



Volume 1	Issue 2	November (2021)	DOI: 10.47540/ijqr.v1i2.306	Page: 127 – 139
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## Gender-Based Violence In Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* Children, Discrimination, Gender, Violence, Women.

*Received* : 27 July 2021

*Revised* : 29 November 2021

*Accepted* : 30 November 2021

### ABSTRACT

This study tried to explore the current nature of gender-based violence and harassment in Bangladesh. Specifically, gender-related harassment and discrimination with violence against women and children have been explored throughout the study. However, the study is based on secondary data collected from gender-focused scholars and organizations. The data of ASK and BSAF have been used for critical analysis regarding violence, harassment, and discrimination against women and children in Bangladesh. As findings, the study found that the prevalence of domestic violence and oppression against wife and housemate including cleaner, housekeeping, and cooker have existed in the forms of torture, negligence, rape, forced rape, physical assault, and sexual assault. The study also found that women and girls are being harassed in transportation as they feel unsecured in movement through abusive and negative attitudes and behavior such as touching, closely standing, intentionally pushing, and gripping in shoulders, bad beckon and comment, and touching in the sensitive part of the body. It is also seen that the business environment is not favorable for women Entrepreneurs due to constraints social and cultural attitudes, lack of political commitment, and insufficient governmental provisions for establishing a women-friendly business environment.

### INTRODUCTION

The term gender is a global phenomenon that is used to denote the identity of men and women as well as the third gender. Though the government took an important step in recognizing *hijras* as the third gender, in practice, it remained difficult for *hijras* to access health care and other government services, a problem exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and advocates in Bangladesh continued to face violence and threats of violence without adequate protection from the police (Human rights watch, 2021). However, gender-based violence, discrimination, and inequalities are the common issues in our society that are maintained or tolerated by the state and that increase women's vulnerability to violence (Johnson et al, 2008).

It is observed that violence against women in Bangladesh is sanctioned by both society and the state, in the name of culture, tradition, and Islamic religion. Therefore, violence against women is an issue that requires continuous redressing to

guarantee women's full enjoyment of their rights. To promote equal status for women, such violence must be recognized as a Human rights violation requiring immediate actions (Desai et al, 2002). The government of Bangladesh has set specific goals to achieve gender equality through eliminating discrimination and violence which are derived from SDGs including health and wellbeing, quality education, economic growth, and decent work, sustainable city and population, peace and justice which emphasizes ensuring secure, accessible, and affordable transportation for women and children as well as achieving better living standards. More specifically, the government is trying to remove all forms of discrimination, remove all personal violence including trafficking and sexual harassment, and eliminate harmful social practices such as child marriage and forced marriage for the protection of women and girls' rights and for achieving gender equality (Khan and Ritti, 2017).

Though the government achieved remarkable progress in the education, and health sectors, it is observed that women are still behind in higher

education, skills development, technical education as well as unequal positions of men and women in educational and professional peripheries (ibid). Women's education, political and economic empowerment, reform of social conducts, provisions, and state laws and policies that outlaw discrimination against women and their effective implementation are needed. However, this study has been tried to explore the current situation of gender-based violence and harassment on the ground of transportation, business, intimate partner violence, rape and sexual assault, violence against children, and child marriage in Bangladesh.

## **METHODS**

This study is quite based on a mixed approach whereas qualitative discussion is dominant. Mainly secondary data have been used to analyze the current situation collected from ASK and BSAF and many scholars on the ground of women's and children's rights. The content analysis method has been adopted to conduct this study. The nature of data cited in the forms of the number and frequency distribution process has been used as per necessity to depict the actual condition of women and children. Additionally, a major portion of the data has been collected in January 2020-May 2021 collected from newspapers, research articles, and organizational websites.

The main objective of the paper is to explore the current nature of gender-based violence in Bangladesh. More specifically, the paper has tried to explore the nature of domestic violence and transportation harassment. The study also has tried to reveal the business environment and freedom of movement of women in the perspective of Bangladesh. Lastly, the paper has tried to reveal the current violence situation in Bangladesh.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The perspective of this study**

#### *Gender*

Gender refers to the characteristics of femininity and masculinity which are socially constructed. The term 'gender' distinguishes the differences between femininity and masculinity, and it includes the biological sex, sex-based social structures e.g. gender role, and gender identity (Udry, 1994; Haig, 2004). According to natural science, gender also is developed and influenced by

the biological characteristics of human beings whereas social science believes and confirms that social construction is the core basement for developing the concept of gender. A group of investigators believes that there is a Trichotomy process among biological sex, psychological gender, and social gender role which determine the formation of gender identity in society (Yudkin, 1978; Haig, 2004). *Precisely, gender refers to the characteristics of men, women, girls, and boys, even of all human being including transgender who is socially constructed (WHO, 2021).* Gender interacts with but is different from sex, which refers to the different biological and physiological characteristics of females, males, and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs. Gender and sex are related to but different from gender identity. Gender identity refers to a person's deeply felt, internal, and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person's physiology or designated sex at birth.

