

Dowry considerations in rural Punjab: Cause and effect syndrome

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Dowry is considered to be an integral part of marriage ceremony. The present investigation was carried out in rural areas of Punjab to determine the causes and consequences of dowry in Rural Punjab. The data were collected personally from the two generations *i.e.* Mother-in-laws (G1) and daughter-in-laws (G2). The findings depicted that majority of mother-in-laws were in the age group of 50-57 years and daughter-in-laws were in age group 26-33 years. Most of the respondents reported that dowry was important in settling of the marriage in both the generations. Majority of G1 respondents had no indication of dowry from the groom side whereas G2 respondents had complete indication of dowry before marriage. It was noted that mother-in-laws demanded the dowry in both the generations. The findings further revealed that dowry is practiced as a tradition and more land holding of groom/ bride are important factors contributing to the dowry payments. Also, a large number of G2 respondents highlighted that abroad settled groom aspire more dowries. All the respondents reported female foeticide as the main irony of dowry system. Other consequences felt by the respondents were the domestic violence, divorce, burden on the bride's parents and ill-treatment by in-laws. Both the respondents perceived dowry as a medium to enhance status of bride in the in-laws families followed by feeling of confidence by bride after receiving dowry from parents. However, it is ironic that the cruel cultural practice has deeply enrooted in marriage institution.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Dowry, Cause, Effect syndrome

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Dowry (*Dahej*) is one of the most ancient practices of the world. In India many of the traditional customs have been given up, but the custom of dowry has not only continued, but flourished over the years. In Punjab, dowry practice is very common in arranged marriages and in rural areas as it is widely recognized as a traditional and compulsory ritual of marriage. Dowry is defined as offering of gifts, money

and valuables given by bride's family to that of groom to permit their marriage. The historical accounts and mythological stocks of writings pertaining to marriage in India are indicative that dowry used to be given in various forms like durable household items, jewelry, cash and even land by the bride's family to the bridegrooms (Mandelbaum, 1978; Menski, 1987; Talwar, 2002; Verma, 2003 and Saavala, 2010). A good marriage is defined as

the one involving all rituals along with abundant gift-giving which are useful for marrying one's other children and for social opportunities or family strategies (Bhachu, 1985; Madan, 1985 and Menski, 2003). In contemporary times, dowry is no longer considered to be a gift, rather substantial demands often made by the groom's family for cash and goods. These gifts are of central importance presented by the wife-givers to the wife-takers at the time of marriage; include the 'Dahej' or 'Dowry'. Dowry, which used to be a divine part of marriage ritual became a serious social problem when grooms and their families started to demand certain amount of dowry at the time of marriage negotiation, making dowry somewhat mandatory for the families of the bride (Rao, 1993; Ghose, 2004 and Srinivasan, 2005). Since women serve as 'conduits of transportable wealth' failure to meet such demands and expectations have led to cases of dowry-related deaths, particularly in parts of north India (Ghadially and Kurnar, 1988 and Malhotra, 2002). Dowries are twenty eight per cent higher in north India than in south India (Shama, 1993 and Dalmia and Lawrence, 2005). One of the central idioms respondents used to discuss dowry, in rural North India, was that since there were no demands or pressures on the bride's family, the gifts involved could not be construed as dowry. That the bride's family gave gifts 'voluntarily' or '*khushi se*' (Fruzzetti, 1982; Fuller, 1992 and Roulet, 1996). The term 'voluntary' implies gifts given by the bride's family without demands from the groom's side. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, there were 91,202 dowry deaths were reported in the country from January 1, 2001, to December 31, 2012. A State-wise break-up shows that the highest incidence of dowry deaths was in Uttar Pradesh (23,824; 19,702 sent for trial) and Bihar (13,548; 9,984 sent for trial). The conviction rate was always around about 50 per cent in U.P. and around 30 per cent in Bihar. Nagaland and Lakshadweep were the only places where no dowry deaths were reported during 2002-12. For every dowry death reported, there are dozens that go unreported. As per a TIME magazine report, dowry deaths in India have gone up from 400 cases in 1980s to 8789 in 2014. The figures of alleged dowry death cases are spiraling and ever increasing to the extent that one woman in India is killed for dowry every 10 minutes. In Punjabi society, this phenomenon of dowry has turned into a problematic issue requiring

