

# Proposal for 23rd Yasin (April) International Academic Conference on Economic and Social Development

Conference Topics: Demography and Labour Markets

Title:

## **Female Early Marriage and Son Preference in Pakistan<sup>1</sup>**

---

**Mazhar Mughal**

**PhD Economics**

Professor of Economics at Pau Business School, France

E-mail: [mazhar.mughal@esc-pau.fr](mailto:mazhar.mughal@esc-pau.fr)

**Rashid Javed<sup>2</sup>**

**PhD Economics**

Senior Lecturer of Economics at Westminster International University in Tashkent,  
Uzbekistan

Associate Researcher at TREE, University of Pau, France

Email : [rachidjaved@gmail.com](mailto:rachidjaved@gmail.com)

**Thierry Lorey**

**PhD Management Sciences**

Professor at Kedge Business School, France

Email: [thierry.lorey@kedgebs.com](mailto:thierry.lorey@kedgebs.com)

---

<sup>1</sup> The work is in progress.

<sup>2</sup> Corresponding author

## Extended Abstract

39% of Pakistani women of child-bearing age are reported to get married before reaching the age of 18 (PDHS 2017-18). Though lower than 50% reported in 1990 (PDHS 1990-91), this incidence of early marriage still remains high by world average. The practice of early-age marriage, also called child marriage, in part results from a higher perceived value of the young bride. In traditional societies, younger women are believed to be more fertile, sexually inexperienced and easy to 'control'. For parents, early marriage of daughters implies lower spending on education, less effort chaperoning the girl in order to protect virginity and guard 'family honour', and smaller dowry requirement (Allendorf et al., 2017; Caldwell, 2005).

Early marriage has important consequences for the health and well-being of the mother and the child. Women who marry early produce more children than who marry later (Maitra, 2004; Nasrullah et al., 2014; Raj et al., 2009). They are younger at the time of first birth and give subsequent births at shorter intervals (Jensen and Thornton, 2003; Koski et al., 2017; Raj, 2010). Early marriage is associated with greater risk of still birth and miscarriages (Kamal and Hassan, 2015). There is increasing evidence for adverse health outcomes among children born to women who married at an early age, including higher risk of premature birth, neo-natal, infant or child mortality (Adhikari, 2003; Garcia-Hombrados, 2017; Raj et al., 2010) as well as negative effects on child weight, height and general health (Chari et al., 2017; Palloni, 2017; Wachs, 2008). Women with early marriages show higher psychological distress, whereas women with late marriages tend to adjust better (Shaud & Asad, 2018). Early marriage can also limit women's economic empowerment and education outcomes of their children (Sekhri and Debnath, 2014; Yount et al., 2018).

A related area of investigation pertains to the influence of female early marriage in sustaining prevailing gender bias in general, and gender-specific reproductive outcomes in particular. Asadullah and Wahhaj (2019) find that early marriage increases agreement with statements supportive of traditional gender roles and gender bias in the allocation of resources. They hypothesize four potential pathways through which female early marriage in developing countries can affect women's beliefs and attitudes towards traditional gender norms:

- 1) less schooling and exposure to a school curriculum presenting alternative views;
- 2) fewer social networks;
- 3) lower likelihood of matching with more progressive men and
- 4) earlier experience of marital responsibilities.

The gender perspectives of early-married women get shaped by their degree of empowerment in important issues such as contraceptive use and reproductive choices (Larsson & Stanfors, 2014; Upadhyay & Karasek, 2012).

In this study, we employ pooled data from four Pakistan Demographic and Health Surveys (PDHS) to examine whether, and to what extent, does the incidence of early marriage shape the married women's perspectives on gender preference associated with reproduction. We investigate how early-age marriage influences both the reported or revealed son preference

of the mother (observed in excessive births of boys) as well as the stated or desired preference that the interviewed women state. From a medical point of view, the likelihood of bearing sons does not depend on the age a woman marries. Any significant variation in the number of sons she bears should reflect differential fertility stopping patterns ultimately resulting from differences in the socioeconomic profile of early and late-marrying women<sup>3</sup>.

To our knowledge, this is the first study that addresses this subject. We employ a number of econometric techniques (Probit, OLS, Cox Hazard Model, IV Probit, and matching) and a large set of model specifications for our analysis. We find significant evidence supporting a role of early marriage in perpetuating disproportionate preference for boys in Pakistan. Women who married before turning 18 not only state a greater desire for boys but are also more likely to end reproduction after obtaining the desired number of boys, regardless of whether or not they have completed their fertility. This son-preferring behaviour is stronger at higher birth order but does not seem to result in differential spacing patterns. We also find evidence for reported son preference among early-married men. Our findings are robust to the use of alternative definitions and empirical procedures. The findings of this study underscore the role played by early marriage in altering the gender-specific attitudes prevalent in the society, and highlight existing gender inequality traps.

