

Share-Net
Bangladesh

The Knowledge Platform on
Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights



HARMFUL TIES

A systematic analysis of the effects of child marriage on SRHR in times of climate change and COVID-19

PREPARED BY:

Anika Binte Habib

Melina Liethmann

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sabuj Miah, RedOrange Media and Communications, Bangladesh

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	Antenatal Care
CC	Climate Change
CA	Content Analysis
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Discrimination against Women
CM	Child Marriage
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
INGO	International Non-government Organisations
KII	Key Informant Interview
NGO	Non-government Organisations
PNC	Postnatal care
QLA	Qualitative Literature Analysis
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year, thousands of young girls are forced into early marriage in Bangladesh. Poverty, lack of education, social and cultural practice, lack of security and dowry practice are the leading factors of early and forced marriage in the country. In recent years, climate change has exacerbated poverty, social inequality as well as gender inequality. Studies show that rural Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to climate change and poor people are mostly affected by it. Though the country is well-known for local adaptation strategies to extreme climate events and climate change, lack of resources and security force poor people to adapt ‘unsustainable strategies’. In this study, we delve into one of the ‘unsustainable strategies’ where poor families marry off their daughters due to climate change. We discuss how climate-induced vulnerability forces girls to early and forced marriage. We further discuss early married girls’ access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services. Subsequently, the current pandemic forced people to leave their jobs, and created economic uncertainty in the country. Therefore, we investigate the potential effects of COVID 19 on girls in Bangladesh. We have employed multi-method data collection approach in our study where we conducted content analysis (CA), combined with Key Informant Interviews (KII) and document analysis/literature review. Our study shows that climate change exacerbates socio-economic vulnerability and women’s vulnerability, and further intensified early and forced marriage in Bangladesh. It destabilises the economy and impairs social structures, which force poor families to marry off their daughters. Our study also illustrates that these early married girls have very limited access to SRHR

services as they have lack of decision making autonomy and their gender roles. Besides, lack of knowledge, education and lack of equitable services make it difficult for these girls to access the services. While analysing the impact of COVID 19 on girls in Bangladesh, our study demonstrates a speculative result. As there are no studies highlighting the correlation of COVID 19 and forced and early marriage in Bangladesh, our result is drawn from the KIIs and available policy briefs. Our study discusses that the current pandemic will most likely create similar vulnerabilities to those of natural disasters for young girls as climate change does. For instance, the pandemic is threatening girls' access to education, making them more vulnerable and therefore more likely to be married off by their families. Based on our findings, we have made connections to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 and 5 and offer recommendations to the Government of Bangladesh and the development partners to promote the best practice and possible adaptation to the current policies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh has 38 million early married girls and of these, 13 million girls are married before 15 (UNICEF, 2020a). The recent report published by UNICEF (2020) highlights that 51% of girls are being married off before the age of 18, making the country the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world. Child marriage is a violation of human rights, which often is moulded by different intersecting factors such as poverty, access to education, social and cultural norms, lack of security, harassment and dowry (UNICEF, 2020a, p. 100, McLeod, Barr, and Rall, 2019, pp. 290-292, Kabir, Ghosh, and Shawly, 2019). While the aforementioned factors have fostered child marriage practice in Bangladesh, climate change has further facilitated this harmful practice (p. 139, Alston et al., 2014). Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to climate change, and studies show it is affecting rural Bangladesh and reshaping social relations (p.2, Islam et al., 2020, p. 139, Alston et al., 2014). Furthermore, climate change not only exacerbated social inequality but also gender inequality (p. 493, Boyd, 2014, p. 113, Tanny, and Rahman, 2016). This gender inequality is deeply rooted in the roles, behaviours, attributes, and relative powers associated with being female or male in a given society (p. 113, Tanny, and Rahman, 2016). Therefore, it puts women in a disadvantaged position, further increasing their vulnerability to climate change (p. 113, Tanny, and Rahman, 2016, p. 139, Alston et al., 2014, p. 72, Rahman, 2013). While rural Bangladesh is well-known for people’s resilience to extreme climate events as well their adaptation strategies to climate change, people tend to adopt ‘unsustainable coping strategies’ where the resources are reduced (p. 139, Alston et al., 2014). The climate-induced poverty fosters this ‘unsustainable coping strategy’, which is the result of increased forced and early marriage in

Bangladesh (p. 141, Alston et al., 2014, p. 304, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019).

The intersectional effects of climate change and child marriage is a rather untapped research area. Where many studies highlight the climate-induced vulnerability among young women and girls in Bangladesh, very few research is done on the intersectional effects. Therefore, our study aims to critically analyse the intersectional effects of climate change and child marriage in Bangladesh. Our first research question is therefore

RQ1. How does climate change impact child marriage?

Studies show that child marriage has a negative impact on girls' Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRHR) as there is a strong association between child marriage and early pregnancy (p.7, ICRW, 2007, p.24, Plan International, 2013, p. 104, McLeod, Barr, and Rall, 2019). Around 5 out of 10 early married girls in Bangladesh gave birth before the age 18 (UNICEF, 2020a), risking girls to maternal mortality and morbidity (p.7, Plan International, 2013). Besides, these girls are subject to domestic and sexual violence, marital rape as well as vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases (p.7, Plan International, 2013, p. 55, Sultana and Salam, 2017). While it is evident that child marriage impacts on girls' SRH negatively, it is important to further analyse the accessibility of the SRHR services among the early married girls. The Government of Bangladesh has an extensive focus on reducing child marriage and ensure that adolescents have information and services on SRHR. The National Adolescent Health Strategy 2017-2030 and the National Population Policy 2011 aim to ensure the SRHR information and services are available among married young couples, however, it does not clarify the accessibility which

also includes affordability of this information and services at all levels. Hence, our study provides a critical analysis of early married girls and their access to SRHR services, resulting in our second research question:

RQ2. In what ways does child marriage restrict young girl's accessibility to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)?

Drawing from the previous crises such as Ebola and other emergency situations, pandemic worsens already existing gender inequalities for women and girls (UNFPA, 2020). Therefore, the current pandemic- COVID 19 may have a negative impact on girls, may facilitate child marriage practice (p. 1, Girls not Brides, 2020, UNFPA, 2020). Besides, pandemics exacerbates poverty, social insecurity and increases gender-based violence, hence, marriage is seen to protect the girls as well as reduce the economic burden (UNFPA, 2020). Hence, it is important to scrutinise the negative impact COVID-19 may have on girls in Bangladesh. Our study draws from the socio-economic effects of climate change on girls and discusses the potentially similar effects the current pandemic may have on them. This is covered by our ultimate research question:

RQ3. What can the connection between Climate Change (CC) and Child Marriage(CM) suggest about the connection between COVID-19 and CM?

