

# EARLY MARRIAGES IN RURAL AZERBAIJAN

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this work was to do a study of early marriages in rural Azerbaijan looking at such marriages in a village in the western part of Azerbaijan in order to find out about the factors that lead to early marriages and how women in such marriages are affected. In order to pursue this goal I interviewed thirty-five people between the ages of thirteen and eighty-six years old including twenty-one women and fourteen men in one of the villages in Azerbaijan.

The main research questions which I attempted to answer in this thesis were: What are the factors that lead to early marriages in rural Azerbaijan? While a marriage is arranged by parents do they take into consideration their daughter's consent? Is arranged marriage the only pattern of early marriage? How does education in families affect the issue of early marriages and how does early marriage affect the process of education of women? How do age, gender and reproduction interact and affect a woman's status in the households characterized by patriarchal power relationships? The inquiry is situated in the field of research on gender relations in marriage and households characterized by patriarchal power relations.

The thesis was an attempt to discuss the determinants of early marriages and how such marriages affect women's lives and to challenge the victimization discourses of women in early marriages.

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## Introduction

The story of this thesis began when I first met Metanet in the summer of 2007 in Baku at a workshop devoted to women's rights in Azerbaijan. During the break Metanet, 38 years old, a lively person with a good sense of humour and a vigorous journalist approached me to discuss the rights of women-journalists in Azerbaijan. A few months later when we both participated in an exchange project on women's issues in Estonia I learned that Metanet had got married before she reached the age of seventeen as a result of her parents' decision to marry her off. By the time we met she was divorced, however, I found out that she managed to get a university degree in journalism while married. She had lived through lots of problems and hardships in her life; however, she didn't conceive of herself as a victim. I noticed that she could tell about the difficulties she had lived through with a sense of humour. Since then I have wanted to do a research project about women getting into marital relationships at an early age in the rural areas of Azerbaijan.

In Azerbaijan the legal age for marriage<sup>1</sup> for women is seventeen and for men is eighteen years of age.<sup>2</sup> The "marriages" involving women and men who have not yet reached the legal marriage age are often fulfilled by mullahs via a religious marriage, *kebin* and therefore, are not reflected in the official statistics of marriage. In the press as well as in the reports and surveys of governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Azerbaijan the marriages in which either one or both partners are under seventeen/eighteen years of age are called early marriages.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The legal age of marriage for both women and men used to be eighteen according to a previous law of 1970.

<sup>2</sup> **Azerbaijan** Respublikasnin Nikah ve Aile Mecellesi [The Marriage and Family Code of the Azerbaijan Republic]. Baku: Huquq Edebiyyati Neshriyyati, 1998, 11.

<sup>3</sup> In the literature there are also terms such as child marriages and adolescent marriages that are referred to early marriages.

The issue of early marriages is one of crucial issues which are being debated by governmental organizations and NGOs in the country at the workshops, conferences and official governmental meetings related to women's issues.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the press in Azerbaijan more and more often discusses early marriages in the country, pointing to the increasing number of early marriages in the rural areas of Azerbaijan specifically in the western<sup>5</sup> and southern<sup>6</sup> regions of the country. Occasionally the newspapers cite qualitative information about early marriages and as a rule the information they give is based on the reports of the projects or results of the surveys conducted by NGOs in Azerbaijan. The governmental organizations and NGOs in the country also often discuss the consequences of such marriages for women and often present girls as objects and victims of such marriages. They also consider early marriage as a form of domestic violence when girls are being married off by their parents without girls' consent.<sup>7</sup>

The aim of my thesis is to do a study of early marriages in rural Azerbaijan looking at such marriages in the rural areas in the western part of Azerbaijan in order to find out the determinants of early marriages and how women in such marriages are affected. I want to know about the reasons given by such girls and their families. My aim is to learn about the factors that lead to early marriages and the conditions under which girls less than seventeen years of age get married.

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<sup>4</sup> **Mehdiyev**, Famil. "Qadin Problemleri Muzakire Edilir" [Women's Issues are being Discussed]. *Ganjabasar*, August 12-19, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> **Abbasova**, Vusala. "Erken Nikahlar Suretle Artir" [The Number of Early Marriages is Increasing]. *Bizim Yol*, February 5, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> **Abdullayeva**, Nigar. "İdeal Ailenin Formulu Nece Olmalidir? Qizlarin Erken Nikahla Ailə Qurması Gelecek Ana və Usagin Saglamligi ucin Tehlukelidir" [What is a Formula of the Ideal Family? Early Marriages of Girls is a Danger for a Future Mother and a Child]. *Palitra Qezeti*, April 30, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> **Alizade**, Mina. "Erken Nigahlar Ailedaxili Zorakiligin Bir Formasidir" [Early Marriages as One of Forms of Domestic Violence]. *Ganjabasar*, August 4-11, 2008.

My main research questions are: What are the determinants of early marriages in rural Azerbaijan? Do parents take into account their daughter's opinion when they decide to marry her off? Is arranged marriage the only pattern of early marriage? How does education in families affect the issue of early marriages and how does early marriage affect the process of education for women? How do age, gender and reproduction interact and affect a woman's status in the households characterized by patriarchal power relationships?

There is no scholarly literature on early marriages in Azerbaijan. In the first chapter of the thesis I will examine the literature related to the issue of early marriage, including the reports of international organizations and the international conventions concerning the minimum age of marriage. One focus of the discussion will be on the discourse of women's victimization in early marriage, including violation of girls' rights as it is depicted in the literature. I will situate my inquiry as a whole in the field of research on gender relations in marriage and households characterized by patriarchal power relations. Furthermore, in order to understand why early marriages take place in the rural areas of Azerbaijan I will explore how the minimum age for marriage was developed in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Azerbaijan and how it was reflected in law and practice throughout this period of history up to present. I will also discuss the methods I used while conducting my fieldwork in Azerbaijan.

In the second chapter which forms the core of my work I will analyze the patterns of marriages in villages of Azerbaijan based on the interviews given to me by women with experiences of early marriage, men whose mothers and/or wives got married at an earlier age as well as parents whose daughters or sons entered into marital relationships at

an early age.<sup>8</sup> First and foremost, I will discuss the factors that lead to early marriages; specifically I will examine whether custom, the number of children in the family and poverty are among the causes of early marriages. Secondly, I will depict the patterns of arranged marriages in Azerbaijan and I will answer the question whether a girl has a voice when parents decide to marry her off at an early age. While answering the question of the daughter's consent to marriage I will analyze to what extent a daughter has a right to express her opinion in this matter to her parents in order to show that daughters are not necessarily forced into marital relationships as it is shown in the literature. Moreover, I will challenge the discourse of women's victimization by discussing the early marriage as a result of decision of a couple getting into marital relations without involving parents in the first place.

Additionally, in order to answer the question about the interaction of education and early marriage I will bring the examples of the parents' level of education, the examples of girls quitting schools and the examples of women who managed to continue their studies by negotiating their position within existing power relationships. Further, I will answer the question about how the status of women in an extended family in a village changes throughout her life course until she becomes a mother-in-law. And finally, in order to complete my analysis of early marriage in the rural areas of Azerbaijan I will discuss how my interviewees evaluate both positive and negative sides of early marriage.

I am far from romanticizing early marriages in Azerbaijan; however, my work is an attempt to challenge discourses and policies contributing to the victimization of women in early marriages by predominantly depicting them as objects of parents'

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<sup>8</sup> See the information about interviewees in the Appendix I in the thesis.



decisions to marry them off without taking their wishes into account. My analysis shows that women in early marriages are not so powerless and voiceless as they are depicted in much of the literature but they are able to make their voices heard within the existing structure of subordination in the households with patriarchal power relationships in villages of Azerbaijan.

## Chapter 1: Background and Methodology

In this chapter I will explore the issue of early marriage in the international context and I will discuss a discourse of women's victimization in early marriage, including violation of girls' rights. Further, I will examine how the age of marriage was developed in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries in law and in practice in Azerbaijan and finally, I will discuss the methods I used in my empirical research.

### *1.1 Theoretical Background*

I will situate my inquiry in the field of research in gender relations in marriage and in households characterized by patriarchal power relationships in an agrarian society. The broader context of my study thus is related to the question “how a woman's status shifted at marriage”<sup>9</sup> to explore how marriage and especially marriage at an early age affect a woman's status in the household throughout her life course. “Variations in marriage timing have world-historical implications” and “focus on moment of marriage” helps to understand “connections between the operation of gender relations in everyday life and in the realm of broader political developments”.<sup>10</sup> Since there is no scholarly literature about early marriage in Azerbaijan I'm looking at theoretically informed literature on other countries with the experiences of early marriage. Early marriage is a practice that is wide-spread in developing countries and it refers to any form of marriage that makes a person under eighteen years old a subject to marriage.<sup>11</sup>

First, I will discuss how a minimum age for marriage was defined in various international documents and then I will examine the early marriages from the perspective

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<sup>9</sup> **Maynes**, Mary Jo and Ann Waltner. “Childhood, Youth, and the Female Life Cycle.” *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 4 (2001): 11-21, 12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> **Otoo-Oyortey**, Naana and Sonita Pobi. *Early Marriage and Poverty. Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls*, London: no publisher, 2003, 8.

of neglecting of girls' rights and consequently, I will discuss the discourse of victimization of girls in early marriages who are presented voiceless and invisible in much of the literature. In my work I will challenge the approach to girls in early marriages as to victims whose parents marry them off without their consent.

Since late 1990s-early 2000s the attention of international community was increasingly drawn on early marriages. Earlier the practice of early marriage was considered as a social issue mostly related to the issues of "premature sex and pregnancy and school drop-out".<sup>12</sup> The studies on early marriage indicate a link between the age of a woman in marriage and domestic violence.<sup>13</sup> Women married at earlier age "more likely to experience domestic violence and believe that in some cases a man is justified in beating his wife".<sup>14</sup> Domestic violence against women used to be regarded as a social problem in 1980s and not as a violation of women's rights.<sup>15</sup>

A method of "approaching any analysis from both female and male perspective"<sup>16</sup> was not previously used in examining the practice of early marriage. Literature shows that since early 2000s there was a new shift in the analysis of the practice of early marriage towards examining girls' rights in regard to the practice of early marriage. In a broader context, the reason of this shift was that, "feminism is being re-shaped by its articulation through a global discourse of human rights and an increased focus on state

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<sup>12</sup> **Early Marriage**, Child Spouses (Innocenti Digest no. 7, March 2001, ed. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy), <http://unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf/digest7e.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2009), 3.

<sup>13</sup> **Jensen**, Robert and Rebecca Thornton. "Early Female Marriage in the Developing World." *Gender and Development* 11, no. 2 (July 2003): 9-19, 16.

<sup>14</sup> **UNICEF**, *Early Marriage. A Harmful Traditional Practice. A Statistical Exploration*, New York: UNICEF, April 2005, 27.

<sup>15</sup> **Reanda**, Laura. "Engendering the United Nations. The Changing International Agenda." *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 6, no. 1 (1999): 49-68, 57.

