

Marriage Related Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities: A Sociocultural Analysis of Gilgit-Baltistan

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Abstract

This study explores the marriage-related challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan, focusing on sociocultural stigma, family influence, economic barriers, emotional factors, and institutional limitations. Using a quantitative descriptive survey design, data were collected from 387 respondents, including unmarried and married persons with disabilities, parents, and community members. The findings reveal that negative societal attitudes, cultural misconceptions, and family concerns about social reputation significantly restrict marriage opportunities. Economic dependency, unemployment, and high medical expenses further reduce marital prospects, while emotional insecurity, social isolation, and limited accessibility hinder confidence and relationship-building. Institutional gaps, such as inadequate legal awareness, insufficient government support, and lack of disability inclusive services, exacerbate these challenges. The study concludes that marriage prospects for persons with disabilities are shaped by interconnected structural and attitudinal barriers, highlighting the need for community awareness, stronger family support, economic empowerment, and inclusive institutional policies to promote marital equity.

Key Words: *Disability, Marriage challenges, sociocultural stigma, Family influence, Gilgit-Baltistan, Economic barriers, Institutional support, Inclusion*

Introduction

Persons with disabilities face deep social, cultural, and institutional barriers that influence their life opportunities, particularly in matters related to marriage and family formation. In many societies, marriage is not only a personal milestone but also a marker of social legitimacy, adulthood, and communal belonging. However, individuals with physical, sensory, cognitive, or psychosocial disabilities frequently confront stigma, discriminatory norms, and structural exclusions that limit their autonomy and participation in marital relationships. International scholarship shows that disability is commonly associated with dependence, reduced social value, and assumptions of inadequacy, creating significant obstacles to marital inclusion (Banks & Polack, 2014). Similarly, global evidence indicates that negative attitudes toward disability are especially widespread in traditional and socially conservative communities where disability is framed as a burden or a social liability (Groce & Kett, 2013). Across South Asia, marriage is shaped by cultural expectations, notions of family honor, and

collective decision-making. Research from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal reveals that persons with disabilities are frequently viewed as incapable of fulfilling marital roles such as household management, economic contribution, and parenting, resulting in reduced acceptance as potential marriage partners (Mishra & Gupta, 2021). Families often internalize community pressures and hesitate to accept or initiate marriage proposals involving a special need individual due to fears of social shame and long-term caregiving responsibilities. Gendered expectations intensify these disadvantages for women. Studies show that special need women face disproportionately higher discrimination, as femininity in South Asian cultures is linked with physical capability, domestic responsibility, and modest presentation, making disability a perceived barrier to fulfilling societal expectations of womanhood (Haque & Shaheen, 2020).

Gilgit-Baltistan, a geographically remote and culturally diverse region of northern Pakistan, provides a unique context where kinship structures, traditional norms, and communal networks strongly influence marital arrangements. Although public awareness about disability has gradually increased, individuals with disabilities in the region continue to encounter limited social acceptance and heightened discrimination in marriage negotiations. While academic literature on disability in Gilgit-Baltistan remains sparse, regional assessments and NGO reports indicate that stigma, overprotective family behavior, and limited participation in social settings where marriage arrangements are typically negotiated contribute to the exclusion of disabled persons from marital opportunities (Sightsavers, 2021). In many communities, disability is still interpreted as misfortune or weakness, reinforcing social exclusion and restricting opportunities for forming marital relationships.

Marriage practices in the region rely heavily on collective decision-making, where potential spouses are assessed based on perceived physical capability, social suitability, and economic contributions to familial responsibilities. These expectations create substantial challenges for persons with disabilities, whose abilities are often underestimated due to widespread stereotypes. Studies from rural Pakistan show that individuals with special needs commonly experience emotional distress, rejection, and social isolation during marriage negotiations, affecting self-esteem and psychological well-being (Hassan & Mehmood, 2020). Such dynamics highlight how cultural norms, disability-related prejudice, and gender roles intersect to shape marital outcomes.

