



Social Marketing for Improving Women's Rights: The Case of Dowry in Pakistan

Hina Yaqub Bhatti, M. Mercedes Galan-Ladero,
and Clementina Galera-Casquet

Learning Objectives

1. To study how social marketing serves to improve women's rights and to fight against harmful cultural practices.
2. To discover the key role of UN Women Pakistan in raising awareness and promoting SDG 5 (Gender Equality) in a developing Muslim country.
3. To analyze the “*Stop Jahezkhori*” campaign, which has marked a turning point in the dowry culture in Pakistan, raising awareness in Pakistani society about the need to eradicate this ancestral practice.
4. To observe how with a subsequent campaign (“*Numaish*”) UN Women Pakistan continues its long-term commitment to SDG 5 in general and to the struggle for the abolition of dowry culture particularly.

1 Introduction

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century and especially in the last decade, globally, more girls have been able to go to school, fewer girls have been pressured by their families into early marriage, more women have gained access to leadership

H. Y. Bhatti

University of Extremadura, Badajoz, Spain

Riphah International University, Lahore, Pakistan

e-mail: hyaqubbh@alumnos.unex.es

M. M. Galan-Ladero (✉) · C. Galera-Casquet

University of Extremadura, Badajoz, Spain

e-mail: mgalan@unex.es; cgalera@unex.es

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positions, and laws have been reformed to develop gender equality. Despite these important advances, many challenges still remain in quite a few countries, where discriminatory social norms and laws remain in place, women continue to be undervalued in the workplace and in political leadership, child marriage is still practiced, and one in five girls and women aged 15–49 have reported physical or sexual violence (UN, 2021). Therefore, the implementation of new laws concerning women's equality (e.g., in all workplaces) and the elimination of any kind of violence against women in all countries of the world are necessary.

The United Nations (UN) considers that “*gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large*” (UN, 2021). A consequence of the lack of gender equality is violence against women. The United Nations (UN) defines “*violence against women*” as “*any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life*” (UN Women, 2022). This violence against women is often widespread and reflected in cultural practices such as female genital mutilation¹ or honor killing,² or stems

¹Female genital mutilation “*is a social norm, often seen as a necessary step to prepare girls for maturity and marriage. It is usually due to beliefs associated with gender and its relation to ‘appropriate sexual expression.’ It includes procedures intended to intentionally alter or cause damage to female genitalia for non-medical reasons. Both the practice and the motivations behind it vary from place to place. Female genital mutilation was first classified as violence in 1997 through a joint statement by WHO, UNICEF, and UNFPA*” (UN Women, 2022).

²Honor killing “*is an act of violence that involves killing a family member, often a woman or girl, on the grounds that the person in question has brought dishonor or shame to the clan*” (UN Women, 2022). The cause “*is usually related to sexual purity and alleged transgressions by female relatives*” (UN Women, 2022): for having relations with someone the parents or siblings do not approve of, for asking for a divorce, for engaging in sexual relations, or simply for dressing inappropriately (Ortiz, 2022). It is usually agreed upon within the family and, for this reason, several male family members are usually involved in the murder (Ortiz, 2022).

from illiteracy and deeply rooted customs such as child marriage,³ arranged marriage,⁴ compensation marriage,⁵ or dowry.⁶

The eradication of violence against women is a priority objective of the United Nations and, therefore, they have included it in the Sustainable Development Goals—SDGs (specifically in SDG 5 “Gender Equality”). Previously, in 2010, UN Women, the United Nations organization dedicated to promoting gender equality, defending women’s human rights and their empowerment, was created.⁷

This case study will focus on dowry as a specific example of a practice that generates violence against women and stems from the lack of gender equality.

2 Dowry

Marriage plays a vital role in human life. Singlehood, although accepted in some cultures, is a real tragedy in others because society considers it a failure.⁸ In the latter case, moreover, they are usually cultures where gender equality does not exist and superstition “*links the gestation of girls with bad luck, so the care and education of girls is very different from that enjoyed by boys of their age . . . And there are even families that punish the woman who gives birth to a girl!*” (Olazábal, 2014). It is in these cultures where dowry acquires a key importance and can become a turning point in people’s lives, sometimes creating too many problems in later married life.

