

Socio-economic values and child marriage: A case study on selected villages in Kurigram district

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to determine the socio-economic effect on child marriage in Kurigram district. Early marriage has been a common practice among many ethnic groups in the world. However, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. Sadly, the practice of early marriage gives no such cause for celebration when it is not done properly. In this paper the researcher used primary data from the questionnaires administered. The data were represented to show the effect of socio-economic condition on child marriage. Based on this finding the following recommendations are proffered to lessen the rate of early marriage of girl-child as it goes with a negative effect on their health and education. Building awareness against the negative impact of child marriage, ensuring the sexual security of girls, role of government by establishing public-private partnerships, decorating the primary and secondary textbooks with negative impact of child marriage and, establishing the marriage and family laws.

Keywords: Socio-economic value, child marriage, Kurigram.

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INTRODUCTION

The internationally accepted definition of a child is anyone below the age of 18 years. Hence any marriage where one of the parties is below the age of 18 years is considered a child marriage, although the laws of individual countries allow marriage to take place at different ages, some even below that age. For example, Maldives allows marriage of boys and girls aged 15 years, whereas in Bangladesh the minimum age is 21 years for boys and 18 years for girls. In most countries of Europe, girls are allowed to marry at the age of 16 years with parental consent. In the USA the legal age for marriage is generally 18 years, but most states allow girls to marry variously at 15, 16 or 17 with parental or court consent. According to Archbishop Desmond turn, child marriage is a practice that robs millions of girls of their childhood, their rights and their dignity.” So child

marriage means, a girl under the age of 18 is married.

Early marriage is most pronounced in South Asia, the Indian subcontinent in particular. Adolescent and child marriage in these country appear to be a strong social norm. Another report shows an estimated 75% of rural girls in Bangladesh marry before the age 16 and only 5% marry after 18 years (Barkat and Majid, 2003). In international comparisons, Bangladesh stands out as having an extraordinarily early marriage, especially for girls. According to BDHS (2004) report, the median of age of first marriage is 14.8 in Bangladesh, whereas, Pakistan and India have reported an age for 22 and 20 respectively.

In many of the developing countries, child marriage continues to be a strong social and economic norm, particularly for girls. Early female

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marriage is associated with a number of poor social, economic, religious and physical outcomes for young women and their off springs. On an average, girls who marry as the adolescents attain lower schooling levels, have lower social status in their husbands' families, report less reproductive control and suffer higher rates of maternal mortality and domestic violence. In addition, these individual outcomes suggest a number of larger social consequences of early marriage, including higher population growth, greater spread of disease, and a higher incidence of orphans.

Bangladesh is a poor country; most of the people are living under the poverty lines. On the other hand, lack of education and social awareness parents are interested to the child marriage. For poverty, parents cannot bear educational expenses of their child, so they face to early marriage. In rural society's people are involving by various social and religious cultures and the sexual behavior, the interest to the child marriage. For modernization and globalization, young boys and girls are being encouraged by early marriage. The researcher wants to try proved tautly.

The early age at marriage of the girls is responsible for many social and health problems, so the researcher wanted to study the relationship between age at marriage of the girl and independent socio-economic variables and also wanted to study how the age of marriage of the girl could be extended. The present study was undertaken to determine how the socio-economic value influence the child marriage in Bangladesh.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of research area

The research area is situated beside Kurigram Sador head quarters which are the South part of Kurigram to Ulipur road. The West part of research place is situated at Rajarhat and East side is situated at Dara river. The Economic condition of research village is lower than other areas of Kurigram District. Most of the people are dependent on the agriculture. Total population is 2000. Their lives are not comfortable and live under the poverty.

Variable specification

Every research, variable is used for determining their positions and justifies the relationship among the different concepts of research topic, and to determine the dependent and independent variables. The main concept of the research is "the socio-religious values and child marriage". The independent variables are social values and economic values. The dependent values are child marriage, age, education, occupation, gender and income.

Child marriage is a dependent variable, because it can increase or decrease on based of social and economic functions and values. When a family has high economic power and status, generally absents from the child marriage. On the other hand, when a family lives under the poverty lines, it involves with child marriage.

Sampling

A total of one hundred and twenty five (125) questionnaires were distributed to respondents out of which one hundred (100) were duly completed and returned. Therefore, the sample size of the study is one hundred (100). The various respondents were men and women, young and old or different religion

Several visits were made to the study area to collect information related to objectives of the study and after each visit collected data were checked for accuracy and clarity. Secondary data were collected from relevant books, journals, thesis and organizations.

Data processing and analysis

A questionnaire was developed in logical sequence and included various questions related to socio-demographic condition, income of inhabitants and the family member, factors affecting the child marriage.

