

## Factors that affect girls' dropping out of secondary-level education: A case study of a village in Bangladesh

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### Abstract

Knowing the factors affecting girls' dropping out is very important. In spite of stipends, free schoolbooks and other incentives given by the government, girls' dropout rate at the secondary level is not decreasing as expected in Bangladesh. The key objective of this study is to find out the different factors that affect girls' dropout. The respondents of this research were girls who were 14-30 years old and had dropped out of the secondary level. In this study, the research area was Bharsho village in Naogaon district, Bangladesh. Using the case study method, data for this study were collected from 21-03-2019 to 05-04-2019 from 12 respondents through face-to-face communication, with the help of an unstructured interview schedule. Findings show that several factors are responsible for girls' dropout. These are--early marriage, poverty, pregnancy, distance from home to school, eve-teasing, teachers' maltreatment, negative attitude of society towards girls' acquisition of education, poor academic performance, lack of security and the notion that if a daughter is more educated, it will cause greater difficulty in getting an equally qualified husband. Among these factors, early marriage is the most prominent.

**Keywords:** dropout; education; factors; secondary level

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### Introduction

Bangladesh is a developing country. Among various problems faced in the education sector of this country, the high dropout rate at the secondary level is a significant one. In previous times, educational amenities in the rural areas of Bangladesh were restricted (Asad, 2009). Disregarding the quality of education and human resource development, the development attempts mostly fulfilled the infrastructural development. The dropout rate is still increasing despite continuing programs like a monthly stipend, school feeding action, and free schoolbooks distribution. The Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (2016) states that school dropouts among girls were higher than boys. The rate of dropout at the secondary level among girls was almost 43 percent, while among boys, it was almost 34 percent. The Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (2016) showed that in 2015, from elementary to tertiary level, the total number of students was 36,646,519, among whom the number of girls was 18,400,637. The enrollment rate of girls is high, but the high dropout rate is not acceptable. In this paper, a dropout at the secondary level means a girl who has left school or college before completing her Higher Secondary Certificate Examination.

Holcamp (2009) found that girls' dropout rates had increased in rural areas in Malawi. Parents thought there was no benefit in keeping girls in school because after getting married they leave their parents' families after getting married. Molosiwa and Moswela (2012) showed that the pregnancy of schoolgirls was a universal crisis that has its effects at the family, society, and



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country levels. Ricketts's (2013) research in Tanzania and Rwanda found that girls had more household responsibilities than boys, leading to their dropping out of school at a very high rate than boys. Mawere's (2012) study in Zimbabwe found that the high rate of girl dropouts was an effect of various factors such as financial trouble, poverty, child marriage, distorted conceptions regarding religious rulings, and traditional beliefs that educating a girl was a waste of money. Rani and Akmam (2022) showed that the greatest number (93.90%) of the respondents were not able to continue their schooling after marriage, and the rest (6.10%) of the respondents were able to continue schooling after marriage. However, they could not continue after S.S.C. Kahise (2013) revealed that parents nurtured the notion that weddings and diverse household duties were the best options for a daughter. They also thought that in the family, a male was responsible for taking care of his wife and children. It indicates that a daughter does not need secondary education since her future husband will look after her. For this reason, a girl's education is rejected when parents face critical financial problems. Ahmed et al. (2010) have shown that poverty and poverty-related factors are responsible for girls' dropout.

Though various research has been carried out in Bangladesh's national context, qualitative studies on factors that affect school dropouts among girls in northern Bangladesh, especially in the Naogaon district, are scant. The present research tries to depict the factors of girls' dropout at the secondary level through qualitative analysis. The findings of this study will help policymakers in formulating and revising their policies on education.

### **Methods**

This study was carried out using a qualitative research design. In this research work, the case study method was used to collect data. The study area was Bharsho village in Naogaon district, Bangladesh. There was a secondary school named Bharsho High School. Every year, a number of girls drop out of this school. The researchers have identified some inclusion criteria to identify the respondents. The respondents of this research were girls who were 14-30 years old and had dropped out of school at the secondary level. For this study, primary data were collected directly by using purposive sampling from the 12 participants through face-to-face interviews with informed consent. Secondary data used in this study were collected from BBS, the local administration office, study reports, books, journals, daily newspapers, and others.

