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Role of Religion in Mate Selection among Educated Working Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract:

The present study was conducted to probe the role of religion in mate selection among educated females of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Data for the study was collected through a pre-tested questionnaire from 278 working women from three public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa i.e. The University of Agriculture, University of Peshawar and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar. Simple random method was applied to pick the samples from the study area whereas chi-square statistics was applied to get the major findings. Results reveal a contradictory type of situation as on the one hand, religion particularly the rituals were strictly followed during marriage but on the other hand, the mate selection rights of women were ignored mainly. This is practised despite of the fact that Islam has given right/liberty in mate selection to both men and women. Female respondents attributed it to lack of Islamic knowledge on part of family members or they do it to get more say and power through following common values and culture. Religious leaders do not lay much stress on the rights given by Islam to females in mate selection in their religious sermons. The issue according to respondents was not discussed either. Females on their part, though found interested in mates from their own sect or religious groups preferred liberal males over conservative ones believing them to be stern and inflexible. The study recommends that an awareness campaign through mass media which may include religious leaders, civil society and political parties



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needs to be launched in order to raise awareness among both the educated and uneducated females along with their parents regarding mate selection, the nature and impact of religious misinterpretations, and current wave of western values, materialistic outlook and idealism that affects the selected females perception about mate selection.

Key words: Mate Selection, Islam, Religion, Education, Family, Women

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Introduction:

Mate selection is one of the most important rather a major decision in a person's life. A good selection leads to happiness for both the partners. It is a complex decision for an individual. Before the act of marriage, there are different considerations on part of the two persons and their families in a country like Pakistan where decision regarding mate selection is generally made on the basis of appearance, social class or manners, attitude, beliefs and common values^{1,2,3}. Other factors determining mate selection include paternal and maternal preferences that predominantly prevail more in traditional societies. However, for many people today, mutual understanding is now an important determinant in selecting a life partner.^{4,5,6,7} Though variations in mate selection do exist in various societies; the main philosophy is the reproduction and continuity of family name referred to as explicit elements and sexual satisfaction as implicit ones. Human physical considerations such as age, bravery, beauty are some additional key factors⁸ however, religion in many societies is still the most dominant consideration. Barbara and David believe religion does have a role in happy marriage⁹ where according to Pittman et al. it plays an important role initially in the selection of a mate and later on the marriage process as a whole. Consequently, the religious satisfaction leads to happy life especially by having less aggression between spouses.¹⁰ Literature further reveal that it is the spiritual belief¹¹ and shared faith that not only help in mate selection but also gives more marital commitment, satisfaction,¹² prevention and resolution to marital conflicts.¹³

The role played by different religions in marital behavior as is practiced in Japan is determined by Shinto, Confucianism and Buddhism that call for distinct gender roles and patriarchal social order in society. In China, marital roles and mate selection both are linked with traditional Chinese families established on Confucius' conception whereas the same in Korea is influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity. In India, Hinduism determines the individual's actions by calling marriage a sacred duty; however, it is influenced by the class and caste system as well. The Chinese Mali and Indians in Malaysia follow both the traditional code of conduct and Islam.¹⁴ Williamson and Hollingshead report religious affiliation as the second most powerful factor

affecting mate-selection. It is the religion that divides males and females of each race into sub- categories of Catholic, Jews, and Protestants where the mate selection occurs chiefly from within each pool.^{15,16}

