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Female Age at Marriage and Fertility Outcomes-A Case Study of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Marriage is a crucial and sacred rite in all societies, especially in Indian rural areas, where it is seen as a formal act and quasi-religious duty. The age at which females marry significantly affects fertility behavior, reproductive span, and status. Early marriage often leads to early childbirth, adversely affecting maternal and child health due to a lack of awareness and the use of birth control methods. This custom results in high total marital fertility, rapid population growth, and high rates of infant and maternal mortality and morbidity. The present study examined fertility differentials in relation to demographic characteristics such as current age, age at marriage, marital duration, and experiences of infant and child mortality. It also explores factors such as pregnancies, spontaneous and induced abortions, live births, and number of living children. The study further examines the connection between these factors and overall fertility levels in the area under investigation.

Keywords: Female age at marriage, fertility behavior, early childbirth, maternal and child health, demographic characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

Universal and early female marriages are also two features of Indian nuptial behaviour, which have made their contribution to the country's population problem. Even consistent legislative efforts have been made to increase the minimum age at marriage for both sexes, despite that, still an important factor that is contributing to the high fertility is the low age at which women get married. Moreover, early marriages in the country have been to some extent, responsible for female ill health and the current incidence of maternal and child mortality. Austere respectability attached to virginity still prompts Indian parents to give their girls in marriage as early as possible before anyone has a chance to question her virginity.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Different scholars have made a case for indifferent socio-cultural groups and socio-economic setting with a view to understanding the various determinants, affecting human fertility behaviour. Before going into the detailed analysis, in order to formulate benefiting methodology for this purpose, some of the important research works have been thoroughly scrutinized. It is done for the reason that the present study could be designed in such a fashion that the outstanding points of such a work could be incorporated in the present study.

Bhatia (1979) studied age at marriage and education of women as indicators of women status and their fertility behaviour. The effect of the age at marriage on fertility has found to be an indirect one. Since education also influences age at marriage, it is education rather than age at marriage, which significantly influences the practice of family planning and fertility. The empirical study of Deshpande (1988) revealed that female age at marriage and couple protection rate were highly and inversely correlated with total fertility rate, and the female age at marriage had more influence on total fertility rate than completed fertility rate. The investigation by Neerupama (1989) in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh confirmed that demographic factors such as the age at marriage and mortality have more effect on fertility than economic factors such as income and education. According to Arora (1990) a substantially higher level of rural development and the age of the female at effective marriage have a marginally significant effect on fertility. The study conducted by Richard and Rao (1994) showed that the age at marriage and the current age of the respondent were significant in determining the mean number of children ever born both in the rural and urban areas. Rajaretnam (1996) observed that small increase in age at marriage of females has contributed substantially to the decline of fertility in the block Athoor of Tamil Nadu. Ahmed, Shaila, *et al.* (2007) conducted a cross-sectional descriptive study to verify the age at marriage and fertility pattern of 426 adolescent women who were married by 15.5±1.5 years, in two purposively selected rural areas of the Faridpur district: Alfadanga and Boalmari in Bangladesh. In comparison to other age groups, this one had a relatively high total fertility rate (TFR) of 2.6 per woman. In his work Dommaraju (2011) concluded that marriage age influences fertility dynamics in India. Late marriage correlates with shorter first birth intervals but longer subsequent intervals, impacting marital fertility trends

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during fertility transitions. The research shows that a lower age at marriage in India is linked to higher fertility rates and increased child loss, indicating a significant impact on fertility performance. According to research on the association between age at marriage and fertility using the multivariate logistic regression technique Nahar *et al.* (2013) exposed that women who married earlier tend to have more children than those who married later in life. The results of the study indicate that there was a 0.728 year delay in the age of first birth for adolescents if their first marriage occurs one year later. Rizzo (2014) drew the inference that across the globe adolescent fertility, particularly pregnancy and childbirth before the age of 20, a serious social and health concern. Adolescent fertility increases the probability of maternal and infant deaths and morbidity. Solanke (2015) examined the relationship between age at first marriage and women's fertility behavior and empowerment on the basis of data extracted from the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey. The Poisson regression and multinomial logistic regression were applied to interpret the data. Results showed that the Age at first marriage was significantly related to women's fertility behaviour and empowerment.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To analyse the socio economic characteristics of the respondents.
- To examine the incidence of pregnancy-related complications in relation to age at marriage.
- To study variations in fertility patterns among women married at different ages; and
- To propose a set of policy recommendations based on research findings.

