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Should we care: A qualitative exploration of the factors influence the decision of early marriage among young males in urban slum of Bangladesh.

Subas Biswas[1], Shuchi Karim[1,2], Sabina F Rashid[1]

Abstract

Objectives To explore how adolescent and young males negotiate their complex realities to explain their pathways into and reasons for early marriage in urban slum of Bangladesh.

Design Qualitative data were used from a three years study from where both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data.

Setting Interviews were conducted in two biggest slums in Dhaka and Chittagong city of Bangladesh from December 2015 to March 2018.

Participants This paper uses qualitative data from 22 In-depth interviews (IDIs) and 3 focus group discussions (FGD) with married and unmarried adolescent and young males aged 15-24 years; 13 IDIs and 4 FGDs with parents and 11 key-informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders. The purposively selected respondents were interviewed in their respective settings.

Results In the context of the urban slums, study revealed that the perceived phenomena of adulthood; drop out from education earlier due to poverty which influence early initiation to income; their aspiration, choice and practicing agency; and desire for family formation and sexuality influence the marriage decision making process especially early marriage among the young males in the context of urban slums of Bangladesh.

Conclusions Study findings shed light on the complex structural factors, social and gender norms, driving the phenomenon of early marriage for both adolescent boys and young males in Bangladesh's urban slums, where conservatism, poverty and urbanization intersect. It is critical that young males should be included in the national and global conversations around child marriage and in the design of research and interventions to prevent child marriage

Key words: Early marriage, Young males, Urbanslums, Bangladesh

Strengths and limitations of this study

➢ This is one of the pioneer studies which explored the complex realities, pathways into and reasons for early marriage of adolescent and young males in urban slums of Bangladesh.

1

> ➢ The in-depth qualitative data were collected using follow-up interview sessions spending long days with respondents to capture and understand holistic scenario of the realities and practices of early marriage.
>
> ➢ Data were collected from two slums of two cities may not represent the whole adolescent and young males realities of other slums in Bangladesh.

Due to the issue sensitivity, our respondents might have some conservativeness to open up and alter the information.

Introduction

Child marriage is a major concern and a public health problem particularly in developing countries. The agenda of 'child marriage' as it pertains to girls has been extensively researched, reviewed and advocated, in an effort to eradicate the practice of Early and Child Marriage (ECM) and comprehend how it impacts the social, cultural, health and economic identity of a girl(1-5).Most of theliterature explores that the root causes of child marriage of girls are poverty, gender discrimination, discriminative social norms, patriarchal attitude, customs and many others(6, 7).However, there is a huge gap in the existing literature with regards to young males' child marriage and its impact on their life (8). Nevertheless, young males also suffer too as their marriage also brings early fatherhood, lowers education and job opportunities which limits their earning power and economic prospects, creates pressure to have income and to provide economic support and take care of families, affects life expectation, freedom, physical and psychological health and social life(9-13).

Although the prevalence of child marriage among boys and young males are lower than the girls, however, these are not uncommon. In a recent UNICEF analysis, it was shown that globally, 115 million boys were married before the age of 18. Among them, one in five was wed before his 15th birthday(14). An evaluation of 82 low and middle income countries data showed that about one in twenty-five boys marry before their age of 18. However, in South Asian context, this rate is about to be 5%(15, 16).

Despite this massive figure, there is a dearth of knowledge about these young males/adolescent grooms, which essentially means that millions of young males are almost non-existent and invisible from past and ongoing research, advocacy, policy and preventive programs surrounding early and child marriage. Recent few researches indicate that in urban slums in Bangladesh, there is an increasing trend for young males to marry before legal age of marriage(17). Keeping this rising but mostly unaddressed issue of ECM of young males in general, and in urban low income/slum context in Bangladesh. This paper aims at understanding the factors influencing and contributing to the causes of early marriage among young males, and what implications does this have on the discourse as well as interventions related to early marriage prevention strategy for all stakeholders. The paper also aims to engage with a deeper understanding of masculinity and sexuality – which hopefully will contribute in a more nuanced analysis of gender and marriage as a social construction in the hetero patriarchal society of Bangladesh.

2

The paper is divided into the following sections: 1) Contextual & conceptual framework or background, 2) methodology, 3) Results, 4) Discussion and 5) Conclusion.

Section 1: Contextual Background

Early marriage and Young males: Context of Slums in Bangladesh

The Bangladesh demographic health survey stated that about four per cent of men aged 20-24 in Bangladesh get married by the age of 18 in 2011(18). However, a survey conducted in some selected slums in Dhaka, Bangladesh reported that approximately 80% of the females and 46% of the males in the slums are the victims of child marriage before they turn 18(17). So, it is observed that the child marriage among males in slums are relatively higher than the national prevalence. Early literature also explored poor socioeconomic condition, like the context of slum, adolescents are more vulnerable to be victimized and experience child marriage(19, 20). In urban slums context of Bangladesh, adolescents living in exacerbated socio-economic conditions, lack scopes for proper information and life opportunities. Poor people in urban slums pass their everyday live in scarcity and uncertainty, lack of scope of opportunities increases the risks of adolescent young males engaging in harmful practices (i.e. gang involvement, early marriage) intersecting with societal gendered expectations about male roles and responsibilities and rapidly evolving urbanization that harm their development and wellbeing(21). Therefore, these new phenomena of child marriage practice amongst young males in a low income, high population density urban slum context which are usually not discussed or focused on, but it is important to understand factors that are shaping early marriage among young males in these contexts. This has implications not only the young males' emotional well-being and health but also on their wives and extended families.

Framing marriageable age

Internationally 18 years is set for adulthood and marriage for males(22), however, Bangladesh has set legal age for marriage for males at 21 years. Though there is a provision that marriage can be arranged before this age in any special circumstances with consent of legal guardians to get a court order(23).

Moreover, marriage in Bangladesh is largely regulated by personal laws which allow marriage before 18(24)(25). Thus, legal loopholes and personal laws, many other religious and customary provisions create challenge to stop child marriage in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh{Ferdous, 2019 #1982}.

These perceptions of marriageable age for girls and boys come from the basic social construction of marriage where the male is ideally responsible for financial care of household, to be the provider and protector of the woman/wife. On the other hand woman/wife is expected to be responsible for household and reproduction(26). This binary of roles of provider and dependent creates a gender power relation, tilted favorably towards the man in terms of decision making. In other words, a man's eligibility centers around financial capacity and virility, while a woman's eligibility is centered around her sexual and reproductive ability. However, the issues of boy's marriageable age remains unaddressed and unchallenged.

3

Boys and young males in the SRHR and Child marriage framework

The SDGs have prioritized on 'leaving no one behind' regarding health and wellbeing, education and gender equality and also specified targets in goals 3, 4 and 5 to increase access to sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) for all. Furthermore, Bangladesh government also sets a target to end child marriage by 2041. Therefore, this paper is particularly positioned in the SRHR and child marriage framework. There is a lack of sense of urgency of addressing the issue of boys and young men within the child marriage space, and this particular paper is a part of a broader research which would like to understand normative perceptions and gender dynamics in the poor urban setting in Bangladesh, focusing on the child marriage phenomena.

Section 2: Methods

This paper is based on a broader research project conducted to investigate the underlying issues that lead to early, child and forced marriages in the contexts of urban slums and specific realities of life in urban slums that lead families to choose child marriage for their children or adolescents to choose child marriage for themselves.

Study settings, respondents and data collection methodology

The broader study was conducted in two purposively selected slums: Bhashantek slum and Shantinagar slum located within Dhaka (capital city) and Chittagong (industrial city) city corporations respectively; two of the oldest and largest urban slums in Bangladesh.

Broader research project collected both quantitative and qualitative data using questionnaire survey with 2136 adolescent girls and young women aged 13-24 years and96 In-depth interview (IDI), and 12 focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted with married and unmarried adolescents and young girls and boys aged 15-24 years, their parents and 33 key-informant interviews (KII) with community leaders, teachers, marriage registrars and program people.

To understand the reasons and pathways into child marriage among young males, this paper uses qualitative data from22 In-depth interviews (IDIs)and 3 focus group discussions (FGD) with married and unmarried adolescent and young males aged 15-24 years; 13 IDIs and 4 FGDs with parents and 11 key-informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders. Among 22 IDIs with adolescent and young males, 12 were early married and 10 were unmarried.

Adolescent and young male participants were selected as interviewee covering diverse groups, married and unmarried, working and not working, in education and not in education. The question guide aimed to extract information regarding the perception, attitude and practice towards marriage, early marriage and their expectations from marriage and in married life. The guideline also included questions to understand the context that influences to young males to get married early and what are the roles they play in these circumstances leading to their marriage, in the decision-making process. After collecting data, verbatim transcript and translation were done of interview recordings, data were coded using Atlasti, followed by thematic analysis.

4

Data were collected using pretested guidelines phase by phase in two study sites from December 2015 to March 2018 by trained interviewers. All the interviews took place at the participant's own settings. Written informed consent was obtained from all the interview participants. The ethical approval of the study was obtained from the ethical review committee of the BRAC James P. Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH), BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Patient and public involvement

Neither patients nor community people of the study sites were involved during the design and development of the study. However, the study team sought expert consultation meetings with the key persons from the academia, researchers as well as practitioners and policy makers. The study results are also shared with national and international communities for advocacy.

Section 4: Results : Reasons of early marriage among young males in urban slums(Pseudonyms are used to maintain confidentiality)

Findings revealed that there are many underlying factors that influence a boy's decision to get married early within the context of the urban slum. Theme 1 describes the perception of adulthood among the respondents and how this influence marriage decision making. Theme 2 states the practices and pathways to making of child marriage decision. Under this theme 2, several sub-themes are identified: capacity to earn a living and play role of a breadwinner, to ensure a fruitful endings of romantic relationship, to fulfill sexual desire, aspiration to form a family and expand social support network through kinship, and finally parental perception of 'protecting' family 'honor' as well the need to 'stabilize' a boy's future. However, decisions pertaining to child marriages of young males are not made in isolation or made specific to one of these factors.

Theme 1: Perceptions of adulthood, being a 'real man'' and readiness for marriage

Regarding perception of adulthood, data from IDI and FGD with male respondents and their parents, it was revealed that there were two stages *na-balok*(*balok*, is a noun, male child around 15/16 years of age, inexperienced and lacks understanding, *na-Balok* is an adjective, not-adult, underage, someone who is not yet old enough to get citizenship rights) and *sa-balok*(adjective, adult or coming of age), which conceptually and colloquially mean childhood and adulthood respectively, and the application of the concepts is for male youth usually aged 13-24. From parent's point of views, *na-balok* is not an age, but rather a life stage when young males are under parent's care, who are not capable of understanding and differentiating between what is good or bad for them. It also implies lack of financial capacity as they are not able to generate steady income or take responsibilities for themselves or their families. One the other hand, when a boy can earn, he is understood to be capable differentiating between good or bad things and take responsibilities – therefore, irrespective of the age, this capacity of earning and awareness of the world grants him adulthood, and he transitions from being a '*na-balok'* to a '*sa-balok*'.

> *"A boy is considered as a man (barohoyese-become grown up or adult) when he can work and earn enough to feed his parents and family members. He can understand good or bad things for his life and capable of taking his own decisions - the right decisions. He can take responsibilities*

> *of his own and also a wife . . . then he can marry as he has capacity to feed his wife including his parents.*" (Mother of adolescents, 55yrin FGD, Bhashantek slum)

It is significant to notice that adulthood for a boy includes capacity to take responsibilities of his immediate family along with the potential of taking a wife, thus starting his own family in time. Therefore, adulthood for male gender is also about having the capacity of becoming a breadwinner and society given gendered responsibility of financially carry an extended version of a family – not a nuclear unit of his own. Here, age is just a number, and adulthood relates to social and gendered concepts of roles and norms. And when a boy earns these characteristics of adulthood, he is also granted the right of marriage and considered as a 'real man'.

But we also see change in this social concept and practice of adulthood for young males, as increasing exposure to education and social advocacy awareness programs convince young men to marry at a later age:

> *"For adult, 18 is not enough, you need more 6-7 years You need job and income, enough income. . . . Before 27-28-30 (years of age), you will not be able to establish financially. Only age, physical growth is not enough (to be an adult)".* (Unmarried boy, age 21, in FGD, Shantinagar slum)

There is also an awareness that income only cannot make a young male ready for big responsibilities of life, like marriage. In the context of Bangladesh, and increasing financial hardship, some felt that it is okay for a male to delay his marriage as long as needed. Higher the educational aspiration and qualification the later he is able to financially become independent and hence delay the marriage. But the bottom line of either side of the argument is that age of marriage for a young male is dependent on being perceived as a financially capable man, who is ready to take on family responsibilities – depending on whatever socio-economic-educational background one belongs to – but never depending on what the legal framework might dictate.

It is important to briefly compare perceptions of boy's age of marriage with that of girls by the same respondents as it clearly indicates differences in norms and practices based on genders. A girl's readiness for marriage is viewed as being sometime dependent on her biology, at the wake of puberty. When a girl reaches puberty, her body shows physical forms of womanhood and reaches menarche – she is believed to be ready for marriage. The social understanding of girl's purpose and readiness of marriage is her capacity of reproduction, to be able to take care of household responsibilities and be in service of her husband and in laws. Financial dependence, not independence is a primary concern for girl's marriage as female gender is considered as responsibility (and burden) for her male custodians (Father, brother and/or husband). Therefore, reasons influencing the age and readiness of marriage for male and female have almost polar opposite positioning of age, income and responsibilities. In the poor socio-economic contexts of slums in Bangladesh, adolescents have to play adult' roles for which they are not ready for- be it marriage or income generating activities. For the greater benefits oftheir families they have to engage in income generating activities earlier to extend financial help to their family (in case of young males), or marry into another family (in case of girls) – as a strategy for their respective survival. Thus,community people, parents, even young males in both slums considered income of a boy as the primary attribute to be able to get married.

6

Theme 2: Decision and pathway into early child marriage of young males

The data revealed that a very common pathway of young males' lives in urban slums is poverty that results in discontinuation of education. Even though young males, because of their social privileges of gender get priorities in families to continue education, usually – poverty is nevertheless a reason for them to drop out from school due to lack of financial resources. There is also an additional reason of peer pressure as young males from similar age group and backgrounds tend to drop out of schools for various reasons and manage to secure some kinds of job or the other in the informal sector as they are expected to support the family. Seeing peers earning money and gaining independence and markers of adulthood – encouraged many to leave school and aspire to earn, take control of life decisions and feel that they are adults. Besides these, many of the young males get married early to bring fruition to their romantic relationships, to fulfill their desires to form a family and expand social support network through kinship, and finally to fulfill newly found sexual desire, which can continue under the umbrella of marriage. Many times parents and families also encourage and support young males at a young age to fulfill these desires and aspirations to start their adult lives as it is considered to socially more acceptable and respectable to organize marriage by families than allowing children to elope or take independent decisions.

2.1 Out of school, into adulthood: Incomplete education, lack of social capital

As presented in previous section that adulthood and age of marriage for young males in urban slums are primarily gained through work and economic capacity before reaching legal age of adulthood. Slum populations are consisted of internally migrated people/families from rural areas often caused by poverty, displacement and economic aspirations for better future in the cities. Slum dwelling is also a socio-economically instable reality for its dwellers live a marginalized existence with a constant threat of evictions and lack of basic amenities. The pressure to earn a living to keep households running is on almost every member of slum households, especially on young males because of their gender. This happens in households where the father is not working, has died, is very sick or has left the household or there is a stepparent who is unwilling to support the rest of the household. These social and economic instabilities in slum communities lead a majority of adolescent boys to drop out of school if they were studying and become early seekers of employment. IDI and FGD with young males and parents found that school dropout is very common in urban slums and the most cited reason is lack of financial support. Parents prefer to send their young sons to work so as to provide the family with additional income and ease the burden of ever increasing expenditures of urban living, with cash required to pay for rent, use of water and other services, food costs, etc. Sometimes, because of the pressure of economic uncertainties, adolescent young males themselves often decide to drop out of school and engage in income-generating activities.

Generating income for a household also translates into a sense of agency or freedom for young males. Monitory freedom can grant them a degree of control over family decisions, including ones regarding his personal life. Saiful, a 23 year old young man in Bhashantek slum, got married at 20, explained the context of economic freedom, agency and decision making process:

7

> *'I had an income. . . I could feed a family. I don't know whether I was at the marriageable age or not but personally I think, I was ready to get married. So, I did (got married).. . I think, age was never a problem."*

During a KII, a male community leader (55 years old) in Bhashantekslum explained it further:

> *"As he (a boy) earns and feeds his family members, parent also have some kinds of economical dependency. If he (the boy) wants to marry, parent may try to prohibit or may not readily agree to his proposal but they cannot create pressure. If they do so, the boy may be get married by himself without the consent of his parents. It is disgraceful (for parents). So, parents agree with such marriage."*

However, Asad who worked as a carpenter for last four years, did not want to get married at that moment as he felt that he had many responsibilities to his family and parents. Even though he is now economically capable of making his own decisions, he prefers to leave marriage decision on his parents:

> *It will be in future. I can't tell about this. However, all the parents want what will be good for their children. If they decide anything about my marriage, they want to marry me off and even if they do not ask for my opinion, I will have no say and will not refuse their decision. (*Asad, unmarried boy, age 17, education-5, Bhashantek slum).

