

Unraveling the Socio-Cultural Insecurities behind Early Marriages: Exploring the Resulting Divorce

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the complex dynamics of early marriages and divorce in Khatiamari Village, Bogura, Bangladesh, aiming to shed light on the underlying factors and implications of these practices. The objectives of the study were twofold: first, to investigate the socio-cultural factors that contribute to the prevalence of early marriages in the community, and second, to examine the impact of early marriages on marital stability. The study employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with community members particularly those who experienced early marriage and divorced to collect comprehensive insights. Khatiamari Village was selected due to its high divorce rate, making it an intriguing subject for investigation. The study found that poverty and economic insecurity significantly influence parents' decisions to arrange early marriages for their children. They perceived early marriage as a means to alleviate financial burdens and secure economic stability for their daughters, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and hindering progress in disadvantaged areas. Economic hardships and traditional gender role expectations within early marriages also strain relationships, affecting overall marital stability and well-being. The implications of early marriages were far-reaching, with young couples facing challenges such as emotional immaturity, limited life experience, and inadequate coping skills, leading to unresolved issues and potential divorce. Additionally, early marriages often result in adverse health outcomes for young girls who become mothers at an early age, further exacerbating the cycle of poverty. The study underscored the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that prioritize education, vocational training, and sustainable livelihood programs to empower women and break the cycle of poverty. This research sheds light on early marriages and increasing divorce rates in Khatiamari Village and similar areas. It emphasizes the need for sustainable solutions to foster a healthier, more inclusive community, enabling individuals to thrive and make positive contributions to their families and society.

Keywords: “Divorce, Early marriage”

BACKGROUND

Early marriage remains a pressing issue in Bangladesh, fueled by a complex interplay of socio-political and cultural factors (Sawkia, 2019). This article aims to explore deeper into the underlying dynamics that lead parents to arrange early marriages for their children, with a particular focus on the resulting high divorce rates. By understanding the factors contributing to early marriages and their impact on marital stability, this research sheds light on the consequences of this practice and its implications for the community.

The latest publication by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics revealed concerning trends in early marriages and divorce rates during the year 2022. Both early marriage rates for girls under 15 and 18 years old, as well as the overall divorce rate, experienced significant increases compared to previous years. Disturbingly, the situation was found to be more severe in rural areas compared to urban areas, pointing to the urgency of addressing this issue in less developed regions. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the divorce rate surged to 1.4 per thousand people in 2022, a notable increase from the previous year's rate of

per thousand in 2021. The national statistics agency reported these figures in its Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2022 report, which also revealed that the divorce rate was higher in rural areas, witnessing a rise of 0.6 per thousand compared to 0.5 per thousand in urban areas. The data was derived from a comprehensive survey conducted in 2022, encompassing over 1.3 million individuals and 300,000 households across the country (www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific).

The national Daily New age Bangladesh reported on 07 August 2023 that several socio-political and cultural factors have been identified as drivers of the surge in early marriages. The disruption of educational opportunities for girls due to the Covid-19 pandemic had increased their susceptibility to early marriages (www.thedailystar.net).

Back to the report Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2022 based on the data from Dhaka city corporations, it was observed that domestic violence and divorce rates witnessed a surge of 29.78% during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, there was a notable increase of 34% in divorce applications over the past seven years.

Profound poverty and inadequate safety measures equally contributed to the situation, prompting parents to organize marriages for their daughters out of anxiety for their security and welfare. The prevailing economic challenges forced families to opt for early marriages as a means to alleviate financial burdens, thereby perpetuating the cycle of both poverty and premature unions (www.newagebd.net).

In contrast to the rise in early marriages, the increased divorce rate in both rural and urban areas was attributed to urbanization and a rise in women's empowerment and awareness. As women gained better knowledge of their rights and embraced individualistic attitudes, they were more inclined to seek divorce in unhappy or abusive marriages. This trend reflects a positive shift towards women's agency and autonomy but also poses new challenges for family dynamics and social structures (Khaleque, 2011).

To gain a deeper understanding of these complex issues, this research study delves into the specific context of Khatiamari Village in Bogura. By focusing on this community, the study aims to comprehend the unique socio-political and cultural insecurities that contribute to the prevalence of early marriages. Additionally, the study investigates the high incidence of divorce in the village, seeking to explore the root causes and implications of this phenomenon within the local context.

