



# Scenario of Dowry in Rural Punjab - Perceptions and Suggestions

**Gaganpreet Kaur<sup>1\*</sup>, Lakhwinder Kaur<sup>1</sup> and Devinder Tiwari<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab, India.*

## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The phenomenon of dowry remained an integral part of marriage in India since time immemorial. In general, dowry is defined as offering of gifts, money and valuables given by bride's family to that of groom to permit their marriage. The rural sector of Punjab has been witnessing sharp increase of spending on dowry. Demonstration effects have engulfed all sections and communities in the vicious circle of 'increased dowry'. Dowry death is one of the most heinous crimes against the women. So this paper is planned to study the perceptions about the dowry consideration as well as suggestions to curb this trigger. The present study was conducted in Rural Punjab by taking three socio-cultural zones that is Malwa, Doaba and Majha into an account. So, in all 360 families were taken accounting for 360 mothers-in-law (G1) and 360 daughters-in-law (G2). As regard to the perception of the respondents regarding the things that make them feel happy at their in-laws house, less than half of G1 respondents felt that their good nature made them feel happy at their in-laws house followed by their intelligence whereas majority (60.83 per cent) of the respondents stated that dowry made them feel happy at in-laws family. People perceived dowry as social evil yet they recognize dowry for achieving long term relationship and achieve healthy marriage. The new phenomenon of "reversal trend" came into light, as, now grooms were ready to pay dowry for the brides who were settled abroad and for the girls who were eligible to settle abroad either on student

\*Corresponding author: E-mail: [gagan.gunvee@gmail.com](mailto:gagan.gunvee@gmail.com);

visa or on permanent residency. On the issue of controlling the curbing the phenomenon of dowry most of G1 respondents were of the view that the dowry practice could be controlled by spreading awareness against dowry followed by Government interventions whereas G2 respondents viewed by raising pressure through NGO's and Panchayats followed by educating girls could help to control this problem.

*Keywords: Dowry; rural mother-in-law; daughter-in-law; perceptions and suggestions.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is one of the important social institutions prevalent in all societies of the world with varying degree of sacramental values. In contrast to the western societies, marriage in Indian society is considered as an indispensable and durable social binding [1,2]. Dowry as an institution or more precisely perhaps as a social reality and an attitude has been around in India for ages. It is only what we perceive dowry to be today is in fact the result of a host of socio-cultural, economic and political influences like ancient rock formation that change formats by beating of winds and water and like river flows that alter courses with time dowry has seen countless shapes, forms and attitudes of acceptance and understanding [3]. The rural sector of Punjab has been witnessing sharp increase of spending on dowry. Demonstration effects have engulfed all sections and communities in the vicious circle of 'increased dowry'. Simple marriages of previous times are now being performed in highly expensive 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 debt. Besides the indebtedness due to marriage, numerous incidents of bride burning, harassment, physical torture of young brides have been reported as routine matter. Dowry death is one of the most heinous crimes against the women. The consequences of dowry affect women's status and their possibilities to grow and educate themselves [4]. The study conducted by [5] found that the status and the affluence of husband's family as well as the secondary education of husband's father is important determinant of incidences of dowry.

While tracing the roots of dowry system in Indian society, some scholars argued that women in the Vedic time could not inherit real property. To encounter this phenomenon, the families in the upper strata of India's social structure devised a dowry system i.e. bride's family provided the groom with dowry to be registered in bride's name [6] while some other viewed that daughters

are cut off from their natal families after marriage, that dowry "pays off" their share of property, and that sons look after parents in old age are used to deny women shares of natal inheritance [7]. 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 [8] Keeping in view the alarming situation of increasing dowry with its harmful socio-economic and psychological ramifications there is a need to empirically explore the situation and find the ways to check the deep rooted problem. So, this paper was planned to assess the perceptions and provide suitable suggestions to control the dowry practice [9].

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was conducted in Rural Punjab by taking three socio-cultural zones that is Malwa, Doaba and Majha into an account. A Multi-stage Random Sampling technique was used. From Malwa being a bigger region two districts Ludhiana and Sangrur were taken. From Doaba region Jalandhar was taken and from Majha Amritsar was taken randomly for the study. Further from each district two blocks were taken and from each block three villages were randomly selected. Thus twenty four villages were taken in all. From each village 15 families constituting mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws were studied. So, in all 360 families were taken accounting for 360 mothers-in-law (G1) and 360 daughters-in-law (G2).

