

Marriage Patterns in A Rural Agglomeration

by

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is one of the most significant events in the life of an individual and from demographic point of view is a vital event leading to further reproduction and continuity of the human race. The concept of marriage has been common to all societies, though it carries structural and functional variations according to different environmental conditions. A Muslim marriage is both a devotional act as well as a contract between the spouses—based on the mutual acceptance of the bride and the groom and the fixation of *mehr*, which a husband has to give as a gift to his wife.

Because of the sanctity of marriage as a religious institution and the only acceptable recourse for fulfilling the mating instinct between the male and the female the tendency in many Muslim societies has been to involve the two individuals into the bond of marriage as early as possible. The emphasis in Islamic traditions on virginity tends to favour marriage at an early age. Even though the value of *mehr* should be fixed equal to an amount which a man can easily afford to pay to his wife, economic and social considerations of the present-day society have increased the acceptable value of *mehr* considerably, which tends to increase the age at marriage of both the male and the female. The explanation for this is that the male spends a good part of his life to reach a level of economic independence. The female, on the other hand, has to wait for her marriage until her parents have saved enough money for the arrangement of dowry and also for the expenditure to be incurred on the marriage ceremony. It may be pointed out here that the religious values do not favour large expenditure on dowry, but the present-day economic considerations determine, to a large extent, the nature and the amount of dowry. A higher expectation of dowry is usually associated with a higher demand of *mehr* to be pledged by the husband. The main purpose of fixing a high *mehr* is to use it as a deterrent to divorce by the husband. The age at marriage and the value of *mehr*, therefore, are influenced by the socio-cultural norms of the society.

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II. DEMOGRAPHIC SIGNIFICANCE OF AGE AT MARRIAGE

The prevailing patterns of age at marriage are of special demographic significance in a country like Pakistan where fertility and population growth rates are persistently high. However, in those segments of society where economic considerations are dominant, because of a desire for educational pursuits and economic independence, the tendency is to marry at a later age. A higher age at marriage seems to contribute to the lowering of fertility in the following ways:—

- (a) The higher age of female marriage reduces the reproductive span of a female which may lead to a lower size of family.
- (b) Females marrying late are likely to be more conscious of the repercussions of producing more children, both because of physical sufferings involved in bearing a child and the ultimate effect which the larger family would have on the family economy and social life.
- (c) The higher age at marriage of males may also result in lowering fertility in the following two ways:—
 - (i) Most of the males with higher age at marriage get married to higher aged females [1, p. 56].
 - (ii) Because of the dominant role of males in Pakistani society, the late marriage of males with females of any age is likely to produce the number of children primarily according to the desire of the male. Such males if motivated to consider the economic repercussions of a large family, are likely to desire a few children only.

Thus, it is clear that the higher age at marriage of both males and females can have a significant effect to reduce the level of fertility in the country.

III. SOURCE OF MARRIAGE DATA

With the introduction of the Muslim Family Law of 1961, the registration of Muslim marriages became compulsory in Pakistan. Previously no systematic record of marriages was maintained. Under the existing system, a marriage contract form called *Nikahnama* has to be filled up at the time the marriage is solemnized. This form is to be signed by both the bride and the groom. In case one of them is illiterate the thumb impression has to be affixed instead of signatures. A duplicate copy of this form is deposited with the Local Union Council or Committee's office for record. The *Nikahnama* carries information of demographic and sociological significance which covers the conditions of the marriage contract agreed to by the parties concerned. The *Nikahnama* provides such particulars as (i) the names of the bride and the groom, (ii) their respective ages at the time of marriage (iii) their residential addresses, (iv) the mount of *Mehr* fixed.

