

# Journal of Law and Human Rights

Volume 5, Issue No. 1, 2025

P-ISSN: 1998-4278

## Challenges and Impediment of Women Empowerment in Bangladesh: A Study on Kushtia District

Atifa Kafi<sup>1</sup>, Taniya Khatun<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Development Studies, Islamic University, Kushtia

<sup>2</sup>Post-graduate, Department of Development Studies, Islamic University, Kushtia

### ABSTRACT

Women are regarded as the primary driving force and strength of society. No development initiative can succeed without the active participation of women. To ensure prosperity, peace, and sustainability in any nation, it is crucial to guarantee their involvement in every sector. However, the reality is often far from this ideal. Like many other developing countries, women continue to face deprivation and neglect throughout their lives. The main aim of this paper is to identify the key barriers, practices, and customs that confine women, restricting their freedom, rights, and overall empowerment. These social structures perpetuate gender inequality, limiting women's access to power, property, status, privileges, education, and opportunities for empowerment. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, purposive sampling was employed, with 250 women from both urban and rural areas being selected as respondents. Data analysis was conducted using Excel and interviews with semi-structured questionnaires were used for data collection. The major findings of this study highlight that dismantling traditional norm and raising awareness through enhanced education can help society recognize that women are not a burden, but rather a gift from God. By providing personal care, boosting self-esteem, ensuring their rights, and breaking down harmful practices, women can be empowered and recognized as valuable assets. When given the proper support and opportunities, they can contribute significantly to the prosperity of the nation.

**Keywords:** Impediment, Barriers, Women Empowerment, Violence, Discrimination

### Introduction

Bangladesh is a densely populated country, with approximately 17 crore people living in the country (SVRS, 2023). Of this population, about 8.18 crore are male and approximately 8.34 crore are female (Population Census, 2022). This shows that nearly half of the total population is composed of women, and without their involvement, no development policy or national advancement can be realized. Women empowerment is regarded as one of the most important issues and a key concern for the development of this country (UNICEF, 2022). Women are considered active agents in the development process, and without empowering women, it would be as if half of the population is excluded from the country's overall development, including economic, political, and cultural advancement.

Bangladesh is an agro-based developing country, and about 80% of the population lives in rural areas and relies on agriculture. These families are often strongly bound by traditional heritage, religious ties, and social norms. This remains one of the major challenges for the empowerment of women. Although the government and other institutions are working together to overcome these barriers, which affect the empowerment process, these

challenges have not been fully eliminated. In rural areas, particularly, women working outside the home are often not regarded as respectable. Women work hard in domestic spheres all day, yet their labor is frequently unrecognized, and they are not given the respect they deserve from male family members or society at large. Religious norms, traditions, and superstitions predominantly govern our society, and like many other under developed and developing countries, Bangladesh remains entrenched in a patriarchal system, where women are dominated in all spheres, from family decisions to economic status (Islam, 1977).

The Government of Bangladesh aims to reduce disparities, and it has enforced numerous laws and policies in this regard. There is no doubt that the socio-economic status of women has been improving overtime. Bangladesh has also made remarkable progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially in reducing child and maternal mortality rates and addressing gender disparity. Women's participation is considered a crucial factor in empowering women and transforming the country from low-income to a middle-income nation (Neal, 2013). The government has enacted the National Policy for the Advancement of Women to empower women and establish them as a strength for the nation. However, there are still impediments that restrain women's empowerment (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, 2011). Thus, the purpose of my study is to identify these barriers to women's empowerment in Bangladesh, with a focus on Kushtia district.

In Bangladesh, 51% of girls are married before they turn 18 (Niport, 2022). A survey conducted in 2022 revealed that 40.9% of women were married before reaching the age of 18. In 2021, this figure was 32.4%, and in 2020 it was 31.3%. This survey also found that child marriage is more prevalent in rural areas, where 44.4% of women marry before the age of 18, despite the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, which sets the legal age for marriage at 18 for women (Nilima, 2024).

Rape and sexual violence are significant issues. A report indicates that around 114 women were raped in the first three months of 2024, with 3 of them killed, 1 dying by suicide after the assault, and approximately 325 children becoming victims of such violence (Nilima, 2024). This alarming situation leads families to discourage their daughters from working outside the home. Additionally, many women have limited freedom to make choices in their lives. Due to family pressures, they often cannot voice their desires or make decisions about their own lives. This lack of freedom reduces them to a subordinate position in society, preventing them from advocating for their rights and contributing to their continued backwardness in the empowerment process.

