



Youth transition to employment and marriage in Kashmir: Changing perceptions and attitudes

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Abstract

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the study of youth transitions. National and international studies have analyzed the role of structure and agency factors in shaping the youth transition. Using the field survey and census data on Kashmiri youths aged 15–29, this study illustrates the processes through which Kashmiri youths make transitions to adulthood along with their life course, focusing on four transition markers—school enrollment, labor force participation, marriage, and the establishment of an independent household. Specifically, the article explores the aspirations, attitudes and perceptions of young men and women for work and marriage and their ability to achieve their transitions to adulthood. I examine how these statuses change with age, with an explicit focus on gender differences. The investigation reveals the significance of educational attainment for transitions to adulthood among Kashmiri youths and also substantial gender and locality differences in the transition process.

Keywords: youth transition, structure, agency, Kashmir, gender, aspirations, attitudes, attitudes, employment

Introduction

Youth constitute an important segment of society. At its simplest, youth can be defined as an interstitial phase in the life course between childhood and adulthood (Jones & Wallace 1992) [1].

Rather than seek a complex and often unsatisfactory age definition for youth, many academic writers have defined it as a series of transitions (Jones & Wallace 1992) [1]. Achieving the status of adulthood is thus dependent upon successfully making at least some of these transitions, rather than reaching some arbitrary chronological age. The main transitions of youth which are of critical importance are as follows:

- The transition from full-time education and training to a fulltime job in the labour market (the school-to-work transition)
- The transition from family of origin (mainly the biological family) to family of destination (the domestic transition)
- The transition from residence with parents to living away from them (the housing transition).

Thus Youth transition is defined here as an interstitial moment that includes diverse passages: from full-education to full-time employment, from the biological family to the family of destination and from the family home to independent housing (Jones and Wallace, 1992; Coles, 1995) [1, 5]. Youth transitions are a central theme that runs through the sociology of youth as youth is a crucial time of life when young people start realizing their aspirations, assuming their economic independence and finding their place in society. The transitions to adulthood and to the world of work often take place simultaneously, and this is a difficult time for many young people.

The transitions perspective in the sociology of youth aims to understand the relationship between the structural environment that young people are born into, and their

biographical movements into family formation, the labour market, and the housing market. One of the main aims of this perspective has been to demonstrate the profound influence of class, gender, ethnicity in shaping youth biographies. Early research on youth transition such as that of Roberts (1997) demonstrated that young people's aspirations and eventual biographies were structured by locally available structural opportunities. Contemporary transitions research continues to stress the importance of structural processes on young people's work, housing and family lives, but new themes have emerged as researchers have come to terms with the dramatic social changes that have reshaped modern societies in the last few decades. These recently developed theories of 'individualisation' and 'risk' have helped to broaden out the discussion on youth transitions. Beck, Baethge, Hurrelmann and Giddens have all shown, in different ways, how choice and uncertainty can be important dimensions in young people's biographies in contemporary societies. Their experiences and their futures are not exclusively determined by socializing and structural influences, but also involve elements of subjectivity, choice and agency.

It is widely recognized that nowadays youth transitions have become more differentiated and complex but also more uncertain (OECD, 1999). In contrast to the past, for many students the moment of leaving school does not correspond to the starting point of their working career. There are at least three main reasons: (1) an increasing number of secondary school leavers choose to continue in education at tertiary level; (2) entering the labour market has become more difficult and a higher number of young people experience a period of unemployment before finding a job; (3) a reduction in the number of jobs requiring only basic education leads less qualified people to attend some vocational training programmes before entering the labour market. As a result of which, the transition to adulthood for contemporary young

adults appears to be slowing. It is no longer taken for granted that individuals will take on adult roles when they reach a legitimate adult age, which is usually defined as between the ages of 25 and 30. Two main characteristics describe the pattern of the new generation's life course transition. First, the pattern is more heterogeneous than in the past (Jacob and Kleinert 2008) ^[10]. Young people no longer follow a standardized order and life course sequence, and the transition has become more flexible and reversible. Second, young adults tend to "put off" the schedule of life course transitions (Cherlin, Scabini, and Rossi 1997) ^[4]. As the importance of social norms and traditional culture decreases, young people take greater individual control and maintain flexible timetables for their life course tempo. This leads scholars to note that the new generation contradicts the principle of reasoned behavior and is willing to risk departing from social norms when deciding to transition to the next life stage (Shanahan 2000) ^[13].

