

Informal Social Networks and Mate Selection: Retrospective Experiences of Divorced Individuals

Kiran Ikram^a, Tayyaba Sohail^b, Ahmed Usman^c, Mudasar Ali Nadeem^d,
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Abstract

The present study explores the retrospective experiences of divorced individuals in the mate selection process in Pakistan. In the socio-cultural, traditional, and collectivistic context of Pakistani society, considering the importance of the mate selection process in marriage and divorce, as well as the role of informal social networks in mate selection, is an emerging yet overlooked phenomenon. Informal social networks, particularly among close and extended family members, provide support in times of need as a benefit of adhering to the network's obligations. They can also withdraw this support from any individual if they deviate from the social norms regulating the network. Thus, family and informal networks provide and control choices, opinions, resources, and decisions regarding marriage. Hence, an individual is highly dependent on them when making life decisions and the structure provides or withdraws support accordingly. The study examines the role of informal social networks in the mate selection process and their gender dynamics, focusing on divorced individuals to explore the navigation between personal desires and collective obligations within the context of power and gender dynamics. The methodological stance is purely qualitative, involving 14 in-depth interviews until saturation is reached. The data has been analysed thematically. The study sample was recruited through purposive sampling. The study's findings illustrate the manifestation of gender and power dynamics in the process of mate selection through informal social networks, indicating

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different privileges and opportunities for both genders. The narratives of the respondents also reflected that the intervention of the extended family sometimes leads to mismatches, based on materialistic needs, and these factors play an essential role in relation breakups and divorce. The study highlights the need to re-evaluate the framework of decision-making in marriages as a step towards stable marriages.

Keywords: social networks, mate selection, marriage, divorce, divorced individuals & gender dynamics.

1. Introduction

Marriage is a fundamental social institution that takes on diverse cultural patterns, modes of communication, and interactions. Marriage is a significant, sacred, and legally binding relationship in various cultures that contributes to the advancement of human society (Moshtagh et al., 2013; Mushtaq et al., 2021). It is the most substantial and long-term relationship, characterized by love, care, and mutual commitment, and is associated with increased life satisfaction, social well-being, and emotional well-being (Eslami et al., 2018; Aman et al., 2019). A good marital relationship is based on wise and appropriate mate selection, which is why the mate selection process plays a crucial role in a successful and happy marriage. The process of choosing a mate is culturally defined, differs among societies, and is influenced by several attributes, including physical appearance, class, sect, health, age, education, religion, social status, and occupation (Alvi et al., 2014; Maliki, 2009; O'Neil, 2006; Todosijevic, 2003).

Marriage can also be viewed as a shift in a new social identity, which may bring privileges, including improved self-worth, better social status, respect, and a strong bond of intimacy (Scott, 2000). In Pakistani culture, marriage is not just seen as an association or contract between individuals, but it is also considered the unification of two families. Therefore, decisions related to marriage are taken at the familial level and individuals are discouraged to taking these decisions independently of their families. Therefore, love marriages are stigmatized as a non-religious and deviant act. A professional matchmaker is approached by the family elders, who share their requirements for marrying their child to the perfect match. Endogamy is strictly observed in Pakistan; therefore, special emphasis is placed to class, caste, and sect in the matchmaking process. Assortative mating is considered a key factor in achieving to successful and happy marriage. (Aman et al., 2019). The possibility of a happy married life is minimized in case of inappropriate or non-assortative mating by causing

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marital conflict, instability, breakups, and increasing divorce rates (Parker et al., 2022; Abdullah, 2011).

