

Girl's Experiences of Child Marriage in Afghanistan: A Scoping Review

Zala Shinwari

Faculty of Psychology, Kabul Education University
Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Airlangga;
zala.inwari-2020@psikologi.unair.ac.id

Ike Herdiana

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Airlangga;
ike.herdiana@psikologi.unair.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to explore factors of child marriage and experiences of girls married below 18 in Afghanistan. A scoping review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA-ScR procedure. Articles were searched from Science Direct, Scopus, Google Scholar and WoS databases. There were seven journal articles that were included based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria set. Meta-synthesis method was used in this research. We found many factors that exist in Afghanistan namely; poverty, illiteracy and lack of access to education, war and instability, cultural and traditional practices, ethnicity and geography and misinterpretation of religious texts are among the main ones. Consequently, girls suffer from many types of violence (physical, emotional and sexual, and other) and psychosocial problems. In spite of these facts there was no specific study in terms of psychological impacts, income level, cultural and religious background, and psychosocial impacts of child marriage based on the findings of this study.

Keywords: *Child marriage, Afghanistan, girls, early marriage, sexual violence*

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Introduction

Afghanistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia with 34 provinces. A country that has been affected by war for more than forty years as it still continues. The country has experienced invasions from the Soviet Union to Afghan opposition troops known as (Mujahidin), Taliban and the United States. On 15, August 2021 Taliban took over of Afghanistan for the second time, and since then the country is under huge crisis. Meanwhile, according to UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) the country has ranked

180 among 191 countries in 2022 (*List of Countries by Human Development Index - Wikipedia*, n.d.). Four decades of ongoing war has affected Afghan context in many aspects, one of them is child marriages that causes Afghan girls to suffer throughout their entire lives. War is among one of the biggest causes of child marriage in Afghanistan. The term "child marriage" refers to both legally recognized marriages and unrecognized unions in which children under the age of 18 cohabit with a spouse as though they were married, which is a pervasive human rights violation (UNICEF, 2016). In Afghanistan, child marriage still occurs at rates that indicate at least one in three young girls will be married before turning 18. And, 60 % of female marriage in Afghanistan occurred in teenager childhood period (Ehsan et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it has not been thoroughly studied in the Afghan setting, and there are still knowledge gaps about prevalence, practice, causes, and aftereffects of child marriage (UNICEF, 2108). Besides, goal 5 (Gender Equality) of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) recognizes the terrible effects of child marriage and the detrimental effects this practice has on achieving development (SDGs); at the same time, ending child marriage is part of the sustainable development goals (*THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development*, n.d.).

Child marriages are common in Afghanistan despite being against the law. There are several factors that contributes to this act, in particular: illiteracy, poverty, instability and conflict, cultural and traditional practices, religion factors, ethnicity and geography are among the main drivers of child marriage in Afghanistan (Raj et al., 2014; Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020; Ehsan et al., 2021; Zaher, 2013). Consequently, girl child experiences domestic violence (Qamar et al., 2022), maternal and infant mortality and morbidity (Zaher, 2013), and drop-out of school (Zaher, 2013), after the marriage happen. Besides, child marriages also affect psycho-social condition of girls (Zaher, 2013), which is the result of all what they experience after the marriage happens.

Indeed, literacy levels and school attendance have a direct impact on female child marriage, education substantially influences female child marriage; girls who do not attend school or just have primary education are more likely to get married between the ages of 10-15/18 than those who do have education

or higher education (Ehsan et al., 2021; Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020). A study demonstrates that both girls and boys consider that girls' possibilities for further education were reduced by early marriage (Blum et al., 2019). Meanwhile, poverty cited by Miran (2019), and instability/conflict are clearly cited as one of the most challenging causes of child marriage in Afghanistan. Certainly, Afghan households' economic circumstances have an impact on the prevalence of female child marriage. For instance, teenager girls from low-income families compared to girls who live in middle class or wealthy households had a higher likelihood of getting married (Ehsan et al., 2021). Poverty is one of the consequences of war and ongoing conflicts that has been continued for more than four decades in Afghanistan. In addition, cultural and traditional practices for instance; "Baad" and "Badal" (marrying someone as blood money or for the purpose of bringing peace and reconciliation among the families to resolve a dispute or issue between these families in payment for a crime committed by a male relative, or to deal with "shameful" acts like adultery as well as exchanging the girls between two families for marriage) is performed, typically, female children are the victims of Baad (Raj et al., 2014; Zaher, 2013).

