Association between Teenage Marriage and Socio Economic & Aneamia Status in West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Child Marriage deprives the child of the inherent dignity which has been elaborated and recognized in The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966. The driving factors for child marriages are multidimensional and deeply rooted in community specific socio- cultural practices and circumstances. At present, this practice is still persistent and arises from the low value given to women and girls. Child marriages can hamper a girl's educational attainment and her chances to participate in the labour force. The isolation and violence inflicted upon the girls can further have physical and psychological health impacts. Child marriages lead to devastating consequences for women's health. Since child brides lack self-esteem and sense of ownership of their body, they are likely to bear forced sexual relations. Young girls who are married early, drop out of school, and hence remain uneducated or undereducated. Less education makes these women unable to take advantages of economic opportunities. The findings suggest that increasing opportunities for girls' education and providing financial assistance to the poor families would eliminate the practice of child marriage among Indian women.

Introduction

Marriage is regarded as a juncture for celebration and a milestone for an adult life. However, unfortunately, child marriages prevalent around the globe pose an entirely different picture for child brides and grooms. Child marriages deny the girl of her right to education, leads her to social and psychological isolation, slavery; and sexual, physical and verbal abuses (Save the children, 2014; Wodon et al., 2017). It is a reality that economic considerations are fundamental to the prevalence of child marriages as poverty is both a cause and consequence of child marriages. In poor communities, girls are seen as an economic burden, whom the family may consider marrying off early to reduce one 'mouth to feed' (UNICEF, 2001). The gender roles and norms consider women and girls subordinate to men having low economic roles to play. In general, work of women is confined to home

and is deemed to be of least value. Desai and Andrist, 2010 stated that in Indian societies where marriage decisions remain within the purview of the family and retain imprimatur of the family the girl is supposed to have least or no say in her marriage choices.

In India, few studies(Raj et al., 2009; Goli et al. 2015) which have directly focused on age at marriage as an indicator for maternal and child health outcomes, have shown that lower the age at marriage is higher is the chance of negative maternal and child health and nutritional outcomes. The risk associated with early pregnancy and childbearing include risks of pre-term labour, reproductive track damage, anaemia, cephalopelvic disproportion delivery complications, low birth weight of the newborn, maternal and child deaths (Senderowitz, 1995; Steer, 2000; Kozuki et al., 2012). Young girls who get married early, drop out of schools and hence remain

uneducated or undereducated. Less education makes these women unable to take advantages of economic opportunities. Thus, these women are compelled to take up low paid jobs in informal sectors. As a result, it can be said that "Child marriage leads to the perpetuation of poverty over generations," especially when the child born out of such child marriages is a girl (Vogelstein, 2013). In the study, it has been tried to find out the relationship between the marriage age below and over 18 years and its associated socio-economic factors in West Bengal. In this current study we are trying to examine the socio-economic status of marriage for girls aged below and above 18 years and its health and other negative and positive consequences. The study used bivariate analysis, logistic regression, and crude or unadjusted and adjusted ODD Ratio.

Review of Literature

The right to free and full consent to a marriage has been recognized by The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 including other international conventions and declarations (United Nations, 1948; United Nations, 1963; United Nations, 1989). In the Article 23 of The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights reaffirms the right to marry with the free and full consent of both the intending spouses (United Nations, 1966). However, the right to choose the partner, age of marriage and full consent to marriage is barely exercised for the child brides or grooms (UNICEF, 2001). If we look at the statistics, we see that, India is a home to the largest number of child brides in the world: 223 million child brides-a third of the global total. While it is illegal for girls under the age of 18 to marry in India, estimates suggest that at least 1.5 million girls under age 18 get married in India each year. Nearly 16 per cent of all adolescent girls aged 15-19 are currently married [1]. Recent evidence, though sparse, highlights the persistence of family-arranged marriages without meaningful consent.

