



Investigating the Major Influencing Factors of Early Marriage among Women in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Despite the fact that early marriage is considered a violation of human rights, in Bangladesh, a sizable portion of women get married before turning 18. The purpose of this study is to determine whether early marriage is influenced by women's preferences for the timing of their marriages as well as other socioeconomic factors in Bangladesh.

Methodology: The Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2017–18 was utilized to collect the latest data for the study. The relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and early marriage among women was examined using a bivariate cross-tabulation and the chi-square test. Binary logistic regression was then executed.

Findings: We discovered that women who wished to wed at the proper time tended to wed later rather than earlier. Additionally, partners' education levels are just as essential as women's education levels in preventing early marriage. Women who were employed before marriage and who were not Muslim tend to have fewer early marriages, necessitating government intervention to generate social awareness programs, create more opportunities for women to work, and build vocational training institutions in rural and urban areas.

Practical Implications: Policies to lower the rate of early marriage among women in Bangladesh can be developed using the study's findings.

Originality/Value: The study includes some new variables and uses the latest dataset. This study also paves the way for doing further research by collecting some other variables that were not present in the dataset.

Limitations: Due to data unavailability, analysis of certain variables' impact on marital age could not be done. Also, the dataset might have some under-reporting errors.

1. Introduction

Marriage is seen as a period of immense significance and celebration all throughout the world. It is a legally recognized union of two or more persons that creates specific rights and responsibilities for all parties involved. Marriage is considered the central and most important social institution (Haviland *et al.*, 2017). But marriage at an early age can bring tensions and uncertainty.

"Child marriage" refers to both legally recognized marriages and unrecognized relationships in which a girl or a boy cohabitates with a spouse as if married before turning 18 years old (UNICEF,

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2022). Even though the problem of early marriage has been addressed, a sizable percentage of women, particularly in Asia and Africa, continue to wed before reaching sexual and intellectual maturity (Rahman, 2017). Due to negative social and health-related consequences, early marriage could be considered a violation of girls' human rights (UNICEF, 2022).

The Indian subcontinent frequently sees early marriage (Bates et al., 2007), and Bangladesh is not free from this practice of human rights violation. The literacy rate in adult females in Bangladesh (aged 15 and above) increased from 57.9% in 2014 to 71.2% in 2018 (World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2022). However, in terms of marital age, there has been a very slow increase over time. In women aged 20 to 49, the median age at first marriage increased from 16.1 years in 2014 (NIPORT, 2016) to 16.3 years in 2017–18 (NIPORT, 2020).

According to a report by UNICEF (2020), 51% of young women in Bangladesh tied the knot prior to turning 18. A rights group called National Girl Child Advocacy Forum revealed that at least 2,301 child marriages took place in 28 districts within the first eight months of 2022 (Sun, 2022). In an effort to decrease the number of early marriages, the government launched the Female Secondary School Stipend Program in 1994. The government also enacted the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, according to which marrying before the age of 18 for girls and 21 for boys is a legal offense.

In spite of efforts from the government and non-governmental organizations, Bangladesh continues to have alarmingly high rates of child marriage. The question then arises: what are the major factors that influence early marriage among Bangladeshi women?

By examining the impact of various socioeconomic factors on early marriage, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of why early marriage continues to persist in Bangladesh, despite legal and humanitarian efforts to discourage it. Moreover, by using recent data and incorporating new variables, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the issue, which could aid in the formulation of policies to further address the problem of early marriage.

To better understand the current scenario of early marriage in Bangladesh, it is essential to explore the key factors influencing early marriage to fight against this violation of human rights more appropriately. The purpose of this study is to look into the socioeconomic aspects that influence early marriage in Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

The marriage of young girls persists throughout the developing world and is most common within regions of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Bates et al., 2007). Bangladesh is among the top 10 countries globally with the highest level of child marriage (UNICEF, 2020). The occurrence of child marriage is not as common today as it was in previous generations. The problem of child marriage has improved over time, although at a pace that isn't nearly satisfactory. According to data pertaining to the year-of-birth and year-of-marriage cohorts of women (Kamal et al., 2015), the trend of child marriage has significantly decreased in recent years. According to research by Razu (2018), Bangladesh's rural areas have a mean first marriage age of 16.8 years, while Saleheen et al. (2021) found it to be 20.05 years using a nationally representative dataset. Contrasting results were found regarding family types.

