

PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATED EXPATRIATE BANGLADESHI WOMEN ABOUT
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION: THE BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED AND THE
STRATEGIES THEY HAVE EMPLOYED

by

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ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative methodology, I conducted this study to identify the barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh and to investigate the possible strategies to remove those barriers, from the perspectives of three Bangladeshi women who received post-secondary education in Bangladesh and who are currently living in Canada. To explore participants' perceptions, I used open-ended structured interviews. I then analyzed data using the conceptual framework of subsystems within an open systems theory.

The study revealed that the barriers Bangladeshi women encounter when pursuing a post-secondary education are vast and complex. The findings from this study indicated that Bangladeshi women face barriers from multi-level social subsystems such as family, financial, educational, socio-cultural, political, and governmental subsystems. Six broad themes of major barriers emerged from participants' reports: (a) financial constraints; (b) socio-cultural practices and attitudes; (c) male domination; (d) inadequate education facilities; (e) student politics and unstable political situations; and (f) corrupt government and inconsistent implementation of law and punishment. Within these six themes, the study identified various factors that hamper women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh.

The participants suggested strategies that may help those who make and implement policy find ways to minimize barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh and beyond. The results showed that since the barriers are multifaceted, positive collaboration between the various levels of social subsystems in Bangladesh can reduce the difficulties and may profoundly change the overall Bangladeshi attitude towards women and their education. The family or the government systems alone are not enough to remove the deeply-rooted barriers to Bangladeshi women's higher learning. Future research might explore the perceptions of a larger sample of Bangladeshi women who are in Bangladesh but could not obtain post-secondary education.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“How can quality of human life improve when hundreds of millions of its children, the new generation of mankind, are born to illiterate, uneducated, untrained mothers who traditionally are responsible for the upbringing of children?” (Report of a Seminar of Women Legislators, 1978, p. 14). The Assistant Secretary of the United Nations, Spilia Helvi asked this question nearly three decades ago at a Seminar of Women’s Legislators. Little has changed around the world since that time, and particularly in developing countries. Millions of mothers around the world continue to live in depressed conditions; many of them are uneducated, uninformed, and untrained.

Women constitute one-half of the world population (King & Hill, 1995). Moreover, women’s contribution in every sector of development is enormous. Women make up 40 percent of the world’s work force in agriculture, a third in services, a quarter in industries, and they grow at least one-half of the world’s food. They bear most of the household responsibilities including preparing food, caring for the sick, and, bringing up their children—the job with the most responsibility (World Bank Report, 1994). The value of women’s ‘hidden contribution’ to the global economy exceeds 11 trillion dollars (UNDP Report, 1995).

In spite of this recognition and huge contribution to world development, a large portion of women, especially in developing countries, do not pursue their education. Most developed countries report literacy rates close to one hundred percent (UNDP, 2005). However, the rate for developing and poor countries remains much lower (UNESCO, 2005b). Reports indicate that, worldwide, women represent almost two-thirds

(64%) of all illiterate adults aged 15 and above (Haider, 1996; UNESCO). Although some of the women in developing countries, including Bangladesh, are able to acquire primary and secondary education, many cannot acquire a post-secondary education, despite their willingness (UNESCO). The deprivation of post-secondary education significantly limits their opportunity to build better lives.

I was born in rural Bangladesh and lived there until completing my higher secondary education. I went to study at the University of Dhaka to pursue a post-secondary education. I often wondered if the challenges that I faced during my school years were common for the rural women in their pursuit of education. Those barriers were a lack of quality education facilities, various social taboos such as pressure for early marriage, negative concept of women's higher education, and family's negative attitude towards women living away from home, even in a university hostel. While at university, I myself encountered barriers such as poor accommodation in women's residences, financial constraints, and political disruptions including incidences of student politics. I wanted to find out what other similar women experienced, and also how they similarly overcame those challenges.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify, from the perspectives of expatriate, educated Bangladeshi women, the reasons for Bangladeshi women's low participation rates in post-secondary education and some strategies for overcoming those barriers. The two objectives of this study are, from the perspectives of the stakeholders themselves: one, to develop a deeper understanding of how various aspects of society inhibit women's

participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh; and, two, to identify some strategies in order to overcome or to minimize those challenges.

The study will attempt to answer the following four questions: (a) What do some Bangladeshi educated women perceive to be the fundamental causes of women's low participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh? (b) How have the various subsystems in Bangladesh affected their own education? (c) How have these women overcome the barriers to pursue their higher education? (d) What possible strategies do these educated Bangladeshi women suggest to reduce the obstacles which impede women from pursuing or completing their post-secondary education in Bangladesh?

The following sections provide a definition of the term 'post-secondary education,' the rationale for conducting this study, including the educational statistics for both females and males in Bangladesh.

Definition of Post-Secondary Education

I use the term 'post-secondary education' to mean education at university (from Grade 13 to doctoral levels), after the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) education. I deliberately use the term 'post-secondary education' here rather than using the term 'higher education' because, in Bangladesh a misconception exists about higher education. Most people in Bangladesh perceive higher education to be after an undergraduate degree (i.e., a masters' degree or doctorate degree). However, the purpose of this study is to identify the reasons for women's low participation rates after higher secondary education, meaning from 13 Grade to upper levels of university. The statistics for Bangladesh show that the major gaps in women's education in Bangladesh start from their 13 Grade (from

post-secondary) (BANBEIS, 2004; Yearbook of Bangladesh, 2005). Hence I use the term 'post-secondary education' instead of 'higher education.'

Rationale of the Study

Bangladesh is a densely populated developing country where women face many obstacles to pursue their education despite their willingness (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Noman, 1984; Raynor, 2005; Shekh, 2001). In the past, most of the women in Bangladesh have been left out of formal education (Noman, 1984). Due to a lack of education, large proportions of women in Bangladesh have suffered from social stigma and economic hardship (Noman; Raynor). Yet studies emphasized the importance of women's education as being the key to power and opportunities (Haider, 1996; Kambhupati, & Pal, 2001; King & Hill, 1995; Nussbaum, 2003). Nussbaum identified women's education as an urgent priority for women's overall well-being.

In recent years, the Bangladeshi government and some non-government organizations (NGO's) have provided various initiatives to encourage and improve women's education in Bangladesh. For example, the Government of Bangladesh has provided women with a free education up to 14th grade (14 years of formal education lead to a bachelor's degree in Bangladesh) in government schools and colleges (Raynor, 2005; UNDP, 2005). There has been some success: in 1970, the secondary school enrollment rate for girls was documented as only 18%; this increased to 50% in 2003 (Raynor; Yearbook of Bangladesh, 2005). But challenges remain, especially in post-secondary education. As a result, the higher levels of education rates for women in Bangladesh remain low. For example, in Higher Secondary Certificate (SSC) completion rate for women is 19.7% and the Post-Secondary education completion rate for women is 1.4% ((Bangladesh Bureau

of Educational Information and Statistic (BANBEIS), 2004; Yearbook of Bangladesh, 2005). Below, I provide the educational situation of both women and men in Bangladesh.

The Educational Situation in Bangladesh

Some more recent educational reports (BANBEIS, 2004; Human Development Report (HDR), 2005; Yearbook of Bangladesh, 2005) revealed that the current primary school enrollment rate for girls in Bangladesh was satisfactory, but that in higher secondary (11 to 12 grades) and in post-secondary (after 12 grades) education levels, women’s participation and completion rates remained much lower than that of men. In 2005, the real progress was in primary school, where enrollment rates were nearly 80% for both girls and boys. The secondary school (Grades 6-10) enrollment rate in 2004 for girls was reported as being higher than for boys (45.9% vs. 41.9%), yet the completion rate for girls was lower (27.8%) as compared to boys (30.5%). In post-secondary level, females’ education rate in Bangladesh decrease gradually which is reflected in women’s post-secondary education completion rate – (1.4%) as compared to that of men (4.2%) (BANBEIS; Yearbook of Bangladesh). I expand on this point below in Table 1.

Table 1

Education Completion Rates for Women and Men in Bangladesh

Education Completion	Female	Male	Year
Primary School	57.85%	52.2%	2005
Secondary School Certificate (Gr. 6-10)	20.8%	27.3%	2004
Higher Secondary Certificate (Gr. 11-12)	19.7%	28.0%	2004
Post-Secondary Education	1.4%	4.2%	2005

Note. From Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistic (BANBEIS), 2004; Human Development Report (HDR), 2005; Yearbook of Bangladesh, 2005.

At the primary level, women's education rate is higher compared to that of men. From that point on, the females' participation rate drops. The national examination results of SSC revealed that in 2004 the completion rate for females was much lower than for males (20.8% vs. 27.3% respectively), and that the completion rate for females in HSC was 19.7% and for males 28.0% (BANBEIS). This trend continues up to university. In 2005, the higher education completion rate for women in Bangladesh was much lower than for males (1.4% vs. 4.2%) Only one woman gets access to the university education compared to three men at the same level (HDR; Yearbook of Bangladesh).

All of the above reports indicate that, in spite of the improvements of primary school enrollment, the higher levels of education and especially the post-secondary education rates for women in Bangladesh remain low. Such a persistent difference in higher levels of education serves as a strong reminder of how far the world has yet to go in order to make real progress in women's post-secondary education. The deprivation of higher levels of education keeps women from realizing their full potential (Nussbaum, 2003). Therefore, I contend that it is important and necessary to identify the barriers that deter women's participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh before making recommendations for change based on research.

During the last three decades, a number of research studies focused on women's education in developing countries. Reviewing a large number of related studies, I found that most of research used quantitative surveys to gain a general view of the importance and impact of women's education as well as to understand some reasons for women's low participation in education in general. Unfortunately, little systematic investigation has been conducted specifically in Bangladesh about the reasons for women's low

participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I could not locate any research that explored women's own perceptions about the roadblocks to their post-secondary education in Bangladesh and about possible strategies to overcome those barriers. In order to devise better strategies for improving women's post-secondary education rates in Bangladesh, I believe that it is necessary to investigate women's own perceptions about the barriers that women usually face and possible solutions and initiatives to overcome those challenges. My study represents a first step in this direction. As a Bangladeshi woman, I have a personal commitment to the women who struggle to attain post-secondary education in Bangladesh. By identifying the roadblocks that Bangladeshi women report, I hope to encourage policymakers to follow-up on these strategies in order to eliminate or minimize these barriers, all toward improving women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh as well as other developing countries.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis contains eight chapters. The following is a summary of the contents of this thesis. This first chapter of the thesis is the introductory part of the study. It contains the introduction, the purpose and research questions, definition of post-secondary education, and rationale for this study. Chapter Two provides a review of four bodies of the relevant literature for this study including, the importance and impact of the education of women; major obstacles that hamper women's education in Bangladesh as well as other developing countries; possible strategies and initiatives to overcome those barriers; and a review of open systems theory literature to develop the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter Three outlines the research design and methodology that I used to conduct the study. This includes a description of the ethical considerations, participant

selection, method, data collection, and data analysis. I report the participants' findings in following three chapters: Chapter Four focuses on the first participant, Moumita; Chapter Five on the second participant, Shaila; and Chapter Six on the third participant, Jahan. Chapter Seven discusses and interprets the results, and compares the findings of the three participants and relates these findings to those in the literature. This chapter also includes a section discussing the results based on my conceptual framework of subsystems in open systems theory. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, includes the limitations of the study and the implications for practice, implications for future research, and the conclusions.

The next chapter, Chapter Two, provides a review of four bodies of relevant literature and a conceptual framework that I utilized to conduct this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter contains a review of the literature that is relevant to this study about the challenges faced by women in Bangladesh to attain a post-secondary education, and the strategies the women utilized to overcome their barriers. The chapter is organized into four sections based on the review of each body of relevant literature. The sections are: one, the importance and impact of the education of women; two, major obstacles that inhibit women's education in Bangladesh as well as other developing countries; three, possible strategies and initiatives to overcome those barriers and improve women's education; and four, a review of open systems theory literature to develop the conceptual framework for this study. Each body of literature is reviewed below.

The Importance and Impact of the Education of Women

The purpose of this section is to present an overview of the importance and impact of the education of women, based on a review of the literature. Some of the literature indicated that women's education is the key to sources of power and opportunities that may otherwise hinder women's lives (e.g., Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; King & Hill, 1995; Nussbaum, 2003). Daniel (2006) stated that at the individual level, education is perceived to be the ultimate liberator, which empowers a person to make personal and social choices. At the national level, Daniel said that educated citizens are believed to be the foundation of well functioning democratic institutions to achieve social consistency. A number of studies recognized that women's education is not only crucial but also an urgent priority (Nussbaum; UN Millennium Project, 2005). After reviewing the relevant literature, I describe below under separate headings the impact of the education of

women, both formal and non-formal, on women's own well-being as well as on the overall growth of the family and society.

Education for Women's Empowerment and Well-being

Several studies indicated that women's education both formal and non-formal increased women's empowerment including self-respect, self-confidence, and capability. Burchfield (1996) highlighted the sense of economic security, ability to earn a living, control over income, household decision-making, self-confidence, and self-respect; all these, she noted, were elements of women's empowerment. She further emphasized that the ability to act effectively in the public sphere, to participate in public protest or political campaigns to be politically aware, all can be earned through education. Stromquest (1995) argued that empowerment was not limited to concerns about personal identity, but extended to the broader context of human rights and social justice. Haider (1996) said that lack of or incomplete schooling contributed to poor self-image and to perceptions of inferiority.

Nussbaum (2003) identified that women's capabilities for self-respect; ability to develop social relationship and to achieve the important social good of self-respect; living with dignity; and cultivation of power of thought and expression; all these she noted, can be earned through education. Further, Nussbaum stressed that access to legal systems and resources, and social and political participation and rights are all opportunities women can gain through education. Education enables and increases women's earning capabilities, thus reducing their poverty and dependence on male dominant society (Nussbaum; Raynor, 2005; Shekh, 2001). The report of the United Nation Millennium Project (2005) confirmed that women's education better prepares women to extract:

The most benefit from existing services and opportunities and to generate alternative opportunities, roles, and support structures. These empowering effects of women's education are manifested in a variety of ways, including increased income-earning potential, ability to bargain for resources within the household, decision autonomy, control over their own fertility, and participation in public life. (p. 37)

Educated women tend to exercise control over birth rates, which slows population growth. In doing so, this has the effect of eventually increasing women's power and economic wellbeing as they are freed from persistent child bearing and child rearing responsibilities (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Burchfield, 1996; Comings, Smith & Shrestha, 1994; King & Hill, 1995; Nussbaum, 2003; Schultz, 1993; World Bank, 1994).

In Nepal, Burchfield (1996) surveyed two groups of women. One group of 400 women who had completed literacy-training programs a year earlier was compared with a second group of 100 who had not participated in such programs. Another study by Kagitcibasi, Goksen, and Gulgoz (2005) in Turkey examined the impact of functional adult literacy program (FALP) on the cognitive, personal, familial, and social spheres of the lives of women participants who did not have formal schooling. Both studies found a statistically significant difference between the before and after responses of women who engaged in literacy courses and those who did not. Burchfield (1996) concluded that women's participation in literacy programs increased respect for women's opinions by family and community and improved the women's confidence in expressing their opinions. In addition, literacy programs increased women's self-awareness to participate in credit programs and check their children's attendance and progress in school. As well, women gained self-confidence after attending literacy programs, which was translated into the outcome that they would not be cheated in the market either as vendors or as purchasers. In the same way, women in Turkey disclosed that adult literacy programs

increased the opportunities for women to interact with other women and enhanced self-concept, capabilities, and confidence (Kagitcibasi et al., 2005).

Shekh (2001) reported similar results after examining the impact of a NGO-run women's education and microfinance program (Young Women Christian Association) in Bangladesh on female borrowers' economic and social well-being and their intra-household relationships. Those findings revealed that the program had a positive impact on the lives of Bangladeshi rural women: women's levels of literacy increased; they had greater social and political awareness, they gained some leadership skills; and were said to contribute to the household economy and they participated in household decisions.

One of the participants commented:

Now we can read and write, take loans, earn money, and contribute to the household economy. Now the members in the household respect and value my opinion and me more compared to before. More importantly, I feel good about the attention that I get now and feel that I am worthy. By taking part in the programme I have learnt a lot. Before joining the programme, I did not usually deal with our household economy and my husband never asked me to get involved. I always thought I am not capable of handling money and the economy, as I was illiterate. (p. 13)

Her description demonstrates a different dimension of her empowerment through the literacy-training program. From this testimony, I found it clear that some women deeply value being educated and becoming self-sufficient in their daily activities.

Women's Education and Social Returns

A substantial amount of qualitative and quantitative research (e.g. Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Archer & Cottingham, 1996; Burchfield, Hua, Iturry, & Rocha, 2002b; Cochrane, 1979; Coming, Smith, & Shrestha, 1994; Fuhriman et al., 2006; King & Hill, 1995; Sandiford, Cassel, & Sanchez, 1995; World Bank, 1994) has indicated that social returns on investment in women's education were greater than a similar investment in

men's education. Rayor's (2005) study revealed that women's education has prepared them to be better wives and mothers. In addition, investing in women's education has reduced poverty, infant and maternal mortality, fertility rates, gender inequality, early marriage, and social injustice (e.g., Daniel, 2006; King & Hill; UN Millennium Project, 2005; World Bank). I discuss each of these topics below, grouped under family health and well-being; children's education and schooling; and national development and economic growth.

Family Health and Well-being

The educational level of mothers is said to be an important determinant of children's health, nutrition, and overall family's growth (Burchfield et al., 2002b; Chen & Hong, 2006; Sandiford et al., 1995). Burchfield's et al. (2002b) survey on the impact of non-formal education conducted in Nepal and Bolivia revealed improvements in health-related knowledge and behavior including knowledge of HIV/Aids, seeking medical health for themselves and for their sick children, adopting preventive health measures such as immunization, and greater knowledge of family planning methods. One recent qualitative study by Fuhriman et al. (2006) revealed that several female participants reported that access to literacy programs had an impact on their family life; their child-care practices had improved and their awareness about the importance of cleanliness and disease prevention had increased. Cochrane (1979) analyzed the impact of women's education on child health, concluding that each year of maternal education was associated with a 9% decrease in under-five mortality. Similarly, Sandiford et al. investigated the effects of adult basic education in Nicaragua over a period of ten years. They found a statistically significant reduction of infant mortality among mothers who had participated

in the literacy campaign as compared with those who had not. Moreover, they observed that the child mortality rate for project participants was less than that for non-participating mothers who had formal primary school education.

Children's Education and Schooling

Research has also shown that mothers' education has a positive impact on children's schooling (Archer & Cottingham, 1996; Kambhupati & Pal, 2001; King & Hill; Pedro, Costas, & Mathias, 2006). Women who attended an education program were more likely to send their children to school (Kambhupati & Pal). Multiple studies have found that mothers' education has a strong positive effect on their daughters' enrollment and the education level of their children's generation (e.g., Kambhupati, & Pal; Pedro, Costas, & Mathias). Along with this positive impact on reduced-child mortality rates, the study by Kagitcibasi, Goksen, and Gulgoz (2005) revealed that most participants in adult literacy programs placed greater value on education for their daughters' and sons' future careers.

Archer and Cottingham (1996) evaluated literacy-training programmes in Bangladesh, El Salvador, and Uganda. In all countries, they noted the positive impact of the program on the self-realization of individuals, their participation in their communities, resource management activities, gender roles, health, and children's education. Although the impact varied by country, the authors documented impressive results across all three countries. In terms of children's education in Uganda, for example, they found that in program areas, children's enrollment increased in government schools by 22 percent and in other schools by 4 percent.

National Development and Economic Growth

National development and economic growth are said to depend largely on women's education because women's contribution in every sector of development is enormous (UNDP, 1995). Moreover, educated women have a higher possibility to produce potential educated 'human capital' for a nation (e.g., Haider, 1996; UN Millennium Projects, 2005; World Bank, 1994). To highlight the impact of women's higher education, Daniel (2006) pointed out that investment in higher education for women, particularly in developing countries, results in high levels of return in national growth. He considered educated men and women as being the foundation for well-functioning democratic institutions. Further, the World Bank report emphasized that educating girls and women was considered the most critical element to achieving social and national benefits (Dundar & Haworth, 1993).

All of the above literature indicated that the expansion of women's education should be an urgent priority for women's own well-being as well as for the overall development of all nations. Despite these above recognized and acknowledged returns on women's education, women in developing countries continue to face many obstacles to participate in and benefit from education. The next section provides a review of some of the published literature that highlighted obstacles to women's participation in education in developing countries including Bangladesh.

Barriers to Women's Education in Developing Countries

The purpose of this section is to describe the literature identifying the obstacles that are commonly said to deter women's participation in education in developing countries including Bangladesh. In my research, I aim to explore the reasons for women's low

participation in the post-secondary education in Bangladesh and will try to learn about the strategies and initiatives that might be possible solutions to overcome those difficulties. I am presuming that many of the problems experienced by women in Bangladesh are similar to those experienced by women in other developing countries. As such, my literature review explores barriers that women encountered to participate in education in Bangladesh and in other developing countries.

When summarizing the factors that perpetuate women's lower educational level compared to men, Haider (1996) noted, "If one is to discuss female education as a human right—then the reasons for not sending daughters to school and the reasons for the high dropout rate are primarily of three categories: traditional and attitudinal, financial, and infrastructural" (p. 118). I have used Haider's three categories to structure my review of the literature because most of the findings in the literature fall into these three categories. I investigated barriers in women's education including primary, secondary, and post-secondary education in developing countries. Each of these factors is discussed below.

Traditional and Attitudinal Barriers

A large number of studies identified some of the long-held socio-cultural practices and beliefs that function as barriers to women's education in many developing countries including Bangladesh. I describe these barriers below.

Gender-biased Socio-cultural Attitudes and Practices

An established gender-biased socio-cultural attitude is one of the main factors that constrains individual girls' access to education in Bangladesh as well as other developing countries (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Chen, Huq, & D'Souza, 1981; Daniel, 2006; Dunder & Haworth, 1993; Haider, 1996; Khan, 1991; Raynor, 2005; Shekh, 2001). In

Bangladesh, “the discrimination in the treatment of male and female starts at birth and continues through the different phases of life” (Khan, p. 329). Women’s education is said to be perceived as a threat to their traditional culture (Arends-Kuenning & Amin; Noman, 1984; Nussbaum, 2003; Raynor; Shekh). Describing the female’s position in a conservative Bangladeshi society, Noman said, “From birth to death, from infancy to old age, a female goes without consideration in all aspects of life within or outside the family” (p. 5). In general, in Bangladesh, it is believed that a man is the breadwinner in a family and a woman is responsible for carrying out household responsibilities and child rearing (e.g., Raynor). The study by Chen, Huq, and D’Souza (1981) revealed the preference for having a son in Bangladesh. They provided evidence from Bangladesh that male child mortality exceed female child mortality in the neonatal period. These differential mortality rates were reversed in the post neonatal period for female children by as much 50 percent due to parents’ neglect and gender-biased attitudes towards female children.

Similar gender-biased attitudes and practices occur in other developing societies. As an example, Hamamsy’s (1994) study conducted in Egypt provided examples of Egyptian society’s outlooks towards girls’ education. Many parents in Egypt are not in favor of formal education of their daughters. A strong belief exists that education spoils a girl’s character and undermines her willingness to fulfill her traditional role as wife and mother. Consequently, parents prepare their daughters for their future domestic roles as wife and mother by providing them with household responsibilities in the home which provide them practical experience in cooking, cleaning, and child caring rather than by sending

girls to school. As a result, girls continue to lag behind their male counterparts in education.

Low Incentive for Daughter's Education

An old *Bengali* saying is, "Caring for a daughter is like watering a neighbour's tree," (Raynor, 2005, p. 1). This implies that investment in a daughter's education is a wasteful venture since a daughter will be lost to another family through marriage. Raynor attested that this argument has often been used to justify girls' exclusion from schools. Raynor and Shekh's studies have concluded that, for several reasons, investment in daughters' education is an unattractive proposal to parents. First, adding to the reason just above, the income of the educated but married daughter would go to her husband's family not to the natal family. Second, the costs of schooling to parents are real and direct, while the benefits are often uncertain, especially for girls because girls' paid job opportunities are limited. Since parents do not see any monetary value in educating girls, they are reluctant to send their daughters to school. Third, in many cultures including Bangladesh, sons are responsible for their parents in their older ages. The son in the household will stay with the parents and provide food and security for their elderly parents. In addition, overall employment opportunities for boys are greater than for girls. Naturally, this expected intention encourages parents to invest in their son's education whose earnings are more certain and visible and which are retained in the family. Thus, obstacles arise from economic concerns for the family and for the (aging) parents.

Patriarchal Societies' Domination and Outlooks

In some patriarchal societies, women's education is perceived as a threat to their socio-cultural status (e.g., Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Hamamsy, 1994; Raynor,

2005). Several studies highlighted that male-dominated cultural practices limit women's education severely in developing countries. Bangladesh is a patriarchal society. Many fathers in rural Bangladesh strongly oppose girls' formal education because fathers believe that boys, as the future breadwinners, should be more educated than girls (Arends-Kuenning & Amin; Raynor). Raynor examined local attitudes toward girls' education in Bangladesh. They found that most of the male respondents have seen girls' education increase their traditional roles in preparing them to be better wives and mothers. But none has seen women's education as a tool for women's empowerment. A male participant [seventeen years old] in Raynor's study said,

It's OK if she's educated to the same level as me, but I don't want her [i.e., his future wife] to work, I want her to stay at home. Most parents feel their daughters are going to get married when they grow up and they'll be housewives, so there's no need for them to get educated (p. 97).

The sentiments expressed here may be applicable to other societies as well. Haider (1996) provided evidence from Egypt where about 49 percent girls indicated that their parents, especially their father, would not allow them to go to schools. For instance, one of the Egyptian girls in that study said,

My father would not allow any of us to go to school because, he says, it is shameful for a girl to go to school. So he kept me at home to help my mother take care of my siblings, to learn all about housework, washing and cooking so that I may become a 'lady of the house' (p. 118).

Nussbaum indirectly pointed to the same reality. She pointed out that, since women's education is revolutionary and works as a key to many other sources of power and opportunity, then those who do not want to extend these sources of power to women obviously are the major barrier to extending women's education.

Daniel (2006) identified that colonial economic structures, policy framework, and male dominating patriarchal society's attitudes are responsible for women's lower participation in higher education and in their subordinate position in Kenyan society. He argued that since women's empowerment and independence depend on women's educational and employment opportunities, then government policies have often forced girls to attend poor quality secondary schools, and thus indirectly limited their opportunities. Moreover, the socio-cultural factors within some Kenyan communities confine women to the lower levels of the education system.

Religious Practices

Many Muslim countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Arab countries restrict women's formal education in the name of religion. They introduced '*Purdah*' (covering from head to feet) customs for girls at the age of 12-13, which limits their free movement in the outside world (Haider, 1996; King & Hill, 1995; Norman, 1984). In fact, the conservative family viewed women's education as a dangerous step (Haider). Haider said that sometimes society limits knowledge for women beyond a narrow confine. As an example, she commented on Adams's findings (1986), where one young male bureaucrat in an Upper Egyptian village said,

Many fellahin (Peasants) here don't let their daughters leave the house to go to school and the like because they fear that their girls will gain a sense of freedom, which is always dangerous. By venturing out, the girls will also gain knowledge of the world of men, and if they learn to read, they will read the wrong kinds of books, not the Koran. (p. 119)

In this way, religious practice can act as a strong barrier to women's education and empowerment.

Early Marriage

Studies revealed that early marriage and early childbearing liability constrain women's education in developing countries including Bangladesh. Research by Arends-Kuenning and Amin (2001) showed that increasing women's education could not change the cultural beliefs about marriage in Bangladesh; rather marriage took priority over education. In Bangladeshi culture, it is perceived that girls should be married early and maintain their household responsibilities. It is estimated that 47 percent of the girls in Bangladesh married before they reached the age of 18 (UNESCO Bangkok, 2003). Most of the families tended to see their daughters marry in their early ages because they believed that marriage was the best way to secure their daughters' overall well-being (Arends-Kuenning & Amin).

This early marriage practice is also common in other societies. Using data from 40 demographic and health surveys, Singh and Samara (1996) revealed that from 20 to 50 % of women marry by the age of 18, and 40 to 70% of women marry by the age of 20. This scenario is even more striking in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South Asia where women's post-secondary education rates are extremely low. In addition, parents tended to withdraw their daughters from school at an early age, especially if the girls were attending a coeducational institution. Similar evidence was provided in Daniel's study (2006). Investigating the causes of women's low participation in higher education in Kenya, he suggested that early marriages before completion of their courses, especially during the undergraduate programmes, and subsequent pregnancies and child rearing responsibilities, in addition, household chores put extra demands on female students'

study time. Therefore, widespread early marriage, childbearing, and child rearing tasks all conflicted with girls' schooling on the larger scale.

