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Gender Based Violence against Female Adolescents and Factors affecting it in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Violence in the domestic sphere is usually inflicted by household inmates. The reasons or grounds of violence vary from individual to individual and on different perspectives. It threatens health, wellbeing, right and dignity of women. In this study, an attempt was made to assess the pattern of domestic violence against adolescent females and also to identify the factors influencing it. Adolescents aged 10-19 years constituted the study population. A multistage cluster sampling technique was adopted to select the sample. For quantitative results, data on 3362 female adolescents from rural and urban areas were analyzed. To substantiate the quantitative results, a series of focus group discussion were carried out among the adolescents. Among the sample adolescents, overall prevalence of domestic violence was 33.6%. It was 31.5% among married and 37.9% among unmarried adolescents. Multivariate regression analysis showed that religion; joint family, family size and premarital sexual activity, income are important correlates of domestic violence.

Key words: Domestic violence, adolescents, Bangladesh



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INTRODUCTION

Violence against women, in its various forms, is endemic in communities and countries around the world, cutting across class, race, age, religion and national boundaries. According to the United Nations Declaration, violence against women includes...

“any act of gender based violence that results in or, it is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychosocial harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurs in public or private life”
(United Nations 1993).

The most common type of abuse in women worldwide is “*Domestic Violence*” or the physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse of women by their intimate partners (Heise *et al.*, 1994). There are other forms of abuse, such as dowry harassments, which are linked to traditional or customary practices and are limited to specific regions and communities (WHO, 2001).

Community surveys indicate that up to one in four women have experienced domestic violence. Studies in the United States and Australia showed that between 5 to 20% of the women attending for health services reported experience of domestic violence in the past year (Mc Cauley *et al.*, 1995; Hamberger *et al.*, 1992; Marais *et al.*, 1999). According to World Health Organization, around 40 million children are subjected to abuse. Adolescents and young adults are the primary victims, rape and domestic violence account for 5 to 10% healthy years of life lost by women (WHO, 2001).

Rao (1993) in India found that 42% of the women were physically assaulted by their husbands, 12% reported that they were beaten in last month (average 2.65 times). It was also noticed that most of the violence was under reported (Rao, 1993). Sonali (1990) in Sri Lanka observed that 60% of the women had been beaten and 51% of them said husbands used weapons. The results from different surveys in USA showed that most physical assaults perpetrated against women by intimate partners consisting of pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, and fewer women reported that an intimate partner threw something at them that hurt them, pulled hair, kicked or bit them, hit them with an object, or beaten them up. Relatively, few reported that an intimate partner threatened them with a knife or gun. Only a



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negligible number reported that an intimate partner actually used a knife or gun on them (Travis & Rosenberg, 1998).

Very few studies have been conducted regarding domestic violence against women in Bangladesh. Thus very little known about it. In one study in rural Bangladesh, however, 47% of the women surveyed were beaten by their husbands in the past year (Schuler *et al.*, 1996). Steele *et al.*, (1998) reported that verbal abuse was very common and 85% of the currently married women reported to have experienced these sorts of abuse. Khan *et al.*, (1999) observed that husbands physically abused 22% of the women in their study and another 28% experienced mental torture (i.e. threat to beat, divorce or abandon, pressure for dowry). Chowdhury *et al.*, (2000) reported that 30.6% of the pregnant women experienced violence during their current pregnancy in the form of physical and mental torture.

As domestic violence against women is increasingly recognized and discussed, important questions are being raised concerning its magnitude in different settings and its causes and consequences. In the developing countries, the problem of violence is gradually increasing with different dimensions. Spousal or partner abuse is not only physically or psychologically devastating to women, but also it can be similarly devastating for children. Domestic violence against women has been widely studied in the developed countries and also in some African countries, only a few small scale empirical studies such as those mentioned above have been conducted in Bangladesh. No adequate study on violence against women, especially against adolescents has yet been conducted in Bangladesh. In this study, an attempt has been made to explore the current pattern of domestic violence among a large number of adolescents both in rural and urban areas and also to identify some of the determinants of domestic violence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a cross sectional study conducted in both rural and urban areas of Bangladesh during 2000. Female adolescents aged 10-19 years constituted the study population. The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined adolescents to be in the age range 10-19 years. A stratified two-stage cluster sampling design was adopted. At the first stage, the mauzas (clusters) were selected and at the second stage all households were covered under the