The research study aims to shed light on the multifaceted challenges faced by the community in Khatiamari Village and similar regions. Early marriages not only perpetuate the cycle of poverty but also often lead to adverse health outcomes for young girls who become mothers at an early age. Additionally, the high divorce rate poses challenges to family structures, potentially affecting children's well-being and social cohesion within the community.

By understanding the socio-political and cultural insecurities that underpin early marriages and contribute to rising divorce rates, this research seeks to provide valuable insights for potential interventions. Addressing the root causes of early marriages will require a comprehensive approach that tackles poverty, improves educational opportunities, and promotes gender equality and women's empowerment. Interventions aimed at supporting marital stability and family well-being must be tailored to the specific needs of the community in Khatiamari Village and similar settings.

Early marriages and rising divorce rates in Bangladesh are complex issues driven by socio-political and cultural insecurities. Understanding the root causes and implications of these phenomena is crucial for addressing the challenges faced by individuals and advocating for positive change. Through this research study focused on Khatiamari Village, Bogura, we aim to shed light on the multifaceted nature of these issues and provide valuable insights for potential interventions that promote a more equitable and stable society.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

The main objectives of the study are aimed at unraveling the complex dynamics of early marriages and divorce in Khatiamari Village, Bogura. Through a rigorous exploration of the root causes and implications of these practices, the research aims to promote a deeper understanding of the issue and pave the way for sustainable solutions to create a healthier and more inclusive community.

1. To investigate the root causes of socio- cultural factors that contributes to the prevalence of early marriages in the community.
2. To examining the impact of early marriages on marital stability

METHODS

The study was conducting by following qualitative methods to gather comprehensive insights into the socio-political and cultural insecurities behind early marriages and the resulting divorces in Khatiamari Village, Bogura. Khatiamari was selected as the study area due to its high rate of divorce, which presents an interesting and significant societal phenomenon worth investigating. The study area consisted of 283 households. Understanding the reasons behind the divorce in specific location 15 case studies (10 female and 05 male) was conducted in the community who have experienced early marriage and divorced.

In-Depth Interviews was conducted with their family members. These interviews were semi-structured to allow for open-ended responses, enabling the participants to share their perspectives, experiences, and insights on the issue. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were organized with community members, particularly those from different age groups and genders, to gain diverse viewpoints on early marriages and divorce. FGDs encourage interactive discussions revealed the beliefs and cultural norms within the community.

Socio- cultural factors that contribute to early marriages

In the study area, the decision to arrange early marriages for children was deeply influenced by various socio-political and cultural insecurities. One of the primary factors contributing to parents enforcing early marriages was poverty and economic insecurity. Economically disadvantaged families viewed early marriage as a potential way to alleviate financial burdens and perceived it as a means to secure economic stability for their daughters. They believed that the husband's family would assume responsibility for their well-being, relieving them of the financial strain they currently faced.

This connection between poverty and early marriage was even more pronounced in underprivileged families where limited economic opportunities created a stark reality of hardship and deprivation. In these areas, access to quality education remained a distant dream for many young girls, closing doors to brighter futures and perpetuating the vicious cycle of poverty. The lack of viable job opportunities and resources suffocated families, leading them to make heart-wrenching decisions for their daughters' future.

Caught in the grip of poverty and desperation, families saw early marriage as a desperate coping mechanism to alleviate their financial hardships. Unfortunately, this choice often came at a significant cost, as young girls were robbed of their childhood and exposed to numerous health risks, emotional trauma, and lost opportunities. Early marriage perpetuates a cycle of inequality, hindering progress and development within these marginalized communities.

Community people mentioned that recently, it was found that the study area became connected with Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, and this led to the employment of competitively educated women in garment

factories. These empowered women were no longer willing to tolerate gender-based violence at home, which had emerged as a significant factor contributing to the increase in divorce rates in the community. Despite facing domestic violence, discrimination, and mistreatment, many women were now refusing to accept such conditions. Moreover, as they were no longer burdens to their families, they have the confidence to assert their rights and said no to the injustices they encounter.

The study area revolved around the factors contributing to divorce, including infidelity, spousal abuse due to dowry and lack of financial support, absence of intimacy, financial difficulties, third-party involvement, and gender-role beliefs.

Intertwining of poverty and early marriage in disadvantaged areas created a climate of desperation and hopelessness for families. By investing in education, vocational training, and sustainable livelihood programs and challenging regressive beliefs through community engagement, it would be possible to liberate these communities from the clutches of poverty. Empowering women and breaking free from the practice of early marriage would pave the way for progress and prosperity in these regions, fostering a future where every individual can fulfill their potential and contribute to the betterment of society mentioned by the FGD respondents.

