

Decision Making Regarding Spouse Selection and Women's Autonomy in India: Exploring the Linkage

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Abstract : The changing character of marriage be it arranged marriage, love marriage, polygamy, informal unions, all signify different gender relations in everyday lives. Marriages in India are part and parcel of the kinship and cultural practices. Arranged marriage is still the dominant form of marriage where spouse selection is the initiative and decision of the parents; but its form is changing, as women are now actively participating in spouse selection but with parental consent. Spouse selection related decision making is important because marriage as an institution brings social change and gender inequality; especially in a women's life as marriages in India are mostly patrilocal. Moreover, the amount of say in spouse selection can affect a woman's reproductive rights, domestic violence issues, household resource allocation, communication possibilities with the spouse/husband, marital life, etc. The present study uses data from Indian Human Development Survey II (2011-12) which is a nationally representative multitopic survey that covers 41,554 households. Currently, married women of age group 15-49 in their first marriage; whose year of marriage is from 1970s to 2000s have been taken for the study. Based on spouse selection experiences, the sample of women has been divided into three marriage categories-self, semi and family arranged. Women in self arranged or love marriage is the sole decision maker in choosing the partner, in semi arranged marriage or arranged marriage with consent both parents and women together take the decision, whereas in family arranged or arranged marriage without consent only parents take the decision. The main aim of the study is to find the relationship between spouse selection experiences and women's autonomy in India. Decision making in economic matters, child and health related decision making, mobility and access to resources are taken to be proxies of autonomy. Method of ordinal regression has been used to find the relationship between spouse selection experiences and autonomy after marriage keeping other independent variables as control factors. Results show that women in semi arranged marriage have more decision making power regarding financial matters of the household, health related matters, mobility and accessibility to resources, when compared to women in family, arranged marriages. For freedom of movement and access to resources women in self arranged marriage have the highest say or exercise greatest power. Therefore, greater participation of women (even though not absolute control) in spouse selection may lead to greater autonomy after marriage.

Keywords : arranged marriage, autonomy, consent, spouse selection

Conference Title : ICPD 2019 : International Conference on Population and Development

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : May 23-24, 2019