Household Responsibilities

Studies suggested that the women's early domestic responsibilities conflicted with the pursuit of women's education (Haider, 1996; Hamamcy, 1994; Smock, 1981; UN Millennium Projects, 2005; World Bank, 1994). The World Bank report indicated that between the ages of 10 and 15, girls may have to work up to 8 to 10 hours a day on activities inside and outside the home. For example, in Malawi school-age girls spent more time on household chores than boys. In Burkina Faso, girls 7 years of age and older spend 3.5 hours a day on household tasks, compared with 1.5 hours for boys. In India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, by age five, girls are involved in many household tasks and farm activities (World Bank). A study of primary schools in Punjab showed that a much higher percentage of girls dropped out of school because of the demand of domestic work (Smock). Most Egyptian fathers insisted their daughters remain at home to help their mother and to bring up younger siblings (Hamamsy).

Reluctance from Girls and Women Themselves

Sometimes reluctance comes from women themselves. In an attempt to identify the cause, Nussbaum (2003) referenced a survey in 1997 by Bagchi on women in West Bengal, India. Bagchi had found that one-quarter of school-age girls thought that women should have less education than men. All of those girls pointed to the fact that most girls are trained from childhood to believe that men are superior to women as are boys to girls. Second, sometimes a rational response comes from girls, such as:

What point is there in going to school when I am going to be married off at age ten and denied any chance to leave the house thereafter, and when being educated may make my husband and my in-laws more likely to abuse me (Nussbaum, p. 343).

Another possible reluctance comes from girls when they see that education does not change women's lives, especially as many educated women are still living at home. Such realities eliminated the difference between being educated and uneducated in their eyes. Therefore, even if they have a strong desire for education, they cannot strongly voice it (Nussbaum). She commented that these girls know that their options and opportunities are limited, their individual rights and personal worth are not recognized beyond their role as wife and mother and, therefore, they are unwilling to fight for education that is out of reach. These attitudes are also common in other societies. Programs for improving female education are said to respond to the demands of the labour market.

Financial Barriers

Many studies emphasized "poverty" as the leading cause of underlying obstacles faced by girls and women in developing countries (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Dundar & Haworth, 1993; Haider, 1996; Nussbaum, 2003; World Bank, 1994). The following paragraphs expand on these issues.

Poverty and High Educational Cost for Poor Parents

Haider mentioned financial situations as the second most often given reasons for lack of schooling. Schooling is seldom inexpensive for poor families, even when governments pay much of the tuition fees at school level (World Bank). In some developing countries, parents bear the direct costs for schooling. For example, although the government of Bangladesh provides free education for women up to 14th Grade in schools and colleges, families must bear other direct and indirect costs, such as transportation, books, uniforms,

sanitation, stationery, and examination fees (Raynor, 2005). Poorer families are more likely not to pay for the education cost for their daughters. As a result, parents sometimes withdraw girls prematurely from primary or secondary schools. This tendency is particularly noticeable in Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Morocco, and Nigeria (UN Millennium Projects, 2005).

Poor families often regard girls' schooling as a "luxury" (Haider, 1996, p. 120). The World Bank Projects found that Per Capita GNP in these countries is under \$500. Despite introducing very gender-specific policies such as establishing single sex boarding facilities, institutions for women or institutions that reserve places for female students in higher education often failed due to economical hardship and difficult socio-economic and cultural settings. The evidence in the World Bank project suggested that countries with low levels of income and difficult social settings (socio-cultural settings with low parental demand for higher education) may put up the most barriers which restrict female participation in higher education, especially in rural areas. Countries in South Asia such as Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and much of North Africa are in this category (Dundar & Haworth, 1993).

Educational and Infrastructural Barriers

Several studies documented a number of educational barriers such as unequal access to quality secondary education, traditional curriculum and limited job opportunities, long school distance, and inadequate girls' school facilities among others that perpetuate women's low participation in secondary and post-secondary education. The following paragraphs elucidate these issues.

Unequal Access to Quality Secondary Education

Unfortunately, girls' lower rates of access to secondary education sometimes have restricted women's access to post-secondary education in many developing countries including Africa and East Asia (Daniel, 2006; Dundar & Haworth, 1993). Moreover, girls' lower completion rates at the primary and secondary levels were noted as a major obstacle to women's access to higher education in China, Malawi, Mali, and Niger (World Bank Report). Daniel provided a comprehensive review of the major obstacles that hinder the participation of women in post-secondary education in Kenya. In his consideration, policy framework was one of the major obstacles in women's higher education. He contended that, in Kenya, colonial economic structures and traditional practices are responsible for women's lower participation in higher education and their subordinate position in the society. He found that, since the colonial period [1880-1963] in Kenya, gender has been an important determinant of education in Kenya. Since secondary education is the entrance to women's higher education, government policies have often resulted in girls attending poor quality secondary schools. Again, while women's empowerment and independence are dependent upon women's educational and employment opportunities, policy can limit those opportunities. As a result, poor secondary education for girls can result in their limited access to higher education and also in their under-representation in competitive courses. Gender inequality is pervasive in every sector of development.

Traditional Curriculum and Limited Job Opportunities for Women

Sometimes girls and their families think that there is little reason to attend school if the curriculum or their teachers or counselors convey the message that girls are less

important than boys (Daniel, 2006; Herz & Sperling, 2004; Raynor, 2005). Analysis of textbooks in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa consistently revealed stereotyped material, where women were portrayed as subordinate and passive compared to men who were depicted as intelligent, leaders, and dominant (Herz & Sperling). Furthermore, the types of programs available to females in secondary and higher secondary education may (negatively) affect their enrolment at the post-secondary level. That is, women have often been channeled into traditional fields of study that do not match the job market (Daniel; Dunder & Haworth, 1993; Raynor).

Two projects of the World Bank in India cited the limited fields of study such as home economics and arts-related subjects as being traditionally reserved for women; these fields of study prepare them as better housewives and mothers and, accordingly, are one reason for low female participation rates in higher education (Dunder & Haworth). With their history of poor quality secondary education, women are said to be unable to successfully compete with men for admission to post-secondary education for non-traditional fields. The effect of poor quality secondary education for girls is their serious under-representation in more competitive courses, such as science, medicine, and engineering in public universities. This unrelated link between education and market demand is given as a major obstacle affecting women's participation in higher education in some countries, including Bangladesh (Daniel; Dunder & Haworth; Raynor).

Distance Problems and Lack of Boarding or Dorm Facilities

Evidence suggests that school location can be a major barrier to girls' enrollment and attendance at school, especially for post-secondary education (Dunder & Haworth; Nussbaum, 2003; UN Millennium Projects, 2005; World Bank, 1994). In general, higher

education institutions in most developing countries have been established in relatively well developed urban areas. Most girls, especially from rural areas, have limited access to higher education because of the distance to higher education institutions. In Ghana, the long distance to school discourages girls' enrollment more than boys. In Morocco, a paved road decreased probability by 5 percent of girls dropping out of school (World Bank). A project in India identified the lack of single-sex higher education institutions and inadequate hostel facilities for women as major obstacles in culturally conservative countries where parental attitudes and societal restrictions limit women's participation in coeducational institution (Dundar & Haworth). Three World Bank research projects identified the lack of culturally appropriate boarding facilities and the lack of female teachers as constraints on female participation in higher levels of education. Culturally conservative parents are reported as being concerned about their daughters' transportation to distant institutions and about their living alone.

Shortage of Female Teachers

In many developing countries, schooling systems are unable to meet parental preferences. The parents often mention female teacher shortage as a main factor for not sending their daughters to school. Conservative parents in many countries prefer their daughters to have female teachers (Haider, 1996; Nussbaum, 2003; World Bank, 1994). International cross-section data suggested a positive correlation between gender parity in enrollment and the proportion of female teachers, even in coeducational schools (World Bank).

Shortage of Girls' Schools and Harassment by Male Peers and Teachers

In some cultures, girls' participation in school depends on whether single sex girls' schools are available. Lack of girls' schools sometimes works as barriers to girls' participation at school (Dundar & Haworth, 1993). Most of the conservative families prefer single-sex school to maintain their daughters' 'purity' (Hamamsy, 1994). In densely populated countries, single-sex schools can reduce parental concerns about girls' safety. This includes freedom from harassment by male peers and by male teachers. In some countries, parents are anxious about sending daughters (especially after puberty) to school because they are afraid about their daughters' contact with male teachers or students (Haider, 1996; UN Millennium Project, 2005). Daniel (2006) suggested that sexual harassment by male peers and teachers and unexpected pregnancy have contributed to a significant number of girls not continuing their secondary and post-secondary education in Kenya.

Inadequate School Facilities for Girls

Several studies indicated that an inhospitable school environment discourages girls from attending school. For example, experience across 30 African countries indicated that a majority of young girls do not attend secondary and post-secondary school when they are menstruating if there are no private latrine facilities to enable them to care for personal hygiene (UN Millennium Project, 2005). Evidence from Bangladesh, Egypt, Mali, Morocco, Peru, Tunisia, and Yemen also suggested that having adequate school facilities are essential for sufficient girls' enrollment (World Bank, 1994).

Possible Initiatives to Reduce Barriers and Improve Women's Education

After reviewing the literature, I found that the reasons affecting women's education in developing countries including Bangladesh are both plentiful and multifaceted. Based on different levels of difficulties and reasons, several studies have suggested some possible solutions. The following paragraphs provide a description of suggested strategies and possible solutions to improve women's participation in education, including post-secondary education in Bangladesh and other developing countries. Those strategies are described under the headings of: the expansion of research to examine men's attitudes; enforcement of laws against early marriage; providing daycare and preschool facilities; making school affordable by raising the living standard of the poor family; provision of single-sex education institutions closer to home and of dorm facilities; recruitment of female teachers; curriculum reform and the expansion of non-traditional fields; and, making school more affordable by offering stipends.

Expansion of Research to Examine Men's Attitudes

Several studies have suggested examining men's attitudes towards women's education. Because of gender hierarchy and patriarchal norms and practices, women tend to have less power in the family in many societies. As solutions, the educational program should include men and focus its activity around change of socio-culture practices of men (Shekh, 2001). Raynor (2005) suggested that in a patriarchal society, young men, husbands, and fathers play a vital role in women's education; therefore, it is important to examine (and change) their attitudes. Moreover, policy implementation could be an effective way to change the perception of the society (Haider, 1996; Pande, Malhotra, & Grown, 2005).

Enforcement of Laws Against Early Marriage

Research by Singh and Samara (1996) showed that a woman who has attended secondary school is considerably less likely to marry during adolescence. Accordingly, making education compulsory for girls of certain ages and enforcement of laws against child-marriage might be effective solutions to reduce early marriage (Nussbaum, 2003; Singh & Samara).

Providing Daycare and Preschool Facilities

Providing daycare centers and preschools for younger siblings at or near schools can free many women to attend school (World Bank, 1994). Provision of childcare relieves women from caring for siblings during the day. Moreover, improving the supply of accessible water and fuel can reduce women's time-consuming household responsibilities (UN Millennium Project, 2005). In addition, a flexible school schedule enables women to pursue their education while meeting household responsibilities (Haider, 1996; Nussbaum, 2003; World Bank). To give an example of the positive impact of such strategies, Nussbaum described the case of Kerala, a relatively poor state in India, where literacy rates rose to 99 percent for both boys and girls by virtue of extreme government concern, and creative school design, among other initiatives. A democratically-elected Marxist government has pushed hard for both health services and education. Nussbaum said, "There is no reason in principle why these excellent ideas cannot be followed elsewhere" (p. 346)

Raising the Living Standard of the Poor Family

Nussbaum (2003) argued that the problem of poverty cannot be solved without raising the living standard of the poor in each nation. She suggested that both nations and

states within nations should get involved. Her realization was that the enormous worldwide problem of female education cannot be solved by domestic policies in each nation alone. Powerful nations should pay more attention to the extension of quality female education in poor and developing countries. She referred to the *Adithi Literacy Project* in India as an example, which received support from Swiss and Dutch development agencies.

Provision of Single-sex Education Institutions and Dorm Facilities

To increase post-secondary education for girls in rural areas, Dundar and Haworth (1993) suggested that locating schools, especially higher educational institutions, closer to homes and providing adequate hostel/dorm facilities for women students might encourage women and their parents in culturally conservative countries where parental attitudes and societal restrictions limit women's participation in co-educational institutions. Alleviating concerns for girls' personal safety and reputation as well as reducing public transportation costs might be solutions contributing to an increase in women's participation in high levels of education (e.g., Dundar & Haworth; Nussbaum). A World Bank-supported project in Yemen (1991) provided culturally appropriate hostel facilities on the campuses of the faculties of Education that saw an increased female enrollment by about 50%. UN Millennium Projects (2005) indicated that providing schools within local communities has substantially increased female enrollments in Egypt, Indonesia, and several sub-Saharan African countries. Evidence in Bangladesh revealed that non-formal schools run by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), located in the community and within walking distance, have high attendance and low dropout rates for girls in secondary and post-secondary education (World Bank,

1994). It is also necessary to make school enjoyable and comfortable for female students, providing usable school facilities such as separate toilets and girls' common rooms.

Recruitment of Female Teachers

Emphasizing the importance of the female teacher, Nussbaum provided evidence from Kerala in India, where literacy and enrollment rates are highest, about 99 percent, compared to those in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (other provinces in India) where female enrollment rates are less than 20 percent. In Kerala, more than 60 percent of teachers are women, road transport is highly developed, safe, and reliable, allowing female teachers from urban areas to travel long distances to teach in rural schools (Nussbaum). Raynor said that female teachers may address some security concerns as well as present useful role models. To overcome this barrier, Raynor (2005) recommended removing age restrictions, introducing local recruitment and posting, and building teacher-training institutions in rural areas. Based on the UN Millennium Projects (2005) in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan, good female teachers are not hard to find if required training is provided and if women teachers are posted near their homes.

Curriculum Reform and the Expansion of Non-traditional Fields

Several studies emphasized the impact of reformed curriculum to improve the quality of women's education by providing gender-sensitive textbooks and developing a curriculum for girls that prepares them adequately in science and mathematics to help them compete in the job market (Daniel, 2006; Dundar & Haworth, 1993; Herz & Sperling, 2004; Raynor, 2005). Raynor suggested that available paid job opportunities might help to change parental attitudes and encourage them to invest in daughters' education. Moreover, it is necessary to expand non-traditional fields for female students.

As I described earlier, when secondary education is the key to increased women's participation in higher education, educational policies often force girls to attend poor quality secondary education. As a result, the effect of poor primary and secondary education for girls has limited the access to higher education and is reflected in their under representation in competitive courses, such as science, technical, medical, and engineering courses (Daniel). Lack of quality education has failed to provide necessary skills for employment in the growing formal sectors in countries which in turn discourages parents' spending on daughters' higher education (Dundar & Haworth; Raynor).

Making School More Affordable by Offering Stipends

Stipend programs are recognized as effective ways in increasing girls' enrollment and retention rates (e.g., UNESCO, 2005b). Bangladesh launched a nationwide stipend program (Secondary Female Programme) in 1982 for girls in secondary schools. The program has had a substantial impact on girls' enrollment, particularly in rural areas. For instance, Raynor found that during the 1970s girls' secondary enrollment rate in Bangladesh was 18 percent, which had increased to 50 percent in 2003. The program's goal was to increase rural girls' enrollment and retention in secondary schools (grades 6 to 10). The goals of the girls' stipend were to cover full tuition, exam costs, textbooks, school supplies, uniforms, and transport; to increase the number of female teachers in secondary schools; and to improve school infrastructure.

A Guatemala NGO's stipend program for primary school girls was modeled after the one in Bangladesh began in 1987 with one village and later expanded to twelve villages (World Bank, 1994). Since parents pay no tuition and schoolbooks are free, the monthly

stipend payment partly compensates and encourages poor parents to send their daughters to secondary school. Evidence revealed that more than 90 percent of the stipend-recipient girls are completing secondary education. Thus, school should be made more affordable by reducing fees and offering targeted stipends.

Summary of the Literature on Obstacles and Solutions

Reflecting on available literature, I have determined that the education of women, both formal and non-formal education, empowers women in many ways. It is a powerful tool in promoting access to other opportunities for women in developing countries. Uneducated, rural, poor women reported benefits in terms of personal goals such as earning literacy, cognitive skills, new health behaviors, self-awareness, self-values, and self-confidence. At the familial level, women's education inspired significant improvement regarding women's concern about their own health, children's health, and children's school enrollment. It is also obvious that education programs in developing countries stimulated qualitative change and have had a significant impact on overall growth and improvement.

Upon reviewing the published literature on barriers to women's involvement in post-secondary education, I observed that the problems that affect women's education are vast and complex. A large numbers of studies have identified that established socio-cultural practices, gender-bias attitudes and investment, early marriage, household responsibilities, and financial constraints all serve to inhibit women's participation in education. With these, many educational problems, such as distance between home and school and a lack of dormitory facilities, lack of role models and of single-sex female schools, unequal access to quality secondary education, traditional curriculum, and

limited job opportunities for women are some of the major factors that constrain girls' access to education in developing countries, including Bangladesh.

Accordingly, the literature has suggested several strategies and initiatives. For example, various educational programs should include men and focus their activities to change the socio-culture practices of men and patriarchal society's attitude towards women. More importantly, education must serve as the vehicle for changing attitudes, beliefs, and deep-rooted social norms that perpetuate discrimination and inequality.

Other interventions have proven effective to increase women's participation in education in a variety of countries. These include making schooling more affordable through reducing fees, supplying stationery and health facilities for girls, offering stipends, providing flexible school hours, and establishing preschools and childcare centers. Besides reducing the direct cost of education other positive measures such as establishing single-sex schools close to girls' homes, making schools safe, and providing adequate facilities for girls while at schools are all essential to help increase women's access to education. Additionally, recruiting more trained female teachers, improving the quality of education in overcrowded schools, reforming relevant curricula making jobs more assessable to women as well as means are some positive steps to help improve women's education. Creating paid job opportunities for educated women would also be very encouraging to help increase women's participation in school. Problems may differ and, accordingly, the strategies should be varied and innovative; the ultimate unifying goal should be to aim for an increase in the post-secondary educational level of women around the world.

Need for This Research

After reviewing the literature, I observed that a large number of research studies both qualitative and quantitative tried to explore barriers that women in developing countries usually face in order to participate in primary and secondary education. Only two studies I found, Daniel (2006), and Dundar and Haworth (1993), explored the reasons for women's low participation particularly in post-secondary education in developing countries. I did not find any study that was from the perspective of the stakeholders, the women themselves. Additionally, I could find no research that has been conducted exploring educated women's perceptions about the fundamental reasons for women's low participation in post-secondary education in developing countries and about possible initiatives for overcoming those barriers. Therefore, in order to uncover more appropriate strategies for improving women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh, I contend that research with women (vs. research about women) is necessary. Accordingly, my research is an attempt to explore women's own perceptions about how different subsystems that exist around women in Bangladesh function to support and to inhibit women's participation in post-secondary education.

Conceptual Framework

This section describes the conceptual framework that I used for undertaking the research and analyzing the findings. Quality research is shaped by the conceptual lens through which the researcher views his/her focus of interest. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a strong theoretical framework appropriate to the nature of the research topic in order to investigate problems or phenomena in a systemic way. To guide my research, I adopted the conceptual framework of open systems theory (Bastedo, 2006; Bertalanffy,

1968; Schermerhorn, 2001; Scott & Davis, 2007) to help me understand and analyze multifaceted social systems which function as roadblocks to women's education in Bangladesh. The following paragraphs provide a general idea of systems theory and the key characteristics of open systems theory.

Systems Theory and Open Systems Perspective

Systems theory was proposed and developed in the 1940's by the biologist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy. Bertalanffy stated that 'systems' of various orders were not understandable by investigation of their respective parts in isolation and this posed a problem because development in the individual sciences was mutually independent and they were largely unaware of each other. His argument was that real systems are open to and interact with their environments, and share certain characteristics. Therefore, he said, a need existed for a theory that could guide research in several disciplines and be applied to almost all systems. In his consideration, systems theory was an interdisciplinary field, which studied systems as a combined whole. The whole is seen as a set of interrelating, interacting sub-systems. In addition, the whole itself is a 'part' of larger systems (e.g., Bertalanffy; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Morgan, 1986).

Based on the key characteristics of systems theory, several systems theorists attempted to define organizations either as closed systems or as open systems. Bertalanffy said that systems, which are considered to be isolated from their environment, are closed systems. On the other hand, a system that exchanges resources with its environment is an open system. Emery and Trist (1965) suggested that a closed system is one where interactions occur only among the system components internally without support to its external environment. In contrast, open systems are dependent upon both

internal and external environments. Scott (1985) identified the difference between closed and open systems by saying that, “Open systems, which include biological and social systems, differ from closed systems (such as mechanical systems) in their capacity to convert environmental elements into system components” (p. 601). Following the characteristics of open systems, open systems theory focuses on the arrangement of and relations between the parts, as connected to a whole.

In open systems perspective, a system’s survival is dependent upon its relationship with its environment because the environment provides key resources that lead to change and survival (Bastedo, 2006; Bertalanffy, 1968; Hanson, 1996; Hoy & Miskel, 1996; Katz & Kahn; Scott, 2003; Scott & Davis, 2007; Wendorff, 2002). Based on this central understanding of open systems theory, Bertalanffy said that an open system is a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole. Scott and Davis explained that an open systems model defines the concept of a system where all systems are characterized by an assemblage or combination of parts, whose relations make the interdependent. Schermerhorn (2001) wrote, “A system is a collection of interrelated parts that function together to achieve a common purpose” (p. 81).

Following the thinking of open systems theory, the basic characteristic of an open system model is the dynamic interaction of its interrelated parts and components. Therefore, at the first level of analysis a system can be conceptualized as being made up of many subsystems, all of which are organized and interconnected within the whole system. Subsystems are systems at the level below the one of which they are parts. A system’s function and structure may be studied, analyzed, and described through basic subsystems of a system. To give an example of subsystems Morgan noted, “Like Chinese

boxes, systems contain wholes within wholes, just as human organs are made up of cells that are made up of molecules” (p. 45). Similarly, as a social system interaction, Hanson argued that a social organization can be characterized by interdependent parts such as grandparents, parents, siblings, son, and daughter, and so on. They all are interdependent and work together within a whole family system and all of these interdependent parts could be considered as subsystems within the broader family system.

In relation to the open systems theory model, women’s education in Bangladesh could be viewed as being impacted by many subsystems. After reviewing the literature, I noted Haider’s (1996) structure (traditional and attitudinal, financial, and infrastructural). This conceptualization led me to reflect on the system that impacts women and their education in Bangladesh. From this initial structure, I conceived of five subsystems in which Bangladeshi women live. To clarify my systems theory framework, I present a diagram (Figure 1) that demonstrates the five subsystems and their interconnectedness. Each lower number subsystem is contained in the higher level subsystem.

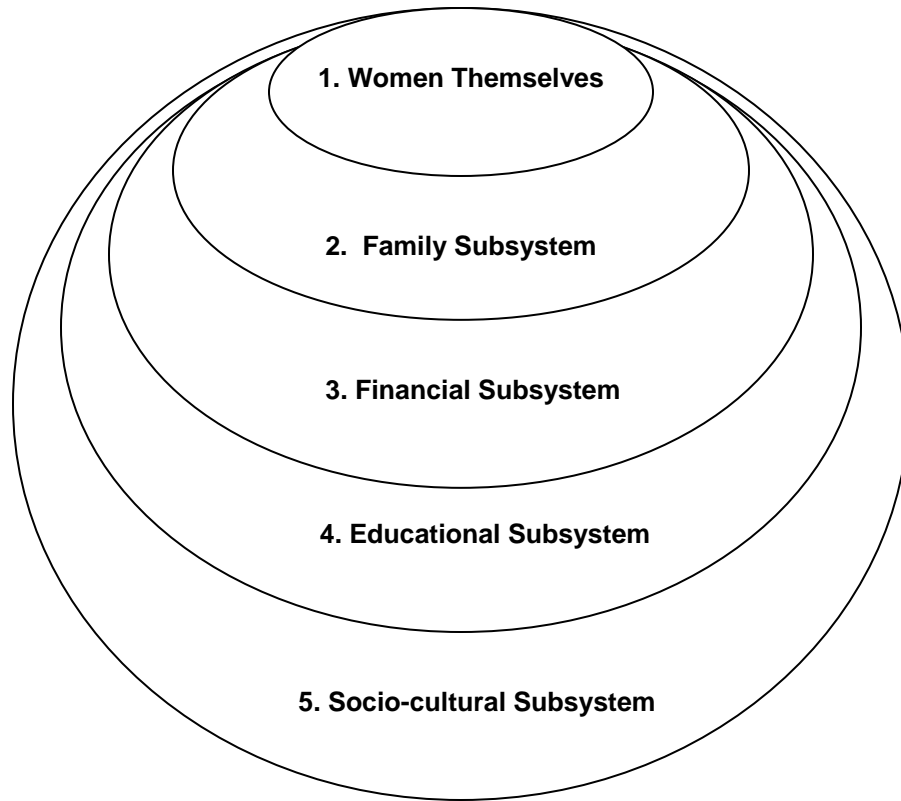


Figure 1. Five subsystems derived from the literature that potentially impact on women and their education in Bangladesh.

This diagram is intended to represent the system impacting women in Bangladesh. I contend that it may be comprised of the following five subsystems: the women themselves, their families, financial, educational, and socio-cultural subsystems. All of these subsystems are interrelated parts of the broader social system of women. I consider the women themselves as an internal subsystem here, because they have their own reluctance or willingness that may influence their education. I consider the other four subsystems as external subsystems. Open systems theory contends that, although the subsystems exist outside the boundary of women, they still can affect women in Bangladesh. To make it clear how the internal and external social subsystems may influence Bangladeshi women and

their education, I present another diagram (Figure 2) below applying five subsystems and multiple factors within each subsystem that I found after reviewing the literature.

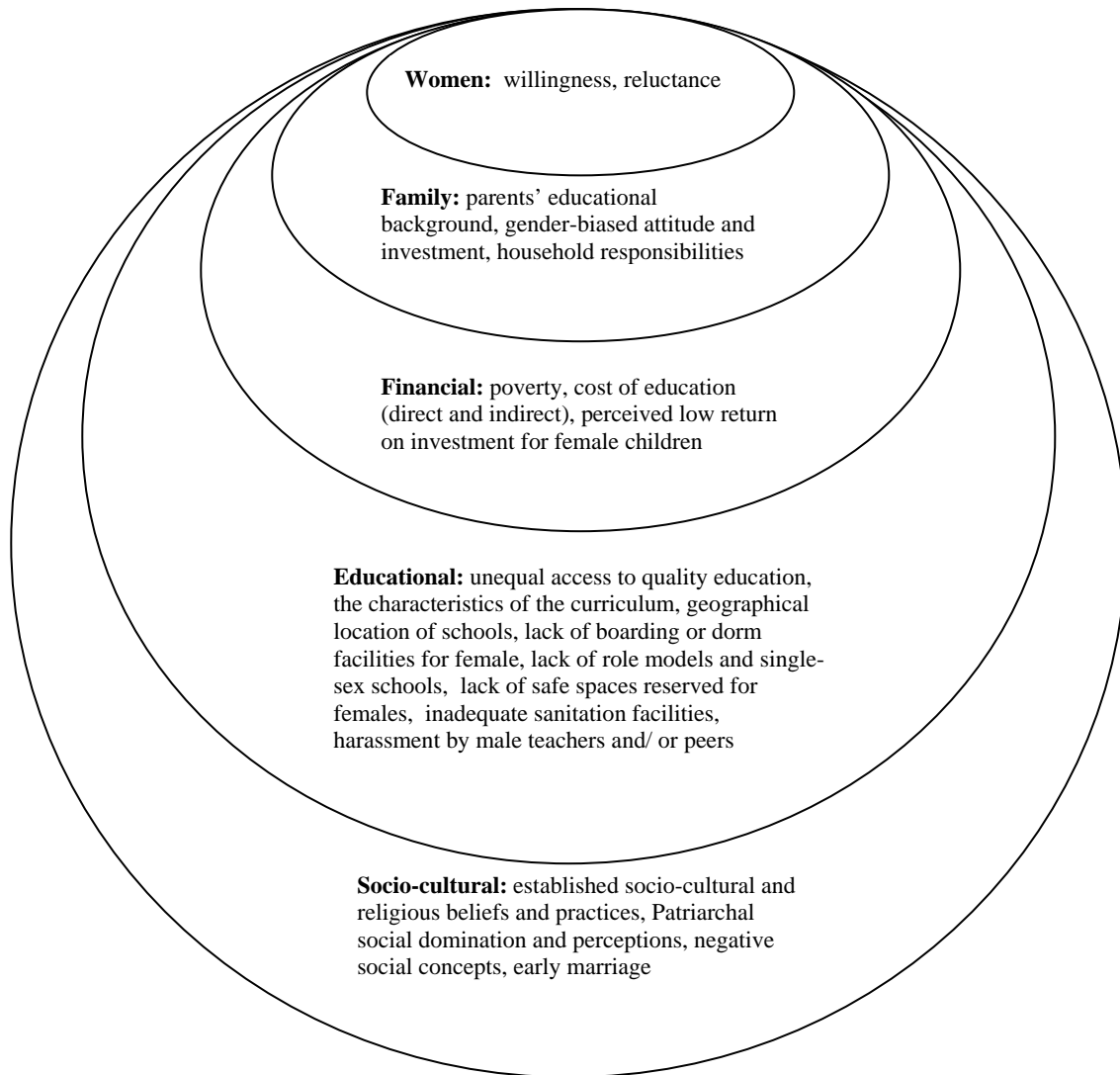


Figure 2. Potential barriers to women's education in developing countries from within the five subsystems.

