

NOBO JATRA-NEW BEGINNING
USAID's Resilience Food Security Activity

Study: Impact of COVID-19 on Child Marriage and Gender Based Violence in south west Bangladesh



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List of acronyms

BDT	Bangladesh Taka
BHA	Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance
CMPC	Child Marriage Prevention Committee
CMRA	Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GBV	Gender Based Violence
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LSBE	Life Skill Based Education
MCHN	Maternal Child Health and Nutrition
MoDMR	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
NAP	National Plan of Action
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund's
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
USAID	The United States Agency for International Development
VAW	Violence Against Women
VDC	Village Development Committees
WAO	Women Affairs Officer
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WVB	World Vision Bangladesh

Executive Summary

Bangladesh ranks among the five countries with the highest prevalence rates of child marriage in the world with more than one in five girls marrying before the age of 15 and half of all women aged 20-24 married age 18¹. The Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey 2017-2018, found that 59% of women aged 20–24 marry before age 18. Poverty is one of the main drivers of child marriage in Bangladesh. Despite laws intended to protect children marrying before their 18th birthday, harmful social and cultural norms regarding child marriage persist and supersede the laws.

Increases in child marriage and gender-based violence (GBV) is a threat in the context of a dynamic, evolving COVID-19 pandemic. In southwest Bangladesh where the Nobo Jatra Project (NJP) works, child marriage is a critical challenge and the average age of marriage for women is 15 (NJP baseline 2016). In July 2021, when this study was conducted, 59.3% of households reported that risks of child marriage and other forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV) have increased². This is a huge increase from 2020, when 28% of households reported that risks of child marriage and other forms of GBV had increased³. While these results are shockingly high, it is worth noting that the actual number of cases are likely even higher due to under-reporting; and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019⁴ found that 25.4% of women think partner (husband) violence is justified. The prolonged lockdowns and loss of livelihoods have inevitably worked as triggers for gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence as well as child marriage.

The wellbeing of children is fundamental to World Vision's mission and the global campaign '*It takes Me to End Violence Against Women*' is implemented in 65 countries including Bangladesh - where the specific focus is on ending child marriage. The following key themes have emerged from this study on the impact of COVID-19 on rates of GBV including child marriage.

- Scaling up awareness of child marriage and GBV through community groups (Village Development Committees, Village Savings Lending Associations, youth clubs) and inclusive school and community-based Life Skills Education sessions targeted to adolescents, teachers, and parents/guardians. This includes capacity building of school and local Government authorities on child marriage legislation and risks.
- Strengthening child protection systems including the Government of Bangladesh's Child Marriage Prevention Committees (CMPCs)

¹ Girls Not Brides, 2nd Global Meeting. Cited in Midline Report: Accelerating Action to End Child Marriage in Bangladesh, Population Council.

² NJP COVID-19 and Food Security Rapid Assessment July 2021

³ NJP COVID-19 Assessment, July 2020

⁴https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/3281/file/Bangladesh%202019%20MICS%20Report_English.pdf

- Intentionally involving faith leaders as champions to shift harmful social and cultural norms around GBV, including child marriage.
- Mobilizing community-led accountability mechanisms through youth clubs and Village Development Committees.

1. Introduction

Bangladesh ranks among the five countries with the highest rates of child marriage in the world with more than one in five girls marrying before the age of 15 and half of all women aged 20-24 married by 18.⁵ The Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey 2017-2018, found that 59% of women aged 20–24 marry before age 18. A UNICEF report, Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in Bangladesh 2020, notes that Bangladesh is home to 38 million child brides including currently married girls along with women who were first married in childhood. Of these, 13 million married before age 15. Nearly half of child brides in Bangladesh gave birth before age 18, and 8 in 10 gave birth before age 20. Married girls are also four times more likely to be out of school than unmarried girls.

Parents are usually motivated to marry their daughters off at an early age because of concerns for the girls' safety from sexual violence, their economic security, the need to conform to traditional socio-cultural expectations, and to avoid higher costs associated with later marriage and dowry demands that rise with age.⁶

A 2021 survey⁷ conducted with 6,370 households by BRAC and UN WOMEN, states that an alarmingly high incidence of child marriages have occurred in the surveyed households during the pandemic. The survey shows more than three-fourths (77%) of the marriages that took place in these households had brides who were under the age of 18, which is 26% higher than the national rate of child marriage (51%) in 2018. According to a new analysis released by UNICEF, 10 million additional child marriages may occur before the end of the decade⁸, threatening years of progress in reducing the practice and efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals⁹ (SDG's) – particularly the SDG target 5.3. ca

According to the Bangladesh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, the legal age of marriage is 18 years for a female and 21 years for a male. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and UNICEF Bangladesh jointly organized the launch of the National Plan of Action (NAP) to End Child Marriage (2018-2030). The NAP targets ending the marriage of girls below the age of 15 years and aims to reduce the rate of marriage for girls aged 18 years by one-third by 2021,

⁵ Girls Not Brides, 2nd Global Meeting. Cited in Midline Report: Accelerating Action to End Child Marriage in Bangladesh (2020), Population Council.

⁶ Accelerating Action to End Child Marriage in Bangladesh (2020), Population Council.

⁷ Demographic and Socio-economic Changes Induced by the COVID-19 Pandemic in Bangladesh: Dynamics and challenges of new circumstances' 2021, BRAC and UN WOMEN.

⁸ Unicef report

⁹ For detail see, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

and to eliminate child marriage all together by 2041.¹⁰ However, the current pandemic has stalled progress to achieve these goals.

In Bangladesh, despite laws that restrain and criminalize child marriage, enforcement of child marriage laws have been relatively poor. One reason for this is an ambiguity in the Bangladesh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, section 19, which states that a child marriage would not be considered an offense, if it was for the interest of the underage girl. However, this has to be done in line with the directives of a court, with the consent of the parents, and following due procedure. This loophole has been abused and intentionally misinterpreted leading to increased numbers of child brides. This is a cause for concern and the focus of advocacy efforts at the national level by INGOs and rights-based organizations.

Nobo Jatra ('new beginning') is a seven-year (2015-2022) USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) funded Resilience Food Security Activity to improve gender equitable food security, nutrition and resilience in southwest Bangladesh. World Vision Bangladesh (WVB), together with Winrock International, undertook the project in September 2015, integrating interventions in Maternal Child Health and Nutrition, Water Sanitation and Hygiene, agriculture and alternative livelihoods, Disaster Risk reduction, good governance and social accountability and gender to achieve its objectives. The Nobo Jatra Project (NJP) is jointly implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) of the Government of Bangladesh in Dacope and Koyra sub districts (hereafter referred to as 'Upazilas') in Khulna and Shyamnagar and Kaliganj Upazilas in Satkhira. NJP's goal is to "Improved gender equitable food security, nutrition and resilience of vulnerable people within Khulna and Satkhira districts in Bangladesh."

Child marriage is a pervasive challenge in NJP working areas – baseline data from 2016 showed that the average age of marriage was 15.2 for girls and the average age for first pregnancy was 16.9. To address these challenges, the project has taken numbers of initiatives to strengthen gender equity and equality, economic empowerment, women's participation in decision-making, awareness raising, and capacity development of youth and children with life skills training to help them stop child marriages in the community.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the risks of child marriage as families try to cope with eroded economic stability and prolonged school closures due to COVID-19. NJP's COVID-19 impact assessment in July 2020 reported that, 3.9% of households reported that they had to marry their girls before the age of 18 since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. In 2021, 11% of respondents said they knew of an incident of child marriage in their community in the previous three months. The impact assessment also found that 60% of respondents felt that the safety and security of women and girls was a concern in the context of COVID-19.

¹⁰ For detail see, <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/plan-action-launched-eliminate-child-marriage-bangladesh>

This study analyzes the state of GBV, including child marriage in NJP's four operational sub-districts.

Objectives of the research are:

- To assess the impact of COVID -19 on child marriage and GBV in NJP locations.
- To understand health risks of adolescent/teen mothers under 18 years and related malnutrition of their newborn babies
- To analyze the effectiveness of a key Government structures known as Child Marriage Prevention Committees (CMPCs) at Union, Upazila (sub district) and District level and determine the way forward for more functional CMPC committees.
- To increase World Vision's profile as an organization addressing GBV including child marriage (especially in fragile and humanitarian contexts) among policy makers, donors and partners; support WV's advocacy campaigns on violence against children, child marriage

2. Research design and methodology

Considering the complexity and sensitivity of the study, a mixed method approach using quantitative as well as qualitative research components were applied. Qualitative tools were utilized to gather information and insights on child marriage. The combination of methods and tools assisted the study team to capture perceptions, attitudes and practices of both men and women with regard to gender-based violence, including child marriage.

