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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

## Gender Inequality in Bangladesh



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### ABSTRACT

*This study focused on gender inequality and its impact on socio-economic development of rural households in Bangladesh. To know the main reasons and areas of gender inequality and its impact on household development the study was carried out in five villages of Sadar Upazilla of Mymensingh District. Data were collected from a purposively drawn sample of 85 from 900 rural households. The study indicated that disparity exists in targeted area, which on many grounds affects the development of rural households. Findings indicated that women had no or low share in income/ earnings of the family, that there was no equal status of women, female were not allowed to work outside home, women were more vulnerable to poverty, women share more burden of productive and household work. The women's participation rate was higher in cleaning house, child care, cooking and preparation of meal and lowest in case of tree plantation, dairy farming, poultry rearing etc. About 88 per cent women contributed to increase their family income. Male members dominated in household decision, there was no equal opportunity in higher education, physical and mental health for women, and women were facing difficulties in labor market. The participation rate of women in many decisions making process such as marriage, education of sons and*

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*daughters, buying health care facilities, use of contraceptive and participating NGOs were very low. Gender inequality increases maternal mortality (92 per cent agree), increase fertility (88 per cent agree), increase dowry (88 per cent agree) and domestic violence (89 per cent agree). Social norms and values restricted women to participate in development activities.*

**KEY WORDS:** *gender, gender inequality, socioeconomic context, household development*

## **Introduction**

The rural economy of Bangladesh has witnessed remarkable structural changes and diversification during the 1990s. In today's society, the role of women extends way beyond the home and bringing up of children. Empirical evidence indicates that there are significant gender differences in all spares and family lives in rural Bangladesh. In Bangladesh about 85 percent of women live in rural areas. The rural social structure plagued with many problems such as illiteracy, unemployment, malnutrition and poverty. Even there is the traditionalization of the system and institution that place them in unequal and disadvantages position (Ali, 2012). Women have to perform the dual role of housewife and wage earner. Women participation in home and farm activities is dependent upon social cultural and economic condition in an area. It also varies region to region and even with a region, their involvement varies widely among different farming system, castes, classes and socio-economic status. Women's opportunities and public involvement have changed extensively in recent decades. For example, major progress has been made in closing the gender gap in school enrolments at both primary and secondary levels (Ferdousi, 2012).

In Bangladesh, there are social and religious restrictions on women in doing works outside homestead area. Therefore their activities are confined to child care, household management, kitchen gardening, processing of rice and maize, service etc. The peace of development in any country largely depends upon the people's participation including women. In Bangladesh women constitute almost half of the population. Bilkis (2010) find family culture and religious values that are taught by the family are the root causes of gender gap in employment. Begum (2005) finds a higher level of gender gap between male and female among the rural households in Bangladesh. Bangladesh are now facing the issues that hinder their development: education for girls, women's political, legal and marital rights, and

employment outside of the home for women and men alike, lower fertility and reduced child mortality. Yet they have, for a long time, remained economically unproductive in the sense that their contributions to GDP are not acknowledged. A good number of studies on women have been undertaken in Bangladesh, but a very few of these were undertaken to explore the gender inequality in rural households.

The study was undertaken with a view to analyzing the impact of gender inequality on the socio-economic development of the rural household in Bangladesh. The focus of the research was to satisfy the following objective: i) to analyze the extent of gender inequality within the household in rural areas; ii) to examine the relations between gender inequality and socioeconomic development in the rural household's.

