**Early childhood developmental status and its associated factors in Bangladesh: a comparison of two multiple indicator cluster surveys**

**Abstract**

**Introduction**

Child cognitive and social development begins within the early years of their life. The lacking of this development creates physical and mental disorder including childhood autism. Considering this, we conducted a comparison study in Bangladesh using two multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS) to assess the early childhood developmental (ECD) status and its associated factors.

**Methods**

We used the nationally representative MICS 2012 and 2019 survey data. Altogether, 17494 [8148 from MICS 2012 and 9346 from MICS 2019] children aged 36 to 59 months were included in the study. We applied Chi-square association test, univariate and multivariable logistic regression model to evaluate the ECD status and its associated factors.

**Results**

The overall ECD status improved from 2012 (65.46%) to 2019 (74.86%). The child literacy-numeracy [28.8% vs 21.2%], physical [98.4% vs 92.2%], social-emotional [72.7% vs 68.4%] and approaches to learning [91.4% vs 87.5%] indicators were found an increasing trend in 2019 comparing to 2012. In both survey years, the four year’s children [71.40% vs 59.46%] and [81.26% vs 68.72%] were more developmentally on track compare to three years of children. Female children [67.65% vs 63.41% in 2012; 78.46% vs 71.51% in 2019] were significantly more developmentally on track than their counterparts. We found children aged four years [OR: 1.78, 95% CI: 1.58-2.01 in MICS 2012; OR: 2.08, 95% CI: 1.85-2.32 in MICS 2019] is more likely to on track compare to three years of children and female children [OR: 1.27, 95% CI: 1.12-1.44 in MICS 2012; OR: 1.47, 95% CI: 1.32-1.63 in MICS 2019] more likely to on track compare to male children. Mother’s with secondary complete or higher educational attainment had a higher chance of developmentally on track than their primary incomplete counterparts. An interesting result noted for children’s place of residence, the child growing in rural areas were found significantly higher chance [OR: 1.28, 95% CI: 1.05-1.57] of developmentally on track in MICS 2012 whereas in 2019, the rural child had 11% less [OR: 0.89, 95% CI: 0.77-1.03] likely to developmentally on track than the urban children.

**Conclusion**

Although many children had developmentally on track, the socio-demographic and economic indicators are influential that should be taken into consideration to enrich.

In summary, the overall ﬁndings indicated that a high number of the preschool-aged children who were the focus in these analyses were not developmentally ‘on track’ on the ECDI. Current early childhood development strategies and initiatives in Bangladesh should be revisited and targeted interventions should take these ﬁnd-ings into account in setting goals and identifying strategies to improve learning opportunities for young children in families. More stimulating home care environ-ments are important as well as access to preschool programs, in recognition of the lack of opportunities for many families to access appropriate resources to support their children’s learning.

Since every behavior can be seen to depend on a collaboration between child and environment, it becomes impossible to analyze any behavior without including both organismic and environmental factors.

In the light of this evidence, governments must prioritise child health, support parenting education, and improve the quality of ECD interventions in order to achieve Education

**Introduction**

The early years of a child's life play a key role in their cognitive development, social and emotional abilities 1. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), early childhood development (ECD) refers to the physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, and motor development in the early years of a child's life 2. Early adversity (for example, maternal depression, domestic violence, drug abuse, having a single caregiver and poverty) influences genetic expression (phenotypes), which, in turn, affects brain structure and cognitive function and child development. The effects of these risk factors are moderated by the intensity, timing and duration of adversity, as well as a child’s reactivity to these factors and associated with developmental delays and chronic health problems, such as coronary heart disease, diabetes and depression later in life 3. Compared with children with non-autistic, children with autism have been described as less likely to demonstrate early social-communicative behaviours such as making eye contact, response to parents or others, offering and giving objects, showing and pointing to objects, raising arms to be picked up, less likely to play, imitating, using non-verbal vocalizations communicatively, and more likely to prefer to be alone, which push them to developmental delays 4–6.

