Psycho-Social Factors Contributing to Marriage Proposal Rejection among Pakistani Men and Women: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract
This qualitative research explore the experiences and psycho-social factors of marriage proposal rejection among Pakistani men and women. Adopting a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to elucidate the lived experiences of those who have experienced proposal rejection. The main research question examined was: What are the psycho-social factors of marriage proposal rejection? Six participants (Three male, Three female) who were previously rejected in their marriage proposals were selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered using in-depth interviews, with an interview protocol being derived from the available literature. The research utilized the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is concerned with people's subjective experiences and how they make sense of them. Through the analytical steps of Smith et al. (2012), data analysis produced 10 themes, 4 of which were superordinate themes: social standards, concerns, psychological factors for proposal rejection, and coping mechanisms employed to deal with rejection. Further, 26 sub-themes were produced for the male participant and 22 for the female participant. The results point towards societal expectations, individual and family concerns, psychological effects, and coping mechanisms related to marriage proposal rejection. This research presents meaningful information on the dominant societal norms underpinning marriage proposal acceptance and rejection, with implications for psychological counseling, social awareness, and subsequent studies on marital decision-making in Pakistan.
Keywords: marriage proposal rejection, psycho-social factors, phenomenology, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

Introduction

Marriage proposal rejection in Pakistan is driven by a multifaceted interaction of psychological and social forces deeply ingrained in societal expectations and cultural norms. The understanding of these forces is essential, considering the profound influence, such rejection can have on the mental health and social well-being of individuals.

Marriage in Pakistani society is not just a relationship between two people but a family union that maintains social status and honor. As such, the standards for accepting or rejecting marriage proposals tend to go beyond individual compatibility to incorporate factors like family background, socioeconomic status, physical appearance, and educational level. These social norms may result in proposal rejections due to perceived shortcomings in beauty standards or family reputation. For example, women who fail to meet perfect beauty standards will have difficulty in obtaining marriage proposals, which can impact their physical and mental well-being (Iram & Muazzam, 2015).

For women, rejection of proposals can lead to low self-esteem and negative body image since cultural pressures focus on physical looks as a primary measure of marital eligibility (Iram & Muazzam, 2015). Unmarried women above the age of thirty are also culturally stigmatized, resulting in psychological distress and social isolation. Similarly, men may experience rejection due to factors such as inadequate financial stability or lack of a prestigious occupation, which are often deemed essential for fulfilling traditional provider roles (Malik et al., 2023).

Proposal rejection refers to the rejection men or women have felt or faced from families throughout the matchmaking process and as a result of this rejection, they are met with a slew of negative responses (Beenish & Humayun, 2017). One of the most significant stages of a person's life is receiving a marriage proposal. There are still conventions and traditions of getting married by receiving proposals, even if there is a growing trend of getting married based on personal preference. Particularly in Pakistan, a girl can receive a marriage proposal at any age. It is extremely difficult for some men to send a marriage proposal with his choice because it is still illegal for men and women to mix in many houses.

However, recent data suggests that the prevalence of arranged marriages in Pakistan is higher. For instance, a survey reported by "The News International" indicates that approximately 81% of Pakistanis have arranged marriages, with 85% of women and 77% of men marrying based on their parents' wishes (Gallup Pakistan, 2024). Marriage bureaus and online platforms like Shaadi.com, Rishta Pakistan, and Mrs. Khan's marriage bureau aim to streamline the search process by matching preferences such as religion, education, profession, and family background.

Lo and Aziz (2009) found that these platforms provide a sense of agency, especially to urban, educated individuals, while still accommodating traditional family involvement. Rehman & Qadir (2021) observed in their study on matchmaking in South Asia that while

matrimonial websites facilitate convenience and choice, they often replicate traditional caste, class, and beauty norms through search filters.

Sultana & Riaz (2020) argue that modern matchmaking often involves commodified checklists where superficial traits like skin tone, height, and family wealth are still prioritized.

