

# JOURNAL OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PEER REVIEWED, INDEXED & REFEREED BI-ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

ISSN 0972-8309

<https://www.jndmeerut.org>

[Vol. 37, No. 2 (Winter), 2024]

<https://doi.org/10.62047/JND.2024.12.31.118>

## Class, Marriage and Marital Status in Nepal

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### Abstract

*The trends and patterns of marriage and marital status are gradually changing worldwide, including in Nepal. These changes are influenced by various factors, such as employment, income, and economic status or class. This paper examines the evolving patterns of marriage and marital status among individuals in Nepal over the past 25 years (one generation), utilizing high quality longitudinal data from the Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS) from 1995/96 to 2022/23. Nepali society is progressively shifting from poverty to prosperity as efforts to reduce poverty take effect. This paper argues that as long as poverty persists among a significant portion of the population, noticeable differences in marital status will remain between the poor and the non-poor, highlighting a significant association between economic class and marital status. However, as prosperity increases and the proportion of the population categorized as poor decreases, the association between marital status and economic class diminishes. Consequently, marriage and marital practices are primarily influenced by the existence of two distinct economic classes within the broader population: the poor and the non-poor (poverty and prosperity), which also includes varying consumption quintiles. This conclusion aligns with Karl Marx's thesis that the economic base (class structure) fundamentally shapes the superstructure, including marriage and marital practices, as observed in the context of Nepal.*

### Keywords

Class, Marriage, Marital status, Nepal.

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## **Class, Marriage and Marital Status in Nepal**

### **1. Introduction: Marriage and Family**

Marriage and family are fundamental institutions of human society, existing in various forms across different cultures. As noted by Mishra (2010), a variety of marriage practices have prevailed since the dawn of human society. As social institutions develop, new practices emerge and continue to evolve over time. This trend of change is likely to persist in the future. Nevertheless, the structure and function of marriage and family continue to fulfill essential human needs throughout this changing landscape.

In this context, Perini and Sironi (2016) highlight the evolving patterns of marriage and family. They observe, “Family structure across the world has changed in recent decades. In particular, there has been a significant increase in marital disruptions, which are primarily caused by two main factors: poor relationship quality and weak commitment to marriage” (p. 41). Therefore, it is crucial to study marriage and family empirically to understand and explain the dynamics occurring in different parts of the world. Numerous researchers have conducted studies on these issues.

Perini and Sironi (2016) report that various studies have identified marital disruption as a social phenomenon that can have significant consequences for individual well-being. A key aspect of this discussion is the definition of well-being itself. While many studies use income or poverty status as indicators of economic well-being, these measures have notable limitations (Aassve et al., 2007). The simplistic poor/non-poor dichotomy in defining poverty has been criticized (Cheli and Lemmi, 1995). Although using income as a measure can address this dichotomy, it complicates our understanding of how a loss in income translates to a real decline in living standards (p. 42).

In conclusion, Perini and Sironi (2016) note that “both income and poverty status represent only the monetary dimension of well-being, defined as ‘objective well-being’, which also encompasses

a non-monetary dimension” (p. 42). Thus, family well-being and its economic status play a vital role in shaping the nature of marriage and family in all societies of the world including Nepal.

## **2. Change in Marriage Foundations over Time**

Sociologically, marriage is regarded as a fundamental micro social institution. Killewald (2016) discusses the current state of marriage in relation to its historical changes. As a social institution, the rates of marital stability and their determinants can vary across time and place. Killewald (2016) writes:

In the United States, over the second half of the twentieth century, women’s college completion rates caught up with and surpassed those of men, their labor force participation increased dramatically, and the gender earnings gap among full-time workers narrowed (Goldin 2006). At home, wives’ average time in unpaid labor declined substantially (Bianchi et al. 2012). Couples married later and were more likely to divorce (Fitch and Ruggles 2000; Stevenson and Wolfers 2007), women’s earnings became positively associated with marriage formation (Sweeney 2002), and gender role attitudes became more egalitarian (Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001 : 699).

