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CHILDREN PERCEPTION ON SECOND MARRIAGES AND STEPFATHER RELATIONSHIPS: EVIDENCE FROM KARACHI, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study shed light on them other's second marriage and its consequences on children in Pakistan. Stepfamilies are a progressively more common family form, observed by different challenges and opportunities with consequences for family functioning and youth well-being. At Present, there is a dearth of research on this topic. This study examines children's perception of their mother's second marriage and stepfather relationship quality. This research aimed to explore family patterns, family functioning, closeness, and stepfather relationships. Using a descriptive-analytic method and sociological perspective, this study tries to answer the question of how the mother's second marriage impacts childcare in Muslim families in the modern context. And how do children define and negotiate the stepfather's role? The data was collected from seventy-six (76) school-going children, under the age group 10 to 16 years. the researcher collected the data through a snowball sampling technique from three Public secondary schools located in the district center and two Private schools located in the district south, in Karachi with the help of a Questionnaire. Results indicate that free communication between growing-up children and their stepfather, illiteracy in the family, poverty, low amounts of arguing between mothers and stepfathers, parenting agreement, and gender have contributed significantly to the quality of the stepfather and children relationship. Finally, this study reveals that stepfather involvement, socioeconomic status, and religion are positively associated with the stepfather-child relationship.

Keywords: Second Marriages, Challenges, Stepfather, Relationship Quality, Childcare.

Introduction

Marriage is the basis for the formation of a family, especially in Pakistani society. Family is the basic social unit where the most precious individuals are knotted in relations like husband-wife, parent-child and relationships among siblings, gives a significant contribution in the personality development of individuals. It is the social structure that interconnected and interdependent on all family members and every single association come with its own set of duties, accountabilities and responsibilities which have to be completed exclusively with honesty.

Every relationship has its specific requirements. Similarly, the relationship between stepparents and stepchildren has its own set of responsibilities that is no variation as being a stepfather, even if the person is not biologically linked with their stepchildren but it does not mean that the stepfather is free from any responsibilities. It is essential to

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recognize that being a stepfather, the person has to raise, nurture, and coach someone else's child as your own and it is a greater challenge. The relationship between a stepparent and a stepchild is certainly complicated and complex.

Pakistani society has a blended society in terms of its socio-structural diversity. It has the most striking characteristic, representing different cultures that are vibrant and versatile at its provincial level like Sindhi culture, Punjabi culture, Balochi culture, Pukhtoon Culture and Gilgit culture. In the southern area of Pakistan, the language was different from that of the north and also written in a different style, but religion is the common factor that connects people concerning the nature of the social bond or the basis of social solidarity. The cultural or social influence stems from the religious guideline. In this situation, marriage is considered a cultural practice that is characterized as a religious obligation. According to S. R. Reiber, "religion and the family have been intimately related. Each has an influence upon the other-neither can be fully understood apart from the other."

From a western perspective, a significant number of researchers have examined the quality of family and relationship strength established by remarriage from the viewpoint of adults (Sweeney, 2010) and have been categorized by rapid changes in the behaviour of spouses, including increased divorces and partnership (Thomson, 2014). In this context, Coleman et al. (2000) assessed that many scholars see the interaction of children and their families as central to the functioning of the family, several scholars had called for greater attention to the perspective of children on family life, proximity and quality of life (Gamache, 1997; Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Sweeney, 2010).

However, the situation of remarriages with children in Pakistan is still unnoticed and there is a dearth of literature on this topic. Moreover, there is an acute shortage of availability of the National statistics on the subject cited above. More importantly, it is viewed that in Pakistani scenario the stepfamilies often been due to two most important reason: first, the death of a parent (usually the mother), second the parental divorce. Due to shortage of the research on this topic, it is useful to explore the prevailing situation about step-families in our society because of the effects that this type of family experiences and the children's perceptions on stepfather's role, family functioning and closeness have important inferences for the social scientist especially for the social workers for the family therapy or interventions.

Research Objectives

- to find out the effect of mother's remarriage on child's mental and physical health
- to identify the social relationships of children in newly formed stepfamilies in Pakistan.
- to find out the academic performance of those children who experienced stepfamilies in Pakistan.