The researchers used an unstructured interview schedule as a data collection tool. At the time of data collection, 143 girls and 44 boys in Bharsho Village had dropped out of secondary school and were aged between 14 and 30 years. As per the objectives of this research, by using purposive sampling, the researchers have collected data from 12 dropout young women. To collect data, the researchers first built rapport with the respondents and then discussed the research-related issues to bring out the information they needed. The interviews were recorded in audio with the consent of the respondents. The length of each discussion was 25 to 30 minutes. The responses were also recorded as field notes. The duration of data collection was from 21-03-2019 to 05-04-2019.

The analysis followed some sequential steps involved in thematic analysis. The first step was to transcribe and translate their statements into English. Then, the researchers read and identified the themes. After identifying themes, the themes were reorganized. Then, the researchers analyzed and interpreted the collected data to prepare this final paper.

### **Results and Discussion**

Khanam (2008) stated that in Bangladesh, the rate of girls' enrollment is higher than that of boys, resulting from different initiatives, but the problem of dropouts is not decreasing. Nath et al. (2017) showed that the rate of dropout is so high that two-fifths of students enrolled in primary schools cannot complete schooling at the secondary level of education. The factors of dropout have more impact on girls. For this reason, the enrollment and dropout rates are always higher for

girls than boys (Holmes, 2003). The results of this study reveal the following factors associated with girls dropping out of the secondary level of education.

### Early marriage

Nath et al. (2017) found that 35.8 percent of girls drop out due to child marriage. They identified it as the most prominent factor for girls' dropout. Three participants of the present study said that the principal factor for their dropout was early marriage. A participant in this research named BR (pseudonym) stated that,

*"Amar jhore porar prodhan karon holo ballobibaho"*  
(The main cause of my dropout is early marriage).

She also said:

"I secured a GPA of 4.68 in the PSC Exam. From the beginning, I was very interested in schooling. When I was 14 years old and a student in class seven, my parents handed me in marriage. After my marriage, I dropped out of secondary school. My husband's family did not permit me to study. I wanted a relaxed and tension-free life. However, at my husband's house, I had no freedom. Moreover, I did not like the pressure of household work at an early age. I could not adapt well to the new family. Therefore, different kinds of problems came up in my husband's family. As a result, I was divorced after six months of marriage. After that, I lived with my parents again. After my divorce, I was admitted once again to my school in Class Eight. I secured a GPA of 4.50 out of 5 in the JSC Examination. Now I read in the science group in class ten. I want to be a doctor."

Another girl who dropped out for a similar reason was named PR (pseudonym). She was very interested in schooling. Her aim in life was to be a teacher. When she was in Class 9, her parents arranged her marriage. Before marriage, when she was continuing her studies, she did not perform any household work. In addition, she got sufficient opportunities to study from her parents and went to school regularly. However, she could not go to school after marriage. She only sat for the exams. She did not get sufficient opportunities for studying.

Nevertheless, she completed her Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examination after marriage. She secured 4.57 in the SSC Examination. Her father-in-law loved her very much. He always took care of her. She admitted that after marriage, she was able to complete her SSC with the wholehearted cooperation of her father-in-law. Immediately after she passed the SSC Examination, her father-in-law died. At that time, she was pregnant. Hence, she could not enroll in a college for higher secondary education and could not fulfill her dream. If she had not gotten married at an early age, she would have been able to continue her studies.

Here, the main cause of the two respondents' dropping out of secondary school was early marriage because if they had not been handed in marriage early, they could have received the opportunity to continue their studies, and they would not have to face different kinds of problems that lead to their drop out.

