



Cultural norms and their Influence on Marriage Decision-Making among Young Adults

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Abstract:

Marriage decision-making among young adults is deeply rooted with cultural beliefs on family responsibility, gender roles and expectations relating to partner selection. In many societies, cultural prescriptions still play an important role when shaping how people gain autonomy and collective values when it comes to determining a marital partner. This paper looks at the role of cultural norms, which include, norms of collectivism, parental authority, honor, gendered expectations, etc. and how this affects decision making by young adults in regards to marriage. Using the scholarly insights of cross-cultural psychology and sociology, the discussion emphasizes on how the youth tend to go through a complex interaction between individual desires and cultural demands. The fact that globalization and modern education have brought about in many contemporary individuals a variety of options for weddings, still, conventional cultural frameworks have maintained considerable authority in influencing marriage-related selection of preferences, behaviours and choices, is pointed out in a research. The results contribute to current debates about issues of youth autonomy, intergenerational bargaining, and changing marital practices in the developing world society.

Keywords: cultural mores, marriage decision making, young adults, collectivism, autonomy, family influence

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Introduction:

Marriage being a social institution is influenced by a cultural condition under which each individual is raised; cultural norms, have a great effect on how young adults go about making their decision on when, whom, and how to get married. Cultural values and traditions are the backbone of social expectations which govern the acceptable behavior and to follow certain prescribed pathways of being into adulthood. Amongst young adults marriage choice, and especially in transitional societies, differs little from coming into focus after negotiation between personal wishes and ideals of cultural groups. Scholars indicate that cultural norms are an invisible structure governing an individual's attitude toward partnership and compatibility, approval of family, and moral issues consolidated on marital choices (Triandis, 1995, Kagitcibasi, 2007). Therefore, an understanding of the meaning of the same aspects of norms to the young adults and how they internalize them gives great insight into the changing dimension in the marriage in the current times.

In many collectivist societies, marriage is not only an alliance between two people but a wedding between two families and has massive cultural, social and symbolic value. Young adults are under both implicit and explicit pressure to conform to cultural prescriptions (e.g. with respect to partner characteristics, ethnicity, religion, caste or socioeconomic background). Existing literature indicates that parental involvement is still very influential and this often make marriage a moral requirement and communal responsibility rather than a personal preference (Hofstede, 2001; Ahmad, 2012). Even in more up to date, urban environment, cultural traditions of acceptable age of marriage, ways of courtship or the importance of family honor continue to persist in young people's decision-making processes. For instance, the new evidence from South Asia brings to light that discontinuing the cultural norm and departure from it typically generates social punishment, resistance from the family or emotional pressure to bring

them in realignment of their decision according to the traditional norm (Qureshi & Shaikh, 2019).

At the same time, globalization, urbanization and education have played a role in changing the views on marriage of young adults. Increased access to digital media, multiple worldviews and greater education opportunities has enabled many people to demand more autonomy in the decision-making process in their marriages. According to multiple scholars, emerging adulthood is now more often defined by the desire of self-expression, the need for personal compatibility, emotional intimacy and mutual selection in choosing a partner (Arnett, 2014). While some young adults accept their fate of culturally sanctioned arranged marriages, others opt for the alternative of "semi arranged" or self-selected marriage that come turbo charged with some level of personal agency with the family's approval. This hybrid form of decision-making reflects the negotiation in the continuous flow that exists today between modern ideals of autonomy and many entrenched cultural structures. Nevertheless, there is considerable variation in the extent of young adult ability to exercise personal agency under a variety of conditions of cultural conditions, socioeconomic status and family life.

Cultural norms are also an impact on marriage decision-making since there are gendered norms that are prescribed by cultural norms and this impacts men and women differently. Research has shown that women are often placed within more restrictive norms with regards to honor and modesty as well as forms of acceptable interaction which later becomes limiting on their autonomy in selecting a partner of choice (Joseph & Najmabadi, 2005). This is Confucian, and in many cultures women are socialized to value family harmony, obedience and social reputation over their personal flaws which creates a scenario where their own preferences can be marginalized under a situation of a collective norm. Young men, although they also have cultural prescriptions to contend with, are often freer in their choices of partners, even though they too are subject to expectations concerning financial

stability, family leadership and their ability to live out masculine ideals. These gendered cultural constructs have drastic implications on how young adults assess would-be partners as well as how they manage conversations with their families on marriage decisions (Mahmood, 2011). So cultural norms typically buttress inequitable patterns of decision-making authority for family and for broader community patterns.

