UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Community-Radio, Choice and Consciousness-raising:

An examination of young women's interactions with SRHR messaging and re-imaginations of womanhood broadcast through Radio Padma, Bangladesh.

Masters Thesis**: Rosemary Vreugdenhil**

International Development Studies

Graduate School of Social Sciences

University of Amsterdam

Graduate School of Social Sciences

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An examination of young women's interactions with SRHR messaging and re-imaginations of womanhood broadcast through Radio Padma, Bangladesh.

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Rosemary Vreugdenhil

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Rose.vreugdenhil@student.uva.nl

Supervisor: Dr Esther Miedema

Second Reader: Dr Anika Altaf

1. The picture presented on the cover is of a respondent leading me around her home of Shaipara Village, Rajshahi Bangladesh. Picture is author's own.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work first and foremost to the young women who participated within this study; their openness to engaged with sensitive topics, bravery displayed in some of their narrations and strength and resilience regarding the difficulties they spoke of made my time learning from them incredibly insightful and inspiring. It is their willingness to provide in-depth engagements and desire to see women's' rights realised in their lifetimes that drives my hope that this research can positively inform further women's empowerment initiatives to build gender equal communities.

This work is also dedicated to the BTS programme host, Kotha. Her passion to empower women through offering them counter-narratives and in-depth SRHR information was deeply inspiring. The emotional and violent resistance she personally faces to provide this support for rural young women reflects both the need for women's empowerment, but also the difficulty facing those attempting to facilitate it. This respect for Kotha's work has driven the desire for this research to contribute to the understandings of media's role in facilitating empowerment and gender equality,

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Abstract

Despite the increase in early marriage reduction programmes and pro women's rights policy, the practice of early marriage and abuse of women's rights within rural areas remains persistent. This persistence is partially driven by restrictive patriarchal constructs of womanhood and inadequate sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) education. The motivators for early marriage are comprehensively understood within academic theory. However, the understanding of how to increase women's choices and how normative shifts in societal expectations of women's roles actually occur is lesser known. Media offers a tool of mass education which can be used for empowerment through SRHR messaging which can provide a counter-narrative for dominant constructs of womanhood as submissive and subordinate. However, SRHR education forms, such as television, are expensive and ineffective as they cannot overcome obstecles to rural women's information access. This study seeks to address these limitations by investigating community-radio SRHR broadcasting potential within rural women's empowerment processes in Bangladesh.

Data was gathered in rural Rajshahi, a North-Western district in Bangladesh, through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with young women and community-radio broadcasters at Radio Padma. This study examined how Bangladeshi young women perceive their interactions with the SRHR messaging broadcast by Radio Padma's programme 'Break The Silence' and if it positively affects their choice capacity. Results show that community-radio's design offers a safe and accessible virtual-space for young women to learn and understand their rights, receive emotional support and go through processes of consciousness-raising. This community-radio dialogue supported several participants in re-imagining more positive constructs of womanhood; gaining the self-worth and knowledge to practice second and first-order choices such as early marriages resistance. Data revealed that community-radio alone is not an adequate solution to a systemic patriarchal problem. Respondents narrated frustration at increased self-worth and ambition in disenabling community environments which the radio is limited in addressing. This study presented the risk faced by women when interacting with empowerment initiatives, whose facilitation of empowerment can result in violent consequences. Thus, this study presents community-radio as a tool which can aid women along *hidden* pathways to empowerment, yet also acknowledges that *motorways* of empowerment such as adequate policy enforcement must also occur; these pathways combined can facilitate women's rights realisation.

Keywords: womanhood; SRHR, choice; community-radio, early marriage, consciousness-raising, empowerment

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List of Acronyms

UN – United Nations

SGD – Sustainable Development Goals

SRHR – Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights

THP-B – The Hunger Project Bangladesh

BTS – Break The Silence

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

BNNRC - Bangladesh NGO Network for Radio and Communication

1 Introduction

The continued abuses of women's rights around the world through the prevalence of practices such as sexual assault and forced early marriage is an alarming reminder that women, globally, continue to face lives of oppression and restricted choice within patriarchal societies (Fraser 2019). The centralisation of empowerment within the United Nation's (UN) 2015 Sustainable Development Goal 5, facilitating gender equality and women's rights, was celebrated by feminists who argue that women's equality is fundamental to creating sustainable development (Ponte and Enriquez 2016). However, the slow progress regarding women's rights realisation demonstrates a developmental discourse disconnect between progressive policy and actualised progress for women's rights implementation (Cornwall 2016).

Shaw (2009) contends that disparities between policy and progress are driven by an indicator-based approach to women's empowerment which inadequately attempts social transformation of gender relations through forcing laws, without genuinely transforming community-held narratives of women's roles and cultural constructs of womanhood. Hodgkinson et al (2016) parallel this concern as they indicate a gap in understanding how genuine social transformation of gender norms can be facilitated regarding the building of early marriage free communities even within the presence of supporting laws and policy. Underpinning these gaps in rights realisation is the fact that dominant narratives of womanhood remain unchallenged at grass-roots community levels (Batliwala 2013). The restrictions on women's choices which narratives of womanhood as modest, docile and submissive present is what Kabeer (1999) defines as the disempowerment of women. Practices such as early marriage encapsulate these restrictive expectations of woman as subordinate and unable to make choices they desire (Bessa 2019). Furthermore, the transferring of daughters from father to husband through marriage reflects both women's objectification and limited ability to resist unwanted decisions (Ibid).

Batliwala (2015) states that for women's empowerment to be facilitated, re-imaginings of what womanhood is and what women are capable of is fundamental. Central to the re-imagining of womanhood a less restrictive of self-worth and capabilities is the need to un-learn internalisations of shame (Camilla 2016). Women living within these restricted narratives of

womanhood often internalise feelings of shame about their bodies and actions, which are constructed by male cultural codes, creating counter-narratives to this shame is vital in increasing women's self-worth and facilitating the aspirations needed to begin practicing choices (Ibid).

Shaw (2009) argues that dominant narratives of women as subordinate are entrenched by a disconnect between the policy promotion of women's sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and women's ability to access or practice that SRHR education. Subsequently, White (2010) asserts that providing young women with in-depth SRHR education can help them to increase their understanding that women deserve the choice over their bodies, such as giving consent to sex or choosing when/if to become wives. This increased awareness of bodily rights facilitates a rights-based approach to increasing women's perceptions of what constitutes a woman in ways which counter-act oppressive and limiting cultural constructions of the female gender (Ibid).

The behaviours and norms taught to and expected of women are referred to as womanhood throughout this study. The term womanhood is used by feminist scholars such as White (2010) to refer to the distinguishing characteristics which define, and the behaviours expected of, women, which are created through local practices and expectations. Hancock (2019) furthers this definition, stating that womanhood refers to the expected ideals of a 'good woman'. Hancock (2019) argues that feminism's aims are intrinsically linked to the disruption of male control over what defines a 'good woman' through creating counter-narratives of womanhood which champion women as equal to men.

1.1 Importance of SRHR within Re-imaginings of Womanhood

Schuler (2006) argues that teaching young women that they are not objects of male pleasure but have rights and capabilities as individuals is an important step in this positive re-imagination of womanhood. These lessons are facilitated by in-depth and adequate sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) which is composed of four independent but interrelated components; sexual health, sexual rights, reproductive health and reproductive rights (Ibid). The parameters these components include sexual consent and access to birth control. However, according to the World Association for Sexual Health (2014), they go beyond this to broader women's equality such as the right to information, the right to choose or resist marriage and

the right to freedom from coercion or violence. These rights explicitly counter-act narratives of women as objects of sexual pleasure and domestic servitude which are promoted within dominant narratives of womanhood (Camellia 2016).

The importance of providing SRHR education was demonstrated by its centralisation within the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the UN in 1979 and continues to shape global SRHR initiatives (Zuccala and Horton 2018). The inclusion of SRHR within SDG Goal 3 for ensuring healthy lives for all, and within Goal 5, reflects that developmental actors, such as the UN, recognise the capability enhancing potential that learning SRHR can have for women (Ibid). As a result of policies such as the CEDAW, SRHR education has overtime been made compulsory in the majority of school curricula around the world (Khan et al 2020). However, the current implementation of SRHR education is '*alarmingly deficient'* regarding the number of adolescents reached and the adequacy of the content provided (Sciortino 2020,4).

Importantly, this limited access to SRHR education is driven by the very gender restrictions which SRHR education seeks to overcome restricts women from accessing that education, as conversations over sex, consent and rights are contradictory to the notion that women's purity of mind should be protected (Camellia 2016). Furthermore, the counter-narratives SRHR education seeks to facilitate threatens women's promoted role as objects of male service (Ibid).

The restriction of women from receiving adequate SRHR education is exacerbated by the often deeply conservative nature of rural areas in developing countries (Shaw 2009). Furthermore, high poverty rates and low women's literacy rates prevalent in rural areas contribute to women's restricted SRHR information access; school attendance is not economically viable for poorer, rural women, nor are the finances needed to travel to less-remote locations where Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) provided SRHR seminars are usually based (Sciortino 2020). Previous attempts to overcome these gaps include television and leaflet SRHR broadcasting, yet Madamombe (2005) states that villages' frequent economic and electrical inefficiencies limited their success, thus calls for SRHR education facilitators to find alternative means.

1.2 Community-Radio and SRHR distribution potential:

The medium of community-radio has been theorised by Akademie (2015) as able to transcend these obstacles of illiteracy and women's constricted access to information, as radios are cheap and provide information verbally and directly into listeners homes. Community-radio is defined by Jallov (2012) as a radio-station established by a local community with the aim of broadcasting locally and culturally relevant information to specific groups within that community which usually consist of marginalised groups. Importantly, Jallov (2012,18) states that community-radio can equally be named 'empowerment-radio' due to the way in which it broadcasts marginalised voices stating useful information for marginalised people, which governmental media often neglect. This study will examine community-radios influence upon rural women, whom Nirmala (2015) states constitute a marginalised community as their access to information, choices and agency are often constricted. The capacity for community-radio to be a source of education and awareness is highlighted through Nirmala's (2015) examination of Indian women's empowerment, which revealed that for many rural women, radio broadcasts were their main source of information. The accessibility to radio broadcasting with or without male permission made it a '*vital tool for women's improved lives'* (Ibid, 46). This safe-accessibility of community-radio establishes it as a potential tool of SRHR broadcasting, as many women, especially in rural areas, are unable to attend SRHR seminars ran by NGO's or unable to reach school-based SRHR classes (Myers 2011).

In their paper on 'Understanding and addressing child marriage', Hodgkinson et al (2016) present a gap in understanding regarding how young women's interactions with forms of media potentially shape and influence their experiences of being a woman and their perceptions of early marriage. This gap was especially noted for rural women. This research gap is combined with one highlighted by Amin (2008), a Bangladeshi scholar seeking to aid communities in resisting early marriage practices, who hypothesises that radio could be an important tool in administering SRHR education which helps facilitate women's empowerment. However, studies into how young women perceive their interactions with community-radio and the impact on expectations of womanhood and choice capacity have not been conducted. Thus, this study seeks to contribute knowledge towards this research gap by examining the potential and perceived influence of community-radio SRHR information broadcasting, contextualised in Bangladesh's rural communities and cultural codes of womanhood.

This study's framing of community-radio's role in women's choice-capacity regarding early marriage resistance was motivated by the aim to contribute to HER CHOICE's gap in understanding of media's roles in facilitating women's early marriage resistance (Hodgkinson et al 2016). Regarding this, this study was conducted in partnership with HER CHOICE, an alliance of organisations based in the Netherlands, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, which seeks to build early marriage free communities. During the field-work period, this study was facilitated through working with HER CHOICE's local organisation partner; In Bangladesh this partner is The Hunger Project Bangladesh (THP-B), an international charity which seeks to facilitate grass-roots based social and economic empowerment, with a central focus on women's rights establishment (THP 2018). Whilst during fieldwork, the focus of this study shifted from first-order choices of early marriage to second-order choices of self-worth and rejecting shame, the data collected still contribute to the understanding of social norm transformation and consciousness-raising arguably needed for sustainable early marriage resistance to occur. Thus, the partnership with these organisations allows for this study to contribute to their knowledge on establishing women's rights through early marriage resistance and increasing women's capacity to practice their rights.

1.3 Thesis Outline:

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter has introduced young women's perceptions of womanhood and experiences of choice and community-radio SRHR broadcasting as the subject of this study. It also presented the social and academic relevance and motivations behind this research. Secondly, this study's theoretical foundation will be examined in-depth, building upon concepts introduced within the first chapter: The concepts of restrictive womanhood, empowerment as choice and the need to un-learn the internalisation of shame will be discussed. The research methodology chapter which follows will present how this study operationalises these theoretical concepts through a coherent set of research questions and present the data collection and fieldwork practices through which these questions will be examined and answered.

The findings from the fieldwork are presented within two empirical chapters. The first chapter presents young women's perceptions of womanhood and shame and the subsequent restrictions on their capacity for choice, and also demonstrates the need for SRHR information forms which

can transcend these restrictions. The second empirical chapter discusses findings related to the perceived influence of community-radio SRHR broadcasting upon young women's perceptions of womanhood and capacity for choice. The final chapter presents an answer to the main research question through embedding empirical findings into theoretical discussions. Finally, based upon these discussed findings, tentative policy and practice recommendations for helping facilitate genuine social norm transformation and pathways to women's empowerment and rights realisation through alternative forms of SRHR messaging will be presented.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introductory Remarks

The following chapter presents the theoretical framing of this study as the foundation through which the research questions were initially created. Porter (2013) implores researchers to explicitly define both the meaning and mechanisms of empowerment. Thus, the first section outlines the theoretical arguments for empowerment as a process of choice expansion through Bangladeshi scholar Nalia Kabeer's (1999) seminal work. The dimensions of choice, *resource, agency* and *achievements,* are outlined and presented as vital components in facilitating a women's capacity to practice choice, and thus experience the process of empowerment.

The second section of this chapter presents how dominant narrative of womanhood and the subsequent expectations of women's behaviour are restrictive of women's choice capacity. Regarding this, the centralisation of shame and control over women and their lived experiences is highlighted as key within the limitations on their aspirations and self-worth, which is theorised as vital to facilitating empowerment. The arguments for the re-imagining of womanhood are then presented through the theory of consciousness-raising, which is asserted here as the mechanism through which women can realise and reject their constructed positions as subordinate.

The final section presents the theorisation of community-radio broadcasting as a potential tool for facilitating the process of empowerment as choice using Cornwall's (2016) different pathways to empowerment approach. The impact of the media form of community-radio's broadcasting upon women's self-worth and critical consciousness-raising will be presented, alongside some gaps in understanding which this study seeks to contribute to.

2.2 Empowerment as a Process

The term empowerment is one of the most contested and theorised concepts within the development agenda (Porter 2013). The concept of empowerment is affected by different cultural understandings which contribute to difficulties in designing women's empowerment

initiatives (Ibid). Regarding these difficulties, zero-sum and instrumentalist applications of empowerment have frequently been deployed in which tangible indicators such as female employment, girls schooling age and asset ownership are measured in order to determine an individual's level of empowerment (Sen and Mukherjee 2014). According to Cornwall (2016, 344), this instrumentalization of the notion of empowerment has negatively reduced the concept from its original socio-politically 'transformative-edge' into a set of neoclassical quotas which neglects to focus on the agency of women. Subsequently, empowerment initiatives neglect to understand empowerment as a process, instead predominantly focusing on positive statistics which appease development donors (Ibid).

Cornwall (2016) states that for women's empowerment initiatives to be genuinely successful and increase choice capacity, a two-lever approach must be deployed. This two-lever approach should consist of: 1. Facilitating the consciousness-raising of women, and 2. Challenging local normative understandings of gender and hierarchy. These two levers utilised simultaneously should facilitate what Cornwall (2016, 346) terms *transformative empowerment* which embodies the more holistic and genuine belief in gender equality at a grass-roots level, which this study promotes as necessary in facilitating genuine women's rights realisation.

2.3 Empowerment as Choice

Drawing upon Kabeer's (1999) theorisation, choice is defined within this study as the ability to practice individual decision-making. Making decisions indicates a certain degree of agentic potential as the individual must desire to make that choice, but also have the agency to practice that choice (Hearn 2012). Ultimately, empowerment as choice is centralised upon the concept of power which Batliwala (1994, 129) defines as '*control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology*'. The term control implies that individuals or institutions can determine their own actions, but also have the potential to determine those of others. This potential is exercised with negative consequences for marginalised groups, whose actions and agency are constricted due to the decisions made by more-powerful groups (Hearn 2012).

The negative consequences of un-equal power relations upon choice constriction are evidenced within women's general subordination to men (White 2010). Kabeer (1999) argues that the historic and current denial of women's choices evident across a myriad of societies forms the ideological roots of and necessity for feminism. This claim is supported by Lewin (2010) who

states that ultimately the feminist developmental agenda should seek to reduce barriers to women's ability to make their own decisions in safety from negative consequences. Empowerment encapsulates this process of removing barriers to women's choice, which facilitates increased power regarding life decisions (Kabeer 2010). The processual definition of empowerment acknowledges that women can be on a journey of empowerment even if they cannot yet control major life choices, such as the popular empowerment indicator of early marriage (Koggle 2010). This processual conception underpins this research's examination of interaction between women's choices and community-radio's influence regarding their empowerment.

2.3.1 Dimensions of Choice

Kabeer (1999) deconstructs choice into three dimensions which chain react to facilitate the process of expanding choice capacity. These three dimensions are: **Resources, Agency and Achievements.** The pre-conditions in which choices are made constitute the dimension of Resources (Kabeer 2002). Within Kabeer's theorisation, these pre-conditions are defined as access to economic capital within the dominant neoliberal discourse of empowerment. However, Koggle (2010) argues that broader societal pre-conditions such as gendered norms are also key pre-conditions for choice-making ability. Gender norms determine the external and internal expectations of an individual's actions, which limits their agency and ability to make choices. Therefore, Batliwala (2013) argues that pre-conditions for choice cannot merely be access to economics but should include the knowledge of rights and constructs of womanhood.

The concept of agency is central to Kabeer's (2002) theorisation of choice as empowerment and constitutes the second dimension. There are multiple forms and theorisations of agency which is an abstract term. This study and Kabeer's empowerment framework utilise *decision-making agency*; defined as the active ability to exercise choice and the capacity to act (Ibid). Agency constitutes the *process* of empowerment as agency describes the ability to act, i.e. the ability to choose; the aforementioned resources build up an individual's ability to realise their potential and their capabilities as broader than their current status which are then acted upon through an individual's agency (Spencer and Doull 2015).

