

Regional Differentials of Age at First Marriage among Women in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine various socio-economic and demographic factors associated with age at first marriage among Bangladeshi women in different divisions. For this purpose the present study utilizes the nationally representative survey data of Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey, (BDHS-2007). The cross-tabulation analysis has been used to estimate the factors affected the use of contraception in Bangladesh. Respondent's education, husband's education, husband's occupation, religion, type place of respondent, socio-economic status, working status of respondent and access to mass media have significant effect on age at first marriage in all divisions. The study shows those respondents who have no education, married at early age and the respondents who have at least secondary education, married at later age in all divisions. Similar pattern to marry at early age has been seen in case of illiterate and service holder husbands. The study also shows that maximum respondents who are not currently working and have no access in mass media married before or at median age (15 years).

Keywords: age at first marriage, divisions, socioeconomic and demographic factors, Bangladesh.

1 INTRODUCTION

There are relatively few empirical generalizations about the social and economic determinants of age at marriage. It is generally believed that rural tradition fosters early marriage, while urbanization and other forces of modernization lead to marriage postponement. Extant data, however, have not always shown this to be true. The most obvious anomaly is the "Western European marriage pattern," which indicates that prior to the Industrial Revolution, women commonly married in their mid- to late twenties (Gaskin, 1978; Hajnal, 1953). Furthermore, there is little evidence which shows homogeneity in the patterns or trends in the timing of nuptiality among less developed non-Western societies.

Several studies reveal that the females' age at first marriage in Bangladesh is still one of the lowest in the world. Traditionally, Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage worldwide (Barkat and Majid, 2003) and age at first birth remain relatively low (Bosch et al, 2008). In a study conducted on 43 developing countries, the median age at

first marriage of Bangladeshi women was reported to be 14.1 years, the lowest amongst the study countries (Sing and Samara, 1996).

Women's access to education and to employment has emerged as one of the most important issues in studies of development. Caldwell (1980) and Handwerker (1986) have shown clearly the importance in the Third World of women's education in fertility decline. Caldwell (1979), Levine *et al.* (1991) and Cleland and van Ginneken (1988) have shown the relationship between women's education and the lowering of infant mortality.

Early marriage which is also referred to as child marriage is common all over the globe and has inflicted dangerous and devastating effects on young children (especially females) who are completed to tie the knot in most cases. While the age at marriage is generally on the rise, early marriage-marriage of children and adolescents below the age of 18 is still widely practiced (UNICEF, 2001). Early marriage of female children is rampant in Bangladesh, especially in slum areas, where there is a noticeable lack of back infrastructure, services and basic shelter. Those areas are characterized by substandard housing and squalor and lacking in tenure security. For female, the problem of early marriage is acute not only in slum areas but throughout the country as well. State's legal provision on minimum age at first marriage in Bangladesh generally is 18 years for female to access in marriage relationship. The average age at first marriage for female in Bangladesh is 18.7 years (BBS, 2009).

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In this study, an attempt has been made to examine the predictors of age at first marriage in different divisions of Bangladesh. There are many factors that influencing on age at first marriage. Thus, greater attentions have to be paid to find out the factors that are influencing on early marriage and ultimately the growth of population. The objectives of this research are:

- 1) To find the percentage of age at first marriage of women by various socio-economic variables according to divisions.
- 2) To determine whether age at first marriage in different divisions vary among women of Bangladeshi by selected socio-economic and demographic characteristics.
- 3) To examine the effects of available socio-demographic factors on age at first marriage in different divisions.