### Pregnancy

Grant and Hallman (2008) found that pregnancy is the result of marriage. Pregnancy is also a prominent factor in girls' dropout. In the words of a participant of the study named SK (pseudonym):

"When I was reading in Class 9, I became involved in a relationship. As a result, I got married to my fiancé when I was a student of class 10. My husband and I read in the same class and the same school. We appeared in the SSC Examination after marriage. Moreover, I was admitted to a

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college. When I was in Class Eleven, I became pregnant. For this reason, my husband did not allow me to study and I dropped out of school.”

Here, pregnancy was the prominent factor for the respondent's dropout because if she had not become pregnant, her husband would not have forbidden her to continue schooling.

### Poverty

Family income creates a serious impact on children's achievement and continuation in school (Hadley, 2010). Poverty always exists as one of the main reasons for dropout. Khanam (2008) showed that 27 percent of the students dropped out due to their families' inability to bear the educational expenses. In the study area of this research, the majority of the respondents' parents' socioeconomic condition was not good. Most of the respondent's parents were illiterate. A majority of the respondents' average monthly income was US\$50-100. One of the participants of this study, named AR (pseudonym), disclosed:

*“Goriber shopno dekhe kono lav nai”*  
(The poor gain nothing by having a dream).

As the respondent had no father, she faced financial problems. Her mother was unable to buy kerosene every day. They did not have an electricity connection at home. Her mother, being alone to run the family, was not able to buy things such as paper, books, pens, clothes, and others. It was required for her education. For the same reasons, she could not avail of private tuition. Even though she was stricken by poverty, she did not get any stipend. So, financial hardship was a great factor that influenced dropout.

### Distance of the school from home

Nath et al. (2017) found that distance between home and school was one of the main factors associated with girls' continuation of secondary school and their educational attainment. Yancey (2015) pointed out that the location of the nearest school in her study area was so far away that it appeared to be very dangerous for girls to walk that distance in the very hot and foggy weather, muddy roads, and starved. It led girls to drop out of school. Similarly, one of the respondents of the present study case study, named NK (pseudonym), said:

*“Amar Jhore porar prodhan karon holo schooler durotto; karon school dure na hole baba ma amake aro lekhapora korato”*  
(The main reason for my dropping out was the distance of the school from home. Had my school not been so far, my parents would have let me continue my studies).

As her school was far away from home, her guardians felt insecure. For this reason, they arranged a marriage for her, and eventually, she dropped out.

### Eve-teasing

In Bangladesh, a number of girls are facing eve-teasing and sexual harassment at school. In fear of encountering such incidents, some parents are arranging an early marriage for their daughters, which results in their dropping out of school. In the words of a participant named TP (pseudonym):

*“Amar jhore porar prodhan karon chilo eve teasing.”*  
(The main cause of my dropping out was eve teasing).

TP could not go to school alone because of eve-teasing. On the way to school, boys made illicit proposals and bothered her in many ways. Her parents sometimes came to school with her and brought her back home from school. However, they did not always have enough time for that. They felt insecure about sending her to school. In spite of these difficulties, she sat for the JSC Examination. Then, her parents gave her in marriage rather than letting her continue school. Thus, eve-teasing was a serious factor that led to early marriage and dropping out of school.

### **Fear of losing honor**

An informant named ZK (pseudonym) said:

“I was very pretty. So, my parents were always worried about my security. My parents thought that, boys might create problems being allured by my beauty. Besides modern age is the age of love affairs. So, my parents suffered from fear of losing honor and handed me into marriage at an early age. After marriage, I dropped out of formal education.”

### **Poor academic performance and teachers' maltreatment**

One respondent of the present study dropped out due to her poor academic performance and teachers' maltreatment resulting from it. A participant named SR (pseudonym) stated that,

“I was not a good student. I could not prepare my homework for school every day. For this reason, my teachers beat me. So, in fear of being beaten, I did not go to school and dropped out of secondary school.”

Here, had the teachers been considerate and not beat her, she probably would not have dropped out of school. So, the government should be aware and take necessary steps regarding the issue and make special arrangements for students who cannot keep up with the regular academic activities of the school.