Across the world over the past decade, the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. It means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted [2]. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat. Over the next decade, up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of child marriage because of COVID-19, putting the global total number of girls at risk at 110 million girls by 2030 [3]. Further, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic's economic impact [4]. A case study on child marriage during the lockdown, supported by UNICEF India in West Bengal, noted that parents seem to be caught in a dilemma between adhering to the socio-legal justifications against child marriage and common fears of their adolescent girls falling prey to trafficking, runaway child marriages, abuse and 'tarnishing family honor' on account of late marriage. A parent in South 24 Parganas

noted that "their life will be spoiled, they will not be able to manage their family and get sick." Though the case study analysis sample size was limited, it is worth noting that 46 per cent of the child marriages recorded were of supposed runaway child marriages, in which the girls (attempted to) escaped with their partners [5]. Despite these setbacks, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.

The driving factors for child marriages are multidimensional and deeply rooted in community specific socio-cultural practices and circumstances. It was used to extend economic, political, and social relationships (UNICEF, 2008). At present, this practice is still persistent and arises from the low value given to women and girls. It is considered a way of dealing with the perceived problems that girls represent for families (Equality Now, 2014; ICRW, 2013; Planning Commission GOI, 2014) [6]. In India, there is a common cultural practice of 'dowry' upon marriages. There is a belief that the younger a bride, the higher the value of the girl, as a child bride is considered 'sexually pure' and 'virgin,' thus lower is the dowry amount. This practice of dowry thus perpetuates child marriages, as low-income families get their daughters married at earliest to avoid high dowry demands otherwise (Abbhi et al., 2013). Education helps to empower girls to take decisions on their part and take greater control over their lives. Girls who are academically weaker generally have lower incentives to continue schooling and go for higher education. These girls are thus more willing to marry early, and their parents also consider it to be best in their daughters' interests (Nguyen and Wodon, 2012f). Apart from the reasons mentioned above, there are some other reasons too which promote child marriages. The faulty laws and legal provisions relating to age at marriage and lack of their enforcement are also a reason for the persistence of child marriages. The perceived ineffectiveness of laws and lack of knowledge of laws by parents and children lead to persistence of child marriages (Loaiza and Wong, 2012). Early marriage is even considered to ensure the safety of girls against kidnapping and being trafficked for prostitution, especially among refugee communities (Equality Now, 2014; Save the Children, 2014). Several studies showed that caste, religion, and place of residence directly affect the age at marriage through other individual level variables like educational attainment, work status, and autonomy. In this context, Audi Narayana's (1990) study of the socio-cultural dimension of marriage in rural Andhra Pradesh has shown caste and religion as a significant determinant of age at marriage.

Objective

To find out the relation between teenage marriage and socioeconomic and anemia status in West Bengal

Methodology

This study used data of recent current teenage and above marriage and socio economic and personal information from district level fact sheets of West Bengal state published by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), India. This study was carried out based upon two-time frames of the NFHS-5, 2019–2020 series. The fact sheets are publicly available on the respective website (http://rchiips.org/nfhs/) and one can access the data set without any prior request. In the study 29443 data have been taken from West Bengal datasheet among recently married teenage and above female population. For the study 2041 population below 18 years and 27402 for 18 years & above has been taken to compare the socio economic and type of anemia in West Bengal [7].

Variables

Inclusion: For simplicity houses made from mud, thatch, or Cane / palm, Bamboo, Grass / reed and other low-quality materials are called kuccha houses, houses that use partly low-quality and partly high-quality materials are called semi-pukka houses, and houses made with high quality materials throughout, including the floor, roof, and exterior walls, are called pukka houses. Raw wood, wood planks, unburnt bricks etc. have been taken as semi pukka and GI/metal, Stone, Cement block, burnt bricks, plywood, asbestos, RCC /

RBC, tiles etc. have been taken as pukka houses. Again, in the study, toilet facility has been divided into hygienic and unhygienic. Flush to septic tank, flush to pit, flush to pipe etc have been taken as hygienic and pit latrine, no facility etc. have been taken as unhygienic toilet in the study. In the formation of wealth index, three groups have been created in lieu of five, poorer & poorest has been included at poor and richer & richest has been represented as rich. The teenage marriage indicator is generated as a binary variable by categorizing the original question as less than 18 years as 0 and ≥18 years as 1.