In addition to studies in developed countries, a growing number of studies have extended to developing (or less developed) countries, highlighting both convergence and divergence of the transition to adulthood between young people in developing and developed countries (Grant and Furstenberg 2007) ^[12]. The extension of interest to developing societies, which vastly differ in social institutions and cultural norms surrounding the transition to adulthood compared to those in developed societies, contributes to a better understanding of how processes of becoming an adult are contingent on broader social contexts as well as influenced by global trends. In contrast to the Western societies, little is known about the transition to adulthood in South Asian societies, particularly in societies with strong family solidarity and intergenerational ties. The present study makes an attempt to study the youth transition in Kashmir.

Institutional and cultural contexts in Kashmir

Jammu & Kashmir is India's northern-most state, lying between six mountain ranges and covering an area of 2,22,236 sq. kilometers. It is located between 32°17' and 36°58' North latitude, and between 37°26' and 80°30' East longitude. The state commonly known as Kashmir is bounded on the north by Afghanistan and China, on the east by China, on the south by the state of Himachal Pradesh and the state of Punjab in India, and on the west by the North-West Frontier Province and the Punjab Province of Pakistan. Jammu and Kashmir actually comprises of three regions: the foothill plains of Jammu; the lakes and blue valleys of Kashmir rising to alpine passes, the high altitude plains and starkly beautiful mountains of Ladakh which lies beyond narrow passes. Jammu and Kashmir consists of three divisions: Jammu, Kashmir Valley and Ladakh, and is further divided into 22 districts.

Demographic changes and Youth population

As per details from Census 2011, Jammu and Kashmir has population of 1.25 Crores, an increase from figure of 1.01 Crore in 2001 census. Total population of Jammu and Kashmir as per 2011 census is 12,541,302 of which male and female are 6,640,662 and 5,900,640 respectively. In 2001, total population was 10,143,700 in which males were 5,360,926 while females were 4,782,774.

The total population growth in this decade was 23.64 percent while in previous decade it was 29.04 percent. The population of Jammu and Kashmir forms 1.04 percent of India in 2011. In 2001, the figure was 0.99 percent.

Sex Ratio in Jammu and Kashmir is 889 i.e. for each 1000 male, which is below national average of 940 as per census 2011. In 2001, the sex ratio of female was 892 per 1000 males in Jammu and Kashmir

Census of India 2011 has highlighted that 65% of the total population is less than 35 years of age and 50% under 25 years. India is expected to be the youngest country in the world by 2020 with the median age of 29 years.

Table 1: Youth population by Age group, and Sex

Area Name	Age-group	Total		
		Persons	Males	Females
India	All ages	1210854977	623270258	587584719
	15-19	120526449	63982396	56544053
	20-24	111424222	57584693	53839529
	25-29	101413965	51344208	50069757
Total		333364636(27.53%)	172911297	160453339
J & K	All ages	12541302	6640662	5900640
	15-19	1237462	640362	597100
	20-24	1160913	603578	557335
	25-29	1086122	584559	501563
	Total		3484497(27.78%)	1828499

Source: Census of India, 2011.

School enrollment and the educational system

Literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir has seen upward trend and is 67.16 percent as per 2011 population census. Of that, male literacy stands at 76.75 percent while female literacy is at 56.43 percent. In 2001, literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir stood at 55.52 percent of which male and female were 66.60 percent and 43.00 percent literate respectively.

