarchal bargain,” an essential concept of (critical) feminism (Kandiyoti, 1988). Drawing on critical feminist literature, and particularly scholars such as Bracke and Bellacasa (2004), Collins (1990), and Harding (1993) enables me to lay bare the implicit and explicit power relations shaping early marriage decision-making at multiple levels (e.g., individual level, household level, community level, provincial level, national level, and international level) and within multiple domains (e.g., state policies and non-state programmes). This research also builds on the work of intersectional feminist scholars such as Collins (1990), and Few-Demo and Allen (2020), which informed my conception of intersectionality as a critical (and radical) practice that challenges the positivist notion of a universal reality and existence of a single truth (see 4.2).

In section 4.3, I engage with scholarship on the concept of women’s empowerment. Section 4.4 discusses the notion of gender equality. In sections 4.5 and 4.6, I present respectively, the basic premises of EST model and Family Systems Theory (FST) and clarify how these two bodies of theory are applied in the present study. In section 4.7, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings and principles of *Ijtihad*, that I will use to form my policy recommendations (see 9.5.6). Section 4.8 brings together the different theoretical and conceptual points of departure in a conceptual scheme. This scheme includes a visual representation of my conceptual framework (Figure 4.2), showing the relationship of family, social caste, state policies, and non-state projects with the practice of early marriage, and how standpoint feminists would see this relationship. Finally, section 4.9 concludes this chapter.

## 4.2 Standpoint Feminist Theory

Standpoint Feminist Theory (SFT) focuses on the power of knowledge. Standpoint theorists contend that authority lies in individuals’ knowledge, perspectives, or lived realities (Krishnan, 2010; Twis & Preble, 2020). The most essential concept of this theory is that the perspectives of an individual are shaped by the social and political events happening around them, which makes their perspective unique and essential. The combination of

a person’s personality, demographic characteristics and the socio-political events taking place in their background form a “standpoint,” through which the person experiences and sees the world (Twis & Preble, 2020).

SFT confirms the feminist notion of “strong objectivity,” which Harding (1993) defines as the idea that the standpoint of oppressed and marginalized individuals can help visualize the world more objectively because the “outsiders” can then reflect on the lived realities of the oppressed and marginalized through their standpoint, which is not the “lived reality” of the outsiders (see also Allen, 2011; Yogisha & Kumar, 2020).

SFT focuses on oppressed and marginalized communities and has been applied by scholars in different areas, such as social work (Keeling & Van Wormer, 2012; Swigonski, 1993), human trafficking (Twis & Preble, 2020), welfare systems (Power, 2004; Swigonski, 1993), empowering women through awareness-raising (Edmonds-Cady, 2009; Hesse-Biber et al., 2012; Mosedale, 2014), employee behaviour in organizations (Gatua, Patton, & Brown, 2010), and management sciences (Allen, 1995; Breeze & Taylor, 2020).

SFT was inspired by the Marxist conception of differences between the proletariat (working class) and bourgeoisie (elite class), arguing that people from the working class have access to knowledge (based on self-experience) that cannot be accessed by people from a more privileged class. My research also builds on the work of Allen (2011), who argues that in sociological research, women have tended to be ignored, objectified, and treated as the “other.” She further argues that women’s experiences are different from those of men, which can provide social scientists with new questions and unique answers. For example, because women have historically been in the role of a caregiver, their caregiving role is considered “natural,” and thereby rendered invisible. If sociological research considers female perspectives, the historically natural association of women with the caregiving role and its consequences can be challenged (Allen, 2011).

Collins’s (1990) notion of negating universal womanhood and emphasizing the notion of a “relational standpoint” has been crucial to much standpoint feminist scholarship (Intemann, 2010; Narayan, 2004; J. Phillips & Phillips, 2019). Because sexism does not emerge in a vacuum, it is essential to see the problems faced by women in relation to other systems of power and oppression, for example, race, class, and colonialism (Collins, 1990; Few-Demo & Allen, 2020; Narayan, 2004).

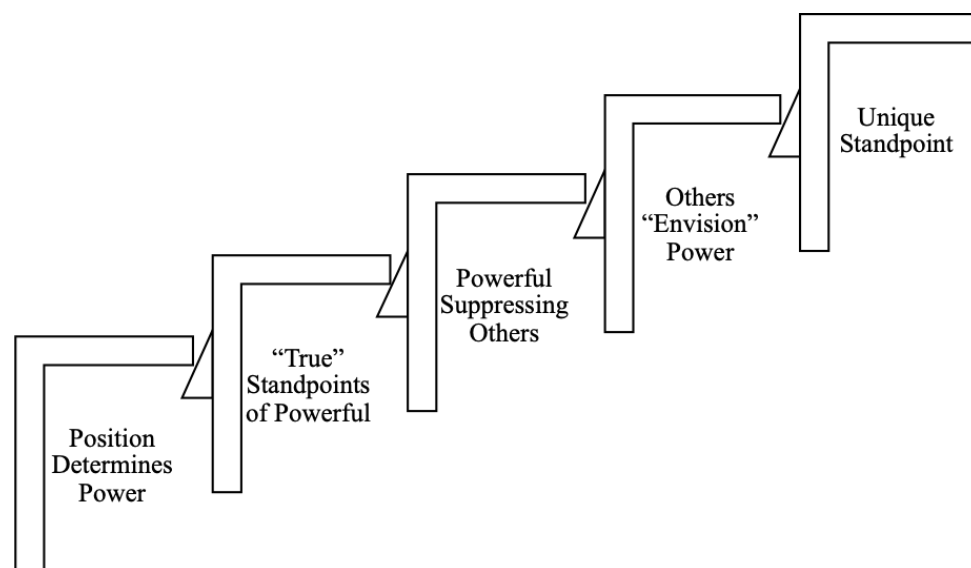
Feminist scholars such as Bracke and Bellacasa (2004), and Collins (1990) have further added to SFT by arguing that within the category of women, there are different lived realities. For example, the life experiences of a black woman differ from those of a white woman. As scholars such as Collins (1990) argue, the matrix of oppression is thus not only about gender,

but also interlocks with, for example, race and class oppression. Another reason I deploy SFT over other (feminist) theories is that SFT also takes into account what Noble and Tynes (2016) call the “trouble” with white feminism, that is, the problem that much feminist work is informed by the experiences of white middle class women, and that these experiences are considered universal (Herr, 2014). SFT (Figure 4.1) is thus inclusive of non-white perspectives, including those of the so called Global South.

#### 4.2.1 Key Insights and Operationalization

Underlying assumptions of SFT are: (i) An individual’s standpoint is determined by their understanding of the contextual social and power relations, (ii) all standpoints are socially created; therefore, they are partial, (iii) the standpoints of dominant or ruling classes tend to be constructed as the truth, which harms subordinate actors, and (iv) dominant groups mostly have the power to structure life around them, and they usually structure life in a way that does not hinder their choices and opportunities, but hinders the choices and opportunities for subordinate set of actors (Adler and Jermier 2005); Flatschart 2017). Finally, according to SFT, the process of struggling to achieve their vision of social life gives subordinate actors a unique standpoint, which makes them powerful in terms of the epistemic advantage they have, because dominant actors are not likely to have this standpoint. It is important to explore this standpoint. While some assumptions are illustrated in Figure 4.1, the following figure highlights crucial concepts of SFT and their operationalization in my research.

**Figure 4.1** Basic Assumptions of SFT - Forming a Standpoint



Source: Author

#### Standpoint

Standpoint refers to a (mental) location that leads to a particular viewpoint of lived realities, shared by a group of people with the same status within a social structure (Harding, 1991). Having this unique standpoint gives the group an epistemic advantage over the other groups (Ashton & McKenna, 2020; Bracke & De La Bellacasa, 2009; Fricker, 2015; Rolin, 2010). The concept of standpoint is used in this dissertation both in terms of my standpoint as an educated, divorced, single mother belonging to the upper middle class studying at a foreign university, as well as the standpoint of the research participants belonging to a small village in interior Punjab, where social caste is still a fundamental determinant of living a good life.

#### Outsider Within

The concept of outsider-within was coined by Collins (1990) where she has described the way “black” women have lived in “white” families and have acquired the status of outsider-within; outsider because they would not feel a part of the mainstream and were treated unequally, but within because they were a part of the white community. I extend this concept in my research concerning gender inequalities rather than racial inequalities. The concept of outsider-within is that the standpoint of marginalized and oppressed individuals or groups can create a different reality of the world because, for the individuals who are oppressed and marginalized, the truth is different from that of the dominant set of actors, which gives marginalized groups the position of an outsider-within (Allen, 2011). Through SFT, the outsiders-within are given a voice to speak up about their marginalization and challenge the status quo. The concept of outsider-within is relevant to my research concerning gender and social caste.

#### From “Truth” to Strategic Essentialism

SFT tends to disagree with essentialism, that is, certain categories, for example women, men, and children, have a common reality or “truth,” which makes them what they are (Newman & Knobe, 2019). SFT also disagrees with the presence of a single universal truth (Hekman, 2005). However, the need to set some minimum standards for policy and practice remains there. To meet this need, feminist authors such as Colebrook (2001), Eide (2017), Pande (2017) and Veronis (2007) have used the term “strategic Essentialism” to set standards for policy and practice. Spivak (1988, pp. 68, 81) coined the term strategic Essentialism to acknowledge that while essentialism is problematic because it overshadows “others,” there is social and political need for strategic essentialism, i.e., a strategy which people of marginalized nationalities, sexual identities, and ethnic groups can use to present themselves. Mambrol (2016: 1) gives an example of strategic essentialism as:

“The bringing together of diverse agendas of various women’s groups to work for a common cause. Thus, strategic essentialism is about the need to accept temporarily, an “essentialist” position in order to be able to act.”

Since my research is built on the theoretical foundations of SFT, and at the same time my research intends to offer recommendations for policy and practice at multiple levels, I use the notion of strategic essentialism to do so.

#### 4.2.1 Patriarchal Bargain and Multiple Patriarchies

While SFT is my meta-theory, I draw on the concept of the “patriarchal bargain” as a heuristic tool to support the examination of my data (Aboulhassan & Brumley, 2019; Kawarazuka et al., 2019; Chaudhuri et al., 2014; Tu, 2004; Hutson, 2001; Kandiyoti, 1988). The idea of the patriarchal bargain might explain the widespread concept in Pakistan and other South Asian countries, that “women are women’s worst enemies.” Chattopadhyay (2017: page 1) writes:

“It is a simplistic, but incorrect, conclusion to draw from some of these depictions of on-screen female villainy is that women are women’s worst enemies [...] Our confusions about why women often act against the interests of other women, despite our assumption of a universal sisterhood, can be clarified by unpacking an often overlooked, but important concept in feminist theory called patriarchal bargain. This is the key to understanding why and how women turn oppressors against other women, while being simultaneously oppressed within patriarchy [...] The token torturer, is a woman, who has internalised societal norms to such an extent that she is unable to reflect on the fact that the injustices rolled out by her are the same ones she once suffered from.”

While the dictionary definition of “bargain” is “an agreement between two or more people or groups as to what each will do for the other” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017: 147), Kandiyoti (1988) argues that under a patriarchal bargain, women bargain with the social system of patriarchy in order to gain benefits, such as power and control, that they would be less likely to acquire if they did not conform to the system. The bargain entails that women uphold and accommodate patriarchal norms, and accept gender norms even if these disadvantage (other) women. Kandiyoti argues that young brides begin to gain power within a patriarchal setup by producing sons, saying:

“[A woman’s] life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law. The cyclical nature of women’s power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves” (Kandiyoti, 1988: 279).

Patriarchy, as a social system, is broadly acknowledged to constitute one of the drivers of early marriage (see 3.3). The concept of the patriarchal bargain combined with SFT is thus very relevant to the present research.

Relevant too is Sangari’s (1995) concept of multiple patriarchies. Sangari argues that patriarchy should be understood in the plural, i.e., in a facet of caste and class, which is exercised in through political and religious power. Sangari (1995) thus claims that there are separate patriarchies governing women and men across caste groups and religions. Since caste is critical to my research, I include Sangari’s (1995) idea of multiple patriarchies (see 9.4).

### 4.3 Conceptualizing empowerment and agency

Feminist authors such as Batliwala (1993) claim that the meaning of the term “empowerment” cannot be specified, which makes the term broad enough to give breathing space to the people who work with it. However, Spencer (2014) emphasizes the importance of conceptualizing empowerment, which is missing in most of the literature. She asserts that empowerment is often conceptualised as a solution to problems, but when left undefined, the contested nature of the term might become a problem in itself.

Tones (2001) argues that the meaning of “empowerment” may vary depending on whether emphasis is placed on collective or individual forms of empowerment, or on its focus on empowerment as an outcome or empowerment as a process. Regarding the former argument, Carvalho (2004) notes that literature on social psychology emphasizes individual – psychological – empowerment, whereas community development literature focuses more on collective – community – forms of empowerment (see Spencer, 2014). In my research, I use the notion of empowerment to refer to empowerment of individual women in terms of their self-esteem and greater decision-making power, as well as empowerment of women as a group in the form of collective consciousness raising. I refer to empowerment both as a process and as an outcome (see Laverack, 2019). Among several other indicators of empowerment, “power,” is a crucial indicator (Pratto, 2016), which I will explain as follows.

Whitt and Lukes (1980) draw a distinction between three forms of power. These forms of power are: (i) power to, as agency to act, (ii) power over, as exerting control over others, and (iii) power through, which is exercised through dominant knowledge. “Power to,” as the reference to “to” implies, exemplifies the power or agency to do something, or power to make a decision. Lukes (2004) argues that “power to” only focuses on power lying within an individual to decide or to act. Arguably, “power to” ignores that an individual’s decisions or actions are also influenced by other forms of power. The second dimension of power that Whitt and Lukes (1980) identify is “power over.” Spencer (2014: 4) states that “power over”

“represents the power of those who set and control decision-making agendas.” She goes on to argue that “power over” denotes the power to prevent “issues from reaching mainstream discussions” (Spencer, 2014: 4), and arguably, the ability to ensure that certain issues do become mainstream. For my research, I deduce that Spencer’s definition of “power over” is equally valid in family discussions as well as broader community and state level discussions.

Lastly, “power through” represents the power that shapes ideologies and “desires” of people. “Power through” is reflected in the reproduction of societal norms that typically support dominant knowledge, that is, the knowledge of those who are powerful. “Power through” thus refers to the power that turns the standpoint of the powerful into the “truth” (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016; Spencer, 2014).

Similar to Whitt and Lukes (1980), Kabeer (1999) argues that “power to” implies decision-making abilities, and being “disempowered” implies not having a choice. However, Kabeer (1999: 437) goes on to argue that empowerment needs to be regarded as a process of change, by which “those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability.” Furthermore, the author has identified several elements in the process of making a choice, which are: (i) “choice” implying that there are alternatives, (ii) some choices being more significant than others, especially in terms of their consequences, and (iii) the ability to make a choice depending on an individual’s access to “resources,” and “agency.” Kabeer defines resources as the “pre-conditions” of an individual, such as their financial resources, human relations, social status, and access to market. Agency, which Kabeer (1999) also refers to as “power within,” is the ability of an individual to decide and act on a decision. Agency, Kabeer notes, can be exercised by individuals and groups, and can take various forms, including:

“Bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis.” (Ibid: 438).

Kabeer (1999) furthermore explains that agency not only implies “power within,” but also, in its positive form, is another word for what Spencer (2014) would call “power to” decide and act, whereas in its negative form, agency refers to Spencer’s “power over” where an individual or a group override(s) the agency of another person or group using force, violence and threat. However, in some cases, “power over” refers not to agency but to societal expectations hidden in the form of norms, values, and beliefs (Spencer, 2014).

This study focuses on “power to” and “power within” – women’s ability to make their own decisions, and their agency to act upon those decisions, including those related to marriage. Furthermore, I study “power over” in the form of family members’ power over decisions

relation to marriage. Finally, I use the notion of “power through” based on the assumptions of SFT, that is, creation of knowledge (as power) through lived experiences (see Figure 4.1). My research seeks to explore participants’ conceptualization of women’s empowerment, and which of the three dimensions of power are relevant to different family members across different generations and caste groups (see 8.3).

## 4.4 Conceptualizing Gender Equality

I now conceptualize the term “gender equality,” which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (2017: 1036) is “the state in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender.” To understand what the term gender equality means, the term gender needs to be unpacked first. Biological determinism, that is, the belief that human behaviour is determined by one’s genes or some component of the physical body (see Scott & Marshall, 2009), and the interchangeable usage of the terms “sex” and “gender” has formed a focus of feminist critique over the past seventy years. The distinction was first made by Money, Hampson, and Hampson, (1955) when they used the term sex to refer to the physical characteristics of an individual, and the term gender to refer to the psychological characteristics and behaviour of individuals.

Biological determinism refers to the view that “anatomy is destiny,” meaning that women and men are perceived as *naturally* behaving in certain ways because of their physiology (Eagly & Wood, 2011). To counter the narrative of biological determinism, feminists claim that gender differences are socially created, and not natural. Simone de Beauvoir’s (1949: 1) argument that one is not born a woman, but becomes a woman is well known and succinctly captures the argument that gender is socially constructed. De Beauvoir (1949: 18) further states that “social discrimination produces in women moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to be caused by nature.” Following her argument, most feminist scholars and activists assert that gender inequalities are not inherent, rather, they are socially created, which vary among cultures and change across times.

It is also widely agreed among feminist scholars and activists that gender divisions tend to place women and men unequally, whereby men are usually privileged (see McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). There have been numerous interventions to reduce gender inequality at national and international level, which is also evident through its inclusion as a priority in the Sustainable Development Goals (UNGA, 2015). However, gender inequalities still tenaciously prevail all around the world, and there is little evidence of consistent progress on this front (see 5.5). Black feminist activists and scholars have emphasized that black women are further marginalized because of the intersection of their gender and race, establishing that some men are more privileged than others, as are some women (see Collins, 1990; Fuller, 2018).

According to UN Women (2017), gender equality implies equality in opportunities given to women and men to contribute to, and benefit, from social, economic, political, and cultural development. Moreover, the International Labor Organization (2000) states that equality does not imply treating women and men the same, rather, equality is a process that starts with “equity,” which means being fair to girls and boys; giving them equal treatment or a treatment that is different, but equivalent in terms of needs, rights, benefits and opportunities. While the definition of equality by UN Women (2017) may seem clear, Roggeband and Verloo (2007) argue that in policy and practice, gender equality may not be this simple and the levels of gender inequality may vary considerably when they intersect with, for example, migration status, and race. Given that gender equality is a complex yet crucial notion in (feminist) policy and practice, my research includes and explores gender inequality as a key concept (see 8.2).

## 4.5 The Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979; 1977) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) was developed to understand the process of a person’s development within their environment.. EST examines influences on human behaviour from different levels, which includes the micro-system, meso-system, exo-system, macro-system, and chrono-system, respectively. Originally, EST was developed for psychological research, however, because it can fit into different fields of research, it has been increasingly used in other social science disciplines including feminist research to, for example, look at the multiple environments in which individuals grow, and make their life choices (Pompeo-Fargnoli, 2018; Lau & Ng, 2014; Grant, Finkelstein, & Lyons, 2003; Ballou, Atsushi, & Michael, 2002).

### 4.5.1 Key Insights and Operationalization

According to EST scholars, a person can be understood as embedded in five direct and indirect layers of context (Edleson & Richard, 1992). I have used these layers to recruit my research participants and to identify levels of influence to attend to in the examination of (early) marriage decisions. Following is a brief explanation of each of the layers:

#### *The Individual*

The “individual” takes a central place in Bronfenbrenner’s theory, as EST model revolves around the individual’s behaviour and development in the form of five -nested- ecological systems that an individual interacts with throughout their life. Marriage is a significant milestone in an individual’s life, and marital decisions are taken in different ways in different cultures (Bronfenbrenner & Pamela, 2006). While in the South Asian context, most marriage decisions are taken by families and not by the intended spouses (Bhandari, 2020; Levinger & Breedlove, 1966), individuals may still exercise a degree of agency when their (marriage)

decisions are taking place (Bhandari, 2020; R. Hussain, 1999). Early marriage mostly affects the lives of girls (see 1.1), and the “individuals” in my research are thus the girls of legally marriageable age (i.e., above 16 years in Pakistan). I have gathered data from the “individuals” through IDIs and participant observation.

#### *Micro-System*

The micro-system is the smallest and the most immediate layer of the “nested” system of layers. It includes an individual’s day-to-day interpersonal interactions, human relationships, and immediate surroundings – with parents, friends, siblings, and school. Relationships can be bi-directional as the individual’s behaviour can affect the behaviour of people in their micro-system, and vice versa (Wachs, 2010).

In my research, the micro-system is the family or people living under one roof, cooking and eating together from a combined pool of resources. The micro-system also includes an individual’s friends and peers. The data from this layer comprises of IDIs conducted with the mothers and grandmothers, notes from participant observation, and the FGDs conducted with men and boys.

#### *Meso-System*

The meso-system is the second layer affecting an individual. This layer encompasses interactions between different people in the micro-system. For instance, it would include the relationship between an individual’s parents with their school teacher (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013; Wachs, 2010). In this layer, the individual’s micro-systems do not work independently, rather, they work inter-connectedly and assert their influence on each other, impacting the individuals’ decisions (Hollander & Haber, 1992).

In my research, the meso-system includes the relationships between different families, as they are interconnected because they only marry within the family. Therefore, the neighbours, extended families, and family-to-peer interaction is included in the meso-system. The data from this layer comprises of information from the IDIs, FGDs and participant observation.

#### *Exo-System*

The exo-system is the third layer, which contains those elements from the micro-system which have an indirect effect on an individual. For instance, the exo-system would include a situation of unemployment of the parent which affects the children through the financial, psychological and/or physical stress (Hollander & Haber, 1992; Stirling, Siu, Jones, & Duda, 2019). A violent disagreement between neighbours might indirectly affect the sense of security when an individual goes out (Swick & Williams, 2006). It also includes the policies and decisions that are made at a broader level, which indirectly shapes and controls their behaviour (Daniels & Moos, 1988).



While authors such as Krishnan (2010), Forrest and colleagues (2008), and Garbarino and colleagues (2002) argue that policies and laws are a part of the exo-system, Bergen (2008) argues that laws and policies are also included in the macro-system, because the macro-system is all-encompassing. It influences all the lower layers of the broader eco-system. Krishnan (2010) argues that, for example, in the countries where the divorce laws are more “liberal,” it is more likely that they have a higher number of single-parent families. This would, in turn, affect the household income and may hinder some opportunities that would have been available to the individual otherwise, for example, participation in sports. However, I incline towards what Krishnan (2010), Forrest and colleagues (2008), and Garbarino and colleagues (2002) argue in this regard, and consider policies as a part of the exo-system.

I interpret this level in terms of state and non-state policies and projects (see 5.6 and Chapter 6) on women's empowerment and gender equality since 1860 to 2021. There are also primary data available from IDIs with three lawyers, two policymakers, and representatives of two non-state organizations working on women's empowerment and gender equality in the village.

#### **Macro-System**

The macro-system includes the societal norms, cultural beliefs, political and economic systems, environmental conditions of the surroundings, and religion. Data were gathered through participant observation during formal and informal conversations with participants about cultural norms, societal values, and religious beliefs about early marriage.

As already established through the review of available literature, early marriage is sometimes a result of poverty and low socio-economic status of the families (section 3.3.4), I have also carefully considered and reflected on the economic situation of the participant families.

#### **Chrono-System**

The chrono-system adds the temporal dimension. It demonstrates the effect of change, as well as constancy, on an individual's decisions. The change may include a change in the family structure, neighbourhood change, employment change, policy change, war, etc. (Lau & Ng, 2014; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Furthermore, events such as parents' illness or death, divorce, migration, etc. also affect an individual's way of thinking (Lau & Ng, 2014; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). As I study decision-making within three different generations, the temporal dimension is critical.

### **4.5.2 Concluding Remarks**

By applying different layers of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST model to my research, I contribute to this theory by validating the possibility of using this model to deepen understanding of (early) marriage decision-making processes within families.

## **4.6 Family Systems Theory**

The psychiatrist Bowen (1974; 1971; 1966) developed the Family Systems Theory (FST) to analyse how family systems work, and how individuals behave in relation to their family. According to Bowen, the family needs to be understood as an “emotional unit,” where the family members share an emotional bond with each other. Families strongly affect the feelings, thoughts, and actions of their members. Family members are not independent of one another, but “interdependent” and seek each other's approval, attention, and support. However, the intensity of this interdependence varies among families, times, and cultures (Bowen, 1974; 1971; 1966).

While this theory originated in the field of psychiatry, it has been adapted for use in other fields, including organization and management studies (Matheny & Zimmerman, 2001), studies of prettification and adulthood (Hooper, 2007; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993), media studies (Hooper, 2007; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993) and psychological studies of family relations (Goodman, 1983). FST has also been used by feminist psychologists such as Braverman and Avis (2019) and Braverman (2013) to re-design family therapy by including women, their perspectives, and their issues, and by deepening awareness about the (sexual) politics of family life. At the time of writing, there appeared to be only one study in the field of gender studies that linked the issue of wife-battering with the family systems approach based on secondary data (Bograd, 1984). Other than a few pieces of research criticizing FST to be male-oriented and male centred (Brown, 1999; Miller et al., 2004), my research is the first feminist empirical research of its kind that employs FST in combination with other theories. I chose this theory over other theories on family functioning, for example, “Family Life Cycle Theory” by Erickson (1998) because (i) FST sees family members as emotionally interdependent, (ii) FST equally focuses on emotions and functions of family members, and (iii) FST is based on the functioning of extended families, and is thus relevant to my research setting.

### **4.6.1 Key Insights and Operationalization**

FST asserts that in a family, each member has a different role to play. While performing the given roles, family members interact and respond to each other, predictably, according to their role, which defines the relationship between different family members. Therefore, the acts, behaviours, and decisions of one family member also affects the lives and well-being of other family members. The malfunctioning of one family member may lead to an increased burden on another family member, which disturbs the family equilibrium. This theory is composed of eight inter-related concepts out of which five are discussed and operationalized below in view of relevance to my research.

### **Triangles**

According to FST, a “triangle” is the smallest stable relationship between three people, which is taken as a building block for larger joint family systems. Such triangular relationships are comparatively stronger because, in a two-people relationship, the tension would build easily, but in a three-people relationship, tension can be shifted and diffused. While triangular relationships are assumed to be comparatively more substantial, there are always two insiders and one odd person out, which Bowen (1974; 1971; 1966) calls the outsider. Bowen asserts that in case of tensions within the triangle, one of the insiders bonds with the outsider, who then becomes the insider, and the left-out person moves to the position of an outsider, and this insider-to-outside cycle continues for life.

As my research participants include different family members, the triangles in my participating families can possibly be comprised of the grandmother-mother-girl, grandmother-father-girl, father-mother-girl, grandfather-father-girl, or father-brother-girl. These triangles can possibly also include various community members, religious leaders, or state or non-state actors. As the research engages with (early) marriage decision-making process within families, the girl is presumed to be part of every decisive triangle, giving her a space of negotiation around the decisions, which, assumingly creates possibilities for change young girls (Parkes, 2008).

### **Family Projection Process**

Family projection process, which is the second relevant concept in FST, includes how the strengths, as well as the emotional problems parents see in their children, are actually transmitted into their children. This concept follows three steps, through which parents’ perception of a problem in the child actually becomes a problem. In the first step, according to FST, the parent gives extra attention to a child due to a fear that something is wrong with the child. In the second step, due to that fear and extra attention, the parent starts seeing something wrong in the child’s behaviour or actions. Ultimately, the parent starts treating the child as a problematic child, believing that something is wrong with them. This is an on-going process of projection, through which a child’s behaviour and personality are shaped by parents’ fears. For example, when a parent thinks their child has low self-esteem, she/he will usually do over-praising, which would make the child dependent on (over) praise, and when somebody is not praising them, the child will experience low self-esteem.

This concept is very relevant in my research, because as the available literature shows, in South Asian culture, the fear of losing family honour is one reason families restrict their mobility in many ways and decide for early marriage of their daughter (Bravo et al., 2014; Malhotra, 2010; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001). Families are afraid that if a girl falls in love, it would be a matter of shame and disgrace for the (men of the) family. This shame and dishonour get even worse if she falls in love with a boy who belongs to a different social caste or

religious sect, and worst if the social caste or religion is of a lower social status than the girls’. Here, falling in love with the same sex is not even a part of the discussion (Gandhi, 2012). I reflect on this concept of parental fear and its impact on child behaviour in section 9.6.

### **Multi-generational Transmission Processes**

Family members have different levels of their differentiation of (or sense of) self, which not only makes them different in personality but also makes them different in terms of vulnerability to be influenced by others. Although children have an almost similar level of self-differentiation because they learn through observing their parents, the differences become visible over generations. For example, a child who has slightly stronger self-differentiation than their parents will marry someone who is like them in their level of self-differentiation, and their children are then likely to be somewhat stronger in their sense of self. If this trend continues, this difference becomes drastic over the course of generations, which sometimes leads to severe problems in the case of joint families.

As my research looks at the process of early marriage decision-making within joint families, and the contribution of family members of three generations in early marriage decisions, this concept is relevant. I assume that there are generational differences in what people think of early marriage, due to – among other reasons – differences in the sense of self.

### **Sibling Position**

The concept of sibling position builds on birth order theory (Gandhi, 2012). It argues that there are known archetypes of different siblings based on their position, for example, the eldest sibling tends to be the most responsible one with leadership qualities, while the younger ones tend to be followers. Therefore, sibling position, and the attributes coming from it, impacts family relationships and functioning.

Although the concept of sibling position looks too deterministic, I use this concept to explore how sibling position can influence the decision-making abilities and individuals’ level of participation in family decision-making (Beatty & Talpade, 2002; Bradley & Mims, 1992). Based on their birth order, different siblings are exposed to different family problems; for example, the eldest sibling in families with low income may have to work (Emerson & Souza, 2008). There is no literature available on girls’ vulnerability to getting married early, and other (unequal) practices hindering their empowerment, and its relationship with their birth order.

### **Societal Emotional Process**

Finally, the societal emotional process or the emotional processes going on within different individuals influence their behaviour, family, and society at large. When such emotional processes meet cultural practices, they may have “progressive” (for example, in the form of progressive laws, policies, or increase school enrolment, etc.) or “regressive” (for example,

increase in crimes, suicides, corruption, etc.) influences on society. Such influences also affect families and individuals; for example, in progressive periods, parents may feel it is safe to send their girls to school, while in regressive periods, that might not be the case.

I use this concept in looking at early marriage decisions against the backdrop of women's empowerment and gender equality policies and projects in Punjab from 1860 to 2021. In some eras there have been more policies to empower women than in others. I explore how certain historically progressive or regressive regimes have led to greater or lesser policies related to women, in numbers, and in essence (section 6.2).

#### 4.6.2 Concluding Remarks

FST enables me to look deeper into and analyse the decision-making process within families around different issues including early marriage against the backdrop of different women's empowerment and gender equality policies during different political regimes. I also contribute to this theory by examining the applicability of different concepts of this theory in my research setting (see 9.3). One of the criticism by feminist scholars on Bowen's theory is that gender was a widely ignored notion in FST (Bartle-Haring & Probst, 2004; Miller, Anderson, & Keala, 2004; Horne & Hicks, 2002; Elieson & Rubin, 2001; Brown, 1999), however, my choice of meta-theory, i.e. SFT compensates this criticism to some extent.

### 4.7 *Ijtihad*

The Arabic word *Ijtihad* implies exercising one's opinion in deducing law from the *Quran* (the holy book of Muslims), *Sunnah* (the sayings and practices of the Prophet *Muhammad*), and *Ijma* (an agreement or consensus of different Islamic scholars on an issue of Islamic law) (Islahi, 2002). *Ijtihad*, in literal terms means making an effort to accomplish something requiring difficulty and strain, to achieve a desired goal (ibid).

#### 4.7.1 Key Insights into the theory of *Ijtihad*

Hussain (2021) argues that with the expansion of *Islam*, an absolute need for a systematic legal thought emerged, resulting in the form of *Ijtihad*, which serves as the medium for deducing rules from the *Quran* and *Sunnah* to provide solutions for the needs of the modern world. According to Hussain (2021), *Ijtihad* is a key element in the growth of Islamic law and jurisprudence.

While authors such as Zainol and colleagues (2020) have argued against the validity of *Ijtihad*, criticising it as an agenda of "liberal" people, seeking freedom from religion, Galadari (2015) has explained how a valid *ijtihad* is different from one's subjective judgement. The authors explains that a valid *Ijtihad* is derived from the laws of the *Quran*, *Sunnah*, and *Ijma* to attend emergent issues with apparent proof and reasoning.

Kamali (2005) posits that *Ijtihad* stands next to the *Quran* and *Sunnah* in terms of its importance in Islamic hierarchy of reliable sources. The only difference between *Ijtihad* and the former two sources is that *Ijtihad* emerges continuously with time, whereas the other two sources did not develop further after the demise of the Prophet *Muhammad*. Therefore, the author argues, *Ijtihad* has become an instrument of interpretation of Islamic law in relation to the emerging conditions of *Muslim* community.

Within the limit of the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, *Ijtihad* can be individual or collective. Hasan (2003) discusses that collective *Ijtihad* increases the validity of the decision, since more than one party reaches the same decision. My research calls for a collective *Ijtihad* by Muslim scholars and International Islamic organizations to agree on certain issues of utmost importance, including the age of marriage (see 9.5.6).

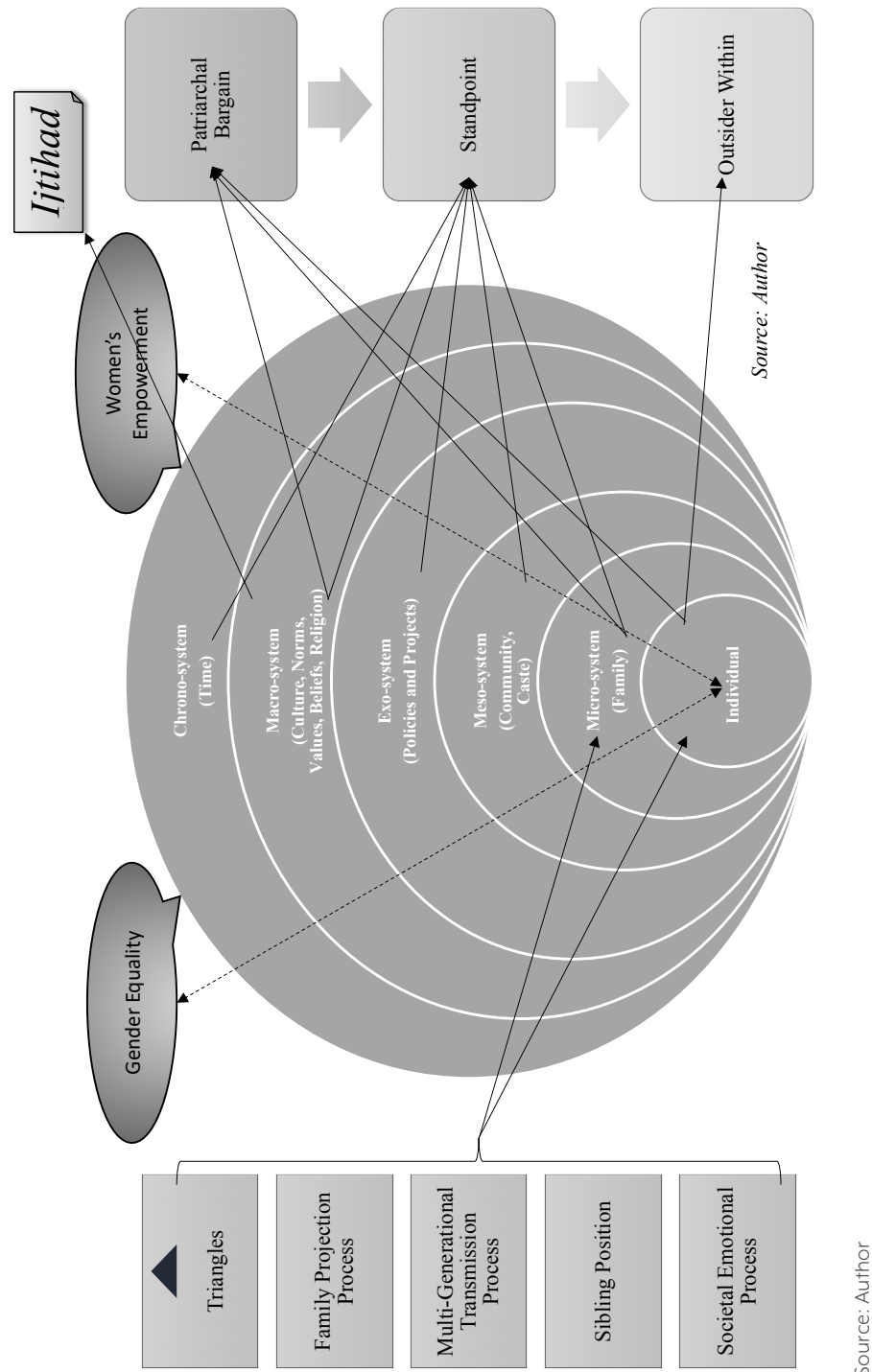
### 4.8 Conceptual Model

The three theories presented above, namely SFT, EST, and FST, and the key concepts of patriarchal bargain, empowerment, gender equality and *Ijtihad*, are combined to form my conceptual model (see Figure 4.2). The model shows that early marriage decisions involving an individual(s) are influenced by direct and indirect factors in the form of layers. The most direct influence is that of family, where different family members contribute to the decisions concerning the individual's position in the family, sometimes in the form of triangles, which makes it possible for the individual to negotiate around the decision.

The family projection, birth order, and the societal emotional process leading to regression or progression in society are also important determinants of how each of the family members contributes to the decision-making process. Sometimes, individuals and other (female) family members also bargain with patriarchies to acquire a degree of power. The second layer is the meso-system, which includes the social caste groups, whereas, in the exo-system, culture and over-arching laws, for example, the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), influences early marriage decisions. In the macro-system, which is the fourth layer of the system, cultural norms and beliefs are the influencing factors of early marriage decisions. The concept of, and need for, *Ijtihad* also emerges from this layer. The last layer is the chrono-system or temporal dimension.

The figure also shows that an individual's standpoint, which is influenced by all the layers of factors, gives them the position of an outsider-within, where they can see the world around them from a unique perspective. The dotted lines in the figure represent that all the layers influence an individual and either empower or disempower them, and contribute to gender equality, or inequality.

Figure 4.2 Conceptual Framework



### 4.9 Conclusion

This chapter provides the following answers to the questions asked in the beginning of the chapter: (i) This research is built on the assumptions of SFT, and I have used a reflexive approach to reflect on my standpoint throughout this dissertation, (ii) indicators of empowerment in my research include “power to” and “power within” which focus on women’s ability to make their own decisions, and their agency to act upon those decisions, “power over” in the form of family members’ power over decisions relation to marriage, and “power through” i.e., creation of knowledge (as power) through women’s lived experiences, (iii) I conceptualize gender equality as a process that starts with equity, which means a treatment that is different, but equivalent in terms of needs, rights, benefits and opportunities (iv) the combination of these three theories gives my research a unique theoretical framework that first helps conceptualize the layers in an individual’s environment which influence decision-making related to them, then helps zoom in within the first layer, that includes the (extended) family, to enable an in-depth analysis of how decisions take place within family, and thirdly, it helps unpack these decisions with a standpoint feminist lens, and (v) *Ijtihad*, as a theory helps me develop my policy recommendations for the Islamic contexts (9.5.6).

# Chapter 5

## **Islamic Republic of Pakistan**

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the geographical context of research. It addresses the following question: What are the most relevant state laws, non-state interventions, and the Sustainable Development Goals to women's empowerment, gender equality, and early marriage in Pakistan?

The geographical focus of my research is Punjab, Pakistan, where the legal minimum age of marriage for girls is 16 years and for boys, it is 18 years. In Pakistan three percent of girls get married before they turn 15, while 21 percent of girls get married before reaching 18 years of age (UNICEF, 2016). However, in some provinces, the issue is more prevalent than in the others. For example, in Punjab, which is the most populated province, early marriage rates are higher as compared to other parts of Pakistan because it has been unable to increase the minimum legal age of marriage for girls from 16 (Koster et al., 2017).

This chapter describes the context of the research setting (see 5.2), offers an overview of family and kinship systems in Pakistan (see 5.3), analyses the social caste system in Pakistan (see 5.4), assesses Pakistan's standing on the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) (see 5.5), introduces and analyses current national and international policies related to early marriage, women's empowerment, and gender equality (see 5.6), and relevant non-state organizations working in the case-study village to improve the status of women (see 5.7). Section 5.8 concludes the chapter.

## 5.2 Country and Punjabi Context

Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world, with 204 million people (World Population Review, 2019). It covers 881,912 square kilometres and is the 34<sup>th</sup> largest country (World Population Review, 2019). It shares its Eastern border with India, the Western border with Afghanistan, the South-Western border with Iran, and the North-Eastern border with China, while it connects with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea with more than a thousand-kilometre long coastline (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2015).

