Author's response to reviews

Title: Circumstances Leading to Intimate Partner Violence Against Women Married as Children: A Qualitative Study in Urban Slums of Lahore, Pakistan

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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Giulia Mangiameli  
Executive Editor  
International Health & Human Rights

Subject: Cover letter for submission of original research article.

Dear Dr. Mangiameli,

Please find enclosed our revised manuscript that we would like to submit for publication in the journal of *BMC International Health & Human Rights* entitled “Circumstances Leading to Intimate Partner Violence Against Women Married as Children: A Qualitative Study in Urban Slums of Lahore, Pakistan.” We have made all changes as recommended by the reviewers. The detailed one-to-one response to the reviewers are submitted with the manuscript.

The data on child marriage from Pakistan is non-existent in the literature. Despite UNICEF and other international organizations’ efforts in eradicating child marriage (before 18 years) globally, it is prevalent in Pakistan, which disproportionately affects young girls in rural, low income and low education households. Prevalence of child marriage and its deleterious effects on women and child health hinders the country in achieving United Nations Millennium Development Goals of improving maternal health, reducing child mortality, promoting gender equality and women empowerment. Limited knowledge is available about different types of IPV (psychological, threatened physical, attempted physical, completed physical, unwanted sex) experienced by women married as children. There is dearth of literature on different circumstances that leads to IPV against women married as children. The aim of this study is therefore, to describe the types and circumstances of IPV against women who were married as children in urban slums of Lahore, Pakistan.

Our qualitative study showed that the majority of women had been victim of verbal abuse, and threatened, attempted and completed physical violence by their husbands. A sizeable number of women reported unwanted sexual encounter by their husbands. Family affairs particularly issues with in-laws, poor house management, lack of proper care of children, bringing insufficient dowry, financial problems, any act against the will of husband, and inability to give birth to a male child were some the reasons narrate by the participants that led to violence against women.

Neither the paper nor any of its essential substance or figures has been published or is being considered for publication elsewhere. The authors declare that the manuscript contains nothing that is, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, unlawful, infringes on the rights of any other person, or on any copyright. All authors have read the manuscript and concur with its contents.

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Sincerely yours,
Muazzam Nasrullah
Responses to reviewers’ comments

Thank you to the reviewers for their thoughtful comments. We have made an attempt to address each comment in the paper and have responded to each below by explaining what we did to address each comment. We feel the revised paper is much stronger as a result of your input. If there is anything we misunderstood, or if we did not sufficiently address a suggested edit, we are more than happy to make additional edits.

RE: Manuscript Number- 9281059811587243

"Circumstances Leading to Intimate Partner Violence Against Women Married as Children: A Qualitative Study in Urban Slums of Lahore, Pakistan."

Reviewers' comments:

Reviewer #1:
1. Overall, the theme of this research study is important in settings where little or no data exists about the experience of IPV among those affected by child marriage or early marriage. The following points were highlighted to clarify:

Major essential revisions
2. The paper is in need of serious professional edit for English language, syntax, grammar and style. A thorough edit will render the paper more clear and coherent.

RESPONSE: The paper is now revised and edited for English language.

3. In the abstract, the authors mention 20 participants who agreed to participate. Later on, in the ‘Methods’ section, the authors state that 19 women agreed to participate. This is confusing, so it should be altered in the abstract so as to accurately reflect the number of participants in this research study.

RESPONSE: Thanks for the comment. We have revised the text. Please see line 37.

4. In the last paragraph of the abstract, authors put forward that strict laws against IPV and child marriage may help reduce the child marriage practice and IPV against women. This is not reflected nor mentioned in the ‘Discussion’ or ‘Conclusion’ section of the main manuscript.

RESPONSE: Thanks for the comment. We have now revised conclusion section of the abstract. Please see line 46-48.