Children begin to learn about the world around them within five years of birth, and this development refers to the sequence of physical, language, thought, and emotional changes,7 which allows them to stay focused, understand and follow directions, communicate with others, and solve increasingly complex problems 1. At the early age of prenatal periods to infancy and early childhood, a child’s newly developing brain is highly productive and responsive to change 8. This period is the golden period for them to make themselves highly thirsty for learning and physically fit to become a successful and productive person in later life 9.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the interest in ECD has become popular worldwide. Developed countries suggest that population-based measures may help measure ECD and predict later life wellness 1.Yet, despite the practical importance of the ECD, population-based measures have not been readily available to low-and middle-income countries (LMICs) 10. Using the data from United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank, the Lancet 2016 child development series concluded that 43 percent or an estimated 250 million children under five fail to achieve their developmental potential each year, living in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are at risk of suboptimal development due to poverty and stunting 11. The series confirms the links between poverty and inequality in childhood development that are mediated through biological factors, including intrauterine growth restriction, child malnutrition, microbial deficiencies, infectious diseases, environmental exposure, and psychological factors 12.

In Bangladesh, government and non-government organizations are working with many developmental facilities for the child, child parents, and child care-takers to ensure all kinds of rights they deserved 13. Creating an innovative foundation for strong development during the early years of life is essential for thriving communities, economic productivity, and civil societies. But most parents in Bangladesh are unaware of this scientific fact, which forms the core of Early Childhood Development. UNICEF continues to popularize the concept of ECD, demonstrate policies, strengthen networks and partnerships, and provide technical assistance and support 14. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence of the mechanisms of the factors associated with early childhood development in Bangladesh. Thus, this paper aims to draw the relationship among factors related to early childhood development in Bangladesh, and we try to show the child's developmental status in Bangladesh.

**Methods**

**Data source and study variables**

We used two waves of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted in 2012 and 2019. MICS is a large, multidimensional nationally representative household survey conducted by the UNICEF. This survey uses standardized questionnaires to provide the information and key indicators on the situation of children. Mostly, they focus on reproductive health, maternal and child health interventions, child nutrition status, and early childhood development. MICS also collects an identical set of socioeconomic characteristics of individuals and households15,16. Datasets were open access for the public domain 17.

**Sampling design and sample size**

The MICS survey is a two-stage cluster sampling procedure, randomly selecting households with children under five years. 2012 MICS is based on a sample of 51,895 households interviewed with a response rate of 98.5% and 2019 MICS is based on a sample of 61,246 interviewed with a response rate of 99.4%. MICS provides a comprehensive picture of children’s and women’s health in the seven administrative divisions (Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Barisal, Khulna) of Bangladesh. Districts were identified as the primary sample strata for sample selection at two stages15,16. In this study, the child age ranged from 36 to 59 months were included. Therefore, the sample included 17494 children, where 8148 were in 2012 MICS and 9346 children in 2019 MICS having the information about the ECD and used in the analysis.

The Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI) primary objective is to inform public policy on children's development status in Bangladesh. To measure early childhood development, UNICEF made a significant contribution by developing the ECDI questionnaire. The ECDI began to materialize when UNICEF, working with countries and partners, designed indicators to assess the quality of a child’s home environment and access to early childhood care and education (ECCE). From UNICEF’s the ECDI was 1st initiated in 2009 during the 4th round of MICS (2012 MICS) and has been available in the following survey. It includes ten dichotomous (yes/no) items in four early developmental domains: Literacy-numeracy (3 items), physical (2 items), social-emotional (3 items), and approaches to learning (2 items). The MICS includes questions in the ECD module for children under five and is addressed to mothers (or caregivers) of children ages 3 and 4 10.

For creating the outcome variable (ECD status), for each ECDI domain, a score of 1 was assigned to every child depends on the number of items to which the mother indicated a ‘yes’ response, otherwise 0. ECDI variable then constructed based on the summation of these scores and used as the outcome variable. This had a possible range of 0 to 4, whereby at least three of these four domains or scores greater than or equals to three were indicated developmentally ‘on track’. The rest scores were treated as to fall in the category of developmentally ‘on delay’ 15,16.

