

EFFECT OF ADOLESCENT MARRIAGE AND MARRIAGE PATTERN ON SOCIAL SAFEGUARD IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

This study confirms that marriage is almost universal among females in Bangladesh and there are very poor numbers of women are interested without having any marriage. In Bangladesh the legal age of marriage is 18 years for the women. But early female marriage is customary in Bangladesh. Most female have been married before age 20. About 95 percent of marriages in Bangladesh are teenage or adolescent marriages. Almost 100 percent getting married by the time they reach age 30. This situation proves that early marriage is very frequent in Bangladesh. Legislation on age of marriage, therefore, seems to be ineffective in delaying childhood marriage in Bangladesh. It is iron of faith that large majorities of the rural community in Bangladesh are ignorant about the legal age for marriage and are even less concerned about the negative social and health consequences of adolescent marriage. The TFR equals on average 7.82 births per women in the absences of contraception, and fertility declines at a rate of approximately 1.0 births per women for each 9% increment in the contraceptive prevalence rate. Under such relationship between TFR and CPR, the replacement fertility requires a prevalence level of fertility can be achieved around the year 2014. The regression equation of TFR on CPR suggest that a TFR of 2.5 births per women can be achieved by the year 2015 if the level of CPR is raised to 47% and that at the end of this century a targeted fertility level of 2.0 per women if the level of contraception is raised to 62%.

Key words: Age, marriage, women, fertility, birth rate, contraception.

Introduction

In Bangladesh there was long been strong social pressure for the preservation of virginity until marriage. Sex outside marriage occurs only seldom, since pre-marital sex was looked down upon harshly in Bangladeshi society (Maloney and others, 1981). Marriage marks the beginning of the period of potential childbearing and therefore was considered the prime determinants of fertility in the face of the country of the relatively low contraceptive use rate. Among females almost 95 percent of marriage takes place before the end of their second decade of life. This densely populated country of 136.7 million people (SVRS, 2004) is also characterized by a high population growth rate (1.42 % annually: BBS, 2004). Traditionally young age at marriage and early childbearing has been encouraged in Bangladesh. According to Aziz and Maloney (1985) Bangladeshi Children, especially in rural areas, are socialized to assume their respective male and female roles well before puberty. This phenomenon has been observed more strictly among girls than boys, because of the impact of girls' behavior during adolescence both on their own reputation and that of their family. Before the end of childhood, a girl is expected to begin learning proper decorum for females so that she will be able to a play the part well once puberty begins. If the marriage of a pubescent girl is delayed her parents and sometimes the girl herself are made to feel guilty. Sometimes neighbors and even relatives criticize parents if they have not married off their daughters soon after the onset of menarche. In such a situation, parents of poor socio-economic standing may begin to think of their daughter as a burden. The younger females are also in higher demand than older females as potential brides and they require fewer dowries as well. Despite such pressures there has been a growing concern in recent years that female children should not be married too young (Islam and others, 1795). A government order in 1976, the minimum legal age of marriage was fixed at 18 and 21 years for females and males, respectively. However in the countryside, such requirements are hardly known and among those who do know about them, they have little impact on behavior (Islam and others, 1795). Frequently, expert have expressed concern about the negative social, health and economic consequences of teenage marriage, adolescent childbearing, unintended pregnancies and in some societies, high levels of pre- and extra-marital conceptions (Bogue and

others, 1977). Although such issues concerning adolescents are much publicized throughout the developed world (ESCAP, 1992), the concepts are relatively new in many developing countries such as Bangladesh. This study examines the marriage pattern of adolescents and some socio-economic and behavioral characteristics of married adolescents in Bangladesh. It also analyses factors associated with adolescent marriage and draws out important policy implications from the findings of the study.

Materials and Methods

An experiment was set in Demographic and Health Survey (2014 BDHS) implemented under the authority of the National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in Bangladesh from June to November, 2014. The sample for the 2014 BDHS was nationally representative and covered the entire population residing in non-institutional dwelling units in the country. The survey used a sampling frame from the list of enumeration areas (EAs) of the 2011 Population and Housing Census of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh; provided by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2011). In the research areas divided into seven administrative divisions: Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Sylhet. These divisions allowed the country as a whole to be separated into rural and urban areas. Among a total of 17,989 selected households, 17,565 were found occupied. Interviews were successfully completed in 17,300 (99%) of households. A total of 18,245 ever-married women age 15-49 were identified in these households and 17,863 were interviewed, for a response rate of 98 percent. The data from a sample of 17863 Bangladeshi married women were collected by BDHS-2014 and checked for outliers by the present authors. The presence of abnormal points in data set, can affect the interpretation of results (Stevens, 1996). These were identified using statistical techniques (Dunn and Clark, 1974).

