CHAPTER VI

NUPTIALITY TRENDS, DIFFERENTIALS AND PATTERNS

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1. Introduction

The study of nuptiality deals with the frequency of marriages i.e. unions between persons of opposite sexes which involve rights and obligations fixed by law or custom; with the characteristics of persons united in marriage; and with the dissolution of such unions (Multilingual Demographic Dictionary, 1982). The term bears roughly the same relationship to marriage and divorce as natality (or fertility) does to birth and mortality does to death (Shryock, et al. 1976).

Marriage is one of the four main proximate determinants of fertility; the other three being contraception, abortion, and breast-feeding (Bongaarts and Potter, 1983). In Nepal marriage takes place at an early age and it is almost universal. Early and universal marriage practice leads to long term social and economic consequences including higher fertility. According to the census reports of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) as quoted by Neupane, the total fertility rate (TFR) was around 6.3 children per women in both 1971 and 1981 (Neupane, et. al., 1993), which is one of the highest in Asia. Higher fertility demands larger proportion of the national resources to be allocated for the fulfillment of basic necessities of the new born babies. It, therefore, reduces the national purse for productive investment. Recognizing the need for controlling the population growth, His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG) has adopted fertility reduction policies since the early 1970s (Pandey, 1980).

The nuptiality parameters such as the proportion never married, currently married, widowed, divorced, separated, and the age at which these events take place are not always static. The changes in these parameters have not only fertility implications but also social and economic implications for the society. Accordingly, the information on the marital life-cycles of men and women are of interest to policy-makers and planners concerned with the formulation and implementation of development programmes.

2. Definition of Terms

Each of the five scientific censuses of Nepal beginning with the first census of 1952/54 collected information on marital status.Information was collected for persons of age fiveyears and above in

the census of 1952/54, six years and above in the censuses of 1961 and 1971, and ten years and above in the censuses of 1981 and 1991. The marital status was divided into four categories, viz., i) never married, ii) married, iii) widowed and iv) divorced/separated in the censuses of 1952/54, 1961, 1971 and 1981. In 1991 census divorced/separated were split into two separate categories. The censuses of 1952/54, 1961 and 1991 further kept a "not stated" category to count those eligible persons for whom information on their marital status could not be obtained.

There is little intercensal variation in the definitions of marital status categories in the censuses of 1952/54, 1961 and 1971. The definitions were further clarified and elaborated, especially in legal terms, in the censuses of 1981 and 1991. The definition of marital status employed by the 1991 census is as follows (Gharty Chhetry, 1993):

i) Never Married: Any person who is not married even once by any means (based on legal document, religious ceremony or social sanctions) at the time of the census enumeration is known as never married. Men and women who have not remained in the society even once as husbands and wives are also known as never married.

ii) Married: Men and women who are married either consensually or religiously or legally and live together in the same place or different places as husband and wife are known as married persons. For a person to be married the following two criteria should be fulfilled: (a) married according to social, cultural or legally practiced method, and (b) men and women bound in marriage should live together or separately as husbands and wives.

iii) Widower / widow : If a married person's husband or wife dies, the marital status of the person will be either widow or widower. These persons are known as widower or widow if they have not remarried at the time of enumeration. But if they are divorced and one of them dies, the status of the other is not a widower or a widow. Again the status of widower or widow is changed if they have remarried. In such a state they are identified as married.

iv) Divorced : After conjugal dispute and misunderstanding if husband and wife continue to live separate permanently under socially practiced norms or legal sanctions, they are known as divorced. Such husband and wife may understand each other and could live together in the future. However, persons legally divorced at the time of the census enumeration fall under this category.

v) Separated : Married persons, unable to live together for reasons of misunderstanding or quarrel or for any other reason may decide to make their living arrangements separate. They are considered to be separated. The marital status of such person is separated unless and until they are not divorced legally and live separate permanently.

3. Marital Status Distributions of Men and Women: Temporal Changes

3.1 Marital Status: Overall Inter - Censal Changes

The marital status distributions of the population aged 10 years and over for the four censuses, 1961 through 1991, are presented in Table 1. The table shows an increase in the proportion single during the period, from 28.47 per cent in 1961 to 35.65 per cent in 1991 for males and 15.12 per cent to 25.71 per cent for females. The increase for the males is steady until 1981, but negligible afterwards.

During the same period, there is a modest decline in the proportion of males who are married, from 65.37 per cent in 1961 to 60.56 per cent in 1991. In the case of females, however, the proportion married slightly increased between 1961 and 1981 and then declined in 1991.

Table 1 also shows an appreciable decline in the proportion widowed, from 4.76 per cent in 1961 to 2.95 per cent in 1991 for males and 14.26 per cent to 7.18 per cent for females. The decline in the widowhood is an evidence of the decline in adult mortality. A reduction in adult mortality, thus, results in the increase of proportion in one or more of the categories of single, married, divorced and separated.

The proportion divorced/separated remained below 1.00 per cent for males and females throughout 1961-1991 period. The data, however, show a modest increase in divorce/separation for males during 1971-1991, and comparatively rapid increase for females during the same period. It is, probably, the higher remarriage rate among males that lowers their proportion as divorced/separated.

The changes in the marital status composition from one census to another remain almost the same even after we take into account the effect of the changes in the age distribution. The effect of these changes are shown by the standardised rates in Table 1.

Table 1: Marital Status of Population Aged 10 Years and Over by Sex, Nepal, Census Years 1961-1991.

Marital Status & sex	1961 Census		1971 Census		1981 Census		1991 Census	
	%	Std.**	%	Std.**	%	Std.**	%	Std.**
Males:	(3,288,362)		(4,410,804)		(5,387,614)		(6,418,531)	
All statuses	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Never married	28.47	30.57	31.93	33.85	35.12	36.79	35.65	35.65
Married	65.37	63.26	64.13	62.09	62.14	60.49	60.56	60.56
Widowed	4.76	5.04	3.66	3.79	2.36	2.34	2.95	2.95
Divorced*	0.40	0.38	0.28	0.27	0.38	0.38	0.24	0.24
Separated							0.21	0.21
Unknown	1.00	0.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.39	0.39
Females:	(3,431,695)		(4,037,816)		(5,130,274)		(6,556,558)	
All statuses	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.01	100.00	100.00	100.00
Never married	15.12	17.61	19.35	21.97	23.30	25.38	25.71	25.71
Married	69.16	67.52	70.27	68.09	70.84	68.82	65.73	65.73
Widowed	14.26	13.70	10.10	9.67	5.45	5.39	7.18	7.18
Divorced*	0.34	0.33	0.28	0.27	0.42	0.41	0.22	0.22
Separated							0.47	0.47
Unknown	1.12	0.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.69	0.69

Source: CBS 1968, Vol. III, Part VI, Table 7
CBS 1975, Vol. II, Part II, Table 15
CBS 1984, Vol. II, Table 15
CBS 1993, Vol. I, Part XI, Table 34

Note
*   Divorced includes seperated in the 1961, 1971 and 1981 censuses.
**   Standardized (percent) on the basis of 1991 age structure.

3.2   Proportion Never Married by Age and sex

The proportions single by age group and sex are presented in Table 2. The table shows that 95.76 percent of the males and 92.36 percent of females were in the single category in the age group 10-14 in 1991. During the same year, the proportion remaining single in the age group 50-54 was only 1.55 percent for males and 0.93 percent for females. As the changes of marriage after age 50 are very rare, the proportion single beyond this age may also represent the extent of permanent celibacy in a population. The data, however, show almost universal female marriage during the reproductive years (15-49), which is a positive factor for fertility. The same conclusion can be drawn from all the censuses, except that of 1981.

Table 2 also shows higher proportion single in every age group among males and females in 1991, compared to 1961. For instance, in the age group 15-19 the proportion single increased from 63.33 percent in 1961 to 79.44 percent in 1991 for males and 25.68 percent to 52.72 percent for females.

The increase in the proportion single is most pronounced at ages below 25-29 years for both males and females (Figure 1). This points to the tendency of the younger people, irrespective of their sex, to postpone marriage.
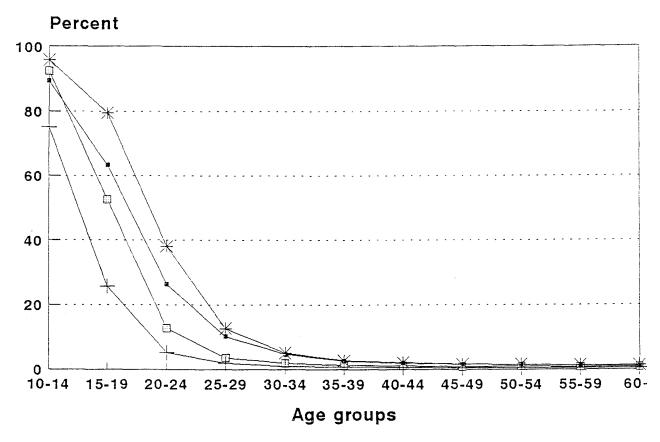
3.3   Proportion Currently Married

Distributions of currently married persons by age and sex have been presented in Table 3. The table shows that in all the censuses except that of 1981, the proportion married crossed 90 per cent mark by age group 30-34 for males. This was reached much earlier for females. The proportion married in the age group 15-19 for females was more than 70, 60 and 50 per cent respectively in the censuses or 1961, 1971 and 1981. Even in 1991, the proportion was over 45 per cent. This shows a high prevalence of early/teenage marriages among females. The early and teenage years are very important for education and socialization. Marriage and pregnancy during this period hamper the process toward fuller development. In general, women having early marriage lack skills to climb-up into the upper social strata. The younger bride also commands lesser power within the household, especially in the joint family system.

