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
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:
The incorporated changes and editing have enhanced the quality of the manuscript. The authors adequately responded to and addressed many of the original remarks.

There are still a few comments that need clarification:

Major compulsory revision:
1. In the original manuscript (version 1), the authors stated the following in the ‘methods’ section: “Twenty participants were approached by the researchers, of which 19 agreed to participate.” Now the authors report: “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.” While the first statement is not necessarily incompatible with the second, it does raise questions. Why did the 20th participant decide not to participate? Were participants 21 to 23 requested to participate?

RESPONSE: Thanks for the comments. The NGO representatives identified (not invited to participate) 23 women for in-depth interviews. However, achieved saturation point at 19th interview and stopped further interviews at that stage. The rest of women though identified but never invited to participate because of the saturation of information.

Minor compulsory revisions:
1. In the revised manuscript, the authors provide more background and information about the choice of research setting and participants’ recruitment. The manuscript would gain clarity if more information could be provided about the geographic representation of participants. What is the number of participants from Nishtar Town, and from Daata Gunj Buksh Town?

RESPONSE: Thanks for the comments. During the interview, no personal information like addresses and phone numbers were collected (mentioned on page 8, lines 154-155).
2. The paper is still in need of some editing for English language, syntax, grammar and spelling. (for example: lines 38-43; line 63; lines 229-230; line 275; lines 297-300, …)

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

**Reviewer #2:**

Overall, 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.

**Major Compulsory Revisions:**

1. The paper is still in need of a professional edit.  
   **RESPONSE:** The paper is now revised and edited for English language.

2. In the discussion section, the authors state that the study showed IPV is common among women married as children. From the methods, it seems that study participants were chosen specifically b/c they were married as children and had experiences with IPV. Therefore, the authors can’t claim that the study showed IPV is common. It can, however, conclude that the violence experienced by women in this study who were married as children share some common characteristics.  
   **RESPONSE:** The only criteria set forth for selection of participants were 1) married before the age of 18 years (child marriage) 2) married for at least 5 years (see page 5, line 84-85). We DID NOT mention anywhere that participants were chosen if they had experienced IPV in the past.

3. The authors should refrain throughout the discussion and conclusion to suggest that the study shows IPV is prevalent. This is a qualitative study with a purposive sample – so its contribution to the literature is a description of IPV (contributing factors, attitudes towards, etc.) not a quantification of.  
   **RESPONSE:** We have revised the text to make sure that it does not depict quantification.

4. Although the authors revised the text so as to remove the word “generalizations,” these claims are still being made. For example, in the discussion section, “a majority of women married as children belonged to a low socio-economic class and had no formal schooling.” These participants were recruited from a poor community, so it cannot add to the literature that says women married as children belong to urban slums…  
   **RESPONSE:** Thanks for your comment. The text has been revised for clarification.

**Minor Essential Revisions:**

1. In the methods section, please clarify if the pre-post natal experiences were necessary for this study or the larger one. Did all of the participants also have children? Is this relevant in anyway to the findings?  
   **RESPONSE:** As explained in our methods section, the present study is a part of a broader qualitative study titled “Child marriage and its impact on
maternal and child health in Pakistan”. Overall in the study we had themes on “Reasons and attitude towards child marriage”, “Fertility outcomes”, “Pre- and post-natal care”, “Morbidity and mortality of children under 5 years of age” and “domestic violence”. This paper is limited to women’s experience of different types of domestic violence. Please see lines 83-84, and 88-91 on page 5.