



Born to be a bride

Child marriage trend and causes:
Findings from household survey

Social Empowerment and Legal Protection Programme

October 2023

Contents

Introduction:	3
Methodology:.....	3
Limitations:.....	3
Key findings	4
Prevalence of Child Marriage.....	4
Tipping Age	4
Does school dropout influence Child Marriage?.....	5
HH Wealth vs. Child Marriage.....	6
HH Income vs. Child Marriage.....	6
Child Marriage and parent’s education.....	6
Child Marriage and Religion.....	7
Do HHs with more than one girl tend to marry off at an early age?	7
Child Marriage in Women-Headed HH	7
Child bride preference for sons in HHs	8
Push and Pull Factors that instigate Child Marriage	8
Perception of Child Marriage at the HH Level.....	9
Perception vs. Practice of Child Marriage	9
Conclusion.....	10
Annexure: Coverage area of SELP	11

Introduction:

BRAC, recognizing the high prevalence of child marriage in Bangladesh within Asia, with 51.4% of women aged 20-24 married as children, made the prevention of child marriage a key development agenda, aligning with BRAC's two broad strategic objectives of **gender equality, and investing in the future generation**. To begin this important endeavor, BRAC's Social Empowerment and Legal Protection (SELP) Programme conducted a comprehensive survey of nearly 50,000 households in 2080 villages across 27 districts. The survey aimed to identify adolescent girls aged 13-17 who are at risk of child marriage and determine the underlying causes and trends.

Based on the profile of adolescent girls resulting from this survey, SELP has identified 51,582 girls aged 13-17 in 27 districts and formed a girl brigade named '*Swapnosarothi*' in 1970 villages. The programme has begun to provide them with life skills training based on a participatory and interactive module to increase their 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.

Methodology:

A non-probability purposive sampling method: BRAC made a conscious decision on what the sample needs to include and chose participants accordingly. (HHs have at least one adolescent girl aged between 13 to 17; 203 Upazilas from 27 districts; 3 to 4 unions from an Upazilas; 10 villages from a single Upazilas; 25 adolescent girls from each village, total 60 thousand adolescents targeted from ±57 thousand HHs.)

A semi-structured interview of the adult household members: A set of pre-determined open questions was applied with the opportunity for further discussion on HH's perceptions of child marriage.

Limitations:

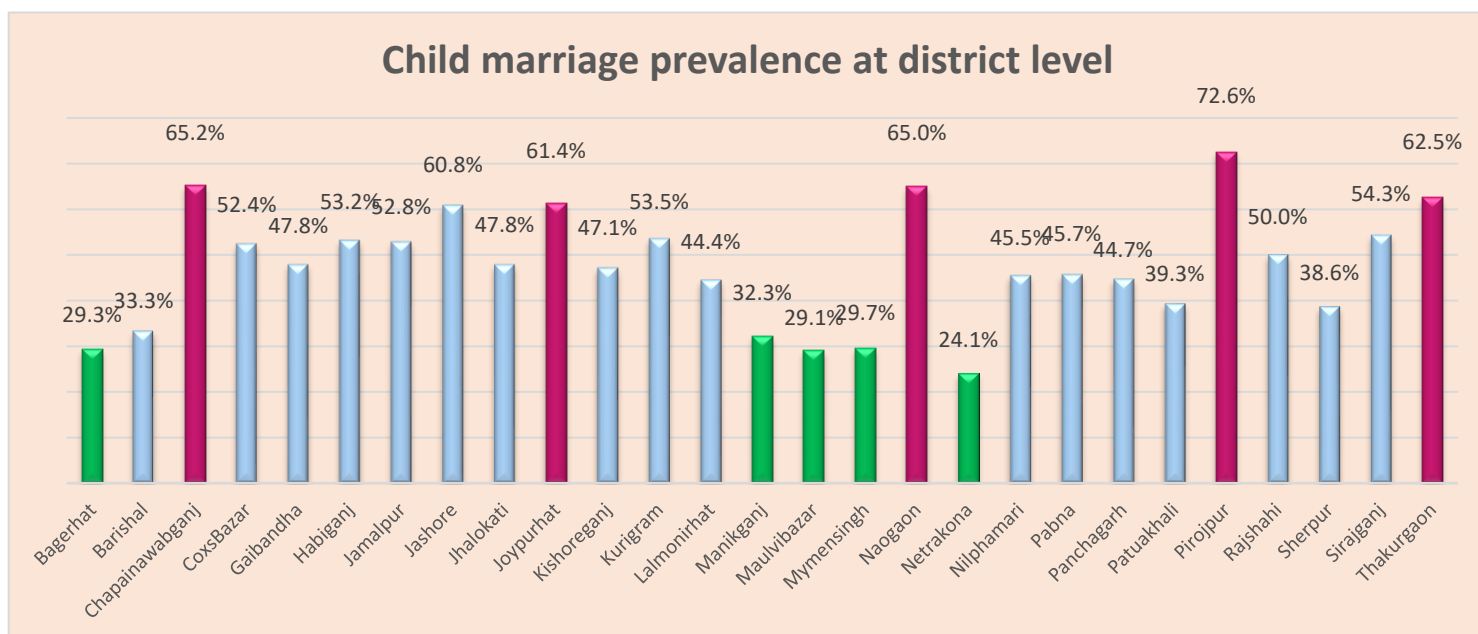
- The survey was designed to create a detailed profile of participants rather than conventional research.
- The survey population selection process was biased due to intervention criteria.
- Only 20-25 HHs were surveyed in that have at least one adolescent girl aged 13-17 years.
- Represents the child marriage trend among the girls, not the boys.
- Data was collected from 27 districts of BRAC intervention areas, therefore does not represent the country as a whole.

Key findings

Prevalence of Child Marriage

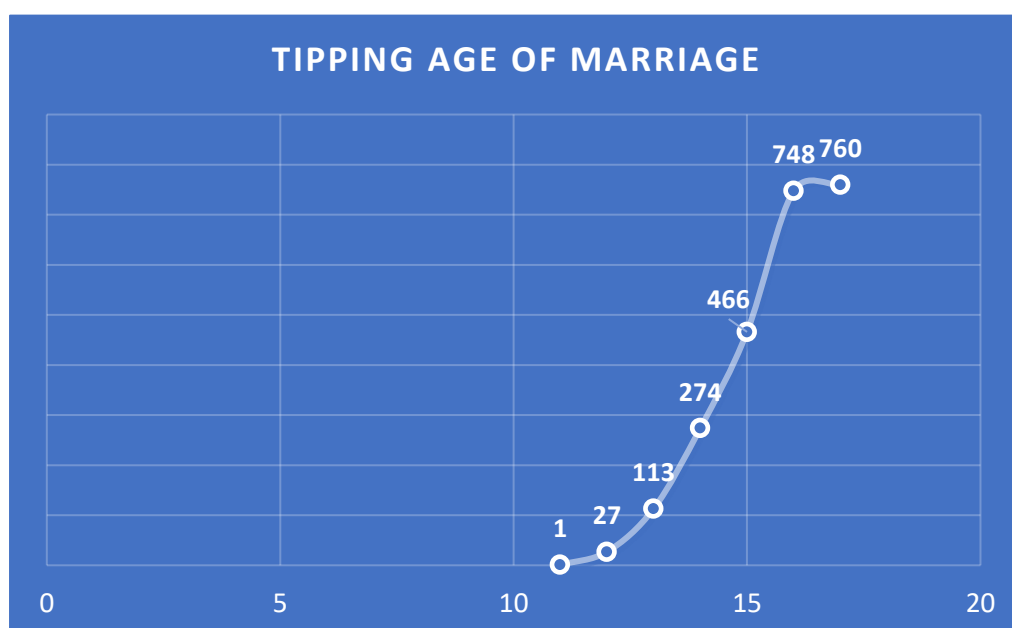
- 44.7% of girls were married off before 18 years. 6.9% of them were under 15.
- Pirojpur has the highest prevalence of child marriage (72.6%) consequently followed by Chapainawabganj (65.2%), Naogaon (65%), Thakurgaon (62.5%) and Joypurhat (61.4%).
- The prevalence is lowest in Manikganj (32.3%), Mymensingh (29.7%), Bagerhat (29.3%), Moulvibazar (29.1%) and Netrokona (24.1%) districts.

