

EXPLORING FACTORS CAUSING MARITAL CONFLICT AMONG MARRIED WOMEN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN SEEKING LEGAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study looks into the root causes of marital discord among Pakistani married women who have taken legal action. The study intends to investigate women's lived experiences and perceptions surrounding their marital struggles in light of the rising prevalence of marital conflicts and divorce in South Asian societies, especially in Pakistan. The study aims to identify the relational, cultural, financial, and emotional aspects of marital conflict through semi-structured interviews with 25 women from diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Purposive sampling was used to gather the data, and initial and axial coding were used for thematic analysis. Financial dependence, in-law meddling, emotional neglect, poor communication, domestic violence, and unfulfilled expectations are some of the major themes that surfaced. Compounding factors mentioned by many participants included the weight of traditional gender roles, a lack of autonomy, and a lack of social or legal support. The results show that a complex interaction between patriarchal norms, societal expectations, and economic pressures frequently leads to marital conflict. The study emphasizes how urgently gender-sensitive counseling services, marital rights awareness campaigns, and changes to the legal and social support structures are needed. It also highlights how crucial it is to give women access to resources for conflict resolution, emotional support, and education. The study's focus on women who pursued legal action and its small, localized sample size are limitations, but it offers valuable insights into the difficulties faced by many Pakistani women in married relationships.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

One of the extreme social and psychological issues that contribute to families' instability and health globally is marital conflict. Marriage is not just a private union but also an ingrained social pact influenced by cultural, religious, and family expectations in most patriarchal societies like Pakistan. The woman's choice to pursue legal redress through approaching the family court is

often the last option, though disputes in marriage are common. This is especially the case in conservative communities where divorce is also viewed as shameful and a failure of both family honor and womanhood (Aston, 2023). The perpetuation and escalation of marital conflict can have deep impacts on the mental and physical health, financial security, and child care of women. Due to their institutional instability, threat of

social exclusion, and economic dependency, most married women continue to suffer silently despite the presence of legal mechanisms and support groups meant for safeguarding women's rights (Ibañez-Tirado & Latif Khan, 2023). Few women take the courage to seek recourse through the law, often after years of material duress, bodily, verbal, or emotional harm, or other serious forms of subordination. What can be learned about the causes of marital conflict from the perspective of women who have brought suits is significant in that it illuminates the intricacy and privacy of these experiences (Robson et al., 2024). The perspectives of the women are enlightening in terms of causes of conflict, the role of social norms, the role of extended family systems, and the limitations of traditional methods of dispute resolution. In addition, their own lives capture the dynamic interplay that governs their decision-making between institutional support, social constraint, and personal agency. The urgency to critically analyze these perceptions and lived realities is the premise of this study (Edler et al., 2025). The research seeks to illuminate the intricate realities of marital conflict, the psychological and social price attached to such experiences, and the reasons why women pursue justice through proper legal recourse by focusing on married women who have made complaints in family courts. Marital conflict is a prevalent social issue that has an influence on the emotional, psychological, and financial health of people and families.

Marital conflict in Asia, and more so in South Asian cultures, tends to be multifaceted, being influenced by patriarchal traditions, interference from extended family members, economic dependence, and cultural demands. The most common types of conflict are emotional abuse, financial domination, lack of communication, domestic violence, and conflict over reproductive decisions or dowry demands. In contrast to Western cultures, in which marital problems are regularly treated by therapy, mediation, or divorce processes with negligible social stigma, in nations such as Pakistan, they are generally dealt with in the personal sphere, with women usually subjected to pressure to withstand and remain quiet.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Historically, marriage has also been regarded as the cornerstone of social and family organization,

indicating economic cooperation, emotional support, and companionship.

Marriage is not necessarily a personal contract between two individuals in most cultures, particularly South Asian ones such as Pakistan (Curthoys et al., 2024; Göksel & Morse, 2022). It is a culturally and religiously endorsed organization that brings people and families together and maintains social norms. Marriage does not always equate to stability or emotional health, even though it has the reverence of a high status. There are many interpersonal, economic, and cultural stresses threatening married life, resulting in tension, conflict, and even court separation (Rajendra, 2025). Due to powerful gendered roles, expectations, and power differences, the marital conflict experience is often more complex and constrained for women specifically (Singh & Mishra, 2024). Marital Conflict refers to the presence of lasting hostility, tension, or conflict between spouses that may deteriorate the relationship in its entirety.

Although disagreements of sorts are unavoidable in every marriage, chronic or unresolved conflict may lead to emotional pain, communication disruption, abuse, and eventually recourse to the law (Kutuk et al., 2024; Wallace, 2023). The conflict is not confined to the domestic sphere for women; it is also shaped and compounded by external sociocultural forces such as patriarchal family relationships, peer influence, religious ideologies, and limited access to autonomous resources. These conflicts are often hidden or marginalized until they have become so extreme that the woman is compelled to take action in court, often as a last resort for survival, safety, or justice (Güzel & Selçuk, 2025). In traditional circumstances, a woman's decision to pursue legal help when there is marital conflict is particularly significant.

For example, legal intervention within family conflicts is continued to be stigmatized and resisted in Pakistan, especially when women lead it. The woman might have transgressed social norms, disobeyed culturally defined gender roles, or brought shame upon the family by seeking recourse from a family court (Abneh Tadesse & Tadesse, 2025). Since their voices cast a light on the veil of conflictual dynamics, the emotional weight they carry, the societal pressures they face, and the weaknesses of informal mechanisms of dispute resolution, research on women who have made this

choice is especially relevant. Their testimonies can offer new insights into the everyday lives of marital conflict and disrupt commonplace narratives (Stephen, 2024). While statistical facts regarding divorce rates or domestic violence may be derived from quantitative data, statistics often fail to capture the emotional and personal nuances underlying these experiences.

To comprehend the perceptions, reasons, and feelings of women experiencing or having experienced marital conflict, a qualitative method is thus most suited (Howe, 2025). The research applies qualitative interviews to understand how women view the causes of conflict, how these conflicts manifest in everyday interactions, and what drives them to seek legal redress. The research also examines the role that cultural values, religious beliefs, communication patterns, abuse, economic reliance, and in-law interference play in the conflicts and their resolution (Halder & Basu, 2025). Since it addresses a gap in the literature concerning the subjective experiences of women about marital conflict in socio-conservative settings, this study is particularly relevant and significant.

The research contributes to our understanding of gender relations within marriage, the role of social institutions, and the inadequacies in existing support systems by focusing on the narratives of married women who are presently filing complaints (Narang & Liu, 2022). The findings could also have important consequences for social policy, law reform, and the development of more sympathetic and accessible support systems for women having marital problems. The aim of the thesis is to analyze the reasons why married women who have approached the courts perceive marital conflict, analyze the emotional and sociocultural history of the experience, and identify the reasons and challenges associated with taking legal recourse (Taha, 2025). In highlighting the voices of women who are often silenced in scholarly and legal debate, the research aims to promote inclusive and socially aware definitions of marital conflict. As per the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2023), the number of reported family court cases against marriage disputes and divorce has largely grown, with more than 28,000 registered cases in 2022 alone.

According to a study by the Aurat Foundation (2021), about 70% of women in Pakistan admitted to having suffered some kind of domestic abuse in

their lives, but very few take the step of going to court. Stigma around divorce, lack of economic independence, and limited legal assistance only discourage women from claiming justice. Conversely, the Western world, especially Europe and North America, has a greater incidence of formal divorce but less tolerance for domestic violence.

For instance, in the United States, almost 45% of marriages are dissolved through divorce, yet strong legal systems, mental health, and public awareness provide individuals—especially women—greater freedom to seek assistance. Additionally, ideas such as marital guidance, prenuptials, and gender parity are more institutionalized in the West than in Pakistan, where religious and societal pressures usually restrict open debate of marital discontent. Today, Pakistan is seeing a gradual movement toward the manner in which marital disputes are being addressed.

Increasingly, more women, particularly in cities, are opting to engage with the legal system, not only as a means of separation, but also as a way of regaining their rights and dignity. The family courts in metropolitan cities such as Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad are experiencing a consistent increase in petitions by women pertaining to khula (women-initiated divorce), maintenance, and domestic violence. The contributions of NGOs, legal aid organisations, and online consciousness-building campaigns have also increased the voices of women in the public and judicial spheres. This study examines the self-perceived causes of marital discord in married women in Pakistan, especially those seeking legal redress. Through qualitative in-depth interviews in family courts, the research seeks to comprehend the socio-cultural, emotional, and structural explanations for marital disintegration, while illuminating mechanisms of coping and seeking justice.

Further, much study overlooks the complex web of sociocultural factors that contribute to marital conflict, such as economic dependence, interference by in-laws, religious or cultural justifications for abuse, and poor support communication. Most relevant are the perspectives of women who have taken the rare and bold step of presenting their cases in family courts because they expose institutional shortcomings as well as broader societal relations and personal adaptations (Duvvury et al., 2024).

Analyzing the motivation of women to pursue legal action and how they perceive their marital experience is essential since there has been an increase in marital disputes and increased awareness of women's rights in Pakistan. The individual, emotional, social, and cultural factors that drive their conflicts, shape their decisions, and form their coping strategies need to be understood urgently (Bemmer, 2025).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Through the exploration of the lived experiences and reasons behind marital conflict among married women who have received legal help via family courts, this research bridges this gap in knowledge.