Psychosocial aspects are traits and elements that affect people's social and psychological well-being (Sam, 2023). They characteristics can be used to characterize people in connection to their social surroundings and the ways in which they impact their bodily and mental well-being. Psychosocial considerations encompass both psychological risk factors and protective psychosocial resources. Social networks and social support are examples of psychosocial resources in the social environment. Self-esteem, feeling of coherence, and coping skills or mastery are essential psychological resources. Vital exhaustion, depression, pessimism, and anger are psychological risk factors (Maddock, 2024).

 Men and women both experienced these kind of factors after rejection. In Pakistani society, women frequently face evaluations based on physical attributes during marriage proposals. A study by Malik et al., (2023) highlights that women are often subjected to judgments regarding their skin tone, body shape, and overall appearance, leading to feelings of inadequacy and psychological distress. Such societal pressures can result in diminished self-esteem and mental health challenges.

Zaman and Naqvi (2023) explored perceived gender discrimination among women in Pakistan, finding that societal norms often dictate strict criteria for women's behavior and appearance, especially concerning marriage. Women reported facing discrimination based on their physical appearance, with societal expectations pressuring them to conform to specific standards to be deemed suitable for marriage.

In a typical Pakistani society, it has somewhat become mandatory for girls to get engaged/married by the age of 25 and in a guy's case, you should tie the knot by not more than the age of 30! *Warna log kiya kaheingy, beta?* In Pakistani society, arranged marriages often involve the prospective groom's family assessing the bride based on criteria such as physical appearance, domestic abilities, and family background. This process places significant pressure on the girl's family to present their daughter in a manner that aligns with societal ideals of femininity and obedience. Studies have shown that these expectations are deeply embedded in cultural norms, where women are often expected to conform to traditional roles of caregiving and subservience.

First and foremost is physical appearance; if you are tall, balanced, and have a fair complexion, you have a decent chance of winning an election. Otherwise, the first sight has failed you. Another factor contributing to the rejection of girls in today's society is greed. This study evolves socio-cultural dynamics in marriage practices—particularly the shift from traditional male-centric evaluations to a growing interest in the bride's family's

financial status, often linked to dowry expectations. This trend is especially prevalent in South Asian cultures, and several sociological and psychological studies have examined it.

Research by Karim and Kakar (2025) examined the impact of gender roles on women's educational aspirations post-marriage in Balochistan. The study found that societal expectations often prioritize women's domestic responsibilities over their educational goals, limiting their opportunities for personal and professional growth. This dynamic reflects a broader cultural trend where women's roles are confined to the household, affecting their autonomy and self-fulfillment.

Kaur (2004) found that socio-economic changes and growing consumerism in India have led to increased demand for financial contributions from the bride's family, thereby shifting attention to their economic standing.

Banerjee et al. (2013) in *"The Marriage Market Returns to Education for Women"* reported that with rising education and job prospects for women, grooms' families now assess the bride's earning potential, treating it as a resource for the marital household.

In case of selecting the right man for a girl, the pitiful criteria is that his income matters, not his face and complexion. And also if he has own house or not. How much big his family is. Proposal rejection generate several obstacles for both gender, resulting in a drop in morale and the formation of negative thoughts, which ultimately have a significant impact on their self-confidence, shattering their personalities, and developing inferiority complex. As a result, they are limited in their ability to serve as a helpful part of the family, and as a result, they lose their self-esteem and no longer regard themselves as a worthy member of society.

There are many researchers conducted on women in context of marriage proposal rejection but this is not a phenomena that just faced by women. Men also faced rejection from women and their families. But they hide it because society do not give right to men to express their feelings and emotions. In Pakistan, marriage is deeply intertwined with cultural and societal expectations. Gender roles and norms also play a major role in influencing marital choices, bringing with them widespread differences in the way men and women undergo proposal rejection. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) points out that gender inequality is still a major issue within Pakistan, as deeply rooted norms impact the empowerment and decision-making of women (UNDP, 2023).