These observations highlight a variety of factors associated with marriage and marital status; however, the determining factors differ across societies and cultures. The foundational elements of marriage and family are rooted in social structures and systems. Change in social structure causes change in the nature of marriage and family. MO (2016 : 29) elaborates:

Family dissolution has long been regarded as an important issue socially and academically. Several theoretical approaches are relevant to establishing the causal relationships between socio-economic and cultural factors and marital disruption. Despite some literature addressing the influence of these factors on divorce trends, most studies are concentrated on the Western world, and there is no consensus on the determinants of marital dissolution.

Indeed, socio-cultural factors not only shape the nature of marriage and its dissolution but also influence the marital status of individuals across societies. Variations in social and cultural

practices directly impact marital status. Among these factors, the nature of the economy and its structure play a crucial role in shaping marriage and the marital status of individuals in any society which is the focus of this paper.

### **3. Economic Class, Marriage, and Marital Status**

Class is a crucial basis of social stratification and inequality, encompassing various forms. When discussing class, it is often understood in economic terms, which serves as a fundamental foundation in all human societies. However, the basis of class changes from one society to another and across different time periods. To comprehend the factors influencing marriage and marital status in any society, empirical study is essential. In this context, Andersson (2016) states that “over the past few decades, increases in the prevalence of divorce and non-traditional family forms (Andersson and Philipov, 2002) have generated interest in how attitude orientations relate to these demographic outcomes” (p. 51). Andersson further notes, “Across both countries (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe, 2004) and cohorts (Paganini and Rindfiiss, 1993), macro-level data show that the presence of non-traditional family behaviour, such as cohabitation and union dissolution, is associated with a general tolerance toward such phenomena” (p. 51). These phenomena are shaped by a number of micro and macro social structures.

At the micro level, however, individuals who adhere to traditional ideals-such as being married with children-tend to exhibit less permissive attitudes toward non-traditional family behaviours compared to divorcees or cohabitants (Sieben and Verbakel, 2013). This observation leads researchers to hypothesize that family-related attitudes may influence demographic behaviour to some extent (Andersson, 2016 : 51). Such hypotheses are grounded in existing empirical evidence and theories regarding marriage and family structures.

The Marxist perspective emphasizes the economy as the foundational structure that shapes all social and cultural practices within a society. As Ritzer (2011 : 87) highlights, one of Marx’s most concise summaries of his materialist conception of history is as follows:

In the social production which men carry on, they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of

their will. These relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, which is the real foundation on top of which arises a legal and political superstructure, to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or-what is but a legal expression of the same thing-with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production, these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation, the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. (Marx, 1859/1970 : 20-21)

Marx's ideas closely connect the economy with social relations. The nature of a society's economic structure profoundly influences its social relationships and institutions, shaping the broader legal, political, and cultural systems.

The changing nature of social structures and institutions is often discussed in relation to capitalism and imperialism. In his book *Capitalism and Nepal*, Mishra (2070 VS) addresses the impact of imperialism on Nepali culture. When capitalism and imperialism infiltrated the economy and state regime, they began to dominate the local culture, transforming it in the image of imperialist countries. This phenomenon of imperialism created two major issues: first, the concept of the local became narrowed; second, it imposed a singular economic status and a uniform cultural model.

As Mishra (2070 VS) explains, imperialist culture began to assimilate national culture into its own framework, gradually erasing local features. This can be observed in many poorer countries, where one politico-economic model coexists with another cultural form. Such dynamics create conditions akin to planting one type of plant in a different root system. This phenomenon occurs across all cultural domains, including marriage, family, and marital status.

This paper arises from questions related to the globalization of capitalism and imperialism at the local level, particularly examining the processes of hybridization or modernization in the context of marriage and marital status.

#### **4. Objectives, Data Sets and Methods**

Nepali society and culture have undergone rapid changes over the past two to three decades, particularly across a generation (25 years). Marriage and family are fundamental units of society, serving as the starting point for social change. This paper explores the transformations occurring within Nepali society and examines how changes in individuals' marital status are associated with their economic status or class, which is also evolving.

To track changes in the living standards of the Nepali population, the Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS) has been conducted periodically, typically every five years, by the government of Nepal. The fourth NLSS, carried out over an 11-year span from 2010/11 to 2022/23, follows the third round of the survey. Each survey includes a question regarding the marital status of every member of the surveyed household.

