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AGE AT MARRIAGE, WOMEN LITERACY AND FERTILITY IN SAGAR DISTRICT, M. P.

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ABSTRACT : The total fertilisty rate (TFR) is recorded to be very high in Sagar district (4.2) in comparison to country's average of 3.6 children per woman. The very high TFR among Muslims (4.5), OBC (4.45) and SC/ST (3.88) is attributed to marriages at an early age and lower percentage of female literacy. The present study is based on field survey conducted in both urban and rural areas of Sagar district of central Madhya Pradesh. An attempt has been made to analyse inter-relationship between age at marriage, level of education and fertility.

INTRODUCTION

The pressure of population on physico-cultural resources is increasing continuously in various parts of Madhya Pradesh. The per capita agricultural income is decreasing and therefore people are migrating from villages to urban centres in search of employment. The socio-economic development both in urban and rural areas has been outstripped by unprecedented growth of population in the study region. Consequently, the living standard of population is declining significantly. The accelerated high growth rate of population has decreased per capita productivity and income, and resulted in widespread poverty, inadequate diet, low level of education and health, overcrowded houseless families and overcrowded social amenities such as hospitals, schools, etc. The persistence of poverty remains the basic socio-economic problem and a major challenge for development policy. The recession and slow economic growth are a setback to the achievement of the goal of eradicating mass poverty.

Two methods are suggested to solve present population problem in our country :
i) by controlling the accelerated growth rate of population immediately, and ii) by development of agricultural resources. As there are limited possibilities for immediate development of agricultural and various other resources, population planning is the immediate need in this region. Among the various measures of population control, the age at marriage is of prime importance. Because, early age at marriage and lower level of literacy are two main factors responsible for high fertility rate. An attempt has been made in the present study to analyse the inter-relationship between level of education, age at marriage and fertility, taking Sagar district as an example.

Differences in women's age at marriage, the proportion of ever marrying, marital disruption and remarriages can be the sources of information to establish relationship between marriage and fertility in an area. A trend towards delay in marriage has been registered

in recent decades in the developing countries (Smith, 1984). When marriage behaviour is viewed as a proximate determinant of fertility, this interpretation is, strictly speaking, correct. However, one must consider that social and economic changes, such as increased schooling for women lead both to delays in marriage and to decline in marital fertility. Marriage age may respond to other policy actions, such as support for continued education for girls and measures to increase job opportunities for women.

METHODOLOGY

Keeping the above facts in mind, a survey of over 300 families of Sagar district, was conducted selecting different parts of urban and rural areas. Data regarding education of women in Sagar district have been derived from the reports of sixth All India Educational Survey (1993) conducted by National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) New Delhi. Statistics regarding women's education, age at marriage and children per women born during fertility period of both urban and rural areas of Sagar district have been placed in Table-1, and castewise percentages of population alongwith education, occupation and socio-economic status etc. have been placed in Table-2.

RESULTS

1. Table-1 shows percentage of women of different age groups, at marriage education level and the children per woman, born alive during entire fertility period (i.e. 14 to 49 years of age) for both urban and rural areas alongwith total fertility rate (TFR) of different castes.
2. It is clear that all women whether educated or illiterate generally marry at the age of 15 to 29. Thus, three groups of age at marriage 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29, have been categorised for both urban and rural areas.
3. For the marriage age 15-19 group 16 per cent women were found lilliterate, 29 per cent educated up to standard first to tenth and 5 per cent upto twelth & above in urban area whereas 31 per cent illiterates and 25 per cent educated upto tenth standard were observed in rural area.
4. For the 20-24 group 9 per cent illiterate 28 per cent educated upto tenth and 3 per cent upto twelth & above in urban area and 9 per cent, 23 per cent and 5 per cent women were observed in rural area as illiterate, educated upto tenth, and above twelth respectively.
5. For 25-29 group 3 per cent each illiterate and educated above twelth standard and 4 per cent educated upto tenth standard in urban whereas 3 per cent upto tenth and 4 per cent above twelth standard were observed to be educated in rural area.
6. It is also observed that in rural areas, the women marrying at age of 15-19, were zero per cent educated upto twelth & above, and for 25-29 group zero per cent were illiterates.
7. Average number of children born alive per woman during entire fertility period for 15-19 group in urban area has been calculated to be 3.0, 3.6 and 5.5 for women educated upto tenth, twelth and above, and illiterates respectively, whereas for rual area this fact has been found to be 4.66, 0, and 4.10 respectively.
8. Average number of children born alive per woman during entire fertility period for 20-24 group in urban area has been calculated to be 3.32, 4.00, 3.00 and for