#### *Violence against women*

Violence against women refers to the pattern of abusive and oppressive behavior occurred by perpetrators against someone through hitting, kicking, biting, slapping, throwing objects, threats, sexual and emotional abuse, dominating, intimidation, stalking, neglect, deprivation, drug addiction, and other negative activities (Khan and Ritti, 2017). In a broad sense, violence against women is classified into two categories such as domestic violence, and outside of domestic violence. Domestic violence includes all types of abusive and negative behavior against women which are occurred outside of the home while domestic violence refers to the violence which is occurred in the home by intimate partners, family members, friends, relatives, or other persons known to the family (Goode, 1971).

Studies revealed that there are different types of violence such as domestic violence includes dowry related violence, child marriage, marital rape or violence, verbal abuse, harassment, humiliation and physical torture (Begum 2005; Hossain et al, 2001) caused by power and control over resources (Barrier, 1998; Gelles and Connell, 1988) created from patriarchal attitude and traditional value (Schuler et al, 1998); dowry related violence including physical torture, suicide after experiencing physical, verbal abuse, mental torture

to slapping, beating, hitting, kicking, dragging by husband or husband's family members, and deaths as a result of dowry demand (Kazi and Suman, 2013; Mannan 2003; Martin et al., 2002; UNICEF 2000); social stigma related violence including birth complications, physical injury, malnutrition, ill health, and diseases (Akhter and Ward, 2005) caused by incapability of child birth, son preference, and subsequent pregnancy (Kazi and Suman, 2013); domestic help related violence including touching female organs, cuddling and molestation, to forced rape on house maids caused by wrongdoing in domestic works, slow working, breaking crockery, and utensils turned into disguised, frustration, and awkward which tend to be involved in commercial sex (Hossain et al, 2004; Kazi and Suman, 2013); child marriage related violence including verbal abuse, humiliation and sometimes physical torture, injury, pain, marital rape, early pregnancy, and subsequent pregnancy (Akhter and Ward, 2005) turned into malnutrition, and ill health (Krug et al, 2002); rape related violence including murder, attempt to commit to suicide, and injury by physical force, coercion, abuse of authority (Kazi and Suman, 2013); acid violence including physical harm and pain, long-term social isolation or stigmatization, resulting in loss of self-esteem and inability to study or work, living in shame, and hiding the disfigurement with a veil, and damage appearance due to family dispute, dowry, enmity, land conflict, refusal against bad proposal, refused to marry, refused to love, extra marital relationship, failure in love, divorce notice, case not withdrawn, and after rape (Ain O Salish Kendra, 2011); and eve-teasing related violence including disturbance, yelling, showing sexual gesture and instruments, obstructing, offering bad proposal, and bad comments in different places such as while coming back home, bus stand, and schools and colleges resulted in vulnerability, insecurity, suicide, and murder (Ethirajan, 2010).

### ***Gender-Based Violence***

Violence is the use of physical force to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy. Other definitions are also used, such as the World Health Organization's definition of violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death,

psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. On the other hand, Gender-Based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power, and harmful norms. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious violation of human rights and a life-threatening health and protection issue. It is estimated that one in three women will experience sexual or physical violence in their lifetime. During displacement and times of crisis, the threat of GBV significantly increases for women and girls.

GBV is the most pervasive form of human rights violation that women and girls are regularly facing in Bangladesh. The VAW Survey 2015, jointly conducted by UNFPA and the BBS, revealed that 73% of ever-married women in Bangladesh have experienced any kind of violence by their current husband, 55% reported any type of violence in the past 12 months, and 50% reported physical violence in their lifetime. The frequency and severity of GBV vary across the country, but the negative impact it has on individuals and families is universal and has direct links to the overall development of Bangladesh. Violence against women impoverishes individuals, families, communities, and governments and reduces the economic development of a nation. At the individual level, as many as 14% of maternal deaths are associated with GBV and at the national level, the country loses 2.10% of GDP due to domestic violence (CARE Bangladesh, 2013).

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in the last 20 years in improving the lives of women and girls. Maternal mortality rates are falling, the fertility rate is declining, and there is greater gender parity in school enrolment. At the same time, 82 percent of married women suffer gender-based violence and pervasive sexual violence prevents women from achieving their full potential. Despite efforts by the government and non-governmental organizations to reduce the rate of child marriage in Bangladesh, it remains the highest in South Asia at 59 percent of girls getting married before the age of 18. Women's participation in the workforce remains constrained to limited, low-paying sectors. Three million Bangladeshi women are employed in the lucrative ready-made garment sector, which is Bangladesh's largest export industry. Increasing numbers of women are involved in small and

medium enterprises, but there remain large financial gaps that women face despite several government initiatives.

