Title: Early entrance to married life in traditional and vulnerable settings: the case of Afghanistan[1].

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RESUMO:

Marriage, the main object of study of nuptiality, is one of the most important social institutions that are still at the beginning of reproduction life in several contemporary societies. It is the result of a complex process that may have implications for social development as seems to be the case in Afghanistan. This paper analyzes age at marriage in a context of both high social vulnerability and unreliable data, it maps the setting of marriage in the Afghan population, pointing to the main challenges of this event at very young ages. It calls attention to a human rights issue by indirectly detecting flagrant statistics of forced marriages and / or involving children.

A 50% sample size household survey, applied to thirteen provinces of Afghanistan are used collected over the years 2011 to 2017.Results confirm a universality of marriage through a very fast process. In the case of women, it starts earlier and the proportion of married couples increases sharply with age. Marriage indicators suggest that important changes are taking place in Afghan society. While policies to postpone marriages at very young ages appear to be fruitful, thanks to the expansion of the educational system to include girls, there are indications that the same strategies of social inclusion may increase the propensity to marry earlier given the high social value marriage and the family and thus, exposing women to greater vulnerability.

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is one of the most important social institutions in a number of current societies that includes Afghan population and is the mean subject of study of Nuptiality. The way this demographic variable performs is a socio-demographic process that can have many and most relevant development implications. It plays an important role in the demographic dynamics when a number of elements converge, as it seems to be the case in Afghanistan where exposure to pregnancies is only within marriage. In this context marital fertility occurs as a natural process related to the level of couples' fecundity (biological capacity to conceive).

There is no strong incidence of social norms, which are geared to protect the women and children's health by preventing too early entry to marriage, too close and too many pregnancies. Under those conditions, the moment of enter into marriage, , the probability of marriage by age, and the final proportion of ever married (EM) women largely determine the reproductive process: the level as well as the age pattern of fertility.

Beyond its demographic implications, nuptiality also plays an important role on gender issues, on the reproductive health outcomes (for both mother and child), on the rights of the child and on human capital formation of the younger generations. Early marriages, including child marriages as well as the spousal age difference are correlated with gender equality and the status of girls and women in society. When girls enter and remain in the education system for longer time, they not only access knowledge and skills that better prepare them for life, but they also enter marriage in more equitable basis. They would have acquired skills which may open opportunities for jobs and the possibility of generating their own income, thus reducing economic dependence. They would enter marriage physically and emotionally more mature, better prepared to have children and provide them with adequate care, reducing infant and child morbidity and mortality. All these elements are powerful factors in the social and economic development, and in different ways, they feature in several of the targets adopted to monitor progress towards achieving the SDGs.

As it is known, in most countries in the South-Central Asia fertility takes place only within marriage; *"There is no word for 'single mother' in the Pashto or Dari"* (Hayeri, 2016) hence, nuptiality is an important component of the reproductive process. This

is particularly true in Afghanistan, a country characterized by an early age at first birth, short birth intervals and the continuation of childbirth up to advanced ages (UNFPA-Afghanistan, 2012). Early age at marriage, in turn, is associated to an early age at first birth and thus it is an important dimension of women's reproductive behaviour with far-reaching consequences, particularly for their reproductive health and social status (Singh and Samara, 1996).

Widowhood is also an important dimension of Nuptiality, whose magnitude – particularly among young women– is unknown. On the one side, the social unrest that Afghanistan has produced impressive male casualties has left young widows, very often with very young children. On the other side, there is the negative social status given to a widow, stigmatized and considered bad luck or burden on the family of the deceased. She is a "*besarparast*" ("without-a-head-of-household"), regardless of whether she works or not or can support her family (Wakilzada, WUNRN, 2017). Both aspects demand data and comprehension of female widowhood if women discrimination, as implicit in the SDG framework, is to be eliminated.

Objectives

This paper refers to the frequency and intensity of marriage, explores the distribution of the population by marital status and develops synthetic measures of marriage. Two set of provinces using the SDES data carried out between 2011-2014 and 2014-2017 respectively are analysed. Annex 1 shows the location of these set of provinces.

As most of the demographic variables suffer the influence of the social context, a brief profile of each province socioeconomic status is considered in order to support the understanding of the nuptiality patterns to be study (See Annex 2). In general terms, social indicators confirm that Balkh and Herat are the most urbanized provinces and have the lowest female illiteracy rates; Badghis and Samangan, at the other end, hold the most vulnerable positions with relatively little difference from other provinces.

In first place, behaviour patterns of entering into marriage and evidences of the beginning of exposure to a reproductive life are presented. Considering early

marriage a harmful traditional practice (UNICEF, 2005) an assessment on the incidence of early marriage is included using the information available.

The age difference between husband and wife is analysed because of both its demographic role and it is an indicator of gender relationships. Finally, an approximation to the potential determinants of the nuptiality pattern is made by using education as a proxy of the socio-economic levels in the population.

As gender relationships are extremely unbalanced, women and male education (including household head) are modelled.

THE BEGINNING OF EXPOSURE TO A REPRODUCTIVE LIFE

The beginning of exposure to a reproductive life is here depicted: firstly, the proportion of married man and women at very young years; secondly using a well-known measure of nuptiality, the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM).