Results and Discussion

Age Patterns of Marriage: Marriage among females in Bangladesh is virtually universal. Very few women remain single throughout their lives as indicated in table 1 which shows the percentage distribution of single females in the population. The percentage who never married in the age group 45-49 years indicates the degree of permanent “Celibacy” that exists in the society. Most female have been married before age 20, with almost 100 percent getting married by the time they reach age 30. However a remarkable change in the proportion of women single; it indicates the rising trend in age at marriage. The most remarkable rise in the proportion of never married females has occurred in the age groups 10-14 years and 15-19 years. The proportion of never married at ages 10-14 and 15-19 rose from 91.2 percent and 29.8 percent in 1975 to 88.6 percent and 52.1 percent respectively in 2014.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of females in Bangladesh never married during 1975-2014 (BDHS, 2014)

| Current age | 1993-1994 | 1996-1997 | 1999-2000 | 2004 | 2007 | 2011 | 2014 |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|------|------|------|
| 10-14 | 95.2 | 95.2 | 92.7 | 88.6 | U | U | U |
| 15-19 | 50.5 | 49.8 | 51.9 | 52.1 | 54.8 | 54.3 | 54.8 |
| 20-24 | 12.4 | 17.2 | 18.5 | 15.2 | 14.3 | 13.4 | 15.5 |
| 25-29 | 2.2 | 3.4 | 4.2 | 4.2 | 4.3 | 3.0 | 4.1 |
| 30-34 | 0.3 | 0.5 | 0.1 | 1.2 | 0.6 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| 35-39 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 0.8 | 0.8 |
| 40-44 | 0.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.6 |
| 45-49 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 0.2 | 0.2 |

u=unknown/un available- = less than 0.1 percent. BFS = Bangladesh Fertility Survey. CPS = Contraceptive Prevalence Survey. BDHS = Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey.

Data from 17863 sampled married females aged below 50 years indicates that about 95 percent had been married when they were below age 20 i.e. teenage or adolescent marriages and only 5 percent were married at 20 years of age or older. The teenage marriages take place at the ages 13 to 15 Years; this age

group accounts for 59 percent of the total marriages. More than 78 percent of teenage marriages occur at age 16 or younger. Among the married women who were currently aged below 20 (i.e. adolescents) at the time of the survey, 6.81 percent had been married by the age of 12.

Table 2 summarizes the fate of 1st marriage and also remarriage after dissolution of 1st marriage. It seems that the adolescent marriage kept the negative role on widowed than that of timely marriage i.e. marriage at 20 years or more. It indicates that emotion of girls as well as boys play a vital role on adolescent marriage. They also realize their wrong decision incase of adolescent marriage, so most of the females are interested for re-marriage after dissolution of 1st marriage comparatively the females who married at aged.

Table 2: Summary measures of some issues related to age at marriage

| Item | Age at first marriage | | |
|--|-----------------------|-------------|------|
| | Below 20 | 20 and more | All |
| Fate of first marriage (%) | | | |
| Coupled | 92.3 | 90.5 | 92.2 |
| Widowed | 4.4 | 2.5 | 4.3 |
| Divorced | 1.3 | 3.3 | 1.4 |
| Separated | 2.0 | 3.7 | 2.1 |
| Remarriage after dissolution of first marriage (%) | | | |
| Yes | 45.8 | 24.4 | 45.2 |
| No | 54.2 | 75.6 | 54.8 |