Pakistan came into being after the partition from the Indian sub-continent in 1947 following independence from the British. Among other reasons, one of the strongest and most apparent reasons of the partition, was religious differences among Hindu and Muslim communities of the sub-continent (Hassan, 2020; Verma, 2001). Today, Pakistani culture is influenced by Indian culture, as well as former British colonialism (Ziring, Sisson, & Rose, 2006). Moreover, as Pakistan is the only country in the world which has been created in the name of Religion Islam (Gilmartin & Ahmed, 2006), it has (elements of) Islamic culture also,

borrowed from Saudi Arabia, which is the centre of Islamic activities (Gilmartin & Ahmed, 2006). This amalgamation of cultural influences makes Pakistan a culturally diverse and pluralistic country.

Pakistan is a developing country, yet one that has a fast emerging, growth-led economy (Iqbal, 2015; Iqbal, 2012). The political history of Pakistan since independence has been marked by periods of political instability, military rule, and conflicts with India (Rosenthal, 2013; Aziz, 2007), which has affected its ability to address poverty, terrorism, illiteracy, and corruption on multiple levels (Johnston & Sarbahi, 2016; Javaid, 2010; Khan, Inamullah, & Shams, 2009; Anwar, 2006).

Today, Pakistan is a Federal Parliamentary state, with five provinces: *Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan* and *Gilgit Baltistan* (in ascending order of population), and two territories: *Islamabad*, which is the federal capital of Pakistan, and *Azad Kashmir*, which is a disputed territory with India and China (Schmidt, 2012; Pye & Schofield, 2010). Figure 5.1 shows the map of Pakistan, and its land and water connection with bordering countries. The mark below Islamabad represents the geographical location of my research.

Table 5.1 summarizes basic information about Pakistan and ranking in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI), which measures a country's overall achievement related to its socio-economic dimensions i.e., health of people, educational attainment, and living standard. The table also includes information on Pakistan's ranking on the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) (see 5.5).

Within Pakistan, Punjab is the most densely populated province with about 110 million people (the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2017), the most industrialized province contributing approximately 25 percent of the gross domestic product (Government of Punjab, 2015) and has the lowest rates of poverty (Arif, 2016). Punjab is also one of the most urbanized regions of South Asia, with more than 40 percent of its population living in urban areas (Government of Punjab, 2015). Punjab has many sub-groups comprising various tribes or social caste groups and a plural culture. However, 97 percent of the population is Muslim, and the remaining three percent are Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Figure 5.1 Map of Pakistan



Source: geology.com

Table 5.1 Pakistan Summary information

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Official name</b>                               | <b>Islamic Republic of Pakistan</b>   |  |
| <b>Provinces</b>                                   | Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan, Gilgit Baltistan  |  |
| <b>Capital</b>                                     | Islamabad, ninth-largest city of Pakistan comprising a population of approximately one million people   |  |
| <b>Languages</b>                                   | Urdu (National language), English (official language), Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Baluchi, Saraiki, Kashmiri, Brahui, Hindko, Shina, Balti (Provincial languages) |  |
| <b>Total population (2017)</b>                     | Two hundred twelve million, seven hundred forty-two thousand, six hundred and thirty-one  |  |
| <b>Literacy rate (2017)</b>                        | 58 percent  | Male: 70 percent<br>Female: 48 percent |
| <b>Human Development Index (2018)</b>              | 150 (out of 189 countries)  |  |
| <b>Social Institutions and Gender Index (2019)</b> | 119 (out of 120 countries)  |  |

Information Sources: OECD, 2019; UNDP, 2018; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017

Throughout the history of Pakistan, and the sub-continent, the average age of marriage has been low – usually below 15 years, compared to the global average of 21.5 years (Mayyasi, 2016) – especially for girls (Alam, 2018). However, with the passage of time, there has been a gradual increase in the average age of marriage among young women, which is now approximately 24.7 years (Mayyasi, 2016). Urban-rural differences also exist concerning the age of marriage, where girls in rural areas are more likely to be married at an early age as compared to young women who live in urban areas (Alam, 2018). To analyse the issue of early marriage, having reliable statistics is important. Such official statistics are not available in Pakistan. One in five girls in Pakistan still marries before her 16<sup>th</sup> year (the legal minimum age); however, this ratio has improved over the last 25 years (Male & Wodon, 2016).

In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, due to the so-called Islamic social system, and also due to increased religious fundamentalism – which emerged during and after the regime of president general Muhammad Zia ul Haq, the 6<sup>th</sup> president of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, from 1978 till 1988 – it is not deemed necessary to by the state and public to question the laws and also the traditions that are presented to the public in the name of Islam (Shah, 2012; Ziring, 2012; Mukherjee, 2010; Jafar, 2005). People tend to follow traditions, often regardless of negative consequences, that they deem to be in keeping with their faith, without realizing that the law or the tradition was influenced by the politics of the time, rather than by religion.

### 5.3 Family and Kinship System in Pakistan

In Pakistan, social life is largely limited to family life. In most cases, children live with their parents until marriage. After marriage, daughters live with their husbands' family, and sons continue to live with their parents, forming a joint family (Itrat, Taqui, Qazi, & Qidwai, 2007). With time and due to rapid urbanization and migration, the traditional family setup of joint families is decreasing, but even when small nuclear families are formed, relationship ties remain very strong and all important decisions such as marriage, switching a job, buying land, or moving to another city, are made in consultation with the extended family including parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunts (Itrat et al., 2007). The household, in the form of a strongly tied nuclear family, or joint family, is the basic kinship unit in Pakistan. Marriage sets the foundation of a new family, which includes the parents, their unmarried daughters, their married and unmarried sons, the wives, and the children of their sons. It is a norm that men are the head of family, and after the death of the father, the eldest son automatically becomes the head.

Joint family life has advantages including old-age security (Vaidyanathan, 2007), help with child-care (Hungerford & Cox, 2006), shared household responsibilities (Coleman & Ganong, 1999), and more love and time for children (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). However,



disadvantages include increased inequalities and inter-dependencies (McLanahan & Percheski, 2008), more workload (Ilies, Wilson, & Wagner, 2009), and more disputes and disagreements (Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006).

Having acknowledged the benefits that the joint family system and strong kinship ties in Pakistan offer, the inequalities and inter-dependencies originating and perpetuating in the same are problematic. In families where kinship ties are strong, inequalities in the form of income inequality and gender inequality are born and strengthened with time (McLanahan & Percheski 2008), which might act as drivers of early marriage (see 3.3.1 and 3.3.4 respectively).

## 5.4 Social Caste System in Pakistan

Different scholars have defined “caste” differently. Quigley (1993) defines the caste system as a product of social structures and divisions, which influence the rituals, norms, and privileges of less powerful groups, where the rituals, norms, and privileges are defined by dominant set of actors. In contrast, Ghaus (1960) has a more inclusive and contextually relevant definition of caste, which refers to (Muslim) social groups as having one or more of the characteristics, including, endogamy (the tradition of marrying within a group, tribe, or clan only), power hierarchy of different social groups/ castes, inheritance of group identity by birth, and association of specific occupation(s) with a caste group.

Kundi (2016) argues that while one motive behind the Muslim independence movement in the sub-continent was related to the rejection of the caste system (Contursi, Liddle, & Joshi, 2006; Alavi, 1972), the caste system survived post-independence. In modern Pakistan, the caste system still prevails with different caste groups (usually) based on their traditional occupations holding power and controlling other caste groups (Usman, 2017).

The caste system is practiced with different intensities in different parts of Pakistan. The caste of a person defines their life starting from (access to) school, to the occupation and socio-economic status (Usman, 2017). Caste-based discrimination is visible in the political leadership, especially in Punjab and in rural areas as compared to the cities and in rural Punjab, people recognize and vote, based on the candidate’s caste group.

Understanding the caste system in Pakistan is not simple and becomes increasingly complex with the emergence of new sub-groups based on caste. The focus of the caste system has shifted from its religious roots to social roots or professions (Tyagi, 2017). In rural Punjab, the lowest-level caste groups facing discrimination and financial problems include, among others, *Lohar* (blacksmiths), *Tarkhan* (carpenters), *Mistri* (construction labourers), *Mochi*

(cobblers), *Mirasi* (dancers/ entertainers), *Chooray* (Christians), *Mussalli* (newly converted Muslims), *Chamar* (cleaners), *Ghulam* (slaves), and *Lacchi* (Dalit/ untouchables). The middle and upper-middle-classes have also been divided into various (sub)caste groups, including, but not limited to, *Rajput*, *Jutt*, *Syed*, *Janjua*, *Dhillon*, *Bhatti*, *Butt*, and *Siddiqui* (Tyagi, 2017).

The social caste system is a growing problem in Pakistan, particularly in Punjab (Tyagi 2017; Rafique 2014), but improvements in public policy, public-private partnership, (higher) education, and increased job opportunities in Punjab has created a shift from caste-based social stratification to class-based social stratification (Farooq & Kayani, 2013). However, dichotomizing “caste” and “class” is not always practical due to the strong association of social caste-groups with certain professions, and thus indirectly with class (Munshi, 2017; Usman, 2017; Gautam, 2008; Das & Dutta, 2007; Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2006; Tamari, 1991).

## 5.5 Social Institutions and Gender Index in Pakistan

This section discusses the ranking of Pakistan in various indicators of the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has designed SIGI to measure discrimination against women in various (formal and informal) social institutions across 180 countries. Since young girls and women face discriminatory social practices, norms, and laws throughout their lives, this restricts their access to fundamental human rights, justice, empowerment opportunities, and decision-making authorities. Discriminatory social institutions perpetuate gender inequality in development areas related to education, health, and employment, which leads to an unjust society. The OECD (2019) global report ranks Pakistan at 119 out of 120 countries, with a 58.7 percent score, which is “very high,” making Pakistan the second-worst country in this index. Worldwide, the ranking is based on five inter-related dimensions of “discriminatory social institutions” affecting women’s lives, which are (i) discrimination within the family, (ii) restricted physical integrity, (iii) son bias, (iv) restricted access to resources and assets, and (v) restricted civil liberties. However, in Pakistan, due to unknown reasons, there is no disclosed data on the dimension of “son bias,” therefore, it is not counted in the SIGI index. The other four dimensions of the SIGI index in Pakistan are detailed as follows.

### 5.5.1 Discrimination in the Family

Discrimination within the family is calculated using four indicators, namely, child marriage, household responsibilities, inheritance, and divorce. Pakistan scored 80 out of 100, which implies an alarmingly high rate of gender discrimination within the family in Pakistan.



The “Child Marriage” indicator assesses the laws on child marriage; gender equality in the legal minimum age of marriage; customary, traditional, and religious practices encouraging girl child marriage; and the percentage of married girls between 15 to 19 years of age. According to the OECD (2019: 2) country report “the law (in Pakistan) allows child marriage for women but not for men,” hence, 13 percent of girls in Pakistan are married before 18 years of age. The report states:

“The 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act sets the legal minimum age of marriage at 16 years for girls, compared with 18 years for boys. Although this provision has been amended in Singh Province (where girls can only marry at 18 years of age) and repealed for all Hindu, Christian, and Parsi marriages (which impose a minimum legal age of marriage of 18 or 21 years of age), Muslim girls outside of Singh province can still be married at 16 years of age. Besides, Christian and Parsi statutes allow parents/guardians to consent to the underage marriage of their daughters as soon as they reach 13 and 14 years of age, respectively, compared with 16 years for boys.” (pp. 2)

The “household responsibilities” indicator focuses on laws related to household responsibilities, legal rights and decision-making powers of women and men in their household. The OECD (2019) country report states that women in Pakistan do not enjoy the legal status that their male counterparts have, being the heads of household and having parental authority. Moreover, approximately 70 percent of the population declares that if mothers work outside the home for money, children will suffer. As a result of this mindset, the female to male ratio of time spent on unpaid care work is 10:2.

The “inheritance” indicator includes any laws on inheritance assuring that women and men have equal legal rights to inherit the land and other assets. In Pakistan, widows and daughters are not given equal rights that widowers and sons have, related to the inheritance of property (OECD 2019).

The divorce indicator includes any laws to assure an equal legal status for women and men to initiate divorce and finalize the process. In Pakistan, women do not enjoy the same rights over divorce as men do; they are not given a right to initiate and finalize divorce, and they have restricted parental authority after divorce (OECD, 2019).

### 5.5.2 Restricted Physical Integrity

Restricted physical integrity is composed of four indicators, namely, violence against women, female genital mutilation (which is not relevant to Pakistan), missing women, and reproductive autonomy. Pakistan has scored 37 out of 100 in this dimension, which is medium to low. I now discuss the indicators.

The “violence against women” indicator includes the legal framework protecting women from different forms of violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV), rape, and sexual harassment; and the prevalence of domestic violence; and attitudes of women between 15 to 49 years of age about justifying wife battering due to reasons such as burning food, arguing with the husband, going out without the husband’s permission, neglecting children, or refusing to have sex with the husband. Other than some legal exceptions, the legal framework of Pakistan protects women from violence, including sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and rape (OECD 2019). However, 85 percent of women in Pakistan have been a victim of intimate partner violence at least once in their lifetime, and 42 percent of women justify intimate partner violence due to one (or more) of the reasons mentioned above (OECD 2019).

The “missing women” indicator applicable to Pakistan includes the male to female ratio in the country among newly born to four-year-old children. In Pakistan, there are 107.8 male children born per 100 female children (OECD 2019).

The “reproductive autonomy” indicator includes the legal framework protecting the reproductive health and rights of women, and the access of (un)married women of reproductive age (15-49) to family planning if they want to stop or delay pregnancy. The OECD (2019) country report shows that in case of an unwanted pregnancy, the legal framework of Pakistan only protects the reproductive health and rights of women with strict justifications. Although the report appreciates Pakistan for using “family planning vouchers” to increase the awareness and usage of contraceptives among women (Ali et al., 2019), it claims that 20 percent of women in Pakistan still do not have access to family planning.

### 5.5.3 Restricted Access to Productive and Financial Resources

Restricted access to productive and financial resources includes indicators such as access to land and non-land assets, access to (formal) financial service, and rights related to a safe workplace. Pakistan has a high score of 60 out of 100, which means that women have restricted access to productive and financial resources. The indicators are discussed below.

The “laws on access to land assets” assesses gender equality with respect to land assets. In Pakistan, women and men enjoy same legal rights and safe access to land assets without any exceptions (OECD 2019). However, some customary, traditional, and religious laws and practices discriminate against this legal right of women and women face many constraints while seeking access to property and “women are still significantly less likely to own a house on their own than men...,” and only five percent of them own a house in their name (OECD, 2019: 126).

The “secure access to non-land assets” indicator aims to determine whether women and men enjoy equal legal rights to secure access to non-land assets. In Pakistan, without any exception, women and men enjoy the same legal rights and safe access to non-land assets (OECD, 2019).

The “secure access to formal financial services,” includes the legal framework on (equal) access to financial services, for example, opening a bank account or getting a loan and the actual gender specific data on who has a bank account. **In Pakistan, without any legal exceptions, women and men have equal rights to open a bank account, and both can get credit from financial institutions** (OECD, 2019). However, 62 percent of the people with a bank account are males, and numerous banks require either the father’s or the husband’s signature as permission to approve the loan applications of women (OECD, 2019: 128).

The “workplace rights” indicator includes an investigation of equal legal rights and opportunities at the workplace, and representation of women and men in managerial positions. In Pakistan, the report mentions, the legal framework fails to guarantee equality between women and men, at their workplaces. Furthermore, the report also claims that among all the managers in various (formal) institutions, 81 percent are males (OECD, 2019).

#### 5.5.4 Restricted Civil Liberties

The fourth dimension of SIGI is “restricted civil liberties,” which includes indicators such as citizenship rights, freedom of movement, political voice, and access to justice. Pakistan scored 53 out of 100 in this dimension, which is again high, meaning that the civil liberties are restricted for women in Pakistan. The indicators are discussed below.

The “citizenship rights” indicator investigates whether women and men have equal citizenship rights and can enjoy those rights. In Pakistan,

“Women and men have the same rights to acquire, change and retain their nationality and to confer their nationality to their spouse and children, without legal exceptions regarding some groups of women. Customary, religious, and traditional laws or practices do not restrict these rights” (OECD, 2019: page 1).

The “freedom of movement” indicator assesses if women and men have equal rights to apply for National Identity Cards (NIC) and passports to travel outside the country. In Pakistan,

“Women and men have the same rights to apply for national identity cards (if applicable) and passports and to travel outside the country, without legal exceptions regarding some groups of women. Customary, religious, and traditional laws or practices do not discriminate against these rights” (OECD, 2019: 3).

The “political voice” indicator assesses whether the country’s laws promote women’s political representation as much as that of men and measures the percentage of men among all parliamentarians. In Pakistan, 92 percent of parliamentarians are men although women and men have an equal right to vote and hold a political or public office (OECD 2019).

The “access to justice” indicator assesses whether women and men have equal rights to the judiciary and to hold a political or public office. In Pakistan:

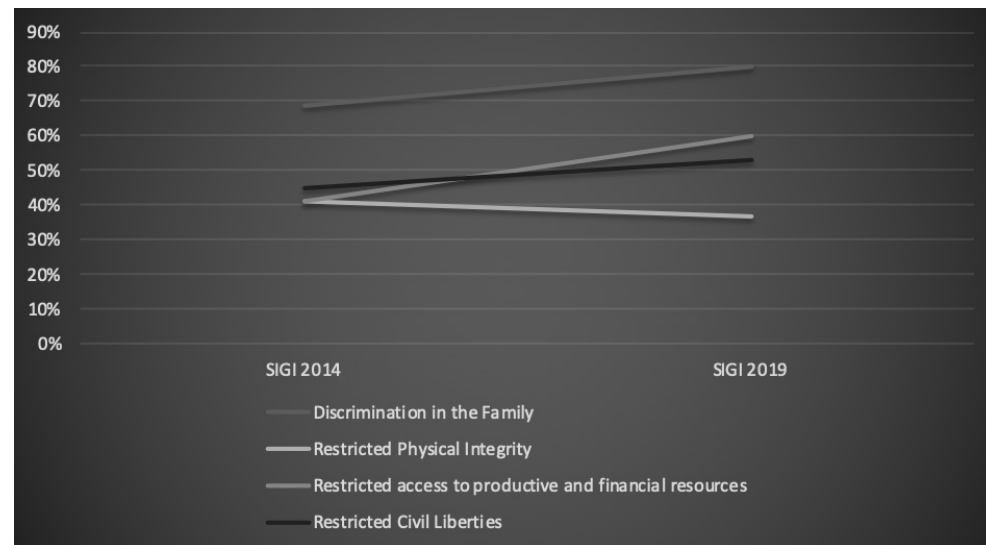
“A woman’s testimony holds the same evidentiary weight as a man’s in all types of court cases and women have the same rights as men to sue and to hold public or political office in the judiciary. Customary, religious, and traditional laws or practices do not discriminate against women’s legal right to sue, to provide testimony in court or to be a judge, advocate, or other court officers” (OECD, 2019: 4).

These four dimensions and their indicators have led to Pakistan’s ranking as second last among 120 countries included in the SIGI index.

## 5.6 Relevant Policies Related to Early Marriage in Pakistan

In the OECD (2014) global synthesis report, Pakistan had a high discrimination score of 30.1 percent, which, after five years, has increased to a “very high” discrimination score of 58.7 percent (see 5.5). This increase of 28.6 percent over the period of five years raises concerns regarding the usefulness of various state and non-state interventions geared towards women’s empowerment and gender equality in Pakistan, which are an essential component of this dissertation. Figure 5.2 compares Pakistan’s score in different SIGI dimensions in 2014 and 2019, respectively. The figure shows that since 2014, (gender) discrimination in families has decreased, whereas restrictions in physical integrity, access to productive and financial resources, and civil liberties have increased over time.

While women are almost half of the population of Pakistan and Punjab, they are still striving to attain a better status in society. To achieve this aim, the Government of Punjab established the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) in March 2014 intending to empower women, enhance and document the socio-economic development of women and to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). All NCSW programs are broadly geared towards women’s empowerment and gender equality in Punjab; however, despite different areas of focus, these programmes might influence the practice of early marriage directly or indirectly.

**Figure 5.2** Comparing Social Institutions and Gender Index 2014 and 2019 in Pakistan

Source: Author, using data from OECD (2014, 2019)

Besides NCSW, the government of Pakistan has developed various laws and policies to improve the status of women, and to eliminate the practices which are deemed harmful for women, including early marriages (see 5.6.1). Nine of such policies will be discussed in the following sections 5.6.1 and 5.6.2. The selection process and criteria of the nine policy documents described below has been explained in section 2.6 and in Figure 2.3, and the overview of 22 shortlisted policy documents including these nine has been attached as annex 13.

### 5.6.1 National Policy Context - Direct Rules

Child marriage is legally a criminal offense in Pakistan. The “Child Marriage Restraint Act” (Government of Pakistan, 1929) was passed in September 1929 in the Indian sub-continent under British rule. This act stipulated the minimum age of marriage for girls at 16 years and that for boys at 18 years (Naveed & Butt, 2015; Nahid, 2014; Whitehead, 1995; Forbes, 1979). This Act, subject to two amendments in 1971 and 2015 respectively, is currently the only applicable law directly targeting child marriage. In February 2017, the Parliament of Pakistan unanimously accepted an amendment to the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC, 2017), which was to make the punishment against child marriage more robust. The punishment set was a minimum of five and a maximum of 10 years of imprisonment and/or a fine of up to one million rupees. The document indicates that the guardians of the child getting married,

the person(s) who “solemnizes” and registers a child marriage, and/or the person(s) who facilitate such marriages will be punished. The document mentions that no women shall be imprisoned under this Act, but it is unclear which women this statement concerns.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 is applicable in all the provinces (including Punjab, which is the geographical focus of this research), except Sindh province. The Sindh Assembly in Pakistan adopted the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act in 2013 (Government of Sindh, 2013), setting the minimum age for marriage to 18 years for both girls and boys (Jabeen, 2016; Naveed & Butt, 2015). A similar Act was also initiated in the national assembly in 2014 for all other provinces, but it did not pass. Moreover, in Punjab also, a bill was adopted to make the punishment of early marriage harsher, but it did not increase the legal age of marriage to 18 for girls (OECD, 2019). Another amendment in the PPC was adopted in 2011 under the title of the “Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act.” This amendment focused on prohibiting exchange marriages (i.e., marriages where two sets of siblings cross-marry; usually a man persuades his sister to marry his bride’s brother), and marriage with the *Quran* (i.e., in some areas, if the family does not find a “suitable” match for their girls within the family, they declare that they have married their daughter to the *Quran*. In such cases, the girls cannot (re)marry a man), and forced marriages (i.e., marriages arranged forcefully, without the prior, informed, and full consent of either or both of the couple getting married).

In addition to the Child Marriage Restraint Act, Hashemi (2018) discusses that in Pakistan, a few legal interventions regarding child marriage also include the Zina and Hudood Ordinances of 1979 (Government of Pakistan, 1979), according to which a girl can be lawfully married at 16 or the onset of puberty. Moreover, in 2014, the Pakistan Council of Islamic Ideology announced that a girl is ready to get married at the onset of menarche, and all the laws against child marriage are anti-Islamic (Ali, 2014) which, according to Ali (2014), influenced the decisions of many people who follow the decisions of the Council. All the amendments and new laws concerning Islamic practices are first sent to the Council of Islamic Ideology for approval, which, if approved, go to the Senate and National Assembly, which is a part of the reason why I have discussed the concept of *Ijtihad* in section 4.7 as it is essential to convince the religious leaders of the challenges of child marriage.

A report by Save the Children UK and Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) (2009) states that despite the existence of the law against child marriages in Pakistan, the issue of marriage under 16 is still prevalent. The authors of report note that since 2009, there have not been any prosecutions of this offence.

### 5.6.2 National Policy Context - Indirect Rules

Other than the Child Marriage Restraint Act, which is the only direct rule on the national level about the age of marriage, there are six indirect rules. These include (i) the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973), (ii) the Pakistan Penal Code (1860), (iii) National Labour Policy (2010), (iv) Pakistan Vision (2013-2025), (v) the Hindu Marriage Act (2017), and (vi) National Education Policy (2017-2025).

The 1973 Constitution is the third constitution of Pakistan and is still applicable. There have been several amendments in the constitution since 1973; at the time of writing this thesis, the latest amendment was in 2018 to mainstream Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The Pakistan Penal Code is a criminal code with the definition and punishment of all the criminal offenses in Pakistan. Pakistan inherited this code from the sub-continent and most of the Articles are still applied in Pakistan subject to some amendments. The code is a (confusing) mixture of British, Indian, and Islamic law (Ahmed, 2009). The Labour Policy focuses on providing (i) worker's right to form unions, (ii) adjustment of rights between workers and employers, (iii) effective consultations between workers and employers for mutual welfare, (iv) job security to the workers, (v) effective work conditions for enhanced labour productivity, (vi) merit-based job promotion, (vii) employment opportunities for jobseekers, (viii) social insurance, (ix) humane working conditions, and (x) restricting child labour. The policy document also includes separate sections on "women's empowerment and gender equality," and "women workers."

The Pakistan Vision (2013-2025) is a 12-year vision adopted in 2014 by the Pakistan Ministry of Planning, Development, and Reform. It has seven pillars with quantitative targets to be met by 2025. The pillars include: (i) "sustained indigenous inclusive growth," (ii) "energy food and water security," (iii) "democratic governance, institutional reform, and modernization of the public sector," (iv) "human and social capital," (v) "private sector-led growth," (vi) "developing a competitive knowledge economy through value addition," and (vii) "modernized infrastructure and strengthening regional connectivity". The document mentions that these seven pillars can be secured through five "enabling conditions," namely, social justice, the rule of law, peace and security, political stability and continuity of policies, and a shared vision.

Since independence, the Hindu community and Hindu women specifically face marginalization and discrimination at various levels (Bukhari, 2013; Gazdar, 2007; Choudhury, 1956), which includes forced conversions, rape, and oppression (Zaidi, 1988). Every year, more than 300 Hindu women are forced to convert to Islam and marry Muslim men (Movement for Solidarity and Peace Report, 2014). In 2017, after exactly 70 years of living in absolute neglect, the Hindu community of Pakistan were 'granted' their first piece

of legislation called the "Hindu Marriage Act of 2017" (Raza, 2017), which is to "protect the marriage, the family, the mother, and the child and also safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities" (Preamble of the Hindu Marriage Act, 2017).

Another policy that indirectly relates to women's empowerment and gender equality in Pakistan is the National Education Policy (NEP) 2017-2025 (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017). NEP called for the decentralization of social Ministries, and the slogan of "Education for All" has been proclaimed in the policy document, which is borrowed from Article 25A of the Constitution of Pakistan, according to which the state is responsible for providing free of cost and compulsory education to every child until 16 years of age (Naqvi, 2018). NEP (2017-2025) is indirectly relevant to the practice of early marriage because the literature shows that there is a link between the level of (formal) education and the age of marriage (see 3.3).

### 5.6.3 International Policy Context - The Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNGA, 2015), adopted in September 2015 (see 1.5) consists of 17 goals that 193 UN member states, including Pakistan, have agreed to achieve by 2030. The 17 goals not only inform the urgency of development planning, but also emphasize that development needs to be sustainable, equitable, and universally acceptable to all the member states, "leaving no one behind" (Browne, 2019; UNGA, 2015).

In the context of international policy related to early marriage, women's empowerment, and gender equality, eight of the 17 SDGs are relevant (see 1.5).

## 5.7 Relevant Non-State Projects Related to Early Marriage in Pakistan

Several local Community Based Organizations (CBOs), national, regional, and international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) work across Pakistan on issues of women's empowerment and gender equality. I have selected two non-state organizations for analysis of their relevant projects based on their presence in the village. These two non-state organizations are introduced below:

### 5.7.1 Bedari

Bedari works at the national level. It is a voluntary, development organization working for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and children. *Bedari* was the first organization to establish a crisis centre for women who have survived acts of violence. It addresses issues of women's empowerment, violence against women, violence against children, child marriage, and processes of attitudinal change. *Bedari's vision* is a society

where girls and women enjoy their equal status as that of a human being. Its mission is to promote equal rights of all citizens (including women, men, girls, and boys) in society through education, advocacy, and capacity building.

*Bedari*, under the “Her Choice: Building Child Marriage Free Communities” Programme, worked to end child marriages in different areas of Punjab, Pakistan. The project aimed at:

1. To raise awareness about the impact of child marriage and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) rights among the communities and the youth.
2. To improve young girls’ access to formal education.
3. To improve young girls’ access to SRH rights services; and
4. To lobby and advocate for legislation to prevent/ban child and early marriages in the Punjab.

Through this project and other similar projects, *Bedari* is advocating and lobbying to amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls equal to that of boys, that is, 18 years.

### 5.7.2 National Rural Support Programme

The National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) is the largest programme to support rural Pakistan in terms of its staff, outreach, and projects. Its mandate is poverty alleviation through development projects related to social mobilization, enterprise development, micro-finance, technology development, physical infrastructure development, human resource development, social service, natural resource management, Information Technology (IT), social protection, Gender and Development (GAD), and research.

NRSP has a leading microfinance bank in Pakistan. NRSP Microfinance Bank Ltd., established in March 2011, has a social mission to provide financial services to marginalized and poor women and men, especially in rural areas. It works in all the provinces benefitting rural people, including poor landless farmers.

NRSP addresses gender discrimination and inequalities in the community. NRSP believes that women, especially rural women, can act as agents of change in order to achieve social and economic development for their respective families and communities (NRSP, 2017). Its policy on gender mainstreaming is guided by the principles of gender integration, intersectionality, diversity, and partnership (between women, men, girls, boys, transgender, youth, minorities, and disabled). Through these principles, NRSP ensures that women get an active role in multi-level decision-making and are not discriminated against.

## 5.8 Conclusion

This chapter responds to the question posed at the beginning of the chapter (see 5.1) as follows: (i) Directly and indirectly relevant to women in Pakistan are the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Pakistan Penal Code, the Child Marriage Restraint Act (and amendments), National Labour Policy, Pakistan Vision, the Hindu Marriage Act, National Education Policy, (ii) two non-state organizations, namely *Bedari* and NRSP, are working for women in the case study village, and (iii) goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 16 of the SDGs are relevant international policies related to the practice of early marriage in Pakistan.

# Chapter 6

## **Feminist Critical Frame Analysis of Policies**

## 6.1 Purpose and Scope

The present chapter responds to my sub-question 4: how do relevant state and non-state policies and programmes conceptualize early marriage and relate to family decision-making processes about early marriage? To answer the sub-question, this chapter combines critical frame analysis methodology and feminist policy analysis to form feminist critical frame analysis method (see 2.6). The pillars for structuring the analysis are: (i) the definition and framing of early marriage, gender equality, and women's empowerment in the documents, (ii) the usefulness of strategies designed for policy implementation, and (iii) looking at the implications of those framings on early marriage.

Section 6.3 analyses the nine relevant national/provincial laws and policies related to women's empowerment and gender equality introduced in sections 5.6.1 and 5.6.2, and section 6.4 summarizes the analytical findings. Section 6.5 analyses international policies relevant to early marriage. In section 6.6, the role of *Bedari* and NRSP (see 5.7) is analysed. Section 6.7 concludes the chapter.

## 6.2 Timeline

This section presents a timeline of state and non-state interventions in (Punjab) Pakistan, focusing on women's empowerment and gender equality. Looking at the timeline of these interventions and comparing state and non-state interventions is crucial because it goes back to the generation of grandparents. Table 6.1 shows a timeline of various state and non-state interventions focusing on women's empowerment and gender equality in (Punjab) Pakistan.

Table 6.1 summarizes Pakistan's political history in nine regimes (Hashim 2013). The first period is the pre-independence period (1850 to 1947) is necessary since some policies and laws, for example, the Pakistan Penal Code (1860), and the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) were made during that period and are still applicable. The second period starts with independence in 1947 and goes till 1958 when the military had taken over the government, and the first martial law was imposed. As the newly built state had just started, there had not been any significant work related to women's empowerment and gender equality during this period. The country also made its first constitution in 1956, turning itself into an "Islamic Republic." The third period from 1958 to 1971 is known as the first military period (Hashim 2013). During this period, (Punjab) Hindu Women's Rights to Agricultural Land Ordinance, (1959) was passed, the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) was amended to make it applicable in the Punjab, and the Muslim Family Law Ordinance (1961) was also passed. At the same time, the Adult Basic Education Society (ABES) also laid its foundation as an NGO to make people aware of the importance of education, and to increase school enrolment, especially of girls.

Table 6.1 Timeline of Relevant State and Non-State Interventions

| Time Frame | 1850-1947                               | 1947-1958  | 1958-1971                           | 1971-1977   | 1977-1988 | 1988-1999 | 1999-2008 | 2008-2013  | 2013-2021  |
|------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|
| State      | The Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) | The Child Marriage Restraint (Punjab) Amendment Ordinance (1971) | Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961) | (Punjab) Hindu Women's Rights to Agricultural Land Ordinance (1959) |           |           |           | Punjab Partition of Immovable Property Act (2012)                  | Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act (2018)                                      |
|            | Pakistan Penal Code (1860)              |  |                                     |   |           |           |           | Criminal Law (Third Amendment) Act (2011)                          | Punjab Women Protection Authority Act (2017)                                     |
|            |   |  |                                     |   |           |           |           | Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act (2011)                         | Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences Relating to Rape) Act, (2016)                 |
|            |   |  |                                     |   |           |           |           | Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) | Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in The Name or Pretext of Honour) Act, (2016) |
|            |   |  |                                     |   |           |           |           |  | Punjab Partition of Immovable Property (Amendment) Act (2015)                    |
|            |   |  |                                     |   |           |           |           |  | Punjab Muslim Family Laws (Amendment) Act (2015)                                 |
|            |   |  |                                     |   |           |           |           |  | Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Act (2015)                                       |
|            |   |  |                                     |   |           |           |           |  | Punjab Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act (2015)                           |
|            |   |  |                                     |   |           |           |           |  | Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act (2014)                                   |
|            |   |  |                                     |   |           |           |           |  | Protection Against Harassment of Women at The Workplace (Amendment) Act (2014)   |



|                  |   |   |   |
|------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Non-State</b> | Applied Socio-Economic Research (ASR) (1983)      | Bedari (1991)                           |   |
|                  | AURAT Publication and Information Service (1986)  | National Rural Support Programme (1991) | Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA) (2000)     |
|                  | Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) (1987) | Bunyad Foundation (1992)                | Mehergarh: A Center for Learning (2004) |
|                  | Adult Basic Education Society (ABES) (1971)       | Kashf Foundation (1996)                 | Home Net Pakistan (2005)                |
|                  | Shirkat Gah- Women's Resource Center (1975)       | South Asia Partnership- Pakistan (1987) |   |

Source: Author

The fourth period is the second democratic era of Pakistan, starting from 1971 to 1977 (Hashim, 2013). While there was no state policy during that period, the only notable event related to women's empowerment and gender equality was the establishment of Shirkat Gah- Women's Resource Center in 1975 as an NGO. The fifth period leads to the second military period starting from 1977 to 1988 (Hashim, 2013). During this period, as the previous era, there was no policy adopted by the state to empower women. However, the non-state interventions were at their peak with the establishment of Applied Socio-Economic Research (ASR) in 1983, AURAT Publication and Information Service in 1986, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in 1987, and South Asia Partnership- Pakistan in 1987. The sixth period from 1988-1999 is the third democratic era of Pakistan (Hashim, 2013). During this era as well, there was nothing offered by the state for women's empowerment, while the non-state actors were still increasing with the establishment of *Bedari* and National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) in 1991, Bunyad Foundation in 1992, and Kashf Foundation in 1996.

In the seventh era, which is the third military period of Pakistan (1999 to 2008) (Hashim, 2013), the state worked on important aspects other than women's empowerment, and the non-state bodies were still growing with the establishment of Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA) in 2000, Mehergarh: A Center for Learning in 2004, and Home Net Pakistan in 2005. The eighth era (2008 to 2013) is the fourth democratic era of Pakistan (Hashim, 2013). During this period, laws such as (Punjab) Partition of Immovable Property Act (2012), Criminal Law (second and third amendment, 2011), and Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) were passed. However, there are no significant non-state organizations established during the era.

The period between 2013 to 2021 is the last era in the table, during which most of the state laws were passed, including Protection Against Harassment of Women at The Workplace (Amendment) Act (2014), Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act (2014), Punjab Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act (2015), Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Act (2015), Punjab Muslim Family Laws (Amendment) Act (2015), Punjab Partition of Immovable Property (Amendment) Act (2015), Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in The Name or Pretext of Honour) Act, (2016), Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences Relating to Rape) Act, (2016), Punjab Women Protection Authority Act (2017), the Hindu Marriage Act, (2017), and Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act (2018).

The table also shows that during the periods where the state is active in policymaking for women's empowerment, non-state institutions are not very active, and vice-versa. For instance, before 1971 and after 2008, whereas, during the times when the state is not very active in law-making, non-state organizations play a crucial role in safeguarding women's rights. As all of the non-state organizations mentioned above are national-level non-state organizations emerging from grass-root level, this is in line with Bowen's (1974; 1971; 1966)



FST, implying that progressive and regressive periods in society are linked to the emotional processes of individuals (see 4.6.1). For instance, during the regressive periods where the state was not actively working on laws related to women's empowerment and gender equality, the family systems as well as individuals are affected, which might have led to more motivation for uniting to work for the cause in the form of, for example, non-state organizations.

## 6.3 State Policies

Since the independence of Pakistan in 1947, the notions of women's empowerment and gender equality have been prioritized differently by different ruling parties, which is reflected in their respective policies and laws. While all state laws directly or indirectly relevant to women's empowerment and gender equality are described in Annex 13, it was not possible to establish the relevance of each in this research. Through a rigorous selection criterion mentioned in section 2.6 and Figure 2.3, nine policy and law documents (seven documents and two amendments) have been selected for the analysis based on their direct relevance to the topic.

### 6.3.1 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973)

The 1973 Constitution claims that it is designed "wherein the Muslims shall be enabled to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres following the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy *Quran* and *Sunnah*<sup>9</sup>." It mentions the pronoun "he" 82 times, and the pronoun "she," only one time while referring to the reserved seats for women in the parliament. Moreover, the document mentions "men" 38 times, and "women" 20 times. Everett (2011), Prewitt-Freilino et al. (2012), and Twenge et al. (2012) argue that the inclusion or exclusion of female pronouns in a document seems to be an accurate reflection of actual inclusion or exclusion of women in that particular social context. Including female pronouns is also important because while the document claims that it has been designed on the principles of Islam and the requirements set out in the holy *Quran*, it seems to ignore and exclude women, unlike the *Quran*. As an instance, I present the following verse of the *Quran*, which not only shows the pattern of how explicitly women are included in the Quranic text but also gives a glance at the notion of gender equality in Islam.

"Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women,

the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward." (*Al-Quran*, 33:35)

Secondly, the document, in its preamble, grants fundamental human rights to all citizens, including equal status, equal opportunities, equalities before law, political, economic, and social justice, freedom of thought, expression, belief, association, and worship, which is "subject to law and public morality." However, it does not define what public morality is and whether the notion of public morality is the same for all genders. Existing feminist literature contends that in general, the standards of morality and ethics are different for women and men (Lawton & Kennedy, 2001; White, 1999; Bernardi & Arnold, 1997), where women have to behave more ethically and bear the burden of "shame and guilt," as compared to men (Smith et al., 2002). In this way, I argue that the document seems to favour equality of treatment but at the same time perpetuates gender stereotypes.

Third, the Constitution states in Article 25 Part 1 that all citizens are equal in front of law, and while "there shall be no discrimination based on sex," "nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the protection of women and children." Similarly, Article 4 part 1 emphasizes the equal right of protection of law to every citizen, which includes that no such action shall be taken except if it is in a law, which is "detrimental to the life, liberty, body, reputation or property of any person," and that no person shall be hindered in doing something which is not illegal. This enables positive discrimination for women and children through pro-women policies and laws to "protect" women. In Article 35, the document states that "the state shall protect the marriage, the family, the mother, and the child," but from whom they are to be protected is not stated.

Fourth, while the Constitution emphasizes equality of all citizens and prohibits discrimination based on sex, in Article 27 part 1, it perpetuates the existing division of labour based on gendered stereotypes, stating:

"No citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the service of Pakistan shall be discriminated against in respect of any such appointment on the ground only of race, religion, social caste, sex, residence or place of birth [...] provided further that, in the interest of the said service, specified posts or services may be reserved for members of either sex if such posts or services entail the performance of duties and functions which cannot be adequately performed by members of the other sex."

9 Sunnah is the body of social and legal traditional customs and practice of the Islamic community as practiced by prophet Muhammad.

At the same time, Article 34 states that the state shall take steps to ensure that women fully participate in all the spheres of public life. In Article 37 (e), the document again comes back to the perpetuation of the “suitability” of certain professions to different genders, stating that the state shall:

“Make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work, ensuring that children and women are not employed in vocations unsuited to their age or sex, and for maternity benefits for women in employment.”

Here, which professions are unsuitable for women of what age and who decides this, remains a question.

