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Effects of Local Wages on Female Joint Decision of Marriage and Working: A Cross-Data Analysis

M Shahin Sarwar[1]*, Md. Arifur Rahman[2]*, Salma Sultana Shrity[3]*, Md. Shariful Haque[4]

Abstract

Women's participation in the workforce enhances gender equality and is essential for sustainable development. The marriage decision for a young woman who wants to participate in the workforce is very challenging in an emerging country like Bangladesh due to societal norms, family structures, and household dynamics. Moreover, the persistent issue of the gender gap highlights how age and gender influence women's experiences in the workplace. This study examines the marriage decisions of young women who want to be part of the workforce in Bangladesh. This study uses the Labour Force Survey 2017 database, conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), and conducts a cross-sectional analysis to examine the effect of wage on the young women's joint decision of both marriage and being in the workforce. The findings of this study show that an increase in wages for the female workforce increases the probability of remaining in the workforce and increases their participation in the workforce. These results signify that higher wages heighten the young women's propensity to join the workforce rather than opt for marriage. Therefore, higher salaries for females can contribute to fostering gender equality by increasing their participation in the workforce and, eventually, sustainable development in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Marriage decision, Women's engagement, Workforce, Local Wage, Gender Equality.

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration in Finance and Banking. Email: shahin.sarwar@bup.edu.bd (correspondent Autor)
[2] Professor, Department of Business Administration in Management. Email: arifur@bup.edu.bd
[3] Email: slmshrity@gmail.com
*Faculty of Business Studies, Bangladesh University of Professionals, Mirpur Cantonment, Dhaka-1216, Bangladesh.
[4] Professor, Department of Economics & Banking, International Islamic University Chittagong, Bangladesh. Email: sharif@iiuc.ac.bd

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the intricate determinants influencing young women's engagement in the workforce and their decisions regarding marriage is essential for fostering gender equality and sustainable development in Bangladesh. Prior research, as exemplified by survey data collected by Kabeer et al. (2011) in Bangladesh, underscores the multifaceted benefits of women's participation in formal waged work outside the home. Paid employment, particularly in formal roles, has been found to positively impact women by bolstering self-worth, agency, decision-making power, and community status, among other factors. This underscores the transformative potential of women's paid employment in reshaping gender relations. However, despite the increasing involvement of women in Bangladesh's workforce, challenges persist in achieving economic growth and poverty alleviation, with women lagging behind men in workforce participation and facing limitations in sectors offering fewer opportunities and lower remuneration. Many women also contribute as unpaid labor to family enterprises. Furthermore, as articulated by Choudhry & Elhorst (2018), the U-shaped relationship between female labor force participation and economic development suggests that certain turning points, such as shifts in industry mix towards services and increased educational attainment among women, contribute to narrowing the gender gap in workforce participation. Additionally, studies have documented a significant increase in labor force participation rates among young, single women compared to married ones, signaling a growing emphasis on economic considerations among this demographic. Age also plays a complex role in shaping women's career trajectories, with changing personal priorities, family dynamics, and evolving aspirations influencing employment patterns. Research by Fitzenberger and Wunderlich (2004) has highlighted a shift among women from full-time, higher-paying jobs to part-time, lower-paying work as they age, influenced by factors such as family responsibilities and the desire for work-life balance.

Historically, empirical studies have consistently demonstrated a U-shaped relationship between household income and women's workforce participation, attributed to the income effect, whereby higher household income may afford women the choice not to work. However, rising wages present a different trend, known as the substitution effect, wherein higher wages incentivize women to engage more actively in the workforce, as observed by Rahman et al. (2013). While existing studies have delved into the complexities of female workforce participation in the country, emphasizing the

profound influence of societal norms, family structures, and household dynamics, a notable gap remains in comprehending how wages specifically shape the decision-making processes of young women, particularly concerning marriage. This paper seeks to address the nuanced relationship between wages and young women's likelihood of making decisions regarding careers and marriage.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Review of the Literature

