

Exploring the Marital Trend of Youths in Uttar Pradesh, India with Educational Attainment by Linking NFHS and SRS Data in A Gendered Outlook

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ABSTRACT

Youth age is very critical year of life because it has a strong association with Education, Employment and Marriage which shapes the future of remanning life. Marital Age is a crucial aspect of demographic analysis as it has immense importance due to its strong association with social, economic and demographic change in population dynamics. This research investigates the intricate interplay between Educational attainment and Marital patterns among male and female youths in Uttar Pradesh, India with a specific focus on Urban-Rural differentials and aims to explore how educational years of schooling influencing Median Age at marriage. The study is based on secondary data sources extracted from NFHS-3 (2005-06), NFHS-4 (2015-16), NFHS-5 (2019-21) as well as Sample Registration System and Office of Registrar General of India. Data correlates between educational year of schooling and the Median Age at marriage, Legal age of marriage and Marriage rate among youth individuals in urban and rural areas of Uttar Pradesh for both males and females. The study underscores, As the level of education increases, there is a clear trend of the median age at marriage increasing for both women and men youth across all three survey periods and the individuals with higher levels of education (12 or more years completed) tend to have a significantly higher median age at first marriage compared to those with lower level of education or no schooling. Encouraging higher education specially for rural females can contribute to delaying marriage and lead to various demographic, social and economic benefits.

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KEYWORDS: Educational Attainment, Marital Trends, Marriage Age Urban-Rural Differentials

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background: Youth is the most energetic and productive section of a society in any nation. A country's ability and potential for growth is determined by the size and strength of its youth population because this demographic advantage could play an impactful role in achieving the nation's ambitious targets. In India, "National Youth Policy 2014" defines persons between the age-group of 15-29 years are considered youths. The United Nations defines 'youth' as persons between the age-group of 15- 24 years.

Entity/Instrument/ Organization	Age (years)
UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO	Youth: 15–24
UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA	Youth: 15–24
The African Youth Charter	Youth: 15–35

Youth age is very critical year of life because it has a strong association with Education, Employment and Marriage which shapes future of remanning life. To empower youth of the country to achieve their full potential it is very necessary to engage them in education and employment during the age-group of 15-29.

The age at which individuals marry is a critical demographic variable that impacts social, economic, and health outcomes, both at the individual and societal levels. Early or delayed marriage has profound implications for education, employment, and reproductive health, among other factors. The age at marriage is influenced by several factors, including socio-economic status, cultural norms, and educational attainment. While global trends show a gradual shift toward later marriages in many regions, early marriage still persists in developing countries, including India, particularly in rural areas.

Globally, the age at marriage has been rising, driven by increased access to education, greater female workforce participation, and evolving social norms. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the global average age of marriage has steadily increased over the past few decades, with more individuals marrying in their late 20s or early 30s (UNFPA, 2022). The postponement of marriage is most notable in high-income countries, but similar trends are visible in some middle-income countries, where access to education and improved economic conditions are promoting later marriages (DeSilva, 2019).

At the national level, India presents a diverse picture of marriage age differentials. The median age of

marriage for women in India has been increasing, but early marriage remains prevalent, particularly in rural and less developed regions. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), conducted in 2019-2021, 23.3% of women aged 20-24 years were married before the age of 18, which is considered early marriage under the legal framework of India (IIPS, 2021). However, the survey also noted that the median age at marriage for women had risen to 22.1 years in urban areas and 18.3 years in rural areas, highlighting the continuing disparity between urban and rural regions.

Uttar Pradesh, one of the largest and most populous states in India, presents a unique case for studying marriage age differentials. According to NFHS-5 data, the state has a significant proportion of women married before the legal age of 18, especially in rural areas. In Uttar Pradesh, 30.9% of women aged 20-24 years were married before 18, reflecting the high prevalence of early marriage. However, educational attainment has been shown to be a key determinant in delaying marriage. The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) data indicate that women with higher levels of education, particularly secondary and higher secondary education, tend to marry later (NSSO, 2018).

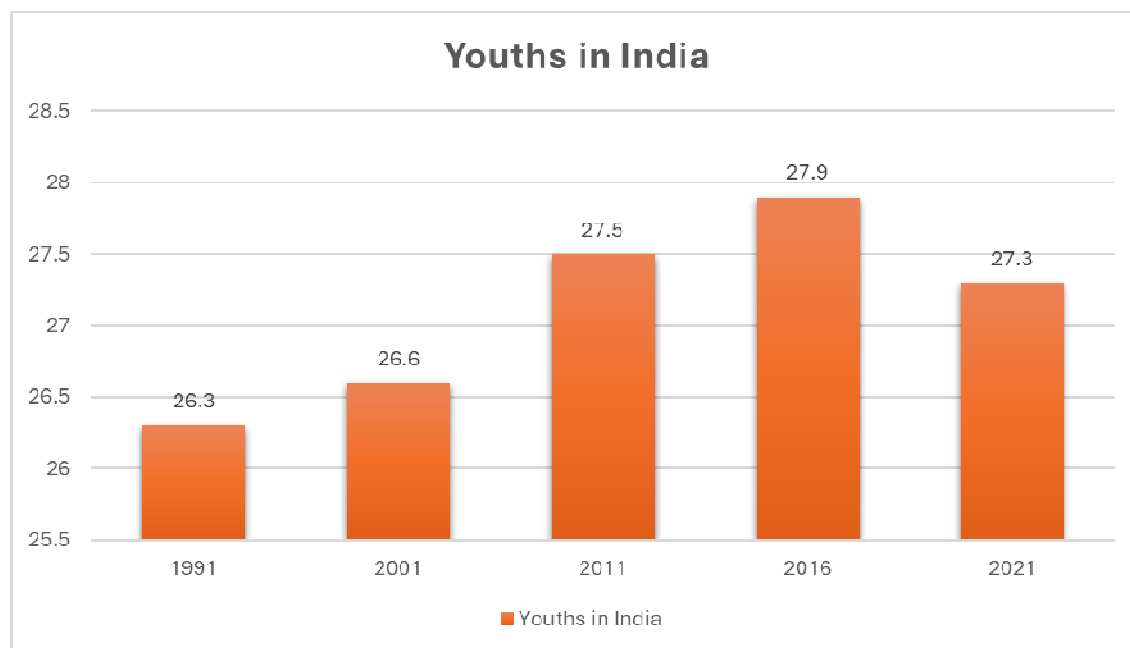
1.2. Youth Population in India and Uttar Pradesh: The demographic Dividend: India has 27.3% youth population more than 37 crore, one-fifth of world's youth and Uttar Pradesh has 29.9% youth population nearly 7 crores between the age-group of 15-29 years as per data of 2021.

Year	Total Population ('000)			Youth Population Age 15-29 Years ('000)			Percentage Share of Youth Population Age 15-29 Years in Total Population		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
1991	838568	435208	403360	222747	114292	108455	26.3	26.3	26.9
2001	1028610	532157	496454	273402	141819	131584	26.6	26.6	26.5
2011	1210855	623270	587585	333365	172911	160453	27.5	27.7	27.3
2016	1291074	664184	626890	359600	188016	171584	27.9	28.3	27.4
2021	1363006	700623	662383	371426	194576	176850	27.3	27.8	26.7

Table 1: Total Population and Youth Population aged 15-29 years in India

Source: Census 1991, 2001 and 2011, Office of the Registrar General of India and

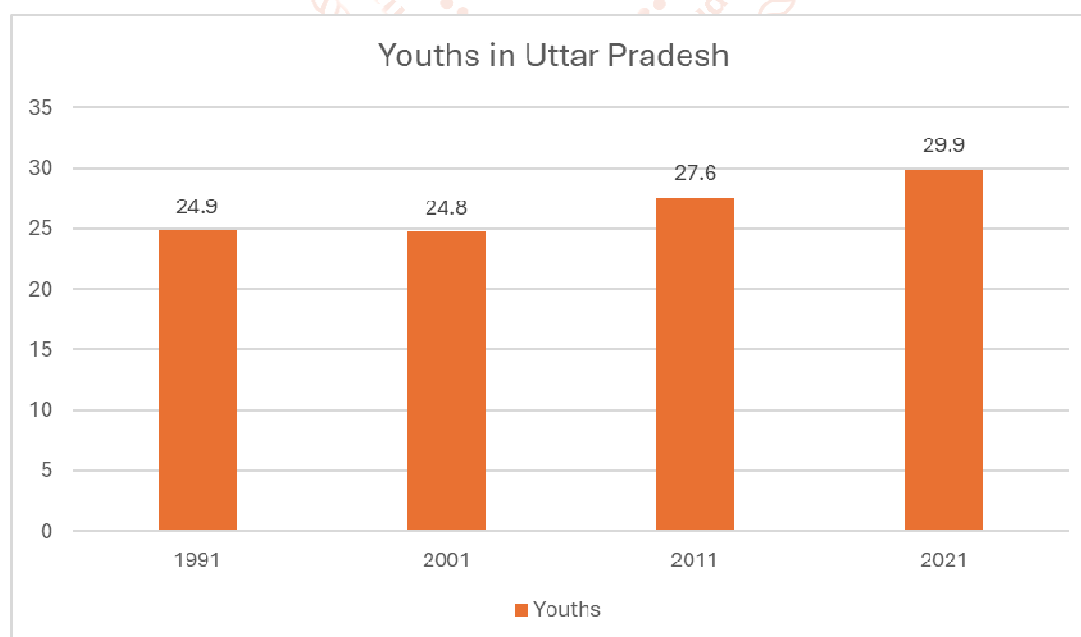
Report of the Technical Group on Population, Projections for India and States 2011-2036, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, July 2020.