**Covariates**

For identifying the possible factors associated with ECD status, some reliable variables are selected as the respondent. A set of covariates such as child’s age, sex, place of residence, region of the country, mother’s educational level, wealth index, religion, sex of household head, ethnicity of household head, C-section delivery, mother’s age, early childhood disease, nutritional status (underweight, stunting, wasting, and overweight), mother’s body mass index (BMI), toilet facility, early childhood educational program, mother stimulation, father stimulation, other stimulation, salt iodization, books, toys, media accessibility (possession of television, newspaper or radio), and child punishment was used. Details including levels of covariates, are provided in Table 2.

For measuring a child's nutritional status, four anthropometric indices, height-for-age, weight-for-age and weight-for-height z-score, were used as recommended by the WHO 18. The z-score implies how many standard deviations a given value is apart from the mean, and it is usually used to standardise data. In this particular case, the z-score was used to compare stunting, wasting, underweight and overweight across gender and all age groups of under-five children. A child was considered wasted if the weight-for-height z-score was less than -2 and stunted if the height-for-age z-score was less than -2. Underweight was considered by weight-for-age z-score when it was less than -2 and overweight if the weight-for-height z-score was higher than +2.

Toilet facilities were categorised into improved (flush toilet, flush to piped sewer system, flush to septic tank, flush to pit latrine, pit latrine with slab and ventilated improved pit latrine), not improved (e.g. hanging toilet, open pit) and others. Mother's educational level was also divided into three groups: no education, primary and secondary complete or higher (completing at least grade 10). Wealth index was re-categorised into high economic class (upper 20% asset value), middle economic class (middle 40% asset value) and low economic class (lower 40% asset value) 19. Mother's BMI was classified as underweight (BMI less than 18.5 kg/m2), normal (BMI 18.5-24.9 kg/m2), overweight (BMI 25-29.9 kg/m2) and obese (BMI higher than 30 kg/m2) 20.

**Statistical Analysis**

Bivariate analysis (chi-square test) was conducted to evaluate the association between ECD statuses with other covariates. For both the 2012 and 2019 MICS survey data, the univariable [unadjusted] and multivariable [adjusted] logistic regression model were fitted separately to show the degree of factors influence and adjusted associations. To account for the complex survey design, we used the Svyset command in Stata (StataCorp LP, College Station, Texas). The Svyset command helps us use design elements such as the primary sampling unit, strata, cluster, and sample weight 21.

**Ethical considerations**

As no work on human subjects was carried out as part of this project, this freely available secondary data analysis was exempt from ethics review.

**Results**

Survey Characteristics:

This study included 8148 in 2012 and 9346 in 2019 nationally representative children 3 to 4 months of age in Bangladesh. The prevalence of developmentally on track children increased from 65.46% in 2012 to 74.86% in 2019. (Figure-1).

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| **Fig 1.** Distribution of developmental status of children by different survey years. |

The comparison of ECD on-track status for indicated domains between the years 2012 and 2019 was assessed [Table 1]. Prevalence of these status has increased for each of the domains. The highest increase rate in ECD on track status (21.2% to 28.8%) was found in the literacy-numeracy domain. The lowest rate of increase in ECD on track status (68.4% to 72.7%) was found in the social-emotional domain [Table 1].

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The overall ECD status by their socio-demographic characteristics for 2012 MICS and 2019 MICS surveys are shown in Table 2. The distribution of developmentally on track status of child age of 3 years is 59.46% according to 2012 MICS whereas it is increased to 68.72% in 2019 MICS and child age of 4 years 71.40% was on track in 2012 MICS whereas that increased to 81.26% in 2019 MICS. By the sex of the child, the female child was always more developmentally on track than the male child. In 2012 MICS, male child developmentally on track status was 63.41% and 67.65% for female. Similarly, in 2019 MICS, 71.51% and 78.46% were male and female developmentally on track. The children from rural 72.17% in 2012 MICS and 78.15% in 2019 MICS were more developmentally on track than the urban 63.72% in 2012 MICS and 73.99% in 2019 MICS children [Table 2].

