



Born to be a Bride

Child marriage trend and causes: Findings from household survey

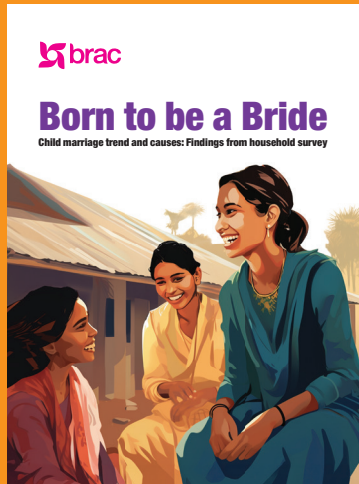


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Child Marriage Trend and Causes in Bangladesh

BRAC Household Survey Report 2023

Social Empowerment and Legal Protection (SELP) Programme



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PREFACE

Conducting a comprehensive survey of nearly 50,000 households in 2080 villages across 27 districts without any external support demonstrates the strength of the Social Empowerment and Legal Protection (SELP) Programme. I take great pride in my team for successfully completing this impressive work. I also want to express my gratitude to the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEAL) team at BRAC for their significant role in analysing and presenting the data in a meaningful way. The survey was conducted between March and June 2023 to identify adolescent girls aged 13-17 at risk of child marriage and investigate the root causes and patterns behind this issue.

The survey reveals the bleak reality of adolescent girls in Bangladesh and dispels the myths around the root causes. This understanding played a significant role in shaping BRAC's interventions aimed at preventing and ultimately ending child marriage. The extensive data set serves as a baseline for BRAC programmes to monitor and evaluate the impacts of their initiatives.

Most importantly, the survey highlights a new perspective that emphasises the importance of addressing the demand side of child marriage by engaging with potential grooms and their families. This approach is crucial for discouraging the practice and promoting a compelling alternative narrative to the notion of marrying young girls.

We hope that this data-driven analysis will also benefit the government and other development practitioners, including researchers, by providing a deeper understanding of the social context of child marriage in Bangladesh, beyond just measuring poverty or economic factors.

Shashwatee Biplob

Associate Director

Social Empowerment and Legal Protection Programme, BRAC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey was part of a program that BRAC is introducing to address the wicked, hard and sticky problem of early marriage in Bangladesh. Utilizing a non-probability purposive sampling method that covered 48,741 households in 1,970 villages across 27 districts, this survey provides critical insights into the prevalence and attitudes regarding child marriage within the surveyed region. The findings are both revealing and concerning, shedding light on the complexities of this deeply entrenched issue. Here are the key takeaways:

A shift in age segments: The highest risk of child marriage has shifted to 16–17-year-olds. Even in 2017-18, a nationwide survey¹ found that 43.1% of women aged 15-49 were married before turning 15. This shift has been evidenced in other representative surveys as well. This is an age when intergenerational relationships start to change, and adolescents begin to develop agency. Nurturing and positively shaping this agency is, therefore, very important.

Traditional Indicators fall short: Many might think that relative poverty is the main reason for child marriage, but our findings suggest otherwise. For example, consider Pirojpur and Netrokona: both have similar poverty rates, at 32.2% and 34% respectively, yet their child marriage rates differ dramatically—72.6% in Pirojpur compared to just 24.1% in Netrokona. Interestingly, we also found that child marriage rates are similar among both poorer and wealthier households.

Another traditional indicator, such as school dropout rates, is inadequate, as 56% of married girls were still attending school at the time of their marriage. A significant factor that influences child marriage rates is the education level of the household head; these rates drop considerably when the head has completed at least the fifth grade. Therefore, effective school governance mechanisms can play a crucial role in addressing this issue.

Quid-pro-quo effect: Households where there was an incidence of early marriage of daughters are much more likely to have their son married to an under-18 bride. Almost 80% of households that had reported marrying off a girl early also reported bringing in a child bride for their son.

Predominant factors: Finding a suitable groom was the most predominant reason for early marriage, and this issue deserves further examination, particularly from the demand perspective. This challenges the notion that child marriage is solely motivated by financial hardship, insecurity, or dropping out of school. Over 55% of our respondents identified the availability of suitable grooms as the primary incentive for early marriage. What is the significance of a woman's age in signalling to potential grooms? Is there a way to shift the focus away from age and replace it with other socially acceptable indicators? Gaining a deeper understanding of this issue could significantly enhance our efforts in designing effective interventions.

¹ Bhowmik J, Biswas RK, Hossain S. Child Marriage and Adolescent Motherhood: A Nationwide Vulnerability for Women in Bangladesh. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021 Apr 12;18(8):4030. doi: 10.3390/ijerph18084030. PMID: 33921264; PMCID: PMC8069693.

Prevalence and Attitudes: There is a significant divide in opinions regarding the appropriate age for marriage. Half of the respondents believe that girls should be married before the age of 18, while 42% of households actually support and practice this belief. This stark contrast highlights the urgent need to address the underlying social norms and practices.

Complex Contradictions: Interestingly, 18% of households oppose child marriage but still engage in the practice themselves. This contradiction underlines the complex and multifaceted nature of the issue, where socio-economic pressures often play a significant role. On the contrary, around 12% of households express support for child marriage but have not practiced it. This suggests that there is some openness to reconsidering traditional beliefs, presenting an opportunity for awareness-building and positive change.

In conclusion, tackling child marriage requires a comprehensive approach. Efforts should focus on raising awareness about the negative consequences of early marriage, providing support for those who wish to avoid it, and challenging traditional beliefs and practices. These findings emphasise the importance of ongoing work to protect the rights and well-being of girls and young women, ensuring they can make informed choices about their lives and futures.



01 Introduction

BRAC, recognising the high prevalence of child marriage in Bangladesh, with 51.4%² of women aged 20-24 married as children has made the prevention of child marriage a key development goal, aligning with its strategic objectives of promoting **gender equality and investing in the future generation**. To kickstart this effort, BRAC's Social Empowerment and Legal Protection (SELP) Programme conducted a comprehensive survey during March-June 2023, covering 48,741 households in 1970 villages across 27 districts. The survey aimed to identify and generate a profile of adolescent girls aged 13-17 who are at risk of child marriage and understand the root causes and trends related to that.

Key questions to answer in this report

- I. What is the child marriage prevalence and trend among the surveyed families
- II. Reasons behind child marriage according to the HHs
 - a. Factors that accelerate child marriage across the intervention areas
 - b. Reasons stated by the respondents from the HHs who married off any girl in the past 5 years

- III. Explore the relationship (both ways) between school dropout and child marriage
- IV. What are the perceptions of the respondents/guardians on marrying off a girl

Based on the outcome of this survey, SELP has identified 51,582 girls aged 13-17 in 27 districts and formed a girl brigade named '**Swapnosarothi**' in 1970 villages, who will be the key community-level collective force and network to work against early marriage locally and nationally.

The programme has begun to provide them with life skills training based on a participatory and interactive module to increase their individual and collective agency. The programme is actively working with multiple stakeholders, including young girls, parents, eligible grooms, leaders of Pollishomaj (a grassroots women-led platform), social gatekeepers such as Imams, teachers, Kazis, matchmakers, LGIs, and the local administration in preventing child marriage.

² <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/data-situation-children-bangladesh>

02 Methodology

2.1 Survey Approach

A non-probability purposive sampling

method: BRAC made a conscious decision about what the sample needed to include and chose participants accordingly (households with at least one adolescent girl aged between 13 and 17). It is worth mentioning that the HHs have adolescent girls aged under 13 or above 17 years, and one month was kept outside of the consideration.

A semi-structured interview of the adult

household members: A set of predetermined open questions was applied, with the opportunity for further discussion on the household's perceptions of child marriage.

Survey area selection: The survey was conducted in districts pre-determined as most disadvantaged following a set of indicators (Poverty Head Count, Mean Years of Schooling, Access to Electricity, Access to Sanitation Latrine, under 5 Mortality rate, Not receiving postnatal care and People affected by Natural Disasters) to work in unison for targeted locations as part of BRAC Strategy 2021-25.

2.2 Sample

- 203 Upazilas (sub-districts) from 27 districts
- 3 to 4 unions from an Upazila located at a parallel distance from the SELP office
- 10 Villages from a single upazila, counting 2-3 villages from a union
- 25 adolescent girls from each village (not 25 HHs, as some HHs had more than one adolescent within the age group. A total of 51,582 adolescents were targeted from 48,471 HHs.)

2.3 Survey Instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire was rolled out for the survey to understand the trends

and root causes of child marriage. The questionnaire was deployed on KOBO Toolbox to conduct the entire survey in a paperless manner and reduce human effort during the post-data collection phase. To capture nuances and qualitative insights, 18 case studies were collected from the field using an open-ended checklist. A regression model was employed to explore the relationship between child marriage and key variables such as wealth quintile, household income range, and perceptions and practices related to child marriage, in order to test for significant associations.

