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Nuptiality in Thailand : An Analysis Based on the 1980 Population Census Data

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Introduction

Marriage is an important social institution in all societies. Its primary functions are procreation, maintenance of the family and the social structure. The age at entrance into marriage and the proportion ever-married are significant factors in determining demographic variables, especially fertility. Age at first marriage was considered as an intermediate variable influencing fertility (Davis and Blake, 1956). Recently it was shown that the proportion married is one of the proximate variables that affects fertility (Bongaarts, 1978).

Using the 1970 Population and Housing Census of Thailand, it was found that the nuptiality pattern in Thailand, lies between the *"traditional"* (young age at marriage and universality of marriage) and the *"modern"* (high age at marriage and high proportion of celibates) (Chamratrithirong, 1980). Chamratrithirong showed that the mean age at marriage is positively related to education, labour force participation and occupation. Also certain differences in marriage by religion and citizenship were evident even after educational level was controlled for. Further, household and migration status were shown to have a strong association with nuptiality (Chamratrithirong, 1980). It was also found that female mean age of marriage in Thailand is positively related to education, labour force participation outside of agriculture and negatively related to sex-ratio. However, the relationship of marriage with demographic, socio-economic variables has not been examined using the recent 1980 Population and Housing Census (Smith, 1980).

In this paper, the nuptiality in Thailand at the regional level is analysed. Thailand, like other developing countries, has a moderately high population growth rate. It has been recognized that increasing the age at marriage can lead to reductions in fertility, and subsequently affect population growth. In this connection, knowledge of association between marriage and demographic and socio-economic variables may be helpful in the formulation of a policy regarding marriage.

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Data and Methods

The previous studies show that age at marriage varies considerably among the rural-urban areas and the four regions of Thailand. The major distinction is between the Central and other regions, with small differences in the age at marriage among the Northeastern, Northern and Southern regions (Chamratrithirong, 1980). As mentioned, the data from 1980 Population and Housing Census of Thailand at the provincial level is used in this paper. In 1980, there were 72 provinces in Thailand.

For the analysis, two nuptiality indicators have been used 1) singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM)[1] and 2) percentage single in the age group 20-24 years (PS). The demographic and socio-economic characteristics considered in this study are percentage of females who have completed higher than primary school education (PHP), the percentage of females in non-agricultural activity (PFNG), sex-ratio (SR), percentage of the female population who live in urban areas (URBF) and percentage of Buddhists (PBUD). Percentage of Buddhists has been used in the analysis only for the Southern region because in this region it has been found to be an important variable in determining marriage patterns. To study the relationship between marriage and demographic and socio-economic variables, zero-order correlation and regression analysis have been used.

Results

From Table 1, it can be seen that the Central region has the highest values for most variables used in this study. For the Central region SMAM is highest at 23.39 years with PS of 48.01. The lowest SMAM is found in the Northeastern region, 21.55 years, and PS of 34.21. The variable PFNG shows substantial variation among the regions. While for the Central region it is 32.88 percent, for the Northeastern region it is only 7.47 percent. For the variables PHP and URBF, the Southern region shows the highest values, although the difference with the Central region is not great. The SR in the Central region is the lowest with a mean value of 97.97.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation for the variables in each region

Variable	Regions				
	Whole Kingdom	Central	North	Northeast	South
SMAM					
Mean	22.32	23.39	21.81	21.55	22.01
Standard deviation	1.13	0.92	0.57	0.47	1.13
PS					
Mean	40.18	48.01	36.66	34.21	37.88
Standard deviation	8.09	6.33	4.33	3.90	7.52
PHP					
Mean	9.36	10.50	8.49	5.88	12.45
Standard deviation	3.74	3.62	2.16	2.36	3.17
PFNG					
Mean	21.81	32.88	15.39	7.47	27.04
Standard deviation	15.56	15.74	5.37	2.49	15.45
SR					
Mean	99.55	97.97	101.61	99.79	99.50
Standard deviation	3.34	3.77	3.12	1.71	2.74
URBF					
Mean	8.58	10.09	7.07	3.82	13.27
Standard deviation	5.84	4.78	3.11	1.52	8.07
PBUD					
Mean					69.96
Standard deviation					27.93

