

USSP Scientific Panel on Adolescent Life Course in Developing Countries

International Seminar on Changing Transitions to Marriage: Gender Implications for the Next Generation

New Delhi, India, 10-12 September 2008

Rapid global changes, including urbanization, broadening regional and international migration, increasing educational opportunities and socio-economic change, have led to unique shifts in transitions to marriage in developing nations over the last half century. While research has documented trends towards rising age at marriage and increased education, especially among women,¹ little work has been done to explore the context of these changes within larger socio-economic transitions or compare the unique and diverse marriage transitions underway in the developing world. Still less scholarship has accurately characterised the effects of these changes on gender dynamics and women's livelihoods and autonomy in the context of marriage.

In this context, the IUSSP Scientific Panel on Adolescent Life Course in Developing Countries held a seminar on "Changing Transitions to Marriage: Gender Implications for the Next Generation" in New Delhi, India, 10-12 September 2008. The seminar, organized in collaboration with Population Council, New Delhi, and the Centre for Demographic Urban and Environmental Studies of El Colegio de México, received financial support from the United Nations Population Fund.

A main objective of the meeting was to explore current trends in marriage and union formation, including trends in the prevalence of marriage, consensual unions, and divorce, as well as age at marriage and the degree of autonomy exercised in the arrangement of marriages across cultures. In addition, the seminar sought to identify how transformations in these institutions are being experienced by various developing societies. Participants were asked to consider the effect of socio-economic and cultural factors – such as economic and social change, education levels, population sex ratio, bride price and dowry, and women's labour force participation – on marriage trends and their implications for gender equality.

Nearly 45 participants and observers from 13 countries attended the seminar. A total of 23 papers were presented, from the fields of demography, sociology, anthropology, and economics. They provided research findings on current trends in marriage and union formation in developing countries and the terms and conditions of these marriages as well as the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing these trends and their implications for marital stability and gender equality within marital relationships. The seven sessions each focused on a unique aspect of marriage transitions and gender relations across various settings.

Marriage patterns and transformations in low-income countries

As shown in the four studies presented in this session, trends towards decreasing prevalence of marriage, increased prevalence of consensual unions – especially in Latin America – and increased age at marriage or union formation are found across the spectrum of low-income nations. Simultaneously, studies found increases in educational levels among both men and

¹ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. 2005. *Growing Up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press National Research Council and Institute of Medicine.

women and increased levels of pre-marital sexual activity and fertility. Globally, there is a trend towards educational homogamy, that is, towards the formation of unions with others from the same level of educational attainment. In Iran, relationships were found between the increased sex ratio (“marriage squeeze”), increased age at marriage, and decreased differentials between age and educational levels within partnerships. In Latin America, researchers found that consensual unions are on the increase leaving women more and more vulnerable.

Early marriages: their consequences and policy implications in India

With a focus on India, where child and early marriage is highly prevalent, this session focused on the consequences of early marriage as well as on recent innovative policy efforts to delay marriage of young women. In a population-based study, Ram and colleagues document the negative psychosocial and health outcomes of very early marriage (below age 18) for young women. Malhotra and colleagues reviewed existing programmes and concluded that mobilizing communities, influencing key decision-makers and empowering girls through life skills programs and education are the most effective ways of delaying age at marriage. Santhya and colleagues provided an example of a successful intervention that improved young married women’s reproductive health knowledge, improved their utilization of healthcare services, and increased their self-efficacy and livelihood skills.

Brideprice: Transformations and consequences

Economic exchanges between families of spouses, or between spouses themselves, are expected to have implications for subsequent marital relations and gender equity within marriage. While papers presented at the seminar did not include a focus on dowry, two studies presented in this session, from China and Botswana, explore the social and economic changes contributing to increases in brideprice. Findings illustrate that while marriage remains a highly valued social institution in both cultures, exorbitant increases in brideprice have contributed to a reduction in marriage as well as later ages at marriage and, in Botswana, increased pre-marital fertility. Participants highlighted other possible negative effects of this phenomenon, such as increased socio-economic instability and vulnerability for young brides, and called for interventions to address some of the consequences of rising brideprice.

Evolving gender relations in unions in Asia and Latin America

This session explored the degree of autonomy and empowerment exercised in partner selection and the nature of gender relations within marriage in selected countries of Asia and Latin America. Findings emphasized the diversity in marriage transitions experienced across societies. Research from Sri Lanka concludes that while self-selection of partners has increased, autonomy, choice and bargaining power of girls is limited and gender relations not necessarily more egalitarian. Research from Bangladesh comparing empowered and unempowered mothers, highlights that empowered mothers failed to postpone the marriages of their daughters because of strong social norms favouring early marriage; yet they played a key role in delaying pregnancies and contributing to the empowerment of their daughters/daughters-in-law. Both studies underscore the fact that in these settings, gender relations remain unequal and women’s autonomy limited. In China, the perceived value of women’s socio-economic contribution to marital partnerships can be correlated with larger policy changes aimed at economic productivity and social change. In Latin America, where there has been a decline in formal marriages and an increase in consensual unions, evidence suggests that gender relations within consensual unions place women at a considerable disadvantage: they are less likely than married women to have autonomy and more likely to experience partner violence. These associations were, moreover, evident among all women in consensual unions, irrespective of the social strata to which they belong.

Gender relations and the evolving conditions of unions in sub-Saharan Africa

Studies from four countries in sub-Saharan Africa presented in this session emphasized the effects of migration, urbanization, women's educational level, and other social changes on changing marriage transitions in the region. Findings highlight wide diversity in marriage practices ranging from selection to exchange practices to post-marital residence patterns. In Mali and Madagascar, findings suggest that marriage processes are evolving away from traditional towards more individualised endeavours but may vary in rural versus urban areas. In Senegal, male migration seems to complicate traditional expectations for cohabitation and negatively affect women's autonomy within a joint household. In Nigeria, women's seemingly dichotomous social and sexual roles before and after marriage, combined with widespread extra-marital sexual encounters among men, do not seem to have eroded the importance of marriage as a social institution. Findings reiterated that while marriage by individual choice was prevalent, some family involvement in marriage decisions continued to be observed. At the same time, individualisation of marriage decisions appeared to erode post-marital family support. Evidence was mixed on the extent to which changing marriage practices resulted in more egalitarian or closer spousal relations. Given these mixed findings, and particularly the suggestion that autonomy in marriage related decisions did not uniformly improve women's situations, the discussion focused on the need for the measurement of women's relative well-being across societies in the face of complex transitions to marriage.

Implications of childhood circumstances and adolescent perspectives for marriage

The three diverse studies presented in this session explored vastly different aspects of childhood and adolescent circumstances with regard to marriage. Findings indicate that orphanhood may have less effect than socio-economic circumstances on marriage in South Africa. In Burkina Faso, inter-religious mixed marriages are increasing; compared to those in homogeneous unions, those in mixed unions tended to be of lower socio-economic status, have agricultural occupations and have limited mass media exposure. Adolescent perspectives on marriage in the South-West Indian Ocean region vary greatly by setting: In Comoros, Madagascar and Mauritius, marriage remained highly valued, was rarely perceived in romantic terms and procreation was considered the primary purpose of marriage; in Reunion and the Seychelles, in contrast, marriage was perceived in less traditional terms and consensual unions considered acceptable despite concerns about their potential instability. Overall, the discussion pointed to the need to explore further the relationship between adolescent marital intentions as expressed by adolescents prior to marriage and their subsequent behaviour as well as the relationship between childhood characteristics and experiences and marital outcomes.

Effects of schooling and changing socioeconomic conditions on marriage

The three studies presented in this session explored women's education and socio-economic status in terms of its influence on transitions to marriage. In India, although increased education did not translate into full autonomy in partner selection, it dramatically increased women's likelihood of being asked her consent for an arranged marriage. In this case, differences in marriage transitions by educational group emphasized a continuum, rather than a dichotomy, between "love" and arranged marriages. In Egypt, more educated young women were more likely to marry more educated husbands, live independently and not marry a relative. A future need to explore links between women's education and potential wage earning capacity in the context of the Egypt's "marriage squeeze" was noted. In urban Cameroon, as in other settings, while age at first sex has remained early and stable, there has been an increase in consensual unions – perceived as transitory phases permitting partners to become familiar with each other; at the same time, there has been an increase in age at

marriage, fewer young women are in polygamous unions, and there is greater educational homogamy in choice of partner.

Research Questions & Methodological Issues

Following presentations, during the discussion session, participants called for the development of new marriage transition paradigms beyond “traditional” versus “modern” models of marriage and social change. Discussion also centred on the conceptual difficulties associated with the quantification and measurement of gender equality and women’s well-being in various types of unions. More systematic exploration of how macro-level political, social and economic change influences marriage patterns and the gender implications of changing marriage transitions across cultures were identified as priorities for further research. Finally, the collection of more complete and longitudinal data was identified as a key methodological issue to be addressed in further research.

Policy & Programming Recommendations

Research findings presented at the seminar pointed to several important areas in which policy and programming interventions are critical:

- 1) Foster educational opportunities for girls and young women.
- 2) Increase young women’s knowledge and self-efficacy surrounding reproductive health and access to contraception, especially among the unmarried and the recently married.
- 3) Encourage control of exorbitant levels of economic exchanges associated with marriage in developing country settings.
- 4) Provide adequate legal protection for partners in consensual unions.
- 5) Implement policies which are evidence-based and feasible.

Summary

Research presented at the seminar pointed to a general increase in marriage age in most settings and confirmed that married young women who are below the age of 18 suffer negative consequences both in terms of their health and agency relative to women who marry later. Research also documented a corresponding decrease in the prevalence of marriages and an increase in never-married individuals and consensual unions, the latter most noticeable in Latin America but also evident in sub-Saharan Africa. Increased age at marriage/union formation and relative, yet varied, increases in autonomy in partner selection were also noted. While a trend towards greater self-selection of spouses was observed in almost every setting, the extent of this self-selection varied considerably – from completely independent decision-making to provision of consent to partners selected by parents. With the increase in self-selection, educational homogamy was observed, with a narrowing of the gap between partners. Findings were, however, mixed, with regard to whether these changing trends implied more egalitarian gender relations within marriage. Indeed, some studies did associate unions characterised by self-selection of spouses with greater spousal communication and greater equality in work force activity. Others, however, noted that gender relations remained unbalanced, with husbands continuing to exercise control over their wives and partner violence quite prevalent, and natal family support to young women considerably diminished. Likewise, studies of young women in consensual unions observed that women in these unions were considerably disadvantaged compared to those in marriage. They suffered from less family support, a greater likelihood of violence and more unequal gender relations. Education was, moreover, identified as a factor which is associated both with later marriage and increased well-being for wives. Overall, scholarship presented over the three-day meeting represents a significant contribution to the understanding of contemporary marriage transitions and related issues in low-income settings and highlights the complex and diverse consequences these have for young women’s well-being and ability to exercise choice.



Population Council



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**International Seminar on
*Changing Transitions to Marriage:
Gender Implications for the Next Generation***

Organised by the

Scientific Panel on Adolescent Life Course in Developing Countries
International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP)

The Population Council – India

and the

Centre for Demographic, Urban and Environmental Studies (CEDUA)
El Colegio de México

With financial support from the IUSSP and UNFPA

Scientific Panel: Fatima Juarez (Panel chair), Cynthia Lloyd, Susheela Singh,
Thomas LeGrand, and Shireen Jejeebhoy

**Magnolia Hall,
India Habitat Centre
Lodhi Road**

New Delhi, India, 10-12 September 2008

Wednesday, September 10

8:30-9:30 Registration

9:30-10:30 **Welcome:**

Chairs: Fatima Juárez

Dr. Saroj Pachauri, Regional Director, Asia Region, Population Council

Dr. Zeba Sathar, representative of IUSSP

Dr. Laura Laski, representative of UNFPA Headquarters

10:30-11:00 Coffee Break

11:00-1:00: **Session 1. Marriage patterns and transformations in low-income countries**

Chair: Shireen Jejeebhoy or Cynthia Lloyd

Discussant: Teresa Castro Martin and Zeba Sathar

Wednesday, September 10 [cont'd]

A. Esteve and R McCaa *Assortative mating patterns in the developing world (To be presented by Sula Sarkar)*

Julieta Quilodran *A post-transitional nuptiality model in Latin America?*

Jorge Valencia* and Fatima Juárez *Changes in marriage practices among low and high income groups. The case of Bolivia, Colombia and Peru*

Djavad Salehi-isfahani* and G. Taghvatalab *The Changing Pattern of Marriage in Iran: Responses to the marriage squeeze*

1:00-2:00 LUNCH

2:00-3:30 **Session 2. Early marriages; their consequences and policy implications in India**

Chair: Poonam Muttreja (MacArthur Foundation)

Discussant: Lester Coutinho (Packard Foundation)

K.G. Santhya*, N. Haberland, F. Ram, R.K. Sinha, Usha Ram, S.K. Mohanty and Arup Das *Fostering Married Young Women's Empowerment and Reproductive Health in India: The Effects of the First-Time Parents Project*

Usha Ram*, F.Ram, S.K. Mohanty, A. Singh; K.G. Santhya, S.J. Jejeebhoy and R. Acharya *How early marriage compromises girls' lives and RH & choices in Maharashtra: Evidence from the Youth in India, Situation & Needs Study*

Anju Malhotra*, S.D. Gupta, S. Mukherjee and M. Greene *Knot Ready: Lessons from Programs and Policies to Delay Marriage for Girls in India*

3:30-4:00 Coffee Break

4:00-5:15 **Session 3. Brideprice: Transformations and consequences**

Chair: Rajib Acharya (Population Council)

Discussant: Cynthia Lloyd

Jiang Quanbao*, L. Shuzhuo and L. Zhilan *Brideprice in China: The Obstacle for Bare Branches to Marriage*

Zitha Mokomane *Contemporary Bridewealth Practices and the Demography of Marriage in Botswana*

5:15-6:00 **Open discussion of findings presented on the day and policy issues (day 1).**

7:00 Dinner (participants make their own arrangements)

Thursday, September 11

9:00-11:00 **Session 4. Evolving gender relations in unions in Asia and Latin America**
Chair: Véronique Hertrich
Discussant: Anju Malhotra

Kalinga Tudor Silva *Transition from arranged marriage to love marriage and its implications for gender relations in Sri Lanka*

Teresa Castro and Teresa Martin *Are women better-off in consensual unions or in marriages? An exploration of gender relations by union type in the Latin American context*

Jing Song* and Nancy Luke *Mate Selection and Gender Relations in Rural China: 1949-2000*

Sidney Schuler*, E. Rottach, F. Islam and L. Bates *Women's Empowerment across Generations in Bangladesh: Implications for Marriage*

11:00-11:30 Coffee Break

11:30-1:30 **Session 5. Gender relations and the evolving conditions of unions in sub-Saharan Africa**
Chair: Fatima Juárez
Discussant: Zeba Sathar

Veronique Hertrich *Unions both freer and more complicated : Individualisation of marriage behaviors and gender relations in rural Mali*

Clotilde Binet *Choosing a spouse in the province of Antananarivo (Madagascar): changing gender relationships in rural and urban areas*

Nathalie Mondain* and Sara Randall *Using post-marital residence as an indicator of contemporary marital dynamics and conjugal life in urban Senegal*

Daniel Smith *Promiscuous Girls, Good Wives and Cheating Husbands: Gender Inequality, Transitions to Marriage and Infidelity in Southeastern Nigeria*

1:30-2:45 LUNCH

2:45-4:30 **Session 6. Implications of childhood circumstances and adolescent perspective for marriage**
Chair: Ian Howie, UNFPA representative
Discussant: Daniel Smith

Thursday, September 11 [cont'd]

Makandwe Nyirenda*, **V. Hosegood**, **N. McGrath** and **M.L. Newell**
Marriage and orphanhood among young adults in rural South Africa

Zakaliyat Bonkougou and **S. Lougue** *Household characteristics of marriages between spouses of different religions in Burkina Faso*
(*To be presented by Nathalie Mondain*)

Anne-Emanuèle Calvès and **M. Gopaul** *Adolescent Perspective on Marriage in the South-West Indian Ocean: Regional and Gender Differentials*
(*To be presented by Fatima Juarez*)

4:30-5:00 Coffee Break

5:00-6:00 **Open discussion of findings presented on the day and policy issues**
(day 2).

7:30 Dinner hosted by the Panel (Dilli-O-Dilli terrace, India Habitat Centre; details will be provided at the seminar)

Friday, September 12

9:00-10:30 **Session 7. Effects of schooling and changing socioeconomic conditions on marriage**

Chair: Julieta Quilodrán

Discussant: Cynthia Lloyd

Manjistha Banerji*, **S. P. Martin** and **S. Desai** *Is Education associated with a Transition to towards Autonomy in Partner Choice? A Case Study of India*

Asmaa Elbadawy *Education Returns in the Marriage Market: Does Female Education Investment Improve the Quality of Future Husbands in Egypt?*

Samuel Nouetagni*, **H. Mimche** and **S. Teutsong** *Effects of socioeconomic change on the marital trajectories of women in the two largest cities of Cameroon.*

10:30-11:00 Coffee Break

11:00-12:00 **Panel Discussion:** Summary, policy recommendations.

12:00-12:30 **Closing remarks and Next Steps:**

Zeba Sathar, Representative of the IUSSP

Fatima Juarez, Chair of the IUSSP Scientific Panel on Adolescent Life Course in Developing Countries

12:30-1:30 LUNCH

2:00: Tour of city

***presenter**

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Magnolia Hall, India Habitat Centre, Lodi Road
New Delhi, India, 10-12 September 2008

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