Furthermore, the impact of the cultural norms extends beyond such feelings and manifests into the emotional and psychological aspect of the marriage decision-making. Studies done within the field of cultural psychology put emphasis on how norms create internalized beliefs related to one's sense of duty, identity and an identity of belonging (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). As a result, young adults internalise things such as family honor, marriage within your community, precautions against breaking norms among others, more so, which further constrains them. The emotional strain created by balancing the obligation to meet cultural mores and the desire to live life according to individual values can create stress, a sense of conflict of identity or intergenerational misunderstanding (Kagitcibasi, 2007). For instance, the manifestation of unconventional choices by the youth may also be accused of guilt, fear of disappointing their parents, or being judged by the community as a whole. These psychological pressures act as powerful forces to achieve the adherence to the culture even when it is undergoing a change in the society.

Despite the importance of cultural norms not being broken, it is important to note how young adults are not passive institutions of tradition. Rather they are actively involved in the construction of meaning and negotiation of boundaries. Many of the studies indicate the adaptive behavior young adults use such as communicating with parents over time, finding allies in the family, or framing personal choices in culturally acceptable terms (Rahman & Hussain, 2020). These strategies demonstrate the understanding that cultural norms are not static, but are created as young adults re-interpret cultural norms in terms of the realities of the present. The

interplay between tradition and modernity consequently makes the marriage decision making a 'dialectic' process where the marriage decision-making becomes a place of culture negotiation, generational dialogue and changing social values.

In conclusion, the influence of cultural norms on marriage decision making in the young adulthood is complex and the decision to marry is deeply-rooted on the cultural norms linked to the society in terms of family structure, gender roles and the collective values. While modern influences have bolstered individual choice and autonomy, the traditional culture prescriptions are still as strong in determining factor on a number of Marital Choices. Understanding this intersection is of importance to policymakers, educators and social scientists who are trying to help young adults navigate these complex dynamics. Future research should go on examine the interplay between globalization and digital communication and how with gender roles consisting of unmarried practices reshape in romantics functioning in different selection and cultures, especially in primary societies where convention is a final typical of order.

Literature Review

The decision-making process in marriage has been the subject of much sociological, psychological and anthropological investigation because it is an area that captures the interplay between the agency of individual and the collective structures of the culture. A rich and extensive body of literature has highlighted the impact that cultural norms have on shared expectations, beliefs, and prescriptions for behavior that young adults exercise in choosing whether or not to marry, choosing who to marry, deciding whether and how early to marry, and the process through which couples form partnerships with one another (Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This literature review attempts to bring together the theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from across regions and disciplines under the themes of (a) voluntarily participating norms and family authority (b) gendered norms and power asymmetries (c) role of modernization and globalization (d) negotiation techniques adopted by young adults and (e) psychosocial ramifications of norm

conflict.

Scholars have discussed the obvious dispute for many years that cultural context is the mediator between own individual preferences and family/ communal expectations of combining marriage choice. In collectivist societies marriage is frequently viewed as a joint endeavor which reinforces the kinship ties and social capital; hence, parents and even extended family members follow the children's choices in selecting their partners with great say (Kagitcibasi 2007; Hofstede 2001). Empirical research from South Asia, the Middle East, and some parts of Africa all show that parental involvement in selecting a spouse is high and arranged and semi-arranged marriages are still common (Qureshi & Shaikh, 2019; Mirza & Haque, 2015). This parental influence often manifested itself by explicit match-seeking, reputation management and social sanctions against deviation. In contrast, in individualistic contexts an emphasis is placed on the importance of personal compatibility and romantic choice (although even in this type of settings considerations of familial expectations and social class can play a subtle role in shaping options, Bourdieu, 1984; Cherlin, 2009).

Research on gendered norms help to come into light the fact that cultural prescriptions generate asymmetric constraints for men and women during the marriage decision process. Feminist and gender studies have documented how patriarchal norms often restrict the autonomy of women, prescribing modesty, family obedience and the consideration of one's line to restrict the variety of socially available partners (Joseph & Najmabadi, 2005; Mahmood, 2011). For instance, research from ethnographic communities of master communities reveals the occupants of young women negotiate honor norms, guardians and danger of reputation while making desires in public (Mahmood, 2011; Abu-Lughod, 2013). Men, on the other hand, are the ones often judged according to the parameters of economic viability or status and the capacity to fulfil familial duties of the family, which are linked to gendered moral economies, seen associated with masculinity in the form of provider roles (Connell, 2005).

Consequently, analyses of marital decision-making need to pay attention to how the process of partner evaluation and the process of decision sanctioning or resistance are influenced by gendered cultural scripts (Allendorf, 2013).

