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Effects of Child Marriage on Education and Health of Women in Rural Naogaon District of Bangladesh: A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Child marriage is a pressing global concern, and Bangladesh is no exception to this social reality. Undoubtedly, child marriage significantly hinders worldwide women's empowerment, constituting a severe violation of human rights. In developing countries, including Bangladesh, as a result of child marriage on education and health, social indicators of women's empowerment are affected, which creates obstacles to reaching sustainable development goals. The main purpose of this study is to identify the effects of child marriage on education and health of women and explore the relationships among child marriage, women empowerment and sustainable development goals. A mixed methodology was applied to this study. By using Snowball sampling techniques, data was collected from 35 respondents 4 male and 31 female, who were read in primary (27) and secondary (8) school. The findings of the study identified that the education and health of women in Naogaon at Sapahar are seriously affected due to child marriage. As a result of child marriage, girls are dropping out of school, deprived of education, creating gender inequality, and hampering women's empowerment; on the other hand, girls are losing physical and mental health, suffering malnutrition and long-term health diseases, increasing their risk of maternal and child mortality. We was found child marriage as the main and only reason for female students dropping out of school both Primary and secondary school Here, 100 percent of the total female respondents dropped out of child marriage. The health condition of the girl's respondents of this study is more vulnerable because the girl's age of marriage is very low. In the study area, the average age of marriage of total respondent was 13, (the age of male respondentis 15 and female student was 11). Lowest age of female was 9 (eleven case) and lowest age of male was 14 (two case). These findings can serve as valuable insights for academics and policy-makers, guiding the development of effective plans and programs to address child marriage. Ultimately, the goal is to contribute to achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) and creating a better future for women in Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social, religious, and legal institution that grants permission for individuals; typically, a male and a female, to live together, engage in sexual intercourse, and bear children. Child marriage, on the other hand, refers to a formal or informal union between boys and girls under the age of 18 (Parson et al., 2016). It is a violation of human rights, and because of this, young girls are denied their childhood and adolescence (Chowdhury, 2004). Globally, an estimated 650 million girls and women were married before turning 18 (UNICEF, 2020), With one in three girls in developing countries marrying before the age of 18, and one in five before the age of 15 (UNFPA, 2016). In over the world, Bangladesh is one of the highest rates of child marriage (59%) and the highest rate within South Asia (Antu et al., 2022) and it stands out with 38 million child brides, including those married before the age of 15. Shockingly, 51% of young women in Bangladesh were married before turning 18, making it one of the countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage worldwide (UNICEF, 2020). The situation

worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic, as reported by UNFPA, indicating a 10% increase in the marriage of girls aged 15 to 19 in 2021 compared to the previous year. The fallout from the pandemic led to a 27% increase in the marriage of girls in this age group over two years (Prothom Alo, 2022). Abera et al. (2020) said, early marriage affected women empowerment. Child marriage creates gender discrimination and inequality in education through dropping out of female students especially in rural area of Bangladesh. To measure the empowerment of women in Bangladesh Mahmud et al. (2012) said four determinants and four dimensions those are: a woman's demographic status indicated by age; a woman's social status as indicated by formal schooling; the household economic situation indicated by household wealth; and her exposure to media. We have found in the study area as the result of child marriage women's empowerment especially social indicators of women's empowerment like education, health etc. are affected. Consequently, we are facing problems to fulfill four sustainable development goals: such as-good health and well-being,

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quality education, gender equality and reduced inequality. We are not able to reduce inequality, maternal and child mortality, as expected. Child marriage contradicts Sustainable Development Goal number 5, as it infringes upon children's human rights, restricts their choices and opportunities, and exposes them to the risks of violence, exploitation, and abuse (UNICEF, 2021). If we want to establish women's empowerment and achieve sustainable development goals, we must abolish child marriage from society. This study aims to investigate the effects of child marriage on education and health of women along with the relationships among effects of child marriage, women empowerment and sustainable development goals in the context of rural Bangladesh from a conceptual point of view.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is basically followed by the qualitative research methodology. But for a better understanding of the research problem comprehensively to collect data we have used mixed methodology. A combination of social survey as a quantitative method and case study and focus group discussion (FGD) as qualitative method along with document study. Research technique including interview, key informant interview, conversation analysis, participant observations and research tools as questionnaire and checklist have been applied to collect data. In this study, 35 respondents (4 male and 31 female) have been selected by Snowball sampling technique.

