Influences of Child Composition on Marital Dissolution:

Evidence from South Asia

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Abstract

The presence, number, and specific characteristics of children can have important influences on couples' likelihood of marital dissolution. Children are valued across settings. In South Asia the value of children for their parents is not only psychological, but is also explicitly economic. In this paper, I explore the influences of childlessness, family size, and sex composition on the odds of marital dissolution among couples in Nepal. Results reveal that childless couples face significantly higher odds of dissolution than couples with at least one child, and each additional child—but only up to parity three—reduces couples' odds of dissolution. Furthermore, having a child under the age of three reduces couples' odds of marital dissolution, but interactions revealed that this age effect only holds at parities one and two. Consistent with other research, I find that sons can have a suppressing influence in this setting, but only among couples with one child.

Introduction

Marital fertility is one of the most consistent predictors of marital dissolution. Couples who have children tend to be less likely to experience marital dissolution than childless couples. Beyond just their presence, the particular characteristics of children can exert important influences on their parents' marital outcomes: a greater number of children, younger children, and sons (compared to daughters) have been found to suppress marital dissolution in Western settings (Cherlin 1977; Harris and Morgan 1991; Morgan, Lye, and Condran 1988; Thornton 1977; Waite and Lillard 1991). However, the existing research focuses mainly on settings in which there is formalized security for the elderly, and parents do not typically have to rely heavily on their children for support. Hence, existing research largely ignores the variance in the value of children across settings. Children may exert an especially strong, and possibly even distinct, influence on marital dissolution in settings where they are depended upon for economic security, and where they hold a unique socio-cultural and psycho-emotional value (Arnold, Kim, and Roy 1998; Cain 1977; Das Gupta, Zhenghua, Bohua, Zhenming, and Chung, Hwa-Ok 2003).

Children hold value across settings, but their value in South Asia is unique from other parts of the world, and particularly from Western settings. In fact, in many non-Western settings parents still rely on their children for support (Biddlecom, Chayovan and Ofstedal 2003; Caldwell 1982; Kpessa 2010). In South Asia, couples are expected to have children soon after marriage (Riessman 2000) and they depend on those children for economic security. In the past, children were economically valued for the labor they contributed to the family farm (Cain 1977). More recently, mass education has reduced the amount of time that children spend working on their families' farms, but, in the absence of institutionalized old age security, parents depend on their children to care for them in old age (Axinn and Barber 2001). These circumstances,

combined with more universal concerns for children's well-being and parents' own ability to find a subsequent partner, may suppress marital dissolution. South Asian parents may be particularly concerned with maintaining their marriages so that they can prevent confusion about which parent the child(ren) should care for later on. The motivation to maintain a marriage may be especially strong when children are young, as this is when parents are establishing bonds and developing loyalty with their children, and when they have a son, as sons ensure security for parents more directly than daughters.

This paper explores the influences of children and their characteristics on couples' odds of marital dissolution in a rural, South Asian setting of southern Nepal. I employ data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS) to estimate the hazard of marital dissolution, using event history models. These extensive, retrospective data span from the beginning of couples' marriages, capturing the period of marriage before they had their first child, the births of each child, and the dissolution (or not) of marriages. This allows for the investigation of the influences that particular attributes of marital fertility can have on marital dissolution in a South Asian setting. Specifically, I investigate the influences of parity, and the age and sex composition of children on the odds of marital dissolution.

Theoretical Framework

Economic theories suggest that children reduce the odds of marital dissolution because they introduce specific value to the marriage, thus increasing the costs of divorce (Becker et al. 1977; Weiss and Willis 1985). Children may also introduce a barrier to marital dissolution due to their parents' concern about the consequences of divorce for children. But, the value of children and the barriers they present to dissolution are not uniform for all parents. In the paragraphs that follow, I describe how the characteristics of children—their presence, number (or parity), age,

and sex—are connected to couples' odds of experiencing marital dissolution in this Nepalese context.

Marital Fertility and Parity

Childbearing in Nepal is inextricably linked to marriage (Bose and South 2003; Jennings et al. 2012). Historically, and still today, many Nepalese people consider childbearing to be a main purpose of the marital union. Moreover, marital unions are considered to be the only acceptable unions in which to have children, solidifying this important link between marriage and fertility (Fricke and Teachman 1993; Jennings et al. 2012). During my fieldwork in Chitwan, one forty year old Nepali woman expressed her thoughts about this link: "I think marriage is nothing more than having children. It's continuity in the world… There is a hope that they [children] would take care [of their parents] in the old age..." [1] This notion that married couples are supposed to have children is prevalent among the population. In fact, of the respondents of the 2008 CVFS (N=5170), only 25% agreed with the statement "It is okay for a person to decide not to have any children." There are strong social taboos related to childlessness, and those couples who remain childless for a lengthy period of time face stigma from their community (Riessman 2000; Stone 1978).

In addition to evading the stigma associated with childlessness, the bearing of children introduces significant value to marriages. In this setting, where there are no state-sponsored pension programs, and where families often depend on subsistence agriculture, children have a direct economic value. Children are valued for their ability to contribute to both the present

[1] In Fall 2010, in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 men and women on the topics of marital dissolution, remarriage, and childbearing. These 30 interviews were conducted with local residents of Chitwan. The author developed and pretested a semi-structured interview questionnaire, with help from a local Nepali staff at the Institute for Social and Environmental Research (ISER). The questionnaire was fielded among 18-45 year-olds (20 women and 10 men). The final sample represents people from different ethnic groups and who were residing in neighborhoods of varying distances from the nearest city.

household economy and to their parents' long-term well-being (Cain 1977; Jennings et al. 2012; Niraula 1995). Children are also valued for their religious role in securing their parents' well-being even in the afterlife (Bose and South 2003; Fricke 1986).

