



"Violence against women: a statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them" (n) T j 3 O 1 D28 O T D(

**Violence against women : A statistical overview, challenges and gaps
in data collection and methodology and approaches for
overcoming them**

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Viol

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responsible for failing to build a strong foundation in the family. Consequently, women are reluctant to complain of domestic violence or file cases against their husbands out of fear of unrelenting social stigmatization.

A second major reason that women rarely assert themselves in these matters is that women have few alternatives to staying with their husbands. In some cases a woman might return to her paternal home and find shelter with her parents or siblings, but in most cases, women lack family or community support. With no alternative, women realize that they have no choice but to tolerate domestic violence and make the best of their tragic situation.

Torture by Husband/Wife Beating

Wife beating is the most commonly occurring act of domestic violence in Bangladesh. An international report published by the United Nations in September of 2000 ranked the country first in wife beating and found that nearly half of the adult female population surveyed reported physical abuse by their husbands. This fact may be startling to the international community, however, in Bangladesh it is common knowledge that husbands exert their authority and physically assault wives for even minor mistakes, such as an unsatisfactory meal, an untidy room, a conversation with another man, or any act of disagreement or disobedience.

Men have been socially conditioned to genuinely believe in their own superiority. From childhood they are treated differently from their sisters. They grow to believe that they are more valuable and more deserving than women, and that their opinions and views should have more weight than any woman's. Furthermore, predominant religious misinterpretations have further legitimized these feelings. These religious interpretations have also provided men with the justification to chastise wives for disobedience and bring them back to the so-called correct path. In this way, men are able to delude themselves into believing that abuse of their wives amounts to a religious duty and they are completely justified in their actions.

Dowry-Related Violence

The practice of dowry demand (*Joutuk*) is not deeply rooted in Bengali Muslim tradition, but has emerged as a major social evil in recent years. Generally dowry means the property that the bride's family gives to the groom or his family upon marriage. However, in Bangladeshi law, dowry has been given an extended meaning 'whatever is presented whether before or after marriage under demand, compulsion or pressure as consideration for the marriage can be said to be dowry'⁷. The emergence of dowry is more due to greed and commercialization of marriage than the impact of traditional culture. Rising unemployment has contributed to the phenomenon; as more and more young men are unable to find employment, their families use marriage and dowry demand as a source of income⁸. Prospective grooms and their families demand large sums of money or property from the would-be bride's family as a precondition to the marriage agreement. Although dowry demand is illegal the practice persists in the rural communities. In fact, few marriages in the rural areas are performed without a dowry condition. In most cases the complete dowry is not paid at the time of marriage. Rather the bride's family pays part of the dowry before the marriage and

⁷ The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000

⁸ The Annual Report on violence against women in Bangladesh, 2002.

promises to pay the remainder soon after the marriage. When the bride's family fails

It appears that increasing numbers of men perceive women to be nothing more than an object used to satisfy one's sexual urges. Furthermore there is evidence that men not only rape women, but also physically torture and murder the victims as well. In the last few years, gang rape has become the prevalent form of rape in Bangladesh. Several men kidnap a woman, take her to an isolated place, and take turns raping her. This new trend is particularly alarming; first because the attack is much more brutal and damaging to a woman, and second because it shows that rape is an accepted activity in many men's peer groups. Men are discussing and planning gang rapes with their friends, no longer ashamed of their disgusting intentions. As such, rape is being normalized in the male community.

Trafficking in Women

Trafficking of women and children is a significant problem in developing countries around the globe, and particularly in South Asia. In the absence of social protection, economic security and legal support, an alarming number of women and children from the poor, marginalized and disenfranchised sections of the community (an overwhelming majority of the population of South Asia) become easy victims of trafficking. The demand and supply factors that push women into trafficking are numerous and compl

Numbers of Cases of Acid Violence Reported.... 2000 ~ 2004¹²

Year	No. of incidents	Female victim	Male victim	Children less than 18 years	Total
2000	172	114	39	73	226
2001	250	138	94		

collection of data. Statistics on gender-based violence are collected by the six divisional offices of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs. In addition the police headquarter established a cell on violence against women complaints in 1993. Data on complaints made by women are collected from all the police stations and from the district women's affairs cells¹⁵. Another cell in the police department was established in 2004 under repeated pressure from NGOs and the donor community to document human trafficking cases. Whilst this initiative is praiseworthy, the source of information is police records. Therefore only incidents of trafficking reported to the police can be taken into consideration. In the absence of reliable statistical data and owing to the illegal nature of trafficking, it is almost impossible to ascertain an exact estimate of the number of women and children that have been trafficked in and out of Bangladesh.

Government statistics are on the conservative side. The statistics rely on victims reporting their crimes to the police and lodging complaints. Police stations and courts are not properly equipped to maintain computer-based data and therefore there is a significant doubt about the quality and accuracy of this data. More importantly, considering the numerous obstacles to registering complaints, particularly if they are sexual in nature, it is likely that this data represent a very small number of incidents of violence against women. In addition women are fearful of being stigmatized or blamed for the incident, and this act as a tremendous pressure not to report incidents. They are also extremely wary of the police and fearful of possible retaliation by the accused in the absence of a government run victim protection mechanism and this inhibits them from reporting the incident.

In rural areas people prefer to solve their problems in *Shalish*¹⁶ as it is less time consuming, and less expensive. Though *shalish* is supposed to provide resolution of small dispute, in reality it is matter of concern that many 'cognizable' cases (those cases where police can arrest without warrant like rape, trafficking, torture for dowry, sexual violence) are also tried by *shalish* in absence of awareness of law. It is estimated that two thirds of the disputes never enter the formal court process and are either settled at the local level through informal settlement of the local leaders or a village court or remain unsettled. This huge numbers of complaints and settled cases remain undocumented.

In addition home office statistics usually remain unpublished. It has also been observed that the annual statistical yearbook produced by the government has yet to recognize violence against women is a serious issue. This yearbook contains data only on rape and unnatural deaths. Even they are reluctant to publish violence against women record maintained by the home ministry.

Aside from official statistics several non-governmental organizations compile data based on newspaper records. This data is also undoubtedly under representative since organizations only take account of a few national dailies and are dealing only with those cases that are published in the leading newspapers. It should be noted that that newspapers have a tendency to cover sexual crimes rather than domestic violence

¹⁵ In every district there is a women affairs cell to provide free legal aid to the distressed women and children. This data is compiled in yearly basis based on the received complaints.

¹⁶ *Shalish* means informal local mediation councils to provide a traditional alternative dispute resolution.

cases. As a result, reports of maternal mortality or suicide get less attention and adultery, child marriage, eve teasing, forced marriage and forced prostitution receive little coverage unless there is an alleged murder.

Domestic violence and torture for dowry or dowry deaths generally occur in the privacy of the husband's home and with collusion of his family members. Often police reports record cases

In Bangladesh there continues to be a need for systematic data collection mechanism on violence against women. The following recommendations focus on three areas.

1. **Accurate and systematic reporting of incidents of violence against women**, by various governmental (e.g. police, courts, OCC or local government) and non-governmental organizations. This should include:

- ! **Computerized database maintained by Police department:** Based on cases reported to the police. To operationalize this system all the police stations should be properly equip with computerize network under a single centralize server so that any remote user can retrieve the uere eeri r a cor sh nuluood pta ttion r or semeetioulriolen

Access to this type of accurate data, which is collected on a routin