Figure 2 shows that there are five subsystems that exist around women in Bangladesh. Within each subsystem, multiple factors exist that function as potential barriers or enhancers to women's participation in education in Bangladesh. For example, in family subsystems, I observed that several factors such as parents' educational

background, gender-biased attitude and investment, and household responsibilities exist which function as barriers to women's involvement in education. In the same way, Figure 2 shows that many other interlinked factors such as, financial constraint, lack of educational facilities, male harassment, and socio-cultural practices exist within the others subsystems.

To counteract the potential barriers to women's participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh within each level of subsystems, a number of strategies and initiatives have been suggested in the literature. For example, to reduce women's own reluctance to participate in post-secondary education, several studies have suggested encouraging women to engage in higher education by providing job opportunities. In a similar way, reducing barriers from other level of subsystems, the literature suggested taking several strategies and initiatives. The findings of the literature regarding barriers to women's education in developing countries and possible solutions addressing the barriers are summarized into Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Potential Barriers to Women's Education in Developing Countries and Possible Strategies and Initiatives to Overcome Barriers within Five Subsystems

Potential Barriers	Possible Strategies to Address Barriers
Women Subsystem	
<p>Women's own reluctance to participate in post-secondary education because:</p>	
<p>1. Girls are trained from childhood to perceive, men are superior to women, so men should be better educated than women</p>	<p>A. Education must serve as the vehicle for changing attitudes and inherent beliefs that perpetuate discrimination and harassment</p>
<p>2. Fear of abuse by husband or in-laws due to her higher education</p>	
<p>3. Limited positive impact on women's lives by educational accomplishments, e.g., limited potentiality to employment opportunities</p>	<p>B. Creating paid job opportunities for educated women to encourage other women to pursue their post-secondary education</p>
Family Subsystem	
<p>1. Parents' educational background</p>	<p>A. Increasing parental education</p>
<p>2. Household responsibilities</p>	<p>B. Providing daycares and preschools for infant children to make women free to attend schools</p>
	<p>C. Encouraging parents to educate daughters by providing stipend or financial support</p>
<p>3. Low incentive for daughter's education</p>	
Educational Subsystem	
<p>1. Women have a lower quality secondary education</p>	<p>A. Increased accessibility to quality education</p>
<p>2. Only traditional curriculum is offered for girls</p>	<p>B. Curriculum reform to include non-traditional fields for women</p>
<p>3. Distance problems of higher education institutions and minimal girls' schools</p>	<p>C. Provision of single-sex higher education institutions closer to home with dorm facilities</p>
<p>4. Inadequate boarding and sanitation facilities</p>	
<p>5. Shortage of female role models</p>	<p>E. Providing adequate school facilities for girls</p>
<p>6. Harassment by male teachers and peers</p>	<p>F. Recruitment of female teachers</p>

Table 2 (*Continued*)

Potential Barriers	Possible Strategies to Address Barriers
Socio-cultural Subsystem	
1. Established socio-cultural and religious norms, practices, and gender-bias attitudes	A. Introduce social movement for changing gender-bias attitudes, religious beliefs, and deep-rooted social norms and practices
3. Patriarchal societies' male domination and outlooks	B. Expansion of research to examine men's attitudes
4. Early marriage discourages girls to participate in higher education	C. Enforcement of laws against early marriage

In order to explore the reasons for women's low participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh from the perspectives of Bangladeshi women themselves, I had to understand the complex relationships in the society in which Bangladeshi women live. Similarly, I needed to understand how each single factor within different levels of social subsystems function as barriers as well as enhancers to women's education individually and collectively as a whole. The open systems theory provided an appropriate framework for understanding and analyzing such multifaceted issues. Table 2 shows how different levels of Bangladeshi social subsystems inhibit Bangladeshi women's involvement in education. Therefore, I contend that the conceptual model of open systems theory is a suitable framework for my research investigation.

Summary

This chapter included a review of the literature relevant to this study. The chapter is organized into four sections based on the review of four bodies of literature. They were: one, the importance and impact of the education of women; two, major obstacles that hold back women's participation in education in Bangladesh as well as other developing countries; three, possible strategies and initiatives to overcome those barriers; and four,

open systems theory for the conceptual framework of this study. As a summary, I have provided a table (Table 2), showing the barriers that were prevalent in the literature and several strategies that have been suggested in order to overcome those barriers in the literature. The next chapter, Chapter Three, provides a description of the methodology that I employed to conduct this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the steps that I used as my methodology to carry out the research. This chapter is arranged in sections which include the research design and rationale for using a qualitative research method, ethical considerations, a description of participant selection, method for the data collection and rationale for conducting an open-ended but structured interview protocol, and data analysis procedures. Each is described below.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of expatriate, educated Bangladeshi women about post-secondary education: the challenges they have faced and the strategies they used to overcome these challenges to pursue their post-secondary education. I have used qualitative research in order to attempt to answer my research questions. Firestone (1993) noted, “Qualitative research is best for understanding the processes that go on in a situation and the beliefs and perceptions of those in it” (p. 22). Locke (1989) stated that the adequacy of a research method depends on the purpose of the research and the questions being asked. My study was exploratory in nature; there is little in the literature to provide guidance. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) suggested that an exploratory qualitative study is appropriate when new areas of inquiry are being explored. To find answers to my research questions, I thought it was necessary to adapt a qualitative research method to learn about the participants’ own perceptions and knowledge of these aspects because qualitative studies can offer the opportunity for in-depth understanding about phenomena (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Patton, 2002).

Ethical Considerations

This section describes the ethical processes that I followed for data collection and how I maintained strict ethical guidelines when conducting the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Patton, 2002). Following the university ethical guidelines, first I submitted the research proposal to Education Research Ethics Board (EREB). With the research proposal and EREB application, I was required to submit essential supporting documents including a statement from the supervisory committee, a description of the methodology for conducting the research, a letter of information, a consent form, recruitment scripts, and sample interview questions. The EREB Application review committee reviewed my application package and asked me to make some minor changes. Once my proposal was cleared through the EREB, the EREB review committee sent the application package to the General Research Ethic Board (GREB) of Queen's University. The General Research Ethic Board of Queen's University approved my research proposal and sent me a letter of clearance, allowing me to carry out the research for this study (dated November 13, 2007). As the ethical guidelines stipulated, I could not approach any potential participants until I had received this ethical clearance. After getting ethical approval from GREB, I then sent recruitment scripts (Appendix A) to the potential participants, known to me, who met the selection criteria for this study. Based on the responses of the potential participants and on their backgrounds, I selected four participants. I then sent a Letter of Information (Appendix B) to these four participants. Each of the participants read the Letter of Information and signed a written Consent Form (Appendix C) before I could conduct the interviews. I assured them their data were going

to be kept in a secure private place, their data would be reported anonymously, and that there were no known risks to them for their participation.

Participant Selection

In the following paragraphs, I provide a description of the participant selection procedures. Since the aim of the study was to develop a deeper understanding of an issue, I used a purposeful sampling strategy to select the participants. Purposeful sampling is “selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). McMillan and Schumacher (2001) said that purposeful sampling entails selecting potentially information-rich participants so that the researcher can gather in-depth information to understand something about the particular issues.

Usually a researcher uses his/her experience and prior knowledge to identify criteria for selecting the participants (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Accordingly, I selected potential participants based on the nature of the research as well as on my personal knowledge of the people who met the selection criteria. The selection criteria were as follows. First, I wanted only those women who were born and brought-up in Bangladesh. Second, I selected participants who had obtained their post-secondary education in Bangladesh in the last decade and who had lived there for at least their post-secondary schooling (e.g., minimum of 25 years). Finally, I selected participants who are now living in my closer Bangladeshi community, in Ontario, Canada. Following the selection criteria, I chose four educated Bangladeshi women currently living in Ontario, Canada as potential participants.

I selected participants following the procedures below. First, I have personally met the expatriate Bangladeshi women in the gatherings of Bangladeshi who live in my

community in Ontario. Through our many casual interactions, I have learned about their background. Based on my knowledge about these women, I created an initial list of 15 potential participants who met the selection criteria for the study and sent them a Recruitment Script (Appendix A) which described the purpose of this study. Eight of these women replied to the Recruitment Script and indicated their interest in participating in this study. I then talked with those women individually over the phone and explicitly clarified their background according to my three initial criteria. Based on that information, I selected four participants among them who best met the above selection criteria. I then sent a Letter of Information (Appendix B) to those four potential participants by mail. The Letter of Information explained the purpose of the study to the participants.

I then phoned these four women to set up a meeting with each of them individually. In the meeting, I discussed the purpose of the research and the interview procedures again. Then I sent the Interview Consent Form (Appendix C) to the participants by mail and asked them to read carefully and sign the Consent Form prior to our initial interview. They all accepted, signed, and returned the Consent Form. Following ethical guidelines, I gave all participants pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity and to keep the data confidential.

I deliberately decided to use the interview with the first participant as a practice interview in order to improve my interview questions and to hone my interview skills. I used the data from the other three participants, anticipating that they would be able to shed some light on the cause(s) of women's low participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Since they had pursued their university education in

Bangladesh and lived there for a significant amount of time, I assumed that they have an in-depth knowledge and understanding about the educational situation of Bangladeshi women and the socio-cultural and economic conditions of Bangladesh.

Method

This section describes the method that I used for collecting data in this study. I conducted the in-depth interviews using open-ended but structured questions for the data collection. Fontana and Frey (2000) said that, in qualitative research, certain types of interviewing strategies are better suited for particular kinds of situations. They suggested that open-ended questions offer interviewees the opportunity to respond in their own words and to express their own perspectives. As well, McMillan and Schumacher (2001) emphasized that open-ended interviews enable a researcher to understand “how individuals conceive of their world and how they explain or “make sense” of the important events in their lives” (p. 443). Furthermore, Johnson (2002) said:

A researcher who uses in-depth interviewing commonly seeks “deep” information and knowledge—usually deeper information and knowledge than is sought in surveys, informal interviewing, or focus groups, for example. This information usually concerns very personal matters, such as an individual’s self, lived experience, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective. (p. 104)

Patton (2002) has suggested that the in-depth interview is the most effective way to enter the inner perspective and gain access to someone’s experiences, perceptions, feelings, and knowledge. Further Patton recommended that open-ended but structured interview questions allow a novice researcher to construct questions carefully in advance and at the same time, they offer the interviewee an opportunity to supply “his or her own words, thoughts, and insights in answering the questions” (p. 346). Since my aim was to understand the perspectives of the participants, I considered that the open-ended in-depth

interview with structured questions would be suitable for the data collection in my study. For collecting data, I maintained the following procedures.

I constructed the interview questions to reflect the research purpose and questions. I created interview questions as per each of the five subsystems such as women themselves, family, financial, educational, and socio-cultural subsystems in which Bangladeshi women live. I came up with these five subsystems after reviewing the relevant literature of previous studies, as I explained in Chapter Two. I deliberately used a semi-structured format including some predetermined questions in order to gather specific information about participants' backgrounds, the challenges they experienced, and the strategies they employed to overcome those roadblocks, as my means of gaining data for the study. I also used probes to extract in-depth perceptions of the participants that were related to the research objectives.

The first set of interview questions (see Appendix D) asked about the participants' background and personal experiences with the supports and barriers they experienced and faced to obtain their post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I developed the second set of interview questions (see Appendix E) based on participants' knowledge and observations about some strategies for reducing barriers and the strategies they personally employed to overcome their barriers to obtain their post-secondary education. In this session, I asked questions about other Bangladeshi women they know in their family or community who could not pursue a post-secondary education. Moreover, for removing or reducing barriers and for devising better solutions to improve women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh, I asked two general questions to get their suggestions as Bangladeshi post-secondary educated women.

To improve the quality of the interview questions, I asked several people to review the interview questions (my thesis supervisor, committee member, and the first of the four participants whom I had selected). Their suggestions greatly improved the quality and reliability of the questions and data. Moreover, I used the interviews with the first participant as practice interviews. These I believe, helped me to revise and improve the interview questions and techniques as a novice interviewer. The practice interviews also helped me to ensure that the language of the questions was clear and to determine the accurate length of the interview time based on the number of questions.

I conducted interviews in the participants' first language (Bengali), to allow them to express themselves without difficulties and so that I could capture the nuances of the language. This was a mutual agreement between my participants and me. To ensure that my questions were understood as I intended them to be, I wrote them in English first, then translated them into Bengali. Next, to ensure that my questions had been translated accurately, I asked one of my colleagues to translate the questions back into English. This way, I was reasonably sure that the questions I wanted to ask in English would be understood, on the one hand, and had the same meaning in Bengali, on the other hand.

I met with each participant individually and conducted two face-to-face interviews with each participant to gather information-rich data for this study. As the opening question, I asked the participants to tell me a bit about their educational background in Bangladesh as Bangladeshi post-secondary educated women. As Patton (2002) suggested, I wanted to help put the participants at ease and allow them to talk about their experience in a non-threatening way.

The interviews took place in a mutually convenient location that was quiet but open at the home of the participants. I strove to ensure privacy and a comfortable environment for the participants where we would not be overheard. I then recorded each interview on audiotapes using a small hand held digital tape recorder. Before starting each interview, I tested the recorder to make sure that everything was working properly. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed with the participant the Letter of Information and the purpose of the study. I recorded each interview on a separate audiotape and labeled them with the pseudonym of that participant. I also took short field notes during each interview. These notes were useful for my later write-up and analysis of the data. At the end of each interview, I asked participants if they had any further comments or concerns. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Next, I transcribed the interviews verbatim within a few days following each participant's interview. First, I transcribed the interviews verbatim in Bengali and then I translated them into English for the data write-up and analysis. Again, for accuracy and trustworthiness of the translation, one of my bilingual colleagues checked whether the English translations were consistent with the Bengali transcripts. Moreover, verbatim transcription also enhanced the trustworthiness of the data. Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggested that member-checking is one of the most effective and essential forms of validation in qualitative research. Therefore, following their suggestion, I asked each participant to read the transcripts of their interviews and to verify that the data clearly reflected their experiences and perspectives. I kept the audio-tapes of the recorded interviews, transcriptions, and all data in a personal secure locked cabinet where only my supervisor and I had access.

Data Analysis

This section describes the data analysis procedures that I used. I used the verbatim interview transcripts as the source for data analysis. I already mentioned that interviews were conducted with four educated, expatriate Bangladeshi women who are currently living in Ontario, Canada. Before starting the analysis, I listened to the recorded interviews and transcribed the interviews first into Bengali. I read and reread the transcripts of the interviews and my field notes that I had written in Bengali. I then translated each of the interviews into English. As I did with the questions, I reviewed the English translations of the transcripts against the Bengali transcripts and with the audio-tapes in order to check for accuracy of my translation.

Patton (2002) suggested that, because each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used should also be unique. Based on the purpose and nature of the study, I used the concept of nested systems, or subsystems, to guide the analysis of the data. After reviewing related literature, I had previously identified five subsystems within the larger system of Bangladesh potentially impacting upon women: the women themselves, and the family, financial, educational, and socio-cultural subsystems. All of these subsystems are interdependent and nested, as are Russian dolls, in the higher level subsystem, all residing within the one broad system in Bangladesh. I had gone through the literature and identified any factors impeding women's participation in higher education into one of these five subsystems. Some of these factors were family attitudes, parents' educational background, household responsibilities, patriarchal social pressure, financial constraints, and institutional harassment which were said to potentially impact women's education in developing countries, including in Bangladesh. In the context of my systems framework,

I began by analyzing one interview at a time following an inductive analysis process (Gay & Airasian, 2003), and using the method of constant comparison (Stake, 2005) to create categories or patterns that emerged from each interview.

“Qualitative data analysis is based on induction; the researcher constructs patterns that emerge from the data and make sense to them” (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p. 229). I first summarized the transcript from each participant, in an attempt to reflect the main issues or themes that emerged. I took these themes and then categorized them into one of the five subsystems in my framework. I did this for both the barriers that they identified and for the strategies that they each suggested as a way of overcoming these barriers. I coded themes manually, using colored markers, on the hard copies of the transcripts, as Stake (2005) suggested. I then arranged my findings on each participant based on my research questions. I report my findings in the following three chapters: Chapter Four is on Moumita (the first participant), Chapter Five is on Shaila (second participant), and Chapter Six is on Jahan (third participant). All names are pseudonyms.

Next, I discuss my findings in the discussion chapter, Chapter Seven. Based on the findings from the individual women, I analyzed the perceptions of the three women to find common themes, as well as the unique perspectives of individuals. Since there are two aspects of my research: (a) participants’ perceived major barriers; and (b) strategies for reducing those barriers, I first discuss my findings to identify the similarities and differences among participants in regards to the barriers to women’s post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I then discuss study findings based on strategies the Bangladeshi educated women suggested for reducing barriers. Next, I compare and contrast my findings (Bangladeshi educated women’s perceived barriers and suggestions)

with the findings in the published literature. Moreover, in my write-up, I specify which reasons are similar across participants and which are different. Finally, I specify any inconsistencies with the literature which I reviewed earlier.

At the end of the discussion chapter, I discuss my findings based on the conceptual framework of subsystems, which I developed following the model of open systems theory. In the analysis, I identify reasons that were different and did not fall within any of the five subsystems that I found reviewing the literature and then make a change to my analytic framework by adding two additional subsystems, and enlarge the conceptual model of subsystems.

Summary

This chapter is the methodological chapter of the thesis. In this chapter, I described the research design that I used to conduct the study. I also described the ethical considerations, the participant selection process, method for data collection, and data analysis procedures. In the next chapter, Chapter Four, I first present an overview of findings from three participants and then I present findings based on Moumita.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS FROM MOUMITA

Overview of Findings from Three Participants

In this chapter and the next two chapters, I present the findings from each of the three participants—the three Bangladeshi women with graduate degrees who have been living in Ontario, Canada. The responses attempt to answer the following four research questions: (a) What do these Bangladeshi educated women perceive to be the fundamental causes of women’s low participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh? (b) How have the various subsystems in Bangladesh affected their own education? (c) How have these women overcome barriers to pursue higher education? and (d) What possible strategies do these educated Bangladeshi women suggest to reduce the barriers impeding women’s pursuit and completion of post-secondary education in Bangladesh?

I use the same format for this chapter and the next two chapters. First I describe the background of the participant. Then I present the findings following the four broad categories that emerged from each participant’s data as related to my research questions. These four broad categories are as follows: (a) major barriers to women’s education in Bangladesh perceived by each participant; (b) the barriers that each participant personally experienced in their pursuit of post-secondary education; (c) the strategies they used to overcome their own barriers; and (d) the possible strategies and initiatives the participants suggested in order to address barriers.

I support the findings with quotations by the participants. Using quotations from participants is important, I believe, so that the researcher can gain an understanding of the

data and make sense of the usefulness when applied to similar cases (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). McMillan and Schumacher noted,

The actual statements of the people observed and interviewed represent their constructions of their world, the meanings they give to social situations and experiences. The researcher's task is to arrange these views in a logical manner, making participants' meanings unmistakable to a reader. (p. 488)

I have labeled each participant's quotation by a code that identifies the subsystem, interview question number, the first initial of the respondent's pseudonym, and the interview transcript number. For example, "SS4Q1M-1" represents Subsystem 4, Question 1, M-1 for Moumita's first interview. I structured all of my interview questions within the five subsystems that emerged from a comprehensive review of relevant literature. These subsystems include: (1) the women themselves, (2) the family subsystem, (3) the financial subsystem, (4) the educational subsystem, and (5) the socio-cultural subsystem. In some cases, I added (p) within brackets, for example "SS1Q3(p), M-1". The (p) indicates a probe question (a follow-up question I asked based on the interviewee's responses) about that subsystem. I present the participants' findings in three chapters: this Chapter Four focuses on Moumita, Chapter Five focuses on Shaila, and Chapter Six focuses on Jahan. All names are pseudonyms.

The in-depth interviews with Moumita were intended to find answers to the four research questions with specific reference to Moumita. I start by describing Moumita's family and educational background.

Moumita's Background

Moumita was born and raised in Bangladesh, and lived there for more than 25 years. She went to school, college, and university in Bangladesh, attaining her highest degree of undergraduate. Moumita grew up in an educated and enlightened family. Moumita's

mother pursued her BA degree and her father received his Master's degree from Dhaka University. Even her older sister, who married in grade 12, went on to complete a Master's degree. Following her family's example, Moumita wished to continue her post-secondary education in a quality university. However, the university was far from home. Accordingly, Moumita attended a local college in a BA honours program. During the first year of her program, Moumita got married. She moved in with her husband into her mother-in-law's house located far from her college. It took an hour of (unsafe) travel by rickshaw to reach the college everyday. Gradually, her attendance slipped to once a week. Meanwhile, Moumita's husband left for Canada to continue his education, and she wished to join him. Moumita switched from the five-year honours program to three-year degree program and moved to a local college under the National University of Bangladesh. This college was closer to home. Moumita completed her undergraduate degree in 2005, and then joined her husband in Canada.

Moumita's Perceived Major Barriers

After recounting her background, Moumita outlined the key barriers that she believes inhibit women's involvement in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Four broad themes emerged from the analysis of the interview with Moumita. These themes are: (a) financial constraints; (b) socio-cultural practices and social attitudes; (c) distance and transportation issues due to male domination; and (d) student politics and unstable political situations. Moumita perceived that these four broad themes work as key barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I expand on each of these four themes below.

Financial Constraints

Moumita said, “Financial problem is the main obstacle for poor families to obtain higher levels of education” (SS2Q5-M2) in Bangladesh. She believed that girls from poor families face a huge financial disadvantage due to their families’ lack of money. Moumita articulated that it is difficult for a family with financial issue to invest in their daughter’s education. They do not see the benefit or any potential return on such an investment because once married, daughters go to live in their husbands’ houses.

In my consideration, the main problem is financial. Girls who usually come from poor financial backgrounds face this problem severely. Bangladesh is a poor developing country. So, poor economical conditions discourage parents to invest money for their female children since they go to their husband’s house. (GeQ1-M2)

Moumita reported, “In Bangladesh, the problem is the lack of job opportunities for girls and especially for students” (SS3Q3-M2). “In our country, most of the students depend financially on their parents. There are no part-time job opportunities or earning facilities for students like there is in Canada or other developed countries” (SS1Q5M-2). The lack of student employment opportunities in Bangladesh makes it difficult for female students to pursue a post-secondary education. This is especially so for those who come from economically disadvantaged family backgrounds.

Socio-cultural Practices and Social Attitudes

As a second leading barrier, Moumita referred to the socio-cultural practices and social attitudes. She acknowledged that these norms, practices, and attitudes represent a challenge for Bangladeshi girls; these practices and attitudes limit females’ participation in post-secondary education. “In my perception, social problems interfere even more than financial problems” (SS5Q2M2). Moumita identified that “there are many factors related to social problems” (GeQ1-M2), such as family’s gender-biased negative attitudes, the

belief that boys are superior to girls, traditional social pressure, and the practice of early marriage. She also mentioned perceived false religious beliefs and misinterpretation of religion as contributing factors. Moumita believed that all of these factors are related to social problems and play vital roles as barriers to women's involvement in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I elaborate upon each of these factors below.

Family's Gender-biased Negative Attitudes

Moumita said that the long-held gender-biased and negative family attitudes towards women and their education play vital roles impeding women from getting a higher education. She elaborated on some negative family attitudes in the following comments she heard: "What will you do after finishing your education? Eventually, you have to get married in your early age;" "Women do not need higher education, they should stay at home and take-care the family and children;" "Men should get their higher education because they are the breadwinner of the family;" "When girls get older and highly educated, nobody will marry them;" and so on.

Moumita told a story about her friend who could not pursue a post-secondary education due to her family's conservative religious attitude. When her friend, Sara, and her sister were struggling financially to pursue post-secondary education, Sara's extended family members' attitudes were: "Let them get married. Why are they struggling for education? They are just girls. They don't need to be so educated" (SS2Q2-M2).

Moumita said, "This neglected attitude is not only at the family level but also exists at other levels of the society too" (SS5Q2M2). However, most of the discouraging and negative comments come from the family first. She explained that our life starts first in

the family. So if a girl encounters these types of attitudes in the family at the beginning of her life, it becomes quite difficult to pursue her education or post-secondary education.

Negative Social Concepts About Boys as Superior Over Girls

Commenting on the social perception towards women's education, Moumita said, "In general, the attitude towards girls' education is negative" (SS5 Q2 M-1). She said,

The common perception about girls is that they are born to look after family, raise children, and cook for the family members, and so on. This has been prevailing for a long time and we cannot get out of this loop. (SS5Q2 M1)

Moumita said that large numbers of families in the Bangladeshi society are not willing to send their female children for higher education. They perceive that educating female children is a waste of money since they will get married at an early age, leaving home to live in their husband's home. Parents do not have any confidence in a woman's capability. Rather parents are more interested in educating their male children because they perceive boys as breadwinners of the family who will remain with parents as they age. Moumita said, "From this attitude, most of the parents take extra care and pay attention to their boys and neglect their girls" (GeQ1-M2).

Moumita provided an example of gender-biased social attitudes towards women and their education:

When a girl returns home in the evening after finishing her school, which may be far away from her home, the other members of the family do not take that normally or easily. Returning home at the evening or night from school for a girl does not match the custom or tradition of Bangladesh. But when a boy does the same, he is treated differently; he is taken care of nicely since it is considered that he is tired and so on. The scenario is quite opposite for the girls, they are told, "since you were not at home for the whole day, no household work has been done." This kind of custom has been in practice for a long time in our culture, which seriously hampers the mental and educational growth of girls. (SS5Q2 M1)

She continued, “Our society does not care where men are going and what they are doing. If girls come home a little late at night, it matters a lot. . . . Boys are exempted in our society” (SS5Q3-M2). Moumita believed that these kinds of social pressures and gender-biased negative attitudes towards women and their education hold girls and their families back from motivating their female children to pursue higher education in the Bangladeshi society.

Traditional Practice and Pressure of Girls’ Early Marriage

Moumita acknowledged that the traditional social practice and pressure of early marriage play a central role in keeping women from achieving their educational goals. “An early marriage pushes a girl to a critical situation. . . . I know many husbands, even within my relatives, who did not want their wives to have higher education. Support from the husband’s family is rarely noticeable after marriage in our culture” (GeQ1 (p)-M2). She explained that, because of early marriage, a girl’s education will likely be interrupted. It is difficult for a girl to manage heavy family and household responsibilities and study successfully with little or no support from the family. In a similar situation, she was forced to choose and eventually gives up her studies.

After getting married, a girl’s responsibilities increase a lot in our culture. So in most of the cases, the husband does not encourage or let his wife participate in education. Instead, the husband totally stops his wife’s education. From my knowledge, many girls are the victim of this situation where the husband and the other members of the family did not let them pursue their higher education. (GeQ1(p)-M2)

False Religious Beliefs and Misinterpretation of Religion

Another significant barrier to women’s education, in Moumita’s opinion, is perceived false religious beliefs and misinterpretation of religion. She said that religion itself did not discourage or restricts women’s freedom and their education. “Actually, no religion

prohibited or restricted women's education. The Koran never said that women should not participate in school to make them educated; rather the Koran said that acquiring knowledge is compulsory for both men and women" (SS5Q4-M2). To give an example, Moumita said,

The first word of the Koran said, "Read, in the name of your God." The Koran did not specify here whether men or women should read. The Koran mentioned both men and women. So why should we believe that religion prohibited and restricted women's education. They just misinterpret it on their own. (GeQ1 (p)-M2)

However, Moumita said that she believes that some longstanding "religious misinterpretation, religious conservativeness and superstitions" work against women in their struggle towards progress and education. "There are some less educated and illiterate religious preachers who speak something in the name of religion which is actually their own creation" (GeQ1 (p)-M2). Moumita elaborated that "some so-called less-educated people," "deliberately take advantage of religion," and "intentionally exploit religious beliefs and mix these up with cultural traditions to go against female advancement" (SS5Q5M-1). She commented that they use religion as an effective tool for dominating women, but "religion never sustains it" (SS5Q5M-1). She said that people who are less educated have these kinds of misunderstandings deeply rooted in their minds; girls from these families face problems in their pursuit of an education.

Distance and Transportation Issues Due to Male Domination

According to Moumita, the distance to the higher education institution and the unstable transportation for females due to patriarchal social domination also function as key barriers in keeping women out of institutions of higher learning. She said that the transportation system in Bangladesh was unsafe and inconvenient for girls. A girl should not travel alone because of the fear of potential harm through male harassment.

Consequently, a guardian or brother must always accompany a woman to protect her from such unwanted attention, making it difficult for a woman to attend college or university for pursuing a post-secondary education. Moumita herself faced this difficulty. She said that, due to the distance to the university and fear of male harassment, many parents do not feel secure in allowing their daughters to travel alone to the university on crowded public transportation. Furthermore, a university student may be required to stay late in the day at the university. This situation raises issues about personal safety for the women due to the increased possibility of harassment on an unsafe transportation system.