Gender gap in literacy

Gender differential exists both in rural and urban areas with incidence of highest gap in rural areas. This is mainly attributed to cultural and social setup in the state. However the gap has considerably narrowed from 23.60% (Census 2001) ^[3] to 20.25% (census 2011) ^[3]. This has been possible due to introduction of host of programmes such as national program for education of girls at elementary level (NPEGEL), establishment of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyals (KGBVs), distribution of free text books/scholarships, community mobilization, establishment of girls hostels in educationally backward blocks of the state. Recently couple of measures has been taken such as distribution of Scotties to the meritorious girl students, payment of scholarships to the girl students.

Dropout rate

In respect of dropout rate, the mechanism of Unified District Information System of Education (UDISE) is throwing startling revelations. The dropout rate has increased considerably from 6.93% and 5.36% in Primary & upper –primary during 2015-16 to 10.30% and 10.20% during 2016-17 in primary and upper primary level. The decrease has mainly been due to disturbing conditions prevailed during 2016-17.

Gross enrollment ratio

There is a modest increase in the gross enrollment ratio in primary and upper levels. During 2015-16 total GER at primary level was 98.26% which has increased to 98.70% in 2016-17. Similarly at upper primary level the modest increase from 97.17% to 97.86% was witnessed during the said period.

The labor market in Kashmir

According to 2011 census, the number of total workers in J&K stood at 43.23 lakhs of which the main workers constitute 26.44 lakhs (61.77%) and the number of marginal workers constitutes 16.79 lakhs (38.83%).

Female workers constituted 26.09% of the total work force. The share of female in the Main workers is only 12.80% as against 47.02% in marginal workers category in J&K.

The unemployment rate signifies the proportion of persons who were available for work but did not get work during the reference period.

The person in the age group of 18-29 years had UR 13.2 per cent at the All India Level using UPS approach and 10.2 using UPSS approach. In the state of J&K, UR is 24.6 per cent using UPS approach and 23.8 per cent using UPSS approach. It is further observed from the data that in J&K, in the age group 18-29 years UR is highest among females i.e. 45.1 per cent and 44.6 per cent using UPS and UPSS approaches respectively. In J&K, UR for males of age group 18-29 years is 17.8 per cent and 16.9 per cent using UPS and UPSS approaches respectively.

The number of unemployed youth registered in various District Employment Exchanges of the J&K State is 111077 lakh as on ending March, 2016.

The transition to marriage

While the transition into marriage is a key component of the transition to adulthood in most contexts, marriage, in and of itself, is not necessarily a marker of adulthood, particularly for the numerous young women who wed during the teenage years. Substantial delays in the timing of marriage among most young people, however, are contributing to an overall lengthening of the interval between childhood and the assumption of adult roles. Compared with previous generations, a smaller proportion of young women and men are married in most regions. Men still marry at older ages than women. While only one-third of men in the developing world are married by ages 20-24, nearly two-thirds of women are married in this age group (Cynthia B. Lloyd, 2005).

In India the percentage of currently married females in the age group 15-49 years is an important indicator which can reflect the level and pattern of fertility over age groups. The percentage share of currently married female in the age group 15-49 years has come down from 84.4 in 1961 to 73.8 in 2011. The percentage in the age group 15-19 years has come down drastically from 69.5 in 1961 to 19.5 in 2011 showing a welcome shift in the level of married women in younger age groups. The highest proportion of women married continued to be in the age group 30-34 (93%) in the year 2011 also. In all age groups, the percentage of married women has declined further during 2011 (Office of the Registrar General, India).

Women in Jammu & Kashmir are getting married later than women anywhere else in the country. The average age at

which women in the state are marrying is nearly 3 years more than the mean age of marriage in India. According to the report Women and Men in India 2016 released by the central government's Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation last month, the mean age of women at the time of marriage in 21 major states was 22 years and 3 months in 2014. That figure was 25 years and 2 months for Jammu & Kashmir. For women in urban areas of Jammu & Kashmir, the mean age of marriage was 25 years and 8 months, 6 months more than the state average (Women and Men in India, 2016). The data shows that the marriage age for girls in J&K was 24.3 in the year 2012, 24.1 in 2013 and 24.9 in 2014 in the rural areas of the state. In the urban centres, the marriage age for girls for 2012 was 26.2, 25.8 in 2013 and 25.8 in 2015. The combined mean age for marriage of girls in J&K is 24.6 for the year 2012, 24.4 in 2013 and 25.2 for 2014. (Daily Excelsior)

