

## The Average Age of Marriage Among Residents of Bashiqa Subdistrict: A Field Study

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Marriage is a crucial social institution that reflects a society's demographics and cultural makeup. Several factors, including social, religious, educational, and economic ones, affect when people marry. In communities with diverse populations, such as the Bashiqa subdistrict in the Nineveh Governorate of northern Iraq, it is particularly important to research the average age of marriage. Investigating the average age of marriage is especially important in this region since it is made up of many different religious groups, including Shabak, Christians, Arab and Kurdish Muslims, Yazidis, and ethnic groups such as Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen. Analysing the average age at marriage yields valuable demographic information that fosters intergroup understanding, community awareness, and the development of effective social policies. The average marriage age among the different population groups in Bashiqa will be examined, along with contributing factors, intergroup variations, and the effects of recent socio-political changes—especially those involving displacement and conflict—on marriage patterns and demographic dynamics.

Keywords: population, marriage, components, Bashiqa

### Introduction

Marriage is one of the most significant social institutions that reflects a society's cultural and demographic structure. Numerous factors, including social norms, religious beliefs, educational attainment, and economic conditions, influence when people get married. Studying the average age at marriage is particularly important in demographically diverse communities, such as the Bashiqa subdistrict in Nineveh Governorate <sup>(1)</sup>, northern Iraq. This area is characterized by its rich religious and ethnic diversity, comprising Yazidis, Christians, Arab and Kurdish Muslims, as well as Shabak and Turkmen communities.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Republic of Iraq, Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, Nineveh Governorate Municipality Directorate, General Survey Division. *Map of Nineveh Governorate*, 2010.

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Studying the average age of marriage in Bashiqa not only provides demographic data but also contributes to the development of more effective social policies, supports community awareness programs, and enhances understanding among the various components of the local community.

The average age at marriage among the population components of the Bashiqa subdistrict is also an important topic for study, given the social and economic transformations that occurred following the mass displacement resulting from the security events after 2014.

## **Research Objectives**

The research aims to shed light on the customs associated with marriage and analyze the factors influencing them. It also aims to determine the average age of marriage among male and female residents of the subdistrict and to identify the most prominent factors influencing marriage age, such as economic, social, educational, and prevailing customs and traditions.

## **Research Contribution**

The research fills the knowledge gap on an under-explored topic. It contributes to building a social database on the Bashiqa community, helping decision-makers and organizations better support this community.

## **Research Problem**

The research asks the following questions:

1. What is the average age at marriage among the communities in the Bashiqa subdistrict?
2. Is there a difference between the average age before and after displacement?
3. What factors influence the timing of marriage in this community?
4. How do marriage attitudes differ between males and females?

## **Research Hypotheses**

1. The average age at marriage among the residents of Bashiqa is expected to be between 20 and 25 years.
2. There is a significant difference in the average age of marriage due to the security conditions experienced by the district.

3. There is a tangible influence of economic factors, educational level, and social traditions in determining the timing of marriage among the residents of the district.
4. Marriage orientations differ between males and females in society in terms of the appropriate age for marriage and other reasons related to the choice of marriage.

### **Methodology**

The research employed a descriptive approach to analyse data related to marriage in the Bashiqa district. It also relied on a field questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with community members (males and females, married and unmarried) to enhance the authenticity of the research. The research sample represented 2% of the total households in the Bashiqa district, with 681 randomly distributed questionnaires. Of these, 166 questionnaires were distributed in the subdistrict center, representing urban environments, representing 24.4%, and 515 questionnaires were distributed in the district's villages, representing rural environments, representing 75.6% of the total sample questionnaires for the year 2024.

### **Bashiqa Subdistrict Location**

Bashiqa Subdistrict is administratively part of the Mosul District<sup>1</sup>, which in turn falls under the Nineveh Governorate in northern Iraq. It is located in the eastern part of Mosul District, lying between latitudes 36.22° and 36.35° north and longitudes 43.10° and 43.33° east. Bashiqa is bordered to the north by Sheikhan District, to the west by Tel Kaif District, to the southwest by the Mosul Municipality, to the south by Bartella Subdistrict (part of Al-Hamdaniya District), and to the east by Al-Asha'ir Al-Sab'a Subdistrict (part of Aqrah District).

### **Research Issues**

This research focuses on four main areas: first, looking at how the size and composition of the population in the Bashiqa subdistrict changes over time; second, looking at the age at which people get married and how that varies across different social groups; third, looking at how the average age of marriage changes depending on the environment, religion, and community group; and fourth, identifying and analysing the main factors that affect people when they get married.