This problem is further exacerbated by the patriarchal social attitudes, “Males are intentionally deemed superior to females” (GeQ1 (p)-M2). To give an example of male domination, she said,

Many husband talk like, “What is the need of your education. You have a husband. I will bear your expenses. You just rear up your children and household tasks. To pass your time is not a problem if you properly take care of your children. So, you don’t need to pursue your higher education or go outside.” In this way, the male dominating societies in our country dominate their wives and try to keep them in a subordinate position in the family and society. (GeQ1 (p)-M2)

Moumita reported that this kind of dominating attitude by males does not only exist inside the house but is pervasive in the wider Bangladeshi society.

Student Politics and Unstable Political Situations

Moumita pointed to student politics and unstable political situations as additional barriers to women’s education. She explained that these activities create a phenomenon known as “session-jams” (due to political instability and violence delayed admission and exams) in higher education institutions. Session-jams may mean that a four-year program could take up to six years to complete. This is discouraging to low-income families, and the additional educational expenses may result in a family withdrawing their daughter

from school. Moumita said, “Sometimes it becomes hard to manage additional expenses. As a result, they stop their girl’s higher education and force their daughter to get married” (GeQ2-M2).

A careful review revealed that, from Moumita’s perspectives the major barriers impeding Bangladeshi women from pursuing post-secondary education were the financial constraints; the Bangladeshi socio-cultural practices and social attitudes; distance and transportation issues due to male domination; and student politics and unstable political situations. Moumita identified family’s lack of finances, lack of employment opportunities for females, and parents’ reluctance to invest in their daughter’s education function as financial barriers. Moreover, Moumita believed that several Bangladeshi socio-cultural and family related factors play vital roles in keeping women from higher learning in Bangladesh.

Barriers Which Moumita Personally Experienced

Moumita reported two major barriers which she personally experienced in her pursuit of a post-secondary education in Bangladesh. These two barriers are: (a) distance and fear of male harassment on transportation, (b) socio-cultural practices and social attitudes. Below I describe Moumita’s barriers in more detail.

Distance and Fear of Male Harassment on Transportation

Moumita faced difficulties arising from the physical distance to the university and her fear of male harassment on unstable transportation for pursuing her own post-secondary education. She reported that upon completing her higher secondary education, she wished to pursue post-secondary education in a high quality university but the institution was far from her home. Moumita said that the transportation system or local bus in Bangladesh is

not safe or convenient for a girl to travel alone due to potential harm of male harassment. Moumita had no one in her family to accompany her on her commute. As a result, her parents forbade her to attend her preferred institution. “Due to the distance to the university and the worse transportation system, my parents did not feel secure to allow me to be admitted there” (SS1Q2 (p) M-1). Instead, Moumita attended a local college in a BA honours program. Moumita again said, “If I were admitted, I would have come back from the university at night, and coming alone at night for girls is a cultural problem in Bangladesh” (SS1Q2 (p) M-1).

Socio-cultural Practices and Social Attitudes

Moumita reported that the Bangladeshi socio-cultural practices and social attitudes hindered her plan for pursuing post-secondary education. Within the broad theme of socio-cultural practices and social attitudes, I identified two factors: the practice of early marriage and the obligation of gender roles, and family’s traditional negative attitudes which negatively impacted her plan for pursuing a post-secondary education. In the following section, I describe these two barriers.

Early Marriage and Obligation of Gender Roles

Moumita was married during the first year of her honours program, which negatively impacted her pursuit of a post-secondary education. She said, “In many cases, husbands or the mother-in-laws do not like to continue their education though the girls have keen interest. For me, it was a big problem” (SS1Q3 M-1).

According to Bangladeshi culture, upon marriage Moumita moved in with her husband in her mother-in-law’s house. Her mother-in-law’s home was located far from her college so Moumita faced the distance and transportation problems again after her

marriage. She reported that it took an hour to reach the college by “unsafe rickshaw” everyday. She said, “It is not the question of expenses but security” (SS2Q2 (p) M-1).

The members of her husband’s family were concerned for her safety.

As I am a new bride of a family, the family does not allow me to avail local buses since these are so crowded and insecure. So it was a difficult problem, which I faced after my marriage. This reduced my regularity of going to college. Later I found myself going to college only once in a week. (SS2Q2(p)M-1)

Within several months of their marriage, Moumita’s husband left for Canada to pursue his higher education. She wished to move in to Canada to live with him. To hasten her program completion and to avoid issues associated with public transportation, she switched from the five-year honours program to three-year degree program in a college which was close to her mother-in-law’s house. She said that, although she got support from her husband’s family, she could not attend her class regularly. As a part of the cultural system, she felt obliged to stay at her new home, which eventually hampered her education. In her words, “Suppose that my mother-in-law may be feeling ill, then she would expect me to stay at home—that is, it is our general mentality that the bride of a family should stay at home” (SS2Q5M-1).

Family’s Traditional Negative Attitudes

Moumita said that her family’s long-established conservative negative attitude also hindered her plan for obtaining post-secondary education. Her parents did not allow her to attend a good quality university only for social reasons. They were afraid, “a young girl coming home alone at night can be a cause of many unwanted problems” (SS5 Q3 M-1). Moumita said that her parents did not even allow her to live in a hostel near the university; they perceived hostels as places of ill repute where their daughter would be unsafe. Instead, she had to be satisfied with attending a local college. Similarly,

Moumita's in-laws also did not allow her to stay in hostels or dorms as these were thought of as unsafe for girls. Her response demonstrated the perceived values of her family:

A middle class family never allows a bride of their house to stay in a hostel or dorm as this is not part of the culture in Bangladesh. So this was not possible for me. Most of the middle class families perceive that a hostel is not a safe and secure place for preserving a girl's purity. (SS2Q3(p)M-1)

Moumita commented on this issue as follows, "My family did not care about my future career. They had too much concern about social practice and social system" (SS5 Q3 M-1).

Summary of Moumita's Perceived and Experienced Barriers

A systematic review of two interviews with Moumita revealed four broad themes which she perceived as major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. These four themes I identified as: (a) financial constraints; (b) socio-cultural practices and social attitudes; (c) distance and transportation issues due to male domination; and (d) student politics and unstable political situations. Within the broader theme of financial constraints, Moumita identified several factors such as a family's lack of finances (poverty), parents' reluctance to invest in their daughter's education, and lack of employment opportunities for females. Moreover, Moumita identified several Bangladeshi socio-cultural and family related factors such as: family's gender-biased negative attitudes; negative social concepts about boys as superior over girls; traditional practice and pressure of girls' early marriage; and false religious beliefs and misinterpretation of religion within the broader theme of socio-cultural practices and social attitudes. Moumita believed that all these four broad themes and their interrelated

factors play vital roles as barriers to deter women's involvement in post-secondary education in Bangladesh in both direct and indirect ways.

I note that the barriers Moumita personally experienced are not exceptional. They are two of the four broad themes which Moumita perceived as major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Moumita personally experienced two major barriers in her pursuit of post-secondary education: the first being the distance to the university and fear of being harassed by males on public transport; and the second, socio-cultural practices and social attitudes. I identified several issues within the theme of socio-cultural practices and social attitudes such as: the practice of early marriage, gender-role obligations, and the family's traditional negative attitudes negatively impacted Moumita's plan from pursuing a post-secondary education.

Moumita's Strategies to Overcome These Barriers

Moumita described some strategies that she took to increase her self-confidence and self-motivation and to reduce the barriers which she faced in her pursuit of post-secondary education in Bangladesh such as family's attitudinal barriers, barriers of male harassment, and barriers of early marriage and obliged of gender roles. Below I describe Moumita's strategies.

Increasing Self-confidence and Self-motivation

Moumita said that she enthusiastically pursued her post-secondary education following in her family's footsteps. Both of her parents completed university education. They encouraged and supported her plan to attend university. Moreover, she was greatly inspired by her elder sister who was her role model. She observed her sister who had

strong willpower and motivation for pursuing a higher education. Even her sister, who was married in grade 12, went on to complete a Master's degree.

I looked at my sister, who struggled a lot for education and she did not discontinue or give up even in the hardest situations. This taught me that self-motivation is the greatest asset and source to motivate myself as woman. (SS4Q1M-1)

At school, Moumita's teachers inspired and helped her to increase her self-confidence and motivation to pursue a post-secondary education. She said that while both male and female teachers were interested in young women's learning, her female teachers motivated and inspired her more than their male counterparts. "All my teachers, particularly female teachers, inspired me a lot at school, college, and university" (SS4Q3M-1). Moumita referred to her female teachers as her role models as well.

Reducing Family's Attitudinal Barrier

Moumita said that her friends also helped her to overcome her family's attitudinal barriers. She carefully observed her friends who struggled to earn a post-secondary education in spite of many difficulties. Moumita said that her conservative parents and in-laws did not allow her to live in a hostel because they perceived hostels as places of ill repute where their daughter would not be able to save her purity. However, Moumita observed that despite the hostels' bad reputation, many of her friends lived in hostels while in school. Their bravery inspired Moumita not to be influenced by the family's traditional beliefs and to complete her post-secondary education.

Reducing Barriers of Male Harassment

Moumita's friends also helped her to overcome the barriers of male harassment. She often traveled with friends. "Since my parents did not allow me to go alone, I used to go

to the college along with my friends” (SS2Q6M-1). Moumita said that this arrangement helped her to overcome male harassment.

Reducing Barriers of Early Marriage and Obligation of Gender Roles

Moumita said that she could not overcome the barriers of early marriage and of obliged gender roles. She mentioned that she tried to cope with traditional socio-cultural practices following in the footsteps of her elder sister who got married before attending post-secondary education and completing her Master’s degree.

Although she got married when she was in grade 12, she continued her studies and completed her Master’s degree when living in her mother-in-law’s house. She also had to stay with her husband in a ship sometimes since he was a mariner. (SS4Q1M-1)

The interviews with Moumita revealed that Moumita eagerly pursued her post-secondary education following her elder sister and educated parents. In addition, Moumita’s male and female teachers encouraged her to pursue a higher education. However, her female teachers motivated and inspired her more than their male counterparts who were her role models as well. Despite the bad reputation of hostels, many of her friends lived in hostels which increased her self-awareness not to be influenced by the family’s traditional beliefs as well as encouraged to complete her post-secondary education. She often traveled with friends to overcome the barriers of male harassment. Moumita could not overcome the barriers of early marriage and of obliged gender roles. She tried to cope with socio-cultural practices following her elder sister’s examples who got married at a young age but still completed her Master’s degree.

Moumita’s Suggested Strategies and Initiatives to Address Barriers

Moumita provided some strategies for reducing barriers and improving women’s post-secondary education in Bangladesh. These were increasing women’s self-confidence

and elevating the awareness of women and their families; and changing family attitudes toward the education of women. Moreover, Moumita suggested strategies geared to reducing financial, educational, social, and religious barriers, as well as reducing the barrier of male harassment. Below I group her suggestions according to which subsystem I believe is responsible for addressing these barriers: the women themselves, family, and individuals in the society, government, and educational institutions.

Increasing Women's Self-confidence and Their Families' Awareness

Moumita suggested that an increase in women's self-confidence and self-awareness about pursuing a post-secondary education is necessary for elevating women's post-secondary education rates in Bangladesh. She believed that women themselves, the government, and individual people in the social subsystem could each play important roles in improving women's self-confidence and self-awareness to pursue a post-secondary education. Below I expand on these strategies.

Women Themselves

Moumita stated that each family is unique; each has different attitudes and social problems. In any case, women must find the inner strength and determination to pursue their education. She suggested that women must develop confidence in their abilities and choices when facing difficulty.

Family

Moumita recommended that families provide positive support and encouragement to make a better educational career for their female children. Moumita strongly believed that, if a family has a positive attitude to their female children and a strong determination

to make their better career, “women can defeat whatever comes as barriers to participate in their post-secondary education” (GeQ2 M-2).

Government

Moumita suggested that media be used to increase women’s self-confidence and awareness by promoting the positive impact of female education to the masses. Making women and their families aware of the value of a higher education, by publicizing the real-life stories of successful and educated women, might have a positive effect on female post-secondary school enrolment. Moumita said, “Media can highlight—if a woman gets an opportunity to pursue her post-secondary education, she can make a successful career. As a successful woman, she can help herself, she can help her family, she can help her society, and she can help her country” (GeQ2-M2).

Educational Institutions

Moumita recommended that the educational institutions provide as many female teachers as possible. She said that the majority of the teachers are male in Bangladesh. Most of the girls’ schools have more male than female teachers. She suggested that schools must have more female teachers acting as role model to female students. Students can be inspired by them and increase their awareness and motivation for attaining higher levels of education.

Individuals in the Society

Moumita suggested that everyone make a difference in improving women’s post-secondary education rates in Bangladesh. Moumita pointed to the already educated women who are successfully established in Bangladeshi society. She said that these visible educated women might motivate other women as well as their families. These

privileged women could actively encourage those who are still struggling for education. Moumita explained that if these successful women shared their strategies for success, it might help others overcome their own hurdles.

Changing Family Attitudes Towards Women's Education

Moumita suggested that it is necessary to change families' attitudes about females attending places of higher learning in Bangladesh. She explained her viewpoint by saying that life starts first with the family. If a woman receives negative attitudes from her family at the beginning of her life, then it becomes difficult for her to pursue a higher level of education. She suggested that the family think deeply about the possible positive impacts of their daughters attaining a higher educational level.

If the members of the family have some concern and understanding such as, we are sending our daughter to her husband's home without a good education at a young age—is it a right decision? If they think deeply that today she is dependent on her husband, but if some incident happens tomorrow in her life that means if her husband becomes disabled or dies suddenly, then how will she survive? . . . Without proper education, will she be able to get a dependable job? (GeQ2-M2)

Moumita said that the family must see the benefits of the education of females in order for an attitudinal shift to take place. If the family observes how education directly and indirectly improves women's lives, it might be easier for parents to reconsider the education of their daughters. For instance, Moumita said that if a woman obtains a respected and well paying job upon graduation, her parents may change their mind about education. First, attitudes have to be changed; then the family must provide support and positive encouragement throughout their daughter's life.

Reducing Financial Barriers

Moumita recommended various social groups take action in order to reduce the financial hurdles that women face.

Women Themselves

Moumita suggested that women should first increase their will power and self-motivation to pursue higher levels of education. She said that if a woman was determined to pursue a post-secondary education, she might take positive initiatives to overcome many barriers including financial ones.

Family

Moumita recommended that family members provide encouragement and financial support for education equally towards their male and female children. She said that family must keep in mind that educated women are the best assets for them in many ways. If parents educate male and female children equally, all their children can support them in their old age. Moumita proposed that friends could extend their assistance to their needy friends who are unable to afford education expenses by providing encouragement, books, and notes to help reduce their mental pressure and financial difficulty. She said that friends should remind the female student that a few years of struggle could result in a permanent and respectable career.

Government and Non-government Organizations

Moumita recommended that government and non-government organizations (NGO) could create job opportunities for female students with a reasonable stipend. She said that if the government and private organizations created jobs especially for women, these women would be able to not only pay their way through school, but also would gain valuable work experience. Moumita suggested the establishment of cottage industries (industries where the creation of products and services is home-based, rather than

factory-based), where female family members could be employed to help defray the educational costs of a female relative.

She suggested that the government could also initiate student loan and bursary programs for women in need. Furthermore, Moumita recommended that the government might introduce night school and food-for-work programs for impoverished women.

Reducing Educational Barriers

Government and Education Institutions

Moumita suggested that government and education institutions could each take some initiatives to improve women's participation in post-secondary education by reducing educational barriers. Each is expanded upon below.

Provision of higher education institutions closer to home. Moumita suggested that the government provide more good quality post-secondary educational institutions in rural areas in order for more female students to access a higher education without the ensuing distance and communication problems. In addition, the government should provide low-rental housing facilities near colleges and universities, as well as improving and expanding the existing hostels and dormitories for women students.

Establishing resource libraries. Libraries in Bangladeshi schools are old and small. Moumita said that the establishment of better resource libraries within places of higher learning would go a long way towards helping less privileged students gain access to expensive learning materials. Furthermore, libraries are secure study havens for all women including those who need a safe and convenient place to meet with a tutor. To give an example of the positive impact of a well-stocked library, Moumita said that Canadian libraries provide students access to necessary books, and a safe place to work.

Introducing accommodation and safe transportation. Moumita proposed that the government and educational institutions introduce accommodation such as women's hostels and numbers of beds in the hostels. Moumita further suggested that the government provide safe and secure transportation for women, especially those who travel a long way from rural areas for a higher education. Moumita believed that those initiatives might be cost-effective for poor rural women and hence improve the higher education rate of women in Bangladesh as a whole.

Changing negative attitude towards hostels. Moumita said that if hostels were improved, and if hostel managers and government inspectors carefully enforced the rules and regulations of the hostels, the negative societal attitudes towards hostels might change. She recommended that hostel authorities should inform the families and guardians about the governing rules of the hostel regarding their daughters' safety. She observed that rules are not always implemented as written, and emphasized the careful "implementation and application" of the rules and regulations of the hostel.

Reducing Socio-cultural Barriers

Moumita suggested that the family and government take some positive initiatives to reduce socio-cultural barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh.

Below I describe her suggestions.

Family

Moumita insisted that the family should reject conservative and traditional ideologies and accept practical and progressive attitudes in order to reduce social and religious barriers to women's education in Bangladesh. Moumita said that the family should realize that, "There is another world outside where women can make something good and

contribute beside men to the world's development" (SS5Q6-M2). She suggested that families needed to overcome the "wrong and backdated" thinking like that "women's world is centered on their family, children, and house only" (SS5Q6-M2).

Government

Moumita proposed that the government take some measures focusing women's abilities, demonstrating women's potential as breadwinners and community leaders. She believed that these initiatives might help to reduce social and religious barriers to women's higher learning in Bangladesh. Moumita again recommended that government and communities could step forward to protect women from male harassment by improving the social security. Aside from these measures, Moumita felt that it is important to improve the education rate of both men and women. She believes, "When more and more people will be educated, automatically their eyes will open, and they will be able to come out from traditional and socio-cultural false beliefs and wrong thinking" (SS5Q6-M2).

Reducing Barriers of Male Harassment

Moumita proposed that eliminating male harassment is needed for improving women's post-secondary education rates in Bangladesh. She suggested that the government should come forward to give better protection for women in the society from male harassment. "The government needs to take some initiatives to improve the social security for women such as security for traveling alone, security from male harassment" (SS5Q6 M-2). She recommended that the government improve the social security and provide safe transportation for the protection of women so they can safely travel alone to

school. Moumita considers higher education for both men and women an effective tool for removing all of the barriers to women's education and progress in Bangladesh.

Eliminating Political Chaos and Session-Jam

Moumita sees the connections between the on-going political chaos, economic turmoil, out-of-control student politics, and session-jam, as all negatively impacting women's participation in post-secondary education by extending the length of time they are in school. Moumita believed that for session-jams to be eliminated from educational institutions, a positive dialog was required among students, political leaders, university authorities, and the government.

Summary of Moumita's Strategies and Suggestions

Moumita suggested that women need to improve self-confidence, women and their families need to increase awareness, and families need to change their negative attitudes towards the education of women. Moreover, she suggested many positive initiatives that might be taken according to the responsibilities of different levels of social organizations that address financial, educational, socio-cultural barriers, and the barriers of male harassment. Below I summarize the findings of Moumita's suggestions in Table 3. The first column of the table mentions various subsystems according to which subsystem is responsible for addressing these barriers. The second column describes possible strategies and initiatives for addressing barriers.

Table 3

Moumita's Suggested Strategies for Removing /Reducing Barriers to Women's Post-secondary Education in Bangladesh

Subsystems	Possible Strategies and Initiatives to Address Barriers
<i>Increasing Women's Self-confidence and Self-motivation</i>	
Women Themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase inner strength and determination to pursue a higher education - Develop confidence in their abilities when facing difficulties
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide young women positive support and encouragement to make a better educational career
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase women's and their families' awareness of the value of higher education by publicizing the real-life stories of educated successful women in the society through media
Educational Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the proportion of female teachers as role models to inspire and to increase female students' awareness of and motivation for pursuing higher levels of education
<i>Changing Family Attitudes towards Women's Education</i>	
Individuals in the Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educated and established women in the society should share their strategies for success with others who are struggling for education
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide well-paying jobs to women upon graduation to change families' negative attitudes
<i>Reducing Financial Barriers</i>	
Women Themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase will-power and self-motivation to overcome financial barriers to pursue a higher education
Family and Friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide equal encouragement and financial support for the education of male and female children - Help friends needy friends by providing necessary supports and mental encouragement
Government and Non-government Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make school more affordable by creating jobs with a reasonable stipend, establishing cottage industries, initiating student loan and bursary programs

Table 3 (Continued)

Subsystems	Possible Strategies and Initiatives to Address Barriers
<i>Reducing Educational Barriers</i>	
Government and Non-government Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take initiatives to change the negative attitude towards hostels by improving hostels’ environments, enforcing the rules and regulations of the hostels, and informing guardians about the governing rules of the hostels regarding their daughters’ safety - Provide available resource library facilities with education institutions - Provide safe and secure transportation, especially for rural women
<i>Reducing Socio-cultural Barriers</i>	
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overcome traditional ideologies and adopt more progressive attitudes to build a educational career for their daughters
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take measures to focus on women’s abilities and to demonstrate women’s potential as breadwinners and community leaders - Educate more people to reject deep-seated traditional socio-cultural beliefs
<i>Removing Barriers of Male Harassment</i>	
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve the social security for the protection of women from male harassment - Provide safe transportation for women to travel alone to participate in education

A quote from Moumita appropriately, I believe, summarizes these issues:

Our attitude is like this—since I don’t have girls hence I should not think about girls and improving girls’ education—this attitude should be changed. If we are aware of improving the education of women, independence of women, then we can do a lot. “An educated woman gives birth to an educated child”—this concept should prevail over everything in our mind. I feel combined and coordinated efforts of family, society, and government can solve this problem. Family or government alone is not enough for removing these difficulties. (SS3Q4-M2)

In the next chapter, Chapter Five, I present the findings from in-depth interviews with specific reference to Shaila focusing on four research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS FROM SHAILA

In a similar format to Chapter Four, in this chapter, I present the findings from two in-depth interviews with Shaila. The interviews with Shaila intended to explore: (a) Shaila's perceived major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh; (b) the barriers Shaila personally experienced in her pursuit of post-secondary education in Bangladesh; (c) the strategies Shaila used to overcome her barriers; and (d) the strategies and initiatives Shaila suggested which address barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. In the following sections, I present the findings from Shaila focusing on my four research questions. Before reporting Shaila's findings, I briefly describe her family and educational background. All quotes below are from Shaila.

Shaila's Background

Shaila is a university-educated Bangladeshi woman, who had lived for more than 26 years. Shaila grew up in an educated higher-middle class family in Bangladesh with both her parents being university educated. Shaila's two older brothers completed their post-secondary education in North America. Shaila's two older sisters also received post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Shaila finished her secondary and higher secondary education in Bangladesh. She then went to Delhi for her undergraduate degree. After one semester, she returned to Bangladesh and finished her remaining course work in a private university and completed her undergraduate degree in Bangladesh. In 2001, she came to Canada for a Master's degree which she completed in Economics. Then she got married and started a PhD program in Economics at the University of Toronto. Becoming pregnant, she experienced some sickness, and her husband moved to another city for his

PhD. She completed the course requirements for her degree but then quit the PhD program. With a young child and her husband in another city, it was not possible for her to continue in school and carry out the obligations of young child and household responsibilities alone. Shaila is now [after five years] planning to pursue another Master's degree in Business Administration or some other field because her child is in school and her husband and she are living in the same city.

Shaila's Perceived Major Barriers

Everything is related to one another. So, there are many systems and many factors interrelated that work as barriers to women's education. You can't say there's one solid cause that impacts women's education in Bangladesh. (SS5Q2 S-1)

Shaila outlined the major barriers that she believes hinder women's involvement in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. My review of Shaila's two interviews revealed three broad themes. These themes are: (a) financial constraints; (b) socio-cultural practices and social attitudes; and (c) male domination. I expand on each of these barriers below.

Financial Constraints

Shaila referred to financial problems or funding constraints as one of the leading factors that hold women back from participating in a higher level of education in Bangladesh. "Almost 50% [of] people in Bangladesh live under the poverty line. Financial barrier is severe for them. For them it is a big factor to take a university degree." (SS2Q2S-1) Shaila identified two types of financial constraints that girls usually face to pursue their education in Bangladesh. The first one is a family's lack of money or lack of employment opportunities; and the second financial difficulty is the parents' reluctance to invest in their daughters' education. She explained that sometimes a girl

cannot continue her education due to her family's lack of money even if she and her family are strongly motivated for her to continue in education. Shaila said, "Girls from poor families face this disadvantage severely" (SS5Q4 S-1). Moreover, Shaila mentioned that the job opportunities for female students are limited and the environment for working is not suitable for women in Bangladesh. "In our society, a male student may take an odd job to support his education which would normally be very difficult for a female student" (SS3Q5 S-2).

Another aspect of financial difficulty, Shaila said, "The second problem comes from parents' discrimination against their female children" (GeQ1 S-2). Shaila explained that sometimes parents' differential treatment of their male and female children about their education plays a vital role in keeping the female children from achieving their educational goals.

Socio-cultural Practices and Social Attitudes

Shaila referred to Bangladeshi socio-cultural practices and social attitudes as another major barrier to women's education in Bangladesh. "Our society and social practices certainly play an important role to slow down women's education" (SS5Q2 S-1). She said that due to socio-cultural barriers many girls and women cannot pursue a post-secondary education in Bangladesh.

With struggle, I came here across a long way in my education career. Now I am a success story. But hundreds of girls and women in Bangladesh I know, they could not win their fight. They could not overcome their socio-cultural barriers to participate in higher education. They just surrendered to those socio-cultural customs and practices over there. So it's really difficult. (SS5Q2 S-1)

Shaila mentioned several factors which hold women back from their education and overall progress such as family's gender-biased attitudes and investment; the practice and

pressure of early marriage; and religious misinterpretation as major socio-cultural barriers. Each of these factors is described below.

Family's Gender-biased Attitudes

“In our culture in Bangladesh, there's a different attitude of parents towards male and female children,” said Shaila (SS2Q2 S-1). She said that most of the parents in Bangladesh usually invest more in their sons' education than in their daughters' education. Shaila believed that such attitudes strongly inhibit women's participation in higher education in Bangladesh. She said that daughters of both poor and solvent families face this barrier directly and indirectly. Shaila explained that in Bangladesh, there is no government old age benefit plan for elderly parents. Thus most of the parents' survival depends on their sons' earnings. Shaila said, “The tendency of dependency on a male child for old age support is a natural outcome of our social system” (SS2Q3 S-2).

When parents invest in their children, Shaila said they always expect a good return. In Bangladeshi culture after getting married, women usually go to their husband's home and do not have the opportunity to support their elderly parents financially. Therefore, when parents do not foresee any returns from their investment in their daughters' educational careers, they are not encouraged to spend an equal amount of money for their daughters' education.

Most of the parents in our country, either self-dependent or dependent, whether they need or do not need, think directly or indirectly that if there is a possibility to get a return from our investment, we will that get from our son, not from our daughter. (SS3Q1 S-1)

Social Practice and Pressure of Early Marriage

“Early marriage is a very large factor” (SS2Q2 (p) S-2) in the reduction of the rate of women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. “Sometimes parents coax their

daughters into marriage saying that they may pursue education after wedding which generally doesn't happen" (GeQ1 S-2). Due to early marriages, in Shaila's opinion, very few women can continue their education because "the early age marriage leaves less or no opportunity for women to pursue higher levels of education" (GeQ1 S-2).

Most girls in Bangladesh get married at the age of 18 or 20. At that age, they are at higher secondary school or just completing higher secondary education or at the beginning of a post-secondary education. At that time, in-laws impose barriers as well as household responsibilities that act as hurdles to the higher education of married girls. (SS2Q2 S-2)

Shaila explained that women cannot overlook marriage nor can they fight to stop it because they are worried about whether or not they will be able to marry at an older age, saying that, men in the Bangladeshi society usually prefer to marry girls of 18 to 20 years of age. "It is built in our social system" (SS2Q2 (p) S-2). She commented that a good student who has strong willpower can overcome this problem but for an average woman, that willpower or encouragement is absent to motivate her for higher education. The woman then thinks that, in order to survive, she has to depend on her husband. Shaila mentioned that although this belief has changed greatly in the urban areas, this belief remains in rural communities,

Religious Misinterpretation

According to Shaila, religious misinterpretation is another key factor to deter women's involvement in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. "True religious practice is not a problem or does not work as barrier to women's education" (SS5Q4 S-2). However, Shaila believes that religious misinformation and religious conservativeness in the family are considerable constraints to women's participation in post-secondary education. Shaila gave an example of how religious misinformation influences parents in

her friend who could not pursue her university education due to her family's religious beliefs and conservative attitudes. Her friend's parents perceived that religion prohibited women's higher education. So her parents arranged for her to marry after finishing her higher secondary education. "She [friend] wanted to get higher education but her family's religious misconception worked as a barrier and she could not overcome that barrier in spite of her willingness" (SS5Q6 S-2).

