

Causes and Consequences of Child Marriage in Rural Bangladesh: A Qualitative Study on Meherpur District



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ABSTRACT. This study investigated the causes and consequences of child marriage in Meherpur District, Bangladesh. Using a qualitative approach, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 20 respondents. Poverty, lack of education, family instability, and societal pressure emerged as significant contributors to child marriage. Furthermore, cultural factors such as superstitions, religious interpretations, and traditional practices perpetuate this harmful practice. The study found that child marriage negatively impacts girls' physical and mental health, leading to various health issues complications and psychological trauma. These findings emphasize the urgent need for interventions that empower rural women, promote education, and address the root causes of child marriage to ensure the well-being of young girls.

1.0. Introduction

Child marriage occurs when a minor under the age of eighteen enters an official or informal partnership with an adult or child (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2023). Despite the legal minimum age for females being 18, about two-thirds of Women who are twenty to twenty-four marry before they reach eighteen (Plan International, 2023). Child marriage is defined as any marriage performed below the age of eighteen before the girl is biologically, mentally, and physically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing (Chowdhury, 2004). A large body of research demonstrates that child marriage has several detrimental effects, many of which are particularly harmful to females, their offspring, and their communities (Jain & Kurz, 2007). Like in other developing nations, child marriage poses a significant obstacle to Bangladesh's social and economic growth (Kamal & Hassan, 2015).

Early marriage has serious adverse effects on a woman's social, psychological, and physical development, as well as the health of her offspring (Kamal, 2012). Marriage before the age of eighteen, sometimes known as 'child marriage,' is a human

rights violation that impedes literacy and educational attainment and raises the possibility that an adult will live in poverty (Fan & Koski, 2022). According to Yount et al. (2016), 'early marriage' refers to marriages where at least one of the parties, typically the bride, is under eighteen, particularly in countries where adulthood is recognized earlier. The term is often used interchangeably with 'Child marriage' (Asghari, 2019). When a boy or girl is married before reaching this age, it is known as child marriage (Chowdhury, 2004). Furthermore, most of the studies done thus far on the age at which women marry in Bangladesh have examined the traditions and variables influencing women's age at first marriage (Islam & Ahmed, 1998).

The term 'child marriage' explicitly mentions girls. Despite several laws being passed in Bangladesh at various points in time, child marriage is still a significant issue in modern culture. Out of all the Asian countries, Bangladesh still has the highest rate of child marriage. The World Population Situation 2023 research states that 51% of Bangladeshi females are married before turning 18 based on statistics from 2006 to 2022 (State of the World Population Report, 2023). According to a second assessment titled The Global Slavery Index, which was released in mid-July by Australia's Walk Free Foundation (WFF), there may be up to 592,000 individuals in Bangladesh

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who are victims of “modern slavery.” The frequency of forced and underage marriages of women is one of the elements that contribute to “modern slavery” in Bangladesh (Shibli, 2018).

According to a United Nations Population Fund study that was made public worldwide, about 51% of girls in the nation marry before turning 18, which is a highly concerning statistic (Rahman, 2023). As the prevalence of child marriage is significantly higher in rural areas than in urban areas, the kinds, causes, and consequences of child marriage differ between cities and villagers. In Bangladesh, Child marriage is more common in rural areas, where 54% of girls are married before the age of 18, compared to 44% in urban areas (Wodon et al., 2017).

The attendant problems causing child marriage in Bangladesh are indigence, socioeconomic background, insufficient religious knowledge, a paucity of education, and a deficiency of awareness. In addition to these driving forces for child marriage, Inadequate social security, low employment rates, challenges for parents to ensure the purity of their daughters, and loopholes in laws are all contributing factors to child marriage (Patoari, 2020; Pourtaheri et al., 2023). Furthermore, the influence of traditions and religion prompts parents to arrange early marriages for their daughters (Pourtaheri et al., 2023; Wilkinson et al., 2024). Traditional practices prioritize early marriage for girls, viewing it as a means of safeguarding family honor and ensuring social stability (Ferdousi, 2014). Discriminatory social norms and patriarchal attitudes devalue girls, limiting their educational and economic opportunities and reinforcing the practice of early marriage (Kamal et al., 2015).

