



The Personal, Social, and Cultural Perspectives on Female Secondary School Dropouts in Bangladesh: An Investigation into Pabna District

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ABSTRACT

Christian missionaries started the modern education of women in India and Bengal. After a long journey, women could strengthen their position in education before the partition in 1947. But during the Pakistani period, the advancement of women was somewhat hindered. However, when Bangladesh became independent in 1971, women started coming to educational institutions with a new vigor, which became tremendously visible in the 21st century. Although women achieved equality in secondary education in the second decade of the 21st century, their dropout rate is still alarming. The general purpose of the research work in this regard is to find out the causes of the dropout rate of female students in secondary education in Bangladesh in general and in the context of personal, social, and cultural barriers in particular. Attempts have been made to achieve the goals and objectives of the research by using a mixed-method approach. The results found that personal, social, and cultural issues are equally responsible for female students' dropping out of secondary education as structural issues. Furthermore, the immediate process of dropping out is child marriage, a socio-cultural disorder. While most studies refer to it as a cause, this study found that it is a process, not a cause. In addition to this, three other factors due to socio-cultural degradation are significant. These are addictions to the virtual world, addiction to illegal affairs (flirting, passion for love, real or purposeful), and addiction to drugs. All the addictions are increasing alarmingly, especially among female students.

Keywords: Self-will, Child Marriage, Family Life, Mental Weakness, Eve-teasing, Self-security, Religious Leaders, Addiction.

INTRODUCTION

The Christian missionaries started the modern education of the western style in India and Bengal. However, men were the main targets. So naturally, there was no place for women in the early stages. Then, with the intervention of the English East India Company, the education policies of the subcontinent began to change drastically, and as a minor beneficiary, women's lives began to change at a plodding pace. When the University of Calcutta was established in 1857, men were allowed to participate in the entrance examinations, but women were deprived (The Calcutta University Calendar, 1858–59, 1858).

Nevertheless, after many setbacks and struggles, *Chandramukhi Basu* passed the "Entrance Examination" for the first time in 1876 (The Calcutta University Calendar, 1858–59, 1858). The university authorities then formulated various policies regarding women's admissions, which gradually smoothed the path of women's education. Thus, by 1947, Indian women, including those from East Bengal, were increasingly involved in this Western-style education. However, after the partition, the women of East Bengal (and later, East Pakistan) became somewhat stunned by this modern style of education. In 1970, just before independence, girls made up only about 17 percent of secondary school enrollment (Layton et al., 2021). However, with the independence of 1971, the women of Bangladesh continued to advance at an increasing rate in modern Western education, but even in the twenty-first century, their achievements are not aspirational. Furthermore, with time and in the context of the transformation of the society and culture of this country, the type and nature of the problems have changed. This article seeks to analyze the problems that still plague almost half of the secondary school students (those admitted to the sixth grade after completing their primary education) and fail to reach the desired level after passing the SSC level due to changes in time.

The overarching goal of this study is to determine the factors that contribute to female students' dropping out of secondary school (from class six to the SSC exam) in Bangladesh in general and in Pabna district in particular. To this end, the research was conducted with the following two specific objectives: (a) to investigate the personal, social, and cultural perspectives that contribute to female students' dropping out of secondary schools in the Pabna district; and (b) to elucidate how personal, social, and cultural factors, issues, or obstacles contribute to female students' dropping out.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been many studies conducted on the dropout rate of students in secondary education in Bangladesh. However, the study did not reveal the socio-economic condition of the people of a district or the country's socio-economic condition as a whole. Although Hossain et al. (2008) discuss almost all aspects of women's education, starting from education philosophy and education policy, they did not include any specific chapter on the dropout rate in secondary education. Besides, the authors have evaluated all women's problems in terms of masculinity. Therefore, this essay has been used indirectly in the present research. In a book, Akbar et al. (1997) tried to analyze the origin and development of women's education from ancient times to the pre-independence period of Bangladesh. The book analyzes the backdrop, society, dignity, position, and qualities of women and their formal education in the history of the progress of the age, along with the change of the governance system at different times. Although women's education has been analyzed considering the socio-economic condition of Bangladesh, it does not contain any specific data

on the dropout rate of female students in secondary education. A series book of three volumes titled Bangladesh Education Sector Review (World Bank, 2000) mentioned some data and information regarding dropouts of female students in high school, but it lacked in-depth and objective analysis. Sabates et al. (2010) have written a monograph on school dropouts in Bangladesh. Through longitudinal examination, they analyzed the reasons behind the high dropout rate of students in secondary education in Bangladesh. However, it also lacks the changing characteristics of Bangladesh. A report prepared for UNESCO (2002) mentions some of the reasons and data for the dropout rate of students in primary and secondary education in Bangladesh. But in the meantime, this development has not been mentioned in this report.

Moreover, the causes of the students' dropping out have been explained in general. Some researchers (Latif et al., 2015; Bates et al., 2007; Blunch and Das, 2008; Brock and Cammish, 1997) in their writings have pointed out various reasons behind the dropout of female students in developing and underdeveloped countries, which in some cases are similar to Bangladesh. But in many cases, all the causes do not match. Moreover, the socio-economic context of each country is different from another.

Reviewing the above books, articles, and research works, it is found that no direct research work has been done on “The Personal, Social, and Cultural Perspectives on Female Secondary School Dropouts in Bangladesh: An Investigation into Pabna District.” However, the present study is indirectly related to the above-mentioned research work.

The books and articles mentioned above have generalized the causes of the dropouts of female students in secondary education in Bangladesh. However, these common causes do not exist equally in all parts of the country. The economic condition of the people in an area may be good, but the social situation of that area is not so favorable for women's education. Again, the economic condition of the people of any area may not be good, but the existing social conditions there are in favor of women's education. Also, the other causes behind the dropout rate are not the same in all parts of the country. Therefore, it is essential to determine the interrelationships between the causes and investigate whether these relationships affect the whole process. Furthermore, since the causes of dropping out of secondary education in Pabna district have not yet been thoroughly explored, there was a need for fundamental research to find out the actual scenario behind it.