Santhya et al. (2010) found that early marriage may compromise young women's reproductive health. According to Ali et al. (2021), women who marry young have a 13.25 times higher likelihood of having children at a young age than those who marry later. Women who marry young miss out on opportunities for personal development, as well as their rights and well-being, education, and active engagement in civic life. (Roy, 2008). Early marriage has more severe social repercussions, such as increased population growth, faster disease spread, and a higher rate of orphans (Field & Ambrus, 2008).

Given the poor socioeconomic condition, a young girl is sometimes regarded as an economic burden (Kamal et al., 2015). The likelihood that a girl would marry young is influenced by a number

of sociodemographic factors. Marital age was found to be substantially influenced by respondents' age, religion, level of education, family size, fathers' occupation, and household income (Razu, 2018). Additionally, it was discovered that respondents' employment status and media exposure were related to getting married young. It has been noted that rural women are more likely to get married young (Kabir et al., 2016). When husbands had little or no formal education, and women were unemployed or unskilled workers, the chance of early marriage increased dramatically. (Kamal et al., 2015).

While one research found that women from nuclear families wed later than those from blended families (Razu, 2018), another study discovered that nuclear households had a higher rate of early marriage (Roy, 2008). The majority of the research indicated that one of the major factors influencing respondents' early marriage among Bangladeshi women was their level of education. Moreover, women who did not receive any education and completed primary and secondary levels of education experience a higher occurrence of early marriages (Razu, 2018). Field and Ambrus (2008) looked at the claim that societal and financial pressure to be married young causes women to drop out of school. After completing secondary education, both for the respondent and their husbands, the chance of early marriage was shown to be low. Singh and Samara (1996) found that women having a secondary level of education are less likely than less educated women to marry during adolescence. The risk of early marriage was notably higher when the respondents were unemployed (Kamal et al., 2015). Compared to respondents who are housewives, servants, or street laborers, respondents who hold jobs and those working in the service industry are 0.796% less likely to marry young (Hossain & Islam, 2013). Regarding the likelihood that a woman may enter into an early marriage, religious identification has a special bearing. It has been discovered that Muslim women are more likely than non-Muslim women to get married young (Rahman, 2017). An important driver of early marriage is the girl's and her family's fear of the effects of postponing marriage. For Hindus, it is critical to prevent miscegenation between different castes since it would result in ritual pollution with disastrous consequences for the families involved. For Muslims, engaging in sexual activity before marriage jeopardizes the young woman's honor and that of her family (Caldwell, 2005). Rural women have a larger percentage of early marriages than their urban counterparts when it comes to their place of residence (Jisun, 2016). In comparison to women whose husbands work in agriculture, those whose husbands are in the service industry marry later in life (Sultana et al., 2017). Fathers who have attained secondary or higher education tend to marry off their daughters later than fathers with no education (Nasrin & Rahman, 2012). Findings revealed that the rate of engagement in early marriage is negatively linked with the wealth index (Saleheen et al., 2021). Exposure to mass media also tremendously affects age at first marriage. Sarkar (2009) found that women without mass media access have a higher likelihood of marrying early than those with such access. According to Talukder et al. (2020), the education of women and their husbands, religion, wealth, and place of living has a big impact on how common early marriage is in Bangladesh. Ahmed et al. (2019) found an interesting correlation between extreme weather conditions and early marriage. People living in environmentally vulnerable areas were found to practice early marriage as a survival strategy. Early marriage allows them to lessen their financial load while also protecting their young daughters from sexual assault during severe weather disasters. Forced early marriage is a practice that lowers women's empowerment, raises the chance of baby health problems, and increases maternal mortality. This practice has a negative impact not only on women but also on their children, family, and society as a whole (Razu, 2018).

However, as a human being, every individual has a right to have a preference for when he or she would like to get married. But in the case of women, this right rarely has been effective in Bangladesh. According to the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), 2017-18, 19.27% of respondents preferred getting early marriage, 47.59% preferred marriage at the right time, and 33.14% preferred late marriage (NIPORT, 2020).