It seeks to put these women's often silenced voices under the spotlight and provide a deeper understanding of how marital conflict is experienced, perceived, and managed within a social environment that typically dissuades such actions. The findings are meant to add to academically oriented knowledge as well as the establishment of support systems, policy amendments, and legislative reforms that are more appropriate to the needs and situations of affected women (Cohen et al., 2024; Niyonkuru, 2021).

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the women's perceptions and lived experiences regarding the causes of marital conflict
2. To explore the factors causing marital conflict among married couples in Pakistan

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What factors do married women perceive as the primary causes of conflict in their marriages?
2. Which socio economic factor push women to get legal support to get rid of marital conflict?
3. In what ways do women and their husbands typically respond to conflict within the marriage?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter addresses the review of literature of the related studies about the topic and recent researches conducted in this context.

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Marriage is as ancient as the history of man; the idea is perceived from various scholars from various contexts, culture and ideology. Even as the idea of marriage is usually ended up into family, there are differences in the literature. For example, there may be a misunderstanding in literature on the correlation which exists between marriage and family. It is for this reason that the addition of a child to a marriage constitutes the marriage and family two social systems sharing the same roof, and simultaneously as a subsystem of marriage and marriage as a subsystem of family (Aston, 2023).

In general, literature available even in the modern era concurred that marriage is a union of consenting adults within heterosexuality, and family is essentially a social unit that possesses individuals who are either consequently or conjugally related or both. Accordingly, marriage is viewed as a social institution where a man and a woman are obligated to remain together as husband and wife under a valid constitution. Beattie (1964) also described extensive literature as something more concrete and deeper than a legal sexual union of a man and a woman. According to this perspective, the children in the marriage circle are indeed part of the concept making up a subsystem in the marriage and thus the concept of family (Ibañez-Tirado & Latif Khan, 2023).

The notion as a definition under law referring to some relationship with regards to people in an attempt to meet three various kinds of needs: material, sexual and psychological (Robson et al., 2024). Individuals find love, sexual loyalty and capacity for discussing feelings to be extremely critical in marriage (Edler et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the notion of family and marriage attracts numerous professionals from all disciplines in an attempt to resolve marital problems. Marriage as legal expectation of a young woman and man who are expected to vow their love for one another to coexist as husband and wife under marriage ordinance (Göksel & Morse, 2022). To him, marriage is more than the simple joining of a man and woman under one roof. Marriage as an inviolable and an eternal agreement that is presumed to be performed when two individuals choose on their own free will, and under the presence of at least two witnesses to accept the formal agreement to live a life of vocation, of love, and sharing for the sake of mutually fostering their

growth and well-being as individuals in their march through life (Curthoys et al., 2024). This definition has posed permanence and sanctity to the institution of marriage. In the world in utopia, there is a lot of literature Marriage relies as indicated in the word, on love, —For better, for worsell, a ritual form of words on the altar among the couples. There is none of the involved individuals who imagines conflicts and discontent at the start. The terms —permanent and —love entice the Christians, Muslims and cultural contexts to ensure the reproduction and maintenance of family in the institution of marriage.

In a comparable attempt, marriage is defined as a social institution where a man and a woman formalize their resolve to live as husband and wife by legally binding and/or religious rites. The final aspect that needs to be born in mind is that marriage institution is not a coincidence, but rather designed to serve specific purposes (Rajendra, 2025). Marriage is also a socially recognized and accepted sexual union between two adult human beings. Thus, it is a distinctive institution that confirms and sustains a particular sociology in human society; gender bridging, enables the creation of life by merging sexes; and encourages the children's birthright to know, to be related to, and to be in a stable relationship with their natural parents (Singh & Mishra, 2024).

According to (Kutuk et al., 2024), marriage is the lawful union of a woman and a man as wife and husband, which also implies matrimony, wedlock, alliance, association and union. From the above definitions, there are some purposes that make up marriage which are revealed as follows: companionship; social integration of individuals; sanctioned sexual union; mutual commitment; mutual growth, bridging the gender gap; and supporting the birthright of children.

It should be noted that not everything union between a woman and a man forms marriage. For example, young people's marriage could not be totally embraced as marriage; instead, it might be co-habiting because some rights and/or ceremonies that sanctify marriage do not exist. In other words, not everything unions are marriages. To them, marriages are not unusual are usually brought about by pregnancy because young people engage in love relationships. Some of the marriages are thus not well formed and might not qualify as marriage in its strict definition. Some of the

marriages bear children while others do not; thereby while some unions become merely marriages, others turn into families (Wallace, 2023).

As per (Güzel & Selçuk, 2025), marriage is not only physical attraction, union at the biological level and social integration. It involves complete commitment, self-giving to each other, and assumption of responsibilities leading to mutual welfare. Celebration of marriage can vary from culture to culture and from religion to religion. But most individuals go into it with the correct expectations, happiness and joy with the complete feeling of fulfilling the reason why marriage is instituted. This is supported that marriage is typically entered into in times of joy, happiness and celebrations for the couple, relatives and friends (Abneh Tadesse & Tafesse, 2025).

Marriage, especially in African is one of the most significant events in one's life; the most thrilling day in African context is the very day when one gets married. Marriage, as such, is not a personal matter. It entails the families, the kith and kin of the couples intending, in addition to the community at large (Stephen, 2024).

But it is argued that a happy marriage leads to a long, healthy life; their research wondered why the marital bliss could soar suddenly. One of the reasons pointed towards issues of happy marriage suggests that, the experience of couple might be due to the fact that they are not capable of handling the challenge and problem that arises and, or they have yet to learn about factors that are beneficial to marital bliss. Basically, every marriage has its own set of challenges and problems, but the issue is not if they will occur but how to deal with them when they occur (Howe, 2025).

When marital issues happen, most marriages become disestablished; most marriages become disestablished when the couples are not in a position to handle issues such as issues of solving their conflict, sexual gratification, effective communication, commitment to one another, childbearing and childrearing. Therefore, the rate of marital problem and adversity is global, not confined to any area or people in isolation. For example, the statistical reports released by the National Centre for Health, Marriage and Divorce (2003), revealed that divorce rate in Canada, England and Wales Greece, the Netherlands and United States has been on rise from 1970 onwards. The reports also revealed that divorce globally has

almost quadrupled since the early 1960 in Britain (Halder & Basu, 2025).

Besides, divorce touches approximately one-third of marriage in Canada and Japan, married couples have no more than 50-50 prospect of remaining together in United States. In Africa, the statistics indicated that divorce brings to an end approximately two out of every five marriages in Zimbabwe, and things are worse in Nigeria where marital relationships are being destroyed on daily basis. Given this, the spouses should be aware and exercise good interpersonal relationship (Narang & Liu, 2022). Also, the guidelines that can aid marriages to flourish consist of enhancing marital happiness, mutual understanding, love for one another and a feeling of satisfaction; becoming good role models to other couples; keeping unwanted individuals out of marital life and spending more interpersonal quality time together (Taha, 2025).

In the pursuit of fulfilling and enduring marriage relationships, there is a lot of need for marriage adjustments between the couples in order to uphold stability in marriage and family cycle. In his view, marriage is a discovery game that goes on until death severs the bond between the spouses or collapse occurs owing to the inability of the partners to adapt to each other's mode of life and circumstances beyond their control (Fakih et al., 2024).

2.2 GENDER AND MARITAL CONFLICT

In a study of family violence, marital violence or spouse abuse is most often quoted as a reason for divorce. In his view, conflict in marriage is usually involved violence that may come in a form of physical abuse, e.g., kicking, punching, hitting with a fist, hitting with something, threatening with a weapon and/or use of a knife or a gun. Conflict or violence in this case does not refer to psychological abuse but usually goes hand in hand with physical abuse. Such psychological violence is a more accurate forecaster of depression among the victimized spouse, as compared to physical violence (Abu Mukh & Jabali, 2025). Spousal violence between couples is of two types (Adebayo et al., 2024); first, an ordinary couple violence that indicates conflict between partners which are not well managed and may at times rise to low-level violence and is usually mutual and of low frequency and less likely to be chronic.

Here, both abused partners use mild to moderate

physical violence. This type of violence is less dangerous to the female, nor would it instill on going fear in her. Secondly, an extreme physical violence or Patriarchal terrorism that is far more recurrent, persistent and predominantly carried out by court-ordered men to violence treatment programs. This male violence tends to be an effort to control and dominate. Women, who employ low level aggression towards their spouse, do so to some degree as self-defence (Zhang, 2025). Nearly one-half of the reported violent incidents in intimate relationships involved men and women as mutually aggressive.

Furthermore, much of intimate relationship violence is precipitated by women and not by men. While women do employ aggression in frequencies similar to men when a continuum of mild to moderate aggressive behavior is the focus, evidence suggests that women are more severely victimized than men and women are more likely to incur injuries requiring medical treatment (Duvvury et al., 2024). Contrarily, sex differences in injuries were found to have nearly equal rates of injury for both genders, whereas women had a greater rate of injuries in older age groups. Women are 6 times more likely than men, to throw objects, smash things, and threaten others (Bemmer, 2025). The report indicates that at least one in three women is exposed to intimate partner violence during the lifetime.