RESEARCH METHOD

Both qualitative and quantitative data were used almost equally in this study. Taking all of this into account, a mixed-methods approach was reasonable. The data was gathered from a variety of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include different types of government documents, Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions, and questionnaire surveys.

The causes of female students' dropouts are the main preoccupation of this study, so the questionnaire survey was conducted in four schools located in Pabna district, Sadar, and rural areas through purposeful sampling. Several issues have been considered in the sample selection. For example, there are nine Upazilas in Pabna district, and the reason for choosing “Pabna Sadar” Upazila is that people of different classes and professions from all parts of the district come here for different purposes. So parents of all classes and their daughters (students) can be found as research samples. Bera was chosen as the 2nd Upazila; as the

literacy rate (41.2%) among the people is lower than in other Upazilas of the district (*Population & Housing Census 2011*). Bera Upazila also represents a rural area, where the difference in the school attendance rate of students by age is noticeable. Because among the boys and girls aged 11-to 14 years old, the literacy rate is 80.37, whereas, among the boys and girls aged 15-to 19 years old, the literacy rate is 35.74 (*Population & Housing Census 2011*). The analysis also found that the district's dropout rate was the highest (Bangladesh Education Statistics, 2020). It should be mentioned that four schools were selected in all the sampling cases. The sampling of the study was as follows:

Type-A: Current Female Students

Table 1: Questionnaire Respondent Source

Questionnaire Respondent Sources			
Questionnaire Respondent	Spatial and Temporal Source	Type of Sampling	Number of Respondents
Student studying in a girls school located in the district sadar	Pabna Town Girls High School	Random	40
	Tebunia Wasim Pathshala (co-education)	Random	40
Student studying in a girls school located in rural area (Bera Upazila)	Bera Girls Pilot High School	Random	40
	Dhobakhola Coronation High School (co-education)	Random	40
Total			160

Type-B: Key Informant Interview

Table 2: Key Informant Interviews (KII) Sources

In-depth Interviews Sources		
In-depth Interviewees	Type of Sampling	Number of in-depth Interviews
District (Pabna) Secondary Education Officer, Upazila Secondary Education Officer (Pabna Sadar Upazila), Head of the concerned educational institution	Purposive	06
Chairman of the School managing committee (four selected schools)	Purposive	04
Local education researcher and social worker of Pabna district	Purposive	03
Total		13

Type-C: Focus Group Discussion

Table 3: Place of Conducting FGD, Date and Number of Participants

Conducting FGD		
Place of Conducting FGD	Date of Conducting FGD	Number FGD Participants
Pabna Town Girls High School	17-07-2019	10
Tebunia Wasim Pathshala (co-education)	2-04-2019	10
Bera Girls Pilot High School	28-03-2019	08
Dhobakhola Coronation High School (co-education)	15-03-2019	12
Total		40

In addition, familial case studies were conducted on eight dropped-out female students (now women) who dropped out of the four selected schools mentioned above. In the research work, the analysis of qualitative data collected from the field level was obtained through documentary analysis, and the Inductive Reasoning Process was done along with the content analysis. Simultaneously, the quantitative data collected from the field level have been analyzed by software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22. Sometimes, qualitative data have been converted to quantitative form for doing this. Necessary validation and editing have been done very carefully. The researchers have anchored descriptive statistical methods such as frequency distribution, time series analysis, and correlation (in exceptional cases). Its results have been presented through tables, graphs, charts, and diagrams.

Causes of drop out of Female Students from Secondary Education

In Bangladesh’s western type of education, female students at the secondary level usually drop out for various causes. However, even if those reasons are generalized, the real causes are not revealed and are ultimately left behind. Therefore, in this research, an attempt has been made to find out the real causes of female students’ dropout by focusing on personal, social, and cultural issues considered barriers.

Problems at the individual (personal) level

Individual initiative is essential for any task. Personal encouragement and cooperation help in the performance of the task, and non-cooperation and obstacles in various cases hinder the performance of the task. In the case of a girl in the stream of education, her parents, relatives, friends, or close ones also play an influential role, but personal matters are considered the most important. The following is a presentation and analysis of how students’ issues affect the drop-out rate of modern Western education in Bangladesh:

Female Students’ Personal Affairs

To answer the question of whether female students’ personal affairs are responsible for dropping out of secondary education, most of the respondents have given a resounding ‘yes’, which is apparent in the following table:

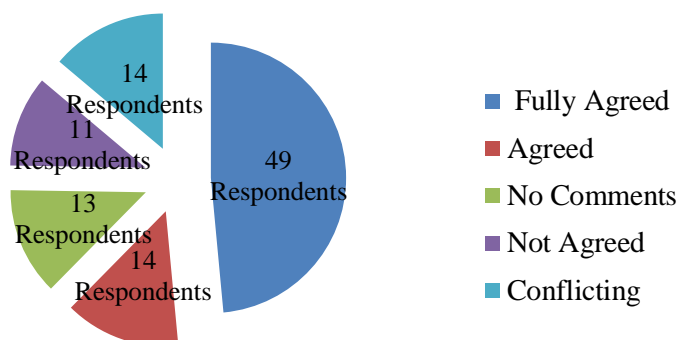
Table 4: Whether female students’ personal issues are responsible for dropping out of secondary education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	101	63.10	63.10
	No	59	36.90	36.90
	Total	160	100.0	100.0

The table above shows that 63.10 percent of respondents feel that they are primarily responsible for dropping out of SSC level education. The issues that create problems in this regard at the personal level have been discussed below.

