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Urban Adolescents' Needs Assessment Survey in Bangladesh: Summary

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URBAN ADOLESCENTS' NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY IN BANGLADESH

The Urban Adolescents' Needs Assessment Survey in Bangladesh was designed to provide a general overview of the experience of urban adolescents, along with specific policy recommendations for adolescent programs.

The Population Council in collaboration with the BRAC Institute of Educational Development developed this study as part of a broader needs assessment to inform several urban adolescent programs aimed at improving educational outcomes, providing better access to sexual and reproductive health information, and providing counseling and mental health support. The findings have implications for existing and future program strategies to promote adolescent well-being.

This summary provides a snapshot of the survey results. On the following pages, we provide:

- Highlights of survey findings
- Policy implications and future directions
- Sampling of figures and table

Read the full report

Amin, Sajeda (ed.) 2015. "Urban adolescents' needs assessment survey in Bangladesh. Dhaka: BIED, BRACU, and Population Council.

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BRAC Institute of Educational Development
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Highlights of survey findings

The Urban Adolescents' Needs Assessment Survey in Bangladesh was conducted in 8 thanas located in Dhaka North, Dhaka South, and Gazipur district near Dhaka city from April to May 2014.

Participants included adolescent girls and boys 12–19 years of age who were sampled from, and interviewed in, their homes.

The total sample size is 3,585 and includes married and unmarried adolescents.

SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND ASSET OWNERSHIP

- Dhaka North is the wealthiest and Gazipur is the least wealthy district.
- This urban population is more predominantly Muslim than the population of the country as a whole.
- Family size, as measured by average number of siblings, is 2.23, with Gazipur having a slightly higher average family size of 2.43.
- 92% of adolescents have both fathers and mothers alive.
- Almost all households have electricity. 87% own televisions and 96% own mobile phones.
- Relatively high proportions own their own homestead land (84%) and a little under half own arable land as well.

PARENTS' EDUCATION AND OCCUPATION

- Almost a third of all adolescents have parents who do not have any education and these rates are similar for fathers and mothers.
- 28% of fathers and 17% of mothers have 10 years of education or more.
- The areas vary in terms of occupational distribution of fathers: 33% are professional in Dhaka North, compared with 20% in Dhaka South and 17 percent in Gazipur.
- More than 85% of mothers are reported to be housewives.

SCHOOLING

- The survey validates other studies that show education levels are rising in urban Bangladesh, resulting in adolescents who are more educated than their parents.
- Less than 4% of adolescents have never been to school.
- Girls who are in school have slightly higher levels of schooling than boys, but they tend to drop out after puberty resulting in girls attaining lower overall levels of schooling than boys.
- Only about 5% of adolescents receive government stipends. Stipends are typically not given to urban students.
- The majority of adolescents (80%) who are in school also are tutored at home by private tutors, and more than half of them pay Tk1,000 per month or more.

LEARNING COMPETENCIES

- Assessments of learning suggest that school quality is poor, particularly in mathematics.
- Most adolescents are able to read well in Bangla, their native language. English language competency is better in urban areas.
- In math competency, gender and age-related differences are small. However, in-school adolescents are much more competent compared with those out-of-school. This suggests adolescents may lose their skills when they are no longer in school.

MARRIAGE

- Early marriage among urban adolescent girls is high and comparable to early marriage rates in rural areas.
- Nearly 20% of girls ages 12–19 are married compared with 1% of boys.
- About one in four marriages are described as “own choice” and the remaining are arranged. The reason most often given for marriage is that a proposal was too good to refuse.
- Marriage registration is common, with 94% of married adolescents reporting that their marriage was registered. However, reports of dowry payment were surprisingly low.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

- Knowledge about sexual and reproductive health is poor for unmarried adolescents and boys.
- HIV/AIDS is relatively uncommon in the country, but sexually transmitted diseases are not. However, knowledge of HIV/AIDs is much higher than knowledge about other forms of sexually transmitted diseases.
- 62% of married adolescents use a contraceptive method. The pill is the most commonly used method for girls, and condom use is most common for boys.
- Girls are much more likely than boys to be sexually active at an early age because of early marriage.

MOBILITY AND GENDER NORMS

- Both boys and girls face restrictions on their mobility. However, girls are more restricted.
- Boys and girls express gender inequitable values on a range of indicators but boys hold more inequitable values than girls.
- Women’s seclusion in the form of purdah practice is condoned by both boys and girls.
- Although respondents generally express equitable values when it comes to general principles such as the right to equality or education, more gender inequitable values emerge when asked about role expectations. Adolescents overwhelmingly endorse views that women should be primarily responsible for domestic chores and that violence against women is acceptable under certain conditions.

