

How to Cite:

Goel, S., Khandelwal, S., Evangelin, B., Belho, K., & Agnihotri, B. K. (2022). Psychological effects of early marriage: A study of adolescents. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S2), 6714–6727. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS2.6628>

Psychological effects of early marriage: A study of adolescents

Sehjal Goel

Students B.A Hons Psychology Lovely Professional University Phagwara Punjab India

Srishti Khandelwal

Students B.A Hons Psychology Lovely Professional University Phagwara Punjab India

Bontha Evangelin

Students B.A Hons Psychology Lovely Professional University Phagwara Punjab India

Keduolhoukuo Belho

Students B.A Hons Psychology Lovely Professional University Phagwara Punjab India

Dr. Brijendra Kumar Agnihotri

Assistant Professor School of Social Sciences and Languages, Lovely Professional University

Abstract---Early marriage is a serious issue in our society, which is faced by many girls and boys all over the world. In India, at least 1.5 million girls each year get married before they even turn 18. A large number is also applicable for boys. Due to various reasons, early marriage is still prevalent in our society. Early marriage can have a serious impact on psychological, physical, and emotional health. The paper will use the interview method to study the psychological impact of early marriages on adolescents. Using the random sampling method, 20 interviews are taken from the villages of Telangana for the study. The paper will study the different challenges that individuals face when married way too early and the awareness will be raised regarding the same. Studying the social consequences is also a part of the paper.

Keywords---early marriage, mental health issues, stress, adolescents.

Introduction

The foundation of any relationship begins with love and trust. Trust is an important aspect in one's life which has to be built over time. And as an adult, we can understand the importance of healthy relationships and how trust plays a vital role in them. When people get married early, they are at a very fragile stage of life where one decision can affect their whole life. Decision-making skills have not been developed properly due to the lack of various things like experience, age, perception, etc. So, they have not explored many aspects of life which can limit their perception of reality, and they are infatuated without knowing the responsibility that comes with it.

It is very predominant in India that families force their children to get married as soon as they reach a certain threshold age. Previously, people used to get married as soon as they hit puberty. Divorce was never considered a thing even if the marriage did not work. It was common back then. But the impact of early marriage was still prevalent during those times. When the government noticed the consequences of early marriage, they imposed certain rules and regulations on it. In India, under the prohibition of the Child Marriage Act imposed in 2006, females above 18 and males above 21 can get married. However, it needs to be amended and should be kept above 21 for females as well. However, the enacted rules still get violated in certain regions of India. Despite the constitutional law, people in many parts of India still get married at an early age due to family pressure, society, poverty, lack of awareness, traditions, etc. They do not get the chance to know their partners which leads to misunderstandings and fights. Especially girls do not get the chance to build their careers which leads to dependence on their husbands. So, when some unexpected situations take place in their life, they get stuck in the middle of it, not knowing what to do in their later life. According to previous research, it has been observed that early marriage leads to an increase in domestic violence, low health care, and poor mental health. It directly affects the children, and it has been noticed that the daughters of those households get married early.

In psychology, there is a concept called nature vs. nurture. Nature is the heredity and nurture is the environment child grows in. Both the elements play a vital role in building a healthy personality in a child. According to Albert Bandura, Modelling plays an essential role in determining the personality a child would carry. Modeling is the technique in which children learn by imitating their parents or family without any verbal guidance. Bobo Doll Experiment is a huge example of proving that child learning depends on the surrounding. So, when parents are not happy with their partners, if they keep on fighting in front of children then it would directly affect the children's personalities. According to a study, it has been observed that children who have witnessed domestic violence are more likely to become violent in future relationships. It has also been seen that people who marry before 20 have an 80 percent divorce rate.

Early marriage affects everyone. In females, depression, anxiety, social isolation, dependence, limited education and jobs, marital rape, and domestic violence are frequently seen. They are also susceptible to Sexually Transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy. Child pressure has also been noticed in females. They are

expected to have a child. Due to this, reproductive health and mental health are at serious risk. They get very little support in their marital home and if something happens then their own home does not accept them. It has also been seen that poor education leads to difficulty in managing households on their own. So, there is pressure to make the marriage work as the consequence of this is very risky. They are also more likely to experience domestic violence, thus leading to serious health risks. In males, financial pressure is prevalent as there is pressure to manage the household. It also limits further education and career opportunities. Early fatherhood also leads to economic pressure thus leading to stress, anxiety, and depression. Males are conditioned to dominate the family due to societal pressure hence it directly affects their relationships. As, they have learned not to express their emotions so their dependence on a substance like alcohol and drugs increases, thus their physical health, as well as mental health, tends to deteriorate.