#### ***Discriminatory and unequal situation***

The violence reduces the movement of women and girls and absenteeism at work resulting in decreasing productivity and earnings as well as increasing the dropout rate among school-going female students. As consequences, women and girls are incapable of participating in the decision-making process including unable to seek necessary services including physical and mental health (World Bank, 2018). Strong reversal relationships have been found between gender violence and the rights of women and girls in Bangladesh (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Violence against women and girls hamper the full enjoyment of their rights and equal opportunities (Wiegand, 2012; Desai, 2002). The study revealed that violence determines the nature of getting and enjoying rights of women and girls including health rights are deleteriously affected by gender inequality (Human Rights Watch, 2020) which increases the vulnerability of women and girls (Johnson et al, 2008).

Gender inequality and discrimination put women's and girls' health and well-being at risk (WHO, 2021). Women and girls cannot enjoy their rights and freedom due to biases and inequality based on men. Women and girls are hard to reach the health care center for their health treatment without the permission of male persons in the family. They must be sought permission to go for counseling services to the counselor for mental or psychological problems (Assaduzzaman et al, 2015). As thus, adolescents' and women's health status is poor due to inequality and biases (Kennedy et al, 2020). These biases and discrimination or disparity are seen in many sectors such as education, health, nutrition, employment, political representation, and enjoyment of human rights (Haque and Druce, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2017). Particularly, it is found that women do not get enough attention in getting proper treatment on the ground of health and nutrition, and thus, the high rate of maternal mortality and fertility, malnutrition, and ill health (Haque and Druce, 2019) which is occurred by the discriminatory attitudes of communities and health care providers (WHO, 2021) tolerated by the society and the state (Wiegand, 2012).

Precisely, this discriminatory situation among men and women is aroused due to patriarchal social systems, discouraging from participation in a public activity instead of encouraging, male preference in job, maltreatment, and early marriage which is restraining women and girls from participation in education, health, employment, and business sectors, and thus, women and girls' rights are violating (Haque and Druce, 2019; Human rights watch, 2020). As we know, the human rights of women and girls are an unchallengeable, fundamental and inseparable part of universal human rights (Khan and Ritti, 2017) but the inequalities and discriminations increase the risk of violating the human rights of women and girls (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The situation increases the vulnerability of women and girls through economic deprivation, discouraging in career buildup, and limitations in health services for women and girls (Haque and Druce, 2019).

#### ***Depiction of violence, harassment, and discriminations***

A study on Dhaka city proved that women and girls face violence, harassment, and discrimination incredibility in city life. It also observed that Dhaka hold 7<sup>th</sup> position as the worst megacity for women (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2017) as well as 3<sup>rd</sup> position as the most dangerous city on the ground of cultural practices for protecting women and girls from violence and sexual harassment in terms of female genital mutilation, child, early or forced marriage and female infanticide which are making them vulnerable as the day before (The Financial Express, 2017). Women and girls in the city do not feel safe during walking or riding in the streets in the daylight due to bad comments being forwarded about dress and physical structure.

Alongside, women and girls do not feel safe outside of the home after sunset and face incredulity in the street. The study reported that congested and overcrowded public transport and narrow aisle for a standing including narrow road size and congested road crossing creates women unfriendly transportation systems in Bangladesh which limited the moving around of women and girls in the city. Moreover, the lack of public toilets and its health ramifications shortage, shortage of street lights, and shortage of recreational places for women and girls increase women vulnerability in city life. Urban planners argued that the design of the city was not

women-friendly, and women are rare to participate and represent in the process of city planning than men's participation, and thus, cities are friendlier towards men rather than women. They also suggested some implications including passenger discipline and traffic management, adequate seat reservation for women, zebra-crossing and underpass development, reintegration and restructuring the public recreational places, and ensuring women participation in the city planning and development process which can help to ensure women safety in the city (Kan and Tarannum, 2019). But in reality, it is seen that government and city authorities have failed to incorporate the implications in their infrastructural development and policies.

Analysts argued that the government of Bangladesh did not succeed to protect the women and girls from discrimination including violence and sexual harassment at the workplace or religious persuaded violence permitted unethical behavior and fatwa (States News Service, 2011). The government pays much attention to murder or rape-related violence rather than attention to discriminations at the root level sceneries (Weigard, 2012) which is an indicator of the prevalence of gender biases in legal and judiciary systems (Reilly, 2009). The judicial system of Bangladesh does not pay the required attention to eliminating the prevalence of trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation and prostitution (CEDAW/C/BGD/Q/7; Weigard, 2012).

