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Socio-psychological impact of dowry problem in rural Haryana

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Abstract

The practice of dowry, though legally prohibited, continues to impact millions of women in rural India, particularly in states like Haryana, where traditional customs remain deeply embedded. This paper explores the socio-psychological impact of dowry-related issues on women in rural Haryana, examining how dowry demands affect their mental health, social standing, and overall well-being. Dowry-related violence, including both physical and emotional abuse, often results in long-term psychological trauma, leading to conditions such as depression, anxiety, and a diminished sense of self-worth. Socially, dowry demands place immense pressure on women and their families, reinforcing gender inequalities and perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependence. The study, based on surveys and interviews with 120 rural women from the Hisar and Kaithal districts, found that 53.3% of participants reported dowry demands at the time of marriage, with 49.2% of these demands coming from mothers-in-law. The respondents' views on whether the dowry system will eventually end were mixed. The findings underscore the importance of educating and empowering women as a crucial strategy for improving their social status and enabling them to challenge dowry demands, stand up against in-laws, and seek justice. Increased awareness of women's rights, better access to psychological support, and stronger enforcement of legal measures are essential to mitigate the harmful effects of dowry practices and address their socio-psychological consequences.

Keywords: Dowry, education, social psychological, rural, impact

Introduction

Dowry demand or dowry system is a deeply rooted issue in our society. The dowry system is a cultural system in India in which the parents of the bride pay a large sum of money to the parents of the groom before, during, and after marriage for jewelry, gifts, and other household items. Dowry affects women's marital lives. It is a multifaceted, deep-seated gender issue with socio-psychological, economic, and health implications. Dowry has a devastating social and cultural impact on society, resulting from a long-standing imbalance of power between men and women. The dowry system has given rise to several socio-psychological and economic issues with severe consequences. There have been numerous cases of bride burning, harassment, and physical torture of newlywed women, and various types of pressure tactics used by the husband/in-law family. To combat this menace, the Government of India enacted the "Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961," which was later amended in 1985. In her new home, the bride is helpless and powerless to retaliate against the coercive tactics of in-laws and relatives, and they lack the courage to divorce the husband on grounds of physical and mental torture in the name of family honor and tradition (Chander *et al.* 2020) [3]. Women constitute half of India's total population, making it the world's second most populous country. Women in ancient India, particularly during the Vedic and Indus

Civilizations, were acknowledged as having great Divine honor and were worshipped as Goddesses as members of society. She used to play an independent role because she was given more power in decision-making in social institutions. Women are God's most precious gift to humanity. She can create what is good and destroy what is bad. Women produce children; they are mothers and wives; they do the cooking, washing, sewing, and washing; they care for men and are dependent on male authority; They are largely barred from high-status occupations and positions of power. It is said that the respect given to women in a civilization indicates its maturity. When it comes to Indian society, the status of women is not something we can talk about (Reshma and Ramegowda, 2013) [4]. Dowry deaths are the result of social change. Dowry is traditionally regarded as a gift. Marriage is a relationship between two families that is not viewed economically. However, as social values shifted, people developed a more consumerist mindset. Grooms demanded dowry because of their desire for a better economic status. Dowry became a means to an end: improved economic conditions, and thus higher social status. Dowry is a social evil that is deeply embedded in our culture. The heinous crimes committed against women include dowry demand, dowry deaths, dowry suicides, and dowry murders, among others. These offenses have created an environment of fear for women in society. Dowry-related

