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Thesis Title

**Dowry and Social Mobility: A Sociological Study of Post Marital Status of Women in
Their in Laws in District Layyah**

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Abstract

The research studies how expensive dowries affect women's living arrangements with their in-laws after marriage in Layyah District of Punjab Province in Pakistan. Dowry maintains its position as a fundamental social custom which influences how married women gain respect and authority and social acceptance in their communities. This research study aimed to explore how dowry practices create social status for brides while investigating the correlation between dowry payments and the social status of women within their husbands' families. The researchers collected data through structured and semi-structured interviews which they conducted with 10 married women who had spent one to five years living with their in-laws. The researchers used convenience and purposive sampling methods to choose participants from various villages located in Layyah District. The research followed Social Stratification Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of Cultural Capital and Social Reproduction. The research results demonstrate that expensive dowries create a strong positive connection with the post-marital status of women in social relationships. The women who brought high dowries to their marriages obtained higher social status and better treatment from their families which resulted in their expanded control over household matters. The study finds that dowry remains a fundamental element which determines a bride's standing within her husband's family but actual women's empowerment requires educational access and equal rights together with economic autonomy instead of dowry customs and material possessions.

Introduction

As it is believed, dowry is one of the socially established aspects in South Asia, and by default, in Pakistan, insofar as factors of marital relationships and family are concerned, including the status of women. During ancient times dowry was more of a publicity to be received by the female when the person dies or when he or she requires funding but eventually it became a social necessity and family reputations. This has led to the situation where marriage is sometimes an exchange hence validating patriarchal culture and a gender inequality cycle is enhanced.

In Pakistan, dowry is not an aspect of marriage that is bought as an individual gift. It affects the voice of the bride, respect and the freedom of the bride in the natal homeland. Social-economic factors also are worthy of note: in many instances the family of bride become bankrupt to cover dowry, in others, it takes loans or sells assets. A bride who is well endowed in terms of dowry is, on the contrary, of superior social standing, more decisive and be diminished as well.

To focus on the Layyah District in Punjab, dowry is the coming out as a manifestation of the differentiation of classes. Dowries in high-society families are typically gold jewelry, automobiles, good furniture and other costly household items, not simply to show off, but also to earn social credit. In middle-class households, dowries tend to be furniture, consumer electronics, a modest amount of gold, and apparel. Dowry in lower middle-class families usually consists of essential items which include basic furniture and kitchen utensils and bedding together with minimal jewelry which the family purchases at high costs. The quantity of a man's dowry presents the only way to assess his worth for receiving warm treatment from his wife's family.

A "sufficient" dowry enables the bride to experience social empowerment. She receives

superior treatment which includes better food during the wedding and reduced stress throughout her married life. The feeling of acceptance together with her status increase her self-worth and her ability to connect with others. A woman faces exclusion from the family home when her dowry amount stands at less than the minimum required level. The presence of high dowry amounts requires women to produce children and especially male heirs which demonstrates that dowry does not shield them from male dominance.

Study Objectives

1. To investigate how high price dowry practices, influence a bride's social status within her in-laws'
2. To measure the extent of relationship between the dependent and independent variable of the study
3. To explore traditional practices regarding dowry in layyah district.

Research Questions

1. How dowry practices in layyah district affect the social status of a bride in her in-laws'
2. How do the high priced dowry practices elevate the social status of bride in her in laws in layyah district

Significance of the Study

The research is important because it focuses on an under researched issue the mobility of dowry the bride into her in laws in layyah district. This study discusses the interdependence of cultural and traditional practices related to dowry, paying attention to its effect on the woman's social standing in the family, in terms of her honor, dignity, and respectability. The results of the study may help to give the larger amount of awareness to related organization, female empowering efforts, female related legislation and education for the society.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical perspectives guide the study: Social Stratification and Cultural Reproduction.

These theories together offer structural, relational, and symbolic accounts of how dowry influences women's social mobility.

1. Social Stratification Theory

This paper uses Social Stratification Theory to show how society structures its members based on their economic status and authority and social standing. In rural Pakistan, dowry functions as a major social status indicator which determines family social standing. The community recognizes a family more because they give bigger dowries which increases the bride's worth and power in her marital home. From this perspective, dowry functions as a marriage contract which shows both social class and the family's capacity to demonstrate financial power. As such, this theory is applied in this study to explain how dowry reinforces existing social hierarchies and influences the bride's social mobility and command among her affinal relations.

