Role of Faith Leaders in Ensuring Child Well-being in Bangladesh

On the ground search

Prepared by

Shafi Md Mostofa, PhD
Muhammad Sazzad Hossain Siddiqui, PhD

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country and home to over 160 million people who are congested only within 147,570 square kilometres territory. UNICEF counted more than 64 million (40 percent) of this population are children aged below 18. Following the Second World War and with the emergence of the UN, child well-being has become a much-discussed topic across the world especially for the developing and underdeveloped countries including Bangladesh. We often coin the proverb today's children are tomorrow's future. For what, alongside the governmental initiatives, to upbringing the child well-being many other formal and informal stakeholders including NGOs and INGOs are playing a significant role in ensuring child well-being in Bangladesh. In this regard, faith leaders are well placed in society to influence faith community households especially towards children. Considering faith leaders' deep emotional attachment with their respective faith communities and their ability interpreting religious scriptures, they are considered powerful agents who can reasonably shift (or shape) the orthodox beliefs to well-accepted social norms.

This study, undertaken by the World Vision Bangladesh (WVB) in collaboration with researchers from the University of Dhaka, assesses the challenges and opportunities in ensuring child well-being in Bangladesh. This research maps out child well-being across four fundamental issue areas: child marriage; violence against children; child education; and child health.

Between July and August 2022, we reviewed the existing relevant literature based on desktop study that included policy papers, and referred academic resources produced by reliable outlets. Between October 2022 and January 2023, we conducted fieldwork for primary data collection. Quantitative data was collected from 200 respondents selecting households from faith community utilizing appropriate survey protocol at the selected four study areas: Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Barishal, and Cox's Bazar districts. On the other hand, qualitative primary data was collected through two streams—i.e., semi-structured key informant interviews, and FGDs from the above-mentioned field sites. In January, an extended further round of mixed interviews (remote – using telephone, and physical – face to face) were conducted in Dhaka with elites as well as expert interviews especially with NGO practitioners, policy community leaders, and academics/researchers to triangulate findings and provide policy recommendations.

Key Findings

The overall perception of the study is that child marriage's magnitude is decreasing day by day. This study has overturned the popularly held perception that religious values cause child marriages. However, our survey evidence that economic insecurity is the most influential triggering factor for child marriage which is followed by social insecurity. Religious values and its practices have lesser influences in this regard. Another point to be noted here that a good number of below 18 boys and girls get married by themselves without parent's permission. Upon considering the need of sexual necessity, faith leaders suggest reconsidering the marriageable age for boys and girls, as they are doing it by themselves either by forging fake adult certificate or by extramarital sexual affairs.

- Qualitative data also suggests that there is no religious restriction either positive or negative on child marriage. As a result, it provides scopes for some faith leaders to argue in favour of child marriages because of their fear of pre-marital loved relationships and sex, which are deemed haram (illegal) in most religions. However, followers of Christianity irrespective of their fractions are found to follow the strict national and international guideline about child marriages.

- The community people have been found overwhelmed welcoming the faith leaders to promote child well-being especially child marriages. But the reality is that they were found not to be reasonably satisfied with the present role of the faith leaders in their respective localities. Only 50 percent of the respondents either witnessed or experienced faith leaders' role in combating child marriages.

- The most popular global educational mottoes include 'education for all' and 'mandatory child education' which were found overwhelmingly encouraged by the faith leaders including faith community respondents, and key informants and FGD participants. The point to be noted here that faith leaders are found to be liberal about girls' higher education as well; so far women are maintaining dress-code of Islam. But most of the survey respondents think that religious education should get priority over general education, which had also been triangulated by the faith leaders who possessed the similar argument as well. Only the Muslim faith leaders have been found disfavour of coeducation especially when girls get adult. Faith leaders' involvement in promoting child education was undoubtedly suggested by almost every respondent, but so far, their engagement is found not satisfactory.

- The findings on violence against children reflects that broadly faith leaders are against bigger scale of punishment/violence against children, but they are seemingly convinced with the traditions and culture that allow smaller mental and physical punishments to keep the children away from out-track engagements; thereby teaching religious principles and education. Smaller scaled beating has been found justified not even an issue to any faith leaders. They consider such punishment as good practices of parents and teachers. They don't consider this violence, rather these should be practiced, if necessary, only for children's well-being. Similar findings were noticed on the role of faith leaders that they should be engaged and so far, their role is not satisfactory in removing violence against children.

- Regarding child health, and lactating and pregnant mothers' health services, there is no strict religious or socio-cultural prohibition but considering privacy issues, social prejudice, and taboo are found still exist across communities. Myths and disbeliefs about contraceptive methods and reproductive health of the women are found prejudiced by community people including the faith leaders – mostly Muslims – who often oppose to the aggressive family planning. Indications that adequate access to health facilities especially girl children's access to gynaecological health facilities, and lactating and pregnant mothers' access to basic health services are found to be limited due to socio-religious and cultural taboos that discourage and restrict girl children from accessing such health facilities. For example, society is not yet suggesting that girls should talk to their teachers and friends about their gynaecological issues.

This is the area where faith leaders are found shy and reluctant to work on. The faith leaders excused that people are already aware about this issue for what do not need to work in this field. They also argued that nowadays health workers have reached at every doorstep and the women/girls have direct access to doctors and nurses for any gynaecological assistantships. And thus, their role was not satisfactory and were suggested by respondents that they should be engaged for creating awareness and breaking such social and religious taboos.

Recommendations

- Government should righteously address the potentials of the children and isolate the negative impacts of child carelessness. The flourishment of children depends on government's inclusive and holistic approach where the faith leaders will feel themselves empowered and engaged themselves confidently in ensuring children well-being. But based on the limitations of the faith leaders that came to the fore is that they are relatively less skilled and not well-educated. So, training of trainers (meaning faith leaders) is of greater importance which has reasonably been recommended by the field data providers. The government has already initiated to train faith leaders through the Islamic foundation, but its scope needs to widen, and consistency must be ensured.

- The Participatory and engaged roles of the faith leaders are strongly recommended irrespective of field informants. The problem is that faith leaders' role is mostly confined to awareness building only through providing lecture in the religious sermons – Madrassa, Mosque, Church, Temple, and Pagoda. Much participatory engagement – directly one to one – is a time worthy recommended strategy which should be practised by the faith leaders. Other than religious installations (Mosque, Church, etc.), some more service outlets at different strategic corners in localities of the country are strongly recommended by the majority of the KIIs, which is lacking in the current practice of engaging faith leaders in development.

- International donors and NGOs should improve the quality of children's well-being services. The NGO services, especially the World Vision Bangladesh (WVB), in improving children well-being are overwhelmingly appreciated and recommended to be continued since their involvement has been found to be inevitable in this regard. Society is changing, and people's understanding of life is also changing and adapting to new world views. In this regard, faith leaders fall short to get themselves updated with modern knowledge. Child marriage, corporeal punishment for children, and taboo about gynecological issues are examples of it. Thus, it appears that faith leaders require extensive and rigorous training on these issues by expert professionals who have comprehensive knowledge.

- The Government of Bangladesh should come forward introducing the said children well-being issues in the textbooks at the primary and secondary education levels more elaborately and employing well-trained trainers/teachers to overcome misunderstanding and prejudice rural people face mainly in the case of gynaecological and lactating issues. So far, this issue seems to be overlooked in the textbooks.

- Faith leaders are mostly found financially insolvent. So, little financial incentives and their indirect involvement in development works are badly needed to be introduced and fully capitalize on faith leaders' potentials. This recommendation comes at the reality that most INGOs suggest very much a strategic relation with faith leaders, rather than engaging them in a continuous manner. This little engagement with continuous development work may empower them and assist them to work effectively when needed.

INTRODUCTION

This is a widely established phenomenon that religion creates social solidarity and cohesion. Religion is the oldest institution to create values and enforce social norms and harmony. In the same line of argument, faith (or religious) leaders are well-positioned in our society at the mass level to address issues of development or children well-being, but the extent to which they do so is unclear and, of course, a matter of academic examination to understand the whole dynamics of religion and development. That said, Bangladesh, one of the South Asian countries is the most densely populated country in the world as well bordering India on its three sides and the Bay of Bengal on its South. Over 160 million people live in 147,570 square kilometres of Bangladesh. The 2022 census reveals that 91 percent of them are Muslims, 8 percent Hindus, and rest of the 1 percent includes Buddhists, Christians, and other faiths (Dhaka Tribune, 2022). Another statistic shows that Bangladesh has over 64 million children, which makes up around 40 percent of the total population (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2021). Thus, children's well-being and their proper flourishment are closely tied with the national development of Bangladesh.

Even though Bangladesh has recently been qualified to be listed as a middle-income country, still a long way to go ensuring children well-being and their basic needs. UNICEF reported that most schools fail to ensure sanitation facilities responsive to the needs of adolescent girls and children with disabilities. Most of the children from urban slums, hard-to-reach, and disaster-prone areas are not attending primary schools. The report also informs us that although Bangladesh has a high transition rate from primary to secondary school, the eventual drop-out rates are also high. Sexual harassment and abuse in public places at times cause girls to drop out of schools. Child labour is another area of concern in Bangladesh. Nearly 1.7 million children are engaged in different odd jobs who are mostly boys, while girls are forced to stay at home for domestic work who are not counted in this report. Improvements have been happened in reducing child marriages, but the practice is still common and widely accepted. The report also suggests that still more than half (51 percent) of Bangladeshi women aged between 22 and 24 are married before their 18th birthday (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2021).

The same report also adds that the adolescent birth rate in Bangladesh is one of the highest in the world, but adolescents and lactating mothers are unaware of live-saving information and access to health facilities. Raising awareness of children's rights is a big challenge. Many children are forced to grow up too quickly. Adolescent boys and girls are often sent to work or married off as part of their families' survival strategy. Millions of children in Bangladesh are exposed to violence, abuse, and exploitation, often by the people meant to protect them. Nine out of 10 children have suffered physical punishment or psychological aggression from caregivers, including their parents and teachers (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2021).

Keeping all these realities in mind, the present research is designed to examine what role faith leaders can play either to sustain or to get rid of these issues of children well-being. Ensuring children's well-being or bringing an end to violence against children is one of the major goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Raikes et al. (2017) pointed out that violence against children is a key barrier to attaining SDGs. Elezaj, Ramful, Cebotari & Neubourg (2019) argue that for an inclusive and sustained development, children well-being and child protection system should be addressed. A statistical analysis shows that 1 billion children across the globe

are subject to violence every year. The report went on to suggest that 9 of those 10 children reside in countries where corporal punishment is to some extent allowed, and 120 million girls are victims of sexual abuse globally (End Violence Against Children, 2020). Marking the persistent vulnerabilities of the children, the 20th of November is recommended by the United Nations Organizations (UN) in 1959 to celebrate Universal Children's Day every year for the purpose of protecting children and ensuring their well-being.

Wessells (2015) points out that children well-being systems has so far usually been premised on a top-down approach, which might be suited for high-income settings, but the low and middle-income countries need community oriented a more bottom-up approach to safeguard children well-being with greater involvement of community-based actors, including faith leaders (Robinson and Hanmer, 2014; Wessells, 2015). So far, no research has yet conducted in Bangladesh to understand this phenomenon. Therefore, this is a first ever research in Bangladesh aimed to explore the role of faith leaders (positive and negative) in ensuring children well-being (child marriage, violence against children, and their access to education and health.

MAJOR CONCEPTS' RELEVANCE TO THE RESEARCH

The core objective of the research is to explore how faith leaders (Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist) create opportunities or obstacles for children well-being. Children well-being is a vast concept, which includes everything that determines their goodness. But single research cannot unveil and explore all areas of the phenomenon. Children well-being, in general, refers to public services, such as education, family assistance, and health care as well as preventive protective services (Khoo, 2010). It has long been recognized that children well-being has several facets (Pollard and Lee, 2003). Axford (2009) underscores the richness and breadth of the children well-being notion through the complexity of the debates surrounding each of these five notions which are In-need, Rights, Poverty, Quality of life, and social exclusion. According to UNICEF (2013), children well-being combines objective life situations – such as material conditions, health, and educational chances – with subjective experiences of children such as how they perceive and assess their circumstances, as well as how they convey their happiness and hardship. Self-awareness and creating the environments viable and compatible for children to develop their present and future skills that considered as well-being. According to Akrami et al. (2022), the concept of children well-being refers to assuring the availability of both moral entitlements and Human Rights norms.

Thus, it appears that children well-being is a vast concept, which includes everything that determines their goodness. But single research cannot unveil and explore all areas of the phenomenon. For this study, our focus is be confined to four fundamental areas of children well-being – i.e., **child marriage**, **violence against children**, and their **access to education** and **health**. We choose these areas based on their importance and relevance to rights and privilege of children.

Child Marriage

Child marriage is defined as an official or informal practice of marrying a male or female child who is under the age of eighteen (UNICEF, 2014). 'Child marriage, often known as "early marriage", is a practice that breaches children's fundamental rights and has been labelled as a destructive cultural practice (Anthony, 2011). The Council of Europe published a broad definition where child marriage or early marriage, constitutes a form of forced marriage because consent to marriage is an issue (Rude-Antoine, 2005; Anitha and Gill, 2011). Bangladesh government has also accepted international guidelines regarding child marriage. Section-7 of the 2017 Act of Bangladesh government says that if any person commits child marriage, then it will be an offence. Subsection (1) says if any adult gets married to a minor then he/she shall face trial of the Court and will be punished with a term does not extend to 2 (two) years or not less BDT 100,000 (equivalent to 960 USD) or both.

According to section-(8) if any parents are involving in doing child marriage, then it will also have considered as an offence under this provision. In section-19 of this act says that for the welfare of child if the guardians want to get their child married with the consent of the court, then that situation of child marriage will be valid. In this research, we complied this definition.

Violence against Children

Child abuse (or maltreatment) as defined by World Health Organization (1999) includes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention, 1999; Geneva et al., 1999). Millions of children globally are victims of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence every day in various contexts, such as their families, schools, neighbourhoods, and places of employment. According to the United Nations Committee (2011) on the Rights of the Child, **"Violence" is understood to mean "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse."**

According to International human rights treaties endorse broad definitions of Violence against Children that encompass a wide range of perpetrators, contexts, and forms, including acts of physical, sexual, and psychological violence, and neglect and exploitation (Unicef, 2015). Violence against children includes all forms of violence against people under 18 years old, whether perpetrated by parents or other caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers (WHO, 2020). But this definition missed the teachers at educational institutions. So, complying with such issues and actors of violence against children we additionally considered educators as perpetrators once they beat/abuse children.

Child Education

Education's impossibility, like psychoanalysis', is derived from a particular conceptualization of: a) the goals of education and psychoanalysis, respectively, and b) the nature of human communication. To determine why education is 'impossible,' we may begin by examining the purposes of education as Freud envisions them. In this regard, Freud is unequivocal, stating that education is tasked with teaching children (and, I would argue, adults) to conform to a normative set of socially approved behaviours. Thus, 'the first task of education,' Freud states, is to teach the children 'to control his instincts. It is impossible to give him liberty to carry out all his impulses without restriction' consequently 'education must inhibit, forbid and suppress' (Freud 1933/1961: 149). In this respect, Freud's position accords with the contemporary critical theory that education serves a social conditioning function, which manifests overwhelmingly in the form of behavioural control.