2.1 Quantitative Study Design

A systematic random sampling technique was applied to select the respondents. Sample size calculation to obtain point estimation of simple random sampling for early child marriage assessment

Initial sample size:
$$n_0 = \frac{z_{\alpha}^2 \times p(1-p)}{\epsilon^2}$$

N	= Total number of beneficiaries	42,000
D	= Design effect ¹¹	2
Z _α	= Z-score corresponding to the degree of confidence	
P	= Estimated prevalence of an indicator at the time of first survey**	0.50
E	= Relative precision required (margin of error 5.5%)	0.055
n _r	= Non-response rate (5%)	1.05
n ₀	= Sample size	279

¹¹ The loss of effectiveness by the use of cluster sampling, instead of simple random sampling, is the design effect. The design effect is basically the ratio of the actual variance, under the sampling method actually used, to the variance computed under the assumption of simple random sampling. Usually, the design effect 2.0 is used for a two-stage cluster sampling procedure.

Proportionately distribution to Upazila

Dacope	Koyra	Kaliganj	Shyamnagar
53	55	81	90

The study reached out to total 279 respondents with a survey questionnaire. After finalizing the questionnaire, a digital data collection tool was developed in the KoBO platform¹² for collecting data.

2.2 Qualitative Study Design

The study arranged Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with the members of Village Development Committees (VDC); FGDs were also organized with the adolescent boys and girls who attended NJP's Life Skill Based Education (LSBE) sessions. Both men and women were included in the FGDs; similarly, both adolescent boys and girls who participated in LSBE sessions were included in the FGDs. The study conducted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Government officials, members of child protection committees, faith leaders, marriage registrars, and people's representatives in four sub-districts. Therefore, qualitative information complemented quantitative data in the analysis.

Respondents	Dacope	Koyra	Kaliganj	Shyamnagar	Total
KII with Upazila Nirbahi Officer	1			1	2
KII with Upazila chairperson		1	1		2
Union Parishad Chairman		1		1	2
KII with community champions against child marriage	1		1		2
KII with Child Marriage Prevention Committee members	1	1	1	1	4
KII with marriage registrars	1	1	1	1	4
KII with school teacher	1		1		2
KII with religious leaders	2	2	2	2	8
KII with law enforcement agencies/police	1	1	1	1	4
KII with Government Women Affairs Officer	1	1	1	1	4
FGD with members of Village Development Committees		1	1		2
FGD with Life Skills Based Education participants	1			1	2
Total	10	9	10	9	38

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and qualitative data were analyzed using spreadsheet/ ATLAS.ti¹³. In addition, direct content analysis was applied. ATLAS.ti/

¹² A platform that enables digital data collection using tablets or smartphones in offline and online mode. <https://www.kobotoolbox.org/>

¹³ Qualitative analysis software to analyse large bodies of textual, graphical, audio and visual data.

Spreadsheet was applied for analyzing qualitative data for this inquiry, which supports coding, organizing and synthesizing data according to the set of questions of FGDs and KIIs.

2.3 Ethical Consideration and Consent

The informed consent process had been followed so that potential respondents can make a voluntary decision, free of coercion, regarding their participation in data collection efforts. Selected study participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study on 'child marriage' and permission sought for discussions and interviews. A prepared consent statement highlighting the objective of the study, target population, benefits, choice to freely participate, and assurance of confidentiality had been read to each respondent before being interviewed. Only individuals aged 18 years and above provided consent to participate in the study. Parents/guardians consent were obtained for interviewing girls and boys below 18 years old.

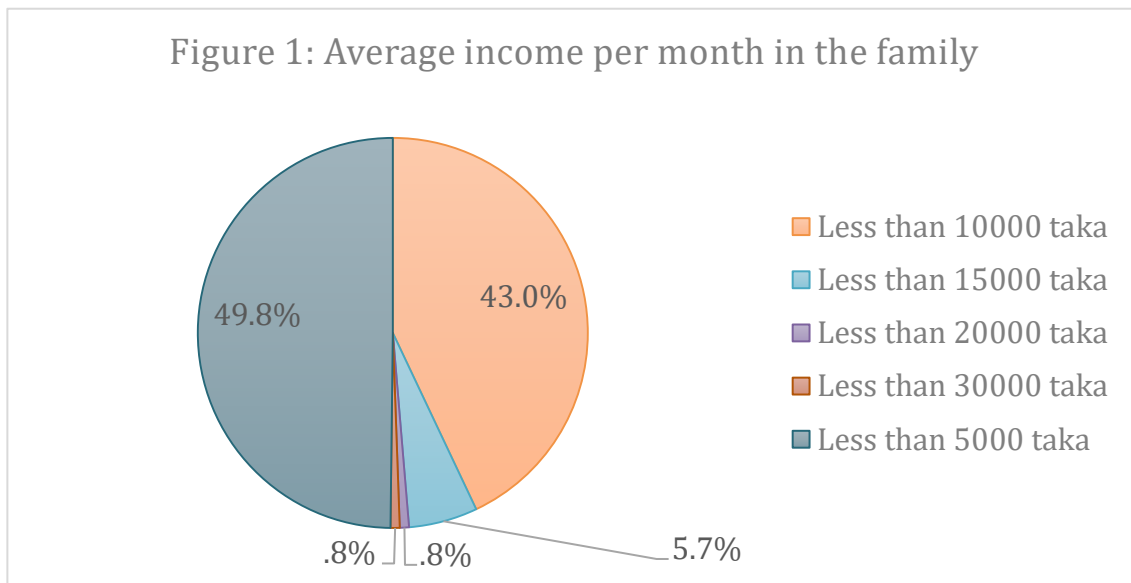
2.4 Limitations

The ongoing pandemic and restrictions imposed by local government about meetings and sessions at community level was a challenge during data collection. However, NJP had official authorization from the Divisional Commissioner Khulna to conduct a selection of activities in the community – and this study was included within the authorized activities. Further, after cyclone Yaas on 26 May 2021, muddy earth roads and stagnant waters, were a challenge for enumerators collecting data at household level.

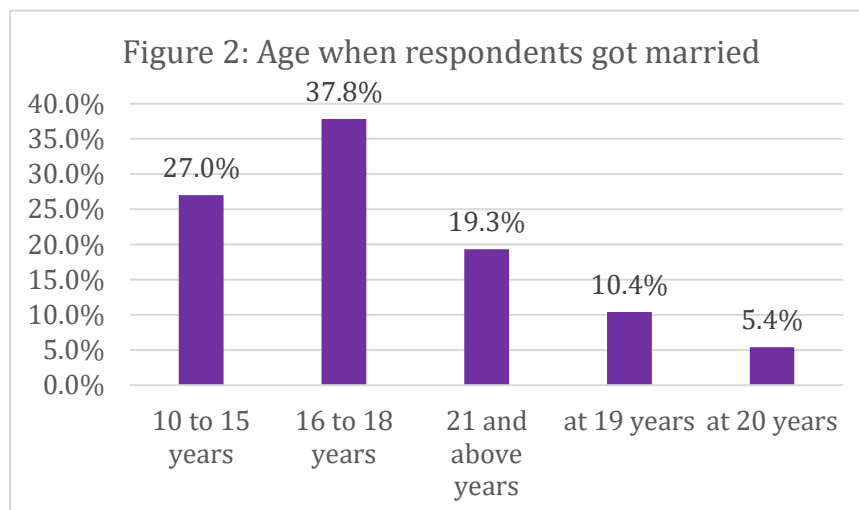
3. Findings and analysis

3.1 Household's basic information

Out of 279 participants, 263 participants were interviewed using the quantitative questionnaire. Thus, 93.4% respondents participated in the survey. 22.4% respondents did not receive education from formal education institutions, 33.1% attended elementary schools but below Grade-V and 37.3% attend high school but below Secondary School Certificate level. 43% families have incomes less than \$ 117.96 (BDT 10,000) per month and 49.8% families have income less than \$ 59 (BDT 5000) per month.

