

International Meeting on
**WOMEN'S HEALTH, GYNECOLOGY,
OBSTETRICS AND BREAST CANCER 2018**
November 19-20, 2018 Sydney, Australia

Early marriage and its consequences on reproductive health: A cross-sectional study in Nepal

Samikshya Neupane
Kathmandu Medical College, Nepal

Introduction: Early marriage (<18 years) is a global public health problem, has been deep-rooted in Nepal for centuries. It has severe consequences on maternal/child health.

Method: A community-based cross-sectional explorative study was carried out in Panauti-Municipality, Kavrepalanchowk-District. Fecund (15-49 years) women (n=430) were confidentially interviewed with informed-consent utilizing subject-specific questionnaires. Data analysis was performed by SPSS, Chi-square and logistic regression. Odds ratio and 95% confidence interval was calculated by EPIINFO, considering $P < 0.05$ for statistical significance.

Result: Prevalence of early and very early marriages (<15 years) was detected 48.6% and 12.8%, respectively. Sociodemographics, mass-media exposure and women's autonomy have been revealed as crucial players for early marriage. Women with early marriage were less likely (COR: 22.77, 95% CI: 11.93-43.45) to access complete ANC services compared to women with normal marriage. In comparison to normal marriage, the greater likelihood (COR: 19.04) of home-delivery was revealed in early marriage. More than 6 times higher risks of adverse pregnancy outcomes (abortion, stillbirth and neonatal death) were observed in early marriage. Statistical significant 27.68 and 15.12 times higher risk of neonatal death was observed in very early and early marriage than normal marriage. Early married respondents had >3 times higher risks of post-delivery danger signs in themselves and their babies.

Conclusion: Women who marry early-age are prone to early child-bearing, lower access to maternal-healthcare, experience higher pregnancy morbidities, post-delivery danger signs and poor health bearing excessive financial burden on health expenditure. This study alarms policy-makers to intervene existing system, implement improved efforts to end early marriage and its consequences.

Biography

Samikshya Neupane is a Resident at Department of Community Medicine, Kathmandu Medical College, Nepal.

samikshyaneupane05@gmail.com

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