HYPOTHESES

Following hypotheses pointing to the relationship between different variables and fertility were framed to be tested after setting the above objectives of the present study.

- The higher the age at marriage, the lower the fertility.
- The larger the marital duration, the higher the fertility.
- The more the experience of infant and child mortality, the more is the fertility.

NEED OF THE STUDY

The need for research demographic aspects of population problem is one of the most pressing scientific demands of the present time. In this study, an attempt was made to analyse the effect of demographic factors on individual fertility. A need for such a study was felt because although Himachal Pradesh is ranked high among some states in providing social welfare in India, the process of fertility decline is very slow in comparison to others. After reviewing the existing literature the present study was undertaken to analyse the demographic correlates of fertility in terms of children ever born (CEB) in study areas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The state of Himachal Pradesh is divided into twelve districts. For this empirical investigation, a sample of 230 respondents was selected using multi-stage random sampling. It was decided to restrict the study in two districts only, Kinnaur and Hamirpur in order to capture the effects on fertility behavior. Both primary and secondary data were utilised to meet the study's objectives. Primary data were gathered through a pre-tested schedule from the sample households and eligible respondents aged 15-44 years, using personal interviews and observation methods. Secondary data and information were sourced from various relevant published and unpublished records, including books, journals, and reports. The standard deviation used to examine the fertility differentials.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The empirical results of this study are based on first-hand information collected from the study areas at a particular point in time. Therefore, it was not possible to compare the results over time.
- The sample size in the present study is quite small and confined to two districts only. Therefore, due to variations in the socio-economic, cultural, demographic, health, educational topography, climatic conditions and other infrastructural facilities in and out of the state, the results of the present study cannot be applied as a whole.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background and other Characteristics of Respondents

Women's demographic behaviour is associated with several characteristics including their age, marital status, religion and caste. Modernising influences such as education and exposure to mass media are also important catalysts for demographic and socio-economic change in addition, women's status and autonomy are critical in promoting change in reproductive attitudes and behaviour, particularly in patriarchal societies. This section examines selected background characteristics of respondents as well as the distribution of children ever born by number of respondents in study areas.

Background Characteristics

Table 1 presents several important background characteristics of respondents. The characteristics are categorised by age, education level, caste, family type, work status, and husband's education. The majority of respondents are aged between 25-34 years (56.52% combined). Most respondents have completed high school (30.87%), with a significant portion having some level of education beyond middle school. A large majority belong to non-scheduled castes (70.44%). More respondents live in joint families (55.22%) than in

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nuclear families (44.78%). Most respondents work at home (89.57%). A significant number of husbands have completed high school (40%), with fewer having higher education levels. This table gives a comprehensive overview of the background characteristics of the surveyed respondents.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by selected Background Characteristics

Background characteristics	No. of Respondents
Age	
15-19	1 (0.43)
20-24	38 (16.52)
25-29	68 (29.56)
30-34	62 (26.96)
35-39	43 (18.70)
40-44	18 (7.83)
Education	
Illiterate	32 (13.91)
Literate but<primary	11 (4.78)
Primary school complete	37 (16.09)
Middle school complete	35 (15.22)
High school complete	71 (30.87)
Hr.Sec. /Sen. Sec.complete	26 (11.30)
Graduate	16 (6.96)
Post-graduate and above	2 (0.87)
Caste	
Scheduled caste	68 (29.56)
Non-scheduled caste	162 (70.44)
Family type	
Nuclear	103 (44.78)
Joint	127 (55.22)
Work status	
Working at home	206 (89.57)
Working outside home	24 (10.43)
Husband's education	
Illiterate	12 (5.22)
Literate but<primary	2 (0.87)
Primary school complete	15 (6.52)
Middle school complete	38 (16.52)
High school complete	92 (40.00)
Hr.Sec. /Sen. Sec. complete	43 (18.70)
Graduate	20 (8.69)
Post-graduate and above	8 (3.48)
Number of respondents	**230 (100.00)**

Note: Figures in parentheses pertain to the percentage value in respective category.

