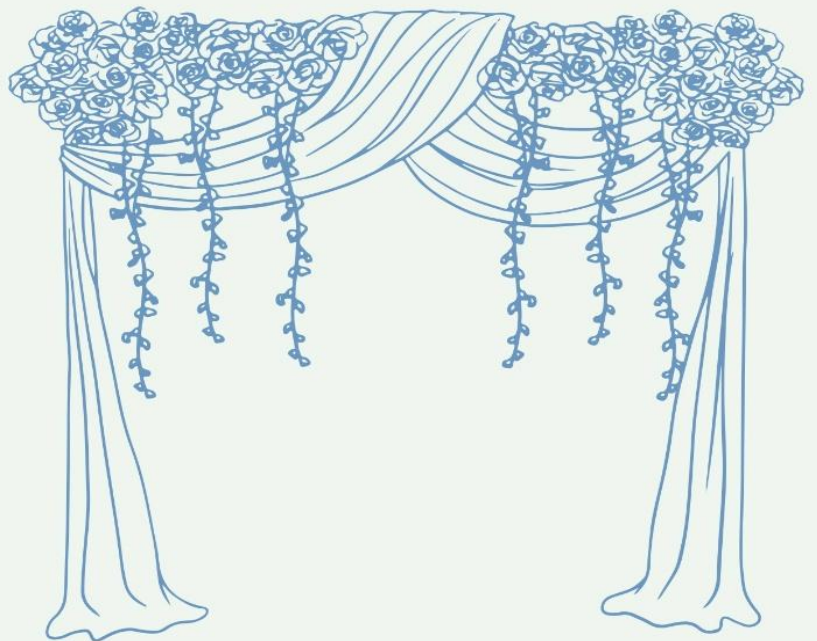




Gallup Pakistan Analysis of Punjab Health and Population Survey (PHPS) 2024–25

Consanguineous Marriage



PRESS RELEASE

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In Muzaffargarh, 84% of Ever-Married Women Are in Consanguineous Marriages — Compared to 37% in Sialkot

Islamabad, August 19th, 2026

Nearly half of all ever-married women in Punjab are married to a first cousin, and more than half are in some form of consanguineous marriage. Data from the Punjab Health and Population Survey (PHPS) 2024–25 Baseline Survey Report, based on interviews with 19,536 ever-married women aged 15–49 across 36 districts, shows that 43.9% of women in Punjab are married to their first cousin, while an additional 11.4% are married to another relative — bringing total consanguineous marriages to 55.3% provincially. The practice is not evenly distributed: in lagging districts, 58.6% of women are married to their first cousin alone, compared to 40.9% in non-lagging districts. At the district level, the range spans 47 percentage points — from Muzaffargarh (84%) to Sialkot (37%) — tracing a geographic pattern that maps directly onto south Punjab's broader social and economic disadvantage.

What is the Big Data Analysis Series by Gallup?

Gallup Pakistan's Big Data series was initiated by Bilal I. Gilani, Executive Director of Gallup Pakistan. As he explains: *"Pakistan does not suffer from a lack of data, but from limited accessibility and weak translation of numbers into understanding. Gallup Pakistan bridges this gap by analyzing large, often under-used datasets — from PSLM and Labour Force Surveys to Economic Surveys and National Census data — so these statistics can meaningfully inform policy and public discourse."*

What data points this current edition covers:

This analysis is based on Table 3.1: Percentage Distribution of Ever-Married Women by Background Characteristics, and Figure 3.2: Percentage of Ever-Married Women with Consanguineous Marriages by District — both drawn from Chapter 3 of the Punjab Health and Population Survey (PHPS) 2024–25 Baseline Survey Report. The data covers 19,536 ever-married women aged 15–49 across 36 districts of Punjab, surveyed between November 2024 and February 2025, disaggregated by rural and urban residence and by lagging and non-lagging district classification. Note: Figure 3.2 reports total consanguineous marriages (first cousin and other relative combined), while Table 3.1 disaggregates these two categories separately.

In Muzaffargarh, 84% of Ever-Married Women Are in Consanguineous Marriages — Compared to 37% in Sialkot

43.9% of ever-married women in Punjab are married to their first cousin, and an additional **11.4%** to another relative — meaning **55.3%** of all ever-married women in Punjab are in consanguineous marriages.