The study area was purposively Selected as Kalmudanga (Biggest village of Patary Union), Uttor patari and Baliaghat of patari union of Naogaon district considering the acuteness of child marriage. The Patari union is the smallest but populous child prone area of Naogaon district. Total population of this union are 30117, male-12700, female-12900 and child-4517 (BBS,2011). There are 8 primary school, 2 high school and 8 madrasahs are situated in this union. This research was prescribed research from Actionaid Bangladesh with a duration of three months only so we had time bound, less manpower and economic insufficiency to complete the study. So, we focused to select the acute victims of child marriage, even we didn't include the guardian's interview with our study which was also very relevant. Patati union is a very remoter area of Bangladesh surrounded by Indian borders, total communication and networking system isn't developed here (less mobile network, we had to cross a river by ourselves with a boat attached with a rope, only vans on muddy and pitched roads) Some religious, cultural and social situations made our study more challenging. Village people didn't like male and female colleagues working together. We had to consider all these issues and that's why we feel further broad study in the community. Sometimes we only gossiped with people to collect data. Because the community is intentionally organized to conceal information regarding child marriage, So, making it challenging to collect data from concerned individuals. Consequently, the snowball sampling technique was

adopted to achieve the research objective, with thirty-five respondents selected as the research sample. So, we confess again that the limitations regarding the selection of sample size remain in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An analysis of the literature on the effects of child marriage reveals that each researcher has focused on a different effect. Yount *et al.* (2016) states that Child marriage is a risk factor for intimate partner violence (IPV) against women. Worldwide, Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of IPV and very early child marriage (before age 15). Patoary (2020) discussed six effects of child marriage. Those are: Drop out of school, health problems, economic problems, population problems, increase of dowry system in the society, barrier to socioeconomic development of the country. The study of Sayed *et al.* indicates that child marriage affects children's physical, social and economic life. It destroys reproductive health; violets human rights create gender inequality and hinder social and economic development. Ani (2020) indicates the negative impacts an early marriage has on her physical psychological and emotional well-being along with health problems and violation of educational rights. Based on the causes of child marriage Ernawati *et al.* (2022) determine the impact of child marriage on aspects of health, psychology, and economic status of rural people. They show poor results is on the health and economic aspects. (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2022) explain that According to the World Health Organization (WHO) data, the ratio of male: female age-standardized suicide death rates in Southeast Asia (which includes Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) is 1.57: 1 as compared to the ratio of close to 3:1 in high-income countries showing a much narrower gender gap (i.e. higher age-standardized suicide rates in females as compared to males in Southeast Asia as compared to high-income countries). Gaston *et al.* (2019) informed that the practice of child marriage has been well studied among girls there has been little information to date about child marriage among boys. Islam and Ahmed (2021) said there is a significant impact of climate change on child marriage. They state that according to UNICEF child marriage as a major impact of climate change on adolescent's girls who are more vulnerable in Bangladesh. They also indicate that for achieving SDGs target by 2030—at least eight child marriages in Bangladesh must be abolished. Save the Children (2022) reveals an additional 2.5 million girls in Bangladesh are at risk of marriage by 2025 due to the pandemic, marking the most significant surge in child marriage rates in 25 years. Abera *et al.* (2020) said, early marriage affected women empowerment where delaying marriage benefited. Khanam & Kabir stated that To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals targets for reducing preventable maternal and child mortality in Bangladesh, it is imperative to reduce the prevalence of anemia among pregnant women. Most of the literature based upon the effects of child marriage focused economic, educational, health, environmental, physical as

well as psychological impacts. Though many researchers have been discussed as the effects of child marriage on education and health but no one study to link among the three concepts: effects of child marriage, women empowerment and sustainable development goals. This paper has been focused on the effects of child marriage on education and health of women which hinder to women empowerment and sustainable development goals in the context of rural Bangladesh through a conceptual analysis and that is the new point of this article.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (figure: 1) focus that child marriage has an impact on women’s education and health which hinders women empowerment and sustainable development. We have shown a process to analyses that how the effects child marriage on education and health of women create obstacle to women empowerment and sustainable development goals (SDGs).

