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The scenario of Violence against Women in Bangladesh: A Trend Analysis

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Abstract. The prime objective of this study is to portray the current trend of violence against Bangladeshi women. Using the survey report on violence against women (VWA) conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, this paper has examined the patterns and trends of gender violence in Bangladesh. This study revealed that sexual violence against women is a great concern for Bangladesh as the rate is not decreasing notably. However, the trend of emotional violence is declining notably. The study recommended some specific preventive interventions including counseling and emergency response center to minimize the VAW in Bangladesh. The results of this study will facilitate the researchers and policymakers to predict the future trend of VAW and formulate the necessary plan of action to prevent this social disorder.

Keywords. Women, Gender Violence, Physical Abuse, Mental Harassment, Sexual Violence, Reproductive Health

1. Introduction

Violence against women is a global solicitude as women across the globe both in developed and developing countries are the victims of this social crisis (Heise et al., 1994). Violence against women (VWA) is an enormous issue of violations of human rights worldwide (Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005) and women are at risk at home, in academic institutions, and workplace. VAW is also a significant human development and public health issue which includes adult women and children (Chrisler & Ferguson, 2006). There are multiple dimensions of violence including sexual harassment, physical & mental abuse, and economic despoliation. Such injustice against women damages social synergy and indulges criminality in a civil society. This study aims at conducting a critical analysis on the contemporary scenario of violence against women in Bangladesh based on a statistical survey report developed by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Current population of Bangladesh is 169.11 million as of January 1st 2021 which is the eighth largest on earth (Nuri et al., 2020). The male population is 84.64 million and the female is 84.47 million which means half of our population is female (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2020). With the rising number of females, the VAW is erupting a mile a minute as the report by the National Institute of Population Research and Training (2011) extrapolates that 87% of our women and girls are the victim of sexual and gender violence at least once in a lifetime. To

protect this large women population from this social catastrophe, Bangladesh Government passed Domestic Violence Act in 2010 which may act as a shield to prevent VAW and human rights violations at large. The present Government of Bangladesh is steadfast to eradicate all sorts of VWA by strengthening the victim support system through an efficient legal framework and institutional arrangements.

VAW is a significant issue of human development studies and to free the world from this social crisis, critical research work is evident. Existing literature on VAW from a world perspective is abundant but very limited with regard to Bangladesh. However, no study with recent statistical reference is available in the existing literature. This study will fill the research gap by comprehensively examining the prevalence of VWA, its nature, causes, and consequences with the aim to explore the disaggregated situation at the national, rural, urban, and division levels of Bangladesh.

2. Review of Literature

Violence against women diminishes the social and economic development of a woman (Biroli, 2016). Abusing a woman or a girl slips their self-confidence which can lead to physical and mental health injuries (Bhandari et al., 2006; Callahan et al., 2003). VAW is a critical human crisis that devastates the economic prosperity and social harmony of a nation (Penn et al., 2003). Gender violence has become a regular incident in Bangladesh and domestic violence, child trafficking, and rape are alarming the society every day (Wahed & Bhuiya, 2007). According to Naved and Azim (2000), most of the rural women in Bangladesh are enduring domestic violence considering it as the men's right over women which is written in their fate. Women across the world are mostly the victim of sexual violence at home, in schools, in the workplace, and in other social institutions (Dartnall & Jewkes, 2013). Most of the women in Bangladesh are subject to marital sexual violence (Naved, 2013) and endure brutal physical violence from their intimate partners (Hadi, 2000). Controlling behavior is also a threatening VAW and the intimate partners of Spanish and Nigerian women forcefully control their behavior by banning free access to family members, relatives, and friends (Aizpurua et al., 2021; Antai, 2011). On the other hand, economic VWA deprives the women to get easy access to financial assistance, health care, job, educational opportunities, participation in financial decision making and legal assistance to establish rights on inheritance property (Fawole, 2008). A sufficient number of research works on VAW or gender violence are available in the existing literature. Hence, a very limited number of researchers are available on VAW which could predict its trend based on recent master data derived from surveys conducted by BBS. This study will try to meet the research gaps in the existing literature by exploring the contemporary trend of VAW in Bangladesh.

3. Methodology

This study is based on secondary data gathered from two most recent surveys conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) namely the Violence against Women (VAW) survey 2011 and 2015. The range of the survey was the whole Bangladesh covering all seven divisions. The respondents were women aged 15 and above. A total of 12600 and 21688 women were interviewed in the year 2011 and 2015 respectively. Data are tabulated in seven tables which present the prevalence of VWA in Bangladesh with regard to physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and controlling behavior violence.