The consequences of child marriage are untimely pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV), and diminished sexual and reproductive health, with an increased chance of maternal mortality and morbidity. Facing solitude is a grave psychological impact of child marriage because no one is keen on helping with marriage-related issues, including domestic life, sexual violence, and marital discord, perpetuating cycles of trauma and harm. and parenthood (Plan International, 2022; Lebni et al., 2023; UNICEF, 2023; Salam & Aktar, 2020; Nour, 2009; Lowe et al., 2019; Roy & Sarker, 2016). Child brides often experience social isolation, low self-

esteem, and depression, undermining their overall quality of life (Pourtaheri et al., 2023).

Existing research on the causes and consequences of child marriage highlights the overall situation in the context of Bangladesh by concentrating on rural areas to a limited extent. The literature gap is particularly crucial because the experiences and challenges of villagers are generally neglected. Moreover, although many studies have been conducted in Bangladesh regarding child marriage, no significant research has been found in Meherpur District in this regard.

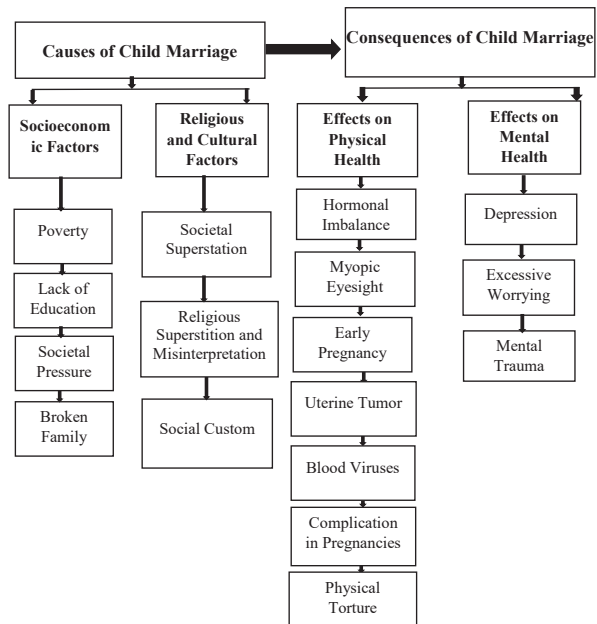
Therefore, this study examined child marriage in the Meherpur district, analyzing the socioeconomic factors contributing to its prevalence, the influence of cultural and traditional practices in perpetuating it, and the long-term consequences on the physical and mental health of girls.

2.0. Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework illustrates how various social, economic, cultural, and religious factors lead to child marriage and result in physical and mental health problems.

The causes of child marriage are mainly related to socioeconomic factors (such as poverty and lack of education, societal pressure, and broken family), social norms, and religious misinterpretations that influence families to marry off their children. This has not only physical effects but also a psychological

Figure 1
A conceptual framework based on the causes and consequences of child marriage developed by authors



impact on children, including early pregnancy, hormonal imbalances, and psychological problems such as depression and trauma.

According to Ganira et al. (2015), marriage at a young age can lead to a range of adverse outcomes for girls, including violence, abuse, and coerced sexual activity. Additionally, it often results in poor sexual and reproductive health, limited education opportunities, and high rates of illiteracy, all of which increase their risk of experiencing violence, abuse, and forced sexual encounters. Women who entered into marriage before the age of 18 have a higher likelihood of experiencing a broad spectrum of mood, anxiety, and other psychiatric disorders in their adult years than those who married at older ages (Le Strat et al., 2011). Child marriage in Bangladesh severely affects girls and their families, causing the discontinuation of secondary education and leading to serious health issues, including death due to early pregnancy, abandonment, and domestic violence from spouses and in-laws (Chowdhury, 2004).

3.0. Methodology

Bangladesh has 64 districts. One is Meherpur, which was selected purposively to conduct the study. Meherpur also has 259 villages, among which Brozopur and Kazipur were selected purposively as study areas. A qualitative research approach was employed in the study. Because it answers the “how” and “why” research questions and promotes a greater comprehension of experiences, events, and context, qualitative research is essential to the field of education (Cleland, 2017). This approach entails gathering individuals’ perspectives, actions, and personal experiences (Tenny et al., 2017). In the study, the term child marriage is exclusively designated for girls. Marriage before eighteen is a child marriage (Hossain, 2023).