serious attention. In Punjab, dowry death figures rose from 55 in 1986 to 769 in 2013. The incidence of dowry deaths was found to be higher in rural than urban areas, perhaps due to free availability of pesticides in rural households. The rural areas accounted for 71 per cent of the total dowry deaths (Anonymous, 2013). As about geographical prevalence of the dowry, Doaba, Punjab's NRI belt, with 19.6 per cent of its population, accounts for 33 per cent dowry deaths in the state (Kaur, 2008). Keeping in view the raising demands of dowry the study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- To examine various factors responsible for dowry.
- To highlight the consequences and impact of dowry on the families.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in Punjab State. Multi stage sampling design was used for selection of the respondents. From the three broad cultural zones of Punjab *viz.*, Malwa, Majha and Doaba, two districts Ludhiana and Sangrur from Malwa (being a bigger region), One district Amritsar from Majha and one district Jalandhar from Doaba were selected randomly. Further two blocks from each district were selected. From each selected block three villages were selected. So in all 24 villages were selected. Further, a sample of 15 mother-in-law and 15 daughter-in-laws were taken respondents were taken into consideration constituting 360 mother-in-laws (G1) and 360 daughter-in-laws (G2) in all. The data were collected from the respondents by using Interview approach and analyzed with the help of frequency and percentages and other statistical tests.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data given in Table 1 revealed majority of the respondents (61.39%) were in the age group of 50-57 followed by 42-49 years (22.78 %) and 58-65 years (15.83 %) in all cultural zones in all cultural zones. In case of G2 respondents more than half *i.e.* (54.72) per cent of the respondents were in the 26-33 years age group category in all three cultural zones of Punjab followed by 18-25 years age category (32.50%). Only 12.78 per cent of respondents were in the age group of 34-41 category.

Importance of dowry in settling marriage :

An attempt was made to study the importance of

dowry in settling marriage. It was quite clear from the data placed in Table 2 that 41.39 per cent in G1 respondents and a considerable number *i.e.* 64.72 per cent in G2 revealed that dowry was important in settling up of their marriage. According to the regional classification in G1 respondents, it was observed that the dowry was an important consideration factor in Malwa (47.78 %), Majha (37.37 %) and Doaba (32.22%). In G2 respondents in Malwa region of Punjab where 68.89 per cent followed by Majha (67.78 %) and Doaba (53.33 %) considered dowry as an important factor in settling of marriage. On the further classification of data, it was observed that 23.89 per cent of G2 respondents considered dowry as 'very important' whereas 41.39 per cent considered dowry as an 'important' in settling of marriages. Also it was noted

58.61 per cent of G1 respondents and 35.28 per cent of G2 respondents revealed that dowry was not important in settling of their marriages.

Indication of dowry :

Table 3 highlights the indication of dowry before marriage and the person made demand of the dowry. It was observed that in G1 respondents about one third (32.50 %) of the respondents had indication of dowry before marriage and in G2 respondents more than half *i.e.* 52.22 per cent had indication of dowry. In both the generations, mother-in-law demanded the dowry *i.e.* (19.44 %) in G1 and (29.72%) in G2 generation resp. Similar results were in time with findings of Hekmat (1998); Talwar (2002) and Kaur (2008) who highlighted that the main irony of all this dowry system is this that

Table 1 : Distribution of the respondents according to their age

Age	Malwa (n ₁ = 180)	Majha (n ₂ = 90)	Doaba (n ₃ = 90)	Punjab (n = 360)
Mother-in-laws (G1)				
42-49	51 (28.33)	19 (21.11)	12 (13.33)	82 (22.78)
50-57	91 (50.56)	60 (66.67)	70 (77.78)	221 (61.39)
58-65	38 (21.11)	11 (12.22)	8 (8.89)	57 (15.83)
Daughter-in-laws (G2)				
18-25	63 (35.00)	26 (28.89)	28 (31.11)	117 (32.50)
26-33	95 (52.78)	52 (57.78)	50 (55.56)	197 (54.72)
34-41	22 (12.22)	12 (13.33)	12 (13.33)	46 (12.78)