### **The environmental population size variation according to the population components in the subdistrict in 2024**

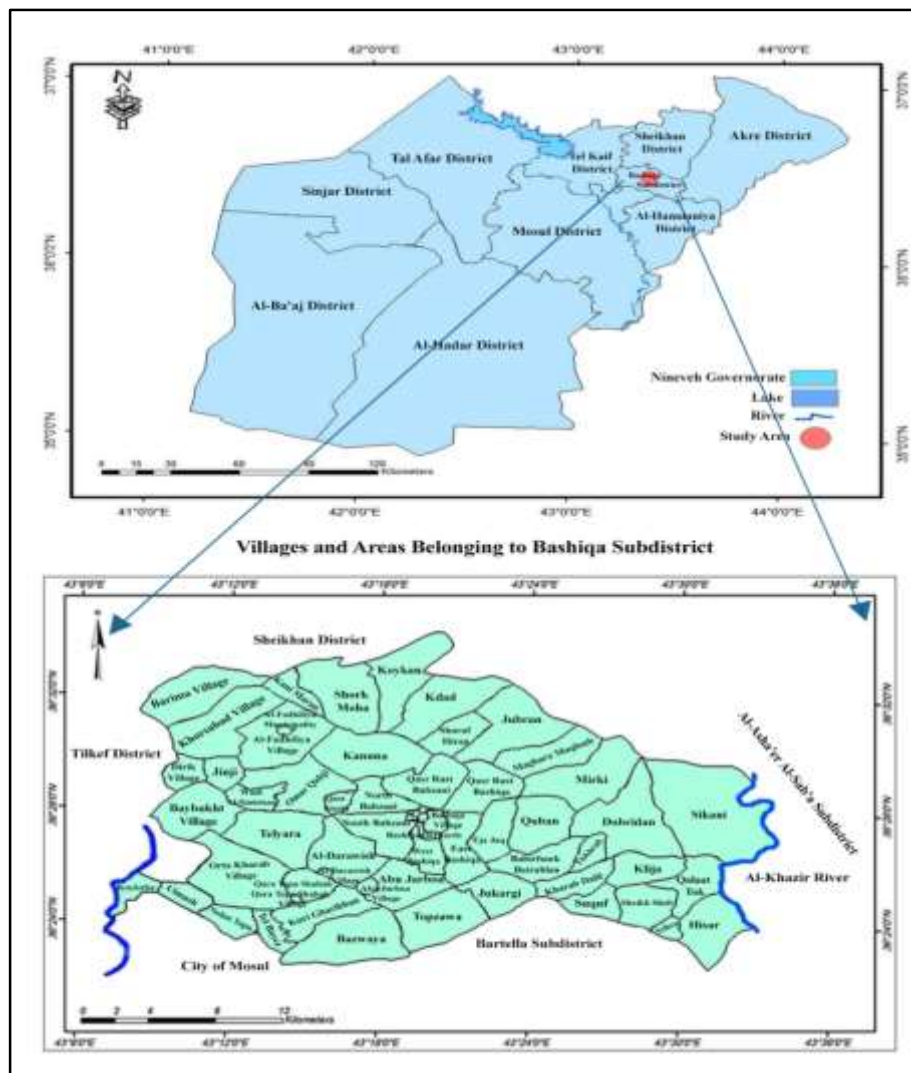
The Bashiqa subdistrict has experienced irregular population growth over time due to a combination of environmental, political, economic, demographic, and social factors. Historically, the subdistrict's residents have relied primarily on agricultural activities, but the region was significantly impacted by mass displacement caused by ISIS, which affected both population size and the average age at marriage. According to estimates prior to the 2024 population census, Bashiqa's total population is approximately 197,571, distributed across

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both urban and rural areas with considerable demographic variation. The urban population is estimated at 43,109, representing 21.8% of the total population. These residents are spread across twelve residential neighbourhoods. Table (1) presents the population distribution across these neighbourhoods. Among them, Al-Rabi'a has the highest population, with 10,854 residents (25.2% of the urban total), followed by Al-Zaytoun (16.1%), Al-Midan (11.4%), and Ras Al-Ain (11.3%). Other neighbourhoods include Al-Nour (7.2%), Kolan (6.5%), and Al-Intisar (5.1%), while Al-Tawassul, Al-Khadra, and Al-Malayin account for 4.7%, 4.3%, and 3.6%, respectively. The Al-Bassi and Al-Askari neighbourhoods have the lowest shares, each comprising less than 3% of the total population.

**Map (1): The geographical location of Bashiqa district**



Source: Republic of Iraq, Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, Nineveh Governorate Municipality Directorate, General Survey Division. Map of Nineveh Governorate, 2010.