Furthermore, we offer context-based recommendations from our findings towards influencing policies and improving the best practices in accordance with the Agenda 2030 in general and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 and 5 in particular.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Three concepts are central to our study:

- Climate Change;
- Child Marriage;
- Access to SRHR services.

These concepts are related in a way that they determine and result from each other. This relation is illustrated in Figure 1.

To answer our RQ3, the COVID-19 pandemic is added as a fourth concept in order to examine whether the consequences of climate change and the pandemic are similar. The following sections will provide an overview of the studied concepts and the connections we expect between them. At the end of the section, we will formulate our working hypotheses based on those concepts.

2.1 Climate Change

While climate change has become a developmental challenge in the world, it is adversely affecting the poorer community. Given that Bangladesh is situated between the Bay of Bengal in the south and the Himalayan mountains in the north, it makes the country most vulnerable to climate change (p. 176, Bari et al., 2016). As the temperature will continue to rise and extreme climate events such as cyclone, floods and droughts will be more frequent, this will increase land degradation, and water scarcity further destabilising agriculture production and

livelihood opportunities (p. 141, Alston et al., 2014, pp. 494-495, Boyd, 2014). Furthermore, it exacerbates socio-economic vulnerability which triggers people for adaptation action (p. 139, Alston et al., 2014, p. 495, Boyd, 2014, p. 315, Brouwer et al, 2007). These adaptation strategies do not necessarily favour girls and women when there is lack of resources and capacity, and this further facilitates child marriage in Bangladesh as a short term solution or coping strategy (p. 139, Alston et al., 2014, CARE, 2016, ICRW, 2006, Parsons et al. 2015, pp. 304-306, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019).

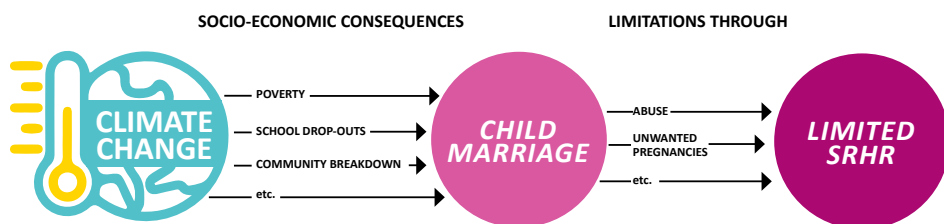


Figure 1: Cause and effect of child marriage

The gender roles defined in the society do not allow girls and women to have little to no control over the resources (p. 115, Tanny, and Rahman, 2016, p. 75, Rahman, 2013). Besides, these gender roles in society put girls and women in reproductive work and men in productive work (p. 115, Tanny, and Rahman, 2016). Hence, they are seen as an economic burden in the families (p. 115, Tanny, and Rahman, 2016, p. 141, Alston et al., 2014, p. 307, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019). Climate change induced poverty further pushes the families to marry off their girls at a young age to reduce the economic hardship and household consumptions (p. 141, Alston et al., 2014, pp. 306-307, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019). In addition, the practice of dowry further forces poorer families to marry off their daughters at an early age to ease the financial burden because the price of the dowry is much higher

for older girls (p. 139, Alston et al., 2014, pp. 304-305, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019). While the practice of dowry increases women's vulnerability- causing gender-based, sexual and domestic violence, and climate change further increases this violence (p. 316, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019). Therefore, to protect families' honour and to ensure girls' security, poorer families marry off their girls at an early age (ibid). In addition, climate change affects the food security, which includes food production, food distribution, food utilisation and food system stability (p. 116, Tanny, and Rahman, 2016, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019). When there is food scarcity, poor families tend to marry off their girls to reduce the families' food supply (p. 141, Alston et al., 2014, p. 307, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019). Our study further delves into the socio-economic vulnerabilities of climate change and argues that these vulnerabilities increase gender-based violence further facilitating forced and early marriage in Bangladesh.

2.2 Early and Forced Marriage

Early and forced marriage is a global concern as it not only violates human rights but also has adverse effects on girls' education, health and wellbeing (UNICEF, 2020a, Plan International, 2013). This harmful practise is firmly mentioned in the Sustainable Development Goals agenda, aiming to eliminate child marriage by 2030. Given that Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has extended its effort to end child marriage by 2041. While both GoB and development partners are tirelessly working towards meeting this goal, UNICEF predicts that the current efforts need to be 8 times faster to meet the national goal and 17 times faster to meet the SDG (UNICEF, 2020a).

Definitions:

In this Act, unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context

1. “minor” means, in case of marriage, a person who, if a male, has not completed 21 (twenty-one) years of age, and if a female, has not completed 18 (eighteen) years of age;
2. “guardian” means a person who has been appointed or declared to be a guardian, under the Guardians and Wards Act, 1890 (Act No. VIII of 1890) and shall also include the person who bears the maintenance cost of a minor;
3. “adult” means, in case of marriage, a person who, if a male, has completed 21 (twenty-one) years of age, and if a female, has completed 18 (eighteen) years of age;
4. “child marriage” means a marriage to which either or both of the contracting parties are minor; and
5. “rules” means rules made under this Act.

*Figure 2: Definition of child marriage by the GoB
Source: Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017*

Both Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has recommended 18 as the minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys (Plan International, 2013). In line with this recommendation, the GoB has published the child marriage restraint act 2017 where it defines the act of child marriage.

The act defines child marriage a marriage where either or both of the contracting parties are minor (for a female, a minor is a person who is below 18 and for a male, a minor is a person who is below 21).

Despite introducing the Child Marriage Prevention Committee at all levels in the country, 38 million girls are married off before the age of 18 among the entire population (UNICEF, 2020a). This report highlights that child marriage is influenced by certain characteristics, such as girls from rural areas in poor households are at risks of early and forced marriage (2020). Besides, early and forced marriage in Bangladesh is associated with poverty, lack of education, dowry practice, lack of security, women's status in the society, religion, and rural residence (UNICEF, 2020a, p. 58, Sultana and Salam, 2017, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019, p. 138-139, Alston et al., 2014, p. 304, p. 23, Plan International, 2013). This practice has negative impacts on girls physical, mental and psychological health and wellbeing (p. 1, Plan International, 2013). Early married girls are subject to sexual, gender and domestic violence, early pregnancy, malnutrition and risks of maternal mortality and morbidity (p. 7, Plan International, 2013, p. 138-139, Alston et al., 2014, p. 55, Sultana and Salam, 2017). Our study adapts this concept of early and forced marriage in the discussion of climate change, access to SRHR and the impact of COVID 19.

