



"The marriage happened suddenly. The groom's family came to see me and the marriage happened on that very same day. I was 13. The groom was 30. There was no chance to feel anything or even think about it.

A lot of boys had been harassing me on my way to school. My family were concerned about my honour. I wasn't ready for marriage, but I had to do it because it was my parents' wish. I wanted to continue studying.

When I had a baby I didn't know how to take care of a child. I am a child myself. I used to be bright and lively. Now I feel like I am suffocating.

I didn't have any complications in my first pregnancy, but this time my physical condition is not good. I am worried about whether I will live or die during childbirth."

Fargana, 16, Jamalpur with her 14 month old son.



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ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN BANGLADESH

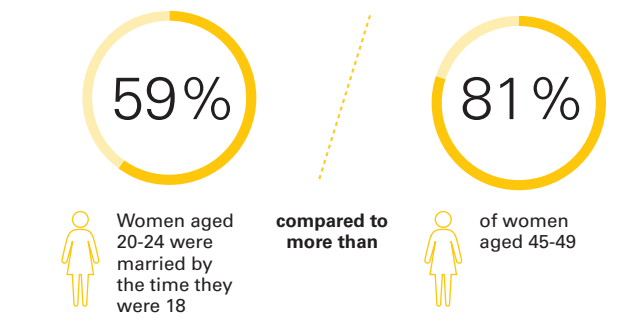
Shima Akter was 15 when her marriage was stopped. She is now 17 and is active in an adolescent club in Jamalpur, Bangladesh. Through various activities like karate, dance and drama, these adolescent clubs educate community members about the consequences of child marriage.

Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage in Asia – and one of the countries with the fourth highest rate in the world.¹ Marriage is illegal for girls under the age of 18 and for boys under 21, with exemptions that allow for marriage with special permission. However, almost three out of five young women were married as children, with more than one in five married by the age of 15 in 2014.² The latest data available shows child marriage also affects boys, but to a far lesser extent – with four per cent

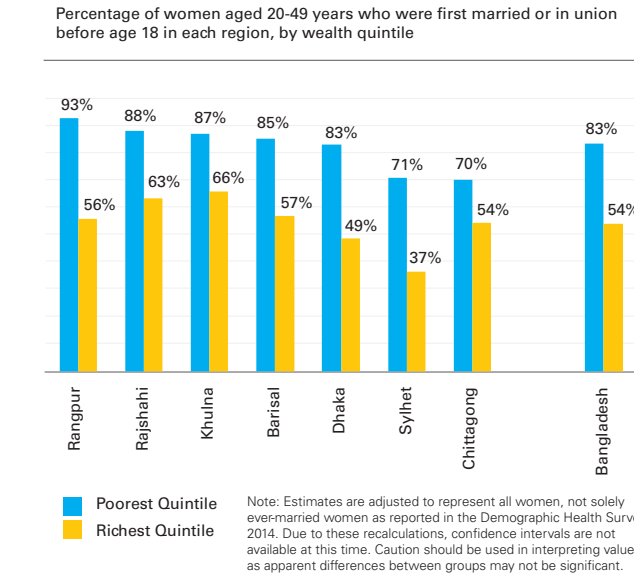
of men aged 20-24 reporting that they were married by the age of 18 in 2011.³ Child marriage violates children's human rights, limits their choices and opportunities, and leaves them vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse. In Bangladesh, almost a third of girls between 15 and 19 are already mothers or pregnant with their first children,⁴ putting them at greater risk of devastating childbirth injuries like obstetric fistula, and of losing their child before the age of five.

Child marriage is associated with limited opportunities. Where young girls have access to employment, such as in the garment sector, there is evidence that families may delay the marriage.⁵ The reasons behind child marriage are varied and complex. For many families, it is a social expectation. Others believe they are protecting their daughters from a future of poverty, or the risk of sexual assault.

