Research article

Gender differences in mate selection criteria among university students in Bangladesh: A study from the social homogamy perspective

Md. Nurul Islam[*]

University of Chittagong, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

Gender differences in mate selection criteria across cultures are common. In various cross-cultural research, these gender differences are explained by different socio-cultural theories. Therefore, the present study was aimed to investigate gender differences in mate selection criteria in Bangladeshi culture and to explain these differences by the social homogamy theory. An unstructured interview method was followed to obtain the aim of the study. A total of 120 unmarried Bangladeshi university students were chosen to participate the study whose age were ranging from 21 to 24 years ($M = 22.45$, $SD = 1.75$). The participants were selected by a convenient sampling method from four universities in Bangladesh. They were equally divided in terms of gender and university. A total of twelve mate selection criteria were found in the study, in which each student averagely responded 7.23 criteria. The highest and lowest number of responses were observed in education ($n = 108$) and residential status ($n = 33$) criterion, respectively. The top-ranked criterion considered by male and female students was physical attractiveness and education respectively. Gender difference in mate selection preferences was found to be significant in the study. Though, gender difference was significant in age, education, financial status, physical appearance, physical attractiveness, and profession criterion; however, the gender difference was not significant in character, in-law family's education, in-law family's social approval, religion, region, and residential status. Mate selection criteria considered by Bangladeshi students are explained by the social homogamy theory. The study would help Bangladeshi people to be aware of their mate selection in their own Bangladeshi culture.

1. Introduction

Marital relationships are one of the most significant human relationships. A marital relationship is to be needed to bond a long-term relationship of mutual care and commitment (Lawrence and Nohria, 2001). A smooth marital relationship depends how well an individual selects a mate, so mate selection is one of the most important decisions individuals make in their lives (Abdullah et al., 2011; Buss et al., 2001; Maliki, 2009). There are several factors influencing mate selection worldwide, for example, cultural and social values, mate selection preferences, one's own value system, and society and social conditions. There is a wide range of cultural variations in mate selection (Buss et al., 2001; Newman and Newman, 1995; Regan et al., 2000). A couple cannot be happy if they do not understand each other. The possibility of a happy married life is lowered if mate selection is not based upon appropriate criteria (Abdullah et al., 2011). Mate selection is a culturally defined process that varies from society to society and depends on some factors such as health, age, body shape, societal conditions, education, religion,

clothing, physique, beauty, financial status, and occupation (Alvi et al., 2014; Maliki, 2009; O'Neil, 2006). The concept of mate selection criterion is not universal; it differs from society to society and from culture to culture, and it changes over times. For example, the concept of 'beauty' varies from society to society and from culture to culture (Todosijevic et al., 2003).

There are a number of socio-cultural theories to explain an individual's mate selection process. The social homogamy theory is one of the most important socio-cultural theories developed by sociologists (e.g., Eckland, 1968). According to this theory, individuals are attracted to people with similar socio-cultural backgrounds including age, race, ethnicity, ethics, socioeconomic status, religion, physical characteristics, proximity (nearby living), and political views. A social homogamous marriage is made between two individuals who are culturally similar (Huber and Fieder, 2011). In the study entitled 'mate selection theories', Eckland (1968) said that social homogamy is a mechanism which serves to maintain the status quo and conserve traditional beliefs and values. Social homogamy is a concept of social equality by which people select

those partners who are similar to their social backgrounds (Brynin et al., 2008). Despite of interracial conflicts and ethnic distances individuals are attracted to people who are socialized in the same environment and similar social background. People with similar attitudes and values, and similar characteristics, including political attitudes, lifestyle, values, personality, appearance, and ethnicity are attracted to each other (Botwin et al., 1997; Keller et al., 1996; Sterbova and Valentova, 2012). According to Schwartz (2013), marriage and mate selection depends on some prime factors such as socio-economic status, racial and ethnic background, and religious status (Schwartz, 2013). The social homogamy theory can be suitable in explaining some mate selection criteria, for example, proximity (Kalmijn and Flap, 2001), similarity in preference (Nojo et al., 2012), economic prospects (Sweeney and Cancian, 2004), social status and education (Farooq and Arshad, 2017), and values (Miner et al., 2009).

1.1. Literature reviews

Ample studies have been conducted to know whether mate selection criteria is differs among people in each culture. Physical attractiveness and physical appearance are the most influential mate selection criteria found by the researchers over the world (e.g., Abdullah et al., 2011; Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 2001; Buunk et al., 2002; Li et al., 2002; Shackelford et al., 2005; Todosijevic et al., 2003). Besides physical attractiveness and physical appearance, physical health is another important mate selection criterion found by the researchers (e.g., Buunk et al., 2002; Maliki, 2009; Regan et al., 2000). Beauty was found to be an important mate selection criterion in Pakistani culture (Alvi et al., 2014). Financial prospect was found to be a highly significant mate selection criterion in many cultures (e.g., Badahdah and Tiemann, 2009; Buss et al., 2001; Buunk et al., 2002; Maliki, 2009; Shackelford et al., 2005). In many societies, education was proved as an important mate selection criterion (e.g., Acitelli et al., 2001; Kalmijn and Flap, 2001; Maliki, 2009; O'Neil, 2006; Todosijevic et al., 2003). In many countries, the graduates preferred to marry who were graduates like them (e.g., Kalmijn and Flap, 2001; Maliki, 2009). College students in Serbia chose mates who had both good education and profession (Todosijevic et al., 2003).

Religion was an important mate selection criterion in some Muslim countries, for example, for example, Malaysia (Abdullah et al., 2011; Alavi et al., 2013; Badahdah and Tiemann, 2009), and Nigeria (Maliki, 2009). In many religious cultures, people expect to marry who have same religious faith with them as they think that religion is an integral force for a prospecting marital relationship (Badahdah and Tiemann, 2009; Maliki, 2009; Yahaya, 2009). In some researches, college students expressed that they would not choose mates from another religious group that is not their rather they would choose mates from their same religious group (Levi-Strauss, 2006; Maliki, 2009). Oguegbe and Onuecheta (2014) showed that the Nigerians students who had higher levels of religious affiliations were attracted to choose mates who had higher levels of religious affiliations. Age is viewed as an influential criterion in mate selection among people in modern contemporary societies (Uddin et al., 2017). The desire for similar age in mate selection is greater among people in modern societies than people in traditional societies (Glenn, 2000). The culture is the most influential criterion among all mate selection criteria that determines how an individual choose his/her mate. A comprehensive cultural study in mate selection preference was conducted in Malaysian culture (Alavi et al., 2013) as well as in Pakistani culture (Alvi et al., 2014). Alavi et al. (2013) found a total of eighteen mate selection criteria in Malaysian culture (e.g., religion, mental health, profession, physical attractiveness, financial status, intelligence, sociability, physical health, refinement and neatness, character, physical appearance, chastity, education, culture, marital status, in-law family's social status, in-law family's social approval, and age). The Nigerian university students considered character as one of the most important mate selection criteria (Maliki, 2009).