Economic marginalization further limits marriage opportunities for persons with disabilities. Research consistently shows that individuals with special needs in Pakistan face limited access to employment, vocational training, and income-generating opportunities due to discriminatory practices and inaccessible environments (ILO, 2020). For many families, financial strain is a major concern, as resources are often diverted to medical needs or caregiving responsibilities, reducing the likelihood of prioritizing or pursuing marriage arrangements.

Institutional shortcomings compound these challenges. Pakistan has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), yet implementation remains inconsistent, and disability-inclusive services are limited. In Gilgit-Baltistan, the absence of accessible marriage counseling, limited government support, and low awareness of disability rights hinder the ability of disabled individuals to navigate marital decisions with confidence (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Community and religious leaders, who often influence marriage-related decisions, may lack adequate knowledge of disability rights, thereby reinforcing existing misconceptions rather than promoting inclusion.

Despite these challenges, slow but notable changes are emerging, driven by increased education, disability advocacy, and greater exposure to national and global rights-based discourse. Younger generations tend to hold more inclusive attitudes, although these shifts have not yet translated into widespread cultural or structural transformation. There is a pressing need for systematic research that examines the intersecting sociocultural, economic, psychological, and institutional barriers affecting the marital prospects of disabled individuals in Gilgit-Baltistan.

The present study seeks to explore the marriage-related challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan by analyzing sociocultural attitudes, family influence, financial constraints, and

institutional support mechanisms. By examining these interconnected dimensions, this research aims to deepen understanding of the lived experiences of individuals with special needs and contribute to policy development, community sensitization, and inclusive social practices that uphold dignity, autonomy, and equality.

Objectives

- 1- To examine the extent of sociocultural stigma and negative community attitudes that influence the marriage prospects of persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan.
- 2- To explore the influence of family perceptions, support systems, and decision-making processes on the marriage opportunities of persons with disabilities.
- 3- To analyze economic and financial barriers that affect the ability of persons with disabilities to pursue or sustain marriage in the region.
- 4- To evaluate physical, emotional, and social support needs that impact the confidence, readiness, and marital expectations of persons with disabilities.
- 5- To explore legal, religious, and institutional factors that either facilitate or hinder the marital rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Literature Review

Marriage is widely regarded as a central social institution across cultures, yet persons with disabilities often experience significant barriers that limit their opportunities to form marital relationships. Existing scholarship consistently demonstrates that disability intersects with stigma, cultural norms, family dynamics, economic constraints, and institutional factors, creating multidimensional challenges that shape marital outcomes (Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2018). Understanding these challenges requires a sociocultural lens, particularly in regions such as Gilgit-Baltistan where traditional value systems and collectivist family structures strongly influence marriage practices. This literature review synthesizes global, regional, and local research to provide a conceptual foundation for exploring marriage-related issues faced by persons with disabilities.

Studies across various countries reveal that sociocultural stigma and discriminatory attitudes are primary barriers to marriage for people with disabilities. Negative societal perceptions often portray disability as a burden, misfortune, or sign of weakness, resulting in reluctance to accept disabled individuals as suitable marriage partners (Trani et al., 2019). In South Asian societies, disability is frequently associated with shame or divine punishment, leading communities to question the capability of disabled individuals to maintain family life or fulfill marital duties (Hussain, 2020). For many families, stigma extends beyond the individual and affects the social standing of the entire household, influencing marriage negotiations and decisions. Such attitudes limit social acceptance and reduce opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in relationship-building activities, particularly in conservative and rural areas.

Another major theme in the literature concerns the role of family influence in marriage decision-making. In collectivist societies such as Pakistan, India, and Nepal, families often make or heavily influence marital choices, which can disadvantage individuals with disabilities. Parents may refuse marriage proposals involving individuals with special needs due to fears of social judgment, concerns about long-term caregiving, or perceived inability of the individual to manage marital responsibilities (Shaheen & Munir, 2021). Research also highlights gendered disparities: women with disabilities face far more barriers than men, as patriarchal norms often cast doubts on their reproductive ability, domestic competence, and social acceptability (Grech & Soldatic, 2016). Families may be more open to arranging marriages for disabled men than disabled women, reflecting deep-rooted gender inequalities.