A 2009 study by Department of Sociology, University of Kashmir, titled 'Emergence of Late Marriages in Kashmir,' states: 'Poverty, caste considerations, generation gap, modernization, inflation, irreligious attitudes and behavior have also influenced the current marriage pattern in Kashmir'. In this study, Dr Dabla had surveyed a sample of 2,500 individuals and concluded that while the desirable age of marriage for men in Kashmir at that time was 28 years, they were getting married at age over 32 years. For women, the desirable age was 26 years, but they were getting married at age 28

Data and methods

Participants

The participants in the present study were 350 youth aged 15-29 from the Kashmir valley, including 70 (20%) aged 15-19, 105 (30%) aged 20-24, and 175 (50%) aged 25-29. Background characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 2. With respect to Geographic area background, the sample was 40% urban and 60% from rural areas and about evenly divides between males and females (54% males and 46% females). Less than 14% of participants were married and less than 10% had atleast one child. There were wide range of education and socio-economic backgrounds (see table 1).

Procedure

Both primary and secondary sources of information were used in the study. In the present research work primary data has been collected from all over the Kashmir through personal interview using structured and guided schedule, formal and informal discussions, participant observations and collateral contacts. Besides, relevant data has been collected from published documents, policy notes, reports and interactions with government officials and non-governmental organizations. The secondary sources of data have been collected from books, periodicals, journals, articles and newspapers.

With an achieved sample size of 350, the survey was conducted in all 10 districts of Kashmir valley chosen by the method of stratified random sampling. The survey was conducted in July-October 2017. In each of the 10 districts, three tehsils were selected using the method of random sampling.

Researcher approached potential participants in public places, educational institutions etc. and asked if they would be willing to answer the brief schedule on the youth transition. Over 90% of those approached agreed to participate. The schedule took about 15 minutes to complete. The relevant data and

information has been collected in the field by the researcher himself during his Ph. D research. The data and information collected from the field, has been statistically treated (percentage, mean, average and correlation techniques are used) and socio-economically analyzed.

Table 2: Background Information (n=350)

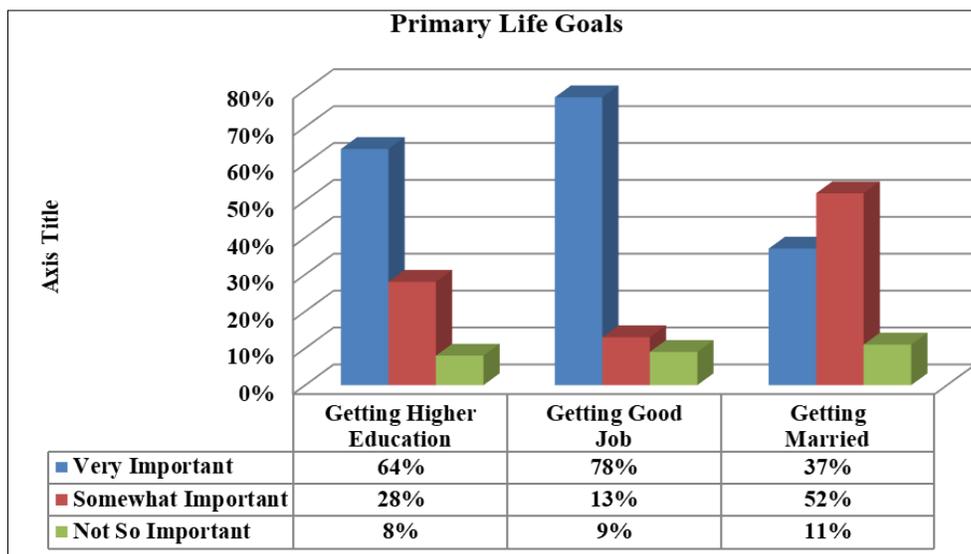
Characteristics		Number	%
Age group	15-19	70	20%
	20-24	105	30%
	25-29	175	50%
Gender	Male	189	54%
	Female	161	46%
Geographic Area	Urban	140	40%
	Rural	210	60%
Marital Status	Never married	301	86%
	Married	49	14%
Educational Status	Illiterate	70	20%
	Literate Upto 10 th	35	10%
	12 th	42	12%
	Graduation	105	30%
	Post-graduation & above	70	20%
Occupational Status	Other	28	8%
	Student	75	22%
	Unemployed (Inactive)	225	64%
	Employed	50	14%

