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ABSTRACT

Human rights violations deter sustainable development, and require effective preventive interventions. In Bangladesh non-governmental organisation-run programmes addressing HR violations suffer from serious lack of resources, and a lack of political will on the part of the government. Thus, programmes that assist survivors of violence are hampered. The absence of reliable data disguises the true scale of the problem. Recently, RED analyzed 3,000 cases of HR violations reported through the BRAC Social Development Program, from 61 districts of Bangladesh between 2006 and 2009. The analysis found that rape was the most frequent crime (31%), followed by murder (25%), acid throwing (15%), suicide (12%, often the result of rape), physical torture (7%) and attempted rape (7%). Adolescent girls (less than 15 years) were the most frequent victims of sexual assault (50% raped and 59% attempted rape victims). Rape often led to murder or shames victims to commit suicide. It is, therefore, likely that many reported suicide and murder victims were also victims of sexual violence. Acid attacks occurred across both sexes and in all age groups, although refusal of marriage or relationship posed a higher risk to the females. An alarming 86% of rape victims and 73% of physically tortured victims received no healthcare. HR violation is a criminal offence and it hinders any development and democratic process. Concerted effort is crucial to fight against the enemy.

Key words: Human rights; Violation; Social development program; Rape; Suicide; BRAC

INTRODUCTION

Six out of every ten women experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO 2005). A vast majority of recorded incidents occur within the victim's own home. Violence, particularly sexual and domestic aggression, is a higher risk factor for death among 16-44 year old women than cancer, car accidents, war and malaria (World Bank 1994). International doctrines including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) distinguish Violence Against Women (VAW) from other forms of violence, as a method of subordination requiring resources and political commitment. Despite serious international commitment women are victimized worldwide. Intimate partner violence, physical assaults, child abuse and rape are widely underreported globally, often deeply hidden within the social fabric in many settings, including Bangladesh.

Bottom-up interventions are instrumental to sensitizing communities, empowering citizens and providing responsive services towards prevention and eradication of violence. Existing mechanisms and infrastructure could be strengthened, and used to disseminate information, record incidents, and connect different rehabilitative services – medical support, trauma counselling, social rehabilitation and legal aid. In Bangladesh, effective intervention is scanty. A few agencies including BRAC, Ain-O-Salish Kendra (ASK), and The Bangladesh Legal Aid Service Trust (BLAST) have come forward to address this problem.

BRAC initiatives

Since 1986, BRAC's Social Development Programme (SDP) has been implementing both preventive and emergency support services for victims of extreme human rights abuse, particularly women and children. The programme builds human and social capital through awareness, so that citizens are able to raise their voices, articulate their needs, and strengthen their community organizations for collective pursuit of existing resources. SDP organizes *Palli Shamaj* (ward-based rural civil society organization) of mostly female villagers, who among other things help report incidents of violence immediately to their trained BRAC Programme Organizers (PO) (BRAC 2008). Over 340 trained POs record human rights (HR) violations in a structured fact sheet that is faxed to BRAC headquarter within 24 hours of knowing about the incident. This allows an immediate and urgent response, as well as advance planning for longer-term medical, legal and rehabilitation support.

Although the POs intensively cover approximately 30% of the wards (lowest administrative sub-unit) spread over 95% of the districts of Bangladesh, it generates nationwide data on violence. Apart from the SDP POs, the program also uses different individuals and/or agencies such as victim's parents, relatives, neighbours, *Palli Shamaj*, POs working in other BRAC programmes, and union council members/chairmen elect, for collecting data on HR violations. To accommodate HR violation-related information coming from the different sources, and to make the data collection format user-friendly, the SDP modified the data sheets thrice during the reporting period. However, between January 2006 and June 2009, the SDP reporting systems generated huge amount of data from 468 out of total 507 *upazilas* in the country. Despite the databank's presently limited coverage, its crude analysis reveals the types of HR violations, patterns and trends in its incidence, and the extent of rehabilitative support received by the victims. But at this stage, a scientific analysis of the data is imperative to reflect the overall situation of HR violations in the reporting areas.

To this end, the Research and Evaluation Division (RED) of BRAC, in cooperation with the SDP, analyzed the data collected between January 2006 and June 2009.