2. Cultural Capital and Social Reproduction

This study also draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his theory of Cultural Capital and Social Reproduction. According to this, social advantages in the form of wealth, education, and prestige are transferred across generations. In this way, the class boundaries are reinforced. Here, dowry is a form of both cultural and economic capital through which the families attempt to realize a better social position by marriages. The social inequality is reproduced in this

process whereby respect and empowerment of a woman in her marital home depend partly upon the economic resources and cultural prestige of her natal family.

Pakistani dowry and particularly of the Layyah District is not merely a rite of an alliance but of establishment of place and strength of the women within the intra-household. Traditional dosage of payment before marriage on the basis of association among classes, culture is equally affecting how bride will be treated amid in-laws. High dowry means that women can move more freely socially, and women are empowered with respect and equality over lower dowry size and coercion and exclusion among women. Although it implies a material meaning as well as having a symbolic meaning, dowry is a tool of patriarchy, which still inert of producing gender dated hierarchies. Given the role it plays in creating social upward mobility for women, one wants to know its contribution so that strategies can be drawn up on what can be done to reduce gender inequalities as well as increase the empowerment of women in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Dowry has conventionally been imbued in the cultural tradition of South Asia, which defines women's social standing, marriages, and intra-household relations. Dowry in Pakistan is not an exchange of money but rather a marker of family standing that defines women's mobility and empowerment after marriage. There is consensus regarding the fact that dowry is not an exchange of goods but one sociological institution articulating patriarchy and class systems. Yasmeen et al. (2021) investigated dowry as a complex measurement tool for determining social security and social standing. The researchers conducted qualitative interviews with Punjabi married women to study their assumption that higher dowry amounts result in improved marital relations and better treatment from in-laws. The research demonstrated that couples who received large dowries experienced respectful treatment which allowed them to take part in decision-making processes. The research discovered that women obtained empowerment through dowry but their capacity to maintain their family's public reputation determined their power instead of having equal rights with others.

Makino (2017) expanded the existing research to show how dowry size determines domestic power sharing between spouses. The researchers conducted a mixed-method study throughout Punjab's urban and rural areas to examine whether dowry material possessions affect a woman's authority over domestic matters. The study demonstrated that women who received high dowries attained greater social status because their material possessions brought them temporary social advantage. According to Makino, women gained empowerment through economic support which vanished when they became financially dependent on their partners. Dowry-based power existed as situational power which people needed to establish their position in society.

Bhamani et al. (2023) made essential contributions by studying how unmet dowry expectations

create emotional and psychological burdens for people. Their cross-sectional study in Sindh in lower- middle-class families investigated whether dowry pressure generates emotional distress. The hypothesis that unmet expectations were linked with greater marital dissatisfaction was confirmed. Experiences of women revealed that those whose families failed to meet expectations were likely to experience humiliation, verbal abuse, and restricted mobility in their in-laws' house. Dowry thus appeared to be a conditional trajectory of empowerment and control tool used to exert influence on women's conduct and self-esteem.

Kamal (2023) offered an ethnographic explanation of how dowry insufficiency leads to post-marital exclusion. During fieldwork in southern Punjab, she discovered that women who bring lower dowries undergo ongoing social ostracism, ridicule, and decreased decision-making authority. Her research had assumed that dowry inadequacy reduces a woman's value in the eyes of her husband's family. Evidence overwhelmingly supported it, illustrating that social mobility in the in-laws' household directly correlates with the material display made at marriage. Kamal also observes that, despite being repressed, certain educated women achieve autonomy through labor and self-worth, suggesting cracks in traditional hierarchies.

Nigam, 2023, brought the topic to the dowry's intergenerational effect. Based on survey evidence from 250 Punjabi families, the research investigated whether dowry demands could keep people poor and limit the mobility of women. Evidence showed that dowry keeps people in poverty and traps them into class immobility: the dowry debt cycle trapped daughters, since families went into debt or sold valuables to pay for marriage costs. According to Nigam, dowry is not a single cultural phenomenon, but rather a structural force of social inequality passed on through generations.

On the same lines, Din et al. (2025) studied the socio-economic causes of dowry in Layyah and Multan districts. Their mixed-method study posits that dowry mediates social status and intra-

family treatment. Information showed that those women who contributed greater dowries were more often integrated into decision-making and invited to family meetings and treated as signs of family prestige. Such information was countered by those with low dowries, their authority limited. The authors established that dowry acts as an intermediary between economic and social capital accorded temporary respect while continuing to empower the patriarchal system that deems women based on wealth.

