

Final report on the ethnography: the contextual realities of violence against women, new brides' vulnerabilities and handwashing practice

Introduction: Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO) III is a development program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Since its inception in 2015, the program addresses deeply rooted social norms that propagate inequalities through its women and girls empowerment interventions. The program developed the capacity of community group including women and girls and sensitized men to become active change agents in the last more than four years of its implementation,

This study is an initiative to contribute to the program's understanding of some of the prevailing challenges in the community including violence against women. To get to the root, the program applied an ethnography-like approach in two of the implementing villages. The key findings suggested that violence against women and malpractice like child marriage were still prevalent in the community. It found that social norms (e.g., son preference, always putting men as decision-makers) along with drug addiction, fueled the incidents of domestic violence. This form of violence was deeply rooted in the social discourses that were nurtured for long. Besides looking into GBV the study explored how handwashing was affected by individual perception.

Background: In Fiscal Year (FY) 19 SHOUHARDO III gradually adjusted its programming to focus on sustaining its impact. This process inherently includes an increasing emphasis on learning and adaptive management. The need to conduct this study derived from the results of the PaBSS¹ and FLAIRb². Findings from these two surveys suggested that in FY19 women's decision-making capacity and mobility declined, and violence against women increased. They also suggested a deterioration in handwashing practices (of the mothers) particularly before cooking and breastfeeding children and after cleaning the baby feces. These findings led to the need for further exploration of the underlying causes and contexts. Besides, the program planned to engage the newlywed women and young mothers meaningfully. Before delving into the program's two years extension phase, it was essential to have a systematic understanding of their current situation. Hence, this study investigated the following areas-

- Assess vulnerabilities of the newly married women and young mothers (awareness aspect at the individual level)
- Identify the key enablers/driving factors of violence against women
- Identify key barriers/disincentive of handwashing before cooking and before breastfeeding

Methodology: The study was inductive in nature as it intended to explore specific areas related to the program. It used an ethnography-like approach to gain a deeper understanding of the ground realities. Ethnography is a means of tapping local 'fund of knowledge' (Moll and Greenberg, 1990) from a close and personal experience. It widens not only the top-down view but also taps bottom-up insights of decision-makers and generates analytical insights by engaging in interactive and exploration of often subtle arenas of human difference and similarity. The initial conceptualization of the study did not include ethnography; however, during the first field test, it became evident that interviewing female respondents on violence against women could lead to further violence from them. The study team had to stop interviews in two communities during the field test to protect the respondents from potential violence. Doing an ethnography seemed to more viable to deal with the survivors of violence individually and to learn about the behavioral practices of mothers with children under five years old.

¹ Participants Based Sample Survey is conducted annually to measure changes in program's result areas.

² Fostering Learning and Adaptation in Resilience building is a longitudinal study that the program has been doing since November 2017.

The study team included four staff of the SHOUHARDO III program including two staff from the Dhaka office and two from the field. The team spent two weeks (one week/per village) all together in two villages, one in char and one in haor. During the ethnography, the team arranged accommodation that was nearby from the selected communities to reduce travel time and spend more time observing the target group. The fieldwork started in the early morning and was wrapped during the evening.

The study was conducted in two villages named Chilni and Dakshin Dighalkandi. Participants for this study were randomly selected from the community, however, the attempt was to cover a wide range of groups that included newly married women/young mothers (8), mothers-in-law (6), under-two children (4), adolescent girls (12), adolescent boys (25), adult women (33), and adult men (32). Typical ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection methods: observation, interview, documents. In this study, we used an in-depth interview (both individual and group), observation, and photography. These, in turn, generated three kinds of data: quotation, descriptions, pictures, and excerpts of documents, resulting in one narrative description. This narrative includes charts, diagrams, and pictures that helped the 'story' (Hammersley, 1990). The study primarily employed participant observation in gathering informational data. The effort was to get close to the respondents being observed in their natural setting, to be factual and descriptive in reporting what was observed, as well as to find out their points of view in the domain where they were observed. The study used an unstructured checklist for the interviews and FGDs that evolved through the data collection process. Qualitative data collected through this study was triangulated and analyzed using thematic categories resulting from findings. In many parts of the narrative, the words – 'I', 'we', and 'the team' have been used referring to the program staff that was engaged in the study.

Ethical measures: Due to the sensitive nature of the study areas, especially the objectives related to the key enablers of violence against women and vulnerabilities of new brides and young mothers demanded strict ethical measures to be adopted for this study. The first measure taken was to make sure that the gatekeepers are aware of the study, and they accept and endorse the entrance and inquiry. Secondly, the data collection process ensured taking consent from the respondents. The study only collected data in a place that was perceived as 'safe' by the participants for example, the new brides and young mothers preferred to speak when their mothers-in-law were away from home. Moreover, the data collectors were aware and responsive to the consequences of respondents' participation in the study. Also, the interviews and observation were done in a manner that neither threatened the safety nor questioned the social norms/taboo. In short, the study followed a 'no harm' principle in every step of it.

Findings narrative:

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(i) Background

Chilni a village in Elongjuri Union of Itna upazila (sub-district) of the Kishoreganj district. It is about three kilometers away from the Itna Upazila and people can travel there by auto-rickshaw (from morning to evening). Most of the men in the community are engaged in agricultural activities. Some had their land to cultivate and others did sharecropping. Some men did fishing beside to earn a living. The farming land remained underwater for six months every year. The farmers got six months to cultivate their lands, and mostly grew paddy. Some male members of the community migrated to Dhaka and other districts in search of livelihood during the monsoon (from April to September) and returned in winter (November to February) when they could do farming. Women were mostly housewives and were not engaged in formal income-generating activities.