Lack of Girls Self-will

Chart 1: Respondents' perspectives on Lack of Girls' Self-will

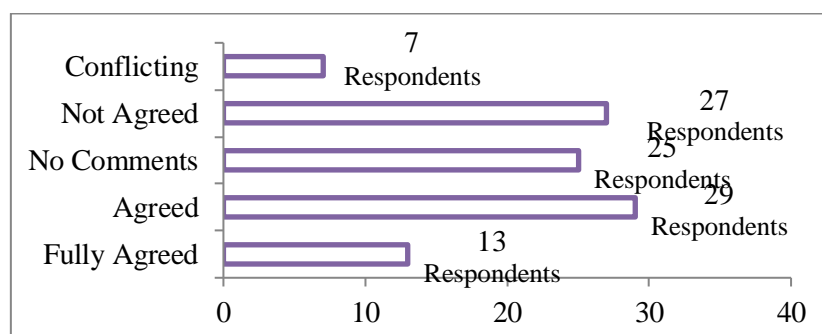


One hundred one students believe that a female student's personal affairs are responsible for her drop out. However, in the case of willpower, their thinking is somewhat different. Analysis of the above figure shows that almost half of the respondents think that their lack of willpower is entirely responsible for those who are dropping out of SSC level education, and 13.9% respondents are against the lack of willpower in the case of female students' dropouts. However, they believe that female students' willpower depends on their physical ability, self-confidence, the financial ability of their parents, environmental conditions, etc. However, the most important of these is self-confidence. In this context, Norman Vincent Pill's theory has been adopted worldwide. He thinks that if you can do three things, you can build self-confidence, "Pray Big, Think Big, Believe big" (Peale, 2013). However, the socio-economic status of the girls studying at the secondary level in the modern Western education system in Bangladesh is such that it is very difficult to think and believe that something big will happen to them, but only to pray.

On the other hand, there is a belief in the social system of this country that "Maa valo to Saa valo" (if a mother is good, her children are supposed to be good). However, no one has been able to develop a single definition of a good mother. Therefore, it has not been possible to use any criteria in the study to verify whether the mother is good or not. Again, many sociologists think that a girl's willpower depends a lot on the educational qualifications of her parents. Nevertheless, no significant correlation was found from the statistical data obtained at the field level. However, only 53 of the fathers and 39 of the female students' mothers have degree-based (from SSC to Masters) educational qualifications.

Physical Incompetence

Chart 2: Respondents' perspectives on female students' physical incompetence



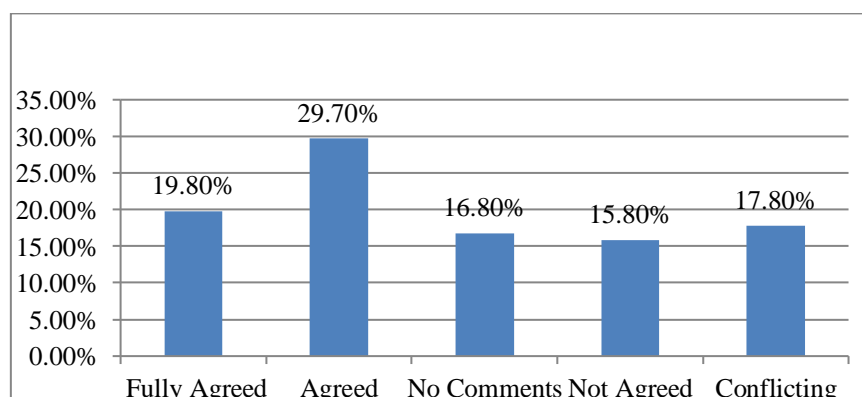
The figure above shows that out of 101 respondents, only 42 blamed physical incompetence as personal matters for dropping out of SSC level education. In other words, out of 160 respondents, 26.25 percent favour it, but about 63.75 percent of respondents do not think so. Those who see this as a problem are referring to the students' physical inability. However, a social worker involved in secondary school education management claimed that, "the main reasons behind this inability are malnutrition, lack of standard accomodation and lack of proper treatment (Chairman, School Managing Committee, Tebunia Wasim Pathsala)." From low-income families, these students find it difficult in many cases and even impossible in some cases to raise a child with sound physical condition. In this regard, the District Secondary Education Officer notes that,

After the break (tiffin) at noon, more than half of the students could not pay attention to the class because most do not go home to eat at noon or cannot afford to eat. As a result, many become unable to participate in afternoon classes. That time is completely wasted; as this situation continues, they do not gain anything, but they suffer physically. Then after a while, that student no longer comes to school and then drops out at one stage (District Secondary Education Officer, Pabna).

Peer influence

A Bengali proverb is known to almost everyone, "Shatt shange sorgo bash, oshott shange shorbonash" (Heaven with the righteous, destruction with the wicked). People worldwide have unanimously accepted the words of the Persian poet Sheikh Saadi (ra), as a social creature, people like company. Because outside the family, people have different needs for different purposes, which is essential in many cases. This partner can be called in various terms, and the most notable is the friend or bondhu. Therefore, there are specific guidelines for Muslims in choosing friends found in Allah's words, the Hadith of Muhammad (PBUH), and the biographies of the caliphs of Khulafa-e-Rashideen. One of the qualities of a friend is 'intelligence' and 'honesty'. As most Bangladeshi people are Muslims, they also prioritize the principles of Islam in choosing friends for good reasons. However, SSC level students often make mistakes in choosing friends (usually among classmates), resulting in them having to suffer much, which is clear from the table.

Chart 3: Female Students' attitude towards Peer influence



Analysis of the table above shows mixed disagreement among students about the effect of classmates or peer. Of them, 18 opposed and 16 disagreed, and 17 did not comment. Fifty

respondents agree or fully agree. A Focus Group Discussion member has explained the nature of the interaction between peers or classmates,

It is normal for a teenage girl to listen to her girlfriend, pay attention to her, and often try to do what she likes. Moreover, the nature of a human being is to be attracted to what is forbidden, which is typical for a girl of this age. At this time, the girlfriends are helping one another get into a relationship with a boyfriend. Often, when a girl is in love or in a relationship with a boy, a few more girlfriends have stepped onto that path (Councilor and Panel Mayor, Pabna Pauroshova, Pabna).

