THE RELATION BETWEEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELEOPMENT AND AGE AT MARRIAGE

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Abstract:

In this study, we take in consideration age at marriage and age difference between males and females. Age differences in Albanian population, Greek minorities and cultural communities of Aromanian, unlike Roma community, are the highest in Europe. This difference is partially explained by the fact that these populations has faced the same harsh conditions of natural and social nature. Due to high rate of migration, cultural communication and economic development in the last decades in Albanian population brought, as it has been observed, a lower age difference. On the other hand, age at marriage is the lowest in Europe and it is an important feature of economic growth. Specifically, coefficient of rank correlations between economic development and age at marriage is 0.97 and 0.90. From this point, we hypothesise that populations living in harsh condition tend to value most, marriages which emphasize economic welfare and having children. On the other side, human population which has a stable welfare, tend to have marriages that provides emotional and sexual pleasure.

Keywords: Age at marriage, age difference, culture, socio-economic status, evolved psychological mechanisms

Introduction:

Albania, after Moldavia, is the poorest country in Europe. GDP value of Albania has been low during communist system and it remain so nowdays. However, pace of development in the last decades has varied greatly. This feature is presented in TFR value from 7 in 1950 to 1,85 in 2008 (INSTAT, Gjoncaj, A et al. 2008).Another important feature is longevity in Albanian population which, contrary to their economic incomes, is relatively high. For this reason, this phenomena is called Albanian paradox and is considered a protective effect of mediterranean lifestyle (Gjoncaj, A., Bobrak, M.1997).

But in our opinion, the most interesting demographic indicator, is related to marriage: age difference of Albanians is the highest in Europe and age at marriage of Albanian female is the lowest in Europe. In Albania, women below 20 years old are married to man 4 years older, contrary to 2 years on average as shown in a study of 37 different cultures around the world (Buss, D.1989). Data collected in 2008 shown that 44.18% of women of age 20 to 24 years old get married with 44,06% of men of age 25 to 29 years old (INSTAT, 2008).

A registration done in 1918 shows that age at first marriage in women varied from 16,5 years old to 21,5 years old and in men it varied from 21,5 years old to 33,5 years old (Grueber, S. 2002). This data shows that variation of age at marriage for men is 12 years and 5 years for women. This difference in age at marriage between men and women is explained with biologically constrained time of reproduction of women which in turn, combined with survival condition that call for more offsprings, dictates marriages at a younger age for women and confine their age at marriage. The main feature of human populations due to economical difficulties, in our opinion, is concerned with high fertility because of children dying at early age and their contributions in domestic economy. In these circumistances, Albanians populations have adapted a social norm where age between men and women was 9.6 years (Gruber, S. 2002). There are other reported cases. For example, Sami people in preindustrial Finland to raise the probability of offsprings, men married women 15 years younger (Bielk, D. 2007., Helle, S et al. 2008). But in recent years, a different social norm take place in Finland: men are married to women 2,3 years younger their age.

Nowdays and presumably in future years to come, is not a successful adaptive solution to have an age difference of 9.6 years and this is certainly due to social and economical changes that took place in Albanian population.

The data suggest that the preferential marriage age is an adaptive problem analogue to opening a lock according to the specific key. The process involved is called evolved psychological mechanism (Buss, D. 2008). This information model deposited in brain is therefore analogue of information that gene once extracted from the environment (Cosmides, L., Tooby, J. 1992). In our case, decision making during mate choice according to age is a function performed due to information gathered. In this context, our behaviours are exposed according to information reserved in our brains. If humans choose some particular age to get married this choice is to be considered a solution to the adaptive problem of getting married. In this point of view, our choices are function performed due to personal and collective information (or knowledge). This study presents the behavior of population as performed functions due to information according to three hypothesis:

1. Human populations, despite ethnicity, has the same high age difference between men and women when facing the same conditions of natural and economic enviroment.

2. Age difference at marriage along one generation, reduce dramatically when a population undergoes a fast growth of economic revenues and face other culture aspects (ex. aspects of greek culture).

3. In human populations living in harsh economic conditions, age difference at marriage is higher than in human populations living in optimal economic conditions.

Materials and methods

Data for preferential age in first marriage and age differences between men and women are gathered from 363 participants in 12 districts of Republic of Albania and from 464 participants (Albanians, Greek minorities, Roma and Aromanian cultural minorities) which live in Gjirokastra district, Albania. In 363 individuals, 170 are males and 193 are females. Among them, 183 are below 30 years old (the average age is 21,3) and 180 are over 30 years old (the average age is 45,05). In Gjirokastra district take part in our survey 151 Albanians of which 91 males (the average age is 45,6) and 60 females (the average age is 41,1). Also took part on this survey 151 individuals of Greek ethnicity of which 89 are males (the average age is 40,4) and 62 females (the average age is 40,4), 98 individuals of Aromanian cultural community of which 69 are males (the average age is 29,9) and 29 females (the average age is 29,8) and 67 individuals of Roma cultural community of which 37 are males (the average age is 26, 5) and 30 females (the average age is 29,4).

Results

In the relatively small Gjirokastra district, lives almost in same social and economical condition Albanians, Greek minorities and cultural communities of Aroumanians and Roma. In table 1 is shown age difference between men and women of the four ethnicities mention above.