Although the early and teenage marriage is still prevalent in Nepal, it has been rapidly declining (see Figure 2). In the age group 15-19, the proportion currently married declined from 35.86 per cent in 1961 to 19.13 per cent in 1991 for males and 71.42 per cent to 45.50 per cent for females. In this age group the decline is 46.7 per cent for males and 36.3 per cent for females. Great declines in marriage also took place in the age group 10-14 and modest decline in the age group 20-24. This shows a clear tendency towards the postponement of marriage by the younger males and females aged below 25-29 years.

Figure 2 also shows increases over time, in the proportion married at later ages viz. after age 30-34 for males and 25-29 for females. This, to a large extent, should be the result of declining mortality. These increments are greater for women than for men. The greater improvements in length of life for men contribute to greater proportions of wives staying in currently married state. The reason for modest increments in proportion married in the case of men, is two-fold: the improvements in length of life for women (wives) are modest and secondly the proportions currently married for men were initially high on account of their practice of remarriage and consequent re-entry into married state, a privilege denied to women.

Figure 1
Percent Single by Age and Sex,
Nepal, Censuses 1961 and 1991

Percent

Age groups

Males-1961 Females-1961 Males-1991 Females-1991

Source: Table 2.

Table 2:   Per cent Never Married, by Age and Sex, Nepal, Census Years 1961-1991.

Age Group & Sex	% Never married				Percentage change			
	1961	1971	1981	1991	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1961-91
Males:								
All ages*	28.47	31.93	35.12	35.65	12.2	10	1.5	25.2
6-9	97.01	98.78	-	-	1.8	-	-	-
10-14	89.3	93.71	85.11	95.76	4.9	-9.2	12.5	7.2
15-19	63.33	73.02	74.13	79.44	15.3	1.5	7.2	25.4
20-24	26.35	33.11	40.85	38.07	25.7	23.4	-6.8	44.5
25-29	10.21	12.26	19.52	12.66	20.1	59.2	-35.1	24
30-34	4.72	5.7	12.36	5.15	20.8	116.8	-58.3	9.1
35-39	2.71	3.25	8.93	2.75	19.9	174.8	-69.2	1.5
40-44	2.06	2.31	8.04	2.11	12.1	248.1	-73.8	2.4
45-49	1.6	1.6	7.37	1.64	0.00	360.6	-77.7	2.5
50-54	1.47	1.43	6.88	1.55	-2.7	381.1	-77.5	5.4
55-59	1.26	1.22	7.04	1.38	-3.2	477	-80.4	9.5
60+	0.98	1.07	7.83	1.29	9.2	631.8	-83.5	31.6
Unknown	10.07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Females:								
All ages*	15.12	19.35	23.3	25.71	28	20.4	10.3	70
6-9	94.67	97.65	-	-	3.1	-	-	-
10-14	75.14	86.56	85.73	92.36	15.2	-1	7.7	22.9
15-19	25.68	39.33	49.17	52.72	53.2	25	7.2	105.3
20-24	5.33	7.87	13.06	12.76	47.7	65.9	-2.3	139.4
25-29	1.91	2.59	5.35	3.66	35.6	106.6	-31.6	91.6
30-34	1.04	1.4	3.07	1.92	34.6	119.3	-37.5	84.6
35-39	0.77	1.08	2.63	1.3	40.3	143.5	-50.6	68.8
40-44	0.68	0.92	2.52	1.09	35.3	173.9	-56.7	60.3
45-49	0.58	0.77	2.93	0.9	32.8	280.5	-69.3	55.2
50-54	0.55	0.71	3.56	0.93	29.1	401.4	-73.9	69.1
55-59	0.51	0.68	4.2	0.89	33.3	517.6	-78.8	74.5
60+	0.45	0.62	6.24	0.89	37.8	906.5	-85.7	97.8
Unknown	3.30	-		-	-	-	-	-

Source: CBS, 1968, Vol. III, Part VI, Table 7
           CBS, 1975, Vol. II, Part II, Table 15
           CBS, 1984, Vol. II, Table 15
           CBS, 1993, Vol. I, Part XI, Table 34.

*   In respect of population aged 10 years and above.

Table 3:   Per cent Currently Married by Age and Sex, Nepal, Census Years, 1961--1991.

Age Group	% Currently married				Percentage change			
& Sex	1961	1971	1981	1991	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1961-91
Males:								
All ages*	65.37	64.13	62.14	60.56	-1.9	-3.1	-2.5	-7.4
6-9	2.97	1.2	-	-	-59.6	-	-	
10-14	10.59	6.23	14.03	4.06	-41.2	125.2	-71.1	-61.7
15-19	35.86	26.62	25.09	19.13	-25.8	-5.7	-23.8	-46.7
20-24	69.63	65.59	57.82	60.29	-5.8	-11.8	4.3	-13.4
25-29	85.27	85.65	78.8	85.51	0.4	-8	8.5	0.3
30-34	90.42	91.5	85.76	92.8	1.2	-6.3	8.2	2.6
35-39	91.83	93.31	88.98	94.75	1.6	-4.6	6.5	3.2
40-44	91.05	92.94	89.07	94.35	2.1	-4.2	5.9	3.6
45-49	89.5	92.44	89.16	93.49	3.3	-3.5	4.9	4.5
50-54	86.96	90.51	88.36	91.15	4.1	-2.4	3.2	4.8
55-59	84.13	88.54	87.18	89.18	5.2	-1.5	2.3	6
60+	73.17	78.95	80.82	79.32	7.9	2.4	-1.9	8 .4
Unknown	16.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Females:								
All ages*	69.16	70.27	70.84	65.73	1.6	0.8	-7.2	-5
6-9	5.29	2.33	-	-	-56	-	-	-
10-14	24.64	13.36	13.36	7.21	-45.8	0	-46	-70.7
15-19	71.42	60.19	50.05	45.5	-15.7	-16.8	-9.1	-36.3
20-24	91.57	91.07	85.93	85.09	-0.5	-5.6	-1	-7.1
25-29	93.71	95.42	93.21	94.13	1.8	-2.3	1	0.4
30-34	91.83	94.99	94.78	95.13	3.4	-0.2	0.4	3.6
35-39	86.65	91.95	93.81	93.89	6.1	2	0.1	8.4
40-44	78.32	86.64	91.12	90.85	10.6	5.2	-0.3	16
45-49	68.59	80.57	87.8	86.33	17.5	9	-1.7	25.9
50-54	59.15	70.82	81.74	78.23	19.7	15.4	-4.3	32.3
55-59	50.78	66.62	79.06	72.26	31.2	18.7	-8.6	42.3
60+	32.13	44.38	61.04	49.17	38.1	37.5	-19.4	53
Unknown	44.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: CBS, 1968, Vol. III, Part VI, Table 7
        CBS, 1975, Vol. II, Part I, Table 15
        CBS, 1984, Vol. II, Table 15
        CBS, 1993, Vol. I, Part XI, Table 34.
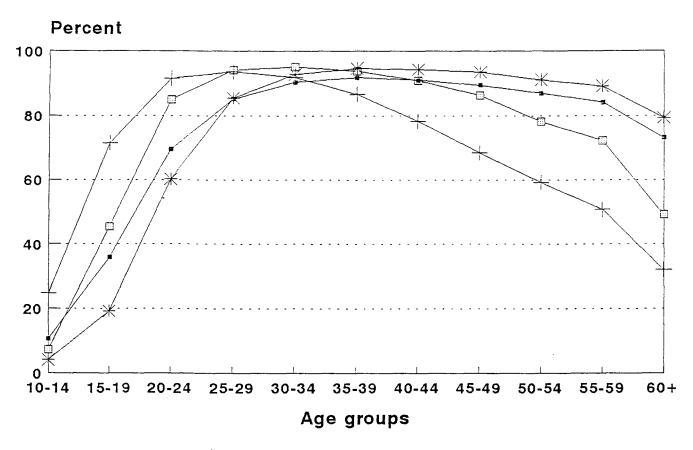
*   In respect of population aged 10 years and above.

Figure 2
**Percent Currently Married by Age and Sex,
Nepal, Censuses 1961 and 1991**

Percent

Age groups

← Males-1961   + Females-1961   ✳ Males-1991   ⊡ Females-1991

Source: Table 3.

3.4   Widowhood

As the mortality is higher at the advanced ages, the proportion widowed is expected to increase with age. This universal fact is also reflected in the Nepalese census data shown in Table 4. The table shows that the highest proportions of the widower/widow category are found in the age group 60 years and over. In this age group, 18.24 per cent of the males and 47.54 per cent of the females were in the status as widower/widow in 1991. The table also shows proportionately more females in the widowhood status than males in every age group. For instance, in 1991, the proportion widows (female widowhood) was 18.93 per cent, compared to 6.43 per cent widower (male widowhood) in the age group 50-54. in Nepalese culture and society the wives are generally younger than their husbands. This factor combined with higher chances of remarriage for men may have produced lower prevalence of widowhood for males, compared to widowhood for females.

The proportion widowed has been declining over the years in all age groups beyond 30-34 during 1961-1991 (Figure 3). Of the two sexes, the overall decline in widowhood is greater for females (49.6%), compared to males (38.0%). The decline in the widowhood status is an evidence of the reduction in adult mortality.

3.5   Proportion Divorced/Separated

Economic development Seems to influence the personal lives of men and women in many ways. Marital unions are among those which underwent changes, concomitant with development in the West. Although Nepal is in the initial stage of development, it can not keep away from the developed western influence. Divorce/separation is, therefore expected to increase as the country develops in the future. However, the influence of the West in marriage and divorce is greatly reduced by the religious and social ideologies of the East.