The exploration of female labor force participation stands at the intersection of societal dynamics,economic progress, and gender equity. Many researchers have directed their attention toward the interplay between marital status, education, and economic conditions, particularly at the regional level. Studies have recognized the significance of the stated variables on women's workforce engagement, which is pivotal for societal progress and economic development. In their study, Bidisha et al. (2022) looked at the factors influencing Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP), especially their concentration in low-productive jobs and lower occupational levels. Using Probit and Multinomial Logit (MNL) estimations, the research reveals that gender- specific factors such as marital status as a wife and the presence of young children, and household factors such as family income, play a crucial role in determining women's employment status. The analysis indicates that largely unexplained factors, rather than inherent capabilities, limit women from entering higher-paying non-agricultural jobs. Multiple researchers have testified to this similar underlying variable in their work on developingeconomies and developed nations. The study by Tong and Chiu (2016) on FLFP in developed countries suggests that both marriage and maternity can reduce the probability of women engaging in the workforce. This decline is attributed to societal and cultural norms that limit married women, particularly mothers, to household responsibilities and motherhood duties. Furthermore, other empirical studies have also documented the discrimination against married women that occurs in work settings, where employers in sizable companies and specific occupational categories exhibit a preference for hiring men or unmarried women (Verme et al., 2016; Mehrotra & Parida, 2017).

Nevertheless, owing to the husband's limited earning capacity compared to the household's daily expenses, a wife might need to seek employment outside the home to augment the family income. Using Thailand as a case study, empirical research by Tumsarp and Pholphirul (2020) shows that marital status does not reduce the

likelihood of FLFP. Instead, married Thai women are significantly more likely (approximately 15.9 percentage points higher) to engage in the labor market and work more hours than unmarried women. This holds, especially for younger, less educated, non-household heads with fewer family responsibilities. On the other hand, Cameron and Suárez (2020) argued that in their study on Indonesia, the key determinants affecting FLFP are marital status, the count of children aged 0 to 2 in the household, educational achievement (particularly tertiary education), and the village industrial structure, where agriculture and manufacturing cater to female employment. The substantial negative influence of marital status and young children on FLFP underscores the potential efficacy of policies facilitating women's reentry into the workforce after childbirth to boost FLFP. To discern the impact of educational attainment on married women's FLFP, Ismail and Sulaiman (2014) conducted a study, revealing a positive correlation between the number of schooling years and the active participation of married women in the workforce. Furthermore, Ghazali et al. (2015) explained that advancements in women's educational access contribute to a heightened engagement of FLFP. At the same time, Rahman and Al-Hasan (2019) state that most of the previous relevant literature supports the idea of a U-shaped relationship between FLFP and economic development. As economies develop, women initially leave the workforce due to increased opportunities for men and societal barriers. However, women often re-enter the workforce in white-collar jobs as education levels rise.

This U-shaped pattern in female labor force participation is not always a strict outcome of the typical labor supply model but has been observed in many studies across developed and developing countries (Mammen & Paxson, 2000; Tanaka & Muzones, 2016; Tam, 2011). Das et al. (2015) implied that the female participation rate exhibits a U-shaped or J-shaped pattern relative to women's education levels. This hypothesis that education positively influences the rate of women's labor force participation has also been supplemented by Chaudhary and Verick (2014), who acknowledged this relationship because of the interplay between income and substitution effects. Nevertheless, among urban women, the trend takes an opposite turn as Abraham (2013) and Klasen and Pieters (2015) respectively observe a declining trend in the participation rates of urban women (aged 15 and above) across all educational categories between 1987–1988 and 2009–2010 and that between 1993–1994 and 2011–2012, married women with no education and those with a graduate degree experienced a relatively higher percentage decline in their labor force participation rates. However, using distinct methodological approaches, Afridi et al. (2016) and Andres et al. (2017) find that the reduction in both urban and rural societies is mainly attributed to rising education levels among married women and men in their

households, along with a stable family income. Klasen and Pieters (2015) find in their study that rising incomes and education among men have contributed to a reduction and stagnation in Indian FLFP, indicating the impact of the classic income effect. Similarly, Gaddis and Klasen (2013) state how the progression of women's wages and work prospects evolves at a slower pace compared to the rapid increase in their husbands' incomes, and, in consequence, the adverse income effect is expected to outweigh any favorable substitution effect resulting from growing female wages. But a few studies also show how the wages of husbands and wives are found to have no significant impact on determining the labor supply of married women, suggesting that wages are not a primary factor influencing the employment decisions of married women (Ismail & Sulaiman, 2014; Dallakyan & Bakhtavoryan, 2012). Some other scholars, like Humera (2009) and Addison and Ozturk (2012), find that increasing the minimum wage rate in the economy leads to a decrease in FLFP.

