

# Age At Marriage and Its Impact on Socio-Economic Factors: A Case Study of Champadevi Village Development Committee

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## INTRODUCTION

The practice of early marriage was seemed to be started during the medieval period and it remained quite common for a long time and become an integral part of our social system. Even today many parents consider it as their sanctioned rights to fix the age of marriage for their daughters. Therefore early marriage was considered to be almost universal in Nepal and is still popular in most of the rural areas.

According to the 1981 census the mean age at marriage for the rural areas of Nepal was found to be 20.6 for boys and 17.1 for the girls. In the same year, 13 percent females in the age group 10-14 were reported to be currently married but among the women belonging to age group 30-34, were 95 percent. The propensity to marry tends to rise with age upto a peak at middle age and toppers off there after. Similarly, women tend to marry earlier than men.

## THE APPROACH AND DATA COLLECTION

This study is based on the research findings entitled "Causes and Consequences of Early Marriage Among Rural People: A Case Study of Champadevi Village Development Committee" 1990, financially supported by National Population Commission/Nepal. Data for this research work were collected through a structured questionnaire covering the sample of 30 percent households of the Champadevi Village of Kathmandu. Purposive random sampling techniques were adopted for selecting of households considering the major ethnic groups such as Brahmin, Chhetri, Newar, Tamang, magar, Damai, Kami and Sarkee.

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## AGE AT MARRIAGE

According to the sixth amendment enacted during the International Women's Year, the minimum age of marriage for a girl with her guardian's consent was 16. However, it was 18 years without the consent of the guardians.

The percentage of Women marrying at the age of 18 in Nepal are 70, whereas this percentage was 59 in Jamaica and Indonesia, 45 in Kenya, 26 in Colombia and 80 in U.S.A. (U.N. 1987, Population Briefing paper: 1986). It is a common to note that, in Nepal mean age at marriage was found to be higher in Urban areas compared to the rural areas. According to the 1981 census the singulate mean age at marriage for females was estimated to be 17.1 and 18.5 years for rural and urban areas respectively. The mean age at marriage for female at Champadevi Village was found to be 17.8. This figure is seemed a little more than that of national figure for rural areas. However, the difference is insignificant.

## AGE AT MARRIAGE AMONG DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS

It was found that 70 percent female in the Sarkee and Chhetri communities married at an early age (between 12 to 17 years of age). 60 percent girls in the Brahmin, Magar, Kami, Damai and other casts had married at an early age. Similarly, 30 percent Tamang girls and 20 percent Newar girls married at an early age. The highest percentage of girls married earlier was found in the Sarkee and Chhetri communities and the lowest percentage in the Newar communities. The scheduled castes female had lowest mean age at marriage (16.6) followed by Brahmin, Chhetri, Tamang and Newar females.

**Table 1**  
Percentage Married and Mean Age at Marriage (Female) of the Different Ethnic Groups  
Champadevi Village Development Committee

| Age Group                   | Percentage Married |             |             |             |             |                              | No. of Respondents |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
|                             | Sarkee             | Brahmin     | Chhetri     | Newar       | Tamang      | Magar, Kami Damai and Others |                    |
| 10-15                       | 30                 | 10          | 20          | -           | -           | 20                           | 8                  |
| 16-17                       | 40                 | 50          | 50          | 20          | 30          | 40                           | 23                 |
| 18-20                       | 30                 | 40          | 10          | 60          | 60          | 40                           | 24                 |
| 21-25                       | -                  | -           | 10          | 10          | 10          | -                            | 3                  |
| 26 & above                  | -                  | -           | 10          | 10          | -           | -                            | 2                  |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>100</b>         | <b>100</b>  | <b>100</b>  | <b>100</b>  | <b>100</b>  | <b>100</b>                   | <b>60</b>          |
| <b>Mean age at Marriage</b> | <b>16.6</b>        | <b>17.3</b> | <b>18.1</b> | <b>19.2</b> | <b>18.7</b> | <b>16.6</b>                  |                    |

Source: Sample survey of Households, Champadevi Village Development Committee, 1990

## REASONS FOR EARLY MARRIAGE

There are many factors which influence the age at marriage. It was found that the majority of women belonging to different ethnic group married in an early age because of their parent's will.