There is another horrible area of pursuing girlfriends that is becoming increasingly difficult for families to check. In this context, an educationist argues,

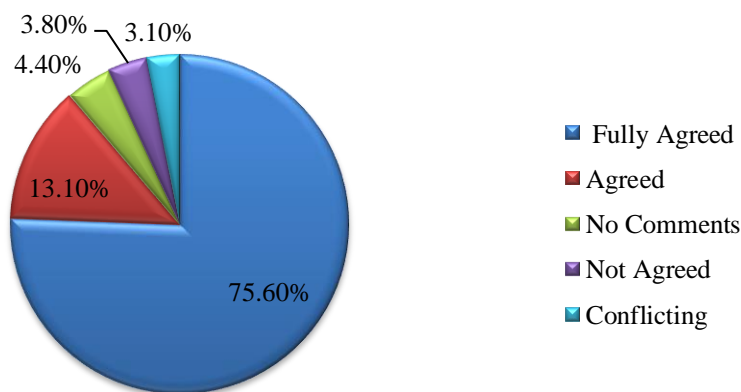
When a girl comes to school with a mobile (smart) phone, she accompanies a few more. They go back home and put pressure on their parents, and they do not go to school until they buy it; they do not even want to study. Then her parents were forced to buy her a mobile phone. Later, the girl misused it in various ways (Education researcher and sociologist, Govt. Edward College, Pabna).

Social and cultural issues

‘When a daughter grows up, getting married is the main responsibility of the parents’--- such like sense of the parents

No one denies that in Bangladeshi society, it is one of the responsibilities of a parent to marry a child, especially their daughters, as early as possible. However, when all their worries are just about the daughter’s marriage, the question may arise. The main question is, what does it mean for a girl to grow up. The answer is quite relative. It depends on many indicators. For example, parents’ educational qualifications, number of siblings, status of relatives, social status (occupation, rank, influence, etc.), economic condition, ideological (right-wing or far-right, left-wing or center-left) position, etc. Most people (of all religions) living in Bangladesh are straightforward, simple, and religious. In the context of events, the afterlife (life after death) is more important to them than the present life. As a result, they think that marriage should be done only if the daughter is an ‘adult’ or ‘suitable for marriage.’ Nevertheless, the problem is that, for whatever reason, they use the word ‘adult’ or ‘marriageable’ in a narrow sense. Moreover, that is where the problem lies. In this regard, female students’ opinion is important.

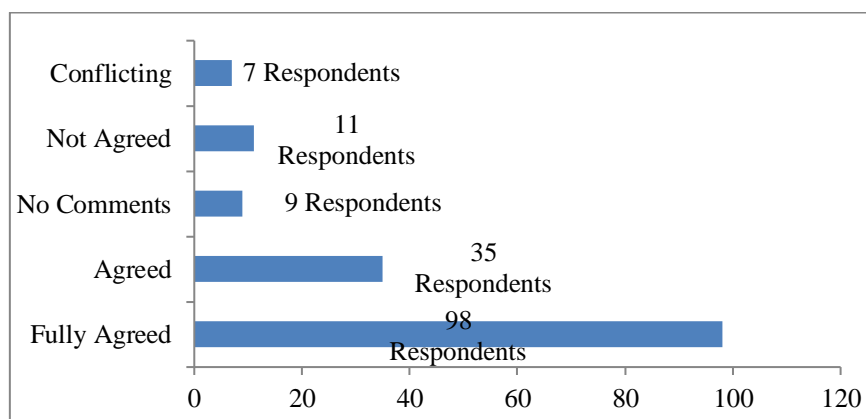
Chart 4: Are parents’ attitudes towards marriage responsible for students dropping out?



The data above shows that only 5 out of 180 respondents opposed it. On the other hand, 6 people did not comment but 142 people became or agreed and fully agreed. In other words, 88.7 percent of the respondents blamed their parents' attitude towards marriage and for their drop out.

Entered into marriage and family life during the period of education

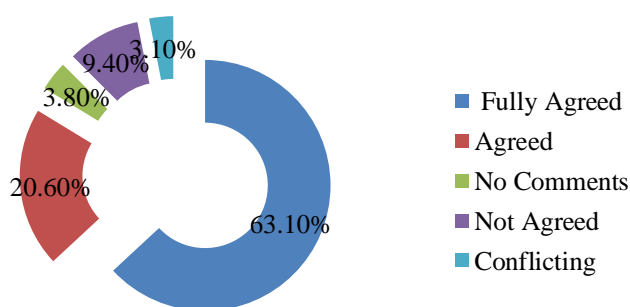
Chart 5: Marriage and family life during education is responsible for the dropout of students or not?



Students who have not yet entered the family life also feel that many of their classmates are dropping out due to getting married and entering the family life while studying. Only seven students opposed it, 11 or 6.9 percent disagreed, and 9 or 5.6 percent did not comment. On the other hand, 35 (21.9 percent) respondents agreed, and another 98 people (61.2 percent) fully agreed. In fact, at the age when a girl's physical fitness is supposed to be imperfect, she has to prepare for others' work that time due to marriage.

Adoption of children, carrying the burden of family of husband and father-in-law

Chart 6: Is the burden of the in-laws' family responsible for the students dropping out?



The figure above shows that only five students opposed it and 15 disagreed, and six refused to comment. On the other hand, 83.7 percent or 134 students agreed and fully agreed. Those who have not yet entered the family life feel the matter from the outside, but they do not face the pain of entering it. A sociologist explains this complex process,

A significant number of girls in Bangladesh may be physically fit for marriage at the age of 14/15/16, but at that age, they are relatively immature in the world of mental development and thinking. If she gets married at such an age, it is almost impossible for her to bear the responsibility of others. Her immediate entry into the vast field of duty, her unfamiliar environment, and her new responsibilities puzzled her greatly. If the situation is wrong or worse, she drops out of this educational process (Education researcher and sociologist, Govt. Edward College, Pabna).