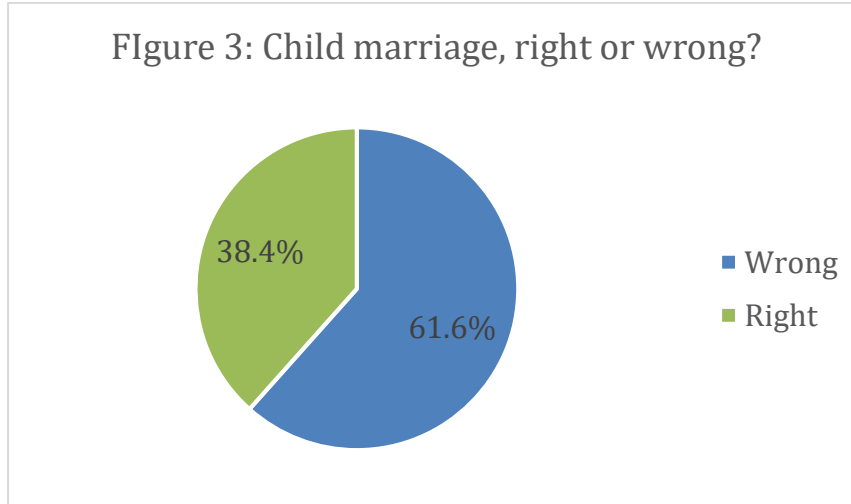


Among the respondents, 73% were female and 27% were male. 98.5% respondents are married. Child marriage is evident amongst respondents: 37.8% noted that they got married between ages of 16 to 18; and 27% between 10 to 15 years. Thus, 64.8% respondents got married before 18. Moreover, 10.4% married just at the age of 19. It is apparent from the data that girls are mostly the victims of child marriage due to deeply rooted social norms and poverty.



3.2 Knowledge of NJP participants on child marriage

NJP participants have adequate knowledge and information on child marriages issues. 87% respondents said that ‘above 18 years’ is the right age for the girls to get married, while 86.3% said that ‘above 21 years’ is the appropriate age for the boys to marry. 61.6% respondents



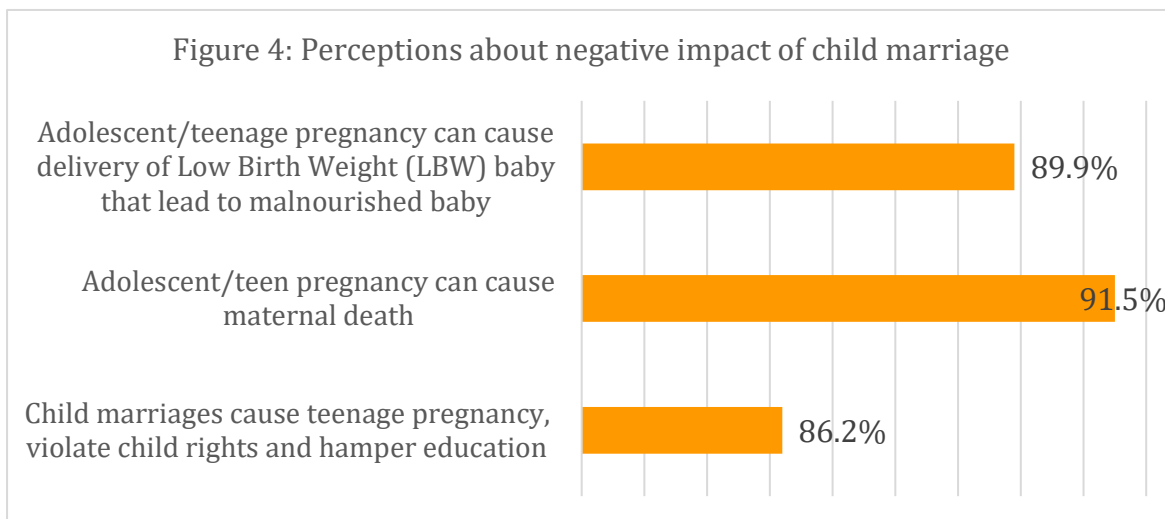
noted that child marriage is wrong; 91% participants know that Government of Bangladesh has an act to prevent child marriage. 93.5% respondents opined that child marriage is a punishable offence.

Participants know who could potentially stop

child marriage legally, for example, 78% think that law enforcing agencies or police could legally stop child marriage. 85.6% answered that chairperson and members of Union Parishad (grassroots body of local Government responsible for service provision) hold the legal authority to stop child marriages within the territory of each Union.

Only 18.3% mentioned the Child Marriage Prevention Committee (CMPC) as a legal entity that could stop child marriage. Child Marriage Prevention Committees (CMPCs) are newer Government structures created under the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017. To date, NJP has focused efforts on working with existing standing committees rather than the CMPCs. This could be a reason why there is limited knowledge of CPMCs. However, this is a gap that needs to be addressed as CPMCs are one of the main Government structures mandated to publicize the harms of child marriage, create social awareness, identify the challenges in preventing child marriage and compile data relating to the Mobile Court cases relating to child marriage in a prescribed format to share at divisional level. 38% noted that the Government Women Affairs Officer and Upazila Nirbahi Officers (highest ranking Government Official at sub district level) also play a role in stopping child marriages in Upazilas.

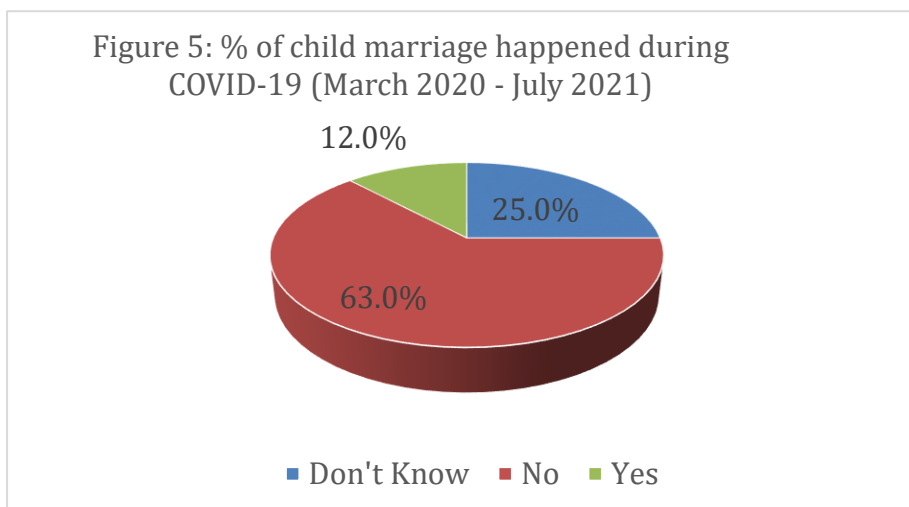
Figure 4: Perceptions about negative impact of child marriage



Respondents have sound perceptions about the negative impacts of child marriage and 86% participants could identify the potential hazards of child marriage on maternal and child health.