The proportions or the divorced/separated persons by age and sex in Nepal, for the censuses of 1961 through 1991, are given in Table 5. The table shows that only 0.46 per cent of males and 0.69 per cent of the females were in the category of divorced/separated in 1991. The age and sex data show that the divorce/separation is larger at higher ages for females. There is also a continuous increase in the overall proportion divorced/separated from 1961 to 1991 in case of females, resulting in a doubling of the proportion (Figure 4). The proportion, however, does not vary much for the males. This may be due to higher remarriage rates among men compared to women.

Table 4:   Per cent Widowed by Age and Sex, Nepal, Census Years, 1961-1991.

Age Group & Sex	% widower/widow				Percentage change			
	1961	1971	1981	1991	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1961-91
Males:								
All ages*	4.76	3.66	2.36	2.95	-23.1	-35.5	25	-38
6-9	0.02	0.01	-	-	-50.0	-	-	-
10-14	0.09	0.04	0.68	0.05	-55.6	1600	-92.6	-44.4
15-19	0.58	0.24	0.55	0.13	-58.6	129.2	-76.4	-77.6
20-24	1.54	0.90	0.82	0.38	-41.6	-8.9	-53.7	-75.3
25-29	2.46	1.59	1.09	0.68	-35.4	-31.4	-37.6	-72.4
30-34	3.25	2.35	1.35	1.03	-27.7	-42.6	-23.7	-68.3
35-39	4.12	3.05	1.67	1.59	-26.0	-45.2	-4.8	-61.4
40-44	5.69	4.40	2.48	2.67	-22.7	-43.6	7.7	-53.1
45-49	7.73	5.67	3.11	4.04	-26.6	-45.1	29.9	**-47.7**
50-54	10.41	7.79	4.39	6.43	-25.2	-43.6	46.5	-38.2
55-59	13.52	9.99	5.44	8.57	-26.1	-45.5	57.5	-36.6
60+	24.5	19.68	10.92	18.24	-19.7	-44.5	67	-25.6
Unknown	1.44	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Females:								
All ages*	14.26	10.1	5.45	7.18	-29.2	-46	31.7	-49.6
6-9	0.04	0.02	-	-	-50.0	-	-	-
10-14	0.18	0.06	0.70	0.06	-66.7	1066.7	-91.4	-66.7
15-19	0.80	0.30	0.49	0.16	-62.5	63.3	-67.3	-80.0
20-24	1.62	0.73	0.62	0.40	-54.9	-15.1	-35.5	-75.3
25-29	3.24	1.64	1.03	0.89	-49.4	-37.2	-13.6	-72.5
30-34	6.14	3.28	1.73	1.76	-46.6	-47.3	1.7	-71.3
35-39	11.56	6.62	3.10	3.62	-42.7	-53.2	16.8	-68.7
40-44	19.88	12.10	5.82	6.74	-39.1	-51.9	15.8	-66.1
45-49	29.57	18.30	8.74	11.35	-38.1	-52.2	29.9	-61.6
50-54	38.99	28.13	14.08	18.93	-27.9	-49.9	34.4	-51.4
55-59	47.24	32.39	16.19	24.85	-31.4	-50.0	53.5	-47.4
60+	6.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: CBS, 1968, Vol. III, Part V1, Table 7
CBS, 1975, Vol. II, Part II, Table 15.
CBS, 1984, Vol. II, Table 15.
CBS, 1993, Vol. I, Part XI, Table 34.
• 	In respect of population aged 10 years and above.

Figure 4 also reveals that the proportions divorced/separated in Nepal are small. The data are in line with the expected pattern in a country where Hindu and Buddhist religion and culture, and lower level of socio-economic development play an important role in shaping the marriage and divorce patterns.

Figure 3
Percent Widowed by Age and Sex, Nepal, Censuses 1961 and 1991

Percent

Age groups

← Males-1961 ⊥ Females-1961 ⋇ Males-1991 ⊡ Females-1991

Source: Table 4.

Table 5: Per cent Divorced/Separated by Age and Sex, Nepal, Census Years, 1961-1991.

Age Group	% divorced/seperated				Percentage change			
& Sex	1961	1971	1981	1991	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1961-91
Males:								
All ages*	0.4	0.28	0.38	0.46	-30	35.7	21.1	15
10-14	0.02	0.02	0.17	0.06	0.0	750.0	-64.7	200.0
15-19	0.23	0.13	0.23	0.20	-43.5	76.9	-13.0	-13.0
20-24	0.63	0.40	0.52	0.59	-36.5	30.0	13.5	-6.3
25-29	0.69	0.50	0.60	0.70	-27.5	20.0	16.7	1.4
30-34	0.61	0.46	0.52	0.65	-24.6	13.0	25.0	6.6
35-39	0.47	0.39	0.43	0.63	-17.0	10.3	46.5	34.0
40-44	0.41	0.35	0.41	0.62	-14.6	17.1	51.2	51.2
45-49	0.41	0.29	0.37	0.59	-29.3	27.6	59.5	43.9
50-54	0.39	0.26	0.36	0.62	-33.3	38.5	72.2	59.0
55-59	0.35	0.25	0.34	0.59	-28.6	36.0	73.5	68.6
60+	0.39	0.30	0.43	0.56	-23.1	43.3	30.2	43.6
Unknown	0.16	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Females:								
All ages*	0.34	0.28	0.42	0.69	-17.6	50.0	64.3	102.9
10-14	0.03	0.02	0.21	0.08	-33.3	950.0	-61.9	166.7
15-19	0.29	0.18	0.29	0.34	-37.9	61.1	17.2	17.2
20-24	0.45	0.33	0.39	0.64	-26.7	18.2	64.1	42.2
25-29	0.45	0.35	0.42	0.72	-22.2	20.0	71.4	60.0
30-34	0.43	0.33	0.42	0.78	-23.3	27.3	85.7	81.4
35-39	0.46	0.35	0.45	0.91	-23.9	28.6	102.2	97.8
40-44	0.46	0.35	0.54	1.07	-23.9	54.3	98.1	132.6
45-49	0.42	0.35	0.53	1.16	-16.7	51.4	118.9	176.2
50-54	0.38	0.34	0.62	1.37	-10.5	82.4	121.0	260.5
55-59	0.41	0.31	0.55	1.32	-24.4	77.4	140.0	222.0
60+	0.24	0.36	0.65	1.05	50.0	80.6	61.5	337.5
Unknown	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

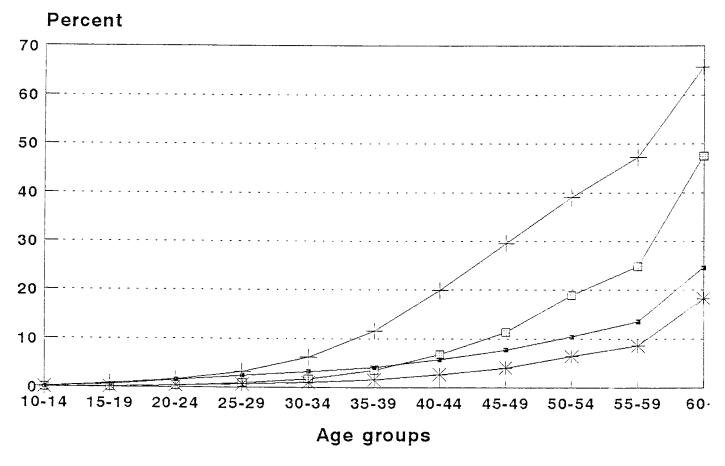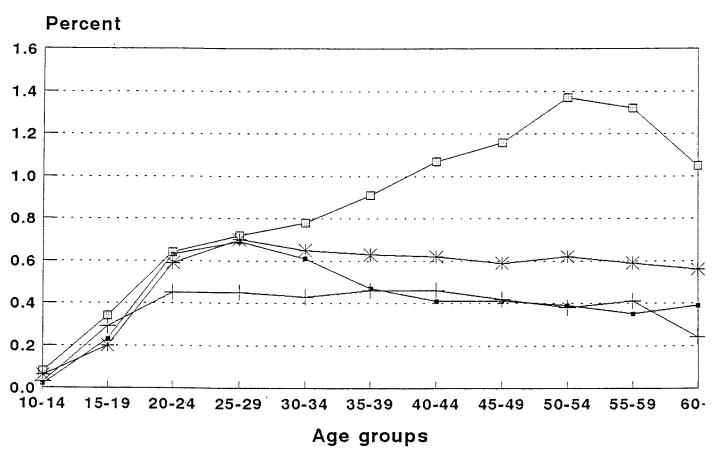Source: CBS, 1968, Vol. 111, Part VI, Table 7
CBS, 1975, Vol. Il, Part 11, Table 15
CBS, 1984, Vol. 11, Table 15
CBS, 1993, Vol. 1, Part XI, Table 34.

* In respect of population aged 10 years and above.

Figure 4
Percent Divorced/Separated by Age and Sex, Nepal, Population Censuses 1961 and 1991

Percent

Age groups

← Males-1961 + Females-1961 ✳ Males-1991 ⊞ Females-1991

Source: Table 5.

