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Changing Norms about Gender Inequality in Education:

Evidence from Bangladesh

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Abstract

Using a recent household survey for two cohorts of married women, this paper examines norms about gender equality in education for children and adults. Among the main findings are that gender education gap norms have changed: younger generations of women are more positive about female vs. male education, both as pertaining to child and adult education outcomes. Perhaps the strongest result is that Bangladeshi women are more likely to espouse attitudes of gender equality in education for their children and less so about gender equality among spouses. It is also easier to explain norms regarding children's education and more difficult to explain norms about equality in marriages. The authors believe that question on relative education of boys and girls captures the value of education per se, while the question on educational equality in marriage captures the norms regarding marriage and the relative worth of husbands and wives. The effect of education in determining norms is significant though complex, and spans own and spousal education, as well as that of older females in the household. This indicates sharing of education norms effects or externalities arising from spousal education in the production of gender education gap norms within marriage as well as arising from the presence of older educated females in the household. Lastly, the authors also find associations between gender education gap norms and household poverty, information processing and religion, though the evidence here is more mixed.

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Changing Norms about Gender Inequality in Education: Evidence from Bangladesh[†]

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"Earlier fathers used to say 'what is the use of educating girls….they will go to another house'. But now, fathers send both daughters and sons to school and college." School going adolescent girl, Mymensingh

" Mothers of the earlier generation used to advise their daughters to learn house-work and get education up to primary; now mothers are telling their daughters to get at least secondary school certificate". School going adolescent boy, Satkhira

Source: World Bank (2007)

Social norms and attitudes are often an indicator of social trends and the demand for various goods and services. They are also often pointers to the trajectory of social change. It is therefore not surprising that norms and attitudes have been studied by scholars for now several decades. The literature on norms and their transformation is rich in the US in particular. During the 1970s Mason et al (1976) looked at changing attitudes to women's work and their domestic roles at a time when the women's movement in the US was gaining strength and women were also entering the labor market in large numbers. This was followed by other scholars trying to assess the importance of education in changing "sex role attitudes." Still others asked how norms and values change, whether behaviors precede norms-change or vice versa.

We aim to add to this body of work by looking at change in attitudes to some aspects of gender equality in Bangladesh during a period of rapid social transformation. This work we believe is of particular significance because, while data sets in developed countries have allowed for analysis of norms and attitudes to emerge, those from developing countries have been few or restricted to small samples and to attitudes to reproductive decision-making, sex preferences for children and to violence against women. Also, for the most part the work on developing countries has focused on using

attitudes as explanatory variables for a number of outcomes, rather than outcome variables in their own right.

Drawing on the literature on change in "sex-role attitudes" from the US that documents changes in attitudes to gender equality (Mason, et al, 1976; Mason and Lu 1988; Brewster and Padavic, 2000) and a body of literature that assesses the importance of education in changing attitudes to gender inequality (Kane and Kyyro, 2001), we ask how norms to gender equality in education have changed in Bangladesh and the individual level determinants of these attitudes. While we cannot delineate clear casual pathways of change, we try to separate out the correlates of attitudes to gender equality in education. We believe this to be an important area to explore since the major part of South Asia suffers from entrenched son preference and low parental investments in girls' education. Parents do not see the value of educating girls for a number of demand and supply side reasons. This translates into poor educational outcomes for girls in absolute terms but also in relation to boys. We believe that this paper will enrich the empirical understanding on norm transformation and on some critical areas of gender inequality.

The work on education and gender norms has been addressed primarily to see if education is a liberalizing influence or a constraint on attitudes to gender equality. The results of this research are equivocal to say the least (Kane, 1995). We situate the analysis on changing attitudes on girls' education within the overall context of educational expansion in Bangladesh and the definitions of sex roles and expectations in the culture.

In the context of the coexistence of conservative gender norms and the far-reaching changes in the Bangladesh social landscape, including expansion in education

we ask the question – what has this meant for social norms and attitudes with regard to the education of girls and women? In particular – what has this meant for attitudes towards equal education between girls and boys and husbands and wives? There are several reasons why this is important. "For although attitudes may fail to influence individual behavior in many instances, marked attitude shifts in the population at large are likely to produce socio-political climates conducive to structural change" (Mason, et al: 1976:573). Montgomery (1999) also discusses the value of addressing changes in perceptions in response to actual patterns and the manner in which these perceptions can fuel further change. Thus, as populations perceive declining mortality, their effects are felt not only in their ability and willingness to regulate fertility behavior but also in the fact that social and political agency furthers the cause of better health care and increased demand for better quality care. In this case, we could argue that perceptions of greater equality among means and women in education could in turn lead to increase demand for better quality education and increased ability of women to access the labor markets, as well in terms of greater equality in marital relationships that would all have positive bearing on women's status in Bangladesh.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We first provide the contextual background for studying gender education norms for the specific case of Bangladesh. Next, we present the data and methods underlying the empirical analysis of this paper. We then present the results, whereafter we provide a section discussing the most special results from the empirical analysis in more detail. A final section concludes.

BACKGROUND

Bangladesh provides an interesting context for this analysis. The growth of education, especially secondary education for girls, has been perhaps Bangladesh's most dramatic achievement in the last two decades. Compared to other low income countries, Bangladesh stands out as a shining success story in female secondary education, along with countries such as Nicaragua, Vietnam, and some countries of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Bangladesh's success is especially commendable because the growth in female education took place within a democratic regime and started from a really low base.