Buss (1989) conducted a study to test gender differences in mate selection preference among more than 10000 participants of 37 cultures. The participants rated the importance of each of 18 characteristics in a potential mate by using a 4-point scale. In selecting mates in each culture, the males preferred females who were younger than them and the females preferred males who were slightly older than them. In addition, in each culture, the males preferred the females who were physically attractive; and in 36 cultures, the females preferred the males who were industrious and financially rich (Buss, 1989). In Furnham's (2009) study, the females chose intelligence, height, education, conscientiousness, social skills, and political and religious value criteria for selecting their mates, whereas the males chose good looks for selecting their mates. In selecting mates, the men placed more value on physical attractiveness criterion than women (Schwarz and Hassebrauck, 2012). In Fisman's study (Fisman et al., 2006), the females responded more to intelligence and race of their mates, while the males responded more to the physical attractiveness of their mates. In mate choice survey, the women chose the men who had a higher level of the profession and status (Buss and Schmitt, 1993; Townsend and Levy, 1990). In Chen's study (Chen, 2002), the Chinese men considered beautiful, healthy, gentle, chaste, and youthful criteria for selecting their mates; whereas the Chinese women considered wealth, advanced academic degree, and height for selecting their mates. In both Singapore and US cultures, the men prioritized physical attractiveness to select their mates, whereas the women prioritized social status (Li et al., 2010). In the study of Farooq and Arshad (2017), the Pakistani students of both genders chose their mates who had same caste, social status, and education as they had.

Amador et al. (2005) examined gender difference in mate selection criteria. Both male and female participants indicated chastity and same religious background for selecting their mates. In selecting mates, the US males expressed preferences on physical attractiveness and sexy looking of their female mates, whereas the US females expressed preferences on warmth and kindness, financial and social status, and wealth of their male mates (Toro-Morn and Sprecher, 2003). Gil-Burmann et al. (2002) found physical attractiveness as the most significant mate selection criteria among men in all ages, whereas it was significant among women who were under 40 years of age, and it was not significant among women who were over 40 years of age. The result of the study of Evans and Brase (2007) revealed that the men chose physical attractiveness for their mates, whereas the women chose ambitiousness for their mates. Bech-- Sorensen and Pollet (2016) suggested that social change and societal norms could make a mate choice process flexible. In the study of Boxer et al. (2013), both men and women placed a high value on their mate's financial prospect. In their study Eastwick et al. (2014) showed that both male and female participants chose physical attractiveness and financial prospect for their mates. In a study, the Pakistani females chose Pakistani males who were physically attractive, were similar age like them, and were financially stable (Sarir et al., 2018) Gender differences in mate selection preferences had been studied in 45 countries (Walter et al., 2020). Men preferred attractive young mates and women preferred older mates with financial prospect. Cross-culturally, people of both genders chose mates who were closer to their own ages.

1.2. Rationale of the study

It is very important to identify mate selection criteria in establishing a balanced married life (Celik et al., 2012). People in every culture adopt a specific mate selection process and use specific criteria to choose their potential mates (Alavi et al., 2013, Alvi et al., 2014, Chen, 2002; Maliki, 2009). So, it is a need to know whether Bangladeshi culture adopts a specific mate selection process, or people in this culture use specific criteria to choose their mates. Gender difference in mate selection was prominent in the past decades in Bangladesh (Ahmed, 1986). At that time, the females had no choice to select their mates and only the males had the choice to select their mates (Ahmed, 1986). But, this scenario has been changing gradually from 1980 to present (Ahmed, 1986; Amin and

Das, 2013; Flicker et al., 2020; Sabur, 2014; Yasmin, 2013). Nowadays, both Bangladeshi males and females have freedom and equal rights to choose their mates (Amin and Das, 2013; Sabur, 2014; Szarota et al., 2021; Yasmin, 2013). So, it is a need to know whether gender differences are existed in the mate selection process in Bangladesh. Although, in a sense, the present study is a replica to some studies conducted on gender differences in mate selection preferences over the world; however, in a deeper sense, it is different from the previous studies. Instead of investigating expected gender differences, the present study attempts to investigate observed gender differences in long-term mate selection preferences. Moreover, the study would help us to know the degree of gender differences that have changed substantially over the last past decades worldwide (e.g., Amin and Das, 2013; Cherlin, 2004).

The social homogamy theory explains mate selection preference by homogamous traits (Brynin et al., 2008; Eckland, 1968). This theory is significant for the present study as majority of the Bangladeshi people choose their mates on the basis of homogeneous traits (Sabur, 2014). Though Sabur (2014) emphasized the importance of this theory in explaining mate selection criteria in Bangladesh, but, he was unable to explain these criteria properly by this theory. So, it needs to conduct such a study in Bangladesh that would explain mate selection criteria properly by this theory. In general, the significance of the study is that it would provide a new knowledge about mate selection process in Bangladeshi culture. But, in particular, the study would help Bangladeshi people to know about their peoples' mate selection criteria and would help them to form a stable marital relationship in their life.

1.3. Objectives of the study

Three specific objectives were formulated in the present study. These were as follows:

1. To know mate selection criteria adopted by students in Bangladeshi culture.
2. To assess the differences between male and females in regards to mate selection criteria.
3. To explain mate selection criteria by the social homogamy theory.

