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The Factors Associated with Adolescent Marriages and Outcomes of Adolescent Pregnancies in Mardin Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, adolescent pregnancy has become an important life-threatening issue worldwide. One in every 10 births in the world today is to a mother who is still a child herself, and complications of pregnancy and childbirth claim the lives of approximately 70,000 teenage girls each year (Khabir, 2004). Although the fact that registration rates differ widely between countries, the rate of adolescent pregnancy in Islamic countries is high. The birth rate per 1000 females (15–19 years old) is 168 in Ethiopia, 114 in Saudi Arabia, 122 in Oman, and 43 in Turkey (UNICEF, 1998). In addition to religion, the interaction between race, social deprivation, and adolescent pregnancy is very strong. In the US in 1997, the pregnancy rate for Hispanic teens was 97.4 per 1000, while the figure for black teenagers was 88.2; the rate was sharply lower for non-Hispanic white American teenagers, 36.0 pregnancies per 1000 (Stephanie & Ventura, 2000). However, pregnancy in adolescence is by no means a new phenomenon. In large regions of the world (e.g., South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa), age at marriage has traditionally been low in kinship-based societies and economics (WHO, 2004). In the Arab world, patterns of early marriage prevail and marriage often translates into immediate childbearing as women and their families are anxious to prove the fecundity of the newlyweds (Zurayk & Sholkamy, 1997).

In Turkey, marriage is demographically very important because almost all births occur within marriage. Therefore, age at first marriage is a significant demographic indicator since it represents the onset of a woman's exposure to the risk of pregnancy. In Turkey, a steady increase is observed in the median age at first marriage, from 19.2 years for those in the 45-49-year-old age group up to 21 years in the 25-29-year-old age group (Ergocmen & Eryurt, 2003). There has been a marked decline in the number of those married at very young ages. For example, the percentage of women married by the age of 15 years has dropped from 8% among women aged 45-49 years to 2% among women 20-24 years old. Although this progress has occurred in Turkey, regional comparisons indicate that women get married earlier in the southeastern region of Turkey (median: 19 years old) (Ergocmen & Eryurt, 2003).

In eastern Turkey, the social pressure on women to marry early, and forced or arranged marriages are supported by cultural and religious practices. Eastern Turkey can, at best, be

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characterized as a semi-feudal, traditional, agricultural society. The region, where this study was conducted, is multi-ethnic, and includes families that speak Turkish, Kurdish, Zaza, Arabic, and Syrian Christians, etc. Nowadays there are very few persons who can speak Syrian Christian's language. Most of the Syrian Christians are using Arabic or Turkish languages in their home. The semi-feudal structure forces people to have large families and that has led to early marriages and couples having many children. In particular, among Kurdish and Arabic speaking families, the feudal structure is more prevalent and family relationships are stronger.

Mardin is a city in the southeastern region of Turkey. There is very limited information about marriage customs and related conditions in the region. Many of the women marry before the age of 19 years, and the adolescent marriage frequency is unknown. Moreover, the existence of marriage custom differences between Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic speaking families remains unclear. In this study we aimed to determine the adolescent marriage frequencies in three different groups living in Mardin and to identify the factors associated with early marriage, as well as to determine the effect of early marriage on child health.

METHOD

This was a cross-sectional study. The record cards on file at primary health centers in Mardin of 17,400 married women between 15 and 49 years of age were the main source of data. The health centers have record cards for the 95% of whole population. While the nurses are giving health services, they regularly inspect records by home visits. We randomly selected 900 of those women with using random numbers and from the record cards addresses of the women were obtained. The records of 17 women were not correct and we couldn't find them, and 12 women would not give informed consent to participate. Eventually, 871 randomly selected married women between 15-49 years of age participated in the study. Social and demographic characteristics of the women were obtained using self- determined, structured questionnaires. All of the data were collected during face-to-face interviews. According to the language usually spoken in their homes, the women were divided into three groups: Turkish, Arab, and Kurdish. Women that married before the age of 19 years were defined as adolescent married and the others were defined as women married as adults. Women who lived in rural areas until 12 years of age and women whose parents still lived in rural areas were categorized as women of rural origin. We also grouped women according to their fathers' education levels. Family type before marriage was also recorded and families that consisted of more than parents and children (parents, children, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, foster children, etc.) were considered extended/traditional families. Families that included only a parent or parents and children were considered nuclear families. We also inquired about the women's fertility and pregnancy outcomes. All of this information was obtained by women's self-determination. Nursing students who could speak the local languages were assigned as interviewers and were given communications skills training.

