

Factors Associated with Mobility of Adolescent Girls: Evidence from Rural Bangladesh

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Background:

Restricting the freedom of movement of girls and women outside the home is common in Bangladesh, as in other parts of South Asia, (Naved, Chowdhury, Arman & Sethuraman, 2007; Ram, Mohanty, Singh, Ram, Jejeebhoy, Santhya, & Acharya, 2010). Restrictions on mobility are thought to be associated with long standing customs and traditions articulated in the rules of purdah or seclusion (Amin, Ainul, Akter, Hossain, Alam, Ahmed & Rob, 2014). These mobility restrictions can have important implications for the socialization of girls by regulating the ability of girls to engage in civic activities or avail income earning opportunities outside the home. Mobility restriction may also limit opportunities for accessing education and health services. The specific nature of restrictive mobility may vary according to local context and can have important implications for the conceptualization and design of programs to improve the lives of girls and women through better programs and services.

This paper explores factors associated with the mobility of rural adolescent girls using data collected for an intervention research study on generating evidence to delay marriage in Bangladesh. The paper explores the ways in which factors such as family wealth and education are associated with specific forms of mobility.

Data and Methods:

A quantitative survey was conducted with around 12000 adolescent girls in 2013. Respondents were adolescent girls aged 12-19 years selected randomly from sample clusters of approximately 700-1000 households living in the vicinity of 96 schools that were chosen as potential intervention sites for an adolescent skill development program. The survey included questions about socio-economic status, experiences, knowledge and attitudes concerning factors that affect their lives. The outcome variables are responses to questions on activities that the respondents have participated in.

Preliminary Findings

Survey findings indicate that adolescent girls' mobility in rural Bangladesh is very low. Less than one percent of all adolescent girls have permission to go out to attend a club or related activities but a good percent (70%) of adolescent girls are allowed to go to market to buy materials. Similarly, around 21 percent of girls overall said that they played outdoor games but this percentage varied substantially with age. About 64 percent adolescent girls visit their friends and among them older girls are less likely to visit friends. Around 90 percent of all adolescent girls thought that girls should maintain purdah when they are outside the home.

Sixty percent of the sample is between ages 12 to 15 and 76 percent girls are Muslim. More than 90 percent adolescent girls have begun to menstruate, 78 percent are enrolled in school in the study areas and among all the girls 19 percent are ever married. Percent of adolescent girls among the categories of family wealth are almost equally distributed. Only 10 percent adolescent girls reported that they ever worked for income (Table 1).

Bivariate associations shown in Table 1, it show that in general, mobility gets restricted as girls get older: only 9 percent girls aged from 16-19 years reported that they played outdoor games compared to 28 percent girls aged from 12-15 years. Older girls are less likely visits their friend than younger adolescent girls. Relative to Hindus and Christians, Muslim girls are less likely to attend club/association, go to market or play outdoor

games. Girls who are poor are less likely to go to the market, visit friends, plays outdoor games. School enrollment plays a positive role by allowing greater mobility, access to clubs and institutions and by promoting social interactions. Married girls are less likely attend any club meetings, go to the market and considerably less likely to play outdoor games (2.2%) compared to unmarried girls.

Table 1: Percentage of adolescent girls reporting mobility by socio-economic variables by outcomes

Variables	Percent distribution among total population (%)	Goes to club/association (%)	Goes to the market (%)	Plays outdoor games (%)	Visits Friends (%)	Thought purdah should be maintained outside home (%)
		0.6%	61.9%	20.6%	64.1%	89.2%
Age						
16-19	39.7%	.6	60.9	9.1	53.7	89.9
12-15	60.3%	.6	62.6	28.3	71.0	88.7
Religion						
Islam	76.3%	.4	59.3	18.7	61.8	98.6
Hindu, Christian & Other	23.7%	1.1	70.5	26.9	71.6	58.9
Experienced menstruation						
Yes	90.2%	.6	61.6	18.1	63	89.3
No	9.8%	.2	65.1	44.1	74.1	87.6
Wealth quintile						
Lowest	20%	.5	53.5	21.1	58.1	83.8
Second	19.9%	.6	56.9	19.5	61.1	90
Middle	20.1%	.6	62.8	19.4	65.0	91.4
Fourth	20%	.7	65.2	20.4	66.1	90.7
Highest	20%	.6	71.3	22.8	70.2	90.1
School enrollment						
In-school	77.9%	.7	66.6	25.6	73.7	88.6
Out-of-school	22.1%	.3	45.5	3.0	30.0	91.1
Marital status						
Married	19.1%	.2	46.7	2.2	73.7	92.5
Unmarried	80.9%	.7	65.5	25.0	30.0	88.4
Working status						
Ever worked	9.9%	1.7	69.8	15.9	26.8	92.3
Never worked	90.1%	.5	61.1	21.2	72.9	88.8

Factors associated to mobility

Five dependent variables are explored as factors reflecting the mobility of rural adolescent girls in Bangladesh. The dependent variables are: attends club/association meetings, goes to the market, plays outdoor games, visits friends and girl's opinion whether purdah should be observed outside of home. Effects estimates associated with independent variables on the dependent variables are estimated from separate models and shown in Model 1, Model 2, Model 3, Model 4 and Model 5, respectively. The independent variables included: age, religion, whether menstruating, wealth quintile/economic status, school enrollment, marital status and working status.

