



Obstacles to Women's Participation in Formal Education: A Case Study on a Village of Northern Part in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Women enrollment in formal education is significantly helpful for the progress of a nation. Therefore, it is essential to know what kind of barriers and difficulties women encounter in pursuing formal education in Bangladesh. Surprisingly, in Bangladesh, even after taking many initiatives by the government, the participation of women in formal education is not satisfactory. On this backdrop, the present study aims to figure out the obstacles and difficulties that demotivate women deciding on their further education in schools and colleges. The respondents of this research are 20 girls aged between 08-32 years and dropped out from the school level. The research area of this study is a village of Parulia in Mohammadabad Union, under Joypurhat Sadar Upazila, Joypurhat District, Bangladesh. The present research adopts a case study method and data has been collected by unstructured face to face interviews conducted from July 15 to July 17, 2024. The outcomes show that women's participation in formal education is disrupted by such factors as child marriage, insecurity, poverty, social ideologies and neighbor's gossip, which ultimately leads to the ending of their formal education in Bangladesh. Among these factors child marriage is the prominent one.

Keywords: Obstacles, formal education, women, Bangladesh.

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INTRODUCTION

All states and societies in the world guarantee six basic rights of individuals. A subset of this is the right to education, which arguably stands at the top. The right is an inalienable birthright of humanity and a safeguard for the social, political, economic, and technological advancement of a nation. Education sustains a nation. In order for the people to participate in national development in the truest sense, they must be humanized through education. Education is equally the right of men and women. Bangladesh is an underdeveloped country.

There are multitude of problems confronted by this country in education sector, especially different obstacles to women's participation in formal education is one of them. And yet, measures like monthly pay of the poorest households, school feeding or free books are not halting the continuing rise in school dropouts. The rural areas of Bangladesh do not have that much educational amenity in the older days (Asad, 2009). In Malawi, dropout rates for girls have risen in rural areas. Parents believe that keeping girls in school is not useful or worth it, since they will leave after they get married (Holcamp,

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2009). According to Rani and Akmam (2022) the highest number of respondents, 93.90%, indicates that they could not continue school after marriage, while the remaining 6.10% of respondents who continued schooling after marriage. However, they were unable to pursue this further after S.S.C. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (2016), school dropouts among girls are higher than boys. But among boys, almost 34% and almost 43% among girls drop out at the secondary level. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (2016), by 2015, at elementary to tertiary level, the total number of students was 36,646,519, out of which number of girls students was 18,400,637. Girls have a high enrollment rate but the high rate of drop out of girls are not accepted at all.

A study conducted by Ricketts (2013) in Tanzania and Rwanda, reveals that girls have more household duties than boys which cause them to withdraw from school quicker and at a higher rate than boys. According to Mawere (2012) in Zimbabwe, a high number of girls drop out as a result of several issues including; financial difficulty, poverty, child marriage and misperceptions surrounding religious beliefs and cultural ideologies that sending a girl to school is equivalent to throwing money away. Kahise (2013) finds out that parents have been breeding the belief that marriages and various household chores are best deals for a daughter. And they also believe that the male in the family is to take care of their wife and children. It means that there is no need for a daughter to get higher education as her future husband will take care of her. Hence, during the crucial time of financial difficulties, a number of parents reject their daughter's education. Ahmed *et al.*, (2010) indicate that poverty and poverty related factors lead to the drop out of girls.

Although independent research has been conducted of national dimension in Bangladesh, particularly regarding the obstacles to women's participation in formal education in northern parts like the Joypurhat district, detailed qualitative studies are very few in number. This research attempts to investigate the hindrances to women's participation in formal education system. The end product of this study will help the policymakers formulate and review their policies on education.

METHODOLOGY

The village of Parulia in Mohammadabad Union, under Joypurhat Sadar Upazila, Joypurhat District, is the research area. A qualitative research method has been used for this study. To collect data case study method is used. The case study focused specifically on girls aged between 08-32. Direct primary data has been collected using purposive

sampling from the 20 respondents by interviewing face to face with an informed consent in this study. An unstructured interview schedule has been used by the researcher as a data collection tool. The researchers have developed rapport which in turn helped them get to the core of the issues pertinent to objectives of research and succeed in gathering the information they needed. Interviews have been recorded with the permission of respondents. Each of the discussions lasted between 25 and 30 minutes. The responses were also recorded as field notes. To finalize the research, the researchers resided in Parulia village of Joypurhat district, the designated research region, from 15-07-2024 to 17-07-2024 and performed fieldwork. Our fieldwork duration was three days.