Early Marriage

Early marriage is a marriage carried out before the girl is physically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing. It also includes what is known as *child marriage* that refers to any marriage before puberty period (12 years old approximately). Early marriage by international standards is defined as any marriage below the age of 18 (UNFPA, 2012) and UNICEF (2005) recommends a set of indicators for their assessment. This subject was not among the main objective of the SDES project, however data collected allow us to detail the marital status at earliest ages since questions were applied to the population of all ages and most of the UNICEF's indicators are included here.

There are two categories to consider: the ever-*married (EM),* on one side, and those *never married but engaged,* on the other side. These two classifications approach, firstly, the population at risk of having children, which is important for the study of the reproductive process. Secondly, by using the information on formal engagement at very young ages, graduation of gender relationships is possible and it is considered here as an analytic category diverse from single population. While it demands no exposure to the risk of sexual intercourse –particularly among Afghan women– similar to the case of those never married nor engaged, it also means that engaged

women is outside of the marriage market and have a quite high probability of ending up marrying. The high probability that the girl will be marriage is based on the tradition that if a woman and her family are honourable, an engagement will not be broken. Even if her fiancé has married another woman an engaged woman is required to marry him (Smith 2009).

The relevance of the *never married but engaged* rests on gender equity, child abuse, girl's rights issues; i.e., human rights. It is still frequent that engagement involving children, particularly girls precedes forced marriages (Smith, 2009) that on turn expose young women to unknown situations[2]. Even after the end of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, some traditional customs related to marriage remain, particularly in rural areas. "*Parents in Afghanistan are likely to marry their daughters at young ages in order to secure their future*" (www.unicef.org; access at 7-10-2015). Thus, it is common between young girls to become betrothed, while they wait to reach the aged need to get married with their future husbands. The engaged status in general is associated with family decisions made on behalf of girls at their earliest age. Although there are no reliable statistics, LANDINFO (2011, page. 6) quoting UNAMA (2010), reports that *"Occasionally, marriage agreements are negotiated for children as young as one year old"*.

Early marriage it is known to be a reality for many young women in Afghanistan. A number of publications mention the prevalence of child/early marriage as an issue of high concern, At the beginning of the 2000's, roughly, half of females in Afghanistan married before their 16th birthday[3].UNFPA web site mentions, that *"Although getting reliable data is difficult, the most recent surveys* (by 2015) *estimate some 46 per cent of Afghani women are married by* age *18;15 per cent of them before age 15"*[4]. Similar proportions were found in the AfDHS-2015.

At the same time, it is important to consider implementation of policy strategies towards struggling early marriage in Afghanistan, that incentive young girls to enter

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[2] Detail sociological implications of "engaged" status, is not the subject of this report. However, for the purposes of these analyses the central issue is related to the human rights of young girls and is an essential issue for policy decisions.

[3] See for instance: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission Economic and Social Rights Report in Afghanistan-III (2008); APHI/MoPH (2011); UNFPA (2012b)

[4]UNFPA web site: http://www.unfpa.org/news/escaping-child-marriage-afghanistan - and - http://www.unfpa.org/news/escaping-child-marriage-afghanistan#sthash.Kvsn9WM3.dpuf. Accessed: July 10, 2015.

and remain in school. See for instance, the "National Action Plan to Eliminate Early and Child Marriage", launched on April 2017[5].

Marriage before age 18

Table 1 shows a wider portrayal of marriage at early ages. Children and young population EEM are classified in specific age groups to analyse evolution of entrance to marriage in each panel as indicated:

a)   Before age 16, to capture information of marriage before the legal age for girls to marry; since information before age 12 seems incomplete, ages 12 to 15 are considered.

b)   Ages 16-17 to complete what is considered early-marriage, i.e. any union before age 18.

c)   Ages 18-19

d)   Ages 20-24 the group that completes the called young population.

Table 2 also includes the sex ratio, indicating how many girls are in each age group relatively to boys. The actual number of persons (N) that have this information available in the SDES is also included to ensure that observations are enough to calculate the indicators.

Early marriage and the child marriage specific subtype does happen. The average prevalence of EEM for girls under 16, the legal age for them to marry in in these provinces can be as high as near 18 per cent in Badghis, and around 37 per cent in Ghor. It has always relevant values in the other provinces and it is always more relevant than among boys. In any given province, number of girls EEM is surely two, threefold or more the number of boys.

Marriage and engagement at ages 16 and 17 present similar pattern. Legal coverage allowing young girls to marry before age 18 makes the proportion rise to near half of these girls to be either engaged or married already. The engagement or even formal wedding of girls very often may be a way to strength family status or even a strategy to escape from poverty (WCLRF, 2008)[6]. It is also known that parents in Afghanistan are likely to marry their daughters at young ages in order to secure their future[7].

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[5] See http://afghanistan.unfpa.org/en/news/together-we-can-end-child-marriage
[6] www.girlsnotbrides.org, access at 7-10-2015
[7] www.unicef.org; access at 7-10-2015

Table 1. Kabul, Bamiyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Kapisa, Parwan, Bagdish, Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Nimroz, Samangan and Takhar (2015-2017) - Proportion of engaged and ever married (EEM) young population (per cent) at selected ages by sex and sex ratio.