Economic factors are also widely documented as significant determinants of marriage prospects. Economic dependency, unemployment, and poverty are common among persons with disabilities due to limited access to education and employment opportunities (Mughal et al., 2020). Families with disabled members often struggle with medical expenses, reduced earning capacity, and long-term

caregiving costs, making marriage negotiations more difficult. In South Asia, where financial stability is a major criterion for marital suitability, disability-related economic limitations can significantly lower marriage prospects. Mitra and Sambamoorthi (2018) found that individuals with disabilities in developing countries are less likely to be married due to financial concerns and societal assumptions about their ability to support a household. These economic barriers intersect with social stigma, creating compounded disadvantages.

The sociocultural and economic barriers, scholars emphasize the impact of emotional, physical, and social support needs in marriage experiences. Persons with disabilities often face social isolation, low self-esteem, and limited opportunities to form relationships due to restricted mobility, inaccessible environments, and exclusion from social gatherings (Aslam & Tariq, 2022). Psychosocial challenges such as anxiety and emotional stress, often resulting from repeated rejection and discrimination, further diminish confidence to pursue marriage. Research suggests that societal assumptions about the caregiving needs of disabled persons influence marital decisions: many people believe that individuals with special need require constant support, leading to hesitancy from potential spouses or their families (Trani et al., 2019). These perceptions restrict autonomy and reinforce marginalization in intimate relationships.

Institutional and structural barriers also play a crucial role. While global frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) emphasize the right to marry and form a family without discrimination, implementation remains weak in many countries, including Pakistan. Studies show that lack of institutional support, inadequate legal protection, and limited disability-awareness programs contribute to the marginalization of disabled persons in marital matters (UNCRPD, 2022). Religious interpretations can also influence attitudes, with some communities misinterpreting religious teachings to discourage marriage involving persons with disabilities. Moreover, social welfare departments rarely provide specialized counseling or support services to address marriage-related needs of disabled individuals, leaving families without guidance or resources (Hussain, 2020).

Although research on disability in Pakistan is growing, studies specifically focused on marriage remain limited, especially in northern mountainous regions like Gilgit-Baltistan. Existing literature indicates that cultural conservatism, strong kinship networks, and community-based decision-making significantly shape marriage patterns in this region (Ali & Khan, 2017). Disability is often perceived through traditional or religious lenses, and families may prioritize social reputation over the personal desires of individuals with special need. Women with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan face heightened vulnerability due to gender norms, restricted mobility, and reduced access to education (Shaheen & Munir, 2021). Despite gradual improvements in awareness and inclusion, social attitudes remain a major obstacle.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design to investigate the marriage related challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan. A structured Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of 50 items was developed based on international disability studies, sociocultural theories, and family-decision frameworks. The population comprised persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychosocial disabilities of marriageable age living across Gilgit-Baltistan, along with parents or guardians involved in marriage decision-making. The accessible population included individuals registered with disability centers, rehabilitation organizations, special education institutions, community based organizations, and social welfare departments across the districts of Gilgit, Skardu, Hunza, Nagar, Diamer, Ghizer, and Ghanche. A purposive sampling technique was used, and a total of 387 respondents were selected for the study, including 150 unmarried persons with disabilities facing marriage obstacles, 85 married persons with disabilities who experienced challenges before or after marriage, 75 parents or guardians involved in marriage decisions, and 77 community members or social workers providing informed perspectives. Data were

collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed through organizational networks and community outreach, with informed consent and assurance of voluntary participation. The study was delimited to the sociocultural context of Gilgit-Baltistan and focused solely on marriage-related challenges using quantitative data.