Although we can see the preconceived notion behind the family opting for early marriage of the children, they fear that as their children grow up, they will forget the tradition and make their own choices which can directly impact the family and the society in general. But it is high time for society to understand that early marriage is not the solution for it as it is followed by various risks which are mentioned above, instead of early marriage they should let them decide and help their children in selecting their life path.

Literature Review

The culture of early marriage is quite old, and people follow this culture generation after generation without noticing its ill-effects of it. Marrying before the age of 18 years is considered an early marriage (UNICEF). Across the globe, there are various girls who are suffering in many ways due to early marriage, and about 20%- 50% of girls in many developing countries get married before the age of 18 years (Somerset, 2000; UNICEF, 2012; Singh, 1996). The ratio of early marriages is higher in countries like Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Singh, 1996; UNICEF, 2012). Marriage at a young age is quite common in South Asia; for example, it is 65 percent in Bangladesh, 48 percent in India, 54 percent in Afghanistan, 7% in Nepal, and 14 percent in Sri Lanka. (Mathur, 2003). According to (DHS) demographic and health survey data, 62% of females are married before they enter the 20th year of their age. The marriage affects boys also but its impact on girls is far greater compared to boys (UNICEF, 2005).

The impacts of early marriages are very severe for girls. They are deprived of education. (ICDDR, B. 2007; Menshb, 1998). According to a survey by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, early marriage is "universally correlated with low levels of schooling." (Glassier, 1998). According to UNICEF, 60-70 percent of girls in numerous African and Asian nations are compelled to marry at a young age (Somerset, 2000). Even their most basic human rights are denied them. Because of these several psychological and physiological problems occur and usually lead to divorce or suicide (Gage, 2013). There are several reasons why girls are often forced to marry early including negative traditional or religious practices, social, economic, and sexual and reproductive health (Jain, 2007; UNICEF 2005 & Barkat, 2003). A range of factors are responsible for early marriages that include

male dominance, parent's ignorance, lack of awareness, pressures from relatives and the community. Girls are considered as liability, so parents marry them off to get rid of them. They seem to think that it protects their daughters and improves socioeconomic status (Bayisenge, 2011).

Girls who are married at a very young age are more susceptible to psychological disorders as these girls are not heard and also are deprived of various fundamental rights such as the right to express and defend themselves. The overall lifetime and 12-month rates of psychiatric disorders were higher for women who married as children (before the age of 18 years), compared with women who married as adults. Unlike adult women, girls who marry early are less likely to have health care facilities (Le, 2011). It causes physical, social and emotional trauma which causes more psychological issues such as low self-concept and self-esteem. Education of these girls are also disrupted due to early marriage, thus leading to severe depression and they feel inferior to well-qualified girls. (Singh, 1996).

Also, the young girls who get married to elder men often fail to match the education and experience level of their husbands (Alia, & Noushad), and when they are not at the same level, then they feel inferior to their husbands and they are disrespected because of this. As a result, in some cases they become the victim of domestic violence, (UNICEF, 2005) and their parents also do not accept them. Or in some cases, they are repeatedly sent back to their parents after being beaten which causes greater psychological shock treatments as the victims suffer from the feeling of instability and loss of self-respect (Ahmed, Khan, Alia, & Noushad, DATE).

Moreover, this leads to more severity when they are sent back to their husbands by their parents by saying to secure their social values and respect (Sadaf Ahmed, Saima Khan, Malka Alia, & Shamoon Noushad). Also, some sort of physiological changes may lead to depression such as obesity, poor health, and childbearing (Alemu, 1988).

In some societies, the demand for male offspring to maintain their position and status causes mental torture and stress-related traumas. For instance, it is also observed that these kinds of uneducated and stressed mothers fail to educate their children on the basic level and are not even able to contribute to their children for their studies, as a result, they are getting neglected by their children and are not able to make a friendly environment for them have (Sadaf Ahmed, Saima Khan, Malka Alia, & Shamoon Noushad).

Research Gap

Emphasis on the psychological health of individuals who marry early is side-lined and has not received much attention. This research also aims to find out the consequences of early marriages in the context of future relationships, trauma, etc. Constitutional rights related to marriage are not taken into consideration in other research studies. Awareness is lacking regarding the same.