Shaila referred to the "religious bigots who intentionally misinterpret religion and use it to mislead people against female education" (SS5Q4 S-2). "In their interpretation, higher education is not for women" (SS5Q3 S-1). The quote below gives examples of these misguided beliefs,

You should not send your daughter for higher education. Higher education is actually not for girls at all. Woman should stay at home and take care of their husbands, houses, and children. In our culture, some less educated so-called religious priests established that parents should get their daughters married in their early age around 16 to 18. (SS5Q5 S-1)

Male Domination

Shaila said that Bangladesh is a patriarchal society where male domination is another key obstacle to women's education. She explained that the male population prefers to keep women less educated and in a submissive position in the family as well as in society. To accomplish their goals, sometimes they misinterpret religious doctrine intentionally. "You know in our country, there are some people who deliberately take advantage of religion to use it against women" (SS5Q3 S-1).

There is a dominating tendency among the male population. That's why they don't want female partners to get equal amount of education or status in the society. Males want to dominate females by keeping them ignorant. . . . They understand that an illiterate woman would remain subordinate to the male partner. (SS5Q5 S-2)

Shaila referred to male harassment as a common tradition in Bangladeshi society. “It is very difficult for a girl to walk alone on the street in Bangladesh and participate in university class” (SS2Q2 S-1). She said that male harassment is such a severe problem for women in Bangladesh that many parents fear sending their daughters to post-secondary education.

The girls who do not find protection from such harassment in many instances quit college or university and are forced to end their education. Male harassment is a severe problem in our society. It holds back many girls and women from participating in higher levels of education in our society. (SS4Q3 S-2)

Shaila referred to her own sister who was unable to remain at the hostel due to harassment by delinquent boys. As a cause of male harassment, she mentioned the disruptive and dishonest legal system. “Our legal system is in a disorder and there is not much help to combat such troubles for women” (SS5Q2 S-2).

Shaila perceived that the financial constraints, the Bangladeshi socio-cultural practices and social attitudes, and patriarchal society’s male domination all work as major barriers to women’s post-secondary education in Bangladesh. As financial constraints, Shaila identified families’ lack of money, lack of job opportunities, and parents’ reluctance to invest in their daughters’ education work as financial barriers in keeping women away from achieving their educational goals. Shaila also identified various social and family related issues such as: family’s gender-biased attitudes and investment; the practice and pressure of early marriage; the obligation of gender roles; and religious misinterpretation which she believed exist within the broad theme of socio-cultural practices and social attitudes and strongly inhibit women’s involvement in post-secondary education in Bangladesh.

Barriers Which Shaila Personally Experienced

Shaila specified three major barriers that she personally experienced in her pursuit of a post-secondary education in Bangladesh. These three barriers are: (a) socio-cultural pressures and social attitudes; (b) financial constraints; and (c) male harassment on transportation. I describe Shaila's barriers below.

Socio-cultural Pressures and Social Attitudes

Shaila said that Bangladeshi socio-cultural pressures and social attitudes strongly impacted her pursuit of post-secondary education. She personally experienced socio-cultural barriers from: family's gender-biased attitudes and investment; family pressure to succeed in school; attitudinal barriers at university; and from the social pressure of early marriage and household responsibilities. Below I expand on each of these barriers.

Family's Gender-biased Attitudes and Investments

Shaila said that her parents' gender-biased negative attitudes and investments greatly inhibited her educational plans and threw her into a constant mental pressure. "Family's attitudinal barrier impacted my plan for higher education strongly. In our culture in Bangladesh, there's different attitude for male and female children, I experienced this from my family though they [parents] both were educated" (SS2Q2 S-1). Shaila mentioned that her mother was not supportive of her pursuit of a post-secondary education. When Shaila completed her higher secondary education, her mother worried that her daughter was getting older and no one would marry her. "As a person, she is very nice but she was not someone outside of the society—She could not go beyond the society's structure or system" (SS2Q1 S-1).

Shaila added that due to the social practice of dependency on sons in their older ages, her parents invested differently in the education of their male and female children. “Although, my parents were educated, they differentiated their mental and financial support for our education” (SS1Q1S-1). Her parents invested more in her brothers’ education than in the education of Shaila and her sisters, which affected her education plan negatively.

Only because of that reason, my parents invested six-lac taka (about 17 thousands dollars at that time) for the education of each brother and sent two of them to America for their higher education. And for my sisters and me their attitude was completely different. (SS5Q2 S-1)

To give examples of gender-biased attitudes of her parents, Shaila said that she had to fight with her parents to get approval to go to even India for higher studies, whereas her two brothers did not need to do any convincing to go to North America to complete their post-secondary education in spite of poor academic performance. “My brothers got an opportunity to come to North America for their higher studies. I did not get that” (SS2Q2 S-1). Shaila explained that she got permission to go to India because the cost of education in India was one-third of the cost in America. Her family was afraid to send her to America alone at such a young age (18 years old) because she might not be able to protect her purity from the American society. In her brothers’ cases, her parents did not even think of those issues. Shaila sadly expressed that for women timing is a very important factor for earning a higher degree, getting married, and having children.

Only because of their attitudes, I came to North America about five years later. If I would be able to come at my eighteen, I would complete my higher education by the age of twenty-three. I quit my PhD program for getting my child. I would not face that problem. (SS2Q2 S-1)

Shaila also faced barriers from her extended family. She said that her uncles, aunts, and other relatives did not appreciate her plans for pursuing a higher level of education. Her extended family members' attitudes were: "Oh Allah! She is getting older. Why are you not caring about it? Why are you not looking for a bridegroom for her? After eighteen, who is going to marry her?" (SS2Q2 S-1) Shaila said, "I would suffer constantly from this pressure" (SS2Q2 S-1).

Family Pressure to Succeed in School

Shaila also felt pressured to prove to her family that she was a good student; otherwise, they would not let her proceed with her education. "My barrier was that I felt pressured all the time. I don't know how to define it, but it seemed to me that if I slipped, I would have to stop my study" (SS2Q2S-1). She became motivated to obtain a higher education when her parents gave her extra attention usually reserved for her brothers after she received a scholarship in class five. Shaila said that before that, she did not get the same attention from her parents. Her other two sisters did not receive this extra attention from their parents, as they were average students. From that experience, Shaila believed, "if I want to pursue higher education, as a daughter, I have to make a good result" (SS1Q1S-1). Otherwise, her parents might not provide the financial support and encouragement that she needed to pursue a higher level of education or they might arrange her marriage as they did for her two sisters.

I would suffer all the time from fear. My brothers had not such fear. They knew that no matter how, our parents would support us financially, mentally, and motivate us to participate in higher education, whatever would be our results. (SS1Q1S-1)

Socio-cultural Pressure of Early Marriage

Shaila said that the Bangladeshi cultural norms and the social pressure of early marriage negatively affected her education. She said that, according to cultural beliefs, girls must get married at an early age. Since boys are the breadwinners of the family, they must complete their education. Due to social practices and the pressure of early marriage, her mother was “suffering from hyper tension” for her to marry. Even at one point in her life, Shaila herself felt inferior as most of her friends were getting married; she felt that she was becoming too old for marriage. She was wondering whether she should pursue education or get married early. Shaila said,

Part of me wanted to be a highly educated woman, at the same time I was thinking, O my God! If I wait until I finish my master degree, I will be 24/25 years old and then who is going to marry me? I had that fear and hesitation. . . . I had strong motivation that does not mean I was outside of that society. So, I always had a social pressure. (SS5Q2 S-1)

Attitudinal Barriers at University

At university, Shaila faced attitudinal barriers from a male teacher and from male classmates. During her undergraduate program, she took a business communication course. Other than two girls in the class, the rest of her classmates (approximately 20) were male. The male classmates and her teacher held the attitude that “Why did women come to take this course? This is not for women. I doubt they will be able to make a good score on this course” (SS4Q4 S-1).

Financial Constraints

Due to her parents’ gender-biased attitudes, Shaila faced financial difficulty when she first tried to come to North America to pursue a higher education. She explained,

To get admission in Canada’s university, I had to fulfill TOEFL requirement, I had to buy a ticket, and I had to gather my living expenses. I did not have that much money.

My family did not support me. For those reasons I had to wait another one year to manage the money. (SS3Q2 S-1)

Shaila said that financial difficulties not only interrupted her plan for a higher degree, but also created other roadblock. She said, “I could not continue my PhD due to my pregnancy and household responsibilities. I tried again and again but did not succeed due to the same reasons. My husband is a good person but reluctant to take household responsibilities” (GeQ1 S-2).

Male Harassment on Transportation

Shaila faced the challenge of male harassment on public transportation when she traveled to the university. Shaila used to go to the university by personal car, but when her father passed away, her family sold their car and she had to take a bus to go to the university. She said that it was very difficult for her to travel by bus. The men used inappropriate language and tried to push others, making it impossible to travel alone to the university. “Most of the time, I had to hear some bad comments, slang language. Some bad students tried to push. In one word, I can tell you it would be impossible to travel alone to the university” (SS2Q2 S-1).

It was a difficult reality. Sometimes I would cry when I came back home. It’s really painful and insulting. No one will understand how insulting it is unless she faces it by herself. Sometimes, when I return home, I couldn’t pay my attention to my study. I believe many girls in Bangladesh face this reality severely. It is also another main reason for women not participating in higher education. (SS2Q2 S-1)

Summary of Shaila’s Perceived and Experienced Barriers

A systematic review of Shaila’s two interviews revealed three broad themes which Shaila perceived as barriers to women’s post-secondary education in Bangladesh. These three themes are: (a) financial constraints; (b) socio-cultural practices and social attitudes; and (c) male domination. Shaila identified two types of financial constraints: families’

lack of money and lack of job opportunities; and parents' gender-biased investments which, in general, Bangladeshi women face to pursue a higher level of education. Shaila identified various Bangladeshi socio-cultural and family related issues such as: the family's gender-biased attitudes and investments; the practice and pressure of early marriage; the obligation of gender roles; and religious misinterpretation. She believed that all these multifaceted issues are related to the broad theme of socio-cultural practices, and social attitudes interdependently work as socio-cultural barriers to hold Bangladeshi women back from their education and overall progress. Shaila also referred to male domination, including male harassment, as another major barrier to women's education in Bangladesh, which discourages parents from sending their daughters for higher education. Shaila contended that all these issues function as barriers to women's education in keeping women away from achieving their educational goals.

Upon reviewing the findings of interviews with Shaila, I realized that the barriers Shaila personally experienced from pursuing her post-secondary education were identical with the barriers that she perceived as major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Shaila personally experienced three major barriers in her pursuit of a post-secondary education. I identified these three barriers as: (a) socio-cultural attitudes and social pressures; (b) financial constraints; and (c) male harassment on transportation. Within the broad theme of socio-cultural attitudes and social pressures, various family and social related issues such as: family's gender-biased attitudes and investment; family pressure to succeed in school; the social pressure of early marriage; the obligation of gender roles and household responsibilities; and attitudinal barriers at

university negatively influenced Shaila's effort to pursue a post-secondary education in many ways.

Shaila's Strategies to Overcome Her Barriers

Shaila described some strategies she used to increase her self-confidence and self-motivation and overcome her hesitation. Moreover, Shaila explained some more strategies to reduce the barriers that she faced in her pursuit of post-secondary education in Bangladesh: hesitation due to social pressures, parents' gender-biased attitudes and family pressures, financial difficulties, attitudinal barriers at university, male harassment, the barrier of religious misinformation. Below I describe Shaila's strategies.

Increasing Self-confidence and Self-motivation

Both Shaila's parents had completed university education. Following them, Shaila eagerly pursued higher education. Her older brothers had completed their post-secondary education in North America. These examples all increased her self-confidence and self-motivation to pursue a university education. Shaila herself had strong willpower to pursue a post-secondary education. Furthermore, Shaila was motivated to become a highly educated woman by observing women:

I observed that people speak and behave with educated and uneducated people differently. I then realized that I have to be educated and establish myself in the society with respect, so that the society can respect me and the society can talk to me in a different way. (SS1Q3 S-1)

Overcoming Her Hesitation

Shaila said that, due to the social practice and pressure of early marriage, at one point in her life, she hesitated to pursue a post-secondary education. She overcame her hesitation by observing two women both divorced, one (her schoolteacher) who had a good education background, and another (her cousin) who had only a secondary

education. One, her teacher, was able to stand on her own with respect and dignity due to her good education. Her cousin, on the other hand, struggled due to lack of a strong educational background and returned to live with her parents after her divorce. Those two experiences helped her to decide to pursue higher education. Shaila was reminded of her teacher's advice, who said, "If you want to do something in your life, you need a good educational background" (SS1Q3 S-1).

Reducing Parents' Gender-biased Attitudes and Family Pressures

Shaila worked hard in school and received a government scholarship in class five. Then her parents gave her extra attention which was usually reserved for her brothers. Her other two sisters did not receive this extra attention from parents as they were average students. Shaila thought that if she wanted to pursue higher education, as a daughter, she would have to continue to be successful. Otherwise, her parents might not provide the financial support and encouragement that she needed to pursue a higher level of education. Shaila said, "This 'fear' always got me going to participate in higher education. This 'willpower' always motivated me" (SS1Q1(p) S-1).

Reducing Financial Difficulties

Shaila could not come to Canada immediately after finishing her undergraduate program due to financial constraints. Her family did not support her with this goal. Shaila worked at a bank for a year to earn enough money. From those savings, she paid for her TOEFL fees, bought a plane ticket, and covered living expenses for several months. Moreover, Shaila always tried to get good grades in order to ensure some financial support from other sources as well. For instance, she received a government stipend from

grade five right up to her undergraduate program. While in the Masters' program in Canada, she received a full scholarship from the university.

Reducing Attitudinal Barriers at University

At university in Bangladesh, Shaila took a business communication course. The male classmates and her teacher were indifferent toward her pursuing the course in business communication. To overcome their discouraging attitudes, Shaila overlooked those negative attitudes and strived for good results in that course. She got the highest mark in that business communication course.

Reducing Barriers of Male Harassment

Shaila tried to minimize the problem of male harassment by avoiding riding those buses where separate seats were not available for women. Instead, she took buses for the university where some seats were reserved for women, when possible.

Overcoming Barriers of Religious Misinformation

Shaila said that due to her strong willpower and motivation, religious beliefs and norms only negatively impacted her plans for education somewhat. Moreover, Shaila used accomplished women as her role models.

I considered them as my role models, those women who went forward and made successful lives by educating themselves. I did not give that much importance to socio-cultural and religious norms and practices that do not support women's progress. (SS5Q5 S-1)

Her family's openness also helped her to overcome religious barriers. "My family was not so conservative or influenced by any superstitions and misinterpretations. So, I was not affected that much" (SS5Q4 S-1).

The review of Shaila's interviews revealed that Shaila enthusiastically pursued her post-secondary education, as her parents had done. She carefully observed people; both

highly educated women as well as less educated women in her family and community. What she saw helped her to overcome her hesitation and motivated her to become more educated. Shaila worked hard to get good grades throughout her education to earn money as well as to help change her parents' gender-biased attitudes. Shaila lived within society's constraints, i.e., she took buses to the university where some seats were reserved for women to minimize the harassment by male on transportation. Moreover, her enlightened family's openness also helped her to overcome religious barriers.

Shaila's Suggested Strategies and Initiatives to Address Barriers

Shaila provided a number of strategies for reducing barriers and improving women's post-secondary education rates in Bangladesh. These included increasing women's self-motivation and self-confidence and changing family attitudes toward the education of female children. She also suggested some strategies geared to reducing financial, educational, socio-cultural barriers, and the barrier of male harassment.

Below I group her suggestions according to which subsystem I believe is responsible for addressing these barriers: the women themselves, family, government, non-government organizations, and educational institutions.

Increasing Women's Self-confidence and Self-motivation

Shaila recommended that women increase their self-confidence and self-awareness to pursue a higher level of education as essential for raising women's post-secondary education rates in Bangladesh. She suggested that women themselves, their families, and the government could each play vital roles in elevating women's self-confidence and self-awareness to pursue a post-secondary education. Below I expand on these strategies.

Women Themselves

Shaila believed that women could become more self-confident and self-motivated to pursue a post-secondary education by observing their surroundings. She explained that if women in any society observed carefully in their own family and community, they would understand how people behave with educated and uneducated people and what the position of educated and uneducated women is in the family as well as in society.

Family

Shaila said that at the family level, both parents could play a significant role in increasing their daughter's self-confidence and self-motivation. Shaila suggested that a mother could play a motivating role model for her daughter by citing her own examples and experiences. Shaila believed that besides the mother's encouragement, if a father provides the financial support and other facilities for education, a daughter might go a long way toward education. Moreover, friends who got married young should be honest to tell the truth about their married life so that the other unmarried friends would not be inclined to get married before completing their post-secondary education.

Government

Shaila recommended that the media could be a very useful and effective means to reach mass people and the government could use the media to increase women's awareness and motivation for pursuing a post-secondary education by publicizing successful stories of educated women as well as the pains of illiteracy to motivate other women in society. Shaila said that through media, women would be able to see how educated women are respected and where the position and status of illiterate women in the society is.

Changing Family Attitudes Towards Women's Education

Shaila said that it is necessary to change families' attitudes about females participating in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Before suggesting strategies to improve the situation, Shaila highlighted a deterring factor. She said that the father is the main bread earner in the family. Usually, a father believes that he will be dependent on his male children in his old age. Therefore, a father is more inclined to educate a male child. Shaila then suggested initiatives that the women themselves and the government could take to change the family's negative attitudes towards women's education.

Women Themselves

Shaila commented, "Whether your parents are wealthy or poor that does not matter" (SS3Q1S), girls must put a lot of effort into their education to prove to be a good student to secure financial support and encouragement from their parents as a female child well as from other sources

Government

Shaila suggested that the government use media to change the family's negative attitudes and to elevate awareness of women's education by publicizing educated and uneducated, successful and unsuccessful women's stories. Shaila contended that the media could increase parents' awareness that male and female children might support parents equally if parents give them equal opportunities for their education.

Shaila further suggested that the government must introduce an old age support benefit plan which in turn will reduce parents' dependence on their male children. Shaila believed that if parents were ensured financial support from the government in their old age, their gender-biased attitudes towards education of their male and female children

would be reduced automatically. In addition, Shaila said that the introduction of student loans by the government might keep parents from differentiating between their male and female children in the matter of education.

Reducing Financial Barriers

Shaila recommended different social groups such as women themselves, the family, and government take initiative in order to reduce the financial problems that women face to pursue their higher education.

Women Themselves

Shaila suggested that girls must strive to obtain strong academic results in order to receive financial support from the government and from other sources. She believed that good academic results work in many ways to help students financially.

Family

Shaila said that, since available job opportunities are minimal for women in Bangladesh, parents are primarily responsible for helping all their children financially. Shaila suggested that parents change their gender-biased attitudes and investments. She proposed that families provide equal financial support within their ability for the education of both their male and female children.

Government

Shaila recommended that the government take responsibility to minimize financial barriers, including providing student loans at a low interest and creating job opportunities for female students. Shaila suggested that the government and higher education institutions introduce on-campus jobs and work-study programs to relieve female students financially in their pursuit of a post-secondary education. Also the government

could introduce micro-credit and cottage industries for female students where they could work part time.

Reducing Educational Barriers

Shaila suggested that the government take initiatives to reduce educational barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I structured her suggestions below.

Government

Shaila recommended that the government step forward to make schooling in rural areas more accessible to women. First, they would need to establish more colleges and universities in remote areas for females. She said that the higher education institutions should be evenly distributed around the country so that girls would not have to travel far for education. Here the government would need to support the institution financially and maintain the school's basic standard by providing qualified teachers and staff.

Second, she recommended that a daycare system would certainly help those who needed the service. In Bangladesh, few daycares are available but only in large cities and affordable only to the rich. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce affordable daycare facilities for school-going mothers to continue their education. In addition, Shaila proposed that the government also introduce a child benefit to school-going mothers who struggle with financial constraints and thus help ensure that women can continue higher education once they are admitted.

Reducing Socio-cultural Barriers

Shaila suggested two strategies that the government might introduce to reduce social and religious barriers from women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Each is expanded on below.

Government

Abolishing religious misinterpretation. Shaila said that many social and religious practices are related to one another. Moreover, she believes that many social practices emerged from false religious notions and misinterpretations. For example, she said that the practice of early marriage is a socio-cultural practice as well as religious practice. Therefore, Shaila suggested that the government first take initiatives to abolish religious misinterpretation from the Bangladeshi society to remove social and religious barriers to women's education in Bangladesh. Shaila proposed that the government use various female organizations (such as: Women for Women, Grameen Bank, Nari Shonghoti Nari Pokkho) to improve women's awareness of false socio-cultural and religious concepts and the objectives behind those types of propaganda.

Publicizing true lessons of religion. Shaila recommended that the government publicize true lessons on religion through media. She further suggested that the law and its implementation should be strong and the government should punish those people who misguide parents in the name of religion.

Reducing Barriers of Male Harassment

Shaila recommended that the government has a role in preventing male harassment.

Below I describe her suggestions.

Government

Shaila said, "The law and order of the country must be improved" (SS4Q5 S-2). She said that the written regulations on harassment exist but their implementation is insufficient. Shaila suggested that the delinquent boys who harass women "must receive exemplary punishments, so that others get lessons from it" (SS4Q5 S-2). In Shaila's

view, in order to reduce male harassment, the government should establish more high quality higher education institutions around the country, so that women would not need to travel far to continue their schooling and would have to travel shorter distances on public transportation where they are exposed to verbal harassment.

Summary of Shaila's Strategies and Suggestions

Shaila said that increasing women's self-confidence and self-motivation as well as changing family's attitudes towards women's education are necessary for elevating the post-secondary education rates of women in Bangladesh. Shaila suggested several strategies for increasing women's self-confidence and motivation for pursuing post-secondary education and for changing family's attitudes. Moreover, in response to financial, educational, socio-cultural and religious barriers, and the barrier of male harassment, Shaila suggested a number of positive initiatives that might be taken by various levels of the Bangladesh society. Below I summarize the findings of Shaila's suggestions in Table 4. The first column of the table mentions various subsystems according to which subsystem is responsible for addressing these barriers. The second column describes possible strategies and initiatives for addressing barriers.

Table 4

Shaila's Suggested Strategies for Removing /Reducing Barriers to Women's Post-secondary Education in Bangladesh

Subsystems	Possible Strategies and Initiatives to Address Barriers
<i>Increasing Women's Self-confidence and Self-motivation</i>	
Women Themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase self-confidence and motivation to pursue higher education - Observe surroundings to realize how people value educated women and the status of illiterate women in the family and society
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide encouragement and supports to the education of female children - Mother become role model by citing her own examples and experiences - Friends who got married at young ages, inform others about the negative impact of early marriage to discourage not to get married before completing higher education
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use media to increase women's motivation and awareness by publicizing success stories of educated women in the society and the pain of illiteracy
<i>Changing Family Attitudes towards Women's Education</i>	
Women Themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Put efforts into education to prove to be a good student to get encouragement from parents as a female child
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change gender-biased attitudes and investments and provide equal financial support for the education of male and female children
<i>Reducing Financial Barriers</i>	
Women Themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obtain strong academic results to receive financial support from the government and from other sources
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide equal financial support for the education of male and female children
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide student loans and create jobs for female students. - Introduce on-campus jobs and work-study programs - Improve work-environment for female students
Non-government Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce micro-credit and cottage industries for female students to where they could work part time

Table 4 (Continued)

Subsystems	Possible Strategies and Initiatives to Address Barriers
<i>Reducing Educational Barriers</i>	
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish more universities in remote areas and maintain the standard of the universities by providing finance, qualified teachers, and staff - Introduce affordable daycares and child benefit to school-going mothers
<i>Reducing Socio-cultural Barriers</i>	
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Abolish first religious misinterpretation from the society by publicizing true lessons on religion through media - Punish those who misguide parents in the name of religion - Use female organizations to improve women’s awareness of false beliefs
<i>Removing Barriers of Male Harassment</i>	
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve the law and order system to decrease male harassment and employ exemplary punishments those who harass innocent women - Distribute higher education institutions evenly around the country to avoid male harassment during journey

To end this chapter about my findings from interviews with Shaila, I include one final quotation by her:

Educated women are assets of a nation. Social and economic developments may be achieved in a much quicker time by investing more in women’s education. Having higher education is like economic insurance for women in any difficulties. I think that educated mothers can build an educated nation more efficiently than anyone else can. Our homes are the centers of our day-to-day activities and the environment of the home of an educated mother must be positively different from that of an illiterate or uneducated mother. (GeQ2 S-2)

In the next chapter, Chapter Six, I present the findings from the two interviews that I held with Jahan.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS FROM JAHAN

In this chapter, I present the findings from the two interviews with Jahan. The interviews with Jahan were intended to provide answers to the four research questions with specific reference to Jahan: (a) Jahan's perceived major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh; (b) the barriers Jahan personally experienced in her pursuit of post-secondary education in Bangladesh; (c) the strategies Jahan used to overcome her barriers; and (d) the possible strategies and initiatives Jahan suggested which address barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Before reporting Jahan's findings, I briefly describe Jahan's family and educational background. All quotes in this chapter are from Jahan.

Jahan's Background

Jahan is a university-educated Bangladeshi woman who lived in a rural area in Bangladesh for more than 28 years. Jahan grew up in a family where education was valued. Her mother completed her primary education and her father received his higher secondary education. Jahan had only one brother, who completed his Master's degree. Both parents encouraged Jahan to pursue a post-secondary education. Jahan completed her secondary and higher secondary education at rural institutions. She then went to the city to attend university. Jahan completed her master's degree in Sociology in 1995 and then in 1999 immigrated to Canada with her husband. Jahan wanted to pursue another degree in Canada but could not because of family obligations. She dreams of one day continuing her education in Canada.

Jahan's Perceived Major Barriers

Jahan outlined the major barriers that she believes obstruct women's participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. My analysis of the two interviews with Jahan revealed five broad themes. These five themes are: (a) socio-cultural practices and social attitudes; (b) financial constraints; (c) inadequate education facilities; (d) male domination; and (e) corrupt government and inconsistent implementation of law and punishment. Jahan recognized these as central barriers to women's education in general, and especially for women in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I elaborate on each of these barriers below.

Socio-cultural Practices and Social Attitudes

As the first leading barrier, Jahan referred to Bangladeshi socio-cultural practices and social attitudes. She said that the established socio-cultural beliefs, social pressures, and attitudes are fundamental barriers holding Bangladeshi women back from furthering their education. Concerning socio-cultural practices and attitudes, Jahan highlighted several issues such as: (a) the family's negative attitudes towards women's education; (b) social pressure towards early marriage and household responsibilities; and (c) false religious beliefs and religious propaganda. Jahan believed that all these matters function as deep-seated barriers to women's education in Bangladesh, deterring Bangladeshi women from their quest for higher educational learning. I describe each of these issues below.

Family's Negative Attitude Towards Female Education

Jahan said that the family's traditional negative attitude towards female education is one of the key barriers to Bangladeshi women's education.

No doubt, there are some social pressures and social barriers. For example, 'why will a girl go far away for her university education?' ...'parents should not send their

daughter to the dorm...it is not a safe place for a girl'...'maybe she will lose her purity'...All these beliefs and superstitions make some problems that hold women back from participating in higher education. (GeQ1J-2)

Jahan added that, in Bangladesh, “There is a tendency to get girls married in their early ages and educate sons as breadwinners. I would say this is one of the major barriers to women’s post-secondary education in Bangladesh” (GeQ1J-2). She explained that many families in Bangladesh consider education is unnecessary for females since they will get married at an early age and go to their husband’s homes. On the other hand, Bangladeshi families consider their sons “as breadwinners” of the family. Typically sons will stay with their elderly parents and provide them food and shelter, as has been practiced for a long time in Bangladeshi culture.

Jahan highlighted the general attitudes of Bangladeshi parents towards women’s education:

They just think, if we get them married and send them to their husband’s homes, they will be fine there. They will not face any problems for their survival because their husbands are responsible for earning money and providing their food and shelter...our daughter only need[s] to take care of children and household tasks. So, what is the need for good education or higher education? (SS2Q6J-2)

Jahan believes that these kinds of long-held foolish and negative family attitudes towards female education hold women back from participating in their post-secondary education.

Social Pressure of Early Marriage and Household Responsibilities

Jahan said that the traditional practice of early marriage “is a big problem” for a Bangladeshi girl desiring to pursue higher levels of education. She said, “Sometimes due to the social norms and taboos of the society, parents feel pressure to get their daughter married at an early age” (SS2Q6J-2). Jahan explained that, for girls, early marriage and

household responsibilities are interrelated. As a traditional social system in Bangladesh, “After marriage, there’s a large amount of responsibilities waiting for a woman in our culture” (SS2Q3J-1). In general, men in Bangladesh do not perform household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for children and sick members of the family. Moreover, as a developing country, the modern household amenities such as washing machines, cooking stove, refrigerator, etc. are very limited there. All these household chores take a large amount of time for women everyday. As a result, it is very difficult for a woman to continue her education after marriage.