Like other religions, religious beliefs and practices in Islam too have a significant role in marriage and family life, Islam establishes freedom to select a mate for marriage.¹⁷ In connection with selecting a woman as a marriage partner, Quran says that “Do not prevent them from marrying their husbands when they agree between themselves in a lawful manner.” (2:232). Islam gives an open choice to spouses by allowing them to look at each of their partner, if they wish to do so, when they are seeking someone to choose for marriage (Dawood). Moreover the criteria for selection of spouse is clearly elaborated by Islamic teachings as it emphasizes on purity, spirituality and moral character for mate selection. The same is reflected in the verses of the Holy Quran as it states that “women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity” (24:26). In general women are married for the sake of property, rank, status, beauty or character. Conversely beauty, economic status, race, ethnicity and cultural bases of preferences for mate selection are secondary in importance as per Islamic teachings.²⁰ Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, and Der-Martirosian¹⁸ and Haqqani found that the changing socio-economic and cultural circumstances however, are bringing some gross changes in mate selection among Muslim communities hailing from different parts of the world. Staunch cultural bases, like in Iranian families that had migrated to the west, the families and individuals are compelled to prefer a mate based on their nationality, class and religion. The exogamous marriages in terms of religion and culture are the least preferred and almost extinct among radical Muslims of Iran. In some cases, however, it becomes impossible to select a mate of perfect choice. It is at this point when sacrifices for the least preferred traits in making choice for mate selection are made. Groups with high religious attachments don’t make any compromise on religiosity of partner while making choice of mate selection whereas less religious people can go for a person with the least religious sentiments.^{21, 22} In metropolitan society, like America, the preferences are limited and those having similar culture and religion, irrespective of their, race, ethnicity and nationality are included in the list of choices for mate selection. The American Muslims cannot turn back to the cultural and religious standards¹⁸ and preference in mate selection.¹⁹ Marital partners are selected to maintain their cultural and religious courtship practices²⁰ because it will unite their family and protect women from abuse and oppression.²¹

Getting married in Pakistani context, has been widely perceived a matter of extreme significance. Despite the change in society especially the rise in education, it is still not just an agreement between two partners but such an exercise involves family, religion and culture as well. In fact, the parents and other family members still make the decision keeping in view of religion, culture and family values to make marriage, a legal, social and religious contract for making a strong foundation of the family where both male and female live

together according to the roles assigned by the society.²² However, the role of religion is more important than the other factors. Fatima et al. reports that generally female mate selection in Islam is a highly ignored issue in Pakistan due to lack of proper guidance by religious leaders. Despite this, tying the nuptial knot in the religious group is considered a key for a happy union.²³ People prefer choosing life partners from similar religious sects despite the rise in literacy rate. Conflict of beliefs not only affects children but also leads to serious consequences like separation or divorce between the couple.²⁴ Malik terms Pakistanis as highly religious people in all aspects of life including mate selection. Marriage is considered a religious duty and more importance is given to religion than the ethnicity the most dominant feature of Pakistani society. A person even belonging to the circle of family and friends is not considered a suitable mate unless from the same religious group.²⁵ The highly educated students in Malaysia choose life partners from same religion or prefer physical attraction.²⁶ In different universities of South Africa and USA, students on the other hand prefer to marry with mates having, more education, better status and steady employment,^{27,28} The present study explores the role of religion in mate selection in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Research Methodology:

It was a cross-sectional study and for which data was collected from three educational institutions i-e. University of Peshawar, the University of Agriculture, Peshawar and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Peshawar. According to official record of the three institutions, there were 661 educated female employees with a break up of 242, 85 and 214 respectively. The main reason of the selection of the three institutions was getting information from females belonging to diverse areas, environment and cultures. Data was collected from female teachers and females working on different posts in the said universities. Though a large sample size gives better results but due to time, financial and human resource constraints, a total of 278 respondents were selected for data collection through sampling procedure designed by Sekaran.²⁹ The sample size within each educational institution was determined on the basis of proportional allocation method while the samples from each of the selected area were picked through lottery method of simple random sampling method. The study is based on both the primary and secondary data where all the available sources that includes the libraries, official records and internet. For primary data, a pretested questionnaire was developed on the basis of study objectives, conceptual framework and relevant literature. All copies of the questionnaire were distributed among those respondents who gave their consent for filling it. They were apprised of the academic purpose of the study and of confidentiality of data. They were assured that information obtained from them would be utilized only for the study under hand as required ethically. The data taken is presented here in original shape without any alteration, maneuvering or other sort of mixing. After collection, the data was edited and entered into computer. The data was processed and analyzed by using SPSS where the basic

results were drawn through frequencies and percentages followed by measuring the association between the dependent variable and independent variables through Chi –Square and Fisher Exact tests. A three level i-e yes, no and uncertain likert scale was applied for seeking answers based on the independent and dependent variable. At analysis level, dependent variable “mate selection” was indexed to obtain the desired degree of responses. The main purpose of analysis was to seek the direction of the responses favoring or disfavoring one or more aspect of variable i-e role of religion. It was assumed that the subjects for each group were randomly and independently selected. The groups were independent and each observation had to qualify for one and only one category.