violence, bride burning, and dowry death are only found in our country, and aside from the husband, his kin also join together in persecuting the bride because dowry and related customs provide a good excuse for them to humiliate, insult, and even beat up women (Salim, 2017) ^[5]. Singh (2013) ^[6] found that a majority of women (29.3%) turned to their parental families for help and support in coping with this violence, while only 12.1 per cent approached the police and even fewer, 10.3 per cent, approached NGOs. The dowry demand was accepted by the majority of parents (44.8%). Only 12.1 per cent filed a police report, and just over 15 per cent decided to seek separation or divorce. The Hindu community is the most affected of all communities. Dowry has spread like a disease and has reached alarming proportions. Demands a large dowry in the form of farm animals, furniture, electronics, and other items. Dowry abuse is becoming more common in India. The most severe form of bride burning is the burning of women whose dowries were deemed insufficient by their husbands or in-laws. The majority of these incidents are reported as accidental kitchen burns or as suicide attempts. Deep-seated prejudices against women exist in India. There are a huge number of reported dowry death cases in India- dowry-related issues claimed the lives of 19 women every day in 2020, and in the same year, there were nearly 7,000 reported dowry death cases in India. This was a gradual decrease from 2014, when the figure was around 8.5 thousand (Kanwal, 2021) ^[7]. A total of 6,966 dowry deaths occurred last year, with 7,045 victims (CNBC,2021). Haryana also recorded an increase in dowry deaths and attempt to rape cases. A total of 208 cases under Section 304 (dowry death) of the Indian Penal Code were registered between January 1 and September 30, 2019, but the number has risen to 217 this year. According to the Times of India, 2725 cases of dowry harassment and 217 cases of dowry death were seen in 2020 (Sura, 2020) ^[9]. The dowry system in India includes payments made to the bridegroom from the bride's family in the form of capital, durable goods, and real estate, among other things, as a condition for marriage. It is one of the basic problems faced by women in our country. Dowry emerges as the first and most serious social challenge. It is one of the oldest and most heinous customs in the world, and it is still practiced today. The concept of dowry is still elegantly practiced, resulting in an increase in domestic violence and tarnishing women's status and respect in society. Dowry, also known as Dahej, is one of the societal ills that has become a barrier to women's daily lives. Dowry has become a societal norm, which is a significant problem for both society and women. The dowry system is the evil that has killed and disabled thousands of vulnerable women, driving some to commit suicide. On the Indian subcontinent, dowry is the oldest social ailment or disease. It has evolved into a terrible social disorder with deep roots in people's blood. Dowry is seen as a symbol of social status and self-recognition by many people. The main goal is to look into the problems with the dowry system and how they affect India. Giving gifts in the form of money or kind on the occasion of a wedding ceremony appears to be a worldwide custom. The idea behind such practice appears to be that such gifts would help the newly married couple to establish their new home. The term "dowry" refers to the custom of

the bride's parents giving gifts to the bridegroom and/or his parents on the wedding day. From the beginning of time, there have been examples of this *practice* among Hindus in India.

Objectives of the research

1. To know the nature and extent of dowry problems among women.
2. To find the level of the extent of dowry problems.
3. To examine the socio-psychological impact of dowry problems.

Methodology

The present study was conducted in the state. Five cultural zones, namely Ahirwal, Mewat, Bagar, Nardak, and Khadar. Out of five cultural zones, two zones were selected for the study. After the selection of two zones, one district from each zone was randomly selected for the study. After the selection of districts, one block from each district was selected randomly for the study. After the selection of blocks, a few villages were randomly selected from each block. Several rural women in the age group of 21 to 35 were surveyed from the selected villages. Out of these, 120 women respondents were selected purposively.

Results and Discussion

1. Nature and extent related to dowry

The nature and extent of dowry refer to the characteristics and prevalence of the practice of dowry in a particular society or community. 25.0 per cent of respondents in the total sample reported that dowry demands were made before marriage. The majority, 53.3 per cent, reported dowry demands at the time of marriage. 21.7 per cent of respondents experienced dowry demands after getting married. 16.7 per cent of respondents reported that husbands made dowry demands. The highest percentage, 49.2 per cent, reported dowry demands made by mothers-in-law. 34.2 per cent reported that the father-in-law made dowry demands. 17.5 per cent of respondents reported demands for vehicles. The most common form, with 48.3 per cent reporting cash as the demanded dowry. 34.2 per cent reported demands for jewellery. 15.0 per cent of respondents mentioned greed as a reason for demanding dowry. Most respondents (59.2%) cited customs and rituals as the main reason. 25.8 per cent reported needing dowry for various expenses. 15.0 per cent of respondents suffered physical violence related to dowry. The study indicates that 45.8% of respondents faced psychological or emotional violence, 39.2% verbal violence, and 15.0% physical violence due to dowry. These observations are supported by the National Crime Records Bureau's (2021) data on dowry-related offenses. 65.0 per cent of respondents continued living with their husbands after experiencing dowry issues. 26.7 per cent chose to live with their parents. 8.3 per cent opted for separation. 65.0 per cent received financial support from their husbands. 25.8 per cent received financial support from their parents. A small percentage, 9.2 per cent, reported being self-independent. 38.3 per cent sought help from their parents. 31.7 per cent sought assistance from relatives, 30.0 per cent sought help from neighbors and local councils (panchayats).

