A STUDY OF MARRIAGE AND FIRST CHILD BEARING PATTERN ON JIREL COMMUNITY OF NEPAL

Chapagain R H[*], Adhikari A P[**]

* Stupa Community Hospital, Kathmandu, Nepal

** Helping Hands, Kathmandu, Nepal

ABSTRACT

This study was carried out through July 2005 to October 2005 in Jirel community of Eastern Nepal to find out the marriage, first child bearing pattern and educational influences. Total of 121 women were included in the descriptive study applying systematic sampling method.

The average median age of marriage in female and male were 18 and 22 years respectively whereas median age at first childbirth was 20 years. 53.72% girls were illiterate and 36.36% had completed 5 years of schooling at their first marriage, but 46.28% male had completed 10 years of schooling before getting married and irrespective of their level of education, 62.81% of girls got married with in 15-19 years of age. 64.46% women gave birth to their first baby within one year of marriage. 80.16% pregnant women underwent Antenatal Check-up (ANC) for three or more times and 29.75% delivered on health institutions whereas 24.79% delivered at home with trained health manpower.

Key Words: Jerels, Education, Marriage, Delivery.

INTRODUCTION

The word marriage may be taken to denote the action, contract, formality by which the conjugal union of male and female is formed. It is the legitimate union between a man and a woman.[1] Marriage for women marks the point on life at which childbearing becomes socially acceptable. The Nepal Marriage Act 2028 defines the legal age for marrriage, with parental consent at 18 years for boys and 16 years for girls and without consent at 21 years for boys and 18 years for girls. However, the eleventh amendment in the Marriage Act in 2002 AD, has defined the legal age at marriage, with parental consent to be 18 years for both boys and girls while it is 20 years for boys and girls without parental consent (Ministry of law, Justice and Parliamentary Affair, 2002). Marriage is multifactorial event and governed by various factors. Prevailing cultural norms and current marital status, years of schooling,

Address for correspondence :
Dr. Ram Hari Chapagain
Stupa Community Hospital, Kathmandu, Nepal
Email: chapagainrh2005@yahoo.co.in

Received Date : *19th Feb, 2006*
Accepted Date : *15th Sep, 2006*

occupation and parental marital decision are important predictors for age of marriage.[2] According to Islam et al.[3] mean age of marriage of female is still reported below 15 years with the mean age being 14.3 years in Bangladesh. In Nepal the age of marriage varies in various districts as well as in ethnicity. The median age at marriage among ever married women of Kapilbastu was 13 years.[4] Average of Dhanusa is 15.8 (Female) and 20.2 (male).[5] On district wise survey carried out by ICIMOD, Dolakha seems to be the best group where child marriage (age group 10-14 years) is only 2.28% whereas the wrost report was Kapilbastu with 21.47%.[6]

Age at the onset of childbearing is an important demographic indicator, since early childbearing adversely affects the health of both the mother and the child because of vulnerability to prematurity, low birth weight, poor apgar of neonate, eclampsia, and risk of operative delivery.[7] The proportion of women who become mothers before age of 20 is measure of the magnitude of adolescent fertility, which is a major health and social concern in many countries. The postponement of the first birth in early years of marriage contributes to overall fertility decline. The incidence of pregency at 15-19 for 1000 pregency has shown to be 96 (USA), 14 (Netherlands), 2-44 (England and Wales).[8] Downward trend has been observed in America with 2% decline since 1992 though pregnancy below 14 has almost remained constant.[9,10] However earlier data showed an increase in the rate of schoolgirl pregnancy from 4%-6% through 1973-1983.[11] Mid-seventies saw an epidemic of teenage pregnancy. More than 12000 girls were found to be pregnant below 16 years of age in England and Wales.[12] In Nepal, adolescent comprise more than one fifth of the total population and nearly half of adolescent girls (15-19years) and 20% of adolescent boys of the same group are married. One fifth of these girls who got married become pregnant or become mothers with their first child without crossing adolescence.[4] A hospital based study shows 57 teenage mothers out of 2799.[7] Reports of the mean age at first childbirth of few districts show 18.7 to 19.4 years.[4]

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Jiri, a hilly area of Dolakha district in the Northeast Himalayan region of Nepal. It lies on the coordinates $27^0$38'N and $28^0$14'E and at the altitude of 2100 m from sea level. Major part of the area is covered with sandy soil and rocks with a few trees. Temperature rarely exceeds 26^0C or falls below -6^0C. Houses are scattered over farmland. There are 2107 households in Jiri Village Development Committee with total population 8508 (male-4267, female-4247).[13] Most of the families live under the threshold of poverty. An indigenous tribe Jirel, who are the subsistance farmers, makes the main population. These Jirels are said to be descended from Kirat. They have 12 clans and 11 sub clans.[14] A descriptive study was conducted applying systematic sampling method. All Jirel mothers having baby of 1-12 weeks were enrolled in the study. Information on age at first marriage was obtained from women by asking their age in years and months when they started living together with their first husband. Their educational status (years in school) at the time of marriage, interval between marriage and first childbirth and other related data were also collected by interview. The study was conducted through July 23, 2005 to October 25, 2005.