2.4 Limitations

- The survey was designed to create a detailed profile of unmarried adolescent girls and their households rather than conventional research.
- The survey population selection process was biased due to intervention criteria.
- The survey area selection was biased towards the most disadvantaged districts.
- Only 20-25 HHs were surveyed that have at least one adolescent girl aged 13-17 years; therefore, we cannot propose to know the trend in all age groups.
- Represents the child marriage trend among the girls, not the boys.
- Data was collected from 27 districts of BRAC intervention areas and only 3 to 4 unions from an Upazila; therefore, it does not represent the country as a whole.
- Determining the right age in some cases was challenging since some adolescent girls possessed more than one birth certificate or had a birth certificate indicating an age greater than their actual date of birth.
- It was difficult to ascertain the age of the girl who had been married off in the past

five years; families somehow managed to produce a birth certificate indicating the age as 18 during the wedding. However, the actual age of marriage was verified through some supplementary questions and probing.

- To illustrate the household's wealth quintile, only six parameters of household durables were recorded instead of 12 indicators (the International Wealth Index and DHS Wealth Index use 12 asset indicators).

03 Respondent Profile

3.1 Income of the households

A total of 48,741 diverse groups of households were surveyed, considering their economic status, education and occupational background, where the average HH income was 19,064 BDT per month.

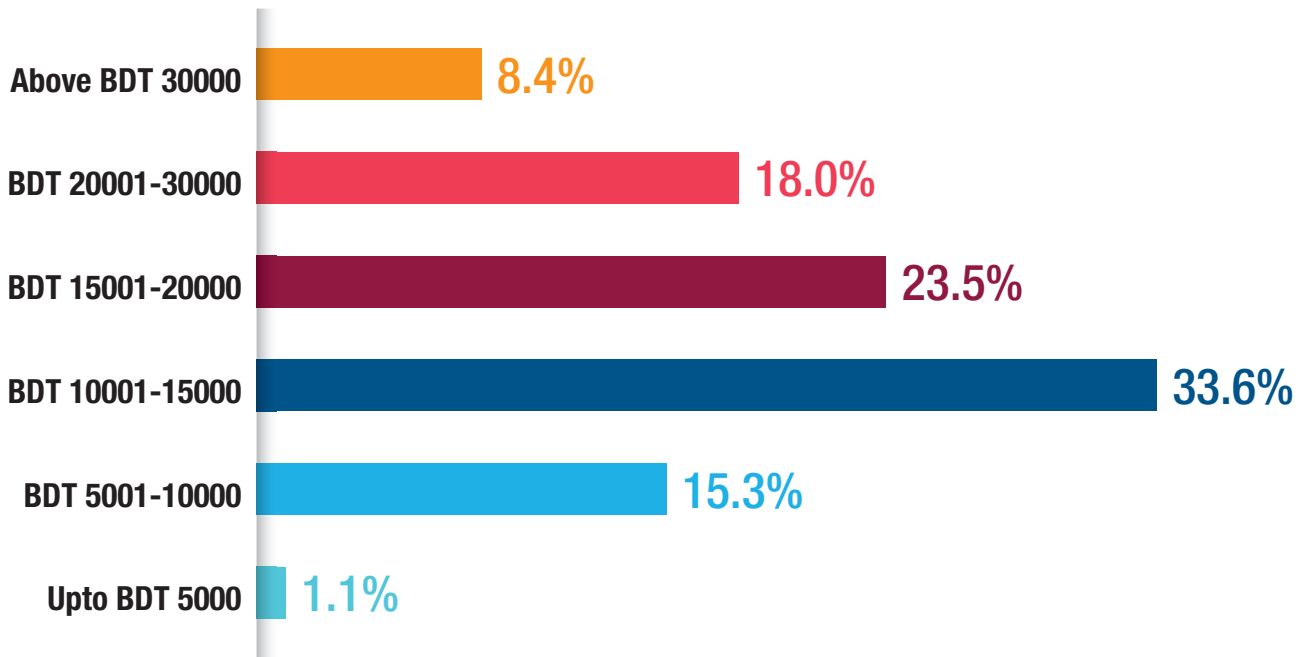


Figure 1: Income profile of the surveyed households



3.2 Religious belief

Muslims comprised a significant 88.19% of the respondents, reflecting the national population data from the 2022 census, which was 91.04%.

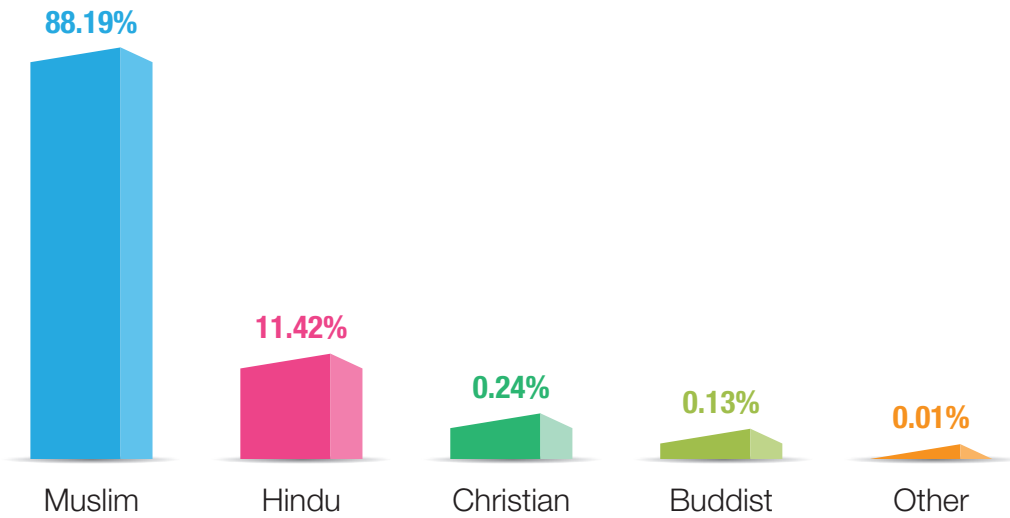


Figure 2: Religious belief of the surveyed households

3.3 Type of Household head

Only 9% of the total households were female-headed, while the average HH size was 4.88.



Figure 3: Type of household head

3.4 Wealth quintile of the surveyed HHs

This index was defined based on the parameter against six durables in the HH. The type of walls in residences, along with access to sanitation, electricity, bicycles, electric fans, and refrigerators, were taken into account to establish the wealth ranking of the households. The data indicates that all the households surveyed are relatively similar in the number of household properties and durable goods.

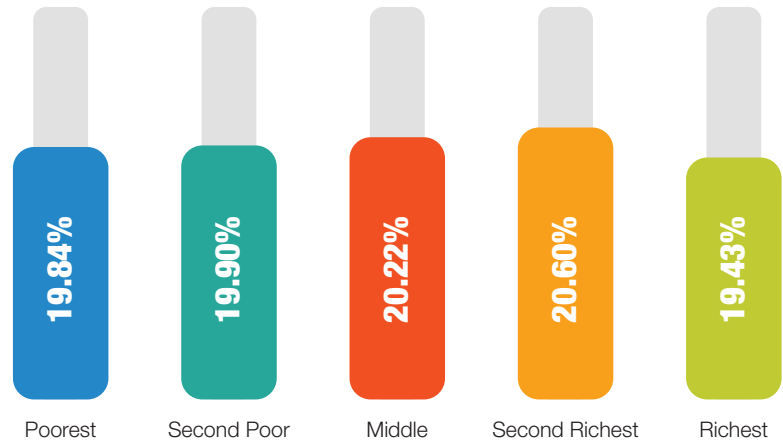


Figure 4: Wealth status of the households

3.5 Educational status of the household heads

The educational attainment of the household heads was not impressive. Only 16% of household heads managed to overcome the hurdles of secondary school.

Of those, 4% dropped out after college, and 3% graduated. Additionally, 21% of household heads have never attended school.