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses data extracted from the 2007 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS-2007), which conducted during the period from 24 March to 11 August 2007, on behalf of the Government of Bangladesh by National Institute for Population Research and Training (NIPORT), with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Dhaka. The sampling frame for the survey considered all households in Bangladesh from which a nationally representative sample of 10,819 households was selected; 10,461 were occupied. Of the households occupied, 10,400 (99.4%) were successfully interviewed. In these households, a total of 11,178 ever-married females aged less than 50 years were identified as eligible for individual interview. Of them, 10996 females (or 98.4%) were successfully interviewed. Among the 10996 ever-married females, the numbers of urban and rural respondents are 4151 (37.75%) and 6845 (62.25%), respectively. The sample had been taken 5 years prior to BDHS-2007 survey. Out of 10996 ever-married females, 1348 (12.26%) are found to age under age 20, known as

adolescents. The associations between age at first marriage and selected explanatory variables have been tested by applying cross-tabulation analysis. The cross-tabulation analysis is an important in first step for studying the relationship of age at first marriage with several characteristics. However, such analysis fails to address age at first marriage predictors completely because of ignoring other covariates.

4 ANALYSIS

The distributions of age at first marriage in different divisions by socio-economic, bio-demographic variables are shown in Table. Here median age at first marriage is 15 years.

Table 1: Percentage and cross tabulation of Religion and Age at first marriage in different regions:

Divisions	Age at first marriage	Religion		Chi-square	Significance level
		Muslim	Non-Muslim		
Barisal	≤15 years	63.0(804)	42.6(69)	25.121	0.000
	>15 years	37.0(472)	57.4(93)		
Chittagong	≤15 years	54.4(959)	35.6(64)	23.255	0.000
	>15 years	45.6(804)	64.4(116)		
Dhaka	≤15 years	63.2(1372)	46.4(78)	18.539	0.000
	>15 years	36.8(800)	53.6(90)		
Khulna	≤15 years	67.7(1060)	48.6(71)	21.745	0.000
	>15 years	32.3(505)	51.4(75)		
Rajshahi	≤15 years	67.5(1261)	58.7(125)	6.744	0.009
	>15 years	32.5(606)	41.3(88)		
Sylhet	≤15 years	45.6(585)	33.7(68)	10.145	0.001
	>15 years	54.4(697)	66.3(134)		

Table 2: Percentage and cross tabulation of Respondent's education and Age at first marriage in different regions:

Divisions	Age at first marriage	Respondent's education			Chi-square	Significance level
		Illiterate	Primary literate	Secondary and higher		
Barisal	≤15 years	76.2(266)	71.3(371)	41.5(236)	148.095	0.000
	>15 years	23.8(83)	28.7(149)	58.5(333)		
Chittagong	≤15 years	66.7(437)	63.3(324)	33.8(262)	186.246	0.000
	>15 years	33.3(218)	36.7(188)	66.2(514)		
Dhaka	≤15 years	77.8(678)	68.1(402)	42.1(370)	249.963	0.000
	>15 years	22.2(193)	31.9(188)	57.9(509)		
Khulna	≤15 years	82.1(432)	75.6(341)	48.8(358)	176.852	0.000
	>15 years	17.9(94)	24.4(110)	51.2(376)		
Rajshahi	≤15 years	81.5(605)	79.4(392)	46.1(389)	270.277	0.000
	>15 years	18.5(137)	20.6(102)	53.9(455)		
Sylhet	≤15 years	57.8(396)	40.3(164)	23.7(93)	120.689	0.000
	>15 years	42.2(289)	59.7(243)	76.3(299)		

Table 3: Percentage and cross tabulation of Husband's education and Age at first marriage in different regions:

Divisions	Age at first marriage	Husband's education			Chi-square	Significance level
		Illiterate	Primary literate	Secondary and higher		
Barisal	≤15 years	73.2(292)	71.1(290)	46.1(291)	100.744	0.000
	>15 years	26.8(107)	28.9(118)	53.9(340)		
Chittagong	≤15 years	66.1(404)	58.9(282)	39.5(337)	111.015	0.000
	>15 years	33.9(207)	41.1(197)	60.5(516)		
Dhaka	≤15 years	75.2(689)	66.9(322)	46.6(439)	168.360	0.000
	>15 years	24.8(227)	33.1(159)	53.4(504)		
Khulna	≤15 years	79.0(459)	74.5(307)	50.8(365)	130.839	0.000
	>15 years	21.0(122)	25.5(105)	49.2(353)		
Rajshahi	≤15 years	81.3(597)	75.6(343)	50.0(446)	198.597	0.000
	>15 years	18.7(137)	24.4(111)	50.0(446)		
Sylhet	≤15 years	56.2(342)	42.9(179)	28.8(132)	79.553	0.000
	>15 years	43.8(267)	57.1(238)	71.2(326)		

