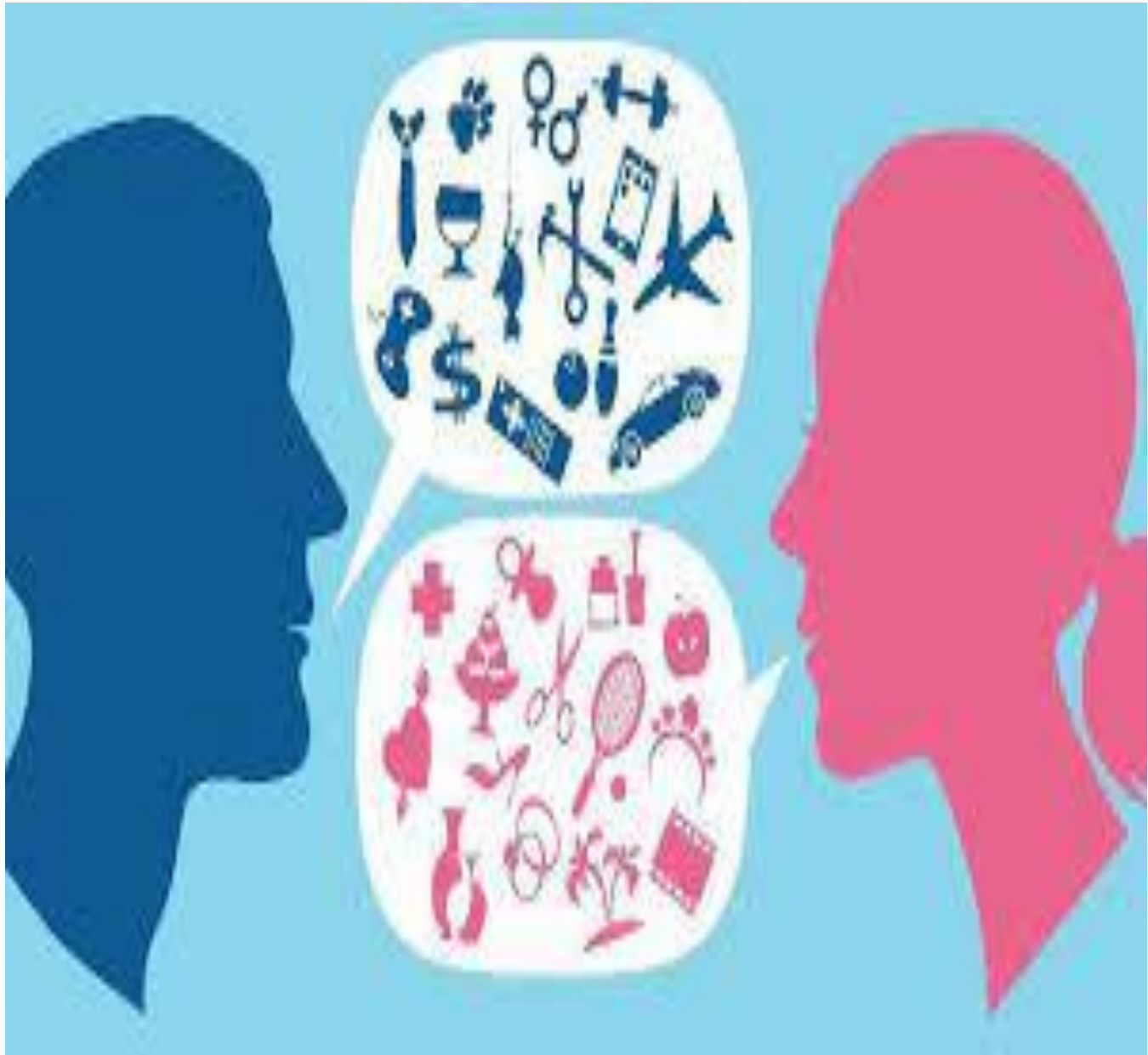


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Gender, Population Change and Social Development: A Sociological Study in Bangladesh

