



# CHILD MARRIAGE IN RURAL BANGLADESH

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## AIM

The report titled **“Child Marriage in Rural Bangladesh: Trends, Factors, and Nijera Kori’s Efforts in Prevention”** examines the complex interplay of factors driving child marriage in rural Bangladesh and highlights the critical role of NGOs like Nijera Kori in empowering communities to challenge harmful norms and prevent child marriage through education, awareness, and economic empowerment. Based on the findings, the report provides actionable policy recommendations to address this pervasive issue and promote gender equality.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Integrate digital literacy and online safety training into school curricula, peer-to-peer education, life skills training, mentorship programs, and youth clubs.

2

Comprehensive gender equality training targeted to local government officials, religious leaders, teachers, and community influencers.

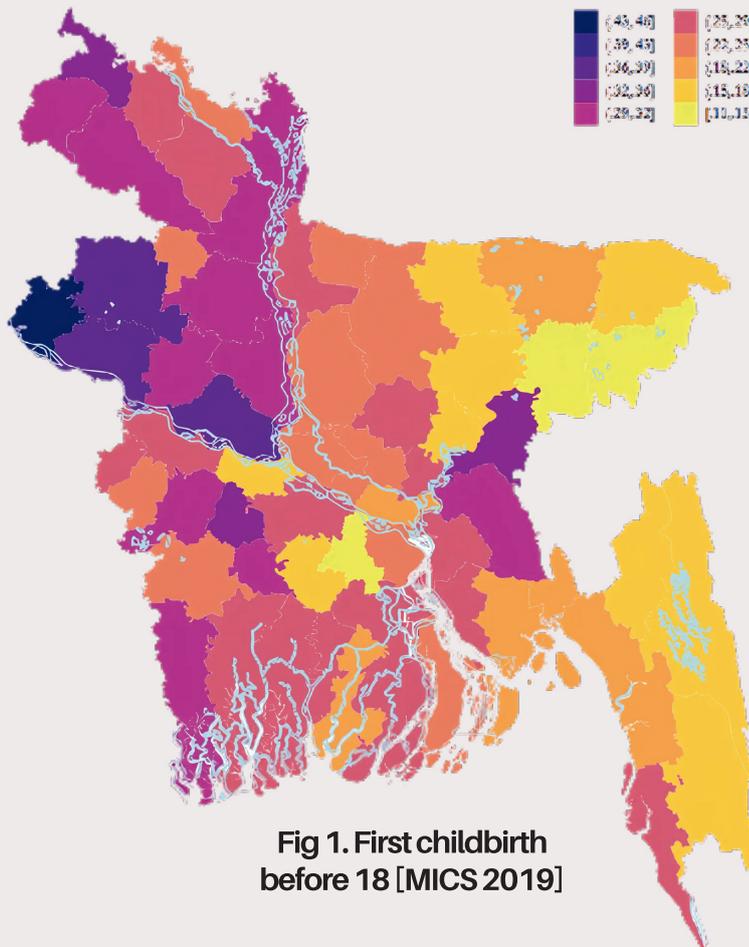
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Community workshops to inform the negative consequences of child marriage, and the importance of girls’ education and wellbeing.

## PROBLEM

The study explores the intricate relationship between child marriage and early childbirth, highlighting an alarming 79.58% correlation between the two. This connection raises serious concerns about the health and well-being of young women, as early childbirth carries significant risks and often curtails educational and economic opportunities. Furthermore, the data reveals a worrying trend of increasing child marriage rates, particularly in rural areas.