Table 4: Percentage and cross tabulation of Type of place of residence and Age at first marriage in different regions:

Divisions	Age at first marriage	Type of place of residence		Chi-square	Significance level
		Rural	Urban		
Barisal	≤15 years	67.2(625)	48.8(248)	46.557	0.000
	>15 years	32.8(305)	51.2(260)		
Chittagong	≤15 years	55.7(670)	47.6(353)	12.071	0.001
	>15 years	44.3(532)	52.4(388)		
Dhaka	≤15 years	70.0(879)	52.6(571)	74.866	0.000
	>15 years	30.0(376)	47.4(514)		
Khulna	≤15 years	71.0(766)	57.8(365)	31.173	0.000
	>15 years	29.0(313)	42.2(267)		
Rajshahi	≤15 years	72.1(992)	56.0(394)	54.481	0.000
	>15 years	27.9(384)	44.0(310)		
Sylhet	≤15 years	46.1(462)	39.7(191)	5.325	0.021
	>15 years	53.9(541)	60.3(290)		

Table 5: Percentage and cross tabulation of Husband's occupation and Age at first marriage in different regions:

Divisions	Age at first marriage	Husband's occupation				Chi-square	Significance level
		Agriculture	Business	Service	Others		
Barisal	≤15 years	71.7(218)	54.8(194)	49.8(118)	63.2(343)	33.827	0.000
	>15 years	28.3(86)	45.2(160)	50.2(119)	36.8(200)		
Chittagong	≤15 years	63.1(209)	47.9(218)	41.9(116)	54.5(480)	32.876	0.000

	>15 years	36.9(122)	52.1(237)	58.1(161)	45.5(400)		
Dhaka	≤15 years	76.9(387)	59.9(328)	42.0(147)	62.6(588)	108.251	0.000
	>15 years	23.1(116)	40.1(220)	58.0(203)	37.4(351)		
Khulna	≤15 years	72.4(325)	64.1(291)	40.9(74)	70.3(441)	65.104	0.000
	>15 years	27.6(124)	35.9(163)	59.1(107)	29.7(186)		
Rajshahi	≤15 years	75.7(523)	63.1(274)	40.2(86)	67.9(503)	95.709	0.000
	>15 years	24.3(168)	36.9(160)	59.8(128)	32.1(238)		
Sylhet	≤15 years	44.9(153)	40.8(150)	33.5(57)	48.4(293)	14.053	0.003
	>15 years	55.1(188)	59.2(218)	66.5(113)	51.6(312)		

Table 6: Percentage and cross tabulation of Respondent's working status and Age at first marriage in different regions:

Divisions	Age at first marriage	Respondent currently working		Chi-square	Significance level
		No	Yes		
Barisal	≤15 years	61.4(701)	41.9(124)	1.057	0.304
	>15 years	38.6(441)	58.1(172)		
Chittagong	≤15 years	50.2(767)	38.3(159)	17.284	0.000
	>15 years	49.8(761)	61.7(256)		
Dhaka	≤15 years	58.9(929)	31.7(242)	19.171	0.000
	>15 years	41.1(648)	68.3(521)		
Khulna	≤15 years	63.3(673)	29.3(190)	9.753	0.002
	>15 years	36.7(390)	70.7(458)		
Rajshahi	≤15 years	63.7(770)	29.3(255)	11.268	0.001
	>15 years	36.3(439)	70.7(616)		
Sylhet	≤15 years	42.4(527)	47.5(114)	8.390	0.004
	>15 years	57.6(717)	52.5(126)		

