

## **Marriage Related Decision Making among Young People: What Influences Their Involvement and Why should Young People be Involved- Evidence from Community Based Survey in Rural and Urban Pune District, India**

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Marriage process needs to be understood in its own right since it not only signals the initiation of reproductive life but also because it reflects the way family life proceeds. Moreover when, whom, and how one marries, all have implications for gender relations within society (Mensch et al 2005). While the large majority of marriages in India continue to be arranged, little is known about the extent to which young people themselves are involved in the decision making process and if they are, whether they play an active role; whether young women are less involved than young men, etc. The part played by the young boy and girl in choosing a spouse indeed has long term implications on their conjugal relations, including gender roles in marriage and decision making between partners, etc. But how this autonomy impacts other spheres of young people's lives, as individuals as well as partners in marriage such as in decision making, self confidence, contraceptive use, etc., is poorly understood (CPOP, CPOP, 2005). What is available on marital process, in Indian context, is mainly on marital age, consequences of early marriage such as early pregnancy and childbirth, dowry and violence within marriage (Jejeebhoy and Sebastian 2003a; Jejeebhoy and Sebastian 2003b; ICRW 2003) but qualitative studies, to a certain extent, do throw light on marital decision making process (see for example Santhya, 2003; Haberland et al, 2001 ; George 1997). Recent evidence points to the fact that, of late more girls and boys are being involved (Jejeebhoy & Halli 2006), but factors or characteristics that encourage involvement of youth in their spouse selection and the impact of such involvement on their married life are poorly understood.

With this background, the objectives of the paper are, one, to describe the prevalence of arranged marriages in this group, the extent to which young people are involved in decisions on when and whom they marry and the extent to which this process is gendered, two, to identify factors that support or hinder this involvement and three, to explore if this involvement impacts their life in terms of better agency and marital relationships.

### **Literature:**

Traditionally marriages especially for women, occur early in developing countries. In India, though national law prohibits marriage below the ages of 18 years for women and 21 years for men, about half of young girls in the 20 to 24 age group and one in three young men in 25 to 29 age group have been married before legal age at marriage (NFHS III, CPOP, 2005). Researchers and demographers' focus has been on the age at marriage due to its implications for fertility . However other aspects of the marriage transition such as the spouse selection process have been relatively neglected. What is available underscores that many young women and to a lesser extent young men have little, if any, input into the timing of marriage and choice of spouse (Desai, 2007; CPOP, 2005; Santhya, 2003). In fact one of the motivating factors for the parents to marry their daughters early, as the literature highlights, is the compliance of daughters in the choice of spouse when they are young (UNICEF 2001 b). Moreover girls and boys barely meet their future spouses before

marriage resulting in marriage of two strangers (Desai, 2007; CPOP,2005; Cynthia Waszak et al, WHO 2003; Haberland et al, 2001; George 1997).

But recent evidence indicates a decline in kin control and increase in a young woman's involvement in mate selection (Jejeebhoy and Halli, 2005; Malhotra in National Academics press 2005; Jejeebhoy & Sebastian, 2003a) or atleast the arranged marriages in India are being transformed to a more consented model (Banerjee, 1999). Increasing age at marriage, education, economic independence, increasing access to western media and living in urban area are cited as playing a role in this transformation (Alexander et al, 2006a; CPOP, 2005; Mensch et al 2005; Lloyd and Mensch, 1999; Singh, S. and Samara, R. 1996). Apart from the consented model of arranged marriages, a significant minority report total self-selection of spouse called 'love marriage' despite restrictions on opposite sex friendships (Desai & Andrist 2007, Alexander et al, 2006a). Although involving young boys and girls in their spouse selection process has gained more acceptance, research has yet to fully establish the causal links between their autonomy in marriage related decision making and its impact on their later marital life which could enhance gender equitable relationship and ultimately marital satisfaction.. What is available points to the fact that potential bride and groom, choosing their spouse has consequences for conjugal relations, inter spouse communication, decision making between partners, especially about the number, spacing, and upbringing of children (CPOP,2005; Population reports 1998).

National data suggest that married adolescent girls are less self confident, less mobile and lack power to decide on day-to-day issues as well as on matters related to their health and their children. For example, only half of married women could decide household purchase (NFHS III) or participate in decisions regarding their own health care (NFHS II). Efforts to improve the agency of young married women would go a long way in improving gender relationship within marriage. Moreover, good couple communication and self confidence in women play pivotal role in influencing family decision making including reproductive decisions, facilitating negotiation between spouses on use of contraception, limited family size and reduced risk of HIV through reduced extra marital sex. (Population reports 1998) but there is less information on the factors influencing interspousal communication.

**Data:** The study was conducted in 2004–2005 in Pune district, Maharashtra, which is close to the state capital, Mumbai. Compared to other states in India, socio-economic indicators in Maharashtra are relatively high, and Pune is one of the most economically developed districts but HIV prevalence is also high, including among youth. Youth in Pune district are assumed to have greater access to education, employment opportunities, modern consumer goods, new ideas and modern lifestyles than those in most other districts of the state. Within the district, study sites were purposively selected that had a strong NGO presence. The rural site covers a population of roughly 100,000 from 90 villages in one sub-district; the urban site is a slum in Pune city, housing one-fifth of Pune's slum residents. The study comprised three phases: a pre- survey qualitative phase that provided insight into youth perspectives and experiences, a survey and in-depth interviews with selected survey respondents. For example young married men and women who reported 'love marriage' were interviewed in depth to understand the process and how it culminated in marriage.

Our sampling strategy (on assumption of sexual relationships and experiences of unintended premarital pregnancy reporting by young women) called for a sample of 1165 married women and 820 married young men in the rural and urban sites. Inflating this number to account for possible non response including refusals and non-response to sensitive questions related to sexual experience and for likely design effect we aimed to select a sample size of 1350 married women and 950 married young men each from the rural and urban sites, respectively.

