



## PERCEPTION OF CHILD MARRIAGE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL GIRLS IN BANGLADESH

Md. Anamul Hoque<sup>1\*</sup> and Jannatul Ferdouse<sup>2</sup>

\*Corresponding Author's Email: [sabunoa@gmail.com](mailto:sabunoa@gmail.com)

### Cite this article:

Md. Anamul Hoque, Jannatul Ferdouse (2025), Perception of Child Marriage of Secondary School Girls in Bangladesh. Journal of Advanced Research and Multidisciplinary Studies 5(1), 30-39. DOI: 10.52589/JARMS-MNHM4UME

### Manuscript History

Received: 19 Nov 2024

Accepted: 5 Jan 2025

Published: 15 Jan 2025

### Copyright © 2025 The Author(s).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits anyone to share, use, reproduce and redistribute in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

**ABSTRACT:** *Child marriage is a worldwide priority issue as ending child marriage by 2023 is a target embedded in the Sustainability Development Goal (SDG). The child marriage practice is going on around the world. Based on the latest data 21%<sup>1</sup> of young women were married as children. In Bangladesh, 38% of adolescent girls are married before the age of 15, and 51% of young women are married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Since research on this particular issue is very scanty, this study aims to explain the perception of Secondary School girls about child marriage and provide practice-based recommendations for strengthening the community especially girls to prevent it. According to the law of Bangladesh, the minimum age of marriage for girls is 18 years and for boys is 21 years<sup>1</sup>. Any marriage before these ages can be treated as child marriage. In practice, child marriage is happening in Bangladesh, particularly in urban slums and rural areas. The studies show poverty and ignorance of the parents/ guardians about the consequence of child marriage, less access to sexual & reproductive health services, and prevailing social norms of marriage are the main reasons for child marriage<sup>1</sup>.*

**KEYWORDS:** Child marriage, early marriage, early pregnancy, adolescent girl, causes-impact of child marriage, prevention of child marriage.

<sup>1</sup> Md. Anamul Hoque, Research, Evaluation, and development professional, Dhaka, Bangladesh

<sup>2</sup> Jannatul Ferdouse, Research, Development and Humanitarian professional, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh



## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the number of women who get themselves married under the age of 18 constitutes 650 million. South Asia is still home to the largest number of child brides 44%, followed by sub-Saharan Africa 18%, and others 12% (UNICEF, 2018). The prevalence of child marriage is very high in many low and middle-income countries (Hotchkiss et al., 2016). Thus, child marriage has emerged as a global problem of recent times and incurs negative consequences on the reproductive health of adolescent girls marrying too early. Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriage among girls 41.6%) and 8.2% pregnant aged below 18 years (Daily Star, March 28, 2024)<sup>3</sup>.

As per marriage law in Bangladesh, the minimum legal age of marriage for girls is 18 years and for boys is 21 years<sup>4</sup>. Any marriage before these ages can be treated as child marriage. Despite such legal obligation- child marriage is happening in Bangladesh, particularly in slum and rural village areas. Poverty and ignorance of the parents/ guardians about the consequence of child marriage, less access to sexual & reproductive health services, and prevailing social norms of marriage are the main reasons for child marriage (UNICEF, 2016, Lat, 2015, Mahato, 2016).

In general, the father suffers the responsibility of marrying their girls in Bangladesh. Father disregards the law and consequences of child marriage which is difficult to stop but rather inevitable when the adolescent girl is in an illegitimate relationship with the opposite sex. Child marriage is a compromise between a sexually abused girl and an offender. It is a strategy of poor parents to get rid of archaic customs of dowry.

The child being married has no opinion on time (age), timing, and partner selection which is a violation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>5</sup>, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. However, they are informed on the day of marriage. The child brides often encounter physical violence and bear huge workloads at the in-law's home. Child marriage has an irreversible impact on health and education often, married adolescent girls experience 1st childhood pregnancy at the age of 13-16 since they rarely seek Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) information & services. With no education or a low level of education, child brides cannot manage their reproductive health. They receive inadequate medical care during pregnancy which incurs risks to the life of both mothers and their babies (Lal, 2015). It is observed (Soo Hyun Yu et al., 2016) that low maternal age (15-19) has a negative impact on a child's growth which continues even after 24 months in children. No reason or stop-gap strategy is useful to convince parents to linger in the marriage until the adolescent girls become 18 years old. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to draw a profile

---

<sup>3</sup> Nilima Jahan, An alarming upswing in child marriage The Daily Star, Thu Mar 28, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929)

<sup>5</sup> The Convention defines discrimination against women as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."