While a variety of factors have been investigated in previous research, the individual's preference for when to marry has not received adequate attention. Since women were asked about their preferred time of marriage, this study attempts to verify whether their preferences have any impact on early

marriage, along with other socioeconomic factors. This study also aims to integrate socioeconomic factors in a comprehensive analysis that have been considered in isolation in prior studies. Using the most recent dataset from the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2017–18 thereby provides a more thorough view of the early marriage situation in Bangladesh.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Source

The study used secondary data from Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2017-18. The sample for the 2017-18 BDHS is nationally representative. This survey's sampling frame was created by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) from a list of enumeration areas (EAs) from the 2011 Population and Housing Census. A stratified two-stage sample of households served as the foundation for the survey. Initially, a probability proportional to the size of the EA was used to choose 675 EAs. An average of 30 households per EA were systematically chosen during the second sample phase. 20,127 women who had ever been married and were between the ages of 15 and 49 participated in this survey. Out of the 20,127 total respondents from the survey data, we used 18,894 responses in our study due to some null values.

3.2 Variables

Early marriage served as the study's response variable. A binary outcome was assigned to the variable. Given that 18 is the minimum age for marriage in Bangladesh for women, women who had married before reaching 18 were coded as “1” when “0” was used for the rest. Religion (Muslim, Hindu, others), region type (rural, urban), division (Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Khulna, Barishal, Mymensingh, Rangpur), respondent's education level (no education, primary, secondary, higher), respondent's working status just before marriage (yes, no), respondents studying just before marriage (yes, no), sex of the head of household (male, female), wealth index (poorest, poorer, middle, richer, richest), partner's education level (no education, primary, secondary, higher), preferred age at first marriage (earlier, right time, later), frequency of reading newspaper (read newspaper, not at all), frequency of listening to radio (listen to radio, not at all) and frequency of watching tv (watch tv, not at all) were used as explanatory variables.

3.3 Methods

The study aims at exploring the significant factors influencing early marriage among Bangladeshi women. The statistical analyses were carried out using the statistical package Stata. We categorized the dependent variable (age at first marriage) as “early” (married below the age of 18) and “late” (married at 18 or above) based on the respondents' age at first marriage. The bivariate analyses were performed along with the chi-square test to explore possible associations between marital age and the explanatory variables.

Let Y_i denote the binary dependent variable for the i^{th} observation.

$Y_i = 1$, if early marriage (prior to turning 18)

0, if late marriage and (after becoming 18 years old)

$X_1 \dots X_{ip}$ be a set of explanatory variables.

We employed the following logistic regression model for econometric analysis:

$$P(Y_i = 1) = \text{logit}(\pi_i) = \log \frac{\pi_i}{1-\pi_i} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{i1} + \dots + \beta_p X_{ip} \quad [1]$$

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the bivariate analysis where a cross-tabulation with chi-square statistics is used. It has been found that 73.58% of respondents were married before turning 18 years old. Muslims are more likely to enter into early marriage (92.36%) than other religions (Jisun, 2016; Rahman, 2017; Razu, 2018). Rural women (66.81%) are more likely than their urban counterparts to experience early marriage. Rajshahi has the highest percentage of early marriages (14.32%) among the divisions, which is similar to the findings of Chowdhury et al. (2013).

Table 1

Cross-tabulation of Women's Early Marriage by Socioeconomic Factors (Percentage values are in parenthesis)

Determinants	Total	Early Marriage	Late Marriage	p-Values
	18,894	13,903 (73.58%)	4,991 (26.42%)	
Religion				0.000
Muslim	17,015 (90.06%)	12,841 (92.36%)	4,174 (83.63%)	
Hindu	1,760 (9.32%)	1,014 (7.29%)	746 (14.95%)	
Others	119 (0.63%)	48 (0.35%)	71 (1.42%)	
Region type				0.000
Urban	6,880 (36.41%)	4,614 (33.19%)	2,266 (45.40%)	
Rural	12,014 (63.59%)	9,289 (66.81%)	2,725 (54.60%)	
Division				0.000
Dhaka	2,822 (14.94%)	1,976 (14.21%)	846 (16.95%)	
Chittagong	2,730 (14.45%)	1,896 (13.64%)	834 (16.71%)	
Barisal	2,012 (10.65%)	1,554 (11.18%)	458 (9.18%)	
Khulna	2,480 (13.13%)	1,942 (13.97%)	538 (10.78%)	
Mymensingh	2,053 (10.87%)	1,583 (11.39%)	470 (9.42%)	
Rajshahi	2,426 (12.84%)	1,991 (14.32%)	435 (8.72%)	
Rangpur	2,346 (12.42%)	1,881 (13.53%)	465 (9.32%)	
Sylhet	2,025 (10.72%)	1,080 (7.77%)	945 (18.93%)	
Respondent's education level				0.000
No education	2,794 (14.79%)	2,400 (17.26%)	394 (7.89%)	
Primary	5,916 (31.31%)	4,829 (34.73%)	1,087 (21.78%)	
Secondary	7,452 (39.44%)	5,735 (41.25%)	1,717 (34.40%)	
Higher	2,732 (14.46%)	939 (6.75%)	1,793 (35.92%)	
Respondent's working status just before the marriage				0.000
No	17,721 (93.79%)	13,387 (96.29%)	4,334 (86.84%)	