Data processing and presentation

During collection of relevant data, both primary and secondary sources were considered. Most of the primary data were collected through face to

face interview with the household head or knowledgeable person of the sample households. A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared and then administered in the interview to collect information pertaining to the objectives of the study. The schedule covered the items of information on personal and family characteristics of the married women. The information to be collected was related to the comments on child marriage, source of family income and social status of the households.

Information of the research is collected from fields and processed using computer and researcher. Data are represented by column, chart, pi-chart and using the statistical elements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

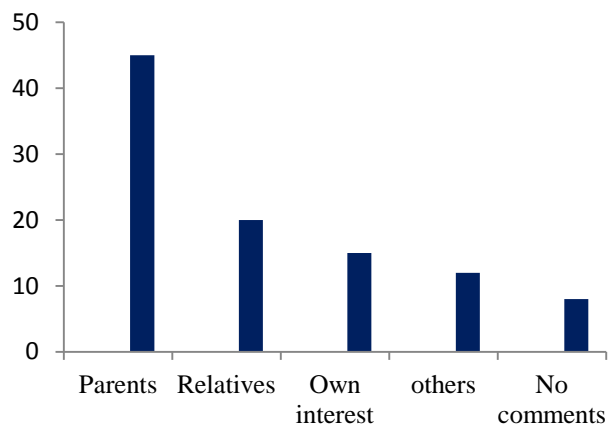


Figure 1
Percentage of respondent who promotes child marriage.

The child marriage was promoted by different social factors. The parents played 45% role to occur child marriage followed by relatives (20%), own interest (15%), others (12%) (Figure 1). Parents encourage marriage of their daughters while they are still children in hope that this marriage will benefit them both financially and socially. Some parents feel that the feeding and upkeep of a girl is economically not fruitful as she is not likely to bring any income to the household. The size of families often leads to a shortage of food and the girls are first to be jettisoned. Additionally, parents are attracted by the prospect of lower dowry payments if they marry their daughters off at an early age. Another root cause

of early marriage in Bangladesh is the fear of sexual harassment of young daughters. Early marriage is seen as a way to “protect” a girl’s sexuality in an unsafe environment.

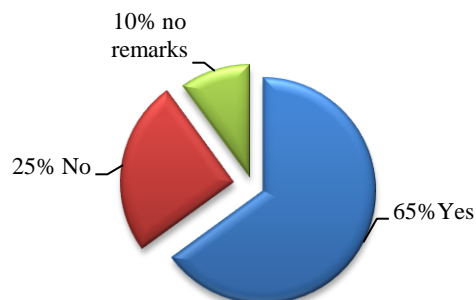


Figure 2
Comments of respondents on occurrence of child marriage.

It is learned from the research finding that 65% respondents are in favour of child marriage, 25% respondents disagree with the child marriage and 10% respondents had no remarks (Figure 2). According to the respondents the girls who are working, they marry later. For instance, garment-factory allows women to delay marriage and even after marriage to delay childbirth, because of the high opportunity costs to women of leaving the work place (Amin et al., 1998).

Child marriage and family income

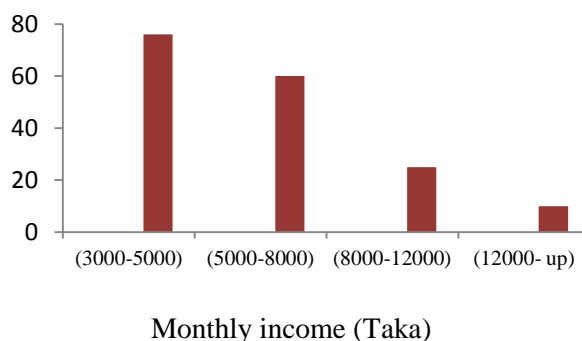


Figure 3
Rate of child marriage and family income.

Monthly household income of the respondents ranged from 3000 to more than 12000 Tk. A large majority (76%) reported the monthly household income 3000-8000 Tk, 60% reported 5000-8000

Tk, 25% and 10% reported more than 12000 Tk. According to the respondent view financial crisis, poverty and low income are greatly influenced to child marriage.

Social status and child marriage

The economic condition of household was measured in relative range, which was defined as perceived by the respondents in the community. Wealth status of the households included all the household property such as land, house, livestock, investment in trade, industry etc. The economic condition was classified into 3 level lower class middle class and upper class (Figure 4).



Figure 4
Rate of child marriage on basis of social stratification.

As shown by the figure 4, majority (80%) of the child marriage occurred in lower class, 55% cases were in middle class and 10% cases were in upper class.