2.3 SRHR

SRHR are the fundamental rights to people's health and survival (p. 2642, Starrs et al., 2018). The GoB has endorsed SRHR for young people and adolescents in 1994 in the International Conference for Population and Development (ICPD) (p. 352, Rob, Ghafur, Bhuiya and Talukder, 2006). Therefore, the GoB has introduced and been implementing various policies and strategies to address SRHR for young

people and adolescents over the past years. This indeed is a milestone for achieving the ICPD agenda as well as SDG. While there is a great focus on eradicating early and forced marriage by the United Nations agencies as well as the development partners and the GoB (p. 1, Amin, 2011), however, more attention is required for addressing underscored needs of SRHR for early married girls. Addressing their needs is important because early and forced marriage is also associated with early childbearing and 8 in 10 girls gave birth before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2020a). Early married girls tend to get pregnant right after their marriage due to the social and family pressure (p. 104, McLeod, Barr, and Rall, 2019, p. 292, Kabir, Ghosh, Shawly, 2019). In addition, these girls have lack of information on the family planning services and the contraceptive methods (p. 104, McLeod, Barr, and Rall, 2019, pp. 138-139, Alston et al., 2014). One of the objects of the Bangladesh Population Policy 2012 is to “ensure the availability of family planning methods to eligible couples by providing easy access to reproductive health services including family planning methods; build awareness among the poor and the adolescents of family planning, reproductive health, reproductive tract infections and HIV/AIDS; and prioritize counselling services;” (2012). However, 2 in the 10 early married girls have family planning needs which are unmet by the modern methods (UNICEF, 2020a). Besides, early married girls have lower knowledge on maternal healthcare including antenatal care (ANC), hospital delivery and postnatal care (PNC) (p. 293, Kabir, Ghosh, Shawly, 2019). Though Bangladesh has made significant progress in reducing maternal mortality rate, the lack of knowledge and services on family planning services, contraceptive methods as well as ANC and PNC risk early married girls to potential sexual and reproductive health damage. Studies also show that unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion is common among early married girls (p. 8, Rashid, 2011, p. 199 Santhya and Jejeebhoy, 2014). In

addition, sexually transmitted diseases, and gender, domestic and sexual violence are associated with early and forced marriage (p. 7, Plan International, 2013, p. 55, Sultana and Salam, 2017). Therefore, our study argues that early and forced marriage hinders girls’ right to practice SRHR and early married girls have limited access to SRHR services.

2.4 Impact of Covid 19

Unlike climate change and early and forced marriage, COVID-19 has only been around for less than a year. In Bangladesh, the first COVID-19 case was confirmed on 8 March 2020 (WHO, 2020). Following the strategy of many other countries worldwide, a lockdown was introduced on 26 March 2020, lasting until 30 May 2020 (Bodrud-Doza et al., 2020, Shammi et al. 2020). While this affected the whole Bangladeshi population, children and adolescent people were particularly hampered by school closures starting from 7 May 2020 (Yeasmin et al., 2020).

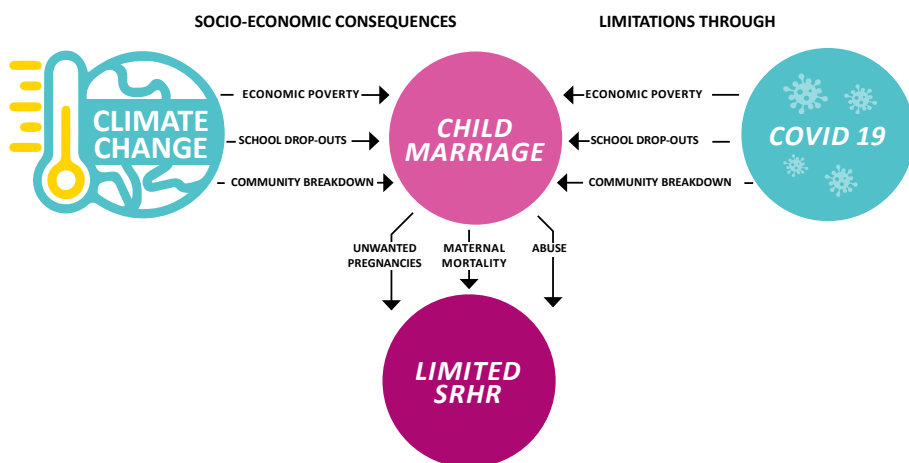


Figure 3: Impact of Covid 19

Despite the novelty of the disease, literature has identified a potential risk of long-term psychological and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic (Bodrud-Doza et al., 2020, Shammi et al. 2020, Duan and Zhu, 2020). 75 percent of the Bangladeshi people fear a lack of financial support by the government and most people believe that the pandemic poses extra heavy burdens on the poor manifesting or even exacerbating existing social and economic inequalities (Bodrud-Doza et al., 2020, Ainul and Amin, 2020, UNDP 2020a). Since girls and women of reproductive age are disproportionately affected by poverty (Munoz Boudet et al., 2018, UNICEF, 2020b), we expect that they will suffer extra hard from the economic consequences of the lockdown and the pandemic in general. Due to the lockdown and school closures, women and girls spend more time at home, exposing them to an increased risk of domestic and gender-based violence (Ainul and Amin, 2020, UNICEF, 2020b, UNDP 2020a, 2020b). On 1 October 2020, Save the Children published The Global Girlhood Report 2020, drawing a horrendous future vision for girls in the global South. According to the report, the number of early marriages worldwide will increase by an additional 2.5 million cases, with 305,000 additional girls at risk of early marriage in the Asia and Pacific region until 2025, blowing out the achievements of yearlong efforts towards reducing gender inequality (Save the Children, 2020). Along with the increased risk of early marriage due to the pandemic comes the risk of adolescent pregnancy, which is expected to affect an additional 118,000 girls in Asia and the Pacific (ibid). Our study draws on the already existing work, aiming at identifying patterns of socio-economic vulnerabilities leading to an increased number of early marriages in Bangladesh.