and understand the knowledge of adolescent girls on child marriage which is available in the study area. The specific objectives of the study are as follows-

- To draw a profile of adolescent girls
- To understand the knowledge and attitude of adolescent girls about child marriage practice
- To know the causes of child marriage in adolescent girls' perception
- To assess the negotiation skills of secondary school girls to prevent child marriage
- To know the possible prevention strategy for child marriage

## **METHODS**

### **Study area, population, and research tools**

The study was conducted through a mixed methodology approach including survey, FGD, and KII, the population of the study covers secondary students from the different schools of the Tangail districts who were 12-18 years old. They are selected from different locations like urban and rural area. Additionally, parents, community leaders, secondary school teachers, religious leaders, marriage registrars, and local government authorities were also involved in exploring insights into the research objectives.

It also explains the study instruments, sample population, sampling procedures, data collection processes, and analysis techniques carried out in the study. Akanda (2023) it is an overall structure of research which facilitates delivering evidence needed to answer the research problem. It is a stage-by-stage procedure for method selection, sampling strategy, data collection, monitoring, validity and reliability, and analysis to acquire objectives. The questionnaire is an instrument used by scholars to reach a moderate number of respondents with ease (Clark & Maguire, 2020). It provides respondents with a free hand to respond with less influence from the researcher (Heirweg et al., 2019); which also accounted for the frequency of occurrence of opinions, knowledge, attitudes, experiences, processes, behaviours, or predictions. Based on the nature of the study objectives; the questionnaire survey was adapted.

The structured questionnaire has been pre-tested and a checklist has been prepared to conduct focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

### **Sample size, Sampling and Data collection**

The sample size of the study is 335 adolescent girls which are estimated by using the following formula:  $n = (Z^2 \times P(1-P)) / e^2$ .

Where, Z= value from standard normal distribution corresponding to desired confidence level (CL) (Z=1.96 for 95% CL); P = estimated proportion (0.5) and e = desired precision of estimate (0.05).



Using a simple random technique, a sample of 323 secondary school girls was identified for the survey from different secondary schools. Focus group participants were selected given their homogenous characteristics such as two fathers group, two mothers group, two teachers group, and two secondary school girls group. KII was also conducted with other potential community leaders.

To collect data, sampled secondary school girls were pre-communicated and then the survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire individually. FGDs sessions and KII interviews have been conducted as per the checklist prepared to cover all the issues concerned. With the permission of focus group discussions, the whole discussion has been recorded using an electronic tape recorder. In the case of KII, the note has been taken in a diary.

## RESULTS

### The profile of secondary school girls

Table 3.1.1 shows the profile of adolescent girls in the study area. Over 54% of adolescent girls are in the age bracket of 12-15 while nearly 20% are 18 years old. Among the respondents' adolescent girls, 84% were unmarried and 16% were married and have experience of child marriage.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
9 years	14	4.3%
10-12 years	144	44.4%
13-15 years	162	50.2%
16-17 years	2	0.6%
18 + years	1	0.3%

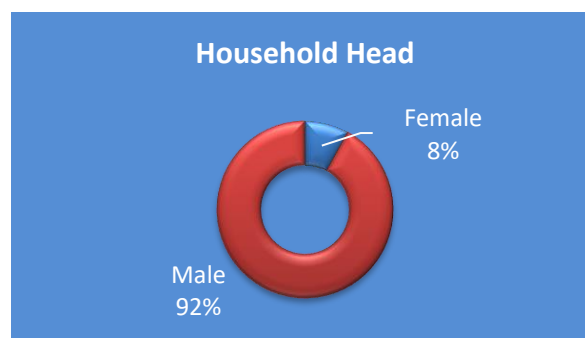


Figure 1: Household Head

According to the data, the age distribution was that almost half of the respondents were girls between 10 and 12 years old, and a half percent of the respondents were under 13 years old and engaged in education. The other age group respondents are not mentioned. The respondent's families were mostly led by male persons. It matches with the common scenario in the Bangladeshi community, where most households are run by male heads. Female-headed households are not very common at the national level (about 15%, BDHS 2021<sup>6</sup>). The religious status of the respondents was 91% Muslim 8% Hindu and 1% Christian. 100% of the respondents are never married. The research sample selected leading students at different high schools in the Tangail districts.