In recent years, Bangladesh has been recognized with a global Women Entrepreneurship Award for its remarkable progress in women's education and empowerment within the Asia-Pacific region. A recent survey indicates that the number of working women in the country has grown from 16.2 million to 18.6 million between 2010 and 2017 (source: Dhaka Tribune). This increase in the number of women in the work force under scores the ongoing strides toward women's empowerment in the country.

Women's empowerment can be ensured by giving women the autonomy to make decisions about their own lives, which is essential for fostering their independence and self-worth. Providing access to information and resources is crucial, as it equips women with the tools they need to improve their lives and actively participate in society. The ability to pursue their desires and dreams, without restrictions or societal constraints, is another vital component of empowerment. Furthermore, empowering women to enhance their skills,

knowledge, and capacity to create positive changes in their communities can have a far-reaching impact on society as a whole. Encouraging women to maintain a positive outlook and embrace new perspectives also plays a key role in their personal growth and development. Lastly, providing women with the power to control their lives and improve their self-image is essential for building confidence and enabling them to thrive in various spheres of life. These factors collectively contribute to a more empowered and equal society for women.

The topic of women's empowerment is complex. Without their participation, sustainable, equitable, and inclusive growth in our country would be impossible. However, it is a matter of great regret that women remain economically, culturally, socially, and politically vulnerable throughout their lives. A recent survey found that nearly 60% of women continue to face violence, domination, and harassment throughout their lives (Neal Walker, 2013). All they require is enough support and security to gain the real definition of development through inclusivity. In order to do that, it is a prerequisite to identify the barriers which are trapping women for years. Once we can do that, practical policies can be made regarding the situations of women in different regions.

### **Research Questions**

The key issues of women empowerment in Bangladesh are rooted in gender-based violence, unequal pay, limited education, and restricted employment opportunities. Women often face domestic abuse and sexual harassment, especially in rural areas. Cultural norms and early marriages hinder their access to education and the workforce, while gender-based discrimination leads to unequal pay, limiting financial independence and growth.

Socio-economic factors like education, income, and health significantly impact women's social and economic status. Limited access to education and particularly in rural areas, reduces women's opportunities for economic independence. Cultural and religious expectations that prioritize caregiving roles over professional growth further restrict women's advancement in the workforce and society, perpetuating a cycle of inequality.

### **Research Objectives**

The primary aim of this research is to identify and analyze the key issues of women's empowerment in Bangladesh by focusing on the socio-cultural, economic, and legal barriers against social participation. These issues include poverty, patriarchy, gender-based violence, limited access to education and employment, unequal pay, and cultural norms that reinforce gender inequality. The study will highlight the challenges that women face in overcoming these obstacles and achieving equality in both public and private spheres.

In addition, this research aims to explore the socio-economic status of women in Bangladesh by examining factors such as labor force participation, access to education, economic independence, and freedom of decision making. It will assess how women's roles within the family and society are shaped by socioeconomic factors and how these factors impact their overall empowerment. By understanding the intersection of gender and socio-economic status, this research will provide a comprehensive picture of the current situation of women in Bangladesh and the ongoing challenges they face.

### **Literature Review**

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional socio-economic process and it helps people to gain control over their lives. Empowerment is a process whereby women become able to

organize themselves in order to increase their own self-reliance to assert their self-right. To make auctions and to control which will help in reducing their challenge of subordination. (Keller, 1991).

Empowerment can be understood through various key aspects, including social, economic, cultural, psychological, and political dimensions, all of which are interconnected (Friedmann, 1992; Riger, 1993). Women's empowerment, in particular, is a widely discussed topic today. In simple terms, it refers to women having the power and authority to make decisions about their own lives, families, and communities (Alemu, 2018). The concept of empowerment has been interpreted in many ways and has evolved over time depending on the context and circumstances (Islam, 2014).

Women empowerment depends on having sufficient control over resources, capacity in personal freedom, a sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy, and changing the existing ideology. The World Bank has suggested that women empowerment should be a key aspect, leading all processes corresponding to greater participation in decision-making power and control, improving the ability to control resources, determine agendas, and make decisions (Sen, 2000).

Bangladesh is a developing country with a predominantly rural population. Women's empowerment in the context of Bangladesh is measured using eight key indicators, which are the ability to make small purchases, economic security, mobility, ability to make larger purchases, involvement in major decisions, relative freedom from domination by the family, political and legal awareness, and participation in public protests and campaigning. Additionally, women's empowerment is assessed through four main dimensions, which are mobility, decision-making power, employment status, and leadership (Hashemi, 1996).

Women empowerment is a process by which the impoverished group gains control over the circumstances of their lives. It indicates not only extrinsic control but also a growing intrinsic capability of the term. Besides, greater self-confidence and an inner transformation of one's consciousness enable women to overcome external barriers. Additional elements like traditional ideology, and monitoring and evaluating these changes can create an environment conducive to women's empowerment (Batliwala, 1994).

