

## Public places in Bangladesh hotspots for crime



Some 64.3 percent of 600 women respondents of a survey had experienced crime and violence in Dhaka's public space, said an urban specialist at a symposium in BRAC University (BRACU) in the capital on Monday.

Nowadays crime and violence, including sexual harassment, occurred anywhere and everywhere in Bangladesh, especially in public spaces, added the architect Salma A Shafi of the Centre for Urban Studies.

Titled "Gender and Public Space", the event was organised at BRACU's GDLN Centre

jointly by the Department of Architecture and the Centre for Inclusive Architecture and Urbanism. It coincided with United Nations Public Service Day.

Dr Saira R Khan, professor of BRACU's School of Law, lamented that the women & children repression prevention act 2000 still awaits inclusion of a detailed definition of sexual harassment and stalking provided by a judge following a petition of 2008 of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association.

This limited justice delivery along with the penal code still using the archaic phrase "insulting the modesty of a woman" to refer to gender-based offences and society-imposing "shame" on victims, she said.

Maheen Sultan, visiting fellow, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, urged rekindling a "take back the night" movement, especially through changing a rule at public universities barring entry to female halls after nightfall.

The University of Dhaka is yet to incorporate an anti-sexual harassment committee, said Professor Firdous Azim, chairperson of BRACU's English and humanities department.

Kashfia Feroz, manager, women rights and gender equity, ActionAid Bangladesh, informed of a Narayanganj survey which identified that garment workers were at risk for blind turns, poorly maintained bushes, absence of lighting and pickups and drop offs and improperly placed dumpsters.

Another on safe cities for women cited mobility and security issues putting off women from working outside their homes, she said, advocating for bringing gender views in public toilet construction and public transportation.

Dr AKM Abul Kalam, a professor of Jahangirnagar University and president of the Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said proper planning personnel must be ensured at each pourasava for incorporating gender views.

Dr M Saiful Islam, associate professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka, said patriarchal practices must be challenged to change the status quo.

Debra Efroymsen, regional director of HealthBridge and advisor of WBB Trust, spoke of giving greater mobility to young women and child, citing a "reclaim our streets" program under which children were brought to play on Manik Mia Avenue on the first Friday of each month, when the road was off limits to motor vehicles.

Sheikh Rubaiya Sultana, assistant professor at the architecture department, suggested design features for gender-sensitive urban planning such as better lighting and signage, visual linkages, clear sightlines and surveillance, help-seeking points and mapping hotspots of crimes and mixed use of land.

Dr Adnan Z Morshed, chairperson of the architecture department, gave the welcome address, Assistant Professor Dr Huraera Jabeen moderated the programme while lecturer Sadia Subrina also spoke at the event.