Province		EEM young population (Per cent)			Abs. number in the ages group in thousands (N)	
		Male	Female	Sex Ratio*	Male	Female
a) Age: 12 to 15 (before age 16)						
First SDES round (Six provinces)	Kabul	1.0	3.2	32.1	166.7	163.4
	Bamiyan	2.3	7.5	31.3	15.9	15.3
	Daykundi	1.9	6.3	31.0	27.7	26.0
	Ghor	16.1	37.3	21.2	32.0	28.9
	Kapisa	0.8	4.0	52.0	12.4	13.2
	Parwan	1.4	4.7	32.2	27.5	27.1
Second SDES round (Seven provinces)	Badghis	6.6	17.8	37.7	24.8	21.0
	Baghlan	1.7	4.7	33.8	45.5	42.0
	Balkh	1.3	4.3	30.6	58.9	54.5
	Heart	2.9	11.2	23.5	79.4	75.6
	Nimroz	2.0	8.6	19.9	10.0	9.1
	Samangan	2.6	11.4	22.2	20.9	19.5
	Takhar	0.6	3.6	16.8	58.5	55.6
b) Ages 16 to 17						
First SDES round (Six provinces)	Kabul	1.8	8.0	41.1	105.8	100.4
	Bamiyan	3.0	14.0	42.0	9.0	8.2
	Daykundi	3.7	15.3	39.2	14.8	14.0
	Ghor	22.2	56.1	27.0	16.0	16.9
	Kapisa	1.9	9.1	51.3	7.9	8.3
	Parwan	2.6	10.5	40.1	16.5	16.2
Second SDES round (Seven provinces)	Badghis	17.2	45.5	36.5	9.1	9.5
	Baghlan	5.0	20.1	25.6	27.9	27.2
	Balkh	3.8	16.8	22.6	40.4	40.6
	Heart	6.8	29.7	20.9	53.1	58.5
	Nimroz	8.6	31.9	28.2	5.6	5.4
	Samangan	8.0	32.5	23.0	10.3	11.0
	Takhar	2.0	21.6	9.3	28.2	28.8
c) Ages 18 to 19						
First SDES round (Six provinces)	Kabul	6.5	26.6	36.0	122.9	107.2
	Bamiyan	9.1	31.8	32.2	18.8	17.4
	Daykundi	6.5	28.8	44.4	9.0	8.9
	Ghor	42.7	75.9	19.2	20.9	22.7
	Kapisa	11.9	38.1	29.0	16.8	15.0
	Parwan	9.5	34.3	33.1	10.0	9.1
Second SDES round (Seven provinces)	Badghis	34.7	72.3	43.7	11.2	12.3
	Baghlan	16.4	46.7	33.2	28.8	30.5
	Balkh	12.0	38.0	29.9	41.6	43.8
	Heart	19.8	55.3	30.1	54.9	65.4
	Nimroz	24.9	60.2	40.5	5.9	6.0
	Samangan	21.4	58.5	32.0	11.1	12.7
	Takhar	8.4	45.7	17.7	28.0	29.0
b) Ages 20 to 24						
First SDES round (Six provinces)	Kabul	30.5	61.3	18.2	222.2	200.9
	Bamiyan	37.4	66.4	16.0	35.7	31.8
	Daykundi	31.7	61.4	18.1	17.5	15.9
	Ghor	73.3	90.5	11.1	40.5	37.4
	Kapisa	42.6	70.5	15.2	25.6	22.9
	Parwan	37.6	71.8	17.0	17.0	15.4
Second SDES round (Seven provinces)	Badghis	67.3	88.9	72.9	23.3	24.2
	Baghlan	49.2	76.3	60.2	55.5	59.3
	Balkh	41.1	68.8	57.6	83.0	86.1
	Heart	55.4	78.5	63.7	114.6	127.0
	Nimroz	63.2	82.2	78.8	11.3	11.0
	Samangan	53.0	79.7	69.5	24.1	23.1
	Takhar	37.9	76.8	46.9	54.7	57.6

* Number of girls at the corresponding ages divided by the number of boys at the same ages among EM and engaged young population.
Source: *SDES- 2015-2016, UNFPA-Afghanistan and CSO of Afghanistan (Micro data)*

Proportion of EEM at ages 18 or older is near twofold the proportion in the younger group and in most of the cases encompasses more that 50 percent of all women. There are always more girls than boys EEM. The exceptions are, again, Ghor and

Badghis with the largest proportions: 75.9 percent and 72.3, respectively, of all women.

Finally, at the age group 20-24, one can say that entrance to marriage is a consolidate process among Afghan women. In general, far more than two thirds of women are either engaged or already married. At this particular age group, vast majority in the latter category. Ghor and Badghis, in fact, presents near 90 percent of all women. Men's profile maintains large differences as it happens at earlier ages. Around half of them, at this age group are EEM.

It is well known that marriage is strongly associated with certain patterns of the socio-cultural contexts; populations with more traditional values in general have nearly universal marriage. It is important to assess the prevalence of early marriage according to a proxy of differentials in life conditions and/ or secularism. The proxy we consider here is residence in either urban or rural areas. The urban population, in general, has better life conditions (higher education and income) than the rural, and tends to be more exposed to innovations and foreign ideas typical of secularism.8 9

Figure 1 shows significant difference among urban/rural proportions of EEM.10 While for the total population it was well below 10 percent in the age group 16–17, in rural areas the proportion is above this percentage. Despite any difficulties to collect information, SDES reveals this common pattern among almost all provinces. with exception of Badghis and Ghor.