Mardin is a city in the southeast of Turkey, the least developed region of the country. In Mardin, in addition to Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish are also prevailing languages. Most of the health professionals working in the health centers of Mardin can speak one or more local language; therefore, the women living in Mardin can use primary health services without any communication obstacles. In Turkey, the legal marriage age is 18 years, but many of the girls

in the region are obliged to marry earlier than this age. Women who marry earlier than the age of 18 years only have religious marriages, not officially registered marriages.

All statistical analyses were performed with EpiInfo 2000 (CDC, Atlanta, USA). Early marriage behavior was revealed by the analysis of frequency distributions. To compare the frequency distribution of women with adolescent marriages and those married as adults, we used chi-square test for linear trend. Student t test was used to compare the mean differences. Crude odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals (CI) were also calculated to evaluate the factors associated with adolescent marriages. Adjusted odds ratios and 95% CI for adolescent marriage were also calculated by logistic regression analysis.

RESULTS

In Table 1, demographic characteristics of the 871 women, according to their age at marriage, are presented. Of the entire study population, 489 women (56.1%) had adolescent marriages. Age distribution of the women with adolescent marriages and women with adult marriages was similar (P = 0.06). Only 7.0% of the women with adolescent marriages had more than a primary education, but this rate was 41.6% in the women with adult marriages. The women with adolescent marriages lived in a traditional extended family at the rate of 19.8%, which was higher than the women with adult marriages (P = 0.03). Most of the women included in the study had urban origins and 16.6% of the women with adolescent marriages had rural origins. Some of the fertility determinants were worse in the women with adolescent marriages compared to the women with adult marriages. In women with adolescent marriages, mean family size, age at first pregnancy, and total pregnancies were higher than in the women with adult marriages.

In Table 2, some demographic risk factors and odds ratios for adolescent marriages are shown. Of the women whose origin was rural, 68.1% had adolescent marriages and adolescent marriage risk was 1.79 (95% CI ranged between 1.19 and 2.71) according to urban origin. Education level of the women's fathers was another factor that had an effect on adolescent marriages. Women with illiterate fathers had 3.71 times more risk of having an adolescent marriage than women with fathers that graduated high school. Language spoken in the homes of the women was also found to be an important risk for having an adolescent marriage. The adolescent marriage rate was 34.3% among Turkish speaking women, 59.7% for Arabic speaking women, and 62.3% of Kurdish speaking women. There were significant differences between the language groups (P < 0.0001).

In Table 3, adjusted odds ratios and 95% CIs that were calculated by logistic regression are provided. Women with rural origins had a higher risk [1.6 (95% CI: 1.06-2.51)] of having an adolescent marriage than women of urban origins. Education level of the women's fathers was an important factor influencing adolescent marriage. Women with illiterate fathers had the highest risk [2.83 (95% CI: 1.65-4.83)]. Women from homes in which Arabic was spoken had 2.68 (1.83-3.91) times greater risk compared to women from Turkish speaking homes, and the risk was 2.29 (95% CI: 1.47-3.54) for women that came from Kurdish speaking homes.

In Table 4, marriage types, consanguineous marriages, and age differences between wives and husbands are shown. Marriages without the woman's consent were experienced by

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of the Women with Adolescent Marriages and the Women with Adult Marriages, Mardin, 2003.