Socio-economic differentials of adolescent marriage: Table 3 provides the percentage distribution of married adolescents (i.e. age at marriage less than 18) by selected socio-economic characteristics along with the same type of data for married adults (i.e. age at marriage greater than or equal to 18) for comparison purposes. The corresponding figures for the adults are more or less of the same 96.9 per cent coming from a rural area and 3.1 per cent from an urban area. When the childhood types of residence are controlled, the percentage of married adolescents who had been born and brought up in a rural area is 86.6 per cent; the urban childhood type of residence contributes 13.4 per cent to adolescent marriages. The teenage marriage is more prevalent in the rural rather than urban areas of Bangladesh. As for region of residence, it may be observed that the frequency of adolescent marriage is highest in Rajshahi division (22.8 per cent) followed the lowest incidence being in Sylhet division (9.8 per cent). The same pattern follows for age at marriage being 18 years and older. The corresponding figures for married adults are highest in Dhaka division (24.7 per cent) and with the lowest incidence being in Barisal division (10.4 per cent). The study also revealed that education may have a significant effect on teenage marriage, that is, education increases the age at marriage and consequently decreases the rate of adolescent marriage. It is so much highlighted in the study that that women's work status has very little effect on age at marriage. This is mainly because employment opportunities are very limited in Bangladesh and very few women get the opportunity to engage themselves in any kind of income-generating works before marriage. The adolescent marriage is prevalent mainly among illiterates. The data indicate that religion has a moderate effect on age at marriage. Hindus are less likely to be married below age 18 than their Muslim counterparts. The prevalence of teenage marriage decreases in line with improvement in a person's economic condition. This indicates that the economic condition of adult marriage is good from teenage marriage.

Covariates of adolescent marriage: Logistic regression was use to identify the risk factor for adolescent marriage. In the model, age at first marriage was used as the dependent variable, which we dichotomized by assigning the value of 1 for age at marriage being less than 18 years and the value of 0 for age being 18 years and older; selected demographic and socio-economic characteristics were used as explanatory variables. The logistic regression coefficients (B) corresponding to the independent variables, partial R and relative odds calculated for each category of the categorical variables are estimated in the present study. The category with relative odds of 1.00 represents the reference category for that variable. If the odds ratio is greater than unity, the probability of age at marriage occurring below 18 years is higher than that of age

at marriage occurring at 18 years and older. Respondent's education is the most important factor that influences age at marriage being below 18 years, when the other variables are controlled. The age at marriage in Bangladesh could be raised by increasing the level of education for females. The analysis shows that husband's occupation is the second most significant factor influencing low age at marriage.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of adolescents and adults marriage accordingly socio-economic characteristics

| Background of characteristics | Age at marriage | |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|
| | Below 18 (<18) | 18 and older (> 20) |
| Place of residence | | |
| Rural | 92.7 | 96.9 |
| Urban | 7.3 | 3.1 |
| Jurisdiction of living | | |
| Barisal | 12.0 | 10.4 |
| Chittagong | 17.8 | 23.9 |
| Dhaka | 22.5 | 24.7 |
| Khulna | 15.1 | 11.2 |
| Rajshahi | 22.8 | 13.7 |
| Sylhet | 9.8 | 16.0 |
| Childhood residence | | |
| Rural | 86.6 | 65.8 |
| Urban | 13.4 | 34.2 |
| Respondent's education | | |
| No school/Madrasha (religious school) | 39.6 | 18.0 |
| Primary | 30.2 | 15.1 |
| Secondary | 26.0 | 21.4 |
| Higher | 4.2 | 45.6 |
| Work status (outside the home) | | |
| Yes | 21.8 | 25.9 |
| No | 78.2 | 74.1 |
| Husband's education | | |
| No school/Madrasha (religious school) | 37.1 | 14.5 |
| Lower primary | 26.0 | 13.5 |
| Upper primary | 26.0 | 20.7 |
| Higher | 10.9 | 51.3 |
| Husband's occupation | | |
| Unskilled labour | 33.1 | 26.1 |
| Non-agricultural workers | 8.0 | 6.4 |
| Businessman | 22.8 | 28.8 |
| Agricultural labour | 28.6 | 11.0 |
| Unemployed | 2.2 | 2.5 |
| Others, or not stated | 1.7 | 2.1 |
| Economic condition (dwelling construction) | | |
| Poor | 36.8 | 16.8 |
| Middle | 19.2 | 10.0 |
| Upper | 44.0 | 73.2 |
| Religion | | |
| Muslim | 89.7 | 75.3 |
| Non-Muslim | 10.3 | 24.7 |
| Total = | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N = | 10127 | 518 |