An initial house-listing exercise identified all households containing youth aged 15–24 in each site. Unmarried and married women and men were randomly selected from these lists. In cases where both a woman and her husband were eligible, only one person was interviewed. Where a household contained more than one eligible respondent in any of the four categories, only one was selected randomly. No replacement was permitted. Refusal rates tended to be lower than 5% for all groups. Married men proved more difficult to recruit, only 54 and 66 percent, of the targeted sample in the urban and rural sites, respectively could be interviewed. Reason was largely due to work-related mobility and long working hours followed by alcohol use, curtailing opportunities for interview.

Since the sample size calculation was based on reporting of pre marital sexual activity assumptions, the data on married youth would be more than adequate to gain meaningful insights into perceptions of their marriage timing, marital process and marriage-related decision making.

Special efforts were made to build rapport between the study communities and the study team: Community level meetings were held to apprise communities of the study, study investigators were young, extensively trained and able to connect to young respondents and community demands, in terms of health camps, were met by study investigators.

A structured bilingual questionnaire was used to explore a wide range of issues including young people's socio demographic information and individual characteristics such as their education and work pattern, attitude, agency, leisure time activities, transition to marriage, access to and control over resources, mobility, social connections, spousal communication and support, and reproductive health knowledge and practice. The marriage process section of the questionnaire explored marriage-related decision making of youth, their perception of the timing of their marriages, marriage-related information such as age difference between the spouses, number of married years and dowry payment.

This paper draws on the data of married young men and women only. T-tests are presented of the significance of differences in site of residence of the respondents as well as differences in data of men and women. Logistic regression was employed to determine the correlates of youth's involvement in marital decision-making. Results of multivariate analysis controlling for other associated factors is presented for the impact of involvement of the youth in spouse selection process on their own capabilities as well as on family decision making including reproductive decisions

## **Results:**

**Young people's Socio Demographic and Individual Profile:** (Table I) Data highlight that gender differences are quite wide, in many of the parameters of socio demographic as well as individual characteristics and capabilities. For example, though more than 80% of the young men and women have ever enrolled in school, over half the young married men as compared to two in five young married women had completed at least eight years of education. Similarly more than 90% married young men as compared to less than 25% of women were working for pay in the last 12 months. One in five women and more than 80% of men had worked for wages prior to their marriage. Girls had fewer close same sex friends and significantly fewer girls had frequent contact with their friends and were members of social organization, as compared to men. As in fewer than one in six women were members of any organization and met their peers at least once in week. In comparison, fewer than half of young married men were members of organization and one in four met friends at least once a week.

Spouses of the married women were 26 years of age, older to the women by 5 years or more where as the spouses of young men were around 19 years, younger to the men by 3 years.

**Household and family:** (Table II) Household socio-economic status, as measured by consumer goods ownership, did not differ between the rural and urban households of the married youth. However more urban houses had electricity and cooked with gas. Overall respondents were mostly Hindus living mostly in joint families.

Wider educational difference between the parents of the young married people as compared to the educational difference between the study sample of married men and women underscore the fact that though girls continue to drop out of school earlier than the boys, they do so later than their parent generation.

Natal family relationship profiles suggest that despite the higher education of youth, interactions with mother and father about reproductive and sex related issues prior to marriage were poor especially for the young men. Moreover almost one in three married women and around one in four men perceive that they had a strict upbringing.

**Age at marriage** (Table III): Despite legal sanctions, men but more women continue to marry early, mostly below the legal age at marriage. 30 to 40% of men and over half of women aged above 21 and 18 were married before they were 21 years and 18 years respectively, legally sanctioned age for marriage in India. In spite of the fact that the parents of married women were more educated than those of married men, strong cultural norms dictate early marriage for girls, at times even interrupting education. A significant proportion of young women, one in five urban women to one in ten rural women have dropped out of school due to marriage, whereas very few men, less than 1 percent have done so. Subsequently, more women, around one half of married women as compared to over one in three young men report feeling that they should have been married later. Women have been married for longer duration, for around 4 years than the men who were married for 2 years on an average, again supporting the fact that the girls are married early.

**Marital processes - Arranged marriage:** (Table IV) Despite the suggestion of a shift away from arranged marriages, our findings confirm that for the large majority of young women and men, arranged marriage was the norm. Typically the marriages are fixed by the family of the prospective groom and bride but usually after the boy approves of the girl. Girl's opinion is rarely sought.

*FGD Participants - Rural Married women:*

R4: *They fix our marriages and ask the girl also if the boy is good or not?*

R7: *If we like the boy then we should say so.*

R4: *If we don't like the boy and if we say so still they [parents] do what they want to do. Here it is like this only.*

R3: *Every thing depends upon their (parents') mind. (Laugh).*

As noted in an urban FGD of married females:

M: *So the final decision is...?.*

*(All said parent's decision is the final decision).*

M: *Then what about the boy or girl who are getting married?*

R3: *Boys decision can be final but not girls.*

Though overall, more than 80 percent of those who have had arranged marriages report having been consulted during the marital process, but significantly more young men (95 percent) than young women (82 to 87 percent) are consulted. But more women, that is 97% as compared to 84% of boys, report approving of their partner, given the fact that the girls may be less able to say no. This finding is supported and explained further by qualitative data that girls are more likely to accept their parents' choice without question trusting their parents' decisions.

*FGD participants, Rural married women, married for more than 2 years:*

R1: *"Parents only decide (about partner).*

R4: *If at all they (parents) ask us, we tell that if you are ok with it then we also agree.*

R5: *Mostly parents don't ask. Mainly it depends upon them only.*

R1: *What they do is correct.*

R4: *Yes. Because parents never think badly for their daughters....*

R4: *Most of the times it is like this, girl never says no.*

R1: *Because every daughter feels that her parents would never do any bad for me."*

But qualitative findings also indicate that the practice could be changing. For example young girls themselves argue that of late, the girls are more involved in their marriage related decision making if the girl is educated and independent.