This concept—that education has an effectively repressive function—is a foundational premise of Civilization and its Discontents (1930) – a book that has been of preeminent importance in intellectual development which advocates the watershed in the history of Western thought. The underlying message of this work that human nature is not so easily subdued, finds refrain in Freud's oeuvre. For Freud, the repression imposed on us through education (both formal and informal) is pathogenic: it makes us neurotic. Education's socializing function, then, is paradoxical. Letting our libidos run free, as seductive as the idea sounds, would leave us in a state of social entropy. As such, we need to curb our innate drives, or 'control our instincts'. But this repressive control engenders neurosis in its infinitely complex manifestations. Simply put, education makes us sick (i.e., neurotic). Moreover, as Freud perceives it, the social order that

education facilitates is fundamentally flawed, and, politically speaking, every education has a partisan aim, [and] it endeavours to bring the child into line with the established order of society, without considering how valuable or how stable that order may be. If [it is argued] one is convinced of the defects in our present social arrangements, education with a psycho-analytic alignment cannot justifiably be put at their service as well (Freud, 1933/1961: 150).

Moreover, Article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh established a uniform, mass-oriented and universal education system for extending free and compulsory education to all children. The following crux in noteworthy in this regard: The state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 2000, pp. 5–6). And thus, we complied with the essence of the Bangladesh's constitutional spirit and world views pertaining to child education.

Child Health

Ettinger (2004) defines Children's health is the extent to which individual children or groups of children are able or enabled to (a) develop and realize their potential, (b) satisfy their needs, and (c) develop the capacities that allow them to interact successfully with their biological, physical, and social environments. Child health is a concept that addresses the child's physical, intellectual, emotional, and social needs must be met completely (Chaudhuri, 1957). For this research, by child health we mean their adequate access to health facilities especially girl children's access to gynaecological health facilities, and lactating and pregnant mothers' access to basic health services. Also, this research focus on identifying socio-religious and cultural taboos that restricts women from accessing health facilities.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The phenomenon of 'religion and development' is only of late 20-century initiative. World Bank president James Wolfensohn and Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey took a historic initiative of bringing development actors, faith leaders, and academics under a single platform. With the aim of acting collaboratively, James and Carey conducted a series of conferences in London in 1998, Washington, DC in 1999, Canterbury, England in 2002, and Dublin in 2005 (Clarke 2008). Their relentless efforts in bringing them together resulted in the creation of the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) in 1998 as a charity organization in UK. It soon reorganized itself as a US non-governmental organization in 2006, and received institutional currency in Washington, DC based at the Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University. Most importantly, WFDD managed to work closely with the now defunct Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics (DDVE), a unit of World Bank. The outcome of this program was to produce policy analysis and research papers (These publications include Marshall and Marsh 2003; Marshall and Keough 2004; Marshall and Van Saanen 2007; Osorio and Wodon 2014; Wodon 2014).

Another important initiative was initiated by UNFPA, which has attempted to engage religious actors in achieving development goals. UNFPA has more than decades of experience working extensively with faith-based organizations; thereby produced in 2009 'Guidelines for Engaging Faith-Based Organizations as Cultural Agents of Change'. Apart from this, it has also published scholarly papers that has addressed the role of religion and culture (2005, 2007, 2008). Not only international organizations felt interested in religious actors, but also state itself started feeling the same necessity of engaging faith leaders in development. By early 2012, some parties and state organs issued a 'policy and legal opinion' in China, which supports engaging religious organizations in delivering social services and public interests (Laliberte, 2015). The rise of religious right in 1980s and the aftermath of 9/11 in the USA contributed greatly to enquire about the role of religion in society and to engage religious actors in social development. With George W Bush in presidency, funding to Faith-based organizations was simply doubled from 10.5 per cent of aid in 2001 to 19.9 per cent in 2005 (James, 2009). This is to be noted here that the Centre for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI) was formulated in 'to create a level playing field for faith and community-based organizations to compete for USAID programs' (Tomalin, 2015). The UK also participated in the wave of working closely with faith leaders. The Department for International Development (DFID) also doubled its funding to FBOs in 2009 (DFID, 2009).

The obvious question can be raised over why then religion was excluded from the post-colonial development projects. Religion and development were considered contradictory ideas; thereby religious actors were excluded from developmental initiatives and in planning development strategies (Wilkinson, van Mierlo, and Trotta, 2018; Palm and Eyber, 2019). Religious beliefs and associated practices were deemed outdated and a barrier to the development of society. Eade (2002) argued that even local or traditional beliefs and practices are considered as a brake on development. Haynes (2007) explained that economic growth typically neglects the influence of religion. McCleary & Barro (2003) found negative association between economic growth and church attendance across countries. Blum & Dudley (2001), more specifically,

showcased the distinction of waning wages in Catholic metropolises and waxing wages in Protestant metropolises between 1500 and 1750. Thus, a hypothesis became prominent that religion is likely to "disappear as societies develop and modernize" (Tomalin, 2013, p. 1).

Against this backdrop of dichotomous relations between religion and modernity/development, a few sociologists also argue that religion has not been disappeared from society, rather it has assumed diverse shapes and forms (Robbins, 2014). Ver Beek (2000) going one step ahead of those sociologists argue that –

For most people of the 'South' spirituality is integral to their understanding of the world and their place in it, and so is central to the decisions that they make about their own and their communities' development. Their spirituality affects decisions about who should treat their sick child, when and how they will plant their fields, and whether [or not] to participate in risky but potentially beneficial social action. Despite the evident centrality of spirituality to such decisions, the subject is conspicuously under-represented in the development discourse (Ver Beek, 2000, p. 31).

Thus, this quotation suggests spirituality provides guidelines to regulate human behaviour. It also influences people's daily decisions, gives meaningful answers to life-oriented questions, and becomes as a source of comfort and support in times of difficulty in life. To many analysts, religion is a powerful agent which shapes/creates social values and affects political systems as well. Renowned development analyst, Tomalin listed a number of factors on why religion matters for development. These are as follows:

1. The fullest range of factors blocking as well as facilitating 'development' may not be taken into consideration.

2. Programmes and interventions could be imposed that will not have the desired outcomes or may be inappropriate for the community or context.

3. There could be an increased perception of 'development' as a western, colonialist imposition.

4. Development actors and agencies could fail to find out what sort of 'development' is needed and desired in particular contexts, since religion often helps shape people's views about this. This may challenge understandings of what counts as 'development' in the Global North.

5. Valuable opportunities to work with religious actors and institutions, including FBOs, in the pursuit of development goals, could be missed (Tomalin, 2013, p., 3).

Thus, it appears that religion being a source of influencing day to day life even in the 21-century should not be divorced from development initiatives. However, development scholars have also suggested that religion at times incites violence and acts as a force of undermining gender equality (Tomalin, 2015).

That said, since the late 20-century an up-turn in the growth of Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) is observed. Tomalin (2013) suggests that last two decades have seen rise of FBOs. To Fountain (2015), some FBOs have adopted secular development agenda or common charitable works such as providing humanitarian assistance and medicines to the poor (Denulin and Bano,

2009). FBOs are often received fierce criticisms for patronizing militancy, providing sectarian social services, and converting poor (Islam, 2015; Occhipini, 2015; Flanigan, 2010).

That said, the focus of this research is child development or children well-being. Ensuring children well-being is fundamental to achieving sustainable development goals. Faith leaders play a key role for children well-being. To Robinson and Hanmer (2014), religious leaders or communities have always played a key role in ensuring education, health services, protection, and care for children who are neglected, abused, and vulnerable. A myriad of scholars suggest that religious actors were widely excluded from planning development strategies (Robinson and Hanmer 2014; Duff and Buckingham 2015; Rutledge and Eyber 2019). Along the same line of thinking, Wilkinson, van Mierlo, and Trotta (2018) and Palm and Eyber (2019) argue that religious actors as a moral authority in society can influence people's beliefs, attitudes, and practices in ensuring children well-being. Thus, some scholars reached a consensus that religious actors need to be involved in safeguarding children well-being (Robinson and Hanmer, 2014; Duff and Buckingham, 2015). Robinson and Hanmer went one step ahead and argue that "partnering with religious communities is not only possible but, in many cases, essential to addressing violence against children and promoting systems at national and community levels to enhance the protective environment for children" (2014, p. 610). The Kyoto Declaration of 2006 states that –

"Faith communities can promote child protection through inter-religious cooperation, the use of religious texts to teach about child rights, advocacy and awareness against violence, and educating and supporting families and communities to care for children holistically" (UNICEF 2010; End Corporal Punishment 2020; cited in Jailobaeva et al., 2021).

While the 2006 Kyoto Declaration made it clear that faith leader can variously safeguard children well-being, Ward et al. (2016) suggests that engaging religious actors in child protection can be cost-effective too for low and middle-income settings. Engaging faith leaders in children well-being is also at times challenging as religion sometimes is used by actors to perpetuate, defend, or hide violence against children. Therefore, engaging religious actors in children well-being is a precondition to improve their attitude and views to protect children (Wilkinson, van Mierlo, and Trotta 2018). At times, child abuses in Church and child marriage received justification from religious actors (Annis and Rice 2002; Wodon 2015). Thus, children's well-being to a greater extent depends on effective communication between faith leaders and stakeholders (Robinson and Hanmer 2014). But Palm and Colombo (2019) reveals that there is a scarce of literature on this field of study as well as a substantial lack of evidence on the engagement of faith leaders in children well-being. Therefore, this research is designed in a way to uncover the role of faith leaders in children's well-being with respect to violence against children, child marriage, and access to health and education.

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Following the theoretical point of departure and objective of the study, this research combines both quantitative and qualitative methods for better understanding of the role of the faith leaders in development – especially children well-being – of Bangladesh.

The survey participants of this research were selected from the households where NGOs and INGOs including the WVB run its religion-centric children well-being projects. Considering such a relevance, we selected Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Barisal, and Cox's Bazar districts as study areas. It is unlikely that the statisticians consensually agreed to determining uniform sample size for the same group of population. However, most statisticians argue that the minimum sample size to get any kind of meaningful result is 100 but if the population is below 100, it is better to survey all of them but not more than 1000 (e.g., Bullen & Brack, 2014). This argument is found mostly relevant to the prevailing studies. A recent study conducted on a sample of 114 articles of which more than 90% opted for a **sample size ≥100**, only 7% comprised of ≥1000, while only 1% have determined an a priori sample size with the rule of the ratio – i.e., 10% of the total population (Anthoine, Moret, Regnault, Sébille, & Hardouin, 2014). Comrey and Lee (1992) also recommend a sample of 100= poor, 200 = fair, 300 = good, 500 = very good, 1,000 or more = excellent.

So, the present study has decided to survey 200 households, which is called a moderate number by Comrey and Lee (1992) and a 'fair' number by Anthoine, Moret, Regnault, Sébille, & Hardouin, (2014). Also, the sample 200 is equally divisible for the said four sampling units/areas. The proportion of Muslim population and other faiths in Bangladesh is 89:11. Following this referral each unit will contain 40 Muslims and 10 from other three religions accordingly.

Table 1. Distribution of target sample units and sample distribution

SL. No.	Sample Units	Households to Survey
1	Barishal	50
2	Rajshahi	50
3	Dinajpur	50
4	Ukhiya	50
Total	4 sample units	200

To triangulate and substantiate the survey data we conducted eight Key Informant Interviews (KII) [1] and eight FGDs at the selected sample areas from where we collected our quantitative survey data. We selected purposively the KIIs at local levels based on their administrative working engagement with development issue especially relating to child education and health, violence against children, child marriage, and child marriage. Two from each sample units which means eight FGDs from four sample areas we covered. Since the ideal number for FGDs lies between six and eight, we considered 8-10 for each FGD: four with Muslim faith leaders and four with non-Muslim faith leaders at the localities. Since the issue is sensitive, at each unit, we separately conducted one FGD with Muslim faith leaders, other one with non-Muslim faith leaders. Similarly, eight KIIs were interviewed form four units meaning two from each. We

---

[1] The number based on the data saturation condition we reached.

selected one senior official from Islamic Foundation at local/regional level. Other one we selected either UNO or Upazila Women Affairs Officer. They both were selected for their direct engagement with children well-being activities run by many government and NGO projects. In January 2023, an extended further round of 12 mixed interviews (remote – using telephone, and physical – face to face) were conducted in Dhaka with experts/elites as well as expert interviews especially with NGO practitioners, policy community leaders, and academics/researchers to provide policy recommendations. The KIIs and FGDs helped to gather in-depth and detailed primary data from the participants. The following flow-chart summarizes the entire data sources and quantity:
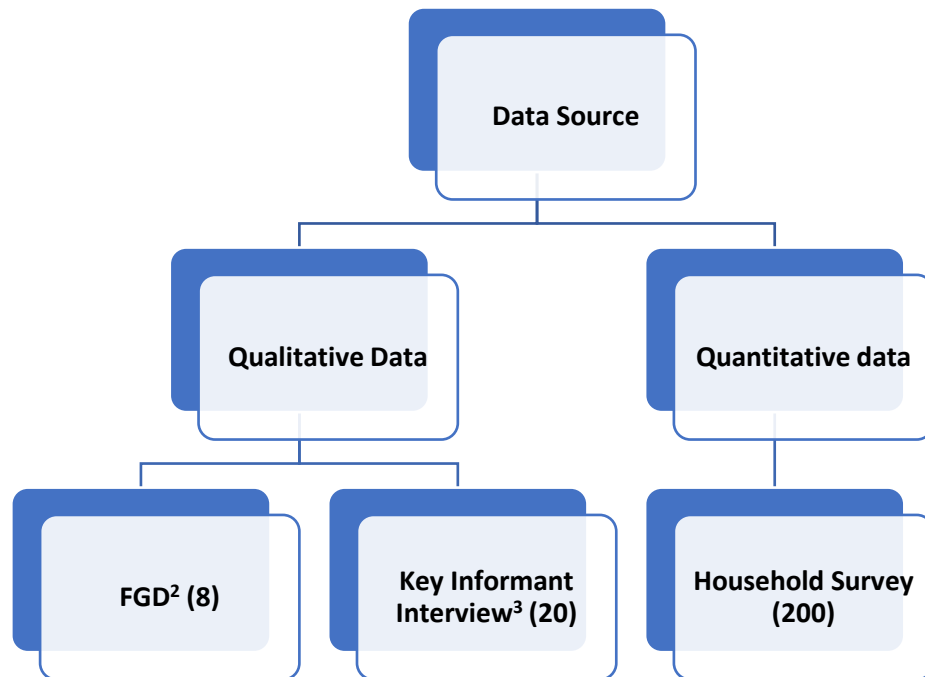

Figure 1. Distribution of both survey and interview populations

Besides, secondary sources like electronic, print, and social media's news about the incidents of faith-leaders contribution/intervention (both negative and positive) we considered to frame the theoretical departure analyse and support primary data. In addition to those reports different local and international NGOs working in the ground will be considered for analysis of such incidence. For theoretical understanding, relevant books, peer-reviewed journal articles will also be reviewed.

