Factors Affecting on Early Marriage of Women in Rural Areas, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world where population growth rate is 1.6 percent (Wikipedia). Early marriage is one of the important factors of population growth. This paper uses data from Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2011 to examine different socio-economic and demographic factors that are correlated to age at first marriage of women in the rural area. Bivariate and multivariate logistic regression analyzes have been used to estimate the factors effect on age at first marriage. The results show that respondent's education, husband's education, husband's occupation, religion, region and socio-economic status have a significant effect on age at first marriage of women in the rural area by both Cross-tabulation and Logistic regression analyzes. Moreover, access to mass media has found a significant association with age at first marriage in the rural area by Cross-tabulation analysis.

Key Words: Age at First Marriage, Cross-tabulation analysis, Logistic regression analysis, Rural, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday. More than one in three (about 250 million) entered into the union before age 15(UNICEF, 2014).

Bangladesh has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with 64% of women ages 20-24 married before the age of 18 years, and stark rural-urban differences (71% in rural areas as opposed to 54% in urban areas) in the percentage of women married before 18 years. Despite significant strides in economic growth and modernization over the past ten years; significant increases in female literacy levels and participation in labor force; advancements in and extensive proliferation of information and communication technology; and strong political will and government commitment to change, child marriages in the country continue unabated. Analysis of data from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) shows that the rate of child marriage among girls below the age of 14 years in Bangladesh has declined considerably over the last 15 years; however, the

marriage rate among girls ages 16-17 years has actually increased (Raj A., McDougal L., & Rusch M. L.A. 2013), which is certainly a matter of concern requiring greater attention in a rapidly modernizing country.

In Bangladesh, 64 percent of women aged 20-24 were married before their 18th birthday (ICRW). The Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2011 stated that 66% of the girls were getting married before the age of 16 years. By the age of 19, one in every three girls was either pregnant or giving birth to a child. Although Bangladesh has recently seen an improvement in gender-based development markers such as rates of female literacy and women's participation in the labor force, which typically indicate gender equality is increasing, the number of girls married at ages 16 and 17 throughout Bangladesh is increasing.

Child marriage rates in Bangladesh are amongst the highest in the world. Every 2 out of 3 marriages involve child marriages (UNICEF. 2012). According to statistics (UNFPA) from 2005, 49% of women then between 25 and 29 were married by the age of 15 in Bangladesh. According to the "State of the World's Children-2009" report, 63% of all women aged 20–24 were married before they were 18. According to a 2008 study, *each additional year* that *marriage* is delayed is associated with *0.22 additional years* of schooling attainment (Field, Erica; Ambrus, Attila, 2008). The defer girls were married; the more likely they were to utilize preventative health care. Married girls in the region were found to have less influence on family planning, higher rates of maternal mortality, and lower status in their husband's family than girls who married later.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early marriage has linked with low educational attainment, poor health outcomes for offspring, low maternal social status in husbands' families, compromised reproductive control, and high rates of maternal mortality and marital violence (Jensen & Thornton 20031, Raj et al. 2010). International and domestic laws and policies to halt the practice of child marriage have widely sanctioned. The phenomenon is still widespread in many parts of the developing world, including India. In fact, nearly half—45 percent—of young women in India marry before the legal age of 18, and this figure rises to 53 percent in rural areas. By the age of 20, 63 percent of Indian women marry (Moore 2009).

Age at first marriage for females in a society is also influenced by their socio-cultural status and environmental situation in which they live. In rural Bangladesh, there are much social pressure to 'marry off' pubescent girls (Aziz and Maloney, 1985). Based on the assumptions of several studies conducted by the United Nations (1988; 1990) and other organizations, showed that in the developed regions mean age at first marriage was from 18 to 25 years for women; in the African and Asian regions as developing and underdeveloped nations it was around 20 years, although early age at first marriage (under 17 years) for women in some nations, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Bhutan was prevalent.

According to UNICEF, the practice of child marriage is slowly declining. Progress is most dramatic when it comes to the marriage of girls under 15 years of age. Globally, 1 in 4 young women alive today were married in childhood versus 1 in 3 in the early 1980s (UNICEF, 2014). The proportion of young women who entered into marriage before age 15 declined from 12 per cent to 8 per cent over the same period. There is also a substantial gap in the prevalence of child marriage between the poorest and richest. Females in the

poorest quintile are 2.5 times more likely to marry in childhood than those living in the wealthiest quintile. In India, the median age at first marriage is 19.7 years for women in the richest quintile compared to 15.4 for the poorest women. In Dominican Republic at least half of the poorest women entered into their first marriage or union at about age 17 compared to age 21 among the richest women. Across all regions, girls who live in rural areas are more likely to become child brides than their urban counterparts. This difference is especially striking in some countries in West and Central Africa and in Latin American and the Caribbean, where the prevalence of child marriage in rural areas is about twice the level found in urban areas.