IV. THE PRESENT STUDY

Although the Muslim Family Law of 1961 became an outstanding instrument in providing useful marriage data of demographic and sociological

significance, only a few attempts have been made to utilize this information for research purposes. The studies conducted so far, on the interrelationships of different variables with age at marriage, relate to the two big cities of Pakistan, namely Karachi and Lahore. For Karachi, the first study was conducted by Korson [5], and the second, by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, which will be referred subsequently as the PIDE Karachi study [1]. The latest study of marriages in the walled city of Lahore was conducted by Nafis [4]. The present study relates to marriages registered in a group of villages falling in three Union Councils of Sheikhpura district of the Punjab and provides results of a similar analysis of marriage patterns utilizing data provided in marriage registration forms. This study can be considered as an extension of the PIDE Karachi study to a rural agglomeration of the Punjab. It may, however, be pointed out here that while the Karachi study was conducted for falling in different socio-economic strata, the present study covers a population which practically represents a single homogeneous stratum. The Lahore study represents a population which may be varying so far as economic status is concerned but socially it is a homogeneous population in that it follows prevalent traditions.

The present rural study covers marriages registered during the years 1964 and 1969 in the Kharianwala, Salar Syedan and Kot Ranjeet, Union Councils of Sheikhpura District consisting of 23 villages. From the information provided in the marriage registration forms an attempt has been made to study the following features of Muslim marriages in this area:—

- (i) Age distribution of first marriages for males and females.
- (ii) Average age at first marriage of males and females.
- (iii) Age at first marriage and amount of *Mehr* fixed.
- (iv) Marriage migration of brides as indicated by the residence of grooms in relation to residence of bride.

The results of the present study have been compared with the PIDE Karachi study and with the Lahore study by Nafis. Visible changes in marriage patterns are examined over a period of five years.

V. NUMBER OF MARRIAGES

The total number of marriages during 1964 in the villages covered by the present study was 149. Of these, 135 were first marriages and 14 were either second or subsequent marriages. In 1969 the number of marriages increased to 295, of which 268 were first marriages and 27 were second or subsequent marriages. The percentage of second or subsequent marriages during 1964 and 1969 were 9.4 and 9.1 respectively, being almost the same in both years.

VI. AGE DISTRIBUTION OF MARRIAGES

The distribution of first marriages registered in the study area, 135 in 1964 and 268 in 1969, according to age at marriage of females is shown in Table I. The table shows that the minimum age of females recorded was 16 and the maximum was 26. The number of marriages between age 16 and 20

formed 81.6 percent of the total marriages in 1964 and 87.7 per cent in 1969, with 18 as the most frequent age at marriage in both years.

TABLE I
AGE AT MARRIAGE OF FEMALES 1964 AND 1969

Age at Marriage	1964		1969	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
16	7	5.2	15	5.6
17	18	13.4	23	8.6
18	49	36.3	126	47.0
19	14	10.4	28	10.4
20	22	16.3	43	16.1
21	7	5.2	9	3.4
22	10	7.4	15	5.6
23	2	1.5	3	1.1
24	4	2.9	1	0.4
25	1	0.7	3	1.1
26	1	0.7	2	0.7
All ages	135	100.0	268	100.0

A comparison of the age distribution of females at marriage in the present study with the corresponding distribution in the PIDE Karachi study and Nafis' study of the walled city of Lahore is provided in Table II.

TABLE II
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF MARRIAGES BY AGE OF FEMALES IN PRESENT STUDY, PIDE KARACHI STUDY AND LAHORE CITY STUDY

Age at marriage	Present study		PIDE Karachi study		Lahore city study
	1964	1969	1962	1965	1969
16	5.2	5.6	7.3	7.1	2.3
17	13.4	8.4	16.1	16.1	8.4
18	36.3	47.0	20.1	18.6	42.7
19	10.4	10.4	31.1	22.9	11.2
20	16.3	16.1	14.4	16.4	17.1
21	5.2	3.4	8.1	10.2	4.5
22	7.4	5.6	2.1	5.6	5.7
23	1.5	1.1	—	0.9	2.0
24	2.9	0.4	0.8	2.5	2.5
25 and above	1.4	1.8	—	0.6	3.6
All ages	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The table shows that the age distribution of the present study is comparable to the age distribution of marriages in the walled city of Lahore for 1969, with most frequent age at marriage in both the areas being 18. The distribution is not at variance with the PIDE Karachi study except that in the latter the most frequent age is 19. On the whole the three distributions are comparable. This indicates that patterns of female age at marriage are similar in the rural agglomeration under study and the urban districts of Lahore and Karachi.