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Research Questions

This study set outs to investigate the following;

1. How did children manage to survive in newly formed stepfamilies in Pakistan?
2. How strongly stepfathers are committed to supporting in nurturing and personality development of the children?
3. Does the mother's second marriage affect childcare?
4. How children describe and negotiate the stepfather 's role in newly formed stepfamilies?
5. What kind of difficulties did they face during their nurturing?

Literature Review

Family as Social System

It is one of the greatest blessings to have a family. It is the basic social unit where all members have a "close relationship either biological or through marriage. They depend on one another for the fulfilment of emotional and practical needs" (Hetherington et al 2003; Suheyl, 2014). The family formation has lain on the shoulder of both husband and wife, resultantly the responsibility of jubilant relationship among family members is associated with couple collaborations, understanding and companionship.

The basic concept of a Family may be explained as a special kind of a social construction that is linked by blood ties and/or marital ties to each other in its principles, and that has such a relationship that it implies "mutual expectancies" prescribing religion, strengthening law, and being internalized by the individual.

Family systems theory viewed "Family does not simply constitute a collection of people, but is defined by the role of family members, rules and connections"(Jensen and Shafer, 2013).

Marriage is a civil contract that rests on the capability of the contracting parties like husband and wife. According to Islamic law, it is important to have mutual consent and public declaration of the marriage contract as per the Shariah.

It is hard to grasp a simple and operable definition of a stepparent or stepfamily because it varies from culture to culture. However, a workable explanation for the reconstructed family can be described as "a family consisting of a husband and wife, at least one of who has been married previously and who has children from a former marriage". step families are established when a parent forms relationships with a partner who is neither the biological mother nor the father of a child or children (Ganong and Coleman, 2017) by cohabitation or remarriage (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).Reconstituted families have to face many unique problems as in this type of family stepfather and family

members did not have the opportunity to gradually move into their specific roles as have in a first family for instance differences in parental roles and sibling relations. The transition of the 'natural family' role to the analogous 'stepfamily' role is disturbed in nature as compared to the stereotype natural family.

Stepfamily formation can be an intense period of change generating disequilibrium and disharmony in a family. Roles, regulations, subsystems, resources and other aspects of family life may change drastically with family dissolution and reform by coexistence or remarriage with new partners (Jensen and Shafer, 2013).). According to the family systems perspective, "stepfamilies can succeed in balancing this with some degree of stability and adaptability and can be achieved and hooked on the quality of relationships between adults and family groups".

The family system in Pakistan is established on religious doctrines and rules. Pakistan is predominately a Muslim state. Under the certain situation, Islam has offered liberty for the termination of a marital union, cancelling the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage, and dissolving the bonds of matrimony between the parties but after following a specific process for the Divorce (or the dissolution of marriage). No doubt, Individuals get separated for valid justifications. While there were tremendous expansions in many separations that are legitimized or turn out to be all the more effectively accessible, that adjustment in the actual law is not even essentially the trigger.

An Islamic Perspective on Stepfather's Right and Responsibilities

As per the Islamic teachings**,** a stepparent has all the right to not interfere with their spouse's child and to maintain a distance. According to Islamic practices, to look after the children is the right and duties of biological parents. However, under some situation biological parent is absent or has passed away, then this situation is just like a bonus for the stepfather to take care of the stepchild. According to a hadith, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said:

> *"The one who cares for an orphan and myself will be together in Paradise like this," and he held his two fingers together to illustrate. (Bukhari 5659)*

Islamic practices encouraged to treat the stepchild in a similar way that someone could treat your children and there is a clear-cut guideline in Islamic principles to marry his stepdaughters. Allah Almighty said:

> *"And (*forbidden *to you for marriage are) your stepdaughters who reside with you, [born] of your wives of whom you have consummated the marriage"[Qur`an 4:23].*

So, it can be concluded that according to Islamic teaching, it is very much appreciated if someone is paying attention to the responsibility of orphans.

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Impact of Mother's Second Marriage on Children

Crucial challenges and societal changes hit every aspect of human lives like moral standards of living as well as also disturbed the marital relationships which sometimes adversely affected the reasons for marriage break down and remarriages of women due to divorce in many cases. This phenomenon is quite difficult for women in a male governing society. Within the frame of a patriarchal male dominating society like Pakistan, woman remarriage with children are not unheard of or as unusual as they were a few years from now, even in a culturally diversified society like Pakistan, but due to social change, this is no longer something uncommon or unique. In traditional society, women with children are not admired to think again for the second marriage due to stereotype resonates especially after the dissolution of marriage with daughters. As in the society, most of close relatives have their different evaluations and expressions on the divorce, while the concerned women had experienced the post-divorce adjustment problems at her life-stage transition for instance the relationship break and childcare assistance particularly the question of who is responsible for providing the financial support to her is regarded as an important issue demanding clarification within families. Within these types of circumstances, divorced or widowed women have to tolerate economic instability, poor parenting and reduced mental and physical health are all negative consequences.