Mate selection, a fundamental aspect of human societies, is shaped by cultural, economic, religious, and familial influences (Islam, 2021). Marriage in South Asia is not just a union between two individuals, but an alliance between families (Ghimire et al., 2006; Netting, 2010), where collective family choices prevail over individual ones. Arranged marriages have been historically prevalent in South Asian cultures, where parents and extended family members play pivotal roles in selecting suitable spouses (Nanda, 2005). Mate selection is a universal phenomenon; however, the process of mate selection may vary culturally around the globe. Contrary to Western societies, where the selection of a partner is often an individual's own choice (van Zantvliet et al., 2014), in Pakistani society, parents and other family members play a significant role in the process of selecting a spouse or mate. It is believed that marriage is not only a bond between two individuals, but also between two families (Timmerman et al., 2009). Various factors play a vital role in spouse selection; the important factors included in marital selection are the economic status of the spouses, physical attributes, social prestige, and position, along with a homogamy perspective (Alvi et al., 2014). In Pakistani Culture, physical attractiveness is given high weight when it comes to choosing a female spouse. Similarly, the fiscal position or status of a male spouse is preferred when selecting a life partner (Islam, 2021; Alvi et al., 2014; Farooq & Arshad, 2017).

In South Asia, a region comprising countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and others, despite shifting from traditional to modern, high-tech, and globalized worlds, the prevailing norms of the matchmaking process remain traditional. The family remains active and the ultimate decision-maker in the process (Islam, 2021). Studies reveal that arranged marriages provide a sense of security and familial continuity (Banerjee et al., 2019). However, recent shifts toward “semi-arranged” or “love-cum-arranged” marriages, particularly in urban areas, illustrate changing attitudes. In these cases, young people have some degree of autonomy in selecting their partners, although family approval remains important (Ghimire et al., 2006). This hybrid model reflects the balancing act between tradition and modernity in South Asia.

Patriarchal structures are influential in determining gender roles in mate selection. Women are less autonomous and more dependent on the choice of their male family members in selecting a mate (Desai & Andrist, 2010), particularly in rural areas (Raj et al., 2009). However, in urban areas, women's entrance into the workforce is changing the dynamics of mate selection. Research shows that educated, working women have begun asserting more control over their choice of spouse, challenging patriarchal norms (Grover,

2011). These changing dynamics have created stress in family organizations, particularly in marriage and divorce. Family is the vital informal network. Informal social networks (Guess, 2004; Khatwani, 2017), including family and close friends, are informal social networks (Khadijzadeh, 2013; Peng et al., 2022). Literature highlights that intense or intimate ties within networks, including family and friendships, extract trust and reciprocity (Ell, 1984; Horak, et al., 2019; Li, 2007; Sparrowe et al., 2001). The social actors within these networks are typically interdependent due to their roles, structural constraints, and obligations within the network. Similarly, the structure of such networks is effective in providing resources and support during times of need and pain. Informal social networks, despite being informal, are not neutral and unbiased in terms of gender and power nominations (Horak et al., 2019). Marriage is a socio-legal contract between two individuals (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Scott, 2000; Tahir, 2021), and this contract is created, developed, flourished, and is made successful with the influence of many close ones, especially the natal families of both spouses, particularly in collectivistic societies (Ali et al., 2020; Hamid, 2011).

Family networks, within the context of informality, reciprocity, and homogeneity, possess the resources and opportunities that bind family members to obligations and constraints emanating from the structure of the networks (Pickens, 2003). The obligations vary based on the social positions of individuals, which can be influenced by factors such as gender, race, and ethnicity (Alvi et al., 2014; Felmlee, 2001; Moore, 1990; Mushtaq et al., 2021). Family is also a type of informal social network based on social homogamy, where people belonging to these networks are influential in decision-making (McPherson et al., 2001). McGuire (2002) claimed that the formal and informal structures of these networks, which further institutionalize discrimination and inequality, are significantly influenced by gender. The power, resources, and influence of an actor in a social network are dependent on their position, which can be influenced by factors such as gender (Hansen, 2009; Hanson & Blake, 2009).