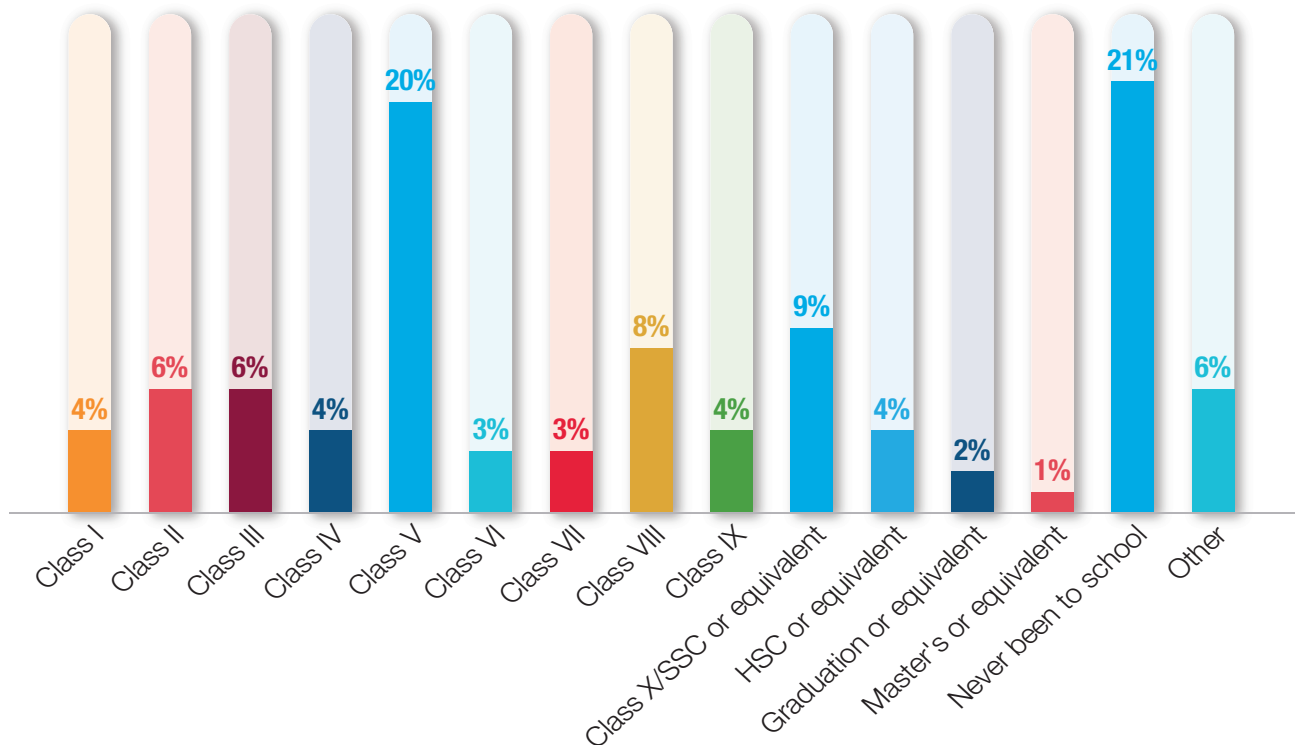


Figure 5: Educational attainment of the household heads

04 Key findings

This report presents the survey findings in two ways: first, the prevalence of child marriage among ever-married women aged 20-24, based on the criteria outlined in SDG 5.3; second, the causes and practices of child marriage at the household level, as perceived by the respondents. A total of 4,348 ever-married women aged 18 to 24 were surveyed, in addition to 51,582 unmarried adolescent girls.

4.1 Prevalence³ of Child Marriage

According to the SDG indicator's (5.3) selection criteria (ever-married women aged between 20-24), 44.7% were married before 18, while 6.9% were below 15.

The result aligns with national data referring to 51.4% of child marriages across Bangladesh. However, it does not provide real-time data on child brides who are currently below 18.

Notably, when we lowered the age threshold by just two years (ever-married women aged between 18 -24), the percentage of child marriages increased significantly to 54.9%, with approximately 9.5% married before their 15th birthday. Furthermore, if the age range were to be lowered to capture all child brides in the surveyed region, the percentage of child marriage prevalence could have gone much higher.

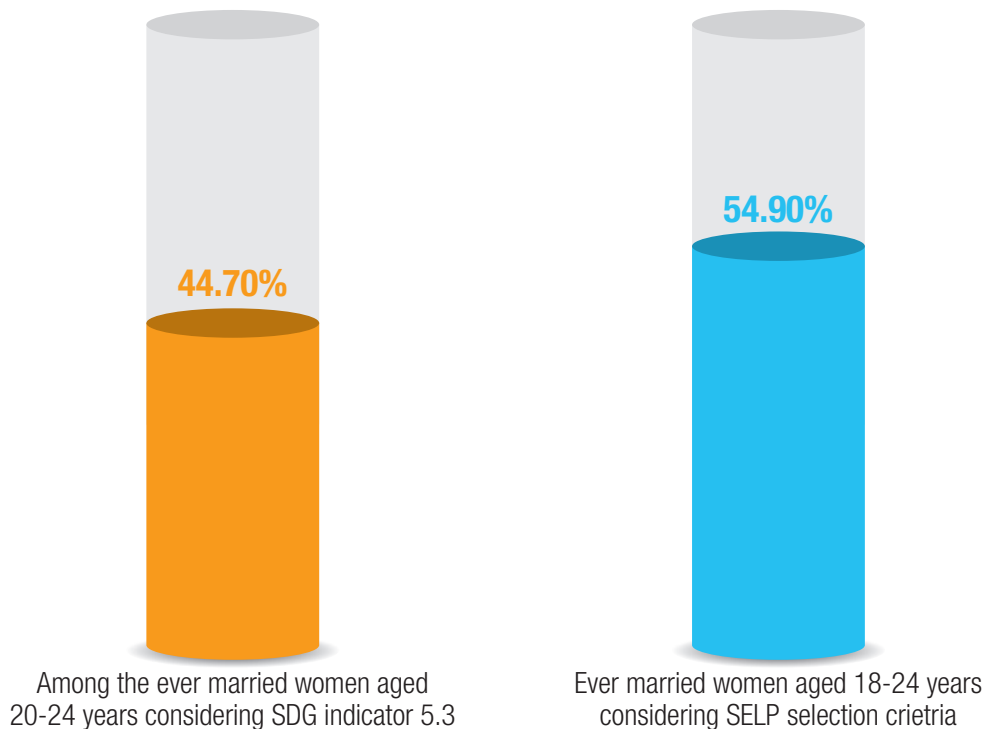


Figure 6: Prevalence of child marriage

³ The number of women married before age 18 out of the ever-married women aged 20-24 years old.

It is important to mention that the survey also collected data on girls who were married off from those households over the past five years. The data reveals a striking rate⁴ where out of every 100 marriages that occurred in the last five years, 60 girls (60.3%) were married before the age of 18.

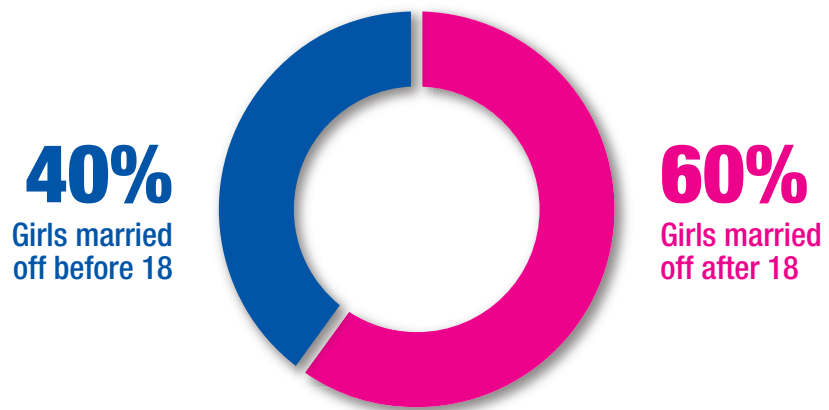


Figure 7: Child marriage rate at Household level

The prevalence of child marriage is significantly higher among the Muslim community (56.8%) compared to the Hindu community (48.5%). This statistic points to disparities in child marriage rates based on religion and indicates that child marriage is often influenced by a complex interplay of cultural, societal, and religious norms. While further investigation is required to delve into the backdrop for this, it is also essential to recognise that child marriage prevalence can vary significantly based on religious, cultural, and regional factors.

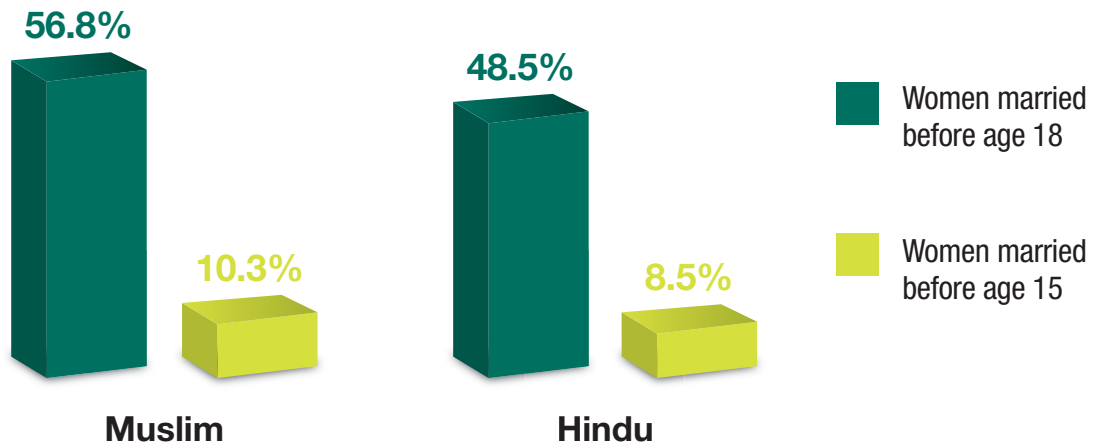


Figure 8: Prevalence of child marriage in different religion

Furthermore, the overall prevalence of child marriage is similar in female-headed households (56.5%) compared to male-headed households. However, the incidence of marriage before the age of 15 is higher in female-headed households (15.7%) than in male-headed households (9.2%).