The negative value placed on childlessness and the positive value placed on childbearing can each affect couples' likelihood of marital dissolution. Childless couples may endure pressure from their family and community members to have children (Jennings and Barber 2013; Link 2010). This pressure can translate into tensions between the spouses, potentially leading the couple to eventually dissolve their marriage. In fact, in Nepal, infertility was grounds for husbands to file for divorce in the recent past, but a ruling in 2006 eliminated husbands' right to file for divorce due to infertility (Dubey 2006). There is a tendency for infertility to be blamed on wives (Rao 1997; Riessman 2000), and it is not uncommon for husbands to seek another wife in order to fulfill their desire to procreate (Cain 1986; Parvez 2011). With contemporary laws, this can take the form of a husband seeking a second wife without dissolving his first marriage. The first wife may then become unhappy and seek dissolution. A twenty-two year old Nepali woman described this kind of scenario to me during my fieldwork: "If there is no child from a couple then the husband wants to bring another wife to get children to extend his generation…When he gets the second marriage then he gives divorce to his first wife".[2] For these reasons, childlessness is expected to increase the likelihood of marital dissolution. Of course, given that premarital sex is rare in Nepal (Retherford and Thapa 1998), nearly all married couples spend some period of time childless.

[2] Although illegal since 1963 (Deuba and Rana 2001), polygamy is still practiced in rural Nepal. This means that husbands do not necessarily have to dissolve their first marriage in order to marry a different woman. However, as expressed in this quote, first wives of such scenarios often seek dissolution.

Once a couple has children, they experience barriers to dissolution. Parents may be motivated to avoid dissolution out of concern for their children's well-being and the possible negative consequences that marital dissolution can have. Some of this concern may be internalized, and some may come from social pressure to do what is best for their children. During my fieldwork, many people expressed the idea that divorce is bad for children. For example, one thirty-nine year old man told me "…if they [a couple] have children and if they decide to get divorced after [having] children then they are [making] a great mistake. They are committing a sin in their life; they damage the life of their children". Because of concerns for their children and fear of social repercussions, parents may perceive high costs to marital dissolution, as compared to childless couples. These barriers may increase in magnitude with each additional child. Thus, couples with a greater number of children may face a lower likelihood of dissolution.

Parents might also be expected to face reduced odds of marital dissolution, compared to childless couples, because of perceptions that children present impediments to remarriage (Becker et al. 1977; Teachman and Heckert 1985; Thornton 1977). Women in Nepal are especially dependent on marriage: they have few prospects for economic independence and typically must rely on male relatives for their livelihood. Thus, Nepalese women have strong incentive to remarry quickly if they experience a marital dissolution. But, a woman with children may anticipate more difficulty in finding a second spouse after dissolution than women without children. Indeed, during my fieldwork in Nepal, people expressed this idea—one forty-three year old man told me "If she has children from the first marriage then it can be almost impossible for her to get remarried." This barrier that children can present to remarriage might motivate wives with children to maintain their first marriages.

Age of children

I expect that having children, and a greater number of children, will suppress the odds of marital dissolution, but children are not likely to have a uniform influence across ages. Couples with younger children have been known to have a lower likelihood of marital dissolution, compared to couples with older children (Heaton 1990; Morgan and Rindfuss 1985; Waite and Lillard 1991). Couples may be especially motivated to keep their marriage intact when they have young children because the perceived costs of dissolution can be greater during this period.

With the expectations for children to care for parents later on, parents may be particularly concerned with avoiding divorce while children are young and bonds are still developing. In Nepal, women have only recently gained access to child custody in the case of divorce (Manzione 2001). In the past, men have been favored in custody arrangements, and joint custody likely remains very rare. Parents may anticipate that, if they were to split up while their children are young, the children may not have developed a strong or secure enough bond with the noncustodial parent to feel obligated to care for that parent in old age.

Additionally, parents may anticipate a greater emotional cost of dissolution while their children are young. Young children require a greater amount of care compared to older children, likely enhancing the bond that parents feel with their children during this stage of their lives (Kelly and Lamb 2000; Waite and Lillard 1991). In Nepal, joint custody is not common, parents' perceived risk of losing regular contact with these young children may present an especially strong motivation to avoid marital dissolution. Furthermore, regardless of custodial arrangements, parents' concern for their children's well-being may also be heightened when children are young. Parents may believe that young children are more vulnerable to the negative effects of dissolution, further motivating them to avoid marital dissolution during this stage.

There is evidence from Western settings that this motivation is strong: couples with young children are less happy than couples with older children (Twenge, Campbell, and Foster 2003; White, Booth, and Edwards 1986), but these couples have the lowest rate of marital dissolution in Western settings (Waite and Lillard 1991; Heaton 1990). Thus, concern for young children's well-being may be so strong that it motivates couples to endure the least happy years of their marriage.

As children get older, they become more independent and less vulnerable, and parents gradually spend less time in childrearing (Heaton 1990; Waite and Lillard 1991). With these changes, the emotional bonds between parents and children may loosen and the concern for children's vulnerability may decrease, thus decreasing the costs of marital dissolution. But, children may continue to have a suppressing effect on parents' marital dissolution into their school ages. Children who are in school are dependent on their parents to finance their school supplies, clothing, and any school fees (Caldwell 1982), and parents may be motivated to stay together and give their children a stable home during this stage. In fact, some parents may perceive that the consequences of dissolution are especially detrimental for school-aged children, who may face stigma from their peers at school. One nineteen year old Nepali woman told me, in reflecting on these concerns, "When they become old enough to go to school, they need their father's [and] mother's name. And friends in school also may ask them who their father is and mother. At that time it becomes difficult for the children and it may affect negatively on their mind… It may hamper the study of the children." With these kinds of concerns, children may continue to prevent marital dissolution into their school ages.

Sex of children

Children's sex composition may have distinct influences in South Asia, compared to Western settings. Even in Western settings, where son preference is not explicit, sons have been found to decrease couples' odds of marital dissolution (Heaton and Albrecht 1991; Morgan et al. 1988; Katzev, Warner, and Acock 1994, although more recent evidence suggests there this gender effect no longer is prevalent in the West (Diekmann and Schmidheiny 2004). The earlier findings were supported by evidence that husbands become more involved in childrearing when they have a son, and this father involvement can increase both the emotional costs of dissolution for fathers and can increase marital satisfaction for mothers (Harris and Morgan 1991; Katzev et al. 1994; Morgan et al. 1988).