Looking at those concepts, we can identify similarities between the effects of early and forced marriage and climate change in terms of social and economic vulnerabilities of

women and adolescent girls. We, therefore, hypothesise that the socio-economic and cultural effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic are similar to those of climate change. Our preliminary assumption is that COVID-19 will have similar impacts on the early and forced marriage rate in Bangladesh, creating further barriers to the SRHR service. Not even a year into the pandemic and with only very few empirical research published, this part of the research is to some extent speculative and will remain so until the pandemic is over and the early and forced marriage rates can actually be explored with ethnographic fieldwork methods or quantitative tool such as differences-in-differences analysis. This study, however, produces an outcome of high value since it bases arguments on scientifically well-established and proven methods which will allow a systematic analysis. Hence, we believe that analysing the possible similarities between the two concepts from the current evidence is relevant and highly valuable for e.g policymakers and in achieving the SDGs.

Based on our conceptual framework, we formulate the following working hypotheses as guidelines for our data collection and analysis.

H1: Climate change has an impact on early and forced marriage in Bangladesh.

H2: Young married girls are facing obstacles accessing SRHR.

H3: The effects of CC and COVID 19 on early and forced marriage are similar because of similar socio-economic consequences.


3. CONNECTION TO SDG 3 AND 5


With our analysis we hope to be able to provide recommendations for how to mitigate the socio-economic and cultural impacts of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic on young girls in Bangladesh and thereby ensure access to SRHR. Here, our study will touch upon Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 (Good health and well-being) and 5 (Gender Equality) and therefore contribute to both the debate and the implementation of the SDGs. Table 1 summarises the SDGs important for our research with their targets and indicators.

The GoB has committed to eradicate early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with the target 5.3 (Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). From previous research, it is seen that girls are being discriminated against mostly in an emergency situation and/or in natural disasters in Bangladesh (p. 141, Alston et al., 2014, p. 307, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019). Plus, The Global Girlhood Report and the Adolescent Girls Community of Practice have emphasised that the current pandemic will increase early and forced marriage in Bangladesh (Save the Children, 2020, Ainul and Amin, 2020). Our study will be useful for further explaining how COVID-19 may foster the discrimination; forcing them to be married off before their legal age (Girls not Brides, 2018).

However, this perspective is a huge backlash regarding all efforts made in order to achieve the targets of SDG 5.3,

eradicating child, early and forced marriage. With this study we will provide an analysis not only of the causes exacerbating early and forced marriage but also of the connectedness between SDG 5 and 3, by pointing out how child and early marriage violates sexual and reproductive health and rights.

SDG	Targets	Indicators
	3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births	3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio 3.1.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel
	3.7 By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes	3.7.1 Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods 3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate (aged 10–14 years; aged 15–19years) per 1,000 women in that age group

SDG	Targets	Indicators
	5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age 5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence

SDG	Targets	Indicators
	5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation	<p>5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18</p> <hr/> <p>5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15–49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age</p>
	5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences	<p>5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care</p> <hr/> <p>5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education</p>

Table 1: SDGs, Targets and Indicators targeted by our research, based on United Nations, 2020

4. RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

We believe that a study applying well-established qualitative research methods would generate the most valuable results for our purposes. However, the current COVID-19 pandemic poses obstacles which we cannot overcome. Hence, we decided to apply a multi-method research design-conducting content analysis (CA), combined with Key Informant Interviews (KII) and document analysis/literature review.

4.1 Data Collection and Population

Our method is fourfold. Each component thus required a different data collection process. The following sections will describe the method itself, how data was collected and the way in which it was analysed.

4.1.1 CONTENT ANALYSIS

CA allows us to systematically trace the concept of early and forced marriage across different topics, which are climate change and SRHR. This method is well-established for capturing the relevant data to unveil the nuances of the contexts (pp. 26-27, Altheide and Schneider, 2013). Therefore, by employing CA in our study, we aim at identifying the impacts of climate change that amplify early and forced marriage and to test our H1. CA therefore allowed us to gain

an insight in how the concepts of climate change, early and forced marriage and SRHR are discussed, and which themes and discourses regarding the socio-economic consequences of climate change can be derived.

We have conducted a detailed and thorough search through the public domains as well as several academic databases. Papers that were published in the last 10 years (2010-2020) were included in our study. Our search items are encapsulated in four main concepts, which are- climate change, socio-economic vulnerability, early and forced marriage, and SRHR. We have reviewed published journals which are written or translated in English. We have included mixed methods, quantitative studies, qualitative studies, empirical studies and so on. We have not included economic analyses in our study. We only included the impact of climate change among girls in Bangladesh. Studies that focus on climate change and early and forced marriage in other countries are excluded from our study.

4.2 Data extraction and quality assessment

We initially screened through titles and abstracts to ensure that these papers reflected our four main concepts. To minimise the language bias, we only included papers written in English. After our initial screening, we downloaded papers to further scrutinise. After finalising the list of articles, we obtained full papers for our study. Data extracted from the papers included introduction, concepts, results, discussion and conclusion.

Around 650 articles were the result of our search, among which 31 articles were selected for our study. These articles

**(climate change) AND (child marriage) AND
(*Bangladesh)**

**(climate change) AND (socio-economic vulnerability)
AND (*Bangladesh)**

(child marriage) AND (SRHR) AND (*Bangladesh)

Figure 4: search items

were catalogued in Mendeley and further coded in NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS). With the help of NVivo, we managed to systematically code our data. This process revealed concepts and categories that could then be analysed with additional tools of the program. We coded the articles around the main categories “social impacts”, “economic impacts” and “women’s vulnerability” of climate change. By using file classification, we defined our literature based on their focus of the issue. This allowed us to run the matrix query to identify how many times different codes were coded in our selected research topics. The more data we coded, the more categories emerged and new topics emerged. The codebook listing and defining all categories and subcategories can be found in the appendix to guarantee reliability of the research. We further coded and re-coded the data several times and constantly discussed the meaning of categories among each other in order to increase reliability.

4.2.1 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

To collect data for the document analysis, we did an equally thorough and systematic web search for policy briefs about gender implications following the COVID-19 pandemic. We

specifically searched the websites of well-known NGOs and INGOs to make sure to capture all policy briefs published so far. Whenever we found a promising document, we used the text search function in order to check whether it touches upon COVID-19 induced effects on early and forced marriage or sexual health. If that search returned positive results, we downloaded the policy brief and included it in our analysis. Each policy brief was analysed to extract the socio-economic relations between the pandemic and early and forced marriage or the pandemic and SRHR. We regard these documents as evidence-informed products and believe that they highlight the context in a systematic, and scientific manner.

