

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING MATE SELECTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF THE PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is the foundation of all social relations which further constitutes family. The present study focuses on the perceptions of university students regarding their marriages and selection of marriage partner. Using simple random sampling, 300 students (150 males and 150 females) from faculty of Social Sciences were interviewed through interview schedule. Being exploratory in nature, findings are presented in simple percentages. The findings show a trend of homogamy among university students in mate selection. However, consistence with the prior researches, preference of caste is the main filter even in the educated class of Pakistan.

Keywords: Marriage, Marital preferences, University students, Homogamy

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an important institution both for the individual and the society at large (Bittles, 2001). From sociological paradigm, marriage is the foundation of family life covering almost all intimate and exciting relationships (Pocs, 1989). When people consider spouse selection, it is generally not only a personal matter rather a cultural one (O'Neil, 2006). Thus, selecting mate is "one of the most important decisions" of people's social life (Abdullah et al., 2011). Worldwide various filters are used in this process such as age, physical characteristics, educational background, parental influence, religion, socioeconomic status, occupation, social factors and ethnic origins, etc. (Bee, 1994; Maliki, 2009; Alavi, et al., 2014).

Studies reveal that different theorists have taken different approaches to tap into the questions surrounding mate selection. Examples of these theories include evolutionary drives, social learning, environmental conditioning, etc. All mating theories hold that human mating is strategic and choices are made either consciously or unconsciously to capitalize on some entity, match, or balance (Buss and Schmitt, 1993; 1996).

About marriage perception among university students, experts stand on opposite poles. For some, they think rationally and can evaluate the available choices with references of resources, income generation and social status (Vue, 2000). While for some others, they may not have a firm sense of identity and in the process of mate selection various qualities attract an individual to a partner (Maliki, 2009).

Studies reveal that university graduates have more specific criteria of mate selection (Abdullah et al., 2011; Buss, 1989; Buunk et al., 2002). Among various characteristics of desired spouse, physical attractiveness and physical appearance are more dominant traits (Furnham, 2009; Li, et al., 2002; Shackelford, et al., 2005; Todosijević, et al., 2003).

For many others, financial and socio economic statuses are significant. (Badahdah and Tiemann, 2009; Regan, et al., 2000; Shackelford et al., 2005; Todosijević et al., 2003; Townsend and Wasserman, 1998).

Religion is also more important for many students. In fact, similar religious ideology is associated with less antagonism between spouses (Badahdah and Tiemann, 2009; Levi-Strauss, 2006; Mare, 1991)

Studies reveal age similarity as another factor considered important especially by educated class. Because it is assumed that people of same age have same level of understanding and exposure to the world (Glenn, 1992 and 2001). This age similarity also enhances emotional satisfactions of couples maintaining kindness and understanding, intelligence, and an exciting personality (Buss and Barnes, 1986). It is also observed that for students, the majority of want to be married someone with the same or similar educational achievement and family background (Ma, 2001; Nielsen and Svaver, 2009).

Besides, occupational preferences also exist among students while explaining about their desired spouses and it is equally applicable for both sexes (Hussain, 2001; Kalmijn, 2001). Caste-based preference is another significant factor in many countries, (Banerjee, et al, 2013).

Recent research on various advanced economies has suggested that educational background has an increasing influence on marriage formation while religion and position in social stratum are decreasing in significance (Blossfeld, and Timm, 2003; Mare 1991). In addition, schools, and colleges in particular, have been identified as efficient “local marriage markets” fostering marital homogamy more so than neighborhoods or workplaces (Kalmijn, 1998).

From theoretical perspective, the most common trend among students is Homogamy. For educated segment of population in any society, all systems of spouse selection have the tendency of ‘marriage of same kind’; it means that people who have similar class status can get married to each other (Courtiol, *et al.* 2010). This similarity index includes all the factors revealed above as education, religion, age, socioeconomic status and specially caste based preferences even in the educated class of society. Notably, educational homogamy and the importance of cultural characteristics in partner selection have increased over time (Kalmijn, 1994), that forms similar values, beliefs and behavior patterns. (Maliki, 2009; O’Neil, 2006; Acitelli, *et al.*, 2001).

