

Safety-security are key reasons behind child marriage. 54.5% people don't know the government hotline numbers that help for preventing child marriage.



Photo: SAM Nasim, creative commons; UAB institute for human rights blog.

1. Introduction

Child marriage is a curse. Due to child marriage, most of the child become a victim. Which is completely a violation of human rights. There are laws to prevent child marriage but these cannot help much to stop the practice in the society. 4% of boys married before age 18. Bangladesh has the third highest prevalence of child marriage in the world¹.

According to MICS 2019 report, 15.5% women who currently aged 20-24, first married before their 15th birthday. But the rate in Barishal division is 16.2% and in Bhola 18.8%². However, the country child marriage rate in 2013 was also 15.5%³. It means child marriage rates before age 15 increased in Barishal and Bhola. On the other hand, 51.4% of women aged 20-24 years first married before their 18th birthday. But the rate in Barishal division is 55.6% and Bhola 60.3%.

However, the country child marriage rate in 2013 was 58.6%. It means child marriage rates before age 18 in Barishal and Bhola are higher than the national average.

COAST Foundation conducted the study from 25 October to 31 December, 2020 to know why the child marriage rates are higher in Bhola than the national average and its impact in life. The findings are below.

2. Objective of the study

1. To identify the reasons behind child marriage.
2. To know the success and failure stories in preventing child marriage.
3. To know the child marriage impact on life.
4. To help share the study findings with the government and non-government organizations in preventing child marriage.

¹ www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/bangladesh

² Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey (MICS) 2019, BBS

³ Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey (MICS) 2013, BBS

3. Methodology

1. Structured questioner was used for direct interview in all Upazilas of Bhola. Those who were victim of child marriage or prevented child marriage or known the situation well were interviewed, e.g. bride, groom, parents, guardian, neighbour, member of adolescent clubs and CBCPC, relatives, peers, etc.
2. Authorities concerned to prevent child marriage were interviewed, e.g. district and upazila administration, Judge, UP members, etc.
3. Case study collected.
4. Experience collected for a learning material from the victims of child marriage.
5. FGD conducted in all upozilas of Bhola in participation with the community people, government officials, UP members, CBCPC members, etc.
6. Secondary literature and information reviewed.

4. Sampling

5. Total population in Bhola district is 17,76,795. Of them, adolescents aged 10-19 are 3,89,119, that means 21.9% of total population. We used expected level of theory for sampling. E.g.- Confidence level-95%, error margin-5% and population proportion-50%. In that case, accepted sampling number was 384. We conducted 385 interview for upholding the highest standard in the study.
6. Sampling covered mainland and char area of Bhola. Random sampling used for data collection by interviewing 300 respondents in 6 Upazilas (50 X 6= 300) in Bhola. And in Bhola Sadar Upazila, we interviewed 85 respondents considering the proportion of population.

5. Findings of the study

Besides personal information, we asked respondents a total of 16 questions. The findings are-

5.1 Personal information

Of the respondents, 57.1% were female and 42.9% male.

Age of the respondents 13-17 were 18.3%, 18-25 were 22.5%, 26-35 were 19.9%, 36-45 were 22%, 46-60 were 15.2% and 61+ were 2.1%.

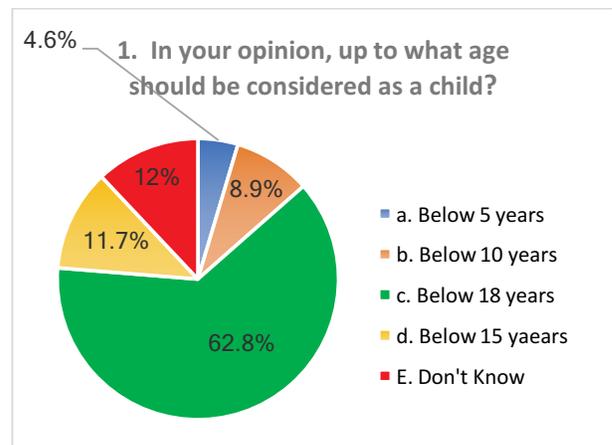
Profession of the respondents were farmers 5.7%, fishermen 6.5%, labour 5.5%, small scale traders 8.9%, service holder 13.8%, housewife 35.4%, Kazi 0.8%, Imam 2.1% and students 21.4%.