Table 2 : Distribution of respondents according to importance of dowry in settling of marriage

Importance of dowry in settling of marriage	Malwa n=180	Majha n=90	Doaba n=90	Overall n=360	Malwa n=180	Majha n=90	Doaba n=90	Overall n=360
	Mother-in-laws (G1)				Daughter-in-laws(G2)			
Yes	86 (47.78)	34 (37.37)	29 (32.22)	149 (41.39)	124 (68.89)	61 (67.78)	48 (53.33)	233 (64.72)
No	94 (52.22)	56 (62.22)	61 (67.78)	211 (58.61)	56 (31.11)	29 (32.22)	42 (46.67)	127 (35.27)
Very important	24 (13.33)	17 (18.89)	14 (15.56)	55 (15.28)	45 (25.00)	19 (21.11)	22 (24.44)	86 (23.89)
Important	31 (17.22)	14 (15.56)	25 (27.78)	70 (19.44)	93 (51.67)	36 (40)	20 (22.22)	149 (41.39)
Not important	116 (64.44)	53 (58.89)	42 (46.67)	211 (58.61)	52 (28.89)	42 (46.67)	33 (36.67)	127 (35.28)

Table 3 : Distribution of the respondents according to indication of dowry and the person who demand dowry

	Malwa n=180	Majha n=90	Doaba n=90	Overall n=360	Malwa n=180	Majha n=90	Doaba n=90	Overall n=360
	Mother-in-law(G1)				Daughter-in-law(G2)			
Indication of dowry before marriage from groom's side								
Yes	78 (43.33)	21 (23.33)	18 (20.00)	117 (32.50)	101 (56.11)	49 (54.44)	38 (42.22)	188 (52.22)
No	102 (56.67)	69 (76.67)	72 (80.00)	243 (67.50)	79 (43.89)	41 (45.56)	52 (57.78)	172 (47.78)
If yes then the person who made the demand								
Vichola/Intermediator	20 (11.11)	9 (10.00)	11 (12.22)	40 (11.11)	15 (8.33)	8 (8.89)	19 (21.11)	42 (11.67)
Mother-in-law	26 (14.44)	24 (26.67)	20 (20.22)	70 (19.44)	62 (34.44)	33 (36.67)	12 (13.33)	107 (29.72)
Father-in-law	0 (0.00)	2 (2.22)	4 (4.44)	6 (1.67)	24 (13.33)	8 (8.89)	7 (7.78)	39 (10.83)

one woman (mother-in-law) is forcing another woman (the daughter-in-law) to bring sufficient dowry or be ready to face the consequences. Furthermore, all mother-in-law have been daughter-in-laws once in their lives, but still they have the same prejudicial approach towards their own gender because of social pressure, illiteracy, lack of awareness, and other factors.

Factors responsible for dowry :

The respondents were also asked to cite the important reasons for giving a dowry (Table 4). Majority of G1 *i.e.* 85.56 per cent and 89.17 per cent of G2 respondents reported that the most important reason for giving a dowry was that it was followed as a tradition in society while 75.56 per cent of G1 respondents and 81.11 per cent G2 respondents cited dowry as a medium to enhance likeliness for bride among in laws' as the second most important reason; an equal percentage 67.78 per cent of G1 females cited 'to get reputed groom' and 'to fulfill desires of groom family' gives it as another important reasons for giving of dowry. Also 65.56 per cent regarded dowry giving as 'prestige issue'. Among the second-generation, 65.83 per cent said it 'imitating others' *i.e.* after looking towards others leads to dowry

giving. However a few (10.00 %) G1 and 25 per cent G2 respondents, the most important reason was that dowry was part of females 'inheritance' and thus parents give it. Also, a large majority (74.17%) of G2 respondents revealed that more land holding on either groom/ bride's side was a major factor responsible for dowry. It was noted especially among G2 generation in Malwa region, the dowry was given as one lac rupee per acre of land. On the regional front in Majha region in G1 generation 93.33 per cent followed dowry as tradition followed by 76.67 per cent in both Malwa and Doaba followed it as medium to enhance status of bride in family. In case of G2 respondents majority (95.50 %) gave dowry as it was a tradition followed by 86.67 per cent in Doaba cited as fulfilling demand of groom and 84.44 per cent opined dowry as enhancing status in the in-laws family.