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This study examines the interrelationship between gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh from a sociological perspective. Drawing on secondary qualitative data, the research analyses demographic trends, gender dynamics, and development outcomes within the broader framework of demographic transition, feminist theory, modernisation theory, and the capability approach. The findings indicate that Bangladesh has experienced a rapid demographic transition characterised by declining fertility, increased life expectancy, and a growing working-age population. These changes are closely linked to improvements in women's education, empowerment, and participation in the labour force. However, persistent gender inequalities continue to influence reproductive behaviour, labour market outcomes, and access to resources. The study also highlights the role of social development indicators, such as health and education, in shaping population dynamics. Emerging challenges, including population ageing, migration, and climate change, further complicate these relationships. The research concludes that gender-sensitive policies and integrated development strategies are essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive social development in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Gender inequality; Demographic transition; Social development; Women's empowerment; Fertility; Bangladesh; Population dynamics

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1. Introduction

Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries in the world, has undergone remarkable demographic, social, and economic transformations over the past five decades. Since its independence in 1971, the country has experienced a rapid decline in fertility rates, improvements in health and education, and significant changes in gender roles and social structures. These changes have not only altered population dynamics but have also reshaped the trajectory of social development. Understanding the interrelationship between gender, population change, and social development is therefore essential for evaluating Bangladesh's progress and future challenges.

Population change is a central concept in sociology and development studies, encompassing shifts in fertility, mortality, migration, and population structure. In Bangladesh, fertility decline has been particularly striking, dropping from approximately 6.8 births per woman in the mid-1970s to around 1.9 in recent years (Maitra, 2024). This demographic transition reflects not only the success of public health and family planning programs but also broader socio-economic transformations, including urbanisation, increased female education, and labour force participation. These factors are deeply intertwined with gender relations, making gender a critical analytical lens for understanding demographic change.

Gender, as a socially constructed system of roles, norms, and power relations,

significantly influences demographic behaviour and development outcomes. In Bangladesh, traditional patriarchal norms have historically restricted women's access to education, employment, and decision-making. However, recent decades have witnessed substantial progress in gender equality, driven by policy interventions, non-governmental organisation (NGO) initiatives, and global development agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite these improvements, gender inequality persists in various forms, including disparities in income, political participation, and social mobility (Azad et al., 2025).

The relationship between gender and population change is particularly evident in the domain of fertility and reproductive health. Women's empowerment-measured through education, economic participation, and decision-making autonomy-has been identified as a key determinant of fertility decline in Bangladesh (Chowdhury et al., 2023). Empowered women are more likely to delay marriage, use contraception, and have fewer children, thereby contributing to demographic transition. Conversely, persistent gender inequalities can limit women's reproductive choices and hinder further progress in population stabilisation.

Population change, in turn, has significant implications for social development. The demographic transition in Bangladesh has created a "demographic dividend," characterised by a growing working-age population relative to dependents. This presents opportunities for economic growth, poverty reduction, and improvements in

living standards. However, realising these benefits requires effective policies in education, employment, and gender equality. Without such measures, demographic changes may exacerbate social inequalities and hinder sustainable development (Islam et al., 2025).

Social development, broadly defined as improvements in human well-being, social equity, and institutional capacity, is both influenced by and influences gender and population dynamics. In Bangladesh, progress in areas such as maternal health, child mortality reduction, and educational attainment has been closely linked to changes in population structure and gender roles. For example, increased female education has not only contributed to lower fertility rates but has also enhanced women's economic participation and social status. Similarly, improved health outcomes have reduced mortality rates, further shaping population dynamics.

Despite these advancements, Bangladesh faces several challenges at the intersection of gender, population change, and social development. Rapid urbanisation has created pressures on infrastructure and social services, while persistent gender disparities limit the full utilisation of human resources. Moreover, emerging issues such as population ageing, climate change, and migration add complexity to the development landscape. These challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive sociological analysis that integrates gender perspectives into the study of population change and social development.