METHODS

Data processing and analysis—Skilled coders at RED edited, coded and transcribed the data. Data entry clerks of RED entered the data in computer from all the three formats and cleaned. The common variables/indicators were included in the analysis using SPSS software version 11.5. Frequency and cross-tables were framed to interpret the results.

Operational definition and types of violence—Violence, especially against women, is a significant global challenge to development. The World Health Organization (WHO 2002) defines violence as “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation.” The SDP dataset for the period from January 2006 to June 2009 contained a wide range of violence, which was classified into eight groups, and each group is given an operational definition for analytical conveniences (Table 1).

Table 1. Operational definition of different types of violence

Broad type	Specific item	Definition
Physical assault	Rape	Any form of unlawful sexual intercourse, committed through force and without consent of the victim. The term rape has been applied to a wide variety of sexual attacks and may include same-sex rape of a male by a female. A man is said to commit rape who has sexual intercourse with a woman under conditions falling under any of the following: (a) against her will, (b) without her consent, (c) with her consent, when her consent has been obtained by putting her in fear of death, or of hurt, (d) with her consent, when the man knows that he is not her husband, and that her consent is given because she believes that he is another man to whom she is or believes herself to lawfully married, (e) with or without her consent, when she is under 16 years of age, (f) genital, anal or oral penetration is sufficient to constitute the sexual intercourse necessary to offence of rape.
	Murder	The term is originated from the <i>Les Murdrorum</i> Law of 1066 of England. A murder refers to unlawful killing of a human being. With certain exceptions, culpable homicide is murder if the act by which death is caused is done (a) with the intention of causing death, (b) with the intention of causing such bodily injury as the offender knows to be likely to cause the death of the person to whom the harm is caused, (c) with the intention of causing bodily injury to any person and the bodily injury intended to be inflicted is sufficient in the ordinary course of nature to cause death, (d) with the knowledge that it must in all probability cause death or such bodily injury as likely to cause death.
	Acid throwing	Refers to bodily injury to a person by throwing any corrosives such as acid.
Self-directed destruction	Suicide	The word ‘suicide’ came from the Latin word ‘sui’ means of ‘himself’ and ‘caedere’ means ‘to kill.’ Thus, the act of killing oneself intentionally is a suicide.
	Physical torture	Refers to causing a bodily harm on a person by striking, punching, pushing, shoving, throwing an objects and drawing a lethal weapon. The harm can range from mild to severe forms, but will not lead to death.
	Attempt to rape	An attempt to rape is said to have been committed if a man does not insert his sexual organ into the victim.

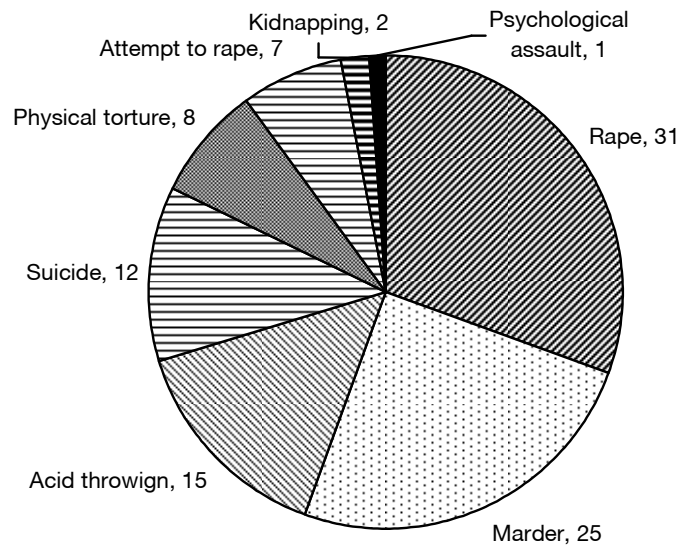
Table 1. (Contd...)

Broad type	Specific item	Definition
Action	Kidnap	The word 'kid' is derived from Old Norwegian word 'kith' means 'young' and obsolete English 'nap' means to 'seizure.' The crime of kidnapping is the unlawful seizure and detention of a person by force or fraud against his/her will.
Psychological assault	Psychological assault	Refers to mental and emotional repression by threatening or using hostile language or unlawful acts that create excessive feelings of guilt affecting the normal course of human behaviour.