Graph 1: Increasing Youth in India (1991-2021)

Year	Youth Population					
	Youths '(000)'	Percentage of Youths	Male '(000)'	Percentage of Male Youths	Female '(000)'	Percentage of Female Youths
1991	34594	24.9	18432	53.3	16162	46.7
2001	41149	24.8	21932	53.3	19217	46.7
2011	55199	27.6	29179	52.8	26019	47.2
2021	68947	29.9	36619	53.1	32328	46.9

Table 2: Youth population (aged 15-29 years) and their share in Total Population in Uttar Pradesh
Source: Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections for India and States 2011-2036, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, July 2020.



Graph 2: Increasing Youth Population in Uttar Pradesh (1991-2021)

Age Group	1991			2001			2011			2021		
	Person %	Male %	Female %	Person %	Male %	Female %	Person %	Male %	Female %	Person %	Male %	Female %
0-14	40.3	40.0	40.6	40.9	41.0	40.8	35.7	36.0	35.4	30.2	30.6	29.5
15-29	24.6	24.9	24.8	24.8	25.0	24.4	27.6	27.9	27.3	29.9	30.4	29.2
30-59	27.3	27.1	27.5	26.9	26.5	27.4	28.1	27.6	28.8	31.8	31.3	32.6
60+	6.9	7.2	6.5	7.0	7.1	7.0	7.7	7.7	7.8	8.1	7.7	8.6
Age Not Stated	0.7	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Population by age-group in Uttar Pradesh*Source: Census 1991, 2001 and 2011, Office of the Registrar General of India.*

Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections for India and States 2011-2036, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, July 2020.

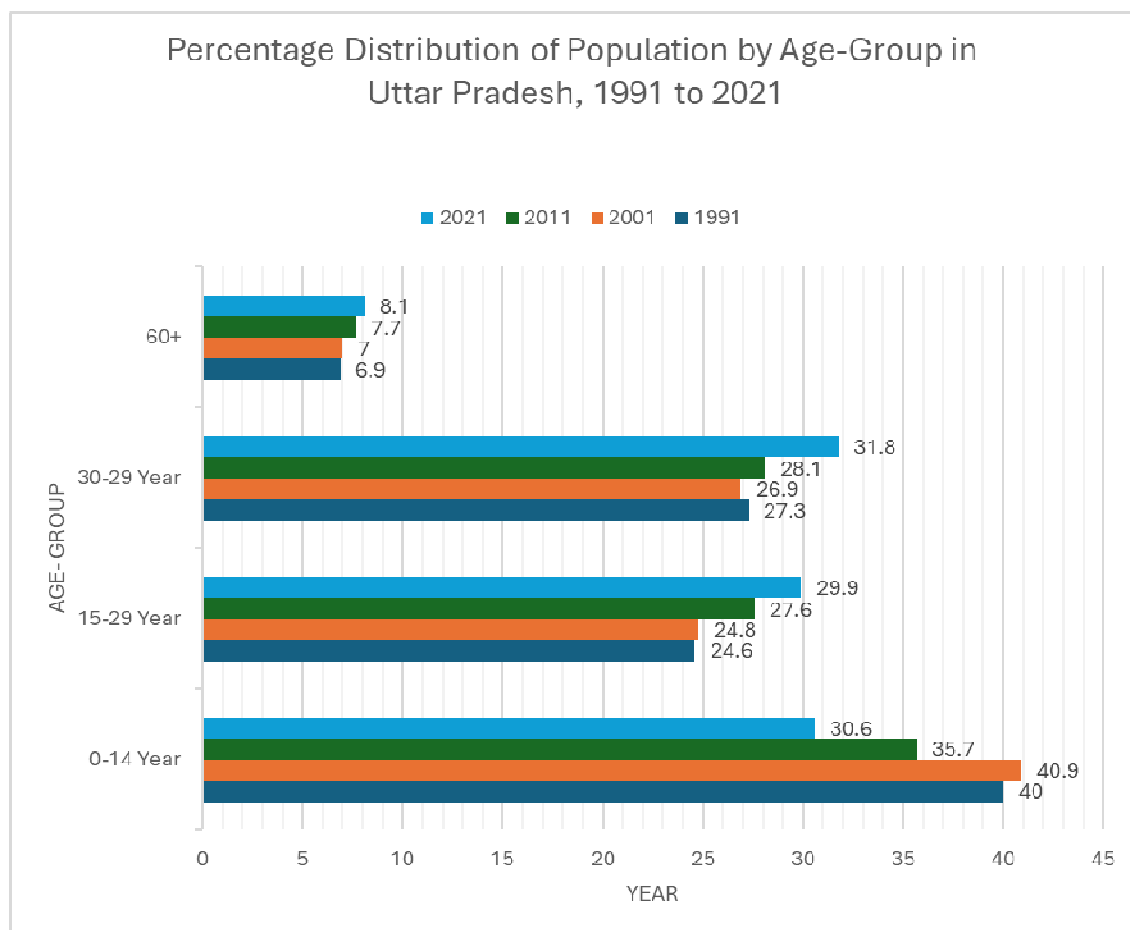
**Graph 3: Trend of Age-Group of population in Uttar Pradesh (1991-2021)**

Table 3, visualised in graph 3, illustrates the demographic shifts in four age groups over a 30-year period, for the years 1991, 2001, 2011, and 2021. The age groups represented are 0-14 years, 15-29 years, 30-59 years, and 60+ years. For 0-14 Year Age Group, in 1991, this age group constituted 40% of the population slightly increased to 40.9% in 2001. It then decreased to 35.7% in 2011 and by 2021, it further declined to 30.6%. For 15-29 Year Age Group in 1991, this age group made up 24.6% of the population, saw a slight increase to 24.8% in 2001. This percentage grew to 27.6% in 2011 and in 2021, it slightly increased again to 29.9%. For 30-59 Year Age Group accounted for 27.3% of the population in 1991, saw a marginal decline to 26.9% in 2001. In 2011, it increased to 28.1% and by 2021, this age group formed the largest segment, constituting 31.8% of the population. For 60+ Year Age Group constituted 6.9% of the population in 1991, slightly increased to 7% in 2001. In 2011, it further increased to 7.7% and by 2021, it reached 8.1%.

The data reveals a clear demographic trend of an aging population in Uttar Pradesh over the 30-year period. The proportion of young children (0-14 years) has been steadily declining, while the proportion of older adults (30-59 years and 60+ years) has been increasing. The age group of 15-29 years has also shown a rising trend, indicating a growing young adult population.

1.3. Review of Previous Studies: Marriage age in Uttar Pradesh remains a complex issue influenced by socio-cultural, economic, and educational factors. **Ajay Pandey and Dilip C. Nath (2016)** highlighted that marriage rates in Uttar Pradesh are slowing in comparison to international standards, such as those in Sweden. However, the age of entry into marriage remains significantly lower than global benchmarks, reflecting persistent socio-cultural norms. **Brijesh P. Singh and Sonam Maheshwari (2014)** analysed the influence of socio-economic and demographic factors on marriage age. They concluded that variables such as place of residence, religion, wealth index, education, and occupation significantly determine the age at first marriage in India. **Marini (1978)** observed that education has a stronger influence on women's marriage timing compared to men. Women's access to education often results in delayed marriages, offering them more opportunities for personal and professional development. **C. A. Ramsheena and Nagaraju Gundemeda (2015)** emphasized the role of higher education in shaping marital choices. While higher education enables students to make more informed decisions, traditional societal norms often continue to influence their choices. **Ravi Prakash and Sulabha Parasuraman (2009)** noted that early marriage still prevails in traditional Indian society. They attributed this to normative life cycle sequencing, where education, employment, and marriage are often seen as successive stages that follow societal expectations. **Pandey and Talwar (1987)** found that females who marry at an early age exhibit higher cumulative fertility at younger ages, which can have long-term implications for their health and socio-economic status. **Gaurav Sankalp and Shalini Agrawal (2017)** argued that marrying after the age of 25 significantly contributes to the self-development of women. Delayed marriage allows women more time for education, career development, and personal growth. **K. G. Santhya et al (2008)** stressed the urgent need for programs in rural India to address the challenges associated with early marriage. They recommended improving sexual and reproductive health services for married young people. **Winter and Nambiath (2016)** highlighted the importance of safe and high-quality secondary education for girls. They emphasized the need for social protection measures, livelihood investments, and opportunities to delay marriage, enabling young people in rural areas to invest in their education and future. **Lata Gangadharan and Pushkar Maitra (2017)** examined the role of education in demographic transition in Pakistan. Their study demonstrated that education significantly influences the age at marriage and the duration to first conception, underlining its transformative potential. **Singh and Samant (2020)** examined how female education affects the age at marriage in Uttar Pradesh. Their study revealed that higher educational attainment among women significantly delays marriage age, citing sociocultural factors that prioritize education as key determinants.

