



## Parents' Attitude toward Girls' Education at Primary Level: A Case Study of Bogra District in Bangladesh

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### KEYWORDS

female education,  
Bangladesh, parents' attitudes

### ABSTRACT

*Girls' education is an imperative factor for enhancing their socio-economic status in a society. It has been recognized as a necessary prerequisite to a sustainable social development. Using descriptive research methodology, this research is aimed at exploring the influence of parents' attitudes toward girls' education in rural Bangladesh. Findings revealed that traditional norms, in many ways, hindered female educational accomplishment at the primary level. It was also revealed that male dominated societal norms, religious misinterpretation and low awareness levels limit female education. As a policy initiative, pursuing gender awareness programs addressing parents' attitudes toward girls would result in positive changes in this regard.*

### Background

Girls' education is an imperative factor for enhancing their socio-economic status in a society (Ojobo, 2008) and it has been recognized as a panacea to sustainable social development (Hill & Elizabeth, 1995). Researchers, who emphasized on gender, education and development issues, also recognized it as an important indicator of balanced development (Chowdhury, 1994; Adcock, 2013; Odili, et al., 2003; Ojobo, 2008). Recent research on social issues (Hussain, Zakaria, Hassan, Mukhtar, & Ali, 2003; Chowdhury, et al., 2001; Ahmad & Haque, 2011 ; UNDP, 1999) also focused a lot on this particular issue. In rural Bangladesh, specifically in the marginalized poor families, female children are usually engaged in household responsibilities that reasonably limit their chances to accomplish education. In a traditional conservative society in many cases, it is expected that women's movements should be restricted within the households (Hashmi, 2001; Jahan, 1994; Cain, et al., 1979). Therefore, women's contribution to household activities such as tending livestock, rearing and caring for siblings can make significant differences in the household economy. Nowadays, it appears that girls' enrollment status has been improved at primary level (Chowdhury, et al., 2001; Ahmad & Haque, 2011). But small number of them can continue their education due to limited support provided by the parents. Considerable number of literature (Chowdhury, et al., 2001; Ahmad & Haque, 2011; BBS, 2002; Chowdhury, et al., 2002; Jahan, 1994; Karim, et al. 2012; ) Khattak, et al., 2008) suggests that subordinated position of women is highly responsible for this vulnerable situation.

In a patriarchal society boys are considered as providers while girls are considered as a burden on the basis of cost benefit analysis (Cain, et al., 1979; Hashmi, 2001 Cain,). Thus parents of marginal families are usually reluctant to invest in girls' education. It is noted that Bangladeshi education levels are stratified in Primary level, secondary level, higher secondary level and higher education. Previous studies that emphasize girls' education ignored parents' influence especially at the primary level of school going children. Therefore, the objective of the present study is to explore the influence of parents' attitude toward girls' educational attainment in rural Bangladesh focusing on the case of Bogra district of Bangladesh. This paper is organized sequentially, first reviewing a brief literature about gender and theoretical aspects of girls' education, and then discussing the methodology of this study. Based on secondary data from various sources the scenario of different aspects of girls' education over the years is presented along with providing the patriarchal background of people's attitude towards girls' education in Bangladeshi society.

## **Study Objective**

The main objective of this study is- to explore the influence of parents' attitude toward girls' educational attainments in rural Bangladesh. More specifically, this study will assess parents' views in the context of traditional society focusing on the case of Bogra district of Bangladesh.

## **Methodology**

In the present research, qualitative as well as quantitative research design was followed as its aim was to explore the socio cultural phenomena influencing parents' attitude. This study was conducted in a rural setting of Shibgonj (a sub-district) under Bogra district, Bangladesh. In this research, a purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of study participants, and totally thirty participants including three key informants were selected. Thirteen fathers and twelve mothers of primary school going children were selected purposively as study respondents. Besides, three key informants including two school teachers and one local leader were selected purposefully to attain the study objective. Field work was conducted from October 2014 to march, 2015. During the interview session, parents' opinions about girls' education were highly emphasized. Besides primary data, secondary data and information have been collected through relevant books, journal articles, reports and online resources. The purpose of the research was described clearly before the interview sessions. Finally verbal consent was taken from the study subjects. Results from the data analyses are presented in tabular forms. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. At the same time, qualitative content analysis technique was followed to attain the research objective properly.