Sometimes parents try to convince their daughter by saying that OK, you can continue your study after marriage. But it does not happen in most of the cases. She gets extra burdens from her husband’s family. Further, when she becomes a mother, she has to do many things for her children. After finishing all those responsibilities, she does not get any extra time for her study. (GeQ1J-2)

False Religious Beliefs and Religious Propaganda

Jahan believed that false religious beliefs and religious propaganda (misinformation) act as another major barrier to women’s education in Bangladesh. She said, “In our society there are some false notions and misinterpretations about religion that are really problems for us” (SS5Q3J-1). However, Jahan believed that religion itself is not a problem for women’s education since no religion prohibits women’s education. “Real religious beliefs and practices are not harmful for us. I would like to say that false religious beliefs and religious propaganda (misinformation) or superstitions are big problems for women’s education, especially for higher education” (SS5Q3J-1). Jahan provided examples of false religious propaganda:

In our country, those who proclaim Islam believe that when girls reach their teen age, they should get married and marriage should be the parents’ first priority rather than to educate them. In their perception, education is not for women—religion does not allow women to be educated. (GeQ1J-2)

Jahan believed that the Koran and other religious documents do not say anything to this effect, nor does true religion restrict women's education. "Actually our religion [Islam] does not say anywhere in the Koran that 'women should not get their education.' There is nothing written in this way" (SS5Q3J-1).

They [priests] interpret the Koran in their own thoughts and words. Those are not true. Most of the people in the village are illiterate and half-literate. They cannot read anything by themselves, so they believe what their priests said. It is very challenging for Bangladeshi girls to overcome these barriers. (SS5Q3 (p) J-2)

Jahan said that these kinds of religious beliefs and misinformation encourage parents to send their daughters at a young age to a husband's house instead of sending them for higher education.

Financial Constraints

Jahan referred to financial difficulties as another leading cause of women's low participation rates in post-secondary education. She said,

A large portion [about 80%] of the people in our country is living on farming. Natural disasters, such as cyclone, drought, and flood are common disasters in our country. Therefore, a financial problem that means poverty is one of the major problems. (GeQ1 J-2)

Jahan explained that the education costs are very high for poor Bangladeshi in rural areas. Job opportunities for students, especially female students, are limited in Bangladesh. Most students depend on their parents to maintain their education costs. However, parents from those families do not invest in their daughters' higher level of education knowing that the women will marry early and leave for their husband's homes and not be able to help their own parents financially. Rather, the parents prefer to educate their sons who will stay and support them in their old age. Jahan compared the situation to Canada by saying:

Here, in Canada, students have some opportunity to work in many places such as the library, stores, fast food shops, restaurants etc. Students themselves maintain their education plus other living expenditures by their earnings. Moreover, universities and the government provide scholarships and student loans. If they do not get any job opportunities, they can apply for loans for their education. In our country, these kinds of financial facilities for a student are quite impossible. Nowadays, there are some part-time job opportunities for male students. For female students, there is no such opportunity and environment to work and to earn some money for her education. It is totally absent in rural areas. (SS3Q4J-2)

Inadequate Education Facilities

Jahan said that the poor education system and the lack of education facilities are other barriers to women's education in Bangladesh. In rural areas in Bangladesh, no available higher education institution exists for women in the closer community. Most of the universities are city-based. Hostels are expensive and life in them is unhealthy. No available library facilities exist; no inexpensive and safe transportation system is available for females to travel on. Jahan said that Bangladeshi women, especially those living in rural areas, face a challenging situation if they wish to pursue higher levels of education.

Most of the universities are far away from the rural areas. Hostels are expensive for them. Sometimes only for that reason many women cannot participate in post-secondary education. There are no safe and secure transportation systems for women. For that reason, parents do not feel comfortable and secure sending their daughters alone far away. (SS4Q5J-2)

Male Domination

Jahan identified male domination as another major barrier to women's education in Bangladesh. She said that Bangladesh is a patriarchal society that has always tried to hold women back from education and keep them in an inferior position.

When they [women] will be educated and self-dependent, they will not want to live in a subordinate position in the family or in the society. But the males in our male dominant society do not want to give those opportunities to women. They [males] want to keep us separate at home. If they are able to keep us separate at home, they will be able to use us as their subordinates. (SS5Q4J-1)

Jahan perceived that various forms of male domination exist in Bangladeshi society. She referred to male harassment as an example, “which exists everywhere in Bangladeshi society” (SS4Q8J-1). She said that male harassment is one of the major reasons girls stop going to school and get married at early ages. Jahan described how girls and women in Bangladesh experience these difficulties:

There are some perverted and corrupt males in every area of Bangladesh who always harass girls. They have nothing to do but hassle. If they don't get the chance to harass at school, they try to bother girls and women on the street. They also send bad letters or tease girls. For this reason, sometimes parents do not allow their daughters to go to school, especially parents who are gentle and conservative. They don't want to see or hear something bad about their daughters. In rural areas, it's a problem; not only is it a problem, it's a severe problem. Sometimes it turns into a dangerous situation. (SS4Q8J-1)

Jahan talked about a girl who studied in the same class with Jahan in grade nine. A group of delinquent boys harassed that girl because she had refused to date them. Jahan said that when her friend used to go to her school, she had to walk past some market stalls. One day a group of boys sprayed acid on her from a market stall. As punishment, the local people arranged a *shalish* (arbitration), but it did not work well since the punishment was not very strong. Jahan said, “This kind of situation [male harassment] is common in our society. . . .Girls and women face this problem everywhere in our country” (SS4Q6 (p) J-1).

Corrupt Government and Inconsistent Implementation of Law and Punishment

Jahan believed that the corrupt government system and the inconsistent implementation of law and punishment are together a central barrier to women's education in Bangladesh and mostly responsible for women's low participation in post-secondary education on a whole. She explained that large numbers of government officials of the respective ministries are “dishonest and inactive.” Reportedly, a large

portion of the government allocation is not used for educational improvement. As a result, the poor education system and the lack of education facilities discourage parents from sending their daughters to attend post-secondary education in Bangladesh.

A major problem is that the government's allocation is not enough for education purposes. Even some of the corrupt people who work for the government steal more than half of that money. A very small amount of government allocation is used to develop rural areas and their education systems. (GeQ2 J-2)

Jahan referred to the government police forces and said that the police are responsible for ensuring a secure environment for women by removing all of the existing barriers which inhibit women's participation in education. However, "The police who are responsible for removing corruption and violence from the society are mostly corrupt and dishonest" (SS4Q9J-1). To highlight the activities of the corrupt police forces of the government, Jahan said,

It is common in our society that some of the people who are rich and have illegal money, can convince the police by paying illegal gratification or black money. As a result, police do not take any initiative to punish those rich but corrupt (crooked) people who harass innocent girls. (SS5Q5J-2)

Jahan further referred to the legal system in Bangladesh, "The implementation of the law is poor and the implementers of the law are corrupt. . . . That is why the situation is so bad" (SS2Q5(p) J-1). She explained that the inconsistent implementation of law and punishment created and prolonged many problems in Bangladeshi society that play vital roles in keeping women from achieving their educational goals. These problems include but are not limited to: the inappropriate distribution of government allocations; the practice of early marriage; religious misinformation; and male harassment.

There is a law against early marriage but those who break the law and marry their daughters off at early ages do not get punishment or the authority does not take any legal action against them. As a result, people do not feel afraid to break the law. (GeQ2 J-2)

Jahan believed that if the government officials would be honest in their professions and take initiative against illegal activities by employing “exemplary punishments,” corruption and male harassment would reduce “tremendously” which would eventually improve the post-secondary education rate for women in Bangladesh.

It is necessary to introduce a legal punishment system and strict implementation of law so that others will be afraid to pass any bad comment or harass girls. I told you that we have a legal system but implementation is weak. The government must put those laws into practice—into action. (SS5 Q6 J-2)

The thorough review of Jahan’s interviews revealed that Jahan perceived the Bangladeshi socio-cultural practices and social pressure; financial constraints; inadequate education facilities; male domination; and the corrupt government and the inconsistent implementation of law and punishment to work as major barriers to women’s post-secondary education in Bangladesh. She identified various family and social related factors: the traditional negative attitudes towards women’s education; the pressure and practice of early marriage; household responsibilities; and false religious notions and religious propaganda as established socio-cultural barriers which hold Bangladeshi women back from their involvement in post-secondary education.

Barriers Jahan Personally Experienced

Jahan reported three major barriers that she personally faced in her pursuit of a post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I categorized these three barriers as: (a) socio-cultural practices and social pressures; (b) male harassment on public transportation; and (c) inadequate accommodation facilities in the hostel. In the following sections, I expand on each of these barriers.

Socio-cultural Practices and Social Pressures

Jahan said that she personally experienced socio-cultural barriers. These were reflected in the pressure of early marriage and household responsibilities she was given. Below I describe these two socio-cultural barriers that Jahan personally experienced in her pursuit of post-secondary education.

Pressure of Early Marriage

Jahan reported that the Bangladeshi socio-cultural practice and pressure of early marriage negatively affected her quest for post-secondary education. She said that during her higher secondary education and at the beginning of her honours first year, her family received several desirable marriage proposals for her. These encouraged her father to marry her off an early age. Jahan said that her father was willing to give her a good education. Nevertheless, due to the social practice and pressure of early marriage, he wondered whether Jahan should get married early or pursue her higher education. Jahan said that those unexpected marriage proposals put her in an uncomfortable situation and gave her stress that shifted her attention from her studies.

Household Responsibilities

Jahan said that, since she got married after finishing her university education, she only had these household responsibilities when she was working toward her Master's degree. After coming to Canada, she wanted to continue her education and have a good career here since she had a good educational background. However, Jahan was unable to, due to her responsibilities associated with child and household. Her own testimony is:

I could not pursue a degree here in Canada. I had to carry a baby. There is an optimal age for carrying a baby. When I had a baby, I gave my time to her and was busy with other household responsibilities. See! My husband and I came to Canada together. He

already established his career here, but me! I had a good education background...But until today [about nine years], I could not pursue my education here. (SS2Q2 J-1)

Jahan realized the difference between the opportunities for education before and after marriage. “Now I could realize what the difference between married life and an unmarried life is! When you enter into a married life, there is a big obligation for you. When I was with my parents, I had no worry except my studies” (SS2Q2 J-1).

Male Harassment on Public Transportation

Jahan said that at the higher secondary level, she encountered male harassment in relation to a poor education system and lack of safe transportation for females. She said that the local community college provided a poor education system. Accordingly, she left and went to a government college. Unfortunately, the government college was approximately four kilometres away from her home and she had to go there by local bus. Jahan said that the bus was not safe for her because many different types of people took that bus. Sometimes, she would not get a seat in the bus and had to stand with “bad” [rude] people. “It was not easy to stand with bad people in a crowded bus” (SS4Q6J-1). In addition, a group of delinquent boys would wait near the bus stop and make inappropriate comments to girls. Jahan mentioned that since two male and two female friends used to travel with her on the same bus, she was not overly afraid of those rude boys. However, a few days later the situation became worse.

After several days, the delinquent boys became very serious. They would even ride on the same bus with us and threaten us by saying that if we did not accompany them, they would capture us. They would offer us love letters. Since we did not agree with their proposals, the situation became even worse. My father complained to the principal of the college but it did not work. (SS4Q5(p) J-1)

Taking her father’s advice, Jahan then moved to the local college despite its lower quality. She said that she left the government college only because of the male

harassment. “I had always a mental pressure there (at the government college). I could not study attentively— I could not sleep properly—I was afraid all the time” (SS4Q6J-1).

Inadequate Accommodation Facilities in the Hostel

Jahan faced problems in the university hostel. The university was about 250 kilometres far away from her home and she had to live in a hostel. Jahan said that the environment of the hostel was not healthy and in first year, she even had to share a bed with a senior student. In second year, she got her own bed, but shared a room with 40 students. Also, the hostel had limited toilet facilities. As a first year student, she had to wait for the toilet until the senior students finished. Despite their complaints to the hostel management, nothing was done. “Nobody will understand how the situation was until he or she personally experiences the situation” (SS4Q10J-1).

Summary of Jahan’s Perceived and Experienced Barriers

I teased out five broad themes from my interviews with Jahan which she perceived as major barriers to women’s post-secondary education in Bangladesh. These five themes I labeled as: (a) socio-cultural practices and social pressures; (b) financial constraints; (c) inadequate educational facilities; (d) male domination; and (e) corrupt government and the inconsistent implementation of law and punishment. The leading barrier Jahan attributed to the Bangladeshi established socio-cultural practices and social attitudes. She identified various factors that were all part of this barrier: the traditional negative attitudes towards women’s education; the pressure and practice of early marriage; household responsibilities; and false religious notions and religious propaganda. Jahan believed that all these long-held beliefs and practices work as key social barriers to keep Bangladeshi women away from their educational goal.

After reviewing the findings of interviews with Jahan, I realized that Jahan herself experienced three major barriers in her pursuit of a post-secondary education: (a) socio-cultural practices and social pressures; (b) male harassment on public transportation; and (c) inadequate accommodation facilities in the hostel. I identified that the pressure of early marriage and household obligations negatively impacted Jahan's plans for pursuing high levels of education. Upon judging two sets of the findings, I realized that the barriers Jahan personally experienced are not unique or unusual. They are three of the five broad themes which Jahan perceived as major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Furthermore, I linked her personal barriers with another broad theme: corrupt government and the inconsistent implementation of law and punishment. Jahan perceived that the corrupt government and the inconsistent implementation of law and punishment created and prolonged many problems in Bangladeshi society such as: the inappropriate distribution of government allocations; the practice of early marriage; religious misinformation; and male harassment.

Jahan's Strategies to Overcome Personal Barriers

Jahan described some strategies that she took to increase her self-confidence and motivation and to overcome her hesitation to pursue a post-secondary education. In addition, Jahan shared some strategies that she took to reduce the barriers which she faced in her in her pursuit of a post-secondary education: her own hesitation, male harassment, inadequate educational facilities in the hostel, pressure of early marriage, household responsibilities, and social and religious barriers. Below I describe Jahan's strategies.

Increasing Self-confidence and Self-motivation

Jahan said that she enthusiastically pursued her post-secondary education. Jahan was determined to go to the university from a young age. She said that when she was a school student, her older brother and uncle, as well as several girls from her community, attended university. These individuals inspired her to pursue her own university education and become a highly educated woman. At school and college, Jahan received support and encouragement from her teachers. Both male and female teachers' attitudes were generally supportive and encouraging about women pursuing higher education. Her female teachers encouraged her more than the male teachers did. One of the female teachers said, "We were making your good career for doing something good for our nation. You should go to the university and earn a good result. We would be very proud as your teachers" (SS4Q4J-1). Jahan observed her female teachers closely—how they dressed and how they confidently taught their students. Jahan wished to become a teacher following in their footsteps.

Overcoming Her Hesitation

Due to the distance to the university from her home, Jahan had to live in a hostel but she was hesitant to do so. Since Jahan had a close relationship with her parents, she sometimes wondered how she would live alone in a hostel. However, Jahan said that she overcame these challenges with strong determination. She always told herself, "I must finish my university education" (SS1Q2J-1). From a young age, Jahan thought that no one in the family and society would value her unless she finished her higher education and secured a good career. That realization helped her to overcome her hesitation.

Reducing Male Harassment

At the post-secondary level, Jahan encountered male harassment. A group of delinquent boys would wait near the bus stop and would make inappropriate comments and tease her. Jahan's father complained to the college principal but it did little good. Her father then advised her not to continue there; Jahan moved to the local college despite its lower quality.

Reducing Barriers of Inadequate Education Facilities at the Hostel

Jahan and other students complained to the hostel management to improve hostel facilities, but no action was taken, Jahan tried to cope with the situation by focusing on obtaining her educational goals.

Overcoming Social Pressure of Early Marriage

Jahan received some unexpected marriage proposals during her post-secondary education. Jahan said that her strong willpower as well as her mother's steadfast position helped her to withstand that pressure. Her mother often referred to herself as a role model by saying things like,

See, I just completed my primary education—I cannot do anything except household responsibilities. I have no life. I completely depend on your father. If you get married now, your life will be very much similar to mine. I don't want that happen to you.
(SS2Q1J-1)

Her mother said, "After marriage, there's a large amount of responsibilities waiting for a woman in our culture. So, first you will finish your master degree, and then you will marry" (SS2Q3J-1). Accordingly, Jahan got married after obtaining a Master's degree.

Reducing Barriers of Household Responsibilities

Jahan said that, when she came to Canada, she wanted to continue her education but was unable to due to child and household responsibilities. Jahan said that she could not overcome the barriers of gender roles as a Bangladeshi mother and wife.

Overcoming Socio-cultural and Religious Barriers

Jahan said that her family's openness helped her to overcome the barriers of socio-cultural and religious beliefs and practices. "My father was a religious person but he had no false notions" (SS5Q5J-1). In addition, the people with whom Jahan interacted in her community (more affluent, better educated, and less superstitious) helped her not to be influenced by the traditional social practices and misinformation of religion.

Jahan shared some strategies that she used to increase her self-confidence and motivation and to reduce her barriers. Jahan had strong desire to go to the university from a young age. In addition, her older brother, uncle, and other girls in the community who attended university inspired her to become a highly educated woman. At school, Jahan's female teachers increased her self-confidence and motivation to pursue a higher education as well. Jahan overcame her hesitation to live alone in a hostel by her strong determination. Following her father's advice, Jahan moved to the local college in order to reduce male harassment. She tried to adjust to the hostel's environment in spite of its poor quality focusing on her educational ambitions. Jahan's strong willpower and her mother's firm position helped her to withstand the social pressure of early marriage. Her family's openness and others in her community who were better educated helped her not to be influenced by the traditional social practices and misinformation of religion. Jahan said that she could not overcome the barriers of gender roles as a mother and wife.

Jahan's Suggested Strategies and Initiatives to Address Barriers

Jahan provided some strategies for reducing barriers and improving women's post-secondary education rates in Bangladesh. These were increasing women's self-confidence and self-motivation for higher education; and changing family attitudes towards women's education. Moreover, Jahan suggested a number of strategies to reduce financial, educational, socio-cultural barriers, and the barriers of male harassment. She also recommended a need to improve a corrupt government system. Below I group her suggestions according to responsibility of various subsystems: women themselves, family, individuals in the society, government, and educational institutions.

Increasing Women's Self-confidence and Self-motivation

Jahan felt strongly that increasing women's self-confidence and self-motivation were essential for increasing women's participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Jahan suggested some strategies that might help women increase their self-confidence and self-motivation for pursuing a higher education. I describe her suggestions below.

Women Themselves

Jahan said that women have their own goals and strong motivation to pursue a higher education and to create a better career. "I know many girls in our community did not continue their post-secondary education in spite of their financial ability. They just stopped their education at high school or at college level because they gave priority to their marriage" (SS4Q4J-2). She advised, "A woman must have to think, 'Whatever situations come in my life, I will try my best to overcome them'" (SS4Q4J-2). Jahan believed that with strong willpower and motivation, a woman can overcome many

obstacles for her education. She believed that, “I am not only a girl. I am also a part of the society. So I have some responsibilities for my family—for my society and for my country” (SS1Q4(p) J-1).

Family

Jahan recommended that the family help their female children in promoting their self-confidence and motivation for pursuing a good education. She said that, if families convey the messages of possible negative consequences of less education to their female children, these young women could more easily motivate themselves to pursue a high level of education. “In my opinion, parents in the family can play the most important role for their both female and male children” (SS2Q7J-2).

Changing Family Attitudes Towards Women’s Education

Jahan said that it is necessary to change families’ attitudes towards women’s education to elevate the rate of women’s post-secondary education in Bangladesh. She suggested some strategies that parents might follow to change their mind about the education of female children. Jahan further suggested initiatives that the government take to change families’ negative attitudes towards women’s education. Below I expand on her suggestions.

Family

Jahan said that the family itself can play a vital role in changing attitudes towards women’s education. She suggested that parents value the benefits of women’s education to develop girls’ futures as well as the overall growth of the society and country. At the same time, according to Jahan, parents should consider the possible negative

consequences that might come in their daughters' lives without a solid educational background.

After marriage, she might not be happy, maybe her husband might not be understanding, and as a result, they could become separated or divorced. Even, suddenly her husband could be sick or die. Then what will be her situation? Where she would go and how could she and her children survive? How could she earn food for her children? (SS2Q6J-2)

Jahan believed that if parents reflect on how education directly and indirectly influences their daughters' lives, then it might be easier for them to change their minds about the education of their female children. She further suggested that parents should care more about their daughters' future career than about the traditional socio-cultural beliefs and social pressures.

Government

In Jahan's view, the government can play a vital role in changing family attitudes towards women's post-secondary education by providing more job opportunities for female students as well as for educated women who have already completed their post-secondary education. She said that available job opportunities might be an effective tool to motivate poor parents to send their daughters to university because in this way parents would see the monetary benefit of educating their daughters. "To motivate a poor family, it is necessary to provide jobs for female students and educated women" (SS5Q5J-2).

Reducing Financial Barriers

Jahan recommended that different social groups take the following initiatives to reduce the financial obstacles to earning a post-secondary education.

Government

Jahan recommended that the government must increase the budget for education, especially for the higher education of women. Moreover, she suggested that the government should take responsibility for the education of talented but needy females by providing financial incentives and by increasing the number of scholarships offered.

In my opinion, the government and educational institutions should provide them a good amount of stipend. As a result, all talented but needy students will be able to take a good higher education. At the same time, other female students will be encouraged to make a good result. (SS3Q2J-2)

Jahan further suggested that government could create some part-time jobs specifically for female students while they are in school, and introduce student loans, as are available in North America. For instance, Jahan proposed that establish some knitting and cottage industries (industries where the creation of products and services are home-based, rather than factory-based), where poor mothers could be employed to help finance their daughters' education.

Educational Institutions

Jahan recommended that schools waive tuition fees for talented but poor women. This could help reduce the financial burden of poor girls as well as increase lower-income parents' interest in sending their daughters for a higher education.

Individuals in the Society

Jahan suggested that certain individuals can help women reduce their financial hurdles. She referred to the affluent people in the society who might come forward to help needy females in their areas by donating money for stipends. Jahan perceived that this initiative might help poor women continue their education, as well as elevate the

motivation of parents who are reluctant to send their daughters to pursue a post-secondary education due to financial problems.

Reducing Educational Barriers

Jahan suggested that, to reduce educational barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh, it is first necessary to remove financial barriers. She proposed that the government and educational institutions could each take the following measures to improve women's participation in post-secondary education by reducing educational barriers.

Government and Educational Institutions

- Increase funds for improving educational facilities
- Establish some good quality higher education institutions in rural areas
- Build resource library facilities
- Provide hostel facilities and improve the quality of the hostels by such strategies as: increasing the number of seats; improving the food served; and eliminating poor sanitary conditions.
- Increase awareness to change negative attitudes towards dorms and hostels
- Introduce secure transportation systems for female students

Jahan believed, "If the government and educational institutions take these positive steps, the higher education rate for women will increase tremendously" (SS4Q5J-2).

Removing Socio-cultural Barriers

Jahan suggested that the family and government should take some positive initiatives to reduce socio-cultural and religious barriers to women's participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I describe her suggestions below.

Family

Jahan suggested that a family could play a vital role in removing socio-cultural barriers to women's education. She said, "Sometimes, due to the social norms and taboos of the society, parents feel that people will gossip about their daughter if they delay getting her married" (SS2Q6J-2). Jahan recommended that parents should not be overly concerned with social traditions and norms; rather parents should care more about their daughters' future lives. They should think more in what way their daughters will be able to stand on their own with recognition and respect. Jahan believed, "If parents have strong motivation, and if they play positive roles in their daughters' education, then the socio-cultural norms and practices cannot be a big barricade" (SS2Q6J-2).

Government

Jahan proposed that the government take some positive initiatives to reduce socio-cultural and religious barriers. Jahan believed that the lack of implementation of law and order created many long-standing negative socio-cultural and religious beliefs and practices in Bangladeshi society. Jahan recommended that the government first improve the implementation of law and order and take action against all illegal activities in the society to remove socio-cultural and religious barriers. "The government should give exemplary punishment to those who break laws. Rules should not be on paper alone; it is urgent to employ them into action" (GeQ2 J-2).

Jahan suggested that the government take the following initiatives to remove the barriers of false religious beliefs and misinterpretation of religion. For the first strategy, the government must uncover those people who advocate misinformation in the name of religion, and take legal action against their activities. As the second strategy, the

government should introduce some strict rules for such individuals. For example, Jahan said that those who advocate religious information must be highly educated. They must study religion properly and spread true religion, which means what the religion actually says.

Those who are priests of Islam and other religions in our country, they are not very educated. They only received an elementary or high school education. They are half-educated. So they cannot tolerate women's higher education. When there will be some mandatory conditions then they will be afraid to influence people in the name of religion. (SS5Q6 J-2)

As the third strategy, Jahan suggested that the government improve the enforcement of law and order. "In this way, illiterate or half-educated people who try to keep women from getting their education automatically will turn back" (SS5Q6 J-2).

Removing Barriers of Male Harassment

Government

Jahan recommended that the government improve the law and order situation in the society to protect women from male harassment and employ exemplary punishments against those dishonest people who are involved with crimes and harass innocent girls and women during their journey to school. "It is necessary to introduce legal punishment systems and the implementation of law strictly so that others would be afraid to pass any bad comment or harass girls" (SS5Q5J-2).

Removing Barriers of Corrupt Government System

Government

Jahan proposed that government should take legal action against illegal and dishonest activities of the government officials and police forces to reduce the barriers of corrupt government system.

A large number of police in our country are corrupted and dishonest. That's why the law and order situation is so poor. If the police would be honest, take the legal action quickly like in Canada or America, and employ exemplary punishments, then the corruption and harassment would reduce tremendously. (SS4Q8 J-1)

Summary of Jahan's Strategies and Suggestions

Jahan suggested strategies for increasing women's self-confidence and motivation for pursuing post-secondary education and for changing family's attitudes towards women's education. Furthermore, in response to financial, educational, socio-cultural and religious barriers, the barrier of male harassment, and corrupt government system, Jahan proposed a number of positive measures that might be taken at different levels of social organizations to remove barriers and improve women's post-secondary education rates in Bangladesh. Below I summarize the findings of Jahan's suggestions in Table 5. The first column of the table mentions various subsystems according to which subsystem is responsible for addressing these barriers. The second column describes possible strategies and initiatives to address barriers.

Table 5

Jahan's Suggested Strategies for Removing/Reducing Barriers to Women's Post-secondary Education in Bangladesh

Subsystems	Possible Strategies and Initiatives to Address Barriers
<i>Increasing Women's Self-confidence and Self-motivation</i>	
Women Themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop own goals and motivation to pursue a higher education and to make a better career - Grow self-confidence in overcoming challenges - Develop a sense of responsibility for the family and society
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convey messages of the possible negative consequences which related with less education as well as the positive impact on higher education
<i>Changing Family Attitudes towards Women's Education</i>	
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change negative and traditional attitudes towards female education - Consider how education directly and indirectly improves women's lives - Consider negative factors of sending a daughter to a husband's home with less education
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide available jobs for already educated women in the society for an example of the monetary benefit of the higher education of women to encourage parents
<i>Reducing Financial Barriers</i>	
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the budget for education, especially for the higher education - Provide financial support and scholarships for talented but needy females - Introduce student loans, create part-time jobs, establish cottage industries for female students and female members of their families
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Waive off tuition fees for talented but poor women
Individuals in the Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affluent people in the society help needy females in their areas by donating money for stipends
Non-government Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce micro-credit and cottage industries for female students to where they could work part time

Table 5 (Continued)

Subsystems	Possible Strategies and Initiatives to Address Barriers
<i>Reducing Educational Barriers</i>	
Government and Educational Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase funds for improving educational facilities - establish higher education institutions and resource libraries in rural areas; provide secure transportation; improve facilities in the hostel, and increase awareness to change negative attitudes towards hostels
<i>Reducing Socio-cultural Barriers</i>	
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve the enforcement of law and order - Enforce strict rules for those who advocate religious information - Uncover those individuals who advocate misinformation in the name of culture and religion; and take legal action against their activities
<i>Removing Barriers of Male Harassment</i>	
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve the law and order situation in order to reduce male harassment - Employ exemplary punishment against those who harass innocent girls and women during their journey at school
<i>Reducing Barriers of Corrupt Government</i>	
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve law and order situation first - Enforce laws into practices and take legal action against illegal activities of corrupt government officials and police forces

At the end of the interview, Jahan concluded by saying:

The government must keep in mind that half of the population in our country is women. Therefore, without the improvement of women's lives and without development of women's higher education, there is no alternative way to develop our country and our nation. (GeQ2 J-2)

In the following chapter, Chapter Seven, I compare the three participants' findings to identify their unique and common perspectives on barriers and strategies and the relationship to the literature which I reviewed earlier in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION

Overview

In this chapter, I discuss my findings. My research purpose was two fold: to report participants' perceived major barriers and their strategies for reducing those barriers. Thus I first discuss similarities and differences among participants' perceived major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Then I discuss strategies that participants suggested in light of the responsibilities of different levels of social subsystems for reducing barriers and improving women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Next, I compare the study findings with the literature reviewed earlier in this thesis as a way of validating my findings and determining any inconsistencies between my findings and those in the literature. Finally, I discuss my findings based on the conceptual framework of subsystems, which I developed to analyze the participants' data. In the following section, I present all themes and factors that participants identified as major barriers.