Yes	1,173 (6.21%)	516 (3.71%)	657 (13.16%)	
Respondent's studying just before the marriage				0.601
No	11,148 (59.01%)	8,188 (58.89%)	2,960 (59.32%)	
Yes	7,745 (40.99%)	5,715 (41.11%)	2,030 (40.68%)	
Sex of household head				0.972
Male	16,682 (88.29%)	12,276 (88.30%)	4,406 (88.28%)	
Female	2,212 (11.71%)	1,627 (11.70%)	585 (11.72%)	
Wealth index				0.000
Poorest	3,546 (18.77%)	2,957 (21.27%)	589 (11.80%)	
Poorer	3,599 (19.05%)	2,884 (20.74%)	715 (14.33%)	
Middle	3,654 (19.34%)	2,899 (20.85%)	755 (15.13%)	
Richer	3,861 (20.44%)	2,778 (19.98%)	1,083 (21.70%)	
Richest	4,234 (22.41%)	2,385 (17.15%)	1,849 (37.05%)	
Partner's education level				0.000
No education	4,019 (21.27%)	3,412 (24.54%)	607 (12.16%)	
Primary	5,923 (31.35%)	4,776 (34.35%)	1,147 (22.98%)	
Secondary	5,579 (29.53%)	4,083 (29.37%)	1,496 (29.97%)	
Higher	3,373 (17.85%)	1,632 (11.74%)	1,741 (34.88%)	
Preferred age at first marriage				0.000
Earlier	3,641 (19.27%)	3,463 (24.91%)	178 (3.57%)	
Right time	8,992 (47.59%)	4,414 (31.75%)	4,578 (91.73%)	
Later	6,261 (33.14%)	6,026 (43.34%)	235 (4.71%)	
Frequency of reading newspaper				0.000
Not at all	16,866 (89.27%)	12,980 (93.36%)	3,886 (77.86%)	
Read newspaper	2,028 (10.73%)	923 (6.64%)	1,105 (22.14%)	
Frequency of listening to radio				0.000
Not at all	17,962 (95.07%)	13,339 (95.95%)	4,623 (92.63%)	
Listen radio	931 (4.93%)	563 (4.05%)	368 (7.37%)	
Frequency of watching TV				0.000
Not at all	6,892 (36.48%)	5,434 (39.09%)	1,458 (29.21%)	
Watch TV	12,002 (63.52%)	8,469 (60.91%)	3,533 (70.79%)	

Source: Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2017-18

Among the respondents who experienced early marriage, those who completed higher education are the least likely (6.75%) to marry young. Respondents who were not working outside of the home just before marriage had a higher rate of (96.29%) early matrimony than respondents who were working. Early marriage was less common (41.11%) among those who were in school right before getting married in comparison to those who were not (58.89%). But according to the chi-square test, this variable is not significant. 88.3% of early marriages were found to have happened in communities where the household head is male. But it is also an insignificant variable following the chi-square test. As far as the wealth index is concerned, the poorest section of society has the greatest percentage (21.27%) of early marriage. However, the wealthiest families (37.05%) are more likely to marry their children when they're 18 or older. Respondents' partners with primary education have the highest rate (34.35%) of marrying underaged girls, while partners having higher education have the highest rate (34.88%) of marrying girls aged 18 or older. Respondents who had preferred to get married at a later age experienced a higher rate (43.34%) of early marriage. Also, early marriage is more common among respondents who do not read newspapers (93.36%) or listen to radio (95.95%) at all. But it is more common among those who watch TV (60.91%).