Result and Analysis

Table.1 Demographic Characteristics of Persons with Disabilities (N = 235)

Variable	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	163	69.4
	Female	72	30.6
Age Group	18–25 years	81	34.5
	26–35 years	123	52.3
	36–45 years	15	6.4
	46 years and above	16	6.8
Type of Disability	Physical Disability	63	26.8
	Visual Impairment	55	23.4
	Hearing Impairment	67	28.5
	Intellectual Disability	30	12.8
	Psychosocial Disability	20	8.5
Education Level	No formal education	58	24.7
	Primary	57	24.3
	Middle	33	14.0
	Secondary (Matric)	22	9.4
	Intermediate	27	11.5
	Bachelor’s degree	15	6.4
	Master’s degree or above	23	9.8
District	Gilgit	45	19.1
	Skardu	37	15.7
	Hunza	23	9.8
	Nagar	29	12.3
	Diamer	52	22.1
	Ghizer	32	13.6
	Ghanche	17	7.2

Note: The demographic data in Table 1 refers to the 235 persons with disabilities, while the descriptive statistics include data from all 387 respondents, including parents and community members.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 235 persons with disabilities who participated in the study. The data indicate that males constituted a larger portion of the sample (69.4 percent) compared to females (30.6 percent). The majority of respondents were between 26 and 35 years of age (52.3 percent), followed by those aged 18 to 25 years (34.5 percent), showing that the sample largely consisted of young adults. Hearing impairment was the most commonly reported disability (28.5 percent), with physical disabilities (26.8 percent) and visual impairments (23.4 percent) also

prominent. Educational attainment varied, with many respondents having no formal education or only primary-level schooling, highlighting educational barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the region. District-wise distribution showed the highest participation from Diamer and Gilgit, while Ghanche had the lowest representation.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Sociocultural Stigma and Attitudes (N = 387)

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Community thinks disabled persons are less suitable for marriage.	48 (12.4%)	72 (18.6%)	61 (15.8%)	125 (32.3%)	81 (20.9%)	3.31	1.25
2	Society discourages marriage for persons with disabilities.	42 (10.9%)	68 (17.6%)	70 (18.1%)	128 (33.1%)	79 (20.4%)	3.34	1.22
3	Stereotypes make marriage proposals difficult for disabled persons.	40 (10.3%)	60 (15.5%)	65 (16.8%)	135 (34.9%)	87 (22.5%)	3.44	1.21
4	Families fear social judgment when arranging marriage.	45 (11.6%)	70 (18.1%)	58 (15.0%)	130 (33.6%)	84 (21.7%)	3.36	1.24
5	Community sees disabled persons as dependent and unfit for marriage.	55 (14.2%)	68 (17.6%)	56 (14.5%)	128 (33.1%)	80 (20.7%)	3.29	1.28
6	Social expectations reduce marriage chances for disabled persons.	52 (13.4%)	66 (17.1%)	63 (16.3%)	132 (34.1%)	74 (19.1%)	3.29	1.23
7	People assume disability makes someone unfit for family life.	60 (15.5%)	72 (18.6%)	59 (15.2%)	123 (31.8%)	73 (18.9%)	3.20	1.26
8	Disabled persons are judged harshly in marriage matters.	54 (14.0%)	65 (16.8%)	60 (15.5%)	135 (34.9%)	73 (18.9%)	3.26	1.24
9	Marriage involving disabled persons is seen as embarrassing.	58 (15.0%)	63 (16.3%)	55 (14.2%)	137 (35.4%)	74 (19.1%)	3.27	1.26
10	Cultural norms discriminate against disabled persons seeking marriage.	56 (14.5%)	68 (17.6%)	62 (16.0%)	132 (34.1%)	69 (17.8%)	3.23	1.23

Table 2 presents the responses of 387 participants regarding sociocultural stigma and attitudes toward the marriage of persons with disabilities. The results show moderate to high agreement with statements indicating the presence of stigma in the community. A considerable proportion of respondents agreed that stereotypes, social judgment, and cultural norms make marriage difficult for persons with disabilities. Items related to negative societal views, embarrassment, and assumptions of dependency also received relatively high agreement. Mean scores across all statements ranged from 3.20 to 3.44, reflecting consistent perceptions of stigma. These findings suggest that sociocultural attitudes remain a major barrier to the marital acceptance of persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Family Influence and Acceptance (N = 387)