Furthermore, geography and ethnicity also play a major role in child marriage for instance; girls from Baloch, Pashtun and Pashai ethnic group have higher risk of getting married before the age of 18 because, Baloch and Pashtun ethnic group inhabits the southern part of the nation and shares a border with Pakistan, as a result, families living in these regions try to marry off their daughters at a younger age because there is a possibility that they could be raped during hostilities (Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020). Also, people's different concepts of religion regarding marriage affects girls get married earlier (Raj et al., 2014).

Child marriage of girls would also impact the child's life post the marriage. They experience domestic violence in many forms: physical, emotional and sexual (Qamar et al., 2022). Nonetheless, girls experience pregnancy at a very young age that can cause infant and maternal mortality and morbidity (Raj et al., 2014), because teenagers' bodies are not only unprepared for sexual activity, but also struggle to sustain pregnancy and childbirth (Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020). According to AIHRC, cited by

Zaher (2013), one of the numerous negative effects of child marriage is the rise in runaways, suicides, self-immolations, murders, sexual perversions and psychological disorders. These issues also include the rising rates of maternity and infant mortality, as well as the low levels of education among women, which have a long-lasting impact on the roles that women play in the political, social, and economic life of the nation (AIHRC, 2007).

In conclusion, child marriage in Afghanistan is practiced due to several factors: the main factors are instability and more than four decades of ongoing conflicts, poverty, illiteracy, cultural and traditional factors, religion, geography and ethnicity, and lack of knowledge about consequences of early marriage. Consequently, these factors cause girl child to experience drastic effects of this act and cause them suffering from domestic violence, barred from continuing their education, likewise, early marriage due to physically and mentally unpreparedness of girls, causes maternal and infant mortality and morbidity. This destructive act leaves behind unrestorable negative effects on the girl child, both mentally and physically that cannot be compensated. Despite its pervasiveness, to the best of our knowledge, there are no previous systematic reviews exploring the factors/consequences behind child marriage in Afghanistan.

Therefore, this review focuses on exploring and summarizing (scoping) literature that covered causes and experiences of girls that have been married before 18 years old. Thus, this study aims to investigate various factors of child marriage and experience of girl child after the marriage happened in the Afghan context, hence it helps developing better understandings of how this structural violence is enacted in the Afghan society in order to develop and target interventions could be an effective tool (for policy makers, INGOs and global social service agencies working in Afghanistan), for comprehending/dismantling the structures that perpetuate these challenges. And, it could be a tool for the current researchers to dig deeper and find the roots of child marriage in Afghanistan in order to design intervention mapping.

Method

This study used scoping review method that aimed to map and give a wide picture of the covered literature, and to summarize/disseminate the research findings and identify gaps in the existing literature (Pham et al., 2014; Arksey & O'Malley, 2007). Scoping review was carried out by determining research questions, identifying related studies using a systematic literature search based on the research questions that have been formulated, collecting study results, conducting discovery tabulations, compilations, analysis, descriptions, and result reporting (Arksey & O'Malley, 2007; Levac et al., 2010; Tricco et al., 2018). The first question served as the guide for this review was "How did child marriage happen in Afghanistan?", the second question "What was known about girls' experiences of child marriage in Afghanistan?", and third question "What was psycho-social condition of girls after they become the victim of child marriage in Afghanistan?".

Literature search strategy and inclusion/ exclusion criteria

Four databases were used in this review, namely: Scopus, Science Direct, Web of Science and Google Scholar. The main keywords were "child marriage", "Afghanistan", and "girls". These keywords were developed with helper keywords ("early marriage", "Afghan"), and were combined with "OR" and "AND". Articles used were published full-text articles and articles that were issued up to July 2022 (not restricted by publication date). The reason there was no year restriction was so that child marriage could be thoroughly investigated in Afghanistan also, while searching for the data researchers discovered that there is actually not adequate data covering child marriage in Afghanistan, despite being a widespread issue affecting Afghan context. Meanwhile, the articles used English language and the location was restricted to Afghanistan. The articles referred to the discussion on child marriage was taken from what causes girl child marriage, and what girls experience after they married at age below 18.