The custom of dowry, defined as “*an amount of money, property or things (jewelry, cars, motorcycles, houses, appliances and electronic devices, furniture, etc.) that, by social convention, the bride’s family must give to the groom’s family*”

³ A child marriage is any marriage in which one or both spouses are under 18 years of age. It is considered a harmful practice and therefore constitutes a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN Women, 2022) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Vega-Gomez and Galan-Ladero, 2019). Although, according to UNICEF (2020), child marriages have decreased by 30% in recent years thanks to international pressure, it is still practiced in different areas of the world.

⁴ An arranged marriage is a union organized by the family (the families of both spouses reach an agreement for the celebration of the marriage—the spouses, especially the woman, do not participate in the choice).

⁵ A compensation marriage is a type of forced marriage. It consists of giving, in marriage, one or more women (usually girls) from the family of a man who has committed a crime (e.g., murder), as compensation to the offended family. The intention is to treat the girl badly in order to punish her entire family (e.g., by forcing her to do housework, wear old clothes, walk barefoot, live as the wife of an older man, and suffer all kinds of physical and emotional abuse as the daughter of a murderer). The decision is usually made by the village Tribal Council (this practice, although illegal, still occurs, for example, in some rural areas of Pakistan) - UN Women (2022).

⁶ Dowry is all money, goods, and rights contributed by the woman (or her family) to the marriage.

⁷ The United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, in July 2010 (UN, 2020). For more information, visit their website: <https://www.unwomen.org/en>

⁸ EFE (2007).

before the wedding⁹ and that are commensurate with the family's social standing,"¹⁰ is prevalent around the world. It is known by different names, depending on geographical and cultural locations¹¹: *Dahej*, in Hindi; *Varadhachanai*, in Tamil; *Jahez*, in Urdu and Arabic; *Joutuk*, in Bengali; *Jiazhuang*, in Mandarin, *Ceyiz*, in Turkish; *Dot*, in French; *Daijo*, in Nepali; *dote* or *ajuar*, in Spanish; or *Idana* (in several African countries). Its origin is due to the fact that, in many societies, women did not participate in inheritances. With the dowry, daughters were given a material basis,¹² thus guaranteeing their economic security and protection for the future. In this sense, it is very frequent in South Asian cultures (for example, in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka) that there is a great agreement before marriage. This agreement can affect and determine people's lives after the celebration of the engagement and the marriage itself.

Some people give dowry because they can afford it, but others demand dowry as if it were a reward (there are families who "sell" their sons and demand the money they have invested in their education). With the rise of consumerism, in some of these countries, dowry began to be seen as a means to get rich and obtain the comforts of a developed country.¹³ Consequently, the demands for marriage gifts increased,¹⁴ and weddings in style began to be demanded by the groom's family, in order to maintain status.

Therefore, dowry has become "*a practice that indebts families and works against women*" (Aceprensa, 1995). Dowry has led many families to ruin. Middle- and lower-class families have taken out loans for their daughters'/sisters' weddings in order to meet the dowry demands of the groom's family. To repay these loans afterward, they live a life of slavery (which may even extend to the next generations).

Due to these demanding and greedy dispositions, it is common for the groom's family to delay the wedding, maintaining this situation even over the years. Thus, when the bride's marriageable age has passed, the engagement is broken off and the girl is left with the only possibility of marrying a divorced or widowed man. Because of the high dowry demands and, consequently, the inability to marry, many young women of middle and lower classes commit suicide; in other cases, brides are harassed by the groom's family and are even attacked with acid or burned because they cannot meet the dowry demands. Or, even after the marriage, the woman is abused or even killed if her family does not continue to pay more money or hand over more property to her husband ("*for marriage-related expenses or as confirmation of a certain social status*"—EFE, 2007).

⁹ Although it is usually the bride's family who delivers the dowry to the groom and his family, some examples can be found throughout history in which the groom was the one who made the payment (for example, in some Germanic peoples of the Middle Ages) - Wikipedia (2022).

¹⁰ By Rojas (2008) and Olazábal (2014).

¹¹ Harrell and Dickey (1985), Comaroff and Roberts (1986).

¹² Aceprensa (1995).

¹³ Aceprensa (1995).

¹⁴ Olazábal (2014).