Sharma et al. (2018) found that disparities in male and female educational levels in rural Uttar Pradesh contribute to substantial marriage age differentials. Their findings highlighted that women's education is more impactful than men's in delaying marriage age.

Gupta and Saxena (2019) explored the association between girls' schooling and child marriage in Uttar Pradesh. They noted that policies promoting secondary education for girls significantly reduced early marriages in economically backward regions.

Rao (2021) argued that literacy rates alone are insufficient to alter marriage norms. Rao's study suggested that empowering youth with vocational education had a stronger impact on delaying marriage in Uttar Pradesh. **Kumari and Tripathi (2017)** reported that urban areas of Uttar Pradesh with better access to higher education exhibit smaller gender differentials in marriage age compared to rural areas. **Agarwal et al. (2016)** highlighted that delayed marriages correlate with better awareness of reproductive health among youth who attain at least a secondary level of education in Uttar Pradesh. **Verma (2020)** focused on how caste-based educational inequalities influence marriage age. The study found that marginalized castes with low literacy rates experience earlier marriages, perpetuating socio-economic disadvantages. **Patel and Joshi (2018)** argued that promoting higher education for women in Uttar Pradesh is critical for reducing gender disparities in marriage age and improving social equity. **Mishra (2022)** examined how state-sponsored educational schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao impact the marriage age. The study reported an average increase of two years in the marriage age among beneficiaries. **Kumar et al. (2015)** found that families investing in their daughters' education view marriage as a secondary priority, contributing to later marriage ages in the region. **Jha and Singh (2018)** studied

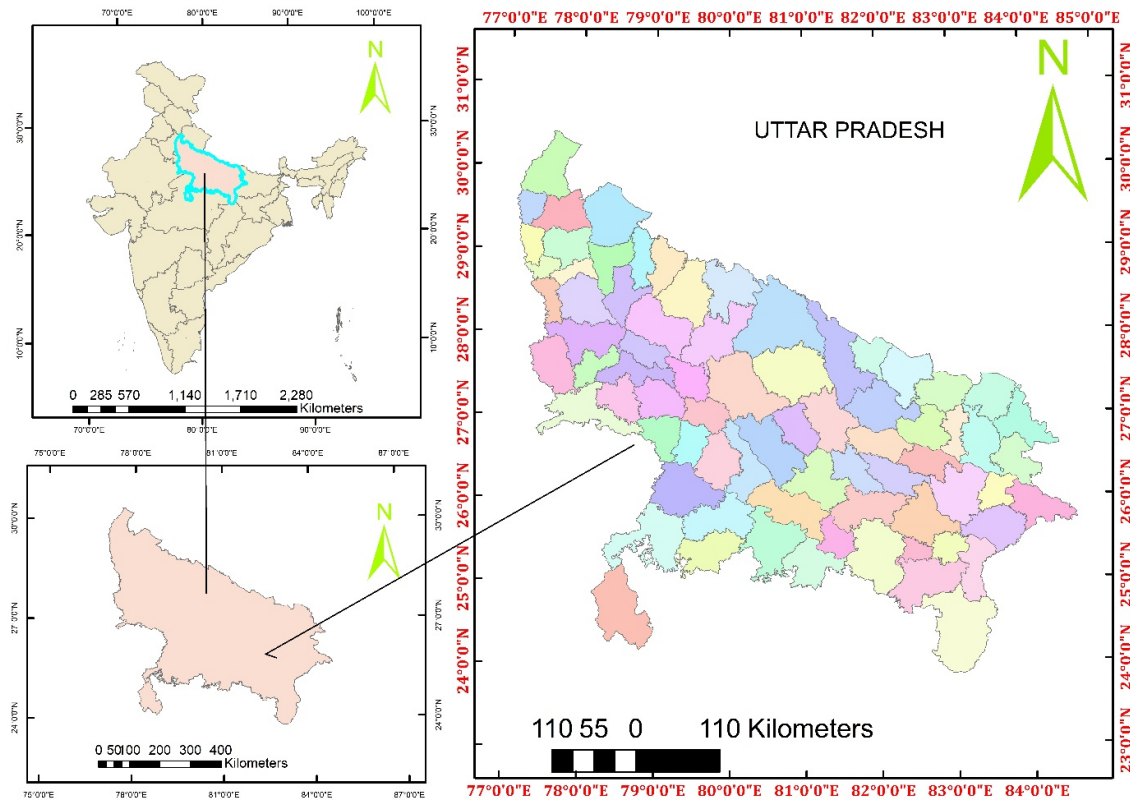
how dropout rates among girls in secondary education contribute to early marriages in Uttar Pradesh. They emphasized the need for policies to reduce school dropouts for improving marriage age metrics. **Prakash and Yadav (2019)** observed that economic constraints and lack of educational infrastructure in rural Uttar Pradesh hinder educational attainment, thereby reducing the marriage age of youth. **Saxena et al. (2020)** explored how societal attitudes towards female education affect marriage age. Their findings underscored the importance of addressing patriarchal norms in rural Uttar Pradesh. **Choudhary and Bhatnagar (2021)** revealed that vocational education programs targeting women contribute significantly to delaying marriages in semi-urban areas of Uttar Pradesh. **Yadav and Sharma (2017)** examined how early marriages hinder educational aspirations among youth, creating a vicious cycle of poverty and limited opportunities in Uttar Pradesh. **Kapoor (2018)** highlighted how access to co-educational schools in urban Uttar Pradesh has led to a decline in the marriage age differential between genders. **Mishra and Pandey (2019)** examined the role of parent-teacher associations in promoting girls' education and its impact on marriage age. Their findings suggest significant improvements in districts where these associations are active. **Das and Kumar (2020)** analysed data from the National Family Health Survey, finding that higher literacy rates among women in Uttar Pradesh directly correlate with a reduction in early marriages. **Joshi (2021)** focused on the urban-rural divide in educational attainment and its impact on the marriage age of youth in Uttar Pradesh. Joshi stressed the need for targeted rural educational policies. **Rastogi and Jain (2018)** identified the lack of digital education tools in rural Uttar Pradesh as a barrier to delaying marriage age, especially among female students. **Shukla et al. (2017)** studied how adolescent education programs influence attitudes toward marriage age. They found that such programs are highly effective in breaking early marriage norms. **Pathak and Singh (2019)** highlighted that the absence of gender-sensitive curriculum often perpetuates gender norms, influencing the marriage age of young girls in Uttar Pradesh. **Rani and Dubey (2020)** investigated how intergenerational education levels impact marriage age. They found that parents with higher education levels are more likely to delay their children's marriages. **Awasthi (2021)** emphasized the critical role of female mentors in schools to encourage educational continuity and delay marriage age in Uttar Pradesh. **Gupta and Srivastava (2019)** explored how income disparities interact with education levels to create regional variations in marriage age. They emphasized the need for region-specific interventions. **Roy et al. (2018)** found that educating boys on gender equality significantly reduced marriage age differentials by fostering supportive attitudes toward women's education. **Khan and Singh (2020)** highlighted that mobile learning initiatives significantly impact educational attainment and marriage age among youth in resource-limited areas of Uttar Pradesh. **Rathore (2022)** demonstrated that education policies promoting scholarships for girls in Uttar Pradesh led to delayed marriages, with significant effects observed in marginalized communities. **Tripathi and Yadav (2018)** emphasized that early exposure to career counselling programs in schools has a profound effect on marriage age among girls in Uttar Pradesh. **Sharma and Kapoor (2019)** studied how cultural resistance to girls' education in specific regions of Uttar Pradesh continues to influence marriage age negatively, despite broader educational reforms. **Tiwari and Gupta (2019)** examined the role of higher education opportunities in delaying the marriage age among women in Uttar Pradesh. Their study highlighted the influence of university enrollment in reducing early marriages, especially in urban areas. **Verma and Mishra (2020)** focused on the relationship between employment opportunities for women and marriage age. They found that higher female labour force participation is associated with a rise in the average marriage age in the state. **Chaturvedi and Singh (2021)** analysed the effects of public awareness campaigns on early marriage. Their findings emphasized the success of such campaigns in promoting educational continuity and delaying marriage in rural areas. **Rao and Sharma (2018)** investigated the intersection of caste, education, and marriage age in Uttar Pradesh. They observed that caste hierarchies often influence educational access, impacting marriage trends in marginalized communities. **Srivastava and Kumar (2020)** studied the role of scholarships for underprivileged youth in delaying marriage age. They noted that financial assistance for education significantly reduces early marriages in economically disadvantaged families. **Kumar et al. (2021)** explored how distance to schools and colleges affects educational attainment and marriage age. They found that improving transportation infrastructure is critical to addressing this barrier in Uttar Pradesh. **Dubey and Singh (2019)** assessed the effectiveness of life skills education in schools in promoting awareness about the consequences of early marriage. Their study highlighted a notable shift in attitudes among adolescents in districts where such programs were implemented. **Roy and Das (2020)** examined the impact of online education platforms in rural Uttar Pradesh. They concluded that increased access to digital learning tools contributes to higher educational attainment and delayed marriages. **Pandey and Gupta (2018)** studied the relationship between maternal education and the marriage age of daughters. They found that educated mothers were more likely to delay their daughters' marriages, emphasizing the intergenerational impact of education. **Chauhan and Rai (2021)**