This study aims to explore the interconnections between gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh from a sociological perspective. Specifically, it seeks to examine how gender relations influence demographic behaviour, how population changes affect social development outcomes, and how these processes interact within the broader socio-economic context of Bangladesh. By synthesising existing literature and empirical evidence, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics shaping Bangladesh's development trajectory.

In doing so, the study also highlights the importance of gender-sensitive policies and interventions in promoting sustainable development. Addressing gender inequalities is not only a matter of social justice but also a prerequisite for achieving demographic stability and inclusive growth. As Bangladesh continues its transition toward a middle-income country, the integration of gender, population, and development perspectives will be crucial for ensuring equitable and sustainable progress.

2. Literature Review

The relationship between gender, population change, and social development has been widely explored in sociological and demographic literature. In the context of Bangladesh, this body of research highlights the complex interplay between demographic transitions, gender relations, and development outcomes. This section reviews key theoretical and empirical contributions to the field, focusing on three main themes:

demographic transition, gender and fertility, and social development.

2.1 Demographic Transition in Bangladesh

The theory of demographic transition provides a foundational framework for understanding population change. It posits that societies move from high fertility and mortality rates to lower levels as they undergo economic and social development. Bangladesh represents a notable case of rapid demographic transition, characterised by a significant decline in fertility and improvements in life expectancy.

Recent studies indicate that Bangladesh has entered the later stages of demographic transition, with fertility rates approaching replacement level (Karim et al., 2024). This transition has been facilitated by a combination of factors, including expanded access to family planning services, increased female education, and improvements in healthcare. The decline in fertility has also been associated with changes in cultural norms and family structures, reflecting broader socio-economic transformations.

However, the demographic transition in Bangladesh is not uniform across regions and socio-economic groups. Rural areas and lower-income populations tend to have higher fertility rates, highlighting persistent inequalities in access to education and healthcare. These disparities underscore the importance of considering social and gender factors in analysing population dynamics.

2.2 Gender and Fertility

Gender plays a central role in shaping fertility behaviour and reproductive health outcomes. In Bangladesh, women's empowerment has been identified as a key determinant of fertility decline. A systematic review by Chowdhury et al. (2023) found that factors such as education, employment, decision-making autonomy, and mobility significantly influence women's reproductive choices. Educated women are more likely to adopt family planning methods, delay childbirth, and have fewer children, contributing to overall fertility reduction.

Similarly, qualitative research highlights the importance of cultural norms and gender roles in shaping reproductive behaviour. Traditional expectations regarding early marriage and childbearing continue to influence fertility patterns, particularly in rural areas. However, increasing awareness and access to education have begun to challenge these norms, leading to gradual changes in attitudes toward family size and gender roles (Chowdhury & Haque, 2025).

The concept of women's empowerment is multidimensional, encompassing economic, social, and political dimensions. Recent efforts to construct comprehensive indices of women's empowerment in Bangladesh emphasise the need to capture these diverse aspects (Chowdhury et al., 2024). Such indices provide valuable tools for analysing the relationship between gender and development outcomes, including fertility and social mobility.

Despite progress, gender inequality remains a significant challenge in Bangladesh.

Women continue to face barriers in accessing education, employment, and decision-making opportunities. These inequalities not only affect individual well-being but also have broader implications for population dynamics and development. For instance, limited access to education and employment can lead to higher fertility rates and slower demographic transition.

2.3 Population Change and Social Development

The relationship between population change and social development is complex and multifaceted. On one hand, population growth can strain resources and hinder development, particularly in densely populated countries like Bangladesh. On the other hand, demographic changes can create opportunities for economic growth and social progress.

The concept of the demographic dividend highlights the potential benefits of population change. As fertility rates decline, the proportion of working-age individuals increases, creating opportunities for economic growth. In Bangladesh, this demographic window has been associated with improvements in income levels, poverty reduction, and human development indicators (Islam et al., 2025).

However, the realisation of the demographic dividend depends on effective policies and institutions. Investments in education, healthcare, and employment are essential for maximising the potential of the working-age population. Gender equality is particularly important in this context, as it enables women

to participate fully in the labour force and contribute to economic development.