Results and Discussion

This section describes the results after the analysis of data. It starts with the description of the perception of sampled respondents about the role of religion in mate selection. This is followed by measuring the association between the dependent variable i-e the mate selection with the independent variable i-e the religion.

Role of Religion in Mate Selection:

In connection with the perception of sampled females about the role of religion in mate selection. Table-1 states that 82 percent of the sampled respondents found agreed that marriages could be sustained on successful basis when religion is followed. About the role of Islam in mate selection, 86.7 percent were agreed with the statement that Islam allows both males and females to see each other before making final decision regarding matrimony. This is followed by another 82 percent who stated that Islam allows a female to have a say if she doesn't want to marry but those who reported about the clear knowledge about Islamic principles were 59.4 percent females. A 54.4 percent were of the view that people mostly lack Islamic knowledge about mate selection.

As for the cause for lack of religious knowledge, a 64 percent termed it due to more domination of culture over the religion. Majority of the respondents blamed the religious leaders who according to (53.2 percent of the cases) do not speak often about the mate selection and hence did not play an active role. About 55.4 percent of the sampled females believed the same. Despite this, 74.1 percent of the sampled females wanted to marry a person from their own sect but that he should not be highly religious (52.9%) rather 57.9 percent of the females wanted to marry liberal males because a 49.3 percent thought that religious persons do not have much flexibility and are stern comparatively.

Table-1 Role of Religion in Mate Selection:

| S.# | Role of Religion | Yes* | No* | Uncertain* |
|-----|--|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Marriage is sustained on successful bases when religion is followed | 228(82.0) | 26(9.4) | 24(8.6) |
| 2 | Islam allows both males and females to see each other before making final decision regarding matrimony | 241(86.7) | 13(4.7) | 24(8.6) |
| 3 | Islam allows a female to have a say if she doesn't want to marry | 230(82.7) | 34(12.2) | 14(5.0) |
| 4 | Most people have clear knowledge about Islamic principles regarding mate selection | 165(59.4) | 108(38.8) | 5(1.8) |
| 5 | People mostly lack Islamic knowledge about mate selection | 154(55.4) | 100(36.0) | 24(8.6) |
| 6 | Culture dominates Islamic laws in mate selection. | 178(64.0) | 54(19.4) | 46(16.5) |
| 7 | Religious leaders do not speak oftenly about women and men rights regarding mate selection | 148(53.2) | 76(27.3) | 54(19.4) |
| 8 | Religious leaders have not played an active role in the provision of basic rights Islam gives to females in mate selection | 154(55.4) | 91(32.7) | 33(11.9) |
| 9 | You prefer to marry within their religious sect | 206(74.1) | 43(15.5) | 29(10.4) |
| 1 | You do not like to marry with a highly religious male | 108(38.8) | 147(52.9) | 23(8.3) |
| 1 | You like to marry with a liberal male | 161(57.9) | 83(29.9) | 34(12.2) |
| 1 | Religious husbands are sterner | 137(49.3) | 72(25.9) | 69(24.8) |

Field Survey, 2015 *Percentages are the figures in the parentheses

Association between Religion and Mate Selection:

There is a close relationship between religion and mate selection. It is religion which like other aspects of life strongly affects the mate selection. Table 2 while exploring such phenomena reports a significant association between mate

selection and statement that Islam allows female to say 'no' if she doesn't want to marry a particular person ($p=0.000$). At the same time, two minor associations were found regarding the same issue that Islam allows both males and females to see each other before making final decision regarding matrimony ($p=0.379$). Most people have clear knowledge about Islamic principles regarding mate selection ($p=0.310$). This was basically due to the agreement of the sampled females with the statement which is also significantly associated that people mostly lack Islamic knowledge about mate selection ($p=0.030$). The results are in line with the findings of Asma,³⁰ Rochadiat et al.,³¹ Al Asma,³² Sandos³³ and Malik³⁴ who found that majority of people even in Muslim countries lack proper Islamic knowledge about mate selection but they still try to meet the basic Islamic criteria and cannot turn back to their religion. This contradicts with the teachings of Islam regarding criteria and freedom in selecting mate for marriage.^{20,21}