Table 7: Percentage and cross tabulation of Access to mass media and Age at first marriage in different regions:

Divisions	Age at first marriage	Access to mass media		Chi-square	Significance level
		No access	Have access		
Barisal	≤15 years	72.6(458)	51.4(415)	66.459	0.000
	>15 years	27.4(173)	48.6(392)		
Chittagong	≤15 years	64.7(453)	45.9(570)	63.877	0.000
	>15 years	35.3(247)	54.1(673)		
Dhaka	≤15 years	77.0(471)	56.7(979)	79.066	0.000
	>15 years	23.0(141)	43.3(749)		
Khulna	≤15 years	75.8(423)	61.4(708)	34.804	0.000
	>15 years	24.2(135)	38.6(445)		
Rajshahi	≤15 years	80.1(559)	59.8(827)	85.496	0.000
	>15 years	19.9(139)	40.2(555)		
Sylhet	≤15 years	50.4(346)	38.5(307)	21.007	0.000
	>15 years	49.6(341)	61.5(490)		

Table 8: Percentage and cross tabulation of Socio-economic status and Age at first marriage in different regions:

Divisions	Age at first marriage	Socio-economic status			Chi-square	Significance level
		Poor	Middle	Rich		
Barisal	≤15 years	71.5(454)	62.1(211)	44.9(208)	79.598	0.000
	>15 years	28.5(181)	37.9(129)	55.1(255)		
Chittagong	≤15 years	65.9(330)	57.0(255)	44.0(438)	68.304	0.000
	>15 years	34.1(171)	43.0(192)	56.0(557)		
Dhaka	≤15 years	75.6(565)	67.1(206)	52.8(679)	108.512	0.000
	>15 years	24.4(182)	32.9(101)	47.2(607)		
Khulna	≤15 years	76.9(393)	76.3(274)	55.2(464)	88.202	0.000
	>15 years	23.1(118)	23.7(85)	44.8(377)		
Rajshahi	≤15 years	77.0(668)	74.1(269)	52.9(449)	122.907	0.000
	>15 years	23.0(200)	25.9(94)	47.1(400)		
Sylhet	≤15 years	49.6(252)	46.2(129)	39.0(272)	14.049	0.001
	>15 years	50.4(256)	53.8(150)	61.0(425)		

5 DISCUSSION

The distributions of age at first marriage by socio-economic and bio-demographic variables are shown in the table.

Table-1 shows the percentages of Muslim and Non-Muslim respondents' marriage before or at and after median age. It is seen that among divisions, in Khulna and Rajshahi Muslims are married early with compare to other divisions. 67.7 percent Muslim in Khulna and 67.5 percent in Rajshahi are married before or at median age where as the next successive rates are 63.2 (Dhaka), 63.0 (Barisal), 54.4 (Chittagong) and 45.6 (Sylhet). Table-1 also represents that Non-Muslims are more conscious about marriage than Muslim counterparts. Non-Muslim respondents, 66.3 percent in Sylhet and 64.4 percent in Chittagong, are married after median age. Chi-square test exhibits that there is a highly association between age at first marriage and religion in all divisions.

It is noticed from table-2 that respondent's education has strong significant effect on age at first marriage in all divisions. Illiterate respondents married early in all divisions. Most early marriage occurred in Khulna (82.1 percent) and Rajshahi (81.5 percent). Among primary literate respondents 79.4 percent in Rajshahi, 75.6 percent in Khulna and 71.3 percent in Barisal married before or at median age. On the other hand, most respondents in all divisions with secondary and higher education married at later ages. 76.3 percent in Sylhet, 66.2 percent in Chittagong married after median age.