Summarizing, although early marriages still happens, the data reveal proportions of young married women below the very high levels frequently referred to in the literature for the previous decades; it shows, however, evidence of child marriage. Entrance at marriage was found to accelerate immediately after the girl surpasses ages at which marriage is a fundamental violation of human rights.

Using the first round of surveys it is found that early marriage in the rural areas of Ghor reaches disturbing levels: about 30 percent of girls below 15 are ever married or engaged, and around 40 percent are ever married before the age of 18, and 17

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[8] Attitudinal dimensions on modernization that are usually a better proxy for secularism were not collected in SDES.

[9] The association between secularism and marital status is widely discussed in the literature. Beresford (2011), in a research that includes Muslim populations provides a number of related studies.

[10] Considering that urban population represents about 10 percent of the total population, with the exception of Kabul, it is worth remembering that figures may be affected by random fluctuations.

percent are already engaged. At ages 20–24, the proportions of EEM in urban and rural areas are similar, although the lower values correspond regularly to the former.

Figure 1. Kabul, Bamiyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Kapisa, Parwan, Bagdish, Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Nimroz, Samangan and Takhar (2015-2017)- Proportion (percent) of engaged and ever married (EEM) females at selected ages according to area of residence

First SDES round (Six provinces)

Second SDES round (Seven provinces)
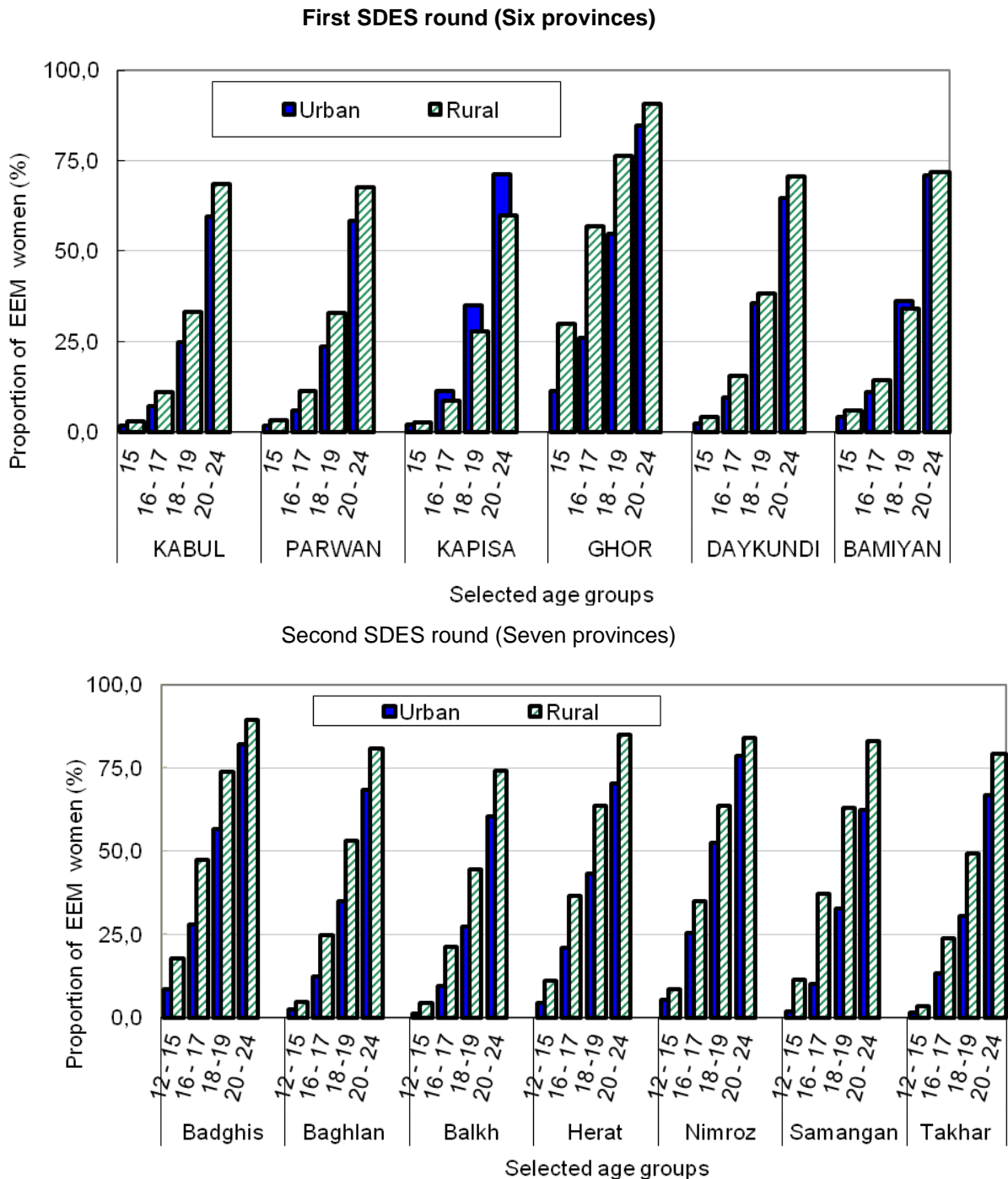
Source: *SDES- 2015-2017, UNFPA-Afghanistan and CSO of Afghanistan (Micro data)*

On the second round, proportions of EEM at after legal age to marriage does increase three times compared to the values at earlier age group (12 to 15). Again, given the sensitivity of the issue, such an increment exposes the evidence of child marriage and particularly the female child marriage. Besides, context of living seems to play strong influence on nuptiality patterns; differentials according rural/urban residence are more accentuated than in the past.