Modernization theories and contemporary scholarship placed emphasis on the fact that globalization, urbanization, and educational expansion is changing marriage regimes everywhere with the creation of hybrid models that integrate both traditional norms and new aspirations for autonomy (Arnett, 2014; Coontz, 2005). Quantitative studies that monitor change among cohorts are reporting support for increasing numbers of love-based marriages, delaying the timing of marriage and increasing premarital interactions by youth in an urbanized environment (Rindfuss et al., 2004; Thornton and Young DeMarco, 2001). Yet, this transformation is not uniform as regions of society are dividing along lines of socioeconomic class, rural and urban inequalities, religious affiliation, and family conservatism temper the tempo and nature of change (Kirk & Pillet, 1998; Jamal, 2018). Alert to cultural continuity, such "negotiated" or "semi-arranged" marriages now document an emergent form where young adults more freely exercise their voice in spousal choice albeit while securing parents approval, suggesting the operation of cultural continuity and growing individualism (Nanda, 2014; Qureshi & Shaikh, 2019).

A great deal of the literature examines the challenges that young adults engage in in the specific situation of conflicting cultural expectations with individual desires. Studies applications of qualitative methods (interviews and ethnography) help to establish a repertoire of negotiation tactics, including: framing personal choices in ways that respect the honour of the family, incremental disclosure and using allies (e.g. siblings, extended kin), and temporal strategies that defer making definitive decisions until there were greater resources or social support (Rahman & Hussain, 2020; Shukla, 2016). These strategies display agency within constraint -- these young adults are active in their interpretation of cultural scripts and not passive things to those. According to identity negotiation theories,

moreover, young people may be able to redefine their choices based on culturally meaningful accounts (e.g. focused on compatible religious values, religious compatibility) in order to garner the consent of the family (Goffman, 1959; Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Norm-conflict in marriage decision-making has also been of scholarly interest in terms of its psychological consequences. The discord between individual preferences and aggregated anticipations may lead to stress, anxiety and tensions of identity especially in those who internalize family-centered values (Kagitcibasi, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Quantitative studies assessing well-being and life satisfaction describe a mixed picture: Again, like other young adults, some young people suffer from psychological distress in their struggle to resist parental mandates, but others gain resilience from social support or can find ways of adapting meaningfully and in a negotiated solution (Fuligni, 2001; Chen et al., 2018; Fuligni et al., 2014). The literature therefore makes us aware of the need to analyze not only decision outcomes (e.g. type of marriage, partner characteristics) but processual outcomes such as perceived agency, quality of the relationship with parents and psychological adjustment in the long term.

Methodologically, current studies are a combination of ethnography, cross-sectional survey, longitudinal cohort, and mixed methods. Cross-cultural comparative studies provide broad patterns, but typically do not have the depth regarding variation within groups and quantitative studies exist with richly contextualized, but limited, generalizations (Allendorf, 2013). Recent advancements demand integrative designs in order to bridge between the macro-level and macro-level including law/ media/ urbanization and the micro-level on the one hand including decision processes, on the other, including institutional relational dynamics (Gebauer et al., 2018). Furthermore, there is increasing emphasis on doing intersectional analysis that sees how class, caste/ethnicity, religion and gender work together with marriage and decision-making rather than treating these different variables

(Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000).

There are still a number of gaps in literature. First, more work needs to be done on the role of digital technologies and social media in mediating marriage negotiations - platforms such as this facilitates the possibility for private communication and new forms of courtship may change the balance of power between generations (Duguay, 2016; Hsu, 2018). Second, comparative research in different areas of transition (e.g., diasporic communities, urbanising rural areas) can help to highlight the conditions that normalise traditional norms as well as those that alter them. Third, it would be useful for longitudinal studies to be able to observe individual trajectories from decision-making that occurs before marriage through post-marital adjustment to understand causal linkages between decision-making processes and subsequent marital outcomes (Rindfuss et al., 2016).

Putting it all together, The literature is rather complex: the ways in which the culture of the young adults still plays very strong role in the marriage decision-making processes but are norms not monolithic and unbound. Young people engage with, Allan together with redefining, and at moment rebelling, the cultural expectations by utilizing the varied strategies which mirror the way of a changing society in which they are actually a part. Future studies that combine nuanced qualitative accounts of marriage with solid quantitative design and a greater focus on digital mediation will be able to better capture the changing contours of marital decision-making in the twenty-first century.

Methodology

This study had utilised a quantitative research design to analyse the impact of cultural norms in marriage decision making by young adults. The research focuses on such key constructs as collectivism, parental authority, gendered expectations, family honor and individual autonomy. These constructs were operationalized by use of standardized scales that were adapted from extant cross-cultural and sociological research. The objective of this study is to find out the extent in which the cultural norms of the decisioning process and the ways young juveniles struggle between their personal desire and the family or societal

expectations.