	Women with adolescent marriages	Women with adult marriages	Total	p
Age groups				
15-19	26(96.3)	1* (3.7)	27 (3.1)	
20-24	80 (58.4)	57 (41.6)	137 (15.7)	
25-29	103 (48.1)	111 (51.9)	214 (24.6)	
30-34	90 (50.3)	89 (49.7)	179 (20.6)	
35-39	90 (58.1)	65 (41.9)	155 (17.8)	
40-44	63 (63.6)	36 (36.4)	99 (11.4)	
45-49	37 (61.7)	23 (38.3)	60 (6.8)	<0,0001[μ], 0,06[â]
Education level of women				
Illiterate	140 (72.5)	53 (27.5)	193 (22.2)	
Primary school	315 (64.9)	170 (35.1)	485 (55.6)	
Higher than primary	34 (17.6)	159 (82.4)	193 (22.2)	<0.001
Family type (before marriage)				
Traditional (extended) family	97 (63.8)	55 (36.2)	152 (17.5)	
Nuclear family	392 (54.5)	327 (45.5)	719 (82.5)	0.03
Orgin of women				
Urban	408 (54.2)	344 (45.8)	752 (86.3)	
Rural	81 (68.1)	38 (31.9)	119 (13.7)	0.005
Education level of women's father				
Illiterate	262 (64.2)	146 (35.8)	408 (46.8)	
Primary school	172 (53.3)	151 (46.7)	323 (37.1)	
Higher than primary	55 (39.3)	85 (60.7)	140 (16.1)	<0.001
TOTAL	489 (56.1)	382 (43.9)	871 (100.0)	
Family size**	5.87 ± 2.81***	4.63 ± 2.17	5.33 ± 2.62	<0.001
Age at first marriage**	16.11 ± 1.49	21.86 ± 2.79	18.63 ± 3.58	<0.001
Age at first pregnancy**	17.49 ± 2.05	22.83 ± 2.98	19.80 ± 3.63	<0.001
Total pregnancies**	4.57 ± 2.88	2.94 ± 2.08	3.86 ± 2.69	<0.001

* Only one women was 19 years old (marriages before 19 was accepted as adolescent marriage). μ : whole age groups, â: 15-19 years old women were excluded.

** t test was used

***(mean ± standard deviation)

Table 2.

Factors Associated with Adolescent Marriages in Mardin.

	Adolescent marriage	Odds ratio (95% CI)	P
(n)	n (%)	Adolescent versus older marriages	
Origin of women			
Urban (752)	408 (54.3)	1	0.005
Rural (119)	81 (68.1)	1.79 (1.19-2.71)	
Family type of women (before marriage)			
Traditional extended family (298)	168 (56.4)	1,65 (1,23-2,21)	0.0005
Nuclear family (573)	252 (44.0)	1	
Education level of women's father			
Illiterate (315)	211 (67.0)	3.71 (2.16-6.38)	<0.0001
Literate informally (93)	51 (54.8)	2.22 (1.15-4.28)	0.009
Primary school (323)	172 (53.3)	2.08 (1.22-3.55)	0.003
Middle school (58)	26 (44.8)	1.48 (0.71-3.13)	0.25
High school (82)	29 (35.4)	1	<0.0001
Language in home			
Turkish (172)	59 (34.3)	1	<0.0001
Arab (216)	129 (59.7)	2.84 (1.83-4.40)	<0.0001
Kurdish (483)	301 (62.3)	3.17 (2.17-4.64)	<0.0001
Total	489 (56.1)		

55.6% of women with adolescent marriages. OR to have unwilling marriage was 4.59 in women with adolescent marriage. Only 25.4% of the women with adolescent marriages had romance-based marriages; whereas 55.8% of the women with adult marriages had marriages based on romance. The prevalence of consanguineous marriage was also very high. Of the entire study population, 39.5% had consanguineous marriages. Of the women who had adolescent marriages, 26.4% married men more than 9 years their senior.

