



**Report Summary of**  
**DRIVERS OF FORCED  
CONVERSION THROUGH  
MARRIAGE IN PAKISTAN**

*A Report by Legal Aid Society and The National  
Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan*

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# **DRIVERS OF FORCED CONVERSION THROUGH MARRIAGE IN PAKISTAN**

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## SUMMARY

Forced Conversion through Marriage (FCM) is a pervasive and deeply entrenched issue in Pakistan, which affects minor girls and women from Religious Minority Communities (RMCs). Despite constitutional and legal frameworks intended to protect religious freedom, the phenomenon of FCM persists due to complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and political factors, reflecting systemic vulnerabilities and societal pressures. In this context, the Legal Aid Society (LAS) in collaboration with the National Commission of Human Rights (NCHR) conducted a research to unravel and understand the multi-faceted drivers of FCM and its impacts on victims/survivors and RMCs. The research seeks to unpack the violative act of FCM, deciphers the situational realities of the victims/survivors, scrutinizes the motivations of the perpetrators, and provides recommendations for actions for prevention and appropriate response to incidents of FCM.

The research utilized qualitative methodology with collection, analysis, and triangulation of both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with key stakeholders, including lawyers, minority rights activists, religious figures, and representatives from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as well as In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with victims/survivors of FCM in Pakistan. Primary data provided high-level perspectives and comparative insights on the potential drivers of FCM. Secondary data comprised of comprehensive and exhaustive review of existing literature on the themes as identified for this research.

The research underscores that, while concrete data on FCM is lacking, reports from victim/survivor, families, and those involved in

recovery and support affirm its occurrence. To establish a case of FCM, two key violations must be proven: coercion to convert religion and coercion to marry, both occurring simultaneously. However, the findings reveal that the methods employed to perpetrate FCM do not conform to a singular pattern of abduction, physical force, violence, or threats. Instead, a wide range of tactics are used by perpetrators, demonstrating that FCM often manifests through various mechanisms that challenge the stereotypical or "mythical" understanding of these crimes.

While the common narrative tends to focus on overt physical coercion, such as abduction and violence, it often overlooks subtler forms of coercion, including psychological pressure and economic vulnerability, which can severely undermine genuine consent. The Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance, and Settlement (CLAAS) has identified eight categories of reasoning behind conversions in FCM cases: willful, for shelter, induced, fraudulent, out of greed, exploitative, under duress, and forceful. These reflect the complex dynamics and different scenarios falling within the scope of FCM.

The research emphasizes the necessity of focusing on the motivations of perpetrators of FCM, rather than merely assessing the consent of female victims/survivors. It demonstrates that the motivations behind FCM perpetrators are rooted in a complex interplay of socio-cultural realities, religious fanaticism, power dynamics, and the desire to exert control over women's bodies and sexuality. Key motivations include religious zeal, sexual gratification, and a drive for social dominance, all of which violate the dignity and autonomy of victims and survivors.

Trafficking and prostitution also play significant roles in FCM, as perpetrators exploit vulnerable girls and women from RMCs. These individuals are frequently lured into marriages with false promises of economic improvement, elevated social status, or escape from dire circumstances. Such forced marriages often lead victims into situations of sexual abuse and labor exploitation. Furthermore, some perpetrators utilize a guise of love or choice in their approach, seeking to establish power and authority over minor girls and women. Legal impunity significantly contributes to the persistence of FCM, as the unresponsiveness of state institutions fosters a culture of cruelty, carelessness, and callousness among perpetrators. Finally, the glorification and sensationalization of FCM cases in the media further enable perpetrators to evade prosecution. The lack of nuanced reporting on the complexities of FCM results in a simplistic and incomplete portrayal of these incidents, allowing the cycle of abuse to continue unchecked.

The research underlines the vulnerabilities and factors influencing victimization of minor girls and women from RMCs. Firstly, the cognitive and emotional development of children plays a pivotal role in their vulnerability to predatory behavior. Cognitive immaturity heightens their vulnerability due to lack of understanding of abstract concepts, such as consent and boundaries. Secondly, predators exploit the risk-taking behaviors of children by offering false promises of freedom and excitement. Thirdly, women from RMCs face unique vulnerabilities as notions of control over them intersect with religious and communal identity. The perpetrators use such vulnerabilities to entice women with offers of marriage and conversion under the guise of providing escape from restrictive cultural norms and familial expectations. Once they enter into relationship with Muslim men, they are made to believe that

they have violated social and cultural norms, bringing shame upon themselves and their families.

The research highlights the profound and far-reaching effects of FCM on victims/survivors, RMCs, and society at large. The victim/survivor experiences and endures psychological trauma as a result of FCM. It undermines the self-worth and personal autonomy of the victims/survivors, often leading to severe anxiety, depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The emotional scars left by such traumatic experiences can persist long after the immediate threats have ended, affecting their ability to form healthy relationships and navigate daily life. In addition to psychological impact, victims/survivors undergo physical and sexual abuse within their coerced marriages, which further traumatize and disempower them. Such abuse exacerbates their trauma and disempowerment, trapping them in cycles of fear and dependency. These experiences not only affect their personal well-being but can also ripple out to affect their families and communities, perpetuating a cycle of victimization and silence. For RMCs, the incidents of FCM undermined the fabric of community solidarity and cultural heritage. Such acts create an atmosphere of fear and vulnerability, disrupting the collective sense of safety and belonging. As individuals witness or hear about these abuses, they become increasingly hesitant to engage with one another, weakening social ties and shared cultural practices essential for maintaining community identity. At the broader societal level, FCM contributes to systemic issues and deepens divisions between different religious groups. This societal division contributes to social unrest, political polarization, and increased violence, threatening overall stability. Moreover, weak enforcement of laws protecting against FCM erodes public trust in

legal institutions. When victims find the system unresponsive or ineffective, it cultivates disillusionment and helplessness, deterring them from seeking justice and emboldening perpetrators. This cycle of mistrust and lack of accountability undermines the rule of law, making it difficult to address the underlying issues of FCM and related human rights violations.

The research provides recommendations to curb FCM in Pakistan. To address FCM, several key recommendations have been proposed. Courts must ensure that conversions, particularly in marriage cases, are voluntary, with Area Magistrates or District and Sessions Judges verifying this through notices and hearings involving all relevant parties. Alleged converts should be placed in state-run shelters, and minors in Child Protection Institutes, with no legal weight given to clerical conversion certificates without court approval. The legal framework must be reformed to explicitly criminalize FCM, while introducing specialized investigation officers trained to handle these sensitive cases will promote trust in legal

institutions. Sensitization training for CJS actors is essential, focusing on victim protection, psychological trauma awareness, and cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, addressing systemic drivers of FCM—such as economic marginalization and extremist ideologies—through community engagement, socio economic development initiatives, and public awareness campaigns is critical. Rehabilitation services for victims/survivors, including psychological counselling and legal aid, should be established alongside protocols for interprovincial cooperation in handling cases. Comprehensive data collection and monitoring through provincial committees will help inform ongoing policy reforms and ensure effective strategies to combat FCM.



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