Among respondents, child marriage groom was 2.4%, bride 13.4%, parents 18.8%, siblings 5.4%, guardians 2.9%, relatives 8.4%, teacher 3.4%, peers 8.6%, neighbour 35.1% and others were 2.6%. Respondents from the mainland were 70.2% and char area were 29.8%.

5.2 Child marriage: its reason, impact and prevention measures

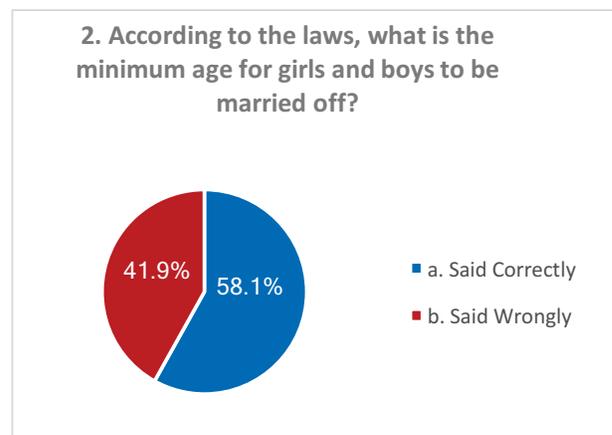
1. In your opinion, up to what age should be considered as a child?

Age below 5 years is considered a child said 4.7% respondents. Age below 10 is a child said 8.9%. Age below 15 is a child said 11.7%. Age below 18 is a child said 62.8%. Don't know said 12% respondents.



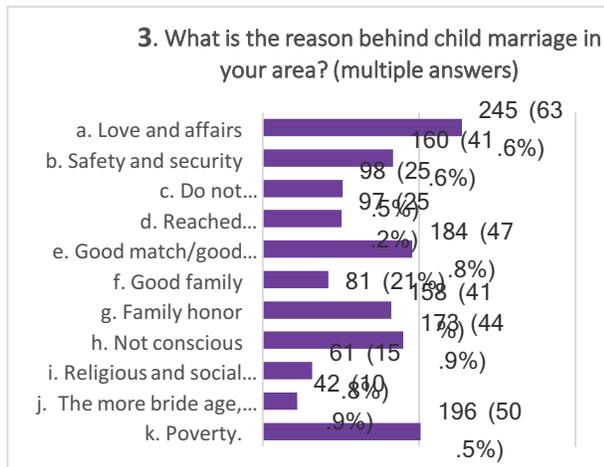
2. According to the laws, what is the minimum age for girls and boys to be married off?

58.1% respondent gave the right answers and 41.9% gave the wrong answers.



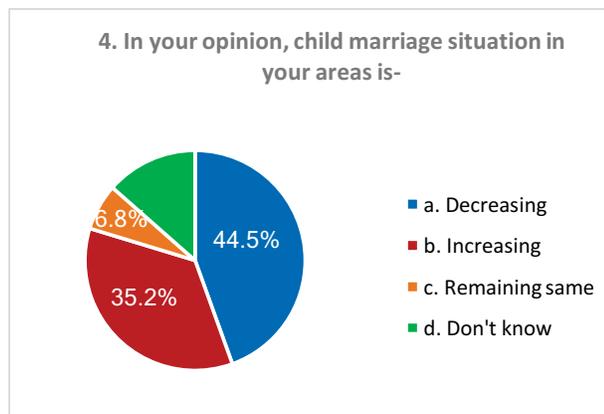
3. What are the reasons behind child marriage in your area?

With the possibility of selecting multiple answers— 63.6% of respondents said love-affairs are the main reason for child marriage. Besides, 41.6% cited safety and security are the reason. Do not study/dropped out from school said 25.5%. Reached at menstruation/adult said 25.2%. Find a good match/good income said 47.8%. Find a good family would also be a reason said 21% of respondents. Adolescents misbehave, so, because of the family honour the child marriage occurs said 41% of respondents. Lack of awareness is the reason said 44.9%. Religious and social cause are responsible said 15.8% of respondents. The more is bride age, the more dowry will be required for arranging a marriage, therefore, child marriage occurs said 10.9% and poverty is the reason said 50.9% of respondents.