**Table (1): Local distribution of urban population in Bashiqa district according to residential neighbourhoods in 2024**

| Number of forms | Population percentage% | population2024 | residential neighborhoods |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| 19              | 11.3                   | 4862           | Ras al-Ain                |
| 12              | 7.2                    | 3109           | Al-Nour                   |
| 42              | 25.2                   | 10854          | Al-Rabi`                  |
| 27              | 16.1                   | 6933           | Al-Zaytoun                |
| 11              | 6.5                    | 2798           | Kolan                     |
| 8               | 4.7                    | 2024           | Al-Tawassul               |
| 6               | 3.6                    | 1571           | Al-Million                |
| 19              | 11.4                   | 4903           | Al-Midan                  |
| 7               | 4.3                    | 1836           | Al-Khadra`                |
| 4               | 2.5                    | 1057           | Al-` Askari               |
| 8               | 5.1                    | 2207           | Al-Intisar                |
| 4               | 2.2                    | 956            | Basi                      |
| 166             | 100.0                  | 43109          | Total                     |

Source: Nineveh Governorate, Bashiqa District Directorate, Mukhtar Administration Division, Household and Population Data in the District, Not Published for 2024.

In rural areas, Table (2) shows that the population reached 154,462 in 2024, accounting for 79.2% of the total subdistrict population. These individuals are distributed across 45 villages, with additional scattered settlements in the surrounding countryside. Population distribution in rural areas varies significantly by ethnic group. The Shabak community forms the majority, numbering 130,185 (84.3% of the rural population), and is concentrated in 20 villages (44.4% of all villages). Arabs represent the second-largest group, with 11,135 individuals (7.2%) residing in 16 villages (35.6%). The Kurdish population numbers 7,551 (4.9%) across seven villages (15.6%). The Turkmen population is 5,132 (3.3%), concentrated in the village of Tisakharab, while the Christian population totals 459 (0.3%) and is concentrated in the village of Merki.

**Table (2): Local distribution of rural population in Bashiqa district according to components in 2024**

| Number of forms | Population percentage % | Population 2024 | Percentage of villages% | Number of villages | Components |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 451             | 84.3                    | 130185          | 44.4                    | 20                 | Shabak     |
| 37              | 7.2                     | 11135           | 35.6                    | 16                 | Arabs      |
| 25              | 4.9                     | 7551            | 15.6                    | 7                  | Kurds      |
| 17              | 0.3                     | 459             | 2.2                     | 1                  | Turkmen    |
| 2               | 3.3                     | 5132            | 2.2                     | 1                  | Christians |
| 515             | 100.0                   | 154462          | 100.0                   | 45                 | Total      |

Source: Nineveh Governorate, Bashiqa District Directorate, Mukhtar Administration Division, Household and Population Data in the District, Not Published for 2024.

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## The age of marriage and its local variations in Bashiqa community

The age of marriage indicates at which age a person is legally permitted or considered ready to marry. This age varies according to the laws and social and religious traditions of each community. The age of marriage is often associated with physical and psychological maturity and has a significant impact on education, health, and family stability. In the ancient tradition, a girl was expected to marry upon reaching puberty. However, this situation is not measured by age. In the past, girls were married at the age of nine or ten, and in practice, there were no legal procedures that prohibited such marriages <sup>(2)</sup>. In Iraqi law, a judge authorizes marriage for anyone who has reached the age of fifteen, regardless of sex. However, the condition for giving permission is the attainment of legal maturity and physical fitness <sup>(3)</sup>. When studying the age of marriage in the Bashiqa subdistrict, it becomes clear that it is influenced by the demographic components present in the region. These components include the Yazidis, Shabak, Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen. The age of marriage differs among these components according to cultural, religious, and social factors, in addition to the connection of cases of early marriage among the demographic components in the Bashiqa subdistrict to religious men or village dignitaries and the marriage of minor girls without immediate official registration. Despite the existence of laws in Iraq that specify the minimum age for marriage for girls, which is that the girl enters her fifteenth year, customary or religious marriage is not always subject to these laws.

The data in Table (3) and Figure (1) show the variation in the age of marriage in the Bashiqa community:

- 1- **Yazidis:** The Yazidi community has experienced social and psychological challenges, mostly because of being forced to move and violence from extremist groups. These events have led to a clear rise in early marriage as a way for people to deal with stress. Additionally, religious texts and community leaders have said that men should marry between the ages of 18 and 22 and women between the ages of 17 and 19. Yazidi religious rules say that marriages below these levels are not allowed. However, field data indicate that average marriage ages have decreased slightly, with males marrying at around 20 and females at around 18 years old. This may be related to social expectations regarding early family roles for women and traditional views about fertility and marriage readiness.