Table-3 summarizes the information of husband's education and age at first marriage in different regions. Chi-square test indicates that husband's education has highly significant association with age at first marriage of women in all divisions. Almost three-fourth of illiterate husbands in Barisal, Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi divisions married before or at median age. Primary literate husband's almost following the similar pattern as like as illiterate husband in all divisions except in Sylhet division. But the respondents who have secondary educated husband married at later age. This tendency has seen in all divisions except in Khulna (49.2 percent) and Rajshahi (50 percent).

Chi-square test in table-4 shows the significant relation of type of place of residence and age at first marriage in different divisions. It is seen that rural respondents married early than their counterpart urban respondents. In sylhet division 46.1 percent rural respondents married before or at median age. Most of the rural respondents except in Sylhet division married at early age. This pattern is not followed by urban respondents. 51.2, 52.4 and 60.3 percent urban respondents in Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions respectively married after median age. Husband's occupation has significant effect on age at first marriage of women. The data show (in table-5) that most women whose husbands are in agriculture and others category married before or at median age except in Sylhet division. Most of the respondents whose husbands are in service holder married at later age. More than half Business holder husbands in Barisal, Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi married early that amounts are 54.8, 59.9, 64.1 and 63.1 percent respectively.

Table-6 provides information on respondent's working status and age at first marriage. The chi-square test indicates that there is a significant association between working status of respondents and age at first marriage of women in all divisions except in Barisal division. The respondents who are currently working have tendency to marry at later age. However, pattern of early marriage has been seen in the 'no' working category respondents except those who are in Sylhet division (42.4 percent).

From table-7 it is seen that more than half respondents who have no access in mass media married before or at median age. Table shows that 54.1 and 61.5 percent respondents, having access in mass media, married after median age in Chittagong and Sylhet divisions respectively. Chi-square test indicates a highly significant association between access to mass media and age at first marriage.

Table-8 presents the information of socio-economic status and age at first marriage in different divisions. More than two-third poor women in Barisal, Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi divisions married before or at median age. About three-fourth middle class women in Khulna and Rajshahi married at early age. Women who belong to upper society in Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions married after median age that accounts 55.1, 56.0 and 61.0 percent respectively. Chi-square test presents highly association between socio-economic status and age at first marriage of female respondents.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigates the predictors of age at first marriage in Bangladesh among female in different divisions. It has been utilized the national representative data from the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS -2007). Cross-tabulation technique has been applied to identify the predictors of age at first marriage. Since age at first marriage is one of the important proximate determinants of population size in all divisions, the present study analyzes the age at first marriage of female respondents.

The median age at first marriage is found to be 15 years, which is 3 years less than legal age at first marriage of females in Bangladesh. The result suggests that early marriage among females is a multidimensional phenomenon. None the less, chi-square analysis exhibits that all explanatory variables here such as respondent's education, husband's education, socio-economic status, access to mass media, type of place of residence, religion and respondents working status are important in explaining differentials of age at marriage of the Bangladeshi adolescents. Of the entire variables respondent's education, husband's education and access to mass media makes by far the strongest contribution to the variability in age at first marriage of the women in Bangladesh.

The findings of the present study have clear policy implications. To increase age at first marriage to check the growth rate of population, topmost importance should be attached to education of the respondents. If literacy rate can be increased it would develop a sense of national awareness and wide outlook among them. Hence, all-out efforts should be taken to weed out female's illiteracy. Initiatives must also be taken to ensure at least secondary education level among girls. In this context, possibility of free education for females up to secondary level can be justified, which will accelerate the females towards higher ages at first marriage. Husband's level of education has impact on age at first marriage. Hence, it can be suggested that male's educational must be improved which will help to reduce childhood marriage. Women who are currently working are more aware of their marriage. For this reason the Government should come forward to create job opportunities for women. Geographical region of residence is found to be a significant predictor of age at first marriage. Therefore, economic disparity should be reduced and uniform distribution of national income must be ensured across the country. If the aforementioned recommendations can be implemented properly, the age of first marriage of women will be increased at expected level and accordingly the rate of infant and maternal mortality can be reduced, which occur due to conception in early age.

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