Government must take the initiatives to eliminate all forms of violence, prosecute perpetrators to ensure access to justice and services for women and girls (Brautigam et al, 2008). Although, some remarkable initiatives have been taken by the government to eliminate the violence and discrimination of women and girls including free legal supports such as one-stop crisis centers, facilities of DNA testing, and measures to counteract fatwa which are considered are limited as required (Right Vision News, 2009).

***Existing organizations, laws, ordinances, and its weaknesses***

Some women's organizations and networks are working for the protection of women and girls' rights in Bangladesh for instance, Bangladesh Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) and Mahila Parshod, We Can Stop Violence against

Women, We Can Alliance to End Domestic Violence and the Gender and Development Alliance, National Girl Child Advocacy Forum, Karmajibi Nari, Durjoy Nari Shangsha, Sex workers Network of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Rights and Women for Women. The government of Bangladesh additionally enacted the Citizens Act, which permits women to transfer citizenship to their children. Besides, the government enacted the following laws and ordinances to ensure women's and girls' rights and to protect them from violence, harassment, and discrimination. The Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act, 2000; The Acid Crime Control Act, 2002; The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1980; National Human Rights Act, 2009; Domestic violence (prevention and protection) act, 2010; The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929; The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1980; The Family Court's Ordinance, 1985; The Muslim Family Law's Ordinance, 1961; The Muslim Marriages and Divorces (Registration) Act, 1974; The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939; The Special Marriage Act, 1872; The Hindu marriage registration act, 2012; The Christian Marriage Act, 1872; The Married Women's Property Act, 1874; The Succession Act, 1925; The maintenance of parents act, 2013; and The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017 (Judicial Portal Bangladesh, 2020).

The acts are ratified by the government of Bangladesh but laws are not being strictly implemented (Right Vision News, 2009). The main focusing area of the acts is the enhancement of punishments rather than prevention for the protection of women and girls' rights strategies (Coomaraswamy, 2001). Most of these laws and ordinances discriminate against women in marriage, separation, maintenance, and child custody (FAO, 2021). The legal protections for women and girls are harmonious to other parts of the world as weak application and biases of law enforcing agencies are seen over the country (Weigard, 2012). Policymakers claimed that weak application of existing laws, delay in judicial procedure, lack of women's rights consciousness, sensitivity, and fragile infrastructures are the major reasons for discrimination and violence in the society of Bangladesh (Khan and Ritti, 2017).

It is a matter of hope that the government of Bangladesh has set specific goals to achieve gender

equality through eliminating discrimination and violence which are derived from SDGs including health and wellbeing, quality education, economic growth, and decent work, sustainable city and population, peace and justice which emphasizes ensuring secure, accessible, and affordable transportation for women and children as well as achieving better living standards (Bangladesh Planning Commission, 2018). More specifically, the government is trying to remove all forms of discrimination, remove all personal violence including trafficking and sexual harassment, and eliminate harmful social practices such as child marriage and forced marriage for protection women and girls' rights and for achieving gender equality (Khan and Ritti, 2017).

Precisely, some measures remain unmarked and need to be addressed for the improvement of service delivery including ensuring access to justice and services for victims e.g. women's refuges and shelters, ensuring proper the allocation of adequate resources and funding, ensuring emergency responses, rehabilitation, and protections (CEDAW Report), and perpetrators must be accountable for their actions, establishing transparency and accountability to enforce positive regulations and legislations (Johnson et al, 2008). As findings, in bold line, removing discriminations, eliminating violence, reform, and strictly enacted existing laws, strengthening the civil society organizations, and enhancing social awareness need to be initiated for achieving gender equality society in Bangladesh.

## **Discussion**

### ***Domestic violence and oppression***

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005) which include physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, and it cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography (The Times of India, 2006 November 8:2) occurred in various places such as home, on the streets, in schools, the workplace, in farm fields, refugee camps, during conflicts and crisis (Centre Considering Bill to Check Domestic Violence: NHRC. The Tribune, 2005 May 11:13). It is observed that domestic violence and oppression started from home and affect all the spheres of women's life. In Bangladesh, it is seen that it has diversified forms such as physical aggression

(hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects) or threats, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, controlling or domineering, intimidation, stalking, passive/covert abuse e.g. neglect and economic deprivation, alcohol consumption and mental illness can be co-morbid with abuse and present additional challenges when present alongside patterns of abuse (Markowitz, 2000).