In South Asia, it seems likely that children's gender will have an important influence on parents' marriage. Sons are particularly valued for a few reasons. They have a vital role in death rites and, in this patrilineal setting, they allow for continuation of the family line and ensure consistency in family inheritance practices through male kin (Bennett1983; Bose and South 2003; Fricke 1986; Karki 1988; Niraula and Morgan 1995). Daughters, on the other hand, join their husbands' family upon marriage, leaving their own parents and natal home (Bennett 1983; Gipson and Hindin 2007). Parents have higher expectations for sons to care for them in old age, compared to daughters, who are expected to help care for their parents-in-law (Goldstein, Schuler, and Ross 1983; Jennings et al. 2012; Niraula and Morgan 1995). Couples with a son, then, may be put at ease in knowing that their son will fulfill these responsibilities and this may translate into greater marital satisfaction. Moreover, these couples may be motivated to maintain their marriage so as to ensure their sons' support in old age. Combined, these mechanisms raise the likelihood the presence of sons will suppress parents' odds of dissolution.

Although there is reason to expect a that sons will suppress marital dissolution, couples tend to desire children of both sexes. This is true across settings (Andersson, Hank, Røsen, and Vikat 2006; Pebley, Delgado, and Brineman 1980; Pollard and Morgan 2002). In Nepal, couples typically desire at least one daughter, in addition to their son(s) (Karki 1988; Niraula and Morgan 1995; Stash 1996). In fact, when asked what gender composition they would prefer if they could have exactly three children, 57% of CVFS respondents say they prefer two sons and one daughter, and another 34% say they prefer two daughters and one son, with only the remaining 9% preferring a same-sex composition.[3] Couples who have at least one son *and* at least one daughter, then, may experience greater marital satisfaction and lower odds of marital dissolution relative to couples with all sons or all daughters.

Data

I use data from the 2008 fielding of the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS). The CVFS is conducted in rural Nepal. Respondents were drawn from a cluster sampling scheme, in which 151 neighborhoods were randomly sampled and each member of those neighborhoods between the ages of 15 and 59 were interviewed. Structured interviews were conducted to gather information on a range of family-related attitudes and experiences. Less structured interviews were also conducted, with life history calendars (Axinn, Pearce, and Ghimire 1999; Freedman, Thornton, Camburn, Alwin, and Young De-Marco 1988), to collect information on events that the respondents had experienced throughout their lives, such as school, work, birth, marriage, separation, and divorce.

I use a combination of the 2008 structured interview data and the retrospective life history calendar data to investigate the influence of children on their parents' odds of marital

[3] These percentages were calculated from the unrestricted 2008 CVFS sample of 5190 men and women.

dissolution. I limit my sample to couples in which the wives are in their first marriage and are age 50 and under (in any year during the retrospective observations) (N= 2833). I use this age restriction because the occurrence of marital dissolution becomes extremely rare after age 50. Restricting the sample to these couples with a higher rate of marital dissolution maximizes the opportunity to investigate the influence of children on marital dissolution. In order to investigate the effect of children's age and sex, I further restrict the sample to couples with at least one child (N=2674). The retrospective nature of the data allows me to investigate the likelihood of marital dissolution from the very beginning of couples' marriages, thus eliminating any issue with left-censoring.

Measures

Dependent

I operationalize marital dissolution by combining the events of marital separation and divorce—a common approach, as there can be a temporal lag in the time from separation to divorce (Hirschman and Teerawichitchainan 2003; Morgan and Rindfuss 1985; Morgan et al. 1988; Martin and Bumpass 1989; Schoen 1992; South 2001). The measure of marital dissolution indicates marital breakdown; separation due to temporary migration is not considered to be dissolution for the purpose of this investigation. Combining separation and divorce into a single event allows me to pinpoint the time at which the marriage was first disrupted. This is especially important in a setting where separation can often occur without a divorce to follow (Dommaraju and Jones 2011). On the other hand, separation is not a prerequisite for divorce in this setting, and many dissolutions are the result of immediate divorce. Of those couples in the full analytic sample who experienced marital dissolution, only about 35% initially experienced separation (some with divorce to follow, some without divorce during the study period).

Following previous research on divorce in Asia (Hirschman and Teerawichitchainan 2003), I focus on dissolution of first marriages (from the wife's perspective). In Nepal, nearly everyone experiences first marriage (Yabiku 2002), but remarriage is very rare. As of 2008, only about 7% of ever-married women and 24% of ever-married men ages 40 and older in the CVFS sample had been married more than once. Later marriages tend to be less institutionalized than first marriages in Western settings (Cherlin 1978). In other words, later marriages tend to have fewer established norms and guidelines than first marriages, as remarriage is a less common and more recent phenomenon. Given the more pronounced infrequency of later marriages in this setting, these marriages are likely to be even less institutionalized than in the West (Holden 2008; Parry 2001). Additionally, research demonstrates that remarriages tend to have significantly different causes and are prone to a greater likelihood of dissolution than first marriages (Becker et al. 1977; Bramlett and Mosher 2002; Cherlin 1978; Martin and Bumpass 1989). Thus, I limit my investigation to first marriages.

I use the life history calendar data to operationalize the yearly hazard of marital dissolution in discrete time. The discrete time approach yields results similar to a continuous approach because the incidence of marital dissolution in any one year is quite low, but the discrete time approach allows the avoidance of parametric assumptions regarding the distribution of the underlying baseline hazard (Yamaguchi 1991). The measure of marital dissolution is coded as 0 for every year the couple is married and 1 for the first year in which the couple is separated (for at least six months) or divorced, after which they cease to contribute to couple-years of exposure to risk of marital dissolution. Widowhood is treated as a competing risk, couples in which a spouse dies cease to contribute couple-years to the hazard.

Independent

In order to investigate the influence of having children and having a greater number of children, I code time-varying dummy measures of fertility, from the life history calendar data. The measures indicate (1) whether the couple is childless, (2) whether the couple has one child, (3) whether the couple has two children, (4) whether the couple has three children, (5) whether the couple has four children, and (6) whether the couple has five or more children. Each measure is coded 1 if the couple falls into the category and 0 otherwise. I combine couples with five or more children (ranging as high as 13) because so few have more than five children by the last observation of the hazard (13% of the sample).