Educational Level of Respondents and Associated Characteristics

The educational levels of respondents categorised by various background characteristics such as age, ethnicity, and their husbands' educational levels are depicted in the table 2. The values in parentheses indicate the percentage of respondents in each category. It is depicted that overall, 32 respondents (13.91%) are illiterate. The largest group of respondents has completed high school (71 respondents, 30.87%), followed by those who have completed higher secondary school (44 respondents, 19.13%).

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Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Highest Level of Education Attained, according to selected Background Characteristics

Background characteristics	Respondents' level of education						
	Illiterate	**Literate but <primary**	**Primary school complete**	**Middle school complete**	**High school complete**	**Hr. Sec. / Sen. Sec. school complete & above**	**Total**
Age							
15-19	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (100.00)
20-24	2 (5.26)	0 (0.00)	5 (13.16)	7 (18.42)	10 (26.32)	14 (36.84)	38 (100.00)
25-29	4 (5.88)	1 (1.47)	12 (17.65)	9 (13.23)	20 (29.41)	22 (32.35)	68 (100.00)
30-34	11 (17.74)	3 (4.84)	10 (16.13)	8 (12.90)	26 (41.93)	4 (6.45)	62 (100.00)
35-39	7 (16.28)	7 (16.28)	6 (13.95)	7 (16.28)	14 (32.56)	2 (4.65)	43 (100.00)
40-44	8 (44.44)	0 (0.00)	4 (22.22)	3 (16.67)	1 (5.56)	2 (11.11)	18 (100.00)
Ethnicity							
Scheduled caste	12 (17.65)	6 (8.82)	12 (17.65)	14 (20.59)	17 (25.00)	7 (10.29)	68 (100.00)
Non-scheduled caste	20 (12.35)	5 (3.09)	25 (15.43)	21 (12.96)	54 (33.33)	37 (22.84)	162 (100.00)
Husband's education							
Illiterate	8 (66.67)	1 (8.33)	2 (16.67)	0 (0.00)	1 (8.33)	0 (0.00)	12 (100.00)
Literate but< primary	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (100.00)
Primary school complete	4 (26.67)	3 (20.00)	7 (46.67)	0 (0.00)	1 (6.67)	0 (0.00)	15 (100.00)
Middle school complete	7 (18.42)	4 (10.53)	12 (31.58)	9 (23.68)	6 (15.79)	0 (0.00)	38 (100.00)
High school complete	11 (11.96)	3 (3.26)	12 (13.04)	19 (20.65)	38 (41.30)	9 (9.78)	92 (100.00)
Hr. Sec. / Sen. Sec. school complete & above	2 (2.82)	0 (0.00)	2 (2.82)	7 (9.86)	25 (35.21)	35 (49.29)	71 (100.00)
Total	**32 (13.91)**	**11 (4.78)**	**37 (16.09)**	**35 (15.22)**	**71 (30.87)**	**44 (19.13)**	**230 (100.00)**

Note: Figures in parentheses pertain to the percentage value in respective category.

The table reveals that education levels among respondents vary significantly by age, ethnicity, and their husbands' education levels. Younger respondents (20-29 years) tend to have higher levels of education compared to older respondents. Scheduled caste respondents have lower education levels compared to non-scheduled caste respondents. There is a strong correlation between the husbands' education levels and the respondents' education levels, indicating that women with more educated husbands are also likely to have higher educational attainment.

Distribution of Children Ever Born to Respondents

The table 3 shows the distribution of the number of

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children ever born to respondents, along with the total number of respondents and the percentage of the total

Table 3: Distribution of Children Ever Born to Respondents

Children ever born	Total number of Respondents
1	43 (18.70)
2	86 (37.39)
3	58 (25.22)
4	30 (13.04)
5	11 (4.78)
6	2 (0.87)
Total	**230 (100.00)**

Note: Figures in parentheses pertain to the percentage value in respective category

represented by each group. The highest proportion of respondents has 2 children (37.39%). There is a clear decreasing trend in the number of respondents as the number of children increases beyond 2. The majority of respondents (56.09%) have either 1 or 2 children. This suggests a trend towards smaller family sizes among the respondents. A smaller proportion of respondents (18.69%) have more than 3 children. This indicates a less common occurrence of larger families among the respondents. A significant proportion of respondents (37.39%) have 2 children, making it the most common family size. There is a notable decrease in the number of respondents as the number of children increases beyond 2, with only 0.87% of respondents having 6 children. Overall, the data indicates a trend towards smaller family sizes, with the majority of respondents having 1 or 2 children and only a minority having more than 3 children.