What is more startling in Bangladesh is that this spectacular increase in girls' education has led to the reversal of a number of well-established patterns. First, girls gross enrollment at all levels except the highest has outstripped that of boys leading us to talk about a "boys left behind" phenomenon (World Bank, 2007; Figure 1 and Table 1). Second, there has been a dramatic increase in women who are marrying men less educated than them (Table 3, see the next section). This is a product of the marriage market where spousal age-gap has not changed much and younger cohorts of girls are more educated than the cohorts of men they marry in a strange "education squeeze."

[Figure 1 about here]

[Table 1 about here]

The growth in education and the attendant social change has probably been the most important but there are others as well. Starting from a very low base of 9 percent, female labor force participation picked up to over 22 percent during the years 1993-2003. Evocative images of hundreds of young girls walking every morning to the garment factories have been etched in the popular imagination as a metaphor for progress. Infant

mortality has dropped faster than in any other country in South Asia and gender differences in infant mortality have disappeared, unlike patterns in its neighboring countries. The total fertility rate nearly halved from 6.1 between 1971 and 2001 and the microcredit revolution sweeping the countryside has given women visibility and greater status. Better water and sanitation facilities have reduced the drudgery of mothers who now have time for other activities. An information and communication boom has accompanied use of radio, television and mobile phones. A better roads network has allowed women to move out of their villages to jobs in town through more secure modes of transport and given them greater mobility (World Bank, 2007).

The progress recounted above is not meant to undermine the serious problems that remain and new ones that are surfacing. So, while women's status has improved dramatically form the last few decades, gender inequalities in many other areas are persistent such as access to markets, political spaces and high tech services. Moreover, there are serious differences by area of residence, wealth quintiles and ethnicity. The practice of dowry is on the rise, and one of the reasons why girls are married off on average by the time they are 15 years old.

Previously we described the extent to which education has expanded in Bangladesh and the manner in which it has trumped the conservative marriage market with increasing numbers of girls compared to their mothers' generation marrying men less educated than them. Clearly then, demand for education is not only contingent on cultural reasons and has some important structural correlates. Bangladesh for the last two decades followed a concerted policy to enhance girls' education through innovative incentive schemes that provided stipends to secondary school girls for remaining in

school. NGOs too did their part in enhancing girls' education and the labor market expanded for them simultaneously during the last decade.

Despite these changes, there is a coexistence of patriarchal norms and conservative attitudes to women's roles. It is well-known that male bias in South Asia is at the core of a number of negative outcomes for women and girls. The literature documenting this and analyzing its correlates throughout the life-cycle in South Asia is rich and varied in terms of disciplinary backgrounds. The basis for this the norm is that daughters only "belong" to their natal family until they are married and parents should not live with their married daughters or accept financial help from them. This has led to the widely accepted notion that parental investments in girl children are determined by their low expected returns in the latter's old age (Cain, 1978). One key investment relates to education for girls.

Marriage of girls is central to their upbringing. The adage that women should be less educated than their husbands and in other ways less accomplished is an accepted apart of the South Asian culture. Thus, women marry "up" in a well-known practice of hypergamy – wives are thus from lower social status, caste, employment status and educational levels than their spouses. Although some ethnic minorities do not adhere to this generally accepted pattern, at the other extreme are Hindu societies which have even a ritual ratification for "marrying up" – "*anuloma*" marriages are acceptable as lower caste women can marry higher caste men but "*pratiloma*" marriages where the women's caste is higher, are ritually unacceptable. In order to cement the relationship of the husband as the enforcer of norms and familial honor, the inter-spouse age difference is also substantial and has remained quite resistant to change. Yet another reason why

educating girls at higher levels is considered pointless, is due to the high levels of dowry in South Asian cultures. While this is a singularly un-Islamic practice, it is widely prevalent in Bangladesh and from recent accounts, also on the rise (World Bank, 2007). Thus, a more educated girl requires a groom who is even more educated and accomplished, thus inflating the amount of dowry her family would have to pay for the marriage.

In other ways too, women and girls are expected to behave in "appropriate" ways. One of the key attributes of a "good Bengali girl" for instance is the notion of "shyness" or "lojja", where girls seldom speak their minds before elders and outsiders. In many conservative parts of South Asia, higher education is considered to liberate girls so much that they would have problems "adjusting" to their marital home. During focus group discussions we have found that rural populations perceive the impact of girls' education most strongly in the ability of the latter to "speak" and to shed inhibitions. This is variously considered one of the positive or negative effects of education, depending on who we are talking to (Das and Hossain, forthcoming; World Bank, 2007).

Norms of seclusion or "purdah" in Bangladesh is yet another reason often cited for low demand for girls' education. Thus, pubescent girls traveling to neighboring villages to seek secondary education is considered unacceptable and a risk to the chastity and purity of girls, who may then have problems finding suitable, respectable husbands. Other research has recently shown that not only is the "purdah mentality" prevalent in non-Islamic populations of South Asia (Lateef, 1991; Das, 2004), but even when it is practiced, it is so amorphous a concept and so tied up with acceptable notions of safety and security than when appropriate conditions exist, it is a scant constraint on girls'

education or on women's labor market participation. In fact, women and girls renegotiate these norms of seclusion when opportunities present themselves (Kabeer, 2001; World Bank, 2007).

Finally, the demand for female education in Bangladesh and other South Asian cultures is considered to be low has been due to low opportunities and returns in the labor market. Several studies on India have argued that low returns to education for women, discourage families from educating their daughters (Kingdon and Unni, 1997; Dreze and Gazdar, 1996). Where female labor is valued only in the home and the labor force participation rate in India, Bangladesh or Pakistan does not exceed 37 percent, the returns to education in the form of entry into the labor market is perceived to be low. Thus, this discussion has shown that there are both cultural and economic reasons against educating girls at higher levels, which has to a large extent been responsible for low educational attainment of girls in South Asia.

Recent qualitative work shows however that there has been a widespread change in perception about girls' education and about gender norms in general. Today, local populations take great pride in the expansion of girls' education in their areas, and in the impact they see of this on the community, on children's well-being and on women's empowerment (Das and Hossain, forthcoming). How and why did this change in perceptions about education come about? At the macro level, we argue that a supply side push for education tapped the latent demand among families of girls, which has existed despite what seem to be conservative norms and values. Once the impact of education on girls and communities became apparent, this fueled further demand. The access to new job opportunities in the garment sector and with NGOs showed families that girls can

have an economic worth as well. Globally of course, higher returns to education for women are borne out in a number of studies including Psacharopoulos' (1994) cross-country review and Schultz (1994) and from such diverse settings as Taiwan (Gindling et al, 1994), Czech Republic and Slovakia (Chase, 1997) and India (Malathy and Duraisamy, 1993; Duraisamy, 2000).

DATA AND METHODS

One of the reasons why the empirical literature on changing norms in South Asia has not progressed much is due to limited data sets that allow for such analyses. Individual questions in the Demographic and Health Surveys on attitudes to violence, fertility preferences and to individual diseases have allowed for some analysis of attitudes to these areas, but very few questions allow for an analysis of attitudes to gender inequality. We use a unique data set – the World Bank Survey on Gender Norms in Bangladesh (WBGNS) 2006, which has a number of questions on attitudes to gender equality. Our aim is to understand whether two cohorts of women display differences in gender norms with regard to education based on two questions – "should girls be equally or better educated than boys" and "should wives be equally or better educated than husbands."

The WBGNS 2006 is the first comprehensive nationally representative survey of gender norms and practices in Bangladesh. It is based on a sample adults that include married women in the 15-25 and 45-59 year age range, married male heads of households men in the 25-50 year age range, and 500 community leaders (such as Union Parishad (UP) members, Imams/Moulvis (religious leaders), primary school teachers and

Madrasah teachers). The samples were drawn in two stages. 91 clusters[1] were selected at the first stage as a subsample of the 361 clusters included in the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) of 2004. The second sampling stage selected one adult from each household. Opinion leaders were selected from among those who were resident in and around the cluster, having knowledge of and influences on the people of the cluster. On average 49 adults and 5-6 opinion leaders were interviewed in each cluster. Out of the 49 adults interviewed in a cluster, roughly 16 were married women age 15-25, 16 married women age 45-59 and 17 married men age 25-50. Interviews were conducted in April-May 2006.

We have two estimation samples: older women (1431 initial observations) and younger women (1543 initial observations). Explanatory variables are missing for some observations, which cause a drop in sample sizes for the final/effective analyses samples. Our final samples thus are: older women (1408 observations) and younger women (1534 observations). Sample drops of these magnitudes do not seem to be cause for concern regarding the representativeness of the estimation samples. The means for the analyses samples are reported in Table 2.

[Table 2 about here]

In analyzing the difference in patterns between the two cohorts of women in the sample, we capture intergenerational change. Of course, it is entirely possible that the difference could well be a function of age and life-cycle and not of cohort. That being so, we believe that once we control for a number of demographic characteristics, we do capture the effect of change over time.

[1] A cluster is a census defined village that corresponds roughly to a mouza village in rural areas and a census block (part of a mohollah) in an urban area.

We use two dependent variables in our analysis. Each of these represents an attitude to a different aspect of gender equality. The first is whether girls should be equally or better educated than boys. The second is whether wives should be equally or better educated than their husbands. The share of women favoring equal or better education of girls changed from 77.8 percent to 85.2 percent across the two cohorts, while the share of women favoring equal or better education of wives changed from 49 percent to 53.9 percent across the two cohorts (Table 2). The gender gap in educational attainment appears to have narrowed over time: the "no education" group has shrunk from 65.3 percent for the older cohort of females to 23.6 percent for the younger cohort of females (Table 2). The share of wives with less education than their husband has shrunk from 38.1 percent to 23.2 percent, while the share of wives with more education has increased from 8.2 percent to 30.2 percent (Table 3).

[Table 3 about here]

Based on the theoretical literature on the pathways to change in attitudes about gender equality discussed previously, we use a set of explanatory variables that include education, region, exposure to the media and congruity with other attitudes relating to gender equality. Our primary explanatory variable of interest is education and we define its role in several different ways. There are at least two pathways through which education interacts with attitudes. First, attitude to education can affect whether and how much education individuals get. Conversely, better education can change attitudes towards education. There are, therefore, inherent problems in establishing a causal relationship here. We can however, through the individual's education, test whether higher levels of education are associated with more liberal attitudes toward gender

equality. Some research from the US has found that this relationship between higher education and liberal attitudes is not necessarily a clear-cut one and is contingent upon a number of other factors and has different effects for different categories of individuals (Kane and Kyyro, 2001). We use an individual's educational attainment (coded as four dummies for some primary, completed primary, some secondary and secondary plus more, with no education being the reference category).