55.3% 
OF EVER-MARRIED WOMEN ARE
IN CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES

 **1st COUSIN**
43.9%
MARRIED TO FIRST
COUSIN

 **RELATIVE**
11.4%
MARRIED TO OTHER
RELATIVE

First-cousin marriages are significantly more prevalent in rural areas (**49.4%**) than urban areas (**36.2%**) — a gap of **13.2** percentage points.

49.4% 
PREVALENCE IN RURAL AREAS

 **RURAL**
49.4%
MARRIED TO FIRST
COUSIN

 **URBAN**
36.2%
MARRIED TO FIRST
COUSIN

Muzaffargarh (**84%**) leads all districts in total consanguineous marriages, followed by Lodhran (**77%**), Rajanpur (**77%**), Dera Ghazi Khan (**72%**), and Bahawalpur (**72%**) — all in southern Punjab.

84% 
HIGHEST PREVALENCE: MUZAFFARGARH DISTRICT

Muzaffargarh	Lodhran	Rajanpur	Dera Ghazi Khan	Bahawalpur
84% TOTAL CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES	77% TOTAL CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES	77% TOTAL CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES	72% TOTAL CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES	72% TOTAL CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES

Sialkot records the lowest consanguineous marriage rate of any district at **37%**, followed by Narowal (**38%**) and Sheikhupura (**39%**) — all in northern Punjab.

37% 
LOWEST PREVALENCE: SIALKOT DISTRICT

Sialkot	Narowal	Sheikhupura
37% TOTAL CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES	38% TOTAL CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES	39% TOTAL CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES

Key Findings:

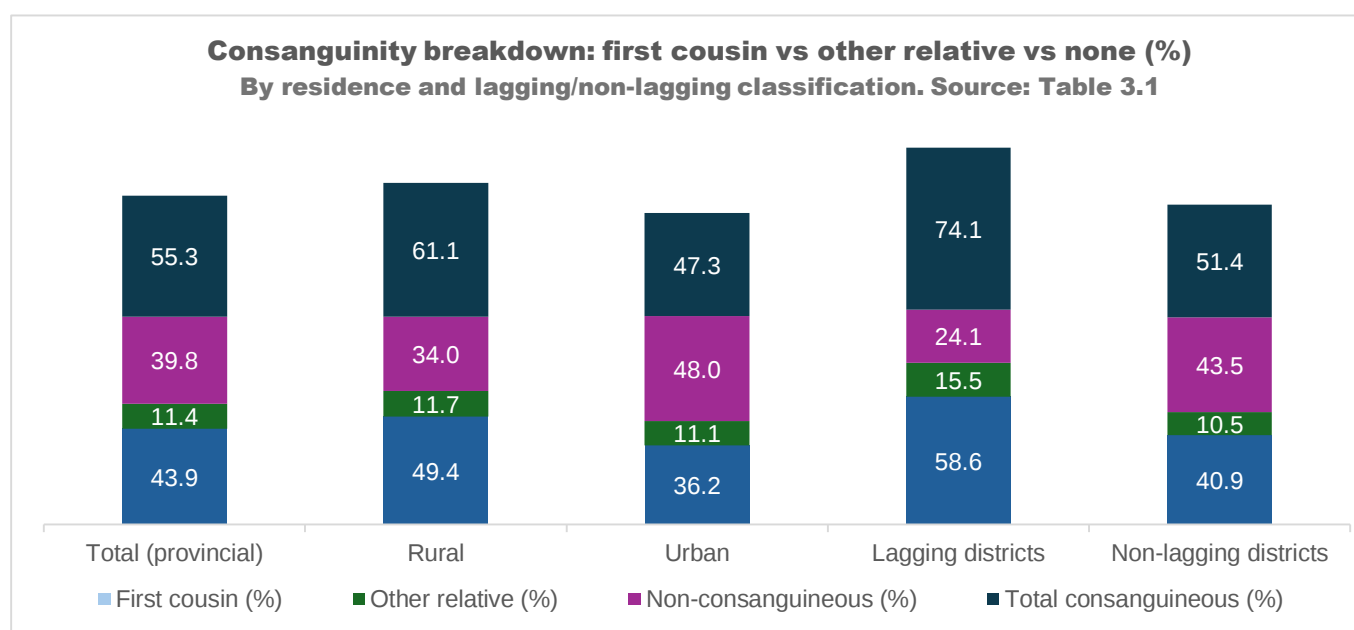
1. 43.9% of ever-married women in Punjab are married to their first cousin, and an additional 11.4% to another relative — meaning 55.3% of all ever-married women in Punjab are in consanguineous marriages.
2. First-cousin marriages are significantly more prevalent in rural areas (49.4%) than urban areas (36.2%) — a gap of 13.2 percentage points.
3. In lagging districts, 58.6% of women are in first-cousin marriages, compared to 40.9% in non-lagging districts — a gap of 17.7 percentage points.
4. Only 24.1% of women in lagging districts are in non-consanguineous marriages, compared to 43.5% in non-lagging districts.
5. Muzaffargarh (84%) leads all districts in total consanguineous marriages, followed by Lodhran (77%), Rajanpur (77%), Dera Ghazi Khan (72%), and Bahawalpur (72%) — all in southern Punjab.
6. All five districts where total consanguineous marriages exceed 70% are in southern Punjab, and four of the five — Muzaffargarh, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, and Bahawalpur — are designated lagging districts. Lodhran (77%) is the only district in this group that is not classified as lagging.
7. Sialkot records the lowest consanguineous marriage rate of any district at 37%, followed by Narowal (38%) and Sheikhupura (39%) — all in northern Punjab.
8. Even Lahore, Punjab's largest city, records a total consanguineous marriage rate of 40% — the fourth lowest of any district, and 15.3 percentage points below the provincial total of 55.3%, but still meaning that two in five ever-married women in Lahore are married to a relative.
9. The 47-percentage-point gap between Muzaffargarh (84%) and Sialkot (37%) within a single province represents one of the largest district-level divergences in any social indicator in the PHPS dataset.