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<sup>(2)</sup> Qashtoli Sabiha, Factors Delaying Marriage among Algerian Youth, master's Thesis, University of Algiers, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2009, p. 46.

<sup>(3)</sup> Iraqi Facts - Collection of Laws and Regulations, Personal Status Law, Part 1, Article 7, Issue 280, dated 12-30-1959, amended in 1987.

- 2- **Shabak:** Religious and cultural factors shape marriage customs among the Shabak, and both men and women tend to marry young. According to information from field surveys, the average age for men to get married is about 18, and for women, it is about 16. This trend suggests that early marriage is still seen by many families to protect family reputation and follow traditional customs. The Shabak people mostly live in rural areas and make their living through farming and herding. This affects family decisions about early marriage, which aims to ensure that work continues, and people get along.
- 3- **Arabs:** In the Arab communities of Bashiqā, marriage practices exhibit clear distinctions between urban and rural environments. In rural areas, early marriage is more common, especially for women, because of traditional customs, worries about family reputation, and limited access to education. The legal age for marriage typically ranges from 18 to 20 for males and from 15 to 18 for females. According to survey data, the reported average age at marriage is 17 for men and 15 for women. The persistence of early marriage is often associated with social traditions, economic conditions, and the perception of marriage to strengthen family ties that reinforce social cohesion within tribal or extended family networks.
- 4- **Kurds:** Among Kurdish populations in Bashiqā, marriage patterns reflect a blend of tribal customs and rural traditions. While the preferred age of marriage for males typically ranges between 18 and 22, females are often married between 16 and 20 years of age. Fieldwork indicates actual average ages of 19 for males and 16 for females. Factors influencing this include the importance of lineage, clan-based affiliations, and longstanding cultural practices that favour early marriage as part of longstanding traditions and social customs linked to family and tribal structures.
- 5- **Christians:** Christian communities in Bashiqā—comprising Catholics, Orthodox, and Syriacs—tend to delay marriage relative to other groups in the district. Marriage is highly encouraged after completing higher education, and spiritual maturity is a prerequisite according to church guidelines. Higher marriage rates are also a result of the widespread requirement for premarital education and counselling. According to field data, Christian women marry around the age of 19, while Christian men marry at an average age of 26. Early marriage is rare and culturally discouraged, with an emphasis placed on individual readiness and economic stability.
- 6- **Turkmen:** Most of the Turkmen reside in the village of Tisakharab and form a small minority in the Bashiqā subdistrict. Islamic teaching and tribal customs have an impact on their marriage practices. Males typically marry between the ages of 18 and 21, while females typically marry between the ages of 16 and 19. Early marriage is rather common, especially for females. The average marriage age is 16 for women and 18 for men, according to field data. Marriages within the same extended family are common, reflecting cultural traditions and the importance of maintaining family ties.

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**Table (3): The average age at marriage varies by demographic group in the Bashiqa Subdistrict.**

