

Research Article**Factors affecting Early Age Marriage in Morang District of Nepal**Sah RB^{1*}, Subedi L², Shah U³, Jha N⁴¹Associate Professor, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, Dharan, Nepal²Senior Instructor, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, Dharan, Nepal⁴Professor, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, Dharan, Nepal³MSc student, Dept. of Microbiology, Sunsari Technical College Pvt. Ltd., Dharan, Nepal***Corresponding author**

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Abstract: Child marriage in Nepal is considered a major barrier to the nation's social and economic development, as well as a major women's health concern. The objective of the study was to find out the factors associated with early age marriages in Rangeli VDC of Morang District. The cross-sectional study was conducted among the residents of Rangeli VDC of Morang District where 300 households were taken as subjects. Semi-structured questionnaire was used and face to face interview was conducted. Chi-square test was applied to find out the association between factors and age of marriages. Almost 69.3% of women were married before 18 years of age. Prevalence of child marriage was lower in Hindu (68.9%) than in Christian and Muslim women (85.7%) but the difference was not significant. Education of wife and husband, and economic status was found to be the important variables in explaining early age marriage ($P < 0.001$). It was also seen that unplanned pregnancies was higher (70.6%) in early age marriage than planned pregnancies (68.3%) but the difference was not significant. Age of marriage was not significantly associated with contraceptive use. The findings of the study indicate that early age marriage was associated with low education and being poor.**Keywords:** Early age marriage, Factors, Family planning, Socio-economic status, Nepal

INTRODUCTION

Among the SAARC countries, adolescents comprise a sizeable proportion (one-fifth) of the total population and the total population in the region, as a whole will increase by 18% by 2020 [1]. According to UNICEF, child marriage is defined as marriage prior to age 18 years, is a reality for over 60 million women worldwide [2]. With reference to the data from prior decade indicate that approximately 30-70% are young married women are below 18 years of age in South Asian nations (i.e., Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Pakistan) [2, 3].

Women married at young age have grave health consequences and are reported to have early, frequent and unplanned pregnancies that are linked to increased risk for maternal and infant morbidity and mortality [2, 4, 5].

In Nepal, early marriage and bearing of child are considered socially acceptable and viewed as successful outcomes [6, 7]. Early marriage is customary in Nepal and more than two-thirds of rural females are married by the age of 20 [8].

Therefore, the present study was chosen to find out the factors associated with early age marriages in Rangeli VDC of Morang district.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The cross-sectional study was conducted from 1st March to 14th March, 2014 among the residents of Rangeli VDC of Morang District in Eastern Nepal. In most countries of the SAARC region, nearly 60% of all girls are married by the age of 18 years [9]. So to represent the women for 60% early age marriage sample size calculated was 300.

All the participants aged 15 to 45 years from the selected households were included in the study. There are 9 wards in Rangeli VDC. Among 9 wards, the ward number 1, 2, 3 and 4 was randomly selected by lottery method. The list of households of these 4 wards was prepared and equal number of households (75) from each ward was selected on the basis of simple random sampling.

The confidentiality and privacy of the study was maintained; name of the individuals or participating group was not disclose after the study. Semi structured

questionnaire was administered to the study subjects in the presence of investigator and face to face interview was conducted. A written permission was taken from concerned authority and an informed verbal consent was taken from the participants of the study. Those families which were available after three visits and willing to give verbal consent were included in the study.

The collected data was entered in MS Excel 2000. The analysis was done by using statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) 17.0 version. Chi-square test was applied to find out the association between factors and age of marriages. The probability of occurrence by chance is significant if $P < 0.05$ with 95% Confidence Interval.

RESULTS

Table 1: Association between sociodemographic characteristics with age of marriage

Characteristics	Below 18 years	18 years & above	Total	p- value
Religion				
Hindu	202 (68.9)	91 (31.1)	293	0.342
Others (Muslim, Christian)	6 (85.7)	1 (14.3)	7	
Ethnicity				
Brahmin/ Chhetri	5 (14.3)	30 (85.7)	35	< 0.001
Kirati	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)	2	
Janajati	117 (79.6)	30 (20.4)	147	
Dalit	10 (90.9)	1 (9.1)	11	
Terai caste	75 (71.4)	30 (28.6)	105	
Education of wife				
Illiterate	130 (90.3)	14 (9.7)	144	< 0.001
Below SLC	65 (65.0)	35 (35.0)	100	
SLC and above	13 (23.2)	43 (76.8)	56	
Occupation of wife				
Service	4 (36.4)	7 (63.6)	11	0.114
Business	9 (75.0)	3 (25.0)	12	
Farmer	5 (71.4)	2 (28.6)	7	
Housewife	190 (70.4)	80 (29.6)	270	
Education of husband				
Illiterate	69 (95.8)	3 (4.2)	72	< 0.001
Below SLC	108 (80.0)	27 (20.0)	135	
SLC and above	31 (33.3)	62 (66.7)	93	
Occupation of husband				
Service	10 (25.0)	30 (75.0)	40	< 0.001
Business	93 (71.5)	37 (28.5)	130	
Farmer	47 (81.0)	11 (19.0)	58	
Others (Abroad, labor, unemployed)	58 (80.6)	14 (19.4)	72	
Economic status				
Below poverty line (<1.25 US\$)	102 (82.9)	21 (17.1)	123	< 0.001
Above poverty line (≥ 1.25 US \$)	106 (59.9)	71 (40.1)	177	
Total	208 (69.3)	92 (30.7)	300	