4. Data Analysis

Table 1: Frequency of partner violence (at least once among ever-married women)

Indicators	Lifetime	
	2015 (%)	2011(%)
Physical violence	49.6	47.8
Sexual violence	27.2	37.3
Emotional violence	28.7	40.2
Economic violence	11.4	17.8
Controlling behavior	55.4	67.8
Physical/sexual violence	54.2	57.8
Physical/sexual or emotional violence	57.7	62.5

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2011) and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2015)

Table 2: Frequency of partner violence (at least once among currently married women)

Indicators	Lifetime	
	2015(%)	2011(%)
Physical violence	45.2	64.6
Sexual violence	24.8	36.5
Economic violence	40.2	53.2
Controlling behavior	68.5	81.6
Physical violence/sexual violence	55.0	67.2

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2011) and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2015)

Table 3: Frequency of partner violence (at least once among ever-married women and currently married women)

Indicators	Lifetime	
	2015(%)	2011(%)
Ever-married women	72.6	79.4
Currently married women	80.2	87.1

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2011) and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2015)

Table 4: Frequency of lifetime and 12-month sexual violence by husband (among ever-married women with range of age)

Age	Frequency of sexual violence(%)	Frequency ofPartner sexual violence(%)
	During lifetime	Within 12 months
15-19	21.9	15.1
20-24	29.3	18.3
25-29	26.6	16.6
30-34	28.3	15.4
35-39	26.1	12.8
40-44	26.9	11.0
45-49	28.1	8.2
50-54	26.3	9.7
55-59	23.5	5.9
60+	29.4	9.8
Total	27.3	13.3

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2015)

Table 5: Proportion of sexual violence during their lifetime by non-partner and background characteristics, 2015

Background characteristics	Sexual violence
Age	
15-19	3.4
20-24	4.3
25-29	2.9
30-34	2.7
35-39	3.4
40-44	2.7
45-49	2.9
Level of education	
Illiterate	2.9
Primary education	3.1
Secondary education	3.0
Higher secondary	3.3
Degree and above	1.8
Marital status	
Never married	4.4
Currently married	2.8
Widowed	3.4
Divorced/Separated/Abandoned	3.3
Residence	
Rural	2.8
Urban	3.4
City corporation	3.8
Other than the city corporation	2.7
Division	
Barisal	4.0
Chattogram	3.2
Dhaka	2.8
Khulna	3.4
Rajshahi	2.7
Rangpur	2.8
Sylhet	2.6
Total	3.0

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2015)

Table 6: Proportion of physical violence during their lifetime by the partner and non-partner and background characteristics, 2015

Background characteristics	Physical violence(%)	
	Partner violence	Non-partner violence
Age		
15=19	37.5	30.9
20-24	48.4	29.9
25-29	51.1	28.5
30-34	50.7	26.3
35-39	49.3	27.9
40-44	49.4	27.0
45-49	50.2	29.7
50-54	50.4	25.0
55-59	47.8	26.4
60+	50.5	25.2
Level of education		
Illiterate	53.6	27.7
Primary education	52.5	29.6
Secondary education	45.1	27.4
Higher secondary	27.9	23.0
Bachelor degree and above	22.8	21.7
Marital status		
Never married		34.7
Newly married	50.6	27.5
Widowed	43.9	28.0
Divorced/Separated/Abandoned	30.5	19.8
Residence		
Rural	51.8	29.1
Urban	42.2	18.5
City corporation	29.4	15.6
Other than the city corporation	48.5	27.9
Division		
Barisal	44.6	33.3
Chattogram	42.5	30.3
Dhaka	46.8	25.2
Khulna	57.0	31.2
Rajshahi	60.1	28.8
Rangpur	55.3	25.3
Sylhet	42.9	26.0
Total	49.6	27.8

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2015)

Table 7: Proportion of places of occurrence of physical and sexual violence (2011 and 2015)

Places of occurrence	Physical violence(%)		Sexual violence(%)	
	2015	2011	2015	2011
Parent's house	16.3	21.0	11.3	15.6
Husband's house	76.8	87.7	45.5	54.4
Working place	21.9	16.2	32.8	28.9
Hat/Bazar/Market	6.0	5.3	8.5	8.6
Crowed/Solitary place/Travelling site	3.6	12.8	4.2	43.5
Educational Institution	11.4	13.4	13.9	12.4
Coaching Center	6.5	4.9	12.6	10.3
Hospital/Nursing home/Health Center	6.8	5.8	10.9	12.1
Station(Bus, Launch & Train)	5.5	7.2	9.8	9.9
Vehicles/Roads & Streets	9.4	14.2	18.3	16.4
Others	1.4	0.7	2.1	1.3

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2011) and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2015)

5. Findings and Discussion

The study analyses the trends and other related indicators of violence against women amid the 2011 and 2015 surveys. The findings of the study interpret the results of the survey and explore the changes in the survey findings between the years 2011 and 2015. According to the results of the study, physical violence increased slightly which is presented in Table 1. The increment was 3.8% within the five years and the annual increment was 0.76%. On the other hand, all forms of partner violence decreased significantly in 2011 and 2015. The study shows that lifelong emotional violence highly reduced from 40.2% (the year 2011) to 28.7% (the year 2015) which is 5.7% decline annually over a period of 5 years. Table 2 presents the partner violence faced by the married women at least once in a lifetime. All kinds of VAW decreased from 2011 to 2015. Physical violence decreased from 64.6% (2011) to 45.2% (2015) and the degree of change is 19.4% during the last 5 years.