RESULTS

A variety of HR violations occur in Bangladesh, the most common being rape (31%), murder (25%), acid throwing (15%), suicide (12%), physical torture (8%), and attempt to rape (7%) (Fig. 1). Overall, more women were victims of HR violation than men (78 vs. 22%). Table 2 shows that the mean age of the incident cases was higher for men than for women (30 vs. 22 years).

Figure 1. Distribution of victims by types of violence (%)



A half of the raped women were in their childhood age (<15 years), followed by 38% in 15-25 years of age. The rape incidence decreased with increase in the age of victims (Fig. 2).

The data reveal that among women, most (33%) acid violence survivors were 15-25 years old, followed by 32% at 26-35 years, and 27% at 36+ years by age group (Fig. 3). In contrast, most (42%) men acid victims belonged to 36+ years (Fig. 4).

Figure 2. Female rape victims by age

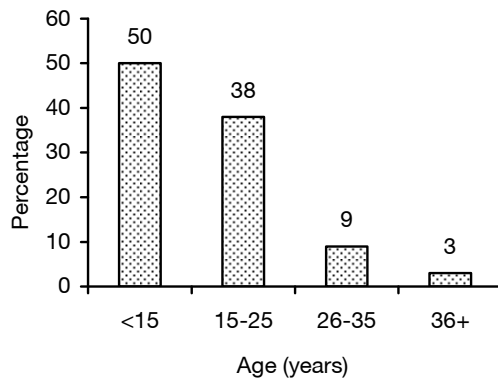


Figure 3. Female acid victims by age

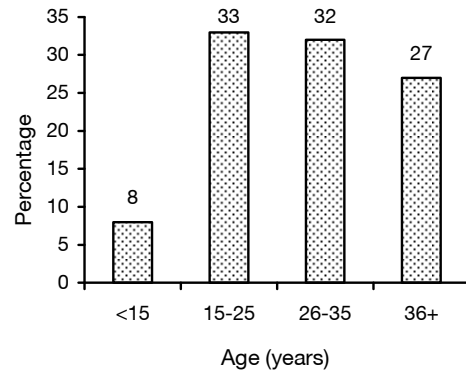


Table 2. Mean age (years) of victims by sex and types of violence

Sex	Violence types								
	Rape	Murder	Acid throwing	Suicide	Physical torture	Attempt to rape	Kidnap	Psychological Assault	Total
Male (n=624)									
Mean age (yrs)	8.8	31.2	31.9	30.8	25.5	0	18.1	24.3	30.3
Std. deviation	3.8	16.1	16.3	15.4	12.8	0	10.1	1.2	15.8
Minimum	3	1	1	8	1	0	8	23	1
Maximum	12	95	82	81	60	0	35	25	95
Female (n=2,304)									
Mean age (yrs)	16.1	27.1	29.8	24.6	25.7	14.6	14.7	28.8	21.5
Std. deviation	8.5	13.7	11.6	10.3	12.4	7.9	4.9	9.4	11.9
Minimum	3	1	1	8	2	2	1	13	1
Maximum	60	90	65	65	70	45	28	45	90

Physical torture was a frequent occurrence regardless of age and sex. Young women (15-25 years) experienced more (42%) physical torture than the other age categories (Fig. 5). For men, it was highest (40%) among 26-35 years age group (Fig. 6).

Fifty nine percent of the girl children (1-14 years) were attempted to rape, and the rates declined with the increase in age (Fig. 7).

