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Child Marriage: Can access to media discourage the practice in South Asia?

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Child Marriage

Can access to media discourage the practice in South Asia?

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore a possible role for the media to facilitate social change through international and domestic politics even when political will may be lacking. Using data from national health surveys in two South Asian countries, we find that frequent reading of the newspaper is associated with higher ages at marriage among women in all of the countries surveyed. Further research is necessary to determine the types of programs and degree of openness for the other forms of media in each of the countries.

Introduction and Background

- South Asia remains a hot spot for child marriages. According to the latest figures, over 50 percent of women between the ages of 20 and 24 report having been married by the age of 18 (NFHS).
- In a region where the practice is commonly held, Bangladesh has the highest rates for early marriage. Here, over half of all girls are married before the age of 15 and sixty percent of all girls become mothers by the age of 19 (UNICEF).
- In India, child marriages traditionally occur as mass marriages experienced simultaneously by dozens of couples during times of festivals. This makes compulsory registration laws difficult to enforce.
- Nepalese advocates argue that Hindu scriptures in 400 to 100 BC urged the father to marry off his daughter at a very young age, eight to ten being ideal (Sapana Malla, 2005).

Theory of Social Diffusion

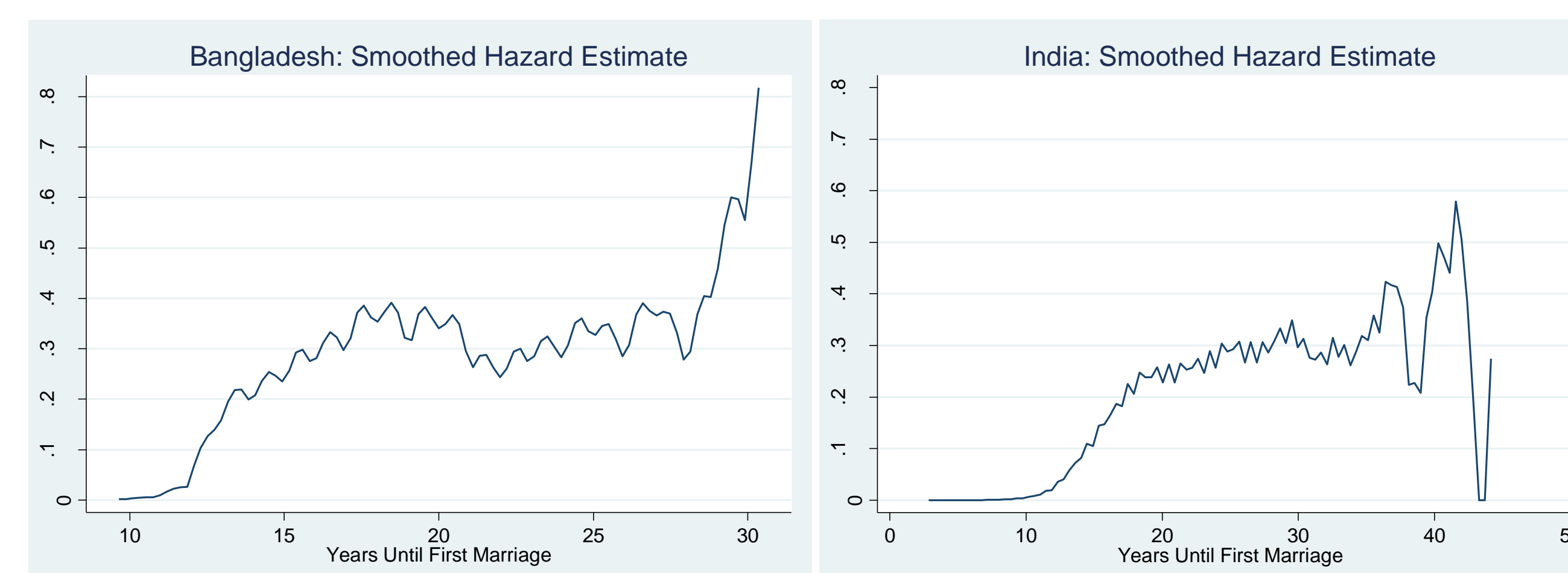
- For decades, social scientists have been interested in the media's influence on how individuals construct their behavior and shape their identity (Bennett, 1975; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).
- The relationship has most frequently been applied within the context of family planning; television, radio, and newspaper campaigns increase knowledge and communication about family planning, increase sterilization behavior, and reduce family size preferences (Hornik & McAnany, 2001).
- This paper contends that in a very similar way media attention can raise awareness of the issue of child marriage, both domestically and internationally, allowing it to have influence in determining behavior.