Findings and analysis

The youth in a society represent the hope for the future. What are the dreams and life experience of the youth? What are the aims and aspirations of the youth in Kashmir? What are the goals of their life? A host of questions in this paper sought to tap their response to some of these questions in order to understand the attitudes and aspirations of a typical young person in Kashmir and maps their principal concerns.

The ranking of life goals, shown in table 3, proved to be significantly dependant on the core current activity status, gender and geographic area of the young respondent. Youth who were already economically active or employed, tended to

express goals that were associated with getting marriage (37%). Not surprisingly, the most commonly expressed goal among youth who remained outside of the labour force (the inactive) related to having a good job (78%). The fact that inactive youth rated “getting good job” as their primary life goal implies that a good portion of the currently inactive still maintain an attachment to the labour market and hope someday to join it. Perhaps some of the inactive are “discouraged” youth who are postponing their labour market entry due to their impression on the lack of opportunity opted for getting higher education.



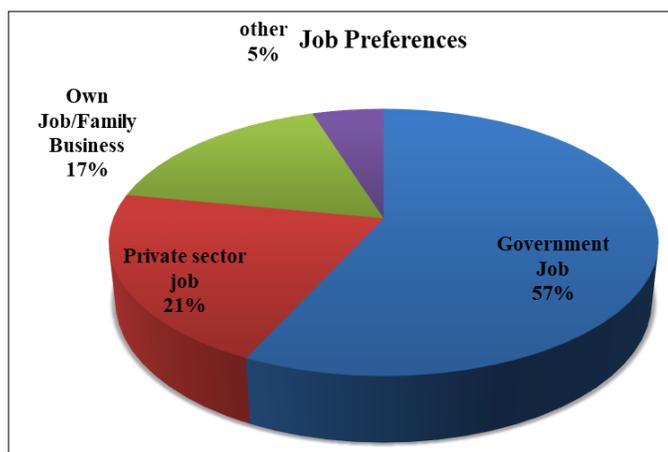
Source: Field Work

Fig 1: Primary life goals of young respondents. (n= 350)

About 64% young people felt that securing higher education was very important there was not much variation across economic status. Place of residence and gender appeared to make a difference. One fourth of the youth in rural areas particularly females claimed that securing higher education was not so important.

Job preference

What is the vision and aspiration of the younger generation in Kashmir with regard to employment opportunities? A range of questions tapped the response of young people in the state on this important issue. The survey asked a battery of questions to get a feel of the nature of employment opportunities young people in the Valley were looking for.



Source: Field Work

Fig 2: Job Preferences of young respondents. (n= 350)

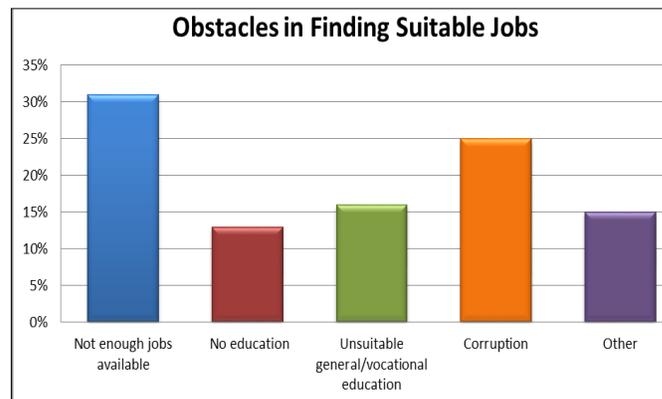
In an age of liberalization, privatization and globalization, do young people still dream of a government job? 57% of youth preferred a government job. Close to 20% wanted to work in the private sector. Only 17% dreamt of starting their own business or join their family business. A very small percentage preferred other options like doing job overseas etc.