## **Gender and Literacy Status in Bangladesh (7 years and over by sex)**

Table 1.1 provides an idea about gender and literacy rate of Bangladeshi population. This table demonstrates that women's literacy rate levels increased gradually. For example, in 1961 10.7% women were literate, in 1974, 16.4%, in 1981, 17.5%, in 1991, 25.5% and in 2011 women's literacy status was 49.4%. At the same period, statistics show that men's literacy rate increased more rapidly. For example, the table shows that in 1961 men's literacy rate was 31.4%, in 1974, 36.6%, in 1981 literacy rate was 33.8%, in 1991 the rate was 38.9% and in 2011, the literacy rate increased significantly (54.1%) compared to women's.

Table 1.1: *Gender and Literacy Status (7 years and over)*

Year	Women (%)	Men (%)
1961	10.7	31.4
1974	16.4	36.6
1981	17.5	33.8
1991	25.5	38.9
2011	49.4	54.1

Source: BBS, *Gender Statistics, 2009- 2012*.

### Gender and Adult Literacy Status in Bangladesh (15 years and over by sex)

Table 1.2 explains the situation of adult literacy rate of Bangladeshi population aged 15+ years. It shows that at the starting point (1981), women's adult literacy rate was very poor in number although the rate was increasing year by year. For example, in 1981 women's adult literacy rate was 18.0% and increased to 25.8% in 1991, 41.4% in 2001 and 49.2% in 2011. Overall, the statistics demonstrate a 31.2 percent increase from 1981 to 2011. It is notable that men's literacy rate increased faster as well as more consistently in comparison to women's. For example, at the beginning point men's literacy rate was higher (39.7%) in comparison to women's (18.0%) which clearly indicates women's weaker position when they started their participation in education.

Table 1.2: *Gender and Literacy Status (15 years and over)*

Year	Women (%)	Men (%)
1981	18.0	39.7
1991	25.8	44.3
2001	41.4	54.0
2011	49.2	56.8

Source: BBS, *Gender Statistics, 2012*.

### Gross Enrolment Rate and Girls' Educational Status at Primary Level in Bangladesh

This table illustrated the gross enrolment rate for girls in Bangladesh. This table (1.3) shows that girls' enrollment rate was 104.5% in 2002, 102.3% in 2004, 98.6% in 2006, 97.9% in 2008 and 100.2% in 2010 while for boys it was 106.8% in 2002, 104.8% in 2004, 101.0% in 2006, 102.6% in 2008 and 102.4% in 2010 respectively. It can be noted from the table that the rate for girls has been declining slowly year by year. It is also noteworthy that in rural Bangladesh, girls' completion rate of education at the primary level is not satisfactory at all. Therefore, a high enrollment rate does not signify that girls' educational status is reasonable good.

Table 1.3: *Enrolment Rate and Girls' Educational Status*

Year	Gross Enrolment (%)	
	Girls	Boys
2002	104.5	106.8
2004	102.3	104.8
2006	98.6	101.0

2008	97.9	102.6
2010	100.2	102.4

Source: BBS, *Gender Statistics*, 2012.

### Dropout Rate and Girls' Educational Status at Primary Level in Bangladesh

Table 1.4 shows girls' drop-out rate at the primary level in Bangladesh. It demonstrates that girls' dropout rate is decreasing year by year. For example, in 2002, the dropout rate for girls was 32.7% and in 2010, the rate declined at 12.2% while for boys it was 37.6% in 2002 and in 2010, the dropout rate declined at 14.4%. Although statistics shows that the dropout rate for girls is lower than that of boys over time, in reality, in rural Bangladesh, a good number of girls cannot complete their primary education due to a variety of socio cultural obstacles. Therefore, a low dropout rate for girls at the primary level may not be a significant indicator of satisfactory condition of their educational attainments especially in a socio-culturally backward society like rural Bangladesh.

Table 1.4: *Dropout Rate and Girls' Educational Status*

Year	Dropout (%)	
	Girls	Boys
2002	32.7	37.6
2004	30.5	34.0
2006	24.0	27.7
2008	19.4	22.7
2010	12.2	14.4

Source: BBS, *Gender Statistics*, 2008, 2009, 2012.