As a result of harassment, blackmail, extortion, humiliation, mistreatment, and torture (physical and/or psychological), suicide and murder, the payment of dowry has been prohibited in some of these countries where it is an integral part of their culture, or laws related to this practice have been passed. Thus, for example, in India, in 1961, the so-called Dowry Prohibition Act was passed, which applies when a married woman, within the first seven years of marriage,¹⁵ dies in strange circumstances (the accused, usually the husband, “*is considered guilty until proven innocent*”—EFE, 2007). In the 1980s, the penal code was tightened in this country, with the intention of reducing violence against women within marriage (and which, in many cases, is linked to the nuptial payment).¹⁶

However, these prohibitions have not ended this custom; on the contrary, it is still something very common in all social classes and castes, it is still present in the family tradition,¹⁷ and the law is not enforced.¹⁸ Dowry has simply been disguised as “gifts” for the groom’s relatives or it has become a “moral obligation” of the bride’s family to have to pay the wedding expenses¹⁹ (EFE, 2007). This is because there is still a widespread belief in these countries that the woman is worth less and must pay the husband to support her.

In addition, the request for the dowry is made verbally (so that there is no record of the demands and thus they cannot be punished by law) and after the announcement of the engagement (so that the bride’s family suffers more pressure to pay it).²⁰ In cases where the bride or her family have decided to break the engagement because of this, they have suffered the rejection of society (it is usually thought that the cancellation of the marriage engagement is because “*the bride has some serious defect or problem that has led her fiancé to repent,*” being already marked forever and, practically, with no possibility of re-engagement and marriage. . .).

Moreover, in these countries, there is strong corruption in the system, which does not protect women who report suffering from this practice,²¹ which generates a sense of impunity among families who demand dowry.²² “*Many dowry murders (especially when the woman is burned alive) are difficult to prove, because the family registers it as an accident or suicide, leaving that death in oblivion . . .*” (Olazábal, 2014). What really happens is that the husband’s family bribes the police to declare

¹⁵This period was set because “*it is considered the time period in which women are most vulnerable to dowry-related abuse*” (EFE, 2007).

¹⁶Olazábal (2014).

¹⁷Olazábal (2014).

¹⁸Rojas (2008).

¹⁹In India, for example, wedding expenses can be double or triple the annual per capita income, because they include, in addition to the wedding reception, jewelry, dresses, and material goods for the groom and the groom’s family (EFE, 2007).

²⁰Rojas (2008).

²¹Rojas (2008).

²²Olazábal (2014).

an accident what is really a murder, and only a few cases have been taken to court and even fewer have been solved.²³

3 Contextualization of the Case: The Situation in Pakistan

3.1 Violence against Women in Pakistan

Pakistan's population has increased rapidly in recent decades (243 million people in 2022).²⁴ As a result, Pakistan has become the fifth most populous country in the world and the second largest country in South Asia. But it is also one of the lowest ranked for gender equality in the world²⁵ and one of the most dangerous for women to live in.²⁶ However, recently, different provinces in Pakistan have received different responses of violence against women (Table 1).

Women's subjection to violence in Pakistan is due to their dependence on male family members and the submission they owe them, as well as the high percentage of illiteracy among the female population, especially in rural areas.²⁷ In addition, they think that domestic violence is a women's problem.²⁸

However, the police system has also slowed down the process of combating violence, as the police put obstacles in the way so that, in the end, the victim gives up and does not report. Consequently, women do not report because (1) such reporting could, in terms of their marital life, play a determining role in ruining their future; or (2) because of people's backwardness (it would be thought to be a disgrace to society). This leads to the fact that almost 56% of women do not seek any help after suffering physical and sexual violence.²⁹ In turn, the police and the judicial system are blamed for impeding the progress of these cases and, consequently, for women's loss of confidence in the police, which pushes them not to go even to file a

²³ Aceprensa (1995).

²⁴ According to CIA (2022). In addition, more than one-third (38%) of this population is under age 15, and the fertility rate is high (women in Pakistan have an average of 3.6 children)—National Institute of Population Studies—NIPS (2019).

²⁵ Asia Pacific. UN Women (2020).

²⁶ Aparicio-Merideño (2021).

²⁷ According to the CIA (2022), the average female illiteracy rate in the country is 53.5%, although there are large differences between urban and rural areas.