With the exception of Nimroz and Takhar – where urban proportion of EM girls is about two thirds the equivalent for rural areas – prevalence of early marriage (at ages 12 to 17) in urban areas is nearly 50% lower than in rural areas. In the most developing setting of this set of seven provinces (Balkh), EM girls represent less than 4 percent in the cities, while in the rural area, prevalence is higher than twofold (near 10 percent).

Exploring the SDES data in relation to Coale-Trussell nuptiality patterns, there is evidence that the experience reflected in the reports of cohorts above 25 years of age differ from that of younger cohorts. Patterns for ages older than 25 reflect ages at the start of nuptiality lower than those associated with the reports of the younger cohorts. Most probably this is evidence of recent positive change toward later marriage, but could also relate to age misreporting. Further analyses are needed to better understand this issue. However, at this stage we trust the evidence that young people are marrying at later ages than their older counterparts. Differences by urban-rural residence are unclear. Whether modern attitudes (or secularism) are influencing marital status calls for further research. Future research should include, on the one hand, whether social changes are operating in Afghan society by collecting data to measure its association with changes in marital status. On the other hand, data validation/evaluation is needed regarding the age at marriage for boys and girls, as well as on the prevalence of child and early marriages among older cohorts or generations.

AGE OF ENTRANCE AT MARRIAGE

Table 2 shows the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) for men and women and the corresponding differences between sexes. SMAM is also calculated for the entrance at Engagement status. It is worth to remember that the estimation of SMAM

assumes stable populations, i.e., without demographic changes, which is not the case in Afghanistan11. As nuptiality has been subject of social policies intending to delay the entrance at marriage, age composition of marital status is changing, hence, these results are representative for the youngest generations.

Table 2. Kabul, Bamiyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Kapisa, Parwan, Bagdish, Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Nimroz, Samangan and Takhar (2015-2017): - Singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) for Ever married and Engaged (EEM) and Ever married (EM) by sex

| Province | SMAM | | | | | | c) SMAM difference between EEM and EM | |
| | a) EEM | | | b) EM | | | | |
	Male	Female	Sex Difference	Male	Female	Sex Difference	Male	Female
First SDES round (Six provinces)								
Kabul	24.9	21.9	3.0	25.9	22.6	3.3	1.0	0.7
Parwan	23.9	21.2	2.7	25.2	22.2	3.0	1.3	1.0
Kapisa	24.3	21.8	2.5	25.6	22.6	3.0	1.2	0.7
Ghor	19.9	16.7	3.2	22.7	18.7	4.0	2.8	1.9
Daykundi	23.6	20.7	3.0	24.4	21.3	3.1	0.8	0.7
Bamiyan	24.1	20.6	3.6	25.1	21.2	3.8	1.0	0.7
Second SDES round (Seven provinces)								
Badghis	20.9	17.5	3.3	23.3	19.4	3.9	2.4	1.9
Baghlan	22.9	20.0	2.9	24.5	21.4	3.1	1.5	1.3
Balkh	23.9	20.9	3.0	25.3	22.1	3.3	1.4	1.2
Herat	22.4	19.4	3.1	23.9	20.7	3.2	1.5	1.3
Nimroz	21.8	19.2	2.7	23.1	20.1	3.1	1.3	0.9
Samangan	22.5	18.9	3.6	24.4	20.4	3.9	1.8	1.5
Takhar	24.1	20.0	4.1	25.4	21.1	4.3	1.3	1.1
Average	*23.0*	*19.9*	*3.1*	*24.5*	*21.1*	*3.5*	*1.5*	*1.1*

Source: *SDES- 2015-2017, UNFPA-Afghanistan and CSO of Afghanistan (Micro data)*

Among those engaged or ever married (EEM) the female SMAM value oscillates around 19-22. The province of Ghor is an outlier, with a female SMAM of 16.7. The province of Badghis has a quite young entrance at this stage (17.5). The male's SMAM, in general, is around three years older than female's, but Takhar with more than 4 years difference. These results are expected since, on average, men would marry older than women.

Considering the ever married population, age average of entrance at marriage oscillates around age 20 among women, being the exception Balkh and Kabul – the most urbanized provinces – where SMAM reaches age 22.1 and 22.6, respectively.

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[11] Original idea from Hajnal (1953). It is based on the concept of number of years lived by a cohort or generation in the state of celibacy; when applied to a cross-sectional data (referred to a population in a given date as in this the case) we assume no changes among cohorts relative to the way they married.

The national SMAM in 2010 was 21,5 (AMS/2010) and there is no equivalent national measure for 2015, however, the AfDHS 2015 presents the median age at first marriage for population aged 25-49 as being 18.5 and 22,9 years among women and men respectively. Considering that youngest population is excluded, the AfDHS 2015 endorse these numbers indicating a young entrance at marriage.

For the engaged or ever married female population the SMAM oscillates around age than 20 and near 22 (in Kabul and Kapisa). The youngest SMAM (16.7) corresponds to Ghor, the most socially vulnerable setting in this set of provinces. Comparison of SMAM between EEM and EM (last columns in table 2) indicates that once an individual is engaged, it takes shorter time for the woman to marry than for the man.