Next, to investigate the influence of children's age on their parents' rate of marital dissolution I code two time-varying measures to indicate the age characteristics of the youngest child. First, I code a continuous measure of the age of the youngest (or last born) child, in years. Next, I code a dummy measure to indicate whether the youngest child is under the age of three. I combine ages three and older because these ages were revealed to exert similar influence on marital dissolution, relative to younger ages (the decision to combine ages three and older is described in more detail below).

Finally, to investigate the influence of children's sex, I code a series of dummy measures to specify gender composition at each parity. These measures indicate whether couples at parity one have a boy or a girl; whether couples at parity two have two boys, two girls, or one of each sex; and whether couples at parity three or higher have at least three sons, only one or two sons, or no sons.[4]

Controls

[4] I code the dummy measure to indicate that the couple has at least three sons instead of indicating that the couple has only sons because the later would create very small cell sizes.

I also include a number of controls in the models, to account for other factors that may influence both fertility and marital dissolution in this setting. Due to the nature of the retrospective data, I do not have the capability to match information from women with information from their ex-husbands. This limits me to controlling for measures of individual and couple experiences as obtained from wives.

I account for wife's age at the time that she was first married. Wife's level of spouse choice comes from the 2008 structured interview, and is coded into a dummy measure: 0 indicates that the wife had no participation in choosing her spouse, and 1 indicates that the wife had any participation in choosing her spouse. Length of marriage is a time-varying measure, coded in years, indicating the number of years that have lapsed since the couple was married.

Wife's education is coded as categorical, ranging from 0 to 4 and indicating the total amount of wife's accumulated school attendance at marriage: 0 = never attended school; 1 = attended school for 1 to 4 years; 2 = attended school for 5 to 9 years; 3 = attended school for 10 to 14 years; and 4 = attended school for 15 years or more.[5] A time-varying measure indicating whether the wife ever worked for wages is coded 1 if the wife ever worked for wages and 0 if she never worked for wages.

Ethnicity is coded as four dummy variables: Brahmin/Chettri (or upper caste Hindus), Dalit (or lower caste Hindus), Hill Indigenous, and Terai Indigenous. Brahmin/Chettri is the reference category in the analyses.

[5] A wife is considered to have attended a year of school if she was enrolled for at least a part of the year.

Finally, birth cohort is coded as three dummy variables, indicating that the respondent was born between 1968 and 1982; between 1953 and 1967; or between 1938 and 1952.[6]

Analytic Method

I use discrete-time event history analysis and logistic regression to model the risk of marital dissolution, with person-years of exposure as the unit of analysis. The models are estimated with multilevel modeling to account for the clustered nature of the CVFS sampling design at the neighborhood level. The analysis is based on yearly measurement indicating whether the respondent experienced marital dissolution. I use the following logistic regression equation:

$$\ln\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = a + \sum\left(B_{in}\right)\left(X_{in}\right)$$

Where p is the probability of marital dissolution, $\frac{p}{(1-p)}$ is the odds of marital dissolution, a is a constant term, β is the effect of independent variables within neighborhoods (n), and X is the value of these independent variables. Individuals (i) who are exposed to the risk of marital dissolution are defined as wives, ages 50 and under, who are in their first marriage. I discuss the results as odds ratios, which is the anti-log of the coefficient. These odds ratios can be interpreted as the amount by which the odds are multiplied for each unit change in the respective independent variable. If the odds ratio is greater than 1, the effect is positive, meaning that marital dissolution occurs at a higher (faster) rate; if it is less than 1, the effect is negative, meaning that marital dissolution occurs at a lower (slower) rate. Moreover, these ratios can be easily transformed into percent change in the odds associated with each unit change in the

[6] Measures for length of marriage, age at marriage, cohort, and parity are correlated. With person-years as the unit of observation, length of marriage is correlated with age at marriage at r= -0.30, with cohort at r=0.40, and with parity at r=0.73. Cohort and parity are correlated at 0.35; cohort and age at marriage are correlated at -0.33; and age at marriage and parity are correlated at -0.19.

respective independent variable by subtracting 1 from the odds ratio and multiplying by 100 (Thornton, Axinn, Xie 2007). Because so few marital dissolutions occur in each yearly interval, the yearly odds of marital dissolution are comparable to the rate of marital dissolution. For this reason, I sometimes discuss the rate of marital dissolution as interchangeable with the odds of marital dissolution.

As Table 1 reveals, only 7.5% of the full sample experience marital dissolution during the period of observation. Although this is a small proportion, it presents a large enough incidence of marital dissolution to allow for the use of logistic regression with event history analysis (Chen 2007; King and Zeng 2001). The main statistical concern is that such a low rate of events might be expected to produce nonsignificant results in the associations between the independent measures and marital dissolution.

Results

Table 1 displays means for the full sample of couples, couples who have children, and (to facilitate interpretability of Tables 2 and 3) couples at each parity. Because the units of observation in my analyses are person-years, I include statistics at both the beginning and the end of the observation period for time-varying covariates. Focusing on the full sample, very few of the couples have children at first observation—not surprising, given that the hazard begins in the first year of marriage. By the last observation, only 6% of couples have no children, and most (83%) have at least two children. Among couples at first parity (11% of the sample), a little over half have a son. At parity two (30% of sample), most couples have a son and a daughter, and only a minority have two daughters. At parities three and higher (53% of the sample), most couples again have a mixed sex composition, and a minority have no sons.

- Table 1 about here -

Wives in the full sample were married at about age 17, on average, and a minority (34%) participation in choosing their spouse. By the end of the observation, couples had been married for an average of about 20 years. (Among marriages that dissolved, this average was 9.21 years.) Wives in the sample do not have high levels of schooling, with a mean of 1.36 on the scale ranging from 0 to 4. Upon marriage, 29% of wives had work experience, and this percentage rose to 48% by the last observation. About half of the sample (52%) identifies as Brahmin/Chettri, 11% identify as Dalit, 18% identify as Hill Indigenous, and 19% identify as Terai Indigenous. Over half of the wives (59%) fall into the youngest cohort—born between 1968 and 1982—and the smallest minority (13%) falls into the oldest cohort—born between 1938 and 1952.