<sup>16</sup> **Johnstone**, Rachel Lorna. "Feminist Influences on UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies." *Human Rights Quarterly* 28, no.1 (2006): 148-185, 149.

interventions”.<sup>17</sup> Sylvia Walby claims that this was a result of “opportunities open to women”, “rhetorical strategies” about women’s rights as human rights and turning from separate women’s groups “towards their mainstreaming within civil society and the state”.<sup>18</sup>

In 2001 and 2005 UNICEF published studies on early marriages describing the necessity of unifying efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations in protecting girls’ rights. Indeed, policy against the practice of early marriage requires a comprehensive approach of all stakeholders. In recent years UNICEF studies have suggested a “holistic approach” to early marriage by “examining every implication of the practice, from its limitation upon personal freedom to its impact upon health and education”.<sup>19</sup> This shift impacted on how early marriages was conceived by international community and on how the international and therefore, national policies were changed towards examining girls’ rights in early marriage. Although the shift occurred towards discussing girls’ rights there is still ‘limited research on determinants of early marriages’.<sup>20</sup>

According to the findings of international organizations, the practice of early marriage shows that both girls and boys can be affected by early marriage but “the issue impacts girls in far larger numbers and with more intensity”. I will focus in my work on girls in early marriages in households in an agrarian society to find out the factors that lead to early marriages in the rural areas of Azerbaijan.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Walby, Sylvia. “Feminism in a Global Area.” *Economy and Society* 31, no 4 (2002): 533-557, 533.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 533.

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF, *Early Marriage*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi. *Early Marriage and Poverty*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> UNICEF, *Early Marriage*, 1.

There are a number of international documents that deal with early marriage. For example, 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 1964 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration stipulate a consent of both parties getting into marriage and the 1964 Convention defines 15 years old as a minimum age for marriage whereas the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination of Women (CEDAW) and the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child define 18 years old as a minimum age for marriage.<sup>22</sup> CEDAW states that “any betrothal or marriage of a child should not have any legal status”.<sup>23</sup>

The incidence of early marriage shows that this practice is still prevalent in the world. According to Jenson and Thornton, before girls reach the age of 18, 70-75 per cent of them are given to marriage in South Africa, 50-60 per cent in West and sub-Saharan Africa, 30-40 per cent in North Africa, Latin America and South East Asia.<sup>24</sup> A study by UNICEF in six West African countries indicates that “44 per cent of 20-24 year old women in Niger were married under the age of 15” and “all decisions on the timing of marriage and the choice of spouse are made by fathers”.<sup>25</sup> Since ‘consent’ is a major factor in marriage national laws in many countries provide women with the right to consent. Nonetheless, there are countries such as Cameroon, Jordan, Morocco, Uganda and Yemen where women are deprived of the right to consent.<sup>26</sup> Naana Otoo-Oyortey and Sonita Pobi claim that early marriages are predominantly arranged by parents without taking into account the consent of daughters and grounded upon the agreement of parents

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<sup>22</sup> UN General Assembly. Joint Written Statement submitted by the International Humanist and Ethical Union and the World Population, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, 2007. <http://www.iheu.org/system/files/G0711491+child+marriage.pdf> (accessed April 3, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> **Otoo-Oyortey** and Pobi. *Early Marriage and Poverty*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> **Jensen** and Thornton. “Early Female Marriage in the Developing World,” 12.

<sup>25</sup> **Early Marriage**, Child Spouses (Innocenti Digest), 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

and “often fail to ensure the best interests of the girl child”.<sup>27</sup> Early marriages usually involve the practice of dowry that often implies payment by a groom’s family to a bride’s family. In an agrarian society “the bride payment” apart from money comprises “goods” or “livestock”.<sup>28</sup> Since a girl is central to this bargaining between families it reinforces women’s inequality and women’s subordination to men after a dowry is paid by his family to hers because the dowry can “strengthen the notion that females can be exchanged or sold for the value that they bring into receiving families” .<sup>29</sup> There is also another system of “bride payment” which exists in some countries of Asia like India where a dowry is paid by bride’s family.<sup>30</sup> Because of “general demand for younger brides” the older daughter is the higher price of the dowry to be paid by her parents is.<sup>31</sup> This is also the reason why families want to marry off their daughters at an earlier age.

As to the situation within marriage, according to available research, girls married at an early age have restricted life choices and they have “to perform heavy amounts of domestic work”, they have to raise children “while still children themselves”.<sup>32</sup> Previous studies on early marriages in the world present women in early marriages powerless and helpless who are married off by their parents. The studies don’t discuss the cases when girls with their boyfriends make decision themselves when decide to get married at such a young age. According to Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, “although children below 18 years sometimes choose to marry freely with or without the consent of their parents... this is an area that requires further research”.<sup>33</sup> In my empirical research I will examine different patterns of early marriages in the rural areas of Azerbaijan, i.e. one pattern when early

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<sup>27</sup> **Otoo-Oyortey** and Pobi. *Early Marriage and Poverty*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> **Otoo-Oyortey** and Pobi. *Early Marriage and Poverty*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>32</sup> **UNICEF**, *Early Marriage*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> **Otoo-Oyortey** and Pobi. *Early Marriage and Poverty*, 8.

marriage can be a result of the parents' decision which is broadly discussed in the literature and another pattern when it can be a result of the couple's decision without involvement of parents. Much of the literature overlooks the second pattern when couples can agree to marry on their own or mentions this area as the area that needs further research. Moreover, I will discuss that the arrangement of marriage by parents does not always imply that a girl was coerced into marital relationships.

Coming to the issue of early marriage and the establishing own household, as a rule, in the rural areas of Azerbaijan bride leaves her parents' house and moves into the household of groom's family which is headed by the groom's father. According to Mary Jo Maynes and Ann Waltner, in China up to twentieth century a newly married couple didn't have to establish their own household as after getting married the couple lived with a groom's family, however, in Europe women and men had to work to establish a separate household.<sup>34</sup> As a consequence of families' approach to household women in Europe got married at later ages than women in China.<sup>35</sup>

The literature indicates that there is a link between the incidence of early marriage and poverty. It is more common in poor rural communities than in cities, "the higher the level of urbanization, the less likely it is that women marry before they reach 20 years".<sup>36</sup> The studies show that in countries with higher level of living where girls can have access to education and employment opportunities early marriages are rare, for example, in the USA 4 per cent, in UK 2 per cent and in Canada about 1 per cent of girls marry before they reach 19-years-old.<sup>37</sup> Poverty is considered to be one of the determinants

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<sup>34</sup> **Maynes** and Waltner. "Childhood, Youth, and the Female Life Cycle," 16.

<sup>35</sup> **Malhotra**, Anju. "Gender and the Timing of Marriage: Rural-Urban Differences in Java." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59, no. 2 (May, 1997): 434-450, 434.

<sup>36</sup> **Otoo-Oyortey** and Pobi. *Early Marriage and Poverty*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

underpinning early marriage in some countries in Middle East and South Asia.<sup>38</sup> In severely poor regions a girl may be regarded as an economic burden which is resulted in parents' preference to marry their daughters at an early age<sup>39</sup> especially when there are many children in the household and the households want to reduce the "costs of raising children (food, clothing and health care)".<sup>40</sup> Anju Malhotra claims that in rural areas of Indonesia "participation in any type of work delays marriage for both sexes" though girls' marriages are arranged by their families at earlier ages. However, there where the labor of women is a key factor in existence of the household parents are unlikely to let their daughters marry if there are no other women "to replace her labour".<sup>41</sup> Thus, the literature shows that in an agrarian society a household is a fundamental and essential unit of production organizing and theretofore, plays a great part in economic survival of the family.

Further, literature indicates that there is a connection between the age of the marriage of a woman and her level of education, i.e. early marriages prevent women's studies.<sup>42</sup>

Indian women who marry before the age of 15 receive less than one year of education, on average, and women marrying between the ages of 16 and 20 receive just under two years. By contrast, Indian women whose marriage is delayed until after 21 receive three to four years of education. Since marriage and schooling appear incompatible, early marriage is likely to be a significant barrier to women's education.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> **Jensen** and Thornton, "Early Female Marriage in the Developing World," 17.

<sup>39</sup> **Early Marriage**, Child Spouses (Innocenti Digest), 3

<sup>40</sup> **Jensen** and Thornton. "Early Female Marriage in the Developing World," 17.

<sup>41</sup> **Ilcan**, Suzan M. "Fragmentary Encounters in a Moral World: Household Power Relations and Gender Politics." *Ethnology* 35, no 1 (Winter 1996): 33-49, 43.

<sup>42</sup> **Ikamari**, Lawrence D. E. "The Effect of Education on the Timing of Marriage in Kenya." *Demographic Research* 12, no. 1 (February 2005). [www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol12/1/](http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol12/1/) (accessed February 25, 2009), 4.

<sup>43</sup> **Jensen** and Thornton. "Early Female Marriage in the Developing World," 13.



Demographic and fertility studies show the connection between the number of years studied and the “postponement of marriage”, for example, in developing countries “women with seven or more years of education marry four years later and have 2.2 fewer children than those with no education”.<sup>44</sup> This coin has another side: the earlier a girl gets into marriage the more chances that she will give up attending school.<sup>45</sup> Otoo-Oyorley and Pobi point to the incidence in drop-outs of girls between the ages of 13-14 years and within very poor households.<sup>46</sup>

There can be different reasons why girls are not allowed to attend schools. On the one hand, parents may see their daughter’s education as a waste of money, they may perceive that her education “will only benefit” her husband’s family.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, as Otoo-Oyorley and Pobi underscore, the reason is that due to socio-cultural factors families may think that education is not necessary for “becoming wives and husbands”.<sup>48</sup> One issue is obvious that lack of education exacerbate women’s inequality and makes them more vulnerable to poverty and renders them unprotected. However, while discussing the issue of education of girls the studies I have consulted leave the level of education of parents and the girls’ wish to continue their studies out of picture. I will show in my research that in the rural Azerbaijan the issue of early marriage is affected by parents’ education as well. Further, I will show that in early marriages women can receive their secondary education and there are cases when they manage to continue their studies at university.

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<sup>44</sup> UNFPA, 1990 quoted in **LeFevre**, Joyce Rebeca, Quiroga and Elaine Murphy. “Future Options Foreclosed: Girls Who Marry Early.” In *Reproductive Health and Rights – Reaching the Hardly Reached*, edited by Elaine Murthy, 139-148. Seattle WA: PATH Publications, 2002, 141.

<sup>45</sup> **Jensen** and Thornton. “Early Female Marriage in the Developing World,” 13.

<sup>46</sup> **Otoo-Oyorley** and Pobi. *Early Marriage and Poverty*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 12.

Further, in my empirical research I'm going to discuss the issues of how a patriarchal system is built in an agrarian society and the concept of 'patriarchal bargain' by Deniz Kandiyoti<sup>49</sup> which can be relevant to the marriages in the rural areas of Azerbaijan as the practice of moving of a woman after the marriage into the household of the husband's parents is widely spread in the rural areas of the country. According to Kandiyoti, girls in North Africa, the Middle East and South and East Asia move at an earlier age in the household of their husband's father; they are subordinated to all men and elder women in the husband's family and their status can be influenced by their "ability to produce male offspring".<sup>50</sup> My question in this context is if comparable mechanisms are at work in Azerbaijan and to which degree women within such marriages exercise their autonomy or are able to relate to the given power structures and intra-household relations in a way as to strengthen their position.

## ***1.2 The Marriage Age in Azerbaijan: Historical Overview of the Law and Practice***

In this subchapter I will examine how the minimum marriage age was changed in the law and how the age of marriage was reflected in practice in Azerbaijan for the last two centuries in the support of my main research question about the reasons for early marriages in rural areas of Azerbaijan. The marriage age in law went up for both women and men from late 19<sup>th</sup> century till late 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>51</sup> until it went down for women in 1990s.<sup>52</sup> The first detailed, thorough and reliable descriptions of a family and

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<sup>49</sup> **Kandiyoti**, Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (September 1988): 274-290, 279.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 278-279.