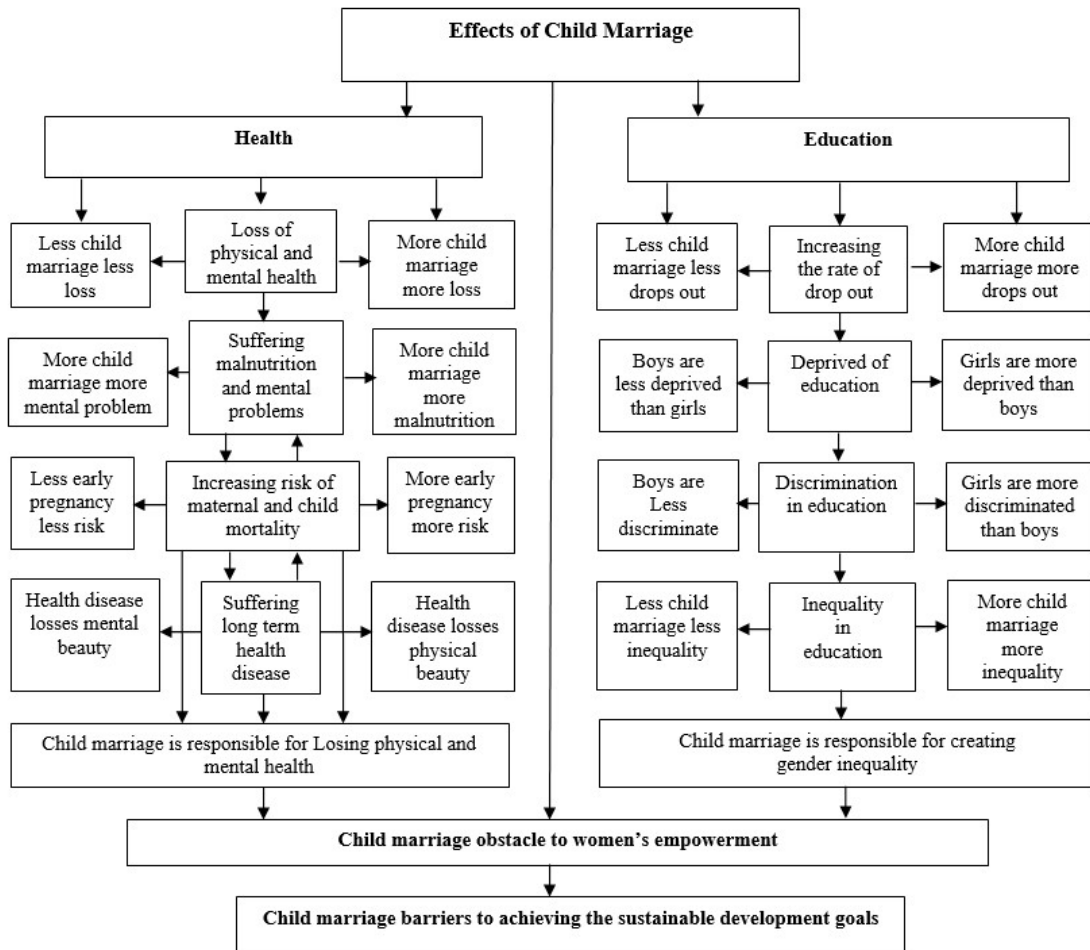


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the relationships among effects of child marriage, women empowerment and the sustainable development goals

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study uncovered significant consequences of child marriage, impacting the lives of girls adversely. It is evident that this practice damages the well-being of girls, disrupts social relationships within families, and alters modes of interaction in society. Child marriage not only robs girls of their dreams and talents but also plunges them into a state of social, economic, psychological, educational and health disorders. Upon analyzing the situation, several major effects of child marriage on education and health of women have been identified, including:

Effects of Child Marriage in Education

Education has hefty negative connection with child marriage (Islam *et al.*, 2016). Child marriage is not always caused by parents, family or society or culture, sometimes it’s an outcome of school going boys and girl’s romantic relationships (Islam, 2021). Nowadays, Schools and coaching centers are the perfect places to make love to each other, and mobile phones and social media, along with Messenger, WhatsApp, IMO, etc., are the best ways to keep love alive. In present time uneducated children cannot understand the consequences of child marriage as

a result they do not deny their parents proposal to marry early (Patoary, 2020). The child marriage phenomenon not only robs children of their right to education but also hinders their personal development, preparation for adulthood, and future well-being. Due to early marriage girl's rights are onerously violated, Because of it, girls cannot continue or complete their education (Jisun, 2016). As a result of child marriage, students, spatially female students are deprived of education through the dropping out process. For a long time, gender inequality in education is created which hinder to women empowerment as well as women development.

Increasing Dropout Rate

Child marriage is a prime cause of high school dropout rates, which negate the fundamental principles of state policy in Bangladesh, as according to article 17 of the Bangladesh Constitution (Patoary, 2020). The dropout rate is very high in the study area, and child marriage is the only cause behind it. The information collected through FGD and Document study states the real picture of the dropout rate in the study area.

The attendance record shows that 80 students were admitted into class six, but only 33 students passed class six, and another 47 students were married in the Kalmudanga girls' high school (Document study-4).

In the study area, the dropout rate and the number of child marriage both are increased proportionally and they have positive relations. If the number of child marriage increase, the dropout rate raises too. Here, child marriage and student dropout are acting as feedback of each other. School teachers provided us this kind of information.

Head teacher Md. Abdul Kahar said before one year there were out of 200 students in this (Kolmudanga Girls High School) school but the present number of students are 150 all of drop out students have been got married (FGD-2).

The teachers told us that they have tried to stop child marriage but to no avail because they are the minority in that case. 'More child marriage come more dropout and less child marriage come less dropout' this sentence is universal truth for the socio-cultural reality in the study area.

Deprived of Education and Creating Gender Inequality

From a human rights perspective, child marriage is a violation of the rights of an individual, rooted in gender inequality and an impediment to girls' social and economic development (Syed *et al.*, 2019). We was seen in the case of many families there is a provision for education of boys after marriage but none of the families send their daughter in laws to school and that is the reality. Because of child marriage girls are dropping out of school than boys. As a result, girls' students are more deprived of education than boys' students which creates gender discrimination and inequality in education (see figure 1). In the study area, a case interview with

Mousumi and Sujon provides a real-life example, offering an opportunity for a nuanced analysis of the situation.

Mousumi, 14 years old, from Uttor Kolmudanga. She had an affair when she was in class seven and the boy was in class nine. Their family didn't agree to marry them off but they were strongly committed to marry each other. At last, their family give them permission for marriage. Now Sujon (the husband) is going to school, but not Mousumi (Case-12).

Child marriage deprives girls of their basic rights, childhood, and, most significantly, their dignity and self-esteem. As a result of dropout especially girls from school gender inequality are creating that hinders empowerment of women for her long life. As child marriage increases, inequality in education also increases as a result, married children at an early age do not have the chance to develop their personalities through education.

Effects of Child Marriage in Health

It is said that health is the root of all happiness. Child marriage is such a social disease that destroys human happiness forever. It has serious detrimental effects on the health of women. As a result of child marriage women are losing physical and mental health, increasing risk of maternal and child mortality, suffering malnutrition and having long-term health disease.