These statistics provide valuable insights into how child marriage varies within households led by females compared to those led by males. Even though the overall child marriage prevalence is similar among female-headed and male-headed households, the higher prevalence of child marriage before the age of 15 in female-headed households is noteworthy. The female-headed households may have

⁴ Rate is measured by the numbers of daughters married off from the household.

unique realities to fall bound to bring a child bride than a male-headed household.

These statistics highlight the need for a holistic approach to address child marriage, taking into account the nuanced circumstances within different households.

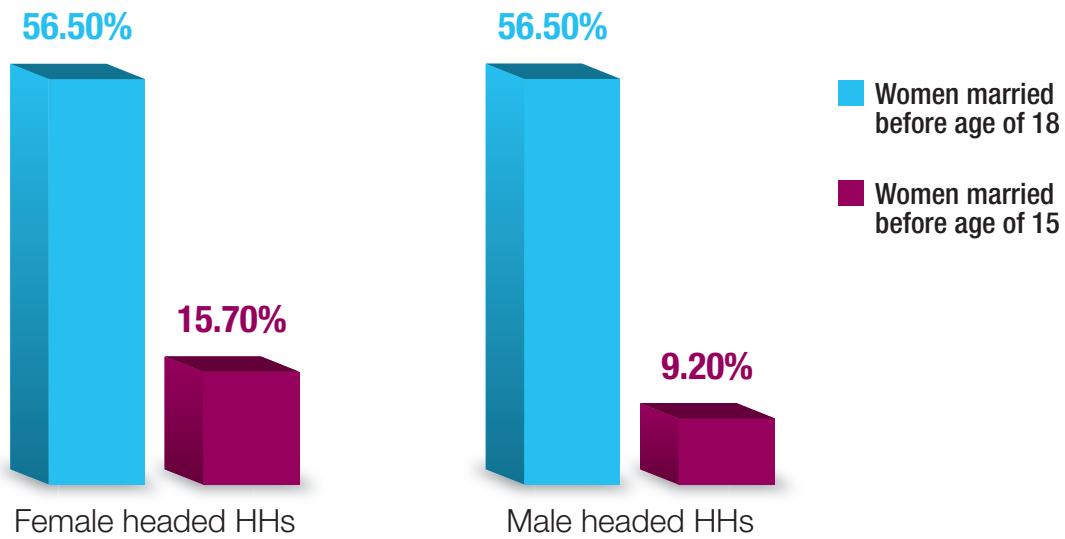


Figure 9: Child marriage prevalence in male headed and female headed households

In terms of district-wise distribution, Pirojpur has the highest prevalence of child marriage (72.6%) consequently followed by Chapainawabganj (65.2%), Naogaon (65%), Thakurgaon (62.5%) and Joypurhat (61.4%). The prevalence is lowest in Manikganj (32.3%), Mymensingh (29.7%), Bagerhat (29.3%), Moulvibazar (29.1%) and Netrokona (24.1%) districts.

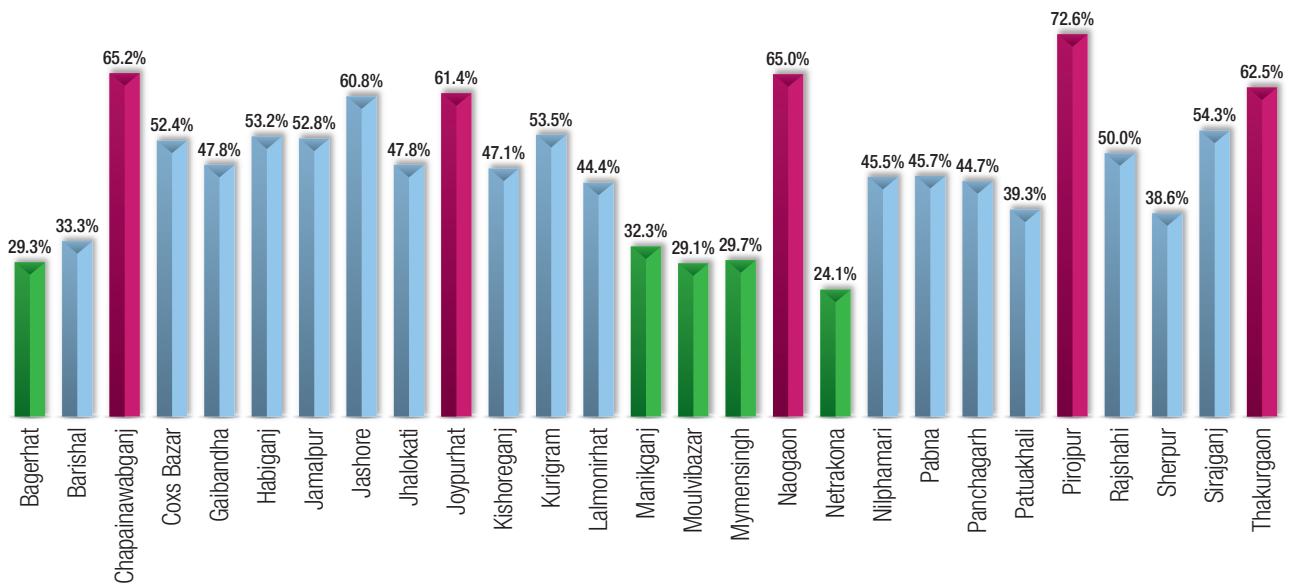


Figure 10: District wise prevalence of child marriage

On the other hand, Chapainawabganj has the highest rate of child marriage (83%), consequently followed by Niphamari (80%), Jamalpur (76%), Naogaon and Thakurgaon (75%), Kurigram and Pirojpur (73%). The rate is lowest in Moulovibazar (28%), Mymensingh (45%), Netrokona (47%), and Bagerhat (49%) districts.

If we combine both statistics, it gives us a district-wise practice of child marriage. Chapainawabganj, Naogaon and Thakurgaon stand out as the highest in terms of both marrying off their daughters and bringing a child bride; and Moulovibazar, Mymensingh, Netrokona and Bagerhat turned out to be the lowest in both cases.

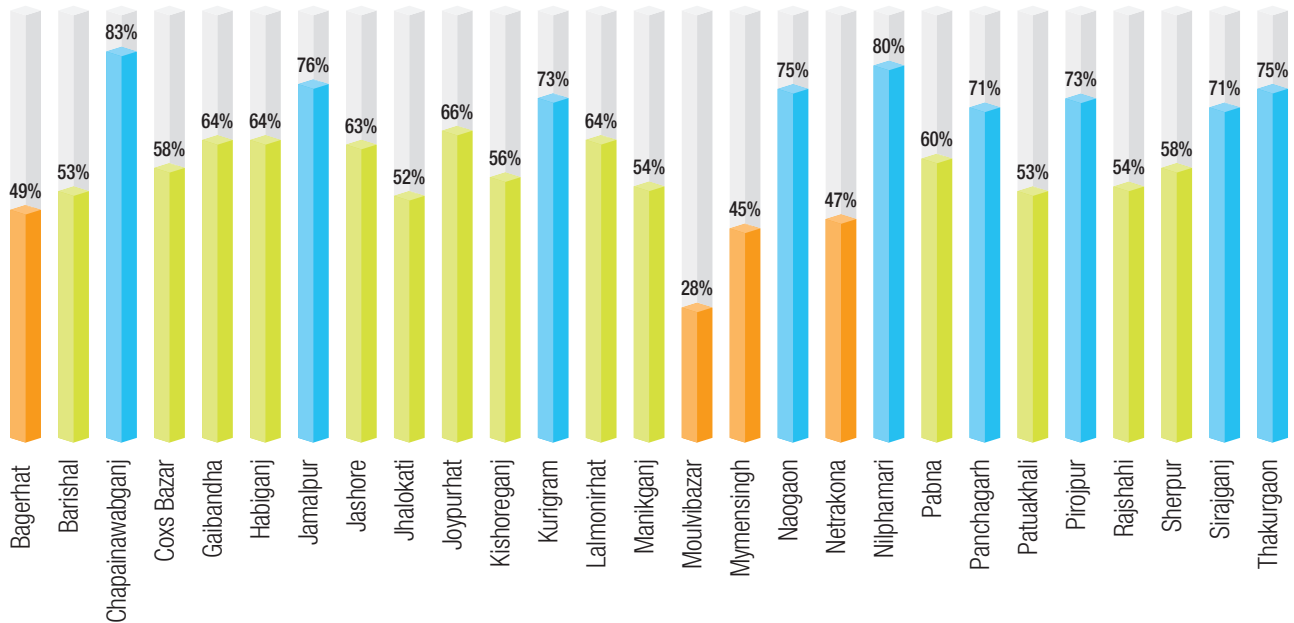


Figure 11: District-wise child marriage rate at the household level

The survey does not provide any insights into why certain districts have a higher prevalence and practice of child marriage than others. Therefore, further investigation is needed to identify region-specific factors that drive high rates of child marriage.