Decision-making agency is grounded within individual self-esteem; a personal evaluative measure in which an individual determines their aspirations, self-perception and potential

(Burke 2004). Self-worth and Self-Esteem are often used interchangeably by different authors and are done so throughout this study which draws upon these different authors. Self-worth is an important dimension of agency, and thus choice, as it determines what roles and goals women have. Porter (2013) argues that women's self-worth is often restricted by the local constructions of womanhood, which confine women to mainly submissive roles. Cameilla (2016) furthers this argument, stating constructs of womanhood cripple women's aspirations and self-esteem, and subsequently drive women's restriction on their agentic capacities. Porter (2013) states that current research into empowerment initiatives fails to examine or facilitate self-worth, and thus is not holistic in its understandings of women's processes of empowerment. This study thus seeks to address this research limitation by focusing on the facilitation of increased self-worth to facilitate a more holistic understanding of women's empowerment processes, and the potential role of community-radio.

Agency is both the process and outcome of the empowerment process. In this sense decision-making agency is the process of gaining the capability and increased self-esteem to make choices. The actual outcomes of this agency constitute the achievement dimension (Kabeer 2002). Outcomes are understood as the objective choices that an individual desires to, or can, make, due to the combination of resources and agency realisation within the empowerment process (Cornwall and Edwards 2010). Observation of choice must acknowledge two forms: First-order choices, which are defined as key overarching life decisions. Examples of first-order choice relevant to this study include when/who to marry or reporting sexual assault. These strategic life choices are formed by multiple second-order choices which are smaller, less significant decisions such as what media to interact with or what opinions to voice (Kabeer 2010). Empowerment cannot be actualised through forcing major first-order choices on women, but by increasing their control over these second-order choices, such as listening to a pro-rights radio programme (Koggle 2010).

Kabeer's theorisation of empowerment as choice, and thus a process, attempts to defer from the neoclassical deployment of empowerment, however, her theory remains focused on first-order choices as the indicator of that process. Eyben (2011) criticises Kabeer, stating that determining which choices indicate a certain level of agency is itself reductionistic due to the meanings a subjective onlooker infers upon those choices. Therefore, rather than measure empowerment on the basis of static indicators of first-order choices, such as a woman's early marriage resistance, this research will examine young women's narrations of their

understandings of, and influences on, their capacity for choice. This maintains that at the core of empowerment is the practice of the individual's agentic potential and acknowledges that women can still be on the pathway to empowerment regardless of first-order choice capacity (Shepard 2008).

The theorisation of empowerment as increased choice capacity supports Amartya Sen's (2005) seminal belief that development is ultimately the increasing of an individual's capabilities and capacity to be and do according to their own ambitions and desires. Combining the components of resources and agency forms Sen's (2005) definition of capabilities; the potential for an individual to live the life they desire through making the choices they desire. Thus, Kabeer's deployment of choice reflects Sen's (1985, 174) term of 'functionings' which describes the myriad ways and practices of being that people give value to within their lives. For people to practice the ways of 'being and doing' that they desire, they need to have the resources and agency in order to make the choices that stimulate these practices. (Cornwall 2016, 246). Thus, choice and development are linked through a capabilities approach.

2.4 Internalisation of Oppressive Constructs of Womanhood

This research utilises Kabeer's theory of choice as the backbone to the theoretical framework. However, her economic focus neglects to fully examine the influence of social norms and cultural codes on the limited choice capacity of women (Porter 2013). Thus, this study also draws upon feminist academics, such as Cornwall (2016) and Batliwala (1993), whose writings on restrictive gender imaginings will further examine the social norms aspect of resource and choice capacity. This provides a nuanced theoretical framework which focuses on choice through a lens of counter-narratives and re-imaginations of womanhood.

Cornwall's (2016)'s paper *Women's empowerment: what works*? outlines the need for women's organisations to prioritise the un-learning of oppressive gender norms in order increase women's agentic potential. The existence and consequences of gender norms must be understood to examine this need. The theoretical debates surrounding the social construction of gender are extensive, a full examination is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, gender construction is examined in relation to the centralisation of shame as throughout data collection

shame was a dominant theme regarding respondent's narrations of their restricted choice capacity.

A key scholar in the field of gender studies is Judith Butler. According to Butler (1990) gender is constructed through cultural norms of masculinity and femininity which are learnt, internalised and continually performed. McClintock (1995) defines norms as cultural codes which define the perimeters of everyday and are expected to be performed. The cultural creation and patrolling of these norms facilitate the oppression of women, as the expected behaviours of women (womanhood) restricts their opportunity to preform behaviours beyond these norms (Pereira 2008).

Kotalova (1996, 27) states that globally, 'womanhood is portrayed as a series of transformations on and services of a women's body'. These transformations prioritise the service of men such as fathers and husbands through practices of sexual pleasuring, childbearing and domestic servitude (Ibid). These roles dedicated to womanhood are inherently limited within the domestic sphere; the appropriate place for a woman is within the home accomplishing domestic chores. Culturally, the representation of a 'good woman' has become intrinsically related to her confinement within the domestic sphere, where quiet and consistent servitude is expected of her. McClintock (1995,28) argues that submissive and 'appropriate' expectations of women's roles are extremely restrictive, as they are restricted from choices ranging from the ability to consent to sex and the ability to fulfil her own desire to continue education. These creation and perpetuation of these restrictive gender norms through patriarchal societies maintains male supremacy, which relies on women's societal status as subordinate (Ibid). Creating counter-narratives to these dominant norms is thus imperative to facilitating women's increased choice capacity and sense of empowerment (Pereira 2008).

2.5 The Centralisation of Shame and Limitation of Choice within Womanhood

White (2010) argues that the centrality of shame within dominant narratives of womanhood is missing in much of the literature on women's restricted agency. As this study will show, shame is a crucial aspect of women's limited choice capacity and self-worth which the following section discusses.

Shame can be defined as personal negative self-evaluation which limits an individual's confidence (Porter 2013). Porter (2013) argues that men's predominant role in generating shame maintains the construction of womanhood as a subdued position. Globally, and especially within South Asian cultures, men's matriarchal honour is intrinsically related to women's actions and the concept of shame; if a woman acts in ways deemed inappropriate, such as raising her voice or exercises her right to refuse sex, then she brings shame upon her male guardian (husbands are included within the term guardian in Bangla contexts) (White 2010). By constantly shaming women for acting beyond the constructed boundaries of womanhood, their agency and confidence to fulfil their own desires are disallowed and dispelled, resulting in timid and obedient domestic servitude (Das and Roy 2015).

Thus, shame is intrinsically linked to limitations on choice capacity, as unlike men, if a woman makes decisions which she desires but men deem inappropriate she will face shaming practices, often manifested in physical and verbal discipline (Ibid). Furthermore, shame is not only forced upon women, but internalised and practiced by women themselves as shame can be experienced as the 'affective cost' of deviating from the cultural codes of gendered expectations (Niccolini 2019, 8). Women will practice self-discipline into performing gendered expectations of womanhood as they internalise and accept the script of womanhood constructed and taught to them by society in order to not feel ashamed or disappointed in themselves (Ibid). This reflects the extent to which shame is a controlling and restrictive notion regarding women's self-worth and ultimately their choice capacity.

2.6 Processes of Re-imagining Womanhood

The perpetuation of women's disempowerment through the actions and choices of women themselves complicates the seemingly simple equation between choice and empowerment that women are presented as seeking, which Kabeer does not address within her empowerment theory. Thus, this study also utilises Rowlands' (1996) argument that the systemic nature of patriarchal oppression results in women internalising the limiting gender norms expected of them. One of the most powerful tools of oppression is the creation of self-deprecation, where individuals of an oppressed group accept the inequality of social order and believe their position as subordinate. Sen (1990,126) summarises this tool's outcome as 'adapted perceptions,' which are generated because 'the underdog accepts the legitimacy of

the unequal order'. Examples of these internalised 'adapted perceptions' and inequality acceptance in South Asian culture include the common acceptance of male physical violence against themselves and their daughters, vehement gossiping and exclusion against other women and the frequently noted mistreatment of daughters-in-law by their mothers-in-law, including physical violence, verbal abuse and retainment of basic necessities for small grievances (White 2010). The notion that women perpetuate their own oppression relates back to choice, as the examples above indicate that women make choices which are not only created by their oppression but help to re-create it (Kabeer 1999).

Indian feminist scholar Batliwala argues that helping women re-imagine their perceptions of womanhood is the cornerstone to effective empowerment initiatives:

'Unless women are liberated from their existing perception of themselves as weak, inferior and limited beings, no external interventions … will enable them to challenge existing power equations in society, or the family.' (1993, 31)

The term 'liberated' regarding notions of 'weakness' reiterates the belief that women are restricted by culturally constructed imaginings of womanhood. Cornwall (2016) agrees with this idea but highlights the challenge of tackling compliance to oppressive gender norms. The process of facilitating individual women's realisation of their oppression is termed critical consciousness-raising, a central concern to feminist agendas (Ibid). Consciousness-raising requires in-depth, usually prolonged, engagement with individuals to learn and understand how certain practices and structures, such as the patriarchal belief of women as subordinate, are limiting their self-worth and communal-worth but also their aspirational ability (Batliwala 2011). This process seeks to build power within by expanding an individual's awareness of their agentic potential as greater than society's imaginings for them, which this study refers to as individual self-worth (Ibid). Batliwala (2015) states that providing women with a new lens, one of self-worth and strength, is a foundation needed before any attempts to push women into practicing public resistance to patriarchal oppression. The notion of consciousness-raising relates back to Kabeer's choice theory, as this learning of self-worth is a key abstract resource which can facilitates women's choice making ability. The centralisation of abstract resources within this study's presentation of expanding choice capacity processes seeks to fulfil Porter's (2013) call to broaden Kabeer's more physical resource-focused theory to specific focus on women's self-identities.

Critical consciousness-raising is vital regarding women's un-learning of shame (Camellia 2016). The prevalence of sexual assault presents a significant means through which shame is centralised within women's identities (Koss 2020). A consequence of patriarchal hierarchies is the threat of rape and sexual harassment which women face globally; stemming from the commonly found male sex right which constructs women's bodies as objects of male pleasure and justifies their non-consented use through the status of women as subordinate (Ibid). In the majority of countries rape is illegal, yet the persistent idea of the male sex right permeates policy and justifies abuses of women's rights such as sexual consent (Ibid). The deep shame felt by victims of sexual assault (males included) cannot be verbally or theoretically described. Importantly, it also cannot be spoken about as victims of abuse are treated with disgust and dishonour rather than support (Koss 2020). This shame and blame rhetoric against victims of assault, rather than the perpetrators is prevalent globally, including in South Asian contexts (Ibid). Strong stigma against abuse victims results in women being unable to seek sexual and mental health support, as familial honour is often threatened if communities realise a female family member has been made 'impure' (Das and Roy 2015).

2.7 SRHR and the Un-learning of Shame

As scholars such as White (2010) have argued, this internalised shame is perpetuated by inadequate SRHR education and women's often limited knowledge over their bodies and rights. White (2010) theorises that consciousness-raising through extensive SRHR programs which discuss sexual assault and provide anti-shaming messages for victims, aids women in realising their gendered inequality. Furthermore, Shaw (2009) states that access to adequate SRHR aids adolescent women in re-imagining womanhood as learning about their rights introduces them to the notion that they are capable of consent and choices.

Critical consciousness is a contested concept as the notion that women internalise oppressive norms can lead to dangerous assumptions that women who do not engage with empowerment initiatives do so not out of active choice, but compliance (Cornwall 2016). This assumption is implied within Kabeer's (1999) theorising of empowerment, as increasing choice capacity is presented as an inherently positive process and thus naturally desired by all women. Seshu (2013, 51) criticises this inferred positive relationship as it assumes that women, by default,

want to be 'helped' and eradicates their capacity to 'choose not to choose'. Assuming that all women who fulfil gendered expectations are oppressed risks ignoring a woman's right to choose to fulfil gender expectations. Making these assumptions risks claiming that the individual is practicing false consciousness, defined as the unwitting misconception of an individual regarding their place in society and how systemic oppression affects them negatively.

Seshu (2013) acknowledges that assuming false consciousness is counter-productive in acknowledging women's agency which is a fundamental goal of feminist empowerment. Assuming false consciousness exacerbates the 'othering' of women through implying that the researcher knows what the individual is truly experiencing, rather than allowing them to narrate their own opinions (Ibid). Thus, this study commits to allowing participants to narrate and explain the meanings of their experiences, rather than being spoken for or unfairly labelled as displaying false consciousness.

2.8 Community-radio and Pathways to Empowerment

The theorisation that a significant resource for increasing women's agency and choice capacity is the un-learning of culturally oppressive imaginings of woman has been presented. There are multiple practical initiatives that encapsulate Cornwall's two-lever approach to social transformation and choice enhancement, community radio is potentially one of these initiatives (Jallov 2012). This following chapter presents the theory behind community-radio creation and how it can be utilised as a platform for women's empowerment and critical consciousness-raising.

The necessity of expanding SRHR education to include processing sexual traumas and unlearning shame has been established. However, impactful mechanisms of achieving this are unclear, partially due to the highly taboo nature of these topics in patriarchal South Asian cultures (White 2010). An essential element to un-learning shame is arguably through creating and promoting counter-narratives to challenge dominant narratives of women and their bodies as objects of servitude and shame (Pereira 2008). By definition, counter-narratives must be created by women themselves, yet how is this possible regarding the limitation to resources, public spaces and education that women, especially in rural communities, face? According to

Nirmala (2015), community-radio provides a platform through which these counter-narratives can be debated, created and spread to normally inaccessible women in rural villages. Jallov (2012) states that counter-narratives are the motivation for community-radio, which by her definition seeks to broadcast locally relevant messages by marginalised people for marginalised people.

Baltiwala's (2011) assertion that women's empowerment must occur at the individual and collective levels is supported by Jallov's (2012) statement that community-radio provides marginalised groups with a platform through which listeners support one another, thus forming a collective identity. Myers (2011) asserts that through the community-radio, women can speak up about issues affecting them and listen to other women's experiences. Feigenbaum (2007) states that trauma created through violence, such as rape, is entrenched through the lack of processing opportunities. Koss (2020) argues the lack of collective processing of trauma facilitates women to feel isolated and unable to process feelings of shame, pain and frustration resulting in hindered self-worth.

According to Nirmala's (2015) case study of community-radio broadcasting and rural Indian women's empowerment, community-radio women's programs can potentially tackle this shame-facilitating isolation by being an accessible space for isolated women. Nirmala (2015) argues that shared-virtual spaces of radio and the anonymity it provides through SMS interaction means that taboo topics can be discussed safely. The power of hearing other women speak out should not be underestimated, as sharing suffering with peers can build provide encouragement through solidarity (Eyben 2011). Batliwala (2011) argues that the solitude of shame can undermine an individual's self-worth, but when that burden is shared and advice received from similar individuals, a shared strength is created. Whilst the link between community-radio and women's empowerment has been hypothesised, the nuanced ways in which women unlearn dominant and repressive gendered ideals through radio engagement have not been explicitly examined. Thus, this research seeks to examine how women perceive their interactions with community-radio and if in practice it lives up to claims that it can be a tool for facilitating women's support and empowerment.

The importance of local, women-lead empowerment initiatives is highlighted by Eyben (2011, 41) whose work on supporting pathways of empowerment found that establishing a relationship of 'trust and love' between participants and workers plays a vital role in the effectiveness of

grass-roots empowerment organisations. The shared experiences and attitudes between local women allow these characteristics to be established. Therefore, locally lead initiatives can help form community identities and goals (Ibid). Jallov (2012) argues that community-radio seeks to accomplish this positive relationship as it utilises local voices to speak to their target community group.

Furthermore, Cornwall (2016) argues that accessible female role models are an invaluable resource for women to un-learn restrictive womanhood. However, Nirmala (2015) states that accessing role models for rural women who have limited media access is extremely difficult. The accessibility of community-radio potentially can provide rural women with access to role models; however, this access has not been research (Ibid). Thus, this study examines listeners interactions with community-radio providers to examine the impact of role model access.

Cornwall (2016) asserts that a women's process of becoming empowered is facilitated by two different pathways of empowerment which are *hidden* or *motorway* pathways. *Motorways* of empowerment consist of top-down mainstream empowerment initiatives such as the international and national establishment and enforcement of policy and law which protect and promote women's rights (Ibid). *Hidden* pathways to empowerment reflect the smaller, grass-roots facilitated processes of empowerment that women encounter such as receiving SRHR education or attending women's support groups. Community-radio SRHR broadcasting would contribute to this *hidden* pathways of empowerment, as it is a grass-roots and non-main stream empowerment initiative (Ibid). This paper will examine how community-radio contributes to young rural women's journey's along *hidden* pathways of empowerment.

The assertion that women's empowerment requires both *hidden* and motorways pathways of empowerment highlights the limitation that solely relying on grass-roots community-radio broadcasting to facilitate women's rights realisation has. Community-radio's facilitation of young women's improved self-worth and choice capacity is challenged by the likely resistance of family and community members (Priyadarshani 2010). This risk is not a side note, but a key limitation regarding many empowerment initiatives (Ibid). Women attempting to practice empowerment education or rights learnt through NGO initiatives often face physical and emotional backlash in the shape of abuse and disownment in South Asian cultures; a stark reminder of the position of risk and responsibility that women hold within empowerment

initiatives (Sanawar et al 2019). Therefore, community-radio broadcasting focusing on women's reimaging's of womanhood is not theorised as the sole solution to tackling inequal social norms of gender. Instead, this research examines how community-radio broadcasters acknowledge this risk and how they seek to mitigate this when giving the responsibility of empowerment and social change to women.

