

# Marital Status of Women in Slum Areas of Dhaka City

## Introduction

Violence against women is rampant in Bangladesh. Especially domestic violence perpetrated against a woman by her husband is never documented. The husbands' often maltreat them. They are not conscious about their legal rights. Deteriorating socioeconomic conditions of slum dwellers is a major cause of unstable and fragile life of married women living there. Female in the slum becomes an easy victim of violence by her husband mainly because of constant demand of dowry, which the family cannot meet, and also polygamy and economic insecurity. These women in many cases had married without registration. Most of them get married at an early age, which affects their health and marital life. They are not conscious about their legal rights. Most of the women did not have any knowledge that they can take legal steps and can claim dower (Mohr) money, which the husband promised to give to his wife during marriage.

## Objective of the study

The objective of the study was to identify problems of married women living in selected slum areas related to their married life, their opinion on how to handle these problems and their concept about women's rights.

## Methodology

The research was based on review of secondary materials, survey and case study. In addition to that, informal discussions have been conducted with the community to have a clear picture of the slum and slum dwellers. The primary data was collected through direct interview method by using pre tested structured interview schedule. The team also gathered some information through informal discussion. The team also collected data through observation on the living condition of the slums, its sanitary and drainage facilities, supply system of pure drinking water, unhygienic condition etc. The data collection was done during the month of January 2006.

For the study the research team members visited following three different slums in Dhaka city selected on the basis of accessibility:

- a. Kallyanpur Slum in Mirpur
- b. Magbazar Wireless Gate Slum
- c. Tejgaon Rail Gate Bashpotty Slum

**The sample** size of the study: One hundred fifty married women, 50 from each slum were selected for interview. As each research team walked through the slum, the sample women were selected on the basis of availability of married women at their homestead.

## **Limitations**

1. Initially, the respondents were suspicious about the intention of researchers. In some cases, the researchers had to struggle hard to convince the respondents for getting appropriate information.
2. There was no privacy. Interview of the respondents conducted in presence of their husband or mother-in-law. So the respondents felt uneasy and probably sometimes concealed information.
3. Some of the married women were reluctant to participate in the interview because there was no monetary benefit. But their information could have enriched our research report.
4. Regarding the information about age, most of them did not know their age. So in majority of cases age was estimated.
5. Age of women at the first marriage was difficult to collect because of same reason.
6. Sample size was only 150, which is not sufficient to make any generalization
7. Time constraint was one of the main limitations. More time was needed for collecting more in-depth information

## **Findings**

### **1. Living Condition:**

Most of the families had an average space allocation of 10feet by 12 feet. More than five members live in only one room house and in a very unhygienic condition. They usually cook, wash clothes and take shower beside the drain, which is two feet away from their house.

### **2. Background Information of the Respondents.**

#### **2.1 Age of the respondents:**

The respondents were young in the age group of 15-24 years.

#### **2.2 Educational background of the respondent:**

A large number of respondents were illiterate.

#### **2.3 Occupation of the respondent:**

Most of the women are not engaged in any income generating activities, which makes them economically dependant on their husbands. Working women include garment workers, housemaid, and women in small business and daily labour. Some of the respondents were helping their husbands in their business. Respondents working, as housemaid answered that they do not work. It reflects that, they want to hide the fact that they are housemaids.

## **2.4 Monthly household income:**

The data shows that many of the respondents belonged to fairly poor economic group. Monthly household income of respondents ranged between Tk. 1000 to Tk. 10,000.

## **3. Information Related to Marital Condition of the Respondents:**

### **3.1 Age at first marriage:**

Age at first marriage was between 10-15 years. This shows that a large number of respondents married for the first time before their puberty or after few months of puberty. So in most cases the tender aged wife lacked knowledge about conjugal life and they did not have knowledge that it can be unsafe for their health.