5. In the ‘Results’ section, under the header ‘psychological violence’, it is stated that qualitative data revealed that women’s mobility or access to information is not restricted in couples from the same age group. It is unclear what the ‘qualitative data’ refers to. Is a reference to external literature missing, or are the authors referring to the data they collected from the research study?

RESPONSE: We have not revised the text for clarification. Please see page 10, line 208.
Minor essential revisions

1. In the ‘Results’ section, under the header ‘threatened physical violence’, a quote is assigned to a participant in mid-twenties, uneducated, and married at the age of forty years’. This is an overlooked error.

   RESPONSE: Thanks for the comment. The quote has been deleted as per suggestion of reviewer #2.

2. Throughout the manuscript, there are inconsistencies with numbers. For example, sometimes the authors mention ‘13 of 19 (participants)’, and other times reference is made to ‘nine of 19’. Also when referring to participants’ age of marriage in the quotes, sometimes the numerological indicator is given for their age (f.ex. 13 years), and other times it is written (f.ex. fifteen years).

   RESPONSE: Thank you. We have now revised the text throughout for consistency in use of the numbers.

Discretionary revisions

1. The article could provide more information on the legislative framework regarding IPV and child marriage in Pakistan. Does Pakistani legislation incorporate a minimum marriage age? Is marital rape a punishable act?

   RESPONSE: Although this information is important but beyond the scope of this paper. We have described the legislative framework of child marriage in Pakistan in our earlier studies. For instance, please read our published paper:


2. What is the reason for the choice of 20 women? And could more details be provided about the geographic representation of the participants among the 6 selected localities?

   RESPONSE: The NGO representatives identified 23 women for in-depth interviews, nevertheless, we achieved saturation point at 19th interview and stopped further interviews at that stage. The information is now updated in the text. Please see page 6, lines 109-111.

3. For enhanced clarity, respondents could be given numbers or false names in addition to age, educational level, etc. This would enable the reader to judge how often individual respondents are drawn upon.

   RESPONSE: We feel that providing false names is not necessary. The other details provided, like age of marriage, age of participant and education can be used for the same reason.

Reviewer #2:

General Points The study’s aims – to describe the types of IPV and contributing factors for experiencing IPV among women married as children are important for the field. As well, research on the IPV experiences of women living in urban slums of Pakistan would
be a critical addition to the literature. However, this study exhibits significant limitations to accomplishing these goals. These are enumerated below.

1. In addition, writing quality, grammar, and use of English are another major impediment. An English language expert should help with revisions, though I am concerned that the translations of the interview transcripts may also need validity checks.

   RESPONSE: The paper is now revised and edited for English language.

Major Compulsory Revisions

2. Background: In the third paragraph, the authors begin to establish the scope of the problem of child marriage in Pakistan, but do not go far enough. They state that child marriage is “prevalent” and is “associated with negative health outcomes,” but do not indicate how prevalent or which health outcomes. This needs elaboration.

   RESPONSE: We have now added the text (see line 70). In our earlier publications we have established relationship between child marriage and worst fertility outcomes, and under 5 morbidity and mortality in Pakistan. Please read our published papers for details (see references 8 and 11).


3. The authors also state that women married as children suffer more violence than women married as adults and includes the statistic “38% vs 25.1%” without giving any context. What study is this from? Is it a representative sample? If not, what was the sample size?

   RESPONSE: Thanks for your comments. We have revised the text for clarification (line 73).

4. Finally, the authors also state that “IPV against young and adolescent women who are married as children is also prevalent in Pakistan,” without offering any figures.

   RESPONSE: We have now added figures in the text (line 74-75).

5. The authors do not justify in the background why they chose to conduct their study in urban slums of Lahore. There is a literature that discusses the unique risks of IPV among urban women, particularly those that live in slums. This should be included here.