2.9 Conceptual Scheme

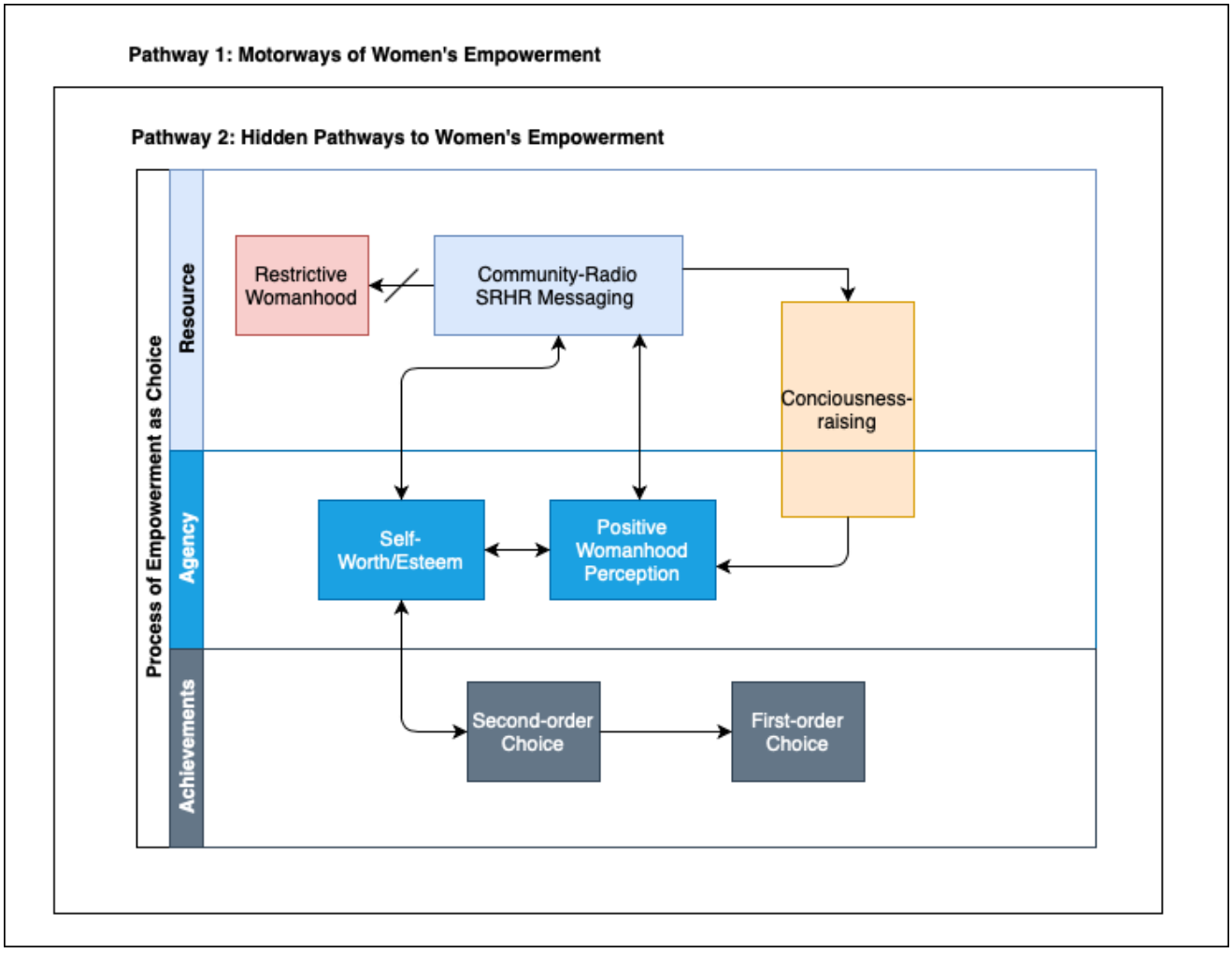

Figure 1:Conceptual Scheme: Author's own design

The conceptual scheme presented above depicts the process of empowerment as the individual's increased capacity for choice through the three dimensions of Resource, Agency and Achievements which are explained here:

Resource Dimension: 'Community-Radio's SRHR' messaging is depicted here as a resource, as it provides rights-based information and a safe space for young women to learn

and be supported. Restrictive womanhood is presented as a resource due to the fact that it constitutes a negative influence upon young women's self-worth. The messages broadcast by Community-Radio are conceptualised as counter-narratives of womanhood which reject restrictive and dominant narrations of womanhood, depicted by the cut-off arrow.

These positive counter-narratives of womanhood are shown to facilitate consciousness-raising which aid in facilitating young women's realisation and subsequent rejection of their subordinate positions and mistreatment under current narratives of womanhood.

Agency Dimension: 'Community-Radio's SRHR' messaging is shown to facilitate or increase the components of self-esteem and self-worth (intimately linked) which are components of agency as they are theorised to give the individual more ambition, confidence and desire to act upon their own will. Community-radio messaging also is shown facilitating a positive Womanhood perception as SRHR information provided reveals to young women that they deserve rights such as consent, choice capacity and equal opportunities as men. These increase young women's ambitions which are encompassed within the self-esteem dimension. Hence the inter-related arrow between 'Positive Womanhood Perception' and 'Self-Esteem'. 'Consciousness-Raising' is depicted as feeding into the agency dimension as it underpins the ability of individuals to realise that womanhood does not need to be restrictive and that they are able to have increased confidence to make and aspirations for choice.

Achievements Dimension: The Resource and agency dimensions are depicted as flowing into and facilitating second-order choices, which individuals can now make regarding increased self-esteem, ambitions and awareness of the capacity to act. These second-order choices are shown to accumulate and ultimately result in first-order choices (such as early marriage resistance). Whilst the end goal of empowerment is depicted as 'First-order choice' capacity, the conceptual scheme labels the whole process from initial engagement with the community-radio SRHR messages to second/first-order choices as a process of empowerment. This whole process as empowering reflects that this conceptual scheme and study reject the idea that empowerment can only be found in women practicing first-order choices, but is also present through the pathway and process depicted through the indicators.

The diagram presents the flow of consciousness-raising and choice expansion facilitated by community-radio SRHR messaging within the framework of a Pathway 2: A *Hidden* Pathway to Women's empowerment. Community-radio is a grass-roots level initiative or tool for facilitating an individuals' journey of empowerment, thus is considered a *hidden* pathway. This community-radio as pathway 2 diagram occurs within a Pathway 1 framework: *Motorways* of empowerment which encompass policy and law. These two pathways combined will facilitate genuine social transformation of norms regarding the expectations of and treatment of women.

2.10 Concluding Remarks

This study's theoretical framework chapter has explained that women's empowerment is process which is facilitated by the expansion of women's choice capacity. This choice capacity is currently restricted by the oppressive dominant narratives of womanhood and the subsequent expectations upon women's bodies and behaviours. The internalisation and perpetuation of these womanhood narratives by women themselves has been presented as a major obstacle to women's ability to practice their rights. A key element of womanhood that must be rejected is the negative influence of shame upon women's self-worth. Thus, the need to increase an individual's sense of self-worth has been added to Kabeer's process of choice expansion. This process of expanding self-worth has been explained through Baltiwala's (2013) theory of consciousness-raising. Community-radio's broadcasting of in-depth SRHR messages has been presented as the potential mechanism through which this consciousness-raising and increased choice can be facilitated. The following chapter presents the research methodology through which these concepts have been operationalised and observed.

3 Contextual Chapter

The mechanisms of and obstacles to women's empowerment and choice capacity are not globally homogenous, but culturally specific (Eyben 2011). Therefore, this following chapter contextualises the concepts examined within the theoretical framework within this study's research context, rural Bangladesh.

3.1 Bangladesh and socio-economic context of women's lives

Bangladesh's government has committed to protecting women's rights and promotes gender quality through the implementation of policy such as the Oppression against Women and Children Act, which makes practices such as domestic violence, early marriage and rape illegal. Bangladesh's policy progress was deemed progressive by UN Women and celebrated for its adherence to SDG goal 5; to eradicate harmful practices against women and promotion of gender equality (CARE 2018).

Three decades ago, Kabeer (1988, 95) wrote that Bangladeshi women faced lived-experiences of 'subordination and struggle'. Bangladesh's policy commitments for women's rights protection might be text-book progressive, however in a review of women's rights progress, Kabeer (2015) states that whilst indicators such as women in the workforce and educational attainments have significantly improved, other domestic-sphere issues such as rates of domestic violence and early marriage remain alarmingly high. This prevalence of women's rights abuses is facilitated by Bangladesh's still persistently high rural economic poverty; 29% of Bangladesh's rural population lives below the poverty compared to 17% in urban areas (Pomi 2019). Kabeer (2017) asserts that this rural poverty results in urban women's disproportionate benefiting of Bangladesh's progress regarding SDG goal 5. For example, the high rural poverty rate results in an abundance of rural families practicing subsistence farming which results in little economic resources to provide education or health care to female family members (Lentz 2018). Thus, Bangladesh's prevalent rural poverty perpetuates the belief that women must remain in the domestic sphere and complete household tasks, as their empowerment is viewed as an unnecessary financial burden (Ibid).

Schuler et al (2018) reported that 72.6% of women in rural Bangladesh faced physical violence, 68% intimate partner violence and 36% faced sexual violence. These statistics highlight the sustained oppression behind the positive quotas of women in politics or education. Women's subordination to men is highlighted by Bangladesh's persistent status as third highest hotspot of early marriage globally; despite policy protecting adolescents from early marriage such as the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, combined with significant NGO initiates, 32% of women are married by the age of 15 and 67% by 18 (Islam and Rabiul 2017).

Early marriage practices encapsulate the restrictions on women's choices, as a combination of women being viewed as socio-economic burdens to the family and individuals who must protected from misbehaviour results in the transferring of their guardianship from father to husband at early ages (Nasrim and Rahman 2012). Women can rarely refuse marriage, or decide to continue education rather than perform domestic duties; these restrictions of first-order choices facilitate a myriad of second-order choice restrictions, such as sex refusal (Ibid).

3.2 Bangladesh and the Construct of Womanhood

The ideals of Bangladeshi womanhood are constructed through 'extremely restrictive codes of behaviour' which are restricting as women's behaviour is reflective of family honour (Islam 2008). Family honour is described as the crux of Bangla society, thus is vehemently protected by male guardians through strict enforcements (Ibid). The male-created restriction of choices is encompassed within the Bangladeshi-Islamic practice of *Purdah;* which describes the enforcement of central virtues of modesty and purity through restricting women's interaction with non-familial males (Nasim and Rahman 2012). *Purdah* physically confines women to the domestic-sphere as food preparation and raising children are deemed appropriate practices (Goel 2005). These expectations are summarised as women's service and submission to men. Therefore, onus of family honour upon women's actions results in a deep-rooted fear of bringing shame which women internalise. Honour is used to regulate and restrict women's choices and actions, but also limits their self-perceptions of self-worth (Ibid).

The cultural codes embedded within *Purdah* are perpetuated through the practice of community censoring (Islam 2008). In public spaces women's behaviour is monitored. Behaviour deemed 'inappropriate' would be reported to male guardians for discipline, motivated by beliefs that

women's actions should uphold honour (Ibid). This censoring reinforces women's internalisation of shame (Goel 2005). This exemplifies how gendered expectations limit women's choice capacity in Bangladesh; respondents narrated that communal censoring restricts them from activities such as receiving reproductive-related medical care or attending SRHR seminars as they are deemed inappropriate (White 2010).

The censoring of women's experiences reflects the significant limitation of women's choice capacity, and thus reveals the difficulty in women practicing their agency in both public or private spheres (Kabeer 2010). This challenges Bangladesh's Constitutional law which states 'Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and public life' (Khan 1988, 16). Bangladesh's faces immense challenges regarding attainment of SDG goal 5, and policy interventions are not facilitating the social transformation of gendered norms necessary for equality (Sanawar et al 2019). The struggle to tackle domestic-sphere issues and imaginings of women indicates the disparity between governmental policy and women's lived-experiences and empowerment. These obstacles to empowerment reveal the difficulty in facilitating genuine social transformation of cultural norms and practices. Contributing to understanding how transformation can be facilitated is the motivation for this study's examination of shame, SRHR and community-radio (Hodgkinson et al 2016).

There is a higher prevalence of abusive and restrictive activities against women in rural areas, facilitated by their often higher economic and literacy dependency on their husbands (Nirmala 2015). A factor driving higher women's rights abuses in rural areas is the higher illiteracy rates of rural Bangladesh populations, especially women; 67% of women in rural areas are illiterate compared with 26% in urban areas (Akademie 2015). Women are disproportionately affected by illiteracy due to the socio-economic prioritisation of male education in lower-economic households (Ibid).

3.3 Bangladesh and Inadequate SRHR Education Provision

The provision of extensive school-based SRHR education is theorised as critical within the establishment of women's rights (Schuler 2006). Bangladesh's National Curriculum makes basic SRHR education compulsory for classes 8 to 12 (7-13 years) (Karim 2012). The curriculum covers menstruation, reproduction and premarital abstinence within a general

women's equality narrative, which if administered could improve adolescent's perceptions of womanhood (Ibid). However, Khan et al's (2020) study revealed that the majority of schools do not adequately administer this curriculum, leaving the majority of rural adolescents without adequate SRHR knowledge. This lack of SRHR knowledge perpetuates female's disempowerment (Ibid).

The reluctance to teach SRHR content stems from the societal norm of sexuality and reproduction as deeply intimate topics which should remain 'inaudible and invisible' outside of the home (Karim 2012, 24). Thus, teachers often feel uncomfortable delivering SRHR content from their societal-taught shame over topics; teachers are 'gatekeepers' for students, their shame over SRHR is reproduced in students who learn to not speak openly about sex or sexual rights, overtime this can develop into personal stigmatisation of sexual trauma and acceptance that women are both the victims *and* perpetrators (Khan et al 2020, 10). Furthermore, the curriculum, when taught, does not include consent, sexual violence nor shame; Khan et al (2020) argues these are vital for stimulating increased respect for women and their choices due the challenging of Bangladeshi norms of submission and men's sexual rights over women which often justifies violence against them.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the impact of Islam upon the cultural codes of Bangladeshi womanhood. However, as 90% of Bangladesh's population is Muslim, it seems safe to assume that certain Islamic teachings will significantly shape the dominant values of modesty, service and submission to male family figures which women are taught and expected to perform (Schuler 2006). The centralisation of *Purdah* within Islamic teachings entrenches the taboo nature of adequate SRHR education within classroom and home settings (Ibid). This significantly contributes to the inadequate education of consent and women's sexual rights as teaching these topics remains restricted by guardians (Khan et al 2020). Furthermore, Mahmood (2005) writes that patriarchal values are enhanced and affirmed through Islamic values which explicitly state a women's role is domestic servitude and that her actions should always honour her male guardian, resulting in 'her constrained individual freedom' (White 2010, 340).

3.4 Bangladesh and Community-Radio

Bangladesh is a pioneer for community-radio broadcasting; Rajshahi city-centre is home to the first community-radio station in Bangladesh, Radio Padma 99.2 which was established in 2011 by the Bangladesh NGO Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) with the aim to provide locally relevant information which Governmental media neglects (Rashid 2017). Rural transmission boosters allow Radio Padma broadcasting across 30km range and reaches 300,000 yearly listeners in urban and rural settings (Ibid). Young people (<25) make up 66% of the listener base, making Radio Padma a key medium in youth education, engagement in community dialogue and empowerment (Rasheed 2012). Radio Padma states that they seek to challenge 'damaging cultural practices' through awareness raising, educational broadcasting and opening community dialogue (Akademie 2015). Central to this aim is the 'Break The Silence' (BTS) women's programme, the 2nd most popular programme (Rashid 2017). BTS seeks to empower women through gender-equality programming which includes SRHR and anti-shame messaging (Ibid).

The BNNRC and value of community-radio broadcasting is supported through the government's Broadcasting Operation Policy which grants legal status to community-radios as alternative forms of education (Rashid 2017). This is important regarding the broadcasting of more extensive SRHR education which tackles the short-comings of governmental-school SRHR curriculums.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented the disparity between women's rights policy and actual women's rights practices within the research area of rural Bangladesh. This disparity is contextualised through data on Bangladesh's socio-economic context. The centralisation of shame through Bangla practices such as *Purdah* have been presented in order to contextualise the limited choice capacity of young women which will be examined within the next chapters. The inadequacies of current SRHR education and access to empowerment information within rural Bangladesh have been presented, as well as the potential for community-radio to provide this information to contextualise the investigation which follows in the next chapter.

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Facilitated by the presentation of the theoretical framework and wider social context of this study, the following chapter presents this study's research questions supported by a conceptual scheme. Detailed explanations of the study's research context and methodological design are then presented describing the research methods. The fieldwork was conducted within the Rajshahi District of Bangladesh from the 27th of January 2020 till the 19th of March.

4.2 Research Questions

4.2.1 Main Research Question

How do young women in rural Bangladesh experience community-radio broadcasting of SRHR messaging, and what role might this programming play in facilitating re-imaginings of womanhood and carving spaces for choice?

4.2.2 Sub-questions

1. What is the motivation for, and content of, Radio Padma's women-focused community-radio broadcasting?

2. How do young women define the expectations of 'womanhood'?

3. How does the community-radio interact with the dominant narrations of a 'good woman' and the notion of shame?

4. How do young women perceive the impact of listening to BTS's alternative SRHR messaging upon re-imagining womanhood and their capacity for choice?

4.3 Ontological and Epistemological Stance

This research project aimed to examine the influence of community-radio broadcasting on young women's perceptions of women's empowerment, SRHR and choice capacity. Womanhood and shame are complex and contentious and shaped by subjective social constructs, beliefs and practices (Islam et al 2017). These practices are derived from multiple truths and individual experiences or expectations of gender roles and marriage which differ interculturally (ibid). Therefore, this research was founded upon a relativist ontological standpoint which perceives reality as a finite subjective experience (Arghold 2012). Subsequently, this study adopted an interpretivist epistemological paradigm which understands knowledge and experiences of practices as relative, intra and inter, to the specific communities (Ibid). This interpretivist epistemology allowed this study to focus on observing the meanings of women's experiences (Fossey et al 2002).

4.4 Research Area

This study's primary research location were two rural unions (administrative districts) called Mohanpur and Paba within the Rajshahi District of north-western Bangladesh. The Rajshahi District is a key area of THP-B's administration of women's equality initiatives due to its persistently high early marriage rates (Ainul et al 2017). Across Rajshahi 32% of women aged 15 are and 67% of women aged 18 are married making it Bangladesh's third highest hotspot for early marriage (Islam and Rabiul 2017). This early marriage persistence is perpetuated by high women's illiteracy rates (52-57 %) within Mohonpur and Paba, (Ibid). This makes these unions relevant locations to investigate the influence of media upon rural women's empowerment.

Rajshahi's population of 2.2 million predominantly live in upazillas (administrative villages) surrounding Rajshahi city. Within Mohanpur and Paba, research was mainly conducted within the Shaipara and Mohobbatpur upazillas due to THP-B's long-established activity there. Furthermore, 94% of their populations are strong practisers of Islamic *Purdah* and both upazillas fall within the transmission range of Radio Padma, making them good locations to observe rural women's interactions with community-radio broadcasting and expectations womanhood.