The study employed an in-depth interview technique for data collection. A total of twenty (20) in-depth interviewees were selected purposively for the study, among whom ten (10) respondents were from Brozopur village, and the remaining ten (10) were from Kazipur village. The in-depth interview is an excellent qualitative method for getting people to talk about their ideas, emotions, and experiences (Milena et al., 2008). Even now, interviews remain one of the most popular research techniques because they let us record various points of view on the same subject; they deepen our knowledge of people’s intentions, viewpoints, and experiences; and they allow us to examine both common and unusual events that take place in real life settings—with a focus on the lived experience (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The goal of the in-depth interview is to obtain specific information that clarifies a person’s viewpoint and

interpretation of the significance of a particular subject, problem, or procedure (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). The participants in the study fell into various age categories. Ten (10) girls were aged 13-17, five (5) were aged 21-25, and the remaining five (5) were aged 30-35. It is particularly noticeable that all respondents were married off before age 15. To fathom the agonizing experience of child marriage, pre-defined open-ended questionnaires were employed. Before the interview, participants were asked to fill out an anonymous demographic survey to gather information regarding their age, income, family, occupation, and area. The participants took part in an extensive question-and-answer session about the driving forces and ill effects of child marriage. Some questions were: What were the deciding factors for your early marriage? What physical and mental issues did you grapple with? Finally, how did religious misinterpretations and superstitions catalyze your marriage?

The study rigorously adhered to all ethical considerations and was highly committed to the participants’ information confidentiality. To uphold ethical considerations in qualitative research, researchers must focus on the rights and interests of the participants, audience, society, and academic community (Walliman, 2021; Al-Natour, 2011; British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2024). The respondents were first fully apprised of the study’s scope and objectives. They consented to having their voices recorded during the interviews. The research data analysis was carried out systematically. At the primary stage, the audio recordings’ verbatim transcription ensured the data’s accurate representation. Then, transcripts were evaluated rigorously by highlighting crucial ideas to compose the theme framework. However, biases and limitations are conceded in the research.

4.0. Results

Participants

The study included 20 participants, ranging in the age group from under 18 to 35, with the majority falling into the under 18 (n=10), (19-25), (26-35), a total of five (5) for each age group. They were married before the age of 15. The participants were housewives (n=19) with limited educational background. Nine (9) respondents had primary-level qualifications, and ten (10) had high school-level qualifications. Fifteen (15) participants were indicated nuclear families, three were joint families, and two (2) were extended families. Ten (10) participants were from Kazipur, and the remaining ten (10) were from Brozopur village. The income level of participants was low, with the majority indicating that their income ranged between

4-9k Tk (n=12). The incomes of the two participants were high, 20-24k Tk per month.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

Participants	f	
Age	Under 18	10
	19-25	05
	26-35	05
Occupation	Housewife	19
	School teacher	01
Education	Primary level	09
	High School level	10
	Graduate	01
Region	Kazipur	10
	Brozopur	10
Family	Nuclear	15
	Joint	03
	Extended	02
Income (TK)	4-9K	12
	10-14K	03
	15-19K	03
	20-24K	02

Socioeconomic factors contributing to child marriage

The study has revealed some contributing factors to child marriage, which act as driving forces in society to perpetuate child marriage:

Poverty. Poverty is the most dominant factor in child marriage. Most people live below the poverty line, with enlarged familial compositions compared to their economic capacity. In most cases, each family consists of only one breadwinner whose primary source of income is agriculture or daily labor. As a result, the persistent challenges of securing income and meeting basic needs leave little room for impoverished families to save money for education.

Moreover, facing economic hardship, parents become reluctant to continue their daughter's education. They anticipate she will reside in her father-in-law's house after a few years. Therefore, defraying educational expenditures for her is considered unnecessary, resulting in the conclusion that marrying off girls will be a wise decision. As a result, most rural girls abandon their studies, sacrificing their aspirations to conform to societal expectations. Parents waste no time pressuring their daughters to accept the proposal when they find a suitable groom, regardless of age.