Child marriage prevalence at district level

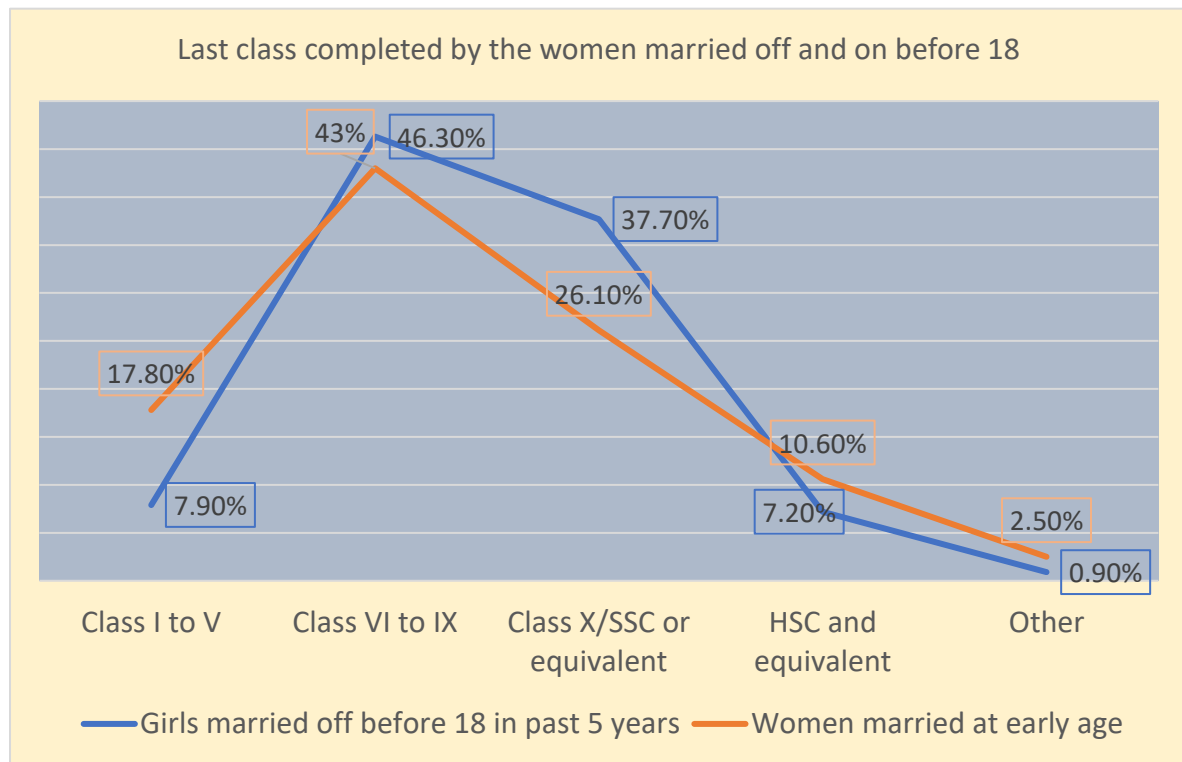


Tipping Age

Girls aged between 16 and 17 are the highest in number (63.1%) experiencing child marriage irrespective of their economic and educational status.