Again, we used the coding function of NVivo12 and coded the content around the main categories “social impacts” and “economic impacts” of COVID-19 in order to compare the impacts of the two concepts as suggested in our conceptual framework. We applied the same methods as before to guarantee reliability. The codebook for the coding of the policy briefs can be found in the appendix.

4.2.2 EXPERT INTERVIEWS

This additional perspective contributed to a higher level of reflexivity about the topic and offered clear descriptions and explanations of the themes and discourses identified. Given that Share-Net Bangladesh values knowledge translation, we strongly believe that these additional interviews are highly beneficial for the study to document the tacit knowledge. Furthermore, these six KII have supplemented and validated our findings from the study and allowed us to develop recommendations.

With the support of Share-Net Bangladesh we got in contact with six experts from various local and international

organisations, being involved in a variety of projects around early and forced marriage, sexual health of adolescents and climate change. Regarding the fact that our primary population, the early married girls in Bangladesh were not accessible for us due to travel restrictions, we were dependent on those key informants (O'Reilly, 2010) to access the population as we understood and studied early married girls through the eyes of the key informants. Between September and November, we conducted six semi-structured interviews with each of these experts, covering the topics climate change, SRHR and COVID-19. The interview guideline can be found in the appendix.

For the interview analysis, we applied a phenomenological perspective. Building on the assumption that the “important reality is what people perceive it to be” (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015), we found the approach suitable for the analysis of our KII since we were interested in the experiences of our participants and the meanings the concepts climate change, early and forced marriage, SRHR and COVID-19 play in their work and lives.

4.2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The last component of our multi-method approach is a systematic qualitative literature review of the limitations of the accessibility of SRHR. The conclusions drawn from that literature review will be linked to the findings from both the CA, and the KII and finally provide a holistic picture of the topic.

5. RESULTS

The expert interviews and the results from the literature analysis align in accordance to our hypotheses. While the interviews touch upon a broad range of topics, the literature are more specific and provide deeper and various aspects of early and forced marriage, climate change and SRH. Hence, this section shortly presents the results from the interviews and then gives a more detailed analysis of the topics brought up based on the results of the literature analysis.

5.1 Climate Change and Early and Forced Marriage

“Climate change will exacerbate the condition girls are in.”

The experts interviewed pointed out that there is no direct link between climate change and child marriage. The link is indirect and the connector is the status of girls in society. Climate change in general and extreme weather events in particular often mean loss of livelihood and increased social insecurity. According to the interviewees, girls in Bangladesh are more commonly regarded as a burden instead of an asset. Hence, in situations where social and economic security of the family is under threat, the families try to divest themselves of that burden, resulting in girls getting married at an early age, to have one mouth less to feed and eventually avoiding high dowries. This argument was very prominent in the literature about climate change and child marriage.

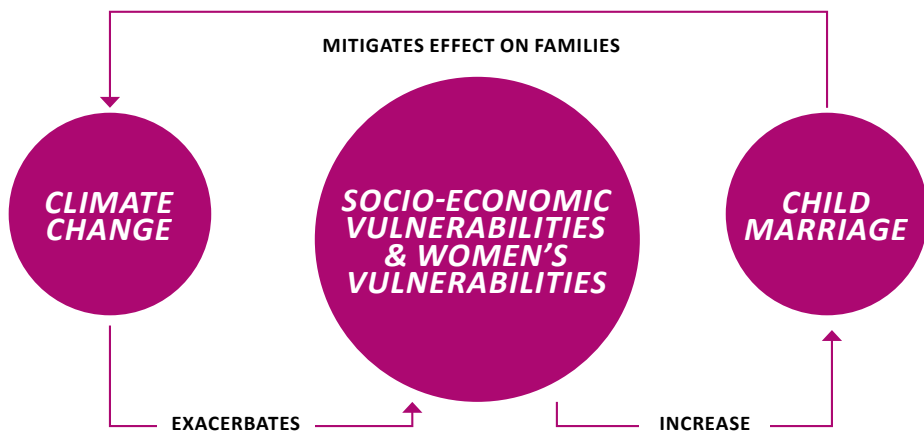


Figure 3: Indirect link between climate change and child marriage

While analysing the economic impact of climate change, all the literature which were studied in this research mention that it increases economic vulnerability in rural Bangladesh, further forcing young girls to be married off at an early age. Literature that focuses on climate change and early and forced marriage were coded with the code “economic impact” as the parent code 88 times, whereas “poverty” and “dowry” was coded as child codes 31 and 29 times respectively.

Lack of agency and low economic value of the girls and women make them vulnerable to early and forced marriage (p. 2, Asadullah, Islam and Wahhaj, 2020, Zoe, 2020, p. 307, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019, pp. 152-154, Ame, 2013). Furthermore, climate variability has increased their vulnerability (p. 114, Fakhruddin and Rahman, 2015, p. 119, Tanny and Rahman, 2016). The research articles from the past ten years highlighted that climate change exacerbates poverty, and poverty is one of the leading causes of early and forced marriage in Bangladesh. Studies discussed that economic conditions are negatively impacted by climate

change due to loss of property and cultivable lands, loss of livelihood opportunities, displacements and food insecurity (p. 116, Tanny and Rahman, 2016, p. 110, McLeod, Barr, and Rall, 2019). Especially agriculture and aquaculture are adversely affected by climate change which hinder the livelihood opportunities for the poor household and create food insecurity (p. 6, Rahman et al., 2017, p. 1653, Otto et al., 2017, p. 803, Parvin and Ahsan, 2013). Besides, household food insecurity affects women and children negatively (p. 6, Rahman et al., 2017). When there is increased livelihood and food insecurity, families tend to marry off their daughters to cope with the economic hardship and reduce the household food consumption (p. 2, Asadullah, Islam and Wahhaj, 2020, p. 141, Alston et al., 2014, pp. 152-154, Ame, 2013). Besides, dowry is highly associated with early and forced marriage. Studies highlighted that natural disasters are more frequent due to climate change and have worsened the existing dowry and early and forced marriage practices. As the dowry price goes up with the age of the girls, poor families marry off their daughters to minimise the dowry cost (p. 4, Asadullah, Islam and Wahhaj, 2020, p. 1353, Tsaneva, 2020, p. 307, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019, p. 110, McLeod, Barr, and Rall, 2019, p. 141, Alston et al., 2014, p. 153, Ame, 2013). This additional dowry cost forces the poor families to marry off their daughters early to cope with the climate shock. Furthermore, studies highlighted that marriage is perceived as an economic transition. Since the grooms' families are also hit by climate shocks, dowry is a source for them to accumulate money (Biswas, Khan and Kabir, 2019, p. 315, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019, p. 138, Alston et al., 2014).