Research objectives

- To understand the factors influencing early marriage.
- To assess the psychological effects of early marriage.
- To study the social consequences faced by individuals in their early marriage.
- To create awareness related to early marriage in society.

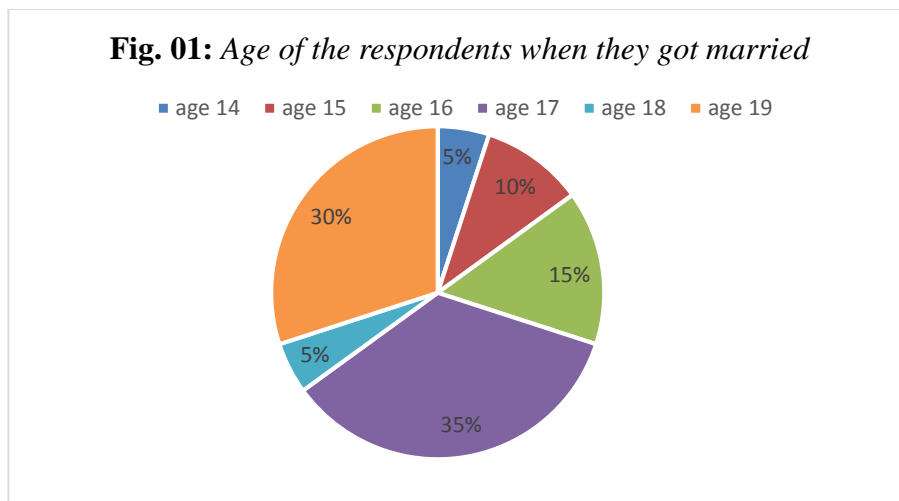
Methodology

The methodology used in the research paper is the most suitable approach taken to collect the data and analyse it. Data has been collected through primary and secondary resources. Primary resources include direct interviews with individuals (male and female both), who falls into the age range of 13- 19 years. Respondents are selected from random sampling methods, from villages in Telangana. Name of the villages are Gondu Good, Adilabad, Nizambad, Khanapur, and Pitlam. Total interviews taken for the study are 20. Secondary resources include various articles from the internet. All the resources used in the research are systematically used and are used to fulfil the objectives of the study.

Hypothesis

The research paper will try to prove the null or the alternative hypothesis. The null hypothesis states that there is no direct correlation between the psychological effects of early marriage on adolescents, whereas the alternative hypothesis states that there is a direct correlation between the psychological effects of early marriages on adolescents.

Data Analysis



Results show that out of total 20 respondents, 1 respondent married at age 14 (5%), 2 respondents married at age 15 (10%), 3 respondents married at age 16 (15%), 7 respondents married at age of age 17 (35%), 1 respondent married at age

18 and 6 respondents married at age 19 (30%). All the respondents are adolescents when get married and fall under the age of 19 years, indicating that they married early in their life.

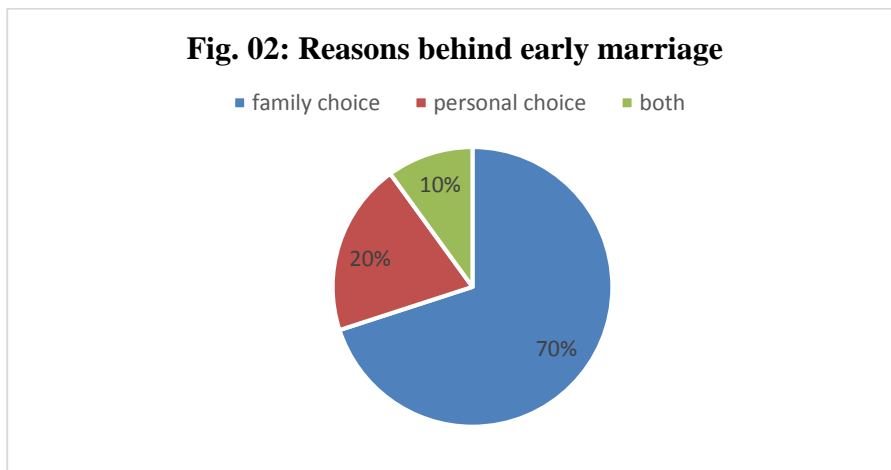
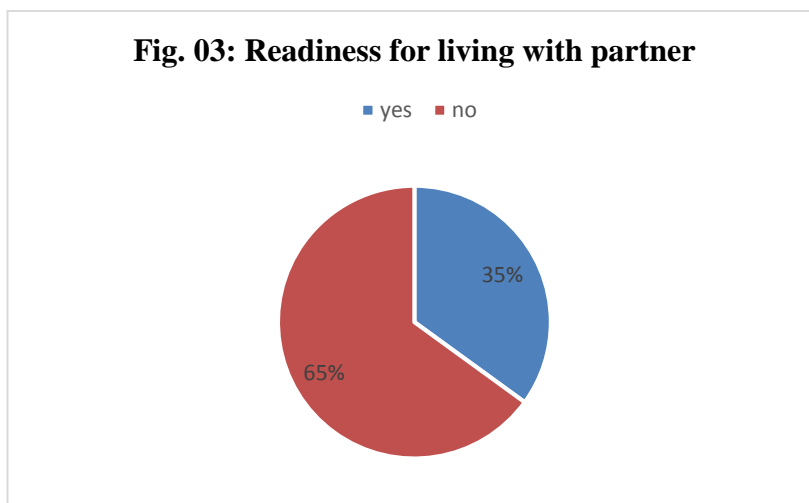