1. Muzaffargarh's 84% vs Sialkot's 37%: A Province Divided by Marriage Practice

The headline figure — 43.9% of Punjab's ever-married women are married to a first cousin — understates the practice's prevalence in the parts of the province where it is most deeply embedded. When other relatives are included, 55.3% of all ever-married women in Punjab are in consanguineous marriages. This means that more than half of all marriages sampled in the PHPS are between related individuals, making consanguineous marriage the modal form of union in Punjab rather than an exception.

At the district level, the range is dramatic. Muzaffargarh records 84% total consanguineous marriages — meaning that in four out of five ever-married women in the district, the husband is a relative. Lodhran and Rajanpur follow at 77% each, and Dera Ghazi Khan and Bahawalpur at 72% each. All five of these districts are in southern Punjab, and four of the five — Muzaffargarh, Rajanpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, and Bahawalpur — are designated lagging districts. Lodhran at 77% is the only district in this group that is not classified as lagging. At the other end, Sialkot (37%), Narowal (38%), and Sheikhupura (39%) record the lowest rates — all in northern Punjab's GT Belt and Gujranwala division. The Muzaffargarh-to-Sialkot gap of 47 percentage points is among the largest district-level divergences of any social indicator in this dataset.

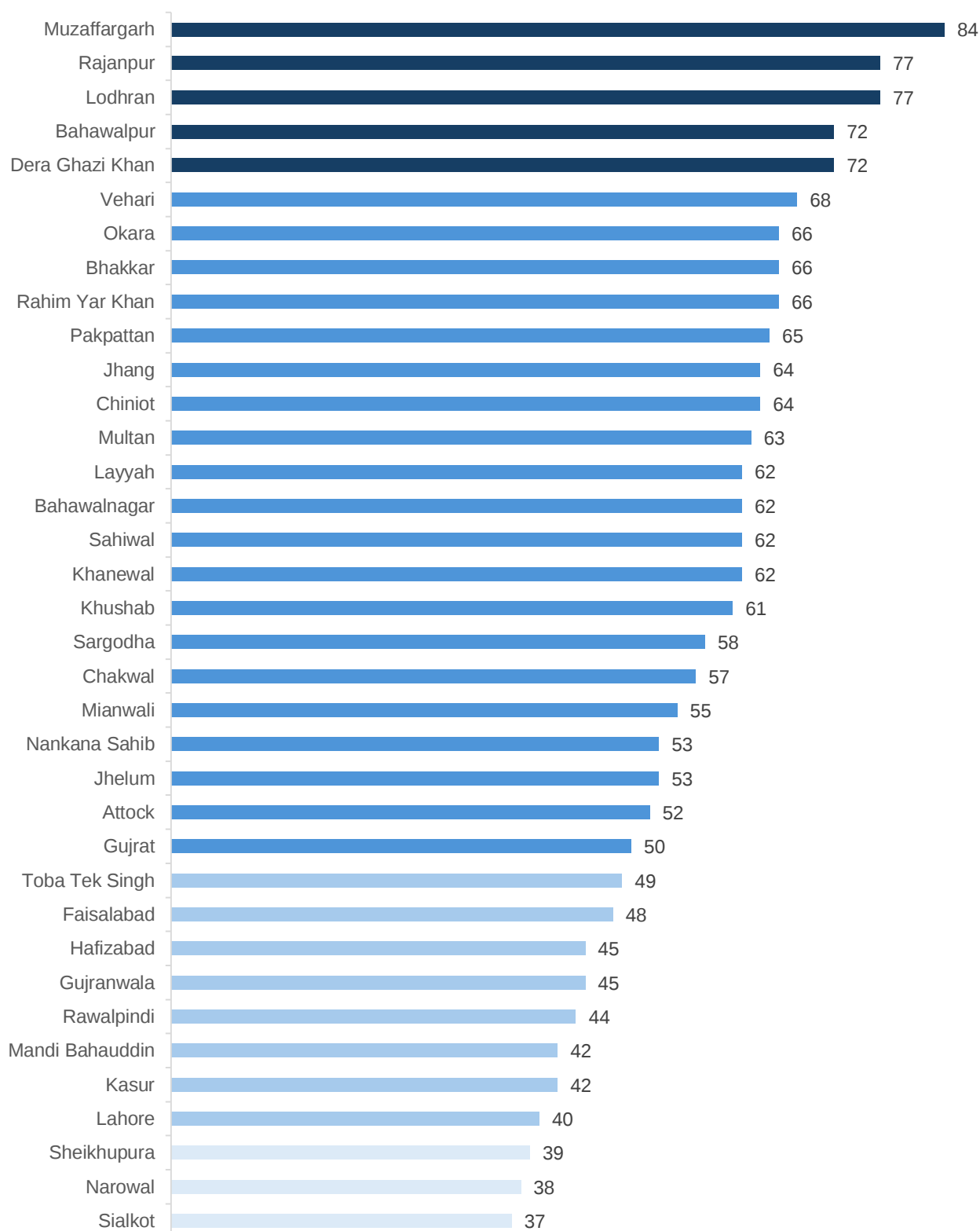