Further examination was done to identify the influencing factors of early marriage among different socioeconomic groups in urban and rural areas separately. The findings are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2

Frequency of Early Marriage Regarding its Influencing Factors Among Different Socioeconomic Groups in Urban Areas (N = 4,614)

Variables	Poorest (%)	Poorer (%)	Middle (%)	Richer (%)	Richest (%)	Total (%)
Religion						
Muslim	92.36	94.01	90.23	93.67	92.83	92.72
Hindu	6.55	5.99	9.37	5.88	6.74	6.83
Others	1.09	0	0.4	0.45	0.43	0.46
Division						
Dhaka	3.06	7.6	12.99	29.86	34.56	24.04
Chittagong	20.52	7.37	9.64	11.62	17.4	13.83
Barisal	15.72	12.67	16.6	8.34	5.45	9.8
Khulna	8.3	16.13	15.26	15.34	13.91	14.2
Mymensingh	7.21	10.6	9.77	8.12	5.76	7.69
Rajshahi	12.45	17.97	18.07	13.55	9.25	13.07
Rangpur	23.8	20.28	11.51	7.59	6.19	10.53
Sylhet	8.95	7.37	6.16	5.58	7.48	6.85
Respondent's education level						
No education	24.24	24.19	18.07	17.35	7.41	15.28
Primary	47.38	37.1	37.62	35.07	21.57	32.12
Secondary	27.07	36.18	39.63	39.84	51.53	42.33
Higher	1.31	2.53	4.69	7.74	19.49	10.27
Respondent's working status just before the marriage						
No	96.07	95.85	93.57	94.27	94.3	94.5
Yes	3.93	4.15	6.43	5.73	5.7	5.5

Partner's education						
No	36.46	29.95	25.84	22.19	9.56	20.46
education						
Primary	43.01	44.93	42.17	31.87	20.28	31.77
Secondary	18.56	21.89	25.57	34.4	36.03	30.8
Higher	1.97	3.23	6.43	11.54	34.13	16.97
Preferred age at first marriage						
Earlier	19.87	25.35	28.11	30.38	32.84	29.37
Right time	27.51	30.41	27.98	29.71	33.95	30.78
Later	52.62	44.24	43.91	39.91	33.21	39.86
Frequency of reading newspaper						
Not at all	97.82	95.62	93.57	93.22	78.98	88.93
Read	2.18	4.38	6.43	6.78	21.02	11.07
newspaper						
Frequency of listening to radio						
Not at all	97.82	95.85	95.98	95.31	92.52	94.73
Listen radio	2.18	4.15	4.02	4.69	7.48	5.27
Frequency of watching TV						
Not at all	74.02	41.47	25.03	17.05	7.23	22.82
Watch TV	25.98	58.53	74.97	82.95	92.77	77.18

Source: Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2017-18

Table 3

Frequency of Early Marriage Regarding its Influencing Factors Among Different Socioeconomic Groups in Rural Areas (N = 9,289)

Variables	Poorest (%)	Poorer (%)	Middle (%)	Richer (%)	Richest (%)	Total (%)
Religion						
Muslim	89.96	93.06	92.98	92.61	93.63	92.18
Hindu	9.64	6.65	6.78	7.18	6.11	7.53
Others	0.4	0.29	0.23	0.21	0.27	0.29
Division						
Dhaka	5.32	8.08	10.5	15.47	11.69	9.33
Chittagong	6.84	10.12	16.5	17.14	31.61	13.54
Barisal	17.13	11.92	10.59	8.01	5.18	11.86
Khulna	7.4	14.24	17.19	17.28	17.93	13.86
Mymensingh	17.33	15.22	11.52	8.71	6.51	13.22
Rajshahi	13.01	15.43	16.5	16.52	12.35	14.94
Rangpur	24.45	16.78	11.06	7.46	3.72	15.02
Sylhet	8.52	8.2	6.13	9.41	11.02	8.22
Respondent's education level						
No education	27.45	20.65	14.64	9.27	7.3	18.25
Primary	43.38	40.78	32.95	29.06	18.33	36.03
Secondary	27.65	36.41	46.98	52.26	58.17	40.71
Higher	1.52	2.16	5.44	9.41	16.2	5.01
Respondent's working status just before the marriage						
No	96.6	97.06	97.35	97.63	98.14	97.18
Yes	3.4	2.94	2.65	2.37	1.86	2.82