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Perceptions of the Respondents

The perceptions of the respondents regarding the various attributes which make them happy at their in-laws house such as dowry, education, intelligence, looks, nature and job were taken into account. Data in Table 1 highlights that less than half (43.89 per cent) of G1 respondents felt their good nature made them feel happy at in-laws house followed by intelligence (27.50 per cent), whereas in G2 respondents, majority (60.83 per cent) stated dowry as the main reason which made them feel happy at in-laws family.

Also many respondents stated their looks and intelligence were important characters which make them feel happy at their in-laws house. As regard to regional classification, in G1 generation of Malwa region, more than one third (36.67 per cent) of the respondents considered that their good nature make them feel happy at in-laws home, followed by intelligence and looks. In Majha region, 45.56 per cent of respondents accounts to good nature and 23.33 per cent of respondents each to dowry, education and intelligence. In Doaba, majority (62.22 per cent) of the respondents stated their education level made them feel happy at in-laws house. In G2 respondents of Malwa region, more than half (53.33 per cent) of the respondents stated importance to their looks followed by (50.00 per cent) of the respondents considered dowry as a reason which make them feel happy at in-laws house, whereas in Doaba, 87.78 per cent revealed their good nature followed by 62.22 per cent considered dowry as the important feature that make them feel happy at in-laws home. In Majha region, 81.11 per cent of G2 respondents considered dowry followed by 73.33 per cent revealed their good nature as the important reasons that make them feel happy at in-laws home So, overall the G1 respondents held their good nature and G2 respondents credited dowry as an important attribute that make them feel happy at in-laws house.

### 3.2 Reversal Dowry

While collecting data for the present study, a new phenomenon came into notice that is given the term "Reversal dowry" and the data in this regard is presented in Table 2 which showed that 23.68 per cent of the respondents who had married abroad reported that the groom's family had spend all the money on the marriage and also sponsored her to go abroad on student visa along with her spouse. During the field survey, it was noticed that all the girls were educated and were also IELTS qualified and were eligible to go abroad on student visa and they can take her spouse along. Just to send their son abroad people used to spend all the expenses on marriage, even bears the college fees and other expenses of the bride at their own. Also, 15.79 per cent of the respondents who were permanent residents or citizens of foreign countries stated that, their spouse and his family had incurred all the expenditure on marriage and other expenses as well. The reason behind this was to settle their sons abroad. It was seen that majority of the cases were in Doaba region with 40.00 per cent brides, were eligible to go abroad, their grooms

spent all the money whereas in Majha region, 27.27 per cent PR/ Citizens took money from grooms that was helpful in their further settlements.

### 3.3 Suggestions to Control Dowry by the Respondents

During the data collection an effort was made to know the suggestions of the respondents for curbing the menace of dowry and data in this regard is highlighted in Table 3, A large majority (88.33 per cent) of G1 respondents held that the practice of dowry could be controlled by spreading awareness against dowry followed by 63.06 per cent reported that Government could play a major role in curbing dowry. Also, more than half (56.39 per cent) stated that by raising social pressure through NGO's, *Panchayats* etc. dowry could be controlled. In G2 respondents, majority (87.22 per cent) stated by raising social pressure followed by 84.17 per cent by educating girls the menace of dowry could be curbed. Also, 80.56 per cent viewed role of media can play an important role in curbing dowry. Also, a large number (78.33 per cent) opined by spreading awareness against dowry. About seventy four per cent viewed the role models in the society could help in controlling the dowry practice.

Overall, the G1 respondents stated that the dowry practice could be controlled by spreading awareness against dowry followed by Government interventions, whereas G2 respondents viewed by raising pressure through NGO's and *Panchayats* followed by educating girls could help to control this problem.