Let us now examine the distribution of marriages by age of males in the area under study, which is shown in Table III.

TABLE III
AGE AT MARRIAGE OF MALES 1964 AND 1969

Age at marriage	1964		1969	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
18	8	5.9	20	7.5
19	10	7.4	12	4.5
20	27	20.0	53	19.8
21	7	5.2	17	6.3
22	28	20.7	64	23.9
23	9	6.7	7	2.6
24	15	11.1	12	4.5
25	17	12.6	62	23.1
26	4	3.0	5	1.8
27	4	3.0	3	1.1
28 and above	6	4.4	13	4.9
All ages	135	100.0	268	100.0

A comparison of the 1964 and 1969 percentage distribution shows that the most frequent age at marriage of males is 22 for both years. The effect of digital preference of ages is clearly visible for both these years as the marriages mainly occur at ages with even numbers and at 25. The Table shows that 92.6 per cent of the males in 1964 and 94 per cent in 1969 were married at the age 26 or before indicating that the marriage patterns of males did not change over time in the area under study.

A comparison of percentage distribution of males by their age at marriage between the rural agglomeration under study, the PIDE Karachi study, and the Lahore city study is provided in Table IV. This shows that the percentage of those married at age 22 or less is 59.2 and 62.0 for 1964 and 1969 respectively in the rural areas, while for Karachi the percentage of marriages for the same ages is about 13.5 for both the years (1962 and 1965). For Lahore city study the corresponding percentage of marriages at these ages is 36.8. This shows that there is a visible differential between the rural population and city population so far as age at marriage of males is concerned. Lahore city population falls in

between the two extremes-rural population and Karachi's population, which shows that economic considerations are dominant in the highly urbanized population of Karachi in determining the marriage patterns and the traditional social values dominate in the rural society. Lahore city represents a society which is both traditional as well as economically-oriented.

TABLE IV

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF MARRIAGES BY AGE OF MALES IN PRESENT STUDY, PIDE KARACHI STUDY AND LAHORE CITY STUDY

Age at marriage	Present study		PIDE Karachi study		Lahore City study
	1964	1969	1962	1965	1969
18	5.9	7.5	—	—	0.8
19	7.4	4.5	—	0.3	1.9
20	20.0	19.8	1.6	1.5	7.9
21	5.2	6.3	2.1	1.5	5.9
22	20.7	23.9	9.7	10.2	20.3
23	6.7	2.6	17.0	11.5	7.2
24	11.1	4.5	24.0	15.5	11.5
25	12.6	23.1	15.7	17.3	15.6
26	3.0	1.8	10.4	10.5	7.6
27	3.0	1.1	12.0	11.8	5.1
28 and above	4.4	4.9	7.4	19.9	15.2
All ages	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

VII. AVERAGE AGE AT MARRIAGE

The average age at marriage of males and females estimated from the data collected in the present study is shown in Table V. The corresponding estimates from the Karachi and Lahore city studies are also provided in the table for comparison.

TABLE V

AVERAGE AGE AT MARRIAGE FOR MALES AND FEMALES

Sex	Present study		PIDE Karachi study		Lahore city study
	1964	1969	1962	1965	1969
Males	22.4	22.6	24.6	25.4	24.4
Females	19.1	18.8	18.7	19.4	19.2
Difference	3.1	3.8	5.9	6.0	5.2

The table shows that in all areas the average age at marriage of females is not much different, being nearly 19, but that the differences are conspicuous in the case of males. Karachi shows highest age of 25.4 for 1965, while the rural areas under study show a minimum average age of 22.4 and 22.6 for 1964 and 1969 respectively. Lahore city shows a slightly lower age at marriage than Karachi. Similarly, the male-female differentials are lowest in the rural area and highest in Karachi. The reasons for these differences are similar to those stated earlier for differences in age distribution of marriages.