**Table.2** Sample characteristics of children by developmental status, MICS 2012 and 2019.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Characteristics** | **Developmental Status in 2012** | | | **Developmental Status in 2019** | | |
| **On track N (%)** | **Delay N (%)** | **P-value** | **On track N (%)** | **Delay N (%)** | **P-value** |
| **Child Age** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Up to 3 years | 2392 (59.46) | 1649(40.54) | <0.001 | 3166 (68.72) | 1584 (31.28) | <0.001 |
| Up to 4 years | 2909 (71.40) | 1198 (28.60) | 3680 (81.26) | 916 (18.74) |
| **Child Sex** | | | | | | |
| Male | 2669 (63.41) | 1565 (36.59) | 0.002 | 3383 (71.51) | 1440 (28.49) | <0.001 |
| Female | 2632 (67.65) | 1282 (32.35) | 3463 (78.46) | 1060 (21.54) |
| **Area** | | | | | | |
| Urban | 4388(63.72) | 2467 (36.28) | <0.001 | 1305 (78.15) | 430 (21.85) | <0.001 |
| Rural | 913 (72.17) | 380 (27.83) | 5541 (73.99) | 2070 (26.01) |
| **Division** | | | | | | |
| Barishal | 526 (67.86) | 262 (32.14) | <0.001 | 552 (67.8) | 269 (32.20) | <0.001 |
| Chattogram | 940 (55.04) | 682 (44.96) | 1479 (78.26) | 470 (21.74) |
| Dhaka | 1286 (67.45) | 674 (32.55) | 1453 (81.85) | 343 (18.15) |
| Khulna | 740 (71.70) | 326 (28.30) | 895 (73.07) | 409 (26.93) |
| Mymensingh | - | - | 347 (61.26) | 209 (38.74) |
| Rajshahi | 527 (66.76) | 263 (33.24) | 720 (69.57) | 307 (30.43) |
| Rangpur | 866 (78.38) | 262 (21.62) | 896 (83.71) | 207 (16.29) |
| Sylhet | 416 (54.15) | 378 (45.85) | 504 (61.73) | 286 (38.27) |
| **Mother's Education** | | | | | | |
| Primary incomplete | 2076 (58.80) | 1462 (41.20) | <0.001 | 847 (68.53) | 389 (31.47) | <0.001 |
| Primary complete | 772 (62.73) | 447 (37.27) | 1590 (68.62) | 727 (31.38) |
| Secondary incomplete | 1800 (70.01) | 760 (29.99) | 3363 (74.63) | 1143 (25.37) |
| Secondary complete or Higher | 653 (79.46) | 178 (20.54) | 1046 (81.27) | 241(18.73) |
| **Wealth Index** | | | | | | |
| Poorest | 1503 (58.34) | 1039 (41.66) | <0.001 | 1625 (68.35) | 750 (31.65) | <0.001 |
| Second | 1118 (62.85) | 657 (37.15) | 1401 (71.50) | 581 (28.5) |
| Middle | 954 (65.97) | 479 (35.03) | 1287 (75.45) | 462 (24.55) |
| Fourth | 885 (67.20) | 407 (32.80) | 1287 (75.86) | 442 (24.14) |
| Richest | 841 (77.55) | 265 (22.45) | 1246 (84.05) | 264 (15.95) |
| **Religion** | | | | | | |
| Islam | 4486 (66.08) | 2384 (33.92) | 0.044 | 6165 (74.90) | 2250 (25.10) | 0.79 |
| Others | 534 (61.42) | 321 (38.58) | 681(74.44) | 250(25.56) |
| **Sex of household head** | | | | | | |
| Male | 4411 (65.67) | 2348 (34.33) | 0.852 | 6223 (73.02) | 2299 (26.98) | 0.367 |
| Female | 609 (65.26) | 357 (34.74) | 623 (75.61) | 201 (24.39) |
| **Ethnicity of the household head** | | | | | | |
| Bengali | 4865 (65.58) | 2620 (34.42) | 0.798 | 6684 (74.89) | 2438 (25.11) | 0.474 |
| Others | 155 (66.60) | 85 (33.40) | 162 (72.70) | 62 (27.30) |

For the divisional region, the children with the highest developmentally on track status were in Rangpur 78.38% 2012 MICS, and it is also highest in 2019 MICS (83.71%) than all other division. On track developmental status was lowest in Sylhet 54.15% in 2012 MICS and 61.73% in 2019 MICS than all other division. The most developmentally on track child was with the mother having secondary complete or higher educational level with 79.46% 2012 MICS, and it is increased to 81.27% in 2012 MICS whereas a child with mother having incomplete primary education was minimum developmental on track status with 58.80% in 2012 MICS and 68.53% in 2019 MICS. By the wealth index, children living in the wealthiest family were most developmentally on track status with 77.55% in 2012 and 84.05% in 2012 MICS and lowest developmentally on track status in the poorest family 58.34% in 2012 MICS and 68.35% in 2019 MICS.