### Traditional Society, Parents' Attitudes and Girls' Education in Rural Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a traditional patriarchal society. Patriarchy is a social system where males dominate most aspects of women's lives (Khan, 2001). Radical feminists also argue that patriarchy is the key instrument by which men dominate over women socially, economically and politically (Chowdhury, et al. 2002; Hashmi, 2000; Jahan, 1994; BBS, 2010). Patriarchal ideology also enforces different rules and norms for men and women that ultimately ensure unequal gender relation in many ways (Baden, et al., 1994). As a matter of fact, due to existing patriarchal norms, differences in behavioral norms between men and women are rigidly maintained specially in rural Bangladesh (Baden, 1996; Cain et al., 1979; Hashmi, 2000; Jahan, 1994; Hussain, et al., 2003; Ali & Buzdar, 2011; Sarkar et al., 2014). Moreover, gender inequalities are deep-rooted in our patriarchal society (Ambreen & Mohyuddin 2012). Sex role is an appropriate approach of explaining this aspect. According to a sex role approach, existing gender inequalities in education, women suffer from lower completion rate, higher dropout and poor achievements in education as well (Good, Sikes & Brophy, 1973). As a primitive social institution, usually the family sets the different norms for male and female roles. As a consequence of different experiences, men and women fit in different roles (Kelly, et al., 1982). In our rural society, the father, or in his absence, the senior male member is the head of the household. Therefore, every final decision-making power (about education, employment etc.) and income generation activities are controlled by the male members of a family (Karim, et al., 2012). In a male dominated family, women are deprived of opportunities such as educational

attainment. Patriarchal rules and norms always expect that boys will be the future earners for the family so investment for their education is required (Hashmi, 2000; Jahan, 1994). On the other hand, in a traditional society like rural Bangladesh, girls are occupied in housekeeping activities that ultimately hamper their educational attainment (Chowdhury et al., 2001). In the village area especially poor parents think that girls are the helping hands of their mothers to be busy in household activities while sons are to work in outdoor activities (Hussain, et al., 2003; Khattak, et al., 2008; Lall, (2009); Ali & Buzdar, 2011). This strong belief is embedded in the community people and poor parents' opinions. Existing traditional norms and beliefs are always discourage parents to invest in girls' education (Tansel, 2002). Apart from parents' unwillingness regarding girls' education, girls are also facing various socio-cultural barriers that keep them at home (Ambreen & Mohyuddin 2012a). Similarly, in the rural areas Bangladesh, some religious extremists do not believe in the education of women (Hashmi, 2000). They also organize poor uneducated people in order not to invest in female education. Sometimes they suggest and encourage poor parents to believe that the place of the woman is in the kitchen room (Odili et al., 2003; Ojobo, 2008; Akmam, 2002; Hashmi, 2000). Therefore, parents are mostly reluctant to give permission for their girls' education. Traditionally, there are some parents in the village with have negative attitudes towards women's education, especially illiterate parents who always discourage their daughters to participate in education, but they encourage their sons' education and participation in income-generating activities (Hashmi, 2000; Khattak, et al., 2008; Khattak, 2013 ). Due to our custom-bound society, parents seek to invest in their boys' than their girls' education as parents expect that they (boys) will take responsibility in the old age and will provide financial security as well (Odili et al., 2003; Ojobo, 2008; Akmam, 2002; Hashmi, 2000; Khattak, et al., 2008). As a consequence, girls' educational opportunity is being limited in terms of their literacy status at different levels, gross enrollment rate at primary level and dropout from schooling. These are discussed in the following sections.

## Results from Primary Data Analysis

### *Literacy Status, Age and Income of the Participants*

The present study revealed that most participants have secondary and higher secondary level of education. The table below has illustrates the situation of the parents' literacy status in the present study's area:

*Table 1.5: Literacy Status of the Study Participants*

Literacy Status of the Parent	Percentage
Illiterate	70
Can sign only	15
Up to Class V	10
Completed primary level	5
Total	100.00

*Source: Field Work, 2014-2015.*

Table 1.5 shows that 70% of the participants were illiterate in the study area. They were not able to understand the meaning of girls' education. It was also found that only 15% of the parents were able to put their signature, while 10% of the parents attended four years of school. At the same time, the present research revealed that only 5% of parents completed primary level education. So, it is very difficult for them (parents) to comprehend the importance of women's education.