Other than the individual's education, the household level "educatedness" may also have a bearing on the attitude of individuals to gender equality. The literature on "social influence" and "social learning" in changing perceptions of mortality and fertility points to a lag between actual and perceived changes (Montgomery and Casterline, 1996). Koenig et al (2003) found in Bangladesh that when women's autonomy is an accepted part of the community culture, violence against women decreases, we would expect that higher levels of aggregate education and individuals from more educated families, especially, where female education is higher, would be more liberal in their attitudes to gender equality in education. We therefore also include spousal education as explanatory variable since a woman's own views on educational equality may well be guided by her husband's in a society that is overwhelmingly patriarchal.

Finally, for younger women we add a measure that denotes the highest education level of an older woman in the household. The literature on South Asia is replete with analyses of the manner in which older women in the household exercise control over younger women. Thus, if older sisters-in-law or the mother-in-law is more educated we would expect the family to "bring in" a more educated and enlightened daughter-in-law and thus her own attitudes would be more liberal.

We use a number of individual level demographic characteristics as control variables. These include age, a squared term for age and household wealth quintiles. We also add a measure that denotes media exposure in terms of frequency of listening to the radio. Exposure to information is a way in which norms are broken down and the literature on acceptance of family planning is replete with the importance of the media in changing attitudes and behaviors. This is especially important when the population in question is not educated. Yet another explanatory variable in our analysis is a measure of gender equality in marriage. In South Asia, eating order signifies a patriarchal hierarchy with men and elders usually eating before the rest. We believe that if wives eat with their husbands they display a form of equality in marriage and that this would to some extent affect other attitudes about marriage. In our sample the proportion of wives who say they eat with their husbands has gone up from 57.7 percent among the older cohort to 60.4 percent in the younger sample (Table 2).

Finally, we include region of residence as an indicator of cultural norms as have other studies in the past (see, for example, Mason et al, 1976). In India, it is common to use region as a proxy for conservatism and the literature on regional differences is strong (see for instance Dyson and Moore, 1989). Bangladesh, however, is all too often viewed as a homogenous entity in the development literature. One reason for this is that national data sets have limited questions that can allow for the links between norms and outcomes. Surveys that do include this information are small in scale and do not allow for national generalizations to be made. That cultural norms are regionally determined and there are more or less conservative areas is well-known. For instance, Sylhet is a region fraught with poor indicators of women's status and universally regarded as conservative. Yet, it

is also the major sending area for migrants to, for example, the UK and the Middle East. Combined with the possibility of some migrants in Dhaka ending up in key leadership positions, its collective view may be to exercise stronger influence on policy with regard to women's status.

Estimation-wise, we note the potential endogeneity problems in terms of potential reverse causality between gender education norms and the different education measures, especially that for individual attainment. The same potential issue exists for gender education norms and eating norms. However, as we do not have available in this dataset any variables that may potentially act as instruments, it does not appear feasible to try to address this problem using instrumental variables (2SLS) methods. As a result, we estimate simple probit regression must interpret any subsequent results with caution and hence not give them a causal interpretations but rather as merely reflecting associations with gender education norms. Further, so as to allow for arbitrary heteroskedasticity, the estimations will be carried out using Huber-White standard errors (Huber, 1967; White, 1980). Additionally, so as to allow for the possibility that observations are correlated within communities the standard errors are also adjusted for within-cluster correlation (Froot, 1989; Williams, 2000).

RESULTS

That girls should be equally or better educated than boys is a value that the majority of the population espouses and this has only become more common. The role of education in this is nuanced and begs the questions – whose education and what kind of education? Own education seems to confer egalitarian attitudes for older women and the effects are

strong and significant at all levels of education except the highest (possibly due to small cell sizes). Education of their spouses has no effect on older women's attitudes towards their sons and daughters relative education (Table 4). For younger women, own education matters, too, both in substantive and statistical terms. Once we add the husband's education to the model, the coefficients drop considerably in size, leaving only own secondary level education statistically significant at the .05 level (M2). Unlike for older women, younger women's attitudes to educational equality among boys and girls, therefore, is determined to a large extent by their husband's education. Brewster and Padavic (2000) also found in the US that over time the importance of education in norm construction became less strong as education became more common. As education becomes more common, other factors determine the attitudes of individuals.

[Table 4 about here]

The older woman's education has strong and statistically significant positive effects for the younger woman's attitudes to gender equality in education (M4). Thus, if an older woman in the household is more educated, younger women tend to have more egalitarian attitudes. Perhaps, families that have more educated women in the household are also families that will bring in a more educated daughter-in-law and the overall value in that household will be towards greater equality in education for boys and girls. The information variable indicated by radio exposure is important for older women but not for younger women, probably since the latter, being better educated, have other avenues for access to information. Also, younger women who eat with their husbands are also more likely to espouse more liberal attitudes towards children's relative education, suggesting that different norms and perceptions are correlated.

Region of residence is the other important determinant of women's attitudes towards educational equality for children. For older women, Barisal and Chittagong are associated with more conservative attitudes and *Sylhet with the most liberal attitudes* to educational equality for boys and girls. Barisal ceases to be a negative influence on gender norms for younger women about education as was the case for older women. Thus, it seems that younger women in Barisal are more liberal in this respect than older women. But in Chittagong we see the same effects for younger women. In fact, this thread of conservatism in Chittagong seems to be increasing, with younger women displaying stronger and more statistically significant results than older women. The counter-intuitively positive effects of residing in Sylhet in terms of having more liberal gender norms about education persist strongly for younger women too.