2. Methods

2.1. Study participants

In the mate selection process, every culture has its own and common criteria (Buss et al., 1990). Therefore, the present study was conceived with the fact that the Bangladeshi people would have its own culture as well as would have some common criteria in mate selection. In order to pursue the study, a total of 120 non-married university students were selected who were age ranged between 21-24 years ($M = 22.45$, $SD = 1.75$). The students were selected through a convenient sampling method from four universities in Bangladesh. The participants were equally divided in terms of sex (male = 60, female = 60) and numbers of universities (30 students from each university). The participants were all undergraduates and they all had no professional identities at all. Among the participants, 108 (90%) were from the Muslim religious group and 12 (10%) were from the Hindu religious group.

The participants participated in the study were selected impartially. The researcher did not show any biasing or judgemental behaviors in selecting the study participants. The participants who contacted the researcher firstly were considered firstly to participate in the study. How did the researcher select study participants? Firstly, the researcher selected four universities conveniently from Chittagong city, Bangladesh. The researcher then contacted the respective authority of each university and sent an email by writing details about the research. The researcher requested the university authority to circulate this email to its under-graduate students. In the email, the researcher had pointed out all points relevant to the study and described how a student will participate in the present study. The students were instructed that if they are interested to participate in the study they have to be contacted by the researcher through email first. After getting emails from students, the researcher had confirmed the participation of students in the study. Based on students' email (receiving first, confirming first), confirmation emails were sent to only first fifteen students from each sex in each university. When any student from first fifteen was failed to participate the study, then a confirmation email was sent to the student who were in number 16. Confirmation emails were sent to students who were on the waiting list until the fulfilment of the requirement of 15 males and 15 females from each university.

2.2. Measurement scale

The present study did not consider any type of scales that are frequently used in psychological studies (e.g., Likert-type, rating, and yes/no). Rather, it used a qualitative data collection strategy to collect data (e.g., unstructured interview). Before performing data collection from participants, the researcher formed a main question to conduct unstructured interviews (e.g., what criteria you will do consider for choosing your mate?). The researcher also formed some additional and clarifying questions so that the interview session can easily be conducted. These questions were then evaluated and judged by one psychologist and one sociologist. Both evaluators were the university faculty and were skilled in their professional activities. The researcher measured content validity of interview questions by a 'Content Validation Ratio' (CVR) method. In measuring the CVR, the researcher asked both evaluators to evaluate each question by choosing one answer from three alternatives: essential, useful but not necessary, and not necessary. It is a linear transformation from the percentage of responses on essential alternative, value ranged from 0 to 1 (Lawshe, 1975). Interview questions made by the researcher had positive CVR values (ranging from 0.700 to 0.800), that indicates that the questions were built with a good conceptualization and no extensive synthesis was needed for them. The interview questions are presented in Appendix 1. The unstructured interview, its conduction, and its session transcription and analysis of transcribed note are described in the following steps.

2.2.1. Unstructured interview

An unstructured interview method was used to know what criteria the Bangladeshi university students consider in their mate selection preferences. It is a qualitative data collection strategy that does not follow a formal question-answer format. The interviewer, in this method, asks open-ended questions on a specific research topic. The interviewer modifies his/her questions or sometimes adding additional questions to suit the respondents' specific experiences. It is sometimes called 'discovery interview' or 'informal interview' as it allows an informal discussion between interviewee and interviewer. Since a question-answer format cannot provide in-depth data on a particular research interest, hence the present study was motivated to use this interview method to gain more in-depth data on that research interest. The key feature of this method is the idea of probe question is to design as open as possible (Bailey, 2008, p. 194). The interview sessions, based on this method, had been taken place in the researcher's personal room. Each interview session was lasting from 50 to 60 minutes with the average of 54 minutes.

2.2.2. Interview conduction

The present study followed a standard data collection procedure. At first, the researcher introduced himself to each participant and then informed about the study's goals and the topics to be discussed. The participants were then provided an 'informed consent form' and they all signed the informed consent form before performing the study. They were informed about some issues related to the interview conduction such as recording, note taking, and the note's transcription. They were reminded that their statements will be kept confidential by the researcher at all the times and will be used only for the research purpose. An

interview session had been progressing with their prior approval. The participants were requested not to hurry in answering interview questions. The interview session was started with a general open-ended question: Can you tell me what criteria you will consider to identify your mate? When the students were unable to understand any questions then additional questions were made to ease those questions. They were asked as few questions as possible and gave enough time to talk. The participants were encouraged to talk more about their mate selection criteria, and in some instances anonymous references were made to help them to talk more.

Each interview session was refrained from suggestive answers and problem-inducing questions (e.g., double barrelled, double negatives, leading, unfamiliar jargon, and technical and ambiguous terms) so that each participant thoroughly understand each question in the interview session. The participants were not asked to any closed-ended questions that leave them no room to elaborate these questions. When the researcher felt that all topics had been discussed in the interview session, then he stopped the session. After that, the participants were asked if they want to add something more in the interview session. Finally, the researcher thanked all participants for their cooperation and support in the interview session.

2.2.3. Transcription of interview sessions

Each interview session was audio-taped and then transcribed so that the results of each interview session became the most accurate representation of the verbal responses of participants. The note taking in each interview session was compared with its transcribed version, so that each interview session includes accurate and enough information. A sample of transcription note is presented in Appendix 2.

2.2.4. Analysis of transcribed notes

A content analysis method was used for finalizing results from transcribed notes. It is a method of qualitative analysis that analyse the meanings of the contents within texts or transcribed notes. A two-step method was followed to perform content analysis in each transcribed note. The first one was 'reading the transcripts and coding data on them'. In this step, the researcher reads each transcribed note thoroughly and highlighted text from each of them. The coding work was completed based on the main question of the present study (e.g., what criteria you will do consider for choosing your mate). Thus, the researcher chose only those texts from transcribed notes that included mate selection criteria. The second step was 'data recording and analyze results'. In this step, the researcher counted and listed all highlighted text (only mate selection criteria) of each transcribed note. The researcher also recorded gender-information (male or female) for each note. Therefore, the researcher was able to reach a conclusion about each note by genders and numbers of mate selection criteria.

2.3. Ethical approval and informed consent

The ethics committee of the Department of Psychology at Chittagong University, Bangladesh approved this study and gave me moral support to conduct it. All participants participated in the study signed a written 'informed consent form' before performing the study. I followed the ethical standards provided by the Helsinki Declaration Act, 1975 in the study.