Although I was eager to continue my studies, my father could not bear my educational expenses because he had to run our family with three daughters. Moreover, the growing age of my three sisters also compelled

my family to arrange my marriage as soon as possible. (Participant No. 05, Face-to-Face Interview, September 05, 2023)

My father, a farmer, is the sole breadwinner in our family, defraying all expenses for our five-member family. However, my father could no longer earn due to his heart problem. So, to reduce familial expenditures, I was married off at 13. (Participant No. 03, Face-to-Face Interview, September 04, 2023)

Lack of education. Many villagers are illiterate and lack awareness, which prevents them from understanding the harmful consequences of early marriage. Due to the persistence of traditional norms that devalue girls, uneducated parents often marry off their daughters as soon as they reach the age of 12-14. Unfortunately, parents usually remain unaware of their daughters' hardships due to early marriage. The absence of education also affects girls by perpetuating certain superstitious beliefs. For example, some parents believe that marrying their daughters at a younger age will secure them more financially stable grooms. They fear that boys will show disinterest in girls over 15.

As my parents are illiterate, they believe that girls' marriage age should be between 12 and 14 years. Suddenly, they arranged my marriage because they thought any delays could make it challenging to find a suitable groom. They do not want to take any risks regarding marriage because they fear being socially dishonored. For this reason, out of respect for my family, I was forced to agree to the marriage. (Participant No. 06, Face-to-Face Interview, September 06, 2023)

Broken family. The study reveals that early marriage typically happens in dysfunctional families or divorced families because girls who are raised in these types of families stay with their fathers or mothers. As a result, the single parent hastens to arrange their daughter's marriage so that they can relieve themselves from the burden of fostering a daughter.

My father is estranged from my mother. Consequently, while my mother took my younger sister to her, I was left with my father. Afterward, my father remarried another woman, who prevented me from having educational aspirations.

Instead, she put mounting pressure on my father to marry me off as soon as possible. Although I initially exhibited my aversion to marriage at an early age, I could not but agree to wed owing to my stepmother's persistent pressure and forlorn condition. (Participant No. 01, Face-to-Face Interview, September 05, 2023)

Societal pressure. Societal pressure is another propelling factor for child marriage. Neighboring families believe that if girls are not married off early, they may engage in relationships with boys, which behavior tarnishes the family's reputation. Whenever a premature marriage happens in society, other families with daughters also face social pressure. Moreover, some families also receive a stream of criticism from older people if parents delay arranging the marriage of their girls.

Some older people in my village say to my parents that all families arrange marriages for their daughters; why do you not do so? Is there any physical problem with your daughters? If not, why do you delay? (Participant No. 07, Face-to-Face Interview, September 05, 2023)

My family and I did not agree to marry, but the mounting pressure of our neighbors forced my parents to marry me off constantly. They claimed that I would elope with another boy if the marriage were delayed, which would tarnish the family's reputation. As a result, my family was compelled to marry me off within a couple of weeks. (Participant No. 10, Face-to-Face Interview, September 04, 2023)

Families routinely hear such irrational talk from their adjacent elder members. So, social pressure ultimately prevails over families, compelling them to arrange an early marriage for their daughters.

Role of cultural and traditional practices in perpetuating child marriage

In the study area of Brozopur and Kazipur villages, cultural and traditional mores act as prime catalysts in perpetuating child marriage, which signifies the gender-based social structure within these societies, contributing to the early marriage of girls. Furthermore, the distinction of the behavior of both males and females is another critical reason for society to be inclined to early marriage because they think the more girls' marriage is delayed, the more they will become deviant, resulting in creating

problems in society and making it difficult for families to arrange a marriage for them.

I think child marriage has become a worrying trend in society for girls, which does not apply to boys because the later the marriage is, the less beautiful and youthful girls are believed to be. (Participant No. 02, Face-to-Face Interview, September 05, 2023)

Moreover, society discourages boys from marrying until they manage a job, while girls face hindrances from society to be employed in any job. Moreover, in such a gendered societal structure, higher familial prestige stems from child marriage. However, although concerted efforts were made to promote education so that the areas are exempt from child marriage, societal superstitions, and misunderstandings thwart all attempts, inculcating the belief that early marriage has a beneficial effect on the family, bringing welfare and dissipating ominousness.