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
11	Families prefer non-disabled partners.	42 (10.9%)	60 (15.5%)	72 (18.6%)	132 (34.1%)	81 (20.9%)	3.38	1.21
12	Parents reject proposals involving disability.	45 (11.6%)	63 (16.3%)	67 (17.3%)	130 (33.6%)	82 (21.2%)	3.37	1.23
13	Families pressure disabled persons to avoid marriage.	50 (12.9%)	65 (16.8%)	70 (18.1%)	128 (33.1%)	74 (19.1%)	3.28	1.24
14	Families doubt ability to manage married life.	48 (12.4%)	62 (16.0%)	68 (17.6%)	132 (34.1%)	77 (19.9%)	3.34	1.23
15	Less willingness to marry off disabled daughters.	54 (14.0%)	60 (15.5%)	72 (18.6%)	125 (32.3%)	76 (19.6%)	3.27	1.25
16	Family honor stops disabled persons from marrying.	52 (13.4%)	63 (16.3%)	65 (16.8%)	128 (33.1%)	79 (20.4%)	3.30	1.25
17	Relatives discourage accepting disabled proposals.	46 (11.9%)	66 (17.1%)	70 (18.1%)	132 (34.1%)	73 (18.9%)	3.31	1.23
18	Marriage decisions depend on community opinions.	50 (12.9%)	68 (17.6%)	62 (16.0%)	130 (33.6%)	77 (19.9%)	3.30	1.25
19	Families doubt long-term relationship ability.	48 (12.4%)	70 (18.1%)	60 (15.5%)	135 (34.9%)	74 (19.1%)	3.29	1.25
20	Disabled persons receive less family support.	55 (14.2%)	63 (16.3%)	65 (16.8%)	130 (33.6%)	74 (19.1%)	3.27	1.26

Table 3 presents the responses related to family influence and acceptance toward the marriage of persons with disabilities. The results indicate that family attitudes play a major role in limiting marriage opportunities. A considerable number of participants agreed that families prefer non-disabled partners, often reject proposals involving disability, and show hesitation due to concerns about family honor and community judgment. Items also reveal doubts about the ability of persons with disabilities to maintain marital life and a noticeable lack of family support in marriage decisions. Mean scores across all statements ranged from 3.27 to 3.38, reflecting moderate to strong agreement. These findings suggest that family perceptions and social pressures significantly shape the marital experiences of persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Economic and Financial Barriers (N = 387)

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
21	Disabled persons face financial difficulties.	40 (10.3%)	58 (15.0%)	70 (18.1%)	140 (36.2%)	79 (20.4%)	3.41	1.22
22	Families believe disabled persons can't support a spouse.	45 (11.6%)	60 (15.5%)	68 (17.6%)	135 (34.9%)	79 (20.4%)	3.36	1.23
23	Lack of jobs reduces marriage chances.	38 (9.8%)	55 (14.2%)	72 (18.6%)	140 (36.2%)	82 (21.2%)	3.45	1.22
24	High marriage expenses burden disabled individuals.	42 (10.9%)	62 (16.0%)	65 (16.8%)	138 (35.7%)	80 (20.7%)	3.39	1.23

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
25	Disabled persons struggle to save money for marriage.	48 (12.4%)	60 (15.5%)	70 (18.1%)	130 (33.6%)	79 (20.4%)	3.33	1.25
26	Families avoid marriage talks due to financial dependence.	44 (11.4%)	63 (16.3%)	72 (18.6%)	133 (34.4%)	75 (19.4%)	3.34	1.23
27	Medical costs reduce resources for marriage.	50 (12.9%)	58 (15.0%)	70 (18.1%)	130 (33.6%)	79 (20.4%)	3.33	1.26
28	Economic instability increases hesitation to marry disabled persons.	46 (11.9%)	60 (15.5%)	68 (17.6%)	137 (35.4%)	76 (19.6%)	3.35	1.24
29	Disabled persons are assumed to be unable to contribute financially.	54 (14.0%)	62 (16.0%)	60 (15.5%)	128 (33.1%)	83 (21.4%)	3.32	1.27
30	Financial security is seen as more critical with disability.	48 (12.4%)	65 (16.8%)	67 (17.3%)	132 (34.1%)	75 (19.4%)	3.32	1.24