Themes and Factors Identified as Major Barriers by All Three Participants

Before comparing the emergent themes, I list all of the themes and factors that the three participants identified as major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I identified six themes as major barriers and various factors were associated with individual themes. Below I present a table (Table 6) listing all of the themes and factors that the participants mentioned as barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. The first column of the table identifies the major themes of the barriers. The second column mentions various factors within the themes.

Table 6

All themes and Factors Mentioned as Barriers to Women's Post-secondary Education in Bangladesh

Themes	Factors
Financial Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family's lack of finances (poverty) ▪ Lack of employment opportunities for female students ▪ Reluctance to invest in daughter's education
Socio-cultural Practices and Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family's gender-biased negative attitudes towards women's education ▪ Traditional practice and social pressure of girls' early marriage ▪ Gender-role related child-care and household responsibilities ▪ Negative social concepts about boys as superior over girls ▪ False religious beliefs and misinterpretation of religion
Male Domination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unsafe transportation issues due to fear of male harassment ▪ Male harassment ▪ The patriarchal social domination and their attitudes
Student Politics and Unstable Political Situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Political instability and violence ▪ Session-jams (due to student politics, delayed admission, and postponed exams)
Inadequate Education Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of higher-education institutions and library facilities ▪ Lack of inexpensive hostel facilities ▪ Lack of safe transportation system for females
Corrupt Government and Inconsistent Implementation of Law and Punishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dishonest and inactive government officials ▪ Poor legal system and corrupt police forces ▪ Lack of implementation of the law and punishment

Themes and Factors Perceived as Major Barriers by Individual Participants

I compared the three participants' perceived major barriers. Through cross-case analysis, I identified three distinguishing themes of major barriers which individual participants said hindered Bangladeshi women's involvement in post-secondary education. Below I present the three individual themes and related factors in a table (Table 7) and discuss these themes and factors.

Table 7

Themes and Factors Perceived as Major Barriers to Women's Post-secondary Education in Bangladesh by Individuals

Individual Themes	Factors
Student Politics and Unstable Political Situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Political instability and violence▪ Session-jams (due to student politics, delayed admission and postponed exams)
Inadequate Educational Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Lack of higher education institutions▪ Lack of library facilities▪ Lack of inexpensive hostel facilities▪ Lack of safe transportation system for females
Corrupt Government and Inconsistent Implementation of Law and Punishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Dishonest and inactive government officials▪ Poor legal system and corrupt police forces▪ Lack of implementation of the law and punishment

Student Politics and Unstable Political Situations

One of the participants, Moumita, mentioned that student politics and unstable political situations is one of the major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. She believed that the ongoing problems of student politics and unstable political situations create "session-jams" (due to political instability and violence-delayed admission and exams) in higher education institutions. For this reason, a four-year

program could take up to six years to complete. Moumita said that uncertainty and additional educational expenses may result in a family withdrawing a daughter from school and sending her to a husband's home. However, the other two participants, Shaila and Jahan, did not mention it as a major barrier. I did not find any studies which highlighted this theme as a barrier. Therefore, I consider this a unique finding.

Inadequate Educational Facilities

Among the three participants, only Jahan mentioned the inadequate educational facilities as one of the major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. In her perception, in rural Bangladesh, no available higher education institution exists for women in close proximity to their homes. She perceived that the poorer education system and lack of educational facilities (e.g., higher education institution, library, inexpensive hostels, and a safe transportation system for females) are fundamental barriers to women. Those women in rural areas face an especially challenging situation if they wish to pursue higher levels of education. This theme was not mentioned as a major barrier by Moumita and Shaila. Participants' background in which they grew-up might be a significant factor here. Although all three participants lived in Bangladesh for a similar amount of time, Moumita and Shaila lived in the city and pursued their education in developed urban educational settings. In contrast, Jahan lived for a substantial amount of time in rural Bangladesh where she also pursued her education. These different lived experiences might have influenced their perceptions on this matter. Nonetheless, both Moumita and Shaila suggested that improving educational facilities, especially in rural areas, is necessary to elevate the post-secondary education rates for women in Bangladesh.

Furthermore, the literature indirectly supports this finding. According to the literature, higher education institutions in most developing countries have been established in relatively well-developed urban areas (Dundar & Haworth, 1993). The geographical location of higher educational institutions and the lack of educational facilities in rural settings have been recognized as a major barrier to girls' attendance at school (Dundar & Haworth; UN Millennium Projects, 2005; World Bank, 1994). Although some higher education institutions do have hostel facilities, they are expensive and not culturally appropriate. One project in India identified that the lack of culturally appropriate boarding facilities limits female participation in higher levels of education. Moreover, three other World Bank research projects on developing countries identified the lack of inexpensive and appropriate boarding facilities as causing parents to be concerned about their daughters living alone at hostels (Dundar & Haworth).

Corrupt Government and Inconsistent Implementation of Law and Punishment

Among the three participants, Jahan recognized that the corrupt government system and the lack of implementation of law and punishment work together as a central barrier to women's education in Bangladesh as a whole. She believed that the dishonesty and corruption of government officials, as well as the inconsistent implementation of law and punishment create and prolong many problems in Bangladeshi society. These problems include the inappropriate allocation of government funds, the practice of early marriage, religious misinformation, and male harassment. All of these issues play vital roles in preventing Bangladeshi women from pursuing post-secondary education. The other two participants did not mention this theme as a major barrier. Nevertheless, when Shaila talked about the barrier of male harassment, she referred to the disruptive and dishonest

legal system and said, “Our legal system is in a disorder and there is not much help to combat such troubles for women.” However, no literature speaks to the government system as a fundamental barrier to women’s post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I consider this finding a unique and important finding of my research.

Common Themes and Factors Perceived as Major Barriers by All Participants

Upon comparing emergent themes, I identified three common themes which all three participants referred to as playing vital roles in inhibiting women’s participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. These three themes I labeled as: financial constraints; socio-cultural practices and attitudes; and male domination. Below I present the common themes and related factors in Table 8.

Table 8

All Three Participants’ Perceived Common Themes and Factors as Major Barriers to Women’s Post-secondary Education in Bangladesh

Common Themes	Factors
Financial Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family’s lack of finances (poverty) ▪ Lack of employment opportunities for female students ▪ Family’s reluctance to invest in daughters’ education
Socio-cultural Practices and Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family’s gender-biased negative attitudes towards women’s education ▪ Traditional practice and social pressure of early marriage ▪ Gender role related child-care and household responsibilities ▪ Negative social concepts about boys as superior over girls ▪ False religious beliefs and misinterpretation of religion
Male Domination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unsafe transportation issues due to fear of male harassment ▪ Male harassment ▪ The patriarchal social domination and their attitudes

Financial Constraints

All participants in this study identified financial constraints as one of the leading causes of women's low participation rates in post-secondary education. All participants spoke of a similar belief that families' lack of money, lack of employment opportunities, and parents' reluctance to invest in their daughters' education are major facets of women's financial constraints.

Family's lack of money. All of the study's participants expressed that a large portion of the people in Bangladesh live under the poverty line. It is difficult for poor families with financial constraints to invest in their daughter's education. Sometimes a girl cannot continue her education due to her family's lack of money even if she and her family are strongly motivated for her to continue in education. Girls from poor families face this disadvantage disproportionately. Similar observations were made in other studies found in the literature. A large number of studies underlined "poverty" as one of the leading causes of women's low participation in education in developing countries including Bangladesh (Dundar & Haworth; Haider, 1996; UN Millennium Projects; Nussbaum; World Bank). Haider mentioned that, due to financial constraints, poor families often consider girls' schooling a "luxury."

Limited employment opportunities for women. Participants articulated that the lack of student employment opportunities in Bangladesh makes it difficult for female students to pursue a post-secondary education. Since job opportunities, especially for female students, are limited and the climate for working is not suitable for women in Bangladesh, most female students depend on their parents to maintain their education costs. One participant said that while a male student might take odd jobs to support his

education, it is very difficult for female students in Bangladesh to be financially self-sufficient. Even employment opportunities for educated women are limited in Bangladesh which discourages poor parents from sending their daughters for higher education. This finding is validated by Raynor (2005) and Nussbaum (2003), who came to the conclusion that overall, employment opportunities for boys are greater than for girls in developing countries. When parents do not see the employment opportunities for educated women, they do not want to invest money for their daughter's education (Raynor).

Parents' reluctance to invest in daughters' education. Parents' reluctance to invest in daughters' education is identified by the three participants as one of the major factors for women's low participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. They said that parents' investing differently in their male and female children's education deters the female children from achieving their educational goals. Shaila commented, "Daughters of both poor and solvent families face this barrier directly and indirectly." Participants shared the same belief as a reason for parents' biased investments. They explained that when parents invest in the education of their children, they expect a good return. However, in the Bangladeshi culture, after getting married, women usually go to their husbands' home and are unable to help their parents financially. When parents do not foresee any returns from their investment in their daughters' educational careers, they are reluctant to spend an equal amount of money for their daughters' education. Raynor's (2005) and Shekh's (2001) research supports these findings. They both concluded that investment in daughters' education is unappealing to parents in Bangladesh since a daughter goes to another family through marriage at a young age. Moreover, parents do

not see any monetary value for educating girls because girls' paid job opportunities are limited (Nussbaum, 2003; Raynor).

Socio-cultural Practices and Social Attitudes

All interviewees repeatedly referred to the Bangladeshi long-held socio-cultural practices and pressures as another leading barrier strongly associated with women's low involvement in post-secondary education. They identified various social and family related factors within the theme of socio-cultural practices and social attitudes that negatively influence women's post-secondary education in many ways. The findings point to the conclusion that all participants were impacted negatively by the Bangladeshi socio-cultural practices and attitudes. For instance, Moumita faced barriers from the traditional socio-cultural practice of early marriage including gender roles as the wife, household responsibilities, and from her family's conservative negative attitudes. Shaila's education was impacted negatively by her family's gender-biased investments and negative attitudes, the social pressure of early marriage, gender roles as a mother and wife, and by household responsibilities. The other participant, Jahan, faced barriers from social pressure of early marriage and traditional gender roles as a Bangladeshi mother and wife, including household obligations. Since all three participants had similar socio-cultural barriers, their perceptions did not vary widely. Each of the three participants identified the following factors as considerable constraints to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh.

Negative social concept and gender-biased attitudes. I found that gender-biased and negative social and family attitudes towards women's education is a major factor which works as a deep-seated barrier impeding women from obtaining a higher level of

education. In Bangladesh, parents have different attitudes towards male and female children. Generally, women are born to look after the family, raise children, and cook for the family members. Men, however, are considered the “breadwinners” of the family. From this attitude, most parents in Bangladesh usually invest more in their sons’ education than in their daughters’ education. As reasons for the gender-biased negative attitudes, very similar explanations came from all three participants. According to the culture, most parents have a tendency to get their daughters married at early ages and justify that higher education is not necessary for females since their husband is responsible for providing them food and shelter. On the other hand, since there is no government old age benefit plan or any financial support for elderly parents, in most cases parents’ survival depends on their sons’ earnings. From this attitude, parents pay more attention to their sons and neglect their daughters and prefer to invest more in their sons’ education than in their daughters’ education. One participant commented, “The tendency of dependency on a male child for old age support is a natural outcome of our social system.”

These findings are consistent with the literature. Several studies identified that established socio-cultural attitudes in Bangladesh play a major role in obstructing individual girls’ access to education in Bangladesh (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Chen, Huq, & D’Souza, 1981; Raynor, 2005; Shekh, 2001). Khan (1981) identified that in Bangladesh the discriminating treatment for males and females begins at birth and continues through the different phases of life. Arends-Kuenning and Amin; and Shekh concluded that in Bangladesh, women’s education is considered a threat to their traditional culture. Raynor found many fathers in rural Bangladesh who strongly opposed

girls' formal education. These fathers believed that as breadwinners of the family, boys should be more educated than girls. Chen, Huq, and D'Souza (1981) concluded that parents' gender-biased outlook is one of the reasons for women's low participation rates in education in Bangladesh.

Early marriage and gender roles of household responsibilities. Participants identified the traditional practice of early marriage as another "very large factor" in lowering the rate of women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. The participants believed that, due to the social norms and practices, parents are pressured to marry off their daughters at an early age. Participants observed that most girls in Bangladesh get married at the age of 18 or 20 when they are at higher secondary school, just completing higher secondary education, or at the beginning of a post-secondary education. Supporting this observation, the UNESCO (2003) findings revealed that about 47 % of the girls in Bangladesh get married before they reach the age of 18.

Participants acknowledged that marriage at an early age resulted in fewer opportunities for women to pursue higher levels of education. In most cases, women do not get support from their husbands or the husbands' families for continuing their education. Moreover, early marriage and household responsibilities are interrelated for girls in Bangladeshi culture; men are reluctant to perform household tasks. Due to traditional gender roles, women bear the burden of the majority of household responsibilities. It is undoubtedly difficult for a woman to manage heavy family and household responsibilities and study successfully with little or no support from the family. This finding has also been noted in the literature. Early marriages and traditional gender roles including household responsibilities have conflicted with girls' schooling on

the larger scale in Bangladesh as well as in other developing countries (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Daniel, 2006; UNESCO Bangkok, 2003). In Bangladeshi culture, girls' early marriages and gender role obligations apparently take priority over their education (Arends-Kuenning & Amin). Similarly, examining the causes of Kenyan women's low participation in higher education, Daniel found that marriages before completion of undergraduate programs, accompanied by subsequent pregnancies, child rearing responsibilities, and household tasks pushed female students' into a difficult situation and reduced their study time.

False religious beliefs and misinterpretation of religion. The study found that false religious beliefs and religious misinterpretation is another key factor slowing down women's post-secondary education rates in Bangladesh. In participants' point of view, no religion prohibits or restricts women's freedom and their education, and true religious practices are not a threat to women's education and empowerment. However, participants shared similar perceptions that some less-educated people and religious bigots (e.g., priests) take advantage of religion and deliberately misinterpret religious doctrines in their own words to keep women in an inferior position in the family and society. It is especially difficult for girls from less-educated families to address these challenges in order to pursue a higher education. All three participants articulated that due to the family's conservative negative outlooks and false religious beliefs their friends could not attend post-secondary education. Jahan, said, "It is very challenging for Bangladeshi girls to overcome these barriers." This finding is also confirmed in the literature. Several studies in the literature found that many Muslim countries including Bangladesh restrict women's formal education in the name of religion (Haider, 1996; King & Hill, 1993).

Haider found that conservative families viewed women's education as a dangerous step.

Haider quotes Adams (1986) who wrote of one young Egyptian male bureaucrat,

Many fellahin (Peasants) here don't let their daughters leave the house to go to school and the like because they fear that their girls will gain a sense of freedom, which is always dangerous. By venturing out, the girls will also gain knowledge of the world of men, and if they learn to read, they will read the wrong kinds of books, not the Koran. (p.119)

Overall, the literature shows that religion itself (such as the Koran) plays a vital role in inhibiting women's participation in post-secondary education (Adams, 1986; Haider, 1996). However, there is a difference between these participants' perceptions and the literature about religious issues. All three participants emphasized that religion itself does not act as barrier to women's higher education and empowerment. Rather, some people deliberately misinterpret religion doctrines in their own way to keep women in a subordinate position in the family as well as in the society. They believed that religious misinformation is one of the large barriers which slow-down women's involvement in higher levels of education in Bangladesh. Additional research might resolve this argument concerning whether or not religion itself is a barrier to women's post-secondary education.

Male Domination

All three participants reported that, in their patriarchal society, male domination is one of the major barriers to women's participation in higher education. The participants said that the male population has always tried to hold women back from their involvement in education, especially in higher levels of education in Bangladesh. The women believed that men thought that a woman with limited education would remain subordinate to men in both the family and society but would perform their [wifely and

household] traditional roles better. This finding supports that of Raynor (2005) who stated that most of the male respondents in her study reported that girls need some education in order to become “better wives and mothers” (p. 93), but they did not need as high a level of education as boys. Daniel (2006) identified that, in Kenya, colonial economic structures, policy framework, and patriarchal society’s attitudes were responsible for women’s lower participation in higher education and in maintaining their subordinate position in Kenyan society. To give an example of male dominating attitudes, Daniel provided evidence from Kanake’s findings (1998), who found that many men in Kenya tended to avoid marrying highly educated women, saying that they viewed highly educated women as rude, uncooperative, and unwilling to manage housework. These attitudes are said to discourage women to pursue a higher level of education. I quote from Nussbaum (2003) who expressed the sentiments of my participants quite eloquently.

Women’s education is revolutionary; it is a key to many other sources of power and opportunity. It is therefore not at all surprising that people who resist extending these other sources of power and opportunity to women typically oppose women’s education, or at least its extension. (p. 340)

Male harassment. Male harassment is identified as another form of male domination and it is said that this male harassment is one of the main reasons for which girls stop going to school and get married at early ages. Participants in my study recognized that girls and women are frequent victims of male harassment which exists in various forms everywhere in Bangladeshi society. Such harassment includes making vulgar comments, making indecent proposals, and attempting to make physical contact. It is found that the geographical location or distance to the higher education institutions and the unsafe transportation are issues related to male harassment. Personal stories of barriers also unveiled that two participants, Shaila and Jahan, were victims of male harassment on

crowded public transportation during their journey to school. Moumita reported that due to fear of male harassment on transportation, her parents did not allow her to get an admission at a quality university. The literature supports that, in some countries, parents are unwilling to send their daughters to school due to male harassment (Daniel, 2006; Haider, 1996; UN Millennium Project, 2005). Haider noted, “Male harassment were aspects frequently mentioned by women as reasons for not attending school” (p. 119). Daniel found that due to sexual harassment and unexpected pregnancy by male peers and teachers, a significant number of girls did not continue their secondary and post-secondary education in Kenya. However, no participant in this study reported that Bangladeshi girls and women are victims of male harassment by male peers and teachers in school; rather, they observed that women are victims of male harassment everywhere in Bangladeshi society including on public transportation, at bus stops, and on the street, especially during their journey to school.

Overall, participants concluded that the financial constraints, the Bangladeshi socio-cultural practices and social attitudes, and patriarchal societies’ outlooks and activities are fundamental barriers to women’s post secondary education in Bangladesh. Further, participants recognized many comparable issues associated within these three broad themes. Their similar lived experiences might contribute to their similar perceptions of the reasons for women’s low participation in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. With only a few exceptions, most of the common themes of barriers are consistent with the literature. For example, among the three participants, one participant, Jahan, mentioned that the lack of educational facilities is a large barrier for rural women to participate in higher levels of education, which is strongly consistent with the literature.

However, the results found two distinguishing themes as major barriers: (a) Bangladeshi student politics and the disruptive political situation; and (b) a corrupt government system and the inconsistent implementation of law and punishment. The literature did not find these as major barriers to women's education in Bangladesh. I consider these results as unique and significant findings of my research and recommend further research on these issues. In the following sections, I discuss the other aspect of my research: participants' suggested strategies and initiatives to address barriers.

Participants' Suggested Strategies and Initiatives to Address Barriers

Participants provided strategies for increasing women's self-confidence, self-motivation, and awareness for higher education; and changing family attitudes towards women's education. In addition, participants suggested a number of strategies for reducing financial, educational, socio-cultural barriers, the barrier of male harassment, and a corrupt government system. Here I discuss participants' suggested strategies and compare them with the literature, highlighting any inconsistencies with the literature.

Increasing Women's Self-confidence and Self-motivation

In regards to increasing women's self-confidence and self-motivation, participants recommended some strategies that might be taken by different social groups. They suggested that women should have their own goals and desire to pursue a higher education and to make a better career. Moreover, women should find the inner strength and confidence in their abilities when facing difficulties. As a strategy, participants suggested women observe their surroundings to realize how people treat educated and uneducated people and what the position of educated and uneducated women is.

All participants contended that the family could play a significant role in promoting their daughters' self-confidence and self-motivation. As a strategy, participants suggested that families convey the messages of negative consequences of less education as well as the positive impacts of women's higher education to their young female children so that they can motivate themselves to pursue a higher level of education. As another strategy, one participant, Shaila, suggested that a mother could become a motivating role model for her daughter by citing her own examples and experiences. Moreover, participants felt that friends who got married at young ages could motivate other friends by telling the truth of the negative impact of early marriage. In this way their unmarried friends would not be inclined to get married before completing their post-secondary education.

Furthermore, participants suggested that the already-educated women who are established in the society could serve as motivating role models to other women in the society who are struggling for education by sharing their strategies so that others can find ways to overcome their own hurdles. Participants suggested that the government can play a vital role in this regard. As a strategy, all of the participants recommended that the government use the media to increase women's self-confidence and awareness by promoting the positive impact of female education to the masses and by publicizing success stories of educated women, as well as stories about the pains of illiteracy. Through the media women might be able to see how education changes women's lives. However, the literature did not mention all of these strategies as effective means to elevate women's self-confidence and self-motivation to pursue a higher level of education.

Participants shared their views that educational institutions should provide more female teachers acting as role models to female students to motivate them to attain higher levels of education. This finding is consistent with the literature. Nussbaum (2003) provided evidence from Kerala in India, where literacy and enrollment rates for both male and female children are highest at about 99 % compared to those in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (other provinces in India) where female enrollment rates are less than 20%. In Kerala, more than 60% of teachers are women, which may account for the increased literacy rates.

Changing Family Attitudes Towards Women's Education

Participants felt strongly that changing families' attitudes towards women's higher learning is necessary to increase women's involvement in post-secondary education. They all suggested different social subsystems take initiatives toward this goal. As a possible strategy, one participant, Shaila, said that girls must put efforts into their education and prove to be good students to get financial support and encouragement from parents as a female child. Moreover, participants emphasized that the family itself needs to think deeply about the negative consequences of sending a daughter to a husband's home with less education. At the same time, the family should count the positive impact of higher levels of education on their daughter's future life. Participants also believed that the government can play an important role to change family's attitudes by publicizing educated and uneducated, successful and unsuccessful women's stories in the media. However, the literature did not mention all of these strategies and initiatives as helpful ways for changing families' attitudes towards women's education.

Furthermore, participants suggested that the government might take some more responsibility by providing student loans and part-time jobs for female students and well-paying jobs to women upon graduation. They believed that paid jobs for already educated women in the society might be an effective tool for changing parental attitudes and encouraging them to invest in daughters' education. This finding is consistent with the literature; the lack of employment opportunities discourages parents from spending on daughters' higher education (Nussbaum, 2003, Raynor, 2005; World Bank, 1994). Both Nussbaum and Raynor support that increasing available paid job opportunities for female students and for educated women is an effective mechanism for elevating families' awareness and changing their minds about females' education.

Reducing Financial Barriers

The study participants recommended that various social groups take initiatives to reduce the financial hurdles that women face in Bangladesh. One of the participants, Shaila, suggested that women must take some responsibility to overcome their financial difficulties by obtaining strong academic results in order to receive financial support from the family, the government, and other sources. She strongly felt that good academic results work in many ways to help students financially. This strategy helped Shaila to overcome her own financial difficulties.

All participants suggested that since employment opportunities are limited for women in Bangladesh, families need to change their discriminating attitudes and provide equal financial support for the education of their male and female children. Jahan proposed that the affluent people in the society come forward to help needy females in their areas by donating money for stipends. She contended that this initiative might help poor women

continue their education, as well as encourage parents who are reluctant to send their daughters for education due to financial problems.

All of the study participants recommended that the government and education institutions take responsibility to minimize financial burdens for female students. As strategies, participants recommended that the government and higher education institutions make school more affordable by increasing the budget for the higher education of women, introducing student loans at low interest, initiating bursary programs, waiving tuition fees for talented but poor females, increasing the amount of scholarships, and creating part-time jobs for female students, as are available in North America. Participants also proposed that the government could introduce some micro-credit, knitting industries, and cottage industries where impoverished female students and other female members in the family could work to eliminate the financial burden. Moreover, the higher education institutions could introduce on-campus jobs and work-study programs to relieve female students financially.

Similarly, the literature noted the need for improving the living standard of poor families (Nussbaum, 2003; Raynor, 2005; UNESCO, 2005b; World Bank, 1994). The stipend programs for female students are effective ways of increasing girls' enrollment and retention rates (Nussbaum; Raynor; World Bank). Evidence in Bangladesh showed that a nationwide stipend program (Secondary Female Programme) for girls in secondary school has had a substantial impact on girls' enrollment, particularly in rural areas. During the 1970s, girls' secondary enrollment rate in Bangladesh was 18%, which had increased to 50% in 2003 (Raynor). The program's goal was to increase rural girls'

enrollment and retention in secondary schools (grades 6 to 10). The same stipend program was modeled in Guatemala after the one in Bangladesh (World Bank).

Reducing Educational Barriers

All three participants shared the view that the government and education institutions should take initiatives for reducing educational barriers. They recommended that the government should step forward to make schooling more accessible to women, especially in rural areas. As strategies, participants proposed that the government establish good-quality post-secondary education institutions and evenly distribute them around the country so that more female students can have access to a higher education without the ensuing distance and communication problems (Dundar & Haworth, 1993). Locating higher education institutions in closer proximity to homes and adequate, culturally appropriate hostel/dorm facilities for women might encourage women and their parents where parental attitudes and societal restrictions are considerable constraints to women's participation in higher education (Dundar & Haworth). As evidence from the UN Millennium Projects (2005), providing schools within local communities has substantially increased female enrollments in Egypt, Indonesia, and several sub-Saharan African countries.

In addition, all three participants proposed that the government maintain the basic standard of the educational institutions by providing qualified teachers and staff, providing low-rental housing facilities near colleges and universities, enforcing the rules and regulations of the hostels, improving hostels' environments and living quality, building resource library facilities, introducing affordable daycares as well as subsidies for needy school-going mothers, and introducing secure transportation for female

students. Similar suggestions were made by several studies in the literature which have proven effective ways to increase women's participation in education in a variety of countries (e.g., Dundar & Haworth, 1993; Haider, 1996; Nussbaum, 2003; World Bank, 1994). Such studies reveal that the provision of safe and inexpensive transportations for females might be a helpful solution in increasing women's participation in high levels of education (e.g., Dundar & Haworth; Nussbaum). Furthermore, A World Bank-supported project in Yemen (1991) found that culturally appropriate hostel facilities on the campuses of the faculties of Education increased female enrollment by about 50%. Finally, the UN Millennium Project (2005) suggested that daycare centers and preschools for younger siblings at or near schools can relieve women from caring for siblings during the day while attending school.

In this study, participants mentioned available resource library facilities as a fundamental priority for decreasing the educational cost, which did not get much attention in previous studies. Participants contended that resource library facilities within higher education institutions would go a long way towards helping less privileged students, both male and female, gain access to expensive learning materials.

Reducing Socio-cultural Barriers

In order to reduce socio-cultural barriers, participants insisted that the family should overcome traditional ideologies and adopt more practical and progressive attitudes to build better careers for their daughters. They said that parents should not be overly concerned with traditional norms and practices; rather, they should care more about their daughters' educational and vocational future.

Moreover, all three participants believed that many social practices emerged from false religious notions and misinterpretations. Therefore, they recommended that the government take initiatives to abolish the long-held false religious beliefs and propaganda. As strategies, they suggested that the government uncover those individuals who advocate misinformation in the name of culture and religion, enforce strict rules on this matter, and punish those who misguide people in the name of religion. Aside from these measures, participants proposed that the government publicize true religious lessons through the media, use various female organizations to improve women's awareness of misinformation and the objectives behind that propaganda, and demonstrate women's potential as breadwinners and community leaders.

Nussbaum (2003) similarly felt the need for social movement for changing religious beliefs and deep-rooted social norms and practices. One participant, Moumita, suggested improving the education rate of both men and women. She believes that when people will be educated, "automatically their eyes will open and they will be able to come out from traditional and socio-cultural false beliefs and wrong thinking." Similarly, Nussbaum suggested that education must serve as the vehicle for changing attitudes and inherent beliefs that perpetuate discrimination.

Reducing Male Harassment

For reducing the barriers of male harassment, participants suggested that the government establish more quality higher education institutions and distribute them evenly around the country so that women can avoid male harassment during their journey. The government also need to provide separate, secure transportation for women to travel alone to participate in their education. In addition, participants emphasized the

need to improve the law and order system and employ exemplary punishment to those who involved with harassment. However, no literature has yet provided all of these measures as effective solutions to the problem of male harassment.

Eliminating Barriers of Political Chaos and Session-jams

One participant, Moumita, suggested that to eliminate the barriers of student politics and session-jams from education institutions, a positive dialog was required among students, political leaders, university authorities, and the government.

Removing Barriers of Corrupt Government System

For reducing the barriers from corrupt government system, Jahan suggested improving the legal system first. She suggested enforcing laws into practices and taking legal action against government officials and police forces for their illegal activities.

A systematic discussion of participants' suggested strategies for reducing barriers helped me to understand that since Bangladeshi women's education is negatively impacted by different levels of social subsystems, the preventive solutions need to come from different levels of social organizations. Although the participants had different approaches to devise better strategies for reducing barriers, their observations and modes of thinking were consistent with one another. Compared with the literature, I found that participants suggested some strategies for removing barriers that have not been documented in previous studies in the literature.