The reality is exactly like that. However, the questionnaire survey found that out of 160 respondents, only 5 were married students. Again, all those who have dropped out are married. In some cases, they married after doing housework for 2/3/4 years from home after dropping out, and 99 percent or more of them could not go back to school after marriage.

Eve-teasing centered insecurity makes female students emotionally vulnerable

In the broadest sense, Eve means woman. Teasing, on the other hand, is an English word that means to make fun of; Annoy; Embarrassed by the question; Chase To ridicule or ridicule someone in a friendly way or to embarrass or upset; Embarrassing someone by grabbing, touching, or pulling something; Sexual arousal is all about eve-teasing. Some people use eve-teasing to mean ‘mental insult.’ However, the Jatio e totthokosh states:

Eve-teasing means making indecent remarks, intimidating, calling, and shouting at a person, especially a woman or adolescent, in the course of her regular movements or activities, Insulting, teasing about her merits, inciting outrageous humor about her, pushing her down the street, making obscene gestures, intentionally retreating, obscenely making love. Ev-teasing also includes intentionally reciting songs, rhymes, or poems, writing letters, running errands, threatening not to respond in love, etc. Today, in the age of electronic media, eve-teasing is also done through mobile phones and e-mails (Eve-teasing).

Table 5: Is eve-teasing-centered mental weakness responsible for female students dropping out?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Conflicting	4	2.5	2.5
	Not Agreed	2	1.2	1.2
	No Comments	6	3.8	3.8
	Agreed	55	34.4	34.4
	Fully Agreed	93	58.1	58.1
	Total	120	100.0	100.0

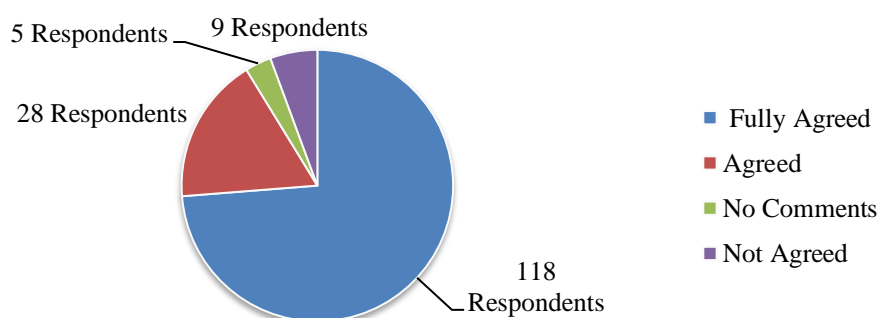
Eve-teasing is a problem that has many negative aspects. One of them is that if a girl is a victim of eve-teasing, she is emotionally scarred at first. This fear continues to weaken her, which harms her body and mind. Insecurity is inextricably linked with eve-teasing in Bangladesh. Personally, that female student and every member of her family felt insecure. Of the 160 students, 92.5 percent or 148 believed that eve-teasing-centered mental retardation was responsible for the dropout, although only 4 opposed it, two disagreed, and eight did not comment. Some of the guardians said that,

A girl who is a victim of eve-teasing does not want to share the problem with family members at first, as she may be blamed for it. In the early stages, she only tells a close classmate or someone outside the family about the incident. The problem is

compounded by the fact that no one knows best, and when it gets out of hand, family members may find out from someone outside. At that stage, the situation becomes very complicated when the girl informs the family members about the problem. Then the family members did not solve the problem but first put pressure on the girl in various ways, making her more broken. Under such circumstances, she stopped going to school. Because she wants to get out of the situation by wrapping herself up, the result of which is dropping out of this process of education (Student's guardian, Pabna Town Girls High School; Student's guardian, Tebunia Wasim Pathshala; Student's guardian, Bera Girls Pilot High School; Student's guardian, Dhobakhola Coronation High School).

Arranging marriage at an early age due to the failure of prevent eve-teasing By family and society

Chart 7: Is failure to prevent eve-teasing responsible for female students' dropping out?



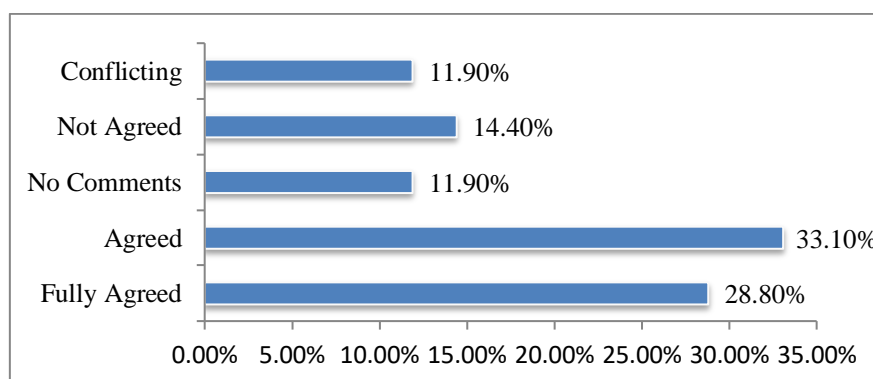
The figure above shows that none of the 160 students opposed it, but nine disagreed and five did not comment. On the other hand, 146 or 91.30 percent of the respondents agreed or fully agreed. In other words, they think that family, society, or administration (local, civil or institutional) failed to prevent eve-teasing. And because of that, a part of the students drop out of the educational or learning process. But none of the school's managing committee, teachers, or local public (political also) representatives acknowledged that they had failed to prevent eve-teasing (*Special Original Jurisdiction*, Writ Petition No. 8769 of 2010, In the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, High Court Division). Asked about the issue at a Focus Group discussion, a public representative said, "If a girl or her family member is aware of an Eve-teasing related problems, and complain to us, we take immediate action to resolve it, and the girl does not face such issues again (Councilor, Ward No. 2, Pabna Pauroshova, Pabna)." But at that stage of the discussion, one of the guardians objected, saying, "Even if an immediate solution is found, the harasser later adopts a different approach. In other words, if the situation becomes complicated or if there is an adamant teaser disturbing the female student and creating a situation of panic, the committee members have nothing to do in most of the cases (Student's guardian, Pabna Town Girls High School, Pabna)." In support of this statement, several other guardians described similar experiences,

If the perpetrator is a local bully, a nominal member of the ruling party (in the language of the respondents, "a pati-neta or upa-neta"), a terrorist, or an influential person, then the managing committee members often deliberately tries to avoid the issue. As a result, the parents become helpless and hopeless and try to deal with the problem individually. In many cases, the local (political) representatives remain silent to protect their vested interests. When they seek refuge, they seek political affiliation.

