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Sibling Estrangement among Unmarried Working Sisters after their Brothers' Marriages: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Sibling estrangement is a vital issue in families of collectivist cultures after their respective marriages. As an emerging matrimonial relationship, it sometimes intensifies the existing inequalities and emotional distance. The current study aimed to investigate the single sisters' estrangement towards their brothers' marriages, their familial, gender-based psychological and emotional struggles as well as coping strategies. A qualitative research design was implemented by using semi-structured interviews for data collection and reflexive thematic analysis. A sample of six females aged between 30-40 years was recruited through purposive and snow ball sampling techniques from different cities of Pakistan. The sample size was considered appropriate as thematic analysis focuses more on the conceptual depth of data, and thematic saturation was also achieved within the dataset. The participants were expected to have at least one married brother with two years of estrangement. The major themes that emerged included impact of marriage as a turning point in sibling closeness, sibling conflict and comparison, disagreement over personal and financial matters, psychological aspects, emotional unrest, and emotional distancing as coping. The findings indicated that brothers' marriages function as vital restructuring events that exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and reshape sibling hierarchies. Therefore, awareness sessions, counselling, and developing culturally-sensitive family interventions would be imperative in improving the family ties among family members in collectivist cultures.

***Keywords*:** estrangement, family dynamics, gender roles, marriage transition, siblings, thematic analysis

Introduction

The relationship among siblings is described as one of the long-lasting relationships in any individual's life (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2021; Cicirelli, 1995). It is assumed that the relationship among siblings remains the same

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across lifespan. However, a developing body of research has introduced a new phenomenon regarding the relationship among siblings known as 'sibling estrangement'. Sibling estrangement can be defined as an emotional and physical distancing between siblings. This distancing may range from decreased communication and emotional support to severance of ties among them (Scharp & Hall, 2017; Scharp, 2023). Approximately, 15-25% of individuals face some kind of sibling estrangement during their lifetime (Blake et al., 2023). Estrangement is often understood as a personal conflict among siblings but it is more than that since it is influenced by family dynamics. The family dynamics may include unresolved conflicts, favoritism among the members, difference of values, and childhood relationship difficulties. All of these factors contribute to sibling estrangement (Agllias, 2013; Blake et al., 2023).

Major life transitions have a considerable influence on the adult sibling relationships. From the perspective of developmental and lifespan research, the closeness/attachment among siblings does not remain the same. It changes overtime as the individuals meet their major milestones, such as marriage and parenthood (Buyukkececi & Leopold, 2021). In the midst of all these transitions, marriage has the most powerful impact on the life of individuals as it introduces new members/relationships, new rules, and different attachments. After getting married, the majority of individuals become more committed to their new roles and attachments, hence weakening the family structure (Milevsky, 2011). Previous literature reflects that many individuals experienced decreased emotional connection after their siblings' marriages. Additionally, a significant increase in distance was also observed due to the priority shift, division in loyalty, and changed family patterns (Shortt & Gottman, 1997; White, 2001). So, marriage is the key event which may either strengthen the family ties or could also create emotional distance among siblings.

Sibling estrangement cannot be understood until the cultural context of the sample being studied is understood. Pakistan is considered as a collectivistic society with strong dependency, proper family structures, and predefined gender expectations. Individuals from such societies are expected to maintain family ties, have close contact with each other, and display loyalty towards their families. In collectivistic cultures, such as Pakistan, predefined gender roles determine the access to resources and decision-making. Literature reflects that, sons in comparison with daughters

are given more authority and power (Suitor et al., 2017). Additionally, favoritism among the siblings and right in heritance intensifies, especially after marriage because the family relationships and expectations change.

These predefined gender roles create considerable issues for single working women in Pakistani households. Unmarried women maintain a strong connection both emotionally and physically in their natal homes while facing societal expectations, stigmas, and labializations. After their brothers' marriage, their standing within their own homes becomes complex as attention and loyalty often shift after marriage. They may experience the feelings of exclusion, reduced support, and less involvement in family matters and decision-making of the household. All of these factors somehow contribute and affect the relationship between unmarried women and their married brothers.

In recent years, a significant amount of research has been carried out on estrangement but the gap remains. Most of the existing literature is western, and limited attention has been given to how brothers' marriage alters the relationships in collectivistic cultures as of Pakistan. Moreover, the experiences of unmarried working women are absent from the literature as well. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate as to how unmarried working women experience estrangement after their brothers' marriage and what factors contribute to it.

