

**UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA**

**NUPTIALITY IN BANGLADESH : PATTERNS AND CHANGES**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF SCIENCES  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS**

**BY  
M. NURUL ISLAM**

**DHAKA, BANGLADESH**

**DECEMBER 1996**

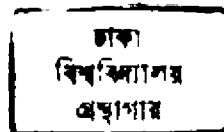
Ph.D.

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## **Acknowledgments**

On this day, I remember my eldest brother Late H.M.A. Jalil and wish to express my deep sense of honor, gratitude and respect to him, who sacrificed his all comforts and happiness to bring me up, like his son, since my childhood.

My wife, Nasima Islam, has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement in my effort toward achieving this goal. I sincerely appreciate her patience, sacrifice and assistance that she extended to me during the entire period of my work. My daughter, Mimi and son, Shakil, missed me in many occasions, when they really deserved my company. While I was working at the Institute for Urban Research, Morgan State University on my dissertation, I missed them very much. I deeply acknowledge their supports, sacrifice and understanding, which provided mental strength to the compilation of this task.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Ashraf Uddin Ahmed, Professor of the Institute of Statistical Research and Training, University of Dhaka, who introduced me with the problem and encouraged me, when in fact, I gave up the hope of working for a higher degree. He gave me lots of his time, both at home and abroad, in revising and finalizing the dissertation. I am indebted to him for making necessary arrangements at the Institute for Urban Research of Morgan State University, Baltimore, USA to work toward finalization of the dissertation, where I got enormous academic facilities, supports and his close supervision.

I would like to thank Dr. Robert B. Hill, Director, Institute for Urban Research, Morgan State University, Baltimore, USA for extending his full co-operation and facilities of the Institute and allowing me to use the computer facilities, library and providing other logistic supports. Dr. Ruhul Amin, Senior Research Scientist of the same Institute, deserves appreciation for his interest in my work. Thanks are due to other faculties and members of the Institute for their kind help and supports.

Mrs. Sayeeda Jafar Ahmed deserves sincere appreciation and respect for her constant encouragement, which she provided to me during my stay with their family in the USA. I enjoyed much of my leisure time with Adil and Adiba, children of Mrs. Ahmed. During my stay with them, I never felt that I was away from home.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Sadia Chowdhury, Coordinator, ENHR for her encouragement toward completion of the dissertation. Dr. M. Aslam, of ENHR also deserves thanks for his keen interest in my work.

I am thankful to the Dhaka University authorities for extending my leave to stay abroad at the most critical stage of my work. I am thankful to my colleagues for their co-operation and encouragement at all stages of the work. Mr. Md. Delwar Hossain and Mr. Md. Majibar Rahman of the Department of Statistics, University of Dhaka, deserve special thanks for carefully typing the manuscripts.

To day, I remember my late father and mother, who could not see my success, which they definitely wished me to achieve, while they were alive.

December, 1996

M. Nurul Islam

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Bangladesh, being the ninth populous country in the world, is characterized by universal and early marriage. This is particularly true for the females, who constitute nearly half of the total population of the country. Although the legally sanctioned age at marriage in Bangladesh is 18 years for females, a significant proportion (50.5%) of them are married off before this age. Unfortunately, as much as 20 percent of the teen aged girls are forced get married before the onset of their first menstruation (Huq and Cleland 1990). As many as 25 percent of them are married before they reach 15 years of age. By age 30, almost all of them get married. Traditionally, most of these marriages are arranged by parents or guardians without giving much attention to the opinions of the marriers. Researches have shown that such marriages are frequent to end in divorce (Islam *et al.* 1995).

With its limited natural resources, Bangladesh Government is striving hard to make the country a prosperous one through various governmental and non-governmental efforts. This has resulted in social changes in various aspects of life, such as increased urbanization, expansion in female education, increased participation of women in labor force, industrialization, increased per capita income and some economic development (Balk 1990; Linkage Lines 1994; Khan 1994). As a result, the country has experienced favorable changes in its social, economic, and demographic behavior. The contraceptive prevalence rate has increased at least by six -fold from its 1975 level, which made considerable contribution to fertility decline. Though insignificant, both crude death rate, maternal and infant mortality rates have fallen down.

One aspect, which is widely cited as an obstacle to rapid demographic changes in Bangladesh is the status of women, which is used to be cited as one of the lowest in the world (Balk 1990). During the last two decades, there have been considerable efforts by various

agencies and the government to integrate women in developing activities through special efforts in the form of women-specific projects for poverty alleviation through income generating activities. Most notable attempt in this respect is the development of new models by *Grameen* Bank and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). These two models have successfully reached a large number of poor and disadvantaged women with resources and services, increasing their incomes substantially ( Linkage Lines 1994). The *Grameen* Bank and BRAC models have incorporated developed techniques, such as group formation, consciousness raising, literacy and numeracy training and credit for social change and self-sustaining development. The BRAC provides special training for the people to assume informal leadership roles in their communities. It is worth to note that, more than 90 percent of these program beneficiaries are women. In the hope of improving women's status, the government of Bangladesh is also supporting three women's programs throughout the country: women's co-operatives, mothers clubs and women's vocational training (Rowley 1995). Besides, the government has given special attention to enhance women's literacy. As a result, rising parental aspiration for girls' education, has appeared as a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. This has contributed to slow but steady progress in female education. There are evidences that the employment rates for females in both formal and informal sectors have increased considerably during the last two decades. In response to these efforts, there has been a notable change in the status of women (Khan 1994).

Among the other aspects of development, expansion in rural communications, rural electrification and media are note worthy, which have created significant impact of social changes. Improvement in rural roads has reduced the physical and mental distances between the urban and the rural people. Rural people have now greater access to radio, television and news paper. This development has also contributed to increased out-migration: rural to urban and to abroad. These changes are likely to influence the pattern and values of societal norms as well as pattern of family formation. The inflow of remittance home played a further catalytic role to accelerate the changes.

It is now widely believed that access to educational and health facilities and self-sustaining means of income-generation can significantly improve the lives of rural people not only because

these problems are so pervasive, but also because intervention in each of these areas have mutually reinforcing effects in improving overall welfare and standard of people. The recent evaluation of the NGOs' activities speaks in favor of this assertion. The success story of BRAC and *Grameen* Bank has motivated more NGOs to replicate the model in other areas of the country (Khan 1994 ; Linkage Lines 1994).

Experiences of both developed and developing countries suggest that these social transformations should be reflected in the demographic behavior of the people. How these changes have effected the nuptiality pattern in Bangladesh? In response to such changes in socio-economic vis-à-vis enhanced status of women, could we anticipate any changes in the level of age at marriage, incidence of marital dissolution or remarriage, which are closely interlinked with the social and economic transformation of the society?

The study of nuptiality has long been a concern of sociologists and anthropologists, because it has a major bearing on individual and family life cycles in particular, and society at large. Because the initial timing of marriage, the tempo with which it continues and the proportion who ultimately marry, will determine the fertility level in a population. Marriage is a threshold through which people enter into family life and family is a primary institution in large social systems. Changes in social system bring about changes in family life and in factors of family formation such as age at marriage and mate selection. This has important policy implications. These issues make the study of nuptiality important from developmental point of view for a country.

Following this introductory background, the present study attempts to investigate the various aspects of nuptiality in Bangladesh based on the data collected through a national survey. Before doing so, a brief account of the country setting with respect to its socio-economic and demographic scenario are presented, following which certain key issues on marriage are discussed.

## 1.2 The Country Setting

Bangladesh is predominantly an agricultural country located in middle south Asia. Having a surface area of 1,44,000 square kilometers and an estimated population of 111.4 millions in 1991, Bangladesh ranks as the world's ninth and Asia's fifth most populous country.

Administratively, the country is divided in six divisions (zones), 64 districts and 489 *thana* (sub-district). Muslims constitute about 85 percent of the population, Hindus about 14 percent and others less than one percent. A small fraction (1.1%) of the population consists of several ethnic groups, which are distinct in terms of their language, race, religion and customs (BBS 1993; Mitra *et al.* 1994).

The country is bounded by India to the east, north and west and shares a short frontiers with Burma on the south-east. To the south, lies the Bay of Bengal and to the north-east lies the broad mass of the Assam hill range on the Shilong Plateau. More than 85 percent of the country is flat alluvial plain criss-crossed by the mighty river Padma, Meghna and Jamuna and by their innumerable tributaries.

## 1.3 Socio-Economic Perspective

### *Economic conditions*

Bangladesh is overwhelmingly rural. It derives about 60 percent of its GNP from agriculture and about 80 percent of its labor force is engaged in agriculture. However, more than half of the rural population belongs to landless or marginal farmer households which is feared to increase further. The problem of land scarcity affects most of the population directly, as 90 percent of the people reside in rural areas. Population growth has reduced land-man ratio to 0.29 acres in 1990 from the 1981 level of 0.33. With the increase in population, the land-man ratio will further accentuate. Perhaps as a result of land scarcity, the country has not been self-sufficient in food for over three decades. Estimates have shown that if population continues to grow at the current level of 2.2 percent per annum, GDP would be required to grow at the rate of 12 percent per annum during the remainder of this century in order to achieve a threshold per capita income level of US\$ 700 by the year 2000 from its current level of US\$ 200. The past experience of plan

documents in Bangladesh indicates that overly ambitious targets were set to serve the political purposes.

Although Bangladesh is an agricultural country, it has also some large-scale manufacturing industries based mainly on local raw materials. The major industrial activities include: jute manufacturing, production of paper and newsprint, sugar, cement, chemical fertilizers, garments and textiles, engineering and ship building, iron and steel and oil refinery. Manufacturing sector contributed 7.6 percent to GDP in 1975/76 and 8.5 percent to GDP in 1987/88 employing about 4.7 percent of total employed persons in 1975/76 and about 10 percent in 1985/86 (Huq and Cleland 1990). The share of service sector in GDP increased from 37 percent in 1970 to 48 percent in 1991.

The total civilian labor force in 1974 was 21.9 million constituting about 29 percent of total population. By 1981, it had grown to nearly 24 million forming 27 percent of the total population. Of the total civilian labor force, 96 percent was male and 4 percent female in 1974, while 94.9 percent was male and 5.1 percent was female in 1981. The labor force as enumerated in 1991 census is 30.4 million with a male: female ratio of 92.8:7.2 (BBS 1993).

The population is further characterized by a very low (7%) participation rate of the females in economic activities compared to males (77%) in 1991. The employment rate for female increased from 2.3 percent in 1974 to only 2.8 percent in 1981, which increased further to 4.2 percent in 1991. The growing but nevertheless small proportion of women who have paid employment reflects the fact that the mobility of women, particularly in the rural area is strictly curtailed by the practice of *purdah*, that is, the traditional seclusion of women (Norman 1981; Khuda 1982). It has been seen that a large proportion of women spend a considerable amount of time in productive work within the family farm business in addition to their involvement in usual household activities. The type of employment varies by socio-economic status. Usually poor rural and illiterate women are employed at low status jobs such as rice husking, rice processing, general household work, cattle raising, and domestic services. They are generally paid in kind.

Even though payment in kind is partly due to lack of salaried jobs in the rural area, it is, in most cases associated with low status and poverty (Huq 1979).

Women are constrained than men in obtaining employment because they have traditionally being protected by society and recognized more for their reproductive than economic role. Moreover, male attitudes towards female employment outside the home is also discouraging and negative. It is commonly maintained in Bangladesh that in a situation where there is large pool of unemployed and underemployed men, the question of providing jobs to women is a redundant issue (Ahmed and Chowdhury 1980). The gender division of labor and the norms of *pardah* as practiced under Islam and applied in the Bangladesh context, severely limit women's mobility and the use of the public/social sphere. These social institutions called *Samaj* (society) primarily govern the lives of poor rural women in various ways and restrict women's freedom of movement.

***Literacy:***

At present, primary school enrollment is about 60 percent. With hundred percent enrollment, which the Government planned to ensure during 1990-1995, the size of investment of secondary and higher education may be triple when the primary school population will move up to their next academic ladders. The enrollment ratios and literacy rates show a marked preponderance of males (at least 2 to 1 in favor of males). Bangladesh ranks 115th of the 131 countries in its literacy rate, with only about one-third of these women over the age of 15 who are able to read and write. The literacy rate as recorded in the 1974 census was 24.3 percent among the population 5 years and above. The rate increased to 27.8 percent in 1987 (BBS 1989). The proportions of literate males and females were 32.9 percent and 14.8 percent at the time of 1974 census while the corresponding literacy rates were 31.0 percent for males and 16 percent for females giving an overall rate of 23.8 percent for the total population in 1981. The corresponding figure increased slightly to 32.4 percent in 1991 with 38.9 percent for males and 25.5 percent for females. Although female literacy rate has shown some moderate increase over the years 1974-1991, it has always been alarming. Available statistics suggest that rural girls are far behind the urban girls in both primary and secondary education. This sex imbalance in education has been



facilitated by poverty, cultural tradition, son preference and lack of social appreciation of the value of female education.

***Religion:***

Islam is the predominant religion with 88.3 percent of the population being counted as Muslims in the 1991 census. Hindus constitute 10.5 percent and the remaining 1.2 percent being Christians and Buddhists. The proportions of Muslim population were 85.4 percent in 1974 and 86.7 percent in 1981 census count (BBS 1993). These data indicate that religious composition the population remains nearly the same in Bangladesh over the last 20 years.

**1.4 Demographic Perspective**

The history of census taking in the area now forming Bangladesh dates back to more than 100 years. The first population census was taken in 1872 as a part of the undivided India and the second in 1881 and the subsequent censuses every 10 years thereafter until 1961. The next census was taken in 1974 instead of 1971 owing to the war of liberation. The latest census was undertaken in 1991.

In 1901, the population of Bangladesh was 29 million which rose to 36 million in 1931, only about 24 percent increase in 30 years. By the next 30 years, the rise was abrupt: nearly 43 percent. Within a period of another 30 years (1961-1991), more than 60 million people were added, implying an increase of about 120 percent within the same span of time. The current rate of population growth is about 2.2 percent per annum. The dramatic fall of the death rate without any corresponding fall in the birth rate over the last 90 years largely contributed to this high rate of growth. Such a rate, if continued, would lead to a doubling of population in only 32 years. With high and constant fertility, Bangladesh is characterized by a very high proportion of children: 45.1 percent of the population are below age 15 according to 1991 census. Median age of the population is 16.8 years. As a result, the dependency ratio also remains very high (98%). The young age structure coupled with high rate of growth, persistent high fertility, high density, limited natural resources and great poverty, Bangladesh remains as a most critical area of the world.

Marriage is universal and early in Bangladesh. By age 30, almost all women get married. Though men do not marry as early as women, 99 percent of them do so by age 50. Child marriage is highly prevalent and as a result, the mean age at marriage still remains well below the legal age at marriage, which is 18 years for females and 21 years for males. This situation is however changing steadily. According to BBS, the Single Mean Age at Marriage for females increased from about 16 years in 1974 to 18 years in 1991 (BBS 1993). The age difference between husbands and wives has narrowed slightly over time but still remains well above 8 years.

Because of its universality and timing, marriages among Bangladeshi women ensure that women are widely exposed to the risk of child-bearing. The current level of fertility has been estimated to be high with a total fertility rate of 3.4 in 1993 (Mitra *et al.* 1994). There has been a substantial decline in the CBR from 34.4 births per 1000 population in 1986 to 30.8 in 1992 (BBS 1993). The CDR has shown dramatic decline from about 20 per 1000 population in 1975 to 11.3 in 1990. The male-female differential in life expectancy is only but marginal: 57.4 years for males and 56.8 years for females. Infant mortality rate has declined from its 1975 level of 150 per 1000 live births to about 110 in 1989 (Huq and Cleland 1990) and further down to a level of 88 in 1992. Child mortality rate was 72 per 1000 births in 1981 and 50 in 1989. In 1989, it is claimed that about 70 percent children and pregnant mothers were immunized and about 40 percent of the total population had access to primary health care facilities. During the last 10 years (1982-1992), maternal mortality has also fallen from 6.2 to 4.7 per thousand live births. The recent demographic changes seem to indicate that the country is now approaching toward the third phase of demographic transition when birth rate falls but remains significantly higher than the death rate, resulting in continued but slower rate of population growth.

Raising age at marriage is seen by the demographers as one of the relatively few policy interventions 'beyond family planning' that might be able to initiate or accelerate population growth changes on a major scale (Duza and Bawldin 1977). A minimum age at marriage, if thoughtfully conceived in conjunction with other legislative and non-legislative efforts, directed at accelerating social change in general, and enhance the status of women in particular, should have

considerable impact. Unfortunately, despite the contribution of the marital factors in slow population growth, this aspect has been neglected in the current development program of approach of the Bangladesh government. The current policy and program emphasizes several integrated approaches to population planning and development without any specific strategy to raise the age at marriage. This has primarily resulted from the lack of realization of the importance and significance of the role of nuptiality in effecting population growth vis-à-vis quality of living.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study of Nuptiality**

The study of nuptiality (marriage, divorce and remarriage) has long been a concern of sociologists and anthropologists. Demographers have only recently started to devote significant attention to this field. One of the most important areas of nuptiality is age at first marriage. It has a major bearing on individual and family life cycle, generation length and in particular, has vital implications for fertility and reproduction (Duza and Mukhtari 1977). The initial timing of marriage, the tempo with which it continues and the proportion who ultimately marry affect the fertility level in a population (Sivamurthy and Seetharam 1976). Substantial reduction in birth rate and population growth can be expected through the marital postponement even when complete family size is not reduced (Coale and Tye 1961). As observed,... "the younger the woman is at marriage, the earlier she is exposed to the risk of pregnancy at highly fecundable age (with the exception of the adolescent infertility of child marriages). Early marriage and/or early fertility forces women to stop work, which in turn reduces exposure to interests and activities that may compete with the marriage and maternal role (United Nations 1975).

The reproductive life span of a women is influenced by behavioral variables such as marriage, divorce, celibacy and terminal contraception and biological variables such as menarche, menopause sterility and widowhood. Hence, in a society where use of contraception and abortion is limited and celibacy is virtually absent, the behavioral variables which influence the reproductive life span of women only, include marriage and marriage dissolution.

Investigation of the dynamics of nuptiality is useful in identifying the socio-economic variables which could be manipulated for bringing about change in age at marriage in a

population if and when desired. Thus, policies concerning age at marriage could vary in response to the dynamics of varying forces in different societies (Duza and Baldwin 1977). Trends in age at marriage are of great significance for these policies, for they represent the evolution of the nuptiality behavior and its adjustment to the changing socio-economic conditions over time (Dixon 1977).

The importance of nuptiality study is not only useful from social point of view but also from demographic angle, for, it may help in formulating housing program, guiding community planning and in the development planning as found in on going efforts in many countries. Thus, a basic task of demographic research in nuptiality is to study the linkage between various aspects of nuptiality and their interrelationships with socio-economic and demographic factors.

The study of marriage patterns is important and obvious in its own right. Patterns of nuptiality is responsible for the specific characters of constitution and dissolution patterns of households and families. In order to know the changes in the pattern of changes of family formation and the type of family, one needs to study marriage pattern. Experiences of both developing and developed countries have shown clear linkage between socio-economic factors and marriage pattern. Another important reason for studying marriage pattern is the close association of age at marriage and child-bearing period in that an increase in the average age at marriage reduces the span of child-bearing with its subsequent impact on fertility levels, particularly in a society where practice of contraceptives is not significant.

The marriage pattern, marital duration and the process of termination of conjugal life vary from one society to another over time in response to socio-economic changes. But the extent of this changes is not of equal magnitude for all societies even if these societies experience equal economic prosperity and uniform transformation. If the cultural and traditional values are strong in a society, the changes follow a slow path (Gupta 1979). It is of interest to the demographers to study when a marriage takes place, how long it lasts, how it terminates in the face of social transformation and how these factors are related to socio-economic and demographic factors

(Ahmed 1982). These issues have been addressed in this study to understand the relationship in the existing socio-economic and demographic context of Bangladesh.

Turning to the significance of studying break-up of marriages--which are more culture-specific than marriages, we find these concepts as being more vital, interesting and challenging, since these issues have been significantly less studied in Bangladesh. Once the family has been formed, social scientists are interested in investigating the process of marriage dissolution and the factors that influence this dissolution. The extent of, and age at separation and divorce, is important in many populations. Alternatively, if the interest is in the formation and break-up of families-- a subject of 'family demography', then separation, divorce, widowhood and remarriage, all are likely to be of at least equal interest as marriage (Newell 1988)

Remarriage is affected by religious custom. Studies have shown that remarriage is associated with population growth, inhibiting fertility. The Hindu ideal of non-remarriageability of widows has been found to affect Muslim women in India, as Muslim ideal of *pardah* has affected Hindu women in Bangladesh (Maloney *et al.* 1981). It happens that *pardah* promotes fertility, while prohibition of widow remarriage inhibits it, which is one of the reasons for variation in the Hindu-Muslim fertility in the sub-continent. Studies have shown that widow remarriage has been an important mechanism inhibiting fertility in India (Maloney *et al.* 1981). This makes the study of remarriage important.

The interspousal age differences provide evidence on one of the desired characteristics of partners in marriage, which may give some indication to assist the efforts towards increasing the age at marriage if there is a relationship between the age at marriage and the age differences of spouses. Sufian (1994) in his work with Bangladesh data established a clear effect of spousal age difference on fertility: the higher the age difference, the lower the fertility. This makes the study on age difference between husband and wife important from fertility point of view also.

What implication does the raising of marriage age have in policy formulation vis-a-vis development of a society ? Raising the age at marriage is seen by the demographers as one of the relatively few policy interventions "beyond family planning" that might be able to initiate or

accelerate population growth changes on a major scale (Duza and Baldwin 1977). Research has shown that, in a certain configuration of socio-demographic conditions, the age at which women marry first, may be related in significant ways to elements of development, including levels of fertility and child mortality, and it may influence population growth through its effect upon the mean length of generation and the shortening the period of reproductive life. In countries where the practice of contraception is negligible and fertility is limited by and large to married women, age at marriage may play an important role in determining the level of cumulative and completed fertility (United Nations 1982).

In addition, age at first marriage is interrelated in a cause-effect nexus with school attendance and the education of women. When women marry at very early age, this tends to be institutionalized and, thus, to have strong cultural support. In optimal circumstances, age at marriage is one of the demographic parameters to which legal measures may be directly applied as government policy without abrogating human rights (United Nations 1982). One of the policy oriented investigations of WFS data led to a conclusion that national leaders and policy makers should take note that changes in age at marriage and in the timing of births are part and parcel of the social changing process that brings about reductions in the rate of fertility (United Nations 1987).

In a situation of limited control of fertility within marriage, an increase in age at marriage will inevitably contribute to smaller family size (Duza and Baldwin 1977). A similar association but less strong has been found even in modern contracepting populations. Bushfield (1972) on the basis of British data concludes that those who marry before the age of 20, have on average one child more than those who marry aged 25-29. Early marriers are simply the people who desire longer family size, while later marrier are those who favor low fertility norms. As supported by another research, late marrying women have higher levels of childlessness and smaller completed families than their early marrying counterparts, regardless of their realism, marital duration or socio-economic status (Sklar 1971). Research findings in Asia hvae shown that a one year delay in age at marriage reduces fertility by 20 percent (Greenspan 1992).

To what extent, the age at marriage be raised ? Observations on these issues reveal that, in order to have a sizeable effect on fertility, marriageable age should be significantly increased. Establishing the legal age at marriage for females at around 16 or 17 years would have little impact on completed fertility. On the other hand, in many countries, it would present a tremendous task to fill the gap between the earlier marriageable age and the legal age with meaningful roles and activities, say universal compulsory free education in order to avoid undesirable or in some cultures, inadmissible premarital relations (United Nations 1987).

Experiences of WFS countries have shown that advancements in age at marriage have a potential in contributing to lowering fertility. A study in rural Bangladesh has shown that total fertility was higher among the women who married at a younger age. In an another study, the authors noted that women in rural Bangladesh who married at comparatively older ages, were more receptive to family planning than those who married at very young ages (Stockel and Chowdhury 1973). The reasons for these differences, as they suggested, may stem from the fact that in traditional societies, where pre-pubertal marriage is orthodox and customary, the delay of marriage may lead to or be manifest in a non-traditional orientation; such couple may form a more progressive segment of the society and possibly be more careful about family limitations.

### **1.6 Policy Relevance**

The age at marriage like fertility itself, interacts with other social and economic influences within a given society or culture. As a results, the status of a women in a country and their access to education and employment may have at least as much impact on age at marriage as a legally enacted minimum age. Ultimately both the status of women and age at marriage may depend more on the commitment of political leadership and on programs benefiting women which result from that commitment than on the specific laws on age at marriage.

Recent research has demonstrated that family planning programs and the use of contraception have had a greater impact in reducing fertility than has been possible through diffusion of social changes as measured by a variety of factors including age at marriage (Population Reports 1979). Yet, with more than one billion young people throughout the world,

soon to reach the age for marriage and reproduction, all policies that can influence the fertility of young people are vital, and none of these policies should be considered in isolation. Similarly, policies that raise the age at marriage but do not at the same time, make it possible for young people to acquire contraceptives, may lead to higher rates of abortion and birth out of wedlock. Continued education and gainful employment for women will encourage later marriage and smaller families, but if these opportunities exist only in the cities and not in rural areas, they will have little or no impact on most of the populations.

Legal age at marriage may be enforced not only in the interest of lowering fertility but also as a family policy and as an instrument favoring advances in education. From this aspect, efforts made at establishing and propagating a legal minimum age at marriage which would facilitate a change in the cultural perception of marriageable age and eliminate child marriages, would be appropriate even in countries where legal manipulation of age at marriage does not seem to be a population policy measure with promising prospect for fertility decline (United Nations 1987).

In order to achieve a higher level of socio-economic development, the objectives of more education and employment for women, a higher age at marriage and much greater availability of voluntary family planning service, especially for young couples and in rural areas, are all interrelated aspects of the same process of demographic change and should be looked on as complementary and mutually reinforcing goals.

The modification of marriageable age would serve the goals of the recommendations of the World Population Conference of 1974, which suggested that legislation having a bearing on the welfare of the family and its members including laws concerning age at marriage should be reviewed and adapted to changing social and economic conditions with regard to cultural setting (United Nations 1975). Proper legislation may contribute to the fulfillment of certain generally accepted social principles- for example, that marriage should be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses; that family ties should be strengthened by giving recognition to the importance of love and mutual respect within the family; and that equal status should be given to the men and women in the family which can hardly be achieved when relatives



arrange for the marriage of a very young girl, usually with a much older man. Measures to support the family thus include a higher legal age at marriage. Except in some exceptional circumstances, early marriage and child bearing are incompatible with all but a few years of schooling. Thus, higher age at first marriage might be enforced also as an element of education policy. Raising the age at marriage may have a beneficial effect on maternal and child health through eliminating or reducing fertility in the early teenage years (United Nation 1987)

### **1.7 Objectives of the Study**

Bangladesh is characterized by the customs of universal marriage, marriage at an early age, especially for females and norms of large families. During the last two and a half decades since independence, marked economic, social, political and attitudinal changes have taken place in Bangladesh. These changes and concomitant rise in the price level and in financial requirements for household maintenance in general and for its marriage and its related issues in particular, justify the analysis of contemporary changes and patterns of marriage, marital dissolution and remarriages. This dissertation attempts to carry out such an investigation with the data obtained from a nationally representative survey conducted by the National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT) with the financial assistance from the World Bank. The detailed description of the survey and survey methodology is provided in Chapter II. The significance and relevance of the present study vis-a-vis its policy relevance in Bangladesh context can be further visualized from the discussions presented in sections 1.5 and 1.6 of the present chapter.

Apart from the greater concern of demographers and other social scientists, the study of nuptiality in Bangladesh, unlike other demographic studies, deserves a special attention due to the view point of serious lack of relevant data on families, family formation and marriage dissolution. It is also worth to mention here that a large number of social, cultural, demographic and economic information was collected in the 1989 BFS for each woman and household. The major purpose of the inclusion of these information was to assist the more focussed and specialized analysis at later stages. This plan was materialized through a secondary analysis of the data undertaken by the

NIPORT at a later date on some important issues on fertility, mortality, health and family planning. Unfortunately, the issues on nuptiality remained totally ignored in this attempt.

With this broad framework, the general objective of this dissertation is to look at the levels and differentials of various aspects of nuptiality in Bangladesh followed by its study of changes and patterns over time. The aspects of spousal age differences and marital dissolution, duration of marital union and remarriage pattern will also be studied to focus on the dynamics of nuptiality in Bangladesh.

The foregoing discussions elaborate the rationale of setting the general objective of the study and lead to set some specific objectives. The specific objectives are to :

- a) study the prevalence and patterns of early marriage ;
- b) examine the levels and trends in age at first marriage;
- c) identify the factors influencing the age at marriage and their relative contributions to the changes in age at marriage;
- d) examine the extent of age differences between husbands and wives and the socio-economic factors determining the spousal age differences;
- e) assess the prevalence of marital dissolution and to identify the factors associated with marital dissolution and
- f) study the incidence of remarriages for marriages dissolved due to divorce or death of husbands.

## **1.8 Hypotheses**

To meet the above objectives, we formulate below a few central hypotheses that are believed to be more responsive to modernizing processes and have relatively more policy oriented implications than the others. We propose to empirically test these hypotheses based on the 1989 BFS data.

### ***A. Hypothesis on age at first marriage***

*Women with longer duration of schooling, more exposure to urban life style before marriage and with pre-marital work experience are likely to have higher age at marriage.*

Some of the modernizing factors such as schooling, work experience and residential exposures identified above, exert their influences to raise age at marriage both directly and indirectly. For example, education in a direct way provides a woman to acquire interpersonal communication, awareness of social mobility and higher non-familial aspiration. Economically, education is perceived as a major route for increasing the value of human capital in the marriage market as well as in social life. This is expected to create a direct impact on the age at marriage. In a similar way, individuals with urban childhood background have more attachment and access to the urban life style and facilities than those who come from rural areas. This enhances their aspiration, desire and wisdom in all spheres of life and thus influence one's vital events including marital decision and timing. Pre-marital work experience is assumed to influence age at marriage in a variety of ways and both positive and negative association have been hypothesized between age at marriage and work experience. In an indirect way, in settings where a single daughter's earning contributes to the household income, parents may have some influence on decision to postpone marriages.

### ***B. Hypothesis on changes in age at marriage***

The changes in the age at marriage over time for females will be more responsive to the modernizing factors. This leads to formulate the following hypotheses:

*Educated women, women who have urban residential background during childhood and those who have pre-marital work experience contribute more in the rate of change in age at marriage*

The rationale behind the expected relationship between age at marriage and modernizing factors outlined in Hypothesis A above is assumed to hold true for the anticipated relationships between the extent of changes in age at marriage and the modernizing influences. Hence no elaboration is made here to justify the hypothesized relationships enumerated in Hypothesis B above.

### ***C. Hypothesis on interspousal spousal age differences***

*(a) The older the groom, the larger the age differences; the older the bride, the smaller the age differences between husbands and wives.*

*(b) Women with urban residence before marriage, higher level of education and pre-marital work experience are likely to have smaller spousal age differences.*

Traditionally, in almost all societies, people adhere to the norm of looking for a bride younger than the groom because of the inherent beliefs and desire to uphold the dominance of males in the society over females. This results in spousal age differences. The higher age difference that results from the husband marrying late, is associated with the fact that there is a strong social stigma against marrying older girls. Religion plays a dominant role here. In some Hindu scriptural traditions, it is stated that a bride should be a third of the husband's age. In societies, where parents arrange marriages, the husband tends to be much older than the wife as parents prefer for their daughter the older suitor as more stable and as better provider than his younger rival. The smaller age difference arising out of the bride being older, stems primarily from the fact that women marrying at a later age, face a shrunken marriage market. In other words, they have to choose mates from an increasingly small proportion of unmarried males of higher ages. Another important factor is that as female's age at marriage rises, males are unwilling to marry women closer to their own ages, so inevitably the age gap shrinks. The modernizing factors listed above are closely linked with the age at marriage. As long as the hypotheses formulated above remain valid, the relationship between these modernizing factors and interspousal age differences will be in the hypothesized direction, provided the male age at marriage does not abruptly rises. The changes in age gap is a function of social transformation for any society. Thus any influence on the modernizing factors through socio-economic transformation, will have enormous effect on the nature and pattern of marriage, as is noted in many recently developed countries, to shorten the interspousal age gap.

#### ***D. Hypothesis on marriage dissolution***

*(a) Women with lower level of education, with pre-marital work experience and having exposure to urban life style before marriage, are likely to have increased risk of experiencing marital dissolution.*

*(b) Women who marry young, who have longer exposure to married life and who are childless, have higher chances of encountering marital dissolution.*

Educated women have a greater capacity for understanding and predicting the attitudes, intentions and motive of their spouses as well as other members of the family. They are more capable of interacting in the marital role performance with relatively higher consensus in marital life. This consensus blended with social prestige keeps the marriage intact. Besides, marriage mediated through education increases the capability of normative role performance by increasing mental maturity and thereby decreasing tension in marital life. This leads to an inverse relationship of age at marriage with marital dissolution.

Work experience before marriage changes the expectations of women regarding marital behavior. This tends to encourage the women to expect more from their husbands in terms of emotional support, life style and consumption of market goods. This may result in marital dissatisfaction, because their expectations are less likely to be met. In addition, work experience makes the women more cognizant about their supportive ability and provides them with better information about the alternatives, that is, how to sustain herself in the event of marriage dissolution; in other words, it provides economic independence to them. All these may lead to marital dissolution.

As the social system in rural areas is less restrictive toward marriage break-down, rural women have a greater risk of undergoing marital dissolution than urban women. In a direct way, it works through norms and values of the urban life style and in an indirect way, it works through education and work participation of women. This relationship, however, may not be valid for the residents in Western societies, because they are associated with breakdown of traditional norms including reduced social pressure to maintain the marriage relationship intact and increased levels of stress in family life.

In developing societies, children are perceived as old age security. Also the presence of children provides marital satisfaction. Like many other societies, Bangladesh is also a pronatalist society. Thus, regardless of the society, presence of children tends to discourage divorce.

### ***E. Hypothesis on remarriage***

*Women with higher level of education, having pre-marital work experience and having been married early, are likely to have higher prevalence of marriage.*

Raising age at marriage considerably reduces the chance of marriage dissolution. This, in turn, is expected to reduce the likelihood of remarriage. Women who are married at a mature age, are emotionally more stable and in the event of any marriage dissolution, they do not want to remarry as they have great emotional attachment to their lost husbands and surviving children. The other factors are closely linked with the likelihood of marital dissolution as described in Hypothesis D and so are expected to bear the same relationships in the same direction, and hence are not discussed.

### **1.9 Organization of the Study**

The dissertation has been organized in nine chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter II describes the data source, survey methodology and characteristics of the survey population. The historical and socio-cultural perspectives of age at marriage have been discussed in Chapter III. Chapter IV has been devoted to the study of trends in age at marriage over time. Age at first marriage and its differentials have been analyzed in Chapter V. Investigation on inter-spousal age differences has been made in Chapter VI. Chapter VII presents the analysis of marital dissolution and duration of first union. Chapter VIII examines the remarriage and its socio-economic differentials. Finally the dissertation concludes with a discussion and policy implications of the findings and recommendations in Chapter IX.

## Chapter II

### DATA, METHODS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE POPULATION

#### 2.1 Introduction

The data on which this present dissertation is based, come from a nationally representative sample of about 12000 ever-married women under 50 years of age. The survey was conducted in 1989 by the National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT) and is known as 1989 Bangladesh Fertility Survey (BFS). The survey has been the unique in the sense that it included a detailed section on marriage history which provides substantial amount of information on nuptiality for a representative sample of ever-married women. This is considered to be the second national survey that permits detailed analysis of various aspects of marriage. The first survey, known as 1975 BFS was conducted in 1975 as a part of the World Fertility Survey (WFS) which included a representative sample of 6515 ever-married women under 50 years of age.

The marriage history section of 1989 Bangladesh Fertility Survey (BFS) included detailed information on age at marriage of the respondents themselves and of their husbands, frequency of marriage, duration of marriage, information on dissolution and remarriage of the widows and divorced women. These information were used to prepare the present dissertation.

#### 2.2 Sample Design

A two-stage probability sample design was used in data collection. At the first stage, a sample of areas or clusters was drawn. Each selected area was then mapped and all households listed. At the second stage, a sample of households was selected within each area. Finally, all selected households were enumerated and all ever-married women under the age of 50 years, who were residents in the households on the night prior to the enumeration, were eligible for interview. Thus the residential criteria for selection of women into sample was *de facto* rather than *de jure*.

### **2.3 Sample Size**

The choice of the total sample size for the 1989 BFS was made after balancing analytic requirements against factors of cost and logical feasibility. A target sample size of 10,000 ever-married women aged under 50 years was set, of which about 7000 were rural and 3000 urban. To allow for under-coverage and non-response, target sample size was raised by 20 percent (Huq and Cleland 1990). Out of a total of 11729 selected households, 11236 households were successfully enumerated. From these households, a total of 11906 ever-married women were finally interviewed.

The sampling frame used for the 1989 BFS was prepared from the enumerated areas (EA) of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). The BBS created these EAs for its economic census of 1986. For the 1989 BFS sample, a total of 275 EAs were selected, of which 100 were urban and 175 rural. Selection of the EAs were made following a probability proportional to size (PPS) procedure, the size being the number of households within the 64 greater districts. The selection of the households was performed with probability inversely proportional to the first stage selection probability. This ensured a self-weighting sample within the rural and urban stratum. The average number of households was 47 for the rural stratum and 34 for the urban stratum.

The main field work was completed in five-month time starting in December 1988 and ending in April 1989. The overall response rate was 96.6 percent, there being little difference between urban and rural response rates.

Several considerations led to the development of the 1989 BFS questionnaires with respect to its contents and scope. The key priority was to address the information on the extent of contraceptive use to cater to the needs of the policy makers and program managers. Particular emphasis was attached to collect information on fertility and childhood mortality so as to make them available for incorporation in the Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-1995). A second consideration was the desire to retain a degree of similarity with 1975 BFS to make the key estimates comparable of these two surveys. Accommodation of this view opened up a wider



scope to see the demographic and contraceptive changes that occurred during the inter-survey period of long 15 years since 1975. Further, in order to provide an account of the recent development, there was however, an appreciable divergence in the contents and design between 1975 and 1989 Bangladesh Fertility Surveys. Three types of questionnaires were developed for the 1989 BFS. These are:

- a. Household schedules:* included all household members and their sex, age, marital status and education.
- b. Individual questionnaire:* included all ever-married women under 50 years of age. This questionnaire contained their and of their husbands' education, occupation, and other background information, such as age, age at marriage, literacy, fertility history, marriage history, contraception, health, fertility preference, household assets and modernity.
- c. Community questionnaire:* included community information with respect to local facilities, such as market, school, post office, health service facilities and the distance of these facilities from the residence of the women.

## **2.4 Characteristics of the Survey Population**

The 1989 Bangladesh Fertility Survey (BFS) consists of three surveys. First, there was a household enumeration during which a few characteristics of all persons resident in each selected household were collected. The household survey was primarily designed to identify ever-married women aged less than 50 years, who were eligible for individual survey. Further, the household survey provides valuable information on the age and sex structure of the population of Bangladesh. In addition, data on marital status are also available from the enumeration. The third component of BFS was the community survey, in which certain characteristics of each rural sample spot, or cluster, were collected.

### **2.4.1 Population characteristics: household survey**

Both *de facto* and *de jure* procedures were adopted to enumerate the 1989 BFS population. Under the *de facto* definition, a person was counted wherever that person slept in the household on the night prior to enumeration, while under the *de jure* count, persons were

enumerated if they were usual residents of the selected households, irrespective of where they were at the time of enumeration.

A total of 58,519 persons were enumerated in the 1989 BFS *de facto* count, of whom 29,780 were males and 28739 females. This gives rise to a sex ratio of 103.6. This ratio is somewhat lower than the 1981 and 1991 census ratios of 106.4 and 106.1 respectively. The age-sex distributions of 1989 BFS, 1981 and 1991 censuses are compared in Table 2.1.

The 1989 BFS enumerated fewer juveniles (43.4% ) under the age of 15 and rather more adults (43.2%) in 15 to 44 than both the 1981 census (46.7%) and 1991 census (45%). Nevertheless, the population is still quite young contributing to a broad based age-sex pyramid tapering with age. This young age structure is typical of most of the developing countries and is highly favorable to growth because a large proportion of women are in the early child-bearing ages.

By and large, the three age distributions presented in Table 2.1 appear to be identical. The significant difference between the 1989 BFS and 1981 census distributions is that the persons under 15 and 60 and above together (persons not in labor force) in 1989 BFS were fewer in proportion (47%) compared to 1981 (50.1%) and 1991 (50.4%) censuses. The dependency ratio defined as the ratio of population of age 0-14 and 60 and above to population of working ages 15-59 is 88.7 percent for BFS 1989, 100.4 for 1981 census and 101.7 for 1991 census. There appears to be a slight increase in the proportion of elderly persons (5.6 in 1981 census to 5.9 percent to 1989 BFS). Improvement in the mortality situation may account for this apparent increase in the older population.

The proportion of the BFS survey population in rural areas (41.9%) for the age group 15-45 was lower than those in the urban areas (47.9%). This reflects the migration of population from the rural to the urban areas. For males, the higher proportions of males in urban areas are indicative of age-selective migration from rural to urban areas for better education and job opportunities. For females, this may be due to misreporting of ages, migration of young wives to join male migrants, and/or a lower rate of maternal mortality in urban areas (Huq and Cleland

1990). Urban areas have relatively fewer people (40.3%) under age 15 than rural areas (43.5%). This difference is indicative of the fact that fertility declines in Bangladesh begins with the urban population.

The average household size as recorded in the 1989 BFS survey is 5.2. This figure is lower than that obtained in the 1981 census, where the average household size was estimated to be 5.7. This figure is 5.5 in the 1991 census. The 1975 BFS estimate was 6.4. This shows that average household size is decreasing over time, which is in good agreement with the recent decline in the fertility in Bangladesh.

#### **2.4.2 Population characteristics: individual survey**

At the individual level of 1989 BFS, a large amount of socio-economic and demographic information was collected. These data provide enormous scope to carry out specialized analyses. The key variables that were addressed in the BFS analysis (main report), include rural-urban residence; respondent's education, husband's occupation and number of household possessions. These, along with some other variables, that have been used in the present investigation for differential analysis of nuptiality are presented in Table 2.2. The justification of the choice and relevance of the variables to the present study have been discussed in more details in pertinent chapters.

The age distribution of the 1989 BFS is nearly identical to other surveys viz. 1991 census and 1993 and Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) with 39 percent of the women in their 20s. The broad age group 15-29 contains 53.7 percent of the total women for 1989 BFS. The corresponding figure for 1993 BDHS is 55.2.

Nearly 29 percent women were drawn from urban areas. The currently married women constitute 91.6 percent of the total ever-married women. Only 4.7 percent are widowed, and 3.7 percent are either divorced or separated. These figures as obtained in 1993 BDHS are 4.0 and 2.8 respectively. Nearly 17 percent of the respondents were reported to be married before the onset of their first menstruation. Most of them (93.4%) were married only once.

A significant proportion, 63.6 percent, of the women are illiterate. Nearly 22 percent were reported to have completed primary level. Illiteracy is less prevalent (46.4%) among the husbands of the respondents. Religious composition shows that 86.2 percent of the women are Muslims. This compares well with other national figures (e.g. 87.8% in 1993 BDHS). Rural women constitute 29 percent of the total. The religiosity variable shows that a large proportion (58.1%) observes their religion every day but strict observance of religion is prevalent among only 21 percent of them.

By occupation, a very few of the husbands (13.5%) are professionals.. More than one third of them are either cultivator or work as agricultural laborers. Only about 16 percent were reported to be involved in work outside home, while single. Largest share of the population (31.7%) falls under Dhaka division, followed by Rajshahi (25.9%) and Chittagong (22.8%).

## **2.5 Methods of Analysis**

The present study primarily makes use of the 1989 BFS data. In order to meet the objectives of the study set and empirically validate the hypotheses formulated in Chapter I, we have considered here three main variables as dependent variables that broadly cover the issues on marriage and family--the focus of this study. These are age at marriage, spousal age difference, marital dissolution due to divorce and widowhood and remarriage that broadly reflect the process of family formation, family structure, family disorganization and family reorganization respectively. The choice of these variables as dependent variables has been made on several considerations followed primarily from theories and hypotheses put forwarded by sociologists and demographers in their endeavor to provide social explanation for family life. A set of socio-economic and demographic variables have been considered as dependent variables in order to examine their significance in explaining the variations observed in the dependent variables. These variables include both modernizing factors ( such as education, occupation, work status and urbanization) and traditional factors (such as religion, region, religiosity).

The present study makes use of a number of statistical techniques to analyze the data whenever warranted, the simplest of which is the univariate presentation that provide descriptive

statistics of variables of interest. To explore bivariate relationships, a series of cross-tabulations were also ran. In some cases, the extent of relationship discerned from the analysis has been evaluated by some usual measures of association viz. chi-squared and odds ratio statistics. Finally, some advanced statistical techniques were employed with the selected variables in order to assess the contribution of each independent variable on the dependent variables controlling for the others. The choice of a particular multivariate analysis was made depending on the nature of data and the nature of outcome desired. The statistical techniques employed here include multiple classification analysis, multivariate logistic regression, life table (survival) analysis and proportional hazard analysis. We present below a brief description of each of these methods enumerated above.

***(a) Logistic regression analysis:***

The logistic regression model is a multivariate technique for estimating the probability that an event occurs. The model is now widely used in social sciences to assess the influence of various socio-economic characteristics controlling for the effect of other variables on the likelihood of the occurrence of the event of interest. In a linear logistic regression model, the dependent variable is a dichotomous one, coded as 1 (event occurring) and 0 (event not occurring).

The independent variable may be either dummy or categorical. For a single variable, the logistic regression model is of the form

$$\text{Prob(event)} = \frac{\beta_0 + \beta_1 X}{1 + e^{\beta_0 + \beta_1 X}}$$

or, equivalently

$$\text{Prob(event)} = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X)}}$$

where  $\beta_0$  and  $\beta_1$  are the regression coefficients estimated from the data,  $X$  is the independent variable and  $e$  the base of natural logarithm.

For more than one independent variable, the model assumes the form

$$\text{Prob(event)} = \frac{e^z}{1 + e^z} \\ = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-z}}$$

where  $z = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_p X_p$

The relationship between the independent variables and the probability is non-linear. The probability estimates will always lie between 0 and 1 regardless of the value of  $z$ . In this model the parameters are estimated using the maximum likelihood method. That is the coefficient that make our observed results most “*likely*”, are selected (Narusis 1990).

In linear multiple regression model, the regression coefficient signifies the amount of change in the dependent variable for a one-unit change in the independent variables. The interpretation of the coefficients in the logistic regression is somewhat different for which the model is to be written in terms of the log odds of event occurring. This is called logit:

$$\ln\left(\frac{\text{Pr ob(event)}}{\text{Pr ob(noevent)}}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \dots + \beta_p X_p$$

This shows that the logistic coefficients can be interpreted as the change on the log odds associated with a one-unit change in the independent variables. For easier interpretation, the log odds are to be changed in odds, in which case, the logistic equation stands as:

$$\frac{\text{Pr ob(event)}}{\text{Pr ob(noevent)}} = e^{\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \dots + \beta_p X_p} \\ = e^{\beta_0} e^{\beta_1 X_1} \dots e^{\beta_p X_p}$$

Then  $e$  raised to the power  $\beta_i$  is the factor by which the odds changes when the  $i$ th independent variable increases by one unit. If  $\beta_i$  is positive, this factor will be greater than 1, which means that the odds are increased, if  $\beta_i$  is negative, the factor will be less than 1, which means that the odds are decreased. When  $\beta_i$  is 0, the factor equals 1 and the odds remains unchanged.

The choice of the dependent and independent variables depend on the nature of the data. This part of the exercise and the interpretation of the results have been undertaken in the relevant chapters of this study.

***(b) Life table analysis:***

The survival analysis in this study has been made to analyze the marriage dissolution data. It is essentially a statistical technique, used to estimate the interval between two events when the second event does not necessarily happen to everyone and when the people are observed for different period of time. In the present instance, for example, we would be interested to know how long a marriage continues. Solution of the problems of this type is complicated by the fact that the event of interest (marriage dissolution here) may not occur for all women during the period in which they are observed and the actual period of observation may not be the same for all women. That is, dissolution of, and entry into marriage do not occur on the same day. These complicated factors do not allow us to calculate the average duration of marriage in a usual manner.

The analysis of data on marriage dissolution through survival procedure is essentially a follow-up life table technique. The basic of this life table is to sub-divide the observations after a starting point (marriage here) into smaller time intervals. For each interval, all people, who have been observed at that long are used to calculate the probability of an event (such as divorce or death of husband) occurring in that interval. The probabilities estimated from each of the intervals are then used to estimate the overall probability of the event occurring at different time points. Symbolically, the dissolution rate for the first year of marriage,  ${}_1q_0$  is found as the proportion of marriages that were dissolved within the first year assuming all marriages that began one or more years before the interval. To find the proportion dissolved during the second year,  ${}_1q_1$ , whose marriages ended in the first year are dropped from the denominator together with women whose marriages began in the two years before the interval. The reminder comprises women at risk of dissolution during the second year, among whom the proportion whose marriages are dissolved, is the desired rate.

After two years, the cumulative proportion dissolved will be  ${}_1q_0 + (1 - {}_1q_0) {}_2q_1$ ; which is the sum of the chances of marriage being dissolved in the first year and the chances of marriage being dissolved in the second year after continuing through the first year. Rates for the later years are found by the same process. Kaplan and Miller (1958) have shown that such rates are consistent maximum likelihood estimates of the proportions of marriages that are dissolved with time. In the process of computation, an estimate of the median survival time is obtained. This median is the time point at which the value of the cumulative survival function is 0.5.

The basic assumption underlying the life table calculation is that the survival experience does not change during the course of the study. To use such a life table, it must be assumed that a person, for example, will behave the same way as a person who was married five years earlier, implying that the probability of marriage and marriage patterns will remain unchanged throughout the period of study. It must also be assumed that observations that are censored do not differ from those that are not censored.

**(c) *Proportional hazard model:***

To study the correlates of marriage dissolution, the life table must be constructed for sub-groups of the population with differing characteristics to examine whether the marriage dissolution vary among the sub-groups. When more than two or three variables are of interest, this approach quickly leads to small sample size problems because of too many selection of data (Balakrishnan et al. 1987). The proportional hazard model is used here to analyze the risks of early marriage and dissolution risks due to divorce after entering in first marriage. The hazard function is often defined as the instantaneous failure rate. This function of survival time gives the conditional failure rate. It is defined as the probability of failure (having a marriage dissolved or having been married early) during a very small time interval, assuming that the individual has survived (marriage not dissolved or not marrying early) to the beginning of the interval, or as the limit of the probability that an individual fails in a very short interval,  $t$  to  $t + \Delta t$  per unit time, given that the individual has survived to time  $t$  (Lee 1992).



Define  $h(t)$  as the instantaneous transition rate from being in marriage to marriage dissolution at time  $t$ . This rate is the limit of the probability of a move to marriage dissolution between  $t$  and  $t + \Delta t$  per unit time. Basically the model allows the risks to depend not only on time, as in a simple life table, but on the personal characteristics of the individuals (Balakrishnan *et al* 1987). The hazard function can be written as

$$\lambda(t) = \lambda_0(t) \exp(\beta \cdot z) \dots \quad (1)$$

where  $\beta$  is a column vector of parameters and  $z$  is a row vector of covariates. The hazard function is the product of an underlying duration-dependent risk  $\lambda_0(t)$  and another factor  $\exp(\beta \cdot z)$  that depends on covariates. The duration-dependent risk  $\lambda_0(t)$  is calculated for a base line or reference group. The hazard function provides an estimate of the relative risk of other groups in relation to this reference group. The survivorship function  $\lambda(t)$  in (1) can be rewritten as

$$S(t; z) = [S_0(t)]^{\exp(\beta \cdot z)}$$

where  $S_0(t)$  is the survivorship function for the baseline or the reference group. Each exponential of the coefficient in equation (1) represents the covariates on the hazard function for the reference group, when there are no covariates present, the exponent  $\exp(\beta \cdot z)$  reduces to unity. Values greater than 1 indicate that the relative risk of early marriage or marriage dissolution is greater for the group compared to the reference category. Thus when the survivorship probabilities are known at various duration, the survivorship probabilities for the other groups can be found easily. The basic assumption of this model is that the population heterogeneity is captured by the set of covariates included in the analysis, and the relative risk remains constant over the duration of the occurrence of the event.

**(d) Multiple classification analysis (MCA):**

In 1934, Yates developed the Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) and later on, it was expanded and elaborated by Anderson (1958) in early 1950's. The MCA program has been widely used in social science research for a long time. The analysis requires one dependent variable and two or more independent variables. The dependent variable can be either a continuous variable or a categorical variable, but all the independent variables must be categorical

in nature. Multiple classification analysis can equally handle the nominal and ordinal variables and can also deal with linear and non-linear relationships of predictor variables with dependent variables.

Statistically, analysis of variance, multiple classification analysis and dummy regression are basically the same but multiple classification analysis has some additional advantages. It provides estimates of each category of the predictor variable and at the same time provides the coefficient for explaining the strength of the relationship.

Mathematically, the model can be expressed by the following relationship:

$$Y_{ijk} = Y + a_i + b_j + c_k + \dots + e_{ijk} + \dots$$

where  $Y_{ijk}$  = value or score of an individual who falls in the  $i$ th category of the factor A,  $j$ th category of the factor B and the  $k$ th category of the factor C.

$Y$  = the grand mean

$a_i$  = the effect due to the  $i$ th category of the factor A;

$b_j$  = the effect due to the  $j$ th category of the factor B;

$c_k$  = the effect due to the  $k$ th category of the factor C and

$e_{ijk}$  = the error term related with  $Y_{ijk}$  score of the individual.

The coefficients which are estimated by solving the normal equation systems are called the adjusted or net effects of the predictors. If there is no inter-correlation among the predictors, the adjusted and unadjusted effects of the predictors will remain the same. The unadjusted *eta-squared* ( $\eta^2$ ) coefficient is usually estimated by solving the normal equations with only one predictor. The unadjusted coefficient ( $\eta$ ) indicates the proportion of variance explained by a single predictor alone. The *eta-squared* ( $\eta^2$ ) coefficient is a correlation ratio, which explains how well the predictor variable explains the variation in the dependent variable. Similarly, the *beta-squared* ( $\beta^2$ ) coefficient indicates the proportion of variation explained by a predictor variable taking account of the proportion explained by the other predictor variables. The *beta* ( $\beta$ ) coefficient is comparable to the partial correlation coefficient in multiple regression and measures the ability of

given predictor to account for the variation in the dependent variable. The adjusted  $R$ -square shows the proportion of variation in dependent variables explained by the predictor variables assuming that there is no intercorrelation or interaction among the predictor variables. The SPSS was used to analyze the data through MCA.

Table 2.1: Percentage distributions of female population in 1989 BFS, 1981 census and 1991 census by current age.

Age	Census	BFS	Census
	1981	1989	1991
0-4	17.1	15.4	16.4
5-9	16.2	15.0	16.5
10-14	13.4	12.8	12.1
15-19	9.5	11.1	8.5
20-24	7.8	8.6	8.4
25-29	7.4	7.2	8.5
30-34	5.6	6.1	6.2
35-39	5.1	5.1	5.6
40-44	4.2	4.2	4.3
45-49	3.2	3.4	3.4
50-54	3.1	2.4	2.9
55-59	1.8	2.8	1.8
60+	5.6	5.9	5.4

Source: Huq and Cleland (1990) and BBS (1993)

Table 2.2 : Distribution of the ever married women according to background characteristics

Characteristics	Number	percent
<i>Current age</i>		
<15	126	1.1
15-19	1762	14.8
20-24	2521	21.2
25-29	2106	17.7
30-34	1962	16.5
35+	3429	28.8
<i>Current residence</i>		
Rural	8467	71.0
urban	3439	28.8
<i>Childhood residence</i>		
Rural	10183	85.5
Urban	1723	14.5
<i>Current marital status</i>		
Married	10905	91.6
Widowed	560	4.7
Divorced/separated	441	3.7
<i>Married before puberty</i>		
Yes	2000	16.8
No	9906	83.2
<i>Frequency of marriage</i>		
1	11120	93.4
2	714	6.0
3	60	.5
4 +	12	.1
<i>Education</i>		
None	7583	63.6
Primary	2601	21.9
Higher	1722	14.4
<i>Husband's education</i>		
None	5528	46.4
Primary	2405	20.2
Higher	3973	33.4

cont....

Table 2.2 cont ....