Finally, household wealth status emerges as a significant determinant of norms towards gender equality for the children's education for older women. Thus, the richest quintile espouses the most liberal values compared to the poorest. But for younger women once we control for spousal education, socioeconomic status does not matter.

The determinants of women's attitudes about educational equality within marriage are much less clear cut (Table 5). Neither their own education nor that of their spouses matters for older women's attitudes. And again, as in the case of attitudes towards girls' and boys' relative education, in the case of husband's and wives' relative education too, we find that listening to the radio regularly enhances older women's liberal attitudes. However, the strength of this effect is somewhat imprecisely measured (statistically significant at only the .05 level). Interestingly, where we would have expected eating together with the husband to exercise a positive influence in gender

norms in marriage, we see no association for either group of women. And socioeconomic status for the most part is not associated with women's attitudes to educational equality in marriage.

[Table 5 about here]

For younger women, a series of "life-cycle explanations" and cultural mores seem to explain their attitudes to educational equality in marriage. To start with, age is highly significant and with increasing years, this younger cohort of women tends to become more liberal in their attitudes. But their own secondary or higher education has only a weakly statistically significant positive effect on their attitudes.

Adding the older woman's education also brings out a negative effect of religion (as we also found for the child education norm regressions for the younger women). Therefore, controlling for own education, spousal education, and education of the older woman, we find that belonging to a Muslim household has a negative and statistically significant association with younger women's attitude to equality in marriage.

As for regional effects, we find that living in Barisal, Rajshahi and Khulna (but not Chittagong) has a negative association with liberal attitudes on spousal educational equality for older women. But Sylhet again shows up as having a positive association with older women's attitudes to educational equality. All these effects of region also persist for younger women *but only until we add the older woman's education level*. Once we do, *the effect of region is no longer significant* (except Rajshahi). Age, too, is a strong and significant factor in younger women's attitudes of educational equality in marriage. It appears, therefore, that younger women are under the strong influence of external factors. Left to themselves they would perhaps have more egalitarian values, but

once we bring in the household or community values in any way, their own values become more conservative. Perhaps as women grow older and acquire greater status in the household, complete childbearing and more "junior" women enter the household, their views become increasingly their own.

DISCUSSION

Perhaps the strongest result that we note in our analysis is that Bangladeshi women are more likely to espouse attitudes of gender equality in education for their children and less so about gender equality among spouses. While there is about a 7 percentage point change in the attitudes of older and younger women towards giving girls equal or better education than boys, there is only about a 5 percentage point change in the view between the two cohorts that wives should have equal or better education than their husbands. The change itself is not the most remarkable – what is truly remarkable are the absolute percentages. While a large majority of both groups of women believe in educational equality for children, only a little over half believe in educational equality in marriage.

Perhaps more important is the fact that education plays a key role in determining liberal attitudes about the relative education of boys and girls, but cannot explain attitudes about educational equality in marriage. We believe that the two questions may perhaps be capturing two different issues. While the question on relative education of boys and girls captures the value of education per se, the question on educational equality in marriage captures the norms regarding marriage and the relative worth of husbands and wives. Here cultural factors denoted by region and other such variables become much more important. For younger women in particular very few variables other than region

and age are significant determinants of their attitudes on educational equality in marriage. If you are a young woman in Bangladesh, perhaps your attitudes about equality in marriage are determined more by societal norms and the influence of elders in the family than your own educational level or characteristics. Thus, "life cycle explanations" and cultural mores emerge as most important. These life cycle issues have also been seen to be important for other outcomes, especially in health (Das Gupta, 1995)

The tendency towards liberalism in children's education and conservatism in views about marriage (or more important, a lack of explanation about views on educational equality in marriage) has interesting antecedents as well as implications. The general norm discussed earlier in this paper that women should be in most ways less accomplished than their spouses is a difficult one to break down. We have also argued elsewhere that while there have been small changes in the attitudes to divorce, marriage in Bangladesh is by and large a stable, unchanging institution (World Bank, 2007). In other South Asian countries, too, marriage patterns seem very difficult to change. Thus, in Sri Lanka, Malhotra and Tsui (1996) found that modern norms had only a small influence on timing of marriage. Perhaps, with greater numbers of women marrying men equally or less educated than them, this may change over time, too. However, it is also possible that it is more acceptable to voice liberal attitudes about children's education and less so about marriage and the marital relationship.

The importance of region as a determinant of both educational equality for boys and girls and husbands and wives has to be underscored. That some regions are known to be conservative is pointed out earlier in this paper, but not all our results are easily explicable. Sylhet, the region widely regarded as the most conservative seems to have

women who have inordinately liberal attitudes to gender equality in education – both for their children and within their own marriages. When seen together with the low educational attainment of women in Sylhet this presents itself as a sort of "yearning for education" among women. But Chittagong defies explanation. It is next to Sylhet in the perception of conservatism and in terms of low levels of educational attainment of girls, and also comes across as the region with the most conservative attitudes to educational equality among girls and boys.[2]

CONCLUSION

Our results show that the far-reaching changes in Bangladesh in terms of female education seem to have had equally far-reaching impacts on the value of girls' education relative to boys. Education for women thus explains these liberal attitudes towards their children's education. But in terms of their attitudes to their marriages, Bangladeshi women are still very conservative and education has done little to change that. We predict for the future that as female education expands, the demand for girls' education will grow even more robust. Also, as more wives are equal or better educated than their husbands, the value of equality in marriages, too, will grow.

[2] These observations are further supported by the data on gross enrollment rates of boys and girls by level and region presented earlier (see Table 1), especially for lower and higher secondary.

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Table 1. Gross Enrollment Rates of Boys and Girls by Level and Region

Name of the City	Primary (Grade 1-5)		Lower Sec. (Grade 6-8)		Secondary (Grade 9-10)		Higher Secondary (11-12)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Barisal	93.9	93.6	55.4	58.9	45.8	58.1	44.7	35.0
Chittagong	83.5	84.5	48.1	58.2	37.2	49.9	34.6	32.8
Dhaka	86.1	84.5	52.7	58.4	62.2	66.6	32.3	33.3
Khulna	96.1	99.5	60.7	66.9	58.3	71.5	39.3	36.2
Rajshahi	85.5	91.5	53.5	70.3	50.3	57.5	38.2	33.4
Sylhet	83.2	85.7	57.1	36.3	39.7	58.0	29.1	28.5

Source: BANBEIS (Government of Bangladesh)

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the (Main) Estimation Samples

	Older cohort:		*Younger cohort:*	
	Mean	*Std Dev*	*Mean*	*Std Dev*
Dependent variables:				
Girls should be equally or better educated than boys	0.778	0.416	0.852	0.355
Wives should be equally or better educated than their husbands	0.490	0.500	0.539	0.499
Explanatory variables:				
Age	49.67	4.164	21.52	2.893
No education	0.653	0.476	0.236	0.425
Some primary	0.137	0.344	0.172	0.378
Primary	0.073	0.260	0.159	0.366
Some secondary	0.090	0.286	0.328	0.470
Secondary and above	0.048	0.213	0.105	0.306
No education (Spouse)	0.503	0.500	0.327	0.469
Some primary (Spouse)	0.113	0.316	0.151	0.358
Primary (Spouse)	0.089	0.285	0.115	0.320
Some secondary (Spouse)	0.126	0.332	0.236	0.425
Secondary and above (Spouse)	0.168	0.374	0.171	0.376
Listens to radio	0.210	0.407	0.297	0.457
Islam	0.908	0.289	0.933	0.251
Eat together	0.577	0.494	0.604	0.489
Urban	0.477	0.500	0.497	0.500
Barisal	0.067	0.250	0.063	0.242
Chittagong	0.181	0.385	0.159	0.366
Dhaka	0.332	0.471	0.309	0.462
Khulna	0.114	0.317	0.130	0.337
Rajshahi	0.237	0.425	0.280	0.449
Sylhet	0.070	0.255	0.059	0.236
N	1408		1534	

Notes: Calculations incorporate sampling weights and also adjust for within-community correlation/clustering (Froot, 1989; Williams, 2000).
Source: World Bank Survey on Gender Norms in Bangladesh (2006).

Table 3. Education Equality in Marriage Across the Two Cohorts

	Older cohort:		*Younger cohort:*	
	Mean	*Std Dev*	*Mean*	*Std Dev*
Wife less than husband	0.381	0.486	0.232	0.422
Wife and husband equal	0.537	0.499	0.466	0.499
Wife more than husband	0.082	0.274	0.302	0.459
N	1408		1534	

Notes: Calculations incorporate sampling weights and also adjust for within-community correlation/clustering (Froot, 1989; Williams, 2000).
Source: World Bank Survey on Gender Norms in Bangladesh (2006).

Table 4. Education Gender Gap Norms Probit Regression Results: Girls Vs. Boys (Marginal Effects)

	Older cohort:			*Younger cohort:*			
	M1: Only own education	*M2: M1 + spousal education*	*M3: M2 + eating norms*	*M1: Only own education*	*M2: M1 + spousal education*	*M3: M2 + eating norms*	*M4: M2 + Max. education of other female in HH*
Age:							
Age	0.180**	0.174**	0.174**	0.077*	0.082**	0.077**	-0.066
	[0.087]	[0.087]	[0.087]	[0.040]	[0.038]	[0.037]	[0.066]
Age squared	-0.002**	-0.002**	-0.002**	-0.002*	-0.002*	-0.002*	0.002
	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.002]
Own education:							
Some primary	0.091***	0.084***	0.082***	0.028	0.035	0.031	0.071**
	[0.024]	[0.026]	[0.026]	[0.025]	[0.022]	[0.022]	[0.029]
Primary	0.123***	0.108***	0.104***	0.057*	0.047	0.039	0.01
	[0.034]	[0.038]	[0.038]	[0.030]	[0.028]	[0.030]	[0.040]
Some secondary	0.106***	0.058	0.056	0.068***	0.047*	0.039	0.037
	[0.036]	[0.046]	[0.045]	[0.025]	[0.025]	[0.025]	[0.038]
Secondary plus	0.068	0.012	0.013	0.090**	0.068	0.06	0.103***
	[0.093]	[0.142]	[0.139]	[0.037]	[0.042]	[0.044]	[0.036]
Spousal education:							
Some primary		0.017	0.018		-0.054	-0.051	-0.052
		[0.029]	[0.029]		[0.039]	[0.039]	[0.055]
Primary		-0.066	-0.065		0.066***	0.067***	0.03
		[0.052]	[0.051]		[0.023]	[0.022]	[0.039]
Some secondary		0.042	0.039		0.059**	0.061**	0.035
		[0.036]	[0.036]		[0.025]	[0.025]	[0.039]
Secondary plus		0.097	0.095		0.047*	0.045	0.054
		[0.059]	[0.058]		[0.029]	[0.029]	[0.038]
Highest education of older female in HH:							
Some primary							0.088***
							[0.025]
Primary							-0.03
							[0.067]
Some secondary							0.078***
							[0.025]
Secondary plus							0.058
							[0.039]