---

[2] Number reached data saturation point.
[3] ibid

FINDINGS AND INTEGRATION

Faith leaders are uniquely placed in our society for the community development or to guide faith community especially in times of crisis (World Vision, 2010). The importance of religion is a well-recognized phenomenon. May studies suggest that despite the growth of modernism, every eight of ten people associate themselves with religious groups (Hackett, Grim, Stonawski, Skirbekk, Potančoková, & Abel, 2012).). Thus, it is quite normal that faith leaders play role in shaping or creating norms and values with textual interpretations and exegesis. Similarly, Pinter et al. (2016) argue that religion is an essential part of cultural fabric that influences individual's decision, helps construct ideologies, and affects moral and ethical behaviours. Keeping all such realities in mind, the World Bank has been engaging faith leaders in poverty alleviation programs such as 'Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative' (World Vision, 2015).

Similarly, the World Vision works shoulder to shoulder with faith leaders in Africa during Ebola pandemic to encourage communities to bring changes to their traditional burial practices. Thus, they managed to contain the outbreak of Ebola (World Vision, 2015). Children well-being can also be ensured if faith leaders are properly engaged and well-trained. During our field visit to different parts of the country, we find a trend of diverse understanding about children well-being. Some of them are distinctly pointed out – e.g., children well-being starts even before their birth while foetus takes place inside a mother's womb, and one child's well-being depends on its mother's better health, etc. By children well-being they commonly understand anything that is related to a baby. Even when a mother is expecting to conceive the woman needs to take care of her health before conceiving. When mother is conceived, she needs to take care both mother and baby's health and nutrition.

Other respondents define children well-being as upbringing children with providing nutritious food, better education, and good environment. Some include child marriage should not be done, violence against them should be avoided, religious or moral teachings should be provided, social and cultural norms and values should be taught, and altruistic love should be given to children. It appears that faith leaders have included a wider range of issues as indicators of child-well-being. However, for the purpose this study, we have chosen only four variables to report here for practical reasons.

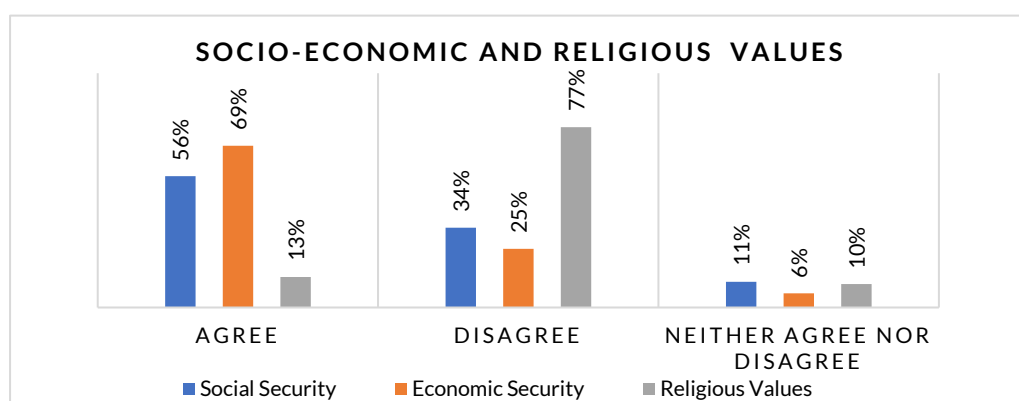**THEME 1: Values and role of faith leaders that determine practices of child marriage**

Figure 1. Socio-economic and Religious Values that Affect Practices of Child Marriage *(N=200)*.

Sub-theme 1.1: Social and religious values that affect the practices of child marriage

Child marriage is a common notorious practice, and some parts of the world is still facing this challenge. Walker (2015) terms child marriage as harmful traditional and cultural practice. He further adds that "it is a human rights violation, a public health challenge of our time, and a human security issue associated with disease burden, infant, child and maternal mortality, and extreme poverty" (p. 52). One major objective of the research has been to explore the extent to what degree social and economic security and traditional religious values affect the state of child marriage in Bangladesh. The findings (Figure 1.) reveal that all these issues contribute to a divergent degree to affect child marriage. But the degree to which it affects child marriage is clearly reported. Out of 200 survey respondents, our study finds that economic insecurity acts as the most influential triggering factor for child marriage (69%) which is followed by social insecurity (56%) and religious values and practices (13%).

The qualitative interview data collected from the Key Informants (KI), Expert Interviewees (EI) and through FGDs at the field level also support reasonably such findings. Most of the KIs identified vulnerable economic conditions and girls' outdoor expositions as insecure and unsafe for their girls. That is why many parents arrange child marriage to get relief from economic and social pressure incurred on them. A faith leader shared his experience in the following way:

Look, these days child marriage is not happening in great numbers. Even though some are still noticed sometimes that is not due to religious values and practices. People are modern enough to decide on this. Instead, what we observed they are doing this mainly because of financial and social strains. Lower middle class and lower-class people sometimes agree to get their children married. For example, when parents of these families get a better or well-off groom, they opt to get their children married. They think that they might not get a good or decent groom when she will be above 18 years of old. Two things work in their mind. One, if they can get them early married, it will reduce their financial pressure. But when they receive an offer from well off groom, that marriage does not incur lot of financial liabilities on parents. Second, they think that girls become old after 20 years because there is Bengali proverb meaning 'twenty years old women are unsuitable for getting married'. So, it is better to get them married early. Parents also at times think that it is better to get them married early, so that they can stay relief from any kind of social stigma or defamation ascribed on them [FGD 1, November 2022].

So, as the findings disclose, socio-economic issues provoke many households to arrange child marriage. When issues regarding social insecurity and financial constraints were highly emphasised by faith leaders, we asked them about preaching religious education about demerits of child marriage. We received mixed responses from faith leaders as well as from experts. We have already observed that very few (only13 percent) of respondents still believe that child marriages are happening due to religious values and its practices. A sourced expert on this said that religion does not have any bindings on child marriage. Faith leaders take side based on their opportunistic choices. As there is no religious instruction, faith leaders don't feel illegitimate to get them married [Interview No. 20, December 2022]. However, the religious values and practices are of multidimensional. Of which protecting virginity, abstaining from physical relationships with opposite sexes before marriage are found most influential factors for early childhood marriage. A recent study conducted in Iran, for instance, by Barai, Rezaei, Nadrian, & Matlabi (2023) found that such cultural and mental attitude entails a kind of gynophobia, within which a fear of losing virginity before marriage is perceived. Keeping girls' virginity is purposed to maintain the honour of family from fear of losing moral principle.

Interestingly, we have received four different responses from four different religions. For example, a Christian Father who attended an FGD, he said:

Our church has unique system, which we follow, does not allow child marriage. It is clearly stated in the church principle that no one can get married until he or she reaches at the age of 18 years. They also cannot make any false age certificate because our church maintain a strict diary for each new-born, where their date of birth is recorded since the very day of their birth. After birth, they are brought to the community for baptism and other purposes. So, they cannot hide their age anyway. So, once they come for marriage, we check their age first. Thus, there is no room for child marriage in our Christian community [FGD 2, November 2022].

A Hindu priest opined that their religious scriptures have neither directly encouraged nor discouraged child marriages. Therefore, the incidents of child marriages depend on individual's choice. Now the question is whether any Hindu priest will allow to get them married or not, this depends on the priest's critical understanding about the negativities of early marriage. As we are well-trained and we know about government rules we do not allow child marriages [FGD 2, November 2022]. On the contrary, a female expert reported that Hindu religion is against the child marriage. She said:

If you read the Hindu Scripture Mahabharata, you will see that girls have their freedom to choose their husband through a competition. For example, Dhrupadi chose not to marry Karna as he was from lower caste. Similarly, Sikhandini decided to marry Bishwa because he won the competition instead of marrying his brother. If you read Ramayana, Sita was praying for Ram to win the competition. So, the rationale is that if they don't reach a period of certain age of maturity, they cannot decide on their own. So, Hindu religion does not allow child marriage [Interview No. 13, December 2022].

Buddhist leaders shared almost similar views of Hindus. A Buddhist priest said: "It is not written anywhere that Buddhists must have children or control the number of children that they want. Buddhism allows every human the freedom and their rights to decide for themselves the issues relating to marriage" [FGD 7, November 2022]. A Hindu priest shared his own experience on how boys and girls are getting married on their own.

My grandchild at her 15 left home and get a Muslim man married. How can we stop it? We are not doing this. Even we are not allowing this. They are doing this on their own. Even they are leaving the home. Where is religion and where is the state? None can stop it. So far, they are not aware of it, or good culture is not being established. Even though Hinduism does not have any scriptural compulsion, still they mostly allow child marriage finding no other alternatives. They put forward a reason that if they don't get them married at early age before reaching adulthood girls might leave their house and get a man married [FGD 2, November 2022].

Faith leaders also showed their concern over marriage without family involvement. They said that the number of child marriages are still happening due to boys' and girls' own choice. Due to their premarital communion and free-mixing between opposite sexes – they elope and get themselves married. They explained why this is happening now.

Nowadays almost every family has electronic devices like smart phone, tab, smart television, etc. Their children spent a good amount of time on virtual platform and interact and make friendship with different classes of people using those devices. They are found to be disobedient to their parents and often elope with their self-chosen boyfriends. This scenario is getting increased over time and intensifying the child marriage scenario [FGD 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7].

This kind of immature marriages do not bring good results, said many faith leaders. One of the faith leaders was enlightening us with an example.

My daughter is studying at class nine. She has a very close female friend. One day, she gets introduced with a man through a social media platform 'Facebook'. After just three to four months, she eloped with that man. But, after few months, she came back home, and she started crying saying that she could not survive in the changed circumstances and choose. Eloping and getting divorced are still considered as taboos which together made her friendless and her family undermined in their community [FGD 3, November 2022].

Islamic leaders have a complex opinion on this issue. A group of leaders puts forward some issues from Prophet's life and argue that child marriage is not a problem.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did marry a child – Aisha Bint Abu Bakr (RA). There are no verses in the holy Quran prohibiting marring a child. Rather, the Quran allows to marry a Nisa, which means when a girl reaches to her puberty or first menstruation. Most girls experienced their menstruation around 12, but sometimes they can experience as early as 8. It is reported in the hadiths that when a man can feed, he needs to marry, but if he is not able to feed his wife, he needs to fast. But no such rule for women. They are free from financial liabilities. Their only way to fulfil their sexual demand is marriage. No fasting is prescribed for them [FGD 6, November 2022].

On the other hand, those who think child marriage should not be recommended. They put forward following reasoning.

Ayesha (RA) case is a different issue. She was chosen by Allah for the Prophet. Even though she was married at six, she starts staying with the Prophet after being experienced her first menstruation at nine. Her physical growth was so high at the early age. Arabian girls are more matured than other regions. There is no verse in the holy Quran as well to allow child marriage. It is well established that a child cannot give birth to a child, and it brings health hazards to both child mother and new-born. By doing this, child mother puts her life at risk. Islam does not allow risking own's life while giving birth to a baby [FGD 1 and 6, November 2022].

So, faith leaders offer divergent opinions on child marriage issue. One of the experts in this area who interview several faith leaders regarding child marriage. He brought two fresh perspectives on this.

To me, marriageable age for girls should be ranged from 15 to 16. Faith leaders are also dissatisfied with the issue that government is not talking about free mixing of boys and girls, having sex before 18 years of age, and pre-marital sex. Rather they are worried much about age-limit for marriage. Due to free mixing and coeducation girls are having consensual sex and sometimes raped before 18 which are not found any problem to state apparatuses. We think government should work bringing an end to the extra-marital sex and free mixing culture. We want to say, make marriageable age 15-16, but no children until they reach 18 or 20 years of age [Interview No 18, December 2022].

Even though, there are issues of religious approval or disapproval regarding child marriage. Figure 2 suggests almost a similar thing where 43 percent of respondents are not satisfied with the role of faith leaders to protect child marriage. Most of them opined that faith leaders don't think age should be restriction for marriage, rather they think that marriage should be validated at any age. However, there have a consensus among faith leaders, experts, and general people that child marriage is still happening at a limited scale mainly for two reasons: a) social and economic insecurities; and b) girls elope leaving behind parental homes and get themselves married with their beloved ones with fake birth certificate [FGD, 1, 2, 3, and 4, November 2022; Interview No. 19, December 2022].

While faith leaders consider marriages sacred, but child marriage can bring health issues. One faith leader interviewed at Rajshahi District remind us that Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) called the killing of the foetus as secret murder and thus terms child pregnancy immoral.

We often have many child marriages that make life miserable for girls. We witness the incidences of foetus abortions mainly occurred to the teenagers who get married earlier. Multifaceted health complexities arise due to child marriage during their pregnancy period. Sometimes doctors suggest those families either to save pregnant girls' lives or the baby that yet to born. In these perplexities, they usually go for the former. Also, due to (un)foreseeable financial challenges and other health issues many couple decide for abortion which in the long run affect maternity. So, at least, for such a great sin we should avoid child marriage [FGD 1, November 2022].

Sub-theme 1.2: The role of faith leaders that determine the practices of child marriage

The discourse – i.e., whether the faith leaders should be engaged in the fight against child marriage – is prevalent in our daily conversation, public debates, and tv shows (e.g., Walker, 2015). We defined the term 'child marriage' as any sexual pairing of a male and a female by any means where one or both spouses are below 18. So, the community people, in our study, have been found overwhelmed welcoming the faith leaders to protect and promote the state of children well-being with their active engagement. Though only 5% of the total respondents disagreed, 95% agreed to their involvement in combating child marriage. However, the respondents were found critical about the present role played by the faith leaders in their localities. In this regard, 57% respondents are found satisfied with their role and engagement, while 43% expressed their dissatisfaction. However, prior to knowing their such a status of satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding the role of faith leaders' role in combating child marriage, the respondents were inquired whether they experienced the engagement of any faith leaders in this context. 58% nodded that they experienced and 42% responded no. From FGDs and expert interviews, it appears that so far faith leaders are doing awareness building works within the limited scope and capacity like only through Khutabs (Friday lecture), Wajmahfis (religious congregations), and other sermons. Qualitative data disclosed one possible reason behind such dissatisfaction for faith leaders' non-engagement in the time of social service delivery to the community people both by government and NGOs. As the Interviewee 5 argued that 'our engagement with development works will ensure empowerment and credibility which in turn may increase our acceptability to the community.'