Social development indicators, such as education, health, and social mobility, are closely linked to population dynamics. In Bangladesh, improvements in maternal and child health have contributed to lower mortality rates, while increased access to education has enhanced human capital. These developments, in turn, influence population behaviour, creating a feedback loop between demographic change and social development.

2.4 Gender, Social Mobility, and Development

Social mobility, defined as the movement of individuals or groups within a social hierarchy, is an important aspect of social development. Gender inequality can limit social mobility by restricting access to education, employment, and resources. In Bangladesh, gender disparities in social mobility remain a significant concern, despite progress in education and employment (Azad et al., 2025).

Research suggests that reducing gender inequality can enhance social mobility and contribute to sustainable development. Policies aimed at improving women's access to education and employment have been shown to have positive effects on both individual and societal outcomes. For example, increased female labour force participation can lead to higher household incomes, reduced poverty, and improved health and education outcomes for children.

At the same time, social development processes can influence gender relations. As

societies become more urbanised and economically developed, traditional gender roles may be challenged, leading to greater gender equality. However, this process is not automatic and requires supportive policies and cultural changes.

2.5 Research Gaps

While existing literature provides valuable insights into the relationship between gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh, several gaps remain. First, many studies focus on specific aspects of this relationship, such as fertility or women's empowerment, without considering the broader sociological context. Second, there is a need for more interdisciplinary research that integrates demographic, sociological, and economic perspectives.

Furthermore, limited attention has been given to emerging issues such as population ageing, climate-induced migration, and digital transformation, which are likely to have significant implications for gender and development. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping Bangladesh's future.

3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh requires a multidisciplinary theoretical foundation that integrates sociological, demographic, and development perspectives. This study draws primarily on four interconnected theoretical approaches: demographic transition theory, feminist theory, modernisation theory, and the

capability approach. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how gender relations shape population dynamics and social development outcomes.

Demographic transition theory serves as the foundational framework for analysing population change. The theory posits that societies progress through stages characterised by shifts from high fertility and mortality rates to low fertility and mortality rates as a result of economic development, urbanisation, and improved healthcare (Lee, 2003). Bangladesh's rapid decline in fertility and mortality aligns with the later stages of this transition. However, classical demographic transition theory has been criticised for its limited attention to social inequalities, particularly gender disparities. In the context of Bangladesh, gender norms and inequalities significantly influence reproductive behaviour, access to healthcare, and family planning decisions. Therefore, while demographic transition theory provides a macro-level understanding of population change, it must be complemented by gender-sensitive approaches to capture the full complexity of the process.

Feminist theory offers a critical perspective on gender relations and their impact on demographic and development outcomes. It emphasises the role of power structures, patriarchy, and social norms in shaping women's access to resources and opportunities (Connell, 2009). In Bangladesh, patriarchal social structures have historically limited women's autonomy in areas such as education, employment, and reproductive decision-making. Feminist

theory highlights how these constraints affect fertility behaviour, labour force participation, and social mobility. For example, women with limited decision-making power may have less control over reproductive choices, leading to higher fertility rates and lower participation in economic activities (Kabeer, 1999). Conversely, increased empowerment can lead to lower fertility, improved health outcomes, and enhanced social development. This perspective underscores the importance of addressing gender inequality as a central component of development policy.

Modernisation theory provides another important lens for understanding the relationship between population change and social development. According to this theory, economic development leads to social transformation, including changes in family structures, gender roles, and population behaviour (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). In Bangladesh, processes such as urbanisation, industrialisation, and globalisation have contributed to shifts in gender norms and demographic patterns. For instance, the expansion of the garment industry has created employment opportunities for women, challenging traditional gender roles and increasing female economic participation. These changes have, in turn, influenced fertility behaviour and contributed to the demographic transition. However, modernisation theory has been critiqued for its linear and deterministic assumptions, which may not fully capture the diverse pathways of development in different cultural contexts. In Bangladesh, traditional and modern values often coexist, creating a complex and dynamic social landscape.