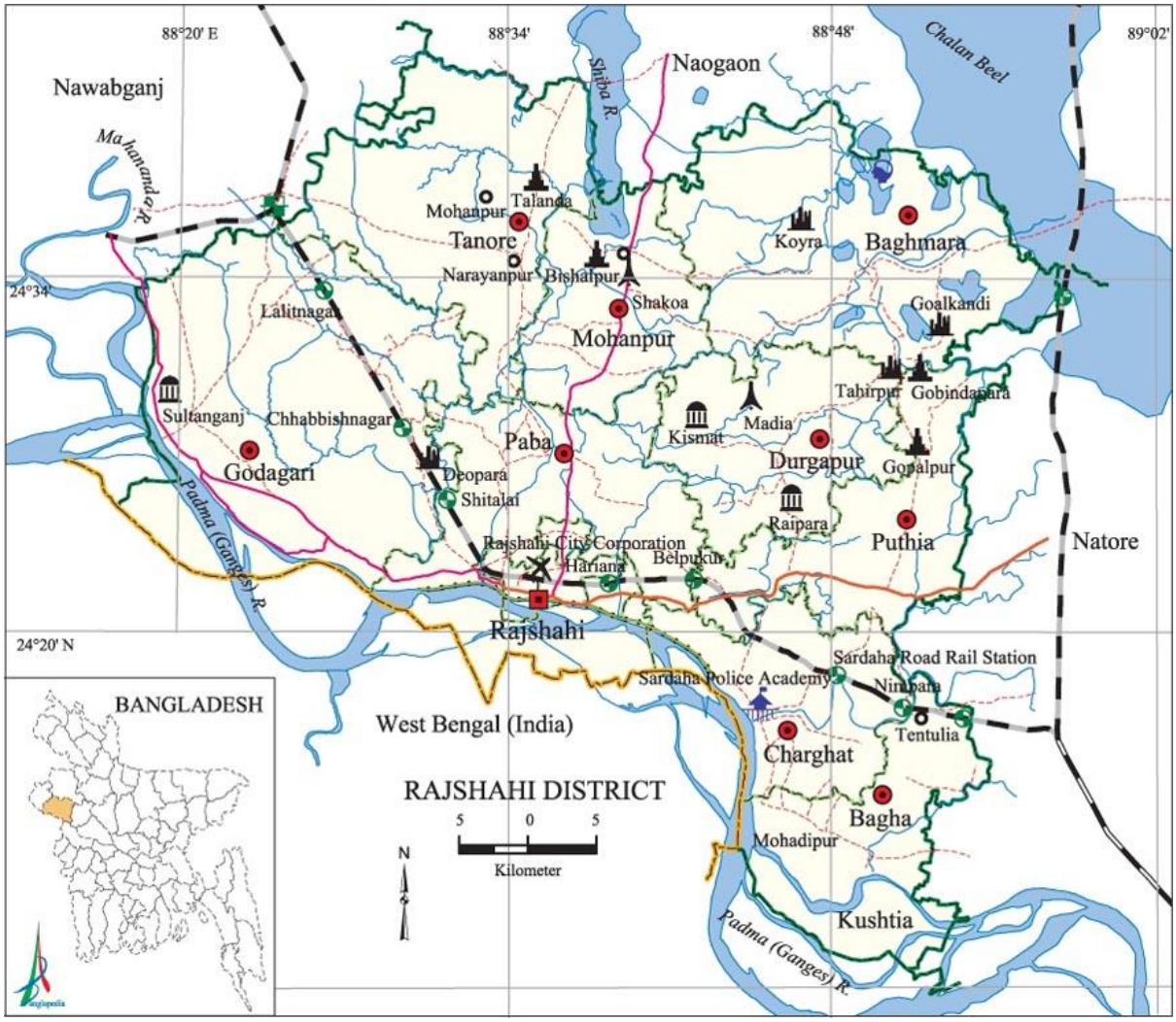

Figure 2: Map of Rajshahi District and Location with Bangladesh. Source: Nawaz et al 2009.

4.5 Unit of Analysis and Sampling

This study's unit of analysis were women's views and narrated experiences on womanhood, shame and choice capacity. The sample predominantly consisted of rural young women aged 13-21 years, the age where women begin significantly forming and internalising expectations of women's roles and thus their limitations on self-worth (Nasrim and Rahman 2012). Within Bangladeshi culture, girls aged 12+ are deemed women once menstruation start. Thus, this study utilises the term 'women' when referring to adolescent women, rather than girls, in order to be culturally appropriate (Bessa 2019).

My research schedule and access to respondents was facilitated by my fieldwork guide Mizan, the Rajshahi district director for THP-B. To aid Mizan in facilitating an effective sampling of

topically relevant respondents, a summary of my research topic and aims had been sent. This was beneficial, as organising respondents prior to fieldwork commencement was difficult. Purposeful sampling through a judgement sampling method was facilitated by THP-B staff, who knew of the BTS programme and its popularity amongst their SRHR seminar attendees, utilising community-links to find BTS-listeners as potential respondents. Once women in an upazilla had been interviewed, snowball sampling occurred with participants telling local peers about the process, resulting in increased participant numbers. This snowballing technique was facilitated by spending whole days with communities due to long journeys into the remote upazillas.. Many of these respondents were not community-radio listeners, but their insights into the constructs and constraints of womanhood, SRHR and shaming practices were vital towards examining the research questions.

Table 1: Table BTS-Listener Status of respondents

Research Method	**In-depth Interview**	**FGD**
Total No. Interview Respondents	**21**	**21**
BTS Listener	**9**	**6**
Non-BTS Listener	**12**	**15**

The staff of Radio Padma were also an important unit of observation. To adequately examine the influence of community-radio upon women's empowerment, the motivations and methods through which the BTS programme sought to facilitate empowerment was examined. This was facilitated by conducting research with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Padma Radio station, as well as with Khota Mehjabin, the BTS host. The relationship with the Radio Padma team was incredibly insightful and rewarding regarding this research.

During fieldwork I was locally supervised by Dr Sufi, whose work with rural women aided contextualised understandings of womanhood and choice constriction. Dr Sufi facilitated field visits and generated research respondents through his well-established community links.

4.6 Research Methods

The importance of acknowledging young women's agency was central to the design of this study, responding to growing critique that research inadequately reflects women's voices (Koggle 2010). Therefore, I adopted Strenger's (2000) principle of being 'at risk' which

implores researchers to perceive knowledge and data collection as co-created by the researcher *and* respondents together, rather than the researcher extracting data from passive respondents (Whatmore 2003). An 'at risk' and interpretivist approach to knowledge was facilitated through a qualitative methodology, defined as the systematic and subjective observing and explaining of cultural experiences in order to perceive meanings in relation to theory (Cresswell 2007). A mixed method approach was utilised with different respondents to triangulate observations and data sources; these methods are outlined here:

4.6.1 In-depth Interviews

Data was mainly collected through conducting in-depth interviews with women, generating purposeful conversations and detailed narrations of gender expectations and interactions with community-radio (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). These interviews were a fundamental method in examining women's subjective experiences. Overall, 21 interviews with women were conducted, which lasted between 35-80 minutes. If permission was granted, these interviews were translated in-person by a translator and recorded (with respondents' permission, see 4.8) on a Dictaphone for transcription.

A semi-structured interview approach was utilised to facilitate an 'at risk' but research-rationale focused approach. An interview question topic guide was created with questions derived from the operationalisation table in order to observe data that examined the concepts underpinning the research rationale. The guide was translated by Dr Sufi, whose fluent English and Bangla accommodated quality control checking. Utilising a topic guide facilitated open-ended discussions, allowing respondents to semi-guide interviews which generated unexpected themes unattainable with rigid interview questions. This contributed to rich and respondent-lead knowledge production whilst also reducing strongly-biased questions (Twining et al 2017). A thematic interview approach facilitated detailed narrations on subjective themes such as perceptions of womanhood and women's rights whilst also facilitating more objective data collection regarding radio access and demographic demand.

Throughout the fieldwork the interview topic guide remained largely the same, allowing for consistency and credibility in the data collection process (Bryman 2012). However, throughout the fieldwork process, cultural insights and recurring themes became apparent, such as the importance of shame and the difference between coercion and control. These went beyond the

expectations of my theoretical framework and thus were not initially included within my interview guide. Questions which accessed these themes were incorporated into my guide as their importance to the research topic became apparent; this is an example of how research respondents were active in shaping the research process as well as research outcomes.

In-depth interviews were conducted with Radio Padma staff to provide contextualisation for the main research question. Initially the Chairman and Station Manager were interviewed to examine listener demographics, demand for alternative media and motivations for their community-radio broadcasting. Three hour-long interviews were conducted with BTS' host, Katha. These were incredibly insightful regarding types of SRHR education and the empowerment messages she delivers to her listeners and how her programme seeks to increase women's choice capacity.

4.6.2 Participant Observation

Field visits presented opportunities for informal participant observations of THP-B community meetings and THP-B provided SRHR lessons. These were vital in locally contextualising data generated through interviews and FGDs. To maintain focus on the research rationale an observation schedule was devised which contained themes such as:

- Are women allowed to participate/ state their opinions?
- How are notions of shame centralised within these discussions/ activities?
- What ideals of womanhood are being entrenched/ challenged?

I conducted two formal observations of Kotha's BTS show live from the studio. A translator translated the discussions between Kotha and her guests, allowing observation of the topics BTS discussed, type of advice given, and questions posed by listeners calling-in. Witnessing how often callers phoned-in with anecdotes and Kotha's responses was important in understanding the powerful tool radio can be and the importance of Kotha's relationship with listeners regarding their trust of her advice on incredibly sensitive topics.

4.6.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Later in the fieldwork period 3 FGD's were conducted to further explore important themes generated from previous individual interviews. Interview respondents would mention sexual harassment but sometimes express discomfort in in-depth discussions. The presence of other women in FGD settings facilitated group-based emotional support, resulting in more confident discussions over topics considered taboo.

Mizan and THP-B SRHR providers aided the organisation of the FGDs, which included previous interview respondents and new respondents. Based upon Barber's (2014) theory for FGD conduct, three FGD's with schoolgirls were held in groups of 6-8 respondents, aged 14-17; These participant numbers allowed for group support but remained manageable for my translator who facilitated the discussions. Creative exercises such as drawing word maps were conducted during FGD. This was important as creative, less word-heavy methods allowed young respondents to still express opinions which they'd find difficulty in an in-depth interview.

The increased positive body language and confidence of previous interview respondents within an FGD setting reflects upon positive consequences when women are allowed to meet, discuss and feel supported by one another. Some of the respondents stated that this FGD had been the first time their opinion on self-worth and women's rights had been asked for or listened to, showing the need for NGO and Community-Radio's to act as alternative platforms and safe spaces for women's discussions and support.

4.7 Data Analysis

The rich, descriptive nature of in-depth interviews generated an abundance of data. Following Strengers (2000) advice I practiced inductive coding during fieldwork by partially transcribing interviews and documenting key themes in my fieldwork journal. This iterative process facilitated interview guide adaptation which enabled me to explore the most relevant themes for the research questions. Discussing themes with Mizan (THP-B) and Kotha (BTS) was constructive as it increased my cultural understanding.

I transcribed the interviews for which I had recordings, which allowed me to submerge myself in the data and note key themes (Whatmore 2003). The thematic coding process that ensued was iterative, as initial thematic labels derived from key themes changed to become more focused on the key theme of shame. Codes such as 'womanhood' merged to include codes such as 'shame' and 'dishonour' as I read and re-read the transcripts. This iterative approach provided key quotations, which organised though key themes generated the structure for the empirical chapters.

4.8 Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality

Partnership with THP-B and HER CHOICE was a deliberate decision to ensure that research observations could contribute to on-going gender-equality projects, thus ensuing sustainable fieldwork practices. Furthermore, practicing researcher reflexivity and prioritising ethical practices throughout the design, data collection and analysis of this project was prioritised to ensure that no white-saviour complex was expressed within conduct or representation of respondents. Grill (2007) highlights that unchecked hierarchical researcher positionality can negatively influence openness within interview responses, especially with marginalised groups. Therefore, it was essential to attempt to reduce unequal hierarchical relations throughout data collection; Discussions of appropriate cultural practice with my THP-B guide and maintaining a fieldwork diary allowed me to reflect on and improve my researcher practices. Helping to prepare food whilst conducting interviews aided in reducing my researcher hierarchy and facilitated an increased trust with respondents, allowing more sensitive topics to be discussed. One interview highlighted this as the respondent became more confident with in-depth responses after teaching me how to prepare a fish meal. Small gestures like sitting on the floor amongst respondents were important in generating a sense of co-created knowledge which facilitated interviewee openness.

Figure 3: A respondent prepares lunch as she is interviewed.

Permission was always acquired by respondents and their guardians regarding the taking of and presenting of pictures within this thesis.

Privacy during interviews presented a significant ethical challenge. This study's focus on shame and women's empowerment often required conversations about abuse and SRHR. Male relatives presented the biggest privacy obstacle; due to the patriarchal nature of the Bangladesh society, women felt more comfortable talking about sensitive topics when there were no males nearby. My guide advised me to conduct interviews during peak work hours when most men would be absent due to the belief that women should not speak out against their male guardians.

Most interviews were conducted in inner-courtyards of respondents' houses as they offered adequate privacy, sometimes limited as women or children were semi-present and could overhear conversations. Mothers often accompanied daughters during interviews, ensuring ethical practice with minor respondents. However, it became apparent that female relatives were involved in shaming practices, and absence of any secondary listeners during interviews was prioritised to facilitate respondent's safety and uninhibited responses. The use of bedrooms as interview spaces aided this privacy; to ensure the safeguarding of minors' doors were always open and another adult (translator) was present.

Figure 4: An older sister stops to listen to the interview process, exemplifying the difficulty in attaining privacy.

In Rajshahi, most people don't speak English and I relied on translators. Temple and Young (2004) explain that using translators within qualitative research can cause dilemmas as cultural nuance is often lost between languages. Simon (1996) states that this issue can be solved by using translators who understand the cultural context of local realities. Working with local translators whose understanding of Rajshahi village life and Bangla understandings of gender expectations resulted in accurate and culturally reflective translations. All translators were female as translator positionality can also reduce participant responses. Patriarchal nature of Bangladesh society deems it inappropriate for young women to speak out against male figures, therefore male translators would have hindered their responses.

Informed consent is fundamental to conducting ethical research (Neuman 2011) thus all respondents were required to give consent before participating; due to the predominantly minor age and prevalence of illiteracy amongst respondents, this study adopted a verbal opt-in approach to consent as advised by Morrow (2012). The topics of shame, gender roles and experiences of patriarchal oppression are culturally sensitive and potentially emotionally triggering for respondents (Bessa 2019). To mitigate this, a written description of the research

rationale and topics was provided in advance which was translated by Dr Sufi (local supervisor) into Bangla, whose fluent English acted as quality control. This ensured that the process was adequately understood and told respondents that they could skip questions, stop the interview or omit their data from the research during fieldwork and beyond.

To maintain minor respondents' agency and individualism, respondents were asked to choose their own pseudonyms to protect their identity. One respondent stated '*my story deserves a name*', which exemplifies the need for researchers to establish nuanced ways of respecting individual voices on topics in which they are often voiceless whilst maintaining anonymity (Bessa 2019). Consenting adults were given the option to anonymise their names; Certain respondents such as THP-B staff and Padma Radio presenters wanted their original names to be used and their ability to understand and consent as adults was greater than minors.

During conversations disclosures of illegal or harmful practices such as marriage before 18, physical, sexual and emotional abuse or family coercion occurred. I attended a 'cultural practices and safeguarding' workshop organised by the director of THP-B upon my arrival in Bangladesh to ensure safety and cultural sensitivity, which is a vital component of ethical research (Merriam 2010).

Ethical research practice must also be prioritised through safe data storage, especially regarding this study's sensitive content and minor age of respondents (Neuman 2011). Participant anonymity was upheld through informed consent and pseudonyms. Furthermore, interview/FGD recordings were stored upon a password protected external hard drive.

Throughout fieldwork, I supported Kotha's encouragement of women to speak out against male sexual harassment. An experience where a man followed me back to my accommodation and made me feel incredibly uncomfortable with sexual comments, highlighted the difficulty in 'speaking out' when fearing retaliation. The fact I didn't feel able to stop his behaviour is not an attempt at comparison between myself and the gendered hardships respondents face daily, which would be simplified and offensive. Instead, it was an important moment of recognising positionality as it revealed the naivety of my subconscious expectation for respondents in (more) vulnerable positions to speak out despite negative consequences.

4.9 Quality Criteria

Confirmability highlights the necessity to strive for objective research practices in order to limit biases and control over participant responses during data collection and presentation. (Bryman 2012). However, Strengers (2000) implores researchers not attempt complete objectivity during qualitative research (Whatmore 2003). Researchers examine topics they are passionate about and their subjectivity is essential as their perspectives stimulate in-depth responses (Pillow 2003). Balancing researcher objectivity and subjectivity became important when respondents asked me for advice on their oppressive situations; for example, I was invited to speak on the BTS programme about my perception of women's rights in the UK and Bangladesh. Refusing to answer questions to maintain objectivity would have been inappropriate and offensive. However, whenever I stated my opinions, I acknowledged my Western-formed understanding of empowerment.

Bryman (2012) encourages authentic research by examining fairness in data collection and representation. The topics of shame and women's choice includes multiple actors and voices, but it was beyond this research's scope to investigate the re-imagining of womanhood through actors such as fathers. Therefore, I chose to focus on young women's narrations.

The motivation to examine women's empowerment in Bangladesh was not solely to extract data for thesis completion. This would be unethical and entrench negative post-colonial relations. I hope the focus on women's narrations will contribute to the undertheorized understandings of choice expansion and empowerment within the context of early marriage resistance. To make this contribution the research needed to be reliable and authentic in the collection, analysis and representation.

4.10 Methodological Reflection: Process, Challenges and Limitations

The first two weeks of fieldwork predominantly consisted of shadowing THP-B activities, which reflected a slight misunderstanding that my research was focused on the drivers of early marriage rather than the interactions between women's imaginings of womanhood and media. This was frustrating as more time was spent observing community meetings, SRHR seminars and THP-B planning-sessions than conducting planned interviews.

Retrospectively, this period was invaluable as I gained in-depth understanding of Rajshahi's cultural construction of womanhood and SRHR education inadequacies. If I had begun interviewing respondents before learning about localised women's restrictions, insights into respondents' interaction with choice and the BTS programme would have been limited. My interview guide was adapted through these observations, resulting in in-depth narrations from respondents.

A difficulty in sampling respondents who were listeners of the BTS programme occurred as listener demographics largely consisted of rural women confined at home. However, BTS was a very popular programme, so several THP-B attendees also listened to BTS. Within a fortnight, THP-B volunteers introduced me to two women in Paba who were active BTS listeners, these respondents informed us of other listeners. Thus more BTS respondents were attained through localised snowball sampling. The challenge of reaching BTS-listener respondents was exacerbated by the absence of the BTS staff attending a British Council Conference in India. Upon their return in the 3rd week, a positive and incredibly insightful relationship with the BTS staff began. Due to the difficulty in attaining BTS-listener respondents, more research was conducted with Kotha (BTS host) to understand motivations for BTS's broadcasting; within the empirical chapters Kotha is repeatedly referenced, thus the specific dates/place of interview interactions with her are not repeatedly listed.

Overall, less BTS listeners, only 9/21, were interviewed then initially hoped. To mitigate this, interview length was increased to facilitate in-depth understanding (Cresswell 2007). The limitation of this restricted sampling pool of BTS-listeners was mitigated for by conducting interviews with non-BTS respondents. This was useful as they frequently knew the BTS programme but chose to avoid, or were restricted from engaging thus provided significant observations towards the restrictions surrounding alternative narratives of womanhood.

4.11 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented the main and sub research questions of this study which have been designed in order to examine the research gaps presented in the preceding chapters. The research location of rural Bangladesh has been explained and justified in according to the unit and sample of analysis. The initial participant observation engagements shaped the question-

guide for interview engagements, which subsequently formed the topic-focus and design for the following focus group discussions. Due to the ethically challenging nature of working with minor and vulnerable participants, this chapter has presented in-depth the ethical implications and fieldwork practices to ensure ethical research practices have been followed. The difficulty in sampling BTS-listeners as research participants has been presented. The subsequent increased data collection with the BTS providers through interviews has been explained in this chapter and justifies the high presence of BTS provider data presented within the next chapters. The following chapters present the empirical findings gathered through the research methods presented here.