Rehman and Javed (2022) reappraised dowry as a vehicle for gender oppression through a feminist sociological approach. The two interviewed 40 married women from Lahore in-depth and questioned whether dowry empowers or only extends patriarchy under a new name. From the research they have conducted, it has been indicated that though dowry sometimes adds status, it also reinforces one's dependency and male dominance. The research shows that people obtain true empowerment when they fight against cultural practices which establish social standing through dowry payments for women. People needed financial help from their family members because their main route to independence required them to obtain education and find job opportunities.

Ali and Fatima's 2020 study examines how dowry functions and its social perception differ between urban and rural areas. The research team used a mixed-method approach to examine 200 families because they wanted to study how education and urbanization changes affected dowry practices during marriage discussions. Urban families established the evidence which showed their preference for compatibility and education as essential traits while rural families chose to follow their established customs. Modernization has decreased the direct effects of dowry through city life but middle-class people continue to use it as a status symbol for social advancement.

Sultana (2021) analyzed dowry through the lens of symbolic interactionism to explain how social meanings attached to gifts determine the power relationships between spouses in marriage. The

researchers found that 60 women interviewed showed that bride presentation and size of their physical appearance created a social hierarchy among brides. The more expensive dowry was interpreted as a prestige factor, raising the bride's image in her in-laws' home. On the other hand, a small dowry was seen as symbolic of a deficit. Sultana's conclusions brought forth the strength of dowry not only in their material value but also in the social meanings produced, which structure women's day-to-day lives and the feeling of belonging.

Hassan and Zafar in 2019 discussed the practice of dowry and how it influences the economic status of a poor family. The quantitative analysis conducted in this study tested whether dowry leads to indebtedness and economic insecurity. Indeed, many families were found to borrow money from informal sources to finance marriages. The hypothesis that dowry results in long-term economic insecurity was therefore supported. Although excess dowry provided temporary status for some women, their families took on debt, fostering social shame and emotional harm for the bride. The authors concluded that dowry serves only to reinforce a false sense of empowerment which actually fosters economic inequality.

Ahmed and Shah 2022 explored the association of dowry with marital satisfaction among a sample size of 300 Punjabi women. The authors hypothesized that with an increased dowry, there are stronger and more tranquil marriages. Results partially supported this hypothesis in that high-dowry women received respect but increased pressure to maintain family honor. Low-dowry women reported less stress and less control. This study concluded dowry achieves mixed results because it confers status on one side but results in social pressure and emotional burdens on the other.

Rashid (2020) presented a masculine perspective by analyzing the way men view dowry as part of the construction of marriage and masculinity. By interviewing married men of southern Punjab

through focus group discussions, Rashid found that they viewed dowry largely as a deserving right and family prestige. This was done in a manner that forwarded gendered hierarchies reducing women to a transactional sphere. In fact, results have solidified that the social status of men is often tied to dowry they are able to provide, thus placing even more pressure on brides to demonstrate their worth in terms of productivity.

Finally, Saeed and Farooq (2021) analyzed dowry variance in terms of class organizations in Layyah district through interviews and family surveys. Their work hypothesized that class determines the size and function of dowry. Indeed, the observations were such that in upper-class societies, dowry is used as a symbol for continuation and status, while middle-class societies consider it a needed social security arrangement, and it is an economic burden for the lower-class societies. However, in all classes, post-marital mobility for women was tied to the extent of perceived dowry adequacy. According to them, though the practice may vary across economic classes, its patriarchal function of controlling the value and mobility of women does not change.

The thirteen studies combined into one body of work demonstrate that dowry practices continue to determine the social standing and psychological wellbeing of women in Pakistan's traditional region of Layyah. The matrimonial system empowers women through high dowry payments which provide them with temporary authority while it maintains economic disparities and systems of gender oppression. Dowry functions as the entrance to social status because it provides respect and enables people to make decisions while establishing their standing in different marriage customs throughout various regions and social classes. The residents of Layyah and its surrounding regions can achieve true women's empowerment through their cultural logic which connects educational achievements and personal autonomy with higher social standing than dowry payment.

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers chose a qualitative research method to study how expensive dowries affect a bride's social standing in her husband family in Layyah district. The statistical associations which quantitative surveys provide differ from the deeper understanding which qualitative research delivers about how people experience their life and show their emotions and construct their personal meaning. The study aims to examine social perceptions about dowry customs which determine how women gain respect and authority in their marital homes without attempting to make results applicable to an entire population.