4.2 Tipping Age

The highest risk of child marriage has shifted to 16–17-year-olds irrespective of their economic status (63.1%), particularly those who are about to complete their secondary education. These are the girls who are typically on the cusp of adulthood but are still legally considered minors. Statistics stating that over the last 5 years, 46.30% of girls who experienced child marriage were students in class nine reveal a critical vulnerability; they are at a pivotal point in their academic and personal development.

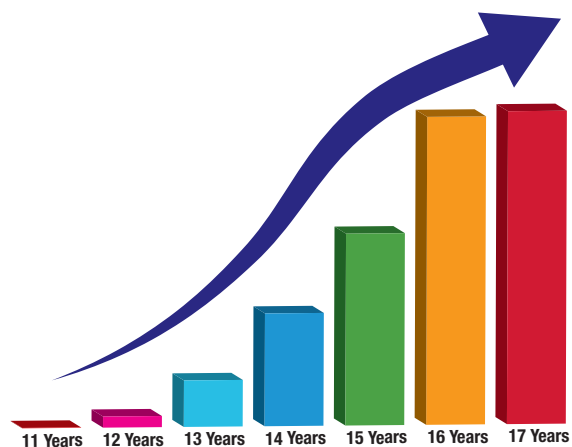


Figure 12: Tipping age of marriage

Marrying off girls who are still students raises questions about their ability to provide informed consent and make independent choices about their lives and futures. These girls may not have the autonomy to decide when and whom to marry.

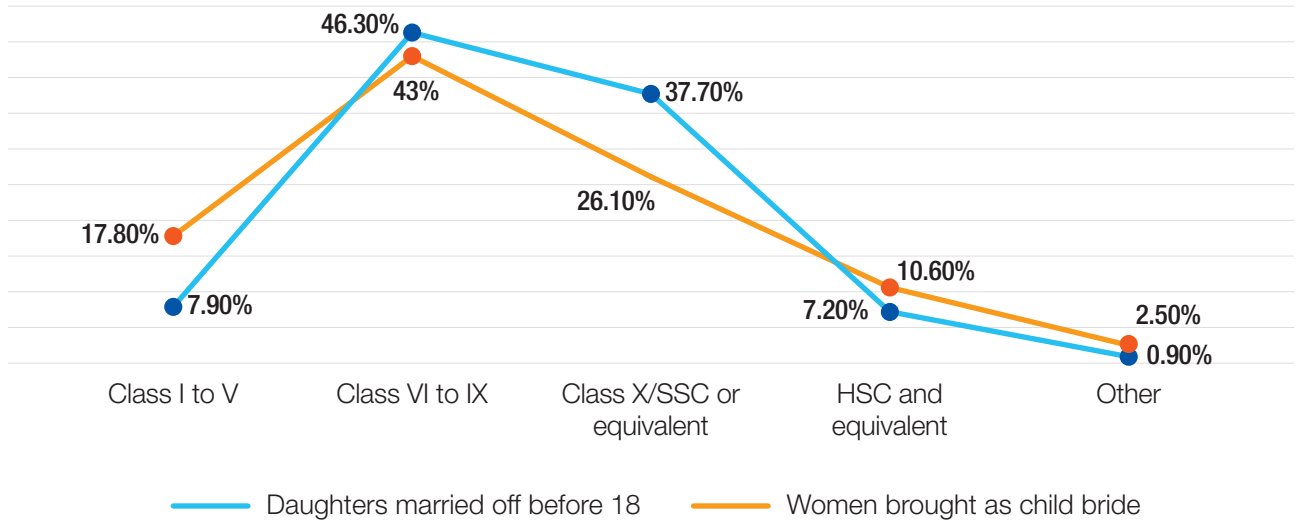


Figure 13: Last class completed by the women married off and brought as bride before 18

4.3 Does school dropout influence Child Marriage?

56% of girl children were married while still attending school. This challenges the assumption that marriage is a consequence of leaving school and instead suggests that schooling alone does not necessarily protect girls from early marriage.

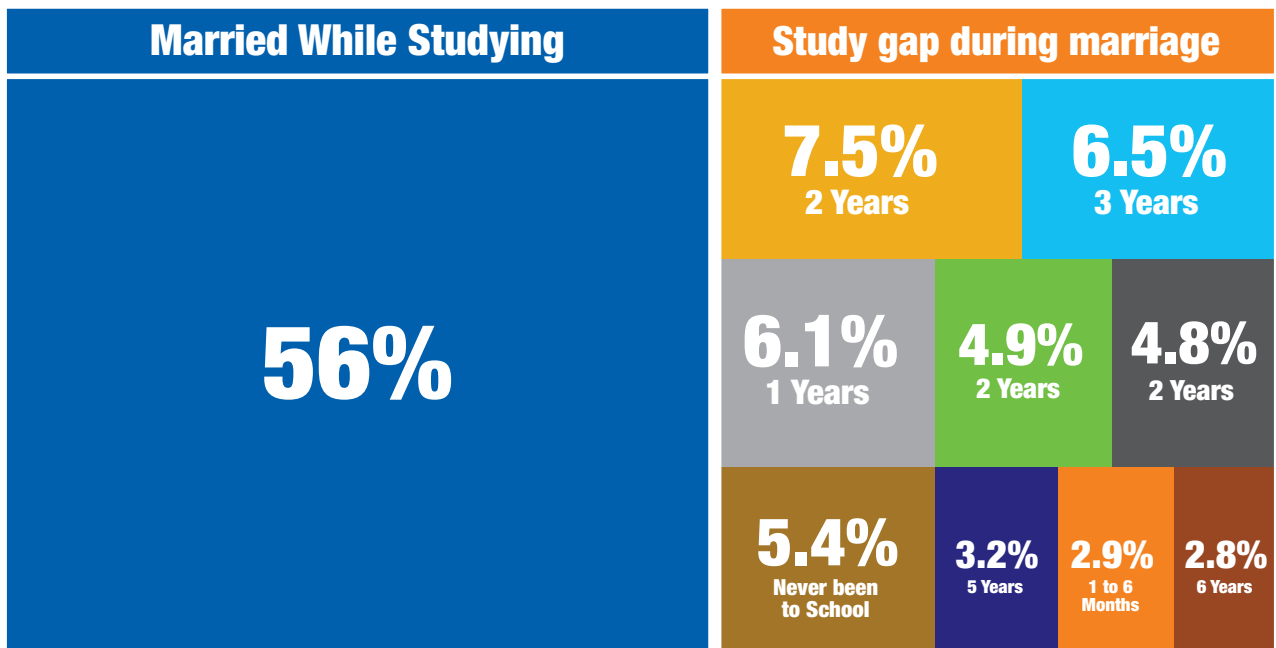


Figure 14: Study gap and child marriage

Furthermore, financial hardship is a major factor leading to girls dropping out. When 37% of families cite the inability to afford education, it underscores how poverty is intricately tied to both dropout rates and child marriage. In such contexts, marriage can be seen as an economic strategy — a way to reduce the financial burden of raising a daughter.

In other cases, perceived poor academic performance also plays a role. Some parents withdraw their daughters from school if they believe there is no academic future for them, reinforcing a mindset where education is only valued when it yields visible success, rather than being a right or a long-term investment. These beliefs often align with cultural norms that place a higher value on a girl's role as a wife and mother rather than as a student or professional.

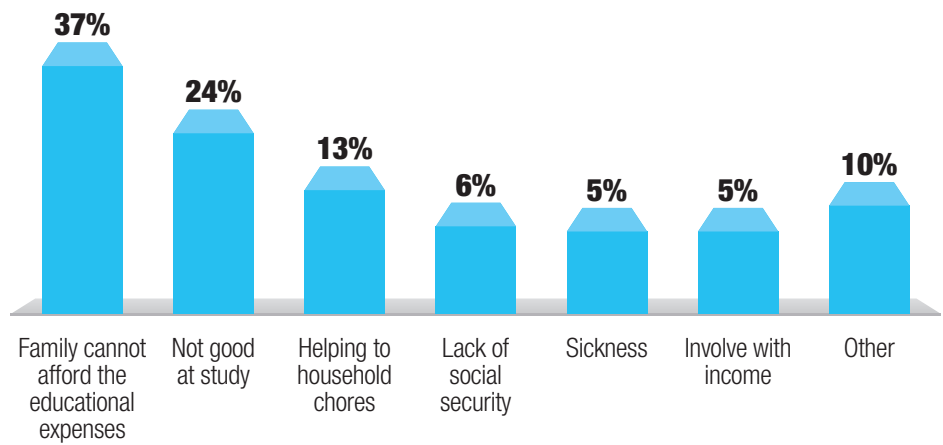


Figure 15: Top six reasons behind dropout from school

Child marriage during a girl's school years not only disrupts her education but also limits her personal development, future opportunities and economic prospects. Ultimately, this data calls for a multidimensional approach to tackling child marriage. Educational support must be paired with economic assistance for low-income families, awareness campaigns, and policy enforcement to delay marriage age and protect girls' rights to education and autonomy. Schools can serve as places where girls can access resources, knowledge, and support to delay marriage and pursue their education.