Climate change not only aggravates economic vulnerability, but also social vulnerability. While analysing social impact of climate change, literatures that focus on climate change and early and forced marriage were coded with the code "social

impact” 48 times as the parent code and “family honour”, and “school drop-out” were coded as the child codes 21 and 16 times respectively. In addition, research that focuses on climate change and early and forced marriage were coded with “women’s vulnerability” as the parent code 50 times, whereas research which only focused on climate change were coded with “women’s vulnerability” as the parent code 45 times.

While discriminatory gender roles, power relationships and social norms systematically create gender inequality, climate change further intensifies women’s and girls’ social vulnerability (p. 3, Asadullah, Islam and Wahhaj, 2020, pp. 115-116, p. 361, Tanny, Rahman and Ali, 2017, Tanny and Rahman, 2016, p. 113, Fakhruddin and Rahman, 2015, p. 148, Jabeen, 2014). Studies highlighted that family honour is one of the dominant factors of early and forced marriage in rural Bangladesh. While discussing family honour, studies further emphasised that poor families marry off their daughters to maintain their reputation and protect their daughters from sexual violence (pp. 3-5, Asadullah, Islam and Wahhaj, 2020, pp. 305-306, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019). This is a very common strategy to protect family honour during and after natural disasters. Especially when people are forced to move to shelters, girls face different forms of violence, including sexual and physiological. Furthermore, the lack of social security and poverty force families to withdraw their daughters from schools. Highlighting the school drop-out among girls, studies also discussed that when schools are damaged by natural disasters and closed during the disasters, parents feel insecure about their daughters remaining idle at home (p. 101, McLeod, Barr, and Rall, 2019, p. 314, Ahmed, Haq and Bartiaux, 2019). This hidden pressure also forces them to take their daughters out of the schools and marry them off. Besides, frequent flooding, drought, and river erosions constantly intensify poverty and social insecurity, further impacting the decisions about girls’ schooling and marriage.

As women's and girls' socio-economic status is shaped by the patriarchal norms, they are disproportionately affected by climate change. Studies highlighted that gender-based inequality moulded by social norms and cultural expectations further produce women's vulnerability to climate hazards (p. 3, Asadullah, Islam and Wahhaj, 2020, pp. 101-104, McLeod, Barr, and Rall, 2019, p. 113, Fakhruddin and Rahman, 2015, pp. 190-192, Azad, Hossain and Nasreen, 2013). Hence, unmarried girls' vulnerability to climate shock also increases, and further forcing them to be married off at an early age.

While the aforementioned intensifies early and forced marriage in Bangladesh, studies also highlighted that there is a strong relation between climate change and traditional belief, and religion. "Fundamentalist view on climate change" was coded 5 times in the research which focuses on climate change and early and forced marriage. A study done by Alston highlighted that women's freedom and visibility are blamed for climate change in rural Bangladesh (p. 142, 2014). This further encourages families to marry off their daughter to control their mobility.

5.2 COVID-19 and Early and Forced Marriage

"The pandemic will impact girls' access to service, it will impact their access to education, it will be increasing violence, there is restlessness in the family and households."

While we could make a clear connection between the effects of climate change and child marriage, the results for the

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were less straightforward. This is not surprising due to the novelty of the virus and the lack of long-term studies about its effect. Still, we want to point attention towards the results we could gain from our data.

The COVID-19 pandemic has and will have especially severe impacts on women and girls. All analysed policy briefs emphasized the increased vulnerabilities of women and girls during times of crisis. The coding of policy briefs showed that the impacts of the pandemic are twofold: As the COVID-19 pandemic has devastating effects on the economic life of nations, it also puts family and community structures at risk (Girls not Brides, 2020). Hence, similar to the climate change scenario, the pandemic exacerbates the vulnerabilities of girls which could potentially lead to an increased number of early and forced marriage. On the other hand, the nationwide lockdown and quarantine requirements force people to stay at home. Hence, women and girls are not only to become victims of domestic violence (which then again leads to an increased risk of early pregnancy, unsafe abortion and maternal mortality) but also have a harder time accessing SRHR service and contraceptives. The unwanted pregnancies resulting from the lockdown situation might put an increased pressure on families to marry off their daughters at a very young age.

The main problem in relation to SRHR services emphasised by the experts we interviewed is that many services closed down since the start of the pandemic. Several interviewees mentioned that there is a decrease in available services between January and September.

The interviewees further brought up concerns that the school closures drastically decrease girls' chances to receive proper education and that even though the government-initiated education programme was followed by more girls at the beginning of the pandemic, the number of girls who still

followed the televised education decreased as the pandemic went on.

Even though all these results are speculative at this point, all interviewed experts and all policy briefs pointed towards a gender-based impact of the pandemic and highlighted high risk of early and forced marriage due to COVID-19. We can only be certain about the effects of the pandemic once it is over and data can be gathered from the field and analysed thoroughly.

5.3 Early and Forced Marriage and SRHR

One important aspect stressed by the experts during the interviews is that early married girls are in a particularly disadvantaged position when it comes to SRHR services. On one hand, early married girls are still adolescents, but due to their status as married women, adolescent services are harder for them to access. On the other hand, an early married girl is not yet an adult and does not have the same autonomy to reach out for services herself. This puts early married girls in an “invisible” position in many SRHR programmes. This and other barriers of early married girls to seek SRHR service have further been identified in the content analysis.

From our content analyses, we have identified that decision making autonomy, lack of knowledge on SRHR and family's expectations are three key main factors which hinder early married girls' access to the SRHR services. Our matrix query shows that research articles which focus on early and forced marriage and SRHR were coded with “no decision-making autonomy”, “lack of knowledge” and “family's expectations” as child codes 14, 10 and 10 times respectively.

