

Child Marriage in Bangladesh: Exploring the Societal and Legal Implications

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Abstract: Child marriage is one of the social problems in Bangladesh. There are a lot of reasons why it happens. Poverty, negligence in sending children to education, societal pressure, harassment, and marriageable dowry are considered the foremost reasons for child marriage in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, child marriage may have several negative effects. The current study demonstrates that child marriage has significant negative social, economic, and cultural repercussions, as well as substantial health costs. Early-aged girls are more likely to give birth to babies, endangering the mother's life and increasing the risk of miscarriage, infant mortality, and malnutrition. However, maternal health risks are quite high, and a woman in her 20s has a five-fold greater chance of dying during pregnancy or delivery if she is a girl under the age of 15. Girls who marry as children face danger and hardship. Young brides run the risk of starting impoverished and ending up poor. Such a marriage restricts their access to education and a good life, endangers their health, and lessens their chances and opportunities for personal development.

Key Words: Child marriage, Circumstances, Poverty, Uneducated, Legal Implications.

Introduction

Child marriage remains a pressing social issue with severe consequences that hinder the progress of societies worldwide. Among the countries heavily affected by this detrimental practice, Bangladesh stands out as a nation grappling with the detrimental effects of early marriage on its young population. This research aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the consequences of child marriage in Bangladesh, shedding light on the profound physical, psychological, social, and economic impacts experienced by those forced into such unions. Bangladesh faces an alarming prevalence of child marriage, with a significant number of girls being married before the age of 18. This phenomenon not only undermines the fundamental human rights of these young individuals but also hampers the development and well-being of the nation as a whole. Understanding the multifaceted consequences of child marriage is critical for implementing effective interventions and policies to address this issue widely. To explore the wide-ranging ramifications of child marriage in Bangladesh, examining its implications for the physical and mental health of young girls who enter these unions unprepared. It explores the disruption of education and curtailed opportunities for personal growth and economic independence that are often accompanied by early marriage. By analyzing the social and cultural factors that spread child marriage, this article aims to provide insights into the complex dynamics that drive the practice and the challenges associated with combating it. Through this comprehensive overview, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners will gain a deeper understanding of the magnitude and gravity of the consequences associated with child marriage in Bangladesh. The findings presented in this research are intended to inform the development of targeted strategies, policies, and programs that can effectively address the root causes and mitigate the far-reaching negative effects of

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child marriage. Ultimately, it is our collective responsibility to advocate for the rights and well-being of the young girls affected by child marriage, striving for a future where every child in Bangladesh will have the opportunity to thrive, grow, and contribute to a prosperous society.

Conceptual Framework

Child marriage has become a burning issue in Bangladesh because the country has the fourth-highest rate of child marriage in the world. It implemented a law to stop child marriage in 1929, and since the 1980s, the legal minimum age for marriage has been set at 18 for females and 21 for males. Inaction on the part of the government and carelessness in local administration permits child marriage, especially for young girls. Typically, families seek to marry their daughters young due to financial constraints. Bangladesh has received recognition for its accomplishments in a variety of development-related fields, including women's rights. Bangladesh's "impressive" drop in poverty from 56.7% in 1991–1992 to 31.5% in 2010 was noted by the UN.¹ Child marriage reflects deeply rooted norms and the unequal position of females in society. It deteriorates progressively over 30 years. Child marriage happens across all socioeconomic sectors and origins, despite poverty and illiteracy. More than half of Bangladeshi mid-20s-aged women married before age 18. Nearly 18% were under 15 years old. South Asian parents influence their children's marriages. Girls protect the family's honour. As their daughter nears adolescence, her parents worry about her virginity. It prevents child marriage. According to recent research, parents who desire to marry off their daughters dread sexual assault from the outset of adolescence. Many married teenagers are abused sexually and physically. 33% of teen girls say a husband can hit his wife.

Present Status of Child Marriage in Bangladesh

Child marriage in Bangladesh was 13% during the COVID-19 pandemic. Loss of parental income and pandemic-related school closures increase child marriages. Child marriages in Bangladesh soared by 13% during last year's COVID-19 epidemic, which devastated towns and businesses. It has become an obstacle to the development of Bangladesh, and the virus has hindered efforts to end it. A survey was run by the BRAC, a renowned NGO, in eleven districts on the way COVID-19 has affected women and young girls regarding their lives. The result of the survey was that 13% of child marriages increased during that time. This year, Bangladesh had the most child weddings within 25 years. The country has reduced child marriage and is leading in social progress indicators. According to the poll, parental financial loss and pandemic-related school closures are driving child marriages. The girl's family was forcing her to marry a man from another upazila until Raushan Ali interfered. Ali and the cops detained the groom-to-be when they arrived. The mobile court granted him a seven-day sentence. Local officials in Dharmapur, Gaibandha district, responded swiftly when neighbours called Child Helpline 1098.