<sup>51</sup> **Ahmedova**, Shahla. *Semeynaya Obshina i Patronimiya v Gorode Sheki* [Family Community and Patronymic Relationships in the Town of Sheki]. Baku: Shirvanneshr, 2001, 47.

<sup>52</sup> **Family Code** of the Azerbaijan Republic, December 28 1999, Excerpts. [http://www.gender-az.org/index\\_en.shtml?id\\_doc=93](http://www.gender-az.org/index_en.shtml?id_doc=93) (accessed March 14, 2009).

relationships within households in Azerbaijan are dated from the late 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

During this period of history the population of Azerbaijan lived predominantly in rural areas, for example, in 1870 86,8 % of inhabitants of Baku province<sup>53</sup> lived in villages whereas 13,2 % of the population lived in towns<sup>54</sup>. Before the 1872 law there were cases when girls got married before they reached thirteen often with men much older than girls were.<sup>55</sup> The new law was adopted in order to prevent the marriage of girls under thirteen years old. According to the new law of 1872 thirteen was defined as a minimum marriage age for girls and fifteen was defined as a marriage age for boys.<sup>56</sup> However, the available studies show that in Baku province it was not common for men to get married before they reached twenty-five because they needed to work and to collect funds for *kebin*, which literally means marriage.<sup>57</sup> *Kebin* was a legal form of marriage in Azerbaijan until the twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>58</sup>

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Baku province among every 100 people the age of those getting into marriage were as following: between 15-16 years old girls- 45,6 % whereas boys-4,1%; between 17-19 years old women- 78,6% while men-13,7%; 20-29 years old women comprised 93,4% and men-52,3%; 30-39 years old women -

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<sup>53</sup> In the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> -beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Baku province included six districts: Baku, Guba, Shamakhi, Lenkaran, Javad and Geokchay. In **Sadihov**, A. "Perezitki Semeynoy Obshini v Vostocnom Azerbajane v kontse XIX-nacale XX v." Avtoreferat Dissertasii na Soiskanie Uchenoy Stepeni Kandidata Istoriceskix Nauk ["Remainder of Family Community in the end of the 19th-beginning of the 20th Centuries in Eastern Azerbaijan." Synopsis of Dissertation for Fulfilling the Degree of Candidate in History], Baku: no publisher, 1970, 10.

<sup>54</sup> **Guliyeva**, Nargiz. *Azerbaycanda Muasir Kend Ailesi ve Aile Meisheti* [Modern Village Family and Family Life in Azerbaijan]. Baki: Elm Nesriyyati, <sup>1</sup>1997, <sup>2</sup>2005, 11.

<sup>55</sup> **Alizade**, A.A. and A. N. Abbasov. *Aile* [Family]. Baku: Maarif Neshriyyati, 1989, 109.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>57</sup> **Geybullayev**, Giyasaddin. *Azerbaycanda Aile ve Nikah (XIX esr ve XX esrin evvelleri)* [Family and Marriage in Azerbaijan (The 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries)], 2 volumes, Baku: Elm, 1994, 73.

<sup>58</sup> **Ahmedova**. *Semeynaya Obshina i Patronimiya v Gorode Sheki* [Family Community and Patronymic Relationships in the Town of Sheki], 47.

90%, men- 27,1%; 40-49 years old women 73%, men-93%; 50-59 years old girls women- 50%, men-62%; over 60 years old women-23,5%, men-84,4%.<sup>59</sup> As we can see from the figures above in Baku province marriages for both women and men between 20-29 years old were prevalent at that time and it was not common for girls to get married before fifteen years old. Though they were engaged at the age of twelve-thirteen they got married two-three years later and during the engagement period they lived in their parents' house.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the girls were married off often without their consent with elderly widowed men or young men they didn't like.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, often a woman and a man didn't know or see each other before marriage.<sup>62</sup> Geysaddin Geybullayev indicates that marriage at early ages was not related to the religion of Islam as marriage at early ages existed in Azerbaijan before Islam became the religion of the vast majority of people in the country and "this custom did not contradict the ethical norms of that time".<sup>63</sup>

According to *sharia*, Islamic law, *kebin* was registered by mullahs in mosques with consent and participation of woman and man getting into marriage as well as two witnesses, one from each side.<sup>64</sup> As I mentioned previously *kebin* was a legal form of marriage until early twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On August 2 1920 after a new political regime, i.e. socialism was established in the country the decree on "Records of the acts of the citizens' status" was adopted by Azerbaijan People's Commissars' Council and it defined fourteen years old as the marriage age for girls and sixteen years old as the marriage age for boys.<sup>65</sup> Later on March 29, 1923 the new legislation concerning

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<sup>59</sup> **Geybullayev.** *Azərbaycanda Aile və Nikah* [Family and Marriage in Azerbaijan], 128-129.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 128-129.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>64</sup> **Guliyeva.** *Azərbaycanda Müasir Kənd Ailesi və Aile Məişəti* [Modern Village Family and Family Life in Azerbaijan], 177.

<sup>65</sup> **Geybullayev.** *Azərbaycanda Aile və Nikah* [Family and Marriage in Azerbaijan], 316.

marriage, family and tutelage adopted by the Central Executive Committee defined sixteen years old as a marriage age for women and eighteen years old as a marriage age for men.<sup>66</sup>

The laws above deprived *kebin* made by mullahs of its legal status<sup>67</sup> and since then *kebin* has been regarded as a religious marriage in the country. However, marriages of girls under sixteen years old were still observed in some villages. For example, in 1928 inhabitant of the Cercibogan village of Nakchivan province<sup>68</sup> E. Ismaylov married to twelve years old S. Abbas qizi and in the same village M. Naghi oglu married to twelve years old K. Veli qizi and in both cases men gave *kebin* money to the girls' fathers.<sup>69</sup> There were cases when there were attempts to marry off the girls by their parents to men much older than they were for *kebin* money. According to Geybullayev, in Ganja province<sup>70</sup> seventeen years-old girl was supposed to get married with fifty-five years old man and he was going to pay her parents *kebin* money in the mount of 200 manat<sup>71</sup> of gold money but fortunately, she filed a complaint to Ganja Executive committee and consequently, she got married with twenty years-old man.<sup>72</sup>

Geybullayev claims that the main type of marriage in the Middle Ages in Azerbaijan was *tekkebinlik* which means monogamy, as there is no information about bigamy and polygamy in the country from 12<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>73</sup> Bigamy and polygamy existed in more ancient periods of history and went back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; among

<sup>66</sup> Geybullayev. *Azərbaycanda Aile və Nikah* [Family and Marriage in Azerbaijan], 316.

<sup>67</sup> Ahmedova. *Semeynaya Obshina i Patronimiya v Gorode Sheki* [Family Community and Patronymic Relationships in the Town of Sheki], 47.

<sup>68</sup> It was located in the south- west of Azerbaijan. Today it is Nakchivan Autonomous Republic which is a part of the Azerbaijan Republic.

<sup>69</sup> Geybullayev. *Azərbaycanda Aile və Nikah* [Family and Marriage in Azerbaijan], 319.

<sup>70</sup> It was situated in the western Azerbaijan. Now Ganja is the second big city after Baku in Azerbaijan.

<sup>71</sup> Manat is the name of the currency in Azerbaijan.

<sup>72</sup> Geybullayev. *Azərbaycanda Aile və Nikah* [Family and Marriage in Azerbaijan], 320.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 121-122.

inhabitants of towns and villages the main reason for bigamy and polygamy was the absence of children or in some cases the absence of sons in the first marriage.<sup>74</sup> The woman who didn't have children had to agree for the second marriage of her husband and this reinforced her inferior position. The law of 1923 officially ended bigamy and polygamy in Azerbaijan.

Since then the marriage age for boys has remained the same, i.e. eighteen years old whereas the marriage age for girls changed twice until now. Until 1970 the marriage age for girls remained sixteen years old. Alizade and Abbasov claim that a new marriage and family code was adopted because girls at the age of sixteen were not physically prepared for marriage and moreover, this age prevented them from completing their secondary education.<sup>75</sup> According to Article 15 of the new marriage and family code which came into force on April 1, 1970 eighteen years old was defined as the marriage age for girls with stipulation that in some exceptional cases it can be reduced until seventeen years old.<sup>76</sup>

After *kebin* had been deprived of its legal status of marriage it could only accompany a legal marriage, i.e. *kebin* was not recognized as an option replacing legal secular marriage. Guliyeva claims that from 1970 until 1987 annually there were 3,000-4,000 *kebin* signed by mullahs whereas 60,000 marriages were registered in marriage registration offices which made 3 per cent of officially registered marriages.<sup>77</sup> The less number of *kebin* during this period can be explained by the fact that people often had to hide that they were in a religious marriage additionally to officially registered marriage

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<sup>74</sup> **Geybullayev.** *Azərbaycanda Aile və Nikah* [Family and Marriage in Azerbaijan], 122.

<sup>75</sup> **Alizade** and Abbasov. *Aile* [Family], 113.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>77</sup> **Guliyeva.** *Azərbaycanda Muasir Kənd Ailesi və Aile Məişəti* [Modern Village Family and Family Life in Azerbaijan], 177.

because the existing political regime was not in favour of the religion in the country. As a result of the policy against religion in the country, out of 1700 mosques functioning in Azerbaijan in 1925-1926 just 17 ones existed in 1944.<sup>78</sup>

The next time the change to the legal age of marriage of girls occurred in 1990s after Azerbaijan regained its independence and lived through a war.<sup>79</sup> The Article 15 of the Marriage and Family Code of the Azerbaijan Republic that came into force in 1998 indicates the new legal age of marriage, i.e. seventeen years old for women and eighteen years old for men; in special cases, the age of marriage can be reduced by one year with parents' agreement.<sup>80</sup> However, today the families often avoid the law above through the practice of a religious marriage *kebin*. Sajida Abdulavagabova claims that there is no official statistics about early marriages in Azerbaijan<sup>81</sup>. According to information I found in the press no records of religious marriages are maintained by mullahs in mosques.<sup>82</sup> However, there is quantitative information provided by NGOs as a result of their research and projects implemented in regard to early marriages and some of them are published in media. For example, the press according to the information had given by Public Union "Khatun" reports that in the first half of 2007 4,342 minor girls were coerced into marriage in rural areas of the country.<sup>83</sup> Huseynova mentions that the surveys they conducted via local centres of their organization in southern regions of the country show that in 2008 in the southern regions of the country there were 2,800 cases of early

<sup>78</sup> **Guliyeva**. *Azərbaycanda Muasir Kənd Ailesi və Ailə Məişəti* [Modern Village Family and Family Life in Azerbaijan], 77.

<sup>79</sup> For more details about the war see **Azerbaijan**.

[http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/Karabakh/Tragedy/humanitarianTragedy\\_e.html](http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/Karabakh/Tragedy/humanitarianTragedy_e.html) (accessed May 29, 2009).

<sup>80</sup> **Azerbaijan** Respublikasının Nikah və Ailə Məcəlləsi [The Marriage and Family Code of the Azerbaijan Republic], 11.

<sup>81</sup> **Abdulvahabova**, Sajida. Domestic Violence against Women in Azerbaijan. Kadın Problemlerinin Tedigat Birliyi-Gadin Institutu [Women Problems Research Union-Woman's Institute]. Unpublished Report. Baku, 2008.

<sup>82</sup> **Aynura** and Liya. "Vozroslo Cislo Devushek, Vstupayushix v Rannie Braki" [The Numbers of Girls in Early Marriages are Increasing]. *Zerkalo*, June 30, 2007.

