Higher dropout rates among girl students

Child marriage blamed

Shahin Akhter   28 November, 2025, 00:03

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The dropout rate is higher among girls compared with boys in Bangladesh, especially at the secondary and higher secondary levels of education, according to government reports.

Child marriage is a major reason for this trend, said educationists and researchers.

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They said that the natural and human-made disasters also caused dropouts and girls outnumbered boys in such dropouts too.

They also pointed at a lack of security for girls, poverty, rural-urban disparity and higher cost for education as the other reasons for the trend.

According to the Bangladesh Education Statistics-2024 prepared by the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics based on a countrywide survey, the dropout rate at the secondary level (grade 6-10) was 9.9 per cent while the rate was 11.4 per cent

for girls and 8.1 per cent for boys.

In 2023, the dropout rate was 13.15 per cent at the primary level (grade 1-5), 32.85 per cent at the secondary level, 21.51 per cent at the higher secondary level (grade 11-12) and 6.34 per cent at the diploma level.

Of the rates, the dropout rate for girls was 12.32 per cent at the primary level, 34.87 per cent at the secondary level, 22.45 per cent at the higher secondary level and 6.53 per cent at the diploma level.

The statistics showed that the dropout rates were higher among girls compared with boys at all but the primary level.

There is no available government data for dropouts at the primary, higher secondary and diploma levels in 2024.

The Bangladesh Education Statistics-2024 also showed that due to different disasters, 1,02,015 students dropped out of primary schools, secondary schools, madrassahs and colleges in 2024. Of the dropouts, 62,308 or 61.08 per cent were girls.

The total dropout and the girls' dropout at the primary level were 696 and 227 respectively, at the secondary level 57,105 and 32,588, at madrassahs 8,600 and 4,822 and at colleges 35,614 and 24,671.

The dropout rate for girls at the primary level 32.61 per cent, at the secondary level 57.07 per cent, at madrassahs 56.07 per cent and at colleges 69.27 per cent.

Campaign for Popular Education executive director Rasheda K Choudhury said that dropouts mostly occurred at low income families as post-primary education was costly as the levels of education got lower support from the government.

'When it comes to girls, parents think twice. They think as they would marry her off, what the use of spending so much for her at the secondary level is,' she said.

Rasheda said that though at the primary level, the participation of girls was good, their number started declining from the secondary level, especially after the grade 7.

'Security is a major concern for parents for their daughters,' she said, adding that secondary schools were not available at every village.

'When girls return home walking from schools, parents think twice sending their adolescent daughters to schools considering the current law and order situation and violence against women in the country,' she added.

Md Mostafizur Rahaman, deputy director (research and advocacy) at CAMPE, said that the main reason for higher dropout rate among girls was child marriage.

'At the primary level, the dropout rate is higher among boys while the rate is higher among girls at the secondary and higher secondary levels as at that stage their parents arrange marriage for them,' he said.

The preliminary findings of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2025 conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics recently, showed that the national rate of child marriage currently was 56 per cent.

As per the report, published on November 16, among the women aged 20-24 years, 47 per cent were married before 18 and 13 per cent were married before 15.

It also showed that the trend of adolescent girls, aged 15–19, being married off increased from 32.9 per cent to 38.9 per cent between 2019 and 2025.

Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research's associate professor Md Mahboob Morshed said that the dropout rate was higher among the children from low-income families and families from hard-to-reach areas.

'Poverty is the reason especially after the Covid pandemic for which the parents could not afford to let their children study,' he said.

He added that at the primary level, the government incentive was higher while from the secondary level, education started to be costlier.

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The World Bank in a report on October 7 said that poverty had worsened in Bangladesh as the rate climbed to 21.2 per cent in the 2024-25 financial year from 20.5 per cent in the FY 2023-24.

In August, local think-tank Power and Participation Research Centre calculated poverty at 27.93 per cent in May 2025 against 18.7 per cent in 2022.

According to the findings of 'Education Watch Study 2023—School Education in Bangladesh: Post-Pandemic Resilience and Sustainability', in the first six months of 2023, education expenses at the primary and secondary levels increased by 25 per cent and 51 per cent respectively, due mainly to having private tutors for students and the purchase of commercial guidebooks and notebooks.

Rasheda also blamed lack of infrastructure like separate toilet and residential facilities for girls at the educational institutions for the situation.

Mostafizur also blamed poverty and rural-urban disparity for the trend.

'For poverty, girls and boys are affected differently,' he said, adding that in rural areas the scope for security for girls was narrower while rural people also lacked awareness and more poverty-prone.

The MICS findings also showed that women with no schooling (69 per cent) or from the poorest households (65 per cent) were twice as likely to marry early against the richest (41 per cent).

Rural girls remain at higher risk of early marriage while the prevalence is 59 per cent in rural areas versus 50 per cent in urban areas, the report said, mentioning that the rates were higher in Rajshahi, Khulna, Rangpur and Barishal divisions.

The BBS survey was conducted on some 63,000 households between October 2024 and June this year in all 64 districts.