Despite the spouse selection process being thorough and various social factors contributing to it, the divorce rate is increasing, and people are found to be dissatisfied with their marriages (Mohlatole et al., 2018). Literature shows that incompatibility among spouses, inappropriate mate selection, and accepting spouses out of family pressure are the vital factors contributing to the increase in divorce rate. Therefore, there is a dire need to explore the mate selection process through the experiences of divorced individuals. The study will help provide insights into the mate selection process, which may play an active role in igniting marital conflicts that lead to divorce. The overcoming of the gaps and problems of the mate selection process can also be effective in

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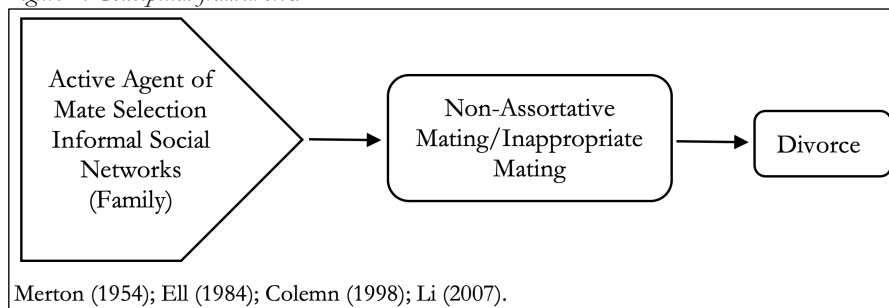
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creating marital stability. A 2021 survey by Gallup and Gilani Pakistan indicated that 58% of Pakistanis believe the divorce rate has risen, with in-law s

2. Objectives of the study

- 1- To understand and explore the role of informal social networks in the mate selection process in Lahore.
- 2- To understand the retrospective experiences of divorced individuals' mate selection process in the context of informal social networks.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.



3. Material and methods

The present study focuses on the retrospective experiences of divorced individuals, examining the role of informal social networks in the process of mate selection. It also enquires how mismatched, forced matches and the intricate role of informal social networks lead towards marital conflict and divorce. Subjectivity is given credit in the current research, which is grounded in interpretive and constructivist philosophy (Creswell, 2009). The study of ontology and epistemology is akin to a house's "footings"—they serve as the building blocks for the entire structure (Grix, 2004, p. 59). In alignment with the research objectives, the methodological stance is ontologically and epistemologically based on subjectivity and interpretation. Hence, the interpretive paradigm was selected to bring the deep, subjective, and meaning-making realities of divorced individuals in the context of the mate selection process and the role of informal social networks in their broken marriages. Social phenomena need to be viewed "through the participants' eyes rather than the researcher's," by an interpretive approach (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 21). The

goal of the interpretive approach is to comprehend social phenomena in relation to their environment (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

The qualitative research approach offers a comprehensive and rich means of understanding the subjective experiences that occur in a given setting (Majid, 2018; Kothari, 2004). It encourages and supports the researcher in illuminating a deep and comprehensive understanding of a particular occurrence within a specific social context, as expressed through their words, texts, gestures, and expertise (Myers, 1997). The research design for the present study was purely qualitative, involving the divorced individuals to share their unaddressed narratives of mate selection within the context of informal social networks, and to understand deeply the importance of mate selection in marriage and how mismatched companionship of marriage is very vulnerable to divorce.

3.1 Research design

Setting up settings for data collecting and analysis is known as research design (Majid, 2018; Kothari, 2004). The qualitative research approach offers a comprehensive and rich means of understanding the subjective experiences that occur in a given setting. It encourages and supports the researcher in illuminating a deep and comprehensive understanding of a particular occurrence within a specific social context, as expressed through their words, texts, gestures, and expertise (Myers, 1997). The research design for the present study was purely qualitative as it involved the divorced individuals sharing their unaddressed narratives of mate selection within the context of informal social networks. Subjectivity is given credit in the current research, which is grounded in interpretive and constructivist philosophy (Creswell, 2009). The study of ontology and epistemology is akin to a house's "footings"; they serve as the building blocks for the entire structure (Grix, 2004, p. 59).