Religious superstition unleashes the practice of child marriage enduring in society. The prevalent incidence of child marriage in society is the by-product of either a lack of exhaustive understanding of religious knowledge or an erroneous explanation of religion. Even some so-called Islamic analysts assert in both sermons and Fatwa (Islamic conclusive verdict on a particular matter) that the more girls are made prepared for marriage, the better it is because it will eradicate adultery and sin from society, deeming girls burdensome for society. Therefore, it is claimed that God can accept the expiation of sin if girls agree to marry as early as possible.

My parents and uncles from my mother's side were too religious. My elder uncle hastened my mother to marry me off so that I, along with my family, could be saved from sin. (Participant No. 12, Face-to-Face Interview, September 04, 2023)

Most respondents expressed that despite their yearning for education, the familial and societal excessive pressure became obstacles to pursuing their further education, coercing them to conform to the practice of child marriage in customary. A proverb is leveraged to convince girls to be inclined to early marriage that women lose their youthful vigor at the threshold of 20 years, making them a depreciating asset in society. Even the inhabitants of Brozopur and Kazipur villages are customary in the belief that the tender age of girls is the optimal age for fertility because their reproductivity erodes with the advancement of age.

I was highly interested in studying in Bangla, but my immediate family members, as well as aunts and grandparents, forced me to agree to marriage at the age of 14. Otherwise, they think that my fertility and youthfulness will diminish over the years. (Participant No.15, Face-to-Face Interview, September 06, 2023)

Furthermore, child marriage has been a long-standing tradition in these two societies. Girls have noticed that only after a girl enters the threshold of puberty at the age of 12 or 13 is she forced into child marriage. The denial to wed brings coercive measures, such as threats of death or harm to their family, for the girls who oppose the child. Following the punitive measures instigated by society, girls cannot but agree to join in matrimony, compelled to embrace the age-old culture of early marriage ingrained in society.

Although I was averse to marriage, I finally agreed to get married because my parents told me that they would otherwise take poison. (Participant No.18, Face-to-Face Interview, September 04, 2023)

It is noteworthy that even though some parents are reluctant to child marriage, the mounting societal pressure renders them helpless to arrange marriage for their daughters, particularly when these parents witness other girls' child marriage. So, it can be deduced that the blame for entrenching child marriage deeply at the root of society rests with society, some superstitious people.

Child marriage's long-term consequences on girls' physical and mental health

The study has revealed the immediate and long-term adverse impacts of child marriage on premature girls' mental and physical health. The victims of early matrimony have been experiencing bodily illness and psychological stress. In terms of physical problems, the main ill effects of child marriage are hormonal imbalance, myopic eyesight, untimely pregnancies, uterine tumors, anemia, blood-borne viruses, and complications of pregnancies. Some health issues originating from mental anxiety have also been observed.

The incidence of premature pregnancies has reached an alarming rate, as evidenced by the study that many respondents were coerced into matrimony at the age of 13, and many of whom became pregnant and gave birth within one year of marriage.

My age during marriage was 13, and I gave birth to a child within one year of my marriage. (Participant No. 06, Face-to-Face Interview, September 04, 2023)

Following childbirth, they endured some complicated health issues, although they were completely healthy before marriage. The tumor in my vagina prevented me from bearing any children. I could no longer be a mother assured by a doctor due to a uterine tumor exacerbated after her marriage at the age of 13. (Participant No.15, Face-to-Face Interview, September 04, 2023)

However, the blame for hormonal imbalance rests on the widening age gap of bride and groom. While a girl's age is 13-15, her partner's age is more than 30.

I am married to a 34-year-old groom. Our bodily needs differ, which creates hormonal imbalances. (Participant No. 20, Face-to-Face Interview, September 05, 2023)

Girls who are victims of child marriage expressed their regret by saying that their physical shape and beauty have been spoiled.

I am still immature, and my husband forced me to have intercourse; my face faded away from its natural beauty. (Participant No.16, Face-to-Face Interview, September 04, 2023)

Many respondents also blamed early pregnancy for anemia.

Only after I gave birth to my first child did I suffer from anemia. (Participant No. 08, Face-to-Face Interview, September 06, 2023)

Physical abuse centering dowry is the by-product of child marriage. Sometimes, failure to bring dowry from parents' homes exacerbates violence and ferocity.