4.   Estimation of Age at Marriage of Men and Women
4.1   Singulate Mean Age at Marriage by Sex

The censuses did not include direct questions on age at marriage and age at cohabitation. In the absence of such questions the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) developed by Hajnal (1953) is used as an estimate of the mean age at marriage. The SMAM is the number of years lived by a cohort of persons before first marriage. Table 6 shows the SMAM for males and females in the censuses 1961 through 1991. In all the computations of SMAM, age groups 10+ have been considered for both males and females. The table reveals that the mean age at marriage is increasing over the years for both sexes. It increased from 19.5 in 1961 to 21.4 in 1991 for males, a gain of 1.9 years, and from 15.4 to 18.1 for females, a gain of 2.7 years. Therefore, the mean age at marriage increased faster for women, compared to men during 1961-1991. Another point revealed by the table is that women in Nepal marry at ages 3 to 4 years earlier than men. The male-female difference in SMAM, however, is decreasing over time. It decreased from 4.1 in 1961 to 3.3 years in 1991.

Table 6:   Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (in years) by Sex, Nepal, Census Years 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991.

| | Singulate mean age at marriage | | | | 1991-1961 |
Sex	1961	1971	1981	1991	Difference in SMAM
Males	19.5	20.8	20.7	21.4	+1.9
Females	15.4	16.8	17.2	18.1	+2.7
Male-Female Difference in SMAM	+4.1	+4.0	+3.5	+3.3	

Source: CBS, 1968, Vol. III, Part VI, Table 7
CBS, 1975, Vol. II, Part II, Table 15
CBS, 1984, Vol. I1 Table 15
CBS, 1993, Vol. I, Part XI, Table 34.

4.2   SMAM by Rural-Urban Residence

The urban-rural differential in SMAM is presented in Table 7. The table shows that the SMAM increased during 1981-1991 period, in both urban and rural areas. The increase was, however, larger in the urban (1.0 year for males and 1.1 years for females), compared to the rural (0.5 year for males and 0.8 year for females). The table further reveals that both men and women in the rural

areas marry earlier than the urban dwellers. In 1991, the rural males married 2.4 years earlier than the urban males, while rural females married 1.7 years earlier than the urban females. There is also evidence of an increasing rural/urban difference from 1981 to 1991 in the age at marriage of both males and females. The differences in social, cultural, occupational and economic factors in the urban and rural areas are probably responsible for the differentials in SMAM.

4.3   Differentials in SMAM by Ecological Zones

In the census of 1991, the singulate mean age at marriage for males was highest in the Hills (22.2 years), intermediate in the Mountain zone (21.9 years) and lowest in the Terai (20.6 years). Similar pattern was found in case of the females too. The SMAM for females in 1991 was 18.9 years in the Hills, 18.6 years in the Mountains and 17.0 years in the Terai. The pattern was not very different in the census of 1981 as well (Table 7).

Although the mean age at marriage is the lowest in Terai, the 1981-1991 intercensal increase was the highest; 0.9 year for males and 1.2 years for females, compared to 0.2 year for males and 0.9 year for females in the Hills and 0.1 year for both males and females in the Mountain zone. The social and economic changes probably had the largest effect in Terai where the initial SMAM was very low.

4.4   SMAM by Development Regions

In terms of the development regions, the singulate mean age at marriage for males in 1991 was the highest in the Eastern Region (22.5 years), intermediate in the Central and Western Regions and the lowest in the Mid-Western and Far-Western Regions. More or less similar pattern is found in the case of females as well. The SMAM shows a somewhat declining trend if we go from east to the west. Comparatively lower socio-economic development in the Mid-Western and Far-Western Regions compared to the other regions until the beginning of the planned development in Nepal in 1956, slower change thereafter in the development indicators and the conservative cultural factor of the predominantly Aryan society, may all have contributed to lower mean age at marriage.

Data in Table 7 also show an increase in the mean age at marriage in all the five development regions during the intercensal period 1981-1991. The increase for the males was the largest in the Far-Western Region (0.9 year), while it was largest for the females in the Eastern Development

Region (2.3 years). Migration from the Hills and Mountains to the Terai in the Eastern and FarWestern Development Regions may have been one of the factors which contributed to this change.

Table 7:   Singulate Mean Age at Marriage by Rural / Urban Residence and Regions for Nepal, 1981 and 1991.

| Areas/regions | Singulate mean age at marriage | | | | 1991-1981 Difference | |
| | 1981 | | 1991 | | | |
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Type of residence:						
Urban	22.5	18.5	23.5	19.6	+1.0	+1.1
Rural	20.6	17.1	21.1	17.9	+0.5	+0.8
Urban-rural difference in SMAM	+1.9	+1.4	+2.4	+1.7		
Ecological Zones:						
Mountain	21.8	18.5	21.9	18.6	+0.1	+0.1
Hill	22.0	18.0	22.2	18.9	+0.2	+0.9
Terai	19.7	15.8	20.6	17.0	+0.9	+1.2
Development regions:						
Eastern	21.7	16.9	22.5	19.2	+0.8	+2.3
Central	20.5	16.8	21.3	17.7	+0.8	+0.9
Western	20.8	17.3	21.2	18.0	+0.4	+0.7
Mid-western	20.1	16.9	20.7	17.6	+0.6	+0.7
Far-western	19.5	15.7	20.4	16.9	+0.9	+1.2

Source: CBS, 1984, Vol. I, Part IV, Table 14; vol. II, Table 15, and Vol. III, Table 15
CBS, 1993, Vol. 1, Part XI, Table 34
CBS, 1994, Vol. 11, Table 9
CBS, 1995, Vol. IV, Table 40.

4.5   District Level Variations in the SMAM

The singulate mean age at marriage by districts is shown in Table 8. The table shows that, during 1991, the highest and lowest SMAM for males were found in Mustang (24.5 years) and Kapilbastu (17.9 years) districts, respectively. Similarly, for the females, the highest was found in Mustang (23.0 years) and the lowest in Kapilbastu, Bara and Parsa districts (15.1 years).

In general, the SMAM for both males and females is higher in many of the Mountain and Hill districts where the, population is fully or partially mongoloid. The mongoloid groups generally marry late, compared to the Aryans. Late marriage is also found in those districts, such as Kathmandu and Jhapa, where the proportion of the migrant population is high. The lowest SMAM is found, for both

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males and females, in most of those Terai districts where the proportion of the non-migrant population is high. Earlier marriage also takes place in majority of the districts of the mid-western and far-western regions where the population is predominantly Aryan and the level of socio-economic development is low. Thus, the existing cultural differences in the Mountain, Hill, and Terai districts as well as differences in socio-economic development in different parts of the country may be responsible for the variations in age at marriage.

Among the different districts the highest difference in male-female age at marriage of about 4.6 years is found in Dhanusha (Terai) district and no difference is observed in Manang (Mountain) district. The prevailing high differences in marriage age between boys and girls in the Terai could be the deep rooted societal traditions and beliefs practiced from the very early times. It is very difficult to change the traditional beliefs on early marriage. In some of these conservative rural societies people even think that having the girls married before their age at puberty is very religious. This ultimately widens the gap between male and female age at marriage. In the Mountain there are no such restrictions and this ultimately reduces the difference in age at marriage between girls and boys.

Table 8:   Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) of Men and Women by District, Nepal, 1991

Area	Males		Females		Husband/wife age difference
	SMAM	Rank	SMAM	Rank	
Nepal	21.4	-	18.1	-	3.3
Mountain Zone					
Eastern Mountain					
1 Taplejung	24.3	2.0	21.7	3.0	2.6
9 Sankhuwasabha	23.4	11.5	20.7	10.0	2.7
11 Solukhumbu	23.7	7.0	21.0	6.0	2.7
Central Mountain					
22 Dolakha	22.1	30.0	19.0	25.5	3.1
23 Sindhupalchok	21.3	39.0	18.1	41.0	3.2
29 Rasuwa	22.1	30.0	18.3	38.0	3.8
Western Mountain					
41 Manang	22.9	15.5	22.9	2.0	0.0
42 Mustang	24.5	1.0	23.0	1.0	1.5
Mid-Western Mountain					
62 Dolpa	22.2	26.5	19.9	15.0	2.3
63 Jumla	20.5	55.0	16.5	62.5	4.0
64 Kalikot	20.6	51.0	16.5	62.5	4.1
65 Mugu	21.2	41.0	17.6	47.0	3.6
66 Humla	22.6	21.0	18.9	27.5	3.7
Far-Western Mountain					
67 Bajura	20.8	47.0	17.4	50.5	3.4
68 Bajhang	20.0	68.0	16.8	59.0	3.2
75 Darchula	20.5	55.0	16.5	62.5	4.0

Table 8 (Contd.)