Many reasons may be cited as the major causes for the lack of religious knowledge in mate selection. One of them is the domination of cultural norms over religion though found non-significant ($p=0.768$). Almost two third of the female respondents had endorsed the statement at univariate analysis level. However, the major causes behind the phenomena was the role played by the religious leaders. There is a significant co-relation between mate selection and the religious leaders understanding the rights of an individual regarding mate selection ($p=0.000$). The religious leaders have not played an active role in the provision of basic rights that Islam gives to its females in mate selection ($p=0.000$). Haqqani,³⁵ Sandos,³⁶ Bozorgmehr³⁷ and Alvi³⁸ found greater role of common values, family preference, nationality, social class and similar cultural background in mate selection for both the parents and persons concerned. Mahdi,³⁹ Haqqani,⁴⁰ Fatima⁴¹ and Malik⁴² terms it mainly due to less attention given to mate selection by religious leaders and society as a whole.

Despite domination of culture and lack of the proper role played by religious leaders, a significant association was found with the statement that females prefer to marry within their religious sect ($p=0.000$) but they prefer to marry either with liberal or less religious males. A significant association in this regard was found in the statements that you do not like to marry a highly religious male ($p=0.040$), you like to marry a liberal male ($p=0.000$) and religious husbands are stern ($p=0.003$). The same was found by Alvi,⁴³ Haqqani,⁴⁴ Loren,⁴⁵ Richard,⁴⁶ Asamarai,⁴⁷ Williamson,⁴⁸ Fatima and Duleep⁴⁹ who reports that marriage within religious group is their top priority but mostly people prefer mates from relatively open families.

The table as a whole reports a contradictory type of situation regarding religious roles. The results report that Islam allows females to say 'no' if she doesn't approve of mate but mostly people lack in Islamic knowledge. Consequently, the females were found preferring liberal males from own religious sect as they are not stern as compared to more religious ones.