Perceived social support contributes significantly to one's mental state, which would have an influence on marital decisions. Vaingankar et al. (2020) identified correlations among mental disorders and subjective social support, suggesting the possibility that one with lower levels of social support could have elevated psychological distress affecting their marital eligibility.

Another study findings revealed that women who have insecure attachment styles especially avoidant attachment style experienced more rejection of marriage proposals. In contrast, older women feel more frustration, hostility, and inner anger towards the proposal rejection that they experience. Females who face rejection more than 10 times are more

frustrated, and exhibit more internal and external anger. The findings were explored in terms of the impact of culture on females seeking counselling services (Beenish & Humayun, 2017).

Men has also specific criteria for marriage. One research findings revealed that majority women said they would prefer their potential partner to have a job, own a business and have a career. Some said they would prefer their spouse to be taller than them. And on the other hand, men said they would prefer potential partner to have a homemaking skills, to know cooking and take their family (Asma, 2020). Another research findings revealed that majority females expressed their desire to have a husband who owns a house and earns twice as them (Desai & Andrist, 2010).

Due to rejection, women have encountered a variety of mental health issues as a result of proposal rejection, including resentment, violence, passive aggression, anxiety, insecurity, sadness, poor self-esteem, and cognitive distortions (Iram & Muazzam, 2016). Previous findings showed that rejection was linked to anxiety, sadness, and aggression in men (Macdonald, 2010).

Gender Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 1999)

Gender role theory explains how societal expectations based on gender shape behavior, including decisions about marriage. In Pakistan, rigid gender roles influence marriage proposal acceptance or rejection, with men expected to be financial providers and women expected to conform to traditional beauty and domesticity standards. Women can turn down proposals because of issues of financial security, family honor, or societal expectations of marriage age and beauty. Men can be rejected if they are not financially secure or do not fit traditional masculine ideals of providers.Gender norms are responsible for psychological distress after proposal rejection because men and women have to cope with societal expectations.

Rationale of Study

Marriage is a significant institution in Pakistani society founded largely on religious, family, and social values (Chaudhry & Malik, 2021). A choice to accept or reject a marriage proposal is a life-changing choice on the grounds of a plethora of psycho-social determinants, but phenomenal study has been minimal concerning the exploration of these dynamics. Understanding why individuals reject marriage proposals can provide insights into shifting social trends, personal priorities, and evolving gender roles in Pakistani society (Khan et al., 2020).

Existing research primarily focuses on aspects that influence marriage decisions, such as economic well-being, caste, and support from the family (Jahangir & Jabeen, 2019). However, little focus has been placed on the personal feelings and psychological basis for rejection in proposals. Personal ambitions, career aspirations, class differences, and psychological concerns—such as avoidance of commitment, past trauma, or personal incompatibility—can be crucial determinants of rejection decisions (Ali & Bibi, 2022).

Moreover, gendered expectations also provide another layer of complication for marriage proposal rejection in Pakistan. Women are likely to be subjected to family and societal pressure to adhere to proposals that are deemed "acceptable" in terms of cultural standards, whereas men may face monetary and social standing concerns affecting their ability to propose or be accepted (Shahid & Farooq, 2018).Investigating these views phenomenologically can serve to reveal the lived experiences of Pakistani women and men in making marriage choices and inform a more complete understanding of current marriage trends.

With the rising tide of individualism in decision-making and shifting socio-economic circumstances within Pakistan, exploring the psycho-social causes for refusals in marriage proposals assumes significance (Raza & Abbas, 2021).So, this study aims to explore the lived experiences and psycho social factors related to marriage proposal rejection in Pakistani men and women.

Research Questions

1. What are the psychological and social factors related to marriage proposal rejection?
2. What are the underlying or hidden factors that contribute to marriage proposal rejection for men?
3. What are the underlying or hidden factors that contribute to marriage proposal rejection for women?

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to choose the participants for the qualitative interviews. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy in which researchers deliberately choose instances or participants based on particular traits or standards pertinent to the study question in order to collect detailed, rich data. Adult male and female who had experienced marriage proposal rejection were approached in Lahore. Initially 5 men and women were approached for the interviews, out of which, 2 (1 male and 1 female) finally completed the interviews. Most of the participants were aged between 25-40 years. Participants whose parents are not alive were excluded. Participant's who are married and in the process of getting married were excluded.