The capability approach, developed by Sen (1999), provides a normative framework for understanding social development. This approach focuses on individuals' capabilities-their ability to achieve valued functionings-rather than merely economic growth. It emphasises the importance of expanding opportunities and freedoms, particularly for marginalised groups such as women. In the context of Bangladesh, the capability approach highlights the role of education, healthcare, and social policies in enhancing women's agency and well-being. By improving women's capabilities, these interventions can influence demographic behaviour, such as fertility decisions, and contribute to broader social development outcomes. The capability approach also aligns with the goals of gender equality and social justice, making it particularly relevant for this study.

These theoretical perspectives are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary. Demographic transition theory provides a structural understanding of population change, while feminist theory offers insights into the role of gender relations. Modernisation theory explains the broader socio-economic transformations that influence both population and gender dynamics, and the capability approach provides a normative framework for evaluating development outcomes. Together, they enable a holistic analysis of the interconnections between gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh.

In applying these frameworks, this study adopts an integrative sociological approach

that recognises the multidimensional nature of development. It acknowledges that population change is not merely a demographic phenomenon but is deeply embedded in social structures, cultural norms, and power relations. Similarly, social development is understood not only in terms of economic growth but also in terms of equity, inclusion, and human well-being.

Furthermore, the study emphasises the dynamic and reciprocal relationships between gender, population change, and social development. Gender relations influence demographic behaviour, which in turn affects social development outcomes. At the same time, social development processes can reshape gender norms and population dynamics. This interconnectedness highlights the need for policies that address these dimensions simultaneously rather than in isolation.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework of this study integrates demographic, feminist, modernisation, and capability perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. By combining these approaches, the study aims to capture the complexity of the relationships between gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh and to contribute to both theoretical and policy debates in the field.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the interrelationships between gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh from a

sociological perspective. Given the complexity and multidimensional nature of the research topic, a qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for capturing the social, cultural, and institutional factors that influence demographic behaviour and development outcomes.

4.1 Research Design

The research is based on a secondary data analysis, drawing on existing literature, national and international reports, and statistical data. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of trends and patterns over time, as well as the integration of diverse sources of information. Secondary qualitative research is widely used in sociological studies to synthesise existing knowledge and generate new insights (Johnston, 2017).

The study follows an interpretive research paradigm, which emphasises understanding social phenomena from the perspective of individuals and groups within their socio-cultural context. This paradigm is particularly relevant for analysing gender relations and social development, as it allows for the exploration of meanings, norms, and power structures that shape human behaviour.

4.2 Data Sources

The study utilises a wide range of secondary data sources, including:

National Surveys and Reports: Data from the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), and other government publications provide information on

population trends, fertility, mortality, and social indicators.

International Databases: Reports from organisations such as the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) offer comparative data and insights into global and regional trends.

Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers provide theoretical and empirical insights into gender, population change, and social development.

Policy Documents: National development plans, gender policies, and program evaluations are analysed to understand the institutional context and policy environment.

The use of multiple data sources enhances the reliability and validity of the study by allowing for triangulation of information.

4.3 Data Collection and Selection Criteria

Data collection involves a systematic review of relevant literature and documents. Inclusion criteria for selecting sources include:

- Relevance to the research topic (gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh)
- Publication in peer-reviewed journals or by reputable organisations
- Availability of empirical data or theoretical analysis
- Publication within the last two decades, with some earlier seminal

works included for theoretical grounding

Exclusion criteria include sources lacking methodological rigour, outdated data without historical relevance, and non-scholarly publications.

4.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The study employs thematic analysis as the primary method of data analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is particularly suitable for synthesising diverse sources of information and generating a coherent narrative.

The analysis follows several steps:

- **Familiarisation:** Reviewing and summarising the selected literature and data sources.
- **Coding:** Identifying key concepts, themes, and patterns related to gender, population change, and social development.
- **Theme Development:** Grouping codes into broader themes and sub-themes.
- **Interpretation:** Analysing the relationships between themes and linking them to the theoretical framework.