explored the role of women's empowerment initiatives in changing marriage norms. Their findings showed that programs promoting self-reliance and financial independence significantly influence marriage age. **Kaur and Tripathi (2020)** analysed the role of school infrastructure in influencing marriage age. They highlighted how well-equipped schools with proper facilities encourage longer educational participation and delayed marriages, particularly in rural Uttar Pradesh. **Bhatnagar and Srivastava (2019)** explored the impact of free midday meal schemes in promoting school attendance and delaying early marriage among girls in Uttar Pradesh. They found a strong correlation between nutritional support and improved educational outcomes. **Patel and Yadav (2021)** examined the effectiveness of rural girls' hostels in reducing dropout rates and early marriages. They observed that safe accommodations significantly improve educational retention among adolescent girls. **Kumari and Sharma (2020)** investigated the influence of cultural festivals and community celebrations on marriage timing. Their findings indicated that traditional ceremonies often align with early marriage practices, particularly in rural settings. **Rastogi and Verma (2021)** analysed the role of mobile health education units in raising awareness about early marriage and its consequences. Their study emphasized the importance of localized health education initiatives in delaying marriage age. **Prasad and Singh (2018)** studied the interrelationship between migration, education, and marriage age. They found that youth migrating to urban areas for education or employment were more likely to delay marriage. **Sharma and Kumar (2019)** examined the role of social media campaigns in altering perceptions of early marriage. They highlighted the increasing impact of digital platforms in promoting education and empowering youth. **Mehta and Rai (2020)** explored the role of microfinance in supporting education and delaying marriage. Their study revealed that families with access to small loans for education-related expenses were less likely to marry off their daughters early. **Choudhary and Gupta (2021)** investigated the relationship between environmental disasters and early marriage in flood-prone regions of Uttar Pradesh. They observed that families in affected areas often resort to early marriage as a coping mechanism. **Yadav and Mishra (2020)** analysed the impact of gender-based educational scholarships on marriage age. Their findings underscored the importance of targeting financial incentives specifically for girls to improve educational retention. **Rai and Das (2021)** studied the role of teacher-student mentorship programs in delaying marriage. They found that supportive mentoring relationships fostered career aspirations, encouraging youth to prioritize education over marriage.

1.4. Study Area: Uttar Pradesh is situated between 23°52'N and 31°28'N latitudes and 77°3' and 84°39'E longitudes with a total area of 240,928 square kilometers.

Uttar Pradesh is the most populated state in India as well as the most populous country subdivision in the world – more populous than all but four other countries outside of India- China, the United States of America and Indonesia and accounting for 16.5 percent of the total population of India. It has a population of about 199,812,341 with a 22.73 Urban and 77.73 Rural Population as per the 2011 census. In 2021 it projected a population of 24,10,66,874.

There is an average population density of 828 persons per km² and sex-ratio is 918 per 1000 Population. The Literacy rate is 70.69% with the literacy rate for Males at 79.20%, while it is 59.30% for the Females. Uttar Pradesh has 29.9% Youth Population age-group 15-29 in its total Population i.e. 7,20,78,995.



Map: Location Map of Study Area: Uttar Pradesh

1.5. Statement of Problem: The state of Uttar Pradesh, India, presents a complex socio-economic landscape where educational attainment and Marital patterns among youth vary significantly between urban and rural settings. However, there exists a dearth of comprehensive studies examining these dynamics with a focus on urban-rural differentials. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the relationship between educational attainment and marriage age among youth in Uttar Pradesh, exploring the disparities between urban and rural areas. By identifying variations in educational attainment and marriage age patterns, this study seeks to provide insights that can inform targeted interventions aimed at promoting education and delaying marriage among youth in both urban and rural settings of Uttar Pradesh.

1.6. Objectives: This paper aims to explore the educational correlates of marriage age differentials among youth in Uttar Pradesh, with a focus on understanding how different levels of education impact median age of marriage. The main objectives of this paper are as follow:

1. To explore marriage pattern of Youths in Uttar Pradesh, India.
2. To examine marriage-age differential among Males and Female Youth in both Rural and Urban Areas.
3. To correlate level of education with Median Age of marriage of youth in Uttar Pradesh.
4. To suggest some suitable measures to increase Age at marriage in Rural Areas of Uttar Pradesh.

2. Methods:

2.1. Database: This study is based on mainly secondary sources of data extracted from the following sources-

- NFHS-3 (2005-06), NFHS-4 (2015-16) and NFHS-5 (2019-21) National Family Health Survey, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Census 1991, 2001 and 2011, Office of the Registrar General of India.
- Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections for India and States 2011-2036, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, July 2020.
- Sample Registration System, Office of the Registrar General of India

NFHS data collected through four survey questionnaires—1. Household, 2. Woman's (15-49y), 3. Man's (15-54y), and 4. Biomarker—were used to collect information using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) method. We utilized data from Woman's (15-49y) and Man's (15-54y) questionnaires regarding their marriage.

Villages selected as the Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) in rural areas and Census Enumeration Blocks (CEB) selected in Urban areas and 22 households selected from each. Number of respondents varied from NFHS-3 to NFHS-5 but this study set them according to the sample size of NFHS-5 Survey for the Uttar Pradesh. In Uttar

Pradesh during NFHS-5 survey a total of 93,124 eligible women interviewed in the age group of 15 to 49 years in which 18,051 were from Urban area and 75,073 from the Rural area. Beside this, 12,043 eligible men interviewed in the age group of 15 to 54 years in which 2,431 were from the Urban area and 9,612 from the Rural area.

Office of Registrar General of India provides population census data from Census 1991, 2001 and 2011 used for inferential statistics for population Projection.

National Commission On Population Ministry Of Health & Family Welfare Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi prepared Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections for India and States 2011-2036 using the various Census Data.

The Sample Registration System is a large-scale demographic sample survey which is being conducted in a random sample of villages and urban blocks and is based on the idea that with an adequate machinery for recording of births and deaths as they occur and with proper supervision at all levels, it is possible to obtain reliable estimates of vital rates at the State and National level. The system combines the advantages of both continuous (longitudinal) enumeration and survey procedures. All vital events occurring to usual residents of the sample area are recorded. The SRS is administered by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, which is responsible for conducting the census and other demographic surveys in the country.

2.2. Methodology: Simple Descriptive Statistics as Percentage, Median, Mean were utilized to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and to provide a clear understanding of the distribution of marital status, Mean age at marriage, Median age at marriage and years of schooling etc.

The percentage distribution of marital status categories (Never Married, Married, and Widowed/Divorced/Separated) was calculated using the formula:

$$\text{Percentage} = \left(\frac{\text{Frequency of Category}}{\text{Total Sample Size}} \right) \times 100$$

The percentage of respondents in each marital status category was reported to understand the composition of the sample.

Mean Age at Marriage:

The mean age at marriage was calculated to provide a central tendency measure of the age at marriage for the sample. The formula for the mean is:

$$\text{Mean}(\bar{X}) = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

Where $\sum X$ is the sum of all ages at marriage and N is the total sample size.