Theoretical Framework

Family Systems Theory

Parental differential treatment (PDT), as highlighted in studies by Feinberg and Hetherington (2001) and McHale (1995), has been associated with detrimental outcomes in sibling relationships. In particular, PDT has been associated with problematic relationships regarding brothers/sisters and behavioral problems of the disadvantaged sibling. These problems also include struggles in sibling relationships, as measured by studies carried out by Brody et al. (1992), Richmond et al. (2005). These observations also fit with family systems theory, according to which subsystems in families are highly interdependent, as argued by (Cox & Paley, 1997). Within the family system, the dynamics of PDT may disrupt the equilibrium of sibling relationships, influencing communication patterns, roles, and overall family functioning.

Equity and Social Exchange Theory

Equity theory (Walster et al., 1978) uses the concept of social comparison to elucidate processes within social relationships and individuals' contentment with those relationships. Under this framework, individuals evaluate their rewards and investments in a relationship. The inequality in the rewards to investment ratios can cause relationship dissatisfaction, emotional turmoil, and attempts to change the relationship, which results in the form of withdrawal. The cognate perspective of social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) also focuses on rewards that individuals receive and the investments they make in their relationships. According to this theory, if the costs of a relationship outweigh its benefits, individuals may opt to disengage, especially if more satisfying alternatives are available. The principles of equity and exchange, which were at first made to understand dynamics in the relationships between consenting adults, would work well in making sense of differences in the closeness or distance of sibling dyads in adulthood due to the voluntary nature of the relationships between siblings.

Rationale

Firstly, sibling relationships, an experience shared by more than 80% of individuals growing up with one or more siblings, are relational and very impactful. Despite the prevalence of sibling bonds, evidence has provided estrangement dynamics in these relationships. Although, as many as 15% of adults reported distanced or severed sibling ties. Investigating factors that precipitate estrangement and shifting sibling relationships after marriage can provide valuable insights into marriage and family counseling. Secondly, whereas upwards of 60% of marriages affect sibling closeness, very few studies have distinguished between pre- and post-marriage estrangement experiences. Moreover, this study aims to address gaps in current research on sibling estrangement as identified (Hank & Steinbach, 2022). Moreover, to explore the relational conflicts and understand the complex foundations of estrangement, associated coping may guide mental health practitioners in promoting wellness.

In conclusion, this study intended to significantly augment the current body of knowledge on this multi-faceted issue of sibling estrangement, with a considerable emphasis on its theories. In this respect, the study adopted a qualitative research approach. This approach was focused at drawing on

theories encompassing family relationship dynamics, as well as equity theory, to substantially augment the existing knowledge on family dynamics, as well as brother-sister relationships. Furthermore, the study particularly focused on the impact that marital dynamics have on perceived brother-sister relationships, taking into consideration the distinctive social context that prevails in Pakistan.

Investigating this issue in relation to the Pakistani culture provided an important insight into the overall understanding of sibling dynamics and sibling relationships around the globe. This study provided an important perspective in relation to comprehensively exploring how marital status has been an important determining link in either worsening or relieving sibling estrangements.

Research Questions

The current study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- How do single working women experience changes in sibling relationships after their brothers' marriages?
- What are familial, gender-based, and interpersonal factors contributing to perceived estrangement?
- What psychological and emotional consequences emerge from sibling estrangement?
- What coping strategies do participants use to navigate relational distance?

Method

Participants

The current study adopted snowball and purposive sampling technique (Kelly et al., 2010) to recruit study sample. Initially, 7 participants were interviewed but one interview was dropped out from the final analysis due to lack of responses on several key questions. To stay aligned with the research standards, only those interviews that provided in-depth data were included for thematic analysis. Hence, the study proceeded with 6 interviews in final analysis. Inclusion criteria comprised single females, age range from 30-40, having at least one married brother, and an experience of at least 2 years of estrangement with married brother. Whereas, the exclusion criteria comprised individuals who were currently experiencing

any trauma, stress, or crisis or in therapy, and those who were not the citizens of Pakistan.

Measures

Semi-structured Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore the lived experiences of single sisters on sibling estrangement after their brothers' marriage. The interview guide was developed by aligning it with research questions, based on literature review and theoretical framework including family system theory and equity theory. A pool of open-ended questions was generated across three conceptual domains. Firstly, on changes in siblings' relationships after brothers' marriage, secondly on emotional and psychological impact of estrangement, and thirdly on coping strategies employed by single sisters. Questions and probing questions were designed to be exploratory, non-leading, and culturally-sensitive. The interview guide was reviewed by three experts in qualitative research in psychology to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. The suggested changes by the experts were incorporated to improve the sequence of questions and reduce ambiguity.