Partner's education						
No education	41.82	29.8	20.03	14.22	7.7	26.57
Primary	40.46	41.59	34.62	27.6	18.46	35.63
Secondary	15.37	24.04	35.08	41.81	44.36	28.66
Higher	2.36	4.57	10.27	16.38	29.48	9.14
Preferred age at first marriage						
Earlier	23.69	26.29	21.38	21.25	14.21	22.69
Right rime	32.45	32.53	31.09	32.68	32.93	32.23
Later	43.86	41.18	47.54	46.06	52.86	45.07
Frequency of reading newspaper						
Not at all	98.44	97.47	95.96	92.2	85.13	95.56
Read newspaper	1.56	2.53	4.04	7.8	14.87	4.44
Frequency of listening to radio						
Not at all	98.48	97.39	95.91	93.87	94.42	96.56
Listen to radio	1.52	2.61	4.09	6.13	5.58	3.44
Frequency of watching TV						
Not at all	77.95	51.47	32.85	25.37	13.41	47.16
Watch TV	22.05	48.53	67.15	74.63	86.59	52.84

Source: Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2017-18

It can be summarized from Table 2 and Table 3 that the highest proportion of early marriage among Bangladeshi women belongs to the wealthiest socioeconomic group in urban Dhaka, whereas this amount belongs to the middle class in urban areas of Rajshahi. But in both urban and rural areas of Rangpur, the highest proportion of early marriage among women belongs to the poorest socioeconomic group. Another significant conclusion is that, although women with better education are less likely to marry young, the frequency is proportionately higher in the richest socioeconomic group compared to the poorest socioeconomic group in both urban and rural locations. Early marriage among women who were working before their marriage: the majority belong to the middle or rich socioeconomic groups in urban areas, whereas in rural areas, it belongs to the lowest socioeconomic group. So the impact of various factors on early marriage in women varies among different socioeconomic groups differently between urban and rural areas.

Logistic regression was used to identify the influencing factors of early marriage. In binary logistic analysis, only independent variables are included, which are found significant in the previous bivariate analysis shown in Table 1. Table 4 shows the odds ratio from binary logistics regression analysis of selected independent variables.

Table 4

*Results of Binary Logistic Regression Model (Ref. = Reference Category, Level of Significance: ***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.10)*

Dependent Variable Independent Variables	Early Marriage	
	Odds Ratio	p-value
Religion		
Muslim (Ref.)	1	
Hindu	0.48	0.000***
Others	0.30	0.000***
Region type		
Urban (Ref.)	1	

Rural	1.12	0.019**
Division		
Dhaka (Ref.)	1	
Chittagong	1.01	0.844
Barisal	1.25	0.011**
Khulna	1.26	0.006***
Mymensingh	1.18	0.05*
Rajshahi	1.83	0.000***
Rangpur	1.64	0.000***
Sylhet	0.45	0.000***
Respondent's education level		
No education (Ref.)	1	
Primary	0.72	0.000***
Secondary	0.61	0.000***
Higher	0.17	0.000***
Respondent's working status just before the marriage		
No (Ref.)	1	
Yes	0.36	0.000***
Wealth index		
Poorest (Ref.)	1	
Poorer	0.86	0.060*
Middle	0.98	0.881
Richer	0.83	0.030**
Richest	0.74	0.001***
Partner's education		
No education (Ref.)	1	
Primary	0.91	0.168
Secondary	0.80	0.004***
Higher	0.63	0.000***
Preferred age at first marriage		
Earlier (Ref.)	1	
Right time	0.05	0.000***
Later	1.11	0.329
Frequency of reading newspaper		
Not at all (Ref.)	1	
Read newspaper	0.70	0.000***
Frequency of listening to radio		
Not at all (Ref.)	1	
Listen radio	0.99	0.969
Frequency of watching TV		
Not at all (Ref.)	1	
Watch TV	0.94	0.325