Impact of early marriages on marital stability

Research indicates that early marriages often faced unique challenges that could affect marital stability. Couples who married young were found to lack emotional maturity, life experience, and necessary skills to cope with the complexities of married life. The limited knowledge of communication, conflict resolution, and decision-making caused to lead heightened tensions and unresolved issues, potentially contributing to divorce.

Moreover, early marriages were often linked to lower educational attainment and economic hardships. Young spouses faced financial difficulties due to a lack of stable employment or educational opportunities, which created additional strain on the relationship. Economic hardships lead to increased stress and a reduced sense of autonomy, further impacting marital stability.

Another factor that impacted early marriages' stability was the issue of gender roles and expectations. Community that promoted early marriages reinforced traditional gender norms, putting immense pressure on young brides to fulfill domestic roles and bear children at a young age. These role expectations lead to dissatisfaction and limited personal growth, increasing the likelihood of marital conflict and instability.

Additionally, early marriages caused to limit the individual's personal development and self-discovery. Young spouses felt they have missed out on crucial life experiences, leading to feelings of resentment or regret. This affected the overall happiness and satisfaction within the marriage, making it more susceptible to breakdown.

The study also found emotional/physiological divorce was a situation where a couple, compelled by necessity and coercion, continues to live together despite lacking a positive or constructive relationship. This circumstance significantly undermined the stability of their married life. In such community, due to the limited acceptance of formal divorce, emotional divorce had become prevalent in many families. The rigidity surrounding feelings and emotions within the family often indicated the presence of anxiety, which could lead to the breakdown of the family system and exposed the individuals involved to potential mental health issues like depression.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that the impact of early marriages on marital stability can vary significantly across different cultural contexts and individual circumstances. Some individuals may navigate early marriages successfully, finding strength in their bond and mutual support. Still, it remains essential to

address the potential challenges and negative consequences that can arise from marrying at a young age to ensure the well-being and stability of individuals and their relationships.

In conclusion, the impact of early marriages on marital stability is a complex and multifaceted issue. The lack of emotional maturity, economic hardships, gender role expectations, and limited personal development are some of the factors that can contribute to challenges within early marriages. Understanding and addressing these issues can help inform policy interventions and support systems that aim to promote healthy, stable marriages regardless of the age of the partners involved.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted in Khatiamari Village, Bogura, Bangladesh, sheds light on the deeply ingrained socio-political and cultural insecurities that contribute to the prevalence of early marriages and the rising divorce rates in the community. The findings reveal that poverty and economic insecurity play a significant role in driving parents to arrange early marriages for their children as a desperate means to alleviate financial burdens and secure economic stability. This practice perpetuates a cycle of inequality and hinders progress and development in disadvantaged areas.

Furthermore, the impact of early marriages on marital stability is evident in the unique challenges faced by couples who marry young. Emotional immaturity, lack of life experience, and limited skills to cope with the complexities of married life contribute to heightened tensions and unresolved issues that can lead to divorce. Economic hardships and traditional gender role expectations further strain relationships, affecting overall happiness and satisfaction within marriages.

To address these pressing issues, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive approach that encompasses various aspects of socio-economic development and gender equality. Investing in education, vocational training, and sustainable livelihood programs can empower women and break the cycle of poverty, providing young girls with opportunities for a brighter future. Challenging regressive beliefs through community engagement is essential to promote a culture that values women's agency and autonomy, leading to more equitable and stable relationships.

Additionally, promoting awareness and education on communication, conflict resolution, and decision-making can better prepare young couples for the challenges of marriage and enhance their marital stability. Encouraging open dialogues about gender roles and expectations can help redefine traditional norms and reduce pressure on young brides.

Ultimately, addressing the complex issues of early marriages and rising divorce rates requires collaborative efforts from policymakers, community leaders, NGOs, and individuals themselves. By understanding the root causes and implications of these practices, the study paves the way for sustainable solutions that create a healthier and more inclusive community in Khatiamari Village and similar regions in Bangladesh.

By breaking the cycle of early marriages and promoting marital stability, the community can work towards a more prosperous and harmonious society, where individuals can fulfill their potential and contribute positively to their families and communities. The knowledge gained from this research study can guide targeted interventions that prioritize the well-being and empowerment of individuals, especially young girls, and foster a future where early marriages are no longer seen as a solution to economic hardships but rather as a hindrance to progress and equality.

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