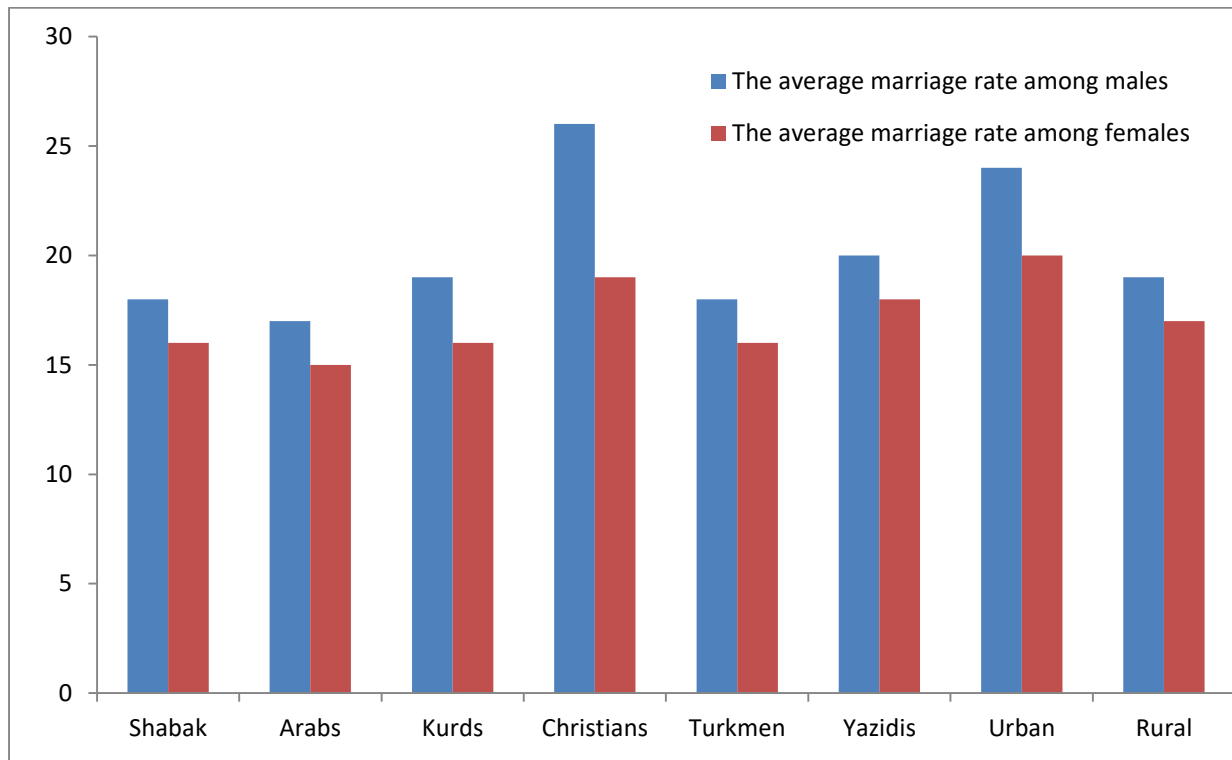
| The average age at marriage among the sample(**) |       | The average age at official marriage |       | Components             |   |
|--|-------|--------------------------------------|-------|------------------------|---|
| Females  | Males | Females                              | Males |                        |   |
| 18   | 20    | 19-17                                | 22-18 | Yazidis <sup>(1)</sup> | 1 |
| 16   | 18    | 19-15                                | 21-17 | Shabak <sup>(*)</sup>  | 2 |
| 15   | 17    | 18-15                                | 20-18 | Arabs                  | 3 |
| 16   | 19    | 20-16                                | 22-18 | Kurds                  | 4 |
| 19   | 26    | 25-20                                | 30-25 | Christians             | 5 |
| 16   | 18    | 19-15                                | 21-18 | Turkmen                | 6 |
| 18.6   | 22.3  | 19.1                                 | 23.1  | Average                |   |

(1) Mamtaz Hussein Suleiman. Religious and secular rituals in the civilizations of Mesopotamia, as well as Yazidi rituals, share many similarities. Noon House for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, Baghdad, 2021, p. 236.

(\*)The Shabak, Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen are all Muslim communities. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud said that the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "O young men, whoever among you can marry should do so, for it helps to lower the gaze and preserve chastity; and whoever is not able, should fast, for it will be a shield for him." See: Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, The Prophetic Biography: The Biography of Muhammad, Dar Ibn Kathir, Beirut, Lebanon, 2018, p. 1905.

(\*\*) Based on the answers to the questionnaire that were collected during the field study in 2024

Figure (1) shows the variation in the average age at marriage among the population components in the Bashiqa district in the year 2024.



Source: Based on the data in Tables (3) and (4).

### Variation in the average age of marriage according to (environment, religion, and component) in the district

#### *Environmental variation in sample size and age of marriage*

The field study data from Table (4) and Figure(1) extracted from the questionnaire forms, which constituted 2% of the total families in the district, numbering 34,034 families, indicate that the number of questionnaires distributed in this study was 681, of which 166 were distributed in urban environments, including 60 families, representing 36.1%, with family members of 4 or less, and 106 families, representing 63.9%, with family members of 5 or more. The number of questionnaires in rural environments was 515, of which 116 families, representing 22.5%, had family members of 4 or less, and 399 families, representing 77.5%, had family members of 5 or more. The average age at marriage in urban settings for males was 24 years, while for females, it was lower at 20 years. There are several reasons why the marriage age is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. The most important of these factors is the change in the economy and the rise in unemployment rates in recent years, along with a rise in the level of education, especially among women. This issue has led many young people to postpone marriage to complete their studies or improve their living conditions. Changes in social and cultural systems also play a significant role in the district, as some segments of society now view

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marriage as a step that is postponed until personal and financial stability is achieved. Furthermore, this rise is relatively common among the components of society in the subdistrict center. It has been observed that Yazidi and Christian residents have tended to delay marriage to a greater extent than other components in recent years due to the relatively closed nature of their traditions and their commitment to choosing partners from within the community, which reduces the chances of early marriage. The average age of marriage in Bashiqa varies significantly from person to person, regardless of their social or environmental background, which has led to differences in the customs and traditions that are most common, especially among young people. In rural areas, the average age at which men and women get married has decreased to 19 for men and 17 for women, which is attributed to social, economic, and cultural factors. In rural areas, traditions prevail that encourage early marriage, especially for girls, as it is considered part of chastity and honor and a guarantee of stability. Also, in some societies, an unmarried girl after the age of 25, for example, is viewed as having been unlucky in choosing a partner. In addition, early marriage for girls is viewed as a small economic burden if the family is large, and the lack of job and educational opportunities pushes many families to marry their daughters off early.