The NLSS is primarily designed to measure poverty levels within the country. In measuring poverty, it also accounts for prosperity, categorizing households that are not poor as non-poor or prosperous. The households are further categorized into different consumption quintiles which manifest different class categories. This paper defines economic class based on the dichotomy of poor and non-poor statuses of households or individuals on the one hand and consumption quintiles on the other. Utilizing survey data sets from three different NLSS rounds—first, third, and fourth—this study explores the relationship between marital status and economic class. Bivariate analysis was employed to assess this relationship, with economic class and marital status cross-tabulated to generate two-way tables displaying the results.

Given the changes in individuals' economic class, corresponding shifts in marriage and marital status are anticipated. There has been a gradual decline in poverty over the 27-year period from 1995/96 to 2022/23. This paper examines the results on economic class, marriage and marital status at three specific points in time: 1995/96, 2010/11, and 2022/23, using cross-sectional data. Each time point is discussed separately, followed by a comparison of the changes observed over the 27-year period. In this context, the comparison of cross-sectional data across time provides a longitudinal perspective.

The application of cross-tabulation and statistical techniques offers descriptive statistics, including two-way tables and non-parametric hypothesis testing using the Chi-Square test. Based on the analysis of these two-way tables and tests of association or independence, conclusions are drawn regarding the relationship between economic class and marital status.

NLSS data sets were chosen for a number of reasons. First, the researcher agrees with Russell (1994 : 336), who asserts, “I see no reason to collect new data in the field if there are documentary resources already available that address some of your research questions.” The NLSS data set is, in fact, a large set of data that includes a number of variables applicable to specific kind of research. Second, the credibility of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and World Bank (WB) is undoubtedly high. Third, NLSS has an adequate sample size, which is a national scale survey that represents the population of Nepal in general and major caste/ethnic groups in particular. Fourth, it has adequate sample across ethnic categories. Fifth, it follows scientific survey methods by mobilizing the trained staffs of the NSO (previously CBS) as well as provides necessary 77 exercise to upgrade the quality of survey and data. Finally, NDHS also has similar advantage, regarding the quality of data. Furthermore, data obtained from NLSS and NDHS were also used by various research institutions as well as individual researchers within and outside Nepal. This is enough to justify the selection of the data sets for the study (Gautam, 2013 : 49).

## **5. Subjective Well-being and Marital Status**

Economic class significantly influences individual decisions about marriage and marital status, as well as subjective well-being and aspirations for a better life. However, an individual’s perceived economic class may not always align with their actual economic standing, affecting their expectations and decisions. In this context, Perini and Sironi (2016) discuss how these dynamics play out differently for men and women, highlighting the importance of considering gender perspectives in understanding the relationship between marital status and subjective well-being.

Perini and Sironi (2016) emphasize that gender differences are especially pronounced when examining the effects of separation and divorce on depression. They suggest that the emotional consequences

of marital breakdowns may not be the same for men and women due to their differing social and cultural experiences. Citing Oldehinkel et al. (2008), they note that women tend to be more emotionally affected by separation due to higher sensitivity to life changes and stressors. However, this increased emotional distress in women may also stem from material changes post-separation, as women's financial conditions often deteriorate significantly following separation, whereas men's incomes remain relatively stable and tend to recover more quickly.

This research highlights that, while not all studies on marital status focus explicitly on gender differences, the socio-economic and cultural structures in society intensify these disparities. Various theoretical frameworks in gender, marriage, and family studies provide insights into how social, economic, and cultural factors uniquely impact men and women in the context of marriage and marital transitions.

## **6. Theoretical Foundation of Marriage**

Interest, attitude, and choices regarding social matters are largely shaped by societal constructs. Individual, household, and family backgrounds-particularly social, economic, and cultural factors-play a critical role in influencing one's views on marriage and marital status. Changes in individual attitudes significantly impact family dynamics. Andersson (2016) discusses these theoretical perspectives on individual attitudes and family structures, arguing that while marital status decisions are personal, they are also shaped by the social structure and economic background within which individuals operate.