²⁸ According to National Institute of Population Studies—NIPS (2019), “about 4 in 10 ever-married women (42%) and men (40%) agree that a husband is justified in beating his wife for at least one of the following reasons: if she burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children, or refuses to have sex with him. Both women and men are most likely to agree that wife beating is justified if the wife argues with him or goes out without telling him.” Thus, “more than 1 in 4 ever-married women (28%) have ever experienced physical violence since age 15,” with the husband being the most common perpetrator of physical violence (80%) and sexual violence (78%).

²⁹ According to National Institute of Population Studies—NIPS (2019).

Table 1 Responses of different provinces of Pakistan to violence against women

Province	Responses
Punjab	<p>The provincial government of Punjab, the largest province in the country, has taken some concrete steps in legislation, as women represent 49% of Punjab's population, with a life expectancy of 62.2 years, a literacy rate of 52%, and a labor force participation rate of 27.8%.</p> <p>Punjab's legislation includes protection against harassment of women in the workplace, the Punjab Land Revenue Act, the Punjab Women's Fair Representation Act, the Punjab Women's Status of Women Act, and the Punjab Women's Protection Authority Act.</p> <p>The Punjab assembly has also passed the early child marriage restriction law to reduce child marriages.</p> <p>To develop female human capital, it is necessary to work for the welfare of women and safeguard their rights as a vulnerable and marginalized group in society.</p>
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	<p>It is the third largest province by population. In this province, 49.32% are women. It has a low literacy rate (50%).</p> <p>After two unsuccessful attempts by the previous two governments, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence against Women (Protection and Prevention) Bill was finally passed. However, the passage of the bill has only been the beginning of something very complex, as the real struggle is to enforce it through the administration of the day.</p>
Baluchistán	<p>It is the fourth largest province in Pakistan. It has a literacy rate of 16%, with a total female population of 47.47%.</p> <p>The Balochistan Assembly has passed a bill for the women of Balochistan (the Balochistan Harassment of Women at Workplace Bill, 2015). However, despite its passage, efforts still need to be made to create awareness of their rights among women.</p>
Sindh	<p>It is the second largest province in Pakistan. The population of women in Sindh is 47.93%, with a literacy rate of 43%.</p> <p>The Sindh Assembly has passed a bill called "The Sindh Commission on the Status of Women" in 2015, with a vision to provide equality, dignity, and fearless contribution to the society. Thus, women can advance their lives and also contribute to the community.</p>

Source: The News (2018), Pakp (2020), Dawn (2016), and Tribute (2018)

complaint. This results in women not disclosing to anyone and becoming emotionally and psychologically ill.

3.2 UN Women Pakistan

SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been welcomed in Pakistan and initiatives have been undertaken that *"have included the establishment of national and provincial commissions on the status of women (which are led by women) and contribute to legislation and policies for women's empowerment and gender equality"* (UN Women, 2020).

Table 2 Muniba Mazari

Muniba Mazari is an advocate for UN Women’s “*Step It Up for Gender Equality*” initiative and other campaigns promoting women’s empowerment.

Muniba Mazari said, “*I am a strong supporter of UN Women and the role we have to end gender discrimination, work towards gender equality and make it a lived reality by 2030. This is the time to empower women and girls because when a woman is empowered, the whole generation is also empowered.*”

Source: Asia-Pacific. UN Women (2020)

UN Women Pakistan appointed Muniba Mazari³⁰ (Table 2) as its first national ambassador “*to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*” (UN Women, 2020). This announcement was made in Islamabad, Pakistan, during an event to mark the end of the “*16 days of activism against gender-based violence.*”

3.3 Dowry Culture in Pakistan

Pakistan is an Islamic country and dowry has become important and necessary for all social classes. In Pakistan, some castes do not marry their son to a girl until her family has not given them, in addition to money, a car, an expensive motorcycle, electronic devices, jewelry, or any other good they have previously requested.

The age-old practice of dowry in Pakistani culture, so ingrained in their culture, has made several laws against dowry dysfunctional, causing 95% of families to continue to manifest dowry. There are 2000 dowry-related deaths per year in Pakistan (Shah, 2016), the highest in South Asia, and annual rates increase by 2.45 per 100,000 women, due to dowry-related violence (Daily Times, 2018).