Thus, the idea of having income and potential responsibilities and capacities to take care of a wifedefine the age of marriageable stage and lead young males to the decision of marriage. However, the lack of options for many of these young couples in the slums, this is seen as pragmatic behavior although there are consequences as many are too young to handle the responsibilities of marriage and children.

2.2 Desire for family formation, building kinship and expansion of social networks: Marriage as a medium of social and economic stability:

Saiful, a 23 years old young male, got married at 20 talks about role of marriage as a pathway or means to bringing regularity and stability in one's life. His father remarried after his mother's death and lived in a separate household in the same slum as Saiful and his brother. He feels that marriage brought back stability, motivation and discipline in his life, which was very much lacking when he lived without a guardian or loved one:

> *"Before my marriage, I had enough earnings and could feed my family members. But I would spend all my money to buy cloths, hang out with friends and at the end of the month, I was empty handed. Then I thought, if I get married, I would have to push myself to work hard and earn more. I thought, I need a family life otherwise I wouldn't be going forward with my life*." (Saiful, age 23, married at 20, Bhashantek slum)

All adolescent boy respondents mentioned that marriage is a mandatory and obligatory social norm which is unavoidable and non-negotiable. As boys they are expected to get married at some stage of their lives and head the family household. There is a common perception that everybody must form a family and everyone should get married at some stage of their lives. This role of a husband, a father and potential head of family – is a role that one must fulfill as part of his duty in life. Because boys in urban

8

slums are either forced by circumstances to earn a living and be economically independent earlier in life – most did not see any good reason to delay marriage.

> "*As I am a boy, one day I have to be married. I will have to form a family, I will have one or two kids. As I loved this girl, I didn't want to lose her, so we got married…*"(an early married boy, age 18, married at 17, worked in a garment factory, Shantinagarslum, he has a romantic relationship with his colleague in same garment factory and got married by eloping).

Marriage, in a traditional South Asian/ Bangladeshi cultural context is not only a norm but it is a social institution that is used as the basis of expanding kinship, social network and resources. Kinship and families work as social safety networks, especially for low income urban poor slum dwellers that depend heavily on kinship and such networks for survival in cities. For many young people, life in slums is devoid of experiences of extended family, support and nurturing – and marriage is seen as a way to acquire these experiences along with gaining valuable social capitals. Desiring kinship and extension of social network, is cited by Mojnu (24) an orphan boy. Monjulived with his distant maternal uncles before his marriage (at the age of 16). He stated that his uncles also influenced his decision of getting married at a young age:

> "*They (uncles) told if I got married, I would have a family, I would have in-laws and a guardian through them. As I had no one, I thought my wife and her family would give me the support I needed. . . At that time, I also thought, it would be better if I got married since my wife would be able to take care of my family, my food, washing my cloths.*' (An early married male, age 24, married at 16, Bhashantek slum)

In hetero-patriarchal social arrangement of marriage, if the boy is expected to bring financial support, the girl (wife) is expected to bring free labor to support and care for her husband and his household. Marriage is not only about love or sexual desires being fulfilled, but the economic aspect of providing in exchange of free labor at household level in terms of care services – is a transactional reality.

Fahim, an early married adolescent supported this aspect and utility of early marriage:

> *I decided to get married as we needed a support for household work. My mother cannot do any work, she is a diabetic patient. My sister goes to work in a garment factory. It is not possible for her to do all the household chores. I felt that I needed to bring in a support. As she (wife) was able to do household works and she could also earn. I though, it would be better to run our family with her income and my income. .*"(An early married boy, age 18, married at 17, worked in a garment factory, Shantinagar slum, he has a romantic relationship with his colleague in same garment factory and got married).

Unfortunately, a few months after their marriage, Fahim lost his job and at the time of interview, he was very much worried regarding inability to maintain household financial responsibilities. All of the early married males expressed that marriage brought many and overburdened responsibilities into their young males' life, which they were not prepared for. The pressure to earn and be responsible for a family or household, gave rise to psychological stress to them. An early married boy expressed his feelings-

'At times I do not feel good since I am unable to give anything to my wife. I have no income and I have to depend on my father. But I am married, and when my wife asks for something, I cannot provide it to her. It is not always possible to ask money (from my father) for me and my wife." (Maruf, 21, married at 20, Bhashantek slum)

Moreover, it was common for young males to stop their education mid-way or opt for low income employment opportunities as they had no previous experience, skill in job which limited their scope to earn more, forcing them to opt for low income, unskilled and physically hardworking jobs. Furthermore, lack of awareness and poor participation in sexual and reproductive health services, early fatherhood was a common phenomenon to the early married young males in urban slums. It created an extra psychological stress as they were not able to meet the demands and proper care of children.

As our respondents stated that adjusting to new adult responsibilities like adulthood and parenthood, financial responsibilities of running a household and balancing new relationship dynamics in the family and society, settling down to a routine of domestic situation yet remaining entitled to young masculinity challenges their gender and sex role performance, create a stressful situation in their lives. Though culturally most of these new life situations are often fallen on the bride/young girls' shoulders as she is expected to become an adult all on a sudden – it is not that different or easy for the young men.

2.3 Fulfillment of sexual desire

Sex is a taboo topic in Bangladeshi society, even though fulfillment of sexual desire is considered as the primary basis of all marriages. In the discussion of marriage, issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights are still difficult to bring into discussions, especially with young people. Fulfillment of sexual desire is nevertheless cited as one of the reasons to influence young males' decision to get married early. During one to one interviews and some informal discussions, some respondents did admit that sex was one of the driving forces to get married so early. Sex outside marriage and before marriage is considered sinful, is socially condemned and is matter of public shaming (when revealed) – marriage remains the only legal and socially acceptable way of fulfilling sexual desires, which is natural for everyone. To pursue a regular sexual relationship without negative consequences, marriage is considered as a valid pathway for young men.

*"Outside of marriage, I will not always get to fulfill my sexual desires. Even if I want to have sex with a prostitute, I need money! But then she (partner outside marriage) may complain about me or file a case against me! So many people think it is better off to marry a girl instead. Then I can have with her anytime and no one will say anything." (*age24, married at 16, in IDI, Bhashantek slum)

Sexual satisfaction, or at least fulfilling sexual urges/desires is considered to be a male entitlement. Through marriage, a young male desires to have easy access to sex with his wife without having to spend money. Regarding this issue young male's sexuality, sexual awareness and desires, a local school teacher tried to explain social reasons:

"Most of the adolescent now a days, have access to the internet. Those who do not have their own mobile phones, their friends have it and they share phones for watching pornography. It may also influence sexual desire. Adolescents get involved in sexual relation out of marriage to

meet up this desire, which is not socially accepted. Also partners are not always available (to monitor). They are also involved in some risks as society does not approve of sex out of marriage. It may be another cause of getting married earlier for the adolescents." (Teacher, age 39, in teaching profession-17 years, Shantinagar slum)

Pre-marital relationships are not socially or morally accepted in the social fabric of Bangladesh, such relationships attract varying degrees of punishments from communities, families and other social/legal structures. Study findings suggested that the desire for sexual fulfillment among adolescent boys plays a vital role as a cultural factor influencing decisions pertaining to child marriage. However, manyof young male respondents reported that husbands lost attraction to wife day by day and they involved in extramarital relationships.

2.4To ensure fruitful endings to romantic relationships

There was a common perception across all of our respondents that the prevalence of romantic relationships between adolescent boys and girls in the slums was increasing compared to before, or atleast young people were more open about being involved in relationships. They mentioned that mobile phone affordability and accessibility had made it easier for adolescents to communicate with each other, engage in romantic relationships and bypass guardian's surveillance. Moreover, due to the very congested nature of slums, young males and girls could easily interact with one another and neighborhood surveillance of adolescents is far lower than it is in rural areas.

Findings showed that once adolescents engaged in a teen romance, there is a fear of losing 'love', which results in decisions about getting marry as early as possible. A few respondents decided to marry "simply out of love" and due to a fear of losing their girlfriend to someone else if they were late by waiting for adulthood. Young males often become emotionally insecure and frustrated in romantic relationships at this age. Under emotional pressure they assume that only marriage can provide social acceptance to an otherwise frowned-upon romantic relationship. Among four cases of elopement, all respondents made the decision of elopement as they feared succumbing to family pressure to end relationships otherwise.

"In our area, most of the early marriage occurred here due to love relation. Parents allow early marriage in a crucial situation. . . . In our area, most of the marriage occurred due to the relation. When the boy & girl left home and elope together for love affection and come back in the slum after some days, that time parents arranged for their marriage. . . . Out of 100, 80 early marriages occurred here for love affair and most of the formal marriages were performed for leaving home with the partner." (Participants of FGD with young males, Bhashantek slum)

Unlike other cases, where young males made independent decisions (in agreement with parents) to marry early because they had financial agency and independence, in most cases of elopement, young males did not have any earning and were dependent on their parents. The rushed decision of getting married before reaching 'adulthood' was based on fear of losing the loved one. Rejection of romantic relations by parental families can put tremendous pressure on young couples. For example, Rusel (19, married at 17) and Tinni (19, married at 17) who were college students, had two years of relationship

11

but the girl's family did not accept the relationship, so they decided to elope and get married. After getting married in the Kazi (marriage registrar) office, they stayed outside the slum for six months and afterwards both families accepted their marriage. Respondents mentioned that publicly declaring one's romance and being seen to be in a relationship are considered to be tabooed, and as a marker of dishonor to the family. There is always a fear of a girl being led to romantic relation with a promise of marriage and that promise being unfulfilled – that fear of disgrace is real and parents keep vigilance over young people all the time. On the other hand, it is also disgraceful for a boy if he fails to marry his girlfriend. When family member and guardian do not accept this relationship, or boys and girls fall into an uncertain situation about their future around this relationship, from the fear of losing this relationship, they decide to get married.

Peer influences play a role when young males get into romantic relations. Some young males shared that they were influenced to engage in romantic relationship by listening and observing their other friends/co-workers who may be older or in a similar age group who are engaging in such relationships. In an FGD, respondents also mentioned that married adolescents could influence their unmarried adolescent peers through sharing stories of their sexual encounters, which instigates the desires and curiosity of young minds. Friends can influence young lovers to marry immediately as they offer social and moral support to the couples, even assisting them with their elopement plans.

Theme 3: Parental interference and influence: marriage as a disciplinary act

According to respondents, especially parents and young males who are dropped out of education and searched for any employment opportunities or were unemployed, remained at risk of engaging in risky practices such as drug addiction, gang involvement and violence which were prevalent in slum communities. As a result, most families lived with a constant fear that adolescent boys might easily become involved in these risky practices. To reduce the chance of their young sons engaging in risky behaviors, some parents resorted to their son's marriage as an effective means of ensuring young males would be kept away from gangs and other addictive and risky behaviors (i.e. drug and alcohol abuse, gambling, violence).

During an interview, Josna (age 45), mother of an early married adolescent boy in Shantinagar, mentioned that her son was eager to get married at the age of 16, at the onset of his puberty. He was already working as a daily labor at that time and therefore had an earning. Josna and her husband did not agree with their son's wish to be married so early in life. In response the young male stopped working regularly, started hanging out with friends, stayed away from home and started using drugs. After some time, Josna and her husband gave into their son's wish and arranged for his marriage because they feared their son was going astray and would be derailed in life. Marriage was, therefore, not only a fulfillment of their young son's desire, but also a socially acceptable method of controlling an unruly young male in a difficult environment where rule of law was absent.

Parents culturally have control and ownership over children's lives. Important life decisions are made by parents, or at least in agreement and consent with them.

> '… if our parents want, then we have to marry. We cannot do anything else at that time. But we
> are not some guys who want to marry without doing anything. We have to wait for our family

order, we cannot break the order' (FGD interview with adolescent boys and young males, Bhashantek slum).

Marriage often is used as a disciplinary act to reign in an otherwise unruly son and help his guide back to a disciplined homely life:

> '*Suppose someone at 15 earns a lot, like 1000 BDT a day by driving. Now his parents can marry him off. Parents think that the boy has his own income and he may involve in bad practice such as drug use, buy sex . . .they think of getting him married…it will pull him to his wife and not towards bad things. And if there is a child – he will not go towards drugs and alcohol, because when he sees his child's potential future, he is discouraged*' (an unmarried young male in FGD, age 22, Shantinagar slum).

On the flip side of the previous section, i.e. early marriage as an outcome of young love – it is also true that early marriages are sometimes organized by parents who want to save family honor from being tarnished by their adolescent children's love/romantic relationships. Young respondents expressed that no matter what might be the nature of a romantic relation between a young boy and a girl – in slum societies, it is always seen with suspicion of immorality and of sexual nature. The collective suspicion and condemnation of any kind of relation between a young boy and girl can put a seal of disapproval and shame on family's name. Parents not only fear children engaging in premarital sexual relations, but also untimely elopement of young lovers – both of which are matter of disgrace.

Sometimes social scrutiny and pressure can cause parents to arrange for their children's untimely and early marriages, for example, Masud (age 21, married at 20) had friendship with a girl, now his wife(age17, married at 16) near to their house. Both of them were in class nine and their relation at that point was nothing more than a likeable friendship. They exchanged notes and met for friendly chitchats in school. But their neighbors accused them of having premarital sex and complained to his parents about his conduct based on their suspicion. This brought tremendous pressure on the families, and on the adolescents. To save families and the young people from social shame and condemnation, his family arranged his marriage with her even though they both were below their legal age of marriage.

Thus, the community plays an important role in early marriage, in both rural as well as urban slum locations. In the tightly spaced and squeezed living arrangements of slums, it is impossible to ignore or avoid neighbors, their opinions and influences, particularly in those sections that are tightly bounded. Slums are also socially organized through common norms, influences of religious bodies and social leaders. Sometimes, local leaders and society can interfere, support and even organize early marriages if they deem a situation to be crucial to uphold social morality. Local leaders and heads accept early marriage to 'save family honor' in cases where adolescents engage in romantic relationships with each other.

Section 4: Discussion

Our study findings show that gendered social norms and masculine construction shape the decision and pathway into marriage of males. Our findings shows that the decision of marriage for young males is not based on their age rather their economic capacity to earn, capacity to provide financial responsibilities to family, willingness to form a family and expand social network, enjoy sexual life, to bring a girl to

13

support household work. It is also perceived that marriage is a medium to control sexuality, body and mind including bad habits like addiction, extramarital sexual relation. Our study results also support other research findings regarding the key drivers of child marriage practice among young males and young males conducted in the low and middle income countries in South Asia and Africa (27). However, our study findings and analysis focuses on particularly poor urban context in Bangladesh to understand deeply the determinants and pathways into the child marriage among young males. What we see in this research discussion is how gender, adulthood and marriage is lived through the social constructions of masculinity, gender stereotype roles and patriarchal ideology. Each of these shapes the attitude towards marriage and decision of child marriage among young males in these particular settings. Early marriage here is understood under the broader framework of adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR). Hopefully findings from this research will help us to incorporate issues of gender and adulthood along with masculinity in ASRHR and child marriage prevention framework to address the problems for a sustainable solution.

The findings show that the decision towards child marriage among young males and young males in urban slum does not follow a linear pathway, rather it is multidimensional and context specific. Our findings showed that the decision of marriage among the married respondents was influences by dominant masculine and gender role ideologies. In patriarchal domain, males are the main breadwinner for family and they mainly take the financial responsibilities of family. In the context of the patriarchal society of Bangladesh, males and husbands are considered as the breadwinner for family and it is essential to establish dominance in his family and society (28). Perceptions of masculinity in Bangladesh are dominated by concepts of strength, fear, honor, power, sexuality – and marriage plays a central role in fulfilling all these roles for men as it indicates health, power and financial capacity(17). Thus, it is seen in this research that when a young male has income, it automatically elevates him to the stage of adulthood. This strong sense of an emerging adult identity pushes young males to think that they are now capable of getting married as they are assuming the role of a breadwinner.

Respondents in the study showed a clear trend of thinking of peer support as a strong backup system in decisions of child or early marriages. Other studies showed that peers are the one of the most influencing group for adolescents in working place, schools or neighborhood (29, 30). Evidence in Bangladesh in urban slum showed that peer influences, parental will and care, social environment and adolescent's personal choice also play role in how adolescents will continue their lives in slum environment (31). Our study showed that peers had a significant influence to think about marriage as marriage gives them an adult identity which gradually places them as a significant and powerful male member of the family. Young males also get influenced by observing other married young males of similar age and contextual background. In the workplace, there are examples of many other peers who already are married at a relatively early age. Interaction with them, discussion about their married life also may have influence on adolescent young males into desire to get married.