### **3.2 Marriage Registration:**

The respondents said that there should be effective implementation of the law related to marriage registration. However, most of the respondents got marriage registration document (Nikah nama) with them, but being illiterate they do not understand what was written there. The .Kazis some time takes this opportunity to exploit them. For example, there was a document where most of the options were not filled up properly. Some unknown individual had signed the document on behalf of the bridegroom. Another respondent informed that during her marriage ceremony none came to ask her opinion and even she did not give her consent (Kabul).

### **3.3 Dower money:**

When respondents were asked about their dower or Mohr, 20% of them informed that they were not aware of it. Among those who were aware of it 60% respondents reported that dower (mohrana) was fixed in the range of mentioned Tk.5001 to Tk 50,001. Respondents knew that it has to be mentioned in the 'Kabinnama', but most of them did not know when they could claim it or whether they can claim it at all. Among the divorced women 74% did not claim it of whom 20% did not know that they could claim it. Among those who knew that they can claim it, 10% did not claim it for various reasons\_????? ,and another 10% who claimed, have not yet received the money. According to research findings 64% of the respondent reported they have not claimed dower money. 4% got the total amount, 12% got partial amount and 20% excused the dower money. ???????

### **3.4 Dowry:**

In most cases women got some gifts from their parents during their marriage: these were clothing, hard cash, household utensil, furniture, electronic goods, watch, ornaments etc. Other gifts given to the husbands included rickshaw, van etc. As per response of the respondents, most parents willingly gave these gifts (since interview was taken in presence of husband and in-laws, respondents may be hesitant to mention that these were given as dowry).

### **3.5 Women's right to divorce:**

In most cases respondents did not have knowledge that there was a clause in the marriage registration form which gives them right to divorce.

### **3.6 Guests invited at marriage Ceremony:**

In the case of settled marriage, between 10 to 100 guests were entertained. No ceremony took place in cases where couple married without the consent of their guardians.

### **3.7 Condition of conjugal life:**

Thirty eight percent (38%) respondents thought that they have a happy married life, 32% thought that they have fairly happy married life and 30% are unhappy with their married life. Since interview was conducted in front of their husband and in-laws, women may not have provided the correct information. Those respondents who were unhappy came up with the following reasons:

- (a) Constant demand for dowry by the husband or in-laws
- (b) Threat of divorce
- (c) Continuous threat of second marriage
- (d) Forced involvement in unethical activities

Most of the women claimed that the practice of polygamy of their husbands is a major factor affecting their conjugal life. **They are also aware of their husband's extra-marital affairs but couldn't raise questions about it**, which may create conflict and bring unhappiness in their conjugal life. They want to keep the relationship at any cost.

### **3.8 Causes of separation:**

Reasons for women living separately from their husbands were:

- (a) husbands were living with their other wives (64%),
- (b) husbands do not provide cost for family maintenance (20%),
- (c) husband disappeared or the women did not know the whereabouts of their husband (6%),
- (d) waiting for finalization of divorce (2%).

### **3.9. Knowledge about Organizational Assistance:**

Discussion with the respondents revealed that most of the women did not have any information or knowledge about the organizations that can help in solving their marital problems. Only a few mentioned "Ain- O-Shalish Kendra" and "Mahila Porishod". They expressed that there should be provision for counseling and legal assistance to marriage related problems. However, they would like to continue their marital status with their present husband.

### **Observations of the participants:**

1. Most of the respondents were married the first time at or near their puberty period. So in most cases the tender aged wife lacked knowledge about conjugal life.
2. Most of the respondents got marriage registration document (Nikah nama) with them, but being illiterate they did not understand what was written there. The 'Kazis' take this opportunity to exploit them. For example, there was a document where most of the options were not filled up properly. Some unknown individual had signed the document on behalf of her.

The respondent informed that during her marriage ceremony none came to ask her opinion and even she did not give her consent (Kabul). It was her second marriage at the age of 42 and her husband did not live with her.

3. When respondents were asked about their dower or Mohr, 20% of them informed that they were not aware of it.
4. Respondents working, as household workers did not consider it as a profession. They answered that they do not work. It reflects that, they want to hide the fact that they were housemaids.