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study. A total of 64 clusters (on an average a cluster has 200 households) were randomly selected from the list of the clusters. All married and unmarried adolescents were selected in a cluster with a ratio of 2:1. To assess the prevalence of domestic violence in the study population, respondents were asked a series of questions on physical, mental and or psychosocial abuse, its frequency, patterns and reasons thereof by structured questionnaire. A team of female interviewers collected the data by face-to-face interview. Female adolescents who ever experienced any type of violence such as physical, mental or psychosocial were interviewed. The current violence was defined any violence experienced during the last six months. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, version 10.0). Both uni-variate and bi-variate analysis were performed. Logistic regression analysis was used to identify the socio-economic and demographic variables that are significantly related to domestic violence. To supplement the quantitative results, a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted among the adolescents having history of domestic violence. Trained and experienced female field investigators were conducted FGDs. A moderator initiated the FGDs. On an average 4-5 female adolescents participated in each FGD. A total of six FGDs were conducted one for each geographical division using an unstructured guideline.

RESULTS

1. Socio-demographic characteristics

The mean age of the respondents was 16.2 ± 1.9 years with a range of 10 to 19 years. Among the respondents, 32.9% were unmarried and 67.1% were married. Their mean years of schooling was 4.7 ± 3.3 years. Among them, 23.3% were illiterate, 35.8% had 1-5 years of schooling and the rest had 6 and above years of schooling. Regarding parental education, mothers were more illiterate than fathers: more than two fifths (43.9%) of the fathers were illiterate as compared with more than two thirds (70.7%) of the mothers. The mean family size was 5.2. About one third (30.7%) of the adolescents were currently engaged in different income generating activities other than household work. The great majority of the respondents were Muslims (89.4%) and only 10.6% were non-Muslims. More than half of the



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adolescents (56.4%) were from nuclear families and the rest from joint/ or extended families (43.6%). The median family income was Tk.2500.0 and about three fifths (59.0%) of the families had family income below Tk. 3000.0 (*Table 1*).

Table 1-Socio-demographic characteristics of the adolescents (n=3362)

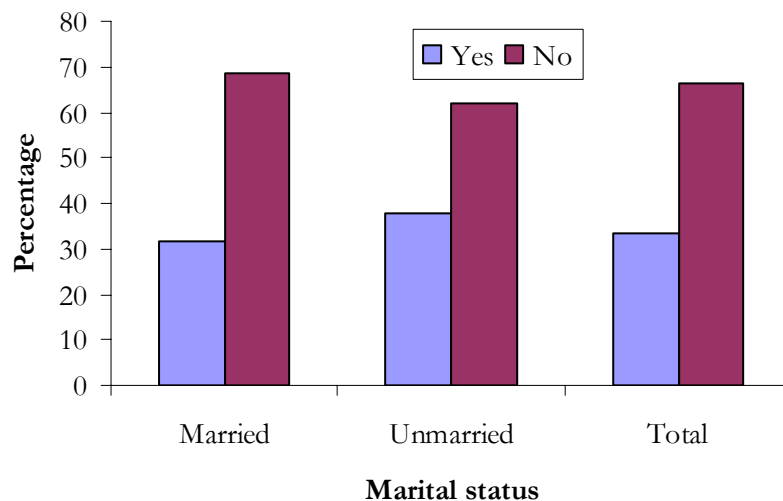
<i>Variables</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Mean ± SD</i>
<i>Age in years</i>			
10-14	695	20.7	16.2±1.9 years
15-19	2662	79.3	
<i>Marital status</i>			
Unmarried	1106	32.9	
Married	2256	67.1	
<i>Residence</i>			
Rural	2056	61.2	
Urban	1306	38.8	
<i>Religion</i>			
Non-Muslim	356	10.6	
Muslim	3006	89.4	
<i>Years of schooling (Res)</i>			
0	785	23.3	
1-5	1204	35.8	
≥6	1373	40.8	
<i>Education (F)</i>			
Illiterate	1477	43.9	
Literate	1885	56.1	
<i>Education (M)</i>			
Illiterate	2378	70.7	
Literate	984	29.3	
<i>Work status</i>			
No	2329	69.3	
Yes	1033	30.7	
<i>Type of family</i>			
Nuclear	1895	56.4	
Joint/extended	1467	43.6	
<i>Family size</i>			
2-3	818	24.3	5.2 ± 2.1
4-5	1206	35.9	
≥6	1338	39.8	
<i>Monthly income (Tk.)</i>			
<2000	661	22.8	
2000-3000	1049	36.2	
3000-4000	704	24.3	
≥4000	485	16.7	