Dakshin Dighalkandi, a small village under the Haldia Union of Saghata Upazila of Gaibandha district. The people living in this village were yet to receive access to electricity. Some of the wooden utility poles (were lying near the riverside and in crop fields. Around 90 percent of the household had a solar system and most of them had a tube well in their house. The villagers were dependent on waterways to travel outside the village. The village had four primary schools and two *madrassas* (religious school for Muslim). If any student wanted to continue their education after completing primary school, they needed to travel far or manage accommodation near the Upazilla. Most of the men were engaged in agricultural and seasonal migrant labor; only a few of them were involved with different trades. On the other hand, women did domestic chores, none of them found to be involved in any formal income-generating activities.

(ii) ‘Saturated’ development

In the past 10 years, several development projects have been implemented in Chilni to achieve different goals. One of the adult female group leaders shared that she received BDT3,000 from SHOUHARDO III. She received a cow from BRAC on installment (BDT1,100 per installment and ten installments altogether). Besides, she got BDT 210 for 27 weeks from BRAC. She received cattle feed also at free of cost. Her family received health care support from the BRAC *Shastha Shebika* (community health worker) named Shahanaz. BRAC was providing antenatal care, ultra-sonogram, and delivery at the hospital free.

The other project implemented in the same village was ‘*Ekti Bari ekti khamar*’³(One House One Farm) that had two groups in the same village, one containing 60 members and another 40 members. She was one of the members. As part of this project, she saved BDT2,400 in Bank Asia for 12 months and received an equal amount from the government. After that (BDT4,8000 savings), she could take a loan of BDT10,000. The good part about this loan according to her, was the ‘unofficial’ flexibility in the repayment process. She shared if any member failed to repay the installment, she could talk to the officer to accept the repayment later. For this project, only one member from each household was allowed in the group. They also received services from the government veterinary center. The group held meetings to learn about cattle fattening, vaccination, and other services from that hospital. She had received BDT300 quarterly along with worm killing tablet and vaccination, from there, and saved BDT200 in her Bank Asia. At the time of the interview, the re-payment was bi-annual. Further to this, Concern Worldwide had worked in this village for five years and given people cattle, poultry, cash for work, and tube well. She shared that from the Union Parishad, the group negotiated for safety net allowances and in 2017, the flood-affected people received 25-kilogram rice with BDT500 for 12 months.

The team met three elderly women at one of SHOUHARDO III participant’s house. They were suspicious and hesitant to talk as they assumed that we were from the SKS foundation. Once they knew our identity, they spontaneously shared their experiences about how they took loans from that NGO and it caused them sufferings. Mominul, whose father is a SHOUHARDO participant commented carefully, “*once I took a loan from them, I’ll never make such mistake twice.*” Another woman from the northern part of the village shared, “*SKS gives us microcredit, if you took a loan of BDT20,000 then you’ve to return it through a total of 46 installments. They’ll visit your house every week for the installment and won’t leave without it, even if it’s flooding. It’s worthy to take a loan if someone can utilize it, and do some income-generating activities. Otherwise, the loan becomes burdensome for that person.*” Currently Red Cross is working in that area, they installed few disaster enduring tube wells under a project and some of them are out of

³ One House One Farm is a poverty alleviation project of the Government of Bangladesh

function. The respondents could not mention the list of NGOs that worked in that village; some mentioned about Char Livelihood Program (CLP).

The community was well aware of the activities of SHOUHARDO III. When walking through the village we spoke to a few village women and one of them started to narrate, *“I’ve learned about the usage of sanitary latrine and handwashing practice, even a few years back I didn’t have the sanitary latrine in my house.”* Interrupting her a non-program participant expressed their disappointment, *“The program is supposed to help out the poor, but many well-off households are getting support from them!”* The team had similar experiences when greeting an old man who was returning from the field, holding a sickle in his hand, his feet were cracked and covered with mud. He hastily said, *“Oh you from SHOUHARDO? They didn’t enlist me saying that I’m rich! Look at me I’m a farmer and I don’t even have my land!”* Then he quickly left the place.

(iii) Debunking the discourse of a ‘good bride/wife’ and a ‘good father/husband’

The villagers perceived that newly married women were supposed to learn rules, practices of their in-laws’ families and should not go outside of the houses to meet with people in the first five-six years of their marriage. The team met a young man at Balur Char was about 25-28 years old. At one point in the conversation, he shared about his marriage plan. He had some specific plans about time and prospective bride. He planned to marry in the year 2022 and wanted to marry a girl from a poor family. He had no concern about her education and financial status of her family. He prioritized that her future bride-to-be must be accustomed to existing social norms and values and did not expect any dowry (or any kind of financial support). He had the intention to help the poor by getting married to such a family. He thought about a good wife who would work in the domestic sphere and would have a good manner and look after children. He did not expect his wife to work outside of the house. He wanted his wife to be dependent on him financially.

In another discussion, a group of women shared their understanding of a ‘good wife.’ They talked about women who leave their husbands because of ‘violence’ as ‘komina’ (local slang for a prostitute) and these who continued to stay with their husbands despite such occurrence became ‘good women.’ They accepted that practice of their husbands beating them. From several discussions, the following traits of ‘good bride’ were identified:

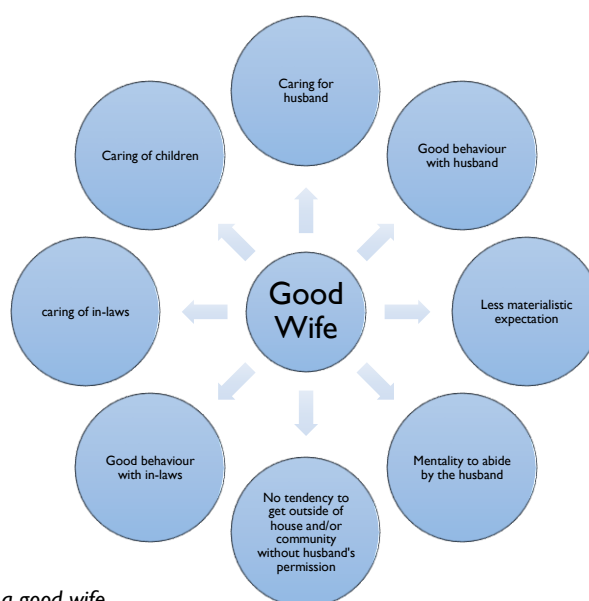


Figure 1 attributes of a good wife

The team facilitated discussions with two separate adult female groups to learn about the discourses on “Good Bride” and “Good Husband,” and both groups came up with similar insights. They mentioned that in char they looked up for some specific criteria, for example - it was highly preferred that a girl/ bride have sound religious knowledge along with physical strength since she needed to perform a lot of household tasks. Among these women, Shaheda (50) mentioned that she was blessed to have two ‘good’ daughters-in-law and said, *“Last year I was very sick, my daughters-in-law took really good care of me, even more than my daughter did.”* She mentioned that her younger daughter-in-law completed SSC, since the rate of girls who completed their SSC was quite low, Shaheda admitted her to the college with the money her son (who was migrant labor) sent her through Bkash. She shrugged and added, *“I wanted her to complete the HSC and tried my best, but a few days later she stopped going to the college. What can I do!”*

‘Good Bride’	‘Good Husband/ Man’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have religious knowledge, prays five times a day, recite the Holy Quran • Prefers to be educated • Obeys the elderly members of the family • Does domestic chores • Looks after the mother-in-law • Must not separate the son from his parents (willingness to live in a joint family) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good human being who will treat his wife with respect • Should work hard, earns well, capable to provide his family • Value wife's opinion • Has "good character" • Spend time with his children • Doesn't waste his time idly

Five adolescent girls shared their opinion on defining a “Good Girl” during the FGD, all of them were below 15 years old. In Dakshin Dighalkandi, it was difficult to find a girl who was above 15 and was still unmarried. Four of them went to a *madrassa* (religious school for Muslim) and only one reported to go to Saghata School. When asked about their future goals or dreams none of them could come up with a response. Golapi (13) told that she wanted to complete secondary school. All of them were extremely shy to talk, later through the discussion, it revealed that they grew up in families where girls were highly appreciated if they did not talk much, did not to play outside and did not go to neighboring houses. Mahmuda (14) mentioned, *“a good girl is someone who obeys the elderly ones, talks politely, practice religion, maintains purdah.”* None of these girls used the mobile phone and they did not go anywhere except their educational institutions, only Mahmuda went to tailor (in the local market) with her mother when she needed to make a dress. The families nurtured their young girls in such a way that they can perform their duties as a daughter-in-law someday.

Bobita (18) a young bride mentioned, *“A good bride is someone polite, most importantly she has to be religious in Char. Sometimes they prefer educated girls, ultimately a good girl will turn into a good bride, isn’t she?”* Most of the young brides do not go outside of their houses. Rather women who passed five or six years of their marriages seem to have higher mobility. The mothers-in-law spent their time freely outside of the house. Selina (23) a young bride shared, *“I don’t like to go to the market, it’s not appreciated in our community, a woman needs to maintain the veil. Since my husband works at a garment factory in Gazipur and my sons are too young to purchase things from the market, sometimes I’ve to go to the local market beyond my will.”*

A tough-wrinkled-faced man who did not cut his hair and beard spoke to the team briefly. He was wearing a torn shirt and *lungi* (a piece of cloth that men wear as the bottom), seemed to be around 50 years old having two children shared that he usually worked in other’s land as a day laborer; did fishing and grew vegetables. His elder son (12 years) was a *madrassa* (religious school for Muslim) student, and

his younger daughter (9 years) was a primary school student. He replied in a low voice with much reluctance that he wanted his son to continue his study and get a job so that the son could support the family in the future. He also expressed his worry as he was not certain how to educate the son in a proper way expressing his inadequate knowledge about education and education expenses. However, he stated that he would bear the education expense of his son at any cost though it seemed he was in a depressive fit while saying that. On the other hand, his statement regarding his girl's future education was not strong at all. Staring at the horizon, he uttered with reluctance that he would educate his girl as far as she wanted to study and would marry her at an eligible age.

A 40-year-old man stated that husbands in his community behaved well with their wives, given their wives were obedient to their husbands. He strongly stated that the behavior of a husband largely depended on the behavior of their wives. According to him, happiness in a family relied on good wives and he defined a good wife to be obedient and caring to the husband, children, and in-laws with little or no tendency to go out of the community without the permission of the husband and in-laws. He added that it was not expected that the newly married bride would go out of the house without the permission of her husband and in-laws as mobility of such a bride was considered as shameful for her in-laws. Besides, he perceived that girls with good family background and nature were not willing to go out of home for income-generating activity, talk to other males of the community, and go to others' houses and gossip unnecessarily with other women of the community. He strongly disagreed with women traveling outside the village, irrespective of new and old brides, without any emergency and without being accompanied by male members.

While narrating findings, we took into consideration the pictures taken and shared by the adolescent boys. The pictures (Please see Annex 1&2) portrayed the varied characteristics of men. Some of those suggested a 'caring' nature of men towards their children, some captured their hard work, while some of the pictures were reflections of how adolescent boys grew up learning violent acts. It was notable to see mounting expectations from a boy and men when it came to providing for their families.

The adult male respondents shared some of their practices during the FGD. They shared that most of the fathers did not spend quality time with children. They shared that (adult) men spent most of their time working outside and spent their spare time in tea stalls gossiping with other males. They also shared that most of the fathers were ignorant of their children's education. They acknowledged that the girls were married before they were 18 years old. Some mentioned that several men and boys were addicted to drugs. The male respondents perceived that it was men's responsibility (those who were addicted) to bear their family expenses.