This analysis followed a series of thematic analysis steps carried out serially. The initial step was to transcribe and translate informant's statement in English. The researchers then read and identified the themes. The reorganized themes were used after identifying the themes. The researcher analyzed data was collected and interpreted to produce this paper.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Child Marriage: Child marriage is the main hindrances to women's formal education. A responsible for marriage of daughters also seen by parents as a big responsibility in arranging it before maturity is attained. Child marriage a is still common in our country including the rural areas. Four respondents of the present study said that the one of the most important obstacles to women's formal education was early marriage. A participant in this research named Johura (pseudonym) stated that,

"Amar porashuna bondho hoye jaoar pichone proghan karon hocche ballo bibaho" (The main reason behind my interruption in education is early marriage.)

She also said:

"I was a pretty good student. I had a good interest in studies. But after class five, I couldn't study anymore. My father got me married. Despite my many tears, I was informed that if I get married early the dowry would be low. Even though my husband promised me before marriage that he would let me study in school, he didn't keep that promise. I couldn't study anymore due to the pressure of family work. A year later, when I had a child, I never went to school again."

Another girl who stopped formal education for a similar reason was named Sabina (pseudonym). She was not very good at studies. But her father did not hinder her from studying. Suddenly one day she

came to know that her marriage was fixed. At that time, she was in class seven. Her family told her that what will happen if she studies? The main job of a girl is to raise a family. So, it is better to get married soon. Then the girl got married. After marriage, although she was able to study for a few days, she was gradually stopped from going to school.

Here the main obstacle to women's formal education is child marriage. Parents educate their daughters in formal education until the girl reaches the age of marriage. When the girl reaches the age, getting her married becomes the big responsibility of the parents. For this reason, child marriage considers as an obstacle to women's formal education. Again, there are some families who educate their daughters but marry them off when they find a good marriage partner. In this case, no opinion of the girls is accepted. In this area, marriage is considered the ultimate destination of the girl child. That is why girls are married off even at the expense of their education. Because the younger the age of the bride, the less the demand for dowry. It makes the parents want to marry their daughters off as early as possible. As a result, many poor parents want to get their daughters married off as soon as possible and send them away from home. Childhood is the best time for education. As a result of marriage at this time, women's lives are plunged into the darkness of illiteracy. They can never come out of that darkness.

Insecurity: Due to the present social unrest situation and lack of security parents cannot send her daughters to school without fear. A participant, named Fatema (pseudonym) who narrated her experience said that one of the main and prominent causes of stopping formal education among girls is insecurity. She said that she wanted to study, and then that she wanted to be a teacher when she grows up. Her result was good. In the PSC examination she got a GPA of 4.33 and in the JSC exam a GPA of 3.71. Despite the fact that she was from a nearby village and went to school in the nearby primary school she was insecure mostly when heading to school. There were many naughty boys on the street who would often say bad things. So she used to be afraid while going to school. One day, bad boys in school found her on her way from school and demanded for her number so that they can be calling her. She ran away from there that day in fear. At one point his mother stopped him from going to school due to lack of security. Girls are not sure about their safety outside of their homes that means on the way to schools and this uncertainty of girls has now taken the same appearance everywhere, in cities and in villages. Incidents of harassment of students on the way to school, kidnapping of students, throwing of acid etc are happening regularly. Because village schools are often isolated, boys and girls are enrolled late in

school and thus all those girls reach adolescence before completing the primary level. On the route from the place where girls live to school, a lot of troubles are waiting for them.

One of the respondents of the present study was Rafika (pseudonym). She said that:

"I was very beautiful. Because of that my parents always had a headache about my security. They had a concern that, my beauty may allure the boys. And that might be a security issue of mine. Moreover, they thought present time is the age of love and teasing. So, my parents had a latent fear of losing honor. Because of this they forced me into marriage at a young age that I was not willing to be married. I couldn't continue my study after marriage."

Eve-teasing is a widespread reason behind the drop out of children, especially girls at secondary and higher secondary level in our country. Eve-teasing is indeed an act of mental damage, and happens without giving any chance of physical injury. It's literally a psychological torture. Any movement and life of a woman is disturbed due to this. In the words of a informants named Samiya (pseudonym):

"Amar porshona bondho hoar pichone proshan karon chilo eve teasing. Eta amake manoshikvabe biporjosto kore dey. Amr schoole jaowar agrho komiye dey." ("The main reason behind my stopping studies was Eve teasing. It upset me mentally. It reduced my interest in going to school.")

Poverty:

In case of women's participation in education poverty is the major obstacle. There is a close relationship between poverty and illiteracy. Women are the most affected. Although children from poor families are usually deprived of education, girls are given a discount in this regard. At an early age girl are forced to leave school because their parents unable to bear their expenses to send their daughters to school. An informant named Jakia (pseudonym) said that:

Ami gorib hoye jonmaichi. Amar eto porashuna kore ki hobe? Class four porjonto porchi. Erpor ma bolche kaje jaito. Karon porashuna kore amader khawa jute na" ("I was born poor. What will happen to me after studying so much? I am studying till class four. After that, my mother tells me to go to work. Because studying will not provide us food.")