### 3.4 Perceptions towards Dowry

Data in Table 4, revealed the perceptions of the respondents regarding dowry. Little less than half (47.78 per cent) of the respondents stated that dowry as a social evil. Curiously, 44.44 per cent stated that bride feels confident in her in-laws family. Also, 43.33 per cent revealed that dowry is a mean to achieve healthy marriage as well as long term relationships. In Malwa region, about forty per cent revealed that paying less dowry is expected to have problems by in-laws, whereas more than half stated dowry as mean to improve relations with spouse and in-laws. In G2 respondents, majority (72.50 per cent) revealed dowry as a mean to achieve healthy marriage and long term relationship followed by 69.44 per cent stated that bride feels confident with dowry in her in-laws family. In Malwa region, most of

the respondents revealed feeling confident with as a mean to improve relation with spouse and dowry whereas 87.78 per cent perceived dowry in-laws.

**Table 1. Perceptions of respondents that make them happy in their in-laws, 2013-14**

Perceptions	Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab	Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab
	(n <sub>1</sub> = 180)	(n <sub>2</sub> = 90)	(n <sub>3</sub> = 90)	(N = 360)	(n <sub>1</sub> = 180)	(n <sub>2</sub> = 90)	(n <sub>3</sub> = 90)	(N = 360)
	Mothers-in-laws (G1)				Daughters-in-law(G2)			
<b>Things that make life happy at in-laws house</b>								
Dowry	31 (17.22)	31 (34.44)	21 (23.33)	83 (23.06)	90 (50.00)	56 (62.22)	73 (81.11)	219 (60.83)
Education	15 (8.33)	56 (62.22)	21 (23.33)	92 (25.56)	63 (35.00)	34 (37.78)	38 (42.22)	135 (37.50)
Intelligence	31 (17.22)	47 (52.22)	21 (23.33)	99 (27.50)	54 (30.00)	43 (47.78)	45 (50.00)	142 (39.44)
Looks	31 (17.22)	19 (21.11)	13 (14.44)	63 (17.50)	96 (53.33)	54 (60.00)	52 (57.78)	202 (56.11)
Good nature	66 (36.67)	51 (56.67)	41 (45.56)	158 (43.89)	67 (37.22)	79 (87.78)	66 (73.33)	212 (58.89)
Job	26 (14.44)	21 (23.33)	13 (14.44)	60 (16.67)	42 (23.33)	22 (24.44)	19 (21.11)	83 (23.06)

Multiple responses

**Table 2. Reversal trend of dowry/ Bride Price, 2013-14**

Characteristics	Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab
	(n <sub>1</sub> = 17)	(n <sub>2</sub> = 10)	(n <sub>3</sub> = 11)	(N = 38)
	Daughters-in-law (G2)			
Bride for student visa (Eligible)	3 (17.65)	4 (40.00)	2 (18.18)	9 (23.68)
PR/ Citizen	1 (5.88)	2 (20.00)	3 (27.27)	6 (15.79)

Figures in parentheses indicates percentages

**Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to suggestions by them to control dowry practice, 2013-14**

Suggestions	Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab	Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab
	(n <sub>1</sub> = 180)	(n <sub>2</sub> = 90)	(n <sub>3</sub> = 90)	(N = 360)	(n <sub>1</sub> = 180)	(n <sub>2</sub> = 90)	(n <sub>3</sub> = 90)	(N = 360)
	Mothers-in-law(G1)				Daughters-in-law (G2)			
By spreading awareness against Dowry	163 (90.56)	84 (93.33)	71 (78.89)	318 (88.33)	135 (75.00)	78 (86.67)	69 (76.67)	282 (78.33)
By enforcing strict law	87 (48.33)	45 (50.00)	54 (60.00)	186 (51.67)	106 (58.89)	76 (84.44)	65 (72.22)	247 (68.61)
Being role model	89 (49.44)	43 (47.78)	48 (53.33)	180 (50.00)	117 (65.00)	82 (91.11)	65 (72.22)	264 (73.33)
By raising social pressure through NGOs, Panchayats etc.	111 (61.67)	41 (45.56)	51 (56.67)	203 (56.39)	170 (94.44)	66 (73.33)	78 (86.67)	314 (87.22)
Role of media	101 (56.11)	38 (42.22)	49 (54.44)	188 (52.22)	152 (84.44)	61 (67.78)	77 (85.56)	290 (80.56)
By educating girls	102 (56.67)	45 (50.00)	49 (54.44)	196 (54.44)	155 (86.11)	69 (76.67)	79 (87.78)	303 (84.17)
By creating opportunities for girls	67 (37.22)	34 (37.78)	48 (53.33)	149 (41.39)	106 (58.89)	7 (7)	73 (81.11)	248 (68.89)
Government could play	108	52	67	227	109	72	69	250

major role	(60.00)	(57.78)	(74.44)	(63.06)	(60.56)	(80.00)	(76.67)	(69.44)
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Multiple responses

**Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to perceptions towards dowry, 2013-14**

Perceptions	Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab	Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab
	(n <sub>1</sub> = 180)	(n <sub>2</sub> = 90)	(n <sub>3</sub> = 90)	(N= 360)	(n <sub>1</sub> = 180)	(n <sub>2</sub> = 90)	(n <sub>3</sub> = 90)	(N= 360)
	Mothers-in-laws(G1)				Daughters-in-law(G2)			
Dowry is a mean to achieve healthy marriage as well as long term relationship	66 (36.67)	49 (54.44)	41 (45.56)	156 (43.33)	118 (65.56)	68 (75.56)	75 (83.33)	261 (72.50)
Dowry is a mean to improve your relations with in-laws and spouse	55 (30.56)	31 (34.44)	46 (51.11)	132 (36.67)	97 (53.89)	79 (87.78)	54 (60.00)	230 (63.89)
Feeling confident with dowry in the in-laws family	61 (33.89)	66 (73.33)	33 (36.67)	160 (44.44)	104 (57.78)	77 (85.56)	69 (76.67)	250 (69.44)
Feeling economically independent after receiving dowry from your parents	11 (6.11)	29 (32.22)	6 (6.67)	46 (12.78)	87 (48.33)	47 (52.22)	43 (47.78)	177 (49.17)
Paying less dowry than expected by in-laws is invitation to problems	71 (39.44)	31 (34.44)	44 (48.89)	146 (40.56)	43 (23.89)	45 (50.00)	38 (42.22)	126 (35.00)
Greed of in-laws raises with more and more dowry	31 (17.22)	29 (32.22)	26 (28.89)	86 (23.89)	38 (21.11)	28 (31.11)	41 (45.56)	107 (29.72)
Dowry is a social evil	94 (52.22)	39 (43.33)	39 (43.33)	172 (47.78)	82 (45.56)	55 (61.11)	41 (45.56)	178 (49.44)

Multiple responses

Overall, G1 respondents perceived feeling of increase in confidence level with dowry followed by dowry as a social evil and interestingly the same number stated dowry as a mean to achieve healthy marriage as well as long relationship, whereas majority of G2 respondents felt dowry as means to achieve healthy marriage as well as long term relationship followed by feeling of confidence with dowry. So, it was seen as a paradox where the respondents had positive and negative views on the issue.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The rural sector of Punjab has been witnessing sharp increase of spending on dowry. Demonstration effects have engulfed all sections and communities in the vicious circle of 'increased dowry'. Simple marriages of previous times are now being performed in highly expensive marriage palaces. As a result of this, high level spending on daughter's marriage, many people are reported becoming heavily indebted. It seems that extravagant expenditure is being made by many people due to the increasing tendency of show off in the society. There is a serious need to think over it and

sensitize the people through various means not to spend beyond their reach on the dowry. The practice of maintaining relations through the payment of dowry encourages the phenomenon of dowry so there is a need to sensitize the people not to fulfill the greed of groom's family. This may become model for others also. Simple marriage ceremonies should be performed with small gathering to avoid wasteful expenditure, time and energy. As most marriages are turning into status symbol so there is a need to shun this tendency. At the school or college level when the teenagers are in forming years of life, there can be some educational programme or course in which moral values could be inculcated. The government may also play its role in curbing the phenomenon of dowry by way of discouraging marriages in big marriage palaces and may clamp some taxes on the people making extraordinary expenditure which send a negative message for the people who cannot afford.

#### CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard written participant consent has been collected and preserved by the authors.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

As per international standard or university standard written ethical permission has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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