Overall it was concluded that the reasons often cited were dowry as a tradition, respectively. A bride, whose family fulfills the dowry demand at the time of marriage, usually enjoys better status in her husband's family and better treatment from her in-laws by the first and second-generations. These results are also accordance to study conducted by Oldenburg (2002); Walia (2005) and Edlund (2000).

Table 4 : Distribution of the respondents according to factors considered by them responsible for dowry

Factors	Malwa	Majha	Doaba	Overall	Malwa	Majha	Doaba	Overall
	n=180	n=90	n=90	n=360	n=180	n=90	n=90	n=360
	Mother-in-law(G1)				Daughter-in-law(G2)			
People follow tradition	145 (80.56)	84 (93.33)	79 (87.78)	308 (85.56)	161 (89.44)	86 (95.56)	74 (82.22)	321 (89.17)
Dowry as share in parental property	11 (6.11)	11 (12.22)	9 (10.00)	31 (8.61)	48 (26.67)	31 (34.44)	11 (12.22)	90 (25.00)
To get reputed groom	49 (27.22)	43 (47.78)	61 (67.78)	153 (42.50)	81 (45.00)	66 (73.33)	71 (78.89)	218 (60.56)
Prestige issue	51 (28.33)	52 (57.78)	59 (65.56)	162 (45.00)	87 (48.33)	44 (48.89)	61 (67.78)	192 (53.33)
Imitating others	61 (33.89)	31 (34.44)	49 (54.44)	141 (39.17)	99 (55.00)	67 (74.44)	71 (78.89)	237 (65.83)
Satisfaction among parents	67 (37.22)	49 (54.44)	32 (35.56)	148 (41.11)	81 (45.00)	59 (65.56)	54 (60.00)	194 (53.89)
To fulfill desire of grooms family	81 (45.00)	69 (76.67)	61 (67.78)	211 (58.61)	71 (39.44)	46 (51.11)	78 (86.67)	195 (54.17)
Daughter faces problems	61 (33.89)	19 (21.11)	41 (45.56)	121 (33.61)	54 (30.00)	17 (18.89)	61 (67.78)	132 (36.67)
Dowry is medium to enhance likeliness for bride among in laws	103 (57.22)	59 (65.56)	63 (70.00)	225 (62.50)	112 (62.22)	67 (74.44)	65 (72.22)	244 (67.78)
More is Land holding of groom/bride more is dowry	136 (75.56)	63 (70.00)	68 (75.56)	267 (74.17)	161 (89.44)	71 (78.89)	60 (66.67)	292 (81.11)
Opportunity to get resourceful men	86 (47.78)	48 (53.33)	56 (62.22)	190 (52.78)	92 (51.11)	43 (47.78)	61 (67.78)	196 (54.44)
Well educated groom	58 (32.22)	41 (45.56)	43 (47.78)	142 (39.44)	69 (38.33)	46 (51.11)	47 (52.22)	162 (45.00)
Expectations of in-laws for dowry	118 (65.56)	75 (83.33)	68 (75.56)	261 (72.50)	163 (90.56)	84 (93.33)	71 (78.89)	318 (88.33)
Abroad settlement	12 (6.67)	20 (22.22)	5 (5.56)	38 (10.56)	91 (50.56)	66 (73.33)	48 (53.33)	205 (56.94)

*Multiple responses

Consequences of dowry :

The rural sector of Punjab has been witnessing sharp increase of spending on dowry. The demonstration effect has engulfed all sections and communities in the vicious circle of 'increased dowry'. The marriages which used to be simple and sacred affair are being done in

extravagant marriage palaces. As a result of this, high level spending on daughter's marriage, many people are reported becoming heavily indebted. Some of the persons are even committing suicides due to non-repayment of loan. Besides, the indebtedness due to marriage, numerous incidents of bride burning, harassment, physical

Table 5 : Distribution of respondents according to their perception regarding various consequences of dowry