Fifth, it is also unclear about the definition of a “child.” Article II Part 3, states: that “no child below the age of 14 year shall be engaged in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment,” whereas, in Section 25-A, it states, “the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to 16 years...” So, whether a child like treatment needs to be given to a person between 14 and 16 remains unclear.

### 6.3.2 The Pakistan Penal Code (1860)

This section points to three key problems highlighted through the analysis of the Pakistan Penal Code (1860). First, Section 8 of Chapter II states that “The pronoun “he” and its derivatives are used of any person, whether male or female.” The non-presence of female pronouns in the Pakistan Penal Code, reflects whether policymakers actually took a woman’s perspective into account while designing the Code in 1860 and related amendments.

Second, I assessed the positioning of specific terms in a piece of text as the proximity of different terms to each other in a text may reflect their actual proximity and relationship in society (Bruckmüller, Hegarty, & Abele, 2012; Millard, 2000). Section 27 of Chapter II states, “When property is in the possession of a person’s wife, clerk or servant, on account of that person, it is in that person’s possession within the meaning of this Code.” The term “person” has been used for a man, and the “person’s” wife has been mentioned along with a “clerk or servant,” which implicitly depicts the gender roles expected from a wife in society.

Third, the Pakistan Penal Code is ambiguous about the definition of a “child.” Section 82 of Chapter IV states that: “Nothing is an offence, which is done by a child under seven years of age,” while in Section 83 of Chapter IV, it is stated that:

“Nothing is an offence which is done by a child above seven years of age and under 12, who has not attained sufficient maturity of understanding to judge of the nature and consequences of his conduct on that occasion.”

Similarly, in Section 90 of Chapter IV, the document states:

“A consent is not such a consent as is intended by any action of this Code, if the consent is given by a person under fear of injury, or under a misconception of fact, and if the person doing the act knows, or has reason to believe, that the consent was given in consequence of such fear or misconception; or [...] consent of child: unless the contrary appears from the context, if the consent is given by a person who is under 12 years of age.”

Whereas, in Section 299-a of Chapter XVI, the document states that an “adult” is a person who is 18 years old. Questions such as what to call a person between the ages of 12 to 18, and what happens to their consent remains unanswered in the document, which is problematic because as the minimum age of marriage for boys is 18 years while that of girls is 16 years, the document protects the rights of men but maintains a silence about the consent of the 16-year-old girl. For instance, in section 87 of chapter IV, the document states:

“Nothing which is not intended to cause death, or grievous hurt, and which is not known by doer to be likely to cause death, or grievous hurt, is an offence because of any harm which it may cause, or be intended by the doer to cause, to any person, above 18 years of age, who has given consent, whether express or implied, to suffer that harm; or because of any harm which it may be known by the doer to be likely to cause to any such person who has consented to take the risk of that harm.”

This clause seems to exclude the girls given into marriage before 18 years of age. Furthermore, in Section 366-A of Chapter XVI-A, the document states with respect to statutory rape:

“...whoever by any means whatsoever, induces any minor girl under the age of 18 year to go from any place or to do any act with intent that such girl maybe, or knowing that it is likely that she will be, forced or seduced to illicit intercourse with another person shall be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to 10 years and shall also be liable to fine.”

However, while this clause is only about illegal intercourse with a girl under 18 years (for example, rape), the document does not state anything about the intercourse with a girl under 18 year which is “legalized” through marriage (for example, marital rape). Also, Chapter XX lists offenses relating to marriage, but there is no clause on the age of marriage or marital rape. However, it explicitly condemns some customary practices harmful to women; for example, in Section 310 of Chapter XVI, the document declares giving a female into marriage to settle a dispute as an illegal act.

### 6.3.3 The Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) and Amendments (1971, 2015)

First, the 1929 Law defines a “child” in Section 2-a as a person who “if a male, is under 18 years of age, and if a female, is under 16 years of age,” and in Section 2-b, the Act defines child marriage as a marriage to which either of the spouses is a “child.” However, like the 1973 constitution and the Penal Code, the Child Marriage Restraint Act is also ambiguous about who exactly is a child and how it is different from being a minor. Section 2-d defines a “minor” as “a person of either sex who is under 18 years of age.”

Second, the punishment for contractors, conductors, and directors of child marriage was a fine of up to Rs 1000 and imprisonment for up to one month as per the 1929 act; this was increased in the 2015 amendment to a fine of up to Rs 50,000 and imprisonment of up to six months. The policy seems to focus on punitive measures, and does not offer any incentives to prevent the crime, for example, providing incentives to delay the age of marriage.

Third, the procedure for filing a child-marriage case is not culturally sensitive. Under this Act, a person can go to a family court and file a complaint to a magistrate of the first class. At the same time, going to a court for filing complaints against a family member is not easy, especially for Pakistani women, because it is against family values in Pakistan, and going to a court has a stigma associated with it (Ashraf, Abrar-ul-Haq, & Ashraf, 2017). Furthermore, police stations are not often easy to reach by young girls due to their proximity, as well as due to cultural restrictions on (young) women’s mobility. Even if a girl reaches the police station, it would not be feasible for her to report her father and thereby set in motion a process that should, at least in principle, lead to the arrest of her father. Should a girl do so, she would not be able to go back home.

Furthermore, some clauses of the Act also do not seem to be based on empirical grounds, as they only address some stakeholders and ignore the others. For example, Clause 6 of the Child Marriage Restraint Act states that “no woman shall be punishable with imprisonment.” This is reflective of the assumption that it is only the men who control and are involved in decision-making related to early marriage. Box 6.1 details a story narrated by a lawyer during an interview which reflects a similar assumption.

The story, narrated by a lawyer whom I interviewed, is important here because (i) it supports my point that unlike what was found in the literature, it is not always men who make decisions of early marriage, (ii) because the law says no woman can be arrested under this law, the police could not do anything because there was no adult male member in the family, and (iii) although this is a story where the “child” at the time of marriage was a man, the outcomes of child marriage for him were very different as compared to the outcomes girl children face.

#### Box 6.1 A Story of an Early Marriage

“This event happened in early 2005 in a city of Punjab, when the police department registered a child marriage complaint following a complaint from a neighbour. The case concerned a grandmother who sought to arrange the marriage of her 13-year-old grandson with her 38-year-old daughter-in-law, who was recently widowed. The grandmother did not want her daughter-in-law to re-marry outside the family because she was the “honour” of her deceased son; therefore, she arranged this marriage. Their neighbour, when came to know about this marriage, filed a complaint to the police after the marriage, but the police could not do anything because there was no adult male in their family. The bride told the police that she was forced to marry, but because the marriage was already consummated, the police could not do anything. Later, when the father of the bride was informed about the marriage, he was very angry and decided to cut-off the terms with his daughter [...].”

The lawyer continued, “I also know the family personally [...] last year [in 2018], the boy married for a second time and moved to another country with his second wife. He also has two children with his first wife, who is [now] living with his mother with the children...”

Source: Author- Retrieved from an Interview with a (male) lawyer (48-year-old)

### 6.3.4 National Labour Policy (2010)

The national labour policy document (2010) has a (i) legal framework, (ii) rights of workers and employers, (iii) skill development and employment, and (iv) manpower export. In the “legal framework,” part, there are separate sections on “women empowerment and gender equality,” and “women workers.” The document recognizes that “Women are Pakistan’s least utilized human resource. Woman labour force participation depicts a gloomy picture.” (Ibid: 15). Firstly, the document, while prohibiting child labour, states: “the employment of children less than 14 years will be eliminated, and the employment of those between the ages of 14 and less than 18 years will be strictly controlled...” (Article 30). Here again, like in the other documents, the definition of “child” has been used differently for different purposes.

Secondly, in the section on “women empowerment and gender equality,” the policy mentions that the International Labour Organization (ILO) has collaborated with the ministry of labour and manpower in Pakistan on a project titled, “Women Employment Concerns and Working Condition in Pakistan” (WEC-PK) to “enhance the quality and number of women employments in Pakistan with goal of economic empowerment of women in rural and urban areas” (Article 16). This project includes (i) creating a conducive work

environment for women, (ii) helping women in getting employment in Pakistan, and (iii) promoting the participation of women in leadership and trade unions in Pakistan. Another such project titled “Towards Gender Parity” included activities such as (i) capacity building of stakeholders, (ii) establishing coordination for learning and experience sharing, (iii) promoting gender-responsive data collection, analysis, and reporting, (iv) strategizing for women’s empowerment and gender equality in entrepreneurship, and (v) advocating for a national policy for home-based workers and bringing them into mainstream.

The interventions mentioned above not only make the policy impressive but have also proved to be successful as the World Bank data show an increase in the labour force participation of women in Pakistan from 21.7% (2010) to a historical peak of 23.8% (2015). However, the graph started moving downward after 2015 to 21.6% (2018), and then 22.1% in 2020. Usage of the term “man” power is also awkward, especially in this section.

Third, in the section on “Women Workers,” the policy ensures (i) equal wages for equal work, (ii) improved working conditions for women working in formal and informal sectors, (iii) improved arrangements related to maternity, (iv) codes of conduct related to sexual harassment, (v) day-care arrangements for children, and (vi) re-examining existing laws to improve women’s access to “suitable jobs that are arising due to Pakistan’s changing labour markets.” While the Labour Policy has deliberately included women, like in the Constitution, it is not mentioned anywhere what kind of jobs are “suitable” for women.

### 6.3.5 The Pakistan Vision 2013-2025

The Pakistan Vision 2025 includes annual strategies and five-year plans associated with each of the seven pillars, which are expected to help to realize the vision. It claims that these plans ensure the success of Pakistan in achieving “SDGs of zero poverty and hunger, universal access to health services, education, modern energy services, clean water and sanitation,” and this success will help Pakistan “join the league of Upper Middle-Income countries by 2025” (pp. 3). In this dissertation, Figure 1.2 presents the SDGs, directly and indirectly, relevant to the present research. When it is compared to the vision 2025, it becomes evident that the vision states its link with SDG-1 (no poverty), SDG-2 (zero hunger), SDG-3 (good health and well-being), SDG- 4 (quality education), and SDG-8 (decent work and economic growth), but fails to establish a relation with the SDG- 5 (gender equality), SDG- 10 (reduced inequalities), and SDG-16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions, which sufficiently reflects the lack of importance attached to issues such as gender (in)equality, peace, justice, and strong institutions in the vision. However, at the same time, the document itself accepts that Pakistan is facing severe challenges on various fronts, which include “serious deficiencies in education, health and population, gender equity and social services” (pp. 3).

Where the document does not mention any relevance to the SDG of gender equality, it states the challenges of gender equality broadly, and women specifically. For example, the document refers to a national level Nutrition Survey, which revealed that approximately 60 percent of people in Pakistan are facing food insecurity, out of whom, more than 83 percent are women and children (pp. 8). The vision document also acknowledges the fact that such nutritional deficiencies hinder the intellectual development of children and young adults. Therefore, nutritional deficiencies could also “perpetuate intergenerational inequalities of opportunity and income” (pp. 8). Although the survey shows the disproportionate impact of food insecurity on women, “women” again disappear in the subsequent discussion.

In addition to the above, the vision also includes the protection of life and human rights and the provision of the required legal, social, and physical infrastructure to empower people, enabling them to live with dignity. Provision of “full employment” by creating “over 1.5 million jobs every year” (pp. 8), women’s empowerment, and elimination of poverty and hunger is also promised (pp. 8). In addition, making special efforts such as providing female teachers and required physical infrastructure (for instance, boundary walls and adequate toilets in girls’ schools) to increase girls’ school enrolment is also a part of the vision 2025 (pp. 34). Eliminating gender discrimination also appears later in the document as “the focus,” stating:

“...No nation can develop by keeping half of its population outside the development cycle. Pakistan Vision 2025 focuses on ending the discrimination faced by women and providing an enabling environment for them to realize their full potential and make their contribution to the socio-economic growth of the country. We fully realize that gender equity and women’s development hinges very strongly on a woman’s independence to pursue economic growth and exercise her life choices freely.” (pp. 38)

Although eliminating gender inequality was the focus of the Pakistan vision 2013-2025, Figure 5.2 shows that discrimination has only increased over the time as per the Social Institutions and Gender Index reports of 2014 and 2019 respectively (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2014, 2019), where Pakistan had a high score of 30.1 percent in 2014, which, after five years, has reached the “very high” score of 58.7 percent in 2019 (see 5.5). In addition to SIGI, the document itself acknowledges Pakistan’s low ranking on the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Human Development Index (HDI), stating,

“Pakistan ranks 123<sup>rd</sup> in the world on the Gender Development Index, even lower than its Human Development Index ranking, indicating that the access to opportunities, resources, and benefits between women and men are skewed. The legislative framework to protect women’s rights shall be strengthened, and enforcement machinery will be made gender-sensitive to improve implementation. Practices based on gender discriminatory cultural patterns will be discouraged. To

increase women's participation in decision-making, affirmative action will be taken in all public spheres. Women will be protected from harassment at work through strict enforcement of the legislation. Economic empowerment of women through ensuring access to education and enterprise shall be promoted. Day-cares will be provided at offices to facilitate women and enable them to work even after marriage." (pp. 38)

Despite acknowledging Pakistan's low GDI ranking and all the promises to improve on gender equality, there are no measurable indicators set in the vision to improve the situation, which might be a reason that the GDI ranking of Pakistan has decreased to 133 out of 160 countries in 2017 (United Nations Development Programme, 2017). Additionally, it seems encouraging that increasing girls' school enrolment and providing them opportunities for employment "even after marriage" is a part of the vision, which has not been there in any of the previous documents. However, there is no discussion on how the vision deals with the practices such as early marriage, which, as discussed throughout the present research, hinders girls' access to education and employment.

### 6.3.6 The Hindu Marriage Act (2017)

The Hindu Marriage Act (2017) sets the minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys to 18 years. The Act emphasizes the valid consent given by both the parties, stating in clause 4,

"... A Hindu marriage shall be solemnized if [...] (a) at the time of marriage, the parties are of sound mind and capable of giving a valid consent; and (b) both the parties are not below 18 years" (pp. 63).

The Act also states in Clause 12 part 4(d) that the marriage will be terminated if "...her marriage, whether consummated or not, was solemnized before she attained the age of 18 years, and she has repudiated the marriage before attaining that age." However, like the Child Marriage Restraint Act, there is no follow-up policy or discussion on the cultural feasibility of a girl "repudiating" her marriage.

### 6.3.7 National Education Policy (2017-2025)

Article 27 of the first chapter of the National Education Policy states that since the independence of Pakistan, various detailed and well-designed education policies have been developed, but they lack implementation. Goals for "free, universal basic education," good quality higher education leading to innovation, enhancing skills and competencies have been set many times before, but implementing these goals has been a challenge. Therefore, the NEP (2017-2025) has been developed to "break the layers of inertia," and actually implement the goals of "education for all," and SDG-4 on "Quality Education."

First, many important values such as the promotion of democracy, equality, social justice, tolerance, peace, social harmony, and bringing positive social change in knowledge, attitude, and actions of learners have been incorporated into the policy document. However, the document ignores core feminist values such as (i) equity or fairness among genders, and (ii) elimination of false dichotomies. These two feminist values are crucial to enhance the participation of girls and women in formal education. Although the policy recognizes gender inequality as a challenge for the education system, stating, "the education system is facing number of other issues and challenges such as inequitable access, gender disparities and high dropouts" (Article 3, Chapter 14), reducing gender disparity is not a part of the policy objectives.

At the same time, the policy recognizes that gender disparity is a significant issue that needs to be addressed, stating: "Provision of standardized facilities and services by removing all kinds of disparities inequities and imbalances including gender disparities and geographical imbalances." (Chapter 2, pp. 11,) however, the problem remains the same, that where implementation strategies are stated in the document, strategies to eliminate gender disparity have been ignored.

Second, the policy recognizes and highlights some cultural barriers hindering girls' access to school, stating, "It is not the poverty but illiteracy and conservative views of parents which prevent them from sending their daughters to schools" (Chapter 5, Article 3,). However, as argued in the previous two paragraphs, there is no mention of this in the section on implementation strategies.

Third, as authors, for example, Doss (2014) have emphasized the importance of sex-disaggregated data, that is, data that are collected and analysed separately on females and males, for an effective problem identification and solution. The analysis of the NEP shows that overall, in the policy document, only population ratio, and middle and high school enrolment figures are given separately for girls and boys; all other important statistics (at approximately 46 places) were given as general statistics. For example, the document mentions that the net enrolment rate in Pakistan is 36%. The analysis shows that the concerns about gender equality and SDG-4 are only superficially present in the document and are not really incorporated in the policy document.

In addition, the policy fails to address an important barrier hindering girls' access to formal education, that is, is sexual harassment. Whether they are students or faculty, women face sexual harassment in and on their way to educational institutions in the form of, lewd remarks, stalking, and staring etc. (Lindquist & McKay, 2018). The policy altogether ignores this component of sexual harassment.

## 6.4 Summary of Analytical Findings

The findings of the above discussed Critical Frame Analysis of selected state policy and law documents has been summarized below in the form of Figure 6.1.

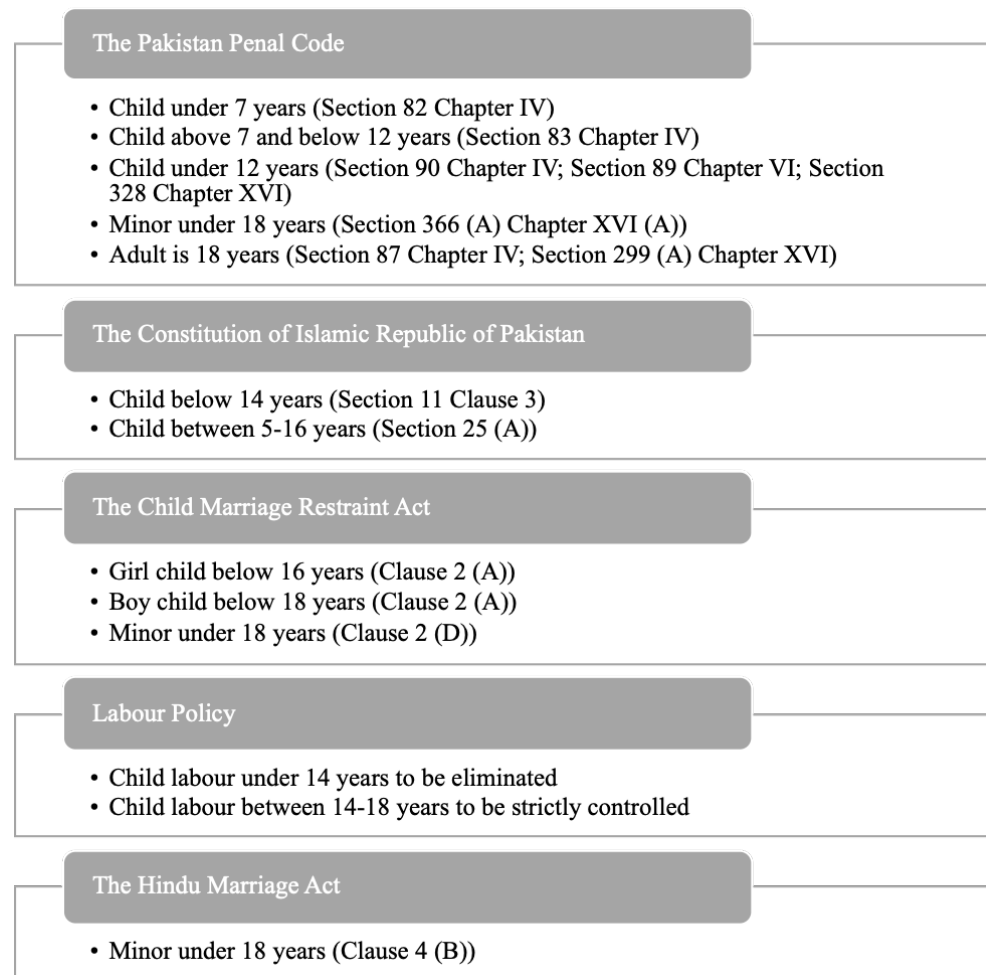
Figure 6.1 shows that different policy documents have different definitions of child, minor, and adult. Figure 6.2 shows various meanings of a “child,” “minor,” and “adult” in various (sections of) state policy documents. This also links to the rationale of using the term “early marriage” rather than the term “child marriage” because the definition of “child” varies across contexts (see 3.2).

Figure 6.1 Findings of Feminist Critical Frame Analysis



Source: Author



**Figure 6.2** Various Age limits of “Child,” “Minor,” and “Adult” in Different State Policies

Source: Author

## 6.5 Feminist Critical Frame Analysis of the SDGs

As mentioned in sections 1.5, 5.6.3, and in Figure 1.2, SDG-5 on Gender Equality has direct relevance to my research, whereas, seven other of the seventeen SDGs are indirectly relevant to my topic. In this subsection, I analyse the goal on gender equality using the feminist critical frame analysis method (see 2.6) and reflect on the implementation of these targets and indicators in Pakistan.

### 6.5.1 SDG-5: Gender Equality

The fifth SDG on Gender Equality aims to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” by 2030. This goal has five targets, three sub-targets, and 14 indicators. Although this goal is stronger in terms of recognizing inequalities as compared to many other goals, a critical review of the goal leads me to make the following points.

First, the fifth SDG seems to equate political participation of women with more women sitting on the table, and ignores the fact that more women in politics does not necessarily mean their substantive participation. Moreover, while the target 5-c recommends to “adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality,” tangible mechanisms for reducing the barriers on the way of women’s political participation remains vague.

Second, target 5.5 on women’s economic empowerment seems problematic because it equates gender equality as provision of equal economic opportunities to women and men. The target turns a blind eye to gender-based wage gaps, occupational segregation on the basis of gender, women’s over-representation in informal work, glass ceiling, maternity wall, and other issues women face on their way to economic empowerment. The term “empowerment” in SDG-5 is mainly used in terms of economic growth, i.e. empowerment as an outcome, but empowerment as a process, for example, increased decision-making of women on different levels, is not included in any of the targets. Similarly, the empowerment agenda fails to address women’s inability to know about their SRH and fully exercise their SRH rights.

Third, a careful reading of the SDG of gender equality indicates that like in the state policies, UN has also used different definitions of “child” for different purposes, contributing to the confusion as to who is a child (see 7.2.). For instance, the indicator of the target on eliminating child, early, and forced marriages is data from girls who were married at 15, and 18 years. Problematic too is that the indicator refers to a child marriage as that which takes place below 15 years and early marriage as below 18 years, because this definition implies that a marriage taking place at, for example, 15 or 16 years is not a “child marriage,” whereas the definition of child by the United Nations itself is people who are 18 years or lesser in age (UNICEF & UN General Assembly, 1989). Furthermore, there is no description of when a marriage is “forced” and by whom.

### 6.6 The Role of Non-State Interventions

Below, I analyse the role of *Bedari* and NRSP in preventing early marriages in Punjab and enhancing women’s empowerment and gender equality (see 5.7).



### 6.6.1 Bedari

Building on the description of Bedari (see 5.7.1), I analyse their projects related to women's empowerment and gender equality in the Punjab. Among all their projects, only "improving the shelter homes" project is implemented in district *Chakwal*, besides the "Her Choice – Building Child Marriage Free Communities" project. While there is no shelter home in village *Abadnagar*, *Bedari* implemented the Her Choice project in the case-study village through various activities. The participant from *Bedari* says:

"Under the "Her Choice" project, we had first made a village-level community-based committee known as the "Child Protection Committee." This committee included the villagers, such as the village councillor, lady health worker, midwife, teacher(s), and one male and one female youth representative. Once the committee was formed, they started raising awareness in the community, especially related to child marriage, but also about the health of male and female children. We [*Bedari*], with the help of the CPC members, also worked on school enrolment of children, especially girls. Then we trained the teachers to help them create a girl-friendly environment in the school to reduce the drop-out rates. The teachers were also trained to help students deal with the changes in their bodies due to puberty and raise awareness among students about sexual and reproductive health."

Despite these efforts, it was tough for *Bedari* to "tackle" the problem of child marriage because of the religious backing given to the practice. Therefore, *Bedari* also decided to engage religious leaders of the community in the project.

"It looked impossible initially, but the credit goes to men of our team, who kept trying to convince the religious leaders to at least listen to what *Bedari* wants to do and how it is crucial for the community."

According to the participant, religious leaders finally came on board, participated in different trainings, and helped *Bedari* in their mission. Other than religious leaders, *Bedari* also trained the police department, raising their awareness of the child marriage law, and how to deal with the cases related to child marriage.

*Bedari*, under "Her Choice" project, not only worked to reduce the practice of early marriage, but also helped people, especially young women, who were married early. For instance, the training of Lady Health Workers includes training on how to help couples, who were married early, with family planning and sexual and reproductive health. While there is no concept of providing sex education to children in school or family, *Bedari* provides awareness sessions and training to girls and boys related to puberty and sexual and reproductive health.

**Photo 6.1** Bedari Activist Conducting SRH Awareness Session in *Abadnagar*



Source: *Bedari*

The most challenging thing, according to the participant, is to make people realize that child marriage is a "problem."

"We (*Bedari*) face a lot of questions such as "we have seen child marriage cases where nobody faced any negative consequence," "my mother was 14-year-old when I was born, and she is still doing well," "child marriage is allowed in Islam." The problem is that the cases where there was no apparent failure in child marriage are highlighted, while the failure cases are not even discussed because it goes against them. For example, a mother was telling me that her young, 12-year-old girl died of diarrhoea a few days after marriage, because the water of the other village did not suit her. Later, somebody told me that the girl died because she could not bear the pain of sexual intercourse with her 31-year-old husband."

Although I could not verify the facts mentioned in the quotation above, this quotation highlights some of the negative consequences of early marriage.

After almost three years of implementation, the organization says that they have at least made people realize that early marriage is a "problem," and now people actually think of the consequences before making any such decision. The local police are trained, and according to the participant, when the police receive such information, they refer the case to *Bedari* for counselling. The CRCs are also very active in the community and vigilant about any cases of early marriage. However, there are still cases of early marriage where the marriage is not announced at the village level.

“While we were doing a session in a school, we noticed a participant girl who was looking very pale and weak, with wrinkled on her face. I thought she is a student. I asked her why are you looking so pale; you are so young why don’t you take care of your food and health? She told me that she is pregnant [...] I was so shocked to hear this because she was so young [...] not more than 13-year-old [...] Later I asked the CPC how could they let this happens, and they told me that the husband had bought this *Pathani* (an ethnic identity in Pakistan) girl from *Mardan* (A city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) in rupees 50,000 (around 286 euro<sup>10</sup>), and they did not announce the marriage in the village. The mother-in-law introduces her as her niece.”

Although “hidden” cases such as this are still happening in the village, *Bedari* believes it has been successful in making a good rapport in the village and has raised awareness about issues that were previously undiscussed, such as early marriage, sexual and reproductive health, puberty, and the importance of girls’ education. While *Bedari* claims that villagers are now increasingly showing interest in training and awareness sessions organized by *Bedari*, and volunteering for them, my findings suggest making the participation more inclusive by reaching out to people from all over the village rather than limiting the activities to one group. My observation from participating in various group activities organized by *Bedari* show that caste dynamics were not considered while organizing activities, which implied that participants of privileged caste groups could participate in the activities more actively, as compared to participants belonging to lower caste groups.

Moreover, *Bedari* claims that most of the times, the decision-making related to early marriage involves only the male family members (i.e., grandfather, paternal uncles, father, and brothers). However, most of their strategies involve (young) women only. Although *Bedari* has been working in Punjab since 2007 and in *Abadnagar* since 2016, the organization claims that they found the villagers, especially men, of *Abadnagar* as one of the most rigid people to work with. They mentioned that before my fieldwork, it was difficult for them to conduct awareness sessions and other activities in the village, particularly among male groups. The organization acknowledged a positive change in the mindsets of people due to which they could finally establish a male volunteer group in the village.

### 6.6.2 National Rural Support Programme (NRSP)

The NRSP (see 5.7.2) claims that they have been able to empower rural women through social mobilization and micro-credit projects in *Abadnagar*. In district *Chakwal*, which is my case study district, NRSP has been active for 15 years. Although NRSP is working on various projects in the area, my research participants only mentioned microfinancing and the Social

<sup>10</sup> Pakistani Rupee to Euro conversion on 3rd September 2019

Mobilization project<sup>11</sup>, therefore, under this section, the influence of only these two projects on (early) marriage decision-making in the village is discussed. The participant from NRSP explained how the social mobilization project works, saying:

“Our (NRSP’s) Social Mobilization Project runs through a three-tier structure. This means we first make a Community Organization (CO) on the neighbourhood level. This provides everyone with a platform to become a CO member and/or discuss their issues on this level. As there are various neighbourhoods in a village, each of the CO nominates two members of their organization to become a part of the Village Organization (VO) and represent their CO. This helps VOs to team up and work for the development of their village. This is interesting that because usually the neighbourhoods are also divided by caste, the VOs include representation of all the caste groups as well. The third level is Union Council (UC) level, where different VOs of all the villages under a Union Council represent their village and talk about the problems of their village and discuss solutions.”

The social mobilization project works on self-help basis, which means that NRSP provides training workshops and sessions to various CO and VO members to help them identify their potential and are aware of the ways they can use their potential to improve their socio-economic situation. NRSP also conducts awareness sessions to create an awareness about fundamental human rights and civic responsibilities, which included awareness about the possible consequences of early marriage. Women’s right to inheritance was also discussed many times in the field because it is also connected with marriage. The participant from NRSP said,

“Sometimes, early marriage is not due to the culture of poverty, but it is also linked to inheritance. You know, in our culture, girls are not told about their inheritance right; we all grew up hearing that all the property goes to the brothers, what will the girl do with the property. So, sometimes girls are married at an early age so that they don’t claim their share of inheritance from the brothers. Intra-family marriages are also based on the same concept that even if the girl takes her share, the property stays within the family. There have also been cases where people say that their daughter is [mentally] sick, and don’t marry her at all so that the property stays within the house.”

<sup>11</sup> Participants did not mention the exact project name, instead, they gave hints, for example, training and group discussion.

Women's right to vote is also one of the main focuses of NRSP's social mobilization programme, which also indirectly controlled the incidents of early marriage. The participant said:

"We [NRSP] also observed that in the village, female voter turnout was very less. Therefore, we started conducting awareness sessions about how important it is to vote. Through these sessions, we came to know that most of the [young] women did not have their National Identity Cards as well. While the male family members had their cards, they argued that "for now they don't need a card, and after marriage, their husband will get a card from them with his name as guardian." [...] Then NRSP helped the women make their identity cards, because accurate birth registration and having an identity card is vital for the girl to determine her age at the time of marriage, so that the decision-makers do not make a benefit of it."

Besides NRSP's Social Mobilization project, the microfinance project has also empowered (young) women through financial independence. NRSP provides a loan to women to start their own small-scale business, for example, "to buy livestock and selling milk, eggs, etc." after conducting a social appraisal and a technical appraisal of their business idea. To do this appraisal, a NRSP team goes to the house of the applicant and discusses it there to make the process easy for women. NRSP also acknowledges that women may not have money or property to use as a guarantee, so NRSP has established a system of social guarantors, where the loan applicant suggests a team of three CO members to be held guarantors of her loan. The participant from NRSP said,

"When we started our activities in the village, women were even hesitant to come out and speak to us. But now, you will be surprised to see women reaching us (NRSP) for facilitation. After becoming a part of NRSP's (various) activities, women have gathered self-confidence and empowerment due to their (financial) independence. Now because they get a loan on their name and start their own work, the sense of ownership also gives them the confidence to speak, which was never there before. Now the male family members also include them in decision-making on different issues because they know that she will only give money if she agrees on the decision."

NRSP also claims that through their various interventions, and with the passage of time, the practice of early marriage is decreasing all over the country, and especially in their programme communities, including village *Abadnagar*. Like *Bedari*, the organization also claims that most of the time, the decision-maker of (early) marriage is the father. The NRSP representative mentions:

"Before let's say 20 years, it was believed that education is not needed for girls and they will just go to their in-laws' house and work in the kitchen [...], but now it is changed. Now people know the importance of education for girls, which delays their [age of] marriage. However, it mostly depends on the father of the girl; if he is educated, he is most likely to enrol his daughter(s) to school and get her married only after she completes her education, but if he is not educated, he will not know the importance of education. But now we also have laws, and a lot of awareness about the issue of early marriage through media as well as NGOs such as us, so people really think twice or thrice before making such a decision, because it is also not socially approved anymore."

NRSP claims that early marriage is not socially approved anymore.

## 6.7 Conclusion

This chapter concludes that state policies do not seem to provide clarity about the practice of "child marriage," and the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) is poorly designed because (i) the policy documents state conflicting definitions of child, minor and adult, (ii) much of the policies have hybrid origin and are, therefore, culturally insensitive, (iii) they miss women and female pronouns in the text; (iv) they seem to perpetuate gender unequal norms, (v) they seem to be based on weak empirical grounds, and (vi) they fail to address many important issues that are relevant.

Second, non-state actors are playing a crucial role in sensitizing people about early marriage and preventing it. Their strengths are: (i) they involve multiple stakeholders in their project activities, (ii) most of their activities are participatory in nature, involving participation from the village, and (iii) they see women as the agents of change. However, what I see problematic is that the non-state actors (i) See men as the key decision-makers in households, (ii) sometimes over-emphasize the agency of girls, and (iii) ignore the dynamics of caste system.

# Chapter 7

**“Because I looked pretty to him:”  
Agency and Early Marriage Decision-  
making Processes Within Families**

## 7.1 Purpose and Scope

This chapter answers sub-question 2: How do family members of different generations engage in decisions about early marriage, and how do these processes vary across social caste? To answer this question, I assess what is a “child marriage” and when is a marriage considered “early” according to my participants. This chapter builds on the previous analysis (see 3.2), to distinguish between child marriage and early marriage based on the data from the field (7.2). It assesses data from IDIs with (female) family members, FGDs with young unmarried men and adult married men, interviews with policymakers, (non)participant observation, and spatial mapping followed by transect walk.

Section 7.3 discusses the role of (maternal and paternal) grandparents, who are referred to as the “first-generation” in decisions leading to early marriage. Section 7.4 details the role of parents and close family members of the same age group, for example, uncles and aunts (i.e., the “second generation”) in early marriage decision-making. The contribution or participation of individual/ self and siblings (i.e., the “third generation”) towards the decision-making related to their (early) marriage is discussed in section 7.5. Section 7.6 discusses the role of the social caste and the community in early marriage decisions, and section 7.7 concludes the chapter.

## 7.2 When is a Marriage “Early?”

My empirical data illustrate that participants from the first and second generations had similar understandings and definitions of child marriage and early marriage. For instance, first-generation participants appeared to hold the idea that child marriage was the marriage conducted before the age of puberty, which they defined for girls as around the time of their first menstruation, and for boys on an average between the age of 10 to 14 years. Whereas the second-generation participants defined early marriage as a marriage that occurs before the age of 16 years for girls, and before starting to work and earn for boys. The following conversation is from an IDI with a 57-year-old grandmother of *Bhatti* caste held on 16/08/2018, which illustrates the points made above:

Nashia: So, what do you think is child marriage?

Mida: If we follow the religion [Islam], I think a girl is ready for marriage when she starts menstruating. That blood means that she is grown up now, and she should be married as soon as possible...

Nashia: So, this will not be a child marriage?

Mida: Yes, this is a good time for marriage. A marriage will be a child marriage if the girl has not started to menstruate yet, for example, 8, 9-year-old girls [...] But these days because of the food they eat and because of this [hot] weather, girls start to menstruate earlier than us...

Nashia: And what about boys?

Mida: One can easily guess when a boy needs to be married [pause] because you see when they grow up, they don't sit at home with mothers and sisters. They become aggressive because when they are adolescents, they have a lot of energy and aggression which means they need to be married now.

Nashia: So, if they get married but are not aggressive, we can call it a child marriage?

Mida: This is different for different men. Some men are not aggressive at all like your uncle [her husband], but he was ready for marriage when we got married [...] His age was 21 at that time. I was 14 [...] But because girls mature faster than boys, I was ready for marriage at 14, but for a boy, 14 year is too young age to marry.

Nashia: And is that different than an early marriage?

Mida: These days people have become so materialistic [...] children also go to school, so I think early marriage will be when they are studying in school because it is good to wait for the girl to finish her school before marriage [...] In the meantime, the boy will also settle down financially and start earning some money...

The above quoted conversation is important because it sums up the ideas of most of the first- and second-generation participants regarding the age of marriage. Some second-generation participants also specified that early marriage for girls occurs before 16 years of age (the legal minimum age in Pakistan). One participant from the second generation distinguished between child marriage and early marriage, saying:

“I think child marriage and early marriage is same, but since you are asking me how they are different, I think child marriage is a marriage when you are a “child” [...] like they do in some villages that they marry their children even before they are born [laughing] of course, being children, they cannot live as a couple, but when they grow up knowing that they are husband and wife [...] I have seen this in an Indian drama [...], but this is not allowed in our religion [Islam]. Early marriage is I think a

marriage when the girl is too young to get married and does not know anything [...] like cooking, managing the household, serving guests..." (Female, 37, *Chaudhary*, IDI on 24/07/2018)

The quotation above not only shows the participants' understanding of child and early marriage but also illustrates the societal expectations of a married young woman. Additionally, the data also show that third-generation participants agreed with the definition of early marriage as given by their parents and grandparents. However, their definition of child marriage differed. They defined child marriage in a gender-neutral manner, as a marriage taking place when the person getting married is in school (usually below 15 or 16 years). Illustrative in this regard is the following extract from an interview with a young woman:

"I think child marriage means marriage when the girl [later added "or boy"] is studying in a school. After school, boys also usually go to college because they can live in a hostel, so they don't get married early. For example, my elder brother attended a college in the city. He lived in the hostel, but because it is not safe for girls to live alone in a hostel, and there many bad girls in the hostels [...] my father did not allow my elder sister to attend a college. She wanted to become a teacher, but she was married right after she finished her school [...] Now I am studying in a college because my uncle has a transport van in which he takes a lot of girls from our village to the college and back..." (Female, 18, *Bhatti*, IDI on 02/09/2018).

Upon asking who these "bad" girls in hostels are, the girl explained:

"My father tells me that in cities, some girls dress-up like they are fashion models; they wear jeans and have short hair. Our relatives live in the city and my cousin told me that the hostelite girls in her college are not good; they talk about boys all the time, and they also talk to boys on phone..." (Female, 18, *Bhatti*, IDI on 02/09/2018).

The quotation above explains the dichotomy of good and bad girls; highlighting some of the characteristics of "bad" girls.

The data show that (young) single men had the same definitions of "child marriage" and "early marriage," and they insisted on the similarity and interchangeability of the terms. However, married men's understanding of the terms was in line with the legal definition, i.e., marriage below 16 years for girls and below 18 years for boys. In contrast, young unmarried men defined the terms as marriage below 18 years for both girls and boys.

While the above discussion engages with the participants' understanding of child marriage and early marriage, their perceptions about the average age of marriage in the village, and how ideal marrying at this age is, is also equally important. When asked about the average age of marriage in the village, most participants mentioned that while it varies across castes, the average age of marriage was 13 to 18 years for girls and 22 to 25 years for men.

During my interviews with the policymakers, I asked them if child and early marriages are same or different. Policymaker-A (male, 70, IDI on 28/08/2020) did not answer the question, saying that "there are no child marriages in Pakistan," and he is not the best person to talk about this because he is not "a minister of human rights or an NGO-person," whereas policymaker-B explained the difference as follows:

"...young girls and boys are most vulnerable when they are forced to be married off before they reach any minimum level of adulthood. The Punjab Marriage Restraint Act still allows girls to be married off at 16 years. How can someone say that a 16-year-old is adult by any means? There are still families who give their daughters into marriage as young as nine and ten years. How can they assume that their nine-year old girl is an adult? Of course, she is not. We are trying to amend the policy and make the minimum age of marriage for girls 18-years all over Pakistan [...] and that age is "minimum." I would say child marriage is when somebody under 18 gets marriage, and early marriage is when somebody gets married at 18 years or 19 or 20. You know getting married is a big responsibility. A marriage is "early" when either of the spouse is not prepared to take the responsibility..." (Female, 60, IDI on 18/11/2020).

The quotation above shows the perspective of a policymaker about the difference between child and early marriage, and when a marriage is "early." Policymaker-B also highlighted that the government is trying to increase the minimum age of marriage to 18-years for all. She mentioned that the bill of amendment has been approved by the Senate but rejected from the National Assembly. She explained that the bill of amendment will be re-presented in National Assembly again.