Table 4 highlights the economic and financial barriers affecting the marriage prospects of persons with disabilities. The responses show consistent agreement that financial hardship, unemployment, medical expenses, and economic instability significantly reduce marriage opportunities. Many participants also believed that individuals with special needs are seen as financially dependent and unable to support a household. Mean scores ranging from 3.32 to 3.45 indicate moderate to high agreement across the factor. These results suggest that financial limitations are a major structural obstacle influencing marriage decisions for persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics on Physical, Emotional, and Social Support Needs (N = 387)

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
31	Disabled persons need extra care that may burden a spouse.	42 (10.9%)	58 (15.0%)	67 (17.3%)	138 (35.7%)	82 (21.2%)	3.41	1.23
32	Lack of accessibility reduces confidence for marriage.	40 (10.3%)	60 (15.5%)	70 (18.1%)	137 (35.4%)	80 (20.7%)	3.40	1.22
33	Emotional insecurity arises from rejection in marriage.	48 (12.4%)	63 (16.3%)	68 (17.6%)	135 (34.9%)	73 (18.9%)	3.32	1.24
34	Limited social participation hinders relationship building.	44 (11.4%)	60 (15.5%)	72 (18.6%)	135 (34.9%)	76 (19.6%)	3.36	1.23
35	Disabled persons worry about meeting marital expectations.	50 (12.9%)	62 (16.0%)	70 (18.1%)	132 (34.1%)	73 (18.9%)	3.31	1.25
36	Physical challenges limit participation in social events.	46 (11.9%)	60 (15.5%)	68 (17.6%)	138 (35.7%)	75 (19.4%)	3.35	1.24
37	Emotional stress from discrimination reduces marriage hopes.	52 (13.4%)	65 (16.8%)	60 (15.5%)	132 (34.1%)	78 (20.2%)	3.31	1.27
38	Social isolation limits meeting potential partners.	48 (12.4%)	58 (15.0%)	65 (16.8%)	140 (36.2%)	76 (19.6%)	3.36	1.25
39	Disabled persons have fewer ways to express partner	54 (14.0%)	63 (16.3%)	62 (16.0%)	128 (33.1%)	80 (20.7%)	3.30	1.27

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
	preferences.							
40	People assume disabled individuals always need caregivers.	50 (12.9%)	60 (15.5%)	67 (17.3%)	135 (34.9%)	75 (19.4%)	3.33	1.25

Table 5 summarizes the responses related to physical, emotional, and social support needs among persons with disabilities. The findings show moderate agreement that limited accessibility, emotional stress, social isolation, and physical challenges negatively affect marriage prospects. Respondents also indicated that assumptions about lifelong caregiving and limited opportunities for social interaction reduce confidence and relationship-building chances. Mean scores ranging from 3.30 to 3.41 reflect consistent perceptions of these barriers. These results suggest that physical and emotional support needs significantly influence the marital experiences of persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics on Legal, Religious, and Institutional Barriers (N = 387)