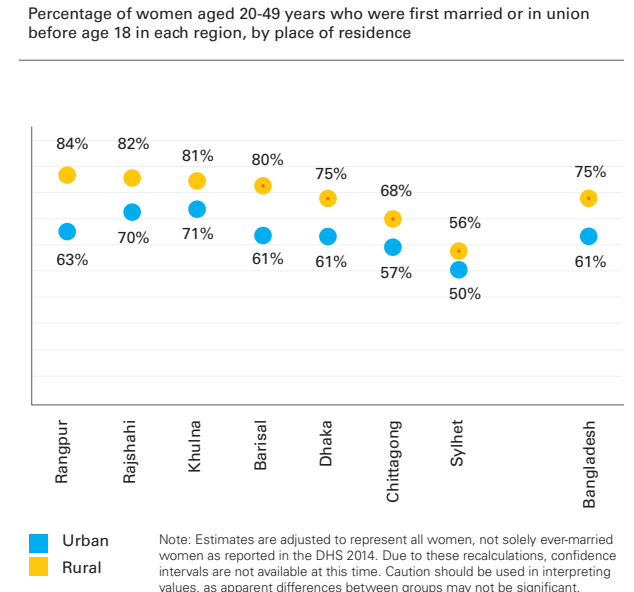
THE RATE OF CHILD MARRIAGE IS GRADUALLY DECLINING, BUT REMAINS THE HIGHEST IN THE REGION ⁶



THE POOREST WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN MARRIED DURING CHILDHOOD THAN THEIR RICHER COUNTERPARTS ⁷

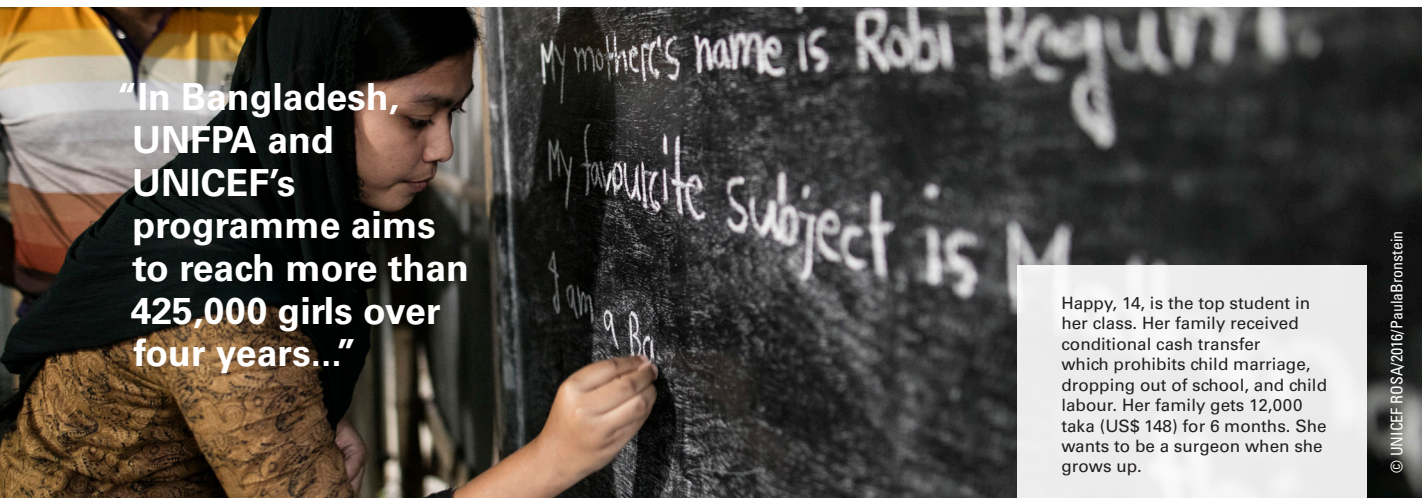


WOMEN WHO MARRIED AS CHILDREN ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE IN RURAL AREAS THAN URBAN AREAS ⁸



Women who have completed secondary or higher education marry almost five years later than those with no education ⁹

Brides are, on average, 6 YEARS younger than their grooms ¹⁰



"In Bangladesh, UNFPA and UNICEF's programme aims to reach more than 425,000 girls over four years..."

Happy, 14, is the top student in her class. Her family received conditional cash transfer which prohibits child marriage, dropping out of school, and child labour. Her family gets 12,000 taka (US\$ 148) for 6 months. She wants to be a surgeon when she grows up.

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In 12 countries with some of the world's highest rates of child brides, UNICEF and UNFPA have joined forces through a Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage. For the first time, existing strategies in areas like health, education, child protection and water and sanitation, are coming together to form a unique holistic programme with shared plans and goals. Working in partnership with governments, civil society organizations and young people

themselves, methods that have already been proven to work will be operated at scale. The programme was officially launched in March 2016 and aims to reach more than 2.5 million girls within the first four years. Donors include the British, Italian, Dutch and Canadian Governments, as well as the European Union.

