

## Creative Direct Marketing Approach to Deal with Child Marriage Problem: A Case Study of the Village Montola

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**Abstract:** Bangladesh has the second highest prevalence rate of child marriage. At the village Montola of Monohardi upazila in Narshindi district, child marriage is still a bad custom. NGOs are not successful enough with their traditional practices. Actually, creativity is in need at this juncture. This study, which is dominantly qualitative in nature, suggests some creative direct marketing approach. With the help of focus group discussion and direct observation, this study found some core causes of child marriage e.g., poverty, lack of education and social norms or tradition and therefore, suggests successful girl's voice, union parishad's seminars on health complicity due to child marriage, melodious songs in hut on hutbar, drama or jatrapala etc.

**Keywords:** Child marriage, NGOs, Direct marketing, Creativity.

### INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a strong social custom, particularly for our girls in Bangladesh. It is found that Bangladesh is in 2<sup>nd</sup> place in terms of prevalence of child marriage after the Niger [1]. According to UNICEF, the prevalence rate of child marriage is 74 in Bangladesh which is alarming. When delving more to source the causes of child marriage, the poor are found most at risk [2, 3]. Perhaps, poverty is one of the vital causes for making our young girls bride at their early stage of life depriving them from being a girl, but superstition, lack of social security, social awareness and pressure from kith and kins and neighborhoods are also responsible for child marriage in Bangladesh rural setting.

As like as other rural villages in Bangladesh, in the village, *Montola* which is situated at *Monohordi* upazila in *Narshindi* district, it has become so common phenomenon. The problem is too extreme that instead of treating child marriage negatively, villagers negatively treat the parents who don't arrange their child marriage before 15. As a result, it has become a tradition that the marriage of the child should be arranged as soon as possible before 15. Some NGOs (e.g., Safe Motherhood Promotion Project (SMPP) of CARE Bangladesh and others) are working in this

village with an aim to reduce that devastating practice. Direct marketing is used by them to deal with that issue. But, the reality warrants much more creativity in their direct marketing approach to actually make a difference indeed. Hence, this study aims to explore what are the experiences of women about child marriage and what they feel to lessen it. In line with the research question, this study places recommendations for creative direct marketing approach which can help those NGOs in lessening child marriage.

**Table-1: Statistics on Socio-Economic Condition**

Indicators	Monohardi	National
Poverty Head Count Ratio	22.7%	31.5%
Extreme Poverty Head Count Ratio	11.8%	17.6%
Literate Population [18 years+]	47%	50.5%
Educational Attainment [Primary completed]	33.7%	33.1%
Educational Attainment [Secondary completed]	11.8%	12.8%
Educational Attainment [Tertiary level completed]	2.3%	3.8%

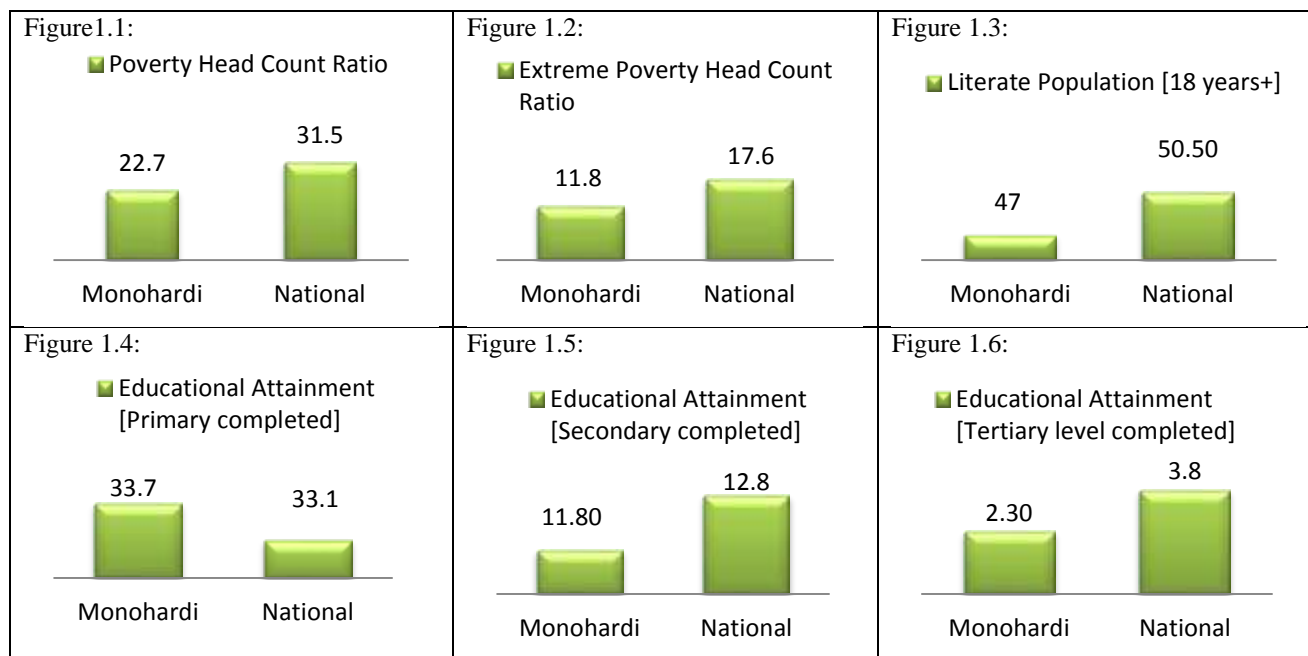
Source: Bangladesh Interactive poverty map [4]

**Socio-Economic statistics in Monohordi Upazila**

This study explores the socio-economic condition (basically poverty and education) prevailing in Monohardiupazila of which a village is Montala. From table-1, it is evident that Monohardi is ahead to

some extent in case of poverty prevalence than that of national level.