This systematic approach ensures transparency and rigour in the analysis.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

As this study is based on secondary data, it does not involve direct interaction with human participants. However, ethical

considerations remain important. The study ensures proper citation and acknowledgement of all sources, avoiding plagiarism and respecting intellectual property rights. Additionally, the use of data from reputable sources ensures the credibility and integrity of the research.

4.6 Limitations of the Study

Despite its strengths, the study has several limitations. First, the reliance on secondary data may limit the ability to capture recent or context-specific developments. Second, variations in data quality and methodology across different sources may affect comparability. Third, the qualitative nature of the study limits the ability to establish causal relationships.

However, these limitations are mitigated by the use of multiple data sources, rigorous selection criteria, and systematic analysis methods.

4.7 Justification of the Methodology

The chosen methodology is well-suited to the objectives of the study. By combining secondary data analysis with thematic analysis, the study is able to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research problem. This approach allows for the integration of theoretical and empirical insights, contributing to both academic knowledge and policy discussions.

Moreover, the focus on Bangladesh as a case study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of gender, population change, and social development in a rapidly developing country. The findings of the study may also have broader implications for other

developing countries facing similar challenges.

5. Findings & Analysis

This section presents the key findings derived from the thematic analysis of secondary data on gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh. The findings are organised into major thematic areas: demographic transition patterns, gender dynamics in fertility and family structure, women's empowerment and labour participation, social development indicators, and emerging demographic challenges.

5.1 Demographic Transition and Population Structure

The findings confirm that Bangladesh has undergone a rapid and significant demographic transition over the past five decades. Fertility rates have declined from high levels in the 1970s to near replacement levels in recent years, while life expectancy has increased substantially. This transformation reflects improvements in healthcare, expanded access to family planning services, and rising educational attainment (Karim et al., 2024; World Bank, 2023).

A key feature of this transition is the changing age structure of the population. Bangladesh is currently experiencing a demographic window characterised by a large proportion of working-age individuals relative to dependents. This shift has created favourable conditions for economic growth and social development, often described as the "demographic dividend" (Islam et al., 2025). However, the findings indicate that the

benefits of this demographic shift are unevenly distributed, with disparities across regions, socio-economic groups, and genders.

Urbanisation has also played a significant role in shaping population dynamics. The migration of people from rural to urban areas has contributed to changes in family structures, with a gradual shift from extended to nuclear families. This transformation has implications for fertility behaviour, gender roles, and social support systems. Urban households tend to have fewer children, higher levels of female education, and greater access to healthcare and employment opportunities.

5.2 Gender and Fertility Behaviour

The analysis reveals that gender plays a central role in shaping fertility behaviour in Bangladesh. Women's education emerges as one of the most significant determinants of fertility decline. Educated women are more likely to delay marriage, use contraception, and have fewer children compared to those with limited or no education (Chowdhury et al., 2023). This relationship reflects the broader impact of education on women's autonomy and decision-making power.

Early marriage remains a persistent issue, particularly in rural areas, and continues to influence fertility patterns. Women who marry at a younger age tend to have longer reproductive spans and higher fertility rates. Despite legal restrictions and policy interventions, cultural norms and economic pressures often sustain the practice of early marriage (UNFPA, 2021).

The findings also highlight the importance of reproductive health services in facilitating fertility decline. Bangladesh's family planning programs have been widely recognised for their effectiveness, particularly in increasing contraceptive use among women. However, access to these services is not uniform, with marginalised populations facing barriers related to cost, distance, and social norms.

Gender norms and expectations continue to shape reproductive behaviour. In many cases, women have limited autonomy in decisions related to childbearing, with husbands and extended family members playing a significant role. This dynamic underscores the importance of addressing gender inequality as part of efforts to further reduce fertility and improve reproductive health outcomes.

5.3 Women's Empowerment and Labour Force Participation

Women's empowerment is identified as a critical factor influencing both population change and social development. The findings indicate that Bangladesh has made notable progress in improving women's access to education and employment. Female enrollment in primary and secondary education has increased significantly, contributing to greater gender parity in education (UNDP, 2022).

