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Dowry: Parental Concerns and Expectations in Pakistan

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The current study was conducted to investigate parental views, concerns, and expectations regarding the dowry practice. For this purpose, six fathers and six mothers were interviewed who indulged in dowry practiced. After analyzing data through thematic analysis, three superordinate themes emerged: dowry perspective, concerns behind dowry, and consequences and prevention of dowry. Participants were aware of the concept, origin, and religious basis of the dowry system. They mainly supported limited dowry provision on a daughter's wedding but opposed accepting from a daughter-in-law. Participants believed that dowry had a destructive impact at societal, economic, and familial levels and was connected to greediness, delayed marriages, loans, psychological impact, financial miseries, dowry-related violence, and divorce. Eradication measures of the dowry system included promoting awareness and knowledge of Islamic Shariah, the role of media, and developing a sense of equity among the community. This study helped us to understand the core motives behind the provision and acceptance of dowry.

Keywords: dowry; dowry concerns; dowry expectations; dowry consequences; dowry challenges

A family is a unit of great importance for society as it transcends social and spiritual values (Hodge, 2005), and marriage is the basis of that family system. In various cultures, marriage is considered as a sacred bond between two individuals who commit to each other. In the Islamic society of Pakistan, marriage is a religious obligation, safeguarding morality, and a social commitment (Meraj, 2018). On the occasion of marriage giving and receiving gifts (where the giver of such gifts is the bride's side and the recipient is the groom's side) is a common practice. These gifts are referred to as dower, and the practice is termed dowry (Goody & Tambiah, 1973). In addition, dowry also denotes the traditional items such as ornaments, cooking utensils, or other domestic items such as wardrobes that accompany a bride to her marital home. It may also include cash, electronics, and furniture items which help the newlyweds in establishing a home (Mohabey & Tiwari, 2015).

Dowry is a way of marriage reimbursement, which indicates facilitation and preparation of expenses by some guardians, which also imposes certain consequences of greater influence on the young couple after marriage (Caldwell et al., 1983). This lens portrays the dowry as a positive practice, but it has become a societal evil that has adversely affected our society and caused social and economic decline. Pakistan faces numerous societal problems to deal with, but dowry is a major one, and also a leading factor in propagating the idea that the birth of a daughter is a burden (Gull, 2011). Further, it is also linked with many negative outcomes such as domestic violence, harassment of daughters-in-law, etc. (Jeyaseelan et al., 2015; Singh, 2013). Generally, dowry is a custom, and its demand is growing with time (Shah et al., 2016). The leading factors which sustain and make dowry a customary practice include lack of information about the law, illiteracy, lack of social awareness, and biased social and cultural attitudes that are commonly embedded in the general mindset of the community (Qudder, 2014).

Unfortunately, dowry has become a rigid custom over time in some parts of the world, mainly in Asia, Northern Africa, and the Balkans (Kalantry & Kestenbaum, 2011). To understand dowry, there is a need to explore it from the provider's and consumer's point of

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view. A bulk of research is available on dowry-related violence and death, and its negative aspects, but little has been done to look at the parental perspective of dowry exchange. Hence, the researchers aimed to explore the lived experiences of parents having marriageable and married children, and their concerns and expectations regarding dowry, as they are the prominent figures in providing and receiving dowry. Therefore, the study was followed by three research questions: Firtly, what are the subjective experiences of parents regarding dowry? Secondly, what are the concerns of marriageable and married daughters' fathers toward dowry? Lastly, what are the expectations of marriageable and married sons' mothers toward dowry?

Method

This qualitative research used thematic analysis to identify and interpret the meaning of the data set, as it enables one to comprehend the complexity of any conflict under research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, it is also suitable to detect any influencing elements generated by the participants. Hence, interpretations are valuable in terms of presenting the most apt explanations for responders' attitudes, thoughts, and actions. It resonates aptly with features included in the process of thematic analysis (Creswell, 2014).