The median age at marriage was also calculated to understand the middle value of the dataset. If the number of data points is odd, the median is the middle value;

$$\text{Median} = X \left[\frac{N+1}{2} \right]$$

if even, the median is the average of the two middle values:

$$\text{Median} = \frac{X \left[\frac{N}{2} \right] + X \left[\frac{N+2}{2} \right]}{2}$$

3. Discussions and Findings:

3.1. Marital Status of Youth in Uttar Pradesh: Marital status is important in demographic analysis as it helps understand family structures, fertility trends, and social behaviours. It reveals patterns in unmarried, married, divorced, and widowed.

The table 4 presents data on the marital status of youth aged 15-29 years in Uttar Pradesh for the years 2011, 2015, and 2019. It breaks down the population by sex (males and females) and marital status categories: never married, married, and widowed/divorced/separated (W/D/S).

Year	Age Group in Years	Total %			Males%			Female%		
		Never Married	Married	W/D/S	Never Married	Married	W/D/S	Never Married	Married	W/D/S
2011	15-29	19.7	11.5	0.1	22.8	8.7	0.1	16.2	14.6	0.1
	15-19	11.6	0.7	0.0	12.4	0.3	0.0	10.7	1.1	0.0
	20-24	6.0	4.3	0.0	7.3	2.6	0.0	4.6	6.2	0.0
	25-29	2.1	6.5	0.1	3.1	5.8	0.1	0.9	7.3	0.1
2015	15-29	23.1	10.3	0.1	25.9	7.6	0.1	20.0	13.1	0.1
	15-19	12.2	0.2	0.0	12.6	0.1	0.0	11.7	0.3	0.0
	20-24	8.1	3.2	0.0	9.3	1.7	0.0	6.8	4.8	0.0
	25-29	2.8	6.9	0.1	4.0	5.8	0.1	1.5	8.0	0.1
2019	15-29	26.7	7.7	0.0	29.2	5.6	0.1	24.2	10.1	0.0
	15-19	11.8	0.1	0.0	12.2	0.1	0.0	11.4	0.2	0.0
	20-24	10.1	1.9	0.0	10.8	1.1	0.0	9.4	2.8	0.0
	25-29	4.8	5.7	0.0	6.2	4.4	0.1	3.4	7.1	0.0

Table 4: Percent Distribution of Youth Population (15-29 years) by sex, marital status in Uttar Pradesh Source: Sample Registration System, Office of the Registrar General of India.

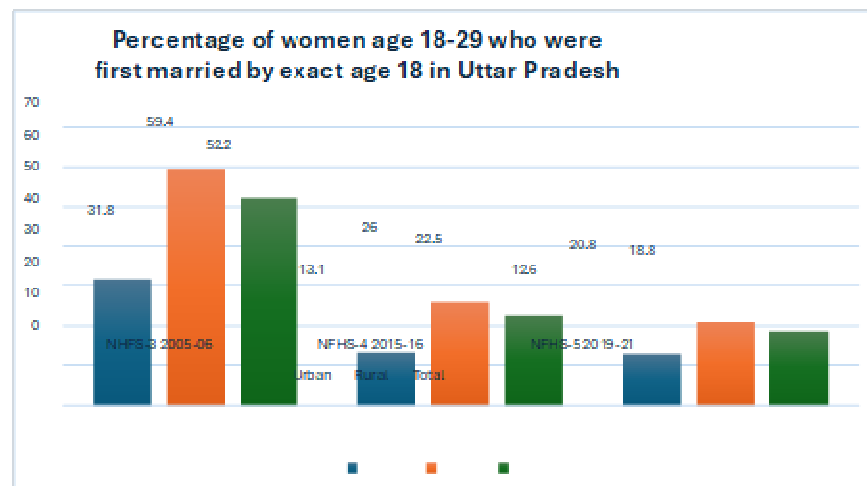
Note: W/D/S - Widowed/Divorced/Separated.

For Overall Youth Population (15-29 years), the percentage of never married youth has increased from 19.7% in 2011 to 26.7% in 2019 and the proportion of married youth has decreased from 11.5% in 2011 to 7.7% in 2019. The percentage of W/D/S remains very low, at 0.1% or less throughout the years. For Males (15-29 years), the percentage of never married males increased from 22.8% in 2011 to 29.2% in 2019 and the proportion of married males decreased from 8.7% in 2011 to 5.6% in 2019. The W/D/S category remains constant at 0.1% or less. For Females (15-29 years), the percentage of never married females rose from 16.2% in 2011 to 24.2% in 2019 and the proportion of married females decreased from 14.6% in 2011 to 10.1% in 2019. The W/D/S category stays constant at 0.1% or less.

The data indicates a trend towards higher percentages of never married youth and lower percentages of married youth in Uttar Pradesh from 2011 to 2019. This shift is observed across both sexes and all age sub-groups within the 15-29 years category. The W/D/S category remains consistently low across all years and groups.

3.2. Status of legal age of marriage in Uttar Pradesh: The legal age of marriage in India is 18 years for women and 21 years for men, as per the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**. This law aims to prevent child marriages and ensure that individuals enter marriage only when they are physically, mentally, and emotionally mature.

The graph 4 illustrates the percentage of women aged 18-29 in Uttar Pradesh who were first married by the exact age of 18. The data is segmented by urban and rural areas, as well as the total percentage, across three different National Family Health Survey (NFHS) periods: 2005-06 (NFHS-3), 2015-16 (NFHS-4), and 2019-21 (NFHS-5).



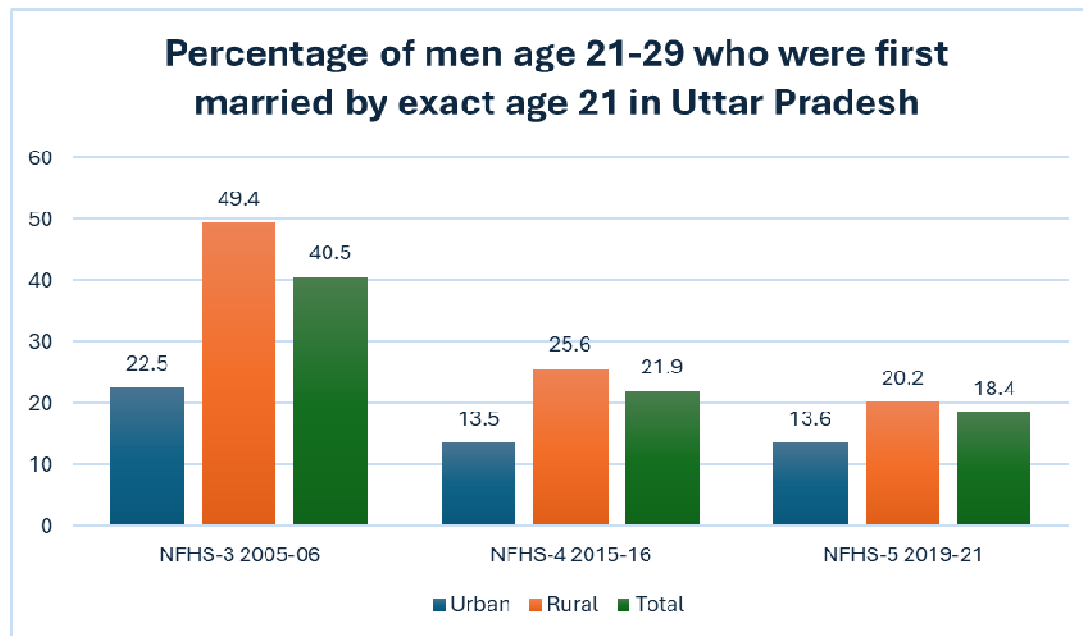
Graph 4: Percentage of women age 18-29 who were first married by exact age 18 in Uttar Pradesh

Source: National Family Health Survey, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

This graph clearly shows in Urban areas, there is a significant decline in the percentage of women married by age 18 over the survey periods, from 31.8% in NFHS-3 to 12.6% in NFHS-5. In the Rural areas also a similar declining trend is observed, with the percentage dropping from 59.4% in NFHS-3 to 20.8% in NFHS-5. Overall, the total percentage of women married by age 18 has decreased over the years, from 52.2% in NFHS-3 to 18.8% in NFHS-5.

The data shows a clear downward trend in the percentage of women getting married by age 18 in Uttar Pradesh across both urban and rural areas. This indicates progress in delaying marriage among young women, aligning with broader social and educational changes.

The graph 5 shows the percentage of men aged 21-29 in Uttar Pradesh who were first married by the exact age of 21. The data is segmented by urban and rural areas, as well as the total percentage, across three different National Family Health Survey (NFHS) periods: 2005-06 (NFHS-3), 2015-16 (NFHS-4), and 2019-21 (NFHS-5).