VIII. AGE AT MARRIAGE AND MEHR

Table VI provides a comparative statement for average *mehr* fixed per marriage according to the age of females in the three studies. It is observed from this table that a positive relationship between age at marriage and average *mehr*, which is visible for Karachi and to some extent for Lahore, is non-existent in the rural areas under study. In terms of the overall average *mehr* the rural population stands lowest with an average of Rs. 359 per marriage while the respective averages for Karachi and Lahore are Rs. 4,102 and Rs. 2,159 per marriage.

TABLE VI

AGE AT MARRIAGE OF FEMALES AND AVERAGE MEHR (IN RUPEES) IN PRESENT STUDY, PIDE KARACHI STUDY AND LAHORE CITY STUDY

Age at marriage	Present study		PIDE Karachi study ¹		Lahore city study
	1964	1969	1962	1965	1969
16	33	587	1,527	1,944	1853
17	113	103	2,343	2,860	1991
18	193	350	3,373	4,279	1313
19	121	265	3,074	4,093	1804
20	139	372	5,624	6,392	1891
21	99	35	8,148	8,486	3503
22	683	364	13,637	7,724	2570
23	33	227	—	20,000	3851
24	33	1000	25,000	8,838	2991
25 and above	516	1325	—	15,000	3795
All ages	187	359	4,102	5,137	2159

The age-wise distribution of average *mehr* shows similar differences amongst the three studies. These differences can be explained in terms of the following factors which determine the age at marriage and the amount of *mehr*:—

- (i) The age at marriage and the amount of *mehr* are related to economic status either directly or through other variables like educational status or time spent for achieving economic independence.

¹The apparent sudden jumps in average *mehr* in case of Karachi are primarily due to the reason that the PIDE Karachi study was based on a 4 percent sample as against complete coverage of marriages in the present study and in the Lahore study [1, p. 49 and 4].

- (ii) The age at marriage and the amount of *mehr* are, dependent on the influence of family pressures to protect matrimonial life. Such family pressures are stronger in a traditional rural area and are weaker in a highly urbanized society like that of Karachi. The age at marriage and the amount of *mehr* are therefore lower in the rural areas, where traditions are strongly upheld. As such a higher amount of *mehr*, which is essentially fixed to work as a deterrent to divorce would not be essential. Such forces being weaker in Karachi, they are replaced by economic pressures through fixation of a higher *mehr*.

IX. MIGRATION DUE TO MARRIAGES

A marriage is characterized by the departure of the bride from the house of her parents to that of her husband or his family. From the demographic point of view therefore, marriage leads to the phenomenon of female migration. Since marriages are generally arranged with close relatives or with persons known to the family, it would be interesting to examine the migration patterns caused by marriage, specifically the relative proportion of marriages arranged (i) within a close group of villages (ii) between rural areas which are at a distance from each other and (iii) between rural and urban areas.

This interesting aspect of marriages has been studied with the data on residential addresses of the bride and the groom as provided in the marriage registration forms.³ As the study has been conducted for two years—1964 and 1969, any change in the attitude of the people of the area in respect of the fixation of marriages to persons in other areas should be apparent from the comparative figures.

Table VII provides the number of marriages which were solemnized between the females of the rural areas under study and the males who were residents of (i) the rural areas under study, (ii) other rural areas outside the areas of study and (iii) urban areas.