Table 2 displays results from event history analyses. In Model 1, I investigate the influence of childlessness on couples' odds of marital dissolution. The odds ratio of 2.45 indicates that couples with no children had 2.45 greater odds of marital dissolution than couples who had at least one child. This coefficient is statistically significant and independent of marital characteristics, wife's nonfamily experiences, and demographics. Note that this childlessness effect is not limited to longer marital durations: an analysis of the first two years of marriage (not shown) revealed a similar effect.

In Model 2, I examine the influence of parity on the odds of marital dissolution with a series of dummy measures. Couples with no children are treated as the reference group, so that the influence of each other measure in this model is relative to childless couples. Couples with one child experience a lower rate of marital dissolution compared to childless couples, but the odds ratio of 0.69 does not quite reach statistical significance. I discuss possible reasons for this in the conclusion. Couples with two children, however, do experience significantly lower odds of

dissolution than childless couples: an odds ratio of 0.28 translates to 72% lower odds. Couples with three children have even lower odds of dissolution (89% lower) than childless couples. Couples at parity four and couples at parity five or more experience just over 90% lower odds than childless couples. In summary, Table 2 demonstrates strong evidence that childless couples are at a greater risk of marital dissolution, having more than one child suppresses couples' rate of marital dissolution, and the rate of dissolution decreases with each additional child, up to three. Additional children beyond the third do not create substantial gains in marital longevity.[7] Thus, in the subsequent models, I employ measures of fertility that combine couples above parity two into a single category.

- Table 2 about here -

Table 3 expands the investigation to examine the influence of children's age composition on their parents' odds of dissolution. In this table, the sample is limited to couples who have at least one child. In Model 1, I investigate the influence of the age of the youngest child, treated as a continuous measure. The youngest child's age exerts a significant, positive influence on the odds of marital dissolution. The odds ratio of 1.12 suggests that the odds of marital dissolution increases by 12% with each additional year of the youngest child's age.

In Model 2 of Table 3, I investigate the influence of a dichotomous measure of the youngest child's age, to indicate that the child is under age three. I combine all parents with children ages three and older because, in a model investigating the influence of a series of dummy measures for the youngest child's age (not shown), no significant effects of children under age three relative to children under age one were revealed and the influence of child's age

[7] Models were also tested in which couples at parity three were treated as the reference category (not shown). Odds of dissolution for couples at parities four and greater than four were revealed to be statistically no different than couples at parity three.

was positive for all ages above age two (relative to under age one). Thus, hypotheses suggesting that school-aged children continue to have a suppressing influence on marital dissolution do not hold. In Model 2, the odds ratio of 0.39 indicates that having a child under age three suppresses the odds of marital dissolution, complementing the results of Model 1. Specifically, couples whose youngest child is under the age of three have 61% lower odds of experiencing marital dissolution than couples whose youngest child is age three or older.[8]

Model 3 accounts for parity, with couples who have one child treated as the reference category. In this model, the influence of the youngest child's age remains significant, even as the influence of parity is strong. An odds ratio of 0.48 indicates that couples with a youngest child under the age of three have 52% lower odds of marital dissolution than couples with all children ages three or older. These results are similar to results from Western settings, which also find that children's age is an independent predictor of parents' marital dissolution, holding total family size constant (Wu 1995; Lillard and Waite 1993). In this Nepalese setting, too, child's age appears to have a strong and independent influence on couples' odds of marital dissolution.

Of course, child's age and parity are correlated. Because of this correlation, I investigate interactions in Model 4. Couples who have one child age three or older are treated as the reference category. The model reveals significant interaction effects between age and parity. Specifically, compared to couples with one child age three or older, couples with one child under age three have 73% reduced odds of marital dissolution. Couples who have two children or at least three children have 75% and 91% reduced odds of marital dissolution, respectively, when their youngest child is age three or older (compared to couples with only one child who is age three or older). Within-parity differences were tested in models not shown, revealing that couples

[8] Investigations for effects of the oldest child's age were also conducted. The oldest child's age is not a strong predictor of parents' marital dissolution, contrary to findings from the United States (Heaton 1990).

with two children and a youngest child age three or older have significantly greater odds of dissolution than their counterparts with a youngest child under age three. Couples with three or more children do not face significantly different odds of marital dissolution if their youngest child is under age three relative to if their youngest child is age three or older. Overall, then, Table 3 reiterates the important influence of both parity and child's age, and illustrates that these two characteristics of child composition interact to influence marital dissolution. The differential effects of children's age, however, are no longer significant for couples at higher parities (i.e., three or more children).

- Table 3 about here -

Next, I turn to possible influences of the sex composition of children. Recall that the retrospective data capture every birth event until the couples' last observation, since the hazard begins in the year of first marriage for everyone. Therefore, couples who reach parity two or higher spent some time at parity one, and couples who reach parity three or higher spent some time at parity two (with the exception of multiple births). Figure 1 displays predicted probabilities of marital dissolution based on couples' parity and sex, for the full sample, using the midpoint of marital duration at last observation (20.08 years). (See Table A.1 in the Appendix for the odds ratio results). The height of the bars illustrates the expected probability of marital dissolution in each year, given that they did not dissolve in the previous year. Asterisks above bars refer to significant differences in the probability of experiencing marital dissolution for couples with different sex compositions, within parity.