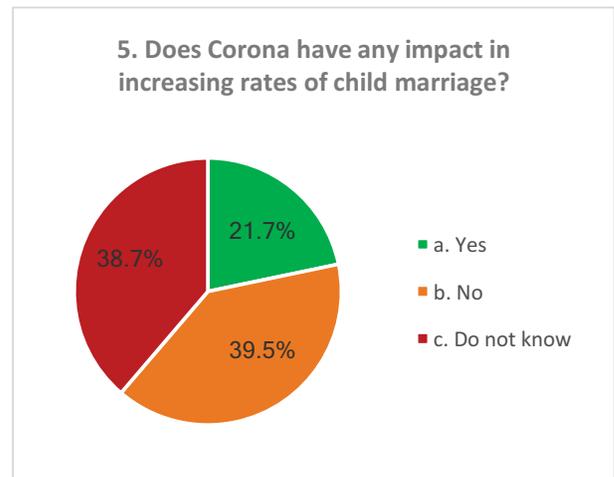
4. In your opinion, child marriage situation in your area is-

Reducing said 44.5% of respondents. Increasing said 35.2%. Remaining as same said 6.8% and don't know said 13.5% of respondents. However, the study also found that 37.8% of respondents had no idea that a person under the age of 18 is considered a child. Marriage between the ages of 15 and 17 is considered by many in the area as not child marriage.



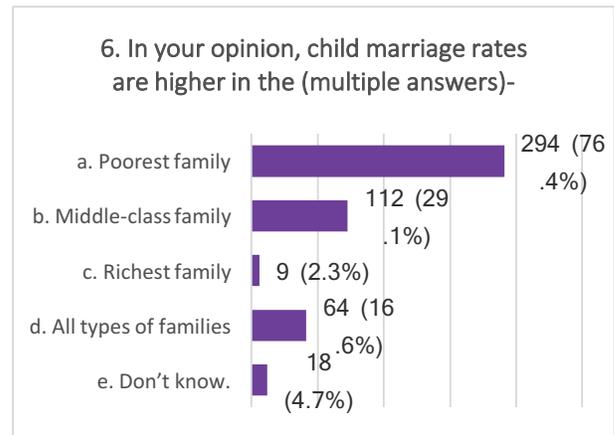
5. Does Corona have any impact in increasing rates of child marriage?

Yes, said 21.7% of respondents. No said 39.5% and don't know said 38.7% of respondents if the pandemic has had an impact on child marriage.



6. In your opinion, child marriage rates are higher in which families?

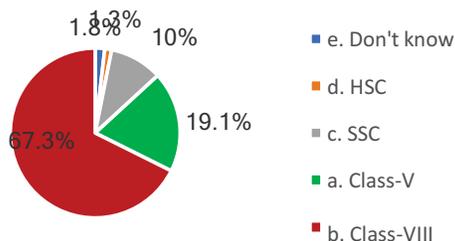
With the possibility of selecting multiple answers – child marriage rate is higher in the poorest family said 76.4% of respondents, higher in the middle-income family said 29.1%, higher in the richest family said 2.3% and don't know said 4.7% of respondents.



7. Considering Education level, child marriage rates get accelerated after completing-

According to the opinion, 19.1% of respondents said child marriage usually happens after completing class-V, 67% said it happens after completing class-VIII, 10% said after completing SSC, 1.3% said after HSC and don't know said 1.8% of respondents.

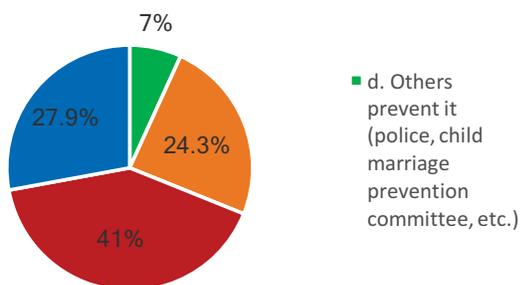
7. Considering Education level, child marriage rates get accelerated after completing-



8. Do you prevent child marriage?

If child marriage is organized, 27.9% of respondents said they prevent it. Do not prevent it said 41% of respondents, sometimes prevent said 24.3% and others prevent it, e.g. police, etc. said 6.8% of respondents.

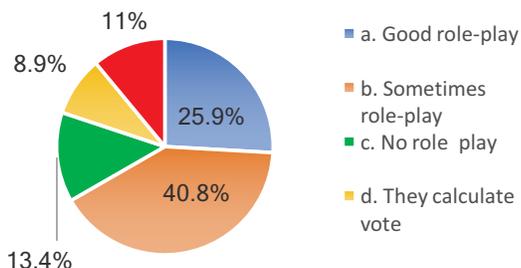
8. Do you prevent child marriage?



