

Sensitizing Communities to Eliminate Discrimination and Violence Against Women: An Assessment of BRAC's Intervention

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Abstract

The project titled 'Sensitizing communities on CEDAW' was a part of the Gender Quality Action Learning (GQAL) programme implemented in Gazipur to sensitize people about CEDAW to prevent violence against women and sexual harassment. The study aimed to assess the change of knowledge level of students and community leaders on CEDAW and sexual harassment. Two rounds of survey data – baseline and endline - were used to assess the change of the project. The difference in changing knowledge level of the respondents on CEDAW and sexual harassment between the baseline and endline survey was found to be much higher. Still there was considerable number of respondents whose knowledge was found to be unchanged or decreased after the intervention. Deeply rooted patriarchal ideology, cultural beliefs and practices were identified as the major reasons behind this fact. It was suggested that BRAC should run this kind of project in a larger scale, targeting larger groups of population for a longer period of time in order to eliminate dominant patriarchal ideology that keeps women subordinate and oppressed in all spheres of life.

I. Introduction

The commitment of the state to establish equality has been reflected in its ratification of various international conventions and treaties. These treaties make the state obligated to take steps and policies to transfer these commitments into practice. Bangladesh has signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)¹ in 1984 with reservation on four articles². Despite all of the constitutional and international commitments, discrimination and violence against women poses one of the most serious threats to overall development in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh women or girls are everyday targets of discrimination within their household (Jahan 1994, White 1992, Zaman 1996, Zaman 1999) and it starts from their birth and continues throughout the life. Smith (2001, cited in Sultana 2010) mentioned that women are frequently deprived of their rights. The cultural beliefs that the role of a woman is to be nothing other than a wife and mother has a consequence for reducing parents' incentives to invest in human capital of their daughters. Within the household and beyond, men exercise control over women's labour, their sexuality, their choice of spouse, their access to labour and other markets, and their income and assets through local decision-making and legal bodies (Baden *et al.* 1994 cited in Alim 2011, p.1). In other words, men mediate women's access to social, economic, political, and legal institutions.

¹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the international bill of women's human rights adopted in 1979, by United Nations Commissions on the Status of Women (Geske and Bourque, 2002: 249). It formally recognizes and explicitly addresses the rights of women. Having 186 state parties, it is one of the most highly ratified international human rights conventions. The substance of the convention is based on three interrelated core principles: equality, non-discrimination and State obligation. It also allows state party to ratify the convention by keeping reservation on particular elements of the treaty which they will not be bound to (IWRAP Asia Pacific, 2009: 3). CEDAW consists of total 30 articles. Article 1 provides a definition of discrimination and forms a fundamental basis for eliminating discrimination, Article 2-4 deals with different measures that are made as obligatory for state parties to eliminate discrimination and ensure equality. Article 5-16 describes different areas that are needed to be addressed through the policies and measures mentioned in Article 2-4, in order to eliminate discrimination. These areas include: sex roles stereotyping and customary practices detrimental to women (article 5), prostitution (article 6), political and public life (article 7), participation at the international level (article 8), nationality (article 9), education (article 10), employment (article 11), health care and family planning (article 12), economic and social benefit (article 13), rural women (article 14), equality before law (article 15), and marriage and family relationship (article 16). Article 17-22 discusses the establishment and the function of the CEDAW Committee while article 18-30 deals with the administrative and other procedural aspects of the convention (IWRAP Asia Pacific, 2009: 3).

² Bangladesh ratified CEDAW in 1984 with reservations on four articles – 2, 13 (a), 16 (a, c and f) under the excuse that these articles go against the principles of *Sharia* laws based on the Quran and *Sunnah* (Husain, 2004: 51). As a result of the demands and advocacy by women's movements, organizations and civil society, in 1996 Bangladesh withdrew its reservation from two articles, and at present, therefore, it still retains reservations on article 2 and 16 (c). These two articles are very important part of CEDAW to achieve equality in every aspect of life.

Women are dependent on men throughout their lives, from father through husband to son. Okojie (1994) reported that women's access to material resources were restricted, leaving them dependent on male relatives. This discrimination makes women subordinate in the family. The subordination of women is a consequence of the existing patriarchal social system which determines power relations within households and the bargaining power of household members through the organization of the family, marriage, inheritance patterns, and associated ideologies (Parveen 2007, Kabeer 2005, Naved 2000).

