

# Marriage and Fertility Among the Dalit Women: An Age-Specific Study of Sarki Community in Chainpur Municipality, Sankhuwasabha

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## Abstract

In Dalit community, age at marriage is relatively low. There is a close relationship between age at marriage and fertility. This paper examines the relationship between age at marriage and fertility in Chainpur Municipality. Although there are many studies on age at marriage and fertility, no such study has been found in Sarki community. The general objective of the study was to find out the relationship between age at marriage and fertility among the Dalit women namely “Sarki” in Chainpur Municipality Sankhuwasaha. The specific objectives of this study were to find out age at marriage in the Sarki community and to explore the relationship between age at marriage and fertility in this community. This article is based on quantitative design. Data has been collected for ever married-women of age group 15-49 years by using the purposive sampling method. This study has covered 240 ever-married women as a sample. Low age at marriage, more involvement in agriculture, high illiterate population, etc. are the result of the study and the interpretation and analysis of the data have been done in this study. Findings of this study have revealed that the highest percentage of women were married below 20 years. The findings have indicated that total fertility rate (TFR) is 3.1 per woman which is higher than that of NDHS. This study concludes that early marriage tends to have high fertility.

**Keywords:** *Age at marriage, Sarki Community, fertility, Early marriage, Children Ever Born.*

## Introduction

Despite marriage is a sacrament in our society, there has been different practices of marriage. Marriage is a social practice which is compulsory and unavoidable for begetting children in the society. Marriage age which also refers to age at first marriage (Dommaraju, 2008) is an important proximate determinant of fertility (Bongaarts, 1978). Marriage ensures biological and psychological satisfaction on the individual. On the wider plane, it ensures two-fold survival, that of the group and its culture (Majumder and Madan, 1967). In Nepal, the age at marriage is fixed at

20 years (Civil Code Act, 2017) for both male and female. The current median age at marriage in Nepal is 18 years for girl (CBS, 2021), which is comparatively low in comparison with the age fixed by law. UNICEF defines child marriage, also known as early marriage, is any formal marriage or informal union between a child under age 18 and an adult and another child. Girls are disproportionately affected, with 1 in 5 young women aged 20 to 24 years old married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, compared to 1 in 30 young men. In 2022, 12 million girls became child brides (UNICEF, 2022). Over the past decade, the proportion of young women married as children decreased by more than a third from one in two to approximately one in three (UNICEF, 2020). There is an inverse relationship between age at marriage and fertility. Early marriage tends to high fertility where late marriage decreases fertility rate. This relationship is influenced by many factors, such as economic, cultural and social factors. In this context, female age at marriage is relatively low in Nepalese society. Fertility rate has been gradually decreasing in Nepal, where total fertility rate was observed 6.3 per woman in 1981 (Adhakari, 2010) and reached to 2.1 per woman in 2022 (NDHS, 2022) in Nepal. This article deals with the age at marriage and number of child bearing in reproductive period 15-49 years. Furthermore, this article explores the relationship between age at marriage and fertility with reference to education, income, occupation and socio-cultural norms and values. Although there are extensive studies on age at marriage and fertility, there seems to be little study on marriage and fertility on Sarki community. In the above context, the objectives of this article are:

- i. to find out age at marriage in the Sarki community,
- ii. to explore the relationship between age at marriage and fertility in this community.

This article has three significances. Firstly, this study gives knowledge to the stakeholders about marriage and fertility. The second is to provide information related to marriage and fertility to the stakeholders and provide on-site information to the concerned authority to create a plan to solve the problems seen in that place. Finally, this study will help researchers for further study on marriage and fertility in Dalit community.

### **Methodology**

This article is based on quantitative research design. Survey method is used under quantitative method. Under this method, data have been collected from ever married Sarki women aged 15-49 years within Chainpur Municipality by using purposive sampling method. This study dealt with the sample size of 240 ever married women aged 15-49 years. The data were collected from the respondents using questionnaire.