3.3 Reasons for child marriages and negative impacts

Figure 5: % of child marriage happened during COVID-19 (March 2020 - July 2021)



In the quantitative survey, 12% respondents witnessed child marriage¹⁴. While 63% of respondents reported that, they did not know about child marriage in their communities. However, this might not be a true reflection of the

picture on the ground, as reported by the local Imam who doubles as a registrar of marriages, "Yes, child marriage happens, I receive requests but I never register child marriage, as this is approved verbally by religious leaders"

Evidence from the qualitative data, shows that a number of factors in addition to the stress of the continued impact of COVID-19 are contributing to increased number of child marriages,

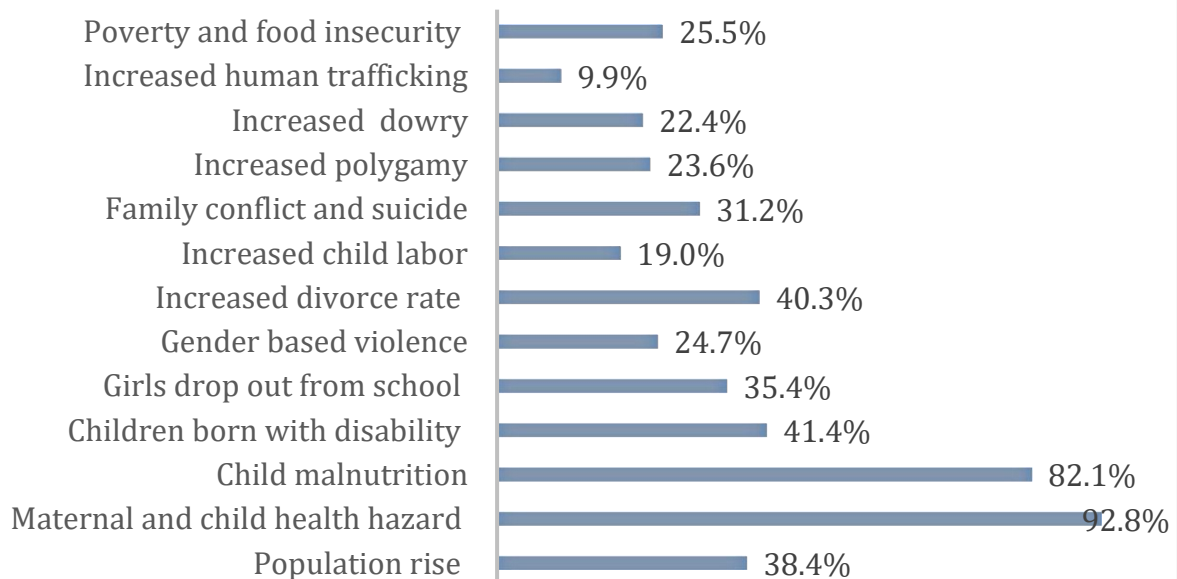
¹⁴ In another NJP assessment conducted in July 2021 on the Impact of COVID 19 on food security, 11% of respondents said they knew of an incident of child marriage in their community in the previous three months. Thus, in both assessments, around 11 to 12 percent participants noticed child marriages in the community.

for example, limited employment opportunities, limited livelihood options and dwindling savings, all combined are forcing households to adopt negative coping mechanisms. Further, the ongoing closure of schools and colleges has exacerbated the situation of GBV including that of child marriage. Thus, poverty and lack of opportunity is one of the lead reasons for child marriages in the households. In addition, school and college closures is another major reason for the increase in child marriages. In Bangladesh, the Government closed schools and colleges in March 2020 and they have not reopened as yet. Some key informants said that excessive use of mobile phones, internet, social media, leads to adolescents starting relationships and wanting to marry a partner of their choice (as opposed to a partner selected by parents, which is the traditional approach). Lockdowns imposed by local government administration resulting in adolescents spending idle time at home are also influencing parents' decisions to have their children married. In addition, lack of activity, services and information about child marriage from CMPC and standing committees is also an influencing factor.

Significant number of key informants (teachers and faith leaders) and NJP participants (Life Skill Based Education programme) of the focus group discussion noted that parents often think that 'girls are burden' and they try to shrug off responsibility. Low or no formal education and lack of awareness is also another key reason that drives parents to marry off their daughters under 18. Apart from these, social pressure, sexual harassment and lack of security compelled parents to marry off their daughters. According to key informants in Dacope and Koyra Upazilas, marriage registrars and public notaries sometime use their power and influence to arrange child marriages. Lack of responsibility and indifference of Government officials is also noted as a reason for child marriage during interviews and discussion with the informants.

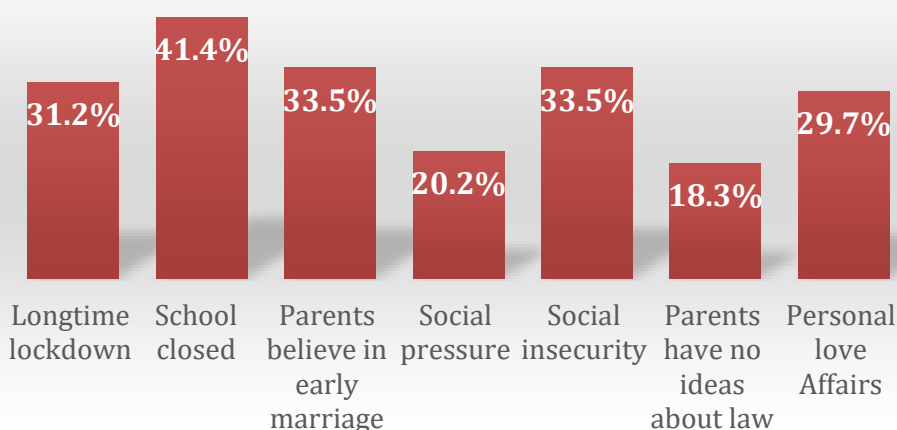
The community's perception of the risks associated with child marriage are malnutrition, poor health of mothers and children, maternal and child mortality, and children born with disabilities. The findings suggest that pressing negative impacts of child marriage are family conflicts, loss of peace in the household, misunderstanding between husband and wife and loss of harmony in conjugal life. Respondents also noted that child marriages increase physical violence cases, dispute between husband and wife, and mental stress in the households. Increased divorce rates and polygamy were also stated by respondents as negative results of child marriages. Another consequence of child marriage is that girls commonly drop out from school and are deprived of higher education. According to key informants, counterfeit/fake marriage registration takes place allowing child marriages to happen.

Figure 6: Impacts of Child Marriage



Data from the quantitative survey resonates with the findings from the qualitative inquiry. 92.8% respondents mentioned that ‘maternal and child health hazards’ is the major negative impact of child marriage; similarly 82.1% said that child malnutrition is another negative consequence. 40.3% respondents alerted that divorce rate has increased in the communities, and child marriage is the reason. 41.4% mentioned that children born with disability. 31.2% said that family conflicts and suicide rate has increased; 24.7% respondents noticed that gender-based violence has increased.

Figure 7: Reasons of child marriages



In the survey, 41.4% respondents mentioned school closure and 31.2% noted longtime lockdown as the main reasons; social insecurity (33.5%) is another key reason. According to a study¹⁵, the role

of social insecurity in driving child marriage is evident; parents become concerned regarding

¹⁵ Department of Population Sciences, University of Dhaka, 2017. Context of child marriage and its implication in Bangladesh.

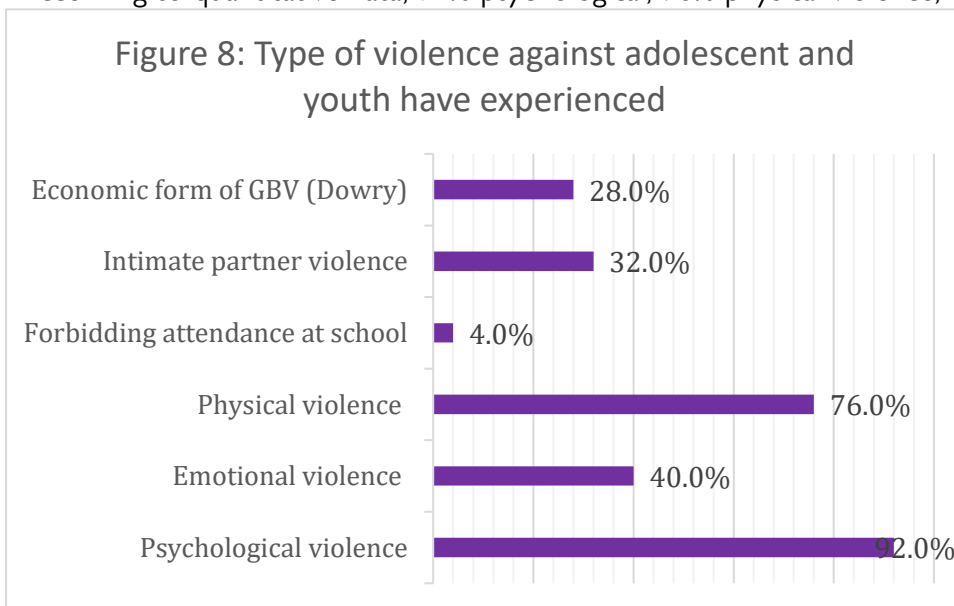
the security and safety of their daughters. In some cases, parents do not feel good sending their daughters to school due to fear of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Due to this fear, there is evidence of discontinuation of education, which might eventually lead to child marriage. In addition, parents overwhelmingly believe in child marriage (33.5%).