*As mentioned in an urban FGD of married females:*

R1: *If the girl is standing on her feet, she is earning something then she can say some words.*

M: *So what do you think? Parents listen to the girl who is independent?*

*R3: Yes, because parents are also well educated. So their line of thinking is the same. (Vichar sarakha karatat).*

*R1: They trust their daughters*

*Respondents of a rural FGD of married females say*

*“Now girls from villages also don't listen to their parents. They have also started speaking. Now it is like this. If the daughter has liked the boy then only the marriages are fixed. This change is seen now. The things were totally different at our time. At our time what parents say was true. Now a days they listen to their daughters. Now a days if the girl doesn't pass the boy then the marriage is not fixed”.*

Given the fact that the marriages are conducted on an average within 3 to 4 months of fixing it and that the partners are mostly not allowed to meet or talk before marriage despite recent trend of girl's involvement in choosing her partner, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the marriages are still taking place, essentially between two almost strangers.

Following textual data highlight the fact that the majority did not meet, for example:

*“I did not even see him properly before marriage. When the marriage took place "lagna lagala tevha” at that time only I saw him.*

*Married female rural in an indepth interview*

Married women respondents of an urban FGD explain why parents do not allow interactions prior to marriage.

*R4: They (parents) think we don't know the nature of the boy, his behaviour, so how can we allow our daughter to go with him.*

*R7: If he just behaves badly with the girl and then what if he refuses to get married? They will spoil their name. (Badanami).*

*R1: If we have "confidence" about he boy or his family that they would not break the marriage then there is no harm.*

*M: What are other reasons, that parents don't give permission?*

*R3: "Bad name to family (Badanami)”*

But a small proportion, 15 and 12% young boys and girls respectively did meet and interact prior to marriage, however they were more from urban area and better educated and met with the permission of their parents.

**Love marriage:** (Table IV) Though overwhelming majority of respondents (more than 85 percent) had their marriages arranged, a significant minority of youth, over one in ten urban married men and around one in twenty rural married men and similar proportion of married women have married partners they liked (Love marriage) in which either the family was not opposed to the match or by convincing their parents of their choice or by eloping.

As elucidated by the textual data;

*My neighbours made my uncle understand what was happening. My mother was working with a doctor and she (doctor) also told her about our relationship. That doctor also explained to her and told her that nowadays these things happen and it is all right. She told her to get us both married. After that my mother agreed and then our marriage was fixed.*

*IDI, Rural 23yrs 10th pass married female reporting a love marriage*

*They (family) were not ready but we went to the court and got married. He (groom) only arranged for everything and he only submitted the form.*

*Urban 22yrs old 7th std housewife: Pre Marital Sex and had Love Marriage, married for 6yrs*

While the arranged marriages typically take place within 3 -4 months of fixing the marriage, those who find their own partners take longer time to marry, meet and communicate more often giving the partners adequate time to get to know each other.

*“We used to discuss about family members; how to behave and how not to behave? We discussed about children”*

*IDI- 23 yrs old, urban Married man, Love Marriage, married for 20 months*

*“I-Means on what topics would you both chat?”*

*R-We would talk about our houses, marriage and in general.*

*I-Was it easy to talk to him about your personal things?*

*R-Yes, I would tell him everything”*

*IDI -23 years old urban Married woman, Love marriage*

**Dowry:** (Table IV) Marriage process is determined to a large extent by dowry negotiation, mostly in arranged marriages but not uncommon in love marriages too. It was reported more by girls than boys (22 to 31% of men and 43 to 55% of women) of the study communities. This gender difference in reporting could be attributed to more awareness, among men, about the law against dowry. Content of the dowry differed by site of residence; Jewellery was mentioned more by the rural youth and cash by the urban youth.

Issues related to dowry alone could make or break a marriage and it could also reflect on the way the young bride is treated at her new marital home (Jejeebhoy & Halli, 2006; CPOP, 2005; AllRefer.com). Varied responses from textual data indicate practice of dowry even today despite laws, which forbid practice of dowry.

*For example:*

*“Then they (boy’s parents) speak about dowry. Marriages can be broken due to dowry. The people from boy’s side ask for more money but if the girl’s parents can’t afford to give, then marriage breaks off”*

*-urban FGD of married females*

*“No, all together 25 thousand rupees. We were not in a position to pay that much amount. So my mother told them that they can take the girl if they wanted but no dowry. They were not happy about that, But my husband insisted. So they had to agree..... they used to say (after marriage) what you brought from your mother, what your parent's gave you, etc. she (mother in law) used to find fault with everything I did”.*

*- IDI: 24 yrs old 9<sup>th</sup> pass urban married woman, love marriage, married for 6 yrs*

### **Correlates of involvement in marital decision-making:**

Arranged marriage is normative in our country, but the extent of the young people's involvement in the spouse selection process is increasing and the arranged marriage is being transformed from “an unconsented to a consented model.” (Banerjee, 1999)

In line with the literature and evidence from qualitative findings, our conceptual framework postulates that host of factors influence married youths' especially women's involvement in marriage related decision making- notably those representing socio demographic and marriage related variables of the individual as well as family, peer influences and connections. We now explore, using logistic regression, the extent to which selected individual, peer and family factors discussed above are associated with the young boys' and girls' involvement in marriage related decision making and similarities and differences between the factors influencing men and women.

### **Analysis:**

#### **Dependent variable (Table V a):**

Involvement in marriage related decision making is operationalised in the paper as follows: youth reporting a love marriage; or an arranged marriage in which they were consulted, approved of the match and met the spouse-to-be prior to marriage are considered to have participated in marriage related decision making. Having met prior to marriage has been included as a component of involvement in marital process since it is hypothesized that this variable would indeed substantiate the claim of autonomy, the girls and the boys exercise in spouse selection process and not just acceptance of their parent's choice as their own. 17 to 22% of married men and 14 to 19% of married women report being involved in marriage related decision making.

#### **Independent variables (Table V b):**

In addition to variables such as site of residence, current age, education, various other factors such as natal home characteristics including parents' education, interaction with parents and strict upbringing, peer connections and employment before marriage are also explored since these factors could confer autonomy to young men and women in decisions related to their spouse selection..

