

City

September 03, 2015

Survey on Married Women in Age Group 20-39

83pc had arranged marriages

According to research of Kent, Malaya, Brac universities

Staff Correspondent

Eighty three percent married women aged between 20 and 39 had arranged marriages, according to a collaborative research of the University of Kent, UK; Malaya University, Malaysia; and Brac University, Bangladesh.

Another Brac study showed that 74 percent adolescent girls accept their parents' choice regarding marriage, and less than one percent resort to extreme measures such as elopement if their parents do not accept their choice of a life partner.

The findings of the two studies contrast the government's reasoning behind reducing the minimum legal marriageable age for girls to 16 from 18 with parental consent and/or approval from courts in the proposed child marriage act, said M Niaz Asadullah, faculty of economics and administration, the University of Malaya.

Asadullah and Zaki Wahhaj, senior lecturers in economics, the University of Kent presented the findings of the two studies -- the Women's Life Choices and Attitudes Survey (WiLCAS), 2014 and marital preferences of adolescents and marital history of their parents in collaboration of Brac in 2012 -- at a seminar titled "Ending Child Marriage -- Empowering Girls or Strengthening the Rule of Law?" at Brac University yesterday morning.

The seminar was organised by Brac Research and Evaluation Division.

The WiLCAS survey was conducted in 64 districts and interviewed over 7,800 women aged between 20 and 39 years; and the Brac survey was conducted in 19 districts and interviewed 4,200 adolescents between 11-16 years and their parents.

The government argued that an increasing number of adolescent girls are attending secondary schools in rural areas and working in the industrial sector and they are more likely to encounter situations where they may be taken advantage of by men and pressured into sexual relationships or persuaded to elope, Asadullah told The Daily Star.

However, the studies show that only 14.5 percent of women in the WiLCAS survey had "love marriages" and their average age of marriage, 16.9 years, was higher than those whose marriages were arranged.

In the WiLCAS survey, only three percent said they were married because their parents were concerned about their physical safety, and 72 percent said they were married off because their parents felt it was a good proposal.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, suggested finding out why early marriage is low in some districts and build policies based on the good practices of those districts.

"Early marriages are often found more in places with higher incidence of foreign migration. So it is not just poverty driven; but religious and cultural norms are involved too," said Prof Abdul Bayes, director of Brac Research and Evaluation Division.

Prof Binayek Sen, research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), among others, spoke.