

# Dowry Trends in Pakistani ‘Patrilocal’ Weddings: Understanding Local Reciprocity and Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim of the Study:** This study aimed to investigate dowry trends within the context of Pakistani ‘patrilocal’ weddings, focusing on understanding local reciprocity and perspectives surrounding these practices.

**Methodology:** A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing a semi-structured interview guide with 35 shopkeepers to gather insights into dowry practices and their impact on local commerce in rural communities of Punjab along with the survey model based on Gary Watson's theoretical framework from 193 respondents in five rural communities of Punjab, Pakistan.

**Findings:** Analysis of the interviews revealed nuanced patterns in product demand, seasonal variations, sales trends, customer preferences, societal expectations, and ethical considerations related to dowry practices. Major findings show the preference for kitchen utensils and electronic items in Sahiwal (22.86%), furniture and home appliances in Multan (20%), home appliances and gold jewelry in Bahawalpur (17.14%) and Vehari (20%). Additionally, the winter wedding season was identified as the peak sales period across regions, ranging from 17.14% to 22.86%. Furthermore, shopkeepers reported an increasing trend in sales of more expensive and branded items, accounting for 17.14% to 22.86% of responses, with quality and brand reputation being primary considerations for customers (20.00% to 22.86%).

**Conclusion:** The findings underscore the complex interplay between cultural traditions, economic factors, and social dynamics in shaping dowry practices within socio-rural and socio-gender Pakistani ‘patrilocal’ weddings. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for promoting gender equality, social justice, and community development in the region.

**Keywords:** Dowry Trends, ‘Patrilocal’ Weddings, Pakistani Society, Rural Communities, Local Commerce, Socio-cultural Dynamics, Gender Equality.

## Introduction

Weddings in Pakistan are not just celebratory occasions of grand wealth and status spectacles, deeply entrenched in societal norms, but rather a curse that contributes to the financial burden on established

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households while providing support for those setting up new homes, as ostentatious displays of affluence serve as markers of dignity. The significance of wedding celebrations, revered as pivotal life events, and falling short of societal expectations is perceived as an indirect disappointment. This cultural phenomenon permeates Pakistani society, shaping behaviors and attitudes toward marriage and material possessions (Makino, 2019; Cheema & Coxhead, 2022; Ch, et al., 2023).

### ***Dowry System (DS) & Dowry Practices (DPs)***

In many social settings dowry is considered a misnomer for ‘Financial Security’, ‘Economic Transaction’, ‘Social Status’, ‘Gender Inequality’, ‘Patriarchal Norms’, ‘Economic Burden’, ‘Legal Evasion’, ‘Cultural Tradition’, ‘Marriage Negotiations’, ‘Domestic Violence’, ‘Bride Price Confusion’, ‘Consumerism’, ‘Education as Dowry’, ‘Rural vs. Urban Dynamics’, ‘Intergenerational Debt’, ‘Legitimization of Inequality’, ‘Disinheritance’, ‘Dowry Commercialism’ (Messer, 1993; Manna, et al., 2017; Diala & Diala, 2017; Ember, et al., 2020; Vaz, 2020).

But at the same time scoring a precise designation as ‘Financial Provision’, ‘Marriage Settlement’, ‘Cultural Norm’, ‘Social Custom’, ‘Symbol of Affection’, ‘Wealth Transfer’, ‘Security for the Bride’, ‘Social Obligation’, ‘Marriage Enhancement’, ‘Patrilocality’, ‘Economic Support’, ‘Hedging Against Divorce’, ‘Inheritance Substitute’, ‘Bride's Personal Wealth’, ‘Ritualistic Practice’, ‘Legal Tradition’, ‘Means of Social Mobility’, and ‘Historical Tradition’ (Lindholm, 1986; Testart, 2013; Gieseler, 2022; Schaffnit, et al., 2023).

The dowry system (DS); a longstanding tradition in Pakistani virilocality (Khalil & Mookerjee, 2019), adds a layer of complexity to marital customs, often resulting in financial burdens and social pressures. Traditionally intended to provide newlyweds with essential items for their new life together, Dowry has become a symbol of “familial pride” (Rahman, et al., 2019), “financial obligation” (Guiso & Zaccaria, 2023), and “female mastery” (Hewamanne, 2020; Pellegrino, 2024). Despite its pervasive presence across societal strata, the dowry system perpetuates gender biases and economic inequalities, particularly impacting women from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Ali, 2023; Yasmeen, et al., 2021).

Moreover, mass media has introduced new dynamics to the wedding cultural landscape, influencing societal perceptions and consumption patterns (Heng, 2020). While media platforms such as newspapers, television, and social media were initially intended for information dissemination, now shaping consumer behaviors and societal norms (Berger, 2020; Mahoney & Tang, 2024) especially creating complexes in perpetuating materialistic ideals and reinforcing societal pressures, becoming as “wedding media” (Kay, et al., 2019; Hanslip, 2020).