Data also indicate that domestic violence in Bangladesh is very alarming and fearful for women's enjoyment of rights which is occurred by husband and other family members of the new family. A study conducted in 2017 found that dowry (32.72%), familial conflict (32.54%), sexual assault (19.16%), extra-marital relation (11.20%, others (3.06%), and violence itself (1.31%) are the major reasons for domestic violence in Bangladesh. it is also observed that family members including nearest relatives are the main perpetrators of GBV for instance, as the husband (64.65%) followed by the known person (14.00%), neighbors (13.30%), lovers (3.15%), housemaster, and mistress (2.62%), and in-laws and others (2.27%) (Khan and Ritti, 2017).

Feminists argued that a major portion of the women and girls are facing the obstacles in movement alone as well as husband and family members discouraged and sometimes prohibited them to go outside of the home without a male person. They also opined that women and girls alone were not able to go shopping, visit a health center, watch movies, visit outside of the city, going financial institutions, visit parents' houses, and out after dark. It is a matter of hope that the prevalence of domestic violence is decreasing day today, but negligence, mental torture, dowry-related violence, fatwa related violence, sexually harassment, threat, domineering and fearing, physically assault forced pregnancy and abortion, and other types of violence such as forced rape and economic deprivation are the major forms of GBV existed which is considered alarming for human rights of the women and girls. The main reasons for the GBV are early marriage, unemployment, lack of adequate education, familial conflict, alcohol consumption, local negotiation, and weak financial condition, negative attitude of law enforcing agencies towards women, extra-marital relations, and age and gender itself.

### ***Transportation harassment***

Although commendable progress has been made in the country in terms of women's education and professional engagement, the feeling of insecurity among women is pervasive. A study conducted by BRAC (2018) revealed that ninety-four percent (94%) of women commuting in public transport in Bangladesh have experienced sexual harassment in verbal, physical, and other forms. Women are harassed in different kinds of verbal and physical harassment that they go through in their daily commute including obscene or abusive languages, catcalls, whistling was among the ways of harassing them. It is observed that 26% of women are harassed in the streets, 81.6% of women are the victim of staring or leering. It is also seen that 20.5% of women stopped using public transport whereas 45.4% started wearing *hijab* to avoid stalking in transportation (The Daily Star, 2018).

A somewhat surprising revelation of the study is that males belonging to a relatively older age group of 41-60 years have been identified as the major perpetrators. This group has been identified as the perpetrators for 66 percent of such incidents. The study also mentions factors including lax implementation of laws, excessive crowds in the buses, and weak or no monitoring such as the absence of close circuit cameras as the major causes behind sexual harassment in roads and public transport, especially in the buses. It is assumed that women and girls are facing different types of harassment and biases in transportation such as sitting very closely, pushing intentionally, touching the shoulder, pinching, tone, touching hair, gripping hand, and touching or pressing sensitive parts of the body, especially in easy bike and bus. It is also observed that the dominant portion of the perpetrators is middle-aged people. Feminists claimed women and girls are being harassed by the drivers, supervisors, conductors, and helpers of buses, microbus, and drivers of the easy bike, and rickshaw when they move alone. It is also seen that picking up more passengers than seats, narrow road to move, lack of preserved seats, male captured preserved seats, uncivilized behavior of the driver, conductor, and helper, unconsciousness of the passenger, patriarchal mentality, weak monitoring system, and lack of existing rules and laws for the protection of women and girls from exploitation,

violence, and harassment are the major reasons for harassment in transportation.

### ***The unfavorable business environment for women Entrepreneur***

In Bangladesh women, entrepreneurs face various hindrances to access to finance. Insufficient initial capital is one of the main problems for women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. Particularly, when a new venture is established, extensive difficulties are faced by then in accessing credit. Access to marketing facilities is another barrier to women's entrepreneurship development. Access to marketing facilities and markets is affected by some essential aspects, such as expert experience, conception, and acquaintance. Activities of women entrepreneurship are not easily included in the trade, industry, or business involvement. Access to marketing information is a problem for women entrepreneurs. They do not know how to get access to the domestic as well as export market. Even they do not know using market promotion activities.

On the other hand Women, entrepreneurs in Bangladesh in rural areas usually do not have access to appropriate cooperative or support services from the appropriate authority. Lack of knowledge among women entrepreneurs is another barrier. Many of them have no education over class eight or SSC level. Knowledge about business enterprise, business management, environment, entrepreneurship, economics, and policy are important in today's business. Lack of knowledge in these disciplines acts as a major obstacle to women's entrepreneurship. In addition, for processing, manufacturing, livestock, and fisheries activities entrepreneurial training is essential. But such training facility is available in urban areas. Lack of necessary training, lack of experience severely affect the efficiency of the rural women entrepreneurs. It negatively affects the opening of a new business segment.

However, some initiatives should be initiated for creating a women-friendly business environment in Bangladesh such as firstly, the government should come forward at first followed by NGOs; SMEF to meet the financing need of women entrepreneurship since financing is their major problem. The government should take steps to provide more financing to them through different state-owned banks at a lower interest rate. Special packages may be introduced for women entrepreneurs both in urban and rural areas.