As discussed earlier that the faith leaders try to convince the families to marry their daughters off at an early age. And all data sources assured and acknowledged the positive impact of active engagement of the faith leaders to combat child marriage. More specifically, the guardians are also found convinced by the preaches provided by the faith leaders. But unavoidable issues like poverty and social insecurity often compel many guardians to get married their children at their early childhood and thereby the guardians claim relief. Apart from this, at times they directly oppose the incidents of marriage. The following figure is a detailed picture regarding the faith leaders' critical role and society perceptions.
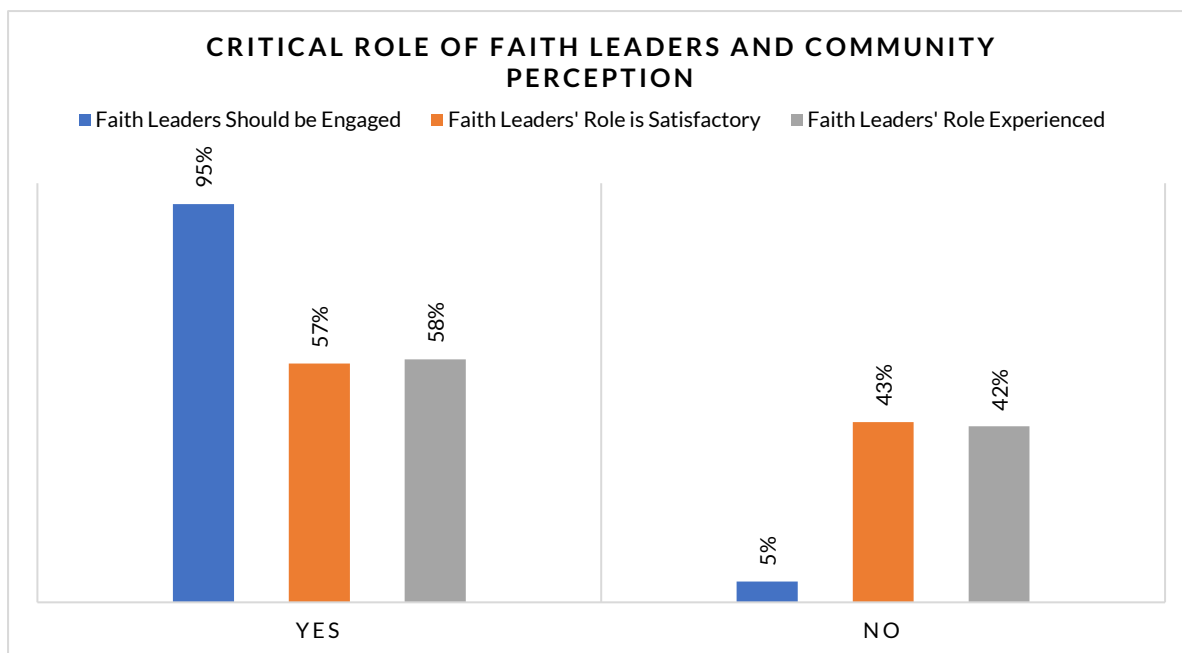
Figure 2. Critical perspectives on the role of faith leaders in combating the practices of child marriage *(N=200).*

THEME 2: Values and role of faith leaders that determine the practices of violence against children

Sub-theme 2.1: Social and religious values that affect the practices of violence against children

Violence against children is defined as any act of being wild or turbulent over a person who is under 18 located both at home and in educational/religious institutions. Despite the trend of having been an apparent development and progress made over time, still, the community people found favour of punishing being wild by beating the children. For instance, findings disclose that 35% of the selected respondents think that disobedient children should be punished by different means. However, on the contrary, 60% of respondents disagree with punishing the children. Moreover, 60% of the respondents considered little punishment is an effective way to compel the children practising religious lives. However, 35% of the respondents disagreed regarding punishing the children for compelling them for religious practices. But most of the respondents (75%) agreed to punish the children to bound them to perform religious practices and religious education both at home and educational institutions. Interestingly, majority respondents (74%) do not blame religious values as causes behind violence against children, while only 14% of the respondents think that religious values are responsible for the violence against children. But women very often address experiences of victimization, like somatic assault and subjugation, mostly happened due to male domination and long-standing patriarchy which are also allegedly legitimized by religions, or resulting from misinterpretations of scriptures, and absorption of the culture into scripture and religious practices (Krob & Steffen, 2015; and Hunnicutt, 2009). For instance, Mligo (2020) showed in his study how the misinterpretations of scriptures lead to revitalization of domestic violence against women, of which the church remains silent as if they do not happen. Regarding any incidence of child

abuse and violence, the majority respondents think that the children should have right to call upon security personnel (e.g., police).

These trends regarding violence against children found from the survey data greatly explained and triangulated by the interviewees and FGD participants. Broadly, this community stance contradicts with the views provided by the faith leaders – mostly Muslims. They were found less interested about reporting to the police and forgiveness.
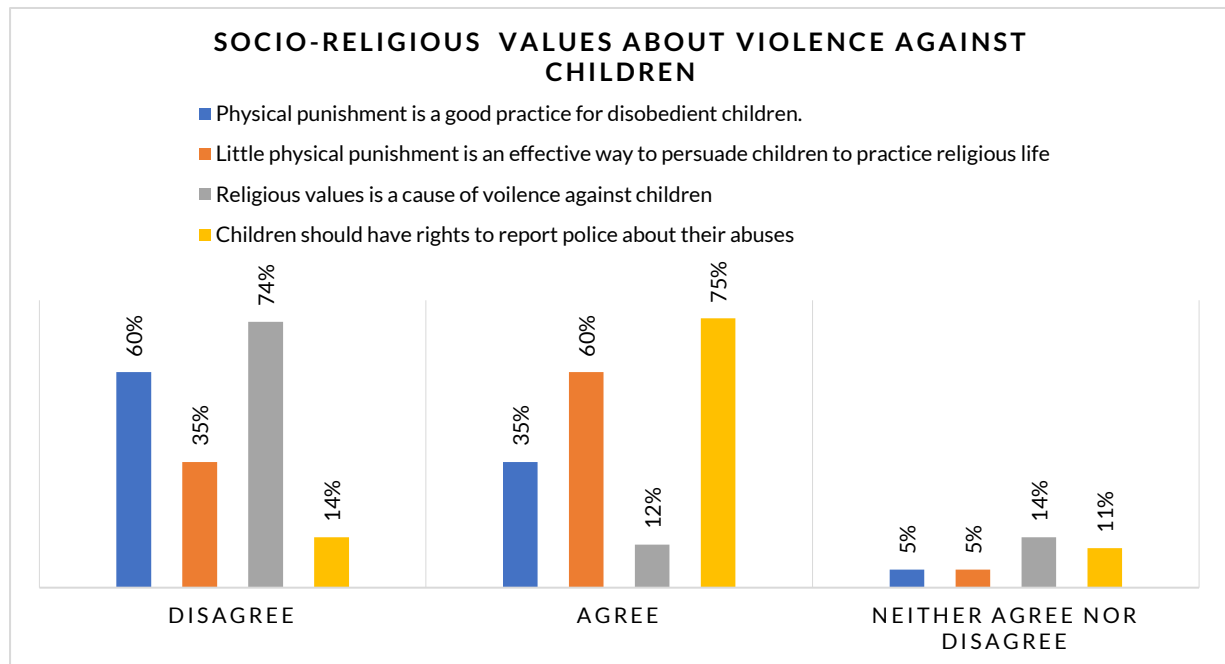

Figure 3. Socio-religious determining values of the practices of violence against children (N=200).

Rather, the FGD (composed of only Muslim participants) data disclose that parents at home and teachers at school and madrasa (where religious education is dominant) believe that children should be beaten at 'smaller extent' – (e.g., slap, beating with small sticks, etc.) for the purpose of compelling them to practice religious rituals and faith-related education. In this context, one Muslim FGD participant at Dinajpur referred religious verses (*Fatawa Shami-4/13*) and justified his position in favour of the practices of child beating –

Do to beat/heat strong that it causes bruising or black spots as mentioned in Fatawa Shami-4/79. Because it is haram to beat a minor child more than three times in this offense and to hit the face and sensitive parts (both adults and minors). And the purpose of correcting the adult student is to bring him under the penal code of Shariah according to the nature of his crime. It should be noted that the cane should be knotless, simple, and medium thick, which will reach the pain but not scar [FGD Participant, Dinajpur, November 2022].

We have also received a different story from another FGD, which disapproves violence against children.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) loves children. He is our model. Throughout his life, he never even scolds any children. Prophet said: He who does not show mercy (towards his children), no mercy would be shown to him (Sahih Muslim). Prophet further said that the Messenger of Allah s.a.w used to come to visit us. I had a younger brother who was called Abu 'Umair by nickname (kunyah). He had a sparrow which he played with, but it died. So, one day the Prophet s.a.w came to see him and saw him grieving.

He asked: 'What is the matter with him?' The people replied: 'His sparrow has died.' He (the Prophet s.a.w) then said: 'Oh Abu 'Umair! What has happened to the little sparrow? (Sunan Abi Daud). Prophet again said: I served the Prophet s.a.w for ten years, and he never said to me, 'Uff' (a minor harsh word denoting impatience) and never blamed me by saying, "Why did you do so or why do you do so? (Sahih Al-Bukhari) [FGD 6, November 2022].

So, we have received mixed responses from Muslim faith leaders. But the difference between non-Muslim and only Muslim-based FGD findings is remarkable for many reasons. The FGDs that composed of non-Muslim participants (Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu) are mostly not in favour of beating the children. For instance, one Christian FGD participant referred to Jesus Christ and explained how Jesus disregarded our rude practices towards children. The participant referred Bible (e.g., Matthew 19: 13-15; Mark 10: 13-16; Luke 18: 15-17) regarding Jesus and the Children. The interviewee added that when Jesus Christ and his apostles left Capernaum for the region of Judea, on his final journey to Jerusalem, in a village, people began to bring their little children to Jesus to bless them or pray for them. However, the disciples reprimanded the parents, not to upset Jesus but Jesus got angry and said to his followers:

Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for such is the kingdom of God, I tell you the truth, whoever does not receive the child of God as a little child will never enter it. (The FGD Participant in Rajshahi, November 2022 referred to Luke 18: 16- 17, NIV).

A Hindu priest also mentioned about the importance of children to achieve the highest goal heaven. He mentioned from the Veda that through a son he conquers the worlds, through a grandson he obtains immortality, but through his son's grandson he ascends to the (highest) heaven.' (All that) has been declared in the Veda" (Baudhayana Sutras 2-9-16.3). By pointing to this verse, he said:

Children should be loved and well treated by everyone, because they are the stairs to reach the heaven and to get blessings of God. They are the beauty of society, and that beauty needs to be protected by all of us. We try our best to protect them [FGD 2, November 2022].

Buddhist also cited from the Tripitaka that there is no room to kill in Buddhism. This ritual does not simply mean not killing any human being, rather it includes not to bring any harm over an insect nor even hurt others. While it comes to violence against children, there is no scope to punishing children. Rather, they should be loved. But it is worth mentioning that incidentally almost all faith leaders opined in favour of practicing little punishments (like swearing, beating with small sticks) against the children only to keep them in the right track. They don't want to consider such practices as violence against children. For instance – As parents love children most, if they give them little punishment or scolding, there is no problem with it. This punishment should not be a serious one, that will harm them. Apart from parents, no one has the right to give physical punishments to children.

The above discussion on violence against children reflects that broadly faith leaders are of against violence against children, but they do prefer a smaller extent of punishment – both mental or physical – to keep them on right track or help them learning religion education.

Sub theme 2.2: The role of faith leaders that determine the practices of violence against children

Since the study presumed and found the existence of violence against children in the given social reality, we further inquired the respondents whether the faith leaders should be engaged combating such an anomaly. The out and out majority of the respondents (94%) are found in favour of engaging those of the faith leaders in this regard. But the activity of the faith leaders in combatting violence against children is only visible to 61% of the respondents. Whereas 39% of the respondents reported that they never find any faith leaders working for reducing violence against children. When the survey respondents were asked whether the faith leaders work combating violence against children, we found 54% respondents marked, 'Yes' and 46% replied 'No'.
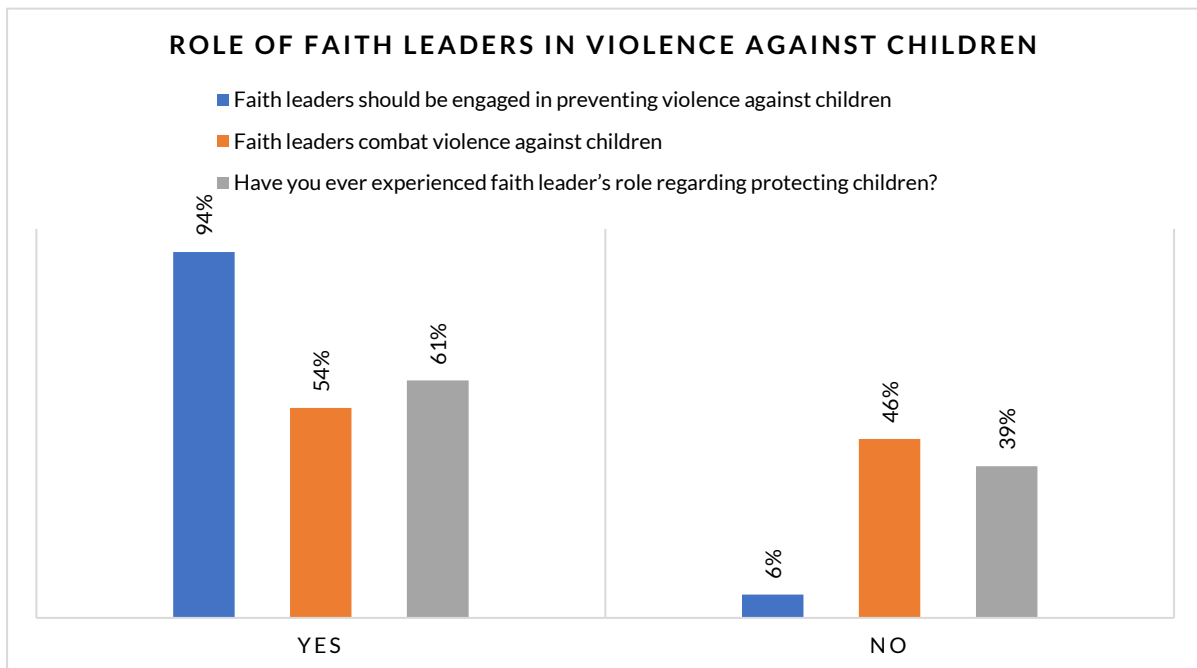

ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS IN VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

- Faith leaders should be engaged in preventing violence against children
- Faith leaders combat violence against children
- Have you ever experienced faith leader's role regarding protecting children?

Figure 4. Faith leaders' role in combating violence against children *(N=200).*

So, the survey findings imply the necessity of engaging faith leaders to combat violence against children in Bangladesh. Similarly, the summary findings of KIIs and FGDs also indicate similar demands and aspirations in this regard. But the qualitative data disclose some criticalities in this regard in terms of both problems and prospects. The role of faith leaders broadly includes advocating and promoting values of love, mutual respect, dignity of human beings, equality regardless of gender, age, and race, forgiveness, and faithfulness to each other, and caring for children and poor (Birdsall & Brown, 2011). So, the experts emphasised on employing skilled and experienced religious leaders to get effective output curving the prevailing incidences of violence against violence.