Figure 4. Male acid victims by age

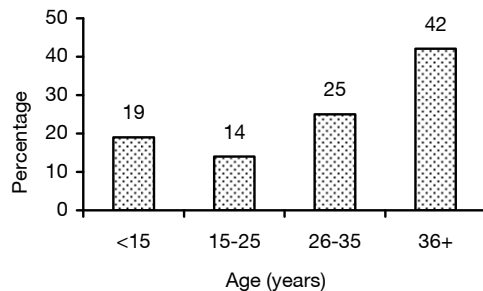


Figure 6. Males physically tortured by age

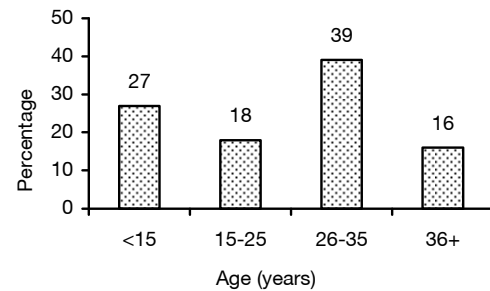


Figure 5. Female victims of physical torture by age

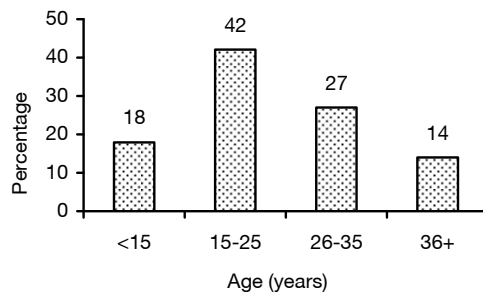


Figure 7. Females by attempt to rape and age

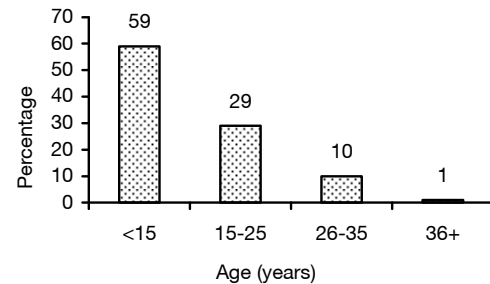


Table 3 shows the incidence of violence by age, sex and types of violence. Most women (46%) who were murdered belonged to 15-25 years of age, whilst for men it was among 36+ years age group (33%). Furthermore, adolescent youths (15-25 years) were more likely to commit suicide (men 38% and women 56%). Child (1-14 years) kidnapping was common among both boy and girl children (56% vs. 62%). Substantial psychological assault was observed among women aged 15 years and over.

People associated with any interventions of BRAC, were less likely to be victims of rape and murder, but were more likely to be victims of acid attack, suicide and physical torture (Table 4).

HR-related violation is a criminal offence requiring legal trials. Many victims often have no access to such facility. Only 63% of the victims could file cases in the court, higher for women than for men (65% vs. 57%). Cases were lodged for 42% of the rape victims among women, and 58% remained unheeded for litigation. More cases were lodged for the incidences of murder among men than among women (58% vs. 23%) (Table 5).

Table 3. Incidence of violence by age, sex and types of violence

Age (Yrs.)	Violence type							
	Murder		Suicide		Kidnap		Psychological assault	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1-14	16.8 (50)	10.5 (44)	10.3 (10)	9.9 (25)	55.6 (5)	62.2 (28)	0 (0)	4.2 (1)
15-25	20.9 (62)	46.4 (195)	38.1 (37)	56.1 (142)	22.2 (2)	35.6 (16)	100 (3)	37.5 (9)
26-35	29.0 (86)	25.2 (106)	23.7 (23)	20.9 (53)	22.2 (2)	2.2 (1)	0 (0)	37.5 (9)
36+	33.3 (99)	17.9 (75)	27.8 (27)	13.0 (33)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	20.8 (5)
All	100 (297)	100 (420)	100 (97)	100 (253)	100 (9)	100 (45)	100 (3)	100 (24)

Figures in parentheses indicate cell frequencies.

Table 4. Victims by types of violence and status of association with BRAC (n=2337)

Violence types	Status association		Total
	Associated	Not associated	
Rape	28.5 (404)	35.5 (326)	31.2 (730)
Murder	22.4 (318)	22.2 (210)	22.9 (528)
Acid throwing	17.5 (249)	13.8 (127)	16.1 (376)
Suicide	12.5 (178)	10.8 (99)	11.9 (277)
Physical torture	8.9 (127)	6.8 (62)	8.1 (189)
Attempt to rape	7.6 (108)	7.3 (108)	7.5 (175)
Kidnap	1.5 (21)	2.0 (18)	1.7 (39)
Psychological assault	1.0 (14)	1.0 (9)	1.0 (23)
All	100 (1419)	100 (918)	100 (2337)

Figures in parentheses indicate cell frequencies.