Ethnicities	Age differences between men and women
Albanian	7.00 ± 0.12
	6.63 ± 0.17
Greek	6.47 ± 0.09
	6.81 ± 0.11

Aromanian	6.52 ± 0.11
	6.93 ± 0.17
Roma	4.53 ± 0.17
	5.77 ± 0.31

Table 1 Age differences between men and women in four ethnicities

Table 1 shows that beside Roma community, Albanians, Greek minorities, and cultural community of   Aromanian has the same age difference. This difference between Roma and others is partially explained by certain way of living that is tipical of Roma community. Albanians and other communities has lived together for centuries and has quite the same way of living while Roma community performs a variety of other behaviours analogue to their perceptions toward reality (for example, they work as musicians which performs at city weedings). Apart from their earnings, the way of living in Roma community in relation to the other social groups defer in a meaningful way due to their unical cultural framework. On the other side, Albanians and Greek minoritiy are muslims and orthodox, have partially migrated and practiced horticulture and livestock beside Aromanian minority which has practiced livestock and transhumance. The three ethnies mentioned above has a common tradition. First, marriage in these ethnies has been arranged by parents. In a previous study has been shown that 60% of marriages is arranged and approved only by parents (Bajrami, A., Ruka, E. 2011). Second, marriage has always been associated with the survival of the couple and the male relatives and so, the choice was in concordance by the groom family and it was expected that the male had a certain status and prospective earnings. From this point of view, the male must have characical features linked to status and prestige. Third, it was expected that the male had a job, apart from his family, which secured him enough earnings so he could create a neolocal residence when married. But the main factor which explains the seven age difference between males and females in Albanians, greek minority and cultural community of aroumanians is their economical organization. For about 4 decades, living in cooperative was more valuable for the new couple in a neolocal residence because they were granted a small piece of land to work and some cattle to look after. Living apart from their parents meant new challenges: building a house of their own and furnishing it with the necessary equipment. In these new circumstance, men were married later because traditionally the house of the couple was considered primarily a male property. In conclusion,

the three ethnies, despite their differences in language and cultural traditions, practiced the same social norm in respect to age differences in marriage because they have faced similar economical and natural conditions. Let us analyze the datas form the table 2.

Age	Sex	No	Preferred average age in the first marriage	Age difference in marriage
Below 30 years old (x=21,3)	M	82	27.4	3.05
	F	101	25.6	3.56
Above 30 years old (x= 45,05)	M	88	25.8	5.05
	F	92	23.6	4.51

Table 2. Values of preferred average age in the first marriage and age difference in marriage for both sex below and above 30 years old.

Table 2 shows a difference of 2 years between individuals aging below and above 30 years old for preferred age at first marriage and with age difference in marriage. These data are relevant when we compare the data with figure 2. Age difference for the first marriage in Albanians, Greek minority and Aromanians living in Gjirokastra district has a greater values in comparison to Albanians living in other districts. And so, age difference in first marriage differ in time and place. What explains this difference?

The great age difference between men and women in Gjirokastra district is explained by their origins, in fact the individuals surveyed lives in village. On the other hand, age difference counts for individuals surveyed in cities. Is now a common fact that for 20 years and so on, the city has faced a growing standart of living in comparison to village individuals. Also, population living in cities has increased threefold between 1950-1990 and has gone through a process of emancipation and abandoned their village traditions in all these years and so on.

Perhaps the change in age difference is more complex in relation to time because it seems quite unbelieveable that during one generation, this difference decreases by 2 years in males (from 5.05 to 3.05) and by 1 year in females (from 4.51 to 3.56). The best explanation

of this phenomena is based, in our opinion, on the low level of HDI in the generation above 30 years old and the higher level of HDI for the generation above 30 years old (Table 3).

Countries	HDI rank in 2003	HDI rank in 2009
Greece	24	25
Slovenia	29	29
Croatia	47	45
Bulgaria	55	61
Rumania	72	63
Montenegro	-	65
Serbia	-	67
Albania	95	70
Macedonia	60	72
Bosnia and Herzegovina	66	76
Turkey	96	79

Table 3. The values of HDI in Albania during three decades (Celebioglu, F. 2010)

In the table 3 is clearly showed that HDI values have increased during the two last decades. This increase is explained by the end of communist cultural isolation and therefore, the adaption of cultural information by other cultural organisms (exp. Italy). Is important to notice the high rate of emigration of Albanians in foreign countries. We assume, that the immediate cultural contact with foreign countries and economical rise of Albanians made possible that age differences between males and females changed rapidly.

Conclusion:

We assume that age difference in marriage changes in human population even during one generation when this population has experienced a major shift in economical and cultural habitus. Even though, GDP values in Albania are way below in comparison to other European countries. On the other hand, the GDP values of 38 European countries is deeply connected with age at marriage in males and females. This connection is positive: European

countries with high GDP levels has a relevant high age at marriage. In Albania, age at marriage of Albanian females is the lowest in Balkans and in Europe wich is, in our opinion, deeply connected to GDP values in this country. Contrary to this, peoples living in countries with high value of GDP tend to get married in an older age and to have a lower age diference between males and females. As a consequence, this form of marriage is now become a social norm. This social norm is now embedded in mental models which states that the optimal solution for marriage is to be married in an older age and with no high differences between males and females in respect to age.

We now ask: Is this social norm embedded in mental models a successful adaptive solution? If we take ín consideration human evolution, the marriage at old age brings low childbirths and presumably mutational children. But most importantly, people living in these societies, tend to think the solution of marriage in a framework of individual pleasure. This "hedonistic" conception of marriage at older age and with no considerable age difference puts in difficulty the concept of marriage from an adaptive point of view.Nowdays, couples tend to value reciprocal understanding and seeking sexual pleasure instead of having babies at young age. In conclusion, due to high GDP levels of a particular society and mental models linked to cultural backround associated with "hedonistic" point of views mentioned above, we can put light to human population tendencies concerning marriage as adaptive solution to a particular environment. According to this, marriage is adaptive on cultural backround is taking place and is deeply influenced by changes in economic reality.

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