**Table (4): Environmental Distribution of the Sample Size and Average Age at Marriage in the Bashiqa District, 2024**

| Average Female Marriage Rate | Average Male Marriage Rate | Total | %    | Families with More than 5 Members | %    | Families with Fewer than 4 Members | Environment |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|------|-----------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|-------------|
| 20                           | 24                         | 166   | 63.9 | 106                               | 36.1 | 60                                 | Urban       |
| 17                           | 19                         | 515   | 77.5 | 399                               | 22.5 | 116                                | Rural       |
| 18.6                         | 22.3                       | 681   | 74.2 | 505                               | 25.8 | 176                                | Total       |

Source: Based on the data collected through the questionnaire administered during the 2024 field study.

## ***Variation in Marriage Age by Religion***

Religious affiliation shapes the average age of marriage in the Bashiqa subdistrict. The average age of marriage among the several religious groups in the Bashiqa subdistrict in 2024 shows notable variations shown in table (5), which illustrates how the social and cultural frameworks associated with every religion influence marriage

decision. Muslims have the lowest average age of marriage; men get married at 19, and women at 17 years old. This rate especially reveals the frequency of social conventions and traditions supporting early marriage, mostly in rural areas where marriage is sometimes seen as a sign of maturity and stability of the family.

While women married at an average age of 18 years, which fits the averages observed among Muslims, men usually married at an average age of 20 among the Yazidis. Thus, the social and religious aspects of this group help to explain the noted variations. These characteristics draw attention to specific conditions and guidelines related to marriage contracts, which may cause a slight delay in the timing of the marriage. Conversely, statistics on the Christian population in the Bashiqa subdistrict clearly show a trend that men's average age of marriage is 26 years. Among women, this is 21 years—the highest among all the religious groups. Many elements can be blamed for the inclination to postpone marriage: higher educational attainment within this group, the link of marriage to financial and social autonomy, more exposure to urban or Western lifestyles, and the migration phenomenon, which may postpone the marriage decision until stability is attained in the destination country or upon return.

In the Bashiqa subdistrict, the age at which people get married is strongly affected by their religion. Due to economic and educational factors, each religious group has its own set of traditions that affect when people get married. Numerical differences in the recorded marriage rates clearly show this link.

**Table (5): Average Age at Marriage Among Residents of the Bashiqa District by Religious Affiliation, 2024**

| Average Age at Marriage (Females) | Average Age at Marriage (Males) | Number of Completed Forms | Religious Affiliation |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 17                                | 19                              | 549                       | Muslim                |
| 18                                | 20                              | 101                       | Yazidi                |
| 21                                | 26                              | 31                        | Christian             |
| 18.6                              | 22.3                            | 681                       | Total                 |

Source: Based on the data collected through the questionnaire administered during the 2024 field study.

### ***Variation in Marriage Age by Community***

Table (6) and Figure (1) help to depict better the notable fluctuations in the average age of marriage among the several social elements in the Bashiqa subdistrict. This variation closely relates to the cultural and social background, educational level, and

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lifestyle (rural or semi-urban) of every component. The data indicate that the Arab, Shabak, Turkmen, and Kurdish components recorded the lowest rates of marriage ages. The average age of marriage for males in the above components ranged from 17 to 19 years, while for females, it ranged from 15 to 16 years. These are the lowest rates recorded among all components. This trend is attributed to the prevalence of rural customs and traditions that encourage early marriage, as well as the low educational and economic levels in some of these communities, which makes early marriage a means of achieving social and economic stability. The Yazidi community recorded a relatively moderate average age of marriage, with males reaching 20 years and females reaching 18 years. This figure displays the balance between respect for tradition and the impact of religious and social rules on marriage contracts, so producing a minor difference relative to other rural elements, as already mentioned.

In contrast, the Christian component recorded the highest average age of marriage, with males reaching 26 years and females reaching 19 years. This trend reflects several factors, most notably relatively high levels of education, a trend toward professional and economic stability before marriage, as well as the influence of urban and Western cultures resulting from migration or contact with the outside world, as also discussed in the previous paragraph.