| Area | Males | | Females | | Husband/wife |
	SMAM	Rank	SMAM	Rank	age difference
Hill Zone					
Eastern Hill					
2 Panchthar	23.5	9.5	21.1	5.0	2.4
3 Ilam	24.3	3.0	20.8	9.0	3.5
7 Dhankuta	23.6	8.0	20.9	7.5	2.7
8 Tehrathum	23.9	5.5	21.3	4.0	2.6
10 Bhojpur	23.5	9.5	20.9	7.5	2.6
12 Okhaldhunga	22.7	19.5	19.8	16.0	2.9
13 Khotang	23.1	14.0	20.2	13.0	2.9
14 Udayapur	22.2	26.5	19.1	23.0	3.1
Central Hill					
20 Sindhuli	21.9	34.0	18.8	29.5	3.1
21 Ramechhap	22.1	30.0	19.1	23.0	3.0
24 Kavrepalanchok	21.2	41.0	18.5	36.5	2.7
25 Lalitpur	23.2	13.0	20.3	12.0	2.9
26 Bhaktapur	21.5	36.0	19.4	19.0	2.1
27 Kathmandu	24.2	4.0	20.5	11.0	3.7
28 Nuwakot	20.9	46.0	17.7	46.0	3.2
30 Dhading	21.4	38.0	18.0	43.0	3.4
31 Makawanpur	21.2	41.0	18.2	39.0	3.0
Western Hill					
36 Gorkha	22.5	22.5	19.2	21.0	3.3
37 Lamjung	23.4	11.5	19.6	17.0	3.8
38 Tanahun	22.2	26.5	18.8	29.5	3.4
39 Syangja	22.8	17.5	18.9	27.5	3.9
40 Kaski	22.8	17.5	19.3	20.0	3.5
43 Myagdi	22.2	26.5	19.5	18.0	2.7
44 Parbat	22.7	19.5	19.0	25.5	3.7
45 Baglung	21.5	36.0	18.6	34.0	2.9
46 Gulmi	22.5	22.5	18.5	36.5	4.0
47 Palpa	22.0	32.5	18.6	34.0	3.4
51 Arghakhanchi	21.5	36.0	17.5	48.5	4.0
Mid-Western Hill					
52 Pyuthan	21.1	43.0	18.1	41.0	3.0
53 Rolpa	20.7	48.5	18.7	31.5	2.0
54 Rukum	20.5	55.0	17.9	44.0	2.6
55 Salyan	20.6	51.0	17.8	45.0	2.8
59 Surkhet	20.4	58.5	17.5	48.5	2.9
60 Dailekh	20.5	55.0	17.1	55.5	3.4
61 Jajarkot	20.7	48.5	17.1	55.5	3.6
Far-Western Hill					
69 Achham	20.1	67.0	17.4	50.5	2.7
70 Doti	21.0	44.5	17.0	58.0	4.0
73 Dadeldhura	20.2	65.0	16.5	62.5	3.7
74 Baitadi	20.3	61.5	16.3	65.5	4.0

Table 8 (Contd.)

Area	Males		Females		Husband/wife age difference
	SMAM	Rank	SMAM	Rank	
Terai Zone					
Eastern Region					
4 Jhapa	23.9	5.5	20.1	14.0	3.8
5 Morang	22.9	15.5	19.1	23.0	3.8
6 Sunsari	22.4	24.0	18.7	31.5	3.7
15 Saptari	19.8	69.0	15.9	68.0	3.9
16 Siraha	19.4	70.5	15.3	71.0	4.1
Central Terai					
17 Dhanusa	20.3	61.5	15.7	69.5	4.6
18 Mahottari	20.2	65.0	15.7	69.5	4.5
19 Sarlahi	20.5	55.0	16.2	67.0	4.3
32 Rautahat	19.4	70.5	15.2	72.0	4.2
33 Bara	18.7	74.0	15.1	74.0	3.6
34 Parsa	18.9	73.0	15.1	74.0	3.8
35 Chitwan	22.0	32.5	18.6	34.0	3.4
Western Terai					
48 Nawalparasi	20.3	61.5	17.2	53.0	3.1
49 Rupandehi	19.2	72.0	16.3	65.5	2.9
50 Kapilbastu	17.9	75.0	15.1	74.0	2.8
Mid-Western Terai					
56 Dang	21.0	44.5	18.1	41.0	2.9
57 Banke	20.2	65.0	16.6	60.0	3.6
58 Bardiya	20.4	58.5	17.3	52.0	3.1
Far-western Terai					
71 Kailali	20.3	61.5	17.1	55.5	3.2
72 Kanchanpur	20.6	51.0	17.1	55.5	3.5

Source: CBS, 1993, Vol. 1, Part XI, Table 34.

5.   Marital Status Distribution: Spatial Variations
5.1   Rural / Urban Differentials

Marital status distributions by age and sex for rural and urban areas are presented in Table 9. Urban areas, as compared to rural areas, are characterized by higher proportion single, lower proportion married, lower proportion widowed and lower proportion divorced/separated, both among men and women. The higher age at marriage in urban areas may be one of the reasons for the higher single proportion in urban. Also, young men and women who go to urban areas-for the purpose of work or study mostly belong to the single category. In the age groups 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 the urban proportion-single is higher than the rural value by 12.1, 62.2 and 119.3 per cent respectively among males; and by 29.6, 117.2 and 152.2 per cent among females. The lower proportions of widowed and divorced/separated men and women in urban areas may at least partly be on account probably of a higher remarriage rate in urban areas.

Table 9: Marital Status Distribution by Age; Sex and Rural / Urban Residence, Nepal, 1991

Type of Residence		Single		Married		Widower/Widow		Div/Sep	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Rural:									
All ages		34.93	25.17	61.13	66.18	3.11	7.29	0.48	0.69
	10-14	95.65	92.12	4.18	7.46	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.07
	15-19	78.37	51.22	20.61	47.00	0.14	0.16	0.21	0.36
	20-24	35.23	11.34	63.09	86.51	0.42	0.41	0.64	0.66
	25-29	11.06	3.16	87.06	94.61	0.73	0.91	0.74	0.73
	30-34	4.76	1.72	93.12	95.31	1.11	1.79	0.69	0.78
	35-39	2.66	1.17	94.74	93.99	1.70	3.66	0.65	0.90
	40-44	2.07	0.99	94.23	90.92	2.83	6.78	0.64	1.06
	45-49	1.59	0.81	93.35	86.43	4.24	11.37	0.60	1.14
	50-54	1.46	0.83	91.02	78.28	6.67	19.01	0.62	1.36
	55-59	1.28	0.79	89.03	72.40	8.82	24.85	0.60	1.31
	60+	1.17	0.80	79.10	49.29	18.59	47.56	0.57	1.04
Urban:									
All Ages		41.91	30.97	55.61	61.33	1.56	6.15	0.30	0.65
	10-14	96.85	94.86	2.90	4.60	0.05	0.05	0.08	0.08
	15-19	87.89	66.37	11.00	31.82	0.07	0.11	0.13	0.21
	20-24	57.13	24.63	41.49	73.29	0.14	0.29	0.26	0.45
	25-29	24.25	7.97	74.31	89.93	0.32	0.67	0.35	0.61
	30-34	8.20	3.76	90.29	93.47	0.47	1.39	0.36	0.81
	35-39	3.53	2.52	94.83	92.96	0.71	3.05	0.40	0.98
	40-44	2.46	2.17	95.44	90.04	1.23	6.33	0.45	1.13
	45-49	2.09	1.97	94.90	85.17	2.07	11.14	0.45	1.37
	50-54	2.56	2.09	92.53	77.66	3.79	17.93	0.59	1.55
	55-59	2.46	2.11	90.89	70.59	5.68	24:90	0.49	1.39
	60+	2.75	1.93	81.98	47.79	14.11	47.25	0.43	1.20

Source: CBS, 1994, Vol. 11, Table 9.

Note: Number of persons to which these marital status proportions apply, are shown in Annex.

5.2   Differentials by Ecological Zones

Table 10 shows the marital status distributions by age and sex in the Ecological Zones of Mountain, Hill and Terai. Proportion single among both men and women are the lowest in Terai and the highest in Hill with Mountain zone occupying the middle position in this respect. As may be recalled, the mean age at marriage which was lowest, for both men and women, in Terai and highest in Hill probably provide the most consistent explanation for the above phenomenon. The proportions widowed and divorced/separated among both men and women are highest in Mountain followed by Hill and Terai. These clear ecological differentials may have their explanations in ethnic differences of the populations occupying these three regions.

Table 10: Marital Status Distribution by Age, Sex and Ecological Zones, Nepal, 1991

Ecological Zone	Single		Married		Widower/Widow		Div/Sep	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mountain:								
All Ages	35.80	26.65	59.47	63.73	3.80	8.16	0.58	0.86
10-14	97.43	95.21	2.35	4.42	0.09	0.08	0.06	0.06
15-19	81.88	56.06	17.05	42.23	0.15	0.21	0.21	0.38
20-24	39.14	15.53	58.99	82.25	0.58	0.47	0.74	0.87
25-29	14.45	5.81	83.19	91.56	0.95	1.10	1.02	0.98
30-34	7.02	3.41	90.46	93.00	1.39	2.17	0.86	1.07
35-39	4.42	2.28	92.29	91.78	2.23	4.53	0.81	1.16
40-44	3.17	1.95	92.34	87.72	3.46	8.63	0.83	1.45
45-49	2.50	1.55	91.30	83.53	5.21	13.41	0.75	1.28
50-54	2.09	1.57	89.08	75.72	7.90	20.82	0.73	1.44
55-59	1.88	1.42	86.89	69.97	10.34	26.55	0.65	1.47
60+	1.56	1.49	75.95	49.38	21.39	46.66	0.57	1.16
Hill:								
All Ages	38.67	29.07	57.55	62.21	2.90	7.17	0.49	0.82
10-14	97.12	95.69	2.74	3.96	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.06
15-19	85.29	61.67	13.72	36.57	0.11	0.12	0.19	0.36
20-24	42.89	16.35	55.43	81.30	0.35	0.38	0.65	0.72
25-29	15.02	5.13	83.09	92.42	0.63	0.87	0.76	0.87
30-34	6.27	2.87	91.63	93.87	0.97	1.81	0.73	0.98
35-39	3.42	1.95	94.04	93.07	1.47	3.52	0.75	1.11
40-44	2.49	1.56	94.14	90.06	2.39	6.77	0.71	1.32
45-49	1.90	1.31	93.67	86.13	3.54	10.85	0.66	1.42
50-54	1.71	1.27	91.66	78.49	5.70	18.03	0.68	1.69
55-59	1.52	1.27	89.68	71.96	7.86	24.49	0.65	1.60
60+	1.31	1.17	79.88	50.64	17.66	45.61	0.58	1.22
Terai:								
All Ages	32.81	22.02	63.55	69.76	2.85	7.02	0.41	0.53
10-14	94.13	88.22	5.66	11.26	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.09
15-19	73.25	42.17	25.68	56.01	0.15	0.19	0.21	0.33
20-24	33.37	8.59	65.08	89.49	0.38	0.40	0.51	0.50
25-29	10.42	1.91	87.88	96.18	0.67	0.86	0.60	0.53
30-34	3.92	0.82	94.14	96.61	1.03	1.64	0.56	0.56
35-39	1.99	0.51	95.66	95.03	1.60	3.56	0.50	0.68
40-44	1.61	0.45	94.85	92.20	2.79	6.37	0.52	0.74
45-49	1.28	0.35	93.68	87.05	4.29	11.51	0.50	0.86
50-54	1.28	0.37	91.02	78.48	6.91	19.61	0.53	0.98
55-59	1.12	0.33	89.07	73.10	9.01	24.92	0.51	0.94
60+	1.21	0.44	79.35	47.41	18.29	49.97	0.53	0.84

Source: CBS, 1995, Vol. IV, Table 17.
Note: Same as Table 9.