LIVELIHOODS, ASSETS, AND INCOME

- Overall about a third of all adolescents work. Boys are more likely to work than girls.
- Urban adolescent girls are more likely than rural girls to work—nearly one in four adolescent girls is engaged in income-earning activities.
- Boys and girls work in different occupations. While the service sector is the dominant sector of employment for boys, garment factories are the dominant place of work for adolescent girls.
- Girls who are in school often earn money by tutoring children.
- Girls work an average of 40 hours per week. Boys work an average of 50 hours and earn 50% more than girls.
- Although labor force participation is highest among the least educated, returns to education are high and even adolescents with incomplete primary education earn more per hour than adolescents with no education. However, adolescents with no education work long hours and their overall earnings are higher than adolescents with higher levels of education.
- Adolescent girls tend to hold their assets in the form of gold and silver. This was reported even among the most educated adolescents, suggesting either that adolescents do not have access to alternative ways of saving or that they prefer to save in this traditional form of asset holding.

IN SEVERAL ASPECTS, THE SURVEY DID NOT REPLICATE RESULTS REPORTED IN OTHER SURVEYS

- In particular, reported levels of harassment and violence were much lower in this survey compared with past studies in urban and rural Bangladesh.
- Reports of sexual activity outside marriage and drug use were also low as was the percentage of marriage that was reported to involve dowry. It may be the case that the survey underreported all of these behaviors, suggesting that it is important to offer higher levels of privacy and anonymity than what the current survey was able to provide.

IN SOME ASPECTS, THE SURVEY DID REPLICATE RESULTS FROM RECENTLY CONDUCTED STUDIES

- Results reported by the current study on measures of gender inequitable values and norms suggest that urban adolescents are similar to rural adolescents in their values.

Policy implications and future directions

- Education levels are rising in urban Bangladesh and adolescents are much more likely to be educated than their parents, but lack of access to schooling is highly detrimental. Caring for siblings or others is a primary reason given by adolescents for school dropout. **Providing child-care support to households may improve adolescent retention in school.**
- Urban child-marriage rates documented in this study are at the same level as rates of child-marriage reported from three rural districts with the highest rates of child marriage in the country. **Programs to address child marriage must target urban as well as rural areas.**
- A large proportion of boys in rural districts of Bangladesh cite lack of interest in studies as the reason for dropping out of school. **School programs should explore ways of making education more relevant and interesting. Resources such as libraries and computer laboratories may make education more appealing.**
- Nearly one in three fathers and mothers surveyed never attended school, while the percentage of adolescents who have never attended school in this sample is less than 4%. Many adolescents attending school thus live in households with no literate adults. **Schools should design mentoring programs to ensure that adolescents have access to educated and trusted adults who can support them in their educational pursuits.**
- Girls have slightly higher levels of achievement in school than boys but tend to drop out after puberty and thus attain lower overall levels of schooling. Marriage is the reason given for school dropout for more than one-third of girls. Girls marry early primarily because parents decide a proposal is too good to refuse. **Programs to address school dropout must engage parents of at-risk girls and inform them of the risks associated with child-marriage.**
- One in four adolescent girls choose to marry of their own accord, even though the majority of girls and boys believe it is ideal to marry at later ages. **Programs need to explore ways to change the way adolescents view the option of marriage.**

- Few urban adolescents receive government support for education because national stipend programs typically do not cover urban areas. **Policies might consider extending stipends to urban adolescents.**
- The data on workforce participation suggest that those who have never attended school and those who are no longer in school work long hours. **Education and literacy programs should consider the needs of adolescents who must also work.**
- The quality of schooling is poor, particularly for mathematics, and about 13% of adolescents have repeated a grade. Four out of five adolescents receive private

tutoring, mostly in English and mathematics, indicating that they are strongly motivated to succeed in school. **Investments should be made to provide educational support in out-of-school settings. Programs for distance learning through television and mobile platforms can likely play a role, given that most adolescents have access to these devices.**

- Assessments of mental health suggest that depression is an important area of concern. The analysis finds higher levels of moderate-to-high depression due to orphanhood status, experience of violence, poor school performance, and

traumatic childhood experiences. Pregnancy and childbearing are also associated with higher rates of depression among girls. Girls reported a greater frequency of praying, listening to music, and drug use—suggesting that these activities may be strategies to cope with depression. **Responses to a question on counseling suggest that unmarried adolescents would value professional help to reduce career- and education-related stress. Issues on sexual and reproductive health and rights and relationship concerns are important to married adolescents.**

Figures and table

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FIGURE 3 SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

FIGURE 4 REASONS FOR SCHOOL DROP OUT

FIGURE 5 MATH COMPETENCY

FIGURE 6 MARRIAGE

TABLE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH KNOWLEDGE

	Ever Married (N=338)	Never Married (N=1669)
Ever heard of HIV/AIDS	90.3%	91.9%
Ever heard of syphilis/ gonorrhea	10.9%	21.4%