### **The respondents recommended that**

1. There should be provision for legal assistance to marriage related problems. However, they would like to continue their marital status with their present husband.
2. There should be effective implementation of the law related to marriage registration.

#### **4. Recommendations:**

1. The Study Group endorses the recommendation of the respondents that there should be program for dissemination and effective implementation of the law related to marriage registration.
2. The proper meaning of "mohr" and its administration should be made transparent to the respondents.
3. Measures should be taken to ensure implementation of birth registration. At the same time implementation of the Child Marriage Restraint Act should be ensured.
4. Mohr should be fixed at a rate, which is possible for the husband to pay.
5. Media should be more involved in broadcasting incidence and consequences of early marriage, dowry, divorce and polygamy with a view to raise awareness.
6. The Study Group endorses the recommendation of the respondents that they should have contact with the organizations providing counseling and legal assistance to marriage related problems. However, they would like to continue their marital status with their present husband.
7. Slum dwelling women should be provided with minimum level of literacy. In this regard, various government and non-government organizations may be involved in organizing effective literacy program for the slum dwellers.
8. Being members of the society they should have adequate knowledge about human rights and women rights. Government, Civil Society, NGO's should take steps to make them aware of these rights.

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GGTP 2nd batch presented a research report on 9th March 2006 at CIRDAP auditorium. The function was chaired by Ms. Taleya Rehman, Executive Director, Democracywatch. Dr. A.S.M. Atiqur Rahman, Director, Institute of Social Welfare and Research, University of Dhaka and Professor Ishrat Shamim, President, CWCS, attended the function as panelist. Ms. Sylvia Islam, Senior Development Advisor, Canadian High Commission attended as special guest. Ms. Selina Khaleque, President, Mahila Samity also spoke on this occasion. In addition to this a total number of 125 participants including NGO leaders, journalists, and eminent personalities attended the ceremony.

During research presentation session three women respondents from slum areas were Presented and gave their opinion in front of audience. They are :

1. Ms. Rashida Begum, cake (pitha) seller.
2. Ms. Sabina Begum, housewife.
3. Ms. Rinu, cake (pitha) seller.

They said that, they are very happy to join the program. They said that they need electricity, water supply, and education for themselves and their children.

**Comments and recommendations from the participants present on IWD, 9 March 2006.**

**Ms. Taleya Rehman, Executive Director, Democracywatch :**

Ms. Taleya Rehman thanked the researcher and Professor A.S.M Atiqur Rahman for helping the students in this study. She also mentioned that men need to learn about women and she is glad that there were more male students in the course. She also added that we know the facts about slums. This research has just presented them in numeric figures.

We are aware of early marriage in rural areas but this research shows that it is also a matter of concern in the urban slums. Ms Rehman quoted the speech of Indian High Commissioner Bina Sicri that women need three "E", these are: Emancipation, Education and Empowerment for development. Ms. Rehman emphasized on education and health security of the slum dwellers. She also said, "Mohrana" can be turned into Social Capital as Bank Fund, which will ensure women's social security. Micro Credit organizations are working only in rural areas. They should rethink about the urban slums.

She also said that issues like adolescents, aged people, violence, urban-rural migration, accommodation and privacy, involvement of women in economic activities and decision making, and male's view on these should be emphasized and should be the subject of future research. Lastly she mentioned that it is time for us to do something for slum dwellers of the city as they lack basic human rights. In her speech she also added that all the development workers, executives of government and non government organization must have intensive training like GGTP to focus on the problems of the society.

**Professor Ishrat Shamim,  
President, CWCS :**

Professor Ishrat Shamim gave some suggestion to include for further study. Such as, Collecting information on marriage, kabinnama and right of divorce from Kazi's. Data collection on migration of slum dwellers. Relation between income of women and violence against women or divorce rate.  
Adolescent girls.