The research team uses interviews which include structured interviews as their data collection methods. The structured questions enable participants to provide identical responses about their dowry expectations and family relationships and their social standing. The participants use semi-structured prompts to share their personal experiences and their understanding of events. The mixed interview method enables researchers to study patterns while maintaining the individual expressions of each research participant.

A qualitative methodology serves as the better choice for this research because dowry and women's status represent sensitive cultural matters which require in-depth investigation of power and prestige and social interaction that numerical data cannot provide. The research demonstrates all connections between dowry value and a bride's treatment in her marital home through an investigation which examines both the reasons for this connection and its underlying mechanisms.

Access and Sampling

The incident will occur in the Layyah District which acts as a semi-rural area of southern Punjab on account of its inhabitants sharing a common social and cultural background. The researchers

will choose women from various villages of Layyah which share a common language and culture because the study needs them to recruit different villages. The findings will be validated by including more than one village because different villages have different gendered practices of dowry. The researchers will interview about 10 to 15 women. We will interview married women that have been living with their in-laws for one to five years. A year of marriage is essential for the participant to assess the effect of dowry on her social status. The study examines women in their first year of marriage because they represent the newest cultural practices which allow the research to demonstrate the recent trends of dowry practices in the district.

The research uses purposive and convenience sampling. The rural population of Layyah is spread over fields and random sampling cannot be applied. The researcher in convenience sampling chooses those who are available and willing to participate and purposive sampling involves only those participants who meet the research criteria; in this study, married women who live with their husbands' families. The study adopted this approach because it needs qualitative research to gather information about the context, rather than quantitative data. The interviews will be undertaken by five to six trained female local researchers because they are familiar with the local culture and language and know gender-based social norms. The training will train them with three main skills, namely confidentiality, impartiality and sympathy. The hiring of female interviewers from the local community has a vital role in the rural society of Layyah because of conservative norms which show women prefer to talk about their family and marriage issues with other women. The study's research team will be supported by community gatekeepers such as lady health workers, school teachers and the local female council members who will connect them with families and build rapport. The research team will interview in safe and confidential places such as study

participants' homes and community centres to enable them to talk freely without distractions from their families.

Ethical Considerations

The study will be ethically conducted as the conversation about marriage and dowry raises personal and emotional tensions. The research team will gain informed consent from all participants during interviews by explaining the purpose of the study and the research process and informing participants about their free choice to participate and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The research team will use the participant's preferred language to understand and feel relaxed during the interview. The researcher will maintain confidentiality and anonymity by pseudonymising all participant names and other identifying information and by protecting sensitive data. The research team will use photos and audio recordings for the purpose of research analysis and forbid their publication. The researcher will ensure that the interview process will not interfere with family relationships and the researcher will ensure that there will be no social consequences. The researchers will take additional precautions to ensure safety measures along with independence precautions because literacy levels are low in Layyah and the region has patriarchal families. The researchers will gather data at convenient times at safe places for the interviewees. Female field researchers will be trained on ethical conduct which will educate them on how to respond to distress and emotional disclosures and how to refer participants to local organisations if needed. The researcher will practice reflexivity during the research process by being aware of their own biases and being objective to show the Layyah culture in their findings.

Analysis

1. Impact of Dowry on Marital Status

The majority of respondents indicated that dowry practices play a significant role in determining a bride's social status within her in-laws' household. Many respondents observed that families who provide larger dowries receive respectable treatment and greater respect from others and they gain more acceptance in family. One common theme was that dowry serves as a standard of the bride's family's social standing. One participant shared, "When the dowry is high, the bride feels more accepted and integrated". The finding shows consistency with most interviews because it shows that dowry determines a bride's marital status and her acceptance in her in laws.

2. High Value Dowry Elevates Marital Status

Most respondents identified high dowries as principal element which increases a bride's social standing within her in-laws' household. The participants described that their dowry amount determined how their in-laws would treat them with greater respect. One respondent stated "My dowry was substantial and I was treated with more respect" which multiple other people confirmed. The response demonstrates that brides perceive their worth based social standing through their dowry amount. This study confirms that the size of dowry affects how society perceives bride's and their ability to move between social classes.

3. Dowry's Contribute Decision-Making Ability

The majority of respondents indicated that dowry size does, indeed, influence the role of the bride in household decision-making. The respondents who received higher dowries showed greater participation in family decisions while those who received lower dowries reported being excluded from decision-making. One participant asserted, "My family treats me with respect because of the dowry, and my decision are valued." The people who received lower dowries believed their

responsibilities consisted of domestic work and caregiving duties. The hypothesis which states that dowry affects a bride's power and participation in family affairs has been confirmed by this research.