3. Results

The present study revealed twelve criteria that Bangladeshi students considered in selecting their potential mates. A total of 867 mate selection responses was found from all participants participated in the study, in which each participant averagely responded 7.23 criteria with the standard deviation of 1.48. The minimum and maximum number of mate selection criteria considered by students was 5 and 13 respectively. The mate selection criteria explored in the study are presented in Table 1.

Gender differences in mate selection preferences among Bangladeshi university students were considered to be important in the present study. Therefore, an independent sample t test was performed to know whether there is a gender difference in respect to mate selection preferences. The t test result showed that male students chose more mate selection criteria ($M = 8.03$, $SD = 1.51$) compared to female students ($M = 6.43$, $SD = .91$), t (118) = 7.04, p < .01 (Table 2). Moreover, gender was a significant predictor in the study as it had explained 29.6% variance of mate selection criteria ($\Delta R^2 = 29.6$, F (1, 118) = 49.61, $p < .01$; see Table 2).

The highest responded criterion by Bangladeshi university students was education, followed by religion, physical appearance, financial status, profession, character, physical attractiveness, region, in-law family's education, in law family's social approval, age, and residential status (Table 3). Of 120 students, 108 students considered education and 33 students considered residential status as their mate selection criterion. A true population range was measured to know how responses of each criterion are reflected in true population. By considering 90% observed response and 95% confidence interval, the true population range for the highest responded criterion education was 84.63%–95.37%. The true population range for the lowest responded criterion residential status was 19.51%–35.49%, where the observed response and confidence interval was 27.5% and 95% respectively (Table 3).

The highest number of responses by males were found in physical attractiveness criterion ($n = 56$), in which 56 males out of 60 considered this criterion for choosing their female mates. Highest to lowest responses by male students were physical attractiveness, education, religion, character, financial status, physical appearance, region, profession, in-law family's education, age, in-law family's social approval, and residential status. The highest number of responses by females were found in education criterion ($n = 60$), in which all of 60 females considered this criterion for choosing their male mates. Highest to lowest responses by female students were education, physical appearance, financial status, religion, profession, character, region, in-law family's education, in-law family's social approval, residential status, physical attractiveness, and age. Based on gender (male and female) and criteria selection (yes and no), a 2 × 2 chi-square test was performed to know whether each criterion is significant. Significant gender differences were found in six mate selection criteria (e.g., age ($\chi^2 = 10.16$, $p < .01$), education ($\chi^2 = 13.33$, $p < .01$), financial status ($\chi^2 = 17.87$, $p < .01$), physical appearance ($\chi^2 = 21.07$, $p < .01$), physical attractiveness ($\chi^2 = 55.56$, $p < .01$), and profession ($\chi^2 = 6.12$, $p < .05$). No significant gender differences were found in other six mate selection criteria (e.g., character, in-law family's education, in-law family's social approval, religion, region, and residential status). The results on gender differences in mate selection criteria are presented in Table 4.

The variety of responses in each mate selection criterion was assessed by an elaborate content analysis method. The elaborate content analysis was used for finding out contents from each transcribed note. Most of the males recognized that their potential female mates would have a bright complexion ($n = 48$), would have same religious beliefs as with them ($n = 43$), would have financial recognition ($n = 39$), would have the same

Table 1. Mate selection criteria considered by Bangladeshi university undergraduates (n = 120).

No. of criteria	Name of criteria
12	Age (AGE), Character (CRT), Education (EDU), In-law Family's Education (FED), In-law Family's Social Approval (FSA), Financial Status (FST), Physical Appearance (PAP), Physical Attractiveness (PAT), Profession (PRF), Region (RGN), Religion (RLG), Residential Status (RST)

Notes: Total number of responses on mate selection criteria = 867, Mean = 7.23, SD = 1.48, The range of mate selection criteria considered by students was between 5 and 13.

Table 2. Difference in mate selection preference by gender.

Variable	Levels	N	M	SD	95% CI for M	Min-Max	DF	t
Gender	Male	60	8.03	1.51	7.64–8.42	5–13	118	7.04
	Female	60	6.43	.91	6.20–6.67	5–10		

Notes: $\Delta R^2 = 29.6$, $F (1, 118) = 49.61$, $p < .01$.

Table 3. Number and percentage of responses to each criterion and ranking of each criterion.

Criterion	Number of responses by each criterion	Percentage of responses by each criterion	Confidence interval with range	CR
AGE	36	30	±8.2% (21.8–38.2)	11
CRT	81	67.5	±8.38% (59.12–75.88)	6
EDU	108	90	±5.37% (84.63–90.37)	1
FED	54	45	±8.9% (36.1–53.9)	9
FSA	42	35	±8.53% (26.47–43.53)	10
FST	93	77.5	±7.47% (70.03–84.97)	3(a)
PAP	93	77.5	±7.47% (70.03–84.97)	3(b)
PAT	72	60	±8.77% (51.23–68.77)	7
PRF	87	72.5	±7.99% (64.51–80.49)	5
RLG	99	82.5	±6.8% (75.7–89.3)	2
RGN	69	57.5	±8.84% (48.66–66.34)	8
RST	33	27.5	±7.99% (19.51–35.49)	12

Notes: Confidence interval was estimated on the basis of the proportion of responses at 95% confidence interval levels.
CR = Criterion's Rank. Each criterion was ranked on the basis of the total number of responses by that criterion.

education and profession as with them ($n = 38$), and would have no premarital relationship before marriage ($n = 35$). Most of the females, on the other hand, recognized that their potential male mates would highly be educated than them ($n = 46$), would have a good physical appearance ($n = 57$), would have better financial security ($n = 49$), would have same religious beliefs as with them ($n = 46$), and would have no premarital relationship before marriage ($n = 36$). Though, on some criteria, variations of responses in mate selection preferences were not significant in terms of gender; but, on some criteria, they were significant (Table 5). For example, in the region criterion, the male ($n = 30$) and female ($n = 35$) students paid importance on regional restriction and regional flexibility respectively. The males said that their mates must be in the same region as them and the females said that their mates might be of any regions. In the profession criterion, the males ($n = 28$) emphasized that their mates must have the same profession, like them; but the females ($n = 37$) said that their mates can be of any professions.