The expansion of the garment industry has been a major driver of female labour force participation. Millions of women have entered the workforce, gaining economic independence and contributing to household income. This shift has had profound

implications for gender relations, challenging traditional norms and increasing women's bargaining power within households (Kabeer, 1999).

However, the analysis also reveals persistent challenges. Women's labour force participation remains lower than that of men, and many women are concentrated in low-wage, informal, or precarious employment. Gender wage gaps and limited opportunities for career advancement further constrain women's economic empowerment.

In addition, unpaid care work continues to disproportionately fall on women, limiting their ability to participate fully in the labour market. This burden is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where access to childcare and other support services is limited.

5.4 Social Development Indicators

The findings demonstrate significant progress in key social development indicators in Bangladesh. Improvements in maternal and child health have led to reductions in mortality rates, while increased access to education has enhanced human capital. These achievements are closely linked to changes in population dynamics and gender relations.

Maternal mortality has declined significantly, reflecting improvements in healthcare infrastructure and increased utilisation of maternal health services (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, child mortality rates have decreased, contributing to higher life expectancy and improved population health.

Education has been a central driver of social development. Increased enrollment and

completion rates, particularly among girls, have contributed to greater gender equality and improved socio-economic outcomes. Education not only enhances individual capabilities but also influences demographic behaviour, such as fertility and migration.

Social mobility has also improved, although significant disparities remain. Gender inequality continues to limit opportunities for women, particularly in higher education and professional employment. These disparities highlight the need for targeted interventions to promote inclusive development.

5.5 Emerging Challenges: Ageing, Migration, and Climate Change

While Bangladesh has made substantial progress, the findings identify several emerging challenges that may affect the future trajectory of gender, population change, and social development.

Population ageing is an emerging issue, as declining fertility and increasing life expectancy lead to a growing proportion of elderly individuals. This shift poses challenges for social protection systems, healthcare, and intergenerational support structures.

Migration, both internal and international, is another factor shaping population dynamics. Rural-to-urban migration has contributed to urban growth, while international migration has provided economic benefits through remittances. However, migration also creates social challenges, including family separation and changes in gender roles.

Climate change represents a significant and growing threat to Bangladesh, affecting

livelihoods, health, and migration patterns. Women are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to existing gender inequalities (UNDP, 2022). Addressing these challenges requires integrated policies that consider the interconnections between gender, population, and development.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex and dynamic relationships between gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh. This section interprets these findings in light of the theoretical framework and existing literature, highlighting key insights and implications.

6.1 Interplay Between Gender and Demographic Transition

The analysis confirms that gender is a central factor in shaping demographic transition in Bangladesh. The decline in fertility is closely linked to improvements in women's education, empowerment, and access to reproductive health services. This finding is consistent with demographic transition theory but also highlights its limitations in addressing gender dynamics.

Feminist theory provides a more nuanced understanding of this relationship by emphasising the role of power and inequality. The persistence of patriarchal norms and gender inequalities continues to influence reproductive behaviour, even as overall fertility declines. This suggests that demographic transition is not merely a

function of economic development but is also shaped by social and cultural factors.

The interaction between gender and demographic transition is also evident in the context of early marriage. Despite progress in education and economic development, early marriage remains prevalent in some areas, reflecting deep-rooted cultural norms. Addressing this issue requires not only policy interventions but also broader social and cultural change.

6.2 Gender, Labour Participation, and Social Development

The findings highlight the critical role of women's labour force participation in driving social development. The expansion of employment opportunities for women, particularly in the garment industry, has contributed to economic growth and poverty reduction. This supports the arguments of modernisation theory, which links economic development to changes in gender roles and social structures.

However, the analysis also reveals the limitations of this process. While women's participation in the labour market has increased, it is often characterised by low wages, limited job security, and poor working conditions. This suggests that economic participation alone is not sufficient to achieve gender equality and social development.

The capability approach provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics. It emphasises the importance of expanding women's capabilities, including access to education, healthcare, and decent work. From this perspective, social

development should be measured not only in terms of economic growth but also in terms of the quality of life and opportunities available to individuals.