Some of these weddings were prevented by the government, but others evaded municipal and federal authorities. In Kurigram, Natore, Jessore, Kushtia, Narsingdi, and Jhalokati, the number of child marriages has grown. 231 child marriages took place nationwide in the first three months (March to June) of the shutdown the previous year, with 61 taking place in Kurigram in the north. Natore had 23 child weddings, Jessore and Kushtia 15 each. 10 child weddings occurred in Jhalokati, 8 in Naogaon, Chapainawabganj, and Narsingdi, 7 in Gaibandha and Cox's Bazar, 6 in Nilphamari, and 5 in Chittagong and Rajshahi. 59% of women marry before age 18, while 22% marry before age 15. Anam said many individuals lost their jobs and all educational facilities were stopped to fight the infection, hence child marriage has risen. Social security considerations worried many parents about homeschooling. Due to the situation, the parents married off their adolescent daughters. Child Helpline

¹ General Economics Division (GED) Bangladesh Planning Commission, "Millennium Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report 2013," August 2014, <http://www.bd.undp.org/content/dam/bangladesh/docs/Publications/Pub-2014/MDG%20Report%20Last.pdf> (accessed August 2, 2022), p. 15.

1098, run in conjunction with UNICEF, has received more reports of child weddings during the epidemic, says manager Chowdhury Mohiman. According to Save the Children's Global Report, 2.5 million more girls will be married by 2025, bringing the total to almost 200,000 in South Asia in 2020.²

Child Marriage: A Global Concern

There are more than five hundred organizations around the world which are working to stop child marriage. South Asian, European, and Middle Eastern child brides exist. Nearly 700 million living women married before 18. One-third were married by fifteen. Most child marriages occur in poor nations. Child marriage "robs girls of their girlhood, entrenches them and their future families in poverty, limits their life options, and imposes huge development costs for communities," according to the UN Population Fund. Child marriage is debated worldwide.

Child Marriage in Bangladesh

Child marriage globally is linked to early pregnancy, poor scholastic performance for girls who marry younger, marital violence, and poverty. "It has severe consequences on the physical health of young girls in Bangladesh. Early marriage often leads to complications during pregnancy and childbirth, resulting in higher maternal and infant mortality rates" UNICEF. (2020). *Child Marriage: Latest Trends and Future Prospects*. Retrieved from <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-latest-trends-and-future-prospects/>.

According to a seven-country study, the women who got married at the age of over 25 are less likely to endure domestic abuse. According to global statistics, girls from the poorest 20% of households are twice as likely to marry before 18 as girls from the richest 20%. Bangladesh has been lauded for its progress in women's rights and other areas. Bangladesh's poverty decrease from 56.7% in 1991–1992 to 31.5% in 2010 was "outstanding," according to the UN. According to the UN, Bangladesh enjoys gender parity in primary and secondary education. Between 2001 and 2010, maternal mortality fell 40%. Why is Bangladesh's child marriage rate so high when it has met several development goals? This study seeks to find a way to answer those questions and identify the ways Bangladesh's government might equally reduce child marriage. Bangladesh's high child marriage rate is caused by many reasons. "The social consequences of child marriage are significant, as it perpetuates a cycle of gender inequality and limits social mobility for young girls. They are deprived of educational opportunities and are confined to traditional gender roles and household responsibilities"³. Because it promotes harmful societal norms and behaviours for girls at every stage of development, gender discrimination is a primary reason for the country's high child marriage rate. In Bangladesh, many families live in great poverty, and many parents believe that child marriage is the only option to secure a girl's future. Many households, especially those in rural and disaster-prone areas of Bangladesh, suffer additional suffering due to natural catastrophes and climate change. As awareness of child marriage's harms has grown, Bangladesh's government has committed to act promptly. At the Girl Summit in London in July 2014, Bangladesh's prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, vowed to reduce child marriage and eradicate it by 2041. By 2021, she promised to stop child marriage and reduce female marriages between 15 and 18 by more than one-third. As part of this initiative, her administration will change social norms and involve civil society in fighting underage marriage. These initiatives included drafting a national plan of action by 2014, revising Bangladesh's Underage Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) before 2015, and more.⁴

² <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/law-rights/2021/03/28/child-marriage-up-13-during-covid-19-pandemic-in-bangladesh>.