Since divorced is a categorical status, its adverse results are considered to proceed up to an individual holds it. Social patterns bring up numerous issues about who kinfolk and what familial obligations have existed after separate from when the primary family separates (Aeby, Widmer, and De Carlo, 2014) and remarriage (Coleman and Ganong, 2000) with widowed stepparent's contracts continuously after the demise of the life partner (Noël-Mill operator, 2013). So, this trend is changing now but still, the rate of women marriages in Pakistan is lower than in developed countries. Currently, people have broadened their approaches and have begun to recognize woman second marriage as help rather than a source of embarrassment. In Pakistani culture, now this trend has very common in all social segments like the upper class, the middle of the lower class. Mostly this type of marriage agreement initiated by the decision taken by either the guardian or any other influential member of the family or the mother herself.

The second marriage of a mother is not an easy process for their children to cope with it easily. This can sometimes carry antagonistic feelings for the children. Sensations of misfortune, outrage, disarray, uneasiness, and numerous others, all may come from this change. It can leave kids feeling overpowered and sincerely delicate. Hence, the second marriage of a mother can be a difficult time for her children. No doubt, it cannot be an easy decision for her, as the mother's life is directly attached to her children coupled with other responsibilities. Not only for a woman but for both partners. In the case of a second marriage, the newlywed couple has to realize new ways of relating to each other and also, they have to learn or adopt new approaches for handling their children.

In contrary to this, the effects of a mother's second marriage on children can vary. Some children react in a natural and understanding way, while other children may struggle with the rough transition. Some children are talented, and they help their mother

in this process, but some children disturbed by this phenomenon. Step-father as a man who occupies one's father's place by marriage to one's mother. From children point of view, it is very hard to accept a stepfather as guardians for them. So, the impact on children varies from family to family, their parenting, their age, and behaviour. Grasping hands is hard for all individuals in the new structure of the family. For youngsters, attempt to understand the changing elements of the family may leave them occupied and befuddled. New relational intricacies, new house or day to day environment, schools, companions, and then some, may all have an impact.

Another important aspect of a mother's remarriages is related to financial issues as a matter of fact in any stepfamily, the stepfather has additional obligations to look after the normative financial responsibility of the children as well. A study (Smyth & Weston, 2005) had indicated that "expectations of stepfathers to provide financial support may be limited, particularly when the stepfather also has biological children to support".

In a study Painter & Levine (2004) noticed that "children from stepfamilies are less likely to go to college than children from intact or single-parent homes". This finding revealed that though the remarriage is unbroken and intact even then, stepchildren may perhaps limit or do not access to the income of stepfathers' financial resources. Thus Stepfathers willingness for the financial support of no biological children is vary from case to case as it also depends on the parent-child love bond quality.

Stepfamilies have been present all over human history and are 'often considered as challenging in most societies '(Amato, 1994). In the research of Iqbal, A. H., & Amjad. N. (2015) it was identified that' stepfamilies experience adjustment and relationship challenges. In a report of the United States National Center for Health Statistics, published in 1981, it was identified that in the USA, about one-half of all marriages were remarriages for at least one of the partners (White & Booth, 1985). More importantly, several of these re-wedded families include children from former matrimonies and these families with stepchildren represent 17.4% of the families with children under the age of 17 (Glick, 1989).

Gendered 'power geometries ' (Mahler and Pessar, 2001) have proposed that during the corpus of remarriages, however the examples of gendered society are amazingly muddled and changing, contingent upon the interconnecting and crossing of social areas, contrasting over geosocial scales and in various spaces. The male advantage may permit divorced people to remarry without breaking a sweat (Qureshi, 2016), while in an exploration Ellwood and Jencks (2004) had distinguished that financial perspective on marriage is viewed as a 'contract that can be commonly helpful to the two players' and they announced it as most compelling speculations of family development

In this context, other furthermost distinguished theories derive from Becker (1981), who theorized that individuals participate in a marriage contract insofar as they can benefit from each other's specializations, as is the case when men's wages exceed women's, or if women have a stronger preference for home creations. Moreover, Latané, (1996) had proposed through dynamic social impact theory and suggests that 'sharing of ideas between members of society and smaller groups perpetuate ideas forms the basis for

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the social construction of reality. Henceforth expectations about a new step-parent or step-sibling can be shaped by our popular narrative and societal biases'.