2. *Ever experience of domestic violence*

Violence against women and girls is a major health and human rights concern. Women experience physical or mental abuse throughout their life cycle, in infancy, childhood and or adolescence or during adulthood or older age. In this part of the study, the adolescents were asked whether they were abused by any means in the last six months. It was found that about one third (33.6%) of the respondents experienced violence of any type in the last six months and it was 31.5% among the married and 37.9% among the unmarried adolescents (*Figure 1*). The average number of violent incidents was 3.2 for married adolescents as against 3.3 for unmarried adolescents in the last six months.

Figure 1 Ever experience domestic violence



3. *Mode of abuse*

The most frequent mode of violence was verbal abuse (57.5%); using abusive language (59.1%) followed by slapping (29.1%), punching (27.5%), pulling of hair (8.4%), kicking (4.5%), pushing (2.0%), using a blunt weapon etc. Verbal abuse using abusive language, pulling of hair were most common among the married adolescents, whereas slapping, punching were higher among unmarried adolescents (*Table 2*).



Table 2 -Pattern of mode of domestic violence

<i>Mode of abuse</i>	<i>Marital status</i>		<i>Total (N= 1129)</i>
	<i>Married (n= 710)</i>	<i>Unmarried (n= 419)</i>	
Verbal abuse	78.6	21.7	57.5
Using abusive language	69.7	41.1	59.1
Slapping	22.5	40.1	29.1
Punching	22.7	35.6	27.5
Pushing	2.8	1.0	2.1
Pulling of hair	11.5	3.1	8.4
Kicking	7.5	0.2	4.5
No food given	2.0	2.1	2.0
Beaten by wooden stick	1.7	2.1	1.9

*Multiple responses

4. *Reasons of abuse*

Regarding reasons for violence, 28.2% adolescents were abused due to household matters such as treatment of the child, purchase of personal amenities, etc. followed by mistakes made while doing work (21.7%), did not work according to expectations (18.2%) etc. Among the married adolescents, family matters appeared to be the highest reason for abuse (37.3%) followed by or mistake done in doing work (15.8%), reproductive issues such as failure to give birth or giving birth of a female child (14.4%), sexual disharmony including forced sex (12.0%), dowry related harassments (10.1%), prevention of husband's anti-social activity (5.8%) or prevention of husband's 2nd marriage (5.8%), whereas among the unmarried, not doing work according to expectations (40.3%) appeared to be the highest reasons for abuse followed by mistake made in doing work (31.7%), love affairs with boyfriend (18.6%) etc. (*Table 3*).



Table 3 - Reasons for abuse

<i>Reasons of abuse</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	
	<i>Married (n = 710)</i>	<i>Unmarried (n = 419)</i>
Family matters	37.3	12.6
Mistake made in doing work	15.8	31.7
Did not work appropriately	5.1	40.3
Reproductive issues	14.4	0.0
Dowry	10.1	0.0
Sexual matters including forced sex	12.0	0.0
Prevention of anti-social activity	5.8	0.0
Prevention of 2nd marriage	5.8	0.0
Love affairs	0.3	18.6
Non specific reasons	2.7	7.4

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed the following important factors provokes domestic violence

Dowry harassment

.....We know that the legal system of the country discourage any financial transaction between two families at the time of marriage. For the sake of happiness and well-being of the daughter, parents give furniture, ornaments, fridge/TV or other household amenities according to their ability. After a few days of happy life, father-mother-in-law including her husband asks his wife to bring cash money from her father for the well-being of his family. If the parents (wife's) fail to give money, initially violence starts verbally and then gradually increases day by day. The wife is frequently beaten by husband in the name of 'rectification of wife' for doing any mistake. In most of the cases mother-in-law encourages beating wife.