The number of sexual violence decreased less (32.1%) during this period (2011 to 2015) compared to other forms of violence. Never-married and currently married women had experienced partner violence at least once in their lifetime which is displayed in Table 3. All types of violence rates decreased in both cases from 2011 to 2015. Violence against currently married women during their lifetime is reduced (87.1% in 2011 to 80.2% in 2015) resulting in a decrease of 1.6% yearly. As shown in Table 4, the lifetime partner sexual violence rate is higher (29.3%) among women aged ranging 20-to 24 compare to other age groups. It is obtained from the findings that, the rate of partner sexual violence is much higher (18.3%) among the women ages ranging from 15-to 44 in 2015. This result shows that the women aged 15-44 years are more vulnerable than the other age groups with regard to sexual violence by the partner.

Lifetime sexual violence by the non-partner is presented in Table 5. Within the age range, 20-24 had the highest rate of 4.3% during their lifetime. Women having the academic qualification bachelor degree or above had the lowest rate of sexual violence (1.8%) and the rate is highest among the never-married women which is 4.4% with regard to non-partner sexual violence. The most similar proportion is found in rural, urban, and other urban areas but it is higher (3.8%) within the city corporation zone. Among the 7 administrative divisions, Barisal

has the maximum rate of lifetime sexual violence by the non-partner which is 4.0%. The result in Table 6 shows that the highest lifetime partner physical violence rate (51.1%) remained within the age group 25-29 and the lifetime non-partner physical violence is highest (30.9%) among the women aged 15-19. Partner physical violence rate is highest (53.6%) among the illiterate women group, as we can note, women with the academic qualification of bachelor degree or above had the bottommost rate (22.8% & 21.7%) for both cases of intimate partner and non-partner physical violence.

Newly married women had suffered the highest degree (50.6%) of intimate partner physical violence. Hence, never-married women had reported the highest rate (34.7%) of non-partner physical violence. It is more evident from the results presented in Table 6 that the overall rate of partner and non-partner physical violence is higher (51.8% & 29.1%) in rural areas than in urban areas. At the divisional level, partner physical violence is highest (60.1%) in the Rajshahi division and lowest in the Chattogram division (42.5%). Non-partner physical violence was recorded as the highest (33.3%) in the Barisal division while the Dhaka division is found lowest (25.2%). Table 7 shows the places of occurrence where physical and sexual violence generally occurs. Data shows that "husband's house" is the most common place for physical violence to occur which is 87.7% in 2011 and 76.8% in 2015, followed by working place 21.9% in 2015. However, sexual violence also happened in the husband's house at the rate of 45.5% in 2015. It is also revealed from the study that VAW is also common in work place (32.8%) and vehicles, roads, or streets (18.3%) respectively.

6. Policy Guideline

The state of physical VAW is very vulnerable and a matter of great concern for Bangladesh. To eliminate this social disease a different set of preventive interventions should be applied other than stereotypical awareness, education, and political programs. Society must understand that VAW is not a female issue rather it's more a male issue as men are mostly responsible for physically and mentally abusing women. The whole society is going towards the wrong direction teaching the girls about abuse and violence. Hence, the boys should be educated comprehensively in this regard. Apart from conventional educational interventions, the policymakers are suggested to establish sufficient counseling centers at all the secondary schools in Bangladesh to counsel the boys and girls on VAW. Here, the men and women must come together for the advocacy to reduce VAW mutually. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs of Bangladesh may establish an emergency response center in all the Upazila (sub-unit of a district) to prevent VAW. This emergency response center could be manned by ready response citizen action teams composing local female leaders, personnel of the village defense party, and school & madrasa teachers.

7. Conclusion

This study tried to figure out the trend of five forms of VAW including sexual, physical, economic, emotional and controlling behavior which are also very common in global context. Except for physical violence, all other forms of violence decreased significantly in 2015 compared to 2011 which is a good sign of progress. The study also showed the partner sexual violence among the women aged from 15 to 44 who are more vulnerable than that of other age groups. Therefore, remedial measures should be taken to abolish this social cancer by taking normative re-educative strategies by the policymaker to change the mindsets and attitudes of men towards women. Despite some limitations with regard to the lack of very recent data on VAW, this research has tried to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on gender studies.

Future researchers may focus on specific forms of gender violence and conduct opinion survey-based research work to discover the impact of VAW on national prosperity.

Author Contributions

Monir Ahmed conceived the idea of research work and tabulated the data. Kazi Nazmul Huda designed the research framework and wrote the manuscripts with support from Monir Ahmed and Shakina Sultana Pomi. All authors provided significant reviews and facilitated to shape up the analysis part. Monir Ahmed and Kazi Nazmul Huda is joint first author.

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