Characteristics	Number	percent
<b>Religion</b>		
Muslim	10268	86.2
Non-Muslim	1638	13.8
<b>Frequency of prayer</b>		
Every day	6915	58.1
Not everyday	4991	41.9
<b>Practice religion</b>		
strictly	2516	21.1
Not strictly	9390	78.9
<b>Husband's occupation</b>		
Sales/service	3083	25.9
Prof./admin/clerical	1605	13.5
Agric. laborers	1341	11.3
Non-agri. laborers	1484	12.5
cultivators	2753	23.1
Production workers	708	5.9
Share croppers	518	4.3
others	414	3.5
<b>Work status</b>		
Ever worked	1843	15.5
Never worked	10063	84.5
<b>Division</b>		
Chittagong	2717	22.8
Dhaka	3778	31.7
Khulna	2325	19.5
Rajshahi	3086	25.9

## Chapter III

### SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF MARRIAGE IN BANGLADESH

#### 3.1 Marriage: Historical Perspectives

Marriage is one of the most important events of human relationships and is a universal institution. It is an important and fascinating area of research and constitute a fundamental characteristic of each society. The family which grows out of it, is the primary social unit of the society (Acsadi and Hammam 1976). Though it is not exactly known how and when marriage was institutionalized, researches on this support the view that it must have started as a continuation of the mating procedure and at a stage when '*tradition*' became strong enough as to institutionalize instinct (Huzayyin 1976). This gives an impression that marriage as an institution dates back from pre-historic times. Review of archeological literature of that time reveals that institutionalized marriage came essentially as a component of *settled life* in the form of *cave* settlement, *shelter* settlement or even as *open air* settlement. This process possibly has began as early as middle Paleolithic and/or upper Paleolithic times. *Settled life* became associated with cultivation and domestication of animals in Neolithic times around 8000-6000 BC. Towards the close of Paleolithic, the *clan* system apparently became more and more the pattern of human society. With the emergence of cultivation that came in Neolithic times, the *clan* got sub-divided into 'holds' with smaller groups of settlers. This new development encouraged the group members to form families and as a result, the institution of marriage became more firmly established. Available evidences lead to suggest that this was more or less the prevailing pattern of family formation through marriage in most of the communities of Neolithic societies in the area of South-West Asia and Africa. It became more gradually modified with the passage of time with differentiated patterns in areas of settled agriculturists from those which continued as nomadic.

The institution of marriage and remarriage experienced serious setback during pre-Islamic period in the Arabian Peninsula. This period has been marked in the Islamic history as a *period of*

*ignorance*. The *period of ignorance* was marked by gradual desiccation and frequent drought leading to heavy internal migration of population contributing to reduction of population growth. During this period, there was continuous strife and war between the Arab tribes. Several socio-cultural and environmental conditions that prevailed during this period were held responsible for this war between tribes. During these wars, male population must have been steadily depleted or kept much under control. Women were usually spared and taken as booty (*ghanimat*). This resulted in a serious sex imbalance in the desert and semi-steppe lands of Arabia (Huzayyin 1976).

The effect of this phenomenon upon marriage, re-marriage and polygyny in pre-Islamic Arabia was considerable not only amongst the nomadic population but also among the other settlers in the neighboring areas. There was no limit to the number of wives taken by a man and no clear linkage between marriage, remarriage, polygyny and divorce. Unlimited number of wives must have changed husbands by socially legalized remarriage or through captivity in the aftermath of regular raids and wars.

The climatic crisis, environmental hazards and antagonistic attitude of the nomadic that existed in the prehistoric era, could lead to devastating demographic and social revolution affecting human relationships and marriage pattern. But the emergence of cognate religion of Islam in the seventh century AD brought moderating impact of more orderly spiritual and social values with more controlling effect on marriage, matrimonial relationships and marriage pattern. Unlike the nomads of interior Asia, the expanding Muslim Arabs had in their hands the holy book of *Quran*, which strictly controlled their human and social relationships with the conquered people.

The status of women became greatly enhanced and remained well safeguard by Islamic creed and practice. Huzayyin (1976) in his essay describes the role of Islam in enhancing the status of women during that critical period as follows:



*"Islam brought a new and rather revolutionizing outlook in the status of women in matrimonial wedlock. Already in pre-Islamic Arabia, it was the women or her proxy who choose and engaged the husband to be ! and not vice-versa ! The father (the uncle or the elder brother in the absence of future) selected the husband for his maiden daughter. It was not the groom that took the initiative to select the bride, though his father might make approaches. The divorced or widowed women made the approaches herself and selected her own second or third husband. This practice was maintained and encouraged under Islam, especially in its early period. In addition the new religion emphasized the independent identity of the women especially after marriage. It is true that the prime right of divorce was left to the husband, but if the wife could make a case, (and if the husband took a second wife without her knowledge and consent), she might get her divorce through the judge. In all cases it was the husband that paid the dowry and bore all expenditure of the household. If the wife was gainfully employed she kept all benefits of her gain. It was never a question in Islam of unequal pay because of sex. The women kept her father's name after marriage and the change of the name was considered 'unrighteous'. She also kept and ran her own property and business (if any). All her property within the household remained hers. When widowed, she inherited one quarter of her husbands property if there were no offspring, and one eighth if there were any. Remarriage was open and allowed to her with even easier and more free conditions than in the case of first marriage. This was not always the case in other social systems outside Islam."*

In inter-marriage of relatives that was practiced during pre-Islamic times was much regulated, modified and restricted by Islam. This provided wider scope for women to select their husbands out of kin. This was also healthier for the society and it paved the way for the women to play more wider and effective role in building up solidarity in the society.

With the spread of Islam, marriage as an institution, became more assimilated. Polygyny and unlimited liberty of the husband became definitely controlled. Divorce was made a costly undertaking. Material penalties made the man think twice before divorcing. The logic of the Islamic rule is that amongst acts allowed, divorce is the most detestable to Allah. As a result, the role and status of women in the society, became much more strengthened and consolidated. Obligations and duties of the husband, rights of the wife, mother, widowed and divorced wife became much clarified, defined, strictly legalized and enforced.

The social revolution in marriage and re-marriage that was initiated in its cradle area of Arabia, started to spread first in Middle East en route to Iran and beyond where Islamic Institutions of marriage and remarriage started to be followed in toto. The spread of Islam into the

central Asia came a little later. The Islamic marriage family clan system and institutions were adopted by the people of interior Asia between 12th and 13th century. All these represented a social revolution which was completed in the record short period of 23 years of the mission. The adoption of Islamic marriage system and institution among the population of East, South and South-East Asia did not however start until the 12th century.

The other major directions in the spread of Islam was into the continent of Africa including Egypt and Sudan between 10th and 12th century. Beyond Egypt, Islam spread into North Africa. From the Sudanese belt, Islam and its social institutions (including marriage, remarriage and polygyny) penetrated well into sub-Saharan Africa, where they became assimilated with the indigenous social structure.

As time passed, the Islamic rules of marriage and family life started to be adapted readily in deep rooted traditional societies. As we see now, polygyny, divorce and other forms of female oppressions are rare in many societies. Strict rules and laws are increasingly being followed throughout the world in the event of any dislocation in family life and matrimonial affairs. As a result, these events are considerably less frequent in modern world than before. This is believed to be the impact of Islam that exerted its influence to bring relatively more stability in marital life.

### **3.2 Marriage Practices in Bangladesh**

Marriage in most societies is the legal union of a man and a woman for the purpose of leading conjugal life and establishment of a family. The legality of such union may be established by civil or religious codes, or in other ways, as may be socially sanctioned. Marriage, by customs and practices, varies widely between societies and religion. In this chapter, we will address this issue in the socio-cultural and religious context of Bangladesh. Inclusion of this aspect in the present chapter is intended to help understand the pattern and recent changes in nuptiality in Bangladesh in response to the changes in socio-economic and demographic processes that has taken place since its independence in 1971. The detailed analysis of various aspects of nuptiality has been undertaken in subsequent chapters of this study. Since Islam and Hinduism are the two

major religions in Bangladesh, most of the discussions in this chapter will center around these two religious groups with respect to the practices, beliefs, laws and customs relating to marriage.

In Bangladesh there are three main phases in the traditional form of marriage among both Muslims and Hindus. These are (1) the proposal of marriage which is initiated from the bridegrooms side except in rare cases; (2) usually marriage is solemnized in the bride's house or a place mutually decided on by families of the bride and the groom, and (3) mostly, marriage is arranged by the father or other male relatives or guardians through *ghataks* (marriage brokers). Usually, the Muslim marriage ceremony is performed by the *kazi* (authorized marriage registrar). The consent to marriage is obtained from the groom directly and, in the case of the bride, it is communicated through her representative designated as *ukil* (pleader) in front of two male witnesses.

In Islam, marriage is considered a contract and the terms are required to be fully documented on *nikah nama* (marriage registration form). In Bangladesh, registration of marriage is obligatory for Muslims and Christians. In the case of other religions, it is optional and in that event, contractual marriage is being performed in traditional ways (BBS 1993). According to the Muslim Family Law ordinance of 1961, the following information is to be recorded on the marriage registration form: (1) year of marriage; (2) place of residence; (3) age of bride and groom; (4) previous marital status of the bride at the time of marriage; (5) amount of *mehr* (bride price) in *takas*, and (6) date of marriage according to Arabic calendar (Afzal, Bean and Hussain 1971). It is also a common practice in Bangladesh that the bride does not move immediately to her husband's house after her marriage is solemnized. This is called *akth*. This happens due to various social and economic problems of one or of both the parties. The movement takes place at a time suitable to both the parties. For this reason the age at marriage and age at consummation has not always been the same for Bangladesh. The reported figure for this consummation delay for women married once is on the average is six months (BFS 1978).

Another traditional and most common feature of marriage in Bangladesh society is that once the two parties finally agree to fix a date of marriage, a ceremony called *Gaaye Holud*

(wedding shower: rubbing the face and part of the body of both the bride and the groom with turmeric) is arranged immediately before the date of marriage solemnization. The first ceremony is held at the bride's house where some women from the groom's side assemble with sweets, cloths, cosmetics, turmeric and related accessories to bless the bride. The bride wearing a yellow *sharee* (dress) sits in specified place on a new cane made mat when all people attending the ceremony, rub her face with turmeric paste and put sweets in small quantity into her mouth one by one. The guests from the groom's side are also entertained with light refreshment. The ceremony is sometimes followed by an informal cultural function or amusement. This is exactly followed for the groom as well on the following day in his house. This sometimes incurs a huge expenditure on both the parties. After the ceremony is over, neither the bride nor the groom can move out of their house until the day of marriage solemnization. This pre-marriage ceremony has been in practice for both Hindus and Muslims for a long time.

After marriage is solemnized, the bride moves to the groom's house in most cases to live with her husband permanently. Another form of marriage, '*Gharjama*' is also in practice in Bangladesh, mainly in rural areas, where the groom comes to live in his father-in-law's house. In this type of marriage, most of the husbands are bound to return to their parental house in the event of marriage dissolution

Marriage among Hindus is performed by a *Brahmin* (priest) according to Hindu rites. The main rites are: *homa* or offering in the sacred fire, *panigrahana* (taking the hand of the bride) and *Saptapadi*, the bride and the groom moving seven steps together around an area encircled by banana trees.

### **3.2.1 Religious beliefs**

#### ***Muslim marriage:***

Islam, which is the predominant religion of Bangladesh, attaches great importance to the family by strengthening the ties bonding its members and safeguarding it against undermining influences. Hence, marriage is an important religious duty and considered an important social institution. Consequently, marriage has been almost universal in Bangladesh. In the Islamic *sharia*

or law, marriage is obligatory for persons who are able to cope with its financial burdens (Ahmed and Chowdhury 1980).

The holy *Quran* generally encourages marriage. It states that women are a field for men to cultivate them as often as they would. Men are cautioned however to seek out women for honest wedlock, not debauchery (Bullough 1974). Islamic law is clear that the only legal and religious way to satisfy the sexual urge is through marriage, and any other sexual activity is sinful and socially unacceptable. Guided by Islamic views and ideas, both men and women think it is important to perpetuate and extend their lineage segment and this is seen almost in a religious sense. The parents will remain alive in the memory of their progeny. There is also a strong believe among some that God wishes to fill up this earth with the view that more people will worship Him. It is doubtful if such beliefs affect their fertility norms in themselves, but they express the pro-natal ethos of the culture (Maloney, Aziz and Sarker 1981).

#### ***Hindu marriage:***

Marriage is an indispensable event in Hindu tradition. Among Hindus, it has been considered as a ritual and a sacramental union. A person who remains unmarried is considered unholy. In Hindu tradition, the objectives of marriage are said to be three: religion (*dharma*), progeny (*praja*) and pleasure (*rati*). In this, the sexual pleasure is given third place but is still honored. As in Muslims, the Hindu culture urges upon procreation of offspring. The customs and rites of Hindu religion demand male children from each married couple. Parents want to make sure that their sons marry and continue to have male children. The Hindus believe that if there is a pubertal unmarried girl in any one's house and if she curses her parents for not arranging her marriage even though she attained puberty, then God will send severe sufferings to such parents. In the belief of many Hindus, a girl should be married before puberty, because if menstruation occurs in her parent's house, the males for seven generations will not be able to reach heaven. (Maloney, Aziz and Sarker 1981). Pointing to the tradition and custom of Hindu religion, Bashan (1963) said that a father who did not give his daughter in marriage before the first menstruation, incurred the guilt of one procuring abortion for every menstrual period in which she remained

unmarried. Review of these beliefs and superstitions offers an explanation as to why marriage is universal and why child marriage is so highly prevalent and well accepted in Indian sub-continent.

### 3.3 Religious Views on Marital Partners and Timing of Marriage

For those who do not have enough means to support a new or separate households after marriage, Islam encourages abstinence until they attain solvency. Besides this economic restriction, Islam has put some restrictions on eligibility of being marriage partners. Islam restricts girls from marrying a non-Muslim, but it is possible for a Muslim to marry a non-Muslim provided he/she is willing to accept Islam. He is also prohibited from marrying both a woman and her daughter at a time and also a woman already lawfully married to another person. The holy *Quran* also prohibits marriage between persons who were reared at the breast of the same woman or between the woman and the man who has been suckled at her breast (Levy 1957). This implies that a Muslim can not keep two sisters simultaneously as wives.

Hindus are divided into a number of castes and sub-castes and preference is given to marriage within the specific sub-caste to which both groom and bride belong. In essence, marriage customs or arrangements among Hindus are similar to those of Muslims and are usually influenced by local customs. For example, the practice of paying dowry to the bridegroom in cash or in kind is prevalent among both Muslims and Hindus. Marriage is usually arranged in both the groups. Among the Hindus the bridegroom is also required to pay a certain amount as *pan* or price to the father of the bride. The *pan* is fixed through negotiation by the bride and groom's party. However, there are differences between the *pan* among the Hindus and the dower among the Muslims, the former being a social practice and a religious requirement. Moreover, the *pan* is to be paid to father of the bride but the dower is payable to the bride only. In addition to this difference, there are some other fundamental differences between the two communities with respect to marriage practices and laws. Amongst the Hindus, marriage is a sacrament of transcendental importance. Traditionally, it has been assumed that marriages were not only arranged by families, but that there was an element of divine guidance. Widows were not supposed to re-marry because their marriage might well be reconstituted with the same husband in

the next life as it might have been in the past. This is being prohibited for many centuries and still being discouraged. In contrast, remarriage of widows among the Muslims is widely accepted. In both religions widow remarriage is relatively less common than the remarriage of widowers. This difference between the sexes has an important bearing on the marriage market (Caldwell *et al.* 1983). Polygynous marriage among the Hindus is rare but restricted polygamy is allowed among the Muslims.

Because of the predominance of an agrarian economy, both males and females have a very young age at marriage. Early marriage of girls is based on the Hindu tradition. Many Hindus believe that it is a disgrace if a girl is still living in her parents house when she has her first menstruation. Most Bengali girls traditionally get married around the age of puberty or shortly after in the case of Muslims. The 1989 Bangladesh Fertility Survey shows that nearly 18 percent of the ever-married women were married before they experienced their first menstruation and an equal proportion did so at about the same time of marriage.

Custom plays a significant role in the formalities of marriage despite the strong influence of religion. Divorce is looked upon as a social evil and disgrace. As a result, the divorce rate is quite low in our society. Remarriage among the widows is fairly common. Under Islamic law, a man may take up to four wives. Ordinary concubinage is not recognized in Muslim law. A form of temporary marriage called '*Mutaa marriage*' is recognized in *shia's* law but not in *Sunni* (Jahabvala 1975, Husain 1976) and therefore is hardly practiced in Bangladesh. In formal Hindu tradition, there is no provision for divorce but among the lower castes Hindus, divorce or separation and remarriage are more frequent.

A related feature is the age difference between the spouses. Contemporary data show this difference is in the neighborhood of 10 years or so. Age differences are greater in the case of remarriage. The acceptability of such age differences is rooted in the traditional role of women and in the desirability of the wife being fecund, both of which are supported in Hindu and Muslim tradition. But among the educated and urbane, marriage for companionship is a growing ideal. (Maloney *et al.* 1981).

### 3.4 Process of Mate Selection

Bangladesh being predominantly a Muslim country, most of the marriages are traditionally arranged by parents or elders of the kin group. In arranging marriages, the intimate kin group functions as a marriage guidance bureau. Marriage is considered as a union of two families and kin groups rather than merely a link between two individuals. The bride should adjust to the groom's household and his kin groups instead of only satisfying the interests and tests of the husbands. So the interests of the parties who enter into the marital union, will be subordinated to the ends of family and kin group. In such cases, love between future spouses does not precede marriage, but it is supposed to develop after it.

It is a convention in Bangladesh culture that parents or the guardians take initiative or place a proposal to the girl's parents. But before this proposal is placed, the guardians make sure that the bride is upto their choice. They sometime esquire about the girl confidentially and observe her informally. In most cases the bride remains ignorant of this arrangement. The bridal side might be knowing this and accordingly encourages the girl to respond to this arrangement. This arrangement is made only to avoid the unnecessary embarrassment on the part of both the parties, particularly of the bride. In some instances, the parents of the girls are directly approached by the groom's parents; sometimes they convey their willingness through a professional match-maker popularly known as *ghatak* who earns some money out of it in cash or kind. Relatives of either family sometimes perform the job of *ghatak*. Necessary formalities may be done at this stage from both the sides.

In the selection of a bride, both economic and non-economic factors get priority. As in Western societies, the first consideration would be the social position of the bride's family as well as her personal qualification such as her age, beauty, complexion, fortune, health, understanding, virtue and her possible feature of adjustability to the new households. In contemporary Bangladesh, higher education for women suitable to the groom's needs in any situation is considered very desirable asset. The non-economic factors are the dowry and the gift that they claim from the bridal party as a part of their marital negotiation.



In selection of a bridegroom, the social and economic status of the groom's family and the health and industriousness of the boy are usually the factors that matter. The bridal party also prefers to see the boy informally once they are approached by the girl's guardians. When the parents of both families find that the would-be-in-laws are acceptable to each other in relation to their family tradition, the engagement ceremony takes place at the bride's residence.

Occupation operates in the same way as education to sort potential marriage mates. When a father thinks of marrying off a daughter, the social status of the boy gets secondary importance to the family well being. The opposite is true when parents look for mates for their sons. This is probably common in patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal societies. Therefore, marriage is a way through which social mobility takes place (Ahmed 1982).

Among the traditional Hindu families, the individual is restricted to select his/her partner within his/her own caste or sub-caste. Normally, class endogamy and hypergamy prevail in the caste structure. Although marriage of parallel-cousin is prohibited, but allowed for cross-cousin marriage and marriage with relative seldom occurs among Hindus. Cross-caste marriage is extremely limited among the Hindus. Where marriage is arranged, the interest of the families gets priority over the interest of the couple themselves. In many cases, the marriage partners do not get a chance to see each other before the marriage. Parish and Whyte (1978) term this marriage as 'blind marriage'. They also found this type of marriage to be prevalent in China before the communist regime (Ahmed 1982).

The early age at which the children are married, necessitates the lead by the parents arranging marriage. The parents in this regard play an important role for their offspring who usually do not have enough ideas or personal experience of life outside their household. When most marriages take place in childhood, the question of mutual liking and consent of the parties to the union never arises. Chekki (1986) has observed in an Indian study that a great majority of the respondents of the study population feel that elders should take the responsibility of marriage of children. However, a few youngsters, influenced by modern values believe that personal choice of mate is essential. The consensus is that, as Chekki observed, in matters of marital alliance, the

parents should approve the family of the bride, and the boy should approve the girl. This idea itself seems to be a radical one. More radical would be the idea of a girl's need to approve the above (Chekki 1968).

It is widely believed that arranged marriage is functional in terms of keeping social tradition. It is thought to maintain social stratification, affirms and strengthens parental power over the family members, helps keeping the family tradition and value system within the ancestral line, consolidates and enhances family property; attaches high value on the kin group and helps to maintain tradition of endogamy, if desired (Goode 1963; Chekki 1968).

### **3.5 The *Mehr* or Dower and the Cost of Marriage**

The practice of *mehr* (dower) has been an indispensable element in Muslim marriage contracts for untold generations and even antedates the days of Mohammed (*sm.*) himself. In pre-Islamic days, however, *mehr* was indeed paid to the father of the bride as a bride price and was the equivalent of a sale price. In contemporary Bangladesh, *mehr* is the sum of money the bridegroom agrees to pay the bride either at the time of marriage or at a later date (Korson 1968).

The law of *mehr* (dower) is drawn directly from the *Quran* where it is stated that "*as the women in marriage surrenders her person, so the man must also surrender brides some of his independence, at least part of his property, according to his means*". Another feature of marriage is the demand for dowry, which usually goes from bride to the groom. This could be in the form of cash or kind.

In Islamic textual tradition, there is no dowry (*Jautuk*). Giving of dowry (which is the wealth the bride brings to the marriage, not to confuse with dower) is the norm in practice and is very important in facilitating family upward social mobility. It also has the effect of economically unifying the two concerned families providing capital and enabling the family of the girl to improve social status by getting its daughter married to a desirable groom in a desirable reputed family. The amount of *mehr* to be paid, is in most cases, negotiable. In contemporary Muslim societies, the amount of *mehr* fixed by the father for the first of his daughters to marry, is the sum frequently maintained for all his daughters, other things being equal. Thus, while the *mehr* set for

the first daughter, has a stabilizing effect on future negotiations for all of his unmarried daughters, it also introduces an element of rigidity into later negotiations that are frequently found to be desirable if not necessary (Korson 1968). It appears that dower and dowry, so deeply woven into the cultural fabric of Muslim society in Bangladesh and so highly institutionalized, will continue into present form for the indefinite future as an element of marital choice and mate selection.

Sometimes a substantial amount of *mehr* is theoretically considered to be paid in advance at the time of marriage negotiation. Ideally, this is equivalent to an amount that the bridegroom party agrees to pay the bride in cash or kind of durable goods, such as ornaments. Controversy however remains on the mode of this payment between both the parties.

As regards marriage, the holy *Quran* commands that the wife alone shall receive the dower payable by the husband immediately after marriage. Islam encourages one to pay the *mehr* as soon as possible. The amount of *mehr* is written into the *nikahnama* (marriage contract) which is registered at the local office of the marriage registrar.

Marriage not only entails a financial commitment and implications on the part of the groom and his family but also requires a similar expense for the bride's family. These expenses however vary depending upon the strategy of mate selection. A better educated boy has a chance to marry a girl with relatively less education involving minimum bride price and with a better chance of getting good dowry in the form of Jewellery, cash money or property. Sometimes bride's family may also be expected to provide complete outfits for the members of the bridegroom's immediate family, which can involve a considerable expenditure of money. This expenditure represents an important outlay of funds and frequently, places a considerable strain on the resources of the family. If he reduces his expectation for dowry and increases his desire for paying a higher bride-price, he might be able to marry into a higher social class than his own. A similar situation can be found in other way around.

### **3.6 Child Marriage: Behavior and Beliefs**

Bogue (1969) classifies the nations of the world on the basis of median age of women at first marriage into four groups: (1) child marriage nations with the median age at marriage less

than 18; (2) early marriage nations with the median age of 18 or 19; (3) marriage at maturity nations with the median age of 20 or 21; and (4) late marriage nations with median age of 22 or over. Clearly Bangladesh has been characterized by child marriage and it has been in practice long before the British era.

The traditional child and early marriage in our society has certain functional features, most importantly, it enables a girl to move to the house of her husband and be socialized in it before her tastes and ideas become very firmly set (Maloney *et al.* 1981). A very young girl could be married off with less dowry and ornaments and can be protected from many social evils.

Child marriage was most pronounced in central parts of North India and Rajesthan, where babies might be betrothed. But the ideal prevailed in Bengal too. Hindus believe that if a girl is given marriage by age eight, the parents will achieve virtue in this and the next life. The father believes that it is a disgrace if a girl is still living in her parents house when she has her first menstruation.

Early marriage of girls is thus based on Hindu tradition. In Islamic law, guardians of a pre-pubescent girl do not have the right to contract her in marriage but the prevalence of pre-pubescent marriage in Bangladesh among the Muslim girls is alarming.

In many societies, a young bride is preferred so that her personality can be molded by both her husband and husband's parents. In many instances, the bride is much younger than her husband. An older husband feels proud to have a younger wife. He finds a younger wife an active sexual partner for a long time, who will, in addition, have potentiality to bear as many children as he desires. Moreover, she is viewed as a useful domestic worker for a long time. In some northern parts of Bangladesh, women are used in smuggling purposes across the border of the country. The husbands of these women go for the second or even higher order marriages. These newly married girls, who are mostly young, take care of the family when their *shatin* (co-wife) stay away from home.

This practice and behavior appear to be important in prevalence of early marriage in our society but traditionally it has not provided the main motivation for early marriage of women. The

main motivation was provided by divine sanction against girls who fail to marry before menarche and against the family that erred in this way (Caldwell *et al.* 1983).

An English observer, reporting Mysore society in India at the end of the eighteenth century, wrote of the Brahmins, "*unless a woman marries before the signs of puberty appear, she is ever afterwards considered impure and of merchant caste, that a girl must be married before any signs of puberty appear, for afterwards she is considered as being deflowered and incapable of marriage*" (cited in Caldwell *et al.*, 1983). At all time, parents consider child marriage as providing an insurance against precocious puberty. Even now, as Caldwell observes, a major control over the age at marriage of women is provided by the fact that many families feel deep disquiet and guilt over the presence of an unmarried menstruating girl in the family, an emotion that may be fulfilled by an apprehension lest she become pregnant and unmarriageable (Caldwell *et al.* 1983). In Bangladesh culture also, the traditional marriage system places great emphasis on protecting family honor by ensuring that daughters are married off before they could bring disgrace to the family through either becoming pregnant outside marriage or reaching an age where they could be considered as an *old maid*. People start to worry about *old maid* status if girl reaches the age of 18 or 19 without marrying. Among the rural people, a more sanguine attitude on this perception is that they consider a woman an *old maid* if she were still unmarried in their 15s. Such a perception is still prevalent in many East-Asian countries (Jones 1995).

The prevalence of child marriage is sometimes thought to be associated with the occurrence of marriage between relatives. Marriage between relatives usually occur at younger ages than that between non-relatives, partly because it had long been assumed and hence there is no delays, and partly because there remains no apprehension about sending young girls off to alien households. For society where mortality is high, a complete eradication of child marriage may be impossible. Parents feel strongly that they should have fixed all their children's marriage before death and also they should have seen their grand children. Mortality in many developing societies has improved and this effect will tend to reduce the incidence of child marriage in our society.

Bride-wealth and dowry as economic factors seem to play an important role in child marriage. The amount of dowry and bride price to be paid becomes significantly smaller when it is a child marriage than a relatively older aged marriage. In order to minimize the ceremonial costs, parents sometimes arrange the marriages of two sons or two daughters at a time, even if the younger one is not yet of marriageable age. This economic consideration has also contributed to the acceptance and popularity of the child-marriage system.

The main considerations for early marriage in Indian subcontinent is the high regard for the chastity of women; easy transfer of the bride from the domination of her father to that of her husband and the greater possibility of better adjustment with her husband and in-laws; endogamy, hypergamy, and the social prestige attached to such unions (Chekki 1968).

Factors other than economic are also in interplay which favor child marriage. In order to maintain social ties between families, child betrothal, marriage between children also occurs in contemporary Muslim societies. A daughter is betrothed and married as a child without the slightest reference to her wishes or ideas, in fact without any knowledge, on her part of the man to whom she is to be married. In some cases, the girl may find herself married to an old man, or she may find that she is one of the several wives, just a new toy for some wealthy man of her father's age or of a local community leader. In some cases two families, which have been in good tie for a long time even go on a commitment to arrange marriage between their unborn children.

This system of child marriage has been found to be prevalent in China. Chinese communists classified this as 'feudal child marriage' (Parish and Whyte 1975). This practice is also found in Iranian community (Momeni 1972). Jewish girls are betrothed when they are very young, eight or nine but not married until they are about sixteen and as a rule, there is a great disparity in age between husband and wife (Rice 1923)

Most marriages in Bangladesh are arranged by the elders, who are often motivated to make such arrangement for their prospective daughters (sons) early in their life time, sometimes even before their children reach puberty. It is a common saying in Bangladesh that parents wish to attend the wedding of their children before they themselves die. This mental orientation has a

great bearing on the parents' attitude toward age at marriage. Still further religious prescription and economic exchange involved in marriage (i.e. dower) is structured in such a way that yields economic disadvantage for those who marry early. Momeni (1972) identifies at least four reasons for this: (a) the dower for young and attractive girls is very much larger than the dower for the older girls; (b) although many young couples establish their own homes especially in urban areas, many newly married couples live with the husbands' family and because it is felt that the young girls are more easily subject to subordinate status in their husbands' home; (c) young girls are fore-feared because they have a higher potential fertility ahead of them; and (e) Muslim men generally put heavy emphasis on sexuality and thus attempt to marry younger girls, who are sexually more attractive.

Because of religious and cultural prescriptions, permanent celibacy is not approved for men and unthinkable for women in Bangladesh society. The implication is that spinsterhood is one of the most damaging social disgraces for a girl. To avoid the disgrace associated with spinsterhood, the search for mates is underway when the girl is in the infancy. Families often promise their sons and daughters to one another when their children are tiny.

The traditional society in Bangladesh is widely held to have been pervaded by gender inequality in favor of men who have dominated virtually all spheres of public life as well as the decision making process within the family itself. The cultural and religious environment reinforced by stark demographic reality of high mortality and strong son preference precaptured the lower status of women as daughter, wife, and mother, and allowed them little role to play outside home. In the midst of pervasive social and environmental insecurities, women proved to be particularly vulnerable. One of the consequences of this lower social status of women is the early and child marriage.

### **3.7 Legal Age at Marriage**

The family law ordinance of 1961 sets the minimum age at marriage for the females at 16 years and that for the males at 21 years. This change was made by amending the Sarda Act of 1929 which considered marriage below the age of 14 for females and 18 for males a criminal

offense. There was an unusual rush by parents to marry off their daughters before passing of the child marriage act of 1929 resulting in a high proportion of young women married during the late 1920s. Despite the provision for fine and/or imprisonment for the violation of the ordinance, no action could be taken for the contravention of the ordinance so far as the minimum age at marriage is concerned, as it is difficult to challenge the stated age in absence of any legal documents to prove the age. In 1984, through a government order, the minimum legal age at marriage in Bangladesh was fixed at 18 and 21 years for females and males respectively. Such requirement is however hardly known over the countryside and has little impact on marriage behavior.

### 3.8 Divorce and Remarriage

*Quranic* law does not place a high value on divorce. Though Muslim men can repudiate their wives without assigning any valid reason, there are ample evidences to suggest that there is a growing sentiment among the common people against it and many people think divorce symptomatic of the immorality of times (Maloney *et al.* 1983). It is presumed that Mohammed (*sm*) permitted it only "if the parties fear they cannot keep within God's bound (Kapadia 1959). In original Islamic law, a woman had no absolute right to divorce her husband but could do it in some cases by judicial decree (Jahabvala 1975). Under Islamic law as codified in British India, and again under the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961, she could do so if it is written in the marriage contract or on various grounds such as impotency, immorality, cruelty, long non-support, failure to perform marital obligation or the absence of the husband for a period of four years. Maloney *et al* (1983) noted that people disdain the present Bangladesh law allowing a woman to divorce. The opinion in favor and against the issue of divorce, however, significantly varies across the different segment of the population. A few think that a wife has the right to divorce her husband but such right should be exercised only when the husband fails to provide the promised level of maintenance.

In formal Hindu tradition, there is no provision for divorce. The Hindus hold the view that if a person can remain married to a single person, God will provide him with the same marital



partner in the next world (the world after death). The preservation of these beliefs varies to some extent across the castes and sub-castes. The concept of marriage in Hinduism is a lofty one as husbands and wives are expected to adjust their differences in taste, temper, and interest instead of separating from each other. In orthodox tradition, a woman is to remain loyal to her lord (husband) for life, and even after his death. Therefore, divorce among higher caste Hindu is low; the elaborate ritual of marriage and the family network makes it difficult. But among the lower caste, divorce or separation and remarriage are more frequent.

### **3.9 Multiple Marriage and Polygamy**

Multiple marriage occurs because of two broad reasons-remarriage of widows and divorced women and polygyny. The predominant majority of the Bangladesh population are married only once. There are evidences that incidence of multiple marriages in Bangladesh is decreasing and without exception, it is considerably less frequent among females compared to males and in urban areas than in rural areas.

Polygyny is a widespread phenomenon among Muslim population. Although the practice of polygyny is more commonly associated with remarriage (and maintenance of multiple unions) on the part of males, several studies in Bangladesh have shown that proportions of females with polygynous background are of similar magnitude as those of corresponding male categories (Huzayyin 1976). compared to other Asian countries, the incidence of polygynous marriage in Bangladesh is considerably higher.

## **Chapter IV**

### **TRENDS IN AGE AT MARRIAGE**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Asia is in the midst of social transformations that are dramatic in pace and effect (Population and Policy 1992). Families, schools, and labor markets are all changing, generally in ways that broaden opportunities for young people and may ultimately alter relationships between the sexes. An important element of these changes is the pattern of delayed marriage that has emerged throughout much of the region.

A paper written by Xenos and Gultiano (1992) provides evidence that the age at which women are first married, has been rising throughout Asia. Despite this changing pattern toward late marriage, the Asian countries display considerable variations in marriage pattern. In countries where women have traditionally married very young (15 years or earlier), moderately young age at marriage is becoming the norm, whereas in countries, where women traditionally married at around age 18 years, the movement is toward late marriage (24 years and over). In South Asia, the age at marriage for women increased from levels under age 15 in the early part of the century to well over 15 or even approaching age 20 by the 1980s. The age at marriage in India increased by nearly 5 years over this period, from 13.2 to 18.1. Pakistan experienced an even a greater jump, from 13.3 to 19.7 during 1921-81. Sri Lanka, the exception among the South Asian countries, started out with a much later age at marriage of 18.1 years by 1901 than elsewhere in the region but it nevertheless increased to 24.2 years by 1981 in 80 years. Korean women marry much later while the Philippine marriages begin at more typical ages. But interestingly, one pattern is shared in all of the Asian countries, 95 percent or more of women ultimately marry.

The trend is less dramatic in Bangladesh among the South Asian countries. Nevertheless, the belief is that the trend is favorable and is associated with changes that have important social and economic implications for the country. This needs to be examined through empirical

evidences. To this end, this chapter has been designed to provide an account of the trends in the age at first marriage in Bangladesh over a period of approximately 70 years beginning 1921. The trend has been examined both at the aggregate and regional levels. Decennial census and periodical survey data have been employed for this purpose. In addition to these direct evidences, indirect approaches have also been followed to arrive at a conclusion as to the recent trend in age at marriage. These include, analysis with the marriage cohort and birth cohort data and the parameters in the Coale's nuptiality model (Coale and Tye 1961).

#### **4.2 Perceived Causes of Rising Trend in Age at Marriage**

The changes in age at marriage occur as a result of multiplicity of causes. These include, among others, social, economic, religious, political and environmental factors. Demographers and sociologists have provided possible explanations and arguments and counter-arguments in the form of theories and hypotheses followed by empirical testing to validate their assertions.

Goode (1963) asserted that the changes in age at marriage are associated with a common set of influences of industrialization and urbanization which is affecting every society. Theory forwarded by Inkeles (1971) in this regard is that the greater the individual's exposure to the presumably modernizing institutions, the further should be his movement along the psychological dimensions of individual modernization. He further emphasizes that these modernizing institutions have the capacity to affect the changes in the same general direction despite the influence of countervailing factors such as traditional socio-cultural value systems. His theory closely follows the assertion of Goode (1963).

Ogburn (1961) argues that though exposure to modernizing institutions can readily change one's material value system, it takes time to change non-material value system, which eventually adjusts to the material value. For example, the process of industrialization creates opportunities and openings of different types of occupations, changes in the material values of the industrial workers, and thus enhances the aspiration of the workers towards material achievement. Industrialization does not necessarily emphasize education, but it requires skilled labor. In order to achieve any skill, workers need some sort of education, formal or functional. Therefore,

industrialization indirectly influences the level of education which workers need to achieve. Thus, education and industrialization interact with people of different social classes in changing their non-material values.

Smith (1976) through his empirical studies conducted in some Asian countries, postulated that three basic keys of modernization process, viz. urbanization, expansion of education and creation of non-agricultural occupation will cause a rapid transition in the marriage pattern or timing of family formation. Smith's argument seems to be more convincing for the presently developing countries.

It is believed by many social scientists that the way the urbanization and industrialization have brought changes in marriage patterns and in family formation in European countries, the same changes will take place in developing countries (Ahmed 1982). Despite the variations in the manifestation of these changes from country to country, there is a general consensus that industrialization, urbanization, and education bring a change in social life irrespective of any place or country. In societies, where the traditional and cultural values and norms are strong, significant changes have not been observed to take place (Gupta 1979).

With this brief introduction of the rationale of studying trends and differentials in changing age at marriage in Bangladesh, we present below an account of this issue with both census and survey data in the light of the arguments and hypotheses stated above, that, changes in the age at marriage is associated with a common set of modernizing processes of expansion of education, industrialization and urbanization.

The main focus of the analysis will be directed toward studying the overall trends and the trends by regions of residence. The sub-categories of the region are Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi. The reason for focusing on regional analysis is that socio-economic development has not taken place equally in all regions. The ecological differences, cultural diversities, differences in the pace of development, and socio-demographic compositional differences brought about by the modernizing factors, have an effect on individuals' value judgments, individuals' decision making processes, and on individuals' outlook about social life. If this situation prevails,

then a differentiation in age at marriage between regions of residence is expected to be observed. We emphasize here that because of the lack of time series data on the age at marriage for the individual regions, we resorted to the cohort approach of studying the trend by regions.

The normative orientation of urban areas is much different than rural areas, as urban areas serve as threshold through which modernizing values are diffused in the society. In view of this, the trend values for the regions will be presented only in relation to the urban-rural residence. Other modernizing and traditional factors will be examined in a subsequent chapter to see their effect on the changing pattern of age at marriage.

### **4.3 The Overall Trends in Age at Marriage**

#### *Trends in mean age and proportion single*

The average age at marriage is a useful summary measure for comparing the distributions of first marriage. In absence of any reliable and adequate statistics on age at marriage, the mean age has conventionally been estimated from proportion single using an indirect technique developed by Hajnal (1953). The resulting estimate is called the Singulate Mean Age Marriage (SMAM). The measure is a synthetic one, that makes use of the data on proportion single from a cross-sectional census or survey and represents mean age at first marriage of those ultimately marrying by the age 50 for a hypothetical cohort experiencing the same age specific probabilities of remaining single. The SMAM does not, therefore, measure current marriage pattern as the ordinary mean age at marriage. Despite its inherent drawbacks, Hajnal's method provides a simple but useful measure of the age at marriage. We will use this measure along with other direct estimates to trace the changes in age at marriage over time.

Table 4.1 shows the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) over a period of 70 years from 1921 to 1991. These estimates are all derived from census and a few survey data on proportions never married. The SMAM displayed in the table under reference shows that there has been a longstanding trend towards later marriage in Bangladesh, which is still continuing. The census data show that the mean age at marriage for females increased from about 12 years in 1921 to 18 years in 1991. The dip in marriage age in 1931 could be attributed to the Child

Marriage Restraint Act of 1930. This act prohibited all marriages involving girls under 14 and boys under 18. To a certain extent, this legislative act interfered with the Hindu and Muslim personal law and thus elicited resistance from all sections throughout India. The bill itself was debated in the assembly; it became law on October 1, 1929 and was enforced on April 1, 1930. Many people took advantage of the delay of the act and solemnized early marriages of their children which might not have taken place in the ordinary course of time (ESCAP 1980).

Age at marriage for females in 1951 is found to be somewhat higher than that of 1961. This anomaly can be explained as a consequence of emergence of Pakistan as an independent country from British India in 1947. During the immediate post-liberation period, many people migrated in and out of the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and there was dislocation in every aspect of the society and the economy. As a result, people had to postpone their marriage at least for a few years. This might have pushed up the age at marriage in 1951 (ESCAP 1980).

The Bangladesh Fertility Survey data of both 1975 and 1989 also show a clear rising trend in age at marriage. Since the 1975 BFS, female singulate age at marriage has increased by 1.7 years, from 16.3 years to 18.0 years. The increase for men over the same period has been almost as large.

In many countries of Asia including Bangladesh, the proportions of people who will never marry, is increasing. Until recently it was rare for Asians not to marry at some points in their lives. Growing proportions of young people of Bangladesh are also remaining single much longer than in the past. Table 4.2 shows the trends in the female proportions single over the last 40 years from 1951 to 1991. The data from decennial sources show a remarkable change in the proportion of the unmarried population in the age groups 10-14 and 15-19 over time. The proportion in 10-14 years of age has increased from 75 in 1951 to 96 in 1991. Besides, the proportions have increased across all age groups.

According to the 1961 census, only 8.3 percent of females aged 15 to 19 were unmarried. By 1991, this proportion had grown to about 49 percent, a change of great social as well as

demographic significance. Figure 4.1 demonstrates more clearly this differential trends in first four age groups: 10-14, 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29.

The percentage of never married in the age group 45-49 indicates the degree of permanent "celibacy" present in a society. As we see, the extent of this celibacy in Bangladesh is a rare event. Except for Sri Lanka, Philippine and Thailand, such celibacy is also virtually non-existent in other Asian countries (Smith 1981).

The trend in increasing age at marriage is also reinforced by Bangladesh Fertility Survey of 1989. The timing of female first marriages in relation to menarche (puberty) is shown in Table 4.3. An appreciable minority (28%) of women aged 45-49 reported that their first marriage occurred before they experienced their first menstruation. This proportion steadily falls to a figure of 11 percent for women aged 20-24. This downward trend is an indication of the rising trend in female age at marriage over time.

#### ***Trends by cohorts***

Further evidences on the rising trend in age at marriage are provided by proportions single from household data in conjunction with the age at marriage from individual survey data of 1989 BFS. These data provide estimates of cohort trend in age at marriage. These estimates are shown in Table 4.4. The horizontal age-groups (labeled current age), shown in the table under reference represent the cohort in question cross-classified by age at marriage. For all cohorts, the percentages who married before specified ages, consistently show downward trend from the oldest to the youngest cohort. For instance, the percentage who first married before age 18, falls from 95 percent among the women aged 45-49 to 73 percent for women currently aged 20-24. This confirms a clear-cut monotonic trend towards later age at marriage. Median ages by cohort have also been shown at the bottom of the table. Comparison of these averages reveals that there has been a rise of about two years in the median age at marriage between the oldest and the youngest cohorts.

The increasing trend in the age at marriage is further indicated by the 1989 BFS data when mean and median ages at marriage are tabulated by year of birth (birth cohort) and year of

marriage (marriage cohort) of the respondents. These averages are shown in Table 4.5 for birth cohorts and in Table 4.6 for marriage cohorts.

For the cohort born before 1943, the average age at marriage was 14.3 years, which rose to 15.9 years for the 1963-67 birth cohort with some irregularities for the later cohorts. The increasing trend is more clearly evident from the data presented in Table 4.6 by marriage cohorts. The median values presented in the table depict the same phenomenon. The marriage cohorts provide experience of marriage performance, relatively of more recent years, because of the shorter intervals between date of marriage and date of interview and thus are likely to yield relatively more accurate and stable estimates of age at marriage than the birth cohort estimates. Comparison of the results presented in Tables 4.5 and 4.6 tends to confirm that age at first marriage in Bangladesh has possibly increased by only 2 years during the last 40 years or so. This change in age at marriage over a long 40-year period is rather too small compared to other countries in South Asia. In India, for example the female age at marriage increased by nearly five years from 13.2 to 18.1 beginning early part of this century to 1980s. The increase is even higher in Pakistan with 13.3 in 1921 to 19.7 in 1981 (Population and Policy 1992).

The single-year trend in age at marriage both in terms of birth cohort and marriage cohort are displayed in Figures 4.2 and 4.3. As Figure 4.2 shows, the respondents born before 1940 had an age at marriage in the neighborhood of 14 years. This continued to rise almost monotonically and reached to a peak value of 16 years in around 1965 which thereafter showed a declining trend. The downward trend is associated with the age at marriage of the respondents belonging to the younger cohort, the members of which have not yet completed their marriage performance. This explains partially the lower mean age at marriage for the most recent period. As the marriage cohort figure (Figure 4.3) shows, the age at marriage has steadily increased from less than 10 years for those who were married before 1950 to over 16 years for those who were married after 1985, immediately prior to the survey date.



***Trends in parameters of Coale's model of nuptiality:***

The trend in age at first marriage can further be studied with the Coale's nuptiality model (Coale 1971). Coale examined the evolution of the risk of marriage with age in specific cohorts using a double exponential so that the model could be determined by three parameters  $a_0$ ,  $k$  and  $c$  where

$a_0$  : the earliest age at which a significant number of first marriages takes place

$k$ : the time-scale during which first marriage takes place and

$c$ : a level that denotes the proportions of women who ultimately marry indicating the proportions ever married in a cohort when first marriage has effectively ceased.

When  $k=1$ , the first marriage will be spread out over a range of 40 years, so that a women who reaches the age  $a_0 + 40$  without ever having been married, is unlikely to do so. For  $k$  greater than or less than 1, this period of 40 years is extended or reduced proportionately.

Two other measures  $A_0$  and  $A$  can be derived using the values  $a_0$  and  $k$ :

$$A_0 = 40k \text{ and } A = a_0 + A_0$$

The values of the  $A_0$  measures the age span within which the majority of first marriages occur and  $A$ , the maximum age beyond which first marriages are unlikely to take place.

The values of the above parameters calculated for different time periods from different data sources for females are displayed in Table 4.7.

The shift in the age at which a significant number of marriages takes place ( $a_0$ ) is found to rise from as low as 10.6 in 1951 to as high as 12.3 in 1989. Moreover the expansion of the period in which the marriage takes place ( $A_0$ ) from 12.4 years in 1951 to 20.8 years in 1989 is suggestive of the change in the pace of marriages. The monotonic increase of  $A$  values indicates that the scope of marriage for Bangladeshi women has significantly widened over time. All the estimated parameters suggest that the initial age at which marriage takes place has risen and at the same time they are being distributed over a wide range. It is worth to note that the value of  $c$  has remained static being closer to 1, suggesting that the marriage is still universal in Bangladesh.

#### 4.4 Regional Patterns in Trends in Age at Marriage

The 1989 BFS data have shown an upward trend in age at marriage for the country as a whole over the last 50 years. Has this increase been uniform throughout the country? Has there been any disparity in the changes in age at marriage due to place of residence or by region of residence? The trend in the age at marriage by the above background variables has been examined through cohort approach for each region. Both birth cohort and marriage cohort approaches have been followed for this purpose.

For the sake of convenience, the birth cohort has been studied with three birth segments namely the cohort born before 1950, the cohort born between 1950 and 1960 and the cohort born after 1960. These three cohorts roughly correspond to three consecutive current age groups of the respondents viz. 40 years and above, between 30 and 39 years and under 30 years. The marriage cohorts represent the marriages that occurred before 1970, between 1970 and 1979 and that occurred in 1980 and later.

##### *Trends by region of residence:*

Table 4.8 presents the mean and median age at marriage for the three birth cohorts by region of residence and by urban-rural breakdown of current residence. Comparison shows that for the initial age cohort (before 1950), the mean age at marriage in Chittagong division was the highest (14.8 years) among the four zones followed by Rajshahi (14.6 years), while Khulna had the lowest (14.3 years) mean age at marriage. A similar pattern is also observed with the median age at marriage. Interestingly, this pattern remains unchanged throughout the study period covering the three birth cohorts. The comparison of the cohort averages suggests that the increase in mean age at marriage was much faster prior to 1960, which seemed to have slowed down in recent years. Examination of these trend values by divisions demonstrates that Chittagong experienced the highest (6.1%) relative rise in the age at marriage from the oldest cohort (born before 1950) to the intermediate cohort (born between 1950 and 1960), but the rise was much slower between the intermediate cohort and the youngest (born after 1960) cohort, averaging around one percent. This trend is uniformly consistent for all the divisions.

The birth cohort analysis permits us to trace the changes in age at marriage approximately for a period of 40 years between 1938 and 1978. The overall relative change in age at marriage for the country as a whole between the oldest cohort and the youngest cohort is 7.6 percent with 8.3 percent in Dhaka (the highest), 7 percent for Khulna, 6.8 percent in Chittagong and 5.5 percent (the lowest) in Rajshahi. In absolute terms these changes amount to 1.2, 1.0, 1.0 and .8 years respectively for the four divisions. Neither the absolute change nor the relative change, however, was significant. The relatively higher increase in Dhaka may partly be attributed to its larger urban areas, higher literacy rate and women's higher participation in labor force. The overall increase was much faster during the period 1950-1960 with over 81 percent of the total change being attributable to this period, which subsequently slowed down in course of time. This is evident from the lower mean age at marriage for the cohort born after 1960. This trend is maintained consistently for all the four divisions (see Figure 4.4).

The changes in the mean age at marriage between the intermediate and the youngest cohorts, as it was noted, are relatively slower than the changes between the oldest and the intermediate cohorts. An explanation for this stagnation is that the women in this cohort were all below 20 years of age and thus the cohort in question represents the experiences of a truncated group of women who have not yet completed their marriage performances. Further, detailed investigation of data revealed that nearly 12 percent in the oldest cohort (before 1950) and 16 percent in the intermediate cohort (1950-1960) of the sample women had age at marriage beyond 17, while for the youngest cohort, none of them had age at marriage of this magnitude. This truncation effect has tended to produce a downturn in the mean age giving an impression that age at marriage has decreased in recent times. Examination of the single year trend presented in Figure 4.2 reflects a downward trend in age at marriage for those who were born after 1965. On the contrary, Figure 4.3 based on the marriage cohort data, however, shows a clear rise in the age at marriage in recent years. Figure 4.4 compares the trends in age at marriage by regions of residence. As this figure demonstrates, the regional patterns of changes are indistinguishable over the entire period under study.

*Trends by residence:*

The overall increasing trend in the age at marriage has been shared by both urban and rural areas. For the country as a whole, the relative change in age at marriage in rural areas is somewhat slower (6.9%) as compared to the urban area (7.4%).

Almost uniformly, the changes in the regional mean age had been relatively more rapid for urban areas except for Khulna. In line with the overall pattern, the changes were more pronounced for the period 1950-1960 in the urban areas and less so for rural areas beyond this period. This pattern seemed to have reversed to some extent for those who got married after 1960, as the relative change for rural areas was somewhat faster (1.2%), while the urban areas had experienced moderate decline (for example for Khulna and Rajshahi). A similar change is evident from the changes in cohort means corresponding to the cohort born between 1950 and 1960 and that after 1960.

Tabulation of age at marriage depicted a similar trend and pattern in age at marriage when type of current residence was replaced by type of childhood residence viz. urban areas demonstrated higher level in the mean age than rural areas (table not shown). The change is more pronounced for 1950-1960 period, with higher relative change attributable to 1950-1960 period in urban areas and lower for the period beyond this. This overall pattern seemed to be uniform for all the administrative zones.

The relatively faster increase in the age at marriage in recent times (closed to the survey date) in rural areas does not speak in favor of the general believe and assumed hypothesis of the influence of modernizing institutions. From a theoretical point of view, the urban area is expected to show a faster increase in age at marriage. Comparing all the mean and median ages across cohorts and the place of current and childhood residence between urban and rural areas, we also observed a faster increase in the age at marriage initially in urban areas. The relatively slower increase in age at marriage for the urban areas for the women of later cohort might be explained as a consequence of higher rural to urban migration of women who migrated to the cities and were married before the migration took place. Most of them probably moved to the cities with

their husbands who had employment there. The age at marriage of these women is expected to be relatively lower. In the case of women who migrated to the cities, either with their parents or any other members of the family before marriage, the age at marriage for them are also expected to be lower, because their early socialization and values related with formation of family and family life are somewhat different than women born and living in urban areas. Thus, these migrated women might weigh down the actual mean age at marriage for the urban areas.

The truncation-effect of the birth cohort can greatly be minimized through marriage cohort analysis. A clear-cut increasing trend in age at marriage is indicated by the survey data across the type of residence irrespective of the divisions. Table 4.9 shows this trend for three marriage cohorts: before 1970, 1970-1979 and after 1979. The overall increase in the age at marriage has been 1.9 (13.3 %) years from the oldest cohort to the youngest cohort. By and large, this increase has been uniformly maintained for all the divisions. In relative terms, these increases amount to 13.8 percent in Chittagong, 14.9 percent in Dhaka, 14.4 percent in Khulna, and 11.2 percent in Rajshahi divisions. For all the four divisions, the pattern of changes appears to be exactly the same as was observed in the previous analysis, with the birth cohort data (Table 4.8). For example, in the birth-cohort analysis the changes in relative terms were 6.8 percent for Chittagong, 8.3 percent for Dhaka, 5.5 percent for Khulna, and 7 percent for Rajshahi divisions. This tends to confirm that Dhaka division experienced the fastest change in age at marriage over the last 30 years or so. The least increase was observed for Rajshahi division.

As before, age at marriage in urban areas has been uniformly higher for all the cohorts than that in the rural areas. This is true for all the divisions. The rate of change in the mean age at marriage with the marriage cohort was also relatively faster for the urban areas for all the divisions. The overall relative increase for urban areas was to the extent of 16 percent, being 3 percentage point higher than in the rural areas. The overall trends in age at marriage changes by literacy levels were also found to be marked (Figure 4.5).

#### **4.5 Comparative Evaluation of the Trends**

The foregoing analyses have indicated that there have been marked changes in the trends and patterns in age at marriage in Bangladesh since 1938. Both marriage cohort and birth cohort analyses demonstrated that these changes were not uniform throughout the period in questions for the country as a whole as well as for the region of residence. The changes were relatively faster during 1938-1960, which thereafter slowed down to some extent.

As one can note, Chittagong division persistently maintained a higher level in age at marriage over entire period of study. In contrast, Khulna division showed consistently lower age at marriage over this period. This is true both birth cohort and marriage cohort data. For Dhaka division, the situation has improved over time as far as the absolute level is concerned. The situation in Rajshahi division remained nearly static. The estimated trends seem to agree well with the one obtained by Ahmed (1982) who worked on with the 1975 BFS data.

The above shift in the rate of change in the age at marriage in recent years have several explanations. It can be conceived as a result of differential impact of modernization, urbanization and industrialization. After the 1950s, Chittagong received attention for being a suitable place for industrial growth. The impact of industrialization has made a change in the structure of feasibility of marriage in Dixon's term of marriage (Dixon 1971). Following Ogburn (1961), it can be conceived that this change occurred through a change in material values accompanied by a change in non-material values regarding when to marry and whom to marry. As a result, the Chittagong division experienced relatively a faster change in marriage initially and thus gained the highest age at marriage, although it is possible that the age at marriage in Chittagong division has stood at a saturated level and thus did not show much change at a later date compared to the other regions.

A part of the differentials in the levels and trends in age at marriage in Chittagong division can perhaps be explained in terms of cultural differentiation. Dowry and bride price play an important role in the marriages of Chittagong division (Ahmed 1982). The amount of dowry and bride price in a marriage is considered an indicator of social prestige; the higher the amount of the dowry and bride price, the higher the social prestige. This attitude is true to some extent for all

the regions. Therefore, the economic demand for providing dowry and bride price contributes to somewhat delay in marriage in Chittagong division. Another factor, which might be worth-noting is that Chittagong has a high concentration of Buddhist people. Marriage among them takes place relatively later. This might have diffusion (social interaction) effect on the other religions. Buddhist value system regarding when to marry, might have some influence on the Muslim (or Hindu) value system regarding timing and feasibility of marriage. Thus, among other factors, which are in interplay, a cultural interacting effect might be in operation for the relatively later marriage in Chittagong division. In a recent investigation by Rahman (1993), it was observed that parents prefer to marry off their daughters to the grooms hailing from districts other than Chittagong, while the grooms in many cases prefer not to marry girls from Chittagong. This tendency primarily originates from the cultural and social practices and beliefs prevailing in Chittagong division. This is true also for a few other districts in Chittagong division, say for Noakhali and Sylhet. These districts are almost unique and peculiar in terms of language, cultural values and social norms. This distinctive nature of the society perhaps makes it difficult for the parents to arrange marriage for their daughters, consequently leading to a higher age at marriage in Chittagong division in the past.