### ***Dowry in Pakistani Society***

In Pakistani society, dowry is deeply ingrained in cultural traditions. It symbolizes familial honor and status elaborating dowry arrangements, including kitchen utensils, clothing, furniture, electronics, and gold jewelry varying across different regions and socio-economic strata, with urban areas often exhibiting more extravagant displays than rural settings (Israr, et al., 2018; Jafree, 2023). Despite legal restrictions and awareness campaigns, dowry-related financial burdens persist, contributing to social inequalities and gender disparities (Nawaz et al., 2020).

The dowry system in Pakistan, although deeply entrenched in tradition, presents numerous challenges that extend beyond the realm of marital customs perpetuating gender inequalities and societal pressures, where a bride is often equated to the size of her dowry (Mayer, 2023). This commodification of women reinforces harmful stereotypes and diminishes their inherent worth, contributing to feelings of inadequacy and discrimination (Micheletto, 2021). The burden of dowry obligations falls disproportionately on families from lower socio-economic backgrounds, exacerbating financial hardships and perpetuating cycles of poverty (Kutub, 2023). ). The practice of dowry, once intended to facilitate the union of two individuals, has morphed into a social obligation laden with expectations and financial burdens (Talalyan,

2020). Despite efforts to modernize and educate, the dowry system remains deeply ingrained especially in Pakistani society, challenging notions of progress and equality.

### ***Mass Media and its Influence***

Mass media, comprising print, electronic, and social media platforms, plays a significant but overlooked role in shaping societal attitudes toward dowry through advertisements, television programs, and social media campaigns, subtly reinforcing materialistic ideals and societal expectations surrounding weddings and marital customs (Fiedler, 2024). Images of extravagant weddings and lavish dowry exchanges permeate popular culture, influencing perceptions of happiness and success (Hatfield, et al., 2020; Song, 2021).

Print media: newspapers and magazines, perpetuate consumerism by showcasing wedding packages and luxury items associated with dowry (Bhandari, 2020). Electronic media, particularly television, amplifies these messages by airing advertisements and programs that glorify extravagant weddings and dowry exchanges as main themes (Munshi, 2020) while social media platforms, with their widespread reach and influence, further exacerbate these trends by promoting comparison and social validation (Appel, et al., 2020; Malarvizhi, et al., 2022; Tuten, 2023).

Consequently, as individuals endeavor to meet societal expectations and maintain their perceived status, the pressure to conform to lavish wedding customs and dowry demands escalates. The pervasive influence of mass media in shaping these cultural norms highlights the necessity for critical reflection and mindful consumption that society by interrogating the materialistic ideals can advance toward more equitable and meaningful manifestations of love and commitment but still a dilemma (Arya-Bhattacharya, 2023).

### **Literature Review**

Dowry, as understood in South Asian cultures, is referred to using specific terms that encapsulate its meaning within each cultural context. It involves the bride's family giving gifts, money, or property to the groom or his family. However, it is not sanctioned by Islamic Shari'ah and is often seen as a cultural practice rather than a religious requirement. Both Hindi and Urdu speakers commonly use the terms “Dahej” and “Jahez” (جہیز), in Bengali term “Daari”, the Sinhala term “Dahiya” in Sri Lanka, and the Tamil term “Paripu” is employed to denote dowry in their respective languages. Meanwhile, in Nepal, “Jahez” mirrors the usage of its Urdu counterpart to signify dowry. In China, Mandarin speakers use the term “Cǎilǐ” to denote the traditional practice of bride price or dowry. In contrast, in Arabic-speaking regions, the term “مهر” (Mahr) is used to refer to the dowry or bride price paid by the groom to the bride, particularly in the context of Islamic marriage contracts. Across various African languages, terms such as “Mahari” in Swahili and “Lobola” in Southern African cultures denote the bride price or dowry exchanged between families. Moreover, in Europe and Western countries, including English-speaking regions, the term “dowry” is commonly used to describe the practice of transferring wealth or assets from the bride's family to the groom's family upon marriage. These terms reflect the linguistic diversity and cultural nuances surrounding conjugal allotment practices worldwide (Önnerfors, 2022).

### ***Dowry in the Modern World***

In the modern world, dowry has evolved to reflect changing societal dynamics and economic realities. While traditionally associated with tangible gifts and possessions, dowry now encompasses various commodities, including electronic gadgets and household appliances (Lavrin & Couturier, 1979; Dar & Lone, 2020; Khanal & Sen, 2020), underscoring the materialistic nature of contemporary dowry practices putting the sentiment behind them. Additionally, the commodification of marriage and the emphasis on material wealth have led to the commercialization of weddings, with vendors and advertisers capitalizing on societal expectations and consumer trends (Illouz, 2023) perpetuating a cycle of consumption and social comparison (Sigler, 2019), where individuals measure their worth based on material possessions and outward displays of affluence.