Table 2 shows results from a multivariate analysis of socio-economic factors associated with each of the dependent variables. Two outcomes are significantly associated with age-- older girls are less likely play outdoor sports and more likely to say they are allowed to go to the market. They are also more likely to attend clubs and more likely to observe purdah and less likely to visit friends but these differences are not statistically significant. All outcomes are significantly associated with the religion. Muslim girls are less likely to attend clubs/associations, go to the market, to play outdoor games, to visit their friends and most of them have to observe purdah outside of home. Starting menstruation restricts girl's mobility in terms of going to the market, and girls who are yet to experience menstruation are more than three times as likely to say they play outdoor games relative to girls who menstruate.

There is a strong association between probability of going to the market and economic status of adolescent girls. Wealthiest girls are more likely go to the market, visit friends and to observe purdah. The association between playing outdoor games and economic status of adolescent girls is not statistically significant. In-school adolescent girls have more mobility than out-of-school girls in terms of all indicators. Three outcomes are significantly associated with schooling status- in-school girls are more likely to go to the market, play outdoor sports and to visit their friends.

Marriage limits the activities of adolescent girls and they are less likely go to the market, engage with a club/association, play outdoor games and visit friends and married girls are more likely to maintain purdah outside home than unmarried girls. Three outcomes are significantly associated with marital status-going to the market, playing outdoor games and visiting friends. Unmarried girls have more than three times higher probability to play outdoor games and to visit their friends than married girls. Working experience also varies the pattern of mobility of adolescent girls. Girls who ever worked to earn are more mobile than those girls who never worked.

Table 2: Results of logistic regression analysis on association of mobility and socio-economic variables

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	Goes to club/association	Goes to the market	Plays outdoor games	Visits Friends	Thought purdah should be maintained outside home
	Odds ratio	Odds ratio	Odds ratio	Odds ratio	Odds ratio
Age					
16-19 (r)					
12-15	.989	.838**	2.582**	1.054	.852
Religion					
Islam (r)					
Other	2.636**	1.633**	1.556**	1.460**	.021**
Experience					
Menstruation					
Yes (r)					
No	.277	1.164*	3.569**	1.052	.812
Wealth quintile					
Highest (r)					
Lowest	.830	.523**	1.021	.789**	.668**
Second	1.115	.579**	.893	.798**	.947
Middle	1.072	.716**	.854*	.866*	.994
Fourth	1.228	.775**	.904	.877*	.947
School enrollment					

Variables	Model 1 Goes to club/association	Model 2 Goes to the market	Model 3 Plays outdoor games	Model 4 Visits Friends	Model 5 Thought purdah should be maintained outside home
	Odds ratio	Odds ratio	Odds ratio	Odds ratio	Odds ratio
In-school (r)					
Out-of-school	.680	.556***	.232***	.334***	.820
Marital Status					
Married (r)					
Unmarried	2.902*	1.518***	3.709***	3.382***	.759*
Working Status					
Ever worked (r)					
Never worked	.248***	.620***	.831*	.944	.814

Significant at *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Discussion and Conclusion

Although mobility restrictions are common in rural Bangladesh the extent of restrictions varies by socio-economic factors. The data reveals important differences in the pattern of mobility of adolescent girls by age, religion, economic status, education, marital status, and age. The mobility of girls is also restricted when they experienced their menstruation. Relative to younger girls, Muslim girls and unmarried girls, the mobility of older, Hindu/Christian/other religion and married adolescent girls is more restricted and controlled. Marriage reduces social networks and interactions. Education, on the other hand, greatly expands friendship and other networks. Girls who are in school are less restricted relative to adolescent girls who are not in school. Most adolescent girls do not play outdoor games and are not involved in clubs/associations and they support observing purdah outside the home. The analysis presented here shows that girls who attend school and earn are more mobile as are girls who are from wealthier households. Though the mobility of rural adolescent girls is restricted, schooling access offers opportunities for change. School continuation, later marriage, developing life skills and creating livelihood opportunities are factors that can increase the mobility of the adolescent girls in rural Bangladesh.

References

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