

The Impacts of Harmful Tribal Traditions on Women: A Case Study of Mastung District Balochistan

Jameel Ahmed

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Pakistan Study Centre, University of Balochistan Quetta, (**Corresponding Author**)

Dr. Shazia Jaffar

Assistant Professor, Pakistan Study Center, University of Balochistan, Quetta

Dr. Suriya Bano

Assistant Professor, Department of Pakistan Study Centre, University of Balochistan, Quetta

Abstract

This research examines the detrimental effects of entrenched tribal traditions and customary practices on women in District Mastung, Balochistan, Pakistan. The study focuses particularly on practices such as *Watta Satta* (exchange marriages), honour killings, locally referred to as *Karo-Kari* and *Siahkari*, denial or restriction of girls' education, early and forced marriages, and *Vani/Swara*, in which women and girls may be given in marriage as compensation for disputes or offences. Although these practices are often justified in the name of tribal honour, social cohesion, or customary norms, they can significantly restrict women's rights, autonomy, and opportunities for social and economic development. The study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by women affected by these practices, while also examining the social and cultural mechanisms through which such traditions are maintained. The findings indicate that harmful customary practices have profound consequences for women's access to education, physical and psychological well-being, personal autonomy, family decision-making, and economic and financial independence. The study further demonstrates that the persistence of these practices is associated with patriarchal social structures, limited awareness of legal rights, inadequate educational opportunities, social pressure, and the influence of traditional authority structures. The research argues that addressing gender-based inequality in Mastung requires more than formal legal provisions; it necessitates sustained social and institutional interventions. The study recommends expanding girls' education, strengthening legal and judicial awareness, improving access to justice and social support services, empowering women economically, and engaging tribal elders, religious scholars, community leaders, and local institutions in reform-oriented initiatives. By examining the relationship between tribal customary practices and gender disparity, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural factors shaping women's status in Balochistan and provides a framework for promoting dignity, equality, education, and greater social participation for women in tribal communities.

Keywords: Tribal Customs, Women Rights, Mastung, Balochistan, Gender Inequality, Vani, Watta Satta

Introduction:

Globally, all the tribal societies have their distinct and unique tribal customs and values, which actually decide that in what manner, the individuals must live and act based on prescribed tribal values. As far as tribal customs are concerned, they are similar to the clothes, which are selected and worn based on their colors. These colors are like tribal traditions and values. These traditions and customs provide the sense of individuality to its people in a tribal society as a whole. The individuals of the tribal society greatly own and respect the qualities of tribal customs. Researches define tribal custom as a comprehensible independent organism of principles and codes, which the particular tribal groups

reproduce with the passage of time, which provide people with the needed suggestions and values for conduct and communal relations in their daily life (Iyanuolu 2008).

The above report indicates that tribal customs are communal inheritances, which include complete awareness, principles, traditions and abilities, which are existing for people of a tribal society. Similarly, it owns sources of single and collective identities in a particular community. In spite of the fact that tribal customs are useful for its people, but certain customs are detrimental as well as directly confront the self-respect of people of the community when considered against modern standard of conduct as well as manners as reflected in global principles. These principles are prescribed in state constitutions and global resolutions. Many of tribal customs are detrimental to the corporeal integrity of the people and particularly women and girl children. Several tribal customs create agonizing corporeal sufferings while others subject them to degrading and shameful conduct (Hanzi 2006; Iyanuolu 2008).

Background of the Study

Tribal traditions have their deep roots in Balochistan. As far as district Mastung is concerned, it owns a robust tribal Jirga structure, which is very influential and stronger than official state Benches. Since the tribal customs provide justice and harmony but certain traditions are very detrimental for women. Although Jirga system is illegitimate in Pakistan, but it owns tribal traditions, which help, resolve issues and disputes between the tribesmen. It is generally ruled by powerful male elders, landlords or tribal chiefs that use authority in their respective societies (Nazar & Zarkoon, 2026).