My participants also mentioned the practice of child marriage is only restricted to some caste groups. For example, a participant mentioned that people of *Bhatti* caste marry their daughters at a very early age – participants referring to marriages occurring when girls were between 12 to 15 years old. The following excerpt reflects the same:

"...We don't do child marriages in our village because it is illegal and not good for the girls [...] In some caste groups, they get their girls married very early, sometimes even at 13, 14 years [...] Usually *Bhattis* do early marriages, and I don't know the

reason, maybe it is just a trend in their caste [...] people of other caste groups in the village usually wait for their girls to finish their school before marriage [...] boys [pause] you are writing book on early marriage. However, nobody writes a book on late marriage because it is a problem for us boys [...] I am 22-year-old. However, still my parents say that this is too early to marry because my elder brother is also not married yet..." (Male, 22, *Chaudhary*, Informal Conversation held on 12/07/2018)

The extract above is from an informal conversation held with an unmarried young man, who seemingly wanted to get married. However, his parents thought this is not the "appropriate" time for his marriage because his elder siblings were also not married yet. As the boy also claimed that people of the *Bhatti* caste conduct early marriages, the following excerpt also proves his claim. The quotation is from an informal conversation held with a second-generation *Bhatti* woman during a wedding ceremony of her niece, Amna, who was 14 years old at the time of marriage.

"...Children these days so ahead of us, so it is very difficult to control them and put restrictions. Especially when they have mobile phones. I never went to a school, so I don't know how to use a phone, and I don't know what my girls are doing on their phones. Amna also used to say that she is discussing work with friends on the phone, but she failed in the 8<sup>th</sup> class. Later it was found out that she has a love affair, and she used to send messages to that boy [...] Her father is very religious; he was so angry when he got to know this ..." (Female, 34, *Bhatti*, Informal Conversation on 05/09/2018).

In this case, the father had arranged Amna's marriage with one of his nephews, who was 28 years old, apparently because he was so angry at her daughter having a love affair. At the same time, almost all my research participants, including those from the *Bhatti* caste, seemed to be aware of the possible negative consequences of early marriage. The following excerpt reflects the same:

"...the girl has to leave school if she is getting married [...] early marriage is not good for her because young girls don't know anything [pause] like [laughing] for example how to raise children, how to cook, how to keep the husband happy [smiling] and how to deal with the in-laws, etc. [...] It is good for the father because he will be relieved from his responsibility..." (Male, 23, *Bhatti*, FGD on 26/12/2018).

While this young interviewee described the potential negative consequences of early marriage and assumed that fathers give their daughters into marriage at an early age to lessen their responsibilities, an adult married man, and policymaker-A described the "necessity" of early marriage, which I will state as the following two quotations:

"When you have an adolescent unmarried daughter sitting at home, it is like a burden. Not because you don't want to give her food, but because you must take care of your honour. It is a big thing if someone talks about your daughter outside..." (Male, 64, *Chaudhary*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

Policymaker-A also mentioned something similar, saying:

"Hearing this might make you unhappy, but we live in a Muslim society. Muslim women are the other name of honour and purity. To save our women from evils like rape, it is very important to marry them when they are young. So that they don't make mistakes which might create a problem for their family. An early marriage is very important for smooth running of Muslim societies, otherwise there are honour killings." (Male, 70, IDI on 28/08/2020)

These quotes confirm scholarly findings that in the South Asian culture, the fear of losing family honour is a key reason why families decide to marry their daughters at an early age (Bravo et al., 2014; Malhotra, 2010; Sev'er & Yurdakul, 2001). In contrast, policymaker-B highlighted some of the negative consequences of early marriage as follows:

"...In Pakistan, every 20-minutes, a woman dies of childbirth or pregnancy-related complications. Many of them are girls who were married under-age [...] Practices such as child marriage usually occur in the most vulnerable and marginalized communities, which has devastating consequences for them. Girls, when married early, are more likely to stop going to school, they are more vulnerable to pregnancy related health issues, and their children are more likely to be malnourished. When young girls are married off, they are more vulnerable to violence from their husbands and in-laws. In short, child marriage sinks the families deeper into poverty..." (Female, 60, IDI on 18/11/2020).

The above quote sums up the negative consequences of early marriage (see also 1.2.1). This section has clarified how participants of different generations define child and early marriage. This leads to the analysis of how different family members of different generations engage in decisions about early marriage, and how these processes vary across social caste. Table 7.1 shows how child and early marriage are defined on various levels, that is, global, regional, and national level and by various actors, that is, (inter)national organizations, researchers, and participants of my research.



**Table 7.1** Difference Between Child and Early Marriage

|                       |   | <b>Child Marriage</b>  | <b>Early Marriage</b>   |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Literature</b>     | <b>Global</b>                           | Below 18 years for girls and boys (for example, UNICEF (1989))                         | "Inappropriate age" when the person getting married should be doing something else (for example, Archambault (2011), and Field and Ambrus (2008)) |
|                       | <b>Regional Literature (South Asia)</b> | Varies across (parts of) countries and different for girls and boys                    | Not differentiated  |
|                       | <b>National Literature (Pakistan)</b>   | 16 years (for girls)<br>18 years (for boys)  | Not differentiated  |
| <b>Field Data</b>     | <b>Generation One Women</b>             | Before puberty for girls and boys (on average between 10 to 14 years)                  | Before 16 years (legal age for girls)<br>Before he starts working and earning (for boys)  |
|                       | <b>Generation Two</b>                   | Before puberty for girls and boys (on average between 10 to 14 years)                  | When she is in school (usually below 15 to 16 years for girls)<br>Before he starts working and earning (for boys)                                 |
|                       | <b>Men</b>                              | 16 years (for girls)   | 16 years (for girls)  |
|                       |   | 18 years (for boys)  | 18 years (for boys)   |
|                       | <b>Generation Three Girls</b>           | When they are in school (usually below 15 to 16 years for girls and boys)              | When she is in school (usually below 15 to 16 years for girls)<br>Before he starts working and earning (for boys)                                 |
|                       | <b>Boys</b>                             | Before 18 years for both   | Before 18 years for both  |
| <b>Policymakers B</b> | Before 18 years for both                | After 18 years, until the intended spouses are not prepared to take the responsibility |   |

Source: Author

Table 7.1 shows that there is confusion related to the understanding of "child" marriage and "early" marriage on global, regional, national, and family level. My research finds that this confusion exacerbates poor implementation of the laws made to delay the age of marriage. Although the global definition of child marriage sets the legal minimum age of marriage as 18 years for both girls and boys, different countries have set their own definitions of child marriage. This is evident from a compilation of the legal minimum age of marriage, both with and without parental consent in 198 countries (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Furthermore, while the literature defines early marriage as a marriage taking place at a "contextually inappropriate" age (Archambault, 2011), the regional and national-level literature uses the terms interchangeably. Relating Table 7.1 with Figure 6.2 shows how the confusion related to the definition of "child" in key policy documents have translated into the mindsets of people, and how effective the policies would have been if they were able to provide a clear definition on "childhood," or use the word "minor" to bring uniformity to

the minimum age of marriage, which, according to the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), means below eighteen years of age. The policymaker-B also mentioned the same during the interview, saying:

"...We have proposed an amendment in the Child Marriage Restraint Act [...] Besides setting the minimum age of marriage to 18 years for all, the amendment will also clear the confusion about the age and definition of "child," which will also be 18 for the purposes of rights and obligations. Defining a "child" is important because in Pakistan, children are often forced into adulthood too early..." (Female, 60, IDI on 18/11/2020).

The above quoted excerpt supports my point, that confusion related to the definition of child needs to be solved to make the implementation of policies possible. This idea is further discussed as a policy recommendation in section 9.5.

I now discuss the contribution of each of the family members (micro-system) in early marriage decision-making across three different generations (chrono-system), and the differences across social caste (meso-system) in early marriage decision-making.

### 7.3 The Role of Grandparents (First Generation)

The joint family system is common in Pakistan, especially in rural areas. A "family" in *Abadnagar* usually includes parents, children, and paternal grandparents. In contrast, in some cases, paternal uncles, their wives and children, and (unmarried) paternal aunts are also a part of the family. The head of the family is usually the person who earns, albeit the earning head of the family does not need to make the decisions, as parents, especially mothers have a very elevated and respectable position. They seem to play a key role in family decision-making. Although the literature covers the role of parents and children, including who is included and excluded in (marriage) decision-making (see 0), the role of grandparents has not received much attention. The category of grandparents in my research is limited to paternal grandparents because they usually live in the joint families and are family members. However, all my first-generation participants were, at the same time, grandparents from the maternal side also.

In the village, intra-family marriage, preferably with a paternal first cousin, is a norm. However, in case there is no single paternal first cousin in the family, the second paternal cousin in the family, the maternal first cousin or a man from the extended paternal family can also be considered. The following excerpt from a second-generation woman illustrates the same:

"...My husband is my father's cousin [laughing] I used to call him "*Chacha*<sup>12</sup>," and he used to bring candies for me. He is 17 years older than me [...], but we are very happy because he is a very good man [...] I was 6-years-old when my father died. He [her husband] used to live next door, and he used to come every day to meet my grandmother. Our marriage was also my grandmother's idea [...]. My father was the only son of my grandmother and the youngest, so all my cousins were already married." (Female, 43, *Mussalli*, IDI on 11/09/2018)

This quotation shows the preference for arranging the marriage within the paternal family, for which other things could be compromised, including the age factor. While intra-family marriage was a norm in *Abadnagar*, the data indicate that in most of the cases, it was the grandmother who proposed and pursued the marriage between two of her grandchildren when they were children, and sometimes even at the time of birth. The following quotation reflects the same:

"...They [the grandchildren] are all the same for me. It does not matter which one of them gets married to whom if it is within the family. If there is no right match in the family, then we see on their mother's side of the family or in other families of the same caste. For example, my youngest granddaughter's marriage is fixed out of the family [...]. However, they are also *Chaudhary*, and I fixed the marriage because he is my friend's son [...] and there was no right match in the family [...] But if it was in the family, I would have let women do their job." (Male, 59, *Chaudhary*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

The above quotation has two important messages, (i) the term "family" (*Khandaan* in Urdu) is usually used for the paternal side of the family. In contrast, for the maternal family, the word "*Nanheyaal*" is used. The preference for fixing marriage within the paternal family somehow indicates that the maternal side of the family is considered the lesser family, and (ii) marriage matchmaking is a woman's job if it is within the "family," and with the "right match." When asked what the "right match means," a woman explained:

"Right match means that there is at least some match between the couple, the boy should not be much older than the girl [...] A gap of 10-12 years is acceptable, but 15-20 is not acceptable because this too much. Our [grand] daughters are educated so we don't want to tie them to an uneducated person... Caste is also important we don't give our daughters outside the caste..." (Female, 63, *Chaudhary*, FGD on 23/07/2018)

<sup>12</sup> The Urdu term "*Chacha*" means uncle

The following conversation from an IDI held with a 63-year-old *Chaudhary* woman on 23/07/2018 also supports the message that match-making is the women's job:

Nashia: So, who decided on the marriage match of your children?

Neeli: My father-in-law had two wives, so I have lived with two mothers-in-law. They both were cousins also, so they used to live like sisters. One of them died early, whereas the other one died a few years ago at the age of 92 years [...] She was the one who had fixed marriages of all the seven of my children. The youngest one got married last year, but his marriage was also fixed by his grandmother when he was seven or eight years old.

Nashia: And what about your father-in-law?

Neeli: You see, he is also very old and sick these days... But he used to be a very typical man when he was young [...] My children were so scared his anger because he was also the *Chaudhary* of the village, so every single person of the village knew that he would not tolerate anything he dislikes [...], But he or your uncle [her husband] never had an objection on the marriage decisions that my mother-in-law had made...

The above quote illustrates that marriage matchmaking in principle is a woman's job, and the grandfather or father will only interfere in the matchmaking decisions if they are unhappy with the decision, or if there is no single man in the "family." Besides this, the woman's definition of a typical man was also reflective of expectations of an ideal man in the village, who is brave, aggressive, authoritative, and intolerant. At the same time, expectations of an ideal woman were altogether opposite. For example, a woman who does not tolerate anything she dislikes would not be an ideal woman. The following excerpt reflects what an average middle-aged woman in *Abadnagar* would go through before she gets to exercise her power:

"... I have also tolerated their father [woman's late husband] beating me because I knew I have two sons, and one day, my sons will grow up and protect me. He died last year but even when he was alive; he could not even shout at me because one day he was about to slap me when Kabir [her younger son] held his hand and told him that he does not like it when his mother cries [...] My sons still listen to whatever I say, even all my grandchildren have never dared to disobey me." (Female, 65, *Khokhar*, IDI on 12/08/2018)

The above quote helps to understand the dynamics of women, gaining a position of power with the passage of time. This woman was married when she was 13 years old, whereas her husband was 20 years old at the time of marriage. The woman mentions “protection” from one man, who happened to be her husband, by two men – her grown-up sons – who were now earning and managing the finances of the households. It is also equally important to mention that this woman had tolerated intimate partner violence for years, waiting for “her time” when her sons grow up and take charge of the household. What she did not mention during the (formal) interview is that she had given birth to six daughters before these two sons, “hoping and praying every time that it is a son.” All six of them were married before they were 16-years old. Son preference and going through multiple pregnancies in the “hope” to get a son is a norm in the village, because the family is considered complete only if there is one or more son. Having daughters was rather counter-effective in a woman’s way to empowerment, and that might be a reason the woman missed mentioning her six daughters during the interview. Becoming mother of a son also “empowers” mothers, as a 43-year-old *Mussalli* woman mentioned during an IDI with her on 11/09/2018. In the conversation below, she was talking about a woman in her neighbourhood, who has two daughters.

Ain: This time I am sure it will be a son. Last time also everybody was hoping for a boy, but it was a girl

Nashia: How do you know it will be a boy this time?

Ain: [Laughing] I know because I gave her a lot of tips to conceive a boy. She has been eating raw mangoes every day since she has conceived. Her mother-in-law was so worried that she is only giving birth to daughters and if she gives birth to a third daughter, she will look for another girl for her son.

Nashia: But her mother-in-law also has only one son after 6 daughters, no?

Ain: That is why she knows how important it is to have more sons, otherwise, people don’t let you live.

Nashia: I know... This is the same in cities also... I wonder why it is of interest to people if somebody has sons or daughters...

Ain: This is same everywhere. Also, in America and London. Because lineage runs through sons only. If you have no sons, nobody will be there to take your name after you die [...] If you have only daughters, your family is never complete. Who will take care of your daughters if their father dies or becomes sick?

Nashia: Right...

Ain: You are so educated, and you travel the world, but I am sure you would always feel worried about the safety of your daughter. You should also try for a son; I will give you raw mangoes from our farm. No matter how educated or rich you are, you need a son to make your place in your in laws’ home. Your husband will only respect you if you give him sons...

This quotation illustrates the deep roots of son bias in society but also the “patriarchal bargain” where women seem to be waiting for “their time” to come so that they can exercise their power, women usually cross their middle-age and become what I call the “first generation” grandmothers. At this stage, they regulate not only the day-to-day decisions within the household, for example, what to cook and where to go when, but also, they play a crucial role in decision-making related to significant life events of the family members, for example, a marriage. The following excerpt demonstrates the (unobstructed) power my first-generation women had, to make marriage decisions of their grandchildren.

“Kashif was eight-year-old when Amna was born. Kashif was so attached to me, and he also used to sleep with me after his grandfather’s death, so he was all the time with me wherever I used to go. When we went to see newly born Amna at her maternal grandmother’s house, Kashif was so happy to see the baby, and he was holding her hand all the time when we were there [...] At the very moment, I had announced that Amna is for him now [...] Now Amna is in sixth class. Kashif has just finished his college [...] Amna is too young [for marriage] at this moment, so we will wait until Kashif finds a good job...” (Female, 57, *Bhatti*, IDI on 16/08/2018)

Kashif was the woman’s grandson from her eldest son. In contrast, Amna was her granddaughter from a younger son. Now, Amna was in the sixth class, which means roughly ten or 11-years-old, whereas, Kashif must have been approximately 20 years of age. While the woman mentioned that Amna was too young to marry, she also indicated that the family would decide the “appropriate” time of marriage once Kashif finds a good job. Thus, in the village, the appropriate time of marriage is determined considering the boy’s readiness for marriage and to afford a family, besides other considerations such as age.

The above story of marriage matchmaking was common in the village. Most of the stories shared by participants were like Amna’s. However, there were also stories where the marriages were fixed at a slightly later age, for example, the following excerpt is from an IDI with a young *Chaudhary* woman, who told me how and when her marriage was fixed:

“...Both of my sisters were also twenty-plus when they got married. I am also twenty-plus now but not married. We don’t have any more single boys in the family who can be suitable for me, so I still don’t know who and when I will get married [...] I am also not very eager to marry, I want to work. I am now waiting for the government college nearby to announce vacancies. Then I will apply [...] *Daadi* was against it, but now I think my father will allow because he is also teaching in the same college ...” (Female, 21, *Chaudhary*, IDI on 06/07/2018)

Here, the girl was 21 years old and had attained 16 years of formal education. Also noteworthy is that she belonged to an educated family of the *Chaudhary* caste group, who own and have access to most of the resources in the village, as compared to the other caste groups. The Urdu word *Daadi* means paternal grandmother. The girl’s grandmother, who was against her dream of teaching in the college, had died just a few days before the interview was conducted. The above-quoted lines again resonate with my broader conclusion, that is, grandmothers play a crucial role in (early) marriage decision-making of their grandchildren, which seems to be similar across social caste groups. The following sub-section details the role of parents in early marriage decision-making.

## 7.4 The Role of Parents (Second Generation)

While the paternal grandmothers seem to initiate marriage matchmaking, and the grandfather only interferes if he has an objection (e.g., out of the family, caste), the parents, especially father, also must agree to the proposal. In cases where the grandmother was not active in matchmaking (e.g., usually for the youngest grandchildren when the grandmother is too old, and the mother already has grown-up and earning son(s)), fathers were also making marriage decisions. In such cases, the fathers make the decision and then inform the family, including the mother. As a 43-year-old mother mentioned:

“After the death of my elder daughter [died when she was 16-year-old] during childbirth, their father fixed the marriage of younger one with the same boy [elder daughter’s husband] to look after her late sister’s baby. My younger daughter is 15-year-old, but you know we are very poor. Their father says it is risky to keep young girls at home for long because it is not safe for young girls [...] I had thought of marrying her to my sister’s son who is F.A pass [around 12 years of education] and owns a grocery shop [...]. However, because of the baby she will have to marry her paternal cousin who could not even pass his fifth class [...] He also used to beat my daughter because she could not cook properly...” (Female, 43, *Mussalli*, IDI on 07/09/2018)

In most families across the four social caste groups, mothers are apparently not a part of early marriage decision-making. However, there were also outliers. For instance, mothers who were financially independent and financially contributing to the household could oppose the decisions made by their husbands. But it came with consequences. An example of a mother’s participation in early marriage decision-making is the case of the 38-year-old woman from the *khokhar* caste (the second lowest in *Abadnagar*), whose husband was a drug addict and did not earn any money. The woman earned a living by helping *Chaudhary* women in their housework. While she was the sole earner for her four children, husband, and the mother-in-law, her husband told her that he had arranged for their eldest 11-year-old daughter to marry his wealthy, upper-caste friend of 46-year-old, whose wife had recently died. The following excerpt is from an IDI with the woman:

“I was clearly not happy with the decision because his friend was also a drug addict like him, and 35 year-older than my daughter [...] The father only wanted to do this for money [...] When I told him that I would not let this happen, he started shouting and beating me, but my mother-in-law supported me in this decision [...] Now we have engaged her to my brother’s son.” (Female, 38, *Khokhar*, IDI on 05/08/2018)

The woman further explained that her husband owed money to his friend because he had no money to buy his drugs, and he had fixed this marriage to settle his debt. The above quote illustrates that the women, who financially contribute to the household thus seemed able to disagree with the marriage decisions about their children including who and when to marry. However, it is important to clarify here that only a small percentage of women were doing (paid) work in the village; only two female participants in my study were earning and financially contributing to the household. The data moreover suggests that while most mothers taking part in the study seemed to be unhappy with marriage decisions made for their children, opposing these decisions was not deemed worthwhile, perhaps because they were not financially independent. That is, women spoke of various risks attached to opposing such a decision. The following quotes reflect women’s concerns with regard to the kinds of risks they might run should they oppose a decision made by their mother-in-law, or husband: “opposing the decision might lead to domestic violence, and sometimes divorce” (Female, 38, *Khokhar*, IDI on 05/08/2018), or “anyway, the father knows better because he has seen the world outside home” (Female, 57, *Bhatti*, IDI on 16/08/2018), or “because we are poor and cannot bear the responsibility anymore” (Female, 43, *Mussalli*, IDI on 07/09/2018).

In addition, some mothers mentioned that they were not very happy with the marriage match of their daughter, but they could not oppose because when the grandparents, the father, and (paternal) uncles and aunts of the girl were in favour of a particular decision, the mothers were not in a position to take a contravening stand, being alone. This finding also confirms Bowen’s (1974; 1971; 1966) concept of family decision-making in the form of

triangles, in which two parties make a stronger bond, and the third party feels left out, and less powerful, for example the mothers mentioned above, who preferred not to contradict the decisions because they felt less powerful and as a result, feared violence. However, my data show that early marriage decision-making processes within families are too complex, and they concern far more stakeholders directly and indirectly affecting the decisions in various ways. Therefore, confining them to a “triangle” is too complex and implies that we are leaving out many stakeholders. Additionally, the data also show that girls to be married, whom I had hypothesized to be a part of each of the triangles in section 4.6.1, seemed to be missing in the decision-making process (see 9.3).

Marriage matchmaking is usually done years before the actual marriage (see 7.3), and it is not only the parents who make decisions about their daughters, but also the (to-be) parents-in-law play a crucial role in making decisions about their future daughter-in-law. These decisions include not only major life decisions such as the time of marriage, but also other decisions such as until when a girl will go to school and whether she covers herself in a veil. The following excerpt is an example of the parents-in-law determining the appropriate time of marriage considering their son’s readiness for marriage:

“When we were in sixth class, my best friend had to leave the school because of her marriage [...] her fiancé was around 10 year-older than her [...] She told me that her mother had said to her mother-in-law that they would marry her after she finishes her schooling, but the mother-in-law said they would not wait because their this son was the eldest and then they also had to marry their other children after him [...] She had said to me that she would resist because she wanted to study, but then she stopped coming to the school and we never met after that...” (Female, 18, *Mussalli*, IDI on 14/08/2018)

The quotation above is an example of the role of parents-in-law in the decision when to marry. Conforming to the pressure put by the parents-in-law is essential because, like divorce, a broken engagement is also a stigma for a girl, and it becomes difficult for the family to find a desirable young man for a girl whose engagement was broken.

To sum up, unlike the grandparents’ generation, in the second generation, usually the father and the parents-in-law control and confirm the decision-making related to the early marriage of their daughter. While this finding was already found in the literature by, for example, Williams (1990), intimate partner violence faced by girls and mothers (before their sons become big enough to “protect” them), emerged as an essential side finding. Data with regard to usually younger women (for example, mothers) experiencing violence in the presence of other – usually elderly – women (e.g., grandmothers) who seem to have certain level of power to control the violence, confirm the notion of “patriarchal bargain,” where the

women who have power to do something perform acts to support patriarchal values to retain their power (see 4.2.2). The following sub-section discusses the role of individuals in early marriage decision-making.

## 7.5 The Role of “Individual,” “self,” and Siblings (Third Generation)

This section details the agency of what Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1977) calls an “individual” and Bowen (1974; 1971; 1966) calls “self,” as well as other family members of the third generation (girls and boys of “marriageable” age), usually the siblings. The data suggest that (young) girls usually start romanticizing their marriage at a very early age because most of them grow up hearing about their marriage. Moreover, the data also show that because their marriages are fixed at a very early age, the agency of young girls is compromised as girls are too young to weigh the pros and cons of their marriage decision and oppose or stand against the decision even if they want to. For example, the following excerpt from one of my young participants illustrates how “romanticized” the notion of early marriage is. The same finding also came out of my exploratory research conducted prior to the fieldwork in an urban setting with young women studying in a university (see Annex 1)

“My grandmother had fixed my marriage with my cousin when I was born. We live in a joint family, so we grew up in the same house [...] he is 9 year-older than me. When he completed his school, my father-in-law opened a small grocery shop for him. He was 23-year-old, and I was 14-year-old when we got married because I failed school examination [laughing] [...] my husband tells me that he was the one who had insisted the elders to fix the marriage soon because I looked very pretty to him...” (Female, 19, *Khokhar*, IDI on 10/10/2018)

While none of my (young) participants mentioned questioning (or opposing) their marriage decision, one reason for not questioning is that in the village, there is no, or very little interaction between girls and boys, and falling in love with somebody is not socially acceptable, especially for girls, leading to consequences starting from (more) restricted mobility and domestic violence, to honour killing. Therefore, coupled to their thin agency, because most girls do not interact with boys, they do not have (m)any ideals, and they happily accept the match their family has made for them. However, boys do participate in discussions related to their marriage, be it the matchmaking or the time of marriage.

The data also show that siblings play a crucial role in maintaining the societal norms related to honour and (early) marriage. Besides the family elders (grandparents, mothers, uncles, and aunts), elder and younger brothers ensure that their sister does not do anything

“inappropriate” that can bring dishonour to the family, which may include “engaging in a conversation with a [young] man [in person or on phone]” (male, 23, *Bhatti*, FGD on 26/12/2019), “going out alone, especially when it is dark outside” (male, 19, *Mussalli*, FGD on 26/12/2019), and “wearing “inappropriate” clothes or not covering themselves up especially when going outside” (male, 17, *Chaudhary*; male, 21, *Khokhar*, FGD on 26/12/2019). This responsibility then shifts from the elders and brothers to the husband after marriage, which is seen by Sev’ser and Yurdakul (2001) as the transfer of patriarchal rights over girls from father to husband.

While both elder and younger brothers ensure that their sister(s) does not bring any “shame” to the family, the data show that the role of elder sisters is to normalize and set examples of being a “good girl” for their younger sisters to follow and the role of younger sisters is usually that of an observer. The following excerpt reflects the same:

“...My [elder] sister got married when I was only nine-year-old [...] She was 15-year-old at the time of her marriage, and my brother (in-law) was around 22-year-old I think [...] They live in the same street as ours, and we meet almost every day. She is like my best friend, and I can share everything with her [...] I also told her that I like my [maternal] cousin [for marriage], but she was very angry with me that I am thinking about boys, and she told me that I should rather focus on my school and help my sick mother in housework...” (Female, 20, *Chaudhary*, IDI on 12/11/2018)

This quotation shows the critical role of elder sisters in ensuring that their younger sisters do what the family and society expect from a good girl. At the same time, Bowen’s (1974; 1971; 1966) concept of *sibling position*, in which he claims that the eldest sibling is usually the most responsible one with leadership qualities, while the younger ones are said to be followers, is also found to be valid in my research. Moreover, my data suggests that the elder daughters are more vulnerable to early marriage, as compared to the younger daughters. However, the importance of sibling position in early marriage decision-making needs to be further explored by means of a comparatively representative sample (see 9.8).

## 7.6 The Role of Social Caste and Community

In rural Pakistan, social caste is a key determinant of an individual’s lifestyle (see 5.4) starting from (access to) school, to the occupation and socio-economic status (Usman, 2017). Although social caste was initially not factored into this research, its significance in relation to decisions regarding early marriage rapidly became evident during the fieldwork. Villagers identified themselves belonging to one of the four caste groups: *Chaudhary*, *Bhatti*, *Khokhar*, and *Mussalli* (in the order of their (perceived) importance in the village) (see 1.1).

The data show that while people belonging to lower castes practice early marriage due to financial reasons and poverty of opportunity, people belonging to higher castes marry their daughters at an early age to preserve the honour of their family and caste. The higher the social caste they belong to, the higher is the fear that if they delay marriage, their daughter might fall in love with a lower caste boy, or a lower caste boy might assault their daughter, which will bring shame to their family and caste. To protect their (high) honour, people of higher caste seem to be more “protective” of the women in their family, thus restricting their mobility.

“God has blessed us with everything; why should we send our women outside for work? They are like queens; we give them a lot of respect and provide them everything within the house [...] Our girls do not go outside [...] alone [...] because you know how unsafe it is outside for the girls [...] And when they do not have to work, why sending them to college or university [...] My daughter has finished her school, and now is getting training of housework from her mother...” (Male, 47, *Chaudhary*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

My research demonstrates that the practice of early marriage is comparatively less common among people belonging to the middle-level social caste groups, i.e., *Bhatti*, and *Khokhar*. The reasons are (i) their expectation of “(dis) honour” is comparatively relaxed than that of the higher caste people, (ii) they were the caste group who mainly participated in various non-state programmes (being) implemented in the village, and (iii) they were the working class who would not mind the extra income earned by women in the household to improve their socio-economic status; and therefore they were sending their daughters to school, and in some cases, to work as well. While the second reason was inferred mainly through (non) participant observation in various activities of the village, the following excerpt supports my other two reasons:

“...I also go outside the house to help people with work in the fields or with housework, but I know my limits [...] My husband is a drug addict, and he hardly gives any money at home [...] My mother-in-law gets a share of my late father-in-law’s pension, and she manages kitchen expenses with it [...] but if I sit at home, who is going to pay for the educational expenses of my children? Initially, my husband was not very happy that I go out for work, because [smiling] I look even younger than my age. He was angry because it is not very safe for women outside, but my mother-in-law is very supportive [...] Now, my husband also knows that even if he does not give us money, we will manage [...]” (Female, 38, *Khokhar*, IDI on 12/08/2018)



The quotation above illustrates the power of first-generation women and talks about the flexibility of the notion of “honour.” While participants argued that women of the highest social caste do not “need” to conduct paid work outside the house, the data suggests that some of the women of the other three castes worked outside the house. However, most of the work women did was unpaid, for example, helping in the fields, managing the livestock, or fetching water from the well (and often unrecognized by the family), whereas only a few women work as paid schoolteachers and lady health workers. Women of the lower social castes, i.e., *Khokhar* and *Mussalli*, also often helped the women of the *Chaudhary* caste group in their housework, not only to earn money but also to create and maintain good terms with women of the highest social caste of the village.

The data suggests that when the families belonging to one of the lower castes make a significant decision such as marriage, their male members usually discuss the proposal decisions with the *Chaudhary* (always an elderly male), who is nominated by the *Chaudhary* caste members as their leader. As the *Chaudhary* is one of the most influential people of the village and because of the social, economic, and “religious” power they hold, they have the power to influence any decision in the village. However, the data show that the *Chaudhary* may or may not contradict the decision depending on his priorities, agenda, and fear of, for example, societal backlash.

Non-participant observations of community politics in *Abadnagar*, and (in)formal interaction with the (informal) male leader of *Chaudharys* (62-year-old), indicate that the *Chaudhary* has the influence to (in)directly regulate any decisions taking place in the village, including early marriage decisions. However, the observation suggests that he seemed to exercise this power only to: (i) advocate for education of boys so that they may get good jobs in cities or abroad, or (ii) to help needy people (usually men, and sometimes divorcees or widows) link with various state and non-state actors for (financial) help. Throughout the fieldwork period, there was no observation of the *Chaudhary's* interference in matters which are socially unacceptable, for example, delaying the age of marriage for girls and sending them to school.

The possible reasons for this selective interference of the *Chaudhary* in village decisions are: (i) the decisions pertaining to women’s empowerment might not affect the *Chaudhary*, being a “man” in a powerful position, and (ii) the *Chaudhary* does not want to be questioned/ criticized on taking a standpoint which apparently goes against their “culture” and (their interpretation of) “religion.”

Such selective interference in the “private matters” of the family is not only done by the *Chaudhary*, but also by other village “elders,” including elderly women. The elders would include women and men of the first generation (roughly 50 years and above), and the men

of the second generation (roughly 30 to 50 years). Like the family members, the village elders also ensure that girls are “good girls;” not seeing and talking to a boy, covering themselves properly, not going out needlessly and alone (especially in the evening), and helping their mother in the housework which also includes looking after the (younger) siblings, brothers, elderly people, and other men of the house. Although the community seemed to be well aware of the possible negative consequences of early marriage, they never interfered in “private” family decisions, for example, an early marriage, as they would do in case the family wants to send their daughter to a city for education/work.

## 7.7 Conclusion

In assessing how different family members of different generations engage in decisions about early marriage, and how these processes vary across social caste, this chapter concludes first that marriages are usually fixed (informally) during the childhood of a girl, preferably within her paternal family by the grandmother, with the agreement of the grandfather, father, and sometimes the mother also. However, the parents-in-law and sometimes the groom-to-be also play an essential role in deciding the “appropriate” time of marriage, which is usually determined by looking at the groom’s “readiness” for marriage. This implies that early marriage decision-making needs to be seen beyond the father, unlike what academic and programmatic literature suggests.

Second, the agency of young girls in Pakistan, especially in relation to making decisions about their marriage, is quite thin. However, comparing the agencies of grandmothers (see 7.3), mothers (see 7.4), and young girls 7.5), I further conclude that the agency of women grows thicker with age, and having financial independence and/or grown up sons.

Third, Kandiyoti’s (1988) concept of a “patriarchal bargain” seems to exist in the village as adult women do tend to negotiate (not bargain) for power from the existing power-holders (i.e., men), but they only exercise this negotiation power when they have additional sources of power, for example, (i) they have grown up sons to “protect” them from for example, violence from husband, or (ii) when they are financially “empowered” and contribute in the household expenditure. Bowen’s (1974; 1971; 1966) triangles did not seem to work in decision-making related to early marriage. This negates my assumption that girls are a part of every decision-making triangle (section 4.6.1).

Fourth, the pattern of early marriage decision-making seems similar across all the four caste groups in the village; however, their reasons behind making early marriage decisions varied, including the fear of “dishonour” and poverty.



And last, like existing scholarly literature, there was no one definition of child marriage and early marriage in *Abadnagar* (Table 7.1). My argument here is that the confusion in the policies pertaining to the definition of a “child” (Figure 6.2) have translated into the mindsets of the public; and therefore, these confusions need to be solved (see 9.4).

# Chapter 8

## **Wearing Jeans and Getting Divorced: Participants Views on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality**

## 8.1 Purpose and Scope

This chapter responds to my sub-question 3: how do different family members' views on women's empowerment and gender equality help explain early marriage decisions, and how do these views differ across social caste groups? This chapter draws on the data from IDIs with female family members, FGDs with married and unmarried men, interviews with policymakers, and (non) participant observation. Drawing partly on this chapter, reflections are made on Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1977) "Exo-system," "Macro-system," and "Chrono-system." The chapter explains how participants define and understand the term "gender equality" (see 8.2), how important they think gender equality is, and how they differentiate between gender equality and "women's empowerment" (see 8.3), the importance attributed to women's empowerment and gender equality in the Pakistani context (see 8.4) and the link between gender equality, women's empowerment, and early marriage (see 8.5). Section 8.6 concludes the chapter.

## 8.2 Participants' Views on Gender Equality

Equality between women and men and increased empowerment of women is both the driver and outcome of delaying the age of marriage (Megan, 2018; McCleary-Sills, Hanmer, Parsons, & Klugman, 2015). However, as various (feminist) scholars have argued, there is no universal definition of gender equality, rather, the notion of gender equality differs across places, cultures, and times (Meisenberg & Woodley, 2015; Cavaghan, 2009; Borchorst & Siim, 2008; Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Inglehart, 2002; Borchorst, 1994). Moreover, "gender equality" is often seen as an "elitist" notion (Teigen & Wängnerud, 2009) and a "Eurocentric" idea (Oyewumi, 2002). This calls for a culturally sensitive reconstruction of women's empowerment and gender equality (Syed, 2010).

Furthermore, SFT used as the meta-theory of this research, also confirms this idea. Harding (1993) refers to a "strong objectivity," which means that the standpoint of oppressed and marginalized individuals (can also be communities) can help visualize the world more objectively because the "outsiders" can then reflect on the lived realities of the oppressed and marginalized through their standpoint, which is not the "lived reality" of the "outsiders" (see 4.2). In my research, I, being the "outsider," unpack my research participants' perceptions on women's empowerment and gender equality by reflecting on the lived realities of my participants through their standpoint.

Almost all participants defined gender equality as "women and men being equal." However, almost all participants viewed gender equality as a negative "un-Islamic" term, which is not suitable for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. They believed that the idea of gender equality

is a root cause of the social evils in Pakistan, including the "increasing incidences of rape." The following two quotations, one by a grandmother and the other by an unmarried man, represent the participants' views about gender equality.

"God created a man first, and then He created a women from the ribs of the man [...] gender equality means that a man and a woman are equal, but this is not a part of Islam [...] I see on television that women want to wear jeans and go out alone [...] they do not want to listen to their father or brother, and then they get divorced because they also do not obey their husband [...] if the Creator has not created them equal, why do you even want to discuss it [...] it is the beauty of a woman that she stays at home [...] If women and men were equal, why don't men get pregnant and give birth to children?" (Female, 59, *Chaudhary*, IDI on 13/11/2018)

"You see they (on media) are blaming us (boys) for the increasing incidences of rape, but I am telling you that rape happens because of things like gender equality [...] If girls realize that they are Muslim women, and behave like Muslim women, wear appropriate clothes, boys will not even be able to see them because they will be inside the house or covered in a veil [...] If women want to be equal to men, then they should not mind if a boy touches them on the street." (Male, 21, *Khokhar*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

The quotes above show that in addition to being negative, un-Islamic, and Westernized, there is, what Shaheed (2010) calls, a "gendered" religion in Pakistan. The notion of gendered religion relates to Marxist and standpoint feminists' argument of knowledge and power. It means that those who are financially, socially, or politically powerful, control knowledge production, and produce knowledge which favours them and helps them keep their power. In Pakistan, as Shaheed (2010) has argued, religious knowledge production and dissemination are controlled by men; and therefore, they interpret religion (Islam) and disseminate the information in a way that it favours (Muslim) men, as a group.

I also observed that the villagers are sceptical of any kind of equality, for example, equality between family members, or equality between a son and a daughter, or equality between various social caste groups or professions. Box 8.1 presents an excerpt from my fieldwork journal in which inequality based on caste was evident.

**Box 8.1** Excerpt from Fieldwork Journal (2)

18 August 2018

2:24 am

The front yard of Uncle *Mehmood's* house

After *Shaheena* cleaned up the kitchen, refusing to take my help, as usual, she, *Uzair*, *Sajjal*, and I were playing Ludo before going to bed. Uncle *Tahir's* (*Shaheena* and *Uzair's* father) phone rang while he was sleeping, and he ran towards the gate, telling us that "uncle *Mehmood's* time has come." Me, trying to recall who uncle *Mehmood* is and worrying about what would have happened... *Uzair* closed the game, whereas *Shaheena* goes inside the room to get her *Chaadar* (a big shawl that women use to cover themselves while going outside the house). *Uzair* picks up a torch from the store and asks *Sajjal* to put on her shoes because it is not "appropriate" to leave us (*Sajjal* and me) alone at night. I also took my *Chaadar*, and within five minutes, we were on the way to uncle *Mehmood's* house.

On our way, *Shaheena* told me that he is her father's cousin, who is also a cancer patient. When we reached his house, the front yard was full of people from the village, who were sobbing... I saw a man lying on a bed in the front yard, whose cries were telling me that he was in much pain, and unconscious. His wife, three sons, and two daughters were sitting around him, and crying...

Soon after, his fourth son came with the doctor, who started checking on uncle *Mehmood*, whereas one of his daughters brought copies of *Surah Yaseen* (a part of *Quran* which is often recited to make death easier and less painful for a dying person) from a room, and distributed among all women, including me. *Shaheena's* married sisters, who were living with their in-laws, had also arrived, and one of Uncle *Mehmood's* daughter offered us a bed to sit on. It was awkward for me because some women were also sitting on the floor and stairs, and their children were lying in their laps or on the floor. I offered one older woman reciting the *Quran* while sitting on the floor to sit on the bed with us, but she refused. Later, *Shaheena's* sister, who was sitting with me, told me that they would not sit with us because they are not *Chaudhary*. Growing up in a Muslim family, I was always told that nobody should sit higher than *the Quran*, so it was still tricky for me...

Men were sitting on the other side of the front yard, on chairs, but I could also see some men sitting on the floor even when there were a few empty chairs available. This time, I could easily guess why they were on the floor...

Source: Author

Box 8.1 shows how deep-rooted inequality is in *Abadnagar*. Although participants could give "religious" cover to their preference for gender (in)equality, they seemed to blame other (socio-economic) inequalities on social traditions. The following subsection details participants' understanding of women's empowerment.