Graph 5: Percentage of men age 21-29 who were first married by exact age 21 in Uttar Pradesh

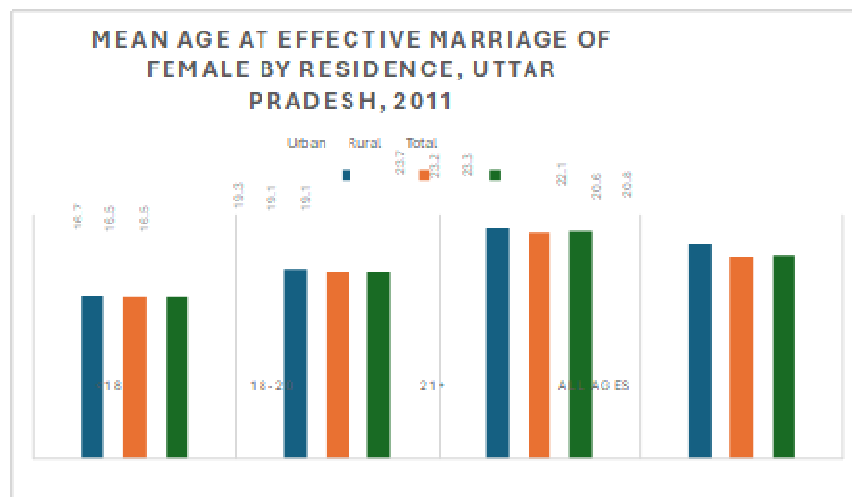
Source: National Family Health Survey, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

In the Urban areas, there is a noticeable decline in the percentage of men married by age 21 over the survey periods, from 22.5% in NFHS-3 to 13.6% in NFHS-5. In the Rural areas also a significant decrease is observed, with the percentage dropping from 49.4% in NFHS-3 to 20.2% in NFHS-5. Overall, the total percentage of men married by age 21 has decreased over the years, from 40.5% in NFHS-3 to 18.4% in NFHS-5.

The data indicates a clear downward trend in the percentage of men getting married by age 21 in Uttar Pradesh across both urban and rural areas. This suggests a societal shift towards later marriages among young men, reflecting broader changes in social norms and possibly economic factors.

3.3. Status of mean age of marriage of females in Uttar Pradesh: The **mean age of marriage** is important in demographic analysis as it provides insights into societal norms, fertility patterns, and population growth. It helps in understanding trends in family formation. Analysing the mean age of marriage also aids in forecasting fertility rates and the timing of childbearing, which impacts demographic projections and social policies.

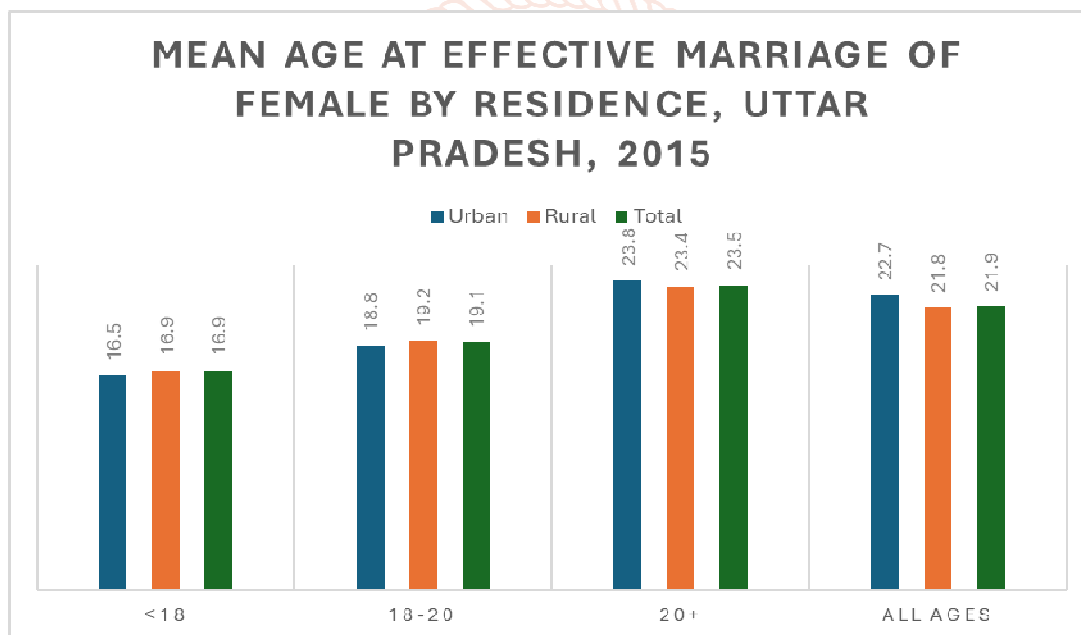
In the Graph 6, As per SRS data of 2011, Urban females had a slightly higher mean age at marriage across all age groups compared to rural females. The overall mean age for all ages was 22.1 years in urban areas and 20.6 years in rural areas, with a total average of 20.8 years.



Graph 6: Mean Age of Effective marriage of female by Residence in Uttar Pradesh, 2011

Source: Sample Registration System, Office of the Registrar General of India

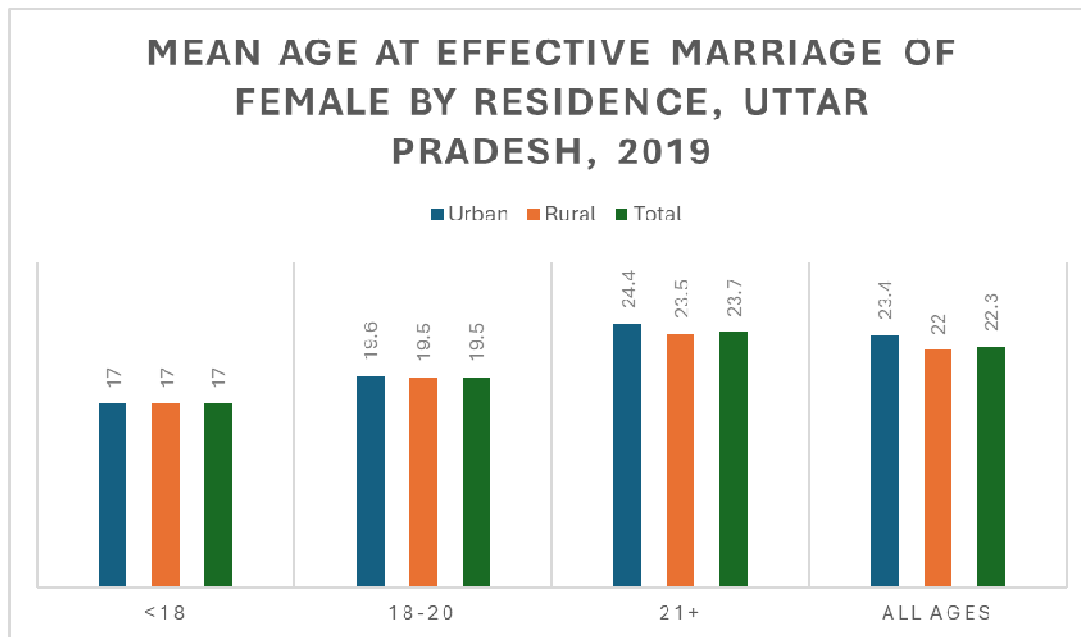
In the Graph 7, the mean age at marriage increased slightly for both urban and rural females across all age groups compared to 2011. The overall mean age for all ages was 22.7 years in urban areas and 21.8 years in rural areas, with a total average of 21.9 years.



Graph 7: Mean age at effective marriage of Female with Residence in Uttar Pradesh, 2015

Source: Sample Registration System, Office of the Registrar General of India.

In the Graph 8, In 2019, the trend of increasing mean age at marriage continued, with urban females maintaining a higher mean age across all age groups. The overall mean age for all ages was 23.4 years in urban areas and 22 years in rural areas, with a total average of 22.3 years.



Graph 8: Mean age at Effective marriage of Female by Residence in Uttar Pradesh, 2019

Source: Sample Registration System, Office of the Registrar General of India.

Graph 6, 7 & 8 depict the trends in mean age at effective marriage for females in Uttar Pradesh across different years (2011, 2015, and 2019), categorized by residence - Urban and Rural in different age groups.

From 2011 to 2019, the mean age at effective marriage for females in Uttar Pradesh showed a consistent increase across all age groups. Urban females consistently had a higher mean age at marriage compared to rural females. In 2011, the overall mean age was 22.1 years in urban areas and 20.6 years in rural areas, averaging 20.8 years. By 2015, this increased to 22.7 years in urban areas and 21.8 years in rural areas, with an overall average of 21.9 years. In 2019, the mean age further rose to 23.4 years for urban females and 22 years for rural females, with a total average of 22.3 years.

For females aged under 18, the mean age at marriage remains relatively stable around 16.5 to 17 years. For the age group 18-20, there is a slight increase in the mean age over the years. For females aged 21 and above, the mean age at marriage has increased significantly, particularly in urban areas.

