

# The Impact of Early Marriage and Childbearing in Rural Areas on Women's Status in Society

Shuge Wang \*

Department of Arts and Sciences, University of Rochester, New York, 14627, USA

\* Corresponding Author Email: swang151@u.rochester.edu

**Abstract.** A profound transformation has occurred in the realms of social status, sex, and gender consciousness over the past few decades. This paper aims to investigate various factors that give rise to gender inequalities based on the social phenomenon of early marriage and childbearing and to identify effective approaches for addressing this issue presented in society for women. This research holds great importance as it has the capacity to provide concrete and implementable strategies to enhance the social standing of women, thereby enhancing the broad objective of establishing a more just and equal societal landscape for future generations of women. This paper is founded upon an in-depth analysis of existing academic resources and research to illuminate the underlying causes and far-reaching consequences affecting the social status of women. The results derived from the analysis presented in this paper highlight the substantial detrimental impact of early marriage and childbearing on women, particularly in terms of the disruption of their educational pathways, constriction of career opportunities, and hindrance of financial independence. To ameliorate these adverse influences on women, it is imperative to implement financial support mechanisms, exemplified by cash transfer programs, in conjunction with comprehensive community awareness campaigns advocated to curtail the prevalence of early marriage and childbearing, thereby fostering a more equitable social landscape for women in subsequent generations.

**Keywords:** Gender disparities, women status, early marriage and childbearing.

## 1. Introduction

In contemporary society, women undoubtedly play an irreplaceable role by bearing the profound responsibility of procreation to ensure the continuation of the human species. However, despite the essential role of giving birth to the next generation, there is a persistent erosion of the social status of women. Although in the modern legal system, the law proclaims that women and men have equal social status and rights, there is a divergence between legal ideals and stark realities faced by women. It is undeniable that gender inequalities are still present in society. Compared to men, women often find themselves at a disadvantage across multiple dimensions. This disadvantage manifests prominently in areas such as education status, occupation status, economic status, and power status. These disparities underscore persistent gender inequalities, which require comprehensive efforts to address this social problem. This paper endeavors to explore the multifaceted reasons underlying gender disparities, typically early marriage and childbearing, and seeks effective strategies for mitigating this deeply ingrained phenomenon. The significance of this research lies in its potential to offer practical and actionable solutions for improving women's social status, which contributes to the ultimate goal of creating an equitable social environment for women in the future generation.

## 2. Literature Review

The research findings substantiate that women who enter into early marriages often find themselves compelled to prioritize their roles as caregivers to their spouses and children, which comes at the expense of pursuing educational opportunities [1]. Limited access to educational opportunities subsequently results in uncontrollable consequences of inability for being financially independent [2]. The disruptions in the career path caused by early childbearing will underscore this problem because it will limit women from achieving prospects of attaining higher-level job positions with commensurate income in the workplace [3]. Additionally, based on prior research, early marriage and

childbearing will post serious damage to women's psychological and physical health [4]. Inadequate access to education, financial dependence, and compromised health status represents significant factors that contribute to the prevailing gender disparities in society. In the realm of existing academic resources, there is a noticeable deficiency in the provision of effective strategies aimed at mitigating gender disparities across all facets of these multifaceted factors. This paper endeavors to present comprehensive approaches that are specifically tailored to directly confront these pervasive social issues at their foundational roots.

### **3. The Impact of Early Marriage and Childbearing in Rural Areas on Women's Status in Society**

#### **3.1. Profound Impacts on Women's Status**

The status of women in society has been a long-term serious and important social problem. The ultimate goal of addressing gender equality is to ensure that women have opportunities to acquire and utilize basic resources without discrimination. Early marriage and childbearing turn out to have significant impacts on women's status in society. In particular, the assessment of women's status primarily revolves around three key dimensions, which are the accessibility of education, pay equity and earnings, and the comprehensive evaluation of their state of health.

##### **3.1.1 Access to Education**

The accessibility of education is the cornerstone of social and individual development and everyone should have the right to pursue knowledge and skills. However, in rural areas, women who marry and have children early face profound challenges in accessing education opportunities, which leads to far-reaching consequences for their lives. Early marriage frequently results in the termination of education in rural areas because, under rural cultures and traditional norms, women have to dedicate themselves to taking care of their husbands and reproducing offspring [1]. In this case, it is less likely for them to be fully concentrated on education and personal school life after the marriage. Women in rural areas gradually conformed to this traditional norm. They prioritize family members over their ambitions and place their husbands and children at the center of their lives. The societal expectation of placing married women into the caregiving role is prevailing in society, which restricts women's educational opportunities. Valuable education resources will not be distributed to women when they are getting married. The limitation of access to education strengthens gender disparities and creates barriers for women who try to pursue freedom and are not willing to enter marriage at a young age.