Figure 02, clearly indicates how many respondents from the sample, married in accord with their own choice, family pressure, or both were the reasons. Turns out, 14 respondents, i.e., 70% of respondents married this early because of the family pressure. 4 respondents, i.e., 20% of respondents remarked that they married this early because they wanted to marry. The remaining 2 respondents i.e., 10% of respondents said, both family pressure and their own choice were the reasons behind their early marriages. From the data, it can be seen that family pressure plays a significant role in early marriages.



With the reference to figure 03, 13 respondents i.e., 65% of respondents said that they weren't ready to begin living with a partner, whereas 7 respondents i.e., 35% of respondents said that they were ready to begin living with their partner. From

the data, the majority of the respondents were not prepared to start living with a partner. They were not mentally prepared for moving in with their partners.

Career goals before marriage

- R1: to get a job
 - R2: higher studies
 - R3: no certain goals
 - R4: become a teacher
 - R5: become a nurse
 - R6: no clear goals
 - R7: become a doctor
 - R8: no goals
 - R9: to travel
 - R10: good career
 - R11: become financially independent
 - R12: get a job
 - R13: get a job and marry
 - R14: financially independent
 - R15: no goals
 - R16: become a soldier
 - R17: no goals
 - R18: no goals
 - R19: to get a job
 - R20: become a singer
-

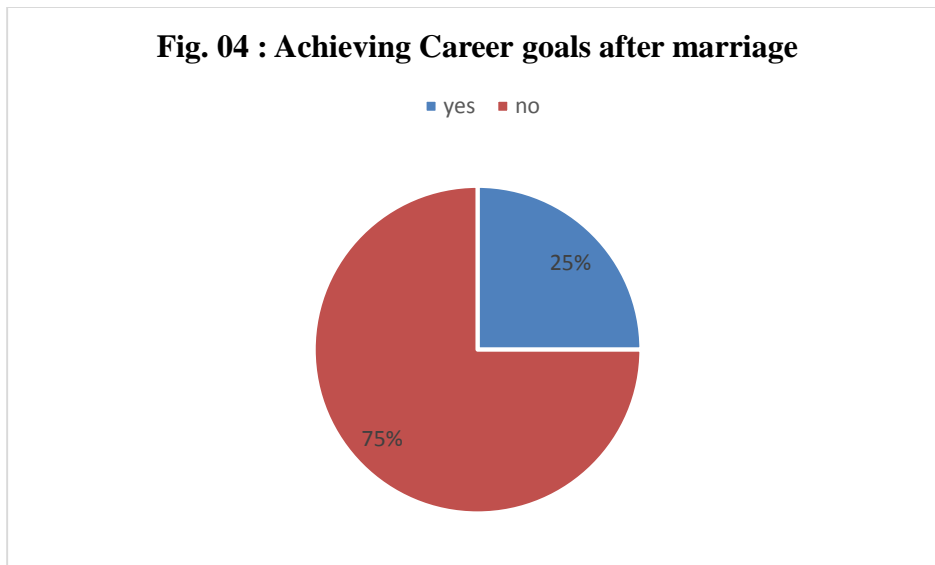
Above mentioned responses indicate that respondents were having lots of life goals before marriage, but early marriage prevented them from achieving so. From pursuing higher studies to becoming a soldier or doctor, goals were pretty much decided, but marrying early prevented them from fulfilling these goals. Some respondents also said that they were having no goals for their future, but the majority according to responses said that they were having life goals.