The univariable and multivariable logistic regression model results refer to the degree of relationship between early childhood development status and children’s socio-demographic profiles.

To show associations between early childhood developmentally on track status and child age, place of residence, division, mother’s education, wealth index, religion, sex of household head, and household head. The univariate logistic model indicates the individual associated with the ECD status. The univariate result from 2012 and 2019 MICS data, child age of 4 years had 70% (2012 MICS OR:1.70, 95% CI: 1.52-1.91) and 97% [2019 MICS OR:1.97, 95% CI: 1.77-2.20] higher chance of developmentally on track than the age of 3. In multivariate results, when all other variables adjusted, the developmentally on track status had the higher chance (2012 MICS OR:1.78, 95% CI: 1.58-2.01) and (2019 MICS OR:2.08, 95% CI: 1.85-2.32) for child age of 4 than the age of 3 in both datasets. There were significant differences in ECD status among child sex, female children had a higher chance of developmentally on track in both surveys than the male child. In both models, children living in the Rangpur division had a 72% higher chance (2012 MICS OR: 1.72, 95% CI: 1.38, 2.13) and after adjusting 71% higher chance (2012 MICS OR: 1.71, 95% CI: 1.36, 2.14) of developmentally on track compared to Barishal division. An interesting result noted for children’s residence. In MICS 2012 survey, the child growing in rural areas were found significantly higher chance [OR: 1.28, 95% CI: 1.05-1.57 in MICS 2012] of developmentally on track than the urban children. On the other hand, the negative result found in MICS 2019 survey where the rural child had 11% less [OR: 0.89, 95% CI: 0.77-1.03] likely to developmentally on track than the urban children [Table 3].