Table 1: Nature and extent related to dowry:

Variables	Kaithal (n=60)	Hisar (n=60)	Total N= 120
1. Dowry demand was made			
Before the time of marriage	14(23.3)	16(26.7)	30(25.0)
At the time of marriage	32(53.3)	32(53.3)	64(53.3)
After the time of marriage	14(23.3)	12(20.0)	26(21.7)
2. Dowry demand was made by			
Husband made the demand	6(10.0)	14(23.3)	20(16.7)
Mother-in-law made the demand	32(53.3)	27(45.0)	59(49.2)
Father-in-law made the demand	22(36.7)	19(31.7)	41(34.2)
3. In which form dowry was demanded			
Vehicle (car, bike, etc.) was given	10(16.7)	11(18.3)	21(17.5)
Cash was given	31(51.7)	27(45.0)	58(48.3)
Jewelry was given	19(31.7)	22(36.7)	41(34.2)
4. What are the main reasons for demanding dowry			
Greed (purchase of motor vehicle, business expansion, etc.)	5(8.3)	13(21.7)	18(15.0)
Custom and ritual	36(60.0)	35(58.3)	71(59.2)
Need and compulsion for medical, educational, employment expenses, etc.)	19(31.7)	12(20.0)	31(25.8)
5. Suffered from any dowry related violence			
Physical	7(11.7)	11(18.3)	18(15.0)
Psychological/emotional	29(48.3)	26(43.3)	55(45.8)
Verbal	24(40.0)	23(38.3)	47(39.2)
6. Place of living after problem of dowry			
With husband	36(60.0)	42(70.0)	78(65.0)
With parents	16(26.7)	16(26.7)	32(26.7)
With separation	8(13.3)	2(3.3)	10(8.3)
7. Who supported you financially after problem of dowry			
Husband	40(66.7)	38(63.3)	78(65.0)
Parents	19(31.7)	12(20.0)	31(25.8)
Self-independent	1(1.7)	10(16.7)	11(9.2)
8. Help sought for dowry related violence			
From parents	26(43.3)	20(33.3)	46(38.3)
Relatives	16(26.7)	22(36.7)	38(31.7)
Neighbors and panchayats	18(30.0)	18(30.0)	36(30.0)

2. Level of extent of dowry

It can be seen that 42.5 per cent of the respondents had a high level of extent of dowry, 40.8 per cent had a medium level of extent of dowry and 16.7 per cent of the respondents had a low level of extent of dowry.

Table 2: Level of extent of dowry

Level	Kaithal (n=60)	Hisar (n=60)	Total N= 120
Low (10-13)	6(10.0)	14(23.3)	20(16.7)
Medium (14-16)	28(46.7)	21(35.0)	49(40.8)
High (17-20)	26(43.3)	25(41.7)	51(42.5)
			χ^2 Cal =4.22

3. Socio-psychological impact of dowry

The socio-psychological impact of dowry is a complex and multifaceted issue that affects individuals and communities in various ways. Dowry is a practice where the bride's family provides gifts, money, or property to the groom's family during the wedding. While dowry practices vary across different cultures and regions, negative consequences are often associated with them.

For physical impact

In Kaithal, 51.7 per cent reported "Sometimes," experiencing physical abuse. In Hisar, 58.3 per cent reported "Sometimes,". Hisar has a higher prevalence of physical abuse. In Kaithal, 58.3 per cent reported "Sometimes," experiencing health neglect. In Hisar, 55.0 per cent reported "Sometimes,". Hisar has a higher prevalence of health neglect. Nutritional concerns were slightly more prominent

in Kaithal (61.7%) than in Hisar (56.7%). These findings align with Das (2019) [2], who emphasized the link between dowry demands and physical harm, often arising from unmet expectations.