The situation in Khulna division was presumably highly favorable for rapid changes. It maintained the lowest mean age at marriage over the last 50 years or so. Apart from other factors, Khulna is culturally very close to West Bengal (India) where the Hindu culture prefers marriage at an early marriage being guided by a number of superstitious and religious beliefs. This might work as diffusion factor to be responsible for lower age at marriage in Khulna division for a long time in the past. The growing awareness of this shortfall might work as a stimulating factor, thus leading to a faster rate of growth. Khulna, being the second important industrial zone, next to Chittagong, had possibly all the impact of a modernizing institution as we observed for Chittagong division. Urbanization in Khulna division was relatively rapid. For example, the percentage of urban population in this division increased from 19.6 percent in 1975 to 31.6 percent in 1989 (Table 4.10)-- a more than 61 percent increase in 15 years. This increase was much slower in Dhaka

(3%) and Chittagong (14.4%) divisions. The highest increase was recorded for Rajshahi division (73.7%). Education seemed to be a stronger factor in the rapid change in age at marriage in Khulna division. The illiteracy rate decreased by about 19 percent in this division (see Table 4.11). Other divisions experienced relatively lower decrease in illiteracy: 11.5 percent in Rajshahi, 13.9 percent in Dhaka, and 18.8 percent in Chittagong.

The decrease in illiteracy vis-à-vis increase in literacy level in Khulna was even more pronounced through the attainment of education above primary level. The percentage change with above primary level of education was the highest for this division: from 12.5 percent in 1975 to 16.4 percent in 1989-- an increase of almost 31 percent in 15 years. The corresponding relative changes were three percent in Dhaka division and 27.5 percent in Chittagong division. Rajshahi division showed rather a decline of 35 percent in the literacy rate which was compensated by an increase in primary level of education (Table 4.11). As data in Tables 4.12 and 4.13 show, illiteracy among the Non-Muslims decreased to a considerable extent. It is true for both rural and urban areas. For the rural Non-Muslims, a 25.4 percent decline in illiteracy was discerned, while for the urban Non-Muslims, this decrease was to the extent of 34 percent. Comparison of the figures of the tables under reference shows that percent decreases in illiteracy were 5.2, and 9.5 for Rajshahi and Chittagong divisions in the rural areas for non-Muslims, while for Dhaka, there was an increase of 1.9 percent. The corresponding changes among the same group were much higher in urban areas: 24.3 percent and 31.2 percent respectively. Economic pressure, which ensued in Khulna division after liberation might be another contributing factor for relatively rapid change in age at marriage.

Next to Khulna division, Chittagong seemed to have taken the advantage to have favorable impact on the changing pattern of marriage. But for the reasons elaborated before, much changes did not seem to have taken place. By all comparisons, Rajshahi division ranks next with respect to the above changes and legitimately can claim to play a vital role in the relatively faster changes in age at marriage than experienced by other divisions.



In recent years, age at marriage has shown a clear upward trend in Dhaka division but with a much slower pace compared to other three divisions. This slower change may largely be attributed to relatively little change in literacy and urbanization during the period 1975-1989. The increase in urban population was one of the lowest in Dhaka division compared to other divisions during this period. The literacy level also increased relatively at a slower pace in Dhaka division as compared to the remaining three divisions.

The above analysis has revealed that changes in age at marriage was rather faster during 1940-1960, which subsequently retarded after 1960. This has been substantiated both by cohort analysis and analysis by direct data of the last two Bangladesh Fertility Surveys.

By comparisons across the divisions, age at marriage has been consistently higher in urban areas. Both birth cohort and marriage cohort analysis showed that rate of change in marriage has been faster in urban areas. This change seemed to have gone in favor of rural areas in recent times. Economic pressure in the rural areas can probably be considered an influencing factor for this pattern of change in rural areas. However, it is difficult to demonstrate how strong an influence of economic pressure has been on the age at marriage. Economic pressure has a dual effect on the parents of young girls. On the one hand, it creates pressure for the parents of girls to marry their daughters off so that they can decrease the family liability and expenditures and on the other hand, it creates unfavorable conditions for the parents to accumulate or arrange money for the dowry, gift and ceremonial expenditures. The former effect has a positive influence on early marriage, while the later delays marriage. However, economic pressure outweighs the later aspects: accumulation of money is more difficult than maintaining a member in a family. For marriageable young men, economic pressure has a unilateral effect. Parents of marriageable boys tend to postpone marriage for their sons until their desired feasibility have been achieved by postponing marriage for boys and in addition, the parents do not feel any economic pressure on the family, rather they enjoy a full share of their sons' earnings.

#### **4.6 Limitations of the Analysis**

In studying the trends in age at marriage, we employed both birth cohort and the marriage cohort approaches. Through the first approach, the trend was analyzed by using data on age at first marriage according the year of birth of the ever married women. The second approaches utilized the data on age at first marriages by duration of marriage derived from the data on "years since first marriage".

As noted earlier, the inferences as to the trend in age at marriage could not be directly drawn from the age at first marriage by birth cohort, because, the younger the cohort, the more of their members are single and will marry at a later age. The younger cohort is, therefore, incomplete in the sense that many of their single members have not yet entered into the ever-married category, thus affecting the age at marriage. This has invariably been the case in the present analysis: the age at marriage has been seriously under-estimated. In addition, the birth cohort method involves some errors due to the fact that the survivors of a given birth cohort, living at the time of survey, may not be exactly representative of the whole cohort born during the relevant period in the past. The age at marriage of those members of the cohort who died after they were married, but before the time of the survey, may not be quite the same as the age at marriage of those who survived. This is because, both mortality and age at marriage are affected by certain social and economic factors. In fact, a larger proportion of persons who married later are likely to survive to the time of the survey than those who married earlier, because of the effect of differential maternal mortality. This bias affects more the data for the older cohorts for being exposed to mortality for a longer periods of time. However, if those who died, had a distribution by age at marriage similar to that who are alive, the bias due to this factor will not be serious.

The second method of analysis, by using marriage cohort also yielded results which are subject to the same types of errors due to differential mortality and migration. In this case, the death of a woman eliminates her from the marriage cohort. Further, the women who got married long before in the past, have the higher chances of surviving to the survey date than their younger

counterparts. Therefore, the mean (or median ) age at marriage obtained for marriage cohorts will generally be too low. This error is greater in the case of the earlier married cohorts than those married later. Hence, the increase of age at marriage over time is expected to be exaggerated. Inaccuracies due to memory lapses will also be greater in the case of earlier married cohorts.

#### **4.7 Summary**

Trends in age at marriage has been examined in this chapter using decennial census and survey data. The singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) estimated from these sources demonstrated that age at marriage has increased from 12.3 years in 1921 to 18 years in 1991- an increase of 5.7 years. The corresponding rise was only three years for male population from 21.9 years to 24.9 years during the same period. This rising trend in age at marriage is consistent with the increasing proportion of people who will never marry. The proportion of single females, for example, in 10-14 year age group has increased from 74 percent in 1951 to 97 percent in 1991. Similar increase was also clearly evident for the 15-19 and 20-24 age groups. The extent of celibacy is a rare event in Bangladesh, where only 0.2 to 0.3 percent never marrying women are in the age group 45-49. An increasing trend in the age at marriage is reinforced by the 1989 BFS from a downward trend in the pre-pubertal marriage. Nearly 28 percent of the women reported that their first marriage occurred before their first menstrual period. This decreased to 11 percent for women aged 20-24.

The birth cohorts generated from the 1989 BFS data revealed that age at marriage has increased from 14.3 years for those who were born before 1943 to 15.3 years for the cohort born during 1968--72. The marriage cohort data showed consistent rise in the age at marriage. For the cohort marrying before 1960, the age at marriage was 13.5 years, which increased to 16.5 years for the cohort marrying after 1985. Use of Coale nuptiality model also indicated a clear rising trend in age at marriage as well as universality of marriage in Bangladesh. To analyze the trend, the birth cohorts were partitioned into three mutually exclusive categories corresponding to those who were born before 1950, between 1950 and 1960 and those born after 1960. For all these three cohorts, the age at marriage in Chittagong division remained higher (14.8 for those who

were born before 1950, 15.7 for 195--1960 and 15.8 for those who were born after 1960) than the other division. Khulna division ranked fourth in this respect having age at marriage 14.3, 15.1 and 15.3 years for the cohort born before 1950, between 1950 -1960 and after 1960.

The overall absolute increase in the age at marriage between the initial cohort (cohort born before 1950) and the youngest cohort (cohort born after 1960) was 1.1 (7.6%) years. Both in absolute and relative terms, Dhaka division experienced the highest increase (1.2 years or 8.3%), followed by Khulna (1.0 or 7%), Chittagong (1.0 or 6.7%) and Rajshahi (0.8 years or 5.5 years).

Three marriage cohorts were also used for the analysis of trend: cohort marrying before 1970, between 1970 and 1979 and those marrying after 1980. The changes in the pattern of marriage as indicated by the birth cohort analysis remained unaltered with the marriage cohort analysis also. Between the two extreme cohorts, viz. Before 1970 and after 1979, the age at marriage in Dhaka division increased by 2.1 (14.9%) years, followed by Khulna (2 years or 14.4%), Chittagong (2 years or 13.8%) and Rajshahi (1.8 years or 11.2%). Comparison of the birth cohort averages suggested that the increase in the age at marriage was much faster (at least by 5 percentage points) for the cohort born prior to 1960 than those who were born after 1960. Similar trend was also suggested by marriage cohort data but to a lesser (1.1%) extent.

For the country as a whole, the relative changes in age at marriage as shown by marriage cohort analysis, was slower (12.8%) for rural areas than (16%) the urban areas. This pattern is maintained for all the divisions. The relative magnitude of the differences with the birth cohort data were 6.9 percent and 7.4 percent for rural and urban areas respectively

Literate women contributed relatively more (6.9%) in the increase in age at marriage than (6.3%) their illiterate counterparts between the terminal years covered by the birth cohorts. This pattern of changes persisted for all the divisions except for Chittagong, where the contribution of illiterate women was relatively more (6.1%) than (5.9%) literate women. The differences are marked (7.9%) for Dhaka division in favor of literate women.

Slightly higher relative changes were also observed for Non-Muslim women (7.4%) than (6.9%) among the women born between the oldest and the youngest cohorts. In line with the

previous results, the differences are marked for Non-Muslims of Dhaka division (10.6% vs 8.4%). Interestingly, one pattern is consistently shared: in all of the divisions, the increase in age at marriage was much faster for women born before 1950. This is also equally true for the marriage cohort data: women marrying before 1970, experienced faster change than those who married after 1979.

Table 4.1: Singulate mean age at marriage : 1921-1991

Year	Source	Male	Female
1921	Census	21.9	12.3
1931	Census	18.7	10.8
1941	Census	21.7	13.4
1951	Census	22.4	14.4
1961	Census	22.9	13.9
1974	Census	23.9	15.9
1975	BFS	24.0	16.3
1981	Census	23.9	16.6
1989	BFS	25.5	18.0
1991	Census	24.9	18.0

Source: ESCAP (1981, p.80) and BFS (1990,p.42)

Table 4.2: Percentage of never married females by current age : 1951-1991

Current age	1951 census	1961 census	1974 census	1975 BFS	1981 census	1989 BFS	1991 census
10 - 14	73.7	67.4	90.5	91.2	98.0	96.2	96.8
15 - 19	11.3	8.3	24.5	29.8	31.3	49.0	48.7
20 - 24	3.0	1.3	3.2	4.6	5.1	12.0	10.5
25 - 29	1.1	0.5	0.9	1.0	1.3	2.3	2.4
30 - 34	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.2	1.0	0.3	1.1
35 - 39	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.6
40 - 44	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.6
45 - 49	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.4

Source: ESCAP (1981, p.80) and BFS (1990, p.42).

Table 4.3: Percent distribution of women according to whether they first married before or after their first menarche

Timing of marriage	Current age						
	<25	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	All
Before menarche	11	16	18	24	29	28	18
After or about the same time	89	84	82	76	71	72	82
N	2521	2100	1886	1364	1168	944	11906

Source: Huq and Cleland (1990, p:45)

Table 4.4: Cohort trends in female age at marriage

Percent first married before age	Current age					
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49
12	2	3	4	7	8	9
15	37	46	50	57	64	68
18	73	83	86	90	91	95
20	83	92	95	97	96	98
Median age at marriage	16	15	15	14	14	14

Source: Huq and Cleland (1990, p:45)

Table 4.5: Mean and median ages at first marriage by birth cohorts: BFS 1989

Birth cohort	Number of EMW	Mean age	Median age
Before 1943	749	14.3	13.9
1943-47	1039	14.6	14.2
1948-52	1369	14.9	14.6
1953-57	1831	15.4	15.0
1958-62	2097	15.6	15.2
1963-67	2443	15.9	15.6
1968-72	2115	15.3	15.3
After 1972	263	13.7	13.7

Table 4.6: Mean and median ages at first marriage by marriage cohorts: BFS 1989

Marriage cohort	Number of EMW	Mean age	Median age
Before 1960	1027	13.5	13.5
1960-64	1086	14.3	14.2
1965-69	1340	14.6	14.4
1970-74	1736	15.0	14.7
1975-79	1996	15.5	15.2
1980-84	2296	15.7	15.3
1985-89	2425	16.5	16.1

Table 4.7: Trend in Coale's nuptiality parameter values: 1951-1989

Parameter values	Census 1951	Census 1961	PGE 1962-65	BRSFM 1974	BFS 1975	Census 1981	BFS 1989
$a_n$	10.6	10.0	11.0	11.9	11.4	11.7	12.3
$k$	0.31	0.33	0.36	0.40	0.43	0.41	0.52
$c$	99.8	99.9	99.0	99.6	100.0	100.0	100.0
$A_0$	12.4	13.2	14.4	16.0	17.2	16.4	20.8
$A$	23.0	23.2	25.4	27.9	28.6	28.1	33.1



Table 4.8: Trends in mean and median age at marriage by birth cohorts, region of residence and place of residence

Region and place of residence	Birth cohort					
	Before 1950		1950-1960		After 1960	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
<b>Bangladesh</b>						
Rural	14.4	14.2	15.2	14.8	15.4	15.2
Urban	14.8	14.4	15.9	15.3	15.9	15.7
All	14.5	14.3	15.4	14.9	15.6	15.3
<b>Chittagong</b>						
Rural	14.8	14.5	15.5	15.2	15.6	15.5
Urban	14.8	14.5	16.2	15.7	16.1	15.9
All	14.8	14.5	15.7	15.3	15.8	15.6
<b>Dhaka</b>						
Rural	14.3	14.2	15.0	14.7	15.4	15.2
Urban	14.8	14.5	15.7	15.1	16.0	15.7
All	14.4	14.2	15.3	14.8	15.6	15.3
<b>Khulna</b>						
Rural	14.0	13.6	14.7	14.4	15.1	14.8
Urban	15.1	14.7	15.8	14.8	15.7	15.3
All	14.3	13.8	15.1	14.5	15.3	14.9
<b>Rajshahi</b>						
Rural	14.5	14.2	15.3	14.8	15.3	15.0
Urban	14.7	14.2	16.0	15.7	15.8	15.5
All	14.6	14.2	15.5	15.0	15.4	15.1

*Note: The mean and median values of this table are based on date of birth and date of marriage data*

Table 4.9: Trends in mean and median age at marriage by marriage cohort, region of residence and place of residence

Region and place of residence	Marriage cohort					
	Before 1970		1970-1979		After 1979	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
<b>Bangladesh</b>						
Rural	14.1	13.9	15.1	14.8	15.9	15.6
Urban	14.4	14.2	15.5	15.2	16.7	16.2
All	14.2	14.0	15.2	14.9	16.1	15.7
<b>Chittagong</b>						
Rural	14.5	14.3	15.4	15.1	16.3	16.0
Urban	14.5	14.3	15.5	15.5	17.2	16.7
All	14.5	14.3	15.4	15.2	16.5	16.1
<b>Dhaka</b>						
Rural	14.0	13.9	15.1	14.9	15.8	15.5
Urban	14.4	14.2	15.4	15.1	16.8	16.2
All	14.1	14.0	15.2	15.0	16.2	15.7
<b>Khulna</b>						
Rural	13.7	13.5	14.8	14.4	15.4	15.2
Urban	14.4	14.2	15.1	14.9	16.8	16.1
All	13.9	13.7	14.9	14.5	15.9	15.5
<b>Rajshahi</b>						
Rural	14.2	14.0	15.2	14.8	15.8	15.4
Urban	14.4	14.1	15.9	15.7	16.3	15.8
All	14.3	14.0	15.4	15.0	15.9	15.5

*Note: The mean and median values of this table are based on date of birth and date of marriage data*

Table 4.10: Percentage Distribution of ever-married women by place of current and childhood residence and regions of residence

Region of residence	Current residence				Childhood residence			
	Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban	
	1975	1989	1975	1989	1975	1989	1975	1989
Rajshahi	84.4	72.9	15.6	27.1	91.8	85.0	8.2	15.0
Khulna	80.4	68.4	19.6	31.6	93.9	87.3	6.1	12.7
Dhaka	67.2	67.1	32.8	32.9	87.2	83.8	12.7	16.2
Chittagong	79.9	77.0	20.1	23.0	92.7	87.0	7.3	13.0

Table 4.11: Percentage distribution of ever married women by education and regions of residence

Region of residence	BFS 1975			BFS 1989		
	None	Primary	Above	None	Primary	Above
Rajshahi	79.1	9.5	11.4	70.0	19.0	11.0
Khulna	70.2	17.3	12.5	57.0	26.6	16.4
Dhaka	74.0	10.6	15.4	63.7	20.4	15.9
Chittagong	76.6	11.8	11.6	62.2	23.0	14.8

Table 4.12: Percentage distribution of ever married women by education for rural areas

BFS 1975						
Region	Muslim			Others		
	No education	Primary	Above primary	No Education	Primary	Above primary
Rajshahi	81.6	10.4	8.0	89.6	4.0	6.4
Khulna	71.6	18.4	10.0	73.7	14.0	12.2
Dhaka	3.6	8.8	7.5	71.8	13.8	14.4
Chittagong	79.6	11.4	9.0	70.5	15.2	14.3
BFS 1989						
Rajshahi	74.3	19.5	6.3	84.9	12.2	2.9
Khulna	66.9	26.1	7.0	55.0	29.5	15.5
Dhaka	73.7	18.9	7.4	73.2	19.6	6.8
Chittagong	67.9	22.6	9.5	63.8	23.6	12.6

Table 4.13: Percentage distribution of ever married women by education for urban areas

BFS 1975						
Region	Muslim			Others		
	No education	Primary	Above primary	No Education	Primary	Above primary
Chittagong	71.6	11.4	17.0	37.5	16.7	45.8
Dhaka	58.4	12.3	29.3	55.2	16.4	28.4
Khulna	61.0	19.3	19.7	66.7	14.3	19.0
Rajshahi	57.8	9.8	32.4	69.2	15.4	15.4
BFS 1989						
Chittagong	47.5	23.1	29.4	25.8	30.4	43.8
Dhaka	43.6	23.4	33.0	41.9	22.1	36.0
Khulna	40.8	26.9	32.3	44.2	21.7	34.1
Rajshahi	53.3	21.4	25.3	52.4	21.4	34.1

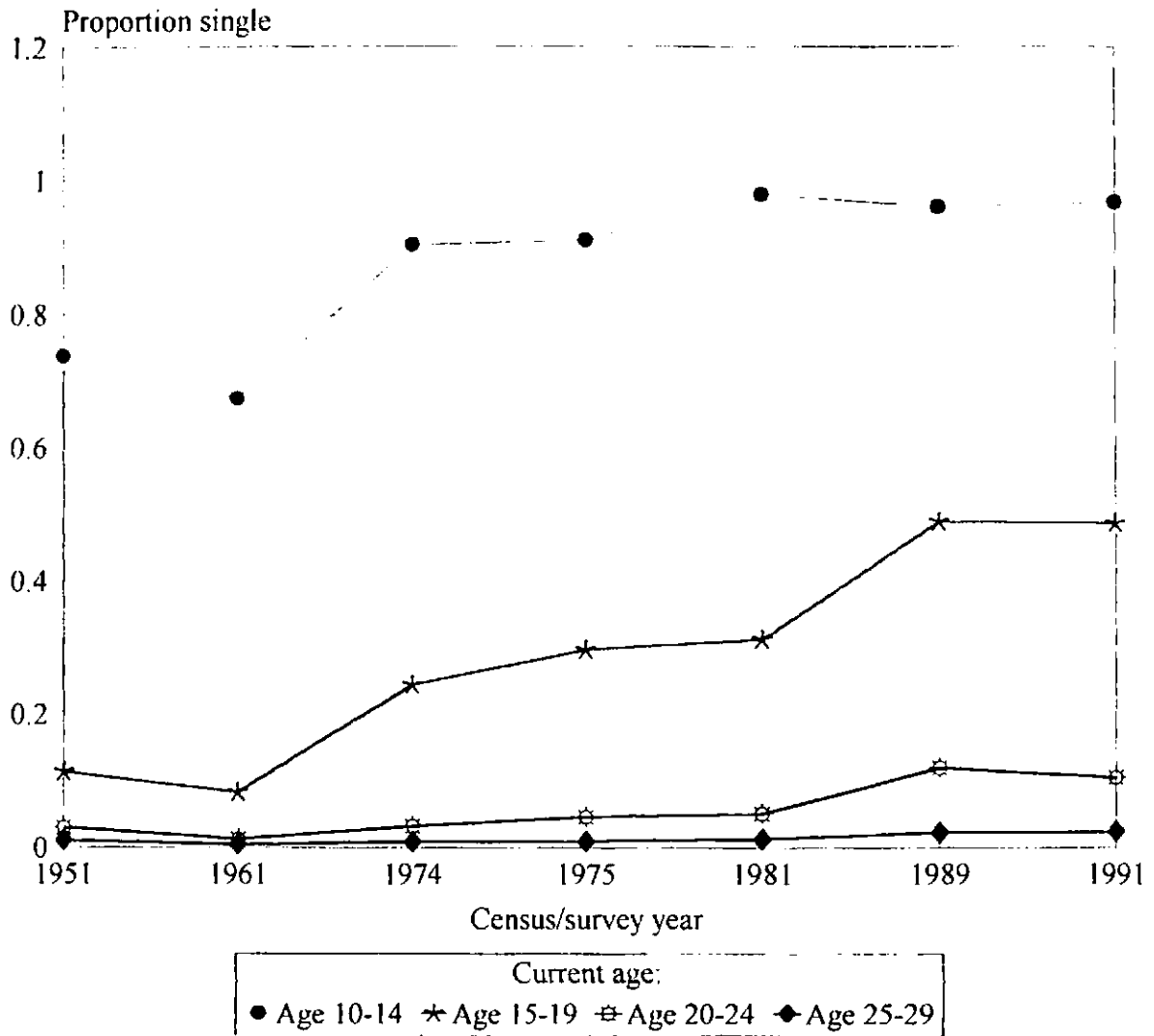
Table 4.14: Percentage literate among ever married women by birth cohort and regions of residence

Region	Birth Cohort		
	Before 1960	1960-1970	After 1970
Chittagong	32.1	42.2	50.3
Dhaka	27.5	39.6	40.0
Khulna	38.6	48.1	42.0
Chittagong	26.8	33.4	31.0

Table 4.15: Percentage literate among the ever married women by marriage cohort and region of residence

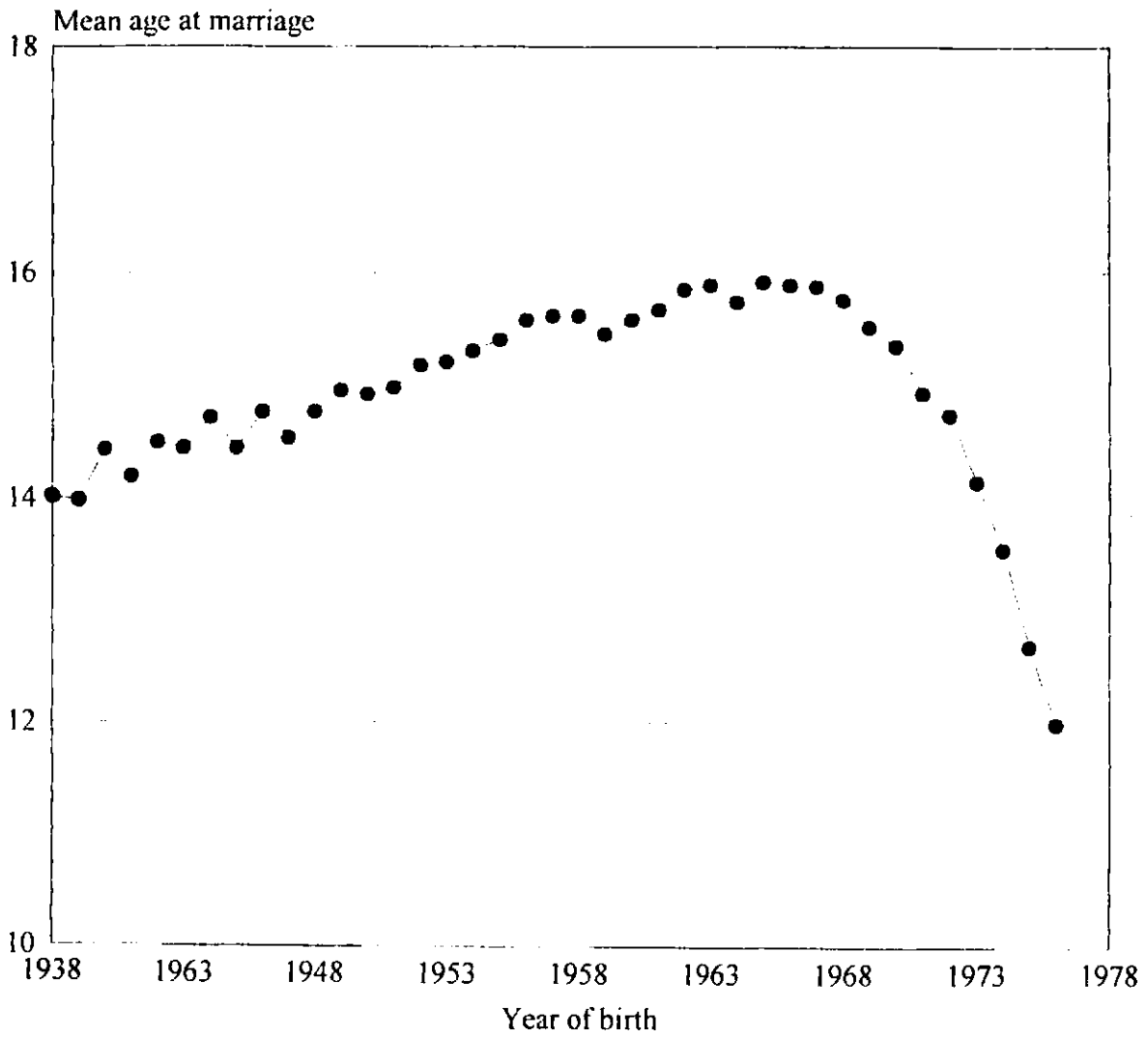
Region	Marriage Cohort		
	Before 1970	1970-1979	After 1980
Chittagong	25.5	38.4	46.1
Dhaka	26.6	36.1	43.6
Khulna	30.9	45.9	49.5
Chittagong	29.4	31.6	35.0

Figure 4.1: Female proportions single by current age: 1951-1991



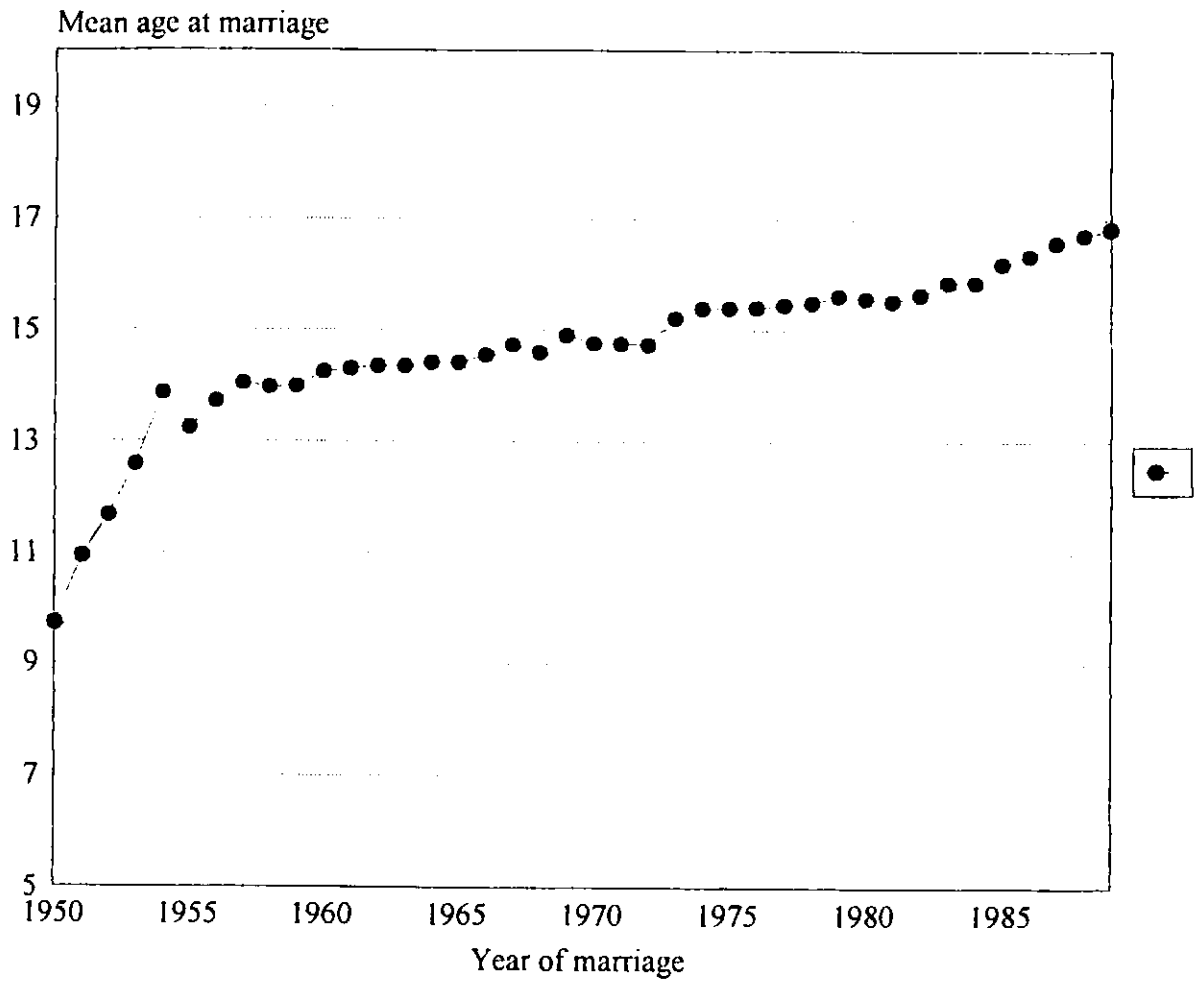
Source: ESCAP (1981) and BFS (1990)

Figure 4.2: Trends in age at marriage by birth cohorts



Source: BFS 1989

Figure 4.3: Trends in age at marriage by marriage cohorts



Source: BFS 1989



Figure 4.4 : Trends in age at marriage by birth cohort and region of residence

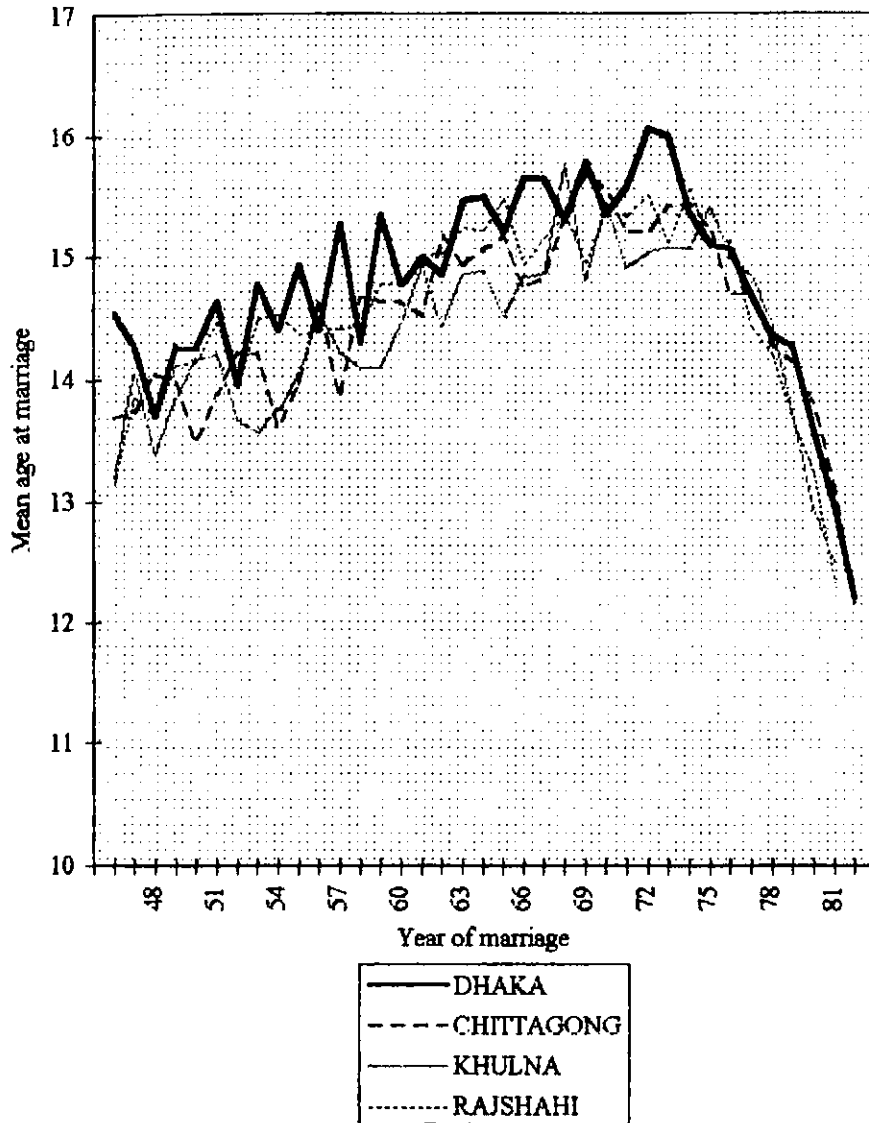
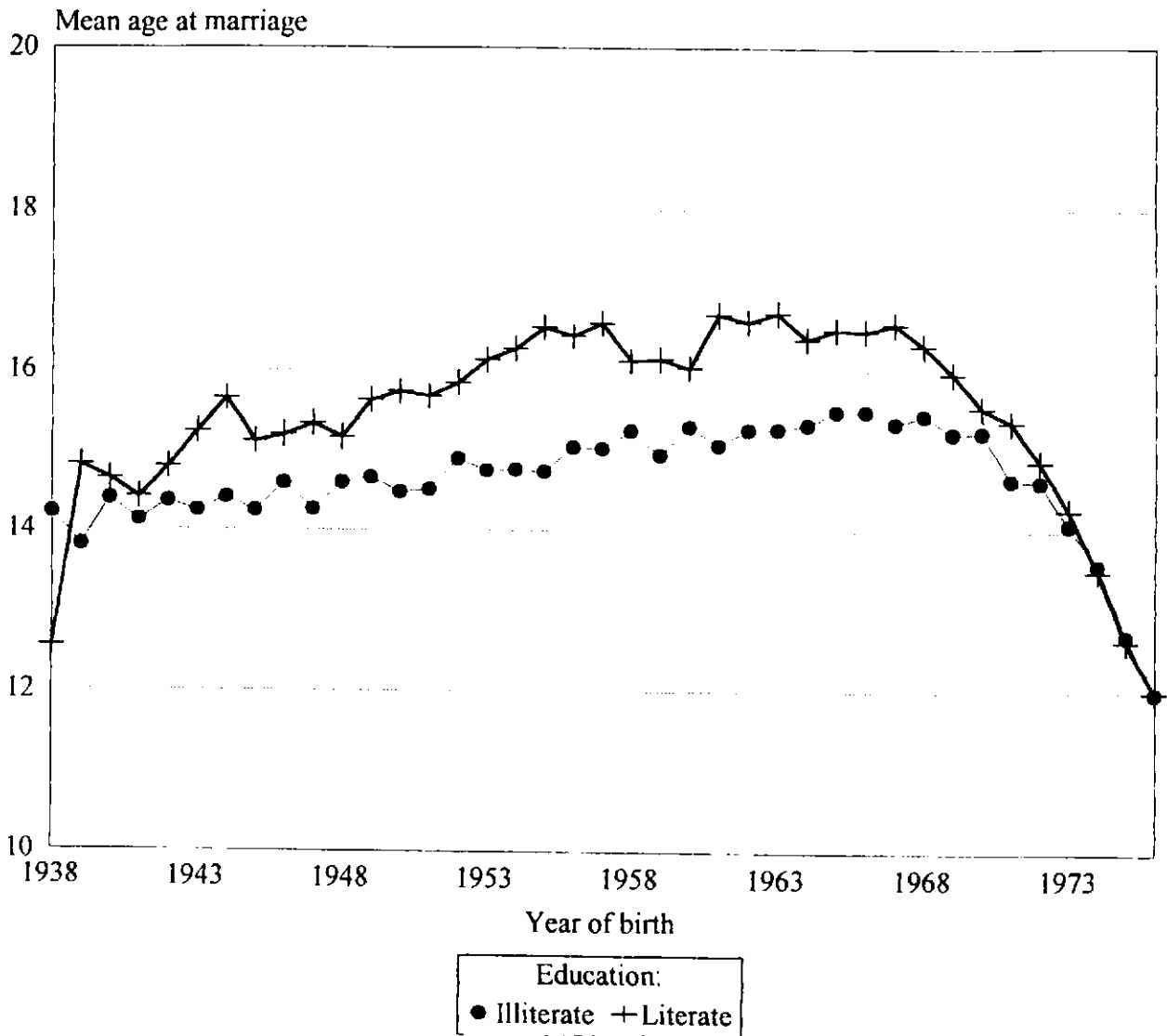


Figure 4.5: Trends in age at marriage by birth cohort and literacy



Source: BFS 1989

## Chapter V

### DIFFERENTIALS AND CHANGES IN AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

#### 5.1 Introduction

There has been a growing interest in the study of nuptiality not only for its impact on women's contraceptive and reproductive behavior but also in its own right as an important demographic determinant. In marital life span, this factor shapes the role and status of women to some extent. Marriage, as a demographic variable, affects the marital life cycles of vast majority of people and acts to change the compositional structure of any population by exerting its influence on the population. Davis and Blake (1956) suggested that marriage is one of the intermediate variables that intervenes between natural and controlled fertility. In particular, nuptiality governs most of the *intercourse variables* including age at entry into sexual union, celibacy due to divorce, separation and widowhood and number of times married.

The role of nuptiality in population growth has drawn attention not only of the demographers but also of the policy makers and planners for the fact that the postponement of marriage can contribute significantly to the reduction in fertility and in turn the population growth. As a result, this aspect has received pivotal importance especially in economically developing countries. This has resulted in the consideration of legislation fixing the minimum age at marriage in effort to check population growth. It must however be emphasized that legislation alone can hardly achieve this goal. A host of other socio-economic changes conducive to alternating attitudes, practice and norms regarding marriage must also take place before any major transformation is expected to take place in this respect (Duza and Baldwin 1977).

The marriage pattern is influenced by a host of institutional factors, both at the societal and familial level, an account of which is a hard task, if not impossible. No particular set of societal or familial factors shows similar pattern of differentiation in marital patterns in every society. These factors act differently to produce different marital pattern at different points of time. There are

certain factors which are highly conducive to change and there are some that are a consistent impediment of this change. This is further complicated by the fact that in most instances, the factors are interrelated to such a degree that it is often not possible to single out one as more important than others in explaining their variations with respect to age at marriage.

The primary factors that directly determine the marriage pattern are the composition of the number of single men and women at the marriageable age termed the '*marriage squeeze*', the familial structure in which they are borne and brought up and by which a young couple may be supported through the extended household and the relative social status of single women, including educational and carrier opportunities (Ahmed 1986). These factors interact with the extrinsic and intrinsic influence of modernizing institutions. If Davis and Goode's assertions on the relationship between socio-economic development and nuptiality patterns are valid, there should be a systematic differential pattern due to the presence of major modernizing factors on the age at first marriage, even though the country remains primarily based on an agricultural economy, which is regarded as a society of low age of marriage (Davis and Blake 1956). It is strongly believed that social development affects people's decisions about the timing of marriage and family structure. Smith (1976) based on his analysis of data from several Asian countries demonstrated that urbanization, expansion of education and promotion of non-farming occupation tend to cause rapid transition in marriage pattern and the timing of family formation. The experiences of Malaysia, Tunisia and Sri Lanka lead to conclude that urbanization and industrialization bring changes in developing countries in the same way as in European countries (Goode 1963). Gupta (1979) demonstrated that in a society where traditional and cultural values are strong, the pace of change in family formation appears to be slower. In Asia, as elsewhere in the world, trends towards later marriage and lower fertility have occurred in a context of urbanization and economic and social development. The social conditions that have provided the incentive to control fertility have also provided the incentive to delay marriage.

The institution of early marriage in the South Asian sub- continent is primarily a product of a certain type of social organization and a product of the cultural and religious values. Being

influenced by the ecological and environmental diversities and societal structures, traditional believe, religiosity, the individual value judgment and decision making process act to change the individual's outlook about the social life and thus age at marriage between religions are likely to be observed.

With this brief introduction, we make a modest attempt in this chapter to examine a few selected factors that are assumed to have influence on the pattern and timing of marriage in Bangladesh.

## 5.2 Prevalence of Age at First Marriage

The prevalence and correlates of age at marriage have been studied in this chapter, alongside the levels, in relation to a set of socio-economic variables. These variables include the characteristics of the women as well as the characteristics of their husbands. Among the women's characteristics, are current age, duration of first union, education, religion, current residence, childhood residence, region of residence, pre-marital work status, and religiosity. The husband's characteristics include education, land possession and occupation. Both bivariate and multivariate analyses have been employed in order to assess the contribution of these factors in influencing the timing and prevalence of marriage.

To explore the bivariate relationships, a series of cross-tabulations were ran between the timing of marriage and the selected characteristics. For this purpose, the age at marriage has been partitioned first into two broad age groups in terms of the timing of marriage: those occurring before 18 years of age and those occurring beyond this. The choice of this age as cut-off point is made on the basis of the fact that the minimum legal age at marriage for women in Bangladesh is 18 years. Although such exact requirement is hardly known over the countryside, a significant proportion (89%) of the womenfolk are aware that there is a minimum legal age at marriage (Islam *et al* 1995). As reported by these women, this age ranges from 15 years to 20 years between which the legal age lies. According to Bogue's typology of female marriage (Bogue 1969), this marriage may be labeled as a child marriage. Thus, it might be of interest to know how prevalent the child marriage is in our society and to what extent this child marriage is taking

place in different socio-cultural segments of the population where a significant proportion of women are not aware of the legal age at marriage. To this end, the age at marriage was dichotomized as falling into these two broad age groups.

The 1989 BFS data, on which the present study is based, showed that more than 87 percent women were married before the legal age. The average age (15 years) at marriage is much below this age. Both 1989 BFS and 1989 CPS showed that this age hardly exceeds 15 years. More than half (51%) of the women were reported to be married before this average age. Does the prevalence differ in timing of marriage with respect to the background characteristics or they maintain the same pattern? Does the changes vary within the sub-strata of the population if the marriage is delayed over a span of 3 years from 15 to 18? Analysis based on a cut-off point of age at marriage below 15 years is expected to provide an answer to this query.

If one goes beyond this, it will be seen that marriage still takes place in rural Bangladesh even long before the average age. Apart from preventing illicit sex and illegitimate births, which most parents are feared of, the traditional child marriage has certain functional and superstitious features. Most important, it enables a girl to move to the house of her husband and socialize in it before her tastes and ideas become firmly set. It is believed in most traditional societies that it is a disgrace if a girl is still living in her parents' house when she has her first menstruation. There is also a strong believe that males for seven generations of the pre-pubescent girl will not reach heaven. In the third set of our analysis, we considered this event to make a cut-off point for the analysis of marriage pattern. The BFS 1989 showed that a significant proportion of women (17%) was reported to be married before they experienced their first menstruation and an equal proportion did so at about the same time of marriage. It might be of interest to the demographers to look for the factors that lead to this undesirable and unethical events. Is there any association between this practice and characteristics of the women vis-à-vis of the society? The 1989 BFS data included a direct question on the timing of marriage. The question that was addressed to the ever married woman was: *"Think back to the beginning of your (first) marriage. Did you first*

*marry before or after your first menstrual period? PROBE: I mean did you start living with your husband before or after your first menstrual period?''.*

The wording of the questions was specifically designed to concentrate on the timing of marriage consummation rather than betrothal or *akth*. The answer was recorded as '*marriage before first period*', '*marriage after first period*' and '*marriage about the same time*'. Recent data suggest that the age at which a girl experiences her first menstruation is in the neighborhood of 13 years (Islam *et al* 1995). The BFS 1989 data suggest that the average age at first menstruation for those who were married before puberty is 12.5 years. The dichotomy of age at marriage occurring before puberty or after puberty will thus reflect a marriage that occurs before or after a woman experiences her first menstruation.

The foregoing discussions justify the importance of considering a cut-off point between desirable marriage and undesirable marriage with respect to timing, representing a marriage before puberty and after puberty respectively. This is also important from the ethical and religious point of view. Islam provides no sanction to marry off a girl before she attains her puberty. It is with these considerations, we attempted to study the factors that might be associated with the decision to marry a girl off before she experiences her first menstruation.

### **5.2.1 Results**

This section provides an overview of the differentials in the age at first marriage with respect to three cut-off points of the timing of marriage viz. (i) before legally sanctioned age (before 18 years), (ii) before half of the women in Bangladesh get married (before 15 years) and (iii) before a woman experiences her first menstruation (approximately before 13 years). We label these cut-off points as pre-legal, pre-average and pre-pubescent marriage respectively. The prevalence of age at marriage by these cut-off points across the background variables have been presented in Table 5.1, alongside the mean and median age at marriage to examine its differentials.

#### ***Current age:***

Current age is found to be correlated with many demographic variables. The chief advantage of using this variable in demographic analysis is that it allows for temporal analysis by

looking at successive cohorts of women and thus provides an indication of the trend values of many of the demographic phenomenon in absence of time series data.

The analysis revealed that a significant proportion of the women in Bangladesh were married before the legally sanctioned age. The pattern by cohorts demonstrates a most recent decline in age at marriage. For example, respondents born in 1964 or later (current age under 25) had higher proportion (87.4%) in pre-legal age marriage compared to those who were born between 1955 and 1964 (83.8%). In terms of the odds ratio, the recent cohort (current age under 25) is 34 percent more likely to be in pre-legal age marriage. The prevalence of pre-legal age marriage was, however, much higher among those who were born before 1955 (now aged 35+). Comparison of these proportions indicates an overall rise in the age at marriage over time, possibly with a tendency of temporary depression in the recent past. In general, the differences are statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 96.6$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The categorization of the age at marriage into pre and post-legal marriage age tends to demonstrate almost a similar phenomenon with statistically highly significant differences ( $\chi^2 = 434.2$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The proportion of women marrying before 15 for those who are now aged 35 years and above is much higher (62.2%) than those who are below 35 years (45.6%-47.6%). These results substantiate the fact that the age at marriage has increased over time.

An approximate downward trend in the pre-pubertal marriage is also discerned from the present analysis. As the odds ratio analysis indicated, the younger women (age under 25 years) were two-thirds (odds ratio = .68) as likely as the women of age group 24-34 to be in pre-pubescent marriage. This ratio decreases to 0.38, implying a much lower likelihood of the younger women to be in pre-pubescent marriage compared to the women now aged 35 years and over. The increasing proportions of pre-pubertal marriage with age also agree with this trend indicating that there has been a growing consciousness in the society not to marry off the girls before puberty.

A declining trend in the age at marriage in recent years has been reflected from the data presented in the table referred to above. The tendency can partly be explained in terms of the



incomplete experience of the youngest cohort whose marriage experiences have not yet been completed. However, more detailed analysis with different data sets should be attempted to address this debatable issue.

### ***Duration of marriage***

The duration marriage as a variable, shows a cohort effect in the age at marriage. That the younger generation is favoring toward late marriage is revealed from the age at first marriage classified by duration of marriage at the pre-legal (18-year) cut-off point. With relatively shorter duration in marriage, say of 9 years, 80.6 percent of the women were married before age 18. This proportion increases to 88.3 percent for those who spent 10 to 19 years in their marital union. With 20 or more years of married life, the proportion shows a moderate decline. This decline might be associated with the memory lapse on the part of the respondents who might fail to recall the date of the events occurring in the remote past. The overall differences were statistically significant at 5 percent level ( $\chi^2=98.4$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

The prevalence of early marriage is still alarming even if pre-average (15 year) cut-off point is considered. The proportions however, show significant decline from 70 percent at the longest duration of 20 years or more to nearly 37 percent at the shortest duration of 9 years, implying an apparent rising trend in the age at marriage.

Women with longer duration of marriage had significantly higher proportion ( $\chi^2 = 689$ ,  $p = .000$ ) married before they experienced their first menstruation. For example, women undergoing pre-pubertal marriage constitute nearly 9 percent of those who spent 9 years in their first union. This proportion increases to 16 percent and further to 39 percent respectively for marital duration of 10-19 years and 20 years and over. The results also tend to demonstrate a declining trend in the pre-pubertal marriage over time and an increasing trend in marriage age.

### ***Women's education:***

Education may have at least as much impact on age at marriage as a legally enacted minimum age. For countries that want to achieve a higher level of socio-economic development, the association of age at marriage with school enrolment, urbanization and female participation in

economic activities in ages 20-24 are moderately strong (Population Report 1979). In the four countries of Asia (Bangladesh, Indonesia, India and Nepal) with low rates of the above three factors, 57 percent of women age 15-19 are married. In contrast, in Japan, Hongkong, Singapore and South Korea with high rates (that is, above the regional medians) for all three socio-economic factors, 3 percent of women age 15-19 are married. The three socio-economic factors are interrelated to such a degree that it is not possible to single out one as more important than others in its relationship with age at marriage. These factors act to enhance individual value system in regard to 'whether to marry', 'when to marry' and 'whom to marry' (Ogburn 1961; Goode 1963; Inkeles 1971).

Education in a direct way delays marriage through longer stay in the school. This provides a women to acquire interpersonal communication, awareness of social mobility and higher non-familial aspiration. It provides a person with different aspirations in life, and with a capability of pursuing it. Economically, education is perceived as a major route for increasing the value of human capital in the marriage market as well as social life. This creates a direct impact on age at first marriage (Becker 1976).

Educated women are more likely to be motivated for participation in work outside home as the job opportunities for them are much wider than that of uneducated women. This will enhance their self-dependence and will ultimately remove longstanding discrimination against them, which has placed an unequal burden on them in all aspects of their life including their reproductive behavior.

For women, education provides a viable alternative to very early marriage, furnishes a break from traditional roles and assumptions, and offers new potentials for economic emancipation. Post-primary education and marriage are frequently considered incompatible for females in many societies, and thus where the force for pursuing higher education is stronger, education will always act as a catalytic change element to raise age at first marriage.

As we see in Table 5.1, early marriage (before 18) is most prevalent (91.2%) among the women who never attended school. This proportion drops to 88.5 percent for women with

primary level of education falling further to 68.6 percent for those who had above primary level of education. The differences are statistically highly significant ( $\chi^2 = 653, p < .001$ ).

The impact of education is more pronounced for marriage taking place beyond menarche. For example, the prevalence of pre-menarcheal marriage among the illiterate women is 20.8 percent which decreases by about 34 percent for those who had primary level of education, showing a further downturns by 80 percent for women having above primary level of education. Increasing age at marriage further above menarche (towards pre-average cut-off point), this proportion declines by nearly 50 percent beyond illiterate category.

For marriage taking place in the neighborhood of 18 years, the proportions still decline but with less rapidity. Simple odds ratio analysis showed that the illiterate women were 6.2 times as likely as the women with above primary level of education) to be in pre-pubescent marriage. In contrast, this likelihood reduces to 1.5 and further to 1.3 for those who were married in the neighborhood of 15 years and 18 years respectively. Comparison of the proportions across the educational levels, tends to demonstrate that heterogeneity due to educational attainment in prevalence of marriage is greatly reduced at higher age at marriage. This is an implication that the effect of education is more pronounced if marriage takes place extremely at tender ages.

The above effect led to a substantial variation in mean age at marriage with respect to education. Women with no education have mean age at marriage of 14.9 years which rises to 17.1 years for those who had above primary level of education. These differentials, as we noted above, could be made homogeneous with respect to the level of education through raising age at marriage.

#### ***Husband's education:***

Husband's education in general, is closely related to wife's education as educated husbands tend to marry educated wives. In the present analysis also, husband's education stands out a significant predictor of age at first marriage. Data presented in Table 5.1 tend to support this view regardless of the categories of the timing of marriage. The information presented in the table for the husband's education and mean age at marriage is found to have a similar pattern of

differences implying a uniform impact of education on marital timing. However, husband's education does not seem to be as strong as wife's education to influence female age at marriage.

**Religion:**

The religious composition of a society is considered to be institutional embodiments of values and values often influence demographic processes. This is particularly true for societies like Bangladesh. Religious value-systems, which influence individual values are different for the Hindus and Muslims. Although the process of mate selection is the same for both Hindus and Muslims, the traits and the importance of the traits are somewhat different. The caste or sub-caste similarity between the bride's and groom's family is an important trait for Hindus, whereas, such considerations are absent among Muslims, because of a more egalitarian social system. In addition, social class within the caste or sub-caste is another dimension of considerations. This also exists among the Muslims. The age at marriage within the Hindus varies widely across caste line (Afzal *et al.* 1973): the higher caste Hindus have relatively a higher mean age at marriage. Part of this difference stems from the desire for more education among the higher caste Hindus. Thus, in an indirect way, the diversity of Hindu castes or sub-castes over the regions and place of residence squeezes the marriage market for Hindus. Thus, they run through a longer waiting time for mate selection resulting in a higher mean age at marriage for the Hindus..

The concern of economic benefit in terms of marriage cost, from early marriage does not differ between religions. As it is economically more viable to arrange for an early marriage, the families of either religion do not attach much value to education, rather find marrying off their daughters economically more profitable.

As we see in the present analysis, the prevalence of marriage significantly varies between religions. Muslim girls have much higher likelihood of being married earlier. The three sets of proportions presented against the three cut-off points across religion in the table clearly demonstrate this feature. The differences in the prevalence of marriage between Muslims and Non-Muslims are 5.2 percent, 13.6 percent and 33.6 percent for those who had pre-legal, pre-average and pre-pubescent marriages respectively. This trend seems to indicate that Muslim girls

are at a much higher risk of being married earlier than others at all times. For examples, odds ratio analysis depicted that Muslim girls are 1.7 times as likely as the Non-Muslim girls to get married before menarche. This ratio decreases to 1.5 if marriage can be delayed to 18 years, implying a reduction of more than 12 percent in the likelihood of marriage among the Muslim girls. The reduction in the prevalence vis-à-vis in the likelihood simply indicates that religious differences in marriage with respect to age will be greatly minimized if age at marriage can be raised.

***Religiosity:***

In almost all societies, religiosity tends to determine the marriage pattern to a great extent through differential beliefs, superstitions and attitude. In the 1989 BFS, religiosity was included as a social attribute. This was measured by two questions. The first enquired as to whether the household observes religious practices more strictly or less strictly than other households in the locality. The second question was framed to ascertain as to whether the respondents worship every day or not. These two attributes were examined to see whether the timing of marriage varies with respect to these characteristics. We note that observance of religion in the household has no impact on the timing of marriage. Those who were reported to be living in households observing religious activities 'less strictly' were marginally more likely (odds ratio=1.2) to be in pre-menarcheal marriage. This difference is greatly reduced as age at marriage is raised. For example, the corresponding value of odds ratio for marriage under 18 is .89, showing that women observing religious activities less strictly have 11 percent reduced chance of being in pre-pubescent marriage.