A bill on dowry and marriage gifts (restricting, though not banning them)³¹ was passed in Pakistan in 2008. Moreover, according to the law, public display of dowry and demand for dowry is illegal. However, despite this law, the demand for dowry and material goods by the groom’s family from the bride’s family is still common today.

The dowry issue is one of Pakistan’s greatest challenges. Today, a growing number of for-profit and nonprofit organizations are working to eliminate the dowry culture in this country. UN Women is one of the nonprofit organizations that is leading this fight and has conducted successful campaigns against dowry in Pakistan. The most prominent has been the 2018 campaign (“*Stop Jahezkhori*”—“*Stop dowry mongering,*” in English), carried out by the agency BBDO Pakistan on behalf of UN Women Pakistan, and which has marked a turning point in the attitude toward dowry by Pakistani society. Subsequently, in 2021, another campaign also had a strong impact and continued the debate on dowry.

³⁰Muniba Mazari is a Pakistani artist, writer, singer, and activist (UN Women, 2020).

³¹This bill states that dowry expenses should not exceed the limit of PKR 30,000, while the total value of the bride’s gifts should not exceed PKR 50,000.

4 “Stop Jahezkhorī” Campaign

In an effort to eradicate the social evil of dowry and abolish it, UN Women Pakistan launched a campaign in 2018 entitled “*Stop Jahez Khori*” (meaning “*Stop Dowry Mongering*,” in English, and seeking to “*stop the practice of dowry*”)—Figs. 1 and 2, aimed at people involved in the practice of accepting dowry (its target audience was men and grooms’ parents), although it was also intended to reach out to Pakistani society as a whole.

“*Jahez Khori*” is a new term in the Urdu language that was created for the campaign as an insult to stigmatize the practice of dowry and change attitudes and behavior toward it. With this term, the campaign message was intended, rather than reminding men of the existing law against dowry (which would not be enough), to appeal to their honor (the most important asset for Pakistani man), to their self-respect. In other words, it sought to connect the message with the consequence of losing self-respect, rather than of breaking the law.³² The main objective of this campaign was, therefore, to trigger negative perceptions among people about this practice and to shame those who demand dowry by insulting them (“*anybody demanding dowry from hereon would be known as a dowrymonger*”—BBDO, 2021). In short, the aim was to change people’s mentality and, above all, their behavior regarding dowry.

UN Women Pakistan started the #StopJahezKhorī campaign on December 19, 2018, coinciding with Pakistan’s winter wedding season.³³ It was featured by the actor Ali Rehman (considered the most desired bachelor in the country at the time), who, surprisingly, announced on social networks (specifically, on Instagram) that he was getting married and that he would like to introduce his girlfriend to everyone the next day, on the morning show on GEO TV. The live broadcast of the program was followed by millions of people, who were eager to know what the most envied woman of the moment was like. But instead of showing off his bride, Rahman focused on opening a wedding palanquin to display the gifts of the dowry (which included everything from a sewing machine to car keys, kitchen gadgets, and jewelry).


This performance aims to show how the dowry culture measures the value of the bride only in terms of material goods. In addition, it encouraged discussion about how the expectation of a dowry can add financial pressure, psychological stress, and threats to the bride’s family. The program also broadcast a special recorded message from the Chairman of the Islamic Ideology Council, Dr. Qibla Ayaz, in which he said that “*Islam categorically discourages the practice of demanding or expecting a dowry from the bride’s family . . . Islam strictly forbids the flaunting of wealth, extravagant spending on weddings and other ceremonies, and burdening the bride’s family with demands for material goods*” (UN Women, 2020).

³² BBDO (2021).

³³ Pakistan’s winter wedding season covers the months of October, November, and December.


unwomenpakistan
14.1 mil seguidores

Jahezkhori





/dʒʌheɪz 'kɔːri/ 

verb

The customary practice of asking for and accepting durable goods, cash, and real or movable property, from the bride's family by the groom's, as a condition for the marriage.



Ver más en Instagram

500
unwomenpakistan

#StopJahezkhori

Do you know how we coined this term?

Just like we use the names for practices such as 'Rishwat Khori' 'Muft Khori', we are introducing Jahezkhori for those who ask for dowry or show entitlement to the gifts received by a bride.