One of the FGDs conducted in a local tea shop to explore the characteristics of a good father and a good husband with adult males in the community. They shared the characteristics given in the diagram on the right side:

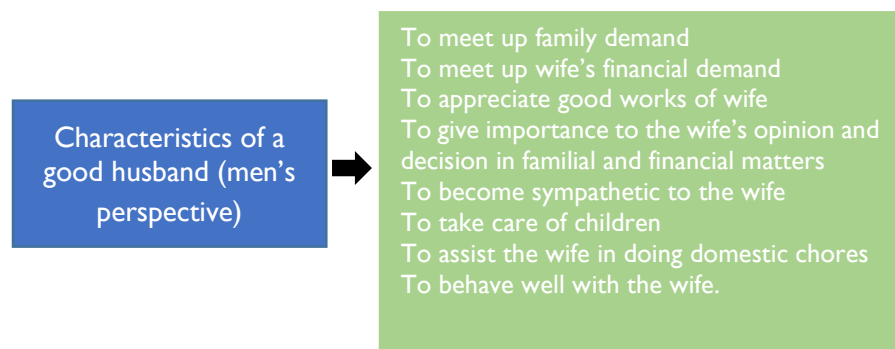


Figure 2 Characteristics of a good husband.

(iv) Underlying factors of GBV

Norms, perception, and practice: Social and religious

Akkas Mia (50), a clean shaved back brushed man, wearing a full sleeve bright green shirt and bright colored lungi, shared while chewing the battle leaf, *“I had to stop my daughter’s education at class 2 as I could not bear her education expenses.”* He did the same in case of his son’s education. When he was asked if he knew that primary education is free for both boys and girls in government schools and girls could get a stipend. With much embarrassment in the face, he did not have anything to say.

The team facilitated a discussion with six adolescent boys in Chilni and they were studying in schools. They shared their views about education and anticipated practices by boys and girls in their village. They mentioned that most of the girls and boys in their village were studying in different educational institutions. However, boys were ‘expected’ to be teachers/doctors/sportsmen, and girls were not seen to be suited for such roles. They shared that though everyone had the right to take education and join in any income-generating activities girls would be married off, migrated to their in-laws’ houses, and become housewives. In terms of sports activities, boys played cricket, football, and others on track games while girls stayed in classrooms. Girls were habituated with the local custom that did not allow them to play outside, or in the playground. It was not socially accepted for girls to mix and play with boys. They perceived that people might harass girls if they played outside of the rooms/in the playground.

The team documented the following conversation between two boys named Pranto and Leon. Both of them were students of grade nine. It reflects the simplicity and acceptance of social norms among adolescents.

Leon, a boy with a shining face, wearing a wrist watch, jeans and a polo shirt, answered as he was asked about his future plan in life, “I don’t have any plan. Actually, I don’t know.” He also shared, “In my leisure, I play cricket with friends. I play games on my smartphone.” About his girl-classmates, he stated, “My girl classmates don’t play outside the home. Most of them play games with their own or fathers’ smartphones.”

In reply to the same questions, Pranto replied, “I want to be a teacher in the future.” However, he had little idea about the qualifications of a good teacher. In his leisure, unlike Leon, he also played cricket and outdoor games with peers and games with his father’s smartphone.

During the conversation, the two young men seemingly educated was asked which group they studied in. Then they replied, “Humanities.” But only Pranto could spell ‘humanities’ correctly. Leon spelled ‘arts’ as ‘airtce.’

The study team had several discussions with Tipu, a male program participant from Chilni village. He mentioned that in his village, both men and women were entitled to freedom of choice and were making joint decisions. Tipu mentioned that in their village working outside of the village was men’s function and domestic chores (e.g., cooking, looking after children, etc.) were for women. *“Women only work in the household,”* was the most referred statements by the male in the village. A young man in the same village said, *“You (pointing to the study team), NGO people, engage women in your activities... now women need to go outside of the household, attend meetings ... these sorts of activities are forbidden in religion.”* He pointed out, *“Islam does not permit women in going outside, meet with outsiders.”*

Afia, a female program participant from Chilni, had become responsible for all the family needs since she got married. As her husband was physically handicapped and unable to engage in hard work, she took

over the responsibility to maintain the family. From the very beginning, she obtained financial support from her relatives and loan from different associations. She re-issued that money as a loan to other community people and collected more interest than she had to pay back to the organizations. However, she shared that she was not allowed to make decisions alone and had to listen to what her husband would ask her to do.

Rupali was a well-known woman in her community. She participated in many development activities and worked under different NGOs (e.g., NariShakti, Concern Worldwide). She continued working for her community despite being married at 14 years old. It was not easy for her to work as a volunteer in different development activities at the beginning. She used to go out of her house when her husband was not at home. She was elected as a UP member. At one point in our discussion, she said in tearful eyes, *“My husband does not want me not to go outside. I love to work with people and for the people. Whatever I have gained in life came from my work for the people. I could not stop working, so I am now separated from my husband”*.

While having group discussions with women in Dakhsin Dighalkandi, they shared that their husbands would get angry when there was no food in the house. If they could earn money and provide their families, everything seemed fine, or else everything would go wrong. The women also mentioned poor income and unemployment during off-season triggered frustrations for men. If the wives did not listen to their husbands, they would end up arguing with each other. Among those women, Asma (23) was comparatively young; she said, *“My husband doesn’t work, and he’s been unemployed even before our marriage. We have some chickens, and my parents gave us a cow on my marriage. I am still with him due to his good behavior even if he’s unemployed. I’m seeing you right now, you seem a good person to me but how do I know what lies in your heart? Same goes for finding a good spouse, a good in-law, you never know until you start to live with them.”*

A young bride who got married at the age of 12 and was 16 years old during this study shared that, *“It’s not only the husbands but sometimes both mother-in-law and father-in-law beat up the bride, it doesn’t matter whether the daughter-in-law is guilty or not, the parents are financially dependent on their son, so they take his side. On the other hand, once you’ve married the parents don’t bother about you anymore.”*

The team experienced an initial denial of the existence of violence against women. At first, a male program participant stated that there was no such thing as violence against women in the community. This denial was specific to the physical form of violence. Later on, he revealed, *“To slap a wife is nothing unnatural if she makes a mistake. It is usual for the husbands to lose their temper. There is nothing to take this seriously.”* One of the FGDs with the adult males also confirmed that men beating their wives was ‘not a good thing,’ however, wives were never allowed to question their husbands’ actions.