<sup>83</sup> **Mamedov M.**, "Early Marriage is a Common Practice," *Zerkalo*, March 15, 2008.

marriages.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, since early marriages are not performed in the official marriage registration offices in the country it's difficult to bring precise quantitative information about these marriages.

Huseynova claims that a religious *kebin* is a social problem in the country.<sup>85</sup> However, according to *fetva*, a religious decree of the Caucasus Muslim Council adopted in November 2002 the ceremony of a religious *kebin* can be fulfilled only after the marriage was officially registered in the Registration office of the acts of the citizens' status<sup>86</sup> which means that the Caucasus Muslim Council doesn't support early, i.e. illegal marriages in the country. Moreover, in Islam consent of both sides getting into marriage is among necessary conditions of marriage and nobody can be forced into marriage.

As for the legislation of Azerbaijan there are articles in the Criminal Code which stipulate punishment for relationships with minors. For example, the Article 152 of the Criminal Code reads:

The Sexual relations or other actions of sexual nature, committed by a person who has reached 18, with the person who is wittingly known as person who has not reached 16 is punished by restriction of freedom for the term up to three years or imprisonment on the same term.<sup>87</sup>

However, there are “no known cases, where this provision has been used to prosecute a man who married an underage girl”.<sup>88</sup> Further, the Article 153 of the criminal code stipulates the punishment in case of depraving actions. It reads:

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<sup>84</sup> **Huseynova**, Ruhengiz. *Molla Kebini və Qadin Huquqlari* [Mullah Kebin and Women's Rights project]. Solidarity Among Women. Unpublished Project Report. Baku, 2009.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> The decree is quoted in the Unpublished Project Report by Ruhengiz Huseynova.

<sup>87</sup> **Criminal Code** of the Azerbaijan Republic, September 1 2000.

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4417f82d4.html> (accessed March 30, 2009).

<sup>88</sup> **Open Society Institute**. “Violence against Women. Does the Government Care in Azerbaijan? 2007” [http://www.stopvaw.org/sites/3f6d15f4-c12d-4515-8544-26b7a3a5a41e/uploads/Azerbaijan\\_3.pdf](http://www.stopvaw.org/sites/3f6d15f4-c12d-4515-8544-26b7a3a5a41e/uploads/Azerbaijan_3.pdf) (accessed March 10, 2009).



Depraving actions, carried out without application of force against the person, with the person who is wittingly known as person who has not reached age of 14 is punished by fine of five hundred up to one thousand nominal financial unit, or by corrective works for the term of up to two years, or restriction of freedom for the term of up to two years, or imprisonment for the term of up to two years.<sup>89</sup>

Nonetheless, early marriage is common in some villages of Azerbaijan. I will discuss the factors that lead to early marriages in the second chapter based on my empirical research.

### ***1.3 Research Methods***

For my empirical research I went to Azerbaijan, first to Baku and then to a village in the western part of the country. At first, in Baku I completed my investigation of secondary literature in the Azerbaijan National library named after M. F. Akhundov and Presidential library of the Azerbaijan Republic where I found some books and articles related to households in an agrarian society and relationships within families in villages. Secondly, I had meetings with several representatives of NGOs dealing with early marriages in Azerbaijan. A few of them provided me with some data, specifically quantitative data about early marriages and the reports of the projects concerning early marriages they have been carrying out in the rural areas of the country. As for the language, the information I have is – besides the literature in English I have been using – mostly in Azerbaijani and there is also some literature which I found in Russian. Therefore, the translations of all the references from Azerbaijani and Russian into English are mine.

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<sup>89</sup> **Criminal Code** of the Azerbaijan Republic, September 1 2000.  
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4417f82d4.html> (accessed March 30, 2009).

In addition I travelled to one of villages in western Azerbaijan which is located close to Ganja and approximately 400 kilometres from Baku with 3,000 inhabitants to personally interview women with experiences of early marriages and their husbands as well as their relatives, i.e. their parents and the parents-in-law. On the whole I interviewed thirty-five people between the age of thirteen and eighty-six years old including twenty-one women and fourteen men. Sixteen out of twenty-one women had experiences of early marriages. As for the age of interviewees by using this range between thirteen and over my purpose was to learn experiences of women who just started their marriage, the experiences of women who have been a few years in marriage and the feelings of women about their lives more than twenty-five years of being in marriage, i.e. to include women with and without children, with children of various ages, and occupying the whole range of positions a woman is going through during her life-course within the intra-household gendered division of labour. Furthermore, among my interviewees there were married, divorced, widowed women and mothers of girls married at an early age. In case of men my main purpose was to learn why they chose to get married with a woman at early age or why they decided to marry off their daughter at early age. Along with men who married at an early age with a woman at a younger age I also interviewed men who were fathers of women or men married early as well as men who were sons of women married at an early age.<sup>90</sup>

I used a method of snowball to identify interviewees. I have known one of the women-interviewees whom I met at a workshop devoted to women's rights in Baku, Azerbaijan. The latter helped me in identifying further interviewees. Furthermore,

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<sup>90</sup> See the profile of the interviewees in Appendix I.

Nusahaba Mamedova, a head of Tomris women's NGO in Ganja, helped me in arranging the interviews.

Before starting each interview I explained to the interviewee the purpose of my research and promised to keep the anonymity of the interviewee. All of the interviews were conducted in the houses of my protagonists and all of them agreed for the recording of the interviews. I conducted the interviews in Azerbaijani and therefore, all translations of the quotes into English are mine. In order to keep anonymity of my protagonists I will use pseudonyms for all of them.

According to Bernard H. Russel, "in situations where you won't get more than one chance to interview someone, semistructured interviewing is best".<sup>91</sup> Taking into account the time constraints I used the method of semistructured interviewing for the purpose of my research. I developed the interview guide, which is "a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order".<sup>92</sup> My interview guide<sup>93</sup> mainly but not exclusively consisted of open-ended questions written in a particular order which I used to open up the conversation with interviewee but leaving much space for her/him to talk rather than me asking questions in a strict order. Since "interviews provide a chance to learn how people reflect directly on behaviour, circumstances, identity, events, and other things"<sup>94</sup> this method helped me to learn the feelings and experiences of interviewees, which is more difficult to learn via questionnaires or participant observation.

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<sup>91</sup> **Russel**, Bernard H. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1995, 209.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

<sup>93</sup> See the interview guide in Appendix II.

<sup>94</sup> **PENN Anthropology**. "Interviews." <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/anthro/anthro/interviews> (accessed May 27, 2009).

At first I had a feeling that it will be difficult to talk to women and specifically to men as I thought that they will regard me as an outsider who doesn't know much about village life and customs. However, it turned out that my interviewees were friendly and willing to help me to do my research. I'm grateful to my interviewees for the opportunity they gave me to learn about their lives and specifically about early marriages in a village of Azerbaijan.

## Chapter 2: Early Marriages in Narratives of Interviewees

In this chapter I will examine the patterns of marriages in villages of Azerbaijan based on the interviews given to me by women with experiences of early marriage, men whose mothers and/or wives got married at an early age, parents of a woman as well as parents of her husband. I'm interested in answering my main research questions, namely: What are the factors that lead to early marriages in the rural areas of Azerbaijan? While a marriage is arranged by parents do they take into consideration their daughter's consent? Is arranged marriage the only pattern of early marriage? How does education in families affect the issue of early marriages and how does early marriage affect the process of education of women? How do age, gender and reproduction interact and affect a woman's status in village families?

In order to answer the question about the reasons for early marriages I will discuss whether parents follow the custom of early marriages in families with their children and whether the number of children and poverty affect parents' decision to marry off their children. While answering the question of the daughter's consent to getting into marriage I will examine to what extent a daughter has a right to express her opinion in this matter to her parents in order to show that daughters are not necessarily coerced into marital relationships as it is shown in the much of the literature. I will present the examples of women's and men's stories, as well as narratives by their parents-in-law on how early marriages are arranged by parents and with children's consent. Further, I will challenge the discourse of girls' victimization by looking at the examples of couples who married without parents' consent. In order to answer the question about interaction of education and early marriage I will bring the examples of the parents' level of education, the

examples of girls quitting school and the examples of women who managed to continue their studies.

According to Susan Ilcan, “household members are usually immediate consanguines and affines, having certain rights and obligations based on age and gender. The older a person becomes the higher rank he or she gains”.<sup>95</sup> I will examine the age as a factor that plays a crucial role in defining the status of women in hierarchies in the households in the villages of Azerbaijan and is one of main determinants of gender relationships within households. While talking to women I was interested in learning about their experiences living in extended families and what changes happen to women’s status through their life course. Further, I will discuss how their status in the household changes with having children, based on the concept of ‘patriarchal bargain’<sup>96</sup> by Kandiyoti, as the practice of having a woman move into the household of the husband’s parents after the marriage is widely spread in the villages of Azerbaijan. I will discuss this in order to answer my question about the interaction of age, gender and reproduction and its influence on a woman’s status in the households characterized by patriarchal power relationships. Finally, in the subchapter about perceptions of early marriages I will analyze how my interviewees evaluate both positive and negative sides of early marriage.

In my sample there were married, divorced, and widowed women and mothers of girls married at an early age. Among men there were those who at an early age married at a woman at a younger age. There were men who were sons of women married at an early age as well as men who were fathers of women or men married at an early age. My sample shows a trend that early marriages happen in families with two or three

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<sup>95</sup> **Ilcan**, Suzan M. “Fragmentary Encounters in a Moral World: Household Power Relations and Gender Politics,” 37.

<sup>96</sup> **Kandiyoti**, Deniz. “Bargaining with Patriarchy,” 279.

generations of women with experiences of early marriage. In the following subchapter I will discuss whether early marriage is a custom in family.

## ***2.1 Early Marriage as Adet (Custom) in Family***

In the analysis of the narratives of my interviewees, both women and men show that early marriages occur more frequently in families where mothers and grandmothers married at a younger age. Ayshe's mother got married at sixteen and her grandmother got married at fourteen. Metanet's mother married at fourteen, both of her grandmothers married at an early age, at nine and fourteen accordingly. Metanet's two sisters married at sixteen, the other two at eighteen and nineteen. Elmira's mother married at fifteen and her grandmother married when she reached fifteen. Zaur's mother got married at fifteen, he himself married at nineteen whereas his wife was less than seventeen and he married off his older daughter when she reached fifteen. Efsane's mother married at fifteen and her grandmother married at fifteen.

My sample shows that mothers of eighteen out of twenty-one women-interviewees including sixteen women with experiences of early marriage and five women whose children married at an early age married before they reached seventeen, which make 85.7% of all the women-interviewees. Mothers of ten out of fourteen men in my sample married below the age of eighteen, which make 71.4% of men-interviewees. Either one or both grandmothers of all interviewees in my sample married before eighteen. The sample shows that in the vast majority of cases early marriage is a result of a custom in village families.

Furthermore, my sample indicates a tendency that early marriages in villages happen more frequently in families with more than two children rather than in families with smaller number of children. Among my protagonists there are Metanet (five sisters

and a brother), Ayshe (two sisters and a brother), Efsane (four sisters), Elmira (four sisters), Zemfira (five daughters), Valida (three sisters and four daughters), Mirvari (seven sisters and two brothers), Yasemen (three daughters and a son), Zaur (three daughters and two sons), Nezaket (five sisters and a brother), Ayten (three sisters) and etc.