- Figure 1 about here -

Figure 1 illustrates the similarity—which was statistically confirmed in Table 2—in the probably of marital dissolution for couples at first parity and childless couples. Moreover, the

figure visually reveals a substantial difference in the probability of marital dissolution for those at first parity compared to those at higher parity. Among the 2674 couples at first parity (at any time during the period of observation), 60 experience marital dissolution. Only these couples exhibit a statistically different probability of marital dissolution depending on children's sex. Specifically, the probability of marital dissolution among couples at parity one is lower for couples with a son, compared to couples with a daughter. Within second parity, couples with one son and one daughter have a higher probability of marital dissolution than couples with only sons or only daughters, but these differences are not statistically significant. Couples at third or higher parities also do not experience a significantly different probability of marital dissolution across sex compositions. Together, results from Figure 1 suggest that only couples at first parity experience a significantly different probability of marital dissolution depending on the sex composition of their children; at higher parities, the sex composition of children does not exert significant influences on marital dissolution.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the influences of marital fertility on marital dissolution in a setting where marital dissolution has historically been very rare, and where parents rely on their children as they age. I find that, not unlike settings where divorce is more common and children provide less explicit value to their parents, having children, having more children (higher parity), and having younger children all suppress the risk of marital dissolution. Parity has an especially strong influence, and this influence is apparent in the investigation of children's age and sex composition. Results revealed that younger children significantly suppress the risk of parents' marital dissolution for couples with one or two, but not more, children. Moreover, having a son reduces the odds of marital dissolution, but only for couples with one child. Overall, influences

of children are consistent in this rural Nepalese setting with influences in Western settings, although this investigation has revealed unique influences of certain family compositions on marital dissolution among Nepalese couples.

Childless couples face greater odds of marital dissolution than couples with children. However, having only one child was not found to be protective against dissolution, relative to childless marriages. It could be that having only one child does not significantly increase couples' perception of the value of their marriage compared to having no children. In present day Nepal, the majority of people state that two children is the ideal family size (Jennings and Barber 2013), and the ideal family size was greater in the past (during the time that many of the women in the sample were bearing children).[9] With the prevalence of this two-child (or larger) ideal family size, it may be that couples place value on children only after they have reached this ideal number. Consistent with this explanation, the odds of marital dissolution decreases with subsequent births.

Though the finding that additional children can suppress marital dissolution is not unique to this setting, children have a particularly important influence on marital outcomes in South Asia, where they are relied on heavily for economic support in both young ages and in their adulthood (Cain 1977; Niraula 1995; Watt et al. 2013). In addition to the value of children for farm labor and for old age support, the perceived detrimental effects of divorce on children and the anticipated stigma for putting their children in such a situation may accumulate with each additional child, adding greater disincentive for parents to seek dissolution. However, after couples have reached parity three, there appears to be little gain in marital success with additional children. Evidence suggests that marital stability may only increase up to third parity

[9] Comparing responses to the 2008 CVFS survey and the 1996 CVFS survey, respondents' average ideal family size dropped from 2.86 to 2.32 children.

in the United States, as well, despite the lower fertility rates (Santelli and Melnikas 2010) and different value placed on children (Heaton 1990).

Also similar to findings in the United States, I found evidence that younger children suppress dissolution relative to older children in Nepal and children's age influences marital dissolution independent of parity (Waite and Lillard 1991). Furthermore, the age of couples' youngest child interacts with parity to influence couples' rate of marital dissolution. However, the within-parity differences in age effects only hold for couples with one or two children. Couples with three or more children no longer experience more strongly suppressed odds of marital dissolution when the youngest child is younger, compared to when couples have one child that is older.

I also found evidence of a sex effect of children, but this effect is limited to couples at parity one. More than two decades ago, Morgan, Condran, and Lye (1988) published an important paper revealing that sons, in the United States, can have a suppressing influence on parents' marital dissolution compared to daughters. Although the effect may have weakened recently in Western countries, recent research in India has offered similar findings (Bose and South 2003). Results from the current analyses suggest that sons suppress parents' odds of marital dissolution in this setting, as well. Morgan et al. (1988) posited that sons may have a greater suppressing effect on marital dissolution than daughters because fathers are more invested in childrearing when they have sons. In Nepal, daughters have less value for their parents than sons because a son is needed for the proper performance of death rituals and for continuation of the family line (Bose and South 2003; Niraula and Morgan 1995). Yet, despite the relatively blatant prevalence of son preference in this setting, this effect was limited to couples with one child.

Another possible explanation, in contrast to the explanation revolving around the value of sons, is that a mother may feel more secure in leaving a marriage with a single daughter. The mother may feel closer to her daughter than she would if that single child were a son, and therefore more confident that the child would grow up to be invested in her mother's well-being. Furthermore, her husband may be less inclined to want or demand custody of a daughter than a son, and the mother may anticipate this. If this is the case, then mothers with one daughter and no other children may expect that the daughter will remain with her and be committed to supporting her in old age, thus eliminating some of the costs associated with marital dissolution. This explanation, however, is tentative and requires further investigation.

Similar to the interacting effect of age, the negative influence of having a son disappears at higher parities. This may be because parents perceive the costs of dissolution to be too high at higher parities, regardless of their children's age or sex composition. The concern for the well-being of each child may accumulate. Parents of these larger families may also perceive that they have even more to lose in the way of expected support in their old age with each additional child. These concerns, directly associated with family size, may begin to outweigh the concerns associated with children's age and sex characteristics, per se, as parents reach higher parities.

Although this study offers important insight into the relationship between fertility and marital dissolution, limitations exist. First, it is possible that happier couples, who are more prone to have successful marriages, are selected into parenthood (Lawrence, Cobb, Rothman, Rothman, and Bradbury 2008; Lillard and Waite 1993) and these happier couples may also be selected into higher parity. Unfortunately, these retrospective data do not allow me to account for marital happiness at early stages of marriage and fertility. Second, the retrospective nature of the data used in these analyses do not necessarily represent the current causes of marital dissolution

in contemporary Nepal, as the Nepalese family is rapidly changing (Axinn and Yabiku 2001). Third, because the average marital duration at dissolution is nearly 10 years, it requires a relatively older marital cohort to allow for observation of marital dissolution events. Replications of these analyses with more contemporary data and younger cohorts of respondents would be useful. Finally, the uncommon occurrence of marital dissolution among this analytic sample brings into question the ability to generalize these results. The 215 couples who experience dissolution may be unique in some unobserved way, and so these results should be generalized, even to similar settings, with caution.