Consequences	Malwa	Majha	Doaba	Overall	Malwa	Majha	Doaba	Overall
	n=180	n=90	n=90	n=360	n=180	n=90	n=90	n=360
	Mother in laws(G1)				Daughter-in-laws(G2)			
Social consequences								
Friction between two in-laws families	109 (60.56)	79 (87.78)	67 (74.44)	255 (70.83)	128 (71.11)	76 (84.44)	86 (95.56)	290 (80.56)
Domestic violence	112 (62.22)	85 (94.44)	75 (83.33)	272 (75.56)	135 (75.00)	69 (76.67)	78 (86.67)	282 (78.33)
Prohibitions on to meet parents/ going out	78 (43.33)	57 (63.33)	64 (71.11)	199 (55.28)	120 (66.67)	47 (52.22)	57 (63.33)	224 (62.22)
Denial to basic facilities	98 (54.44)	69 (76.67)	55 (61.11)	222 (61.67)	114 (63.33)	54 (60.00)	59 (65.56)	227 (63.06)
Divorce	125 (69.44)	55 (61.11)	48 (53.33)	228 (63.33)	89 (49.44)	67 (74.44)	48 (53.33)	204 (56.67)
Female Feoticide	180 (100.00)	87 (96.67)	90 (100.00)	357 (99.17)	170 (94.44)	78 (86.67)	66 (73.33)	314 (87.22)
Economic consequences								
Denial of pocket money by in-laws	67 (37.22)	45 (50.00)	65 (72.22)	177 (49.17)	98 (54.44)	54 (60.00)	65 (72.22)	217 (60.28)
Economic Burden on parents of bride	107 (59.44)	58 (64.44)	78 (86.67)	243 (67.50)	117 (65.00)	65 (72.22)	82 (91.11)	264 (73.33)
Restrictions on expenses on basic necessities	119 (66.11)	45 (50.00)	59 (65.56)	223 (61.94)	109 (60.56)	49 (54.44)	68 (75.56)	226 (62.78)
Psychological consequences								
Ill treatment by in-laws	156 (86.67)	72 (80.00)	60 (66.67)	288 (80.00)	123 (68.33)	79 (87.78)	78 (86.67)	280 (77.78)
Mental depression	178 (98.89)	67 (74.44)	78 (86.67)	323 (89.72)	131 (72.78)	59 (65.56)	49 (54.44)	239 (66.39)
Disrespect in front of strangers	87 (48.33)	54 (60.00)	45 (50.00)	186 (51.67)	89 (49.44)	48 (53.33)	43 (47.78)	180 (50.00)
Using intimidation								
Ill treatment through looks, actions, gestures etc.	149 (82.78)	47 (52.22)	55 (61.11)	251 (69.72)	106 (58.89)	65 (72.22)	76 (84.44)	247 (68.61)
Smashing things at home	79 (43.89)	38 (42.22)	38 (42.22)	155 (43.06)	83 (46.11)	43 (47.78)	59 (65.56)	185 (51.39)
Displaying weapons	65 (36.11)	33 (36.67)	45 (50.00)	143 (39.72)	98 (54.44)	66 (73.33)	45 (50.00)	209 (58.06)
Physical assault	113 (62.78)	56 (62.22)	66 (73.33)	235 (65.28)	79 (43.89)	55 (61.11)	50 (55.56)	184 (51.11)