.....Married adolescents

Abuse is provoked by mother-in-law

Sometimes, mother-in-law provokes her son to beat her as a measure to control wife. Most of the mothers-in-law have learnt it from their mothers-in-law and it continues generation to generation. Misunderstanding or conflict with her (mother-in-law) begins with violent activities. In most of the situations, she (mother-in-law) humiliates son's wife and wife's father-mother as they failed to rear their daughters correctly. Even she complains it angrily to her son when he (son) returns from job with empty stomach. After listening this (without verification), the husband starts beating his wife.

.....Married adolescents



Substance abuse provokes violence

Husband's addiction to substance such as ganga, heroine, alcohol sometimes leads to unrest in the family. In most of the cases, he spends money for that purpose instead of meeting family needs. He usually returns home at midnight. Any inquiry for delay to return home, he begins yelling and blaming the wife for failure of being a good wife. Quarrelling starts with husband and at times altercations happen resulting in beating of wife. In most of the situations, the mother-father-in-law keep silent.

..Married adolescents

Woman has no right to freedom

Man thinks that a woman has no right to live freely in the society. Most of the women believe this. Before marriage, parents and after marriage husband is her legal guardian. Therefore, she thinks that her legal guardian should correct any mistake. Women have no right to make decision for household matters although they are capable enough to make right decision and right choice. In most of the families, womens' arguments are not accepted. Alternatively, these arguments end in beating or verbal abuse to women.

..... Married and unmarried adolescents (FGDs)

Subordinate role of women

Usually men see that women are physically, emotionally and socially inferior to men. Most of the time, they believe that women are created for household work, procreate child and to meet sexual urge. If any deviation rises from this ideology, it results in conflicts which ultimately end within physical torture and forced sex.

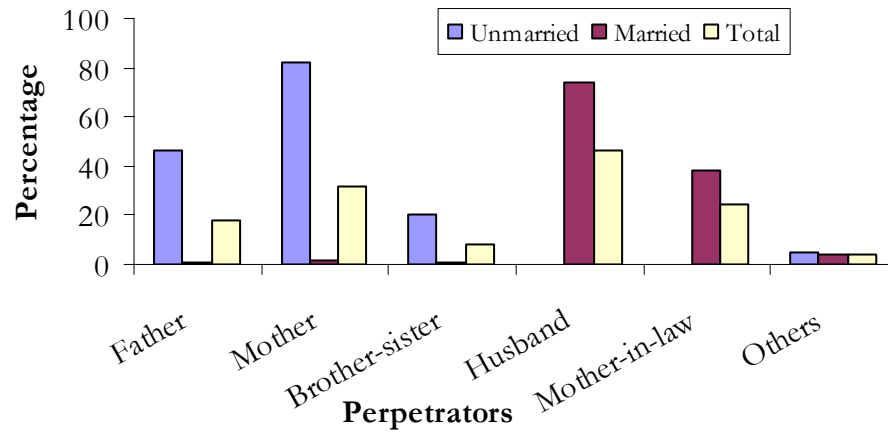
.....Married adolescents

5. *Perpetrators of domestic violence*

In case of married adolescents, about three fourths of the husbands (73.8%) were the main perpetrators of domestic violence followed by mothers-in-laws (38.5%) as opposed to 82.3% among the unmarried adolescents where the abuse was carried out by mothers (82.3%) followed by fathers (46.1%) (*Figure 2*) appeared to be the perpetrators. This might be due to gossiping or having love affairs with male adolescents of similar age, inattentive to study and school task preparations, moving outside without the permission of the parents, etc.