Table 1.6: Age of the Study Participants

Age category	Percent
Young Age	33
Middle Age	50
Old Age	17
Total	100

Source: Field Work, 2014-2015.

Table 1.6 shows that 50% of the study participants were in middle age category while 33% of the participants were in young age category and 17% of the participants were in old age category.

Table 1.7: Monthly Household Income of the Study Participants

Income Level	Percentage
Poor income	25
Middle income	50
High income	25
Total	100

Source: Field Work, 2014-2015.

Table 1.7 shows that 25% of the study participants were in the poor income category while 50% of the participants were in the middle income category and 25% of the participants were in the high income category.

## 2.1 Parents' Awareness Level regarding Girls' Education and Varieties of Issues

Table 1.8: Level of Awareness

Awareness Level regarding Girls education and Varieties of Issues	Percentage
Having high level of Awareness	10
Having medium level of Awareness	30
Having low level of Awareness	60
<b>Total</b>	100

Source: Field Work, 2014-2015.

Evidences suggest that parents' awareness level has an impact on child development. Although a number of NGOs are working and implementing development programs on social awareness related issues in rural Bangladesh, parents were unaware about their girls' future in many ways. Specifically, it was found that (table 2.1) only 10% of the parents have a high level of awareness while 30% have a medium level of awareness and the remaining 60% have a low level of awareness regarding girls' educational and socio-cultural issues.

## Analysis of Parents' Attitudes

### *Religious Misinterpretation and Parents' Experiences*

In the present study's area, a good number of parents are victims of religious misinterpretation

as well as social legislation. They also reported that their girls' participation in the formal education system had been stopped eventually. The table shows religious legislation in the study area.

*Table 1.9: Religious Misinterpretation and Parents' Attitude*

Status of Victim of Religious Misinterpretation	Percentage
Yes	60
No	40
Total	100

*Source: Field Work, 2014-2015.*

Table 1.9 demonstrates that 60% women were victims of religious misinterpretation in the present research. At the same time 40% women reported that they are free from such kind of occurrence.

One study participant said:

*In the village area, we (parents) usually consider that girls do not need higher education because they (girls) are treated as unproductive in terms of earnings and contribution to the family. I have no objection to recognize that our girls are always victimized by social and religious legislation imposed by our conservative leaders. (Source: Field Work, 2014-2015).*

### **Socio cultural Restriction and Parents' Attitude toward Girls' Education**

In the study area, the majority of the participants faced family restrictions to participation in career development activities. The table shows family restrictions for student girls.

*Table 2.0: Views of Socio-cultural Restrictions of the Respondents in the Study Area*

Family Restriction Status	No of Victims	Percentage
Restriction imposed by the Family	25	62.5
No restriction	15	37.5
Total Participant	40	100

*Source: Field Work, 2014-2015.*

Table 2.0 shows that about 62.5% participants were subject to some restrictions regarding educational attainments. At the same time it shows that 37.5% participants were free from restrictions regarding educational attainment and career development. Therefore it may be concluded that most women in rural Bangladesh face family restrictions imposed by husbands or family members that ultimately hinder their career growth in general.

### **Causes of Family Restriction: According to Parents Views**

In rural Bangladesh, a number of causes limit access to professional career development, especially when families impose restrictions on participation in outdoor activities. The table shows various causes of family restrictions revealed in the study area:

Table 2.1: *Causes of Family Restriction: According to Parents' Views*

Various Causes	Percentage*
Girls/ women are not for outdoor activities	55
Girls/ women are not economically productive	60
Girls/ women are for household responsibilities	45
Girls/ women are perfect assistant to their family	50
<i>Purdah</i> norms violation	55
Traditional values	60

\*Multiple answers

Source: *Field Work*, 2014-2015.

Table 2.1 suggests that more than 50 % of the participants reported that girls are not for outdoor activities while 60% participants recognized that girls are not economically productive. Thus education is not essential for them. It also shows that 45% of the participants reported that girls are not desirable for education or professional career but they are fit for family duties. 50% of the participants reported that girls are the perfect helpers for their mothers. At the same time it was found that 55% of the parents recognized that women's participation in education or job market is clearly a violation of *purdah* (veil system) norms which is strictly maintained particularly in rural Bangladesh. And at last but not least, 60% of the parents disclosed that girls are not allowed access to formal education and employment because of existing traditional culture and values in rural Bangladesh.