A member of a Village Development Committee, a community-based structure, during focus group discussion, noted, *"Adolescent mothers are there in the community. Both mother and children fall sick often; she cannot take care of her health. She does not have peace in her household and her child has malnutrition."*

Girls and boys of the of NJP's Life School Based Education sessions, during FGD, said, *"Children of adolescent mothers get illness often such as fever, diarrhea, and colds. Adolescent mothers do have a strong understanding of the importance of health and hygiene behaviors and this can affect the wellbeing of the child and the mother."*

3.4 Reasons and types of gender based violence

According to quantitative data, 92% psychological, 76% physical violence, 40% emotional



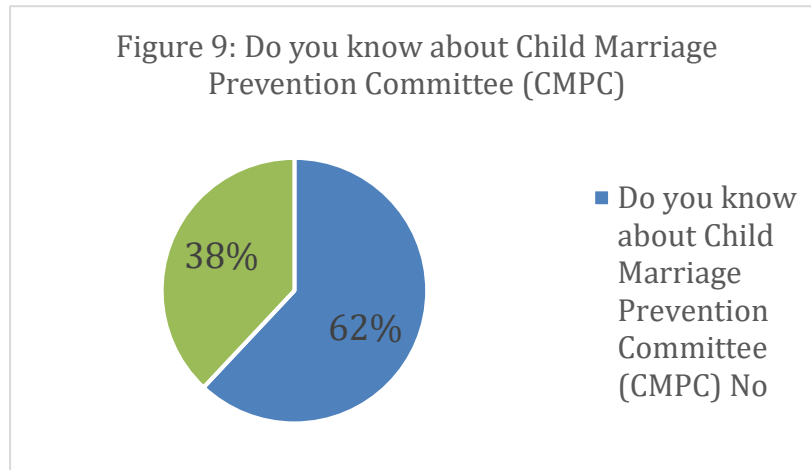
violence and 32% intimate partner violence happened during the pandemic. In the qualitative inquiry respondents mentioned financial insecurity, poverty, low income, unemployment, lack of livelihood

options as the leading cause of gender-based violence against girls during the pandemic. Respondents in the group discussions and interviews mostly noted that physical violence and psychological violence (e.g. mental torture) are the major types of violence. Key informants revealed that family conflicts, humiliation, and husband-wife disputes are also frequent in the households. Lack of mutual respect and understanding are the primary causes of disputes between husband and wives.

Informants observed increasing rates of child labor, violence against children, and child marriage cases. Rates of sexual harassment in communities were also reported as having increased. Some respondents felt that idle time, mobile phones, social media and the internet

have not been positive influences on adolescent boys and girls. Frustration, boredom, mental agitation, mental stress, and insecurity are some of the emotional challenges that family members have been experiencing in the households during lockdowns. Adolescents and youth are having difficult time due to closure of schools and colleges. Online learning is not accessible to all adolescents, especially in NJP direct participant households as the majority are categorized as poor or extremely poor.

3.5 About Government Child Marriage Prevention Committees

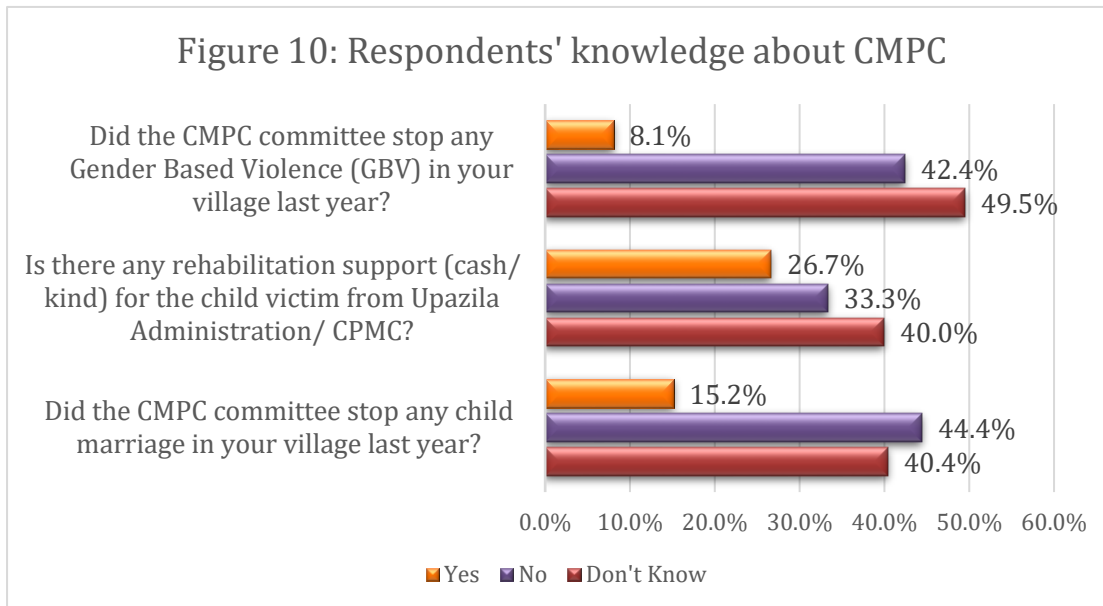


In the quantitative survey, 38% respondents know about the Child Marriage Protection Committees (CMPC), while around 62% respondents do not have idea or information about existence of such committees. During the focus group, discussion members of a Village Development Committee (VDC) in Koyra Upazila noted that they do not know of any committee but they understand that the Union Parishad plays a role to stop child marriage. The members of a VDC in Kaliganj Upazila said that there is a standing committee in the Union Parishad but they do not know about CMPC. On the other hand, adolescent boys and girls of LSBE sessions in Dacope Upaizla during FGD said that police and Union Parishad stop child marriage but they did not know about CMPCs. Boys and girls in Shyamnagar have not observed activities of CMPC or standing committee to stop GBV and child marriage.

In the qualitative inquiry when asked, most of the key informants mentioned that Upazila Nirbahi Officer¹⁶, Upazila administration, Upazila Parishad and Upazila chairperson usually take actions with regard to child marriage cases. Large number of informants noted that chairpersons, members and Union Parishad respond to child marriage cases. A significant number of respondents said that Women’s Affairs Officer in Upazilas and police administration bears major responsibility to stop child marriage. Some informants could mention that standing committee at Union Parishad stops child marriages. Fewer informants mentioned name of social welfare officer and youth development officer in this connection.

¹⁶ Highest ranking Government officer at sub district level.

Fewer respondents could acknowledge CMPC’s role to stop gender-based violence (8 of 99 respondents) including that of child marriage (15 of 99 respondents). Most of the respondent said ‘no’ and ‘do not know’ with regard to questions as shown in Figure 10.