Figure 2. Perpetrators of domestic violence



6. *Correlates of domestic violence against adolescents: Multi-variate analysis*

There are many factors associated with domestic violence. Some are personal and others are related to the way the males and females are brought up in the family and in the society. In the hierarchy of gender based power relations, adolescent females occupy the lowest position. Their opportunities for self development and autonomy are limited. Many are continuously confronted with abuse often at a very young age. Out of 12 variables entered into bi-variate analysis, six variables showed significant association with domestic violence and those were then entered into multi-variate logistic regression analysis with a view to finding out the factors influencing domestic violence. The occurrence of domestic violence was dichotomized as yes or no. Analysis revealed that marital status, religion, type of family, family income and history of premarital sexual activity were found to be significantly associated with domestic violence. The domestic violence is less likely among the married adolescents than their unmarried counterparts and it was also less likely among the adolescents having monthly family income Tk. 4000 and above, indicating that domestic violence is more prevalent among low socio-economic groups. Domestic violence was 2.2 times higher among the adolescents having history of premarital sexual activity than those who did not experience premarital sex. This might be due to fact that in our religious and social point of view, premarital sex is strongly prohibited (*Table 4*).



Table 4- Correlates of domestic violence against adolescents: Multi-variate analysis

Attributes	β	<i>p value</i>	<i>Odds ratio</i>	<i>95% CI</i>
<i>Age in years</i>				
10-14 (RC)	-	-	-	-
15-19	0.1836	0.1243	1.2016	0.9507-1.5186
<i>Marital status</i>				
Unmarried (RC)	-	-	-	-
Married	-0.4144	0.0002	0.6608	0.5333-0.8187
<i>Religion</i>				
Non-Muslim (RC)	-	-	-	-
Muslim	0.3561	0.0096	1.4277	1.0905-1.8692
<i>Type of family</i>				
Nuclear (RC)	-	-	-	-
Joint/extended	0.2527	0.0054	1.2875	1.0774-1.5386
<i>Family size</i>				
2-3 (RC)	-	-	-	-
4-5	0.2097	0.0616	1.2333	0.9899-1.5366
≥6	0.1767	0.1377	1.1932	0.9450-1.5067
<i>Monthly income (Tk.)</i>				
<2000 (RC)	-	-	-	-
2000-3000	0.0316	0.7675	1.0321	0.8372-1.2724
3000-4000	-0.0463	0.06925	0.9548	0.7590-1.2010
≥4000	-0.5046	0.0002	0.6037	0.4612-0.7903
<i>Premarital love affairs</i>				
No (RC)	-	-	-	-
Yes	0.7048	0.0000	2.0234	1.4949-2.7386
<i>Model chi square</i>	79.440			
<i>df</i>	10			
<i>Significance</i>	0.0000			
<i>N</i>	2899			
<i>Constant</i>	-1.0739			

* RC= Reference category

* Variables not included in the regression model are: Residence, yeas of schooling, parental level of education, work status.



DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Domestic violence against women is a significant health and social problem affecting virtually all societies. The manifestations and forms of violence vary in different socio-cultural settings (Heise *et al.*, 1994). In this study, an effort was made to explore the hidden fact of violence against adolescents. Although the spectrum of violence studied was very limited, the frequency of violence inflicted was high. The women's reproductive health is closely related to the status of the families in which they are married. Marriage at lower age accelerates early family life, which in turn increases the risk of reproductive health problems including child bearing with immature physical and emotional development. It was found that early age at marriage with wider spousal age difference is another factor, which impedes the equality of household decision making process. As a result married adolescents are continuously exposed to marital conflicts. The Logistic regression analysis showed a significant inverse relationship between domestic violence and the level of education of the battered and the victims (Subramaniam & Sivayogaon, 2001). The study found that the domestic violence was more among the adolescents of Muslim families and also those with a history of premarital sex especially among the unmarried respondents. Among the unmarried adolescents the most quoted reason for the abuse was love affairs as our religion and custom did not support premarital sexual relation, whereas among the married adolescents, either mistakes made in household matters, sexual disharmony, or dowry related causes appeared to be the most frequent reasons for domestic violence.

Regardless of the cause(s) of violence, there are a variety of factors that contribute gender-based abuse such as the legal systems that discriminate women and fail to protect them. In addition, economic structure, empowerment of women, cultural systems also contribute to gender based violence. Women empowerment through education and employment opportunity and political commitment would help to reduce the violence against women.



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