In a report on DHS data concerning adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14, the Population Council emphasized the need for research about important markers of the transition from childhood to adolescence. In reviewing these DHS data on very young adolescents, what we mainly know is that we don't know very much (Blum et al., 2013).
Despite near-universal commitments to end child marriage, one in three girls in developing countries (not including China) is married before age 18 (UNFPA, 2012). The prevalence of child marriage varies substantially across countries, ranging from 2 percent in Algeria to 75 percent in Niger, which has the world's fifth-lowest per capita gross national income (World Bank, 2013). While child marriages are declining among girls under age 15, 50 million girls are still at risk to marry before their 15th birthday in this decade.

Girls under age 15 are not physically ready for sexual intercourse or childbearing and lack the cognitive capacities and power to make safe, informed or voluntary decisions (Dixon-Mueller, 2008). Still, in more than 30 countries, 10 percent of adolescents have had sexual intercourse by age 15, with rates as high as 26 percent in Niger. Research shows that in some countries, many girls' first sexual encounters are non-consensual, and the incidence of forced sex is higher among very young adolescents (Erulkar, 2013).

Child marriage persists for reasons including local traditions or parents' beliefs that it can safeguard their daughter's future. However, more often than not, child marriage is the consequence of limited choices. Girls who miss out or drop out of school are especially vulnerable—while the more exposure a girl has to formal education and the better-off her family is, the more probable marriage to postpone. Simply stated, when girls have life choices, they marry later (UNFPA, 2012). They are often view as adults in the eyes of the law or by custom (when children are married, they are often emancipated under national laws and lose protections as children), child brides need particular attention and support due to their exceptional vulnerability (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003). Compared to older women, child brides are more vulnerable to domestic violence, sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy due to power imbalances, including those that may result from age differences (Guttmacher Institute and International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2013).

Baird et al. (2009) also found that the initiative may have affected sexual behavior and suggested that "as girls and young women returned to (or stayed in) school, they significantly delayed the onset (and, for those already sexually active, reduced the frequency) of their sexual activity. The program also delayed marriage—which is the main alternative of schooling for young women in Malawi—and reduced the likelihood of becoming pregnant." For program beneficiaries who were out of school at baseline, the probability of getting married and becoming pregnant declined by 40 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

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

- To find the percentage of different socio-economic and demographic factors affecting on age at first marriage in the rural area.
- To find out whether different socio-economic and demographic factors have any association with age at first marriage in the countryside of Bangladesh.
- To identify the factors that may explain the variation in age at first marriage in the sample area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses data extracted from the 2011 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS-2011), in which field work conducted during the period from 8 July to 27 December, 2011 in four phases of about 3 weeks each. Out of total 18,222 ever-married women age 12-49 years, 17,842 were interviewed. Ever-married men age 15-54 in every third household were eligible for the interview; of the 4,343 men, 3,997 or 92 percent were successfully interviewed. In this survey it is found that twenty-six percent of women and 28 percent of men live in urban areas. Almost one-third of respondents live in Dhaka and about one-sixth each lives in Chittagong and Rajshahi. In 2011, the latter division was split into two divisions, Rajshahi, and Rangpur. Rangpur has 12 percent of women and 13 percent of men, very similar to the size of Khulna division. Sylhet and Barisal are the smallest divisions, accounting for only about five percent of respondents each. Twenty-eight percent of ever-married women and 26 percent of ever-married men age 15-49 have no education while 12 percent of women and 18 percent of men have completed secondary or higher education. Compared with data from the 2007 BDHS, these results show that there has been a decline in the proportion of women who have never attended school from 34 to 28 percent and for men from 30 to 26 percent.

The associations between age at first marriage and selected explanatory variables have tested by applying cross-tabulation analysis. The cross-tabulation analysis is an important method in the first step for studying the relationship between age at first marriage with several characteristics. However, such analysis fails to address predictors of age at first marriage completely because of ignoring other covariates. Hence, Logistic regression analysis has also been adopted to estimate independent effects of each variable while controlled for others. This analysis has considered all the covariates that have found significant in the cross-tabulation analysis.

VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

Independent Variables of this study are:
Respondent's education, Respondent currently working, Husband's education, Husband's Occupation, Religion, Region, Socio-economic status, Access to mass media.
Dependent variable is age at first marriage, which for convenience analysis we make it dichotomous variable using median age at first marriage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The distribution of age at first marriage and effect of various socio-economic and demographic factors have shown in Table-1 and Table-2. Table-1 shows that age at first marriage of women has significant association with their education. It is seen that illiterate majority respondents are married before or equal 15 years that stand for 69.5 percent, a similar result has seen among primarily educated respondents (64.4 percent). In contrast, 57.3 percent secondary and higher educated respondent's married later age i.e. after 15 years. Age at first marriage of women has a significant association with husband's education. Like as respondent's education, women whose husband have no education and primary education married before or equal 15 years that accounted for 68.3 percent and 59.4 percent respectively. 53.9 percent women whose husbands have secondary and higher education married after 15 years.

Table 1: Percentage distribution and cross-tabulation analysis of age at first marriage of women by different socio-economic and demographic factors in the rural area, Bangladesh

Characteristics	Age at First Marriage		Value of χ^2	Significance level
	≤15 years	>15years		
Respondent's education				
Illiterate	69.5	30.5	673.012	0.000
Primary	64.4	35.6		
Secondary and Higher	42.7	57.3		
Respondent currently working				
No	57.7	42.3	1.358	0128
Yes	56.0	44.0		
Husband's education				
Illiterate	68.3	31.7	423.412	0.000
Primary	59.4	40.6		
Secondary and Higher	46.1	53.9		
Husband's occupation				
Agriculture	54.4	35.6	170.527	0.000
Service	51.1	48.9		
Businessman	53.3	46.7		
Others	61.3	38.7		
Religion				
Non-Muslim	41.3	58.7	165.468	0.000
Muslim	59.7	40.3		
Region				
Barisal	58.7	41.3	588.865	0.000
Chittagong	44.6	55.4		
Dhaka	63.4	36.6		
Khulna	63.4	36.6		
Rajshahi	66.8	33.2		
Rangpur	67.3	32.7		
Sylhet	35.6	64.4		
Socio-economic status				
Poor	64.1	35.9	286.049	0.000
Middle	58.7	41.3		
Rich	45.8	54.2		
Access to mass media				
No access	62.4	376	88.214	0.000
Having access	53.7	46.3		

Table-1 shows that age at first marriage has a strong significant association with husband's occupation. In rural Bangladesh, interestingly, the majority of all categories of women whose husbands are in agriculture, service, business and other job married before or equal 15 years, which stand for 54.4, 51.1, 53.3 and 61.3 percent respectively.

Religion in rural Bangladesh is one of the important factors influencing age at first marriage. Table-1 shows that Non-Muslim respondent married later age than Muslim respondents. 58.7 percent Non-Muslim respondents married after 15 years while 40.3 percent Muslim respondents married at the same time.

The region has a significant association with age at first marriage of women in the rural area. Women in Rangpur district is married early (67.3 percent) i.e. before or equal 15 years, followed by Rajshahi (66.8 percent), Khulna (63.4 percent), Dhaka (63.4 percent) and Barisal (58.7 percent).

Socio-economic status of the respondents in rural Bangladesh has a significant effect on age at first marriage. Maximum poor status and middle-class respondents are married before or equal 15 years whereas rich class respondent is married later age i.e. 54.2 percent rich respondents married after 15 years.

Age at first marriage plays a significant role on access to mass media. 62.4 percent respondents who have no access to mass media married before or equal 15 years whereas 53.7 percent respondents are having access to mass media married in the same span.

Table-2 presents logistic regression analysis. In this analysis, we consider those variables that are significant in bivariate analysis. Education is the single factor strongly related to the postponement of marriage (Jejeebhoy, 1995). Logistic regression analysis shows that respondent's education is an important factor that has a great significant influence on age at first marriage in the rural area. Table indicates that the more education, the more delay marriage. The respondents who have a primary education are 1.202 times more likely to marry after 15 years with compare to those have no education. Similarly, the respondents who have secondary and higher education are 2.620 times more likely to marry after 15 years with compare to those who have no education.

Husband's education also has a significant effect on age at first marriage of women. The result shows that as the level of husband's education increases the likelihood of the age at first marriage also increases. The women whose husbands have a primary education are 1.132 times more likely to marry after 15 years than those husbands have no education. In like manner, the respondents whose husbands have secondary and higher education are 1.419 times more likely to marry after 15 years than those whose husbands have no education. Again husband's occupation has found a significant effect on age at first marriage in countryside area. Women whose husbands engage in service are 1.145 times more likely to marry after 15 years as compared to those whose husbands are in agriculture.