Jirga System and Women

The Jirga relies upon the values of *Impartiality*, pursuing *Forgiveness or Refuge, Hospitality, Tribal Traditions* and *Rules of Compensation Honor and Fidelity*. These values guide the Jirga for making verdicts, which are impartial in the eyes of the tribal society (Ahmed et al., 2024). *Jirgas* ruled by harmony, without any official judges. A *Jirga* takes its decision based on individual testament, understanding of the society and antiquity. The *Jirgas* choose a senior citizen as a Head or Chief who has the capacity to neutrally. The Head or Chief is known for his understanding about bringing the stability in community and the tribal customs and family honor and the society accepts his decision. There are two major aims of the consensual procedure of the *Jirga*: defining fault or purity and communal settlement bringing the disputants back into their social roles.

In Pakistan's unique culture, the tribal dispute resolve is in different practices: *Jirga* for *Pashtun* society, *Muchchi* for Balochi society, *Panchayat* in *Punjab* and *Faislo* or *Jirgoin* in *Sindh*. Such apparatuses have been collectively named as alternative dispute resolution (ADR) which bring people-driven and fast outcomes rather than official court structure, raising the simple query of coordination or association of such organizations in tandem (Naqvi, 2025). The situation is stark; these organizations are socially honored, nevertheless in several circumstances, these structures are in clash with the Constitution of Pakistan and global human rights resolutions i.e. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Khan & Hassan, 2026).

The Jirga and Treatment of Women

The regrettable and deplorable matter in *Jirga* remains the unequal treatment of women. The negotiable instruments, women are not involved in decision-makings. As stated by Brohi, (2016) an innocent woman is held guilty in a case of tribal custom like murder of a woman for suspected wrong conduct, as mentioned in provisions of UDHR. A kind of marriage in which a young innocent girl is engrossed into wedding to solve disputes, *Swara* is reported as an important part of *Jirga* decisions in *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* and remains a violation of child marriage and CEDAW (Sarfranz et al., 2022). An innocent young girl was forcefully married to her brother in 2021, which was regarded as an instance of Gender discrimination in the Pakistani Constitution at Article 25(3) (Ashraf et al., 2023).

The Price of Honor: Mastung (2023)

An incidence in Balochistan's far-flung tribal zone *Mastung*, happens in the year in 2023, illustrates the bitter reality of honor killings that are condoned by the *Jirga* structure. Sudden death that occurs as a young girl brings disgrace on her family by her acts. The case is presented before the local *Jirga* where the council tries to solve the issue between the offenders and the society, determining not to prosecute the offenders, but to request them paying the *Diyato* the elders of the society (Sarfranz et al., 2022). The incidence is a fiasco of neutrality on many parts. This was a breach of the right to life, and fundamentally, an individual permit for killing a person allotted in the shape of a lucrative financial payment. It takes away the right to a just trial under Article 10-A in the authorized organization, thus placing the committers outside authorized organization. It is a breach of the Constitution's surety of impartiality (Article 25) and self-respect (Article 14) of women and reinforces the perception that women's life has no value (Khan & Hassan, 2026).

Problem Statement

The effects of detrimental tribal customs on women's general state could be proved in the societal, financial and political activities and services. The societal effects comprise issues of wellbeing, education of girls, effects on societal self-respect, denial of women's rights in a particular community. In contrast, the economic effects comprise issues of female's access to and control over resources, earnings and work opportunities (Teamir & Tilahun, 2010).

Dangerous tribal traditions are customs, which violate human rights. In Mastung, women are frequently regarded as commodities or honor of the households, not as free humans. The main tribal traditions in Mastung are

1. *Watta Satta* (Exchange Marriages) in which two families exchange their daughters.
2. Child Marriages
3. Rejection of Female Education
4. *Siahkari* / Honor Killing
5. *Vani / Sawara*: Offering a woman as compensation for ending a tribal clash
6. Prohibition on Property Rights

The aim of this research article is to examine the effects of dangerous tribal customs among women based on interviews with key informant women and focus group discussions in district Mastung Balochistan.