What makes the district data analytically significant is that it does not simply reproduce a north-south income gradient. Lahore — Punjab's most economically developed city — records a total consanguineous marriage rate of 40%, making it the fourth-lowest district in the province. At 15.3 percentage points below the provincial total of 55.3%, Lahore's rate is meaningfully lower than the provincial average. Yet it remains higher than the three lowest-performing districts (Sialkot 37%, Narowal 38%, Sheikhupura 39%), and means that two in five ever-married women in Lahore are still married to a relative. The geographic pattern points to deeply embedded regional cultural traditions that are not simply dissolved by urbanization, and that persist with meaningful variation even within urban populations.



Note: Total consanguineous = first cousin + other relative. Missing values (4.8% total) excluded from total consanguineous computation. Lagging total: 58.6 + 15.5 = 74.1%. Non-lagging total: 40.9 + 10.5 = 51.4%.

Source: Punjab Health and Population Survey (PHPS) 2024–25 Baseline Survey Report, Bureau of Statistics Punjab.

Total consanguineous marriages by district (%), all 36 districts
Sorted highest to lowest. Source: Figure 3.2



Note: Figure 3.2 reports total consanguineous marriages (first cousin + other relative combined). Lagging districts: Rahim Yar Khan, Bhakkar, Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh, Pakpattan, Rajanpur, Bahawalpur (Table 1.2).

Source: Punjab Health and Population Survey (PHPS) 2024–25 Baseline Survey Report, Bureau of Statistics Punjab.