Participants

Through the purposive sampling technique, the study recruited 12 participants (three fathers of marriageable daughters, three fathers of married daughters, three mothers of marriageable sons, and three mothers of married sons). Only the participants who were from middle socio-economic status, had 3 to 4 children, and were involved in dowry practices were included in the study. Cousin and love marriage cases, and parents of grooms who had settled abroad for earning purposes, were excluded. The bride's father and groom's mother were selected because, in Pakistan, the father as the head of the family who has the decision-making power on fundamental issues (e.g., weddings, schooling, etc.) (Qamar, 2016). On the other hand, the mother-in-law is an authoritative and governing figure for the daughter-in-law in her marital family (Qamar, 2018). The demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Sample (Fathers)

Participants	Age	Religion	City	Education	Family system	No. of Chil-dren	Occupation	Residency
P1	70	Islam	Shahpur	MA	Nuclear	4	Rt. Director	Own
P2	48	Islam	Lahore	FA	Nuclear	2	Business	Own
P3	55	Islam	Laiya	MA	Nuclear	3	Officer	Own
P4	62	Islam	Gojra	Matric	Nuclear	5	Rt. Officer	Own
P5	60	Islam	Kahna	Primary	Nuclear	6	Property dealer	Own
P6	54	Islam	Rahimyar - khan	BA	Nuclear	7	Business	Own

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Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Sample (Mothers)

Participants	Age	Religion	City	Education	Family System	No. of Childr-en	Occupation	Residency
P7	50	Islam	Shahpur	FA	Nuclear	4	LHV	Own
P8	54	Islam	Tandliaw-ala	Matric	Nuclear	5	Housewife	Own
P9	60	Islam	Lahore	FA	Nuclear	7	Rt. Teacher	Own
P10	53	Islam	Badomali	FA	Nuclear	4	Housewife	Own
P11	50	Islam	Lahore	Primary	Nuclear	9	Housewife	Own
P12	60	Islam	Chichawa-tni	FA	Nuclear	6	Business	Own

Material and Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were used to scrutinize in-depth perceptions and experiences of the participants. These types of interviews are a flexible tool that aids in the rapport-building process with respondents, allows higher and diverse coverage of content, helps to cover different areas, and tends to generate a valuable amount of data (Osborn & Smith, 2015). For conducting these interviews, an interview guide was made which included two portions (each containing 9 questions), one for fathers and the other for mothers. Data was collected at the participants' residences after obtaining consent and developing rapport. Interviews were recorded and conducted in the native language. On average, it took 20-35 minutes to complete an interview.

Taking into account the research goals, this study adopted a content analysis approach to create a comprehensive understanding and knowledge of the information. After transcribing the interviews, comprehensive reading and coding were done by the researchers. During initial coding, the data was organized by formalizing meanings into clusters of relevant sub-themes and themes. Emerged codes and themes were shared with other researchers to reach an inter-coder agreement. Furthermore, significant statements for all the themes were extracted. Interpretations of the results were done from two stances, as the data suggested, and based on the researchers' insight into the data.

Ethical Consideration

Participants of the study were informed about the research purpose and its nature. Before the interview, their consent to participate was sought. They were also guaranteed that their shared informational data would be kept private, anonymous and would be used only for research purposes. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time with impunity. A written informed consent from concerned participants was an integral of the interview procedure, and interviews were recorded after taking their consent.

Results

For the investigation of parental views, concerns, and expectations regarding dowry and its practice in Pakistani civilization, thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcribed data of all informants. Investigation of the data proposed three main themes, namely dowry perspective, concerns behind dowry, and consequences and coping.

Dowry Perspective

Dowry as a practice is almost as old as the institution of marriage itself. In the following study, participants hold different views with regard to dowry and its practice. A mutual stance is the traditional obligation of the bride's family to present dowry at the time of her marriage. Participants held different perspectives regarding the dowry concept; the most common view was that dowry practice was the result of shared living with Hindus before the partition of subcontinent. "This is Hindu culture as we got partitioned, so our mentality

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remained enslaved. Dowry is one of the evils we inherited from them" (P6). "We have inherited the evil of dowry from India. Baniya is a culture in India. Since Muslims and Hindus used to live together, so this ritual came from there" (P1). "Our society has made it a ritual. Dowry includes the things given at the time of the daughter's wedding" (P3)