On the other hand, in terms of overall education, it is evident that the study area is lagged behind than that of national level (See table-1 and figure 1.3-1.6).



**Fig-1: Percentage of Socio-Economic (Poverty and Education) condition**

Source: Bangladesh Interactive poverty map [4]

**METHODOLOGIES**

**Sampling**

This study aims to explore what are the experiences of women about child marriage and what they feel to lessen it. Hence, purposive sampling method has been adopted to select participants due to its qualitative nature.

**Study design and data collection**

To collect data, this study relied on focus group discussion/group interview. An interactive session was conducted involving total ten participants out of which five were those who were victim of child marriage. Two parents were invited and they participated in the session. The rest one was Jahida who protested her child marriage. However, the session last almost ninety minutes with an unstructured checklist.

**Core reasons for child marriage and the relevant consequences**

To find out causes of child marriage and hindrance to prevent child marriage, a focus group discussion (FGD) was held. From the FGD, it was found that child marriage, in the study area, may due to number of reasons.

**Core reasons**

**Poverty**

Poverty is one of the most frequently cited factors for child marriage in Bangladesh. Where poverty is acute, a young girl may be regarded as an economic burden. So, poor parents always try to get rid of the young girl by arranging marriage of their child.

**Lack of education**

Very few of the girls get the opportunity to continue their education in Montala, Monohardi. Girls are dropped-out from school, especially, in cultural settings where girls are raised for a lifetime confined to household chores and are expected to marry very young.

**Social norms and barriers**

Most of the families think that the only way to protect their young girls from abuse is by letting their child marry. Again, in many cases it was reported that villagers negatively treat the parents who don't arrange their child marriage before 15. Eve teasing is another cause as has been specified.

**Consequences**

From the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), some points have been noted as the consequences of early marriage.

### **Loss of interpersonal development**

Early marriage of girls weakens their interpersonal skills e.g., managing relationship with others, appropriate contacts, built concentration etc. which are very necessary for the development of a child. Early married girls also reported that they have *withdrawal symptoms*.

### **Lack of Education**

Child marriage is repeatedly cited as a significant factor impeding the realization of the right to education [3]. This is also true for our study area. With early marriage, many girls drop out of school. They take away their right to education which undermines their self-confidence, decision-making power and denies them from the opportunity to become economically independent. Girls who marry as adolescents attain lower schooling levels; have lower social status in their husband's families and suffer various problems.

### **Health related Problems**

Women's  $\alpha$ -period normally ranges from 15-49 years. But it is still dangerous to give a birth for a teen than for a woman of 20 or older. According to Save the Children, each year 50,000 teen mothers around the world die during child pregnancy or childbirth. The harsh reality is same here. One child girl aged 14 died last year in the study area during birth of the child. Moreover, an estimated 50 per cent of adolescent girls are undernourished and suffer from anemia. Most are not properly educated about reproductive health and contraception.

### **Activities against the child marriage**

#### **Role of NGOs working**

NGOs in our village are dealing with the villagers directly to influence villagers to protest child marriage. That is, they are trying to use direct marketing to diminish that harmful tradition. It is called direct marketing, when organizations communicate directly with target customers to generate response. Direct marketing is a valuable tool in the integrated marketing communication program, though it usually seeks somewhat different objectives. It is one of the fastest growing forms of promotion [5].

According to the employees of the NGOs currently working there to prevent child marriage, they usually follow the direct marketing like informing the villagers about *Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929*, *The Children Act, 1974* and *The Birth and Death Registration Act, 2004* and make them conscious that they can be punished according to those law if they arrange marriage of their child girl before 18, by arranging programs where the consequences of the child marriage are presented.

### **Voice from the girls**

One girl named Jahida in the village Montala is highly popular for her effort to prevent her marriage during her childhood. After that she continued her study and now she is a respected school teacher in local school.

### **DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Though the NGOs are trying to prevent child marriage, it is still prevailing. Women are raising their voice, girls are raising their voice but, child marriage is yet to end!

To stop child marriage, this study suggests creative direct marketing as-

For example, Jahida can be used as a marketing tool to influence the villagers. Instead of directly talking about child marriage prevention, she can go to villagers' house and just gossiping about her success- how she is contributing to her parents, how she is living a happily married life which occurs after her maturity, how she is enjoying her profession and about her interpersonal skills etc. That can affect the villagers greatly.

Union Parisad can arrange some seminars disseminating health related complicity that arises for a girl under 20 to give birth. If properly be arranged, it can create high emotional appeal to villagers. When the villagers will feel what kind of sorrowful fact can be happened in the life of their child as a consequence of the early marriage, they may be more conscious.

Men are the main decision maker in the village. So, they basically take the decision of arranging marriage of their child. They spent a lot of time in the village hut. Melodious song can be released and village shoppers can be influenced to play it in their shops.

Village doctors can also be used here who can go to the village hut and can talk about the harmful consequences happen due to child marriage like death, cervical cancer and other deadly diseases and effects.

The people of the village are always fascinated about drama, cinema, jatrappala etc. So, jatrappala can also be arranged which actually can disseminate harmful consequences of the child marriage. Those types of interesting things sometimes bring a great success.

However, ending child marriage will yield a double dividend. This will help to protect human rights of adolescent girls – and it will provide them opportunities to live better lives that could break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. The full and equal participation of women in civil, political, economic, social, cultural, at national, regional and international level, and the eradication of all discrimination can only make the actual development of the society. Child

marriage hampers that participation and creates discrimination. So, let us prevent child marriage and let the girls be girls.

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