Overall, this paper points toward important policy implications of future family trends. Fertility rates have drastically fallen in Nepal over the last several decades and are likely to continue to fall (Thornton et al. 2012). As family sizes decrease, more couples will face lower barriers to marital dissolution and the prevalence of marital dissolution may grow. Yet, with fewer children to rely on for emotional and economic security after dissolution, the well-being of men and women who experience dissolution may be at particularly high risk. As fertility falls and divorce and separation become more common, institutional support for families facing the repercussions of dissolution will become even more important. While fertility trends and marital dissolution trends are independently important for policy, the two trends combined raise the priority for policies that protect individuals from the potential detriments of these family changes.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Full Sample (N=2833)		Sample with Children (N=2674)		Sample: Couples at Parity 1 (N=2653)		Sample: Couples at Parity 2 (N=2353)		Sample: Couples at Parity 3 (N=1510)	
	First Obs.	*Last Obs.*	*First Obs.*	*Last Obs.*	*First Obs.*	*Last Obs.*	*First Obs.*	*Last Obs.*	*First Obs.*	*Last Obs.*
Marital Dissolution (proportion)		0.076		0.050		0.023		0.015		0.026
Fertility Experiences										
Couple has no children	0.97	0.06								
Has one child	0.02	0.11								
Has two children	0.0004	0.30								
Has three children	0.00	0.20								
Has four children	0.00	0.13								
Has at least five children	0.00	0.20								
Age of youngest (continuous)			0.00	10.39						
Youngest under age 3			1.00	0.14						
Parity 1										
Son	0.01	0.06								
Daughter	0.02	0.05								
Parity 2										
Two sons	0.0004	0.09								
One son, one daughter	0.00	0.17								
Two daughters	0.00	0.04								
Parity 3 or higher										
Three or more sons	0.00	0.18								
Mixed sex	0.00	0.33								
No sons	0.00	0.02								
Has at least one son					0.50		0.77		0.87	
Characteristics of the marriage										
Wife's age at marriage	17.37		17.32		17.33		16.92		16.15	
Wife had some spouse choice	0.34		0.34		0.34		0.31		0.25	
Marital duration	1.00	20.08[b]	3.74	20.75[d]	3.73	6.09[f]	6.53	10.91[h]	9.59	26.20[j]
Wife's nonfamily experiences										
Accumulated school enrollment at marriage	1.36[a]		1.37[c]		1.37[e]		1.24[g]		0.76[i]	
Ever worked for wages	0.29	0.48	0.35	0.48	0.36	0.38	0.38	0.41	0.39	0.51
Demographics										
Brahmin/Chettri	0.52		0.52		0.52		0.52		0.50	
Not of Brahmin/Chettri ethnicity	0.48		0.48		0.48		0.48		0.50	
Dalit	0.11		0.11							
Hill Janajati	0.18		0.18							
Terai Janajati	0.19		0.19							
Cohort born 1938-1952	0.13		0.13		0.13		0.14		0.20	
Cohort born 1953-1967	0.28		0.28		0.28		0.30		0.40	
Cohort born 1968-1982	0.59		0.59		0.59		0.56		0.40	

[a, c, e] Standard deviation=1.44; minimum value=0, maximum value=4
[b] Standard deviation=10.69; minimum value=1, maximum value=46
[d] Standard deviation=10.38; minimum value=2, maximum value=46
[f] Standard deviation=3.92; minimum value=1, maximum value=37
[g] Standard deviation=1.38; minimum value=0, maximum value=4
[h] Standard deviation=5.94; minimum value=2, maximum value=40
[i] Standard deviation=1.13; minimum value=0, maximum value=4
[j] Standard deviation=9.01; minimum value=4, maximum value=46

Table 2: Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression for Childlessness and Parity Influencing Marital Dissolution

	Model 1	Model 2
Fertility Experiences		
Couple has no children	2.45***	
	(4.38)	
Ref: Has no children		
Has one child		0.69
		(-1.64)
Has two children		0.28***
		(-4.39)
Has three children		0.11***
		(-5.18)
Has four children		0.08***
		(-4.72)
Has five ore more children		0.09***
		(-5.18)
Characteristics of the marriage		
Wife's age at marriage	0.94*	0.95+
	(-2.23)	(-1.79)
Wife had some spouse choice	0.68+	0.67+
	(-1.85)	(-1.78)
Length of marriage	0.95***	1.00
	(-4.43)	(-0.01)
Wife's nonfamily experiences		
Accumulated school enrollment at marriage	1.12	1.07
	(1.16)	(0.65)
Ever worked for wages	2.08***	2.13***
	(4.18)	(3.96)
Demographics		
Ethnicity (Ref: Brahmin/Chettri)		
Dalit	2.07**	2.16**
	(2.93)	(2.95)
Hill Indigenous	1.72*	1.82*
	(2.17)	(2.27)
Terai Indigenous	1.54+	1.64+
	(1.76)	(1.94)
Birth cohort (ref: born 1938-1952)		
Cohort born 1982-1968	0.57*	0.59+
	(-2.15)	(-1.81)
Cohort born 1953-1967	0.76	0.78
	(-1.41)	(-1.14)
Total person-years	56899	56899
Total persons	2833	2833
Total persons experiencing marital dissolution	215	215