9. In your opinion, what is the role-paly of UP member-chairman to prevent child marriage?

Besides community people, UP member-chairmen prevent child marriage said 25.9%. Sometimes they prevent it said 40.8%, do not prevent it said 13.4%, they calculate the vote said 8.9% and don't know said 11% of respondents.

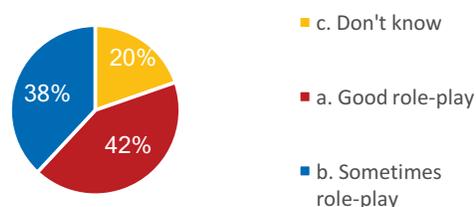
9. In your opinion, what is role-paly of UP member-chairman to prevent child marriage?



10. What is the role-paly of local police-administration to prevent child marriage?

Their role-play is good said 42.3% of respondents. Role-paly is not good enough said 38.1% and don't know said 19.7% of respondents.

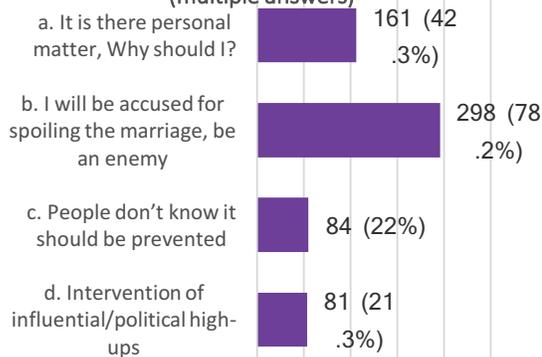
10. What is role-play of the local police-administration to prevent child marriage?



11. If you do not prevent child marriage then what is the reason behind this?

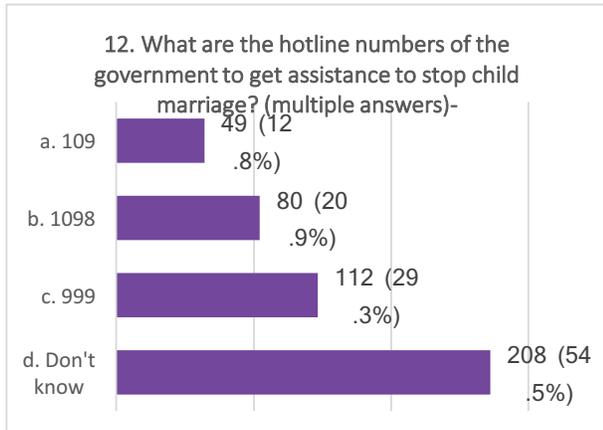
With the possibility of selecting multiple answers— 42.3% of respondents said it's their personal matter, why should I be involved stopping their marriage? 78.2% of respondents said we would be accused for spoiling their marriage, be treated like an enemy. 22% of respondents said people don't know that it should be prevented and 21.3% of respondents said due to intervention of influential people/political high-ups we do not prevent child marriage.

11. If you do not prevent child marriage then what is the reason behind this? (multiple answers)-



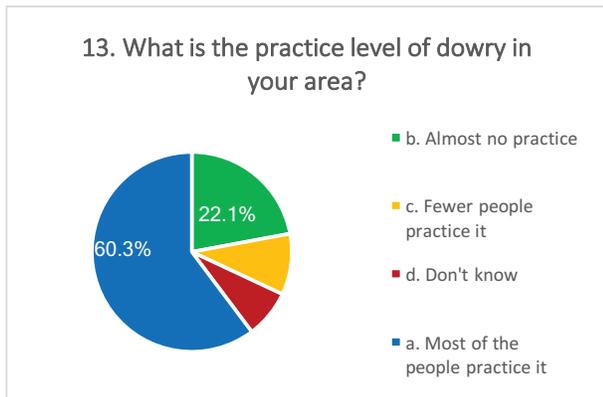
12. What are the hotline numbers of the government to get assistance to stop child marriage? (multiple answers)-

With the possibility of selecting multiple answers— 12.8% of respondents said 109, 20.9% of respondents said 1098, 29.3% of respondents said 999 and don't know said 54.5% of respondents.