Violence-exposed women are at increased risk of abusing alcohol and drugs and experiencing sexual dysfunction, suicide attempt, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and central nervous system disorders. Partner abuse is also linked with depression, anxiety, and eating and personality disorders at higher levels. The survey also found that every year, one out of 6 American households suffers from some kind of violence between wives and husbands. That is to say, extreme violence is an ongoing characteristic of nearly 13% of all marriages in the United States and 1.6 million women are brutally attacked by their partners. Men also indicate a lifetime prevalence of domestic violence victimization of 7.5% (Niyonkuru, 2021). As per the report, a woman in U.S. is beaten by her partner every 15 seconds; and overall men's physical aggression causes more injuries than women's aggression. 25% to 30% of married women in the U.S. have been subjected to some kind of spouse abuse during their marriage at some time. Out of approximately 50 million married

individuals in the U.S., approximately 15 million have been victims of violence within their marriage. Thirteen percent or 5 million American wives have been repeatedly and seriously battered by husbands (1 in 6 wives or 16% experience violence within their relationship). One and one half percent witness a severe violent act like "beating up" in a particular year. Therefore, women who suffer partner abuse are at risk of injury, death and various physical, emotional and social issues, partner abuse is linked to such issues as depression, suicidality, anxiety, PTSD, eating disorders, substance abuse and personality disorders (Cohen et al., 2024).

He also regret that violence in intimate relationships usually takes place in the midst of an argument between partners. Key problematic areas cover finances, home management and child rearing and sexual disagreements. The disagreements can result in pushing and shoving and throwing. Frequent problems include communications and commitment and sexuality (Simon & Behnjarachajarunandha, 2025).

2.2.1 TYPES OF MARITAL CONFLICT

Marital conflict is the term used to refer to the conflicts or tensions arising between the spouses due to differences in expectations, values, behaviors, or situations. These types of marital conflict have been categorized into different types, and each one has effects on the marital relationship.

The most common form is emotional conflict, involving negative emotions such as anger, frustration, jealousy, or resentment. These negative emotions usually stem from perceived lack of emotional support or being understood from partners. Bradbury and Karney (2004) explain that when spouses are emotionally neglected or misinterpreted, marital dissatisfaction and erosion of the marital bond ensue.

The other important category is communication conflict, where the couples struggle to communicate adequately or hear one another appropriately. Poor communication, for example, criticism, defensiveness, or avoidance, can damage trust and closeness. Gottman (1994) emphasized that poor communication patterns repeated over time are a good predictor of the marital dissolution.

Financial conflict is also a major source of conflict in marriage. Disagreements about spending,

saving, income splitting, or managing debt are frequently reported by couples as a source of conflict. Dew and Dakin (2011) suggest that financial stress is positively correlated with frequency of conflict and decreased marital satisfaction, especially in low-income families.

Sexual or intimacy conflict is made up of incompatibilities in sexual desire, sexual preference, or sex frequency. If either of the two feels he or she is unwanted or pressured by the other, it can lead to emotional alienation. Byers (2005) argued that sexual dissatisfaction is both a cause and effect of marital conflict, usually an aggravant of other forms of conflict.

Conflicts over child-rearing and parenting practices also often arise, especially when there is disagreement among parents in terms of discipline, education, or emotional nurturing. Disagreements have been noted by Feinberg (2003) to be a persistent source of strain, especially during the early stages of parenthood, where planning and coordination become critical.

Role conflict occurs when there is household chore and gender role incongruence or incompatibility. This is prevalent in the modern marriages where both spouses may be working but the household workload remains imbalanced. According to Hochschild and Machung (2012), the unequal burden mostly results in resentment, especially by working women.

Conflict with in-laws or extended family, in most cultures, particularly in collectivist cultures, is a source of much marital tension. Ahmad and Najam (2014) discovered that intrusiveness by in-laws, especially mothers-in-laws, was a cause of much conflict in South Asian families. Intrusiveness created conflicts regarding boundaries, finances, and decision-making in the marriage.

Conflicts also arise due to conflicts in religious values or family values]. These can be sensitive when they are about drastic choices in lifestyle, children's rearing, or ethics. Mahoney et al. (2001) observed that there can be harmony through common spiritual values but conflicting values can create ongoing conflicts as well as misunderstandings.

Lastly, personality and behavioral conflict arise from inherent differences among individuals. For instance, an introverted partner may clash with an extrovert partner, or a punctual person with a late partner. Caughlin and Huston (2002)

hypothesized that such differences in personality can lead to persistent conflicts, particularly if the relationship is low in empathy or flexibility.

Understanding these types of marital conflict can assist in their recognition as the causes of tension and in the creation of appropriate coping or intervention strategies. Every type of conflict, despite being distinct, can interlink and complement others, thereby bringing to light the complexity of marital relations and the need for effective communication and understanding.

2.3 EDUCATION LEVEL AND MARITAL CONFLICT

The quest for variables that can influence marital satisfaction required the application of various characteristics of the spouse and situations, which are psychologically significant in marriage. Thus, the patterns of the marriage dissolution rates due to marital dispute all over the world have been a common subject of public discourse (Sarvesh, 2024)(Manisha & Ankit, 2025).

Researchers like (Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2023) investigate the effect of education on the risk of divorce in Estonia. According to the research, individuals who are more educated have a lower risk of divorce; and the protective effect of education on men is more pronounced than on women. So, there is no consensus among scientists regarding the effect of education on the risk of divorce.

The family's economic theory would have it that the level of education of the wife would raise the chances of divorce, that is the higher the education, the greater the economic prospects for women outside of marriage and the easier the choice to abandon the union (Bak McKenna & Grasten, 2022). Part of education is the ability to earn more in careers that demand higher levels of education. This suggests that individuals who are more educated possess more means to manage divorce expenses and thus opt for divorces with ease, hence educational level enhances marital conflicts (Dudić-Sijamija & Bakić, 2025).

However, scholars have posited that education at a higher level can reduce the marital conflict, risk of divorce. But the wife's high income also enhances the risk of divorce, particularly if the wife's income is greater than the income of the husband (Jeffery & Qureshi, 2022). Conversely, scholars described that couples who had more educational levels would possess improved communication skills and

hence would find it easy to resolve conflicts within the family. A further reason why individuals with higher education have a greater risk of divorce is that they have more liberal attitudes towards divorce and thus may more readily choose to dissolve an unhappy union (Ghauri, 2024).

2.4 MARITAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING SKILLS PROGRAM

In accordance with (Rubenstein & Isaac, 2024) prevention of relationship distress is based on the assumption that educating couples as to how to communicate well allows them to enjoy more satisfying and long-lasting unions. In accordance with this claim, marital conflict resolution training may also be anticipated to decrease marital conflict among couples. For this purpose, research numerous empirical studies are performed testing the impact of marital conflict intervention in conflict resolution between couples. As per (Ledvinka & Donovan, 2023) the majority of these tests are aimed at investigating how couples handle conflicts, and research among newlywed couples corroborates the argument that expressions of hostile and critical behaviors in problem-solving discussions accelerate the rate of relationship decline while positive communication counteracts such effects. Program for marital conflict resolution skills training exists in the literature.

2.5 FEMALES APPROACHING COURT FOR THE MEDIATOR IN CONFLICT

Marriages in the rich tapestry of Pakistani society are more than the union of two individuals but also bring together two families, cultures, and traditions. However, similar to any relationship, marriages in Pakistan are subject to conflicts and issues that must be addressed. In this blog post, we shall examine the legal and mediation recourse avenues open to couples in Pakistan to address marital disputes constructively and within the cultural context.

Marital problems in Pakistan frequently result from a range of causes, such as cultural expectations, economic stress, and family dynamics. Social pressure concerning family honor and respect can sometimes drive tension in marriages to the point of communication breakdown and misunderstandings. Gender roles and expectations can also lead to power relations and disagreements regarding decision-making and domestic work.

In Pakistan, couples who are experiencing marital conflicts have a number of legal recourse under the national family legislations. Among the nation's family legislation is the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961, that governs issues such as marriage, divorce and maintenance providing avenues for both judicial and extra-judicial divorce cases such as Talaq, Khula, and Mubarat. In addition to this, the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939, enables Muslim women to obtain a divorce on grounds of cruelty or desertion from family courts. The West Pakistan Family Courts Act, 1964, enables family courts to adjudicate family disputes with an emphasis on reconciliation and mediation. Finally, the Guardians and Wards Act, 1890, addresses custody and guardianship of children. By availing themselves of these legal provisions, couples can acquire assistance in resolving marital conflicts, enhancing equity and the best interests of any children involved.

Mediation is a holistic approach to conflict resolution in Pakistan, weaving together legal, Islamic, and cultural perspectives. From a legal perspective, mediation offers a formal process under the aegis of Pakistani law, allowing couples to resolve differences without resort to court hearings. Embracing Islamic values of reconciliation and unity, mediation is in harmony with Islamic principles, which lay great importance upon mutual understanding, forgiveness, and accommodation in conflict resolution. Furthermore, mediation is most attractive to Pakistani cultural values of respect, family solidarity, and communal solidarity, providing an honorable platform for couples to settle their differences. Mediation's integration of legal, Islamic, and cultural aspects serves as an all-embracing system of conflict settlement that is attractive to the diversification of Pakistani society, while allowing for amiable solutions at the cost of not jeopardizing the sanctity of wedded relations. Mediators play a significant role in facilitating reconciliation and conflict resolution in Pakistani society. By virtue of their in-depth understanding of cultural principles and religious teachings,

mediators create a safe and impartial setting where couples feel comfortable presenting their concerns and examining solutions. By fostering empathy and mutual understanding, mediators enable couples to settle disputes and continue their relationship.

