

CLP's influence on dowry and violence against women on the chars

Innovation, Monitoring, Learning and Communications Division



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Acronyms

ATP	Asset Transfer Project of CLP-2
CLP-2 (or CLP)	Chars Livelihoods Programme, Phase 2
CP	Core Participant
CPHH	Core Participant Household
DEMO	Data Entry and Monitoring Officer
DFAT	Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFID-B	Department for International Development (Bangladesh Office)
IGA	Income-Generating Activity
IMLC	Innovation, Monitoring, Learning and Communications Division of CLP
IMO	Implementing Organisation
MSP	Maxwell Stamp PLC
UP	Union Parishad
VAW	Domestic Physical Violence Against Women
VDC	Village Development Committee

Executive Summary

Bangladesh is a patriarchal society, with social and cultural norms that impact on women's development, their status in society and their empowerment. In Bangladesh's rural areas, such as the *chars*, values and beliefs remain traditional, and therefore these norms are even more prevalent. In Bangladesh, violence against women, dowry and child marriage are common practices. A key objective of the Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) is to build the empowerment of the women it works with, through a holistic range of interventions. Through these interventions, CLP aims to raise awareness and reduce the prevalence of social issues such as dowry and violence against women.

In April 2014, CLP conducted research on dowry (the transfer of parental property to a daughter at her marriage) and domestic physical violence against women (VAW) on the *chars*. A qualitative research methods approach was used, through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-depth Interviews (IDI), with CLP core participants (all of whom are female) and male and female members of the community.

Although dowry is a practice that is deeply-rooted in the *char* society, results showed that there was a common understanding, between CLP (core participants) and non-CLP respondents, of the negative consequences of dowry, as well as a collective agreement on the ways in which dowry could be reduced on the *chars*. These fell under four main suggestions: implementing existing dowry law; raising awareness and mobilising communities against the practice of dowry; increasing girls' education; and engaging women in income-generating activities (IGAs). There was a difference between CLP participants and non-CLP community members in their awareness of dowry law, with CLP participants demonstrating greater awareness. It is clear that CLP's teachings have helped raise awareness of dowry and importantly have created a space where groups within a community feel able to work together to prevent the occurrence of dowry. One of the biggest ways it seems dowry can be reduced is by continuing to increase this social capital among *char*-dwellers. Further, enforcing existing dowry law is extremely important. In the last 18 months of CLP, it is essential that the Programme continues working with influential leaders in the community and teaching core and non-core participants about dowry law to emphasise its message.

It is clear that VAW is a common occurrence on the *chars*. There was a strong link, throughout the research, between dowry and VAW, with VAW being one of the most cited problems when discussing dowry. Although some male respondents felt that some form of physical violence was necessary within a marriage, on the whole it was not widely accepted. CLP and non-CLP respondents had similar perceptions on VAW, the problems associated with it and ways in which VAW could be reduced. The five key ways proposed by respondents included: engaging women in IGAs; poverty reduction; increasing the authority of village elders; raising awareness and mobilising communities; and increasing the education of women on the whole. The fact that laws are not in place to protect women within the home, coupled with communities not feeling able to interfere with matters of the home, leaves women in a very vulnerable position and provides impunity to perpetrators of violence. Although this makes it difficult to hold people accountable to violence against women, results suggest that CLP has had an influence on the level of VAW in the households it works with. Specifically, respondents highlighted three main ways in which CLP has helped reduce the incidences of VAW: through poverty reduction; by engaging women in income-generating activities; and through education. Although some CLP respondents felt hopeful, on the whole many CLP and non-CLP respondents expressed doubt that VAW would stop completely. If women continue generating an independent income and households remain out of extreme-poverty, this



Chars Livelihoods Programme

Reducing Extreme Poverty on the Riverine Islands of North West Bangladesh

could have a lasting impact on the level of violence in *char* communities. With 85%¹ of CLP's core participant households graduating, the Programme's interventions are making a contribution to reducing VAW.