Data Collection

In the current study, the process of data collection on sibling estrangement perceptions required conducting semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted 35-45 minutes. All interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim in Urdu. The transcripts were subsequently translated into English by the researcher. To ensure linguistic accuracy and preserve the original meanings of participants' narratives, a bilingual academic with proficiency in both Urdu and English reviewed selected transcripts and translations. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved collaboratively. Particular attention was given to preserving culturally-specific expressions and contextual meanings during the translation process.

The researcher was a Pakistani female academic familiar with local family structures and gender norms. This insider position facilitated rapport-building but also required reflexive awareness of potential assumptions regarding marriage and gender roles. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout data collection and analysis to bracket personal biases and enhance analytic transparency.

Procedure

The first part of this study entailed getting approval from the Institutional Review Boards at University of Central Punjab. This was followed by commencing the process of data collection after getting approval. The participants were also made aware that they could withdraw from this study freely at any time. Since no personal information was gathered, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was safeguarded. Coding aided in attaining the objective of managing and condensing the data (Palys & Atchison, 2014). Each interview lasted 35-45 minutes. The study did not anticipate any risks associated with participation. A key point in participant interaction was building the rapport. There was a need to form a connection, a bond based on a relationship of honesty and open communication to gain trust (Martins et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). A contextual stance guided the analysis, acknowledging both sociocultural structures including gender norms, family hierarchy, and participants' subjective meaning-making. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatims, and anonymized with identification code. The researcher was engaged in repeated reading to ensure immersion and maintain reflexive memos/journal throughout the analytic process. Initially, coding was conducted inductively and manually. Approximately, 50 initial codes were generated across three analytic domains including diverse factors contributing to estrangement, psychological and emotional impact, and lastly coping strategies. Codes were inclusive at this stage to preserve the depth. Through iterative comparison across transcripts, overlapping codes were merged and redefined into 18 consolidated codes for diverse factors, 19 consolidated codes for psychological and emotional impact, and 14 for coping strategies. These refined codes were clustered into themes and these themes were reviewed by primary researcher and experts for internal coherence, distinctiveness, and alignment with research questions.

Data saturation was assessed through the data. Each interview generated certain codes and these codes were then compared with previous codes. By the 5th interview, no new code emerged, indicating code saturation and to confirm it 6th interview was conducted. Since the research questions were focused and the similarity existed among the participants, data saturation

was reached as no new themes or codes emerged. Themes were reviewed by researcher, and then expert advice was also taken to ensure internal consistency and alignment with the research questions.

Results

The results revealed that the sibling estrangement following a brother's marriage is a multi-faceted experience influenced by psychological, emotional, and familial factors. The unmarried sisters also mentioned a significant decrease in communication and connection with their brothers after their marriage. This had occurred due to the perceived interference in the marriages, especially from sisters-in-law, as well as a change in family dynamics. Some themes, including gender-related disparities, brother-sister rivalry because of differences in academics, as well as disagreements regarding marriages and appropriate behavior, were identified to have played a great contributing factor to this experience. However, it can be noted that self-efficacy was practiced by some members, in that they had managed to cope with the situation by becoming emotionally independent, as well as growing as persons in terms of self-reliance.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

ID	Age	Background	Education	Siblings	Duration of brother's marriage	Years of Separation	Job
1	39	Lahore	Masters	4	7y	4	Teaching
2	35	Lahore	BSc	3	6y	5	Teaching
3	37	Karachi	BSc	3	3.5y	2	Nursing
4	32	Lahore	BBA	2	4y	2.5	Teaching
5	34	Lahore	BS	3	4y	3	Teaching
6	35	Rawalpindi	BSc	2	3	2	Teaching

Table 2

Themes, Subthemes, and Codes (N=6)

Themes	Sub-themes	Quotations
Marriage as a turning point in sibling closeness	Family neglect	After marriage, he has completely changed. Now he has become distant, and he does not care about what crisis our family is facing (Pr#1).