Table 1

Sagar District : Caste and Areawise variation in the Educational level, occupation and Socio-economic status of the people in sagar district

Caste	Area	Educational Lavel				Illiterates		Occupation								Socio-Economic-Status %			
		Class I to XII		Degree				Service		Business		Agriculture		Labourer					
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Low	Lower Middle	Upper Middle	High
Brahamin	U	51.4	52.9	45.7	41.1	2.8	14.7	31.4	23.5	17.1	0.0	20.0	11.7	2.8	2.9	90.9	9.1	0.0	0.0
	R	62.5	74.0	32.1	3.7	3.5	16.6	37.5	1.85	7.14	0.0	17.8	1.85	3.5	0.0	52.6	42.1	5.2	0.0
Jain	U	40.0	70.9	53.3	22.5	3.3	6.4	40.0	25.8	23.3	6.4	3.3	3.2	3.3	0.0	62.5	37.5	0.0	0.0
	R	40.6	96.8	34.3	18.7	3.12	3.12	15.6	34.3	6.2	3.12	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	80.0	0.0	0.0	
Thakur	U	75.0	69.2	25.0	23.0	0.0	7.6	43.7	23.0	0.0	0.0	31.2	15.3	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0
	R	84.2	69.5	11.8	4.3	6.5	39.1	2.6	0.0	6.5	0.0	40.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.1	72.2	16.6	0.0
Kayastha	U	23.0	20.0	76.9	50.0	7.6	20.0	69.2	40.0	15.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	75.0	0.0	0.0
OBC	U	79.4	59.0	9.8	16.8	8.8	19.3	9.8	2.4	8.8	3.6	9.8	7.2	15.7	6.0	90.0	10.0	0.0	0.0
	R	74.5	52.5	21.8	16.9	20.0	27.1	27.2	8.4	9.0	0.0	21.8	1.7	7.2	5.0	54.5	31.8	5.4	4.5
SC/ST	U	72.8	59.7	4.2	3.8	20.0	27.3	5.7	5.1	1.4	0.0	2.8	0.0	40.0	25.9	96.15	3.8	0.0	0.0
	R	35.2	34.9	23.9	7.9	7.0	26.9	14.08	3.2	7.04	0.0	8.4	11.1	21.1	9.5	69.5	26.08	0.0	0.0
Muslims	U	77.7	70.0	3.7	0.0	22.2	26.6	7.4	0.0	7.4	3.3	0.0	0.0	37.0	13.3	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	R	66.6	79.1	7.4	0.0	11.1	33.3	7.4	0.0	4.0.7	0.0	3.7	0.0	3.7	8.3	75.0	25.0	0.0	0.0
Christian	U	33.3	54.5	66.6	45.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	36.3	40.0	9.0	0.0	0.0	13.3	18.2	75.0	25.0	0.0	0.0
	R	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sikhs	U	0.0	75.0	100.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	25.00	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	R	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source : Based on Field Survey. U : Represents Urban. R : Represents Rural

rural area 3.75, 5.40, 4.59 for women educated upto tenth, twelth and above and illiterates respectively.

9. Average number of children born alive per woman during entire fertility period for '25-29' group in urban area have been calculated to be 3.25, 2.66, 4.00 and for rural area 3.60, 2.00 and 0.0 for women educated upto tenth, tenth and above and illiterates, respectively.

10. The TFR of different castes vary according to age at marriage and level of education. In every caste illiterate women have been found to marry at early age compared to literates but the percentage of such women is comparable with those educated upto tenth standard (29 per cent against 16 per cent in urban area and 25 per cent against 31 per cent in rural area).

11. The TFR and age at marriage have been found to be less affected for most of the castes but for Muslims, OBCs and SC/ STS. strongly nonmotonic behaviour is observed, TFR of urban muslims marrying at early age (15-19) varies from 4.50 to 2.80 whereas it is found to vary from 4.42 to zero in rural muslims as they marry at theearlier age only.

