

## Time Use as a Measure of Marriage Quality: An Application to Rural Bangladesh

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***Shongshar shukher hoi romonir guney.***  
**(A household's happiness depends on its woman's attributes).**  
**-Bangla proverb.**

Time use is increasingly used by researchers as a means of analyzing aggregate trends in schooling, work, and other activities at the national level. Time use in a longitudinal panel setting is less readily available. Even less available is time use data for cohorts experiencing rapid transitions in schooling, work, and marriage. Using longitudinal panel data from an adolescent study in rural Bangladesh, this paper will examine the association between time use patterns and marriage-related indicators such as dowry, domestic violence, and age at marriage using detailed data on time use and various other background characteristics.

Marriage is a defining event in the lives of young girls in Bangladesh. The importance of marriage is reflected in the intricate process of marriage negotiations—as most marriages in Bangladesh are arranged, both sets of parents struggle to meet their expectations of what constitutes a ‘good’ marriage. Parents of potential brides are particularly keen to find the best possible suitor given the patrilocal<sup>1</sup> nature of family arrangements in Bangladesh.

Many factors are taken into account during marriage negotiations. Dowries, payments made by the bride's family to the groom's family, often play a central role, as many parents feel their daughters will receive better treatment if a higher dowry is paid. For example, brides' parents might hope that a higher dowry will free their daughters from the burden of excessive domestic work. Brides and their parents must also deal with the prospect of domestic violence—an issue of growing concern in the developing world. In addition, marriage distance can play a role in marriage discussions as brides can be more vulnerable to maltreatment the greater the distance between her husband's home and her natal home.

In sum, the numerous issues discussed during the marriage negotiation process can directly impact the well-being of a bride in her marital household. But this begs the question of how well-being is most accurately measured. For example, the absence of violence and the amount of time spent in leisure are often used as markers of well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> *Patrilocality* refers to family arrangements in which a bride moves into the household of her husband and his family upon marriage.

This study proposes to explore the connections between time use and indicators of marriage quality. In other words, we will examine the association between time use patterns and more traditional markers of well-being in marriage, such as domestic violence. We will also examine the effect of dowry on time use, since dowry is often paid in the hopes of improving the welfare of the bride in her marital household<sup>2</sup>. Do time use patterns differ when comparing brides married with a high dowry with those married with a low dowry? Do they differ when comparing brides who report being beaten by their husbands with those that do not report such violence? What about brides who live far from their natal home compared with those living close to their parents?

## **Data**

*As part of a project on adolescent livelihoods<sup>3</sup>, survey data was collected in 2001 and 2003 from adolescents between the ages of 13 and 22 that were chosen randomly from 90 villages in three districts of rural Bangladesh. 5,024 were contacted successfully and completed the initial interviews. A follow-up survey was conducted from January to June of 2003 in which 2,386 females respondents who had been successfully interviewed in the baseline survey were contacted for a follow-up interview, and 2,211<sup>4</sup> of these respondents were successfully interviewed. 584 of the 2386 respondents with whom follow-up interviews had been attempted had migrated, mostly due to marriage. Interviewers asked about the new location of these migrated respondents, and 476 were successfully interviewed. None of these respondents moved out of their respective district.*

Detailed time use data were collected from respondents in both surveys. Time use data were collected for the day prior to the interview using a sequential recall of activities. Time use patterns were recorded in an open-ended format and later coded into detailed activity lists. In other words, respondents were not forced to pigeonhole their activities into existing categories. The total number of activities listed is 68. Respondents reported the start time and end time of their activities and this data was converted into hours and minutes.

The survey also included detailed information concerning the circumstances surrounding marriage, including marriage distance, dowry, marriage timing and husband's and natal family characteristics.

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<sup>2</sup> If this is true, brides married with higher dowries would be expected to enjoy more leisure time than those married with lower dowries.

<sup>3</sup> This project, entitled *Kishori Abhijan* ('Adolescent Girls Adventure'), was a UNICEF-funded initiative on adolescent livelihoods was implemented by two development NGOs, BRAC and CMES, in three districts of rural Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies in collaboration with Population Council, conducted a two and a half year investigation to document the project and its implementation.

<sup>4</sup> A total of 2,214 respondents were successfully interviewed in *both* 2001 and 2003. However, three respondents from control villages reported participating in an intervention program and were dropped from the analysis.

Sampling weights were used in all analyses to account for over-sampling of younger respondents and respondents from villages in which the adolescent livelihoods programs were to be implemented.

Table 1 presents data on some summary characteristics of the 2,211 females respondents interviewed in both 2001 and 2003.

<b>Table 1. Summary characteristics of surveyed respondents interviewed in both 2001 and 2003 (data taken from 2003).</b>	
Mean age	18.8
Percent married	61.6
Percent ever enrolled in school	83.2
Percent currently enrolled in school	29.9
Percent reporting ever working for pay	42.9
Percent beaten in previous year	19.8
Percent reporting leisure activities	38.9
Percent of married respondents who paid dowry	74.9
<i>N</i>	2,111

### Method

This study will explore how the amount time spent in a variety of activities, such as leisure, domestic work, productive work, self-maintenance, and schooling, is related to indicators of marriage quality. Specifically, we will examine the impact of dowry (both the payment *and* amount of dowry), domestic violence, and marriage distance on respondents' time use. In addition, the detailed nature of the time use data allows us to compare the different natures of each activity. For example, activities constituting productive work can be associated with intra-household tasks such as tailoring or extra-household tasks, such as selling fish. These distinctions are important when considering the culture of *purdah* that limits the movement of females once they reach puberty.

In addition to the analyses discussed above, the longitudinal nature of the survey design presents us with the unique opportunity to study the 383 respondents who were unmarried in 2001 but married by the time the 2003 survey was conducted. A comparison of the “before” and “after” states of these respondents presents us with an alternative to simply comparing married and unmarried females. Given that married and unmarried females can differ substantially in terms of key characteristics such as schooling and age, comparing the *same* individuals at two points in time (i.e. unmarried in 2001 to married in 2003) can lessen the degree of confounding that may accompany a comparison of two different populations.