Moreover, the enduring challenge of the gender pay gap underscores the intersectionality of age, gender, and societal factors in shaping women's experiences in the workforce. While some attribute this gap to differences in human capital between female and male workers, others emphasize discriminatory practices within the labor market against women (Hossain and Tisdell, 2005; Ahmed and Maitra, 2010). Against this backdrop, this paper aims to contribute to the existing literature by focusing on the impact of local wages on the joint decision-making of young women. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined the broader impact of wage discrimination on labor force participation, this paper endeavors to compare female participation in districts with varying wage levels, elucidating the nuanced relationship between wages and women's decisions regarding workforce participation and marriage.

2.2. Hypothesis Development

Serumaga-Zake and Kotze (2021) highlighted that married women's involvement in the workforce depends on whether their potential earnings exceed their minimum acceptable wage. Additionally, women navigate significant life choices such as marriage, childbearing, and employment decisions (Ueda, 2007). Che and Sundjo (2018) aim to justify exploring how maternal and household characteristics influence female labor force participation and examining how the employment status of spouses affects it. Various studies investigate factors like wages, income disparities, childcare decisions, spouses' earnings, and education levels in relation to women's workforce participation. Therefore, this study focuses on understanding how the local wage influences young women's decisions regarding marriage and employment. Our hypothesis aligns with this objective.

H_1: With the increase in local wages, women who are married and working are more likely to be so.

According to Mincer (1962), employed married women are likely to remain in the workforce despite their marital status, as the rise in average wages renders leisure time comparatively more costly, thereby incentivizing continued employment. Serumaga-Zake and Kotze (2021) contend that married women who are not currently employed are inclined to enter the workforce as the average wage increases. This inclination stems from the market wage surpassing their reservation wage, thereby increasing the likelihood of employment. This leads to the second hypothesis, as stated below.

H_2: As local wages increase, the likelihood of being married and not working decreases.

Lee and McElwain (1985) state that employed unmarried women are prone to prolonging their decision to marry in response to an uptick in average wages. Highly educated women are more inclined toward career advancement, often delaying marriage accordingly. Therefore, the study posits the third hypothesis as below.

H_3: The increase in local wages lowers the increase of likelihood that women are unmarried and working.

Grossbard-Shechtman and Neuman (1988) assert that unmarried women who are not employed are likely to opt for employment over marriage as average wages rise. This decision-making process is directly influenced by anticipated wage opportunities in the labor market and inversely affected by the perceived value of leisure time at home. Based on this argument, this study assumes the following hypothesis.

H4: The increase in local wages will decrease the likelihood of being unmarried and not working.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data Source and Sample Size

The study sample encompasses data from the year 2017, comprising 493,886 individual-level observations derived from the Labour Force Survey 2017 conducted by the International Labour Organization, as documented by Khatun (2016). In instances of missing data, a placeholder value of 99999999 is employed, following the methodology established by Miller and Volker (1983) and Hafeez and Ahmad (2002). For the cross-sectional analysis, the sample is confined to young adults aged between 18 and 30, totaling 62,086 individuals among all female participants. This selection

criterion is informed by the observation that married women aged 25–39 exhibit a higher propensity for labor force participation compared to women aged 40–54, as evidenced by Widarti (2006).