Metanet, forty years old, is a journalist. She is a financially independent woman who is raising her two children alone. Two years ago she asked me to give her an interview for her women's magazine. This time our roles were different, I interviewed her and she narrated her life story about her marriage. As Metanet told me, there was a trend in their family and in the whole village: as soon as girls finished the secondary school they needed to get married. There were six children in their family, five daughters and a son and they lived with their parents and their grandmother, their fathers' mother. Once, Metanet's mother told them that this is a village and whether they like it or not they [Metanet's parents, G.M.] will marry their daughters off. It was more than twenty-six years ago but she still remembered her mother's words "we'll marry you off". However, she didn't judge her parents as her parents also grew up in a village and this was a custom in her family. Moreover, as she said, this was how the whole village lived.

The sample shows that out of twenty-one women-interviewees six women come from families with five and more than five children, eight women come from families with four children, five women come from families with three children and two women come from families with two children, i.e. 90.4% of women come from families with more than two children. Out of fourteen men-interviewees six come from families with four and more than four children, three come from families with three children, four come from families with two children and one comes from a family with one child, i.e.



there are 64.2% of men who come from families with more than two children in the sample. Since in the majority of cases the early marriages are a result of arranged marriages<sup>97</sup> I will move on to discuss how early marriages are arranged in the villages in Azerbaijan and to what extent a woman has a voice in expressing her opinion regarding her marriage.

## ***2.2 Arranged Early Marriages in Households in an Agrarian Society***

Historically, in Azerbaijan a man is a head of the family. According to Gadirzade, the survey conducted in villages of Nakchivan Autonomous Republic<sup>98</sup> showed that out of 3,652 agrarian households the heads of 2,998 families were men whereas the heads of 654 families were women; the latter could hardly happen in the past when only a man could be a head of the household.<sup>99</sup> Historically, in case of a divorce or a husband's death the older son in the family became the head of the household.<sup>100</sup> At present, a woman can be a head of the family when she is divorced or widowed.

In households with patriarchal power relationships in an agrarian society the man, as the head of the family, is responsible for well-being of the family. Traditionally, he is seen as the main breadwinner and he is responsible for making a number of decisions in the family. Depending on his personal characteristics and his social position in the society the head of the family has a real authority. Following the tradition women purposely show their inferiority to their husbands in public underscoring traditional gender roles

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<sup>97</sup> **Mamedov, M.** "Rannie Braki-Yavlenie Obicnoe" [Early Marriage is a Common Practice]. *Zerkalo*, March 15, 2008.

<sup>98</sup> Nakchivan Autonomous Republic is a part of the Azerbaijan Republic.

<sup>99</sup> **Gadirzade.** "Sovremennaya Semya u Azerbayjantsev (po materialam selskix rayonov Nakicevanskoy ASSR)." Avtoreferat Dissertatsii na Soiskanie Uchenoy Stepeni Kandidata Istoriceskix Nauk ["Modern Family of Azerbaijanis (based on the materials of rural districts of Nakhcivan ASSR)." Synopsis of Dissertation for Fulfilling the Degree of Candidate in History], Moscow: no publisher, 1983, 16.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

and relationships within family.<sup>101</sup> The head of the family is respected by all the members of the family, however, as Guliyeva points out while making decisions he discusses the issue with “other adult members of the family” and in some cases they might not agree with him.<sup>102</sup>

Normally, in the case of arranged marriages in villages both bride’s and groom’s families or at least some of members of the family know each other well or there is *vasiteci* (literally, a mediator), a third person, usually a woman who participates in arranging of marriage. As a rule, this person is in a good relationship with somebody in one or both families. In Azerbaijan there are villages where endogenous marriages are common. When the families are not relatives they come normally from the same village or in some cases from neighbouring villages.

There are various patterns of arranging a marriage in villages of Azerbaijan. Similarly to an arranged form of marriage in rural Central Asia, “the initiative always comes from the family of the young man.”<sup>103</sup> The parents of a man decide to marry him and they discuss this issue among themselves and with their son. In this pattern the parents most probably know the family whose daughter they want their son to get married to and they suggest their son meet and talk with a girl or to look at her from afar when she goes to a market or a school. In case the fathers are friends they can visit the home of the girl’s family as friends where a man can see his future wife.

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<sup>101</sup> **Ahmedova.** *Semeynaya Obshina i Patronimiya v Gorode Sheki* [Family Community and Patronymic Relationships in the Town of Sheki], 32.

<sup>102</sup> **Guliyeva.** *Azərbaycanda Muasir Kend Ailesi ve Aile Meisheti* [Modern Village Family and Family Life in Azerbaijan], 106-107.

<sup>103</sup> **Poliakov,** Sergei P. *Everyday Islam: Religion and Tradition in Rural Central Asia*. Edited by Martha Brill Olcott. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1992, 53.

In some villages it is common that marriages are arranged by the recommendation of elders.<sup>104</sup> There are the cases when a man's mother, upon agreement with her husband first goes and sees a future *gelin*, a daughter-in-law and if she likes her and her family as well she suggests that her son should see her. After he likes her they agree to go for *elchilik*, literally to ask in marriage.

The first time I met my future husband on my way back home from market. He told me that his mother came to ask my mother to get us married and if I don't mind we can create a family. I asked him if he saw me before. He said 'no' and my next question was why then his mother visited my mother. He said that his mother liked me and told him that I am a nice girl (Metanet, 40, divorced, mother of a daughter and a son).

The bride is chosen according to a number of criteria such as purity, age appearance, and health.<sup>105</sup> Family honor plays a crucial role while looking for brides, i.e. purity and chastity are among important characteristics of a future *gelin* as brides are chosen from families with good reputation in the village.<sup>106</sup> This indicates to the issue of keeping women's bodies under control not only after marriage but well in advance before marriage.

Another important factor in bride choosing is age. Guliyeva claims that due to agricultural character of work in villages marriage is an important factor in maintaining the household and that's why traditionally inhabitants of the villages marry early, for example below the age of twenty per every 1000 persons in 1915-1919 there were 340 married women, in 1920-1924 there were 264 married women, in 1930-1934 there were 293, in 1945-1949 there were 374, in 1955-1959 there were 244, 1960-1964 there were 222 married women.<sup>107</sup> In villages of Azerbaijan there are the households with two-three

<sup>104</sup> **Alirzayev**, Ali. *Nehrem* [Nehrem <village name, G.M.>]. Baku: Adiloglu Neshriyyati, 2003, 57.

<sup>105</sup> **Alirzayev**. *Nehrem*, 69.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>107</sup> **Guliyeva**. *Azərbaycanda Muasir Kənd Ailesi və Aile Məişəti* [Modern Village Family and Family Life in Azerbaijan], 126-127.

generations, including a married brother, and single siblings.<sup>108</sup> In some villages where it's common for women to get married as soon as they reach fourteen-fifteen years old, the parents' main argument for their daughters is that there is no more single women of their age in the village.<sup>109</sup> Neighbours can gossip whether something is wrong with this girl if she is not getting married. The fact of marrying off at such a young age is also affected by labour migration when young men leave the country in a search of jobs abroad<sup>110</sup> and parents of a girl are worried that nobody will marry their daughter in the village after she reaches a certain age.

Historically, in Azerbaijan there were clearly regulated traditional pre-wedding and wedding ceremonies most of which are alive in present times as well. The traditions of the wedding ceremony vary from region to region, from city to city, or sometimes even from village to village in Azerbaijan but they have some common features that I will describe in this subchapter. According to tradition there are a few wedding related events that precede the wedding party. First, the relatives of a man visit a future *gelin* family to propose her parents to marry the children of the two families.<sup>111</sup> Normally after two or three visits they receive a response for marriage from a woman's family. According to the tradition, when they arrive they are served tea in the place of a future *gelin* and only after the consent is received from a bride's family the groom's relatives drink tea by putting sugar into the glass which means that agreement about marriage is achieved between families. As the next (official engagement) step after the consent is

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>109</sup> **Aganise.** "Azyasli Qizlarin Ere Verilmesi Yolverilmezdir. Qadinlarin Huquqlari Daha Cox Eyaletlerde Pozulur" [The Marriage of Minor Girls is Not Acceptable. The Women's Rights are Violated in the Regions]. In *Qadin ve Cemiyet* [A Woman and Society], edited by Firuze Asadullayeva, 180-183. Baku: no publisher, 2007, 82.

<sup>110</sup> **Huseynova.** Molla Kebini və Qadin Huquqlari [Mullah Kebin and Women's Rights project].

<sup>111</sup> **Gadirzade.** "Sovremennaya Semya u Azerbayjantsev (po materialam selskix rayonov Nakicevanskoy ASSR)" ["Modern Family of Azerbaijanis" (based on the materials of rural districts of Nakchivan ASSR), 21.

received the parents of the groom bring a ring for the bride and this ceremony is called *kicik nishan* which literally means a small engagement. The next step of the wedding ritual the parents with other relatives of a groom come for *boyuk nishan* which literally means a big engagement ceremony. They bring an engagement ring and gifts for a bride as well as *shekebura* and *paklava* which are traditional sweets, a big cake and presents for the whole family.

The period after the engagement and before the wedding the bride and groom are called *nishanli* which literally means betrothed. During this period the relatives of a groom visit the bride's family on holidays mainly but not exclusively on *Novruz* bayrami (a holiday of spring), *Gurban* bayrami (the Muslim holiday of sacrifice) and a New Year and the parents of the bride invite the groom to their place. A few days before wedding party *patarkesdi* or *parcakesdi* (literally, cloth cutting) ceremony happens when the relatives of a groom bring gifts and a wedding dress for a bride. The next step is *xnayaxti* (literally, putting henna) when henna is put on the hands of a bride and all the women participating in the party. And finally, *cehiz* (literally, trousseau) that include the necessary household things that the bride will use in the household is brought to the groom's household. When both families agree on the date of the wedding party they have a big wedding party announcing the marriage of two people. In some places the wedding party starts on Friday and ends on Sunday when the groom and his relatives bring the bride into the groom's household.<sup>112</sup> It is common that after a wedding party *gelin* moves to the household of her husbands' parents which is considered also her husband's household. It rarely happens that after a wedding party a man moves to the household of his wife's parents.

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<sup>112</sup> **Gadirzade.** "Sovremennaya Semya u Azerbayjantsev (po materialam selskix rayonov Nakicevanskoy ASSR)" [Modern Family of Azerbaijanis (based on the materials of rural districts of Nakchivan ASSR)], 21.

While talking to women I was particularly interested if they felt they were forced into marriage. According to the information given by local NGOs and published in media as a rule, young women in rural areas are forced into marriage.<sup>113</sup> However, my sample shows that in the overwhelming majority of cases young women either were willing to get married or didn't mind following their parents' decision.

Ayshe, a beautiful woman at the age of seventeen, said that she got married because she was willing to do so. She wanted to get married at an early age following the example of her mother who got married at the age of sixteen. Ayshe mentioned that her father and the father of her husband are friends. His father often visited their place and she remembered hearing when he told her father that one day Ayshe will be his daughter-in-law. Once he visited Ayshe's parents together with his son Ziya, Ayshe's future husband. After that visit they visited Ayshe's family quite frequently. The first time Ziya saw Ayshe in her parents' house and after a few visits they exchanged some notes. First, Ziya sent her a note via her cousin asking what she thinks about possible marriage. Her reply was that this would depend on her father's decision.