## **Methods and Materials**

Considering the objectives, time and availability of fund and man power, five villages i.e. Bhabkali, Charkai, Naraynpur, Unairpar and Sutiakhali under Mymensingh Sadar upazila in Mymensingh district were selected purposively. The villages were selected considering easy communication facilities and accessibility to the village. Poor rural households mainly farming households were selected from the selected villages. In all 85 sample households were selected where women were participating in different farm and non-farm activities and deprived from different facilities which they require. The study period was January to June 2014. The final survey was conducted during the period from February to march 2014 by direct interviews using a questionnaire. Tabular and statistical techniques were used for the analysis of the data.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Socio-economic Profile of the Selected Households**

The findings of the study show that socio-economic characteristics of women of the selected households were not different from those of other parts of the country. Majority of the respondent women (84 per cent) were between 18-40 years of age. Average family size was found to be 5.58 persons where male and female was 2.86 and 2.72 respectively. About 19.35 per cent of family members were illiterate, 10.39 per cent could write their

name, 59.86 per cent had academic qualification of secondary level; 1.39 per cent had education above secondary level. Heads of respondents household were engaged in agriculture 52 per cent, 16 per cent in business and 32 per cent in service.

### **Extent of Gender Inequality**

Women get a smaller share of household expenditures on education and health care relative to men. Women's have less opportunity to visit health center, go to a movie, visit outside the village, and visit friends and relatives. Most of the women were discriminated by their parents at first and then by their husband in the family. Usually parents were exposed different attitude between their boys and girls after birth. Women in family have always been considered subservient to men. Men mostly own the lands owned by the households and women were deprived of this rights. In the family, as women are responsible for child bearing and rearing, they have less scope to go out home for employment, hence most of them are confined to the domestic chores, which are not counted in the accounting procedure of the country, however, there is a clear discrimination with family affairs falling under personal laws governed by religion, where the state is reluctant to become involved. Literacy as well as the significantly higher proportion of female dropout from the system is still a major concern. The situation of female health is still poor.

### **Women Participation and Cooperation of Other Members in Household Activities**

Most of the household activities were done by women. The women's participation rate was higher in cleaning house, child care, cooking and preparation of meal and lowest in case of tree plantation, dairy farming, and poultry rearing etc. The cooperation of the family members to different household activities was not sufficient enough. The highest cooperation was seen in case of child care.

*Table: 1 Women participation and cooperation of other members in household activities*

Items of operation	Extent of participation (Percentage)			Extent of cooperation (Percentage)		
	Regularly	Occasionally	Never	Sufficient	Moderate	Little
Cooking & preparation of meals	81	19	0	8	40	52
Vegetables production	46	14	40	34	40	26
Tree plantation	24	34	42	14	32	54
Poultry/ Dairy	52	20	28	12	48	40
Child care	80	20	0	46	30	24
Teaching children	28	36	36	30	22	48
Washing cloths	81	12	7	36	32	32
Cleaning house	92	8	0	31	26	43
Buying daily necessities	24	64	12	12	50	38

Source: Sample Survey, 2014

### Women Participation in Household Income Decision

Women are often less concerned in the decision making process even at the household level. Women's participation rate in choice of crop to be grown and buying and selling of agricultural product was 19 per cent and 34 per cent respectively. The women's participation rate was higher in livestock and poultry rearing 46 per cent and lowest in case of buying and selling of real estate 17 per cent from others. The Table 2 shows that only 31 percent household decisions were made by women.

*Table 2: Participation of women in household income decisions (N=85)*

Decision making process	Female		Male	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Buying and selling of real estate	17	20	68	80
Buying and selling of agricultural product	29	34	66	66
Homestead gardening	35	41	50	59
Livestock and poultry rearing	39	46	46	54
Fishery operation	26	31	59	69
Purchase of agricultural equipment	23	27	62	73
Working outside the home	27	32	58	68
Employment of the children	22	26	63	74

Decision making process	Female		Male	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Borrowing of money	19	22	66	78
Choice of crop to be grown	16	19	69	81
All decision matters	26	31	59	69

Source: Sample survey, 2014

### Women Participation in Social Affairs Decision

Lastly, women's participation rates in marriage of sons and daughters, education of sons and daughters, buying health care facilities, use of contraceptive and participating NGOs stood at 31, 47, 31, 61 and 38 per cent respectively (Table 3). The women's participation rate was higher in child care 62 per cent and lowest in case of expenditure on family maintenance 18 per cent from others.