### ***Patriarchal Society and Girls' Education: Parents' Views***

In the rural areas of Bangladesh, patriarchy is dominates, and the father, or in his absence, the next senior male member is considered as the head of the household (Hashmi, 2000; Jahan, 1994; Hussain, et al., 2003; Ali & Buzdar, 2011). As a result, decision-making about girls' participation in education and other activities are mostly controlled by the household head and women are ignored in most cases (Hussain, et al., 2003; Ali & Buzdar, 2011; Sarkar et al., 2014). Most parents of school going children reported that the husband or a senior male member was the most influential person regarding decisions about their girls' education. One participant reported:

*All decisions about our family are taken by my husband. I have no minimum say about my girl's education or any aspect of my life as he provides economic support for all in our family. Sometimes I try to give my opinion about my children's schooling but he (husband) refuses without any consideration- this is the reality.* (Source: *Field Work*, 2014-2015).

### ***Economic Support and Parents' Attitude toward girls Education:***

In Bangladesh, a large number of people live under the poverty line in both rural and urban areas. For economic reasons, most parents consider girls' education a waste of money. Prior studies also report that 'poor families usually prefer to educate sons rather than their daughters because of economic insolvency' (Aslam 2007, Khalid & Mukhtar 2002). One participant narrated:

*I believe that money spent on a girl's education is a waste, since she will soon be married to her husband and be a part of another family. Actually, she will not contribute to my family, but she will help her husband's family.* (Source: *Field Work*, 2014-2015).

During the interview sessions, a good number of parents also reported that when their families are faced with the option of choosing between their sons' and daughters' education, boys are the first choice and the daughters are always the victims.

## **Discussion**

This study was aimed at exploring the influence of parents' attitudes toward girls' education in rural Bangladesh. It was observed that most parents believed in patriarchal ideology. Therefore they were reluctant to invest in girls' education. It was also found that in a male-controlled social setting, mothers were deprived of decision-making aspects like educational attainments of girls because of traditional conservative social rules. Misinterpretation of religious values was identified as a key factor that influences parents' attitude toward girls' educational achievements. As rural society is based on traditional values and norms, it maintains these societal norms rigidly (Hussain, S. et al., 2003; Ali & Buzdar, 2011). This study also reported that in many cases, girls' participation in the formal education system stopped due to parents' negative attitudes toward women education. Previous studies also revealed similar findings. For example, Aslam (2007a) concluded that the parents select comparatively better schools, as to fees, for their sons. Daughters were ignored or enrolled in schools with lower fees and fewer facilities. During the interview sessions, a good number of participant reported that due to conservative religious norms girls' education is being hampered in many ways. The present research shows that decision-making processes about girls' participation in education and other activities are mostly controlled by the household head. In most cases, women are ignored regarding decisions about their children's schooling. For example, most mothers of school going children reported that their husbands or senior male members were the most influential people as to the decision about their girls' education.

## **Conclusion**

In our society, female children are treated as a burden and male children are treated as a resource. So, essential support should be provided to poor parents (Dejaeghere & Lee, 2011). Moreover, GOs and NGOs should provide various supports for women's employment which may help poor parents to overcome the financial burden of keeping a girl child at home. In this respect, both GOs and NGOs initiatives are also needed. Parents need to be encouraged to send their children to school and to stay in school for longer years as education may reduce poverty and create employment opportunities. Misinterpretation about women's role must be eliminated through the creation of mass-consciousness activities. Print and electronic media must play a necessary role in this respect. Uneducated and poor peoples' mentality change is badly needed to create opportunities for women in education. Integrated programs should be taken in this respect. Existing laws should be modified and new laws should be formulated to remove fundamentalist actions (e.g. fatwa against women). Moreover, there is a common misconception about son's preference existing in our village area that is totally wrong. This is a kind of superstition and it should be removed through social actions and law enforcement agencies. Similarly, the findings of the present research suggest that gender awareness programs regarding parents' attitudes should be highly recommended.

## **Acknowledgement**

*The corresponding author would like to thank to the anonymous reviewers for their effective suggestions. Special thanks to the participants of this study for their cordial cooperation during the field work.*

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