Themes	Sub-themes	Quotations
	Emotional adjustments after marriage	After marriage, I noticed that he remained quite insecure, and the little conversations we used to have also stopped completely after the marriage (Pr#3).
	Shifts in familial dynamics post-marriage	This all started right after the marriage, and I have observed it very closely. Everything has changed since then. If I said anything in front of my sister-in-law, he could not tolerate it (Pr#4).
	Escalating domestic conflicts	After marriage, my brother stopped talking to me and started listening to his wife instead (Pr#6).
Sibling conflict and comparison	Gender discrimination and emotional neglect	I haven't had a good relationship with my brother from the start because, in our family, boys are given more support and are prioritized, which has always made me feel left behind and caused my wishes to be suppressed. Maybe that's why my relationship with my brother isn't good, as he treats me the same way (Pr#1).
	Sibling rivalry	Maybe I was better in studies and overall performance at school, while my brother didn't take his studies very seriously. Perhaps that created a sense of competitiveness between us and maybe even an element of jealousy (Pr#3).

Themes	Sub-themes	Quotations
Disagreement over personal and financial matters	Concerns in marital preferences	My brother thinks that I should just get married to that man, but I don't feel the same way. I don't like his nature, and I don't think we could live together (Pr#4).
	Inheritance disagreements	There were frequent arguments and fights, and then the issue of my share in the property came up. That was the main problem (Pr#5).
Psychological aspects	Anxiety and panic	At that time, I also started experiencing a lot of anxiety and began having panic attacks (Pr#2).
	Challenges in maintaining self-esteem	I feel like I am not as motivated as I used to be, and my self-esteem has also dropped a lot because of all this (Pr#3).
	Mental distress and persistent rumination	Mentally, I keep thinking about this, and I cannot sleep (Pr#4).
	Psychological turmoil and stress-induced negligence	I have suffered a lot both mentally and physically; I could not pay attention to eating or drinking because I was always worried (Pr#5).
	Family separation, anxiety, and chronic psychological stress	I used to cry all the time, missing my parents and brother because of my worries (Pr#6).
Emotional Unrest	Trust and relationships, fear of exploitation, and solitude	I constantly feel that I should not trust anyone, as it will harm me. When my own family did not support me, I realized that people just want to take advantage of me, and I do not like that. I

Themes	Sub-themes	Quotations
		often have to stay alone, and many times, I prefer being by myself (Pr#1).
	Emotional turmoil	Even now, I still feel this way. It's like a complex mix of emotions, such as sorrow and a great deal of frustration (Pr#2).
	Emotional vulnerability and solitude	I feel lonely, as if I am missing the kind of support an elder brother gives when he puts his hand on your head. I have felt this emotionally a lot (Pr#3).
Emotional Distancing as coping	Self-reliance, independence	I tried to start enjoying my own company so that I wouldn't need anyone (Pr#1).
	Personal growth	I recognized myself, looked within, and understood my self-worth. If I do not support myself today, no one else will (Pr#1).
	Self-awareness and personal growth Empowerment through education and independence	I feel that I understand better than my brother what is good and best for me. I trust myself, and since I am educated, I can do everything on my own (Pr#4).
	Personal growth through adversity psychological resilience	I think and act according to my own will and wisdom. It was difficult to deal with everything, and I was broken, but I held myself together (Pr#5).

Marriage as a Turning Point in Sibling Closeness

According to the responses, marriage appeared to be an important

turning point between the sibling relationships. Participants reported multiple times that before their brothers' marriage they shared a strong, close, and an expressive bond. As stated by one participant:

"We were a unit, me and my brother, we both faced all the difficulties in life together". (P2)

The participants also reported that after marriage they felt that the previous bond that they shared with their brothers slowly drifted away and it was not deciphered as a normal change, rather it was considered as relational rescission. As one participant expressed, "After marriage, my brother has totally changed. He is now more distant, and he does not care about what crisis family is going through." (P1)

This noticeable distancing is seen as a shift in loyalty towards their partner. Another one stated that: "My sister-in-law wanted to separate, she had issues with many things, it went on for a while and eventually they got separated". (P4)

Decreased communication and amplified emotional liability, specifically in the presence of the sisters-in-law, strengthened the feelings of isolation. One participant reflected, "If I ever said anything in front of my sister-in-law, my brother would not endure it." (P4)

Marriage for that reason appeared as a symbolic reframing of emotional bond within the family members. Estrangement did not solely appear from a single split but through continuous encounters of invalidation, weakened support, and perceived readjustment of priorities.