Table-2 Association between Religion and Mate Selection

| S.No. | Role of Religion | Mate Selection | | | Chi Square P=Value |
|-------|--|----------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| | | Yes | No | Uncertain | |
| 1. | Marriage is sustained on successful bases when religion is followed | | | | $\chi^2 = 5.674$ (p=0.225) |
| | Yes | 130(46.8) | 96(34.5) | 2(0.7) | |
| | No | 15(5.4) | 11(4.0) | 0(0.0) | |
| | Uncertain | 8(2.9) | 16(5.8) | 0(0.0) | |
| 2. | Islam allows both males and females to see each other before making final decision regarding matrimony | | | | $\chi^2 = 4.205$ (p=0.379) |
| | Yes | 138(49.6) | 101(36.3) | 2(0.7) | |
| | No | 5(1.8) | 8(2.9) | 0(0.0) | |
| | Uncertain | 10(3.6) | 14(5.0) | 0(0.0) | |
| 3. | Islam allows a female to have a say if she doesn't want to marry | | | | $\chi^2 = 25.977$ (p=0.000) |
| | Yes | 138(49.6) | 92(33.1) | 0(0.0) | |
| | No | 11(4.0) | 21(7.6) | 2(0.7) | |
| | Uncertain | 4(1.4) | 10(3.6) | 0(0.0) | |
| 4. | Most people have clear knowledge about Islamic principles regarding mate selection | | | | $\chi^2 = 4.782$ (p=0.310) |
| | Yes | 95(34.2) | 68(24.5) | 2(0.7) | |
| | No | 57(20.5) | 51(18.3) | 0(0.0) | |
| | Uncertain | 1(0.4) | 4(1.4) | 0(0.0) | |
| 5. | People mostly lack Islamic knowledge about mate selection | | | | $\chi^2 = 10.750$ (p=0.030) |
| | Yes | 83(29.9) | 69(24.8) | 2(0.7) | |
| | No | 63(22.7) | 37(13.3) | 0(0.0) | |
| | Uncertain | 7(2.5) | 17(6.1) | 0(0.0) | |
| 6. | Culture dominates Islamic laws in mate selection | | | | $\chi^2 = 1.822$ (p=0.768) |
| | Yes | 100(36.0) | 76(27.3) | 2(0.7) | |
| | No | 30(10.8) | 24(8.6) | 0(0.00) | |
| | Uncertain | 23(8.3) | 23(8.3) | 0(0.00) | |
| 7. | Religious leaders do not speak often about women and men rights regarding mate selection | | | | $\chi^2 = 31.072$ (p=0.000) |
| | Yes | 100(36.0) | 48(17.3) | 0(0.0) | |
| | No | 37(13.3) | 39(14.0) | 0(0.0) | |
| | Uncertain | 16(5.8) | 36(12.9) | 2(0.7) | |
| 8. | Religious leaders have not played an active role in the provision of basic rights Islam gives to females in mate selection | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|----------|--------|--------------------------------|
| | Yes | 96(34.5) | 58(20.9) | 0(0.0) | $\chi^2 = 21.973$ (p=0.000) |
| | No | 44(15.8) | 47(16.9) | 0(0.0) | |
| | Uncertain | 13(4.7) | 18(6.5) | 2(0.7) | |
| 9. | You prefer to marry within their religious sect | | | | $\chi^2 = 23.408$ (p=0.000) |
| | Yes | 117(42.1) | 89(32.0) | 0(0.0) | |
| | No | 27(9.7) | 16(5.8) | 0(0.0) | |
| | Uncertain | 9(3.2) | 18(6.5) | 2(0.7) | |
| 10. | You do not like to marry with a highly religious male | | | | $\chi^2 = 10.028$ (p=0.040) |
| | Yes | 57(20.5) | 51(18.3) | 0(0.0) | |
| | No | 89(32.0) | 56(20.1) | 2(0.7) | |
| | Uncertain | 7(2.5) | 16(5.8) | 0(0.0) | |
| 11. | You like to marry with a liberal male | | | | $\chi^2 = 25.011$ (p=0.000) |
| | Yes | 100(36.0) | 61(21.9) | 0(0.0) | |
| | No | 43(15.5) | 40(14.4) | 0(0.0) | |
| | Uncertain | 10(3.6) | 22(7.9) | 2(0.7) | |
| 12. | Religious husbands are sterner | | | | $\chi^2 = 16.072$ (p=0.003) |
| | Yes | 82(29.5) | 53(19.1) | 2(0.7) | |
| | No | 46(16.5) | 26(9.4) | 0(0.0) | |
| | Uncertain | 25(9.0) | 44(15.8) | 0(0.0) | |

Source: Field Survey, 2015 Percentages are the figures in the parentheses

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Mate selection is an important step in the formation of a family. A sound footing of both the marriage and family depends on selecting an appropriate mate on the basis of certain basic considerations such as common values, status, culture and religion. Females were not found happy with mate selection mechanism. A contradictory type of situation was found with respect the role of religion in mate selection. Religion as a whole had a definite role in mate selection and respondents' families were following all the rituals relating to marriage except the mate selection rights that Islam gives to its females. On the one hand, females were well aware about their right to reject a proposal if they are not interested but this could not be applied mostly either due to the ignorance of common people about females' mate selection rights or they intentionally deny it and follow the common values or culture which gives more power and say to males and other family members. The matter was also not found highlighted by the religious leaders in masjid and through other media sources. The females on their part, wish to get marry with the liberal type of mate from their sect or religious group as they think that highly or more religious persons are sterner. The study recommends to highlight the problem through a campaign on priority

basis through religious leaders, civil society, mass media and other forums not only to follow the Islam in its true letters and spirit but also apply them for the welfare of the females in the society. The major emphasis during this process may be given to communicate the message through Imams, parents, family elders which includes females and educational institutions not only about the mate selection but also the other discriminations existing in our society on gender basis.



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