Gender discrimination is also associated with violence against women which is considered another major impediment to gender equality. Jahan (1994:200) relates that gender discrimination, leading to gender violence, is deeply embedded in Bangladeshi social structure; all Bangladeshi social institutions permit, even encourage the demonstration of unequal power relations between the sexes. In other words, violence against women in Bangladesh is culturally accepted, tolerated and 'in certain prescribed forms and given contexts' it is legitimized (Marcus 1993). Lack of women's autonomy in their household as well as in the community is also associated with domestic violence (Koenig *et al.* 2003 cited in Alim, p.2).

Gender-based violence is perpetrated at different levels, i.e. at the family, community and state, and in different forms. Much violence against women are unreported. Domestic violence can be cited as an example of unreported violence, where customary, personal or family laws often prevail, and state institutions are reluctant to intervene. Therefore, laws, even exist, against particular forms of violence against women may be largely ineffectual and barely enforced (Pisa and El-Bushra 1992 cited in Marcus 1993, p.1).

Jahan reported that the incidences of women becoming victims of family violence like abnormal death at home and torture by in-laws are considerably high in our society (Jahan 1994). These facts indicate that domestic violence threatens the safety of Bangladeshi women (Jahan 1994).

BRAC recognizes the necessity of making people aware of and sensitizing them about the policies and initiatives taken by the state to establish equality and remove all kinds of discrimination and violence against women. BRAC identified students and community leaders as potential agents of change who would play a strong role to ensure proper implementation of policies formulated on the basis of CEDAW and other international treaty and commitments.

Overview of the project

This project is part of The Gender Quality Action Learning (GQAL) programme initiated by BRAC Gender Justice and Diversity (GJ&D) programme. It creates a community movement on violence against women (VAW) and children through GQAL programme.

As a member organization of Citizen Initiatives on CEDAW platform, Bangladesh, BRAC believes CEDAW to be one of the powerful tools through which BRAC can lead the community towards a society free from all types of discrimination, violence, inequality and injustice based on sex. The objective of the project under study is to sensitize the community on CEDAW and its use in preventing VAW.

A session was organized to sensitize the target group on CEDAW and to discuss how to prevent sexual harassment at home, on way to school, and in classroom. A total of 6,243 students from grade VIII-XII were selected for orientation programme in 100 batches on CEDAW and sexual harassment in public and private places. Two hundred community leaders, journalists, teachers, government officials, imams, and UP chairpersons and members were also oriented in eight batches. The duration of the orientation was two-and-a-half hours for students and four hours for others. The project was expected to identify risky locations/areas for sexual harassment, parents' role, and community mobilization.

Objective of the study

This study aims to assess the change of knowledge level of students and community leaders, who were considered change agents on CEDAW and sexual harassment. The specific objectives were to:

1. Determine the change in knowledge level of high school and college students about CEDAW and sexual harassment, and
2. Observe changes in knowledge level of community leaders, chairmen and members of union parishad (the lowest administrative unit of the government), and village elites on the same issues.

II. Methods

We conducted this study following quantitative techniques. We followed one group pre-post test design.

Study area

We conducted the study in the schools and colleges and among the community leaders in the operational area of the project, i.e. five unions of Gazipur sadar *upazila* (sub-district) of Gazipur district. The five unions are Bashan, Baria, Pubail, Mirzapur and Kaultia.

Sample size and data collection tools and techniques

Based on study design, we included pre-test and post-test with respondents and used similar questionnaire. The baseline included the following population as respondents:

- High school students (class seven and nine),
- College students (class eleven),
- Union *Parishad* members (chairmen and members), and
- Village leaders (who were respected as leaders resolving disputes and attended social and ritual ceremonies).

Respondents, especially students, were randomly selected. There was a register in each school and college from which the respondents were selected and interviewed. Boys and girls were selected separately. The project also collected the list of the name of the village leaders and chairmen and members from which respondents were randomly selected. The total number of students was 834 in the baseline survey conducted in 2011. Due to the dropout or unavailability of respondents the number of students was 390 in the post-test survey conducted in 2012. Similarly, although 136 village leaders were taken as respondents in the pre-test, the number of village leaders was 44 in the post-test survey. Therefore, the comparison between pre-test and post-test data was made on the basis of 434 respondents.