³ Ahmed, S., & Khan, M. A. (2018). *The Consequences of Child Marriage: A Synthesis of Recent Evidence from Low- and Middle-Income Countries*. *Annu. Rev. Public Health*, 39, 417-432.

⁴<https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/09/marry-your-house-swept-away/child-marriage-bangladesh>

Bangladesh's Legal Marriage age Minimum

The Ban on Child Marriage The bill maintains the legal marriage age as 21 for males and 18 for women but adds exceptions for "exceptional instances" or where it is in the "best interests" of the teenager.

Bangladesh's Child Marriage Problem

Child marriage is a global issue, not just in Bangladesh. However, Bangladesh has a worse situation. Child marriage in Bangladesh is caused by poverty, illiteracy, low socioeconomic level, and religious ignorance. Child marriage in Bangladesh is also impacted by custom, a lack of social security, career opportunities, parents' anxieties about their daughters' virginity, and the country's poor law enforcement. Below are explanations.

Poverty

Child marriage in Bangladesh is largely caused by poverty. In Bangladesh, it causes and causes child marriage. Bangladesh's poverty hinders its development. It's an epidemic that causes all social problems. Poor parents who can't afford their daughters' schooling and other expenses often use early marriage to shift their financial burden to the husband's family. 12.9% and 24.3% of residents live below the lower and upper poverty lines, respectively (HIE Survey, 2016). 11.5 percent of Sylhet residents live below the poverty line and 16.2 percent live above it, making child marriage closely linked to poverty. Jisun, 2016. 11 per cent of Sylhet weddings are to minors, according to the 2015 BBS Report. According to the 2016 HIE Survey, 30.5 per cent of Rangpur's population lives below the poverty level, while 47.2 per cent does not. According to the 2015 BBS Report, 55.3% of Kurigram children are married. "Poverty forces poor parents, especially impoverished female parents, to arrange early marriages for their children." Child marriage rates are lower when financial situations improve but higher when poverty rates are high.⁵

Lack of Education

Development depends on education. Without good education, no nation can progress. Underage marriage in Bangladesh is linked to illiteracy. Child marriage and schooling are bad. Uneducated children accept their parents' early marriage proposals since they don't grasp the repercussions. When a girl graduates, her parents usually rush her marriage. Higher education reduces child marriage, but lower education increases it. Uneducated parents are more motivated to get the under-aged girls married than making them more educated, but the scenario is the opposite in the case of their boys⁶. Bangladesh's efforts to reduce child marriage are directly impacted by education; in Barisal, 15.11 per cent of the population lacks a high school certificate, while in Rajshahi, 27.9 per cent do (Islam, Haque, & Hossain, 2016) While the percentage of marriages between those under the age of 18 in Rajshahi is 28.5%, it is just 11.7% in Barisal.

Improper Knowledge and Conventional Wisdom

Muslim girls without basic education often marry early. "Psychologically, girls forced into child marriages face an increased risk of mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, due to the emotional and psychological stressors associated with early marriage"⁷. Theocratic philosophers are more prevalent because young moms are healthier, more obedient, better able to care for their husbands, and more productive. However, sometimes an imam (a Muslim religious authority) would utilize phoney theological grounds to force the parents to arrange an early wedding. In addition to

⁵https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301300503_REGIONAL_VARIATIONS_IN_CHILD_MARRIAGE_IN_BANGLADESH.

⁶<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1634549852>.

⁷ Sabbe, A., Oulami, H., Zekraoui, W., Hikmat, H., Temmerman, M., & Leye, E. (2016). *Reproductive Health Consequences of Child Marriage: A Systematic Review of the Literature*. *European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care*, 21(5), 420-430.

these, it's important to start wedding preparations early because society believes that a girl loses her appeal as she gets older and then regains it, making it hard for her to find a good husband.

Lack of Knowledge of the bad impact of Early Marriage

"Early marriage contributes to poverty by limiting women's access to education, work, and resources, which hampers their ability to support themselves and their families."⁸ It is also induced by a lack of awareness, especially in rural and slum parts of Bangladesh. Early marriage lets the girl early pregnant which harms the mother and child. STIs are also possible. Parents supported arranged marriages because they were unaware of the health risks of early marriage.