Time of pregnancy and outcome of pregnancies according to the women's self determine are presented in Table 5. Most of the women had their first pregnancies within one year of marriage. This rate was higher in the adult marriage group. Stillbirths and child mortality was more prevalent among the women who had adolescent marriages and this difference was statistically significant. The risk of having more than one stillbirth was 5.6 times higher in

Table 3.

Adjusted Odds Ratios and 95% Confidence Intervals for Adolescent Marriages and Different Risk Factors.

	Adjusted Odds ratio	95% CI	P
Origin of women			
Rural versus urban	1.6	1.06-2.51	0.03
Family type of women (before marriage)			
Traditional extended family versus nuclear family	1,05	0.78-1.41	0.47
Education level of women's father			
Illiterate versus high school	2.83	1.65-4.83	<0.001
Informally literate versus high school	1.78	0.94-3.37	0.07
Primary school versus high school	1.81	1.07-3.04	0.03
Middle school versus high school	1.42	0.70-2.89	0.32
Language in home			
Arab versus Turkish	2.68	1.83-3.91	<0.001
Kurdish versus Turkish	2.29	1.47-3.54	<0.001

Adjusted odds ratios were calculated by using lineer logistic regression analyses.

women with adolescent marriages compared to the women with adult marriages and the risk of child mortality was 3.66.

DISCUSSION

Marriage generally occurs at an earlier age in developing regions and this may be accepted as determinant of developing. The mean age at marriage was cahages between 15.9 to 17.4 in developing countries particularly in Muslims (Aryal, 1991; Hussain & Bittles, 1993). In European Region age at firt marriage for women was higher and it changes between 25.6 in Spain and 30.1 in England (Castro, 1992; Nault 1996) Turkish civil law requires a minimum age of 18 at marriage for both women and men and does not recognize religiously sanctioned marriage before that age. However, a national survey in 2003 shows that 34.7% of all women in Turkey had been married, mostly through a religious ceremony before the age of 18 (Ergocmen & Eryurt, 2003). This figure is estimated to be as high as 50% in the eastern regions of the country, constituting an economically disadvantaged area populated mainly by Kurdish and Arabic speaking people adhering to the Muslim faith. Saka G. (2002) also reported that in 2002, 16.3% of all women who married were under the age of 15 years in the eastern region of Turkey. In the study population mean age at first marriage was 18.6 years and it was 16.1 years for women with adolescent marriage. In Mardin, mean age at first marriage was lower than European countries and whole Turkey, but it was similar to Islamic countries or regions.

Female education is an important determinant of adolescent marriage (Rahman & Kabir, 2005; Sivaram & Joshi, 1995). In Turkey, the least educated women are living in the eastern region, particularly in the southeastern region, where the median years of schooling is 0.0, compared

Table 4:

Marriage Type, Consanguineous Marriage, Age Difference with Husband, and Marriage Consent of the 489 Women Who Had Adolescent Marriages, Mardin.

	Women with adolescent marriage	Women with adult marriage	Odds ratio and 95% CI	P
Marriage without consent of women	272 (55.6)	82 (21.5)	4.59 (3.35-6.28)	<0.0001
Marriage type				
Romantic marriage	124 (25.4)	213 (55.8)	0.27 (0.20-0.36)	<0.0001
Woman sent to find a prospective bride	201 (41.1)	117 (30.7)	1.08 (0.80-1.46)	0.60
Arranged within relatives	144 (29.5)	49 (12.9)	2.84 (1.96-4.12)	<0.0001
Berdel (Extended exchange of Wives)	9 (1.8)	2 (0.5)	4.09 (1.29-14.04)	0.006
Exchange of her father's loan	3 (0.6)	1 (0.3)		
Betrothal while an infant	6 (1.2)	-		
Abduction	2 (0.4)	1 (0.8)		
Marriage (consanguinity)				
Cousin marriage	193 (39.5)	76 (19.9)	2.63 (1.93-3.62)	<0.0001
Other relatives	64 (13.1)	40 (10.5)	1.29 (0.83-2.00)	0.23
Not consanguineous	232 (47.4)	266 (69.6)	0.39 (0.29-0.53)	<0.0001
Age difference with her husband				
< 9 years	335 (69.9)	321 (87.5)	0.41 (0.29-0.58)	<0.0001
10-14 years	126 (26.3)	30 (8.2)	4.07 (2.62-6.37)	<0.0001
15-19 years	12 (2.5)	11 (3.0)	0.85 (0.35-2.09)	0.69
> 20 years	6 (1.3)	5 (1.4)	0.94 (0.25-3.56)	0.91