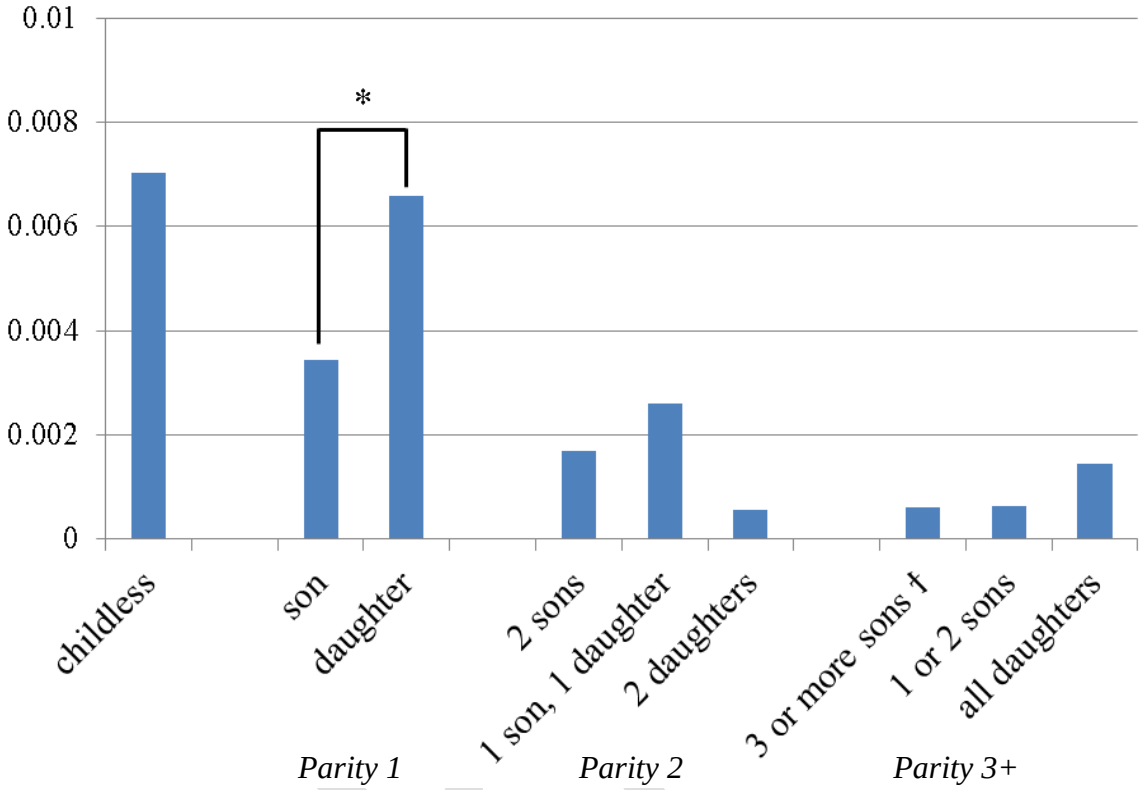
Two-tailed +p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001
Results presented as odds ratios. T-ratios are indicated in parentheses.

Table 3: Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression for Age Characteristics of Youngest Child Influencing Marital Dissolution, Sample of Couples with at Least One Child

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fertility Characteristics				
Youngest Child's Age (continuous)	1.12** (2.66)			
Youngest Child is Under Age 3		0.39** (-2.95)	0.48* (-2.26)	
Ref: Has One Child				
Has Two Children			0.44** (-2.58)	
Has Three or More Children			0.20*** (-4.07)	
Ref: Has One Child Age 3 or older				
Has One Child with Under Age 3				0.27*** (-4.03)
Has Two Children with Youngest Age 3 or older				0.25*** (-3.80)
Has Two Children with Youngest Under Age 3				0.67 (-0.96)
Has Three Children with Youngest Age 3 or older				0.09*** (-5.65)
Has Three Children with Youngest Under Age 3				1.06 (0.14)
Characteristics of the marriage				
Wife's age at marriage	0.92+ (-1.87)	0.92+ (1.84)	0.93+ (-1.69)	0.94+ (-1.88)
Wife had some spouse choice	0.84 (-0.55)	0.86 (-0.51)	0.83 (-0.64)	0.78 (-1.03)
Length of marriage	0.87*** (-4.50)	0.89*** (-5.13)	0.95* (-2.01)	0.96* (-2.08)
Wife's nonfamily experiences				
Accumulated school enrollment at marriage	1.18 (1.13)	1.17 (1.11)	1.13 (0.85)	1.11 (0.89)
Ever worked for wages	2.73*** (3.58)	2.70*** (3.59)	2.74*** (3.75)	2.78*** (4.60)
Demographics				
Ethnicity (Ref: Brahmin/Chettri)				
Not of Brahmin/Chettri ethnicity	1.56 (1.53)	1.54 (1.50)	1.56 (1.59)	1.48 (1.59)
Birth cohort (ref born 1938-1952)				
Cohort born 1982-1968	0.32** (-2.70)	0.31** (-2.76)	0.38* (-2.32)	0.43* (-2.44)
Cohort born 1953-1967	0.63 (-1.34)	0.67 (-1.21)	0.77 (-0.82)	0.84 (-0.63)
Total person-years	48150	48150	48150	48150
Total persons	2674	2674	2674	2674
Total persons experiencing marital dissolution	135	135	135	135

Two-tailed +p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001
Results presented as odds ratios. T-ratios are indicated in parentheses.

Figure 1: Predicted Probabilities of Couples' Marital Dissolution for Different Sex Compositions



* Indicates statistically significant difference between sex composition categories within parity at p<.10.
† At parity 3 and higher there are few couples who have only sons. Because of the small cell size for couples with only sons, I use this measure of 3 or more sons for couples with 3 or more children, total.

APPENDIX

Table A.1: Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression for Gender and Parity Composition Influencing Marital Dissolution

	Model 1
Reference: No children	
Parity 1	
Son	0.49* (-2.27)
Daughter	0.93 (-0.25)
Parity 2	
Two sons	0.24* (-3.07)
One son, one daughter	0.37** (-2.99)
Two daughters	0.08* (-2.46)
Parity 3 or higher	
Three or more sons	0.09*** (-5.12)
Mixed sex	0.09*** (-6.00)
No sons	0.21* (-2.09)
Characteristics of the marriage	
Wife's age at marriage	0.95+ (-1.83)
Wife had some spouse choice	0.67+ (-1.73)
Length of marriage	1.00 (0.07)
Wife's nonfamily experiences	
Accumulated school enrollment at marriage	1.08 (0.75)
Ever worked for wages	2.20*** (4.10)
Demographics	
Ethnicity (Ref: Brahmin/Chettri)	
Not of Brahmin/Chettri ethnicity	1.87** (3.07)
Birth cohort (ref born 1938-1952)	
Cohort born 1982-1968	0.57+ (-1.91)
Cohort born 1953-1967	0.76 (-1.19)
Total person-years	56899
Total persons	2833
Total persons experiencing marital dissolution	215

Two-tailed +p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001
Results presented as odds ratios. T-ratios are indicated in parentheses.