Articles given as dowry were more or less the same for all participants. Some were in favor of providing basic need items such as simple furniture, crockery, dresses, bed linen, and electronics. However, some participants suggested the provision of expensive items such as LCD, AC, and refrigerator in dowry. "It should have a bed, sofa, chairs, a cupboard, clothes, jewelry, etc., these are called Dowry" (P2). "Dowry is a share. As they say, this is a share, take it. The things that parent give to the daughter are given as a gift" (P11). "All the domestic use things that the daughter needs are called Dowry. Dowry includes all the things. We gave everything, including room accessories, crockery, furniture, bedding, trunks, blankets, machine, fridge, LCD" (P8)

Provision of household items was the most common form of dowry as reported by participants. All of the participants were well aware of the religious basis of dowry. Here dichotomy of ideas was seen, ten participants reported that dowry is a non-Islamic practice, yet the basic need items are Islamic, and they gave the reference of Jahez-e-Fatima (R.A). "It is a social custom and not an Islamic custom. According to Islam, what has our Prophet (s.a.w) given to his daughter, a lota, a prayer mat, and a few such things?" (P7)

One participant reported that dowry is a "Sunnah" of the Prophet (s.a.w). "This is Sunnah. The Prophet (s.a.w) also gave basic accessories to his daughter but in today's time, the needs have increased. It's fine if dowry is limited to only basic things. As far as basic accessories are considered, then it is an Islamic custom" (P4)

However, just two participants knew the reality of Jahez-e-Fatima, that Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W) was the guardian of Hazrat Ali (R.A) and he paid for those limited items quoted as Jahez-e-Fatima. "This is not an Islamic custom. Nowhere is it proven that it is an Islamic ritual. The accessories that we quote as Jahaiz e Fatima were provided by the Prophet (S.A.W), but he didn't pay for those things. Hazrat Ali bought them, which were then given by the Prophet (S.A.W) to Bibi Fatima." (P6) "As far as my knowledge is, Prophet (S.A.W) gave things (dowry) to her daughter because Hazrat Ali used to live there." (P12)

While pointing out the present trends, dowry has become a form of inheritance share of daughters that is given to them at their weddings. "My religion has advised to give a property share to daughter. If the daughter withdraws from it herself then be it, it is her right, to either take it or give it to her brothers. A new trend has started these days that, in my life, I have given my daughter dowry from her share in property" (P6)

Concerns behind Dowry

It is apparent and explicit that dowry is practiced on account of certain reasons. However, the motives behind its provision and acceptance can vary family-wise and region-wise. In Pakistan paying dowry at the time of wedding, is a universal trend and seems an intentional act of the bride's family. "We have to give (dowry) to our daughter, everyone will arrange whatever they can afford" (P11). "My daughter is going; she should get every facility there and should not become dependent on anyone." (P2). "Definitely, I will give (dowry) to my daughter; because I do not know what type of in-laws she will have. Family's culture differs. If in future her Devarani, Jethani's mother has provided (dowry) to them then they will keep on complaining to her that your mother gave you nothing." (P12)

Similarly, two participants also reported that dowry is linked to the bride's respect and matter of ego issues of the new generation. "Our society does not respect the one who does not bring dowry. No matter how strongly you say it's a curse but our society has lost respect of good and bad" (P8). "It is respected when the daughter is bringing some accessories from

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her home. It is a matter of her own (girl's parents) pride and daughter's respect and to fulfill other family's (groom's family) expectations." (P4)

All participants proposed and supported a form of dowry termed the 'Limited dowry concept'. They were in favor of providing a room setup so that the bride could be accommodated conveniently in her marital home. "I want to give but as little as possible. Make the groom's family happy. Clear all the matters before engagement that we will not give dowry. I will only provide the room accessories" (P2)

According to a participant, dowry is not obnoxious in the case of affording suppliers and non-affording consumers. "If the girl's parents are filthy rich and the groom's family does not have much then it's alright to provide it as a gift rather than dowry." (P-10)