   RESPONSE: This is a convenient sample, and given the access of gatekeepers who were female representatives of NGOs, had a rapport and efficient networking with women in the locality, we conducted our study in urban slums of Lahore. The text is now added in the methods section. Please see page 5 & 6 (lines 84-111).
6. Missing from the background is a discussion about acceptance of IPV in Pakistan. Most readers will not have a familiarity with the context, so including information on attitudes/norms related to violence against women, as well as legal implications, is important. 
**RESPONSE:** We have discussed the attitude/norms related to violence against women in the discussion section. Please see page 18-19, paragraph 2 and 3.

7. Methods: Generally, justification of the methods was weak and need much deeper explanation and clarification. Participant selection: 1. It is not clear why the authors chose interviewees that had “prenatal and postal experience.” At no point in the manuscript do they discuss that participants had to have children. 
**RESPONSE:** Information is now added in the methods section. See page 6.

8. Also, what NGOs did the “gatekeepers” work for? And how did the NGO employees identify the 19 participants. This is critical information. 
**RESPONSE:** Information is now added in the methods section. See page 6.

9. 2. How were the six localities randomly selected and why did the authors choose six? And out of how many localities? 
**RESPONSE:** Information is now added in the methods section. See page 6.

10. Data collection: 1. Why did the authors choose to use in-depth interviews? Some justification of this approach (as opposed to surveys or focus groups, etc.) would legitimize the methods for the reader. 
**RESPONSE:** Information is now added in the methods section.

11. 2. Authors state “Themes for interviews were developed using published scientific literature and everyday observations of the researchers.” What does this mean? Please provide concrete examples of literature, interview questions, and observations of the researchers. 
**RESPONSE:** Information is now added in the methods section. See page 7.

12. 3. If the interview guide was revised based on the feedback of pre-test interviewees – were these cognitive interviews? The manuscript reads as though these were informal comments given to the researchers. The authors should elaborate on this process. 
**RESPONSE:** Information is now added in the methods section. See page 7. As a note these are qualitative in-depth interviews and not the quantitative surveys where cognitive testing are required.

13. 4. Were the interview guides initially written in Urdu? Or were they translated from English? Later it says the transcripts were translated to English. If this is also the case with the interview guides, the authors should explain this process. 
**RESPONSE:** Information is now added in the methods section.

14. 5. Who were the interviewers? Are they also the researchers? Or people contracted for this research? And who were they trained by?
RESPONSE: Information is now added in the methods section. See page 7.

15. 6. Interviewers “sharing their respective experiences of married life” with interviewees is not standard research protocol. Is this a customary practice in Pakistan? Please justify.
   **RESPONSE: The text has been revised for clarity.**

16. 7. Further elaboration on safety, privacy, and anonymity protocols is needed. Is there any way to link the participant with her responses? How can you ensure privacy and safety? Also, it is standard to implement protocols in anticipation of participants experiencing emotional distress when collecting data on IPV. Did the authors have such protocols? If so, what were they?
   **RESPONSE: Information is now added in the methods section. See page 8.**

17. Data Management and Analysis 1. It reads as though one person conducted translation and back translation between Urdu and English. Is this the case? If so, accuracy of translations might be compromised. This process is supposed to be completed by at least two people to ensure quality of translation.
   **RESPONSE: Thanks for the information. The text has been revised for clarity. See page 9.**

18. Results Psychological Violence 1. One major concern I had was the use of the categories “psychological violence, threatened physical violence, attempted and completed physical violence, and unwanted sex” to parse out the results. Types of IPV are not typically delineated this way. Usually, IPV is categorized as physical, sexual, and emotional, though each group has sub-categories (e.g., sexual IPV includes both forced sex using threats/intimidation and physically forced to have sex). See: World Health Organization. (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. World Health Organization. The authors need to state whether or not they created these categories (and if so, how) or if these categories were derived from the data collected for this study. Even if the latter is the case, better definition of these categories is needed and more precise differentiation.
   **RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. Intimate partner violence module questions were designed to be behaviorally-specific and were based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)’s uniform definitions of IPV [Saltzman et al., 2002*].*Saltzman LE, Fanslow JL, McMahon PM, Shelley GA. Intimate partner violence surveillance: uniform definitions and recommended data elements, version 1.0. Atlanta: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: 2002.**