Marriage and spouse related variables such as age at marriage, difference in age and education of the spouses have been considered as independent variables. Age at marriage has been considered as proxy measurement for age at which marriage was first discussed



since early age at marriage could represent even younger age at which the process started. Also literature highlights the fact that the motivation for a parent involved in mate selection to marry a daughter off early is that girls are thought to be compliant in the choice of spouse when they are young (UNICEF 2001 b). Similarly it is hypothesized that parents would give less opportunity to the girl to participate in marital decision making process fearing losing a 'good match' as in when the groom is more educated and employed. More over dowry payment is also included as an independent variable if indeed the dowry is paid due to 'marriage squeeze' (Jejeebhoy and Halli 2006) or if the family is paying more dowry if for example, the girl is disadvantaged in terms of age or looks, then she might have less opportunity to express her opinion.

**Factors influencing marriage related decision-making in young women (Table V b):**

It is evident that socio demographic variables of the respondent such as, education and working before marriage significantly influence the decision making, in that they are positively correlated to the dependent variable where as site of residence was negatively correlated. It could be interpreted that living in urban area, having higher education and being engaged in economic activity prior to marriage confer some autonomy on the girls enabling them to have a say in their marital process. More over older the married female respondent, significantly lesser is the likelihood of their reporting involvement in their marriage related decision making, again underscoring the fact that, of late, girls are more involved in their spouse selection process (Malhotra in National Academics 2005)

Number of close same sex friends doesn't appear to influence the dependent variable where as frequent contact with friends and being a member of any social group prior to marriage is significantly positively correlated. The findings suggest that having a pre-marital peer support system facilitating interaction and exchange of ideas, enables youth to play a more active role in marriage related decision making.

At family level, as highlighted by the qualitative data, mother's education plays an important role in marital process of the daughters. Other family level factors such as closeness and interaction with parents and fathers' education do not have any significant influence on the dependent variable. The findings imply that mother's and not father's education facilitates involvement of their daughters in selection of their partner.

As expected higher the age at marriage of the girl, that is later the marital process is initiated, more is the likelihood that she is involved in the marriage process, which could probably indicate that higher the age, higher would be the educational level and economic independence of the girl (CPOP, 2005; Cynthia Waszak et al, WHO 2003). Dowry payment is inversely related to the dependent variable; as in dowry payment significantly reduces the probability of the girl's involvement in the marriage process. Similarly age and educational difference between the spouses are inversely correlated with the girls' participation, that is narrower the difference in age and educational level between the spouses, more is the likelihood of the girl being given equitable opportunity to participate in marriage related decision making. This finding not only supports the evidence from literature that narrow husband and wife age and educational differences facilitate gender

equitable relationship within marriage (CPOP, 2005) but also argues that the gender divide in the autonomy a young girl and boy exercises in spouse selection is likely to be lessened.

**Factors influencing marriage related decision-making in young men (Table V b):**

Unlike young women, factors influencing men's involvement in spouse selection process are few underlining the fact that young men do exercise considerable choice in their spouse selection. Socio demographic factors such as higher education and participation in wage earning activities are positively correlated similar to women. But unlike the correlates for women, all peer related factors such as being part of social organization, having more number of close same sex friends as well as having frequent contact with peers, influence men's involvement, though the association is very strong for the former but weak for the latter two factors. The findings suggest that being part of social organization, expose them to interactions with wide peer circle, give them opportunity to take up responsibilities and make decisions in organization related activities which could enhance his self assertion skills, including in his marital partner selection process. Site of residence doesn't affect the men's involvement.

Marriage related variables such as age at marriage, dowry, and differences in age and education between the spouses do not have significant correlation with the men's involvement. Unlike girls, father's education facilitates boy's autonomy in marriage related decision-making.

To summarize, factors at various levels influence involvement in marriage related decision making for young people. Many socio demographic factors influence young women's involvement in their marital process, where as for young men, number of influencing factors are far fewer. For example for both sexes, education and work status are important factors underlying decision making; for girls moreover it is the social support systems with frequent peer contact and involvement in social organization that enable participation in their marriage related decisions. In addition to having many close friends and frequent contact with them, it is their involvement in social organizations that strongly encourages men's participation in their spouse selection process. Residence in urban area facilitates girl's but not the boy's participation. At the family level, maternal education of girls confer autonomy for selection of their partners where as for the boys, paternal education plays a more important role. Data underline the fact that marriage related factors such as higher age at marriage signifying later initiation of marital process, narrower gap between age and education of the spouses support girls' involvement but plays no role in that of boys.

Dowry, even after controlling for age at marriage, exerts deterring influence on involvement of the girl. Effect of dowry was controlled for since evidence from literature underlines the fact that later age at marriage for girls attracts larger dowry (Jejeebhoy & Halli 2006). But our data further point to the fact that if dowry is entailed, involvement of girls in marital process is restricted despite autonomy conferred by later age at marriage.

Closeness to and interaction with family however are not found to have significant influence on both young men and women's participation in marriage related decision making.

**Effects of involvement in marital decision making on later marital life:** (Table VI)

Literature points to the fact that youth's involvement in the marriage process is advantageous, in that, it impacts their conjugal relations, including gender roles in marriage and decision making between partners, especially reproductive decisions and good couple communication (CPOP, 2005; Mensch et al 2005: Population Reports 1998), it is envisaged that the same could impact other spheres of the young people's life. It is hypothesized that it could impact self confidence, freedom of mobility, decision making in other spheres such as health, about children's education, etc of their life as well as in their gender attitude and attitude towards violence in the long term. . We acknowledge confounding effect of other factors such as age, number of married years, education, etc and effort has been taken to control for these effects.

**Analysis:** Logistic regression was employed and each outcome variable being explored was entered as dependent variable. The regression was carried out at three stages. Initially being involved in marital decision making by itself was included as the independent variable. The odds ratio and the p-value were noted. At the next step, odds ratio was adjusted for a number of socio-demographic variables that could influence the outcome measures, to investigate the independent association of being involved in marriage related decision-making with agency and later marital life experiences. Socio demographic variables controlled in the model include current age, education attainment, working for wages currently, site of residence (rural or urban) of the respondent, socio economic status measured in terms of number of household articles owned out of 7 items (television, telephone, pressure cooker, mobile phone, motor cycle/car, bicycle and VCR) by the family and type of family(nuclear or joint) the respondent was living in.