“Women empowerment” the term holds great importance due to its ability to reduce the curse of poverty and its power to enhance the rights of all human beings (DFID, 2000). Most scholars, development partners, and members of civil society have reached a commitment. In the meantime, Bangladesh has achieved considerable success in this regard. In recent years, women have had great opportunities to establish themselves through micro finance and the ready-made garments industry, enabling this vulnerable group to achieve economic emancipation (Goetz, 1996; Kabeer, 1999, 2001).

Women empowerment plays a crucial role in the socio-economic process of any country, involving participation in decision-making, holding significant power to control income, raising awareness about rights and freedom, improving their position in the family, and generating confidence in their capabilities (Keller, 1991).

The diversification of the education system creates an opportunity for women to move from domestic work to professional activities, and in most developed countries, they work alongside men at the same level in any type of organization (Nandy, 2014). Women-

controlled and women-owned businesses are now a significant functional foundation of society and the overall economy (Sinha, 2019).

In the meantime, the world has made significant progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals related to women empowerment set by the United Nations in 2000. Moreover, the overall performance of women empowerment has had a substantial impact on ensuring social and cultural emancipation in both urban and rural areas, improving living standards and facilitating the overall economy to a great extent (Chakraborty, 2019).

Though the prospects of women's involvement in business are still criticized in developing and under developed countries, they have to face several obstacles and harassment to achieve success. Such domination still exists in many parts of the world and in various nations in a subtle way. In many cases, the situation is quite worse. There women are restricted and confined within walls, unable to move a single step without permission from men. This disparity is quite natural, and these practices are cherished in many poor and under developed nations to a great extent (Allen, 1992).

Gender inequality and differential treatment are also common issues in this context. In the Indian sub-continent, due to poverty, when the general population feels helpless and cannot meet the minimum effort to feed their children, they sacrifice the welfare of girls (Rose, 1999). Research conducted in rural Tanzania has revealed a similar pattern, where families sacrifice their daughters in response to extreme crisis. Frequent natural disasters and wide spread food scarcity make the situation worse. In an attempt to cope with these challenges, some individuals turn to crimes, such as the murder of witches, which has become disturbingly common place in this region (Miguel, 2004).

Girls also face significant discrimination when it comes to medical care. A study found that many parents are indifferent and unwilling to invest in health purposes, considering it as a waste of money. As a result, though medical science is upgraded with the advancement of the modern world, the rate of maternal and child mortality still exists in society. (Khanna, 2003).

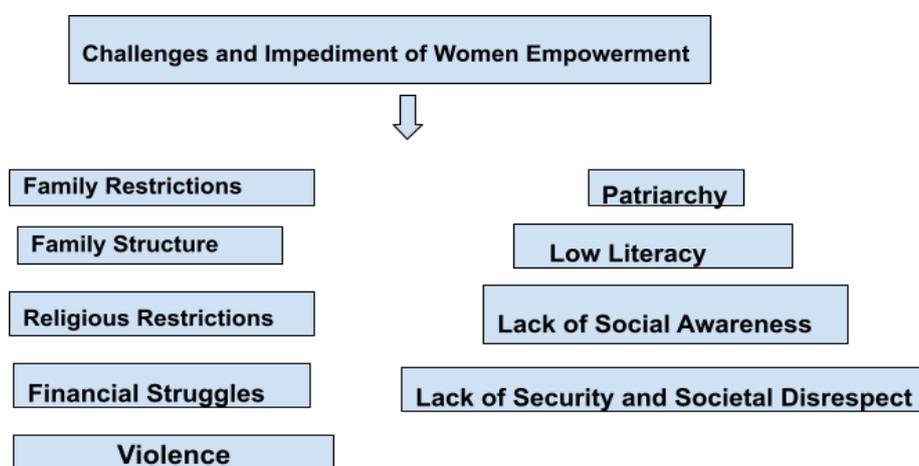
As half of Bangladesh's population consists of women, without addressing their needs equally, overall socio-economic development will not be achievable. Empowering women is crucial for achieving success in this area. To make this happen, sound policies and a holistic approach are essential. These efforts play a key role in changing society's outlook in the longterm. However, this journey is not easy. To reach the goal, awareness should begin at the individual level and spread from households to communities. The goal should be ultimately affecting the overall socio-cultural structure of society. The Millennium Development Goals, which are approaching their end in 2015, aim to ensure inclusive growth, sustainability, and equality (BBS, 2012). Achieving inclusive and equitable growth is impossible without considering and involving women. One of the core components of the Millennium Development Goals is "Women Empowerment and Gender Equality" (Neal Walker, 2013).