### **Negative attitude of society towards girls' acquisition of education**

One of the participants of the present study was TA (pseudonym). Her story was as follows: TA liked going to school. Her school result was 'mediocre'. TA said that although her parents were poor, they were willing to continue her schooling. However, when she grew up, a new problem arose. Neighbors took the issue seriously when she was admitted to the sixth grade in secondary school. As almost everyone was illiterate in her neighborhood, they thought that when girls become adolescents, they should not go to school. They thought that girls would interact with friends when they went to school and their character would become spoiled. TA said:

*“Jodi keu amakey kono cheleyr sathey dekho taholey tara vabto tar sathe amar kharap somporoko achey. Tara eta niyay bajey comments korto. Amar maddhomik biddalay theke jhore porar prodhan karon holo amar lakhaporar proti somajer manuser kharap dristivongi”*

(If someone saw me with a boy, they would think that I had an illicit relationship with him. They made many bad comments about these issues. The main reason for my dropping out of secondary school was the negative attitude of society toward my acquisition of education).

Due to the negative social environment, TA was irregular in attending school when she was in class VII. Had the attitude of society towards girls' acquisition of education not been negative, she could have continued her schooling. Another negative idea about girls' education was that when a daughter is more educated, it will be difficult to find an equally qualified husband. In the words of MK (pseudonym):

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*"Jeleder moddhe meyeder beshi lakhapora korale joggo bor pawa jaina karon jeleder moddhe sikkhar har khubi kom. Tara sikkhar gurutto bujhena. Jeleder modhhey cheyleyrao besi poralehka korena"*

(If a girl were more educated, it would be difficult to get an equally qualified husband in a fishermen's community because the literacy rate is low in this community. Fishermen do not understand the importance of education. In a fishermen's community, boys also do not educate themselves up to a high level).

Rural people of Bangladesh only emphasize the importance of boys' education. They also think that the educational qualification of a wife should not be higher than that of her husband. On the basis of this misconception, every year, many girls drop out of school in Bangladesh.

### Lack of security

Lack of security is one of the most prominent causes of girls' dropout. A participant named MR (pseudonym) said that she was very interested in her studies. Her dream was to be a teacher. The distance from her home to school was not so far. She went to school on foot. She attended her school regularly. She participated in different kinds of games and cultural activities in school. Her result was good. She got a GPA of 4.42 in the PSC and a GPA of 3.83 in the JSC Examination. Although her mother was poor, she got ample opportunities for studying at home. She got a stipend and textbooks from school. So, she could continue her studies. However, her mother was worried about her daughter's security on the way to and from school. They even suffered from a lack of security at home because MR's father was dead. Therefore, when she was reading in Class IX, her mother handed her into marriage at an early age. After marriage, she dropped out of secondary school. Although her father-in-law and mother-in-law wanted her to continue school, her husband did not allow her to study. She opined that the main reason for her drop out was lack of security. If her mother had not felt insecure, she would not have arranged her marriage, and she would not have dropped out of secondary education. Had MR been secure, her mother would not have arranged a marriage for her. In Bangladesh, many girls are victims of rape, sexual harassment, and others. So, parents think that early marriage can be a great solution for securing their girls. So, they arrange an early marriage for their girls instead of letting them continue school.

Sekine and Hodgkin (2017) and Barr (2017) revealed that every year, the highest number of girls drop out owing to child marriage. Grant (2012) found that wedding has always been a dominant cause of schoolgirls' dropout. Omoeva, Hatch, and Sylla (2014) showed that the attendance rate of married girls is comparatively lower than that of their unwedded friends. Mansory (2007) found that in Afghanistan, child marriage was a prominent factor in schoolgirls' dropout. The present study reveals similar findings. Three participants said that the most prominent cause of their dropout was early marriage. Several studies found that teenage pregnancy was an influential factor in girls' dropout (Boyle, Brock, Mace, & Sibbons, 2002). Dunne and Leach (2005) stated that the rate of girls' dropout is higher as compared to boys, and the major reason behind their dropout was pregnancy. Adams (2013) found that the dropout rate was high among girls due to their pregnancies and demerits of sexual relations at an early age. Though some countries permit pregnant girls to come back to school, the research found that the re-entry rate is low. The findings of the present study resemble the findings of those studies. One of the participants disclosed that the main cause of her dropout was pregnancy.