TABLE VII

FEMALE MARRIAGE MIGRANTS FROM RURAL AREAS UNDER STUDY TO DIFFERENT AREAS

Residence of males (destination of female migrants)	1964		1969	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
1. Within the rural areas under study	54	40.0	75	28.0
2. Outside rural areas	72	53.4	150	56.0
3. Urban areas	9	6.6	43	16.0
All areas	145	100.0	268	100.0

³Because of the limitation of data it is not possible to provide an estimate of the percentage that such female marriage migration constitutes of the total internal female migration to urban areas. Independent estimates of male and female migration to urban areas in Pakistan are, however, available in another study [1].

The table shows that the percentage of brides migrating from rural areas under study to other rural areas for 1964 and 1969 is 53.4 and 56.0 respectively. The corresponding percentage of migrants to urban areas which was 6.6 in 1964 shows a significant rise to 16 in 1969.³ This indicates that the number of marriages between females of rural areas to the males of urban areas as well as of other rural areas are on the increase, while the marriages within the group of villages under study are relatively decreasing. This shows that more marriages are being arranged between distant areas. Of particular interest is the significant increase in rural to urban female migration due to marriage over the period 1964 to 1969. It may be pointed out here that the present study shows no difference in the average age at marriage of females who went from rural to rural areas or from rural to urban areas (being about 19 years for all the groups). Keeping in view the fact that no differences are visible in the female age at marriage in the rural agglomeration under study, Karachi and Lahore (Table V) it would be difficult to say whether the increased proportion of rural to urban female migration in 1969 would contribute to a change in the fertility patterns of urban areas. Such a change of residence would however expose such females to a significant social change, which may change their overall outlook towards acceptance of new ideas, female education and desire for improvement in the standard of living. This may ultimately induce to realize them the necessity of bearing fewer number of children to avoid financial hardships.

X. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Muslim Family Law of 1961 requiring registration of marriages on the prescribed form called *Nikahnama*, with the local Union Council or Committee provides a direct source of marriage statistics. The present study has utilized this source of data to provide a picture of marriage patterns in an agglomeration of Punjab villages.

Results of the present study which have been compared with the PIDE Karachi study and with the Lahore study, indicate that the age of females at marriage is about 19 years in all these areas, which shows no rural-urban differential in this respect. The primary reason for this may be that the predominant proportion of population is poor and illiterate in rural as well as urban areas. This is not, however, the case for males, where a significant differential does exist between the rural and the urban areas. For the rural areas under study the average age of males at marriage is 22.6 for 1969 (22.4 in 1964). The corresponding average for Karachi in 1965 was 25.4 and for Lahore in 1969 was 24.4. The study shows no change over time for rural areas while such a change is visible in case of Karachi where the average age of males at marriage increased from 24.6 in 1962 to 24.4 in 1965. The comparison is indicative of the additional years spent by males in educational pursuits and for the attainment of economic independence in order to support a family.

The fact that there is no difference in the female average age at marriage between rural and urban areas and that no increase has taken place over time means that each married female remains fertile for about thirty years after her marriage. The 1972 census, shows little impact of family planning prog-

³It will be of interest to know that in a village study of Indian Punjab, with a population consisting mainly of *Sikhs* conducted by Wyon and Gordon during 1957-1959, the percentage of brides going to urban areas or cities was 12 [6, p. 213].

rammes [3, Pp. 123-134] and points to the need for increasing the age at marriage of females. However, to bring about such a change, a major transformation of traditional mores is essential. In so far as the practice of *mehr* is concerned the rural population under study does not show the positive relationship between the age at marriage and the average *mehr* as is visible for Karachi and Lahore. This indicates that in a rural traditional set up the fixation of a higher *mehr* which is considered essential in Karachi or to some extent in Lahore particularly for females of higher ages, is not needed because of the protection provided by the social pressures. Such a protection is not available in the cities to the same extent as in the rural areas.

The present study also provides an idea of the extent to which female migration after marriage takes place between the rural areas and between rural and urban areas. The study shows that rural to urban female migration of this type has increased from 6.6 per cent to 16 per cent between 1964 and 1969, which shows a greater degree of population redistribution between rural and urban areas due to marriage.

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