
CenRaPS Journal of Social Sciences

International Indexed & Refereed



ISSN: 2687-2226 (Online)
www.journal.cenraps.org



Original Article

Article No: 20_V2_I1_A11

doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3698944

HUMAN CAPITAL OF CHAR PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOODS IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract:

Sustainable livelihoods are achieved through access to a range of livelihoods capitals which are combined in the pursuit of different livelihood strategies. Human capital represents the skills, knowledge, education, ability to labor and good health that together enable people to pursue their livelihood strategies. It is therefore necessary, though not on its own sufficient, for the achievement of positive livelihoods outcomes. The study examines the sustainability of human assets of livelihoods of char people and explores the influence of land and river, and the impact of climate change on their natural assets. The study found that the livelihood pattern of the people of char is insecure, vulnerable and unsustainable. They are deprived of education-both modern and traditional and health services or medical facilities. There is a strong relationship among education, gender and patriarchy. It is recommended that, there is a strong need for institutional support to assist them in developing their human capital.

Key Words:

*Livelihood, Education, Health
Services, Gender and Patriarchy.*

1. Introduction

Given the scarcity of land, extreme poverty and unsustainability of livelihoods in Bangladesh, many people are found to live in the Char (Shoal) areas of the country, despite the rather harsh physical conditions there ((Jansen, 1987:2; Baqee, 1998). The livelihood pattern of the people of chars and their coping mechanism with poverty is insecure, vulnerable and unsustainable and is frequently faced with the man-made and natural calamities of gender, patriarchy, different types of conflicts, land erosion and flooding, which can cause destitution for many of them (Khan and Seeley, 2005). Global warming and climate change has a devastating impact on their livelihoods. They are the innocent victims of this man-made ugly curse. The people of the chars are deprived of land, food, educations, proper sanitation, safe drinking water and other health services. They survive depending on agriculture, livestock-rearing and fishing (Mahbubullah, 1996). In proportion to total population, land area in Bangladesh is very limited. As a consequence, the population pressure on it constantly is on increase causing different social problems. Which in the long run is affecting the economic growth of the country negatively. For example, at the turn of the present century there was only one person to every 2.5 hectare of land and today there are about 7 persons living in the same unit of area (Jansen: 1987: 2; Baqee: 1998.4; BBS, 2009). Per head cultivable land is 0.15 acre or .4 hectare. Out of the total labor power 48.4% engaged in agriculture. Directly or indirectly 80% people are dependent on agriculture. In DCI method the poverty rate is 40.4% and 19.5% people are hardcore poor. Child mortality rate is 43%. The char people who have very little agricultural land or none are highly dependent on the elites or the powerful in society for their employment, for access to credit and for the little security available. Their mode of production is feudalistic. The relation of production is lord and serf. Employment for the landless in the char means working as daily wage laborers in the agricultural fields (Jansen, 1987:2; Baqee, 1998:5).

2. Methodology of the Study

This study is basically exploratory in nature. There are many chars in Lakshmipur District as Bayer char, Toomchar Char Falcon, Char Jhangalia, Kalir Char, Shac Char, Char Ruhita, Char Alecjhander, Char Gojaria etc. But my study site was Bayer Char under Ramgati Upazila of Lakshmipur District because it is nearest to river, a new char, near to my house and very conflictual-disaster prone area. For having a clear view about the livelihood pattern of char people review of literature was done. In the study the method was quantitative and to collect data survey technique was followed. An interview schedule was used instead of mail questionnaire and self administrated questionnaire. Both structured and unstructured questions

were incorporated in the interview schedule. I designed the draft questionnaire and also completed pre-testing. The quantitative was supplemented by qualitative because some feelings, speeches and irony cannot be mentioned numerically and with numerical meanings. It was intended to explore some social meanings. Char people of Bayer Char were the population of my study. Heads of the households were the respondents of the study. The households of the study area were the unit of analysis of the study. Three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with: 1. Key informants-NGO officials working in that area, 2. Women – Heads of households and 3. Female members of NGOs

There are 9 villages (*Somaj*) in Bayer Char under Lakshmipur District. I selected 3 villages using simple random sampling. From 479 households I selected 160 i.e. one third (Sampling interval: 3, $k=N/n$) households as my sample size and I selected these 160 using the technique of systematic sampling. After the completion of the field work, data were processed and analyzed using SPSS for Windows (Version 16) and based on the analysis of data, the report was prepared.

3. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the Study is to examine the livelihood pattern of char people in Lakshmipur. Other specific objectives are to assess whether gender and patriarchy have any influential role on their livelihoods and to examine whether education has any influence on their livelihoods or not.

4. Conceptual Structure

4.1 Livelihood

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not understanding the natural resource base.

4.2 Livelihood Framework

Figure:1 shows the livelihood framework and its various factors, that constraint or enhances livelihood opportunities and show how they relate to each other.

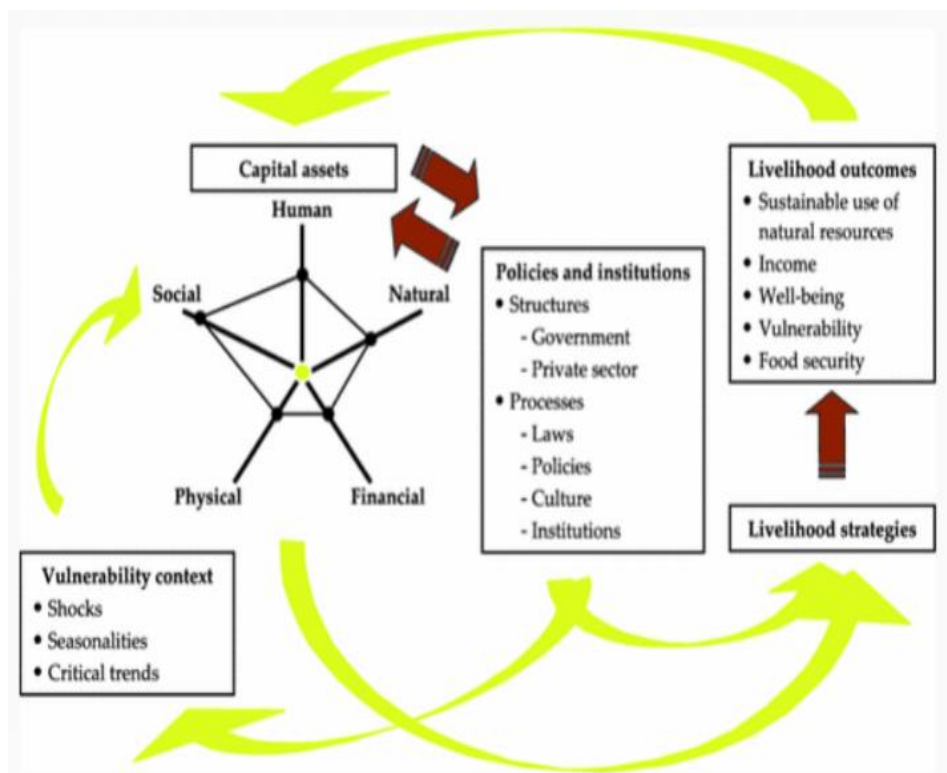


Figure 1 Sustainable Livelihood Framework

[Source: Khan and Seeley, (2005:23), Quoted from DFID- Bangladesh, 2001

4.3 Human Capital of Livelihoods: human capital represents the skills, knowledge, education, ability to labor and good health that together enable people to pursue their livelihood strategies. As well as being of intrinsic value, human capital is required in order to make use of any of the four other types of assets. It is therefore necessary, though not on its own sufficient, for the achievement of positive livelihood outcomes.

4.4 Household

Below the community level, the household is likely to be the important key unit in any social analysis, but considerable care has to be taken regarding what contributes a “household” in different social and cultural contexts (Townsend, 1998:24). In many urban areas or in some parts of the “developed” world, the household generally corresponds to the nuclear family. Some times expanded to include some additional generations or some relatively close “kin”. However, in many rural areas the household can consist of a wide range of contribution of kin or people connected by links of patronage and employment to the care household members or the head of household.

4.5 Samaj (Society)

Somaj refers to the concept of a society as an entity which includes and transcends the *ghar*, the *bari*, the *paribar* and the *gushti*. *Samaj* is at the apex of rural life. *Samaj* also connotes an association or community in a particular area with a definite stamp of its own and cultural uniqueness.

4.6 Char and Choura:

The rivers not only erode land, causing settlement to be constantly on the move, they also throw up new, virgin lands through ascertain for newer settlements and agricultural activity. These newly formed lands, called *char* or *doira* in Bengali, are locally inhabited by some of the most desperate people in the country, locally known as *chouras*.