Objectives of the Study

1. To what extent do the harmful tribal traditions influence the societal and mental life of women in Mastung?
2. To examine the effects of harmful tribal customs on female's schooling, wellbeing and societal life.
3. To suggest useful recommendations for reforms in tribal society of district Mastung Balochistan.

Literature Review

In several emerging states, mainly in South Asian tribal boundaries, traditional customs and ancestral cultures employ a deep, controlling effect over everyday life, harshly controlling women's activity and human rights (Frederick & Bertsch, 2013). Mastung District, situated in Pakistan's Balochistan province, depicts a captivating setting where customary tribal supremacy organizations (Jirga structures and accepted tribal codes or Riwaaj) frequently succeed national constitutional acts in handling societal conduct, household business, and social standards. Intellectual works on gender in Balochistan underlines that ancestral cultures are intensely stratified along male-controlled outlines, where honors, ancestry, and communal man status are arbitrated through the guideline and mechanism of women's bodies, movement, and work.

As stated by Arif et al. (2025), woman ostracism in such backgrounds is not inadvertent; rather, it is organizationally created through linking micro- and macro-level instruments that regularize subservience. Comprehending the influences of these customs needs an investigation of how social wealth and local patriarchy interconnect to limit women across societal, educational, and mental scopes.

Social Seclusion and the Constraint of Woman Activity

Khan, (2008) states that cultural customs in Balochistan deeply highlight hyper-masculine codes of honor (Balochi Mayaar or local cultural honor variants) that builds woman discernibility as a potential danger to household status. Thus, social life for a woman in districts like Mastung is considered by stark detention to the national scope (Chadar-o-Chaar-deewari).

Ardenier, (2021) in a similar vein states that sociological studies indicate that inflexible spatial isolation and limitations on liberty of society stop females from making free societal nets, contributing in society decision-making, or accessing community spaces. Similarly, Kabeer, (1994) likewise says that this general segregation decreases female's social characters to inactive reproducers of ancestry instead of dynamic managers of communal progress. When tribal acts command that a female's community presence needs severe man oversight or accessory, her independence is analytically worn, making an environment of prevalent surveillance and societal noiselessness (Tamez, 2025).

Effects on Woman Education and Learning Prohibition

According to Mahata, (2025) schooling is generally known as a main substance for empowerment and gender parity. However, tribal traditions in regions like Mastung often place female schooling as unimportant or even adverse to tribal standards. Jones et al, (2014) claims that tribal marriage customs, son partiality in resource distribution, also the prioritizing of women's' work for home chores work as intense organizational fences to educational permanence (Hassan & Raza, 2009). As Arif et al. (2025) note these complex fences influence in extraordinary dropout ratios among young girls, efficiently sealing off paths to financial freedom and continuing an intergenerational cycle of poverty and subservience.

Mental Health and Psychological wellbeing Effects

The junction of cruel tribal customs, home suppression, also the continuous danger of communal sanction takes a stark toll on the psychological wellbeing and mental health of a woman (Gupta & Gupta, 2023). Long-lasting experience to

preventive surroundings, enforced or early marriages, home labor misuse, as well as the mental burden of honor-based monitoring nurture extraordinary rates of anxiety, depression, and somatic stress disorders among women in tribal regions (Ramos, 2023). Since psychological wellbeing, support systems are almost non-existent in rural Balochistan, and since male-controlled standards defame emotional weakness or opposition, women often adopt their suffering. The shortage of safe official paths for protest redressal or mental treatment leaves victims of damaging customs stuck in cycles of silent fortitude, highlighting a serious necessity for general public health and sociological interventions (Snha & Sapna, 2026).

Methodology

This research article uses a **qualitative case study design** for exploring the lived experiences of women in Mastung District, Balochistan, regarding the effects of detrimental tribal customs. **Data Collection:**

Regarding the data collection, the study collects the primary data by utilizing semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 women aged 18 to 55 living across urban and rural areas of Mastung District. The study uses the purposive and snowball sampling techniques in order to reach the respondents eager for sharing their stories within a delicate tribal atmosphere.