Afia, a local woman, shared that women should work as per the demand of her family and should abide by their husbands (rules?). If any husband did not allow his wife to go outside, she should not do that. She shared, a wife was questioned if she did anything without her husband’s permission. She pointed out that violence against women in her locality was not uncommon, especially, intimate partner violence, and in most of the cases, it happened as wives did not follow husbands’ dictations. She asserted that community people would not accept any refusal from a wife to her husband, and the wife would be questioned. She said, *“If a husband beats his wife even though the society would question the wife, not him.”* In her community, it was not permitted to work outside of the community which was not connected with education. She shared that in her community, men were the driving force of everything and women were to support their male counterparts. She uttered that it was a good thing that the community was led by men, and they had controlling power.

A young bride who fought back

Mst. Sakina (45) got married at the age of 12 even before she had reached puberty. She started to share, *“I didn’t realize what marriage is. I couldn’t work hard or was unable to manage the household chores. My mother-in-law was unhappy, she expected that I’d do all the tasks perfectly. My husband got disgusted with me, then I got separated with one month of my pregnancy.”* After that Sakina worked hard, she started sewing and tailoring and brought up the child with her income. She also educated her daughter till HSC, who’s a community group leader of the SHOUHARDO III program. Sakina is now unable to work hard like before, but she passes her days at peace.

Child marriage as a ‘normalized’ practice

The discussions with villagers and observation of their lives made it clear that there was a consensus on equal right to education for girls and boys, but in practice, priority was given to ensure boys education as ‘potential’ earning members for the families. If any girl stopped schooling she would be married off as early as possible. Some of the boys suggested that dropping out of schools led to early marriage for both boys and girls. And when this was not the case, boys were to be prepared to become the provider for their families. A class 5 drop-out boy shared that his parents were willing to support his study, but he was not interested in the study. Due to his reluctance to study, he was unable to obtain a good result in the examinations; his parents didn’t see value to continue his study and thus engaged him in income-generating activity buying him a power-tiller.

Child marriage for girls was still a common phenomenon in the village. Both poor and financially solvent families arranged these marriages. Almost one in two girls in the village was married off before 18 years old. One of the local shop keepers (Rakib) shared about a child marriage incident that took place during the fieldwork of this study. The name of the girl was Sharmin, one of the girls who received skills training from SHOUHARDO III. He asserted, though her family members were mentioning her age as above 18, actually it would be no more than 15 years. Mst. Hosneara, a former member of Union parishad and lived in Nurpur hati of the village, confirmed girls were victims of early marriage and poverty was one of the primary reasons. She said, *“I encouraged my daughter to get higher study but most parents in this village would rather choose to marry their daughter over education and degrees.”* Afia, one of the local women, shared that, in most cases, women were not educated at a higher level as they were supposed to be housewives in the upcoming days. Rather, boys were supposed to be educated as they would have to engage in income-generating activities. Child marriage was not very uncommon in her locality, especially the girl who could not continue education (due to poverty of the family) and sitting idly; eventually, she faced marriage, ignoring her age.

The story in the following was documented based on multiple discussions with a child bride and her family members. It shows a strong case of decision making of a girl, yet reinforcing one of the traditional practices like child marriage.

A child bride by choice: Sharmin’s story

Sharmin received skills training from SHOUHARDO III. She dropped out of school after completing grade five. We took part in her ‘gaye holud’ (turmeric on the body) ceremony eventually when all the family members were engaged in organizing the event. There was a stage decorated in a small but open place on the right side of her house. In her home, we met her mother, sisters, and other relatives and came to know that her father went to the upazila Bazar for purchasing necessary products for the next day. We were offered sweets prepared at home for the ceremony which we had to take as they mentioned not doing so meant ‘bad luck’ for the bride. Sharmin’s mother shared that they bought utensils to be sent to her in-laws’. She mentioned that they purchased a bed, a wardrobe, and tables and chairs and already sent it to the groom’s house.

During the conversation, Sharmin’s mother shared that it became tough to arrange all the necessary things for her family. She asserted that they had to rely on others’ support in organizing all. At one point, she requested, “Can you please ask the

local officer to send the money that she is supposed to get from SHOUHARDO III. At this point, we could use the money to help with the expenditures for her marriage.”

It was getting dark outside when Sharmin’s father came back from the market. He sighed and said, “Is it possible to purchase products without lots of money!”

At one point, we spoke to one of Sharmin’s uncles who was currently studying at a college in Itna. He briefly shared that about one year ago, they found out that Sharmin had an affair with a young man living in Itna. The guy was an auto-rickshaw driver (a local battery charged vehicle). After six months, Sharmin’s family arranged a sitting with the future groom’s family. They could not arrange for the ceremony and decided to delay the process for six months as the groom did not have enough money. ‘Now he is ready, so we’re organizing the ceremony”, said her uncle.

On the wedding day, most of the people in Sharmin’s household were busy organizing the marriage. Some relatives came to her house to attend the ceremony. There was a cheerful mood in the home and neighborhood. Children happily chatted, laughing, and roaming here and there. Some men were cooking in front of Sharmin’s house. We looked for Sharmin but could not find her. Her father looked at us and questioned, “Who are you? What are you doing here? I do not recognize you?” Sharmin’s mother noticed that and introduced us to her husband. She muttered, “She is 18 years old, and we’re not doing anything wrong”. The program’s record suggested that Sharmin on 6th December 2019, Sharmin was exactly 16 years 3 months and 26 days old.

We could only meet Sharmin once sitting in a dark room and waiting to get married. She was happy and indicated that she had forced her family to organize the marriage. She was finally going to be united with her lover. Was she ready for the duties of a wife and potential mother with all that society expected of her? That only time would tell and given the experience of many others, she was not.