4. Dowry and Respect in the In-Laws' Home

The majority of respondents believed that high dowry payments brought them greater respect from their in-laws. The theme shows that people use material wealth as a benchmark to measure their social position which leads them to choose higher dowries that provide brides with increased family status. One participant shared, "A high dowry made my in-laws treat me like an equal, and I felt more respected." The majority of respondents established a link between dowry and respect which proved the hypothesis that dowry increases respect inside the marital home.

5. Social Acceptability in laws circle

Most respondents believe that dowry size causes a major impact on social acceptability within in-laws' families. Higher dowries allowed brides to enjoy more freedom and respect, while lower dowries restricted brides and treated them as social outcasts. One respondent mentioned, "A higher dowry allows a bride to move freely and have a say in family matters," which shows that people believe dowry serves as a major factor determining a bride's ability to move up the social ladder in her husband's family. The high dowries of bride's lead to increased social advancement opportunities according to this research.

6. Authority within the Household

Most respondents shared that dowry does influence a bride's authority, with those who brought higher dowries feeling more empowered in their marital homes. Bride's with larger dowries felt their opinions received respect which enabled them to exercise greater control over household matters. One participant shared, "I have more authority in household matters because of my

dowry." People who received smaller dowries experienced reduced authority, as one respondent explained, "I have less say in family matters because my dowry was small." The practice of dowry establishes a power dynamic which determines a bride's domestic authority.

7. Elevate Bride Perception

The majority of people believe that dowry size determines how society views a bride. People considered brides with higher dowries to come from wealthier families but they judged brides with lower dowries through social norms. One respondent stated that "A large dowry shows that the family is wealthy and that the bride is of higher social standing." Most interviews included social comparison as a dominant theme because people used dowries to evaluate a bride's community value. The hypothesis that dowry affects how people view a bride has received support through this evidence. The research results demonstrated that dowries function as a social assessment tool which enables people to determine automatic information about others.

8. Friendly Treatment Based on Dowry

The most common response among participants showed that they believed higher dowries led to better treatment from their in-laws. Brides with higher dowries experienced greater family respect and better social integration into their new families. One respondent said, "I was treated like a guest because my dowry was substantial," which showed that higher dowries resulted in better treatment for him. The study shows that higher dowry amounts result in better treatment and higher respect from in-laws.

9. Husband positive attitude towards wife

In most marriages, men are more likely to listen to their wives than to their in-laws. Vast majority of the respondents said, " It is because my husband respects my decisions more than they do. Such a distinction illustrates the difference between the close, marital relationship and the family as a

whole. The most important thing is that the bride's views are taken into consideration, especially by her new family. It is an issue when a father or brother realizes that his daughter is not being listened to. The dream is that the ideas of the bride are to be admired and that she is to be regarded as equal in everything

10. Emotional Impact of Dowry Comparison

The majority of respondents expressed that dowry-related comparisons had a negative impact on their emotional well-being. Brides who had smaller dowries experienced feelings of shame and inferiority when their dowries were compared. One respondent said, "The constant comparisons made me feel worthless," which showed how dowry comparisons created psychological distress for him. This finding demonstrates that bride's experience both decreased self-esteem and emotional distress because of dowry comparisons.

11. Dowry-Related Abuse and Discrimination

Multiple interviews showed that dowry-related abuse occurred as an ongoing issue because participants reported that bride's with lower dowries experienced verbal abuse and social exclusion. One respondent shared, "I have seen bride's humiliated for their dowries," which indicates that dowry-related discrimination is a prevalent issue. The results show that the treatment a bride receives from her in-laws depends on the size of her dowry.

12. Effective Role in Household Dynamics

The presence of dowry affects how bride's participate in family relationships because respondents showed that bride's who receive larger dowries gain more power and dignity within their marriage. One respondent noted, "My dowry gave me a voice in family decisions," while another said, "Bride's with lower dowries are often excluded from family decisions." The research demonstrates

that dowry functions as a major factor which determines how bride's participate in family relationships thus proving the hypothesis.

13. Freedom in the Household

Freedom inside the home depends on dowry amount because participants reported that higher dowries provided them with increased personal freedom together with decreased public observation. One respondent shared, "With a higher dowry, I had more freedom and respect," while those with smaller dowries expressed feeling more restricted. The research results support the hypothesis that dowry size affects a bride's freedom to move about her husband's family residence.