Initiation of mediation in Pakistan consists of a number of steps, beginning with the mutual willingness of the parties to go through the process. Couples may visit mediation centers or family courts in order to request help in initiating mediation proceedings. The mediation process usually consists of joint hearings where the two spouses, and their respective attorneys if so wished, sit with the mediator to air their grievances and find a settlement.

Although mediation is an informal and non-obligatory process, couples can choose to consult attorneys and represent their interests in the mediation. Attorneys provide valuable guidance on legal matters and assist the couples in interpreting the meaning of any agreement achieved through mediation. Together with the mediators, attorneys can help the parties draw fair and equitable agreements that reflect both parties' interests.

Mediation has succeeded in ending marital disputes in Pakistani families. Case studies document how mediation can be used to open communication channels, encourage understanding, and enable couples to make sound choices about their own futures. Through the emphasis on these success stories, we honor the transformative ability of mediation to foster concord and reconciliation in Pakistani marriages. In summary, Pakistani marital conflict resolution needs to be tackled by a multi-faceted method of integrating legal recourse with culturally sensitive mediation. Through the ethos of conversation, empathy, and compromise, couples can settle disputes with dignity and respect, maintaining the integrity of their marriages and bringing their families closer together. In our endeavor to further engage in peaceful marital conflict resolution, let us realize the benefit that mediation has in bringing harmony and oneness to Pakistani families.

Issue	Relevant Law	Protection/Relief
Domestic Violence	Provincial DV Acts	Protection order, residence, compensation
Divorce (Khula)	Muslim Family Laws Ordinance	Legal divorce, maintenance
Maintenance	Family Courts Act	Financial support
Dowry Harassment	PPC 498-A	Criminal charges
Property Rights	Shariat Law	Legal inheritance
Shelter	Punjab Women Act & NGOs	Temporary protection

2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are varying concepts on how to handle issues in relationships, particularly in the case of marriage agreements. One could view that the ability to settle disputes, discuss controversies, and handle issues with other individuals is one of the most significant lessons a child must learn once they begin socializing. Socialization theories validate their argument. These theories hold that social skills overall, as well as conflict resolution overall, are acquired at home by participation and observation—by taking part in household social interactions and observing the conversations between parents (Tecu, 2025). These conceptions are consistent with ecological and family systems models, which explain that parent-child, spouse-spouse, and co-parent relationships influence one another in both ways, as do methods these relationships handle conflict and the ability of the child to handle conflict outside the family (Graca, 2021).

Research has indicated that marital aggression, ineffective parental discipline, and co-parental undermining behavior have the potential to make children more aggressive, maladjusted, and develop behavior problems (Sunil, 2022). This conforms to socialization theory. Conversely, few research studies examine parent-child conflict in toddlerhood, when children begin to experience conflict with their parents and witness or engage in conflict with their peers (such as marital conflict). Due to this, a particular theory of marriage and marital conflict is examined (Ojewale et al., 2024).

2.6.1 ERIKSON'S CONCEPTS REGARDING PSYCHOSOCIAL MARRIAGE COUNSELING

There are numerous approaches to considering the evolving dynamics of marriage and marriage conflict. One significant theory in this regard is

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Erik Erikson is sometimes referred to as a neo-Freudian (Liu, 2024), and he developed one of the most renowned and significant theories regarding individuals' identity development (Kheirallah et al., 2022). Erikson reported in his seminal book that his work originated from the psychoanalysis field. Erikson, however, elaborated Freud's psychosexual model to encompass psychosocial development across an individual's lifespan. Erikson also placed greater emphasis on the function and role of the ego, which he referred to as a concept defining an individual's capacity to adaptively integrate their action and thought (Ottakkam Thodukayil et al., 2025).

Erikson explained that identity development involves combining identifications from childhood, physical and social changes occurring currently, and future commitments (Kadyan & Unnithan, 2025). Erikson's model of development states that psychosexual and psychosocial development is interconnected (Barak-Bianco & Rajman, 2025). Erikson explained that individuals pass through eight stages of development throughout their lives, and every stage has a crisis in the dialectical sense which has to be resolved. Erikson employed the term "crisis" in a developmental context to refer to not a danger of calamity, but turning point, a time when individuals were more susceptible and endowed with greater potential (Foley, 2024).

This concept is central to Erikson's eight psychosocial crises, which begin with Trust vs. Mistrust and conclude with Integrity vs. Despair. For healthy development to occur, the first of each pair must gain precedence over the second, but the second never loses all influence. In addition, each component exists in some form prior to the phase-specific crisis that characterizes it. Therefore, by the

end of adolescence, identity is phase-specific, i.e., it must achieve a certain integration as a fairly conflict-free psychosocial alignment or remain defective or conflict-ridden" (Cheah, 2022).

But, of course, it is presupposed that a counselor who is thoroughly knowledgeable about these development stages has the tools and expertise necessary to grasp marital conflict and how to manage it. For instance, Erikson referred to the sixth developmental crisis as "intimacy vs. isolation." Here, the young adult who has successfully emerged from the fifth psychosocial crisis with a sense of identity is prepared for intimacy (Đurović & Lech, 2022). Researchers have described intimacy as "the capacity to make commitments to actual relationships and partnerships and to develop the moral strength to maintain those commitments, even if they involve significant sacrifices and compromises" (Sponsler, 2021). Erikson referred to the opposite of intimacy as "distantiation," which is "the desire to separate and annihilate those forces and individuals whose essence appears threatening to one's own" (Sabri et al., 2022). Erikson applied Freud's response to the question of what a healthy adult can do to define this stage. Freud answered, "Lieben und arbeiten," that is, "to love and to work" (Mazel, 2022).

2.6.2 CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEORY

However, Heitler's (1987) psychotherapy integration revolution gave birth to conflict resolution theory. Initially, practicing clinicians applied the theory and methods, and subsequent on, they applied to research in academic settings (Savoie, 2021). The theory is founded on a very common notion: that conflicts lie at the center of emotional distress and that effective resolution of them will bring back emotional wellness. An individual can be in conflict with himself or herself (intra-psychic conflict), with others, or with things happening in the environment.

Conflict-focused theory is founded on what we observe regarding the way in which information travels and how disagreements get resolved in effective problem-solving discussions. This knowledge base arises from the integration of marriage counseling research with that on mediation in law, business, and foreign relations, as well as clinical practice with individuals, couples, and families (Halder & Basu, 2025). He continued to explain that conflict resolution theory provides us with a means of understanding emotional

health, distress, and treatment in terms of the exchange of information. How individuals manage their issues, such as the way they communicate while making personal choices, differing with others, or coping with life issues, determines their maturity. Healthy conflict resolution and open and free communication make individuals healthy and foster goodwill in relationships. Psychopathology (Narang & Liu, 2022) is the name for the negative emotions, self-defeating behaviors, and interpersonal issues that result from badly managed conflicts in which information is minimized, repressed, or otherwise not permitted to circulate fluidly.

Conflict resolution theory holds that four primary forms of psychopathology can occur when individuals fail to manage conflict in a healthy manner (Taha, 2025). A fight path results in anger syndromes; a flight path results in avoidance psychopathologies (addictions and other obsessive-compulsive disorders); immobilization, or a freeze path, maintains the conflict in awareness with no action response, which sustains anxiety (such as panic disorder and agoraphobia); and a submit path, i.e., surrendering to conflicts, results in depression. These four detours lead to the same emotional issues, whether the conflicts are occurring in the mind, between individuals, or between an individual and their environment. The reason that the same patterns of conflict resolution apply in the mind and in relationships is why conflict theory is so valuable in couples therapy in treating the problems of the couples themselves as well as the problems of their marriage (Fakih et al., 2024).

Researchers indicate that psychodynamic theory proposes a model based on conflict in which incompatible wants, fears, values, and beliefs (the superego) rely on an intermediary third party, the ego. The conflict resolution theory also discussed the function of counseling. The most straightforward conflict model is Gestalt theory as it stipulates that conflicts are "unfinished business" (Abu Mukh & Jabali, 2025). Gestalt therapy has gone furthest perhaps in allowing therapists to notice the tiny hints of "breaks in the flow" that indicate there is a conflict occurring intra-psychically. Gestalt theory also emphasizes how essential it is to bring difficulties into the therapy session now so they can be resolved. This is a central premise of conflict resolution treatment. Behavioral therapies, particularly behavioral

marital therapies, address conflict as well by instructing individuals on how to communicate and manage anger so they are able to resolve problems.