Today, women in Bangladesh are actively contributing to the national economy by participating in economic, cultural, and political life. The changes in women's lives have had a significant impact on the national economy and have greatly influenced progress in human development over the past quarter-century (Mahmud, 2017; Hossain, 2018).

Another major obstacle, towards women empowerment is related to women safety and security. Sexual harassment on the way to school also raises a big question about the safety and security of girls attending school. The sanitation facilities, such as toilets, are very poor, especially in rural communities. This is another cause of missed school days. Besides this, traditional norms and male ego are also note worthy in this context. A report reveals that about two-thirds of women agreed with the statement that men should have priority over women because they bear all the responsibilities in the family. They carry the burden of the family's needs, from goals to medical expenses. If they don't earn, the entire family will face starvation. This view strategically overlooks the fact that women can also be contributors to any family. Even 56% of women agree with this statement (Raeesa Rahman, 2023).

While most studies focused on the significance of women's empowerment and addressed barriers from economic, political, and social perspectives, cultural barriers are often overlooked. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to identify and explore the cultural barriers to women's empowerment, with a specific focus on the Kushtia district.

### Conceptual Framework



### Methodology

This study uses both numbers and personal stories to understand the situation of women better. Data was analyzed using Excel, and information was also gathered through semi-structured interviews. The data was collected from 250 women, both from urban and rural areas in the Kushtia district. A purposive sampling method was used to select respondents based on their relevance to the topic. Also, a semi-structured questionnaire was employed to collect primary data, enabling the interviewer to ask open-ended questions within a pre-determined theoretical framework. The primary aim of this study is to explore the actual socio-economic status of women, identify the root causes of their challenges, and propose measures to reduce the societal barriers they face. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, ensuring confidentiality in the collection of primary data. Secondary data was gathered from various sources, including journals, newspapers, reports, and literature, in line with the study's objectives.

### Limitations

A key limitation of this study is that it could not explore every aspect of women's empowerment using a scale-based approach. This was due to the nature of the data and the cultural context. Many women in the study area are unaware of their rights or existing inequalities, often accepting societal barriers as normal. Their lack of awareness and he

situation to discuss gender issues made it difficult to collect detailed responses. Additionally, the study was limited by budget constraints, which restricted the scope of data collection. A larger budget would have allowed for a broader survey, more in-depth interviews, and additional research tools to better understand the issue. The focus on Kushtia district also means that regional differences in cultural, social, and economic challenges could not be fully captured. Future research should include multiple regions and a larger sample to provide a more complete picture of women's empowerment in different contexts.

### **Findings and Discussion**

After analyzing data, we have been able to find out some major impediments of women empowerment in the study area. Reviewing data, we see that there also have some key reasons which also hamper the empowerment process badly. Including patriarchal system, cultural norms, taboo and religious ties, family structure, low literacy rate, child marriage, lack of awareness, insecurity in working place, gender-based violence, dowry, and domestic violence. Lack of proper establishment of law and order is considered as the major hindrance in women empowerment process in Bangladesh. In this study, it has been noticed that through family restriction, most of the family have not got proper education and due to the lack of education they are not self-confident enough to raise their voice against the domination or malecentered oppression of the society.

Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring that women can actively contribute to and benefit from the nation's development. Overcoming these barriers will enable women to access the necessary resources and support for their empowerment.

### **Family Restrictions Impacting Women's Empowerment**

In many families in Bangladesh, a strict patriarchal structure prevails, where men hold all decision-making power, and women are treated as subordinates with no freedom of choice. Many men believe that if women are educated or aware of the outside world, they will become disobedient and disrespectful. To maintain control, restrictions are placed on women, even limiting their movement for personal needs.

*“I was born into a poor farming family, but I always dreamed of becoming a teacher. I was a bright student, eager to continue my education. However, when I was 16, my family arranged my marriage, and I had no say in the matter. After marriage, I faced constant harassment from my in-laws over dowry. When my father couldn't meet their demands, my husband divorced me and married someone else.”* (Participant 1, 23 years old, urban Bangladesh)

### **Family Structure and Women's Empowerment: Cultural influence**

Family structure plays a significant role in women's empowerment. In extended and joint families, women are burdened with numerous household responsibilities, leaving them with little time for personal growth. In contrast, women in nuclear families experience less pressure and have more opportunities for empowerment. According to data from 250 women, only 18.8% in extended families and 27.6% in joint families have access to empowerment, while 53.6% of women in nuclear families participate in the empowerment process, highlighting the greater opportunities for women in nuclear family settings.