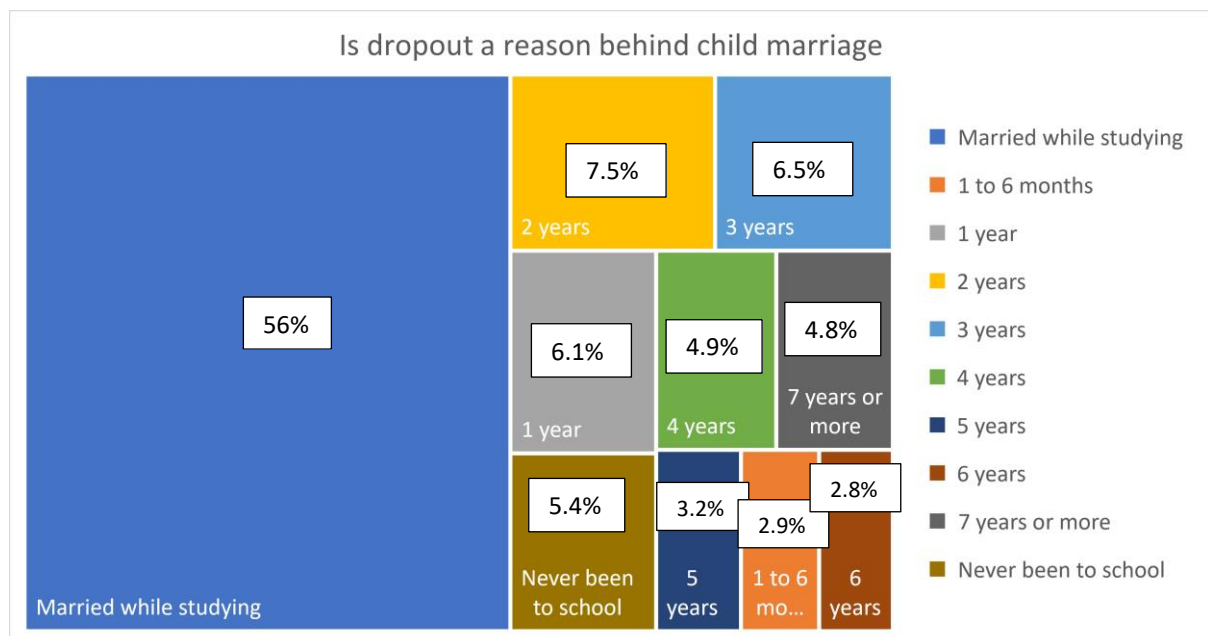


Girls who are close to completing secondary education are most vulnerable to child marriage. 46.30% of girls who fell victim to child marriage over the last 5 years were students of class nine.



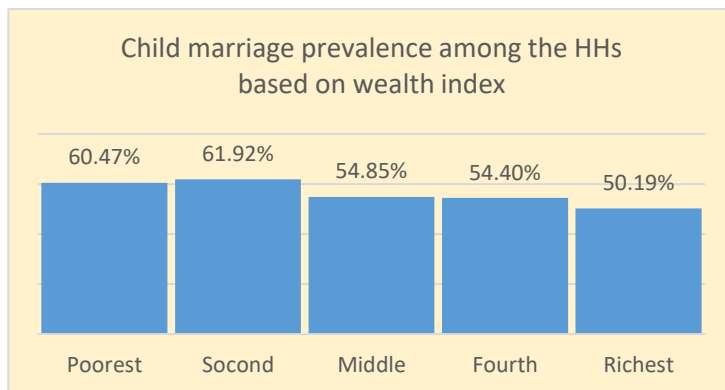
Does school dropout influence Child Marriage?

Contrary to popular belief, 56% of Girl children were married off when they were studying.



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.