The attribute 'frequency of prayer' is closely akin to practicing religion and possibly reflects more directly the involvement of the respondents with religious activities. Respondents who perform their religious activities regularly, are more likely (1:1.4) to be in early marriage than those who do not do so. The consistently higher prevalence under the three cut-off points of marital timing tends to substantiate this observation. The difference is more pronounced at the pre-post cut-off points. Examination of the above two attributes reveals that religious involvement promotes early marriage. This tendency largely stems from blind religious and superstitious beliefs

regarding early marriage which is deeply rooted in the society irrespective of the religious affiliation of the respondents. However, this relation may not exist among women with higher level of education.

***Current and childhood residence:***

Childhood residence expected to have enormous influence on the future behavior of a person because this is the time when he/she gets first and permanent impression about his/her surroundings. Individuals with urban and modern background are likely to delay marriage more and to marry less often than individuals with rural background. Further, there seemed to have a direct relationship of the childhood residence and current residence of an individual with respect to the age at marriage. This is because individuals with urban background have more attachment and access to the urban life- style and facilities than those who come from rural areas. This enhances their aspiration, desire and wisdom in all spheres of their life and thus influence one's vital events including marital decision and timing.

Table 5.1 shows the differentials in age at first marriage with respect to the childhood residence and current residence of the respondents. Both the childhood and current residences were classified into two broad categories: urban residence and rural residence.

Respondents with urban childhood residential background reported to have a higher mean age at marriage of 16 years. The corresponding mean for the respondents with rural childhood residential background is 15.2 years, the differences being statistically significant. Similar differentials exist for the current residential status of the respondents: 15.7 years and 15.1 years respectively. Further classification of the data on age at marriage by residential status, as shown in the following table, demonstrates that for the respondents with rural childhood background and currently residents in rural areas have the lowest mean age at marriage, 14.8 years. This mean is the highest if the respondents have all through urban residential background: 15.9 years. For respondents currently enumerated in urban areas but born in rural areas have somewhat lower mean age at marriage of 15.2 years compared to those who were born in urban areas but currently in rural areas (15.6).

## Mean age at marriage by residence

Current residence	Childhood residence	
	Rural	Urban
Rural	14.8	15.6
Urban	15.2	15.9

For rural areas, as in Table 5.1, the women are consistently more likely to be in early marriages which acts to make a difference in the mean age at marriage. This is true for both current residence and childhood type of residence. For current residence, the proportions are significantly different (18.6% vs 12.4%) for those who were married before puberty, the relative difference being more than 30 percent. For those who deferred their marriage toward higher age (from pre-pubertal marriage to 15 years), this change is 17 percent (from 53.6% to 44.6%) which reduces to 7 percent (89.2% to 82.7%) for respondents marrying in the neighborhood of 18 years. Thus, the results again point out the fact that the women differ greatly in respect of their age at marriage by place of current residence and childhood residence. The women with current and childhood residence in urban areas have considerably higher age at marriage. Further, the urban-rural disparity in age at marriage tends to disappear at higher ages at marriage. The urban-rural differentials will be greatly reduced if age at marriage can be raised. Similar interpretation follows from the results presented for respondents with childhood residential background.

***Region of residence:***

As in urban-rural differentials, the region of residence is also assumed to produce variations in the age at marriage. This variations primarily stem from the cultural, educational, religious, climatic, societal and other socio-cultural diversities and differential developmental efforts that largely regulate the societal norms and values. As mentioned before, Bangladesh was administratively comprised of four regional divisions when this survey was undertaken. As such, we present our analysis only for these four regions.

As shown in Table 5.1, Chittagong division maintains the highest (15.6 years) level of age at marriage while Rajshahi the lowest (15 years). Both Dhaka and Khulna divisions are at the same level (14.5 years vs 14.5 years) with respect to the mean age at marriage.

Similarly, incidence of early marriage also varies with the administrative divisions. Among the four divisions, pre-pubescent marriage is most prevalent in Khulna with 19 percent marrying before first menarche followed by Dhaka division (18.6%) and Rajshahi division (16.3%). It is the least in Chittagong division (13%). The relative chances of marriage before first menarche in Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi divisions compared to Chittagong division (with odds ratio=1) were estimated to be 1.54, 1.59 and 1.30 respectively, implying that women living in Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna divisions all had higher chances of getting married before experiencing their first menstruation than those living in Chittagong division. The differences were statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 52.7$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The prevalence of early marriage remains at the same level even if the 15-year cut-off point is considered with the same degree of statistical significance ( $\chi^2 = 75.4$ ,  $p < .001$ ). More women (55.9%) in Rajshahi division than the women in other divisions got married before 15 years of age. Khulna division ranked second (51.4%) in this respect, followed by Dhaka (50%) and Chittagong (43.9%) divisions. As the data show, Chittagong had the lowest prevalence of child marriage which is reflected in the higher level of age at marriage for this division (15.6 years), the highest among the 4 divisions. It is again interesting to note that with increasing age at marriage, the inter-regional differences in the prevalence rates get significantly reduced. For example, the difference between the highest and the lowest prevalence for marriage taking place before puberty is over 46 percent. This disparity declines to 26 percent and falls further to 4 percent at the cut-off point set at 15 years and 18 years respectively.

***Work status:***

In the 1989 Bangladesh Fertility Survey "work" was defined as work apart from doing household work for cash or kind, work on contract basis, part-time work, small business or work on a local farm. It was evident from data that a very few women (15.5%) work outside home for



money. It is true for both rural and urban Bangladesh. In rural areas, the main type of work for the illiterate women is the processing and husking of paddy. In urban areas, they work mainly as household servants, looking after children, washing clothes or preparing meals. In recent years, illiterate and poor women in urban and sub-urban areas are mostly being employed in garment industries and in most cases, these women are very poorly paid. Few educated women also work outside home and they prefer school teaching as a profession.

Work opportunities and labor force participation for single women are assumed to influence age at first marriage in a variety of ways and both positive and negative interactions have been hypothesized between age at marriage and women's participation in outside job. The actual relationship is likely to be on the development setting and cultural context. On the other hand, in settings where women are expected to provide market earnings to support the marriage, single women who work, may be able to achieve an adequate economic basis for marriage at a younger age than women who do not work before marriage (Sklar 1971). In that case, a negative association between age at marriage and pre-marital work experience would be observed. Certain occupations may provide more exposure to ideas and norms that favor delayed marriage. In settings where a single daughter's earning contributes to the household income, parents may have some influence on decision to postpone marriage (United Nations 1985).

Any employment in the modern sector therefore needs some basic education and the number of years spent in schooling activities may end up in raising age at marriage. In a developing country like Bangladesh, labor force participation of females in the modern sector has a greater impact on age at marriage than males because of the educational qualification for the females and lack of enough employment facilities for males locally. The involvement of women in modern pursuits is often said to be a significant determinant of family building behavior because it creates new goals and opportunities for women generally unavailable to them in the traditional system (Smith 1976).

It is encouraging to note that the Bangladeshi women are gradually participating in works other than their domestic work in a greater proportion. For example, the 1975 BFS data showed

that only about 3 percent of women worked before their first marriage. This increased to about 15 percent over a period of 14 years as is evident from 1989 BFS results. This trend is expected to have positive impact on raising age at marriage.

The effects of pre-marital work on age at first marriage is presented in Table 5.1. It is observed that women who worked before marriage, had negligibly higher average age at marriage than those who did not work. McDonald and Rahman (1974) also found in an Indonesian study that in rural areas women who worked before marriage married earlier, presumably because rural work being largely agriculture based included in household activity. Smith (1976) in a Philippine study also observed that rural household activities have little impact on raising age at marriage. The difference in our case is negligibly small, which might also arise entirely due to sampling fluctuation.

***Husband's occupation:***

In almost all studies on marriage, husband's occupation has been identified as a significant determinant of age at marriage. Husband's occupation dictates social status of a woman in cultures similar to ours. As a result, husbands with white collar jobs would respond to a delayed marriage norm more quickly than others, and consequently will have higher mean age at marriage (Shahidullah 1980; Driver 1963).

As can be seen in Table 5.1, early marriage is relatively more prevalent among the respondents whose husbands were agricultural laborers. This is true in all dichotomies of the timing of marriage considered in this analysis. The incidence significantly varies across all the cut-off points of marital timing. A close examination of the data reveal that occupational differences in the prevalence of marriage can be greatly reduced if marriage can be delayed. For example, the difference in the prevalence rates between professional category and non-agricultural laborers is 78 percent with pre-menarcheal marriage. The corresponding figure for the pre-legal age marriage (before 18) is only about 17 percent. This tends to indicate that occupational differentials in age at marriages can effectively be reduced through increasing age at marriage or in other words, the

disparities among occupational groups with respect to age at marriage can be made much homogeneous through raising age at marriage.

***Land possession:***

In rural areas, husbands with less land possession were more likely to marry relatively younger women. The results showed that husbands with less than two acres of land were 1.2 times as likely as their counterparts with more than 2 acres of land to get married with women not experiencing menarche before marriage. This likelihood continues to remain at the same level at the 15-year cut-off point. In both the cases, the differences are statistically significant. With raising age at marriage further, the differences become significantly smaller implying that landholding size is not an important differential at higher age at marriage.

**5.2.2 Multivariate analysis**

In the foregoing sections, we analyzed the prevalence of marriage by individual factors through a series of cross tabulations and focused on the variations in the age at marriage by those factors. The analysis is no doubt important for understanding marriage pattern and differentials but interactions among causal variables are sometimes so complex that simple bivariate analysis fails to isolate the independent effects and relative importance of the predictor variables under consideration on the independent variables. It is for this reason, multivariate treatment of the variables is warranted.

***(i) Logistic regression analysis on timing of marriage***

We present in this section a multivariate analysis with a set of independent variables that are assumed to have influence on the timing of marriage in Bangladesh using logistic regression model. We note that the age at marriage was dichotomized in the bivariate classification in three mutually exclusive categories to reflect the timing of marriage: pre-legal (before 18), pre-average (before 15) and pre-menarche (before menarche). The multivariate analysis has been performed here with all these classifications. The analysis showed consistent estimates of the parameters of all the three models almost in the same direction, leading essentially to draw the same conclusion as to their statistical significance. It is for this reason no attempt will be made to elaborate the

discussion on the models separately all of three models. The third attribute based on the pre and post-pubescent marriage will be used in elaboration to provide multivariate treatment of the data. The summary results of the other two models are presented only for comparison. The rationale behind this choice was that this attribute represents a more clear-cut division of the timing of marriage and avoids the distortion in the analysis due to possible misreporting of age at marriage.

The very categorization of the dependent variable allows us to use the multivariate logistic regression analysis with the coded value 0 for the pre-pubescent (before puberty) marriage and 1.0 for the post-pubescent (beyond puberty) marriage. The effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable is indicated by the odds ratios for each variable category relative to the reference category for which the odds ratio is 1.0. These ratios and the 95 percent confidence intervals for each are shown in Table 5.2. In Table 5.3, only the odds ratios of the other two models have been compared along with their level of significance. The odds ratios show the likelihood of occurrence of the dependent variable, dichotomized as pre/post pubescent marriage. Odds ratios of less than 1.0 imply a lower likelihood of being married beyond puberty than that reported by each reference group, whereas those greater than 1.0 indicate a higher likelihood. The confidence intervals indicate the precision of the estimated odds ratios.

A total of 13 variables, eight pertaining to wife's characteristics and five to husband's characteristics, were included in the analysis. The variables due to wife's characteristics include current age, duration of union, premarital work status, religion, education, childhood residence and observance of religion. The variables that pertain to the characteristics of the husbands are education, occupation, land possession, region of residence and current (urban/rural) residence.

Of the 13 variables, only 5 emerged as significant predictors of the timing of marriage in the multivariate solution. These variables are current age, duration of marriage, religion, respondent education, and region of residence. The results of the multivariate analysis have been presented in Table 5.2.

In the model, current age is seen to have the strongest influence on determination of age at marriage where the major effect is directly exerted. This direct effect can be termed a cohort

effect, which reflects the general trend of later marriage among the Bangladeshi women over the past several years. For example women in 25-34 years group who were born between 1954 and 1964, were about two-thirds as likely as the women who were born after 1964 ( which corresponds to age under 25) to get married beyond puberty. In contrast, those who were born before 1954 (which corresponds to age 35 and over) were 60 percent less likely than the women born after 1964 to get married after they experienced their first menstruation. Most of this effect of age possibly is mediated through education of the women. The older women tend to be less educated and the less educated women marry earlier.

Duration of first union demonstrates a similar trend of rising age at marriage: women in 10-19 years of marital union, were one half as likely as the women of less than 10 years in such union to be married after the first menstrual period. This likelihood is nearly one-fourth beyond 20 years of marital duration implying a decreasing trend in the prevalence of pre-pubertal marriage. This result, by and large, is in conformity with the bivariate analysis presented in Table 5.1 where the proportions of women marrying before the three cut-off points of marriage were found to increase as the current age as well as duration of marriage increased. Furthermore, this pattern is consistent with the one presented for the remaining two models in Table 5.3.

Religion of the respondents emerged as one of the significant predictors of the timing of marriage. Non-Muslim girls are significantly less likely than the Muslims to be married before their first menstruation. In terms of the odds ratio, a Non-Muslim girl has 43 percent reduced probability than their Muslim counterparts to get married before puberty. Both the bivariate and multivariate analyses presented in Tables 5.1 and 5.3 speak in favor of this observation. Again, the observance of religion is not a significant predictor of the timing of marriage as found in the bivariate analysis.

Large and statistically significant differences in the timing of marriage by educational attainment of the respondents were observed after controlling for other variables. As the beta coefficients vis-à-vis the odds ratios of table under reference demonstrate, the likelihood of marriage after first menarche rises steeply with the level of education. An woman with primary

level of education is about one and a half times (Odds ratio=1.4) more likely to get married after she experiences her first menstruation than for a women who had never gone to school. This likelihood is 4.4 times higher for those who completed education above primary level. Husband's education does not seem to exercise any effect in this respect. The pattern due to educational attainment remains the same for the other two models but its effect becomes less pronounced as timing of marriage changes toward later marriage (see Table 5.3).

Neither current residence nor childhood type of residence seems to have any independent influence on the timing of marriage at least at the earliest stages of marriage. The likelihood is however, somewhat higher among the urban residents to get married after the legal age of 18 years. This is in contradiction with the bivariate analysis (see Table 5.1) where the residential background, current or childhood, demonstrated differential prevalence with respect to age at marriage.

Regional differences also exert enormous influence on the age at marriage. The odds ratios corresponding to the regions suggest that, with reference to Chittagong division, women in other three divisions are less likely to get married after puberty. The likelihood is significantly less for Rajshahi division, which is consistent with the bivariate analysis. The results thus support the view that the regions vary substantially in their marriage pattern. There are two possible explanations for regional variations in preferring marriage before puberty sets in. A socio-economic hypothesis suggests that regions with low level of education among the females vis-à-vis limited excess to employment in formal sectors for the women are expected to experience relatively lower prevalence of marriage beyond first puberty. In addition, region of residence may be a proxy for ethnic or cultural boundaries that are related to post-pubescent marriage.

In line with the bivariate analysis, the multivariate results for work status of women also show somewhat higher likelihood for the working women to get married after puberty than their non-working counterparts but the differences are not statistically significant. The lack of association in the expected direction between work experience and timing of marriage indicated in the present study does not necessarily mean that this variable is not important to avoid pre-

menarcheal marriage. It simply implies that the duration of this factor is not prolonged enough to exert its influence on the age at marriage. This is clearly evident from the progressively declining odds ratios from .94 associated with the lowest mean age at marriage to .70 associated with the highest mean age at marriage for the non-working women.

Of the three direct characteristics of the husbands, namely, land owning, education and occupation, only education seems to have some association with the wife's age at marriage in the multivariate solution. Compared to husbands with no education and some primary level of education, husbands having schooling beyond primary level are relatively more likely to be engaged in marriage with girls who have already experienced their first puberty. The differences are not so prominent ( $p=.13$ ). Professional achievement of husbands does not seem to influence or motivate the husbands to avoid marriage with the teen-aged girls who have not yet developed enough physiological maturity for marriage.

Multivariate Analysis with age at first marriage before the minimum legal age at marriage (before 18 years) and that before average age at marriage (before 15 years) produce results that are not, by and large, significantly different from the one that we have presented above with pre and post-pubescent dichotomy of marriage. A close examination of the estimates of the parameters of the models associated with the three sets of attributes are summarized in Table 5.3 in terms of odds ratios together with their level of significance marked by an asterisk (\*) will tend to support this assertion.

***(ii) Multiple classification analysis (MCA) on age at marriage***

The studies on changes in age at marriage over time in relation to socio-economic and cultural factors have not been numerous in Bangladesh. This has mainly resulted from the paucity of pertinent time series data. The present study made an attempt in Chapter IV to study the trends in age at marriage for a period of 70 years since 1921 using the data from both census and surveys. Use of indirect information on birth cohort and marriage cohort provided a rough indication of the trends in age at marriage for a period of about 40-year period. Another important

focus of the chapter was to highlight the regional trends in age at marriage by urban-rural breakdown.

This section is designed to provide a detailed account of the changes, the country has experienced during 1975-1989 based on the direct information on age at marriage obtained from 1975 and 1989 BFSs through a multivariate treatment of data. This attempt is expected to focus in more detailed the recent changes in age at marriage and the contribution of the socio-economic factors to these changes. The changes in the age at marriage has been studied in this section first in terms of absolute as well as in relative change with respect to a number intervening variables (see Table 5.4) and then through a multivariate approach (Table 5.5 and Table 5.6). The basic question to be answered through this analysis is : do a particular characteristics of the women influence more than the others after controlling for these remaining variables to bring a change in the age at marriage over the period 1975-1989 ?

In order to accomplish this, the multivariate technique adopted here is the multiple classification analysis (MCA). The dependent variable is the age at first marriage and the independent variables are education, place of residence (current and childhood), religion, region of residence, work status, husband's education and husband's occupation. Two models of MCA were used. The first MCA was calculated with age at first marriage as the dependent variable and six women's variables discussed previously as independent variables. The second MCA was calculated with age at first marriage as the dependent variable and a few characteristics of the husbands as independent variables. The models were calculated for both 1975 BFS and 1989 BFS. The results of these regression analysis are presented in Table 5.5 and Table 5.6.

### *Women's Characteristics*

#### *Education:*

Educational levels are generally considered to have high explanatory power with regard to variations in age at first marriage. As we see, the results in Table 5.5 demonstrate such evidence. Among the included variables, education has the strongest influence ( $\beta^2=21\%$  in 1975 and  $28\%$  in



1989). The increase in the value of  $\beta^2$  is an indication that the influence of education on age at marriage has been rising over time.

The adjusted differences in the mean age at marriage in both 1975 and 1989 on the educational levels are somewhat lower than the unadjusted difference, but the patterns of unadjusted and adjusted coefficients are about the same. The higher ages at marriage at higher levels of education agrees with prior expectations. As observed in Table 5.4, the changes in the age at marriage over the inter-survey period have been less responsive to the higher educational attainment of the respondents both in absolute and relative terms as compared to the illiterate group. The near identical values of the adjusted and unadjusted means indicate the absence of inter-correlation among the predictors.

***Religion:***

Although minimal, the impact of religion on age at first marriage goes in favor of non-Muslims: Both adjusted and unadjusted means maintain these differentials. There seemed to have virtually no differences between the adjusted and unadjusted means for either religion, implying that religion is uncorrelated with other predictors considered in the model. Controlling for all other variables, the Hindu-Muslim differences in mean age at marriage increases from 0.5 years to 0.7 in 1975 while it remains unchanged (amounting to 0.5) for 1989. This implies that religion as a determinant of changes in age at first marriage is of little significance. This may also be seen from the relative increase (Table 5.4) in the age at marriage for Muslims (from 12.8 years to 14.8 years, a 15.6% increase) as compared to that for Hindus (13.3 years to 15.3 years, an increase of 15%). Both adjusted and unadjusted means demonstrate that whatever changes have taken place over this period, Muslim women contributed relatively more to this change (see Table 5.4).

***Current residence:***

Generally, women in urban areas are younger, more educated, more apt to be engaged in paid employment and thus are likely to marry later than their peers in rural areas. This expectation is generally met in the present instance for both 1975 and 1989.

As the results indicate, there is little pronounced difference between unadjusted and adjusted means. This again implies that the variable under consideration is not inter-correlated with other variables addressed in the analysis. As revealed by the coefficients, the contribution of this variable in predicting the age at marriage is somewhat lower than it was for the childhood residence. Once again we note that rural areas have undergone more rapid changes in age at marriage during the period 1975-1989 (Table 5.4) and as a result, the mean age at marriage of the rural respondents surpasses the mean ages of their urban counterparts by a half year after statistical adjustment of the data through multivariate analysis (Table 5.5).

***Childhood residence:***

In a direct way, as Simmel (1971) and Wirth (1938) assert, urbanism is a way of life. The normative orientation and cognitive orientation of people in urban areas are different from that of the people in rural areas. Traditional values and peer group pressure are not strong in urban areas, where late marriage is an acceptable behavior for young women and their families. In an indirect way, urban areas provide greater opportunities for education vis-à-vis greater job opportunities. It is for this reason, age at marriage is influenced by childhood residence via education and premarital work experience (Ahmed 1982). However, the effect of childhood residence on age at marriage mediated by pre-marital work experience may not be very strong here, because there are virtually a very few women who have pre-marital work experience.

As shown by the unadjusted means, the mean age at marriage is higher for respondents with urban childhood residence than for the women having rural childhood background for both 1975 and 1989. The pattern remains the same even after statistical adjustment.

For both 1975 and 1989 data, the unadjusted mean ages of marriage differ by 1.9 years and 1.2 years respectively. However, after statistical adjustment, these differences have been considerably narrowed down to 1 year and .5 years respectively. This is an indication that this predictor has become relatively less important in explaining the variation in age at marriage over time. This pattern remains the same for both the data sets. Although the mean age at marriage for the women with urban childhood background is higher than those of the women with rural

childhood background, rural areas have shown relatively faster change in age at marriage than urban areas (15.7% vs 8.9%, see Table 5.4). This difference remains the same even after statistical control.

***Region of residence:***

The region of residence as a variable is found to be the second strongest variable after education for explaining the variation in age at marriage for 1975 data ( $\beta^2=.18$ ). The impact of this variable has considerably decreased over time as it is revealed by the beta-squared value of only .09 for 1989. This tends to imply that inter-regional variations and disparities in age at marriage have been minimized in recent years.

As can be seen from Table 5.4, the age at marriage has increased over the last 15 years for all the regions. With relatively higher level in the age at marriage, the rate of increase in Chittagong division was the lowest, while with the lowest age at marriage, Khulna division recorded the highest increase during the inter-survey period. The greater regional disparities in 1975 with respect to the mean age has been substantially reduced in 1989, which is consistent with the multivariate analysis (Table 5.5).

***Work-status:***

Work status before first marriage has 1.3 years and 0.6 years (adjusted) differentials respectively for 1975 and 1989 between the working and the non-working women. As we see in Table 5.4, working women have marginally maintained higher level of mean age for both 1975 and 1989. Strikingly, both absolute (1.9 years vs 1.1 years) and relative (14.7% vs 7.9%) changes in the age at marriage during 1975-1989 were higher among the non-working category. This effect remains unaltered (1.9 years vs 1.2 years and 14.8% vs 8.5%) even after statistical adjustment.

The relatively narrower difference (0.6 years) in the mean ages between working and non-working groups for 1989 has been reflected in the beta-squared value ( $\beta^2$ ) of only .02 confirming that the independent influence of work status has been reduced in explaining the variations in age at marriage over time. However, as the adjusted mean indicates, differential work status before

marriage has created one of the largest difference (1.3 years) in the age at marriage in 1975, although the beta-square ( $\beta^2$ ) was only to the extent of 6 percent.

### **Husband's characteristics**

A few factors that are directly related to the males have been considered here to study the differentials in female age at marriage. These are husband's childhood residence, husband's education, and husband's occupation.

#### ***Husband's education:***

The husband's education is not as strong as a factor as women's education in explaining the variation in mean age at marriage for 1975 ( $\beta^2=.09$ ). Nevertheless, the education of husbands for 1989 has contributed significantly in explaining the variation in age at marriage. The data presented in Table 5.6 show that husband's education is gaining importance with the passage of time in explaining the variation in age at marriage for the females. This is demonstrated by the  $\beta^2$  value which showed almost a three-fold rise from .09 in 1975 to .25 in 1989. The relative changes in age at marriage as demonstrated in Table 5.4 from unadjusted data shows virtually no impact of husband's education. But statistical adjustment of data considerably improves the situation.

#### ***Husband's occupation:***

Husband's occupation broadly classified as manual worker and non-manual worker has shown even weaker strength for explaining variation in age at marriage for both 1975 and 1989 ( $\beta^2=.08$  and .06 respectively). The mean ages at marriage of the manual and non-manual categories for the 1975 data were 12.8 and 13.5 with a difference (adjusted) of 0.7 years. These increased to 14.8 and 15.0 years respectively in 1989 with a difference of only .2 years. The  $\beta^2$  values have also decreased by 25 percent implying a trend toward homogeneous age at marriage within husband's occupation. In other words, the role of husband's occupation has become much narrower in explaining the variation in the female age at marriage. As a matter of fact, husband's characteristics bear little significance in explaining the variation in age at marriage for females. Moreover, there seemed to have very little differences between unadjusted and adjusted means (see Table 5.6). This is a clear indication of absence of inter-correlation among the predictor

variables. Except for education of husbands, the ability of childhood background and occupation of husbands is remarkably weak to account for variations in the age at marriage ( $\beta^2=.02$ ).

***Husband's childhood background:***

Husband's childhood residence seems to have some association with the age at marriage (see Table 5.6). The effect is somewhat higher for 1975. For both 1975 and 1989, the urban-rural gross effect is higher than that of the net effect. This implies that in presence of other variables, childhood residential status of the husband is of secondary importance in the determination of the age at first marriage. The decreasing trend in the beta square ( $\beta^2$ ) values from .07 in 1975 to .02 in 1989 implies that the effect of childhood variable as a predictor of age at marriage has been minimized over time. It is interesting to note that the relative increase in the age at marriage of the women whose husbands have rural childhood background is higher than those who had husbands with urban background (2 years vs 1.1 years). This implies a greater motivation of the rural people who postpone their marriage, which ultimately resulted in having wives of older ages. This process acted to raise the age at marriage of the rural women to bring them closer to the urban women with respect to the age at marriage.

***(iii) Proportional hazard analysis of the risk of early marriage***

To focus on the effects of covariates on the risk of early marriage, the hazard model analysis is used. The dependent variable here is the interval between the timing of entry into first marriage and date of occurrence of the birth of the individual. To avoid the possible bias of incomplete cohort on the on age at marriage, the model truncates the cohort of women who were under 20 years of age at the time of the survey. Two models were fitted. The first model includes seven variables: current age, current residence, pre-marital work status, religion, religiosity, education, region of residence and childhood type of residence. The second model excludes current residence and work status, since they were found not to be statistically significant in the first model. The hazard coefficients obtained from the models are summarized in Table 5.7 with their statistical significance,

The coefficients in model 2 show that the current age is significantly positively related to the risk of early marriage. The coefficient associated with age indicates a higher risk of early marriage among the older cohort, implying a rising trend in age at marriage. Women who are Non-Muslims, have nearly 18 percent lower risk of getting married early compared to their Muslim counterparts. The coefficients show that education is an important factor in reducing the risk of early marriage. Women, who have primary level of education, have about 13 percent lower risk of early marriage than those who were illiterate. This increases steadily to 48 percent, implying that women with above primary level of education are about half as likely as the illiterate women to experience the risk of early marriage. Compared to Dhaka division, the risk of early marriage is 14 percent lower among the women in Chittagong division. The coefficient .9034 shows that urban childhood residential background of the women significantly reduces the risk of early marriage.

### **5.3 Summary**

The present chapter has been devoted to the study of levels and differentials of age at first marriage for the female population of Bangladesh. Both bivariate and multivariate techniques have been used for this purpose. For the purpose of analysis, the age at marriage has been partitioned into two broad categories with respect to the timing of occurrence of marriage: marriage before or after first menarche, marriage before or after average age at marriage and marriage and before or after legally sanctioned age.

#### ***Age at first marriage: levels and patterns:***

As to the extent of pre-legal marriage, more than 87 percent of the women were found to get married before the legal age at marriage (18 years). Pre-average (before 15) marriage is prevalent among 51 percent of the women. Most importantly, as many as 17 percent of the marriages occur in Bangladesh before the onset of their first menstruation.

***Age at first marriage: trends and differentials:***

The prevalence of pre-legal, pre-average and pre-pubertal marriages, all were found to be positively correlated with current age of the respondents. All these three sets of estimates of prevalence provide a cohort effect on the trends in age at marriage. For example, cohort of women born before 1955 (now aged 35 and over), were more in proportion (25%) to accept pre-pubertal marriage. This declined to 11.3 percent for those who were born after 1964. The corresponding reduction for pre-average marriage is over 16 percentage points from 62 percent to 45.6 percent over this period. For pre-legal marriage, these proportions are 91.4 percent and 87.4 percent. Both mean and median ages at first marriage increased over this period by about one year.

The duration of marriage variable also speaks in favor of the above findings that there has been a modest increase (in the neighborhood of 1-1.5 years) in the age at marriage. Pre-pubertal classification of marriage has shown that more than 39 percent of the women who spent 20 years or more in their married life, married before the onset of their first menstruation. This proportion drops to 8.5 percent for those who were married for a duration of less than 10 years. At the pre-legal cut-off point, these proportions declines from 70.1 percent to 36.7 percent respectively from a marriage duration of 20 years or more to a duration of less than 10 years.

Education of women exerts enormous influence on the age at marriage. For marriage taking place before puberty, the effect is more pronounced than if it takes place at a later age. For example, women with no schooling at the pre-marital cut off point, were more than 6 times as likely to be married before puberty as the women with some schooling. This likelihood is only 1.5 at the pre-average and 1.3 for pre-legal cut-off points of marriage. The differences in the mean age at marriage are significant: 14.9 years for women with no schooling and 17.1 years for women with some schooling. Similar association was discerned from the education of husbands.

Between the two major religions, Muslim women have consistently lower age at marriage (15.2 years) than (15.7 years) their non-Muslim counter-parts. At all cut-off points, non-Muslim women maintain a lower prevalence of marriage (Table 5.1) as is in the case of women with rural

residential (both current and childhood) background. Women living in rural areas, have been more in proportion (18.6%) to marry before puberty than (12.4%) their urban counterparts.

Among the four regions, pre-pubescent marriage is most prevalent (19%) in Rajshahi division, followed by Dhaka (18.6%), Khulna (16.3%) and Chittagong (13%). This pattern remains nearly the same at the other two cut-off points. As a result, Chittagong division recorded the highest mean age at marriage (15.3 years) and Rajshahi the lowest (14.0 years). An interesting feature of this pattern is that with shifting age at marriage toward higher level, the inter-regional disparities in age at marriage are greatly reduced.

Pre-marital work-experience does not seem to have any positive effect on the age at marriage. Between the two categories of occupational classification of the husbands, pre-pubertal marriage is more prevalent among the women with husbands in agricultural labor force (18.2%) than (10.2%) among those with professional/administrative work. These proportions are 55.1 percent vs 36.8 percent and 90.1 percent vs 77.1 percent at the pre-average and pre-legal cut-off points respectively. These differences are however not statistically significant and as a result, its impact on age at marriage is minimal. Neither land possession nor religiosity could show any significant impact on the age at marriage.

The multivariate treatment of data on the age at marriage showed that out of 13 variables included in three logistic models, only four variables were common to all the three models to emerge as significant predictors. These variables are current age of the respondents, duration of first union, religion and level of schooling of the women. The hazard model analysis identified current age, education, religion and childhood residence as associated with the risk of early marriage.

#### ***Changes in age at marriage:***

The last two Bangladesh Fertility Surveys demonstrate that during a period of 15 years, the female age at marriage in Bangladesh has gone up by 1.9 years from 12.9 years in 1975 to 14.8 years in 1989. The present study documents that education of the respondents as compared to the other variables, has considerably contributed to this positive change. It was interesting to note



that the gain in age at marriage came relatively more from the illiterate women, though overall impact of education was the highest of all variables.

Both 1975 and 1989 data sets recorded higher mean age at marriage for non-Muslim women (13.5 in 1975 and 15.3 in 1989) than Muslim women (12.8 in 1975 and 14.8 in 1989). Muslim women, however, contributed relatively more (15.6%) toward the increase in mean age than their Non-Muslim counterparts (13.3%). Both adjusted and unadjusted means agree with this trend. As a result, both absolute and relative changes in age at marriage due to religion has been observed to bridge over time.

Despite the fact age at marriage remains consistently higher in urban areas than in rural areas, for both 1975 and 1989, the changes in the age at marriage that have taken place during the period have been more pronounced for rural areas. For current residence, the changes in the unadjusted and adjusted means are 16.7 percent and 18.7 percent for rural residence, while for the urban residence, the proportions are respectively 8.9 and 10.9 only. Similar degree of difference was indicated by childhood residential status of the women.

The regional disparities with respect to the mean age at marriage have been considerably reduced from its 1975 level to 1989 level. Though age at marriage for Khulna division has been the lowest both in 1975 (12.0 years) and 1989 (14.6 years), it has shown the highest relative increase ((21.8%) over this period. The lowest (11.8%) recorded relative change was documented in Chittagong division which had the highest (13.5 years) mean age at marriage in 1975 and 1989 (15.1 years). This change, as we examined, is compatible with the social and economic transformation that have taken place during the period under study in Khulna division.

Non-working women contributed more (14.8%) to the changes in age at marriage than (8.5%) their working counterparts, though the working women maintained a higher mean age at marriage both in 1975 (14.0 years) and 1989 (15.3 years) than the non-working women (12.8 years in 1975 and 14.7 years in 1989).

Our analysis revealed that husband's education is gaining importance in explaining the variation in age at marriage over time. This is suggested from almost a three-fold rise in beta-

squared coefficient value of the MCA from .09 in 1975 to .25 in 1989. Occupation of husband, however, bears little significance in explaining the variation in age at marriage for the women. The analysis revealed that, with the rising age at marriage, the existing differences due to husband's occupation will be narrowed down considerably in future.

In line with the change in age at marriage due to childhood residential background of the women, husbands' childhood residential background also exerts enormous influence. There has been a relative change of 15.6 percent in the age at marriage of the women whose husbands were reported to be born in urban areas, while this change was to the extent of only 8 percent for husbands who were born in rural areas.

Table 5.1: Percentage of women married before puberty, before average age and before legal age

Correlates	Timing of marriage					
	N	Pre legal	Pre average	Pre pubertal	Mean age	Median age
<b>Total</b>	<b>11905</b>	<b>87.3</b>	<b>51.0</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>14.9</b>
<i>Current age</i>						
<25	4410	87.4	45.6	11.3	15.5	15.2
25-34	4089	83.8	47.6	15.7	15.6	15.2
35+	3406	91.4	62.2	25.1	14.7	14.3
<i>Duration of union</i>						
0-9	4720	80.6	36.7	08.5	16.1	15.7
10-19	3742	88.3	51.6	15.9	15.2	14.9
20+	3443	85.5	70.1	39.3	14.2	14.0
<i>Education</i>						
None	7583	91.2	57.2	20.8	14.9	14.6
Primary	2601	88.5	47.3	13.7	15.3	15.2
Higher	1722	68.6	30.0	04.0	17.1	16.6
<i>Husband's education</i>						
None	5528	91.4	57.2	20.6	14.9	14.6
Primary	2405	90.2	53.4	18.3	15.1	14.7
Higher	3973	79.9	38.3	10.5	16.0	15.8
<i>Religion</i>						
Muslim	10267	87.9	52.0	17.6	15.2	14.9
Non-Muslim	1638	83.3	44.9	11.7	15.7	15.4
<i>Current residence</i>						
Rural	8466	89.2	53.6	18.6	15.1	14.8
Urban	3439	82.7	44.6	12.4	15.7	15.3
<i>Childhood residence</i>						
Rural	10183	88.7	51.7	17.8	15.2	14.8
Urban	1723	78.9	40.6	10.8	16.0	15.9

Cont.....

Table 5.1 cont.....

Correlates	Timing of marriage					
	N	Pre legal	Pre average	Pre pubertal	Mean age	Median age
<i>Region</i>						
Chittagong	2717	85.5	43.9	13.0	15.6	15.3
Dhaka	3778	88.7	50.0	18.6	15.3	15.0
Khulna	2325	89.1	55.9	19.0	15.0	14.6
Rajshahi	3086	85.9	51.4	16.3	15.3	14.8
<i>Work status</i>						
Worked before	1843	87.8	53.1	16.3	15.0	14.8
Not worked	10062	84.6	50.7	09.7	14.8	14.7
<i>Husband's occupation</i>						
Professional/ Administrative	1605	77.1	36.8	10.2	15.1	14.7
Non-agri.lab	3791	86.8	47.2	16.6	15.6	15.4
Agri.labour	6510	90.1	55.1	18.2	15.2	14.7
<i>Land possession (in acres)</i>						
<1.0	5116	88.4	51.6	17.0	15.0	14.6
1.01-2.0	2552	87.9	50.4	18.3	15.2	14.9
2.01+	4237	88.0	47.5	14.9	15.5	15.3
<i>Practicing religion</i>						
Strictly	2516	83.3	47.9	17.2	15.4	15.2
Not strictly	9390	87.6	50.7	15.2	15.3	14.9
<i>Frequency of prayer</i>						
Often	4991	85.9	49.0	15.8	15.4	15.0
Regular	6915	88.3	51.0	22.2	15.2	14.9

*Note: The mean and median of this table have been estimated from the information on date of birth and date of marriage of ever married women recorded in cmc rather than the reported age at marriage.*

Table 5.2: Likelihood of marrying beyond puberty by socio-economic characteristics of women: results of multivariate logistic regression analysis : BFS 1989

Characteristics	Beta coefficient	Significance probability	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
<i>Current age</i>				
<25	-	-	1.00	-
25-34	-.3681	.0001	0.69	.57-.83
35+	-.8908	.0000	0.41	.34-.49
<i>Duration of Union</i>				
0-9	-	-	1.00	-
10-19	-.7133	.0016	0.49	.43-.59
20+	-1.4697	.0029	0.23	.20-.26
<i>Education</i>				
No education-	-	-	1.00	-
Primary	.3112	.0008	1.37	1.14-1.64
Above	1.4788	.0000	4.39	3.10-6.21
<i>Husband's education</i>				
No education	-	-	1.00	-
Primary	-.0055	.9524	0.99	.83-1.10
Above	.1559	.1293	1.17	.95-1.43
<i>Religion</i>				
Muslim	-	-	1.00	-
Non-Muslim	.5654	.0000	1.76	1.39-2.22
<i>Current residence</i>				
Rural	-	-	1.00	-
Urban	-.0001	.9992	1.00	.79-1.27
<i>Childhood residence</i>				
Rural	-	-	1.00	-
Urban	.0422	.7980	1.04	.74-1.46

cont.....

Table 5.2 cont.....

Characteristics	Beta coefficient	Significance probability	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
<b>Region</b>				
Chittagong	-	-	1.00	-
Dhaka	-3738	.0003	0.69	.59-.84
Khulna	-.3960	.0006	0.67	.55-.84
Rajshahi	-.1218	.2799	0.89	.71-1.10
<b>Work status</b>				
Worked before	-	-	1.00	-
Not worked	.0654	.5880	0.94	.74-1.19
<b>Husband's occupation</b>				
Professional	-	-	1.00	-
sales/service	-.2097	.1341	0.81	.62-1.07
Agri. laborer	.1539	.2633	0.86	.65-1.12
<b>Land possession</b>				
<50 deci.	-	-	1.00	-
50-100 deci.	-.0394	.7088	0.96	.78-1.18
Above	.0876	.3356	1.09	.91-1.30
<b>Observance of religion</b>				
Strictly	-	-	1.00	-
Not strictly	-.0406	.6198	0.96	.82-1.13

Table 5.3 : Comparisons of the odds ratios obtained from three multivariate logistic regression models

Correlates	Timing of marriage		
	Post legal	Post average	Post pubertal
<i>Current age</i>			
<25	1.00	1.00	1.00
25-34	0.92*	0.15*	0.69*
35+	0.70*	0.21*	0.41*
<i>Duration of uion</i>			
0-9	1.00	1.00	1.00
10-19	0.08*	0.03*	0.49*
20+	0.01*	0.01*	0.23*
<i>Education</i>			
None	1.00	1.00	1.00
Primary	1.18	1.24*	1.37*
Higher	2.69*	2.68*	4.39*
<i>Husband's education</i>			
None	1.00	1.00	1.00
Primary	1.07	1.07	0.99
Higher	1.23	1.19	1.67
<i>Religion</i>			
Muslim	1.00	1.00	1.00
Non-Muslim	1.35*	1.56*	1.76*
<i>Current residence</i>			
Rural	1.00	1.00	1.00
Urban	1.26*	1.02	1.00
<i>Childhood residence</i>			
Rural	1.00	1.00	1.00
Urban	1.10	1.19	1.04
<i>Region</i>			
Chittagong	1.00	1.00	1.00
Dhaka	0.84	0.79	0.69*
Khulna	0.67*	0.58*	0.67*
Rajshahi	1.19	0.85	0.89

Cont.....

Table 5.3 Cont.....

Correlates	Timing of marriage		
	Post legal	Post average	Post pubertal
<i>Work status</i>			
Worked before	1.00	1.00	1.00
Not worked	0.70*	0.86	0.94
<i>Husband's occupation</i>			
Professional			
Administrative	1.00	1.00	1.00
Non-agri.lab	0.74*	0.98	0.81
Agri.labour	0.85	0.83	0.86
<i>Land possession (in acres)</i>			
<1.0	1.00	1.00	1.00
1.01-2.0	1.09	1.13	0.96
2.01+	1.14	1.15	1.09
<i>Practicing religion</i>			
Strictly	1.00	1.00	1.00
More strictly	1.11	0.95	1.12

\* significant at 5 percent level.



Table 5.4: Changes in age at first marriage by socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	Mean age		Absolute change 1975-1989	Relative change(%) 1975-1989
	1975	1989		
<b>Total</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>14.7</b>
<i>Respondent's education</i>				
None	12.5	14.4	1.9	15.2
Primary	13.3	14.9	1.6	12.0
Higher	14.9	16.7	1.8	12.1
<i>Husband's education</i>				
None	12.6	14.4	1.8	14.3
Primary	13.6	14.6	1.0	7.4
Higher	14.5	15.6	1.1	7.6
<i>Religion</i>				
Muslim	12.8	14.8	2.0	15.6
Non-Muslim	13.3	15.3	2.0	15.0
<i>Current residence</i>				
Rural	12.6	14.7	2.1	16.7
Urban	13.9	15.2	1.3	9.3
<i>Childhood residence</i>				
Rural	12.7	14.7	2.0	15.7
Urban	14.6	15.9	1.3	8.9
<i>Region</i>				
Chittagong	13.5	15.1	1.6	11.8
Dhaka	13.1	14.9	1.8	13.7
Khulna	12.0	14.6	2.6	21.7
Rajshahi	12.8	14.8	2.0	15.6
<i>Husband's occupation</i>				
Manual	12.8	14.5	1.7	13.3
Non-manual	13.9	15.3	1.4	10.1
<i>Work status</i>				
Worked	13.9	15.0	1.1	7.9
Not worked	12.9	14.8	1.9	14.7

Note: The mean and median of this table is directly  
Calculated from the reported age at marriage

Table 5.5: Mean age at first marriage of ever-married women by selected socio-economic characteristics: results of multiple classification analysis (wife's characteristics)

Explanatory variables	1975		1989	
	Unadjusted mean	Adjusted mean	Unadjusted mean	Adjusted mean
<b>Education</b>				
None	12.5	12.5	14.4	14.5
Primary	13.3	13.4	14.9	14.8
Higher	14.9	14.6	16.7	16.4
(Beta square)	(.24)	(.21)	(.31)	(.28)
<b>Religion</b>				
Muslim	12.8	12.8	14.8	14.8
Non-Muslim	13.3	13.5	15.3	15.3
(Beta square)	(.05)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)
<b>Current residence</b>				
Rural	12.6	12.8	14.7	15.2
Urban	13.9	13.3	15.2	14.7
(Beta square)	(.15)	(.06)	(.12)	(.05)
<b>Childhood residence</b>				
Rural	12.7	12.8	14.7	14.8
Urban	14.6	13.8	15.9	15.3
(Beta square)	(.05)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)
<b>Work status</b>				
Worked before	13.9	14.1	15.0	15.3
Not worked	12.9	12.8	14.8	14.7
(Beta square)	(.05)	(.06)	(.02)	(.02)
<b>Region</b>				
Chittagong	13.5	13.6	15.1	15.2
Dhaka	13.1	13.0	14.9	14.9
Khulna	12.0	11.9	14.6	14.5
Rajshahi	12.8	12.9	14.8	14.5
(Beta square)	(.17)	(.18)	(.08)	(.09)
<b>Grand mean</b>		<b>12.9</b>		<b>14.8</b>
<b>Variance explained (%)</b>		<b>10.9</b>		<b>11.7</b>

Note: These means are based on reported age at marriage

Table 5.6: Mean age at first marriage of all ever-married women by selected socio-economic characteristics: results of multiple classification analysis (husband's characteristics)

Explanatory variables	1975		1989	
	Unadjusted mean	Adjusted mean	Unadjusted mean	Adjusted mean
<b>Education</b>				
None	12.6	12.7	14.4	14.5
Primary	13.6	12.8	14.6	14.6
Higher	14.5	13.6	15.6	15.4
(Beta square)	(.23)	(.09)	(.27)	(.25)
<b>Occupation</b>				
Manual	12.8	12.8	14.5	14.8
Non-Manual	13.9	13.5	15.3	15.0
(Beta square)	(.15)	(.08)	(.17)	(.06)
<b>Childhood residence</b>				
Rural	12.8	12.8	14.7	14.8
Urban	14.5	13.8	15.3	14.9
(Beta square)	(.16)	(.07)	(.15)	(.02)
<b>Grand mean</b>	<b>12.9</b>		<b>14.8</b>	
<b>Variance explained (%)</b>	<b>6.9</b>		<b>7.4</b>	

*Note: The means are based on reported age at marriage*

Table 5.7 : Hazard coefficients for age at fist marriage

Variable	Category	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Current Age</i>	-	1.0177**	1.0177**
<i>Residence</i> (Rural)	Urban	.9626	-
<i>Work status</i> (Not worked)	Worked	.9561	-
<i>Religion</i> (Muslim)	Non-Muslim	.8249**	.8229**
<i>Education</i> (None)	Primary	.8669**	.8687**
	Above primary	.5220**	.5179**
<i>Region</i> (Dhaka)	Chittagong	.8496**	.8572**
	Khulna	1.1324**	1.1328**
	Rajshahi	.9580	.9585
<i>Childhood Residence</i> (Ruual)	Urban	.9265**	.9034**

\*\* p < .001    \* p < .05

Note: Reference categories shown in the parenthesis in the variable column, represent the modal group of the category.

## **Chapter VI**

### **INTERSPOUSAL AGE DIFFERENCES**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In most of the developing countries, it has been a usual practice to look for a bride younger than the groom. Traditionally, both Muslims and Hindus adhere to this norm, largely because of the inherent beliefs and desire to uphold the dominance of males in the society over the females. This has resulted in longer age differences between husbands and wives. The extent and patterns of these differences have been different for different countries at all times. Apart from the traditional and societal norms, a multiplicity of causes have been assumed to be responsible for these inter-country variations including the differences in the number of women and men and the age distribution of the unmarried men and women. Though age difference between a husband and his wife is largely supposed to be primarily a social variable rather than a demographic variable (McDonald and Rahman 1974), but nevertheless, these differences have several important demographic implications. Consequently, spousal age differences affect population and social structure.

The age difference between husband and wife is interesting in itself and in its effect, if any, on fertility. It is interesting in itself because it provides evidence on one of the desired characteristics of partners in marriage which may give some indications to assist the efforts towards increasing the age at marriage if, as it appears to be the case, there is a relationship between age at marriage and the inter-spousal differences in age at marriage. This, in turn, makes the study of the age differences between husband and wife important from the fertility point of view also.

In developing countries, the interspousal age differences are considerably greater. Among several factors, religious belief plays a dominant role. In some Hindu scriptural tradition, it was stated that a bride should be a third of her husband's age. The acceptability of the prevailing age

difference is rooted in the traditional role of women and in the desirability of the women being fecund, both of which are supported in Hindu and Muslim traditions. "Where parents arrange marriages, the husband frequently, if not typically, is much older than the wife (Burgess and Cotrell 1939). Parents prefer for their daughter the older suitor as more stable and as a better provider than his younger rival". This observation still remained valid particularly in societies where marriages are predominantly arranged by parents (Ahmed 1982). This situation, however, is changing in many recently developed countries toward a shift from parent-arranged marriage to couple -arranged marriage. Sri Lanka and Indonesia can be cited as examples where parent-arranged marriages have shown a significant fall in recent years as a result of socio-economic transformation (Hull 1988; Jones 1995).

The factors that explain the variations in the interspousal age differences across the countries should be understood in their social context and must be examined in their proper perspective. The foremost factor that leads to this variation is due to prevailing higher unemployment rates and economic hardship that tend to postpone men's marriage. Men do not want to marry unless they have the means to support the family. In a society, where arranged marriage is dominant, neither the parents of the groom nor of the bride are willing to arrange marriages for their offspring unless the grooms do have a steady source of income. In Hindu culture, there is also related economic problem. A girl, who has reached menarche is usually withdrawn from agricultural field work, especially paid work for other households which is so important for the lower castes, and can not resume such activities until after marriage (Caldwell *et al* 1983).

In addition to the economic factors, there are cultural factors for early marriage. Parents of young girls are always concerned about the chastity and virginity of the girls, which is highly valued in a society (Ahmed 1982). Such occurrences may badly damage the chances of a good marriage not only for a girl but also for her sisters, thus narrowing down her family goodwill.

In the case of men, as Caldwell observed, against their marrying younger, namely that their parents are usually anxious to marry off all their sisters first. But there are other arguments: most families feel that a man, who married much before his 25th birthday, will be sexually immature and that such early drains on his sexual strength will have permanent effects on his physical strength. One of the reasons most commonly put forward for a large age gap between spouses is that, this is a necessary mechanism for giving husbands sufficient dominance to resist their wives' sexual demand. Most feel that he will make an immature husband unsuited to run a nuclear family, and as bride's age increases, likely to be too close to his spouse's age to keep her under control or always to defer to his mother's wishes against those of his wife (Caldwell *et al* 1983).

Superstitious belief also plays positive role to accelerate the child marriage. "If a girl menstruates in her parent's home, the males for seven generations will not reach heaven"-is a belief among both the Muslims and Hindus in this sub-continent. Thus, the two opposing forces, late marriage of the males and early marriage of the girls, are in interplay to widen the interspousal age gap in our society.

Shortage of potentially marriageable women in the marriage market may create large age gap between spouses. Such a situation might arise due to the sex differential mortality of younger age groups. The relative importance of males in the family probably explains this sex differentials in childhood mortality. Male child in a family gets better food, clothing, health care and other attentions. The net result is a shortage of marriageable women in the marriage market. In a rapidly growing population, younger cohorts are larger than older cohorts. Because of the tradition that girls marry men older than themselves, there tends to be a shortage of eligible grooms. This increases the age differences further.

One of the foremost alternatives to early marriage and one providing a major, although temporary, non-familial work is education. On the basis of partial evidence, it can be argued that in developing countries the transition from massive illiteracy to even elementary literacy represents a much more vital change than is usually recognized. It may well symbolize and

activate a whole chain of modernization effects, including nontrivial consequences for female marital postponement (Duza and Baldwin 1977). Another major alternative to marriage appears to be female employment particularly in modernized productions, which generates a movement toward female autonomy (Bumpass 1969; Dixon 1977; Sklar 1971). In Bangladesh society, significantly less importance is attached to female education vis-à-vis female employment. Participation of women in the labor force is seriously discouraged. Having thus no alternative role to play, the girls marry early.

Theoretically, the greater the age difference between spouses in a society, the larger the number of single parent families. The age differences transmigrate its influence from one generation to the next to create large age differences under economic constraints. The children of single parents face economic hardship at an early age, because the source of family income has largely ceased with the death of the family head. The male children of these families delay their marriages more in order to achieve economic solvency and to earn their own feasibility of marriage. Economically, they get minimum support from the family. The position of girls in these families is just the opposite. Since girls are an economic burden, parents try to marry them off at a very early age (Ahmed 1982).

A counter argument to this is that if a single parent family faces economic constraint, the family will face hardship for arranging money for dowry and other relevant costs for the marriage of their daughters. It is of course true, but in order to maximize all these costs, they usually tend to make a decision for hypogamy for their daughters. Consequently, the cost of the dowry and other relevant costs become relatively cheaper. The above factors together enlarge the age difference between spouses.

The smaller age differences between spouses might arise from the early marriage on the part of the males. The arguments in favor of early marriage for males include two that most families make (Caldwell *et al.* 1983). First, men's sexual powers begin to wane after about 30 years of age and steeply after 35. As a man becomes older, too much sexual activity drains him



physically, affecting his other activities, while women have much greater capacity for sexual activities (Mandelbaum 1970). Secondly, such an old age marriage carries a risk that the parents will die either before the marriage can take place or before the grandchildren are born. There is also some fear among parents that their sons will become morally dissolute with a further apprehension that people will begin to tease them for not having really reached a man's estate (Srinivasan 1952).

Perhaps the most detailed published analysis of differences in age at marriage has been that of Glick (1967). Glick's discussions on this issue imply that there is a simple relationship of inter-spousal age difference with age: the older the groom, the greater the age difference, the older the bride, the smaller the age difference. It has been widely assumed that the relationship with age is of this form. As Glick argues, this relationship has resulted from an assumption that the only phenomena affecting the age differences have been age homogeneity and the norm that the husband is the elder partner, a situation that normally exists in all societies. An analysis on British data (Office of the Population Censuses and Surveys 1978) of the marital circumstances of older persons, however, has revealed that the relationship between age and marriage in later life is not that simple as it appears.

Krishnomoorthy (1977) in his study on the effect of the disproportionate sex ratio on marriage in India found that 7 percent more men than women preferred to accept an age gap of 4 years between husband and wife, husband being the older partner. He also found that non-availability of marriage partners did not arise for small changes in sex ratio in a society, since by changing the age difference between a husband and his wife suitably, every individual in that society could get a marriage partner. This also seems to hold true for Bangladesh because no abrupt change in the sex ratio has been observed during the last two decades and pattern of age difference between a husband and his wife is almost similar to that of India (D'Souza 1979).

In Western countries, inter-spousal age differences are minimal ranging from 2 to 4 years (Ahmed 1982). In north-central European countries, the average age of women was even higher

than their spouses (Cox and Wilson 1973). These differences vary by the ages of the spouses. Analysis of British data by Bytheway (1981) showed that for all marriages in England and Wales in 1976, the percentage of men marrying younger women rises from 35.4 percent for those who were 20-24 years old to a local peak of 68.8 percent for those who were 35-39 years old. The percentage then fell to about 65 percent for men who were 50-54 years old before rising again as one moves into old age. The converse pattern, as he found, characterizes men marrying older women. The general norm is that people who marry in middle age are, more likely to prefer to marry a person of similar age, but after age 35-39 years, people prefer to marry an older person. For both sexes, the tendency towards marrying a younger person reaches a local maximum at the broad age group 30-39 years and a local minimum at 50-54 years.

Glick (1967) in his study observed the pattern of age differences between spouses in the United States. He found that the average difference between median ages of spouses varies from 4.7 years for a 15 year-old bride to 1.0 year for a 31 year old bride, and from 0.1 year for 18 year old grooms to 6.5 years for 34 year old grooms. He concluded that the older the groom, the greater the average age difference between spouses, the older the bride the smaller the age difference. In a subsequent analysis, Glick (1977) documented a narrowing of the inter-spousal age difference from 4 years in the 1900s to little over 2 years in the 1950s.

The worldwide trend at present is for a convergence of interspousal age difference. Most Asian countries are now in the midst of this change. Xenos and Gultiano (1992), reviewing the marriage pattern in 17 countries of Asia confirm that age differences in Asia is declining. For example, in Korea, the age gap between husbands and wives dropped from 5 years in 1960s to 3 years in 1985 (Kim 1987). In Indonesia, there is a trend toward this convergence (Hull 1988). Examining the US data from a cohort perspective, Scohen *et al.* (1985), also noted such a decline for the cohort born after 1940.

Because of economic constraints, flow of young males of marriageable age in Bangladesh to some Asian and Western countries, the problems have been more aggravated. Recent outflow

of young males to these countries led to a substantial imbalance of sex ratios thus creating a shortage of prospective grooms.