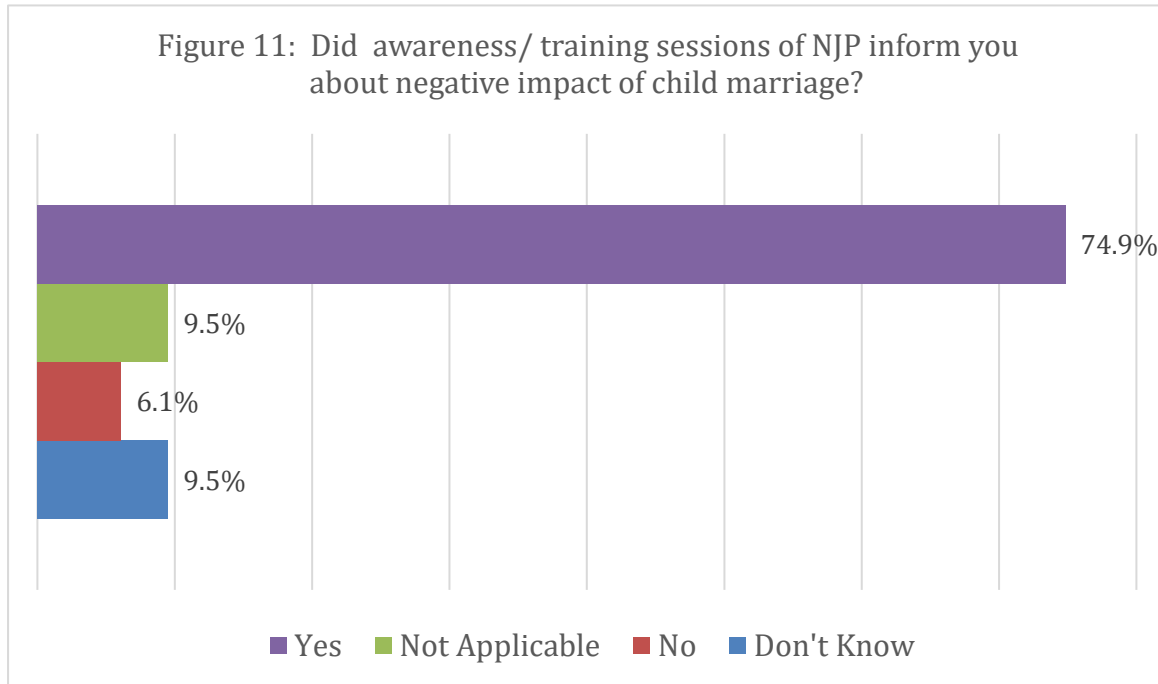


Large number of informants, while asked specifically about CMPC, said that they do not know which committee stops child marriage. Members of VDCs and adolescent boys and girls of LSBE sessions mostly said they did not know about CMPC. Some key informants (such as religious leader, police, chairman of union parishad, women affair’s officer, teacher, marriage register, youth champion, chairman of upazila parishad) said that a standing committee exist in Union Parishad, However, there is opportunity to increase awareness of these key Government structures mandated to mitigate child marriage. A member of CMPC said, *"In each union this committee consists of a women member of union parishad, a representative of NGO, a teacher, an eminent person, and Imam. Meeting takes place in every two months."*

Some youth and members of village development committees are known as “champion” because they have been working closely with NJP to stop child marriages. A champion, while interviewed as key informant, suggested, *"CMPC is there but the committee needs to become proactive and more effective."*

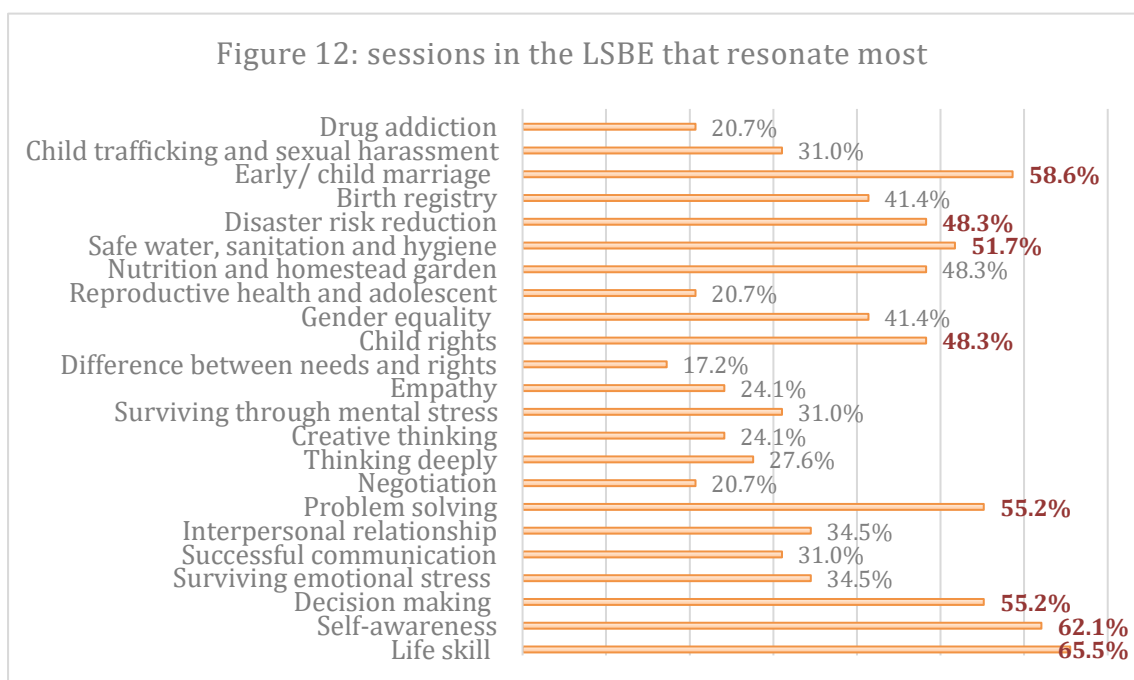
A member of CMPC, during discussion, noted, *"CMPC consists of members from upazila and union parishad, education officer, eminent persons. I have stopped two child marriages on behalf of upazila administration. I did resolve 8-10 GBV cases on behalf of upazila administration but not as a member of CMPC."*

3.6 Interventions in the Nobo Jatra project



73.8% participants said that they attended NJP facilitated sessions and received awareness messages about child marriage. 74.9% respondents confirmed that the project has adequately informed them about the negative impact of child marriages through range of training and awareness raising sessions.

Adolescent and youth respondents, in the training module of Life Skill Based Education (LSBE), noted that the following sessions were useful: child marriage (58.6%) life skill (65.5%), self-



awareness (62.1%), decision-making (55.2%), problem solving (55.2%), safe water and sanitation (51.7%).

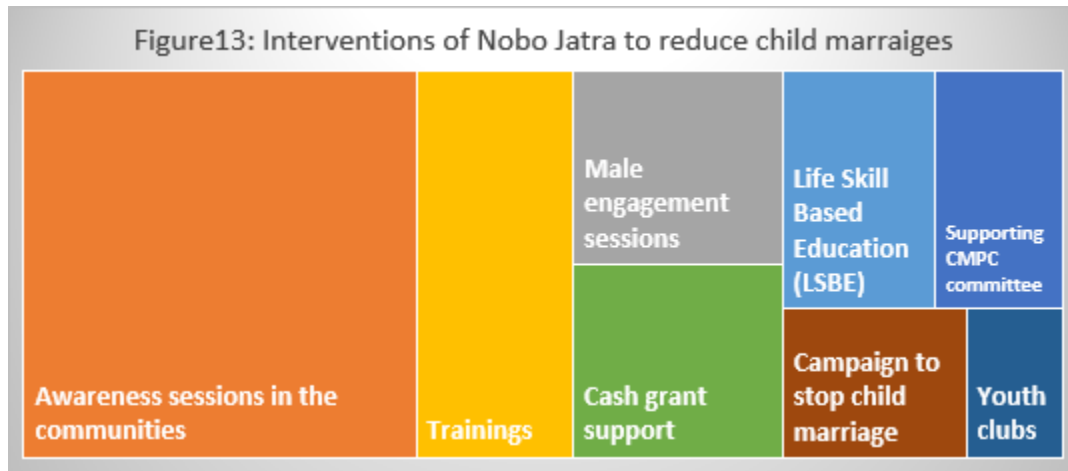
In the qualitative inquiry, a large number of informants (such as faith leaders, members of the child protection committee, the chairperson of Union Parishad, marriage registrars and other champions) appreciated activities such as awareness raising, capacity development, awareness sessions, meetings, and posters on child marriage issues. Life Skill Based Education programme at schools was also mentioned by the key informants (upazila women affairs officer, teacher, upazila chair, Upazila Nirbahi Officers, marriage registrars, and faith leader) as effective to aware students, teachers and parents. LSBE sessions increased knowledge base of adolescent boys and girls in the schools. Students understand very well about the negative impacts of child marriage and built confidence and knowledge to advocate against child marriage within their family or in the community.

NJP has facilitated meetings and coordination with Government Standing Committees at union level, and with Upazila administration and police. Standing committees did exist but in most cases, these committees were not functional; NJP took initiatives to activate these committees at Union and Upazila level ensuring representation of women.