Women Empowerment in Different Family Structures

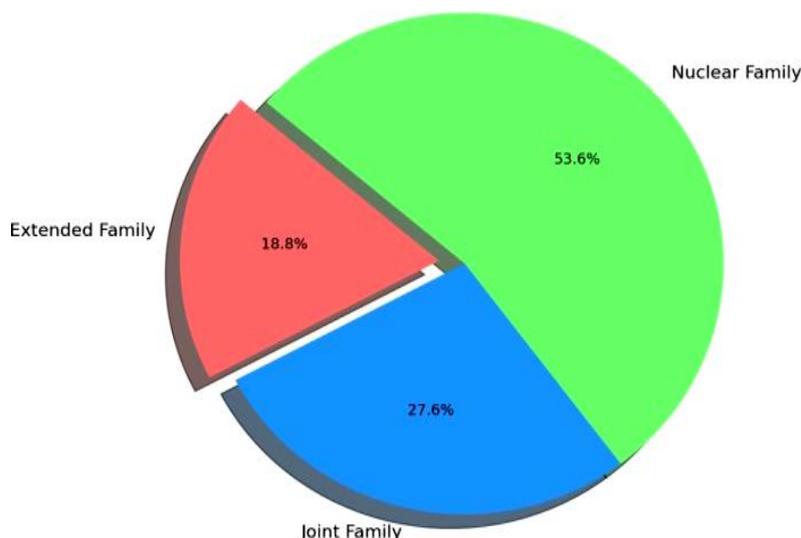


Figure 01: Family Structure of the respondents

### Religious Restrictions and Women Empowerment

In many families, religious beliefs impose strict roles on women, emphasizing obedience to husbands and household duties. Among the four religious groups studied, Muslims form the majority. Out of 190 individuals, 76 Muslim women have access to empowerment. In Hindu families, the rate is 22, while in Christian families, it is only 2. No Buddhist women were found in this area. These findings highlight the significant influence of religious ties and superstitions on women's empowerment. Women are often discouraged from working outside the home, as it is considered inappropriate or a task only for lower-class families. Certain religious interpretations claim that men are solely responsible for earning and providing for the family, reinforcing the idea that women should remain at home. This mindset hinders women's empowerment by restricting their opportunities for financial independence and personal growth.

*“I come from a middle-class family and completed my MBA, hoping to work in the banking sector. However, my family arranged my marriage into a strict, religious joint family where women had no voice. The men controlled all decisions, believing that religion forbids women from working outside. They insisted that a woman's duty was to manage the household, care for children, and serve her husband. My in-laws viewed working women as disobedient and immoral, fearing it would harm the family's reputation and lead to social disruption.”*(Participant 2, 25, urban Bangladesh.

Religion	Population	Rate of Women Empowerment
Islam	190	76
Hindu	55	22
Buddhist	0	0
Christian	05	2
	<b>Total=250</b>	

Figure 02: Religious Restriction of the Respondents

### Low Literacy and Financial Struggles for Women

Education is a key driver of women's empowerment, providing them with essential skills, confidence, and opportunities for growth. However, this research indicates that low literacy

rates significantly hinder women's awareness of their rights and potential. According to UNESCO, globally, two-thirds of illiterate adults are women, limiting their participation in social and economic activities. Studies show that educated women are more likely to engage in decision-making, workforce participation, and community leadership, contributing to overall national development.

Financial struggles further widen this gap. Families with low income often prioritize education, especially for daughters, reinforcing gender equality. There is research suggesting that in low-income households, girls are more likely to drop out of school due to financial constraints, child marriage, or household responsibilities. In contrast, wealthier families invest more in their daughters' education, leading to greater empowerment and social mobility. This economic disparity highlights the urgent need for targeted policies and support systems to bridge the gap and ensure equal educational opportunities for all women.

*“Without education, I feel trapped. I depend entirely on my husband, who decides everything for me. I wish I had studied more, maybe learned some skills, so I could work and be independent. I see other women with education who have jobs and confidence. I want the same for my daughters.”* (Participant 3, age 19, rural Bangladesh)

Figure 03: Educational Status of the Respondents

Educational Status	Population	Rate of Women Empowerment
Signature Completed	25	10
One - Five	50	20
Six - Ten	80	32
SSC - HSC	60	24
HSC - Masters	35	14
	<b>Total=250</b>	

### **Patriarchy and Women's Lack of Autonomy in Decision-Making and Lower Pay Scale**

In many families, especially in patriarchal societies, men usually make all the important decisions of their families. Such a tendency leaves women with little to no autonomy over their lives. This research indicates that in many developing countries, including Bangladesh, traditional gender roles dictate that men control financial, social, and personal decisions within households. According to a UN Women (2023) report, over 70% of women in South Asia have limited decision-making power in their own households, including choices related to education, marriage, healthcare, and employment.