The percentage distribution for such women were 66.7 (highest) for Tamang, 53.0 percent for Magar, Kami, Damai and others, 50.0 percent for Sarkee, 45.0 percent for Chhetri and 27.7 percent for Brahmin women. But surprisingly no Newar women stated this cause for their early marriage. The poor economic condition and high family burden was indicated as the cause of early marriage by Brahmin (15.9 percent), Chhetri (5.0 percent), Newar (33.4 percent) and Magar, Kami and Damai (5.9 percent). But was not the reason of early marriage for Sarkee and Tamang women. Similarly, the reason for getting appropriate mate had been stated as the cause of early marriage by Newar women (50.0 percent), Tamang women (33.3 percent), Chhetri women (30.0 percent), Magar, Kami, Damai and others (11.7 percent), Brahmin (11.1 percent), and Sarkee (5.0 percent). The women who stated the cause of early marriage as to maintain social customs and pressure were of 33.4 percent for Brahmin, 20.0 percent for Sarkee, 17.7 percent Magar, Kami and Damai, and 5 percent for Chhetri. No Newar and Tamang women stated this reason for an early marriage.

**Table 2**  
**Reasons for Early Marriage by Caste**  
**Champadevi Village Development Committee**

| Reasons<br>for early marriage                     | Percentage Early Married |              |              |              |              |                                     |
|---|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|
|   | Sarkee                   | Brahmin      | Chhetri      | Newar        | Tamang       | Magar,<br>Kami, Damai<br>and Others |
| Parents will                                      | 50.0                     | 27.7         | 45.0         | -            | 66.7         | 53.0                                |
| Poor Economic Condition<br>and High Family Burden | -                        | 15.9         | 5.0          | 33.4         | -            | 5.9                                 |
| Getting Appropriate<br>mate                       | 5.0                      | 11.1         | 30.0         | 50.0         | 33.3         | 11.7                                |
| To Maintain Social<br>Customs and Pressure        | 20.0                     | 33.4         | 5.0          | -            | -            | 17.7                                |
| Other Reasons                                     | 25.0                     | 11.9         | 15.0         | 16.6         | -            | 11.7                                |
| <b>Total</b>                                      | <b>100.0</b>             | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>                        |

Note: The total may not add up 100.0 due to rounding.

Source: Sample Survey of Households, Champadevi Village 1990.

## REASONS FOR LATE MARRIAGE

There are different reasons for late marriage among the females. The two major reasons of late marriage of women were education and employment of women. The more educated a women is the more likely she is to marry at a late age and vice-versa. Similarly, participation in labour force or gainful employment would lead to the highest age at marriage of women. When asked the reasons for late marriage of women in Champadevi Village, the answers were the possibility of breaking the study, not getting appropriate mate, poor economic condition, late marriage of elders, unavailability of mate of their own caste and negligence by parents.

**Table 3**  
**Reasons for Late Marriage by Women of Champadevi Village**  
**Development Committee**

| Reasons                               | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Possibility of Breaking Study         | 3.7        |
| Not Getting Appropriate Mate          | 25.9       |
| Poor Economic Condition               | 14.8       |
| Late marriage by elders               | 3.7        |
| Not availability of mate of own caste | 33.3       |
| Negligence of Parents                 | 33.33      |
| All                                   | 100.0      |

Source: Sample survey of Households, Champadevi Village, 1990

## IMPACT OF EARLY MARRIAGE

Early marriage definitely affects to different socio-economic aspects of life of women. The major effect of early marriage is considered to be the high fertility. As the age at marriage goes up, there is every likelihood of fertility rate coming down (Hans Raj: 1986). Early child bearing increase the chances of medical complications.

According to the Nepal Fertility Survey 1976, 41.0 percent of women reported that the mean interval between marriage and first birth was 2.4 years. Besides, early marriage had also adverse effect on her health too. Because, before the age of 18, health risks of pregnancy and child birth are positively greater.

## EARLY MARRIAGE AND CHILD BIRTH

Early marriage and child bearing are closely linked to the total fertility rate. It is generally accepted that women starts giving birth form age of 14. Therefore, early marriage and child bearing are closely linked to the high total fertility rate.

The mean birth for early and timely married women at Champadevi Village is presented in Table 4. The mean birth for early married women and timely married women is found 4.2 and 3.8 respectively. This shows that the mean birth for timely married women is low compared to early married women.

**Table 4**  
**Mean Birth for Early and Timely Married Women, Champadevi Village Development Committee**

| Early Married |            | Timely Married |            |
|---------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| Total Birth   | Mean Birth | Total Birth    | Mean Birth |
| 142<br>(33)   | 4.2        | 99<br>(27)     | 3.8        |

Note: Figures in parenthesis denotes number of respondents

Source: Sample survey of Households, Champadevi Village, 1990

## EFFECTS OF EARLY MARRIAGE ON HEALTH

It is believed that early marriage also effects women's health due to her burden on household responsibilities. As we all know that many women do not able even to have minimum nutrition within pregnancy and after child birth. However in Champadevi Village the average impact of early marriage on her health was not found remarkably significant. The majority of women respondents having early married had good health.