International and national day observations, street-drama, traditional songs, and debates, cycle rallies drew attention of the community about negative impacts of child marriage and gender based violence. Qualitative findings suggests that economic empowerment of women, entrepreneurial literacy, ultra-poor graduation, nutrition safety nets and overall multi layered approach of NJP have created positive impact in the vulnerable communities. While interviewed, a Women's Affairs Officer said, *"I am here in Shyamnagar for 10 months; I have heard lots of appreciation about this project. The project facilitates awareness sessions, training, meetings, male engagement approach, LSBE, day observations, cash transfer, and so on."*

Awareness raising meetings with the marriage registrars and faith leaders (Imam and purohit) were particularly useful as they are influential actors at community level. A faith leader noted, while interviewed, *"I have had the superstition that girls should be married early. I did not have much information about child marriage. Nobo Jatra had invited me in the meetings and events; they made me realized the issue. Now I am a member of Child Marriage Prevention Committee. They have opened my inner eye. Now I work for stopping child marriages."*

79.8% respondents opined that awareness sessions are the most effective intervention of Nobo Jatra project to stop child marriage. Training (31.9%), male engagement sessions (21.3), and cash grant support (21.3) were also very useful.



4. Success story

Eka, a brave teenager in Bangladesh, says NO to child marriage



USAID and World Vision Bangladesh equip teenagers with the knowledge and skills to choose education over child marriage

The U.N. children’s agency, UNICEF, estimates more than 650 million¹⁷ women alive today were married before the age of 18. Even in countries where there are laws to prevent child marriage — like Bangladesh — the practice is deeply rooted in culture and largely accepted in society. Laws are inconsistently enforced, and most people are not even aware that the practice is illegal. Children are often allowed to marry as long as there is parental consent, regardless of their age.

But the practice is devastating for girls. Child marriage can significantly impact a girl’s ability to continue with her education. Many girls are forced to drop out in order to focus on domestic responsibilities or to raise children of their own. As children themselves, they are not physically and emotionally prepared to become mothers. Teen moms and their babies are both at a higher risk of dying in childbirth. In fact, complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death globally among adolescent girls ages 15 to 19¹⁸. Robbed of the chance to grow, learn, and fully realize their potential, child brides are disempowered. Without an education, they are unable to end the cycle of poverty for themselves or their family.

These are all things that Eka, 14, learned when she was selected to participate in a life skills education course at her school in Khona village in southwest Bangladesh. During the course, 20

¹⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/25-million-child-marriages-prevented-last-decade-due-accelerated-progress-according>

¹⁸ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>

students – 10 boys and 10 girls – in each of 142 high schools and in communities, are taught leadership and communication skills, as well as the dangers of child marriage. So far, over 19,000 teenagers have completed the course.

When Eka’s parents began to arrange a marriage for her to a man at least 20 years older than her, she had the confidence and knowledge to say no besides seeking community support to stop the marriage.

“I raised my voice against it,” says Eka. “I said to my parents, ‘Right now, I don’t want to get married. I have a long life and a dream in front of me.’”

Eka’s parents resisted initially, but from the life skills education course, Eka was well-equipped. Eka had the confidence, communication skills and child marriage data that helped her succeed in convincing her parents.

“Again and again, I tried to make them understand,” she says. “I want to be something in my life. I want to help my parents, too. And I was able to convince them!”

Eka’s triumph does not end there: Shortly thereafter, Eka’s 14-year-old cousin learned that her parents were arranging her marriage. However, Eka successfully convinced her cousin’s parents to decide against the marriage. Both she and her cousin were able to continue their education.

“I felt so good that I could stop the marriages,” Eka says.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures by the Government of Bangladesh to curb the virus, Eka has stayed busy and proactive. To start, Eka enrolled herself in courses on tailoring and basic computer skills. She also graduated high school with the secondary school certificate and is now a first-year college student. Eka now dreams of becoming a nurse and is determined to continue stopping child marriages in her community.

Eka’s parents are proud of the skills Eka has learned through the life skills education sessions. Eka has developed qualities that they want their children to have, including higher levels of confidence and the ability to adapt in a changing world.

To make sure more children can benefit from the life skills education sessions, USAID and World Vision are working with Bangladesh’s Department of Education to include the sessions as part of standard secondary schools’ curriculum in the future.

5. Recommendations

1. **More community education and awareness activities are required by Government and non-Government agencies and communities on risks of child marriage, and the implications of the Child marriage Restraint Act.** Training and awareness sessions at courtyard and ward level were identified as useful by participants. Intentionally engaging parents, religious/faith leaders,

Government officials, adolescents and youth to build awareness on the risks and legislation on child marriage (including where to report instances) would be effective. Additionally popularizing Government hotline numbers in the communities would be useful.

2. **Stricter implementation of Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017 (CMRA)** was highly recommended by the key informants, respondents and government officials to stop child marriages. Marriage registrars, who violate the Act, should be held accountable and brought under jurisdiction. Marriage registrars should scrutinize age certificates of girls and boys carefully before registration. Administration officials need to pay attention to ensure punishment for fake registrations cases and marriages arranged by notaries.
3. **Ensure functionality, increase effectiveness and raise awareness on Child Marriage Protection Committees/ standing committee** at the Union Parishad and Upazila level. Capacity building of members is critical. One way to do this is to incorporate information on these committees consistently in all of NJP's SBC messaging to raise awareness on the role of the committees and where/how to contact them.
4. **A strong monitoring system is required to stop child marriage.** An accountability mechanism of Upazila administrations, local government institutions, and union parishad should be established to monitor child marriage cases.
5. A counselling center should be established in schools for adolescents to learn about menstrual health and hygiene. . **Life Skill Based Education at school** will inform and raise awareness on child marriage and its associated risks for adolescent boys, girls, teachers and parents.
6. **Women's economic empowerment activities** through diverse livelihood options and income generating activities. Village Savings and Lending Associations comprising poor and extreme poor women are key entry points to disseminate information on gender-based violence including child marriage.
7. **Mobilizing and increasing effectiveness of youth clubs** for stopping child marriage and gender-based violence at the community level. The project has taken numbers of initiatives to facilitate the youth clubs and youth journalists so that they could continue to organize mass awareness activities as a part of their voluntary works like community theatre, courtyard session etc. to stop child marriage.

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Annexes

Questions for the qualitative inquiry



Set of questions.Engli
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Set of question in English	Set of questions.Engli sn.zip
Set of question in Bengali	Set of questions.Bang la.rar

Survey questionnaire for quantitative analysis

Questionnaire
On
The study titled - Impact of Covid-19 on Child Marriage in south west
Bangladesh

Name of the interviewer.....

Serial Number:.....

Good morning/ afternoon,

My name is _____. Currently I am conducting a research titled 'Impact of Covid-19 in child marriage in south west Bangladesh' for Nobo Jatra project implemented by World Vision Bangladesh with its partner organizations. The purpose of this questionnaire is to ask questions about child marriage issues. All the information in this questionnaire will remain confidential. No information such as your name or address or any detail that would identify you will be used in any way. This interview will take approximately 90 minutes. Your questions and responses are confidential, and your name will never be used with the information you will provide. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question at any time during the discussion. You may withdraw yourself from the interview at any time. Your participation is very valuable for us and for the future of the project. So, will we continue with the interview?

 Yes

 No

(Parents/ guardian of respondent under 18 will provide consent for this interview)

Interviewer's/Facilitator's Signature _____

Date _____

Questions	Coding categories	Code
Name of the district		1
		2
Name of the Upazila		1
		2
		3
		4
Name of the Union		
Name of the Village		
Name of the Respondent		
Respondent's mobile number		

Section 1: General Information

Sociodemographic characteristics. First, we want to ask you some questions about your age, your current education/ employment status, and who you live with.