Andersson (2016) notes that studies in social psychology and sociology have examined how behaviours impact family attitudes, drawing on theories like Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). CDT (Festinger, 1957) posits that when behaviours conflict with personal attitudes, it creates cognitive dissonance, prompting attitude adjustments to reduce discomfort. For example, an individual who views marriage as oppressive may experience distress if they marry, potentially shifting their perspective to support marriage. TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2000), meanwhile, suggests that attitudes are context-specific evaluations, influenced by experiences and attitudes towards particular



behaviours. Andersson (2016) considers TRA particularly useful for examining how attitudes evolve concerning gendered family roles, offering insights into gender-based differences in family dynamics.

Davis and Love (2017) provide further sociological insights, suggesting that social hierarchies and identity influence interpersonal dynamics and shape stability in personal identity. Their work, grounded in identity theory, shows that individuals with higher social status are more able to validate their identity, while those with lower status experience more identity instability. This dynamic affects various social interactions, including those within families, the workplace, and educational settings, further illustrating how social positions influence identity and behaviour.

The sociological literature on marriage also addresses the declining role of traditional norms in shaping relationships. Green, Valleriani, and Adam (2016) discuss the evolution toward what Giddens (1992) calls the “pure relationship”, characterized by mutual satisfaction rather than traditional obligations of procreation or economic stability. This shift reflects a broader trend toward individualization, where personal goals and relationships are defined less by societal expectations and more by individual needs.

Killewald (2016) explores the changing dynamics in marital stability over recent decades, noting shifts in employment, household labor, and gender role expectations. While financial stability has historically influenced divorce rates, evolving gender norms have reshaped marital expectations. For instance, while the traditional role of the wife as homemaker has declined in importance, the husband-as-breadwinner norm remains influential, underscoring that marital stability is embedded in broader, shifting gender structures.

Killewald (2016) also highlights that economic independence is often linked to divorce risk, although financial factors shape not only divorce but also marriage decisions. While studies provide extensive, sometimes contradictory, findings on the relationship between money, work, and marital outcomes, the social and cultural context remains crucial in understanding these connections. Thus, a nuanced understanding of marriage stability and family life requires recognizing how economic, social, and cultural factors interact within specific societal frameworks.

## **7. Theoretical and Analytical Framework**

The concept of economic class and marital status can be effectively operationalized through Killewald's (2016) insights on how individual background and personal choice are constructed within specific social contexts. Conceptually, divorce may occur when one or both partners believe they will be better off separated; thus, the risk of divorce is influenced by the perceived gains from marriage (Becker, Landes, and Michael, 1977). Killewald (2016) notes that, according to the economic independence perspective, divorce rates are likely to rise when financial dependency on marriage decreases, as partners are then more able to exit unsatisfactory relationships (Ruggles 1997; Sayer et al. 2011; Schoen et al. 2002). Women's economic independence, in particular, is shaped by work experience, education, and occupation, as well as by external support factors, such as child support policies and government assistance. However, the significance of economic independence varies across societies.

Marital status-including marriage and divorce-is closely tied to individual backgrounds, especially economic conditions. In the U.S., evidence for the economic independence perspective is mixed, with some studies finding support (Dechter 1992; Heckert, Nowak, and Snyder 1998; Ruggles 1997) and others finding contrary evidence (Rogers and DeBoer 2001; Sayer and Bianchi 2000). Interestingly, men's divorce decisions may also be influenced by their economic well-being post-divorce (Sayer et al. 2011).

Ritzer (2011) discusses Marx's perspective on how economic class, as the base structure, shapes various social and cultural practices, collectively referred to as the superstructure. According to Marx, the base comprises the ways people meet their material needs and the resulting economic relations. In contrast, the superstructure includes noneconomic relations, social institutions, and prevailing ideologies.

Importantly, Marx's view of history does not suggest a simple, one-way alignment of the superstructure with the base. Human history is driven by the pursuit of need satisfaction, but these needs evolve over time. Progress in meeting existing needs often generates new ones, making human needs both the foundation and the outcome of the economic base. Therefore, it is evident that an individual's economic class significantly influences social and cultural practices, including marital status (Ritzer, 2011).

Ritzer (2011 : 87) explains that Marx was able to critique capitalism from the perspective of its future due to his belief in history's predictable course, rooted in his materialist conception of history—commonly referred to as historical materialism (Vandenbergh, 2005). According to Marx's historical materialism, the way people meet their material needs fundamentally determines or conditions their social relationships, institutions, and even dominant ideas.