Ruzicka and Chowdhury (1978) in their study in Matlab have shown that when the groom's age is 20-24 years, the bride's age is about 6 years younger, when the groom's age is 30-34 years, the bride is on the average is 13 years younger when the groom is 40-44 years old, the age differences reaches 20 years. In another study Islam *et al* (1995) observed that when groom is under 20, the bride's age is 7.3 years younger. This difference rose to 11 years if the groom is between 25 and 29. This rose to 15 years when the groom was above 30. Ahmed (1982), Shahidullah (1980) and Dutta (1995), with the 1975 and 1989 BFS data, also showed the existence of similar pattern of age differences in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh society, early marriage is still prevalent. Early marriage is prevalent because of both societal, sexual and economic reasons being aggravated further by superstitious belief. An older husband feels proud to have a younger wife. He knows that a younger wife can be an active and enjoyable sexual partner for a long time. Moreover, she is viewed as a useful domestic worker for an extended period of time (Maloney *et al.* 1981). In some northern parts of the country (Khulna, Rajshahi, Dinajpur), males prefer to go for polygynous marriage rather than employing a domestic servant for agricultural support. Evidences of using females for smuggling purposes across the boarder areas is not also infrequent. In most cases these anti-social activities are promoted through older wives. Most importantly, marriage of a teen-age girls, as it is believed, enable them to move to the house of her husband and be socialized in it before her taste and ideas become very firmly set.

Another important dimension of early marriage in Bangladesh is that a young girl could be married off with less dowry and ornaments, but the overwhelming fear of the parents is that no husband may be found at all if marriage of this girl is postponed. In a recent study conducted in rural Bangladesh, a strong positive association between age at marriage and amount of dowry was discerned (Swapan 1996). Interestingly, as age at marriage increased, the amount of dowry

Despite the fact that age at marriage for females has shown an upward trend over time, age difference between husband and wife has remained nearly constant over the last 40 years since 1951. This is suggestive of the fact that age at marriage for males is also steadily increasing. Such a rising trend is evident from all studies conducted in recent times.

### **6.3 Differentials in Interspousal Age Differences**

A series of cross-tabulations were ran to examine the association of age gap between a husband and his wife with a few socio-economic factors. The factors included were the current age of the wife, age at marriage of spouses, education of spouses, religion, current residence, childhood residence, work status, and husbands' occupation.

#### ***Current Age:***

There seemed to have a significant association between the age difference of the spouses and the current age (*vis-à-vis*) of the women (Table 6.4). The table reveals that there is a trend towards a slight decline in the age difference. For example, for women, who were born between 1940 and 1945 (currently aged 45-49), were about 12 years younger than their husbands. This age difference decreased to 9.7 years for the cohort born after 1970 (current age 15 and over). This is particularly true for the younger women. Furthermore, concentration in the age differences is shifting toward 5-9 years from the higher differences. Although a few men choose their partners from among those who are of their same age or of higher age, this trend is declining over time. As an unmarried woman ages, she is at first increasingly likely to marry men closer to their ages with 1-4 or 5-9 years age differences. This tendency continues until 25-29 but after an age of 27 or 28, she then becomes more likely to marry a person older than herself. This trend continues upto the end of their life.

#### ***Wife's age at marriage:***

Age difference between spouses varies inversely with the age at marriage of the female partner. This is in conformity with Glick's assertion that the older the bride, the smaller the age difference between spouses. Girls marrying relatively at younger ages are significantly less likely

to accept husbands of their same age. Equally true is the case, where females are less likely to choose husbands with higher age differences when they are married at a later age (Table 6.5). For example, for females marrying before age 15, the average age differences between the spouses was 10.7 years. This difference has dropped to 9.7 years for those marrying between 15 and 17 and further down to 8.6 years for those marrying beyond 20 years. This result supports our hypothesis of relationship between spousal age difference and bridal age at marriage. The tendency perhaps results from the fact that for women marrying at later ages, the marriage market gradually shrinks, both demographically and sociologically speaking. In other words, they have to choose mates from an increasingly small proportion of unmarried males of higher ages. Besides, most of the late marrying males are likely to be of higher educational and occupational level, many of whom prefer to select partners with reasonably adequate educational attainments and mental maturity, thereby having to choose wives closer to their own age. Perhaps the most important factor is that, as females age at marriage rises, males are unwilling to marry at correspondingly later ages of themselves, so inevitably the age gap must shrink.

***Husband's age at marriage:***

In a society, where early marriage for females is highly prevalent, younger men marrying at an early age are significantly more likely to get wives who are pretty young. This reduces the interspousal age differences almost in all societies. The probability of marrying an older girl for a husband decreases as he postpones marriage resulting in an increasing age gap between spouses. As the data in Table 6.6 indicates, males marrying before age 20, the age gap is only about 4 years, which sharply increases to more than 7 years for those marrying between 20 and 24 years and reaches to its maximum of 25 years for those marrying beyond 35 years. For those who marry after 35 or in the neighborhood of 40, there is a serious shortfall of women who are closer to their age and thus are most likely to have wives who are relatively younger. These circumstances widen the interspousal age differences. For example, a man marrying beyond 35 is almost sure (96.6%) to get a wife who will be at least 15 years older than him. This likelihood appears to be only to the

extent of 59 percent if he marries between ages 30 and 34 (see Table 6.6). The results obtained here is in conformity with our hypothesized relationship of spousal age difference with the groom's age.

***Current residence:***

Current residential status of the spouses does not seem to be a predictor of interspousal age difference as observed with age at first marriage, thus contradicting our assumption that smaller age difference is associated with residential background of the women. The distributions of the differences, as shown in Table 6.7 by urban-rural residence, appear to be nearly the same. In terms of the mean age differences, the variation is only to the extent of 0.3 years. The pattern of age differences does not vary by urban-rural background of the women. The lack of higher differences between the interspousal age gaps for urban and rural areas stems from the fact that the relative level in the age at marriage for both males and females remains the same despite recent changes in the trend in age at marriage in Bangladesh. This fact kept the age differences in urban areas about the same as that of the rural areas.

The results for the childhood type residence may be similarly interpreted. As the data presented in the same table demonstrate, interspousal age differences do not vary by respondent's childhood background. The mean values differ only by a half year.

***Region of residence:***

A differential in the mean age difference is expected to be observed due to regional differences. A socio-economic hypothesis suggests that regions whose female population have low level of education and limited formal sector employment are expected to have high mean age difference. In addition, region of residence may be a proxy for ethnic or cultural boundaries that are related to mean age difference. The religious composition, differential pattern of urbanization, differential pattern of rural-urban migration that distinguish the regional characteristics, are expected to be reflected in the timing of marriage of both the spouses that tend to contribute to the interspousal age differences. This expectation, generally speaking, is met in the present

instance. Looking at the data presented in Table 6.8, we note that by and large, the relative distribution of the age differences depicts slight variation by divisions. In Chittagong division, the proportions of men marrying women closer to their age (same or less or 1-4 years younger) are lower compared to other divisions. As a consequence, they are relatively more in proportion (16.6%) at a point where they are 15 years or more older than their wives. This has contributed to the higher age difference (10.4 years) for Chittagong division. Dhaka and Khulna divisions had an equal age gap of 10.1 years. The lowest age gap was recorded for Khulna division (9.8 years). Statistical test shows that the differences are significant. The regional pattern of age differences are nearly the same as that of the age at marriage.

***Respondent's education:***

Educated men and women have a greater chance to voice their opinion in matters relating to marriage as well as mate selection. From Burgess's point of view, modernization changes the concept of marriage from an institution to a source of companionship. So, besides the expectation of normative role performance, educated people also take into consideration what kind of companion their prospective mate will be in marital life. Education replaces the old values associated with family life with new ones. They perceive that the lower age differences will enable them to have a more compatible marriage. Education, specially to females, provides a major non-familial role to them and as a result of the spread of education, more and more girls are in schools at an age when their mothers possibly were already married and raising children.

The data presented in Table 6.9 seem to agree with the above expectation and is in agreement with our assumed hypothesis. As one examines the proportions placed horizontally along the age differences of 1-4 years, an increase in the proportion is noted from 'no education' to the higher level of education. This implies that as the level of education increases, the likelihood of women being married to men closer to their age increases. Equivalently, an illiterate woman is significantly more likely to have husbands much older to her. This is evident from the proportion corresponding to the age of husbands "15 years or more older" which decreases from

17.5 percent for those who were illiterate to 11.8 for those who had primary or above level of education. The mean differences in age presented in the last column of the table under references reflect the same phenomenon: illiterate women possess an age difference of at least one year compared to their literate counterparts.

***Husband's education:***

In the same line of reasoning as was expected in the case of women's education, a similar direction of the relationship is anticipated between the husband's education and interspousal age differences. Women's education also has an impact on this relationship. This expectation in general is met, with nearly the same degree of association. The unique similarity between the two distributions presented in Table 6.9 is at once revealed. What happens to this age difference when both husbands and wives are illiterate or husband is illiterate but wife literate? This was examined and the results are presented below:

**Spousal age differences in years**

Wife's education	Husband's education	
	Illiterate	Literate
Illiterate	11.3	10.8
Literate	9.7	9.6

The above exercise demonstrates wife's education as an important factor in determining the age difference between husbands and wives. When both are illiterate, the age difference is the highest (11.3 years) and it is the lowest (9.6 years) when both of them are literate.

***Religion:***

Non-Muslims are more likely to wait longer for marrying off their daughters than Muslims. This happens for the Hindus in Bangladesh since grooms are not as easily available as it is for the Muslims. The higher age at marriage among the Hindu girls thus can be explained by the increasing difficulty in finding suitable grooms. This contributes to age differences for Hindus in



the absence of any corresponding change in age at marriage for the males. Data, however, fail to provide any evidence in support of this hypothesis. The association between age difference and religion is measurably weak and the interspousal age differences are nearly the same (see Table 6.10) for both Muslims and Non-Muslims. The lack of evidence in support of the hypothesis is perhaps because of the enhanced age at marriage of the male counterparts of this group.

***Work status:***

The age differences for women with premarital work experience is assumed to be lower than it is for women with no premarital work experience. But in the present instance, working and non-working women are almost equally likely to accept husbands with similar age differences. Although the age differences of the working women are somewhat smaller (10.1 years) compared to that (10.3 years) of the non-working women (Table 6.11), these differences are not statistically significant. As the mean values show, working women have an excess of only 0.2 years age differences from their non-working group. Most of these working women come from the lower socio-economic class, who, before their marriage, remain engaged in works of tertiary importance. In most cases, their involvement in outside work during premarital period is to keep them engaged in some activities since they get little opportunity to go to school. They are withdrawn from these temporary works as soon as their parents can arrange marriage for them. The very nature of their work does not stand on their way to get married. Thus, their age differences are not expected to differ from the non-working group who are significantly quite large in number.

***Timing of marriage:***

Women marrying at a mature stage is expected to get husbands closer to their age. Our data tend to support this proposition. Those who were married after their first menstruation period, were more in proportion to have husbands of reasonably higher ages. For example, 6 percent of the women, who experienced their first menstruation before their marriage had an interspousal age difference of 1-4 years (see Table 6.12). In contrast, this proportion was about

11 percent, who experienced the post-pubertal marriage. About 18 percent women, having been married before menstruation had husbands 15 years or more older than them, while this proportion for the women marrying after their first menstruation is 14 percent. The mean age difference is about one year in favor post-pubescent marriages. The differences appeared to be statistically significant.

#### 6.4 Multivariate Analysis of Age Differences

To make an assessment of the independent effects of the factors affecting the interspousal age difference, a multiple classification analysis (MCA) was applied to the 1989 BFS data. The MCA was calculated with the age differences between husbands and wives as the dependent variable and 10 variables viz., current age of the wife, age at marriage of the wife, current residence, childhood residence, region of residence, spousal education, timing of marriage, premarital work status of the women and religion as independent variables.

Table 6.13 summarizes the results of the MCA. The near identical values of the adjusted and unadjusted mean values of the predictor variables signify evidence of little inter-correlation among the predictors. The *eta* coefficient ( $\eta$ ) applicable to unadjusted means, shows how well a given predictor can explain the variation in the dependent variable. The proportion of variation explained by the predictor alone is given by its square. On the other hand, beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficient, on the basis of adjusted mean, measures the ability of a given predictor to account for the variations in the dependent variable. This coefficient is usually regarded as a summary statistic indicating the relative importance of each predictor.

The statistical adjustment of the data does not lead to draw any different conclusions from what we arrived at before in the previous sections. By and large, the patterns of differences across the levels and sub-groups of the variables essentially remain identical after making allowances for the effects of other variables.

As far as the wife's age at marriage is concerned, there is a differential of 2.16 years between the lowest age at marriage (<15 years) and the highest (20+) which narrows down by .07

years (3%) after statistical adjustment. Nevertheless, this variable possesses the highest predictive capacity explaining the age difference between husband and wife ( $\beta = .11$ ).

The next important variable is the respondents' education with  $\beta = .10$ . The statistical adjustment increases the differential by 9.2 percent from no education category to the highest level of education. Wife's current age stood out as the third important variable in the interspousal age differences. The other variables are somewhat weak predictors of the age gap between husband and wife.

### **6.5 Trends in Interspousal Age Differences**

In almost all developing societies, a majority of females entering polygynous marriage are entering themselves being married for the first time, although their husbands had obviously married at least once before. Data on this are scant in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, sporadic evidences reveal a similar feature where the number of first marriages for females in a particular year far exceeds that for males. This implies that women are obliged to marry men of a higher marriage order even it is the first marriage for them. Thus, it would distort both the pattern and the preference relating to the age difference between the spouses if is not controlled for the order of marriage.

The reasons behind wide gap between the ages of the husbands and their wives in Bangladesh is difficult to explain easily. The accuracy of this variable largely depends on the accuracy of the age reporting. The respondents in the survey were ever married women. Ages of the husbands were recorded from these women verbatim, who were presumably less aware of their husbands' age. This guess might run in either direction: upward or downward. The error may be conspicuous in rural areas where the husbands are viewed as an authoritative figures. If the errors occur systematically by sex, this tendency might not affect the differential analysis but can distort the data for levels and trend analysis over time. The problem becomes further aggravated if the women are in polygynous marriage. The distribution of the husbands by their age at marriage shows that as much as 2.4 percent of them were married between 40 and 50, 0.5 percent between

50 and 60 and 0.2 percent beyond 60. The average age at marriage of the husbands marrying beyond 40 is 46.9 years with a modal value of 40. For those who married before 40, the corresponding average is only 24.8 years (mode being 24 years). Such a large proportion of husbands marrying beyond 40 with such a wide age gap indicates that they were mostly divorced or widowed. This is expected to contribute to the wide interspousal age differences. Any change in the characteristics of the husbands over time can distort the age gap to a considerable extent. Keeping the above points in view, an attempt has been made in this section to throw light on the provisional trend in age difference between husbands and wives. As before, the respondents were classified as belonging to three broad birth cohorts: before 1950, between 1950 and 1960 and after 1960. This classification roughly corresponds to three current age groups of the women: 40 and above, between 30 and 39, and less than 30 years.

Estimates based on census and survey data indicate a moderate decline of about two and a half years in age differences over the last 70 years since 1921 (see Table 6.1). According to 1921 census, the average age difference was 9.6 years. This seemed to have declined to 7.9 in 1931 and thereafter showed an erratic pattern until 1974. This average, with some erratic pattern, seemed to have started declining in recent times and reached to 6.9 years in 1991. It may be mentioned that the census data provide the estimates based on singulate mean age at marriage whereas other sources base the estimates on direct recording of age at marriage. Against the background of these uncertainties and conflicting evidences regarding a clear trend in interspousal age difference, we present our findings based on the reported age at marriage with retrospective information based on cohort approach.

The cohort analysis presented in Table 6.14 reveal that the interspousal age difference has declined roughly by only 1.7 years from 11.3 years for those who were born before 1950 to 9.6 years for those who were born after 1960. The data further indicate that during the 20 year-period (mid 1950-1960 to 1960 and thereafter), the age difference virtually remained static, averaging around 10 years implying that whatever decline in the interspousal age differences has been

observed during the period covered by the cohorts, can be attributed to have taken place during period covered by the initial (before 1950 )and the intermediate (between 1950-1960) cohorts. We present below an account of the changes in age at marriage by some background variables across the cohorts.

***Wife's age at marriage:***

The age differences for the total sample have shown a consistent fall as age at marriage increased: from 10.7 years for women currently under 15 years to 8.6 years for those who are 20 years and over. This fall is exactly repeated for all the cohorts (see Table 6.14). As to the trend, the fall was faster from the initial cohort (before 1950) to the middle cohort and subsequently slowed down since the intermediate cohort. For the women who were married before 15, experienced the highest (14.3%) decline.

***Current residence:***

Rural areas have recorded relatively a faster decline (15.8%) in the age differences during the entire period covered by the cohorts. This trend is consistent with the trend in age at marriage as noted earlier. On the other hand, this decline is to the extent of little over 11 percent for the urban residents during the same period. For the first two cohorts, the age differences for urban areas were lower but this pattern appears to be reversed for the last interval. With an overall curvilinear pattern, urban age difference is 0.2 years higher than rural difference. There are two possible explanations for this apparently higher mean in urban area: imbalanced change in the age at marriage for men and women and migration of rural people to urban areas. Males might have been more responsive to the government plan for social development and thus participated more in education program than women because the attitude of parents toward education for their daughters was not as favorable as it was for the sons. Consequently, the average age at marriage for males increased rapidly without any accompanying change in the age at marriage for females. The birth cohort data reflect that proportion of respondents with rural childhood background enumerated in urban areas increased from 15.9 percent to 17.9 percent from the initial cohort to

the terminal cohort. This group might marry quite early in their life, thus contributing to large interspousal age gap. The overall difference of 0.3 years between urban and rural areas were however not statistically significant.

***Childhood residence:***

A pattern similar to the current residence seems to exist for the childhood residence, the overall age difference being slightly higher (.5 years) in rural areas. The urban-rural differences for the first two cohorts are .7 and 1.1 years respectively. The decline was faster (15.8%) in rural areas than (10.2%) in the urban areas.

***Region of residence:***

Irrespective of the regional affiliation of the women, the age differences showed a clear and consistent downward trend from the initial cohort to the terminal cohort. The decline has been more steeper for Khulna division (17.4%), followed by Dhaka (16.4%), Rajshahi (14%) and then Chittagong division (13.7%). The trend in age difference seems to follow the same pattern as that of the trend in age at marriage, where Khulna division experienced the faster increase in age at marriage and Chittagong division the least. The analysis presented in this study seems to suggest that, as far as the regional developmental efforts are concerned, Khulna division had been much more responsive to the social transformation, and as a result, the demographic scenario in this division has been relatively more favorable in response to the developmental efforts.

***Education:***

For all sub-categories of educational level, a consistent decline in interspousal age difference was observed for all the three cohorts. The decline was substantial (18.3%) for the respondents with highest educational attainment followed by illiterate group (15.4%). The least decline (12.3%) was noted due to primary level of education. The overall level of age differences showed a consistent fall across all educational levels for the entire period of study.

***Husband's education:***

The contribution of husband's education in lowering the interspousal age gap is about of the same magnitude as of the wife's education and it is true regardless of the cohorts. Across the cohorts, the age differences have shown notable decline. The fall is about 14 percent for 'no education' category, over 18 percent for the 'primary level' category, and 12 percent for the 'above primary level' category. Compared to the initial cohort, the decrease in age difference has been more pronounced for the recent birth cohort. This effect primarily comes through the primary education. There is virtually little difference between the primary level and above primary level.

***Religion:***

For all religious groups, age differences have shown a downward trend over time. This fall has been more pronounced (15.8%) for Muslims than Non-Muslims (13%) from initial cohort to the last cohort. For Muslims, the age difference falls from 11.4 years for the cohort born before 1950 to 10.1 years for 1950-1960 cohort and declines further to 9.6 for those who were born after 1960, the relative fall being 11.4 percent and 2.9 percent respectively. For Non-Muslims, the corresponding declines are 6.5 percent and 6.9 percent. This shows that the initial decline was much faster for Muslims which brought about a higher contribution of Muslims in the overall change in the spousal age difference.

***Work status:***

The age differences for both working women and non-working women have shown a clear downward trend across all birth cohorts. The mean age differences for women for the first cohort with work experience before marriage 11.2 years, is 0.2 years lower than that of the women who did not work. The age difference for both working and non-working women declines by exactly one year from the initial cohort to the intermediate cohort.

***Timing of marriage:***

This variable acts as a proxy to the age at marriage and as such expected to exert the same influence as that of the age at marriage viz. women with pre-menarcheal marriage will have higher

interspousal age difference than those who were in post-menarcheal marriage. This expectation is apparently met in the present instance, where the former group had an interspousal age difference of 10.7 years which is about one year higher than that of their counterpart group. These differences are maintained for all the birth cohorts. The age differences drop almost linearly for both the groups from the initial cohort to the terminal cohort with relatively faster pace for pre-menarcheal group (13.8% vs 12.8%).

***Husband's age at marriage:***

For all cohorts, the spousal age differences increased considerably with the age at marriage of the groom. As explained earlier, the results are consistent and are in the expected direction. The declining trend is evident at all ages at marriage (Table 6.14).

**6.6 Summary**

***Current level of age differences:***

In Bangladesh, women's marriages are very often arranged well in advance (in about 20 % cases) of puberty and are to husbands who are on the average 8 years or more older than themselves. An insignificant proportion (0.5%) of women are married to persons who are of their same age or older while a significant proportion (15.3%) still marry men who are 15 years or even more older than themselves. The corresponding proportion as recorded in 1975 BFS was 19.4 percent, implying a 15 percent decrease in interspousal age difference over a period of 15 years. The overall age difference in Bangladesh has been estimated to be 10.1 years from 1989 BFS.

The present study has been in agreement with the stated hypothesis that older the groom, the greater the age difference; the older the bride, the smaller the age difference. For example, when the groom married before 20, the age difference was 3.9 years, when he married between 20 and 24 years, the bride was on the average 7.3 years younger than him. This differences increased sharply and reached to 25 years when the groom was 35 years or over. When the females married before the age of 15 years, the interspousal age difference was 10.7 years. This difference



decreased by one year for the bride marrying between 15 and 17 years, decreasing further to 8.6 years for women marrying beyond 19 years of age

The differential analysis by cohorts revealed a trend toward decreasing age differences between husbands and wives. Women who were born before 1945, were almost 12 years older than their husbands, while this age difference reduced to less than 10 years for those who were born after 1970 women.

Neither childhood residence nor current residence had any impact on the interspousal age differences. The differences were only marginally higher (10.2 years) in rural areas than (9.9 years) in the urban area for current residence For the childhood residence, these differences were 10.2 and 9.7 respectively.

Though overall levels of age differences did not vary widely by region of residence, the age pattern of differences varied substantially. More women (0.7%) in Khulna division marry men of equal age than women in other divisions. The prevalence is the least (0.3%) in Chittagong division. This produces heavy concentration of marriages of the women at significantly higher age differences. At the extreme age difference of 15 years or more, the prevalence of marriages in Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi are 16.6 percent, 15.1 percent, 15.9 percent and 13.9 percent respectively.

Educational differentials in the age differences between husbands and wives were marked. Women with some education marry men who are on the average 9.4 years older than themselves, while this difference was 10.5 years for the illiterate women. The age difference is considerably less (9.6 years) when both husbands and wives are literate than (11.3 years) when both of them are illiterate. When husband alone is literate, the difference is 10.8 years. This difference reduces to 9.7 years when wife is literate, showing that wife's education is an important factor in the determination of interspousal age difference. In about 18 percent of the cases, illiterate women married men at least 15 years older to them. This proportion is less than 12 percent for the literate women, supporting our hypothesized relationship between spousal age difference and education.

The pattern of differences remained the same when husband's education is considered. Religious differences with respect to the spousal age gap was insignificant (10.1 years and 10.0 years respectively for Muslims and non-Muslims respectively). Pre-marital work status of women was also not associated with the age differences between the spouses.

Spousal age differences were significantly related to the timing of marriage. Women marrying before their first menstruation, were on the average 10.7 years younger than their husbands. The difference reduced to 9.8 years for those who were married after the onset of their first menstruation. Within an age difference of 5 years or less, women marrying after their first menstruation were more (11%) in proportion than (6.7%) those who experienced their first menstruation before their marriage. As a consequence, at the extreme difference of 15 years or more, there were as many as 18 percent of the women, who were married before the onset of their first menstruation. This figure is less than 14 percent for women marrying after puberty

#### *Changes in age differences:*

The multiple classification analysis (MCA) identified the wife's age at marriage to possess the highest predictive capacity explaining the age difference ( $\beta = .11$ ). Respondent's education appeared as the next important variable with  $\beta = .10$ . Wife's current age stood out as the third important variable in explaining the spousal age differences.

The birth cohort analysis confirmed a declining trend in the age difference. For example, an age difference of 11.3 years was suggested for the cohort born before 1950. This declined to 9.6 years for the cohort born after 1960 implying an average decline of 1.7 years. The analysis further suggested that the age difference remained nearly static for the cohort born roughly between 1955 to 1975.

The differential analysis of the age difference by cohort showed a consistent fall of the age differences by age at marriage. For example, those who married before 15, had an age gap of 10.7 years. This declined to 8.6 years for the women, who were married at an age of 20 years or later. This pattern is consistent regardless of the cohorts.

Both in urban and rural areas, the age difference decreased monotonically. On the average, the rural women maintained a higher age difference (10.2 years) than (9.7 years) their urban counterparts. Interestingly, rural areas experienced relatively more faster decline (15.8%) than (13.5%) for the urban areas. This pattern is similar for the childhood residence.

The trends towards declining age differences were noted at all educational levels. For all cohorts, effect of education was pronounced on age differences. The decrease in age difference was much faster (18.3%) for women with above primary level of education than (15.4%) women with no education. The age difference fell more rapidly (15.8%) for Muslim women than (13.8%) non-Muslim women. The trend values by timing of marriage across the cohorts showed that the pace of decline in age gap was slightly higher (13.7%) among the women having been married before their first menstrual period than (12.8%) among the women marrying after their puberty. This trend tended to bridge the interspousal age differences over time: from 0.8 years for the cohort born before 1950 to 0.6 years for the cohort born after 1960.

Table 6.1: Age differences between husband and wife  
based on singulate mean age at marriage  
: 1921-1991

Year	Source	Male	Female	Difference
1921	Census	21.9	12.3	9.6
1931	Census	18.7	10.8	7.9
1941	Census	21.7	13.4	8.3
1951	Census	22.4	14.4	8.0
1961	Census	22.9	13.9	9.0
1974	Census	23.9	15.9	8.0
1975	BFS	24.0	16.3	7.7
1981	Census	23.9	16.6	7.3
1989	BFS	25.5	18.0	7.5
1991	Census	24.9	18.0	6.9

*Source: ESCAP (1981) and BFS (1990)*

Table 6.2 Relative age of wife by husband's age: BFS 1989

Husband's age	Number of women	Wife younger	Wife same	Wife older
<20	73	90.5	6.8	2.7
20-24	602	98.0	1.5	0.5
25-29	1588	99.4	0.2	0.4
30-34	1785	99.7	0.2	0.1
35-39	1768	99.4	0.1	0.5
40-44	1422	99.6	0.2	0.2
45+	3001	100.0	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>10275</b>	<b>99.5</b>	<b>0.25</b>	<b>0.25</b>

Table 6.3: Interspousal age differences by husband's age in relation to wife's age: BFS 1989

Husband's age in relation to wife's age	BFS 1989	BFS 1975
	Percent	Percent
Same or less	0.5	0.6
1 to 4 years older	9.2	7.5
5 to 9 years older	45.0	39.3
10 to 14 years older	30.0	33.2
15 years or more older	15.3	19.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Mean difference</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>10.7</b>
<b>Median difference</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>

Table 6.4: Interspousal age differences by wife's current age: BFS1989

Wife's current age	N	Husband's age in relation to wife's age					diff in years
		Same/ less	1 to 4 yrs older	5 to 9 yrs older	10 to 14 yrs older	15 a more yrs older	
15-19	1761	0.3	10.7	46.7	30.9	11.4	9.7
20-24	2264	0.5	10.6	47.4	29.1	12.4	9.6
25-29	1828	0.6	10.6	48.4	28.4	12.0	9.5
30-34	1694	0.6	6.6	46.2	29.6	16.9	10.3
35-39	1145	0.6	9.2	43.6	28.8	17.8	10.5
40-44	092	0.8	6.4	34.6	34.3	23.9	11.3
45-49	684	1.2	3.9	36.1	34.8	24.0	11.5
$\chi^2 = 269.3$		df= 24		p< .001			

Table 6.5: Interspousal age differences by wife's age at marriage: BFS 1989.

Husband's age in relation to wife's age							
Wife's age marriage	N	Same or less	1 to 4 yrs older	4 to 9 yrs older	10 to 14 yrs older	15 or more yrs older	Age difference
<15	4949	.5	6.9	40.9	33.4	18.4	10.7
15-17	3955	.6	10.1	48.4	28.2	12.7	9.7
18-19	890	.7	12.6	50.6	24.8	11.3	9.1
20+	484	1.2	19.6	47.5	20.0	11.6	8.6
$\chi^2 = 251$		df = 12		p < .001			

Table 6.6: Interspousal age differences by husband's age at marriage: BFS 1989.

Husband's age in relation to wife's age	Husband's age at marriage				
	<20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35+
Same or less	4.4	0.1	-	-	-
1-4 years older	52.8	8.6	1.4	0.7	-
5-9 years older	42.8	76.5	29.3	5.5	1.3
10-14 years older	-	14.7	61.7	34.4	2.1
15 years or more	-	0.1	7.6	59.3	96.6
Age difference	3.9	7.3	10.8	14.9	25.0
	$\chi^2 = 11772$	df=16		p < .000	

Table 6.7: Interspousal age differences urban-rural residence : BFS 1989

Husband's age in relation to Wife's age	Current residence		Childhood residence	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Same or less	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5
1-4 years older	9.2	9.3	9.1	10.2
5-9 years older	44.9	45.2	44.6	47.5
10-14 years older	29.8	30.4	30.3	28.5
15 years or more	15.6	14.4	15.6	13.3
<b>Age difference</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>9.7</b>
	$\chi^2 = 2.7, df=4, p=.60$	$\chi^2=10, df=4, p<.05$	$\chi^2=10, df=4, p<.05$	$\chi^2=10, df=4, p<.05$

Table 6.8: Interspousal age differences by region of residence:BFS 1989

Husband's age in relation to wife's age	Region of residence			
	Chittagong	Dhaka	Khulna	Rajshahi
Same or less	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.6
1-4 years older	7.9	8.4	10.0	10.9
5-9 years older	43.0	45.2	43.7	47.5
10-14 years older	32.3	30.9	29.7	27.1
15 years or more	16.6	15.1	15.9	13.9
<b>Age difference</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>9.8</b>
	$\chi^2= 48.08$	$df=12$	$p<.001$	

Table 6.7: Interspousal age differences urban-rural residence : BFS 1989

Husband's age in relation to Wife's age	Current residence		Childhood residence	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Same or less	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5
1-4 years older	9.2	9.3	9.1	10.2
5-9 years older	44.9	45.2	44.6	47.5
10-14 years older	29.8	30.4	30.3	28.5
15 years or more	15.6	14.4	15.6	13.3
<b>Age difference</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>9.7</b>
	$\chi^2 = 2.7, df=4, p=.60$ $\chi^2=10, df=4, p<.05$ $p<.05$			

Table 6.8: Interspousal age differences by region of residence: BFS 1989

Husband's age in relation to wife's age	Region of residence			
	Chittagong	Dhaka	Khulna	Rajshahi
Same or less	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.6
1-4 years older	7.9	8.4	10.0	10.9
5-9 years older	43.0	45.2	43.7	47.5
10-14 years older	32.3	30.9	29.7	27.1
15 years or more	16.6	15.1	15.9	13.9
<b>Age difference</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>9.8</b>
	$\chi^2 = 48.08$ $df=12$ $p<.001$			



Table 6.9: Interspousal age differences by education: BFS 1989

Husband's age in relation to wife's age	Wife's education		Husband's education	
	Illiterate	Literate	Illiterate	Literate
Same or less	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.6
1-4 years older	8.3	10.7	8.3	10.0
5-9 years older	43.6	47.2	43.1	46.4
10-14 years older	30.0	29.8	30.7	29.2
15 years or more	17.5	11.8	17.4	13.6
<b>Age difference</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>9.8</b>
	$\chi^2=84.12$	$df=12,$	$p<.001$	

Table 6.10 : Interspousal age differences by religion: BFS 1989

Husband's age in relation to wife's age	Religion	
	Muslim	Non-Muslim
Same or less	0.5	0.5
1-4 years older	9.0	10.5
5-9 years older	45.1	44.5
10-14 years older	30.2	28.9
15 years or more	15.2	15.7
<b>Age difference</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>10.0</b>
	$\chi^2=4.20$	$df=4$ $p=.38$

Table 6.11: Interspousal age differences by pre-marital work status: BFS 1989

Age of husband in relation to age of wife	Work status	
	Worked	Not-worked
Same or less	0.6	0.5
1-4 years older	9.6	9.2
5-9 years older	44.2	45.1
10-14 years older	28.2	30.3
15 years or more	17.5	15.0
<b>Age difference</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>10.1</b>
	$\chi^2= 6.6$	df=4 $p=.16$

Table 6.12: Interspousal age differences by timing of marriage: BFS 1989

Husband's age in relation to wife's age	Timing of marriage	
	Pre-pubertal	Post-pubertal
Same or less	0.7	0.5
1-4 years older	6.0	10.5
5-9 years older	39.9	46.6
10-14 years older	35.4	28.5
15 years or more	17.9	13.9
<b>Age difference</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>9.8</b>
	$\chi^2= 76.1$	df=4, $p<.001$

Table 6.13: Multiple classification analysis of the interspousal age differences: BFS 1989

Explanatory variable	N	All married women		Correlation ratio	
		Unadjusted	Adjusted	$\eta$	$\beta$
<i>Current age*</i>					
£25		9.64	9.69	.10	.08
25-34		9.92	9.97		
35-44		10.85	10.73		
45+		11.48	11.26		
<i>Age at marriage*</i>					
<15		10.75	10.70	.11	.11
15-17		9.69	9.73		
18-19		9.13	9.21		
20+		8.59	8.61		
<i>Current residence*</i>					
Rural		10.20	10.40	.02	.02
Urban		9.90	9.27		
<i>Childhood residence</i>					
Rural		10.20	10.14	.03	.02
Urban		9.70	9.86		
<i>Region</i>					
Chittagong		10.44	10.52	.04	.05
Dhaka		10.12	10.11		
Khulna		10.11	10.04		
Rajshahi		9.77	9.77		
<i>Education</i>					
No education		10.50	10.54	.09	.10
Primary		9.60	9.60		
Above primary		9.20	9.12		
<i>Husband's education*</i>					
No education		10.50	10.23	.07	.04
Primary		9.60	9.60		
Above primary		9.30	10.23		
<i>Timing of marriage</i>					
Premenarcheal		10.70	10.48	.06	.04
Post menarcheal		9.81	9.88		
<i>Work status</i>					
Worked before		10.31	10.37	.01	.02
Not worked		10.07	10.06		
<i>Religion</i>					
Muslim		10.10	10.12	.01	.01
Non-Muslim		10.00	10.00		

Grand mean=10.10

The main effects of these variables are significant at 5 percent level

Multiple R=.15, R<sup>2</sup>=.022

Table 6.14: Trends in interspousal age differences by birth cohorts: BFS 1989

Characteristics	Birth cohort			
	Before 1950	1950-1960	After 1960	All cohort
<b>Total</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>10.1</b>
<i>Age at marriage</i>				
<15	11.9	10.7	10.2	10.7
15-17	10.6	9.9	9.3	9.7
18-19	9.8	9.2	9.0	9.1
<i>Current residence</i>				
Rural	11.4	10.4	9.6	10.2
Urban	11.1	9.6	9.6	9.9
<i>Childhood residence</i>				
Rural	11.4	10.3	9.6	10.2
Urban	10.7	9.2	9.6	9.7
<i>Region</i>				
Chittagong	11.7	10.3	10.1	10.4
Dhaka	11.6	10.0	9.7	10.1
Khulna	11.5	10.2	9.5	10.1
Rajshahi	10.7	10.1	9.2	9.8
<i>Education</i>				
No education	11.7	10.7	9.9	10.5
Primary	10.5	9.8	9.2	9.6
Above primary	10.4	8.6	8.5	9.2
<i>Husbands' education</i>				
No education	11.5	10.8	9.9	10.5
Primary	11.0	10.1	9.0	9.6
Above primary	10.9	9.5	8.6	9.3
<i>Religion</i>				
Muslim	11.4	10.1	9.6	10.1
Non-Muslim	10.8	10.1	9.4	10.0
<i>Work status</i>				
Worked before	11.2	10.3	9.9	10.3
Not worked	11.4	10.1	9.6	10.1
<i>Timing of marriage</i>				
Pre-pubescent	11.7	10.4	10.1	10.7
Post-pubescent	10.9	9.9	9.5	9.8
<i>Husbands' age at marriage</i>				
<20	3.7	4.3	3.8	3.9
20-24	8.1	7.3	7.1	7.3
25-29	11.7	10.6	10.5	10.8
30-34	16.6	14.6	14.4	14.9
35+	23.5	24.8	26.0	25.0

## **Chapter VII**

### **MARRIAGE DISSOLUTION**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

Interest in marriage dissolution--the break-up of marriages--and remarriage focuses on both their cultural and demographic aspects. Culturally, the stability of marriages, and the ease with which they are entered into or dissolved, reflect and also influence relations between husbands and wives and between parents and their children (Smith 1981). Where dissolution patterns are changing, the nature of the family is likely to be in transition as well, the newer pattern not necessarily being an improvement over the old. Demographically, interest in marriage stability also derives from the implications that marriage patterns may have for births, particularly where fertility outside marriage is rare.

Marriage dissolution is brought about by two forces of attrition: (a) incompatibility, resulting in separation or divorce and (b) death of one of the marriage partners (widowhood). Separation is a state in which husband and wife are living apart because of marital discord, but the marriage may not be considered dissolved (Shahidullah 1980). Divorce and separation are two of the ways whereby an individual adjusts to marital disharmony. Widowhood is largely a natural and inevitable phenomenon of old age.

Work on marriage dissolution and remarriage in Asia is limited, but much has been done on Latin America (Downing and Yaukey 1979 ) and the Caribbean (Roberts 1975). This limitation primarily stems from the fact that the concept of marriage dissolution is even more culture-specific than marriage, making comparative analysis virtually impossible (Newell 1988). Even if reliable data can be collected, there are very great problem of interpretation, partly because in many cultures there is a stigma associated with them so that some people will state that they are married or single when in fact they are separated or divorced. What demographers are interested in, essentially, is the break-up of sexual union, yet often this is not a clear-cut event.

Moreover, divorce is often a very poor indicator of this because legal and religious obstacles to obtaining a divorce in many societies are very great. The aspect has been, however, extensively investigated in developed countries, among which, experiences of Blayo and Festy (1976) on French population and that of McCarthy (1978) on American population are noteworthy. The studies by Goode (1993) and Jones (1994) provide more recent experiences of world's changes in marriage dissolution. The trends differ markedly by regions of the world. Divorce rates in Western countries rose sharply over the 1960s and 1970s, though over the 1980s and 1990s, the rates have flatten off in most cases (Jones 1995). There are of course, considerable variations in these themes; in Southern European catholic countries, divorce was not possible before 1970, and Eastern European countries faced special factors. Western demographers held the view that, throughout the world, increasing urbanization and industrialization will tend to raise divorce rates, because they are associated with breakdown of traditional norms including reduced social pressure to maintain the marriage relationship intact, pursuit of individual self-interest, increasing economic independence of women and increased level of stress in family life (Jones 1995).

In contrast, divorce rates in Islamic South-East Asia, declined dramatically over the period when the divorce rates in Western countries were rising. Despite rapid urbanization and industrialization, this decline continued through 1980s. The rates in Islamic South-East Asian countries had been at extraordinarily high levels in the 1950s and earlier, indeed. During the 1970s, there was a 'cross-over' with rates in Islamic South-East Asia, falling those in the West. By 1990s, the rates in Western countries were approximately four times as higher as those of the Muslim populations of Indonesia ( Jones 1995).

The causes of decline in the divorce rates in Western societies have been identified to be an intensification of a long-term tendency for individuals to seek their own interests and happiness rather than to stay married for the sake of their children or interest of the family (Goode 1993). Carmichael and McDonald (cited in Jones 1995), while explaining the rising trend in Australian divorce rates, cite some demographic factors as having contributed. These include, the potential greater longevity of marriages as result of unprecedentedly young age at marriage and rising life

expectancies and as a resultant interest in the quality of marital relationship. Youthful marriages in any case, were more susceptible to disruption, especially when they are contracted in response to pregnancy, women's growing capacity for economic independence, both through rising labor force participation and altered social security provisions for mothers supporting children alone, enabled them to live independently; the principles espoused by the women's movement, increased demands for more egalitarian, role sharing and emotionally fulfilling marriages, leading to major friction. A number of other factors may have played a role: lengthening intervals to the first birth facilitated the termination of unsatisfactory marriages; conflict about when to forego the second income in order to have children; unfavorable economic conditions; more potentials for both sexes to meet other potential marriage partners owing to the movement of more women into the work force; and declining adherence to religious beliefs.

Despite development of an urban-industrial economy and improved educational and employment opportunities for women, the opposite has happened for the Islamic South-East Asian countries. Discussing the declining trend in the Japanese perspectives, Goode (1963) argues that the decline was a net outcome of two opposing forces: a decline in divorce from traditional causes (normally the parent-in-law sending back the bride because they were not satisfied with her), which more than offset the rise due to individual incompatibility between husband and wife. Jones (1995) however reached a different conclusion in discussing the South-East Asian trend that trends in this case did not offset, but rather reinforced each other. Indeed a major traditional cause of divorce was that many couples were incompatible from the start as a result of system of mate selection, as well as being immature and that society did not frown too strongly on dissolution of such marriages. Thus the result of drastic changes in this mate selection system were unambiguously in the direction of lowered divorce rates. Many societies have high divorce rates simply because of legal ease of obtaining divorce, lack of strong economic deterrents, availability of practical and moral support for a divorced woman from her kin, the ease of remarriage, and flexible arrangements for the care of children after divorce (Wilder 1982). All

these factors operate in a context where young people are socially immature when they were married.

keeping in view the dissolution of marriage in the above perspectives, this chapter presents an overview of the various aspects of marriage dissolution and remarriage in Bangladesh using the 1989 BFS data supplemented by the data obtained primarily from census. The main focus of this chapter is to examine the pattern of marriage dissolution, its differentials and trends over time. Finally, the chapter provides an empirical testing of some propositions and hypotheses discerned from historical and cross-cultural studies relating to marriage break-up.

## **7.2 Patterns of Marriage Dissolution**

In an effort to examine the pattern of marriage dissolution due to widowhood and divorce, we present in Table 7.1 the percentage widowed and divorced by age as recorded in 1989 BFS household survey, alongside similar figures from the 1975 BFS and the 1981 census for comparison. The distribution shows that for 1989 survey, the percentage widowed abruptly rises from 3.6 percent in the 30 to 35 age group upto 68 percent for those aged 60 and over. Tabulation of the same figures for male population (table not shown here) demonstrated that the proportion of males reported as widowers are negligible (1 to 3%) below age 60 and rises only to 8 percent among them aged 60 and over. There are two possible reasons for this huge disparity. First, there exists a large interspousal age difference (to the extent of 10 years) in Bangladesh and therefore husbands usually die before their wives. Second, the differences tend to imply that men are much more likely to remarry than women.

On the contrary, the divorced and separated cases constituted a very small proportion. Almost certainly, there has been some under-reporting, particularly among older women, who may find it more acceptable to declare themselves as widows than as divorced or separated to avoid embarrassment (Huq and Cleland 1990).

A close examination of the data on marital status (Table not shown here) for 1975 BFS, 1981 census and 1989 BFS revealed a number of changes that have taken place in marital status.



There has been an appreciable rise in the proportion single vis-à-vis a fall in the proportion ever married, reflecting a rise in the age at marriage.

The data in Table 7.1 exhibit a major shift in marital status toward a decline in widowhood since 1975. For instance, among women aged 40 to 44, the percentage widowed fell from 20 percent in 1975 to 17 percent in 1981 and further down to 12 percent in 1989. A similar trend seems to emerge for other age groups between 45 to 59 years. This may probably be attributed to a fall in adult mortality and a rise in probabilities of remarriage for widows. As a result of declining widowhood, the proportions of women who are currently married are higher in 1989 than in 1975 at all ages above 30. In presence of a fall in the incidence of widowhood and a corresponding rise in the incidence of divorce/separation, the resultant effect has been a declining trend in the incidence of marital dissolution due to all causes. This feature has been displayed in Figure 7.1 by current age.

A marriage cohort analysis of 1975 BFS data (Ahmed 1982) demonstrated that of those women who were married before 1955, 16.5 percent had been widowed. For the marriage cohort 1965-1969, only 3.4 percent were widowed. The extent of widowhood was found to be less than 2 percent for the most recent cohort of 1970-74. Although the differences in the extent of widowhood among the marriage cohorts may be due to variation in age, the trend suggests a moderate decline in the widowhood incidence over time (ESCAP 1980).

The data in Table 7.2 indicate that the prevalence of widowhood has declined over time. As expected, the proportion of dissolved marriages shows a precipitous fall from 14.9 percent for those who were married before 1970 to only 0.3 percent for those who were married in recent time (1985-1989). Overall, 86 percent women are still in their first union. Among the ever married women, 13.7 percent of the first marriages were dissolved, 6.1 percent by the death of the husbands, 5.9 percent by divorce and 1.8 percent by separation, while 9.9 percent of first marriages in 1975 were dissolved due to death of the husband. This figure is only 6.1 for the 1989 BFS data. This confirms a downward trend in the incidence of widowhood.

The proportions of women who experienced divorce seem to follow a curvilinear pattern across the marriage cohorts. The percentage of women whose first marriage ended in divorce, was found to be 4.9, who were married before 1970. This rises to 7.4 for the 1970-74 cohort rising further to 8.2 for those who were married between 1975 and 1979. The recent cohort experienced a prevalence of divorce of only 3.3. This curvilinear pattern poses difficulties in determining a trend in divorce over time. Nevertheless, the data indicate a rising trend in the divorce rate for the middle cohort, which shows a downturn beginning 1980's. The 1975 BFS data recorded a very high divorce rate to the extent of 10.5 percent, while the 1989 BFS data suggest this rate in the neighborhood of 6 percent, indicating that the divorce rate might have started falling recently in Bangladesh. This comparison is however affected by the fact that the youngest cohort has just entered the marital state and therefore the proportions of women divorced in the youngest marriage cohort are likely to be biased downward. Misreporting of marital status may also be an added factor for such a lower proportion. As indicated earlier, the possibility of some under-reporting of women who may find it more acceptable to declare themselves as widows rather than as divorced or separated can not also be ruled out. This is particularly true for those who are older, thus depressing the proportion. Thus, looking for a trend based on the divorce experiences of the oldest and the youngest marriage cohorts may be misleading. The data in Table 7.2 further indicate that the incidence of separation has begun to rise in Bangladesh. The 1975 BFS data also demonstrated a similar trend (ESCAP 1980). The overall incidence of separation is 1.8 percent for 1989 which is comparable with the 1975 BFS figure of 1.1 percent, showing a slight increase in the incidence over time.

### **7.3 Differentials in Marriage Dissolution**

Marriage dissolution is inherently a social problem and as such is expected to vary by socio-economic characteristics. The present section is designed to focus on the variation in the dissolution rates by selected demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The analysis is primarily drawn from life tables, which allow incremental and cumulative dissolution rates to be found for variations since start of marriage. We may compare, for example,

the proportion of marriages that end within one year or within five years for women born in different years or belonging to different marriage cohorts. The dissolution rates have also been shown by birth cohort for the same set of socio-economic conditions through bivariate presentations. The life table for marriage dissolution is constructed utilizing the data on duration from marriage to the date of interview. The dissolution rate for the first year of marriage,  $1q_0$  is found as the proportion of marriages that were dissolved within the first year among all marriages that began one or more years before the interview.

To find the proportion dissolved during the second year,  $1q_1$ , women whose marriages ended in the first year are dropped from the denominator together with women whose marriages began in the two years before the interview. The remainder comprises women at risk of dissolution during the second year, among whom the proportion whose marriages are dissolved is the desired rate.

After two years the cumulative proportion dissolved will be  $1q_0 + (1 - 1q_0)1q_1$ , which is the sum of the chances of marriage being dissolved in the first year and the chances of marriage being dissolved in the second year after continuing through the first year. Rates for later years are found by the same process. Kaplan and Meier (1958) have shown that such rates are consistent maximum likelihood estimates of the proportions of marriages that are dissolved with time.

The rates so derived are subject to error if duration are systematically misreported or if the experience of women married relatively recently is unlike that of women married longer ago, since recently married women contribute only to the earlier part of the  $q_j$  series.

The life table analysis of marriage dissolution revealed that the overall duration of first union of Bangladeshi women is in the neighborhood of 35 years (see Figure 7.2). The dissolution rates seem to increase monotonically as duration of union progresses. As revealed by the figure, more than 5 percent of the marriages were dissolved within 10 years of marriage. Within a period of next 10 years, another 10 percent marriage break-down occurred reaching a figure of 15 percent by 20 years of marital union. This trends continued and by the end of 35 years of union, more than 50 percent of the women experienced the consequence of marital dissolution.

The dissolution rates seemed to vary by socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the women. Figures 7.3 through 7.12 display the cumulative proportions of women whose first marriages were dissolved classified by the interval start time. The following discussions will be centered primarily along the differential pattern of marital dissolution by current age with respect to a few selected characteristics of the sample women.

***Age at marriage:***

It is expected that delayed marriage effected through education will increase the capability of normative role performance by increasing mental maturity and thereby decreasing tension in marital life. This leads to an inverse relationship of age at marriage and marital dissolution. In other words, the lower the age at marriage, the higher the incidence of divorce and widowhood. The 1976 Indonesian Fertility Survey revealed a clear negative association of young marriage with marital dissolution (Guest 1991). Figure 7.3 tends to support this view and thus is in conformity with the stated hypothesis of greater risk of marriage dissolution among the early marriers. Dissolution rates are considerably greater in all marriage duration for marriages occurring at ages under 15 than at ages 15-17, these in turn are greater than dissolution rates for marriages taking place at 18 years or later. In consequence, the duration in first union is the lowest (29.7 years) for those who were married before 15 and the highest (35.2 years) for the group marrying later. The bivariate analysis by age at marriage also displayed the same phenomenon: dissolution rates are greater in all age groups for marriages occurring earlier (Table 7.3). For example, the percentage of widowed among those who were first married before 15 years of age was 8.4 percent. This proportion decreases to 2.3 percent for those who were married between 18 and 19. This pattern seems to be consistently followed for all age groups across the age at marriage. The percentage of women who have been widowed rises steadily with age, a feature to be expected in presence of the accumulated risk of mortality associated with age. The risk of divorce also seems to be diluted as age at marriage is raised. For example, for women marrying before 15, 8.7 percent of them were reported be divorced/separated, which declines to 6.1 percent for these who were married beyond 20 years. The table under reference presents a very interesting pattern of widowed. The

risk of dissolution due to divorce or separation is lower for the younger women, which sharply rises to a maximum for those who are between 25 and 34. This risks then abruptly decreases for those who are between 35 and 44 years of age and reaches to its minimum. This pattern seems to persist even when the age at marriage is controlled for. For example, for those who were married before 15, 8.9 percent of them under 25 were reported to be divorced/separated, which rises to 10.7 percent for those who were in 25-34 and then it starts declining and reaches to 7 percent and 6.1 percent at 35-44 and 45 and over. The corresponding figures for those who were married between 18 and 19 were 6.8, 7.5, 6.6 and 3.0 percent. The data in this table thus provide an impression that, Bangladeshi women encounter the highest risk of marriage dissolution due to divorce in the age range 20-34. The process of instability perhaps starts in early 20's and peaks somewhere between 25 and 34 and then begins to stabilize in the neighborhood of 45 and beyond. This tends to indicate that as the duration of marriage vis-à-vis age increases, the couples develop a better understanding of life blended with social prestige, which keeps a marriage intact. As revealed by the life table analysis, there exists a sharp differentials in dissolution rates for the younger women as compared to the older women (see Figure 7.4). This figure also indicates a cohort effect implying that the older cohort enjoyed a more stable life during first few years of their marriage. The overall impression is that the dissolution rates are closely related to the age at marriage that produces the observed variations in dissolution rates.

***Current residence:***

As the social system in the rural areas is less restrictive toward marriage breakdown, rural women have a greater risk of undergoing marital disruption than the urban women. In a direct way, as norms and values of urban lifestyle are different than those of rural life, the values of marriage and the normative structure of marital roles are also different between urban and rural areas (Ahmed 1982). This is expected to create a difference in the dissolution rates between urban and rural areas. In an indirect way, divorce rate is influenced by residential status through education and work participation. Opportunities for better education and jobs are more wider for urban women than their counterpart women in rural areas.

The above expectation is generally met at longer duration of marriage for the Bangladeshi women. Women in both the areas experience marital dissolution at the same rate to about 20 years since marriage. Dissolution rates for urban areas are seen to fall beyond 20 years of duration and continues to be prevalent to the remaining years of marriage (Figure 7.5).

Data presented in Table 7.3 indicate that dissolution of marriage due to divorce in rural areas is more prevalent than in urban areas. For urban residence, the overall rate of divorce is 6.7 percent as compared to 8 percent for those who were from rural areas. Controlling for current age, the pattern remains the same across the urban-rural residential status. In consequence, urban women spend two years more in the first marriage than their rural counterparts. This finding is in variation with the western societies where the divorce rate for rural areas is lower than that of the urban areas (Mueller and Pope 1977). One of the reasons for this pattern is probably the better economic condition of people in rural areas of these countries. Besides, informal social control has some influence of this divorce rate in the rural areas of developed countries. But this does not seem to be the case for Bangladesh and for other developing countries (Ahmed 1982). For these countries, scope for education is limited and incomes are relatively low. Low income places a strain and pressure on marital relations, ultimately bringing an end to the marital life. Family feuds between two families caused by failure to pay committed or unpaid dowry or bride price frequently results in divorce also.

The incidence of marital dissolution due to widowhood among the urban women is considerably higher than among the rural women. This is an implication of the fact that male mortality among the adult population is higher in urban areas. The life table constructed from 1981 sample enumeration seemed to support this assertion. The male population in urban areas are more exposed to the 'industrial deaths' and other accidental health hazard and thus have higher likelihood of experiencing higher mortality, implying a higher widowhood prevalence.

***Region of residence:***

The regional differences in marriage dissolution rates are not marked. The rates are fairly similar approximately until 25 years of married life, after which some minor variations are noted

(Figure 7.6). This closeness has resulted in little variation in the duration in the marital union, from 34.4 years to 35.3 years.

As revealed by bivariate analysis, the prevalence of widowhood is the lowest in Dhaka (5.6%) and the highest (6.6%) in Rajshahi. On the contrary, the incidence of divorce and separation is the highest (8.5%) in Dhaka division and the lowest (6.9%) in Chittagong division. A similar pattern was also discerned by 1975 BFS data (Ahmed 1982).

Despite the higher age at marriage, the divorce rate is found to be the highest in Dhaka division. The effect of age at marriage does not exist, however small it is, but other countervailing factors have concealed its effect. With a higher percentage of urban population and literacy, it is not possible to claim strongly the validity of Davis's argument that—it is an effect of urbanization. But the economic characteristics such as per capita landholding, family income, job opportunity, population density have a stronger impact on the divorce rate of the region. There is an indication that for all the regions, the incidence of marriage dissolution due to divorce/separation was higher in the past. This has shown a declining trend in recent years. This can be seen from the rising trend of proportions from the oldest (aged 45+) to the youngest (aged <25) via the mid-cohort (aged 25-34).

#### ***Education:***

Several studies have indicated that formal education is directly related to marital happiness and satisfaction which leads to lower incidence of marital dissolution (Guest 1991; Jones 1984; Jones 1995). Education has been important, partly as an indicator of differences in socio-economic status, which has also been a major theme in studies in marriage and divorce. In line with this expectation, sharp differentials appear in marriage dissolution rates by education of the respondents (Figure 7.7). Dissolution rates are seen to fall markedly with increasing education and continues to be sharp at longer duration. The bivariate analysis by age cohort also displays the same phenomenon. For example, women with no education experienced a divorce rate of 7.6, percent which falls to 2.2 percent for those who were reported to have level of education above primary. Likewise, educated women are significantly less likely to face the consequences of

divorce or separation than their counterpart non-educated women: 2.5 percent versus 9.4 percent. This pattern appears to persist even when the age is controlled for. The divorce rates consistently show an upward trend with respect to time irrespective of the level of education. The dissolution rates due to widowhood also vary by education: educated women experience considerably lower rate of marital dissolution due to widowhood.