Data were collected through survey using a detailed questionnaire. Information was collected on socioeconomic and demographic profile of the respondents, their knowledge on CEDAW, and sexual harassment. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 17. Bivariate and multivariate analyses were also done.

III. Findings

Demographic composition of the respondents' households

The number of females in the household was slightly higher compared to males (Table 1). Most of the members of respondents' households were educated up to secondary level and 34.4% of them were in the age group of 11-20 years. On the other hand, 44% were reported students and 25% of them were involved in household work. Besides, 92% were not the members of any NGO.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents' household

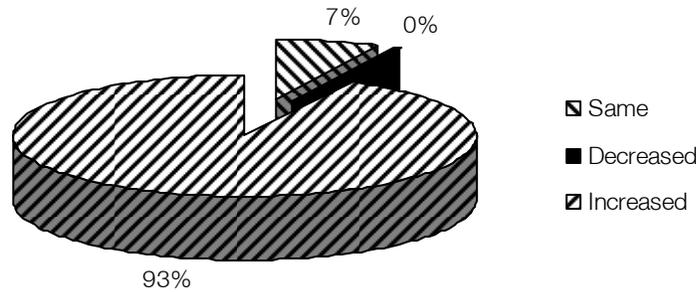
Indicators	%
Sex	
Male	49
Female	51
Age in years	
0-10	13.2
11-20	34.4
21-30	9.3
31-40	22.8
41 and above	20.4
Education	
Illiterate	12.5
KG to class five	22.5
Six to ten	45.1
HSC	14.9
BA	4.0
MA	1.0
Occupation	
Agriculture	4.1
Service	9.5
Business	11.1
Household work	25.1
Student	43.9
Others	6.3
Marital status	
Unmarried (age>10)	44.7
Married	52.2
Widow	3.0
Separated	0.2
NGO membership	7.8

Changes in knowledge level on CEDAW

We measured the respondents' knowledge on CEDAW including its major theme and issues, and the number of articles of CEDAW, the year of its adoption, and the name of the organizations or institutions that adopted CEDAW. We also tried to know their knowledge on the reservation on CEDAW by Bangladesh and their opinion about this reservation. Changes in their knowledge level were determined at three levels: decreased, unchanged and increased.

The overall positive change in their knowledge on CEDAW was found quite significant after the intervention. Most respondents (92%) reported to have increased their knowledge due to intervention (Fig. 1). Very few (7%) remained with same knowledge as it was before the intervention. The level of knowledge decreased is insignificant, only 1%.

Figure 1. Changes in knowledge level on CEDAW



We also measured the difference of changing knowledge between males and females. Ninety-two percent of both males and females reported to have increased knowledge, but there was no significant difference in the change of knowledge level between males and females (Fig. 2).

Although the changes in the knowledge level did not vary between male and female, it was found to be different for different types of respondents (Fig. 3). The impact of the project was observed to be higher in changing the knowledge level of community leaders than students. Ninety-two percent students and 96% community leaders reported to have increased knowledge level. On the other hand, among students 8% was seen to have the same knowledge level while 2% of community leaders had same level of knowledge after intervention. The difference of change in the level of knowledge between the two groups was found statistically significant ($p=.073$).