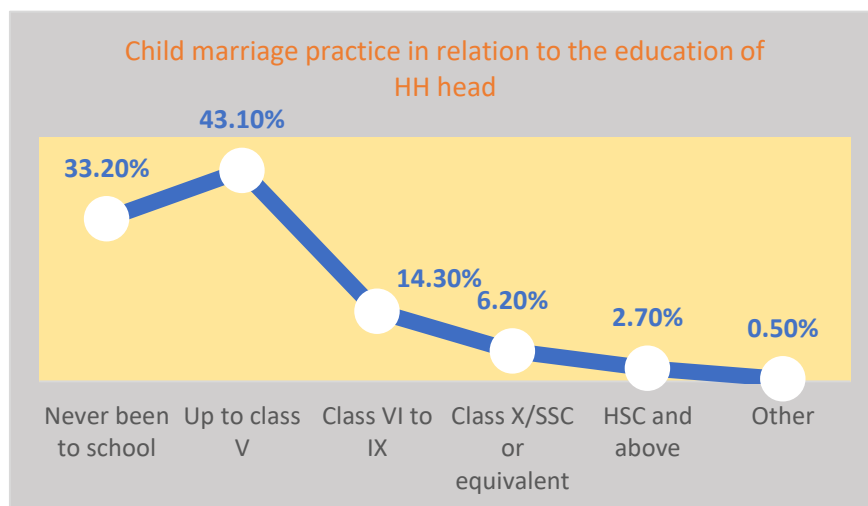
HH Income vs. Child Marriage

Also, there is no significant correlation between HH income and child marriage. The prevalence is slightly higher (58%) among the households earning 10,001-20000 BDT per month rather than those who have a monthly income of up to 10 thousand (54.2%) and above 20 thousand (54.8%).

The monthly income of the HHs	Up to BDT 10000	BDT 10001-20000	BDT 20001 and above
HH level prevalence of CM	54.2%	58.0%	54.8%

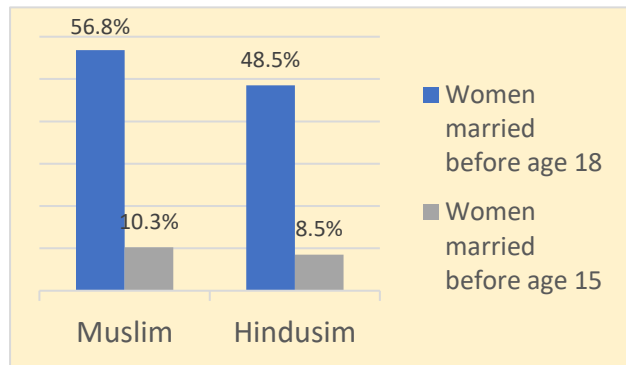
Child Marriage and parent's education

The HH head's education is positively correlated with child marriage. The higher the level of education, the lower the rate of child marriage. 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.