Information Tools for Data

Demographic Information Sheet

Participants' personal, family, financial, and social details were included in the demographic data (e.g. age, years of formal education, number of siblings, employment status, family income, number of times a participant had their proposal rejected, etc.).

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Based on the research goal and the real-life experiences of participants who had their marriage proposal rejected, a semi-structured interview technique was developed. Prior to being finalized and given to the recruited participants, the interview questions were piloted on two participants—one male and one female—using indicators derived from the body of current literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Two experts from the University of the

Punjab's Institute of Applied Psychology examined the interview process. The faculty members were chosen on the basis of their subject-matter knowledge. They believed that the questions aligned with the study's purpose and would aid in examining Pakistani men's and women's lived experiences and perspectives on marriage proposal rejection.

Ethical Considerations

The American Psychological Association's ethical guidelines for human subjects research were adhered to. Concerns like the ability to leave the study, getting permission to record the interview on audio, and protecting the privacy of the participants' identities were all taken into consideration. Every participant filled out an informed consent form after being given the necessary information regarding the procedure, its goal, and ethical rights.

Procedure

The interviews were conducted after obtaining the individuals' consent and institutional approvals. Carefully transcribed interviews were compared to the recordings to make sure no information was omitted. To record the codes, the initial step was reading the transcribed material several times. The second step involved coding the data's developing components, counting and transforming the pertinent codes into unique but internally consistent subordinate themes. It was therefore decided to combine these subordinate themes into superordinate themes. The final step was further classifying the superordinate themes into master superordinate themes.

Findings

To examine data gathered from interviews, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed in this study. IPA enables one to comprehend how participants make sense of themselves and the world (Giorgi, 2011) and, in addition, how they make sense of themselves and their own experiences. That is, it gives the researcher interpretation of the participant responses as well as examining them. Analysis was carried out in three stages, that are breakdown, exploration, and integration of text (Ishaq & Rafique, 2021). This led the researcher closer to the subjective accounts of the perceptions, and experiences of the rejection by the participants.

This study outlines the understanding of the perceptions and lived experiences of the marriage proposal rejection among Pakistani men and women by using IPA. In the following section, results are discussed in terms of the superordinate themes that emerged. The following master table depicts the superordinate themes, superordinate and subordinate themes along with the supporting verbatim seperately for both men and women.

Table I

Emergent Themes Regarding the Perception of Rejected Male and Female

Superordinate Theme 1: Social Standards (Male)
Subordinate Themes:
● Nature of Job
● Monthly Earning

- Smoking, Drugs/Anything
- Any other bad habit
- Friends Company
- Size of house
- Any other property
- Bank Balance

Themes

- *"My income is not reasonable. In future how did we manage with this income? While in my opinion my income is quite reasonable".Wealth is ultimately not something that we can predict and rizk is entirely dependent upon Allah."*
- *"The other family asked me some questions related to my physical health and my habits of smoking or any other bad habits. Whether I smoke or not, or involved in any unholy act".*

Superordinate Theme 1: Social Standards (Female)

Subordinate Themes

- Height (tall/short)
- Skin complexion (fair/dull)
- Over-Weight
- Cooking
- Stitching
- House (Location)
- Father's employment
- Dowry issues

Themes

- *"People see multiple things like how dose girl look like, is she or her family welcoming or not, nature of family, manners, does she know cooking or stitching? One major focus is that girl should be very pretty.I faced rejection on my skin color (how much dull color you have), weight (not slim or smart), and height (short) like I have to clean cobwebs (laugh)."*
- *"I faced rejection on the basis of poor cooking skills and having no experience of stitching. Don't know stitching. If Govt. job then something could be happen otherwise no."*

Superordinate Theme 2: Family Concerns (Man)