Secondly, lengthy formalities in securing loans should be reduced and simplified because it sometimes discourages women entrepreneurs especially new ones. So, financial institutions both under the government and private sector, micro-credit, MIDAS, SMEF should make loan disbursement procedures flexible. Thirdly, arrangements should be made under the private sector and NGOs for increasing knowledge about business management, environment. Assessing risk among entrepreneurship theoretically and practically. This will help them to become more educated in operating their business efficiently. Educated entrepreneurs can efficiently release entrepreneurial accountability. Without difficulty, they can take more risks and have access to information about entrepreneurship.

#### ***Unsafe movement environment***

Mobility of women and girls is much more common today; nonetheless, only 49% of older women and 38% of younger women feel safe going out within their neighborhood. In fact, “eve-teasing” of girls walking to school or using public transport is considered to be one of the major causes of dropout from school and also of early marriage of girls in Bangladesh. Since 2010, “eve-teasing” has also been a crime in Bangladesh and subject to punishment by the Bangladesh state authority. The incidence increased so rapidly that the government decided to employ mobile courts to prosecute people accused of sexually harassing women. Local news media say that “eve-teasing” is on the rise in Bangladesh and links are made between it and other forms of sexual harassment and violence and their consequences, such as abduction, acid burning, murder, and suicide. To ensure women and girls' safe movement, some measures need to be initiated such as firstly, family is the first institution of learning for a human being. If he achieves proper Islamic values, ethics, and knowledge from his family he cannot engage himself with bad works like eve-teasing the outside of his house. Secondly, maintaining the guidelines regarding the street. As a complete code of life any religious guideline encompasses all necessary directions for humankind even the rules of the streets.

Alongside, religious persons and messengers prohibited fellows from doing misdeeds and harmful acts in all spheres of life for example; Prophet (SM) prohibited Muslims from sitting on

the streets. Thirdly, it is needed to raise awareness about social responsibility. Every man is responsible to Allah and he will be asked for his deeds. As social beings, many men have their subordinate persons. If a man properly takes care of his subordinates and prevents them from doing bad acts, then no one in society can do evil works. Fourthly, giving and ensuring exemplary punishment to the offender. The offenders must be kept under the ambit of the law. If the offender remains unpunished, crimes spread quickly in society. Every person will be feared if exemplary punishment is given to an offender. Fifthly, controlling sky culture and ensuring the arrangement of fair culture, literature, and recreation for mass people. We have to limit the open sky culture rather than religion and national culture must be opened and widened. India, Singapore, Thailand, China, and many other countries stopped the telecast of various channels of different countries as the channels are seemed to be harmful to their culture.

Lastly, increase awareness about misuses of mobile, internet and computer. Sociologists argued that misuses of mobile, internet, and computer have to be prevented immediately. Frequently these tools are used in various crimes. Now a day's mobile has become in the hand of young boys and girls as a store of pornography. There are more than 10 million pornographic sites on the internet. The young generation is using mobile, the internet, computer in a way which is very much detrimental for society. The use of modern technology with the internet in third-world countries like Bangladesh increases the risk of violence and harassment of women and girls.

#### ***Current violence situation in Bangladesh***

Although the government of Bangladesh took protective measures for women and children, it remains difficult to stop violence against women and to end child marriage. Human right focused organizations claimed that the government of Bangladesh failed to pass a law on the protection of sexual exploitation abuse and harassment or make an amendment to the existing discriminatory rape law rather government rapidly ratified an amendment to the death penalty for rape (Human Rights Watch, 2021). These weakened situations increase the magnitude of violence including rape and sexual assault, intimate partners' violence,



violence against children, and child marriage. It is seen that violence against women and children has occurred in many forms such as rape; child marriage; dowry related violence; domestic abuse; stalking; sexual harassment at workplaces and educational institutions; and sometimes, violence perpetrated by one's family members being pervasively prevalent in many countries (The Daily Star, November 25, 2019/Editorial).

### ***Rape and sexual assault***

Rape refers to sexual assault involving sexual intercourse or other types of sexual penetration that occurred against a person without that person's consent. It is the most hateful deed in all forms of activities in human society. Sociologists argue that rape varies following the nature of state character and culture. For instance, it is more prevalent in poor and underdeveloped countries rather than developed and civilized countries. However, in Bangladesh, rape is seen as a social problem that violated women's and girls' rights and threat to honor and life. The report claimed that many women and girls have been killed after rape as well as they commit suicide after rape in Bangladesh. ASK (2020) reported that 1627 women have been raped and 326 women are the victim of an attempt to rape resulted in death after rape (53 women); committed suicide after death (14 women); murder after rape attempt (4 women); and suicide after rape attempt (3 women) in 2020 (ASK, Violence Against Women-Rape (Jan-Dec 2020). Moreover, the term rape is sometimes used interchangeably with the term sexual assault (Petraak and Hedge, 2003).

