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# Research Update

RAPID RESEARCH RESPONSE TO COVID-19 ■ SERIES: GENDER 06 ■ 03 JUNE 2020



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Phase III

## Media Tracking of Domestic Violence, Bangladesh

### Introduction

Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) has undertaken a media tracking exercise to understand the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic violence, how it is being reported as well as the discussions surrounding the issue.

Our previous brief focused on the availability of data on domestic violence, preventive measures in national media, digital contents on social media, media programs by domestic violence specialists and the demand for the establishment

of virtual courts. The present brief tracks the media coverage of domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis from the period of 10 May to 30 May 2020. This is the third output from our media tracking series of domestic violence during COVID-19.

## Key Findings

### Virtual Courts Start Proceedings

Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge court started its [virtual court proceedings](#) from 11 May through video conferencing. The District courts are only hearing matters of bail; while the High Court or Supreme Court will receive applications regarding any 'urgent' matter, and conduct a virtual hearing if it deems the matter to be urgent. Online courts started proceedings in a [limited scale in other parts of the country](#). Previously, on 30 April, the Citizen's Initiative against Domestic Violence (CiDV) made a plea to the Chief Justice to take necessary steps for [establishing virtual courts](#), which could take domestic violence cases into account and for victims to be able to file GDs and FIRs online in the time of COVID-19. There have been attempts to digitalise the judiciary in the context of violence against women by both parliament and the Supreme Court in the past, but these were never put to action. The introduction of such a system was seen as the onset of a [historic era](#) for the judiciary system. However, it remains to be seen if domestic violence cases are given priority.

### Webinars on Domestic Violence by Specialists: Has Access to Justice become Access to Technology?

["Aarna"](#) (not anymore), a campaign against gender based violence, hosted a webinar on 16 May discussing the rise in domestic violence statistics worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic. The webinar covered issues such as victim blaming, lack of understanding of the cycle of abuse, social stigma, lack of knowledge and capability of supporting domestic violence victims at the community level, hotlines, etc. The

panelists also mentioned CIDV's application to Inspector General of Police (IGP) for filing electronic GDs. The discussion brought out that in COVID times, [access to justice has become equivalent to access to technology](#). Access to information and provision of information are issues that need to be thoroughly analysed in order to provide effective support. Panellists included legal experts, a clinical psychologist, women's rights advocates, gender based violence experts, development practitioners and survivors. Aarna will continue a series of webinars featuring experts and survivors of domestic violence to promote a multifaceted discussion on the issue.

UN Women organized a [webinar on "Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 in Bangladesh"](#) on 19 May where key findings from a Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) of the impacts of COVID-19 was presented. Acknowledging Bangladesh's high prevalence of violence against women and girls during the pandemic, On the issue of violence against women Dr. Abul Hossain, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and Project Director for Multisectoral Programme on Violence Against Women, discussed how the services of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs such as the One Stop Crisis Centers, National Trauma Counselling Centers and National Help Line for GBV are continuously providing support to women during the crisis. The National Help Line has been receiving approximately 10,000 calls a day, an increase from the average of 6000 calls a day before the COVID outbreak.

### Countrywide Incidents Continue

Incidents of countrywide domestic violence continue to be reported in national newspapers. A few striking incidents are mentioned below.

On 10 May, a [woman was murdered](#) by her husband and in-laws for dowry, in Lalmonirhat. The husband and his family members are currently on the run as police continue the search. In Sylhet, a woman was [murdered with an axe](#) by her husband during an argument on 11 May. In Chandpur, a [woman was stabbed to death](#) by her husband on 15 May. Her mother

and brother was stabbed as well when they came to rescue. The woman died on the spot while her mother passed away after being taken to the hospital. The husband has been arrested. In Jaipurhat district, a [woman was tied to a tree and tortured](#) by her husband in front of her in-laws on 27 May. She was rescued by neighbours and taken to the hospital. The perpetrator and his brother has been arrested. In Noakhali, a [woman's body was found hanging](#) from a tree and her daughter's body was found in a nearby pond on 29 May. The husband has been missing since the incident.

## Job Loss as an factor in Increasing Domestic Violence

According to a [study by The Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendra \(BNSK\)](#) on internal migrant female workers, almost 94% of workers in Dhaka faced domestic violence for the lack of income during the pandemic. The study was conducted from the period of March-April 2020, and covered 154 families from urban low income settlement areas. Majority of women (88%) in the survey worked in informal jobs such as domestic help, street vendor and cleaner; and the remaining 12% were garment workers. Respondents from the study reported their husbands tortured them due to the mental stress of being away from their habitual involvement in gambling and addiction to drugs; followed by economic insecurity caused by job losses. While this was a single study it has shed some light on domestic violence among families working in the informal sectors.

## Media framing of Domestic Violence issues is more harmful than helpful

An article in Conversation, an online international newsletter suggested that the [media narrative about domestic abuse](#) during lockdown is wrong and harmful. The report argued that it is critical to point out that more men are not becoming abusive or violent during the lockdown; but women who are already suffering abuse are being attacked by their partners more often and it is crucial for the media to make this distinction. The media has often referred to murders through domestic violence as "coronavirus murders".

This has served to construct a narrative that the virus is to blame for these murders and under normal circumstances these murder would not be happening. This interpretation is therefore wrong and harmful.

## International Media Reports on Domestic Violence Continue, Focus on Bangladesh given

According to a [study in the United States](#), social-distancing measures led to a 10.2% increase in domestic violence-related calls to the police. Stress among households have been amplified by intense financial pressures, and violence behind closed doors have "soared". In the [United Kingdom](#), there were 72 refuge vacancies on 3 April, compared with 170 on the same day last year. The shortage in spaces in refuges during lockdown has made way for further initiatives to offer safe accommodation with specialist support.

International media has also focused on Bangladesh's context of domestic violence during COVID-19. A report [alleged a rise in domestic violence cases in Bangladesh](#) during the lockdown. Focusing on the recent [MJF study](#) conducted on April 2020 with 17,203 women, which revealed that 4249 women were subjected to domestic violence during the lockdown, the report stated that lack of social activities and financial pressures are increasing rifts within families.

## Recommendation

- Virtual courts need to start addressing domestic violence. Urgent applications on protection, residency, maintenance and custody orders under the DV Act should be heard at the district courts and/or high court through virtual courts proceedings.
- Use of on-line FIRS and virtual courts may be facilitated through civil society organisations, Union Parishad information centers and local

government bodies for those who lack access to digital technology.

- Both the lawyers and human rights activists will need orientation on digital technology in order to access and make use of virtual courts.

## Methodology

Our information sources include major national and international media sources such as The Guardian, DW News, The Conversation, The Daily Star, Prothom Alo, New Age, The Financial Express, Dhaka Tribune, UN Women official website and Facebook pages.

**[Brac Institute of Governance and Development \(BIGD\)](#)**, Brac University is a globally-recognized centre of excellence in rigorous research on policy and development interventions, with the aim of bringing together academics and practitioners to raise critical questions on development, providing lessons on good practices, and advocating for pro-poor policies.

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*This research is a part of the [Rapid Research Response to COVID-19](#) project which aims to generate rapid and actionable research-based insights to policy and program actors, on the socioeconomic impact the COVID-19 pandemic on our lives, focusing on the poor and vulnerable population of Bangladesh.*



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