The relationship discerned above is in the hypothesized direction. In family life, educated women have a better capacity for understanding and predicting the attitudes, intentions and motives of their spouses as well as other members of the family. They are more capable of interacting in the marital role performance with relatively higher consensus in marital life. This consensus blended with social prestige keeps the marriage intact and consequently, the risk of marital instability of these women remains relatively very low.

***Religion:***

The concept of marriage is different for Muslims from Hindus. Marriage in Islam is civil and contractual, with provision for nullification in cases of serious maladjustment, whereas for Hindus it is sacramental and eternal and can not be terminated. It is for this reason, that in formal Hindu tradition, there is no provision for divorce. Remarriage for Muslims is frequent but among Hindus, this is difficult. This discourages divorce for Hindus resulting in a lower incidence of dissolution, not taking into account the possibility of differential male mortality. As can be noted from Figure 7.8, Muslim women consistently experienced higher rates of dissolution than their Non-Muslim counterparts regardless of duration.

The prevalence of divorce as appears from our bivariate analysis is also much higher among the Muslims than among the Hindus (8.5% vs 2.1%), a result that seems to be in the hypothesized direction. Ahmed (1982) also found a similar pattern with the 1975 BFS data: the divorce rate for Muslims and Non-Muslims were respectively 12 percent and 1 percent respectively. The differences were statistically highly significant ( $p < .001$ ). The differences were found to exist even when the ages were controlled for. In addition to the arguments provided above for such a large variations in divorce rates by religion, different property inheritance law is



also factor which causes Hindus to divorce less. In the case of divorce, a Hindu women does not know how she will sustain herself if she is not accepted by her parents. In other words, marital alternatives predict marital disruption (Udry 1981). In contrast, there is no marked differentials in the widowhood prevalence by religion. In absence of any differences in male mortality by religion, widowhood prevalence are not expected to differ by religion, provided, effects of other factors remain negligible.

**Religiosity:**

An important attribute included in the BFS was religiosity. This dimension was measured by two questions. The first inquired as to whether the household observes religious practices more strictly or less strictly than other households in the locality. The second question was designed to know whether the respondent prays (for Muslims) or worships (for Non-Muslims) every day, less often or not at all. Tabulation of related data demonstrated that observance of religion by the household and the frequency of prayer of the respondents were significantly associated with the religion. This was confirmed by estimating odds ratios and their 95 percent confidence intervals from contingency tables. Under this condition, it is expected that as of religion, these two factors will also have effect on the dissolution of marriage.

As the data presented in Table 7.3 indicate, practicing religion strictly dilutes the risk of instability in marriage. For example, family observing religion more strictly, is confronted with a risk of divorce of 5.2 percent, which increases to 9.8 percent for those who observe it less strictly. This is true for all age cohorts. For frequency of prayer, the same relationship did seem to hold (not shown in table): women who say their prayer regularly, encounter divorce less frequently (5.3%) than those who do not do so at all (12.9%).

The above effect of religiosity is also discerned from life table analysis with respect to duration of marriage. As Figure 7.9 demonstrates, the gap due to religiosity seems to increase as duration lengthens. At the close of the marital life, this gap appeared to have bridged somewhat, a feature which has been observed to agree with other differentials. Strict observance of religion leads to a longer stable life (35.7 years) as compared to less strict observance (34.1 years).

***Work status:***

Large and significant differentials appear in marriage dissolution rates by premarital work status of women. The effect was felt for women regardless of ages (Table 7.3) and marriage duration (Figure 7.10). The dissolution rates increase linearly with the duration for those who had pre-marital work experience. The pace is somewhat slower for non-working women. This produces a significant difference in the duration in first union: 27.5 years for working women and 35.9 years for non-working women. The divorce rate for the women who worked before marriage (18.3%) is more than 3 times than that of women who did not work (Table 7.3). The relationship between work status and marital instability documented in the present analysis is also consistent with the one obtained by Ahmed for 1975 BFS data. He noted that the divorce rate for the women who worked before marriage (19%) is almost the double that of women who did not work. These results lead to accept our stated hypothesis of the positive relationship between work experience and dissolution of marriage.

The above result is in variation with the one obtained in a study conducted in Thailand (Silk 1981). Silk found that for Thai women, work prior to marriage was significantly associated with more stable unions than was for non-work. The effect was not felt among older women or at marriage duration beyond ten years. Among the Sri Lankan women, however, work was not found to correlate with marriage stability. It was also much prevalent, about 90 percent of Thai women having worked before marriage, as against 35 percent of Sri Lankan women. The comparable figure for Bangladeshi wives is only to the extent of 1.5 percent.

We noted in previous chapter that work status is not a significant differential in age at first marriage. In presence of this finding, we do not expect any positive effect of work on stability of marriage. Even if this does not seem to be convincing, there are some possible and plausible explanations as to why the divorce rate is higher for women who had premarital work experience. First, the work experience before marriage changes the expectations of women regarding marital behavior. Women, who have been exposed to modern marital norms or to the marital employment or travel, tend to expect more from their husbands in terms of emotional support, life style and

consumption of market goods (Lee 1977). This may result in marital dissatisfaction, because their higher expectations are less likely to be met. Secondly, as the work experience changes women's attitude, these women prefer to live in a conjugal family system than in an extended or joint family system. In a conjugal family system, married couples experience less pressure from the kin group to live together (Ahmed 1982). The environment prevalent in such families is highly congenial to take any decision individually and independently with greater freedom. Thirdly, work experience makes the women more cognizant about their supportive ability and provides them with better information about the alternatives, that is how to sustain herself in the event of marriage dissolution. Fourth, the husband's normative marital role expectation remains unchanged while his wife is working. Last but not the least, is the husband's desire to have full control over his wife's income. Some of these causes are more salient than the others. However, with lack of adequate and firm information about the causes of divorce, it is not possible to have a clear perception about the relative importance of all the factors.

***Timing of marriage:***

Timing of marriage measured by asking the women as to whether they were married before or after their first menstrual period. This age is assumed to be in the neighborhood of 13 years and thus expected to bear the relationship of marital dissolution along the same line as of the age at first marriage. This is indeed the case in the present instance. Marriage before the onset of first menstruation leads to a shorter duration of marriage (34 years) as compared to those who were married later (36 years). The dissolution rates sharply rise with duration of union but relatively at a slower pace in the case of those who got married after their first menstrual period. This is displayed in Figure 7.11.

The bivariate analysis with age demonstrated that for those who got married before their first menstruation, experienced a divorce rate of 10.6 percent, which decreased to 6.8 percent for those who got married after or at the edge of their first menstruation.

Marriage stability or instability might sometimes depend upon the comparability of marriage partners. A number of factors may be considered. In this analysis, we investigate this issue only with three characteristics of the husbands: education, occupation and landholding size.

Tabulation of data by the above categories (Table not shown ) demonstrated that the incidence of marriage dissolution is related to the education of the husbands. It is specially noticeable that those whose husbands have had no education, have a higher than average dissolution rate, while the opposite is true for those with higher education. Further analysis of the data revealed that marriages, where both the spouses had high education level were characterized by the lowest (4%) divorce rate, while the divorce assumed the highest prevalence (10.4%) when both the spouses were illiterate.

Among the three occupation categories of the respondents' husbands, the lowest rate of divorce was reported for the husbands who were involved in non-manual works. This category includes those who were in administrative or in sales and services. Respondents whose husbands were manual workers, experienced the highest rate of divorce (10.7%). The analysis revealed that the size of the land holding was unrelated with the marriage dissolution.

#### **7.4 Influence of Childbirth on Marriage Dissolution**

Regardless of the society, the presence of children discourages divorce as has been demonstrated in studies of both developing and developed societies. For instance, Jacobson (1950) found about 60 percent of the divorced couples in the United States to have no children. The average number of children born to these women is also very low. In Chad, Reyna (1979) found that only 15 percent of women were divorced with children as opposed to 49 percent without children. Investigation in Thailand and Sri Lanka also revealed a high correlation of the occurrence of birth with marriage stability (Smith 1980). A number of interrelated factors act to dissolve the marriage in absence of children. In developing societies, children are perceived as old age security. The more the children the couples have, as they think, the more their support or security is granted. This influences the men to divorce the barren wives, or encourages them to remarry without divorcing the first wife.

Presence of children provides marital satisfaction. Much research has documented that children are a major source of marital satisfaction. In the United States, a high percentage of couples reported that children are a major source of satisfaction in marital life (Lucky and Bain 1970). These evidences and arguments lead to conclude a close linkage between childlessness and marital instability, although no clear-cut relationship could be established so far.

Studies in Bangladesh also have demonstrated such a relationship. Based on Matlab data, Ruzicka and Chowdhury (1978) found childlessness to be a frequent cause of divorce. The 1975 BFS data also found that about 80 percent of divorced couples were childless at the time of divorce (Ahmed 1982). The average number of children born to the divorced women was found to be 2.84. Nearly 62 percent divorced women did not have any living children. Data on Singapore showed that the extent of this childlessness is to the extent of 31 percent (Ling 1979). In Indonesia, Jones (1994) observed that a very high percentage of divorced women did not have children at the time of divorce.

A similar feature of childlessness among the divorced women was discerned from the present study, but to a much lesser extent. The proportion of divorced women who were childless (barren) was 20 percent and nearly 28 percent of the divorced women did not have any living children. In contrast, 11.4 percent of those who were continuing their first marriage, were childless. The proportion without any living children was 13 percent. These figures are evidences of the fact that childlessness is highly prevalent among the divorced women than among those who are continuing their first marriage. The mean number of children everborn and still living to the divorced women were 2.3 and 1.7 respectively. The comparable figures for those who were continuing their marriages were 3.7 and 3.0. The hypothesis that the couples who do not have children or the minimum of one child during the first few years of union face a greater risk of having their marriage dissolved is examined through adjustment of age at first marriage and duration of union since first marriage. Although it is impossible to disentangle the relationship between childlessness and marital stability as cause or effect, but certainly there is a two-way relationship.

The relationship between dissolution of marriage and childlessness is mediated through the age at marriage. As shown in Table 7.4, the general pattern is that the older the women marry, the less critical is the effect of having children on the marriage. Comparison of the incidence of dissolution of marriage between the women in presence of the children across different ages at marriage supports this view. For both the distributions, the chances of remaining in the married state is a function of the age at marriage. For those who were married at an early age (<15), the likelihood of first marriage dissolved is relatively higher: 17.2 percent for nulliparous and 7.9 percent for women with at least one live birth. The dissolution rates drop with age for both the distributions but the rates persist and remain uniformly higher for the childless women. The second panel of the table shows the effect of time elapsed since marriage on the dissolution of marriage in absence and presence of children. The dissolution rates are substantially higher for women having no children as compared to women having at least one live birth. The rate of increase in the incidence in marital dissolution is substantially higher among those who were childless than those who had at least one birth beyond 5 years of marital union. The life table analysis demonstrates this feature more distinctly as can be seen from Figure 7.12. The consequence of this is that the duration of union for the women with no live births is half of those who had at least one live birth.

The above findings lead to conclude that infertility probably is an important factor affecting marital stability. Thus the children provide protection to their parents from marriage breakdown and this is specially true among younger women.

### **7.5 Age at Dissolution of First Marriage**

Despite the fact that the longevity of the Bangladeshi women is very short (to the extent of 56 years), widowhood seems to occur fairly at a mature age. As data in Table 7.5 show, the overall mean age at widowhood of first marriage is 28.2 years. Because of this relatively late age at widowhood, widowed women are less likely to remarry. As we will see later, among those whose first marriages were dissolved, 27.5 percent of the widowed and 59.3 percent of the divorced or separated women remarried after their first dissolution. The unadjusted odds ratio

estimated from these data was 0.26 implying that the widowed women were about one-fourth as likely to remarry as the divorced women. The difference was statistically highly significant. The average age at divorce worked out to be only 19.3 years, the median age being 18.3 years. The mean ages of widowhood and divorce as obtained from the 1975 BFS data, were 26.4 years and 14.2 years respectively. This indicates a rising trend in marital duration. Among others, improvement in mortality, decrease in pre- and early teen-age marriages and expansion of education among the females might be the contributing factors towards this achievement.

In the light of the foregoing discussions, we examine below a few background characteristics of the women to see whether the age at marriage dissolution varies with respect to these characteristics. The results of this investigation is presented in Table 7.5. Both the age at widowhood and age at divorce for our study population appeared to be positively associated with the age at first marriage. For those who were married before 15, the age at which they were divorced was 17.5 years. This increases to 20.1 years for the respondents marrying between 15 and 17 and further to 22.5 years for women whose reported age at marriage was between 18 and 19 years. As an explanation, as advocated by exchange theory, early marrier may divorce more rapidly because there are more potential males available for them, they are more cognizant of their good chances of remarriage, they tend to have fewer financial assets to bother, they may have fewer children or none at all and thus are likely to have least tolerance. Literature review shows that teen-age marriages are two to three times more likely to breakup than marriages occurring beyond 20.

The dissolution of marriage occurs due to divorce somewhat earlier in rural areas (18.6 years) than in urban areas (20 years). For widowed women, the differences (27.6 years Vs 28.1 years) primarily result from higher interspousal age differences. By and large, this is true for both current residence and type of childhood residence (see Table 7.5). The extent of inherent values of marriage, the normative structure of marital role and family structure prevalent in urban and rural areas create a difference in the longevity in marital union. The implication of these differential age

at dissolution is that the rural women spend relatively shorter period in conjugal union (see Figure 7.5).

Region of residence does not seem to differ much with respect to timing of marital dissolution which results primarily from near invariance in the prevalence in marital instability. The average age at divorce varies from 18.4 years in Khulna to 19.2 years in Dhaka. The differentials prevalent between the regions largely account for the differences in age at marriage.

As education is a primary route for achieving higher social status, people in higher social status are more concerned about the social prestige. The norms and values of the higher social status do not accept divorce easily. People of this class struggle to the last to keep the marriage intact. This leads to a longer duration of marital union and consequently a higher age at dissolution, provided age at marriage does not substantially varies by the level of education. Data presented in Table 7.5 speak in favor of this: women with no education experience marital dissolution due to divorce at least three years before than those who completed at least higher secondary level of education.

In formal Hindu tradition, there is no provision for divorce. But various studies in India show rates of divorce/separation between 10 percent and 20 percent or even more. The concept of marriage in Hinduism is a lofty one, as husband and wife are expected to adjust their differences in taste, temper, and interests instead of being separated from each other (Gupta 1970). In orthodox tradition, a woman is to be loyal to her lord for life, even after his death. Therefore divorce among Hindus specially among the higher caste is low; the elaborate ritual of marriage and the family network make it difficult. This raises the age at divorce or separation of the Hindus. This expectation is, by and large, met in the present analysis. Muslim women got their first marriage terminated at least one year before their counterpart non-Muslim women (see Table 7.5). Observance of religious activities by the household members as a whole, does not seem to make much differences in the age at dissolution of union

Women who worked before marriage had slightly lower age at dissolution than their non-working counterparts due to both divorce and widowhood. This has also been substantiated by



the life table analysis (Figure 7.10), where duration of first union for the working women was much shorter (27.5 years) than their non-working counterparts (35.9 years).

Women who were married before their first menstrual period got their marriage dissolved due to divorce/separation at an early age (16.9 years) than those who were married after their first menstrual period (19.9 years). The time spent in marital union by the former group of women was thus much shorter (34 years) compared to their counterpart women (36 years). This is also shown in Figure 7.11.

Women married to illiterate husbands experienced marital dissolution due to divorce at an average age of 18.3 years. This increased to 20.4 years for those who had husbands completing at least above primary level of education. This relationship is in conformity with the one observed for respondent's education.

## **7.6 Factors Affecting First Marriage Dissolution**

It has been documented in many studies that couples who marry in their mid-to-late twenties have a greater chance of marital stability than do couples who marry in their early twenties, or particularly to prior to age twenty (Lee 1977). This inverse relationship, as Lee argues, has three possible explanations. First, the correlation between age at marriage and probability of dissolution may be spurious due to factors which are correlated to both age at marriage and divorce. Burchinal's (1965) list of factors which are negatively related to marital success includes many, which are also related to age at marriage. Among these factors are low education, premarital pregnancy, short premarital acquaintance, personality maladjustment, and low socio-economic background. The review of research on early marriage by Bartz and Nye (1970) point to evidence that each of the above factors is associated with early marriage as are variables such as low parental marital satisfaction, poor relations with parents, minimal interest in education and little or no religious involvement. Each of the factors are also inversely related to marital instability. It is worth to note that many of these variables are rarely available in developing world to comment on their interrelationship with marital stability.

A second type of explanation which closely parallels many popular opinions on the subject, is that people who marry young are unprepared in emotional, psychological and instrumental ways for the process of selecting a mate and/or for the adequate performance of marital role. This would result in relatively low marital satisfaction and consequently in an increased probability of marital dissolution (Bartz and Nye 1970). The Australian divorce rates in the late 1960s and early 1970s rose sharply mainly due to women's growing capacity for economic independence, both through increased participation of the women in labor force and altered social security provisions for mothers for supporting children alone (Jones 1995).

A third possible explanation of the relationship in question emerges directly from exchange theory (Nye 1976). It may be the case that individuals who marry at young ages are cognizant of their relatively high chances for remarriage in case of divorce. This is probably less true of individuals who marry later in life since chances for remarriage (as well as first marriage ) decreases with age beyond approximately 20 years in most of the developing countries.

A host of other interrelated factors are correlated with marriage dissolution. We make an attempt to examine some of the interacting factors through multivariate analysis, which isolates the contributions of an individual factor controlling for the others. The multivariate approach of identifying the factors contributing to marriage dissolution due to divorce adopted here are the logistic regression model and proportional hazard model.

**(a) Logistic regression model:**

In the model the dependent variable is the dichotomous (yes/no) variable of marriage dissolution. The odds ratios presented in Table 7.6 indicate the likelihood of occurrence of the dependent variable relative to the reference category (odds ratio of 1). Odds ratios of less than 1 imply a lower likelihood of marriage dissolution than that reported by the reference category (comparison group), whereas those greater than 1, indicate a higher likelihood.

The model shows that a woman who has been married between 15 and 17 years has 22 percent lower likelihood to have their marriage dissolved due to divorce compared to a woman marrying before 15 years. This likelihood increases as age at marriage increases. For example,

women marrying between 17 and 19 have about 33 percent higher probability than the women marrying before 15 to experience marital dissolution due to divorce. Women living in urban areas do not differ significantly from their rural counterparts with respect to marriage dissolution, indicating no association of marital disruption with current residence.

With respect to Chittagong division, women in other three divisions are less likely to experience marital instability. Women in Rajshahi division show significantly lower probability (21%) of being divorced compared to Chittagong. For Dhaka and Khulna divisions, the likelihood of dissolution is about 8 percent lower, but the differences are not statistically significant. Chittagong and Rajshahi divisions are at the two extremes in terms of marital dissolution: highest (odds ratio=1,) and lowest (odds ratio=.79).

As expected, educational attainment of the women shows statistically significant differences in marital stability. Women with primary level of education have about 28 percent reduced probability of experiencing divorce, while those having higher level of education are about one-third as likely (about 70% lower) to experience such dissolution as compared to their illiterate counterparts. This relationship is equally true for educational attainment of the husbands to whom they were married. For example, women whose husbands had primary and above level of education, had 20 percent reduced probability of experiencing marriage dissolution due to divorce. In both cases, the differences are statistically significant.

The model further shows that the non-Muslim women have a 78 percent reduced probability of being divorced compared to Muslim women. The difference is statistically highly significant ( $p < .001$ ). These results are consistent with the bivariate analysis.

Poor religious involvement is inversely and significantly related to marital stability. For women living in families where observance of religious practices are less strict than other families in the locality, the likelihood of marriage dissolution due to divorce is 1.23 times higher than those women who were born and brought up in families practicing religion more strictly. Bartz and Nye (1970) also got similar relationship of the marital instability with religiosity.

Non-working women (women who have never worked for payment) are about one-fourth as likely as the working women to experience marital dissolution due to divorce.

Many studies have suggested that the longer the couples are married, the lower their satisfaction, and thus more the marital dissolution tends to be (Pineo 1961; Blood and Wolfe 1960; Mathewes and Milhanovich 1963; Luckey 1966; Paris and Luckey 1966). However, another cluster of studies have suggested that marital adjustment does not decrease steadily with the length of marriage but it appears to revive and actually increase in the later marital career and hence decreases the chance of dissolution (Gurin *et al* 1960; Axelson 1960; Figley 1973; Rollins and Cannon 1974; Spanier *et al.* 1975).

Duration of marriage, when controlled for other variables, seem to be positively correlated with marriage dissolution: with reference to the shortest duration of marriage viz. of 5 years or less, the probability of dissolution remains significantly higher for all other duration. For example, with 5-9 years of marital union, the women have nearly 34 percent enhanced probability of marriage dissolution. For those who spent 10-14 years of marital life, the risk increases to 43 percent. This likelihood decreases as span of marital union increases, a result consistent with the bivariate analysis. The result is in the expected direction implying that marriage once stabilized during first few years is unlikely to end in divorce.

***(b) Proportional hazard model analysis:***

The proportional hazard model is used to analyze the risk of marriage dissolution for divorcing population. Three models were fitted with the interval between age at entry in first union and age at dissolution of the union due to divorce as dependent variable. The first model includes eight independent variables: age at marriage, current age, residence, religion, religiosity, education, work status and the number of surviving children. In the second model, one more variable 'age squared' was introduced to examine the nature of relationship of dissolution of marriage with current age. The third model excludes the residence variable, because it was not found to be statistically significant in either of the previous two models. The hazard coefficients are presented in Table 7.7. An examination of the models reflect that exclusion of the 'residence'

variable from the third model does not change much the efficiency of the model. Thus referring to model III for our discussion, we note that the results are consistent with the logistic regression analysis presented in Table 7.6. The coefficient of the 'age squared variable' reflects that current age bears a positive and non-linear relationship with the risk of marital dissolution. The variable 'number of living children' shows a clear negative relationship with the risk of marriage dissolution. The coefficient associated with the women having no living children is 3.085, which decreases sharply to 1.209 for those who had one or two living children. This implies that, other things being equal, the risk of dissolution is more than three times greater for those who had no living children compared with those who had three or more living children. The chance of dissolution for those who had 1-2 children, is nearly 21 percent higher compared to the reference category (i.e. with 3 or more children).

## 7.7 Summary

This chapter focused on the various aspects of dissolution of marriage, duration of marriage and prevalence of remarriages among the women in Bangladesh, based on both period and cohort data.

### *Marriage dissolution : general trends and prevalence*

The analysis revealed a number of interesting features of marriage dissolution. Of particular interest is the very large difference between men and women in the proportions who are widowed. For women, the percentage widowed rises from 8 percent in 35-39 age group upto 68 percent for those aged 60 and over, while the male proportions reported as widowers run from zero to only 8 percent in this age range.

There is an appreciable rise in the proportions single for both men and women. This is a reflection of the rising age at marriage. The 1989 BFS results on marital composition is radically different from the 1975 BFS and the 1981 census. The change seems to have taken place since 1981. Among women aged 40-44, the percentage widowed falls from 20 percent in 1975 to 17 percent in 1989 and to 13 percent in 1989. The prevalence of widowhood has substantially

declined over time. Similarly, the proportion of women who married before 1970 falls from 14.9 percent to 0.3 percent who were married between 1985 and 1989. The percentages of women whose marriages were dissolved due to husbands' death in 1975 and 1989 are 9.9 and 6.1 respectively. The dissolution rates due to divorce/separation are 6.1 and 7.7 respectively for these two years. As a result of declining widowhood, the proportions of women who are currently married are higher in 1989 than in 1975 at all ages above 30.

The cohort analysis of 1989 BFS data indicated a declining trend in the divorce rate. Over the last 15 years, the rate of divorce has recorded a fall from 10.5 percent in 1975 to 5.9 in 1989 while the incidence of separation seems have an apparent rise from 1.1 percent in 1975 to 1.8 percent in 1989.

The life table analysis of marriage dissolution reveals that the women in Bangladesh spend on the average 35 years in their first marital union. More than 5 percent of the marriages appear to dissolve within the first 10 years of marriage. By 20 years of duration, 15 percent of the marriages come to an end.

***Differentials in marriage dissolution:***

The incidence of dissolution is found to be inversely related to the age at marriage. As a result, the duration in the first union remains the lowest (29.7 years) for those who were married before 15 years and the highest (35.2 years) for those who were married after 18 years. Analysis further revealed that the Bangladeshi women encounter the highest risk of marriage dissolution when they are in the age range 20-34. The marriage subsequently stabilizes in the neighborhood of 45 years.

Rural women experience a greater risk of undergoing marital dissolution than the urban women. For urban residents, the overall divorce rate is 6.7 percent as compared to 8 percent for those who were from rural areas. Consequently, duration of marital union for urban women is slightly higher (35.2 years) than their rural counterparts (33.4 years). The regional differences in marital dissolution are not marked until 25 years of married life, beyond which the rate seems to fluctuate with a varying degree. This near invariance in marital dissolution by division has resulted

in almost closer duration of marital union that varies from 34.4 years to 35.3 years. Widowhood is less prevalent (5.6%) in Dhaka division, while it is the highest (6.6%) in Rajshahi. On the contrary, the incidence of divorce and separation is the highest (8.5%) in Dhaka division and the lowest (6.9% ) in Chittagong division.

Large and significant differentials appear in marriage dissolution by level of education of the women. Illiterate women experience much higher rate of divorce (7.6%) than the women with higher level of education (2.2%). It is equally true for divorce/separation rates: 9.4 percent vs 2.5 percent. The estimated duration of first union for illiterate, primary and higher level of education are 34.5, 36.1 and 37.7 years respectively.

The life table analysis revealed that Muslim women consistently experience higher rates of marital dissolution at all duration, a consequences of which is that the Muslim women spend 2 years less in marital union than their non-Muslim counterparts. The bivariate analysis shows that the Muslim women as opposed to non-Muslim women experienced 6.4 percentage points higher rate of divorce. Religious differentials due to widowhood is however turned out to be negligible.

Religiosity is closely related to the dissolution of marriage. The risk of experiencing divorce is higher (9.8%) for those who do not practice religion more strictly than (5.2%) those who do it strictly. Similarly, women saying their prayer regularly experience lower (5.2%) divorce rate than those (12.9%) who are infrequent in saying their prayer. Life table analysis showed that strict observance of religion leads to a longer (35.7 years) marital life than (34.1 years) when it is not strictly observed.

There exists a significant difference in marriage dissolution prevalence between working women and non-working women. More than 18 percent of the women who had pre-marital work-experience, got their marriage dissolved due to divorce. In contrast, this proportion is only 5.3 percent for those who did not have such experience. This results in a huge disparity in marital duration: 27.5 years for working women and 35.9 years for non-working women. This is in conformity with our hypothesized relation between pre-marital work status and marriage dissolution.

Nearly 11 percent of the women who married before the onset of their first menstruation, experienced marital dissolution due to divorce. This decreases to 6.8 percent for women marrying after puberty. This differences have been reflected in the duration of union of these two groups of women: 34 years for pre-pubertal marriage and 36 years for post-pubertal marriage

Analysis further showed that the childless women are more than two times as likely as the women with at least one child to experience marital dissolution, thus agreeing with our hypothesis. The proportion of divorced women who were childless was 20.1 percent. In contrast, 11.4 percent of these women, who were still in their union, were childless. In consequence, duration of union for the women with no surviving children is half (17.5 years) of those (34.9 years) who had at least one live birth.

The incidence of dissolution of marriage for nulliparous women marrying before 15 years of age was higher (17.2%) than women (7.9%) having at least one surviving child. These proportions decrease with the increase in age at marriage retaining the observed pattern of differences, implying that older the women marry, less critical the effect of having children on the marriage.

#### *Age at dissolution and its differentials:*

The data demonstrate that the Bangladeshi women experience their first marital dissolution at an average age of 28.2 years due to the death of husbands. The age at dissolution due to divorce is 19.3 years. The 1975 data provided an estimate of 26.4 years for widowhood and 14.2 years for divorce. There is thus an apparent rise in the duration of first union during 1975-1989.

Delayed marriage enhances the age at dissolution. For example, women, who were married before the age of 15, experienced marital dissolution at an age of 17.5 years. This increases to more than 20 years when marriage is delayed until 17 years. Rural women experience divorce, on the average, one and a half years before the urban women. This difference is about one year for widowed women.

Women without any formal schooling encounter marital dissolution at least 3 years before their educated counterparts: 18.6 years vs 21.7 years. A Muslim woman experiences divorce at an



average age of 18.9 years as against 20.3 years for a non-Muslim woman. The age at which a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim woman become widowed, are 27.7 years and 28.5 years respectively.

Working women experience marital dissolution relatively at an early age (18.5 years for divorced and 27.6 years for widowed) than the non-working women (19.6 years for divorced and 28.5 years for widowed). The age at divorce was much lower (16.9 years) for those who were married before their first menstruation than (19.9 years) those who were married after their first menstruation .

***Determinants of marriage dissolution:***

Multivariate analysis of marriage dissolution revealed that women marrying between 15 and 17 years are three-fourths as likely as the women marrying before 15 years to experience marital dissolution due to divorce. Both husband's education and respondent's education seemed to have pronounced effect on marital stability. For example, women having primary level of schooling, have 28 percent reduced probability of experiencing divorce from the husbands than those who were illiterate. The likelihood decreases significantly (to 70%) with more than primary level of education.

Large and significant differentials also seem to exist in marital dissolution by religion. Non-Muslim women are less than one-fourth as likely as the Muslim women to experience divorce. Practicing religion less strictly promotes marital dissolution by about 23 percent compared to those who follow religion strictly. Compared to women with pre-marital work experience, non-working women have nearly 75 percent enhanced probability of experiencing marital dissolution.

The analysis showed a trend toward higher incidence of marital dissolution with increasing duration of marriage. For example, compared to the reference category (less than 5 years of marriage duration), women in 5-9 years of marriage duration are 1.3 times more likely to be divorced, which increases to 1.4 for 10-14 years of duration. The hazard analysis demonstrated that with increasing age at marriage, the risk of marital dissolution decreases, while for women

being Muslim, the risk increases. Better educated women and the women with at least one surviving child experience lower risk of marriage dissolution. Least attachment with religion and pre-marital work experience of women are the significant risk factors for marital instability.

Table 7.1: Percentages of females widowed and divorced by current age: 1975 - 1989

Age	Widowed			Divorced /Separated		
	BFS 1975	Census 1981	BFS 1989		Census 1981	BFS 1989
15-19	0.5	0.8	0.2	4.8	1.5	1.8
20-24	1.7	1.6	1.1	3.4	2.4	4.1
25-29	3.9	2.7	2.0	3.1	1.6	4.2
30-34	7.4	5.1	3.6	1.7	1.0	4.0
35-39	13.1	9.1	8.0	2.1	0.5	3.1
40-44	19.7	16.9	12.0	1.4	0.5	2.3
45-49	27.9	24.8	14.0	1.2	0.4	1.6
50-54	35.1	36.0	33.5	1.2	0.3	0.6
55- 59	49.9	44.6	44.8	0.3	0.2	0.4
60+	71.8	66.4	68.0	0.3	-	0
<b>All</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.5</b>

Source: BFS 1999 Main Report , Table 4.1 , p. 42

BFS 1975 Main Report , Table 5.2 , P . 49

Census 1981 Analytical Findings and National Tables, Table 4 , P. 62

Table 7.2 : Status of first marriage by marriage cohorts: BFS 1989

Marriage cohort	<u>First marriage</u>		<u>First marriage</u>	<u>dissolved</u>	<u>due to</u>
	Continuing	Dissolved	Hus. death	Divorce	Sep.
<1970	78.8	21.2	14.9	4.9	1.3
1970 - 1974	85.5	14.5	5.8	7.4	1.3
1975 - 1979	87.3	12.7	3.0	8.2	1.5
1980 - 1984	89.7	10.3	1.6	6.8	2.0
1985 - 1989	93.6	6.4	0.3	3.3	2.8
<b>ALL cohorts</b>	<b>86.3</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>1.8</b>
(N)	(10278)	(1628)	(721)	(697)	(210)
<b>BFS 1975</b>	<b>78.5</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>1.1</b>

Table 7.3: Proportion of marriage dissolved by current age and causes of dissolution by background characteristics

Character-istics	N	Current age								Total	
		<25		25 - 34		35 - 44		45+		W	D/S
		W	D/S	W	D/S	W	D/S	W	D/S	W	D/S
<b>All</b>	<b>11906</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>7.7</b>
<b>Age at marriage</b>											
<15	5968	1.5	8.9	6.1	10.7	14.8	7.0	22.0	6.1	8.4	8.7
15 -17	4428	0.7	6.8	3.5	7.9	9.5	4.0	17.5	3.6	4.2	6.5
18 -19	981	0.3	6.8	1.6	7.5	8.5	6.6	6.1	3.0	2.3	7.0
20+	529	0.6	5.7	0.7	7.0	9.4	3.5	15.4	-	2.5	6.1
<b>Current residence</b>											
Rural	8467	0.9	8.2	4.1	9.6	11.8	6.4	18.3	4.7	5.7	8.0
Urban	3439	1.3	6.4	4.9	7.9	14.6	4.8	25.5	6.3	7.0	6.7
<b>Childhood residence:</b>											
Rural	10183	0.9	8.0	4.4	9.3	12.3	6.3	19.3	4.8	6.0	7.9
Urban	1727	1.5	6.0	3.9	7.9	14.6	3.4	26.8	9.2	6.2	6.4
<b>Education</b>											
None	7583	1.2	10.3	5.3	11.6	14.4	6.7	21.4	5.6	7.6	9.4
Primary	2601	0.8	5.5	3.5	6.7	9.5	4.8	12.3	4.3	4.2	5.7
Higher	1721	0.3	1.8	1.9	2.3	5.4	2.9	2.8	-	2.2	2.5
<b>Region</b>											
Chittag.	2717	0.9	6.6	4.3	8.2	12.7	7.3	21.1	2.8	6.3	6.9
Dhaka	3778	1.0	8.2	4.5	9.9	12.3	7.0	15.6	8.0	5.6	8.5
Khulna	2325	0.7	8.2	5.0	8.4	11.9	4.3	17.0	5.0	5.7	7.2
Rajshahi	1086	1.4	7.6	3.7	9.4	13.4	4.6	25.8	5.0	6.6	7.5
<b>Religion</b>											
Muslim	10284	1.0	8.5	4.5	10.1	12.4	6.6	20.5	6.2	6.0	8.5
others	1622	1.1	2.1	3.1	2.7	13.3	1.9	18.2	0.6	6.2	2.1
<b>Practicing religion</b>											
Strict	2516	0.9	5.4	4.2	7.0	10.9	2.9	21.8	4.1	6.8	5.2
Average	6305	0.8	6.9	4.0	8.0	12.8	5.8	18.3	5.3	5.9	6.8
Less	3885	1.4	10.3	5.1	13.3	13.8	9.7	22.2	7.2	5.8	11.1
<b>Premarital work</b>											
Yes	1842	3.7	26.7	10.7	18.8	27.7	11.7	37.7	7.3	15.0	18.3
No	10064	0.7	5.4	2.8	6.9	9.1	4.6	17.4	4.9	4.4	5.7
<b>Timing of marriage</b>											
Before puberty	2000	2.5	12.5	7.2	12.8	13.3	8.0	21.3	7.1	9.6	10.6
After puberty	7859	0.9	6.9	3.2	6.8	10.8	5.6	17.7	4.5	4.4	6.8

Table 7.4 : Proportions of women by marital status in presence or absence of at least one child.

Characteristics	<u>With at least one child</u>		<u>Childless</u>	
	First marriage		First marriage	
	Continued	Dissolved	Continued	Dissolved
<b>Age at marriage</b>				
<15	83.2	7.9	81.5	17.2
15-17	89.9	6.0	87.8	10.4
18-19	92.8	5.2	86.9	13.1
20+	92.9	4.6	87.8	10.6
<b>Duration of marriage</b>				
< 5	95.0	4.7	91.8	7.8
5-9	91.0	7.4	71.9	26.1
10-14	88.1	8.6	62.0	38.0
15-19	86.1	8.0	59.1	38.0
20+	79.2	5.8	52.9	31.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>86.4</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>85.6</b>	<b>13.0</b>

Table 7.5: Mean age at dissolution of first marriage due to widowhood and divorce by characteristics of the woman.

Characteristics	N	Age at widowhood	Age at divorce/ sep..
<b>Total</b>	<b>1628</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>19.3</b>
<i>Age at marriage</i>			
<15	1019	27.3	17.5
15 - 17	473	28.4	20.1
18 - 19	91	29.0	22.5
20+	45	30.1	23.6
<i>Current residence</i>			
Rural	1158	27.6	18.6
Urban	470	28.1	20.0
<i>Childhood residence</i>			
Rural	1412	27.8	18.8
Urban	216	27.5	20.0
<i>Region</i>			
Chittagong	361	28.5	19.0
Dhaka	534	27.5	19.2
Khulna	300	26.6	18.4
Rajshahi	433	28.3	18.7
<i>Education</i>			
None	1290	27.8	18.6
Primary	256	27.1	19.7
Higher	82	28.8	21.7
<i>Religion</i>			
Muslim	1493	27.7	18.9
Non-Muslim	135	28.2	20.3
<i>Premarital work</i>			
Worked before	613	26.6	18.5
Not Worked	1015	28.5	19.6
<i>Practicing Religion</i>			
More strictly	302	29.3	18.8
Average	804	28.6	19.2
Less strictly	522	28.6	18.5
<i>Timing of marriage</i>			
Before puberty	403	27.1	16.9
After puberty	883	28.0	19.9
<i>Husband's education</i>			
None	985	27.9	18.3
Primary	289	27.2	19.1
Higher	338	27.9	20.4

Tables 7.6: Logistic regression analysis of likelihood of dissolution of first marriage due to divorce.

Variable	B	SE(B)	Sig	Exp(B)
<b>Age at marriage</b>				
<15	-	-	-	1.0000
15 - 17	-.2495	.1078	.0020	.7792
18 - 19	-.3963	.1278	.0019	.6728
20+	-.0836	.2038	.6818	.9198
<b>Current residence</b>				
Rural	-	-	-	1.0000
Urban	-.0599	.0868	.4900	.9419
<b>Region</b>				
Chittagong	-	-	-	1.0000
Dhaka	-.0765	.1019	.4531	.9264
Khulna	-.0799	.1167	.4934	.9232
Rajshahi	-.2405	.1094	.0279	.7863
<b>Education</b>				
None	-	-	-	1.0000
Primary	-.3178	.1050	.0025	.8055
Higher	-.11597	.1863	.0000	.8055
<b>Husband's education</b>				
None	-	-	-	1.0000
Primary	-.2162	.0972	.0262	.7278
Higher	-.2125	.1078	.0487	.3136
<b>Religion</b>				
Muslim	-	-	-	1.0000
Non- Muslim	-1.5073	.1804	.0000	1.2287
<b>Practicing Religion</b>				
Strictly	-	-	-	1.0000
Not strictly	.2060	.1072	.0546	.2215
<b>Premarital work</b>				
Worked before	-	-	-	1.0000
Not Worked	-1.4616	.0795	.0000	.2319
<b>Duration of marriage (yrs)</b>				
0 -4	-	-	-	1.0000
5 - 9	.2904	.1169	.0130	1.3369
10 - 14	.3606	.1193	.0025	1.4341
15 - 19	.2001	.1276	.1167	1.2216
20+	-.0009	.1198	.9940	.9991
<b>Constant</b>	<b>-1.2062</b>	<b>.1733</b>	<b>.0000</b>	

Table 7.7 : Hazard coefficients for marital dissolution.

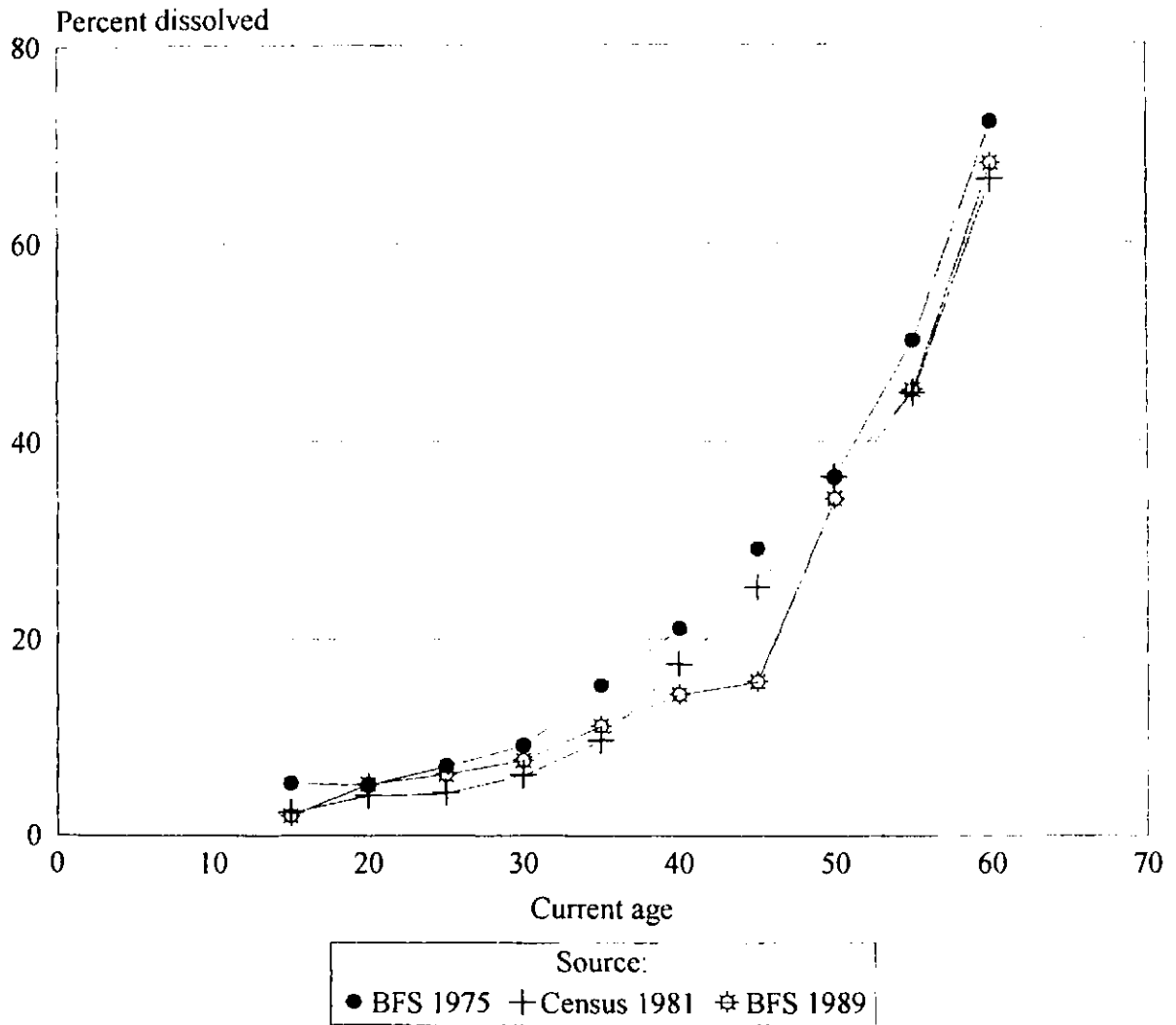
Variable	Category	Model		
		1	11	111
Age at marriage	-	.0982*	.8890*	.8888*
Current age	-	1.046*	1.389*	1.389*
Age square	-	-	.9954	.9954
Residence (Rural)	Urban	.931	.911	-
Religion (Muslim)	Non- Muslim	2.10*	.212*	.212*
Religiosity (Not strictly)	Strictly	.705*	.726*	.723*
Education (None)	Primary	.701*	.707*	.701*
	Above primary	.312*	.302*	.293
Work status (Not worked)	Worked	3.671*	3.287*	3.246*
Living Children (3 or more)	None	9.178*	11.523*	11.513*
	1-2	4.5313	4.515*	4.513*
- 2log likelihood		15568.2	15461.4	15462.8
Model $\chi^2$		1150.1	1375.3	1374.8
df		10	11	10

\* p < .001

Note : Reference categories, shown in parentheses in variable columns. represent the modal group of the categories

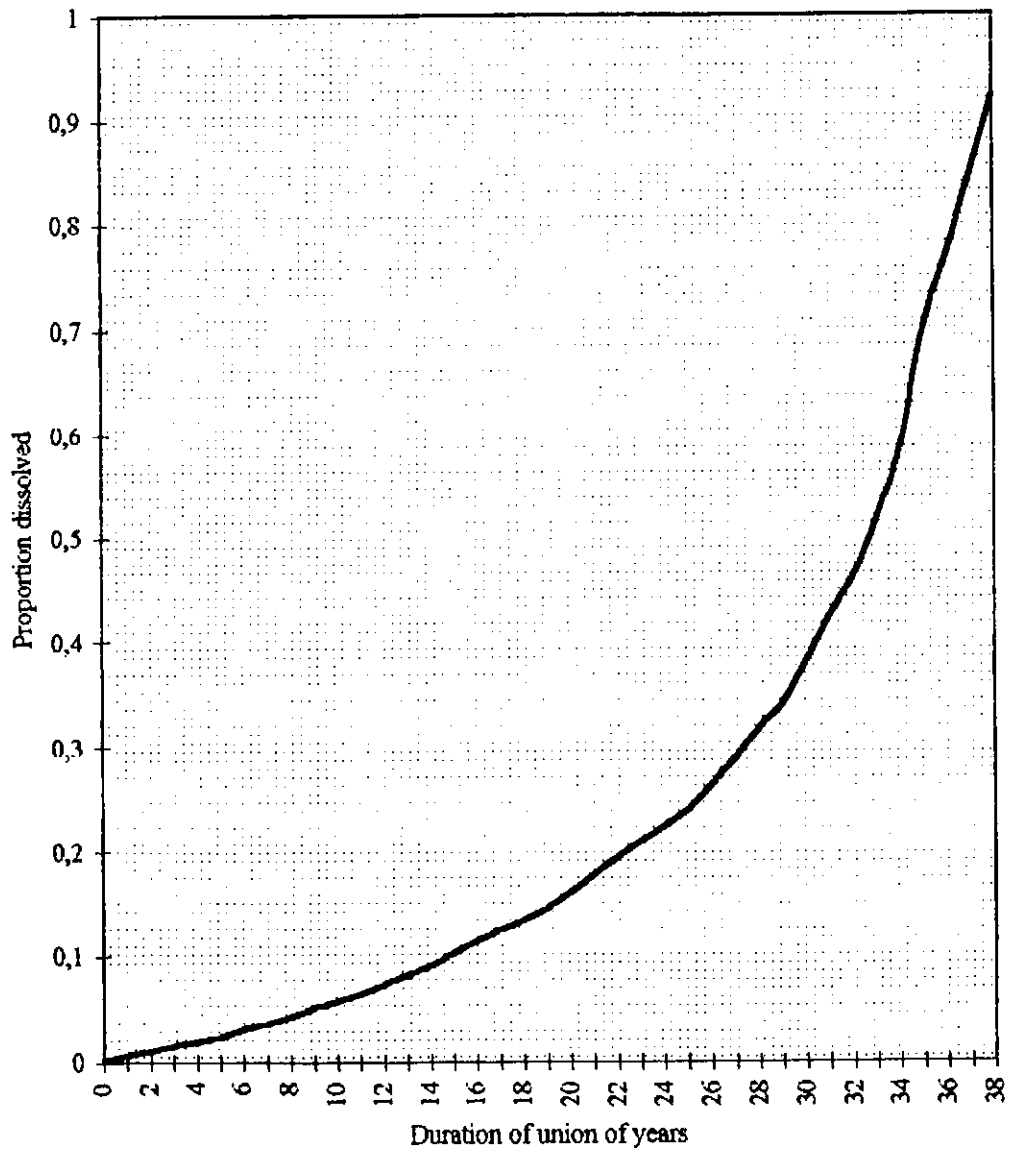


Figure 7.1: Percent of first marriage dissolved by source and current age :1975-1989



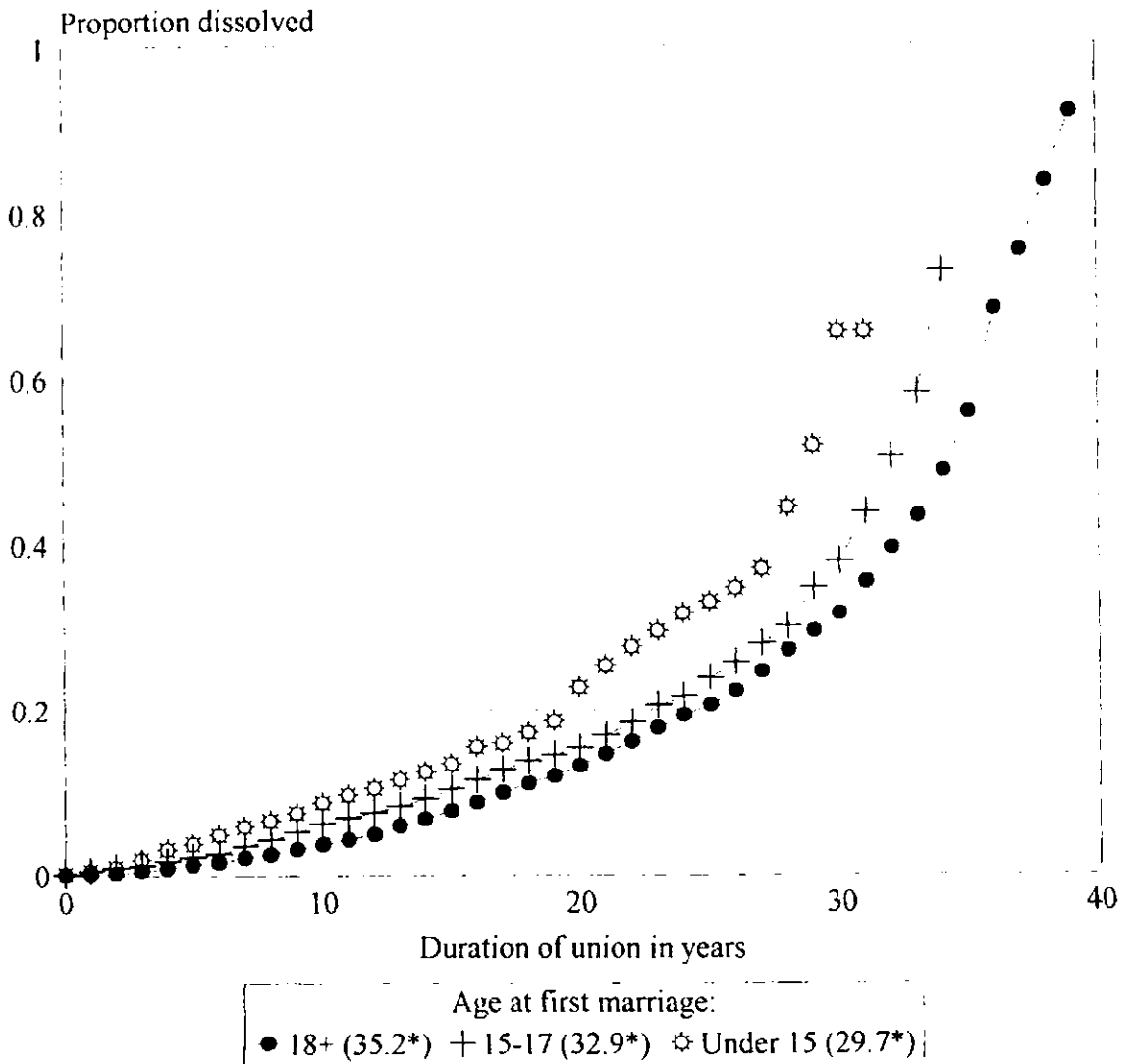
Source: BFS 1989

Figure 7.2: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage



Source: BFS 1989

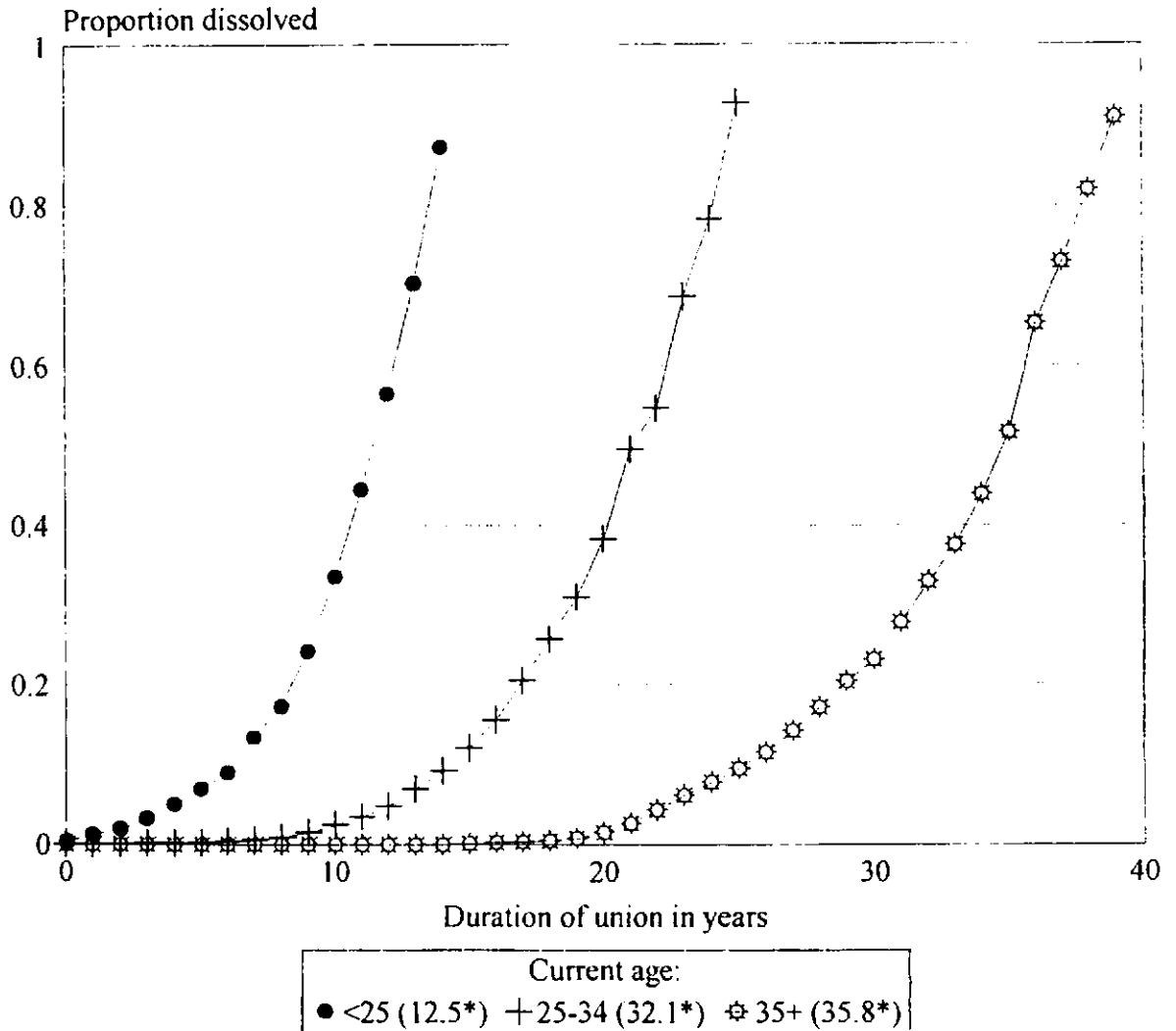
Figure 7.3: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage and age at marriage