Education

Findings from previous studies revealed that education generally has a strong and positive relationship with age at first marriage. Education affects the age at first marriage in two directions. Firstly, education can change attitudes about early marriage. Secondly, the chance of marriage is not high when a person is studying. It is therefore surprising that from Table 2, the correlation between SMAM and PHP is negative for Northeastern and Northern regions. When we consider PS instead of SMAM we find, as shown in Table 3, that the relationship between PS and education is positive in the North but in the Northeast the correlation remains negative. It is not clear why this negative relationship exists for the Northeastern region. The regression analysis (Tables 5 and 6) also show that PHP is not an important variable in determining SMAM or PS. The only exception is in the case of PS for the Central region where PHP is a significant determinant.

Table 2. Correlation coefficient between SMAM and demographic and socio-economic variables by region

	Variables				
Region	**PHP**	**PFNG**	**SR**	**URBF**	**PBUD**
Central	0.5599	0.5471	-0.5292	0.3823	-
North	-0.0333	0.3264	-0.6697	0.4298	-
Northeast	-0.1287	0.2560	-0.7110	0.2666	-
South	0.1454	0.2598	-0.2117	0.1532	0.8870

Table 3. Correlation coefficients between PS and demographic and socio-economic variables by region

	Variables				
Region	**PHP**	**PFNG**	**SR**	**URBF**	**PBUD**
Central	0.6225	0.5628	-0.5567	0.3460	-
North	0.1361	0.5063	-0.5239	0.3702	-
Northeast	-0.1576	0.1705	-0.7339	0.1744	-
South	0.1764	0.1893	-0.2961	0.1457	0.8827

Non-agricultural activity

The increasing labour force participation rates of women both before and after marriage may increase their ability to be self-supporting, and bring about changes in the attitude regarding early marriage. For Thailand, the zero-order correlation coefficients show a high positive correlation between SMAM, PS and PFNG. The results of the regression of SMAM and PS show that PFNG is a significant variable for the Northeast, North and Whole Kingdom. For the Whole Kingdom of Thailand, the influence of PFNG on PS is much higher (coefficient = 0.373) than the influence of PFGN on SMAM (coefficient = 0.054).

Sex-ratio [2]

As it has been explained that the factors which enter into a woman's decision to marry are 1) her attitudes or predispositions towards or against marriage as compared to alternative behavior at a given point in time, 2) her actual short-run alternatives to marriage, such as education, career or inactivity and 3) the availability of potential spouses (Smith, 1983). It has been shown that for Thailand, the sex ratio has a negligible correlation with female SMAM and male SMAM. In Malaysia and Indonesia however the sex ratio has a positive correlation with both female and male SMAM, which, in town is opposite to the situation in the Philippines (Smith, 1980). Using 1970 Population and Housing Census of Thailand, a negative correlation of masculinity ratio[3] with female SMAM was found (Chamratrithirong, 1980). The analysis shows that SR has a negative correlation with female SMAM in every region. The regression analysis of both SMAM and PS reveals that SR is an important variable nationally and for all regions except the South.

Urbanization

In this study we consider urbanization as the ratio of the female population living in urban areas to total population. A previous study on Thai nuptiality patterns shows marriage age differentials among women residing in the four regions as well as in rural and urban areas (Chamratrithirong, 1980). The same pattern of regional marriage variations is also confirmed by the findings from SOFT/WFS, 1975 (Limanonda, 1983). Our regression analysis of PS shows that URBF is a significant variable only for the Central region.

Religion

Religion is an important social institution which is closely related to traditions and customs. The influence of religion on nuptiality has been studied cross-nationally and within specific countries (Smith, 1975). It is observed that both Sri Lanka and Burma (where the majority of the population are Buddhists) have higher celibacy levels, resulting from religious practices (Smith, 1980).