If the victim's family is not their supporters, the matter will end there. If they are their supporters, they may take steps to resolve the issue. However, that is not the case. The severity of the problem there depends on a few factors. For example, what does the female student look like, her family status, the social status or prestige of her guardian, etc.? Those who are beautiful to look at face a deadly problem. They say that most people who have serious problems don't get the help they need. This leads to the girls getting married and dropping out of school (The guardians of four students at Pabna Town Girls High School in Pabna),

Female students' indifference to their own safety

Chart 8: Is self-indifference responsible for students dropping out?



In many cases, the students are indifferent to their safety, which is evident in the figure above. Out of 160 students, 33.1 percent or 53 students agreed, and 26.7 percent or 46 students fully agreed that many dropped out of education due to their indifference. Individuals involved in school management think,

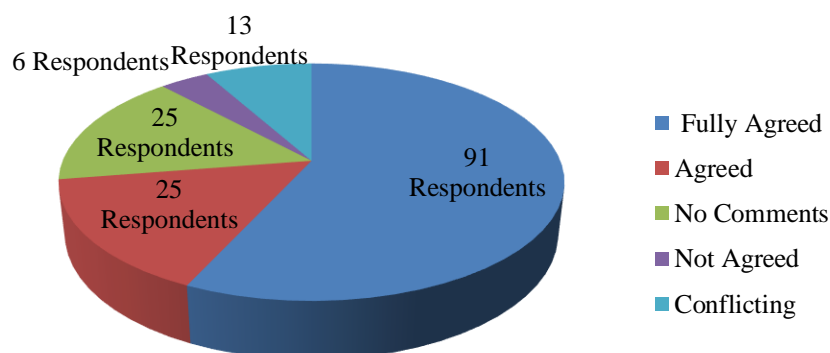
A girl in a rural area does not think her safety is important to her and many of her parents. However, the people living in the city take their daughters' safety seriously. However, they (mostly rural and urban parents) refer only to physical security. Mischievous and naughty people take that opportunity by considering such attitudes of students and parents as a weakness (Chairman, Educationist and Social Worker, School Management Committee, Dhobakhola Coronation High School; Chairman, Educationist, and Social Worker, School Management Committee, Tebunia Washim Pathshala; Chairman, Educationist, Journalist and Social Worker, School Management Committee, Pabna Town Girls High School; District Education Officer, Pabna.).

Security here means physical, mental, human, and emotional security. Just as it is easy to tease a girl who goes to school alone, it is just as challenging to tease a girl who goes to school with a guardian. It is as easy to offer love by motivating or showing greed to a girl who goes to school alone as it is challenging to offer love by motivating or showing greed to a girl who goes to school with her guardian. Moreover, female students are at risk for emotional intelligence at this teenage level. Due to the lack of a universal counseling system in the education system of Bangladesh (English medium schools, of course, there is a counseling system), usually students do not get the desired level of mental and human development. As a result, many of them (secondary school students) become insecure in this case, which is a prominent cause of female students' dropping out.

Religious issues

Studying up to class Four-Five is enough for women ... such a remark of some religious leaders.

Chart 9: Are religious leaders' comments responsible for female students' dropping out?



As shown in the figure above, some female students are dropping out of SSC level education due to the indirect effect of religious leaders' comments on formal education. Of these, 72.5 percent or 116 respondents think so. Moreover, 11.9 percent or 19 people opposed or disagreed with it, and 25 respondents did not comment. However, it is not appropriate to blame religious leaders alone for simplifying the issue. Because there are a few other things involved with this. Religious leaders indeed have a significant influence on ordinary people in the rural areas of Bangladesh. Naive and candid people who are illiterate do not know or understand the basics of Islam. So they are influenced by the statements and decisions of the religious leaders. In that case, if a famous Islamic scholar says that girls should study up to class four-five to keep an account of their husbands' income, wealth and asset, there is no need to study more. Then an ordinary pious person thinks that if his daughter does not get a job, what is the need to get more education. As a result, the comments of religious leaders put a girl or a female student at risk because parents think that if a daughter is not sent to school or an educational institution, they can get relief from the cost of education. As a result of such thoughts of the parents, the female student stopped going to school and became trapped inside the house. Shortly after such an uncomfortable time, the girl agreed to get married and left for the in-laws' family. According to an education expert,

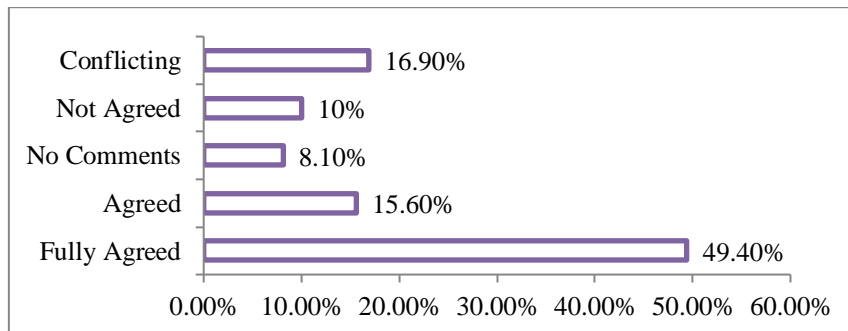
Many girls in Bangladesh are forced to take home education (religious) after stopping their formal education. Those parents initially recognized the importance of women's education (unanimously up to the primary level), but later, inspired by another person or group, they kept the girl out of this educational process. However, it is complicated to determine how much the lifeless home-based education system (the Zenana system) is expanding the scope of their knowledge. As a result of such irresponsible and ignorant parents' decisions, it is impossible to determine how many girls or female students are dropping out of this education process. Because in today's society, it does not seem like it is possible to use the "Zenana method" in real life (Educationist and Sociologist, Govt. Edward College, Pabna).