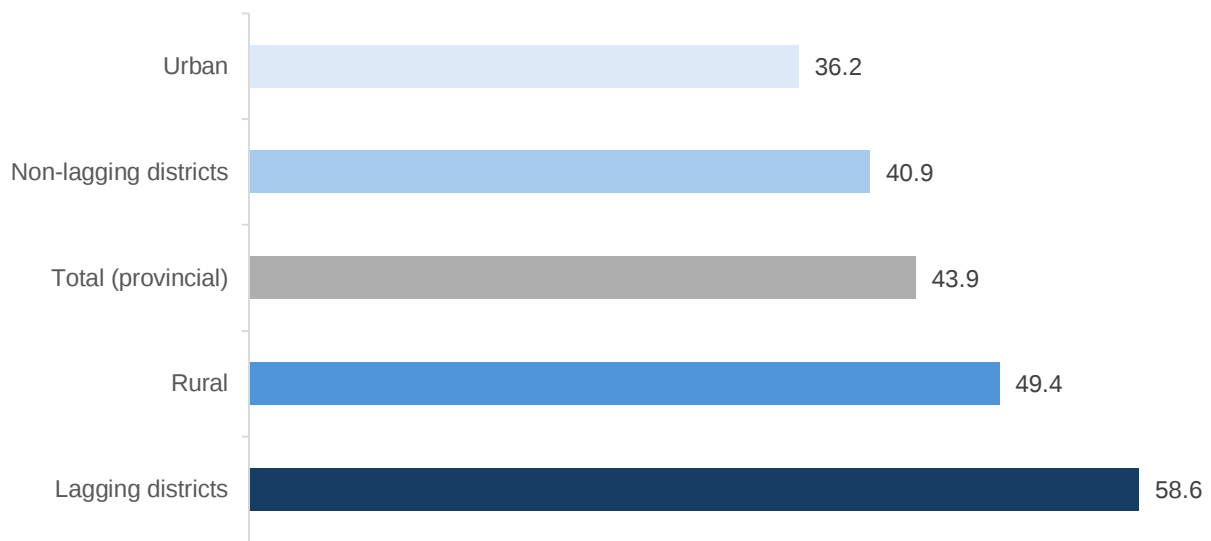
2. Rural-Urban and Lagging-Non-Lagging Gaps: Where Consanguinity Is Most Concentrated

The rural-urban divide on first-cousin marriage is 13.2 percentage points: 49.4% of rural women versus 36.2% of urban women are in first-cousin marriages. This gap is substantial, though it is the lagging-non-lagging distinction that reveals the sharper structural divide. In lagging districts, 58.6% of women are in first-cousin marriages and only 24.1% are in non-consanguineous marriages — meaning that in these seven districts, more than three in four women are married to a relative of some kind. In non-lagging districts, 40.9% are in first-cousin marriages and 43.5% are in non-consanguineous marriages — a structurally different distribution, though still with a majority in some form of related-party marriage when other relatives are included.

The data from Table 3.1 allows a precise reconstruction of the full consanguinity distribution across the four sub-categories. Lagging districts have a first-cousin rate of 58.6% and an other-relative rate of 15.5% — giving a total consanguineous rate of approximately 74.1% in lagging districts. Non-lagging districts have a first-cousin rate of 40.9% and an other-relative rate of 10.5% — giving a total of approximately 51.4%. The lagging-non-lagging total consanguinity gap is therefore roughly 22.7 percentage points. This gap is larger than the rural-urban gap for first cousins alone (13.2 points), suggesting that the lagging-non-lagging classification captures more of the variation in consanguinity than the rural-urban divide does — likely because lagging districts combine rurality with additional cultural, economic, and educational characteristics that reinforce the practice.