Research Method

This research aimed to explore family patterns, family functioning, closeness, and stepfather relationships and to investigate the special effects of the mother's second marriage in Muslim families on the child psycho, social and academic performances. This topic has a serious issue now due to the increasing number of divorces and second marriages in Pakistan. Stepfather-child relationship value is directly connected with family firmness and children's well-being. However, the literature offers a deficient comprehension of components that advance top notch stepparent-kid connections, particularly among socio-demographically different stepfamilies in Pakistan. This study is based on children's perspective and primarily focused on the influencing factors like social structure of the family, characteristics, parental subsystem qualities, and assets that may impact how kids see the nature of their stepfamily connections.

The data was collected from seventy-six (76) school-going children, under the age group 10 to 16 years from heterogeneous population and different socio-economic background. the researcher had collected the data through a snowball sampling technique and five secondary schools were selected for the data collection after getting permission for the data collection from school authorities, among them three Public secondary schools located in the district center and two Private schools located in the district south, in Karachi.

In this study, the researcher has collected the data only from those students whose religion is Islam, and their family has consisted of mothers' remarriage and the children having at least six-month living experiences with their stepfather.

The data was collected through face-to-face meeting in the school premises of the researcher with study respondents with the help of a questionnaire. The researcher must face certain restrictions as due to the COVID-19 the schools were opened for two days for the physical classes and following all precautionary measure for social distancing in social contacts. The data was collected from February 2021 to March 2021.

Results and Discussions

This research aimed to explore family patterns, family functioning, closeness, and stepfather relationships as perceived by school-going children under the age bracket of 10 to 16 years. A sample of seventy-six students, who have their stepfather has been selected from the school (both public & private) in different locations in Karachi, the megacity of Pakistan. A large majority of the respondent were girls (58%). By investigating children's perception of her mother second marriage and stepfather relationship quality, this study is descriptive. The researcher has used a descriptive-analytic method and sociological perspective for the study analysis. A profound demographic swing that has followed in the Pakistan family landscape is clear regarding

the woman with children and remarriages decisions, particularly for those with less education.

Table 01: Family type & Formation	
Family type	Percentage
1-Single	41%
2-Joint	69%
Total	100 %
Your Family Background 1-Urban	64%
2-Rural	46%
Total	100%
Children Current Living Arrangements	
1-With stepfather' house	63%
2-Within Maternal grandmother's house	10%
3- Within biological father's house	16%
4. With other relatives	11%
Total	100%
Type of stepfamily	
1-I am alone as stepchildren present in family	11%
2-I am residing with my biological Father & siblings	16%
3-I am living with my Stepsibling	43%
4-I am living with my Stepchild with biological siblings	30%
Total	100%

This study has provided insight into children perceptions on second marriages and stepfather relationships in different family situations. The current data highlights that the majority of the respondent are living in a joint family, system, from urban background and living with their stepfathers. Moreover, it is also indicated that majority of the children have to live accompany with step siblings (43%) whereas, almost (30%) had to live with biological ties. However, 16% of the respondent were stated that they had the experienced to live with stepfather's family and they left the family and living with their biological father. It is very obvious that, the children in stepfamilies are reluctant to express their feelings freely as they had experiences the transition from living with a single biological parent to living with a step-parent, and step-siblings can be an undesirable or unwanted for them. So the great change in living arrangement create mental disturbance if the children has to move with their mother in a separate or new house and live with new and non -biological father. During the process of data collection, it was felt by the researcher that the majority of the children perceived discomfort from mother's remarriage along with their shifting with mother as a 'package deal' (Aslam et al, 2015). Additionally, it was also noticed that the results of the study had showed that about 16% children had

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significantly lower level of happiness as they have to live with their biological father & siblings separately from their mother but they had gain the experience to live with their step father in past. Due to adjustment problems they had to join their biological Father & siblings again,

Table 02: Reason for Marriage	
Reason for Mother's Second Marriage	Percentage
Finances	12%
Cultural differences	6%
Religious differences	4%
Lack of understanding & Family conflicts	24%
Widowed or divorced	28%
Others	26%

In this study it was also revealed that a particular discourse on widowed women remarriage has been emerged due to financial instability, lack of social protection and common man's increase level of awareness about religious rules in Pakistani society. Besides this, refer to the matter about other important reasons for mother's remarriage, it was reported that fathers' illiteracy, family conflicts, extra marital affair affairs of real father with others were considered as an important reason for Mother's second marriage.