19. Isn’t threatened physical violence a form of psychological violence? According to most IPV literature, this is the case. This is a major concern because identifying the “types of IPV” women married as children face is one of the stated aims of the study.
   **RESPONSE: Please see my response to your comment #18.**
20. The contextual factors contributing to “psychological violence” are vague and needs further explanation. For example, “issues with in-laws, instigation of mother in law, poor house management” are all highlighted as contributing factors, but I’m not sure what the authors mean by these.

RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. In the results section we only added what we get from the participants. Unfortunately, we do not have more information.

21. Authors need to better integrate quotes and findings. Specifically, the quotes should elucidate the finding or findings in the text written just prior. Here is an example of where the authors fail to link the quotes to the narrative (page 9): “It was believed by the victims that men adopt humiliating behavior to show their supremacy over women. According to one of the participant (sic), ‘It not only depicts that they their (sic) husbands were ignorant of the principals (sic) of Islam (which forbid violence and humiliation) but also had poor training by their parents that they legitimize violence against women.’” This quote should demonstrate that the participants believe men perpetrate violence to enact their supremacy, but instead it addresses a different issue.

RESPONSE: The quote has been deleted.

22. In the third paragraph on page 9, the authors discuss the difference between couples who are closer in age and those that have a “greater age difference.” In order to make a meaningful comparison, additional information is needed. First, how do the authors define close in age? And how do they define greater age difference? Also, how many participants fall in each category? I would be cautious about drawing general conclusions about these two categories.

RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. These are qualitative in-depth interviews and not the population surveys used for quantitative data. Whatever was perception of the interviwee about the age difference at the time of interview we took that information.

23. Threatened Physical Violence 1. Participants’ explanation of drivers of threatened physical violence – like those of psychological violence – need further explanation. What do the authors mean by “a technique by their husbands to release tension, hide their faults”? Also, what do authors mean by “children’s future” and “family honor” as reasons for participants staying in abusive relationships?

RESPONSE. Thanks for your comments. We have added information for clarity. However, we want to point out here that these are results and not the discussion section. We cannot infer the results here in this section. However we did discuss some of it in the discussion section.

24. Here too, the second quote does not link with the paragraph just preceding it. In fact, it appears to contradict the finding. In the text, “children’s future” is given as a reason women stay in abusive relationships, but the quote highlights how this participant’s children also experience abuse at the hands of her husband.

RESPONSE: The quote has been deleted.

25. Two participants did not experience threatened physical violence because the couples had “developed mutual trust.” Please explain. Also, did these participants experience any other type of violence? Or no violence at all?
RESPONSE. Thanks for your comments. We want to point out here that these are results and not the discussion section. We cannot infer the results here in this section.

26. 4. The authors stated that “it was interesting to explore that ‘wife’s limits’ were defined by her husband.” This needs further explanation.
RESPONSE: I am sorry we do not have further information. Also, these are results and not the discussion section. We cannot infer the results here in this section.

27. 5. The authors might want to consider dropping the quantification of different experiences. The sample size is small, so it does not really add to the analysis. As well, in many instances the frequencies are not used with precision. For example, on page 11, the authors state that 13 out of 19 participants stated that “quarrel on domestic issues, financial problems…” contribute to threatened physical violence. Do all 13 agree on all of the reasons? Or just some? This is a problem throughout the manuscript.
RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. The quantification here is needed to understand the magnitude of the problem.

28. 6. What do the authors mean by “anything happening against the will of husband led to their threatening behavior”? This is another example of contextual factors needing further exploration/explanation.
RESPONSE: I am sorry we do not have further information. Also, these are results and not the discussion section. We cannot infer the results here in this section.