13. What is the practice level of dowry in your area?

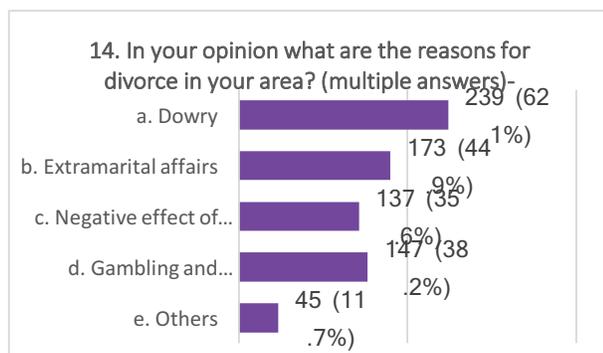
Most of the people practice dowry said 60.3 % of respondents. Fewer people practice it said 22.1 % of



respondents. Almost no practice in here said 9.9% and don't know said 7.8 % of respondents.

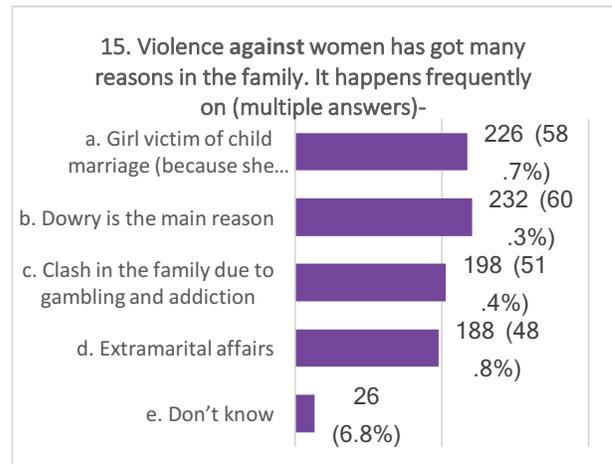
14. In your opinion what are the reasons of divorce in your area?

With the possibility of selecting multiple answers— 62.1% of respondents said dowry is the main reason for divorce. Besides of it, 44.9% of respondents said extra marital affairs is also one cause. Negative effect of child marriage also lead to divorce said 35.6%. Also, gambling and addiction said 38.2% and other issues cited by 11.7% of respondents.



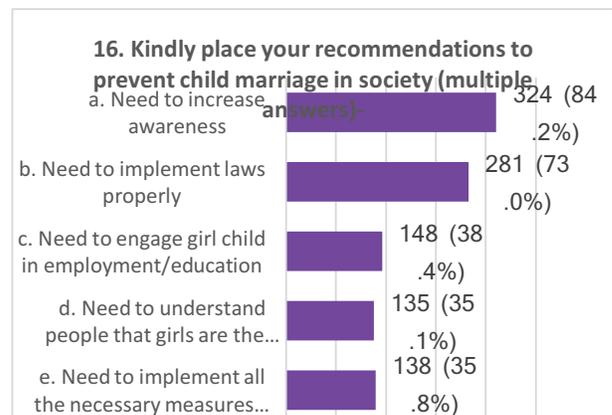
15. Violence against women has got many reasons in the family. In your opinion, it happens frequently when-

With the possibility of selecting multiple answers— 58.7% of respondents said it usually happens on girls who is a victim of child marriage because she cannot deal household responsibility properly. Besides, dowry is the main reason said 60.3%. Clash in the family occurs due to gambling and addiction by male counterpart which sometimes leads to a violence against women said 51.4%. Extra marital affair is the reason said 48.8% and don't know said 6.8% of respondents.



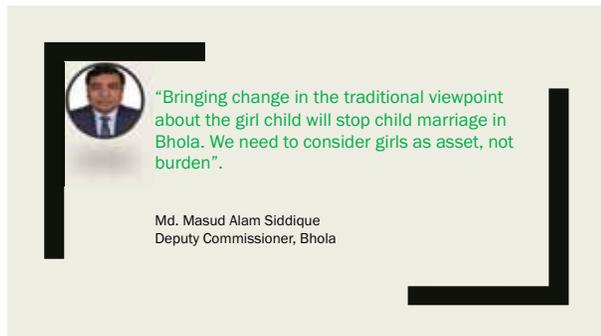
16. Kindly place your recommendations to prevent child marriage

With the possibility of selecting multiple answers— 84.2% of respondents recommended that it needs to increase awareness. 73% of respondents said the need to implement laws properly. 38.4% of respondents said the need to engage girl child more in the employment/education. 35.1% of respondents said the need to understand the people that girls are resources not a burden in the family and 35.1% of respondents said the need to implement all the necessary measures for ensuring safety-security for children.