#### References:

- Adhikari, R. K. (2003). Early marriage and childbearing: risks and consequences. In Bott, S., Jejeebhoy, S., Shah, I., and Puri, C., editors, *Towards adulthood: exploring the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents in South Asia*. In *World Health Organization*.
- Allendorf, K., Thornton, A., Mitchell, C., Young-DeMarco, L., & Ghimire, D. J. (2017). Early Women, Late Men: Timing Attitudes and Gender Differences in Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 79(5), 1478–1496. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12426>
- Asadullah, M. N., & Wahhaj, Z. (2019). Early Marriage, Social Networks and the Transmission of Norms. *Economica*, 86(344), 801–831. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecca.12291>
- Chari, A. V., Heath, R., Maertens, A., & Fatima, F. (2017). The causal effect of maternal age at marriage on child wellbeing: Evidence from India. *Journal of Development Economics*, 127, 42–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2017.02.002>
- Garcia-Hombrados, J. (2017). *Child Marriage and Infant Mortality: Evidence from Ethiopia*.
- Jensen, R., & Thornton, R. (2003). Early female marriage in the developing world. *Gender and Development*, 11(2), 9–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/741954311>
- Kamal, S. M. M., & Hassan, C. H. (2015). Child marriage and its association with adverse reproductive outcomes for women in Bangladesh. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Public Health*, 27(2), NP1492–NP1506. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1010539513503868>
- Koski, A., Clark, S., & Nandi, A. (2017). Has Child Marriage Declined in sub-Saharan Africa? An Analysis of Trends in 31 Countries. *Population and Development Review*, 43(1), 7–29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12035>
- Larsson, C., & Stanfors, M. (2014). Women's Education, Empowerment, and Contraceptive Use in sub-Saharan Africa: Findings from Recent Demographic and Health Surveys. *African*

---

<sup>3</sup> The same outcome would result if the two groups of women differed in terms of sex-selective abortion practiced.

*Population Studies*, 28(2), 1022–1034.

- Maitra, P. (2004). Effect of Socioeconomic Characteristics on Age at Marriage and Total fertility in Nepal. *Journal of Health, Population, and Nutrition*, 22(1), 84–96.  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15190816>
- Nasrullah, M., Muazzam, S., Bhutta, Z. A., & Raj, A. (2014). Girl child marriage and its effect on fertility in Pakistan: Findings from Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, 2006-2007. In *Maternal and Child Health Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-013-1269-y>
- Palloni, G. (2017). Childhood Health and the Wantedness of Male and Female Children. *Journal of Development Economics*, 126, 19–32.  
<https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2016.11.005>
- Raj, A. (2010). When the mother is a child: The impact of child marriage on the health and human rights of girls. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 95(11), 931–935.  
<https://doi.org/10.1136/adc.2009.178707>
- Raj, A., Saggurti, N., Balaiah, D., & Silverman, J. G. (2009). Prevalence of child marriage and its effect on fertility and fertility-control outcomes of young women in India: a cross-sectional, observational study. *The Lancet*, 373(9678), 1883–1889. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(09\)60246-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)60246-4)
- Raj, A., Saggurti, N., Winter, M., Labonte, A., Decker, M. R., Balaiah, D., & Silverman, J. G. (2010). The effect of maternal child marriage on morbidity and mortality of children under 5 in India: Cross sectional study of a nationally representative sample. *BMJ (Online)*, 340(7742), 353. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.b4258>
- Sekhri, S., & Debnath, S. (2014). Intergenerational Consequences of Early Age Marriages of Girls: Effect on Children's Human Capital. *Journal of Development Studies*, 50(12), 1670–1686. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2014.936397>
- Shaud, S., & Asad, S. (2018). Marital adjustment , convergent communication patterns , and psychological distress in women with early and late marriage. *Current Psychology*, 1–8.  
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9936-1> Marital
- Upadhyay, U. D., & Karasek, D. (2012). Women's Empowerment and Ideal Family Size : An Examination of DHS Empowerment Measures In Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 38(2), 78–89.  
<https://doi.org/10.1363/3807812>
- Wachs, T. D. (2008). Mechanisms linking parental education and stunting. *The Lancet*, 371(9609), 281–283. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(08\)60144-0](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(08)60144-0)
- Yount, K. M., Crandall, A. A., & Cheong, Y. F. (2018). Women's Age at First Marriage and Long-Term Economic Empowerment in Egypt. *World Development*, 102, 124–134.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.09.013>