Fertility Performances and Fertility Wastage of the Respondents

A summary of pregnancies, abortions, births, living children, and child mortality, along with their respective totals, means, and standard deviations is provided in table 4. In conclusion, the study reveals that on average, each respondent experienced 2.75 pregnancies, resulting in 2.5 children born and 2.24 living children per respondent. The data shows low variability in these averages. Abortions and child deaths are relatively infrequent, with an average of 0.25 abortions and 0.26 child deaths per respondent. The number of male and female children born and living are nearly equal, demonstrating balanced gender representation in the offspring. Overall, the study indicates stable reproductive outcomes among the respondents with minimal instances of abortion and child mortality.

Table 4: Fertility Performance and Fertility Wastage of the Respondents

S. No.	Fertility facts	Total	Mean	Standard deviations
1	Pregnancies	634	2.75	1.3
2	Spontaneous and induced abortions	58	0.25	0.55
3	Children ever born	576	2.5	1.13
	Male	285	1.23	0.85
	Female	291	1.26	1.07
4	Living children	516	2.24	0.95
	Male	254	1.1	0.73
	Female	262	1.13	1.01
5	Infant and child deaths	60	0.26	0.67
	Male	31	0.13	0.37
	Female	29	0.12	0.39
	Number of respondents		**230**	

Current Age of the Respondent and Fertility

The table 5 effectively captures the relationship between age and fertility, demonstrating how the number of children ever born varies across different age groups. It highlights trends in childbearing and family size, offering insights into fertility patterns among the respondents. The table revealed that fertility increases with age. Younger age groups (15-19, 20-24) have fewer children, reflecting their shorter reproductive span and possibly later onset of childbearing. The number of children per respondent tends to increase with age, peaking in the 40-44 age groups. A significant number of respondents aged 20-24 have only one child (63.16%). The proportion of respondents with three or more children increases with age, indicating a trend towards larger families as women age. The age group 40-44 has

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the highest mean number of live births (3.77), indicating that older women tend to have more children, possibly due to extended childbearing years and higher completed fertility. The value of co-efficient of correlation between number of children ever born and current age of the respondents found 0.564 for the sampled respondents. It is clear from the table that sample data revealed moderate positive relationship between current age of the respondents and fertility.

Table 5: Distribution of Children Ever Born and Mean Live Births by the Current age of Respondents

Particulars	Current age of Respondent						
	15-19	**20-24**	**25-29**	**30-34**	**35-39**	**40-44**	**Total**
Children ever born							
1	0 (0.00)	24 (63.16)	13 (19.12)	5 (8.06)	0 (0.00)	1 (5.55)	43 (18.70)
2	0 (0.00)	10 (26.32)	37 (54.41)	25 (40.32)	11 (25.58)	3 (16.67)	86 (37.39)
3	1 (100.00)	3 (7.89)	13 (19.12)	20 (32.26)	18 (41.86)	3 (16.67)	58 (25.22)
4	0 (0.00)	1 (2.63)	4 (5.88)	10 (16.13)	10 (23.26)	5 (27.78)	30 (13.04)
5	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (1.47)	2 (3.23)	4 (9.30)	4 (22.22)	11 (4.78)
6	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (11.11)	2 (0.87)
Number of respondents	**1 (100.00)**	**38 (100.00)**	**68 (100.00)**	**62 (100.00)**	**43 (100.00)**	**18 (100.00)**	**230 (100.00)**
Percent	**0.43**	**16.52**	**29.56**	**26.96**	**18.7**	**7.83**	**100**
Mean live births	**3**	**1.54**	**2.16**	**2.66**	**3.16**	**3.77**	**2.5**

{Coefficient of correlation (r) =0.564}

Note: Figures in parentheses pertain to the percentage value in respective category.

Age at Marriage of the Respondents and Fertility

Age at marriage of the women is one of the most important demographic variables, which influence fertility in India. Marriage at an early age means early initiation into the reproductive process and lengthier exposure to reproduction. On the other hand, higher age at marriage reduces the length of the reproductive span. Most of the studies conducted in India pointed out an inverse relationship between the age at marriage and fertility. Age at marriage of a woman itself depends upon her education and working status. Many studies have considered rising age at marriage as an important factor in fertility decline. So, here an attempt has been made to study the relationship between age at marriage of the respondents and fertility.