Like other corners of the globe, in Pakistan also university students have specific criteria for mate selection. They also have certain filters through which possible spouses are screened. Similarly, perspectives of homogamy also exist in Pakistani culture (Masood et al, 2007). Pakistan is a patriarchal society where caste, family traditions and religion have more influences on mate selection process. Usually cultural traditions of Pakistan do not encourage young adults to make their marital decisions independently rather arranged marriages are still order of the day (Hamid et al, 2011). Here, caste, sect and propinquity are more important considerations (Banerjee et al, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to initiate discussion on the perception of highly educated people regarding marriage. It should be noted that very few researches are conducted in Pakistan on such issues, whereas at present it houses the largest number of young population of its history. Especially on national level no data are available in this regard. Further investigation is needed so that more and more dimensions of the phenomena can be explored. Besides by exploring the relationship with education, it will reveal the preferences of young generation in terms of social status, employment, future security and of course, caste. Thus, by analyzing their individual inclinations, it would be easier to assess the ratios and reasons of transition of marriage patterns in Pakistan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Being exploratory in nature it was a quantitative study based on primary data. Inclusion criteria were unmarried students of final years of Masters and BS programmes of social

science faculties of University of the Punjab, Lahore. Using simple random sampling, data was collected from 300 respondents by using interview schedule.

Education was taken as main independent variable whereas marital preferences were taken as dependent variable, which were further classified in demographic characteristics and physical characteristics. To draw conclusions data was analyzed using simple percentages.

OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to explore the expectations and desires of highly educated people about their ideal mate and the effects of education on choices of spouse among university students.

FINDINGS

Table 1. Characteristics of Desired Spouse (N = 300)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>f (%)</i>
<i>Specific criteria of mate selection</i>	
Yes	247 (82.3)
No	53 (17.6)
<i>Personal preferences for marriage only within caste</i>	
Yes	270 (90)
No	20 (10)
<i>Desired age of ideal mate</i>	
Same Age	112 (37.3)
Older ^c	95 (31.6)
Younger ^d	92 (30.6)
<i>Age difference (in years) with desired spouse</i>	
0 ^a	112 (37.3)
1 - 3	122 (40.6)
4 – 6	66 (22)
<i>Height of desired mate</i>	
4.9 to 5.1	20 (6.6)
5.2 to 5.6	120 (40)
5.7 and above	147 (49)
No considerations	13 (4.3)
<i>Complexion of ideal mate</i>	
Fair	166 (55.0)
Wheatish	37 (12.3)
No preferences	97 (32.3)
<i>Education of desired spouse</i>	
Same	117 (39)
Higher	117 (39)
Lower & No Considerations	66 (33)
<i>Living background of ideal mate</i>	
Rural	49 (16.3)
Urban	242 (80.6)
No considerations	9 (3)
<i>Socioeconomic status of spouse</i>	
Higher SES than yourself	65 (21.6)
Relatively equal SES	170 (56.6)
Lower SES than yourself & No considerations	65 (21.6)
<i>Employment status of spouse</i>	
Government employee	105 (35)
Employed in Private Sector / Self employed	139 (46.3)
None / House wife ^c	41 (13.6)
No considerations	15 (5)

^a Because these respondents preferred spouses of similar ages

^b opinion of only females respondents

^c opinion of only male respondents

For present study, 300 students with equal proportions of both sexes were interviewed. Mostly students (82.3%) had specific criteria for possible mate with preference of marrying in same caste (90.0%). For physical characteristics, majority of the respondents preferred same age (37.3%) of spouses. Another majority (40.6%) preferred age difference from 1 -3 years. While Mean age difference with spouse was 2 years. Besides specific height (95.7%) (Mean height of desired spouse was 5.11 feet ranging 4.09 to 6.04, whereas for desired husband and wives it was 5.05 and 5.03 respectively), fair complexion (55.0%) and equal or higher educational status (78%) were most desired traits of ideal spouses.