Figure 2. Changes in knowledge level on CEDAW by sex

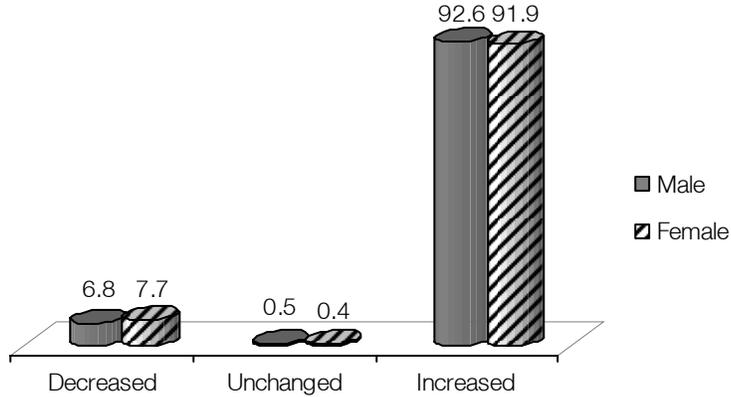
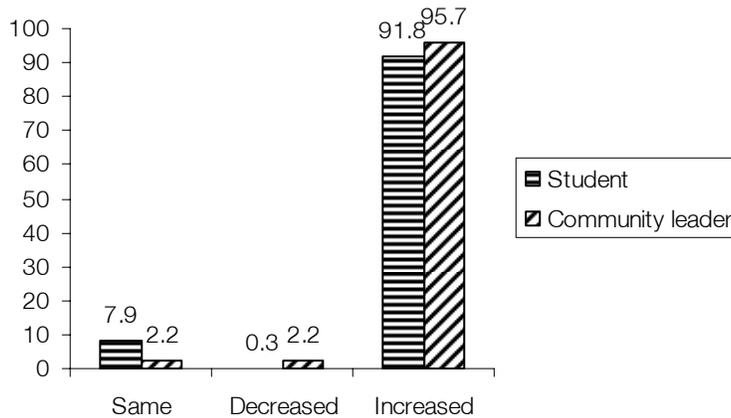


Figure 3. Changes in knowledge level by type of respondents



We also measured the changes in knowledge level on the basis of economic condition of the respondents' household (Fig. 4). Significant changes in the knowledge level were found among all the respondents whose households were very poor. The intervention was found to have the same impact on the knowledge level of other groups. More than 90% of the poor and middle class respondents were found to have increased knowledge while almost the same percentage of rich people was found to have increased knowledge. Change in knowledge also varied by religion. Both positive and negative changes were observed higher for Muslims than that of Hindus (Fig. 5).

Figure 4. Changes in knowledge level by economic condition

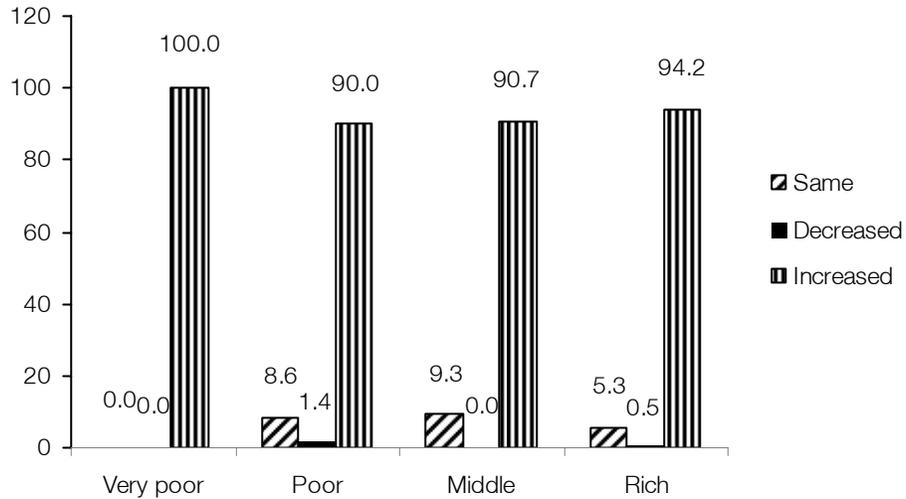
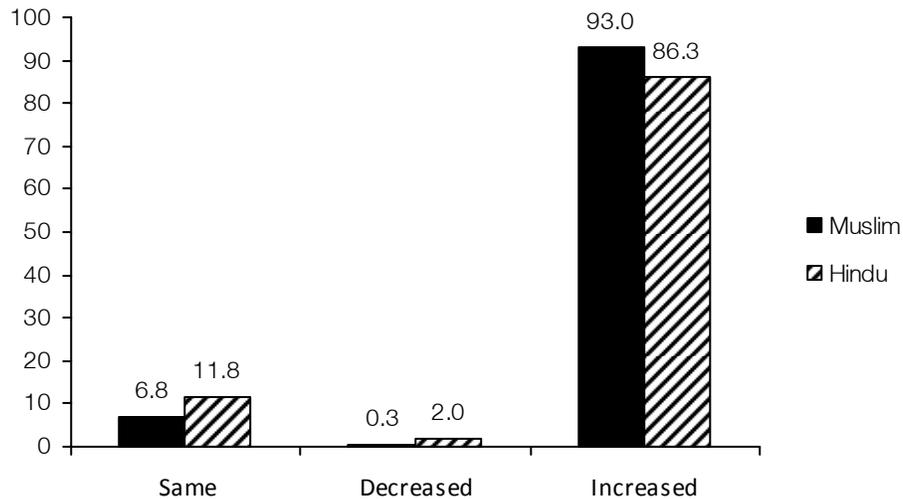