Subordinate Theme

- Cast
- Sect
- Family System (Nuclear/Joint)
- Unmarried Siblings
- Divorced sister/widow sister

Themes

- *"An aunt came to my house for proposal and asked me whether I live with my family after marriage. Some people point out the fault unnecessarily and reject the proposal, like my friend face rejection only because his sister got divorced and she stayed with him. I faced rejection due to caste difference that girls family don't get married out of caste".*

- *"How does house look like, where we live, how much saving my father did, we have no other property except this house where we are living. I understand there should be a basic standards of living, the boy should be educated enough, perhaps have a job with a decent salary, and be able to afford a home...however money is not everything. Wealth comes from Allah swt, and He can take it away whenever he wishes."*

Superordinate Theme 2: Family Concerns (Woman)

Subordinate Theme

- Cast
- Sect
- Family system (Nuclear/Joint)

Themes

- *"I faced rejection on basis of cast issues and family system. As I have joint family system and I faced rejection on the basis of this. Like "Larki ka to khandan hi itna bara h. Vo sb rhty b akhty h. Hamy to choti family chahy, q k kal ko mera beta kis kis sy mily ga".*

- *"How does house look like, where we live, how much saving my father did, my father do nothing so I faced rejection so many time".*

Superordinate Theme 3: Psychological Factors (Man)

Subordinate Theme

- Anxiety when people come to see me (Negative emotions)
- Distress due proposal rejection (Negative emotions)
- Over thinking (Negative thoughts)
- Low self confidence (Negative thoughts)
- Low mood when think about sister's wedding (Low mood)
- Irritation (Low mood)

Themes

- *"Its not a big deal for me to face rejection. I feel depressed when my mother wants that my and my sisters marriage fixed on time.".*

- "*I am 27 years old. I have been rejected by three families based on multiple factors the boy doesn't have his own house, the boy's income is very low, and the boy is not financially stable. All these words result in the loss of all my confidence that I am not good enough to do anything and low my self-esteem. I am tired of rejection and feel like a loser all the time".*

- *"A aunt came to my house for proposal and asked, did you stay with your family*

after getting married? When did your sister get married? your sister stayed at home after marriage? All these questions cause irritation in me. On the other hand, my mother also worried about my sister's wedding. All these things result in low mood and get frustrated".

Superordinate Theme 3: Psychological Factors (Woman)

Subordinate Theme
- I feel pity on myself (Negative emotions)
- I Feels worthless (Negative emotions)
- Sympathies hurt move (Negative thoughts)
- Overthink about future (Negative thoughts)
- Low self confidence (Low mood)
- Don't want to get married (Low mood)

Themes
- *"Now this is very normal. People considers that it's their right to say no to girl's family on small things. Without thinking that what will happen with them and how much this thing affect girls and their families. I feel bad too that I'm not a showpiece. The other family always made me feel bad.I feel mentally disturbed. Sometimes I feel worthless. In that situation, people feel sorry for me that hurts me the most".*
- *"I know rejection is heartbreaking and still I handle this issue in a mature way. But people around me tried to reminds me that I face rejection many times and use words for me like "Oh Bechari" this hurts me the most and results in over thinking that like other girls I am not so pretty, my complexion is not fair, don't have proper job. All these things results in low mood".*
- *"I faced rejection multiple times in my life. I burst into tears. The pain pierced my heart. I could hardly breathe. The pain was excruciating. I felt shattered into a million pieces. My life would never be the same after facing rejection. No matter how you slice it, the message is: "You are no longer good enough. This lowers my self confidence and brings a feeling of I don't want to get married in my life."*

Superordinate Theme 4: Coping Strategies (Man)

Subordinate Theme
- My parents and I feel disturbed (Emotion Focused)
- Mother cries (Emotion Focused)
- Detach from society (Emotion Focused)
- Keep myself busy (Problem Focused)
- Do double duty or work overtimes (Problem Focused)
- Everyone is made in pairs. I'll find one when Allah will's (Religious Focused)

Theme
- *"My parent always got emotional after rejection. I feel bad too that I'm not a*

showpiece. Especially my mother cried a lot.After this, I detached myself from everyone including my family. I feel sad and guilt to think about my parents."