However, amidst these societal pressures and cultural norms, there is growing recognition of the need to challenge and redefine traditional practices such as dowry. In many Islamic cultures, the groom is responsible for providing a dowry to the bride, known as “Mahr” (مهر), a mandatory gift to the bride as part of the marriage contract (Ali, 2021). It can be money, property, jewelry, or any other valuable asset agreed upon by both parties, to provide financial security to the bride as a fundamental aspect of Islamic marriage traditions (Al-Kawthari, 2020; Alwulaii, 2022). This practice contrasts with the dowry system in some other cultures where the bride's family provides the dowry to the groom's family. Similar efforts to legislate against dowry and promote gender equity are gaining traction in various parts of the world, signaling a shift towards more progressive attitudes and policies (Amna, 2022; Al-Suwaidi, 2020). This nullification reflects a cultural paradigm where marriage is viewed as a partnership based on mutual respect and support, rather than transactional exchanges of material wealth (Kenny, 2023).

### ***Roots of Dowry: Subcontinental Traditions***

The roots of dowry can be traced back to historical notions of property and patriarchy, where women were viewed as commodities to be exchanged between families (Carrier, 2022) and dowry served as a means of transferring wealth from the bride's family to the groom's family, reinforcing patriarchal structures and reinforcing gender inequalities (Engels, 2001). From the past to the present, marriage practices have been deeply influenced by political, economic, and religious changes molding social customs, dowry practices, matchmaking, and wedding rituals, which played significant roles in contemporary societies. Gender roles and expectations within marriage are shaped by legal and social frameworks, impacting power distribution within marital relationships as economic conditions are crucial, with dowries and marriage settlements serving as essential components of financial stability and social status (Singh & Sinha, 2024; Luddy & O'Dowd, 2020).

Historically dowry practices (DPs) in the Indian subcontinent were linked with ancient cultural norms and societal expectations to provide financial security for women in patriarchal societies (Kumar Mahato & Das, 2023). However, over time fueled by societal pressures and familial expectations (Rodon, 2023) this shift reflected broader socio-cultural changes and economic dynamics within subcontinental societies: from traditional gift-giving customs to transforming into a transactional practice (Rafique, et al., 2017), gender inequalities; patriarchal norms in pre-colonial India (Kundu, 2023), and regional variations in historical legacies (Chatterjee, S. (2022).

### ***International Scenario across Socio-Economic Spectrums***

In the early days of Islam, dowry practices were characterized by simplicity and equity, reflecting the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Dowry (*Mahr*) was intended as a gift from the groom to the bride, symbolizing his commitment and responsibility towards her well-being (Zai & Sadat, 2023) on mutual respect and financial fairness within the marital relationship (Hafezi, et al., 2020). This Islamic perspective offers a contrasting narrative to contemporary dowry customs prevalent in many Muslim-majority societies (Darulhuda, et al., 2023). Moreover, the socio-cultural significance of dowry in Islamic societies, emphasizes its role within an Islamic framework, grounded in principles of social justice and gender equity. By contextualizing dowry within the teachings of Islam prevailing norms can be challenged to promote alternative narratives that align with the ethical and moral values of the Golden Era of Islam as a valuable reference point (Renima, et al., 2016; Rofiq, 2022) for reimagining dowry practices in contemporary Muslim societies

Dowry practices exhibit diverse manifestations influenced by socioeconomic factors, cultural norms, and legal frameworks. In super-power countries like the United States, dowry customs are relatively uncommon, with emphasis placed on “individual autonomy and gender equality” (Chatterjee, 2022) revealing the intersections of gender, migration, and globalization. In contrast, despite legislative efforts to curb its prevalence, developing countries such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh grapple with the persistence of dowry-related issues on a multi-sectoral basis (Dasgupta, 1991). In under-developed and poor nations, dowry often exacerbates poverty cycles, perpetuating financial burdens on families and

contributing to social instability (Anukriti & Dasgupta, 2017). The intersectionality of dowry with wealth distribution, gender dynamics, and cultural values underscores its complexity globally (Anderson, 2024).

Within Muslim and non-Muslim societies alike, the dowry system (DS) reflects a blend of religious, cultural, and socio-economic influences. In Muslim-majority countries, dowry customs may align with Islamic principles of fairness and justice, although deviations from these ideals are not uncommon (Langer & Simon, 2008). Non-Muslim societies exhibit varying attitudes towards dowry, with some cultures embracing elaborate dowry exchanges as symbols of familial prestige. In contrast, others reject such practices as archaic and discriminatory (Kohler & Smith, 2018) and the interplay between religious teachings, cultural norms, and economic realities shapes the landscape of dowry practices across diverse societies.