I was thirteen then, I just finished five grades of the secondary school. He was a driver by then (and now he is a driver, too). He is four years older than me. When I saw him the first time I liked him very much. We didn't have much chance to talk to each other but he sent me letters via my cousin. They came to ask my hand. At first my father was against saying that I'm too young but finally, my parents gave their consent. Since then I stopped attending the school and in a year there was an engagement ceremony. A few months later we had a wedding party and a *kebin* [a religious marriage, G.M]. I was fifteen, then. Since then, we, I and my husband live in my parents-in-law household. Ziya's single brother also lives with us (Ayshe, 17, married, no children).

Ziya liked Ayshe from the first sight. When I asked Ziya when he got married and whose decision his marriage was he said:

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<sup>113</sup> **“Problema** Nasilnoy Vidachi Nesovershennoletnix Devushek Dostigla Urovnya Natsionalnoy” [The Problem of Marriage of Minor Girls has Reached the National level], *Nedelya*, March 14, 2008.

I married when I was nineteen and it was both my parents' and my decision. We exchanged notes and her reply was "It's up to my father". Then, my parents went to ask her parents to get us marry. I'm happy to be in marriage with Ayshe but I think it would be even better if we could wait and marry two-three years later. I think she was too young then (Ziya, 21, married, no children).

Unlike in rural Central Asia where a woman and a man entering into marital relationships in the pattern of an arranged marriage "often do not see one another prior to registration in the marriage registry office"<sup>114</sup> my sample reveals that in Azerbaijani villages, all the interviewees, including both women and men, either talked to or at least saw their future husbands and wives not only before a wedding day but before they were officially betrothed. As I mentioned previously, an official engagement comes just after a man's parents receive positive response from a girl's family. Here I want to bring an example of marriage of Tural, who married when he reached eighteen.

My marriage was my mother's decision. I don't have a father. I liked my future wife as soon as I saw her. It happened before we got affianced. I was eighteen and she was sixteen, then (Tural, 20, married, no children).

All the women-interviewees stated that they either saw or had a chance to talk to their future husbands before they were engaged. Here is the example of a typical answer of a woman who got married at an early age:

I respected my parents' decision and got married at the age of sixteen. I met my husband before our engagement and I liked him. I don't regret that I got married (Nezaket, 34, mother of a daughter).

Furthermore, while the parents arrange the marriage of their daughters they allow a man to come to their place to see and to talk to her. This happens after the talks and the agreement with a man's family. Zaur, a former military pilot, a father of five children, lives according to *sharia*, Islamic law. He says that according to *sharia* no parents can force their daughter into marriage. His daughter was married when she was fifteen with a

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<sup>114</sup> **Poliakov.** *Everyday Islam: Religion and Tradition in Rural Central Asia*, 54

man seven years older than her who lived in the same neighborhood with them. He said that his future *kureken*, son-in-law visited their place and had a chance to talk to his daughter. His son-in-law was coming to Zaur's place twice or three times a week during seven months before wedding but of course after two families agreed on marriage.

It's not a simple thing to marry off a daughter. She should be morally and physically prepared to start a new life to live in another household and with a new family, with husband and parents-in-law. I saw that she was prepared for a new life. However, it was not only my decision. His parents visited our house several times before we finally agreed to the marriage of my daughter. First, we discussed this issue with my wife. Daughters are normally close to their mothers and mother knows better how well a girl feels prepared to start a new life. Then, we talked to our daughter and asked her opinion. She didn't say anything. In our family in such cases "no" means negative answer but silence means "as you say" which means her consent (Zaur, 39, married, father of three daughters and two sons).

According to the results of the survey conducted by the State Committee working with the religious institutions published in the on-line press, in villages of Azerbaijan more than seventy per cent of girls at an early age are coerced by their parents to enter into marital relations through practice of *kebin*, a religious marriage; these girls are deprived of the right to consent to choose husbands as the decision whom to marry is made upon the agreement of parents.<sup>115</sup> However, in the overwhelming majority of cases in my sample, parents (either mothers or fathers) stated that they received the consent of their daughters while arranging the marriage as they are aware that in Islam the creation of a family is impossible without consent of both sides: a woman and a man getting into marriage.

There are also some cases when the parents decide to marry their son when his mother is sick and can't take care of the household, i.e. when she needs help because

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<sup>115</sup> **Day.Az**, V Azerbaijan Susestvuyut Fakti Zamuzestva Maloletnix Devocek [There are Facts of Marriages of Under-aged Girls in Azerbaijan], May 20, 2006. <http://www.day.az/news/society/49140.html> (accessed May 22, 2009).



there are no more single daughters left in the household. The solution then is to bring a daughter-in-law into the family. Senuber, is Ziya's mother and Ayshe's mother-in-law. One issue that drew my attention when Ziya answered my question about a custom of getting married at an early age in their family was that none of Ziya's four married sisters started their families as early as his wife Ayshe. One of Ziya's sisters married when she reached nineteen and three other sisters married in their early and mid twenties. I asked about this issue Sanuber, Ayshe's mother-in-law. She told me the following:

My daughter-in-law Ayshe is a daughter of my husband's friend and when my son saw her he loved her. I don't think that it's a good idea to marry at so early age because a girl at her fourteen-fifteen doesn't understand a lot of things in life, she doesn't understand what a family means and she is not aware about family values. It's better to wait until 19-20. After engagement I wanted them to wait a bit but my husband told me that due to my sickness (I have health problems) it's better to marry them so that she could help me in the household. Her mother also didn't wait after engagement (Senuber, 65, married, mother of four daughters and two sons).

Furthermore, I will examine the issue of age difference between a wife and a husband in early marriage. The survey I discussed above indicates that the vast majority of girls were coerced to enter into marital relations with the men much older than the girls.<sup>116</sup> Nonetheless, my sample shows that the average age difference between a man and a woman in a couple is three-four years. There are some patterns where the age difference between a husband and a wife is not more than a year. Here I will discuss the example of Ayten and Rehim whose marriage was arranged by their parents and with the consent of both Ayten and Rehim. They lived in the same neighborhood and knew each other from childhood. Rehim was seventeen and Ayten was sixteen by the time of their marriage.

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<sup>116</sup> **Day.Az**, V Azerbaijane Susestvuyut Fakti Zamuzestva Maloletnix Devocek [There are Facts of Marriages of Under-aged Girls in Azerbaijan], May 20, 2006. <http://www.day.az/news/society/49140.html> (accessed May 22, 2009).

Available studies on early marriages are mainly focused on arranged and coerced patterns of early marriages which are a result of parents' agreement whereas my sample shows that another pattern of early marriages when a couple decides to get married without parents' consent also exists.

### ***2.3 Bride-kidnapping or Early Marriages against Parents' Will***

*Goshulubqacma* is a form of bride-kidnapping when a couple decides to run away. Usually, a man brings a woman to the house of one of his relatives' where she stays until a wedding party is held. According to Guliyeva, *qoshulubqacma* is a way of getting into marriage when parents of a woman or a man is against their marriage or when either or both families lack of funds to follow all pre-wedding ceremonies; *qoshulubqacma* rarely happens in Azerbaijan.<sup>117</sup>

However, among my interviewees there were four cases of *qoshulubqacma*: one occurred over thirty years ago, two happened over ten years ago, and one took place two years ago. Alizade and Abbasov claim that bride-kidnapping contravenes the tradition of our country and it is negatively perceived by society.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, in the case of bride-kidnapping parents of a woman don't talk to their daughter until parents of a man visit them and ask to forgive their children but this doesn't necessarily mean that forgiveness will take place immediately.<sup>119</sup> Sometimes it happens before a wedding party and sometimes it can take months or years for parents to forgive their daughter after the wedding party. The parents of a man even if they at first don't consent have to eventually agree after the fact of bride-kidnapping took place. Otherwise, according to the Article

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<sup>117</sup> **Guliyeva.** *Azərbaycanda Muasir Kend Ailesi ve Aile Meisheti* [Modern Village Family and Family Life in Azerbaijan], 124

<sup>118</sup> **Alizade** and Abbasov. *Aile* [Family], 132.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

144.1 of the Criminal Code of the Azerbaijan Republic their son can be punished for kidnapping “by imprisonment for the term of five to ten years”.<sup>120</sup> Suleyman, nineteen, told how he and his future wife decided to marry despite the fact that their parents were against their marriage:

We got married two years ago when I was seventeen and my wife was not even sixteen. My parents were against my marriage at such an early age but I put them before the fact. We live in the same household with my parents. Her parents still don't talk to us (Suleyman, 19, married, no children).

Elmira, a young woman, thinks that *qoshulubqacma* is not the best form of getting into marriage. She knew that her parents couldn't afford the expenses of pre-wedding ceremonies and decided to leave her parents' house with her future husband Telman.

Telman told me that there will be a wedding party of his brother and they could celebrate two weddings the same day. We agreed that his parents will visit my parents before wedding. The first time they went my father was really angry. In a while they visited my parents again and this time my parents decided to forgive me (Elmira, 29, married, mother of two sons).

Fergane, a young woman, told me that it was not easy for her to leave her parents' house but she thinks that they didn't have any other way to get married as her parents were against their marriage. She studied in the same school with her future husband.

We loved each other and we ran away together. I was thirteen, then. Our parents had to put up with this. We live together with his parents (Fergane, 23, married, mother of two daughters).

Zemfira's case happened over thirty years ago when she was fourteen. When I asked how she decided to get married without parents' consent she told me the following:

Mukhtar fell in love with me from the first sight and told me that a few months later he was going to serve in the army but before going to the army he wanted to get married with me. Since my parents wouldn't agree for my marriage at such a young age I decided to go with him. He brought me to their house and when his parents came home from work and asked about me he explained that he wanted to get married with me. A month later we had a wedding party (Zemfira, 55, married, mother of five daughters).

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<sup>120</sup> **Criminal Code** of the Azerbaijan Republic, September 1 2000.  
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4417f82d4.html> (accessed March 30, 2009).

In this subchapter I brought the examples of people who married at an early age without involving their parents in the first place. Further, I will examine how gender and education interact with early marriage.

## ***2.4 Early Marriage and the Level of Education***

On one side, studies on early marriages show correlation between the age of the marriage of a woman and her level of education, i.e. early marriage is related to lack of her educational attainment.<sup>121</sup> On another side, the earlier a girl enters into marital relationships the bigger are the chances that she will give up attending school.<sup>122</sup> The results of surveys conducted by NGOs in a number of regions of Azerbaijan among parents of girls who stopped attending schools the main reason of dropouts turned out to be early marriage.<sup>123</sup> This factor influenced the decrease in the number of girls who finished secondary schools. In 1995 girls comprised 50.8 % of schoolchildren in Azerbaijan whereas the situation had changed in 2005 when girls comprised 47.7 % of all pupils attending secondary schools.<sup>124</sup> Early marriage affects the education of the girls. According to Huseynova, in one of the villages 2250-2285 pupils are accepted to a secondary school yearly and 45% of them comprises girls, however, each year 120-150 girls don't finish the school.<sup>125</sup> Some of them drop out of the school because of the socio-economic hardships but most of them get married.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> **Jensen** and Thornton. "Early female marriage in the developing world," 13.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>123</sup> **Azerbaijan Gender Information Center**. Research and Surveys on Violence Against Women. [http://gender-az.org/index\\_en.shtml?id\\_doc=301](http://gender-az.org/index_en.shtml?id_doc=301) (accessed December 12, 2008).

<sup>124</sup> **Human Rights Center** of Azerbaijan. Alternative Report On the Compliance of the Azerbaijan Republic with The Convention on Elimination of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women (2007) in Azerbaijan. Gender Information Center, [http://gender-az.org/index\\_en.shtml?id\\_doc=134](http://gender-az.org/index_en.shtml?id_doc=134) (accessed December 12, 2008).