Loss of Physical and Mental Health

The majority of young brides face limited access to contraception and reproductive health services, coupled with a lack of clear understanding of reproductive health. This exposes them to early and frequent sexual relations, leading to repeated pregnancies and childbirth, abortion along with illness and malnutrition before they are physically mature and psychologically prepared. Child marriage not only losses the physical health but also mental health. As Child are not psychologically prepare for taking any responsibility of family and child bearing. As a result, after marriage, they face lots of mental problems like depression, tension, unnecessary scare, cleanliness, suicide ideation, etc. (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, 2018). Effects of child marriage early pregnancy, childbirth and abortion which can have severe and long-term health impacts on girls whose bodies are not adequately developed for childbirth, while also increasing health risks for the newborn (Plan International, 2013). Early marriage often results in boys becoming less energetic, experiencing negative effects on their overall well-being and girls have to live through a fear and anxiety. For an example, we can refer some Loss of physical and mental health related cases.

Abdur Rahman, a van driver, entered into marriage at the age of 16 and is now 18 years old, His wife, whom he married from his own village at the age of 14, is now pregnant. Unfortunately, she has fallen ill, prompting him to send her to her in-laws' house for necessary treatment and care. This marriage was contracted two years ago (Case-29).

Adori, aged 15 from Uttor Kolmudanga, entered into marriage at the tender age of eleven. Within a few months of her marriage, she became pregnant and gave birth to her only son, Akash. Unfortunately, both mother and son are currently grappling with issues of malnutrition and reproductive health problems, leaving them weak and thin (Case-6).

Early pregnancy, abortion, tension, Physical and mental torture, heard work, late eating habits (not eating on time) are responsible for losses of physical and mental health. So, it goes without saying that if the rate of child marriage increases in society, the losses of physical and mental health to girls will also increase.

Suffering Malnutrition

When a girl is married between the ages of 9 to 17, she is still a child and clearly not prepared or suitable for conjugal life. Unfortunately, she often lacks the option to decline such arrangements. Within a few months of marriage, she finds herself expecting another child, leading to both the mother and child experiencing malnutrition and various other physical problems.

Salma, a 16-year-old from the village of Boldiaghat, entered into marriage when she was in class five. Now, she is a mother to a son but finds herself suffering from malnutrition but her mother-in-law is pressuring her to have another baby as soon as possible. Salma, however, is not ready for another pregnancy at this point, but she may have to conceive again based on her mother-in-law's wishes (Case-9).

Abortion emerges as a significant consequence of child marriage in the study area, with five girls having undergone the procedure due to their immaturity. Additionally, the study uncovered the tragic deaths of two women during childbirth, highlighting the serious problems child marriage poses to reproductive health.

Ayesha, aged 14 from Uttor Kolmudanga, entered into marriage with a 16-year-old boy from the same village three years ago. Shortly after her marriage, she became pregnant but had to undergo an abortion, resulting in severe illness to the point of near death. (Case-7).

Abortion poses a risk of physical harm and endangers the lives of girls. The aftermath of an abortion often leaves the girl weakened, making it challenging for her to fulfill her household responsibilities. This, in turn, can lead to the emergence of family violence and, at times, contribute to marital breakdown. Moreover, the physical health damage resulting from abortion can have adverse effects on the mental well-being of the individuals involved.

Samira, at the age of 14 from Boldiaghat, entered into marriage when she was only in class three. Her husband, a cattle trader trafficking cows from India, disregards her opinions as she is just a woman. Despite Samira's disapproval, she had two abortions under circumstances beyond her control. Presently, she has one child. Samira's health deteriorated significantly during childbirth, leading to her admission to the hospital and undergoing an operation. Unfortunately, she continues to face health

issues, remaining unwell most of the time (Case 13).

High poverty and high child marriage rates are correlated with each other (Islam, *et al.*, 2018). Poverty is the root cause of girl's malnutrition in the study area, besides abortion and early pregnancy the rate of suffering malnutrition of married girls. If the child marriage increases in society indubitably, the number of malnourished child and women will increase in society.