6. Study found many have on idea that a person under the age of 18 is considered a child. Education and safety-security are to prevent child marriage.

Bangladesh has made significant progress in many aspects but not in stopping child marriage. In 2013, 52.2% of girls in Bangladesh were married before their 18th birthday and in 2019 this rate was 51.4%. The government has undertaken a number of policies and plans but the progress is not satisfactory. Sheikh Hasina, the honorable prime minister, government of Bangladesh has made a commitment to The National Plan of Action (NPA) to end the marriage of girls below the age of 15 years and to reduce by one third the rate of marriage for girls aged 18 years in 2021, and to completely eliminate child marriage by 2041⁴. However, the trend in Bhola district is opposite to and growing day by day. If we do not take appropriate measures right now, implementation of prime minister's commitment and achievement of SDGs will may not be possible on time.



6.1 Why child marriage occurs? Are we committing child marriage of being unconscious?

The study also found that 37.2% respondents have no idea of age 18 is considered as child and marriage between age 15-17 are considered by many as is not a child marriage. Besides, 41.9% of respondents have no idea about the minimum age for girls and boys to be married off. Parents, who married off their daughter at early age do not want to admit it in public. So, being unconscious of the issues, child marriage is being performed by many in the society.

6.2 Child marriage rate is higher at which family? Why child marriage rates are increasing?

What is its impact in the society?

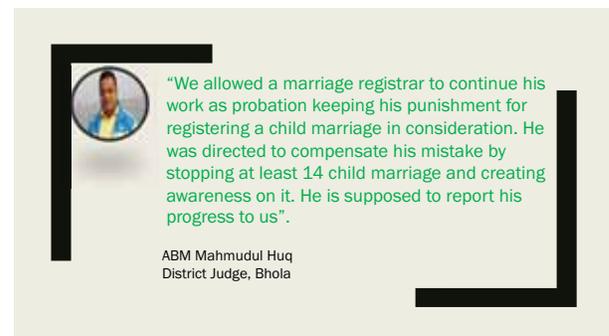
According to 76.4% of respondents, child marriage rate is higher in the poorest family. If child marriage is organized, 27.9% of respondents said they prevent it. Do not prevent it said 41% of respondents, sometimes prevent said 24.3% and others do it like police, CBCPC committee, etc. said 6.8% of respondents. Besides community people, UP member-chairmen prevent child marriage said 25.9%. Sometimes prevent said 40.8%, do not prevent said 13.4% and they calculate the vote said 8.9% of respondents.

The role-play by the police and administration is good said 42.3% and role-paly is not good enough said 38.1% of respondents. 42.3% of respondents said organizing child marriage is their personal matter, why should I be involved to stop that? 78.2% of respondents said we will be accused for spoiling their marriage, be treated like an enemy later on. So, why should I stop it? 22% of respondents said people don't know that it should be prevented and 21.3% of respondents said due to the intervention of local influential people/political high-ups they do not/cannot prevent child marriage.

As the role-play from different segments is not well-performed, child marriage prevention is remain elusive. The study also found that 54.5% of respondents do not know the government hotline numbers that help for preventing child marriage.

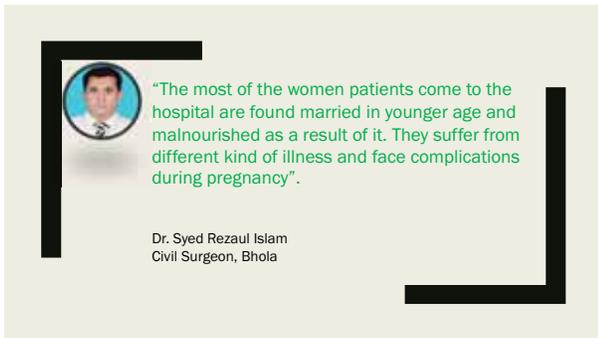
6.3 Good and bad things of child marriage

The study found that till last August 2020, a total number of 4183 cases were pending with the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in Bhola district. Of them, 3961 cases were on Women and Children affairs issues. Which means 94.69% of total cases. Total accused number was 8870 and accused of Women and Children affairs cases were 8606. Which means 97.02% of total accused. Child marriage, dowry, divorce, maintenance, repression, etc. were the main reason behind those cases.