***According to Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics (SVRS), marriages before the age of 15 have risen from 4.20% to 8.20%, while marriages before the age of 18 have increased from 30.00% to 41.60%.***



**Fig 1. First childbirth before 18 [MICS 2019]**

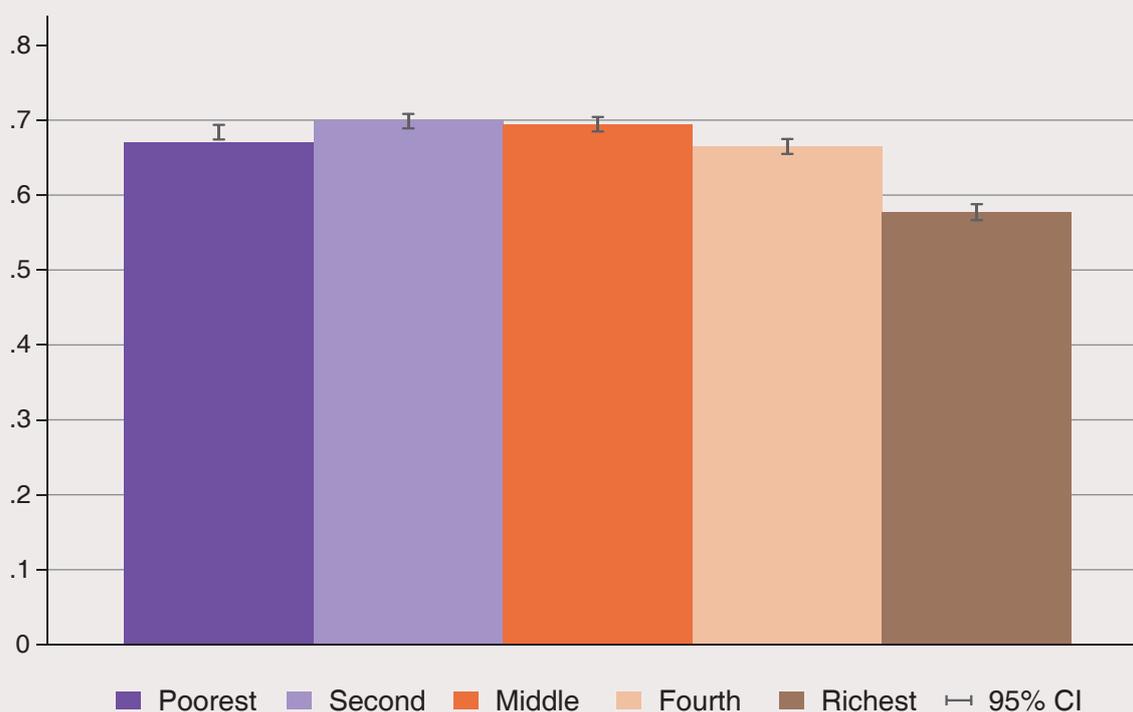
This escalating prevalence underscores the urgency of addressing this issue. While awareness of the legal minimum age for marriage is widespread, perceptions of government action to prevent child marriage vary between genders, suggesting a need for targeted interventions. The research identifies several key drivers of child marriage, including the perceived suitability of the groom, the presence of marriage proposals, and challenging economic circumstances.

These factors often intertwine, creating a complex web of pressures that lead families to marry their daughters at a young age. The socio-demographic analysis further reveals that child marriage is closely associated with lower educational attainment, early childbearing, limited economic prospects, and heightened vulnerability to poverty and social exclusion. This multi-dimensional impact underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to prevent child marriage and support young girls in achieving their full potential.

## FINDINGS

Contrary to the historical trend from the national representative sample survey, qualitative findings of this study indicate a decline in child marriage rates in the past 15 years in the study locations or Nijera Kori's working areas, attributed to various awareness programs implemented by both governmental and nongovernmental organizations. Despite this progress, the practice persists, with some families opting for arranging child marriages secretly outside their communities to avoid legal and societal repercussions. The economic hardships brought by the COVID-19 pandemic have temporarily increased child marriage rates as families face financial instability.

The root causes of child marriage are deeply intertwined with socio-cultural norms and economic challenges. In many rural areas, traditional gender norms that prioritize marriage and motherhood over education for girls persist, limiting their aspirations and making them vulnerable to early marriage. Additionally, increased access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has unintentionally facilitated romantic relationships at an early age, leading to elopements and child marriages without parental consent.