Figure 5. Changes in knowledge level by religion



The average knowledge score difference of the respondents between pre-test and post-test was also measured (Table 2). After the intervention the average knowledge score of the respondents on CEDAW increased significantly in different indicators. Among that the increase of female knowledge on the issue as mentioned was slightly higher than a male and the difference between pre-test and post-test was statistically significant. On the other hand, the average knowledge score of the students was higher than the community leaders, but both of their knowledge scores increased after the intervention.

The knowledge score of the respondents from different economic backgrounds was found different between pre-test and post-test. The respondents who considered themselves very poor reported to have increased average knowledge score on CEDAW after the intervention. They scored .20 on average in pre-test but it increased up to 8.00 after intervention. A similar type of change was noticed for poor, middle and rich classes. Besides, Muslims were found more knowledgeable than Hindus after intervention.

Table 2. Average knowledge score difference on CEDAW by different indicators

Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance
Sex			
Male	.14	4.76	.000
Female	.12	4.88	.000
Respondent type			
Student	.12	4.95	.000
Community leader	.21	3.78	.000
Economic status			
Very poor	.20	8.00	.000
Poor	.08	4.94	.000
Middle	.05	4.86	.000
Rich	.21	4.67	.000
Religion			
Muslim	.13	4.97	.000
Hindu	.07	3.78	.000

Table 3 shows much improvement in the knowledge level of the respondents regarding CEDAW after the intervention. With regard to all the indicators except gender discrimination, no respondents in the pre-test had been able to answer any of the questions, but after the intervention they were able to answer. When the respondents were asked what is CEDAW 44% were able to answer correctly in the post-test compared to '0' in the pre-test. A similar type of change had taken place for other indicators.

On the other hand, around half of the respondents in the post-test had been able to answer the question regarding 'what is discussed in CEDAW, how many sections in CEDAW and whether Bangladesh should withdraw reservation' compared to '0' respondents in the pre-test. But 13% of them answered correctly the question of what is gender discrimination in the pre-test, which increased up to 42% in the post-test.

In order to know the impact of the project, the study also explored the sources of knowledge of the respondents. Almost all the respondents having increased knowledge mentioned BRAC as the source of their knowledge on CEDAW in the endline survey, while very few of them reported to have their knowledge from other sources (TV, book, newspaper, family, society, other NGO etc.) (Table 4).

Table 3. Change in knowledge level on CEDAW (%)

Indicator	Pretest	Posttest	Significance
What is CEDAW	00	44	.000
What is substance of CEDAW	00	23	.000
Who has prepared CEDAW	00	36	.000
In which year was CEDAW prepared	00	40	.000
What is discussed in CEDAW	00	52	.000
How many sections in CEDAW	00	51	.000
When has Bangladesh signed in CEDAW	00	43	.000
What is reservation in CEDAW	00	05	.000
How many sections of CEDAW is reserved by Bangladesh	00	37	.000
At present in which section of CEDAW is reserved by Bangladesh	00	16	.000
In which subject in CEDAW Bangladesh has reserved	00	07	.000
Whether Bangladesh should withdraw reservation	00	47	.000
Which part in CEDAW can play role to preserve women rights	00	28	.000
In which section of CEDAW is told gender equality	00	14	.000
What is discrimination against women	13	42	.000

Table 4. Sources of knowledge on CEDAW after intervention (%)

Indicator	Sources	
	BRAC	Others*
What is CEDAW	96.9	3.1
What is substance of CEDAW	99	1.0
Who has prepared CEDAW	98.1	1.9
In which year CEDAW is prepared	96	4
What is discussed in CEDAW	96.5	3.5
How many sections in CEDAW	98.8	1.2
When has Bangladesh signed in CEDAW	96.3	3.7
What is reservation in CEDAW	100.0	0.0
How many sections of CEDAW is reserved by Bangladesh	96.9	3.1
At present in which section of CEDAW is reserved by Bangladesh	92.6	7.4
In which subject in CEDAW Bangladesh has reserved	93.5	6.5
Which part in CEDAW can play role to preserve women rights	94.4	5.6
In which section of CEDAW is told gender equality	96	4
What is discrimination against women	92.3	9.7

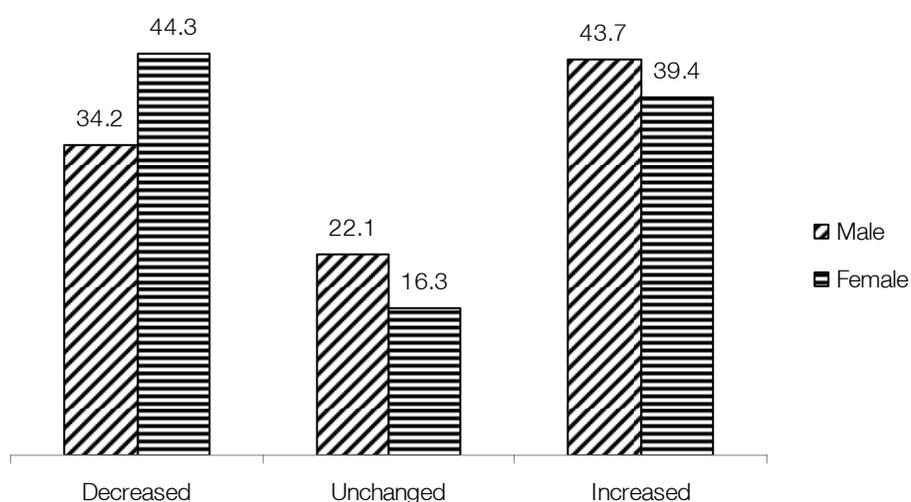
*TV, Newspaper, society, books, family, other NGOs, experience etc.

Almost none of the respondents (<1%) have any knowledge on CEDAW before the intervention. But few respondents who had knowledge reported newspapers, books and society as the sources of their knowledge. A comparatively higher percentage (>12%) knew the concept of discrimination against women before intervention.

Changes in knowledge level on sexual harassment

A significant change at the respondents' knowledge level on sexual harassment was observed after the intervention. Change in knowledge level was not similar between male and female. It was found that male's knowledge increased much better compared to female and decreased less than female (Fig. 6). On the other hand, a little more than one-fifth of the respondents' knowledge (22.1%) remained unchanged despite the intervention.

Figure 6. Change in knowledge level on sexual harassment by sex



The average knowledge score of the respondents on sexual harassment in pre-test and post-test changed (Table 5). The average knowledge score of both male and female on sexual harassment decreased in the post-test. Findings also present the increase of average knowledge score of the very poor in the post-test. A similar type of change was observed for the poor, middle and the rich group. Besides, the Hindu respondents were found more knowledgeable after the intervention.

Different indicators of sexual harassment were considered (Table 6). The changes in knowledge level for different indicators were found to be different. In some cases the level of knowledge of the respondents increased but in other cases decreased.

When respondents were asked about the definition of sexual harassment 33% answered correctly in the pre-test, but in the post-test 12% more respondents answered correctly.

Table 5. Average knowledge score difference on sexual harassment by different variables (%)

Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance
Sex			
Male	2.30	2.07	.09
Female	1.60	2.80	Ns
Respondent type			
Student	2.24	2.21	Ns
Community leader	2.26	2.00	Ns
Economic status			
Very poor	1.60	2.80	Ns
Poor	1.74	2.19	.05
Medium	2.02	2.09	Ns
Rich	2.65	2.25	.01
Religion			
Muslim	2.29	2.20	Ns
Hindu	1.90	2.04	Ns

Table 6. Change in knowledge level on sexual harassment (%)

Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance
What is sexual harassment	32.6	45.2	.000
Conduct/Activities of sexual harassment	58.5	59.4	Ns
Consequences of sexual harassment	31.7	19.0	.000
Laws related to preventing sexual harassment	1.4	11.2	.000
Places of sexual harassment	69.7	85.1	.000

But the number of the respondents remained unchanged after the intervention regarding the knowledge on the conduct of sexual harassment. The percentage of the respondents decreased even after the intervention for having knowledge on the consequences of sexual harassment. The respondents knew about the place of sexual harassment both in pre-test and post-test. During the post-test, the respondents mentioned BRAC as the main source of their knowledge in this regard (Table 7).