12. In urban OBCS the TFR is observed to decrease as the age at marriage is increased (4.45 to 3.00) whereas it appears to increase (3.31 to 6.00).

13. In SC/ST whether urban or rural the TFR has been found to increase according to increase in age at marriage (3.00 to 5.00 urban and 4.11 to 5.00 rural).

14. Sikhs and Christians have been found to marry at a later age compared to other castes but the TFR for Sikhs is found to be moderate and for Christians it varies from 2.10 to 4.0 children per woman. It is also observed that these two castes have been found to reside in urban areas only.

15. Rural Jains and Thakurs have been observed to have more TFR than urban Jains and Thakur (4.60 to 5.80 against 3.66 to 2 Jains and 5.00 to 6.66 against 1.50 to 2.50 Thakur).

Table-2

Sagar District : Variation in Fertility with 'Age at Marriage' and 'Level of Education' and among different Caste group in Bhopal District

Area	Age at Marriage	Women Education (%)			Average number of Children Per Woman at different levels of Education			Total Fertility Rate of Different Castes								
		I to X	XI and above	Illiterate	I to X	XI and above	Illiterate	Brahmin	Thakur	Jain	Kayastha	OBC	SC/ ST	Muslims	Christians	Sikh
URBAN	15-19	29	5	16	3.00	3.60	5.50	3.50	1.50	3.66	3.00	4.45	3.00	4.50	2.00	0.00
	20-25	28	3	9	3.32	4.00	3.00	3.00	2.5	3.00	0.00	3.16	3.88	2.80	4.00	0.00
	25-29	4	3	3	3.25	2.66	4.00	3.33	0.00	2.00	0.00	3.00	5.00	0.00	0.00	3.00
RURAL	1-19	25	0	31	4.66	0.00	4.10	3.33	5.00	4.60	0.00	3.31	4.11	4.42	0.00	0.00
	20-24	23	5	9	3.75	4.50	4.59	5.00	3.60	5.80	6.00	3.72	4.60	0.00	0.00	0.00
	25-29	3	4	0	3.60	2.00	0.00	3.00	6.66	0.00	0.00	6.00	5.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Source : *Based on field survey conducted in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh.*

16. Table 1 shows area and caste-wise percentage of population alongwith education, occupation and socio economic status. It is observed that females of all castes of rural areas are mostly illiterates and of higher fertility. The socio-economic status of most of the population lies between low and lower middle level of income.

17. It is also observed that 2.8 to 3.3 percent upper castes (unreserced) are labourers whereas 5 to 15.7 per cent OBCS 9.5 to 25.9 percent SC/ST, 3.7 to 37 percent Muslims and 13.3 to 18.2 percent Christians fall in this category.

18. Figure-1, shows variation of TFR versus age at marriage for both the areas and sex. It is clear that the variation is of complex nature.

19. Figure-2, shows TFR for different castes and different ages at marriage for both urban and rural areas. It is clear that OBCS SC/STS and Muslims have higher TFR than other castes. These castes have also a tendency to marry at early age irrespective of area of living or standard of education.

DISCUSSION

It is evident from Table-1 that the percentage of illiterate women marrying at early age (15-19 group) for both urban and rural area is 16 per cent and 31 per cent, whereas literate women upto tenth standard marrying at this age group are found to be 29 per cent and 25 per cent respectively. Minimum age to marry for women in India is legally fixed at 18 or above but present observations indicate a different situation. Percentage of educated married women at lower age for both urban and rural area being more than lilliterates may partly be due to 'Female literacy drive' during the last few decades. This fact is also observed by the sixth, All India Educational Survey Report (NCERT, 1993). Female literacy in Madhya Pradesh, according to 1991 census, is 28.8 per cent and found to increase 13.26 per cent compared to 1981. Enrolement of girls upto fifth standard at state level is 42.57 per cent and at Sagar it is 43.75 per cent (i.e. above average), enrolement upto eighth standard is below average at Sagar 33.54 per cent (34.67 per cent state levels). Though the social consciousness for literacy is increased but the security of women has declined. It is pertinent to note that 8.44 per cent of the schools in Madhya Pradesh are run in open space and 8.92 percent in tents (State Survey Report, Madhya Pradesh, Part-I, NCERT, 1993). Table-1 further shows that 28 percent and 23 per cent women of urban and rural area respectively, who are educated upto tenth have been found to marry at an age of 20-24 years where as 9 per cent illiterates of both the areas come under this category. Women educated upto twelth or above for both urban and rural areas have been found to marry at later age (20-24) or (25-29) but their percentage is relatively low, 3 to 5 per cent.