The aspiration to work in/for government tended to increase with better access to education among the youth. Those who limited access to education/ did not pursue their education were more likely to be among those who preferred to start/work in their own business.

Main obstacles in finding suitable jobs

Responses to the question as to the main obstacles in finding

Suitable jobs are outlined in Figure 2. There are five main obstacles shown below in order of preference:



Source: Field Work

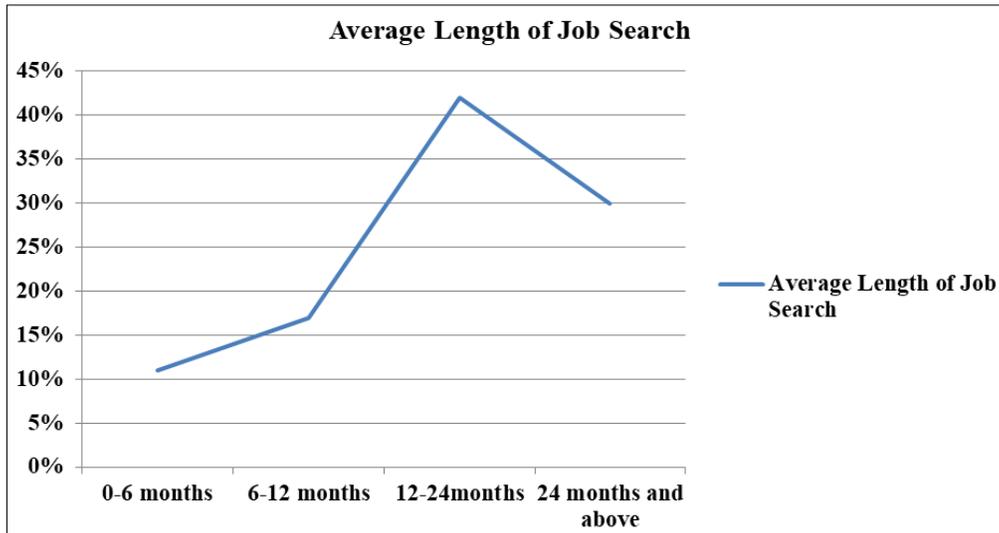
Fig 3: Main Obstacles in Finding Suitable Jobs. (n= 350)

Some 31% per cent of all youth identified “not enough jobs available” as the main obstacle to finding a suitable job. This perception however, was not shared by the Working Youth. 13% and 16% were of the opinion that “no education” and “unsuitable general/vocational education” were the main obstacles respectively. More than 25% of the youth identified the corruption as the second main obstacle to finding a ‘suitable’ job. The main obstacle recognized by the youth in finding a job is that there are not enough available jobs this was the main factor selected by Not Working Youth for their continued unemployment.

Average length of job search

For the Not Working Youth, approximately half of the cohort (42%) had spent more than a year searching for a job. (Table 6) An analysis by gender showed no significant difference between males and females. By education, youth were more likely to have a long job search, the lower their academic attainments, while analysis by age showed that older youth were more likely to search for a job longer than one year.

The majority of the Employed and the Self-Employed (11%) were employed within six months, while 17% respectively searched for more than a year. Patterns by age were similar to those for the Not Working Youth with the older youth searching longer. However, by educational attainment and gender there were some differences as Employed Youth with secondary level education had longer periods of extended job search than those with lower educational attainment.