The concept highlights the critical role of the “base”, which consists of the material means of production and the resulting economic relations. In contrast, “superstructure” refers to non-economic aspects, such as social institutions and prevalent ideologies. Importantly, Marx did not propose a simplistic model where the superstructure passively aligns with the base (Ritzer, 2011).

Human history, according to Marx, is driven by the ongoing effort to satisfy needs, but these needs evolve over time. Advances in satisfying existing needs often generate new ones, making human needs both the foundation of and a product of the economic base. This dynamic interplay underpins the historical processes Marx sought to explain (Ritzer, 2011).

Economic status thus serves as a fundamental determinant of marriage and family outcomes. However, social and cultural practices shaped by economic status vary between societies. Roth and Dashper (2016) explore how gendered experiences are shaped by factors such as race, class, marital, and parental status. For instance, Ramazanoglu (1989) critiques a singular “feminist standpoint”, arguing that women's varied experiences highlight the importance of intersectionality. Academic research reflects this as well; Platt (2007) examined three leading British sociology journals from 1950 to 2004 and found a male author majority, with women more frequently publishing on topics related to family, gender, and feminism, often using qualitative methods. This gendered academic landscape reflects broader social and cultural influences.

In Nepal, Nakarmi (2021) discusses the Newari community, where socio-economic background significantly affects cultural practices and resource access. Due to occupational and cultural differences, Newari caste groups experience unequal access to education, employment, and other resources, often stratified by gender. This socioeconomic stratification influences marriage

practices across class in Nepal, as argued by Pandey (2010) and Gautam (2013). Access to education, employment, and healthcare is primarily determined by economic class, with wealthier groups accessing more resources, which, in turn, shapes social and cultural norms around marriage, including age at marriage, divorce, and separation.

In sum, analyzing marriage and marital status across economic classes in diverse societies, such as Nepal, reveals the complex interdependencies of economic, social, and cultural factors shaping marital outcomes worldwide.

## **8. Trends and Patterns of Marriage and Marital Status in Nepal**

The Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) of 2022, reported by the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP, 2023), provides detailed insights into marriage and marital status trends in Nepal, with significant gender and economic differences in age at first marriage. According to the report, women tend to marry earlier than men, with a median age at first marriage of 18.3 years for women and 22.3 years for men between the ages of 25-49. Over time, the median age at first marriage has gradually increased, rising from 16.2 years in 1996 to 17.9 years in 2016, and reaching 18.3 years in 2022 for women. Among men, it increased from 20.1 years in 2001 to 21.7 years in 2016, and 22.3 years in 2022 (MOHP, 2023).

The NDHS (2022) also highlights that 75% of women and 63% of men aged 15-49 are currently married or in a union, while 22% of women and 36% of men in this age range have never married. Age-wise, marital status disparities are notable: among those aged 15-19, 21% of women are married or in a union compared to just 5% of men. By the age of 20-24, 68% of women are married or cohabiting, compared to 35% of men. The data reveals a trend toward later marriage among young women, with a decrease in adolescent marriage rates. For instance, the proportion of married women aged 15-19 has declined from 43% in 1996 to 27% in 2016 and to 21% in 2022. Similarly, the percentage of women aged 20-24 who are married has decreased from 84% in 1996 to 68% in 2022 (MOHP, 2023).

The report also links economic status to age at marriage. For women aged 20-49 and men aged 25-49, the median age at first marriage varies by economic quintile: 17.8 and 20.6 years for women and men, respectively, in the lowest quintile, and rising to 18.7 and

23.0 years in the fourth quintile. This trend aligns with the national averages of 18.5 for women and 22.3 for men, showing that economic status is closely related to marriage timing in Nepal.

This analysis underscores how marital status, including age at marriage, is influenced by both economic and gender factors, reflecting broader socio-economic disparities in Nepal.

## **9. Class (Economic: Poverty, Prosperity) and Marital Status in Nepal**

Marital status is defined and categorized by researchers based on societal norms and the relevance of these categories in a particular social context. Cheng (2016) organized marital status into three mutually exclusive categories: (1) never married, (2) married with spouse present in the household, and (3) other (including divorced, widowed, or separated, collectively referred to as “divorced” in subsequent analysis). To address missing data on marital status, Cheng (2016) imputes an individual’s current marital status by referring to records from previous periods.