4.7 Gender

Gender is the socially and culturally constructed discrimination between men and women.

4.8 Patriarchy

There is no single indicator to measure patriarchy in a society. Patriarchy has been defined as the men's absolute authority and access to and control over maternal resources (like food, income, land and other forms of wealth) and to social resources (including knowledge, power and prestige) within the family, the community and in the society at large (Dixon, 1978: 6-7).

5. Findings of the Study

5.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table-1 points out that, out of the total respondents, a significant number of respondents (70.0%) are male where only 30.0% (48) are female respondents. From age perspective, a substantial number (45.0%) of respondents fall between 20 and 40 age and a narrow figure (5.0%) fall at 80 age or above. 40.0% respondents' age is between 40 and 60 year; and 10.0 respondents' age is between 60 and 80 year.

Table-1 Respondents Based on Sex, Age, Religion and Marital Status

Sex		Age				Religion		Marital Status			
Male	Female	20-40	40-60	60-80	> 80	Muslim	Hindu	Married	Unmarried	Widow	Widower
112 (70.0%)	48 (30.0%)	72 (45.0%)	64 (40.0%)	16 (10.0%)	8 (5.0%)	155 (96.9%)	5 (3.1%)	129 (80.6%)	7 (4.4%)	16 (10.0%)	8 (5.0%)

Out of the total respondents, 155 (96.9%) respondents are Muslim and only 5 (3.1%) respondents are Hindu. There was no any respondent of other religion. From marital status, most of the respondents (80.6%) are married where unmarried is only 4.4%. The totality of widow and widower is 15.0% (respectively 10.0% & 5.0%). Among the total female headed households 33.4% are widow and among male headed respondents 7.2% are widower.

Table-2 shows that a significant number (101, 63.1%) of respondents are illiterate and 23.8% (38) can sign only. The primary and secondary passed respondents are only respectively 16 (10.0 %) and 5 (3.1%). There were not found any higher secondary or graduate level respondents. Among the total respondents most of the respondents' occupation is agriculture (40.0%).

Table-2 Respondents Based on Education, Occupation and Family Size

Education				Occupation					Family Size			
Illiterate	Can Sign	Primary	SSC	Agriculture	Fishing	Rickshaw Pulling	Business	House Wife	4	5	6	> 6
101 (63.1%)	38 (23.8%)	16 (10%)	5 (3.1%)	64 (40%)	48 (30%)	19 (11.9%)	5 (3.1%)	24 (15.0)	16 (10%)	40 (25%)	48 (30%)	56 (35%)

The second highest number of respondents engaged in fishing (30.0%). There are 24 respondents who are housewives among the total respondents. The number of respondents who are related to business and household activities are 3.1% (5) and 15.0% (24) respectively. Most of the families have more than six members (35.0%) and six-member-family is the second highest (30.0%) among the total respondents. The number of four-member-family is 16 (15.0%) and the 25.0% (40) families' number of member is 5.

5.2 Education and Patriarchy

When the respondents were asked who are the decision maker in their family, 75.63% (121) out of the total respondents asserted that husbands are the decision maker in every aspect in their family, of them, 83.47% (101)

Table -3: Educational Qualification & Decision Makers in the Family

		Decision makers in family (% within row)			Total
		Husband	Wife	Both	
Educational qualification of the respondents	Illiterate	101 (100%)	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)	101
	Can Sign	4 (10.5%)	19 (50%)	15 (39.5%)	38
	Primary	16 (100%)	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)	16
	SSC	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)	5 (100%)	5
Total		121(75.6%)	19 (11.9%)	20 (12.5%)	160

Source: Compiled by the Researcher Based on Primary data

are illiterate. Only 11.88% (19) out of total respondents informed that wife is the decision maker and all of this category can sign only and they are the 79.16% of the total respondents whose occupation is housewife. 12.5% (20) said wife and husband both are the decision maker in their family, of them 75.0% can sign only. So, we can say that in illiterate families gender discrimination is extreme but it is evident from this table that all the primary passed respondents said that husband is the decision maker in their family. It indicates the real nature of the char that you cannot predict every aspect of social life of char people. There are a lot of factors that influence their lives (Table-3).

In response to the question whose income is considered as income in their family, out of the total, 78.1% of the respondents replied that husband’s income is considered as income; of them 96.8% said husband is the decision maker in their family. Only 10.6%, out of the total respondents asserted that wife’s income is considered as income and 11.3% said,

Table- 4: Educational Qualification and Income Earners of the Family.