Sagar district has below average primary school facilities within one Km distance; 60-80 per cent of population in Sagar district is served by middle schools within three Km, still it is below average at state level (72.6 per cent). Middle school education is treated to be next step to primary education under Government policy of universalization of education since students of age group 11-14 are enrolled. At this stage, Age Specific Enrolement Ratio (ASER) becomes more important. At state level ASER for girls is 32.33 per cent (22.96 per cent Rural 59.29 per cent Urban) and in Sagar this is 44.30% i.e. above average. State level high

Figure -1.: SAGAR DISTRICT :- TFR & AGE AT MARRIAGE

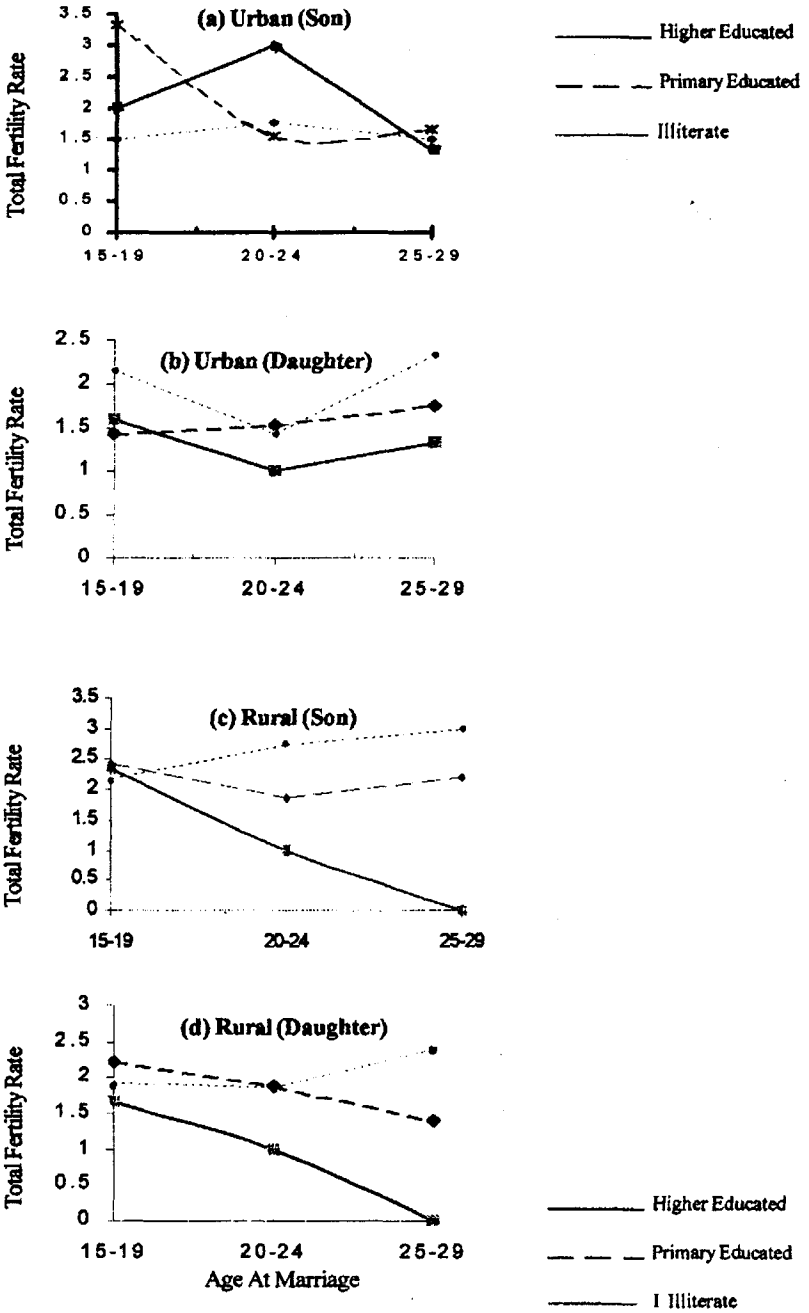

Fig. 1 : Sagar District - TFR & Age at Marriage

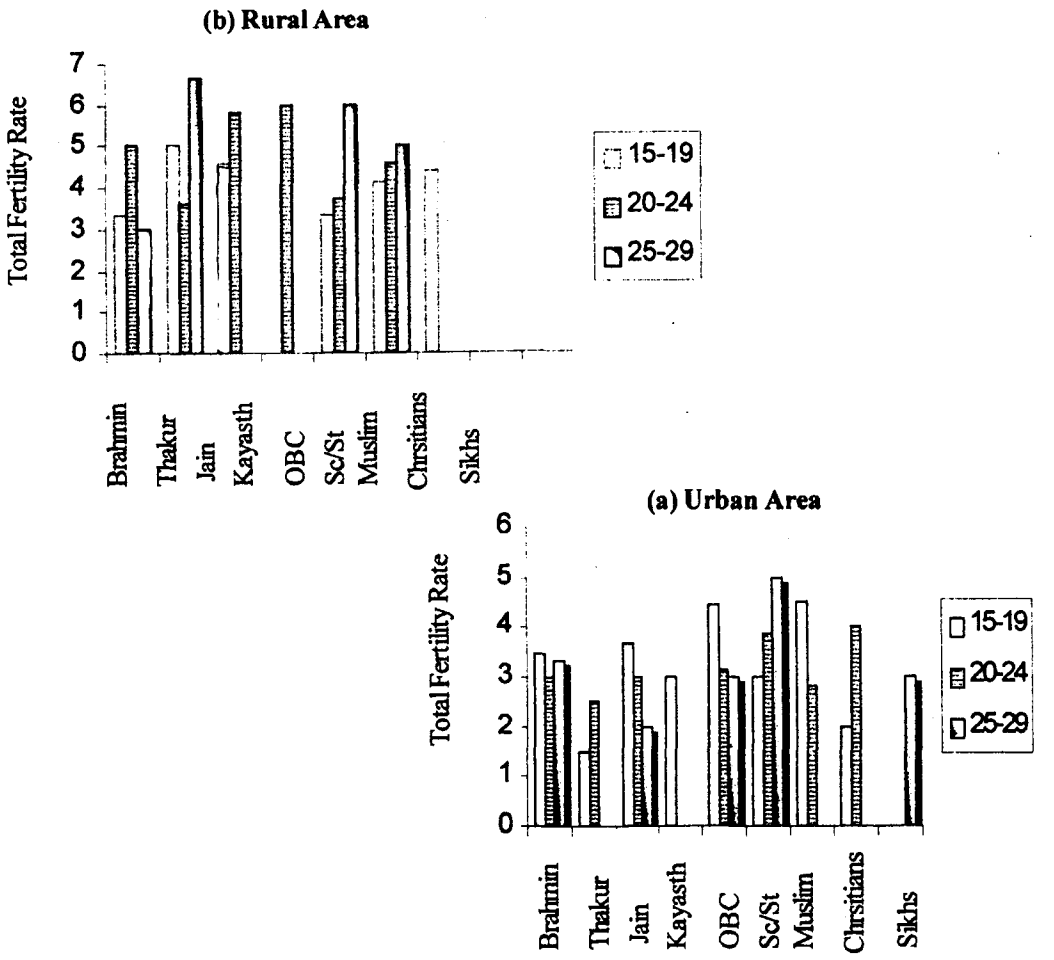

Fig. 2 : Sagar District - Case wise TFR & Age at Marriage

school enrolement for girls is 19.31 per cent (rural) and 34.83 per cent (urban) and Sagar is below average in both the areas. Same is the case of higher education for girls in Sagar district. This finally shows that though educational facilities available for girls in Sagar district are below average compared to the state of Madhya Pradesh yet, low socio-economic security and awareness is responsible for early marriage trend in women in this area. Literacy and age at marriage in Sagar district has non-monotonic relation for both rural and urban centres.

Age at marriage and fertility in both urban and rural area also give non-monotonic relation. Illiterate women or literate upto fifth standard, have been found to have approximately the same average number of children per woman during entire fertility period. Literate women upto tenth standard in rural areas have been found to show lower average number of children born (0.15 to 0.91) for every 5 years delayed marriage, whereas this is not observed in urban areas. The effect of reductions in marital exposure may be summarized as the difference between total marital fertility rate and total fertility rate. This difference is

between 0.15 and 0.91 children in the rural areas. Despite the support found for relationship between age at first marriage and completed family size, it is evident that a delayed age at marriage cannot be the main means of reducing fertility to a low level in Sagar district where lower fertility is a desirable goal. Even the areas with the highest ages at first marriage, a mean age of 23 years or older, have total fertility rates of 3.5 to 3.8 children.

It is clear that increasing the age at marriage within a practical range (e.g., with a maximum mean of 25) is not in itself a sufficient means of greatly reducing fertility. Nevertheless, delaying the first marriage has the potential to cause fertility decline to the extent that it allows women time to develop alternative roles to child bearing and motherhood, either in the workforce or in other areas. Those competing roles or activities may result in greater fertility control within marriage in order to limit the amount of time devoted to motherhood. In an area, where an increase in the legal minimum age for marriage might have large effect, it is in reducing adolescent marriage and childbearing. However, marriage behaviour is difficult to be influence a directly by public policy. One sign of this is the lack of any clear tendency for the region under study with relatively late legal minimum age to have fewer marrages at ages below the minimum. Marriage age may respond to other policy actions, such as support for continued education for girls and measures to increase job opportunities for women.

Age at marriage versus average number of children born during entire fertility period has been illustrated in fig.-1, for both rural and urban areas, according to the extent of literacy among the couples under test. Fig.1 (a) shows that urban illiterates if married at early age, produce more children compared to those married at a later age. Couples having primary education show similar behaviour as higher educated. Fig-1 c) shows that rural illiterates increase their production as the age at marriage is increased, whereas educated people in rural areas show moderate behaviour. Negative slope of these people indicates that education among rural people causes a considerable decrease in population growth.

Fig.-1 b) and d) show the variation in the average number of female children ever born to urban and rural women marriage at different ages at marriage.

Fig. -2 (a) and (b) represent castewise variation in fertility of both urban and rural areas (at different ages at marriage). It is clear that Brahmins, whether urban or rural have nearly the same rate of fertility at all ages at marriage, whereas Thakur, Jain, Kayasth, OBC, SC/ST and Muslims living in rural area have higher rate of fertility compared to those of urban area. Christians and Sikha are found to be educated compared to other castes but rate of fertility has been found to be approximately the same as upper castes (i.e. Brahmins, Jains).

Muslims of urban as well as rural areas have higher rate of fertility compared to other castes. This indicates that the Muslims have no influence of urbanization or literacy on fertility rate. This may probably be due to their religious beliefs.

Rural OBC and SC, ST, show higher rate of fertility as compared to urban areas showing the influence of education, urbanization, and urban social norms. This observation necessitates the popularization of education in rural areas specially among these castes alongwith Muslims in order to achieve a moderate rate of fertility in Sagar district.

CONCLUSIONS

The proportion of women with no schooling of different age at marriage groups in Sagar district ranged from 3 to 31 per cent while the proportion with tenth or higher standards of schooling ranged from 0 to 29 per cent. Educational facilities for women in Sagar district have been observed to be below the average of Madhya Pradesh and hence the attainment in education of women is also below the average. Age at marriage also shows pronounced differences by education. Since age at marriage is linked to the duration of exposure to the risk of pregnancy, the late age at marriage among relatively well educated women has no consistency with lower fertility. The present study shows that relationships between education, age at marriage and fertility of women are indeed complex and they tend to vary within the district itself, with the relative level of socio-economic and temporal factors.

Age at marriage and fertility in both the areas show non-monotonic behaviour. It therefore compells one to think that age at marriage can not be treated to be main means of reducing fertility to a low level in this region where lower fertility is a desirable goal. Even high educated women have been found to marry earlier in search of social security. No fertility change in literate women compared to illiterates may be due to unawareness to the methods of spacing, postpartum intecundability, family planning programme and inappropriate educational attainments specially in rural areas. The present situation can only be brought under control by proper educational attainments in women which we failed to do so far in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh.

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