In the final model, we controlled for the effect of marriage related variables such as number of years of marriage and age difference between the spouses in addition to socio demographic variables.

Specifically these factors are being controlled for, since literature emphasizes independent association of various socio demographic factors as well as marriage related factors with outcome variables being examined as well as autonomy in spouse selection process. For example, higher the age more is their autonomy and self confidence (Jejeebhoy, S. 1996, Youth Lens), urban residence is associated with more involvement of girls in the spouse selection (Mensch et al 2005), longer the duration of marriage more is the decision making power of the women (Haberland et al 2001), women in nuclear family have more autonomy (Haberland et al 2001), younger girls married to much older men have less autonomy and say in their marriage (Barua 2000) and that poverty enforces girls to marry early without their concurrence.(ICRW 2003)

**Outcome variables:** Effect of involvement in marital decision making is explored for the following variables: Experiential dimensions of autonomy, that is self efficacy and some of the measures used to assess self efficacy such as perceived ability to convince others of one's own belief, ability to make new friendships, being good at solving day to day problems, mobility measured in terms of going alone to friend's house within the village and in the neighboring area and decision making for small as well as large house hold

articles and self health care, being consulted in decisions about going for yatra or mela were included as independent variables. At the perceptual level, gender relationships and attitude to violence under various circumstances such as if wife refuses sex, if there is disagreement, if wife goes out without telling the husband and if she is unfaithful were examined.

Marital relationship factors explored include domestic as well as sexual violence, first marital sexual experience, couple communication on sex, money matters, children, etc, and spousal intimacy measured in terms of going out together for movie and picnic in the last six months. Impact of involvement of the young women in marital process on her access to resources was explored through her ability to use her dowry, whether she has some money saved and whether she could use this money for her own personal expenses. Effect on decision making related to family size was measured through discussion on contraception, and actual current contraceptive use as well as for delaying first pregnancy. Association with gender equitable role between partners within marriage was measured through current use of condom for prevention of pregnancy.

**Results:** (Table VIa to VIId) At individual level, after controlling for socio demographic as well as marriage related variables, being involved in spouse selection process has implications for young women and men, on different dimensions of agency. For women experiential autonomy was enhanced in terms of higher likelihood of mobility, self efficacy and decision making where as for men, perceptual autonomy was affected wherein these men held attitudes that were less justifying to wife beating and more gender egalitarian.

For example women who had participated in their marriage related decision making are more likely to say that they can make new friends easily, they are very good convincing others of their belief, could go to friend's house within and outside the area or village without permission and more likely to take part in decisions concerning major household goods purchase and their own health care. Intriguingly men involved in spouse selection are less likely to say that they were consulted in major household good purchase or for going to mela, etc, probably because they are more gender equitable, trusting and leave these decision making on these issues to their spouses. Further these young married men are more likely to agree that girls can decide when to marry and less likely to justify wife beating even if she refuses sex.

The data set do not allow us to ascertain direct cause effect relationship especially between individual attributes and involvement in marital decision making, since it is a cross sectional survey and to prevent recall bias, self confidence, mobility, decision making capabilities, violence and gender attitudes of these men and women prior to marriage was not measured. Hence it is difficult to say whether the higher level of self efficacy associated with involvement in one's own marital process was a projection of continuing higher autonomy since younger age or directly correlated with autonomy in marital decision making.

Marital relationship(Table VIe): Apart from the effect on their individual attitude and capabilities, involvement in marital process seems to have significant consequence on marital relationship for both the partners, in that, overall the relationship appears to be more companionable and equitable. Women who were involved in partner selection are more likely to say that they got married at the right time, but for men involvement was not significantly correlated with their perception of being married at the right time since mostly they marry much later than women. These men and women with marital decision making autonomy are more likely to describe positive wedding night experience, report good inter spouse communication and intimacy in terms of going out together for movies and picnics, etc and less violence within marriage. For example these men and women are more likely to have discussed about money, children as well as more likely to have gone out for movies and picnics with the family in the last six months. In addition these young women are less likely to say that they were ever beaten or forced for sex by their husband.

Further this autonomy in spouse selection process impacts family decisions including reproductive decisions through open discussion on contraception and its acceptance (Table VI f). Men and women who were involved in their spouse selection process are more likely to have discussed contraception with their spouses, use contraceptives currently as well as to postpone first pregnancy. This outcome, as mentioned in the literature, could be enhanced by other related factors such as good couple communication in addition to autonomy in marital process (Population Report 1998). But the correlation remained significant even after controlling for good couple communication stressing independent association(not shown in table). In addition, these young men and women are more likely to report to be currently using condom for prevention of pregnancy, supporting the evidence from literature that autonomy in partner selection process has long term effects on gender roles within marriage (CPOP, 2005).

Finally access to resources for women who were involved in marital decision making were explored(Table VIg). The findings suggest that these women who were involved in their spouse selection process, in addition to being more self confident, are more likely to have worked in the last 12 months, have money saved and the autonomy to use this money for personal expenses.

To summarize, evidence from data suggest that involvement of men and women in their marriage related decision making are associated with several beneficial long-term characteristics, such as positive conjugal relationship in their marital life, with more communication and intimacy, discussion and practice family planning measures but with fewer disruptions such as wife beating. In addition these men and women are likely to enjoy their first sexual experience with their spouses. Men who were involved in their spouse selection process are more gender egalitarian and less accepting of wife beating. Where as these women are more self-confident, mobile, participate in major household decisions as well as have money saved and use it for personal expenses. These attitudes, attributes and capabilities in men and women clearly could lead to more gender equitable marital relations where reproductive decisions are made by both the partners with equal involvement, paving the way for a more positive reproductive and sexual health of the couple.

**Conclusion and recommendations:**

Conclusions that can be drawn from the paper regarding marital process in recent times is that despite law, sizeable proportion of youth continue to be married earlier than legal age at marriage and consequently one in three and less than one half of married men and women, perceive that they were married too early. Married women, as compared to men, were younger, less educated and less likely to be employed, married earlier and hence married for longer period to spouses five years older on an average. Under this circumstance clearly, the young women continue to be situated at a subordinate position in the marital household, despite efforts by social organizations as well as Government to bridge gender gap.