RESULTS

A total of 121 women participated in the study. 81.82% Jirel girls were married to Jirels and 18.18% non-Jirel

Table I : Respondent age group

Age Group	No. of Respondents
<20	7 (5.78%)
20-25	58 (47.93%)
25-30	27 (22.31%)
30-35	26 (21.48%)
>35	3 (2.47%)
Total	121

Table II : Age at first marriage

Age	No. of Male	No. of Female
13	1	1
14	1	2
15	0	9
16	0	14
17	4	15
18	11	21
19	14	17
20	11	17
21	15	7
22	13	8
23	11	2
24	11	4
25	6	1
>25	23	4
Total	121	121
Average mean age (Years)	22.42	18.74
Median age (Years)	22	18

Table III : Age at first marriage (age group in years)

Age group	Male	Female
<15	2 (1.65%)	3 (2.48%)
15-19	29 (23.97%)	76 (62.81%)
?20	90 (74.39%)	42 (34.71%)
Total	121 (100.00%)	121 (100.00%)

Table IV : Age at first child

Age	No. of mother bearing first child
16	8
17	9
18	16
19	17
20	22
21	18
22	8
23	7
24	4
25	7
>25	5
Total	121
Average mean age (years)	20.33
Median age (years)	20

girls had married with Jirel boys. Most of the respondents (47.93%) were age group of 20-25 followed by age group of 25-30 (22.31%).

Regarding the age at first marriage, 70.24% girls got married within 20 years of age whereas most of the boys got married after 20 years of age.

When they are grouped in different age groups, following results were obtained.

Regarding educational status at the time of marriage, 53.72% girls were illiterate and 36.36% had completed primary education (5 years of schooling) but 46.28% boys had completed secondary education (10 years of schooling).

Table V : Educational status at the age of first marriage

Level of education	Males	Female
Illiterate	8 (4.60%)	65 (53.72%)
Primary	66 (38.01%)	44 (36.36%)
Secondary	56 (46.28%)	12 (9.92%)
Higher	11 (9.10%)	0 (0.00%)

Table VI : Educational status and age of first marriage (girls)

Age at marriage	Educational status	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Higher	Total
<15		2	1	0	0	3
15-19		32	33	11	0	76
20-25		28	10	1	0	39
>25		3	0	0	0	3
Total		65	44	12	0	121

Table VII : Interval between marriage and first childbirth

Year	No. of female
<1 year	78 (64.46%)
1-2 years	28 (23.14%)
2-3 years	6 (4.96%)
>3 years	9 (7.44%)
Total	121 (100.00%)

Table VIII : ANC Visit

No. of visit	No. of women
No visit	16 (13.22%)
<3	8 (6.61%)
?3	97 (80.17%)
Total	121 (100.00%)

Table IX : Place of delivery

Place	No. of female
Health Institution	36 (29.75%)
Home with trained Health manpower	30 (24.79%)
Home without trained manpower	55 (45.45%)
Total	121 (100.00%)

When the girls were grouped in different age groups versus level of education irrespective of level of education, 62.81% girls got married within 15-19 years of age.

Regarding the interval between marriage and first childbirth, 64.46% women had already given birth within the firstyear of marriage. Remaining 23.14% gave birth within 1 to 2 years of marriage and 7.43% gave birth after three years.

During their latest pregnancy, 80.16% had visited for ANC three or more times while 13.22% never had antenatal check up.

Regarding the place of delivery 29.75% women gave birth in health institutions and 24.79% gave their birth at home with the assistance of trained health manpower and 45.45% gave birth at home without trained health manpower.

DISCUSSION

We found that Jirel women got married sooner than male which is true for all Nepalese people as well. Though getting married before 20 years invites many health consequences to mother as well to children, 65.29% of Jirel female got married below 20 years of age whereas only 25.61% male got married before 20 years of age. The average age of marriage for Jirel female and male were found 18.73 and 22.43 respectively which correspondents to the national data. According to our national data the average age at marriage of girls and boys in census years 1971, 1981, and 1991 were 16.7, 17.1, 18.1 and 20.8, 20.8, 21.4 respectively. This seems better than that of Bangladesh.[3] Though our existing Marriage Act prohibits marriage with or without consent for male and female before 18 years we found 33.84% female and 4.95% male got married before 18 years. This shows that only commencement of law is not sufficient for controlling early marriage but massive awareness programme is necessary in addition to enforcement of the law.