Ahmed et al. (2010) revealed that the main factors for girls' dropout are poverty and poverty-related factors. Poverty remains the most common prime factor for school-going children's dropout (Orkin, Boyes, Cluver, & Zhang, 2014). Hunter and May (2011) said that poverty is a faithful interpretation of school discontinuation. The findings of the present study resemble those studies because one of the participants of the study mentioned that she dropped out of secondary education because of poverty.

UNESCO's (2003) findings show that teachers' insults, angry shouts, corporal punishment, and sexual harassment influenced girls' dropouts. Arko (2013) reported that bad academic

achievement is one of the prominent factors in schoolgirls' dropout. When a female student cannot pass an exam, she is disinterested in continuing education, and finally, she drops out (Mzuza, Yudong, & Kapute, 2014). In the present study, one of the respondents dropped out for poor academic performance, followed by teachers' maltreatment. So, we can say that the findings of the present study more or less are in accord with the findings of those previous studies. Chege and Sifuna (2006) observed that in some parts of Kenya, parents tend to discourage their daughters from achieving much education, fearing that they would have problems in getting equally educated husbands or being good wives. Therefore, girls dropped out of school, and their mothers taught them different kinds of household chores such as cooking, laundry, baby care, and others. In the present study, one of the participants dropped out because of her guardian's idea that when a daughter is more educated, it will create a complication in getting an equally qualified husband, especially in a fisherman community, which matches the findings of Chege and Sifuna (2006).

Ainsworth (2005) carried out a study in Tanzania and found that where the distance from home to school was very far, the school dropout rate was high. The findings of the present study have similarities with this finding. One of the participants of the present study said that she dropped out of school due to the distance between home and school. Ricketts's (2013) study in Tanzania and Rwanda found that young girls had much more household responsibilities than boys, which led to their dropping out of school at a very high rate. However, the findings of the present study reveal the opposite situation, where none of the respondents had dropped out for being overburdened with household work.

Juneja (2001) found that if the school distance is very far from home, the trend to drop out among young girls will be high because of their vulnerability to sexual harassment. Parents are worried for the safety of their daughters when they have to roam longer distances to school. The results of the present study support this finding. One of the participants revealed that the main cause of her dropping out was eve teasing. Another participant expressed that social insecurity was the prominent factor for her dropping out.

The present government has taken various initiatives to reduce dropout rates in educational institutions, e.g., distributing free textbooks to students at the beginning of the year, granting stipends for both boys and girls, and others. "The main aims and objectives of education are to remove socio-economic discrimination irrespective of race, religion and creed and to eradicate gender disparity" (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (GPRB), 2010, p. 8). The government of Bangladesh is trying to create unhindered and equal opportunities of education for all as per learners' talents and aptitudes, irrespective of geographical, social and economic situations to establish a society that will be free from discrimination. "State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law" (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (GPRB), 1972, p. 9).

## Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of finding out factors that affect girls' dropout from secondary level of education. In the present study, several factors were found to be responsible for girls' dropout from the secondary level of education. These are--early marriage, poverty, pregnancy, the distance of the school from home, eve-teasing, poor academic performance, teachers' maltreatment, the negative attitude of society towards girls' acquisition of education, lack of security and the notion that when a daughter is more educated, it will create a complication to find an equally qualified husband. Among these factors, early marriage was the most prominent one. To eradicate girls' dropouts, the government should prevent early marriage and should increase awareness among parents. Therefore, further measures should be taken to prevent early marriage, which is likely to decrease girls' dropout rate at the secondary level of education in the long run.

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