Increased Risk of Maternal and Child Mortality

Child mortality is an important indicator of child health and overall national development (Kabir, 2024). Several studies shows the correlation between child marriage and increased maternal mortality (Uche & Uche, 2023; Fan & Koski, 2022; Elnakib *et al.* 2022; Malhora & Elnakib, 2021; Pangaribuan *et al.*, 2020; Kohno *et al.*, 2020; Datta and Halder, 2020; Ahmed *et al.*, 2019; Chandra Mouli *et al.*, 2018; Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017; Ainul & Amin, 2015; Raj *et al.*, 2014; Ferdousi, 2013; Marshall, 1996). We was found maternal and child mortality rates were higher in this study area than others study because the average age of marriage for girls here was 11 years which we did not find anywhere else.

Nazma 16 years old, got married with her brother-in-law, when her sister died during child bearing. But after some month she got a divorce. Her husband married again. This wife is pregnant now. Nazma's sister died because she was too young to bear a baby (Case 18).

Early marriage comes early pregnancy. As a result, a child gives birth to a child, Child marriage and early childbirth are linked to high rates of pregnancy-related complications or risk to the life of the newborn and mother. Child marriage poses the risk of maternal and child death. Giving birth at a young age can result in the poor health and, in many cases, the death of the mother and child.

Suffering Long-Term Health Disease

Child marriage is responsible for many long-term health diseases (communicable and non-communicable disease) like sexually transmitted disease, loses of immunity, wet loss, epilepsy diabetes, osteoporosis, hypertension, heart disease asthma, thyroid, cervical cancer, breast cancer, uterine cancer etc. Hypertension [adjusted odds ratio 1.20 (95% CI: 1.17–1.24)], diabetes [1.29 (1.22–1.37)], thyroid disorder [1.10 (1.02–1.18)], asthma [1.19 (1.11–1.28)] and heart disease [1.27 (1.18–1.36)], are associated with child marriage (Vikram, *et al.*, 2023) Early married women are more likely to suffer from anaemia. Early marriage is significantly associated with anaemia, with a majority of anaemic mothers having married at age 18 or younger (Khanam & Kabir, 2023) In the study area most of the girls are not health conscious, they do not pay attention to these diseases. Many families of the girls cannot even get treatment due to poverty and many fall into poverty while seeking treatment. We have got such kind of information from the health worker in the study area. Such as:

Mst. Habiba Khatun, a Family Welfare Assistant (FWA)

at Kalmudanga Health Center, said child marriage is responsible for many communicable and non-communicable disease of the married girls of Kalmudanga village. She emphasizes the immediate need for health interventions in the region. She notes the unequal burden of birth control responsibility increases the risk of breast cancer and other diseases in girls. Additionally, early childbirth contributes to the breakdown of women's health, resulting in both mothers and children suffering from malnutrition and poverty is the main impediment here (KII-02).

There are positive relations between malnutrition and long-term health disease though child marriage is responsible for both. Malnutrition causes disease to grow in the body and disease grows in the body due to malnutrition. Both are losing girl's physical and mental beauty in the study area.

CONCLUSION

Child marriage, gender discrimination and inequality in education that hinders economic development as well as the empowerment of women at Patari Union of Naogaon district, Bangladesh. The girls are getting marriage from both primary and secondary schools (High school and Madrasa). We observed a few families or guardians who interested about their girl's higher education and better Career, moreover they are further concerned about as early as they can found a groom for girls. As they cannot study further, they cannot give their opinion about their own life and career. This hinders the total development of the area. We found a lot of physical, social and mental issues of child marriage. Family violence, abortion, early pregnancy, maternal death, malnutrition, extramarital affairs, divorce, dowry, remarriage, marital rape, abuse, kabin business of guardians (Demand for more kabin, divorce There and give marriage to somewhere else) cause girls psychosocial and mental health to a vulnerable condition. All these change girls' mentality, they dream of get marriage and sustain the relation at any cost instead of dreaming for educate themselves and their empowerment. This is how achieving sustainable health or sustainable development remaining an impossible mission here as a result of child marriage women are highly affected than man. This kind of social disease, like child marriage, must be stopped in Bangladesh as early as possible for achieving sustainable development goals, succession vision 2041, and contributing to demographic dividends as an important part, especially women. We confess that 35 cases are not sufficient to conduct this kind of research. So, more and more empirical and comprehensive studies should be conducted at Patari union in the Naogaon district of Bangladesh.

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