### 8.3 Participants' Views on Women's Empowerment

The participants viewed the concept of women's empowerment as something positive and Islamic, arguing that Islam is the first religion that has "empowered women." This is a bit contradictory as Sen (2015), Kishor and Gupta (2009), Kabeer (2005), Dargan (1996), and Borchorst (1994) see empowerment as a component of gender equality. However, participants criticized the Western definition of women's empowerment and questioned the relevance of this definition to Pakistan. They defined women's empowerment as educating women, which empowers women automatically. The following excerpt reflects the same:

"Women's empowerment means giving education to women [...], but this does not mean that we send our girls to the city or other countries for education, like you [myself] are doing. We like to make our daughters empowered but within the limits of Islam. Islam does not even allow women to go out of their house [later added "needlessly"], I wonder how people send their daughters and wives far away for education or writing books [...] Islam is the first religion to introduce women's rights and to empower women, but if we follow the West, our country is going to face even more earthquakes and floods." (Female, 38, *Khokhar*, IDI on 12/08/2018)

The above quote shows that while the participant was in support of girls getting education and becoming "empowered" through education, she was questioning my presence, being a daughter and (supposedly) a wife, in the village for the purpose of research, calling it un-Islamic and Western; and therefore, not relevant to Pakistani "Muslim" culture. At the same time, most research participants mentioned that (formal) education makes women empowered, because an educated woman is better able to raise her children and manage the house in comparison to an uneducated woman. Some also mentioned that marrying an educated woman is better financially as then they did not need to send their children for extra tuitions and the mother would be able to help the children with school homework, thus saving money. The following excerpt is from a young boy who mentioned the same:

"Women's empowerment is crucial because if a woman is empowered, she is educated. Even if she is not doing a (paid) job because of her husband [not allowing it], she can save much money by teaching her children at home so that they do not have to get tuitions." (Male, 19, *Mussalli*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

Additionally, a few participants – mostly married women and men from the upper caste – also believed that women in Pakistan are already empowered according to the Muslim definition of women's empowerment, which, according to one of the (male) participants is as follows:

“Women's empowerment and giving respect to women is essential. Our religion [Islam] also emphasizes respecting women [...]. However, women today think that empowerment means doing whatever they want without asking anyone, like in the West [...]. This is not empowerment, this is a sin which leads to a lot of social evils [...] for example, just think if a woman goes out alone at night; obviously, men will tease her because she is calling for it, or if she wears jeans and skin-tight clothes, obviously men will stare at them because they are giving men a chance to stare [...] women's empowerment in Islam means giving respect and special treatment to women and provide them everything they need at home. [...] I think women in Pakistan are empowered enough, and I do not like it when they discuss women's rights on television because it makes our women confused.” (Male, 59, *Chaudhary*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

As an instance of the same argument, another male participant mentioned:

“We should not compare our women to the Western women [...] they [in the West] do not give respect to their women the way we do [...] we even have separate queues for ladies outside [...] our women are already empowered [...] their empowerment is that we honour them, provide them everything at home so that they do not have to go outside in such heat.” (Male, 64, *Chaudhary*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

In line with the above quote, a woman also mentioned that women's empowerment lies in staying at home and feeling pride in their reproductive abilities and power of “creating” a home and a family because women can give birth. She further said:

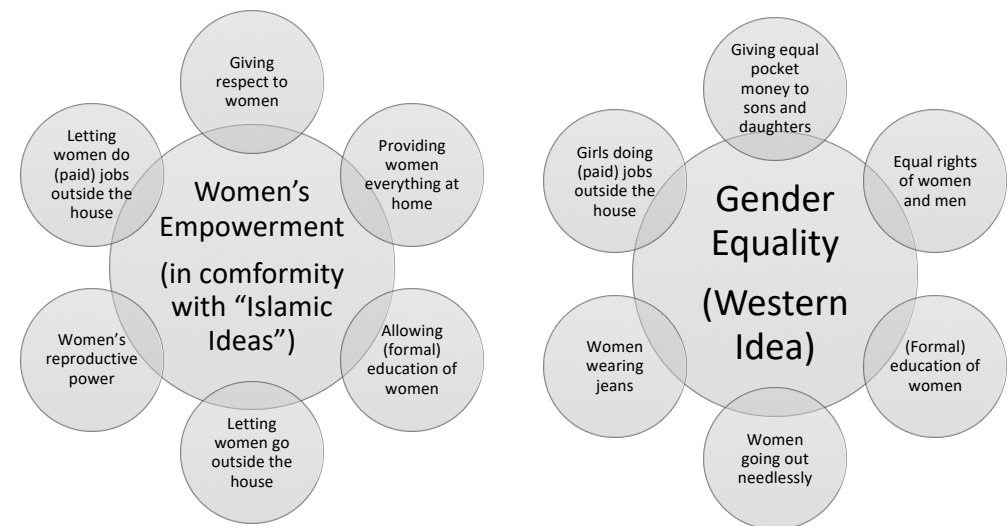
“We [women] are already empowered because we have been blessed with the ability to reproduce, which men cannot. Women's empowerment is not that we wear jeans, or get divorced and go out on streets, but real empowerment of women is that they create children, make a family, keep their house clean, and keep their husband happy [...] because only if the husband is happy and satisfied, he will treat his wife like a queen, and this will make her empowered.” (Female, 42, *Chaudhary*, IDI on 30/10/2018)

The data show that people belonging to different caste groups perceived the idea of women's empowerment differently. For example, as apparent in the above two quotes, women and men belonging to the higher caste thought that women in Pakistan are already empowered, where their definition of “empowerment” was their husbands treating them as a “queen” and providing them everything they need. Contrarily, participants from the lower social caste groups seemed to relate empowerment with the financial contribution of women in the household. One of the female participants from a lower social caste group mentioned:

“Women's empowerment is very important because these days it is challenging for a family to depend on one person's [man's] income [...] if a woman is empowered, and can do something to earn money, her children will never die hungry even if the husband gets sick or becomes drug addict or passes away [...] an empowered woman means that she can earn money and raise her family.” (Female, 34, *Bhatti*, IDI on 21/10/2018)

Figure 8.1 is a synthesis of how my research participants described women's empowerment and gender equality.

**Figure 8.1** Participants' Definitions of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality



Source: Author

Where the definitions of the term “women's empowerment” varied, most participants seemed to understand women's empowerment as their “power to” do things – within societal limits – while keeping their “power over” the “empowered” women (see 4.3). One reason behind

varying understandings of the term “women’s empowerment” across various social caste groups might be their – what standpoint feminist call – “lived realities” of poverty, hunger, drug addictions (usually among lower caste men), unaffordable health care facilities and physical and mental disabilities due to intra-family marriages. The finding of different understandings of women’s empowerment across participants belonging to different caste groups also seems to relate with Moser’s (1989) theory of “practical” and “strategic” gender needs, which emerged more strongly during discussions with (groups of) men (see 8.4).

#### 8.4 The Voices of Men: Practical Versus Strategic Gender Needs

The notion of practical and strategic gender needs was introduced by Molyneux (1984), familiarized by Moser (1989) and also used by authors such as Quisumbing and Pandolfelli (2010), Hovorka (2006), and Regmi and Fawcett (1999) in urban and rural agricultural settings. My discussions with the village men confirmed this notion. It is essential to clarify that Moser’s (1989) Gender Planning Framework is not a part of my theoretical framework because gender planning is beyond the scope of my research. However, because it came out as a relevant finding, it is essential to mention here what Molyneux (1984) and Moser (1989) mean by practical and strategic gender needs. Understanding practical and strategic gender needs is critical because they inform my policy recommendations (see 9.5).

Moser (1989: 1803) defines practical gender needs as needs which arise from concrete conditions that women experience due to their engendered position within the existing sexual division of labour. Women (and/or men) identify the practical gender needs within their socially accepted roles in the society, and these needs do not challenge, although they usually arise out of, the existing gendered division of labour and a subordinate position of women in the society. Moreover, practical gender needs are usually a response to practical and urgent problems identified within a specific context, such as water provision, healthcare, and employment (Moser, 1989).

Strategic gender needs are “formulated from the analysis of women’s subordination to men [...] and (usually lead) to overcome this subordination” (Moser, 1989: 1803). These needs are what women (and/or men) require in order to improve their social status or position by aspiring for more control over themselves, instead of limiting their social status and position to the restrictions imposed by their socially defined roles (Moser, 1989). Considering the above definition, my findings seem to be significantly related to the practical and strategic gender needs of women, men, and the community. The excerpts below illustrate what practical and strategic gender needs mean in the village:

“In our country, we have more important problems (to address) like poverty, electricity and water shortage, unemployment, increasing divorce rate, etc. [...] why do you want to write about women and gender equality [...] This is not a problem; you only want to create it by discussing it with other women and us...” (Male, 42, *Khokhar*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

While in the quotation above, the participant was generally pointing to the practical and more urgent needs of the community to be addressed, another (younger) participant explicitly made it more related to women, saying,

“Gender equality is an important issue, but the issues like [un-availability of] water, gas, electricity, and [paid] jobs, are also very important [...] I think if these issues are resolved, our women will be happier [...] They do not know about the issue of gender equality, but they know about the issue water and gas, and they have to work really hard for it...” (Male, 26, *Bhatti*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

The above quotations show that while the male participants saw women’s empowerment and gender equality as long-term commitments, they were at the same time concerned about the short-term commitments and role that women play in the society. They acknowledged the problems faced by women in their day-to-day life in performing their routine chores including fetching and providing water for the family members, cooking – and if there is no gas, fetching and burning wood to cook – which not only consumes far more time but also negatively affects their physical health. Not surprisingly, women’s day-to-day problems also related to the idea of feminization of poverty (see 1.2.1; World Bank, 2001). Women are “poor” both financially but also socially including the lack of education, health problems and lack of social networks (for example, friends).

While to men acknowledge the problems faced by women in their everyday lives and show goodwill to address these problems, both groups (unmarried young men, and married adult men) also mentioned the provision of (formal) education to women as one of the solutions to address their problems, including early marriage. The following excerpt illustrates the same:

“Early marriage is a problem because it is difficult [for the girl] to go to school after marriage; her husband and in-laws may not allow this. That is why it is in the law also, and nobody wants to go to jail [laughing].” (Male, 51, *Bhatti*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

This implies that the participant(s) acknowledged the importance of getting formal education for women and that women usually lose the opportunity to go to school after their (early) marriage, but it also throws light on the importance of having a law to stop

child marriages. While this man mentioned that child marriages should be stopped because if not, the father will have to go to jail, a few other men also jumped into the discussion and mentioned some reasons they could think of for delaying the age of marriage, which included the inability of girls to handle family politics because they are too young to “fight back,” which “sometimes might lead to intimate partner violence and divorce,” and the inability of young mothers to take good care of their children.

However, both groups of men also identified some reasons why families encourage early marriage for their daughters: (i) early marriage of girls might give economic relief to the poor father, (ii) it might reduce the social burden on the father and brothers in the form of (fear of) dishonour and shame, (iii) when the husband is old and the wife is still young, she can take care of the husband until his death, and (iv) an early marriage gives the girl more time (in the life-span) to adjust to her in-laws and husband.

Most of my research participants mentioned that women’s empowerment means women getting education (see 8.3). In contrast, participants see women’s empowerment and gender equality as the strategic gender need (or no need at all), they seem to think of (formal) education of girls as a practical gender need, which might help women perform their gendered roles in a comparatively easier way. I now discuss the inter-relation between gender equality, women’s empowerment, and early marriage.

## 8.5 Bridging Gender Equality, Women’s Empowerment and Early Marriage

As most interviewees saw gender equality as irrelevant in Pakistan (see 8.2), it was impossible to explore the idea of gender (in)equality further, and how it relates to (or not) the practice of early marriage. However, the data from (non) participant observation shows the gendered socialization of girls and boys from their very childhood, which is often unequal. This unequal socialization perpetuates the existing division of labour, for example, girls help their mother with the (unpaid) housework, while boys help their father with the (paid) work outside the house. This unequal gender socialization might also lead to early marriage of the girl, as one of the female respondents said:

“This generation of girls is so ill-mannered [...] my granddaughter does not even listen to her father [...]. I was telling her mother (woman’s daughter-in-law) to teach her to respect and obey the elders [...] she is now growing up and if she does not learn it now, how will she settle in her next home [i.e., with her in-laws after marriage] [...] Girls have no tolerance these days, that is why every other girl is getting a divorce.” (Female, 56, *Mussalli*, IDI on 10/09/2018)

However, most male, and female participants showed their goodwill for “women’s empowerment” which implied sending girls to schools and allowing them to do (paid) jobs (outside the house) but within “Islamic limits” (see 8.3). Interestingly, no participant could give an authentic definition of these Islamic limits. This is in line with what Shaheed (2010), Hoffmann (2015), Sasaki and Kim (2011), and Simpson et al. (1998) say about the use of religion as a tool to define “morality” and exercise “social control” by men over women. This also provides space for the argument that state and non-state policies and projects have the power to shape the common understanding of certain practices. It seems that these religious limits mentioned by several female and male participants belonging to different age and caste groups, and their inability to define these limits relates to the “(un)suitability” of certain professions for women and children, which is mentioned in the Constitution of Pakistan in Article 37 (e), which has been likewise left open for (subjective) interpretations (usually by those who are socially dominant, for example, men, in Pakistan (Shaheed, 2010).

Despite the imprecision of the idea of “women’s empowerment within the limits of Islam,” the willingness of participants for increasing the level of young women’s formal education shows their readiness for accepting women’s empowerment. However, at the backdrop is their (men’s and elderly women’s) fear of (dis) honour that might come to the family if they send their girls to seek education. Here, dishonour does not necessarily mean that the girl does something socially unapproved, for example, falling in love with a boy, instead, a boy passing comments on a girl or discussing about a girl is also shameful and a matter of dishonour for a girl’s family (Raza & Liaqat, 2016; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001). While the causal relationship between family honour and early marriage has already been established (see 3.3.2), the excerpt below and the discussion that follows further substantiate the argument:

“It is not that we do not trust our granddaughters [...] we know that we have raised that in a way they will prefer to die than bringing dishonour to our family [...], but you know these days it is not safe for outside for girls [...] your uncle [the participant’s husband] was telling me the other day that many rape cases are happening even in the cities [...] we like to send our girls to school, but we keep them in front of our eyes all the time because we do not want anything bad to happen with our daughters.” (Female, 56, *Khokhar*, IDI on 06/09/2018)

The fear of (dis) honour evidently is a reason behind the 44 percent female literacy<sup>13</sup> rate in the village (see Table 2.1) and between 49.6 percent to 51.8 percent overall female literacy rate in Pakistan (UNDP, 2017). It is also the reason why, according to World Health Organization (2018), more than 140 million underage girls were expected to be married between 2011 to

<sup>13</sup> Literacy is defined here as the ability to read a letter and write their name and draft a basic letter” (Iqbal, 2019: Page 1).



2020 in Pakistan (Ali, 2019; Ali, 2018). The relationship between (low) education and early marriage (see 1.2.1) also came out strongly from the data, for instance, one of the young male participants said:

“If a girl is good in studies, she must get an education [...], but if she fails in school or does not like to study, then it is good for her to get married and start her life early.” (Male, 17, *Chaudhary*, FGD on 26/12/2018)

In the quotation above, “starting her life” early by getting married early represents that a girl seemingly has no life before she gets married, and the “sooner she gets married, the more time she will have to enjoy her life.” Furthermore, as hypothesized in section 4.6.1 (gendered) socialization under the patriarchal setup leads to differences in an individuals’ sense of “self,” where boys’ sense of self and individualism is stronger as compared to girls’, which lies more in relational identities.

Furthermore, my findings confirm those of authors such as Wodon et al. (2016), Bhatti and Jeffery (2012), and Bayisenge (2010), who have argued that during the time of transition from secondary school to high school, many girls enter into marriage in Africa and South Asia. While the average age of finishing (secondary) school and starting college (high school) in Pakistan is between 15 and 16, one reason for lower education of girls, as observed during the fieldwork and also mentioned by a few participants is the distance of the college(s) from the village. Even the families who could financially afford to send their daughters in a van preferred not to send them to a college because of security reasons. The following excerpt reflects the same:

“Government college fee is quite affordable, but transport from the village to the city is costly [...] when my son was in college, he used to wake up at 4:30 in the morning because the van leaves the village at 5 am. They (the van) pick up boys from the surrounding villages also and reach the college at around 7 am. While the college finishes at 2 pm, my son used to come home after 4:30 [...] You know in winter it already starts getting darker by then.” (Female, 42, *Chaudhary*, IDI on 26/10/2018)

The quotation above again links to the discussion of “honour,” which is endangered if a girl goes out or stays out of the house when it gets dark, calling for (sexual) harassment and even rape. To save their girls from such problems, the elders usually prefer to keep their girls at home after they finish secondary school. When they are not going to school anymore, they are usually considered marriageable by themselves, their family, and the society, as mentioned by one of my male participants (see 7.5).

Given that most of my participants advocate women’s empowerment through higher, formal education, and given that the data show that girls, who have to leave education after school are more likely to get married early(ier) as compared to the girls who join college, college education appears to be a bridge for the transition from (early) marriage to women’s empowerment. This has also been highlighted by, among other authors, Brown (2012). This finding has implications for policy(ies) related to early marriage (see 9.5)

## 8.6 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter provides the answer to sub-question 3, that is, how do various groups of participants across different social caste groups see women’s empowerment and gender equality, and how do their views relate to early marriage decisions? The chapter concludes that while the respondents seemed to perceive gender equality as a Western concept which is not relevant to the concept of Pakistan, they saw women’s empowerment as a positive, which, in their opinion, can be attained through focusing on practical gender needs, for example, girls’ higher (formal) education, provided that they aspire for the empowerment within “Islamic limits.” Therefore, (college) education seems to play the role of a transition bridge from (early) marriage to women’s empowerment. Similarly, this conclusion implies that there is a dire need for policies and projects to differentiate between “practical” and “strategic” gender needs. These findings will be further taken up as policy recommendations in section 9.5.

Second, the chapter concludes that most of the time, gender inequalities are overseen by individual women and men at the micro-level. An important reason for this ignorance might be that similar gender inequalities prevail at meso and macro levels, which are also not always understood and emphasized.

While the policy implications of differentiating between practical and strategic gender needs have been further elaborated in section 9.5, the next chapter provides the answer to my research question and concludes my research (Chapter 9).

# Chapter 9

## **Synthesis and Conclusions**

## 9.1 Opening

This chapter concludes my research by providing an answer to the overall research question in sections 9.2 and 9.3, and drawing four conclusions and their implications in section 9.4. As policy analysis has been a crucial part of this dissertation, section 9.5 offers policy recommendations at the international level, including for the Sustainable Development Goals, (Inter)national NGOs, the Government of Pakistan, and for the broader Islamic world. In section 9.6, I reflect on the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the research, whereas my reflections on the methodology are in section 9.7. At the end, section 9.8 offers some recommendations for further research on topics related to child and early marriage. Section 9.9 closes this chapter and the dissertation.

## 9.2 Policy influence on Early Marriage

This dissertation examined the following question: How do relevant state and non-state women's empowerment and gender equality policies and programmes relate to early marriage decision-making processes within families, and across different caste groups?

I first explored how current state and non-state women's empowerment and gender equality policies and programmes related to these family processes and outcomes in Chapter 6. A Feminist Critical Frame Analysis conducted on nine relevant state policy documents revealed that existing policies do not sufficiently align with family decision-making processes and outcomes related to early marriage. My research found that the existing state policies have a low compliance pull as they exclude certain stakeholders, who might play a vital role in early marriage decision-making, for example, grandmothers, but also religious leaders and their councils.

Second, my participants' narratives are reflective of a similar confusion related to the definition of a "child" as was apparent in state policies (see 7.2) which is another reason for the lack of compliance with such policies. I further argue that some of the policies analysed are culturally insensitive because, for example under the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), the policy expects a young girl, who is about to be married at an early age, to go to the Union Council or a Police Station and report the case, while in my case study village, it would have entailed traveling 17-18 kilometres to the nearest Police Station and Union Council office. In fact, 15 kilometres is the average distance of police stations in Pakistan, and 16.5 kilometre is the average in the province of Punjab (Khan et al., 2021). I call the proximity of police stations culturally insensitive because the law simply turns a blind eye to the restrictions on young women's mobility.

Third, even if a girl was able to reach the police station (see section 6.3.3), it would not be appropriate or even desirable for her to file a complaint against her father and thereby set in motion a process that should, at least in principle, lead to the arrest of her father. Should a girl do so, she would be unable to go back home having been the cause of her father's arrest and the disruption to family life. Therefore, I argue, that the policies, which were aimed to "empower" women, seem to be blind to family dynamics and particularly young women's position within families, perpetuating gendered norms. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that women and females as agents of their own change did not feature in most of the documents, the policies seemed designed to "protect" women, rather than empower them and in the process may even disempower them (see 9.6)

Fourth, non-state programmes seem to align with early marriage decision-making processes in families, and the outcomes of these processes. The analysis indicates that the two non-state organizations – *Bedari* and National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) – which were part of my research, have brought a positive change in the community through their projects, and have raised awareness about early marriages and other critical problems such as SRH-related issues. At the same time, they, like the state policies, seem to undermine some critical stakeholders in early marriage decision-making, for example, (i) men, in the sense that they seem to put the blame on them, especially fathers, and (ii) grandmothers, in the sense that they seem to neglect and under-utilize their power and agency. At the same time, the programmes seem to over-emphasize some other stakeholders, for example, (young) women by over-estimating their agency and decision-making power, which, in the case of my research, turned out to be thin (7.7).

Fifth, the non-state projects seem to ignore the power dynamics of the caste system in the community, which benefits some groups, while further marginalizing the others. In the activities where members of more than one caste were participating, participants from the upper caste seemed to dominate the discussions whereas those from comparatively lower castes were mostly silent recipients. Another finding related to non-state interventions is that they are perceived by all the three generations of female and male participants as a Western agenda, aimed to destroy the values and culture of Pakistani Muslims.

## 9.3 Early Marriage Decision-Making

To understand the decision-making process related to (early) marriages, I have sub-divided family members into three generations. Below, I clarify how family members belonging to each of the three generations contributed to early marriage decision-making:

1. First generation: Paternal grandmothers were particularly very active; they initiate and take further steps to arrange the marriage of their grandchildren. The grandfathers only intervened: (i) if they were unhappy with their wife's decision, or (ii) if there was no "right match" in the paternal family. Maternal grandparents were usually not included in "family."
2. Second generation: the father's role was like that of the grandfather, i.e., they only intervened when: (i) the grandmother was inactive in marriage matchmaking due to sickness or old age (ii) there was no "right match" in the paternal family, or (iii) when there were disputes with the proposed groom's family or debts that needed to be settled. Mothers, even when they disagreed with the choice of groom, seemed to have a low influence on (early) marriage decision-making of their daughters. Many times, the mothers chose not to influence the decision-making process possibly out of the fear of facing intimate partner violence or divorce. Only those mothers who were financially independent and contributed to household finances appeared to actively participate in marriage decision-making or dared to oppose a marriage proposal. From the same generation, the girl's potential parents-in-law also had a critical role in deciding the time of marriage, which was based on the "readiness" of the groom.
3. Third generation: young girls seemed to romanticize an early marriage; however, they could not communicate their eagerness or "readiness" to their family due to the "shame" felt in discussing marriage. However, boys could tell their parents that they were ready to be married. The role of the elder and younger brothers of girls was to "protect" their sisters from other (young) men so that they do not bring shame and dishonour to the family by, for example, falling in love with a boy. The role of elder sisters was to set an example of being a "good girl" for their younger sisters and make sure that their younger sisters also behaved like "good girls."

There were no caste variations in how different generations appeared to contribute to early marriage decision-making processes within families, that is, the pattern of marriage decision-making was highly similar across the four caste groups within the studied village. However, an important side finding of my research is the way family "honour" is treated. Families belonging to lower caste groups appeared more relaxed about issues of "honour" in comparison to upper caste families. For example, the families belonging to lower caste(s) did not seem to mind sending "their" women out to work and earn money. Women belonging to lower caste families also appeared to be less afraid of taking a stand against a decision taken by their husband. My research explains that women belonging to lower caste families were less afraid to speak because: (i) they understood the "flexible" treatment of "honour," and/or (ii) some were financially independent and contributing to household expenditures. Figure 9.1 shows the contribution of different family members belonging to

different generations in early marriage decision-making. The decisions regarding "whom" to marry are denoted as "+" whereas the decisions regarding "when" to marry are marked as "X." Four ++++ or XXXX mean the highest impact and one + or X means the lowest impact. "Nil" means no impact. Annex 14 offers a detailed note on how I arrived at these results.

Figure 9.1 illustrates that it is mainly the paternal grandmother who has the power to decide who the granddaughter should marry and when to marry. The grandfather only interfered in the "whom" to marry decisions, and that too only if he disagreed with his wife's decision, or if his wife was unable to make a decision because of poor health or if there was no "right match" in the paternal family. The same was the case with the fathers, who only interfered in the "whom" to marry decisions when the grandmother was unable to make a decision. The figure also shows that the mothers who were financially dependent on their husbands had very little say in the "whom" to marry decisions, whereas the mothers who either had grown-up and earning sons or who were themselves earning and financially contributing to the household had almost an equal power of marriage decision-making for her daughters. Therefore, as Spencer (2014), and Whitt and Lukes (1980) would call it, the grandparents, fathers, and sometimes mothers, had the "power over" decision-making related to marriage of their daughter(s).

The figure also illustrates that parents-in-law had lesser say in the "whom" to marry decisions, but they were the ones who were mainly controlling the "when" to marry decisions, being the parents of the groom, and usually the groom's "readiness" is asked and given importance while deciding for the right time to marry. The groom is also usually able to communicate his readiness for marriage to his family, whereas, for the girl, it is "shameful" to say that she wants to get married.

The findings show that most of the times, the siblings of the girl did not have a direct contribution in early marriage decision-making, but in one case where the father and the grandparents were not alive or active, the brothers took charge. Besides early marriage decision-making, the brothers also assured that the girls kept the "honour" of the family, and not meet/interact with boys and men. The figure also shows that only a few girls had little say about "when" to marry, but it was not expected from a "good" girl to talk about that. The figure illustrates that the parents in law have the "power over," whereas the groom has both "power over" and "power to" over the marriage decision-making.

Figure 9.1 Contribution of Family Members in Early Marriage Decision-Making

| Family Member    | Contribution | Whom to Marry (+) | When to Marry (x) |
|------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Grandmother      |              | +                 | x                 |
| Grandfather      |              | +                 | x                 |
| Father           |              | +                 | x                 |
| Mother           |              | +                 | x                 |
| Parents in-law   |              | +                 | x                 |
| Intended Groom   |              | +                 | x                 |
| Bride's Brothers |              | +                 | x                 |
| Bride's Sisters  |              | +                 | x                 |
| Intended Bride   |              | +                 | x                 |

N.B: + Denotes "whom" to marry decisions  
 x denotes "when" to marry decisions  
 four + or x denote highest impact  
 one + or x denote lowest impact

Source: Author

Source: Author

My research further shows that such social expectations, and many other influencing factors in multiple layers affect an individual's development, family life, and life decisions. Table 9.1 presents the effects of each of the Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1977) layers on decision-making related to early marriage. The decisions regarding "whom" to marry are denoted as "+" whereas the decisions regarding "when" to marry are marked as "X." Four ++++ or XXXX mean the highest impact and one + or X means the lowest impact. "Nil" means no impact. Annex 14 offers a detailed note on how I arrived at these results.

Table 9.1 Layers of Actors Influencing Early Marriage Decisions

| Layers        | Actors                               | Whom to Marry (+) | When to Marry (x)  |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Micro-system  | Immediate family                     | ++++              | xxxx               |
| Meso-system   | Neighbors                            | Nil               | Nil                |
|               | Members of extended family and caste | ++                | Nil                |
|               | Peers                                | Nil               | xx (For boys only) |
| Exo-system    | State policies                       | +                 | Nil                |
|               | Non-state organizations              | +++               | Nil                |
| Macro-system  | Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929)  | +                 | Nil                |
|               | Norms, Values, Beliefs               | +++               | xxxx               |
|               | (Interpretation of) Religion         | +++               | Nil                |
| Chrono-system | Time                                 | ++                | xx                 |

Source: Author

Table 9.1 shows the five layers of actors that influenced decision-making related to early marriage. However, the intensity of the influence varied across factors and layers. For example, "family" in the micro-system fully influences early marriage decision-making in terms of "whom" and "when" to marry, followed by "norms, culture, beliefs, and (interpretation of) religion" in the macro-system, and "non-state organizations" in the exo-system. "Extended family and caste," and "time," in sense of temporal dimension in the chrono-system, were the third-most influencing factors on early marriage decision-making. "Peer Group" in the meso-system also seemed to have an influence on decisions related to "when" to marry, but for boys only. "State policies," including the "Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) in the exo-system, had the least influence on early marriage decision-making. Furthermore, no influence of neighbours was observed in my research.

In the following section, some policy recommendations have been drafted on multiple levels, extrapolating the findings of my research. While the theoretical foundations of my research are built on SFT, which does not speak of "essentialism" and "universality," I have coupled my (standpoint) theoretical foundations with strategic essentialism (see 4.2). To extrapolate my conclusions, I am using the same principle, i.e., acknowledging that there is a socio-political need for strategic essentialism to be used by marginalized people to present themselves, which, in the case of my research are young women.

## 9.4 Conclusions and Extrapolation

I now present four conclusions which I have taken up for policy recommendations in section 9.5.

### 9.4.1 Beyond Father and Family

My research first concludes that early marriage decision-making needs to be seen beyond the father and beyond the family (Chapter 7). Within family, there are multiple stakeholders within the family that influence (early) marriage decisions directly and indirectly. Similarly, other than family, various factors influence (early) marriage decisions in multiple layers (see 4.5.1). Another key insight relevant to this conclusion is that many times, grandmothers initiate and regulate (early) marriage decisions; and by doing so, they bargain with patriarchies by making decisions which favour and satisfy men, in order to keep their decision-making power (section 7.3). Agency of young women in relation to decision-making about when and whom to marry is thin; they have almost no say in whom to marry, and very little say in when to marry decisions (section 7.5). However, agency thickens with -among other factors- age.

These findings can be extrapolated to other areas in Pakistan and where child marriage is prevalent, since this has been brought up by other authors as well (see Aibel et. al., 2001; Aibel, 2006; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010)

### 9.4.2 Women's Empowerment Versus Gender Equality

My second conclusion is that non-state interventions focus on achieving the strategic gender needs (e.g. gender equality), instead of the practical gender needs of women (e.g. education of girls that would make their life easier) (section 6.6), which, according to my research is, mostly counter-effective (section 8.4). Gender Equality is perceived as a Western idea by my participants and considered irrelevant to the context of Pakistan. However, Women's Empowerment is perceived as a positive notion, which can be achieved by, for example, providing education and paid jobs to women, but within the limits of Islam. Such empowerment can increase the agency of women.

This conclusion can also be applicable to other Global Southern countries and countries with lower SIGI rankings (5.5) where women and men are still struggling to fulfil their practical gender needs and the strategic gender needs seem irrelevant to them. Similarly, this conclusion can also be applicable to other "Islamic" or Muslim majority countries.

### 9.4.3 Confusion Pertaining to Notions of "Child" and "Early"

My third conclusion is that state policies offer conflicting definitions of a "child," "minor" and "adult" (section 6.4), causing confusion among people about the same, leading to weaker implementation of the policies (section 7.2).

This conclusion can be applicable to other settings as multiple definitions of who a "child" is are not only an issue of my geographical context, rather, the same conflicting definitions have been found in other contexts such as Tajikistan (Bakhtibekova, 2014; Bunting, 2005; Holloway & Valentine, 2007).

### 9.4.4 Call for *Ijtihad*

The fourth conclusion of my research is the need for collective *Ijtihad* to build a consensus on among other issues, the minimum age of marriage for Muslims. This is important because (i) religion was one of the drivers of early marriage established through the literature (3.3.3), (ii) I have used the theory of *Ijtihad* as one of the theoretical basis of my research, and (iii) my participants seemed to relate their perceptions and practices to their interpretation of Islam. While early marriages and some other anti-women practices are encouraged in their interpretation of Islam, a solution is needed on a higher level and should be based on the availability of objective knowledge regarding the problems associated with child marriage (see 9.5.6).

## 9.5 Policy Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions, I offer the following sets of recommendations to the United Nations and other relevant international organizations, the Government of Pakistan generally, and to the ministry of human rights, national and international organizations working in Pakistan, and other Islamic countries.

### 9.5.1 "Minor" Marriage

My first recommendation is a broader one, which is in line with my third conclusion (see 9.4.3). I recommend using the term "Minor Marriage" at all levels to refer to child and early marriages. I recommend this because: (i) childhood is socially constructed (3.2), (ii) the word "child" has emotional connotations attached to it (1.1), (iii) there is a lot of confusion related to defining who a "child" is, and until when (Table 7.1), and (iv) early is too subjective to define and measure (7.2). I contend that using the word "minor" instead of a child will make the term more inclusive and will include individuals who are not competent enough to make decisions about their marriage despite their age. In doing so, I am focusing on the chronological age.

### 9.5.2 Implications for Sustainable Development Goals

I offer the following sets of recommendations to the United Nations:

### • **Defining Early, Child, and Forced Marriage**

This recommendation is based on my third conclusion (see 9.4.3). In relation to the Sustainable Development Goal 5 and target 5.3 on “elimination of all harmful practices like early, child, and forced marriages, and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)” (UNGA, 2015) (1.5), I argue that the member states of the UN themselves are contributing to the confusion in relation to the terms “early” and “child” (see sections 6.4 and 9.4.3). I recommend using the term “minor” marriage to avoid the confusion.

One of the indicators set to measure the achievement of goal 5.3 is the “proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18.” The indicator is referring to a child marriage as below 15 years and early marriage as below 18 years. There is also no description of when a marriage is forced, and by whom. The subjectivity of the terms “child” marriage and “early” marriage and the inability of agreeing on one definition is part of the reason why the practice still exists. I argue that if the goal is to end the problem by 2030, the first step is to clearly define what these terms mean so that they can be measured accordingly.

In this regard, I think the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UN, 1989) was right in recommending the minimum age of marriage as 18 because: (i) in most parts of the world, including Pakistan, the legal age of an “adult” is 18 years for most of the purposes, including the right to vote, the right to drive, the right to own property, the right to register a business. If it is assumed that a person younger than 18 years old cannot cast their vote sanely, cannot enter into a contract, it should also be assumed that making a marriage decision also demands the same level of sanity and maturity, as well as a certain level of independence, and (ii) the minimum legal age of marriage for girls and boys is that by this age, most of them have completed at least 12 years of formal education, which is very important to lead a better life. Most of my research participants also defined a child marriage as marriage before the age of 16 to 18 years (Table 7.1). My recommendation is in line with that of UN agencies and even the proposed amendment in Pakistan.

Although my research is not on forced marriages, I agree with the scholarly literature reviewed in section 3.4 that claims that child marriages are a euphemism for “forced” marriages, as most of the times, in these cases the free, full, and informed consent of both the parties is not sought (Marsden, 2007) and in my view cannot be given by a minor. Even if the decision-makers ask for the “consent,” the adolescent cannot be expected to give an informed consent without any pressure, because of their limited knowledge and experience (Ouattara et al., 1998).

I recommend that the relevant agencies of the United Nations should give a thought to the sensitivity of the problem, especially in relation to the South Asian culture, including Pakistani culture, where the understanding of “forced” marriages might not be the same as in the other parts of the world. Free, full, and informed consent is difficult to measure, which is part of the reason why cases of forced marriages are under-reported. Therefore, setting a criterion for measuring the nature and extent of “force” is recommended. Besides measuring on the indicators of “free” “full” and “informed” consent, I suggest, that every marriage below 18 years should be counted as a “forced” marriage. Above 18 years, the indicators for measuring a “forced” marriage can also be based on (i) the number of times the spouses have seen each other before marriage, (ii) feeling of being controlled and in “surveillance” by the family, (iii) feeling of, or actually running away from home, (iv) belonging to a community where “honour” is often talked about and is associated with girls, (v) belonging to a family where violence is a norm, and (vi) anxiety, depression, or incidents of self-harm near to marriage.

### • **Un(der) Reported Cases**

This recommendation is related to my second conclusion (section 9.4). The criteria to measure the achievement of SDG-5.3 is the “proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18.” In the Global South, including Pakistan, where (young) women are still struggling for their mobility, many of them are not even allowed to go to a school because of the distance they have to travel, the probability of minor marriage cases going unreported is very high. It is recommended that besides policy reforms, which will be discussed in section 9.5.4, a weightage of the potentially unreported cases is also included in the statistics. The weightage might be different in different countries, depending on the strength of their judicial system. In their special report to the secretary-general, United Nations Economic and Social Council (2019) acknowledges the fact that:

“Insufficient progress on structural issues at the root of gender inequality, such as legal discrimination, unfair social norms and attitudes, decision-making on sexual and reproductive issues and low levels of political participation, are undermining the ability to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5.” (pp. 11)

For example, a recent survey report by the World Justice Project (2019) has ranked Pakistan at 117<sup>th</sup> out of 126 countries on the extent of adherence to the law. In the South Asian region, Pakistan is ranked 5<sup>th</sup> out of 6 countries. The report also states that the rate of civil justice in Pakistan is only 38 percent, and criminal justice is 38 percent (World Justice Project, 2019), which means the public does not have trust in the legal justice system. In this case, I recommend to acknowledge that minor marriage cases might be un(der) reported, and



consider this as a data gap, as they have acknowledged for FGM; due to the sensitive nature of FGM, families might be reluctant to report the cases and provide details (UN Women, 2017).

#### • **Bridging Through (College) Education**

My research shows that secondary education might serve as a bridge to delay the age of marriage, and lead women towards empowerment (section 8.5). The fourth SDG refers to the provision of quality education to girls and boys (UNGA, 2015), and target 4.5 and indicator 4.5.1 aims at reducing the gender inequalities in education and ensuring equal access of all girls and boys to all levels of education by the year 2030. I recommend more emphasis and strategies designed to implement this target and indicator especially in the global South. In this case, as recommended by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2019), “indicator 4.5.1 can be changed to Parity indices (female/male/trans, married/unmarried, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples, and conflict- affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated.”

### 9.5.3 (Inter)national and Regional Non-Governmental Organizations

Based on the findings discussed in section 6.6, I present the following recommendations for non-state organizations, including (inter)national non-governmental organizations.

#### • **Over-emphasized Women's Agency**

A main problem that came out of the analysis of non-state projects was that they seem to over-emphasize (young) women's agency. For example, initiatives such as -among others- “her choice,” “girls not brides,” and “girls up” seem to over-emphasize the agency and decision-making power of (young) women, which, in most of the cases, is very thin. Although it is appreciable that these initiatives are not considering women and girls as passive victims of violence, unlike some other initiatives, it is also important to consider the fact that in some cultures, it is not expected from “good” young women to make decisions for themselves, and design strategies accordingly. For example, the emphasis can rather be shifted from the girl to the family, including men and older women, as this this dissertation has shown that marriage decisions are often taken by the family, and not by the intended spouses.

Furthermore, my research shows that the grandmothers were the ones who initiated and pursued the minor marriage decisions. Based on my sixth conclusion (section 9.4), I recommend to the non-state organizations working to reduce minor marriages to involve and sensitize grandmothers and the mothers in their activities; mothers because they seem to be more learnable at their age, and sensitizing them will lead to sensitive grandmothers for the next generation, who will make better decisions for their grandchildren.

#### • **Practical and Strategic Gender Needs**

In section 8.4, I have discussed practical and strategic gender needs, which came out as another important outcome of my research. Many of my participants mentioned that women's empowerment and gender equality (the strategic gender needs), is not what women around them need. Rather, they mentioned that women need initiatives that can ease their daily life problems, including the provision of water, gas, electricity, and paid jobs, which were their practical gender needs. Although making routine jobs easier for women and engaging them in paid employment would presumably lead them towards “empowerment,” my second recommendation for non-state organizations working to empower women is to:

1. Consider starting from practical gender needs towards strategic gender needs, because it is very important to make participants realize that the interventions are relevant to them, and not just “Westernized,” and “Euro-centric” projects funded to destroy their cultural values.
2. Keeping in mind the limitations and funding requirements, if it is not feasible to focus on the practical gender needs identified by the participants themselves, these needs can at least be referred back and forth in various project activities, so that the participants might not feel that the interventions are irrelevant or that their ideologies are threatened.

#### • **Caste Variations**

The findings of my research also show the inequalities based on the social caste of the participants (Box 8.1). I observed that people of high caste and low caste do not interact on an equal level, their participation together in a project activity might not give them an equal chance of active participation and speaking. Furthermore, my data also shows that people belonging to different caste groups have different views about minor marriage, and their reasons to follow this practice also vary (7.6). Therefore, universal strategies or the strategies designed for one caste might not be equally effective for another caste groups. The recommendation is to keep in mind the dynamics of the social caste group while designing project activities so that all the participants actually get a chance to benefit from the project.

#### • **Minimizing the Consequences of Minor Marriage**

This recommendation is also related to my third conclusion (section 9.4). As I have recommended in section 9.5.2 to differentiate child marriage and early marriage, I recommend to the non-state organizations to not only design strategies for stopping minor marriage, but also, at the same time design strategies minimizing the negative consequences of minor marriages, including:

1. Provision of SRH education to young women and men, so that they make informed choices of family planning.

2. Creating an enabling environment for young, married girls to continue their education even after marriage. This requires not only training of teachers, but also awareness-raising in the community, and sharing success stories to create role-models.
3. Creating an enabling environment at the workplace for married young women based on the principle of positive discrimination, for example, providing them with- among other facilities- flexible work hours and child-care facility.