The overall mean age at marriage for all ages has increased from 20.8 years in 2011 to 22.3 years in 2019, indicating a trend towards later marriages among females in Uttar Pradesh.

3.4. Variation in median age of marriage in Uttar Pradesh: The **median age of marriage** is the age at which half of the population gets married before and half gets married after. It is a statistical measure that provides a more accurate representation of the typical age at marriage by reducing the impact of extreme values such as very early or late marriages.

From the table 5, For females, the median age at marriage has shown a noticeable increase in both urban and rural areas. In urban areas, it rose from 19.2 years in 2005-06 to 21.3 years in 2019-21, while in rural areas, it increased from 16.6 years to 19.1 years over the same period. This increase is more pronounced in rural areas, suggesting an encouraging shift toward delayed marriages, likely due to improvements in education, awareness, and socio-economic development. The rural-urban gap has gradually narrowed, with the difference decreasing from 2.6 years in 2005-06 to 2.2 years in 2019-21.

Residence	Median Age at Marriage(In Years)	
	Female	Male
NFHS-3 (2005-06)		
Urban	19.2	23.5
Rural	16.6	22.3
NFHS-4 (2015-16)		
Urban	21.0	25.5
Rural	18.7	24.4

NFHS-5 (2019-21)		
Urban	21.3	25.7
Rural	19.1	24.9

Table 5: Variation of Median Age at Marriage of Youths with Residence in Uttar Pradesh*Source: National Family Health Survey, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare*

For males, the median age at marriage also increased over time, though the change is less dramatic compared to females. In urban areas, the median age rose from 23.5 years to 25.7 years, while in rural areas, it increased from 22.3 years to 24.9 years. The relatively uniform increase in male marriage age across urban and rural areas indicates a general trend toward later marriages for men. Smaller gap is observed for males, with urban males consistently marrying about one year later than their rural counterparts.

3.5 Educational correlates of Median age at marriage in Uttar Pradesh: The data reveals distinct trends in the median age at marriage for males and females based on their educational attainment, as well as notable changes over time across the three survey periods (NFHS-3, NFHS-4, and NFHS-5).

Years of Schooling	Median Age at Marriage(In Years)		
	Female		
	NFHS-3 (2005-06)	NFHS-4 (2015-16)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)
No Schooling	15.5	17.4	17.5
< 5years Completed	16.4	17.6	17.6
5-7 Years complete	17.1	18.2	18.1
8-9 Years complete	18.5	18.9	18.9
10-11 Years complete	19.6	19.8	19.4
12 or more years complete	23.1	23.0	23.0

Table 6: Variation of Median Age at Marriage of Female Youths with Educational Attainment in Uttar Pradesh*Source: National Family Health Survey, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare*

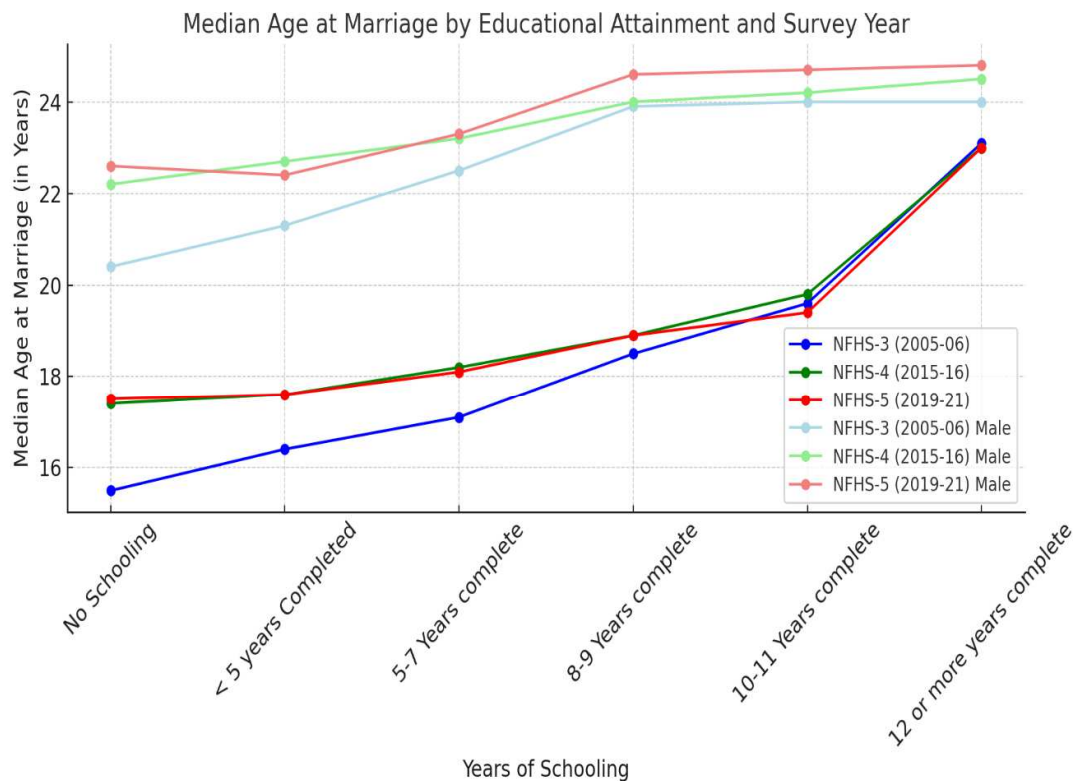
From Table 6, it is clear that for females, the median age at marriage consistently increases with higher levels of education. In NFHS-3 (2005-06), females with no schooling had a median age of marriage of 15.5 years, which increased to 17.4 years in NFHS-4 (2015-16) and further to 17.5 years in NFHS-5 (2019-21). A similar upward trend is observed for females with less than 5 years of schooling, where the median age increased from 16.4 years in NFHS-3 to 17.6 years in both NFHS-4 and NFHS-5. For females who completed 5-7 years of education, the median age rose from 17.1 years in NFHS-3 to 18.2 years in NFHS-4, before slightly decreasing to 18.1 years in NFHS-5.

A marked improvement is observed in the median age for females with intermediate levels of education, such as those completing 8-9 years. Their median age rose from 18.5 years in NFHS-3 to 18.9 years in NFHS-4 and remained stable at 18.9 years in NFHS-5. For females with 10-11 years of education, the median age showed a modest increase from 19.6 years in NFHS-3 to 19.8 years in NFHS-4, followed by a slight dip to 19.4 years in NFHS-5. Notably, for females with 12 or more years of schooling, the median age has remained consistently high across all survey periods, around 23 years. These findings demonstrate that increased educational attainment for females correlates strongly with delayed marriage, particularly at lower education levels where the improvement over time is most significant.

Years of Schooling	Median Age at Marriage(In Years)		
	Male		
	NFHS-3 (2005-06)	NFHS-4 (2015-16)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)
No Schooling	20.4	22.2	22.6
< 5years Completed	21.3	22.7	22.4
5-7 Years complete	22.5	23.2	23.3
8-9 Years complete	23.9	24.0	24.6
10-11 Years complete	24.0	24.2	24.7
12 or more years complete	24.0	24.5	24.8

Table 7: Variation of Median Age at Marriage of Male Youths with Educational Attainment in Uttar Pradesh*Source: National Family Health Survey, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare*

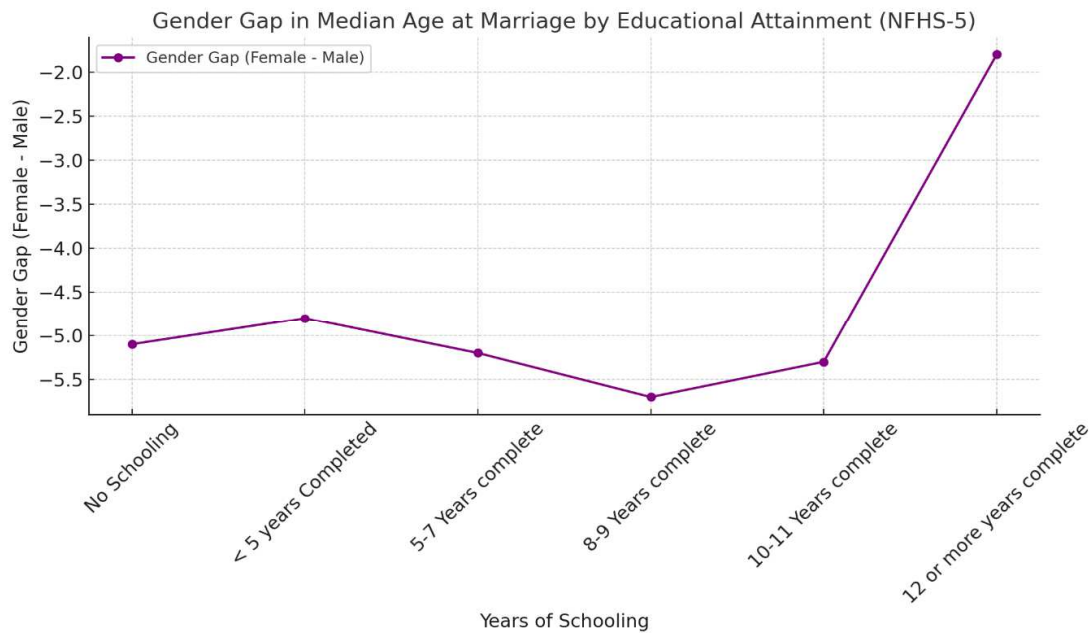
In the table 7 we can see that for Males, the median age at marriage also increases with higher levels of education but shows less dramatic changes over time compared to females. In NFHS-3, males with no schooling had a median marriage age of 20.4 years, which increased to 22.2 years in NFHS-4 and further to 22.6 years in NFHS-5. For males with less than 5 years of schooling, the median age at marriage rose from 21.3 years in NFHS-3 to 22.7 years in NFHS-4, before slightly decreasing to 22.4 years in NFHS-5. For those with 5-7 years of education, the age increased consistently across surveys, from 22.5 years in NFHS-3 to 23.2 years in NFHS-4 and 23.3 years in NFHS-5.



