Early Female Marriage and Sex Differentials in Child Healthcare and Nutrition

Rashid Javed, Mazhar Mughal and Charlotte Fontan Sers
Westminster International University in Tashkent and Pau Business School, France

Introduction

Figure 01: Incidence of child marriage in the developing world

What the literature says?

Early marriage is shown to be associated with:

- mother’s education (Delprato et al., 2015; Field and Ambria, 2008);
- mother’s health (Clark, 2004; International Center for Research on Women, 2018; Noor, 2006);
- mother’s age at home (Chari and al., 2017; Sanyika and al., 2009; Wodon and al., 2017; Youn and Crandall, 2018);
- children’s education (Chari and al., 2017; Delprato and al., 2017; Sekhri and Debabrata, 2018);
- children’s health and nutrition (Chari and al., 2017; Delprato and al., 2017; Wodon and al., 2017).

Few studies have hitherto analyzed the intergenerational gender dimensions of early marriage.

Objective:

- To study the interaction between women’s early marriage and gender biases found in parental allocation of nutrition and healthcare resources.

Contribution:

- Focus on the role of women’s early marriage in driving gender-specific health outcomes.
- Provides the evidence of role of maternal age at marriage in differential child health outcomes and investments.

Methodology

Model:

\[ \text{CHHND}_{imj} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{EM}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Sex}_{imj} + \beta_3 \text{EM}_{ij} \times \text{Sex}_{imj} + \beta_4 \text{BA}_{ij} + \beta_5 \text{F}_{ij} + \beta_6 \text{M}_{ij} + \mu_{ij} \]

- Perinatal care: Birth at home (binary). Weight at birth (binary), Mis carriage (binary).
- Child healthcare: Postnatal check up (binary); Full immunization course (binary); Dose of Vitamin A (binary); Treatment for Diarrhea (binary); Treatment for cough (binary).
- Child nutrition: Breastfeeding (count); Meat or fish (binary).
- Child development: Stunting (binary); Underweight (binary); Stunted (binary); Infant mortality (binary); Child mortality (binary).

Controls:

- Child’s age, sex and birth order, the respondent mother’s education level, employment status, exposure to electronic or print media, age difference with the husband; husband’s education level; household size; household wealth, area of residence; availability of sanitation facilities, and access to improved drinking water. Mother’s Body Mass Index (BMI) is also included as a determinant of the child’s health outcomes.

Data:

- Four waves of Pakistan Demographic and Health Surveys.
- DHS 1996/97: 406,611 women with a total of 26,870 corresponding children.
- DHS 2006/07: 1,000 PSU; 10,023 women with a total of 39,049 corresponding children.
- DHS 2012/13: 500 PSU; 13,558 women with a total of 50,238 corresponding children.
- DHS 2017/18: 506 PSU; 15,068 women with a total of 50,495 corresponding children.
- Pool sample consists of 45,260 women with 197,151 children, out of which 2,709 were under 5.

Results

- Table 01: Early marriage and perinatal care (Partial results)
- Table 02: Early marriage and child healthcare
- Table 03: Early marriage and child nutrition
- Table 04: Early marriage and child development outcomes

Conclusion

- Few studies have hitherto analyzed the intergenerational gender dimensions of early marriage.
- We come up with no evidence to support the contention that women’s early marriage is associated with gender bias in early investment in child’s health.
- Whether or not a woman married early or late does not modify the male gender bias prevalent in the society.
- Preferential treatment of sons, be it in the form of pre- or post-natal care access to nutritious food or healthcare the male-child receives does not depend upon the mother’s age at the time of marriage.

What If?

- Early marriage is associated with a higher risk of child mortality.
- Early marriage is associated with a higher risk of stunting.
- Early marriage is associated with a lower risk of breastfeeding.
- Early marriage is associated with a lower risk of underweight.
- Early marriage is associated with a lower risk of diarrhea.
- Early marriage is associated with a lower risk of cough.

What Next?

- Further studies need to be conducted to explore the long-term effects of early marriage on child health.
- More research is needed to understand the mechanisms underlying the association between early marriage and child health.
- Policy interventions are required to address the gender biases in early marriage and child health outcomes.