- *"After facing rejection, some coping strategies I used, to stable my mental health. I kept myself busy. I have a job so don't have time to think about that much about it".*

- *"I think religion is our great strength. It is the best healer. I always pray that Dear Allah! Kindly bless me with the best".*

Superordinate Theme 4: Coping Strategies (Woman)

Subordinate Theme
- My parents and I feel disturbed (Emotion Focused)
- Mother cries (Emotion Focused)
- Detach from society (Emotion Focused)
- Keep myself busy (Problem Focused)
- Work on my diet and exercise (Problem Focused)
- Everyone is made in pairs. I'll find one when Allah will's (Religious Focused)

Themes
- *"My parent always got emotional after rejection. I feel bad that I am not good enough to find a match for myself. I feel I am a showpiece who never got accepted by anyone. Especially my mother cried a lot. After this, I detached myself from everyone including my family. I feel sad and guilt to think about my parents."*

- *"After facing rejection, some coping strategies I used, to stable my mental health. I kept myself busy. I have a job so don't have time to think about that much about it. I tried to improve my physical appearance by working on my diet, exercise and I also go to dermatologist for improving my skin".*

- *"I think religion is our great strength. It is the best healer. I always pray that Dear Allah! Kindly bless me with the best*

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the significant psycho-social factors contributing to marriage proposal rejections among Pakistani men and women. The themes emerging from the participants' experiences reflect deeply rooted societal expectations, family concerns, psychological impacts, and coping mechanisms, all of which shape individuals' perceptions and responses to rejection. This discussion contextualizes these findings within existing literature and theoretical frameworks, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

One of the most salient themes that emerged in the study is the significance of social standards in marriage proposal rejection. Men and women both experience rejection on account of social expectations that typically center around money, looks, and gendered roles. Economic considerations like the nature of job, monthly salary, ownership of property, and bank balance became key determinants of marriage acceptability for men. This is consistent with earlier findings that financial stability is an important factor in marriage in collectivist societies such as Pakistan (Ali & Azam, 2018). Most participants felt resentful at being evaluated on the basis of their financial status instead of their individual traits, affirming that wealth is a foremost determining factor for a man's suitability. In addition, behaviors like smoking, drug consumption, and peer influence were also examined, capturing social worries regarding character and behavioral consistency (Khan & Hussain, 2019).

For women, rejection was often due to physical characteristics like height, complexion of the skin, and weight, and domestic abilities like cooking and sewing. These results are in line with the literature that points to the deeply entrenched preference for beauty in South Asian marriage markets (Hoplock and Stinson (2021).

Women who fell outside the common standards of beauty or domestic know-how were not as desirable and were enforcing traditional gender norms stressing the importance for a woman in taking care of the home. Economic factors involved, including dowry and fathers' jobs, emphasized the money-related aspects entailed in women's marriageable prospects.

Family-related issues were another primary cause of marriage proposal rejections. For men, familial organization and background, such as caste, sect, family type (nuclear or joint), and whether siblings were married or not, were significant factors. Having a divorced or widowed sister was a major issue, carrying stigma that influenced marriage opportunities since some families considered it a burden or an indication of instability. These results are consistent with South Asian cultural values that highly value family reputation and shared identity in marriage choices (Bari, 2017).

Likewise, for women, caste, sect, and family system were key obstacles. Women belonging to joint families tended to be rejected, with families preferring brides from small families to avoid possible family conflicts. This is an indication of the desire for nuclear family forms in modern urban areas, where privacy and autonomy are cherished (Sultana, 2021). Moreover, socio-economic status, such as father's work and residential conditions, also had a significant impact, highlighting the class-aware nature of marriage choice in Pakistan.

The frequent experiences of rejection caused serious psychological distress to both men and women, which is reflected in the themes of negative emotions, low self-confidence, and overthinking. Men's rejection based on economic insecurity and family origin caused depression, frustration, and low self-esteem. This confirms earlier research in which financial hardship was linked to mental illness in young men within patriarchal cultures (Javed & Ahmad, 2020).