Table: 3 Women's role in making decisions regarding household and social affairs (N=85)

Decision making process	Female		Male	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Expenditure on family maintenance	18	21	67	79
Joining social ceremonies or visiting relatives	37	34	48	56
Family planning	35	41	50	59
Marriage of son and daughters	26	31	59	69
Education of sons and daughters	40	47	45	53
Childcare	62	73	23	27
Buying health care facilities	26	31	59	69
Use of contraceptive	52	61	33	39
To give a vote	33	39	52	61
Participating NGOs	32	38	53	62
Repairing house	28	33	57	67
All decision matters	35	41	50	59

Source: Sample survey, 2014

### Women's Response to Mobility Questions

Table 4 shows that women are free to move from one bari to another. Women travel outside bari often 68 per cent, 28 per cent sometimes and 4 per cent seldom. However, they are confined in their movements outside of

the village. About 62 per cent women often, 32 per cent sometimes, and 4 per cent seldom travel outside the village and 2 per cent never travel outside the village. When traveling outside, most women (57 per cent) do not wear a burka. Further, very few women travel outside of the village alone (12 per cent). When they go outside the village, other members of the family mainly children (52 per cent) and female members (18 per cent) usually accompanies with them.

*Table 4: Percentage distribution of women responses in mobility questions (N=85)*

<b>How frequently do you travel outside....</b>		<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Never</b>
The bari?		68	28	4	0
the village?		62	32	4	2
When you travel outside, do you generally wear a burka?			Yes 25	Sometimes 18	No 57
When you go outside the village, who usually accompanies you?	No one 12	Children 52	Female relative 18	Male relative 8	Husband 10

*Source: Sample survey, 2014*

### **Factors Affecting the Level of Family Income**

The several factors affecting the level of family income were identified for functional analysis. They were land, number of female earning member, women education, women occupation, women income and family size. From the Table 5 we see that, the regression coefficient of land and number of female earning member variables stood 0.154 and 0.099. They were significant at 5 per cent level. The regression coefficient of women income and expenditure variables stood at 0.084 and 0.412. They were significant at 1 per cent level. On the other hand, education and family size were insignificant. The variables selected in the log linear model explained about 8.20 per cent variation in family income.

*Table 5: Estimated values of co-efficient and related statistics*

<b>Selected variables</b>	<b>Co-efficient</b>	<b>t-value</b>
Land ( $X_1$ )	0.154*	4.903
Earning member of family ( $X_2$ )	0.099*	1.981
Women education ( $X_3$ )	-0.009	0.218
Women income ( $X_4$ )	0.084**	3.558
Family size ( $X_5$ )	-0.089	-0.095
Expenditure ( $X_6$ )	0.412**	8.023
$R^2$	0.802	
$\bar{R}^2$	0.765	
F-value	21.98	

Note: \*\* = Significant at 1 per cent level

\* = Significant at 5 per cent level

### **Impact of Gender Inequality on Household Development**

The Table 6 shows that 92 per cent respondents agree to the statement that gender inequality increase maternal mortality, increase fertility 88 per cent, increase dowry 88 per cent. Gender inequalities also ensure lower nutritional status of women (93 per cent agree) and lower recreational facilities (84 per cent agree). On the other hand due to gender inequality women was become sufferer to different domestic violence (83 per cent).

*Table: 6 Impact of gender inequality in society: (N=85)*

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Per cent distribution of respondents</b>	
	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Increase family income	0	100
Reduce family size	36	64
Ensure better health	16	84
Increased family assets	15	85
Increase women income	6	94
Increase fertility	88	12
Increase maternal mortality	92	8
Ensure social development	44	54
Reduce early marriage	24	76
Increase dowry	88	12
Increase domestic violence	83	17
Lower nutritional status of women	93	7
Lower recreational facilities	84	16

Source: Sample survey, 2014



## Problems and Cconstraint Faced by Rural Women

The respondents were asked to identify the major problems and constraints faced by rural women in society and to suggest some possible solutions. Low payment for same work (59 per cent), low efficiency of women (26 per cent), physical and mental violence against women (76 per cent), lack of sufficient educational facilities (67 per cent), social norms and rules (73 per cent), physical harassment in the working place (57 per cent), low availability of nutritional food for women (83 per cent), early marriage and lack of gender education (79 per cent) were identified as the major problems by the respondent women (Table 7).