Construction of gender roles in married life has also influence to think to get marriage. Our findings show that bringing a girl as wife in family would help to do household affairs. Therefore to get a free labor for household activities they wanted to get married. Marriage, through which a young male can

14

add support to household work, a care taker of his parents and family – is understood as a compliance to his role as a son.

According to study respondent, there is an increasing trend of love relationship among adolescent and young generation is prominent than before. Young males who are in romantic relation, expressed that losing their girlfriend as wife is disgraceful for them, counted it as a defeat of being as a man. So, they marry by eloping and out of guardians consent as they want to prove their power as a man. This masculine attitude also accelerate child marriage among young males in the study context like urban slum.

Our findings revealed that access to movies, pornography influence and shape the need to be sexually active and in a relationship. Other studies also support this findings that watching pornography/adult sexual content can negatively influence young males, which motivates them to get involved in premarital sexual relationships and shapes their ideas of sex, sexuality and relationships (32, 33). Respondents agreed that marriage guarantees regular sex and a sexual partner. With marriage, sexual desire can be fulfilled without any additional costs or hassles.

Findings revealed that, parents are always in fear of their adolescent and young male child as children may get involved in gang violence, drug addiction or other anti-social activities. There are also evidence that norms, attitude and perceptions about heterogeneous masculinity often instigates adolescent young males to engage in unsafe harmful practices such as practicing violence against others, risky sexual practice, involvement in gangs, and substance abuse (34). In the economically, socially and politically marginalized slum setting, where adolescents lack parental guidance and are surrounded by violence, exploitation and abuse, these vulnerabilities of adolescence can be far greater and more damaging (35). Respondents informed that crimes, sexual and physical violence, drug addiction in urban slum area are very common. Earning capacity at a relatively early age in life not only grants some privileges of adulthood in terms of autonomy in spending money, but it also gives resistance to otherwise omnipresent parental surveillance. This capacity to earn and spend money can easily draw young males to 'bad habits and influences'. Other studies (36)also showed that same evidences. So, parents feel insecure about their sons' lifestyle, and their lack of control. Therefore, they try to engage their sons into work and often in marriages. It also helps parents to secure their financial needs for family. Parents along with (and often under pressure from) other people in society perceive 'marriage' of a young male may be a strategy to protect and to keep control from any uneven practice and a disciplinary act. They perceive that 'marriage' creates some responsibilities and accountabilities to wife and family.

There is definitely a gap between knowledge versus practice. Young males who are in school and have been part of various NGO led advocacy awareness programs on child marriage seem to 'know' about early child marriage and prevention issues – they also knew the 'correct' answers and responses to technical questions (like legal age of marriage, impact of early marriage etc.). But in practice and real life application of this knowledge, it was obvious that practice is more difficult than preaching. Ingrained values, beliefs and norms dominated everyday life choices and most adolescent young males subscribed to socially dominated gendered discriminated practices when it came to marriage. Though young males enjoys relatively greater degrees of gender privileges when it comes to decision making processes and

15

agency in choosing age, time and partners in marriages – but when it comes to their own sisters, most of them supported early marriage arrangements in support of family or parental decisions. Parental ownership and control over child's life and major landmark decisions, like marriage – dominates over every other forms of agency and freedom of young people, especially girls. Young males do exercise, in an increasingly more, powerful position within household, and this role is solidified with their economic power.

After parents, it is immediate and extended families, as well as kinship that play significant roles in shaping children's lives, when it comes to marriage. Reputation, acceptability, social position and respect – aspects of lives that are considered as prized possessions, especially in newly urbanized lives in slums, where survival can depend on social networks – neighbor's, local people and leaders' opinion on relationships and marriages matter. Often time of marriage is decided by these external forces even if the adolescent boy or his parents might want to decide otherwise.

Early marriage takes place for both girls and boys irrespective of what gender norms and values one might harbor. Adolescent boys negotiate a complex web of gender privilege, emerging adulthood, agency and social network and influences in making important decisions of life, like marriage. The matter of early marriage, for adolescent urban slum young males, is rarely a case of vulnerability and victimhood, like majority of their female counterpart. Agency, consent and desire to start family, sexual partnership, to run a household and provide support to parental households with additional (free) labor – are major reasons that influence adolescent boys' decision to marry earlier than legally sanctioned age by the state.

Conclusion

Our study has revealed that the issue of early marriage, in low income urban slum contexts, has many different entry points for young males. Researches show that increasingly both young males and femalesare getting married early with their own consent, and in this research, it is evident that young males have greater voice and agency to give consent to marriage even if they are not technically (legally) adults.

From the findings of this research, we get a glimpse of how in low income socially vulnerable context of urban slums, adolescent young males negotiate adulthood processes in a complex but gender unequal spectrum of power and agency, and when it comes to marriage, these gendered power, privileges and agency pave pathways in asserting decisions that are otherwise not even legally granted to them.

In slum contexts, where space and livelihood is earned with a premium, and newly urbanized families struggle to find a footing in an already crowded and competitive city like Dhaka or Chittagong, there is a constant conflict, pull and push of norms, traditions and modernity – and young people are at the center of these shifting norms and ideas. The new realities of urban spaces bring new realities and definitions of adulthood, and we clearly see that adolescent young males find new agency with new economic prowess. In the context of the urban slums, the perceived phenomena of adulthood, decision making capability, aspiration towards marriage, family formation and sexuality influence the marriage decision

making process especially child marriage among the young males in the context of urban slums of Bangladesh.

When an adolescent boy is considered as adult mainly based on his income ability and marital status, he is deprived of opportunities for his growth and development (8). Moreover, child marriage cut short the adolescence of young males and compromises their fundamental human rights. It affects their education, earning power and economic prospects, expectation, freedom, physical and psychological health and social life (8), however, nominal attention given to the vulnerabilities of young males(37, 38).

Adolescent and young males' child marriage has many risk profiles that not only negatively affect their own situation but also have impacts on their partner's and family life. As long as child marriage prevention program only focuses girls with nominal focus on young males, it will be difficult to address child marriage holistically. A clear understanding about male's understandings, behavior and practice regarding child marriage arecrucial to design interventions and programs to support this group of young men to stop child marriage.

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18

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19

This consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative studies (COREQ) checklist for this article are described as follows-

No Item	Description
Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity	
Personal Characteristics	
1. Interviewer/facilitator	SubasBiswas with other researchers conducted the interviews and focus group discussion sessions. Sabina F Rashid trained researchers how to conduct interviews and focus group
2. Credentials	All of the researchers had minimum Master's degree in Anthropology, Public Health or Social Science Whereas Sabina F Rasid and ShuchKarim have PhD degree.
3. Occupation	All of the researchers were full time engaged in this research; however, Sabina F Rashid and ShuchiKarim were also involved in teaching in universities.
4. Gender	There were a group of researchers and both male and females researchers were in this group
5. Experience and training	All of the researchers had prior experience in conducting research. Moreover, all of the researchers were gone through several training and workshop sessions for present study
Relationship with participants	
6. Relationship established	Prior to data collection a good rapport was established with each respondents and also community people. The researchers spent several weeks in the field and collected data.
7. Participant knowledge of theinterviewer	Participants were informed about the researcher's identity, objectives and involvement in this study.
8. Interviewer characteristics	Researcher informed participants about their designation, affiliation of the organization, aims and objectives of the study and what the involvements of the researchers in this study were. Participants were also informed how researchers would use this data and what would be the role of the researchers in presenting information to other audiences.
Domain 2: study design	
Theoretical framework	
9. Methodological orientation andTheory	Content and thematic analysis were done to underpin the study
Participant selection	
10. Sampling	Purposive and snowballing methods were used to select participants
11. Method of approach	Participants were approached face-to-face
12. Sample size	The broader research project collected both quantitative and qualitative data using questionnaire survey with 2136 adolescent girls and young women aged 13-24 years and 96 In-depth interview (IDI), and 12 focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted with married and unmarried adolescents and young girls and boys aged 15-24 years, their parents and 33 key-informant interviews (KII) with

	community leaders, teachers, marriage registrars and program people.
	However, this present article used 22 In-depth interviews (IDIs) and 3 focus group discussions (FGD) with married and unmarried adolescent and young males aged 15-24 years; 13 IDIs and 4 FGDs with parents and 11 key-informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders.
13. Non-participation	About 10-12 young male respondents refused to participate in this study as they were not interested or they had no time enough to spend time as most of the interviews were conducted at the day tome and these potential participants were engaged in work during day time.
Setting	
14. Setting of data collection	All of the interviews were conducted at participants own setting, whether it was in their home or near to their home where they felt comfort to talk.
15. Presence of non-participants	When interviews were conducted in participant's own home, there were family members near to the interview sessions in some cases. But they were not present full time of the interview sessions. One researcher conduct one interview and audio recorder was used to record all of the conversations with the informed consent of the participants. Two researchers were involved to conduct focus group discussions session. Here researchers also used audio recorder to record all of the conversations with informed consent of participants.
16. Description of sample	The sample characteristics include age, marital status, age at marriage, income and job status
Data collection	
17. Interview guide	Data were collected using pretested guidelines phase by phase in two study sites
18. Repeat interviews	No repeat interviews were conducted
19. Audio/visual recording	The research use audio recording with informed consent of the participants to collect the data
20. Field notes	Field note were taken during and after the In-depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group discussion (FGD) and also key-Informant Interviews(KII)
21. Duration	For IDIs, the duration was about 90-100 minutes, For FGDs, the duration was about 120-150 minutes For KIIs, the duration was about 60-80 minutes
22. Data saturation	Data saturation was not discussed
23. Transcripts returned	Transcripts were not returned to participants for comment or correction
Domain 3: analysis and findings	
Data analysis	
24. Number of data coders	Eight data coders coded the data

25. Description of the coding tree	The authors did notprovide a description of the coding tree
26. Derivation of themes	Themes were derived from the data
27. Software	Atlasti (version 8) software was used to manage the data
28. Participant checking	Participants did not check the findings
Reporting	
29. Quotations presented	Participant quotations are presented to illustrate the findings. Basic characteristics of these participants were also presented with these quotations.
30. Data and findings consistent	Consistency between the data and findings are discussed
31. Clarity of themajor themes	Major themes are clearly presented in the findings
32. Clarity of minor themes	A description of diverse cases and discussion of minor themes are also presented

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Should we care: A qualitative exploration of the factors influence the decision of early marriage among young malesin urban slum of Bangladesh.

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Title page

Title of the paper: Should we care: A qualitative exploration of the factors influence the decision of early marriage among young males in urban slum of Bangladesh.

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1
2
3   **Main text**
4
5   **Should we care: A qualitative exploration of the factors influence the decision of early marriage**
6   **among young males in urban slum of Bangladesh**.
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9
10   **Abstract**
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12   **Objectives** To explore how adolescent and young males negotiate the complex realities of lives to
13   explain their pathways into and reasons for early marriage in urban slum of Bangladesh.
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15   **Design** The Qualitative data used here came from a larger three years study that used both quantitative
16   and qualitative research methods.
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19   **Setting** Interviews were conducted in two of the largest slums in Dhaka and Chittagong city of
20   Bangladesh between December 2015 and March 2018.
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22   **Participants** This paper uses qualitative data from 22 In-depth interviews (IDIs) and 3 focus group
23   discussions (FGD) with adolescent and young males aged 15-24 years; 13 IDIs and 4 FGDs with parents
24   and 11 key-informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders. The purposively selected respondents
25   were interviewed in their respective settings.
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27
28   **Results** In the context of urban slums, this study revealed multiple factors influence early marriage
29   decision making processes among young males. These factors include socially perceived phenomenon of
30   adulthood and readiness of marriage, poverty leading to drop out from schools and early initiation to
31   earning livelihood, manifestations of increasing individual aspiration and agency, fulfillment of romance
32   and erotic desires, and dreams of forming one's own family. In addition parental and immediate societal
33   interference to preserve norms around gender and society can act as catalysts for this decision.
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37   **Conclusions** Study findings imply that complex structural factors, social and gender norms that are
38   contributing to the early marriage for both adolescent boys and young males in Bangladesh's urban
39   slums. These are locations where conservatism, poverty and urbanization intersect resulting in early and
40   often unprepared entry to adulthood for young males impacting on their development and wellbeing. It
41   is therefore, critical that young males should be included in the national and global conversations
42   around child marriage and child marriage prevention program.
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47   Key words: Early marriage, Young males, Urban slums, Bangladesh
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49   **Strengths and limitations of this study**
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51   ➢ This is one of the pioneering studies in the context of urban slums in Bangladesh which explored
52   the complex realities, pathways into and reasons for early marriage of adolescent and young
53   males. .
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➢ The in-depth qualitative data were collected using follow-up interview sessions spending long days with respondents to capture and understand holistic scenario of the realities and practices of early marriage.

➢ Data collected from two slums of two cities may not represent the whole adolescent and young males realities of other slums in Bangladesh but nevertheless this marks the beginning of an exploration to an otherwise ignored group of adolescents from early marriage discussions.

➢ Due to the issue sensitivity, our respondents might have some conservativeness to open up and alter the information.

Introduction

Child marriage is a major public health concern particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh. The agenda of 'child marriage' as it pertains to girls has been extensively researched, reviewed and advocated in an effort to eradicate the practice of Early and Child Marriage (ECM) and to comprehend how it impacts the social, cultural, health and economic identity of young girls[1-5].Most of the existing literature shows that the root causes of child marriage of girls are poverty, gender discrimination, discriminative social norms, patriarchal attitude, lack of awareness and legal loopholes[6,7].However, there is a huge knowledge gap in regards to young males' ECM and its impact on their lives [8]. Nevertheless, young males also suffer as their early marriage practices can bring early fatherhood, lack of educational and subsequent better job opportunities– all of which can limit their socio-economic prospects in life, creating pressure to have increased income to provide economic support for family and children. Early life responsibilities, affect their life expectation, freedom. Like in case of girls, early marriage can have negative impacts on the physical, mental and sexual health development of young males especially in low resource environments. [9-13].

Although the prevalence of child marriage among boys and young males are lower than that of girls, however, this is not an uncommon phenomenon. In a recent analysis, UNICEF reported that globally, 115 million boys were married before the age of 18. Among them, one in five was wedded before his 15th birthday[14]. An evaluation of 82 low and middle income countries data showed that about one in twenty-five boys marry before they turn 18. However, in South Asian context, this rate is 5%[15-16]. The Bangladesh demographic health survey (BDHS) 2011 stated that about four per cent of men aged 20-24 in Bangladesh get married by the age of 18[17].

Despite this significant figure, there is a dearth of knowledge about young males/adolescent grooms, which essentially means that millions of young males are almost non-existent and/or invisible from past and ongoing research, advocacy, policy and preventive programs addressing early and child marriage. A handful of recent researches indicate that in urban slums in Bangladesh, there is an increasing trend for young males to marry before legal age of marriage[18]. Keeping this rising but mostly unaddressed issue of ECM of young males in general, and in urban low income/slum context in Bangladesh, this paper aims at understanding the factors influencing and contributing to the causes of early marriage among young

3

males, and what implications does this have on the discourse as well as interventions related to early marriage prevention strategy for all stakeholders. The paper also aims to engage with a deeper understanding of masculinity and sexuality – which hopefully will contribute in a more nuanced analysis of gender and marriage as a social construction in the hetero patriarchal society of Bangladesh.

The paper is divided into the following sections: 1) Contextual & conceptual framework or background, 2) methodology, 3) Results, 4) Discussion and 5) Conclusion.

Section 1: Contextual Background

Early marriage and Young males: Context of Slums in Bangladesh

A survey conducted in some selected slums in Dhaka, Bangladesh reported that approximately 80% of the females and 46% of the males in the slums are the victims of child marriage [18]. Early literature also explored how poor socioeconomic condition in the context of slums, can make adolescents more vulnerable to be victims of child marriage[19,20]. In urban slums context of Bangladesh, adolescents living in exacerbated socio-economic conditions, lack access to correct information, education and life opportunities. Life of poverty, uncertainties, fear of displacement, violence and social insecurity inevitably increase the risks of adolescent young males engaging in various harmful practices (i.e. gang involvement, unsafe sexual practices, drugs etc.). These risk factors intersecting with societal gendered expectations about male roles and masculinity harm their development and wellbeing[21]. Therefore, these new phenomena of child marriage practice amongst young males in low income, high population density urban slum context which are usually not discussed or focused on, but it is important to understand factors that are shaping early marriage trends. This has implications not only the young males' emotional well-being and health but also on their young counterparts, children and extended families.

Framing marriageable age

Internationally 18 years is set for adulthood and marriage for males[22], however, Bangladesh has set legal age for marriage for males at 21 years. Though there is a provision that marriage can be arranged before this age in special circumstances with consent of legal guardians with a court order[23].Moreover, marriage in Bangladesh is largely regulated by personal laws which allow marriage before 18 for both boys and girls[24, 25]. Thus, legal loopholes and dominance of personal laws along with many other religious and customary provisions create multiple challenges to prevent child marriage in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh[26].

