

Watch Report

No. 27

Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC, Bangladesh

March 1997

Household Violence Against Women in Rural Bangladesh

Abstract: The prevalence of household violence against women is high in Bangladesh. Poverty, illiteracy and religious values are usually blamed for such violence. This report assesses the prevalence and determinants of violence against women within marriage and the role of credit program in reducing violence in rural Bangladesh. Three forms of marital violence such as verbal abuse, mental torture and physical assault were focused by using case study method. The report concludes that the risk of marital violence can be significantly reduced by expanding women's participation in credit-based development programs for the poor.

Introduction

Although elimination of all forms of violence against women is a cherished social goal of any development program, household violence within marriage is expected to continue as long as patriarchal form of social system exists. During the last two decades, Bangladesh has witnessed the proliferation of non-government organizations (NGOs). They have introduced collateral-free credit for rural poor women with a package of support services such as group formation, skill training and legal awareness. Besides with credit support, group formation creates solidarity among poor women that reduces physical and social isolation at home, and provides opportunity to earn and financially contribute to the family. These together may have initiated the process of changing women's traditional role in the

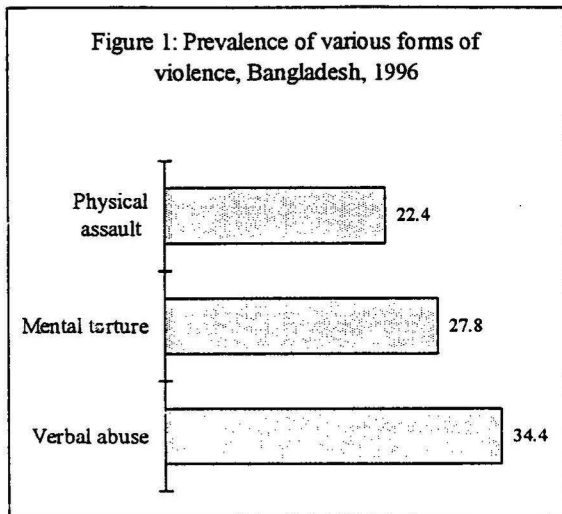
household and their relationship with their husbands. In this report, we focus on i) the prevalence and determinants of violence against women within marriage and ii) the role of credit program participation in reducing violence in rural areas of Bangladesh.

Data and Method

Data were collected from a nationally representative intensive monitoring system, known as *Watch*, in 70 villages located in ten districts of Bangladesh. The study sample consisted of 50 married women aged <50 years, selected at random, from each district. Thus, information from a total of 500 women were successfully collected using a case study method during March--May 1996. Nearly a third of the sample women participated in credit programs while the other two-third were not involved in any development intervention. In the analysis, sample women were grouped into *non-participants*, *participants* and *non-eligible to participate* in credit programs. In other words, we have three group of women where a third had credit support, nearly 26 percent of credit eligible women had no such support and the remaining 42 percent were non-eligible socioeconomically better-off women.

Findings

Violence against woman within marriage is viewed in this study as an act or behavior displayed by their husband that destabilizes or reduces the physical or emotional well-being. The reference period considered to measure the prevalence of violence was one year.



Three forms of violence were investigated viz. verbal abuse, mental torture and physical assault. Figure 1 indicates that verbal abuse (such as name calling in front of children or neighbors, etc.) was widespread in the villages. The prevalence of mental torture (such as threat to beat, divorce or abandon, pressing for dowry, etc. by husband) was also considerably high. More than a fifth of the women reported to be victims of physical assault each year.

Age of women	Nature of Violence		
	Verbal abuse	Mental torture	Physical assault
< 30	39.5	36.4	31.0
30 - 39	33.2	26.9	21.9
40 +	30.7	18.2	11.4

Older women were less likely to become victims of violence than younger women (Table 1). This is particularly true in case of physical assault. Two explanations are forwarded. First, the husband may become both physically less vigor and emotionally less arrogant as they also become older with their wives. Second, older women, on the other hand, gain more power and prestige within the households as a result of being the mother of adult children.

Table 2. Nature of violence by education, Bangladesh, 1996

Level of education	Nature of Violence		
	Verbal abuse	Mental torture	Physical assault
<i>Women</i>			
No school	41.2	30.7	27.2
I - V	24.4	24.4	13.4
VI +	17.2	19.0	13.8
<i>Husband</i>			
No school	41.8	31.8	27.5
I - V	25.5	27.5	18.6
VI +	24.6	18.6	13.6

As expected, education of both women and their husbands were negatively associated with prevalence of any form of violence against women (Table 2). It is not clear why education reduces violence or which trait of education has played a role in modifying violent behavior of men. The wider gaps in prevalence between ever and never school-goers indicate that socialization and learning process in schools may have played a role.

Like years of schooling, socio-economic condition of the household was also inversely associated with the prevalence of violence against women (Table 3). Our explanation is that poverty and economic crisis keep pressing the bread-winner, who are mostly men, to make them mentally unstable. It reflects on spousal cohabitation at the occasion of even minor disagreements.