THEME 3: Values and role of faith leaders that determine children's access to education

Sub-theme 3.1: Social and religious values that determine children's access to education

The following Figure 5. unearths the necessity of child education especially emphasizing more on girls' access to education. Most of the respondents (85%) argued that despite the abject poverty that many parents face, they prefer not to send their children to child-incentive work for livelihood. Following this general inquiry about child education, we posed four subsequent questions concentrating only on religion and gender issues connecting to education. Again, 82% of the respondents think that there should not be any social barrier to girls' education. Though 62% of the respondents think that religious education should get priority over general education, majority of the respondents (89%) are in favour of girls' compulsory education, and they (85%) do not think that religious values affect girls' access to education.
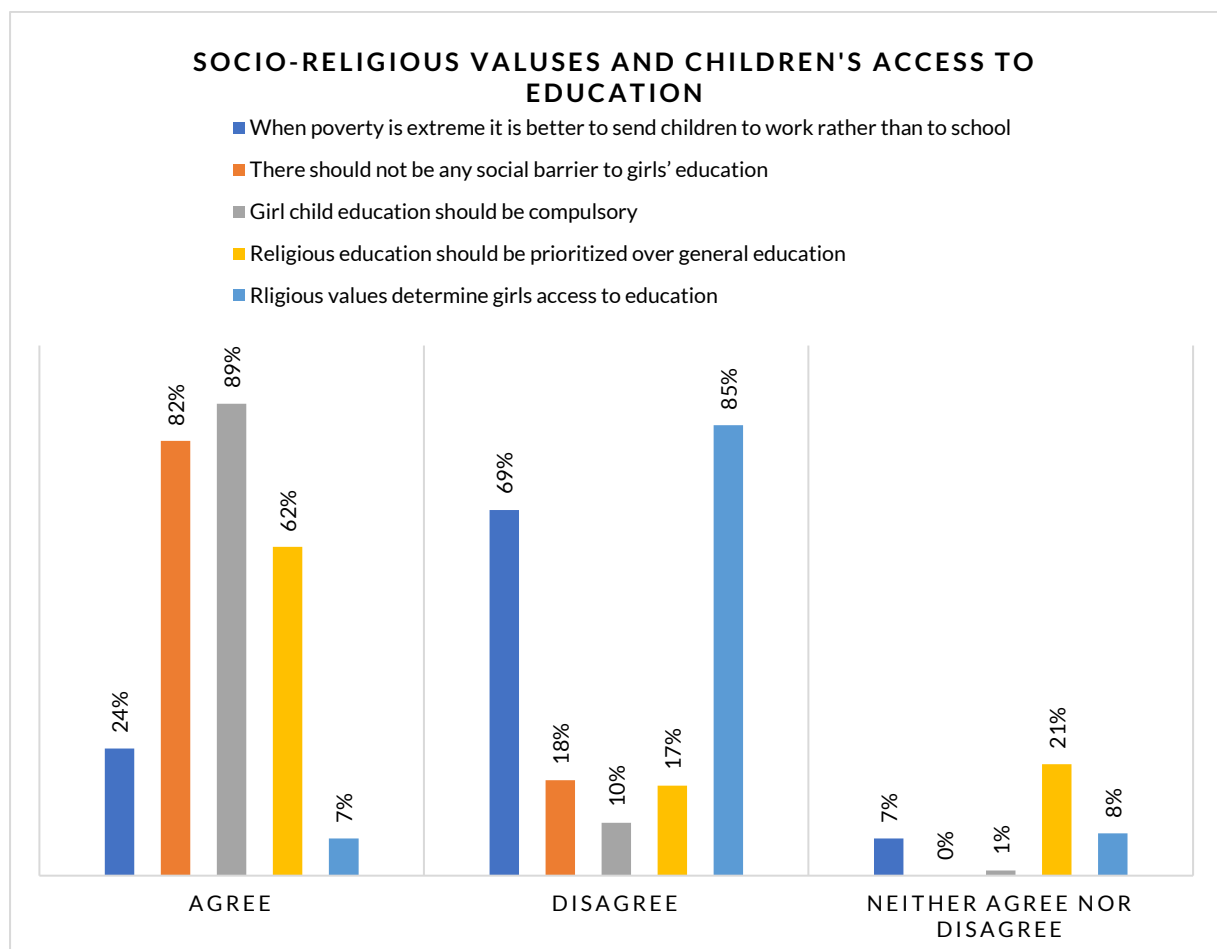
Figure 5. Socio-religious determining values of children's access to education *(N=200)*.

To begin with, one point is clear from the field data that irrespective of all religions, everyone suggests that education should be compulsory children – both boys and girls alike. Muslim participants cited several hadiths and verses from the Qura'n in favour of children education. Look, Islam has placed greater importance on education and acquiring knowledge. The first word of the Holy Quran is the Iqra, READ. Therefore, seeking knowledge is a sacred and mandatory duty for every Muslims – both male and female. Thus, the Quranic command is to seek knowledge, to educate

yourselves and to be educated [FGD1, November 2022]. Another participant continued citing from the Quran in favour of education for all that Surah Al-Zumr, ayah 9 reveals: Are those equal, those who know and those who not?" Surah Al-Baqarah, ayah 269 reveals: Allah grants wisdom to whom He pleases and to whom wisdom is granted indeed he receives an overflowing benefit [FGD 3, November 2022].

Other participants cited from the Prophets life that –

If anyone travels on the road searching for knowledge, Allah will cause him to travel on one of the roads of Paradise. The angels will lower their wings in their great pleasure with one who seeks knowledge; the inhabitants of the heavens and the Earth and the fish in the deep waters will ask forgiveness for the learned man. The superiority of the learned man over the devout is like that of the moon, on the night when it is full, over the rest of the stars. The learned are the heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets leave neither dinar nor dirham, leaving only knowledge, and he who takes it takes an abundant portion [FGD 1, November 2022].

In addition to this, almost all faith leaders informed that Prophet Muhammad's urge that "Seek knowledge even if you have to go as far as China" When all Muslim leaders were favouring education for all, we asked specific about girls' education. In this regard, they all cited a hadith that is "Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and women." They said "in this hadith, man and woman's education is similarly stressed in Islam" [FGD 8, November 2022]. Other participants also added hadiths, "He who has a slave girl, teaches her good manners, improves her education, and then manumits and marries her will get a double reward" [FGD 6, November 2022]. From Hindu perspectives, Hindu priests said that an ideal Hindu life is divided into four stages, such as Brahmacharya-Asrama (student), Grihastha-Asrama (householder), Vanaprastha-Asrama (retirement), Sannyasa-Asrama (renunciation). Hinduism considers average age of a person to be 100 years. This span of time is divided into four sections. The first 25 years should be spent in learning different skills and things must be useful for life. Brahmacharya, the stage of education is the heart of life circle. In ancient times, the students lived with their teachers as members of their respective families. They were Brahmacharis and observed the rules pertaining to educational life, a life of self-control and abstinence from worldly affairs for a period of twenty-five years. Only after completing this Brahmacharya stage, they can enter the family life [FGD 2, November 2022].

So, from Hindu perspective, without education, an ideal Hindu cannot enter family life. Buddhism also offers similar understanding about education. A Buddhist monk citing Tripitaka that "Ignorance is the root cause of suffering" [FGD 7, November 2022]. He continued to say that if ignorance is the root cause you should have knowledge to overcome it. The Buddha also showed how to get rid of suffering, which is known as 'Eightfold path'. One of the eightfold paths is the Right Knowledge. So, there is no alternative than right education [FGD 7, November 2022]. Christian Fathers and Sisters concord and reiterated the need for education for all. The summary of their argument for education includes many things. Like God created man in His own image. So, education is a must for human being to understand his potentials as God's best creature. Without education, he or she cannot fully understand his or her potential as well as his responsibilities. That is why, Christian churches across the globe put utmost emphasis on ensuring education for all irrespective of genders. The church has also several missionary schools and colleges. They do believe truly in the principles of education for all. While the

necessity of education has been echoed by all faith leaders, religious education was priorities over secular education. When the issue of religious education came to the fore one FGD faith leader participant argued that –

"If education is considered as a backbone of a nation, religious education should be regarded as a premier pre-condition for civilizational and sustained development" (Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, December 2022).

Similar tendency was observed among general people. Among the survey participants 62% responded in favour of the statement that "Religious education should be prioritized over general education." Comments and suggestions collected from the KIIs and FGDs regarding child education and preference of educational institution are important to report here. One interviewee (Islamic Foundation, Rajshahi) argued in favour of compulsory child education as it plays special role in developing moral values among children at their initial stage of growth. The interviewee referred the historic practices that, in the mosques of Bangladesh, the custom of opening the Maktab (religious traditional education training centre) in the morning and giving religious education to children used to build their foundation. Maktab education is the original and basic education of humanism, and values and virtues of Islam. Education is obligatory on every Muslim. Especially if there is no religious knowledge it is not possible to live with fraternity and according to humanism. He said regretfully that there were thousands of Maktabs and Madrasahs in every neighbourhood of the village are almost extinct today and consequently a large population is being grown without religious knowledge. While all put utmost emphasis on religious education, they did not discard the importance of general education as well. But the confusion arises from among Muslim faith leaders on the issue of co-education and employment.

Look, so far children are not reaching their puberty, there is no issue of separating them while learning together, boys and girls. But, when boys and girls reach their puberty, they must maintain Purdah and it is highly recommended to get them separated. Boys and girls should take education separately. They should not sit together. If they sit together and stay together, this might generate lust for sex which is haram in Islam. So, we don't recommend co-education. Rather, we should organize separate education for boys and girls. So, co-education is better to be avoided [FGD 1 and 3, November 2022].

Similarly, the faith leaders encourage employment opportunities for girls/women after their higher secondary and higher education for economic self-reliance. But findings are sharply mixed. Majority of them discouraged co-employment – where male and female employees work together at the same time. In this regard, the Muslim faith leaders referred Quran and Hadith. However, few of the were found liberal and argued in favour of co-employment for a hatred-free and compatible social coherence. One FGD participant at Dinajpur viewed that "I have seen man and women praying in the same row in the Haram Sharif in Makkah, but I have also seen the complete opposite in Madinah. So, it depends on our mindset and respect for opposite gender."

Sub-theme 3.2: The role of faith leaders that determine children's access to education

The following frequency distribution (Figure 6.) on 'the role of faith leaders in enhancing access to education for girl children' disclose three ground realities. The out and out majority respondents (97%) are found in favour of engaging faith leaders in promoting the state of girls' education. Only 55% respondents found to be witnessed as well as experienced faith leaders'

role in enhancing girls' education and 63% found to be satisfied with the role played by the faith leaders in enhancing girls' education.
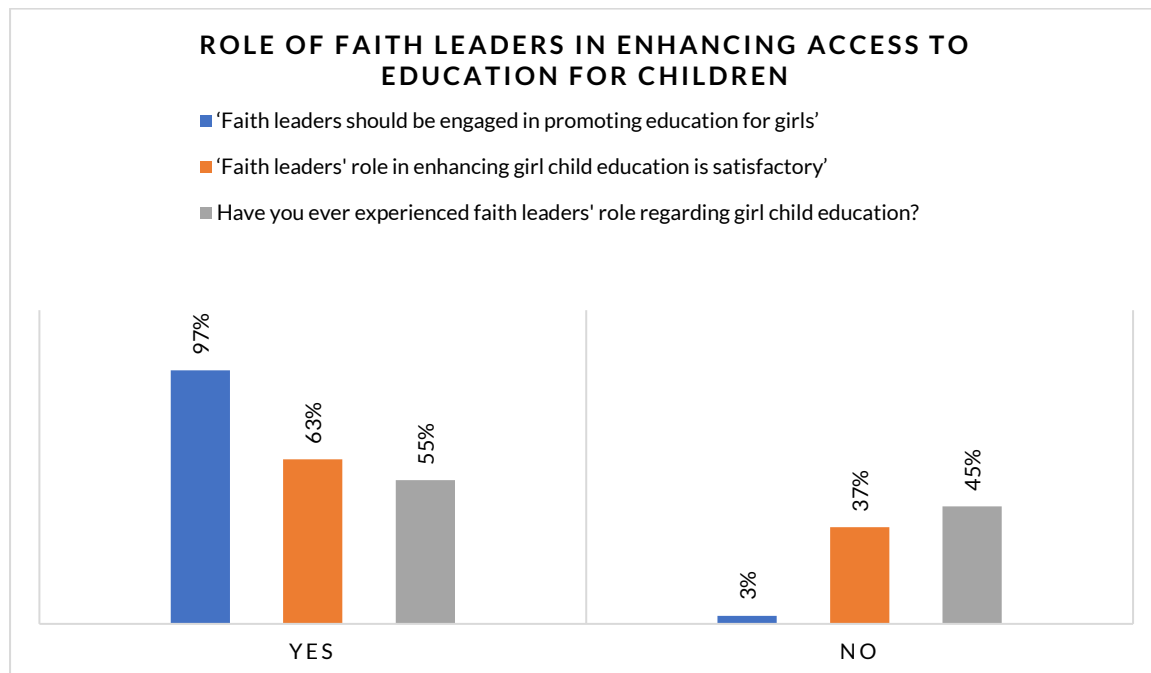
ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS IN ENHANCING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

- ■ 'Faith leaders should be engaged in promoting education for girls'
- ■ 'Faith leaders' role in enhancing girl child education is satisfactory'
- ■ Have you ever experienced faith leaders' role regarding girl child education?

	YES	NO
'Faith leaders should be engaged in promoting education for girls'	97%	3%
'Faith leaders' role in enhancing girl child education is satisfactory'	63%	37%
Have you ever experienced faith leaders' role regarding girl child education?	55%	45%

Figure 6. Faith leaders' role in promoting child education *(N=200).*

This data-driven analysis implies the inevitability of engaging faith leaders to ensure girls education. But two concerns came to the fore. First, the visibility of the faith leaders and their apparent participant engagement in enhancing girls' education are found not that satisfactory. Second, the role played by the faith leaders is also not that satisfactory. The interview data collected from the society people provide some reasons behind such this scenario. In terms of population of the country the number of faith leaders is disproportionate which might be one reason behind the limited experience of the faith leaders' role in enhancing girls' education – as many of them claimed. Their role is still the same as above mentioned building awareness through religious sermons. No mass level engagement has been noted from expert interviews, FGDs, and surveys.

According to the experts, faith leaders are traditionally prone to promote Madrasa-based religious education and curriculum especially for boys. They are much more interested in installing madrasas compared to schools and colleges – as the Interviewee 15 argued. Faith leaders rarely send their children to the formal schools and colleges for higher education. Even they less likely allow their girl children for jobs wherein male and female do work together. However, on the contrary, we came to know that one Muslim FGD participant at Rajshahi sent his daughter to college and university after completing Dakhil (equivalent to Secondary School Certificate). Now his daughter is a college teacher where co-education exists. The FGD participant added that his daughter never faced any serious hurdle to this journey despite she maintains religious attires.