Sexual assault creates a harmful and unfavorable situation for women and girls in all spheres of life. They can't move alone safely and can't lead a tension-free life. They even don't feel secure in the workplace if harassment takes place in the working environment. It is observed that women commit suicide after experiencing sexual assault. ASK report reveal that a total of 201 incidence of sexual assault have occurred including 14 women who have been committed suicide due to sexual assault in their life while 14 protesters including 11 male persons have been killed by the perpetrators and assaulter in 2020 (The Daily Star, January 01, 2021). Women activists argued that the protesters have been victimized by physical assault or torture or arrested or murdered for saving women and girls

from sexual assault by the culprits and perpetrators in Bangladesh.

### ***Intimate partner violence***

Intimate partner violence or domestic violence is a form of violence that occurs in a house environment by intimate partners or family members or the nearest person related to the husband or wife. It is a common phenomenon all over the world. A report by WHO (2021) on domestic violence revealed that the prevalence of domestic violence has been found in poor countries in the world. For instance, it is seen that Kiribati has the highest prevalence of physical and sexual intimate partner violence. Fifty-three percent of the women in this poor country become the victim of this form of violence while the prevalence for Bangladesh is at 50 percent (WHO, 2021). The report also revealed the prevalence of physical or sexual violence against women by the intimate or non-intimate partner for the last 12 months amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

Bangladesh has ranked sixteenth in the list whereas, with 36 percent of women facing violence, the African country Democratic Republic of Congo has topped the list. Moreover, it is observed that people's mindset, patriarchal behavior (Tania Haque cited in Prothom Alo, 2021), child marriage, COVID-19 (UNICEF, 2021), feudal culture, social structure, longtime staying at home (Abul Hossain cited in Prothom Alo, 2021) are responsible for occurring violence against women and girls in Bangladesh. A report reveals that women in Bangladesh have faced various types of domestic violence such as being tortured by husband (36 women), tortured by husband's family (14 women), murdered by husband (183 women), murdered by husband's family members (52 women), murdered by own family (44 women), tortured by own family (29 women), and committing suicide (74 women) from January to September 2020. It is seen that the prevalence of tortured and murdered by the husband are the dominant portion of the domestic violence whereas family members of the husband play both roles as main perpetrator role and assistive role in the ground of occurring violence by intimate partners in Bangladesh.

### ***Violence against children***

Although the government of Bangladesh has taken programs and actions for the protection of children (The Daily Star, 07 March 2021), they

have been suffering a lot of difficulties still (Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum, 2020). They face difficulties in all spheres of life including personal, family, society, education, and workplace. According to Ain O Salish Kendro (2020), 1018 children have been raped, 589 have been killed, and 279 have been sexually assaulted in Bangladesh (The Daily Star, January 01, 2021). It is also seen that the rate of killing of children has increased than the previous year as 111 children additional killed in 2020. Alongside, according to Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum, children of Bangladesh are facing violence in the forms of rape, murder, kidnapped, missing, acid throwing, death and injured by road accident, electrocuted, lightning striking, drowning, group violence, child domestic workers (CDW) raped, injured by physical tortured at educational institutions, killed by medical negligence, and killed by water vessel accidents/boat capsized.

A report published in 2020 about on monthly data on violence against children-2020 (January to August) revealed that 324 children have been raped including gang rape, disabled child rape, attempt to rape, beaten by perverts, sexual harassment, murder after rape, suicide after rape, the victim of pornography. The report also explored that 164 children were murdered including the attempt to murder, committing suicide, and attempting to suicide whereas 81 children have been kidnapped including attempted and murdered after kidnapped. Data further revealed that 78 children have been missed including found dead bodies after missing, and found the dead body of newborn baby while 3 children have been targeted to acid throwing. Moreover, it is seen that 24 child domestic workers have been raped, killed, physically tortured, and even suicide after being targeted while 7 children have been injured by physical torture at educational institutions by the teacher.