There is a need to call for an end to this practice as it also leads to violence against women and girls. The most common forms of dowry-related violence are emotional abuse, domestic violence, acid throwing, stove-burning, and other forms of violence.




Fig. 1 “Stop Jahez Khori” Campaign. Source: UN Women Pakistan/BBDO (2020)



Fig. 2 Different images from the campaign. Source: UN Women Pakistan/BBDO (2020)

Following the show, UN Women coordinated a series of posts from the “Stop Jahez Khori” campaign and its hashtag #StopJahezkhori by influencers, bloggers, celebrities, and leading women’s rights activists and experts on major social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). They challenged the dominant narratives about the practice of dowry, appealed to critical thinking, and pointed out its serious and harmful consequences. Several videos of the campaign were also uploaded to YouTube.³⁴

For this campaign, henna stencils³⁵ were designed (Fig. 3), which were then printed on posters (500 individually created posters by henna artists were illustrated) and distributed and strategically placed in high-traffic areas in general, and in wedding shops, in particular. Special labels were also designed for retail stores to

³⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ok3a7M6J6dA>

³⁵In South Asian weddings, happiness and fertility are often symbolized by henna designs placed on the bride’s palms.



Fig. 3 Symbol of the campaign. Source: UN Women Pakistan/BBDO (2020)

display on items typically purchased for dowry: furniture, electronics, jewelry, etc. It was also prepared as an image that could be downloaded from the website.

The country's celebrities (women and men),³⁶ civil society activists, influencers, and government officials, in addition to many citizens, put these henna stencils on their hands and displayed them as a symbol of solidarity and support for the UN Women's campaign (Fig. 4).

The campaign set social media on fire and became a hot topic in Pakistan during the wedding season, sparking a huge community debate about dowry and its effects. In that time, 495 million impressions of the campaign symbol were made (UN Women, 2020). Ultimately, this campaign was highly successful and recognized, not only nationally (all major national news channels featured the

³⁶Many stars and celebrities, such as Iqra Aziz, Ahmed Ali Butt, Osman Khalid Butt, Yasir Hussain, Sana Javed, Juggan Kazim, Ayesha Omar, Ushna Shah, Haroon Shahid, Adnan Siddiqui, and others, took a stand against this practice and tried to raise awareness about how harmful it is and how it ruins the lives of millions of people.



Fig. 4 Pakistani personalities collaborating with UN Women. Source: UN Women Pakistan/BBDO (2020)

campaign in the news), but also internationally (world’s leading media such as BBC, Gulf News, etc., echoed the campaign and valued its importance in generating debate on the subject). It has also won several international awards.³⁷

This campaign was the beginning of a cultural shift (some parents even went so far as to cancel their daughters’ weddings if someone demanded a dowry), although the most shocking result of the campaign was the statement made by the Islamic Council (the most influential body in Pakistan) that forced dowry is against Islam. Several clerics joined in the condemnation, making dowry not only a loss of self-esteem, but also a completely un-Islamic practice (and, consequently, a sin).

Despite the widely recognized success of the campaign, some criticisms were also made. Some pointed out that sometimes the bride’s family also demands material goods from the groom or his family; or that many families only want to marry their daughters to wealthy grooms. And many people commented on their personal experience with dowry pressure (UN Women, 2020).

³⁷ In September 2019, at the Spikes Asia Festival of Creativity in Singapore, creative agency BBDO Pakistan, which had produced the campaign for UN Women, took home the Grand Prix for Good award. The campaign also won the Glass Spike award because it “*aimed to positively impact entrenched gender inequality, imbalance or injustice*” (Asia Pacific. UN Women, 2020). In 2021, it also won the prestigious Identity Design Award, at the 2021 ADA-Architecture Design Art Awards (BBDO Pakistan, 2021).

5 The Road to Change: From “Stop Hahezkhori” Campaign to “Numaish” Campaign

In 2021, the UN Women Pakistan launched a second campaign entitled “Numaish,” with one of Pakistan’s fashion designers, Ali Xeeshan. As in the previous campaign, this new one was intended to trigger negative perceptions among people about the practice and shame dowry-seekers, also improving gender equality and women’s rights.