The researcher visited the respective places from 24 to 28 March, 2024 to collect the data. After collecting the questionnaire, the data were analyzed and presented in tables, graphs, charts, and diagram according to the needs. Names, surnames and other identities of the respondents were kept secret during the study. The data were collected only with the prior consent of the respondents.

## Results

### Age at marriage

Table 1 below shows the age at first marriage of female in the community. It was found that majority (90 percent) of women did not know the legal age at marriage. Similarly, the data in the table 1 indicated that the highest number of women married below the age of 20 (51.3 percent) and the lowest married above the age 30 (0.4 percent). Most of the respondents said that the ideal age for marriage is 19-21 years, with their respective percentage of 41.7 and 31.3. Likewise, the study revealed that the “illiteracy and poverty” were the main reasons for early marriage. Other reasons are family pressure (20.1 Percent), religious taboos (0.9 percent), culture (2.3 percent), fulfillment of sexual desire (1.4 percent) and love affair (18 percent). The illiteracy was the reason for about 3.3 percent women who got married in their early age, about 22 percent marriages occurred do to poverty and religious taboos was the lowest percent (about 1 percent) for early marriage. The reasons of late marriage were education, employment, peer counseling, family agreement and others. Education was the main reason for about 55.5 per cent women who married late in the Sarki community.

**Table 1**

*Pattern of Age at Marriage (percentage distribution of age at marriage, reasons of early and late marriage)*

### Variables (N=240)

Age at marriage	Number	Percent
below 20 year	123	51.3
20-24	96	40.0
25-29	20	8.3
30 +	1	0.4
<b>Appropriate age at marriage</b>		
15-18 year	75	31.3
19-21	100	41.7
22-25	60	25.0
25+	5	2.1

<b>Knowledge of legal age at Marriage</b>		
Yes	24	10
No	216	90
<b>Reasons of early Marriage(N=222)</b>		
Illiteracy	69	31.1
family pressure	45	20.1
Poverty	48	21.7
religious taboos	2	0.9
Cultural	5	2.3
fulfillment of sexual desire	3	1.4
love affair	40	18
Other	10	4.5
<b>Reasons of late Marriage(N=18)</b>		
Employment	1	5.6
Education	10	55.6
peer counseling	2	11.1
family agreement	3	16.7
Other	2	11.1
Total	18	100.0

### **Relation between Age at Marriage and Fertility**

Relation between age at marriage, women's education status among Sarki women of Chainpur Municipality.

Table 2 shows that percentage distribution of ever-married women age group 15-49 according to the age at marriage and education in Chainpur Municipality. Out of total respondents 72.9 percent women got married before 21<sup>st</sup> birthday in that community. While 27.1 percent women got married after 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday. This indicates that large number of women married before 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Similarly, among married women, 36.7 percent were not literate, which is followed by basic level i.e. 30.4 percent. Among all respondents, 10 percent of married women have completed higher education. Agriculture was the main occupation where about 84.6 percent married women are engaged in agriculture while 15.4 percent only involve in non agriculture sectors.

**Table 2**

*Percentage Distribution of ever-married women aged 15-49 according to age at marriage, women's education and occupation in Sarki community.*

**Variable(N=240)**

<b>Age at Marriage</b>	Number of women	per cent
<21 years	175	72.9
>22 years	65	27.1
<b>Education</b>		
Illiterate	88	36.7
Basic	73	30.4
Secondary	55	22.9
Higher Education	24	10.0
<b>Occupation</b>		
Agriculture	203	84.6
Non Agriculture	37	15.4
Total	240	100

### **Age at Marriage and Children Ever Born (CEB)**

Table 3 shows the number of children ever born to married women by age group up to the survey date. Out of total group, the highest number of CEB has observed in the age group of 40-44 is 2.4 per woman followed by 2.1 in the age 35-39. The lowest number of CEB is observed in age group 15-19 i.e., 0.9 per woman. Similarly, the average CEB of reproductive aged ever married women is 1.6 per woman. Likewise, the study revealed that the respondents who have married below 20 years have the highest number (2.1 per woman) of CEB.