In Nepal’s Living Standards Surveys (NLSS), marital status is categorized in a similar manner, though with some variations over time. For instance, NLSS includes categories such as (1) married, (2) divorced, (3) separated, (4) widow/widower, and (5) never married. However, in NLSS-III, the categories were expanded to include (1) never married, (2) single married, (3) poly-married, (4) remarried, (5) widow/widower, (6) divorced, and (7) separated—showing notable differences from NLSS-I and NLSS-IV. The analysis of marital status across economic classes follows the survey categorizations, covering survey years from 1995/96 (Table 1) to 2010/11 (Table-2) and 2022/23 (Table 3). Economic class is defined by poverty status, distinguishing between “poor” and “non-poor” categories as measured by the NLSS across different years.

The 1995/96 data reveal notable differences in marital status between economic classes in Nepal (Table 1). In the non-poor category, 56.8% of individuals were married, compared to 60.6% in the poor category—a 4 percentage point higher likelihood of marriage among the poor. Divorce rates were almost twice as high among the non-poor (0.4%) compared to the poor (0.2%), suggesting that divorce is more prevalent among the non-poor. Similarly, separation rates were higher in the non-poor group (0.6%) compared to the poor group (0.3%), indicating a greater likelihood of separation among non-poor

individuals. The percentage of never-married individuals was also higher among the non-poor (34.8%) compared to the poor (32.7%), with a 2.1 percentage point difference. Widowhood, however, was observed equally among non-poor and poor individuals (6.6%).

These data reflect how marital status varies by economic class, highlighting a tendency for higher marriage rates among the poor and higher rates of divorce and separation among the non-poor.

**Table-1 : Economic Class and Marital Status in Nepal**

**(N=14734)**

Economic Class	Marital Status (in percentage)					Total
	Married	Divorced	Separated	Widow/ Widower	Never Married	
Non-Poor	58.7	0.4	0.6	5.5	34.8	100.0
Poor	61.3	0.2	0.3	5.6	32.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>59.8</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Pearson Chi-Square= 139478.489, df= 4, p=0.000 (Sig. 2-sided), =0.01						

**Source :** Computed by the researcher based on NLSS-I: 1995/96 data sets;

**Note :** The results obtained and presented in the table are weighted.

The observed differences in marital status across economic classes were tested using the Chi-Square test of independence, yielding a Chi-Square value of 139478.489, which was statistically significant ( $p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.01$ ). This result provides strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis, indicating a significant association between economic class and marital status.

Over time, the poverty rate in Nepal has shown a consistent decline, dropping from 41.8% in 1995/96 to 20.27% in 2022/23. This trend reflects a steady improvement in economic conditions, with the poverty gap decreasing from 11.75 in 1995/96 to 4.52 in 2022/23, as reported by NSO (2024). Additionally, income inequality, as measured by the Gini index, has also declined from 32.2 in 1995/96 to 30 in 2022/23, suggesting a gradual reduction in economic disparity across classes.

This economic progress has implications for marital status differences between poor and non-poor groups. While the inequality remains, the gradual decrease in poverty and increase in prosperity has been accompanied by shifts in marital practices that align more closely with patterns observed in the non-poor category. This

evolution suggests that as economic status improves, the marital status dynamics of previously poorer groups increasingly mirror those of the more prosperous groups (Table-2).

**Table-2 : Economic Class and Marital Status in Nepal**

**(N=22360)**

Economic Class	Marital Status (In Percentage)							Total
	Never married	Single married	Poly married	Re-married	Widow/widower	Divorced	Separated	
Non-Poor	35.5	55.2	0.8	3.0	4.9	0.2	0.4	100.0
Poor	36.0	52.5	0.8	4.5	5.5	0.2	0.4	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Pearson Chi-Square=221762.533, df= 6, p=0.000 (Sig. 2-sided), =0.01								

**Source :** Computed by the researcher based on NLSS-II: 2010/11 data sets;

**Note :** The results obtained and presented in the table are weighted.

The analysis of marital status by economic class in Nepal shows notable shifts in marital patterns from 1995/96 through to 2022/23, coinciding with changing poverty levels and economic development.