Rethinking the Conceptual Framework

In the final stages of my discussion, before discussing the results based on my conceptual model of subsystems, I provide a brief overview of the characteristics of open systems theory. In open systems theory, an individual "system" is seen as a set of

interrelating elements (Bertalanffy, 1968; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Schermerhorn, 2001; Scott & Davis, 2007). Open systems theory contends that a system is a collection of interrelated parts that function together to achieve a common purpose (Schermerhorn). Following the basic characteristic of an open systems theory, an open system model is the dynamic interaction of its interrelated parts and components. Therefore, at the first level of analysis, a system can be conceptualized as being made up of many subsystems, all of which are interconnected within the whole system. The results of this study support the subsystems model of open systems theory. Upon analyzing the findings of all three participants, I found seven subsystems (not five) all of which are interconnected parts of the broader system of Bangladeshi women. Based on my findings, I present a diagram (Figure 3) below, which illustrates participants' perceived seven subsystems, that impact upon Bangladeshi women's education.

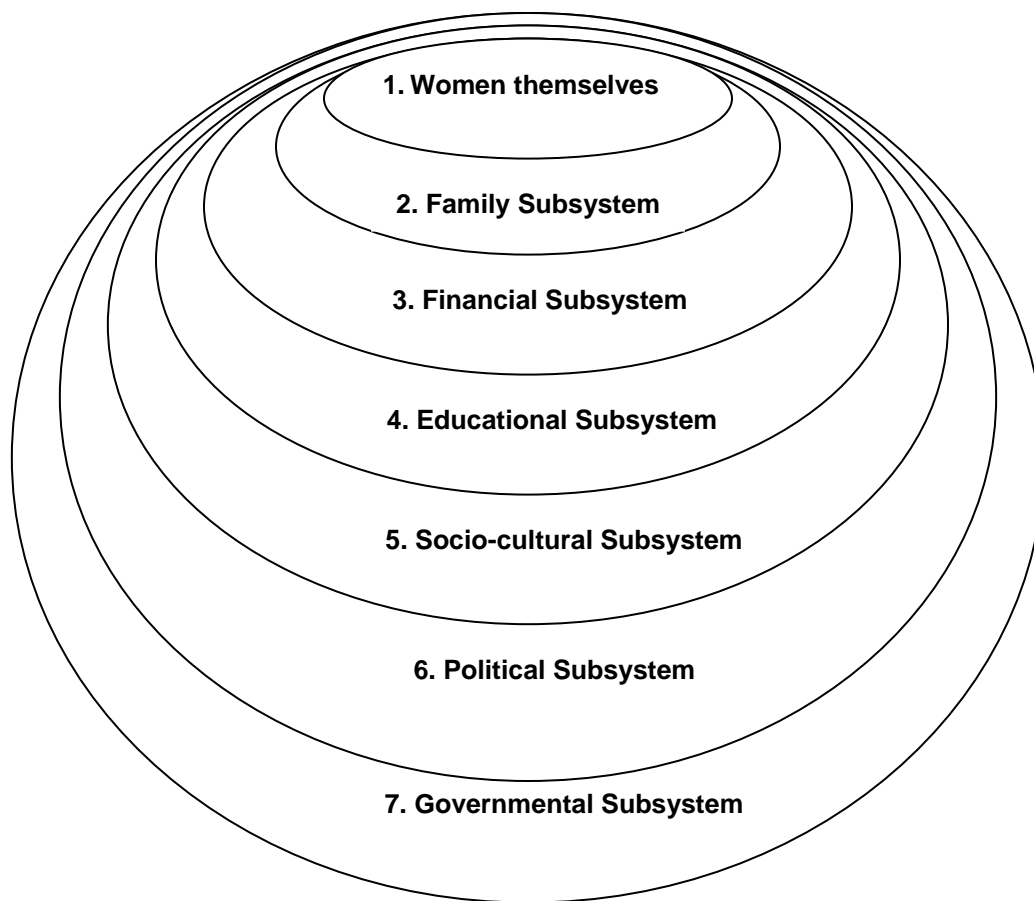


Figure 3. Seven subsystems derived from three participants' reported data that potentially impact on women and their pursuit of higher education in Bangladesh.

Figure 3 shows seven subsystems: women themselves, their families, financial, educational, socio-cultural, political, and governmental subsystems. I considered the women themselves as an internal system, as their own reluctance, willingness and hesitations might influence their education. I considered the other six subsystems within which the women in Bangladesh are nested are below the system of women, as external subsystems in which the Bangladeshi women live. I present another diagram (Figure 4) below based on major factors that participants reported as barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh.

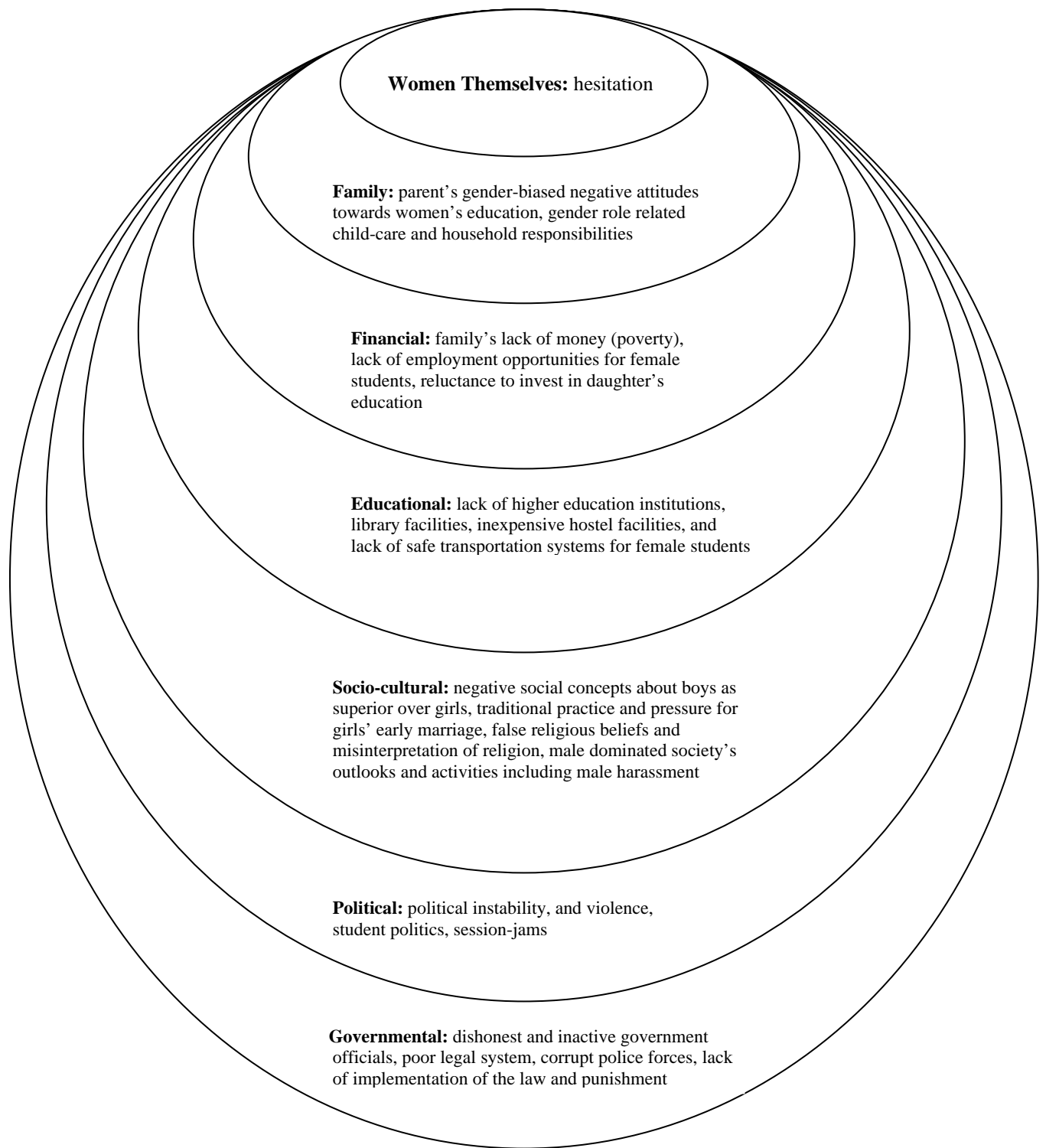


Figure 4. Barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh within seven subsystems from Bangladeshi educated women's perspectives.

Figure 4 shows seven subsystems and related factors within each subsystem, which play certain roles to deter women's higher education. Here I considered women themselves as a broader social system in Bangladeshi society, as their own reluctance, willingness and hesitations might influence their education. Participants acknowledged that due to socio-economic conditions, they had some hesitations within themselves which negatively impacted their motivation for a post-secondary education. The figure shows that all of the subsystems which exist around women in Bangladesh are interrelated with the system of women and the various factors within these subsystems influence women's education in many ways. For example, in terms of socio-cultural subsystems, a number of factors exist such as negative social concepts about boys as superior over girls, traditional practice and pressure of early marriage, false religious beliefs and misinterpretation of religion, male dominated society's outlooks and activities, including male harassment, all of which play a certain role in inhibiting Bangladeshi women's involvement in higher learning.

In a similar way, the other subsystems and their related factors also hold Bangladeshi women back from their involvement in post-secondary education. Some more new barriers emerged from participants' data that do not fall within any of the five subsystems that I identified reviewing the literature. Therefore, to accommodate this new information and to specify my findings, I enlarged the conceptual model of subsystems by additional two subsystems: political subsystem and governmental subsystem. Figures 3 and Figure 4 show that the results of this study support the conceptual model of open systems theory which I adopted to help me understand how various social subsystems in Bangladesh function as barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh.

Contributions to the Literature

This study has made several contributions to the literature. I describe them below. First, this study contributes two additional subsystems to the literature which were not identified as major barriers to women's education in Bangladesh and other developing countries in prior research. These two subsystems are: (a) political; and (b) governmental subsystems. After reviewing the literature, I found five subsystems: the women themselves, their families, financial, educational, and socio-cultural subsystems. The literature had indicated that all these five subsystems are roadblocks women's education in Bangladesh, as well as in other developing countries. However, no literature speaks to the disorderly political system and the government system as barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I consider these as two important findings of my research and unique additions to the literature.

Second, examining the barriers from the perspectives of educated women was important because these women represent a group who prevailed despite many roadblocks. Based on the findings that these educated Bangladeshi women reported, additional researchers might be encouraged to investigate the barriers to women's post-secondary education from the perspective of women themselves, not only in Bangladesh but also in other developing countries.

Third, it was also essential to ascertain educated women's perceptions of possible ways to overcome barriers. In this study, participants suggested taking a number of comparable strategies according to the responsibilities of various levels of social organizations, none of which are specified in the literature. I hope that through these strategies, policy makers and implementers might get some insights and possible ways in

order to minimize barriers to women education, specifically post-secondary education in Bangladesh and beyond.

In next and final chapter, Chapter Eight, I address the implications of this study and make some recommendations for further research. I then draw conclusions based on the findings.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter contains several recommendations for future research and for practical implications. Limitations of this research are also specified here. I end this chapter along with my own conclusions and some reflections.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study supports further research in several areas dealing with the barriers to women's education in Bangladesh.

This qualitative study has revealed a need for further research with a large sample to explore the perceptions of Bangladeshi women who could not pursue a post-secondary education. In my research, I studied barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh from the perspectives of expatriate educated Bangladeshi women who prevailed over their barriers. Examining the barriers from the perspectives of the women is important to ensure which challenges actually deter women from their higher learning.

Research found that in any patriarchal society, males play a critical role in women's education (Nussbaum, 2003; Raynor; 2005). The literature shows that, in some patriarchal societies including Bangladesh, males considered women's higher levels of education as a threat to their socio-cultural status quo (Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Daniel, 2006). However, research examining men's perspectives on women's higher levels of education in developing countries is limited. Therefore, I suggest that research should be undertaken to examine men's attitudes towards women's higher levels of education.

This qualitative study revealed two issues as major barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. I classified them as: (a) student politics and unstable political situations; and (b) corrupt government and inconsistent implementation of law and punishment. However, to date, no literature has identified these two aspects as major barriers to women's education. These two areas thus need to be further investigated not only in Bangladesh but also in other developing countries.

The findings also revealed that a family's lack of money is one of the financial factors that women face when pursuing a post-secondary education in Bangladesh. However, one participant, Shaila, reported that although her both parents were university educated and the family was economically solvent, both her parents were reluctant to invest an equal amount of money in her education, as they did in her brothers' education. The findings led me to suggest further qualitative research on Bangladeshi parents to explore whether the actual barrier is purely the family's lack of money or more parents' gender-biased reluctance to investment in their daughter's education.

Results of this study indicated that no religion restricted women's education and empowerment in any society; but the misinterpretation of religion is a considerable constraint to women's education. However, several studies in the literature highlighted that religion practices are very large factors for women's low participation in higher education in many Muslim countries, including Bangladesh (Haider, 1996; King & Hill, 1993). Additional research should be conducted on this issue with more participants to determine whether the actual barrier to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh is religion itself or the (patriarchal) society's interpretation (i.e., misinterpretation) of religion not only in Bangladesh but also in other developing countries.

Recommendations for Practical Implications

The participants of this study provided a number of strategies and initiatives that would facilitate creating practical implications to reduce barriers and to improve women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh.

Increasing women's and their families' awareness is necessary in order to help to raise the rates of women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh. Specifically, changing families' attitudes towards women's education is an urgent priority in order to increase the education rates for women in Bangladesh. Since the media is an effective means of reaching a mass of people, the government may use the media, such as radio, television, and newspapers, to publicize the negative consequences of receiving less education as well as the positive impacts of women's higher education to the mass people by depicting the real-life stories of educated and uneducated women. These stories may motivate other women in the society. Besides advertising in the media, the privileged women who are established in society could become active in encouraging those who are still struggling for education by sharing their strategies for success.

Beyond promoting higher education in the media, the government may provide available paid job opportunities for female students and for already educated women which might be a positive step for changing parents' attitudes towards women's education (Nussbaum, 2003, Raynor, 2005; Shekh, 2001). The literature showed that a possible reluctance comes from women and their families when they do not see that education changes women's lives, especially as many educated women are still living at home (Nussbaum). Such realities eliminate the difference between being educated and uneducated in their eyes. Current programs such as the Bangladesh Grameen Bank-run

women's micro-credit programs and the NGO-run women's education and microfinance programs have had a positive impact on the lives of Bangladeshi rural women (Pitt et al. 2006; Shekh). Following those models, the government, non-government organizations, and higher education institutions might take collaborative initiatives focusing on the improvement of Bangladeshi women's post-secondary education and empowerment by providing available jobs for female students and well paid jobs for educated women upon completion their post-secondary education. In this way, they may encourage parents to send their daughters for a better educational career. Once the family's attitude changes, all other barriers to women's post-secondary education might be less significant.

The geographical location of higher education institutions and male harassment on crowded public transportation during journey to school are further large factors in women's low participation in post-secondary education. However, establishing available higher education institutions in close proximity to women in rural areas might be costly and time consuming, and thus better proposed as a long-term rather than immediate solution. Therefore, in order to protect women from male harassment in the short term, the government may provide available separate transportation with safeguards for female students to travel alone for higher education. This arrangement might encourage rural parents to send their daughters for higher learning.

Improving the law and order situation in Bangladesh as well as enforcing laws into practices was a main concern of all three participants. The findings showed that the lack of implementation of laws and punishment created and extended many problems in Bangladeshi society such as early marriage, male harassment, and misinterpretation of religion, which play key roles in holding women back from pursuing a post-secondary

education. Therefore, the legal system of the government and the implementation of laws must be improved.

Limitations of the Study

I see three limitations of my research. One is the fact that I collected data only from women who are educated in Bangladesh and now reside in Canada. Thus the data reflect the perceptions of expatriate Bangladeshi educated women only. This study does not reflect the perceptions of the educated and uneducated women who are living in Bangladesh now. A second limitation is that I conducted interviews with participants in ‘*Bengali*’ (participants’ and my first language) and subsequently translated them into English. Although there was a positive advantage in that, by using their first language participants were able to share their perceptions and lived experiences fluently without difficulties, when I translated the interviews back into English I might have lost some of the nuances of the language, since English is my second language. Finally, the third limitation that I perceive is that I have only interviewed three women. Research to further explore this topic should include incorporating a larger sample size; also participants who are now residing within a broader geographic area; and participants who are currently still residing in Bangladesh. All participants should be higher-educated women from Bangladesh.

Conclusions

This study was conducted to explore barriers to women’s post-secondary education in Bangladesh and to investigate some possible strategies for removing those barriers from the perspectives of post-secondary educated Bangladeshi women. The participants were three expatriate Bangladeshi educated women currently living in Ontario, Canada. I have

used a qualitative research method and conducted the interviews using open-ended but structured questions in order to explore the in-depth perceptions of the participants.

Based on the nature of the study, I used the conceptual framework of subsystems within a larger system, as in open systems theory, to analyze the data.

The study revealed that the Bangladeshi women face a number of barriers from multi-level social subsystems in their pursuit of a post-secondary education such as: family, financial, economical, socio-cultural, political, and governmental subsystems. Within these subsystems, the study identified various factors that play certain roles to deter Bangladeshi women's involvement in post-secondary education. As some large factors, this study found: financial constraints; inadequate educational facilities; long-held socio-cultural beliefs and practices including family's gender-biased attitudes towards women; early marriage; household responsibilities; religious misinterpretations; patriarchal attitudes and activities including male harassment; political instability; student politics; and inconsistent implementation of law and punishment. The results also uncovered that all these multifaceted factors are deeply interrelated with the broader social system of the Bangladeshi government which is corrupt. Participants contended that the dishonest and dormant government system generated and prolonged all these multifaceted factors that function as roadblocks to women's higher education in Bangladesh.

Some Reflections

After several rereads of my previous chapters and revisiting my past experiences in Bangladesh, I realized that many of my female acquaintances (my friends, my relatives, girls from my community) did not continue onto university to pursue a higher education. Before undertaking this research, I sometimes wondered why these women from my past

did not accompany me to university. When I came to Canada, many asked me, “Do you know the reasons for Bangladeshi women’s low participation in post-secondary education?” I did not have a solid answer. This lack of knowledge urged me to conduct this study. As I finally began to collect my data, Shaila, one of my participants, said, “Everything is related to one another. So, there are many systems and many factors interrelated that work as barriers to women’s education. You can’t say there’s one solid cause that impacts women’s education in Bangladesh.” At the time, I did not realize what Shaila meant by this. However, after a long journey with Moumita, Shaila, and Jahan through my research, my findings helped me to understand why many of the females with whom I grew up in Bangladesh could not come with me to university. Now I could realize what Shaila meant. My results gave me the answer that the barriers which Bangladeshi women encounter when pursuing a post-secondary education are vast and complex.

Since the barriers are many-sided, the solutions need to come from various levels of the larger systems. Accordingly, the family or the government system alone is not enough to remove all the deeply-rooted barriers to Bangladeshi women’s higher learning. Only through “combined and coordinated efforts” will they resolve the issue of low higher education rates for Bangladeshi women.

Finally, I hope that further research in this direction might conclude that Moumita, Shaila, and Jahan were not isolated and individual expatriate Bangladeshi educated women; rather, they were representative of hundreds of Bangladeshi women who are struggling with multilevel barriers to obtaining a solid educational career and better future. Only positive collaboration of the various sectors of the Bangladeshi systems can

wipe out all these difficulties and profoundly change the overall Bangladeshi attitude towards women and their education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Script

The primary method of participant recruitment will be email. The following script will be followed when contacting expatriate educated Bangladeshi women of the Bangladeshi community in Ontario for potential participants of my study:

Dear [Name],

My name is Yamun Nahar and I am a student in the Master of Education program at Queen's University. I have received your email address from the email lists of Bangladeshi community. I decided to email you because I am looking educated Bangladesh women for possible participants for my thesis study, which will begin in October 2007. I am wondering if you [or if you can recommend someone who] might be interested.

The purpose of the research is to identify some reasons as to why Bangladeshi women have low participation in education, and particularly in post-secondary education, from the perspective of the expatriate educated Bangladeshi women. Also, the study will investigate, from the perspective of these educated Bangladeshi women, some strategies for overcoming those barriers. The ultimate goals of this study is to report perceptions of the fundamental causes of women's ongoing low participation in education in Bangladesh and possible opportunities and strategies for overcoming those difficulties from the perspective of the educated Bangladeshi women themselves.

To do this, I am looking for a small sample of educated Bangladesh women who are currently living in Ontario, Canada. For this research, I would like to conduct individual, face-to-face interviews with four educated and knowledgeable Bangladeshi women. As there are two objectives of this study, the proposed method of study requires that I conduct interviews in at least two sittings with each individual participant.

If you are [or someone you know might be] interested in participating, please let me know. If you have any further questions about this research, I am happy to answer them, please contact me, at 613-531-3934 or by email at (yamun.nahar@gmail.com). Additional information about this study will be provided in a Letter of Information, which we can discuss if you are interested in participating.

Thank you,

Yamun Nahar

APPENDIX B

Letter of Information

This is an invitation to participate in a research study conducted by myself, Yamun Nahar, Masters of Education graduate student in the Faculty of Education, Queen's University, under the supervision of Dr. Ruth Rees. The purpose of the study is to identify, from the perspectives of expatriate educated Bangladeshi women, reasons for Bangladeshi women's low participation rates in post-secondary education and some strategies for overcoming those barriers.

To fulfill the objectives of this study, I intend to conduct individual interviews with four post-secondary educated and knowledgeable Bangladeshi women currently living in Ontario, Canada. The interviews will take place in a mutually convenient spot that is quiet but open.

I intend to conduct interviews with you in two sessions. In first session, I plan to ask questions based on your personal experiences about supports and barriers you experienced and faced to obtain your post-secondary education in Bangladesh. In second session, if anything, held you back from pursuing your post-secondary education, then I intend to ask questions how you overcame those barriers to obtain your post-secondary education. I may ask questions about other Bangladeshi women you know in your family or community who pursued a post-secondary education. For devising better solution and for removing or reducing barriers to women's post-secondary education in Bangladesh, I intend to ask general questions to get your suggestions as Bangladeshi post-secondary educated woman.

Each interview with you will be 75-90 minutes in length. With your approval, I will record the interviews on audiotape. I will ask participants in which language they would prefer to be interviewed with, participants' native language Bengali or English. I will conduct the interviews in the language that they will prefer. The taped interviews will be transcribed and translated into English at a later point for analysis. I will destroy the recorded audiotape after the thesis has been defended.

I will protect participants' name and personal identification to the extent possible. Moreover, I will take necessary measures to maintain confidentiality throughout the study. This includes publication of the results. None of the data for this study will contain your name, or the identity of your place of work. The place of work will be identified using general terms only and your name will be replaced by a pseudonym. I will keep all collected information and responses confidential at a secure location. Only my supervisor, a bilingual colleague (for checking the accuracy for translation), and myself will have access to the transcript data.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and choosing not to participate will not result in any adverse consequences. I do not foresee risks or discomforts in your participation in this study. Furthermore, you are free to refuse to

answer any question you find objectionable and to withdraw from the study without reasons at any point. At any time, you may request removal of all or some of the data. This research may result in publications of various types, including journal articles, professional publications, and conference presentations. I will not attach your name to any form of the data that you provide, nor any identifying information. If the data are made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, I will not reveal your identify.

The Queen's University General Research Ethics Board has approved this research. If you would like to participate in this research study, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me at a suitable time. If you have any questions or concern about this research, please contact me, Yamun Nahar, 613-531-3934 (yamun.nahar@gmail.com) or my supervisor, Dr. Ruth Rees, at 613-533-3022 (Ruth.Rees@queensu.ca, reesr@educ.queensu.ca). For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact EREB committee at ereb@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Stephen Leighton, 613-533-6081 (Chair.GREB@queensu.ca).

Sincerely,

Yamun Nahar

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

For Yamun Nahar of the Faculty of Education

Title: Perspectives of Educated Expatriate Bangladeshi Women about Post-Secondary Education: The Barriers Encountered and the Strategies They Have Employed

I have read and retained a copy of the letter of information concerning the study "*Perspectives of Educated Expatriate Bangladeshi Women about Post-Secondary Education: The Barriers Encountered and the Strategies They Have Employed*" and agree to participate in the study. All questions have been sufficiently answered to my satisfaction. I am aware of the purpose and procedures of this study, and I have been informed that interviews will be in two sessions. Each session will be approximately 75 to 90 minutes in length and the interviews will be recorded by audiotape.

I understand that there are no known risks or discomforts associated with participation in the research study. I understand that my name and personal identification will be protected to the extent possible. Confidentiality will be protected by appropriate storage of and access to data and by the use of pseudonyms.

I have been notified that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point during the study and I may request the removal of all or part of my data without any consequences to myself. I have also been told the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality of all information.

I am aware that if I have any questions or concerns about this research, I can contact Yamun Nahar, 613-531-3934 (yamun.nahar@gmail.com) or her supervisor, Dr. Ruth Rees, at 613-533-3022 (Ruth.Rees@queensu.ca, reesr@educ.queensu.ca). I am also aware that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, I can contact EREB committee at ereb@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Stephen Leighton, 613-533-6081 (Chair.GREB@queensu.ca).

Please sign one copy of this *Consent Form* and return to Yamun Nahar. Retain the second copy for your records.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Participant's name (Please print): _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Please write your e-mail or postal address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive a copy of the results of this study.

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions (I)

Questions Based on Personal Experiences of Barriers

Women Themselves

1. What situation motivated you most to pursue your post-secondary education and become a highly educated woman? Please give details.
2. Did you have any hesitation about pursuing a post-secondary education? Please elaborate on your experience.

Family Subsystem

1. Who in your family members supported your plan for post-secondary education and how? Please explain.
2. Did you face any barriers from your own and your husband's families to continuing your post-secondary education? If yes, please describe how that/those barrier(s) affected your education or your plans for higher education.
3. How did you get support from your friends in pursuing your post-secondary education? Please elaborate.

Financial Subsystem

1. Who has helped to finance your post-secondary education?
2. What financial barriers have you encountered in continuing your education?
3. How did you overcome your financial constraints to pursue post-secondary education?
4. If you did receive money from other sources, what were the conditions or constraints placed on this money?

Educational Subsystem

1. When did you decide that you wanted to pursue a post-secondary education?
2. What program (courses) did you take in secondary school? Was this program (courses) open to both women and men?
3. What kinds of support did you receive in secondary school and from whom?
4. What kind of educational barriers did you experience and from whom to obtain your post-secondary education?

5. What were the attitudes of your teachers about women in general pursuing a post-secondary education?

Social Subsystem

1. How social norms in Bangladesh supported your plan for post secondary education? Please explain.
2. What social norms in Bangladesh have inhibited your pursuit of post-secondary education and how?
3. How have religious norms and practices in Bangladesh supported your post-secondary education? Please elaborate on your opinion.
4. What religious norms and practices in Bangladesh acted as roadblocks to your post-secondary education? Please give details.

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions (II)

Questions Based on Observations and Strategies to Overcome Barriers

Women Themselves

1. How did you overcome your own hesitation for pursuing a post-secondary education?
2. How do you think that women could become more self-confident and self-motivated to pursue a post-secondary education?

Family Subsystem

1. You mentioned that at family level, factor 'B' worked as barrier to continuing your post-secondary education. In spite of these difficulties, you were able to obtain higher education in Bangladesh. Can you explain how you overcame that problem?
2. You told me that at family level, factor 'D' inhibited your plan for post-secondary education. Can you explain how you handled and prevail over that barrier?
3. How would you suggest changing a woman's family's attitude towards encouraging women to pursue post-secondary education in Bangladesh?
4. From your experience, at the family level, who could play a vital role for improving post-secondary education of their female members? Please explain.
5. What role do friends play in all this?

Financial Subsystem

1. How could the financial barriers be reduced for women in Bangladesh who want to pursue a post-secondary education?
2. Who should be involved here?

Educational Subsystem

1. You mentioned that you faced 'X' educational barrier. What strategies did you use to overcome this educational barrier?
2. You mentioned that you encountered 'Y' educational barrier. What strategies did you employ to overcome that barrier?
3. How could these strategies be helpful for other women pursuing a post-secondary education? Please elaborate.

4. Please suggest ways in that the educational system could help to reduce barriers and encourage women to pursue a post-secondary education in Bangladesh.

Social Subsystem

1. You mentioned that in Bangladesh, the social norm 'B' has affected your pursuit of post-secondary education. In spite of this serious difficulty, you received your higher education in Bangladesh. Can you explain how you handled and overcame this social barrier as a Bangladeshi woman to pursue your post-secondary education in Bangladesh?
2. How did you as a Bangladeshi woman overcome the religious barriers in order to pursue a post-secondary education in Bangladesh? Please explain.
3. In your opinion, what positive steps and initiatives might be helpful in reducing or removing social barriers to women's higher levels of education in Bangladesh?
4. What would be your suggestion to eliminate religious barriers to women's education in Bangladesh?
5. Do you know a contemporary who could not participate or continue her higher education, in spite of her willingness? If so, please tell me her story as to why could not she participate or continue her higher education.

Now I would like to ask you two more questions to get your in-depth knowledge and perception. My first question is:

1. From your perspective, what are the major barriers that in general Bangladeshi women face to participate in post-secondary education?
2. As a Bangladeshi educated woman, what would be your suggestions that can be taken to remove those barriers?