Findings reiterate the fact that over 90% of the marriages continue to be arranged and though the young people, more men than women, are being involved in marriage related decision making, marriages take place soon after it is fixed, with hardly any interaction between the spouses prior to marriage. Hence marriage continues to take place between two almost strangers despite approval of their partner by the concerned groom and the bride. But a trend of involving girls, in their marital decision-making is emerging, especially among the educated and economically independent girls, though it could just be a reiteration of trust in their parent's choice and decisions.

Data highlight many underlying factors at various levels that are associated with participation of young people in their own marriage related decision-making process. Higher education and involvement in economic activity prior to marriage confer autonomy for both boys and girls in selection of their spouse. Peer support plays a very significant role for both boys and girls. As in, social space and opportunity to interact and exchange ideas with a larger peer group made possible for the girls by frequent peer contact and membership in formal or informal social organization, play definitive role in autonomy the girl exercises over her marriage where as membership in social organization as well as wide peer connections influence boy's involvement. Findings highlight need for interventions that aim to keep young boys and girls longer in schools and colleges, increase their economic independence and build more social space for interaction with peers.

Moreover mother's education play an important role in allowing daughter's participation and father's education in son's participation, in their marriage related decision making highlighting the need for programmes for, not only young people's education but also to improve that of their parents, especially mother's.

Many factors hinder young people's autonomy in marriage related decision-making. For example, residence in rural area deters girl's autonomy but not boy's, stressing the extent of gender disparity that rural women face. The girl has significantly less opportunity to have a say in who her life partner would be if the spouse is more educated and considerably older, stressing the vulnerability of young, less educated women to enter into an unequal power relationship without their consent. Similarly dowry hinders young girls' autonomy in spouse selection process and as recognized, which has, in the long term, a bearing on gender relationship within marriage (CPOP, 2005).

Data also throw light on long-term implications on their marital life as well as on their individual characteristics and capabilities. Men and women who played an active part in spouse selection had more gender equitable marital relationship, communicated and interacted with their spouses more and discussed and practiced family planning methods. The fact that these men held more egalitarian gender attitude and women were more self confident and took part in decisions concerning major household purchases argues for including a focus on promoting young people's involvement in marriage related decision making, in programmes addressing women's empowerment and gender equity. Specifically, multi-pronged strategies to increase women's education, involvement in economic activities prior to marriage, facilitate positive peer interaction by providing safe space for young people to meet and interact would contribute to conferring more autonomy of the young people, especially the women in spouse selection process.

Focus of programmes addressing marriage and its process for young people in India is restricted only from fertility control point of view. For instance, raising age at marriage especially for girls through empowering women with education and employment opportunities as well as offering incentives for postponing marriage, has been a very important strategy for implementation of the Government's Population Policy 2000 to reduce fertility level. Interventions need to be designed with the larger goal of population control that could be achieved through a broad based approach addressing gender equitable marital relationships with good couple communication and strong inter spousal relationship so that family decision making including reproductive decisions are made with involvement of both the partners.

Findings argue for the need of a multi pronged approach that could include strategies to help build gender equitable marital relationships such as educating parents and the young people of advantages of marrying partners with narrower gap in age and education, strategies to improve young people's autonomy through education, employment and peer connections and strategies to strengthen inter spouse relationship through better interaction and communication.

Most important, findings reiterate the need for programmes that would address involvement of the boys and girls in their own spouse selection process which has long term implications at individual level and at spousal relationship level, clearly could contribute to better Sexual and Reproductive Health of the married couples.

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# **TABLES**

**Table I: Socio-demo graphic:**

	Married males		Married females	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
<b>Number</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>1154</b>	<b>1152</b>
<b>Individual characteristics</b>				
Mean age	22.6	22.6	21.3*	21.3*
Ever enrolled in school	92.8	93.2	84.1*	79.3*
Mean no. of yrs of school	7.3	7.4	6.7*	6.4*
Completed 8+ years of school(of those who have been to school)	57.5	55.1	44. *	39.5*
<b>Spouse characteristics</b>				
Age of spouse	19.4	19.2	26.9*	26.8*
Age difference between spouses- Mean yrs (younger spouse for men and older spouse for women)	3.2	3.4	5.6*	5.5*
Mean years of spouse's education	6.5	6.4	8.2*	8.1*
<b>Work history and current activity Status</b>				
Woked before marriage	90.0	84.7	25.1	19.7
Ever engaged in unpaid work	15.3	41.5 <sup>+</sup>	19.1	62.5 <sup>+</sup>
Ever engaged in paid work	98.0	97.2	40.1*	37.9*
Unpaid work in last 12 months	6.1	30.8 <sup>+</sup>	3.9	46.4 <sup>+</sup>
Paid work in last 12months	96.5	94.1	18.6*	23.2*
<b>Peer Connectedness (Pre Marital)</b>				
Number of same sex close friends: Median	3	2	1*	1*
Frequent contact with peer (atleast once a week)	21.0	17.3	8.1*	7.1*
Member of social organization	47.4	42.6	8.8*	15.9*

\* comparing men and women data

<sup>+</sup> Comparing urban and rural data

**Table II: Household and natal family characteristics:**

	Married males		Married females	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
<b>Number</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>1154</b>	<b>1152</b>
<b>Household and family:</b>				
Mean number of consumer goods owned	6.7	6.8	6.8	6.9
Religion				
Hindu	84.5	91.1	85.3	91.2
Muslim	6.6	3.9	6.8	2.3
Christian	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.2
Buddhist	8.5	5.0	7.8	6.3
Type of family:				
Nuclear	14.8	11.6	33.4*	25.8*
Joint.	85.2	88.4	66.6*	74.2*
Father's education (Excluding Don't know response)	3.7	3.3	4.4*	4.0*
Mother's education (Excluding Don't know response)	1.1	0.9	1.7*	1.5*
Interaction index with father on SRH matters (0-5)	0.02	0.0	0.02	0.01
Interaction index with mother on SRH matters (0-5)	0.01	0.01	0.9*	0.8*
Perceived strict upbringing	24.5	27.6	36.1*	34.8*