Results

Among the total sample of 29443 women, majority were Hindu (73.78%) and nearly 29% had no formal education. This table also shows the binary association between child marriage for women and socioeconomic factors. The incidence of early marriage decreases with an increasing level of women's education. In type of house for floor at semi pukka (COR: 1.38, 95% CI: 0.641-2.960) and Pukka (COR: 1.30, 95%CI: 1.195-1.432) with reference to kuccha floor. Again, for semi pukka floor (AOR: 1.39, 95% CI: 0.645-2.993) and Pukka floor (AOR: 1.30, 95% CI: 1.157 -1.454) with reference to kuccha floor. Type of kuccha houses are more for under 18 households residing women compared to 18 or more years of households. Similarly for toilet facility used, the unhygienic practices are more for under 18 women residing households compared to 18 or more years. For cooking fuel, LPG used households are more for 18 and above years of households resided women and wood users are more for under 18 years of households. In wealth quintile, less than 18 years of women households belong to poor compared to 18 and above (Tables 1-4).

Table 1: Household characteristics of below 18 years & >=18 years current female population.

Household Characteristics	<18 years(n=2041)		18 Years>=(n= 27402)		Total(n=29443)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Type of House						
Floor						
Kuccha	932	45.66	10712	39.09	11644	39.55
Semi kuccha	7	0.34	111	0.41	118	0.4
Pukka	1102	53.99	16579	60.5	17681	60.05
Wall						
Kuccha	548	26.85	6571	23.98	7119	24.18
Semi kuccha	130	6.37	1360	4.96	1490	5.06
pukka	1363	66.78	19471	71.06	20834	70.76
Roof						
Kuccha	230	11.27	2,563	9.35	2,793	9.49
Semi kuccha	68	3.33	759	2.77	827	2.81
pukka	1743	85.4	24080	87.88	25,823	87.71
Toilet Facility						
Hygienic	1385	67.86	19827	72.36	21212	72.04
Unhygienic	656	32.14	7575	27.64	8231	27.96

Type of Fuel Used						
Animal dung	51	2.5	562	2.05	613	2.08
Biogas	2	0.1	29	0.11	31	0.11
LPG	591	28.96	10,550	38.5	11,141	37.84
No food cook	0	0	9	0.03	9	0.03
Other	207	10.14	2,370	8.65	2,577	8.75
Straw/shrubs	183	8.97	2,022	7.38	2,205	7.49
Wood	1007	49.34	11,860	43.28	12,867	43.7
Assets						
Mattress	1248	61.15	18,109	66.09	19,357	65.74
Presser cooker	981	48.06	15,166	55.35	16,147	54.84
Color TV	1201	58.81	17,569	64.12	18,770	63.75
Air-condition cooler	51	2.5	1,300	4.74	1,351	4.59
Washing Machine	62	3.04	1,364	4.98	1,426	4.84
water pump	285	13.96	4,300	15.69	4,585	15.57
Wealth Index		0		0		0
Poor	1395	68.35	16,956	61.88	18,351	62.33
Middle	367	17.98	5,474	19.98	5,841	19.84
Rich	279	13.67	4,972	18.14	5,251	17.83

Table 2: Relationship between Teenage Marriage and Adult Current marriage at Individual Level.

Background Characteristics	Less than18 years(n=2041)		18 Years and above(n=27402)		Total(n=29443)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Religion						
Hindu	1341	65.7	20383	74.39	21724	73.78
Muslim	673	32.97	6505	23.74	7178	24.38
Christian	15	0.73	268	0.98	283	0.96
Buddhist	4	0.2	151	0.55	155	0.53
Jain	2	0.1	19	0.07	21	0.07
Other	6	0.29	69	0.25	75	0.25
Sikh	0	0	7	0.03	7	0.02
Level of Education						
No Education	38	1.86	8580	31.31	8618	29.27
Primary	52	2.55	5065	18.48	5117	17.38
Secondary	1946	95.35	11355	41.44	13301	45.18
Higher	4	0.2	2392	8.73	2396	8.14
Don't know	1	0.05	10	0.04	11	0.04
Prevalence of Aneamia						
Mild	593	29.05	5684	20.74	6277	21.32
Moderate	787	38.56	7541	27.52	8328	28.29
Severe	51	2.5	447	1.63	498	1.69
Not Anemic	574	28.12	5332	19.46	5906	20.06
Don't know	36	1.76	8398	30.65	8434	28.65