This lack of agency reinforces gender inequality, as women are often expected to obey male authority without question. Many are treated as dependents rather than individuals with rights, limiting their ability to pursue education, careers, or even basic personal preferences. Studies have shown that when women are empowered to participate in decision-making, families benefit from improved economic stability, better child development, and overall societal progress. Addressing this issue requires legal reforms, education, and awareness campaigns to promote gender equality and women's rights in decision-making.

*"In my family, decisions were always made by my father or brothers. I was never asked what I wanted, whether it was about my education, marriage, or even simple daily choices. When I expressed my desire to continue my studies, I was told that a woman's place is at home, and my opinions didn't matter. Eventually, I was married off at a young age without any say in the matter.*

*Now, as I see other women gaining independence, I realize how much freedom I was denied. I want my daughters to have a different future one where they can make their own decisions and choose their own paths in life. Women are not just silent followers; we deserve the right to think, speak, and decide for ourselves." (Participant 4, 35 years old, rural Bangladesh)*

Despite women's increasing participation in the workforce, they are often paid less than their male counterparts for the same work. The disparity of payment limits women's economic independence and further reinforces traditional gender roles, preventing women from achieving financial stability. This hinders women in having equal opportunities for career advancement. This unequal compensation is not only an economic injustice but also a major obstacle to women's overall empowerment in the country.

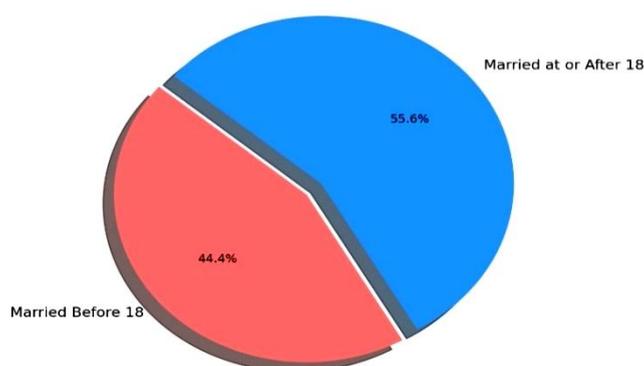
*"I have been working in the garment factory for over five years now. I do the same work as the men, sometimes even more, but when it comes to the paycheck, I always get less. My male colleagues get higher wages, even if their work isn't as hard or as long as mine. It's frustrating because I know I'm doing the same job, but they still think I'm worthless. I'm just trying to support my family, but this unfair pay makes it so hard to save or have any independence. It feels like the system is designed to keep us women in the same place, no matter how hard we work." (Participant 5, age 20)*

### **Lack of Social Awareness and Early Marriage**

In many rural areas, poverty and illiteracy prevent families from prioritizing education, especially for girls. Struggling to afford daily meals, many believe that institutional education is unnecessary for women, leading to low female enrollment in schools and minimal interest in women's empowerment.

This lack of awareness also contributes to the high rate of child marriage. According to UNICEF (2023), Bangladesh has the highest child marriage rate in South Asia and rank eighth globally. Despite the enforcement of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, about 44.4% of women still marry before the legal age of 18. Social norms and financial struggles continue to drive early marriages, further limiting women's education and empowerment opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires stronger awareness campaigns and policy enforcement to ensure a brighter future for women. According to Figure 04, it can be observed that among the total 250 respondents, approximately 45.6% were victims of child marriage. The consequences of early marriage have significantly hindered their ability to continue their education, thereby greatly impeding the process of women's empowerment.

Child Marriage Rate in Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2023)



**Figure 04: Early Marriage**

### **Women’s Security and Societal Disrespect**

Women’s safety and security remain significant concerns, especially as incidents of rape, sexual harassment, and violence continue to rise. In a patriarchal society, women are often viewed as commodities, leading to their mistreatment and exploitation. This mind set causes women to feel insecure in all aspects of their lives, whether in public spaces, workplaces, or even within their own homes.

The fear of abuse and the stigma surrounding mistreatment destroy a woman’s reputation, often making it impossible for her to move forward in life. In many communities, a woman who has been victimized is seen as a disgrace to her family, and the trauma of such events can leave lasting emotional and social scars. Such situations are so acute that many women take attempts at suicide considering it as an escape from the physical and mental torture.

### **Domestic and Gender-Based Violence: Major Obstacles to Women's Empowerment**

Domestic violence remains a significant curse and one of the major barriers to women's empowerment in our society. It is widely acknowledged, often discussed by mothers, grand mothers, and neighbors, and many women in the past, particularly in the nineteenth century, have suffered from this ongoing issue. The situation is so severe that many women, in an attempt to escape the ongoing abuse, have even considered suicide as an escape from the physical and emotional torture. With no support from their husbands, their families, or society, these women lose all hope in life.