Table 03: Stepfather Relationship Quality			
Statements	Very much (%)	A little (%)	Not at all (%)
Warmth and helpful behaviors	48	32	20
How do you see your stepfather is taking care of your financial responsibilities just as a father	38	33	29
Criticism shouting and an argument	28	30	42
Experiencing new rules to follow in this family setup	48	28	24
Stepfather act as supportive and understanding.	35	34	31

The children perceived feelings on the step-father –child relationship quality has a whole mix of emotions. Majority of the children considered that their stepfather is supportive, wanting involved in warmth, helpful and used to take care of their whole financial affairs, while some respondent (28%) reported that the behavior is angry and insulting. Almost, 48% of the respondent had reported that they had to face challenges, including loyalty binds and had observed and flowed new rules to live with stepfather at their accommodation. A potential justification for these results is that children may want parents to be more involved in warmth (48%) and less involved in control i.e. criticism & shouting (28%).These results are quite different from the research of Falci (1997)

examined that children living in stepfamilies showed lower levels of well-being as compared to other family structures and stepparents were less involved, distant, and expressed less control, warmth and affinity.

Table 04: Educational Performance& Stepfathers obligations

Statement	Very much improved (%)	Sometime improved (%)	Not improved or decreased (%)
My stepfather attend all meetings whenever they are called by the educational institution.	21	43	36
I am not satisfied with my studies it is very difficult to understand material presented in the class	28	44	32
Obtain good grades, my progress is better	44	17	39
Feeling difficulties in class participation and maintain relationship with class fellows due to mother's second marriage	47	37	16
My stepfather help me in reading or homework assignments	26	54	20

It was noticed by the researcher that the children viewed the stepfather role in different ways. In this regard, gender role transformations contribute to modifications in capacity for instance girls are more detached and showed greater adjustment problems than boys. Overall, children reported positive feedback regarding stepfather's social functioning was reflected at quality relationship and it was greater in joint family setup. More importantly, it was also reported.

By 47% children's experienced difficulties in adjustment problems at their schools when faced with maladaptive patterns of stepfamily processes as strain in front of their class fellows or teachers.

In addition, family characteristics such as maternal education and her socioeconomic status had a significant impact on perceived obligation as stated by the children. Nearly, 62% children's mother had obtained the degree of Matric.

Stepfathers were perceived as having some obligation to support stepchildren. However, the level of obligation perceived Stepfathers' perceived obligations commitments fluctuated an extraordinary arrangement starting with one individual then onto the next. According to this study, children had distinct stepfamily experiences marked by unique challenges and strengths in quality relationships. About 21% had expressed that their stepfather are committed with their studies and visited the schools on regular basis, while merely 28% are not satisfied with their educational pedagogy. Past research has recognized how the presence of a stepparent means for children by tending to issues, for example, school execution, disguised issue conduct, externalized practices, and hazardous practices (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000)

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Recommendations and Conclusions

On the basis of above highlighted problems, it is recommended that the necessary legal restriction should be impose for easy divorce process. Moreover it is also recommended that in order to overcome the above noted challenges, the services of social worker ,family counselor can be hired to resolved the issues through family counseling, by rejecting the stereotypes and through nurturing mutual trust and acceptance.

It is suggested that a family oriented strategy need to adopt for better understand about gender structure, family structure, socio-economic status, literacy level of the family and other structures of inequality as they currently operate. Moreover, it is also suggested that scientifically considering how these axes of dominance intersect within stepfather-child relationship. It is recommended that some other research are needed to be conducted that will explain the stepfather's perception on the topic. Off course, the stepfather can also be supportive, caring for their stepchildren and viz-a viz. Keeping in view the changing scenario with respect to the impact of globalization, it is recommended that a proper database should be documented and provided to researchers on family formation and its dynamics.

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