Participants in this review article were girls, restricted by age, who have been married at the age below 18. On the other hand, the articles that were not included in this review were those that discussed child marriage but referred to conference abstracts or blogs; those that did not specify the age, age of being

married for the first marriage; and those that did not mention research ethics. A thorough search procedure was established based on the exact inclusion and exclusion criteria listed in (Table. 1) to help in the identification of pertinent research.

A search for articles turned up 656 results across 4 databases. These articles were being read on the titles and abstracts for selection. After removing the duplicates, the titles and abstracts that did not fit the goal of this review were excluded (exclusion) thus, they became 14 articles. There were 9 articles left after a second evaluation of the filtered articles that focused on reading each article in its entirety. It was concluded that 7 of the articles would be appropriate for this review after carefully re-reading all of them while considering the consistency and clarity of each article's results. In the PRISMA-ScR flowchart, (Figure 1) shows the steps involved in the search procedure (Tricco et al., 2018).

Table 1. *Criteria for inclusion and exclusion*

| Criteria | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Language | Published in the English language | Non-English |
| Type of Article | Published and full-text articles | Not peer-reviewed, not full text, conference abstracts, blogs, and book chapter |
| Location | Only in the context of Afghanistan | Researches which were not conducted on Afghan context |
| Age | Girls who married below age 18 | Women, married after age 18 |