5 Shame, Inadequate SRHR and the Limitation of Choice through Constructs of Womanhood

5.1 Introductory Remarks

Initially, this research's rationale was focused on early marriage resistance as the indicator of a first-order choice. This focus resulted in frequent discussions with respondents about their experience with, and understanding of, early marriage practices. However, after initial engagements with respondents, it became apparent that early marriage is a practice which encapsulates the choice restrictions over women through dominant Bangladesh societal understandings of gender. Furthermore, as this chapter presents, early marriage practices also encompass the predominance of shame and sacrifice expected of a 'good' woman, which respondents repeatedly narrated as central to their choice restriction. Regarding this, the following chapter examines respondents' perceptions of the centralisation of shame within women's identities. It then presents observations on the inadequacies of school-based SRHR and how contrastingly interaction with Radio Padma's BTS programme provides SRHR messaging and aids women in tackling deep-rooted shame and re-imagining womanhood.

5.2 Constructions of Womanhood and the Limitation of Women's Choice and Self-worth

On my first fieldwork day a THP-B volunteer informally stated that a women's life revolves around being '*respectable*', reflecting the centralisation of the 'good women' ideal within Bangladeshi constructs of womanhood. The components of a 'good women' were investigated through an FGD with schoolgirls in Shaipara Village (FGD 1). Respondents were asked to discuss and write down key words and themes that constituted a 'Good women in society' (see figure 4 below). The word-map was quickly covered in submissive words such as 'quiet', 'obedient' and 'soft spoken' which embody the promoted ideals of *Purdah.*

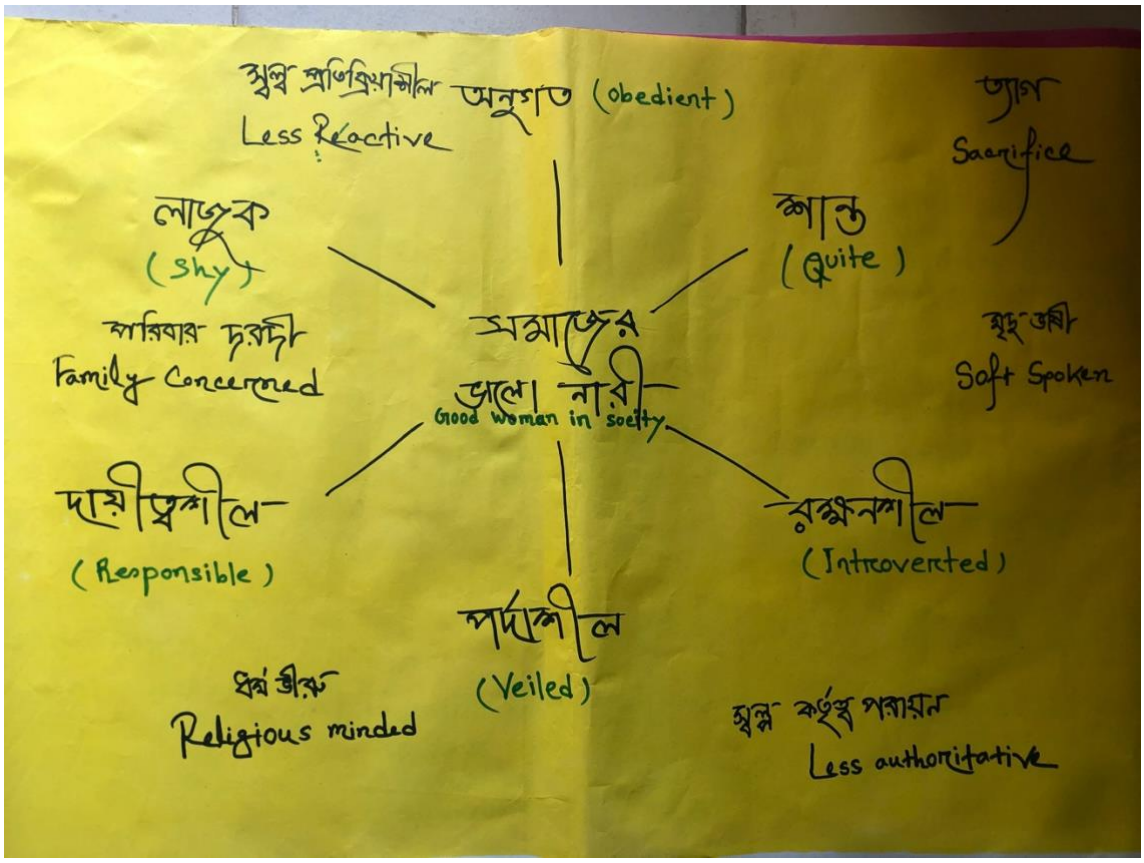

Figure 5: Word Map of a 'Good Women'.

One respondent Zakia, (16-years) explained her writing of ‘less reactive’ as such:

We can’t say no. […] If something happens, we don’t want, we must be quiet and accept.

This acceptance Zakia narrates reflects the limited choices women are able to practice due the confining expectations of a ‘good women’. This choice constriction is further revealed through another FGD respondent named Runi (17-years) who stated that ‘sacrifice’ should actually be central within their word-map which she justifies in the following statement:

Sacrifice is everything for women. We give birth, our hands for food and washing. All for someone else.

Whilst some respondents agreed with Runi's above statement and expressed belief that women ought to be sacrificial and accept restrictions against voicing opinions, others rejected the idea that women's voices and choices should be so heavily restricted. The following excerpt from an interview with a 15 year-old bride in Shaipara Village, reveals a participant's disdain at having to accept the negative aspects of womanhood such as the inability to choose her own life-decisions:

Sejuti: *As women, we have no life-thread of our own. We just here to bear and serve.*
Facilitator: *Can you explain having no life thread?*
Sejuti: *I always belong to another man. When I'm born, I belong to my father, now I belong to my husband.*

The translator explained that this metaphor of a '*life thread'* is a common Bangla expression for '*someone's life story and experiences'*. Given the use of the term '*belong*' can have positive connotations in English language contexts, I wanted to properly understand Sejuti's use of 'belong.' I asked Kotha, (BTS host), for its Bangla context. She stated that '*belong*' means possessive ownership, rather than a positive relational term. The negative consequences of '*belonging*' to men on women's capacity for choice were furthered in Sejuti's subsequent statement that:

Sejuti: *I agreed to marry my husband if he'd let me keep attending school, but now we are married he says I must stop, instead I must accomplish chores.*

This statement reveals how marriage encapsulates the societal norm of control over women, as through marriage Sejuti's life-thread and choices are transferred from her father to her husband. Her desire to be educated is restricted by her husband, constraining her from making her own second or first-order choices. Sejuti never mentioned being consulted about her desires, instead stating that her husband must be respected as '*that is my duty'*. In order to understand how women perceived these cultural constraints, I asked Sejuti how this '*belonging'* made her feel. She responded, '*I feel very sad, I enjoyed my schooling but that is gone now*'. The notion of women belonging to men was paralleled by a THP-B volunteer (Nanti) statement that 'Changing *the belief that women belong to men is the hardest. Even with laws, the respect for women doesn't come and control continues'*. This reflects Cornwall's (2016) findings that pathways to empowerment cannot solely rely on improving women's

rights policy but must tackle the root cause of inequality which are the oppressive expectations of womanhood.

After Runi's comments on sacrifice a discussion occurred amongst the respondents. The translator explained that Runi's comments were disrespectful to Amil, whose mother had taught her that a '*women's duty is to serve'* and that neglecting to do so is shameful. This evidences how gendered expectations become internalised so that individuals perceive themselves as male's objects which parallels Batliwala's (2013) findings that women internalise the limitations set upon their gender, and then preach them to others. Amli's rejection of the negative consequences of women's sacrifice indicated a need for my research to enquire about how other participants internalise values of a '*good women*' which men deem appropriate, and how these might limit a woman's choice capacity and therefore ability to feel empowered.

5.3 Shame and the Limitation of Choice

Prior to fieldwork, the notion of shame had been an important but not central theme within this study's conceptualising of women's choice capacity. However, during the first half-dozen interviews, the theme of shame was predominant in respondents' narrations of restriction. Therefore, this study increased the theoretical and observational focus on shaming practices and community-radio counter-narratives to those, which are presented in the following extracts.

The restrictive consequences that shame has on choice was further exemplified through an informal conversation with a male villager in Paba Village, Mohonpur. Based upon the earlier interviews regarding shame, my translator asked him what his thoughts on shame were and if shame could affect men. His response was:

Male Villager: *[Laughing] Shame is women's game! Men cannot bring shame but instead feel it on behalf of their women.*
Facilitator: *What do you mean by on behalf?*
Male Villager: *Men can't make shame. I feel ashamed when our daughters bring dishonour upon us, but I do not make the dishonour.*

This excerpt highlights how gendered the notion of shame is perceived to be; men cannot produce it, instead it is women who are seen as causing shame when they act in ways that are deemed inappropriate. In contrast, shame constitutes a persistent threat for women throughout their daily lives, respondents narrated that even conversing with an unrelated male can cause shame and thereby bring dishonour upon them and their families.

This interaction demonstrated how shame can control women's behaviour which demonstrates Camilla (2016) findings that shame is used as a tool by families to protect family honour . The notion of family honour was mentioned by the majority of participants during the fieldwork, revealing that a family's reputation was a priority. The male villager's comments exemplified the use of shame to control and when he stated that '*honour is the most important in life*,' and that his daughters knew that dishonour meant '*strict discipline*'. The translator told me that the term he used for discipline meant physical discipline.

The centralisation of marriage within Bangla society was an important theme in highlighting the ability for family members (both male and female) to coercive women into certain practices through shaming them. In several different interviews, respondents would utilise the example of pressure to get married before the legal age of 18. The following excerpt illuminates participant's' perceived link between marriage and coercive shaming:

Khanm (16 years, married woman, Paba Village): *I did not want to get married when I was 15. Actually, my father wanted me to carry on my school. But my aunty told him that if I wasn't married soon, I would be corrupted by village men, and that I would bring him dishonour.*
Facilitator: W*hat did she mean by corrupted?*
Khanm: *My aunty said that I would have immoral relations and that if I got old other men would think I had been bad and not propose. […] She told my father that my uniform was immodest, and that talking to schoolboys was inviting problems for my father's honour.*

Within this interaction, the pressure for early marriage stems from Khanm's fear of bringing dishonour to her father, thus the whole family. Khanm explained that her family '*mocked me'* in order to coerce her into stopping education and thus limiting the '*shame I can bring*'. This cycle of shame and coercion, illustrated by Khanm, parallels White's (2010) findings that shame is taught, internalised and then deployed as a method of control, either through physical threats or coercion through slander and gossip.

A similar cycle of shame and limitation of choices through coercive slander was reiterated by another unmarried participant:

Edrita (21-years, Paba): *The neighbour women mock me for being 21 and not married. They spread horrible rumours that I'm barren or undeserving of proposals because I'm dishonouring* [referencing her continued education]. […] *To them, I'm not a good woman yet.*

The pairing up of mockery with malicious gossip is exemplified here as a powerful incentive for women to agree to choices made for them by their family, sacrificing their own desires to continue education or resist an early marriage. This also highlights the active role of women within the coercive practices against other, younger women. Edrita's statement that '*I am not a good woman yet'* indicates that her family's perceptions of womanhood is intrinsically related to her status as a wife, for her to become a good women she must thus neglect her own desires to '*become an engineer',* and marry. This reflects how cultural constructs of womanhood, enforced through family, can restrict a woman's opportunities to fulfil her own desire.

5.4 Women's Limited Access to SRHR Information:

Throughout fieldwork, participants repeatedly commented that their limited access to media forms, such as television, disenabled their access to information and therefore choices. Thus, it was important to examine this limited media access. Many respondents regarded televisions as '*luxury items*' (Ayesha, FGD, 14-years); Only 4/21 interviewees had television access. Ayesha explained that women's policy is promoted on news channels, but she could not access due to her family's inability to afford a television.

Economic restrictions regarding women's non-formal SRHR education access evidences the necessity for media forms which transcend both social and economic obstacles. Radio Padma's chairperson promotes radio as this medium as radio sets are '*considerably cheaper and accessible'*. This statement was corroborated as the majority of interviewees (18/21) had access to physical radios or radio-compatible mobiles. Kotha explained 'br*oadcasting BTS through Facebook, mobile FM and satellite FM means we reach more rural women that must be home'*. For example, An interviewee (Ratna, 16-years, Kazimwu Village) explained she was able to

access Radio Padma on her father's phone which was her main way of receiving media information as they couldn't afford a television. This anecdote and Kotha's above statement illustrate Jallov's (2012) findings that radio can often transcend economic boundaries to media access, especially for impoverished rural areas.

5.5 Break The Silence: 'Together we learn, together we listen'.

Radio Padma broadcasts one women-focused show named 'Break The Silence' (BTS). The programme is hosted and created by Kotha, a 24-year-old masters student studying law at Rajshahi University in Rajshahi City, and co-produced by the station manager Sahana. The rest of this chapter focuses on these women's motivations behind the content of BTS, and what information and interaction they seek to provide to their listeners. The motivations for Kotha and Sahana to broadcast the BTS programme is examined in order to contextualise how women taking part in this study perceived their interactions with the BTS programme.

Figure 6: Radio Padma Studio: BTS International Women's Day Broadcast

5.5.1 Knowledge and Choice: 'School taught me my rights, radio helped me believe in them' (Ratna).

During observations of the BTS broadcasts Kotha often repeated the phrase *'Silence is violence'*. She explained this phrase is central to the BTS motivation to advocate against sexual abuse as she wants to teach women that men's expectation of women's silence is in fact a '*violent oppression of their rights*'. As narrated by respondents, sexual violence is extremely prevalent within Bangladesh society. During interviews, young women related the ways in which women were framed by society as both the victims and the instigators of their assaults. A combination of trauma and blame for young women was reiterated by Kotha who during a BTS studio broadcast explained that women can not talk about their assaults because '*they will face more blame than support'.* Twice she explained that she believes silence results in young women internalising the shame that men put onto them:

Kotha: *Men touch our bodies inappropriately, but we [women] cannot speak out because men will say it is our fault. So, we stay silent and nobody helps us. That dirty feeling never goes away. It tells you that you're ruined and you believe it.*

Kotha's narrated feelings of shame, ruin and trauma caused by sexual assaults were paralleled by multiple respondents; a dominant theme within their narration of women's daily experiences was their expected silence regarding sexual assault. On multiple occasions respondents stated that being 'pure' was a fundamental to being 'good women' and not bringing dishonour. One respondent highlighted the consequence of this expected silence in relation to processing sexual assault and subsequent feelings of shame:

Shohagi (15-years, schoolgirl, Kazimwu Village): *I'm made to feel so dirty… an older boy hurt me on the way from school. But I'm too scared to tell my father. […] My brother found out and he called me Apabitra [Unclean], he said I should've been home but now I bring dishonour. So, I must stay silent.*

Shohagi's reference to cleanliness reflects the discomfort and shame that sexual assaults can cause, resulting in victims feeling 'dirty'. Importantly, as respondents have narrated earlier, purity is taught to women as one of their most important attributes. Thus, for Shohagi to feel dirty, but to have no one to process those feelings with, risks her chastising herself for not

fulfilling ideal women expectations. Shohagi exemplified this as she felt '*ashamed*' of herself. This reflects Goel's (2005) findings that women who face assault will criticise themselves for no longer being pure for their current or future husbands, thus not fulfilling their desires.

This honour-driven preservation of silence enforced by men blaming women for the abuse they experience explicitly restricts women's choices. Illustrative of this restriction is the response of Shohagi when she was asked if she could receive emotional or health-based support to deal with the abuse she experienced: '*from who? Who can I speak to… even so who will pay*?'. Her statement reflects that not only does experiencing sexual assault take away women's choice to consent and safety, it also results in the inability for women to choose to receive sexual health support due to the immense stigma they would often face. Economic obstecles to receiving support are also evidenced, as Shohagi explained she could not pay for health help, nor could she ask her father for money due to fear of shame.

Respondents also expressed shame regarding their perceived responsibility for causing their abuse, which is reflected in Kotha's earlier statement that '*you believe it*' regarding feelings of post-sexual assault guilt. The remarks made by Shabana (15-years, Shaipara) are reflective of this belief that victims play a role of responsibility in their own abuse; Responding to a question into women's responsibility in sexual assaults, Shabana observed that '*a girl alone disobeys her father, when she's hurt she can't cry… women know not to be alone'*. This statement is suggestive of an internalised belief that women are responsible for their abuse.

These internalised acceptances of injustices against women are dangerous and difficult to un-learn, yet they drive Kotha's reasons for Broadcasting the BTS programme; she stated '*the real reason for BTS'* broadcasting was to:

Start conversations about women's abuses and remind women that we worth more, we have rights and should not accept it. We should not stay silent.

The use of word '*start*' was interesting as it reiterated the general lack of conversations about assault and shame. Respondents confirmed Kotha's remarks, as many stated that women's violence and related issues were incredibly taboo and not socially acceptable to talk about. This excerpt depicts Kotha's opinions regarding the need for women's rights conversations:

Rose: S*tart indicates that this conversation is not being had, why is this*?
Kotha: *We do not want girls to stay silent any longer. They [men] teach us to not talk about our troubles saying it is not honouring to speak about men in such ways. This is why our slogan is 'together we learn, together we listen'. Many girls don't have anyone to talk to about their problems of abuse. Our big priority is to be listeners.*

This interview demonstrated that starting discussions over women's rights and sexual assault within a safe and non-judgemental space was Kotha's main goal for BTS. Kotha explained that women's silence is a significant '*tool of contro*l' explaining that '*men justify abuse. […], they make women silent and without victim's reporting incidents, assaults can continue*'.

As a consequence of this expected silence, the programme's explicit mentioning of sexual violence, such as groping ('*unwanted touching'*) and rape is rare within Bangladesh. A BTS-listener evidenced this rarity as she explained school SRHR inadequacies:

Ratna (15-years, Paba, Interview): *School only tells that women's have children and we must be pure for our husbands* [abstinence]. *They never taught about unwanted touching or [that] women can say no to relations* [sex].

This statement reflects the limited information women receive at school-based SRHR and how it contributes to oppressive dominant constructs of womanhood as women's sexual health is focused upon attaining purity for their husbands. This limitation demonstrates Sciortino's (2020) findings that regardless of Bangladesh's school curriculum requiring consent and women's rights promotion, many young women are being restricted from accessing that information adequately within formal SRHR education. Contrastingly, Ratna spoke of the positives of BTS's SRHR messaging and space for taboo discussions:

Ratna: B*TS tells us real women's things in an honest way. […] I have learnt that men cannot force themselves on women and if they do, I now know who to get help from*.

The lessons Ratna narrates reflect important counter-narratives to womanhood, as they promote consent and women's rightful access to support. The word '*honest'* reflects the positive influence the non-shameful and honest conversations Kotha facilitates for her listeners and

seemingly suggests she is reaching her goal of breaking the silence over women's in-depth SRHR.

5.6 'Women as Women's Worst Enemy'

The following section presents the recurring theme of women as actors within other women's suppression and shaming. The reality that shame for women is also created and perpetuated by women, which interviewees highlighted, was also evidenced by Kotha as she spoke of '*women as women's worst enemy*'. Kotha explained that a key element of BTS is '*to stop women shaming other women'*. The following excerpt examines why she thought educating women on their potential to be complicit in shaming practices is important:

Kotha: *Women learn from men to slander another girl because she isn't 'good' or pure. […] They control their daughters-in-law through vicious slander.*
Rose*: How does BTS change women's mindsets about women?*
Kotha*: It's very difficult, the belief that our behaviour is shameful is deep in women's knowing. […] Women must feel respect for themselves and see themselves in a new way before helping other women…this is BTS's goal.*

The notion that women *'must see themselves in a new way'* reflects Kotha's desire for the BTS programme to be a medium which helps facilitate women's rejection of oppressive narrations of womanhood, which pit women against each other through encouraging slander. Instead, Kotha explains that BTS promotes women's self-worth through the right to '*to reject a proposal'* or '*report inappropriate touching'* in order to inspire women to believe it themselves, and not shame others when they practice those rights.

The attempt of BTS to aid its listeners in re-imagining womanhood through this self-worth messaging was positively discussed by a BTS-listener named Reya (15-years) during an FGD with eight other young women at Paba Village. Reya admitted that two years ago she'd slandered her sister for reporting that '*a boy had forced himself on her'*. Reya, stated that listening to the BTS programme regularly for a year and a half had shown her that the '*dishonour shouldn't be hers'* (the sister) but instead the blame should fall on the perpetrator. She further explained listening to explanations of the illegality of non-consensual '*relations*'

had helped her see her sister as a '*victim*' rather than the '*tempter*'. Reya stated that this change in perception of shame was a 'good lesson', reflecting the positive potential of community-radio broadcasting. Whilst Reya was the only participant to explicitly speak about the influence of BTS on reducing her shaming of other women, the broader narrative of BTS anti-shaming messages upon increasing women's perceptions of what womanhood can be was reflected by other respondents throughout the research.

5.7 Concluding Remarks

This first empirical chapter's goal was to demonstrate that the dominant Bangla construct of womanhood is restrictive of women's choices and self-worth due to the promotion of women as limited to domestic-based roles and the servitude of men. Respondents have illustrated that a key theme within their understandings and experiences of womanhood is shame, which restricts their choices through creating obstecles to accessing SRHR n or sexual assault support. The internalised belief that women are subordinate to men has been presented by evidencing that young women believe they are the victims, yet are to blame for assaults. The need for a platform which facilitates consciousness-raising has been evidenced through this chapter which presented a recurring theme of 'women as women's worst enemy. These insights contribute to the examining of the sub-research questions of how do young women define and experience the expectations of womanhood, revealing a repeated theme that they acknowledge the first and second-order choice restrictions inherent within womanhood. Furthermore, this chapter aimed to present the BTS programme and their motivations for providing in-depth and safe access discussions regarding young women's SRHR.

This chapter begins to examine the sub-question regarding BTS's interactions with womanhood, as evidenced by their championing of anti-shaming messages for victims of sexual assault. The following empirical chapter will examine further how respondents perceived the influence of BTS's SRHR messaging upon their self-worth and ability to practice choices.

6 SRHR Education Access and Consciousness-raising: Young Women's Interactions with BTS and Choice

This chapter's first half presents data from interviews and FGD's to firstly examine how community-radio serves as an alternative information resources for women, and secondly, how women perceive the influence of their interaction with the radio upon their ability to make choices and their self-perceptions. Further conversations with Kotha, the BTS host, provided insights into how the BTS programme seeks to facilitate women's access to choices through practicalities such as broadcasting times and provision of right's-based information. Data generated through conversations with Kotha triangulates listeners' opinions, hence her frequent mention within the following chapter.

This chapter's second half examines how young women perceive the effect that interactions between BTS, shame and self-worth have on their ability to make choices within daily life. The positive aspects of increased self-worth and SRHR knowledge are examined. However, data regarding the relationship between risk and reward of young women learning their rights in systemically patriarchal surroundings are also examined. An vignette of an ethnographic engagement with a participant will be used to illuminate women's perceptions upon early marriage, SRHR and community-radio. This vignette offers a springboard for the subsequent discussion of data as to why participants seek SRHR and the consequences women may face when exercising the choice to listen to the radio.

6.1 Radio Accessibility: Access to Resources and Increased Choice Capacity

The following sections will firstly present data upon the motivations of the BTS team for broadcasting a women's-focused radio programme, which contributes to the examination of this study's first sub-question: 'What is the motivation for, and content of, Radio Padma's women-focused community-radio broadcasting?'.

6.1.1 Radio Access

During an interview at the first BTS studio visit, Sahana (radio station manager) explained that BTS provides '*information for marginalised women who need supportive information'*. Sahana promoted community-radio's usefulness in reaching marginalised women, stating that '*accessibility makes radio so powerful'* and thus key to '*successfully breaking the silence'* which she explains here:

Rose: *Why do you choose the radio to help women?*
Sahana: *Village girls have little access to our messages [*SRHR-positive*]. But, radio can reach them.*
Rose: *How does radio reach them?*
Sahana: *Girls have no control over television, but radio is sneaky, fathers think it's just music. […] They're wrong. It's education, it's learning rights*, *it's emotional support. It is more 'danger' to men they know.*

Here, Sanaha highlights the limited capacity young women have to access information especially in rural areas. In accordance to Kabeer's (2010) empowerment as choice theory, this study regards media access as a second-order choice. Sahana's statement demonstrates that women are restricted from making second-order choices, such as choosing what to watch and accessing pro-women's messaging. This restriction illustrates the difficulty for women to access SRHR information provided informally, i.e. through television. Community-radio transcends restrictions such as father's disapproving of content, by being '*sneak*y'. This was highlighted during an FGD with schoolgirls in Shaipara Village. A participant named Tani (16-years) stated that *'my father doesn't pay attention when I listen to radio…he believes it's just music*'. Tani listened to public radio, not BTS. However, her statement reflected Sahana's statement that '*fathers think it is just music',* when in reality women are listening to debates and (other) educational content. Accessing television of SRHR seminars was impossible for Tani, as it would cause '*many public questions'* and cause her father's '*anger as girls can't be learning about sexual things'*. In contrast, radio interaction was repeatedly described by participants as more accessible form of media. Hence Sahana's earlier comments on BTS being a '*danger*' to men, in that it seeks to teach women what resources are available regarding SRHR which men constrict access to. Thus, the BTS programme seeks to improve women's capacity to make choices regarding their sexual health.

Tani's narration of radio's positive privacy was repeated by Mohinee (15-years, Shaipara). According to Mohinee, her father forbids her from watching television as it '*makes her lazy'*. However, he allows listening to the radio on his mobile phone using earphones; allowing her to complete chores whilst learning about SRHR. Mohinee explained that her father was a farm labourer who listened to Radio Padma's programmes offering financial and agricultural advice. According to Mohinee, it was programmes such as these that gave Radio Padma a positive local reputation. Community trust in Radio Padma was also mentioned by Harin (THP-B volunteer, Shaipara) who stated that given presenter*s* come from Rajshahi's upazillas, they are seen as providing '*relevant and trustworthy information'*. This positive perception of Radio Padma formed an important element for enabling access to the BTS programme. Mohinee's remarks are once again illustrative in this regard:

Mohinee: *My Baba [*Father*] does not like programs like Break The Silence, they are inappropriate for me. […] But he lets me listen to Radio Padma on his phone.*
Facilitator: *Why does he allow you to do that*?
Mohinee: *He trusts them, thinking it's news or local music. He doesn't know that it's about my rights or girl matters.*

This interaction highlights how the positive reputation is an important feature of community-radio's ability to provide SRHR education for young women as it is perceived by participants as playing a central role in their ability to access the BTS programme.

The broadcasting of BTS within a community-radio station enables young women to make second-order choices to listen to their programme in safety. BTS's design facilitates second-order choice for respondents such as Mohinee in that it provides SRHR information which women can choose to access safely. The positive aspect of being able to practice second-order choices to listen was more explicitly discussed by a unknow participant who phoned into a BTS broadcast at the studio live (21/02/2020). Through Kotha I was able to ask how the ability to listen to a programme like BTS made her feel, to which she replied:

Un-named female (14-years): *Very happy, ma'am. I can't everyday hear or speak about these things safely. But I choose to listen now and I am learning things, it's making me happy*.

This comment suggests that listeners are happy that BTS provides an alternative and safe space to discuss issues which women are usually restricted from. The comment was explained by Kotha as '*very common from my listeners,*' suggesting a broadly shared consensus amongst listeners which was generally illustrated through interactions with respondents. Importantly, feelings of happiness were frequently stated by respondents, highlighting the positive impact community-radio broadcasting can provide upon young women lives.

6.1.2 Break The Silence: Privacy and Participatory Design

The next section presents data on how BTS's design allows listeners to practice second-order choices through allowing them to deciding content coverage. Sahana (BTS station manager) explained that creativity is central to community-radio broadcasting, including creative solutions to male control over media access. Sahana explained that this control, BTS is broadcast on Tuesdays at 3pm and repeat session recordings on Thursdays at 8pm. This mid-afternoon timeslot was chosen to exploit rare moments of female privacy as the majority of men working, giving women the freedom to listen without male interference. Sahana stated:

> *We use gendered roles to our advantage. The men leave for the fields. Then, as women cook it's quiet time to listen to BTS.*

This quote illustrates that BTS programme positively uses the absence of men to facilitate women's ability to listen, which may not be deemed appropriate by present male family members. BTS's carefully crafted timeslot reflects Myers (2011) findings that community-radios is successful in reaching domestically-confined women through creative methods of overcoming restricted media access.

Sahana stated that allowing listeners to decide what topics should be discussed on the BTS programme is a significant way in which women can contribute, resulting in listeners feeling valued:

Sahana: *There aren't many opportunities for women to speak [regarding decisions]. Our show gives them that chance.*

This sense of giving women respect through facilitating their choice of conversation content was a recurring theme in interviews about why young women enjoyed listening to BTS rather than government-radio programmes. Sejuti, a schoolgirl from Shaipara, named active participation as why she chose to listen to BTS, stating:

Sejuti (15-years): *Our ideas aren't wanted, But the programme (BTS) asks for my thoughts for topics to talk about. […] If I suggest something they listen.*
Facilitator: *How does that make you feel*?
Sejuti: *It makes me with pride. […] They want to hear me, it's a good feeling.*

This interaction between expressing an opinion and it being listened to may seem a relatively small choice, but it is significant. The feeling of '*pride*' reflects a sense of respect that occurs when someone's opinion is listened to. Rather than being told to be quiet, which Sejuti stated '*happen many times when I ask* things', her opinions were validated by the BTS team by listening and implementing it. As previously presented, women's capacity to state opinions, which lead to choices are restricted by expectations of quietness. BTS specifically counters this silence and increases listener's opportunities to contribute and be respected.

6.2 Radio and Choice: Kabita and Resisting Early Marriage

A significant component of this research's rationale was to avoid a western narration of Bangla women's experiences, as inspired by Mohanty's (2003) criticising of the 'othering' of women. To honour the agency of women, this study prioritised their voices and opinions through data collection which is reflected in the following excerpt presenting an in-depth interview with Kabita, a 15 year-old schoolgirl in Shaipara. This following section presents Kabita's opinions on how listening to BTS aided her in making a first-order choice of early marriage resistance.

During a THP-B facilitated school visit in which young women were narrating their experiences with shame and choice restriction, Kabita stood up and explained with a confident voice her relationship with shame and its effect on her capacity to make her own choices:

Kabita: *Parents are afraid of their daughters. We can bring shame, I will bring them dishonour if I disobey them, so we have to be good.*

Based upon her confident response, I asked Kabita to participate in an interview to understand more in depth how this need to be good had affected her life choices. She surprised me by stating:

Kabita: *I was to be married, but I'm not married. Instead I'm here at school. [...] My father wanted me to marry, but my cousin told me that I should not as she married young and suffered. […] She told me about BTS and helped me to listen. […] School told us child marriage was wrong but not how to resist. BTS explained the rules helping us and the mind and physical problems marriage causes which I and my father didn't know.*

Kabita's statement reflects the minimal women's rights education received at school. A SRHR facilitator (Kazimwu, informal-conversation) revealed that early marriage illegality is '*an official requirement for school Life Skills curriculum'* but *'it's never properly taught'*. Contrastingly, Kabita mentioned how BTS provides her with adequate information about the physical dangers of young childbirth, but also the negative psychological effects that early marriage can have:

Facilitator: *What did BTS teach you about early marriage dangers*?
Kabita: *They warned that many girls are abused by their husbands. […] Also, that if a man wants sex, they think that wives must not say no, she please him.[…] Before, I agreed to marry to become a woman. But listening to girls talk about problems with marriage made me want to avoid it.*

This extract reveals the pressure for women to practice marriage and childbirth in order to become '*a woman',* reiterating the restrictions on women's choices through the cultural constructs of womanhood. Also, Kabita reveals how limited information is on the hardships of these processes for adolescents. In contrast, the honest information BTS provides through narrating women's lived experiences of these issues is reflected here as educational to Kabita.

Figure 7: Kabita asked to show me her father's phone, through which she listened to BTS.

I commented on Kabita's confident deceptions of telling her father her desires. She revealed that her confidence had grown due to participating with BTS, stating:

Women voices should be heard. […] BTS helped me know this. […] *Listening to sister [Kotha] speak about telling her father she must be allowed to study made me think bravely*.

The self-confidence Kabita displays suggests that community-radio can be an important tool for women to re-imagine womanhood as not submissive, but deserving of voices and choices. Furthermore, Kabita's mentioning of Kotha as a source of inspiration reflects Nirmala's (2015) findings that community-radio can facilitate self-worth through positive female role models.

However, it was important to ask Kabita what the consequences of making those choices were and her confidence translated into practical choices and lived experiences. In the in-depth interview with more privacy Kabita explained the dangerous reality of exercising her voice and defying her father's wishes:

Facilitator: *How did your father react to your wish not marry?*

Kabita: *When I told my father that I didn't want to marry I whispered it. I was scared. He was angry that I had dishonoured him.[…] My aunties scolded me, they were angry that I would disobey him.[…] Now I'm bold, but you cannot see my bruises. I was very scared.*

The narrative of anger and fear in Kabita's statement over bruises illustrates the difficulty for women to express their desires which defy elder males. This description of '*dishonoured'* and '*disgrace'* reflects shaming tactics, combined with physical violence, to dissuade Kabita. By instilling fear through the notion that her expressing of opinions automatically results in disrespect, it is likely that her family hoped she would comply. This was not an isolated incident; other respondents spoke of similar feelings of fear when attempting to voice opinions.

When asked if she felt comfortable explaining why she received bruises, Kabita stated:

My uncle hit me. Saying I was disrespecting my father. He didn't like that I wanted education, saying it's not useful for women. […]On advice from the BTS, I asked my school ma'am [teacher] to help me when my uncle hurt me.[…] She helped explain policy to him.

The physical and emotional aggression against Kabita reflects a sombre reality that increasing an individual's confidence to make decisions can create a dangerous situation. Importantly, Kabita spoke about enlisting the help of a schoolteacher, as advised by BTS. Bangla policy against child abuse is extensive, yet conversations with Mizan (THP-B guide), revealed the difficulty in enforcement due to '*strong local beliefs that discipline is the right of a man*'. Kotha explained that BTS encourages listeners to report issues such as early marriage or violence to schoolteachers, whom are trained to be community liaisons. She stated that '*support is there, but girls don't know them'* so the programme teaches girls who they can speak to. Kabita's story exemplifies how access to resources, such information (BTS) and confidence (self-worth), can facilitate second-order choices such as speaking to her teacher, which resulted in the facilitation of a first-order choice, that is, of resisting her early marriage.

6.3 Risk and Responsibility Regarding Choice

The initial physical violence and deployment of shame to stop Kabita from voicing and enacting her choices is an uncomfortable yet important reality. Sanawar et al's (2019) findings

that resistance against systemic patriarchal structures can have positive outcomes, but also increases physical and emotional risk of the individual has been reflected by this study. For example, a relationship of risk and reward was highlighted through an informal conversation with my THP-B guide who explained running SRHR seminars for women was a '*very good educational activity*' but that '*many girls go home without safety for practice'*, indicating that women did not live in an enabling environment. This notion of well-provided SRHR without potential to practice was a recurring theme in participants' accounts concerning SRHR education. The following section aims to highlight the risks women face along their pathway to empowerment by presenting the difficulties that participants faced when attempting to implement knowledge gained through BTS programme interaction, and how the BTS hosts perceive their role in mitigating that risk.

6.3.1 Choice in hostile environments: *The choice is still not mine* (Amna).

The – at times, aggressive -- resistance against respondents exercising choice was paralleled by feelings of frustration. This theme of frustration was demonstrated by women who felt that community-radio had highlighted their oppression but could not facilitate real life changes. This was highlighted during an FGD with six schoolgirls in Shaipara Village in which only one of the respondents (Ratna) was a BTS listener. Amna (16) discussed, unprompted, the '*frustrating'* effects of BTS's SRHR messaging during her explanation of why she chose to not listen to BTS:

Facilitator: *You called BTS frustrating. Why?*
Amna: *It makes me angry, saying that girls should speak out. We want to but how can I at? If I want to eat then I can't do that. If I argue against my father I'll get beaten.*

Amna demonstrates the difficulty in exercising the choices that BTS encourages. The reality of violence is an important obstacle that merely inspiring girls to speak out does not overcome. Amna '*wants to'* speak out, yet realises the potential severity of the consequences. This '*frustration'* reoccurred throughout participants accounts, and echoes Sholkamy's (2010) study into the risks of individual empowerment schemes for women in unsupportive environments. This frustration was also evidenced by Amna and other FGD respondents, who describe practising choice BTS inspired choices with words such as '*fear*' and '*trouble*'.

6.3.2 BTS and Limitation Awareness

The interaction with Amna highlighted the need to investigate how BTS providers acknowledge and address the issue of young women's unsafe environments. Regarding this Kotha explained that this was the '*hardest aspect of my job'*. She expanded upon this:

Kotha: *We cannot make girls* safe. *We teach policy and give useful words to speak to their family. But we know the problem is too big.*

Kotha's recognition that they cannot ensure the safety of listeners is important, it is not the radio's promise to protect young women, but instead it seeks to help process feelings of shame and abuse and teach girls methods and resources to reduce further oppression. However, the danger for listeners is very real and often serious which highlights a limitation to grassroots empowerment programs which are not embedded within an enabling social environment.