- **Providing Support to Efforts to Bridge Through (College) Education**

This recommendation is also related to my fourth conclusion (section 9.4). As discussed above, the transition from school to college came out as the crucial point in a girl's life, that decides if she is going to get married in the next two years (usually between 16 to 18 years) or not; therefore, I strongly recommend that non-state organizations put more emphasis on girls' formal education and design their initiatives and activities in the way that creates an enabling environment for girls to go to the college. As one of the key problems in girls' access to a college education was their restricted mobility and expensive travel costs, non-state organizations may consider spending the funds in this domain.

#### 9.5.4 National Policy- The Child Marriage Restraint Act

For the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) and amendments (1971 and 2015), my recommendation is to make the monitoring and reporting mechanisms gender-sensitive and culturally sensitive. For example, in a village where the nearest police station and union council office is at 17-18 kilometres, it is not easy to report a child marriage case. This recommendation is based on my second conclusion (section 9.4). To improve this, I recommend the following four scenarios:

- **Using Women Protection Centres**

In Punjab province, Women Protection Centres and shelter homes have already been established on district level under the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act, 2006. A similar model can be adapted in the other provinces and at the federal level. The designated Women Protection Officers have the right to walk in a house where they suspect domestic violence, they should also be deputed to influence and monitor minor marriage decisions within families in their districts.

- **Engaging Lady Health Workers**

In Pakistan, almost every village has at least one trained Lady Health Worker under the Lady Health Worker Programme. There exists an all-Pakistan Lady Health Worker Association also. These lady health workers can be trained on reporting child marriage and other human rights violation cases in addition to their regular training. The state can make a centralized reporting mechanism through telephone or internet, to make the reporting easy. During the

fieldwork, it was observed that the LHWs have easy access to households, and they can also meet women in privacy. Engaging them in this activity will be not only cost-effective, but also culturally feasible.

- **Working in Partnership with Non-State Organizations**

Partnership with non-state organizations, in which the state can partner with one or more non-state organizations on union council or district level and sublet this task of reporting child marriage. Various non-state organizations working in the rural areas already have volunteer committees and contacts on the grass-root level as well as district and provincial levels.

- **Engaging Village Leaders**

In rural areas of Pakistan, the caste system is very strong. The state can also use this caste system to help implement their laws, including the Child Marriage Restraint Act, by training the *Chaudhary* or other leaders of the village on gender and human rights issues and make a centralized reporting system, preferably through telephone or internet to save costs.

#### 9.5.5 National Policy- Other State Policies

Where the points presented in section 9.5.3 (for non-state actors) are equally relevant to the state, I recommend to deliberately include women and female pronouns to increase women's involvement and relatedness with the state policies.

- **Bridging Through (College) Education**

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, in article 25-A, promises to "provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law." In 2018, the net primary school enrolment rate for girls was approximately 62 percent, and for boys, it was approximately 73 percent (UNESCO, 2018). The net secondary school enrolment, which includes colleges, is even lesser, estimated at 36 percent for girls and 40 percent for boys (UNESCO, 2018). While the importance of college enrolment for girls in delaying their age of marriage has already been established in my dissertation, I recommend that the state provides incentives to the girls and their family for a college education.

For example, research conducted by Masood (2015) explores the influence of female secondary school stipend programme launched in 2003 by the government of Punjab on girls' age of marriage. The study found that in the districts covered by the programme, the average age of marriage for girls increased to 1.4 years (Masood, 2015). I recommend a similar programme nation-wide, especially in the rural parts of the country.

### 9.5.6 Other Islamic Countries

While in the context of other countries, the recommendations offered in sections 9.5.2, 9.5.3, and 9.5.4 might suffice, I offer some additional recommendations for Islamic countries, including Pakistan, to consider while designing solutions to delay the age of marriage.

I recommend that global-level research-based progressive Islamic organizations such as -among others the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Muslim World League (MWL), and World Islamic Organization (WIO) to form an *Ijma* to bring this problem on their agenda, and based on the principles of *Ijtihad*, build a consensus on the ideal minimum age of marriage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Islam, convincing their member countries to reconsider their interpretations of Islam. I also recommend these Islamic organizations to bring forward solutions based on the principles of *Ijtihad* on other inter-relating issues such as (i) intra-family marriages, (ii) intimate partner violence, and (iii) Islamic limits of women's empowerment and gender equality.

## 9.6 Reflection on Theoretical Framework

This section reflects on the theories and concepts employed in this research (see Figure 4.2). This research drew on SFT perspective as the meta-theory, coupled with EST by Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1977), and FST by Bowen (1966). The following are some reflections on various concepts the theories employed in my research.

I will start with the concept of “Patriarchal Bargain” (4.2.2), which emerged as one of the most relevant concepts in relation to my study. The concept of patriarchal bargain was very valid in some situations, and inapplicable in others. My finding that minor marriage decisions were mostly initiated and finalized by the grandmothers, whereas grandfathers and fathers only seemed to interfere if they disagreed with the decision made by the grandmother, has one apparent meaning that grandmothers hold the decision-making power related to minor marriage. At the same time, this finding offers a concealed message, that is, absolute power is held by the grandfather and/or the father, but that power is only used if the grandmother makes a decision, they are not happy with. I will explain the later -concealed- message in relation to the concept of “bargaining with patriarchy(ies).”

Concerning Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of the patriarchal bargain, my data highlight that in patriarchal societies, patriarchal values are not always exercised and promoted (directly) by men. Instead, women, who hold the “power over” decision-making also perpetuate such values to maintain their decision-making power. For example, by the time a woman becomes a grandmother, she has already acquired “power over” as she is the mother of the head of the family, that is, her grown-up son(s). Here, being a “mother” implies a power-position

for the woman who has the power to “control” or regulate the “head” of the family. My data show that usually, most of the family decisions were controlled by the grandmothers; however, the grandmothers seemed to prioritise the preferences of their husband and sons in their decisions, whether this concerned a minor routine decision, for example, what to cook today, or a bigger life-time decision such as marriage.

In my research, the concept of the patriarchal bargain was valid in most of situations, excluding a few cases, in which the concept was not very relevant. For example, my data show most of the time, mothers were not very happy with the marriage decisions the grandmothers were making for their daughter(s). However, most of the mothers indicated that they thought that it was not “wise” to take a stand against the decision as this could lead to disputes, violence by their husbands, and possibly, divorce. At the same time, there was a case where the mother, who was earning and financially managing the household, took a firm stand against the marriage decision being made for her daughter, and the grandmother stood by her in her decision. This example suggests that not all women in positions of power “bargain” with patriarchies to safeguard their power. I argue that financial independence gives women a chance to make their decisions independent of the societal and familial pressures, as women who are financially empowered have less need to propagate patriarchal values to keep their power, because they are financially independent of the “patriarch,” whereas the women who are in power-positions only because they are the “mother of the patriarch” have to bargain with patriarchies to keep their power.

My research findings also resonate with Sangari's (1995) notion that patriarchies exist at multiple levels, and vary across caste groups and socio-economic classes. For example, in my research, women of high(er) castes seemed to be “governed” by patriarchies in the form of higher standards of “honour,” leading them to stay within the house as their male family members treated them as “queens” and provided them everything at home. Women of low(er) caste, on the other hand, appeared more likely to experience “patriarchy” in the form of domestic violence.

While designing my policy recommendations (see 9.5), I observed an apparent contradiction between the theoretical assumptions of Standpoint Feminist Theory (4.2.1), and my recommendations. At the same time, I found it very crucial to make those recommendations. The concept of “strategic essentialism” (4.2.1) solved my problem and released the contradiction between my theoretical framework and policy recommendations. I have extrapolated my conclusions based on the same principle in section 9.4. Similarly, I later included *Ijtihad* in my theoretical framework in order to be able to build recommendations related to it based on my data.

Reflecting on the concept of empowerment and relating “empowerment” to policies and programmes designed to “empower” women, I notice that most of the policies I have analysed seem to be designed to “protect” women in one way or another, and do not actually “empower” them. This protection versus empowerment debate is not recent, and not only relevant to Pakistani laws and policies, rather, the debate has been going on since long (see Dunn, Clare, & Holland, 2008; Fox, 1984).

## 9.7 Reflection on Methodology: Field-working with “Family”

My field work was enriching. However, if I had to conduct this research again, I would (i) have included more men in the research, possibly by requesting my male assistant to accompany me for a longer time and help conduct IDIs with men, (ii) I would have included more policymakers, particularly having regional experience in Punjab, as participants of my research to understand the challenges they face, and to dialogue with them about the results I had acquired, and (iii) instead of staying in only one village, I could have chosen to do research in two – however, building trust takes time and it may not have been possible.

Furthermore, since the village culture required me to have my family with me to gain access and acceptance, I call my data collection process “field-working with family.” I say so because field-working with family made the process of rapport building much more convenient and quick for me, as the participants started feeling comfortable and relatable to me. Living in the village with my six-year-old daughter, who is known for her social skills and adaptability, was an experience in itself because before I had to introduce myself to (possible) participants, they would already know me through her. One of the participants, while waiting for me to introduce myself and my research, said, “you have come for the research, but this girl [indicating my daughter] has already started the interview. She will complete her book even before you...”

Apart from this, my parents, sister(s), or another member of my family always accompanied us while traveling to the village and back, and frequently visited us during our stay in the village. The same was the case for occasions such as *Eid*<sup>14</sup>, and weddings and deaths in the village. The presence of my family helped me become a part of the community and made my presence trustworthy and acceptable for the participant families of my research. My father’s presence and good rapport in the village also helped us conduct the FGDs, and the participants seemed to be more comfortable to open up due to his participation in the discussions.

<sup>14</sup> Religious festival for Muslims

Being a divorced woman and knowing that divorce is still a stigma in Pakistan, I had decided to “make up” an imaginary husband, who was working in the city and was too busy to accompany us in the village. Although I believe that it is unethical to lie and too easy for the villagers to guess that I have lied, I decided to withhold this information because I presumed that my status as a divorced, single mother was likely to be regarded negatively in the community and as such be counter-productive to building rapport and gathering good quality data. I also indicated this concern while seeking ethical approval from the AISSR review board (annex 12).

I have also mentioned the above reflections and more in an interview with Her Choice (Ajaz, 2019). Since the recent approaches to (ethnographic) qualitative field-work have started to include “accompanied field-work” (Xu, 2018; Cupples & Kindon, 2003), my method of “field-work with family” builds on the existing literature on “accompanied field-work,” particularly in the South Asian context, and especially, highly recommended for female researchers.

## 9.8 Research Recommendations

This section offers a few recommendations for further research on topics related to minor marriage:

1. Research into how men from different generations make decisions with respect to minor marriage. This also includes local religious scholars who happen to be men.
2. Research into the factors influencing the agency of young women in Pakistan.
3. Bowen’s (1966) Family System’s Theory includes discussion about the archetypes of different siblings based on their position (section 4.6.1), which is not a part of my research. I recommend in-depth research exploring how birth order shapes girls’ vulnerability to minor marriage and affects their decision-making possibilities more broadly.
4. Research on mitigating the impact of minor marriage in relation to education, health, and poverty the consequences of minor marriage.
5. Research into intra-family marriages, especially with first cousins, and birth defects due to such marriages.

## 9.9 Closing

This chapter provided an answer to the overall question of my dissertation, and detailed the four conclusions and multi-level recommendations for policy, practice, and research. This chapter also provided a reflection on the theoretical and methodological choices made in this dissertation.

This dissertation has been one small step towards understanding the complexities related to the practice of early/ child/ minor marriages, and how policies and projects might adequately address these complexities.

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**Annex 1**  
**Engaging Families Against Early Marriages: A Case Study of Pakistan**  
**Exploratory Research Report**

**1. Overview**

| # | Group/Individuals     | Details   | Topics Covered   | Time/ Place                                   | Main findings and Reflection   |
|---|-----------------------|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | Respondent 1 (Female) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lecturer in gender studies department in a women university</li> <li>Age: 30</li> <li>Unmarried</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forms/ Types and Practices of marriage in Pakistan.</li> <li>Ideals about the age at Marriage.</li> </ul> | 45 minutes /June 8th (her office)             | The respondent was quite critical of the practice of early marriage, as it makes both young girls and boys vulnerable to a lot of social, economic, physical, mental, and reproductive health issues which could otherwise be avoided. Being a university teacher in the department of gender studies, she knows a lot about the issues women have to face in their daily lives, and she has also read about early marriages and its implications on the lives of young women. The most striking thing in the discussion was her understanding that usually parents think good for their children, and in some cases, they decide for early marriages because life brings them to a point where they have to choose among the available options, and then they would choose the lesser bad for their children to avoid a bigger bad. |
| 2 | Respondent 2 (Female) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House maid</li> <li>No education</li> <li>Got married at 14</li> <li>5 kids (two daughters married at 15-16)</li> <li>Age: 55 years</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivations and Incentives, and Reasons for early/ later marriage.</li> </ul>                             | 30 minutes/ June 20th, Islamabad (my house)   | The respondent was in favor of early marriages, as according to her, girls are more “obedient” in young age, and they can easily be molded into what the new family expects her to be. Early marriages also relieve the parents’ financial burden and social and religious responsibility. Initially, it was difficult to talk to her about the issue as it is very personal, but when the conversation got a pace, the lady became comfortable and more open.   |
| 3 | Respondent 3 (Female) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Medical Officer in a women University.</li> <li>Married at 16</li> <li>3 children</li> <li>Age: 35 years</li> </ul>                            |  | 30 minutes/ June 23rd, Islamabad (her office) | The respondent was overall in favor of early marriages, but still had a lot of contradictory examples. According to her, it is difficult for the young bride to adjust in the new life, but if the husband is matured and sensible enough, the marital life becomes pleasant. I found her arguments more self-centered, and may be because it was her office, and we did not know each other personally, she was reluctant to share any bad experiences (if she had).  |
| 4 | Respondent 4 (Female) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housewife</li> <li>3 unmarried girls</li> <li>Age: 52 years</li> <li>Education: Bachelors</li> </ul>   |  | 45 minutes/ July 7th, Islamabad (her house)   | The respondent was somewhat against the practice of early marriage but was not very critical of it. According to her, the girl should be well trained for household work and managing the new house and family before she gets married. She also emphasized on the “moldable” nature of the girls when they are young.   |
| 5 | Respondent 5 (Male)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social Worker- consultant</li> <li>4 daughters</li> <li>Age: 55 years</li> <li>Education: Masters</li> </ul>                                   |  | 1 hour/ August 20, Islamabad (my house)       | The respondent- my father- was strictly against early marriages (I think he had in mind my bad example also). It was initially difficult for me to break the ice and talk to him in detail about the topic, as he is not very open to talk. However, when we started talking, it became very smooth and easy. According to him, both the girls and boys should be well settled in their life and financially independent before getting married, so that they can become equal partners in marriage.   |

|   |                             |   |  |  |  |
|---|-----------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| 6 | Group of students (Females) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group of 25 Undergraduate students in Human Rights class</li> <li>Ages from 18 to 20</li> <li>Unmarried</li> </ul> |  | 90 minutes/ August 17th, (Classroom- Fatima Jinnah Women University) | I was teaching them about CEDAW <sup>19</sup> in our human rights class, and when the discussion moved to women’s right to marry the person they want, I found the girls very interested to talk about it, and they had a lot of questions and comments. Therefore, we decided to leave CEDAW for the next class, and we started talking about marriage, and then early marriages. There were two broad categories of responses among the students. One group of students were kind of romanticizing the practice of early marriages, where the girl is young, and the boy is a grown-up man and financially well-established (fairytale life). Ideal age of marriage for girls is 16-22, that for boys is 25-30. The other group of students had somewhat practical approach, and they were in favor of later marriages, after the girl has finished her education and starts her career (if she wants to be a career woman). |
|---|-----------------------------|---|--|--|--|

**2. Details per topic**

**Topic 1: Forms/ Types and Practices of marriage in Pakistan**

| # | Group/Individuals | Findings   | Discussion and Reflection  |
|---|-------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Respondent 1      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Warta Satta<sup>20</sup></li> <li>Vani/Swara<sup>21</sup></li> <li>Pait likh<sup>22</sup></li> <li>Intra-caste marriages</li> </ul> | The respondent, based on her knowledge and observation, mentioned these forms of marriages happening in Pakistan. According to her, these kinds of marriages are harmful for the girls (sometimes boys also). After reviewing literature, I also found that all four of these are culturally common in rural Punjab.   |
| 2 | Respondent 2      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bride buying</li> </ul>   | As the respondent belonged to a tribal area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa <sup>23</sup> (KPK) she mentioned the tradition of bride buying, where the groom gives an agreed upon amount of money to the bride’s parents, and he is then not answerable to the bride’s parents about the girl later on in their life. The respondent also mentioned that with the passage of time, this tradition is also changing with the passage of time, and she mentioned the example of her daughter, who was married recently at the age of 15. She told me that she had taken Rupees 50,000 (around 370 Euro) as bride price, but because the groom is her nephew, she can always go and meet her daughter, and he will take care of her daughter. During my literature review, I likewise found the practice of paying bride price in Pakistan and some parts of Africa also. |
| 3 | Respondent 3      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intra-family marriages</li> <li>Intra-caste marriages</li> </ul>  | The respondent was married to a paternal first cousin of hers when she was 16 years old. She discussed with examples the problems of getting married within family and caste (social problems and disabilities among children). However, she was still in favor of early marriages because according to her, she was living a very happy life because of her husband’s un-ending love and support.   |

<sup>19</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

<sup>20</sup> Where one son and one daughter of a family are married to one son and one daughter of another family.

<sup>21</sup> Exchange of daughter as dispute settlement.

<sup>22</sup> Where the child’s marriage is fixed even before she/he is born.

<sup>23</sup> One of the five provinces of Pakistan

|   |                   |  |   |
|---|-------------------|--|---|
| 4 | Respondent 4      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intra-caste marriages</li> <li>• Love marriages</li> <li>• Arranged marriages</li> </ul>  | The respondent mentioned the tradition of intra-caste marriages among certain religious sub-sects in Pakistan (e.g., among Syeds). Also, she mentioned the growing trend of love marriages among the youth, where the girls don't give their parents the due respect and the right to choose the best partner for their daughters. Thus, she was against the practice of love marriages, emphasizing on the importance and due respect of parents.  |
| 5 | Respondent 5      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love marriages</li> <li>• Arranged marriages</li> </ul>   | The respondent discussed that there are only two types of marriages in Pakistan, arranged and love. In case of love marriage, the couple decides to marry (sometimes the parents agree sometimes they don't), while in arranged marriages, the parents decide for their children. The other popular kinds of marriages like vami/swara, and watta satta, they are the sub-types and can fall in either of the category.   |
| 6 | Group of students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love marriages</li> <li>• Arrange marriages</li> <li>• Forced marriages</li> <li>• Marriages with Quran<sup>24</sup></li> </ul> | Students discussed the rising trend of love marriages, its positive and negative sides, the appreciation and encouragement for arranged marriages in Pakistan especially among elders, the practice of forced marriages in some families (through emotional blackmailing, force, battering, sometimes leading to honor killing). The practice of marriage with Quran was also discussed, where the parents announce that they have married their daughter to Quran, and now she will remain pure and un-touched (by any man). One of the motives behind this practice is keeping the land and property within the immediate family. |

### Topic 2: Ideals about the age at Marriage

| # | Group/ Individuals | Findings  | Discussion and Reflection  |
|---|--------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Respondent 1       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25-28 years for both</li> </ul>                      | Both girl and boy need to be sensible and financially settled before marriage.   |
| 2 | Respondent 2       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15-18 for girls</li> <li>• 20-25 for boys</li> </ul> | Girls are more adaptable to new life and family when they are younger. The groom should be earning something.  |
| 3 | Respondent 3       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16-20 for girls</li> <li>• 25 ++ for boys</li> </ul> | Girls are more adaptable to new life and family when they are younger, and they can keep studying even after marriage if their husband allows. The man should be financially established at the time of marriage.  |
| 4 | Respondent 4       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20-25 for girls</li> <li>• 24-30 for boys</li> </ul> | Girls should be married-off after basic education, not too early but not too late also. While boys should be financially established at the time of marriage.  |
| 5 | Respondent 5       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25-30 for both</li> </ul>                            | Both girls and boys need to be educated and financially independent at the time of marriage, so that they become the equal partners. The respondent had married her daughter in an early age, and due to her divorce, he changed his views overtime.   |
| 6 | Group of students  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20-26 for girls</li> <li>• 25-30 for boys</li> </ul> | After thorough discussion on the importance of education and economic independence for girls, and the negative consequences of early marriages, the group reached the conclusion that the ideal age for marriage is 20-26 years, so that they are in their early career/ higher education, while that for men is 25-30 years, so that they are financially independent. It was also unanimously agreed that the groom should be at least 3-5 years elder than the bride, so that he can lead/ control. |

<sup>24</sup> The holy book for Muslims.

### Topic 3: Motivations and Incentives and Reasons for early/ later marriage

| # | Group/ Individuals | Findings   | Discussion and Reflection   |
|---|--------------------|--|---|
| 1 | Respondent 1       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People go for early marriages because it relieves them of the socio-economic burden (society sees daughters as a burden).</li> <li>• If married later, both girls and boys become more sensible, and are self-sufficient to solve their issues.</li> </ul>  | The respondent was very critical about the practice of early marriages and discussed the social and structural flaws in our society leading to the practice. According to her, early marriage decisions are taken not because the parents want to get rid of their daughters, but because they are "forced" to take these decisions because of social pressures, culture, and structural flaws which do not let the women live on their own.  |
| 2 | Respondent 2       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls are more adaptive to new home when married early.</li> <li>• Early marriage relieves the socio-economic burden of parents.</li> </ul>   | The respondent was strongly in favor of early marriage, and insisted that these days, many marriages are unsuccessful because the bride doesn't compromise and adapt to her new life (due to her advanced age, i.e. over 18). What I inferred from the discussion is that people's understanding about early marriages depend on what opportunities they got in life, and their aspirations.  |
| 3 | Respondent 3       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The couple gets more time to understand each other and enjoy intimate life.</li> <li>• If the husband is not supportive, the girl can get divorce and get re-married because she is still "young."</li> </ul>   | The respondent gave some real-life examples of how the couples get time (their whole life together) to understand each other and enjoy intimate moments, and if the marriage turns to be unsuccessful, the girl still has a chance to get a better life partner because she is still young. However, after thorough discussion through examples, she herself mentioned that in Pakistan, it is not very easy for a girl first to get a divorce, and then to re-marry as a divorced woman. These is stigma associated with women who are divorced. |
| 4 | Respondent 4       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents marry-off their daughters early because girls are more obedient (to them, their husband, and the in laws) in young age (they don't have a very strong opinion).</li> <li>• If girls are married later (30 plus), society makes fun of them. Also, they face trouble in adjusting in the new house because they have their own opinion now.</li> </ul> | The respondent was somewhat against the higher education for girls, because she believed that more education the girls get, more strong opinions they develop, and thus they tend to be less obedient to their husband and in-laws.   |
| 5 | Respondent 5       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Pakistan, most of the times, the reasons behind early marriages are economic; parents marry-off their daughters early because they are not wealthy enough to raise them.</li> <li>• Later marriages (when both the girl and boy is financially established), because they couple is then more sensible and equal partners.</li> </ul>                      | The respondent emphasized on the importance of higher education, and a good career for both girls and boys, so that they become equal partners in marriage.   |
| 6 | Group of students  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents get their daughters married-off early due to the unseen threats to their honor, including eve teasing, rape, etc.</li> <li>• When girls start growing old (26 plus), they don't get any good proposals, rather, they get options of marrying some divorced man, or widower, or old men.</li> </ul>  | The students gave a lot of daily life examples of how they get harassed on streets and public transport. I also found during my literature review that one of the reasons/ motivations behind parents deciding for an early marriage of their daughters is harassment/ eve teasing, which, in Pakistan, is ultimately a threat to the honor of the family. Girls believed that if they are married/ have their husband along with them, they would not face this.   |

#### 4. Narrative summary of Each Respondent/ Group of Respondents:

**Respondent 1:** She was a learned university teacher, with more than 7 years of experience teaching graduate and under-graduate students of Gender Studies department in a women university. She was thirty years old, and un-married, due to which she has been “a center of discussion in family” (because she is growing “old” and not getting married). The respondent was quite critical of the practice of early marriages and discussed how harmful it can be for young girls, as it “steals” their childhood, and burdens them with the responsibility other girls of their age don’t have. Also, early marriages make young girls vulnerable to domestic violence, developing false consciousness, and physical, emotional, and SRH problems. She was quite critical of social pressures in different forms, that make people think in certain ways and take certain decisions which they otherwise would not have taken.

**Respondent 2:** The respondent herself had narrated the incidences of domestic violence, and extreme economic dependency faced by one of her daughters who was married-off when she was 15. At the same time, she was in favor of early marriages in her particular circumstances (poverty and illiteracy). She mentioned that she would get her other daughters married early (15-16 years), because she could not financially afford to keep the girls with her for long time. She also mentioned that it is the girl’s duty to sacrifice and compromise to keep her family in-tact, and marriages are successful only if the bride makes compromises.

**Respondent 3:** The respondent, who is a medical doctor, got married when she was 15 years old. At that time, she was in ninth standard. She mentioned that her husband, who is in the army, had been very supportive throughout her education, and helped her become a doctor. The respondent argued that she was not really against the practice of early marriage, because it is not always problematic. If the husband is good enough, the girl can continue her education, and enjoy her life. And in case the husband is not supportive, the girl can always take a divorce and get married because she is still “young.”

**Respondent 4:** The respondent was a housewife, and a mother of three unmarried girls between the age of 27 and 14. She herself was married when she was 22 years old, and it was a totally arranged marriage and out of caste also; she had not even seen a picture of her husband before marriage. The respondent was not actually in favor of “early” marriages, however, there were some contradictory arguments also in the discussion. She mentioned that she was not in favor of higher education and professional degrees for girls, rather, girls should be married-off after getting basic education (maximum 14 years of education). She also mentioned that girls should be trained for the household work before marriage, so that

they can win the hearts of their in-laws by doing good work in the house and cooking good food for them. She also mentioned that girls should be nice enough to respect their new family (in-laws) and be ready to make a lot of sacrifices and compromises in their new life.

**Respondent 5:** The respondent is a father of four girls. One of his daughters was married at the age of 19, while she was doing her bachelors. Her marriage could only last for a few months, which ultimately changed his views about marriage. The respondent therefore had a very strong opinion against the practice of early marriages, and he was of the idea that both the girl and the boy should get married only when they are ready for the marriage, and are financially independent, so that they can become equal partners, and none of them faces trouble in their marital life. He was also very much in favor of higher education for both the girls and boys. Also, he discussed about two types of marriages, i.e. love marriage and arranged marriage. Although he showed support for arranged marriages, but he was of the idea that the girl and the boy should be asked for the marriage, and it should be arranged with the consent of the girl (and the boy also).

**Group of students:** The class was broadly giving two kinds of responses. The one group had kind of practical approach, and they were certainly against the practice of early marriages and believed that it brings a lot of negative consequences on the couple (mostly on the girl). They were also of the opinion that a girl should get married when she has completed her education and is financially independent (if they want to be career women).

The other perspective was kind of fairy-tale one, where girls were romanticizing the concept of early marriages. A few of them were also convinced that they will even leave their education incomplete if they find a handsome and financially well-settled man to marry.

Also, the girls mentioned their concern about the stigma attached to the concept of love marriages, and that no matter how much education they get, and how much financial independence they gain, they will have to get married to the person their family wants, so that they don’t damage the “honor” of their family.

#### 5. Narrative summary of findings per topic.

**Forms/ Types and Practices of marriage in Pakistan:** Watta Satta, Vani/ Swara, Pait likhi, intra-caste marriages, bride-buying, intra-family marriages, love marriages, arranged marriages, and marriage with Quran were some of the forms of marriages the respondents discussed about. The main finding was that these customary practices are mostly harmful for the girls, because they are “victims” here. Some people (respondent 4) realize the harm these practices pose for women, but still they preferred these because of their own reasons

and interests, including economic reasons, increasing security concerns for un-married women in Pakistan mainly due to poor implementation of laws (respondent 1), and of course because they want to keep up their family traditions (respondent 3). Another main finding of the research is that most of the people were strictly against the notion of love marriages, and they believe that parents, because they invest all their lives, energy, and money on their children, have the due right to decide for their children's (practically the girls') marriage, as they have more experience, and they know people. The age of marriage also needs to be decided by the parents, because of-course they know more about their children.

**Ideals about the age at Marriage:** There were two main arguments about the ideal age of marriage for girls. One was that the ideal age for girls to get married is between 15-20, because they are more obedient to their parents, in-laws, and husband and moldable by the husband and in-laws at that time, and as they grow older, they become more stubborn and difficult to "handle." While the other argument was that the girls should be between 25-30 years of age and should have completed her education by then and should be financially settled (if she wants to be a career woman). While most of the people mentioned that the ideal age of marriage for boys is between 20-30, and when they are financially established and earning. In short, the ideals about the age of marriage for girls and boys were influenced by the gender roles and expectations for both.

**Motivations, Incentives and Reasons for early/ later marriage:** The study revealed four main reasons or motivations for early marriages among Pakistani families. These include the fact that girls are seen to be a social responsibility and an economic burden (because of dowry, and because of the fact that they will not feed the old parents unlike sons), and the families (usually poor) want to get rid of this burden/ responsibility as soon as they can. This motivation can be framed under the gender roles and expectations from girls about family formation, due to which girls are considered as "paraya dhan" (translated as someone else's property). The second reason is that girls are more moldable in the early age, and as they grow older, they start developing their own opinions and view-points, which makes it difficult for them to make compromises to adjust in the new family. This is also the reason why young girls get more better proposals as compared to the elder girls. The third reason or motivation for the early marriages was that it gives the couple more time to understand each other and they may enjoy their sex life for long before they get old and physically weak. The fourth reason for early marriages was the threats to the "honor" of young girls and their families starting from eve-teasing to rape and murder (student group).

## 6. Reflection on the findings: What was surprising, unknown, or not reported in the literature.

What I found surprising in the exploratory research findings is that people change their mind with time and experience, if their socio-economic circumstances allow them to be. For instance, if a person has enough of money and resources to give education and a good life to their daughters, he/ she may change their mind about marrying their daughter early based on previous bad experiences. However, if someone cannot economically afford to give a good life to their daughter, he/she may ignore the negative experiences and knowledge around them and keep marrying-off their daughters in early age.

Through the review of literature, I could identify main reasons and motivations behind early marriages, but through my exploratory research, I found out the links between different reasons, and how they all mix up and contribute to the decisions of early marriage. Also, there was no literature about the changing viewpoints of people about early marriage with the passage of time, or due to certain experiences.

Another thing that I found worth exploring was the students romanticizing early marriages, and at the same time speaking against love marriages. This makes me think about the role of (gendered) socialization in our lives, and how the learnt roles and expectations (through socialization) makes us think and behave in certain ways, to gain social approval.

## 7. Implications for main research, for instance for topics in interview guide, way of asking about the topic, data collection methods, type of people to talk to.

- I found through the study that people belonging to different socio-economic classes, different educational backgrounds, different genders, and different cultures, think differently. Therefore, in my research I want to take into account the contributions of all the family members (differently positioned) of lower and middle socio-economic class, in shaping the decisions about early marriages.
- I got more in-depth information in interviews, while in focus group discussions, there were variety of arguments, but they were not very open may be due to peer pressure, and their opinions very easily influenced by each other. Therefore, I have decided to use interview method in my field research.
- People were more open when I kept my views and expectations aside and gave them more space to talk whatever they wanted to. In my first conversation (with respondent 1), I found myself biased and very emotional about the topic, which I deliberately avoided in rest of the conversations.



## Annex 2

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### Interview Guideline for Grand Mothers

Good morning / afternoon

My name is Nashia Ajaz, and I have come from Islamabad to do research for my book about family structures in *Abadnagar*. Being a woman, and being a part of a women university, I am very interested in knowing how women of different age groups live, what issues do they face, and how do they solve them.

The objective of my visit today is to ask you about your life experiences as a woman; the issues you have faced/are facing in your life, and how you managed to resolve them. This interview is a part of my PhD research. During the coming months, I hope to speak to many other women in *Abadnagar*, but I will not share what anyone says to me with any other person. The information I get from you will be very important for my research, therefore I am very thankful to you for agreeing to give me your valuable time and energy.

I also want to mention here that your participation in my research is voluntary, which means that you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you can stop the interview at any moment. I assure you that everything you tell me will be confidential, and I want to request you to do the same and not tell anybody about what we have discussed.

I also want to seek your permission to record the discussion. This audio discussion will help me remember the points we have discussed. The recordings and the notes will not be shared with anyone else except my supervisors at my university, so that they may not doubt the authenticity of my book. However, I will not disclose your name, address, telephone number, so no one will be able to trace/link the information to you.

I have quite a few questions so perhaps we will need to meet again. Is this ok by you? Each of the session will be of no longer than one and a half hours. In next few days, I will write the notes of our conversation, and I will share with you that I have written. I will use that information only when you say that I have written and understood it correctly.

Do you have any questions?

Do I have your permission to proceed?

I already know your real name, but I will be using a nick name in the research so that the information you give does not get traced by your name. Is there a preferred nick name you want me to use?

**Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Respondent Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Generation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your marital status?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Level of education** \_\_\_\_\_ (to be filled later)



### Preliminary Interview

1. First of all, I would like to know more about you. Can you tell me about yourself?
  - a. What is your age?
  - b. Where were you born?
  - c. Were you already born at the time of partition?
    - i. If yes, where was your home at that time??
  - d. Who was in your family at that time?
  - e. How long have you been living in *Abadnagar* (if not born here)?
  - f. Who else lives in your household?
  - g. What did/do you do?
    - i. *E.g., homemaker, work part time, work full time, etc.*
  - h. Are you happy with what you did/ are doing?
2. Did you go to school?
  - a. Which school did you go?
  - b. (Till) which class do/did you study?
    - i. *Why did you stop after that?*
  - c. Did you enjoy studying?
    - i. *If yes, what did you like the most?*
    - ii. *What did you not like?*
    - iii. *If no, what is the reason for that?*
3. How many siblings do you have?
  - a. Did they go to school?
    - i. *Till what level?*
  - b. Where do they live now?
  - c. What do they do?
  - d. How was your relationship with them when you were living together?
    - i. *Who was your favorite and what was the reason for this?*
4. When did you get married?
  - a. What was your age?
    - i. *What was the reason for marriage at that age?*
  - b. What was your husband's age?
  - c. Where did you live before marriage?
  - d. What was your father's occupation?
  - e. What was your mother's occupation?
  - f. How did the marriage happen? Is it within family or outside?
  - g. Was it a love marriage or arranged?
    - i. *If arranged, were you asked to give consent?*
  - h. Did you see each other before?
    - i. *Did you meet before marriage?*
  - i. Who made the final decision of marriage?
    - i. *What did he/she consider?*
5. Were girls in your area usually asked before finalizing the marriage proposals?
  - a. If yes, to what extent could they influence the decision?
  - b. Were they shown pictures of the young man?
  - c. Were they allowed to meet each other before marriage?
  - d. Did they meet/ speak to each other when engaged?
6. How many children do you have?
  - a. What are their ages?
  - b. What do they do?
  - c. Do/ did they study?
    - i. *If yes, at/ till what level?*
    - ii. *If no, what is the reason for that?*
  - d. Are they all married?
    - i. *If yes, at what age did each of them marry?*
    - ii. *Were these love marriages or arranged, or...?*
    - iii. *Did they see each other before marriage?*
    - iv. *Do you people marry outside the family/cast?*
    - v. *Which family members made the marriage decision?*
    - vi. *Was there any influence from your extended family?*
    - vii. *What qualities did your family look for in your daughters in law?*
    - viii. *What qualities did your family look for in your sons in law?*
    - ix. *Are they all happily married?*
  - e. Is any of them engaged?
    - i. *If yes, to whom?*
    - ii. *Is he/she in the family?*
    - iii. *Are they happy?*
    - iv. *Do they often see/ meet each other?*
    - v. *When will they get married?*
  - f. If some of them are neither married nor engaged, what is the reason for that?
  - g. Do you think it is important to get married for girls and boys?
    - i. *If yes, what is the reason for that?*
    - ii. *If no, what is the reason for that?*
7. Tasks are often divided differently in families and different people take different kinds of decisions. Can you tell me about your family and who does what – usually? For example,
  - a. Who decides what will be cooked in the dinner?
  - b. Who cooks?
  - c. I have seen some private school chains here, and there is a government school also. Who decides which school the children shall go to?
  - d. Do girls and boys decide which subjects will they study? If not, who decides?
  - e. Were there subjects at school you could choose between? If so, how did you choose which subject to take? (probe to find out how decisions were taken)
  - f. Who decides which crops will you grow this season? When to harvest? What to sell (if applicable)
  - g. Who decides who and when a boy or a girl will marry?
8. Are there any working women in your immediate or extended family?
  - a. Who is/are she/they?
  - b. What do they do?
  - c. Is she educated?
    - i. *If yes, until what level?*
  - d. Do you know if she likes her work?
  - e. What is the major source of income in her house?
- e. What would happen if they said no?

9. Do people in your community think that women should work and earn money?
- Is it same for the home-based jobs like sewing clothes, making handicrafts, beauty parlors, giving tuition, etc., and working outside in offices?
    - If different, what is the reason for that?
  - What kind of work women in your area usually do?
  - Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that women are very good at?
  - Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that women are not so good at?
  - Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that men are very good at?
  - Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that men are not so good at?
  - In your community, are there jobs that people think women (married/unmarried, young/old) should not do?
    - What kind of jobs are these?*
    - What is the reason behind this?*
    - Is it the same for married and unmarried/ old and young women?*
    - Is it the same across different castes?*
  - In your community, are there jobs that people think men should not do?
    - What kind of jobs are these?*
    - What is the reason behind this?*
    - Is it the same for married and unmarried/ old and young men?*
    - Is it the same across different castes?*

10. Can you tell me about how jobs and tasks are divided in your house?
- Do you and your husband do particular jobs?
    - What do you do?*
  - Do your married sons and daughters in law do particular jobs? (if applicable)
    - What do they do?*
  - Do your un-married sons and daughters do particular jobs? (if applicable)
    - What do they do?*
  - Do your married grandsons and granddaughters do particular job? (if applicable)
    - What do they do?*
  - Do your un-married grandsons and granddaughters do particular job? (if applicable)
    - What do they do?*
  - Are there any other people in your family, who do particular jobs?
    - What do they do?*

11. In your opinion, how does “Islam” differentiate between men and women, and their roles?

This is it for this session from my side. Is there anything else you feel important to tell or ask me about my research?

Thank you for giving me your time and be assured that the things we have discussed will only remain between two of us. I would have to come to you again in a few days for the follow-up interview, is that fine with you?

THANK YOU!

-CONTINUED TO NEXT PAGE-

-PART 2-

Good Morning/ Afternoon

In the last interview, I had asked you general questions about yourself, your family, and your community generally. I remember you had told me \_\_\_\_\_

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(a quick summary of the first discussion/ anything significant that was discussed/ or anything that would make her comfortable), and I myself have also observed the same during my stay in the village.

Today, I would want you to tell me more specifically about what are the facilities that are given to women to make their life easy. I will again start my audio recorder now, with your permission. You already know that this participation of yours is voluntary, and you can deny answering any question and quit whenever you feel uncomfortable. Thank you again for your time and energy.

#### Follow-up Interview

- Have you heard about any governmental organizations/ schemes/ policies/ programmes, working in this area to benefit young girls and women?
  - If yes, what are the schemes?
  - Do you know any beneficiaries?
  - Do you see any impact of them in your village?
- Have you heard about any private organizations/ schemes/ policies/ programmes, working in this area to benefit young girls and women?
  - If yes, which organization(s)?
  - What do they do?
  - Do you know any beneficiaries?
  - Do you see any impact of them in your village?
- Do you know if there any harassment of girls or women, eve-teasing in your community, like in Islamabad?
  - If yes, at what place does it happen most often?
  - Is it age-specific?
  - Is it caste specific?
  - Does it happen with unmarried girls only?
  - What about when you go to market?
    - What about when you were young?*
  - How do girls cope with it?
  - Are boys teased or harassed too?
    - If yes, at what places and by whom?*
- You told me that usually girls in *Abadnagar* stop their education after \_\_\_\_\_ class. Does this have some relationship their marriage?
  - If yes, what is that relationship?

5. Now in *Abadnagar* what the average age of marriage for girls and boys is?
  - a. Do you think it is the best age for marriage?
    - i. *If yes, what is the reason?*
    - ii. *If no, what is the reason?*
  - b. When do you think is a marriage “early” for girls?
  - c. When do you think is a marriage “early” for boys?
  - d. When do you think is a marriage “too early” for girls?
  - e. When do you think is a marriage “too early” for boys?
  