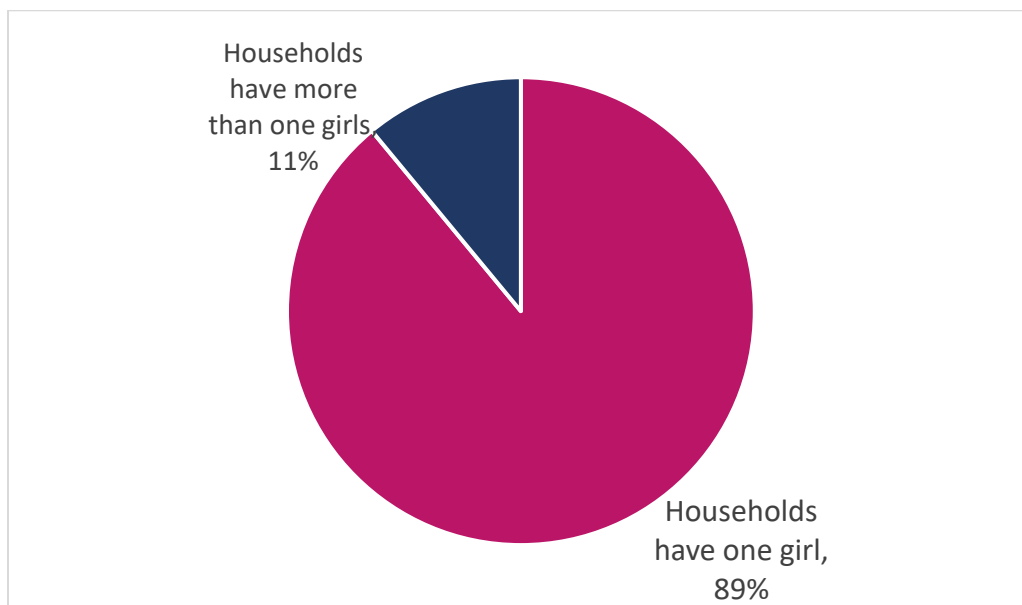
Child Marriage and Religion

Child marriage prevalence is higher among the Muslim community (56.8%) rather than the Hindu community (48.5%).



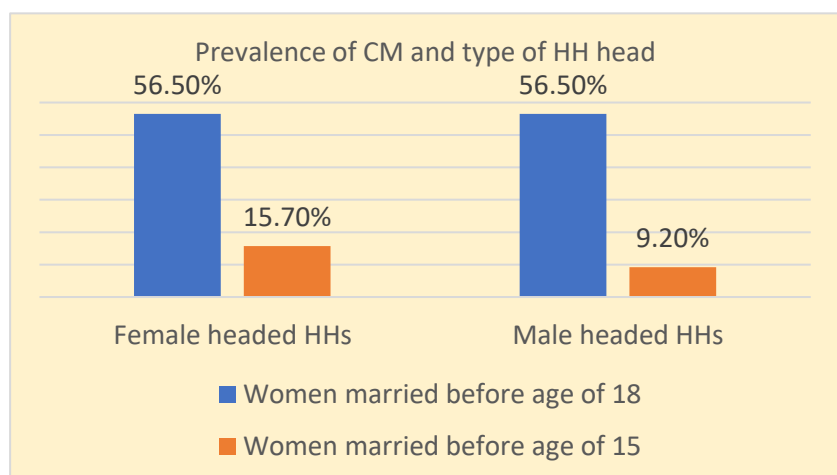
Do HHs with more than one girl tend to marry off at an early age?

Strikingly, HHs with one adolescent girl are far (89%) more likely to marry her off than HHs with more than one girl (11%).



Child Marriage in Women-Headed HH

CM prevalence is the same among the female-headed households (56.5%) compared to the male-headed households. Marriage before age 15 is higher among the female-headed households (15.7%) compared to the male-headed households (9.2%).