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Table 6: **Distribution of Children Ever Born and Mean live Births by Age at Marriage of the Respondent**

Particulars	Age at marriage			
	<18	**18-21**	**22+**	**Total**
Children ever born				
1	2 (5.26)	28 (18.42)	13 (32.50)	43 (18.70)
2	12 (31.58)	62 (40.79)	12 (30.00)	86 (37.39)
3	13 (34.21)	35 (23.03)	10 (25.00)	58 (25.22)
4	7 (18.42)	18 (11.84)	5 (12.50)	30 (13.04)
5	4 (10.53)	7 (4.60)	0 (0.00)	11 (4.78)
6	0 (0.00)	2 (1.32)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.87)
Number of respondents	**38 (100.00)**	**152 (100.00)**	**40 (100.00)**	**230 (100.00)**
Percent	**16.52**	**66.09**	**17.39**	**100**
Mean live births	**2.97**	**2.39**	**2.17**	**2.5**

Note: Figures in parentheses pertain to the percentage value in respective category.

The table 7 provides a detailed analysis of the number of children ever born to women, classified by their age at marriage. The data is segmented into three age groups: less than 18 years, 18-21 years, and 22 years and older. The table includes the total number of respondents and the mean number of live births for each category. The majority of respondents married between 18 and 21 years of age, and this group also had the most balanced distribution of children. The largest group of respondents married between 18-21 years (66.09%). Those who married under 18 had a higher average number of children (2.97) compared to those who married at 22+ years (2.17). Most respondents who married between 18-21 years had two children (40.79%). A smaller percentage of respondents married at 22+ years had four or more children compared to those who married younger. This table shows a correlation between the age at marriage and the number of children, with younger marriages generally resulting in more children. So, our hypothesis 1 proved true that these two variables studied in this section are positively correlated.

Knowledge of Minimum Legal Age at Marriage to Respondent

The majority of respondents (77.83%) are aware of the minimum legal age at marriage, indicating a relatively high level of awareness. However, a significant minority (22.17%) of respondents lack this knowledge, highlighting an area for potential improvement. By addressing the gaps in knowledge and reinforcing the legal framework, communities can work towards reducing instances of underage marriage and promoting the well-being of individuals and families.

Table 7: Knowledge of Minimum Legal Age at Marriage to Respondent

Knowledge	Total
Yes	179 (77.83)
No	51 (22.17)
Number	**230 (100.00)**

Note: Figures in parentheses pertain to the percentage value in respective category

Ideal Age of Marriage Desired for Females by the Respondents

Insights into the ideal age of marriage desired for females by the respondents illustrated in table 8. The majority of respondents (75.22%) express a preference for females to marry between the ages of 18-23 years. Specifically, 46.09% prefer females to marry between 21-23 years, indicating a common preference for early twenties as the ideal age for marriage. A smaller proportion (14.35%) believe that females should marry at 24 years or older. A notable minority (10.43%) did not provide a specific response, which may reflect uncertainty or varied opinions.

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Table 8: Ideal Age of Marriage Desired for Females by the Respondents

Ideal Age	No. of Respondents
18-20	67 (29.13)
21-23	106 (46.09)
24+	33 (14.35)
No response	24 (10.43)
Number	**230 (100.00)**

Note: Figures in parentheses pertain to the percentage value in respective category

Distribution of Children Ever Born and Mean Live Births according to Duration of Marriage of Respondent

The given table 9 provides data on the distribution of children ever born and means live births according to the duration of marriage of the respondents. The study revealed that for marriages lasting less than 11 years, the majority of respondents (41.52%) have two children, followed by those with one child (34.75%), whereas marriages lasting between 11 to 20 years, most respondents (36.67%) have two children, but there is a notable proportion with three children (32.22%). For marriages lasting more than 21 years, the highest

Table 9: Distribution of Children Ever Born and Mean Live Births according to Duration of Marriage of Respondent

Particulars	Duration of marriage			
	<11	**11--20**	**21+**	**Total**
Children ever born				
1	41 (34.75)	2 (2.22)	0 (0.00)	43 (18.70)
2	49 (41.52)	33 (36.67)	4 (18.18)	86 (37.39)
3	21 (17.80)	29 (32.22)	8 (36.36)	58 (25.22)
4	6 (15.08)	21 (23.33)	3 (13.64)	30 (13.04)
5	1 (0.85)	5 (5.56)	5 (22.73)	11 (4.78)
6	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (9.09)	2 (0.87)
Number of respondents	**118 (100.00)**	**90 (100.00)**	**22 (100.00)**	**230 (100.00)**
Percent	**51.3**	**39.13**	**9.57**	**100**
Mean live births	**1.95**	**2.93**	**3.68**	**2.5**