**Comments from the floor :**

1. Mrs Latifa Akhand, Social Activist, also emphasized study on adolescent child in her speech. She said that, since most of the slum dwellers are floating people and living here and there, class-consciousness is never built up and there is no collective forum for raising their voices. She added from her experience that lack of privacy in the slums interferes with birth control and other family matters and is also a problem for collecting data for the interviewers. The practice of dowry is higher in the slums than rural areas. Opportunities are limited for the slum dwellers to participate in development activities. Micro credits are distributed only in the rural areas but not in slums. She expressed her view on leadership building in the slums to raise their voices and solving problems.
2. Ms Khaleda, one of the representatives of Probin Hitoishi Shangha, informed that Professor Nazrul Islam works in slum area with garbage recycling project. She added

that if there were primary data, it would be easier to work. On this point she thanked GGTP Unit for conducting this research. And she mentioned that many women who work as housemaids hide their work description because they feel their job has no dignity. It is a patriarchal society. Male members of the society should come forward to advocate and support women's issues.

### **Conclusion**

The research was in a small range and had limitations. The experience of this presentation ceremony on the occasion of International Women's Day 2006 was very significant for Gender and Governance Unit. The valuable remarks and recommendation by the panelists and the participants will contribute as a base line for future studies and help to enrich the program.



## Annexure:

### 1. Participants

#### **Group A**

1. Monjur Ahmed
2. A.N.M. Arifur Rahman
3. Farzana Sultana
4. Rumana Sharmin
5. Roksana Yeasmin
6. MD. Mofasher Alam
7. A.A.M. Ferdaous Azad

#### **Group B**

1. Reshma Sultana
2. Mohammad Shahabuddin
3. Nusarrat Sultana
4. Masud Al Mamun
5. Md. Masum Billah
6. Shahidul Hasan
7. Farida Hafiz

#### **Group C**

1. Kabir Ahmed Sayeedi
2. Sayma Mostafa
3. Shamima Begum
4. Sultana Begum
5. Nirban Pal
6. Md. Asaduzzaman
7. Tahiyat Ahmed Chudhury
8. Md. Nazmul Alam

## 2. Interview Schedule



ডেমক্রেসিওয়াচ

৭, সার্কিট হাউজ রোড, ঢাকা ১০০০

ফোন : ৯৩৪৪২২৫-৬, ৯৩৩০৪০৫ঢাকা শহরের বস্তিবাসী নারীদের বৈবাহিক অবস্থা

### Marital Status of Slum Dwellers Women in Dhaka City

(আমরা ডেমক্রেসিওয়াচের পক্ষ থেকে এসেছি। এটি একটি শিক্ষা, সামাজিক ও গবেষণামূলক প্রতিষ্ঠান। দেশের বিভিন্ন আর্থ-সামাজিক ইস্যু নিয়ে প্রতিষ্ঠানটি নিয়মিত গবেষণা করে থাকে। প্রতিষ্ঠানটি একটি কোর্সের অংশ হিসেবে 'ঢাকা শহরের বস্তিবাসী নারীদের বৈবাহিক অবস্থা' সম্পর্কে একটি জরিপের আয়োজন করেছে। আপনার মতামত আমাদের গবেষণার জন্য অত্যন্ত মূল্যবান। সম্পূর্ণ খোলা মনে আপনি আপনার মতামত দিন। আমরা প্রতিষ্ঠানের পক্ষ থেকে আপনার মতামতের সকল প্রকার গোপনীয়তা রক্ষার নিশ্চয়তা দিচ্ছি।)

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#### ক. ব্যক্তিগত ও পারিবারিক তথ্য

ক্রম	নাম	উত্তরদাতার সাথে সম্পর্ক	বয়স	শিক্ষা	প্রধান পেশা	অপ্রধান পেশা	আয়	আয় কে খরচ করে

১. আপনার বিবাহ প্রথম কত বছর বয়সে হয়েছিল ?