Lack of educational institutions and poor communication system triggered the incidence of child marriage. Ashraf (52) a SHOUHARDO participant said, *“None of my children completed the SSC, it needs a lot of money to keep the children at Boarding school of Saghata which I couldn’t afford. I married off my only daughter four years back when she’s at ninth grade, currently, my two younger sons go to local madrasa.”* Ashraf’s daughter-in-law also a ninth-grade dropout when she got married. Security concern for the girl child and the potentiality of developing affairs fueled child marriage. Another father Mominul (31) who has a school going girl added, *“My daughter goes to Saghata school which is around thirty minutes away from home, I get tensed if she’s ever late from school. Nowadays so many mishaps are happening around us, even little girls are being raped, it’s easier for the parents to find them a husband rather than continuously worrying.”* Sometimes parents fear that their children will get involved in affairs, and they get them married at an early age. Shaheda married her daughter in the last month, the girl was only fifteen years old and seventh-grade student. At first, she told me that the girl got into an affair with the groom, later both families decided to get them married. Later on the discussion, Shaheda denied the part of the affair and emphasized, *“No, that was completely an arranged marriage, the groom is a bit older for my daughter but he works at Dhaka, and earns well!”*

Drug Addiction

Drug addiction was strongly prevalent in Chilni. It was mostly believed to be taken by the better-off people. Marijuana, Yabba, and Alcohol were the major drugs/intoxicants consumed by the people around. They shared, there was a case drug addiction by the father and the son (from the same family) and when villagers protested it, they (drug addicts) replied, *“We are taking drugs by our money; you should not be bothered.”* Almost every day the police would come to the village and arrest the drug addicts. Some of the adult male respondents perceived that drug addiction was a primary reason for domestic violence. The men that took drugs were ignorant of family needs and children’s education according to them. A local tea-shop keeper stated, *“Drug destroys a family, and any good deed is not possible from a drug addict.”* Riazur Islam, a 22 years old young man, was a drug addict. He was addicted to yaba (drug). He identified that for adolescent and young boys, the drug was a significant threat in their area. A considerable portion of young boys was addicted to different sorts of drugs.

Suicidal incidents

The study team came to know about several suicidal cases during the ethnography in Dakshin Dighalkandi. One of the men whose wife committed suicide was asked about what intrigued his (first) wife to do suicide and he responded that he never understood her intentions. His current wife joined with him, *"It's nothing unusual that daughters-in-law commit suicide here, every year it's happening and the reasons are many, even sometimes husbands beat them to death and stage it as suicide. It's quite common in our Char region and such cases are buried down bribing the police!"* She also mentioned, *"Just around two months back a young girl committed suicide, she had a love marriage, but her parents never approved the marriage, so whenever there's a dispute/ conflict she had to listen that oh you married on your own will, and it started to fade away all the dreams she had during having the affair, the reality is different."* Mominul and his parents tried to explain to me, *"The social status varies between you and me, between poor and rich, even when it doesn't matter to your society, it does matter in ours. Even when the in-laws accept the bride, whenever there's a dispute she might hear rude statements due to the affair."* According to the family, the causes of suicides were pre-marital and extra-marital affairs of women. The young wife of the man (whose first wife committed suicide) said, *"After few years of her marriage the girl starts to realize that her parents detached her, and she's no places to go. She breaks the silence of a new bride and starts to speak up. That's what the in-laws cannot stand. I tried to adjust, endured all the injustice, and it went all wrong when I decided to stand out against them."*

The team met three village women, among them Majeda (47) wanted to show us her husband's horse cart. After a while, when we asked her about the reasons of suicide, she whispered, *"It's all true, it keeps happening here, a few months back a girl committed suicide ... she had a love marriage. The husband heard her groaning and tried to rescue her, she's even alive for few minutes, when she died they got really scared and try to hang her again, but they did the mistake and made it look like it was staged."* She also mentioned about the prevalence of extramarital affair, pointed at a neighboring house she narrated, *"The younger sister got involved with her brother-in-law, can you think about the elder sister. What a pity!"*

(v) Social capital and mobility of new brides/young mothers

Sekul, one of the program participants, his leg was paralyzed, yet engaged in different income-generating activities, for example running a grocery shop, working as wage labor, and fishing. Sekul's wife was washing teacups and some of the elderly persons were sitting inside and in front of the shop when we met them. She shared that she and her husband both worked hard to run their business. Sekul's wife was solely responsible for all the domestic activities, including taking care of their four children (three daughters and one son). She shared that in their village, it was the man who was allowed to visit the market. We also spoke to Sekul's mother. The power dynamic was a bit different in that household compared to others. The mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law seemed to have a conflict of power. The daughter-in-law was 'in-charge' in that family which made the mother-in-law feel annoyed. The mother-in-law came from a 'well-off' family, so it was difficult for her to compromise on the power position.

Suraiya's house was marked as 'MSB – SRHR – 2015' seemed to be done by a development project by one of the NGOs. The main entrance of the house was in front of the bed. The bed is covered/ shed with a fabric curtain to create a sense of privacy. She took her bath in the tubewell in the backyard of their house; it was shared by three families. That place was perceived as a 'private' space appropriate for the young brides like her while her mother-in-law (who was at her 60s) took a shower in the river. Her

mother-in-law walked in with a little bottle of mustard oil in her hand, rubbing it on her almost bare body – as if it was normal to show off her skin. Suraiya told me that she was planning to stock paddy for the next year's ration as the price fell, but she was waiting to consult this with her husband. So he could send money for her to be able to buy it. The money that her husband was sending came to her through her brother-in-law, whose house was adjacent to theirs.