In each region of Thailand except for the South more than 95 percent of the population are Buddhists. In the South only about 75 percent of population are Buddhists, with Muslims comprising most of the remainder of the population. Tables 2 and 3 show high positive relationship between PBUD and SMAM and PS. Without PBUD the total variation explained in SMAM or PS is less than 30 percent, but total variation explained in SMAM or PS is 90 percent when PBUD is taken into account in the regression equation. (See Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4. Regression coefficients and coefficient of multiple determination for SMAM

	Variables						
Region	CONST	PHP	PFNG	SR	URBF	PBUD	R^2
Whole Kingdom	38.35	-0.044	0.054*	-0.167*	-0.016		0.64
Central	34.31	0.089	0.011	-0.130*	0.051*		0.68
North	34.84	-0.079	0.073*	-0.134*	0.012		0.75
Northeast	45.79	0.003	0.099*	0.252*	0.026		0.81
South	1) 51.81	-0.012	0.083	-0.310	-0.081		0.28
	2) 32.43	0.122	0.013	-0.127	0.060	.037*	0.90

Note : * Significant at 5 percent.

Table 5. Regression coefficients and coefficient of multiple determination for PS

Region		Variables						
		CONST	PHP	PFNG	SR	URBF	PBUD	R^2
Whole Kingdom		156.37	-0.137	0.377*	-0.221*	-0.175		0.64
Central		125.41	0.801*	0.052	-0.925*	0.304*		0.74
North		130.27	-0.378	0.656*	-0.983*	0.076		0.74
Northeast		236.50	-0.015	0.758*	-2.085*	0.064		0.76
South	1)	239.18	0.477	0.506	-2.129	-0.686		0.27
	2)	108.53	-0.262	0.038	-0.895	0.259	0.246*	0.90

Note : * Significant at 5 percent.

Discussion

The reason for PHP not being a significant determinant of marriage patterns in Thailand may be that the most direct effect of education occurs mainly at the levels of highest attainment where it acts as a competing use of time. College attendance has been associated with late marriage in the United States for this reason; and college - going elites in LDC's have been found to marry late as well (Smith, 1983).

The results of the regression of SMAM and PS show that PFNG is a significant determinant of Thai marriage patterns with changes in the percentage of females working outside agriculture exhibiting a significant affect on age at marriage (Smith, 1980). The reason that URBF is a significant determinant only for the Central region may be due to the fact that the Central region of Thailand is the most urbanized in the country.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been the study of female mean age at marriage and its relationship with socio-economic and demographic variables. The analysis was undertaken for each region of Thailand, namely, Central, Northern, Northeastern and Southern. Though each region is different in its own way, the sex-ratio was found to be an important influence on SMAM in all regions except in the South. In the South PBUD is the only significant variable for SMAM and percent single. The

importance of PBUD in the South is reflected by the high value of R^2. The addition of PBUD resulted in R^2 being increased nearly threefolds. The percent of female is non-agricultural occupations is a significant variable in the North, Northeast and for the Whole Kingdom but neither schooling or urbanization are important in explaining SMAM and PS except for Central region. If the government wishes to implement a policy designed to contribute to the reduction in population growth through increasing the age at marriage then a promising area for intervention may be the employment of women outside the agricultural sector. Other variables are found to significantly influence the age of marriage but they generally are not amenable to policy intervention.

Notes

1 SMAM is calculated from the proportion single in successive age groups where S_x is the percentage single in the age group x to x+5,

$$SMAM = (S_x - 5S_{50} / (1-S_{50})$$

2 Sex-ratio (SR) is defined as number of males aged 20-45 years per 100 females in the same age group.

3 Masculinity ratio is defined as number of males per 100 population.

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Appendix

Table A. Correlation coefficient between nuptiality indexes and demographic and socio-economic variables for Whole Kingdom

	Variables				
Region	**SMAM**	**PS**	**PHP**	**PFNG**	**SR**
PS	0.9868	-	-	-	-
PHP	0.3860	0.4181	-	-	-
PFNG	0.6196	0.6217	0.7338	-	-
SR	-0.5220	-0.5293	-0.0673	-0.0614	-
URBF	0.3560	0.3438	0.6263	0.6373	-0.1052