Women, in contrast, underwent self-pity, feelings of worthlessness, and reluctance for marriage because of multiple rejections. Many participants described the feeling of being objectified instead of treated as an individual, an experience that is in line with feminist arguments over marriage markets objectifying women on the basis of looks and housekeeping abilities (Fatima & Saleem, 2019). The social stigmatization following rejection also deepened their pain since family and society tended to confirm negative perceptions about themselves, promoting low mood and increased doubt.

Despite the challenges, individuals used different coping mechanisms to decrease their emotional distress. Emotion regulation processes involved social withdrawal, self-isolation, and disclosure of emotional distress to relatives. Most participants said that their mothers wept after rejection episodes, which indicates the shared nature of distress prevalent among Pakistani families. These results agree with existing research showing a high correlation between family honor and emotional well-being among collectivist communities (Niaz, 2021).

Problem-focused coping strategies included staying busy with work activities, practicing physical exercise, and seeking self-improvement. Some women aimed to enhance their physical appearance through diet changes and skin care practices, reflecting the adoption of dominant societal standards of beauty. Men, at the same time, worked extra hours and maximized their work efforts, reflecting the belief that financial success would advance their marriage chances.The large majority of participants employed religious coping strategies, predicated on the idea that marriages are preordained by Allah and that the ideal partner would come at the right time. This is similar to Islamic models of resilience studies, which have highlighted the involvement of religion in providing psychological support in times of adversity (Rehman & Haque, 2018).Limitations and Future Recommendations

- The study was conducted on a small population, which may not be generalizable to the diverse socio-economic and cultural background of the wider Pakistani population.
- The study only captures the gendered experience of rejection of marriage proposals; however, due to the dominant social norms, some deeper psychological and emotional consequences may have been overlooked. For instance, women may have downplayed reported emotional suffering due to societal expectations of strength, and men may have downplayed their vulnerabilities due to cultural norms of masculinity.
- A mixed approach of interviewing with psychological testing could provide a richer insight. The study presents an account of the participants' experience at a specific point in time. However, the psychological effect of rejection may change over time, and coping mechanisms may also evolve.

Implications

The research establishes the high social and economic standards that characterize marriage compatibility. Social campaigns and media portrayal have to work towards dismantling such unrealistic expectations, encouraging greater tolerance of varied economic status, physical features, and family backgrounds in marriage choices.The pain of continued rejection highlights the importance of accessible mental health treatment, particularly for young women and men who are feeling reduced self-esteem and emotional distress. Pre-marital counseling, offered by schools and community organizations, needs to incorporate counseling on how to better handle rejection in a healthier way.The study identifies the role of families in maintaining rigid expectations leading to psychological distress. The debate in public, school interventions, and debates at the community level need to confront harmful caste-based, sectarian, and gender-based biases in the selection of marriage. Parents need to be encouraged to consider compatibility over seeming traits.The study reveals the discriminatory beauty norms that determine women's marriage prospects. Schools, advertising, and the media can be powerful in promoting body positivity, self-acceptance, and redefining women's roles as more than physical beauty and domesticity. Similarly, redefining masculinity narratives can un-stigmatize men's financial struggles.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal the stringent social and cultural demands that result in marriage proposal rejections in Pakistan. For men, economic success, social status, and family history are central to being accepted, whereas women are primarily assessed on physical appearance, domestic skills, and socio-economic status. The psychological effect of repeated rejection is significant, leading to inadequacy, tension, and distress. However, people employ various coping mechanisms, such as emotional support from family members, efforts at self-enhancement, and religious faith, to deal with these issues. The findings suggest the necessity of instant social consciousness and cultural change to address unrealistic expectations about marriage and to reduce the stigma of rejection. Promoting more balanced expectations of marriage, improving mental health services, and

cultivating self-esteem independent of material and physical attributes can help build a healthier and more egalitarian culture of marriage in Pakistan.

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