All participants reported that dowry is mainly practiced as an imposed societal ritual. It seemed difficult to marry a daughter without dowry because of tangible fears and concerns. "People gossip if dowry is not provided, in-laws too, even the surrounding people also. It is compulsion for the bride's family to give either more or less. They upset the daughter by saying what have your parents provided for you by taunting her. We have made these rituals to keep our noses (meaning to maintain our respect)." (P5). "Our society does not let the daughters live if no dowry is given. In-laws do not let them settle. Parents (girl's) do not want anybody to taunt their daughters about what they have bought. People do not give respect if (dowry) is not provided. The girl feels safe in society because of dowry." (P8)

In addition, the nature in which dowry demand is made is another significant aspect along with other factors behind its practice. Dowry is the demand of the groom's family conveyed either in a direct manner or by some indirect gestures. Sometimes the demand of the dowry takes on the form of a gamble that if the bride's family pays a certain quantity of dowry, marriage will happen. "In-laws complain (to daughter-in-law) you have not brought this and that. Therefore, (we) give money to shut their mouths. They still demand more even if you give almost everything. My father provided me with everything still they made an issue. My in-laws wanted me to bring (petty things) like matchsticks too from my home." (P8). "My daughter's in-laws had not demanded dowry as such but the behavior is so that they are expecting nice things in their daughter-in-law's dowry so that their extended family can admire that they have brought a good daughter-in-law." (P4). "Some people show their demands to surrounding people and not directly." (P5)

Few participants suggested that greed is a contributing aspect to dowry demand. Sometimes, greed levels increase to the point that families feel no hesitation while cashing the groom based on certain qualities. "If somebody is greedy, he will demand dowry; this is nothing else but greed. She (daughter-in-law) will bring new and latest accessories. Demand a new and big fridge from her, so this is nothing but greed." (P12). "Dowry is something that no matter how much you provide, it never gets admiration. There should be jewllery set, car, plot, and the property share of girl should be allotted to her." (P10)

Mostly, mother-in-laws reported no demand from the bride's family, however, daughter-in-laws were allowed to bring whatever they wanted or what their parents provided with convenience. "My son's mother-in-law says she has only two daughters so she will give dowry to her daughter. It is her happiness. So we are in trouble, either we take dowry or we do not" (P11). "Whatever anybody wants to do for himself or herself; can do. I think no demands should be made; they have given their daughter to us that is enough of their favor" (P12)

Although dowry was not demanded from the groom's side, most mothers showed disappointment towards the gifts from the bride's side and other dowry items. "The clothes that came from son's in-laws were of low quality. I did not like them" (P7). "I have provided everything to my daughters but my daughter-in-law has not brought anything no cooler, hotpot, washing machine, sewing machine, nothing, but she says she knows stitching then she

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should have brought a machine, she has brought nothing for her use. Those dresses given to my daughters were of low quality and ordinary like those from Auriga (a low price market) which are priced at PKRs. 1500 easily. Nothing came on childbirth; they did not bring anything for her only sister-in-law who stays at home (unmarried yet). I thought I too might not have given any dowry to my own daughters had I know before that my daughter-in-law would bring nothing" (P9). "My whole extended family complained and gossiped about what is given to the groom, no car etc.; they said Baaji did not marry her son where a car was being gifted to him instead brought daughter-in-law from where nothing was given, whereas I wanted my only daughter in law to be decent, religious and good. We already had all material things at home" (P7)

Furthermore, few mothers valued their daughters-in-law and their characteristics instead of dowry. "A good daughter-in-law is a blessing even if she does not bring dowry. According to my experience dowry, is not necessary, but the daughter-in-law and her upbringing should be good. If the girl is good, leave the rest (dowry). I do not want dowry; she should give me mental peace and just behave well with me." (P8). "The bride's personality is valued, no matter how much dowry you have brought but if your personality is not good, you cannot coexist then you are not valued" (P12)

One participant reported that education plays a vital role in terms of dowry issues. They further explained that educated marital families never have a blaming attitude towards daughter-in-law. "By the grace of Allah, all my sisters are educated so neither my sisters nor my mother taunted my wife ever" (P6). "All the expenses her (daughter-in-law's) father bore for her education and upbringing, taking her back and forth is enough for me" (P10)

Consequences and Prevention

Collectively, the dowry system may contribute to devastating effects on a society as well as on the individual. It may also be a source of devaluing human virtue and dignity. It has created many socio-economic problems with severe consequences. Sometimes severity increases to a point that it becomes the source of violence. Dowry violence may occur due to a lack of, or insufficient, or dowry amount and items. All participants identified its adverse effects on the community, the bride, the bride's family, the marriage, and family economics.