SLC: School Leaving Certificate

Table 1 shows that majority of women were married before 18 years of age. Dalit and Janajati caste have higher prevalence of child marriage than other ethnic groups and the difference was highly significant ($P < 0.001$). The highest prevalence of child marriage was

recorded in those who were illiterate and below poverty line ($P < 0.001$). Child marriage was also more common in women with illiterate husbands than those with more educated husbands ($P < 0.001$).

Table 2: Association between selective variables with age of marriage

Characteristics	Below 18 years	18 years & above	Total	p- value
Decision of marriage				
Self	72 (57.1)	54 (42.9)	126	< 0.001
Family	136 (78.2)	38 (21.8)	174	
1st pregnancy				
Planned	112 (68.3)	52 (31.7)	164	0.761
Unplanned	96 (70.6)	40 (29.4)	136	
Use contraception before 1st pregnancy				
Condom	42 (75.0)	14 (25.0)	56	0.461
Oral pills	20 (62.5)	12 (37.5)	32	
Depo	146 (68.9)	66 (31.1)	212	
Total	208 (69.3)	92 (30.7)	300	

All the participants of this study had used contraceptives. Child marriage was not significantly associated with use of contraception and planned or unplanned pregnancies (table 2).

DISCUSSION

Early marriage has been prevalent in Nepal. According to Census data, 75% of women aged 15-19 years were married in 1971. However in recent years, very early marriages have become less common. According to the Census data of 1991, 46% of women aged 15-19 years were married [10].

Population based study on child marriage in India from 1998-1999 reveals that 50% of women 20-24 years were married as children [3, 4]. However it is reported that in the Amhara region in Northern Ethiopia almost 50 percent of girls are married by age 15 [11]. Our study showed that two third of women were married before the legal age of 18 years.

It is observed that Dalit and Janajati caste have higher prevalence of child marriage than other ethnic groups and the difference was highly significant. Previous studies have also reported the relationship between ethnicity and age at marriage both in developed and developing countries [12-14]. Similarly, the ethnic groups, Brahmin, Chettri and Newar have higher average age at marriage and also a higher level of education [15]. The relationship is not symmetric for all ethnic groups, varies depending on regional distribution of ethnicities as well as females' level of education.

The highest prevalence of child marriage was recorded in women, those who were illiterate ($P < 0.001$). Previous data also established the relationship between education and age at marriage [8, 16, 17]. Age at marriage is found to be positively correlated with years of schooling of the female [18]. A study carried out in Bangladesh had shown that one year of delay in marriage age would have increase females years of schooling by 3 years and probably 6.5% higher female's literacy [19].

This study showed that economic status significantly associated with age at marriage. In many societies the economic status of the family is also significant in determining the age at which people marry. Axinn and Thornton had stated that socioeconomic conditions in the parental home affect the likelihood of marriage [20]. Economic independence of women, as well as the economic status of the family, has a significant effect on the age at which women marry. It is reported that that increased economic independence of women is largely responsible for the delay in marriage [21].

This study showed that the parents have decided to their children's marriage. In a society where parents play a central role in their children marital decisions, girls are expected to get married at a certain age determined by their parents. Statistics from Nepal reveals that approximately 66% of rural females get married by the age of 20 and 80% of rural young individuals reported that they got married because their parents wanted to [4]. This phenomenon is believed to be common in developing countries, particularly in South Asia, and has a significant contribution in producing gender bias in education through age at marriage. However, parental anticipation of this ideal age can be influenced by the socio-specific culture they practice.

Previous studies had shown that the prevalence of unplanned pregnancy was 28% in Nigeria [22] during 2002-2003, 41% in Nepal [23] during 2001, and 40% in Vietnam [24] during 1994-1997. In a hospital-based study, the reported rate of unplanned pregnancy was 33% in Bangladesh and 44% in the Philippines [25]. Our findings suggest that the prevalence of unplanned pregnancy among rural women of Rangeli VDC was higher than that in Nigeria, Nepal, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Philippines. It has been reported that the reasons of unplanned pregnancies include religious, cultural beliefs, contraceptive failure was shown to be the most important factor [26]. Therefore, the relationship between the use of modern methods and increased risk of unplanned pregnancy suggests the need of further

research. All the participants of this study used contraceptives.

CONCLUSION

The early age marriage has become major public health problems in Nepal. Risk factors like lack of money and education level of men and women are positively associated with early age marriage. While greater enforcement of existing policies are critical to preventing child marriage, education and support services regarding family planning for adolescent wives and their families are also clearly indicated in order to reduce the reproductive health consequences of this socially normative practice. Efforts to improve the status of women through their increased participation in education should be encouraged.

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