4. Discussion

The first objective of the present study was to find out mate selection criteria in Bangladeshi culture. In response to this objective, the study found a total of twelve important mate selection criteria that considered by Bangladeshi university students in preferring their future life partners. Though the criteria found in the present study were not significantly different from the criteria found in other studies, however they were different in preference consideration. In every society, culture has a significant impact on mate selection process. So it can be said that the mate selection criteria explored in the present study were based on culture, that were supported by many previous findings (e.g., Buss et al., 2001; Chen and Austin, 2017; Hamon and Ingoldsby, 2003; Mafra et al., 2021; Maliki, 2009; Nakahashi, 2017; Nongkynrih, 2016; O'Neil, 2006; Sassler, 2010; Souza et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2020).

Table 4. Number and percentage of responses to each criterion by gender.

Criterion	Male (n = 60)		Female (n = 60)		2 × 2 chi-square test		CR	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	χ^2	p	Male	Female
AGE	26	34	10	50	10.16**	.001	10	12
CRT	41	19	40	20	.038	.845	4	6
EDU	48	12	60	00	13.33**	.001	2	1
FED	30	30	24	36	1.21	.270	9	8
FSA	20	40	22	38	.071	.675	11	9
FST	39	21	54	06	17.87**	.001	5	3
PAP	36	24	57	03	21.07**	.001	6	2
PAT	56	04	16	44	55.56**	.001	1	11
PRF	32	28	45	15	6.12*	.013	8	5
RLG	43	17	46	14	.391	.531	3	4
RGN	34	26	35	41	.040	.839	7	7
RST	16	44	17	43	.041	.838	12	10

Notes: CR = Criterion's Rank. It was calculated on the basis of the number of responses by each criterion in terms of sex.
**Significant at .01 levels; *Significant at .05 levels.

Table 5. Gender differences in mate preferences.

Criteria	Males' mate preferences to females	Females' mate preferences to males
AGE	younger than at least for 5 years ($n = 22$)	older than at least for 5 years ($n = 10$)
	same age ($n = 4$)	
CRT	no pre-marital relationships ($n = 35$)	no pre-marital relationships ($n = 36$)
	not more exposing ($n = 6$)	sexual abstinence ($n = 4$)
EDU	same educational background ($n = 38$)	higher than what they have ($n = 46$)
	at least high school graduated ($n = 10$)	same educational background ($n = 14$)
FED	in-law family will be educated ($n = 28$)	in-law family will be educated ($n = 24$)
	father in-law's higher education ($n = 2$)	
FSA	social recognition of in-law family ($n = 20$)	social recognition of in-law family ($n = 22$)
FST	financially set up in-law family ($n = 39$)	financially set up mate ($n = 49$)
		financially set up in-law family ($n = 7$)
PAP	must be good as what I desire ($n = 26$)	must be good as what I desire ($n = 57$)
	moon shaped face desired ($n = 6$)	
	angular shaped face desired ($n = 4$)	
PAT	bright complexion ($n = 48$)	bright complexion ($n = 16$)
	brown complexion ($n = 8$)	
PRF	same profession ($n = 28$)	any profession ($n = 37$)
	any profession ($n = 4$)	same profession ($n = 4$)
RLG	must be from the same religion ($n = 43$)	must be from the same religion ($n = 46$)
RGN	must be from the same region ($n = 30$)	from any regions in Bangladesh ($n = 35$)
	from any regions in Bangladesh ($n = 4$)	
RST	must be resided in city areas ($n = 16$)	must be resided in city areas ($n = 17$)

The second objective of the present study was to assess gender differences in mate selection criteria. The study showed gender differences in mate selection criteria that had supported the findings of previous studies on it (e.g., Bech-Sorensen and Pollet, 2016; Walter et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2019). The males considered education as the second criterion in selecting their mates, whereas the females considered it as the first criterion. Both male and female participants thought that they would have an educated life partner. This finding was in accordance with some past studies (e.g., Acitelli et al., 2001; Maliki, 2009; O'Neil, 2006; Todosijevic et al., 2003; Yasmin, 2013). Why did the participants want to choose educated life partners? Since the participants participated in the study were educated, hence they mostly wanted to choose educated life partners. They thought that their education would help them to form similar attitudes, values, and beliefs with their educated mates and would help them to establish a balanced marriage life (Acitelli et al., 2001). The males considered physical attractiveness as the first criterion in selecting their female mates. As similar as the present study, this mate selection criterion was found in several past studies over the world (e.g., Abdullah et al., 2011; Buss et al., 2001; Buunk et al., 2002; Furnham, 2009; Li et al., 2002; Shackelford et al., 2005; Todosijevic et al., 2003; Zhang et al., 2019). Why did the males want to choose physically attractive females as their life partners? A female partner's physical attractiveness plays an important role in predicting a male partner's marital satisfaction (Meltzer et al., 2014). Instead of physical attractiveness criterion, most of the females chose physical appearance for selecting their male mates. This finding was consistent with some past findings (e.g., Abdullah et al., 2011; Li et al., 2002; Todosijevic et al., 2003).

The religion criterion was important in the study in terms of gender (e.g., male and female) and religion types (e.g., Muslim and Hindus). The participants considered this criterion based on their own religious cultural views. They preferred to marry someone from their own religious group and they did not like to marry someone from other religious groups. This finding was supported appropriately by some past findings on it (e.g., Badahdah and Tiemann, 2009; Braithwaite et al., 2013; Li et al., 2002; Maliki, 2009; Szarota et al., 2021). Why did students prefer to marry someone from their same religious group? This question can rightly be answered by the religious views. The 'Islam' demands a marriage only between a Muslim man and woman. The Muslim people cannot get married people of other religious groups, for example, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhist, etc. But, intermarriage is possible in Islam if people of other religious groups are converted to Muslims (Hassan, 2004). In Hinduism, the Gita prohibits intermarriage by differentiating between people of Dharma (i.e., Hindus) and people of the outside Dharma (Bhagavad-Gita, 3:35). In this religion, it is strictly prohibited not get to marry outside Hinduism as a Dharmic person will start to lose his/her Dharma by marrying a person of another religion (Bhagavad-Gita, 1:41).