"The dowry (custom) should end, as many daughters become old without marriage waiting for dowry arrangement" (P2). "The real problem is for the ones who cannot afford dowry as a result their daughters remain unmarried; this also happens when the groom's family demands dowry and those demands go unfulfilled" (P3). "Parents try harder to maintain (societal) standards and fall into debts. We have made dowry a burden on ourselves" (P4). "Girls were sent back to their parent's home from their in-laws when their parents had not given them dowry as demanded; fights and quarrels would happen leading to divorce" (P7)

Two participants explained forms of dowry abuse and torture from marital families. "The groom's families definitely complain and make the girl's life miserable and return her to her family saying that your father has not provided such and such things, it's like the stove blasts in homes, these don't happen just like that, first they blast the girl's mind and then the stove, leading to the girl's death. Alternatively, the girl dies while the in-laws keep on displaying negligence" (P6). "The ones who want dowry they take it no matter what. My sister's in-laws would beat her and send her to get money from me (sister) and they would sell things from her dowry when she would come to her parents' home. They inflicted many cruelties on her so that she died so early" (P10)

There are numerous challenges on the path to doing away with dowry practice. Participants of the study also reported challenges to abolish and overcome this evil. "Fighting against the society is only possible with great force. You do not have the courage to fight society. Yes, you can exert limited control in your own home. We have made dowry a

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necessity, life can be spent without it even, and everything is possible. If you do not eat biryani, and cannot afford or it and you do not have finance for it, you can eat plain rice too or even if you do not eat (rice), you will still stay alive. However, you say no, I want to eat it, I want to cook it because so and so has cooked it" (P1)

To prevent the spread of dowry system, participants suggested the requirement of communal efforts, the role of media, and decreased advertisement of dowry items. "There should only be as much dowry as people can afford; unlike I provide so much that my surrounding people find it conduct their children weddings" (P1). "The groom should be able enough to have decorated the home and bought things for his wife beforehand so he will not have to need dowry" (P6). "Many issues will be solved if our children's parent's mentality turns for the better. It is all due to ignorance from religion, nothing else" (P10). "It will end if you cancel it today. The society should boycott it. As we have unions here, union councils are built, similarly, all the neighbors or people from the same area should gather, discuss it, the TV channels should discuss it. It should end" (P2). "The government should make a law as they have fixed the time and one dish (at weddings). Only the government can do something about it, only then we all will be relieved "(P12)

These comments indicated that participants discouraged the practice of dowry that would become a burden for daughters' parents, and wanted to cease this custom by collective initiatives.

Discussion

In Pakistan, marriage is a challenge on account of corresponding ceremonies which require substantial expenditure, in which dowry has become an integral part. According to current estimates, expenditure on dowry articles is six times larger than the annual family income in South Asia and four times greater in sub-Saharan Africa (Anderson, 2007). Moreover, in a survey by Gallup Pakistan (2017), 56% of Pakistanis believe girls can't get married without a dowry.

In the current study, all the participants considered dowry as derived from Hindu customs in practice due to the impact of shared living before the Indo-Pak partition, Indian culture and media, and the social illness of society. Tambiah (1973) maintained contradictory views that dowry is an ancient custom not practiced primarily by Hindus, not a direct custom borrowed by the Muslims from the Hindus. Further, dowry is seen as a pre-mortem inheritance share of daughters, which is also supported by previous literature indicating a rise in dowry trend because of its perception as a pre-mortem inheritance (Sarwar et al., 2016). In terms of dowry articles, participants pointed out varying degrees of agreement. However, common dowry items comprised room accessories, furniture, closets, electronics, kitchen utensils, dresses, bed linen, jewelry, automobiles, and cash (Puri, 1999). The concept of limited dowry is an additional finding to the previous literature as participants considered that the dowry system is difficult to cease, so it should be limited to basic things only.