Graph 9: Median Age at Marriage by Educational Attainment and Survey Year

Graph 9 shows, Males with junior intermediate education levels, such as 8-9 years of schooling, showed a steady increase in the median age at marriage from 23.9 years in NFHS-3 to 24.0 years in NFHS-4 and 24.6 years in NFHS-5. For males with 10-11 years of schooling, the age remained relatively stable, increasing slightly from 24.0 years in NFHS-3 to 24.2 years in NFHS-4 and 24.7 years in NFHS-5. Similarly, for those with 12 or more years of education, the median age at marriage increased marginally from 24.0 years in NFHS-3 to 24.5 years in NFHS-4 and 24.8 years in NFHS-5. Overall, males marry later than females at all levels of education, and their median age increases modestly over time.

The gender gap in the median age at marriage, calculated as the difference between the ages of males and females (Male - Female), provides further insights. This gap is widest at lower education levels and narrows significantly with higher educational attainment.



Graph 10: Gender Gap in Median Age at Marriage by Educational Attainment

From graph 10, it clear that individuals with no schooling, the gender gap in NFHS-5 is 5.1 years, with males marrying at 22.6 years and females at 17.5 years. For individuals with 5-7 years of education, the gap reduces slightly to 5.2 years, with males at 23.3 years and females at 18.1 years. At the highest level of education (12 or more years completed), the gender gap narrows considerably to just 1.8 years in NFHS-5, with males marrying at 24.8 years and females at 23.0 years.

These trends reveal two key dynamics. First, higher levels of education for both males and females are strongly associated with delayed marriage. Second, education serves as a powerful equalizer, significantly narrowing the gender gap in the age at marriage. Over time, this gap has reduced in most educational categories, indicating progress toward greater gender parity in marriage practices.

4. Conclusions: Followings points are concluded after comprehensive discussion:

- **Marital Status of Youth in Uttar Pradesh:** The data from 2011 to 2019 reveals a notable trend in the marital status of youth (ages 15-29) in Uttar Pradesh. The proportion of never-married youth has increased from 19.7% in 2011 to 26.7% in 2019. Conversely, the percentage of married youth has decreased from 11.5% in 2011 to 7.7% in 2019, with the percentage of widowed, divorced, or separated (W/D/S) remaining consistently low (0.1% or less) across all years. This shift suggests a growing trend towards delayed marriage, particularly among both male and female youth.
- **Legal Age of Marriage:** The data on the percentage of women aged 18-29 married by age 18 (Graph 4) and men aged 21-29 married by age 21 (Graph 5) shows a significant decline in early marriages over time. For women, the percentage of those married by age 18 has dropped from 52.2% in 2005-06 (NFHS-3) to 18.8% in 2019-21 (NFHS-5). The rural-urban divide is also evident, with rural women's early marriage decreasing from 59.4% in NFHS-3 to 20.8% in NFHS-5.

Similarly, for men, the percentage of those married by age 21 has decreased from 40.5% in NFHS-3 to 18.4% in NFHS-5, showing a similar trend towards delayed marriage among young men, particularly in rural areas.

- **Mean Age at Marriage of Females:** Data from the Sample Registration System (SRS) reveals a consistent increase in the mean age at marriage for females from 2011 to 2019. In urban areas, the mean age at marriage rose from 22.1 years in 2011 to 23.4 years in 2019, while in rural areas, it increased from 20.6 years in 2011 to 22.0 years in 2019. The total mean age at marriage for all areas combined increased from 20.8 years in 2011 to 22.3 years in 2019, signifying a shift toward later marriages, particularly in urban regions. The data also shows a slight but steady increase in the age at marriage for females under 18 and those aged 18-20, with the most significant increases observed in females aged 21 and above.
- **Median Age at Marriage:** The variation in the median age at marriage for both males and females between 2005-06 (NFHS-3) and 2019-21 (NFHS-5) further emphasizes this trend of delayed marriages. For females, the median age at

marriage in urban areas increased from 19.2 years in NFHS-3 to 21.3 years in NFHS-5, while in rural areas, it rose from 16.6 years in NFHS-3 to 19.1 years in NFHS-5. This indicates a shift towards delayed marriages, especially in rural areas, where the increase in the median age is more pronounced. For males, the median age at marriage also rose over the same period, from 23.5 years in urban areas in NFHS-3 to 25.7 years in NFHS-5, and from 22.3 years in rural areas to 24.9 years (NFHS, 2021; SRS, 2019). The urban-rural gap in median marriage age for males remains smaller compared to females, with a consistent difference of around one to two years.

- **Educational Correlates of Median Age at Marriage:** Educational attainment shows a strong correlation with delayed marriage for both males and females. Among females, those with no schooling had a median marriage age of 15.5 years in NFHS-3, which increased to 17.5 years in NFHS-5. For females with 12 or more years of schooling, the median age at marriage remained high at 23.0 years across all survey periods. Similarly, males with higher educational attainment marry later, with those completing 12 or more years of schooling having a median marriage age of 24.8 years in NFHS-5, compared to 22.6 years for those with no schooling (NFHS, 2021; SRS, 2019). These trends demonstrate that higher education levels are strongly associated with delayed marriages, with females showing a more significant change over time. Furthermore, the gender gap in the median age at marriage has reduced notably at higher education levels, indicating progress toward gender parity in marriage patterns.

5. Suggestions: These are following suggestion regarding this study:

- **Promotion of Education:** Education is a critical factor in delaying marriage, particularly for girls. By increasing access to education and raising awareness about the benefits of postponing marriage, we can address the root causes of early marriage, such as limited knowledge and economic dependency. Studies show that educated girls are more likely to marry later and make informed decisions regarding their future (UNICEF, 2021). Therefore, enhancing educational programs and awareness campaigns is not only a preventative measure but also an investment in the socio-economic empowerment of youth.
- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Policies:** While legal frameworks exist to prevent child

marriage, their enforcement is often weak, especially in rural areas. Strengthening these laws, alongside comprehensive legal awareness campaigns, can create a more substantial deterrent for early marriages. Research indicates that when laws are enforced and communities are educated about their rights, marriage age increases significantly, particularly in areas where traditional practices prevail (SRS, 2019; Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2020).

- **Targeted Programs for Rural and Marginalized Communities:** Rural and marginalized communities face unique challenges, lack of education, and entrenched cultural norms that encourage early marriage. By focusing on these communities with tailored programs that provide educational support, we can create opportunities for youth to delay marriage and pursue personal development (NFHS, 2021; Giri & Ghosh, 2018). Targeted interventions are essential for reaching those most vulnerable to early marriage.
- **Gender-Sensitive Approaches in Policy Development:** Gender inequality often accelerates early marriage, with girls more likely to marry early due to societal expectations and limited opportunities. Addressing gender inequality through policies that ensure equal access to education will reduce the pressures for early marriage. Gender-sensitive policies have been proven to delay marriage and improve social outcomes for women, ultimately benefiting society as a whole (UN Women, 2020; UNFPA, 2021). Ensuring that policies are inclusive and gender-responsive is essential for breaking the cycle of early marriage.
- **Collaboration with Community Leaders:** Community leaders can foster a shift in cultural norms that prioritize education and delayed marriage. Studies show that interventions led by trusted community figures can have a more profound impact on local attitudes, making them a vital tool for social change (Raj et al., 2019). Engaging religious and community leaders can enhance the effectiveness of policies and campaigns aimed at reducing early marriages.

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