বছর

২. আপনার বিবাহ রেজিস্ট্রি হয়েছিল কি ? ----- ক. হ্যাঁ খ. না

৩. (উত্তর হ্যাঁ হলে) কাবিনের কপি আছে কি ?----- ক. হ্যাঁ খ. না

৪. আপনার বিবাহ কোন ধরনের ছিল ?----- ক. আয়োজিত খ. স্বৈচ্ছা বিবাহ

৫. (উত্তর 'ক' হলে) বিবাহে আপনার সরাসরি সম্মতি ছিল কি ?

হ্যাঁ  না

৬. আপনার বিবাহের কাবিননামায় কত টাকা দেনমোহর নির্ধারণ করা হয়েছিল ?

ক. ----- টাকা খ. জানিনা গ. প্রযোজ্য নয়

৭. (উত্তর 'ক' হলে) দেনমোহরের টাকা বুঝে পেয়েছেন কি ?

ক. সম্পূর্ণ পেয়েছি খ. আংশিক পেয়েছি গ. মাফ করে দিয়েছি চ. চাইনি

৮. (রেজিস্ট্রিকৃত বিবাহ হলে) কাবিননামায় আপনাকে প্রয়োজনে তালাক দেয়ার ক্ষমতা অর্পন করা হয়েছিল কি ?

ক. হ্যাঁ খ. না গ. জানিনা ঘ. প্রযোজ্য নয়

৯. বিবাহের অনুষ্ঠান করা হয়েছিল কি ? -----

ক. হ্যাঁ খ. না

১০. (উত্তর 'ক' হলে) কতজন লোক খাওয়ানো হয়েছিল ? - - - - - ক. ----- জন

১১. বিবাহের সময় আপনার বাবার বাড়ি থেকে কি কিছু দেয়া হয়েছিল ? --- ক. হ্যাঁ খ.  
না

১২. (উত্তর 'ক' হলে) বিবাহের সময় আপনার বাবার বাড়ি থেকে কি কি পেয়েছেন ?

১. ২. ৩. ৪. ৫. ৬.

১৩. বিবাহের পর আপনাদের ঘর সংসার কেমন চলছে ?

ক. ভালো খ. মোটামুটি গ. ভালো নয়

১৪. (উত্তর 'গ' হলে) সমস্যা / কারণ কি কি ?

ক. যৌতুক দাবী করে; খ. তালাকের ভয় দেখায়; গ. আরেকটি বিয়ে করার ভয় দেখায়;

ঘ. অনৈতিক কাজ করার জন্য চাপ দেয়; ঙ. দৈনিক টাকা পয়সার জন্য চাপ দেয়; চ. অন্যান্য (কারণ নির্দিষ্ট করুন)।

১৫. আপনার স্বামীর আর কোন স্ত্রী আছে কিনা বা ছিল কিনা ? ----- ক. হ্যাঁ খ.না

১৬. আপনি একাধিক বিয়ে করেছেন কি ? ----- ক. হ্যাঁ খ.না

১৭. (উত্তর 'ক' হলে) আগের স্বামীর সাথে সম্পর্ক ছেদ হয়েছে কিভাবে ?

ক.স্বামী মারা গেছে; খ.স্বামী নিরুদ্দেশ হয়েছে; গ.খোঁজ খবর নেয় না;

ঘ.রেজিস্ট্রি তালাকের মাধ্যমে; ঙ.প্রযোজ্য নয়। চ. অন্যান্য (নির্দিষ্ট করুন:-

১৮. বৈবাহিক ক্ষেত্রে সহায়তা করে এমন কোন সংগঠনের নাম আপনি জানেন কি ?

ক. হ্যাঁ খ. না

১৯. (উত্তর 'ক' হলে) এদের নাম বলুন।

ক. খ. গ. ঘ.

২০. মহিলাদের কল্যাণে বৈবাহিক ক্ষেত্রে আপনার কোন সুপারিশ আছে কি ?

১. ২.

৩. ৪.

সময় দেয়ার জন্য আপনাকে ধন্যবাদ

# Map of the Area

ঢাকা মেট্রোপলিটন এলাকার বিভিন্ন থানার বস্তুর অবস্থান নিচে মানচিত্রের সাহায্যে উপস্থাপন করা হলো:

