

AGE AT MARRIAGE IN UTTAR PRADESH— DISTRICT LEVEL ESTIMATES FOR 1971 AND PATTERNS IN VARIATION

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Universal and early female marriages are the two features of the Indian nuptiality behaviour, which have made their own contribution to the country's population problem. 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. Besides being directly related with female marriage age, male marriage age also has similar consequences for family welfare.

In view of the above serious implications of low marriage ages, raising the age at marriage from their chronically low levels in India has been considered to be an essential pre requisite for happy family life from early times. The first child Marriage Restraint Act, known as Sarada Act after the name of its sponsor, Mr. Har Bilas Sarada, was passed by the legislative Assembly of India in September 1929 and was introduced with effect from April 1, 1930. It prescribed minimum ages of marriage for girls and boys at 14 years and 18 years respectively. In 1949, the minimum legal age of marriage for females was raised from 14 years to 15 years. Recently in March 1978, by a fresh legislation on the subject (Child Marriage Restraint Amendment Act), the Indian Parliament has raised the minimum ages of marriage for girls and boys by three years each to 18 years and 21 respectively. This Act has been enforced with effect from 1st October, 1978.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to estimate mean ages at marriage of females and males in various districts of Uttar Pradesh for the census year 1971. The estimates made will help to understand the relative position of these districts vis-a-vis revised legal minimum ages for the two sexes. In addition, an attempt is made to study the patterns of variation in these ages. Section I gives the method for estimating mean ages at marriage and the data utilised for the purpose. It is followed by presentation of these estimates and an analysis of the pattern of inter-district variation in them in Section II. Section III studies the pattern of variation by administrative divisions of the State, which is likely to bring out more clearly the regional pattern of variation in respect of these ages. Section IV analyses the pattern of variation by development levels of the districts, which is expected to throw some light on the relationship between level