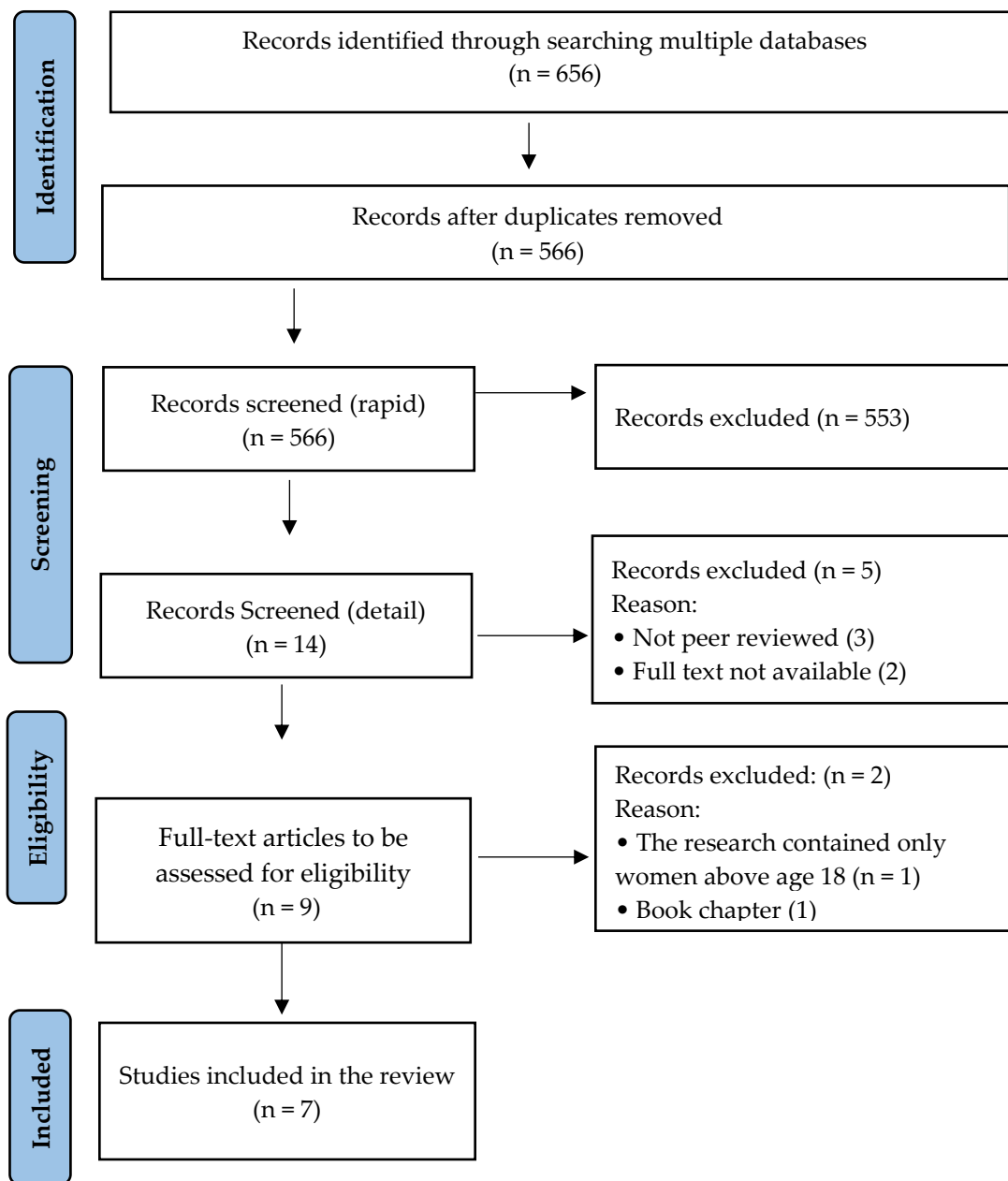


Figure I. PRISMA flow chart of study selection process.

Analysis

The data from 7 studies was mapped and managed using Microsoft Excel. For the collating and reporting of results meta-synthesis method was used. Meta-synthesis is a method for systematically integrating qualitative data emerging from numerous studies (Jensen and Allen, 1996; Sandelowski et al., 1997). In a meta-synthesis, data from several studies are continuously and iteratively compared and integrated to develop new ideas or overarching narratives about an underlying phenomenon (Jensen and Allen, 1996; Sandelowski et al., 1997). The primary goal of all meta-synthesis is interpretative, not summative.

Results

Articles used in this review were 7 articles as follows; 3 articles across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, 1 Kabul, 1 Balkh, 1 across (Badghis, Bamyán, Daikundi, Kandahar, Logar and Paktya), and 1 across (Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar). Table.2, illustrates detailed characteristics of the articles used for this review. In these articles, the reasons that lead to child marriage for girls under the age of 18 as well as the married lives of girls who were married under the age of 18 were thoroughly studied (Table.3).

Causes of Marriage in Girls Aged Below 18

Poverty

Poverty is both a consequence of child marriage and a cause of child marriage. It is one of the main causes of the practice of early marriage (Ehsan et al., 2021; Miran, 2019). Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world with limited achievement of human resource development (Blum et al., 2018). According to the evidence, more than 75% of households living in rural areas are suffering from poverty in Afghanistan (Ehsan et al., 2021). Therefore, the likelihood of a girl marrying when she is still a teenager is higher for poor girls than for middle-class or wealthy girls. Furthermore, in a study, participants noted that often the poor and the wealthy together reinforce this practice where rich men were willing to take these girls as brides, and elders and community leaders were willing to support the union, as well as the poor were willing to give up their children in exchange for money or reduced costs associated with raising the child (Raj et al., 2014). The marriage that happened to girls in poor families was often thought

of as the solution for a load of the economy of the families, because married girls were no longer the families' responsibility thus, families were not obligated to provide for their life necessities (Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020).

War and instability

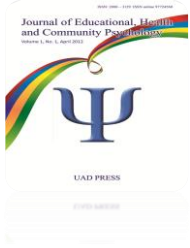
According to the literature, political instability and war give men in a patriarchal culture more power and authority to oppress women, child marriage is one of the many unfavourable effects of war in Afghanistan, which has given families the opportunity to marry off their daughter at an early age under the guise of protection (Zaher, 2103). Meanwhile, there is a high rate of rape in areas where there is war because the situation is chaotic (Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020). Due to conflicts and instability families are worried about their children specifically their daughters for example:

“Some 40 years back when I was young, I remember men behaved well when they saw a girl on the street. In recent years, men and young boys are becoming uncivilized instead of improving. Although I escort my daughters everywhere, they face harassment even when I am with them. Men stare at, curse, and even touch women on the street”. (Zaher, 2013)

Parents see insecurity, rape, and sexual harassment as reasons for marrying their daughter at a young age. They marry their daughters to provide them with a comfortable life. They do not feel guilty or consider the marriage to be “child marriage” if their daughter has reached puberty, commonly in the rural areas (Zaher, 2103).

Illiteracy and education

In Afghanistan, decades of war, insufficient schooling and inadequate educational resources (schools, classrooms, lack of female teachers, water, toilet facilities, transportation), have a significant negative impact on children's illiteracy and future; literacy and schooling have a direct impact on female child marriage, girls who do not attend school will not be able to read newspapers, magazines, or books to



increase their awareness. Since education has a significant impact on the number of female child marriages, girls who do not attend school are more likely to get married in early age (Ehsan et al., 2021; Zaher, 2013).