**Table 3.** Factors associated with the developmental status of children, MICS 2012 and 2019.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **MICS- 2012** | | | | **MICS- 2019** | | | |
| **Univariate** | | **Multi-variate** | | **Univariate** | | **Multi-variate** | |
| **Variables** | **Unadjusted**  **OR (95% CI)** | **P-value** | **Adjusted**  **OR (95% CI)** | **P-value** | **Unadjusted**  **OR (95% CI)** | **P-value** | **Adjusted**  **OR (95% CI)** | **P-value** |
| **Age of child** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 | 1.70 (1.52-1.91) | <0.001 | 1.78 (1.58-2.01) | <0.001 | 1.97 (1.77-2.20) | <0.001 | 2.08 (1.85-2.32) | <0.001 |
| 3 | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - |
| **Child’s sex** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | 1.21 (1.07-1.36) | 0.002 | 1.27 (1.12-1.44) | <0.001 | 1.45 (1.31-1.61) | <0.001 | 1.47 (1.32-1.63) | <0.001 |
| Male | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - |
| **Area** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Rural | 1.48 (1.21-1.79) | <0.001 | 1.28 (1.05-1.57) | 0.013 | 1.26 (1.09-1.44) | <0.001 | 0.89 (0.77-1.03) | 0.125 |
| Urban | Reference | - | Reference |  | Reference | - | Reference | - |
| **Division** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Chattogram | 0.58 (0.47-0.71) | <0.001 | 0.49 (0.39-0.62) | <0.001 | 1.71 (1.43 - 2.05) | <0.001 | 1.55 (1.27-1.89) | <0.001 |
| Dhaka | 0.98 (0.80-1.20) | 0.859 | 0.87 (0.70-1.08) | 0.217 | 2.14 (1.77 -2.60) | <0.001 | 1.91 (1.56-2.34) | <0.001 |
| Khulna | 1.20 (0.97-1.49) | 0.097 | 1.07 (0.84-1.36) | 0.553 | 1.29 (1.07-1.55) | 0.008 | 1.18 (0.96-1.43) | 0.101 |
| Mymensingh | - | - | - | - | 0.75 (0.59 - 0.95) | 0.017 | 0.77 (0.60-0.98) | 0.035 |
| Rajshahi | 0.95 (0.75-1.20) | 0.675 | 0.92 (0.71-1.18) | 0.514 | 1.09 (0.88-1.33) | 0.430 | 1.04 (0.84-1.29) | 0.719 |
| Rangpur | 1.72 (1.38-2.13) | <0.001 | 1.71 (1.36-2.14) | <0.001 | 2.44 (0.62-0.95) | <0.001 | 2.59 (2.10-3.19) | <0.001 |
| Sylhet | 0.56 (0.44-0.71) | <0.001 | 0.59 (0.46-0.75) | <0.001 | 0.77 (0.62-0.95) | 0.015 | 0.75 (0.60-0.93) | 0.010 |
| Barishal | Reference | - | Reference |  | Reference | - | Reference | - |
| **Mother’s education level** | | | | | | | | |
| Secondary complete or Higher | 2.71 (2.14-3.43) | <0.001 | 1.89 (1.46-2.46) | <0.001 | 2.26 (1.82-2.79) | <0.001 | 1.76 (1.38-2.23) | <0.001 |
| Secondary incomplete | 1.64 (1.43-1.87) | <0.001 | 1.43 (1.22-1.68) | <0.001 | 1.53 (1.31-1.78) | <0.001 | 1.37 (1.16-1.62) | <0.001 |
| Primary complete | 1.17 (0.99-1.40) | 0.062 | 1.16 (0.96-1.39) | 0.117 | 1.04 (0.88-1.23) | 0.651 | 1.04 (0.87-1.23) | 0.689 |
| Primary incomplete | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - |
| **Wealth Index** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Richest | 2.47 (1.98-3.08) | <0.001 | 1.82 (1.38-2.40) | <0.001 | 2.44 (2.04 -2.93) | <0.001 | 1.85 (1.47-2.31) | <0.001 |
| Fourth | 1.46 (1.22-1.75) | <0.001 | 1.24 (1.01-1.52) | 0.040 | 1.45 (1.24-1.70) | <0.001 | 1.17 (0.98-1.40) | 0.084 |
| Middle | 1.32 (1.12-1.56) | 0.001 | 1.22 (1.01-1.47) | 0.036 | 1.42 (1.22-1.66) | <0.001 | 1.22 (1.03-1.46) | 0.019 |
| Second | 1.21 (1.04-1.41) | 0.014 | 1.06 (0.90-1.26) | 0.482 | 1.16 (1.00-1.35) | 0.051 | 1.07 (0.91-1.25) | 0.412 |
| Poorest | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - |
| **Religion** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Islam | 1.22 (1.01-1.49) | 0.045 | 1.29 (1.03-1.62) | 0.029 | 1.02 (0.86-1.22) | 0.790 | 1.08 (0.88-1.33) | 0.451 |
| Others | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - |
| **Sex of household** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | 0.98 (0.81-1.19) | 0.852 | 1.04 (0.86-1.26) | 0.656 | 1.08 (0.91-1.29) | 0.368 | 0.95 (0.79-1.14) | 0.551 |
| Male | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - |
| **The ethnicity of household sex** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Bengali | 0.96 (0.67-1.35) | 0.799 | 0.72 (0.48-1.06) | 0.095 | 1.12 (0.82-1.53) | 0.474 | 0.93 (0.63-1.39) | 0.735 |
| Others | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - | Reference | - |

For univariate and multivariate models, the child with a secondary complete or higher educated mother had a higher chance of ECD on track status than the child bought by the primary incomplete mother in both surveys. In 2012 MICS, household religion affects ECD on track status, but it is not statistically significant in 2019 MICS. No statistically significant effects of household head’s sex and ethnicity on ECD on track status were observed in both surveys.

**Discussion**

We investigated the ECD status among children of Bangladesh. We observed that a large portion of children (74.86%) had developmentally on track. This finding is in line with the previous MICS reports in 2012 and 2019 15,16. However, this percentage is lower in Pakistan (Balochistan) and higher in Vietnam 22. Moreover, this figure varying in low- and middle-income countries, mean rate of children aged 36–59 months with on-track development was 65·5%, ranging from 42·6% in Sierra Leone to 85·9 % in Belize 22. We also found a substantial impact on child age, child sex, residence, division, mother’s education, and wealth index on the ECD status.