Recalling that the first round of SDES (Kabul, Parwan, Kapisa, Ghor, Daykundi and Bamiyan) was carried out about 4/5 years before the second round, timing of entrance at marriage and association with degree of social development are similar in both surveys' rounds. Were these 13 provinces here analysed a national representative sample, the hypotheses devised before, saying that "compared to neighbour countries Afghanistan has a nuptiality pattern with an age of entrance at marriage similar to that found in the Region, unlike what would be expected according available literature that attributes significant earlier age at marriage to Afghanistan" seems plausible. While it may be true that entrance at marriage is not happening at extreme earliest ages as these results suggest, the comparison with data from the previous round of surveys may also be indicative of no or little impact of social polices oriented to avoid marriage at young ages over the last, say, five years.

MODELLING ENTRANCE AT MARRIAGE ACCORDING EDUCATIONAL STATUS

To measure the role of improvement is social development in the nuptiality pattern using educational levels as a proxy, a logistic model was fitted. Education was considered from three different approaches:

e) The woman itself
f) The highest educational attained in the household
g) The household head educational level.

The analysis was made only for the provinces of the SDES second round (2015-2017).

In order to control the association by age and sex simultaneously, and control for some of the potential composition effects, it was estimated the odds ratios of being EM by each measure of education examined in the previous section and for each of the seven Afghan provinces. Tables 3, 4, and 5 separately present these results.

Table 3 - Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Nimroz, Samangan, Takhar (2015-2017): Odds ratios predicting the likelihood of being ever-married by years of education among women/men aged 15 to 34 years

Variables	Badghis	Baghlan	Balkh	Herat	Nimroz	Samangan	Takhar
Years of education							
Zero	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
1 to 6	0,49*	0,61*	0,67*	0,57*	0,63*	0,48*	0,68*
7 to 9	0,35*	0,50*	0,48*	0,37*	0,42*	0,40*	0,51*
10 to 11	0,25*	0,34*	0,33*	0,24*	0,29*	0,31*	0,39*
12 or more	0,35*	0,33*	0,25*	0,15*	0,30*	0,29*	0,32*
Age group							
15-19	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
20-24	7,89*	10,65*	11,05*	10,81*	10,21*	6,83*	12,61*
25-29	43,17*	70,07*	60,14*	62,73*	49,04*	37,64*	85,66*
30-34	180,12*	288,75*	230,78*	234,20*	167,97*	143,89*	404,96*
Sex							
Male	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
Female	4,04*	2,83*	3,17*	3,81*	3,37*	3,67*	5,73*
Constant	0,16*	0,09*	0,07*	0,13*	0,15*	0,13*	0,04*
Total	68,498	209,776	287,920	415,033	39,534	79,872	208,154

Source: *SDES- 2015-2016, UNFPA-Afghanistan and CSO of Afghanistan (Micro data)*
p-value: * <.001

Table 3 presents the odds ratios predicting the likelihood of being EM by years of education for women and men aged 15 to 34 years. First, results confirm that the association between individual education and the chance of being EM is, indeed, negative. That is, when controlling for age and sex, the highest the individual education, the lowest the odds of being EM. This association remains even for the highest educational level of education (12 years or more). That is models in Table 4 show that men and women with the highest level of education display the lowest odds of being EM. One exception is Badghis.

Results from Table 3 also confirm that age has a very strong association with the chance of being EM. Older men and women (30-34) display the highest odds of being EM. In addition, results according to sex show that women has a much higher odds of being EM than men, when controlling for age and individual level of education. This finding was expected taking into account earlier results of this paper about sex differentials in entrance at marriage.

Table 4- Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Nimroz, Samangan, Takhar (2015-2017): Odds ratios predicting the likelihood of being ever-married by the highest educational level of education in HH among women/men aged 15 to 34 years

Variables	Badghis	Baghlan	Balkh	Herat	Nimroz	Samangan	Takhar
Highest educational level in HH							
Zero	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
1 to 6	0,44*	0,55*	0,61*	0,49*	0,56*	0,38*	0,53*
7 to 9	0,33*	0,46*	0,43*	0,32*	0,44*	0,32*	0,46*
10 to 11	0,23*	0,32*	0,32*	0,21*	0,30*	0,25*	0,37*
12 or more	0,26*	0,27*	0,22*	0,13*	0,28*	0,20*	0,28*
Age group							
15-19	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
20-24	8,42*	10,98*	11,29*	11,11*	10,47*	7,39*	12,84*
25-29	48,13*	71,70*	65,17*	68,34*	51,52*	43,10*	89,82*
30-34	209,27*	305,01*	254,38*	260,60*	182,33*	176,75*	426,32*
Sex							
Male	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
Female	4,91*	3,75*	3,63*	4,13*	3,85*	4,33*	6,37*
Constant	0,20*	0,11*	0,10*	0,19*	0,20*	0,19*	0,06*
Total	68,498	209,776	287,920	415,033	39,321	79,872	208,154

Source: *SDES- 2015-2016, UNFPA-Afghanistan and CSO of Afghanistan (Micro data)*
p-value: * <.001

Table 4 presents the odds ratios predicting the likelihood of being EM by the highest educational level of education in the household among women and men aged 15 to 34 years. As for individual years of education, results from Table 4 indicate that the higher educational level of education in the household the lower the chance of being EM. Again, and unlike the descriptive findings, this association does not change when education rises and becomes stronger for the highest educational level of education (12 years or more). Again, the exception is Badghis.