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3.2 Participants and sampling strategy

The foundation of this research is a profound understanding of the experiences, subjective values, and social realities that divorced individuals encounter (Creswell, 2012). As a result, by taking into account the fact that knowledge and information are active and creative rather than static and

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permanent and that they are emergent rather than existent, this develops and aligns its focus on describing social phenomena and practices with a thorough understanding of human interactions (Cavana et al., 2001; Namanji & Ssekyewa, 2012). Although generalizability is not possible, the researcher did not overlook the importance of sampling in the study. This is an extreme stance; however, a predetermined, structured methodology with a sample size and sampling procedure could offer more comprehensive and richer data about individuals who are representative of the topic under study (Omona, 2013). In light of this position, the current study carefully considered its participant recruitment strategy and chose to use purposive sampling. Considering the sampling and recruitment procedure for participants, the sample of this study consisted of 14 divorced individuals (both men and women) recruited from the family courts in Lahore. Divorced Individuals (Both men and women) who have been divorced after 5 to 7 years of marriage and have at least one child. The participants were recruited from the family courts of Lahore, informed about the complete research process, and consideration was given to the ethical issues of anonymity, confidentiality, and consent. The participants have been selected from the urban settings of Lahore. Choosing Lahore as the research site was due to its diversity. Lahore is a city of multiculturalism and a hub of education and business. Divorce is becoming normative in many urban settings of Pakistan due to many reasons. Although many other factors and reasons contribute to this, the present study highlights this issue in the context of mismatched and forced mate selection processes, particularly due to the involvement of informal social networks. The family court lawyers were the gatekeepers to access the relevant respondents. The Participants were recruited by informing them of the research purpose and process, and obtaining their consent with assurances of no harm to their well-being, confidentiality, and anonymity.

3.3 Data collection procedure

The University's ethics board provided all necessary ethical approvals prior to the commencement of data collection. After approval, the researcher got to work gathering data. Additionally, by disclosing the institutional information, the supervisor ensured that the research was constantly monitored for ethical violations. The data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews using an interview guide. The interview guide has been designed with the assistance of literature and is based on both inductive and deductive codes. Pilot testing was conducted during the initial phase, and the interview guide was revised accordingly. The duration of each interview was 50 to 60 minutes. The

interview has been recorded according to the participant's consent; otherwise, the notes have been taken.

3.4 Data analysis

It can be pretty tough and demanding for a researcher to explain and understand the subjective and unstructured nature of qualitative data (Hennink et al., 2011). Qualitative research data analysis is a challenging task. The procedures used for the data analysis were as follows. Interviews with participants who gave their consent to be recorded were conducted. Written notes were taken during the interviews with the individuals who declined to have their interviews digitally recorded. In qualitative research, the analytical cycle comes after the iterative process. The researchers prepared the data for the current study by following procedures that included categorization, thematic coding, immersion, and descriptive coding.

4. Findings

The findings of the present research highlight the experiences of divorced individuals, which are categorized as expectations, opportunities, and obligations based on gender while choosing a spouse. The names of the participants are fictitious and have been used to maintain high ethical standards, and the actual identities of the research participants are not disclosed.

The current research also brought forth how mismatched marriages, missing social homogamy, and the intervention of informal social networks in mate selection lead towards marital dissolution. The study's findings reveal discrimination and biased obligations and opportunities for men and women in the mate selection process. These experiences are based on the narratives of divorced individuals that also highlight how forceful and hasty decisions of marriage lead to marital breakdown.

Table 1. The demographic table shows the basic details about the respondents.

Sr.#	Name	Age	Gender	Education Status	Occupation Status	Family Type at Time Mate Selection
I.	1- Javeria	37	F	M.Phil	Teacher	Joint
II.	2- Hina	33	F	Masters	N/A	Nuclear
III.	3 Jamal	35	M	Bachelors	Self-Employed	Joint
IV.	4- Kinza	36	F	Masters	Bank Job	Nuclear