Studies highlighted that decision-making autonomy to

SRH services, contraceptive methods and childbearing are very low among early married girls (p. 8, Shahabuddin et al., 2017, p. 203, Santhya and Jejeebhoy, 2015, p. 6, Shahabuddin et al., 2016). Given the characteristics of early and forced marriage where girls have no say in whom and when to marry, they lose their rights to practice and seek SRHR services within the marriage. These girls depended on their husbands' and parents-in-laws' decision to seek the services. Husbands' and parents-in-laws' perception, knowledge and expectations create barriers for these girls to seek the SRHR services. Besides, lack of information, financial powerlessness, education and experience make these girls incapable to negotiate with their husbands and in-laws (p. 12, Trommlerová, 2020, p.2, Shahabuddin et al., 2017, p. 8, Rashid, 2011). Studies further stressed that these early married girls have limited knowledge of contraceptive methods and SRH services as well as the consequence of early pregnancy, which further lead to the negative health outcome (pp. 6-10, Shahabuddin et al., 2017 pp. 6-8, Shahabuddin et al., 2016, p. 503, Kamal and Hassan, 2015, p. 203, Santhya and Jejeebhoy, 2015, p. 12, Trommlerová, 2020). Furthermore, misconceptions related to SRH services create barriers for these girls to avail the services. Religious beliefs, socio-cultural practice and myths also shape the early married girls' attitude towards SRH services. For example, one study discussed that "such beliefs and myths perceived by adolescent girls and their family members inspired girls to seek care from traditional and spiritual healers" (p. 10, Shahabuddin et al., 2017). While the aforementioned issues hinder accessibility, studies reported that lack of quality health care services and attitude of health service providers discouraged these girls to seek public health care services.

“Life skill education of the adolescents as well as the SRHR education of the parents is very much necessary.”

While the literature focused on the restrictive roles of husbands and in-laws, the interviewees stressed the role of the parents. Conducting a matrix query with the codes from the interviews revealed that parents are very frequently mentioned together with SRHR. Even before getting married off, girls are restricted by their parents to access SRHR services that are of high importance for their mental and physical health when entering the marriage. However, parents are sceptical towards SRHR education of their girls as they believe it could inspire them “to do the wrong things”. This fear and scepticism from the parents’ side prevent girls from getting the information on SRHR when entering not only in a marriage but also in a sexual relationship with their partners. The interviewees therefore stressed the importance of an adequate SRHR education also for parents.

While discussing the SRHR services among early married girls, we delved into the negative health outcome for these girls. Research which focus on early and forced marriage and SRHR were coded with the code “increased maternal mortality”, “pregnancy-related complications” and “unintended pregnancy” 14, 9 and 6 times respectively. Research which focus on early and forced marriage and/or SRHR were coded with “negative impact on early married girls’ mental health” 4 and 5 times respectively.

Studies showed that early and forced marriage has negative health outcomes on early married girls. Especially early pregnancy is highly associated with maternal mortality and morbidity (p. 2, Shahabuddin et al., 2017, p. 11, Shahabuddin et al., 2016, pp. 84-86, Ahmed, Khan, Alia and Noushad, 2013).

These girls are expected to bear children before they are physically and mentally mature and exposed to pregnancy-related complications. Furthermore, adolescent mothers have high risks of miscarriage, developing obstetric fistula and severe infections. Early pregnancy was also the most frequently mentioned as the negative consequence of poor SRHR education among early married girls by the interviewees. They stressed the enormous pressure early married girls are facing to “proof their fertility” within one year after the marriage. This societal expectation was described as an “health hazard” to young girls, who lose not only their childhood as a consequence of early marriage, but also their lives. However, as one interviewee pointed out, after giving birth to the first baby, and proofing the ability to be “a bearer of the next generation”, the pressure on early married girls decreases and accessing SRHR services becomes easier and more acceptable. Early married girls then have established contact with health care providers due to their first pregnancy, and can get in contact with them also about contraceptives and other information regarding SRH services. This allows them to prevent another hazardous pregnancy.

**“She got pregnant with the first child.
But for the second she is in contact with
this health care provider and other social
supportive networks, then she can choose.
But the first child is very hard to prevent
because she doesn’t have any knowledge”**

Studies also highlighted that unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion are highly associated with early and forced marriage (pp. 363-364, Roy and Sarker, 2016, p. 493, Kamal and Hassan, 2015, p. 85, Ahmed, Khan, Alia and Noushad, 2013, p. 145, Kamal, 2012). Unavoidable sexual relations, as well as marital

rape, unsafe sexual intercourse and sexual violence, lead to unintended pregnancy; forcing girls to either continue with the pregnancy or seek for unsafe abortion. In addition to poor health outcomes, early and forced marriage has a severe impact on their mental health. As these girls often fear to share their views on sexual relationships and experience violence, they are left with psychological traumas.

While early and forced marriage has negative physical and mental health outcomes on the early married girls, research showed that it increases sexual and domestic violence. Research which focus both on early and forced marriage and/or SRHR were coded with “increased sexual and domestic violence” as parent codes 9 times respectively. Studies further showed that sexual and domestic violence is highly associated with early and forced marriage. The experience of violence not only leads to psychological trauma but also fatal death. One study unfolded that miscarriage reported by the early married girls are the result of physical violence by the husband (p. 503, Kamal and Hassan, 2015). This increased sexual and domestic violence further leads to poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes for early married girls.

6. DISCUSSION

Our study unfolds that climate change aggravates socio-economic vulnerability and women's vulnerability, further intensifying early and forced marriage in Bangladesh. Climate change is a multifaceted problem as it not only has an adverse effect on the environment but also destabilising the economy and impairing social structure. Loss of cultivable land and food production, crop failures and loss of livelihood opportunities caused by climate change aggravates poverty and food insecurity. To ease the financial burden and household food consumption, families marry off their daughters to cope with the crises. In addition to this, dowry practice also forces families to marry off their daughters since the price is expected to increase as the girls get older. Besides, climate change also worsens social vulnerability and women's vulnerability. Discriminatory gender practice, social norms and responsibilities, power relationship, patriarchal norms and cultural, traditional and religious beliefs, systematically make women vulnerable to climate change. Our findings show that these practices, norms and beliefs push young girls to early and forced marriage. Family honour is one of the dominant factors of early and forced marriage. Studies discussed that climate change impairs social security and network, further increasing sexual violence. Hence, families are forced to marry off their daughters to ensure their security and protect family honour. The key issue that emerged from our study is that climate change exacerbates poverty, dowry practice, food insecurity. Furthermore, it destabilises social structure and increases women's vulnerability further intensifying early and forced marriage. To sum up, early and forced marriage is one of the mal-adaptation strategies of the families to cope with

the climate change crises. These findings further support our first hypothesis which is '**Climate change has an impact on early and forced marriage in Bangladesh**' and answer our first research question.