6.3 Demographic Dividend and Development Opportunities

The demographic dividend presents a significant opportunity for Bangladesh to accelerate its development. The large working-age population has the potential to drive economic growth, provided that adequate investments are made in education, healthcare, and employment.

However, the realisation of this potential is contingent on addressing gender inequalities. Women's full participation in the labour force is essential for maximising the benefits of the demographic dividend. This requires policies that promote gender equality in education, employment, and decision-making.

The findings also suggest that the demographic dividend is time-limited. As the population ages, the proportion of dependents will increase, placing greater pressure on social protection systems. This underscores the importance of long-term planning and investment in human capital.

6.4 Social Development as a Multidimensional Process

The study reinforces the idea that social development is a multidimensional process that encompasses health, education, and social equity. Improvements in these areas are closely linked to changes in population dynamics and gender relations.

The capability approach highlights the importance of expanding individuals' freedoms and opportunities. In Bangladesh, progress in education and healthcare has enhanced human capabilities, contributing to both individual well-being and broader social development.

However, persistent inequalities, particularly along gender lines, continue to limit the benefits of development. Addressing these inequalities is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

6.5 Emerging Challenges and Future Directions

The emerging challenges identified in the findings—population ageing, migration, and climate change—have significant implications for the future of Bangladesh. These challenges are interconnected and require integrated policy responses.

Population ageing will require investments in healthcare and social protection systems, as well as efforts to promote active ageing and intergenerational solidarity. Migration presents both opportunities and challenges, requiring policies that support migrants and their families while addressing the social impacts of migration.

Climate change poses a particularly serious threat, with implications for livelihoods, health, and population displacement. Women are disproportionately affected by these impacts, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive climate policies.

6.6 Policy Implications

The findings and discussion point to several key policy implications. First, promoting gender equality should be a central component of development policy. This includes investments in education, healthcare, and employment opportunities for women.

Second, policies should address the social and cultural factors that influence gender relations and demographic behaviour. This includes efforts to reduce early marriage and promote gender-equitable norms.

Third, integrated approaches are needed to address the interconnections between gender, population change, and social development. This requires coordination across sectors and levels of government, as well as collaboration with civil society and international organisations.

7. Conclusion

This study has explored the complex and dynamic relationships between gender, population change, and social development in Bangladesh through a sociological lens. The findings demonstrate that Bangladesh has undergone a remarkable demographic transformation over the past several decades, marked by declining fertility rates, increasing life expectancy, and significant changes in population structure. These demographic shifts are closely intertwined with improvements in social development indicators, particularly in education and healthcare.

A central conclusion of the study is that gender plays a critical and transformative role in shaping both population dynamics and social development outcomes. Improvements in women's education, access to reproductive health services, and participation in the labour force have contributed significantly to fertility decline and broader socio-economic progress. At the same time, persistent gender inequalities continue to limit the full realisation of development potential. Barriers such as early marriage, unequal access to employment opportunities, and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work highlight the ongoing challenges in achieving gender equality.

The study also underscores the importance of viewing population change not merely as a demographic phenomenon but as a socially embedded process influenced by cultural norms, institutional structures, and power relations. The integration of theoretical perspectives, including demographic transition theory, feminist theory, modernisation theory, and the capability approach, provides a comprehensive understanding of these interconnections. This multidimensional perspective reveals that sustainable social development requires not only economic growth but also the expansion of human capabilities and the promotion of social equity.

Furthermore, the research highlights emerging challenges that may shape the future trajectory of Bangladesh's development. Population ageing, migration, and climate change present significant risks and opportunities, requiring proactive and integrated policy responses. These challenges

are particularly relevant from a gender perspective, as women often face disproportionate vulnerabilities in the context of environmental and socio-economic changes.

In conclusion, the study emphasises that achieving sustainable and inclusive development in Bangladesh depends on the effective integration of gender considerations into population and development policies. Strengthening women's empowerment, reducing gender disparities, and promoting equitable access to resources and opportunities are essential for maximising the benefits of demographic transition. Future research should continue to explore these relationships in greater depth, particularly in the context of emerging global challenges and changing socio-economic conditions.

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