Sibling Conflict and Comparison

Participants also explained their experiences from the patriarchal families' systems. Persistent male prioritization appeared to be amplified after marriage, enhancing brothers' authority in almost all matters while ostracizing sisters' voices. "Our family gives boys more support and priority, which makes us feel being left behind and causes our wishes to be suppressed." (P1)

Participants described sibling rivalry multiple times as something that is deeply rooted in academic achievements. Earlier, these kinds of issues were manageable but now marriage has caused them to reappear and reignite the unsettled issues. "I was always a good student, maybe that somehow created a sense of competition and jealousy between the two of

us." (P3)

This rivalry was not just limited to superficial comparisons, it went way beyond and contributed in leaving an emotional strain in the affected person's life. After marriage, the roles reversed, patterns of evaluation changed, and all the resentment reappeared, which collaborated with the new power dynamics of the family. Hence, estrangement does not only highlight the present conflicts but it also highlights the history that has remained unresolved.

Disagreement over Personal and Financial Matters

Participants took their brothers' controlling choice of where to marry and whom to marry as a direct ban on their personal freedom. Even when participants shared a difference of opinion in that matter it was invalidated. One participant shared, "My brother has this strong desire that I should get married to this man he likes, but I totally disagree with him" (P4).

In the same way, dispute over property is also deeply-rooted in the hierarchy of authority, the one who stands on the top takes the decisions. As another participant highlighted: "There were frequent arguments and fights, and then the issue of my share in the property came up. That was the main problem (P5).

These issues highlight the power imbalance that exists within the family systems. After marriage, the male authority strengthens which ultimately amplifies the pre-existing gender inequality, hence contributing to estrangement.

Psychological Aspects and Emotional Unrest

Psychological distress had a direct link with estrangement. On multiple occasions, participants mentioned of experiencing anxiety, rumination, sleep disturbance, and reduced self-worth. This indicated that relational split had a significant emotional impact. "I experience anxiety and have panic attacks as well." (P2)

Another participant stated that: "I felt like mentally I was thinking about it again and again and was not able to sleep because of it" (P4).

Decreased self-esteem along with weaking of relational security were reported by participants. They also felt a sense of insecurity within families, which led towards the development of mistrust as stated by a participant:

"My own family didn't support me; I realized at the moment people only use me."

Estrangement also caused significant emotional distress among the participants and it directly affected their ability to trust, sense of security, and emotional well-being. Participants became more vigilant in forming and maintaining relationships, as one participant stated that:

> I constantly feel that I should not trust anyone, as it will harm me. When my own family did not support me, I realized that people just want to take advantage of me, and I do not like that. I often have to stay alone, and many times, I prefer being by myself.

Moreover, participants reported the feelings of loneliness and emotional turmoil as they struggled to cope with the complex family dynamics. As stated by participant 3: "I feel lonely, as if I am missing the kind of support an elder brother gives when he puts his hand on your head."

Emotional Distancing as a Coping Mechanism

Estrangement not only disturbed participants' sense of belonging to someone but also diminished the protection associated with their elder brothers. Some participants later mentioned that they started distancing themselves and gained independence as a coping strategy. They lowered their expectations and fortified independence; they tried their best to regain the control over their emotions in the absence of real support. As mentioned, "I started enjoying my own company, I understood that no one is coming for me". (P1)

Another said that: "I saw my own worth and told myself that if I don't support myself today, no one else will." (P3)

This changed mindset reflects the participants' inability to rebuild the relationship with their brothers and their inability to regrow the lost bond. The participants reported that they gained self-efficacy by working on development of their personal resilience and by managing major life events and situations on their own. As stated by one participant: "I feel like I know myself better than anyone, better than my brother even. I can and I should take decisions for my own self." (P4)

This increased sense of freedom and authority over their own decisions proves to be a positive factor to overcome the distressing life events.

Discussion

The current study shed light on how single women in Pakistan experience sibling estrangement after their brothers' marriages. The findings suggested that marital transitions are marked as a structural reorganization of family dynamics, specifically within collectivistic and gender strategized contexts.

Firstly, changes in sibling relationships after marriages were described by participants as a marked decline in emotional closeness, reduced communication frequency, and relational priority change. Marriage appeared to have shifted emotional alliances, with brothers redirecting loyalty towards their spouses. This reorganization is consistent with family system theory. This theory posits that when a new family subsystem (marital dyad) forms, pre-existing subsystems (sibling relationships) are restructured (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that sibling relationships can become more vulnerable over the life course as disruptive family events accumulate (Hank & Steinbach, 2022).