The perceptions of marriageable age for girls and boys come from the basic social construction of gender roles in relation to marriage where the male is ideally responsible for financial care of household, to be the provider and protector of the woman/wife. On the other hand woman/wife is expected to be responsible for household, care and reproduction[27]. This binary gender roles of provider and dependent creates an uneven gender power relation, tilted favorably towards the man in terms of decision making. In other words, a man's eligibility centers on financial capacity and virility, while a woman's eligibility is centered on her sexual and reproductive ability. However, the issues around the social construction of boy's marriageable age is much more complex, something that remains unaddressed and unchallenged.

4

Boys and young males in the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and Child marriage framework

The SDGs have prioritized on 'leaving no one behind' regarding health and wellbeing, education and gender equality with specified targets in goals 3, 4 and 5 to increase access to SRHR for all. Furthermore, Bangladesh government has also set a target to end child marriage by 2041.Therefore, this paper is particularly positioned in the SRHR and child marriage discourse framework. There is a lack of sense of urgency in addressing the issue of boys and young men within the child marriage space.

Section 2: Methods

This paper is drawn from a broader research project conducted to investigate the underlying issues that lead to early, child and forced marriages in the contexts of urban slums and specific realities of life in urban slums that lead families to choose child marriage for their children or adolescents to opt for early marriage for them.

Study settings, respondents and data collection methodology

The broader study was conducted in two purposively selected slums: Bhashantek slum and Shantinagar slum located within Dhaka (capital city) and Chittagong (industrial city) city corporations respectively; two of the oldest and largest urban slums in Bangladesh.

Broader research project collected both quantitative and qualitative data using questionnaire survey with 2136 adolescent girls and young women aged 13-24 years and96 In-depth interview (IDI), and 12 focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted with married and unmarried adolescents and young girls and boys aged 15-24 years, their parents and 33 key-informant interviews (KII) with community leaders, teachers, marriage registrars and program people.

To understand the reasons and pathways into child marriage among young males, this paper uses qualitative data from22 In-depth interviews (IDIs)and 3 focus group discussions (FGD) with married and unmarried adolescent and young males aged 15-24 years; 13 IDIs and 4 FGDs with parents and 11 key-informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders. Among 22 IDIs with adolescent and young males, 12 were early married and 10 were unmarried. As the main target respondents were adolescent and young males (aged 15-24), the socio-demographic background characteristics of the 22 IDI respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic background of the In-depth Interviewed (IDI) adolescent and young male respondents in Bhashantek,slum of Dhaka and Shantinagar slum of Chittagong, Bangladesh (n=22)

Socio-demographic Characteristics	Bhashantek (n=13)		Shantinagar (n=9)	
	Married(n=7)	Unmarried (n=6)	Married (n=5)	Unmarried (n=4)
Age (years)				
18-20	2	5	1	3
21-24	5	1	4	1
Education (years of education)				
<5	4	2	3	2

5

	5 to 9	2	1	2	1
	10 to 12	1	2		1
Age at marriage (years)					
	<17	4		2	
	18-19	1		2	
	20	2		1	
Current Income status					
	Having regular income	1	2	2	3
	Having irregular income	3	1	2	1
	No income	3	3	1	

All of the study participants for qualitative method were purposively selected using snowball techniques covering diverse groups. The question guide aimed to extract information regarding the perception, attitude and practice towards marriage, early marriage and their expectations from marriage and in married life. The guideline also included questions to understand the context that influences to young males to get married early and what are the roles they play in these circumstances leading to their marriage, in the decision-making process. After collecting data, verbatim transcript and translation were done of interview recordings, data were coded using Atlasti, followed by thematic analysis.

Data were collected using pretested guidelines phase by phase in two study sites from December 2015 to March 2018 by trained interviewers. All the interviews took place at the participant's own settings. Written informed consent was obtained from all the interview participants. The ethical approval of the study was obtained from the ethical review committee of the BRAC James P. Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH), BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Patient and public involvement

Neither patients nor community people of the study sites were involved during the design and development of the study. However, the study team sought expert consultation meetings with the key persons from the academia, researchers as well as practitioners and policy makers. The study results are also shared with national and international communities for advocacy.

Section 4: Results: Reasons of early marriage among young males in urban slums

(Pseudonyms are used to maintain confidentiality)

Findings revealed that there are many underlying factors that influence a boy's decision to get married early within the context of the urban slum. Theme 1 describes the perception of adulthood among the respondents and how this influence marriage decision making. Theme 2 states the practices and pathways to making of child marriage decision. Under this theme 2, several sub-themes are identified: capacity to earn a living and play role of a breadwinner, to ensure a fruitful endings of romantic relationship, to fulfill sexual desire, aspiration to form a family and expand social support network through kinship, and finally parental perception of 'protecting' family 'honor' as well the need to

6

'stabilize' a boy's future. However, decisions pertaining to child marriages of young males are not made in isolation or made specific to one of these factors.

Theme 1: Perceptions of adulthood, being a 'real man'' and readiness for marriage

Regarding perception of adulthood, data from IDI and FGD with male respondents and their parents, it was revealed that there were two stages *na-balok* (*balok*, is a noun, a male child of 15/16 years of age, indicating a state of inexperience and lack of understanding.*na-Balok* is an adjective, not-adult, underage, someone who is not yet old enough to get citizenship rights) and *sa-balok* (adjective, adult or coming of age), which conceptually and colloquially mean childhood and adulthood respectively. The applications of these concepts are for male youth usually aged 13-24. From parent's point of views, *na-balok* is not a specific age, but rather a life stage when young males are under parent's care, not capable of understanding and differentiating between what is good or bad for them. It also implies lack of financial capacity as they are not able to generate steady income or take responsibilities for themselves or families. One the other hand, when a boy can earn, he is understood to be capable in differentiating between good or bad, take responsibilities – therefore, irrespective of the actual age, this capacity of earning and awareness of the world grants him adulthood, and he transitions from being a '*na-balok'* to a '*sa-balok*'.

> *"A boy is considered as a man (baro hoyese-become grown up or adult) when he can work and earn enough to feed his parents and family members. He can understand good or bad things for his life and capable of taking his own decisions - the right decisions. He can take responsibilities of his own and also a wife . . . then he can marry as he has capacity to feed his wife including his parents."* (Mother of adolescents, 55yrin FGD, Bhashantek slum)

Adulthood for a boy includes capacity to take responsibilities of his immediate family along with the potential of taking a wife, thus starting his own family on time. Therefore, adulthood for male gender is about having the capacity of becoming a breadwinner and fulfilling society given gendered responsibility of ultimately becoming head of the extended household – not only with the purpose of a nuclear unit of his own. Here, age is just a number, and adulthood relates to social and gendered concepts of roles and norms. And when a boy earns these characteristics of adulthood, he is also granted the right of marriage and considered a 'real man'.

But we also see change in this social concept and practice of adulthood in relation to manhood for young males, as increasing exposure to education and social advocacy awareness programs convince young men to marry at a later age:

> *"For adult, 18 is not enough, you need more 6-7 years You need job and income, enough income. . . . Before 27-28-30 (years of age), you will not be able to establish financially. Only age, physical growth is not enough (to be an adult)".* (Unmarried boy, age 21, in FGD, Shantinagar slum)

There is also awareness that income only cannot make a young male ready for big responsibilities of life, like marriage. In the context of Bangladesh, and increasing financial hardship, some felt that it is okay for a male to delay or stretch the boundaries of marriage age as long as needed. Higher the educational aspiration and qualification the later he is able to financially become independent and hence delay the

7

marriage. But the bottom line of either side of the argument is that age of marriage for a young male is dependent on being perceived as a financially capable man, who is ready to take on family responsibilities – depending on whatever socio-economic-educational background one belongs to – but never depending on what the legal framework might dictate.

It is important to briefly compare perceptions of boy's age of marriage with that of girls by the same respondents as it clearly indicates differences in norms and practices based on genders. A girl's readiness for marriage is viewed as being dependent on her biology, at the wake of puberty. When a girl reaches puberty, her body shows physical forms of womanhood and reaches menarche – she is believed to be ready for marriage. The social understanding of girl's purpose and readiness of marriage is her capacity of reproduction, to be able to take care of household responsibilities and be in service of her husband and in laws. Financial dependence, not independence is a primary concern for girl's marriage as female gender is considered as responsibility (and burden) for her male custodians (Father, brother and/or husband). Therefore, reasons influencing the age and readiness of marriage for male and female have almost polar opposite positioning of age, income and responsibilities. In the poor socio-economic contexts of slums in Bangladesh, adolescents have to play adult' roles for which they are not ready for- be it marriage or income generating activities. For the greater benefits of their families they have to engage in income generating activities earlier to extend financial help to their family (in case of young males), or marry into another family (in case of girls) – as a strategy for their respective survival. Thus, community people, parents, even young males in both slums considered income of a boy as the primary attribute to be able to get married.

Theme 2: Decision and pathway into early child marriage of young males

The data revealed that a very common pathway of young males' lives in urban slums is poverty that results in discontinuation of education. Even though young males, because of their social privileges of gender get priorities in families to continue education, usually – poverty is nevertheless a reason for them to drop out from school due to lack of financial resources. There is also an additional reason of peer pressure as young males from similar age group and backgrounds tend to drop out of schools for various reasons and manage to secure some kinds of job or the other in the informal sector as they are expected to support the family. Seeing peers earning money and gaining independence and markers of adulthood – encouraged many to leave school and aspire to earn, take control of life decisions and feel that they are adults. Besides these, many of the young males get married early to bring fruition to their romantic relationships, to fulfill their desires to form a family and expand social support network through kinship, and finally to fulfill newly found sexual desire, which can continue under the umbrella of marriage. Many times parents and families also encourage and support young males at a young age to fulfill these desires and aspirations to start their adult lives as it is considered to socially more acceptable and respectable to organize marriage by families than allowing children to elope or take independent decisions.

8

2.1 Out of school, engaging in income generation: Gaining agency and sense of adulthood

As presented in previous section adulthood and age of marriage for young males in urban slums are primarily gained through work and economic capacity before reaching legal age of adulthood. Slum populations are consisted of internally migrated people/families from rural areas often caused by poverty, displacement and economic aspirations for better future in the cities. Slum dwelling is also a socio-economically instable reality for its dwellers live a marginalized existence with a constant threat of evictions and lack of basic amenities. The pressure to earn a living to keep households running is on almost every member of slum households, especially on young males because of their gender. This happens in households where the father is either not working, or has died, or has left the household or there is a stepparent who is unwilling to support the rest of the household. These social and economic instabilities in slum communities lead a majority of adolescent boys to drop out of school if they were studying and become early seekers of employment. IDI and FGD with young males and parents found that school dropout is very common in urban slums and the most cited reason is lack of financial support. Parents prefer to send their young sons to work so as to provide the family with additional income and ease the burden of ever increasing expenditures of urban living, Sometimes, because of the pressure of economic uncertainties, adolescent young males themselves often decide to drop out of school and engage in income-generating activities.

Generating income for a household also translates into a sense of power, agency and ability to reposition oneself within a household. For young males, even though circumstances might push them to assume their ultimate gender role of the head of household at a much early age, this eventually grants them some unprecedented freedom to make decisions for themselves. The transition to '*sa-balak*' status through assuming financial responsibility for an entire household translates into some degrees of control regarding their personal lives. Sariful, a 23 year old young man in Bhashantek slum, got married at 20, explained the context of economic freedom, agency and decision making process-

> '*I had an income. . . I could feed a family. I don't know whether I was at the marriageable age or not but personally I think, I was ready to get married. So, I did (got married).. . I think, age was never a problem.*"

During a KII, a male community leader (55 years old) in Bhashantek slum explained it further:

> "*As he (a boy) earns and feeds his family members, parents also have some kinds of economical dependency. If he (the boy) wants to marry, parent may try to prohibit or may not readily agree to his proposal but they cannot create pressure. If they do so, the boy may be get married by himself without the consent of his parents. It is disgraceful (for parents). So, parents agree with such marriage.*"

Thus, the idea of having income and potential responsibilities and capacities to take care of a wife define the age of marriageable stage and this lead young male to the decision of marriage.

9

2.2 Desire for family formation, building kinship and expansion of social networks: Marriage as a medium of social and economic stability

Sariful, a 23 years old young male, married at 20, talks about role of marriage as a pathway or means to bringing regularity and stability in one's life. His father remarried after his mother's death and lived in a separate household in the same slum as Sariful and his brother. He feels that marriage brought back some stability, motivation and discipline in his life, which was very much lacking when he lived without a guardian or loved one:

> "*Before my marriage, I had enough earnings and could feed my family members. But I would spend all my money to buy cloths, hang out with friends and at the end of the month, I was empty handed. Then I thought, if I get married, I would have to push myself to work hard and earn more. I thought, I need a family life otherwise I wouldn't be going forward with my life.*" (Sariful, age 23, married at 20, Bhashantek slum)

All adolescent respondents mention that marriage is a mandatory and obligatory socio-religious norm which is unavoidable and non-negotiable. As boys they are expected to get married at some stage of their lives and head the family household. There is a common perception that everybody must form a family and everyone should get married at some stage of their lives. This role of a husband, a father and potential head of family – is a role that one must fulfill as part of his duty in life. Because boys in urban slums are either forced by circumstances to earn a living and be economically independent earlier in life – most did not see any good reason to delay fulfilling their other duty, i.e. marriage.

Marriage, in a traditional South Asian/ Bangladeshi cultural context is not only a norm but it is a social institution that is used as the basis of expanding kinship, social network and resources. Kinship and families work as social safety networks, especially for low income urban poor slum dwellers that depend heavily on kinship and such networks for survival in cities. For many young people, life in slums is devoid of experiences of extended family, support and nurturing – and marriage is seen as a way to acquire these experiences along with gaining valuable social capitals. Desiring kinship and extension of social network, is cited by Mojnu (24) an orphan boy. Mojnu lived with his distant maternal uncles before his marriage (at the age of 16). He stated that his uncles also influenced his decision of getting married at a young age:

> "*They (uncles) told if I got married, I would have a family, I would have in-laws and a guardian through them. As I had no one, I thought my wife and her family would give me the support I needed. . . At that time, I also thought, it would be better if I got married since my wife would be able to take care of my family, my food, washing my cloths.*' (An early married male, age 24, married at 16, Bhashantek slum)

In hetero-patriarchal social arrangement of marriage, if the boy is expected to ensure financial support, the girl (wife) is expected to bring free labor to support and care for her husband and his household. Marriage is not only about love or sexual desires being fulfilled, but the economic aspect of providing in exchange of free labor at household level in terms of care services – is a transactional reality.

Respondents mentioned that girls usually have to stop working in paid labor market after marriage. However, in the slum context where most of the families were living under poverty, many of the girls

continue their jobs even after marriage to support in-law's family or husband with their permission. Faruk, an early married adolescent supported this aspect and utility of early marriage:

> *I decided to get married as we needed a support for household work. My mother cannot do any work, she is a diabetic patient. My sister goes to work in a garment factory. It is not possible for her to do all the household chores. I felt that I needed to bring in a support. As she (wife) was able to do household works and she could also earn. I though, it would be better to run our family with her income and my income. ."*(An early married boy, age 18, married at 17, worked in a garment factory, Shantinagar slum, he had a romantic relationship with his colleague in same garment factory and got married).

Unfortunately, a few months after their marriage, Faruk lost his job and at the time of interview, he was very much worried regarding inability to maintain household financial responsibilities. All of the early married males expressed that marriage brought many and overburdened responsibilities into their young lives, which they were not prepared for. The pressure to earn and be responsible for a family or household, gave rise to psychological stress to them. An early married boy expressed his feelings-

> '*At times I do not feel good since I am unable to give anything to my wife. I have no income and I have to depend on my father. But I am married, and when my wife asks for something, I cannot provide it to her. It is not always possible to ask money (from my father) for me and my wife.*" (Maruf, 21, married at 20, Bhashantek slum)

Moreover, it is common for young males to stop their education mid-way in school or opt for low income employment opportunities as they had no prior skills or experiences in better paying jobs , these situations limited their scope to earn more, forcing them to opt for low income, unskilled and physically laborious jobs. Furthermore, lack of awareness and poor participation in sexual and reproductive health services, early fatherhood was a common phenomenon among the early married young males in urban slums. It created an extra psychological stress as they were not able to meet the demands and proper care of children.

As our respondents stated that adjusting to new adult responsibilities like earning, marriage and parenthood, financial responsibilities of running a household and balancing new relationship dynamics in the family and society, settling down to a routine of domestic situation yet remaining entitled to young masculinity challenge their gender and sex role performance, create a stressful situation in their lives. Though culturally most of these new life situations are often fallen on the bride/young girls' shoulders as she is expected to become an adult all on a sudden – it is not that different or easy for the young men.