However, it's, not just the parents who are doing this. There is a group of highly educated (Western type of education they receive) people (both male and female) in society looking for a bride for marriage who is not institutionally highly educated but affluent in religious knowledge. As a result, parents with the same mentality know that even if their daughters do not have formal higher education, there will be no problem arranging a suitable and qualified

bridegroom, but there will be benefits in many cases. So it is not right to blame the religious leaders alone that the parents are being encouraged because of them but rather that there is no shortage of suitable bridegrooms in the marriage market for the girls who have dropped out of school.

It is normal for the violation of shariah (in the case of maintaining pordah or hijab) when a female student comes to an educational institution

Chart 10: Is the anti-hijab campaign responsible for dropping out female students?



Of the 180 respondents, 27 disagreed and said that the anti-hijab campaign was not responsible for their dropout. Moreover, 16 did not agree, and 13 did not comment. However, 104 people, or 65 percent of the respondents, think that such propaganda is responsible for their dropout. From a general point of view, it may seem that where a significant portion of female students (Muslims) wear the hijab, it is difficult to violate the rule of shariah (especially in the case of maintaining porda or veil). However, a section of the religious leaders thinks that it is normal for them to violate the rule of shariah when a female student comes to study in educational institutions. They have no objection to the type of hijab or dress code. Religious leaders have objected to the way female students travel to school. In the society of Bangladesh, women are insecure in many cases, so the students can not do it even if they want to. Going to school in ways other than walking (for example, women are often harassed on public transport) is very difficult because their male counterparts cherish a patriarchal mentality. Again, not all female students in this country get the opportunity to study in girls' schools. At the same time, there are no girls' schools in Bangladesh where all the teachers are female. So a section of religious leaders thinks that, in a male-dominated Bangladeshi society, it is pervasive to violate the law of shariah when a female student goes to school. They argue that acquiring knowledge is obligatory in Islam. However, there are differences of opinion among the followers of Islamic scholars regarding the time and limits of acquiring formal knowledge. For various reasons, a significant number of religious leaders have objections to learning outside the home, which ordinary Muslims cannot ignore. Therefore, it can be said that the attitude and criticism regarding the breach of the veil (porda) can deprive female students of SSC level education which the respondents have rightly mentioned.

Other factors related to the individual, society and culture

A question was thrown to the respondents, telling them that are there any causes left? Why the female students in Bangladesh drop out of SSC level education. In answering the question, out of a total of 160 respondents, 84.4 percent or 135 answered 'yes', and 15.6 percent or 25 answered 'no'. Notable among other factors are the addiction to the virtual world; Secondly, the addiction to illegal affairs. And thirdly, addiction to the drug. None of the issues had been discussed or mentioned before in details.

Addiction to the virtual world puts all students in Bangladesh in grave danger and risk. Internet-centric addiction is called 'virtual addiction', and SSC level students are also not out of this risk (Griffiths. 2019). The respondents have expressed their views and observations in various ways while mentioning the problem. Not only students but also anyone who is virtually addicted can face various losses. Among them, misbehavior, mental health problems, insecurity, and abuse are notable. Although FGD members and individuals involved in school management express their views differently, but the tone of their statements is almost the same,

Now the use of mobile (smart) phone among students has increased so much that it can be easily said that they are addicted to the mobile phone. They are using mobile phones untimely, they are using them in useless act rather than work. Someone may have a phone in his house that his mother is supposed to use. But in most of the cases her mother can't use it, so the girl uses the phone. From here, things get trickier, and this is where the true abuse of internet comes in. The students, especially female students use the phone to enjoy watching movies (English, Hindi, Marathi etc.), dramas, pornography and many more. There are very few students who use it for true learning. Such use of the phone has led to a decline in her interest in reading and the use of it has led to her addiction to other things which in turn has brought her danger (Chairmen of the selected school management committees; Assist. Head Masters of the selected High Schools; Reserved Female Members, Ward No-4, 5 & 6, Ruppur Union, Aminpur Thana of Bera Upazila; Four members of the respective School Management Committees).

Addiction to illegal affairs (flirting, which is not allowed in Bengali society, especially for those who are Muslims) is seriously affecting teenage students, which is driving them out of the learning process. As much as she is engaged in it, she needs special security measures due to some valid grounds. The security of her physical, mental, and emotional intelligence is paramount here. If she becomes addicted to this type of relationship at this point, she has no interest in education. At the same time, if she encounters other problems, she will drop out of school and start flying in colorful dreams. In this regard, parents and individuals involved with the school management said,

The children of this generation are deeply involved in this kind of immorality (flirting or illegal affairs) which is commonly termed, love. However, it is not love. It is an addiction and is a sign of the moral decay of the present time. The age of modern science has made it much more accessible. Even if family members know, they can continue their relationship using a mobile phone. Amid this addiction, some students (both male and female) get involved in true love again. Moreover, when a real love relationship is formed, in most cases, it is not possible for a male or a female student to continue their education well, the result of which is marriage and sometimes leading to divorce. If the number and scale of such immoral relationships cannot be reduced, then this process of dropping out is likely to increase further in the days to come (Chairmen of the selected school management committees; Assist. Head Masters of the selected High Schools; Reserved Female Members, Ward No-4, 5 & 6, Ruppur Union, Aminpur Thana of Bera Upazila; Four members of the respective School Management Committees).