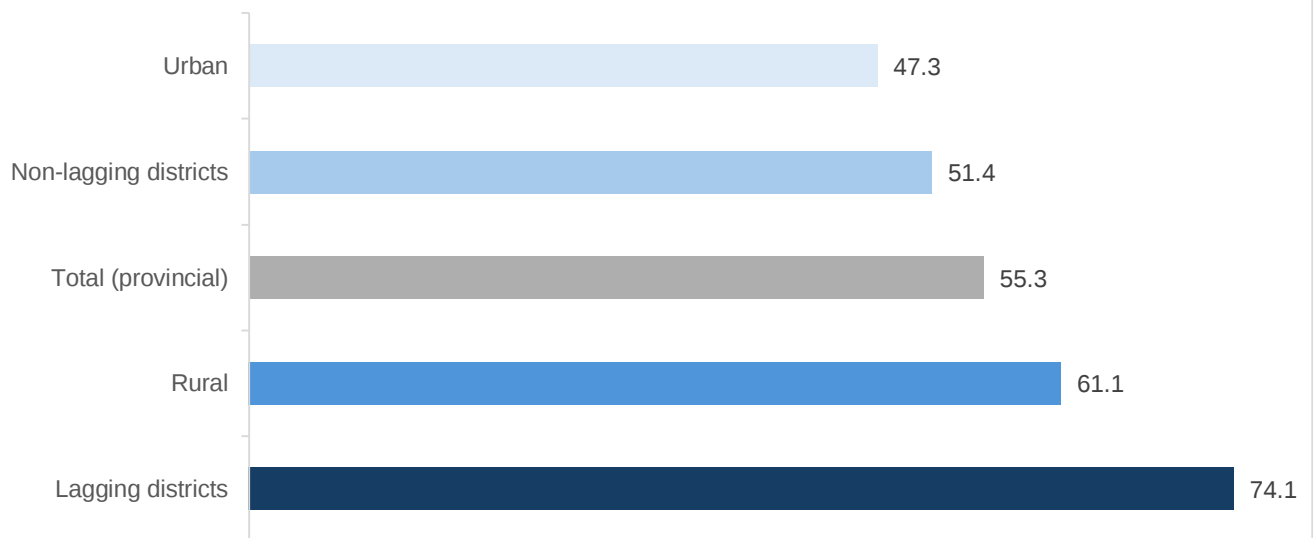
The pattern is consistent with an important structural logic: consanguineous marriage and low female education tend to co-occur. In lagging districts, 59.7% of women have no education, compared to 29.6% in non-lagging districts (Table 3.1). The districts with the highest consanguineous marriage rates — Muzaffargarh, Lodhran, Rajanpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Bahawalpur — are the same districts that record the lowest female educational attainment in the province. This co-occurrence does not establish causation, but it does establish that the two deficits are geographically concentrated in the same communities, making interventions in either domain likely to interact with the other.

First-cousin marriage rate by residence and district classification (%)
Source: Table 3.1



Source: Punjab Health and Population Survey (PHPS) 2024–25 Baseline Survey Report, Bureau of Statistics Punjab.

Total consanguineous marriage rate by category (%)
First cousin + other relative combined. Source: Table 3.1



Source: Punjab Health and Population Survey (PHPS) 2024–25 Baseline Survey Report, Bureau of Statistics Punjab.

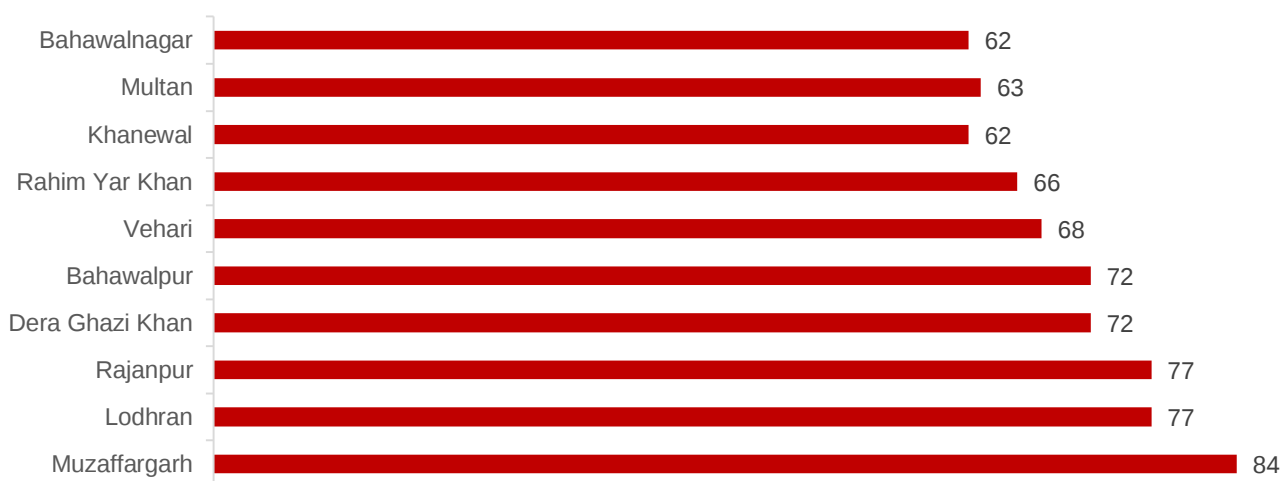
3. The Geography of Consanguinity: Southern Punjab's Structural Pattern