2.3Fulfillment of sexual desire

Sex is a taboo topic in Bangladeshi society, and bound by marriage normativity (even though fulfillment of sexual desire is considered as the primary basis of all marriages). In the discussion of marriage, issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights are still difficult to bring into conversations, especially with young people. Fulfillment of sexual desire is nevertheless cited as one of the reasons to influence young males' decision to get married early. During one to one interviews and some informal discussions, some respondents did admit that desire to have sex was one of the driving forces to get married so early. Sex outside marriage and before marriage is considered sinful, is socially condemned and is matter of public

11

shaming (when revealed) – marriage remains the only legal and socially acceptable way of fulfilling sexual desires, which is natural for everyone. To pursue a regular sexual relationship without negative consequences, marriage is considered as a valid pathway for young men.

> *"Outside of marriage, I will not always get to fulfill my sexual desires. Even if I want to have sex with a prostitute, I need money! But then she (partner outside marriage) may complain about me or file a case against me! So many people think it is better off to marry a girl instead. Then I can have with her anytime and no one will say anything." (Early married male,* age24, married at 16, in IDI, Bhashantek slum)

Sexual satisfaction, or at least fulfilling one's sexual urges/desires is considered to be a male entitlement. Through marriage, a young male desires to have easy access to sex with his wife without having to spend money. Regarding this issue of young male's sexuality, sexual awareness and desires, a local school teacher tried to explain social reasons:

> *"Most of the adolescent now a day, have access to the internet. Those who do not have their own mobile phones, their friends have it and they share phones for watching pornography. It may also influence sexual desire. Adolescents get involved in sexual relation out of marriage to meet up this desire, which is not socially accepted. Also partners are not always available (to monitor). They are also involved in some risks as society does not approve of sex out of marriage. It may be another cause of getting married earlier for the adolescents."* (Teacher, age 39, in teaching profession-17 years, Shantinagar slum)

Pre-marital relationships are not socially or morally accepted in the social fabric of Bangladesh, such relationships attract varying degrees of punishments from communities, families and other social/legal structures. Study findings suggested that the desire for sexual fulfillment among adolescent boys plays a vital role as a cultural factor influencing decisions pertaining to child marriage. However, many of the young male respondents reported that husbands lost attraction to wife day by day and they involved in extramarital relationships.

2.4 To ensure fruitful endings to romantic relationships

There was a common perception across all of our respondents that the prevalence of romantic relationships between adolescent boys and girls in the slums was on the rise, or at least young people were more open about being involved in relationships. They mentioned that mobile phone affordability and accessibility had made it easier for adolescents to communicate with each other, engage in romantic relationships and bypass guardian's surveillance. Moreover, due to the very congested nature of slums, young males and girls could easily interact with one another and neighborhood surveillance of adolescents is far lower than it is in rural areas.

Findings showed that once adolescents engaged in a teen romance, there is a fear of losing 'love', which results in decisions about getting marry as early as possible. A few respondents decided to marry "simply out of love" and due to a fear of losing their girlfriend to someone else if they were late by waiting for adulthood.

12

"*As I am a boy, one day I have to be married. I will have to form a family; I will have one or two kids. As I loved this girl, I didn't want to lose her, so we got married…*"(an early married boy, age 18, married at 17, worked in a garment factory, Shantinagar slum, he had a romantic relationship with his colleague in same garment factory and got married by eloping).

Young males often become emotionally insecure and frustrated in romantic relationships at this age. Under emotional pressure they assume that only marriage can provide social acceptance to an otherwise frowned-upon romantic relationship. Among four cases of elopement, all respondents made the decision of elopement as they feared succumbing to family pressure to end relationships otherwise.

"In our area, most of the early marriage occurred here due to love relation. Parents allow early marriage in a crucial situation. . . . In our area, most of the marriage occurred due to the relation. When the boy & girl left home and elope together for love affection and come back in the slum after some days, in that time parents arranged for their marriage. . . . Out of 100, 80 early marriages occurred here for love affair and most of the formal marriages were performed for leaving home with the partner." (Participants of FGD with young males, Bhashantek slum)

Unlike other cases, where young males made independent decisions (often in agreement with parents) to marry early because they had financial agency and independence, in most cases of elopement, young males did not have any earning and were dependent on their parents. The rushed decision of getting married before reaching 'adulthood' was based on fear of losing the loved one. Rejection of romantic relations by parental families can put tremendous pressure on young couples. For example, Rujib (19, married at 17) and Tonni (age 19, married at 17) who were college students, had two years of relationship but the girl's family did not accept the relationship, so they decided to elope and get married. After getting married in the *Kazi* (marriage registrar) office, they stayed outside the slum for six months and returned only afterwards when both families accepted their marriage. Respondents mentioned that publicly declaring one's romance and being seen to be in a relationship are considered to be tabooed, and as a marker of dishonor to the family. There is always a fear of a girl being led to romantic relation with a promise of marriage and that promise being unfulfilled – that fear of disgrace is real and parents keep vigilance over young people all the time. On the other hand, it is also disgraceful for a boy if he fails to marry his girlfriend. When family member and guardian do not accept this relationship, or boys and girls fall into an uncertain situation about their future around this relationship, from the fear of losing this relationship, they decide to get married.

Peer influences play a significant role in influencing decision making processes when young males get into romantic relations. Some young males shared that they were influenced to engage in romantic relationship by listening and observing their other friends/co-workers that may be older or in a similar age group who are engaging in such relationships. In an FGD, respondents also mentioned that married adolescents could influence their unmarried adolescent peers through sharing stories of their sexual encounters, which instigates the desires and curiosity of young minds. Friends can influence young lovers to marry immediately as they offer social and moral support to the couples, even assisting them with their elopement plans.

13

Theme 3: Parental and societal interference and influence: marriage as a disciplinary act

According to respondents, especially by parents -young males who are dropped out of education and searching for employment opportunities or were unemployed for some time - remained at risk of engaging in practices such as drug addiction, gambling, gang involvement and violence which were prevalent in slum communities. As a result, most families lived with a constant fear that their adolescent boys might easily become involved in these risky practices. To reduce the chance of their young sons engaging in risky behaviors, some parents resorted to their son's marriage as an effective means of ensuring young males would be brought back to discipline.

Josna (age 45), mother of an early married adolescent boy in Shantinagar, mentioned that her son was eager to get married at the age of 16, right at the onset of his puberty. He was already working as a daily labor and therefore had an earning. Josna and her husband did not agree with their son's wish to be married so early in life. In response and resistance the young male stopped working regularly, started hanging out with friends, stayed away from home and started using drugs. After some time, Josna and her husband gave into their son's wish and arranged for his marriage because they feared their son was going astray and would be derailed in life. Marriage was, therefore, not only a fulfillment of their young son's desire, but also a socially acceptable method of controlling an unruly young male in a difficult environment where rule of law was absent.

In Bangladeshi culture, parents have control and ownership over children's lives. Important life decisions are made by parents, or at least in agreement and consent with them particularly marriage decision. When searching for a bride for the boy/young man, parents or guardians mostly consider potential bride's physical appearance, politeness, bride's parent's social and economic status. Usually, love affair or choosing own brides by sons are not socially well accepted in the Bangladeshi context. When any son does it, it is a matter of shame and dishonor for the parents. Even if any son makes his own choice in romance and marriage, they inform parents and parents usually arrange their marriage. If parents or guardians do not agree with their son's choice and decision many of the young couples might choose to marry without parental consent. But in general, everyone wishes to marry with family consent and support.

> *'… if our parents want, then we have to marry. We cannot do anything else at that time. But we are not some guys who want to marry without doing anything. We have to wait for our family order, we cannot break the order'* (FGD interview with adolescent boys and young males, Bhashantek slum).

Marriage often is used as a disciplinary act to reign in an otherwise unruly son and help his guide back to a disciplined homely life:

> '*Suppose someone at 15 earns a lot, like 1000 BDT a day by driving. Now his parents can marry him off. Parents think that the boy has his own income and he may involve in bad practice such as drug use, buy sex . . .they think of getting him married…it will pull him to his wife and not towards bad things. And if there is a child – he will not go towards drugs and alcohol, because when he sees his child's potential future, he is discouraged*' (an unmarried young male in FGD, age 22, Shantinagar slum).

14

If early marriage can be an outcome of young love – it is also true that early marriages are sometimes organized by parents who want to save family honor from being tarnished by their adolescent children's love/romantic relationships. Young respondents expressed that no matter what might be the nature of a romantic relation between a young boy and a girl – in slum societies, it is always seen with suspicion of immorality and of sexual nature. The collective suspicion and condemnation of any kind of relation between a young boy and girl can put a seal of disapproval and shame on family's name. Parents not only fear children engaging in premarital sexual relations, but also untimely elopement of young lovers – both of which are matter of disgrace.

Sometimes social scrutiny and pressure can cause parents to arrange for their children's untimely and early marriages, for example, Maruf in Bhashantek (age 21, married at 20) had friendship with a girl, now his wife(age17, married at 16) near to their house. Both of them were in class nine and their relation at that point was nothing more than a likeable friendship. But their neighbors accused them of having premarital sex and complained to his parents about his conduct based on their suspicion. This brought tremendous pressure on the families, and on the adolescents. To save families and the young people from social shame and condemnation, his family arranged his marriage with her even though they both were below their legal age of marriage.

Thus, the community plays an important role in early marriage, in both rural as well as urban slum locations. In the tightly spaced and squeezed living arrangements of slums, it is impossible to ignore or avoid neighbors, their opinions and influences, particularly in those sections that are tightly bounded. Slums are also socially organized through common norms, influences of religious bodies and social leaders. Sometimes, local leaders and society can interfere, support and even organize early marriages if they deem a situation to be crucial to uphold social morality. Local leaders and heads accept early marriage to 'save family honor' in cases where adolescents engage in romantic relationships with each other.

Section 4: Discussion

Our study findings show that gendered social norms, patriarchaland masculine construction shape the decision and pathway into marriage of young males. These decision making processes might be initiated by personal choices or parental wishes or under social pressures – but at the end of the day these factors intersect with each other and culminates into an early marriage. The pathways to early marriage for young males in urban slums are complex. Findings show that the decision of marriage is not based on appropriateness or legal age for marriage rather based on their capacity to earn, to provide financial responsibilities to family, willingness to form a family and expand social network, enjoy sexual life, to bring additional labor in form of a wife to support household work. It is also perceived that marriage is a medium to control sexuality, body and mind including bad habits like addiction, extramarital sexual relation. Thus parents and society interfere to arrange marriage to protect family and societal honor if it finds a young male to be at risk of being morally derailed. Our study results also support other research findings regarding the key drivers of child marriage practice among young males and young males conducted in the low and middle income countries in South Asia and Africa[28]. What we see in this research discussion is how gender, adulthood and marriage is lived through the social constructions of masculinity, gender stereotype roles and patriarchal ideology. Each of these shapes the attitude towards

15

marriage and decision of child marriage among young males in these particular settings. Early marriage here is understood under the broader framework of adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR). Hopefully findings from this research will help us to incorporate issues of gender and adulthood along with masculinity in ASRHR and child marriage prevention framework to address the problems for a sustainable solution.

The decision of marriage among the married respondents was influences by dominant masculine and gender role ideologies. In patriarchal domain, males are the main breadwinner for family and they mainly take the financial responsibilities of family. In the context of the patriarchal society of Bangladesh, males and husbands are considered as the breadwinner for family and it is essential to establish dominance in his family and society[29]. Perceptions of masculinity in Bangladesh are dominated by concepts of strength, fear, honor, power, sexuality – and marriage plays a central role in fulfilling all these roles for men as it indicates health, power and financial capacity[18]. Thus, it is seen in this research that when a young male has income, it automatically elevates him to the stage of adulthood. This strong sense of an emerging adult identity pushes young males to think that they are now capable of getting married as they are assuming the role of a breadwinner. The whole process of negotiating agency for personal matters (like romance, marriage, sex) which are otherwise almost non-negotiable at a '*na-balak*' stage with no monitory power, now gains power to bargain with social norms and expectations (of staying asexual or childlike till marriages are arranged by family and elders). Compared to middle class and economically privileged children from the same society, where children gain social perceptions of adulthood much later in life as they live under the financial shelter and control of parental households – slum children, especially the young males gain adulthood and subsequent agency as a default outcome of lack of opportunities to stay children for as long as possible, as per Bangladeshi norms[30-32].

Other studies showed that peers are the one of the most influencing group for adolescents in working place, schools or neighborhood[33, 34]. Respondents in the study showed a clear trend in thinking of peer support as a strong backup system in making decisions about marriages. Evidence in Bangladesh in urban slum showed that peer influences, parental will and care, social environment and adolescent's personal choice also play role in how adolescents will continue their lives in slum environment[35]. Our study showed that peers had a significant influence to think about marriage as marriage gives them an adult identity which gradually places them as a significant and powerful male member of the family. Young males also get influenced by observing other married young males of similar age and contextual background. In the workplace, there are examples of many other peers who already are married at a relatively early age. Interaction with them, discussion about their married life also may have influence on adolescent young males into desire to get married.

According to study respondent, there is an increasing trend of love relationship among adolescent and young generation is prominent than before. Young males who are in romantic relation, expressed that losing their girlfriend as wife is disgraceful for them, counted it as a defeat of being as a man. So, they marry by eloping and out of guardians consent as they want to prove their power as a man. This masculine attitude also accelerates child marriage among young males in the study context like urban slum.

16

Our findings revealed that access to movies, pornography influence and shape the need to be sexually active and in a relationship. Other studies also support this findings that watching pornography/adult sexual content can negatively influence young males, which motivates them to get involved in premarital sexual relationships and shapes their ideas of sex, sexuality and relationships[36, 37]. Respondents agreed that marriage guarantees regular sex and a sexual partner. With marriage, sexual desire can be fulfilled without any additional costs or hassles.

Findings reveal that, parents are always in fear of their adolescent and young male child getting involved in gang violence, drug addiction or other anti-social activities. There are also evidence that norms, attitude and perceptions about heterogeneous masculinity often instigates adolescent young males to engage in unsafe harmful practices such as practicing violence against others, risky sexual practice, involvement in gangs, and substance abuse[38]. In the economically, socially and politically marginalized slum setting, where adolescents lack parental guidance and are surrounded by violence, exploitation and abuse, these vulnerabilities of adolescence can be far greater and more damaging[39]. Respondents informed that crimes, sexual and physical violence, drug addiction in urban slum area are very common. Earning capacity at a relatively early age in life not only grants some privileges of adulthood in terms of autonomy in spending money, but it also gives resistance to otherwise omnipresent parental surveillance. This capacity to earn and spend money can easily draw young males to 'bad habits and influences'. Other studies also showed that same evidences[40]. So, parents feel insecure about their sons' lifestyle, and their lack of control. Therefore, they try to engage their sons into work and often in marriages. It also helps parents to secure their financial needs for family. Parents along with (and often under pressure from) other people in society perceive 'marriage' of a young male may be a strategy to protect and to keep control from any uneven practice and a disciplinary act. They perceive that 'marriage' creates some responsibilities and accountabilities to wife and family.

After parents, it is immediate and extended families, as well as kinship that play significant roles in shaping children's lives, when it comes to marriage. Reputation, acceptability, social position and respect – aspects of lives that are considered as prized possessions, especially in newly urbanized lives in slums, where survival can depend on social networks – neighbor's, local people and leaders' opinion on relationships and marriages matter. Often time of marriage is decided by these external forces even if the adolescent boy or his parents might want to decide otherwise.

Early marriage takes place for both girls and boys irrespective of what gender norms and values one might harbor. Adolescent boys negotiate a complex web of gender privilege, emerging adulthood, agency and social network and influences in making important decisions of life, like marriage. The matter of early marriage, for adolescent urban slum young males, is rarely a case of vulnerability and victimhood, like majority of their female counterpart. Agency, consent and desire to start family, sexual partnership, to run a household and provide support to parental households with additional (free) labor – are major reasons that influence adolescent boys' decision to marry earlier than legally sanctioned age by the state.

This is a first time attempt to explore the perspectives, underlying reasons that influence the decision of early marriage of young males in urban slum context of Bangladesh. However, data were collected only from two slums which may not portray full scenario and realities of other slums in Bangladesh. Due to

17

the sensitivity of the topics, such as, early marriage, sexuality, drug addiction, violence, power politics in slum community, many of the respondents might be conservative to express their views and practices or might change some information. However, we start the discussion regarding the early marriage decision of these ignored and vulnerable groups. Therefore, it is important and expects more explorations and understandings in the discourse of preventing early marriage.

Conclusion

Our study reveals that the issue of early marriage, in low income urban slum contexts, has many different entry points for young males. Researches show that increasingly both young males and females are getting married early with their own consent, and in this research, it is evident that young males have greater voice and agency to give consent to marriage even if they are not technically (legally) adults.

From the findings of this research, we get a glimpse of how in low income socially vulnerable context of urban slums, adolescent young males negotiate adulthood processes in a complex but gender unequal spectrum of power and agency, and when it comes to marriage, these gendered power, privileges and agency pave pathways in asserting decisions that are otherwise not even legally granted to them.