Source: BFS 1989

\* Median duration in years

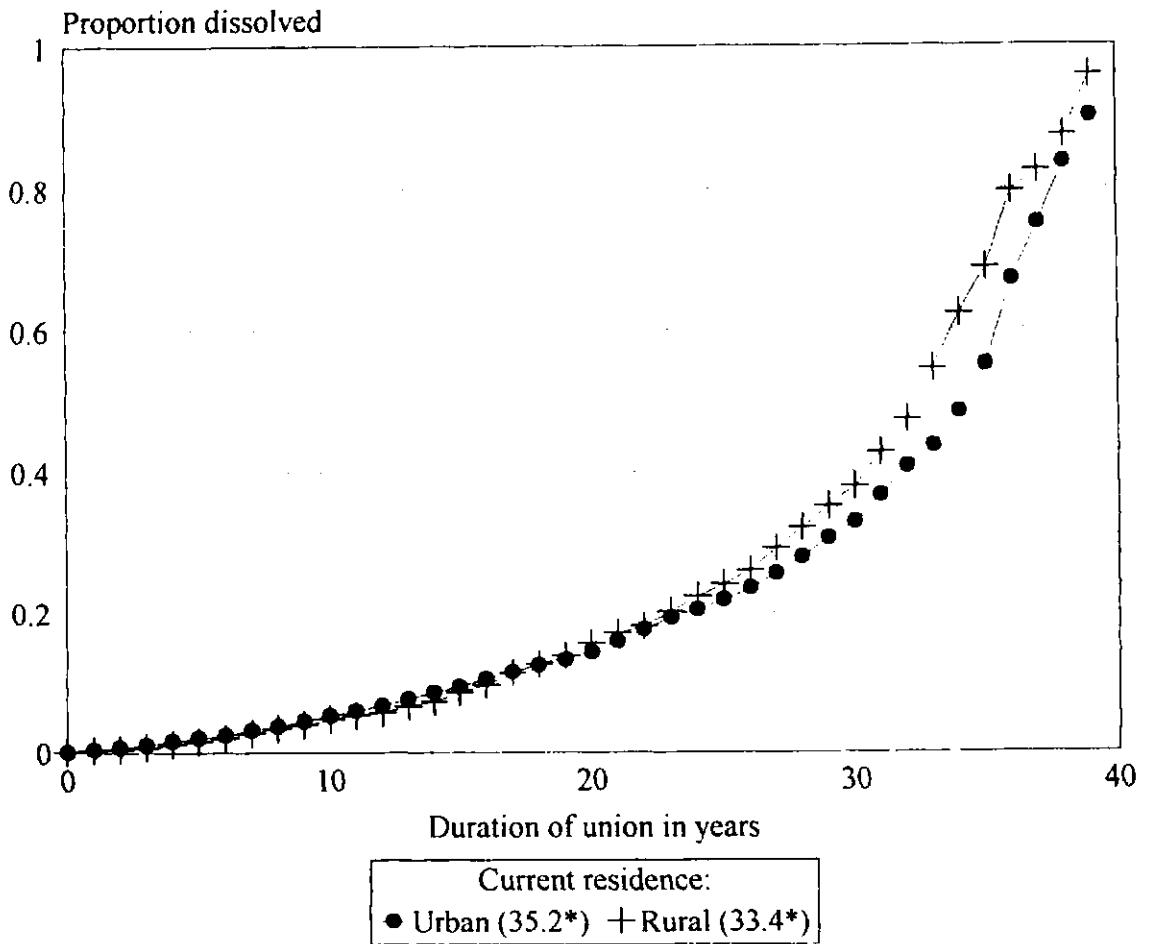
Figure 7.4: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage and current age



Source: BFS 1989

\*Median duration in years

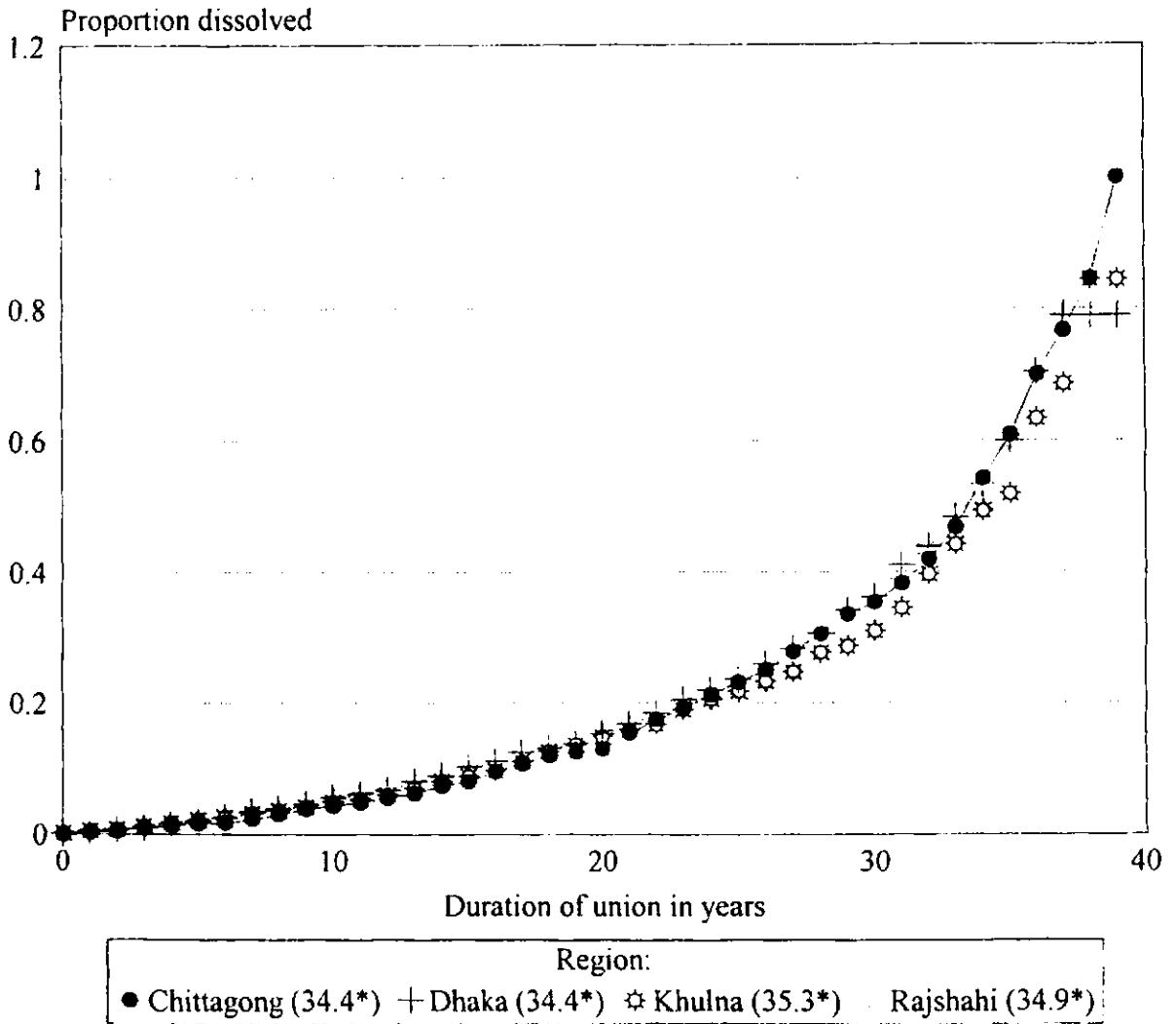
Figure 7.5: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage and current residence



Source: BFS 1989

\*Median duration in years

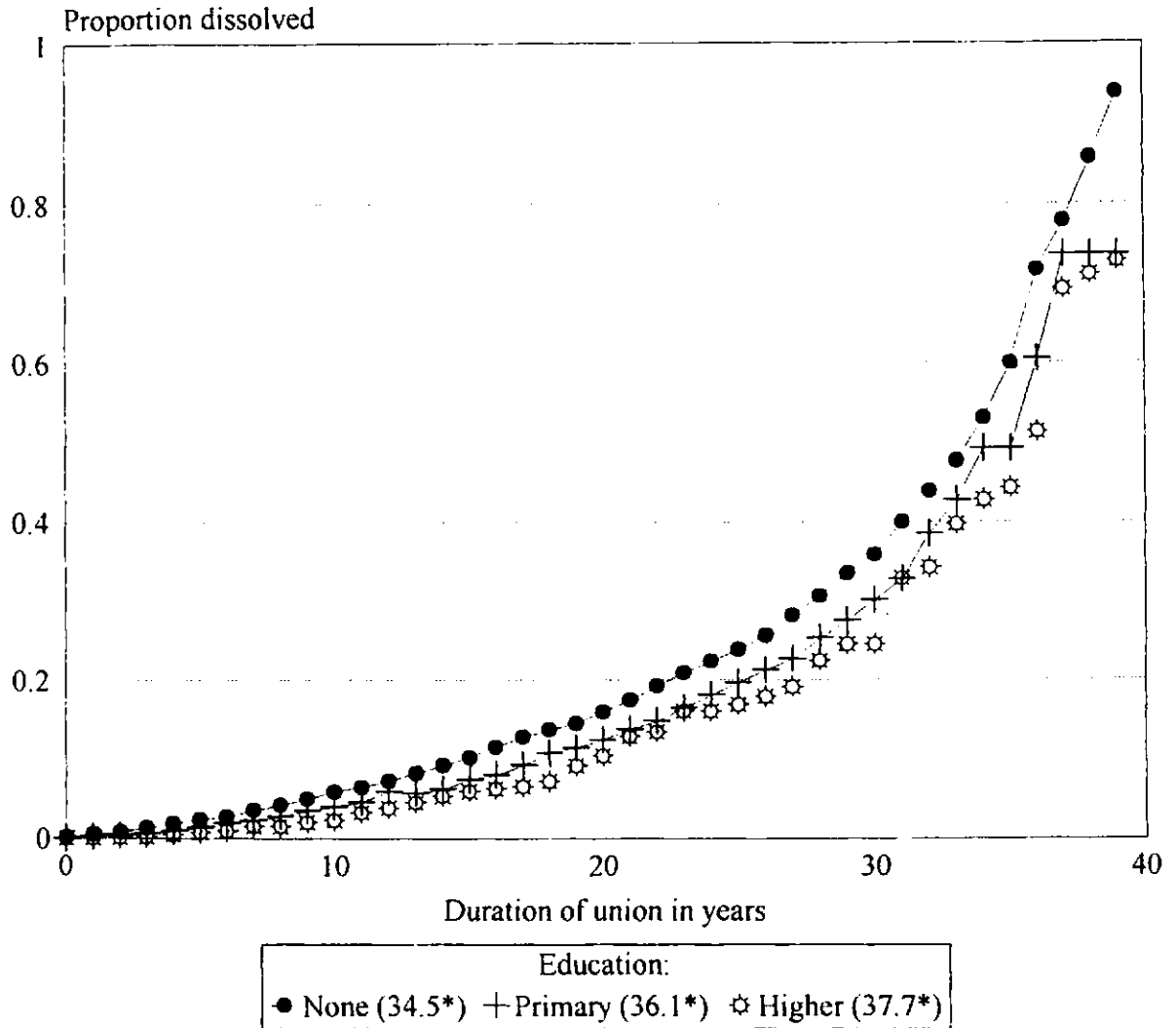
Figure 7.6: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage and regions



Source: BFS 1989

\*Median duration in years

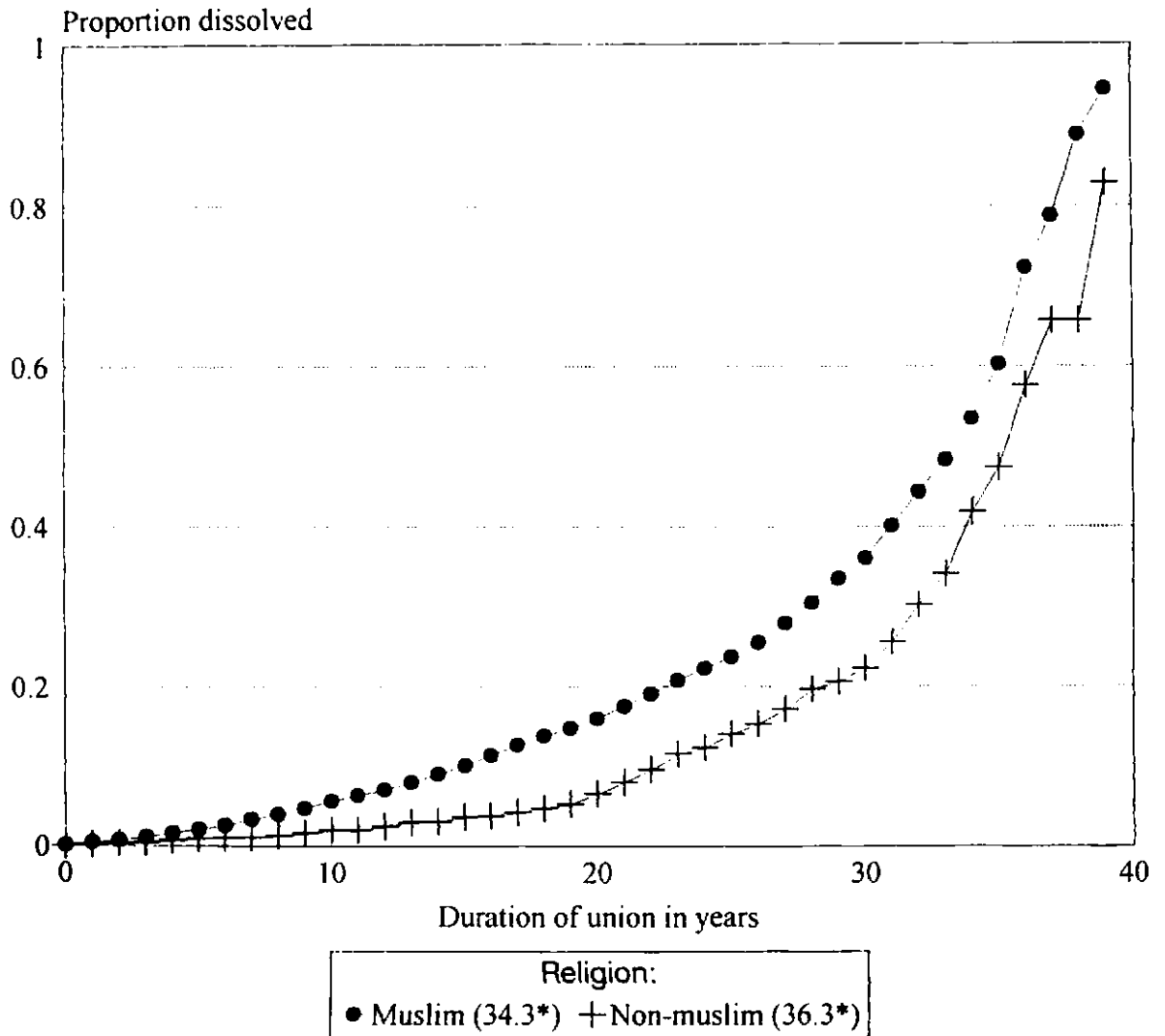
Figure 7.7: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage and education



Source :BFS 1989

\*Median duration in years

Figure 7.8: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage and religion

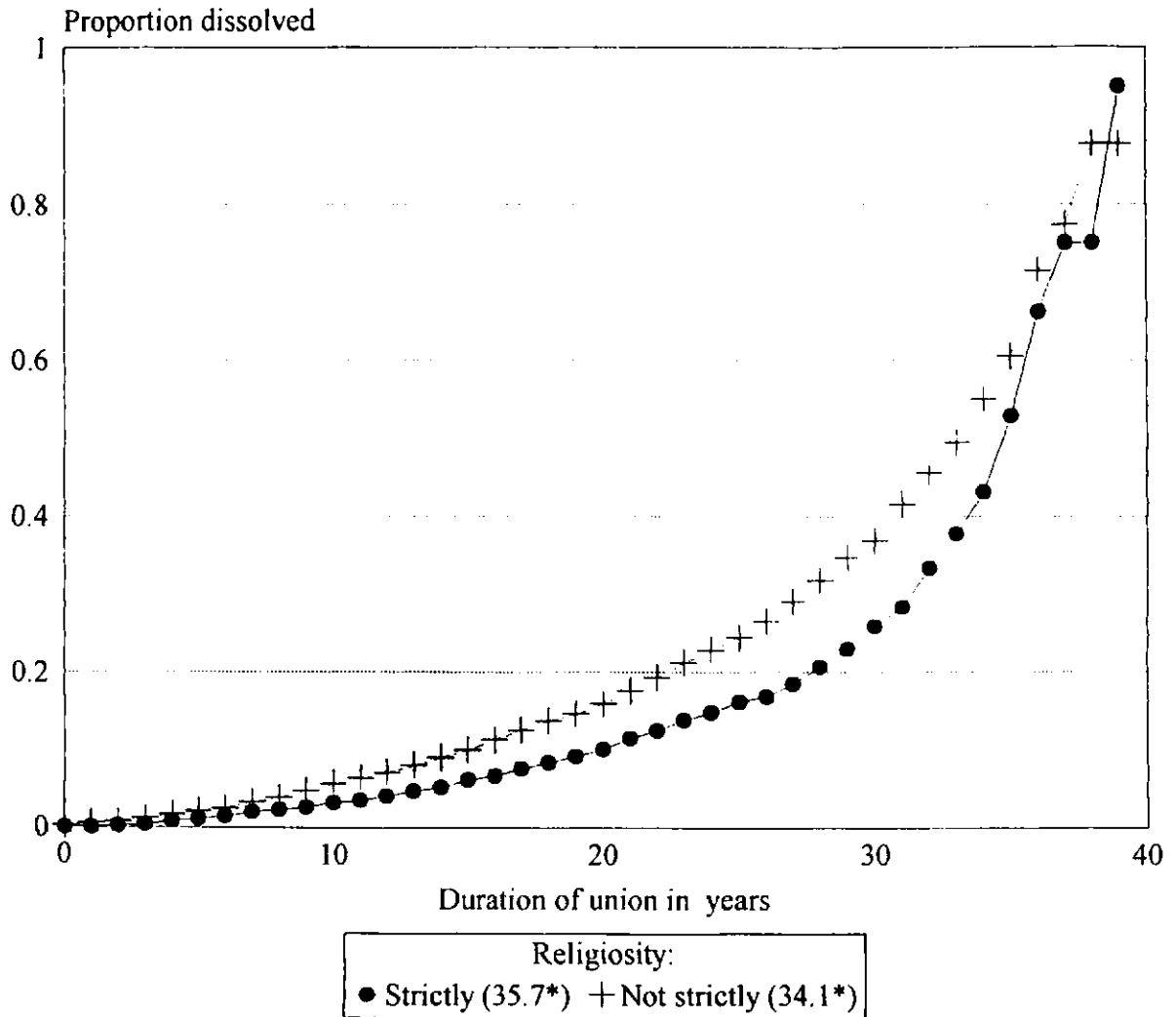


Source: BFS 1989

\*Median duration in years



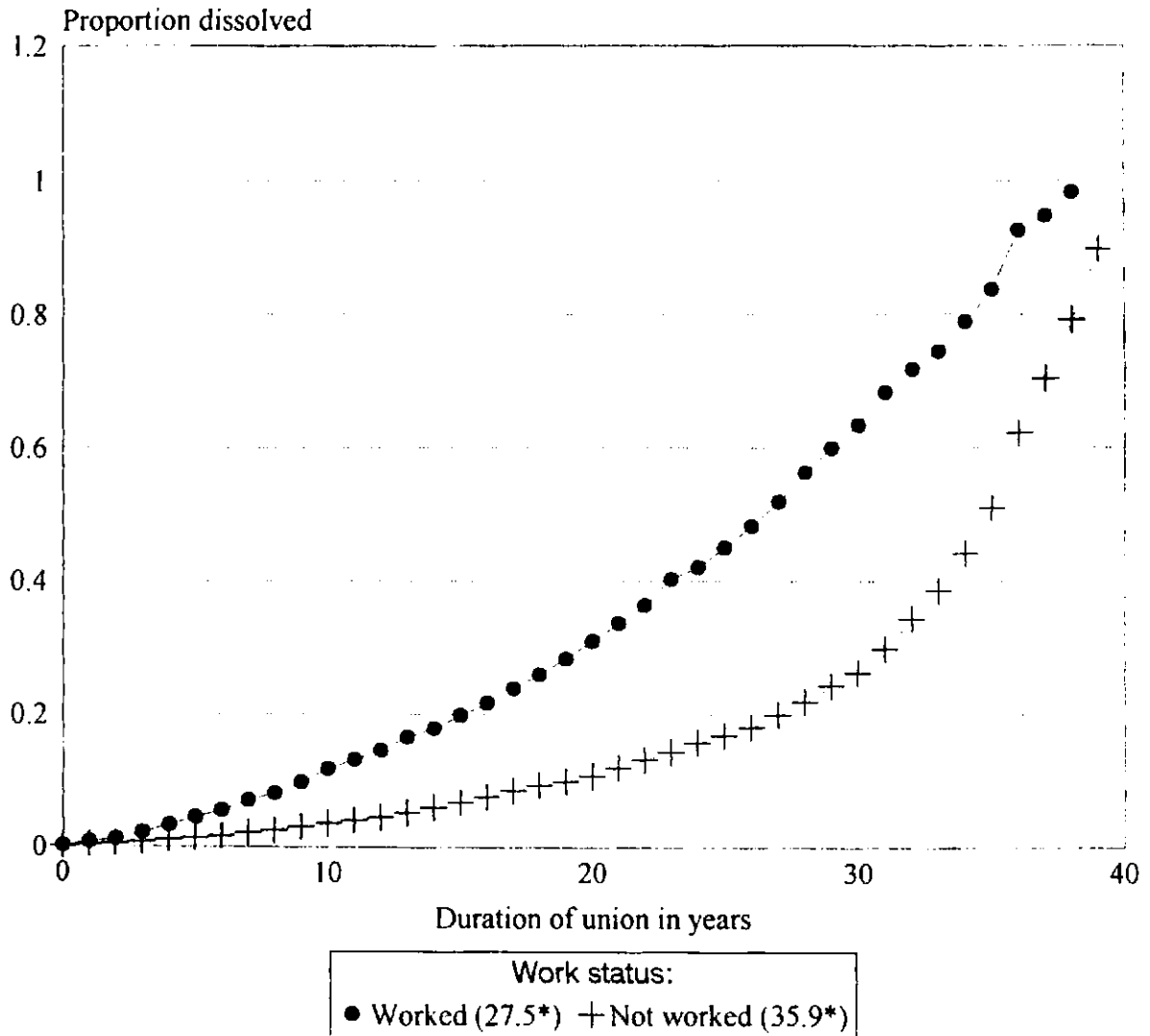
Figure 7.9: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage and religiosity



Source: BFS 1989

\*Median duration in years

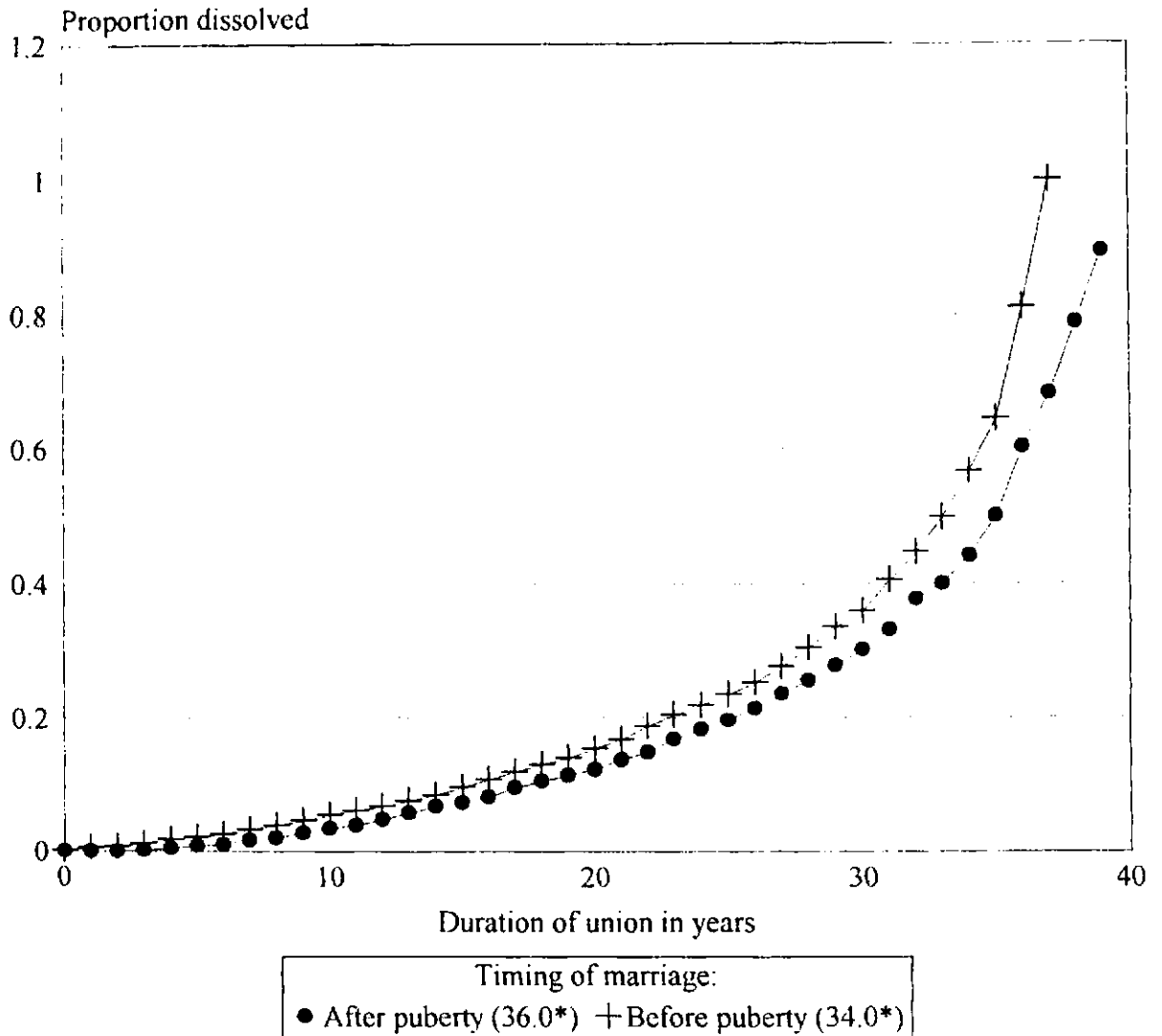
Figure 7.10: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage and premarital work status



Source: BFS 1989

\*Median duration in years

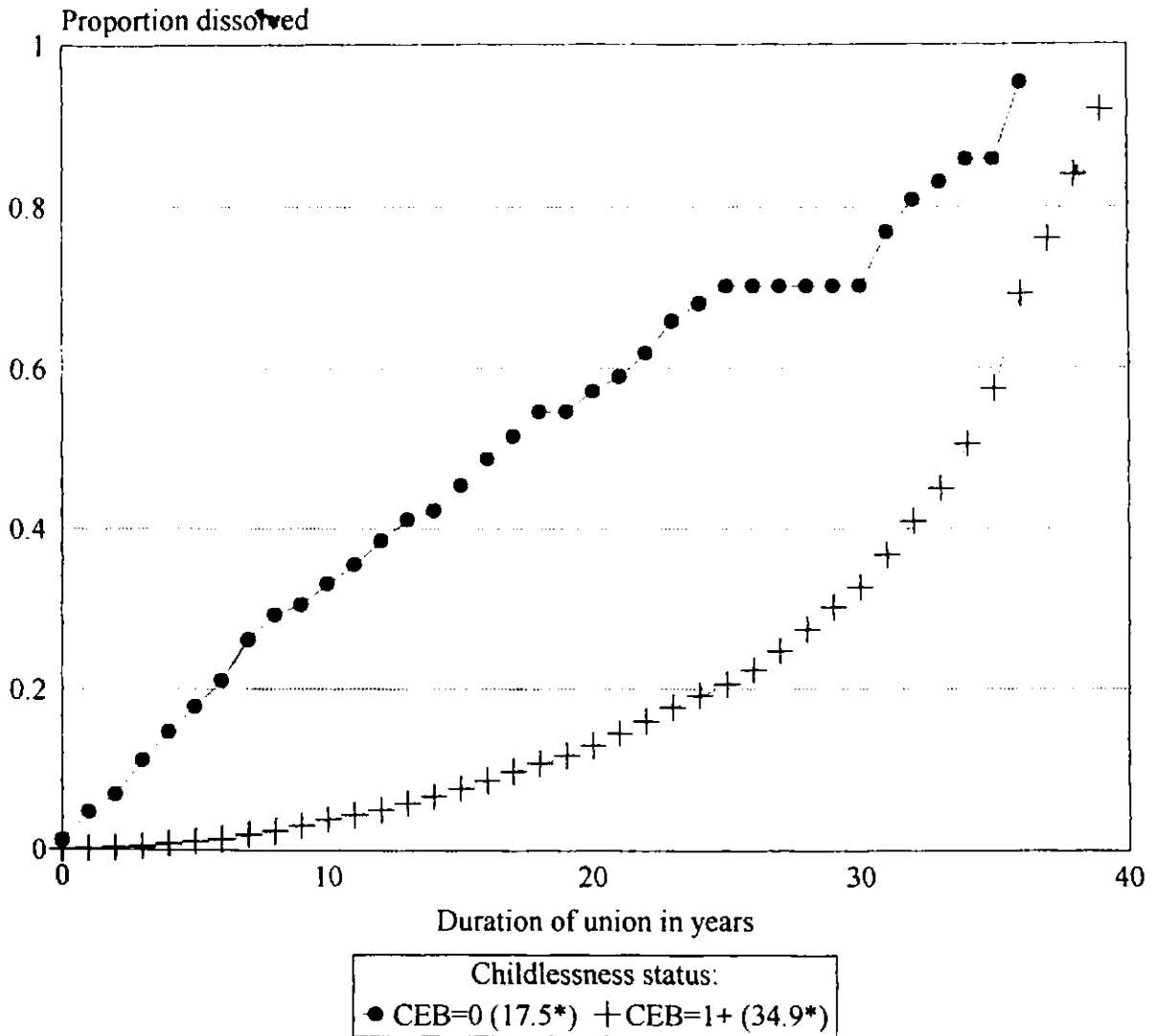
Figure 7.11: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage and timing of marriage



Source: BFS 1989

\*Median duration in years

Figure 7.12: Cumulative proportions of first marriage dissolved by duration of marriage and childlessness status



Source: BFS 1989

\*Median duration in years

## **Chapter VIII**

### **REMARRIAGE**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

Studies on age at first marriage have been numerous both in developed and in developing countries. Its importance has also been well documented in literature. But very little attempt has been made so far to study the various aspects of subsequent marriages. It is simply because statistics on remarriages or frequency of marriage are extremely limited and far less accurate compared to data on first marriage. A large data base is required for a meaningful analysis since remarriages in many cultures are restricted. For some subgroups of the population, the relevant data may not be available, and if available, they are unlikely to be suitable for any proper statistical treatment.

Both from fertility and mortality points of view, second and higher marriage bears special significance. The second marriage is related to the survival status of one of the partners and the extent of marital adjustment among the couples. It also reflects the societal and religious views as well as of cultural diversities prevalent in a society

The incidence of remarriage in most developing countries varies widely depending largely on the type of dissolution a woman experiences and type of social environment she is surrounded by. Remarriage of widows is found to be very rare in Bangladesh. According to the 1975 BFS data, only 5 percent of the widows remarried within one year following widowhood (ESCAP 1980). Within 5 years after widowhood, less than one-third of the women in rural areas and one-quarter in the urban areas remarried. ICDDR,B data also suggest that chances of remarriage of widows are rare (ESCAP 1980). According to this source, widows who remarried had to wait for two and a half to three years on the average.

Though remarriage among the divorced women is not that infrequent as is for the widows, a divorced women also has to wait for a substantial period of time before she is remarried.

According to ICDDR,B data (Ruzicka and Chowdhury 1978) divorced women generally have to wait almost for two years before they remarry and those few who remarry at the age of 25 years or older, had to wait for about two and a half years to four years. According to the 1975 BFS data, at least 50 percent of the ever-married women, who were divorced, had to wait for three years before remarrying. The waiting time before remarriage lengthens following divorce from a second marriage.

The data on which the present analysis is based demonstrate that a total of 1628 (13.7%) women got their marriages broken due to widowhood and divorce, of whom 45.2 percent went on to have a second husband. The 1975 BFS data showed that 60 percent of women whose first marriages were dissolved, remarried after first dissolution. This shows a declining trend in remarriage over time. The incidence of remarriage among the divorced women was much higher (59.3%) than among the widows (27.5%). The odds ratio analysis showed that the divorced women were nearly 4 times as likely as the widows to remarry. The explanation for such a differential prevalence is that widowhood is a feature of old age and social pressure exists against widows' remarrying. Widows themselves do not want to remarry as they usually have great emotional attachments to their deceased husbands. Instead they derive satisfaction from looking after their own children. Most people approve of widow remarriage if she is young, but have different opinions if she is a little older or has growing children. The reason is that, step children may not be received and treated well as own children by the new husband or husband's family, if the children accompany their mothers. Most societies show a favorable attitude toward remarriage of young widows, by men more so than by women (Maloney *et al* 1981).

Regardless of whether the marriage was dissolved due to widowhood or divorce, the prevalence of remarriage was strongly negatively associated with the age at dissolution. Table 8.1 supports this statement. For example, nearly 71 percent of those who got their marriage dissolved before the age 20, moved on to the second marriage. This proportion sharply falls to 48 percent for those whose marriages were dissolved between 20 and 25 years. The fall in the proportion still

remains steeper and finally levels off at only 3.8 percent for those women whose marriages were dissolved beyond 35 years.

The table depicts an interesting pattern of remarriage. The chances of remarriage are much higher for the divorced women than for the widows. This is primarily because of the differential age at dissolution, social pressure and emotional attachment between the two groups. As expected, the likelihood of widow remarriage declines sharply as age at widowhood advances from 74.1 percent for women experiencing marriage dissolution before age 20 to only 3.5 percent for those who had their marriages broken beyond 35 years. The pace of decline is much steeper beyond 25 which is not the case with the divorced women.

## 8.2 Differential Patterns of Remarriage

Studies in Bangladesh have shown a favorable attitude toward remarriage of young widows, by men more so than women (Maloney *et al* 1981). The first reason given is that a young widow may feel the urge of sexual fulfillment: if her parents do not arrange her remarriage, the matter might be regarded suspiciously by the fellow villagers. It may even be felt that parents of a young widow living at home may face disaster for failing in her obligation, and such remarriages may be something of a religious obligation. But among Hindus, if it is done at all, it would only be a social obligation.

It is apparent that a host of social and emotional factors promote/discourage remarriage in every society. In this study, we examine a few related characteristics to shed light on their similarity with respect to the prevalence of remarriage through a series of cross-tabulations. The results of this analysis have been presented in Table 8.2.

### *Age at marriage:*

We noted that attempt to raise the age at marriage considerably reduces the chance of marriage dissolution. This in turn is expected to reduce the likelihood of remarriage. Women who are married at a mature age are emotionally more stable and in the event of any marriage dissolution, they are less likely to remarry as they have great emotional attachment to their lost husbands (if widows) and surviving children (if any). We also find in the present analysis that

lower the age at marriage, the higher is the likelihood of remarriage. Studies by Glick and Norton (1971) and by Krishnan and Kayani (cited in Lee 1977) indicate that people who marry young are likely to divorce at relatively young ages, thus re-entering the 'marriage market' at a highly marriageable stage of the life cycle. This feature is reflected in the present analysis, where more than half of the dissolution (51.6%) resulted in a remarriage when the age at marriage is less than 15 years. This is probably less true of individuals who marry later in life. Data presented in Table 8.2 clearly demonstrate this feature.

***Current age:***

Current age is negatively associated with the prevalence of remarriage. For example, women now aged under 25, constituted 69 percent of those who experienced marital dissolution. This proportion decreases to 58.6 percent for those who are aged 25-34 falling further to 48.5 percent for women aged 35-39.

***Residence:***

Women living in rural areas and with rural childhood background are much more likely to remarry once their marriages are broken. For current residence, this difference is 48.7 percent as against 36.6 percent between rural and urban areas. These prevalences for childhood residence are 46.7 percent and 35.6 percent respectively. The same social system that encourage early marriage in rural areas, also encourage remarriage there. Remarriage also seems to vary considerably between the regions of residence. Incidence of remarriage appears to be less frequent in Chittagong (43.8%) and Rajshahi (43.6%). Dhaka division experienced the highest incidence (47.4%) of remarriage followed by Khulna (45.3%).

***Education:***

Remarriage among the educated women is relatively less prevalent than among those who are illiterate. For example, nearly half of the women (46.7%) who had no schooling got into the second marriage. When they achieve primary level of education, the rate decreases to 43 percent, which further declines to 29.3 percent for those who had above primary level of education. Husband's education seems to play the same role: when they have no education, the rate is 47.7



percent; when they achieve primary level, this rate decreases to 46.7 percent and finally to 36.7 percent when their level of schooling is beyond primary. It is primarily the social prestige and status of the educated women that discourages them from remarrying.

***Religion:***

Incidence of remarriage is substantially higher among the Muslims (47.8% vs 17.8%). As the odds ratio analysis showed, Muslim women were more than four times as likely as the non-Muslim women to remarry. This results shows that traditionally Muslim women marry early, experience frequent marital duration, live a shorter period in stable union and remarry frequently than their Non-Muslim counterparts.

***Work status:***

Premarital work experience of the women tends to reduce the chance of remarriage, as it did for the women currently in work (not shown in table here). As can be seen from the table, 37 percent of the working women went on to have husbands once their first marriage dissolved compared to 50 percent for those who had no working experience. This result points out the fact that work experience enhances the status of women making them more responsible and secured both socially and financially. This in turn tends to encourage the women with work experience to avoid remarriage provided they are not too young.

***Timing of marriage:***

As we saw earlier, pre-pubertal marriage is more likely to be dissolved than post-pubertal marriage. This is likely to expose a larger number of this group of women to second marriage. This is indeed the case in the present instance. Women married before their first menstruation were 2.7 times more likely to remarry than their counterpart women marrying beyond puberty. In terms of percentage values, the figures were 60.3 percent and 37 percent respectively.

***Observance of religion:***

The table under reference (Table 8.2) demonstrates that the observance of religion more strictly, tends to reduce the prevalence of remarriage. The strong believers in religion are mostly reluctant to go for remarriage. They think that there is no peace in it, and it destroys the unity of

the family. It is widely believed in Hindu tradition that something she did or her *karma* (results of her past deeds) caused her husband's death. This fear discourages her from accepting husbands again. The Hindu ideal of non-marriageability of widows affect Muslim women in Indian sub-continent as the Muslim ideal of *Pardha* affect Hindu women.

#### ***Duration of marriage:***

Marked variations in remarriage rates seem to exist by duration of first union. As the last panel shows, remarriage rates increase rapidly with duration of union until 20 years, which subsides thereafter. This reflects the effect of marriage cohort on marriage dissolution, implying that incidence of dissolution is lower for those who were married in recent years.

### **8.3 Factors Affecting Remarriage**

We have studied earlier in this chapter the incidence of remarriage among the study population in relation to a few selected characteristics through bivariate analysis. In this section, we employ a multivariate technique to study these predictors in order to identify strength of factors and to arrive at a valid conclusion regarding their individual contribution to remarriage. The dependent variable is thus a dichotomous one assuming a value 0 (zero) if the deserted woman remained in her present state or 1 if she remarried after first dissolution. All the independent variables were made either dichotomous or categorical. The specific multivariate technique adopted in this analysis is the logistic regression. The results of the analysis is presented in Table 8.3.

#### ***Age at marriage:***

The result of the regression analysis shows that when all variables are controlled, increase in age at first marriage significantly reduces the chances for remarriage. For example, women marrying between 15 and 17 years, are half as likely to remarry as the women marrying before 15. Women marrying between 18 and 19 were one-fourth as likely as the women who got married before 15 to get married again once they experience marital dissolution. This results agree well with the bivariate analysis presented earlier.

***Current age:***

Prevalence of remarriage was found to be significantly related to current age. The likelihood of remarriage gradually diminishes as current age increases: women in 25-29 age group are three-fourths as likely as the women under 25 to remarry. This likelihood substantially declines with age. It is worth noting that women attaining age 40 are one-fourth as likely as the women to remarry compared to their counterpart women under 25, which is consistent with the bivariate analysis.

***Current residence:***

As the social system in the urban areas are more restrictive toward marriage breakdown and remarriage, the urban women are much less likely to remarry once their marriages are broken. This is indeed the case here. When the effects of other variables are held constant, urban women were two-thirds as likely as their rural counterparts to remarry (see Table 8.3). This difference is statistically highly significant.

***Region of residence:***

The variations between remarriage pattern and region of current residence are not statistically significant. This weak relationship is clearly evident from the beta coefficient vis-a-vis odds ratios.

***Education:***

Though our study has indicated that women with higher level of education are less likely to remarry, however, the differences are not statistically significant. Women with primary and above primary level of education have 2 percent and 23 percent respectively, less chance of remarriage. However, the beta coefficients associated with these likelihood values indicate that education may positively contribute to reduce the incidence of remarriage in the long run.

***Religion:***

Large and statistically significant differences are observed in remarriage rates by religion. Non-Muslim women are about one-fourth as likely as their Muslim counterparts to get remarried. The result is in the expected direction and is in conformity with the bivariate analysis.

***Observance of religion:***

Unlike the results obtained in bivariate analysis, observance of religion has not been found to be significantly associated with the prevalence of remarriage when the effects of other variables are controlled for.

***Work status:***

The regression coefficient shows that non-working women have 93 percent higher probability to go for the second marriage compared to the women having work experience. The differences are statistically significant. This relationship of work status and remarriage primarily is product of the fact that working women have acquired enhanced status through their work experience. This has made them more responsible, secured and self-sufficient both socially and financially. Thus they remarry less.

***Duration of marriage:***

From the predicted model, we observe that duration of marriage significantly contributes to the occurrence of remarriages. Women who spent 5 to 9 years in marital union are about 4 times as likely as the women who were less than 5 years in such union to remarry. This likelihood gets even stronger (7 times) for those who spent 10-14 years in first union, 5.5 times for those who were 15-19 years in such union and 5.2 times for couples spending 20 years or more in such. The results demonstrate that probability of remarriage is the highest in 10-14 years marriage duration which starts declining thereafter.

**8.4 Frequency of Marriage**

The frequency of marriages is affected by two factors. First, the extent of widowhood and divorce and the incidence of subsequent remarriages influence the number of times a person actually marries. The second factor is polygyny. Since data on polygyny were not obtained in 1989 BFS, we confine our attention to the study on frequency of marriage to study the prevalence of remarriage.

Table 8.4 reflects an obvious cultural pattern of marriage in Bangladesh, namely, that most people married only once (93.8%) during their lifetime. It is noted that only 6.2 percent married

more than once: 5.7 percent twice, 0.4 percent thrice and the rest 0.1 percent 4 times or more, and the average number of marriages is 1.49 times. The present study does not allow us to study the extent of remarriage among the males; however, studies in rural Bangladesh (CDC 1980) documented that, at least 15 percent males marry two times or more in rural Bangladesh. Unlike males, this reflects a tendency for females not to remarry very often after the dissolution of their first marriage. This difference between male and female prospect of remarrying may arise partly from cultural reasons, namely societal discouragement of remarriage among females, their emotional attachment toward deceased husbands and partly from women's voluntary preference to devote their lives to child-rearing. On the other hand, the customary age difference between spouses almost inevitably and automatically excludes once married women, who are usually older, from the competition in the marriage market.

Table 8.4 summarizes the differences in some of the socio-economic and demographic characteristics with respect to frequency of marriage. As can be seen, the proportion marrying twice or more decreases by age at marriage. The percentages of women marrying more than once for the group with age at first marriage under 15 years, 15-17, years and 18-19 years are respectively 8.9, 4.1 and 2.0. This inverse relationship is expected in a population, where age at marriage is inversely related to the dissolution of marriage, which in fact is the case in the present instance.

The proportion of women marrying twice or more was higher among the women in rural areas than among the women who live in urban areas (6.7% vs 5.1%). This is consistent with the differences in the remarriage rate as shown in Table 8.2. The region of residence does not seem to differ much with respect to frequency of marriage, but second marriage is somewhat more prevalent in Dhaka division and third marriage in Rajshahi division.

Educational differentials of frequency of marriages are marked. The percentage of women who married two or more times is 8 for illiterate women and 1.4 percent for women above primary level of education. This is also reflected in the mean number of times married. Education

of husband appears to act on the number of times married in the same direction but relatively less frequently.

Religious differential is significant for both prevalence and levels. The incidence of second and higher order marriage among Muslims is almost four and a half times as much as among non-Muslims. Observance of religion 'more strictly' reduces the chances of marrying more than once for those who experienced marital dissolution. This appears to be consistent with the results presented in Table 8.2.

Both second and third marriages are significantly more prevalent among the non-working women than among the working women. The percentages marrying more than once for the working women and non-working women are 5.1 percent and 12.3 respectively. The economic as well as higher status acquired by the working women prevent them from subsequent marriages.

Women marrying before their first menstrual period marry more frequently than their counterpart group marrying after their first menstrual period. For example, 11.2 percent of the women, who were married before they experienced their first menstruation married twice. While those who married beyond puberty, constituted only 3.9 percent of remarriages. This result is in the expected direction.

The average number of marriages for the entire population for those whose marriages were dissolved, was estimated to be 1.49. Among the subgroups, the highest number of marriages, 1.67 times was reported for the women who were married before their first menstrual period. This is a reflection of the consequences of child and early marriage, in which case the breakdown of marriage is more frequent. This is indeed the case in the present instance: pre-pubertal marriages were twice as likely as the post-pubertal marriages to dissolve, with 20.2 percent having their marriages dissolved as compared to 11.2 percent with post-pubertal marriages.

### **8.5 Age at Second Marriage**

For the whole sample, 45.2 percent of the women remarried whose first marriages were dissolved. The mean and median age at second marriage were calculated to be 21.1 years and

19.9 years respectively. The ages at which they remarry, vary substantially between widowed and divorced/separated women with higher average value for the widowed women.

For example, women whose marriages were broken by the death of their husbands, entered into the second marriage at an average age of 23.5 years (see Table 8.5). The corresponding age for the divorced/separated women was 20.2 years. The median ages of second marriage for the widowed and divorced/separated are 22.8 years and 19.1 years respectively. An widowed woman enters into the first marriage at an early age (13.8 years), spends a longer period (6.6 years) in first union and has to wait for a longer period (3.1 years) for second marriage. On the contrary, a divorced or separated woman enters into the first marriage somewhat later (at 14.2 years), spends relatively shorter time in first union (3.6 years) and remarries relatively earlier (within 2.4 years) compared to her widowed counterparts (see Table 8.5). This implies that prospect for widow remarriage in our culture is extremely limited. This is further evidenced from the fact that among the women who did not remarry despite being widowed, spent a longer time of 16.8 years in their first union. The corresponding interval is only 5.7 years for the divorced or separated women. This higher duration in the first union for the widowed reduces their chances to remarry. It may be noted that there exists an age difference of 1.5 years between the widowed and the divorced women (who did not remarry) while they were first married. Table 8.5 further demonstrates that between the two groups, those who married and those who did not marry after first dissolution, the age at marriage is lower for the former group (14 years vs 15 years). This indicates that early marriers have better prospect for remarriage.

### **8.6 Differentials in Age at Second Marriage**

As in the case of age at first marriage, the age at second and subsequent marriages is also likely to vary by socio-economic and background characteristics of the respondents. These differentials may however vary widely in nature, pattern and extent as compared to the first marriage. In the present instance, we make an attempt to investigate the age at second marriage only with respect to a few selected characteristics of the women. The results of this investigation have been presented in Table 8.6.

The age at second marriage clearly rises with current age implying that second marriage is taking place relatively earlier than before. This is in contrast with the trend in age at first marriage. The declining trend is true for both types of dissolution. The effect of age at first marriage is pronounced for both widowed and divorced women. This happens because of the direct relationship between age at marriage and age at marriage dissolution (see Table 7.5). This displaces the age at second marriage toward higher ages. Such a pattern is evident from Table 8.6. Those who marry beyond 20, remarry somewhat at an early age irrespective of the cause of dissolution.

Urban widows remarry at about the same age as of the rural widows. The rural divorced women however remarry somewhat earlier than their urban counterparts. Region of residence does not seem to differ much in this respect.

Educated women tend to delay their second marriage. This does not seem to be the case for the widowed women. Neither religion nor religiosity (observance of religion) has any effect on the age at second marriage.

Age at marriage dissolution has been considerably lower for those who were married before puberty, specially for widows. This has resulted in lowering the age at second marriage nearly by 2 years. This has been true for both widowed (22.3 years vs 23.8 years) and divorced/separated (19.1 years vs 21 years) women.

### **8.7 Marital Stability by Marriage Orders**

Altogether 1628 (13.7%) women had their first marriages dissolved, of whom 736 (45.2%) went on for the second marriage. A total of 184 (25%) of these women experienced marital dissolution for the second time, of whom 60 (32.6%) went on to have the third marriage. The proportion of women experiencing marital dissolution in their third marriages was 35 percent, exactly 10 percentage point higher than the first order marriage. Table 8.7 summarizes these findings along with the mean age at marriage by marriage orders. The table provides some indications of relative stability of first, second and third order marriages. As marriage order increases, the probability of continuation of the marriage decreases. For example, more than 86



percent of the women continued their first marriage, while the proportion of women continuing their second marriage is 75 percent which decreases further to 65 percent for the third marriage. This implies that first marriage is more stable than the second marriage, and second marriage is more stable than the third marriage. This pattern primarily comes from divorced and separated status. The rate of divorce or separation clearly increases with marriage order, which does not seem to be the case for widowhood. This tends to indicate that higher order marriages are more frequent to end in divorce or in separation than widowhood.

We examine the nature of the above instability in marriage with reference to only three crucial background characteristics of the women: education, residence and religion. The results are presented in Table 8.8. As the data indicate, for all marriage orders, marriage is more stable among the educated women. Following the average pattern, this stability seems to decrease with the order of marriage at all education levels.

It is interesting to note that the incidence of dissolution of first marriage is much higher (14.5%) among the Muslims than among the non-Muslims (8.3%). Surprisingly, for the second order marriage, Muslim marriage dissolves in 24.4 percent of the cases, while for the non-Muslims, marriage becomes unstable in 37.5 percent of the cases. For the third order marriages, Muslim marriages dissolve in about 35 percent of the cases, while this proportion is much higher (50%) for non-Muslims. This implies that higher order marriages are more unstable among the non-Muslims.

For first marriages, both urban and rural marriages are equally stable (86.3% vs 86.3%). Dissolution due to widowhood is however somewhat higher in urban areas (7% vs 5.7%). This is compensated by increased dissolution rate due to divorced cases for rural areas.

This balance is offset by increased instability in marriages among rural women for second order marriages, implying that second order marriage is more unstable among them. This situation seems to aggravate further in third order marriage where rural women experience marital instability in 37.3 percent of the cases compared to a figure of only 22.2 percent for urban women.

## 8.8 Summary

### *Differential prevalence in remarriage:*

The comparison of 1975 and 1989 BFSs shows that the incidence of remarriage among the women in Bangladesh has probably gone down. In 1975 BFS, 60 percent women, whose marriages were broken, went on to marry for the second time. This proportion is 45 percent for 1989 BFS. Analysis showed that divorced women are 4 times as likely as the widowed women to remarry.

Data showed that remarriage is frequent among the women when they experience marital dissolution at an early age and the divorced women have higher chances to remarry than the widowed. Differential analysis showed that the lower the age at marriage, the higher the likelihood of remarriage. For example, 52 percent of the women, who married before 15, remarried. This proportion sharply falls to 38 percent if age at marriage is raised to 15-17 years. Current age also shows a similar pattern.

Rural women have a much higher prevalence of remarriage than their urban counterparts: 48.7 percent vs 36.6 percent. It is equally true for childhood residence: 46.7 percent vs 35.6 percent. Nearly 47 percent of the women who had no schooling, remarried, while this proportion was much lower (29.3%) for women having higher level of schooling.

Incidence of remarriage is substantially lower (17.8%) among the Non-Muslims than (47.8%) among the Muslim women. More women (50.1%) with no pre-marital work experience than women with pre-marital work experience (37%) remarried. As expected, pre-pubertal marriage increases the risk of marriage dissolution, while strict observance of religion tends to reduce it. For example, 60.3% of the women who were married before their first menstrual period got their marriage dissolved due to divorce, while only 37 percent of the women experienced such dissolution who were married after their first puberty.

The multivariate attempt to identify the factors influencing remarriage showed that out of 10 variables included in the logistic model, 7 variables came out to be significant predictors of remarriage. These are: current age, age at marriage, current residence, religion, work status,

timing of marriage and duration of marriage. As the analysis showed, women marrying between 15-17 years are one half as likely as the women marrying before 15, to remarry. As for the current age, women who were aged 25-29, are three-fourths as likely to remarry compared to their counterpart women who married before 25. This likelihood significantly declines with age. Urban women are one-fourth as likely as the rural women to remarry, while the Muslim women are almost three times as likely as the non-Muslim women to remarry .

The analysis further demonstrated that women with no work experience have 93 percent higher probability to remarry than the women with work experience. Women who were married after their first menstrual period, had 25 percent lower probability of remarrying than those who were married after their period occurred. Duration of marriage significantly contributes to the incidence of remarriage.

***Frequency of marriage:***

The 1989 BFS data revealed that only 6.2 percent of the respondents married more than once: 5.7 percent two times, the 0.4 percent three times and the rest 0.1 percent four times or more, the average number of marriages being 1.49 times. Analysis showed that the average number of marriages was the highest (1.67 times) among the women who were married before their first menstruation and the lowest (1.19 times) among the Non-Muslims. Second order marriage was most prevalent (11.2%) among the women with no pre-marital work experience, while it is the lowest (1.1%) among the Non-Muslims. The third order marriage occurs most frequently (in 1% cases) for women experiencing menarche after marriage, while its lowest prevalence (in 0.1% cases) was noted among the non-Muslims and among the women having the highest level of education.

***Age at second marriage:***

The average age at second marriage is 21.1 years, with a difference of only 0.9 years between widowed and divorced remarriages. It is the highest (26.8 years) for those who were married for the first time between 18 and 19 years and the lowest (17.8 years) for those who were less than 15 years of age at the time of survey.

***Stability of marriages:***

Analysis indicated that among the Bangladeshi women, the first marriage is more stable than the second marriage and the second marriage is more stable than the third marriage. Furthermore, marriage is more stable among the educated women. This stability decreases with the order of marriage irrespective of the level of education. Higher order marriages are more unstable among the non-Muslim women than among the Muslims. For first marriages, both urban and rural marriages are equally stable (86.3% vs 86.6%), while the second order marriages become unstable among the rural women. This situation aggravates further with third order marriages where rural women experience marital instability in 37.3 percent of the cases, compared to only 22 percent for urban women.

Table 8.1: Prevalence of remarriage by age at first dissolution and causes of dissolution

Age at dissolution	N	<u>Percent remarried of</u>		
		widowed	Div./ Sep.	Total
<20	727	74.1	69.7	70.6
20-24 .99	341	46.4	49.3	48.1
25-29 .99	219	10.7	32.9	18.7
30-34 .99	159	5.4	13.8	6.9
35+	182	3.5	8.3	3.8
All ages	1628	27.5	59.3	45.2
N	-	(198)	(538)	(1628)

Table 8.2: Percentage of all ever married women whose first marriage dissolved and who remarried after dissolution by women's characteristics

Characteristics	Number of women	<u>First marriage dissolved</u>		<u>Remarried after dissolution</u>	
		N	%	N	%
<b>Bangladesh</b>	11906	1628	13.7	736	45.2
<i>Age at marriage</i>					
< 15	5968	1019	17.1	526	51.6
15 - 17	4428	473	10.1	179	37.8
18 - 19	981	91	9.3	20	22.0
20+	529	45	8.5	11	24.4
<i>Current age</i>					
< 25	4409	384	8.7	265	69.0
25 - 34	4068	546	13.4	320	58.6
35 - 39	1376	231	16.8	112	48.5
40+	2053	467	22.7	139	29.8
<i>Current residence</i>					
Rural	8467	1158	13.7	564	48.7
Urban	3439	470	13.7	172	36.6
<i>Childhood residence</i>					
Rural	0183	1412	13.9	659	46.7
Urban	1727	216	12.5	77	35.6

Cont. Table 8.2.....