Results for age and sex, in Table 5, follow the same pattern observed before in those models controlling for individual years of education exhibited in Table 3.

Next, Table 5 displays the odds ratios predicting the likelihood of being EM by the household head years of education among women and men aged 15 to 34 years in the seven Afghan provinces. Results for Badghis, Baghlan, Herat, and Nimroz show that when the head's education increases from zero to 1-6 years of education, the chance of being EM increases. That is, women and men living in households where the head has between 1 to 6 years of education present a higher chance of being EM than those living in households where the head has no schooling. In addition, in all the seven Afghan provinces, individuals that reside in households where the head has between 7 and 9 years of education present a (much) higher chance of being EM than those living in households where the head has no schooling. These findings follow a different path than those observed for the two other measures of education employed before and need to be more deeply studied.

Table 5 - Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Nimroz, Samangan, Takhar (2015-2017): Odds ratios predicting the likelihood of being ever-married by the HH head years of education among women/men aged 15 to 34 years

Variables	Badghis	Baghlan	Balkh	Herat	Nimroz	Samangan	Takhar
HH head years of education							
Zero	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
1 to 6	1,14*	1,11*	0,89*	1,15*	1,29*	0,80*	1,00^{ns}
7 to 9	1,52*	2,00*	1,06*	1,15*	1,13**	1,29*	1,41*
10 to 11	0,93^{ns}	2,44*	1,15*	0,95^{ns}	0,97^{ns}	1,99*	1,30*
12 or more	0,76*	1,34*	0,64*	0,55*	0,66*	0,77*	0,74*
Age group							
15-19	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
20-24	8,06*	10,32*	10,42*	9,61*	10,24*	6,90*	12,27*
25-29	45,89*	71,99*	62,75*	60,05*	53,13*	41,88*	89,33*
30-34	207,60*	330,95*	259,28*	241,79*	191,89*	167,78*	443,15*
Sex							
Male	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
Female	4,96*	3,90*	3,66*	3,99*	3,91*	4,37*	6,53*
Constant	0,11*	0,04*	0,04*	0,07*	0,10*	0,09*	0,03*
Total	67,996	208,284	286,168	412,709	39,321	78,491	207,193

Source: *SDES- 2015-2016, UNFPA-Afghanistan and CSO of Afghanistan (Micro data)*
p-value: * <.001; **<.05; ns: no significant

In the other hand, with the exception of Baghlan, results for those living in households with the highest level of head's education (12 or more) present a lower chance of being EM than those in households where the head has no education.

CONCLUSIONS

The main results of the nuptiality analysis confirm that marriage is universal in the provinces covered by the SDES. It is also a very fast process: in a relative short period of time since the onset of nuptiality, almost 100 percent of women and men have married; in the case of women it starts earlier and proportion of married quickly increases by age.

The widespread perception that Afghan women enter into marriage at very early ages has been confirmed only in Ghor and Badghis. Whilst it is said that most girls are married before age 18, according to this data, this is not the case for the younger generation in a great part of the surveyed provinces. Although a significant number of girls are already engaged or married by age 18, they are still a third or less of all women aged 18–19, except in Ghor, where this proportion is 76 percent for girls and 43 percent for boys, and Badghis, where this proportion is 72 for girls and 35 percent for boys.

The proportion of ever married women at age 20 or older increases very quickly with age. Almost 100 percent are married by age 30, which confirms that among older cohorts marriage occurred at very early ages Marriage is, effectively, universal in the provinces covered by the SDES. It is also a very fast process: in a relative short period of time since the onset of nuptiality, almost 100 percent of women and men have married; in the case of women it starts earlier and proportion of married increases quickest by age.

At older ages, most of those outside marriage are widowed, and most of these are women. A byproduct of considering the sex composition of widowhood status is that it may reflect differences in the mortality level among provinces and by sex; hence, these results can supplement mortality research.

Nuptiality indicators suggest that important changes are operating in Afghan society. Policies for delaying early marriages seem to have produced results; the expansion of the educational system to include girls surely has also had an important role and may continue to do so. Improvement in living conditions and women's empowerment should take off if universal education is achieved.

Modeled results on education and marriage indicate that marriage has a positive association with welfare. This unexpected relationship is explained by the particular Afghan conjuncture. This may pose paradoxes on the possible effects of inclusive programmes, aimed to raise the standard of living. Would better life standards increase the entrance to marriage with consequent effects on fertility? As fertility is very high among married women, would this effect worsen the already precarious situation of women's reproductive health? By no means should the consideration of these hypotheses be perceived as casting doubt on the need to urgently increase social investments in education, health and other social programmes. These investments are paramount, and decision makers should ensure that upgrades in social development translate into real life improvements for each female and male citizen. Indeed, these reflections are meant to highlight the need to adopt culturally sensitive approaches in the design of policies and programmes. In particular, culturally sensitive approaches are necessary to adequately address traditional values surrounding marriage and motherhood/ parenthood, and thus to bring about positive change.