4.4 HH Wealth vs. Child Marriage

There is no definitive positive correlation between wealth and child marriage. Out of every 100 girls from poorer HHs, 60 adolescent girls are likely to be married, while for richer HHs, it is 50.

The survey data indicate that child marriage is not solely a phenomenon of impoverished households. In fact, it suggests that girls from wealthier households are also affected by child marriage. The data highlights the important point that child marriage is influenced by a complex interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, and societal factors. While poverty is a significant factor, it is not the sole determinant of child marriage. Other factors such as cultural norms, traditions, and perceptions of gender roles also play a role.

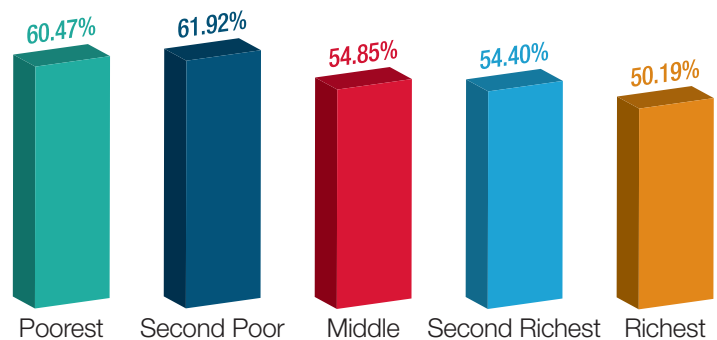


Figure 16: Household wealth and prevalence of child marriage

4.5 HH Income vs. Child Marriage

Also, there is no significant correlation between HH income and child marriage. The prevalence is slightly higher (58%) among the households earning 10,001-20,000 BDT per month rather than those who have a monthly income of up to 10 thousand (54.2%) and above 20 thousand (54.8%).

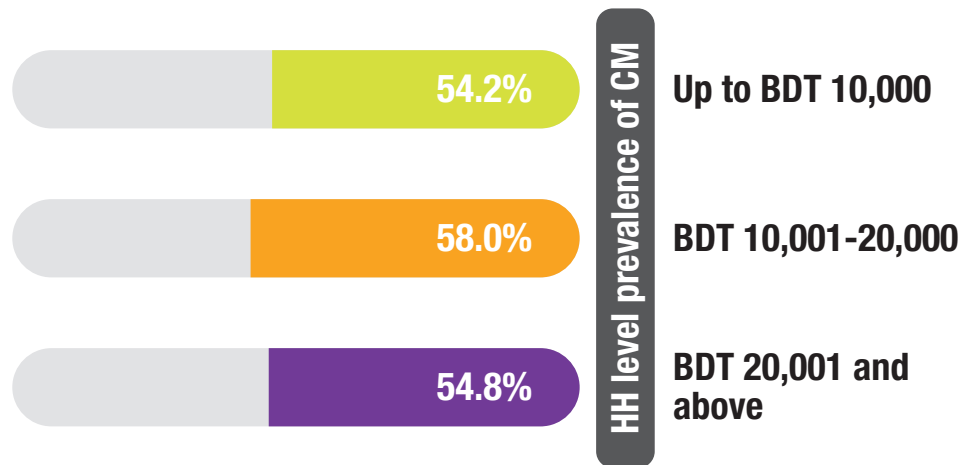


Figure 17: Monthly income of household and child marriage

This additional information on HH income continues to emphasize the complexity of child marriage dynamics and the lack of a clear, direct correlation with household income. Notably, child marriage prevalence varies only slightly across different income levels. The data suggest that household income alone does not strongly predict the occurrence of child marriage. It is influenced by a combination of factors, including but not limited to income.

However, the statistics regarding the relationship between the number of members earning in a household and the rate of child marriage reveal another striking pattern. Child marriage peaks in households with two earning members (50.5%) and then gradually decreases as the number of earners increases, reaching its lowest point in households with six or more earners (2.7%).

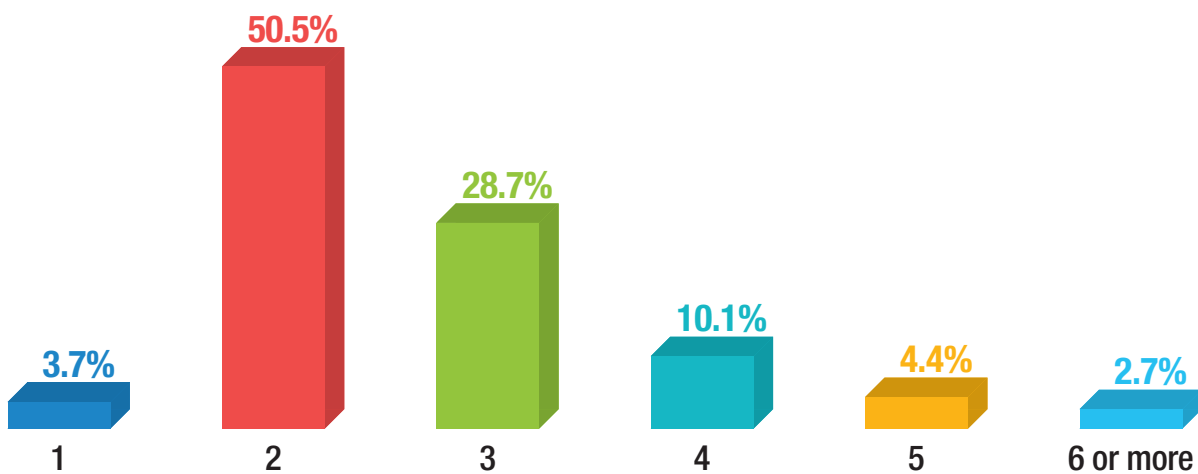


Figure 18: Number of earning persons in HH and practice of child marriage

To understand this pattern, we must consider the socio-economic dynamics of rural Bangladesh. In rural Bangladesh, boys often start working young, leading to early school dropouts and a preference for marrying younger, less educated girls.

The spike in child marriage among households with two earners can be explained as a common scenario where both a father and a son are working, with the son typically being a teenager. These households may have just enough income to afford a wedding but not enough to prioritise education or long-

term investments in their daughters. Cultural pressure and affordability converge, making child marriage a perceived “next step.”

As the number of earners increases, economic stability improves, reducing the urgency to marry off daughters early. Families may become more open to investing in education and waiting for better matches. The burden of supporting the family is more evenly distributed. This shift transforms marriage from an economic necessity to a personal choice.

4.6 Child Marriage and parents’ education

The survey finding demonstrates that there is a direct, positive correlation between the educational attainment of the household head and the likelihood of child marriage. When the household head’s education level is higher, the incidence of child marriage is lower. For example, the survey found that the prevalence of child marriage is highest (76.3%) among the HHs where the Head’s education level is below primary.

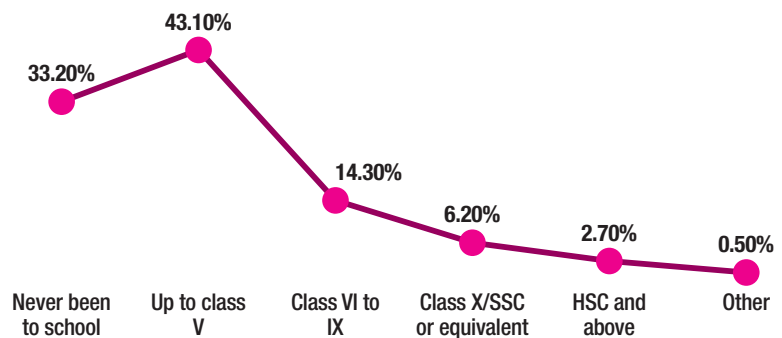


Figure 19: child marriage practice in relation to the education of HH head

Education is often linked to increased awareness of the harmful consequences of child marriage. Households where the head has received a higher level of education may be more informed about the importance of allowing their children to complete their education and avoid early marriage.

While this statistic doesn’t directly address poverty, it’s important to note that household heads with lower levels of education may be more likely to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In such households, factors like financial constraints and lack of access to education may contribute to the higher prevalence of child marriage.

4.7 Child bride preference for sons in HHs

Statistics highlight a concerning trend, a quid-pro-quo effect of child marriage – 79% households that marry off a girl in childhood are more likely to bring another underage girl as a bride for their sons. Moreover, when a household practices child marriage, it may normalise this harmful practice, making it more likely for them to continue marrying their children off at a young age in subsequent generations.