*Multiple response

Table 6 : Perceptions of respondents towards dowry

Perceptions	Malwa	Majha	Doaba	Punjab	Malwa	Majha	Doaba	Punjab
	(n= 180)	(n= 90)	(n= 90)	(n= 360)	(n= 180)	(n= 90)	(n= 90)	(n= 360)
	Mother-in-laws (G1)				Daughter-in-laws (G2)			
Mean to achieve healthy marriage as well as long term relationship	61 (33.89)	33 (36.67)	66 (73.33)	160 (44.44)	118 (65.56)	75 (83.33)	68 (75.56)	261 (72.50)
Mean to improve your relations with in-laws and spouse	55 (30.56)	46 (51.11)	31 (34.44)	132 (36.67)	97 (53.89)	54 (60.00)	79 (87.78)	230 (63.89)
Confident with dowry in the in-laws family	66 (36.67)	41 (45.56)	49 (54.44)	156 (43.33)	104 (57.78)	69 (76.67)	77 (85.56)	250 (69.44)
Economically independent after receiving dowry from your parents	11 (6.11)	6 (6.67)	29 (32.22)	46 (12.78)	87 (48.33)	43 (47.78)	47 (52.22)	177 (49.17)
Paying less dowry then expected by in-laws is invitation to problems	71 (39.44)	44 (48.89)	31 (34.44)	146 (40.56)	43 (23.89)	38 (42.22)	45 (50.00)	126 (35.00)
Greed of in-laws raises with more and more dowry	31 (17.22)	26 (28.89)	29 (32.22)	86 (23.89)	38 (21.11)	41 (45.56)	28 (31.11)	107 (29.72)

torture of young brides have been reported as routine matter. Some of the consequences as cited by the respondents were social, economic, physical and psychological in Table 5. As regard to social consequences, in generation G1, female foeticide was reported by 99.17 per cent followed by domestic violence (75.56%) and friction between two families (70.83%). As on economic front it was economic burden on parents (67.50 %), restriction on basic necessities (61.94%) and denial of pocket money was reported by 49.17 per cent respondents, respectively. Mental depression was the psychological consequence observed by 89.67 per cent followed by ill treatment (80.00 %) and disrespect in front of strangers (51.67 %), respectively. Also ill treatment through looks, gestures etc was cited by 69.72 per cent of them. On the other hand in G2 respondents also cited female foeticide (87.22 %) and inability to pay dowry results leads friction between two in-laws families' was given by 80.56 per cent followed by less dowry leads to domestic violence (78.33 %). Divorce was also cited as social consequence by 56.67 per cent of G2 respondents. Also, on economic front, 73.33 per cent reported it was burden on bride's family followed by restrictions on basic necessities (62.78%) and denial of pocket money (60.28 %), respectively. As regard to the psychological consequence majority 77.78 per cent revealed ill treatment by in-laws followed by mental depression 66.39 per cent and disrespect in front of strangers 50 per cent, respectively. Overall, it was concluded that female foeticide and domestic violence are highly inter-connected with the phenomenon of dowry. Ghose (2004); Srinivasan (2005) and Walia (2005) also reported that the expectation of a large dowry payment tops the list of causes for the undesirability of daughters. It is generally, believed that people started killing of daughters in the wombs for fearing of marriages of the daughters due to high demands of groom's family coupled with other socio and psychological pressures.

Perceptions of respondents towards dowry :

The perceptions of the respondents were noted towards dowry. The data a given in Table 6 revealed that in G1 generation more than forty per cent and 69.44 per cent of G2 respondents perceived that they felt confident with dowry in the in-laws family . Again about forty per cent of G1 but a large number *i.e.* 72.50 per cent of G2 perceived dowry as a means to achieve

healthy marriage as well as long term relationship . Also, 37.67 per cent of G2 respondents and 63.89 per cent of G2 respondents viewed dowry as way to improve relations with husband and in-laws. About half (49.17 %) of G2 respondents reported they felt confident after receiving dowry from their parents whereas very few *i.e.* 12.78 per cent of G2 respondents perceived the same. The respondents also perceived paying less dowry then expected by in-laws is invitation to problems and greed of in-laws raises with more and more dowry.

Conclusion :

Dowry is still considered by many as the cultural tradition and the gifts given in the form of dowry continue to have a critical significance in most of the north Indian marriages. Dowry was an important consideration in settling of marriage in both the generations. People had the indication of dowry before settling up of marriages and the main ironic thing was the women herself demanded dowry. The present study shows although families give and take dowry in different ways and for various reasons, large dowries and extravagant weddings, especially for daughters, contribute to their father's prestige and their own status in the conjugal family. However, it needs to be noted that often dowry is given because of socially constructed demands, and the consequences associated with not giving dowry, which include female foeticide, domestic violence, divorce etc. A number of other social, economic as well as psychological consequences of dowry are occurring in families. Awareness of dowry issues needs to be raised and steps need to be taken to speed up this process of change by empowering women and ensuring equality in Punjab.

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