**Table 3**

*Average Number of Children Ever Born (CEB) to married women by age up to the Survey Date.*

### **Variables Children Ever Born (CEB)**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Number of Women</b>	<b>Total Birth</b>	<b>CEB</b>
15-19	16	14	0.9
20-24	47	62	1.3
25-29	45	57	1.3
30-34	41	69	1.7

35-39	29	61	2.1
40-44	32	76	2.4
45-49	30	45	1.5
<b>Age at Marriage</b>	<b>Number of women</b>	<b>Total birth</b>	<b>CEB</b>
< 20 year	123	258	2.1
20-24	96	97	1.0
25-29	20	37	1.9
30+	1	2	2.0
Total	240	384	1.6

### Age Specific Fertility (ASFR) and Total Fertility Rate (TFR)

Table 4 shows age-specific fertility (ASFR) and total fertility (TFR) based on the number of live births and total number of women of reproductive age within the last 1 year. Looking at the status of age-specific fertility rate, 15-19 years age group has the highest (187.5 per thousand) ASFR, which is followed by the age group 25-29(111.1 per thousand). Likewise, the total fertility rate of the community is 3.1 per woman.

### Age Specific fertility rate (ASFR) and Total Fertility rate (TFR)

Age Group	Number of Women	Total Live Birth	ASFR
15-19	16	3	187.5
20-24	47	5	106.4
25-29	45	5	111.1
30-34	41	3	73.2
35-39	29	2	69.0
40-44	32	1	31.3
45-49	30	1	33.3
Total	240		611.7
		TFR	3.1

### Discussion

This article examines the age at marriage and fertility among Dalit women of Chinpur Municipality.

Early marriage is prevalent in Sarki community. This study has proved that the number of women marrying before 20 years of age is high in the community, which

affects fertility. Findings of this study shows that early marriage tends to have high fertility. About 93 percent of women said that the age at marriage is low due to lack of education, poverty, involvement in agricultural profession, cultural and family pressure. Similarly, 7 percent of women got married late because of advice from family, employment, education and peer counseling. This indicates that socio-cultural and economic factors affect age at marriage in the community.

The current study has revealed that age at marriage has negative impact on fertility. The lower the age at marriage, the higher was the fertility. It is found from the result of the study that the number of women who got married before the age of 20 is the highest, and the number of CEB they have is also high (2.1 per woman). Likewise, analyzing the CEB according to age group, it is seen that the number of CEB by women increases as the age group increases. What is clear from this is that Sarki mothers have a tendency to produce children throughout the reproductive period.

Looking at age at marriage, education and occupation of women, there is a majority of those who got married before the age of 21, while the number of those who got married above the age of 22 is less. Similarly, this study indicates that the number of married women in agriculture sector is more than non-agriculture sector. From the above facts, it is clear that age at marriage is low and the fertility is high due to factors such as education and occupation.

Like other studies, in this study, women in the age group of 15-30 years have the highest fertility rate. According to the result of national census and survey, the age group of 20-25 years has the highest age-specific fertility rate, but in the study, the age group of 15-19 has the highest age-specific fertility rate. Calculating the total fertility rate in this study, it is found that a mother gave birth to an average of 3.1 children in her reproductive period which is higher than the data of Nepal Demography Heath Survey 2022.

### **Conclusion**

This study shows that early marriage still exists in Sarki community. Early marriage has several negative consequences. In order to prevent early marriage, it seems that various concerned agencies should conduct awareness programs. Although the government has fixed the age of marriage at 20 years, effective monitoring is needed to end the practice of marrying before that age. Likewise, this study concluded that age at marriage has significant relationship with fertility. The number of live birth by women of reproductive age is high and total fertility rate is also high. Therefore, programmes should focus on decreasing fertility rate by promoting the use of birth control devices in the Sarki community.

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