6. Are there early marriages practiced in your area?
  - a. If yes, why do you think people choose to do early marriages?
  - b. In this case, what is the age of bride usually, and what is the age of the groom?
  - c. Are early marriages more common among girls or boys?
  - d. In what casts is it more common?
  - e. Is it practiced in your cast also?
  - f. Is there anyone in your family who was married when they were young?
    - i. *What was their age?*
    - ii. *What was the age of their bride/groom?*
    - iii. *Did she have to quit her education due to this?*
    - iv. *Is she happy now?*
    - v. *Is she healthy now?*
    - vi. *What is the positive impact of early marriage on the couple’s lives?*
    - vii. *Did she have to face any negative consequences due to early marriage?*
    - viii. *Do early marriages affect girls’ education? And how?*
  
7. I remember you had told me that you were \_\_\_\_\_ years old when you got married. Did you (want to) go to school at that time?
  - a. Did other girls in your surroundings also get married at the same age? Or earlier/ later?
  - b. Do you think it was an early marriage, and you wanted to do something else before/ rather getting married?
  
8. Do you know of any laws prohibiting child marriages?
  - a. Do you know what is the legal age of marriage in Pakistan?
    - i. *What do you think of this?*
    - ii. *Does it comply with Islamic teachings about marriage?*
  
9. At the end, what advise you would like to give to young girls, boys, their parents, and their grandparents regarding when to marry and how to make it successful?

I have asked many questions- is there anything else that you want to tell me regarding marriages, early marriages, or any other issues faced by women in your area?

What did you think of the interview?

Is there anything that you want to ask me regarding my research?

At the end, I would like to thank you a lot for cooperating with me and giving me this much of your precious time. (If applicable) I know I cannot solve your problems, but the least I can do is to document them so that the people who have the power of policy making would know that these are the issues of women in *Abadnagar*.

I have recorded this interview with your permission, and when I go home, I will write all of this and share with you in a few days. I will read it to you to have your confirmation that this is what we had discussed, and I have not made up the stories by myself.

Thank you so much! I will see you with the transcript in the next few days.

### Annex 3

#### Interview Guideline for Mothers

Good morning / afternoon

My name is Nashia Ajaz, and I have come from Islamabad to do research for my book about family structures in *Abadnagar*. Being a woman, and being a part of a women university, I am very interested in knowing how women of different age groups live, what issues do they face, and how do they solve them.

The objective of my visit today is to ask you about your life experiences as a woman; the issues you have faced/are facing in your life, and how you managed to resolve them. This interview is a part of my PhD research. During the coming months, I hope to speak to many other women in *Abadnagar*, but I will not share what anyone says to me with any other person. The information I get from you will be very important for my research, therefore I am very thankful to you for agreeing to give me your valuable time and energy.

I also want to mention here that your participation in my research is voluntary, which means that you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you can stop the interview at any moment. I assure you that everything you tell me will be confidential, and I want to request you to do the same and not tell anybody about what we have discussed.

I also want to seek your permission to record the discussion. This audio discussion will help me remember the points we have discussed. The recordings and the notes will not be shared with anyone else except my supervisors at my university, so that they may not doubt the authenticity of my book. However, I will not disclose your name, address, telephone number, so no one will be able to trace/link the information to you.

I have quite a few questions so perhaps we will need to meet again. Is this ok by you? Each of the session will be of no longer than one and a half hours. In next few days, I will write the notes of our conversation, and I will share with you that I have written. I will use that information only when you say that I have written and understood it correctly.

Do you have any questions?

Do I have your permission to proceed?

I already know your real name, but I will be using a nick name in the research so that the information you give does not get traced by your name. Is there a preferred nick name you want me to use?

**Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Respondent Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Generation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your marital status?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Level of education** \_\_\_\_\_ (to be filled later)

#### Preliminary Interview

1. First of all, I would like to know more about you. Can you tell me about yourself?
  - a. What is your age?
  - b. Where were you born?
  - c. Who was in your family at that time?
  - d. How long have you been living in *Abadnagar* (if not born here)?
  - e. Who else lives in your household?
  - f. What did/do you do?
    - i. *E.g., homemaker, work part time, work full time, etc.*
  - g. Are you happy with what you did/ are doing?
2. Did you go to school?
  - a. Which school did you go?
  - b. (Till) which class do/did you study?
    - i. *Why did you stop after that?*
  - c. Did you enjoy studying?
    - i. *If yes, what did you like the most?*
    - ii. *What did you not like?*
    - iii. *If no, what is the reason for that?*
3. How many siblings do you have?
  - a. Did they go to school?
    - i. *Till what level?*
  - b. Where do they live now?
  - c. What do they do?
  - d. How was your relationship with them when you were living together?
    - i. *Who was your favorite and what was the reason for this?*
4. When did you get married?
  - a. What was your age?
    - i. *What was the reason for marriage at that age?*
  - b. What was your husband's age?
  - c. Where did you live before marriage?
  - d. What did your father do?
  - e. What did your mother do?
  - f. How did the marriage happen? Is it within family or outside?
  - g. Was it a love marriage or arranged?
    - i. *If arranged, were you asked to give consent?*
  - h. Did you see each other before?
    - i. *Did you meet before marriage?*
  - i. Who made the final decision of marriage?
    - i. *What did he/she consider?*
5. Were girls in your area usually asked before finalizing the marriage proposals?
  - a. If yes, to what extent could they influence the decision?
  - b. Were they shown pictures of the young man?
  - c. Were they allowed to meet each other before marriage?
  - d. Did they meet/ speak to each other when engaged?
  - e. What would happen if they said no?

6. How many children do you have?
  - a. What are their ages?
  - b. What do they do?
  - c. Do/ did they study?
    - i. *If yes, at/ till what level?*
    - ii. *If no, what is the reason for that?*
  - d. Are they all married?
    - i. *If yes, at what age did each of them marry?*
    - ii. *Were these love marriages or arranged, or...?*
    - iii. *Did they see each other before marriage?*
    - iv. *Do you people marry outside the family/cast?*
    - v. *Which family members made the marriage decision?*
    - vi. *Was there any influence from your extended family?*
    - vii. *What qualities did your family look for in your daughters in law?*
    - viii. *What qualities did your family look for in your sons in law?*
    - ix. *Are they all happily married?*
  - e. Is any of them engaged?
    - i. *If yes, to whom?*
    - ii. *Is he/she in the family?*
    - iii. *Are they happy?*
    - iv. *Do they often see/ meet each other?*
    - v. *When will they get married?*
  - f. If some of them are neither married nor engaged, what is the reason for that?
  - g. Do you think it is important to get married for girls and boys?
    - i. *If yes, what is the reason for that?*
    - ii. *If no, what is the reason for that?*
7. Tasks are often divided differently in families and different people take different kinds of decisions. Can you tell me about your family and who does what – usually? For example,
  - a. Who decides what will be cooked in the dinner?
  - b. Who cooks?
  - c. I have seen some private school chains here, and there is a government school also. Who decides which school the children shall go to?
  - d. Do girls and boys decide which subjects will they study? If not, who decides?
  - e. Were there subjects at school you could choose between? If so, how did you choose which subject to take? (probe to find out how decisions were taken)
  - f. Who decides which crops will you grow this season? When to harvest? What to sell (if applicable)
  - g. Who decides who and when a boy or a girl will marry?
8. Are there any working women in your immediate or extended family?
  - a. Who is/are she/they?
  - b. What do they do?
  - c. Is she educated?
    - i. *If yes, until what level?*
  - d. Do you know if she likes her work?
  - e. What is the major source of income in her house?

9. Do people in your community think that women should work and earn money?

- a. Is it same for the home-based jobs like sewing clothes, making handicrafts, beauty parlors, giving tuition, etc., and working outside in offices?
- b. What kind of work women in your area usually do?
- c. Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that women are very good at?
- d. Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that women are not so good at?
- e. Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that men are very good at?
- f. Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that men are not so good at?
- g. In your community, are there jobs that people think women (married/unmarried, young/old) should not do?
  - i. *What kind of jobs are these?*
  - ii. *What is the reason behind this?*
  - iii. *Is it the same for married and unmarried/ old and young women?*
  - iv. *Is it the same across different castes?*
- h. In your community, are there jobs that people think men should not do?
  - i. *What kind of jobs are these?*
  - ii. *What is the reason behind this?*
  - iii. *Is it the same for married and unmarried/ old and young men?*
  - iv. *Is it the same across different castes?*

10. Can you tell me about how jobs and tasks are divided in your house?
  - a. Does your father-in-law and mother-in-law do particular jobs?
    - i. *What do they do?*
  - b. Do you and your husband do particular jobs?
    - i. *What do you do?*
  - c. Do your married sons and daughters in law do particular jobs? (if applicable)
    - i. *What do they do?*
  - d. Do your un-married sons and daughters do particular jobs? (if applicable)
    - i. *What do they do?*
  - e. Do your married grandsons and granddaughters do particular job? (if applicable)
    - i. *What do they do?*
  - f. Do your un-married grandsons and granddaughters do particular job? (if applicable)
    - i. *What do they do?*
  - g. Are there any other people in your family, who do particular jobs?
    - i. *What do they do?*

11. In your opinion, how does “Islam” differentiate between men and women, and their roles?

This is it for this session from my side. Is there anything else you feel important to tell or ask me about my research?

Thank you for giving me your time and be assured that the things we have discussed will only remain between two of us. I would have to come to you again in a few days for the follow-up interview, is that fine with you?

THANK YOU!

-CONTINUED TO NEXT PAGE-

Good Morning/ Afternoon

In the last interview, I had asked you general questions about yourself, your family, and your community generally. I remember you had told me \_\_\_\_\_

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(a quick summary of the first discussion/ anything significant that was discussed/ or anything that would make her comfortable), and I myself have also observed the same during my stay in the village.

Today, I would want you to tell me more specifically about what are the facilities that are given to women to make their life easy. I will again start my audio recorder now, with your permission. You already know that this participation of yours is voluntary, and you can deny answering any question and quit whenever you feel uncomfortable. Thank you again for your time and energy.

**Follow-up Interview**

1. Have you heard about any governmental organizations/ schemes/ policies/ programmes, working in this area to benefit young girls and women?
  - a. If yes, what are the schemes?
  - b. Do you know any beneficiaries?
  - c. Do you see any impact of them in your village?
2. Have you heard about any private organizations/ schemes/ policies/ programmes, working in this area to benefit young girls and women?
  - a. If yes, which organization(s)?
  - b. What do they do?
  - c. Do you know any beneficiaries?
  - d. Do you see any impact of them in your village?
3. Do you know if there any harassment of girls or women, eve-teasing in your community, like in Islamabad?
  - a. If yes, at what place does it happen most often?
  - b. Is it age-specific?
  - c. Is it caste specific?
  - d. Does it happen with unmarried girls only?
  - e. What about when you go to market?
    - i. *What about when you were young?*
  - f. How do girls cope with it?
  - g. Are boys teased or harassed too?
    - i. *If yes, at what places and by whom?*
4. You told me that usually girls in *Abadnagar* stop their education after \_\_\_\_\_ class. Does this have some relationship their marriage?
  - a. If yes, what is that relationship?

5. Now in *Abadnagar* what the average age of marriage for girls and boys is?
  - a. Do you think it is the best age for marriage?
    - i. *If yes, what is the reason?*
    - ii. *If no, what is the reason?*
  - b. When do you think is a marriage “early” for girls?
  - c. When do you think is a marriage “early” for boys?
  - d. When do you think is a marriage “too early” for girls?
  - e. When do you think is a marriage “too early” for boys?
6. Are there early marriages practiced in your area?
  - a. If yes, why do you think people choose to do early marriages?
  - b. In this case, what is the age of bride usually, and what is the age of the groom?
  - c. Are early marriages more common among girls or boys, or both?
  - d. In what casts is it more common?
  - e. Is it practiced in your cast also?
  - f. Is there anyone in your family who was married when they were young?
    - i. *What was their age?*
    - ii. *What was the age of their bride/groom?*
    - iii. *Did she have to quit her education due to this?*
    - iv. *Is she happy now?*
    - v. *Is she healthy now?*
    - vi. *What is the positive impact of early marriage on the couple’s lives?*
    - vii. *Did she have to face any negative consequences due to early marriage?*
    - viii. *Do early marriages affect girls’ education? And how?*
7. I remember you had told me that you were \_\_\_\_\_ years old when you got married. Did you (want to) go to school at that time?
  - a. Did other girls in your surroundings also get married at the same age? Or earlier/ later?
  - b. Do you think it was an early marriage, and you wanted to do something else before/ rather getting married?
8. Do you know of any laws prohibiting child marriages?
  - a. Do you know what is the legal age of marriage in Pakistan?
    - i. *What do you think of this?*
    - ii. *Does it comply with Islamic teachings about marriage?*
9. At the end, what advise you would like to give to young girls, boys, and their parents, grandparents regarding when to marry and how to make it successful?

I have asked many questions- is there anything else that you want to tell me regarding marriages, early marriages, or any other issues faced by women in your area? What did you think of the interview?

Is there anything that you want to ask me regarding my research?

At the end, I would like to thank you a lot for cooperating with me and giving me this much of your precious time. (If applicable) I know I cannot solve your problems, but the least I can do

is to document them so that the people who have the power of policy making would know that these are the issues of women in *Abadnagar*.

I have recorded this interview with your permission, and when I go home, I will write all of this and share with you in a few days. I will read it to you to have your confirmation that this is what we had discussed, and I have not made up the stories by myself.

Thank you so much! I will see you with the transcript in the next few days.

#### Annex 4

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### Interview Guideline for Young Girls

Good morning / afternoon

My name is Nashia Ajaz, and I have come from Islamabad to do research for my book about family structures in *Abadnagar*. Being a woman, and being a part of a women university, I am very interested in knowing how women of different age groups live, what issues do they face, and how do they solve them.

The objective of my visit today is to ask you about your life experiences as a woman; the issues you have faced/are facing in your life, and how you managed to resolve them. This interview is a part of my PhD research. During the coming months, I hope to speak to many other women in *Abadnagar*, but I will not share what anyone says to me with any other person. The information I get from you will be very important for my research, therefore I am very thankful to you for agreeing to give me your valuable time and energy.

I also want to mention here that your participation in my research is voluntary, which means that you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you can stop the interview at any moment. I assure you that everything you tell me will be confidential, and I want to request you to do the same and not tell anybody about what we have discussed.

I also want to seek your permission to record the discussion. This audio discussion will help me remember the points we have discussed. The recordings and the notes will not be shared with anyone else except my supervisors at my university, so that they may not doubt the authenticity of my book. However, I will not disclose your name, address, telephone number, so no one will be able to trace/link the information to you.

I have quite a few questions so perhaps we will need to meet again. Is this ok by you? Each of the session will be of no longer than one and a half hours. In next few days, I will write the notes of our conversation, and I will share with you that I have written. I will use that information only when you say that I have written and understood it correctly.

Do you have any questions?

Do I have your permission to proceed?

I already know your real name, but I will be using a nick name in the research so that the information you give does not get traced by your name. Is there a preferred nick name you want me to use?

**Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Respondent Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Generation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your marital status?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Level of education** \_\_\_\_\_ (to be filled later)



### Preliminary Interview

1. First of all, I would like to know more about you. Can you tell me about yourself?
  - a. What is your age?
  - b. Where were you born?
  - c. How long have you been living in *Abadnagar* (if not born here)?
  - d. Who else lives your household?
  - e. What do you do?
    - i. *E.g., student, work part time, work full time, etc., homemaker, etc.*
  - f. Are you happy with what you are doing?
2. Did/ do you go to school?
  - a. Which school/ college did/do you go?
  - b. (Till) which class do/did you study?
    - i. *Why did you stop? (if applicable)*
  - c. Did/do you enjoy studying?
    - i. *If yes, what did you like the most?*
    - ii. *What did you not like?*
    - iii. *If no, what is the reason for that?*
3. How many siblings do you have?
  - a. Are your siblings at school/studying?
  - b. Which school, class, etc.
  - c. Do you or your siblings work?
    - i. *If yes, what kind of work do they do?*
4. What do your parents do to earn living?
  - a. Do you or your siblings help your parents with their work? (in/outside home)
5. Do generally girls and boys in your village study? Till what level usually? What are the reasons they stop?
6. Do people in your community think girls should study?
  - a. If yes, till what grade do they generally think is enough?
  - b. What is the purpose of getting education?
    - i. *Is the purpose same for boys also?*
  - c. If no, what is the reason for that?
7. What is your caste?
  - a. What are the other castes in the village?
  - b. What is seen as the best caste?
8. Do you get on well with your siblings? With whom in particular, if any? And what is the reason for that?
9. Tasks are often divided differently in families and different people take different kinds of decisions. Can you tell me about your family and who does what – usually? For example,
  - a. Who decides what will be cooked in the dinner?
  - b. Who cooks?
    - c. I have seen some private school chains here, and there is a government school also. Who decides which school the children shall go to?
    - d. Do girls and boys decide which subjects will they study? If not, who decides?
    - e. Were there subjects at school you could choose between? If so, how did you choose which subject to take? (probe to find out how decisions were taken)
    - f. Who decides which crops will you grow this season? When to harvest? What to sell (if applicable)
    - g. Who decides who and when a boy or a girl will marry?
10. What are your views about marriage?
  - a. Is it a good thing?
  - b. Is it a bad thing?
  - c. What is a happy marriage?
    - i. *What leads to a happy marriage?*
  - d. Have you seen around any unsuccessful marriages?
    - i. *What leads to an unsuccessful marriage?*
11. Are any of your siblings married?
  - a. If yes, when did they get married?
  - b. What was their age at the time of marriage?
  - c. Do you think it was it a love marriage or was it arranged, or ...?
  - d. Did they see each other before marriage?
  - e. Do you people marry outside the family/caste?
  - f. Who had brought the proposal?
  - g. Which family members made the marriage decision?
    - i. *Was there any influence from your extended family?*
  - h. Were there other proposals also?
    - i. *If yes, how did your family select this proposal? What things did your family consider in this suit?*
  - i. When I was getting married, my grandmother gave me a lot of advice on how to behave when married. Were/Are your siblings given any advice for happy marriage?
12. Are any of your siblings engaged?
  - a. If yes, to whom?
  - b. Is he/she in the family?
  - c. Are they happy?
  - d. Do they often see/ meet each other?
  - e. When will they get married?
13. Are girls in your community usually asked for their opinion before finalizing their marriage proposals?
  - a. If yes, to what extent can they influence the decision?
  - b. Are they shown pictures of the young man?
  - c. Are they allowed to meet each other before marriage?
  - d. Do they meet/ speak to each other when engaged?
  - e. What happens if she says no?
14. Are there any working women in your immediate or extended family?
  - a. Who is/are she/they?

Good Morning/ Afternoon

In the last interview, I had asked you general questions about yourself, your family, and your community generally. I remember you had told me \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(a quick summary of the first discussion/ anything significant that was discussed/ or anything that would make her comfortable), and I myself have also observed the same during my stay in the village.

Today, I would want you to tell me more specifically about what are the facilities that are given to women to make their life easy. I will again start my audio recorder now, with your permission. You already know that this participation of yours is voluntary, and you can deny answering any question and quit whenever you feel uncomfortable. Thank you again for your time and energy.

**Follow-up Interview**

1. Have you heard about any governmental organizations/ schemes/ policies/ programmes, working in this area to benefit young girls and women?
  - a. If yes, what are the schemes?
  - b. Do you know any beneficiaries?
  - c. Do you see any impact of them in your village?
2. Have you heard about any private organizations/ schemes/ policies/ programmes, working in this area to benefit young girls and women?
  - a. If yes, which organization(s)?
  - b. What do they do?
  - c. Do you know any beneficiaries?
  - d. Do you see any impact of them in your village?
3. Do you know if there any harassment of girls or women, eve-teasing in your community, like in Islamabad?
  - a. If yes, at what place does it happen most often?
  - b. Is it age-specific?
  - c. Is it caste specific?
  - d. Does it happen with unmarried girls only?
  - e. What about when you go to market?
  - f. How do girls cope with it?
  - g. Are boys teased or harassed too?
    - i. If yes, at what places and by whom?
4. You told me that usually girls in *Abadnagar* stop their education after \_\_\_\_\_ class. Does this have some relationship their marriage?
  - a. If yes, what is that relationship?

- b. What do they do?
- c. Is she educated?
  - i. If yes, until what level?
- d. Do you know if she likes her work?
- e. What is the major source of income in her house?

15. Do people in your community think that women should work and earn money?
- a. Is it same for the home-based jobs like sewing clothes, making handicrafts, beauty parlors, giving tuition, etc., and working outside in offices?
  - b. What kind of work women in your area usually do?
  - c. Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that women are very good at?
  - d. Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that women are not so good at?
  - e. Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that men are very good at?
  - f. Are there particular jobs or kinds of work that men are not so good at?
  - g. In your community, are there jobs that people think women (married/unmarried, young/old) should not do?
    - i. What kind of jobs are these?
    - ii. What is the reason behind this?
    - iii. Is it the same for married and unmarried/ old and young women?
    - iv. Is it the same across different castes?
  - h. In your community, are there jobs that people think men should not do?
    - i. What kind of jobs are these?
    - ii. What is the reason behind this?
    - iii. Is it the same for married and unmarried/ old and young men?
    - iv. Is it the same across different castes?

16. Can you tell me about how jobs and tasks are divided in your house?
- a. Do your grandfather and grandmother do particular jobs? (if applicable)
    - i. What do/ did they do?
  - b. Do your mother and your father do particular jobs?
    - i. What do they do?
  - c. Do your married brothers and sisters in law do particular jobs? (if applicable)
    - i. What do they do?
  - d. Do your un-married brothers and sisters do particular jobs? (if applicable)
    - i. What do they do?
  - e. Are there are any other people in your family, who do particular jobs?
    - i. What do they do?

17. In your opinion, how does “Islam” differentiate between men and women, and their roles?

This is it for this session from my side. Is there anything else you feel important to tell or ask me about my research?

Thank you for giving me your time and be assured that the things we have discussed will only remain between two of us. I would have to come to you again in a few days for the follow-up interview, is that fine with you?

THANK YOU!

5. Now in *Abadnagar* what the average age of marriage for girls and boys is?
  - a. Do you think it is the best age for marriage?
    - i. *If yes, what is the reason?*
    - ii. *If no, what is the reason?*
  - b. When do you think is a marriage “early” for girls?
  - c. When do you think is a marriage “early” for boys?
  - d. When do you think is a marriage “too early” for girls?
  - e. When do you think is a marriage “too early” for boys?
6. Are there early marriages practiced in your area?
  - a. If yes, why do you think people choose to do early marriages?
  - b. In this case, what is the age of bride usually, and what is the age of the groom?
  - c. Are early marriages more common among girls or boys, or both?
  - d. In what casts is it more common?
  - e. Is it practiced in your cast also?
  - f. Is there anyone in your family who was married when they were young?
    - i. *What was their age?*
    - ii. *What was the age of their bride/groom?*
    - iii. *Did she have to quit her education due to this?*
    - iv. *Is she happy now?*
    - v. *Is she healthy now?*
    - vi. *What is the positive impact of early marriage on the couple’s lives?*
    - vii. *Did she have to face any negative consequences due to early marriage?*
    - viii. *Do early marriages affect girls’ education? And how?*
7. Do you know of any laws prohibiting child marriages?
  - a. Do you know what is the legal age of marriage in Pakistan?
    - i. *What do you think of this?*
    - ii. *Does it comply with Islamic teachings about marriage?*
8. When do you hope to marry?
  - a. Are you engaged?
    - i. *If yes, to whom?*
    - ii. *Is he/she in the family?*
    - iii. *Are you happy?*
    - iv. *Do you often see/ meet each other?*
    - v. *When will you get married?*
  - b. If no, are there any proposals?
    - i. *If yes, are they intra cast/ family?*
    - ii. *What is the wait for?*
    - iii. *Who will take the final decision?*
  - c. If no, what is the reason?
  - d. Do you like someone?
    - i. *If yes, Is he in the family/cast?*
    - ii. *Did/can you tell your parents?*
    - iii. *How will the family react?*
    - iv. *Who will take the final decision?*

I have asked many questions- is there anything else that you want to tell me regarding marriages, early marriages, or any other issues faced by women in your area? What did you think of the interview?

Is there anything that you want to ask me regarding my research?

At the end, I would like to thank you a lot for cooperating with me and giving me this much of your precious time. (If applicable) I know I cannot solve your problems, but the least I can do is to document them so that the people who have the power of policy making would know that these are the issues of women in *Abadnagar*.

I have recorded this interview with your permission, and when I go home, I will write all of this and share with you in a few days. I will read it to you to have your confirmation that this is what we had discussed, and I have not made up the stories by myself.

Thank you so much! I will see you with the transcript in the next few days.

## Annex 5

### Interview Guideline for Lady Health Workers

Good morning / afternoon

My name is Nashia Ajaz, and I have come from Islamabad to do research for my book about family structures in *Abadnagar*. Being a woman, and being a part of a women university, I am very interested in knowing how women of different age groups live, what issues do they face, and how do they solve them. As you are a Lady Health Worker working in this area, I feel you would be the best person to talk to in this regard.

The objective of my visit today is to ask you about your experiences of working as a Lady health worker; if there are any issues you face being a woman, and how you deal with them. I would also like to tell you about women in *Abadnagar*, and their issues. I want to assure you that the information I get from you will not be shared with anyone. The information I get from you is important for my research, therefore I am very thankful to you for agreeing to give me your valuable time and energy.

I also want to mention here that your participation in my research is voluntary, which means that you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you can stop the interview at any moment. I assure you that everything you tell me will be confidential, and I want to request you to do the same and not tell anybody about what we have discussed.

I also want to seek your permission to record the discussion. This audio discussion will help me remember the points we have discussed. The recordings and the notes will not be shared with anyone else except my supervisors at my university, so that they may not doubt the authenticity of my book. However, I will not disclose your name, address, telephone number, so no one will be able to trace/link the information to you.

I have quite a few questions, so this discussion might long up to one hour, is it okay by you? I will write the notes of our conversation, and I will share with you that I have written. I will use that information only when you say that I have written and understood it correctly.

Do you have any questions?

Do I have your permission to proceed?

I already know your real name, but I will be using a nick name in the research so that the information you give does not get traced by your name. Is there a preferred nick name you want me to use?

**Pseudonym:**

**Approximate Age:**

**Years of working as Lady Health Worker: (to be filled later)**

**Level of education: (to be filled later)**

1. First of all, I would like to know more about you. Can you tell me about yourself?
  - a. Since how long you are working here as a Lady Health Worker?
    - i. Your age
  - b. How did you get selected for this job?
    - i. Your level of education
  - c. Whose decision was it that you work as a lady health worker?
  - d. Did you face any issues by your family and village for this job?
    - i. If yes, mainly by whom and what was the reason?
  - e. What caste group do you belong to?
    - i. Is it common for women of your caste to work for earning?
      1. Is it same for the home-based jobs like sewing clothes, making handicrafts, beauty parlors, giving tuition, etc., and working outside in offices?
      2. If different, what is the reason for that?
  - f. As your profession demands mobility, did you have to face any incidences of eve teasing or sexual harassment?
    - i. If yes, at what place does it happen most often?
    - ii. Is it age-specific?
    - iii. Is it caste specific?
    - iv. Does it happen with unmarried girls only?
    - v. How do you or other girls cope with it?
    - vi. Are boys teased or harassed too?
      1. *If yes, at what places and by whom?*
2. As my research revolves around women and girls, and early marriages is one of the most important issues faced by them sometimes leading to severe health issues also, I would like you to hear your word on this.
  - a. Do you think child marriages take place in this village?
  - b. What is the average age of girls and boys to get married here?
  - c. What are the problems faced by girls who get married early?
    - i. Specifically, what are the consequences of early marriages on women's health?

3. I would also like to ask about any government and non-state initiatives for women in this area.
4. Have you heard about any governmental organizations/ schemes/ policies/ programmes, working in this area to benefit young girls and women?
  - a. If yes, what are the schemes?
  - b. Do you know any beneficiaries?
  - c. Do you see any impact of them in this village?
5. Have you heard about any private organizations/ schemes/ policies/ programmes, working in this area to benefit young girls and women?
  - d. If yes, which organization(s)?
  - e. What do they do?
  - f. Do you know any beneficiaries?
  - g. Do you see any impact of them in this village?

I have asked all my questions- is there anything else that you want to tell me regarding marriages, early marriages, or any other health or other issues faced by women in your area?

What did you think of the interview?

Is there anything that you want to ask me regarding my research?

At the end, I would like to thank you a lot for cooperating with me and giving me this much of your precious time. I have recorded this interview with your permission, and when I go home, I will write all of this and share with you in a few days. I will read it to you to have your confirmation that this is what we had discussed, and I have not made up the stories by myself.

Thank you so much! I will see you with the transcript in the next few days.

## Annex 6

### Interview Guideline for NGO Representatives

Good morning / afternoon

My name is Nashia Ajaz, and I have come from Islamabad to do research for my book about family structures in *Abadnagar*. Being a woman, and being a part of a women university, I am very interested in knowing how women of different age groups live, what issues do they face, and how do they solve them. I have come to you because I have been told by the people of *Abadnagar* that your organization is working in their area for the betterment of women.

The objective of my visit today is to ask you about your presence in Abadnagar, what projects is your organization working on, and what have been your experiences regarding working for women in *Abadnagar*. This interview is a part of my PhD research. I want to assure you here that I will not share what we have discussed here by your name with anyone. I will use the name of your organization only. The information I get from you will be very important for my research, therefore I am very thankful to you for agreeing to give me your valuable time and energy.

I also want to mention here that your participation in my research is voluntary, which means that you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you can stop the interview at any moment. I assure you that everything you tell me will be confidential, and I want to request you to do the same and not tell anybody about what we have discussed.

I also want to seek your permission to record the discussion. This audio discussion will help me remember the points we have discussed. The recordings and the notes will not be shared with anyone else except my supervisors at my university, so that they may not doubt the authenticity of my book. However, I will not disclose your name, address, telephone number, so no one will be able to trace/link the information to you.

I have quite a few questions so perhaps this interview will last till an hour or so. Is this okay by you? In next few days, I will write the notes of our conversation, and I will share with you that I have written. I will use that information only when you say that I have written and understood it correctly.

Do you have any questions?

Do I have your permission to proceed?

#### **Preliminary Interview**

1. First of all, I would like to know more about you. Can you tell me about yourself? How long have you been working with this organization?
2. Please tell me about your organization.
  - a. Since when your organization is working in this geographical area?
  - b. What are the different projects your organization is working on?
  - c. Which projects are specifically focused on women empowerment and/or gender equality?
    - i. What are they?
    - ii. What impact do you see in the village?

- d. Is any of your projects working to reduce the incidences of child marriage in the area?
  - i. What are they?
  - ii. What impact do you see in the village?
3. What do you know about the family structure and decision-making in the village? How do you think marriage decisions are made and how can they be influenced?
  - a. Who participates in decision-making?
  - b. Who can influence the decisions?
4. How is your experience working in the village *Abadnagar* as an “educated” “working woman” working in an “NGO?”
5. Do you want to share any success stories where you have changed a decision affecting a girl in the village?
6. Do you want to share any lessons learnt?

I have asked all my questions- is there anything else that you want to tell me regarding marriages, early marriages, or any other issues faced by women in this area?

What did you think of the interview?

Is there anything that you want to ask me regarding my research?

At the end, I would like to thank you a lot for cooperating with me and giving me this much of your precious time. I have recorded this interview with your permission, and when I go home, I will write all of this and share with you in a few days. I will read it to you to have your confirmation that this is what we had discussed, and I have not made up the stories by myself.

Thank you so much! I will see you with the transcript in the next few days.

## Annex 7

### Interview Guideline for Members of the Parliament

Good morning/afternoon

My name is Nashia Ajaz, and I am conducting my Ph.D. research on the status of women in Pakistan. I am particularly interested in their participation in decision-making at various levels, including family, community, and national level. Another focus of my research is marriage, where I want to understand what an ideal age of marriage is, and when is a marriage deemed too early or too late.

The objective of my appointment with you today is to know your insights about the status of women in Pakistan, and how it has changed over the years. This interview is a part of my Ph.D. research. I want to assure you here that if you are uncomfortable, I will not share what we have discussed here by your name with anyone. The information I get from you will be very important for my research. Therefore I am very thankful to you for agreeing to give me your valuable time and energy.

I also want to mention here that your participation in my research is voluntary, which means that you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you can stop the interview at any moment.

I also want to seek your permission to record the discussion. This audio discussion will help me remember the points we have discussed. The recordings and the notes will not be shared with anyone else except my supervisors at my university if they ask.

Do you have any questions?

Do I have your permission to proceed?

1. First of all, since you have a lot of knowledge and experience in the field of policymaking, please tell me about it.
  - How long have you been working?
  - How did you start?
  - What are your main concerns/ interests in Pakistan/ Punjab?
2. Over the last few decades, there is a hype about women's rights and gender equality. A number of laws have been made to improve the status of women. Some people think that it was much needed, the others argue that this is just a “western” agenda. In your experience, do you think we need laws for women?
  - Have such laws been useful?
  - Are there any differences provincially?
  - If yes, I want to know specifically about Punjab.
3. In your experience, how is it made sure that a policy reaches the wider audience, and actually reaches its goal?
4. Since I am particularly interested in the age of marriage, I want to understand when a marriage is considered too early or too late in our society.

- When, in your experience, is the best age for girls to marry?
- When, in your experience, is the best age for boys to marry?
  - (If different), what are the benefits?

5. As you know we also have a law about the minimum age of marriage. Do you think we need such laws? Because every family has their own problems and priorities related to marriage.

- Is there a difference between child marriage and early marriage?
- You think the practice of child marriage is prevalent in Pakistan?
  - Is child and early marriage different? ◦ What is a child marriage?
  - What is an early marriage?
  - When is a marriage too early?
  - Is any of these practices prevalent in Pakistan?
  - Is this even a problem?
  - In which provinces/ urban/ rural areas, this practice is more common?
  - For whom child marriage is a problem?
- In your experience, have you observed a relationship between the level of education and the practice of child marriage? ◦ Socio-economic status?
  - Caste?
  - Religion? (if not already mentioned)
  - Is it even a problem? ◦ For whom?
  - What, in your experience, is the solution?

6. Thank you for your insights about the drivers of child marriage. I was reading that in Sindh, the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) was amended to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls from 16 years to 18 years. Do you think it was a good initiative?

- (If no, and if not discussed already) What do you think is the reason behind different minimum ages of marriage for girls (i.e., 16 years) and boys (i.e., 18 years)?
- If yes, do you think this change ought to be made in other provinces as well?
- In your experience, what are the reasons that it was amended in Sindh and not in other provinces, e.g. Punjab?
- Who can initiate the process?

7. When I was studying the state laws and policies, I realized that in Pakistan, almost all the laws we have are hard, focusing on punishments, fines, and imprisonments. In your experience as a policy maker, do you think such hard laws have been successful in implementation?

- If no, what can be the reasons?

8. Do you have an experience with soft policies also? Which focuses on incentivizing the public to do or not do certain things?

- How useful can soft policies be?

9. In the end, I would like to know your views about if the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) is enough from the policy side to stop the practice of child marriage?

- What else do we need to stop the practice/ delay the age of marriage?
- Is it even relevant to spend this much time and energy on laws such as Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), because I see there are many other important issues to be addressed at policy level?

10. I still don't understand a few things because in a populated country like Pakistan, policymaking seems to be hard to do. Can you give me more insights on:

- What is the reason that some laws, e.g. the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) are not equally implemented in all areas of the country?
- In your experience, who are the people who can implement or not implement a law?
- How can the civil society and NGOs contribute in the implementation of laws, such as Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929)?

11. I am looking forward to doing more interviews with policymakers. Can you please connect me with some other serving or ex-members of parliament? It will be a huge help if you can!

I have asked all my questions- is there anything else that you want to tell me? Is there anything that you want to ask me regarding my research?

In the end, I would like to thank you a lot for cooperating with me and giving me this much of your precious time. Thank you so much!



## Annex 8

### Guideline for Focus Group Discussions

#### Household Characteristics

1. How many household members are there in your household, or how many members an average household contains in your area?
2. How do the household members live in their house, or what should be an ideal way of living together in a household?
3. What are the common indicators of health and wellbeing of a household?

#### Significance of Health and Food?

4. What is the significance of food, and for which gender is the availability of food more important and why?
5. Have you ever felt food insecurity in your household or in your community? If yes then on which level, and what can be the possible reasons for it? Or what are the common reasons for food insecurity?
6. In your area, what are the common health issues, and which gender faces these issues more?
7. How are the dietary requirements of men and women different from each other?
8. In your opinion, how can women contribute in fulfilling the dietary requirements in their household, or how can women manage to eliminate food insecurity in their household?

#### Income and Economic Way of Living

9. In your area, what is the common source of income of people? And does this income source contribute in making their lifestyle better?
10. What are the common reasons for low or high income and good source of income?
11. If there is less income in your household, then what will be your preferences regarding the food distribution and grooming and education of your children.
12. In your opinion, how can the dietary requirements of a household be fulfilled in low income?

#### Gender and Division of Labor

13. In your community, what is the division of labor between men and women?
14. In your opinion, who among men and women can fulfill the household responsibilities better and who can solve the household problems in a better way? And why?
15. If we talk about the social and economic role of men and women, should the roles and responsibilities of men and women flexible (Burden Sharing)? And if they become flexible, how does the society see that particular individual?

#### Decision-Making and Distribution of Household Assets

16. In your opinion, how should the household assets be distributed, and who should be the in charge of household assets? And why?
17. If you feel the need of going against cultural values in order to make your household living, what will be your preferences? What will be the suggestion of your household and community members? And why?

## Annex 9

### Daily Observation Schedule

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Observation note ID</b>           |  |
| <b>Observation Date and Time</b>     |  |
| <b>Female/ male headed household</b> |  |
| <b>Place</b>                         |  |
| <b>Event</b>                         |  |

#### 1. Observations on (gendered) socialization in the area, and how important family decisions are made?

- Who does what?

**Notes:**

- Who is encouraged (and by whom) to do what?

**Notes:**

- Who speaks – when, about what, to whom? Who listens?

**Notes:**

- Who is silent? When?

**Notes:**

- Notes on body language?

**Notes:**

- Who influences whose opinions? Directly or indirectly? How?

**Notes:**

- Whose say seem to be important? Why?

**Notes:**

- Who appears to have or has Veto power? When?

**Notes:**

- Observations on whether decisions seem to be “family” decisions or those of specific members?

**Notes:**

- Other relevant observations:

**Notes:**

2. Notes on any decisions taken:

- Topic/issue

Notes:

- Who is involved in decision-making process (and at which stage of the process)?

Notes:

- Who takes the final decision?

Notes:

- Other relevant observations:

Notes:

3. Observations and informal discussions on marriage and its importance

- How do people define marriage?

Notes:

- Why do people marry?

Notes:

- Who is an ideal bride?

Notes:

- Who is an ideal groom?

Notes:

- What is ideal age of marriage?
  - i. What is an “early” marriage for boy / girl?
  - ii. When is a marriage appropriate?
  - iii. When is a marriage too early?

Notes:

- Who makes marriage decisions?
  - i. The groom?
  - ii. The dowry?
  - iii. Wedding dress?
  - iv. Wedding dates?
  - v. Wedding ceremony?
  - vi. Food?

Notes:

- How do marriages happen?
  - i. Spatial setting
  - ii. Who sits where?
  - iii. Who serves food?
  - iv. Body language of bride, groom, and their families
  - v. Who spends what?
  - vi. Dowry?
  - vii. Bride price?

Notes:

- Other relevant observations:

Notes:

4. Observations and informal discussions on different state and non-state women empowerment and gender equality programmes

- State programs working in the area for women and men

Notes:

- Non-state programs working in the area for women and men (see comment above)

Notes:

- How much people know about state and non-state actors working in the area for women and men

i. What are their goals and how do they achieve them?

Notes:

- What do people think of them in terms of their service delivery?

Notes:

- How do people react/ respond to them?

Notes:

- Other relevant observations:

Notes:

5. Observations and informal discussions on relationship between women empowerment, gender equality, and early marriages

- What do people think of working women?

Notes:

- What do people think of women doing things that usually women don't do in the area?

Notes:

- When is a marriage “early?”

Notes:

- When is a marriage “too early?”

Notes:

- What do people think about early marriages? Is it a problem?

Notes:

- What are the motivations behind early marriages?

Notes:

- What are the negative consequences of early marriages in the area?

Notes:

- Other relevant observations:

Notes:

6. Any other observations not covered in 1,2,3, and 4?

Notes:

7. Personal comments, reflections, and emotional reactions?

Notes:

**Annex 10**

**Caste Hierarchy and Distribution of Resources in *Abadnagar***

Good morning / afternoon

My name is Nashia Ajaz and I have come from Islamabad to do research for my book about family structures in *Abadnagar*.

The objective of my visit today is to ask you about your opinion on the distribution of resources among different castes in *Abadnagar*, which caste owns most of the resources, and which of the castes face more problems, and how do they resolve them. I will not ask your names and which castes you belong to, and I want to assure you that I will not share what anyone says to me with any other person. The information I get from you will be very important for my research, therefore I am very thankful to you for agreeing to give me your valuable time and energy.

I also want to mention here that your participation in my research is voluntary, which means that you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you can return the questionnaire at any moment. I assure you that everything you tell me will be confidential.

On the second page, I have made a chart which you have to fill. Starting from the top, you are invited to tell me which caste you think is considered most important in *Abadnagar*, what percentage of population does this caste constitute, what resources do they own, and what problems do they face. Similarly, you are invited to fill the second most important caste in the second box, and so on.