Table 2: Logistic regression for age at first marriage among ever married woman

Characteristics	Rural Area		
	Coefficient of β	S.E	Odds Ratio
Respondent's education Illiterate Primary Secondary and Higher	---- 0.184 0.963	----- 0.055 0.061	1.000 1.202*** 2.620***
Husband's education Illiterate Primary Secondary and Higher	----- 0.124 0.350	---- 0.050 0.060	1.000 1.132* 1.419***
Husband's occupation Agriculture Service Businessman Others	------- 0.135 0.087 0.014	---- 0.051 0.059 0.066	1.000 1.145*** 1.091 1.014
Religion Non-Muslim Muslim	----- -0.718	----- 0.064	1.000 0.488***
Region Barisal Chittagong Dhaka Khulna Rajshahi Rangpur Sylhet	----- 0.573 -0.004 -0.248 -0.237 -0.327 1.147	---- 0076 0.078 0078 0.079 0079 0.082	1.000 1.774*** 0.996 0.781*** 0.789*** 0.721*** 3.147***
Socio-economic status Poor Middle Rich	---- -0.057 0.166	----- 0.053 0.057	1.000 0.945 1.181***
Access to mass media No access Having access	---- -0.058	---- 0.046	1.000 0.943
Constant	-0.466	0.097	0.628***

From table 2, religion has found strong significant effect on age at first marriage in rural Bangladesh. Muslim women are 0.512 times less likely to marry after 15 years than their counterpart Non-Muslim women. The effects of different socio-economic and demographic characteristics are unlike in different divisions. As a result the age at first marriage of the divisions are fluctuating. Women in Chittagong and Sylhet divisions are 1.774 and 3.147 times respectively higher likely to marry after age 15 years than women in Barisal division. However, respondents in Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur are 0.219, 0.211 and 0.279 times respectively less likely to marry after 15 years than those from Barisal.

Table 2 shows that family status of women has a significant effect on age at first marriage of rural women. From the table it is seen that rich women marry at the later age. Women from rich status are 1.181 times more likely to marry after 15 years than those from the poor status. This happen because rich women get more education and modern facility than poor women.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigates the predictors of age at first marriage in the rural area, Bangladesh. The study utilizes the national representative data from the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS -2011). Both cross-tabulation and Logistic regression analysis techniques have been applied to identify the important predictors of age at first marriage. Within the independent variables considered for the study some of the independent variables might help policy makers. It is found the woman's education has significantly affected the age at first marriage. Literacy rate in Bangladesh is 537 percent (BBS, 2011). In rural areas, the gap between men's and women's literacy can be as much as 12 percentage points. Disparities between rural and urban areas are even greater (Cooke S, 2013). By this time, Government of Bangladesh has taken so many programs to increase the national literacy rate, specially the rate of female education. If women education could be made universal up to higher secondary level, it will greatly help to increase the age at marriage. Education positively influences the socio-economic and demographic status and hence it may provide better labor force involvement and create the perception about future and, as a result, it helps to increase the age at first marriage of women. The study also indicates that job facility of the woman increases the age at first marriage. In that case, the Government should increase more job facility like as establishing garments, training handicraft made goods, establishing animals farm, etc.

These findings suggest that there is a fundamental need for the expansion of education facilities up to higher secondary level, particularly for Muslim women in rural areas to increase the age at first marriage. The result further suggests that the greater investments in education and employment for rural women are some of the much-needed interferences to encourage late marriage. The study indicates that access to mass media increases the age at first marriage of the respondents. The modern mass media such as radio, TV and newspaper provide information involving to marriage and other related issues and thus exposes women to modern ideas and views. So government should take proper care to increase the access of rural women to modern mass media. Bangladesh is one of the largest Muslim countries in the world. About 90.4% of Bangladeshis are Muslims. The study also indicates that in Muslim community early age at marriage practice is much higher than the non-Muslim counterparts. So it is impossible to increase the mean age at marriage without any personal and social change on the vast populated Muslim community. To ensure higher age at first marriage, particularly of rural Muslim respondents, learned spokesman emphasizing the bad effects of early marriage should properly motivate rural women through religious conferences so as to change their perceptions about marriage (Mawla and Islam, 2004).

The results show that there are significant differences in age at marriage between the seven divisions in rural Bangladesh. Although the percentage of late marriage in Chittagong division is higher than others, the results are not still satisfactory. The reasons for this variation are not obvious from this research although some qualitative data suggest that there are some inequalities; such as resource, power, activities of both Government and NGO, etc. seen there.

As explained earlier, the concerned authority should strictly implement the marriage act to increase the level of age at first marriage in the rural area and thus strengthening secondary education in Bangladesh should be the most prioritized goal.

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