Characteristics	Number of women	First marriage dissolved		Remarried after dissolution	
		N	%	N	%
<b>Region</b>					
Chittagong	2717	361	13.3	158	43.8
Dhaka	3778	534	14.1	253	47.4
Khulna	2325	300	12.9	136	45.3
Rajshahi	3086	433	14.0	189	43.6
<b>Education</b>					
None	7583	1290	17.0	602	46.7
Primary	2601	256	9.8	110	43.0
Higher	1721	82	4.8	24	29.3
<b>Husband's education</b>					
None	5528	985	17.8	470	47.7
Primary	2405	289	12.0	135	46.7
Higher	3910	338	8.6	124	36.7
<b>Religion</b>					
Muslim	10284	1493	14.5	712	47.7
Hindu	1022	135	8.3	24	17.8
<b>Premarital work</b>					
Worked before	1842	613	33.3	227	37.0
Not worked	10064	1015	10.1	509	50.1
<b>Timing of marriage</b>					
Before puberty	2000	403	20.2	243	60.3
After puberty	7859	883	11.2	327	37.0
<b>Practicing religion</b>					
More strictly	2516	302	12.0	119	39.4
Average	6305	804	12.8	378	46.0
Less strictly	3085	522	16.9	247	47.3
<b>Duration of marriage</b>					
<5	2425	156	6.4	33	21.1
5 - 9	2296	236	10.3	117	49.6
10 - 14	1996	253	12.7	163	64.4
15 - 19	1736	251	14.5	144	57.4
20+	3453	732	21.2	279	38.1

Table 8.3: Logistic regression analysis on the likelihood of remarriage by background characteristics

Characteristics	Beta (B)	SE(B)	Sig	Exp(B)
<b>Age at marriage</b>				
<15	-	-	-	1.0000
15 - 17	-.70440	.1245	.0000	.4944
18 - 19	-1.3994	.2754	.0000	.2467
20+	-1.6162	.3756	.0002	.1987
<b>Current age</b>				
<25	-	-	-	1.0000
25 - 29	-.2611	.2817	.0000	.7702
30 - 34	-.4021	.1399	.0020	.6687
35 - 39	-.6054	.1597	.0002	.5458
40+	-1.5173	.1509	.0000	.2215
<b>Current residence</b>				
Rural	-	-	-	1.0000
Urban	-.3966	.1277	.0019	.6726
<b>Region</b>				
Chittagong	-	-	-	1.0000
Dhaka	.1228	.1538	.4246	1.1307
Khulna	.0852	.1759	.6281	1.0889
Rajshahi	.0787	.1623	.6277	1.0819
<b>Education</b>				
None	-	-	-	1.0000
Primary	-.0176	.1645	.9150	.9826
Higher	-.2607	.2974	.3807	.7705
<b>Religion</b>				
Muslim	-	-	-	1.0000
Non- Muslim	-1.4133	.2440	.0000	.2433
<b>Practicing Religion</b>				
Strictly	-	-	-	1.0000
Not strictly	.1331	.1540	.4177	1.1401
<b>Premarital work</b>				
Worked before	-	-	-	1.0000
Not Worked	.6603	.1176	.0000	1.9358
<b>Timing of marriage</b>				
Before puberty	-	-	-	1.0000
After puberty	-.2492	.1077	.0019	.7800
<b>Duration of marriage (yrs)</b>				
<5	-	-	-	1.0000
5 - 9	1.3583	.2524	.0000	3.8895
10 - 14	1.9512	.3396	.0000	7.0373
15 - 19	1.7109	.4231	.0001	5.5339
20+	1.6466	.5155	.0014	5.1893

Table 8.4: Percentage distribution of women ever married by number of marriages by background characteristics

Characteristics	Number of times married				
	1	2	3	4	Average
<b>Total</b>	<b>93.8</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>1.49</b>
<i>Age at marriage</i>					
< 15	91.1	8.0	0.8	0.1	1.57
15 - 17	95.9	3.9	0.2	0.0	1.40
18 - 19	98.0	2.0	-	-	1.22
20+	98.0	2.0	-	-	1.22
<i>Current age</i>					
< 25	96.2	3.6	0.2	0.0	1.46
25 - 34	92.1	7.1	0.7	0.1	1.66
35 - 49	92.6	6.9	0.4	0.0	1.38
<i>Current residence</i>					
Rural	93.3	6.1	0.5	0.1	1.54
Urban	94.9	4.8	0.3	-	1.36
<i>Region</i>					
Chittagong	94.1	5.6	0.3	-	1.46
Dhaka	93.3	6.2	0.4	0.1	1.52
Khulna	94.2	5.4	0.4	0.1	1.50
Rajshahi	93.8	5.5	0.6	0.1	1.48
<i>Education</i>					
None	92.0	7.3	0.6	0.1	1.52
Primary	95.8	4.1	0.2	-	1.44
Higher	98.6	1.4	-	-	1.29
<i>Husband's education</i>					
None	91.4	7.7	0.7	0.1	1.53
Primary	94.3	5.3	0.4	0.0	1.51
Higher	95.8	3.1	0.1	-	1.38
<i>Religion</i>					
Muslim	93.0	6.4	0.5	0.1	1.52
Non-Muslim	98.5	1.4	0.1	-	1.19
<i>Observance of religion</i>					
More strictly	95.2	4.3	0.4	0.1	1.45
Less strictly	91.9	7.3	0.7	0.1	1.52
<i>Premarital work</i>					
Worked before	94.9	4.7	0.3	0.0	1.40
Not worked	87.7	11.2	0.9	0.2	1.55
<i>Timing of marriage</i>					
Before puberty	87.7	11.2	1.0	0.2	1.67
After puberty	95.8	3.9	0.2	0.0	1.40



Table 8.5: Comparison of the age at first marriage and age at second marriage

Type of dissolution	Age at first marriage	Age at first dissolution.	Duration in first union	Age at second marriage	Waiting time for second marriage
Widowhood	13.8	20.4	6.6	23.5	3.1
Divorce/ Separated	14.2	17.8	3.6	20.2	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>2.6</b>
First marriage dissolved but not remarried					
Widowhood	14.4	31.2	16.8	-	-
Divorced / Separated	15.9	21.6	5.7	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

Table 8.6: Differentials in age at second marriage

Characteristics	Age at second marriage when first marriage ended in			
	Widowhood	Divorced/ Separated	Total	SD
<b>Total</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>2.6</b>
<i><b>Current age</b></i>				
< 15	17.6	17.8	17.8	2.5
15 - 24	22.0	20.1	20.5	4.1
35 - 49	25.2	22.8	23.9	6.3
<i><b>Age at marriage</b></i>				
< 15	22.8	19.4	20.4	5.4
15 - 17	25.6	21.1	22.2	4.5
18 - 19	27.8	25.9	26.3	4.5
20+	26.2	24.4	24.6	2.2
<i><b>Current residence</b></i>				
Rural	23.3	19.9	20.7	5.1
Urban	23.8	21.4	22.2	5.5
<i><b>Region</b></i>				
Chittagong	23.5	20.7	21.5	5.0
Dhaka	23.5	20.2	21.1	5.4
Khulna	24.0	19.9	21.0	5.7
Rajshahi	23.1	19.8	20.7	5.1
<i><b>Education</b></i>				
None	23.4	19.9	20.9	5.2
Primary	24.4	20.8	21.8	5.5
Higher	22.5	22.9	22.8	6.2
<i><b>Religion</b></i>				
Muslim	23.5	20.2	21.0	5.3
Non-Muslim	23.9	20.4	22.3	5.5
<i><b>Observance of religion</b></i>				
More strictly	23.3	20.4	21.4	5.1
Less strictly	23.6	20.4	21.0	5.2
<i><b>Timing of marriage</b></i>				
Before puberty	22.3	19.1	20.0	5.4
After puberty	23.8	21.0	21.7	4.8

Table 8.7 : Mean age at marriage and marital status by marriage order

Marital status	Proportion			Mean age at		
	FM	SM	TM	FM	SM	TM
Continued (N)	86.3 (10278)	75.0 (552)	65.0 (39)	15.4 (10278)	21.3 (552)	23.9 (39)
Widowed (N)	6.1 (721)	8.8 (65)	5.0 (3)	14.2 (721)	21.1 (65)	19.7 (3)
Divorced (N)	5.8 (697)	10.7 (79)	33.0 (14)	14.7 (697)	18.7 (79)	21.9 (14)
Separated (N)	1.8 (210)	5.4 (40)	6.7 (4)	15.9 (210)	22.3 (40)	25.9 (4)
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>100 (11906)</b>	<b>100 (736)</b>	<b>100 (60)</b>	<b>14.8 (11906)</b>	<b>21.1 (736)</b>	<b>23.3 (60)</b>

Note: FM =First marriage, SM=Second marriage, TM=Third marriage

Table 8.8 : Marital status by education, religion and residence

Marital status	First Marriage		Second Marriage		Third Marriage	
	<u>Education</u>		<u>Education</u>		<u>Education</u>	
	None	Some	None	Some	None	Some
Continued	83.0	92.2	74.0	80.6	62.5	100.0
Widowed	7.6	3.4	9.4	6.0	50.4	-
Divorced	7.4	3.1	11.5	6.7	25.0	-
Separated	2.0	1.3	5.1	6.7	7.1	-

Marital Status	First Marriage		Second Marriage		Third Marriage	
	<u>Religion</u>		<u>Religion</u>		<u>Religion</u>	
	Muslim	Others	Muslim	Others	Muslim	Others
Continued	85.5	91.7	75.6	62.5	65.5	50.0
Widowed	6.0	6.2	8.4	20.8	5.2	-
Divorced	6.6	0.9	10.4	16.7	22.4	50.0
Separated	1.9	1.2	5.6	-	6.9	-

Marital status	First Marriage		Second Marriage		Third Marriage	
	<u>Residence</u>		<u>Residence</u>		<u>Residence</u>	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Continued	86.3	86.3	74.8	76.4	62.7	77.8
Widowed	5.7	7.0	9.3	6.9	5.9	-
Divorced	6.4	4.5	11.1	9.2	25.5	11.1
Separated	1.6	2.2	4.8	7.5	5.9	11.1

## **Chapter IX**

### **DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **9.1 Introduction**

The primary objective of the present study has been to evaluate the various aspects of family formation, family structure, family disorganization and family reorganization. The process of family formation starts with first marriage. The heterogeneity in the age at marriage, as well as interspousal age difference reflect the structural pattern of the family, while family disorganization is a product of insatiability in marriage. The acceptance of remarriage in any society, promotes reorganizing a family when a previous marriage is dissolved.

Despite the fact that studies on fertility, mortality and contraceptive behavior have been numerous in Bangladesh, very little attempt has been made so far to perceive the people's demographic behavior in relation to the family formation or family disorganization. This has mainly resulted from the failure to realize the importance of this aspects from policy point of view and lack of adequate data.

As indicated earlier, Bangladesh is in the midst of social transformation, though this transformation is less dramatic compared to other contemporary Asian countries. There are evidences that educational facilities have been expanded, economic status has improved and labor markets are changing generally in ways that have broaden the opportunities to young people. Nuptiality pattern is an important element in this process. An study of this issue is thus of importance to establish a linkage between the perceived social transformation and changes in the nuptiality pattern, if any, over time. To this end, the present study was undertaken.

#### **9.2 Trends in Age at Marriage**

Despite the fact that Bangladesh population is characterized by very low age at marriage for both sexes, a trend toward higher age at marriage has been demonstrated for the country as well as for the administrative regions of the country. Rate of changes in marriage timing has

resulted in gender difference. Males have a less rapid pace of change than females. And, the trends are found to be converging. These changes can be attributed to the recent social transformation and is supportive of the hypotheses of the modernizing effect for developing countries. The aggregate of the social developmental programs changed individual value-structure and social norm for age at marriage. Parental aspiration and attitude surrounding the welfare of their daughters have also contributed to this rise. Most parents, in the face of growing independence and assertiveness of daughters, appear to have simply abdicated their former role in arranging their daughters' marriages. But there was perhaps more to it than this. Educational attainment became a matter of prestige, and working daughters were able to make an important contribution to poor households.

The trend analysis demonstrated considerable variations in the age at marriage by broad administrative zones both in terms of levels and trends. This is mainly because of the reason that socio-economic development has not taken place equally in all the regions. The general conclusion as emerged from the trend analysis is that the mean age at marriage has been consistently higher for Chittagong division. This pattern uniquely persists for the entire period covered by the analysis. The lowest age at marriage was recorded for Khulna. This pattern has been maintained for a long time. The 1975 BFS data also demonstrated this feature. Dhaka division ranked second in this respect.

The higher level of age at marriage in Chittagong division can be explained partly in terms of the cultural differences. Dowry and bride price play an important role in the marriage of Chittagong division. The amount of dowry and bride price in a marriage is considered an indicator of social prestige. Therefore, the economic demand for providing the necessity of dowry and bride price created somewhat delay in the marriage in Chittagong division. Another factor, which might be worth noting is that Chittagong has a high concentration of Buddhist people. Marriage among them takes place relatively later. This might have a diffusion effect on other religions. The higher level in marriage age in Chittagong can also be conceived as a result of differential impact of modernizing institutions. After the 1950s, Chittagong division received attention for being a

suitable place for industrial growth. The impact of industrialization has made a change in the structure of feasibility of marriage. This change occurred through a change in non-material values regarding when to marry and whom to marry. Since long before, a significant proportion of the males of marriageable ages is working in the Middle East countries. This created a shortage of potential grooms. As a result, Chittagong division experienced the highest level in the age at marriage.

Two factors are perceived as being responsible for the lower age at marriage in Khulna division. As observed in the 1974 and 1981 censuses, Khulna experienced high rural to urban migration. These migrated women, might weigh down the actual age at marriage for the urban areas. Women, who moved to the city with their husbands are expected to have relatively low age at marriage. Those who moved to the city with their parents, are also expected to marry earlier, because their early socialization and values related to formation of family and family life are different than women born and living in urban areas. Secondly, Khulna is culturally very close to West Bengal (India) where the culture of low caste Hindus prefers marriage at an early age. This has also a diffusion effect on the marriage age of Khulna.

Despite the fact that age at marriage has remained higher in Chittagong division, it has experienced relatively the lowest pace of change in age at marriage, while Khulna division, which recorded the lowest age at marriage, experienced the fastest relative change during the period 1975-1989. Cohort data, however, suggested somewhat slower change in Khulna division than Dhaka, but this difference is not statistically significant. The regional disparities in age at marriage that were discerned from the birth cohort and marriage cohort data, reduced considerably over time.

The above differential pace of change in age at marriage in Khulna and Chittagong has also some explanations. It can be conceived as a result of differential impact of modernization, urbanization and industrialization. Education seems to be a stronger factor in the rapid change in the age at marriage in Khulna division. Increase in literacy rate in Khulna division was the highest

during this period. Urbanization was also relatively rapid. Chittagong, which already attained a high level in age at marriage, was thus less responsive to the social and economic transformation.

Both age at marriage and rate of change in age at marriage have consistently been higher in urban areas for a long time in the past. But in recent years this change has been reverse: rural areas are undergoing rapid changes in the age at marriage than the urban areas. This shift has been possible due to a number of development programs aimed at enhancing the status of women in rural areas by government's initiatives. In the hope of improving women's status, the government supports three women's programs: women's co-operatives, mother's clubs, and women's vocational training. A number of NGOs are also working to this end.

An emerging pattern of changing age at marriage discerned from our analysis is that in recent years, the increase in age at marriage has been rather slower. This trend is uniquely demonstrated by cohort analysis across all the background variables. The rate of change in age at marriage has been faster for the cohort born before 1950 than for those who were born after 20 years apart. This trend refers to Dixon's (1971) proposition that with economic prosperity, the age at marriage in developing countries will increase, but after a certain point, the age at marriage will cease to increase (Ahmed 1982). The case of rapid change in Malaysia is an example supporting her inference. Over the last four decades, in Sri Lanka, age at first marriage for males increased marginally, and for the females, it rose considerably, but there has been no recent increase in female age at marriage. Among the younger cohorts, estimated age at which some married, indeed show a declining age at marriage. This also seems to agree with Dixon's proposition. Coale and McNeil estimates, however, indicate that there has been no real decline in female age at marriage in Sri Lanka. Marriages were delayed as a result of economic hardship or increased mortality to the mid-1970s, but once the overall economy improved after 1977, more marriages took place. Female age at marriage in Sri Lanka remained slightly below 24 years, the age which is anticipated by younger cohorts and this level is likely to persist for some time (De Silva 1990). But the recent trend of slow rise in age at marriage in Bangladesh remains unexplained.



### **9.3 Timing and Differentials of First Marriage:**

At the start of our research endeavor, we intended to focus on the issues on marriage using variety of approaches that were expected to uncover the factors related to the timing and prevalence of marriage. To this end, we converted the age at marriage into three dichotomous variables with a cut-off point for each of the variables. The first cut-off point is the timing of marriage which bisects the age at marriage as taking place before first menstruation (pre-pubertal) or after first menstruation (post-pubertal). The average age at marriage was the second cut-off point dividing the age at marriage into pre-average (before 15) and post-average (15 years or later). Similarly, with the legal age at marriage of 18 years as the third cut-off point, the age at marriage was dichotomized as to have occurred before 18 (pre-legal) or after 18 (post-legal). These variables provide an account of the prevalence of marriage with respect to timing and trace its trend across a number of socio-economic and cultural variables.

The pre-post cut off points shows that as much as 17 percent women in Bangladesh get married before their first menstruation. There is, however, a clear declining trend in pre-pubertal marriage prevalence. The second cut-off point reveals that more women now than before are postponing their marriage much beyond the average age 15. The third cut-off point reveals that only about 13 percent women get married at 18 or later. Comparison of these three cut-off points by current age shows that propensity to delay marriage among the younger generation is increasing over time. The high proportion of marriage before puberty is not only undesirable but also unethical from religious as well as social point of view. The consequences of such marriage are numerous. Becoming pregnant at an early age is problematic, since it occurs before a young woman has reaches full biological, physical and emotional maturity, which in turn leads to the high risk of maternal and child mortality and marital instability..

Prevalence of marriage by duration since first union recorded a clear and significant trends toward later age at marriage. This is a cohort effect implying that the age at marriage is rising. Education of wife than of husband, has more pronounced effect to reduce the incidence of early marriage. Surprisingly, wife's pre-marital work experience had little significance in postponement

of female marriage. This contradicts our hypothesis of effect of modernizing factors on age at marriage. McDonald and Rahman (1974) from their Indonesian experience, however argues that women who worked before marriage, marry earlier, presumably because rural work being largely agricultural based, was included in household activities. Smith (1975) also found a similar relationship in a study carried out in Philippines and concluded that rural household activity has little impact on raising age at marriage. This insignificant relationship, however, does not necessarily mean that work-experience is not important in explaining the variation in age at marriage, but rather it reflects that its duration is not prolonged enough to exert its influence. Moreover, these women are in most cases poor and illiterate, who are married off at a very early age.

Muslim girls have much higher prevalence of marriage and marry at an early age than the non-Muslim girls. This difference is in the hypothesized direction. This difference is not merely a product of traditional, religious or ethnic values as theorized by Moss (1965) from his empirical observations, or an impact of the shrinking of marriage market for Hindus and other non-Muslims, but also a product of preference of education and residential background. There is however, an indication that religious differences converge at higher age at marriage. The current rising trend in age at marriage, if continues, will considerably close the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims in differential prevalence in early marriage.

Women with beyond primary level of education were at least 2 years older than their illiterate counterparts at the time of marriage. This association has been found empirically valid in many studies and now is almost universally true. Women's education is found to be the strongest determinant of timing of marriage.

Rural women marry much earlier than their urban counterparts. This is also supported by Davis (1963) proposition that lower age at marriage is a product of an agricultural society, as a large proportion of the population lives in rural areas. Goode (1968) also supported this view from a historical perspective. This difference is most pronounced when they marry pre-puberty, which decreases at the later cut-off points. Multivariate analysis clearly suggests that residential

differences are significantly low at higher ages. This is an indication that attempt to raising age at marriage will have considerable effect to eliminate the existing urban-rural disparities in age at marriage.

Rank ordering of the administrative regions places Chittagong division at the first position with the lowest prevalence of pre-pubertal, pre-average and pre-legal marriages followed by Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna. The consequential effect is that the age at marriage remained highest for Chittagong and the lowest for Khulna. This regional pattern of marriage can partly be attributed to the lack of homogeneous social and economic development, differences in the cultural pattern and variation the level of urbanization. In addition, region of residence may be a proxy for ethnic boundaries that are related to post-pubertal marriage. We provided several arguments before, explaining the regional variations in age at marriage. In sum, the higher level in marriage age in Chittagong primarily results from cultural values and level of industrialization and the lower level in Khulna is associated largely with the out-flow of migrants from rural area to urban area coupled with religious interactions from Hindus of neighboring country with poor or no education, traditional values and superstitious beliefs.

The above analysis leads to conclude that:

(a) Age at marriage is rising in Bangladesh. But the rate of change has slowed down in recent time.

(b) Current age, duration of marriage, women's education and religion are related to the timing of marriage. Women with older age, no education, Muslim religion and longer duration of marriage are associated with early marriage.

(c) Differential impacts due to socio-economic and cultural factors on age at marriage are greater when the marriage takes place earlier. This difference is more pronounced when it takes place before puberty, less so for pre-average marriage and minimum when marriage occurs in the neighborhood of 18 years (pre-pubertal marriage).

(d) Prevalence of early marriage is most frequent in Khulna division followed by Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong

(e) Average age at marriage is higher among educated women and among women with urban residential background. On average, women with pre-marital work experience were older than women without pre-marital work experience at the time of marriage. Muslims have almost universal child marriage, while non-Muslim women generally marry later.

(f) Husband's occupation, education, family landholding size, and religiosity of the respondents are less important factors in the differential prevalence of age at marriage of women.

(g) Policy toward raising age at marriage will lead to the reduction of the socio-economic and cultural differences in the age at marriage.

Evidence from multiple classification analysis of 1975 and 1989 BFS data identified education of the respondents to have the strongest influence on age at marriage for both the years. Husband's education also plays a similar role. It is interesting to note that change in age at marriage during the period 1975-1989 has been more faster among the women with no education relative to the educated women. Cohort analysis showed that age at marriage increased relatively faster for the cohort born before 1950-60 where educated women contributed more. This pattern took a reversible trend after 1960 with slower pace of increase and the contribution of education of women became less important to the change in age at marriage. The reasons for this upward trend in age at marriage thus remains conjectural. It may be that the age structure of the population has affected adversely chances of marriage of getting married for girls because lack of availability of eligible marriage partners squeezes the marriage market for them. Both 1975 and 1989 age distributions tend to demonstrate such an evidence (Huq and Cleland 1990; MOHPC (1978).

Nevertheless, the overall contribution of education, controlled for other variables has been rising over time. This trend is expected to be continued if women's status can be enhanced. In hopes of improving women's status, the government of Bangladesh supports three women's programs: women's co-operatives, mother's clubs and woman's vocational training (Rowley 1985). In addition to these program, a large number of Non-Government Organizations are also involved in enhancing women's status, such as Babgladesh Rural Advancement Committee

(BRAC), Grameen Bank, Association for Social Advancement (ASA) etc. The effort of these programs has made some improvement on changing the attitude of early marriage for girls.

Rural women who, maintained a lower level in age at marriage throughout the period, contributed relatively more in the changes in age at marriage. This phenomenon is a recent one when rural areas are receiving more attention for development. In last fifteen years, Bangladesh has experienced revolutionary change in communication and transportation. About 18 percent of the rural households have been brought under rural electrification program. Health facilities have been expanded in rural areas. In recent years, food for education program is in operation to educate the rural girls. NGOs are more in number than before to provide facilities to rural women through income generating activities. This is slowly contributing to the social transformation.

Next to education, region of residence was found to be the second strongest variable. In line of previous findings, Chittagong division, with a much higher age at marriage, displayed the lowest relative increase during 1975-1989, while Khulna showed the highest increase. We further conclude that inter-regional variations and disparities in age at marriage have bridged considerably in recent years. This is, as we indicated earlier, resulted from differential impact of socio-economic and cultural behavior of the areas.

Despite the higher mean age at marriage among Non- Muslims, relative increase has been more pronounced for Muslims. This reflects that, in recent years, Muslim women, starting out with a low age at marriage, have been able to make a compensation of the deficit. The Savar study (Rowley 1985) indicates that fundamentalist ideas now do not have strong influence on Muslim women. This has an impact, as Rowley points out, to delay marriage. The fight against these fundamentalists is now has gained momentum throughout the country.

In conclusion, the results of this study have provided empirical evidence, whatever may be its magnitude, in support of the general theory of social change. The modernizing factors, as perceived by the United Nations (1975) for developing countries, appeared in the analysis as major determinants of delayed marriage. The role of traditional factors such as ethnicity, religion, religiosity continue to be also significant.

#### 9.4 Age Difference

The interspousal age differences in Bangladesh have been studied in the present work under serious data constraints particularly with respect to the age reporting error. The trend analysis has been limited further due to the lack of time series data. Nevertheless, the analysis clearly demonstrated a situation with regard to the existing age differences among the Bangladeshi couples that significantly differ from the Western pattern. It is unique in the sense that such a large age difference seldom exists in countries other than Bangladesh. It is undoubtedly true that the phenomenon of large age differences observed in this analysis arises from complex associations between age at marriage on the one hand and several background characteristics of the spouses.

Interspousal age gap of 10 years in Bangladesh is one of the highest in the world. This large age gap has resulted from the tradition that, in Bangladesh, girls marry men considerably older than themselves. This large age difference is partly a result of economic condition. By and large, under high underemployment conditions in a country, men postpone their marriages until it becomes economically feasible; on the other hand, in such economic conditions, parents are inclined to some of economic pressures of the family (Ahmed 1982). The large age gap in the long run, creates a shortage of eligible grooms. This imbalance, what we call a *marriage squeeze*, may make it more difficult for parents to find suitable grooms for their daughters. The 1989 BFS data and the latest census of 1991 in Bangladesh provide a small sign of decreasing trend in interspousal age difference. This trend is in conformity with a study in India (Singh 1992). Korea also experienced a decline of 2 years in interspousal age difference during 1980-85. Studies in other Asian countries show a trend of a converging of male and female ages at marriage (Xenos and Gultiano 1992).

It is apparently true that an insignificant proportion of women are married to persons who are of their same age or even older. Age of the husband is closely associated with this situation. In most cases, the imbalanced marriage ages (where the groom has to accept women older than himself) mostly occurs because of property inheritance. Such incidence is highly prevalent among the younger males. A significant proportion of the women in Bangladesh still marry men who are

15 years or even more older than themselves. Our analysis has shown that this situation has considerably improved over the last 15 years.

The factors which significantly contribute to produce large age differences between husbands and wife, as the present study identified, include: wife's age at marriage, respondents education, wife's current age, husbands education and current residence.

Our study revealed that with a slight increase between 1951 and 1975, the interspousal age differences started to decline from a larger difference to smaller difference. In absence of any firm time series data, we resort to birth cohort analysis as we did for the analysis of age at marriage. This analysis showed that the interspousal age difference decreased by less than 2 years over the last 40- year period. This is, by any standard, a very insignificant decline experienced over a wide span of time.

In the line of the trends in age at marriage, rural Bangladesh experienced rapid decrease in age difference. This trend probably emerges from the relatively faster increase in female age at marriage in rural areas. This trend was closely followed by the type of childhood residence. Among the four administrative regions, Khulna experienced the highest decline in interspousal age differences. The same arguments, that we posited before to explain the rapid changes in the age at marriage, may be attributed to the decline in the spousal age difference for Khulna division.

Education of both husbands and wives demonstrated a similar pattern and trend in age differences. Education is a good mediator which affects the age difference through occupation by providing differentiation in high achievement motivation. However, the margins in age difference between illiterate group and literate group have remained nearly the same from the initial cohort to the terminal cohort. Trend in age difference with respect to pre-marital work status was not found to be consistent.

We have studied only a few of the factors that bring changes in age differences between spouses. Broadly speaking interspousal age differences is primarily a function of ages at marriage of both the partners. That is to say, in Dixon's term (Dixon 1970), the whole process is dependent upon the availability, desirability and feasibility of marriage. The factors that affect the above

process, are both demographic and non-demographic which by their very nature, do not behave equally on both sexes, and hence an imbalance is eminent resulting in a disproportionate age at marriage for both the partners vis-à-vis interspousal age difference.

It is true that in every society, as alternatives to marriage become more attractive, women at the margin will postpone, reject or terminate marriage. Obvious alternatives are schooling and participation of women in non-agricultural labor force. These alternatives directly expand non-familial role of the women in the society and improve their status.

When do we expect changes in the above respect in countries like Bangladesh? Men with greater motivation are more likely to postpone their marriage. By the time, most of the women of their cohort get married and thus when men look for women to marry, the marriage market is already exhausted. Under these circumstances, they can only find a greater choice in selection among the girls of younger cohorts. Parents of younger women in Bangladesh place great value on the economic factors of men in the selection process (Burgess and Cottrell 1939). The consideration of age differences are minimal in their perception and older men are alternative as good providers. The so called squeeze effect then remains minimal since parents continue to choose husbands--many years older--for their daughters. The growing male-specific migration offers little impediment to this context. Men marry young women of the prescribed ages and simply leave behind, often under the care of extended system, if (male) migration to seek employment becomes necessary.

The traditional attitudes of parents as well as of the society is so deep rooted that these have kept their offspring in dark days for untold generation. Both boys and girls, particularly the younger adolescents still place great faith and confidence in the wisdom and judgment of their parents on matrimonial matters. As a result, age difference does not matter to the females, in particular. We found in a nationwide study that age of the groom is of secondary importance to the women (Islam *et al.* 1995). To lessen the burden (they think they are burden to their parents) of the parents, they sacrifice their own choices in mate selection and remain contented in married life irrespective of the age of the husbands.



In a rapidly growing population, younger cohorts are larger than older cohorts. Because of the tradition that girls marry men considerably older than themselves, there tends to be a shortage of eligible bridegrooms. For instance, a total of 3336 girls aged 15-19 were enumerated in the 1989 BFS compared to only 2150 men aged 25-29, a ratio of 1.55 to 1.0. This ratio was estimated to be 1.52:1 for 1975 BFS. This imbalance may make it more difficult than in the past for parents to find suitable grooms for their daughters. If age difference is not brought down from its present level, this situation will continue to prevail. The recent census of 1991, however, showed a precipitous fall in the ratio to 1.03:1 giving an impression that the imbalance has considerably reduced.

A large proportion women in Bangladesh gets married very early in their life. The 1989 Bangladesh Fertility survey shows that 24 percent of the ever married women claimed to have been married under 15, 39 percent under 16, and 51 percent under 17. These statistics tell that more than half of the Bangladeshi women get married long before the stipulated minimum legal age at marriage. As revealed by the 1975 BFS, the situation remained nearly static between 1977 and 1989. Though it is difficult to estimate the accuracy of this claim, for women are likely to understate the ages of their marriage, it is beyond doubt that these proportions are very close to the reality. There are ample evidences that age structure of the population has adversely affected the chances of marriage for girls. (Huq and Cleland 1990). In our society, the religious and social environment are highly conducive to early marriage. In survey of community and religious leaders, nearly 37 percent of the respondents talked about lack of security of the young girls (Islam *et al* 1995). This environment encourages parents to marry off their daughters at an early age. Men are less vulnerable to this environment. Thus, social customs and a relatively higher demand of women because of imbalanced age structure, works as a "pull factor" for women to be married earlier while economic factors work as a 'push factor' for men to delay their marriages (Ahmed 1982). These factors are largely in inter-play to create such a large age difference among the Bangladeshi couples.

## 9.5 Marital Dissolution

We have studied the various aspects of marriage and marital dissolution in Bangladesh using both census and survey data. The study reveals that the dissolution pattern in Bangladesh varies widely from other developed and developing countries. The analysis revealed a number of interesting features of marriage dissolution. Of particular interest is the very large difference between the men and women in the proportions who are widowed. This huge disparity largely resulted from wide age difference between husbands and wives and therefore husbands usually die before wives. Secondly, the disparity implies that men are more likely to remarry than women. The study further documented a very few persons as divorced or separated. This gives a strong feeling that there has been some under-reporting, particularly among the older women, who deliberately reported themselves as widows rather than declaring as divorced or separated to avoid embarrassment.

The study revealed remarkable fall in the percentages of women who were widowed. The main reason for this trend is declining adult mortality coupled with higher probabilities of remarriage of widows. The declining widowhood has resulted in higher proportions of currently married women in 1989 than in 1975 at all ages above 30. This declining trend in widowhood is consistent with the expectation in a situation when mortality is decreasing and remarriage is increasing among the younger.

The incidence of marriage dissolution due to divorce is also declining in Bangladesh, while a rising trend in the incidence of separation is discernible from the data. This result is in contrast with the Western societies which are experiencing a much higher rate of marital dissolution for a long time. The US has the highest dissolution rate due to divorce of any Western country (Schoen *et al* 1985; Jones 1995). There are however, small indication, as the author noted, that divorce increase is coming to an end in the USA. Islamic South-East Asian countries (Peninsular Malaysia, Malay, Singapore Muslims and Indonesian Muslims) are also experiencing a recent decline in the divorce rate (Hull 1988; Jones 1994, 1995). This declining trend is associated with a rising age at marriage and recent change in the nature of marriage from traditional arranged

marriage to non-arranged (love) marriage. Partners in such 'love marriage' are more mature and have a greater stake in the success of the marriages than was the case in traditional marriages. The incidence of divorce was seen to remain static for a long time in Sub-Saharan Africa (Pebley and Rutenberg 1986). This factor (system of mate selection) however does not seem to bring any change in divorce change in Bangladesh, where more than 95 percent marriages are arranged by parents and many couples do not even get a chance to see each other before marriage. In an study in rural Bangladesh, it was seen that 52 percent of the women remain unaware of their marital negotiation (Islam *et al.* 1995). In contrast, taking the case of Indonesia again, we see that the proportion of marriages arranged by parents has fallen from 90 percent to less than 50 percent in 10 years time. In urban area, the proportion of parent-arranged marriage is negligible. Data for Peninsular Malaysia from a 1981 survey also showed that the proportion of Malay women whose marriages were arranged (with or without their consent) fell from 85 percent among those aged 45 and above to 35 percent for those aged 15-24 (Jones 1995). Education and economic transformation facilitated this trend by enhancing youth's independence and expanding opportunities for meeting future mates. In Bangladesh case also, the downward trend is assumed to be related to socio-economic development, more employment of young women in formal sector and widened influence of media (TV, Radio) in changing traditional attitude. Other factors making for lower levels of divorce, particularly after some years of marriage, includes rising levels of living, which have lessened poverty-related causes of divorce and declining practice of polygyny (Swapan 1995), which have weakened an irritant and source of suspicions in many marriages.. .

Though social system in rural areas in Bangladesh is still less restrictive toward marriage dissolution, our analysis did not show any significant variation in the dissolution rates between rural areas and urban areas disagreeing partly with the stated hypothesis of higher marital dissolution in rural areas. This partly refutes Davis (1965) proposition that urbanization is associated with a higher divorce rate. The Bangladeshi women experience higher dissolution rate during first few years of marriage which reaches at its highest level between age 30 and 34. This

sharply falls after 35, implying that marriage once stabilized during the first few years, is less likely to end in divorce. This pattern was also discerned from 1975 BFS data.

It is interesting to note that reduced prevalence of dissolution in Chittagong is in clear compatibility with the higher age at marriage. With the highest age at marriage, the dissolution due to divorce is the lowest for Chittagong, a result that agrees with the hypothesis of an inverse relation of age at marriage and incidence of dissolution. For Dhaka division, with a higher age at marriage compared to other two regions, the dissolution rate is also higher. The effect of age at marriage does not exist, whatever small it is, but other countervailing factors have concealed its effect. In multivariate analysis, these differences are not significantly different.

Educated women experience lower incidence of divorce. In family life, educated women have a better understanding and predicting the attitude, intention and motives of their spouses. This results in reduced prevalence of marital dissolution among the educated women. Studies conducted in Thailand, Sri Lanka (Smith 1976), Algeria (Duza and Mukhtari, 1986) and in Bangladesh (Ahmed 1982) substantiate these findings.

Incidence of divorce among Hindus were much lower compared to their non-Muslim counterparts. The Muslim concept of marriage is contractual with provision for nullification in case of serious maladjustment. The concept of Hindu marriage is non-contractual and based on eternal union which can not be terminated. This religious background partly explains the difference, not taking onto account the possibility of differentials male mortality.

Those who observe religious activities more strictly, encounter marital dissolution less frequently than those who did not do so. This feature was related to religion of the respondents. Strict observance of religion was prevalent among the non-Muslim, who have been found to experience less frequent divorce. This partly explains the lower incidence of dissolution among them.

Women who had pre-marital work experience, had the propensity of having significantly higher dissolution rate than their non-working counterparts. This is consistent with the 1975 BFS data but contrasts the Thai experience (Smith 1981). For Thai women, work prior to marriage

was significantly associated with more stable union than was for non-work. Among Sri Lankan women, however, work was not found to be correlated with stability in marriage. There are several arguments that explain the relationship for Bangladesh. Work experience before marriage changes the expectations of women regarding marital behavior in a number of ways which may vary in direction and magnitude. The resultant force will determine the relationship between work experience and marital dissolution. The relationship is a complex one and any conclusion to be drawn on the perceived and hypothesized relationship between work experience and marital instability, should be based on more intensive examination of data. Nevertheless, the magnitude of difference in the present instance reminds us that it is indeed plausible for Bangladesh that work experience of women promotes marital dissolution significantly and that non-working women spend at least twice the time as the working women in marital duration. For Bangladesh situation, the most likely explanation is that the working women are more cognizant about their supportive ability. This provides them with better information about the alternatives to marriage. In many instances, husband's normative marital role expectation remains unchanged and they want to have a full control over his wife's income, which a working woman is less likely to tolerate. Another factor that may also be important to note that the working women mostly come from poor families with little or no schooling. This might also be an associated factor to explain the difference.

The positive relationships of marriage dissolution with lower age at marriage, illiteracy and women's pre-marital work experience, that we have empirically verified here, are in conformity with Goode's convergence hypothesis.

The study revealed that childless women experienced more frequent dissolution due to divorce than women with at least one child. This is the situation that prevails in almost all societies and a general conclusion that we arrive at, is that children provide protection to their parents' marriage from breakdown for a significantly extended period of time (about 2 to 1). Marital instability is also associated with timing of marriage. If a woman is married before her first

menstruation period, she faces a higher likelihood of ending her marriage in divorce. This bears the same relations of dissolution with age at marriage.

Among the variables included in the analysis to examine the marital dissolution, we found age at marriage, religion, education and pre-marital work experience of the women and husband's education to be significantly related to marital stability. We further note that, by and large, the same set of factors, which were related to the formation of family, is also linked with the disorganization of the family.

Despite the fact that longevity of Bangladeshi women is very short, widowhood occurs fairly at a mature age (28 years) while divorce takes place much earlier (19 years). We anticipate from our analysis that age at marriage dissolution due to divorce has increased by at least 5 years during the last 15 years while for widowhood, the increase is only about 2 years. Increased age at marriage, fall of mortality as a result of social transformation have contributed to this increase. Multivariate analysis identifies, in order of importance, age at marriage, current residence, religiosity, religion and timing of marriage as significant predictors of duration of marriage.

## **9.6 Remarriage**

The incidence of remarriage varies widely depending largely on the type of dissolution a woman experiences and the type of environment she is surrounded by. A comparison of 1975 and 1989 BFS data showed that incidence of remarriage has gone down by nearly 33 percent in 15 years time. The remarriage is more frequent among the younger women. Less widowed than divorced women in Bangladesh remarry. The reason for remarriage of younger women is associated with the societal differential outlook. The differential pattern of widow and divorced remarriage is that widowhood is a feature of old age and social pressure exists against widow remarrying. Widows themselves do not want to remarry as they usually have greater emotional attachments to their deceased husbands. Instead, they derive satisfaction from looking after their own children.

The rise in age at marriage is likely to reduce the marital dissolution in both in both divorce and widowhood, which in turn reduces the likelihood of remarriage. People who marry

young, are likely to divorce relatively at younger ages thus re-entering the *marriage market* at a highly marriageable stage of the life cycle.

Urban women who were less likely to experience divorce, remarry less frequently too. Though women with pre-marital work experience had higher prevalence of marital dissolution, the remarriage is significantly lower among these women than their non-working counterparts. This points out the fact that work experience enhances the status of women making them more independent, responsible, secured and self-sufficient both socially and financially, resulting in a lower prevalence of remarriage among them. This indicates that economic independence reduces the likelihood of remarriage.

Neither wife's education nor husband's education seem to be a strong predictor of remarriage. But a close examination of the results indicated that higher level of education will ultimately lead to less frequent remarriage. Muslim women had a much higher likelihood of remarrying- a result, which consistent with the dissolution rates among them.

As noted earlier, the incidence of pre-pubertal marriage in Bangladesh is decreasing. Our analysis demonstrated that this trend will contribute to a decline in the marriage dissolution due to divorce, and as a result, fewer women will be there to remarry.

Most people in Bangladesh marry only once, the average number of marriages being 1.49. Only a tiny proportion (6.2%) of women marry two times or more. This proportion is at least 20 percent for males. This difference between male and female prospect of remarriage may arise partly from cultural reasons, namely, societal discouragement of remarriage among females, their emotional attachment toward lost husbands and partly from women's voluntary preference to devote their lives to child-rearing. On the other hand, the customary age difference between spouses almost inevitably and automatically excludes once married, who are usually older, from the competition in the marriage market.

Our analysis indicated that first marriage is more stable than the second marriage and the second marriage is more stable than the third marriage. This pattern primarily results from the maladjustment arising out the problem in decision making of property inheritance among the

children by the couples. In most cases of remarriage, the children of new husbands live with their fathers, which is less likely to be tolerated by the new wife, which ultimately leads to marriage break-up. As a result, we find that higher order marriages are more frequent to end in divorce/separation than in widowhood. Interestingly, second and higher order marriages are more stable among the Muslims than the non-Muslims. Marriage is more stable among educated women regardless of marriage orders.

In this study, marriage and its socio-economic and demographic correlates were explored to estimate the mean age at marriage and to determine the nature of the association between age at marriage and these factors. We also analyzed the trends in age at marriage with respect to some of these factors. The issues on marital dissolution and remarriages have also been investigated. How do these findings now conform to the reality? How do they compare the demographic scenario particularly of the contemporary developing countries. Although we have met these queries in integrative comments in each chapter, we intend to highlight these issues to see what it adds up.

There is no doubt that age at marriage in Bangladesh for females has been showing an increasing trend over the years. But the trend is less dramatic when the other Asian countries are compared. The norm for female age at marriage has risen in the early part of the century from 15 years to 17-18 years by the 1980s and from 18 years to 24 years and older in East Asia. Males have a less rapid pace of change than females. The age at marriage in India increased by nearly 5 years over this period. Pakistan experienced even a greater jump from 13.3 to 19.7 during 1921-1981. Sri Lanka started out with a much higher age of 18.1 by 1901 and increased to 24.2 years by 1981 in 80 years. For Bangladesh, the SMAM increased from 12.3 in 1921 to 16.6 in 1981--a rise of 4.3 years in 60 year while the increase was 6.4 years for Pakistan during the same span of time.

Until recently, it was rare for women in Bangladesh not to marry at some points in their life. While following Asian countries, the proportion never marrying in Bangladesh is rising and



expected to continue to rise. But this change is still much slower compared to our neighboring countries.

The analysis has demonstrated moderate changes in age at marriage, marital dissolution and remarriage and their socio-economic differentials. Of the various factors, women's education, urbanization and women's labor force participation have contributed to the major changes. Beyond these factors, the country as a whole, is experiencing a rapid social transition mediated through a greater exposure of the people to the outside world. Out-migration, labor migration and communication media are playing a crucial role in such exposure and transition which in turn contributing to the changes in norms and values of the society. This transition is likely to reduce the incidence of early marriage and bring its benefits along, but at the same time, it might also contribute to enhancing the incidence of marital instability as the benefits of marriage are perceived with economic rationality. We, therefore, need policies which bring about the welfare of family and reinforce the family as a basic and important institution of the society.

### **9.7 Policy Implications**

The benefits of raising age at marriage are numerous. Precisely, early marriage is associated with the negative social, economic and health consequences. It promotes fertility, accelerate marital instability and increases morbidity and mortality of the offspring. We must realize that for a society, the cornerstone of a solidly constructed satisfying life free from overwhelming tension, is a happy and stable marriage. And for the emergence of such a society, delayed marriage possibly has no alternative.

The present study has provided ample evidence in support of the believe that Bangladesh is characterized by early and universal marriage. We therefore urgently feel that an effective and well conceived policy for raising age at marriage in general and betrothal in particular, is essential for Bangladesh. A minimum legal age at marriage, if thoughtfully conceived, in conjunction with other legislative and non-legislative efforts, directed at accelerating social changes, in general, and enhance the status of women in particular, should have considerable impact (Duza and Bawldin 1977). Of course, legal age at marriage, alone can not raise the age at marriage in a country like

Bangladesh, where a vast majority of the people are illiterate. The concept of legal age at marriage is hardly known over the countryside and since there is no provision of punitive measure in case it is violated, people do not bother about the prescribed age of marriage. In addition, it can not also be ascertained whether a marriage is taking place before or after the minimum legal age, because there is not any efficient and accurate vital registration system in the country. As a result, dates of occurrence of these vital events including marriage are incomplete and inaccurate. The lack of accurate date of birth makes the implementation of legislation impossible, because it is not impossible for the marriage partners or their parents to falsify the ages. This error may also arise due to genuine ignorance of the reporters which may cause error in either direction.

Despite the shortcomings and drawbacks, legislative measure is a direct method of raising age at marriage, if introduced effectively. The 1974 World Population Conference suggested that legislation having a bearing on the welfare of the family and its members including laws concerning age at marriage should be reviewed and adapted to changing social and economic conditions with regard to the cultural set up (United Nations 1975). A well conceived legislation should contribute to fulfill certain accepted social principles:

- (a) that marriage should be entered into with the free and full consent of the intending spouses;
- (b) that family ties should be strengthened by giving recognition to the importance of love and mutual respect within the family;
- (c) that equal status should be given to the men and women in the family, which can hardly be achieved when parents or relatives arrange for the marriage of a very young girl usually with a very older man.

There is, however, doubt that how far the above principles can be ensured in Bangladesh society. In Parish and Whyte 's (1978) term, *blind marriage* is highly prevalent in Bangladesh. More than 50 percent of the bride in Bangladesh remain unaware of their marital negotiation prior to their marriage. Many couples do not even get opportunity to see each other before marriage. The incidence of dowry breaks the family ties and thus stands on the way of love and mutual

respect. This ultimately leads to marital instability and family turmoil. In recent years, domestic violence (either suicide or murder by husbands) arising out of non-payment of dowry to the groom, has increased considerably. A study in Matlab (Rowley 1985) shows that violence is a significant cause of maternal death. Marriage in 95 percent cases are arranged. As a result, the interest of the families gets priority over the interest of the couples themselves.

The simple adherence to the legislative principles laid down above can be highly beneficial to raise age at marriage. This must be followed through guiding and helping the young men and women to make their own decision regarding marital timing and initiating special community education program so that both individuals and families come to recognize that marriage is a serious responsibility meant for adult men and women, not merely an exchange of family property or merely a contract or bond between two families. In support of our recommendation of guiding the young generation on decision making, we can cite the example of Indonesia, where a significant change in age at marriage was noted in recent years. This change primarily came from a change in the nature of marriage. The proportion of marriages arranged by parents has shown a significant fall and in many urban parts of the country, it is almost negligible (Hull 1988). This has led to a substantial reduction in divorce rate also. Caldwell *et al.* discovered that low traditional age at marriage in Sri Lanka had been enforced by parents through arranged marriage so as to forestall unsuitable marriages. With the transition to a society dominated by nonagricultural employment and high levels of education, these aims became less important and parental pressure slackened. They further noted that young females felt no great urgency about immediate postpubescent marriages, and with the reduction of parental pressure, female age at marriage spontaneously rose.

No doubt, in optimal circumstances, age at marriage is one of the demographic parameters to which legal measures may be directly applied as government policy without abrogating human rights. But at the same time, the tenacity of culture and tradition in Bangladesh are such that laws governing age at marriage may not be strictly followed, so that alternative measures, which are non-legislative in nature, could be thought of in the prevailing circumstances. Many countries,

with both high and low fertility, enacted laws to raise the age at marriage. China and Tunisia, for example, have achieved rapid changes in age at marriage (Ahmed 1982) through legislative measure.

The legislative measure is unlikely to be successful in our society, however, unless concurrent steps are taken to create a favorable socio-economic context for delayed marriage, specially improvement in opportunities for young women. Pakistan is an example where attempt to raise age at marriage through legislative measure was not successful. India, Iran, Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka are some of the countries where increase in age at marriage has been achieved primarily through non-legislative measures (Xenos and Gultiano 1992; Greenspan 1992). We can cite some examples from Bangladesh as well at the micro level. The case of Savar in Bangladesh (Rowley 1985) is an example where non-legislative measures increased the age at marriage and reduced fertility considerably. The experimental area in Sreeballavpur in Bangladesh is another example where age at marriage increased significantly as a result of initiating a rural development program (Khuda 1985). A survey in popularly known *Swanirvar* (self-reliance) area in Bangladesh documented that age at marriage is higher in *Swanirvar* area than in *non-Sawnirvar* area (Kabir et al 1990). The ICDDR'B-BRAC project has project depicted a similar trend in age at marriage in the project areas. The *Grameen* Bank model has shown a beacon to Bangladesh and to the world in this respect.

We have observed that age at marriage increased very little in Bangladesh compared to other Asian countries over a long period of time. Even in the face of this only marginally increasing trend of age at marriage, the government has failed to develop and implement policy and program to effect changing social and marriage norms in support of higher age at marriage. The present contraceptive-oriented program will not suffice to significantly reduce fertility in absence of higher age at marriage. In order to achieve a significant reduction in fertility, vis-a vis higher level of socio-economic development, the objectives of increased education and employment for women, a higher age at marriage, are all interrelated aspects of the same process

of demographic change and should be looked on as complementary and mutually reinforcing goals.

Education of the girls will not only ensure basic literacy for all, but also will provide realistic training for their income generating activities and primary health care. Such training would necessarily extend at least to age 20 and often later and would open up more income generating opportunities for women. The type of education to be imparted is also to be decided upon: formal or functional. Experiences of several programs in Bangladesh that functional education is more effective, less expensive and can be achieved in shorter time period. We have seen in this study that effect of education can only be realized at a higher level of education. The age at marriage between illiterate women and women with primary level education varies by a narrow margin. The difference can only be felt at higher level. Can we afford to send our women folk to school beyond primary at a rate higher than what we have now? Improved education for girls is not the national norm, however. For example, only 14 percent of the new generation of girls can read and write as compared to 22 percent of the boys. The number of children enrolled to schools increased slightly from 8.2 million to 8.8 million between 1980-1984, of whom 70 percent were boys. Nevertheless, legally granting women equality with men would make education more accessible to women thereby raising their status. Moreover, formal education must accompany informal and functional education. The status of women in a country and access to education and employment may have at least as much impact on age at marriage as a legally enacted minimum age. Ultimately both the status of women and age at marriage may depend more on the commitment of political leadership and on programs benefiting women which results from that commitment than on the specific laws on age at marriage.

The present rate of population growth must be kept at a minimum through more intensive family planning program. It is apprehended that the current rate of growth, if continued, will result in a more imbalanced age structure leading to a disproportionate sex ratio. Such an indication is discerned from both 1975 and 1989 BFS age distributions. This will lead to a '*marriage squeeze*' for the females. The solution lies in a further narrowing of age difference

between brides and grooms. In the long term, this tendency may have important implications for the relationship between husbands and wives.

We have provided ample evidence that women's voluntary involvement in social development program can considerably increase the age at marriage. This should not necessarily be directed towards industrialization and modernization. A number of such programs are now operating in Bangladesh. These programs include ICDDR,B-BRAC rural credit programs, Grameen Bank program, Sawnirvar (self-reliance) program, PROSHIKA and the like. To improve the status of women, the GOB has also taken active initiative through programs like mother's club, vocational training and women's co-operative. All these programs are aimed at raising the status of rural women through income generating activities and functional education. Most of these programs have shown considerable impact on demographic and contraceptive behavior of the women which have important policy implications. The success of programs, however, should be evaluated, reviewed and be replicated throughout the country.

Women must be given importance in securing job so that their interests are protected in the job market. There is thus an intense need for policy and economic social welfare for the family and policies for equal wage between working men and women. The Government should take appropriate measure to employ potential young women in white collar jobs specially in the health and education that women usually seek. By doing this it will break through the traditional concept of the women's role in the society and encourage change in attitudes of the society that have confined women in low level jobs.

Employment opportunities for young males should be ensured establishing more industries and creating more jobs through both private and government initiatives. This will, in the long run, check the outflow of the unskilled labor force to other countries. But in the present circumstances, the prospect for creating such opportunities in near future is not very bright. Indeed, considerable socio-economic development and innovative approaches toward achieving this goal will be needed before any major transformation is expected.

A social mobilization program through mass media might also be an effective way to change orthodox religious and cultural values regarding 'when to marry' and 'whom to marry'. Promotion and advocacy of such program will ensure a voice for women in marriage decision, will help enhance youths' independence, expand opportunities for meeting future mates and lessen parental pressure. This will lead to policies that guide and help young people to make marriage and fertility decisions and choices in an intelligent, informed and responsible way to elevate age at marriage. Involvement of community and religious leaders in the program can be an added advantage in the promotion of the program. Appropriate laws can also be adopted on public discussion leading to a clear legal age at marriage.

Dowry system in our society is deep-rooted and an indicator of female suppression. It is continuously being considered to be the symbol and measure of status of a women by her in-law's family, and it is because of dowry, that many atrocities are inflicted on women. A significant proportion of the child marriage occurs in Bangladesh from a fear that marrying off an older girl will require more dowry. A young girl can be married off with less ornaments and dowry. A study in an rural area has shown that a groom remains satisfied with material goods as dowry when the bride is pretty young, but for a relatively older bride, both material goods and cash money are claimed (Swan 1996). This brings a serious imposition on the brides parents both financially and mentally which has far reaching consequences for bride's as well as groom's family. In India, the lowest age at marriage is among the low caste Hindus, who marry off their daughters early for bride price. Government should take an appropriate measure to eliminate this social stigma for the greater interest of the society. The study cited above revealed that 97 percent of the community leaders hold views against dowry. This shows that an environment exists in Bangladesh to eliminate this social stigma. This needs further public mobilization. This measure will raise age at marriage, reduce violence and decrease marital instability.

Government must be increasingly concerned to increase the stability of marriage. This can be done through establishing marriage counseling board. Such a board was initiated in Indonesia in 1954. This board is attached to the Religious Offices and the couples contemplating divorce

were supposed to be counseled by members of such boards. The 1974 marriage law in Indonesia made it an offense to marry a girl against her will; it also required that all requests for *talak* (divorce) have to be taken before a court hearing at the religious court. The court hearings, the requirements for counseling and the expenses involved in the court hearings, all provide a considerable discouragement and disincentive to divorce. More recently, a regulation has been promulgated in 1983, which requires a male civil servant to seek the permission of his superior before divorcing his wife or taking a second wife (Jones 1995). In Malaysia, the Islamic Family Act of 1984, which was progressively enforced in most states by the late 1980s, provided for similar procedures governing divorce to those followed in Indonesia. More recently, marriage preparation courses have proliferated and it has become compulsory to attend such course before marrying (Jones 1995).

Expansion in the industrial sectors is a pre-condition for national development. Our review of the present economic condition in Chapter one presents a very gloomy picture of the country, despite various attempts by GOB to promote industrialization. This situation is being further aggravated by present political crisis in the country. During the first two decades of its existence, Bangladesh experienced the trauma of political turbulence. Political instability is, therefore, often singled out as the main impediment to Bangladesh's economic development. Despite this fact, in recent years, Bangladesh has successfully implemented structural reforms to stabilize the economy. It is expected that an improved situation and good sense among the politically conscious people will prevail for the greater interest of the country.

A formal marriage ceremony in Bangladesh is preceded and followed by two ceremonies where both the parties are involved. This is common to both Hindus and Muslims. These functions are popularly known as *Gaaye Halud Amushthan* (Wedding shower). This incurs a huge expenditure on the parties involved and should be banned. Instead, a single reception party can be arranged involving both the parties. There should be a limit also as to the number of guests to be entertained in such occasions. Such a rule exists in Bangladesh with a provision of punishment,



but it is seldom practiced neither by the bridal party nor by the groom party. Government should see that this is strictly followed.

The present study has focused on a number of issues, tested a good number of central hypotheses on various aspects of nuptiality and identified some key factors that act to change the societal attitude toward marital postponement and other nuptial behavior of the people. In the light of the findings and related discussions on the nuptiality situation existing in some contemporary Asian countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia and in the midst of social transformation through which Bangladesh is now currently undergoing, there do not appear to be compelling reasons, why, given careful planning, choice of implementing measures, commitment, need, desire, more rapid and sustained socio-economic transformation vis-à-vis further marital postponement can not be implemented and accelerated in Bangladesh.

Last but not the least, the present study was undertaken to understand the current status of nuptiality in Bangladesh. A number of issues have been raised as we proceeded with the analysis and in many instances, these remained unresolved and thus no valid conclusions could be arrived at. This calls for a more in-depth study focusing on the dynamics of nuptiality pattern in Bangladesh. Causes of divorce and remarriages should be studied with a larger data base from social and economic perspectives. Statistical modeling and theorizing should also be evolved based on both qualitative and quantitative perspectives to understand the marital issues more comprehensively.

To conclude, we urgently feel that age at marriage has to be raised to a desirable maximum acceptable to our social norm. Its increase will help women to take care of themselves to be a good mother and lead to a solidly mounted satisfying family life free from overwhelming anxieties and tension and finally to a prosperous nation.

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