Again, parents of poor families are not so aware of education. So if girls express reluctance to go to school, then the parents do not bother about it.

Despite this, differences between boys and girls are created in most families in poor families. The priority that boys get in education, girls get it over time. Parents worry more about girls from poor families. They think that if we educate our girls more, we will not be able to marry them off to equally educated boys. They also say that what is the point of educating girls so much, they will move to the next house after two days. All they need to do is learn some basic skills. If they can hand them over to a good, capable man, they will survive. The main reason for this happening in the case of girls is poverty.

Social Ideologies:

One of the major reasons for hindrance to women's education is social ideologies. Because of the social structure, ladies are liable for oppression; straightforwardly, in this patriarchal society, ladies are kept as such and under the men. This means their kids are too. Hence, both men and women are deprived of the same opportunity in our social structure. Backward class women, subjugation of women, leisure and recreation opportunities for women are less, so we talk about female oppression; they are a neglected group in society.

One respondents of the present study stopped her formal education due to the social ideologies. A respondent named Aleya (pseudonym) stated that,

"I was admitted to school. My father sent me to school till class nine. Then I got married. After marriage, my husband stopped me from going to school because like everyone, he also considered that it is a waste of money to educate girls. And it'd be the girl who would take care of the children and do all the housework. After studying so much, what will girls do? Because of my husband's attitude, I did not go to school anymore."

Other informants named Khairun ((pseudonym)) stated that:

"I come from a poor family. My parents admitted me to school till class 5. Then they discontinued my studies despite me wanting to study, they said that household work is more important than schooling. My mother keeps on saying you will have to get married after a few days. My mother used to say it if you don't work now, you will not have any respect when you are with your in-laws. You will have to pay a terrible price."

In this country, women have very little opportunity to participate in social work. They are dependent on men. Therefore, they cannot take any decisions in various social activities, they are powerless and without dignity. There is no control

over women's financial resources in the family. Their hard-earned unpaid household work is never valued. Even though women earn income, they are subordinate to men, that is why women's contribution has never found a place in our society, technology, religion, laws and cultural fields. Women education is not valued properly in our society because from very beginning women are undervalued in every sphere of there life. Discriminatory social, cultural beliefs, values and behaviors become obstacles in the way of women's rights. Most of the rules and regulations in our society are against women's progress, which is one of the main obstacles to women's real education and development as human beings and these have been prevalent in our country for ages. As a result, women's education is truly hindered.

Neighbors' gossip:

Gossip of the neighbors often stops women having education. According to Sabina (pseudonym), respondent in this research work said,

"The harsh words of my neighbors were one of the main reasons I stopped going to school. I'm not a good student and I come from poor family. Even then, my family was very aware of continuing my education. After I studied up to class eight, my father stopped my studies since, during my schooling if my male classmates ever talked to me, our neighbors would say a lot of bad things about me. These comments passed on to my father's ears and my father stopped me to go to school"

Another girl who dropped out for a similar reason was named Meena (pseudonym). She said that:

"Negative thoughts and gossips from people around us affected me a lot to quit my studying. It is a common belief among the people of my area that if a girl is too old, she will not get married, she will not find a good husband. And if she is too old, she will have to pay a large dowry. After hearing all these things, my family decided to get me married quickly, and I got married within a few months."

Hearing all these things, the girl's parents are forced to marry their daughter off. Then the girl's parents stop their daughter's education and get her married off. Because of such gossip from the neighbors around us the involvement of women in formal education is decreasing.

CONCLUSION

Certainly, for the overall development of this country, it is necessary to develop all its human resources. For that reason, women need to play their

part through participating in formal education. However, one of the reasons for the slow development of women's education in Bangladesh is that for a long time period, woman has been neglected in every sphere of their life. In past, women were considered as a liability, a non-wage earner dependent on male members of the family. So, their education always lacked the due priority and attention. The current research aimed at exploring the obstacles to women's participation in formal education and found out a number of factors responsible for women dropouts from formal education. They are child marriage, insecurity, poverty, social discipline, neighbors' gossip and the notion that most girls in Bangladesh are educated to make them suitable for the marriage market instead of making them self-reliant. As a result, some of them complete their school level education, some do not; but no one pursues knowledge. Hence, in black and white, the education rate of women rises but in reality it is still vague. Among these obstacles, child marriage is the most prominent one. To eliminate women dropouts, the government should prevent child marriage and should rise consciousness among parents. Thus, to overcome the obstacles to women's participation in formal education in long run more suitable measures should be taken for stopping child marriage.

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