For socio-economic impact

In Kaithal, 55.0 per cent reported "Sometimes," experiencing a financial burden. In Hisar, 53.3 per cent reported "Sometimes,". Hisar has a higher prevalence of a financial burden. In Kaithal, 48.3 per cent reported "Sometimes," experiencing social pressure. In Hisar, 48.3 per cent reported "Sometimes,". In Kaithal, 41.7 per cent reported "Never," experiencing gender inequality. In Hisar, 41.7 per cent reported "Sometimes,". Kaithal and Hisar have similar levels of gender inequality.

For psychological impact

In Kaithal, 60.0 per cent reported "Sometimes," experiencing stress and anxiety. In Hisar, 68.3 per cent reported "Sometimes,". Hisar has a higher prevalence of stress and anxiety. 56.7 per cent reported "Sometimes," experiencing depression. In Hisar, 60.0 per cent reported "Sometimes,". Hisar has a slightly higher prevalence of depression. In Kaithal, 66.7 per cent reported "Sometimes," experiencing an impact on children. In Hisar, 48.3 per cent reported "Sometimes,". Hisar has a higher prevalence of effects on children. In Kaithal, 61.7 per cent reported "Sometimes," experiencing low self-esteem. In Hisar, 60.0 per cent reported "Sometimes," Hisar has a slightly higher prevalence of low self-esteem.

Table 3: Socio-psychological impact of dowry

Sr. No.	Physical impact	Kaithal (n=60)					Hisar (n=60)				
		Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Always (3)	WMS	Rank	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Always (3)	WMS	Rank
1.	Physical abuse	21(35.0)	31(51.7)	8(13.3)	1.78	III	11(18.3)	35(58.3)	14(23.3)	2.05	II
2.	Health neglect	14(23.3)	35(58.3)	11(18.3)	1.95	I	11(18.3)	33(55.0)	16(26.7)	2.08	I
3.	Nutritional concerns	13(21.7)	37(61.7)	10(16.7)	1.95	II	12(20.0)	34(56.7)	14(23.3)	2.03	III
Socio-economic impact											
1.	Financial burden	18(30.0)	33(55.0)	9(15.0)	1.85	I	23(38.3)	32(53.3)	5(8.3)	1.70	III
2.	Social pressure	25(41.7)	29(48.3)	6(10.0)	1.68	III	24(40.0)	29(48.3)	7(11.7)	1.72	II
3.	Gender inequality	25(41.7)	25(41.7)	10(16.7)	1.75	II	24(40.0)	25(41.7)	11(18.3)	1.78	I
Psychological impact											
1.	Stress and anxiety	5(8.3)	36(60.0)	19(31.7)	2.23	I	6(10.0)	41(68.3)	13(21.7)	2.12	IV
2.	Depression	6(10.0)	34(56.7)	20(33.3)	2.23	II	8(13.3)	36(60.0)	16(26.7)	2.13	III
3.	Impact on children	6(10.0)	40(66.7)	14(23.3)	2.13	III	4(6.7)	29(48.3)	27(45.0)	2.38	I
4.	Low self-esteem	14(23.3)	37(61.7)	9(15.0)	1.92	IV	8(13.3)	36(60.0)	16(26.7)	2.13	II

Conclusion

In conclusion, the dowry system, also known as Dahej, remains a deeply entrenched and pervasive societal issue in India. It leads to severe consequences, including violence against women and a range of socio-economic impacts. The study, conducted in Kaithal and Hisar districts of Haryana, reveals that dowry practices are still prevalent, affecting women across different age groups and castes. Education appears to empower women and reduce dowry-related pressures.

The findings indicate a pressing need to raise awareness about the Dowry Prohibition Act and its legal consequences, as many respondents were unaware or had misconceptions about it. Although some believe that dowry practices have increased, most respondents expressed support for ending the dowry system.

The study highlights the complex nature of the dowry issue and the importance of addressing it comprehensively, including legal education, raising awareness, and fostering societal change to eliminate this harmful practice that negatively impacts women's lives.

The study underscores the need for continued efforts to combat dowry practices and their associated problems, emphasizing the importance of women's education, legal awareness, and societal transformation.

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