Table 6 revealed that perpetrators of either economic stratum (rich, middle class and poor) were almost equally likely to commit different types of violence, for instance, among the rape perpetrators 35% were rich, 36% middle class and 28% poor. No noticeable differences were found between different groups of perpetrators in committing murder, acid throwing, physical torture, etc.

Table 5. Cases lodged in the court by types of violence and sex of victims

Violence types	Sex of victims	
	Male	Female
Rape	1.4 (5)	43.0 (636)
Murder	61.0 (219)	23.3 (345)
Acid throwing	20.1(72)	11.0 (163)
Suicide	11.1 (40)	9.2 (136)
Physical torture	3.9 (14)	4.4 (65)
Attempt to rape	0 (0)	6.4 (94)
Kidnap	1.9 (7)	2.2 (32)
Psychological assault	0.6 (2)	0.5 (8)
Total	100 (359)	100 (1479)

Figures in parentheses indicate cell frequencies.

Table 6. Perpetrators by economic status and types of violence

Status	Rape	Murder	Acid throwing	Suicide	Physical Torture	Attempt to rape	Kidnap	Psycho-logical Assault	Total
Rich	36.3 (89)	20.8 (51)	16.7 (41)	5.7 0 (14)	10.2 (25)	7.3 (18)	2.4 (6)	0.4 (1)	100 (245)
Middle	37.0 (436)	22.1 (260)	17.0 (200)	6.7 (79)	6.2 (73)	7.6 (90)	2.5 (29)	1.0 (12)	100 (1179)
Poor	28.7 (329)	24.5 (281)	15.8 (181)	13.5 (155)	8.9 (102)	6.7 (77)	1.0 (11)	1.0 (11)	100 (1147)
Others	14.3 (37)	36.7 (95)	8.9 (23)	26.6 (69)	5.4 (14)	3.9 (10)	3.1 (8)	1.2 (3)	100 (259)

Figures in parentheses indicate cell frequencies.

Over three-quarters (75.6%) of acid victims received basic medical treatment, followed by murder (39%), and physical torture (27%). It was lowest for rape victims (14%), suicide (13%), and attempt to murder (14%), respectively (Table 7). Overall, more men than women victims received treatment (41% vs. 27%). Nine percent of the victims reported about the need for further treatment, higher for men than for women (14% vs. 8%) (Table not shown), which most likely remained unmet.

Table 7. Victims by status of any medical treatment received and types of violence (n=2736)

Violence types	Yes	No
Rape	13.6 (119)	86.4 (758)
Murder	40.0 (257)	60.0 (385)
Acid throwing	75.6 (331)	24.4 (107)
Suicide	13.6 (42)	86.2 (267)
Physical torture	27.2 (53)	72.8 (142)
Attempt to rape	13.4 (26)	86.6 (168)
Kidnapping	22.2 (12)	77.8 (42)
Psychological assault	18.5 (5)	81.5 (22)
All	30.1 (845)	69.1 (1891)

Figures in parentheses indicate cell frequencies.

DISCUSSION

NATURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND VICTIMS

Pervasive HR-related violations and severe criminal offences have emerged as a critical barrier to socioeconomic and health development in Bangladesh. The frequently occurring forms of violence include rape, attempt to rape, murder, acid throwing, suicide, and physical torture. At the aggregated level, most victims were women compared with men (78% vs. 22%). Women were more commonly victims of rape or attempted rape than men (38% and 8% vs. 0.7% and none). However, men more frequently than women were victims of murder (46% vs. 18%), acid throwing (23% vs. 13%), suicide (15% vs. 11%) and physical torture (9% vs. 6%). This implies that gender differentiated violations exist in Bangladesh. Gender role and exposure to risk factors such as inter-family conflicts, property-related conflicts, etc. might have caused a higher incidence of murder, and acid throwing among men. Other explanations could be underreporting of these incidences among women due to hierarchical gender and power relations in social structures (Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development 1990). Particularly in low income countries, violence against women is commonly underreported as women feel embarrassed or are scared into hiding violent incidents (Watts *et al.* 2002). Most (46%) of murdered women were in 15-25 years of age group, whilst for men it was among 36+ years of age (33%). Women and men belonging to these age groups are economically and physically active and productive for the family and society. Killing of such workforce is disastrous for overall development.