Data and Methodology

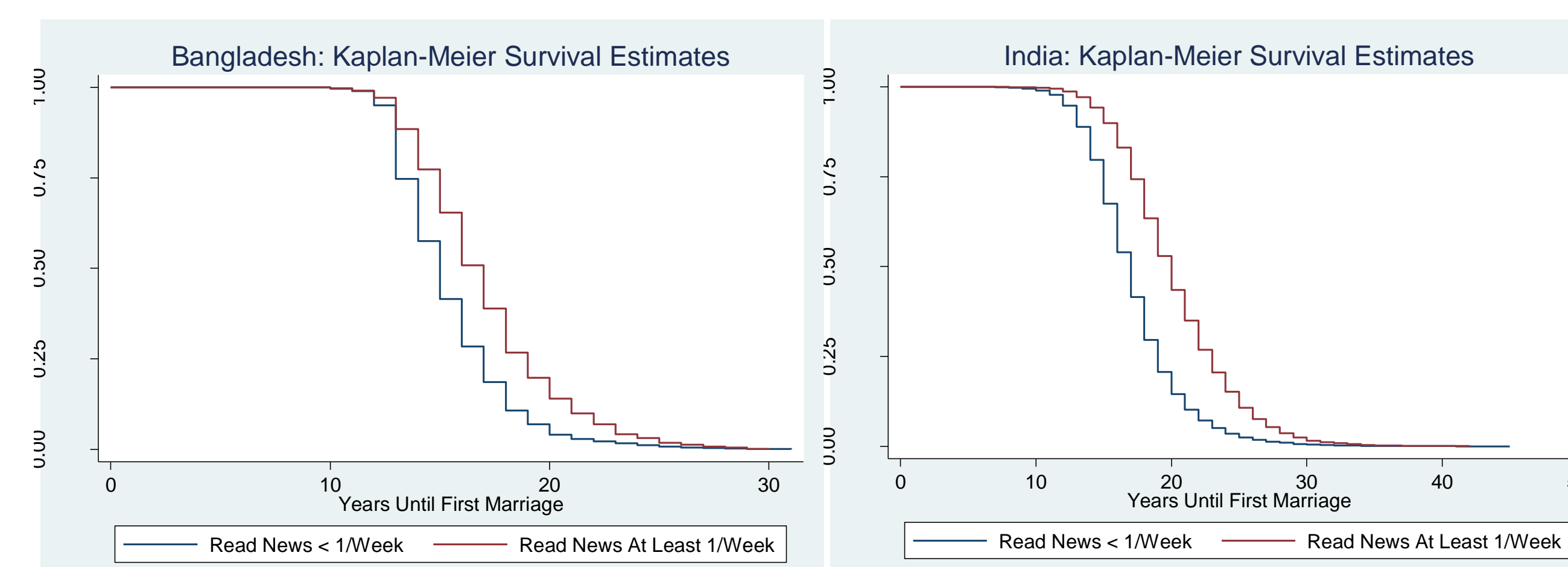
- The data used in this study were obtained from the Demographic and Health Surveys online data archive and consist of two national health surveys in Bangladesh and India. The surveys include individual level observations collected between 2006 and 2007. Child Marriage is measured in the surveys with the variable Age at First Marriage.
- The Coale-McNeil (CM) nuptiality model is a standard demographic tool for the estimation and projection of age schedules of first marriage and birth by birth order.
- Ryuichi Kaneko found that a generalized gamma distribution better models the distribution of first marriage in societies where arranged marriages are common (2003).
- Based on this evidence, we use a Generalized Gamma Survival Model to determine the influence of the media on the timing of first marriage.
- Goodness of fit comparisons with other model specifications confirm this to be the case.



Ten year-old Savita is from a rural town in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. She and girls like her are at a high risk of early marriage within the next few years. Photo credit: <http://photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photo-of-the-day/uttar-pradesh-portrait/>



Figures 1 and 2: Estimated Hazard Probabilities for Bangladesh and India
In these survival models, the hazard function represents the probability that an individual will experience first marriage at a given age. The magnitude of the function at each age indicates the risk of first marriage. In the graphs above, a sudden increase in the risk of marriage occurs for both countries between the ages of 10 and 20.



Figures 3 and 4: Estimated Survival Functions by Newspaper Exposure for Each Country
The survivor functions presented above cumulate these risks of event occurrence to determine the probability that a randomly selected individual will not experience the event. In this case, the graphs show the probability that an individual will not get married at a given age. It can be seen that in each country, girls who have a habit of reading the newspaper at least once a week, have a lower probability of early marriage.

Results

- Preliminary hazard and survival models are displayed and explained in Figures 1-4. It is important to note the sharp rise in the risk of first marriage in both countries beginning at age 10. Additionally, it seems that weekly reading of the newspaper shows a slightly longer duration of survival.
- Results of the GGM estimation are found in Table 1.
- The Generalized Gamma model follows a different parameterization than the commonly used Cox model. A positive coefficient in this model represents a longer duration (or shorter hazard) relative to that of the baseline.
- In the India model, respondents who read the newspaper and listen to the radio at least once a week can experience a longer duration until first marriage relative to the baseline. Interestingly, respondents who watch TV at least once a week experience a shorter duration than the baseline.
- In the Bangladesh model, reading the newspaper is still associated with a longer survival. Watching television has no discernible effect, and listening to the radio is associated with a shorter duration until first marriage.
- It is possible that the effect of social diffusion in these cases can be partially determined by the type of programming through each medium. Coverage of related news and awareness campaigns may do more to prevent child marriage than entertainment programs. Further research is warranted in this area.

Conclusion

The limited evidence presented in this paper suggests that there is a role for the media to empower youth and circumvent a lack of political will among law enforcement. Youth may be exposed to alternative options in response to marriage pressures, and law enforcement may react to external pressures from international, national, and local agents. With better data collection methods, this theory can be tested more rigorously against alternatives.

Table 1: Generalized Gamma Survival Model Results

	India	Bangladesh
Covariates	Coefficients	Coefficients
Newspaper	0.047*** (0.003)	0.038*** (0.006)
TV	-0.014*** (0.003)	-0.005 (0.005)
Radio	0.022*** (0.003)	-0.003*** (0.005)
Observations	24347	6142
LL	5902.39	2974.65
LR Statistic	4024.65	750.11
AIC	-11780.78	-5925.31
BIC	-11683.58	-5844.64

Other Controls Include: Literacy; Highest Year of Education; Wealth Index; Husband's Highest Year of Education; Urban; Age Group
*Significant at $p < 0.05$; **Significant at $p < 0.01$; ***Significant at $p < 0.001$
Standard errors in parentheses
Media variables = 1 if respondent participates in that activity at least once a week.