14. Integration into the Family

A bride's ability to join her husband's family depends on the amount of dowry which she brings to the marriage. Respondents with higher dowries received more respect from others while maintaining better relationships with their in-laws. One participant shared, "My high dowry helped me settle in and feel accepted," which demonstrates how dowry functions as a tool that facilitates better integration into society. The study found that people who receive higher dowries achieve better social integration outcomes through their social status as recipients of high dowries.

15. Influence of Dowry on Bride's Power in Household Decision-Making

The study showed that most participants believed that dowry practices provide women with increased authority to make decisions in their home. The higher dowry amounts enable brides to achieve greater household authority while lower dowry amounts restrict brides from controlling family matters. One respondent explained, "I have more power in decisions because of my valued dowry," which established a link between dowry and decision-making authority. The research demonstrates that dowry practice affects a bride's ability to make decisions within her household.

16. Increased Bride's Authority in in laws

The majority of respondents shared that their authority increased with the dowry they brought. The family dynamics determined how much authority those people held. One participant noted, "My authority grew with time and the dowry I brought," which shows that a bride's authority receives an initial boost through dowry but this boost does not provide permanent power. The relationship between dowry and authority in the marital home shows complex dynamics throughout its entirety.

17. Impact of Dowry on Bridal Social Status

The essential factor that establishes a bride's social standing depends on the amount of her dowry which determines her social value. One respondent shared, "People see a high dowry as a sign of wealth and respect," which shows how society uses dowry to determine a bride's social status. The research shows that dowry functions as a principal factor which determines how society regards bride's.

18. Dowry and Societal Mental Health

Dowry expectations from society create major problems for brides because they have to fulfill their dowry obligations which causes them to experience stress and anxiety. One participant shared, "The pressure to bring a large dowry is immense, and it makes bride's feel insecure." The social pressure on brides to fulfill dowry requirements creates negative effects on their mental health.

19. Consequences of Dowry Abuse

Dowry-related abuse results in three major impacts which include emotional distress and social exclusion and physical violence. Multiple respondents described their personal experiences of encountering dowry-related abuse. One respondent stated, "Bride's with low dowries face constant

ridicule and verbal abuse," the statement shows how dowry-related mistreatment causes mental health problems for brides who experience it.

20. Changes in Dowry Practices

Research shows that dowry-related abuse creates severe consequences which produce both emotional distress and social withdrawal and physical damage to victims. The study participants shared their personal accounts of witnessing or experiencing dowry-based violence. The respondent reported that "Bride's with low dowries face constant ridicule and verbal abuse" which demonstrates how dowry-related mistreatment harms bride's mental health through its negative impact.

Findings

The study identified five major themes regarding dowry and its influence on women's social status, empowerment, and psychological well-being within families and society.

Theme 1: Dowry Gives the Bride More Power in Her In-laws' House

This theme shows that women who have an impressive dowry tend to earn greater respect and authority than those who do not. Women who have large dowries tend to be involved in conversations on various family issues. On the other hand, women who have a small dowry tend to be marginalized in such conversations since they are perceived as being of less importance. Some of the participants revealed that at first their opinions did not matter, but once it was revealed how big their dowries were, they were accorded greater consideration. Simply put, a larger dowry equates to empowerment of women.

Theme 2: Dowry Shows Respect and Status in Society

The issue of dowry also has a close relationship with the concept of social perception. With a big dowry, not only does the woman gain more respect from her family and others, but she and her family become more prestigious within the society. When families offer bigger dowries, they get more respected, prestigious, and honored; as a consequence, people will treat the woman from those families better. It is obvious that women with bigger dowries have more social respectability, appreciation, and worthiness. On the other hand, small dowries make a person less prestigious within the society.

Theme 3: Social Status and Empowerment through Dowry

This theme also supports the idea that empowerment is linked to social status. Higher dowries lead to better respect for women and a feeling of authority, which makes them more important in the family. Early experiences of being less significant due to having a low dowry gradually change for women when their family members come to appreciate their social or financial contribution via the dowry system. One woman put it this way: “I felt more respected by my in-laws because of my high dowry.” In this context, dowry mediates influence, bargaining, and recognition in society.

Theme 4: Patriarchy and Gender Roles Reinforced by Dowry

The dowry system keeps on promoting gender-related values because a woman is judged by the amount of property she brings to the marriage. Those women who come from wealthy backgrounds and can afford a high dowry are considered very valuable and get the same position among men in family issues. On the contrary, those women who do not afford to bring any dowry with them may face discrimination and will not even be involved in decision-making process. The dowry tradition keeps the power structure intact in the favor of patriarchy.