The financial status was one of the important mate selection criteria considered by Bangladeshi students. Like the present study, some previous studies found its importance in mate selection (e.g., Badahdah and Tiemann, 2009; Buunk et al., 2002; Maliki, 2009; Shackelford et al., 2005; Townsend and Wasserman, 1998). At present, the Bangladeshi males are very much positive towards their mates' profession and they expect that their mates will have professional status and good financial status as well (Sabur, 2014; Yasmin, 2013). Moreover, they do not show intention of getting a dowry from their in-law families or from their mates, but they expect that they will have a better livelihood with the help of their mate's financial support (Sabur, 2014; Yasmin, 2013). That's why they thought that their female mates would have good financial status. The participants of both sexes considered region as the seventh ranked criterion in mate selection. The participants thought that if they both are of same region they would have same common interests, values, and background (Regan et al., 2000) that would help them to communicate with each other easily and would help them to avoid culture shocks as well (a feeling of disorientation due to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes). Though the desire for similar age in mate selection is greater among people in modern societies, but, such type of desire was not found among Bangladeshi students. Most of the students in this study considered the mates who had at least 5 year age gap with them. This result was consistent with some previous findings on it (e.g., Abdullah et al., 2011; Maliki, 2009).

The third objective of the study was to explain mate selection criteria explored in the study of the social homogamy theory. The participants in the study did consider mate selection criteria based on their own cultural and social backgrounds. In selecting the maximum number of criteria, the participants of both sexes showed similar attitudes toward their potential mate selection preferences. In a maximum number of criteria, the

participants' mate selection preferences were in accordance with the concept of social homogamy theory (e.g., Brynin et al., 2008; Eckland, 1968; Huber and Fieder, 2011). This finding was also in accordance with some previous studies conducted on the social homogamy model (e.g., Farooq and Arshad, 2017; Kalmijn and Flap, 2001; Miner et al., 2009; Schwartz, 2013; Sterbova and Valentova, 2012). Besides social homogamy model, the social heterogamy model was also reflected in some mate selection preferences in the study. In some criteria, the participants were attracted to those mates who were dissimilar to them. For example, in physical attractiveness criterion, some participants emphasized that their mates would be different from them phenotypically. The participants were also heterogamous in region and age criterion (Kemkes-Grottenthaler, 2004; Uddin et al., 2017; Vera et al., 1985). The finding of the study can also be explained by evolutionary or genetic model (Templeton, 2006), though it was not of our concern in the study.

4.1. Implications of the study

The findings of the present study would be important for the Bangladeshi people who are planning to get married and it would help them by providing important mate selection criteria. People from other cultures would also be able to gain knowledge about mate selection preferences adopted by people in Bangladeshi culture and would be able to compare their own cultural views with it. The present study would help the cultural psychologists as well as the cross-cultural psychologists to gain knowledge on variation in mate selection criteria across cultures. The current study would be significant for the researchers in social sciences as it had considered one of the most important social theories (e.g., social homogamy theory) in explaining mate selection criteria. Based on the present study results, the psychologists and marriage counselors in Bangladesh would be able to help Bangladeshi people in improving satisfactory marital relationships by selecting an appropriate mate.

4.2. Limitations of the study

There are three important limitations that have been addressed in the present study. Firstly, only educated individuals were chosen as the sample in the present study, and the individuals who were not educated were not considered in the study. Secondly, data collection of the study was completed by using only the interview method. Thirdly, due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, the sex differences in mate selection were not revealed properly.

4.3. Future directives

If the future study includes both educated and non-educated individuals as the sample, then it will be a good comparative study. The interview method used in the study may trespass participants' response rates. The responses may be underestimated or overestimated by this interview method. So, the future study, including both interview method and self-report questionnaire will help us to identify mate selection criteria more accurately. A cross-sectional study may not provide definite information about the cause-effect relationship. If a longitudinal study is considered in future then it will provide definite information about the cause-effect relationship. Overall, the present study is providing a new line of inquiry in the area of the mate selection process as well as in the area of psychological and socio-cultural studies. Instead of the methodology used in the study, a new methodology can be developed through the addition of future studies.

5. Conclusions

The university students in Bangladesh considered a total of twelve criteria in their mate selection preferences. These criteria were varied from internal (e.g., religion) to external (e.g., physical appearance) and were supported by the social homogamy theory. The present study explored mate selection criteria among Bangladeshi people by considering their own culture. But, it does not mean that they have no other criteria rather than their own culture. The study reveals how a particular cultural element (e.g., mate selection) is influenced by its national culture. The study has also significantly contributed to include a new finding in the literature of mate selection as well as it has addressed the role of culture in the development of a scientific society.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Md. Nurul Islam: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Data availability statement

The data that has been used is confidential.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

Supplementary content related to this article has been published online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07378.

References

Abdullah, H.S., Li, L.P., David, A.P.V., 2011. Gender differences in mate selection criteria among Malaysian undergraduate students. Sarjana 26 (2), 33–50.

Acitelli, L.K., Kenny, D.A., Weiner, D., 2001. The importance of similarity and understanding of partners' marital ideals to relationship satisfaction. Pers. Relat. 8 (2), 167–185.

Ahmed, A.U., 1986. Marriage and its transition in Bangladesh. Int. J. Sociol. Fam. 16 (1), 49–59.

Alavi, M., Alahdad, R., Shafeq, S.M., 2013. Mate selection criteria among postgraduate students in Malaysia. Proc. Soc. Behav. Sci. 116, 5075–5080.

Alvi, A.K., Haneef, M., Ali, F., 2014. Spouse selection criteria: a case study of university students. Sci. Int. 26 (5), 2509–2513.

Amador, J., Charles, T., Tait, J., Helm Jr., H.W., 2005. Sex and generational differences in desired characteristics in mate selection. Psychol. Rep. 96 (1), 19–25.

Amin, S., Das, M.B., 2013. Marriage continuity and change in Bangladesh. In: Kaur, R., Palriwala, R. (Eds.), Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing Practices in a Globalising World, pp. 89–115. Orient Blackswan.

Badahdah, A.M., Tiemann, K.A., 2009. Religion and mate selection through cyberspace: a case study of preferences among Muslims. J. Muslim Minority Aff. 29 (1), 83–90.

Bhagavad-Gita. Chapter 1, Verse 41. https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/1/verse/41.

