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No. 183, 2003

Quisumbing, Agnes R. and **Kelly Hallman**. "Marriage in transition: Evidence on age, education, and assets from six developing countries," *Policy Research Division Working Paper* no. 183. New York: Population Council. ([PDF](#))

Abstract

Marriage is an event of great social and economic significance in most societies. Despite the centrality of marriage in an individual's life history, the literature on marriage patterns pays little attention to men. This paper examines trends in schooling, age, and assets at marriage for both men and women, and spousal differences in these variables in six countries—Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Mexico, the Philippines, and South Africa—using comparable data sets and methodologies.

Descriptive statistics show that the correlation between personal characteristics is increasing compared to the correlation between parental characteristics, indicating greater personal choice in marriage. Multivariate results indicate that both husbands and wives are better educated and older in more recent marriages. Husbands' assets at marriage increase through time in four countries and remain constant in two. Wives' assets at marriage increase in three countries, remain constant in two, and decline in one.

Husband educational advantage at marriage has decreased in three countries, has not changed in two, and has increased in one. Husband age seniority has decreased in four countries and remained constant in two. However, the distribution of assets at marriage continues to favor husbands. In three of the six countries studied, the husband–wife asset difference has not changed through time—and therefore continues to favor husbands—and has increased in the other three.

While the reduction of husband–wife gaps in schooling and age may improve the balance of power within the family, persistent differences in assets in favor of husbands may have important effects on family well-being. Lastly, the implications of increased personal choice and delayed marriage on the institution of marriage itself deserve further investigation.

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