Population and Sample

The populations that were targeted were those who are young adults in the age of 18-30 years old, those who were enrolled in universities or recently graduated as this age group is considered to be at a critical level of marriage-related decision making. The study was done at slogan city cities in Lahore, Pakistan, those were urban and suburban to cover up with different kinds of sociocultural backgrounds. A total of 6 universities (3 public - University of the Punjab, Government College University, University of Lahore and 3 private - LUMS, Forman Christian College, Beaconhouse National University) were chosen in order to have a representation coming from different socio-economic, educational and cultural settings. Using the stratified random sampling method, a sample of 300 was selected which is stratified for gender, urban or rural residence, educational program. This approach allowed for the possibility that the difference in experience between demographic groups would be captured and analyzed.

Data Collection Instrument

The data were gathered with the help of a structured questionnaire that was aimed at the evaluation of the perceptions of cultural norms and marriage decision-making behavior. The questionnaire was divided into five parts:

Demographic Data: Age and sex, place of residence, education and family history.

Cultural Norms: Working within the frame of the items made on the ground of the scale of collectivism and the family authority offered by Hofstede (2001) i.e. family influence, expectations of the partner selection, and following the traditions.

- 1. Gendered Expectations:** These refer to items that indicate the role of men and women in marriage decision making (Joseph and Najmabadi, 2005; Mahmood, 2011).
- 2. Marriage Decision-Making Autonomy:** The items that address the perceived autonomy of choice of the partner, preference-negotiable

capability with the family, and hybrid or semi-arranged options (Arnett, 2014; Qureshi and Shaikh, 2019).

3. Negotiation Strategies and Psychological Effects:

The questions asked will include the negotiation strategies used, tension or conflict experienced and perceived family support.

The level of agreement with the statements was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), which allowed quantifying cultural effects on decision-making.

Pilot Study

The questionnaire items were pre-tested on 30 respondents to determine the questionnaire items clarity, reliability and validity. The pilot gave feedback to answer ambiguous questions and become more culturally sensitive. All of the constructs had alpha greater than 0.78, the implication of which is that the instrument is well-consistent and reliable.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed both physically and via the institutional email groups and social media to get a certain level of ethical clearance by the concerned university authorities. The participation was voluntary and anonymity and confidentiality were assured to the respondents. The data gathering was done over a 6-week period.

Data Analysis

The analyzed data were coded and analyzed in the SPSS 28 and AMOS 24 in Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The analysis included:

Descriptive Statistics: To summarize demographic characteristics and mean levels of cultural norms and decision-making Autonomy

Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency of scales that have multiple items

Correlation Analysis: To study bivariate relations among cultural norms, gender based expectations and decision making autonomy.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM): To test hypothesized relationship between latent constructs both the impact of collectivism, parental authority, gendered expectations and

family honor on autonomy on marriage decision-making. achievement of model fit indexes (CFI, TLI, RMSEA, kh2/df) was also possible using SEM.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical research principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Respondents were assured that their responses would only be used for academic purposes and remain confidential.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section consists in the analysis of data gathered from 300 young adults from Lahore, Pakistan, this investigation was carried out with the aim of analyzing the influence of the cultural norms on the young adult's marriage decision-making. Data were analyzed included in Microsoft Excel 365 with the help of statistical test with SPSS. Data were analyzed with the help of SPSS 28, Amos 24. Descriptive statistics, Reliability analysis, Correlation analysis, and Structural equation modeling (SEM).

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics of respondents and their responses to cultural norms and marriage decision making variables. There was a total sample of 160 females (53.3%) and 140 males (46.7%) with an average age of 23.4 years (SD = 2.8) years. Most of the respondents were from urban areas (70%), and they were from moderate socioeconomic backgrounds.

The following table shows the results of the mean and SD for the main variables measured: collectivism, parental authority, gendered expectations, family honor and autonomy in marriage decision-making.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Main Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Collectivism	4.12	0.61	2.5	5.0
Parental Authority	4.05	0.68	2.0	5.0
Gendered Expectations	3.87	0.72	1.8	5.0
Family Honor	4.20	0.59	2.6	5.0
Marriage Decision-Making Autonomy	3.45	0.78	1.5	5.0

The results obtained from the descriptive are showed high level of collectivism, parental

authority, family honor and moderate level of marriage decision making autonomy (autonomy). Gendered expectations a little less but influential nonetheless.