Mapping consanguineous marriage rates across all 36 districts reveals a clear geographic pattern that is both more pronounced and more nuanced than a simple north-south split. Of the 12 districts with total consanguineous marriage rates above 62%, all are in south and central Punjab: Muzaffargarh (84%), Lodhran (77%), Rajanpur (77%), Dera Ghazi Khan (72%), Bahawalpur (72%), Vehari (68%), Rahim Yar Khan (66%), Bhakkar (66%), Okara (66%), Pakpattan (65%), Chiniot (64%), and Jhang (64%). This cluster is geographically contiguous and encompasses both the Seraiki heartland of the deep south and the central Punjab districts of Jhang, Chiniot, and Okara — indicating that the practice extends beyond the lagging district zone into broader central Punjab.

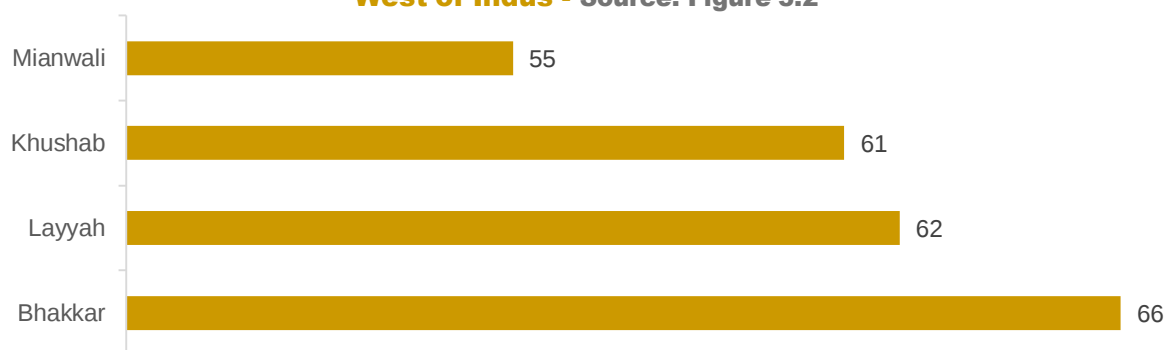
The intermediate tier — districts in the 50–62% range — includes Multan (63%), Khanewal (62%), Sahiwal (62%), Bahawalnagar (62%), Layyah (62%), Khushab (61%), and Sargodha (58%), as well as northern districts such as Chakwal (57%), Mianwali (55%), and Jhelum (53%). The presence of northern districts like Chakwal, Mianwali, and Jhelum in this mid-range — at 57%, 55%, and 53% respectively — indicates that consanguineous marriage is not absent from northern Punjab, merely less concentrated. Even the three lowest-performing districts — Sialkot (37%), Narowal (38%), and Sheikhupura (39%) — record rates that would be considered high by international standards, underscoring that this is a province-wide characteristic with regional intensity variation, not a phenomenon confined to the south.

The district pattern also raises a specific finding about Okara (66%) and Sahiwal (62%), which are central Punjab districts with consanguineous rates comparable to the deep south. These districts do not share the extreme poverty or lagging district designation of Muzaffargarh or Rajanpur, yet their consanguinity rates are similar. This suggests that the practice in these districts may be sustained by cultural continuity rather than by the same socioeconomic mechanisms that entrench it in southern Punjab — a distinction relevant for how policy interventions targeting consanguineous marriage would need to be tailored differently across the province.