3.2. Model Specification

The analytical framework of the study draws upon the LFP Logit Model formulated by Hussain et al. (2016), wherein Labor Force Participation (LFP) is represented as a binary variable denoting employment or unemployment. Explanatory variables incorporated into this model encompass marital status, age, and educational attainment. Similarly, Abraham et al. (2017) investigated female labor force participation (FLFP), utilizing a binary variable to delineate employment status. The determinants of this variable include age, educational attainment, wealth, and marital status. A regression analysis is undertaken to explore the concurrent relationship between work and marriage, as elucidated by Ueda (2007), in conjunction with the average wage prevailing in each district.

$$Y_{id} = \beta_1 W_d + \varepsilon_{id} \quad \text{.....(1)}$$

3.3. Data Description

In this context, the dependent variable represents the outcome of women denoted as "i" within district "d", while signifies the average wage within district "d." For the rudimentary analysis, the model is segregated into four distinct outcomes, where the dependent variable assumes a binary form, as outlined by Hussain et al. (2016). It is presupposed that if the individual is concurrently

I. Married and working, the dependent variable assumes the value of 1; otherwise, it assumes 0.
II. Unmarried and working, the dependent variable takes on the value of 1; otherwise, it takes 0.
III. Married but not working, the dependent variable is assigned the value of 1; otherwise, it is set to 0.
IV. Unmarried and not working, the dependent variable is designated as 1 if the condition is met; otherwise, it defaults to 0.

In the context of this study, both marital statuses, as delineated by Ueda (2007), and labor force participation, as defined by Choudhry and Elhorst (2018), are binary dummy variables. Specifically, if an individual is married, the variable assumes a value of 1; otherwise, it is coded as 0. Similarly, if an individual is employed, the corresponding variable is assigned a value of 1; otherwise, it is set to 0.

The primary explanatory variable under scrutiny is the average wage prevailing across districts. It is posited that gainfully employed individuals may increase their work hours in response to an uptick in wages, attributable to the income effect, as elucidated by Serumaga-Zake and Kotze (2021). In calculating the average wage, male and female participants with educational qualifications ranging from grades 5 to 12 are considered. The average wage is then computed district-wise and transformed into a logarithmic form for analysis. Furthermore, the variables of education and age are controlled for in examining the joint decision-making process about work and marriage, as advocated by Yakubu (2010). Educational attainment and age are influential factors in women's decision-making processes; notably, individuals with higher levels of education tend to exhibit a greater inclination toward career advancement. Moreover, age is often associated with the decision to enter into marriage. Hence, these variables are controlled to discern the impact of wage increases on female decision-making regarding marriage and employment.

In this analysis, the control variable age is quantified in years by the methodology outlined by Tumsarpa and Pholphirul (2020). Conversely, as delineated by Che and Sundjo (2018), education is categorized into dummy variables. The highest level of education attained is categorized within the following thresholds for analysis:

I. If the education level falls within the range of 0 to 5, it is assigned a value of 1; otherwise, it is coded as 0.
II. If the education level ranges from 6 to 10, it is coded as 1; otherwise, it is set to 0.
III. For education level 11, the variable is designated as 1; otherwise, it is coded as 0.
IV. If the education level falls within the range of 12 to 13, it is assigned a value of 1; otherwise, it is set to 0.
V. For education levels 14 and above, the variable is designated as 1; otherwise, it is coded as 0.
VI. If the education level corresponds to 99 (Madrasha), it is coded as 1; otherwise, it assumes a value of 0.

The regression equation is estimated using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS), with standard errors clustered by districts. While age and education are included as control variables in the estimation process, they are not considered focal points in the analysis. Rather, the primary objective is to investigate the impact of average wage increases across districts on the joint decision-making process regarding marriage and employment.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Descriptive analysis

Table 1 presents the summary statistics of the variables under study. Panel A of Table 1 showcases the statistics for high-wage districts, while Panel B of Table 1 describes the statistics for low-wage districts. The classification of high- and low-wage districts is determined based on percentiles. Districts with wages at or above the 75th percentile are categorized as high-wage districts, while those below the 25th percentile are designated as low-wage districts. Specifically, districts with wages equal to or exceeding 12,479.39 taka are deemed high-wage, whereas districts with wages equal to or below 10,681.677 taka are categorized as low-wage.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of the Variables