In slum contexts, where space and livelihood is earned with a premium, and newly urbanized families struggle to find a footing in an already crowded and competitive city like Dhaka or Chittagong, there is a constant conflict, pull and push of norms, traditions and modernity – and young people are at the center of these shifting norms and ideas. The new realities of urban spaces bring new realities and definitions of adulthood, and we clearly see that adolescent young males find new agency with new economic prowess. In the context of the urban slums, the perceived phenomena of adulthood, decision making capability, aspiration towards marriage, family formation and sexuality influence the marriage decision making process especially child marriage among the young males in the context of urban slums of Bangladesh.

When an adolescent boy is considered as adult mainly based on his income ability and marital status, he is deprived of opportunities for his growth and development. Moreover, child marriage cut short the adolescence of young males and compromises their fundamental human rights. It affects their education, earning power and economic prospects, expectation, freedom, physical and psychological health and social life, however, nominal attention is given to the vulnerabilities of young males[41, 42].

Adolescent and young males' child marriage has many risk profiles that not only negatively affect their own situation but also have impacts on their partner's and family life. As long as child marriage prevention program only focuses girls with nominal focus on young males, it will be difficult to address child marriage holistically. A clear understanding about male's understandings, behavior and practice regarding child marriage are crucial to design interventions and programs to support this group of young men to stop child marriage.

18

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Patient consent for publication Not required

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19

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22

This consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative studies (COREQ) checklist for this article are described as follows-

No Item	Description
Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity	
Personal Characteristics	
1. Interviewer/facilitator	SubasBiswas with other researchers conducted the interviews and focus group discussion sessions. Sabina F Rashid trained researchers how to conduct interviews and focus group
2. Credentials	All of the researchers had minimum Master's degree in Anthropology, Public Health or Social Science Whereas Sabina F Rasid and ShuchKarim have PhD degree.
3. Occupation	All of the researchers were full time engaged in this research; however, Sabina F Rashid and ShuchiKarim were also involved in teaching in universities.
4. Gender	There were a group of researchers and both male and females researchers were in this group
5. Experience and training	All of the researchers had prior experience in conducting research. Moreover, all of the researchers were gone through several training and workshop sessions for present study
Relationship with participants	
6. Relationship established	Prior to data collection a good rapport was established with each respondents and also community people. The researchers spent several weeks in the field and collected data.
7. Participant knowledge of theinterviewer	Participants were informed about the researcher's identity, objectives and involvement in this study.
8. Interviewer characteristics	Researcher informed participants about their designation, affiliation of the organization, aims and objectives of the study and what the involvements of the researchers in this study were. Participants were also informed how researchers would use this data and what would be the role of the researchers in presenting information to other audiences.
Domain 2: study design	
Theoretical framework	
9. Methodological orientation andTheory	Content and thematic analysis were done to underpin the study
Participant selection	
10. Sampling	Purposive and snowballing methods were used to select participants
11. Method of approach	Participants were approached face-to-face
12. Sample size	The broader research project collected both quantitative and qualitative data using questionnaire survey with 2136 adolescent girls and young women aged 13-24 years and 96 In-depth interview (IDI), and 12 focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted with married and unmarried adolescents and young girls and boys aged 15-24 years, their parents and 33 key-informant interviews (KII) with

	community leaders, teachers, marriage registrars and program people.
	However, this present article used 22 In-depth interviews (IDIs) and 3 focus group discussions (FGD) with married and unmarried adolescent and young males aged 15-24 years; 13 IDIs and 4 FGDs with parents and 11 key-informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders.
13. Non-participation	About 10-12 young male respondents refused to participate in this study as they were not interested or they had no time enough to spend time as most of the interviews were conducted at the day tome and these potential participants were engaged in work during day time.
Setting	
14. Setting of data collection	All of the interviews were conducted at participants own setting, whether it was in their home or near to their home where they felt comfort to talk.
15. Presence of non-participants	When interviews were conducted in participant's own home, there were family members near to the interview sessions in some cases. But they were not present full time of the interview sessions. One researcher conduct one interview and audio recorder was used to record all of the conversations with the informed consent of the participants. Two researchers were involved to conduct focus group discussions session. Here researchers also used audio recorder to record all of the conversations with informed consent of participants.
16. Description of sample	The sample characteristics include age, marital status, age at marriage, income and job status
Data collection	
17. Interview guide	Data were collected using pretested guidelines phase by phase in two study sites
18. Repeat interviews	No repeat interviews were conducted
19. Audio/visual recording	The research use audio recording with informed consent of the participants to collect the data
20. Field notes	Field note were taken during and after the In-depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group discussion (FGD) and also key-Informant Interviews(KII)
21. Duration	For IDIs, the duration was about 90-100 minutes, For FGDs, the duration was about 120-150 minutes For KIIs, the duration was about 60-80 minutes
22. Data saturation	Data saturation was not discussed
23. Transcripts returned	Transcripts were not returned to participants for comment or correction
Domain 3: analysis and findings	
Data analysis	
24. Number of data coders	Eight data coders coded the data

25. Description of the coding tree	The authors did notprovide a description of the coding tree
26. Derivation of themes	Themes were derived from the data
27. Software	Atlasti (version 8) software was used to manage the data
28. Participant checking	Participants did not check the findings
Reporting	
29. Quotations presented	Participant quotations are presented to illustrate the findings. Basic characteristics of these participants were also presented with these quotations.
30. Data and findings consistent	Consistency between the data and findings are discussed
31. Clarity of themajor themes	Major themes are clearly presented in the findings
32. Clarity of minor themes	A description of diverse cases and discussion of minor themes are also presented

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Should we care: A qualitative exploration of the factors that influence the decision of early marriage among young males in urban slums of Bangladesh.

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Title page

Title of the paper: Should we care: A qualitative exploration of the factors that influence the decision of early marriage among young males in urban slums of Bangladesh.

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Main text

Should we care: A qualitative exploration of the factors that influence the decision of early marriage among young males in urban slums of Bangladesh.

Subas Biswas[1], Shuchi Karim[1,2], Sabina Faiz Rashid[1]

Abstract

Objectives To explore how adolescent and young males negotiate the complex realities of lives to explain their pathways into and reasons for early marriage in urban slums of Bangladesh.

Design The qualitative data used here came from a larger three years study that used both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Setting Interviews were conducted in two of the largest slums in Dhaka and Chittagong city of Bangladesh between December 2015 and March 2018.

Participants This paper uses qualitative data from 22 In-depth interviews (IDIs) and 3 focus group discussions (FGDs) with adolescent and young males aged 15-24 years; 13 IDIs and 4 FGDs with parents and 11 key-informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders. The purposively selected respondents were interviewed in their respective settings.

Results In the context of urban slums, this study revealed multiple factors influence early marriage decision-making processes among young males. These factors include socially perceived phenomenon of adulthood and readiness of marriage, poverty leading to drop out from schools and early initiation to earning livelihood, manifestations of increasing individual aspiration and agency, fulfillment of romance and erotic desires, and dreams of forming one's own family. In addition, parental and immediate societal interference to preserve norms around gender and society can act as catalysts for this decision.

Conclusions Study findings imply that complex structural factors, social and gender norms that are contributing to the early marriage for both adolescent boys and young males in Bangladesh's urban slums. These are locations where conservatism, poverty and urbanization intersect resulting in early and often unprepared entry to adulthood for young males impacting on their development and wellbeing. It is, therefore, critical that young males should be included in the national and global conversations around child marriage and child marriage prevention program.

Key words: Early marriage, Young males, Urban slums, Bangladesh

Strengths and limitations of this study

➢ This is one of the pioneering studies in the context of urban slums in Bangladesh which explored the complex realities, pathways into and reasons for early marriage of adolescent and young males.

> ➤ The in-depth qualitative data were collected using follow-up interview sessions spending long days with respondents to capture and understand holistic scenario of the realities and practices of early marriage.
> ➤ Data collected from two slums of two cities may not represent the whole adolescent and young males' realities of other slums in Bangladesh but nevertheless this marks the beginning of an exploration to an otherwise ignored group of adolescents from early marriage discussions.
> ➤ Due to the issue sensitivity, our respondents might have some conservativeness to open up the information.

Introduction

Child marriage is a major public health concern particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh. The agenda of 'child marriage' as it pertains to girls has been extensively researched, reviewed and advocated in an effort to eradicate the practice of Early and Child Marriage (ECM) and to comprehend how it impacts the social, cultural, health and economic identity of young girls[1-5]. Most of the existing literature shows that the root causes of child marriage of girls are poverty, gender discrimination, discriminative social norms, patriarchal attitude, lack of awareness and legal loopholes[6,7]. However, there is a huge knowledge gap in regards to young males' ECM and its impact on their lives[8]. Nevertheless, young males also suffer as their early marriage practices can lead to early fatherhood, lack of educational and subsequent better job opportunities– all of which can limit their socio-economic prospects in life, creating pressure to have increased income to provide economic support for family and children. Early life responsibilities affect their life expectation and freedom. Like in case of girls, early marriage can have negative impacts on the physical, mental and sexual health development of young males especially in low resource environments[9-13].

Although the prevalence of child marriage among boys and young males are lower than that of girls, however, this is not an uncommon phenomenon. In a recent analysis, UNICEF reported that globally, 115 million boys were married before the age of 18. Among them, one in five was wedded before his 15th birthday[14]. An evaluation of 82 low and middle-income countries data showed that about one in twenty-five boys marry before they turn 18. However, in South Asian context, this rate is 5%[15-16]. The Bangladesh demographic health survey (BDHS) 2011 stated that about four per cent of men aged 20-24 in Bangladesh get married by the age of 18[17].

Despite this significant figure, there is a dearth of knowledge about young males/adolescent grooms, which essentially means that millions of young males are almost non-existent and/or invisible from past and ongoing research, advocacy, policy and preventive programs addressing early and child marriage. A handful of recent researches indicate that in urban slums in Bangladesh, there is an increasing trend for young males to marry before legal age of marriage[18]. Keeping this rising but mostly unaddressed issue of ECM of young males in general, and in urban low income/slum context in Bangladesh, this paper aims at understanding the factors influencing and contributing to the causes of early marriage among young

3

males, and what implications does this have on the discourse as well as interventions related to early marriage prevention strategy for all stakeholders. The paper also aims to engage with a deeper understanding of masculinity and sexuality – which hopefully will contribute in a more nuanced analysis of gender and marriage as a social construction in the hetero patriarchal society of Bangladesh.

The paper is divided into the following sections: 1) Contextual & conceptual framework or background, 2) methodology, 3) Results, 4) Discussion and 5) Conclusion.

Section 1: Contextual Background

Early marriage and Young males: Context of Slums in Bangladesh

A survey conducted in some selected slums in Dhaka, Bangladesh reported that approximately 80% of the females and 46% of the males in the slums are the victims of child marriage[18]. Early literature also explored how poor socioeconomic condition in the context of slums, can make adolescents more vulnerable to be victims of child marriage[19,20]. In urban slums context of Bangladesh, adolescents living in exacerbated socio-economic conditions, lack access to correct information, education and life opportunities. Life of poverty, uncertainties, fear of displacement, violence and social insecurity inevitably increase the risks of adolescent young males engaging in various harmful practices (i.e. gang involvement, unsafe sexual practices, drugs etc.). These risk factors intersecting with societal gendered expectations about male roles and masculinity harm their development and wellbeing[21]. These new phenomena of child marriage practice amongst young males in low income, high population density urban slum context are usually not discussed or focused on. Nevertheless, it is important to understand factors that are shaping early marriage trends. This has implications not only for the young males' emotional well-being and health, but also for their young counterparts, children and extended families.

Framing marriageable age

Internationally 18 years is set for adulthood and marriage for males[22], however, Bangladesh has set legal age for marriage for males at 21 years. Though there is a provision that marriage can be arranged before this age in special circumstances with consent of legal guardians with a court order[23]. Moreover, marriage in Bangladesh is largely regulated by personal laws which allow marriage before 18 for both boys and girls[24, 25]. Thus, legal loopholes and dominance of personal laws along with many other religious and customary provisions create multiple challenges to prevent child marriage in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh[26].

The perceptions of marriageable age for girls and boys come from the basic social construction of gender roles in relation to marriage where the male is ideally responsible for financial care of household, to be the provider and protector of the woman/wife. On the other hand woman/wife is expected to be responsible for household, care and reproduction[27]. This binary gender roles of provider and dependent creates an uneven gender power relation, tilted favorably towards the man in terms of decision making. In other words, a man's eligibility centers on financial capacity and virility, while a woman's eligibility is centered on her sexual and reproductive ability. However, the issues around the social construction of boy's marriageable age is much more complex, something that remains unaddressed and unchallenged.

4

Boys and young males in the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and Child marriage framework

The SDGs have prioritized on 'leaving no one behind' regarding health and wellbeing, education and gender equality with specified targets in goals 3, 4 and 5 to increase access to SRHR for all. Furthermore, Bangladesh government has also set a target to end child marriage by 2041. Therefore, this paper is particularly positioned in the SRHR and child marriage discourse framework. There is a lack of sense of urgency in addressing the issue of boys and young men within the child marriage space.

Section 2: Methods

This paper is drawn from a broader research project conducted to investigate the underlying issues that lead to early, child and forced marriages in the contexts of specific realities of life in urban slums that lead families to choose child marriage for their children or adolescents to opt for early marriage for them.

Study settings, respondents and data collection methodology

The broader study was conducted in two purposively selected slums: Bhashantek slum and Shantinagar slum located within Dhaka (capital city) and Chittagong (industrial city) city corporations respectively; two of the oldest and largest urban slums in Bangladesh.

Broader research project collected both quantitative and qualitative data using questionnaire survey with 2136 adolescent girls and young women aged 13-24 years and 96 In-depth interview (IDI), and 12 focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted with married and unmarried adolescents and young girls and boys aged 15-24 years, their parents and 33 key-informant interviews (KII) with community leaders, teachers, marriage registrars and program people.

To understand the reasons and pathways into child marriage among young males, this paper uses qualitative data from 22 In-depth interviews (IDIs)and 3 focus group discussions (FGD) with married and unmarried adolescent and young males aged 15-24 years; 13 IDIs and 4 FGDs with parents and 11 key-informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders. Among 22 IDIs with adolescent and young males, 12 were early married and 10 were unmarried. As the main target respondents were adolescent and young males (aged 15-24), the socio-demographic background characteristics of the 22 IDI respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic background of the In-depth Interviewed (IDI) adolescent and young male respondents in Bhashantek slum of Dhaka and Shantinagar slum of Chittagong, Bangladesh (n=22)

Socio-demographic Characteristics	Bhashantek (n=13)		Shantinagar (n=9)	
	Married(n=7)	Unmarried (n=6)	Married (n=5)	Unmarried (n=4)
Age (years)				
18-20	2	5	1	3
21-24	5	1	4	1
Education (years of education)				
<5	4	2	3	2
5 to 9	2	1	2	1

5

10 to 12	1	2		1
Age at marriage (years)				
<17	4		2	
18-19	1		2	
20	2		1	
Current Income status				
Having regular income	1	2	2	3
Having irregular income	3	1	2	1
No income	3	3	1	

All of the study participants for qualitative method were purposively selected using snowball techniques covering diverse groups. The question guide aimed to extract information regarding the perception, attitude and practice towards marriage, early marriage and their expectations from marriage and in married life. The guideline also included questions to understand the context that influences young males to get married early and what are the roles they play in these circumstances leading to their marriage, in the decision-making process. After collecting data, verbatim transcript and translation were done of interview recordings, data were coded using Atlasti, followed by thematic analysis.

Data were collected using pretested guidelines phase by phase in two study sites from December 2015 to March 2018 by trained interviewers. All the interviews took place at the participant's own settings. Written informed consent was obtained from all the interview participants. The ethical approval of the study was obtained from the ethical review committee of the BRAC James P. Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH), BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Patient and public involvement

Neither patients nor community people of the study sites were involved during the design and development of the study. However, the study team sought expert consultation meetings with the key persons from the academia, researchers as well as practitioners and policy makers. The study results are also shared with national and international communities for advocacy.

Section 4: Results: Reasons of early marriage among young males in urban slums

Findings revealed that there are many underlying factors that influence a boy's decision to get married early within the context of the urban slum. Theme 1 describes the perception of adulthood among the respondents and how this influence marriage decision making. Theme 2 states the practices and pathways to making of child marriage decision. Under this theme 2, several sub-themes are identified: capacity to earn a living and play role of a breadwinner, to ensure fruitful endings of romantic relationship, to fulfill sexual desire, aspiration to form a family and expand social support network through kinship, and finally, theme 3 states parental perception and societal interference for early marriage decision as a disciplinary act for 'protecting family honor' as well the need to 'stabilize' a boy's future. However, decisions pertaining to child marriages of young males are not made in isolation or made specific to one of these factors.