Source: Field Work

Fig 4: Average Length of Job Search. (n= 350)

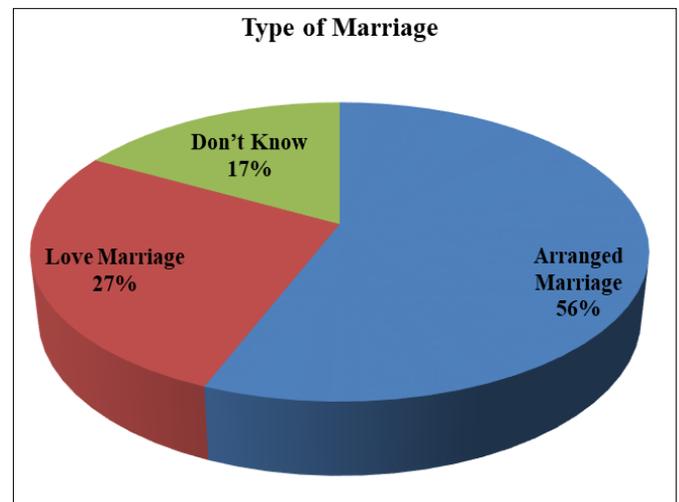
Young people’s preferences regarding timing and type of marriage

The Study also sought to assess young people’s preferences about the age at which to marry and, among the unmarried, their preferences for love or arranged marriages. It is possible, of course, that youth who were married in adolescence might have reported the age at which they married as the preferred age. Findings show that few young women preferred to marry below age 18, the legal minimum age at marriage for females, and, likewise, few young men preferred to marry before age 21, the legal minimum age at marriage for males. This preference was indicated by all youth, irrespective of sex, marital status or rural-urban residence. For example, just 3% of young women and hardly any young men preferred to marry before age 20. Sizeable proportions of young women (37%) and just 3% of young men preferred to marry before age 25. Moreover, the majority of young men (55%) preferred to marry at age 25 or later, a preference articulated by 18% of young women as well.

Differentials by marital status and rural-urban residence of respondents were notable. Married women were considerably more likely than the unmarried to prefer marriage before age 25 (48% and 24%, respectively); differences were negligible among young men (6% and 1%, respectively). Conversely, more unmarried than married youth preferred to marry at age 25 or later (62% versus 41% among young men, and 18% versus 6% among young women). A larger proportion of rural than urban young women expressed a preference to marry before age 25 — 45% of young women in rural areas compared to 17% in urban areas; differences were muted among young men (3% and 1%, respectively). Conversely, a smaller proportion of rural than urban youth expressed a preference to marry late; for example, 48% of rural young men compared to 70% of urban young men preferred to marry at age 25 or later, as did 8% and 20%, respectively, of young women.

Findings also show that the vast majority of unmarried youth preferred to have an arranged rather than a love marriage (56%). For example, 27% of young men and women reported

that they would prefer to have a love marriage. Rural-urban differences were muted. While 17% of unmarried have not decided yet.



Source: Field Work

Fig 5: Types of Marriage. (n= 350)

Conclusion

This article has examined how young men and women in their early and late twenties navigate the transition to adulthood within the context of educational change, flexible labor markets, and economic uncertainty in Kashmir Valley. I have emphasized that young men and women share certain uncertainties in the labor market, such as upward credentialing; reliance on personal networks during their job search; and the dilemma of how to juggle personal life, education, work, and planning for the future.

Young women’s entry into temporary employment prior to marriage signals both their desire to experience modernity and the economic necessity to contribute to their personal and family’s financial situation. Yet patriarchal values and a gender ideology set age boundaries for marriage and

emphasize girls' responsibilities as future wives and mothers in ways that differ from their male peers. Youth is a crucial time of life when young people start realizing their aspirations, assuming their economic independence and finding their place in society. The global jobs crisis has exacerbated the vulnerability of young people in terms of: i) higher unemployment, ii) lower quality jobs for those who find work, iii) greater labour market inequalities among different groups of young people, iv) longer and more insecure school to work transitions, and v) increased detachment from the labour market.

In sum, the results of the present study indicate that the new generation of young Kashmiris had interesting priorities and aspirations like letting higher education, favor for a government job and changing preference regarding age and type of marriage.

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