5.3 Differentials by Development Regions

Marital status distributions by age and sex for the Development regions are shown in Table 11. Proportions single among men and women are about the least in the Mid-western and Far-western regions closely followed by the Central Region. The fact that the mean ages at marriage are the

lowest in these regions explains the above phenomenon. Another observation distinguishes the Midwestern and the Far-western regions from the rest. Proportion of women widowed in the higher age groups 45+ in these two regions is the least among all regions. Also the proportion of divorced/separated men and women are the least in the Far-western region. A higher remarriage rate may be a factor which can not be verified in the absence of remarriage data.

Table 11: Marital Status Distribution by Age, Sex and Development Regions, Nepal, 1991.

Development Regions	Single		Married		Widower/Widow		Div/Sep	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Eastern:								
All Ages	38.60	29.35	57.80	62.13	2.80	7.07	0.43	0.88
10-14	97.51	95.10	2.35	4.60	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.06
15-19	85.77	62.79	13.38	35.76	0.09	0.13	0.12	0.28
20-24	47.53	19.57	51.13	78.39	0.28	0.37	0.42	0.71
25-29	15.81	5.57	82.54	92.10	0.57	0.92	0.62	0.94
30-34	5.67	2.83	92.54	93.99	0.85	1.79	0.60	1.07
35-39	2.72	1.79	95.02	92.94	1.39.	3.73	0.62	1.32
40-44	2.07	1.41	94.68	90.07	2.34	6.74	0.69	1.57
45-49	1.46	1.13	93.91	85.44	3.80	11.58	0.63	1.67
50-54	1.36	1.16	91.38	78.08	6.30	18.36	0.75	1.95
55-59	1.14	1.07	89.29	71.33	8.68	25.13	0.66	1.81
60+	1.08	0.94	78.49	48.41	19.20	48.08	0.66	1.35
Central:								
All Ages	34.37	23.66	61.97	67.94	2.86	7.12	0.42	0.60
10-14	95.67	90.84	4.15	8.67	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.08
15-19	77.50	48.79	21.50	49.44	0.12	0.16	0.18	0.30
20-24	37.64	12.16	60.82	85.88	0.37	0.36	0.51	0.55
25-29	13.04	3.63	85.23	94.39	0.62	0.80	0.63	0.59
30-34	5.13	1.77	92.89	95.58	1.03	1.57	0.58	0.66
35-39	2.63	1.25	95.03	94.40	1.52	3.35	0.55	0.74
40-44	2.05	1.07	94.44	91.52	2.71	6.27	0.57	0.93
45-49	1.64	0.93	93.59	87.19	4.02	10.71	0.52	0.95
50-54	1.77	1.04	90.95	79.22	6.48	18.01	0.56	1.24
55-59	1.66	0.98	88.83	73.76	8.62	23.53	0.63	1.13
60+	1.59	0.94	79.53	50.15	17.81	46.71	0.53	0.94
Western:								
All Ages	35.47	25.67	60.71	65.83	2.99	7.03	0.44	0.63
10-14	92.96	90.07	6.83	9.46	0.05	0.06	0.08	0.08
15-19	79.00	55.61	20.09	42.48	0.13	0.14	0.14	0.24
20-24	38.09	12.00	60.40	85.53	0.34	0.38	0.50	0.52
25-29	11.73	3.35	86.48	94.31	0.66	0.82	0.66	0.64
30-34	5.35	1.96	92.59	95.20	1.01	1.57	0.65	0.68
35-39	3.14	1.43	94.32	94.28	1.56	3.04	0.65	0.82
40-44	2.40	1.14	94.28	92.09	2.36	5.52	0.63	0.96
45-49	1.98	0.97	93.52	88.18	3.52	9.41	0.66	1.13
50-54	1.67	0.95	92.14	80.92	5.26	16.28	0.64	1.32
55-59	1.41	0.87	90.44	7 5.61	7.28	21.58	0.56	1.29
60+	1.24	0.92	81.60	52.46	16.03	44.25	0.54	1.03

Table 11 (Contd.)

Mid-Western:								
All Ages	34.69	26.13	60.85	65.45	3.39	6.98	0.70	0.80
10-14	96.34	93.62	3.47	5.96	0.04	0.07	0.06	0.09
15-19	75.71	47.80	22.98	50.13	0.20	0.17	0.49	0.71
20-24	29.18	8.34	68.39	89.21	0.57	0.45	1.25	1.03
25-29	9.68	2.40	87.87	95.29	0.89	0.88	1.15	0.90
30-34	4.87	1.32	92.50	95.50	1.27	1.94	1.04	0.87
35-39	2.90	0.90	93.95	93.93	1.98	3.99	0.92	0.92
40-44	2.17	0.89	93.45	89.84	3.38	7.99	0.75	0.97
45-49	1.70	0.68	92.21	84.75	5.15	13.12	0.73	1.09
50-54	1.54	0.66	89.13	74.84	8.34	22.58	0.69	1.32
55-59	1.32	0.70	86.94	67.51	10.78	29.74	0.63	1.28
60+	1.16	0.78	74.67	44.32	22.89	52.35	0.64	1.09
Far-Western:								
All Ages	34.29	23.00	61.91	67.39	2.97	8.40	0.35	0.48
10-14	96.95	93.78	2.82	5.76	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.08
15-19	75.07	40.08	23.43	57.96	0.19	0.23	0.25	0.33
20-24	26.00	4.62	72.06	93.41	0.56	0.55	0.56	0.44
25-29	7.97	0.95	90.09	96.70	0.92	1.31	0.57	0.54
30-34	3.74	0.63	94.07	95.92	1.31	2.56	0.55	0.57
35-39	2.27	0.43	94.93	93.61	1.98	5.09	0.50	0.61
40-44	1.69	0.50	94.59	89.01	3.06	9.46	0.42	0.69
45-49	1.24	0.39	93.83	83.26	4.31	15.21	0.36	0.78
50-54	0.96	0.36	91.86	73.43	6.62	24.66	0.30	0.75
55-59	0.95	0.38	90.17	66.27	8.23	31.54	0.29	0.77
60+	0.92	0.57	79.89	42.97	18.07	53.82	0.35	0.68

Source: CBS, 1993, Vol. I, Part XI, Table 34.

Note: Same as Table 9.

6.   Factors in Rising Age at Marriage

It was noticed that there has been an increase in the age at marriage of men and women between 1961 and 1991 in Nepal. This has apparently been achieved mainly due to the tendency of younger persons to postpone marriage. There may be a combination of factors contributing to this. Expansion of literacy, education and health services, development of other sectors such as transport and communication, the increasing urbanization and the fixation of the legal minimum age at marriage by Mulki Ain of 1961, may have all contributed to the rising age at marriage. According to the Mulki Ain, the legal minimum age at marriage in Nepal is 21 years for males and 18 years for females without consent and 18 for males and 16 for females with consent of parents. Literacy and urbanization are two variables considered here for which data are available in the censuses.

6.1   Effect of Literacy

Literacy and education are expected to contribute to a rise in age at marriage. The mechanism of the relationship operates in more than one way. The number of years a person spends in school, contributes to the postponement of marriage. This results in the postponement not only of his/her marriage but also of the partner. This is supported by the fact that the age difference between bride and groom changed only slightly between 1961 and 1991. During this period, men postponed their marriage by 1.9 years on the average and women by 2.7 years and the age difference between brides and grooms dropped only by 0.8 years (Table 6).

Literacy and education also cause changes in attitudes and practices leading to reduction in marriages at very young ages.

Proportion single in the young age groups, upto 25 years, are presented for the literate men and women in Table 12. Literacy classification of marital status was not available in 1971 and age classification of marital status by literacy was not available in the 1991 census.

In the case of females, proportion single is significantly higher among literate compared to the illiterates in each age group as well as over all ages. This has not been exhibited clearly in the case of males especially in 1961. In the 1991 census, however, the overall proportion single among men was more than twice as high in literate as in illiterates.

6.2   Effect of Urbanization

It is expected that the age at entry into marital union of men and women would be influenced by their residence in rural or urban area. In urban society, young people may find many choices such as education, employment etc.. which are important alternatives to early marriage.

Table 12:   Proportions Singles by Literacy Status and Sex, Selected Age Groups, Nepal, 1961-1991.