Violence against women manifests in various forms, including dowry-related violence, sexual harassment, cheating, murder, child abuse, robbery, kidnapping, trafficking, acid attacks, molestation, and more. These forms of violence rob women of their educational, political, social, and cultural freedoms. The persistence of orthodox beliefs and practices within society only exacerbates the problem, as women continue to suffer from physical, mental, and emotional violence. The deep-rooted patriarchal norms further perpetuate this cycle, making it difficult for women to break free from abuse.

Gender-based violence is a significant issue in our subcontinent, where societal beliefs and a male-dominated, patriarchal system play a critical role. The traditional view that male children bring strength and honor to the family results in them receiving extra care, privileges, and opportunities. This imbalance extends to education, decision-making, and career opportunities. On the other hand, women are often mistreated in their families, work places, and various other aspects of life.

According to recent research, **31.2%** of women (78 out of 250 respondents) have been victims of gender-based violence, highlighting the wide spread nature of this issue. The persistence of such violence and mistreatment severely limits women's empowerment, as they are continuously marginalized and denied the rights and freedoms they deserve. Addressing gender-based violence requires a societal shift in attitudes, legal reforms, and improved support systems for women to escape this curse.

<b>Total Respondent</b>	<b>Number of Women become Victims of Gender-based Violence</b>	<b>Rate of Women become Victim of Gender-based Violence</b>
250	78	31.2%

*Figure 05: Gender-based Violence*

### **Case Study 1: Rehnuma's Journey to Empowerment**

Rehnuma, from a poor farming family, had dreams of becoming a teacher and supporting her family. At 14, her family arranged her marriage while she was still in school. Her family, mostly illiterate, lacked awareness about the negative impact of child marriage and the importance of women's education. Despite her desire to continue her studies, she could not oppose the marriage due to her lack of decision-making power. After marriage, she faced severe harassment and dowry demands from her in-laws. Unable to meet the demands, her husband divorced her and remarried. This traumatic experience opened her parents' eyes to their mistakes. Determined to rebuild her life, Rehnuma returned to school, completed her education, and secured a good job. Now, she supports her family financially and enjoys decision-making power in family matters. Rehnuma has become a role model and inspiration for young girls in her village, showing that empowerment through education is possible.

### **Case Study 2: Rima's Struggle Against Societal Norms**

Rima, a graduate with an MBA, aspired to work in the banking sector. However, after completing her studies, her family arranged her marriage to a man from a joint family. In her husband's home, the patriarchal structure dominated, and women were restricted to household duties. The family believed that women should not work outside, citing religious beliefs and fears of disruption to family life. They viewed working women as characterless and a threat to social harmony. Despite her dedication and desire to pursue a career, Rima's husband, influenced by his family, refused to support her dream. With no decision-making power and burdened with the responsibilities of managing a large household, Rima's aspirations were crushed. Her dreams were left unfulfilled due to societal norms and lack of support from her family.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of barriers to women's empowerment and discussions with respondents, the following recommendations are suggested to address these challenges:

1. Women should be given access to education to help them become self-reliant and independent. Since poverty is a major barrier to girls' education, the government should provide more subsidies to encourage families to prioritize educating their daughters.
2. Awareness-building initiatives should be implemented to ensure that women are informed about their rights and the importance of education. It's crucial to challenge and break down outdated societal norms, promoting a more progressive and inclusive outlook toward women. Societal campaigns should encourage women to speak out about their rights and take action.
3. Women must be treated with respect, and strict rules should be enforced against eve-teasing and violence. Immediate action must be taken against individuals who disrespect or harm women.
4. Efforts should be made to dismantle patriarchal family structures and religious constraints that contribute to discrimination, ensuring equal treatment of men and women. Educating men about women's rights can also play a significant role in this transformation.
5. Opportunities for women to participate in all sectors political, economic, and social should be expanded. Additionally, equal pay should be ensured across all fields of work, fostering fairness and empowerment for women.

## Conclusion

We are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where women's empowerment is increasingly recognized as essential for societal progress. To stay in line with the modern world, there is no alternative to empowering women. Women are active agents of society, and their participation is crucial for the overall advancement of society. It's time to change our perspective on women and treat them as independent individuals with the right to make decisions about their own lives. By empowering women to become independent decision-makers, we can help them improve their social status and greatly enhance their lives.