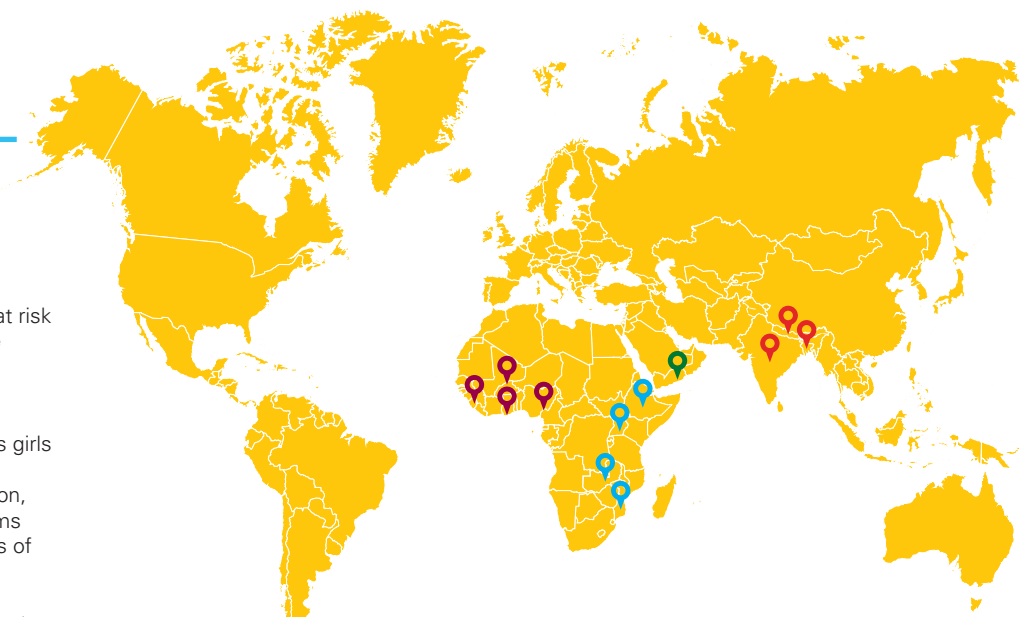
In Bangladesh, UNFPA and UNICEF's programme aims to reach more than 425,000

girls over four years. As well as direct interventions to stop child marriages the two agencies are concentrating on building a supportive environment for children through a wide range of more indirect measures – from working with national and local government, to running programmes to increase young people's self-confidence, to providing separate toilets for girls in schools to encourage them to stay in school.

5 KEY ROUTES TO CHANGE

The Global Programme will:

- 1 Empower adolescent girls at risk of and affected by marriage
- 2 Work with families and communities to promote positive behaviours towards girls
- 3 Ensure that health, education, protection and other systems are responsive to the needs of girls
- 4 Support governments to create a positive legal and policy environment to end child marriage
- 5 Use and build the data and evidence on what works to end child marriage



SOUTH ASIA	WESTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA	EASTERN AND SOUTH AFRICA	MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
Bangladesh India Nepal	Burkina Faso Ghana Niger Sierra Leone	Ethiopia Mozambique Uganda Zambia	Yemen



POSITIVE LEGAL AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The Bangladesh Government is working with UNICEF and UNFPA on a National Plan of Action to help implement three ambitious commitments made by the Bangladesh Prime Minister – Sheikh Hasina – at the Girls' Summit in London in 2014:

- » End child marriage amongst girls under 15 by 2021.
- » End child marriage amongst girls under 18 by 2041.
- » Reduce marriages among girls 15 -18 by a third by 2021.

"Ending child marriage is the top priority of our Government. We can't secure Bangladesh's development without it," said Nasima Begum, Secretary, Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs.



CHILD HELPLINE

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

Bright paper decorations dangled above the first set of guests as they finished their meal. The bride watched from inside her home – just fifteen years old. Dusk, and the groom and his family, were approaching.

The authorities arrived first.

"I still hadn't got changed into my bridal wear," says Yesmin, whose family had arranged her marriage in a bid to protect her after she was harassed by an older man. "I think I was just waiting, hoping for any possibility..."