THEME 4: Values and role of faith leaders that determine children's access to health and nutrition

Sub-theme 4.1: Social and religious values that determine children's access to health and nutrition

Although gynaecological (e.g., menstruation) is a natural activity, in the developing countries, like Bangladesh, women are still encountered with a socio-religious and cultural taboos. Menstrual health and hygiene issues are not shared with their respective peers like friends, parents, schoolteachers for what many of them must suffer both mentally and physically. So, we asked the community people a few questions to understand the society pulse on issues like pregnancy, menstruation, lactating motherhood, and born-crippled and blind.

Similarly, myths and beliefs about contraceptive – meaning birth control – methods and women's reproductive health are still well-discussed/prejudiced in many developing parts of the world. And Bangladesh is not exception to this regard. For instance, Amin and Hossain (1994) revealed that faith leaders including Christianity, Islam, Judaism voiced early opposition to the aggressive family planning campaign to change attitudes towards birth control in Bangladesh.
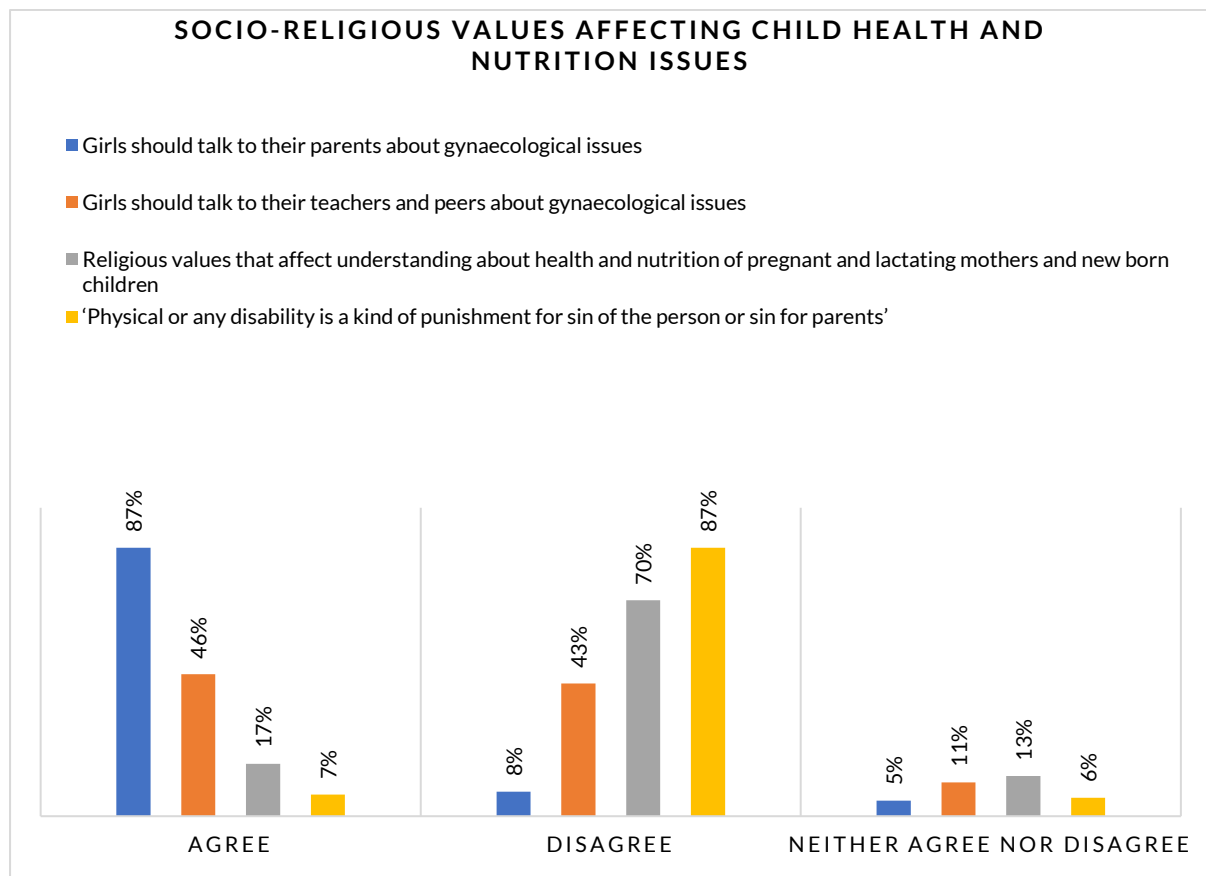

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS VALUES AFFECTING CHILD HEALTH AND NUTRITION ISSUES

- Girls should talk to their parents about gynaecological issues
- Girls should talk to their teachers and peers about gynaecological issues
- Religious values that affect understanding about health and nutrition of pregnant and lactating mothers and new born children
- 'Physical or any disability is a kind of punishment for sin of the person or sin for parents'

	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
Girls talk to parents	87%	8%	5%
Girls talk to teachers/peers	46%	43%	11%
Religious values	17%	70%	13%
Disability as punishment	7%	87%	6%

Figure. Socio-religious determining values of children's access to health and nutrition *(N=200)*.

Data suggests that 87% of the survey respondents think that girls should talk to their parents about gynaecological issues and only 46% responded that girls should talk to their teachers and peers about these issues. In earlier times, we often witnessed that the religious values used to

negatively affect the understanding of the community people about health and nutrition of pregnant and lactating mothers and new-born children. Here this study found only 17% of the respondents think that religious values influence peoples' understanding about health and nutrition of pregnant and lactating mothers and new-born children. Also, most of the respondents (87%) do not blame those who face any physical disability nor even blame their parents' misdeeds for what their children are born-blind and born-crippled.

The striking thing is that 43 per cent population still think that they should not talk to their teachers and peers about their gynaecological issues. This means that there is still a kind of social taboos, or they maintain a secrecy about gynaecological issues. This social taboo is expressed by an expert in the following way:

Drug shops in Bangladesh still offer sterile napkins and condoms wrapped in paper so that others cannot see them. Even the girls having traumatic weariness during periods, they cannot examine their conditions unreservedly (Interview No 18, December 2022).

Including illiterate people many faith leaders are found doing terrible things like preventing their children or descendants from getting vaccinated because of some religious misconceptions or misinterpretations. They think that Allah is the owner of disease and cure, so trying to prevent disease before it occurs is un-Islamic. Vaccines can cause children to get sick and die, develop epilepsy, autism or mental retardation, and cause diseases such as cancer. If the pregnant mother takes the vaccine, the new-born child may be disabled (Hossen, 2021). Although the number of deaths in this case has decreased, rural areas continue to suffer, including many pregnant mothers.

Faith leaders also feel shy to work on issues related to women health especially related to gynaecological issues.

What should we do with it. We are not doctors or nurses. These days people are more aware about their own health. We used to have some superstitions about child and mothers' health that pregnant mother should not move, they should not eat certain food and they should not go out after sunset. These-days, through the help of social media and other electronic media, people are more concern about their health issues. If they face some problems, they see community care givers. So, there is not any real challenges [FGD 1, November 2022].

Other participant asserted that they have lack of knowledge about child health, lactating and pregnant mothers' health. They need to be well trained to work on this issue [FGD 1, November 2022]. We have witnessed a consensus among faith leaders that there are no religious values that refrain women from accessing health facilities. Rather, all agreed to the point that saving life is greater than any good works on the surface of the earth. Muslim faith leaders cited from the Quran and the hadith on ensuring child health.

No other milk is as good than colostrum for the children. The mother's milk is of such prime importance in the eyes of Islam that when she feeds her child on it, she is earning rewards for the Hereafter. The Prophet of Islam has said that as many times as a mother suckles her milk to the child, so many times Allah's reward to her will be equivalent to freeing a slave from the tribe of Ismail. When she reached the weaning stage, an Angel would put his hand on the arm of the mother and say,' start your life afresh that your past sins have been pardoned!' [FGD 5, November 2022].

Muslim faith leaders also cited from the Quran that "The mothers shall give suck to their children for two whole years, (that is) for those (parents) who desire to complete the term of suckling . . ." [al-Baqarah 2:233] [FGD 5, November 2022]. Thus, the well-established rights of the children are protected by the Quran. Muslim faith leaders also cited from another hadith that suggests that due to mother's caring role Allah has increased her respect three times than a father. Abu Huraira reported: A man asked the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, "Who is most deserving of my good company?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked, "Then who?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked again, "Then who?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked again, "Then who?" The Prophet said, "Your father." (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 5626, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2548) [FGD 6, November 2022]. Different Islamic scholars have also suggested similar respect for mother for her role in children's life (for details see Mostofa, 2012; 2014; 2015; 2017).

Sub-theme 4.2: The role of faith leaders that determine children's access to health and nutrition

Whether the faith leaders should be engaged to enhance children's access to health and nutrition. In response to such an inquiry 60% of the survey respondents replied 'YES' but only 40% respondents 'NO'. We also measured the experience of the faith community the extent to what degree the faith leaders are available in providing services in the cases of improving health and nutrition of pregnant and lactating mothers and new-born children. The response is not satisfactory. Because only 38% of the respondents experienced (or witnessed) the faith leaders' role in this regard despite the community people think of their engagement as crucial.
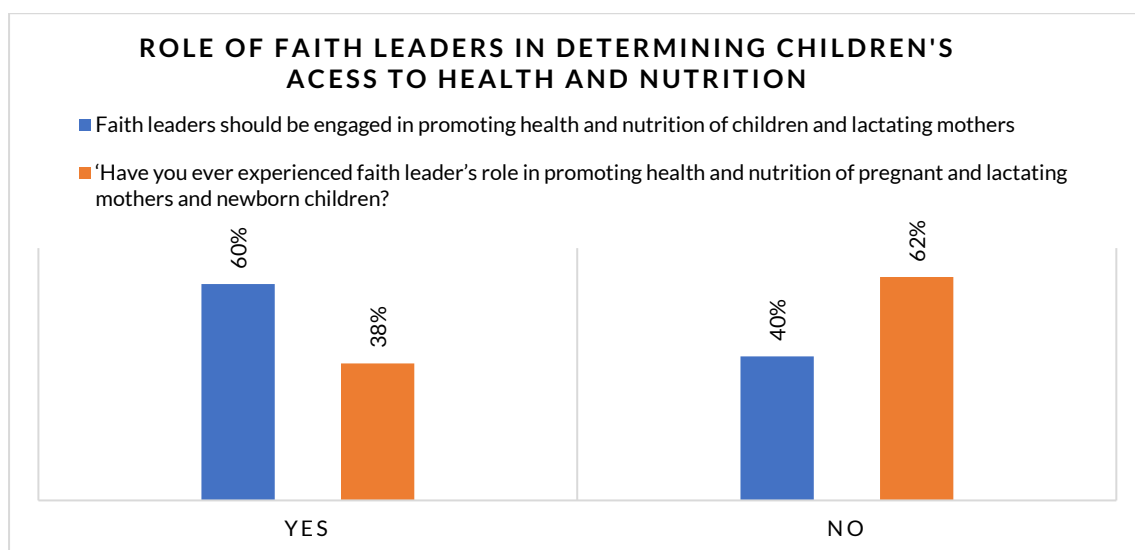

ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS IN DETERMINING CHILDREN'S ACESS TO HEALTH AND NUTRITION

■ Faith leaders should be engaged in promoting health and nutrition of children and lactating mothers

■ 'Have you ever experienced faith leader's role in promoting health and nutrition of pregnant and lactating mothers and newborn children?

Figure 7. Faith leaders' role in ensuring children's access to health and nutrition
(N=200).

However, qualitative interview and FGD data disclosed kind of reverse findings pertaining to maternity and sexuality issues. The faith leaders feel shy in promoting awareness especially about care of a lactating mothers and gynaecological aspects. Though the non-Muslims KIIs brought many examples of religious traditions like better services in the community clinics and hospitals, teaching health care values, religious instructions pertaining to good habits, and care to the children and mothers' heath in maintaining good practices during pregnancy and period, Muslim

KIIs are reluctant in this regard. But, to a smaller extent, they are building awareness through religious sermons only.

THEME 5: Engaging faith leaders in children well-being

Sub theme 5.1: Effectiveness of engaging faith leaders in children well-being

Religion is one of the oldest institutions that dictates social and moral values (Parsons, 1974). Agreeing to Parsons, World Vision (2012) suggests that religious beliefs and principles have powerful influences on or shape individual's behaviours and community actions (Legros and Cislashi, 2020). World Vision (2022) further suggests.

Faith plays a vital role in our world. More than 85 per cent of the world is religious and faith leaders are the most trusted in many places. We work with people of all faiths and none because we believe God can work through all people to achieve His purposes.

To achieve purposes, faith leaders are most trusted people in society. Thus, to World Vision, faith leaders should be engaged in development works. UNDP also accepts the encompassing role of faith leaders. UNDP (2017) statement runs as follows.

Faith matters to people and matters to development. In many parts of the world, faith-based organizations (FBOs) and religious leaders (RLs) are influential in both the political and social spheres and have a broad following in society. Their presence in local communities, coupled with their capacity to deliver critical services, allow them to mobilize grassroots support, earn the trust of vulnerable groups, and influence cultural norms - all of which make them vital stakeholders in development.

From UNDP's statement, it is clear how important is the role of faith leaders in development. UNFPA also suggests similar standpoints. However, they offer a bit different guideline to engage faith leaders. UNDP (2015) suggests that first and foremost thing is that we have to take an approach of impartiality by engaging leaders from all faiths, and transparency by appointing a neutral press spokesperson. The next step is to build mutual trust and respect by demonstrating respect for all faiths and fractions. The most important point is to find an entry point of partnering with faith leaders, for example poverty reduction. This will lead to finding common ground. The target of this stage is to normalize both groups, i. e. UNDP and faith group, by UNDP adopting more religious languages and faith groups using more secular languages. In the final stage, programme design and priorities have to be set based on demography of the region to maximize impact based upon on each partner's assets.

On the other hand, UNFPA (2007) involves faith leaders based on five principles. Their engagement has to be issue-based and strategic. Secondly, a level playing field has to be created between UNFPA and diverse faith groups. Third, diversity of outreach has to be confirmed. The outreach has to be multi-faith and balanced according to the religious diversity within the community. Fourth, clarity, accountability and consistency have to ensured. The outcome of the join programme has to be clearly stated, which every partner strive to achieve. Finally, UNFPA divides the world into two regions to work differently. For South-South countries (Africa, Arab States, Asia and Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Carribean), there is much scope for knowledge sharing, creation of knowledge networks, and the strengthening of alliances. For global perspectives, "there is much to be said for a continuous feedback loop where the national, regional and the global/international enrich one another.

For all these reasons, in the sub-Saharan context, a report published in 2006 provided empirical evidence that people showed more trust to faith-based organizations than to their national governments (Tortora, 2007). This survey report empirically suggests that faith leaders have an enormous role in setting community behaviour. This finding led USAID (2021, p.1) to claim that "it is important to engage faith leaders effectively when looking to shift community norms to support behaviour change for improved health and well-being." Our research has also similarly found the importance of engaging faith leaders who can reasonably contribute improving children well-being. A development expert working in an INGO expressed his experience working with faith leaders in the following way.

Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country, where Islam dictates everything of a day-to-day life and Islam is considered as the complete code of life (according to the holly Qurán), which includes their social, political, cultural, and economic life. When religion or religious norms and values become a guiding source, faith leaders have an extraordinary role to play to ensure welfare for children (Interview No 19, December 2022).

Manpower logistics are considered as key drivers (Clare,1984) which play an effective role to implement any policy objective. An interviewee perfectly explained such a crucial issue that why faith leaders can play a major role in ensuring children well-being from this point of view:

Look at their [faith leaders] network, they are available at every corner of the country. Even in some rural areas or islands where there are no state organizations but has Mosques and Madrassas. So, their network is in many ways bigger than many state organizations. Another thing is that people flock to faith leaders in times of crisis and happiness especially in times of their any achievement, marriage, birth, death, and puberty ceremonies. Faith leaders psychologically boost up in times of their crises. So, they have fundamental and emotional connections with the masses with their strong support bases. That is why, faith leaders need to be employed to improve child related development (Interview No 18, December 2022).

Almost in a similar view a faith leader who participated in a FGD narrated their accessibility to the society are sketched below:

Mass people rely on us on many issues about their daily lives. They seek guidance from us when they plan to get married, celebrate birth related customs, and perform funeral rituals. Apart from these, they also seek religious principles and practices (Fatwa) on many family affairs (e.g., use of contraceptives, divorce issues, child marriage issues, taking loans on interests, and the like day to day life issues). They seek advice on what kind of activity is supported by religion. So, we are deeply connected with the masses (FGD 2, November 2022).

Sheikh (2006) found positive association of trust between faith community and faith leaders in the context of Pakistan. He argues: "Religious leaders in Islam are highly respected individuals; they are approached by community members on matters dealing with all aspects of daily life according to the teachings of Islam" (p. 319). Thus, it appears that faith leaders are so deeply connected with the masses, and they act like a guiding source in the community. USAID (2021) suggests that faith leaders are the key influencers and social power holder and can be champions bringing positive changes in the society. Some experts opine that if faith leaders are well trained, they can successfully contribute to achievement of children well-being in Bangladesh, because,

in general, religions are so sympathetic towards children and urges its follower to be kind with children. A high official of an NGO said:

We have engaged faith leaders in the Northern Part of Bangladesh to help improve conditions of orphanage children. Their response is so positive now they are working with us shoulder to shoulder. Faith leaders are providing support to the orphanage children. They only need bit financial support to carry out the work. With this little support, they are happy to work for the welfare of children [Interview No. 12, November 2022].

While we were conducting expert interviews, surveys in the community, and FGDs with faith leaders, all have expressed opinion that faith leaders' engagement should be continued with some improvisations to ensure sustained children well-being. It is to be noted that none of them has disagreed with the involvement of the faith leaders to this case. Issues of their connections with the masses, their widespread network, power to interpret the holy books' texts, and shaping daily behaviours are well identified by the interviewees. They see it an effective way to ensure child rights and children well-being. In addition, many interviewees opined and even alarmed that if their engagements are withdrawn, the present progress of children well-being would be at stuck.

Sub-theme 5.2: Challenges of engaging faith leaders in children well-being

In the previous section, it has been discussed very widely about the effectiveness of engaging faith leaders in ensuring children well-being. However, engaging faith leaders without proper training and purpose might bring some challenges too. Ahmed (2009) contends that Islamic clerics are historically less meritorious because the well-off families do not invest in Islamic scholarship due to colonial introduction of secular education. From this statement, two things are clear; the first is they are not well-educated as well as meritorious, which suggests that they lack critical understanding about certain phenomena, thereby boosting their bigotry and dogmatism. The second is that they are not well-off and thus they face persistent economic challenges. These two issues have also come out from our expert opinions. One source interviewee shared his experience working with faith leaders.

Our Maulanas, Imams and madrassa teachers are brought up in a certain way. They are neither taught Bengali culture properly nor the Western one. They are educated in Arabic. Arabic culture and language have more influences on them. They see things in Bangladeshi culture in Arabic contrast and they all the time seek to transform it into Saudi culture. This is how their brain is shaped and modified. In the long process, they lack analytical power. Therefore, you must think twice to engage them in children well-being, especially when issues of child marriage and co-education are concerned. But this problem can be overcome by providing them rigorous training emphasising updated knowledge [Interview 16, October 2022].

Another interviewee goes further to advise that if they are not well trained there is a possibility that they might use this network as well to proceed with their hidden agenda or more specifically their political agenda. The point we discussed above that our faith leaders are not economically well-off. They have financial challenges. This financial challenge might restrict them from working for children well-being. But a significant number of interviewees suggest that this challenge can easily be overcome by offering them a decent honorarium. This small financial

assistance 'will boost them dramatically' – as an expert interviewee added specially (Interview 8, October 2022). Several NGOs, especially World Vision and Islamic Relief have already engaged faith leaders in some development issues. They have also faced series of challenges to ensure children well-being. One of the faith leaders shared his experience of a challenged he faced in FGD, and others agreed. He shared his engaged experience as below:

We are already trained through attending frequent workshops especially on how to ensure children well-being, how to protect violence against women, and how to live a healthy life restricting child marriage and ensuring child education. Faith leaders are convinced that this is their moral and professional duty to preach them and help government and other NGOs to achieve those goals which do not contradict with religious principles. For instance, Islam believes in equal opportunities and a better life for all, this is our religious duty too to preach those issues of human development. But the problem is with our society as it is not yet ready to accept wholeheartedly faith leaders talking about these issues of daily life, which are not directly connected with religion. Sometimes, we witness a nominal extent of suspicion within society the community people that why Imams talk about such non-religious issues they might be paid by the government or NGOs [FGD 8, November 2023].

So, it appears that faith leaders working on these social vital issues are disliked by a section of population. Their understanding is that faith leaders should only deal with religious practices and spiritual issues. These claims are almost like those of Martin Luther's claim that clergies should deal with spiritual matters, not with issues of temporal matters (Luther, 1970). Faith leaders extrapolate varieties of challenges arises that arise when they approach restricting child marriages. In most cases, child marriages are happening due to social and economic insecurity as viewed by the faith leaders. The summary of the FGDs hinted on many crucial aspects. **First**, when child marriages are attempted to be restricted by us, they move on to other neighbouring convenient places to get them married, because all faith leaders are not equally conscious about the downsides of child marriage and motivated and trained. **Second**, even if we restrict them, they go to the court with fake birth certificate and court get them married. These two kinds of things put indirect pressure on us. **Third**, when we approach child marriages incidences, they become dissatisfied with us. Sometimes, they seek help from local political leaders, local goons, or local elected members to get their sons or daughters married. These people put a lot of pressures on our duties. Our job is not secured by any contract or government regulations, but these people have power to insecure our job opportunity. Often, we face these types of problems.

While they were facing above challenges to ensure children well-being. They have not faced issues ensuring violence against children, and child education. The reason they put forward is that these are strictly prohibited by the state laws and regulations and are slowly becoming part of social ethos. Even though child marriage is protected by law, it has some grey areas such as economic insecurity, and fake birth certificate. The other issue that is child health, menstruation related health issues, and issues of lactating mother are still bit sensitive and often considered as taboo in the eyes of faith leaders. Differing to this opinion, another faith leader argued that these days people are more conscious than us about child health and child education. They do not seek suggestions from us on these issues.

Sub-theme 5.3: Ways to overcome the identified challenges

We have also attempted to understand the whole dynamics of challenges that faith leaders faced during and after their work of ensuring children well-being and discussed how to get rid of those challenges. The challenge we find that they are less meritorious/educated and (or) less critical due to madrassas are less attracted to meritorious people or well-off families. Solutions are also suggested by experts, FGDs, and KIIs. Madrassa curriculum can be updated introducing modern education and better interpretation of those issues. This is how, it may attract some elites or meritorious intakes to this education system [FGD 2, November 2022]. Religious bigotry is another issue. This can also be overcome through up-gradation of education system.

Madrassa education is devoid of Bengali culture. It focuses more on Saudi culture. Therefore, a massive change is required in accordance with local traits and customs. For instance, Bengali culture and its social ethos, and modern knowledge base including science and technology need to be included in Madrassa curriculum. That will make them liberal to understand the society and the world views [Interview No. 19, December 2022].

Another challenge put forward by an expert that faith leaders might use the newly acquired network to expand their hidden agendas. He also recommended a solution that faith leaders can be employed at ad hoc basis in a certain area initially to look at whether they are going to misuse this opportunity. And the long-term solution can be based on outcome of the given ad hoc implementation activities [Interview No. 18, December 2022]. It is also observed that the whole society is not yet ready to accept the increasing role of faith leaders in ensuring children well-being. Faith leaders have suggested that this number is very few and are confident that once they all will start working together, society will slowly accept these increasing roles of faith leaders.

However, preventing child marriage has been challenged for several serious reasons which require some adaptive initiatives. So far, very few faith leaders are sufficiently trained, and they found no avenues to modify their understanding. Suppose religions like Islam and Hinduism do not prohibit and restrict child marriage by any religious scriptures. Faith leaders, in general, do not find child marriage as an anti-religious. Sometimes, they accept it happily in exchange of some financial incentives. As they are not well trained on how child marriage will incur mental and physical health issues, they do it without hesitation. Therefore, one dominant theme that we came to isolate from the qualitative data is to provide massive training on negative effects of child marriage to faith leaders.

Many experts recommended to upgrade Bangladesh's legal system – e.g., bringing an end to providing fake birth certificates. At times, the faith leaders are challenged with external pressures coming from influential locals in the time of intervening child marriage incidences. So, if the wrongdoers are brought to the court of justice including the political power misusers, the faith leaders are expected to be engaged in ensuring child protection and children well-being more effectively [FGD 3,5, and 8, November 2022]. Two more issues raised by the faith leaders participated in the FGDs are to be considered as crucial. They argued that majority of the faith leaders are challenged with financial crises. Faith leaders are often found to be feared of losing jobs. So, the suggested that if government established a kind of control over their appointment that would secure their jobs, and thereby, they would be able to work more efficiently and

confidently in accordance with the guideline of government. If they are offered reasonable financial support, this will boost them up to work for these social issues [FGD, 2, November 2022]. If they are physically engaged in development works with the mainstream stakeholders, this might increase their empowerment and credibility to the community people which in turn would have much impactful. For instance, one of the faith leaders argued in a way that –

When the World Vision is giving a cow or a goat to a beneficiary as a part of their poverty alleviation project or hunger free project, they could involve us in the process. They can do their work by involving us. We should not influence their selecting criteria. But, when they hand over the cow or goat or whatever they give, they should give them through our hands. This will empower us to eye of the society people. That will give us a kind of acceptability that faith leaders are involved in this works. When time comes these layman and women will be on our side and they will happily listen to us. Unfortunately, this is not happening. World Vision wants us to speak in a certain way, but they don't involve us in their development works [FGD 1, November 2022].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed to assess to what extent socio-religious and cultural values affect children well-being and what role faith leaders are playing to promote/demote children well-being. To come up to a conclusion, we conducted 200 surveys with masses of four locations in Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Barisal, and Coxs Bazar, 20 Key Informant Interviews, and eight Focus Group Discussions with faith leaders of Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists. Findings suggest that child marriage is still a silent problem for children well-being Bangladesh. Due to several reasons, these malpractices still exist in Bangladesh. The issues regarding social and economic insecurity both convergently and divergently evolved as premier reasons responsible for child marriages. Social insecurity and economic vulnerability push reasonably poor families to allow their children (mainly girls) to get married at the earlier stage. Another reason we unveiled that child boys and girls are getting married by themselves based on their loving relationships with opposite sexes. It is happening due to extensive use of technology-ridden social media. So called modernization and liberalization affecting teenagers' lifestyle negatively. Moreover, religious values and principles are not found that responsible for child marriage incidences though very few consider child marriage as religiously legal. Violence against children is another cardinal issue that we examined under this study. The findings did not convince to say that social and religious values have influences on violence against children. Rather the absence of application of rule of law against the perpetrators for committing violence against children are found responsible for this kind of unlawful occurrences. But, in precise, it is worth mentioning that our socio-cultural and religious environment allows sometimes to punish children slightly to compel them obedient.

Child education is a fundamental child right. Bangladeshi laws protected child education and made it free and compulsory. Bangladesh has made remarkable progress on this stance. Religious and social values are also found in favour of it. Two things are needed to mention here. First, while all religions ensure education for all irrespective of gender, co-education is highly criticised mainly by the Muslim faith leaders. Second, most of the respondents invariably found to put priority on religious education over secular one. Access to child health care facilities is another important factor for ensuring children well-being. Our study has not been found any social and religious values and practices that restrict them from accessing health services. But what is crucial is that still there are social taboo and prejudice to share gynaecological issues with friends, teachers, and others apart from parents. This means that the girls still have a kind of shyness to get access to these facilities. Similarly, we have found a kind of shyness and unreadiness amongst those of the faith leaders in talking about gynaecological health issues. This study also revealed that a few NGOs are working engaging faith leaders to promote children well-being. Some faith leaders are well trained and motivated, while majority of them are not, because of the limited scope of their engagement. The problem is faith leaders' role is still confined to awareness building only through providing lecture in the religious sermons and in the Madrassas. Much participatory engagement has not yet kicked off. Their potentials have not yet fully utilized. Both data types convinced to say that faith leaders who are uniquely placed in terms of bridged trust between society and faith leaders. So, they are relevant to improve children well-being in many ways. Faith leaders are reasonably influenced by scriptural texts and aim to both live and preach in accordance with their teachings. They are also affected by the

prevailing social norms. For faith leaders to effect change and enable social norm shifts in their congregations, it is important for them to first reflect on their own personal attitudes and how these align with key scriptural teachings. To utilize their full potentials, we need to improve the numbers of faith leaders creating some more scopes, provide them job security, economic incentives, social empowerment by engaging them in development works, and massive training. Printing materials like manuals on different issues can also be distributed among masses to get built awareness.