Theme 5: Psychological Impact of Dowry Comparisons

Apart from material considerations and social factors, dowry has far-reaching implications on a psychological level as well. Girls with small dowries may find themselves subject to shame, embarrassment, and inferiority in comparison with girls who have large dowries. As stated by the participants, this could lead to problems in terms of esteem, as they felt they were being underappreciated and underestimated by their in-laws. As noted by one of the participants: “It is difficult not to feel inferior when others are being favored based on their dowry.”

Generally, these results indicate that dowry practices have a considerable impact on women's empowerment, social status, gender relations, and psychological wellbeing, which demonstrates the material and symbolic nature of dowry.

Discussion

The research results show that high-priced dowries create additional marital difficulties which impact the ways women interact with their husbands' families. The research demonstrates that dowry functions as a traditional marriage custom in Layyah District which determines how society views a bride after she gets married. Women who brought larger and more valuable dowries received better treatment because they were considered more dignified which resulted in higher social acceptance and more power to make decisions about household matters. Women who received smaller dowries experienced different treatment which resulted in their social exclusion and disrespect and emotional distress.

The major discovery demonstrates that dowry functions as a direct force which determines a bride's marital outcome by establishing her treatment from her husband's family. Respondents explained to interviewers that high dowry creates a positive first impression which establishes a stronger household position for the bride. The research shows that Yasmineen et al. (2021) established a link between larger dowries which lead to better marital harmony and increased respect from in-laws. The study results show that high dowry payments lead to greater bride acceptance which helps her to gain social status.

The second main finding shows that a bride with an expensive dowry gains power to make decisions and control her household. Women who brought expensive dowries reported that their opinions were respected, and they were included in family decisions regarding finances, domestic matters, and social affairs. This finding shows that women gain institutional power through dowries according to Makino's research from 2017. The authority which temporary exists actually delivers instant benefits which prove that dowry practice enhances women's authority rights. The study discovered that the practice of dowry creates a connection between marital home and respect.

The respondents explained that higher dowry payments result in superior treatment together with friendly interactions and emotional protection. Brides with high dowries felt more valued and were treated as equal family members, while low-dowry brides experienced humiliation and restrictions. The argument which Kamal (2023) presented shows that a woman gains less value in her husband's family when her dowry does not meet expectations. The present research shows that people respect others based on their material contributions instead of their personal qualities.

Social mobility and freedom within the household existed as two factors which positively correlated with the size of dowry payments. Women who received higher dowries experienced greater freedom to move about and stronger social participation and increased confidence in sharing their opinions. The theory of social stratification demonstrates that people use their material possessions and wealth to gain social status and power. Dowry serves as an open display of social class status because people view brides who possess valuable dowries as members of high-status families which leads to better treatment from their in-laws. The research demonstrates that dowry payments determine how society views brides and how they present themselves to others. People who give greater dowry payments create an impression of their family wealth and social standing as well as their family honor. The bride's worth increases because her value exists in both private and public spaces which belong to her family. Sultana (2021) demonstrated that dowry acts as a symbolic capital system through which expensive gifts enable people to elevate their social status. The symbolic value which exists in Layyah District continues to play a major role in determining someone's marital status.

The study shows a positive connection between the two variables but it demonstrates that people who receive smaller dowries or their dowry comparisons will experience negative emotional effects. Women who received smaller dowries experienced feelings of shame and anxiety and

emotional stress together with verbal mistreatment. The study participants reported that they suffered social mistreatment because their families failed to provide the expected dowry payments. The research results support Bhamani et al. (2023) who proved that dowry pressure causes mental health problems and leads to marital relationship problems. The research shows that high dowries provide temporary social status enhancement while low dowries create severe social vulnerability which leads to social distress. The problem of dowry-related abuse emerged as an essential social issue. People who received lower dowries encountered social exclusion together with verbal abuse and loss of decision-making power. People who received lower dowries experienced social exclusion together with verbal insults and loss of decision-making power. The research results support Rehman and Javed (2022) who proved that dowry systems maintain patriarchal authority while failing to provide genuine power to women. The researchers found a positive link between two variables but they must understand this connection as a product of social circumstances instead of demonstrating actual gender equality.