Panel A: High-Wage Districts			
Variable	N	Mean	S. D
Average Wage	16664	13754	1020.28
Marital Status	16664	0.81	0.39
Working Status	16664	0.22	0.41
Age	16664	24.18	3.78
Education Level (0-5)	16664	0.32	0.47
Education Level (6-10)	16664	0.49	0.5
Education Level 11	16664	0.14	0.34
Education Level (12-13)	16664	0.03	0.17
Education Level (14-15)	16664	0.02	0.14
Education Level 99	16664	0.00	0.04

Panel B: Low-Wage Districts			
Variable	N	Mean	S. D
Average Wage	12108	10183	388.18

Marital Status	12108	0.82	0.38
Working Status	12108	0.17	0.38
Age	12108	24.11	3.88
Education Level (0-5)	12108	0.37	0.48
Education Level (6-10)	12108	0.48	0.50
Education Level 11	12108	0.11	0.31
Education Level (12-13)	12108	0.03	0.16
Education Level (14-15)	12108	0.01	0.10
Education Level 99	12108	0.00	0.05

The average wage of the woman living in the high wage districts is 13,754 taka, whereas this value is 10,183 for the woman living in the low income districts. Most female participants' education level is below class 11 for both high and low-wage districts. That means they do not have a college education. Half of the participants' education level for both income districts is between classes 6 and 8. Only less than 2% percent female participants have above a college education.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the proportions of young females married and employed within high-wage districts. Among the total female 16,664 participants of high-wage districts, 13,460 are married, while 3,589 are employed. Within high-wage districts, 21.53% of participants are employed, while 80.77% are married among the total female participants.

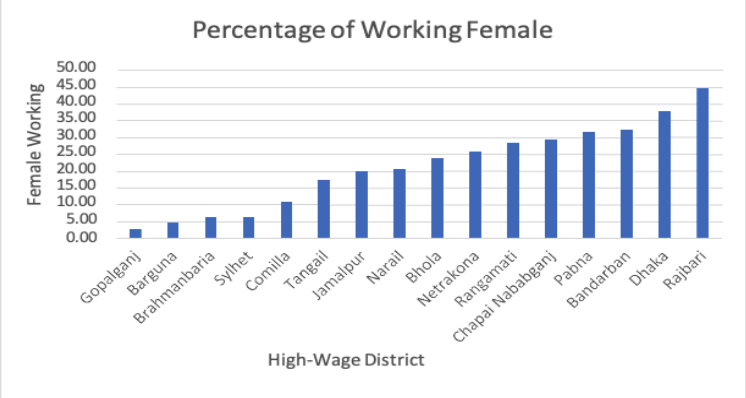

Figure 1: Females Who are Working in High-Wage Districts

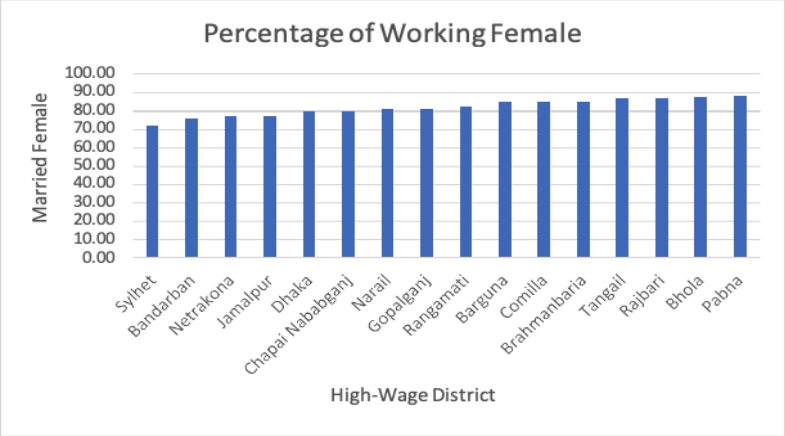

Figure 2: Females Who are Married in High-Wage Districts

Upon scrutinizing Figure 1, it becomes evident that Gopalganj exhibits the lowest percentage of working females at 2.59%, whereas Rajbari demonstrates the highest at 44.67% in that particular district. Regarding marital status, as depicted in Figure 2, among the total women of that district, Sylhet records the lowest proportion of married women at 71.80%, while Pabna reports the highest at 87.97%.