Participants were well aware of the religious basis of dowry and practiced it as a Sunnah of the beloved Prophet (S.A.W) (Bazmee, 1978). However, two out of twelve participants reported contradictory views reporting that Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W) was the guardian of Hazrat Ali (R.A), so being his guardian, he provided basic articles of living (Noorie, 2010). Dowry is not entitled in Islam rather Islam gives women an advantage in that the groom needed to pay mehr (bridal gift) and supporting wife and family modestly (Ashraf, 1998). Three out of twelve participants reported that the provision of a secure place, furnished with basic utilities, and expenditure of marriage is the responsibility of the husband (Perveen et al., 2012).

In Pakistan, the bride's parents give dowry mostly out of love, care, and welfare motives (Hamid et al., 2011; Makino, 2014). Among twelve participants, three of them considered dowry as a gift from parents (Chaudry, 2016) because it represents the parent's

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affection and care (Kapadia, 1966). Being a patrilocal civilization, in our society the bride moves to her marital family, therefore, parents provide basic belongings to accommodate their daughters (Ali, 1992). Moreover, parents had to give dowry to ensure the happiness of their daughter in her in-laws because they consider dowry as a shield against the in laws misconduct towards their daughters (Nasrin, 2011). Commonly, dowry-related problems mainly originate from the in-laws, and mother and sisters-in-law play a significant role in dowry-related taunting attitudes toward the bride (Ali et al., 2013). In the current study, most mothers-in-law reported no demand imposed on the bride's family, yet they showed disappointment towards gifts from the bride's side and dowry items which revealed their hidden expectations. Specific to Pakistani culture, obvious demands are less prevalent; however marital families expect to receive a dowry upon their son's marriage (Rao & Rao, 1980). Similarly, other research has also shown that dowry requirement was linked to domestic abuse, i.e. physical, psychological, economic, and verbal (Ali et al., 2013; Singh, 2013).

Apart from parents' voluntary intentions, participants reported that dowry is practiced due to the imposed fear of post-marital crisis and divorce (Esteve-Volart, 2003). They also reported that dowry is demanded due to the decline of moral virtues, i.e., affection, love, kindness, compassion, etc. (Singh, 2016). Another reason behind dowry demand is greed and custom in Pakistani society (Gulzar et al., 2012). Regardless of any sort of concerns behind dowry, parents have to face certain difficulties while arranging a dowry due to the economic situation of Pakistan, therefore, they remain strained while collecting the desired amount to pay for their daughter's wedding (Singh, 2016), which leads them to take loans from different sources, consequently, forcing families into impoverishment (Davis 2007; Ejaz, 2006). Especially in Punjab (Pakistan), dowry creates psychological stress on the bride's side (Perveen et al., 2012). Anjum et al. (1995) stated that due to poverty, either girls stay unmarried or are married to a mismatched partner (Sarwar et al., 2016).

Beside the negative effects of dowry, there are still numerous challenges on the path of decreasing dowry practice. Participants of the study reported that it is difficult to eradicate the dowry system in our culture due to a lack of unity against this practice and an inability to confront established societal norms and tradition. However, dowry can be limited to basic needs purpose instead of luxurious items exhibiting social standing (Roulet, 1996) by promoting awareness (Tomlinson & Tariquzzaman, 2009). Participants suggested that dowry can be controllable at an individual level by the strict refusal of accepting dowry and arranging bridal setup by in-laws. It is also suggested that media, local union councils, and government should play an active role in limiting dowry to a range of basic items in every class of society out of a sense of equality. This can be done by introducing some format of basic and required articles, and by prohibiting dowry display and advertisement of dowry items. Moreover, promoting awareness of the Islamic teachings that daughters are a blessing, and promoting females' rights to possessions can help limit this dowry practice.

This study helps us to understand the views and struggles of the bride's parents assuring dowry at the time of wedding. We hope that this study will contribute to promoting awareness in society about how dowry affects family economics and mental well-being. One of the significant limitations of the current study is that it included only fathers from the bride's side and mothers from the groom's side. Further, due to a shortage of time, the sample was taken only from the Punjab province. Future studies could include parents from both sides (brides and grooms) high and lower-class families from different regions in order to explore how they view dowry and what problems they face on account of dowry practice and whether they support dowry practice or not and also investigate regional differences in dowry practice.

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