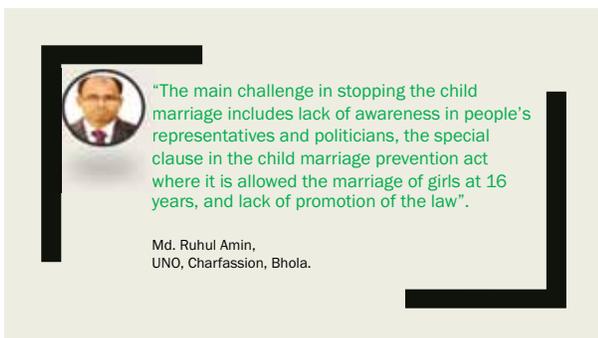


⁴ National Plan of Action (NPA), 2018-2030

Patients who came to the Bhola Sadar Hospital in July-September 2020, the study found that patient rates suddenly increased at a certain age of people. For example, in that three months, patents age between 5-14—male patients were 1394 and female 1399. On the other, patents, age between 15-24—male patients were 1840 and female 2665. It means, female patients’ rates of age between 15-24 suddenly highly increased. According to some medical practitioners, many of the girls become a victim of child marriage in that age and some of them started suffering from reproductive health issues. That’s may be the case for increase the rate of the female patients at that stage.

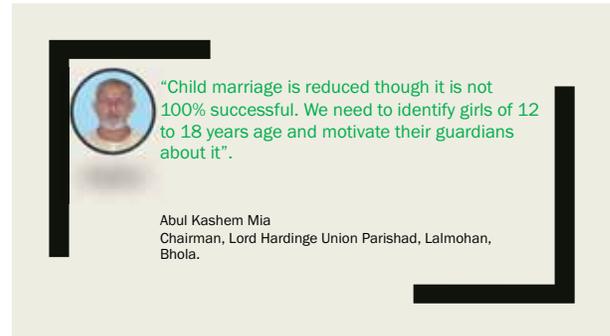


Study found that almost all girls lose their girlhood due to the negative effects of child marriage. The bride child cannot understand what marriage really is. They cannot cope adequately with the day-to-day care of their homes, resulting in scolding, and physical torture. In certain cases, there is a great deal of pressure for dowry. This sometimes leads to a divorce. Child marriage deprives them of access to legal safeguarding, and since they do not have marriage registration or certificate, they can't demand or apply for a dower and alimony. The divorced girl becomes a burden on her parent's family and spends her days with a complex of inferiority and embarrassment. They're going to be a mother at a young age. It is in danger of their wellbeing. Often, they welcome death when give birth.



7. Recommendations from the FGD and study

1. Girls are considered a burden in the poorest families. So, they want to marry off to their daughters and wanted to be freed from the burden. Therefore, awareness meeting needs to be organized at village level including the Union Parishad (UP) in this regard.
2. Organize campaign highlighting the negative impacts of child marriage.



3. Campaign to aware people the right age for girls and boys to be married off.
4. UP members and their officials know about all the marriage being organized in there are. Effective measures from UP is enough to stop child marriage.
5. Misuse of mobile phone, Facebook, etc. have a negative impact on adolescents and thereby they are being involved in love-affair, and in some cases, they are misbehaving. Stalker is also a problem. So, because of the family honour the child marriage occurs. A ward level committee including all level of stakeholders can stop the issues and prevent child marriage.



6. Schools are now on vacation due to COVID-19 pandemic. It also gives momentum in organizing child marriage. So, schools will be open in limited scale following the necessary safety measures.

7. Considering the education level, the study found that child marriage rate is higher when the girls complete class-VIII and it gradually reduces with girls' higher education. So, forwarding girls in higher education will in turn incredibly reduce child marriage.
8. Offering scholarships by covering 80% girls will help reducing child marriage. Scholarship amount is very poor. It needs to be increased.
9. Community people do not feel interest to be involved in stopping child marriage because it creates clash with neighbours. On the other, most people don't know the government hotline numbers that help preventing child marriage. So, mass campaign is needed to aware the people on this.
10. Stop providing/creating fake birth registration.
11. Getting commitments from Kazis and religious leaders not to conduct child marriages. A strong network with them and police-administration will help in this regard.
12. All the authorities concerned need to perform accordingly to stop child marriage.