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha was computed to investigate the internal consistency of the multi-item scales. Results suggested great reliability for all constructs:

- Collectivism ($\alpha = 0.82$)
- Parental Authority ($\alpha = 0.85$)
- Gendered Expectations ($\alpha = 0.80$)
- Family Honor ($\alpha = 0.83$)
- Marriage Decision-Making Autonomy ($\alpha = 0.79$)

These results prove that the measurement scales are reliable for the study.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to address relationships between the key study variables. Key findings include:

- Collectivism had a negative relationship with marriage decision-making autonomy ($r = -0.48, p < 0.01$).
 - Parental authority was also found to be negatively correlated with autonomy ($r = -0.52, p < 0.01$).
 - Gendered expectations were also found to have a negative correlation to autonomy ($r = -0.45, p < 0.01$).
 - Family honor had a negative relationship with autonomy ($r = -0.50, p < 0.01$).

The results of this magic angle discovery showed that strict adherence to traditional cultural norms is also related to low perceived autonomy in marriage decision-making among young adults.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Findings SEM was employed to explore the direct and indirect contact of the cultural norms on the autonomy of marriage decision-making. The hypothesized model contained collectivism, parental authority, gendered expectations, and family honor as independent variables and marriage decision-making autonomy as the dependent variable.

The model had been shown to have good fit:
 $\chi^2/df = 2.18$ (acceptable < 3)
CFI = 0.95 ([?] 0.90 indicates good fit)
TLI = 0.94 ([?] 0.90 indicates good fit)
RMSEA = 0.056 ([?] 0.08 indicates good fit)

Path Analysis Results:

Collectivism - Autonomy: $b = -0.28$, $p < 0.01$
Parental Authority - Autonomy $b = -0.32$, $p < 0.01$
Gendered Expectations - Autonomy: $b = -0.25$, $p < 0.01$
Family Honor - Autonomy: $b = -0.30$, $p < 0.01$

These results suggest the fact that all cultural norms used in this study have significant and negative impact on autonomy of young adults in marriage decision-making, which proved the central hypothesis of this study.

Summary of Findings

Young adults indicate a high degree of adherence to collectivism, parental authority, and family honor and a moderate degree of autonomy regarding marriage decisions.

Cultural norms are found to be significantly negatively related to marriage decision making autonomy.

SEM analysis affirms a collective outcome of reduced ability of young adults to exercise the independent decision-making power related to marriage that is due to collectivism, parental authority, gendered expectations, and family honor.

Discussion

The results of the present study show that cultural norms play an important role in the marriage decision-making process among the young adults of Lahore, Pakistan. Collectivism, parental authority, gendered expectations and family honor are all important factors which greatly constrain the freedom of young adults to select deeply intimate marital relationships. These results are consistent with previous research, that stresses that in collectivist societies, marriage is often considered a family/community decision rather than an individual decision (Kagitcibasi, 2007; Hofstede, 2001).

Gendered expectations were found to have more overwhelming effects on women as this becomes limiting their ability to negotiate on marital matters, although men, albeit to a slightly freer degree, do face some of the same pressures of family responsibilities as well as societal norms

(Joseph & Najmabadi, 2005; Mahmood, 2011). These findings point to the ongoing influence of patriarchal and traditional structures on the decisions of young adults.

Despite the fact that young adults have been modernized through education and exposure to global perspectives, the study reveals that they still function within a strong cultural framework and try to balance their personal desires and family expectations and often use negotiation strategies to do so. This represents a hybrid approach to decision-making where autonomy is present yet it is limited due to deeply embedded cultural norms (Arnett, 2014; Qureshi & Shaikh, 2019).

Conclusion

The findings of this study conclude that cultural norms such as collectivism and parental authority and gendered norms, and family honor remain important in determining the marriage decision-making process among young adults in Lahore. While modern influences such as education and globalization offer the possibility to be more autonomous, traditional cultural values preponderate in the decision-making process. The results highlight the importance of young adults not being totally passive but negotiating and adapting within cultural constraints, but their autonomy is limited.

Recommendations

Awareness Programs: Educational institutions should organize workshops and awareness programmes promoting possibilities to talk about individual rights, autonomy, and gender equality in married or partner decisions.

Parental Engagement: Parents and family members should be encouraged to help young people communicate their preferences within the cultural values that they have and encourage a balance between tradition and personal choice.

Policy Support: Policymakers should create efforts that promote gender equity in social and familial decision-making situations that emphasize the participation of women in marital and social decisions.

Research Expansion: Further research should delve deeper into the role of social media, digital communication, and urbanization in the changing marriage norms and their role in helping youths reach an informed decision.

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