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
41	People are unaware of legal marriage rights.	44 (11.4%)	60 (15.5%)	70 (18.1%)	137 (35.4%)	76 (19.6%)	3.36	1.23
42	Lack of inclusive policies affects marriage prospects.	40 (10.3%)	62 (16.0%)	65 (16.8%)	138 (35.7%)	82 (21.2%)	3.41	1.23
43	Religious views discourage marriage.	120 (31.0%)	140 (36.2%)	60 (15.5%)	45 (11.6%)	22 (5.7%)	2.26	1.14
44	Institutions do not support marital rights.	42 (10.9%)	58 (15.0%)	72 (18.6%)	138 (35.7%)	77 (19.9%)	3.38	1.23
45	Government services are insufficient.	50 (12.9%)	60 (15.5%)	70 (18.1%)	132 (34.1%)	75 (19.4%)	3.32	1.25
46	Counseling services rarely address disability needs.	46 (11.9%)	63 (16.3%)	68 (17.6%)	135 (34.9%)	75 (19.4%)	3.34	1.24
47	Religious leaders lack awareness of disability rights.	54 (14.0%)	60 (15.5%)	65 (16.8%)	130 (33.6%)	78 (20.2%)	3.31	1.27
48	No proper institutional framework exists.	48 (12.4%)	62 (16.0%)	70 (18.1%)	133 (34.4%)	74 (19.1%)	3.32	1.25
49	Welfare department's offer limited assistance.	50 (12.9%)	63 (16.3%)	60 (15.5%)	137 (35.4%)	77 (19.9%)	3.33	1.26
50	Lack of campaigns increases misunderstanding.	46 (11.9%)	60 (15.5%)	68 (17.6%)	138 (35.7%)	75 (19.4%)	3.35	1.24

Table 6 highlights respondents' perceptions of legal, religious, and institutional barriers. Most participants agreed that limited legal awareness, weak institutional support, and insufficient government services negatively affect the marital rights of persons with disabilities. Notably, Statement shows strong disagreement (mean = 2.26), indicating that most respondents do not feel religious interpretations are commonly used to discourage marriage. Overall, mean scores across other items range from 3.31 to 3.41, reflecting consistent acknowledgement of institutional gaps and lack of support structures.

Summary

The article examines the marriage-related challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan through a sociocultural, economic, and institutional lens. It highlights that individuals with disabilities experience widespread stigma, negative community attitudes, and cultural misconceptions that significantly limit their opportunities for marriage. Families often play a restrictive role by prioritizing social reputation, doubting the marital capabilities of individuals with special needs, and rejecting proposals involving disability. Economic constraints such as unemployment, medical expenses, and financial dependence further reduce marriage prospects. The article also discusses emotional insecurity, physical barriers, social isolation, and limited participation in social gatherings as factors that lower confidence and hinder relationship-building. At the institutional level, the absence of disability-inclusive policies, weak legal awareness, insufficient government services, and limited counseling support contribute to these challenges. Although awareness is slowly increasing, the study emphasizes that persons with disabilities continue to face structural and attitudinal barriers that undermine their right to marry and participate fully in social life in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Discussion and Findings

The results of the study show that persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan experience a wide range of challenges that collectively limit their opportunities for marriage. The findings consistently indicate that sociocultural stigma remains a dominant barrier. Community members often perceive persons with disabilities as less capable of fulfilling traditional marital roles, which leads to reduced acceptance as potential spouses. This pattern is consistent with earlier studies from Pakistan, where disability is frequently associated with social shame, perceived dependency, and reduced social value in marriage negotiations (Hussain, 2020; Shaheen & Munir, 2021). These studies similarly found that negative stereotypes, cultural misconceptions, and fears of social embarrassment contribute to the exclusion of individuals with special needs from marriage-related conversations, affecting their emotional well-being and social inclusion.

Family dynamics play an equally important role. The study found that families often prefer non-disabled partners and may discourage or reject marriage proposals involving disability. This aligns with previous research in Pakistan showing that marriage decisions are strongly shaped by family concerns about social status, community judgment, and the protection of family honor (Ali & Khan, 2017). Parents and relatives frequently doubt the marital capability of disabled individuals, assuming they will struggle with household management, childrearing, and long-term relationship responsibilities. Similar findings were reported by Trani et al. (2019), who noted that families often underestimate the emotional and functional capacity of persons with disabilities, especially women, who face heightened discrimination due to patriarchal norms deeply embedded in South Asian societies.

Economic and financial barriers also emerged prominently in the findings. Limited employment opportunities, high medical expenses, and financial dependence reduce the ability of persons with disabilities to contribute economically to a household. In Pakistan, economic stability is a major determinant of marital suitability, and earlier studies have also found that disabled persons are less likely to be employed or financially independent (Mughal et al., 2020). These financial constraints place them at a disadvantage during marriage arrangements. Families with limited income often prioritize non-disabled members and may delay or reject marriage proposals involving a disabled son or daughter out of fear of long-term financial burden. This supports Mitra and Sambamoorthi's (2018) argument that disability-related economic dependency significantly limits marital opportunities in low-income regions.