The campaign kicked off with the launch of the “Numaish” collection, designed by Ali Xeeshan, at the “Pantene HUM Bridal Couture Week 2021.” The staging was intended to highlight the sad and harsh reality of dowry culture, in an artistic way (a model, dressed as a young traditional bride, pulled a cart full of gifts, with her adult groom sitting on it—Fig. 5), but which greatly surprised the audience. The presentation ended with a note urging people to take an oath against dowry. The shocking photos of this campaign were subsequently uploaded to social media (#StopDowryMongering #NumaishNaLagao #JahezkhoriBandKaro”) and videos were also posted.³⁸

This second campaign created more controversy than the first. While many people applauded this collaborative initiative and the social message behind it, others criticized it as hypocritical and the result of regressive practices. Some even went so far as to say that “*the opinion of anyone dealing with Pakistan’s opulent wedding business had no right to criticize the dowry culture*” (Jain, 2021). They felt that the designers themselves are part of the problem because the luxurious dresses they create are very expensive³⁹ (“*parents have to save for years before they can afford to buy wedding dresses from such designers and there is constant competition*”). Others felt it was simply an advertising strategy using social issues to draw public attention to the newly launched luxury collection. Anyway, this second campaign has reinforced this awareness against the dowry requirement.


6 Conclusion and Final Thoughts

For centuries, dowry has existed in Pakistani society. It has been practiced by all types of people, irrespective of caste or educational background (it is not only practiced by illiterate people, educated people also engage in it). Therefore, UN Women Pakistan has focused on discouraging the practice of forced dowry and related violence.

The dowry system is acceptable if it is considered as a voluntary gift given by the bride’s parents to the prospective husband. But if the groom’s parents demand



³⁸The video was posted by Xeeshan and directed by Abdullah Haris. It features a young bride pulling a cart, heavily loaded, along with her groom sitting in it and she is barely able to move it. The post read, “*It’s time to put an end to this overburdened tradition!*”.

³⁹The main expense of marriage is the bride’s and groom’s dress and the marriage ceremony.

 UN Women Pakistan 
February 7, 2021 · 

UN Women Pakistan supports NUMAISH - a pledge against dowry by Ali Xeeshan Theater Studio .
Share this powerful message and join us to #StopDowryMongering
#NumaishNaLagao #JahezkhoriBandKaro
UN Women UN Women Asia and the Pacific



  693 117 comments 787 shares


 Like  Comment  Share

Fig. 5 Second campaign (“Numaish”) #StopDowryMongering #NumaishnaLagao #DowryFree-Pakistan. #SayNoToDowry #CapitalismThrives. Sources: UN Women Pakistan (2021)

money as “dowry” to get married, that is completely wrong, unethical and, moreover, illegal.

After these kinds of campaigns against dowry culture, which have been most effective through digital platforms and social networks, people have learned about this practice, its effects (which include violence and abuse, and can even lead to the bride being thrown acid or burned if her family does not give the dowry; or the murder of the wife, if the family does not continue to give more money or property after the wedding; or selective abortion and female infanticide, so as not to be “burdened” with daughters—they are considered a burden, rather than an asset—and have to pay their dowry when they reach marriageable age; or the suicide of the bride or her relatives, unable to pay the dowry). All these constitute some of the most detrimental dowry-related evils perpetrated against women.

After the UN Women’s first campaign in Pakistan, the dowry system and the demand for dowry by the groom’s family became an illegal procedure in Pakistan. Thanks to this campaign, the provisions and acts against dowry in Pakistan or in the global legal code have mainly become more effective.

Due to this first awareness campaign and the laws against the dowry system, the number of suicides of women due to this system was reduced, as well as the number of child marriages at very young ages (many families used to marry off their daughters as children to avoid a higher dowry later on).

The campaign “*helped disprove the misperception that the practice of dowry is lawful by religion*” by being endorsed by the Council of Islamic Ideology, which declared this practice of dowry as completely un-Islamic (UN Women, 2018). The second campaign has continued the line of the first and has continued to reinforce this awareness.

However, much remains to be done. Changing people’s mindset, attitude, and behavior in the face of deeply entrenched practices in society takes time, even generations. That is why social marketing is key to achieving this change.

7 Discussion Questions

Question 1—What do you think about dowry? Do you agree/disagree with this practice?