\* comparing men and women data

+ Comparing urban and rural data

**Table III: Marriage related factors:**

	<b>Married males</b>		<b>Married females</b>	
	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>
<b>Number</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>1154</b>	<b>1152</b>
Mean age at marriage in years	20.7	20.4	17.1*	17.2*
% Married below legal age at marriage [MF<18 and MM <21 years]	31.4	40.1	52.7*	51.7*
% Married at below 18 years	5.7	8.0	52.7*	51.7*
Reason for dropping from school- engaged/married	0.7	0.7	18.9*	10.5*
Marriage time opinion Too early	35	37.3	47*	43.6*
Duration of marriage	1.8	2.1	4.2*	4.0*

*\*significant in t test*

*\* comparing men and women data*

**Table IV: Marriage process up to marriage:**

	Married males				Married females			
	Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural	
<b>Number</b>	<b>458</b>		<b>561</b>		<b>1154</b>		<b>1152</b>	
<u>How marriage took place:</u>								
Arranged marriage:	88.4		94.3*		92.3*		95.9*	
Love marriage	10.7		6.5		6.8		4.1	
a. Love marriage (no opposition from family)	4.6		2.7		2.9		1.5*	
b. Love marriage (convinced family)	1.7		2.2		1.1		1.7	
c. Love marriage (eloped)	4.4		1.6*		2.8		0.9*	
Ever said no to partner choice before marriage	17.5		16.8		28.6*		34*	
Ever had sex with partner prior to marriage	2.6		2.3		1.3		2.2	
<u>Dowry:</u>	22.4		31.2		42.7*		55*	
Taken/given dowry								
Cash (a)	68.6		21.1		76.2*		32*	
Jewellery (a)	70.6		88.6		63.6*		91.3*	
<b>Arranged marriage</b>								
<b>Number</b>	<b>405</b>		<b>529</b>		<b>1062</b>		<b>1101</b>	
Consulted in marriage process	94.6		94.7		81.7*		87.2*	
Approved of partner	82		83		94.4*		97.3*	
Ever met	16.8		14		13.1*		11.4*	
No. of months between fixing marriage and actual marriage (Mean)	3.6		3.2		3.9		3.4	
% Married within 3 months of marriage being fixed	65		75.9		61.5		75.9	
% married within 6 months of marriage being fixed	79		75		76.5		82.5	
	<b>Met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Not met</b>
	<b>68</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>921</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>975</b>
Average education of those met partner before marriage	7.9	7.1+	8.4	7.1+	8.8	6.3+	8.7	6.1+

(a) out of those who reported giving/taking dowry

+ Comparing between those who met and who did not.

\* Comparing men and women data

**Table V a: Involved in Marital Decision Making (Dependent Variable)**

Dependent Variable	Married males		Married females	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
<b>Number</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>1154</b>	<b>1152</b>
Involved in decision making ( Love marriage or consulted and approved and met before marriage)	22.3	16.9	18.8	14.3

**Table V b: Involved in Marital Decision Making: Logistic Regression:**

Independent Variables	Variable Description	MF 2305	MM 1017
<b>Socio-demo</b>		RR	RR
Urban/Rural	Binary (0=Urban 1=Rural)	0.8*	0.8
<b>Individual</b>			
Age	Continuous	0.9**	1.0
Education < 8 std	dichotomous	0.6***	0.7*
Work before marriage	dichotomous	1.8***	2.2*
<b>Peer</b>			
Number of same sex friends	Continuous	1.0	1.0+
Frequency of contact -same sex friends	Continuous	1.5***	1.1*
Member of social organizations	dichotomous	1.5*	1.9***
<b>Family</b>			
Interaction -Father index	dichotomous	1.6	0.02
Interaction -Mother index	Continuous	1.1	0.002
Father education	Continuous	1.0	1.1*
Mother education	Continuous	1.1*	1.0
Parents strict	dichotomous	1.0	0.7+
<b>Marriage related</b>			
Age at marriage	Continuous	1.1*	1.0
Dowry	dichotomous	0.6***	0.8
difference between spouse age	Continuous	0.8+	1.0
difference between spouse education	Continuous	0.8*	1.0
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>		0.19	0.12

**Table VIa: Self-efficacy and mobility:**

Sr. No.	Independent variables	High self efficacy		Can convince others		New friendship		Mobility within village		Mobility outside village	
		MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197
1.	(%) of those involved in decision making who has:	19.9	11.2	29.3	24.4	38.7	25.9	80.1	NA	3.1	NA
<b>Correlates</b>											
2.	Involved in decision making	1.8***	1.1	1.6***	1.1	1.9***	1.5*	1.4*	NA	1.3*	NA
3.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic variables <sup>c</sup>	1.6***	1.0	1.3*	1.1	1.6***	1.4+	1.4*	NA	1.3+	NA
4.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic and marriage related variables <sup>d</sup>	1.3*	1.0	1.3*	1.1	1.6***	1.4+	1.4*	NA	1.3+	NA

<sup>a</sup>: variable removed from controlled variable list

<sup>b</sup>: only involvement in marital decision making

<sup>c</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic factors-age, education, rural urban sites, type of family and SES, work for pay-12 months

<sup>d</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic and marriage related factors- no. of years of marriage, age difference between husband and wife

+ =0.1, \*=<0.05, \*\*=<0.001, \*\*\*=<0.0001



**Table VIb: Decision making**

Sr. No.	Independent variables	High dec. making capabilities		Purchase large HH articles		Decision on self health care	
		MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197
	Involved in decision making (n)						
1.	(%) of those involved in decision making who has:	92.7	98.0	88.2	93.8	80.4	91.4
<b>Correlates</b>							
2.	Involved in decision making	2.0**	1.0	1.6**	0.8	1.7***	1.6+
3.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic variables <sup>c</sup>	1.7*	0.9	1.5*	0.6	1.6**	1.6+
4.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic and marriage related variables <sup>d</sup>	1.7*	1.0	1.5*	0.6+	1.6**	1.6+