*Table 7: Problem faced by rural women (N=85)*

<b>Nature of suggestions</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Low payment	50	59
Low efficiency	22	26
Physical weakness	36	43
Violence against women	65	76
Low quality of education	57	67
Social norms and rules	62	73
Physical harassment	48	57
Low nutritional food facilities	71	83
Early marriage and lack of gender education	67	79

*Source: Sample survey, 2014*

## Solution Suggested by the Respondent

Ensuring equal education for both male and female, increased training facilities for women, ensure health facilities, providing same wage to women, providing gender related education to girls and women, taking various steps to reduce domestic violence, reducing physical and mental harassment in the working place were the possible solutions suggested by the respondents in general.

## Conclusion

Gender inequalities exist in rural areas. Regrettably, this has led society to place greater emphasis and value on the role of men and boys in public life and in the work place, as opposed to women's role in unpaid

family labor, care giving, and community work. Since factors that perpetuate gender inequality, especially in rural communities are manifold (e.g., cultural practices, traditional gender roles, gender socialization, poverty and discrimination in access to land) they have implications for policy and research. Structural inequalities continually deprive women of having equal access to social and economic opportunities and services. Gender inequalities could have both short and long-term consequences not only for women but the entire society. Reducing gender inequalities implies benefits not only for women but also for all vulnerable persons and groups. The respondents were found to be able to realize their problems and suggested probable solutions. It is important for government to understand and find out the extent to which this problem is prevailing.

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## Rodna neravnopravnost u Bangladešu

### APSTRAKT

*Ovo istraživanje se fokusira na neravnopravnost među polovima, kao i na njen uticaj na društveno-ekonomski razvoj ruralnih domaćinstava u Bangladešu. U cilju otkrivanja glavnih uzročnika i oblasti u kojima se rodna neravnopravnost javlja, kao i posledičnog uticaja na razvoj domaćinstava, ova studija je sprovedena u pet sela Sadar Upazile okruga Mimensing. Podaci su prikupljeni iz namenski kreiranog uzorka od 85 od 900 seoskih domaćinstava. Istraživanje je ukazalo na*

postojanje razlika u ciljanoj oblasti, koje po mnogim osnovama utiču na razvoj ruralnih domaćinstava. Rezultati su pokazali da žene nemaju ili imaju mali udeo u prihodima/ primanjima porodice, da ne postoji jednak status žena, da ženama nije dozvoljeno da rade van kuće, da su žene podložnije siromaštvu, da žene preuzimaju veći teret proizvodnog rada i rada u kući. Žene su više učestvovala u čišćenju kuće, brizi o deci, kuvanju i pripremanju obroka, a najmanje u sadnji stabala, izradi mlečnih proizvoda, uzgoju živine, itd. Oko 88% žena doprinosi povećanju porodičnih prihoda. Muški članovi domaćinstva dominiraju u donošenju odluka vezanih za domaćinstvo, ne postoje jednake mogućnosti za visoko obrazovanje, fizičko i mentalno zdravlje žena, dok se žene suočavaju i sa teškoćama na tržištu rada. Stopa učešća žena u mnogim procesima donošenja odluka, kao što su brak, obrazovanje dece, zdravstvena zaštita, upotreba kontraceptiva i učešće u nevladinim organizacijama je veoma niska. Rodna neravnopravnost utiče na rast stope smrtnosti kod majki (92% ispitanika potvrđuje), povećava plodnost (88% se slaže), povećava miraz (88% saglasnih) i nasilje u porodici (89% saglasnih). Društvene norme i vrednosti ograničavaju mogućnosti žene da učestvuje u razvojnim aktivnostima.

**KLJUČNE REČI:** *pol, rodna neravnopravnost, društveno-ekonomski kontekst, razvoj domaćinstva*

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