Figures 3 and 4 describe the percentage of the total number of young females who are married and working in low-wage districts. A total of 12,108 female participants in low-wage districts, 9,936 are married, and 2,092 are employed. Thus, it signifies that among all participants in low-wage districts, 17.27% are employed, while 82.06% are married, which is the total number of female participants.

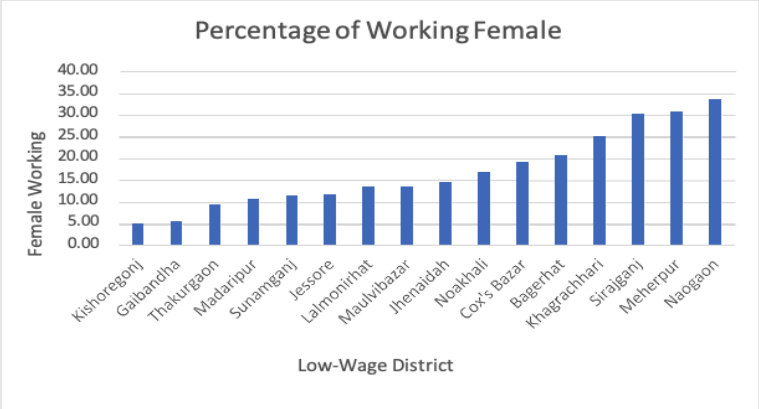

Figure 3: Females Who are Working in Low-Wage Districts

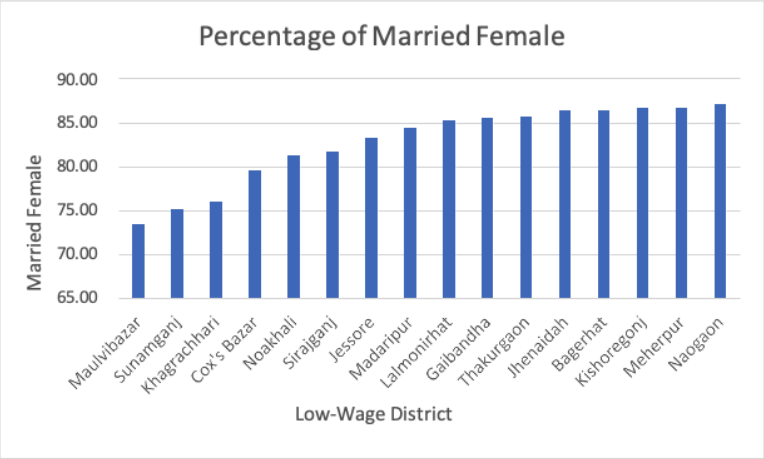

Figure 4: Females Who are Married in Low-Wage Districts

Upon examination of Figure 3, it becomes apparent that Kishoregonj exhibits the lowest percentage of working females at 4.92%, whereas Naogaon demonstrates the highest at 33.59% among the total women of that district. Regarding marital status, as illustrated in Figure 4, Maulvibazar records the lowest proportion of married women at 73.45%, while Naogaon reports the highest at 87.09% of the total females of that particular district.

4.2. Empirical Results and Discussions

Table 2 presents the estimates of the equation for various outcomes. Table 2 outlines the effect of an increase in the logarithm of average district income on female decision-making regarding marriage and employment. The coefficient exhibits insignificance and a negative effect on these decisions, as this group of females is married and working, so the increase in local wage has no influence on decision-making regarding being married and in the workforce. However, it is noted that an increase in local wages within a district has been observed to marginally enhance the likelihood of married women persisting in their employment, underscoring the stability and commitment displayed by married women in the workforce, as highlighted by Che and Sundjo (2018).