My husband constantly castigates me for bringing an astronomical sum. Failure to satisfy his precipitous avarice for wealth most times augurs ill, such as exacerbating the enormity of torture or even posing a threat of divorce. Moreover, sometimes, I was also beaten severely, leaving some indelible marks on my body.

(Participant No.13, Face-to-Face Interview, September 05, 2023)

As a result, the childhood of girls is ruined by early marriage. In addition to the sufferings, dowry is another woe that arises from early marriage. Failure to meet the steep demand of the members of the father-in-law's house intensifies the extent of mounting pressure and torture that, at one stage, outraged familial feuds. To mention some health hazards triggered by child marriage.

I spawned twins within one year of marriage, but both of whom died after three days, which made me bitterly sad, as I am still constantly struggling to give birth to another child. Moreover, early childbirth also imperiled my eyesight. (Participant No.19, Face-to-Face Interview, September 04, 2023)

Apart from physical problems caused by early marriage, it also worsens mental disorders. Instances of depression, excessive worrying, and an oblivious mind have been observed among them. Whereas girls are supposed to enjoy their childhood with friends and family members, premature marriage confines them in the boundaries of four walls, even if they are to stay apart from their family, exacerbating the existing mental trauma.

I married an expatriate who went abroad within one year of marriage. Since then, he has been torturing me mentally over the phone, forbidding me to talk to my relatives. He also vehemently reviled me if I wanted to go to any place, depriving me of my human rights. As a consequence, I became a mental health patient. (Participant No.16, Face-to-Face Interview, September 05, 2023)

5.0. Discussion

In society, girls are the worst sufferers of gender discrimination, which makes them susceptible to further adverse impacts of society. Communities throughout the globe uphold traditions and conventions that lead to discrimination against women and girls (Kabir et al., 2019). Unexpected pregnancies and the ruination of dreams are two of the ultimate consequences of child marriage. Girls who marry young have the risk of having premature pregnancies that might be fatal (Ahmed, 2015). Married girls in Bangladesh are supposed to get pregnant as soon as feasible (Bell, 2019). Due to their lack of use of contraception, these females are more likely to become pregnant more frequently and unexpectedly (Kamal, 2012). Obstetric fistula

(vaginal urine leakage), postpartum endometritis (uterine infection after childbirth), premature birth, stillbirth, difficult labor, and systemic infection are among the complications that pregnant girls are more likely to experience than women between the ages of 20 and 24 (Ponnupillai & Shanmuganathan, 2022). In addition, the limited autonomy and inability to exercise the fundamental rights of child brides might potentially be harmful to their overall health and psychological state (Gogoi, 2023). The childhood of girls becomes horrendous because they must grapple with socioeconomic problems, poverty, lack of education, and insufficient respect from society. The incidence of child marriage is frequently attributed to religion (Vogelstein, 2014). Attitudes toward gender roles, especially those of women, are closely linked to religious and cultural perspectives on marriage (Marshall, 2018).

Moreover, society deems girls burdensome, as neither can they generate money and aid society financially nor defray the expenses of their respective families. So, the early marriage of girls is believed to prevent the necessity for the family to disburse their expenditures, but the ill effects of child marriage rebound on the family. As society is ingrained in child marriage, accepting it as an inevitable part of society, they relegate girls' preferences in marriage to negligible importance. However, in Bangladesh, it is not a novel concept; instead, it is ingrained in the country's conventional and improvised cultural contexts (Das, 2017). The devaluation of girls and women in societies advocates child marriage in areas where it is prevalent and its acceptability (Parsons et al., 2015). Because they worry that the cost of the dowry would rise as their daughter gets older, parents in rural areas frequently support early marriage (Das, 2017). The practice of paying dowries persisted even after being prohibited in the 1980s (Bell, 2019). People are adversely affected throughout their lives by child marriage and its terrible repercussions (Akand, 2022).

That child marriage is a crime is never admitted by any family members. Instead of confessing faults, they provide flimsy excuses, buttressing the significance of early marriage. Otherwise, they will receive mass condemnation from society. However, in contrast, the victims of child marriage used to nurture some high hopes and dreams of securing a promising career, thereby contributing to the welfare of their nation. The victims of child marriage experience an unexpected change in their lives due to domestic and onerous chores, leading them to become mothers. Due to their higher exposure to stressful life events, girls are more susceptible to depression symptoms and episodes (Burgess et al., 2022). They are then required to foster children, which is a grueling task at

such an early age. As a result, while they are supposed to enjoy an independent life with family members, they suffer from the challenges of early married life.

Early marriage is a deeply ingrained tradition, with societal norms and threats of punitive measures compelling girls to marry young. Religious and social superstitions, such as girls' early marriage and boys' delayed marriage due to joblessness, perpetuate child marriage. Child marriage is a practice sustained by poverty and prevailing social norms that prioritize a girl's chastity and ability to bear children over her potential for personal growth, which could positively impact her, her offspring, and her community (Brundtland & Machel, 2011).

Although qualitative research provides profound knowledge regarding the participants' experiences and insights, some limitations cannot be discarded. Qualitative research relies heavily on researchers' interpretations and analyses, which are likely biased. The unique abilities of the researcher significantly impact the quality of qualitative research and can be more readily influenced by their personal biases and peculiarities (Anderson, 2010). Additionally, purposive sampling assisted in selecting a handful of participants from various age groups, which cannot comprehensively represent Meherpur District. However, despite sampling and methodological bias, the research outcome is exempt from any influence.

6.0. Conclusion

The causes and consequences of child marriage can vary from one society to another. However, in light of the factors mentioned above, child marriage in rural society is mainly attributed to poverty, lack of education, social pressure, and separation of parents. Moreover, social and religious prejudices, such as the view that late marriage is a sin for girls, the misinterpretation of tenets of Islam, and the traditional view that women are a burden on society, have perpetuated child marriage. Victims of child marriage suffer from various physical and psychological problems, such as blood infections, vision loss, pregnancy at a young age, hormonal imbalances, and severe health problems such as anemia. In addition, the unspeakable abuse and physical abuse of husbands for dowry has exacerbated the harmful effects of child marriage. The tendency to threaten divorce if they are unable to bring dowry has subsequently led to mental trauma, excessive stress, and depression.

Although it is not possible to completely prevent child marriage in rural communities, it should at least be significantly reduced. The study found that in many villages, girls under the age of 15 are being given in marriage, which is hampering their everyday lives. Therefore, the following recommendations are given to prevent child marriage. First, proper education

should be provided in rural communities, and special scholarships should be provided to encourage women's education. Besides, various government and non-government organizations should play an active role in empowering women in every sector of society so that the rate of child marriage is significantly reduced.

7.0. Limitations of the Findings

This study exclusively examined the experiences of female respondents, as it was not feasible to include male respondents. The study received only 20 responses, indicating a limited sample size. Data were collected from just two villages, Brozopur and Kazipur, in the Meherpur district of Bangladesh, which is another limitation of this research. The researchers experienced fatigue during the data collection process due to the substantial rise in temperature in southern Bangladesh in September. The data collection technique used in this study relied solely on in-depth interviews, presenting an additional limitation. Although this approach is effective for gathering comprehensive and detailed data, it may limit the accuracy and diversity of the findings compared to other methods. The study outcomes could have been more thorough and complete if other methods, such as participatory observation or focus group discussions, had been employed.

8.0. Practical Value of the Paper

This study significantly contributes to a thorough analysis of the causes and consequences of child marriage in rural Bangladesh. This has significant practical value for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders involved in preventing child marriage in Bangladesh. The research results may promote the formulation of effective policies and targeted interventions, and the study's findings may help raise public awareness about the causes, consequences, and prevention of child marriage.

9.0. Directions for Future Research

This work augments the understanding of the causes and consequences of child marriage in rural Bangladesh while also creating a substantial pathway for future research. The first phase involves investigating the roles of males and boys in child marriage. Secondly, we must evaluate the effectiveness of several strategies designed to prevent child marriage, followed by the roles of parents in child marriage. The use of mixed methodologies—qualitative and quantitative—will allow for more comprehensive data in the future since the study has only relied on qualitative methods and in-depth interviews.

10.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors and co-authors disclosed no possible conflicts of interest for the study.

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