<sup>a</sup>: variable removed from controlled variable list

<sup>b</sup>: only involvement in marital decision making

<sup>c</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic factors-age, education, rural urban sites, type of family and SES, work for pay-12 months

<sup>d</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic and marriage related factors- no. of years of marriage, age difference between husband and wife

+ =0.1, \*=<0.05, \*\*=<0.001, \*\*\*=<0.0001

**Table VIc: Perceptual dimension of agency  
Attitude to violence**

Sr. No.	Independent variables	High acceptance attitude to violence		DV ok if wife refuse sex		DV ok if unfaithful	
		MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197
	Involved in decision making (n)						
1.	(%) of those involved in decision making who has:	6.0	15.2	11.3	33.5	7.9	15.2
<b>Correlates</b>							
2.	Involved in decision making	0.8+	0.4***	0.7*	0.5***	0.9	0.6**
3.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic variables <sup>c</sup>	1.1	0.5**	0.9	0.5***	1.1	0.6*
4.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic and marriage related variables <sup>d</sup>	1.1	0.5**	1.0	0.5***	1.1	0.6*

<sup>a</sup>: variable removed from controlled variable list

<sup>b</sup>: only involvement in marital decision making

<sup>c</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic factors-age, education, rural urban sites, type of family and SES, work for pay-12 months

<sup>d</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic and marriage related factors- no. of years of marriage, age difference between husband and wife

+ =0.1, \*=<0.05, \*\*=<0.001, \*\*\*=<0.0001

**Table VIId: Attitude to gender roles**

Sr. No.	Independent variables	High egalitarian gender attitude		Girls can decide when to marry		Women to work before marriage	
		MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197
	Involved in decision making (n)						
1.	(%) of those involved in decision making who has:	91.6	64.5	84.6	82.2	92.4	77.2
<b>Correlates</b>							
2.	Involved in decision making	1.1	1.2+	1.1	1.9**	1.1	1.6*
3.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic variables <sup>c</sup>	0.8	1.2	0.8	1.8**	0.9	1.5*
4.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic and marriage related variables <sup>d</sup>	0.8	1.2	0.8	1.8**	0.9	1.5*

<sup>a</sup>: variable removed from controlled variable list

<sup>b</sup>: only involvement in marital decision making

<sup>c</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic factors-age, education, rural urban sites, type of family and SES, work for pay-12 months

<sup>d</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic and marriage related factors- no. of years of marriage, age difference between husband and wife

+ =0.1, \*=<0.05, \*\*=<0.001, \*\*\*=<0.0001

**Table VIe: Marital relationship**

Sr. No.	Independent variables	Married at right time		Ever DV		Ever forced sex		High positive sex initiation experience		Good couple communication		Watch f last 6 month	
		MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197
1.	(%) of those involved in decision making who :	64.4	64.0	24.1	65.0	17.5	5.6	46.3	87.8	76.2	77.7	31.9	
<b>Correlates</b>													
2.	Involved in decision making	1.8** *	1.1	0.9	1.2	0.7*	1.1	1.5** *	1.5	1.6** *	1.9** *	2.3** *	2
3.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic variables <sup>c</sup>	1.4*	1.0	0.8+	1.3+	0.8	1.1	1.4**	1.5*	1.4*	1.7**	1.7** *	2
4.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic and marriage related variables <sup>d</sup>	1.3*	0.9	0.7*	1.5+	0.8	1.1	1.4**	1.4*	1.4*	1.8**	1.6** *	2

<sup>a</sup>: variable removed from controlled variable list

<sup>b</sup>: only involvement in marital decision making

<sup>c</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic factors-age, education, rural urban sites, type of family and SES, work for pay-12 months

<sup>d</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic and marriage related factors- no. of years of marriage, age difference between husband and wife

+ =0.1, \*=<0.05, \*\*=<0.001, \*\*\*=<0.0001

**Table VI: Family welfare**

Sr. No.	Independent variables	Contraception before 1 <sup>st</sup> pregnancy		Current contraception		Discuss contraception with spouse	
		MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197	MF 382	MM 197
1.	Involved in decision making (n) (%) of those involved in decision making who:	8.6	21.8	35.6	24.9	26.7	3.0
<b>Correlates</b>							
2.	Involved in decision making	3.0***	2.4***	1.2*	2.1***	2.1***	2.6*
3.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic variables <sup>c</sup>	2.1**	2.1**	1.4*	1.8**	1.8***	2.0
4.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic and marriage related variables <sup>d</sup>	2.2**	2.0**	1.6**	1.8**	1.9***	2.0

<sup>a</sup>: variable removed from controlled variable list

<sup>b</sup>: only involvement in marital decision making

<sup>c</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic factors-age, education, rural urban sites, type of family and SES, work for pay-12 months

<sup>d</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic and marriage related factors- no. of years of marriage, age difference between husband and wife

+ =0.1, \*=<0.05, \*\*=<0.001, \*\*\*=<0.0001

**Table VI g : Access to resources**

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Independent variables</b>	<b>Paid work last year<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Has money saved</b>	<b>Use money for personal expense</b>
	Involved in decision making (n)	<b>MF 382</b>	<b>MF 382</b>	<b>MF 382</b>
1.	(%) of those involved in decision making who	21.7	31.4	16.8
<b>Correlates</b>				
2.	Involved in decision making	1.1	1.7***	1.8***
3.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic variables <sup>c</sup>	1.4*	1.3+	1.4*
4.	Involved in decision making controlled for socio demographic and marriage related variables <sup>d</sup>	1.4*	1.3+	1.4*

<sup>a</sup>: variable removed from controlled variable list

<sup>b</sup>: only involvement in marital decision making

<sup>c</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic factors-age, education, rural urban sites, type of family and SES, work for pay-12 months

<sup>d</sup>: Controlled for socio demographic and marriage related factors- no. of years of marriage, age difference between husband and wife

+ =0.1, \*=<0.05, \*\*=<0.001, \*\*\*=<0.0001