Conflict resolution framework therapists require an array of therapeutic interventions to assist with various aspects of the resolution process. Pharmacological, cognitive-behavioral, paradoxical, and solution-oriented therapies are particularly useful at the onset of treatment when the primary objective is symptom reduction. Psychodynamic and Gestalt therapies assist individuals in examining the deeper causes of strong feelings that arise in conflict scenarios. Behavioral interventions are a significant component of treatment that assists individuals in acquiring new skills. Therapists, in turn, can be more competent with many of these interventions if they are aware of how to manage conflicts and possess a broad overview of conflict resolution theory. For instance, solution-focused, paradoxical, and pharmacological interventions are more successful if accompanied by skill-coaching to ensure that future conflicts will not result in regressions. Psychodynamic therapies assist individuals to better comprehend their family-of-origin sensitivities. Conflict-resolution models then prompt the therapist to recall that the work is not yet complete until new methods of handling these sensitivities have been discovered. Gestalt therapists may apply the three steps of healthy conflict resolution to transform interactions between the underdog and the top dog into healthy means of problem-solving for both parties (Adebayo et al., 2024).

It should be noted that Margret Harlow's theory of contact comfort, the Savador family system therapy, and R. Fredrick's theory of cognitive marriage all provide parallel means of viewing marriage and problem-solving in marriage. Based on the theoretical discussions above, this study will look at how training in resolving marital conflicts affects married couples' ability to resolve conflicts. The study will look at how gender differences, level of education, and length of marriage affect things (Zhang, 2025).

One out of three women around the world has been a victim of intimate partner violence (IPV). One reason for this is how society treats women and recognizes what they do. As individuals, groups, communities, and societies, we have ideas about gender and what men and women should

do. These ideas tell men and women how to dress, act, and present themselves in public and private settings, as well as what they should not do. Gender roles are considered by people to be guidelines that society has established for individuals based on their socially constructed sex. Gender roles can be descriptive or prescriptive (Duvvury et al., 2024). The prescriptive component influences what individuals believe and what is deemed fit for them and others to do, whereas the descriptive component refers to what individuals perceive men and women to actually do (Bemmer, 2025). Men and women rely on one another, influencing both social and personal expectations about how men and women should behave. It assists individuals in creating mental models of how men and women behave (Niyonkuru, 2021). Individuals tend to have preconceived notions of what their partners ought to do in private relationships. Specifically, marital role expectations refer to the responsibilities, obligations, and behaviors that men and women as spouses or partners want from one another. Power differences in society are what result from gender role stereotypes asserting that women are submissive and helpless and that men are dominant and in control (Cohen et al., 2024). In most nations, particularly in Asian and Eastern nations, men are supposed to make decisions and provide for their families. Women, conversely, are supposed to assist men in decisions making and providing for their families. Saudi Arabia is a prime example of this since women are unable to advance in society until they reach the age of 21, and they require male guardians in order to secure employment and healthcare (Simon & Behnjharachajarunandha, 2025). When it comes to marriage and close relationships, these gendered internalizations affect what spouses expect from each other when it comes to work, making decisions, doing household chores, and having the power to make decisions in the home (Sarvesh, 2024). They might also make the burden of hostile sexism worse (Manisha & Ankit, 2025). According to research, traditional ideas about gender roles are what keep hostile sexist views alive that support men's control over women (Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2023).

As a result, people's views on IPV change, which causes problems in personal relationships and in many cultures and countries (Bak McKenna & Grasten, 2022). Cultural norms and ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman make

gender roles even stronger. Research indicates that violence, aggression, and conflict and stress against intimate partners are more likely to occur if individuals (particularly men) hold strict beliefs about the kind of behavior men and women should exhibit (Dudić-Sijamija & Bakić, 2025). Perceptions and gender role expectations continue to have a significant influence on how contented a marriage is (Jeffery & Qureshi, 2022). Men with a belief in traditional gender roles are more likely to justify and resort to IPV when they feel disrespected, not heard, or doubted. Women who adhere to gender equality are more likely to be violent towards their romantic partners, however, because they might come across as confrontational and not willing to be submissive towards men. It's also significant to be aware that the gender roles that each other expects from the other might not be the same as how they actually behave or work (Jeffery & Qureshi, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses a qualitative research design to look into what married women who have gone to family court think are the reasons for their marital problems. Qualitative research is great for looking into sensitive social issues like marital conflict because it focuses on understanding how people make sense of their social and cultural environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design is based on a phenomenological approach that focuses on the women's real-life experiences and how they made sense of them. This helps the researcher learn more about how these women see conflict, what causes it, and how social and cultural factors affect their decisions.

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study uses a qualitative research method, specifically phenomenology. The goal of using a qualitative method is to get a full, deep picture of the lives of married women who have had problems in their marriages and have gone to court to get help. A phenomenological design was chosen because it looks at the personal meanings and interpretations people give to their experiences. This method lets the researcher see the emotional, psychological, and social complexities of marital conflict that are often missed in quantitative designs. The study's goal is to look at not only what happened but also what participants think about it

and the cultural, family, and legal settings in which those meanings are formed. It will do this through in-depth conversations and narrative accounts.

3.2 RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

3.2.1 THE RATIONALE FOR CHOOSING A DIVERSE POPULATION

The study looks at married women who live in Punjab, Pakistan, and have gone to family court because of problems in their marriage. The reason for choosing this group of women is because of their unique social position. In many traditional societies, like Pakistan, women are expected to keep the family's honor and put up with problems in their marriages without saying anything. But people who choose to go to court are often motivated by deep personal and social experiences that make them act even when society tells them not to. Because of this, they are a great source of information about what causes marital problems and what makes people seek legal help. The study wants to get a wide range of experiences and interpretations of marital conflict by talking to women of different ages, educational levels, and social and economic backgrounds.

3.2.4 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

We gathered demographic information so that we could understand each person's experience in the context of her own social and cultural background. At the start of each interview, we asked for information like age, level of education, number of children, length of marriage, and job status. We didn't use these variables to make generalizations about the data; instead, we used them to make the interpretive analysis of each story more in-depth. For instance, a participant's level of education could affect how much she knows about her legal rights, and the length of her marriage could be linked to how long or how bad the conflict is. Getting this kind of demographic information helped make the results more interesting and let the researcher connect individual stories to bigger social patterns in a meaningful way.

3.3 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

We made a semi-structured interview guide to make sure that all of the interviews were the same while still letting us explore new themes as they came up.

3.4 TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

3.4.1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

The guide had open-ended questions that were meant to get participants to tell stories about their experiences with conflict in their marriages. Questions covered things like the nature and cause of the conflict, the role of the extended family, the emotional and financial effects, ways to deal with it, and the choice to go to court. The guide helped make sure that all the important topics were talked about, but it also let the people in the group lead the conversation and bring up issues that were important to them.

3.4.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

We got our data by doing in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 12 to 15 people. We chose this method because it can give us a lot of detailed information and let us dig deeper into what people are thinking and feeling. The interviews took about 45 to 60 minutes each and were held in a safe and private place, like a legal aid center or a neutral area of the court. Interviews were done in either Urdu or Punjabi, depending on what the participant wanted, to make sure they were comfortable and could express themselves clearly. The researcher stayed non-judgmental and understanding throughout the process, which helped build trust and made participants feel comfortable sharing.

3.4.3 BRACKETING

The researcher used bracketing before and during data collection to stay objective and avoid letting their own biases affect the results. Bracketing is an important part of phenomenological research. It means putting aside what you already know, think, and believe about the phenomenon you are studying. The researcher kept her own positionality in mind and made sure that her own interpretations didn't drown out the voices of the participants by keeping a reflective journal and being aware of herself all the time. This practice was important to keep the results' credibility and authenticity.

3.4.4 REFLEXIVE NOTES

The researcher wrote down notes about what they saw, thought, and felt during and after each interview. These notes added another layer of information, giving the researcher a better understanding of how the interviewees interacted with each other and how the researcher was

learning more about the phenomenon. Reflexive notes also made the research process more open, and they were used later to back up the thematic analysis.

3.4.5 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The core method of data collection was in-depth interviewing. Each session was conducted one-on-one to create a comfortable environment where participants could discuss sensitive topics without fear of judgment or exposure. The interviews provided a platform for participants to narrate their stories in their own words, emphasizing their personal perspectives and lived realities. The depth and detail of these interviews were instrumental in capturing the emotional and psychological dimensions of marital conflict.

3.4.6 FIELD NOTES

In addition to audio recordings, field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues, contextual details, and environmental conditions during the interviews. These notes enriched the data by offering insights into the participants' body language, tone of voice, and emotional expressions, which could not be fully captured through transcripts alone. Field notes were later used to interpret the nuances of participants' narratives during the analysis phase.

3.4.7 AUDIO RECORDINGS

With the informed consent of participants, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation of their narratives. The use of recordings allowed the researcher to focus fully on the interaction during the interview and revisit the data multiple times during the transcription and analysis stages. The recordings were stored securely to protect participants' privacy and were only accessible to the researcher.

MEMBER CHECKING

to enhance the credibility and accuracy of the findings, member checking was conducted with selected participants. After the initial analysis, the researcher shared brief summaries or interpretations of the participants' responses to confirm whether the meanings derived accurately reflected their intentions. This process not only validated the findings but also demonstrated respect for participants as co-constructors of knowledge.