Question 2—How is the situation in your country? Is it like Pakistan, or is it completely different? If similar, has any action been taken? And if so, what kind?

Question 3—What other social marketing campaigns could have been carried out? Suggest some actions that could have been taken.

Question 4—Do you think it will be possible to eradicate the practice of dowry, especially in countries where it is deeply rooted and part of their culture? Why?

Teaching/Classroom Notes

Synopsis

UN Women Pakistan has been the first organization in this Asian country to focus on SDG 5 “Gender Equality.” In 2018, UN Women Pakistan launched a campaign against dowry culture, entitled “Stop Jahezkhori” (“Stop Dowry Mongering,” in English), which means “to stop the practice of dowry demands.” Thousands of people, women and men, wore a henna stamp on the palm of their hand, designed specifically as a symbol for this campaign. It ran from December 2018, coinciding with the wedding season in Pakistan.

The main objective of this campaign was to trigger negative perceptions about the practice of dowry and stigmatize it. Although the campaign specifically targeted those who continue to ask for dowry (appealing to their honor), it was also aimed at Pakistani society as a whole, to change attitudes and, above all, people's behavior toward this long-standing—but very harmful and damaging—custom, which, although illegal, is still in full force today.

Given the great impact this campaign had, and the significant results obtained, later, in 2021, UN Women Pakistan launched a second campaign, entitled “Numaish,” continuing with the same objective: “to trigger negative perceptions among people about the practice and shame dowry-seekers, also improving gender equality and women's rights.”

With these campaigns, UN Women Pakistan seeks to ensure that the dowry culture will soon be abolished, and the long-desired gender equality can be achieved in the country, guaranteeing women's rights and empowering them.

Potential Audience and Instructor's Material

This case has been developed for use in the framework of Marketing Management courses in general and Social Marketing seminars particularly. The potential audience for this case study is twofold:

- Undergraduate students pursuing degrees in Business Administration or Marketing.
- Graduate students pursuing MBA and Masters in Marketing, Corporate Social Responsibility, or Social Marketing; or Executive Programs and Seminars (about Marketing in general and Social Marketing particularly).

Learning

1. To study how social marketing serves to improve women's rights and to fight against harmful cultural practices.

2. To discover the key role of UN Women Pakistan in raising awareness and promoting SDG 5 (Gender Equality) in a developing Muslim country.
3. To analyze the “Stop Jahezkhori” campaign, which has marked a turning point in the dowry culture in Pakistan, raising awareness in Pakistani society about the need to eradicate this ancestral practice.
4. Observe how with a subsequent campaign (“Numaish”) UN Women Pakistan continues its long-term commitment to SDG 5 in general and to the struggle for the abolition of dowry culture particularly.

Time Frame for Class Discussion

This case can be taught in one session of 60–100 minutes, depending on the number of students participating in the discussion activities, as well as the previous work that students have done before class.

Suggested Discussion Questions

Question 1—What do you think about dowry? Do you agree/disagree with this practice?

Question 2—How is the situation in your country? Is it like Pakistan, or is it completely different? If similar, has any action been taken? And if so, what kind?

Question 3—What other social marketing campaigns could have been carried out? Suggest some actions that could have been taken.

Question 4—Do you think it will be possible to eradicate the practice of dowry, especially in countries where it is deeply rooted and part of their culture? Why?

Analysis

Answer to Question 1—What do you think about dowry? Do you agree/disagree with this practice?

This is an open-ended question for students to give their opinion on this topic and reflect on this practice.

Answer to Question 2—How is the situation in your country? Is it like Pakistan, or is it completely different? If similar, has any action been taken? And if so, what kind?

This question is also open-ended. The answer will depend on the culture and country to which the student belongs. Comparisons can be made between countries in the face of this practice.

Answer to Question 3—What other social marketing campaigns could have been carried out? Suggest some actions that could have been taken.

This question is open-ended, so that students can consider other possible actions that could be taken in response to this practice and its possible effects.

Answer to Question 4—Do you think it will be possible to eradicate the practice of dowry, especially in countries where it is deeply rooted and part of their culture? Why?

This question is also open-ended, so that students can reflect on the ease/difficulty of changing attitudes and behaviors that are strongly linked to a particular culture or cultural practice that is deeply rooted in society.

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