Table 2: Effect of local wage on the joint decision of women

	Married Working (1)	Married Not-Working (2)	Unmarried Working (3)	Unmarried Not-working (4)

Log (Average Income)	-0.0011 (0.0062)	0.0098 (0.0117)	0.0615*** (0.0147)	-0.0703*** (0.0180)
Age	-0.0066*** (0.0002)	-0.0287*** (0.0004)	0.0124*** (0.0004)	0.0229*** (0.0005)
Education Level (0-5)	-0.1129*** (0.0106)	-0.1592*** (0.0112)	-0.0001 (0.0141)	0.2722*** (0.0163)
Education Level (6-10)	-0.1235*** (0.0106)	-0.1408*** (0.0111)	-0.0425** (0.0140)	0.3068*** (0.0162)
Education Level 11	-0.0865*** (0.0109)	0.1173*** (0.0122)	-0.1087*** (0.0142)	0.0779*** (0.0170)
Education Level (12-13)	-0.0239 (0.0126)	-0.0222 (0.0137)	-0.0252 (0.0163)	0.0714*** (0.0194)
Education Level (above 13)	-0.1557*** (0.0110)	-0.0718 (0.0411)	-0.0674 (0.0379)	0.2949*** (0.0516)
Constant	0.3143*** (0.0600)	0.8353*** (0.1109)	-0.6644*** (0.1390)	0.5149** (0.1701)
Observations Adj. R2	62,086 0.0341	62,086 0.21409	62,086 0.0293	62,086 0.07299

Note:

(i) *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
(ii) Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by district
(iii) control for both age and education.

Again, the coefficient is insignificant yet positive for married women who do not engage in employment. With the increase in local wages, the likelihood increases. This suggests that for non-working married women, there exists a slight inclination towards entering the workforce, particularly among women aged 25–39, who are more predisposed to working compared to those aged 40–54, as indicated by Widarti (2006), especially when market wages exceed reservation wages. Further, it shows a positive

and significant coefficient for unmarried women actively participating in the labour force. For this group of females, with an increase in local wages, the likelihood of being unmarried and working increases. If the local wage increases by 1 unit, the probability of being unmarried and working increases by 0.0615 units for young women. This trend reflects contemporary societal shifts wherein young individuals prioritize education and career pursuits over marriage. With the escalation of average wages, there is a notable increase in the likelihood of unmarried women remaining in the workforce, aligning with findings by Ueda (2007), which underscore the growing tendency among the youth to defer or eschew marriage in favour of career advancement.

Finally, Column 4 of Table 2 reveals a negative yet significant coefficient for unmarried women who are neither married nor employed. A decrease in the likelihood of being unmarried and not working is being observed. So, with a 1 unit increase in local wages, the probability of being unmarried and not working decreases by 0.0702 units for young women. As these women are not tethered to familial responsibilities or employment obligations, a wage increase is observed to heighten their propensity to join the workforce rather than opt for marriage. This finding is particularly pertinent for unmarried women aged 18 to 30, who prioritize higher education and delayed entry into the workforce, as documented by Ueda (2007) in their exploration of the interplay between marital status, childcare decisions, and labor force participation among women. Notably, women pursuing extended education beyond high school tend to postpone marriage and workforce entry.

5. CONCLUSION

In essence, this study underscores the profound influence of increasing average wages on the joint decisions of young women concerning marriage and employment in Bangladesh. Unlike conventional economic theories suggesting a negative correlation between household income and female labor force participation, the findings reveal a notable shift: rising wages catalyze women to enter the workforce, driven by the allure of enhanced financial stability and independence. Moreover, age emerges as a pivotal factor shaping these decisions as women navigate through various life stages, including education, career initiation, and family-building. These changing life circumstances, coupled with evolving aspirations, significantly influence women's choices regarding workforce participation and marital decisions. Despite progress, persistent gender pay gaps remain a significant challenge, indicating ongoing disparities in economic

opportunities for women. This highlights the imperative for policymakers to address wage differentials and promote gender equality through targeted interventions. Such interventions may include initiatives to enhance access to education, training, and skill development programs, empowering women to capitalize on economic opportunities. Furthermore, policies supporting work-life balance and flexible employment arrangements can facilitate women's integration into the labor market while accommodating their diverse roles and responsibilities. Moving forward, continued research efforts are essential to deepen our understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding wage determination and its implications for women's economic empowerment, thereby informing evidence-based strategies to foster sustainable development and gender equality in Bangladesh and beyond.

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