Based on the above, the disparity in marriage age among the components of the Bashiqa subdistrict is not merely a numerical difference but rather an expression of contrasting cultural and social patterns. Rural components tend to marry early for traditional and economic reasons. In contrast, components with an urban character or those linked to migration and Western culture tend to delay marriage for reasons related to independence and individual maturity.

**Table (6): Average Age at Marriage by Population Components in the Bashiqa District, 2024**

| Average Age at Marriage (Females) | Average Age at Marriage (Males) | Population Group |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| 16                                | 18                              | Shabak           |
| 15                                | 17                              | Arabs            |
| 16                                | 19                              | Kurds            |
| 19                                | 26                              | Christians       |
| 16                                | 18                              | Turkmen          |

|      |      |                 |
|------|------|-----------------|
| 18   | 20   | Yazidis         |
| 18.6 | 22.3 | Overall Average |

Source: Based on the data collected through the questionnaire administered during the 2024 field study.

### **Factors Influencing Marriage Age:**

#### **1) Income Level: Correspondence with Marriage Age**

Table (7) shows the field study results showing differences in household income levels between the urban and rural areas of the Bashiqā subdistrict. The percentage of urban households with a monthly income exceeding 500,000 dinars was 54.9%, while the percentage in rural areas was only 46.8%. Rural areas had 53.2% of limited-income households—that is, those earning less than 500,000 dinars per month—while urban areas had 45.1%. This income difference reflects a disparity in economic capability between the two environments, which has both direct and indirect effects on the age of marriage. Low incomes in rural areas cause some people to delay marriage since they cannot afford the related expenses. To help with the financial load, some families choose to marry off their children—especially girls—at young ages. Meanwhile, urban families with slightly higher incomes benefit from the wealth that allows them to postpone marriage in favour of completing their education or advancing their careers.

**Table (7): Environmental Variation in Average Family Income in the Bashiqā District, 2024**

| Total Forms Collected | %    | Households with Income More than 500,000 IQD | %    | Households with Income Less than 500,000 IQD | Environment |
|-----------------------|------|--|------|--|-------------|
| 166                   | 54.9 | 91   | 45.1 | 75   | Urban       |
| 515                   | 46.8 | 241  | 53.2 | 274  | Rural       |
| 681                   | 48.8 | 332  | 51.2 | 349  | Total       |

Source: Based on the data collected through the questionnaire administered during the 2024 field study.

Considering the above, it is clear that family income is an important economic factor that contributes to explaining the differences in marriage ages between urban and rural residents in Bashiqā, which should be considered when analysing marriage patterns among the various social components of the region.

#### **2) Education Level and Its Relationship to Marriage Age**

Table (8) shows the gender and environmental differences in Bashiqā subdistrict 2024 educational attainment. The facts show a clear relationship between people's average age at marriage and their degree of education. Comparing educational variations between urban and rural populations as well as between men and women reveals this relationship especially clearly.

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In urban settings, the majority are concentrated in the intermediate education category or above, with the percentage of educated females reaching 36.0%, compared to only 14.1% for those who did not continue their education after completing primary school. In the same environmental context, the percentage of men who continued their education rose to 42.7%, while those whose education stopped at the elementary level only registered 7.2%. This disparity draws attention to a more general trend in society toward delayed marriage, most especially among women. Urban settings show especially clear patterns where women's search for more education and professional growth usually takes precedence over early marriage. Data show that the rural population—especially women—is much overrepresented in the category of primary education or less. The percentage of rural females who do not complete their education or have limited education is 26.1%, which explains the high frequency of early marriage in this group, which can be attributed to several interrelated elements, including limited access to quality education, ingrained social norms, and general economic pressures. Still, it is interesting that 24.0% of educated rural women were able to finish their degree, suggesting a degree of tenacity and will in the face of environmental obstacles.

In general, these results demonstrate a direct relationship between education level and average age of marriage: rural females have lower levels of education than urban females, and therefore, early marriage is more common in rural areas. The higher the educational level, the higher the age of marriage, and vice versa. These results support the hypothesis that education is a decisive factor in shaping social behaviour related to marriage <sup>(4)</sup>, especially in rural and urban communities with diverse cultural compositions, such as the case in Bashiqa.

**Table (8): Environmental and Gender-Based Variation in Educational Attainment in the Bashiqa District, 2024**

| Total | %    | Females (Intermediate or Higher) | %    | Males (Intermediate or Higher) | %    | Females (Primary or Less) | %    | Males (Primary or Less) | Environment |
|-------|------|----------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|------|---------------------------|------|-------------------------|-------------|
| 332   | 36.0 | 119                              | 42.7 | 142                            | 14.1 | 47                        | 7.2  | 24                      | Urban       |
| 1030  | 24.0 | 247                              | 33.9 | 349                            | 26.1 | 269                       | 16.0 | 165                     | Rural       |
| 1362  | 24.5 | 366                              | 36.0 | 491                            | 23.2 | 316                       | 13.6 | 189                     | Total       |

Source: Based on the data collected through the questionnaire administered during the 2024 field study.