6

Theme 1: Perceptions of adulthood, being a 'real man'' and readiness for marriage

Regarding perception of adulthood, data from IDI and FGD with male respondents and their parents, it was revealed that there were two stages *na-balok* (*balok*, is a noun, a male child of 15/16 years of age, indicating a state of inexperience and lack of understanding. *Na-balok* is an adjective, not-adult, underage, someone who is not yet old enough to get citizenship rights) and *sa-balok* (adjective, adult or coming of age), which conceptually and colloquially mean childhood and adulthood respectively. The applications of these concepts are for male youth usually aged 13-24. From parent's point of views, *na-balok* is not a specific age, but rather a life stage when young males are under parent's care, not capable of understanding and differentiating between what is good or bad for them. It also implies lack of financial capacity as they are not able to generate steady income or take responsibilities for themselves or families. One the other hand, when a boy can earn, he is understood to be capable in differentiating between good or bad, take responsibilities – therefore, irrespective of the actual age, this capacity of earning and awareness of the world grants him adulthood, and he transitions from being a '*na-balok*' to a '*sa-balok*'.

> *"A boy is considered as a man (baro hoyese-become grown up or adult) when he can work and earn enough to feed his parents and family members. He can understand good or bad things for his life and capable of taking his own decisions - the right decisions. He can take responsibilities of his own and also a wife . . . then he can marry as he has capacity to feed his wife including his parents.*" (Mother of adolescents, age 55yr)

Adulthood for a boy includes capacity to take responsibilities of his immediate family along with the potential of taking a wife, thus starting his own family on time. Therefore, adulthood for male gender is about having the capacity of becoming a breadwinner and fulfilling society given gendered responsibility of ultimately becoming head of the extended household – not only with the purpose of a nuclear unit of his own. Here, age is just a number, and adulthood relates to social and gendered concepts of roles and norms. And when a boy earns these characteristics of adulthood, he is also granted the right of marriage and considered a 'real man'.

But we also see change in this social concept and practice of adulthood in relation to manhood for young males, as increasing exposure to education and social advocacy awareness programs convince young men to marry at a later age:

> *"For adult, 18 is not enough, you need more 6-7 years You need job and income, enough income. . . . Before 27-28-30 (years of age), you will not be able to establish financially. Only age, physical growth is not enough (to be an adult)".* (Unmarried boy, age 21)

There is also awareness that income only cannot make a young male ready for big responsibilities of life, like marriage. In the context of Bangladesh, and increasing financial hardship, some felt that it is okay for a male to delay or stretch the boundaries of marriage age as long as needed. Higher the educational aspiration and qualification the later he is able to financially become independent and hence delay the marriage. But the bottom line of either side of the argument is that age of marriage for a young male is dependent on being perceived as a financially capable man, who is ready to take on family responsibilities – depending on whatever socio-economic-educational background one belongs to – but never depending on what the legal framework might dictate.

It is important to briefly compare perceptions of boy's age of marriage with that of girls by the same respondents as it clearly indicates differences in norms and practices based on genders. A girl's readiness for marriage is viewed as being dependent on her biology, at the wake of puberty. When a girl reaches puberty, her body shows physical forms of womanhood and reaches menarche – she is believed to be ready for marriage. The social understanding of girl's purpose and readiness of marriage is her capacity of reproduction, to be able to take care of household responsibilities and be in service of her husband and in laws. Financial dependence, not independence is a primary concern for girl's marriage as female gender is considered as responsibility (and burden) for her male custodians (Father, brother and/or husband). Therefore, reasons influencing the age and readiness of marriage for male and female have almost polar opposite positioning of age, income and responsibilities. In the poor socio-economic contexts of slums in Bangladesh, adolescents have to play adult' roles for which they are not ready for- be it marriage or income generating activities. For the greater benefits of their families they have to engage in income generating activities earlier to extend financial help to their family (in case of young males), or marry into another family (in case of girls) – as a strategy for their respective survival. Thus, community people, parents, even young males in both slums considered income of a boy as the primary attribute to be able to get married.

Theme 2: Decision and pathway into early child marriage of young males

The data revealed that a very common pathway of young males' lives in urban slums is poverty that results in discontinuation of education. Even though young males, because of their social privileges of gender get priorities in families to continue education, usually – poverty is nevertheless a reason for them to drop out from school due to lack of financial resources. There is also an additional reason of peer pressure as young males from similar age group and backgrounds tend to drop out of schools for various reasons and manage to secure some kind of job in the informal sector as they are expected to support the family. Seeing peers earning money and gaining independence are markers of adulthood that encouraged many to leave school and aspire to earn, take control of life decisions and feel that they are adults. Besides these, many of the young males get married early to bring fruition to their romantic relationships, to fulfill their desires to form a family and expand social support network through kinship, and finally to fulfill newly found sexual desire, which can continue under the umbrella of marriage. Many times parents and families also encourage and support young males at a young age to fulfill these desires and aspirations to start their adult lives as it is considered to socially more acceptable and respectable to organize marriage by families than allowing children to elope or take independent decisions.

2.1 Out of school, engaging in income generation: Gaining agency and sense of adulthood

As presented in previous section, adulthood and age of marriage for young males in urban slums are primarily gained through work and economic capacity before reaching legal age of adulthood. Slum populations are consisted of internally migrated people/families from rural areas often caused by poverty, displacement and economic aspirations for better future in the cities. Slum dwelling is also a socio-economically instable reality for its dwellers live a marginalized existence with a constant threat of evictions and lack of basic amenities. The pressure to earn a living to keep households running is on almost every member of slum households, especially on young males because of their gender. This happens in

8

households where the father is either not working, or has died, or has left the household or there is a stepparent who is unwilling to support the rest of the household. These social and economic instabilities in slum communities lead a majority of adolescent boys to drop out of school and become early seekers of employment. IDI and FGD with young males and parents found that school dropout is very common in urban slums and the most cited reason is lack of financial support. Parents prefer to send their young sons to work so as to provide the family with additional income and ease the burden of ever increasing expenditures of urban living. Sometimes, because of the pressure of economic uncertainties, adolescent young males themselves often decide to drop out of school and engage in income-generating activities.

Generating income for a household also translates into a sense of power, agency and ability to reposition oneself within a household. For young males, even though circumstances might push them to assume their ultimate gender role of the head of household at a much early age, this eventually grants them some unprecedented freedom to make decisions for themselves. The transition to '*sa-balak*' status through assuming financial responsibility for an entire household translates into some degrees of control regarding their personal lives. A 23 year old young man in Bhashantek slum, got married at 20, explained the context of economic freedom, agency and decision-making process-

> '*I had an income. . . I could feed a family. I don't know whether I was at the marriageable age or not but personally I think, I was ready to get married. So, I did (got married).. . I think, age was never a problem.*"

During a KII, a male community leader (55 years old) in Bhashantek slum explained it further:

> "*As he (a boy) earns and feeds his family members, parents also have some kinds of economical dependency. If he (the boy) wants to marry, parent may try to prohibit or may not readily agree to his proposal but they cannot create pressure. If they do so, the boy may get married by himself without the consent of his parents. It is disgraceful (for parents). So, parents agree with such marriage.*"

Thus, the idea of having income and potential responsibilities and capacities to take care of a wife define the age of marriageable stage and this leads young male to the decision of marriage.

2.2 Desire for family formation, building kinship and expansion of social networks: Marriage as a medium of social and economic stability

An early married young male talked about role of marriage as a pathway or means to bringing regularity and stability in one's life. His father remarried after his mother's death and lived in a separate household in the same slum. He felt that marriage brought back some stability, motivation and discipline in his life, which was very much lacking when he lived without a guardian or loved one. He lived in Bhashantek slum, stated-

> "*Before my marriage, I had enough earnings and could feed my family members. But I would spend all my money to buy cloths, hang out with friends and at the end of the month, I was empty handed. Then I thought, if I get married, I would have to push myself to work hard and earn more. I thought, I need a family life otherwise I wouldn't be going forward with my life.*" (Age 23, married at 20)

9

All adolescent respondents mention that marriage is a mandatory and obligatory socio-religious norms which is unavoidable and non-negotiable. As boys, they are expected to get married at some stage of their lives and head the family household. There is a common perception that everybody must form a family and everyone should get married at some stage of their lives. This role of a husband, a father and potential head of family – is a role that one must fulfill as part of his duty in life. Because boys in urban slums are either forced by circumstances to earn a living and be economically independent earlier in life – most did not see any good reason to delay fulfilling their other duty, i.e. marriage.

Marriage, in a traditional South Asian/ Bangladeshi cultural context is not only a norm but it is a social institution that is used as the basis of expanding kinship, social network and resources. Kinship and families work as social safety networks, especially for low income urban poor slum dwellers that depend heavily on kinship and such networks for survival in cities. For many young people, life in slums is devoid of experiences of extended family, support and nurturing – and marriage is seen as a way to acquire these experiences along with gaining valuable social capitals. Desiring kinship and extension of social network, is cited by an orphan boy in Bhashantek slum. He lived with his distant maternal uncles before his marriage (). He stated that his uncles also influenced his decision of getting married at a young age:

> "They (uncles) told if I got married, I would have a family, I would have in-laws and a guardian through them. As I had no one, I thought my wife and her family would give me the support I needed. . . At that time, I also thought, it would be better if I got married since my wife would be able to take care of my family, my food, washing my cloths.' (Age 24, married at 16)

In hetero-patriarchal social arrangement of marriage, if the boy is expected to ensure financial support, the girl (wife) is expected to bring free labor to support and care for her husband and his household. Marriage is not only about love or sexual desires being fulfilled, but the economic aspect of providing in exchange of free labor at household level in terms of care services – is a transactional reality.

Respondents mentioned that girls usually have to stop working in paid labor market after marriage. However, in the slum context where most of the families were living under poverty, many of the girls continue their jobs even after marriage to support in-law's family or husband with their permission. An early married boy who had a romantic relationship with his colleague in same garment factory and got married, supported this aspect and utility of early marriage:

> I decided to get married as we needed a support for household work. My mother cannot do any work, she is a diabetic patient. My sister goes to work in a garment factory. It is not possible for her to do all the household chores. I felt that I needed to bring in a support. As she (wife) was able to do household works and she could also earn. I though, it would be better to run our family with her income and my income." (Age 18, married at 17).

Unfortunately, a few months after their marriage, this boy lost his job and at the time of interview, he was very much worried regarding inability to maintain household financial responsibilities. All of the early married males expressed that marriage brought many and overburdened responsibilities into their young lives, which they were not prepared for. The pressure to earn and be responsible for a family or household, gave rise to psychological stress to them. Another early married boy expressed his feelings-

> 'At times I do not feel good since I am unable to give anything to my wife. I have no income and I have to depend on my father. But I am married, and when my wife asks for something, I cannot

10

provide it to her. It is not always possible to ask money (from my father) for me and my wife." (Age 21, married at 20)

Moreover, it was common for young males to stop their education mid-way in school or opt for low income employment opportunities as they had no prior skills or experiences in better paying jobs. These situations limited their scope to earn more, forcing them to opt for low income, unskilled and physically laborious jobs.

As our respondents stated that adjusting to new adult responsibilities like earning, marriage, financial responsibilities of running a household and balancing new relationship dynamics in the family and society, settling down to a routine of domestic situation yet remaining entitled to young masculinity challenge their gender and sex role performance, and create a stressful situation in their lives. Though culturally most of these new life situations often fall on the bride/young girls' shoulders as she is expected to become an adult all on a sudden – it is not that different or easy for the young men.

2.3 Fulfillment of sexual desire

Sex is a taboo topic in Bangladeshi society, and bound by marriage normativity (even though fulfillment of sexual desire is considered as the primary basis of all marriages). In the discussion of marriage, issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights are still difficult to bring into conversations, especially with young people. Fulfillment of sexual desire is nevertheless cited as one of the reasons to influence young males' decision to get married early. During one to one interviews and some informal discussions, some respondents did admit that desire to have sex was one of the driving forces to get married so early. Sex outside marriage and before marriage is considered sinful, is socially condemned and is matter of public shaming (when revealed) – marriage remains the only legal and socially acceptable way of fulfilling sexual desires, which is natural for everyone. To pursue a regular sexual relationship without negative consequences, marriage is considered as a valid pathway for young men.

> "*Outside of marriage, I will not always get to fulfill my sexual desires. Even if I want to have sex with a prostitute, I need money! But then she (partner outside marriage) may complain about me or file a case against me! So many people think it is better off to marry a girl instead. Then I can have with her anytime and no one will say anything." (*Age 24, married at 16)

Sexual satisfaction, or at least fulfilling one's sexual urges/desires is considered to be a male entitlement. Through marriage, a young male desires to have easy access to sex with his wife without having to spend money. Regarding this issue of young male's sexuality, sexual awareness and desires, a local school teacher tried to explain social reasons:

> "*Most of the adolescent now a day, have access to the internet. Those who do not have their own mobile phones, their friends have it and they share phones for watching pornography. It may also influence sexual desire. Adolescents get involved in sexual relation out of marriage to meet up this desire, which is not socially accepted. Also, partners are not always available (to monitor). They are also involved in some risks as society does not approve of sex out of marriage. It may be another cause of getting married earlier for the adolescents."* (Teacher, age 39)

Pre-marital relationships are not socially or morally accepted in the social fabric of Bangladesh, as such relationships attract varying degrees of punishments from communities, families and other social/legal

11

structures. Study findings suggested that the desire for sexual fulfillment among adolescent boys plays a vital role as a cultural factor influencing decisions pertaining to child marriage. However, many of the young male respondents reported that husbands lost attraction to wife day by day and they got involved in extramarital relationships. Furthermore, due to lack of awareness and poor participation in sexual and reproductive health services, early fatherhood was a common phenomenon among the early married young males in urban slums. It created an extra psychological stress as they were not able to meet the demands and proper care of children.

2.4 To ensure fruitful endings to romantic relationships

There was a common perception across all of our respondents that the prevalence of romantic relationships between adolescent boys and girls in the slums was on the rise, or at least young people were more open about being involved in relationships. They mentioned that mobile phone affordability and accessibility had made it easier for adolescents to communicate with each other, engage in romantic relationships and bypass guardian's surveillance. Moreover, due to the very congested nature of slums, young males and girls could easily interact with one another and neighborhood surveillance of adolescents is far lower than it is in rural areas.

Findings showed that once adolescents engaged in a teen romance, there is a fear of losing 'love', which results in deciding to get married as early as possible. A few respondents decided to marry "simply out of love" and due to a fear of losing their girlfriend to someone else if they were late by waiting for adulthood. A boy who had a romantic relationship with his colleague in same garment factory and got married by eloping, stated-

> "As I am a boy, one day I have to be married. I will have to form a family; I will have one or two kids. As I loved this girl, I didn't want to lose her, so we got married..."(Age 18, married at 17).

Young males often become emotionally insecure and frustrated in romantic relationships at this age. Under emotional pressure they assume that only marriage can provide social acceptance to an otherwise frowned-upon romantic relationship. Among four cases of elopement, all respondents made the decision of elopement as they feared succumbing to family pressure to end relationships otherwise.

> "In our area, most of the early marriage occurred here due to love relation. Parents allow early marriage in a crucial situation. . . . In our area, most of the marriage occurred due to the relation. When the boy & girl left home and elope together for love affection and come back in the slum after some days, in that time parents arranged for their marriage. . . . Out of 100, 80 early marriages occurred here for love affair and most of the formal marriages were performed for leaving home with the partner." (Young male in FGD, age 20)

Unlike other cases, where young males made independent decisions (often in agreement with parents) to marry early because they had financial agency and independence, in most cases of elopement, young males did not have any earning and were dependent on their parents. The rushed decision of getting married before reaching 'adulthood' was based on fear of losing the loved one. Rejection of romantic relations by parental families can put tremendous pressure on young couples. For example, a young male (age 19, married at 17) and young female (age 19, married at 17) who were college students, had two years of relationship but the girl's family did not accept the relationship, so they decided to elope and get

12

married. After getting married in the *Kazi* (marriage registrar) office, they stayed outside the slum for six months and returned only afterwards when both families accepted their marriage. Respondents mentioned that publicly declaring one's romance and being seen to be in a relationship are considered to be tabooed, and as a marker of dishonor to the family. There is always a fear of a girl being led to romantic relation with a promise of marriage and that promise being unfulfilled – that fear of disgrace is real and parents keep vigilance over young people all the time. On the other hand, it is also disgraceful for a boy if he fails to marry his girlfriend. When family member and guardian do not accept this relationship, or boys and girls fall into an uncertain situation about their future around this relationship, from the fear of losing this relationship, they decide to get married.

Peer influences play a significant role in influencing decision-making processes when young males get into romantic relations. Some young males shared that they were influenced to engage in romantic relationship by listening and observing their other friends/co-workers that may be older or in a similar age group who are engaging in such relationships. In an FGD, respondents also mentioned that married adolescents could influence their unmarried adolescent peers through sharing stories of their sexual encounters, which instigates the desires and curiosity of young minds. Friends can influence young lovers to marry immediately as they offer social and moral support to the couples, even assisting them with their elopement plans.