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V.	5-	Ali	35	M	MBBS	Doctor	Joint
VI.	6-	Rida	30	F	Graduation	Beautician	Joint
VII.	7-	Fahad	39	M	Masters	Self-Employed	Nuclear
VIII.	8-	Sana	38	F	Inter	N/A	Joint
IX.	9-	Shafqat	37	M	M.Phil	Teacher	Nuclear
X.	10-	Maira	33	F	Graduation	Office Job	Joint
XI.	11-	Saba	31	“	Inter	N/A	Nuclear
XII.	12-	Asghar	35	M	MBA	Bank Job	Nuclear
XIII.	13-	Jabbar	32	M	Masters	Shopkeeper	Joint
XIV.	14-	Zara	31	F	Masters	School Teacher	Nuclear

4.1 Gendered opportunities and structural privileges given to men in mate selection

Selecting a good marital match is a latent and manifest function of the family. Informal networks, particularly among close family members, play a significant role in this process in a collectivistic society like Pakistan. The structural regulations of these networks required someone to obtain the consent and willingness of close family members before entering into marriage or choosing someone as a life partner. However, these obligations are a gender construct that varies according to the individual's gender and social status, based on the power and gender hierarchy within the social network. One of the male participants shared

I always imagined and idealized a life partner with good looks and good character, who is compromising, flexible, and up-to-date with modern trends. Moreover, my family was very clear about it. So, I always asked to accompany my family whenever they visited somewhere for the purpose of selecting a spouse (Sarim, 40).

Thus, it indicates that due to their higher position in the power hierarchy of informal social networks, men gain an advantage in deciding and choosing their life partners, and their families provide them with options that align with their preferences. Horak (2014) also supports the respondent's narrative that informal social networks provide benefits to men in terms of their choices and opportunities in decision-making. A male shared, “My mom was always imagining a beautiful, soft-spoken and well-educated girl, with a good complexion and lively nature who can handle the responsibilities maturely.”

Alvi et al. (2014) and Islam (2021) support that beauty is the basic standard for choosing a female spouse in Pakistani society.

It also reflects that beauty standards are the main criteria set by men and their families while selecting a female spouse. These beauty standards are shaped by an individual's familial and cultural contexts. They are always taken into consideration when choosing a spouse, regardless of whether this standard remains in the relationship or not. Another male respondent also shared:

I regret that our whole life we try to chase beauty as men, and this is what we learn from our environments that a beautiful wife is a reward of manhood. But sometimes relationships based on outer beauty under the influence of informal surroundings create a mismatched couple, and their marriage becomes full of conflicts, leading them to live legally apart (Asghar, 35).

The mate selection process continues under the structural obligations, and choices are given accordingly. Some of the female research participants reported that their choices and opinions were unsatisfactory to their family members; they believed that marriage had different standards that were contrary to the contemporary and modern needs of women. Their parents considered that females' choices and decisions are based on idealism. Another research participant, 31, a divorced woman, explained:

When I mentioned the idea of mental compatibility between couples during the mate selection process of my marriage, my parents told me that it was unrealistic and that compatibility could only be achieved by obeying one's spouse and his family. Consequently, I accepted their decision (Rabia, 31).

Thus, the study's findings elucidate the structural biases and privileges of men and women when choosing a spouse, and autonomy is less visible in the context of mate selection for women participants. Informal social networks within Pakistani society are less resourceful for women when they express their opinions in decision-making, especially in the process of mate selection. This also reflects the structural constraint within family and informal networks in patriarchal societies. On the contrary, a person in a higher position and with greater power in the informal social network benefits from expressing their views and being involved in the process.

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4.2 Bounded autonomy of women in mate selection

Educated and empowered women in Pakistan and Asian societies have “Bounded Autonomy” regarding their role in decision-making within family spheres. This manifests that most women are not awarded autonomy in the decision-making of marriage despite their education and income because of the cultural and gendered autonomy in decision-making (Khatwani, 2017), and it can lead to disharmony in marriage. A female respondent shared:

I initially informed my parents of my preference. However, they were unconvinced and put me under pressure, as they believed that money was the solution to all problems, which ultimately led to an unsuccessful outcome. This was mainly due to certain materialistic ideals and ideas from my extended family. A well-established son-in-law was what they needed. I have every luxury, but I do not have a soul mate (Rida, 34).