Table 2. *Summary of included studies*

| Sample information | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|----------|------------------------|---|---|---|
| Author, year | Purpose | n | Age (years) | Location | Method | Results |
| Blum et al. (2019) | To understand adolescent and parental attitudes toward education, child marriage, and the changes in matriculation for boys and girls over one generation. | 910 | 12-15 | Badghis, Bamyán, Daikundi, Kandahar, Logar and Paktya | Quantitative method: Two-staged household sampling with a structured interview used in six provinces with low educational enrolment during 2016 | Adolescents reported highly valuing education, but they saw boys as benefitting more from it than girls. Nearly ninety percent of parents agree that their children should complete at least secondary education, regardless of their sex, and some of them stated that marriage should be postponed until after high school graduation. Likewise, both boys and girls believe that marrying girls under the age of eighteen years limits their future educational opportunities and increases the risk of domestic violence and loss of freedom. |

Table 2. *Summary of included studies*

| Sample information | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|----------|------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| Author, year | Purpose | n | Age (years) | Location | Method | Results |
| Ehsan et al. (2021) | To examine the effect of poverty and education on female child marriage in Afghanistan | 25,650 | 10-49 | Across all 34 provinces | Data from Afghanistan's Demographic and Health Survey (AfDHS) collected in 2015 | Female child marriage is significantly influenced by education and poverty. Girls who have never attended school and who are from low-income families are more likely to get married between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Similar to this, there is a significant increase in female child marriage in Afghanistan due to illiteracy, living in rural area, ethnicity, and region. Afghanistan is experiencing a rise in female child marriage as a direct result of poverty. |
| Miran (2019) | To gain an understanding of the of girls' early marriage, identify | 180 | 15-60 | Kabul | Quantitative method: the study was cross-sectional, | The respondents agreed upon that early marriage was a human rights violation, and the majority of them disapproved of the practice. Most of them had had unwanted |

Table 2. *Summary of included studies*

| Sample information | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|----------|--------------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| Author, year | Purpose | n | Age (years) | Location | Method | Results |
| | reasons behind its perpetuation, and how it affects the victimized girls' wellbeing, and how it constitutes a violation of their human rights. | | | | data were collected with questionnaire | pregnancies. Nevertheless, half of them were still satisfied with their marriage. |
| Qamar et al. (2020) | To assess the association between child marriage and domestic violence in Afghanistan | 21,324 | <15-18 | Across all 34 provinces | Quantitative method: secondary data collected by the Demographic and Health Surveys (AFDHS) | Girls who experienced very early marriage were more likely to report sexual violence compared with those who married as an adult. While, odds of reporting any, physical, and emotional violence among those who married as children did not differ from those who married as adults. |

Table 2. *Summary of included studies*

| Sample information | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------|------------------------|----------------------------|--|--|
| Author, year | Purpose | n | Age (years) | Location | Method | Results |
| Raj et al. (2014) | To identify Afghan perspectives on the causes of and potential solutions to child and forced marriage in Afghanistan | 102 | | Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar | Qualitative method with open-ended interviews | Poverty, tradition, conflict-related insecurity, low status of women, and ignorance of religious and civil laws were cited as drivers of child marriage practices, that causes poor social and health condition for mothers and infants. |
| Shonazar ova & Eshchano v (2020) | To study the factors affecting early marriage and the effect of early marriage on child mortality under five among all children, sons and daughters | 2640 0 | 8-24 | Across all 34 provinces | Quantitative method: data from Afghanistan's Demographic and Health Survey (AfDHS) | According to the result, it was found that the main determinants of early marriage are the education of women, employment status, exposure to media, ethnicity, current age group, marital status, number of wives and unions, region, place of residence and age at first sexual activity. Early marriage increases the likelihood of child mortality |