Educational status is one of the important factors determining the age of first marriage. As 53.71% of female were illiterate and only 9.91% completed secondary level of education, it was not unusual that most Jirel females got married before the age of 20. The study showed 55.38% Jirels boys had completed secondary or higher level education and their average age of first marriage was increased beyond 20. One important point to be noted in our study was that 62.81% female got married in their age group 15-19 despite their educational background. This supports the fact that only education can't help delay the age of first marriage as it is affected by prevailing cultural norms, years of schooling, occupation and parental decisions.[2]

Age at the onset of childbearing is an important demographic indicator. Early childbearing adversely affects the health of both the mother and the child. Prematurity, low birth weight, poor apgar of neonate, eclampsia, and risk of operative delivery are some potentioal hazards of early child bearing.[7] The proportion of women who become mothers before age of 20 is measure of the magnitude of adolescent fertility, which is a major health and social concern in many countries. The postponement of the first birth in early years of marriage contributes to overall fertility decline. It is observed that 64.46% gave birth within their first marriage anniversary and another 23.14% gave birth in 1-2 years of marriage. This is one of the causes of increased overall fertility. For a couple, it takes some time to have their better understanding between themselves and to make plan for the pregnancy as most of the marriages in Jirel community is arranged marriage. But more than 80% Jirels gave birth within their second marriage aniversary. This shows a need of awareness regarding family planning. 20-25 year age is considered to be the best for child bearing according to medical point of view. Although the average age of first child bearing in Jirel women is 20 years which seems to be satisfactory from medical point of view and it also coincides with national data. The overall fertility rate did not seem to decrease as most of the Jirel women (64.48%) had their first pregnancy within first year of their marriage.

The second long-term health plan (1997-2017) of Nepal has targeted to increase the percentage of pregnant women attending a minimum of four antenatal visits to 80% which is considered standard for complete antenatal visit. ANC visit is mandatory for paving the path for the safe delivery and for decreasing prenatal morbidity and mortality. Our national health report 2004-2005 shows 44.1% pregnant women attend full ANC visit and it also shows that the percentage of at least one ANC visit in national average is 68.8% and in Dolakha district only is 43.2%. It was observed that 80.17% Jirel pregnant women attended three or more antenatal visits. This seems that Jirels were above the national target in this regard. This satisfactory participation of pregnant Jirels in ANC is attributed to the intervention of health facility to the community and awareness brought about by it.

Place of delivery and availability of trained manpower for assistance are the prerequisite to avoid adverse consequences of mother and infant during delivery and postnatal period. Health centers are considered ideal place for giving birth and if the delivery is conducted at home, it is better to be conducted with the assistance of

trained birth attendances. Upon the analysis of the place of delivery, it was seen that 29.75% Jirel women delivered babies in health institutions and 24.79% delivered with the help of trained birth attendants. Thus 54.54% Jirel women gave birth with the help of trained health manpower, which was far greater than the district average (9.8%) and the national average (20.20%).[15] This may be due to the health facilities available locally in an easy manner as the district hospital is located within the village and the level of health consciousness may also be high.

CONCLUSION

The age at first marriage is governed not only by the educational status but also by multiple factors like prevailing cultural norms, occupation, parental decisions etc. Avaibility of health facility nearby plays an important role in its utilization regarding ANC visit and place of delivery. As the rate of ANC visit and health personnel assisted delivery is higher than that of district averages there is need of detail study regarding the factors which play role in this mismatch within a district.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank Miss B.M. Jirel, Mrs. S. Jirel and Mr. P. Sherpa of Jiri Helminth Project, Jiri Dolakha for helping in interview .Our special thanks goes to the Jiri community for their co-operation and anticipation.

REFERENCES

1. Ragan JA, The catholic encyclopedia vol. IX, Robert Appleton Company, online edition.NY, 2003.

2. Rahman MM, Kabir M: Do adolescent support early marriage in Bangladesh? Evidence from study JNMA, July-Sept, 2005, 44, 73-75.

3. Islam MN, Islam MM and Yusuf HKM, Fertility and reproductive health status of married adolescents in rural Bangladesh, Planning, Development and evaluation unit, Ministry of Planning, Govt.of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 1995.

4. Baseline Survey Report: Population and Reproductive health integrated (PARHI) Project, UNFPA+HMG, ministry of local development) 2003, page 56-57.

5. Childhood marriage in Nepal and Status of Terain. Save the children Japan, 2001.

6. Nepal district: Indicator of development ICIMOD 1997.

7. Pradhan N et. al.: Young teenagers and Child birth J.Inst. Med. Jan -Mar, 2000, 73-77.

8. Bury JK, Teenage pregency .Br.J.Obstet Gynaecol 1985, 92, 1081-5.

9. Center for disease control and prevention. State specific pregnancy and birth rates among teenagers. US 1991-1992. NMWR, 44: 677,1995a.

10. Ventura and Coworker. Advanced report of Final Fatality Statistics 1993. National center for Health Statistics. Monthly vital static report (suppl) 1995a.

11. OPCS 1983, British static England and Wales 1981. OPCS series FMI no.10, HMSO, Londom.

12. Black D. Schoolgirl mothers. BMJ 1986. 293,1047.

13. Population of Nepal: HMG of Nepal National Planning Commission Secretriat, central Bureau of statistics June 2002.

14. Jirel SK: The Jirels of Nepal 1992, Jiri community of Jiri Valley, Dolakha, Nepal.

15. National health report, 2004-2005. Department of Health Service, Nepal Government Ministry of Health.