HHs married off a girl at early age	Brought a child bride
Yes	79.3%
No	20.7%

Figure 20: Preference of child bride

4.8 Push and Pull Factors that instigate Child Marriage

The following top three reasons were shared by the families who married off their girls at an early age:

- I. Found a suitable groom (44%)
- II. Poverty (18%)
- III. Groom demanded no/less dowry (10%)

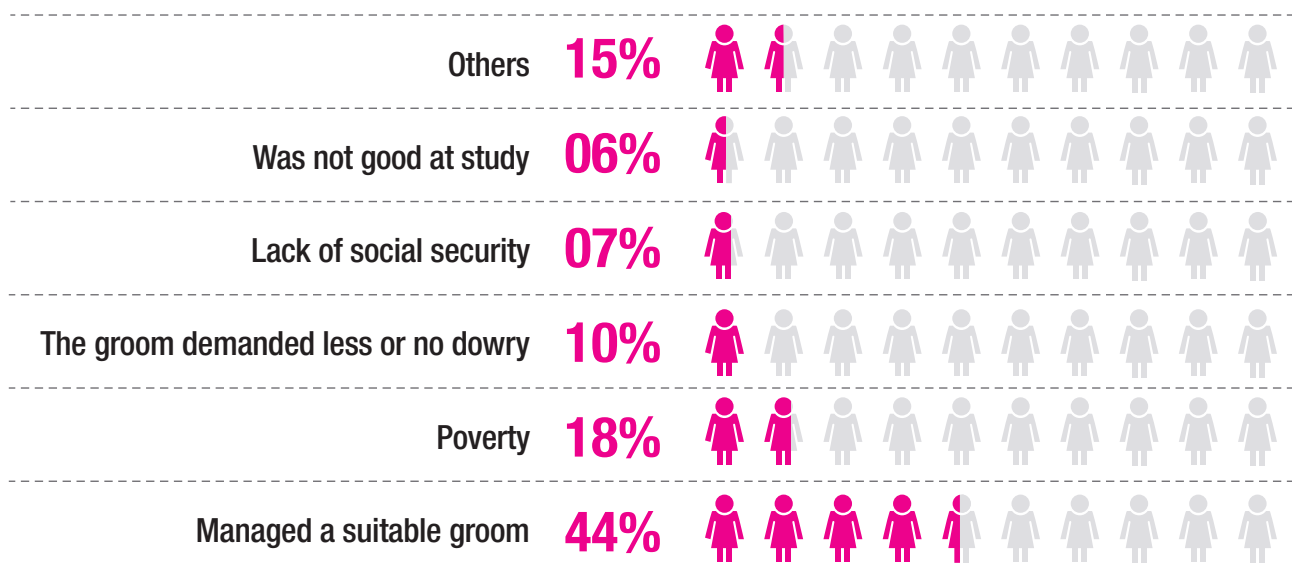


Figure 21: Factors that contribute to child marriage

While families facing economic hardship may see child marriage as a means to reduce the financial burden of caring for their daughters, a significant portion of families, regardless of their socio-economic background, prioritise marrying off their daughters at an early age

when they believe they have found a suitable match. Suitability includes living/working abroad, having cultivable lands, a nuclear family, a similar socio-economic background, a similar cast, a sustainable job, etc. The demand for little or no dowry can also be perceived as

a sign of the groom's suitability, which, when combined with the top reason, accounts for over 50% of cases.

It's important to note that in the marriage market, the suitability of a bride is often determined by the younger age of a girl, while it is the wealth or economic condition of the groom. The conventional narrative about what is suitable for both parties involved in the marriage significantly influences this decision.

4.9 Perception of Child Marriage at the HH Level

The perception of whether a girl should be married off before or after 18 years is equally split.

Almost 50% believe that a girl should be married before 18 years of age, and another 50% believe that they should be married after 18 years of age.

7.5% of HHs believe that a girl should be married by the time they are 15.

The equal split in perceptions reflects the deep-seated and widespread difference in societal views regarding the appropriate age of marriage, while a smaller but concerning percentage (7.5%) believe that girls should be married off by the age of 15.

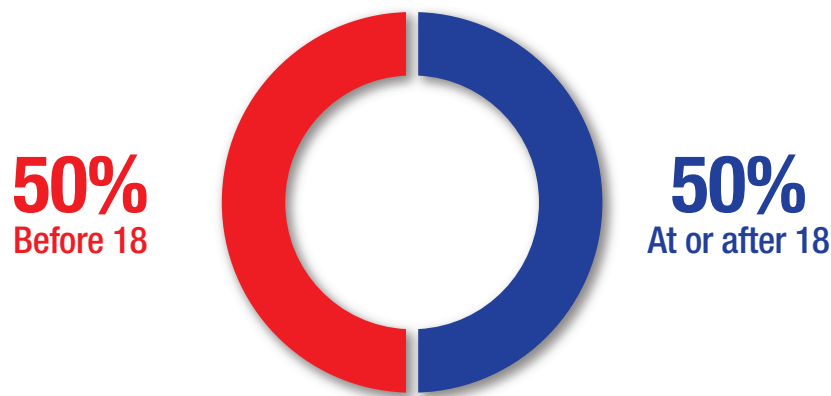


Figure 22: Perception of the household on suitable age for marriage



4.10 Perception vs. Practice of Child Marriage

The survey suggests that the percentage of households in favour of child marriage and practising it is 42%, whereas the percentage of households that are against child marriage but do not practice it is 28%.

18% of the households hold the belief that child marriage is detrimental but still engage in it, while the percentage of households that consider child marriage to be favourable but refrain from practicing it is 12%.

These four combinations of practising/not practising child marriage and supporting/not

supporting represent the tendency of child marriage at a significant level. The survey found that the majority of households (72%) either support or practice child marriage or do both, while a considerable proportion of households are against it (28%). Again, while 46% of households suggest a growing awareness of the consequences of the practice and willingness to break the tradition, 18% of them highlight the complex factors in play that may include societal pressure, economic hardship or lack of viable alternatives.