29. Attempted and Completed Physical Violence 1. Were the categories “hit, push, slap, and hurt” derived from participant interviews? Were there other categories? How is “hurt” defined?
RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. As mentioned earlier, intimate partner violence module questions were designed to be behaviorally-specific and were based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)’s uniform definitions of IPV [Saltzman et al., 2002].


30. 2. The distinction between attempted and completed physical violence is unclear. This needs further explanation. What prevented those who attempted violence from actually perpetrating the violence? And how is attempting different from threatening?
RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. As mentioned earlier, intimate partner violence module questions were designed to be behaviorally-specific and were based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)’s uniform definitions of IPV [Saltzman et al., 2002].
31. This section also provides another example of an unclear use of frequency. “It was reported by 4 of 19 participants that some men consider themselves honored, glorious and masculine if they beat their wives.” Did all four participants state all three “honored, glorious, and masculine”? Also, what did the participants mean by these descriptions?

RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. The quantification here is needed to understand the magnitude of the problem. We combined themes with similar meanings together.

32. The three women who “had not faced violence in their life” because of submissive behavior – they didn’t face any violence? Does this also include the threat of violence? Further exploration of “submissive behavior” would also add a meaningful contribution to the manuscript.

RESPONSE: I am sorry we do not have further information.

33. Unwanted Sex 1. The authors title this section as “unwanted sex” and then state in the first sentence that women reported an “unwanted sexual encounter.” Are these the same? They both need defining. As well, why isn’t this called “sexual violence” in the same way the authors use “physical violence”? “Forced sex” could be another possibility. Authors need to substantiate the use of terms. 2. The second sentence needs to be addressed for two reasons. First, the authors highlight two of the “reasons” for the perpetration of unwanted sex, one of which is intoxication. It is important to frame “reasons” instead as “contributing factors.” Forced sex does not occur solely because of intoxication, but it does contribute to the perpetration. Second, the other contributing factor given is “sexual arousal with intense love of husbands.” The meaning of this is unclear.

RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. As mentioned earlier, intimate partner violence module questions were designed to be behaviorally-specific and were based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)’s uniform definitions of IPV [Saltzman et al., 2002].


34. Discussion 1. In the discussion and conclusion, the authors claim that their data substantiate the “prevalence” of certain phenomenon, including IPV, among women married as children. As a qualitative study, this research does not support any conclusions about prevalence among the broader population. For example, in the second paragraph the authors state, “Our data indicated that a majority of women married as children belonged to a low socio-economic class…” And later in the third paragraph, “Consistent with previous national and international research, our study found that women married as children are at an increased risk or IPV.” The authors cannot make this claim. While the findings of the study can be contextualized within the broader literature, they do not offer quantitative support to previous studies.

RESPONSE: We have revised the text, where ever possible. We by no means want to quantify the findings but trying to say that our findings are in parallel to the published literature.
35. In the discussion the authors discuss findings from their study that were not mentioned in the results section. This needs to be addressed. For example, in the third paragraph, the authors state that participants did not consider psychological violence a form of violence, particularly if it was perpetrated in private. This was never mentioned previously.

RESPONSE: The text has been revised for clarity.

36. The authors state, in paragraph four, that participants living with extended family were more likely to experience IPV. The study does not support these quantitative claims. As well, the authors did not discuss in the findings the difference in experiences of IPV among participants living in extended families and those who were not.

RESPONSE: We have revised the text. Several of our participants narrate that in-laws were the cause of violence at several instances.

37. This is also the case on page 16 when the authors discuss that people who have previously experienced family violence are more likely to experience violence later in life. In the discussion, the authors suggest this is a finding of the study, but it is never mentioned in the results.

RESPONSE: The text has been deleted for clarity.

38. As discussed in the results section, the authors need to further clarify the difference between couples closer in age and those with greater age difference. These findings are re-emphasized in the discussion and need a much deeper explanation.

RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. These are qualitative in-depth interviews and not the population surveys used for quantitative data. Whatever was perception of the interviewee about the age difference at the time of interview we took that information. There is abundant literature out there, depicting that larger age group is one of the risk factor for IPV among women married as children. For instance, see the reference 18 by Raj et al.

39. The limitations need broadening. Not only can the authors not generalize to rural or “upper social class” women, they cannot generalize at all. The findings might reflect the experiences of other women married as children living in poor urban areas of Lahore, but it is not certain - particularly given that the method for participant selection is unclear from the manuscript.

REFERENCE: Thanks for the comment. We have added limitations in the section.

40. Conclusion 1. Here too the authors draw conclusions that are not supported by their findings. This study does not indicate that “women married as children are more vulnerable to IPV” nor that they “have little autonomy and control over their lives.”

RESPONSE: The text has been revised for clarity.
41. For the first time authors discuss “patriarchal norms.” The authors should introduce this concept, particularly in the context of Pakistan, in the background.
RESPONSE: The ”patriarchal norms” have been discussed at few places in the discussion. Please see page 17, and page 18.

42. Given that this study does not add to the literature on prevalence of IPV among women who were married as children, but instead contributes contextual factors on the types of IPV this population experiences, conclusions might also include that this group needs specific types of services, etc.
RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. We tried accomodating your suggestions, where ever necessary.

43. Minor Essential Revisions Background: 1. The authors need to update their global statistics on intimate partner violence. They state that estimate lifetime prevalence is from 15-71%, however, it is standard now to cite WHO’s new figures from the 2013 study, Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women, which indicates that 30% of ever-partnered women globally have experienced IPV. The full citation: World Health Organization. (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. World Health Organization.
RESPONSE: Thanks for providing the reference. We have now updated the reference.

44. Methods: 1. How many people coded the transcripts? Were there systematic cross-checks among coders to ensure agreement on codes/themes? Was this a dialogic process? If so, please elaborate.
RESPONSE: Information is now added in the methods section.

45. Conclusion: 1. Add citations to the first sentence of the second paragraph.
RESPONSE: This is a general statement.

Reviewer #3:
Major Compulsory Revisions:
1. Selection and recruitment of study participants is not clearly described. The practice of using “gatekeepers” is not explained, and introduces questions of potential bias. If informal and personal networks were used to identify respondents, it is difficult to know how similar or different respondents might be to the broader population.
RESPONSE: Thanks for your comment. Information has been added in the methods section. Please see pages 5-9. We have also included a limitation of using a gatekeeper in the study (please see page 20).

2. One of the main conclusions of the study is that women married as children are more vulnerable to IPV, but this finding is not supported by the methodology. Presumably, the authors mean that the women married as children are more vulnerable to IPV than women married as adults, but there is no such comparison group in this study that could lead them to this conclusion. While it is valuable to have information on the extent and types of violence experienced by this group of
women, it is difficult to know to what extent this is attributable to the age at which they married, versus other factors. This conclusion needs clarification.

RESPONSE: Thanks for your comments. We have now revised the text for clarification. Reviewer is right in saying that there is no comparison group. As a result we cannot come to a conclusion whether women married as children suffer more violence than those married as adults. We only said in the text that the women married as children suffer IPV.

3. Limitations stated are extremely brief. There should be fuller exploration of potential bias in study due to participant recruitment, as well as acknowledgment of the limitations of the small size of the study.

RESPONSE: We have now included the limitation in the text related to selection bias of the participants (see page 20). We have also included text in the methods section explaining the reason of including 19 participants in the study (see page 6 at the end of first paragraph).

MINOR Essential Revisions:

1. In the background section, it is stated that "IPV is prevalent in Pakistan, like in other low and middle-income countries," but IPV is common across socio-economic settings.

   RESPONSE: We have now revised the sentence.

2. The conclusions on how spousal age gap affects the key outcomes are not clearly stated.

   RESPONSE: The outcomes of spousal age gap has been explained in the discussion section. Please see page 18, paragraph 2.