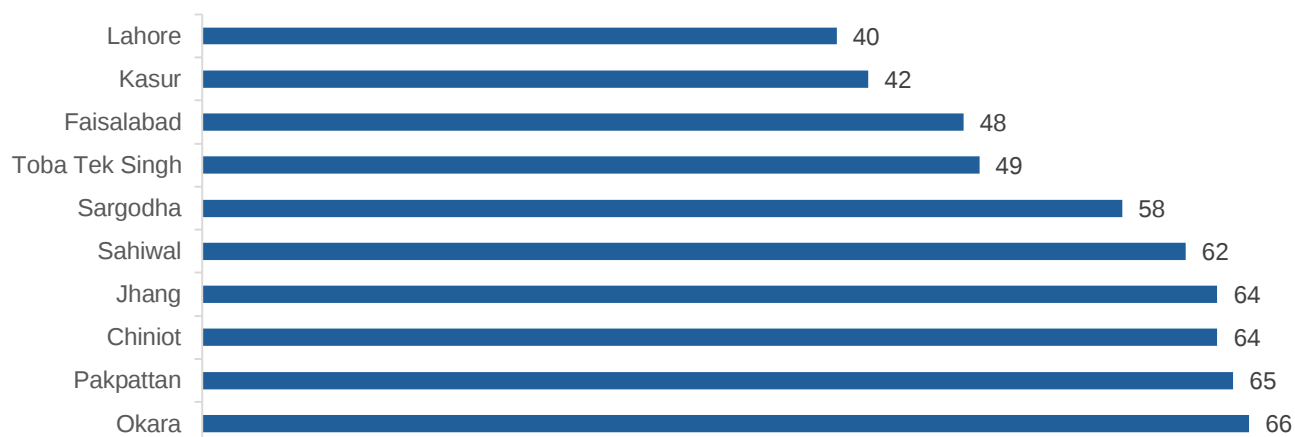
**Consanguineous marriage rate by district, colour-coded by region (%) -
South Punjab - Source: Figure 3.2**



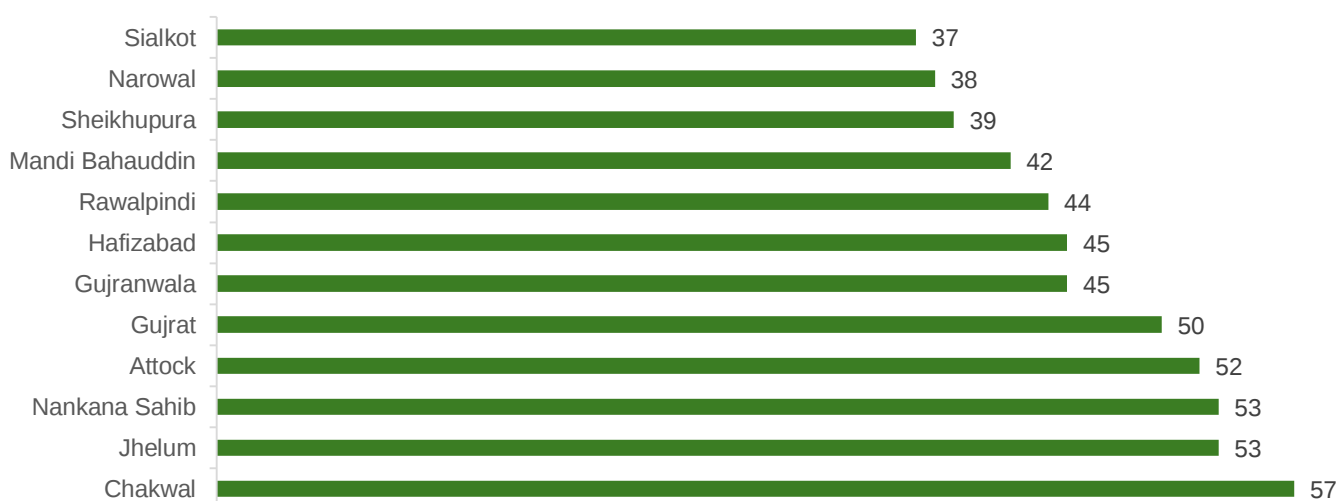
**Consanguineous marriage rate by district, colour-coded by region (%) -
West of Indus - Source: Figure 3.2**



**Consanguineous marriage rate by district, colour-coded by region (%) -
Central Punjab - Source: Figure 3.2**



**Consanguineous marriage rate by district, colour-coded by region (%) -
North Punjab - Source: Figure 3.2**



Source: Punjab Health and Population Survey (PHPS) 2024–25 Baseline Survey Report, Bureau of Statistics Punjab.



Wish to Contribute to Gallup Big Data Analysis?

Gallup Pakistan is looking for collaboration with researchers to expand the Big Data Analysis project. If you have any ideas, please write to Bilal I Gilani, Project Director, Big Data Analysis at Gallup Pakistan.

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