3.5 INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

The interviews began with a brief introduction to the study's objectives, followed by open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share their experiences. These questions explored the origins and progression of marital conflict, the influence of in-laws and societal expectations, emotional and physical consequences, and the motivations behind seeking legal support. While a set of core questions guided the interviews, the researcher allowed flexibility for participants to raise additional issues or elaborate on topics they deemed important.

3.6 PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was initiated after obtaining ethical approval from the concerned institutional review board and relevant court authorities. Participants were approached through legal aid offices and family court premises, where they were informed about the study and invited to participate voluntarily. Once consent was obtained, interviews were scheduled at a time and place convenient and safe for the participants. The researcher ensured that participants felt comfortable, and every effort was made to maintain confidentiality and emotional safety throughout the process. A culturally sensitive and trauma-informed approach was adopted, especially given the sensitive nature of the subject matter.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke. The process began with familiarization, during which the researcher read and re-read the transcripts to immerse herself in the data. This was followed by the generation of initial codes, where meaningful segments of text were labeled to identify recurring ideas. These codes were then grouped into potential themes that captured the essence of the participants' narratives. Themes were reviewed and refined by comparing them against the full data set to ensure they accurately represented the participants' lived experiences. Finally, the themes were clearly defined and named to construct a coherent and compelling narrative. NVivo software was used to facilitate coding and theme

development. This methodical process allowed for both depth and rigor in the interpretation of qualitative data.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical considerations were integral to every stage of the research. Prior to participation, all respondents were given detailed information about the study and were required to sign an informed consent form. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. All data were anonymized by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifiable information from transcripts. Audio recordings and written data were stored securely and accessible only to the researcher. Given the potentially distressing nature of the interviews, the researcher also provided information about local counseling services in case participants experienced emotional discomfort.

3.9 LIMITATIONS

Like any qualitative study, this research faced several limitations. The use of purposive sampling and a relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, some participants may have chosen to withhold information or present themselves in a socially acceptable manner. Cultural stigma around marital conflict and legal proceedings could have influenced the openness of responses. Despite efforts to remain objective, the possibility of researcher bias cannot be entirely ruled out, although it was minimized through reflexivity and bracketing.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

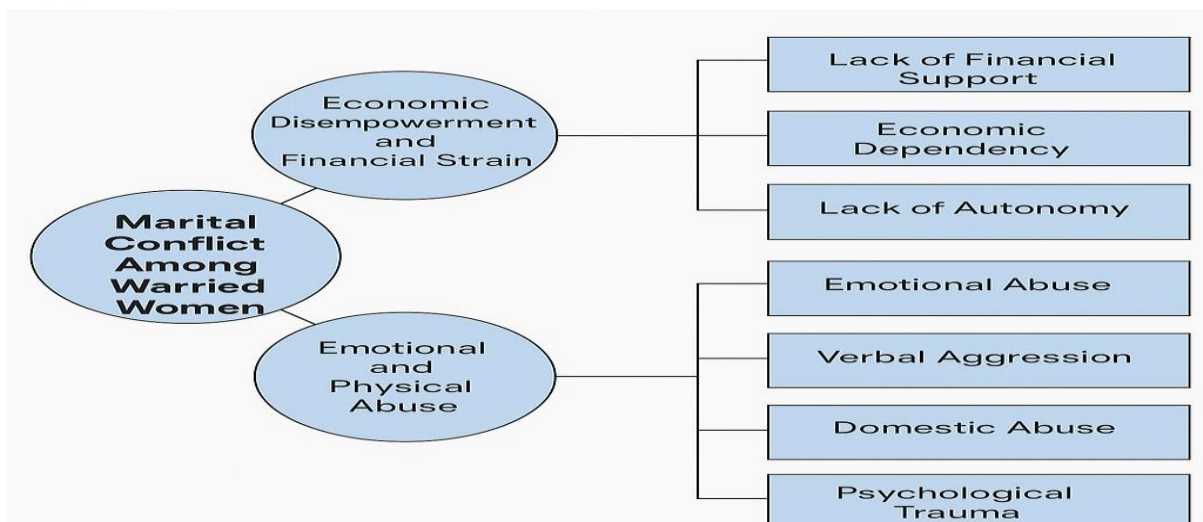
To understand the nature and context of the marital conflicts explored in this study, it is essential to consider the demographic background of the 15 married women who participated. The following table summarizes the key characteristics of the respondents:

Participant	Age Range	Educational Qualification	Duration of Marriage	Children	Employment Status	Living Arrangement
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1.	36-40 years	Matric to Intermediate	Less than 5 years	More than 2 children	Housewife	Joint family
2.	26-30 years	Matric to Intermediate	More than 10 years	1-2 children	Housewife	Nuclear family
3.	26-30 years	Bachelor or above	5-10 years	No children	Housewife	Joint family
4.	20-25 years	No formal education	Less than 5 years	1-2 children	Informal Work (e.g., sewing)	Joint family
5.	26-30 years	Matric to Intermediate	5-10 years	No children	Housewife	Joint family
6.	31-35 years	Matric to Intermediate	5-10 years	1-2 children	Formal Employment (teaching, etc.)	Joint family
7.	36-40 years	Primary to Middle	More than 10 years	No children	Housewife	Nuclear family
8.	31-35 years	Matric to Intermediate	5-10 years	1-2 children	Housewife	Joint family
9.	20-25 years	Primary to Middle	Less than 5 years	No children	Housewife	Joint family
10.	31-35 years	Matric to Intermediate	5-10 years	1-2 children	Housewife	Joint family
11.	26-30 years	Bachelor or above	Less than 5 years	No children	Housewife	Joint family
12.	20-25 years	Primary to Middle	5-10 years	More than 2 children	Housewife	Nuclear family
13.	26-30 years	Primary to Middle	Less than 5 years	No children	Housewife	Joint family
14.	31-35 years	No formal education	Less than 5 years	1-2 children	Housewife	Joint family
15.	26-30 years	Matric to Intermediate	More than 10 years	More than 2 children	Formal Employment (teaching, etc.)	Joint family

The demographic profile gives us a lot of information about the bigger picture in which these marriage problems happened. Most of the people who answered were between the ages of 26 and 35 and had been married for less than ten years. This is a common age and length of time for people to have trouble adjusting to marriage. Most of the people who answered the survey had only finished high school or less, which means they probably didn't know much about their rights or the support services that were available to them.

Most of the women in this study were financially dependent (as housewives or doing informal work), and almost all of them lived in joint family systems. This was a major factor in in-law interference and family control, which were two of the main themes of the study. In some cases, the lack of children made things even harder for women, which ties in with the theme of early marital instability and not having kids. These demographic factors not only affected the types of conflicts, but they also affected how people dealt with them and whether or not they chose to get legal help.



4.2 ECONOMIC DISEMPOWERMENT AND FINANCIAL STRAIN

A common worry among most of the people who answered was that they were not financially independent and did not have control over their household income. Many women said that their husbands didn't give them money or didn't help with basic living costs, which caused both material and emotional problems. Financial neglect was often a way for the husband to control the wife, using the fact that he was the only one who could provide for her to do so. This not only made women more dependent, but it also took away their power in the relationship.

One person said, "He would bring home money, but he never gave me anything." I had to ask for everything, even to buy milk. Another person said, "When I asked him about his spending, he yelled, 'You don't earn, so stay out of it! Others said they were just as upset. "My sewing work barely paid for school." A woman with two kids in school said, "He never helped, though." One person said, "He wouldn't pay the rent, so we were kicked out." "I had to stay with my mom for months," said one woman. "After the wedding, his promises went away." He thought I could do everything with nothing.

These stories all tell the same story of financial stress made worse by gendered expectations and a lack of support from a spouse, which led many women to seek legal help or think about separating. Participants often said they were upset about their financial situation, especially when their husbands didn't help with household expenses or limited their access to money. Economic disempowerment was a big cause of problems in marriages and often led to other emotional and relationship problems.

Being dependent on husbands for money was not only a financial problem, but it was also a psychological weapon used to keep them in line. Most of the women were either housewives or did small, informal jobs like sewing or cleaning, which didn't give them financial freedom. Many of the people who answered the survey had low levels of education, which made it harder for them to find work and made them more dependent. "He said that since I don't earn, I have no right to question where the money goes," said one woman who had only finished primary school.

4.3 IN-LAW DOMINANCE AND FAMILIAL INTRUSION

One of the most common sources of stress for participants, especially those who lived in joint family systems, was how much their in-laws affected their marriages. People often said that mothers-in-law were the main cause of problems. They would often make decisions for the family, turn the husband against the wife, and make everyone feel like they were being watched and compared all the time. A lot of women felt worthless, left out, and emotionally drained because of this.

One person said, "My mother-in-law would question everything I did, from cooking to raising my kids. "She never made decisions without her mother's permission," said another. "I felt like a servant in my own home." "I was always the outsider," one person said. "She always compared me to her older daughter-in-law and said I wasn't good enough." Another person said, "If there was a fight, they would all blame me." "I had to say sorry even when it wasn't my fault." Another person said, "They used to say, 'You're just a guest here,' and I never felt like this was my home."

These stories show how too much interference from in-laws can break up a marriage and cause long-term emotional pain for the wife.

In-laws, especially mothers-in-law, played a big role in how things worked in the home. The women often felt worthless and helpless because of these power differences.