		Income Earners (% within column)								Total	
		husband		wife		both		other			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Educational Qualification	illiterate	85	67.4	5	33.3	8	53.3	3	75.0	101	63.2
	can sign only	27	21.5	7	46.7	4	26.7	0	.0	38	23.7
	primary	12	9.5	2	13.3	1	6.7	1	25.0	16	10.0
	SSC	2	1.6	1	6.7	2	13.3	0	.0	5	3.1
Total		126	100.0	15	100.0	15	100.0	4	100.0	160	100.0

Source: Compiled by the Researcher Based on Primary data

the income of both husband and wife is considered as income in their family. Those who said wife's income is considered as income, they are the 70.83% of total respondents whose occupation is house wife. So, it is the natural result. It is very interesting that all of the total respondents, who said the income of both is considered, said that husband and wife both are the decision maker in their family (Table-4).

5.3 Education, Gender and Dowry

In response to this question whose they prefer from boys and girls, a significant number of respondents (117) asserted that they prefer boys to girls (Table-5). They are the 73.1% of the total respondents. Of them 86.3% respondents are illiterate and they are the 63.1% of the total respondents.

Table-5: Educational qualification & Gender preference

		Gender Preference (% within row)			Total
		Boys	Girls	Both	
Educational qualification	Illiterate	85 (100%)	5 (.0%)	11 (.0%)	101
	Can Sign	4 (10.5%)	19 (50%)	15 (39.5%)	38
	Primary	16 (100%)	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)	16
	SSC	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)	5 (100%)	5
Total		121(75.6%)	19 (11.9%)	20 (12.5%)	160

Source: Compiled by the Researcher Based on Primary data

Who are primary passed, all of them prefer boys and who are SSC passed all of them prefer boys and girls both. It indicates that lower level of education is in active in case of poverty. The cause of it is they think boys can earn income and they can help them at the old age, on the contrary, girls are the load for family, she will go to husband's house, for her marriage father will have to manage a vast amount of dowry. When the respondents were asked if there is any practice of dowry, 88.75% (142) of respondents, out of total informed that there is dowry practice in this char and only 11.25% respondents said negatively. So gender preference and dowry are interrelated.

Table-6 implies that when the respondents were asked whose education they prefer from their children, most of the respondents (117) replied that they prefer boys' education to girls; of them 86.3% are illiterate and there is no SSC passed respondents in this category.

Table- 6: Educational Qualification & Gender Preference in Education.

		Gender preference in Education (% within row)			Total
		Boy	Girl	Both	
Educational qualification	Illiterate	101 (100%)	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)	101 (100%)
	Can Sign	0 (.0%)	22 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	38 (100%)
	Primary	16 (100%)	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)	16 (100%)
	SSC	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
Total		117	22	21	160

Source: Compiled by the Researcher Based on Primary data

Only 13.7% respondents said girls and all of them can sign only. 13.2% respondents said that they like the education of boys and girls equally and of them 76.2 respondents can sign and the rest are SSC passed. There is no illiterate respondents in this category. It indicates that education has a great influence on gender preference. The more people will be educated, the less gender discrimination in education will be.

The respondents were asked about their preferable education, 65.0% respondents informed that they prefer religious education; of them 84.6% are illiterate and 15.4% are primary passed.

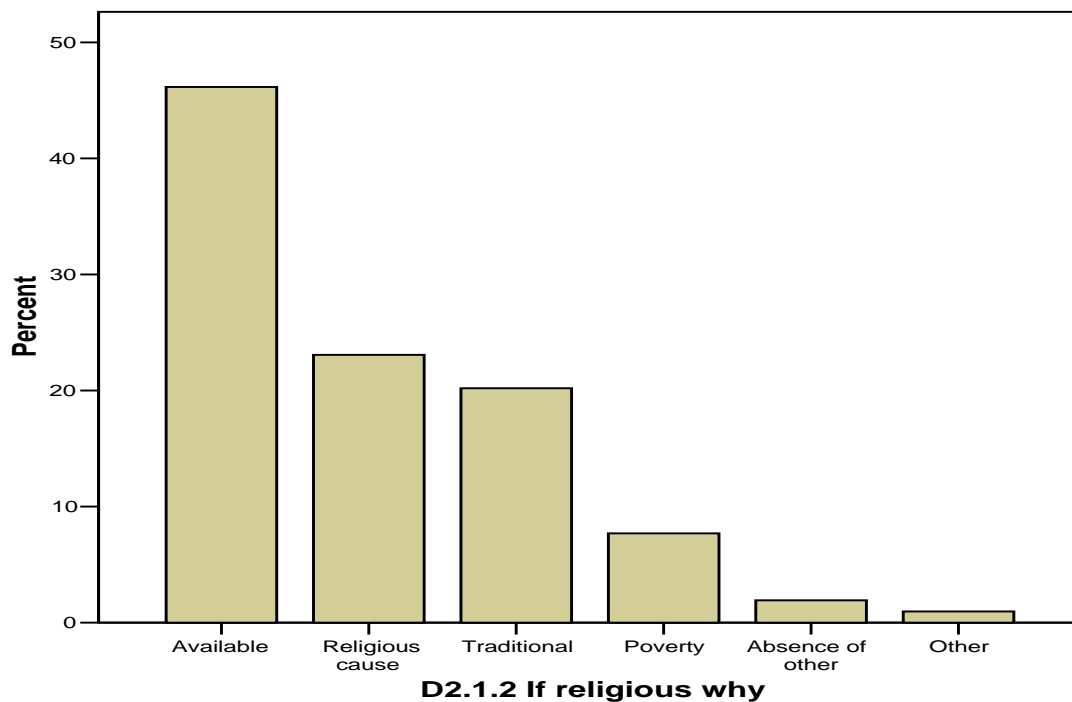


Figure 2 Causes of Preferring Religious Education

(Source: Compiled by the Author)

46.1% respondents replied that the main cause of it is religious education is available in the char, 23.1% said religious cause and 20.2% said they prefer religious education because it is traditional (Figure-1).

In response to the question if their children go to school or not, only 7.5% (12) out of the total respondent, responded positively; of them 58.3% respondents are landless and only 8.3% respondents are medium land owner. The cause of it is there is only one primary school in Bayer Char which is near to this landless respondents and no other educational institution.

A significant number of respondents replied that their school going children are not going to school; of them 60.1% respondents are landless, 18.9% are marginal, 6.1% are medium and 5.4% are large land owners. The causes of their children’s not going to school are stated by the respondents as describes the table-. The highest number of respondents informed that their children are not going to school because of poverty, and 40.5% the lack of institution and even 10.8% mentioned that children’s education is unnecessary. It indicates the extreme poverty and livelihoods vulnerability in this char area they were not affected by disasters and of them, 50.0% have more then 0.096 hectares land. The Fig.- 8 shows the percentage of respondents Based on disaster after very clearly.

5.4 Education & Coping Strategy with Disasters

When all the respondents were asked where they take shelter during natural disaster, 91 respondents (75%) out of 101 illiterate respondents responded that they take shelter at house during disaster & only 9 respondents said that they take shelter in cyclone shelter in this category. The total number of respondents who stay home during disaster are 121 (75.6%) and only 31 respondents (19.4%) take shelter in cyclone shelter out of the total respondents.

Table 7: Educational Qualification & Taking Shelter during Disasters

		Place of Shelter			Total
		stay at house	cyclone shelter	other	
Educational Qualification	illiterate	91 (75.2%)	9 (29.1%)	1 (12.5%)	101 (63.1%)
	can sign only	26 (21.5%)	5 (16.1%)	7 (87.5%)	38 (23.7%)
	primary	3 (2.5%)	13 (41.9%)	0 (.0%)	16 (10%)
	SSC	1 (.8%)	4 (12.9%)	0 (.0%)	5 (3.2%)
Total		121 (100%)	31 (100%)	8 (100%)	160 (100%)

Source: Compiled by the Researcher Based on Primary data

Out of the total respondents who take shelter in cyclone shelter, 41.9% are primary passed and out of the total SSC passed respondents (5), 75.0% take shelter in cyclone shelter during disaster (Table-7). It implies that the more people are educated, the more they are conscious. It is applicable in char people also.

When the respondents who stay at house during disaster were asked why they do not go to cyclone shelter, they stated the cause as religiosity (41.7%), lack of reliability of information (20.0%), love of house (26.7%) and lack of security (7.5%).