In 2010/11, the NLSS survey found slight variations in marital status between economic classes. For instance, 35.5% of non-poor individuals were never married, compared to 36% among the poor. Single marriage rates were slightly higher among the non-poor (55.2%) than the poor (52.5%), with a small difference of 2.7 percentage points. Similarly, widow/widower status was marginally higher among the poor (5.5%) than the non-poor (4.9%), and non-poor individuals had higher rates of divorce (0.2%) and separation (0.4%) than the poor (0.2% and 0.4%, respectively).

Additionally, two unique categories of marital status, “poly-married” and “re-married”, were included in the 2010/11 survey, reflecting more traditional marital practices. Poly-marriage was common among non-poor individuals (0.8%) than the poor (0.8%). Conversely, re-marriage rates were significantly higher among the poor (4.5%) compared to the non-poor (3%), nearly doubling among the poor.

The 2010/11 survey period also saw a reduced poverty rate of 25.2%, a marked improvement from 41.8% in 1995/96, reflecting broader economic growth. This improvement in economic conditions corresponded with evolving marital patterns across economic classes, suggesting that marital status variation between the poor and non-poor narrowed as poverty decreased.

The Chi-Square test of independence for 2010/11 yielded a significant result ( $\chi^2 = 51.598$ ,  $p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$ ), confirming an association between economic class and marital status. The data suggests that prosperous individuals tend to have higher rates of marriage, divorce, and separation than poorer individuals, while patterns of marital status become more similar as economic inequality diminishes.

In the 2022/23 NLSS survey, where poverty rates had further declined to 20.3%, differences in marital status between economic classes were minimal. Married rates were nearly identical for poor and non-poor individuals at 60.1%. Divorce (0.2% and 0/3%) and separation rates (0.8% and 1.0 %) were equal across both groups (non-poor and poor) respectively, and widowhood was also different, with 4.7% for the non-poor and 5.6% for the poor. This alignment suggests that as poverty declines and a larger share of the population experiences economic prosperity, marital status differences between economic classes diminish.

**Table-3 : Economic Class and Marital Status in Nepal**

**(N=38951)**

Economic Class	Marital Status (in percentage)					Total
	Never Married	Married	Widow/ Widower	Divorced	Separated	
Non-Poor	33.5	60.7	4.7	0.2	0.8	100.0
Poor	34.5	58.5	5.6	0.3	1.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	33.7	60.3	4.9	0.2	0.9	100.0
Pearson Chi-Square= 83719.675, df= 4, p=0.000 (Sig. 2-sided), $\alpha = 0.01$						

**Source :** Computed by the researcher based on NLSS-IV: 2022/23 data sets;

**Note :** The results obtained and presented in the table are weighted.

This progression highlights how economic improvement contributes to uniformity in marital practices, supporting the conclusion that as economic class inequality decreases, the diversity in marital status among classes also reduces.



The Chi-Square test results from the recent data ( $\chi^2 = 83719.675$ ,  $p = 0.000 > \alpha = 0.01$ ) provide valuable insight into the relationship between economic class and marital status in a context of declining poverty rates. These findings indicate that, at a 1% significance level, there is enough evidence to conclude an association between economic class and marital status. Thus, the null hypothesis-that marital status and economic class are independent-cannot be rejected.

This lack\* of significant association implies that as the poverty rate decreases and a larger proportion of the population becomes prosperous, marital practices tend to converge across economic classes. In other words, when economic inequality diminishes, differences in marital status between economic classes become negligible. This suggests that prosperity fosters a more uniform pattern in marital practices, likely due to increased access to similar social and economic resources across different segments of society.

In summary, these results underscore that lower poverty and rising prosperity levels contribute to reducing distinctions in marital status based on economic class, supporting the idea that economic equality fosters greater similarity in marital behaviours across the population.

## 10. Discussion

Marriage and marital dynamics are indeed fundamental aspects of human society, shaping individual life courses and broader social structures. Recent shifts in union formation and marital behaviours, as noted by Carlson, Wimer, and Haskins (2022), reflect significant changes over the past several decades. The trend toward later marriage and the increasing acceptance of alternatives to marriage highlight a transformative period in family life.