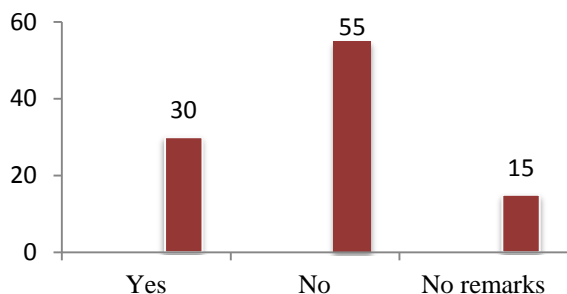


Figure 5
Percentage of respondents aware about law at the time of marriage.

The government of Bangladesh has taken many policies and laws to prevent the child marriage, but these laws are not active in the society and people don't follow the laws properly. It was observed in the study area that 55% people don't follow the laws during the marriage, 30% people follow the rules and regulations of child marriage, which are imposed by the government (Figure 5).

Causes of child marriage

Most reasons were socio-economic in nature, like the fear of overwork faced by married lazy women, violence and harsh treatment by husbands against wives and children, and bearing many children. The bride wealth is usually quite high, meaning the girl has to persevere in such conditions because her father is unlikely to be willing or able to pay back the bride wealth he received. However the identified major causes of child marriage in the study areas are given below-

Poverty

Poverty is a major and important cause of child marriage. Poor parents can't bear the expenditure of their children. Poor families sell their children into marriage either to settle debts or to make some money and escape the cycle of poverty. Child marriage fosters poverty, however, as it ensures that girls who are married off at the tender age cannot be properly led their life and cannot take part in the workplace.

Protecting" the girl's sexuality

Various kinds of social culture and modernizing the society, girls don't protect their body so in the early age they are faced sexual violence by the young generation. The imposition of family honor on a girl's individuality, in essence robbing the girl of her honor and dignity, undermines the credibility of family honor and instead underscores the presumed protection's actual aim: to control the girl.

Gender discrimination

Gender is a social construction, and not God gifted. In the rural areas, it is greatly affected on the girls. Male get many privileges than girls in all

sectors of society. They are deprived of from their basic needs as the human being and no rights to take any decision about theirs.

Lack of education

We know a common proverb that education is the backbone of nation. Girls have no ways to achieve the higher education for family restrictions. For this reason they don't know about their rights and responsibilities. Parents marry off their girls at the early age out of their ignorance.

Lack of policy implement

Government has formed many laws against child marriage. The laws are not enforced. Constitutionally strong against child marriage but actually policy implementers are influenced by various interests. So lack of legality, government can't implement the policy against the child marriage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Building awareness against the negative impact of child marriage

Building awareness in the society to reduce the child marriage and it is the best way at the present times. There are various methods to aware the people of society- groups or individuals, media and newspapers, meetings and seminar and following situational methods to reduce the child marriage.

Ensure the sexual security of girls

Girls are not secure to control their body and in our society sexual harassment is a common seen. The young generations are involved with these activities but there are no proper and active policies to protect the girls from sexual harassment. So various steps, to ensure the sexual security of girls, must be under taken. Village community and police community centers can contribute deeply to solve this problem.

Role of government

Government is all in all in the developing countries, where child marriages are seen mostly. After comparative discussing with the experts, who have much knowledge about the social environment and have to take policy and implement these policy by his executive body in the rural areas and arrangement the punishment system against who are involved with the child marriage, then possible to reduce the child marriage.

Establish public-private partnerships

The private sector comprising NGOs, community organizations, female and activist groups would work together of protecting early marriage and creating appropriate opportunities for the adolescents in the country that would eventually bring about a positive change in the status and life conditions of women in Bangladesh. Partnerships between the NGOs and the Government is a dire need to implement the programs of preventing early marriage at the local level, as a change firstly at the grassroots level is essential to change the perception of the society towards early marriage.

Decorating the primary and secondary textbooks with negative impact of child marriage

Aware of the students about child marriage, government should include the important issues relating to this affair in class V, VI, VII, VIII, IX text books, then possible to reduce the child marriage. Because, during this times, girls are very emotional on sex. They should be given primary knowledge about the bad effect of child marriage.

Establish about the marriage and family laws

After comparative discussing and disadvantages about child marriage, government to form various policies on the family laws and against child marriage for reducing the child marriages. Laws` relative child marriage should be promoted to prevent this effectively.

CONCLUSIONS

Child marriage is curse in our society, without multiple steps very difficult to control. Socio-

economic situation is played an important role to reduce the child marriage. Government should take both preventive and protective approach to reduce child marriage.

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