In this study, the boy’s ECD on track status is low compared to girls and correspondingly had a higher chance of developmental delay. These findings are consistent with other cohort studies in Western Cape, South Africa, where they explored developmental performance by cognitive, language, and fine motor in very young children 23. Statistically significant gender differences among children with developmental delay in two or more countries were found using two indicators. Concerning “learning support”, gender inequality was inconsistent (higher disadvantage among boys in Vietnam and girls in Nepal). Concerning “aggression” to others, a significantly higher prevalence was observed among boys with developmental delay in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Vietnam 24.

Child from the wealthiest family had a higher chance of overall development compared to their poorest counterparts. Because early childhood programs may exacerbate existing developmental inequalities if uptake of promoted activities is more significant in higher socio-economic groups with already comparatively better growth and development 25. Evidence shows a graded effect of deprivation and adversity across the entire spectrum of socioeconomic status. Even those children from the second-highest social class lead to poorer health and development than those from families of the very highest socioeconomic status 26. In five of the six countries, children with developmental delay were more likely to be living in poverty than their peers. In three countries (Bangladesh, Laos, and Vietnam), differences were statistically significant. The highest relative disadvantage rates were observed in Vietnam, with children with development delay being 2.2 times more likely to be living in poverty 24.

Our study findings also confirmed that children's on-track developmental status occurred among secondary or higher educated mothers. Parents’ cultural backgrounds have been associated with the learning environments provided to children of all ages. Parents tend to promote not only those skills that they value but also those they have mastered. In a recent study, immigrant parents of different cultural backgrounds—Cambodian, Dominican, and Portuguese—differed significantly concerning the areas of their children’s education in which they were involved. These differences existed even when many parents in all groups reported valuing education and having high aspirations for their children’s educational attainment 27.

**Strengths and limitations**

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study based on the most recent MICS data in the context of developmental status using ECDI scores with Bangladeshi children. We used a sufficiently large nationally representative dataset, which represents the general population of Bangladesh. We also considered a wide range of factors that are influencing the developmental status. Despite all these strengths, our study had some limitations. As we used secondary data, the selection of variables, quality of data, and measurement indicators were beyond control. Data on child development are also available only for children of ages 3 and 4. It is unclear how similar developmental scores among younger children are to the outcomes observed among 3- and 4-y-olds. Additional data spanning the full 0- to 5-y age range is needed to understand children’s development at the country levels more precisely. Moreover, the survey was conducted in 2012 and 2019; in the meantime, the developmental status may have changed.

**Conclusion:**

The study focused on the level and influencing factors of early childhood developmental status among children aged 3 and 4 years from rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. A strong impact of the child’s age, region, division, education of the mother, wealth index, and religion on the child’s developmental status was detected. Although many children had developmentally on track, initiatives should be taken to enlarge the mothers in higher education. Children in the poorest wealth status group of the countries are the most in need of assistance to reach their full development potential. Adding the early learning setting procedures in higher-secondary textbooks could be a valuable step towards reducing the developmental delay. A deeper understanding of the relationship between the risk factors and children's early development and approaches to encouraging parents' engagement in children’s learning, development, and health is needed to most effectively ensure that children in Bangladesh reach full developmental potential.

**Recommendations:**

This study's findings have implications for governments, international agencies, non-government organisations, and public health professionals who are working to improve early childhood development. To ECD, future research is needed to develop more detailed and age-specific measures that can more accurately capture children’s abilities across a wide range of cultures and local contexts. Further work is required beyond typical development standards to understand the specific needs of children who may experience more severe disabilities requiring more intensive treatment and care.

A**cknowledgments**

We acknowledge UNICEF and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics for allowing us to use the data.

**Ethical consent**

Our study was wholly based on an analysis of existing public domain health survey datasets obtained from the MICS 2012 and 2019 which is freely available online with all personal identifying information removed. The MICS procedures were reviewed and approved by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and UNICEF. Informed consent was obtained from participants while interviewing them. Because this study involved the analysis with secondary data thus, it did not require the ethical approval of the respective institution.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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