Analytical Method:

The study uses the thematic analysis for processing the qualitative data. The study also uses the Interview transcripts along with codes line-by-line to find repeated perceptions. The study consequently clusters the repeated perceptions into principal thematic classes depicting social life, lack of education, and mental health.

Ethical Considerations:

Considering the delicateness of tribal traditions and gender matters in Balochistan, severe privacy and informed agreement procedures were upheld. Fictitious name are utilized throughout the results for protecting the respondents' identities and security.

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews yields three central themes that directly address the research's objectives about social life, educational barricades, and mental health.

Theme I: Spatial Captivity and the Destruction of Social Life

Respondents openly report that tribal cultural standards harshly hamper their movement and active contribution in social life. Tribal anticipations decree that women's purview is harshly in-house and private matter.

We may not go out of our families without a male relative's consent or companion. Even to visit our own parents' family depends on whether the men of the family consider it essential. We feel like residing in an obscure cage where our voices own no value outside these walls (Participant 3, Age 34).

As far as our tribe is concerned, the tribal chiefs make all the verdicts in Jirga and there are no women in it at all. They never consult any woman, even on issues that directly influence our marriages, our wellbeing, or our children's futures. They always expect from us to conform noiselessly (Participant 7, Age 42).

Discussion: The above narratives prove that how ancestral tribal organizations force a deep social divide. By rejecting women free movement and decision-making authority, local customs uphold an authority asymmetry that silences woman assistance and confines their incorporation into wider public life.

Theme 2: Educational Stoppage and Regular Prohibition: The survey highlights how tribal values and organizational discrepancies unite for truncating the Women education in Mastung. Early marriages and household chores were cited as main features of school dropouts.

I love studying school, however when I was fourteen years old, my parents settled my marriage. My schooling finished overnight. Our elders state that women do not need to study; they need to learn how to run a family and bring up children (Participant 2, Age 21).

There is only one high school for girls in our entire area, and it is very far away. Since we do not have secured transport also because sending teenage girls through male-dominated paths break up customary honor codes, majority of people simply pull their daughters out of school after primary grades (Participant 11, Age 29).

Discussion:

The above-mentioned results support the broader literature (e.g., Arif et al., 2025), approving that educational deprivation in tribal, Balochistan is dynamically contrived by tribal values that highlight home life and perceive a literate woman as a challenge to tribal influential orders.

Theme 3: Mental Toll and General Psychological Suffering

The growing burden of compliance to severe tribal customs, combined with a lack of individual liberty and emotive outlets, reveals stark mental loads among the respondents.

There is a continuous load on my chest. If I protest against prejudiced customs, I am considered as disobedient and bring disgrace to the family. If I remain silent, I gradually lose my mind inside. We tolerate all silently since there is no one to listen to us (Participant 5, Age 38).

Several young girls in our village undergo from stark depression and anxiety, however no one considers it sickness; they simply consider it as destiny. We own no counselors, no secure places sharing our agony, and speaking about psychological health is considered as a taboo (Participant 12, Age 45).

Discussion:

The survey of research discovers a serious public health crisis concealed under the surface of tribal protection. The subdual of emotive manifestation and the nonexistence of support systems compound the trauma imposed by general gender prohibition in tribal atmospheres.

Conclusion:

This case study of Mastung District shows that dangerous tribal custom use a very harmful effect on the social liberty, educational achievement, as well as psychological health of women. Entrenched in severe ancestral organizations and forced by accepted tribal values, these customs generally are continuously hampering the women movement, truncating the education, and inducing long-lasting mental suffering. To address these profoundly rooted inequalities needs a multi-pronged method that involves local societies while safeguarding human rights and state legitimate structures.