In the afternoon, her mother-in-law went to the other room which was dark and shabby, to take her afternoon nap. Gradually, she started talking about her past and shared that she worked in a garment factory in Dhaka for two years. Her income when she worked in the garment industry was spent on her marriage by her parents. She had three sisters and one brother. Her father was a farmer. She went to Alia Madrasa in Itna and studied until the sixth grade. She showed her birth certificate which stated that she was born in 2000 and married in 2017; (while the program was still going on and her husband was a participant). She had no complaint about her marriage as she was married to her first cousin. She said, *"I knew everything about them."* The practice of dowry seemed to exist strongly but without having many discussions about it. Everyone was doing it as if it was normalized. Moriom, another young mother, was wearing a gold earring; when asked, she said that during her wedding, her parents gave her five grams of gold, a bed, and a steel cabinet. She also got five grams of gold from her in-laws. She shared that she learned to tailor before marriage; she spent BDT 3000 to learn the trade. She wanted to buy a sewing machine. She knows how to operate a sewing machine and now wants to start tailoring clothes. She wants to take a loan and buy a sewing machine. Suraiya spoke to tailoring shops in Itna and they wanted to give her orders, but she did not have a sewing machine. She was waiting for her husband to come back and then would buy a sewing machine. We (the study team) asked her if she would be allowed to go out to Itna by herself if she would start working. She said, *"When they'll see cash flow, they'll automatically lift the bars from my movement."*

Khadiza, another young mother, did not go to the market; her mother-in-law did all grocery shopping for the family. Her mother-in-law did the shopping, grocery picking, and all other works that required mobility. One of the days during the ethnography, someone called in her phone to take all the electric billing papers (from the last three months) to the office; her mother-in-law was not at home (she went to visit another daughter-in-law in her parents' house) but she (the mother) could not move outside the home because of the children (nobody to look after them). At the same time, her mother-in-law was not here to give her approval. She started looking for help from other men in the neighborhood. She said, *"I cannot go out as long as my mother-in-law is alive."* Everyone that she spoke to refused to help. She looked a little helpless. She was clever enough to find out that everyone learns tailoring that's not going to work, but couldn't come up with one specific livelihood opportunity that she could involve in.

(vi) Perceptions of handwashing

One of the male group members shared that usually, all the family members washed hands with soap before the meal and after using the toilet, the farmers working in the fields washed their hands with water (excluding soap) and took their meal. He also shared that mothers did not feel the importance of washing hands before breastfeeding. He thought, *"There is no connection between handwashing and breastfeeding because the hand is not directly used during breastfeeding."*

The team met Moriom, a young mother who used to get commodity (food) from the program. She was standing in the yard with her head covered and holding the baby in her arms. She was married in December 2017 and became a mother in 2018. Her child was suffering from fever, cough, and diarrhea. The child was so sick that the family had spent five days in a hospital.

Suriya, another young mother, became quiet while talking about her child and said in a dimmed voice that they spent BDT20,000 on the baby's treatment. She said that her daughter suffered from fever, cough, and dysentery frequently. *"At first, I take treatment (medicine) from the local areas; if it doesn't work, then I take her to Itna,"* said Moriom. She and her mother-in-law repeatedly mentioned breastfeeding the child and said, that *"we don't get the child food from outside; we know these foods aren't good for her."* Right after that, she opened a red-plastic container used to store biscuits and gave the baby one. In an hour, the baby defecated and urinated on the floral-printed rexine (artificial leather often used to protect the bed from baby feces and urine); she saw it and took a piece of cloth (a torn scarf) and swept it off. Then she threw puffed rice on the place, and the baby started putting it in her mouth one by one. On the second day, when we met her, she was sweeping the mud-floor of the house. Her mother-in-law came from outside, and she had the baby in her lap. The baby seemed hungry and started crying; Moriom started breastfeeding her without washing her hands. In the meantime, her mother-in-law bought some dried fish from a hawker and asked her to cook it with spinach. She pointed at the spinach lying on the muddy floor that was sent from her brother-in-law's house. *"Now I don't have to rush my cooking because my husband is not at home. When he's home, we've to rush it."*

Suraiya's household had four different types of soaps: one for washing clothes, one for her to take a shower, the third type for handwashing, and one for the baby. She shared that, *"I cannot always wash my hands, sometimes I'm in a rush and don't get the time, other times I wash. The soap that I use at home to wash my hands is always available. Before cooking, sometimes I wash hands, but sometimes I don't."* She washed her hands after cooking, after using the toilet, after cleaning the house (only the times when she thought or could see the hands visibly dirty).

Khadiza's (another young mother) baby suffered from fever and diarrhea. Khadiza was giving feed to the chicken in her yard while talking to us (the study team), then she suddenly stopped and started breastfeeding her child without washing her hands. Then, the baby girl fell asleep. She shared that the baby's weight started reducing from April/ May 2019, when she was eight months old. I asked her why you didn't feel like washing her hands with soap before breastfeeding the child, and she responded that the baby was crying, and her hand was not dirty. She didn't wash her hand when cooking that morning. This family used three different types of soap. Her mother-in-law was the one buying these soaps. On the second day at Khadiza's place, she was trying to find a male neighbor to pay the electric bill as it required travel. Little did she notice that the child (was playing on the mud floor) suddenly tossed chicken feces in its finger-tip and then put it into the mouth. It was only when the other children started laughing at it, the mother took her in the lap and washed its hand.

Besides tailoring Ashraf's family (one of the program participant's household) earned money from growing chilies. They had two goats and some chickens. During their household visit, Laily (a young mother) cleaned the chicken feces from the courtyard with a small hoe-like-tool, after that without washing hands she served food to her younger son who returned from *madrassa* (religious school for Muslim). The boy started to eat his food without washing his hands, and Laily seemed to be fine with the whole thing. Later on the same day, once again Laily cleaned the chicken feces from the yard and did not wash her hands afterward. She grabbed her niece Mariam who lived next door. Laily started to touch Mariam's face and started to pick lice from her niece's hair. When she was asked about washing hands, with wide-eyed she explained, *"I didn't touch the feces, that's why the hoe was used!"*

Analysis: The ethnography findings suggested that multiple development programs were implemented in the study locations, especially in Chilni. Yet the overall development scenario in these villages did not make progress as was expected. The poor remained poor for decades. Findings on social norms like – women's restricted mobility and limited opportunity to earn can be the reason behind this intergenerational poverty. The villagers' attitude and practice related to educating their children,

especially the girls may have also led to decades of inequality. It seemed that by reinforcing social norms that are not progressive, the villagers in these two villages trapped themselves into a situation like this,

The findings gave a strong notion that young mothers embraced their lives with limited mobility. One of the reasons could be their perceived 'comfort' at the in-laws. They were provided by food and other necessities in their in-laws which might not be the case before their marriage. We have seen a man willing to marry a girl from a poor family so that the new bride has little expectation from her husband. The norms and practices were not forced on them; rather, they accepted it as inevitable. This gives a sense that new brides and young mothers were keen on ensuring their practical gender needs (e.g., food, accommodation) rather than strategic ones (e.g., decision making, negotiation).