Social life before marriage and after marriage.

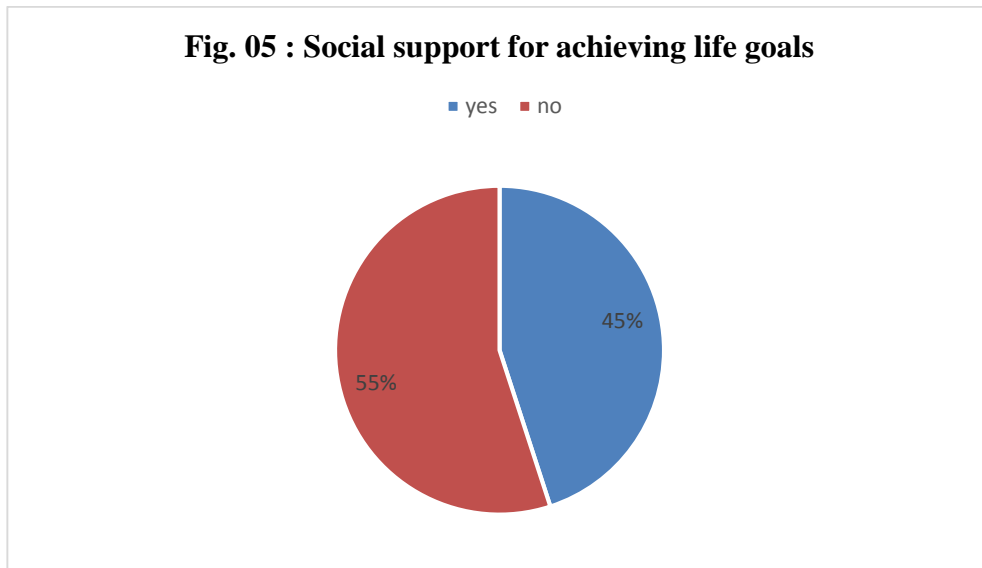
- R1: Before marriage, just a child who used to play, after marriage became a woman with responsibilities
 - R2: before marriage used to do house chores at my parents' house, but now am still doing it in in-laws.
 - R3: girl turned into a woman in the society
 - R4: earlier used to have friends to talk now aunties are there to discuss anything
 - R5: responsibilities especially looking after children
 - R6: study took a backseat after marriage
 - R7: region changed my environment changed new social life husband side's
 - R8: it was ok after marriage it became worse, especially after the death of the husband
 - R9: good now too
 - R10: home friends' family now new area new home new people to interact with kind hard to deal with at this age
-

R11: Socially never got support to study or to do anything in life but people supported to get married and settle
 R12: Nothing changed
 R13: Nothing changed
 R14: Just my circle changed but it's still the same
 R15: not much changed
 R16: not much changed
 R17: it's good
 R18: same as before
 R19: Changed much, earlier I had to deal with new people and every day tried to reach people's expectations
 R20: People used to see me as a girl after marriage I became head of the family and caretaker