Table 2. *Summary of included studies*

| Sample information | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|----------|------------------------|-----------------|--|---|
| Author, year | Purpose | n | Age (years) | Location | Method | Results |
| | | | | | collected in 2015 | |
| Zaher (2013) | To analyses Afghan people's beliefs and perceptions of child marriage, especially their knowledge of the law; their attitudes toward marriage and gender relations; and marrying off their daughters at a young age | 26 | 18-65 | Balkh | Qualitative method: with In-depth interviews, focus group, and observatory methods were used to collect the data | The increase in child marriage is one of the legacies of war and gender segregation. Although child marriage has been practiced for centuries in Afghanistan, it has become more common since 1980s (since Mujahideen and Taliban era). Due to lack of knowledge women thought child marriage is a norm, also they don't know the legal age for marriage and their rights. In rural areas where child marriage is very common, child brides faced high rates of maternal and infant mortality, miscarriage, and other |



Table 2. *Summary of included studies*

| Sample information | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------|------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--|
| Author, year | Purpose | n | Age (years) | Location | Method | Results |
| | | | | | | complications during pregnancy and after delivery. |

Table 3. *Causes and consequences of child marriage in girl child in Afghanistan*

| Causes of child marriage in girls aged below 18 | Consequences of child marriage on girls aged below 18 | Psycho-social condition of girls married below age 18 |
|--|--|--|
| Mainly, the factors behind child marriage in Afghanistan are as below: | Girls who married at the age below 18 experienced: | Girls faced violence in many forms that detrimentally affect one's life and physical and mental health and causes: |
| Poverty | Domestic violence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical violence • Emotional violence • Sexual violence | Isolation |
| War and instability | Maternal mortality morbidity | Stress, depression and PTSD |
| Illiteracy and Education | Infant mortality morbidity | Suicides and self-immolations Runaways |
| Cultural and Traditional Practices religion | Girls drop out of school | |
| Ethnicity and geography | | |

Adolescents said they placed a high value on education but thought boys benefited more from it than girls, the majority of parents concur expecting their children to complete at least secondary education regardless of their child's sex. They indicated that marriage should be postponed at least until after high school graduation. Simultaneously, boys and girls also agreed that marriage of females under the age of 18 reduces prospects for future education, raises the danger of domestic abuse, and deprives girls of their freedom (Blum et al., 2018).

Cultural and traditional practices

Many of the structures and practices that support child marriage have their origins in Afghan cultural norms. One of the main reasons it's challenging to address child marriages is that

most people don't think anything is wrong with it. In rural areas, many hold the view that it is best to marry off their daughters as soon as possible and child marriage is more common than the urban context (Zaher, 2013). As an example, “Baad” and “Badal”; marrying someone as blood money or for the purpose of bringing peace and reconciliation among the families to resolve a dispute or issue between these families in payment for a crime committed by a male relative, or to deal with “shameful” acts like adultery as well as exchanging the girls between two families for marriage) is performed, typically, female children are the victims of Baad (Raj et al., 2014; Zaher, 2013).

Zaher (2013), states that all participants agreed that 98 percent of marriage-related decisions are made by parents, particularly the father, or, in the event that the father is not present, by a brother or uncle who serves as the primary family decision-maker. Men command more authority because they are regarded as the guardians of family honor. Even while men often make the marriage-related decisions, women also have a role in the continuation of child marriage, where women are the ones who find, select, and request girls for their sons and brothers, and the men finalize the decisions.

Dowry or ransom is another tradition among Afghan people, which is a price for the bride, the bride price is not perceived as “selling,” but as a customary practice. Families are willing to "sell" their daughters for ransom in order to ease the burden on themselves and their other children. Thus, child marriage is also performed due to extreme poverty, mainly in the rural areas where people are poorer (Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020; Zaher, 2013).

Religious beliefs

Religious scholars said that early marriage can shield girls from illegal behaviours, thus, lowering the risk for the girl's family and the community at large (Raj et al., 2014). Regarding child marriage religious scholars often fall into one of two camps: those who are in support

of it and those who are against it. Girls have the right to select their spouses, and they should get married when they reach the legal marriage age, claims the religious scholars who oppose child marriage. According to scholars who support child marriage, a girl is legally eligible to marry when she reaches puberty (Zaher, 2013). Meanwhile, girls are not asked for their consent to be married in rural areas where child marriage is most prevalent because they are expected to automatically accept the family's decision out of respect or for the sake of family honor.