In any case, data point to the dawn of new patterns where young people are marrying at later ages. Whether modern attitudes and wider expectations of better life conditions are influencing marital status calls for further research. Future research should include, on the one side whether social changes are operating in the Afghan society by collecting data to measure its association with changes in marital status.

By considering inconsistencies in the dataset, there is also need of more data validation/evaluation regarding the age at marriage for boys and girls, as well as on the prevalence of child and early marriages among older cohorts or generations.
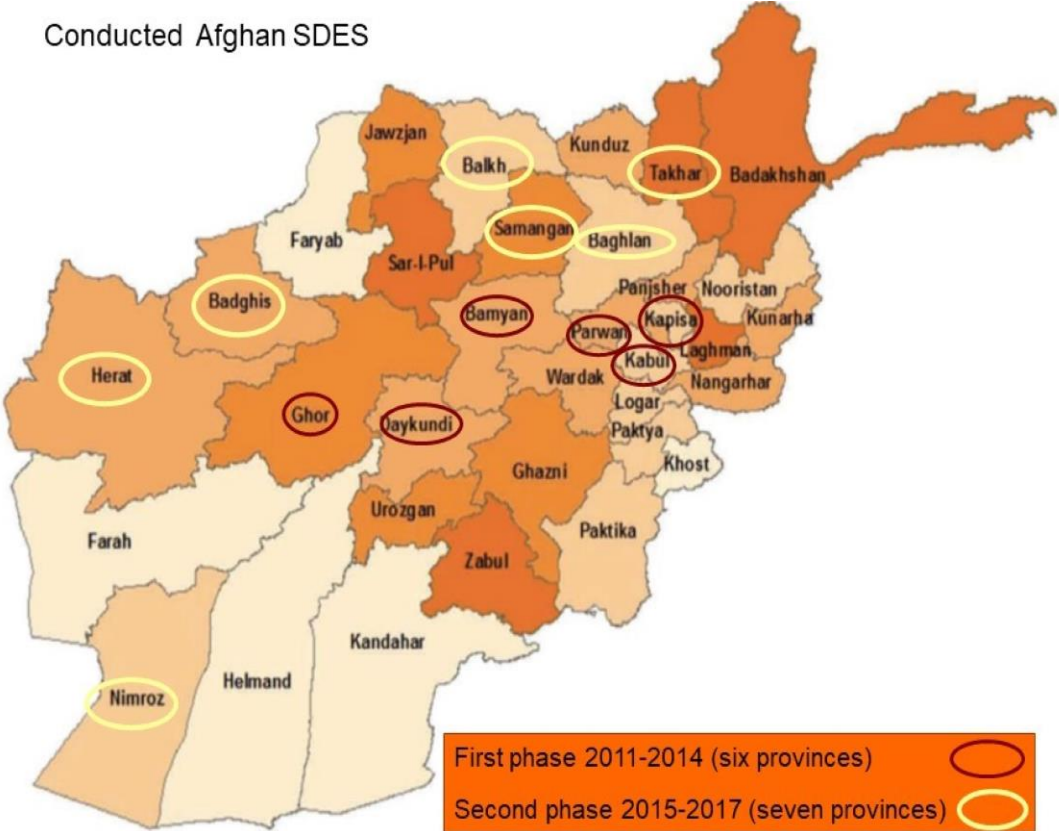
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Annexes

Annex 1 – Afghan territory and provinces where Socio-demographic and Economic survey (SDES) were conducted.

Conducted Afghan SDES

First phase 2011-2014 (six provinces)
Second phase 2015-2017 (seven provinces)

Annex 2
Selected indicators of social development - Afghanistan, Kabul and Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Nimroz, Samangan, Takhar (circa 2013/2014):

Afghanistan and selected provinces	Female Population[1]	Rural Population[2]	Female Illiteracy Rate[2,3]	Years of Schooling[4]	Net Attend. Rate, Prim. School[5]	Access to Skilled Ante natal Care[2]	Access to water	Access to Sanitary Toilet[2]
Afghanistan	7,586,627	76,1	79,7	2,8	54,4	62,6	64,8	39,0
Kabul	976.682	16,1	59,1	5,7	75,7	88,4	93,7	94,2
SDES - seven provinces from second round filed work								
Balkh	396.976	63,7	73,7	3,6	63,9	85,8	49,1	22,3
Herat	590.448	71,7	74,0	2,3	53,3	76,2	76,5	52,9
Baghlan	29.0305	79,8	84,9	2,6	52,1	70,5	61,6	18,1
Nimroz	52.104	84,0	71,9	2,3	51,1	82,6	23,5	73,5
Takhar	286.127	86,9	83,9	1,9	61,9	56,9	71,5	50,7
Samangan	109.702	92,2	88,1	1,6	50,7	58,3	14,7	10,3
Badghis	115.583	97,1	96,2	0,5	40,0	34,4	23,1	18,1

1. Ages 15-49
2. Per cent
3. Age 14+
4. Age 18+
5. Ages 7-12

aa.a = Two best ranked indicators

aa.a = Two worst ranked indicators

Source:

a) Female Population: Basic data SDES project (UNFPA/CSO-Afghanistan) and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations (2017) World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, - Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). DVD Edition.

b) Other indicators: World Bank-Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2016) Afghanistan Provincial Briefs (English report) http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/publication/afghanistan-provincial-briefs-2016 - Accessed in:11/30/2017 12:16 PM