QUESTIONS AND FILTERS	CODING CATEGORIES
1.1. How old are you?	10-18 years1 19-25 years.....2 25-35 years.....3 35-50 years.....4 50 to above.....5
1.2 Type of respondent?	LSBE participants1 Youth leaders.....2 CPC members3 Faith leaders/religious leaders.....4 Teachers/SMC5 Law enforcing agency/ Police.....6 VDC members.....7 Project participants/parents8 Marriage registers9
1.3. What is the highest degree you have completed?	No Education.....1 Below class 5.....2 Below SSC.....3 HSC.....4 Degree/honors.....5 Masters.....6 Other.....7 (please specify)
1.4. How many persons do live in your household?	More than 2 persons.....1 More than 4 persons.....2 More than 6 persons.....3 Only me..... 4 (skip to 1.5)
1.5. Who lives with you?	Partner/spouse1 My children.....2 My parent (own and in laws).....3 My brother/sister (own and in laws)4 Children of My brother/sister (own and in laws) ...5 My relatives.....6
1.6. Who is principle earner in your family?	Husband.....1 Wife.....2 Father.....3 Mother.....4

	Son.....5 Daughter.....6 Other.....7 (please specify) Note: Multiple answer is accepted
1.7. What is the main source of income in your home?	Farmer1 Agricultural day labor2 Earthwork3 Blacksmith4 Boatman/Trawler d.....5 Fishing Worker6 Rickshaw/Van / Motorcycle7 Business/ shops.....8 Animal husbandry.....9 Service/ Jobs10 Pension.....11 Government support (welfare).....12 Other (specific).....13 Note: Multiple answer is accepted
1.8. How much is the average income per month in the family?	Less than 5000 taka.....1 Less than 10000 taka.....2 Less than 15000 taka3 Less than 20000 taka.....4 Less than 30000 taka.....5 More than 30000 taka6
1.9 Are you married?	Yes1 No.....2
1.10 At what age did you get married?	10 to 15.....1 15 to 182 at 19.....3 at 204 21 and above.....5

Section 2: Respondents' Knowledge about Child Marriage

QUESTIONS AND FILTERS	CODING CATEGORIES
2.1 Do you know about the right age of marriage according to law?	Yes1 No.....2
2.2 What is the right age limit of girls for marriage?	5-10.....1 10-15.....2 15-18.....3 19.....4 20 and above.....5

2.3 What is the right age limit of boy for marriage?	10-15.....1 15-18.....2 18-20.....3 21 and above4
2.4 What do you think about Child Marriage? Is it right or wrong?	Right1 Wrong.....2
2.5 Do you know Government of Bangladesh has an act to prevent child marriage?	Yes1 No2
2.6 Do you know Child Marriage is a punishable offence?	Yes1 No2
2.7 Who can legally stop the child marriage?	Law enforcing agencies/police.....1 CMPC committee2 UP Chairman/Members3 UNO/DC/Women Affairs Officers4 Teachers.....5 Youth6 Other (specific).....7

Section 3: Child marriage, health risks and nutrition

QUESTIONS AND FILTERS	CODING CATEGORIES
3.1 Did you get pregnant? (For women respondents)	Yes1 No2
3.2 At what age did you get pregnant? (For women respondents)	10 to 15.....1 15 to 182 at 19.....3 at 204 21 and above.....5
3.3 Do you have a baby less than 6 months old?	Yes1 No2
3.4 During pregnancy/when you were pregnant of your youngest baby, did your spouse/partner accompany you for any ANC visit? (For women respondents)	Yes1 No2
3.5 My husband buys me nutritious food as a pregnant woman, breast feeding mother, or to feed our youngest child. (For women respondents) (base on respondent's current situation)	Yes1 No2
3.6 Do you know that child marriages cause teen pregnancy, interfered child rights and education?	Yes1 No.....2

3.7 Do you know that adolescent/teen pregnancy can cause maternal death?	Yes1 No2
3.8 Do you know that adolescent/teen pregnancy can cause delivery of Low Birth Weight (LBW) baby that lead to malnourished baby?	Yes1 No2
3.9 Is there teen mother (under 18 years) in your community?	Yes1 No.....2
If answer of 3.9 is yes then, 3.10 Does the teen mother (under 18 years) have malnutrition-baby?	Yes1 No.....2

Section 4: Impact of Covid-19 on Child Marriage

QUESTIONS AND FILTERS	CODING CATEGORIES
4.1 Did child marriage incident take place during lockdown due to Covid-19 in your village	Yes1 No2
If answer of 4.1 is yes then, 4.2 During COVID lockdown how many girl children (under age 18) did get married in your village?	1-31 3-52 5-103 10 and above.....4
4.3 What was the major reason of Child Marriage in your community?	Longtime lockdown1 School closed2 Family suffered financial crisis.....3 Parents believe in early marriage.....4 Social pressure.....5 Social insecurity6 Parents have no ideas about law.....7 Personal love Affairs8 Others.....9 (please mention here)
4.4 Did you take action while child marriage incident took place in your community?	Yes1 No2
If answer of 4.4 is yes, then 4.5 What was your role?	I protested against child marriage.....1 Talked with girl's parents2 I informed law enforcing agencies3 I informed UNO/Women affairs officers.....4 I informed local chairman/youth leaders/ CMPC committees.....5

	I informed Nobo Jatra staff.....6 I didn't take any action.....7 Others8 (please mention here)
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Section 5: Role of Child Marriage Prevention Committee (CMPC)

QUESTIONS AND FILTERS	CODING CATEGORIES
5.1 Do you know about Child Marriage Prevention Committee (CMPC) in your union parishad?	Yes1 No2
5.2 What is the role of Child Marriage Prevention Committee (CMPC)?	They create awareness in community1 They stop child marriage2 They take legal action3 Rescue girls and boys4 Support girls and boys for education5 They do nothing6 Others.....7 (please mention here) Note: Multiple answer is accepted
5.3 Did the CMPC committee stop any child marriage in your village last year?	Yes1 No2
If answer of 5.3 is yes, then 5.4 What number of Child Marriage did CMPC committee stop in your village last year?	1-31 3-52 5-103 10 to above4
5.5 Is there any rehabilitation support (cash/ kind) for the child victim from Upazila Administration/ CPMC?	Yes1 No2
5.6 Victim child does receive support from which department?	Please mention here(insert code)
5.7 What kind of support (cash/kind) is provided to the family?	Please mention here(insert code)
5.8 Is the support useful for the family to refrain from doing Child Marriage?	Yes1 No2

5.9 Did the CMPC committee stop any Gender Based Violence (GBV) in your village last year?	Yes1 No2
5.10 How many GBV cases have been dealt by Child Marriage Prevention Committee (CMPC) in last year?	1-31 3-52 5-103 10 to above4
5.11 Is there any rehabilitation support (cash/ kind) for the GBV victim from Upazila Administration/ CPMC?	Yes1 No2

Section 6: Nobo Jatra's interventions to stop Child Marriage

QUESTIONS AND FILTERS	CODING CATEGORIES
6.1 Do you know about Nobo Jatra Project?	Yes1 No2
6.2 Did you participate in the LSBE sessions? (for adolescent and youth respondent)	Yes1 No2
6.3 Which topics in the training module of LSBE do resonate with you? (for adolescent and youth respondent)	Life skill1 Self-awareness2 Decision making3 Surviving emotional stress4 Successful communication.....5 Interpersonal relationship ,.....6 Problem solving.....7 Negotiation8 Thinking deeply9 Creative thinking10 Surviving through mental stress11 Empathy12 Difference between needs and rights.....13 Child rights14 Gender equality15 Reproductive health and adolescent16 Nutrition and homestead garden17 Safe water, sanitation and hygiene18 Disaster risk reduction19 Birth registry20 Early/ child marriage21 Child trafficking and sexual harassment22 Drug addiction23 Note: Multiple answer is accepted

6.4 What kind of violence did you experience? (for adolescent and youth respondent)	Psychological violence.....1 Emotional violence2 Physical violence3 Stalking4 Sexual harassment5 Forbidding attendance at school6 Forced marriage7 Intimate partner violence8 Dowry9 Note: Multiple answer is accepted
6.5 Did you participate in the courtyard sessions on child marriage facilitated by Nobo Jatra?	Yes1 No2
6.6 Did you participate in any training/ workshop on child marriage facilitated by Nobo Jatra?	Yes1 No2
6.7 What are the impact of child marriage?	Population rise1 Maternal and child health hazard2 Child malnutrition3 Children born with disability4 Girls drop out from school5 Gender based violence6 Increased divorce rate7 Increased child labor8 Family conflict and suicide.....9 Increased polygamy10 Increased dowry11 Increased human trafficking12 Poverty and food insecurity13 Note: Multiple answer is accepted
6.8 Did awareness/ training sessions of NJP alert you about negative impact of child marriage?	Yes1 No2
6.9 Did male engagement session support NJP participant to build a good conjugal relationship between husband & wife?	Yes1 No2
6.10 Which intervention of Nobo Jatra did support to reduce Child Marriage most in your village?	Life Skill Based Education (LSBE)1 Courtyard sessions.....2 Male engagement sessions.....3 Trainings4 Supporting CMPC committee5 Cash grant support6 Youth clubs7

	Campaign to stop child marriage.....8
	Others.....9 (Please mention here)



Questionnaire in Bengali
Questionnaire.docx