Inadequate Laws

Underage marriage is legal in Bangladesh. When parents and other close relatives give their approval, child marriage is unlawful, making it hard to prevent. The penalties for child marriage, parents, and solemnizers under the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017 (Act No. VI of 2017) are insufficient to deter repeat offenders. Birth certificates are occasionally falsified by parents, and weddings are not always recorded. Because there are no consequences under the law, child marriages are common.

Behind causes of early Child Marriages

- Poverty
- Lack of girls' education
- Considering the girl child as a burden to a family
- Cultivate the folk and old traditions and customs

Statistics

As per the statistics organized by UNICEF

- 29% get married before the age of 15 of a girl,
- 2% get married before the age of 11 of a girl,
- 66 % get married before the age of 18 of a girl.
- The child law of Bangladesh says that boys should be at least 21 at their age to get married and other hand, girls should be 18.
- The number of girls getting admission into secondary school is only 45% and among them, a smaller number attend regularly.
- It is also found that One-third of teenage girls whose ages are between 15 to 19 become pregnant as well.

Bangladesh Government's Responses to Child Marriage

Since taking office in 2009, the People's Republic of Bangladesh's current administration has committed to ending child marriage as soon as possible, by the year 2041. Sheik Hasina, the prime minister of Bangladesh, also promised to stop child marriage and reduce the number of married women between the ages of 15 and 18 during the London Women's Summit in July 2014. She promised that as part of this endeavour, her administration would update the Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA), create a national child marriage action plan by 2015, and take further efforts to modify societal customs and involve civil society in the battle against child marriage.⁹

Bangladesh's International Legal Obligations

The Bangladeshi government must protect women's rights under international law. These include freedom from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, equality, and nondiscrimination. They include health, education, and knowledge rights. Infringed parties need an effective remedy. In Bangladesh,

⁸ World Bank. (2018). Ending Child Marriage in South Asia: A Profile of Progress in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29787>.

⁹<https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/09/marry-your-house-swept-away/child-marriage-bangladesh>.

child marriage can lead to these rights not being completely safeguarded, and failing to do so can increase child marriage.

Governments must prevent and respond to human rights violations as per international law, which holds nations liable for private acts. The CEDAW Committee, which reviews government compliance with CEDAW, adds, "States may also be liable for private activities if they fail to act with reasonable care to avoid rights violations or investigate and punish acts of violence."

CEDAW requires states to stop social and cultural breaches of women's rights. Governments must "change the social and cultural patterns of men and women" to eliminate biases, conventions, and other behaviours based on the challenge of discriminatory behaviour. The Human Rights Committee, which reviews ICCPR compliance, says governments must "ensure that traditional, historical, religious, or cultural perspectives are not used to excuse violations of women's rights to equality before the law and to equal enjoyment of all Covenant rights."

Government Initiatives of Child Marriage

Bangladesh's elementary and secondary school enrollments are equal. Bangladesh's MMR has dropped 66% in 20 years, to 194 per 100,000 live births. Poverty decreased from 34% in 2000 to 24.8% in 2015. The government removed primary college fees to promote education. Despite awareness and desire to prevent child marriage, Asian countries have not taken the essential actions. This issue has helped young women delay marriage establish a family and obtain jobs. 1995: 1.1 million Bangladeshi women in secondary school; 2018: 3.9 million. According to a Globe Bank analysis, married women aged 13 to 15 were born between July 14 and Bastille Day, while those aged 16 to 19 were born between July 72 and July 65, showing the regular payment program delays marriage. The joint program aims to eradicate poverty (MDG #1) by empowering women, expand access to education (MDG #2) through gender-sensitive program design, improve child and maternal health (MDGs #4 and #5) through increased access to women's health care, and eradicate HIV/AIDS (MDG #6) by addressing women's vulnerability to the virus.¹⁰

NGO Initiatives of Child Marriage

Community radios may launch a November-December campaign to raise awareness against child marriage. Nationwide, 17 community radios distribute information on 11 child marriage-related topics in local languages.

The event indicates that community radio broadcasts may cover child marriage, the role of fathers, academics and community leaders, community engagement, government, social media, NGOs, and harassment. Bangladesh Community Radio Association engages with BRAC's Gender Justice and Variety and Community Authorization Program on magazine shows, skill training, and promotion.¹¹

World Vision

World Vision promotes children's global education. WHO risk exploitation, early marriage, and poorer income-earning capacity. In Bangladesh, they engage with communities and governments to improve children's education. Wedding Studies 1st educates families about child marriage.