Theme 3: Parental and societal interference and influence: marriage as a disciplinary act

According to respondents, especially by parents mentioned, young males who dropped out of education and are searching for employment opportunities or were unemployed for some time - remained at risk of engaging in practices such as drug addiction, gambling, gang involvement and violence, which were prevalent in slum communities. As a result, most families lived with a constant fear that their adolescent boys might easily become involved in these risky practices. To reduce the chance of their young sons engaging in risky behaviors, some parents resorted to their son's marriage as an effective means of ensuring young males would be brought back to discipline.

, One mother (age 45) of an early married adolescent boy in Shantinagar, mentioned that her son was eager to get married at the age of 16, right at the onset of his puberty. Her son was already working as a daily labor and therefore had an earning. She and her husband did not agree with their son's wish to be married so early in life. In response and resistance, the young male stopped working regularly, started hanging out with friends, stayed away from home and started using drugs. After some time, she and her husband gave into their son's wish and arranged for his marriage because they feared their son was going astray and would be derailed in life. Marriage was, therefore, not only a fulfillment of their young son's desire, but also a socially acceptable method of controlling an unruly young male in a difficult environment where rule of law was absent.

In Bangladeshi culture, parents have control and ownership over children's lives. Important life decisions are made by parents, or at least in agreement and consent with them particularly marriage decision. When searching for a bride for the boy/young man, parents or guardians mostly consider potential bride's physical appearance, politeness, bride's parent's social and economic status. Usually, love affair or choosing own brides by sons are not socially well accepted in the Bangladeshi context. When any son does it, it is a matter of shame and dishonor for the parents. Even if any son makes his own choice in romance

13

and marriage, they inform parents and parents usually arrange their marriage. If parents or guardians do not agree with their son's choice and decision many of the young couples might choose to marry without parental consent. But in general, everyone wishes to marry with family consent and support.

> *'… if our parents want, then we have to marry. We cannot do anything else at that time. But we are not like some guys who want to marry without doing anything. We have to wait for our family order, we cannot break the order'* (Unmarried young male in FGD, age 21).

Marriage often is used as a disciplinary act to reign in an otherwise unruly son and help his guide back to a disciplined homely life:

> *'Suppose someone at 15 earns a lot, like 1000 BDT a day by driving. Now his parents can marry him off. Parents think that the boy has his own income and he may involve in bad practice such as drug use, buy sex . . .they think of getting him married…it will pull him to his wife and not towards bad things. And if there is a child – he will not go towards drugs and alcohol, because when he sees his child's potential future, he is discouraged'* (an unmarried young male in FGD, age 22).

 If early marriage can be an outcome of young love – it is also true that early marriages are sometimes organized by parents who want to save family honor from being tarnished by their adolescent children's love/romantic relationships. Young respondents expressed that no matter what might be the nature of a romantic relation between a young boy and a girl – in slum societies, it is always seen with suspicion of immorality and of sexual nature. The collective suspicion and condemnation of any kind of relation between a young boy and girl can put a seal of disapproval and shame on family's name. Parents not only fear children engaging in premarital sexual relations, but also untimely elopement of young lovers – both of which are matter of disgrace.

Sometimes social scrutiny and pressure can cause parents to arrange for their children's untimely and early marriages, for example, one young male in Bhashantek (age 21, married at 20) had friendship with a girl, now his wife (age17, married at 16) near to their house. Both of them were in class nine and their relation at that point was nothing more than a likeable friendship. But their neighbors accused them of having premarital sex and complained to his parents about his conduct based on their suspicion. This brought tremendous pressure on the families, and on the adolescents. To save families and the young people from social shame and condemnation, his family arranged his marriage with her even though they both were below their legal age of marriage.

Thus, the community plays an important role in early marriage, in both rural as well as urban slum locations. In the tightly spaced and squeezed living arrangements of slums, it is impossible to ignore or avoid neighbors, their opinions and influences, particularly in those sections that are tightly bounded. Slums are also socially organized through common norms, influences of religious bodies and social leaders. Sometimes, local leaders and society can interfere, support and even organize early marriages if they deem a situation to be crucial to uphold social morality. Local leaders and heads accept early marriage to 'save family honor' in cases where adolescents engage in romantic relationships with each other.

14

Section 4: Discussion

Our study findings show that gendered social norms, patriarchal and masculine construction shape the decision and pathway into marriage of young males. These decision-making processes might be initiated by personal choices or parental wishes or under social pressures – but at the end of the day these factors intersect with each other and culminates into an early marriage. The pathways to early marriage for young males in urban slums are complex. Findings show that the decision of marriage is not based on appropriateness or legal age for marriage rather based on their capacity to earn, to provide financial responsibilities to family, willingness to form a family and expand social network, enjoy sexual life, to bring additional labor in form of a wife to support household work. It is also perceived that marriage is a medium to control sexuality, body and mind including bad habits like addiction, extramarital sexual relation. Thus, parents and society interfere to arrange marriage to protect family and societal honor if it finds a young male to be at risk of being morally derailed. Our study results also support other research findings regarding the key drivers of child marriage practice among young males and young males conducted in the low and middle income countries in South Asia and Africa[28]. What we see in this research discussion is how gender, adulthood and marriage is lived through the social constructions of masculinity, gender stereotype roles and patriarchal ideology. Each of these shapes the attitude towards marriage and decision of child marriage among young males in these particular settings. Early marriage here is understood under the broader framework of adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR). Hopefully findings from this research will help us to incorporate issues of gender and adulthood along with masculinity in ASRHR and child marriage prevention framework to address the problems for a sustainable solution.

The decision of marriage among the married respondents was influences by dominant masculine and gender role ideologies. In patriarchal domain, males are the main breadwinner for family and they mainly take the financial responsibilities of family. In the context of the patriarchal society of Bangladesh, males and husbands are considered as the breadwinner for family and it is essential to establish dominance in his family and society[29]. Perceptions of masculinity in Bangladesh are dominated by concepts of strength, fear, honor, power, sexuality – and marriage plays a central role in fulfilling all these roles for men as it indicates health, power and financial capacity[18]. Thus, it is seen in this research that when a young male has income, it automatically elevates him to the stage of adulthood. This strong sense of an emerging adult identity pushes young males to think that they are now capable of getting married as they are assuming the role of a breadwinner. The whole process of negotiating agency for personal matters (like romance, marriage, sex) which are otherwise almost non-negotiable at a '*na-balak*' stage with no monitory power, now gains power to bargain with social norms and expectations (of staying asexual or childlike till marriages are arranged by family and elders). Compared to middle class and economically privileged children from the same society, where children gain social perceptions of adulthood much later in life as they live under the financial shelter and control of parental households – slum children, especially the young males gain adulthood and subsequent agency as a default outcome of lack of opportunities to stay children for as long as possible, as per Bangladeshi norms[30-32].

Other studies showed that peers are the one of the most influencing group for adolescents in working place, schools or neighborhood[33, 34]. Respondents in the study showed a clear trend in thinking of peer

15

support as a strong backup system in making decisions about marriages. Evidence in Bangladesh in urban slum showed that peer influences, parental will and care, social environment and adolescent's personal choice also play role in how adolescents will continue their lives in slum environment[35]. Our study showed that peers had a significant influence to think about marriage as marriage gives them an adult identity which gradually places them as a significant and powerful male member of the family. Young males also get influenced by observing other married young males of similar age and contextual background. In the workplace, there are examples of many other peers who already are married at a relatively early age. Interaction with them, discussion about their married life also may have influence on adolescent young males into desire to get married.

According to the study respondents, a trend of love relationship among adolescent and young generation is prominent than before. Young males who are in romantic relation, expressed that losing their girlfriend as wife is disgraceful for them, counted it as a defeat of being as a man. So, they marry by eloping and out of guardian's consent as they want to prove their power as a man. This masculine attitude also accelerates child marriage among young males in the study context like urban slum.

Our findings revealed that access to movies, pornography influence and shape the need to be sexually active and in a relationship. Other studies also support this findings that watching pornography/adult sexual content can negatively influence young males, which motivates them to get involved in premarital sexual relationships and shapes their ideas of sex, sexuality and relationships[36, 37]. Respondents agreed that marriage guarantees regular sex and a sexual partner. With marriage, sexual desire can be fulfilled without any additional costs or hassles.

Findings reveal that, parents are always in fear of their adolescent and young male child getting involved in gang violence, drug addiction or other anti-social activities. There are also evidence that norms, attitude and perceptions about heterogeneous masculinity often instigates adolescent young males to engage in unsafe harmful practices such as practicing violence against others, risky sexual practice, involvement in gangs, and substance abuse[38]. In the economically, socially and politically marginalized slum setting, where adolescents lack parental guidance and are surrounded by violence, exploitation and abuse, these vulnerabilities of adolescence can be far greater and more damaging[39]. Respondents informed that crimes, sexual and physical violence, drug addiction in urban slum area are very common. Earning capacity at a relatively early age in life not only grants some privileges of adulthood in terms of autonomy in spending money, but it also gives resistance to otherwise omnipresent parental surveillance. This capacity to earn and spend money can easily draw young males to 'bad habits and influences'. Other studies also showed same evidences[40]. So, parents feel insecure about their sons' lifestyle, and their lack of control. Therefore, they try to engage their sons into work and often in marriages. It also helps parents to secure their financial needs for family. Parents along with (and often under pressure from) other people in society perceive 'marriage' of a young male may be a strategy to protect and to keep control from any uneven practice and a disciplinary act. They perceive that 'marriage' creates some responsibilities and accountabilities to wife and family.

After parents, it is immediate and extended families, as well as kinship that play significant roles in shaping children's lives, when it comes to marriage. Reputation, acceptability, social position and respect – aspects of lives that are considered as prized possessions, especially in newly urbanized lives in slums, where

16

survival can depend on social networks – neighbor's, local people and leaders' opinion on relationships and marriages matter. Often time of marriage is decided by these external forces even if the adolescent boy or his parents might want to decide otherwise.

Early marriage takes place for both girls and boys irrespective of what gender norms and values one might harbor. Adolescent boys negotiate a complex web of gender privilege, emerging adulthood, agency and social network and influences in making important decisions of life, like marriage. The matter of early marriage, for adolescent urban slum young males, is rarely a case of vulnerability and victimhood, like majority of their female counterpart. Agency, consent and desire to start family, sexual partnership, to run a household and provide support to parental households with additional (free) labor – are major reasons that influence adolescent boys' decision to marry earlier than legally sanctioned age by the state.

This is a first time attempt to explore the perspectives, underlying reasons that influence the decision of early marriage of young males in urban slum context of Bangladesh. However, data were collected only from two slums which may not portray full scenario and realities of other slums in Bangladesh. Due to the sensitivity of the topics, such as, early marriage, sexuality, drug addiction, violence, power politics in slum community, many of the respondents might be conservative to express their views and practices. However, it might have a minimal effect on findings as method triangulation and data source triangulation were performed to verify the information. This paper is nevertheless a start to the discussion regarding the early marriage decision of these ignored and vulnerable groups. The entrance point of the perspectives of adolescent and young males to understand early marriage is important and needs more explorations and understandings in the discourse of preventing early marriage.

Conclusion

Our study reveals that the issue of early marriage, in low income urban slum contexts, has many different entry points for young males. Researches show that increasingly both young males and females are getting married early with their own consent, and in this research, it is evident that young males have greater voice and agency to give consent to marriage even if they are not technically (legally) adults.

From the findings of this research, we get a glimpse of how in low income socially vulnerable context of urban slums, adolescent young males negotiate adulthood processes in a complex but gender unequal spectrum of power and agency, and when it comes to marriage, these gendered power, privileges and agency pave pathways in asserting decisions that are otherwise not even legally granted to them.

In slum contexts, where space and livelihood is earned with a premium, and newly urbanized families struggle to find a footing in an already crowded and competitive city like Dhaka or Chittagong, there is a constant conflict, pull and push of norms, traditions and modernity – and young people are at the center of these shifting norms and ideas. The new realities of urban spaces bring new realities and definitions of adulthood, and we clearly see that adolescent young males find new agency with new economic prowess. In the context of the urban slums, the perceived phenomena of adulthood, decision-making capability, aspiration towards marriage, family formation and sexuality influence the marriage decision-making process especially child marriage among the young males in the context of urban slums of Bangladesh.

17

When an adolescent boy is considered as adult mainly based on his income ability and marital status, he is deprived of opportunities for his growth and development. Moreover, child marriage cut short the adolescence of young males and compromises their fundamental human rights. It affects their education, earning power and economic prospects, expectation, freedom, physical and psychological health and social life, however, nominal attention is given to the vulnerabilities of young males[41, 42].

Adolescent and young males' child marriage has many risk profiles that not only negatively affect their own situation but also have impacts on their partner's and family life. As long as child marriage prevention program only focuses girls with nominal focus on young males, it will be difficult to address child marriage holistically. A clear understanding about male's understandings, behavior and practice regarding child marriage are crucial to design interventions and programs to support this group of young men to stop child marriage.

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18

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19

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20

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21

This consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative studies (COREQ) checklist for this article are described as follows-

No Item	Description
Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity	
Personal Characteristics	
1. Interviewer/facilitator	SubasBiswas with other researchers conducted the interviews and focus group discussion sessions. Sabina F Rashid trained researchers how to conduct interviews and focus group
2. Credentials	All of the researchers had minimum Master's degree in Anthropology, Public Health or Social Science Whereas Sabina F Rasid and ShuchKarim have PhD degree.
3. Occupation	All of the researchers were full time engaged in this research; however, Sabina F Rashid and ShuchiKarim were also involved in teaching in universities.
4. Gender	There were a group of researchers and both male and females researchers were in this group
5. Experience and training	All of the researchers had prior experience in conducting research. Moreover, all of the researchers were gone through several training and workshop sessions for present study
Relationship with participants	
6. Relationship established	Prior to data collection a good rapport was established with each respondents and also community people. The researchers spent several weeks in the field and collected data.
7. Participant knowledge of theinterviewer	Participants were informed about the researcher's identity, objectives and involvement in this study.
8. Interviewer characteristics	Researcher informed participants about their designation, affiliation of the organization, aims and objectives of the study and what the involvements of the researchers in this study were. Participants were also informed how researchers would use this data and what would be the role of the researchers in presenting information to other audiences.
Domain 2: study design	
Theoretical framework	
9. Methodological orientation andTheory	Content and thematic analysis were done to underpin the study
Participant selection	
10. Sampling	Purposive and snowballing methods were used to select participants
11. Method of approach	Participants were approached face-to-face
12. Sample size	The broader research project collected both quantitative and qualitative data using questionnaire survey with 2136 adolescent girls and young women aged 13-24 years and 96 In-depth interview (IDI), and 12 focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted with married and unmarried adolescents and young girls and boys aged 15-24 years, their parents and 33 key-informant interviews (KII) with

	community leaders, teachers, marriage registrars and program people.
	However, this present article used 22 In-depth interviews (IDIs) and 3 focus group discussions (FGD) with married and unmarried adolescent and young males aged 15-24 years; 13 IDIs and 4 FGDs with parents and 11 key-informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders.
13. Non-participation	About 10-12 young male respondents refused to participate in this study as they were not interested or they had no time enough to spend time as most of the interviews were conducted at the day tome and these potential participants were engaged in work during day time.
Setting	
14. Setting of data collection	All of the interviews were conducted at participants own setting, whether it was in their home or near to their home where they felt comfort to talk.
15. Presence of non-participants	When interviews were conducted in participant's own home, there were family members near to the interview sessions in some cases. But they were not present full time of the interview sessions. One researcher conduct one interview and audio recorder was used to record all of the conversations with the informed consent of the participants. Two researchers were involved to conduct focus group discussions session. Here researchers also used audio recorder to record all of the conversations with informed consent of participants.
16. Description of sample	The sample characteristics include age, marital status, age at marriage, income and job status
Data collection	
17. Interview guide	Data were collected using pretested guidelines phase by phase in two study sites
18. Repeat interviews	No repeat interviews were conducted
19. Audio/visual recording	The research use audio recording with informed consent of the participants to collect the data
20. Field notes	Field note were taken during and after the In-depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group discussion (FGD) and also key-Informant Interviews(KII)
21. Duration	For IDIs, the duration was about 90-100 minutes, For FGDs, the duration was about 120-150 minutes For KIIs, the duration was about 60-80 minutes
22. Data saturation	Data saturation was not discussed
23. Transcripts returned	Transcripts were not returned to participants for comment or correction
Domain 3: analysis and findings	
Data analysis	
24. Number of data coders	Eight data coders coded the data

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25. Description of the coding tree	The authors did notprovide a description of the coding tree
26. Derivation of themes	Themes were derived from the data
27. Software	Atlasti (version 8) software was used to manage the data
28. Participant checking	Participants did not check the findings
Reporting	
29. Quotations presented	Participant quotations are presented to illustrate the findings. Basic characteristics of these participants were also presented with these quotations.
30. Data and findings consistent	Consistency between the data and findings are discussed
31. Clarity of themajor themes	Major themes are clearly presented in the findings
32. Clarity of minor themes	A description of diverse cases and discussion of minor themes are also presented