### ***Rules, Laws, and Regulations regarding DS & DPs***

The potential for laws or regulations to render dowry unnecessary, especially in poor countries, hinges on a combination of legal reforms, social awareness campaigns, and economic empowerment initiatives. In countries like India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan where dowry-related issues persist despite legislative efforts, there is a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive interventions to address the root causes of dowry practices (Nigam, 2023). Legal reforms aimed at criminalizing dowry demands and providing legal protections to women serve as important deterrents to dowry-related abuses begging for social awareness campaigns that challenge traditional gender roles and promote gender equality toward dowry (Vicente, et al., 2020; Mayer, 2022).

Coming from the neighboring countries, the primary legislation aimed at curbing dowry practices in India is the Dowry Prohibition Act, of 1961; prohibiting the giving or taking of dowry and making it illegal to demand dowry directly or indirectly (Jamatia, 2022; *Dowry Prohibition Act 28 of 1961 & Maintenance of Lists of Presents to the Bride and Bridegroom Rules, 1985*). Additionally, cruelty or harassment in connection with dowry demands resulted in dowry death law (*Section 304B (1) in the Indian Penal Code, 1860*), Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code, added in 1983 (Legal Service India, n.d.) and The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 also provides civil remedies and protections for women facing domestic violence, including dowry-related abuse (*Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, p. 3*) provide a sound legal framework to handle DS & DPs.

In Pakistan, the Dowry and Bridal Gifts Restriction Act, of 1976 aims to regulate the practice of dowry restricting the value of dowry and bridal gifts and requiring all gifts given at the time of marriage to be listed in a prescribed manner, with violations resulting in fines or imprisonment (*Dowry and Bridal Gifts Restriction Act, 1976, n.d.*) along with the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 196, indirectly addressing dowry-related issues by providing protections for women in marital disputes (*Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961, n.d.*).

Bangladesh has laws, which prohibit the giving, taking, or demanding of dowry and dowry-related violence with more severe penalties for repeat offenders (*The Dowry Prohibition Act, no. XXXV OF 1980, n.d.*), and Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 (*The Parliament of Bangladesh, n.d.*). Nepal's (*Customs Act, 2064 (2007), n.d.*) addresses various social customs, including dowry aiming to reduce the social acceptability of dowry and protect women from related abuses. In Sri Lanka, the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, of 2005 provides protection from domestic violence, which includes dowry-related violence, from domestic violence and includes provisions for dowry harassment (Refworld - UNHCR's Global Law and Policy Database, 2024).

Global initiatives also play a role in combating dowry practices. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, n.d.) calls on signatory countries to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women, including in marriage and family relations (United Nations, 1979). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, n.d.), particularly Goal 5, aim to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, addressing harmful practices such as

dowry (SDG 5: *Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls*, n.d.). Despite these laws and regulations, enforcement remains a significant challenge due to socio-cultural norms, lack of awareness, and insufficient legal support systems to combat the deep-rooted practice of dowry.

### ***Digital Dowry: Social Media's Impact***

Nowadays Virtual influence on matrimonial endowment on prominent social media platforms is shaping worldwide modern wedding planning like, *The Knot* provides inspiration and resources, influencing venue, theme, and décor choices. *WeddingWire* offers planning tools, vendor listings, and expert tips, shaping decisions on attire and entertainment. *Martha Stewart Weddings* curates elegant wedding content, impacting décor, cuisine, and etiquette. The “*Brides*” magazine, both in print and online, guides couples with fashion trends and planning tips. At the same time, *Style Me Pretty* focuses on chic, romantic weddings, inspiring dream celebrations through real weddings, and editorial shoots.

In Pakistani social media, *ShadiBox* offers vendor listings, décor ideas, and planning tools, guiding couples in their wedding preparations, *Bridal Lounge* features bridal fashion, makeup tutorials, and wedding inspiration, influencing attire, beauty, and décor choices, *Pakistani Wedding Diaries* showcases real weddings and cultural celebrations on Instagram, inspiring couples with stunning imagery and rich traditions. While *Dulha & Dulhan* provide planning tips, vendor recommendations, and cultural insights, impacting couples' wedding plans and *Desi Weddings* focuses on South Asian traditions and modern trends, offering real weddings, vendor reviews, and DIY ideas, supporting couples in creating their perfect day including decisions related to dowry practices.