In reality, most parents cannot accept their childrens' such kind of unacceptable and undesirable behavior and can not even say outside. So when the parents do not find any other option, they initially stop their daughters from schooling but still arrange for their marriage if they cannot repent and be corrected. As a result, the daughters (female students) can no longer return to school. Another problem that threatens students is drug addiction which is still unknown to many parents. If practical and valid action is not taken now, it could pose a severe threat to female students' dropout.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

After the analysis mentioned above, it can be said that in addition to the structural barriers, the student's personal, social, and cultural barriers are primarily responsible for their dropout. However, the data obtained from the field level show that almost every indicator of the dropout is directly or indirectly related to each other. Most stakeholders, including female students (158), usually mention that the direct or immediate cause of the dropout is child marriage. However, in most cases, it is not the actual cause. It is a process through which a female student drop out. The real cause is the family's financial incapability, which was identified by 114 or 71.7 percent of the respondents (Alam and Haque, 2021), then they blamed Eve teasing, which is supported by 104 or 65.4 percent of the respondents, then their reluctance and indifference respectively. Although not mentioned in the questionnaire, two other important social and cultural issues (addiction to the virtual world; addiction to illegal affairs) have been mentioned separately by students, parents, educationists, and school administrators, which may be considered important causes for female students' dropout. However, it is to be hoped that the concerned stakeholders are now well aware of the whole process of female students' dropout and taking necessary steps to prevent them from dropping out.

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Acknowledgement

Focus Group Discussion-No-1 (Dhobakhola Coronation High School, Sannyasibadha, Bera Upazila, Pabna, and Date: 15-03-2019)

1. Assistant Headmaster, Dhobakhola Coronation High School.
2. Union Parishad Member, Ward No-4, Ruppur Union No. 8, Aminpur Thana, Bera Upazila, Pabna.
3. Reserved Women Members, Ward No. 4, 5 and 6, Ruppur Union, Aminpur Thana, Bera Upazila,, Pabna.
4. Rabia (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
5. Rashida (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
6. Kaniz Fatema (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
7. Karishma Sheikh (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
8. Shakila Akter (pseudonym), female member, School Managing Committee.
9. Mehdi Hasan (pseudonym), Member, School Managing Committee.

10. Md. Arj Ali (pseudonym), School Managing Committee.
11. Md. Kanai Maondol (pseudonym), Member, School Managing Committee.
12. Md. Gazi (pseudonym), Member, School Managing Committee.

**Focus Group Discussion-No-2 (Bera Girls Pilot High School, Bera Upazila, Pabna), and
Date: 26-03-2019)**

1. Ali Hasan (pseudonym), Senior Teacher, Bera Girls Pilot High School.
2. Female Teacher Representative, Bera Girls Pilot High School.
3. Shikha Rani Das (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
4. Nigar Sultana (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
5. Md. Atiyar Hossain (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
6. Md. Ahmed Khan (pseudonym), Member, School Managing Committee.
7. Md. Mostaq Ahmed (pseudonym), Member, School Managing Committee.
8. Md. Anis Uddin (pseudonym), Member, School Managing Committee.

**Focus Group Discussion-No-3 (Tebunia Wasim Pathshala, Pabna Sadar, Pabna), and
Date: 2-04-2019)**

1. Assistant Headmaster, Tebunia Wasim Pathshala.
2. Union Parishad Member, Ward No-3, Maligachha Union, Pabna Sadar, Pabna.
3. Reserved Women Members, Ward No-1, 2 & 3, Maligachha Union, Pabna Sadar, Pabna.
4. Nasia Akter (pseudonym), Member, School Managing Committee.
5. Rokeya Khatun (pseudonym), Member, School Managing Committee.
6. Halima Parveen (pseudonym), Guardian Member, School Managing Committee.
7. Kabita Khanam (pseudonym), guardian of the student.
8. Masuma Parveen Sylvia (pseudonym), Member, a Student's Guardian.
9. Delete: Cameron Nahar (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
10. Farooq Ahmed (pseudonym), Member, School Managing Committee.

**Focus Group Discussion-No-4 (Pabna Town Girls High School, Pabna Sadar, Pabna),
and Date: 18-06-2019)**

1. Assistant Headmaster, Pabna Town Girls High School.
2. Councilor, Ward No-2, Pabna Pauroshova, Pabna.
3. Councilor and Panel Mayor, Pabna Pauroshova, Pabna.
4. Md. Kamrul Islam (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
5. Fariha Jannat (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
- . Sayida Jannat (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
- . Tansimul Jannat (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
- . Gahra Jannat (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
9. Arwa Jannat (pseudonym), guardian of a student.
10. Sadiqur Rahman (pseudonym), Guardian Member, School Managing Committee.

Name and Identity of the Key Informant Interviewees, Place and Date of Interview

1. Chairman (Educationist and Social Worker), School Managing Committee, Dhobakhola Coronation High School, Sannyasibadha, Bera, Pabna; 15-03-2019 .
2. Headmaster, Dhobakhola Coronation High School; 15-03-2019.
3. Chairman (Educationist and Social Worker), School Managing Committee, Bera Girls Pilot High School, Bera, Pabna; 26-03-2019 AD.
4. Headmaster (Acting), Fence Girls Pilot High School; 26-03-2019.
5. Chairman (Educationist and Social Worker), School Managing Committee, Tebunia Wasim Pathshala, Pabna Sadar, Pabna; 2-04-2019.
6. Headmaster, Tebunia Wasim Pathshala; 2-04-2019.

7. Chairman (Educationist, Journalist and Social Worker), School Managing Committee, Pabna Town Girls High School, Pabna Sadar, Pabna; 18-06-2019.
8. Headmaster, Pabna Town Girls High School; 18-06-2019.
9. Headmaster (Retired), Pabna Government Girls High School; 18-06-2019.
10. District Education Officer, Pabna; 07-08-2019 and 04-02-2020.
11. Upazila Secondary Education Officer, Pabna Sadar, Pabna; 13-12-2019.
12. Education Researcher and Sociologist, Department of Sociology, Government Edward College, Pabna; 10-06-2019.

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