The biased structural privileges and rigid intervention of social pressures in the name of collective culture bring the undesired circumstances in the mismatched couple's lives, and women's exclusion from marital decision-making in contemporary and urban life is one of the reasons for unhappy and broken marriages. Women in urban life, despite their independence, often feel dependent on the people in their surroundings for decision-making due to the limited choices available in their private lives. Otherwise, their career, education, and wisdom are often viewed as a form to rebellion and misuse of mobility and progress. Family norms exert pressure on them in the modern world, particularly in matters of career selection and partner choice (Horak & Suseno, 2023). Increased rates of delayed marriages, broken marriages, and women's mobility are considered to be the obstacles to choosing the right partner for a woman in urban settings, and have minimized the choices for them. The 38-year-old divorced woman said while talking about the choice of marriage, the *ugly side of the women's progress is a social pressure of abiding by the enforced decisions of mismatched marriages in contrast to the need of time*. The social pressure on my parents at the time of mate selection was so significant that, despite giving me freedom in education and career, they preferred the choices of others when deciding my marital relations, due to familial norms. This forced decision brought another social pressure on me and them when I pursued divorce for survival from a suffocated bond that was not satisfactory for me from the time of choosing.

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4.3 Gendered expectations in marriage and spousal selection

The process of mate selection is not gender-free; the family members consider and prefer their mates based on traditional and expected roles. Moreover, in Pakistani culture, marriage is the final reward of one's life and destiny, especially for women. A divorced woman shared her views about her expectations from marriage:

We have high expectations for marriage because, throughout our lives, our families and friends have given us hope for an ideal life after marriage. We see marriage as a blessing, a prize, or a reward, and when someone chooses not to get married or puts off getting married, our loved ones help us realize that we are drawing God's curse upon ourselves. Finding the right partner later on is preferable to making an ill-fitting, hurried choice (Sana, 38).

The expectations of mates for men and women are not gender-neutral; for instance, physical appearance, body image, moral virtues, and commitments. The normative structure of informal social networks, including family and kin, embeds emotions, privileges, social influence, roles, and responsibilities in marriage and is crucial in the process of choosing a partner. The interplay of informal social networks and their norms influences individuals and their lives (Horak & Suseno, 2022, 2023). A 36-year-old divorced woman shared:

Like every girl who has ever dreamed of a guy riding a white horse, I, too, had specific hopes that my husband would be tall, elegant, and own all the necessities of life, such as a lovely house and a car, just like I do at my father's house. These are not high standards;

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having each of these qualities is necessary for a happy married life (Hina, 36).

The preconceived notion that a husband will provide resources, care, and protection to fulfill the traditional masculine role is prevalent, and most young women anticipate receiving all of these things before getting married. Malik et al. (2020) also discussed in their research that Cultural norms dictate what constitutes a decent husband or wife, such as having a tall husband and a beautiful wife. Men also have premarital thoughts about their partners that mirror these expectations, which include roles and divisions within the marriage organization. These expectations are not limited to women alone. A 34-year-old man said:

I have always yearned for a woman who will support me through good times and bad. She needs to be aware of my emotional needs and understand what I expect from her. To put it briefly, she would be adaptable enough to my family and me (Sajid, 34).

Another man reported:

I wanted a wife who could support my family through difficult times, even while I was away, who could make them happy, and who could produce a good generation of family members who would uphold family values. I also wanted a woman that I could trust and who would obey me in the role of a decent wife (Imran, 36).

According to the participant explanations, women in the institution of marriage are viewed as secondary, more responsible, and adaptable, and these views reflect the norms governed by the informal social network structure. In a similar vein, males likewise want a companion who can fulfill the roles of both a career and lover. It is easy to characterize a married woman's only role as satisfying her spouse's expectations. An idealized and inaccurate picture of the spouse can be developed thanks to expectations placed on them. A 35-year-old participant responded:

"Marriage for me was an upward mobility." She further said:

A woman can anticipate social security, emotional and physical safety, and upward social and economic mobility from her marriage. However, nowadays it is the other way around, particularly when it comes to upward mobility, as men now want these things from their spouses (Maria, 35).