Almost all of the 19 women who lived in joint families said that problems with in-laws were a major source of stress. Sometimes, it seemed like the husband was torn between his wife and mother, which led to neglect or unfairness. "He believed everything his mother said," said one woman. He never asked me what really happened. In homes where couples and extended family lived together, the lines between them and their roles were often blurred, which made women more likely to feel psychological pressure and have their roles suppressed.

4.4 EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE

A lot of people who answered talked about times when they were emotionally abused (yelling, insulting, threatening) and physically hurt. The husband often made abuse seem normal or okay, and in some cases, the families didn't even notice it. Many of the people who answered said they had been emotionally abused, which included constant criticism, yelling, threats, and making them feel bad on purpose. A lot of women also said that their husbands had been physically abusive to them. One woman said through tears, "He would slap me and say it was his right. Even when I stayed quiet, it continued." Other women talked about how emotional abuse slowly turned into physical violence, often without the family feeling bad or doing anything about it. Many people didn't speak up or ask for help right away because abuse was seen as normal and people were expected to deal with it. This led to longer suffering.

4.5 COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN AND EMOTIONAL DISCONNECT

Many of the people who answered said they had been through emotional and physical abuse, which was very painful. Many women remembered being verbally abused, belittled, and threatened over and over again, and husbands and extended family members often made these things seem normal. These things caused long-lasting mental damage and often turned into physical violence.

One woman said, "He used to yell at me over little things. Sometimes I didn't even know what I did wrong." Another said, "He would insult me in front of the kids, calling me names like 'useless' or 'burden.'" A participant emotionally said, "He slapped me on the second day after our wedding and said, 'This is how I will teach you.'" One explained, "When I cried or tried to defend myself, he said I was being dramatic." "I never got any help for my pain," said another woman. "His family knew everything, but they said, 'These things happen in marriage.' I had nowhere to go."

These accounts show a larger pattern of abuse that was not only personal but also socially accepted through silence or denial, making the trauma these women went through even worse. Respondents consistently said that their spouses did not communicate with them in a meaningful way or show any emotional interest. Over time, this lack of connection made misunderstandings worse and made the marriage less happy.

Another big reason for marital conflict was a lack of communication. People said that their husbands either didn't want to talk about things or didn't care about their worries. The lack of real conversation made the relationship feel lonely and emotionally distant. One participant said, "He never asked how I was feeling. We lived in the same house like strangers." Many women said that there was no emotional support or understanding between them, which slowly broke down the emotional bond in the marriage. Couples had trouble dealing with their problems because there were no good ways to resolve conflicts, which led to fights happening over and over again.

4.6 EARLY MARITAL INSTABILITY AND CHILDLESSNESS

Almost half of the people who took part did not have children, and many of them had been married for less than five years. These women were especially likely to be watched and blamed by their families. A number of people said they were threatened with divorce or a second marriage. "They told me I had six months to get pregnant, or they would send me back," one woman said. Being called "barren" and being made fun of by others caused long-term stress, and in many cases, it led to the need for legal help.

A number of women said that fights started within the first few months or years of marriage. In-laws often used the fact that the couple didn't have kids

as an excuse to abuse them, which caused a cycle of emotional pain and separation.

4.7 RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL JUSTIFICATION OF CONTROL

Early marriage problems and not having children became major sources of stress that not only made fights worse but also caused social isolation and emotional trauma. A lot of people said that their marriages fell apart quickly, some within months and others within the first few years. This was especially true when their expectations about having children were not met. A lot of the time, the woman was blamed for not having children, which put a lot of pressure on her from her in-laws and even her husband.

"We began to fight just a few weeks after we got married," one woman said. His mother kept asking when I would bring good news. Another person said, "They gave me six months to get pregnant, or I would be sent back." "I felt like a machine, not a person." A third person said, "I had a miscarriage and was still blamed for not keeping the baby."

"That was the start of my suffering," one participant said. "He started talking about marrying another woman because I couldn't get pregnant." Another said, "They would make fun of me at family gatherings." I began to stay away from everyone because I was ashamed of something I couldn't change.

These stories show how early marital problems and stigma around infertility can be harmful to women. They were judged not for who they were, but for what they hadn't given birth to: a child.

Some people who answered said that religious or cultural stories were used to support the husband's authority and take away the woman's freedom. This made faith, family honor, and personal well-being fight with each other.

Some women said that their husbands used religion and culture to control them. Misunderstanding religious teachings was used to support male dominance and keep the wife's voice quiet. One person said, "He would say that Islam gives him the right to control me and that I shouldn't question his choices." Cultural norms also said that women should suffer in silence to protect the family's honor. Women were less likely to speak out against abusive behavior or ask for help from outside sources because they were under pressure to keep up appearances and avoid social shame. Many participants were unable to move

forward because of the conflict between their religious duty and their sense of personal dignity.

4.8 PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT AND COPING MECHANISMS

The long-term emotional and mental effects of ongoing marital conflict and abuse were very strong in the people who took part. Many people said they lived in a state of constant anxiety, fear, and emotional exhaustion. Their stories show that their inner worlds are filled with constant stress, a lack of self-worth, and social isolation. For a lot of people, the stress of being emotionally neglected, physically abused, and verbally abused all the time slowly wore down their mental health, causing them to feel sad, anxious, and alone.

"I used to be confident and outgoing," one person said. I stay in my room all day now. "I feel like a ghost in my own house," one person said. "My heart would race every time he came home." "I couldn't breathe from the fear," said a third woman. "No one believed me when I said I was depressed." They told me I was just being dramatic. Another person said, "I stopped talking to my friends and family because I was embarrassed." "I felt like a failure," one participant said. "Filing a case wasn't easy, but it saved my life." For the first time, I found people who listened to me.

These voices show both the deep scars of psychological trauma and the slow change that leads to taking back control.

Long-term conflict and abuse took a heavy toll on people's mental health. A lot of people said they were depressed, anxious, and withdrawn from social situations. People often only sought legal help after all other ways of dealing with their problems had failed.

The combination of financial, emotional, and social stress had serious effects on the mental health of many women. They said they were depressed, anxious, couldn't sleep, and stayed away from other people. One person said, "I felt like I had no value. I cried myself to sleep every night." Even though these women were going through a lot of emotional pain, they were able to cope in different ways. Some people turned to spiritual practices for comfort, while others turned to friends or women's rights groups for help. People often said that asking for legal help was the last, brave thing they did after years of suffering in silence. For these women, the legal system was not

only a way to get justice, but also a way to get back their sense of worth and identity.

4.9 SUMMARY OF THEMES

The thematic analysis of interviews with 15 married women who were looking for legal help showed a complicated and multi-layered picture of marital conflict that was affected by social, cultural, economic, and personal factors. Women who were financially dependent were more likely to be abused, neglected, and controlled because they didn't have their own money or education. Most of the women were either unemployed or worked in informal jobs, which made them even less important in the marriage. Interference from in-laws was a big reason why conflicts got worse, especially in families where everyone lived together. This was because it often led to misunderstandings, alliances against the wife, and less emotional and material commitment from the husband. Verbal,

emotional, and physical abuse, which was often downplayed or normalized, was a common theme that showed deep-seated differences in gender power and patriarchal norms. A lot of women had mental health problems that made them feel lonely, rejected, and worthless because they got married too young, didn't have kids, or felt pressured to fit in. Poor communication between spouses, where they didn't work together to solve problems, and misunderstandings that often led to heated arguments made things even more stressful. Women often said that their marriages were emotionally one-sided, and in almost all cases, their spouses didn't support them or help them make decisions. These results show that women who are having problems in their marriages need more legal and emotional support. They also show that society needs to change its views on marriage, gender roles, family interference, and women's rights.

Initial Codes	Category	Sub theme	Theme
Financial neglect	Lack of financial support	monetary support	Economic Disempowerment and Financial Strain
Financial control by husband	Economic dependency	Fiscal enslavement	
No access to husband's income	Lack of autonomy	Lack of self-sufficiency	
Struggles after marriage	Post-marital financial stress	Financial issues	In-Law Dominance and Familial Intrusion
In-laws interfering in decisions	Third-party involvement	Interference	
Pressure from husband's mother	Patriarchal family system	Male-controlled system	
Constant comparison with sisters-in-law	Undermining wife's role	Diminishing role	
Blaming the wife for disputes	Scapegoating within family	Censuring	
Verbal insults	Emotional abuse	Emotional breakdown	Emotional and Physical Abuse
Frequent shouting	Verbal aggression	Shouting	
Physical violence	Domestic abuse	Domestic mishandling	Communication Breakdown and Emotional Disconnect
Threats and humiliation	Psychological trauma	Psychological disturbance	
Lack of communication	Emotional disconnection	Responsive withdrawal	
Ignoring concerns	Emotional neglect	Ignorance	
Avoidance of conflict resolution	Problem avoidance	Aversive behavior	

No emotional intimacy	Lack of bonding	Understanding	
Conflicts began soon after marriage	Early conflict onset	Misunderstandings	Early Marital Instability and Childlessness
No children after several years	Reproductive pressure	Propagative	
In-laws blamed wife for infertility	Social pressure around fertility	fertility	
Separation after 4–6 years	Mid-marriage breakdown	breakdown	
Husband uses religion to justify control	Misinterpretation of Islam	Self Justification	Religious and Cultural Justification of Control
Cultural pressure to stay married	Social shame	Communal disgrace	
Forced compromises for “family honor”	Patriarchal obedience	Male-controlled	
Stress and anxiety	Psychological distress	Mental suffering	Psychological Impact and Coping Mechanisms
Depression or isolation	Mental health deterioration	Psychological effect	
Seeking legal recourse	Coping strategy	Handling policy	
Support from friends or NGOs	Emotional survival	Emotional survival	

4.10 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study was to find out what married women who were having problems in their marriages and decided to get legal help thought were the main reasons for their problems. A number of central themes that came up in in-depth semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis show the nature, causes, and effects of marital conflict in Pakistan's current sociocultural context. The results show that the most common problems are not paying attention to feelings and not communicating well. Many people said that their spouses didn't listen to them when they argued, didn't talk to them about important things, or didn't give them emotional support. The emotional distance made the marriage unbearable over time because of the constant feelings of loneliness and misunderstanding.

