

Chapter 10

Understanding Ethnic Disparities in Family Status Attainment: Implication for Family Welfare Policy–Practice in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic disparity in family status attainment (FSA) is the social issue across the world societies, including Bangladesh. Based on systematic cross-cultural literature 1980-2010, this chapter compares and explains ethnic disparity in FSA between majority (Muslim) and minority groups (Hindu, Santal, and Oraon) in Bangladesh. Evidence in systematic literature reveals that FSA is two-fold higher in the majority group than in the minority ethnic communities in Bangladesh. Using social science theories, this chapter argues that disadvantaged psychological, social, and political status, as well as discrimination and unequal distribution of resources perpetuate disparity in FSA between the majority and minority ethnic groups. The chapter also describes comparative social welfare policy-programs on which administrators, educationists, social activists, and social workers may play important roles to reduce, eliminate, and change disparity in FSA between the ethnic groups in Bangladesh.

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INTRODUCTION

Family status attainment (e.g., education, occupation and income) is the building block of social structure as well as the achievement aspect of human behaviors in any society. Evidence in social science approaches and its related literature suggests that people across the social systems occupies not only certain socio-economic position and social standing in stratified, hierarchical class-based society but also acquires certain power, prestige, privileges and resources through which they meet their day-to-day human needs and solve personal and social problems faced in a particular society they live. This paper focuses on ethnic disparity in family status attainment (FSA) between majority (Muslim) and minority ethnic (e.g., Hindu, Santal, Oraon) communities in Bangladesh. Disparity (also difference) in FSA between nations, between poor and rich, between religious/racial/ethnic communities and between male and female is the social issue across the world societies, including Bangladesh. Over the decades a number of theoretical (e.g., biological, social, economic, political, psychological, cultural) approaches and its related systematic comparative studies (Buchmann & Hannum, 2001; Breen & Jonsson, 2005; Downey, 2008; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Leicht, 2008; Sakamoto, Goyette & Kim, 2009) conducted in the U.S. and E.U. have revealed that there are wide cultural/sub-cultural disparities in FSA across the societies, although the societies are highly developed, fully democratic and egalitarian in nature.

Functional theory and its comparative research studies have revealed that socio-economic status of people with highly developed capital market economies is higher than that the people with moderate market and agricultural ones. The functionalists have argued that without higher socio-economic status people in the former cannot fulfill their human needs and cannot solve their human problems faced in that environment than in the later. Other cross-cultural studies conducted within the (multicultural) societies (for example, U. S., U. K.) have showed that FSA also varies across social class, race, ethnic group and region. Based on majority-minority paradigm (Eitzen & Zinn, 1997) and oppositional cultural theory (Ogbu, 1978) researchers have argued that the dominant class or cultural group (the White) by dint of their higher status, power, prestige and privileges always dominates, deprives and exploit the lower classes or non-dominant cultural/ethnic, racial groups (e.g. the Black, Hispanic, Indian American, African) in the society (Adkins & Valsey, 2009; Breen & Jonsson, 2005; Peek, 1979). As a result, FSA of the lower class and minority groups is widely lower than the dominant group. In line with the hypothesis several cross-cultural/cross-ethnic research studies investigated in the multicultural societies have also revealed that the FSA the early generation achieved is transformed into the next generation. As the FSA of the minority parents or non-dominant groups compared to the majority (dominant) is two to three-fold lower,

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