

In a study carried out in Bangladesh on Women's Health and Domestic Violence as part of a multi-country study between 2000 and 2003 by the World Health Organization, it was estimated that 53% of 1603 women in urban Dhaka and 62% of 1527 women in rural Matlab had ever experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Also, a report published annually by the Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association on violence against women in 2006 showed that various forms of violence continued to be endured by Bangladeshi women such as rape, dowry related violence, acid attacks, murder, trafficking, and *fatwa* related violence. However, the Bangladesh Government has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (with reservations to Article 2 and 16c). The Government has also endorsed the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing in 1995 without any reservations and has committed to its implementation at the national level. As a result, a National Action Plan (NAP) was drafted in February 1997 for the advancement of women by reviewing twelve ministries. However, there continues to be an absence of prevalence data on VAW issues and women continue to be subjected to violence at the home, workplace and the public sphere. By learning more about the various forms of violence against women as well as its causes and consequences and by looking at the interventions that exist to combat them, it will help assess the situation better and aid in finding ways to alleviate it. The aim of this report is to review the extent of violence against women in Bangladesh and existing interventions in this regard. This literature review was carried out by obtaining information from published reports such as annual reports, books and articles collected from local NGOs who work with VAW issues. Information was also gathered from interviews with staff of local NGOs. Furthermore, workshops and seminars were attended such as those of the Multi-Sector Programme on Violence against Women (MSP-VAW) a joint initiative of 6 ministries of the Government of Bangladesh and the dissemination session of the annual report on VAW by the BNWLA, among others. Forms of violence found in the review at the household level include battering, verbal abuse, marital rape, forced sex and dowry related violence. At the work place, the review found various forms of sexual harassment at garment factories and electronic industries such as pulling hair, slapping, hitting on the head, stroking, touching the body, winking, staring, whistling, standing very close, and pinching. Offensive and suggestive comments, whistling, getting run over, kicking, tripping over, groping and pinching were some of the abuses faced by women who walked to work. In public buses grabbing, groping and suggestive comments were endured by working women as well. In the public sphere forms of violence include rape, *fatwa* related violence, murder/suicide, acid attacks, violence in police custody, trafficking, forced prostitution, and pressure to accept contraceptives without proper counseling of side effects. Also, literature showed that causes of violence were lack of knowledge of women's rights and lack of implementation and enforcement by judiciary and law enforcement agencies. Lack of education, lack of economic independence, and income and lack of security were some of the other reasons found to result in violence. Finally, poverty, culture and tradition and the subordination of women were found to be the root causes behind violence against women. The consequences of violence were found to be affecting the health, social and economic components of women's lives. Existing interventions that strive to address VAW in Bangladesh are legal aid and awareness, mediation, shelter homes, counselling services, medical services, community mobilization, research & documentation, advocacy, and monitoring of state interventions such as police cells which are carried out by many non-government organizations, especially women's and human rights groups. The Government also has an extensive programme that addresses VAW involving seven ministries called the Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women (MSP-VAW) whose objectives are to improve public services such as health, police assistance, criminal justice and social services (counselling, rehabilitation) that are utilized by women victims of violence and to increase public awareness on all forms of VAW. Literature showed that gaps in the political environment and the government, the legal

system, the social structure, research and health services are present which need to be addressed so that VAW can be redressed: Hoodlums get away with committing violence against women because of their affiliation with political parties'. Corrupt police officials and lack of women representatives in higher authoritative positions in civil and police administration are some of the other deterring factors in addressing VAW. Laws exist to combat violence but are often not implemented due to complicated and lengthy court proceedings, detailed evidence required in sensitive cases such as rape, and the miscreant being in a more powerful social position than the victim. Socially, raped or abducted women and battered wives face social stigma. Most information on violence is found in newspapers and cannot be evaluated as extensively as data collected from in depth studies. Also discussion of violence remains limited among urban elites and information is not widely disseminated among the rural poor. Gaps in the health sector include lack of qualified psychological counselors and lack of understanding of the significance of mental health support.