The discussion demonstrates that dowry functions as both economic capital and social power in marital life. The value of the dowry which in-laws accept as valuable leads to increased authority and freedom and respect and acceptance for the bride. Social Stratification The combination of theory and Bourdieu's Cultural Capital theory explains how people acquire social standing through their ownership of material goods which leads to their control over their home environment. The dowry system enables women to achieve temporary progress within patriarchal family systems. The research shows that expensive dowries create a strong link to the post-marital situation of women who move into their in-laws' home in Layyah District. Brides who receive higher dowries enjoy better treatment and more control over their social relationships than brides who receive lower dowries. The advancement process relies on patriarchal standards which evaluate women

based on their economic contributions. True empowerment should not rely on dowry, but within the current cultural reality, dowry continues to function as a major factor shaping women's marital status and social mobility.

Limitations

The research study examined the Layyah District which preserves traditional dowry customs throughout its South Punjab territory. The research results demonstrate that different marriage customs and social values between urban and rural areas create limitations on the study's ability to apply to all areas in Pakistan. The results primarily show the cultural and social conditions present in Layyah and other similar rural areas. The research employed qualitative methods to study 10 married women who participated in the research. The research used qualitative methods to gather comprehensive data about personal experiences, yet the study's limited number of participants failed to reflect the complete district female population. Different families and social classes may experience dowry practices differently.

The study used both convenience sampling and purposive sampling as its second restriction. The research team selected participants from the available pool who expressed willingness to join the study because they faced cultural constraints which prevented them from approaching women who resided in conservative families. The study created sampling bias because women who experienced critical dowry problems chose to hide their situation from the study team. Women disclosed dowry information to researchers but their complete disclosures faced obstacles because respondents feared family unrest and social stigma which resulted from their situation. Study participants provided inaccurate answers about their experiences of abuse and discrimination and emotional distress that stemmed from dowry.

Conclusion

The research studied how expensive dowries influence in-laws' households' functioning after marriage in Layyah District. The study investigated how dowry customs in Layyah District affect brides' social standing in their new families while examining how expensive dowries determine their social standing and power and family acceptance. The research used a qualitative design and researchers collected data through structured and semi-structured interviews. The study collected data by interviewing married women who had lived with their in-laws for one to five years which took place between 10 to 15 sessions.

The research findings show that there exists a strong positive relationship between dowry amounts and the life circumstances of married women. The brides who provided higher and more valuable dowries gained greater respect and better treatment and stronger authority and increased participation in household decision-making. The in-laws accepted them more easily while they gained higher social status within the family. The women who received smaller dowries during their marriages experienced emotional distress and social isolation because they faced disrespectful treatment that prevented them from exercising their personal rights. The evidence supports the research hypothesis while showing that dowry remains a key factor which determines a bride's standing within her husband's family. Women will achieve actual empowerment through educational opportunities and equal treatment and independence instead of acquiring material possessions and following traditional dowry customs.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Dowry and Social Mobility: A sociological study of post marital status of women in their in laws in district layyah

Researcher: Sardar Muhammad Shamshair Sehar

Institution: Forman Christian College University

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to explore how dowry impacts the lives of women in their in laws.

Confidentiality:

All information shared during this study will remain confidential. Your name will not be disclosed, and pseudonyms will be used.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Consent:

I have read and understood the information above.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Section 2: Dowry Practices

1. In your opinion, how important is a dowry for a bride in a marriage?
2. In your opinion every girl must bring dowry.
3. If a girl does not bring dowry, what repercussions she faces in her in-law's home?
4. Do you think that better quality or more expensive dowry increases a bride's respect and dignity in in-laws?
5. What kind of dowry did you bring with you?
6. Do you feel that the size or quality of dowry affects your status in your in-laws' home?

Section 3: Social Status and Respect within In-Laws

7. What kind of treatment did you get in your in laws in the early days of marriage?
8. Are you allowed to take part in family decision making by your in laws?
9. Do you feel that your husband and his family respect your decisions?
10. Do you think the value of dowry is associated with the respect you receive in your in-laws' home?

Section 4: Social Mobility and Authority

11. Do you think dowry has given you more independence in household matters?
12. How does having a valuable or low-value dowry affect a woman's status or role in her marital home?

Section 5: Psychological and Social Effects

13. How do women feel when their dowry is compared with others in the family or neighborhood?
14. Do you think a low value or unacceptable dowry causes victimization of women?
15. How do dowry expectations affect a woman's emotional well-being and her relationship with her husband or in-laws?

Section 6: Cultural and Traditional Context

16. Do you think the culture in your locality encourages giving dowry?
17. What do religious or community leaders in your area perceive about dowry system?

18. What advice would you give to families of young brides about dowry and marriage expectations?
19. Do you do household chores willingly or because of pressure?
20. Does a bride need permission to use utensils of the in-laws' home, or must she rely only on her own dowry articles?