Another important thing that came up was stress and control over money. Several women talked about times when their husbands didn't do enough to support the family, mishandled money, or limited access to household income. Sometimes the wife was unfairly given financial responsibilities, especially if she worked in a non-formal job like sewing or tutoring. Their relationship was tense, and it hurt their mental

health.

There were a lot of reports of verbal and physical abuse and domestic violence. Some people said they were hit, slapped, insulted, or threatened during fights with their spouses. This kind of conflict often had to do with power dynamics, with the husband or his family trying to take control and often using threats, fear, or traditional gender roles to justify their actions. Women felt weak and vulnerable in these situations, especially in joint family structures where they had even less freedom. People often blamed problems on meddling in-laws, especially mothers-in-law. Some of the people who took part said that members of their extended family had a big impact on their marriage choices or even told them what to do. These interferences caused the couple to have problems, misunderstandings, and eventually lose trust in each other. Some women felt like they were not being treated as equal partners in the marriage, but as the daughters-in-law of the family.

A lot of women also said that their expectations for their roles and duties didn't match up. Some husbands wanted their wives to do everything they said, but women wanted their husbands to be there for them emotionally, let them make decisions, and treat each other with respect. The conflict between

old-fashioned gender roles and new expectations of equality made problems that were already there worse.

There were also problems related to children, like disagreements over how to raise them or not getting enough help with raising them. Women, especially those with more than one child, were upset that their fathers didn't help with decisions or care for their children. On the other hand, women who didn't have kids were shamed, blamed, or even threatened with second marriages by their in-laws or spouses.

The results also suggest that social pressures, religious obligations, and a fear of being judged by others often keep people from talking about their marital problems. Many of the people who took part said that they had long periods of conflict before asking for help, often because they felt pressure to protect their family's honor or because they didn't have enough money to be independent. What makes these results different is that they look at how different types of conflict—economic, familial, social, and emotional—affect a woman's marriage experience all at once. The study also shows that women of all ages, educational levels, and job statuses are at risk for these problems, even though their ways of dealing with them may be different. In conclusion, the results show that many marriages have a widespread lack of power and communication. There are many reasons why women stay in bad marriages for a long time, such as the social stigma against divorce or separation, being financially dependent, being emotionally detached, and the continuation of patriarchal norms. These new facts show how important it is to have family counseling programs, easy-to-reach support services, and legal literacy to give women more power and help make marriages happier.

5.1 DISCUSSION

This chapter goes into great detail about the results, using the existing literature and the cultural and social context of Pakistani weddings as a backdrop. The main goal of the study was to look into the reasons that married women who went to court gave for having problems in their marriages. The analysis of interview data looks at causes that are both multi-dimensional and interrelated. These are talked about in more detail below.

The study's most important results were that husbands and wives often ignore each other's feelings and don't communicate well. A lot of

women said they felt emotionally cut off from their husbands, which made them feel very lonely and unhappy. This fits with what Gottman (1994) found in earlier studies, which showed that bad communication is a strong sign that a marriage will end. In Pakistani culture, men and women are expected to act in certain ways, which makes it hard for men to show their feelings. This makes emotional distance in marriages worse.

Money was the second biggest source of conflict in married life. Many women said that their financial problems were caused by not getting enough help with money, bad management, or someone else being too controlling with the money. In a lot of cases, women who worked informally weren't able to make economic decisions for their families yet. Studies like Ali & Gavino (2008) show that economic dependence is a major factor that limits women's freedom in South Asian marriages. This is even worse when the male partner is out of work or doesn't want to take on the financial role.

Sadly, a lot of people who answered talked about physical and verbal violence. This agrees with earlier studies that found that in societies where men are in charge, unresolved marital problems are both a cause and a result of domestic violence (Naz et al., 2020). A lack of structural power and gender inequality in the family leads to the normalization of male violence as a way to discipline, which in-laws often accept or ignore. This study shows how important it is to include legal knowledge and protection in community support systems.

Living in joint families was one of the reasons why mothers-in-law and others often got involved in the couple's business. Women said that their in-laws often made them feel small and didn't ask them for their opinion when making decisions. This shows that the joint family is better than the married couple, which is common in traditional Pakistani homes (Qadir et al., 2005). In these situations, there is not only conflict between the couple, but also between the woman and her husband's family. This makes finding a solution even harder.

There was a lot of imbalance between what was expected of husbands and wives. Many women said that their husbands didn't show much understanding, companionship, or shared responsibilities, but instead expected them to obey and submit. The literature that says traditional roles often limit women's freedom and create problems in marriage (Chaudhry, 2004) shows that this imbalance exists. Not being able to hold each

other accountable for decisions made at home and taking care of the kids was a big source of frustration.

The most important thing this research found is that there is a cultural silence about problems in marriage. Women often put up with years of physical and emotional abuse before deciding to go to court. This was mostly because they were afraid of being shunned by their friends, were ashamed of their family, or couldn't afford to take care of themselves. This delay is in line with what Khawar and Shaikh (2015) found: that conservative societies discourage women from speaking up or ending unhappy marriages. These results show that communities need to do more to help, such as counseling and awareness programs.

The study shows that one thing almost never leads to problems in a marriage. It is not just one thing; it is a mix of social, familial, economic, and emotional factors. For instance, a woman who is financially independent may also have emotional neglect and interference from her in-laws, which can cause her to feel more stressed. This shows that we need to look at marital conflict as a whole, taking into account the different social factors that affect a woman's experience of marriage.

5.2 CONCLUSION

In general, the study's results help us understand how complicated and varied marital conflict is among Pakistani women. In all of the interviews, the women talked about how the power dynamics were uneven and how they didn't respect each other in the marriage. These problems, along with the lack of social support and legal information, make women feel like they have to go to the edge before they think about getting legal help. This study shows how important it is to have stronger legal protections, more culturally sensitive counseling, and changes in how people think about marriage equality and gender roles.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Based on the results and criteria of this qualitative study, here are some suggestions for future research:

To get a better idea of what causes marital conflict, future studies should include the points of view of husbands, in-laws, or marriage counselors. A more complete and balanced picture of what is going on can be gotten by looking at things from different

angles.

Larger sample sizes and structured surveys can help quantitative research apply its results to other parts of Pakistan. Researchers would be able to compare the frequency and severity of different factors that cause conflict in a statistical way.

Longitudinal research is the best way to find out how marital problems change over time and how women's decisions and coping skills change as they get older, gain more life experience, and change their socioeconomic status.

Another area of research could be how well community-based, religious, and legal interventions work to settle disagreements in marriage. This would help find problems with the current support systems and best practices.

To learn more about how marital conflict and divorce affect families in the long term, more research could look into how these problems affect the mental health of children and other family members.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research has some theoretical, practical, and policy implications:

By putting marital conflict in the context of Pakistani culture, society, and gender norms, it theoretically adds to the body of literature on the subject. It backs up feminist and sociological theories that look at how gender roles, power dynamics, and family structures are all connected. In real life, the results can help social workers, marriage counselors, and lawyers make counseling and support services that are more culturally sensitive. Knowing about the many different reasons for conflict can help us come up with more compassionate and effective ways to intervene.

The study also has effects on policy. It shows how important it is to make married women more aware of their legal rights and to make family courts more responsive to gender issues. Governments and non-governmental organizations should start affordable counseling programs for people who are getting married and after they get married.

It also stresses that religious groups and community leaders need to work to make marital problems less stigmatized. Education programs and public awareness campaigns about emotional health, marriage rights, and how to resolve conflicts can give women more power and encourage them to ask for help early on.

5.5 Limitations Of The Study

The study's results are interesting, but it has some problems:

The study only looked at married women who had already gone to court. Women who have similar problems but never go to court for help because of shame, fear, or not being able to get there are not included.

The research is full of information, but its external validity is low because it is qualitative. The results may not show the full range of experiences in Pakistan across different regions, income levels, and levels of education.

Memory bias, emotional distress, or social desirability could make self-reported information less accurate, especially when talking about sensitive topics like divorce, fighting with in-laws, or abuse.

The study did not include direct observation, court cases, or counseling sessions as sources of contextual knowledge because they were too sensitive to the topic.

Resources and time also limited the number of participants, which may have affected the range of themes that came up.

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