Source: MICS 2019, Unicef

Economic difficulties remain a significant driver, as impoverished families consider child marriage as a way to alleviate financial burdens and secure dowries. A lack of awareness among parents and adolescents about the negative consequences of child marriage on girls' health, education, and future prospects perpetuates the practice. Misinterpretation of religious texts by local leaders and complicity of Union Parishad Chairman and members, who sometimes falsify birth certificates, further exacerbate the issue. Local matchmakers also pressurize families into child marriages for financial gain.

Organizations like Nijera Kori play a crucial role in preventing child marriage through awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and community engagement. They empower both adults and adolescents to challenge harmful social norms and make informed decisions, helping to break the cycle of child marriage and support the well-being and empowerment of girls in rural Bangladesh.



***“The Adolescent Corner made us this confident. I learned how to ride a bike, and now many girls want me to teach them. Nijera Kori has provided us with a platform to break out of our shells, and now, many girls like me have ‘broken the ice’ and are excelling.***

[Member, Adolescent Corner, Nijera Kori, Pakerhat.]



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Comprehensive Gender Equality Training

- Target Audience: Local government officials, religious leaders, teachers, and community influencers.
- Content: Training on gender equality, human rights, and the harmful impacts of child marriage.
- Goal: To challenge harmful gender norms and promote girls' empowerment.

### 2. Awareness Campaigns for Parents and Community Members

- Strategies: Community workshops, media campaigns, and public service announcements.
- Content: Information on the legal age of marriage, negative consequences of child marriage, and the importance of girls' education and well-being.
- Goal: To educate and sensitize parents and community members about the harms of child marriage.

### 3. Youth Empowerment Programs

- Target Audience: Adolescents and youth.
- Strategies: Integrate digital literacy and online safety training into school curricula, peer-to-peer education, life skills training, mentorship programs, and youth clubs.
- Content: Sexual and reproductive health education, gender equality, responsible use of technology, educate youth on potential risks and harms associated with online platforms and social media.
- Goal: To empower young people to make informed decisions about their lives and resist child marriage. Promote responsible digital citizenship and ethical online behaviour.