Year & Age Group	Percent Single			
	Illiterate		Literate	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1961				
10-14	89.9	74.7	86.0	89.7
15-19	64.0	25.5	60.6	46.4
20-24	27.4	5.2	24.8	14.6
25 & over	4.1	0.9	3.4	3.6
10 & over	28.9	14.9	27.4	36.2
1981				
10-14	80.4	83.6	80.1	84.3
15-19	68.2	45.3	70.9	52.7
20-24	37.6	11.5	38.6	18.8
25 & over	**	**	**	**
10 & over	27.8	19.9	22.8	27.7
1991				
10-14	**	**	**	**
15-19	**	**	**	**
20-24	**	**	**	**
25 & over	**	**	**	**
10 & over	19.8	16.1	49.1	58.6

Source: CBS, 1968, Vol. III, Part VI, Table 7
CBS, 1987, Table 5.22
CBS, 1993, Vol. 1, Part XI, Table 36

**   data not available

Proportion single by age, of men and women are shown by rural and urban residence in Table 13. Proportion single at each age and across all ages are higher in urban than in rural for both men and women in all the censuses without exception. This phenomenon is a result of two factors. One, the way of life in urban areas may contribute to postponement of marriage. Two, the rural to urban migration stream usually is biased towards young persons in single status. Whether it is causation or selectivity, urbanization does seem to be clearly related to higher age at marriage for men as well as women.

Table 13: Proportions Singles by Rural / Urban Residence, Sex and Selected Age Groups, Nepal, 1961-1991.

Year & Age Group	Urban		Rural	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1961				
10-14	96.1	89.8	88.6	73.6
15-19	74.6	42.3	61.9	23.6
20-24	39.8	12.2	24.4	4.5
10 & over	34.2	21.6	28.2	14.9
1981				
10-14	89.4	90.3	84.8	85.4
15-19	82.9	61.3	73.4	48.3
20-24	54.8	22.1	39.6	12.4
10 & over	41.8	29.2	34.6	22.9
1991				
10-14	96.9	94.9	95.6	92.1
15-19	87.9	66.4	78.4	51.2
20-24	57.1	24.6	35.2	11.3
10 & over	41.9	30.9	34.9	25.1

Source: CBS, 1968, Vol. III, Part VI, Table 7
CBS, 1984, Vol. II, Table 15 & Vol. Ill, Table 13
CBS, 1993, Vol. 1, Part XI, Table 34.
CBS, 1994, Vol. II, Table 9.

7.   Nuptiality Parameters and Differentials

7.1   Nuptiality Indexes

There have been several attempts to summarize the nuptiality patterns into single indexes. One such index is Coale's Index of proportion married Im. This is a ratio of the weighted sum of married women to the weighted sum of all women where the weights in age groups are the age - specific fertility rates of Hutterites'. If all women are married, Im would be equal to unity. The non-marriage is indicated by (1-Im). This part of non-marriage has been partitioned into single, widowed, divorced and separated statuses with corresponding individual indexes. Thus a change in Im can be appropriately ascribed to the component parts in a quantitative manner. These are also discussed in the context of countries in Asia and the Pacific (Smith, 1978).

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[1] $I_m = \Sigma\, F_i m_i\, /\, \Sigma\, F_i w_i$

Where F; = Hutterite Fertility Rate in age group i; mi and wi are respectively the number of married women and all women in age group i.

The indexes of proportion married (lm), proportion single (Is), proportion widowed (1w), proportion divorced (Id) and proportion separated (lp) have been computed for Nepal and its regions for 1981 and 1991 and shown in Table 14.

Between 1981 and 1991 the index of proportion married Inn declined from 0.854 to 0.844. This is accounted for by increase in the index of single to most extent and by index of separated to a slight extent.

There has also been a decline in the index of proportion married in rural as well as urban areas, the decline being greater in urban areas. There is a very slight decrease also in the index of widowhood in both urban and rural areas. The compensation essentially came from the single category although the divorced and separated categories also contributed. Proportion single had the greatest share of non - marriage, namely, 0.126 out of 0.149 (84.6%) in rural and 0.209 out of 0.227 (92.0%) in urban.

With regard to the Ecological zones, the pattern of change is different. The index of married declined in Hill and Terai whereas it increased in the Mountain zone. This has been the result of a drop in the index of single from 0. 168 to 0. 155. A slight drop in the widowhood index and a slight increase in the divorced/separated index are also noticed in the case of the Mountain zone. The drop in the index of married is more in Terai than in Hill zone. In Terai there is also a slight drop in index of widowed. In both Hill and Terai the index of single increased and this increase was much greater in Terai than in Hill. It may be noted however that the index of single has been low, nearly half as high in Terai as in Hill.

The pattern of change from 1981 to 1991 among the development regions has been different. In the Eastern, Central and Western regions, the index of married exhibited decline and the index of single increased. In these three regions, a slight decrease in the index of widowed and a slight increase in the Index of divorced/separated has been observed. Both in Mid-Western and Far-Western regions, the increase in the index of married and a drop in Index single were observed. Increase in index of divorced/separated was also observed in both these regions. In addition, the Far-Western region also exhibited an increase in the index of widowed.

Table 14:   Nuptiality Indexes for Nepal, Rural-Urban Areas, Geographic and
             Development Regions

Area/Region	Year	Single Is	married Im	widowed Iw	divorced Id	seperated Ip	Proportion currently not married (Iu)
Nuptiality Indexes Proportion							
Nepal	1981	0.126	0.854	0.016	0.004	0.000	0.146
	1991	0.134	0.844	0.016	0.002	0.004	0.156
Rural/Urban Residence:							
Rural	1981	0.122	0.857	0.017	0.004	0.000	0.143
	1991	0.126	0.851	0.016	0.003	0.004	0.149
Urban	1981	0.189	0.795	0.013	0.003	0.000	0.205
	1991	0.209	0.773	0.012	0.002	0.004	0.227
Ecological Zones:							
Mountain	1981	0.168	0.808	0.018	0.006	0.000	0.192
	1991	0.155	0.815	0.020	0.004	0.006	0.185
Hill	1981	0.163	0.817	0.015	0.005	0.000	0.183
	1991	0.172	0.805	0.015	0.003	0.005	0.195
Terai	1981	0.076	0.903	0.018	0.003	0.000	0.097
	1991	0.095	0.884	0.015	0.002	0.004	0.116
Development Regions:							
Eastern	1981	0.151	0.827	0.017	0.005	0.000	0.173
	1991	0.177	0.799	0.016	0.002	0.006	0.201
Central	1981	0.111	0.868	0.017	0.004	0.000	0.132
	1991	0.122	0.858	0.014	0.002	0.004	0.142
Western	1981	0.133	0.848	0.015	0.004	0.000	0.152
	1991	0.137	0.842	0.014	0.002	0.004	0.158
Mid-Western	1981	0.124	0.854	0.017	0.005	0.000	0.146
	1991	0.115	0.859	0.017	0.005	0.004	0.141
Far-Western	1981	0.102	0.881	0.015	0.002	0.000	0.119
	1991	0.084	0.888	0.023	0.002	0.003	0.112

Source: CBS, 1987, Table 5.20, p. 112
         CBS, 1993, Vol. 1, Part XI, Table 34
         CBS, 1994, Vol. 11, Table 9
         CBS, 1995, Vol. IV, Table 17 Smith, Peter C., 1978, pp. 1-3.
*   Divorce and separated are in a merge category for 1981.

Thus there are regional and geographic variations not only in marital status patterns but also in the way these patterns changed over the years.

7.2   Coale's Model of Age Pattern of Marriage

Coale has identified that the age pattern of first marriage takes the form of a exponential (Coale, 1971) with three parameters describing the beginning age, at which a significant number of marriages take place (a0), the speed (tempo) with which marriages

take place (k), and the proportion eventually marrying (C). When k=1, it means the time-span of the entire marriage process is identical to that implied in the model. When k is less than 1, the time-span in the population under consideration is less than that of the model; as a consequence the entire marriage process has to be completed in a shorter duration, thus signifying a greater speed or tempo of marriage. Thus, a lower value of k signifies a greater tempo or speed and vice versa.

The estimates of the three parameters a0, k, C are obtained using the age-marital status distributions of 1971, 1981 and 1991 censuses for Nepal and its rural and urban areas, and are shown in Table 15.

Table 15:   Coale's Nuptiality Parameters a0, k and C During the Period 1971 to 1991 for Nepal and by Rural / Urban Residence.

	Coale's Nuptiality Parameters								
	1971			1981			1991		
Area & Sex	a0	k	C	a0	k	C	a0	k	C
Nepal									
Male	12.0	0.774	0.984	11.8	0.783	0.926	13.4	0.704	0.984
Female	11.1	0.501	0.992	11.1	0.536	0.971	12.1	0.528	0.991
Rural									
Male	-	-	-	11.6	0.792	0.928	13.4	0.677	0.984
Female	-	-	-	11.0	0.536	0.971	12.0	0.519	0.992
Urban									
Male	-	-	-	13.9	0.756	0.901	14.0	0.836	0.979
Female	-	-	-	12.1	0.562	0.961	12.9	0.589	0.980

Source: CBS, 1975, Vol. II, Part II, Table 15
         CBS, 1984, Vol. II, Table 15
         CBS, 1993, Vol. 1, Part Xl, Table 34
         Smith, 1978, pp. 1-3.

Note: a0 =The earliest age at which significant proportion of marriages start,
         k= The speed of marriage and
         C= the ultimate proportion married.

The starting age of marriages (a0) has all along been lower for females than males in both rural and urban. Also the starting age of marriages has been increasing for males and females in rural as well as urban.