Among women victims, 38% were sexually abused. Naved *et al.* (2002) also reported similar finding. A WHO study (WHO 2005) revealed that the teenage girls were the most victims of sexual abuse. It further indicated a noticeable overlap between sexual and physical violence, one out of 4 victims of domestic violence also experienced sexual abuse. Sexual abuse of girl children is a frequent phenomenon, which obscures all the rays of so-called civilization and social, political and cultural advancement of mankind.

Although the dataset indicates that more men victims than women violated with acid throwing, this contrasts other study findings that report that every week more than 10 women in Bangladesh experience an acid attack, which brutally disfigure and disable them (Acid Survivors Foundation 2007), leading to reduced acceptance in social and family life. Implementation of well-designed interventions is imperative for conscientizing and empowering the entire community towards reduction of vulnerability to acid throwing.

Access to litigation

Although SDP links victims with BRAC's Human Rights and Legal Services Programme, fear of further aggression and social rejection prevents victims from taking legal action. A few of convictions favour the victims. BRAC staff members engaged in reporting in addition to their defined duties, pressing for time and creating a time lag within which, threats or payoffs coerce victims and witnesses to withdraw.

Technical and legal flaws often deprive women of justice, particularly where the perpetrators are in a dominant socioeconomic position (United Nations 2000). However, interventions undertaken by BRAC, ASK and BLAST, and other governmental and non-governmental organizations have an encouraging effect on the victims to pursue legal justice. Required financial and human resources are inadequate to meet the pace of needs. Women's socioeconomic powerlessness, ignorance and stigma limit the opportunity for legal protection. In fact, litigation does not always guarantee the desired justice. Thus, a strong preventive intervention may improve the situation of HR violation in Bangladesh.

Unmet need of healthcare

Violence is a severe public health hazard, especially against women. It is a prime cause of death and disability for women aged 16 to 44 years (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2002). Rape and domestic violence together account for 5% of the healthy years of life lost to a woman of reproductive age in low income countries (Jejeebhoy 1998). Thus, violations especially against women impoverish individuals, families, communities and governments, resulting in reduced economic development of a nation. In addition, violence contributes to enormous psychological and mental sufferings of the victims affecting their productivity. Our analysis reveals that only 30% of the victims received basic healthcare, higher for men than for women (41% vs. 27%). A large majority (86%) of rape victims especially women missed opportunity of receiving basic healthcare. Resource constraints and inaccessibility to the service sources may impede availing necessary healthcare. This warrants an appropriate, preferably one-stop service intervention to address the urgent health and litigation needs of the victims.

Limitations

Lack of sufficient background data of the victims and perpetrators limit the use of inferential statistics to explore the determinants of HR violations. Besides, coverage of all incidences is not definite. Because, the SDP reporting systems cover only the notified cases, thus the hidden cases remain out of the reporting purview. Implementation of well-designed case tracking and reporting system is crucial to capture all the incidences being occurred. Such a system can routinely generate HR-related violations and inform the policy makers, managers, legal justice and law enforcing agencies for taking appropriate remedial and preventive measures.

CONCLUSION

Though insufficient, the existing interventions on HR violations have mostly been directed to address the post-violence consequences. A few organizations such as BRAC, ASK and BLAST dedicate their efforts towards prevention of overall causes of violations. Among these, BRAC's SDP seems to be in the forefront, but resource constraints hinder its smooth expansion and progress. SDP's preventive measures should be strengthened and effectively supported by sufficient rehabilitative and legal protective inputs for a longer period for alleviating HR-related violations in Bangladesh. In the implementation process, BRAC may form a consortium drawing like-minded agencies from NGO and government sectors. HR violation is a criminal offence and hinders any development and democratic process. Concerted effort is crucial to fight against the enemy.

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