References

1. Adamson, P. (2007). Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries. Innocenti Report Card 7. UNICEF.
2. Ahmed, I. (2009). Terrorism in the 21st century: Perspectives from Bangladesh. Dhaka: University Press Limited.
3. Akrami, F., Zali, A., & Abbasi, M. (2022). Entanglement of the Rights of the Child, Well-being, and Justice: A Conceptual Framework for Child Protection and Well-being. Int J Med Toxicol Forensic Med, 12(2), 36827.
4. Amin, S., & Hossain, S. (1994). Women's reproductive rights and the politics of fundamentalism: a view from Bangladesh. Am. UL Rev., 44, 1319.
5. Anitha, S., & Gill, A. K. (2011). Reconceptualising consent and coercion within an intersectional understanding of forced marriage. Forced Marriage. Introducing a social justice and human rights perspective, 46-66.
6. Annis, A., and Rodger R. (2002). "A Survey of Abuse Prevalence in the Christian Reformed Church." Journal of Religion & Abuse 3:7–40.
7. Anthony, D. (2011) Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity. The State of the World's Children 2011, New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).
8. Anthoine, E., Moret, L., Regnault, A., Sébille, V., & Hardouin, J. B. (2014). Sample size used to validate a scale: a review of publications on newly developed patient reported outcomes measures. Health and quality of life outcomes, 12(1), 1-10.
9. Axford, N. (2009). Child well-being through different lenses: why concept matters. Child & Family Social Work, 14(3), 372-383.
10. Barai, B., Rezaei, M., Nadrian, H., & Matlabi, H. (2023). What Socio-Cultural Factors Encourage Child Marriage in Sanandaj, Iran? A Qualitative Study. Child & Youth Services, 1-22.
11. Blum, U., & Dudley, L. (2001). Religion and economic growth: was Weber right? *Journal of evolutionary economics, 11*(2), 207-230.
12. Birdsall, D., & Brown, L. (2011). *The Cape Town commitment: A confession of faith and a call to action*. Hendrickson Publishers.
13. Bullen, P. B., & Brack, T. (2014). How to choose a sample size (for the statistically challenged). *Www. tools4dev, tool4dev, www. tools4dev. org/resources/how-to-choosea-sample-size*.
14. Chaudhuri, A. (1957). Child health—Concepts old and new. The Indian Journal of Pediatrics, 24(8), 251-253.
15. Child Education Law and Legal Definition | USLegal, Inc. (n.d.). Retrieved January 8, 2023, from https://definitions.uslegal.com/c/child-education/
16. Clare, A. (1984). Book Review: Madness and Government: Who Cares for the Mentally Ill?.
17. Clarke, Gerard (2008) 'Faith-Based Organizations and International Development: An Overview', in Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings (eds), Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 17–45.
18. Comrey, A. L., & Lee, H. B. (1992). Interpretation and application of factor analytic results. *Comrey AL, Lee HB. A first course in factor analysis, 2,* 1992.

19. Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention (1999: Geneva, S., Team, W. H. O. V. and I. P., & Research, G. F. for H. (1999). Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention, 29-31 March 1999, WHO, Geneva (WHO/HSC/PVI/99.1). World Health Organization. https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/65900

20. Denulin, S. and Bano, M. (2009). Religion in Development: Rewriting the Secular Script. London: Zed Books.

21. DFID (2009) Eliminating World Poverty: Building Our Common Future, White Paper, London: Department for International Development.

22. Dhaka Tribune (2022) Census 2022: Number of Muslims increased in the country, available at https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2022/07/27/census-2022-number-of-muslims-increased-in-the-country

23. Duff, Jean, and Warren Buckingham. 2015. "Strengthening of Partnerships Between the Public Sector and Faith-Based Groups." The Lancet 386: 1786–1794.

24. Eade, Deborah (2002) Preface, in Deborah Eade (ed.) Development and Culture, Oxford: Oxfam GB in Association with World Faiths Development Dialogue, pp. ix–xiv.

25. Elezaj, E., Ramful, N., Cebotari, V., & Neubourg, C. D. (2019). *Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Child well-being in Ethiopia*. UNICEF.

26. End Violence Against Children. 2020. "Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children." https://www.end-violence.org/.

27. End Corporal Punishment. 2020. "The 2006 Kyoto Declaration." http://endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/key-docs/Kyotodeclaration-2006.pdf.

28. Ettinger, A. S. (2004). Children's Health, the Nation's Wealth: Assessing and Improving Child Health. Environmental Health Perspectives, 112(14), A844-A844.

29. Flanigan, S.T. (2010). For the Love of God: NGOs and Religious Identity in a Violent World. USA: Kumarian Press.

30. Fountain, P. (2015). Proselytizing Development. In: Tomalin, E. ed. The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development. London: Routledge. pp. 80-98.

31. Freud, S. 1925a/1961. An Autobiographical Study. In: Strachey, J. (ed.) The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. 20. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 1-74.

32. Freud, S. 1925b/1961. Preface to Aichhorn's Wayward Youth. In: Strachey, J. (ed.) The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. 19. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 271-276.

33. Freud, S. 1933/1961. New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. In: Strachey, J. (ed.) The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. 22. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 1-182.

34. Freud, S. 1937/1961. Analysis Terminable and Interminable. In: Strachey, J. (ed.) The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. 23. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 209-254.

35. Fröbel, F. (1886). The Education of Man. A. Lovell & Company.

36. Hackett, C., Grim, B., Stonawski, M., Skirbekk, V., Potančoková, M., & Abel, G. (2012). The global religious landscape. *Washington, DC: Pew Research Center*.

37. Haynes, J. (2007). Religion and Development: The Ambivalence of the Sacred. In *Religion and Development* (pp. 53-74). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

38. Herbert, L. (2021, August 26). The Erik Erikson Education Approach. London School of Childcare Studies. https://childcarestudies.co.uk/2021/08/26/the-erik-erikson-education-approach/#:~:text=What%20Was%20His%20Educational%20Theory

39. Hunnicutt, G. (2009). Varieties of patriarchy and violence against women: Resurrecting "patriarchy" as a theoretical tool. *Violence against women*, 15(5), 553-573.

40. Islam, M. D. (2018). The Role of Faith Based Organizations in Development: A Critical Analysis. Philosophy and Progress, 81-108.

41. Kanykey Jailobaeva, Karin Diaconu, Alastair Ager & Carola Eyber (2021) Child Protection Practices and Attitudes of Faith Leaders Across Senegal, Uganda, and Guatemala, The Review of Faith & International Affairs, 19:1, 95-110, DOI: 10.1080/15570274.2021.1874131

42. Khoo, E. (2010). Early Childhood Risk, Protection and Abuse Prevention.

43. Krob, D. B., & Steffen, L. (2015). Religious influence on education and culture: violence against women as common sense. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 174, 2374-2379.

44. Laliberté, A. (2015). Religion and development in China. In The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development (pp. 247-263). Routledge.

45. Legros S, Cislaghi B. (2020). Mapping the Social-Norms Literature: An Overview of Reviews. Perspect Psychol Sci;15(1):62–80. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31697614

46. Luther, M. (1970). *Three treatises*. Fortress Press.

47. Marshall, Katherine and Keough, Lucy (eds) (2004) Mind, Heart and Soul in the Fight against Poverty, Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.

48. Marshall, K., and Marsh, R. (2003). Millennium Challenges for Development and Faith Institutions, Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.

49. Marshall, K., and Van S., M. (2007). Development and Faith: Where Mind, Heart, and Soul Work Together, Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.

50. Marshall, K., & Keough, L. (2005). *Finding global balance: Common ground between the worlds of development and faith* (Vol. 41181, No. 4). World Bank Publications.

51. McCleary, R., & Barro, R. (2003). *Religion and economic growth across countries* (No. 3708464).

52. Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs (2000). The constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Dhaka, Bangladesh: BG Press.

53. Ministry of Social Welfare (2001). The Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act 2001. Dhaka, Bangladesh: BG Press.

54. Mostofa, S. M. (2012) Position of Women in Islam and Sikhism: A Comparative Study, the Faculty Journal.

55. Mostofa, S. M. (2014) Gender Equality in Islam: A Critical Analysis, The Dhaka University studies.

56. Mostofa, S. M. (2015) Rights and Responsibilities of Family Members in Different Religions: A Comparative Study, International Journal of Recent Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (IJRRSSH).

57. Mostofa, S. M. (2017). Legal and Moral Rights and Responsibilities of Family Members in Islam: An Analysis| ইসলামে পরিবারের সদস্যদের আইনগত এবং নৈতিক অধিকার এবং কর্তব্য: একটি পর্যালোচনা. ইসলামী আইন ও বিচার| Islami Ain O Bichar, 13(50), 195-214.

58. Mligo, E. S. (2020). The power of silence in marriage: a gender-based reading of John 4: 1–11. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, *6*(1), 71-87.

59. Nations, U. (2011). The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence. Refworld. https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e6da4922.html

60. Occhipinti, L.A. (2015). Faith-based Organizations and Development. In: Tomalin, E. ed. The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development. London: Routledge. pp. 331-345

61. Osorio, J., Carlos P., and Wodon, Q. (2014). Faith-Based Schools in Latin America: Case Studies on Fe Y Alegria, Washington, DC: World Bank, https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/16375 (accessed 8 June 2014)

62. Palm, S., and Carola E. (2019). Why Faith? Engaging Faith Mechanisms to End Violence Against Children. Briefing Paper. Washington, DC: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities. Ending Violence Against Children Hub. https://jliflc.com/resources/why-faith-engaging-faith-mechanisms-to-end-violence-against-children/

63. Parsons, T. (1974). Religion in post-industrial America: the problem of secularization. *Social Research*, 193-225.

64. Pollard, E. L., & Lee, P. D. (2003). Child well-being: A systematic review of the literature. Social indicators research, 61(1), 59-78.

65. Raikes, A., Hirokazu Y., Pia R. B., and Iheoma I. (2017). "Children, Youth and Developmental Science in the 2015–2030 Global Sustainable Development Goals." Social Policy Report 30: 1–23.

66. Robbins, J. (2014). How Do Religions End?: Theorizing Religious Traditions from the Point of View of How They Disappear. The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology, 32(2), 2-15.

67. Robinson, M., and Stephen H. (2014). "Engaging Religious Communities to Protect Children from Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation: Partnerships Require Analysis of Religious Virtues and Harms." Child Abuse and Neglect 38: 600–611.

68. Rude-Antoine, E. (2005). Forced marriages in Council of Europe member states: A comparative study of legislation and political initiatives. Directorate general of human rights.

69. Rutledge, K., and Carola E. (2019). Scoping Study on Faith Actors' Involvement in the Prevention, Elimination, and Perpetuation of Violence Against Children: Literature Review. Washington, DC: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities. Ending Violence Against Children Hub. https://jliflc.com/resources/evac-literature-review/

70. Sheikh, K. M. (2006). Involving Religious Leaders in Conservation Education in the Western Karakorum, Pakistan, Mountain Research and Development, 26(4) : 319-322.

71. Tomalin, E (2015). Introduction. In *The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.

72. Tomalin, E. (2013). Religions and Development. London: Routledge.

73. Tortora, B. (2007). Africans' Confidence in Institutions: Which Country Stands Out? Gallup World, accessed on 23 December 2023, http://www.gallup.com/poll/26176/africans-confidence-institutions-which-country-stands-out.aspx

74. UNDP (2015). UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders. https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-guidelines-engaging-faith-based-organizations-and-religious-leaders. (Accessed on 06 March 2023).

75. UNDP (2017). UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders. https://www.comminit.com/global/content/undp-guidelines-engaging-faith-based-organizations-and-religious-leaders (Accessed on 05 March 2023).

76. UNFPA (2009). Guidelines for Engaging Faith based Organisations (Fbos) as Agents of Change. https://www.unfpa.org/resources/guidelines-engaging-faith-based-organisations-fbo-agents-change. (Accessed on 07 March 2023).

77. UNFPA (2005). Culture Matters: Working with Communities and Faith-Based Organizations: Case Studies from Country Programmes, New York: UNFPA, http://www.unfpa.org/public/publications/pid/1430 (accessed 9 July 2022).

78. UNFPA (2007). Engaging Faith-Based Organizations in HIV Prevention, New York: UNFPA, http://www.unfpa.org/public/global/pid/398 (accessed 9 July 2022).

79. UNFPA (2008) Culture Matters: Lessons from a Legacy of Engaging Faith-Based Organizations, New York: UNFPA, http://www.unfpa.org/public/pid/1353 (accessed 9 July 2022).

80. UNICEF Bangladesh (2021). Children in Bangladesh, available at https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/children-bangladesh

81. UNICEF (2010). From Commitment to Action: What Religious Communities Can Do to Eliminate Violence Against Children. New York: UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/protection/What_Religious_Communities_can_do_to_Eliminate_Violence_against_Children__(UNICEF_Religions_for_Peace_Guide).pdf.

82. UNICEF, 2011, Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation and Abuse Report

83. UNICEF (2014). Child protection from violence, exploitation and abuse.

84. Unicef (2015). Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence against Children [Working Paper]. eSocialSciences. https://econpapers.repec.org/paper/esswpaper/id_3a7925.htm

85. USAID (2021). Powerful Partnerships: Engaging Faith Leaders in Norms-Shifting Interventions, accessed on 4 January 2023, https://www.irh.org/resource-library/engaging-faith-leaders/

86. Ver Beek, Kurt (2000) 'Spirituality: A Development Taboo', Development in Practice 10 (1): 31–43.

87. Walker, J. A. (2015). Engaging Islamic opinion leaders on child marriage: Preliminary results from pilot projects in Nigeria. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs, 13*(3), 48-58.

88. Ward, Catherine, Matthew Sanders, Frances Gardner, Christopher Mikton, and Andrew Dawes. (2016). "Preventing Child Maltreatment in Low and Middle-Income Countries." Child Abuse and Neglect 54: 97–107.

89. Wessells, M. (2015). "Bottom-up Approaches to Strengthening Child Protection Systems: Placing Children, Families, and Communities at the Center." Child Abuse and Neglect 43: 8–21.

90. Wilkinson, Olivia, Bibiane van Mierlo, and Susanna Trotta. (2018). Faith and Positive Change for Children: Global Initiative on Social and Behavior Change. Literature and Evidence Review for UNICEF. Washington, DC: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities. https://jliflc.com/resources/fpcc-info-brief/

91. White, E. G. (1903). Education. Pacific Press Publishing Company.

92. Wodon, Quentin (2014) Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Comparing Faith-Inspired, Private Secular, and Public Schools, World Bank Studies, Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.

93. Wodon, Q. (2015). "Islamic Law, Women's Rights, and State Law: The Cases of Female Genital Cutting and Child Marriage." The Review of Faith & International Affairs 13 (3): 81–91.

94. World Health Organization (WHO), (2020). Violence against children. Who.int; World Health Organization: WHO. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children

95. World Vision (2010). Faith Leaders, making a difference on the frontlines, accessed on 2 January 2022, https://www.wvi.org/hidden-hero/role-faith-leaders

96. World Vision (2012). ENGAGING FAITH LEADERS IN FAMILY PLANNING: A Review of the Literature plus Resources, accessed on 4 January 2023, https://www.worldvision.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Engaging-Faith-Leaders-in-Family-Planning.pdf

97. World Vision (2022). Faith is at the heart of everything we do. https://www.wvi.org/role-faith (Accessed on 05 March 2023).

98. World Vision (2015). Having faith in development: Why faith is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, accessed on 3 January 2023, https://www.wvi.org/united-nations-and-global-engagement/article/having-faith-development-why-faith-key-achieving

99. হোসেন, মনজুর (2021). শিশুস্বাস্থ্য সুরক্ষায় যত কুসংস্কার (Superstitions in child health protection). দৈনিক যুগান্তর। https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/features/stay- (accessed 05/03/2023).