<sup>6</sup> Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2021

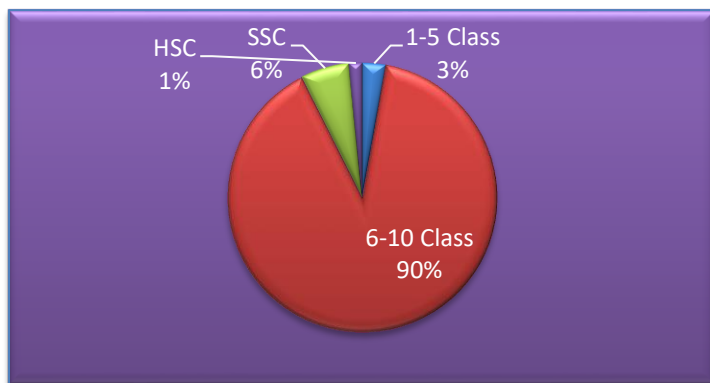


Figure 2: Education level of the respondents

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
1-5 Class	6	1.9%
6-10 Class	70	21.7%
SSC	96	29.7%
HSC	92	28.5%
BA	54	16.5%
Missing	5	1.5%
Total	323	100%

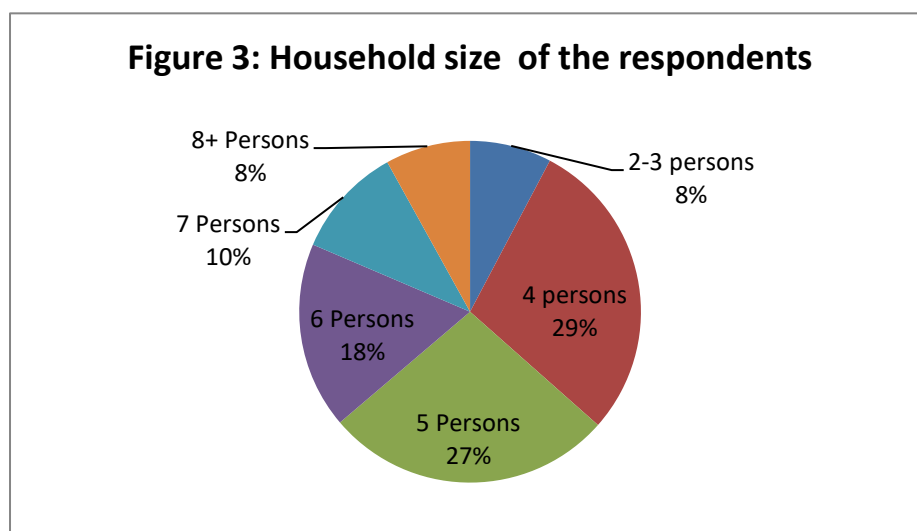


Figure 3: Household size of the respondents

The average household size is about 4.35 in the study area which is slightly higher than the national estimate of 4.3% per household (BDHS, 2021<sup>7</sup>).

<sup>7</sup>Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2021,



### Practice of Child Marriage in the study area

The adolescent girls' perception of practising child marriage in the study area shows that about 88% (age 11-16) of adolescent girls get married off at the age below 18 years. Only 10% of adolescent girls above 18 age their area get married.

### Practice of Child Marriage in the study area

Table 3.3.1 illustrates that about 88% of adolescent girls get married before age 17 in the study area. Only 3.3% of adolescent girls get married at the age of above 18.

Marriage Age Range (Year)	Number	Percent
13-14	39	12.1
15-16	57	17.6
17-18	124	38.4
>18	103	31.9
Total	323	100%

Respondents mentioned that to date 68.1% of marriages occurred before the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday of the adolescent girls in the study area. The Focus Group discussants opine that it is a very common phenomenon in their locality for a girl to get married at the age of 14 to 17 (adolescent girl, teacher, and father). Girls sometimes raise their voices against the prevailing social norms/taboo that humiliate, parents before society. Often neighbors point fingers at an unmarried 16-year-old girl which induces risk and delays the marriage of the girl for a short period. If girls refuse to get married, parents punish them by beating or scolding them. Sometimes girls run away from their houses while their parents pressure them to get married.

Focus group discussions reveal that the main reasons for child marriage in the study area are-

- Lack of consciousness
- Lack of knowledge of the demerits of child marriage
- Financial constraint
- Lack of education
- Girls' tendency to have an illegal relationship with boys
- Stokers tease and disturb school-going girls on their way to school
- Parents seek a good groom for their girl even from an early age
- Lack of social security

*"In the rural community, the age of marriage for a girl is not more than 14 or 15. Parents or guardians do not think about taking the consent of their daughters while arranging their wedding ceremony." Told a head teacher during KII*

Overall, 78% of adolescent girls report that it is quite hard to talk with their parents about their marriage (survey). Their opinions are not taken on marriage decisions (FGD-Adolescent girl).