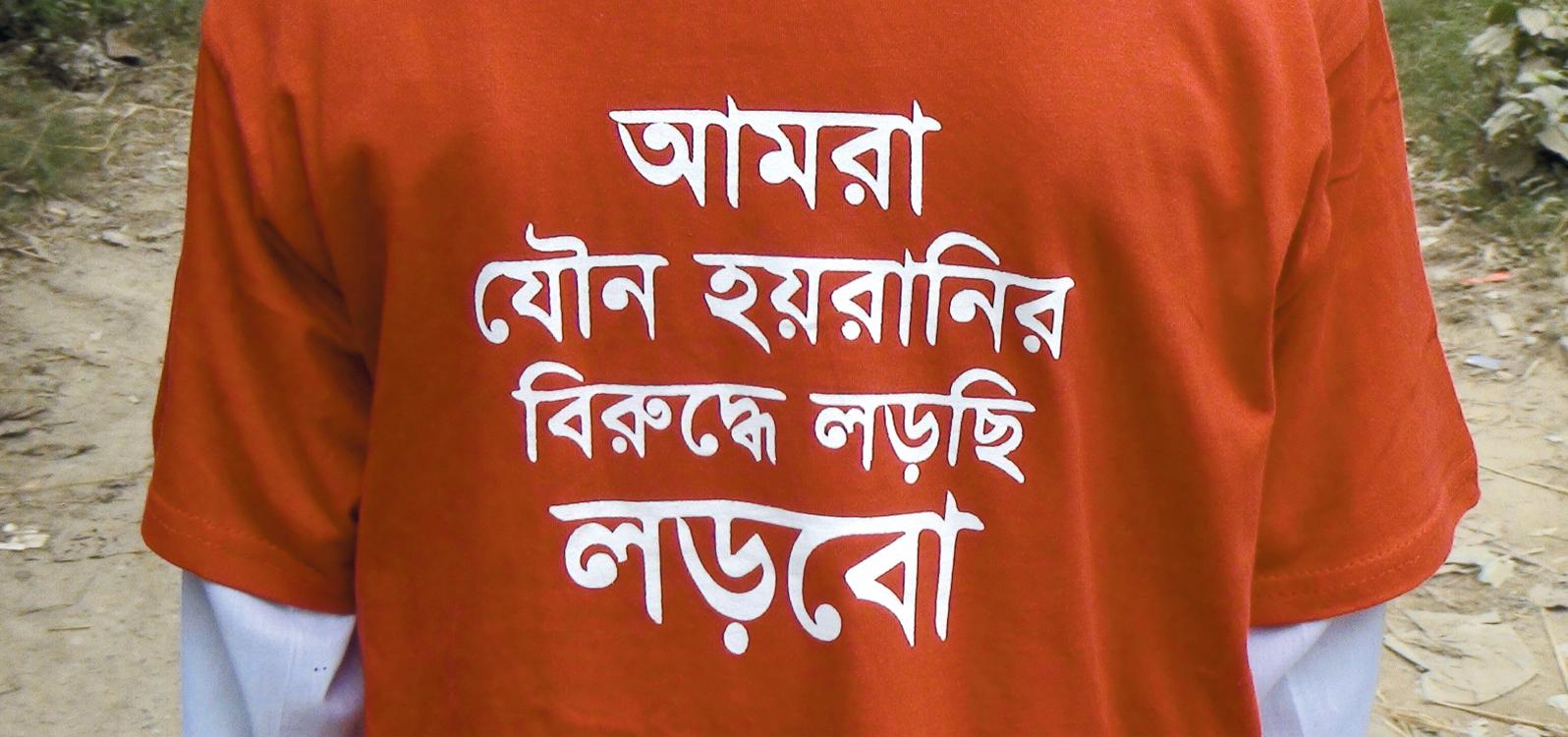
### 4. Enhanced Birth and Marriage Registration Systems

- Strategies: Implement a nationwide digital database for marriage registrations, accessible to relevant authorities, and integrate it with the national birth registration system to enable real-time age verification and prevent the registration of underage marriages.
- Goal: To prevent age falsification and ensure accurate documentation of marriages.

### 5. Economic Empowerment for Girls and Families

- Strategies: Inflation adjusted stipends or cash transfers for girls, vocational training, skill development programs, and financial literacy training.
- Goal: To enhance economic opportunities for girls and families, reducing the economic incentives for child marriage.





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## 6. Health and Well-being

- Strategies: Raise awareness about the health risks of child marriage, improve access to reproductive healthcare for young women, and mandate pre-marriage counselling sessions covering legal age requirements and benefits of delayed marriage.
- Goal: Reduce child marriage by raising awareness of its health risks, improving healthcare access for young women, and mandating pre-marriage counselling to educate couples on benefits of delaying marriage and legal age requirements, ultimately protecting young women's futures.

## 7. Multi-Sectoral Collaboration

- Partners: Government agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations, and community leaders.
- Goal: To create a coordinated and comprehensive response to child marriage.

## 8. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Strategies: Regular data collection and analysis on child marriage prevalence and program effectiveness.
- Goal: To track progress and inform evidence-based policymaking.

## Conclusion

Addressing child marriage in rural Bangladesh requires a multi-pronged approach that tackles the root causes and empowers girls and communities. By implementing these policy recommendations, Bangladesh can take significant steps towards ending child marriage, promoting gender equality, and ensuring a brighter future for all its children.

## Acknowledgements

We express our sincere gratitude to all respondents who participated in the interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs). We extend our heartfelt thanks to the local office staff of Nijera Kori for their invaluable support in facilitating the field studies. Additionally, we acknowledge the significant contributions of Somaiya Akter Rona, Khairul Hassan Jahin, Joy Paul, and Imran Hossain for their dedicated assistance in research activities and the transcription of interviews.

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