Table 3: Binary logistic regression model that indicates the role of explanatory factors of less than 18 years marriage.

Explanatory factors	Teenage Marriage (<18 Years)				Teenage Marriage (<18 Years)			
	Unadjusted OR (95% C.I)			p- Value	Adjusted OR (95% C.I)			p-value
	Odd Ratio	Lower	Upper		Odd Ratio	Lower	Upper	
Type of House								
Floor								
Kuccha (Reference)								
Semi pukka	1.38	0.641	2.969	0.411	1.39	0.645	2.993	0.401
Pukka	1.308	1.195	1.432	0	1.3	1.157	1.454	0
Wall								
Kuccha (Reference)								
Semi pukka	0.872	0.714	1.066	0.181	0.73	0.588	0.897	0.003
Pukka	1.191	1.075	1.321	0.001	0.95	0.829	1.081	0.422
Roof								
Kuccha (Reference)								
Semi pukka	1.002	0.755	1.328	0.991	0.95	0.717	1.264	0.732
Pukka	1.24	1.074	1.431	0.003	1.13	0.975	1.318	0.104
Type of Fuel								
LPG (Reference)								
Wood	0.66	0.594	0.733	0	0.71	0.636	0.798	0
Straw/shrubs	0.619	0.521	0.735	0	0.67	0.561	0.801	0
Animal Dung	0.617	0.458	0.832	0.002	0.66	0.489	0.894	0.007
Other	0.645	0.548	0.76	0	0.7	0.592	0.833	0
Toilet Facility								
Hygiene(Reference)								
Unhygienic	0.807	0.732	0.888	0	0.9	0.814	0.998	0.045
Wealth Index								
Poor(Reference)								
Middle	1.227	1.09	1.382	0.001	1.15	1.017	1.299	0.026
Rich	1.466	1.284	1.674	0	1.32	1.15	1.52	0

Table 4: Binary logistic regression model that indicates the role of explanatory factors of less than 18 years marriage.

Explanatory factors	Teenage Marriage (<18 Years)			
	Odd Ratio	COR (95% C.I)		p-value
		Lower	Upper	
Religion				
Hindu(Reference)				
Muslim	0.636	0.577	0.7	0
Christian	1.175	0.697	1.983	0.545
Buddhist	2.484	0.919	6.713	0.073
Jain	0.625	0.145	2.686	0.528
Other	0.757	0.328	1.746	0.513

Level of Education			
No Education(Reference)			
Primary	0.43	0.284	0.656	0
Secondary	0.03	0.019	0.036	0
Higher	2.65	0.944	7.428	0.064
Prevalence of Aneamia			
Not Anemic(Reference)			
Mild	1.03	0.915	1.164	0.611
Moderate	1.03	0.921	1.155	0.591
Severe	0.94	0.697	1.276	0.706
Not Measured	25.11	17.902	35.229	0

Conclusion

Child marriage is still a curse in our society. Poverty causes society to view the marriage of young girls as an economic transition rather than a violation of human rights. Monetary desires frequently motivate marriage, regardless of the child's best interest. Patriarchal views in India lead men to believe that they are superior to women. As a result, women are frequently silenced, and the desires and well-being of young girls are considered irrelevant. The girls who have low levels of education, limited or absent peer networks, restricted mobility as compared to boys are more prone to child marriages. Poor socio-economic indicators compelled the poor family for early marriage in study area. Women economic empowerment, education and awareness.

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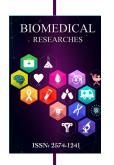
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