The data shows that 67.8% of secondary school girls are unable to prevent child marriage arranged for other girls. The local government authority cannot prevent child marriage every time. The parents and caregivers do not care about law or punishment (KII- Female Word Councilor).

Postponing Child Marriage	Number	Percentage
Have confidence	104	32.2
No confidence	219	67.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>100</b>

From the research recommendation on the way to stop child marriage from society, respondents mentioned some recommendations which as follows:

Subjects	Frequency	Percentage
Increase awareness	113	35.0%
Improve social security	29	09.0%
Increase education level	14	04.3%
Increasing awareness of the demerits of child marriage	157	48.6%
Others	4	01.2%

Respondents mentioned that the community able to play a vital role in stopping child marriage. Because every part of the community knows first if any child marriage is happening in their community. If they raised their voice against child marriage, it would not be possible for child marriage in their locality. Besides this public leaders will be able to play the main role in stopping child marriage. Every local occurrence is known by local leaders if they are determined to stop child marriage it can be. Teachers are also able to play a very important role in preventing child marriage. If government officials will work properly Bangladesh will be free from child marriage.

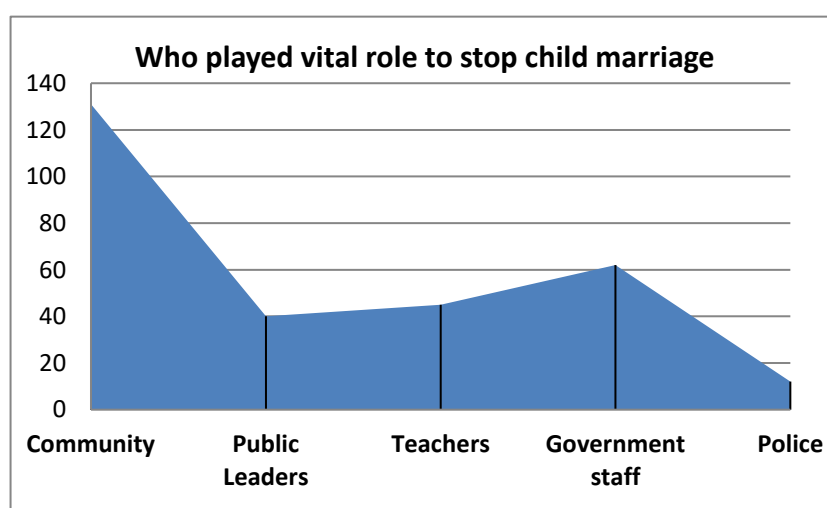


Figure 4: Vital role player to stop child marriage

Findings reveal that child marriage is more common among households that are financially and socially vulnerable and weak. Social insecurity compels many such households to set the marriage of their girls at an early age. They apprehend any unwanted situation that may create more complex and harmful consequences if marriage is delayed.

### Information getting on Child marriage

This question asked to check the flow of information to the community, especially adolescent girls. Respondents answered the question and said that textbooks and teachers provide information to them about 77 percent of the time. TV and radio also provide information 13.6 percent of the time. Only two respondents mentioned the Police name. Some respondents also got information from the community.

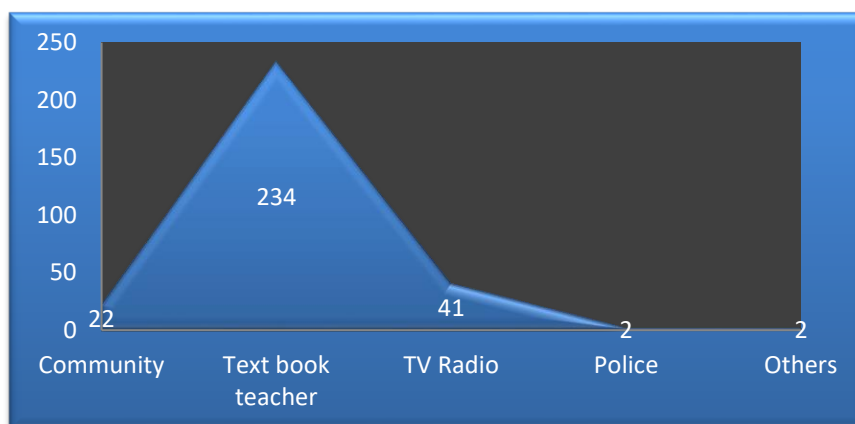


Figure 5: Information getting on Child marriage

### Knowledge and perception of consequences of child marriage

It is found in the following illustration that 68% (Table 3.3.1) of adolescent girls know the bad effects of child marriage. Teenage girls who can name at least one bad effect of child marriage are considered to know the bad/harmful effects of child marriage. It is found that 32% of adolescent girls do not know the bad effects of child marriage considering the context of health, education, and well-being.