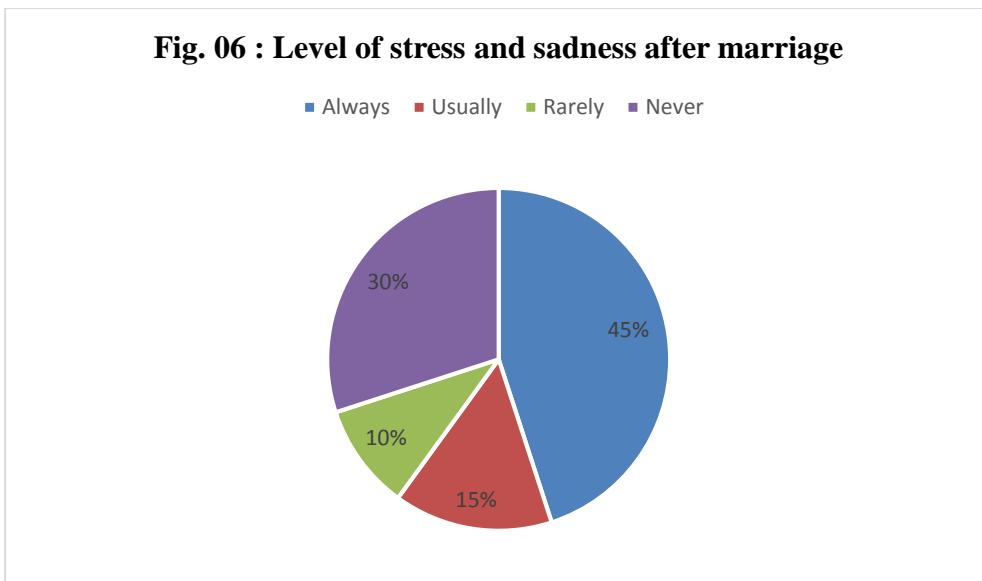
From the above-mentioned response, we can conclude that life before and after marriage is surprisingly different. Before marriage life was mostly about friends, studies, and being dependent on parents but after marriage, according to respondents, life is mostly about household, kids, in-laws, and earning for living. Life for some respondents stays the same but for the majority, it changes drastically. Dealing and interacting with new people becomes challenging and standing on their expectations is tough. Issues like this are major causes of mental issues.



According to figure 04, 75% of respondents after marriage have not achieved the goals they once aimed for, and 25% of respondents said that they have achieved their goals they aimed for. From the data, we can conclude, that majority of the population are not accomplishing the dreams they once aimed for as now they have responsibilities of household and children.

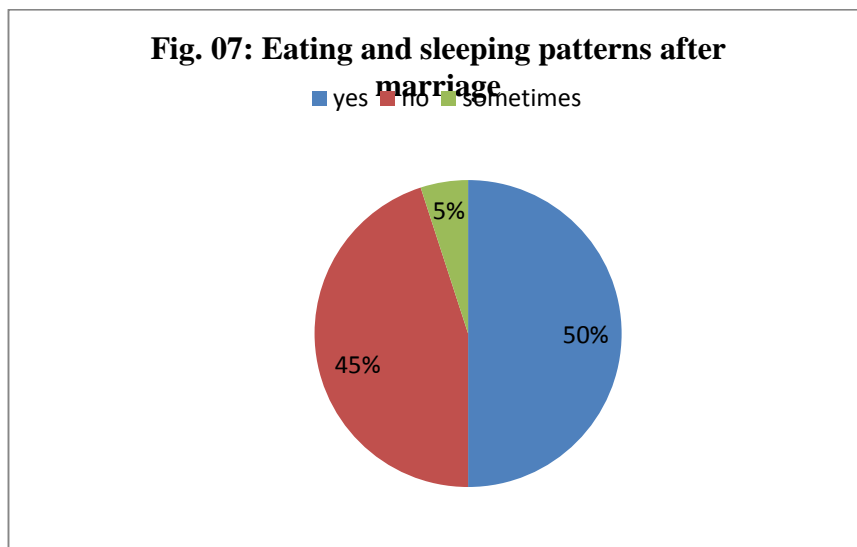


According to figure 05, 55% of respondents said that no, people around them are not supportive while 45% of respondents said that yes people around them are supportive in whatever they want to do in their life. The data shows that, if given chance some of the respondents can try to fulfil their goals and achieve what they once aimed for, but a majority of respondent still lacks social support which is beneficial at many levels.



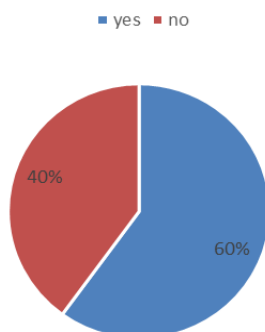
According to figure 06, 45% of respondent feels that they are always stressed and sad with their married life, 15% of respondent said that they usually feel stressed and sad with their married life, 10% of respondent said that they are rarely stressed or sad with their married life, and 30% completely refused to be stressed

or sad in their married life. The data shows the majority of respondents, if not fully but are stressed and sad about their married life.

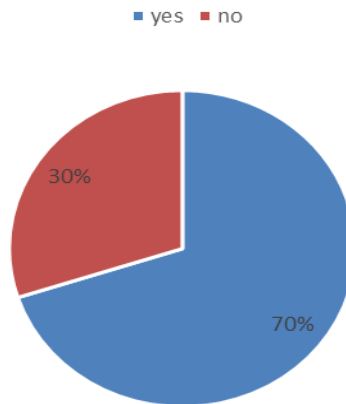


According to figure 07, 50% of respondents said that they were able to eat and sleep properly after marriage, 5% of respondents said that sometimes they were not able to sleep and eat properly, and 45% of respondents said that they were unable to sleep and eat properly after marriage. The data shows that approximately half of respondents faced issues after marriage in eating and sleeping. The change in environment can cause such issues.