Table 7. Sources of knowledge on sexual harassment after intervention (%)

Indicator	Sources	
	BRAC	Others*
What is sexual harassment	88.3	11.7
Conduct/Activities of sexual harassment	71.9	28.1
Problems caused by sexual harassment	72.2	27.8
Laws related to preventing sexual harassment	95.9	4.1
Places of sexual harassment	84.6	15.4

*TV, Newspaper, society, books, family, schools, other NGOs, experience etc.

IV. Discussion and conclusion

The desirable outcome of the studied project was to ensure that community people were sensitized on CEDAW and sexual harassment. This project targeted students and community leaders who were expected to be the potential agents for change for intervention. Based on the findings of this study, the project could claim success in bringing change in the knowledge level of its target groups.

The findings reveal positive effect of the project on the level of knowledge among students and community leaders regarding CEDAW. The number of students whose knowledge increased due to intervention was not higher than the community leaders. Nevertheless, the knowledge of community leaders also increased due to the intervention. The sensitivity they got from the project would mobilize them to question the patriarchal ideology that maintains the inequality between sexes. The variation of changes in knowledge level was observed in different economic status. The project can claim 100% success in bringing changes in knowledge on CEDAW among the respondents belonging to very poor groups, but they were few. In short, the difference between the knowledge level of the respondents on CEDAW between the baseline and endline survey was undoubtedly much higher.

Changes in the knowledge level varied with the themes the project addressed. In the pre-test survey the respondents could hardly answer the question on CEDAW, but in the case of sexual harassment, they could answer all questions, except the relevant laws. Huge coverage and exclusive focus on sexual harassment by different media like TV, books, newspapers, etc. might also contribute in increasing the knowledge level of the respondents.

After intervention the changes in the knowledge level on sexual harassment were observed different in different indicators. Positive differences in changing knowledge level regarding the concept of sexual harassment, behaviours and laws related to sexual harassment were observed in the post-test survey, while the knowledge on the consequences of sexual harassment was seen to have decreased after intervention. Although the respondents were aware of the places where sexual harassment occurs both in pre-test and post-test surveys, the increase in their knowledge level was observed to be quite significant (from 69.9 to 85.1%) after the intervention. Also much change in the respondents' knowledge on existing laws on sexual harassment was observed (from 1.4% to 11.2%) after intervention. Despite positive changes, the average knowledge level on sexual harassment by sex as well as the type of respondents was observed to have decreased.

Although positive changes occurred, there was considerable number of respondents whose knowledge was found to be unchanged after the intervention. Deeply rooted patriarchal ideology, cultural beliefs and practices that have been prevailing in the

minds of individuals for generations might be one of the major reasons behind this fact. Duration of the intervention maximum of four hours was not enough to be effective in bringing the desired changes in knowledge level.

The respondents whose knowledge level decreased after intervention always should be given more attention by the programme. This finding also points out the necessity of running this kind of project on a larger scale, targeting larger groups of population for a long time.

In both pre-test and post-test surveys, the respondents were asked to give their recommendations on how to prevent sexual harassment. According to pre-test data, the respondents suggested creating awareness as the main approach to prevent sexual harassment. At the same time, they also focused on practicing *purdah* to prevent women from sexual harassment. It also reflects the traditional ideology that considers women's 'inappropriate' and 'indecent' appearance and behaviour as the responsible factor that results in violence against women by men. Therefore, they suggest that women should maintain 'proper' and 'decent' dress to prevent sexual harassment. In the post-test survey the recommendations about maintaining *purdah* was suggested with slight changes (from 11.3 to 10.3%). That again indicates the necessity of running this kind of project for a long time to eliminate patriarchal ideology that makes women more accountable to the dominant system for their dress and behaviour, especially when they become victims of violence. The respondents also suggest making the existing laws related to sexual harassment effective and ensuring the perpetrators' proper punishment.

On average, >71% of the respondents mentioned BRAC as the main source of their changing knowledge level. This signals the project's success in educating the respondents on CEDAW and sexual harassment. It also supports the idea of running this type of project on a larger scale. Therefore, it is expected that the sensitized students and community leaders would work together as agents of change in future.

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