6.3.3 Expanding Ambitions through Education: Self-worth and Frustration

Positive outcomes from BTS promotion of female ambition and positive role models, such as Kotha, have been previously presented by Kabita. However, the theme of frustration again emerged when participants discussed the disparity between increased ambition on the one hand, and the lack of opportunities to realise ambitions on the other hand. The negative aspect of increasing young women's desires for education, employment or respect, in an environment when they cannot fulfil them was highlighted by Fateha, an engaged 16-year-old in Mohobbatpur Village. Fateha stated that after listening to BTS her dream was to be '*a journalist like Kotha*'. When asked if she thought that dream was possible, she shook her head and told me of her father's arranged marriage for her. Subsequently, Fateha described her relationship with BTS as '*difficult*' because she loved the '*sisters that I can share with'*. However, her believed inability to fulfil the choice that BTS inspired meant listening was '*upsetting'*. This complicated BTS interaction is illustrated by Fateha's following statement:

Radio has made my mind free, but my body isn't free. In dreams the choices are mine, but in real they are in the hands of my father, and soon will belong to my husband.

Fateha's use of 'belong' here strongly demonstrates that '*women have no thre*ad,' a topic that was discussed in section 5.2, and reiterates that women's physical bodies, but also their ambitions belong to men. The indication that BTS has helped '*free'* her mind echoes Kotha's desire to '*free girls from shame and abuse'*. However, Fateha's speaks of desired, but unattainable freedom which drives her frustration. Fateha explained that listening to BTS and interacting with THP-B SRHR seminars helped her decide that she wants to go to college, but only if her new-husband will allow it. The reality that her newly increased desires remain in her husband's control indicates that community-radio SRHR messaging can be successful in increasing women's ambitions, yet are limited in the potential for actual choice.

6.4 Shared Relationship of Resistance

This next section demonstrates that shared experiences of struggle and violence experiences between female listeners and female radio providers results in an increased sense of trust which facilitates increased self-worth learning.

6.4.1 Violence and Women's Empowerment as Weakness

The resistance against women seeking to practice choice is not limited to BTS listeners. Both emotional and physical violence has been inflicted on multiple Radio Padma staff for broadcasting women's rights-focused content, including Kotha herself. The attempts to limit women's voices in the name of the 'good woman' ideal within rural life expressed by participants is paralleled by accounts of the multiple attempts to silence the BTS programme. The following excerpt presents data from an interview with the Radio Padma chairman at their studio where he described the aggressive backlash against the first BTS programme broadcast:

Chairman: *The first session in 2016 discussed how to protect girls from early marriage. We had 20 furious calls; men were so angry that Radio Padma had allowed this message. […]I was attacked outside the studio, a man said I'm 'weak for letting women speak blasphemy.*

The violence above reflects a commonly seen visceral reaction to disruptions to systemic social norms. Labelling men '*weak'* for supporting women's empowerment reflects Porter's (2013) findings that a patriarchal fear that female empowerment meaning male disempowerment often hinders empowerment initiatives from facilitating empowerment processes; if strength is

associated with control over women, then supporting platforms which increase women's capacity to practice their rights is determined as weakness.

6.4.2 Listeners and Internalised Resistance

The resistance towards SRHR education and women practicing choice narrated by respondents had predominantly been voiced by men. Therefore, I was surprised when Kotha stated that '*women are women's worst enemy*' as critiques against the BTS programme also came from female listeners:

Rose: *You said people 'viciously scolded you' for your programme, which people?*
Kotha: *The listeners! I was shocked., many girls told me you should not talk about men in such a way, it is disrespectful'. Girls would send me abusive SMS saying I was disrespecting Allah.*
Rose: *Why did they reacted this way?*
Kotha: *Girls are taught they can't say no against male family, it's bad mouthing and not submissive. Therefore, they're disrespectful. Girls believe this, so when I call some men abusive, they say I'm a bad mouther.*

The active disapproval of young women against BTS's pro women's rights content is not surprising when regarding the extent to which young women internalise the notions of womanhood. Kotha's perception that women have internalised patriarchal teachings reflects this research's previous discussions about internalising shame. This results in listeners reacting with shock towards Kotha, who counter-narratives to learned gendered ideals. This backlash to BTS from young women themselves highlights another way in which learned gendered ideals restrict choice or self-worth; It is not only male imposed restriction to SRHR education for women that hinders them as they themselves initially reject those messages.

Kotha mentioned that the reception of the BTS content by young women had '*turned from anger to understanding, to want for it'* which was demonstrated by the '*massivel growth in listeners over the past 4 years'*. The BTS program was now the 2nd most popular Radio Padma program. Sahana (station manager) stated that the amount of female complaints over the four years of BTS broadcasting had significantly decreased which is '*a celebration for what good*

information and listening can do'. Kotha explained the change from backlash to desire for more content due to '*good information'* in the following statement:

> *We didn't stop because we believe our message is important. […] Eventually we started hearing from girls starting to believe their rights. We are slowly breaking the silence.*

Kotha referred to the process of gaining listeners acceptance as slow. Not all women find BTS appropriate, reflected in some respondents' decisions to not listen despite having access. However, the listeners were reportedly slowly showing increased belief in their rights. The reality of slow change in women's mindset reflects the difficulty in facilitating the unlearning of shame and imagining women differently, but reflects the process of critical consciousness-raising. Cornwall's (2016) study on pathways to empowerment frames this backlash from women as a natural part of consciousness-raising. Internalised notions of 'good women' as submissive and compliant cannot be quickly eradicated (Ibid), which is exemplified through Kotha's explanation that slowly listeners are realising that they deserve rights and the ability to say no without being condemned as '*shameful'* or '*bad mout*hers'.

6.4.3 Strength in Shared Resistance

Physical violence was a concern of my THP-B guide, who felt uneasy letting me attend the Radio Padma studio, as the '*staff are targets'*. Enquiring why Kotha personally risks her safety to provide empowerment messages to her listeners highlighted the consistent threatening behaviour Kotha receives from '*angry men'* for her '*misleading of women'*. Kotha presented these threats as motivation to continue as '*it shows me that there is so much need for brave women's voices'*. She stated that her listeners were facing similar situations of silencing daily, so the threats against her increased the positive shared bond between listener and broadcaster:

Kotha: *My girls know that men verbally abuse me for talking about rights. This makes us closer because we struggle together.*

As Kotha described this notion of togetherness, she became very passionate, standing up from her seat. She explained that '*it's my goal, to show they're not alone.'* which highlights how the relationship between radio-host and listener positively creates a collective identity through

shared struggles. The positive impact of Kotha's shared struggles was reiterated by Ratna (15-years) who explains why she trusts Kotha's SRHR messaging in the following*:*

Kotha grew up with village ways against women. She knows our struggles and is trying to protect us. […] *She has faced harm but still wants our rights*, *so we trust her.*

Shared experiences between listener are evidenced here as a foundation for genuine learning through the facilitation of Ratna's '*trust*'. Ratna's statement parallels the trust that several respondents narrated when describing their BTS programme participation and reiterates the positive impact that role models, such as Kotha, have upon women's consciousness-raising processes. This positive trust demonstrates Eyben's (2011) finings that trust and respect between a respondent and provider of women's empowerment messaging facilitates increased acceptance of those messages.

6.4.4 Male Engagement with Women's Empowerment

Kotha stated that the '*overwhelming majority'* of BTS listeners are female. She did not have access to specific figures, but estimated that only 1% of listeners were male which is understandable regarding the women-focused content and '*the misleading and taboo nature of the content from boy's views*.' (Kotha). Yet, male disengagement is an important observation regarding BTS's limited effectiveness at facilitating Cornwall's second lever of empowerment; facilitating wider social norm transformation.

The difficulty of male engagement was exacerbated when during the first in-studio observation of BTS the discussion focused on rape. Minutes into the discussion, my male THP facilitator left stating '*You're talking about women's problems, those issues do not concern me so why would I want to listen*'. The fact that a pro-women's empowerment organisation's (THP-B) staff member believed the prevalence of women's sexual abuse didn't concerned him reflects the difficulty in engaging men in pro-women's rights debates. This incident was eye-opening in understanding the disparity between women's want for increased respect and male neglect to champion those issues.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

The goal of this second empirical chapter was to examine how young women perceived their interactions with the 'Break The Silence' programme regarding elements of choice capacity, such as access to educational media, and ideological choices such as acceptance of their rights. Positive narrations of increased self-worth and choice capacity have been presented here through respondents such as Kabita, whose accumulating second-order choices, partially facilitated by BTS listening, resulted in her ability to practice the first-order choice of marriage resistance. This chapter has presented community-radio SRHR messaging as a successful tool in facilitating the re-imaginings of womanhood and increasing young women's choice capacity. Thus, this chapter has presented evidence for Nirmala's (2015) theorisation that community-radio can facilitate women's empowerment. However, the violence and resistance narrated by BTS listeners and providers for attempting to practice choices by their disenabling environments reflects the negative effects of risk and responsibility regarding women-focused empowerment initiatives. This evidences that whilst community-radio can be a tool of empowerment for individual women and their self-worth, it is limited within its ability to stimulate whole community acceptance of women's rights.

The following chapter will situate the findings presented through these empirical chapters within broader theoretical debates to place community-radio broadcasting within discussions over pathways to women's empowerment, and choice.

7 Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how young Bangladeshi women perceived their interactions with community-radio's SRHR messaging upon their perceptions of womanhood and expansion of their choice capacity. Ultimately, this study was driven by a desire to understand how alternative SRHR education through community-radio broadcasting can aid communities and thus a country's commitments to achieving gender equality, not only within policy but also in practice. This research is underpinned by Kabeer's 'choice as empowerment' framework, adapted to examine shame through the inclusion of Porter's (2013) work on the notion of internalised shame. Kabeer's adapted theory is set within Cornwall's (2016) work on pathways to empowerment, in which she asserts that mainstream and grassroots empowerment initiatives are necessary to facilitate genuine gender equality realisation. This study argues that community-radio has potential to be a tool within women's *hidden* pathways to empowerment.

This chapter provides an answer to the study's main research question and presents a discussion on the key findings and limitations of the empirical data. Then, potential policy and practice recommendations for SRHR education and women's empowerment actors will be presented, based upon these key findings.

7.1 Answer to Main Research Question:

How do young women in rural Bangladesh experience community-radio broadcasting of SRHR messaging, and what role might this programming play in facilitating re-imaginings of womanhood and carving spaces for choice?

The main research question was examined through the perceptions and narrations of young women on their interactions with the BTS programme. Through observing listener's perceptions of community-radio's influence upon their understandings of SRHR and womanhood, this study was able to examine what role community-radio broadcasting potentially can have, rather than assuming that there is a positive role. Thus, the findings presented are based upon the narrations of research respondents. Examining a concept such as choice is subjective and difficult to measure in observations, especially when the choices observed include both practical and ideological choices, such as increase belief in ones rights (Self-worth) (Porter 2013). Therefore, this study acknowledges that the following findings are

subjective interpretations of the collected in-depth data, which have been interpretated with as much integrity as possible.

The main aim of the study was to investigate how young women perceived the community-radio's broadcasting of SRHR messages, and how this messaging might support the creation of spaces for choice. This study concludes that community-radio has potential to carve such space for women's choice in two central ways:

7.1.1 Community-Radio as an Interactive Spaces of Choice

This study demonstrated that BTS's design as an interactive platform resulted in its ability to carve out a space for choice for its listeners. Participants positively narrated their ability to determine BTS' topic content and safely speak out about their struggles of abuse through SMS or phoning-in. This participation was possible due to the anonymity and accessibility of the programme, which meant that listeners were able to safely use it as a space for speaking out and choosing to use it for SRHR-related messaging. These examples are all second-order choices, facilitated by the participatory design of BTS which demonstrates that community-radio can carve out spaces of choice for its listeners. This interactive space was asserted by research participants as very rare for rural women to be able to access, demonstrating both its necessity and positive influence. Participants also narrated feelings of increased pride and confidence, components of Self-worth, due to their ability to express their opinions safely, and see them put into practice in the programme.

Thus, this thesis argues that the BTS programme constitutes an example of community-radio that lives up to the potential to be an alternative and supportive medium for SRHR and women's rights messaging (Nirmala 2015). Therefore, this thesis argues that community-radio broadcasting can successfully create a safe-virtual space for girls to practice second-order choices, and facilitates women's access to spaces of choice.

7.1.2 Individual Consciousness-raising

The empowerment messages in the form of anti-shame messages regarding sexual assault, emotional support for victims of sexual and physical abuse and women's rights more broadly, were narrated by respondents as facilitating confidence and the genuine belief that

they deserved equal rights. Frequently, participants stated that before engagement with BTS they had accepted their place as subordinate, with some expressing initial agreement with slander against women who failed to behave in accord with what was expected of women. This finding reflects Rowlands (1996) statement that marginalised people may internalise and reiterate their expected subordination.

Regarding this internalisation, this study finds that BTS successfully broadcasts counter-narratives to this restrictive womanhood by aiding listeners to re-imagine their expectations of being a woman to include the right to choose, the right to safety and the right to be listened to. Respondents narrated that listening to the SRHR messages broadcast by BTS helped them to view themselves with more self-worth and ambition than they have typically been told they are capable of by listening to and accepting Kotha's assertions that women have and deserve rights. This realisation is the process of consciousness-raising which Batliwala (2013) argues is needed for women's rights realisation. This process has been demonstrated through this study as significant for choice expansion through participants stating that their increased self-perceptions of womanhood had made them more ambitious to resist the limitations put upon them and achieve their own desires. This positively increased perception of womanhood was demonstrated by Kabita's decision to continue her education and reject her early marriage, partially motivated by her BTS interactions.

7.1.3 Further Findings on consciousness-raising and Capacity to Choose

This study's findings regarding community-radio broadcasting's positive influence on listeners process of consciousness-raising must acknowledged that the respondents who chose to listen to the BTS programme were already seeking out a platform to aid them in their empowerment. Arguably, their desire to be empowered could be a prerequisite of their indications that radio is an effective tool of empowerment facilitation or constitute a precondition for their seeking out of a radio programme. This potentially limits the conclusion that community-radio can help facilitate genuine societal norm transformation. However, this study actively sought to examine narrations of respondents who had listened to the BTS programme and rejected it because it was 'inappropriate'. Presenting these opinions highlighted expectations of Bangla womanhood which is significant as it means the dominant expectations of womanhood as oppressive has come from respondents who were both active and passive in terms of seeking to enhance their rights.

Respondents who chose not to listen to BTS expressed beliefs that open discussions on sexual health were inappropriate for women. These data suggest that young women must un-learn the obstacle of internalised dominant narratives of womanhood in order to facilitate their empowerment. This finding contributes to Hodgkinson et al's (2016) desire to find methods of facilitating social norm transformation.

Consciousness-raising raises the question of how can SRHR education providers and NGO's support women's journeys of empowerment if they choose not to engage with progressive women's rights-based content platforms such as community-radio? Specific insights into facilitating engagement with these individuals could be a future research priority. However, it raises the ethical question of if these women *should* be targeted. This issue is later examined within the discussion.

The finding that BTS facilitates positive re-imaginings of womanhood for some listeners is underpinned by the fieldwork observation that shame restricts women's choice capacity, as narrated by multiple respondents. The adapted observational focus from early marriage onto shame and self-worth during fieldwork was motivated by Porter's (2013) claim that self-worth is a central component for women's choice capacity. Fieldwork observations of participants' narrations regarding their self-worth generated an abundance evidence for the centralisation of shame within women's identities and their restricted choice capacity. The BTS programme has been presented as providing a safe space in which women can speak out on their feelings of shame, which were often presented through feelings of guilt and dirtiness related to sexual assault trauma. The BTS programme counter-acts this shaming of victims through promoting messages that women have the right to receive help post-trauma support and by letting girls speak out about their sexual assaults. This ability to tell assault stories which was deemed empowering by respondents who usually have to process those feelings of shame alone. Several Participants indicated that they experienced these shared struggles as positive, and ultimately beneficial to their empowerment processes.

This sharing of struggles amongst listeners through the BTS platform has demonstrated Eyben's (2011) assertion that there is strength and empowerment to be found within collective processing of trauma. Multiple participants narrated that the BTS programme provided them a mechanism through which they could feel a collective identity through listening to other

women's encouragement and advice. Thus, this study contributes to the research gap concerning whether community-radio can live up to the expectation of supporting rural women's empowerment (Nirmala 2015).

7.1.4 Community-Radio and First-order Choice Facilitation

During fieldwork it became apparent that establishing a link between interactions with BTS broadcasting and increasing capacity for first-order choices would be too reductionistic as it neglects to acknowledge the empowerment found through second-order choices. This study has shown that practicing first-order choices such as reporting rape to law enforcement officers or resisting an early marriage requires a multitude of smaller second-order choices. Claiming that BTS broadcasting is the sole facilitator of first-order choice practice would be too tenuous and simplistic. However, respondents did state that BTS interaction was important in their ability to practice significant choices. For example, Kabita, who stated that BTS facilitated her confidence to make second-order choices, such as believing she deserved the right to continue her education. Kabita narrated that these smaller choices accumulated into her ability to resistance her early marriage.

However, this study thus does not claim that community-radio is the sole means to facilitate empowerment processes. Kabita's ability to resist marriage was facilitated by seeking help from her schoolteacher, a supportive cousin *and* interaction with the BTS programme. Kabita narrated that the combination of these factors enabled her to assert a life altering first-order choice of resisting an early marriage. In this light, it is also important to return to the BTS providers' motivations for broadcasting; Kotha stated that the BTS slogan 'together we learn, together we listen' reflects her main priority of listening to young women's difficulties. She does not claim to be solving or generating empowerment, but merely wishes to be a component of both the process which this study argues she achieves.

7.2 Discussion

7.2.1 Theoretical Limitations and Adaptations

The adaptation of the research focus from community-radio's perceived impact on early marriage and first-order choices, to shame and second-order choices reflects a limitation of utilising Kabeer's theory. Whilst Kabeer's work (2007) attempts to refrain from rigid measurements of agentic processes, it still preforms an indicator-based and economically focused approach to measuring empowerment through first-order choices. Applying Kabeer's framework resulted in an initial focus on the relationship between women-focused community-radio broadcasting and young women's ability to make choices about their marriage. This focus would have been reductionistic as it ignores the myriad of smaller second-order choices which respondents narrated. This study concludes that the process of empowerment can be observed through individual's ability to make second-order choices, rather than only using first-order choices as the indicator of empowerment.

The inclusion of the work of Porter (20113) and White (2010) on shame and women's self-worth significantly improved this study's engagement with women's empowerment processes. Including Porter's (2013) theorisation of the need to un-learn shame allowed this research to examine participants' accounts of their capacity to choose, rather than making tenuous assumptions about community-radio interactions and early marriage resistance. Including the White's (2010) work on the need for anti-shame messages within empowerment allowed this study to observe the importance of second-order choices, such as listeners deciding to tell their stories about sexual abuse and receive advice.

Importantly, the adaptation of the study's focus was driven by the respondents themselves as their accounts regarding community-radio and choice suggested a range of second-order choices rather than first-order choices. Re-shaping the research focus and theory maintained an ethical desire to *not*, as a white-Western researcher, speak for marginalised women but letting women speak of their experiences and embedding those narrations within theory which demonstrates the agentic nature of women, rejects the trope of the oppressed Third World woman (Mohanty 1988). However, it must be acknowledged that complete removal of western perspective in presenting data and drawing conclusions is inherently impossible (Koggel 2010).

