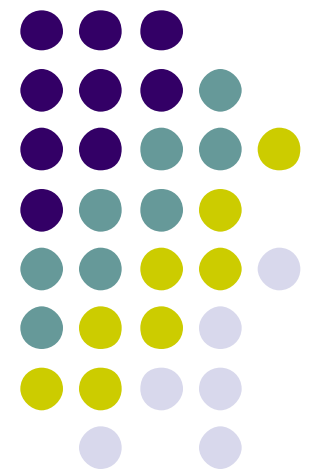


Women's Empowerment Across Generations in Bangladesh

Influences on the Timing of Marriage and Childbearing

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Background

Previous analyses

- 2002 survey in 6 villages
- 867 Mother/Daughter pairs
- 352 Mother-in-law/Daughter-in-law pairs

→ *No evidence of empowerment effect*



Background (2)

Why no cross-generational empowerment effect?

- Women's empowerment is superficial?
- Empowerment too difficult to measure quantitatively?

Current Study - Objectives



- 1) Re-examine the concept of women's empowerment
- 2) Explore socio-cultural processes through which women influence the next generation of women
- 3) Investigate how institutions and processes resistant to change may undermine women's empowerment and its cross-generational effects

Methods

- 3 core villages and others linked by marriage
- 104 in-depth interviews with triads of women
- Sample taken from mothers and mothers-in-law who scored in top empowerment quartile



Modes of Cross-generational Influence



1. **Strategic life** choices made by mothers
2. **Influence** of mothers and mothers-in-law over **decisions and behaviors** of married children and children-in-law
3. Mothers' and mothers'-in-law **direct actions**
4. Mothers' and mothers'-in-law **roles** in shaping next generation's **attitudes and expectations**

Definition of Women's Empowerment

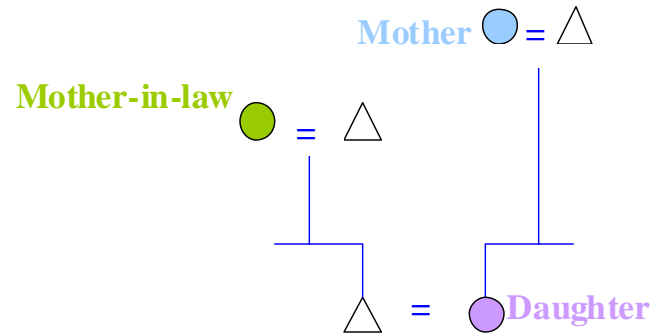


- The capacity to exercise agency in a context where women's agency is constrained by an inequalitarian gender system



Case Study of One Triad

- Married 13 year old girl
- Mother
- Mother-in-law



➤ Exception that proves the rule

Sajeda: Empowered Mother



- ✓ Main financial contributor in family

“I have tried everything....I can do any work a man or a woman can do....I don't like to waste my time sitting around the house.”

Sajeda: Empowered Mother



- ✓ Good reputation in the community

“If I needed to,” she said, “I could immediately get a loan of as much as 30,000 Takas (about \$425). Everyone has faith in me. If my husband goes to ask for a loan he won’t get it.”

- ✓ Educated both son and daughter

Typical Empowered Mother



- Aware of the risks and disadvantages of early marriage and childbearing
- Experiences “child marriage regret”
- Uses poverty as justification
- Attempts to delay daughter’s first childbirth

“The Exception”



“I am always alert and conscious about my daughter, and I believe I will be able to compensate for the mistake I made by getting her married at such a tender age....Other mothers tend to think that they have freed themselves from a burden when they get their daughters married.”



“The Exception” (2)

- Collusion between young bride’s mother and mother-in-law

“You will have to keep your daughter under your control, and when she comes to my house I will keep her under my observation. We can’t let them have a baby within the next 5 years.”

“The Exception” (3)



- Leveraging of economic power

“I told my son-in-law that my daughter is a little girl and he can’t stay with her now. But I told him this after giving him the money...After I pay back the 8000 taka I plan to borrow another 5000 so he can start a business. Then he won’t be able to disobey me.”

A young married man's insecurity



“If your daughter-in-law leaves me after pursuing her education what will I do then?... I am an illiterate person. If she gets an education she may not want to live with me!”



Discussion

Bangladesh at early stage in marriage transition

- Schooling, marriage and childbearing decisions influenced by decisions influenced by:
 - Competing ideas and ambivalence
 - Economic and social insecurity



Discussion (2)

- High Awareness of risks and disadvantages of early marriage and childbearing
- Child marriage still common
- Empowered women equally prone to marry off underage daughters
- “Early marriage regret” common



Discussion (3)

- Education gap makes young husbands insecure
 - Impregnation used as strategy to keep wife from leaving
- Lack of educational opportunities for young men from poor families may contribute to early marriage and childbearing among women

Thank you!



➤ More to come:

Changing Meanings of Empowerment!