

A Probe Into The Access To Graduate Education In Bangladesh—II

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The amount seems substantial when one considers that the country's average yearly per capita income is about Tk. 5,000 (120 USD or 75 GBP). The minimum monthly expenditure recorded was Tk. 500, while the maximum was Tk. 2,700.8 (17%) persons used to spend between Tk. 1,800 and 2,700 per month. Most respondents drew the money from their parents. The female respondents generally spent less (by an average of about Tk.172 per month) than men. The reasons recorded were: "we (Women) didn't go out and about much," "girls ought to be more responsible (as compared to boys)": "a woman does not have those bad habits (which) 'eat' all your money, up, like smoking, drug etc", "we need to think about our future", "I spent with caution, (because) I was more sensible and wanted to save for tomorrow".

Many graduates migrated from rural to urban areas in order to pursue their higher education. Although there were colleges (which offered graduate courses) in rural or semi-urban locations, the respondents preferred to study in city-based universities. The reasons were explained by a number of respondents:

Life is different in a city campus—you get to know new people, new technology....You can see the real world.

The difference (between rural and urban educational institutions) is like a stagnant pond and a flowing stream.

You meet all famous professors, political leaders, writers, thinkers in the varsities (universities). You can build up the network for (possible) jobs and socialization.

Villages are villages—a city is a city! When you go for a job-interview, they would not be very impressed to hear that you have been educated in a college up in a remote hill or (in an) obscure island. Would they?

It was revealed that 18 (38%) graduates—11 male and 7 female—began their formal education in rural/semi-urban locations and subsequently moved to metropolitan centres for higher education.

The movement from rural to urban centres had some special implications for women. The women respondents had to persuade their parents hard in order to get parental approval to move to city-based universities; because their parents believed that "city campuses were full of politics (i.e. more politicized) and violence (than) rural colleges"; moving about in cities without a guardian is not safe (for girls); "education is important, but

sombhrom (dignity, modesty etc.) is a must for woman" (implying that city life, away from direct parents supervision, might threaten these "precious female attributes"). Even when they were allowed to move to city campuses, most women recalled that they were under family pressure to stay with (the city-based) relatives because of the general belief that "students' halls (of residence) are not safe and suitable for women". Majority of the women who stayed with relatives found their stay "unpleasant", "not responsive to (a student's) needs" and "generally uncomfortable". Still they continued to stay to show respect to their parents' wishes. They also remembered that during off-term vacations they had to remain at home or visit their parents, whereas their male classmates "were (relatively) free to move about wherever they wanted—some of the boys even arranged overseas holidays". Many women candidly noted that, among other advantages of urban-based education (as noted above), women had "better chances and choices" of selecting a partner (the term they used, without exception, was "husband") in an "enlightened urban environment".

Majority of the respondents (26, i.e. 54%) reported that their parents owned more than 5 acres

of land. Another 16 per cent (8) commanded 10 to 14 acres. The minimum land holding recorded was 3 acres, while the maximum was 27. Most of these lands were used for agriculture, horticulture and real estate purposes; and they produced regular income for the owners. In Bangladesh, it may be noted, land is one of the key factors which determines people's access to resources, opportunities and means of production (for details on the significance and implications of land tenure in Bangladesh, see, e.g., Jansen 1986, Jannuzi and Peach 1980).

Table 1 depicts the average annual family income of the respondents during their graduates study period. The gross figures include income from different sources, such as, earnings from land, houses and other fixed assets; salary from paid-employment, remuneration or compensation for any special skill/aptitude etc.. It may be noted that all, except 1, women represented the Tk. 80,000 to 130,000 income class.

Table 1. Family income distribution of the respondents (in Thousand Taka)

Annual income-class	Frequency	percentage (%)
30-80	4	8.33

80-130	32	66.67
130-180	8	16.67
180 and above	4	8.33

Note: The Taka figures approximately correspondent to 1996 factor cost.

Most respondents hailed from families which had a rich heritage of education. This particularly applies to women. The fathers (or legal guardians) of 20 (42%) respondents, including 8 women, were themselves graduates. 16 (33%) respondents noted that their parents were educated up to Higher Secondary (equivalent to A level) level. Another 8 (16%) respondents' parents were post-graduates, out of whom 2 held doctoral degrees.

28 (58%) respondents—10 men and 8 e—noted that their parents were in full-time employment in public or private sectors while they were studying in the universities. Alongside regular jobs, these parents also held landed properties in the country side. Many of them were 'absentee landlords', i.e., they owned land in the villages and city-suburbs, and engaged hired workers (farmers, artisans, estate agents etc.) to manage and use their land in their absence. Another 25 per cent (10 men and 2 women) of the respondents' parents were self-employed (small to large scale) business entrepreneurs. These business enterprises included grocery, shops, garments industries, cloth retailing shops, chemists, book publishers, transport agencies, retailing agents for imported electronic goods etc. Almost all the parents, who were engaged in regular employment and business, were based on cities or semi-urban localities. Only 8 (16%) respondents—7 male and 1 female—said that their parents were small farmers living permanently in villages.

From the above, it also becomes evident that the majority (73%) of female graduates represented parents who themselves were educated, owned landed properties and were in regular employment. Only 1 out of 11 women (9%) came from an ostensive rural farming household.

Test of Hypothesis

The hypotheses of the study were tested by Chi-square analysis. The value of Chi-square was calculated to be 11.32 which was well beyond the acceptable range, implying a clear rejection of the Null Hypothesis (H₀). The test result indicates that the access to (and/or opportunity of) graduate education is, more or less, restricted to a particular income-group.

Which socioeconomic class does an average Bangladeshi graduate belong to? The question defies any straight-forward answer, given the regional diversity and the lack of sufficient cross-sectional data on graduates. However, as mentioned before, recent studies are increasingly drawing our attention to the skewed pattern of access to higher education in Bangladesh. The findings presented above are preliminary and incomplete in the sense that they are a part of a broader research scheme which still running and the data have not been fully analysed. Further exploration and analyses may help us to comprehend the situation better and to draw conclusions more confidently. However, the above findings subscribe to the general lessons reported in similar studies (e.g. Raham 1993, Khan 1994, Hossain 1989); and it may be possible to sketch out a preliminary picture of a typical graduate:

The graduate hails from an affluent socioeconomic class with an average yearly income of Tk. 80,00 to 130,000. His (her) family has an gross land holding of more than 5 acres. (S) he began formal schooling in a rural setting, but eventually migrated to the urban centres for higher education. (S) he has been brought up in an 'enlightened' atmosphere, with the care and guidance of a fairly educated father (or legal guardian). (S) he was almost solely dependent on the family for supporting him (her) through the university life.

In pursuing graduate education, women have some special features relating to their distinct status from men. The parents of most women respondents were graduates themselves and enjoyed secured income and landed assets. The shift from rural to urban setting caused additional pressure on women relating to compliance with parent and social expectations and norms.

Generally speaking, the recent graduate represents a traditional higher middle class family which enjoys a successful blend of secured income, social status and educational heritage. Put differently the above findings also suggest that if a family lacks socioeconomic resources and power, education does not in itself provide upward mobility.

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