In the United States, the median age at first marriage has reached historic highs, with women marrying at an average age of 28.6 and men at 30.4 as of 2021. This trend mirrors broader societal changes, including greater emphasis on education and career establishment before marriage, as well as changing cultural

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\*The unweighted results of NLSS IV data set on Pearson Chi-Square= 4.863,  $df= 4$ ,  $p=0.302$  (Sig. 2-sided), and  $\alpha=0.05$  clearly show there is similarities in marriage and marital status among the poor and non-poor categories. This is enough evidence to argue that the declining gap between poor and non-poor ultimately creates similar features of marriage and marital status.

attitudes toward relationships and family structures. Similarly, in Nepal, there has been a noticeable increase in the median age at first marriage, reflecting a gradual shift in societal norms and economic conditions that influence marital decisions.

The decline in annual marriage rates and the proportion of currently married women in the U.S. further illustrates this shift. The annual marriage rate dropped from 76.5 per thousand unmarried women in 1970 to just 31.3 in 2018, and the percentage of women who are married has also decreased significantly over the decades, from 65% in 1960 to 46% in 2018 (Schweizer, 2020). This trend indicates a growing preference for alternative forms of partnerships, which could be attributed to changing societal values, economic factors, and an increase in women's autonomy and opportunities.

The findings from recent opinion surveys, such as those conducted by Horowitz, Graf, and Livingston (2019), reveal a complex relationship with marriage. While many Americans still view marriage as important, a significant portion considers it "important but not essential" for a fulfilling life. This perspective underscores a broader societal acceptance of diverse family structures and relationship forms, including cohabitation and single parenthood.

In summary, the evolving landscape of marriage and marital behaviour reflects profound societal changes influenced by economic conditions, cultural shifts, and individual choices. Both in the United States and in Nepal, the increase in age at first marriage and the acceptance of alternative partnership arrangements signal a new understanding of family and commitment in contemporary society.

## **11. Conclusions**

The transformations in marriage and family structures that have occurred globally reflect profound shifts influenced by economic, social, and cultural changes. The processes of globalization and modernization have also led to significant changes in marriage, divorce, cohabitation, and fertility behaviours in many Western industrialized nations, including the United States. This transition, characterized by increased diversity and instability in family structures, suggests that traditional notions of family are being redefined.

The relationship between economic status and marital practices is particularly noteworthy. In contexts where poverty

remains high, significant disparities in marital behaviours exist between poor and non-poor individuals. For example, economic hardships can lead to different marriage rates, divorce rates, and cohabitation patterns. When a large portion of the population lives in poverty, economic class can greatly influence marital status, leading to distinct practices that reflect the broader economic realities.

As economic conditions improve and poverty rates decline, studies indicate that the differences in marital practices between economic classes also diminish. In economically homogeneous societies, where a larger segment of the population experiences similar levels of prosperity, variations in marital status become less pronounced. This phenomenon suggests that as economic disparities narrow, social and cultural practices regarding marriage and family life may converge.

The research by Eads and Tach (2016) underscores the impact of economic stability on marriage. Their findings emphasize that economic hardships can lead to increased marital conflict, which is a key predictor of divorce. This perspective is supported by the family stress model, which posits that financial pressures can undermine the quality of marital relationships, resulting in higher rates of conflict and instability. Economic hardships, whether measured through income levels, poverty rates, or specific hardships such as housing insecurity, consistently correlate with increased marital distress.

The link between economic class and marital status underscores the broader societal impact of economic conditions. As inequality persists or diminishes, family life and marital practices will continue to evolve. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing the needs of diverse family structures and fostering policies that promote stability across economic classes.

This conclusion aligns with Marxist theory, which argues that the economic base shapes social and cultural practices, including marriage, as part of the superstructure. However, Marx's perspective does not imply a simple, one-way relationship between the base and the superstructure. Human history is driven by the pursuit of need satisfaction, but these needs evolve over time. Progress in meeting existing needs often generates new ones, making human needs both the foundation and the outcome of the economic base. Consequently, an individual's economic class significantly influences social and cultural practices, including marital status (Ritzer, 2011).

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