Source: Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2017-18

Table 4 shows that the odds ratios for Hindu and other religions except Muslim were 0.48 and 0.30, respectively, which suggests that compared to women from other religious groups, Muslim women were more likely to get married young. Muslim parents marry their daughters at a young age because of a concern of losing the family's social standing as a result of the daughters' premarital behavior (Sarkar, 2009). Compared to urban women, rural women had a 1.12 times higher likelihood of being married young (Kamal et al., 2015). While the risk of early marriage is lowest in the Sylhet division, it was 1.83 and 1.64 times more likely for women from Rajshahi and Rangpur, respectively, than for women from the Dhaka division (Islam et al., 2016). The higher levels of poverty in the districts of Rajshahi and Rangpur may be the cause of this divisional variation. On the other hand, thanks to the larger rate of migration, the greater number of foreign contacts among Sylhet residents

contributed to a decline in poverty and a rise in social consciousness (Islam et al., 2016). Early marriage was more common among respondents who had no formal education and did not work outside the home right before getting married. This result is analogous to the findings of Saleheen et al. (2021), who argued that highly educated women preferred to participate in technical and other income-generating activities and thus wanted to postpone marriages. Women from the poorest families had a higher likelihood of getting married early than those from more affluent families (Rahman, 2017). This result may seem misleading at first glance as women move to their in-laws' houses after marriage, and the wealth index considered here does not represent the wealth index of the family the respondent originated from. But it gives us an indication of the wealth index of the families from where the respondents came from, as marriage between different socioeconomic classes with significant wealth disparity is not very common in Bangladesh. Women who had partners without any education were more likely than those who had educated partners to experience early marriage. This outcome is in line with the findings of Rahman (2017), who found that men with higher education had a lower propensity to marry women under the age of 18. Women who preferred to marry at the appropriate time were less likely to do so. Respondents who never read the newspaper had a higher likelihood of getting married young than women who did. Because in the case of Bangladesh, it can be believed that women who read newspapers are more aware of the negative effects of early marriage. The frequency of listening to radio and watching TV was found to be statistically insignificant in the regression analysis. The insignificance of these variables can be attributed to the fact that a very low percentage of respondents listen to radio, and the survey did not ask respondents the kind of program they watch on TV.

The findings of the logistic regression analysis thus indicate that the significant influencing factors of early marriage in Bangladesh are religion, region type, division, respondent's education level, respondent's employment status just prior to the marriage, wealth index, partner's education level, preferred age at first marriage, and frequency of newspaper reading.

5. Limitations

Although we achieved the objectives of our study, we had some limitations too. Due to the unavailability of data, we could not analyze the possible effects of some variables influencing the age of marriage, such as - family type (whether it was a nuclear family or a joint family) from where the respondent came from, the respondent's parents' vital status during their daughter's marriage, parent's education and the effect of environmental migration. Also, the dataset might have an under-reporting error. The age of respondents, their age of marriage, and other factors are frequently underreported in surveys conducted in developing or underdeveloped nations where vital registration systems are not strictly adhered to. Further research can be done by collecting and using the variables mentioned above.

6. Conclusion

In Bangladesh, early marriage is a major social concern in ensuring the overall well-being of women. As early marriage carries negative biological and social consequences for women, it also hinders national development. This study aimed to look into the main influencing factors of early marriage among Bangladeshi women. Regarding the objectives and findings, we can deduce that women who belong to the Muslim religion and have poor socioeconomic status are at a higher risk of having an early marriage. Another major finding is that early marriage is significantly influenced by women's preference for the time of marriage. Before getting married, women who worked outside the home and wanted to wait until the ideal time to get married tended to delay their marriage. It has also been found that, except for reading newspapers, no other media exposure significantly affected the likelihood of early marriage. Following the findings, it can be recommended that the government should put greater emphasis on female education, promote technical and vocational training for adolescent girls, and social awareness programs to lower the rate of early marriage to a greater extent. The study's findings contribute to doing further research in Bangladesh based on women's preferences

for the timing of marriage. However, the tabular analysis highlights the role of geographical disparities, as urban areas like Dhaka showed a higher concentration of early marriages among the richest group, whereas, in Rangpur, both urban and rural areas showed a higher concentration of early marriages among the poorest socioeconomic group. And such disparities among different socioeconomic groups in urban and rural areas require further investigation or research in different socioeconomic groups. This will enable the formation of targeted policy suggestions that can facilitate the reduction of early marriage among Bangladeshi women.

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