## References

1. Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics (SVRS) 2023 (Uploaded: 26-08-2024).
2. Census (2022): Bangladesh's female population 83.34 m, male 81.7 m, 2022. Published in Tribune deskin 27 July,2022.
3. Islam. S (1977), Women Education in Bangladesh: The foundation for Research and Educational Planning and Development, Dhaka, pp.25.
4. Neal Walker: Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh: Looking beyond the MDGs: published On Daily Staron March 2013.
5. Nilima Jahan (2024). 114 Women raped in the last months this year: published on Daily Staron April 2.2024.
6. Keller B, and DC Mbwewe (1991). Policyand Planning for the Empowerment of Zambias' Women Farmers. Canadian Journal of Development Studies 12:75-88.
7. Friedmann, J. (1992) Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
8. Riger (1993) "Internal Notions for Promoting the Sense of Empowerment" p. 281.
9. Alemu, S. H., Van Kempen, L., & Ruben, R. (2018). Women empowerment through self-help groups: The bittersweet fruits of collective apple cultivation in highland Ethiopia. Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 19(3), 308-330
10. Islam MS, MF Ahmed and MS Alam (2014). The role of micro credit program on women empowerment: Empirical evidence from rural Bangladesh. Developing Country Studies; Vol (4), pp.90-97
11. Sen S., Batliwala, S. (2000). Empowering Women for reproductive Rights. In Presser H. B., Sen G. (Eds.), Women's empowerment and demographic processes (pp. 15-36). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
12. Hasemi, S. M.(1996): "Rural Credit Programs" \*Hossain N. (2018) "Post Conflict Raptures "; (March). doi: 10.1016/ j.wsif.
13. Batliwala, S. (1994). "The meaning of Women's empowerment; New Concepts From Action. In population policies reconsidered: Health, empowerment and rights. Harvard University, Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies 127-138.
14. Goetz, A. M., and Gupta R. S. (1996) Whotakesthecredit? Gender, power and control over loan use in rural credit programs in Bangladesh. World Development, 24(1) pp.45-63.
15. Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. Development and Change, 30, 435-464.
16. Kabeer, N. (2001). Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. In Sisask A., (Ed.), Discussing Women's Empowerment: Theory and Practice (SIDA Studies No. 3, pp. 17-57). Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.
17. Keller. B, and DC. Mbwewe (1991). Policy and Planning for the Empowerment of Zambias' Women Farmers. Canadian Journal of Development Studies12: 75-88.
18. Kumar, N., Raghunathan, K.,Arrieta, A., Jilani, A., Chakrabarti, S., Menon, P., & Quisumbing, A. R. (2019). Social Networks, Mobility, and Political Participation: The

- Potential for Women's Self-help Groups to Improve Access and use of Public Entitlement Schemes in India. *World Development*, 114, 28-41
19. Huis, M. A., Hansen, N., Otten, S., & Lensink, R. (2019). The Impact of Husbands' involvement in goal-setting training on women's empowerment: First evidence from an intervention among female micro finance borrowers in SriLanka. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*.
  20. Nandy, S., & Kumar, S. (2014). Women entrepreneurship in 21<sup>st</sup> century India. *Global Journal of finance and management*, 6(9), 967-976.
  21. Sinha, M., Mahapatra, S. S., Dutta, A., & Sengupta, P. P. (2019). Micro finance and Women Empowerment: An Empirical Analysis. In *Handbook of Research on Micro-financial Impacts on Women Empowerment, Poverty, and Inequality* (pp. 52-64). IGI Global.
  22. Chakraborty, A., Sharma, P., & Chaturvedi, C. (2019). Increasing Impact of Self-Help Group on Women Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation: A Study of Reliability. *International Journal of Advance & Innovative Research*, 6(2), 35-38.
  23. Allen, S. & Truman, C. (1992). Women, business and self-employment: a conceptual mine field. In *Women and working lives* (pp.162-174). Palgrave Macmillan, London
  24. Rose, E (1999), "Consumption Smoothing and Excess Female Mortality in Rural India" *Review of Economics and Statistics* 81(1): 41-4
  25. Miguel, E. (2004), "Poverty and Witch Killing," forth Coming Review go Economic Studied.
  26. Khanna, R. Kumar, A. Vaghela, J.F., and J. M. Paliyel (2003), "Community Based Retrospective Study of Sex in Infant Mortality in India," *British Journal of Medicine* 327: 126-129.
  27. Neal Walker: Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh: Looking beyond the MDGs: published On Daily Star on March 2013.
  28. Mahmud, M. et al. (2017). "Women Empowerment in Bangladesh: Household Bangladesh Ready-Made Garments Industry. A Conceptual Model; *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management*, 6 (2). Pp.-1085-1101. doi: 10.4236/ajibm.2016.611102.
  29. Hossain N. (2018) "Post Conflict Raptures", (March). doi: 10.1016/ j.wsif.
  30. Raesa Rahman (2023). "How empowered are women in Bangladesh: Published on Daily Star on 23 September in 2023.