Table 4: Logistic regression of age at marriage below 18 years on selected socio-demographic factors in Bangladesh

| Variables | Coefficient (B) | Std. error of coefficient | Partial R | Odds ratio |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Respondent's education | - | - | 0.117 | - |
| Higher | - | - | - | 1.0 |
| Secondary | 3.182 | 0.132 | | 4.1 |
| Primary | 3.089 | 0.140 | | 1.9 |
| No education | 2.585 | 0.126 | | 3.2 |
| Husband's occupation | - | - | 0.043 | - |
| Did not work | - | - | - | 1.0 |
| Professional/administrative/sales/services | -1.927 | 0.303 | | 0.14 |
| Sales | -0.221 | 0.296 | | 0.80 |
| Agric-self employed | 0.271 | 0.653 | | 1.30 |
| Agric-employee | 0.989 | 0.315 | | 2.68 |
| Household & domestic | -0.639 | 1.082 | | 0.58 |
| Skilled manual | -0.050 | 0.297 | | 0.95 |
| Unskilled manual | 0.792 | 0.323 | | 2.2 |
| Region of residence | | | | |
| Barisal | - | - | - | 1.0 |
| Chittagong | 0.632 | 0.180 | | 1.8 |
| Dhaka | 0.199 | 0.147 | | 1.22 |
| Khulna | 0.403 | 0.146 | | 1.49 |
| Rajshahi | 0.794 | 0.176 | | 2.21 |
| Sylhet | 1.005 | 0.166 | | 2.73 |
| Childhood residence | | | | |
| Urban | - | - | - | 1.0 |
| Rural | 0.912 | 0.091 | | 2.4 |
| Respondent's work status | | | | |
| Yes | - | - | - | 1.0 |
| No | 0.224 | 0.103 | | 1.3 |

The logistic coefficients indicate that the highest occurrence of low age at marriage was among Agric-employee followed by did not work. The odds against low age at marriage among the wives of Agric-self employed. The analysis further shows that, with other covariates controlled, regional differentials in low age at marriage are also significant. The positive sign of each regression coefficient in table 4 suggests that, with reference to women who were living in Barisal division, the residents of Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions were more likely to have been married at a young age. The logistic regression analysis implies that the occurrence of low age at marriage among women who lived in Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions are 1.8, 1.22, 1.49, 2.21 and 2.73 times higher, respectively, than that of women who live in Barisal division. Thus, the occurrence of early marriage is the highest level of occurrence, followed by Sylhet division. This regional differentiation is observed because industrialization, urbanization and education did not evolve uniformly in all regions. Dhaka division is relatively more urbanized and industrialized, having of a higher population density. Khulna division is comparatively less urbanized and industrialized, while Rajshahi division is rich in agricultural products and has more educational institutions than Khulna division. Demographic characteristics such as infant mortality and the sex-ratio of such deaths are also different for these regions (BFS, 1989). There are some conceivable explanations for this difference. Females who migrated to urban areas were likely to have been married before they migrated. Most of them probably moved to the urban areas with their husbands who had employment there. The age at marriage for such women may be expected to be relatively low. In the case of married females who migrated to urban areas either with their parents or brothers before marriage, the age at marriage for them may also be expected to be lower, because their early socialization and their

values related to family formation and family life may be somewhat different from females born and living in urban areas. Thus, migrant women might weigh down the actual age at marriage for urban areas (Ahmed, 1982). The analysis indicates that the respondent's work status is the next most important determinant influencing low age at marriage. It has been observed that age at marriage below 20 years is likely to be 1.3 times higher among women who have never worked outside the home than those who had work experience. The primary cause for this situation may be the improvement in the socio-economic condition of the respondents as compared with others.

Conclusion

This study confirms that marriage is almost universal among females in Bangladesh there are very few women (give value or %) who remain single throughout their lives. This leads to an exceptionally low Mean age at first marriage in Bangladesh. Differential analysis shows that most of the married female adolescents have a rural background and have not had a formal education. Their husbands are also mostly illiterate and farmers by occupation. Logistic regression analysis identifies education, region of residence, place of residence (urban/rural), work status, husband's education and occupation as important covariates of teenage marriage. The country's basic education system and its curricula should be redesigned to meet present day needs. Education of girls as well as boys will not only ensure basic literacy for all, but also will provide a realistic basis for training women in income-generating activities and primary healthcare. The Government should also take appropriate measures to create more employment opportunities for young women and make efforts to employ more young women in white-collar jobs, especially in the fields of health and education. As early adolescent marriage seems to contribute to a greater likelihood of marital dissolution, a voice for adolescent women in making decisions about marriage should at least be promoted, if it cannot be ensured.

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