Child bride preference for sons in HHs

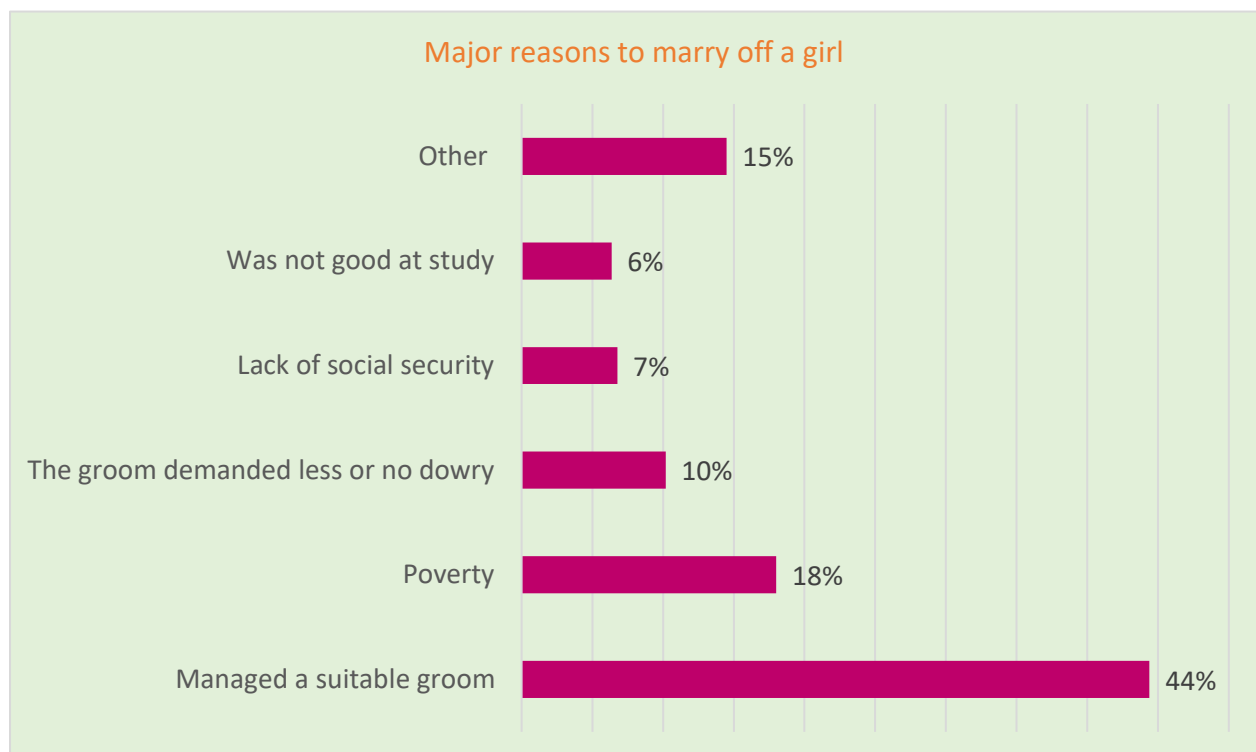
Households marrying off a girl in childhood are more likely to bring an adolescent girl as a bride. The survey found that 79% of the HHs that married off a girl at an early age, brought an under-aged girl as a bride.

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

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:

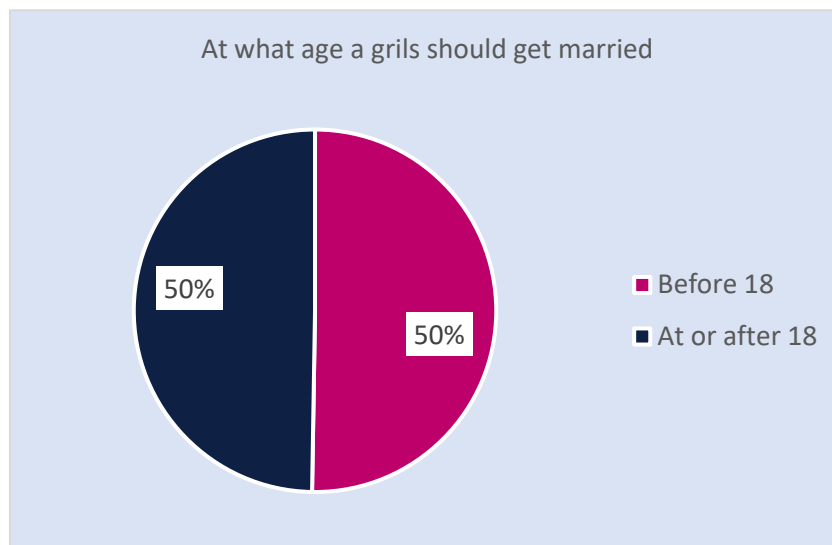
- i. Found a suitable groom (44%)
- ii. Poverty (18%)
- iii. Groom demanded no/less dowry (10%)



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.