Note: Figures in parentheses pertain to the percentage value in respective category

percentage of respondents has three children (36.36%), followed by those with two children (18.18%). The study concluded that the mean number of live births increases with the duration of marriage which reflects a positive correlation between the duration of marriage and the number of children ever born satisfying the hypothesis 2 of the present empirical investigation. This trend is consistent across all categories of marriage duration.

Distribution of Children Ever Born and Mean Live Births by Experience of Infant and Child Mortality

The table 10 shows the distribution of children ever born and means live births by the experience of infant and child mortality. There is a notable positive correlation between the experience of infant and child mortality and the number of children ever born, which satisfied the third hypothesis of this investigation. Respondents who have experienced child mortality tend to have more children overall, with a higher mean number of live births (3.68) compared to those who have not experienced child mortality (2.22). The data indicates that respondents who have experienced infant and child mortality tend to have more children compared to those who have not experienced such mortality. This might be due to attempts to compensate for the loss of a child or due to higher fertility rates associated with factors that also contribute to child mortality. In summary, there is a clear link between child mortality experience and higher fertility, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions

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to improve child health outcomes and support families in their reproductive decisions.

Table 10: **Distribution of Children Ever Born and Mean Live Births by Experience of Infant and Child Mortality**

Particulars	Experience of infant and child deaths		
	No	**Yes**	**Total**
Children ever born			
1	43 (23.12)	0 (0.00)	43 (18.70)
2	85 (45.70)	1 (2.27)	86 (37.39)
3	35 (18.82)	23 (52.27)	58 (25.22)
4	19 (10.21)	11 (25.00)	30 (13.04)
5	4 (2.15)	0 (0.00)	11 (4.78)
6	0 (0.00)	2 (4.55)	2 (0.87)
Number of respondents	**186 (100.00)**	**44 (100.00)**	**230 (100.00)**
Percent	**80.87**	**19.13**	**100**
Mean live births	**2.22**	**3.68**	**2.5**

Note: Figures in parentheses pertain to the percentage value in respective category

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The present investigation was undertaken to analyse the demographic correlates of fertility in terms of children ever born (CEB) in study areas and proved a clear link between child mortality experience and higher fertility. Overall, the study indicates stable reproductive outcomes among the respondents with minimal instances of abortion and child mortality. The data revealed a moderate positive relationship between current age of the respondents and fertility and a negative association between the age at marriage and the number of children, with younger marriages generally resulting in more children. A significant minority number of respondents lack this knowledge of the minimum legal age at marriage, highlighting an area for potential improvement. The study concluded that the mean number of live births increases with the duration of marriage which reflects a positive correlation between the duration of marriage and the number of children ever born. In view of the above findings of the present study the following recommendations can be suggested:

1. To help improve the situation, awareness on the negative consequences of early marriage and consequent childbearing needs to be created not only among the young adolescent girls but should be targeted towards their parents too.
2. Implement targeted awareness campaigns in communities to educate people about the minimum legal age for marriage. Strengthen the enforcement of existing laws regarding the legal age of marriage.
3. Utilise various media platforms, including social media, radio, and community meetings, to disseminate information effectively. Partner with local NGOs and community leaders to conduct workshops and seminars on the legal aspects, health issues and other consequences of underage marriage.
4. Conduct educational programs to inform communities about the physical, emotional, and social implications of early marriage.
5. Highlight the benefits of delaying marriage for women's health, education, and overall well-being.
6. Implement programs that empower young women with skills and opportunities, thereby delaying marriage and promoting independence.

Policymakers should consider these trends when designing programs aimed at population control and maternal and child health. Strengthen health programs focused on reducing infant and child mortality, which may help in stabilizing family size. Provide psychological and social support to families who have experienced child mortality to help them cope with their loss and plan future pregnancies better. Enhance family planning and education programs, especially targeting those who have experienced child mortality, to inform them about healthy family planning practices and the risks associated with high parity. Ensure better access to healthcare services, including prenatal and postnatal care, which can help reduce infant and child mortality rates and improve overall family health.

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