5.5 Health, Hazards and Vulnerability of Livelihoods

In response to the question what diseases are broken out in this char, a significant number of respondents, out of the total, replied diarrhoea; of them 72.5% (58) informed that they were affected by diarrhea. Second highest number of respondents said that fever is frequently broken out here; of them, 75.0% (36) asserted (Table-8)

Table-8 Diseases and Affected by It

		Affected (% within row)		Total
		Yes	No	
Diseases broken out	Diarrhoea	58 (72.5%)	22 (27.5%)	80 (100%)
	Cholera	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	8 (100%)
	Fever	36 (75%)	12 (25%)	48 (100%)
	Dysentery	18 (75%)	6 (25%)	24 (100%)
Total		118	42	160

Source: Compiled by the Researcher Based on Primary data

that they were affected by it. Out of all respondents, 73.8% affected by diseases because of lack of safe drinking and cooking water, lack of quality food, and poverty. Only 26.3% (42) of total respondents said they were not affected by diseases, the cause of it is they are new comer in this char. When the diseases affected respondents were asked whether they took medicine, 78.5% (92) respondents informed that

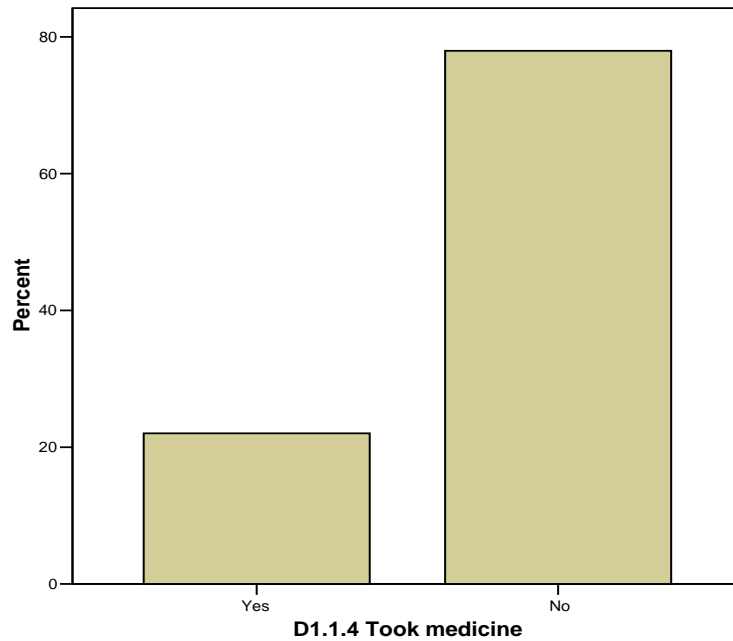


Figure 3 % of Medicine Consumption

(Source: Compiled by the researcher based on Primary data)

they did not take any kind of medicine and they are the 57.0% of the total respondents. Only 16.3% (26) of the affected respondents said that they took medicine (Graph-2). The cause of their not taking medicine is that they are living in a char which is a remote area from the main land; so they are deprived from medical facilities

Being asked what the types of their medicine are, a significant number of medicine taken respondents (84.7%) responded that they took traditional medicine i.e., *Jad, fuk* the juice of trees etc as these are available in this char; of them, the highest number of respondents are Primary passed and 27.8% are illiterate. Only 15.4% asserted that they took modern medicine and they are the only 2.5% of the total respondents (Table-38). They are rich men and they have to expend a lot of taka to manage it.

5.6 Health Services and Vulnerability of Livelihoods

Table-9 shows that when the total respondents were asked whether there is any qualified physician in this char, about all of the respondents (88.1%) replied negatively; of them a significant number of respondents (97.2%) inform that they did not hear about HIV/AIDS and only 2.5% said they heard about HIV/AIDS. Out of the total number of respondents, only 5.6% said they heard about HIV/AIDS and of them, 55.6% said

Table-9 Knowledge about Specialist Physician and HIV/AIDS

		Awareness of HIV/AIDS				Total
		Yes		No		
		N	%	N	%	
Qualified physician	Yes	5	100.0	0	.0	5
	No	4	2.8	137	97.2	141
	Don't know	0	.0	14	100.0	14
Total		9	5.6	151	94.4	160

there is qualified physician in this char and 44.4% said there is no qualified physician in this char. 94.4% of the total respondents replied that they did not hear about HIV/AIDS; of them, 90.2% said there is no qualified physician in this char. 8.8% of the total respondents.