Table 3. Nature of violence by socio-economic condition of the household, Bangladesh, 1996

Socioeconomic condition	Nature of Violence		
	Verbal abuse	Mental torture	Physical assault
<i>Land ownership</i>			
Landless	41.8	34.7	30.3
1 - 199 dec	28.1	24.7	18.0
200 +	23.9	11.3	5.6
<i>Living standard</i>			
Poor	37.5	34.1	27.3
Rich	27.4	13.0	11.0

Muslim men appeared to behave more violently with their spouse than their Hindu neighbors (Table 4). We have two explanations for such a scenario. First, tolerance in Islamic faith is much less than any major religious beliefs. Second, Hindus, being minority in Bangladesh, are themselves feel insecure and, therefore, prefer to avoid problems at home.

Table 4. Nature of violence by religion, Bangladesh, 1996

Religion	Nature of Violence		
	Verbal abuse	Mental torture	Physical assault
Muslim	36.1	29.2	23.5
Hindu	22.6	17.7	14.5

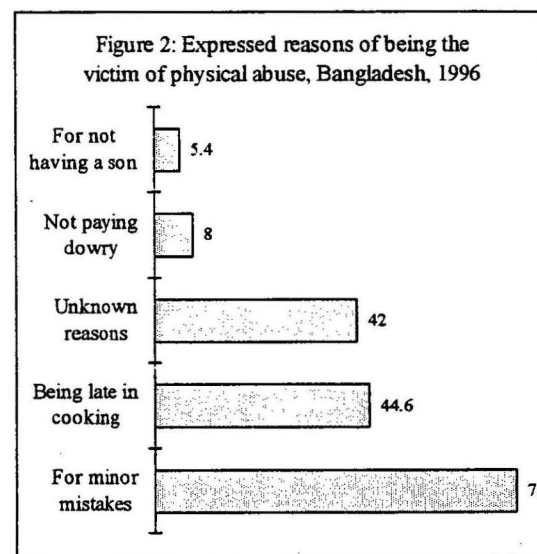
Does credit-based income generating program play any role in reducing the prevalence of violence within marriage in Bangladesh? Yes it does. Table 5 shows that the participants of credit program were less likely to become the victims of any form of violence than non-participants. Our explanation is that women's power relationship and bargaining capacity with husband change if they participate in credit program and earn an income. By performing both the domestic and productive roles compared to husbands who generally play only the culturally assigned productive role, women can

considerably reduce the gender inequality within home.

Table 5. Prevalence of various forms of marital violence by credit program participation, Bangladesh, 1996

Indicators of change	Credit Program Participation		
	No	Member	Not eligible
Verbal abuse	50.4	31.4	28.0
Mental torture	45.3	22.1	22.7
Physical assault	40.2	19.2	15.2

An incidence of violence may be an out-burst of an effect of a simple event or a synergistic effect of a host of factors. The causes of physical assault as reported by the sample women are shown in Figure 2.



The more frequently cited reasons of violent acts clearly reflect how helpless and unprotected victims the women are in our society. A sizable proportion of women believe that their husbands have the right to abuse or beat them occasionally (not shown in the Table). They are not aware that these acts are punishable by law and they can seek protection from the legal authority.

Watch

No. 26

Research and Evaluation Division

Environmental Awareness Levels and Disasters

Abstract: This report assesses the level of environmental awareness in the rural communities of Bangladesh. Findings reveal that nearly half of the people were aware about the change of environment and its implications although the knowledge about the specific aspects of environmental change is poor. Regional as well as socio-economic differentials in environmental awareness were very high. NGOs played an important role in raising the awareness level. The study suggests that a concerted effort should be initiated including both the public and private development organizations to routinely disseminate the consequences of environmental disaster.

Introduction

Like other developing countries, environmental hazards are major health threats in Bangladesh. But the importance of educating people about the consequences of environmental change is getting recognized only recently among policy makers in Bangladesh. It is widely believed that people are generally ignorant about the risks of environmental disaster and that environmental problems are the results of the development process itself. It is important, therefore, that people should be made aware about the processes and consequences of environmental change. This report assesses the awareness level of the people and the process of environmental change in the rural communities in Bangladesh. In this study, the process of environmental change in rural setting is viewed as the effects of rural industrial activities, use of firewood to produce energy, mechanized farming, and deforestation.

Summary

The prevalence of household violence against women has remained very high in Bangladesh villages. Patriarchal social system is always blamed for such inhumanity. We should also add poverty and illiteracy. Also, Islamic teachings regarding spousal relationship needs to be re-examined and interpreted considering the changed context. The paper concludes that women's participation in credit-based development programs can significantly reduce household violence against women by addressing the sources of subordination, help gaining self-esteem and reducing gender inequality.

This report has been prepared by Abdullahel Hadi of the Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC.