Who Marries Whom in Pakistan?
Role of Education in Marriage Timing and Spouse Selection

Abstract

Marriage markets in Pakistan have been undergoing changes in the recent decades, with age at first marriage, for both men and women, increasing steadily, especially for the more educated ones. Increasing women education, in absolute terms and in relation to men, is providing an opportunity for educational homogamy compared to in the past. At the same time, the tradition of hypergamous marriage arrangements for women is creating a "*success penalty*" for those who are more educated. Absolute level of educational homogamy is rising but no definitive word can be given on whether the function of education in spouse selection is strengthening or weakening in Pakistan. Marriage markets in the country are in a transitory state, showing increasing trends of educational homogamy on one hand, and on the other, we find a rising trend of familial endogamy and living in polygynous relationships for the more educated women.

Keywords: Age at marriage, Educational homogamy, Hypergamy, Marriage squeeze, Endogamy, Polygyny.

Extended Abstract

Patterns of who marries whom have important implications for social stratification, family formation, the degree of inequality among families and individuals prevalent in a society, and the intergenerational mobility and transmission of social and genetic traits. Educational assortative marriages have interested social scientists because of the role that education plays in socio-economic inequality and its persistence from one generation to the other. Education does not only have a role in the selection of spouse but also the timing of the union, with more educated men and women likely to marry later than their less educated counterparts.

The last several decades have seen changes in the marriage markets[1] of Pakistan. The age at which the men and women of the country are getting married the first time is progressively increasing, especially for the more educated ones. An increasing trend is also visible for educational attainment, especially among women, with each generation being more educated than the previous. Increasing woman education, in absolute terms and in relation to men, is providing an opportunity for educational homogamy, at least demographically, compared to in the past. In a society that Caldwell refers to as being characterised by a "patriarchal, patrilineal,

[1] The paper talks about "marriage markets", instead of "marriage market", as it premises that different opportunities are available to individuals belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds. They are thus part of different layers of social systems, each offering a different market.

patrilocal" system, increasing woman education can have its own repercussions, more so in the case of marriage markets.

Objectives of the study

Marriage markets in Pakistan are a much neglected field, and warrants serious exploration, given the changes that are appearing in it. The present paper attempts to fill this vacuum and sets forth the following objectives:

1. Explore the relation between education and timing of first marriage for the men and women of the country, and trace changes in it over time.
2. Investigate the role of education in spousal selection, and the trends of educational homogamy/hypergamy/hypogamy over the years.
3. Probe how the educational assortative process varies across different educational levels.
4. Examine the effects of changing marriage market dynamics for the educated women, especially those who are active in the labour market, to gauge the presence or otherwise of the perceived "success penalty"/"marriage squeeze" for them.

Data and Methods

The Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) conducted worldwide provide the most comprehensive information on issues under consideration in this paper. The biggest advantage of DHS is that it provides information about the men/husbands as well, compared to most demographic surveys where only women are the subjects. The paper uses the findings of the two Pakistan DHS (PDHS), i.e. PDHS 1990-91 and PDHS 2006-2007 to pursue the objectives set forth for the study. Using the two datasets, the paper tracks the changes taking place in the marriage markets vis-à-vis education for the men and women of the country.

Preliminary Results[2]

The age at first marriage is progressively increasing in Pakistan for both men and women, as can be seen from Table 1. Other thing to be noticed in Table 1 is the gradual reduction in the mean

[2] Data of the PDHS 2006-2007 has only been partially released, and the "couples' data" needed for this study is yet to be made public. This abstract is based on the final report of the survey and whatever data that is accessible at present. Expected date of release of the whole dataset is mid-October.

age difference between the SMAM for men and women, hinting towards a reduction in age-heterogamy.

Table 1: Singulate mean age at marriage by sex over decades

(Years)

Year	Men	Woman	Difference
1951	23.4	17.9	5.5
1961	23.3	18.1	5.2
1972	25.4	19.6	5.8
1981	25.0	20.4	4.6
1998	25.6	21.7	3.9

Source: Census Reports various issues.