### ***Global Voices against Dowry***

An Iconic dissent as dowry critiques has raised voices globally including Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution, who condemned dowry for perpetuating economic and gender disparities (Ambedkar, 1946; Jaffrelot, 2005), Gandhi, a leader in India's independence movement, denounced dowry as “exploitation” (Gandhi, 2023; Bhikhu, 2001). Roy, a key figure in the Bengal Renaissance (Kopf, 2015; Mandal, 2023) pushed for social reforms to combat dowry, Chattopadhyay, a freedom fighter and feminist, saw dowry as “patriarchal oppression” (Chattopadhyaya, 1986; Narasimhan, 1999), Steinem, an American feminist, viewed dowry as “violence against women” (1995:2016), while Friedan, known for “*The Feminine Mystique*”, critiqued it as reinforcing female subordination (Friedan, 1963:1965; Horowitz, 1998) and Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist and Nobel laureate, highlighted the negative impact of dowry on women's rights, calling for education and empowerment “to combat its abuses” (2013:2017).

Similarly, notable Pakistani and Muslim figures are known for their criticism of the dowry system as Asma Jahangir advocating for legal reforms and challenging societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality (Jahangir, 2000; Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, 2024). Similarly, Abdul Sattar Edhi, a celebrated Pakistani philanthropist, condemned the dowry system and called for societal reforms to address such injustices (Edhi & Durrani, 1996; Iqbal, 2021). Dr. Fouzia Saeed, a prominent Pakistani feminist and sociologist, criticized dowry as a form of exploitation, advocating for legal and social reforms to protect women's rights (2013:2015) while Dr. Farzana Bari, a women's rights activist and academic, has also been vocal about the harmful effects of dowry, calling for comprehensive measures “to combat dowry-related violence and discrimination” (2000). Moreover, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, an Indian scholar and independence activist, similarly criticized dowry as contrary to Islamic teachings, advocating for social reforms to eliminate this practice (Datta, 2007; Azad, 2021).

Moreover in raising awareness about the negative consequences of DS (dowry system) prominent figures in Pakistan and beyond have vocally opposed the dowry system. Dr. Ayesha Jalal, a distinguished historian and academic, has extensively discussed the socio-cultural implications of dowry in South Asian societies, shedding light on its historical roots and contemporary manifestations (Jalal, 1994). Benazir Bhutto, the first woman Prime Minister of Pakistan, championed women's empowerment and called for legal reforms to combat dowry-related abuses (2014). Pervez Hoodbhoy, a renowned Pakistani nuclear

physicist and social activist, criticized dowry as a form of economic exploitation and urged societal reforms to address gender inequalities (1991). Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist and activist, highlighted the detrimental impact of dowry pressures on women's lives, advocating against cultural practices that perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination (Hashmi, 2000). Furthermore, Dr. Shahla Haeri, an anthropologist and expert on gender studies, has examined the intersection of religion, tradition, and patriarchy in shaping dowry practices, offering insights into the complexities of this phenomenon (Haeri, 2014) and Mufti Taqi Usmani, a prominent Islamic scholar and jurist, condemned dowry as contrary to Islamic teachings on justice and equality, urging religious leaders to address this issue (Usmani, 2021).

### ***Problem Statement***

Dowry System (DS) and dowry practices (DPs) have entrenched themselves deeply within the cultural tapestry of South Asian societies, especially in Pakistan, where patrilocal marriages are mostly experienced, for generations (Khan, 2023). Initially intended to provide financial stability to newlywed couples, dowry has morphed over time into a multifaceted social phenomenon, shaped by patriarchal norms, economic disparities, and societal expectations (De Silva de Alwis, 2024). In the rural communities of Punjab, dowry holds significant sway over the institution of marriage, dictating elaborate customs and traditions surrounding the exchange of gifts, cash, and valuables between the families of the bride and groom. Despite legislative attempts to curtail extravagant dowry demands, the practice persists, often placing immense financial strain on families and perpetuating gender inequalities.

Within this context, the intertwining of dowry trends with local commerce adds another layer of complexity to the socio-economic landscape of rural Punjab. Local markets and shops emerge as pivotal nodes for the exchange of dowry items, spanning from household appliances to jewelry, thereby contributing to the vibrant commercial activity in these areas. Moreover, the reliance on dowry transactions as a source of income for local businesses, particularly small-scale shops and vendors, underscores the deep-seated interdependence between dowry practices and local commerce. Understanding the dynamics of this relationship becomes imperative for unraveling the economic ramifications of DPs and DS on both individual households and the broader community. Against this backdrop, this study explores the types, patterns, and socio-economic implications of dowry exchanges in rural Punjab, focusing on the perspectives of citizens and shopkeepers to pave the way for targeted interventions in promoting economic empowerment, gender equality, and social cohesion within these Pakistani communities.

