

LIFE HISTORY OF MARIUM BEGUM

Shree Q2 Research on Extreme Poverty in Bangladesh					
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Interviewee name	Marium Begum	Sex	Female	Age	30
Union, Upazilla and District	Abdullahpur, Austogram, Kishoreganj				
Dates of Interview	17 th April, 2012				
Livelihood before the intervention	Domestic service worker Day labourer				
Well-being Status	Working Extreme Poor(2)				
Marital status and household composition	Widow with her two children.				
Keywords	money lending, corruption, theft, accident,				

INTRODUCTION

Marium Begum is a working extreme poor widow living with her two children in the Haor region. Marium was born into a working extreme poor household and her father was a day labourer and head of a nine member household. It was difficult for him to provide his household with food and clothes and when she was 16 her father arranged a marriage for her to a local fish seller.

Unfortunately in 2007 Marium's husband died in an accident, leaving her to care for their children. To make matters worse her father in law kicked her out from his house. She and her children were looked after by her brother for a while, however after his marriage he eventually stopped supporting them and they fell into extreme poverty. In an attempt to provide for her family Marium got a job doing domestic service work and also did some day labouring. She has been struggling to provide for her family in this way ever since.

QUALITATIVE MONITORING OF SHIREE INTERVENTIONS: CMS5 (S) LIFE HISTORIES

WELL-BEING JUST BEFORE THE SHIREE INTERVENTION

Prior to involvement with the shiree programme the household's wellbeing was as followed:

Indicator	Just before the intervention
Well-being category	Working Extreme poor (2)
Diets	Two meals per day with low cost food items such as feral leaf, vegetables smash and dry fish smash.
Livelihoods now) in terms of contribution to that years' income For other principal adult member	1. Domestic service worker. 2. Day Labourer
Productive assets now rank them in terms of value (e.g. land, livestock, rickshaws),	None
House and homestead: ownership, condition of tenure, condition of house.	Lived on brothers land in a small hut made from polyethylene straw and bamboo

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Marium Begum was born in 1982 in Austogram Upazila within Kishoreganj district. Her parents had six daughters and one son. She was the second daughter and was pretty in appearance.

Her father was a poor day labourer who only earned between 1000-1500 taka a month depending on the season and availability. In the paddy season he was able to earn ten to twelve mounds of paddy by selling his labour in advance. Her mother was a housewife and was unable to contribute to family income. It was quite difficult for her father to afford even two meals per day for his family. On average they had to survive on just one and a half meals with feral vegetable smash and sometimes a bit of dry fish smash. As a result of her family's poverty, Marium had never been to school during her childhood.

EARLY MARRIED LIFE AND EARLY ADULthood

Marriage and birth of children

Marium's parents were eager to get their six daughters married, and got the eldest married to a day labourer in 1997. As Marium grew up to be quite beautiful it was not difficult for her father to arrange her marriage, and she got married to a man named Mostofa Mia one year later. After the marriage Marium moved to live in her husband house. Mostofa had a fish selling business and was well off as he earned 3000-4000 taka per month.

In 2000 her husband started a money loan business and invested 150,000 taka. in market. The interest rate was 100 taka per thousand per month. Her first child was born in 2003 and she remembers passing these days with happiness. Her second child named Manik Mia was born in 2006.

Death of husband

Marium's husband travelled to Chittagong regularly for his work as a fish seller. In 2007 he went to Chittagong to restock but had a severe accident. A truck crashed into him and he died on impact.

The death of Marium's husband was not only an emotional shock, but also represented a severe financial crisis. Marium immediately had to spend 4000-5000 taka to retrieve her husband's body. Her primary source of income stopped and day by day she become more vulnerable. Although she was compensated 30,000 taka by the truck owners association, her father in law cheated her of all the money by saying her husband had unpaid loans and unpaid costs at the shop. Marium was unable to do anything to prevent this.

MID-ADULthood

Shortly after her husband's death, her father in law threw her and her children out of his home. She had no alternative but to go to her brother's house for help. Her brother provided her with a tiny hut to use as her shelter. Her brother was also a fish seller and earned 4000-5000 taka a month. With this money he was able to provide food and other support to Marium and her children. This continued for approximately two years though it was a hardship for her brother. Unfortunately for Marium he then got married, making him unable to continue the support, and forcing her to search for a job in order to provide for her two children. She was however able to remain living in his house.

Father in law appropriates husband's investment

In 2009 she was informed that her father in law had withdrawn all the money that was invested in her husband's moneylending business without informing Marium. When her husband was alive he had dealt with the business and she did not know which people had borrowed money. She complained to the Union Chairman and he ruled that 80,000 taka had to be returned to Marium by her father in law. This decision has not yet come to anything and Marium believes that the Chairman had embezzled the money.

Marium works as a domestic maid

In the same year Marium was able to find a job as a domestic maid, and worked to a limited extent as a day labourer. Altogether she was able to earn an average of 50-100 taka per day. Since then she has been continuing this work whilst looking after her children. She manages to provide the household with two meals a day although the food items are low cost.

Despite earning and living in her brother's house Marium has been struggling to survive with her two children. One is now age 11 and the other is 5 but neither are able to go to school. Her brother and other relatives have tried to help Marium send them to school for the last two years but have failed.

Box 1: conceptualising poverty

Living in a country like Bangladesh constantly forces one to reconceptualise poverty. A day labourer seems hard done by until you meet a sand lifting worker. The sand lifting worker similarly seems hard done by until you see the child collecting fallen paddy. The child in turn is then outdone by a disabled beggar.

When one isn't immersed in this reality it is easy to think of the poor as simply the poor; to see all of the conditions they face as equally bad. But in reality the poverty is extremely complex and it isn't realistic or meaningful to treat each person's poverty as if it were the same as Marium Begum.

CONCLUSION

Marium Begum is a working extreme poor woman supporting her two children with some support from her immediate family. While she was born into a household of similar status she married a man that had a fish selling business and was a money lender; this marriage was easy to arrange because of her beauty. He, however, died in an accident and despite her husband's assets and compensation of 30,000 taka, her situation rapidly deteriorated. Being pushed out of her new household by her father in law, and then cheated out of her husband's assets, she was forced to rely on her brother who had limited capacity to support her, particularly after his marriage.

SEASONAL LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITY MAP

	JAN	FEB	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
Domestics Service work	low	low	Low	High			Moderate		moderate		High	
Day Labor Work	high	high	high	lean			Lean		Low		Low	
payment	100 taka	100 taka	1000 taka	70 taka			70 taka.		70 taka		70 taka	
Son Sandlifiting work	15	15	15	30			20		10		15	
Total	1500 taka.	1500 taka	1500 taka	1600 taka.			1400 taka		700 taka		1050 taka.	

LIFE HISTORY MAP

Dates	Well-being movement	Reasons
1982-1996	2	Early marriage to well off family due to her family insolvencies
1997-2006	Moved up to 3	Joins husband's household who is better off. He invests 150,000 taka. in money lending business and their two children are born.
2007	Moves down to 2	Husband dies in an accident
2007-2008	Moves to low 2	Thrown out from her father in law's house and takes shelter with her brother who supports her. Father in law appropriates her husband's investment.
2009	Moves to middle 2	Starts work as domestic maid and day labourer

Life history map of Marium Begum (30)