The lack of access to educational opportunities will restrict women from improving themselves to gain a high level of capacities, which is not beneficial for them to augment their skills and work abilities. Under the fierce competition in the job market, women face a relatively diminished probability of getting a satisfactory job with high remuneration. They lack competitive advantages to compete with women who did not marry early and without family responsibilities because those who are not entering the marriage will spend their time largely on education and self-development. Due to the fact of limited educational opportunities, women have to rely on their marital partners and families' financial support, which relegates them to a comparatively subordinate position within the family [2].

##### **3.1.2 Pay Equity and Wage Discrimination**

The social problem of pay equity refers to the fact that people cannot receive equal pay for equal work. There is a wage gap between people of different genders, and races because of bias and discrimination [3]. It is essential to address unfair pay to enhance equality in the workplace. It is a common phenomenon that women who enter the job market face wage discrimination because of gender bias. Wage discrimination occurs when women are paid less compared to men, but they do similar work and they both have similar levels of capacities. The wage paid to women represents that

their ability to work for the business is being undervalued because of gender. This kind of discrimination prevails in many workplaces no matter overtly or covertly, which is a manifestation of deep-seated societal biases. The consequences of the gender wage gap will have a significant impact on women, which not only has a short-term effect on comparatively low income but also a long-term effect on their retirement savings and social health benefits.

Early marriage and childbearing forces women to take the responsibility of spending large amounts of time taking care of their marital partners and offspring. Therefore, they always have to face uncontrollable interruptions in the workplace, which leads to diminished workforce engagement. Several factors lower their earning potential and future career prospects. First of all, women's overall work experience will be reduced if they have interruptions in their career path [3]. As we all know childbearing takes about one to two years. During this period, it is less likely for women to focus on their business while pregnant. On the contrary, men do not need to leave their jobs positive for their families, which results in comparatively higher work experience. A lack of work experience for women can cause low original wages and slow wage growth, as work experience is the critical factor in determining compensation levels.

Moreover, they do not have the advantage of negotiating with their employers when proposing a higher salary since they have limited work experience and instability in the workplace, which often results in accepting lower offers and a lack of confidence [5]. For those women who return to the workplace after interruptions, it is challenging for them to adapt to the job market in this fast-paced environment because of the fast development and innovations. The main trend of society will probably change. Peers and competitors are well-capable of dealing with various tasks, while women who enter marriage do not have chances to augment their capabilities [6]. Also, they will tend to choose part-time or lower-paying positions for the need for flexibility and energy to take care of family responsibilities. These work positions are not serving as opportunities for them to achieve their potential and financial independence. Gradually, this phenomenon will lead to a cycle of poverty for women, as they do not have the power to get rid of dependence on marital partners.

### 3.1.3 Health Status

Early marriage can have far-reaching consequences on the health status of women in various ways. These impacts are both direct and indirect, which influence women's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Starting with physical health risks, early marriage leads to early childbearing, which exerts considerable risks to maternal health including higher rates of maternal mortality, long-term health issues, or other complications for pregnancy [4]. Girls at a young age are not capable of being prepared both physically and mentally to be a mother. Furthermore, women who get married early because of family or partner pressure may not have reproductive rights, which damages their health irreversibly because of early childbearing or even frequent pregnancies.

The family responsibilities such as taking care of children's daily life and doing household chores takes a large amount of time. Therefore, as a mother, the opportunities to attend community activities are relatively limited. This leads to the consequence that they will be isolated by society [7]. Early marriage means that young girls have to be taken out of their familiar social circle. In other words, they will be alienated from their friends and classmates because they have limited chances to interact with peers for entertaining purposes typically for their age group. They are expected to be mature women who have family responsibilities rather than a girl. For instance, before they have a baby that needs to be taken care of, teenagers can enjoy outdoor activities and stay outside for dinner or party without any concerns. Nevertheless, a responsible mother will not choose to leave a baby for a long period of time. It is likely for mothers to worry about their child such as whether they are hungry or thirsty or not. With those concerns, they have to abandon relaxing time for hanging out with friends to stay at home all the time to monitor their children. The feeling of being isolated impacts their mental well-being and sense of self-worth. They may face challenges in adjusting to their new roles and lack emotional support and guidance from peers. Social isolation can have detrimental effects on a woman's mental health. When women are isolated from their peers, they easily feel a sense of loneliness, anxiety, and depression.