<sup>(4)</sup> Hanaa Jassim Muhammad. The Impact of Early Marriage for Girls on the Social Development Process: A Field Study in the City of Mosul. Mosul Studies Center, Issue No. 18, November 2007, p. 102.

## Conclusions

The 2024 field study's results show that there are important demographic and socio-cultural trends in how people get married in the different communities of the Bashiqa subdistrict. The study shows that there are big differences in the average age at which people of different ethnic and religious groups get married. These differences are caused by a complicated mix of cultural, economic, and educational factors.

1. The study shows that there is a strong link between social identity and how people act in their marriages. The Shabak and rural Arab communities have lower average marriage ages because of traditional norms and limited access to education. Christian and Yazidi communities, on the other hand, tend to put off getting married until later in life, focusing on getting a higher education, being financially stable, and growing as a person.
2. Educational level becomes a very important factor. People who had secondary or post-secondary education, especially in cities, were more likely to put off getting married. This was especially true for Christian and Yazidi respondents.
3. Economic factors, especially income levels and job prospects, were very important in making decisions about marriage. People said that financial instability was a big reason why they put off getting married, especially young people in cities where they want to be independent and move up in their careers.
4. The data showed that there were differences in the age at which men and women got married, with men always getting married later than women. But the size of this gap depended on what each group's culture expected.
5. Religious and cultural traditions still have a big impact, especially in more conservative communities where they encourage early marriage. In these kinds of places, marriage is still a way to keep families together, protect religious identity, and keep family honor.
6. The rural-urban divide was evident, with earlier marriage ages observed in rural areas due to the persistence of customary practices and lower exposure to formal education and modern social norms.

In short, the study shows how important it is to look at marriage behaviors in the larger social, cultural, and economic contexts in which they happen. The patterns we saw show that we need to make specific policy changes that consider the needs of each community, especially when it comes to education, women's empowerment, and rural development.

## Recommendations

Based on the study's results about how marriage age varies between social groups in the Bashiqa subdistrict, the following suggestions are made to help policymakers and future community development efforts:

1. **Enhancing Educational Access and Retention:** It is important to have programs that help girls in rural areas get more education. Making secondary and higher education

# The Average Age of Marriage Among Residents of Bashiqa Subdistrict: A Field Study

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more accessible could help people wait longer to get married and give them the tools they need to make smart decisions about their lives.

2. **Developing Culturally Sensitive Awareness Campaigns:** Programs to raise awareness in the community should be based on the unique customs and beliefs of that community. These campaigns must engage religious leaders, elders, and local influencers to promote balanced views on marriage, child development, and women's rights.
3. **Supporting Economic Empowerment for Youth:** Economic interventions—such as vocational training, microfinance programs, and job creation schemes—should target young adults to alleviate the economic pressures that often lead to early marriage, particularly in urban environments.
4. **Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Community Enforcement:** Local-level systems for monitoring and enforcing existing laws about the minimum age for marriage should be put in place. Community-based reporting and dialogue forums can help change the way people get married over time.
5. **Bridging the Urban-Rural Development Gap:** Investing in rural infrastructure, education, and health services is very important for closing the gap in development between urban and rural areas. This is because early marriage is more common in rural areas where there are not many other options.
6. **Encouraging Further Interdisciplinary Research:** To better understand how marriage works and how it affects population growth, future studies should take a multidisciplinary approach that includes ideas from sociology, psychology, gender studies, and economics.

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### **Questionnaire on Bashiqa District Residents on Age at Marriage – 2024**

#### ***Purpose of the Study:***

The purpose of this survey is to determine the age at which people in the Bashiqa District get married for academic and scientific research purposes.

#### ***Section One: General Family Information***

1. Current Place of Residence: Urban:  Neighborhood Name Rural:  Village
2. Religion: Muslim  Yazidi  Christian

#### ***Section Two: Information about Marriage***

1. How old were you when you got married: Husband: Year Wife: Year
2. Family Size: Four or less five or more

#### ***Section Three: Educational Status and Economic Level***

- Husband's Educational Attainment: Primary or below Intermediate or above
- Mother's Educational Attainment: Primary or below Intermediate or above
- Monthly Income: Less than 500,000 More Less than 500,000