Table-40 describes that, out of the total respondents, 91.9% respondents informed that they do not get proper health services; of them 59.9% are landless who are the 91.7% of total landless respondents. Only 8.1% of the total respondents 8.3% of landless and 12.5% of marginal land owner respondents said they get proper health services. It indicates that the landless poor char people are deprived from proper health services. The total number of large land owner respondents also said they do not get proper health services. It proves that in spite of having been money, char people are deprived from expected health services.

In response to this question whether they practice family planning or not, out of all the married respondents, only 5.9% replied positively and a significant number of respondents replied negatively; of them, 50.4% said do not use it because of unavailability and 28.7% responded

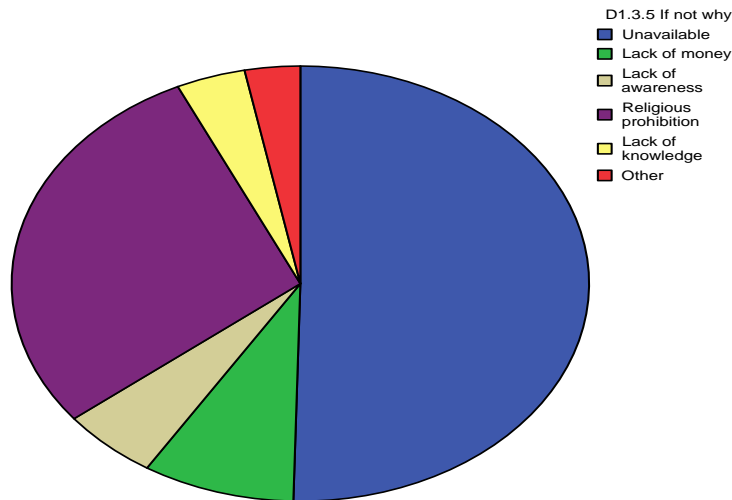


Figure 4 Causes of not Practicing Family Planning

(Source: Compiled by the Author)

that they do not use it because of religious prohibition (Graph-3). It indicates that they are deprived from modern family planning devices and they practices religion strictly. That is why while the fertility rate in the country is 2.05, in char it is more than 6.

6. Conclusion

Health and education are important matter for char people's livelihood because they are usually fully dependent on their physical labor. They study shows that prolonged illness, physical and psychological disability, death etc, are the reasons for the deepening of poverty in all char contexts. The quality of food consumed varies among the members of a household. I was told that the male income- earners got the top priority when there was not enough food in the house hold, women & children were neglected. A family with a number of marriageable daughters is more vulnerable than a family with a few sons when illness strikes. During illness they take no medicine or traditional medicine as the juice of trees, jad, fuk because there is no doctors or medical facilities in the chars. During this time people take loan from *mohajans*, *neta* (political leaders), NGOs, relatives and other money lenders with high rates of interest for getting treatment for ailing members of their families. For this loan they become like the slave of those money lenders. They do not escape from the exploitative network of *neta*, NGOs and mohajans. People (106) are affected by disasters—natural and man-made--like flood, cyclone, and drought, abnormal rainfall, tornado & erosion. Flood cyclone and tornado severely disrupt the

livelihood of them as they are wage laborers and fishermen. In addition people suffer from different types of diseases (96%) during this time such as cholera, dysentery, diarrhea & fever including malaria & respiratory illnesses because of contamination of water due to the inundation of latrines and stagnation of water for a long time. After disaster their crying need is food.

Inter group violence (82.2%) is the name of the game in char life based on lands as land provides food and symbolizes power and aristocracy. During disasters-- natural & manmade—woman, children and old people's lives are most vulnerable. Women & girls are raped, embarrassed & insecure especially during manmade disasters. Women gender roles are disrupted because of scarcity of fuel, water collection & difficulties of cooking food.

Most of the char people are illiterate (62.7%) and can sign only (20%) here, there is no educational institution. Illiteracy and landlessness or poverty played vital role in gender & patriarchy. Here decision makers in family are husbands (75.6%) and husbands income is considered as income (78.8%). It is related to dowry and early marriage. Dowry is a commonly observed practice (89.7%). People, regardless men and women, tend to rationalize dowry saying that husbands are wage earners while their wives only ate and did not work so they are entitled to dowry. To meet dowry obligations people sell land, offer payment and takes loans from NGOs, relatives or rural elites with high interests. As a girl grows older she loses her value on the marriage market, entailing a larger amount of dowry to be paid by her parents. So age in the most crucial factors in early marriage of daughters because of lack of education and awareness.

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