Ethnicity and geography

More than 15 major ethnic groups coexist in Afghanistan, which is a multi-ethnic nation. Afghanistan is mostly populated by Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks (Ehsan et al., 2021). The highest risk of getting married before age 18 is among Baloch, Pashtun and Pashai ethnicity (Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020), while the lowest rates can be seen among Turkmen ethnicity (Ehsan et al., 2021). These findings can be explained by the higher prevalence of early marriages among girls in border regions and the southern part of the Afghanistan. Baloch and Pashtun ethnic groups mostly inhabits the southern part of the country and shares a border with Pakistan, where hostilities are frequent. As a result, families living in these regions try to marry off their daughters at a younger age because there is a possibility that these girls may be raped during the hostilities (Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020).

Consequences of child marriage on girls aged below 18

Domestic violence

According to the findings there is an association between child marriage and domestic violence in Afghanistan (Qamar et al., 2022; Raj et al., 2014). Domestic violence manifests itself in three forms: physical, emotional, and sexual. In girls who married before the age of 15 were more likely to report sexual violence compared with girls who married as adults,

while physical, and emotional violence among those who married as children did not differ from those who married as adults (Qamar et al., 2022). Because a child bride is less equipped to manage a home and please her husband and in-laws such inadequacies were perceived to create family conflict (domestic violence), (Raj et al., 2014; Zaher, 2013). Moreover, according to Blum et al. (2018), adolescents agreed that early marriage of girls limited future educational opportunities they also indicated that child marriage increased girls' exposure to domestic violence; and they reported that girls lose their freedom as well.

Maternal and infant mortality and morbidity

Early marriage, followed by early pregnancy and childbirth, were both linked to significant health risks for infants and mothers, including infant and maternal morbidity and mortality (Raj et al., 2014; Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020; Zaher, 2013). Low levels of mother and child wellness are a result of child marriages in Afghanistan. Girls who have not achieved adulthood are unprepared for sexual activity and pregnancy both mentally and physically, which results in severe pain throughout labor, problems during delivery, and low birth weight (Zaher, 2013). Consequently, due to the lack of knowledge of the mother, children may not receive the care and nutrient that they need at an early age. As a result of this, majority of children suffer from underweight, stunting, poor physical condition, which lead to children mortality under five years, since at this age range, children are most vulnerable, during which vital changes occur in the baby's body (Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020).

Girls drop out of school

Girls who get married as children lose their right to education since, they must leave school and stay at home to serve their husband and his family and childbearing. Early marriage had a negative impact on girls' education in terms of preparing them for employment outside the home, but it also created problems for the child brides' children because they are raised by uneducated children rather than educated mothers. (Zaher, 2013). School attendance

and reading newspapers, magazines, books and attending to education centres strongly decreased the early female child marriage in Afghanistan according to the findings of Ehsan et al. (2021). On the other hand, adolescents reported that by continuing education they may have improved knowledge, improved decision making, better marriage resulted from better education, have a better status in the family, have a better status in the community, secure good jobs, being self-sufficient and will gain better life quality (Blum et al., 2018).

Psycho-social condition of girls married below age 18

Girls married as child suffers many sorts of violence that were harmful to their lives and physical and mental health. For instance, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and post-traumatic stress disorder have all been related to emotional violence, among other detrimental effects that can have a negative effect on one's life and physical and mental health (Qamar et al., 2022). Negative social consequences to child marriage were cited, including cessation of the girl's education and too early loss of parents in their lives; girls will not complete their education, dispossessed of parents' love, they will experience psychological problems by Raj et al. (2014).

Discussion

The legal age for marriage in Afghanistan was 16, Since 2019 Afghanistan government officially started implementing of children protection law and rights. According to this law, girls or boys under age of 18 deemed as children (Ehsan et al., 2021). Although marriage of girls under age 18 is illegal, this practice continues in Afghanistan because most rural residents adhere to traditional customs rather than the country's constitution. When children are married, they are typically treated as property, typically of their parents or guardians, who make the decision on their behalf. There are many reasons to marry a child, but very few of them place the child's welfare as their top priority. Further, children are given or promised in marriage as a way to build political or family ties, pay off debts, earn

money as the bride price, to avoid pregnancy before marriage, to increase the number of children a woman can have, to relieve a financial burden, to ensure obedience and subservience (Raj et al., 2014; Shonazarova and Eshchanov, 2020; Zaher, 2013). Whatever the reason for coercing a child into marriage, if they are not consenting participants, the obligations of marriage are necessary and frequently coerced throughout the lifetime of the female. Child brides are rarely given the option to reject the marriage by their families. Social, economic, and religious expectations of the community often make it difficult for the girls to avoid early marriage or end the marriage later (Parrot, 2011).