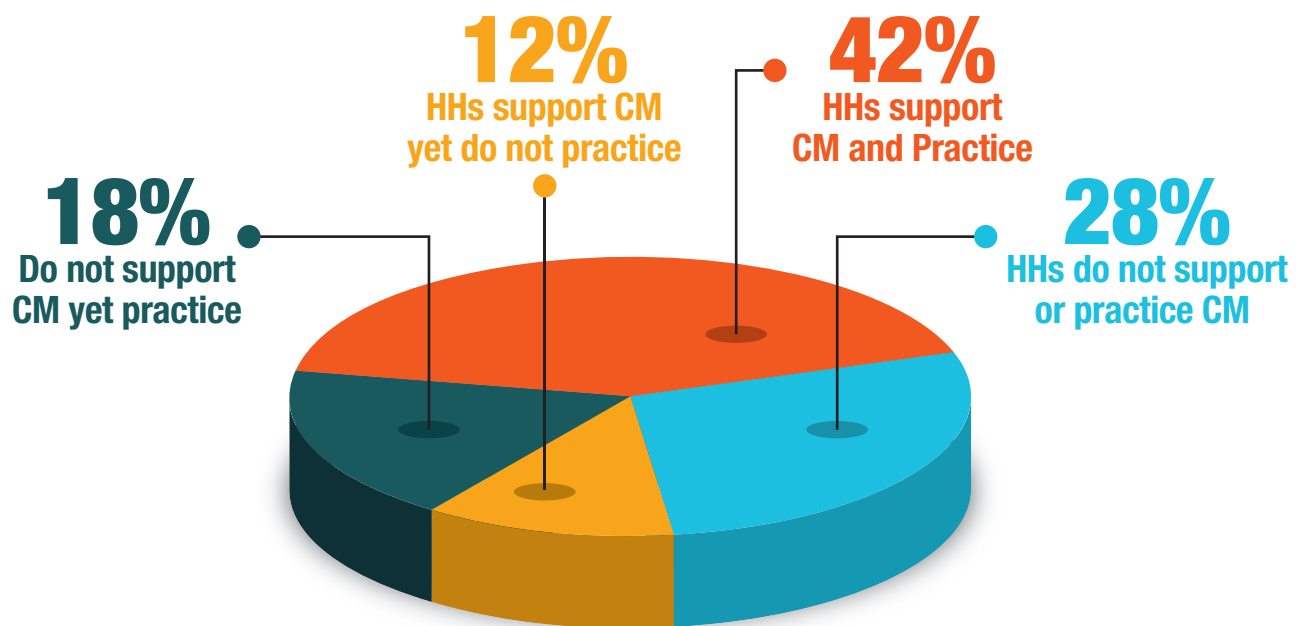


Figure 23: Perception vs. practice of child marriage





05 Girl born to be a Bride

- The family and relatives generally believe that a girl is destined to become a bride. There is a prevailing perception that girls appear more attractive at a young age, leading many grooms to seek younger brides, often with fewer or no dowry requirements.
- Parents sometimes inflate the age of their daughters during the birth registration process, intending to marry them off while they are still young and possess a legal document.
- Relatives, neighbours, and family members often play a crucial role in arranging marriages for underage girls, especially if the girls do not have a father or brother, particularly in cases where the father is deceased or suffering from a chronic illness.
- A child bride is often accepted more easily in her in-laws' home, as there is an assumption that she can quickly learn the family's norms and customs. She is expected to abide by the in-laws' decisions and create less disruption. Furthermore, she can be mentored in the way the in-laws desire and is likely to give birth to a grandchild early on. In contrast, if a bride is more educated and mature, she may be seen as more difficult to manage by the in-laws. Brides from poor families are often viewed as a more suitable choice for the groom's family.
- If a girl is not married by the age of 15 to 17, or if her family does not openly discuss her marriage prospects, neighbours and relatives may speculate that she has a physical or mental issue, or that she is involved with someone else. This stigma can make it increasingly difficult to find a suitable groom, particularly for lower-income families. Parents may be reluctant to educate their daughters for several reasons: completing a graduation program may make the girl too old in the eyes of family, neighbors, and potential grooms; there is uncertainty about her ability to secure a job; and the chances of finding a suitable match become nearly impossible in rural settings.
- Key considerations for the bride's family when looking for a groom include the groom working or living abroad, possessing cultivable land, coming from a nuclear family, having a similar socio-economic background and caste, and maintaining a sustainable job. These factors help ensure that both parties maintain a minimum level of responsibility.
- Often, parents prefer marriages between cousins or aim to marry their daughters to neighbours, believing that they can better look after their daughters in these situations.
- When a groom is in his late teens (around 18-20), families typically look for brides who are younger (around 15-16). It is a common belief that the bride should be at least 5-6 years younger than the groom. Consequently, boys are often compelled to start working with minimal education, leading their families to look for brides with less education, while the girls' parents usually prefer to have a say in the choice of groom.



06 Myth Busting

- Child marriage is not solely influenced by poverty or economic conditions. It is not the key driver either.
- 56% of child marriages occur while the girls are still at school, indicating that dropping out of school is not a significant factor. However, having some level of education, ranging from grade V to IX, increases a girl's likelihood of being married.
- It is important to note that being a minority does not necessarily increase the likelihood of child marriage. However, further investigation is necessary to understand the underlying causes of the high prevalence of child marriage in the Muslim community.
- Finally, the decision to marry off a girl at an early age is often influenced by the availability of a suitable groom (living/working abroad, having cultivable lands, a nuclear family, a similar socio-economic background, a similar cast, a sustainable job, etc.), regardless of the socioeconomic conditions of the household.



07 Conclusion

This survey reaffirms the concerning prevalence of child marriage in Bangladesh. A detailed analysis suggests that over 70% of adolescent girls are at risk of child marriage due to societal norms and practices. Factors like household income or poverty, school attainment, and having more girl children did not show any significant correlation with child marriage. Instead, it indicates the deeply rooted cultural practices that perpetuate child marriage, making it essential to address these underlying causes. Combatting child marriage in Bangladesh will require a comprehensive approach that includes collaboration between the government and development partners, awareness raising, policy reform, and community involvement at large.

Based on the statistics, several key conclusions can be drawn regarding the prevalence of and attitudes toward child marriage:

1. **Widespread Support and Practices:** Child marriage remains a deeply entrenched issue in the surveyed region, with 42% of households both supporting and practising it. This highlights the urgent need for interventions to challenge and change the prevailing beliefs and practices surrounding early marriage.
2. **Awareness of Harm:** A significant portion of households (28%) understand the detrimental impact of child marriage and refrain from practising it. This suggests a growing awareness of the negative consequences for girls' well-being and prospects.

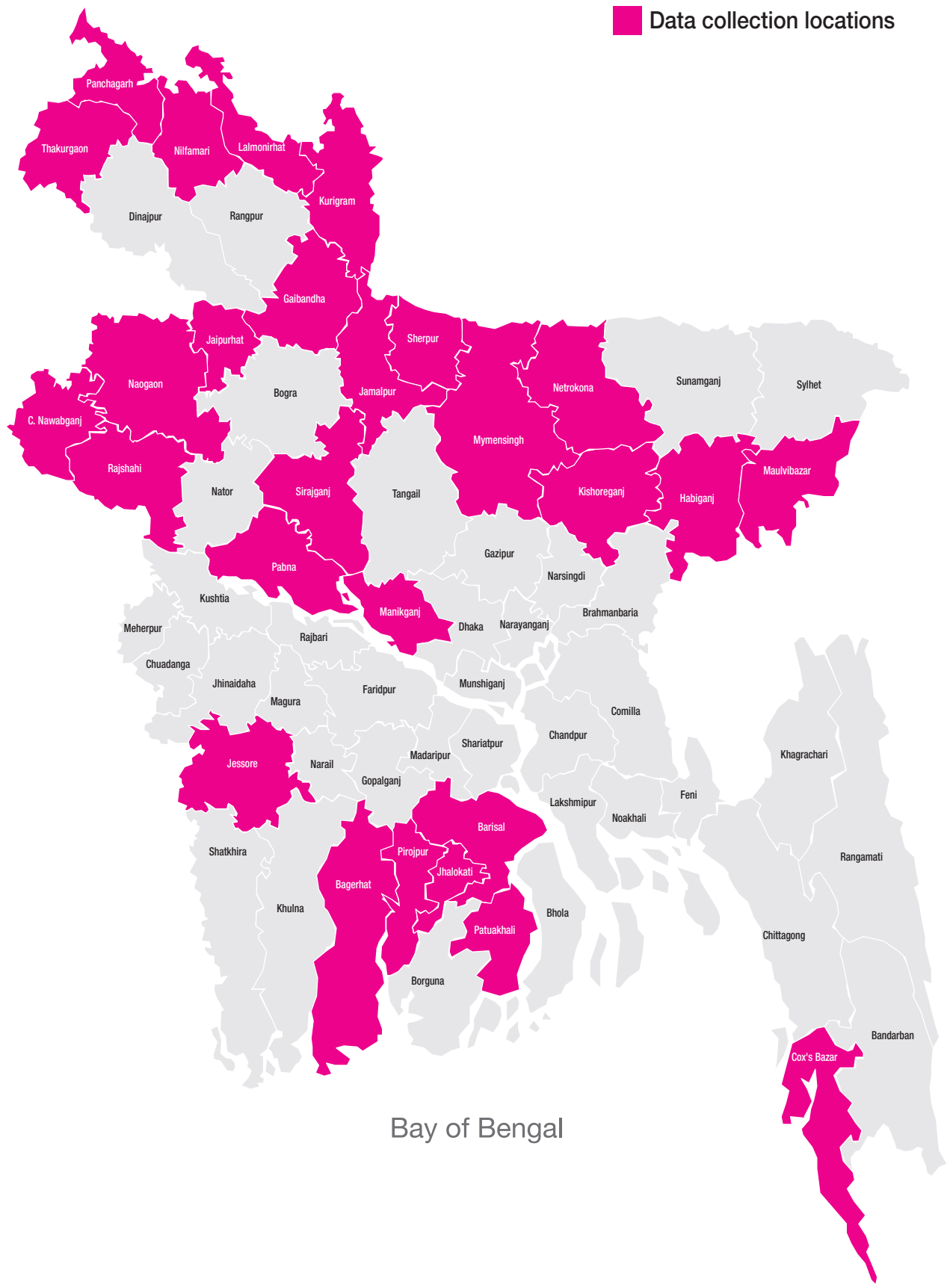
3. **Complex Contradictions:** The presence of households (18%) that are against child marriage but still engage in this practice underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of the issue. These households may face various socio-economic pressures, making it difficult for them to act in accordance with their beliefs.
4. **Changing Beliefs:** There is a category (12%) of households that support child marriage but have not practised it. This suggests that some are beginning to reconsider traditional beliefs and are open to change. This group presents an opportunity for engagement and awareness-building efforts.
5. **Culturally Sensitive Approach:** Addressing child marriage within specific religious communities requires a nuanced and culturally sensitive approach. While this statistic highlights disparities, it's a starting point for developing targeted strategies to reduce child marriage and protect the rights and well-being of girls across different religious backgrounds.

6. **Tailor-made interventions:** The data highlights that girls experiencing child marriage come from a variety of economic and educational backgrounds. Therefore, to address child marriage effectively, interventions must be tailored to the specific contexts and populations in question. Targeting impoverished households alone may not be sufficient; a more nuanced approach that considers the broader socio-cultural context is needed.

In summary, the survey data highlights the need for targeted interventions that address the root causes of child marriage, including cultural norms, economic pressures, and a lack of viable alternatives. Efforts should focus on raising awareness about the harmful consequences of child marriage, providing support to those who wish to refrain from it, and engaging with communities to challenge traditional beliefs and practices. Reducing child marriage is a complex task, but it is crucial for protecting the rights and well-being of girls and young women and ensuring they have the opportunity to make informed choices about their lives.



Annexure: Surveyed Districts



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