Bhagavad-Gita. Chapter 3, Verse 35. https://bhagavad-gita.org/Gita/verse-03-35.html.

Bailey, K.D., 2008. Methods of Social Research, fourth ed. Free Press.

Bech-Sorensen, J., Pollet, T.V., 2016. Sex differences in mate preferences: a replication study, 20 years later. Evol. Psychol. Sci. 2, 171–176.

Botwin, M.D., Buss, D.M., Shackleford, T.K., 1997. Personality and mate preferences: five factors in mate selection and marital satisfaction. J. Pers. 65 (1), 107–136.

Boxer, C.F., Noonan, M.C., Whelan, C.B., 2013. Measuring mate preferences: a replication and extension. J. Fam. Issues 36 (2), 163–187.

Braithwaite, S.R., Coulson, G.L., Spjut, K., Dickerson, W., Beck, A.R., Dougal, K., Debenham, C., Jones, D., 2013. The influence of religion on the partner selection strategies of emerging adults. J. Fam. Issues 36 (2), 212–231.

Brynin, S., Longhi, S., Martinez-Perez, A., 2008. The social significance of homogamy. Working Paper. In: ISER Working Paper Series (2008-32). Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, Colchester, UK.

Buss, D.M., 1989. Sex differences in human mate preferences: evolutionary hypotheses tested in 37 cultures. Behav. Brain Sci. 12 (1), 1–14.

Buss, D.M., Abbott, M., Angleitner, A., Asherian, A., Biaggio, A., Blanco-Villasenor, A., 1990. International preferences in selecting mates: a study in 37 cultures. J. Cross Cult. Psychol. 21 (1), 5–47.

Buss, D.M., Schmitt, D.P., 1993. Sexual strategies theory: an evolutionary perspective on human mating. Psychol. Inventory 6, 1–30.

Buss, D.M., Shackelford, T.K., Kirkpatrick, L.A., Larsen, R.J., 2001. A half century of mate preferences: the cultural evolution of values. J. Marriage Fam. 63 (2), 491–503.

Buunk, B.P., Dijkstra, P., Fetchenhauer, D., Kenrick, D.T., 2002. Age and gender differences in date selection criteria for various involvement levels. Pers. Relat. 9 (3), 271–278.

Celik, I., Halmatov, M., Halmatov, S., Saricam, H., 2012. Research on views about male university students' marriage and future family role expectation. Proc. Soc. Behav. Sci. 46, 3275–3278.

Chen, X., 2002. Women and marriage in China. China Today 51 (3), 10–17.

Chen, R., Austin, J.P., 2017. The effect of external influences on mate selection necessity traits: cross-cultural comparisons of Chinese and American men and women. Marriage Fam. Rev. 53 (3), 246–261.

Cherlin, A.J., 2004. The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. J. Marriage Fam. 66 (4), 848–861.

Eastwick, P.W., Luchies, L.B., Finkel, E.J., Hunt, L.L., 2014. The predictive validity of ideal partner preferences: a review and meta-analysis. Psychol. Bull. 140 (3), 623–665.

Eckland, B.K., 1968. Theories of mate selection. Eugen. Q. 15 (2), 71–84.

Evans, K., Brase, G.L., 2007. Assessing sex differences and similarities in mate preferences: above and beyond demand characteristics. J. Soc. Pers. Relat. 24 (5), 781–791.

Farooq, S., Arshad, H.F., 2017. Perceptions regarding mate selection among university students: a case study of university of the Punjab. Acad. Res. Int. 8 (3), 178–185.

Fisman, R., Iyengar, S.S., Kamenica, E., Simonson, I., 2006. Gender differences in mate selection: evidence from a speed dating experiment. Q. J. Econ. 121 (2), 673–697.

Flicker, S.M., Sancier-Barbosa, F., Afroz, F., Saif, S.N., Mohsin, F., 2020. Marital quality in arranged and couple-initiated marriages: the role of perceived influence over partner selection. Int. J. Psychol. 55 (4), 629–637.

Furnham, A., 2009. Sex differences in mate selection preferences. Pers. Indiv. Differ. 47 (4), 262–267.

Gil-Burmann, C., Pelaez, F., Sanchez, S., 2002. Mate choice differences according to sex and age. Hum. Nat. 13, 493–508.

Glenn, N.D., 2000. Toward a more complete integration of evolutionary and other perspective on age preferences in mates. Behav. Brain Sci. 15 (1), 100.

Hamon, R.R., Ingoldsby, B.B. (Eds.), 2003. Mate Selection across Cultures. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Hassan, S., 2004. Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam. Ashgate Publishing.

Huber, S., Fieder, M., 2011. Educational homogamy lowers the odds of reproductive failure. PLoS One 6 (7), e22330.

Kalmijn, M., Flap, H., 2001. Assortative meeting and mating: unintended consequences of organized settings for partner choices. Soc. Forces 79, 1289–1312.

Keller, M.C., Thiessen, D.T., Young, R.K., 1996. Mate assortment in dating and married couples. Pers. Indiv. Differ. 21, 217–221.

Kemkes-Grottenthaler, A., 2004. For better or worse, till death do us part: spousal age gap and differential longevity- evidence from historical demography. Coll. Anthropol. 28, 203–219.

Lawshe, C.H., 1975. A quantitative approach to content validity. Person. Psychol. 28 (4), 563–575.

Lawrence, P.R., Nohria, N., 2001. Driven: How Human Nature Shapes Our Choices. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Levi-Strauss, C., 2006. Historical trends and variations in educational homogamy. J. Marriage Fam. 333, 83–95.

Li, N.P., Bailey, J., Kenrick, D., Linsenmeier, J., 2002. The necessities and luxuries of mate preferences: testing the tradeoffs. Pers. Soc. Psychol. 82 (6), 947–955.

Li, N.P., Valentine, K.A., Patel, L., 2010. Mate preferences in US and Singapore: a cross cultural test of the mate preference priority model. Pers. Indiv. Differ. 50 (2), 291–294.

Maliki, A.E., 2009. Determinants of mate selection choice among university students in south-zone of Nigeria. Edo J. Counsell. 2 (2), 165–174.

Mafra, A.L., Fisher, M.L., Lopes, F.d.A., 2021. Does mate preference represent mate choice? A cross-cultural investigation. Evol. Behav. Sci. 15 (1), 64–81.