CARE

CARE is a multinational nonprofit that helps poor women. Education for girls is part of their responsibility to combat child marriage. CARE works with families, communities, and local organizations to reduce child marriage via educational and behavioural modification programs.

¹⁰http://bmet.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bmet.portal.gov.bd/publications/d0a417cc_46ea_439f_aebf_e70dd03325e7/Brief%20on%20Child%20Marriage%20in%20Bangladesh.pdf.

¹¹<http://www.brac.net/search?start=182>.

Existing Laws Relating to Child Marriage in Bangladesh

Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017 (CMRA) repealed a British statute from 1929. The Act sets the male marriage age at 21 and the female marriage age at 18.

Protection Act

Bangladesh's Force (Prevention and Protection) Act was approved in 2010. This statute gave victims of coercion fresh hope but lacked societal control.

The statute gave victims of family abuse greater recourse and aid. The statute covers physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse. The statute allows magistrates to issue protection, shelter, maintenance, compensation, and child custody orders. The statute offers housing, medical, and legal services to victims. Forceful violators of court orders will be imprisoned and/or punished.

CMR Act reform (CMRA)

The CMRA made child marriage illegal throughout Asia in 1929. In July 2014, Bangladesh's prime minister committed to revising the CMRA, indirectly acknowledging the law's inadequacies. Some of the loopholes that allow child marriage in Asian countries have to do with societal control of the legislation, yet the law itself is also a hindrance.

Problems regarding Child Marriage in Bangladesh

There are several factors regarding child marriage in Bangladesh. To analyze child marriage in Bangladesh this study uses case studies also. The problems are:

- In Bangladesh, child marriage is still very common. Women aged 20 to 24 make up 64% of the population, and 64% of those marriages took place before they turned 18.
- Younger women are less likely to get married as children than older women, which suggests that the number of child marriages is declining.
- Location (urban/rural) and child marriage have a positive relationship. All women aged 20 to 24 who were married had a child at a rate of 54% in urban regions vs 71% in rural ones.
- Child marriage and education are closely related. In comparison to 26% of women who had earned a secondary or higher degree, 86% of women with no education were married before becoming 18 years old. The father of the bride is frequently the one who decides if his daughters will be married.
- Location and knowledge of legal age restrictions are related. The percentage of women who knew the marriage age was 45% among rural women and 55% among urban women. Why Child marriage rates are lower when there is employment present (57% employed versus 70% jobless at the time of marriage)?

Recommendations

- Government agencies that help low-income families and disaster victims should avoid child marriage.
- The government and development partners must prioritize a strategy to prevent child marriage, limit sexual harassment, support girls in education, and provide contraceptive supplies and information.
- To reduce forced child marriage and its detrimental repercussions, early marriage laws must be altered. From informal behaviors to formal rules, society must be educated and aware. Bangladesh's child marriage law must be revised and enforced.
- Government and non-governmental groups must collaborate to reach Bangladesh's most remote and neglected villages to enhance advocacy on this problem.
- Improve the efficiency and accessibility of birth and wedding registration systems, especially in remote regions, enforce the legal marriage age, and increase penalties for noncompliance. First, provide a girl with the tools to make her own choices.

- Schools may teach child marriage. This would allow women to freely express their concerns about forced marriage.
- Anti-child marriage programs need more financial and technical support.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the consequences of child marriage in Bangladesh are far-reaching and detrimental to the well-being of girls and the overall development of the nation. This research has highlighted the profound physical, psychological, social, and economic impacts experienced by those forced into early marriages. From compromised health outcomes to limited educational opportunities and perpetuation of gender inequality, child marriage hampers the potential of young girls and contributes to the cycle of poverty. By understanding these multifaceted consequences, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners can work together to develop evidence-based interventions that address the root causes and mitigate the far-reaching negative effects of child marriage. We must advocate for the rights and well-being of these young girls, striving for a future where every child in Bangladesh has the opportunity to thrive, grow, and contribute to a prosperous society. Efforts to eradicate child marriage must prioritize empowering girls, promoting gender equality, and fostering an environment that nurtures their physical, emotional, and intellectual development. Only through comprehensive and sustained action can we break the chains of child marriage and build a brighter future for the girls and the nation as a whole.