Secondly, the contributing factors, such as gender, equity, and family hierarchies are changed, which leads towards estrangement. Participants' narratives indicated the perceptions of inequity, marital interference, and gendered prioritization. These experiential patterns align with equity theory. This theory argues that perceived imbalance in relational investment and rewards contribute to dissatisfaction and withdrawal. Moreover, care and support characterized by families are gender-biased, with male siblings receiving most of the care and support (Kalmijn, 2007). The longstanding gender disparities, consistent with broader findings suggest that gender shapes relational expectations and involvement in caregiving roles (Suitor et al., 2017). In addition, family conflicts, often initiated by in-laws, particularly sisters-in-law, were reported as major contributors to disputes and estrangement. The post-marriage changes in marital quality and family interactions become dominant influences in long-term relationships (Grover, 2017).

Marital interference and favoritism (Connidis, 2001) broadly negotiated power dynamics within families. Structural disruptions including parental divorce or death were shown to increase the likelihood of sibling estrangement (Hank & Steinbach, 2022). This shows that structural family incidents exacerbate relational vulnerabilities.

Psychological and emotional consequences due to estrangement were associated with anxiety, loneliness, diminished self-esteem, and rumination. This shows that adverse family ties, such as estrangement among siblings, may have measurable health and well-being consequences. The existence of everyday family stressors contributes greatly to emotional well-being through the creation of ruminations of the same stressors that cause continued psychological distress. Their experiences confirmed that family hassles are a cause of psychological complications after the conflict episodes.

Lastly, coping strategies indicated adaptive reconstruction. Moreover, results showed coping mechanisms, such as self-reliance, autonomy, and reframing relational loss in terms of growth. This matches with self-reliance theory, which majorly emphasizes the restoration of agency through self-belief in personal competence (Bandura, 1997). The coping strategies in conflicted family contexts had been linked to broader adaptive outcomes, though research specific to adult sibling estrangement remains nascent. However, the limited literature on adult relationship pathways suggested that sibling relational patterns in their adolescence may have a long-term influence on adult relational capacities (Masarik & Conger, 2024). This indicates that early relational experiences could shape coping responses later in life. On the contrary, sibling rivalry in childhood showed that siblings were treated as competitors. Furthermore, Folkman and Lazarus (1988) explained the strategies through which various people make use of and predispose to stressors, such as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Now, emphasizing personal growth for subjects and independence would then be duly under the problem-focused approach, where individuals seek active solutions and means to overcome the challenges.

The study immensely contributed to the literature situating sibling estrangement in Pakistani collectivistic and patriarchal society unlike western context where adult siblings distance is considered more normative (Hank & Steinbach, 2022). The topic of estrangement in Pakistan challenges strong cultural expectations for enduring sibling support. Gender preference, expectations to live in joint family systems, and marital boundary norms uniquely shape post-marital sibling relationship dynamics, extending existing research beyond western family models and frameworks.

Conclusion

Overall, the outcomes indicated that brothers' marriages may act as pivotal events of family restructuring, intensifying pre-existing inequalities and reshaping sibling hierarchies. The estrangement emerged through interplay of shifting marital loyalties, gender prioritization, interpersonal conflicts, and perceived injustice. While psychological consequences were significant, participants demonstrated adaptive self-reconstruction. The results underline the importance of culturally-sensitive family interventions that target equity, communication, and boundary re-negotiation in the context of marital transitions.

Implications

- Create mental health awareness regarding intra-family conflicts in Pakistan.
- Develop culturally-sensitive family mediation, communication workshops, and encourage gender-equity discussions to reduce discrimination.
- Incorporate sibling relationships counselling into premarital and marital guidance programs.
- Develop culturally-sensitive family therapy embedded in Pakistani culture.
- Furthermore, there is a need to develop and maintain healthy family ties among all family members before and after the marriages of siblings.

Limitations

- The small, urban-based sample limits transferability to rural population and different socioeconomic strata within Pakistan.
- Only sisters' perspective was included, brothers' narrative must be examined.
- Findings are culturally-embedded in Pakistani patriarchal family systems.

Future Recommendations

- Longitudinal studies need to be conducted to determine the long-term effects of sibling alienation. The way in which practices and policies for

supporting Pakistani families are affected by sibling alienation should be grounded in research and guided by findings in relation to the long-term effects of its sustainability.

- Compare rural and urban population to assess contextual differences.
- Explore experiences of married sisters and with various age differences.
- Use mix method designs and include multiple family members for systemic analysis and comprehensive strategies.

Author Contribution

Bisma Azeem: data curation, formal analysis, writing – original draft. **Arooj Nazir:** conceptualization, methodology, supervision. **Zainab Sohail**: formal analysis, writing – review & editing. **Laiba Shaukat**: formal analysis, writing – review & editing.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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