Norms:							
Eat together			0.036			0.058**	
			[0.036]			[0.023]	
Information access / processing:							
Listens to radio	0.062**	0.061**	0.066**	-0.018	-0.013	-0.008	0.01
	[0.029]	[0.029]	[0.029]	[0.028]	[0.025]	[0.025]	[0.027]
Religion of household head:							
Islam	-0.067	-0.061	-0.061	-0.064*	-0.064*	-0.061*	-0.088***
	[0.054]	[0.056]	[0.056]	[0.036]	[0.034]	[0.035]	[0.026]
Poverty / Wealth:							
Second -to-lowest asset score decile	0.062**	0.057**	0.060**	0	-0.002	-0.004	-0.028
	[0.029]	[0.029]	[0.029]	[0.027]	[0.028]	[0.028]	[0.051]
Median asset score decile	0.039	0.032	0.035	0.034	0.024	0.027	0.002
	[0.027]	[0.028]	[0.029]	[0.030]	[0.029]	[0.029]	[0.040]
Second-to-highest asset score decile	0.115***	0.106***	0.106***	0.052	0.041	0.042	0.004
	[0.028]	[0.029]	[0.029]	[0.033]	[0.033]	[0.034]	[0.047]
Highest asset score decile	0.162***	0.148***	0.149***	0.074**	0.055	0.059*	-0.045
	[0.025]	[0.029]	[0.029]	[0.033]	[0.035]	[0.033]	[0.063]
Geography:							
Urban	-0.005	-0.005	-0.003	0.001	0.006	0.01	0.023
	[0.033]	[0.032]	[0.033]	[0.023]	[0.022]	[0.021]	[0.031]
Barisal	-0.145*	-0.165**	-0.170**	-0.089	-0.086	-0.095	-0.154
	[0.076]	[0.078]	[0.077]	[0.064]	[0.066]	[0.067]	[0.113]
Chittagong	-0.117**	-0.122**	-0.121**	-0.176***	-0.154***	-0.152***	-0.278***
	[0.053]	[0.052]	[0.052]	[0.055]	[0.052]	[0.052]	[0.093]
Khulna	0.012	0.007	0.004	-0.058	-0.047	-0.055	-0.157**
	[0.053]	[0.053]	[0.053]	[0.037]	[0.036]	[0.035]	[0.071]
Rajshahi	-0.099*	-0.109*	-0.111**	-0.101**	-0.091**	-0.090**	-0.146**
	[0.057]	[0.057]	[0.057]	[0.040]	[0.036]	[0.036]	[0.066]
Sylhet	0.152***	0.151***	0.151***	0.114***	0.116***	0.113***	
	[0.040]	[0.039]	[0.039]	[0.020]	[0.017]	[0.017]	
Pseudo-R^2	0.112	0.119	0.121	0.0886	0.108	0.117	0.16
N	1408	1408	1408	1534	1534	1534	611

Notes: Dependent variable: one if responding that girls should be equally or better educated than boys, zero otherwise. Terms in brackets are robust Huber-White (Huber, 1967; White, 1980) standard errors. Estimations also incorporate sampling weights and also adjust for within-community correlation/clustering (Froot, 1989; Williams, 2000). Reference groups are ”none or below primary” (education), “Lowest asset score decile” (poverty/wealth), “Dhaka” (region).
Source: World Bank Survey on Gender Norms in Bangladesh (2006).

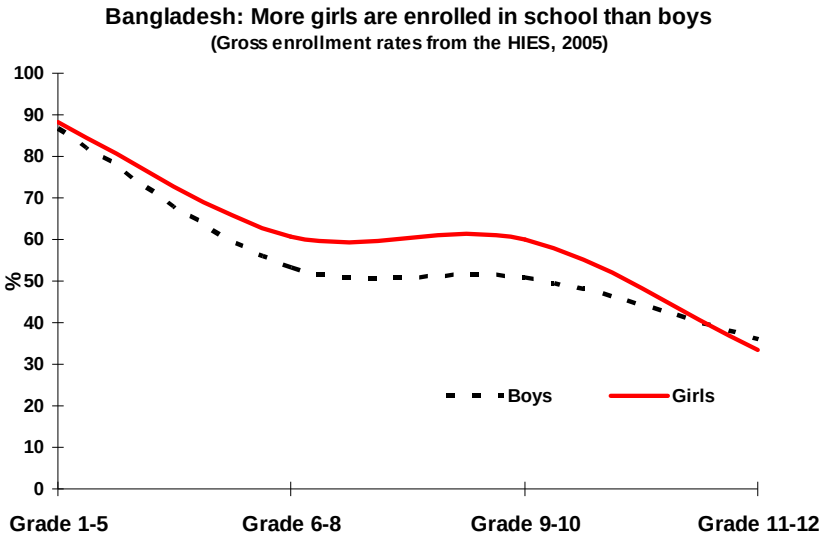
Table 5. Education Gender Gap Norms Probit Regression Results: Wives Vs. Husbands (Marginal Effects)