with national median of 4.6 years (Ergocmen & Eryurt, 2003). According to our results, as expected, there was a positive relationship between level of education and adolescent marriage. The differences between the women who had adolescent marriages and the women who had adult marriages were particularly pronounced in the group who had completed high school. Level of education has important influences on the status of women. Educated women marry at an older age and are less dependent on men or parental influences. In better-educated adolescent girls, the overall rate of childbearing is also usually lower. There is a bi-directional inverse relationship between education and early marriage.

In the present study it was also observed that the education levels of fathers were a contributing factor to younger marring ages of the women. In fact, education level of fathers was an important determinant of family structure. The other determinants of family structure were family type and family origin (rural or urban). Women from families of rural origin and from extended traditional families married earlier. The early marriages we documented showed a significant correlation to the family structure prior to marriage. Between the most economically deprived and the most affluent families, the percentage of adolescent mothers

Table 5:

Time of First Pregnancies and Outcome of Pregnancies in Women with Adolescent Marriages and in Women with Adult Marriages, Mardin.

(n)	Women with adolescent marriage	Women with adult marriage	P, OR, and 95% CI of OR
Time of first pregnancy			
Within first year of marriage	337 (69.3)	302 (79.1)	0.0007. 0.59 (0.42-0.81)
Within 2-3 year of marriage	111 (22.8)	51 (13.4)	0.0004. 1.91 (1.31-2.79)
Within 4-5 year of marriage	17 (3.5)	10 (2.6)	0.46. 1.34 (0.57-3.18)
After 5 years of marriage	13 (2.7)	3 (0.8)	0.05. 3.41 (0.91-15.34)
Still had no pregnancy	8 (1.6)	16 (4.2)	-
Still births			
Never	441 (90.2)	366 (95.8)	0.001. 0.40 (0.21-0.74)
Had at least one still birth	34 (7.0)	14 (3.7)	0.03. 1.96 (1.1-3.91)
More than one still birth	14 (2.9)	2 (0.5)	0.01. 5.60 (1.21-35.88)
Children death			
Never had	399 (81.6)	360 (94.2)	<0.0001. 0.27 (0.16-0.45)
At least one children death	63 (12.9)	16 (4.2)	0.000009. 3.38(1.87-6.21)
More than one children death	27 (5.5)	6 (1.6)	0.002. 3.66(1.42-9.99)

varied from 18% to 3%, respectively (Sloggett, 1998). Adolescent childbearing was associated with father absence and lack of financial support (Buvinic, 1998), parent education (Moore & Myers, 1993), rural residence (Choe & Thapa, 2005), and other familial factors.

In the literature, both religion and ethnicity were cited as factors increasing adolescent marriage. Ethnicity was an important risk factor for adolescent marriage. The probability of marriage dissolution was highest among uneducated, early married Muslim women living in big cities (Savitridina, 1997). There are many other studies with supportive evidence of women marrying earlier in Islamic countries (Zurayk & Sholkamy, 1997). In our study, all women were Muslims, but the rate of adolescent marriage was lower among the Turkish speaking Muslim women. This result suggests that ethnicity has greater influence on early marriage than religion. In Mardin, where the study was conducted, Arabs and Kurds were observed to have more traditional social structures. According to our observations, not only early marriage, but other women's negative health-related social determinants, like lower education level and living in a traditional family, were more prevalent among those from Arabic and Kurdish speaking families. In Diyarbakir, another southeastern city of Turkey, early age marriages were 42.4% and this rate was higher among Kurdish speaking women (Ertem & Saka, 2005). In a study conducted by National Statistic Institutes of Turkey the causes of early age marriages were reported as poverty of family, lost of parents, rural