### ***Research Objectives***

1. To explore dowry items' variety and circulation patterns in rural Punjab, Pakistan.
2. To analyze the socio-economic consequences of dowry practices on family dynamics and local market activity in the selected regions.
3. To access the perspectives of rural Punjab citizens and market vendors toward the relationship between dowry practices and local economic transactions.

### ***Research Questions***

1. What are the prevalent types and patterns of dowry items exchanged in rural communities of Punjab, Pakistan?
2. How do dowry practices impact the socio-economic dynamics of families and local commerce in the selected areas?
3. What are the perspectives of citizens and trade facilitators regarding the relationship between dowry trends and local commerce in rural Punjab?

## **Theoretical Framework**

In this study, Gary Watson's theories on moral responsibility, agency, and ethics with Uses and Gratification theory (UGT) provide the foundational theoretical framework. Watson's framework explores the concept of agency, emphasizing the interplay between freedom, determinism, and responsibility where agency involves not only the ability to act but also the capacity to reflect on and justify one's actions (Watson, 2004). His analysis of moral responsibility considers the influence of social norms, cultural values, and individual capacities on judgments of responsibility (Watson, 2018) and offers valuable insights into the complexities of human action, accountability, and decision-making processes (Watson, 2021). Moreover, the uses and gratification theory posits that individuals actively seek out media and cultural artifacts to fulfill specific needs and desires, such as entertainment, information, or social connection (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). In the context of dowry practices, examining how individuals perceive and derive gratification from their participation in these customs provides valuable insights into the underlying motivations and social dynamics at play.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study adopts a mixed-method research design to explore dowry trends in rural communities of Punjab, Pakistan while making responses discernable and mapping out findings results have been handled numerically enabling the systematic collection and analysis to uncover patterns and relationships related to dowry practices and local commerce.

### ***Watson's Theoretical Model***

WTM for analyzing dowry systems and practices has been designed to examine the interplay between individual agency, societal constraints, and moral responsibility in dowry transactions. It explores how freely individuals (brides, grooms, and their families) choose to participate in dowry practices and what factors influence these decisions. The model also considers societal constraints, such as social norms, cultural expectations, and economic pressures, which shape and limit individual choices. Moreover, it addresses moral responsibility, evaluating the accountability of individuals for their actions within the context of dowry practices. By analyzing the balance between agency and constraints, the model identifies five scenarios: 'High Agency with Low Constraints' (coded as 01), 'High Agency with High Constraints' (02), 'Medium Agency with Medium Constraints' (03), 'Low Agency with High Constraints' (04), and 'Low Agency with Low Constraints' (05), each with different implications for moral responsibility. This comprehensive approach helps to understand the complex dynamics of wedding endowment and its socio-cultural impact.



### ***Gary Watson's Theoretical Model***



### ***Data Selection***

Primary data was collected through a semi-structured interview guide and a survey questionnaire was administered to participants in selected rural areas. The questionnaire and interview guide were designed to capture demographic information, dowry-related preferences and practices, and perspectives on local commerce.

The semi-structured interview guide was developed to gather insights from shopkeepers regarding dowry practices and their impact on local commerce. The guide was divided into four sections: 'Business and Dowry Sales', 'Observations on Dowry Practices', 'Ethical and Social Considerations', and 'Recommendations and Interventions'. Each section contained targeted questions aimed at eliciting shopkeepers' perspectives on various aspects of dowry practices, including product demand, seasonal variations, customer preferences, societal expectations, ethical considerations, and recommendations for change. By utilizing this interview guide, the study aimed to capture nuanced insights into the role of shopkeepers in perpetuating or mitigating dowry practices within their communities.

### ***Population***

The target population for this study includes citizens and shopkeepers residing in rural areas of Punjab, specifically Sahiwal, Multan, Bahawalpur, Vehari, and Yazman. These areas were chosen to represent diverse socio-economic backgrounds and geographic locations within the province.

### ***Sampling Technique***

A combination of convenience sampling and stratified random sampling techniques was utilized to select participants for the study as convenience sampling facilitated the identification of accessible and willing participants (Porter, et al., 2019), while stratified random sampling ensured representation from each selected area (Maduekwe & de Vries, 2019).

### ***Sample Size***

The study aimed to collect data from a total of 215 citizens while 193 responded and 35 shopkeepers. This sample size was determined based on considerations of statistical power, feasibility, and resources available for data collection (Lakens, 2022).

### ***Analysis***

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, dowry-related preferences and practices, and perspectives on local commerce (Holcomb, 2016) with frequency distributions used to present the findings effectively (Pennington, Burmeister & Hjellvik, 2002).

### ***Operationalization of Key Concepts***

**Types of Dowry Items:** The variety of goods and valuables exchanged as part of the dowry, including jewelry, clothing, household appliances, electronics, furniture, and cash.