This narration explains the transition of standards in spousal selection based on gender which is more demanding from women in marriage. Men expect their spouses to meet all the private and public standards of a good woman. When choosing a partner, men and women alike often prioritize material aspects such as financial stability, social standing, and wealth. However, nowadays, materialistic expectations of people and spouses can also cause a delay in marriage as they are primarily centered on physical and material requirements, which can be a barrier to a successful marriage (Ghazal et al., 2022). A 36-year-old man responded:

My parents devoted a great deal of time and money to raising me,
and I had hoped and expected that my wife would reciprocate in kind.
I was certain that I would be the ideal partner for a working woman
(Hashim, 36).

Within Pakistani society's patriarchal framework, a man is required to repay his parents' investments and fulfill the role of the "Good Son," which entails controlling his spouse and married life. For the sake of being a good wife, the lady is expected to support her husband's family emotionally. As a result, the newly married woman must demonstrate her faithfulness to her husband by living up to the expectations of a "good wife," even if doing so means jeopardizing their emotional and marital well-being. Though they run the risk of being rejected by their family networks when they voice their opinions, women's expectations for marriage have changed as a result of the dynamic changes in modern, metropolitan life.

4.4 Normative regulations of collectivist culture and the mismatches

These personal and social networks refer to the close and strong ties and connections that can play a role in enabling certain practices and facilitating relationships within the structural norms. The interplay of informal social networks and their norms influences individuals and their lives (Horak & Suseno, 2022). In Eastern nations with collectivist cultures, parents are granted greater autonomy in decision-making and throughout the marriage process, in contrast to those in Western nations. In addition to causing delayed marriage and marital breakup because of mismatched matches, parental decision-making is reinforced by a patriarchal framework (Ghazal et al., 2022). According to Malik et al. (2020), cultural expectations surrounding mate choosing prevent

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women from being autonomous, even with education and knowledge. (Malik et al., 2020). A divorced woman aged 36 shared:

After my mother died, my phupo looked for a husband for me; in the end, she became my mother-in-law. However, I was disappointed that my father did not participate with the same enthusiasm I had anticipated. Despite holding a postgraduate degree and a reputable career, I struggled to comprehend the concept of an intermediate spouse (Iram, 36).

This suggests that one of the primary reasons for arranged marriages is to maintain the property and land within the familial roots, as informal networks consider it more important than the lives of the two individuals (Ali et al., 2020). The strong family association and connections are the same for both genders when it comes to the materialistic approach to choosing spouses. A 36-year-old divorced man shared:

My friends, who were like family to me, talked to my father and asked him not to marry me to his rude and ignorant niece. I tried to persuade my father for four years, despite my protests, by refusing to sit and eat with the family. Nevertheless, he remained unconvinced (Shahid, 36).

As a result, the youth's lives are at risk due to the deep-seated family avarice and status, which forces them to marry against their choice due to the powerful family influence. According to Milardo (1982), marriage relationships develop, change, and revolve around the dynamics of social networks. Mismatches can also result from the usage of unofficial social networks during the dating process, which is a significant contributing factor to divorce in today's society.

4.5 Unmet social homogamy: mismatched and hasty marriages

Social similarity is significant in social relations, particularly in intimate relations. The urban structure of Pakistani society is diverse in terms of education, occupation, and demography. Selecting an appropriate and suitable match is considered the first important step towards a quality and happy marriage. In urban Lahore, marriage homogamy is the desire of many individuals. However, the deeply rooted cultural norms and expectations associated with marriage make this decision even tougher. Many of the respondents shared that the right and perfect match as imagined and expected

by themselves was not possible because of the cultural and structural intervention of informal social networks within the Family. The desire and greed for money and a better social standing are fueled by materialistic demands and expectations associated with marriage. Some people even choose not to reveal certain aspects of their lives when they are married, such as a man's job or their marital status. One of the females shared that *when my mother passed away, I felt I needed to settle my career.*

However, the hasty decision of my family and the social pressure from my extended family forced my family to arrange my marriage soon. I felt like a misfit in the small heart and big house of my husband from the very first day, because he was already married to someone else, and my family could not afford it due to financial constraints.

In the same context, another female shared;

My higher studies put my family in a state of apprehension that I might fall prey to societal evils, and there was a lack of suitable matches. Unfortunately, in the haste, they were unable to investigate my ex-husband's employment status thoroughly. My in-laws wanted to enjoy the hard-earned money, not of their son but their daughter-in-law. Excessive greed in the relationship was the primary reason for the breakup (Javeria, 37).

Another finding of the current research is that higher expectations of women's natal families towards the financial status of male spouses are blatant and sometimes unjustified in urban settings. This is one of the reasons for delayed and unsuccessful marriages in urban life. Many marriages break due to materialistic mismatches and covert truths. A female respondent said that:

In contrast to my in-laws, who only informed me that my brother-in-law was divorced due to a bad marriage, after five months of marriage, my family learned that my spouse had been married twice. My family was enthralled with the seeming extravagance of their home and completely ignored everything else (Hina, 33).

Thus, mismatched and hasty marriages without proper investigation, and only because of others' influence, make an unendurable knot which can lead to divorce.

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5. Discussion

Mate selection is a crucial decision for a long-term relationship within marriage. It lies at the core of marital life stability. Although a good life partner is ideal for everyone, not everyone finds one. This study explores the role of informal social networks in the mate selection process in Pakistan and how it influence marital life, looking at it through the retrospective experiences of divorced individuals. The process of mate selection varies around the globe, but it is highly dependent on the family and close relationships in Pakistani society (Brass, 2012; Kilduff & Brass, 2010; Fowler & Christakis, 2010). However, the intervention of other relations mainly creates unwanted involvement and pressure in the decision-making process. Informal social networks, including family and close relationships, are deeply interlinked, connected, and involved. An individual is heavily dependent on them when making life decisions, whether it involves career choice or spouse selection. Informal social networks within the patriarchal social structure of Pakistani society offer choices, opportunities, and obligations that differ based on an individual's social status. Consequently, men occupying higher positions in the hierarchy of relationships and social status tend to benefit from this process. The complex and interwoven involvement and pressure of informal social networks in the mate selection process can bring unwanted consequences, such as mismatches and incompatibility, paving the way to conflict in marriage and potentially leading to divorce. The involvement and intervention of informal social networks often lead to mismatched couples. The narratives of the research participants indicate that materialistic demands by family and mismatched couples are the reasons for marital dissolution, which is deeply rooted in the selection process of marriage.

Mismatched couples in terms of compatibility are one of the strong reasons for divorce, and informal relationships usually become the reason for such unwanted companionships.

The findings of the present research revealed that the beauty standards for females when choosing a marital partner are something inculcated in the minds of men throughout their lives. Instead of considering compatibility and other factors, men and their families prefer beauty. Informal social networks, including family, due to being dense, strong, and deeply connected social ties, are essential for relationship building based on the informality of frequent interactions that may provide choices and opportunities to someone in the decision-making of life, like marriage.

6. Conclusion

A person's expectations and decisions about marriage are influenced by their informal familial social networks, which are shaped by their social standing. This study also emphasizes how Pakistani culture's informal social networks and marriage are being shaped by ingrained material concerns, which are altering the fundamental institutions that shape society. Numerous female participants expressed that the informal social networks inside the family do not thoroughly scrutinize the character and behavior of a prospective spouse. It does, however, point to additional institutional and societal inefficiencies. Women's ideas are often disregarded, and their opportunity to participate in matrimonial decisions is denied, which can negatively impact their ability to form a strong marriage relationship. When the fundamental goal of marriage disappears, even the institution of marriage may be in jeopardy. It is crucial to consider societal forces and material choices.

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