On the third page, you will see the map of *Abadnagar*. According to your estimate, you are invited to mark people of which caste live in which area of the village. Wherever you feel any confusion, please feel free to ask me.

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

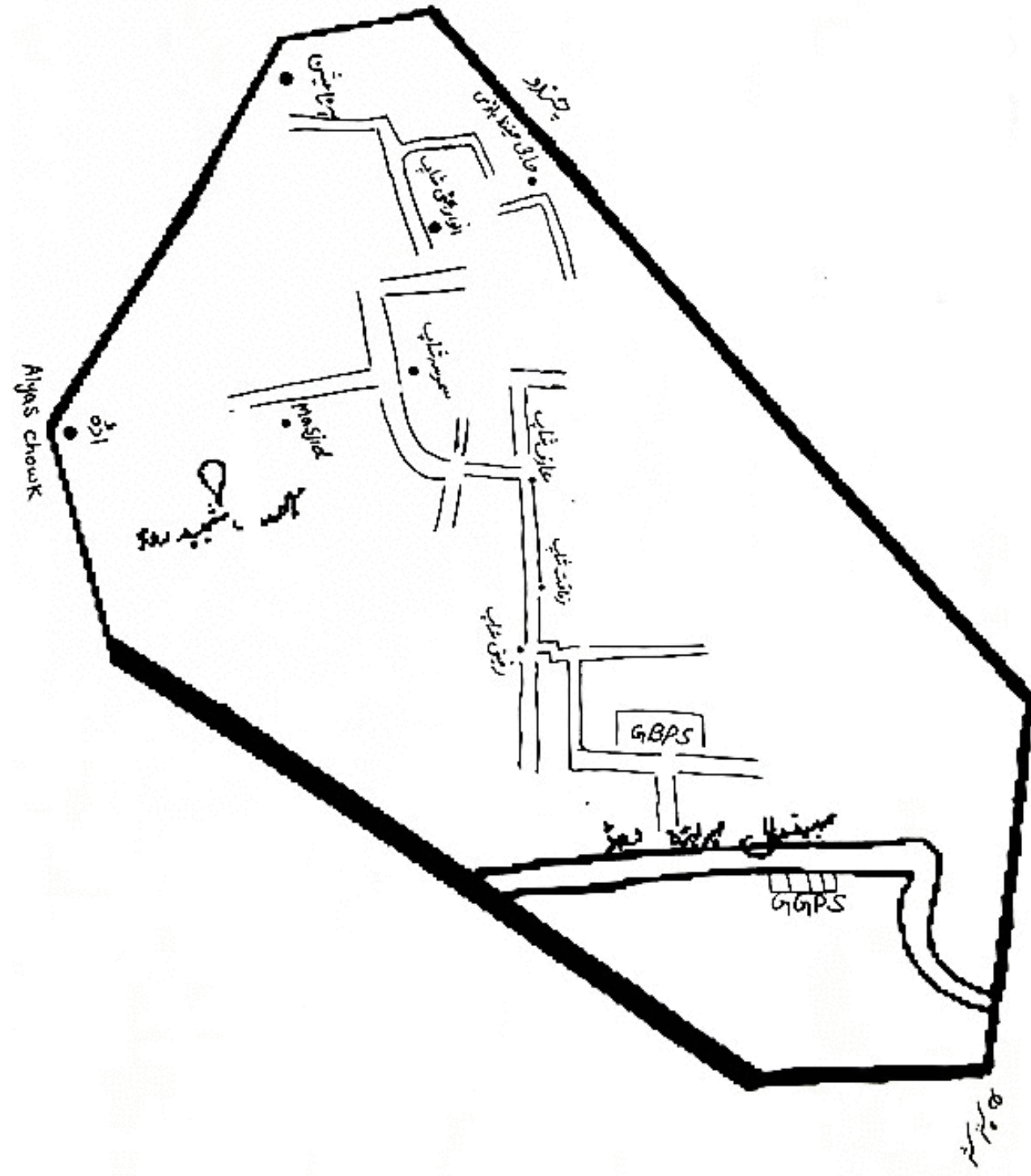
Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Education: \_\_\_\_\_

## Distribution of Land Among Different Castes

### Distribution of Resources Among Different Castes in Abadnagar

|   |   |                              |
|---|---|------------------------------|
| What are their problems?                          | 1 | Which resources do they own? |
| What percentage of population do they constitute? |   |                              |
| What are their problems?                          | 2 | Which resources do they own? |
| What percentage of population do they constitute? |   |                              |
| What are their problems?                          | 3 | Which resources do they own? |
| What percentage of population do they constitute? |   |                              |
| What are their problems?                          | 4 | Which resources do they own? |
| What percentage of population do they constitute? |   |                              |
| What are their problems?                          | 5 | Which resources do they own? |
| What percentage of population do they constitute? |   |                              |



## Annex 11

### Guideline for Feminist Critical Frame Analysis

This guideline has been built on elements from the Critical Frame Analysis framework of Verloo (2005) followed by Dombos and colleagues (2012), Cavaghan (2009), Meier (2008), Rein & Schön (2008), and Verloo & Lombardo (2007), and Spencer and colleagues (2018), and from the Feminist Policy Analysis of McPhail (2003), followed by -among other authors- Kanenberg (2013). This methodology with a merger of these two analysis frameworks is named “Feminist Critical Frame Analysis.” The guideline seeks to identify:

1. How is early marriage defined and framed within the policies?
2. How are the concepts of women’s empowerment and gender equality framed in the policies?
3. What are the strategies used for implementation of selected policies?
4. How is the implementation monitored?
5. What are possible implications of these framings for decision-making processes related to early marriage within families?
6. How does the policy mediate relationships between the state and the family? E.g. does it increase women’s dependence on state or on family?
7. Does any special treatment to women cause unintended or restrictive consequences?
8. Does presumed gender neutrality hide the reality of the gendered nature of the problem or solution?
9. Does the language infer male dominance over female invisibility?
10. Is the social construction of the problem recognized?

Following are the elements that have been looked for in the policy documents to perform the analysis:

#### 1. Identifying the nature of the problem

- a. What is represented as the problem?
- b. Why is it seen as a problem?
- c. How is the problem defined?
- d. What is the cause of what?
- e. What is the stake of women and men in the policy?
- f. What assumptions are made regarding the problem? (stated and implied)
- g. Does presumed gender neutrality hide the reality of the gendered nature of the problem or solution?
- h. Is the social construction of the problem recognized?

#### 2. Proposed Solutions to the problem

- a. What is the aim of the policy? (stated and implied)
- b. What is the proposed solution? (stated and implied)
- c. What are the instruments designed for policy implementation?
- d. Who are the actors and institutions involved in the implementation?
- e. What are the strategies used for policy implementation? (stated and implied)
- f. What are the indicators for target setting and monitoring progress? (stated and implied)
- g. How are women and men represented in the solution?
- h. How does this solution relate to the individual, familial, and societal norms in Pakistan?
- i. How does the policy mediate relationships between the state and the family? E.g., does it increase women’s dependence on state or on family?

- j. Does any special treatment to women cause unintended or restrictive consequences?
- k. Does the language infer male dominance over female invisibility?

#### 3. Causes, effects, and the role(s) of stakeholders

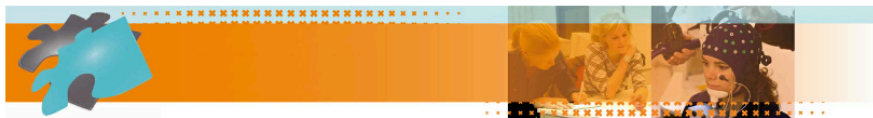
- a. Who are the stakeholders and what is the envisaged role of each of them?
- b. What are the stated and implied responsibilities of the government?
- c. What are the stated and implied implications of the policy for the practice of early marriage?
- d. What are the stated and implied implications of the policy for women’s empowerment and gender equality?

#### 4. How many times is each of the following terms used in the document, and in what context?

- i. Marriage
- ii. Child marriage
- iii. Women/ woman/ girl/ girls/ female/ females
- iv. Women’s empowerment/ woman’s empowerment
- v. Gender equality
- vi. Family
- vii. Decision

## Ethical Approval from AISSR

UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM



## Analyzing the Influence of Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Projects on Familial Decisions about Early Marriages- A Feminist Research

### Project details

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>ERB number ID</b> | 2018-AISSR-9178<br>9178  |
| <b>Title</b>         | Analyzing the Influence of Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Projects on Familial Decisions about Early Marriages- A Feminist Research |
| <b>Department</b>    | Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR)  |
| <b>Status</b>        | ERB approved   |
| <b>Created</b>       | 2018-05-02 07:42:04  |
| <b>Modified</b>      | 2018-05-02 07:42:04  |

### Project collaborators

Nashia Ajaz | Owner | N.Ajaz@uva.nl |

### General

#### Responsible researcher

Prof. Dr Joyeeta Gupta (Promoter), Dr Esther Miedema and Dr Winny Koster (Co-promoters)

#### Who conducts the research?

Nashia Ajaz, PhD Candidate

#### Research location

village Phatar located in Union Council Budhial, Tehsil Talaganj, District Chakwal, in Punjab, Pakistan

#### Brief project description

This project falls under the larger "Her Choice: Building Child Marriage Free Communities" programme. "Her Choice" is an alliance made of four organizations based in the Netherlands, including Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland, International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI), The Hunger Project, and the University of Amsterdam. These four partner organizations have twenty-seven local partner organizations in eleven countries in South Asia and Africa, working to end early marriages. The practice of early marriage exists worldwide, but particularly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, and has worldwide attention coordinated through the Girls-not-Brides network, which is a global partnership comprising of around 800 civil society organizations, working to combat early marriages and helping girls to fulfil the potential they have got. Literature shows that the general drivers of early marriage include sociocultural (e.g. gender inequality), economic (e.g. poverty) and political factors (e.g. unequal access to education). Early marriage heightens young women's vulnerability to physical and emotional problems, including a heightened risk of intimate partner violence. In many Asian and African societies (including Pakistan), marriages are arranged by families. Although there is a significant amount of literature available on the general drivers of early marriages, little is known about the specific internal and external influences on the familial decisions about early marriages. My research, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining the contribution of different (ly positioned) family members in the decision-making processes related to (early) marriage, and I want to analyze the family members' viewpoints in the light of relevant state and non-state programs geared to women's empowerment and gender equality. The theoretical framework of my research revolves around the feminist scholarship on gender (equality), family, family formation, power relations within the family, roles and expectations of different (ly positioned) family members within and outside the family, and women empowerment. The research falls under the larger umbrella of inclusive development, as it has been designed to bring up the voices and issues of marginalized young women related to early marriages. The research will produce insights on the understanding of early marriage, understanding of (and norms associated with) women empowerment and gender equality, the negative and positive effects of early marriage, the ideal age of marriage, individual experiences and observations about early marriages, the motivations, interests and points of consideration while making decisions about (early) marriage, the role of socialization, gender and power relations within family, and the relationship of early marriage decisions with different state and non-state projects on women empowerment and gender equality.

#### Expected duration of the project

Three and half years from March 2017, expected to have the PhD defence by August 2020

#### Expected number of participants

My research participants will be people of three subsequent generations in 5-6 families. I estimate around 35-40 participants.

#### This project is comparable with the following submitted project(number)

### Ethics Questions

#### 1. Recruitment

In conducting my field research, I will deploy qualitative methods. The data will be obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with different sets of actors and participant observation. The recruitment of participants will be done through purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling. I will present myself as an individual researcher attached to Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Given the common perception in Pakistan that people and institutions in the west give funds to local people to change mind-sets and 'destroy' Pakistani culture, I will refrain from mentioning my affiliation to the University of Amsterdam (UvA). In a similar vein, my status as a gender studies teacher, and a divorced, single mother is likely to be regarded negatively in the community and as such be counter-productive to building rapport and gathering good quality data. While it is problematic to withhold information, doing so will be important to ensure my safety (see Athanassoulis & Wilson, 2009; Pascual-Leone et al., 2010). In the context of Pakistan, it is customary to give small gifts to people taking part in research and I will abide by this custom. Gifts and contributions will be small to prevent people from opting into my research for financial reasons, however.

#### 2. Concerns of others

My research question, i.e., "How do different (ly positioned) members of lower and middle-class families in rural Punjab shape decision-making processes related to (early) marriage, and how do family members' viewpoints relate to relevant state and non-state programs geared to women's empowerment and gender equality?", will benefit the participants as early marriages are practised more in rural areas within the families belonging to middle and lower socio-economic groups. Knowing the influences of different policies and projects on people will help me formulate recommendations for policy and practice about early marriages, which will hopefully contribute to better policies and programmes leading to a reduction of early marriages and thus helping the participant community in the longer run. While I am interested in women's rights and empowerment, I shall refrain from voicing my opinions on practices and decisions in families that I engage with during the course of my research, including those that I deem to be discriminatory.

#### 3. Harmful research



Yes, please explain in a comment

While there will always be a chance that my research will -- directly or indirectly -- harm people, I will do my best to minimize this eventuality. I expect that the potential harms in my research will mainly relate to (fear of) social criticism and disputes in families due to differing opinions and disagreements, but I will minimize the risk of family members hearing about what others' have shared with me by maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of data.

#### 4. Informed consent

I will explain that the research is intended for academic purposes. To seek consent, I will first clarify the purpose of my research, and the broader research question, i.e. "How do different (ly positioned) members of lower and middle-class families in rural Punjab shape decision-making processes related to (early) marriage, and how do family members' viewpoints relate to relevant state and non-state programs geared to women's empowerment and gender equality?". I will not inform participants that I am doing the research on early marriage but on marriage in a broader sense. I do this as specifying my focus as being early marriage may be, counter-productive to generating good quality data, and as it would be a limited portrayal of what I am trying to understand, that is, family decision-making processes and how decisions may be shaped by external factors such as state and non-state policies and programmes. I will request the participants for their consent to be researched. I will not tell them that I want to study early marriages, but I will tell them that I want to explore how do people get married here, and who contributes to marriage decisions. However, it would not be in a form of a physically signed document, because the literacy rate among rural people is very low, so most of the people will not be able to read and write. During interviews, I will record the conversation with prior permission of the respondents. Before starting the interview, I will inform them that participation in this research is voluntary, and there is no pressure on them if they do not wish to participate if they feel uncomfortable. In addition, I will clarify that participants do not have to answer questions they are uncomfortable with and can end a research session (e.g. interview) when they wish to.

#### 5. Vulnerability

No

#### 6. Anonymity

I will guarantee anonymity alongside consent. Anonymity will be ensured by not mentioning names or any private personal data in any publications. All participants will be given a pseudonym. I will preserve the original data for certain period of times (approximately 5 years) and will destroy it (list of names and private personal data). However, to ensure openness of my sources, I will use pseudonyms for my respondents.

#### 7. Impact research

The only potential negative impact of participating in my research are family disputes due to disagreement on certain viewpoints. I will seek to avoid these kinds of situations by speaking to family members separately and in private. It goes without saying that I will not share the responses of one participant with another, even if they belong to the same family and even when requested. I will protect my research participants by keeping anonymity in every publication and dissemination.

#### 8. Negative consequences

As mentioned earlier, my being (a), a foreign-funded researcher, (b), a gender studies teacher and (c) a divorced single mother might create a social backlash against me in the field, and the participants might not feel comfortable interacting with me given my social status. For this reason, I plan to go into the field with my daughter and live there as a family. I will tell them that my husband is working in his home-town.

#### 9. Data privacy

Once I have conducted an interview or a set of interviews, I will assign a letter to each of the families (e.g. family A) and assign a number to the research participants within the families (e.g. A1, A2, etc.). This will help me in keeping their names and identifying information confidential in case I plan to take help in transcription. The number-name list will be kept password protected in e-drive so that no one can access it except me. For reasons of transparency, I will share this document and transcripts with my supervisors. My final research findings will be shared in my thesis monograph, which will be publically available online and in UvA library. I will keep the hard-copies of the transcripts and their English translations until five years of completion and discard them afterwards. The soft copy will be kept safe for the record and if I want to use it later. I will endeavour to do justice to my data, by trying to keep an open mind. Above all, my intention will be to understand reasons underlying particular viewpoints of participants, whether I agree with these or not. I will keep a daily research journal too, among other things, note observations concerning my feelings and reactions to views expressed by participants, for example, during participant observation. I will use these journal entries to examine how I may be shaping the research process and data and to identify ways in which I can prevent inserting too much of myself in the research, particularly in terms of what participants share with me. In addition, when writing up my dissertation, I will be open about the limitations of my research and reflect on the ways in which my positionality may have shaped the kinds of questions I posed, the lens I have applied in interpreting data as well as how I strove to overcome the possible limitations this lens could pose in terms of doing justice to what participants share with me.

#### 10. Publication ethics

In my thesis monograph and the research articles, I will be publishing based on the data, I will be transparent in explaining the methods I have used to gather, treat, and analyze the data. I do not foresee any ethical issues in terms of being transparent about my research methods, as long as the anonymity of research participants is maintained. I will publish the work for well-reputed national (Pakistan) and international social sciences journals, which are open access, as I believe in open and free access to information. My publication language will be English. My thesis monograph will be published by The University of Amsterdam. In my publications, I will keep my participants anonymous to ensure their safety. I will also welcome and respond to any criticism of my dissertation and publications thus maintaining good ethical standards. I will conduct the interviews in Urdu or Punjabi language (local language of the village, and my mother tongue also), transcribe them in Urdu, and then translate the data in English. Data loss is possible in this process as some words may not translate well. I will seek to prevent such loss by using original terms used by participants and providing the English translation that comes closest to the original terms in brackets. I believe that by being transparent, open to criticism, and acknowledging my limitations as a human being will be the best solution of ensuring a good ethical sense of my work.

#### Project history

2018-06-12 10:54:35 Project approved [by Yomi van der Veen]

Dear Nashia,

Thank you for the additional answers on the board's questions.

Your project has been reviewed again and is hereby approved.

One last note: please don't use e-drive (do you mean USB?) for storage of your data, but rather Surfdrive.

Or take a look at [rdm.uva.nl](http://rdm.uva.nl) for more tips and information on datamanagement.

The receipt of your project is hereby acknowledged and archived as 2018-AISSR-9178.

Please use this file number in future correspondence.

Modifications of the concerning project should be submitted to the Ethics Review Board for evaluation.

The best of luck with your fieldwork!

Regards,

Yomi van der Veen,  
Member of the Ethics Review Board.

2018-06-04 21:05:09 Project submitted for ERB review. [by Nashia Ajaz]

2018-05-29 12:16:51 Additional information requested [by Yomi van der Veen]

Dear Nashia,

Thank you for your ethical reflections. The board thinks they are well put and thought through. However there remain a few remarks and additional questions:

1. Anonymity: why do you choose to delete the data instead of storing it in a secure and safe place?
2. Data storage: where do you store your data?
3. The board advises to use verbal consent instead of written consent.
4. Recordings might not be necessary in this situation?
5. Your choice to name the FJW University as affiliation instead of UvA, is it fictional or the truth?
6. Lastly, the board worries about vulnerability. First, could you reflect on the vulnerability of your participants. You will speak to different family members who each have a different vulnerability. Can anyone speak freely with you? Do you speak with the bride? Please reflect on this power dynamic within families. Secondly, please reflect a bit more on your own vulnerability. In case someone finds out that you're a divorced, single mom, what would that mean? Will you and your daughter still be safe? Do you have a back up plan?

To submit the above-mentioned information, your project appears in the list of "Open Projects" under "My Projects". Here you can modify the general project information as well as the required file attachments and resubmit your project for review.

Please keep in mind that formal approval by the Ethics Review Board is mandatory before starting your research.

Regards,

Yomi van der Veen,  
Member of the Ethics Review Board

2018-05-02 09:08:33 Project submitted for ERB review. [by Nashia Ajaz]

2018-05-02 07:42:04 Project created [by Nashia Ajaz]



## Annex 13

### Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Policies in Pakistan from 1860-2021

| Serial Number | Document Title  | Policy Problem   | Prognosis   | Responsible actors and Beneficiaries  |
|---------------|---|--|---|---|
| 1             | The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929                             | the solemnization of child marriages   | Restraining child marriages through:<br>Punishing the spouse (if above 18) with an imprisonment of one-month, or with fine which may extend to 1000 rupees, or with both.<br>Punishing the performer, conductor, contractor with an imprisonment of one-month, or with fine which may extend to 1000 rupees, or with both.<br>Punishing the parents/ guardians with an imprisonment of one-month, or with fine which may extend to 1000 rupees, or with both  | 1. Spouse (if above 18)<br>2. Parents/ guardians having the "charge of minor"<br>3. The third party referred to as the person who "solemnizes," the child marriage as someone who "performs, conducts, or directs" the child marriage |
| 2             | (Punjab) Women's Rights to Agricultural Land Ordinance, 1959      | Hindu widow women not getting the agricultural land inheritance  | When a Hindu man dies intestate, his widow/s shall get the share of agricultural land equal to that of his son(s);<br>When a Hindu man living in a joint family dies intestate, his widow/s will get the same share of the agricultural land as the deceased husband had  | 1. Sons<br>2. Grandsons<br>3. Family members  |
| 3             | Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961                                | Succession.<br>Marriage Registration.<br>Polygamy.<br>Divorce.<br>Dissolution of marriage otherwise divorce.<br>Maintenance.<br>Dower  | Orphan children will get a share from their grandfather's property if their father has not got his share.<br>Only licensed <i>Nikah</i> Registrars shall solemnize marriages and they shall duly submit the <i>Nikah-nama</i> form to the union council for each of the marriage.<br>No man shall do a second marriage if his first wife is alive except with the previous permission in writing from union council.<br>When the husband pronounces <i>Talaq</i> (divorce), he shall register it to the union council as soon as possible, and the union council shall give the couple a time of 90-days for reconciliation (if they want to).<br>If the right to divorce is delegated to the wife at the time of <i>Nikah</i> , she can exercise it like the husband would do.<br>If a husband fails to maintain his wife and keep equality between his wives, the wife(ves) can go to the union council and the chairman may issue a certificate specifying | 1. Families<br>2. Men<br>3. Union council<br>4. <i>Nikah</i> registrars   |
| 4             | The Child Marriage Restraint (Punjab Amendment) Ordinance, 1971   | the solemnization of child marriages   | the amount which shall be paid as maintenance by the husband. Same is the case if a father fails to maintain his children.<br>The amount and mode of payment shall be written in the <i>Nikah-nama</i> form, and the <i>Mahr</i> (footnote 12) shall be made available by the husband to the wife on demand   | Same as in the original law   |
| 5             | Muslim Family Laws (Punjab Amendment) Act, 1975                   | Same as the original, revised due to some punctuation mistakes in the original document  | Further amendment of the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, in its application to the Punjab   |   |
| 6             | Protection Against Harassment of Women at The Workplace Act, 2010 | Harassment faced by women in the workplace   | Definition and description of what includes sexual harassment.<br>Every public and private organization to form an inquiry committee comprising of senior and junior employees.<br>Inquiry Committee to give their recommendations on the reported harassment case within 30-days.<br>The competent authority to implement the given recommendations.<br>Any aggrieved party can appeal within 30-days to the appointed federal or provincial ombudsperson.<br>Any aggrieved party can then appeal to the provincial governor   | 1. Employer/ Competent authority<br>2. Employee<br>3. Inquiry Committee<br>4. Ombudsperson<br>5. Colleagues<br>6. Provincial Governor   |
| 7             | Labour Policy (2010)  | A "balanced" policy to enhance "social and economic well-being" of people, "revitalize economy," increase the level of productivity, promotion of investment, maximization of employment and spreading awareness about the rights and responsibilities of workers. | Legal Framework.<br>Advocacy: Rights of Workers and Employers.<br>Skill Development and Employment.<br>Manpower Export  | All workers and employers   |

|    |   |   |   |   |
|----|---|---|---|---|
| 8  | Criminal (Second Amendment) Act, 2011                                     | Law Amendment in Pakistan Penal Code (1860) for adding the description of "disfigurement" or "de-facement" and insertion of new sections about "hurt caused by corrosive substance," its explanation and punishment   | Disfigurement means disfiguring or dismember any organs or any parts of the human body organs impairing or injuring or coroding or deforming the symmetry or appearances of people. Whoever knowingly causes or attempts to cause hurt through a corrosive substance or a substance deleterious to human body if comes into contact or received into human body, swallowed, or inhaled, shall mean "hurt caused by corrosive substance" for example, acid, poison, explosive substance, heating substance, noxious thing, arsenic, etc. The punishment for hurt by corrosive substance is life imprisonment or imprisonment up to 14 years and a fine of minimum one million rupees.  | Assumingly all Pakistani women and men  |
| 9  | Criminal Law (Third Amendment) Act, 2011                                  | Amendment in Pakistan Penal Code (1860) to add a punishment for giving a female in marriage or otherwise in "badla-e-suth" (dispute settlement), wanni, or Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Policies in Pakistan Since 1929 to 2018 and insertion of a new chapter namely Offences against women containing description of offences for example, inheritance issues, forced marriages, marriage with Holy Quran, and rape. | Giving a female into marriage or otherwise compelling her to enter into marriage as a mean to settle a civil dispute or criminal liability shall be punishable with three to seven years of imprisonment and 500,000 rupees. Depriving any woman deceitfully or illegally from inheriting property shall be punishable with five to 10 years of imprisonment or one million rupees fine or both. Compelling a woman to enter into marriage shall be punishable with three to seven years of imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 rupees. Compelling or facilitating a marriage with the Holy Quran shall be punishable with three to seven years of imprisonment and a fine of five 500,000 rupees. Here, marriage with Holy Quran refers to a customary practice to compel women to remain unmarried for the rest of their lives and to not claim their share of inheritance. Provincial governments shall not have the power to suspend, remit, or commute any rape sentences | Assumingly all Pakistani women and men  |
| 10 | Punjab Partition of Immoveable Property Act 2012                          | Amendment and reformation of the law relating to speedy partition of immoveable property and to provide for ancillary matters   | Any owner of an immoveable property (for example, a house) may file a suit for partition of the property, giving details of the property, citing all other co-owners as defendants and attaching all the relevant documents in his reach or possession. The court shall hear all the defendants, and if there is a dispute, settle it through hearings, appointing a referee, internal auction, and an open auction.  | Property owners   |
| 11 | Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace (Amendment) Act, 2014 | Amendment in the Protection Against Harassment of Women at The Workplace Act (2010) to give the ombudsperson powers to undertake investigations on a complaint by the aggrieved party.  | The ombudsperson ( <i>Mohasib</i> ) may, on a complaint by any aggrieved person, "undertake any investigation into any allegation of mal-administration on the part of any Agency or any of its officers or employees."   | 1. Aggrieved party(ies)<br>2. Ombudsperson  |
| 12 | Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act 2014                              | Amendment of certain laws of the Punjab for purposes of fair representation of women in the decision-making process and their empowerment.  | In this amendment, different private and government educational and training institutions, and industries have fixed a quota for women at higher positions for example, syndicate, board of directors, etc. to assure significant contribution of women in the organization's decision-making.  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Various Universities</li> <li>2. Various Colleges</li> <li>3. Various Schools</li> <li>4. Various Research and Training Institutions</li> <li>5. The Punjab Metrobus Authority</li> <li>6. The Parks and Horticulture Authority</li> <li>7. The Punjab Power Development Board</li> <li>8. The Lahore King Road Authority</li> <li>9. The Punjab Food Authority</li> <li>10. The Punjab Holy Quran (Printing and Recording) Organization</li> <li>11. The Punjab Industrial Relations Organization</li> <li>12. The Punjab Examination Commission</li> <li>13. The Punjab Privatization Board</li> <li>14. The Punjab Procurement Regulatory Authority</li> <li>15. The Punjab Emergency Service Organization</li> <li>16. The Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Organization</li> <li>17. The Punjab Journalists Housing Foundation</li> <li>18. The Punjab Government Servants Housing Foundation</li> <li>19. The Lahore Arts Council</li> <li>20. The Punjab Housing and Town Planning Agency</li> <li>21. The Punjab Information Technology Board</li> </ol> |

|           |  |                     |  |   |   |
|-----------|--|---------------------|--|---|---|
|           |  |                     |  |   | 22. The Punjab Environmental Protection Organization<br>23. The Punjab Agriculture Research Board<br>24. The Punjab Irrigation and Drainage Authority<br>25. The Punjab Health Foundation<br>26. The Punjab <i>Bait-ul-Maal</i><br>27. The Employment of Children Organization<br>28. The Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Organization<br>29. The <i>Zakat</i> and <i>Ushr</i> Organization<br>30. The <i>Cholistan</i> Development Authority<br>31. The Punjab Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education<br>32. The Punjab Seed Corporation<br>33. The Punjab Council of the Arts<br>34. The Punjab Small Industries Corporation<br>35. The Punjab Fair Price Shops (Factories)<br>36. The Punjab Social Services Board<br>37. The Provincial Employees' Social Security Organization<br>38. The Punjab Minimum Wages Organization<br>39. The Punjab Government Servants Benevolent Fund<br>40. The Punjab Town Improvement Organization |
| <b>13</b> | Punjab Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act 2015 | Child Restraint Act | Further amendment of the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) to make it focused for the Punjab and revising the punishments for solemnization of child marriages | Restraining child marriages in Punjab through:<br>1. Punishing the spouse (if above 18) with up to six-months of imprisonment and fine of 50,000 rupees.<br>2. Punishing the performer, conductor, contractor with up to six-months of imprisonment and fine of 50,000 rupees.<br>3. Punishing the parents/ guardians with up to six-months of imprisonment and fine of 50,000 rupees | 1. Spouse (if above 18)<br>2. Parents/ guardians having the "charge of minor"<br>3. Third party referred to as the person who "solemnizes" the child marriage as someone who performs, conducts, or directs the child marriage  |

|           |   |                                      |  |   |   |
|-----------|---|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>14</b> | Punjab Revenue (Amendment) Act 2015                                   | Land Revenue Act (1967).             | Further amendment of the Punjab Land Revenue Act (1967).   | 1. The law is to "consolidate and amend" the laws pertaining the making and maintaining the records-of-rights, assessing and collecting the land-revenue, the appointing and functioning of the Revenue Officers and some other matters which are connected with the Land Revenue Administration in Punjab province.<br>2. In this amendment, the word "an adult male" is replaced with "an adult" in the article 24, stating "A summons issued by a Revenue Officer shall, if practicable, be served (a) personally on the person to whom it is addressed or, failing him, (b) on his authorised agent or (c) an adult male member of his family usually residing with him," in order to make it possible for women to be included in the process.<br>The rest is same as the original except for some punctuation mistakes. |   |
| <b>15</b> | Punjab Family Laws (Amendment) Act 2015                               | Muslim Family Laws Act               | Amendment in the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, (1961) after the 1975 amendment. The purpose is to further protect women from exploitation.   | It is amended that to solemnize marriages, the council shall grant licenses to one or more persons called "Nikah Registrars", who will carefully fill all the columns of the <i>Nikah-nama</i> form with specific answers of the bride and groom.<br>Different penalties have also been added for violating the law which includes imprisonment and fine.<br>It is also added that if a father does not maintain his child, the mother or grandmother may apply to the chairman of arbitration council to issue a certificate specifying the monthly maintenance of the child to be paid by their father.   | 1. Families<br>2. Men<br>3. Union council<br>4. <i>Nikah</i> registrars |
| <b>16</b> | Punjab Immoveable Property (Amendment) Act 2015                       | Partition of Immoveable Property Act | Same as the original, revised to omit a subsection saying that the court may appoint a referee to decide whether the disputed property is divisible or not.  |   |   |
| <b>17</b> | Criminal (Amendment) Offences in Name or Pretext of Honour) Act, 2016 | Law                                  | Amendment in the Pakistan Penal Code (1860), and the Code of Criminal Procedure, (1898) in order to prevent offences in the name or pretext of honour in Pakistan, which claims the lives of hundreds of victims every year.<br>The law says:<br>"Honour killings are common throughout Pakistan, claiming the lives of hundreds of victims every year. According to Aurat Foundation's statistics, 432 women were reportedly killed | It is amended that even if the <i>Wali</i> (guardian) may waive or forgive the murderer of murdering someone under their guardianship, the court may, giving regard to the facts and circumstances of the case, still decide to punish the murderer with death or life imprisonment provided the offence has been committed in the name or pretext of honour.<br>Assumingly all Pakistani women and men   |   |

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|   |  | <p>in the name of honour in Pakistan in 2012, 705 in 2011, 557 in 2010, 604 in 2009 and 475 in 2008. These figures do not include unreported cases or, indeed, the number of men who are often killed alongside women in the name of honour. Addressing the loopholes and lacunae in the existing laws is essential in order to prevent these crimes from being repeatedly committed.<sup>25</sup></p>   |   |
| <p><b>18</b> Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences Relating to Rape) Act, 2016</p> | <p>Amendment in the Pakistan Penal Code (1860), The Code of Criminal Procedure (1898), and <i>Qanun-e-Shahadat</i> (1981)</p>                  | <p>If a public servant entrusted with investigating a case of rape fails to carry out the investigation properly and breaches their duty, shall be punished with imprisonment of up to three years or a fine or both.</p> <p>If someone intentionally hampers, misleads, or jeopardizes an investigation or inquiry, he/she shall be punished with imprisonment for up to three years or a fine or both.</p> <p>A person who commits rape shall be punished for life imprisonment or death and fine.</p> <p>Whoever commits rape of a minor or a personal with a disability shall be punished with death or life imprisonment and fine.</p> <p>If a public servant, including a police officer, medical officer, or jailor, takes advantage of their official position commits rape, he shall be punished with life imprisonment, death, and fine.</p> <p>If someone prints or publishes the name of anything which reveals the identity of a rape victim, he/she will be punishable with imprisonment up to three years and fine.</p> <p>It is also added that the rape victim or preparator shall be taken for a medical examination by a registered medical practitioner working in a government hospital if the court thinks it is important.</p> <p>If a woman files a report of rape crime, the report will be written by/ in front of a female officer or a female family</p>   | <p>Assumingly all Pakistani women and men</p> |
| <p><b>19</b> Hindu Marriage Act, 2017</p>                                       | <p>Protection of the marriage, the family, the mother, and the child and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Hindu minorities</p> | <p>member or any other person with the consent of the complainant.</p> <p>If a rape victim needs free legal aid, the police officer shall provide him with a list of lawyers maintained by the provincial bar council for this purpose.</p> <p>Soon after a rape offence is committed, the victim shall give DNA samples to the medical practitioner with her consent or with the consent of her guardians.</p> <p>It is also amended that the court shall conclude the case reported under the offence of rape within three-months, failing which, the judge will be answerable to the chief justice.</p> <p>Marriages can only be solemnized if "both the parties are of sound mind and capable of giving a valid consent," both the parties are not below 18 years of age, both the parties are not within "prohibited relationships," which means any prohibited relationship as per laws, religions, and customs having force of law relating to Hindu persons, neither of the party has a spouse living at the time of marriage (except when a living female spouse cannot conceive with a child and medically declared to be so).</p> <p>Hindu marriages shall be registered in the form of <i>Shaadi</i><sup>25</sup> within 15-days of solemnization.</p> <p>When either of the husband or wife withdraws from society of the other without a reasonable excuse, the aggrieved party may file a complaint to the court for the restitution of conjugal rights. Here, the burden of proving an excuse "valid" is on the person who withdraws from society.</p> <p>A marriage can be terminated by filing a petition in the court if the either of the spouses has (a), treated the other with cruelty, (b), deserted (without valid reason) the spouse for a period of not less than two years, (c), has changed their religion, (d), unsound mind (resulting in abnormally aggressive or irresponsible conduct), (e), incurable leprosy, (f), a venereal disease in a</p> | <p>Hindu women and men living in Pakistan</p> |

<sup>25</sup> Hindu marriage registration form

|           |   |                               |   |
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|           |   |                               | <p>communicable for or HIV aids, (g). renounced the world by entering any religious order.</p> <p>A marriage can also be terminated if there has been no cohabitation between the parties for more than one year.</p> <p>A marriage termination application can also be filed in the court if the girl was not 18 years of age at the time of marriage, or if the husband marries again when his first wife is alive; or if the husband neglects or fails to provide maintenance for two years, if the husband has been sentenced for imprisonment for more than four years.</p> <p>A Hindu widow is entitled to marry with her own will and consent after a period of six-months of the death of her husband</p> |
| <b>20</b> | Punjab Protection Authority Act 2017      | Women Authority               | <p>Lack of a comprehensive, efficient, effective, and gender-equitable system for protection, relief, and rehabilitation of women against all forms of violence in Punjab</p> <p>Establishment of Punjab Women Protection Authority to Establish and manage protection centres in Punjab.</p> <p>Plan for protection system.</p> <p>Execute and implement the protection system and rehabilitation.</p> <p>Formulate and ensure minimum standards, Standard Operating Procedures, and Code of Conduct for people engaged in this system.</p> <p>Conduct research.</p> <p>Improve the protection centre and shelter homes for women</p> <p>Women and girls</p>   |
| <b>21</b> | National Education Policy (2017-2025)     | Education                     | <p>Literacy rate of 60 percent (10 years and above), and net participation rate of 72 percent at primary level of education.</p> <p>Islamic Education.</p> <p>Early Childhood Education.</p> <p>Literacy and Non-Formal Basic Education.</p> <p>Primary Education.</p> <p>Secondary Education.</p> <p>Technical and Vocational Education.</p> <p>Teacher Education.</p> <p>Examination and Testing Service.</p> <p>Assumingly all women, men, girls, and boys.</p>  |
| <b>22</b> | Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act 2018 | Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act | <p>Solemnization and registration of Sikh Marriages commonly known as Anand Karaj</p> <p>A Sikh male and Sikh female may contract a marriage in accordance with Sikh religion if (a), both the parties are of sound mind and not below 18 years of age, (b), enter into marriage with their free and full consent, (c), are not unlawfully related to each other.</p> <p>Sikh women and men living in Pakistan</p>  |
|           |   |                               | <p>The bride and the groom shall fill the Anand Karaj form and present it to the government certified Anand Karaj registrar within 30-days of marriage.</p> <p>If any of the spouses wishes to dissolve the marriage, he/she may write an application to the chairman Arbitration council who will try to help reconciliation for within 90-days, and if failed, shall declare the marriage dissolved.</p>  |

## Annex 14

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### Addendum to Figure and Table 9.1

In figure 9.1 and table 9.1, the decisions regarding “whom” to marry are denoted as “+” whereas the decisions regarding “when” to marry are marked as “X.” Four ++++ or XXXX mean the highest impact and one + or X means the lowest impact. “Nil” means no impact whatsoever.

To make figure 9.1, I coded using a + each of the time the participants had mentioned a family member participating in “whom” to marry decisions. Similarly, A X was used to code each of the time the participant mentioned a family member participating in “when” to marry decisions. The coding was done on my IDI transcripts, Fieldwork Journals, and daily observation schedules.

The highest number of + were for grandmothers’ participation in “whom” to marry decisions, counting 54, whereas the lowest number of + were for the brides’ mothers, counting 12. There were no + for the intended bride and her sisters.

The highest number of X were also for grandmothers’ participation in “when” to marry decision, counting 57, followed closely by the parents in law, counting 55. The lowest number of X were for the intended bride. There were no X for the intended bride’s grandfather, parents, brothers and sisters.

To arrive at table 9.1, I coded a + each of the tome the participants had mentioned an actor in “whom” to marry decisions. Similarly, a X was used to code each of the time the participants mentioned an actor in “when” to marry decisions. The coding was done on my IDI transcripts, Fieldwork Journals, and daily observation schedules.

The highest number of + were for immediate family members, counting 78, whereas the lowest number of + was for state policies, including the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), counting 7. There were no + for neighbors and peers.

The highest number of X were also for immediate family members, counting 68, closely followed by various norms, values, and beliefs (including religious), counting 64. The lowest number of X were for peers, counting 8, mentioned in the context of boys only. There were no X for neighbors, members of extended family and case, state policies, and non-state organizations.

## About the Book

This book is the author's doctorate dissertation, written at Amsterdam Institute of Social Sciences Research (AISSR) at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In this book, the author examines early marriage decision-making processes within families and across different caste groups in rural Punjab, Pakistan, and analyses these dynamics in relation to state and non-state women's empowerment and gender equality policies and programmes.

The analysis reveals the central role played by paternal grandmothers in early marriage decision-making processes, but only to the extent that these met the approval of paternal grandfathers, fathers, and elder brothers of the intended bride.

The author concludes by arguing that to develop a more comprehensive understanding of early marriage decision-making processes, it is necessary to (i) look beyond the father and beyond the family and (ii) attend to shifts in women's relative power as their position in the family changes. The author offers a series of recommendations to align better state and non-state policies and interventions with early marriage decision-making processes.



## About the Author

Nashia Ajaz is a researcher, teacher, and a Gender Policy Expert. Her specific research interests include issues intersecting gender with women's rights, child rights, and rights of transgender persons, particularly related to marriage, education, sexual harassment, and harmful cultural practices in the world.

Before enrolling in the Ph.D. program, Nashia used to spend most of her time with her daughter, travelling the world, and eating. She will be doing the same while you read this book!

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