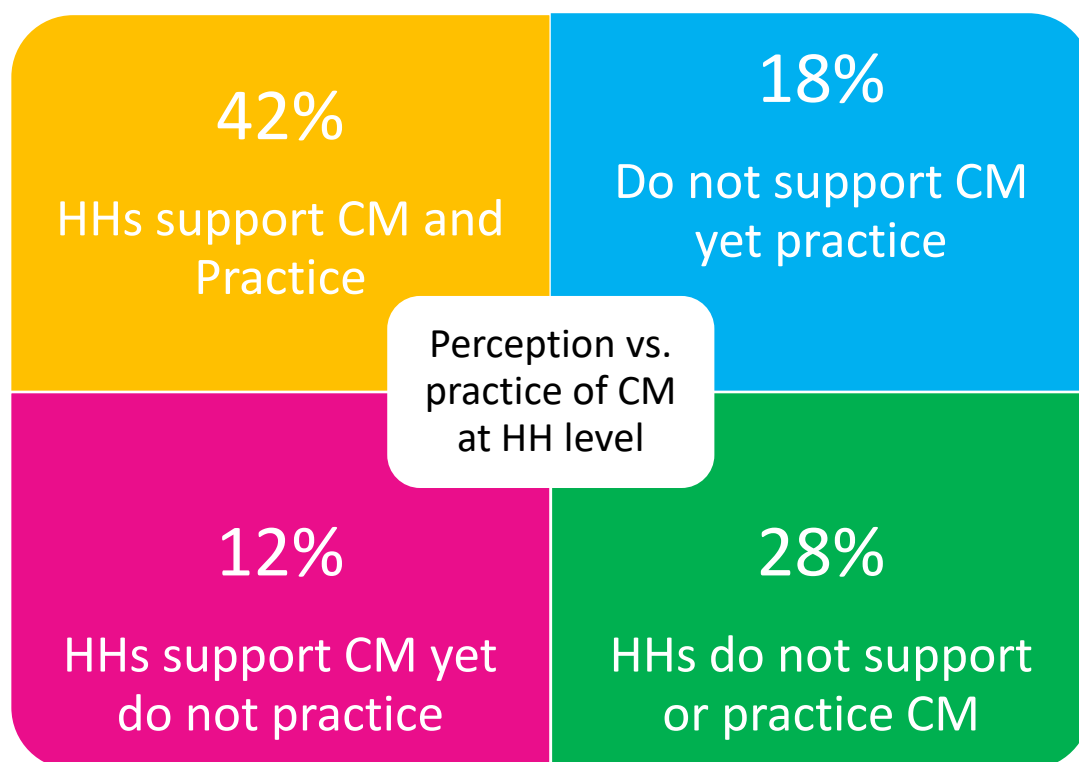
- Almost 50% believe that a girl should be married before 18 years of age, and another 50% believe that they should be married after 18 years of age.
- 7.5% of HHs believe that a girl should be married by the time they are 15.



Perception vs. Practice of Child Marriage

The survey suggests that the percentage of households in favor of child marriage and practicing 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 favorable but refrain from practicing it is 12%.



These four combinations of practicing/not practicing child marriage and supporting/not supporting it represent the tendency of child marriage at a significant level.

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 government and development partners, awareness raising, policy reform, and community involvement at large.

Annexure: Coverage districts of SELP

SL	District Name
1	Mymensingh
2	Manikganj
3	Maulvibazar
4	Netrokona
5	Jamalpur
6	Habiganj
7	Kishoreganj
8	Sherpur
9	Jashore
10	Pirojpur
11	Cox'sBazar
12	Jhalokati
13	Bagerhat
14	Patuakhali
15	Barisal
16	Gaibandha
17	Kurigram
18	Lalmonirhat
19	Thakurgaon
20	Panchaghar
21	Nilphamari
22	Rajshahi
23	Naogaon
24	Pabna
25	Sirajganj
26	Chapainwabgonj
27	Joypurhat
28	Rangpur
29	Dinajpur
30	Khulna
31	Satkhira