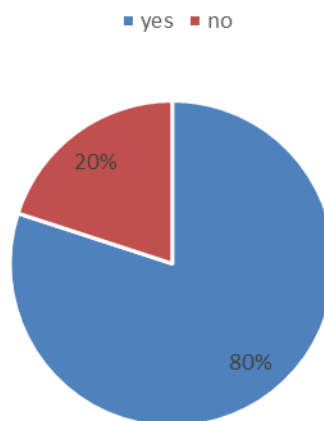
Fig. 08 : Presence of Physiological and Behavioural Symptoms after marriage



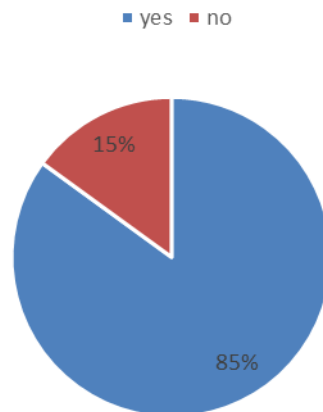
According to figure 08, 60% of respondents faced several psychological and behavioural issues after marriage, while 40% of respondents doesn't face any issues after marriage. The major psychological issues, respondents faced are fatigue, unable to rest, disturbed sleep, poor appetite, chilly hands, short breath, sweaty hands, digestive problems, and lack of concentration.

Fig. 09 : Sense of affection by other half

According to figure 09, 30% of the respondent doesn't feel loved, cared for, or respected by their other half whereas 70% of respondent feel they are loved, cared for, and respected by their other half. The majority of respondents said that they are loved and cared which is a good sign but the remaining who said that they are not loved and cared for are prone to several psychological issues. The presence of support from family is beneficial for healthy physical and psychological well-being.

Fig. 10: Willingness to live with their partner

According to figure 10, 20% of respondents said that if given a choice, they will leave their partner, while 80% of respondents are content with their partners. The majority of respondents are satisfied with their partner which is a good sign but other respondents who are ready to leave their partner are at risk of several psychological issues or are already suffering from several psychological issues.

Fig. 11: Presence of social stigmas in marriage

According to figure 11, 85% of respondents believe that social stigmas play a significant role in marriages especially early marriages, whereas 15% of respondents believe that social stigmas don't play any role in early marriages. The respondents who believe that social stigmas play a role in early marriages could be the victim of it also.

Result

The above data shows that out of a total of twenty interviews that were done, thirty five percent of the respondents married at seventeen, thirty percent of the respondents married at nineteen, fifteen percent of the respondents married at sixteen, ten percent of the respondents married at fifteen and five percent married at fourteen and eighteen. All the respondents were adolescents when they got married and sixty-five percent of the respondents got married before eighteen which is against the constitutional law. They were at the developmental age where their cognitive development and reproductive development were taking place which is a huge shift in a human's life. Seventy percent of the respondents say that the decision of getting married was their family's which demonstrates that they were not ready to get married during that time. Sixty-five percent of the respondents say that they were not ready for living with their partner. Thus, it indicates that it must have been difficult for them during that period as they were not prepared in changing their whole lifestyle for marriage. Ninety percent of the respondents say that their life has changed. Almost every respondent feels that family and financial responsibilities have come with marriages. Earlier they used to focus on their career, goals, and aspirations but after marriage, they had to look after the family, their children and have to manage the finance of the family which becomes particularly challenging for someone who is below twenty years of age due to lack of experience and many more. It is not as same as it was before. There is a notable change in their social life. They feel that before marriage life was simple with no responsibilities, they had friends to share things but after marriage, the region changed, they had no friends there, they had to look after the