Child marriages are frequent in rural areas of Afghanistan, as well as Egypt, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Pakistan, India, and other Middle Eastern countries. Many young girls are rarely permitted to leave their households, with the exception of occasions when they must marry or go to work in the fields. Most of these uneducated girls are married off at age 11, but others are as young as 7. And, up to 80% of marriages in Afghanistan are forced marriages (Parrot, 2011).

Girls frequently experience a variety of negative effects from early marriage. Young brides frequently don't get the chance to go to school, which causes illiteracy. A lifetime of poverty may result from this. Meanwhile, domestic violence is also a prevalent occurrence. If these girls are able to leave the marriage or become widows and must work to support themselves and their children, they often struggle to earn enough money. Many child brides give birth when they are still quite young, which frequently causes serious health issues including HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality and infant mortality. The best of these health effects results in lifetime misery and frequently social isolation, while the worst results in an early death (Parrot, 2011).

Limitations

This is the first literature review of girl's experience of child marriage in Afghanistan. And as such, there are certain limitations. 1. Although this scoping review covered the data until the year 2022, still we could not find any research related to child marriage after Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan since 15 August, 2021. Since the Taliban takeover last year, the risk of young girls being promised as brides has risen to the highest level in Afghanistan. The condition is critical, the rise is mostly due to increasing financial desperation. Currently, only 5% of families having enough to eat, forcing many to take extremely difficult decisions around the futures of their children, UNICEF has reported cases of children as young as 20 days being promised for marriage. 2. There was limited number of research addressing child marriage in Afghan context and there was not any review done before this, despite its pervasiveness. 3. Most of the included literature in this study used quantitative method (due to lack of literature regarding child marriage in Afghan context we included the most quantitative studies), which was a bit complex for interpretation.

Conclusions

The present study contributes to give a wide picture of the covered literature, summarized/disseminated the research findings and identified gaps in the existing literature. We found that Afghan girls are driven to early and child marriages due to many factors that exist in Afghanistan namely; poverty, illiteracy and lack of access to education, war and instability, cultural and traditional practices, ethnicity and geography and misinterpretation of religious texts are among the main ones. It was noticed that girls living in rural areas are affected from most of these factors of child marriage. All of these factors should be studied deeply to get to the root of the issue regarding this matter. Consequently, this destructive practice caused and is causing Afghan girls to suffer from many types of violence (physical, emotional and sexual) from their husband and his family, early childbearing which causes both the mother and infant morbidity and mortality due to unpreparedness of girls physical and mental condition for marriage, as well as causes girls to stop their education and making

career for their future. They have lost their voice and respect in the wedded family and are isolated which cause them suffer from social and psychological problems, in spite of this fact there was no specific study on the psychosocial impacts of child marriage in Afghan context.

The factors that impact child marriage and what girls experience after the marriage happened were described in this scoping review. The factors are intertwined, and interventions will fail if they do not account for all of them. Social change would require multi-sectoral collaboration among diverse stakeholders, with the goal of empowering girls, their families, and communities. The response must also include a mix of concrete efforts that result in social change. Besides, we also noted a lack of different studies in terms of income level, cultural and religious background, and psychosocial impacts of child marriage based on the findings of this study.

Implication of this study

Our main aim in this study was to investigate various factors of child marriage and experience of girl child after the marriage happened in the Afghan context. Currently, the circumstances are critical and ambiguous in Afghanistan for girls because, since last year 15 August, 2021 Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan the number of child marriages is increasing day by day due to poverty, economic stagnation and instability, as well as secondary and high school girls are not allowed to attend school because it is banned by the Taliban. Therefore, the findings of this study will help developing better understandings of how child marriage, this structural violence is enacted in the Afghan society in order to develop and target interventions, also when implementing programs to reduce child marriage could be an effective tool (for policy makers, INGOs and global social service agencies working in Afghanistan), for comprehending/dismantling the structures that perpetuate these challenges. Eliminating these harmful practices is included in the SDGs target 5.3 aiming to tackle gender inequality. Meanwhile, it could be a tool for the current researchers to dig

deeper and find the roots of child marriage in Afghanistan in order to design intervention mapping.

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