Connection with SDGs and recommendations:

As mentioned earlier, the GoB has committed to eradicate early and forced marriage by 2030 in compliance with the target 5.3 of the SDGs. Therefore, it is important to address one of the driving forces of early and forced marriage; which is climate change. It is crucial that the government and development partners address climate change to eradicate early and forced marriage by 2030. There is a need to conduct more field study to understand the lived experience of women's vulnerability to climate change and how this could be addressed through policies and programmes. In addition, there should be collaboration among SRHR development partners with climate change activists and scientists to address SDG 5.3. The pressure of providing adequate SRHR services is high on the health sector, however, experts point out the importance of receiving stronger legal support also from e.g the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

*Figure 2: Definition of child marriage by the GoB
Source: Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017*

Our findings show that early married girls have very limited scope to attain SRHR services. First of all, they have little to no decision-making autonomy to attain SRHR services. Before they are married off, their access to services and knowledge about SRHR is restrained by their parents, and after the marriage, it is the husbands and in-laws that restrict them. Hence, at

all times before and during the marriages, until the birth of their first child, girls are dependent on these “gatekeepers” determining how much information and access they may have. However, the interviewees pointed out that usually, the parents do not want to harm their daughters, it is more due to societal taboos and shame that parents do not want their daughters to get involved in anything related to sex and contraceptive methods, even though it is for their daughters’ best. This poses severe health risks for the girls as the marriage comes with an unavoidable sexual relationship, expectations to childbearing at a very early age, and increased sexual and domestic violence. As girls have no financial independence within the marriage, they face barriers to seek SRHR services. Therefore, they depend on their husbands and parents-in-law to seek services. Studies highlighted that their perception, knowledge and expectations limit early married girls’ access to the SRHR services. From our analyses, we have found that lack of knowledge and information on contraceptive methods and SRHR services among these girls lead to early and unintended pregnancy, and unsafe abortion. These girls have high risks of having pregnancy-related complications, miscarriage, obstetric fistula and other severe infections. Besides, maternal mortality and morbidity are associated with unintended and early pregnancy which is the result of early and forced marriage. Besides, continuous sexual and domestic violence and marital rape not only have negative physiological outcome but also psychological outcome for these girls. Our findings unravelled that the overall sexual and reproductive health outcome of early married girls is adversely affected by early and forced marriage. Furthermore, they have little to no scope to attain SRHR services. This is particularly crucial right now, as many services had to close down as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings support our second hypothesis, **“Young married girls are facing obstacles accessing SRHR”** and answer to our second research question.

Connection with SDGs and recommendations:

“If elderly people in the community say that your child should get married then they are honouring those decisions. That kind of things are behind child marriage”

In accordance with SDG target 3.1 and 3.7, the GoB and the development partners need to address the SRHR for early married girls. Our study highlighted that maternal mortality and morbidity is highly associated with early and forced marriage. Bangladesh has achieved the Millennium Development Goals reducing maternal mortality ratio and the GoB and development partners have extended its imitative to reduce this rate. Besides, the GoB is committed to ensure universal access to SRH services for all. Though current policies discuss addressing SRHR for early married girls and their access to the SRHR services and information, more collaboration among the GoB and development partners is needed to implement the current policies.

We strongly encourage the GoB to work towards SRHR education not only for adolescents, but also for the parent generation and even at the community level. A lot of pressure experienced by families that marry off their daughters comes from elderly members of the community as well. Hence, these members need to learn about the health hazards of early marriages as well.

*Figure 2: Definition of child marriage by the GoB
Source: Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017*

Connection with SDGs and recommendations: To secure the previous achievements in reaching SDG 5.3, the GoB and its partners need to work towards mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which has aggravated existing vulnerabilities of young girls.

The answer to our third research question “What can the connection between climate change and child marriage suggest about the connection between COVID-19 and child marriage?” has to remain speculative. To the best of our knowledge, data or studies on the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage is not yet available. Based on our results, especially the results from the experts we interviewed who are currently working on different projects focusing on early and forced marriage in Bangladesh, we can however draw a worrisome conclusion. The pandemic, like the natural disasters, is threatening girls’ access to education, making them more vulnerable and therefore more likely to be married off by their families. We further learnt from the analysis of literature on climate change and early and forced marriage that girls are married off due to the reason of financial hardships that result from climate disasters. It therefore seems logical that the pandemic, that poses severe burdens on economies worldwide, puts families into difficult financial situations. As girls are often regarded as a burden to the family’s financial means, they are married off at an early age to ease the financial pressure as well as to pay a lower amount of dowries. It is very likely that the pandemic exacerbates this vulnerable position of girls within their own families. We can therefore give the preliminary answer that the socio-economic effects of the pandemic on young girls in Bangladesh are similar to those of climate change. However, this answer remains a hypothesis that needs to be further researched once the pandemic is over.

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we showed that climate change intensifies the early and forced marriage. This harmful practice is one of the mal-adaptation strategies of poorer families in rural Bangladesh. Natural disasters such as flooding, cyclones and drought are more frequent in Bangladesh due to climate change, placing greater economic burdens to the poorer families. In addition to that, displacement, lack of security and livelihood instability due to climate change force poorer families to marry off their daughters.

In addition to that, experts pointed out that the current pandemic is going down a dangerous path to become a catalyst of child marriage as it's socio-economic consequences are similar to those of climate change. Like climate hazards, the novel and dangerous effects of the pandemic hit particularly hard on the already vulnerable position of women and girls in Bangladeshi society. Even though it is too early to provide exact numbers, our experts expressed their concerns that this pandemic may lead to increased early and forced marriage. Therefore, action needs to be taken as quickly as possible in order to prevent early and forced marriage and the resulting health hazards for young girls in Bangladesh.

We further argued that early married girls have very limited access to SRHR services. This access is even further limited in times of crises, e.g. due to extreme weather events or the

current COVID-19 pandemic. Girls have no decision-making autonomy, nor information and knowledge on SRHR services. This further leads to unintended pregnancy, pregnancy-related complications and unsafe abortion. We also highlighted that maternal mortality and morbidity is highly associated with early and forced marriage. Furthermore, these girls are subject to sexual and domestic violence, causing severe negative health outcomes for them. Husbands, in-laws and parents are jointly responsible for this limited access. They need to be directly targeted and addressed to ensure the achievement of SDG 3 and 5.

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