<b>Table 6: Harmful effects of child marriage</b>		
Particulars	Number	Percentage
Knowledge of the harmful effects of child marriage	239	73.9
No knowledge of harmful child marriage	84	26.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>100%</b>

Loss of health, dropping out from school, malnourished, the risk to the mother's life, and pregnancy at an early age are the most common effects of child marriage identified by adolescent girls, 35% of adolescent girls identified loss of health as the highest bad effects of child marriage (Table 3.3.2). Besides, 24% of girls mentioned dropping out of school is a major effect of child marriage. Other effects are furnished as follows:

<b>Table 7: Bad impact of child marriage (multiple responses)</b>		
Particulars	Number	Percentage
Drop out from School	280	86.7%
Loss of health	276	85.4%
Malnourished	259	80.2%
Risk of mother's life	232	71.8%





Pregnancy at an early age	225	69.7%
Inadaptability to match with new family	111	34.4%
Pregnancy-related complications	293	90.7%
Domestic violation	153	47.4%
Divorce	127	39.3%
Polygamy	59	18.3%
Others	12	3.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>	

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

The study findings show that Bangladesh is extensive in terms of child marriage practice and, lagging in respect of providing accessibility to education. Due to the high frequency of child marriage, girls' school dropouts and discontinuation of education are high in the study area.

Child marriage is widely practiced with 87% of adolescent girls being married before the age of 17. Adolescent girls have knowledge about the menace of child marriage. Most of the time they are neither asked nor allowed to give their consent to their own marriage. Social customs, less education, poverty, less priority of reproductive health, ignorance of parents, and dowry systems are very detrimental to child marriage. Eve teasing and fear of molestation by the stoker to secondary school girls are the compulsions of marrying off adolescent girls early. The application of the Child Marriage Restrain Act is hardly visible in the study area rather child marriage is unofficially encouraged/supported by the local government authority to gain cheap popularity.

### LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

Bangladesh is a conservative society, especially in reproductive health issues. Yet in the rural and some urban areas child marriage personal and familial issues are not discussed with outsiders even in need of help. In view of the sensitive nature of some of the issues, it was not possible to ask adolescent girls directly about their understanding, knowledge, experience, and practice of child marriage. Respective school teachers are selected for data collection.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The study group recommends several interventions for the three major target groups in society to create an environment of change, namely the (a) adolescent girls, (b) parents and the community, and finally the (c) service providers. While the pattern of intervention would be quite closer for the last two groups targeting awareness and action as an agent of change in the process, it will be a little different for the third group targeting both awareness and commitment. The interventions should address the need for awareness-building, capacity-building advocacy, and networking.



## Ethics Declarations

This paper has not been submitted to more than one journal. It is self-plagiarism. Real fieldwork data has been analyzed properly.

## Conflict Interests Statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

## Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## REFERENCE

- i. BDHS (2021) Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey, National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, People's Republic of Bangladesh
- ii. Associates for Community and Population Research (ACPR), ICDDR, B, & Plan Bangladesh (2012). Child Marriage in Bangladesh: Findings from a National Survey. Dhaka, Plan Bangladesh. [Publication forthcoming]
- iii. Hotchkiss, D.R., Godha.D., Gage, A.J., and Cappa, C. (2016) Risk factors associated with the practice of child marriage among Roma Girls in Serbia. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 16 (6) 1-10.
- iv. UNICEF (2018). Child marriage data brief Data and Analytics Section, Division of Data, Research and Policy 3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA F.
- v. UNICEF (2011). Child Marriage: UNICEF Information Sheet. [[http://www.unicef.org/india/Child\\_Marriage\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_Nov2011\\_final.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/india/Child_Marriage_Fact_Sheet_Nov2011_final.pdf)]
- vi. UNICEF (2016), State of the World's Children 2011: Adolescence – An Age of Opportunity. New York.
- vii. United Nations. Programme of action. Adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5–13 September 1994. New York, United Nations, 1995 (<http://www.unfpa.org/public/site/global/publications/pid/1973>, accessed 4 November 2010).
- viii. World Health Organization. Defining sexual health. Report of a technical consultation on sexual health 28–31 January 2002 Geneva. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2006.
- ix. WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank. Trends in maternal mortality: 1990 to 2008. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2010.
- x. Akanda, M. A. S. (2023). *Research methodology: A complete direction for learners*. Academic Publishers, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- xi. Nilima Jahan, An alarming upswing in child marriage The Daily Star, Thu Mar 28, 2024.