Mates from Urban living backgrounds (80.6%) and equal socioeconomic statuses (56.6%) were choices of students. While with respect of employment mostly respondents (46.3%) preferred private sector employments.

DISCUSSION

Mate selection is very important event in lives of individuals and various factors influence this process all over the world. Marriage patterns, marital preferences and its relationship with education has been a significant area of interest for many sociologists, anthropologists, social workers and demographers, because it is an important factor in marriage partner selection in many societies (O'Neil, 2006). Previous researches indicate that the socialization process of individual provides the bases for marital preferences.

Consistent with prior studies (Gadlin, 1976; Hamid *et al.*, 2002), this study reveals that marriage decisions in Pakistan are not a matter of personal choice. Rather there are certain cultural and social factors which determine the criteria of spouse selection. All of the respondents in present study were of same educational qualifications. Therefore, education was taken as constant while analyzing the data

Education has played a vital role in changing the worldwide patterns of marriage. However, analyzed data supports that education does not influence the marital preferences. It means that in exchanging social attributes education does not rank first. Rather caste, socioeconomic status and living background were more important. It strengthens the view that caste is the most significant criteria of marriages (Bittles and Black, 2010a; Darr and Modell, 2002) forming almost 1/3 of the total marriages in Pakistan (Jacoby and Mansuri, 2005). And interestingly, 80% of these are between first cousins (Hussain and Bittles, 1998). Thus it is the most desired attribute with reference of homogamy in mate selection.

Besides, for majority of respondents, equal socioeconomic status (57%) and urban background (81%) of desired spouse were more significant in comparison to the education level. However, in exchange of other attributes such as age similarity, education is the most preferred filter for ideal spouses especially in rural Pakistan (Fricke *et al.*, 1986).

It also supports result of Banerjee's (2010) regarding caste preference in South Asia. However, this result is limited to South Asia only and is not in accordance with researches in other regions. For instance, study by Louie E. Ross (1997) which explains that more attainment of education has changed these considerations for spouses' selection over decades. Thus, there was a strong relationship between caste and gender of respondents. However, this does not explain the higher frequency of consanguine marriages which still account a large proportion of total marriages in Pakistan.

Confirming the previous researches (Buss and Schmitt, 1993; Mare, 1991), present study also indicates the trend of educational homogamy. Mostly respondents desired for spouses having similar educational qualifications. Same results were revealed for south India, when Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell (1983) found education as the best social trait to exchange with age and lower socio-economic status. Age similarity is another important consideration of respondents which means decreasing the age differences between spouses. This trend is further strengthened by preferences of same caste and same socioeconomic status. However, to confirm the trend of educational homogamy, further research is needed.

STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

1. Present study discusses marital preferences within framework of social considerations such as socioeconomic status, caste and living background.
2. There are very few researches have been conducted on marriage in Pakistan. Especially on national level, there is a vast gap. This study is an initiative to study this phenomenon specifically with reference of higher education among young adults. Therefore, the present research can be a pilot project to analyze the marriage trends in Pakistan for future research.
3. Moreover, in almost all previous researches main focus has been on married couples and post marriage experiences. Therefore, this study can be beginning point for research with single young adults.
4. By exploring the relationship between education and rising age at marriage this study reveals the preferences of young generation in terms of social status, employment, future security and of course, caste.
5. The findings of this study will be helpful in assessing the ratios and reasons of transition of marriage patterns in Pakistan.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study has following limitations:

1. The study was conducted only from the students of Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of the Punjab. Therefore, the results are confined to only aforementioned faculties excluding students of other disciplines of university.
2. Present study focuses only on quantitative aspects of the topic ignoring qualitative aspects. Therefore, its results are limited in generalizations.
3. Present research is only about a general perception of students regarding their marital preferences. However, it does not predict any future trends of marriages in Pakistan.

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