residence and regional factors. Although this report didn't state that people were Kurdish but early age marriage costum was prevalent in the region where most of the people Kurdish. Arabic people were also had this custom (Zurayk & Sholkamy, 1997). The family structure and attitudes to arranged marriage and early age marriages were different within other regions of Turkey. This difference may be explained by the presence of ethnic minority issue.

Reasons for early marriage among girls in this region include their subordinate gender status, perpetuated through customs such as parental arranged marriage, endogamous marriage systems ("cousin marriages"), the bride price and the special concept of family honor which ascribes rigid norms of sexual conduct for women (Kagitcibasi, 1986; Sever & Yurdakul, 2001). In our study we couldn't search on social reasons of early marriages.

The majority of adolescent girls in Turkey who bear children do so within marriage, and young women generally face social pressure to have a child soon after marriage. Age at first marriage was one of main determinants of age at first pregnancy and high fertility (Acsadi & Johnson-Ascadi, 1985; Gupta, 2000). In our study, age at first marriage was close to age at first pregnancy, because in Turkey, marriage was considered as family grew. Particularly in traditional communities, higher fertility rates are more socially acceptable. Women could not exercise many of their rights, particularly reproductive health rights, because of their lower social status. The obligation of women to marry earlier, for example before the age of 16 years, was frequently observed in families speaking Arabic and Kurdish, which is representative of a pervasive neglect of women's human rights.

One of the results of the present study was the painful discovery of early marriage in Mardin, where most of the adolescent marriages occurred without consent of the girls. In the eastern region of Turkey, a majority of marriages (61.2 %) were arranged by families without the consent of the girls (Ilkkaraca, 1998), and there were a variety of traditional marriages like "Berdel," "arrangement in cradle," or "marriage for doing housework of old parents." Particularly in early marriages, girls had no chance to choose her prospective husband. The families did not consult the girls for fear they would choose the wrong person. In the opinion of many families from the study region, a girl should be married before she begins to experience sexual feelings.

Inbreeding in Jordan was compared to inbreeding in Lebanon, Kuwait, Egypt, and Turkey, and it appeared its prevalence was associated with Muslim affiliation (Khoury & Massad, 1992). In other Islamic populations, the prevalence of consanguineous marriage was high (Hussain & Bittles, 1998; Husain & Bunyan, 1997). Consanguineous marriage was found to be significantly high among people living in the eastern region of Turkey (Kir & Gulec, 2005). In our study, consanguineous marriage was higher among women who had adolescent marriages than the women who married as adults. This result showed that similar factors had influence both on early marriage and consanguineous marriage.

Spontaneous abortion, preterm delivery, combined fetal death and infant mortality, and loosing pregnancies any time during their childbearing years are the health risks of adolescent pregnancies (Bukulmez & Deren, 2000; Cansun & Kadayifcioglu, 2000; Kir & Gulec, 2005; Shawky & Milat, 2000). In our study, the rate of women who had stillbirths was significantly higher in the adolescent marriage group. Stillbirths might be associated with a woman's

physical development, but child mortality is probably related to insufficient parenting. Babies born to mothers who were under 20 years of age have poor chances of surviving more than 5 years (WHO, 1998).

We concluded that, in multicultural and underdeveloped city, Mardin, the rate of adolescent marriage was higher than developed regions of Turkey. Family type, education level of fathers, education level of women, and ethnic and cultural factors may affect this high ratio. Lots of adolescent marriages occurred without the full consent of the adolescent girls and to first-degree relatives. Child mortality was also inversely affected by adolescent marriage. Adolescent marriage is an important reproductive health issue threatening the health of both women and children. Social development (women education, father's education, urbanization) may be important in the prevention of early age marriages.

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