<sup>125</sup> **Huseynova**. Molla Kebini və Qadin Huquqlari [Mullah Kebin and Women's Rights project].

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*.

In some villages the number of girls studying in the last grades of the secondary school, i.e. the tenth and the eleventh grades are decreasing. For example, according to the survey conducted in one of the village schools, at the tenth grade of the school in 2006/2007 academic year there were sixteen girls studying in the tenth grade of the school, in 2007/2008 academic year fourteen girls continued their studies at the tenth grade whereas in 2008/2009 academic year seven girls studied in the tenth grade in the same school.<sup>127</sup> There are villages in Azerbaijan where girls drop out of the school after they finish the fifth and the sixth grades.<sup>128</sup>

In my sample among sixteen women-interviewees married at an early age two women dropped out of a secondary school after they finished the fifth and seventh grades accordingly, six women stopped attending a secondary school after they finished the ninth grade, one completed a secondary school, i.e. eleventh grade and five women received secondary technical education whereas one is a student and one has a university degree. Furthermore, according to my sample, among six men married between seventeen and nineteen years old two dropped out of a secondary school after they finished the ninth grade, one completed a secondary school, two graduated technical schools and one is a university student.

In some villages of Turkey “women with illiterate fathers had 3.71 times more risk of having an adolescent marriage than women with fathers that graduated high school.”<sup>129</sup> My sample also indicates that there is a connection between the level of education of parents and their decision to remove their daughters from school and marry

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<sup>127</sup> **Huseynova.** Molla Kebini və Qadin Huquqlari [Mullah Kebin and Women's Rights project].

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> **Ertem,** Meliksah, Gunay Saka, Ali Ceylan, Vasfiye Deger and Sema Ciftci. “The Factors Associated with Adolescent Marriages and Outcomes of Adolescent Pregnancies in Mardin Turkey.” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 39, no 2 (2008): 229-243, 234.

them off at an early age. When I asked Ayshe about education in her family she told me the following:

My mother finished eight grades and my father completed a secondary school. I finished five grades and my husband completed nine grades of a secondary school. (Ayshe, 17, married, no children).

According to my sample, early marriages more frequently happen in the families where parents have incomplete secondary or complete secondary education rather than in families with parents having university degree. Among three interviewees-mothers of daughters who got married when they were very young one finished a secondary school, one completed a technical school and one has university degree (and the latter was against her daughter's marriage). Firengiz's daughter got married at the age of fifteen. She didn't expect that her daughter would marry at such a young age.

I married after I finished my studies at university and I had hoped that my daughter would have done so. I and my husband didn't want our daughter to marry being so young. We wanted her to continue her studies and to be independent. She even didn't finish her secondary school. They loved each other and decided to marry without our consent. I am not in favor of early marriages. (Firengiz, 61, married, mother of a daughter and a son).

Firengiz is an example of parents with a university degree who prefer their daughters to continue their studies before marriage. Women and men with university degree are less inclined to marry their daughter off at an early age rather than parents with incomplete or complete secondary education.

As I mentioned previously, there is a woman in my sample who is continuing her education at present. Ayten was sixteen when she got married. She and her future husband lived in the same neighborhood and they knew each other from childhood. She fell in love with him and was happy when their parents decided to marry them. When I asked her how she managed to continue her studies she told me the following:

By the time of my marriage I finished a secondary school and I told my parents that I want to continue my studies. Then I discussed this with Rehim, my future husband and we agreed that we will both continue our studies. Now I'm taking a correspondence course at Ganja Pedagogical University and he is a student of the same university (Ayten, 20, married, mother of a daughter).

Ayten's example shows that there are women among those married early who want and manage to continue their studies.

Among my women-interviewees there is one case when a woman who got married at an early age has a university degree. In some cases although following their parents' decision women who marry early manage to achieve their goals of study. They understand that education can help them to make a career and earn money independently. They are able to negotiate their position within exiting structure of subordination though it not easy especially when there is still is a traditional gender division of labour and stereotypes about women's and men's types of work in villages. However, Metanet managed to become a journalist which was her dream. After she completed a ten years' secondary school program for six years with a gold medal she told her mother that she wanted to become a journalist. Her mother's answer was that it's impossible for her to study in Baku as their family was poor and they couldn't afford supporting their children's studies in Baku.

However, there was another reason why I was not allowed to become a journalist. My mother told me that nobody would marry me if I became a journalist as this was not a profession for a woman in the village. My mother also mentioned that she didn't allow my two older sisters to study in Baku because it is easier to keep daughters us under control when they study close to home (Metanet, 40, divorced, mother of a daughter and a son).

As Metanet mentioned, there were two possible professions for a woman in the village: she could become either a teacher or a nurse. Metanet was not even asked what she wanted and against her will she had to enter Ganja Pedagogical School which is

situated close to their village. After lots of protests she agreed to marry a person who said that he did not mind if she wanted to work.

The idea to become a journalist was still on my mind. My future husband didn't mind my work at school and my next step was to enter a journalism department at university in Baku which I did when my daughter turned three years old (Metanet, 40, divorced, mother of a daughter and a son).

In existing gender power relationships Metanet negotiated her position before she was allowed to go on with her education and eventually she reached her goal.

Another factor that drew my attention was that among women-interviewees in the most of the cases of early marriages of the last ten-fifteen years in comparison with early marriages before 1990s women have fewer chances to continue their studies than women who married at an early age before 1990s. However, the women married early before 1990s most probably had secondary education rather than university degree. Mirvari got married in 1937 when she was fourteen. Her future husband's parents passed away by the time they married. He had a married sister who lived in their neighbourhood and who recommended her brother to see Mirvari and if he liked her to marry her. He was a teacher in the village. After getting married with him Mirvari continued her studies and became a nurse.

I finished my studies and worked as a nurse in the hospital for fifty years (Mirvari, 86, mother of two daughters and three sons, grandmother and great-grandmother).

Mirvari is the only woman in my sample who never experienced living in an extended family who has had her own household. In the next subchapter I will discuss how age, gender and children interact in influencing women's status living in extended families.



## 2.5 Age, Gender and Children as Factors Defining Women's Status in the Household

All the women-interviewees (besides Mirvari) have experiences living in the same household with husbands' parents (when men have parents): some of them still live together and the others moved to a new house. The respect to elderly, specifically respect of children towards their parents is central to the families of Azerbaijan. As Guliyeva puts it, the respect to elderly is a key determinant of intra-households relationships in the villages of Azerbaijan<sup>130</sup>. According to Ilcan, in rural Turkey "older married women (especially the wives of paternal heads) exercise some authority over household members in social and work relations".<sup>131</sup> My interviewees presented contradictory opinions about relationships with a mother-in-law. However, in the vast majority of the cases mothers-in-law exercise power over their sons and therefore, over their daughters-in-law while living in the same household. Furthermore, in all the cases of families living in the same household with parents-in-law mother-in-law help a lot in raising children. According to Guliyeva in village families a mother-in-law and other relatives in the household help *gelin* with domestic work and with raising children.<sup>132</sup> Naile's marriage was arranged by her parents when she was sixteen. She respected her parents' decision and didn't go against their will. As she said this was her destiny.

After wedding I moved to the household of my husband's parents. It was difficult to live in a big family but what to do? It was my destiny. My mother-in-law wanted that I would get up before dawn, clean the yard, milk a cow, churn, and prepare breakfast for everybody. However, she was kind and helped me to take care of my children. We moved in a separate household after the birth of my second son. Years passed and I've become a mother-in-law.

<sup>130</sup> **Guliyeva.** *Azərbaycanda Muasir Kend Ailesi ve Aile Meisheti* [Modern Village Family and Family Life in Azerbaijan], 111.

<sup>131</sup> **Ilcan.** "Fragmentary Encounters in a Moral World: Household Power Relations and Gender Politics," 40.

<sup>132</sup> **Guliyeva.** *Azərbaycanda Muasir Kend Ailesi ve Aile Meisheti* [Modern Village Family and Family Life in Azerbaijan], 81.

Now I'd better understand my mother-in-law [laughing] (Nailya, 47, married, mother of three sons).

Naile's status in the household changed with years from a very young woman to a mother-in-law when she gained power over her sons and daughters-in-law. Another example of a woman who exercised power over members of the household was Metanet's grandmother.

Metanet remembered that although her father had an authority in the household his mother, i.e. Metanet's grandmother could often influence his decisions.

I lived through serious tensions in relationships with my parents when I rejected to marry to a man with a good social position. My parents were sick of my behaviour and my father told me that I don't respect him. He hardly talked to me and it was my grandmother who helped me to restore the relationships with my parents because her opinion was always significant for my father (Metanet, 40, divorced, mother of a daughter and a son).

Women gain power in the household not only because of their age but also because of children they have. As Geybullayev mentions, historically, reproduction was central to marriage relationships.<sup>133</sup> In the past the status of a woman and her husband's attitude towards her was determined by her ability to have a child.<sup>134</sup> A man who didn't have children could participate in the village councils but didn't have a right to vote.<sup>135</sup> Infertile women often were not invited to women's parties related to birth of a child.<sup>136</sup> Reproduction was one of main determinants of intra-household relationships in the villages of Azerbaijan. In village families if a woman can't have a child during the first

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<sup>133</sup> **Geybullayev.** *Azərbaycanda Aile və Nikah* [Family and Marriage in Azerbaijan], 265.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 265.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 265.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 265.

two-three years of marriage her mother and mother-in-law start seriously worrying about it. Traditionally, barrenness was one of main reasons of divorces.<sup>137</sup>

Women expected that they would become mothers soon after marriage; however, my sample shows that the majority of women-interviewees could not have children during the first two-three years of marriage and therefore, women didn't care about having a girl or a boy.

My daughter is three years old. She was born in three years after we got married. I got treatment for along time to become a mother. That's why it didn't matter for me to have a girl or a boy, the most important thing was to have a child (Ayten, 20, married, mother of a daughter).

In a similar case it doesn't matter for men to have a daughter or a son as their first child. But they'd prefer their second child to be a son. As Hartman puts it, "agricultural societies display a sharp preference for sons that has often been linked to an allegedly higher value on men as workers and as heirs".<sup>138</sup> Ayten's husband said that he would like to have a son as well.

Ayshe and Ziya don't have children yet.

It doesn't matter whether it will be a boy or a girl. I will be happy to have a daughter but I would like to have a son as a second child. (Ziya, 21, married, no children).

Fergane has two children. Her first child was born in two years after marriage.

I have two daughters. We live together with my parents-in-law and my mother-in-law helps me a lot to raise children. Everybody in the family including my husband and my parents-in-law are expecting that I will give a birth to a boy (Fergane, 23, married, mother of two daughters).

<sup>137</sup> **Gadirzade**. "Sovremennaya Semya u Azerbayjantsev (po materialam selskix rayonov Nakicevanskoy ASSR)" [Modern Family of Azerbaijanis (based on the materials of rural districts of Nakchivan ASSR)], 20

<sup>138</sup> **Hartman**, Mary S. *The Household and the Making of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 40

In the final subchapter I will discuss perceptions of early marriages by women and men to complete my analysis of such marriages in a small village in Azerbaijan.

## ***2.6 Perceptions of Early Marriages***

To my question regarding advantages and disadvantages of early marriages I received mainly responses about advantages of such marriages. All the women-interviewees with experiences of early marriage in my sample mentioned that the positive side of the early marriage is to have adult children at a young age. When I asked Ayshe whether she wanted to have a child in a near future she told me that it is difficult to imagine the family without a child and she would like to have a child soon. Moreover, she told that she would like to be a young mother with adult children like her mother.