	Older cohort:			*Younger cohort:*			
	M1: Only own education	*M2: M1 + spousal education*	*M3: M2 + eating norms*	*M1: Only own education*	*M2: M1 + spousal education*	*M3: M2 + eating norms*	*M4: M2 + Max. education of other female in HH*
Age:							
Age	-0.071	-0.074	-0.072	0.212**	0.211**	0.212**	0.248**
	[0.119]	[0.118]	[0.119]	[0.083]	[0.085]	[0.086]	[0.117]
Age squared	0.001	0.001	0.001	-0.005***	-0.005**	-0.005**	-0.006**
	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.002]	[0.002]	[0.002]	[0.003]
Own education:							
Some primary	-0.026	-0.021	-0.023	0.04	0.051	0.052	0.154
	[0.044]	[0.046]	[0.046]	[0.049]	[0.047]	[0.047]	[0.097]
Primary	-0.098	-0.091	-0.092	0.022	0.029	0.03	0.142
	[0.060]	[0.066]	[0.066]	[0.055]	[0.055]	[0.055]	[0.096]
Some secondary	0.074	0.072	0.071	0.024	0.03	0.031	0.103
	[0.071]	[0.074]	[0.074]	[0.050]	[0.051]	[0.052]	[0.090]
Secondary plus	-0.041	-0.046	-0.047	0.118*	0.133*	0.134*	0.165
	[0.100]	[0.107]	[0.107]	[0.068]	[0.079]	[0.080]	[0.119]
Spousal education:							
Some primary		-0.022	-0.021		-0.076	-0.077	0.028
		[0.056]	[0.056]		[0.054]	[0.054]	[0.088]
Primary		-0.025	-0.025		-0.036	-0.036	0.022
		[0.059]	[0.059]		[0.049]	[0.049]	[0.073]
Some secondary		-0.028	-0.03		-0.004	-0.004	-0.024
		[0.057]	[0.057]		[0.051]	[0.051]	[0.073]
Secondary plus		-0.001	-0.002		-0.036	-0.036	-0.016
		[0.056]	[0.056]		[0.061]	[0.061]	[0.085]
Highest education of older female in HH:							
Some primary							-0.081
							[0.083]
Primary							-0.083
							[0.106]
Some secondary							-0.089
							[0.076]
Secondary plus							-0.026
							[0.111]

Norms:							
Eat together			0.018			-0.007	
			[0.036]			[0.033]	
Information access / processing:							
Listens to radio	0.105*	0.106*	0.108**	0.005	0.006	0.005	0.003
	[0.056]	[0.056]	[0.055]	[0.043]	[0.042]	[0.042]	[0.056]
Religion of household head:							
Islam	0.05	0.049	0.049	-0.058	-0.054	-0.054	-0.227***
	[0.058]	[0.058]	[0.058]	[0.042]	[0.043]	[0.042]	[0.047]
Poverty / Wealth:							
Second -to-lowest asset score decile	0.025	0.024	0.026	0.006	0.006	0.006	-0.021
	[0.048]	[0.048]	[0.047]	[0.043]	[0.043]	[0.043]	[0.085]
Median asset score decile	0.026	0.026	0.027	0.048	0.05	0.05	0.137
	[0.047]	[0.048]	[0.048]	[0.056]	[0.056]	[0.056]	[0.085]
Second-to-highest asset score decile	0.082	0.084	0.084	0.064	0.072	0.072	0.139
	[0.053]	[0.054]	[0.054]	[0.057]	[0.055]	[0.055]	[0.088]
Highest asset score decile	0.085	0.086	0.086	0.016	0.017	0.017	0.099
	[0.070]	[0.070]	[0.070]	[0.066]	[0.065]	[0.065]	[0.101]
Geography:							
Urban	-0.007	-0.007	-0.007	0.031	0.031	0.031	0.036
	[0.040]	[0.041]	[0.041]	[0.028]	[0.028]	[0.028]	[0.047]
Barisal	-0.182***	-0.181***	-0.181***	-0.158***	-0.156***	-0.155***	-0.042
	[0.056]	[0.055]	[0.055]	[0.046]	[0.048]	[0.048]	[0.066]
Chittagong	-0.056	-0.056	-0.056	-0.015	-0.009	-0.009	-0.031
	[0.054]	[0.055]	[0.055]	[0.045]	[0.045]	[0.045]	[0.072]
Khulna	-0.142***	-0.141***	-0.142***	-0.132***	-0.131***	-0.131***	-0.08
	[0.053]	[0.054]	[0.053]	[0.035]	[0.035]	[0.035]	[0.085]
Rajshahi	-0.220***	-0.220***	-0.221***	-0.234***	-0.235***	-0.235***	-0.243***
	[0.050]	[0.051]	[0.051]	[0.033]	[0.032]	[0.032]	[0.062]
Sylhet	0.309***	0.313***	0.312***	0.369***	0.374***	0.374***	
	[0.071]	[0.070]	[0.070]	[0.039]	[0.037]	[0.037]	
Pseudo-R^2	0.0688	0.0692	0.0694	0.0745	0.0764	0.0764	0.0707
N	1408	1408	1408	1534	1534	1534	611

Notes: Dependent variable: one if responding that girls should be equally or better educated than boys, zero otherwise. Terms in brackets are robust Huber-White (Huber, 1967; White, 1980) standard errors. Estimations also incorporate sampling weights and also adjust for within-community correlation/clustering (Froot, 1989; Williams, 2000). Reference groups are ”none or below primary” (education), “Lowest asset score decile” (poverty/wealth), “Dhaka” (region).
Source: World Bank Survey on Gender Norms in Bangladesh (2006).

Figure 1.


Bangladesh: More girls are enrolled in school than boys
(Gross enrollment rates from the HIES, 2005)
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
%
Boys
Girls
Grade 1-5
Grade 6-8
Grade 9-10
Grade 11-12