The study highlights emotional and social barriers. Many respondents expressed emotional insecurity, social isolation, and reduced confidence due to persistent rejection and discrimination. Prior research in Pakistan similarly indicates that individuals with special needs face psychological

stress, limited social participation, and restricted access to public spaces, all of which reduce their ability to form relationships that may lead to marriage (Aslam & Tariq, 2022). Inaccessible environments and limited opportunities for interaction reinforce their marginalization and hinder meaningful social engagement.

Institutional findings also show significant gaps at the policy and service levels. There is limited awareness of legal rights related to marriage for persons with disabilities, and existing government programs do not adequately support their marital prospects. Studies on disability rights in Pakistan highlight similar concerns, showing that policy frameworks lack practical implementation and that social welfare mechanisms remain weak and underfunded (UNCRPD, 2022). The absence of disability-inclusive marriage counseling services and inadequate engagement by social welfare departments further reinforces the structural barriers faced by disabled individuals. The limited awareness among religious leaders regarding disability rights reflects earlier observations by Grech and Soldatic (2016), who noted that religious interpretations in many developing contexts are often influenced by cultural norms rather than inclusive principles.

The discussion shows that the challenges identified in the findings are deeply interconnected. Sociocultural stigma, family influence, economic limitations, emotional constraints, and institutional weaknesses collectively limit the marriage prospects of persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan. These results are strongly supported by previous studies across Pakistan, demonstrating that the barriers faced by individuals with special needs are not isolated but reflective of broader societal attitudes and systemic shortcomings. The findings suggest that improving the situation requires community awareness, better family support, economic empowerment, accessible environments, and stronger institutional frameworks. Only by addressing these barriers holistically can persons with disabilities enjoy equitable opportunities to pursue marriage and participate fully in social life.

Recommendations

- 1- Launch community-wide awareness campaigns to reduce stigma, challenge negative stereotypes, and promote acceptance of marriage involving persons with disabilities.
- 2- Provide family counseling and training programs to help parents understand disability realistically and support marriage decisions without fear of social judgment.
- 3- Introduce targeted economic empowerment initiatives such as skill-development programs, inclusive job placement, and financial assistance to reduce dependency and strengthen economic stability.
- 4- Improve physical accessibility in public spaces and social events to increase participation of persons with disabilities in gatherings where relationships and marriage prospects are often formed.
- 5- Integrate disability-inclusive services into marriage counseling centers, ensuring that disabled individuals receive guidance tailored to their emotional, social, and physical needs.
- 6- Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks that protect the marital rights of persons with disabilities and ensure these rights are clearly communicated to the public.
- 7- Enhance the role of social welfare departments by establishing support programs specifically focused on marriage planning, counseling, and family mediation for disabled individuals.
- 8- Provide awareness and training sessions for religious leaders to ensure accurate understanding of disability rights within religious teachings and promote inclusive perspectives.
- 9- Encourage collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, disability organizations, and community groups to address sociocultural, economic, and institutional barriers holistically.

Conclusion

The study concludes that persons with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan face significant challenges that collectively limit their opportunities for marriage. Sociocultural stigma, family pressure, financial constraints, emotional insecurity, and weak institutional support all contribute to restricting their marital prospects. The findings highlight that marriage decisions are heavily influenced by

community attitudes and family perceptions, often shaped by misconceptions about disability. Economic dependency, lack of accessibility, and limited participation in social activities further reduce confidence and social interaction for disabled individuals. Institutional gaps, including limited legal awareness and inadequate support services, reinforce these barriers. The study emphasizes the need for greater awareness, stronger family and community support, economic empowerment, improved accessibility, and more inclusive institutional policies to ensure that persons with disabilities can pursue marriage with dignity and equal opportunity.

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