The study findings did not offer a linear understanding of the young mother's social capital. It was found that women had easy access within their perceived 'private sphere.' They exchanged goods and foods and discussed local politics. Some of the positive aspects found during the study included strong bondage among women in the neighboring households as the older women visited the young mothers (who were not allowed to visit other households in the first five-six years of their marriage). It seemed that they were accommodating this form of social capital — however, their restricted access to local markets and organizations during their need in indeed questionable. One of the ways of analyzing such a dynamic situation can be breaking down discourses that exist in the community. The discourse of a good bride comprised of range qualities that were not in favor of women's mobility and social capital. For the new brides and young mothers, it was essential to get approval from their in-laws before they could get to the point of decision making and ownership of resources. This discourse has been nurtured for many years now and only became more deeply rooted in the day to day practice of the community people. Being said that, the mothers-in-law met through this ethnography, shared the same attitude, and seemed supportive of the new brides and young mothers. It can be tapped as a unique opportunity to address discourses that reinforce inequality gradually.

Violence against women and girls was a common phenomenon in both of the villages. This was not a loose cord from the existing discourses. The men could successfully portray the characteristics of a good father, but none of them qualified for it. This has to be interpreted by taking into account the expectations carried by men and boys. Household heads in poor families had to provide for their families and be approved as a good father and husband. Failure to do so may lead to frustrations for them. In such a situation, drugs may seem an 'easy' way out for them. Drug addiction accompanied by the existing norms and practices may have reinforced the practice of violence against women. The incidence of child marriage is quite common in both of the villages; the lack of schools and insecurities pushed parents to get their children married at an early age. This malpractice resulted in more complex social conditions.

The third objective of this research was to understand the disincentives of handwashing for mothers before cooking and breastfeeding their child. More in-depth observations of young mothers' day to day life suggested that there was a lack of understanding and identifying dirty hands among them. They only considered their hands dirty when they could see it. Their perception was strong to that extent that they justified their hands as clean even though they were not. Hence, repeated engagement with them can be a way to challenge their misconceptions related to handwashing. Suggesting different messaging on handwashing

Conclusion: The ethnography was an attempt to understand the contextual realities relating to gender-based violence and handwashing practices. The need for this study emerged as the other sources of program data could not answer a question like – what are the underlying reasons for gender-based

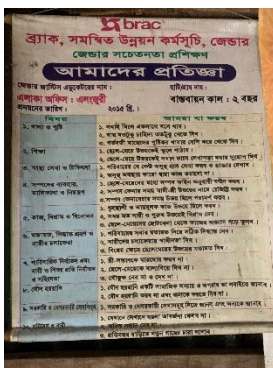
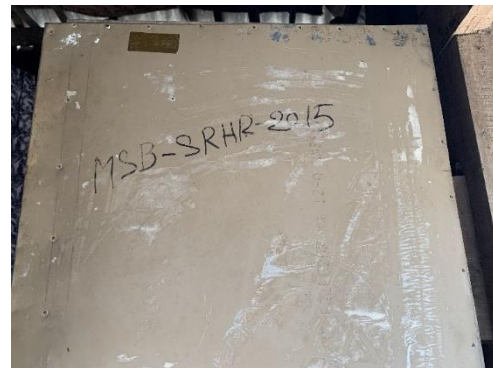
violence and why young mothers did not wash their hands during the critical times as expected. Findings as narrated above offered some answers in these aspects. For instance, intergenerational poverty and reinforcement of social norms that result in inequality led to a vulnerable situation of women. Most of the women accepted the social norms like – restricted mobility and violence against them to meet other practical needs. Child marriage seemed to become a ‘normal’ practice with the twist that young girls wanted to get married before reaching the legal age (18 years). Other findings including the existence of son preference, drug addiction, and suicidal incidents. These issues are subject to concern as they made men and boys more desperate, frustrated, and violent. Handwashing as it appeared was not practiced as it was supposed to be during the critical times, like – cleaning animal feces and household. Young mothers observed as part of this study washed their hands only when they perceived that their hands were dirty rather than when the hands were dirty.

The study aimed to offer a deeper understanding of two specific areas of inquiry using an ethnography-like approach. Considering the findings, the program may strengthen its work to address the gender-based violence in the implementing areas and tailor messaging on handwashing practices.

Annex I: Pictures were taken and shared by adolescent boys during the ethnography



Annex 2: Pictures taken by researchers during the ethnography:



ମାଲେର ଆଇଡି ପିରମ-୦୨ ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫) ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫) ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)

କ୍ରମିକ ଅନୁସାରେ ନିମ୍ନଲିଖିତ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ରମ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ରମ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ରମ

କ୍ରମିକ	ଅନୁସାରେ	ନିମ୍ନଲିଖିତ	କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ରମ	କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ରମ	କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ରମ
୦୧	ମାଲେର ଆଇଡି ପିରମ-୦୨	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)
୦୨	ମାଲେର ଆଇଡି ପିରମ-୦୩	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)
୦୩	ମାଲେର ଆଇଡି ପିରମ-୦୪	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)
୦୪	ମାଲେର ଆଇଡି ପିରମ-୦୫	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)
୦୫	ମାଲେର ଆଇଡି ପିରମ-୦୬	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)
୦୬	ମାଲେର ଆଇଡି ପିରମ-୦୭	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)
୦୭	ମାଲେର ଆଇଡି ପିରମ-୦୮	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)
୦୮	ମାଲେର ଆଇଡି ପିରମ-୦୯	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)
୦୯	ମାଲେର ଆଇଡି ପିରମ-୧୦	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)	ଉପରାଂ (୨୫୫୫)