The increasing age at first marriage in not uniform across all women, as it is mainly the more educated ones that contribute to this trend. As can be seen from Table 2, the increase is more pronounced among women with schooling till high and above. For an increase of mere 0.2 year for women with no education, there has been a rise of 2 median years for age at first marriage for women educated till high school and above between the two DHS (Table 2).

Table 2: Median age of women at first marriage by education

(Years)

	PDHS 1990-91	PDHS 2006-2007
No education	18.3	18.2
Primary	18.7	19.1
High	18.9	21.1
Post-high	22.5	24.5

Source: PDHS 1990-91 and 2006-2007.

With more education, chances of exogamy are expected to be higher. Trends in Pakistan follow this expectation with women having more education being more likely to marry someone who is not related to them (Table 3). Proportion of marriages between first cousins is highest for those who have no education, and lowest for the highest education category. Likewise, an opposite trend is visible for those marrying out of the family. The point of interest, however, in Table 3 is the increasing trend for first cousin marriages in the country over time. Although there is a negligible 2 per cent increase in such marriages from year 1990-91 to 2006-07, accompanied by an around 4 per cent decrease in marriages to persons not related (Table 3), the trend defies common logic that increasing education should lead to reduction in endogamy.

Table 3: Women: Relation to the spouse

(%)

	PDHS 1990-91			PDHS 2006-2007		
	First Cousin	***Other relation***	***Not Related***	***First Cousin***	***Other relation***	***Not Related***
No education	52.5	12.0	35.5	56.2	14.6	29.2
Primary	48.9	16.2	35.0	50.6	14.9	34.5
Secondary	43.1	11.5	45.3	43.5	15.1	41.4
Higher	32.5	12.1	55.4	37.2	11.3	51.5
Total	50.3	12.3	37.4	52.4	14.6	33.0

Source: PDHS 1990-91 and 2006-2007.

In another peculiar finding while tracing the dynamics of the marriage markets in the country we find an increase in the proportion of women living in polygynous relationships. The trend has not increased only for the uneducated women from year 1990-91 to 2006-07 (Table 4) but also for the more educated women for whom the rate has more than doubled. Such a living arrangement should logically be unacceptable to an educated woman, who has options to fend for herself economically, but ground realities show a trend contrary to this perception.

Table 4: Women in polygynous unions

(%)

	PDHS 1990-91	PDHS 2006-2007
No education	4.9	7.7
Primary	3.7	5.8
Secondary	1.7	4.7
Higher	2.3	5.0
Total	4.5	6.8

Source: PDHS 1990-91 and 2006-2007.

A recurring theme in literature talks about the "*success penalty*", or the disadvantage education and career success poses to women in the marriage markets. This *penalty* has its roots in the conflict that women face between their roles in two spheres, i.e. family and labour market. In the traditional marriage model, as pointed out by Becker (1974), men specialise in the labour market and women specialise in the home. If education increases market productivity more than home productivity for women, the result would be a marriage squeeze for them in situations where woman hypergamous marriages are a norm. Pakistan subscribes to this traditional model and education is leading to a success penalty for women in the marriage market, as it tends to disadvantage women with more education, more so if they are active in the labour market as

well. Table 5 shows that men and women in Pakistan exhibit reverse trends for never getting married vis-à-vis education and employment. Men are less likely to be married if they are not active in the labour market while the reverse is true for women (Table 5). Educational level does not seem to affect the marriage prospects of men while the more a woman is educated the higher her probability of being never married even after age 30 years. This squeeze is felt strongest by women who are educated and active in the labour force as well, as over 14 per cent have never been married until age 30 years (Table 5).

Table 5: "*Success Penalty*" for women in the marriage markets in Pakistan

Education and Work Status	**% Never Married**	
	Men ≥ 35	**Females ≥ 30**
Total	2.0	1.9
Educational Level		
Never been to school	2.0	1.3
Primary	1.3	2.4
High	2.4	4.2
Post-High	2.1	**7.9**
Work Status		
Working	1.5	3.7
Not working	4.1	1.6
Working with the educational level:		
Never been to school	1.5	2.1
Primary	0.9	0.9
High	2.1	9.5
Post-High	1.5	**14.3**