7.2.2 Risk and Responsibility: the Challenges of Women-Focused Empowerment Initiatives:

A significant motivation for conducting research which examined women's experiences was to honour the agentic nature of young women as active participants, rather than passive victims (Chakma 2016). This study presented the positive aspects of viewing young women as 'agents of change,' which were expressed by both BTS hosts and listeners (Gonick et al 2009, 2). However, the onus of women to practice 'speaking out' against sexual violence and shame, as the BTS programme promotes, can entail great risk for those individuals. The second empirical chapter presented this risk, as respondents described facing physical abuse and social shaming for attempting to practice the rights they had learnt through BTS. Therefore, this project acknowledges that whilst women-focused empowerment initiatives, such as BTS, can create spaces for women's choice, be educational and can facilitate change, the risks for women participating in these programs can be serious and merit careful thought. Thus, this study confirms Sanawar et al (2019) argument that empowerment programs must acknowledge the severe family and communal backlash women can face against their attempts to practice their rights. Failure to do so would be dangerous and suggest a disconnect between those designing and implementing women's empowerment initiatives and the women they seek to reach and 'empower.' Crucially, such initiatives risk placing the onus of change on women (Ibid).

Whilst this study does not advocate for empowerment initiatives responsibilities to solely be upon women, the potential for women-focused programs to stimulate a change in social expectations of womanhood is acknowledged. Batliwala (2007, 558) argues that women's grassroots participation can stimulate an 'empowerment spiral', which she defines as the mobilisation of 'larger-scale transformative political action' from smaller-scale grassroots resistance to inequality and mistreatment. This spiral effect highlights the important potential for small resistance efforts, such as Radio Padma and the aim to 'Break The Silence' on women's oppression, to grow into a wider-held community desire to accept and uphold women's rights. Batliwala (2015) utilises the imagery of a spiral effect to explain how the individual's realisation of rights and practising of consciousness-raising generates inspiration for other women to join the practise, which can lead to exponential growth of resistance. This spiral effect has been demonstrated through this research through Kabita's Father, who eventually accepted his daughter's rejection of her early marriage which she decided upon with the help of the BTS programme. Kabita's father and uncle learnt from her the real dangers of

early marriage and eventually agreed to delay her marriage. This reflects that for some listeners, their empowerment facilitated by the community-radio can spiral and educate other important choice actors.

This study cannot predict the effect BTS will have within local Rajshahi communities or on gender equality. Nevertheless, the data presented in section 6.4.2 indicate that the BTS listener numbers have continuously grown and the resistance from female listeners against the promotion of a women's right to choose has declined. These data can be interpreted as small, yet significant indicators that BTS, and other community-radio programs, have potential to contribute to the *hidden* pathways of individual and collective resistance against women's abuse.

Furthermore, Cornwall's (2016, 344) theorisation that women travel different 'pathways of empowerment' does not state that all empowerment initiatives must be grassroots-based or classed as *hidden* pathways in order to facilitate gender equality. Instead, Cornwall (2016) argues that the 'motorways' of empowerment, for example top-down initiatives such as enforcing protective rights laws, are vital to the process of facilitating genuine women's rights development. The need for both *hidden* and *motorway* pathways is demonstrated through the 'risk and responsibility' presented by this study's examination of the BTS programme. The findings that respondents found BTS frustrating because they would learn their rights but not be able to practice them in daily life due to physical and emotionally dangerous consequences reflects that the onus of women's empowerment should not solely be on women-as-agents. Rather, the BTS programme should be broadcast as a combined effort of *hidden* pathways and governmental *motorways* of empowerment, such as enforcing punishments on sexual assault and implementing punishments on those who break the Child Marriage Restraint Act (Nasrim and Rahman 2012). This combined-pathway effort would facilitate a safer daily reality for young women to practice BTS-inspired choices within, and thus reduce the risk they face in listening or practicing choices.

Supporting a combined approach of differing pathways to empowerment highlights that community-radio is *not* an alternative to comprehensive and enforced policy protecting women's rights nor school-based SRHR curricula. Instead, this thesis presents community-radio as a tool which facilitates a 'hidden-pathway', a smaller-scale and individual grassroots medium which seeks to empower women through education and self-worth promotion

alongside local law governments enforcing the protective laws of Bangladesh Women's policies.

Acknowledging the limitations of the BTS programme in facilitating genuine social transformation of women's rights in Rajshahi is important to examine regarding the extent to which they can, or cannot, enhance women's capacity to choose. However, it is important to re-visit the initial aims of the BTS programme. BTS's overarching goal is to '*break the silence on their struggles and to see women empowered'* (Kotha, 08/03/2020). The BTS staff acknowledged that this is a united goal, shared with other gender-equality NGO's, not an aim they claim, nor seek, to be able to accomplish alone. The limitations of their programme's effect on facilitating safety in making choices for their listeners, even second-order choices such as choosing to listen and the threat that can present, was explicitly expressed by Kotha during our interactions and echoed by participant listeners.

7.3 Further Research

This thesis has highlighted that alternative messages about womanhood and women's rights often neglect to engage with men. Further research is needed into facilitating and attracting male interaction with women-positive media forms and examination into how men could be accessed through alternative media forms such as community-radio. Pereira's (2008) assertion of the common male fear that women's empowerment equates to men's disempowerment is a demonstrated by the Radio Padma Chairman as a significant obstacle to men's engagement with women's rights promotion. The need to dispel this fear is known, yet the mechanisms to do so are not (Ibid). Further research into the design of, and creating demand for, men's-focused programs which promote women's gender equality is needed, as genuine social transformation must be a combined effort from both genders.

The fieldwork period was significantly shortened due to the Covid-19 pandemic; national lockdowns in Bangladesh meant the last two weeks of data collection were inhibited as travel into the villages was barred. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the powerful potential of radio-based empowerment programs as NGO's in Bangladesh were prohibited from continuing SRHR programs in rural areas. Throughout the pandemic, Radio Padma, including the BTS programme continued to broadcast due to its small production team and costs. Thus, the support, education and empowerment facilitation by the BTS programme could continue. This

continued broadcasting is even more significant when reports abuse within locked-down homes increased world-wide and in Bangladesh (MJF 2020), resulting in an increased need for support for women. Community-broadcasting's relevance as an empowerment facilitating platform, especially during times of crisis, further evidences the necessity to invest in community-radio's SRHR messaging potential.

7.4 Recommendations for gender work and communication initiatives:

7.4.1 Policy Makers:

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1. Policy which seeks to empower women must consider how *motorways* of empowerment, such as legal age for marriage and abuse prosecution, can be supported by *hidden* pathways of empowerment such as SRHR broadcasting through community-radio. This combined-pathway policy approach ***must*** be supported by increased funding and commitment to enforcing already constituted laws protecting women, especially within rural communities where enforcement often recedes. An integrated approach of the two could enhance the processes and progress of women's empowerment.

7.4.2 Policy Practitioners such as NGO's:

1. In light of male THP-B staff's remarks of sexual violence as 'women's issues' (See 6.4.4), organisations which seek to empower women, such as THP-B, must more extensively train staff and volunteers (especially male) in gender equality and inclusive SRHR education if community change is to be facilitated

2. The content of SRHR seminars organised by NGO's should broaden to explicitly include in-depth discussions on young women's self-worth, anti-shame messages and sexual assault processing. Especially focusing on the un-stigmatising victims of sexual assaults as young women often lack safe spaces for this to occur. This anti-shame focus should occur alongside, not replace, physical health-related SRHR components.

3. A combined approach to SRHR broadcasting by BTS and THP-B could be an effective and fruitful partnership regarding their shared aim to empower rural women. BTS stated that their staff are not trained in SRHR policy, yet they have a wide and trusted female

listener-base. THP-B has trained SRHR providers but stated a difficulty in reaching participants, especially rural women. Thus, this study advises that a THP-B SRHR facilitator could frequent the BTS broadcast to help distribute high-quality SRHR to listeners. Importantly, BTS is a community-radio programme and independent from top-down organisations, the recommendation to work with THP-B is in partnership rather than THP-B overriding the BTS broadcast.

4. Women's empowerment and SRHR-based NGO's should consider increasing funding for community-radio broadcasters. Providing SRHR and communication training for female hosts and providing resources such as hand-outs and posters accompanying broadcasts could significantly aid community-radios in increasing their listener-base and empowerment facilitation.

7.5 Conclusion:

The dominant themes of modesty, dependence and submission which underpin narratives of Bangladeshi womanhood lead to women internalising shame and their restricted choice capacity. The prevalence of sexual, physical and emotional abuse against women is justified by the culturally constructed status of women as subordinate to men. This construction is re-affirmed though inadequate SRHR education in schools, which frequently do not teach consent, anti-violence messages or reflect the women's rights that are promoted within Bangladesh's policy and laws. The Bangla constructs of womanhood restrict women's choice capacity through their expected submission, resulting in their continued lived realities of struggle and sacrifice. For the process of women's empowerment to occur, re-imaginings of womanhood which refute the centralisation of shame and servitude must occur and be accepted by both women themselves and their surrounding communities, including male guardians.

This thesis concludes that community-radio presents a potentially powerful tool to enhance young women's pathways to empowerment by expanding their self-worth and capacity for choice. Radio's cheap and accessible design and the ability for listeners to actively participate and shape broadcasting content reveals the potential of community radio to carve out spaces for rural women. Furthermore, programmes such as BTS can contribute to re-shaping women's imaginings of themselves through counter-narratives of positive womanhood. Through anti-

shame messages, rights education and breaking the silence about women's abuse and oppressive experiences, the BTS programme aided respondents in increasing their self-worth and confidence. This process of critical consciousness raising through community-radio engagement has been presented as the foundation for facilitating second-order choices. These second-order choices can, with support from community-radio, policy and law enforcement lead to women making first-order choices, such as resisting early marriage. Thus, this thesis argues that community-radio broadcasting is a tool and resource for facilitating *hidden pathways* to empowerment, which when supported by *empowerment motorways* such as well-enforced policy and legislation can result in facilitating an increased capacity for choice and facilitates genuine social transformation of gender inequalities. This thesis thus argues that attempts to build early marriage free communities should include supporting community-radio broadcasting of SRHR messages for rural young women.

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9 Appendix

9.1 Interview Transparency Documents: respondents and dates

Number	Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Status	Activity	Place	Date
	NAME (not pseudonym)	44	**THP Gender Coordinator?**	Informal Interview	Dhaka, THP Head Office	1/02/2020
	Ratna	16	School Girl	In-depth Interview	Kazimwu Village Primary School, Natore	06/02/2020
	Shohagi	15	School Girl	In-depth Interview	Kazimwu Village Primary School, Natore	06/02/2020
	Asha	14	School-Girl	In-depth Interview	Uttragonobhon Village, Natore	12/02/2020
	Royeka	14	School-Girl	In-depth Interview	Uttragonobhon Village, Natore	12/02/2020
	Kabita	15	Unmarried School Girl	In-depth Interview	Shaipara Village, Mohonpur	15/02/2020
	Shabana	18	Married Women	In-depth Interview	Shaipara Village, Mohonpur	15/02/2020
	Rhia	17	Married Woman	In-depth Interview	Shaipara Village, Mohonpur	15/02/2020
	Tani	16	Young Women	In-depth Interview	Shaipara Village, Mohonpur	19/02/2020
	Sejuti	15	Young Woman	In-depth Interview	Shaipara Village, Mohonpur	19/02/2020
	Zakia			In-depth Interview	Shaipara Village, Mohonpur	19/02/2020
			Radio Padma Chairman	In-depth Interview	Radio Padma Studio, Rajshahi CBD	21/02/2020
	Sahana (not pseudonym)		Radio Padma Station Manager	In-depth Interview	Radio Padma Studio, Rajshahi CBD	21/02/2020
	Kotha (not pseudonym)	24	BTS Host	In-depth Interview	Radio Padma Studio, Rajshahi CBD	21/02/2020

	Ayesha		School Girl	In-depth Interview	Paba Village, Union office	23/02/2020
	Fateha	16	Engaged School Girl	In-depth Interview	Paba Village, Union office	23/02/2020
	Khanm	16	Married Woman	In-depth Interview	Paba Village, Secondary school	23/02/2020
	Mohinee	15	School Girl	In-depth Interview	Mohobbatpur Village, Union office	25/02/2020
	Kotha (not pseudonym)	24	BTS Host	In-depth Interview	Radio Padma Studio Rajshahi CBD	28/02/2020
	Tauhida	15	Unmarried School Girl	In-depth Interview (After participation in SRHR Observation)	Jhiha Highschool, Chargart, Mohonpur	10/03/2020
	Edrita	21	Unmarried Young Woman	In-depth Interview	Jhiha Highschool, Chargart, Mohonpur	10/03/2020
	Kotha (not pseudonym)	24	BTS Host	In-depth Interview	Rajshahi University, Rajshahi CBD	11/03/2020
	Sani	16	Engaged woman	In-depth Interview	Paba Village	12/03/2020

9.2 Focus Group Transparency Discussion Documents: Respondents and Dates

Number	Names	Status	Age ranger	No. Particpents	Place	Date
FDG 1	Zakia	**School Girls**	14 - 16	6	Shaipara Village, Secondary School	08/02/2020
	Ayesha	**School Girls**	14 - 16	6	Shaipara Village, Secondary School	08/02/2020

	Runi	**School Girls**	14 - 16	6	Shaipara Village, Secondary School	08/02/2020
	Amil	**School Girls**	14 - 16	6	Shaipara Village, Secondary School	08/02/2020
	Nanti	**School Girls**	14 - 16	6	Shaipara Village, Secondary School	08/02/2020
	Rachna	**School Girls**	14 - 16	6	Shaipara Village, Secondary School	08/02/2020
	Anikaa	**School Girls**	14 - 16	6	Shaipara Village, Secondary School	08/02/2020
FDG 2	Rahia	**School Girls**	15-17	7	Uttragonobhon Village, Village Hall	16/02/2020
	Zakia	**School Girls**	15-17	7	Uttragonobhon Village, Village Hall	16/02/2020
	Sohal	**School Girls**	15-17	7	Uttragonobhon Village, Village Hall	16/02/2020
	Jeeya	**School Girls**	15-17	7	Uttragonobhon Village, Village Hall	16/02/2020
	Vanita	**School Girls**	15-17	7	Uttragonobhon Village, Village Hall	16/02/2020
	Bijal	**School Girls**	15-17	7	Uttragonobhon Village, Village Hall	16/02/2020
	Fahim	**School Girls**	15-17	7	Uttragonobhon Village, Village Hall	16/02/2020

FDG 3	Ratna	**School Girls**	15-17	8	Paba Village, Secondary School	26/02/2020
	Tani	**School Girls**	15-17	8	Paba Village, Secondary School	26/02/2020
	Mohinee	**School Girls**	15-17	8	Paba Village, Secondary School	26/02/2020
	Amna	**School Girls**	15-17	8	Paba Village, Secondary School	26/02/2020
	Jasnima	**School Girls**	15-17	8	Paba Village, Secondary School	26/02/2020
	Reya	**School Girls**	15-17	8	Paba Village, Secondary School	26/02/2020
	Nadia	**School Girls**	15-17	8	Paba Village, Secondary School	26/02/2020
	Sana	**School Girls**	15-17	8	Paba Village, Secondary School	26/02/2020

9.3 Participant Observation Transparency Document

Number	Type of Gathering	Age	Gender	Place	Date
1	THP-B staff meeting	n/a	M/F	THP-B Head office, Dhaka	28/01/2020
2	THP-B regional planning meeting	n/a	M/F	THP-B Rajshahi Office	30/01/2020
3	THP-B Early marriage resistance staff meting	n/a	M/F	THP-B Rajshahi Office	02/02/2020
4	THP-B SRHR seminar	15-16	F	Shaipara Village, Mohonpur	03/02/2020
5	Community Meeting – THP-B Facilitated	n/a	M/F	Paba Village, Paba	05/02/2020
6	THP-B SRHR seminar	13-14	F	Kazimwu Village Primary School, Natore	17/02/2020
7	BTS live broadcast with Kotha and Sahana	n/a	F	Radio Padma Studio, Rajshahi CBD	21/02/2020
8	Early-marriage and Drug awarness community meeting. THP-B.	n/a	M/F	Uttragonobhon Village, Village Hall	02/03/2020
9	BTS live broadcast with Kotha and Sahana	24	F	Radio Padma Studio, Rajshahi CBD	21/02/2020
10	THP-B SRHR SEMINAR	13-14	F	Jhiha Village secondary school, Mohonpur	13/03/2020
11	BTS live broadcast, International Women's Day	24	F	Radio Padma Studio, Rajshahi CBD	08/03/2020

9.4 Operationalisation Table

Concept	**Dimensions**	**Variable**	**Indicator/Questions**
Empowerment as **Choice**	**Resource (access: institutions, cultural norms, human capital and practices)**	Age Literacy level Education status Religion Educational access Media forms they have access to Access to BTS Frequency of media interaction/ listening THP and HER CHOICE workshop access Individual perceptions of women's roles and status Social perception of women's roles, responsibilities and status Social perception on the practice of child marriage	- What forms of media do you use? -Do you listen to Radio Padma (community-radio) -Can you listen to Radio Padma Women's programmes? -what are the expectations of womanhood -How do you define a 'good woman' -Do you go to school? -Do you have access to SRHR training -THP workshop attendance? -What does women's equality mean to you? -What does having choice as a women mean to you -What are the expected roles and practices of women? -what is marriage? -Opinions on CEFM?

	Agency (process)	Engaged/Unengaged Roles of women Aspirations Decision making	-what are your life goals/aspirations -How has listening to community-radio or engaging with forms of media informed your decision-making process regarding child marriage/ education levels/ goals. -Do you know your legal rights a s a child and as a woman -What mediums have helped you know your rights -Do you feel you are able to voice your opinions on marriage to your family/community? -Do you feel your voice/opinions are heard or respected? -Can you safely state your opinions -Do you feel you are a valued part of community life
	Self-Esteem (self-worth)		-Collective identity with other women? -How do you defineSelf-worth -Opinion on their status in society -what are women capable of? -what does shame mean to you -Where does shame come from? -What acts are considered shameful? -How does shame affect your daily life -Who brings feelings of shame upon you?

Empowerment	**Achievements (choice)**	**First Order Choice**	-who decides when you will marry? -Do you have control over who/when to marry -Can you choose to continue your education? -Is your opinion on marriage valid? -Can you report violence or abuse? -Can you choose to speak out against your family.or resist their choices that affect you?
		Second Order Choice	-Can you choose to access BTS -Is this access safe? -Can you leave the house without permission -Can you contribute to content -Can you express your opinions on a topic -Are you opinions wanted or respected? -What media can you choose to access -Can you tell someone that you have rights -Can you share your knowledge on rights with members of your family -Can you attend THP Women's workshops

			-Can you freely listen to the radio? -Do you feel you are able to voice your opinions on marriage to your family/community? -Do you feel your voice/opinions are heard?