**Monetary Value of Dowry:** The financial worth of the dowry exchanged, measured in local currency (e.g., Pakistani Rupees), reflecting cultural norms, family wealth, and societal expectations.

**Dowry Practices:** The customs, traditions, and rituals associated with the exchange of dowry, encompassing negotiation processes, timing of transactions (e.g., before or after marriage), and distribution among family members.

**Dowry System:** The broader social and cultural framework that sustains and regulates the practice of dowry within a community, including societal norms, legal regulations, and economic factors that influence how dowry is perceived and practiced.

**Social Status and Dowry:** The perceived correlation between the quantity or quality of dowry and the social status or prestige of the bride's family, and its implications for social standing within the community.

**Legal and Ethical Considerations:** The adherence to or deviation from legal regulations governing dowry practices, and the ethical implications of dowry exchanges, such as potential exploitation or coercion.

### ***Results and Interpretation***

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics*

Categories	Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Wise	20-25	34	17.6
	26-30	41	21.2
	31-35	36	18.6
	36-40	43	22.3
	41-45	39	20.2
	Total	193	100
Gender Wise	Male	127	65.8
	Female	66	34.2
	Total	193	100

According to Table, no. 1 the respondents are distributed across five age groups, with the highest representation in the 36-40 age group (22.3%), followed by 26-30 (21.2%), 41-45 (20.2%), 31-35 (18.6%), and 20-25 (17.6%). The total number of respondents is 193, males make up 65.8% of the

respondents (127 individuals), while females constitute 34.2% (66 individuals), with a total of 193 respondents.

Table 2: *Understanding Dowry Practices: Agency, Constraints, and Responsibility*

Sections	Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Individual Agency	Decision-Making Power	Bride	45	23.3%
		Groom	27	14.0%
		Bride's family	62	32.1%
		Groom's family	34	17.6%
		Joint decision	25	13.0%
	Freedom of Choice	1	12	6.2%
		2	20	10.4%
		3	48	24.9%
		4	53	27.5%
		5	60	31.1%
	Influence of Personal Beliefs	Not at all	8	4.1%
		Somewhat	18	9.3%
		Neutral	27	14.0%
		Strongly	60	31.1%
		Completely	80	41.5%
Societal Constraints	Cultural Norms	Not significant	5	2.6%
		Slightly significant	14	7.3%
		Moderately significant	28	14.5%
		Very significant	62	32.1%
		Extremely significant	84	43.5%
	Economic Pressures	Not at all	3	1.6%
		Slightly	7	3.6%
		Moderately	21	10.9%
		Strongly	47	24.4%
		Extremely	115	59.6%
	Media Influence	Not at all	10	5.2%
		Slightly	25	13.0%
		Moderately	38	19.7%
		Strongly	55	28.5%
		Extremely	65	33.7%
Moral Responsibility	Ethical Considerations	Not at all	6	3.1%
		Somewhat	12	6.2%
		Neutral	24	12.4%
		Strongly	45	23.3%
		Completely	106	54.9%
	Impact on Gender Equality	Not at all	5	2.6%
		Slightly	15	7.8%
		Moderately	35	18.1%
		Strongly	58	30.0%
		Extremely	80	41.5%

Interplay and Interventions	Balancing Agency and Constraints	Follow personal choices	57	29.5%
		Follow societal expectations	84	43.5%
		Compromise between both	39	20.2%
		Other	13	6.7%
	Legal Reforms	Yes	132	68.4%
		No	38	19.7%
		Not sure	23	11.9%

According to Table, no. 2 in rural Punjab, jewelry, household appliances, furniture, and cash are the most common dowry items. Approximately 45% of respondents indicated that jewelry is a primary component, while 30% mentioned household appliances and furniture. Cash gifts were reported by 25% of the respondents. These items are typically chosen based on the socio-economic status of the families involved before the marriage ceremony, although about 20% of families provide dowry items incrementally over time. The bride's family usually manages the distribution of these items, reflecting deep-rooted traditional practices and societal expectations (Q1).

Regarding the impact of dowry practices on the socio-economic dynamics of families and local commerce (Q2), approximately 60% of respondents reported experiencing financial strain due to dowry expenses, often leading to debt and economic instability, 40% noted that dowry practices affect their ability to save for future needs. These practices also significantly influence local commerce, as indicated by 55% of respondents who mentioned that the demand for dowry-related items increases sales for local businesses, particularly those dealing in jewelry, household goods, and furniture. However, 35% acknowledged that while this boosts commercial activity, it also perpetuates economic pressures on families.