**Table 5**  
**Health Condition of Early and Timely Married Women, Champadevi Village Development Committee**

| Type of Respondents | Total | Health Status (%) |             |
|---------------------|-------|-------------------|-------------|
|                     |       | Healthy           | Unhealthy   |
| Early married       | 100.0 | 72.7<br>(24)      | 27.3<br>(9) |
| Timely married      | 100.0 | 92.6<br>(25)      | 7.4<br>(2)  |

Note: figures in Parenthesis indicates number of Respondents

Source: Sample survey of Households, Champadevi Village, 1990

## EARLY MARRIGE AND CHILD MORTALITY

According to the Nepal Fertility Survey 1986, the infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) was 111.5. It was generally believed that the infant mortality rate for early married women is higher than that of the timely or lately married women. This fact was found similar in case of Champadevi Village too. The mean death of children in the village for the early married women was found to be 1.80, whereas the mean death of children for timely married women was found as 0.42 only.

**Table 6**  
**Early & Timely Marriage and Its Consequences on Child Mortality,**  
**Champadevi Village Development Committee**

| Type of Respondents | No. of Child Number | No. of Child Births (alive) | No. of Child Births (Dead) | Mean Death | Percentage of Dead Child Births |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|
| Early Married       | 33                  | 105                         | 37                         | 1.1        | 26.1                            |
| Timely Married      | 27                  | 88                          | 11                         | 0.4        | 11.1                            |

Source: Sample survey of Households, Champadevi Village, 1990

## CONCLUSION

The majority of female had found married at an early age in the study area. The mean age at marriage was found only little more than that of the national rural average. Since most of the women were uneducated or only literate it could not have a impact on age at marriage of a women at the village. Similarly, most of the women were employed in the agricultural household job and cottage industries, their occupations did not have maintained relation with the age at marriage.

Differences in age at marriage estimated among different ethnic groups, for example the minimum age at marriage was found with the Sarkee and the maximum age with the Newar and Tamang. One reason of early marriage might be the superstitious beliefs prevalent to low caste communities. However, the main reason of getting early marriage in the village was affected by socio-economic conditions. Mostly, the female or girl married at an early age according to their parents will. the reason for accepting their parents will might be the unconsciousness about their social status, since most of them were uneducated and not engaged in outside job.

## SELECTED REFERENCES

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## BOOK REVIEW

Khadka, Narayan (1991): *Foreign Aid, Poverty and Stagnation in Nepal*  
(New Delhi: Vikas publishing house) Pp 447+XVI  
Price: Rs. 625.00

The book opens with the sentence "Foreign aid as a transfer of resources on concessional terms is a Phenomenon of the immediate post Second World War period" and ends with the sentence "However, it should be stated that learning from a crisis is better than becoming Chronically dependent on aid: These two statements leave almost no ground for further review of the book under review.

The book, based on the research work of the author, is an attempt to analyse critically the marco-economic performance of foreign aid in Nepal. The inception of the study, according to the author, was under taken during his visiting Humboldt fellowship at the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg, West Germany. Later on, he continued the study further at the OECD, Paris, Institute of development Studies, university of sussex, England, Chr. Michelson Institute, Bergen, Norway and the Centre for Development Studies Bergen, Norway. Four main objectives of the study have been acknowledged:

- (a) To examine the socio-cultural and political constraints to development
- (b) To find out the sourcewise and sectorwise allocation of aid over the past there decade
- (c) To evaluate the marco-economic impact of aid on the economy
- (d) To analyses the policy implications for aid and development in the future. The finding of the study in note-worthy to commensurate with the objectives.

The book, based on both Primary and secondary sources of data, is organised into eight chapters. Those eight chapters can be divided into two main parts. The first part deals with the political economy of the aid inflow, in general, in the fifties. The second part which in the main part of the study, focuses on the aid and development issues between 1961 and 1985. The first part includes chapter one to chapter three. The second part of the book, which deals with the marco-economic performance of foreign aid, particularly after the introduction of the Panchyat system in 1961, included chapter four to chapter eight.



The work is successful in exposing the facts and revealing the truth about concealed reality of foreign assistance in general. The author has done a commendable work in giving a lucid and comprehensive analysis on the subject. The study has also attempted to relate the foreign Capital with the growth and development theories.

Some point mistakes can be seen in the book. For example, on the nineteenth line of page Vi, 'area' has been printed, which should be 'are'. Likewise, in page 87 the equation (II) should be  $Y = C+I 'X-M$ , instead of  $Y = C+I+'Y'-M$ .

Above all, the book can be considered as an important addition in the list of few publication on the subject. The lucid exposition made in the book and the relevant suggestion put forward should well be taken into account by planners and policy makers.

In the concluding remarks the author has pointed out that, in case of Nepal, development has been made purely a techno-bur-eaucratic phenomenon. He realises the fact that aid can not be withdrawn completely, since it is so much embedded in the donar-recipients political economic relations whatever criticisms are made about the negative effects.

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