Meltzer, A.L., McNulty, J.K., Jackson, G.L., Karney, B.R., 2014. Sex differences in the implications of partner physical attractiveness for the trajectory of marital satisfaction. J. Pers. Soc. Psychol. 106 (3), 418–428.

Miner, E.J., Shackelford, T.K., Starratt, V.G., 2009. Mate value of romantic partners predicts men's partner directed verbal insults. Pers. Indiv. Differ. 46, 135–139.

Nakahashi, W., 2017. Cultural sexual selection in monogamous human populations. Royal Soc. Open Sci. 4 (6), 160946.

Newman, B.M., Newman, P.R., 1995. The Development through Life: A Psychosocial Approach. Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Nojo, S., Tamura, S., Ihara, Y., 2012. Human homogamy in facial characteristics: does a sexual-imprinting-like mechanism play a role? Hum. Nat. 23, 323–340.

Nongkynrih, A.K., 2016. Mate selection: a sociological exploration. NEHU J. 14 (1), 19–39.

Oguegbe, T.M., Onuecheta, I.C., 2014. Age and religious affiliation: the determinant factors of choice of spouse among undergraduate students. J. Relig. Hum. Relat. 1 (6), 181–192.

O'Neil, D., 2006. Sex and Marriage: an Introduction to the Cultural Rules Regulating Sexual Access and Marriage. Topics, Overview: Part I. http://www.anthrop almor.edu/marriage/.

Regan, P.C., Levin, L., Sprecher, S., Christopher, F.S., Cate, R., 2000. Partner preferences: what characteristics do men and women desire in their short-term sexual and long-term romantic partners? J. Psychol. Hum. Sex. 12 (3), 1–21.

Sabur, S., 2014. Marital mobility in the Bangladeshi middle class: matchmaking strategies and transnational networks. South Asia. J. Southeast Asian Stud. 37 (4), 586–604.

Sarir, S., Muhammad, N., Ala, I., Jadoo, M.A., Iqbal, S., Abbas, S., Sajid, A., Kashif, N., 2018. Role of physical attractiveness in mate selection by educated women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Arts Soc. Sci. J. 9 (2), 335.

Sassler, S., 2010. Partnering across the life course: sex, relationships, and mate selection. J. Marriage Fam. 72 (3), 557–575.

Schwartz, C.R., 2013. Trends and variation in assortative mating: causes and consequences. Annu. Rev. Sociol. 39 (1), 451–470.

Schwarz, S., Hassebrauck, M., 2012. Sex and age differences in mate selection preferences. Hum. Nat. 23 (4), 447–466.

Shackelford, T.K., Schmitt, D.P., Buss, D.M., 2005. Universal dimensions of human mate preferences. Pers. Indiv. Differ. 39 (2), 447–458.

Sorensen, J.B., Pollet, T.V., 2016. Sex differences in mate preferences: a replication study, 20 years later. Evol. Psychol. Sci. 2 (3), 171–176.

Souza, A.L., Conroy-Beam, D., Buss, D.M., 2016. Mate preferences in Brazil: evolved desires and cultural evolution over three decades. Pers. Indiv. Differ. 95, 45–49.

Sterbova, Z., Valentova, J., 2012. Influence of homogamy, complementarity, and sexual imprinting on mate choice. Anthropologie 50, 47–59.

Sweeney, M.,M., Cancian, M., 2004. The changing importance of white women's economic prospects for assortative mating. J. Marriage Fam. 66, 1015–1028.

Szarota, P., Rahman, E., Cantarero, K., 2021. Globalization, sharia law, and cultural hybridity: a case of marriage preferences of young Bangladeshis. Soc. Psychol. Bulletin 16 (1), 1–12.

Templeton, A.R., 2006. Systems of mating. In: Templeton, A.R. (Ed.), Population Genetics and Micro Evolutionary Theory. John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ, pp. 48–81.

Thomas, A.G., Jonason, P.K., Blackburn, J.D., Kennair, L.E.O., Lowe, R., Malouff, J., Stewart-Williams, S., Sulikowski, D., Li, P.N., 2020. Mate preference priorities in the East and West: a cross-cultural test of the mate preference priority model. J. Pers. 88 (3), 606–620.

Todosijevic, B., Ljubinkovic, S., Arancic, A., 2003. Mate selection criteria: a trait desirability assessment study of sex differences in Serbia. Evol. Psychol. 1, 116–126.

Toro-Morn, M., Sprecher, S., 2003. A cross-cultural comparison of mate preferences among university students: the United States vs. The People's Republic of China (PRC). J. Comp. Fam. Stud. 34, 151–170.

Townsend, J.M., Levy, G.D., 1990. Effects of potential partners' physical attractiveness and socioeconomic status on sexuality and partner selection. Arch. Sex. Behav. 19, 149–164.

Townsend, J.M., Wasserman, T., 1998. Sexual attractiveness: sex differences in assessment and criteria. Evol. Hum. Behav. 19 (3), 171–191.

Uddin, E., Hoque, N., Islam, R., 2017. Familial factors influencing age-heterogamy vs. age-homogamy in marriage in Bangladesh: implication for social policy practice. Global Soc. Welfare 4, 127–140.

Vera, H., Berardo, D.H., Berardo, F.M., 1985. Age heterogamy in marriage. J. Marriage Fam. 47 (3), 553–566.

Walter, K., Conroy-Beam, D., Buss, D.M., Asao, K., Sorokowska, A., Sorokowski, P., Zupancic, M., 2020. Sex differences in mate preferences across 45 countries : a large-scale replication. Psychol. Sci. 31 (4), 408–423.

Yahaya, L.A., 2009. Marriage, Sex and Family Counseling. ABIC Publishers, Lagos.

Yasmin, S., 2013. Impact of Changing Bridal Selection Criteria on Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh. BRAC University Institutional Repository. http://h dl.handle.net/10361/3039.

Zhang, L., Lee, A.J., DeBruine, L.M., Jones, B.C., 2019. Are sex differences in preferences for physical attractiveness and good earning capacity in potential mates smaller in countries with greater gender equality? Evol. Psychol.: Int. J. Evol. Approaches Psychol. Behav. 17 (2), 1474704919852921.