An anonymous call had been made to the Child Helpline in Dhaka – 1098 – informing them that in Jamalpur, around 200 kilometres away, a wedding was about to take place. Staff at the toll-free national service – set up by the government in 2015, with support from UNICEF, to offer information, counselling and emergency rescues – contacted their mobile response team. Within minutes, the district probation officer, magistrate and police were racing to the scene.

"We informed everyone about the law and that legal action could be taken," says Jannatal Ferdous, Jamalpur District Probation Officer.

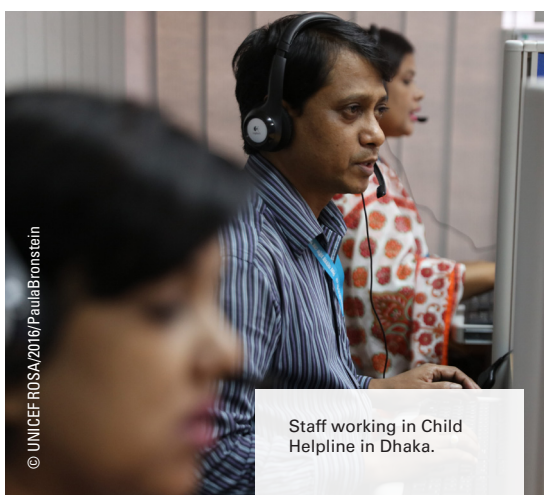
After heated discussion, Yesmin's father was convinced to call off the wedding and wait until his daughter was 18.

"I was so happy when I realised it wasn't going ahead after all," says Yesmin. "I am looking forward to re-enrolling in school."

Local authorities are offering Yesmin support and protection.

"We want to retain girls in school and for them to marry when they are adults," says Deputy Commissioner of Jamalpur District, Mohammed Shahbuddin Khan.

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



Staff working in Child Helpline in Dhaka.

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EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT BOYS AND GIRLS

"We respect each other. Together we can change society."

Shima Akter, 17

In Shorishabari, Jamalpur, it was never common for teenage girls and boys to socialise. But now, twice a week, they are doing just that, in a club supported by UNICEF. The adolescents learn new skills, build self-confidence and work together to speak out on issues like child marriage.

"Boys have to stand with girls to make sure they are not pressured into early marriages. They [child marriages] are not healthy and can harm their [child brides] futures." Arifur Rahman, 19

"We respect each other. Together we can change society." Shima Akter, 17



Adolescent clubs like this one in Jamalpur, Bangladesh are an approach to transform adolescents to be agents of social change. Shima Akter's (in the picture) marriage was stopped at the age of 15. She is 17 now and participates in various activities such as dance, karate and drama to educate her community against child marriage in her village.

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CASH TRANSFER

"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."

Conditional Cash Transfer

- » UNICEF offers cash grants to families assessed as vulnerable.
- » The family must ensure that the child stays in school, is not married off and does not work.
- » Families also take part in sessions on the impact of child marriage.
- » A first instalment of 12,000 taka (US\$ 148) is made to a family.
- » After regular monitoring and assessment of the child's vulnerability, two further payments may be made

"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."



Happy, 14, with her classmates. She is the top student in her class and wants to be a surgeon when she grows up.

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WOMEN'S HELPDESK IN POLICE STATIONS

"I want to do everything I can in the future to stop child marriage for other girls."

"My experiences have made me realise that the police are human beings just like us," says Sharmin, managing a smile.

The 17-year-old is in regular contact with Jamalpur Police Station's Women's Helpdesk, after officers helped her foil two weddings planned by family members.

The desk was officially set up by the Ministry of Home Affairs and UNFPA in 2015 and has dealt with dozens of cases of child marriage. It aims to provide a safe space for women who are survivors of abuses like child marriage, gender based violence and rape to consult with women police officers. Its trained female officers also attend police "call-out" visits involving vulnerable women and girls.

"Women often find it difficult to express themselves fully to male police officers," says 57-year-old Rekha Akter, who runs the desk. "We talk woman to woman."

The desk is part of efforts to reduce crimes against women and girls, by encouraging more reporting, and better police response.

"When we hear of a case of child marriage we have to act very quickly. Child marriage is often connected to other crimes, like sexual abuse and violence," says Rounok Jahan, Assistant Superintendent of Jamalpur Police.

Sharmin is now continuing her studies and hopes to become a police officer.

"I want to do everything I can in the future to stop child marriage for other girls," she says.



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Rokshana Akter Rekh, 57, from the Women's Police Helpdesk supports and counsels young women in need.