The universality of marriage is indicated by C which has been 97 per cent or more for females. The value for males had been slightly less than the value for females, except in 1981 when the male proportion was significantly lower. However slight the difference, the universality of marriage is of a lower degree in urban than in rural areas.

When age at marriage rises, it usually does on account of young people postponing their marriage. When there is postponement of marriage at younger ages (in contrast to older ages), this results in the shortening of the marriageable age span indicated by a reduction in the estimate of k. In Nepal the mean age at marriage has been rising and this rise has been through postponement of marriage of the young people. The reduction in k during 1981-1991 from 0.783 to 0.704 for males and from 0.536 to 0.528 for females may be seen from Table 15. This reduction is even more pronounced in the case of rural areas which means that in rural areas, a postponement of marriage at the young ages has resulted in an increased tempo or speed of marriage. In urban areas however, not only the marriages got postponed but even the speed or the tempo of marriage got reduced; it was more so in the case of males than females. Of course the speed of marriage has all along been significantly greater for females than males. This is because in this culture, if the female does not get married before a certain age, the chances of her being able to marry get reduced significantly. Such an upper age limit may not strictly apply for males. This type of phenomenon, for males and females, is more true in rural than in urban areas.

8.   Effect of Changes in Marital Status Distribution on Birth Rate

Over the years there have been changes in the marital status distribution and these changes are bound to have their impact on fertility. While the impact could be in terms of both life time and period fertility, the immediate interest here is on period fertility. The decline in mortality over the years contributes to reduction in proportion widowed at each age which in turn increases the proportion married. This phenomenon is likely to enhance fertility in the absence of contraception. On the other hand, the increase in age at marriage is likely to contribute to a drop in the proportion married particularly at the early ages, thus contributing to a reduction in fertility. In the case of Nepal, the age at marriage, measured by the SMAM, has increased for females from 15.4 in 1961 to 18.1 years in 1991 (Table 6). The proportion of widowed women among the ever married for ages 10+, dropped from 16.8 per cent in 1961 to 9.7 per cent in 1991. The combined effect of these two opposing factors had resulted in a decrease in the proportion married for ages 10+, from 69.2 per cent in 1961 to 65.7 per cent in 1991 (Table 3). The resulting fertility reflects the net effect of these two opposing factors. It is not easy to separately measure the fertility - reducing effect of the rise in age at marriage and fertility - increasing effect of the reduced widowhood. One convenient way is to measure these effects by age group of women as shown in Table 16. The age-specific marital fertility rates of 1991 are kept the same in all computations. If 1961 age schedule of proportion married remains unchanged then the births in each age group would be as shown in

Col.(5). Since 1991 age schedule of proportion married are different, they yielded the number of births in each age group as shown in col.(6). The actual births (Col.6) fell short of the expected births (Col.5) in age groups 15-19 and 20-24; this may be attributed to rise in age at marriage since at these ages widowhood effect would be very little. The actual births exceeded the expected births at ages beyond 25 and this may be attributed to decline in widowhood since at these ages the effect of rise in age at marriage is negligible, assuming of course that there has been no significant change in divorced/separated categories.

Table 16:   Effect of Rising Age at Marriage and Declining Widowhood on Crude Birth Rate

Age Group	Total Women	1991 Marital Fertility Rate	Proportion Married 1961	Proportion Married 1991	Expected Briths	Actual Briths	(Actual-Exp) Briths
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)=(6)-(5)
15-19	902777	0.209	0.7142	0.455	134755	85849	-48906
20-24	847924	0.336	0.9157	0.8509	260885	242423	-18462
25-29	721712	0.289	0.9371	0.9413	195455	196331	876
30-34	599465	0.223	0.9183	0.9513	122758	127170	4412
35-39	509566	0.161	0.8665	0.9389	71087	77027	5940
40-44	431631	0.085	0.7832	0.9085	28734	33331	4597
45-49	358865	0.032	0.6859	0.8633	7876	9913	2037
				Births	821550	772044	49506
							(-67368+17862)
				CBR^2	44.4	41.8	-2.6
							(-3.6+1.0)
				% Change in CBR			-5.90%
							(8.1%-2.2%)
		Change in CBR	=	Due to rise in age at marriage	+		Due to decline in widowhood
		(-5.9%)		(-8.1%)			(2.2%)

Sources: CBS, 1968, Vol. 111, Part VI, Table 8
            CBS, 1975, Vol. II, part 11, Table 15
            CBS, 1993, Vol. I, Part XI, Table 34
            Tuladhar, et. al., 1977, pp. 27-29
            UN., 1983, pp. 32-35.
 1. No of births expected if 1961 Proportion married remained unchanged.
 2. The 1991 population of 18,491,097 was used in the denominator.

It is clear from Table 16 that, had the 1961 proportion married remained unchanged, the CBR was expected to be 44.4 in 1991. But the actual CBR was 41.8. The actual CBR was less than the expected CBR by 5.9 per cent. This was the net result of 8.1 per cent reduction caused by rising age at marriage and 2.22 per cent increase caused by declining widowhood. Thus the effect of rising age at marriage appears much greater than the neutralizing effect of declining widowhood in the reduction of fertility.

9.   Conclusion

Marital status distribution has been changing over the years. The declining mortality has the effect of increasing the proportion married through reduction in widowhood. The rising age at marriage has also contributed to reduction in proportion married particularly at young ages. There are also regional and rural-urban variations owing to differences in marriage practices as well as mortality differences.

The age at marriage has been rising for both males and females, somewhat faster for females than males, thus contributing to a narrowing of the inter-spousal age gap. Rural-urban and regional variations do seem to exist also in age at marriage. Lower age at marriage in rural than urban, in Terai compared to Hill and Mountain, in Far-Western and Mid-Western regions compared to others have been observed. Literacy, education and urbanization seem to have had a role in the postponement of marriage for both males and females.

Marriage is still universal in Nepal; the age pattern of marriage has been slowly changing. Marriages do not take place any more at very early ages as they once used to. The tempo of marriage has been changing and does vary between rural-urban and between sexes.

The changing marital status distribution of females has implications for fertility. The fertility-reducing effect of rising age at marriage seems to be stronger than the fertility-increasing effect of the declining widowhood.

Annex

Number of Persons, of All Marital Statuses, by Age and Sex for Rural / Urban, Ecological Zones and Development Regions, Nepal, 1991

Age-Group	Urban		Rural		Mountain		Hill		Terai	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total	664,147	607,451	15,754,384	5,949,107	502,809	516,818	2,861,022	3,089,620	3,054,700	2,950,120
10-14	110,575	98,213	11,099,228	1,019,270	89,954	84,182	560,800	540,972	559,049	492,329
15-19	98,959	90,451	779,076	824,041	66,022	69,796	404,017	445,105	407,996	399,591
20-24	94,614	91,570	634,665	765,914	58,204	65,911	325,426	401,564	345,649	390,009
25-29	78,364	75,376	569,904	650,765	50,191	55,688	271,380	327,301	326,697	343,152
30-34	63,603	57,431	488,736	544,531	44,375	46,656	230,701	261,922	277,263	293,384
35-39	54,671	47,222	461,558	463,796	39,810	39,660	206,854	229,689	269,565	241,669
40-44	41,424	35,489	368,568	397,238	32,333	35,619	174,451	198,592	203,208	198,516
45-49	34,836	28,893	339,526	330,907	28,429	29,382	159,500	169,837	186,433	160,581
50-54	25,724	22,556	281,722	268,482	26,951	26,793	144,256	145,574	136,239	118,671
55-59	19,755	17,171	230,285	198,746	21,298	19,063	119,181	108,044	109,561	88,810
60-64	15,772	15,898	199,707	200,268	18,904	19,325	103,232	104,492	93,343	92,349
65+	25,850	27,181	301,409	285,149	26,338	24,743	161,224	156,528	139,697	131,059

Annex
(Contd)

Age-Group	EDR Male	EDR Female	CDR Male	CDR Female	WDR Male	WDR Female	MWDR Male	MWDR Female	FWDR Male	FWDR Female
Total	1,569,234	1,578,625	2,228,955	2,162,774	1,248,444	1,392,775	818,332	831,652	553,566	590,732
10-14	292,892	273,258	393,170	346,501	252,703	242,367	158,855	152,269	112,183	103,088
15-19	222,122	225,634	298,901	288,414	169,140	190,350	113,183	125,869	74,689	84,225
20-24	181,444	208,119	267,160	291,583	122,594	170,737	96,211	110,408	61,870	76,637
25-29	162,270	178,279	240,247	246,711	107,345	145,904	83,614	91,626	54,792	63,621
30-34	138,703	146,507	201,250	207,315	96,455	122,025	70,570	73,690	45,361	52,425
35-39	128,938	121,834	184,699	168,612	92,673	108,001	66,085	65,591	43,834	46,980
40-44	99,383	100,883	143,384	143,594	78,089	91,883	53,669	55,102	35,467	41,265
45-49	88,903	82,584	129,479	119,794	74,143	78,330	48,806	45,408	33,031	33,684
50-54	69,418	63,880	103,613	95,081	66,729	66,342	39,994	37,087	27,692	28,648
55-59	60,513	52,080	82,914	72,404	54,595	48,952	30,496	23,974	21,522	18,507
60-64	48,142	49,257	72,844	74,905	50,813	48,903	25,334	23,602	18,346	19,499
65+	76,506	76,310	111,294	107,860	83,165	78,981	31,515	27,026	24,779	22,153

Source: CBS, 1993, Vol. I, Part XI, Table 34
CBS, 1994, Vol. II, Table 9
CBS, 1995, Vol. IV, Table 17.

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