Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage in Asia – and one of the countries with the fourth highest rate in the world. It is illegal for girls under the age of 18 and for boys under 21, with exemptions that allow for marriage with special “social” status. Yet three out of five young women were married as children, with more than one in five married by the age of 15 in 2014.

83% 83% 85% 87% 88%
93% 94% 95% 96% 97%

Bangladesh
Rangpur
Khulna
Chittagong
Barisal
Sylhet
Kathmandu
Bhaktapur
Khusab

57% 59% 61% 61% 63%
61% 63% 71% 70% 75%

THE HIGHEST IN THE REGION

Poorest Quintile
Richest Quintile

Women aged 20-49 years who were first married or in union before age 18 in each region, by wealth quintile

Percentage of women aged 20-49 years who were first married or in union

62% 58% 66% 64% 61%

Richest Quintile
Poorest Quintile

Khulna

The marriage happened suddenly. The groom’s family came to see me on my way to school. My parents were not aware about that and did not allow the marriage. But I knew that I could not have anything of my own. I used to be bright in my first pregnancy, but this time my physical condition is not good. I had given up hope of stopping her marriage when two leaders of her adolescent club in Jamalpur, Naval, 17, was engaged to be married at the age of 13. She did not want to marry. When she was pulled out of school and had no idea how to take care of a child, she was encouraged to marry a boy she did not love and was forced to delay the marriage.5

Child marriage is associated with limited opportunities. Often young girls have to leave school, get married, and have children – and delay the marriage.

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While many Bangladeshis believe marriage before the age of 18 is a "social" necessity, 17 out of 20 young women say they would not have married so early.

The CEO of an NGO in Dhaka, 49, said, "Of course there is evidence that families may have limited opportunities, such as in the garment sector, which lead them to consider marriage a feasible option, especially for the third of girls between 15 and 19 reporting by the age of 18 in 2011.

The Livelihoods and Economic Empowerment program (LEEP) of the Asia Foundation in collaboration with利益相关者, works to promote the rights of girls and women, and to support the government’s efforts to end child marriage.

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In Bangladesh, 425,000 girls over four years old were reached through the programme. Working in partnership with organizations and young people in areas like health, education, sanitation, are coming together to End Child Marriage. For the world’s highest rates of child brides, UNICEF and UNFPA have joined forces through a Global programme that was officially launched in 2015 and has dealt with dozens of cases of child marriage. It aims to provide a supportive environment for girls and boys to socialise. But now, “Boys have to stand with girls to build their self-confidence, to make them feel it’s okay to talk about their experiences in their community,” says Sharmin, 32 year-old Superintendant of Jamalpur Police.

Shima Akter, 17 from Shorishabari, Jamalpur, Bangladesh is an adolescent girl who has benefited from the programme. “We talk woman to woman. ” says Sharmin, “I am continuing my education,” says Shima, “to educate her community against child marriage in her village.”

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT BOYS AND GIRLS

“We respect each other. Together we can change society.”

Shima Akter, 17

Shima Akter, 17 wants to be a surgeon when she grows up. “We respect each other. Together we can change society,” says Shima. “I want to do everything I can to stop child marriage and work with other girls.”

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT BOYS AND GIRLS

My parents had started to get proposals from different people before we got the cash transfer. [It is] paying for books, clothes and tuition fees.”

Rokshana Akter Rekh, 57, from Shorishabari, Jamalpur, Bangladesh supports and counsels young women in need. The Child Helpline has received more than 400 calls about child marriages in the past year and helps stop harassments.

CHILD HELPLINE

The Child Helpline has received more than 400 calls about child marriages in the past year and has helped stop harassments of ceremonies.

The Child Helpline is a part of efforts to encourage women and men to report, and better police response. "We talk woman to woman. " says Sharmin, "I am continuing my education," says Shima, "to educate her community against child marriage in her village."