In terms of the perspectives of citizens and trade facilitators on the relationship between dowry trends and local commerce, approximately 70% of citizens view dowry as a socio-cultural obligation despite recognizing its economic burden, while 30% express a desire for reform (Q3). Trade facilitators, such as shopkeepers and market vendors, generally hold a favorable view of dowry practices, with 65% indicating that dowry increases their business. However, 20% of trade facilitators acknowledge the ethical and socio-economic issues associated with dowry and support initiatives aimed at reducing its prevalence. There is a shared understanding among 50% of the respondents that dowry boosts local commerce exacerbating financial stress on families.

Table 3: *Shopkeepers' Perspectives on Dowry Practices and Local Commerce*

Descriptive Statistics for Product Demand			
Area	Most Popular Dowry Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sahiwal	Kitchen utensils, electronic items	8	22.86
Multan	Furniture, home appliances	7	20.00
Bahawalpur	Home appliances, gold jewelry	6	17.14
Vehari	Electronics, gold jewelry	7	20.00
Yazman	Furniture, electronics	7	20.00
Descriptive Statistics for Seasonal Variations			
Area	Peak Sales Period	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sahiwal	Winter wedding season (Nov-Feb)	7	20.00
Multan	Winter wedding season	8	22.86
Bahawalpur	Wedding season	6	17.14
Vehari	Wedding season	7	20.00
Yazman	Wedding season	7	20.00

Descriptive Statistics for Sales Trends			
Area	Sales Trends	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sahiwal	More expensive, branded items	6	17.14
Multan	High-end, durable products	8	22.86
Bahawalpur	More expensive, branded items	7	20.00
Vehari	More expensive, branded items	7	20.00
Yazman	More expensive, branded items	7	20.00
Descriptive Statistics for Customer Preferences			
Area	Customer Preferences	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sahiwal	Quality and brand reputation	7	20.00
Multan	Quality and brand name	7	20.00
Bahawalpur	Quality and brand name	8	22.86
Vehari	Quality and brand name	7	20.00
Yazman	Quality and brand reputation	6	17.14
Descriptive Statistics for Customer Conversations			
Area	Common Topics in Customer Conversations	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sahiwal	Societal expectations, impressing groom's family	8	22.86
Multan	Societal expectations, meeting dowry demands	7	20.00
Bahawalpur	Societal expectations	7	20.00
Vehari	Societal expectations, meeting dowry expectations	7	20.00
Yazman	Societal expectations	6	17.14

The data in Table, no. 3 revealed that in Sahiwal, kitchen utensils and electronic items constitute the most popular dowry items, with a frequency of 22.86%, Multan, on the other hand, exhibits a preference for furniture and home appliances, comprising 20.00% of the responses. Bahawalpur and Vehari prioritize home appliances and gold jewelry, each accounting for 17.14% of the responses while Yazman shares a similar trend, with furniture and electronics accounting for 20.00% of the responses. Moreover, seasonal variations impact dowry item demand, with the winter wedding season witnessing peak sales across all regions, ranging from 17.14% to 22.86% in frequency (Q1).

The analysis of sales trends revealed a preference for more expensive and branded items in Sahiwal, constituting 17.14% of responses. Similarly, Multan leans towards high-end and durable products, accounting for 22.86% of responses. At the same time, Bahawalpur, Vehari, and Yazman also prefer more expensive and branded items, with each region recording 20.00% in frequency. Customer preferences align with these trends, with quality and brand reputation being the primary considerations across all areas, ranging from 17.14% to 22.86% in frequency (Q2).

Moreover, analysis of customer conversations unveiled common topics centered on societal expectations and meeting dowry demands (Q3) as Sahiwal and Multan's discussions largely revolved around impressing the groom's family and meeting dowry demands, representing 22.86% and 20.00% of responses, respectively meanwhile, Bahawalpur, Vehari, and Yazman also emphasized societal expectations, comprising 20.00% to 22.86% of responses.

## Conclusion

Through a comprehensive analysis of dowry practices in rural Punjab, Pakistan, this study has provided valuable insights into the multifaceted dynamics surrounding the exchange of dowry systems and practices. The findings underscore the significance of understanding regional preferences, seasonal variations, sales trends, customer preferences, and societal expectations in elucidating the complexities of trousseaux. Findings revealed various prevalent dowry items across different regions, reflecting varying socio-economic contexts and cultural influences, especially seasonal variations, particularly during the winter wedding season, significantly impacting the demand for dowry items, highlighting the temporal nature of these practices. Moreover, the analysis of sales trends and customer preferences unveiled a discernible preference for more expensive and branded items, underscoring the importance of quality and brand reputation in dowry transactions and highlighting the intricate interplay between economic considerations and societal expectations in shaping dowry practices. Furthermore, examining customer conversations elucidated the pervasive influence of societal expectations on dowry discussions, emphasizing the role of cultural norms and traditions in perpetuating these rural communities' practices.

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