The obligations associated with early marriage and motherhood can bring out considerable stress and anxiety on women who marry at a young age. Young girls lack the management abilities to take the adult responsibilities for a family. The need to manage the household and raise children can result in chronic stress and potentially lead to negative emotional outcomes such as depression [8]. The transition from adolescence to adulthood seems challenging to them. This transition, combined with marital and parental responsibilities, and potential social isolation resulting from early marriage can trigger feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and disconnection. If they cannot deal with those negative feelings effectively, the lasting psychological impact on women will affect their overall quality of life.

Given all of the above, early marriage and childbearing have tremendous effects on women. The inability to get access to education makes it difficult for women who get married early to be financially independent. Family obligations are barriers for them to achieve potential job positions with satisfactory incomes. More importantly, getting married and having children at a young age will cause both physical and psychological damage to women. These divergent effects shape a considerable influence on women's status and their societal standing. It is important to address the gender inequality problem resulting from early marriage and childbearing. A comprehensive policy is indispensable for ensuring a fair and equal environment for women in the society.

#### 4. Discussion

An effective strategy for solving early marriage and childbearing social problems is to support girl's school attendance by implementing a cash transfer program [9]. Specifically, this program aims to provide financial support for women in rural areas to encourage them to attend schools and get access to education. This program involves a regular allowance for families that have children, typically girls, to attend schools regularly, including costs of tuition, uniforms, and books to diminish the barriers to attending school to a greater extent. The regular stipend can reduce the financial burdens on rural families, which is critical in addressing the problem of early marriage because the economic pressures are key reasons why families want to marry off their daughters at a young age. By supporting a girl's education, it is more likely for an educated girl to make wise decisions about their life, especially marriage. Education can also enhance their awareness of the negative consequences of early marriage and childbearing. In this case, rather than entering into marriage, girls tend to focus on their studies and career aspirations. Moreover, girls with healthcare knowledge are likely to understand reproductive health and family planning resulting in better maternal experience and outcomes. It is also essential to ensure the quality of education by providing well-trained teachers and conducive learning environments. The purpose is to equip girls with life skills to help them advocate for their rights in the future, which are the ability of decision-making, negotiation, and communication. Overall, the cash transfer program lends a helping hand for rural families to overcome financial barriers to education and empower girls through highly qualified education and knowledge, which constructively reduces the prevalence of early marriage and childbearing. More importantly, women in rural areas with high capabilities and skills can effectively deal with their marriage to avoid negative consequences such as health risks or restriction of job opportunities.

Strengthening the community's awareness of early marriage and childbearing with the enhancement of advocacy in rural areas is a productive approach. It is necessary to launch an education campaign in the community to increase families' awareness of the harmful effects of early marriage and childbearing by using various media channels such as television, social media, and community meetings to disseminate the information. Gradually, families' attitudes towards early marriage and childbearing will be altered because of the awareness of negative consequences on women [10]. It is also crucial to have engagements of community leaders in this activity. By involving the participation of elders and gaining their support and endorsement for the change, there is a higher chance of changing social norms to transform the harmful traditional practices of prompting early marriage. The phenomenon of early marriage in rural areas is closely related to its backward cultural

concepts. Therefore, it is needed to rely on village committees to spread out “new fashion” for establishing correct cultural concepts. Mobilizing communities for the goal of challenging families' traditional views of women can substantially mitigate the occurrence of early marriage and childbearing. Ultimately, these measures and approaches will considerably improve women's status both in physical and mental aspects.

## 5. Conclusion

Early marriage and childbearing are very influential on women's status. Women who enter into marriage at a young age face uncontrollable interruptions in both education and career paths. They fall into a vicious spiral because inadequate access to education builds barriers for them to enhance human capital, which results in limited career opportunities and an inability of financial independence. In the job market, wage discrimination and frequent undervaluing directly affect women's status in society. Family responsibilities restrict women's opportunities to achieve their full potential. Early childbearing causes irreversible damage to women's health and puts them at risk of having mental diseases. Early marriage and childbearing will likely be alleviated to a greater extent through cash transfer programs for financial support and community campaigns to raise awareness of harmful effects.

Scholars can do a questionnaire survey in rural areas by applying quantitative research in studying women who have early marriage and childbearing have direct major implications based on specific data. Accessing the effectiveness of strategies to prevent early marriage is also difficult because the changes and movements towards these approaches are commonly accompanied by several reasons, not a particular reason. To analyze the persuasive interventions in detail, scholars have to identify whether the outcome is accomplished by an individual or a group of components.

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