BSAF data also reveal that 15 children have been killed and 21 children have been tortured by brutal parents due to many reasons such as financial incapacity, social structure, feudal culture and norms, and lack of awareness. Lastly, it is found that 19 children have been killed by medical negligence and indifference of doctors and nurses while 88 people have been beaten by the perpetrators and culprit people in the society of Bangladesh. The data of the report show that a

major portion of the children has been raped, murdered and subject to drowning resulted in death in 2020 while lower cases found in kidnapped, missing, acid throwing, educational and familial torture, and medical negligence. It is highly alarming that the prevalence of violence of child domestic workers are increasing and poor child who is compelled to workhouses are being the victim of rape, killed, physical torture as well as suicide. Furthermore, Ain O Salish Kendro reported that a total of 589 children have been suffered violence including rape, murder, suicide, physical torture, and death in 2020 (ASK, Child Killed January-December 2020). ASK also reported that a total of 222 cases have been found of child abuse and oppression from 01 January to 23 March 2021 in which the dominant portion of children have been victimized of rape and attempt to rape whereas 21 out of 25 cases related to a raped child under the age of 0-6 years (ASK Bulletin March 2021). Despite that situation, domestic child worker abuse, torture by teachers and parents, stalking, acid throwing, and physical torture have been found as forms of violence against children of Bangladesh in 2021.

#### ***Child marriage***

UNICEF believes that child marriage is a form of violence against children. Child marriage is a marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18 years. It affects both of them; girls are affected disproportionately, particularly in South Asia. It is seen that South Asia has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world. Data revealed that about 45% of women reported being married before 18 whereas 17% of girls are married before 15 years (UNICEF, 2017). Child-leading organizations claimed that child marriage violates the human rights of children and has increasingly pushed them at high risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse. They also claimed that economic status, social norms, attitudes, feudal culture and thoughts, religious tolerance and fatwa, and social structure increase the prevalence of child marriage in the world, particularly in Bangladesh. Bangladesh ranks 4<sup>th</sup> position in the prevalence of child marriage globally. It is observed that many parents marry off their daughters thinking of their safety.

A report revealed that the number of child marriages reported by Polli Shomaj in 2020 grew by 68%, compared to the same period in 2019. There

was also a 72% rise in the number of child marriages prevented by the women's groups during the same period (BRAC data cited in Prothom Alo, 01 December 2020). Data also warned that COVID-19 increases the pressure on teenage girls to submit to child marriage. COVID-19 has pushed girls into the risks of child marriage and has exacerbated the prevalence of child marriage (UNICEF cited in Prothom Alo, 11 March 2021). The pandemic situation is seen as closure of schools, detachment from friends and voluntary activities, and growing poverty which has increased the risks of child marriage in Bangladesh.

According to UNICEF, the closure of schools, economic pressures, service disruption, pregnancies, and parental deaths have put the most vulnerable girls at risk of child marriage. The government has enacted a new law to prevent child marriage. The law has flaws though. But in Bangladesh, there is a huge gap between enacting a new law and its implementation. Child marriage occurs due to parents' and society's lack of awareness (Prothom Alo, 11 March 2021). Although the government has achieved working to stop child marriage, the prevalence of child marriage still exists due to our traditional mindset, economic vulnerable conditions, and improper implementation of policies, rules, ordinances, and laws related to women and girls' rights and protection against child marriage.

## **CONCLUSION**

Bangladesh has achieved remarkable progress in improving the conditions of women and children, particularly on the ground of education, health, nutrition, human rights, and other fields of basic needs. They more likely enjoy rights and opportunities which are playing very important roles in enhancing their socio-economic status. Though the condition of Bangladesh is still fragile, the government has been trying to improve the living standard of its citizen by eliminating poverty and hunger through comprehensive programs, particularly reducing the feminization of poverty. The government took programs to decrease inequalities in living standards between men and women and reduce the widening gender gap in poverty but existing data claimed that women and girls have been suffering violence, harassment, and discrimination created by the gender gap and socio-

economic fragile condition of the society. as such, they face domestic violence and oppression, transportation harassment, barriers to being entrepreneurs, and unsecured movement conditions.

Similarly, the conditions of women and children of Bangladesh are not quite favorable and enjoyable because many abusive and harmful activities still existed in the forms of violence, harassment, and deprivation of human rights. The study found that the prevalence of rape and sexual assault has existed that took many lives of women and girls as well as they take to attempt to commit suicide. Particularly, it is seen that wife has been dominated and oppressed by husband or husband's family members due to dowry or claim their rights to protest against domestic violence whereas housemates including child domestic workers, cleaners, cooks, and caretakers have been oppressed and harassed in the forms of rape, torture, mental pressure, work burden, and sexually assault. Despite these vulnerable situations of women and girls, children have been targeted to violence and sexual assault indoor and outdoor of the home.

Existing data revealed that they are being harassed and raped in educational institutions as well as in-home by house teachers and nearest relatives. Children are also facing early marriage without their consent which is detrimental to their health and a threat to life. Though the government of Bangladesh took initiatives to eliminate child marriage for ensuring a better status of living for them, their condition remains vulnerable yet. Feminists argued that government should be taken initiatives for amending the existing laws and the executive process of laws and protective measures must be transparent and accountable as well as the mindset of mass people must be a positive change towards women and children.

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