family, and they had to meet their expectations which indicates that they have faced a lot of challenges as adolescents which is very tough to handle. Almost everyone was unable to accomplish their goals due to marriage. Seventy-five percent of the respondents say that they were not able to do things that they aimed for before marriage which implies that their life decisions were taken by their family, and they had to follow the path created by their own family without any say. Fifty-five percent of the respondents say their life was turned upside down after marriage. It indicates that they were bombarded with the things they were not ready for, and they were not the master of their life. Fifty-five percent of the respondents say that the people around them were not supportive of whatever they wanted to do in life. Thirty percent of the respondents say they are not loved and cared for, by their partner. As social support plays a vital role in one's life, it can help to create a positive self-perception and improve quality of life. Low social support leads to many health risks, stress, earlier onset of depression and mood disorder, and many more. Ninety percent of the respondents says that they were sad and stressed after marriage. Fifty-five percent of respondents state that they were not able to sleep and eat properly after marriage. Sixty percent of the respondents reveals that they were facing psychological issues after marriage like fatigue, unable to rest, disturbed sleep, poor appetite, chilly hands, short breath, sweaty hands, digestive problems, and lack of concentration. It indicates that they were suffering from anxiety and depression during that period. 20% of the respondents say that if given a choice, they would leave their partner, but lack of education has created a financial dependence on their partner, and this forces them to stay with them. 85% of the respondents say that social stigma has somehow pressured them into getting married. And 10% of the people say that early marriage is as normal as taking time for marriage which shows the lack of awareness in society.

Discussion

In the 21st century, many challenges need to be resolved in society, be it a crime or poverty. Amongst it, early marriage is one of the major issues that need serious consideration from society. Though it has decreased to a certain level, the prevalence of early marriage is still there. However, there is still a lack of awareness of early marriage and its consequences in society. As per our analysis of the gathered data it can be concluded that almost every respondent has physically, mentally, and socially been affected by early marriage. We can see a lack of importance given to psychological health thus ignoring various consequences that come with it. From our research, it has been observed that almost every woman wanted to study so that they could create a better lifestyle for themselves and their family members and the future generation, but society has pressured them into taking a decision which had turned their life upside down. It is exceedingly difficult to cope with these kinds of issues especially when there is very less near to zero social support. Males get affected majorly due to financial crises and sometimes they had to quit their education for the sake of earning money to support their families and maintain their lifestyle. This impacts their overall career journey. When they got married, they were at that stage of life where sharing their problems with their partners and family was not comfortable enough and not opening up leads them into bottling up their emotions. As a result, it directly impacts their mental health, and they are more susceptible to

various health risks. Lack of education and awareness makes them continue the cycle. They follow the path of elders; therefore, it becomes a vicious circle that grows into an unbreakable loop. So, from the above evidence, it can be concluded that early marriage is not the solution but the problem itself.

So, in order to eradicate early marriage from society, we should spread awareness regarding the consequence of early marriage. Education should also be given importance as the higher the literacy, the lesser the chances of falling into this vicious cycle. Divorce is also high in early marriage so if people would take their time, then it might be decreased. Issues like domestic violence, dependence on partners for basic needs, unwanted pregnancy, various health risks, etc. would also decrease. There should be awareness of mental health so therapy would be easily accessible to people. Thus, people should have the freedom to decide for themselves and family should be the guiding force in order to live a healthy and sustainable life.

Reference

- Fakhari, A., Farahbakhsh, M., Azizi, H., Esmaeili, E. D., Mirzapour, M., Rahimi, V. A., Hashemi, L., & Gaffarifam, S. (n.d.). *Early marriage and negative life events affect on depression in young adults and adolescents*. Archives of Iranian Medicine. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from <http://aimjournal.ir/Article/aim-7990>
- Fakhari, A., Allahverdipour, H., Esmaeili, D. E., Chattu, K., V., Salehiniya, H., & Azizi, H. (2022). Early marriage, stressful life events and risk of suicide and suicide attempt: a case-control study in Iran. *BMC Psychiatry* 22:71 doi.org/10.1186/s12888-022-03700-0
- Le Strat, Y., Dubertret, C., & Le Foll, B. (2011). Child marriage in the United States and its association with Mental Health in Women. *Pediatrics*, 128(3), 524–530. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-0961>
- Marphatia, A. A., Ambale, G. S., & Reid, A. M. (2017). Women's marriage age matters for public health: A review of the broader health and Social Implications in South Asia. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2017.00269>
- Summary of a baseline study to estimate the ... - unicef.org*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 15, 2022, from <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/sites/unicef.org/rosa/files/2018-08/Summary%20of%20CM%20Baseline%20Study%20Final.pdf>
- Youth at the United Nations www.un.org/youth*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 15, 2022, from <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/briefingnotedisability.pdf>