Recommendations:

1. The government should start socially delicate discourse circles including tribal chiefs, religious scholars, and local leaders for re-evaluating dangerous tradition and promoting broad-minded understandings of public honor that worth women education and safety.
2. The government must spend heavily in rural Balochistan by creating girls' middle and high schools, to provide safe female-staffed transport options, and to offer conditional cash transfers or stipends to families for encouraging girls to stay in school.
3. The government should incorporate nearby psychological well-being and counseling services into basic health units (BHUs) across Mastung District, specially tailored to support women experiencing household pressure and distress.
4. The government must reinforce the implementation of national acts about minimum age for marriage and women's judicial rights, while carrying out gender-sensitization training for local law implementation and managerial forms working in tribal regions.

References

- Ahmed, S., Khan, W., & Ali, R. (2024). Tradition, reconciliation, and the modern state: Reassessing the Jirga in Pakistan and Afghanistan. *Journal of South Asian Legal Studies*, 12(1), 44–68.
- Ardener, S. (Ed.). (2021). *Women and space: Ground rules and social maps*. Routledge.
- Arif, M., Shaoan, M. M. R., Ismail, A., & Okafor, M. U. (2025). A case study of patriarchy and girls educational exclusion in tribal Balochistan. *Discover Sustainability*, 6(1), 972.
- Ashraf, M., Bibi, S., & Hussain, T. (2023). customary justice and constitutional rights: The Jirga and fair trial in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, 15(2), 88–107.
- Frederick Littrell, R., & Bertsch, A. (2013). Traditional and contemporary status of women in the patriarchal belt. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 32(3), 310-324.
- Gupta, M., Madabushi, J. S., & Gupta, N. (2023). Critical overview of patriarchy, its interferences with psychological development, and risks for mental health. *Cureus*, 15(6).
- Hanzi, R. (2006). *Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of the Girl Child through Cultural Practices in Zimbabwe: A Human Rights Perspective*. Masters' Thesis, Unpublished. Pretoria: Centre University of Pretoria.
- Hasan, A., & Raza, M. (2009). *Migration and small towns in Pakistan* (Vol. 15). IIED.
- Iyanuolu, A.E. (2008). *The Challenge of Culture for the Rights of Women in Africa: A Critical Analysis of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*. Masters' Thesis, Unpublished. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Jones, N., Tefera, B., Stephenson, J., Gupta, T., Pereznieto, P., Emire, G., ... & Gezhegne, K. (2014). *Early marriage and education: the complex role of social norms in shaping Ethiopian adolescent girls' lives*. London: ODI.
- Kabeer, N. (1994). *Reversed realities: Gender hierarchies in development thought*. Verso.
- Khan, K., & Hassan, A. (2026). Coexistence or Conflict? The Jirga, Legal Pluralism, and the Reform of Customary Dispute Resolution in Pakistan. *ASSAJ*, 5(01), 4933-4942.
- Khan, S. (2008). *Everybody knows, but nobody knows*. Naz Foundation International.
- Mahata, A., & Singh, C. (2025). *A Theoretical Study on Socio-Economic and Familial Influences on Tribal Girls' Education*.
- Naqvi, S. A. (2025). Coexistence or conflict: The Jirga and alternative dispute resolution in Pakistan. *Social Science Research Network*.
- Nazar, N., & Zarkoon, S. M. (2026). Honor Killings As a Violation of Fundamental Rights: A Provincial Analysis of Sindh and Balochistan. *Review of Crime, Peace and Society*, 3(3), 313-327.
- Ramos, A. A. (2023). Considerations in designing trauma-focused interventions for displaced Afghan women. *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*, 3, 893957.
- Sinha, R., & Sapna, S. (2026). When Silence Becomes Survival the Psychology of Silence, The Politics of Voice, and the Imperative of Trauma-Responsive Practice for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in India. *International Journal of Special Education*, 41(8s), 473-489.
- Tamez, J. (2025). PATRIARCHY AND WOMEN'S AUTONOMY: EXAMINING ITS IMPACT ON RIGHTS. *Sociological Imagination*, 60(2), 96.
- Teamir, M., & Tilahun, A. (2010, August). Research Achievement and Experiences on Enset Food Products. In *Enset research and Development Experience in Ethiopia*. Proceeding from Enset National Workshop held in Wolkite, Ethiopia (pp. 19-20).