However, some of the women in the sample especially young ones think it is better to get a good education first, to find a job not to be dependent on husband. Fergane told me that she is proud to have two daughters but the only thing that she would like to change is her financial dependency on her husband. Ayten said that women in early marriages should not stop attending school and should be able to combine their marriage life and their studies.

As for men's responses the positive side of early marriage for them is to be together with a beloved woman. Most importantly, men think that a positive side of early marriage is that a man can adapt a woman to his character, i.e. her character is being formed while she already lives with him in the same household.

I will analyse my main findings of my research in the conclusion part of the thesis; however, I would like to mention that in spite of leaving in the households characterized by patriarchal power relations women in early marriages in my sample don't perceive themselves as victims.

## Conclusion

The aim of my thesis was to explore early marriage in of villages of the western Azerbaijan in order to determine the factors that lead to early marriages and how women are affected in such marriages.

Both the literature and the narratives of my interviewees demonstrate, firstly, that one of the main reasons for early marriages is an agrarian way of life in which a household plays a fundamental and essential part in organizing of production and family survival. Secondly, both the literature and my protagonists indicate that early marriages are a result of a custom which parents follow with their children. Available studies and my findings show that the number of children in a family is also one of the factors that lead to early marriages, i.e. the more children, especially girls, are in the family, the more it is likely that parents will arrange the marriage of their daughters.

Further, I found that the literature concerning early marriages mainly discusses the pattern of an arranged marriage when girls are forced into marital relationships without their consent with men much older than them. Furthermore, I found that the available studies leave girls' consent in arranged marriages as well as marriages without parents' permission out of picture. At the same time my findings based on narratives of my protagonists allowed me to discuss the form of an arranged marriage when marriage is not only an agreement between the parents of two families but also a result of consent to marriage given to parents by their daughters in the rural areas of Azerbaijan. I also found that there is another pattern of marriage, which according to the secondary literature and stories of my protagonists is not supported by public opinion but still takes place in the villages of Azerbaijan, i.e. a form of marriage when a couple decide to marry

without taking into account parents' opinion hoping that they will be forgiven in the future.

As for my question regarding the link between education and early marriage I found that much of the literature I have consulted exploring the connection of early marriage and girls' education overlooks the role the level of education of parents plays in their decision to marry off their daughters. I also found that the wish of girls to continue their education allows them to negotiate their position in existing structure of subordination as a result of which they were able to go on with their studies. I agree with Ikamari that the more a woman is educated the less likely she will get married at an early age;<sup>139</sup> however, my sample showed the examples of women who managed to continue their education while being married. My sample also showed that the better parents are educated the less likely it is that they will marry their daughters off. Instead, they want their children, including both sons and daughters, to receive a good education first and to get married afterwards.

Both available studies and the narratives of my protagonists demonstrate that early marriages are more common in societies where women and men are assigned traditional gender roles in the family and traditional gendered division of responsibilities in the household. In this regard, age, gender and reproduction play an important role in defining a woman's status in the household. Since respecting one's elders is central to families in Azerbaijan and specifically to households in the villages of the country my sample showed that women receive more power with age in extended families whereas

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<sup>139</sup> **Ikamari**, "The Effect of Education on the Timing of Marriage in Kenya," [www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol12/1/](http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol12/1/) (accessed February 25, 2009), 21.

the situation is different when a couple managed to move to a separate household where a younger woman gains more power with giving birth to children.

Since motherhood is essential to the families of Azerbaijan, immediate childbirth after marriage in villages is a crucial factor for a woman to gain more power in the household. Women's status is even more affected if a woman gives a birth to a son. Available studies and women-interviewees mentioned the health problems they had during their first pregnancies, however, the vast majority of them told me that children are central to family and they wanted to have a child immediately after marriage but often it took two or three years of treatment for them to become mothers. Otherwise, they don't see a reason to get married. They see the fact that early marriage allows one to have adult children while still being young themselves as the main advantage of the early marriage. The men also mentioned that children are important for them but they also indicated the age of a woman as an important factor of relationships within the household. In their opinion it is easier to adapt women's character to their (i.e. men's) characters and the rules in the household when a woman is very young and her character is not properly formed yet.

I want to conclude that this work was an attempt to challenge the discourse of women's victimization in early marriages. I acknowledge that there were limitations of my work due to shortage of time and disproportion of women's and men's numbers, i.e. in my sample there were more women than men. The narratives of my interviewees give a – in some respects limited – picture of early marriages in rural Azerbaijan. However, I hope that my work will be a contribution to the literature about marriage in Azerbaijan and will open more windows for further research related to early marriages, for example, early marriages among internally displaced persons and refugees. Further, a labour

migration and, in particular men's migration to cities within the country as well as their migration abroad in a search of jobs as another factor that can possibly lead to early marriages can be a topic for future studies.



## ***APPENDIX I: PROFILE OF THE INTERVIEWEES***

### **Women**

Name of a woman married at an early age and her age now	Age of marriage	Marital status	Number of children if any	Place
Zemfira, 55	14	Married	5 daughters	lives in a village
Elmira, 29	16	Married	2 sons	lives in a village
Efsane, 21	16	Divorced	no children	lives in a village
Ayshe, 17	15	Married	no children	lives in a village
Ayten, 20	16	Married	a daughter	lives in a village
Mirvari, 86	14	Widowed	2 daughters and 3 sons	lives in a village
Metanet, 40	16	Divorced	a daughter and a son	used to live in a village
Ferqane, 23	13	Married	2 daughters	lives in a village
Nise, 25	16	Married	a daughter	lives in a village
Valide, 85	17	Married	4 daughters	lives in a village
Naile, 47	16	Married	3 sons	lives in a village
Melahet, 46	16	In her second marriage	2 daughters and a son	lives in a village
Nezaket, 34	16	Married	a daughter	lives in a village
Fazile, 85	14	Widowed	3 daughters and 4 sons	lives in a village
Yasemen, 38	16	Married	3 daughters and a son	lives in a village
Terane, 52	16	Married	3 daughters and a son	lives in a village

Name of a woman, mother of a daughter /a son married at early age and her age now	Age of marriage	Daughter/Son's age of marriage	Marital status	Place
Firengiz, 61	22	16	Married	lives in a village
Senuber, 65	25	19	Married	lives in a village
Mehriban, 62	30	17	Married	lives in a village
Tamilla, 63	25	16	Married	lives in a village
Rena, 57	20	16	Married	lives in a village

## Continuation of Appendix I

### Men

Name of a man and his age now	Age of marriage	Age of his wife at Marriage	Number of children if any	Place	Comments
Suleyman, 19	17	16	no children	lives in a village	–
Tural, 20	18	16	no children	lives in a village	–
Rehim, 21	17	16	a daughter	lives in a village	–
Zaur, 39	19	17	3 daughters and 2 sons	lives in a village	His mother married at 15, he married off his daughter at 15
Mukhtar, 57	17	15	5 daughters	lives in a village	–
Vagif, 43	22	16	2 daughters and a son	lives in a village	–
Sabir, 55	20	17	3 daughters and a son	lives in a village	–
Samir, 47	24	16	3 daughters	lives in a village	–
Togrul, 66	26	25	4 daughters and 2 sons	lives in a village	his son at 19 married with a girl at 15
Natig, 50	24	22	3 daughters	lives in a village	his son at age of 19 married with a girl at age of 15
Maarif, 64	32	26	2 daughters and a son	lives in a village	his son married at 17
Chingiz, 64	30	29	a daughter and a son	lives in a village	his mother married at 16
Azer, 34	19	16	2 daughters	lives in a village	his mother married at 14
Ziya, 21	19	15	No children	lives in a village	–

## **APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Questions for women**

1. How did it happen that you got married when you were so young? Follow-up questions: how old were you? Was it your parents' decision? What was your reaction? Did you see your husband before a wedding day? When you saw your future husband first did you like him? Did you have a chance to talk to him?
2. Was it a religious marriage? When did you officially get married, i.e. register your marriage in marriage registration office?
3. Did you and your husband after marriage live in the household of your husband's family? Follow up questions: If yes, for how long? Why did you have to live there? How was it? What were your responsibilities in the household when you just moved? How did you build up your relationships with in-laws, your husband's parents, brothers and sisters? Once you could/did move out: how was this achieved?
4. How did you feel about living in a big family? Could you visit your parents? Friends? Do you feel that intra-household relationships changed over time? If yes: from when on? What do you think the reasons are?
5. Did you get a chance to continue your education? If yes, how did you manage it?
6. Do you have children or how many children do you have? Follow-up questions: did you give a birth to your first child immediately after marriage? How did things work out with the baby? Did you get any help, advise, and from whom? Did you feel prepared yourself to have a baby being so young?
7. In case of only girls in the family: how does your husband and your husband's parents react that you don't have sons? Does it affect your relationships? In case of women with adult children: would you like your daughter to get married at earlier age as you did (or would you like your daughter to get education and to find a job first?) How do you feel about this?
8. Who makes decisions in your family? What, if you don't agree with your husband? What is his reaction? Can he accept it calmly, try to discuss with you or is he unhappy? If unhappy, how does he react? Did any of these issues change over time? If yes, why and in which directions? Do you feel that you have now, and had in the past, influence on these relationships?
9. What are, in your view, overall advantages and disadvantages of early marriage?

### **Questions for men**

1. How old were you when you got married?
2. Was your marriage arranged by your parents? Follow-up question: could you disagree with your parents in case you didn't like your future wife or you didn't feel ready to start a family? What is in your view the ideal way for a man to get married? When did you see your future wife first did you like her? Did you have a chance to talk to her?
3. How did you feel about getting marriage with a girl at a young age?
4. Can your wife visit her parents, relatives, friends without asking your permission?
5. Did you and your wife after marriage live in the household of your parents? Follow up questions: If yes, for how long? Why did you have to live there? What were your responsibilities in the household towards your family and your new wife? Once you moved out: How was this achieved?

## Continuation of Appendix II: Interview Guide

6. Did you engage in paid employment or other work outside the house before and after marriage?
7. How do you think whether it's good to have a wife who works at home, or to have a wife who works outside home and can contribute in this way to a family budget?
8. Would you like your daughter to get married as early as your wife did?
9. Do you have children or how many children do you have? Follow-up questions: did you have your first child immediately after marriage? Did you feel prepared yourself to have the baby? How were the responsibilities about the baby divided? In case if there are only daughters in the family: how do you feel that you don't have a son?
10. What are, in your view, overall advantages and disadvantages of early marriage?

### **Questions for wife's parents**

1. At what age did you get married?
2. How did it happen that you decided to marry off your daughter at an early age? What was the main reason when you decided that time has come for your daughter to get married?
3. Did you ask her consent? What was her reaction?
4. Is it related to tradition that girls in your family get married at early age
5. How do you feel about her education? Will she continue her education?
6. How do you think whether it is good to have a child immediately after marriage?
7. What are, in your view, overall advantages and disadvantages of early marriage?

### **Questions for husband's parents**

1. At what age did you get married?
2. What is your attitude to early marriages?
3. Why did you decide to marry your son to a girl at younger age?
4. Is it related to tradition that men in your family get married with girls at an early age?
5. What do you think about girls' education? Will the wife of your son be able to continue her education?
6. Do you think whether it's good that a couple has the first child immediately after the marriage?
7. What are, in your view, overall advantages and disadvantages of early marriage?

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