¹ CLP datasets

1. Background

1.1 CLP's interventions on the chars

The Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) aims to improve the livelihoods, incomes and food security of over one million extreme-poor and vulnerable people by 2016. The second phase of CLP (CLP-2) will run from 2010 to 2016. During this time CLP will work with 78,000 core participants, all of whom will receive its full 18 month support package. Whilst all members of the household benefit from the core package, all core participants are female. A key objective of CLP is to build the empowerment of the women it works with, through a holistic range of interventions (outlined below), designed to build women's confidence, increase their role in decision making and improve women's status within their home and community.

Asset Transfer Project

The first step towards increasing women's empowerment is through the provision of an income-generating asset to each core participant, coupled with livelihoods training and a monthly stipend. This creates an opportunity for women to engage in income-generating activities (IGAs) and for many, this is the first time they will have contributed something of financial value to their household.

Social Development Groups

Core participants enrol in CLP's Social Development Groups. Groups comprise of between 15-25 women (all core participants) who meet weekly and follow a social development curriculum. Weekly sessions consist of role plays, exercises and discussions, aimed at making participants aware of and understand their rights, as well as increasing their confidence in exercising their rights.

Couple Orientation

CLP also provides Gender Development Training through a one-day couple-orientation course. The meeting is attended by core participants and their husbands and addresses issues such as the gender division of labour and family planning. Couples are encouraged to make joint decisions and the sessions aim to generate support within the family for the empowerment of women.

Training influential leaders

CLP engages influential men in the community, such as Union Parishad (UP) members and local religious leaders. These influential leaders attend a two-day residential training, where a wide range of topics are discussed such as conflict resolution, dowry, early marriage and violence against women. Attendees are then encouraged to use their authority and position within the community to carry out these teachings and advocate for change.

Village Development Committees

Village Development Committees (VDCs) are formed in communities, with the support of CLP. Key objectives of the VDCs include: providing support to CLP activities, re-enforcing the teachings of CLP and helping to create social cohesion in the community. CLP provides training aimed at building the capacity of VDC members. When VDCs form, members attend a three-day residential training. One of the sessions focuses solely on dowry and the prevention of violence against women.

1.2 Dowry and domestic physical violence against women on the chars in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a patriarchal society, with social and cultural norms that impact on women's development, their status in society and their empowerment. In Bangladesh's rural areas, such as the *chars*, values and beliefs remain traditional, and therefore these norms are even more prevalent. A woman's role is typically the homemaker and caregiver, which are viewed as less valuable and are less well-respected than the conventional male role. These prevailing roles result in gender disparities which occur throughout a woman's life, with women having a lower status than their male counterparts, both in the home and in society. Even from before birth, women are often discriminated against, due to a high son preference that exists in the country. A rural woman living in Bangladesh will be, on the whole, less educated, have less control over family finances, have less influence on decision-making and have fewer social and economic opportunities.

In Bangladesh, violence against women, dowry and child marriage are common practices. Lack of value and respect for women is a key and deep-rooted attitude that leads to the acceptance and normalisation of violence against women. According to the Bangladesh Constitution, women should be afforded equal rights to men in all spheres of the state and public life. In practice this is not the case. Social norms and practices are instead strongly influenced by patriarchy limits women from exercising their rights.²

A dowry is the transfer of parental property to a daughter at her marriage rather than at the owner's death. A dowry establishes a type of conjugal fund, the nature of which may vary widely. This fund may provide an element of financial security in widowhood or against a negligent husband, and may eventually go to provide for her sons and daughters. Dowries may also go toward establishing a marital household, and therefore might consist of furnishings such as linens and furniture.

In 1980, Bangladesh banned dowries³, and sanctions were imposed: those taking or demanding a dowry face imprisonment, a fine, or both. But the practice continues.

² All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of the law (Article 27 of the Constitution), The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 28(1), Women have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and public life (Article 28(2). Cited in Farouk, S. A. *Violence against women: a statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them*. UN Division for the Advancement of Women. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-stat-2005/docs/expert-papers/Farouk.pdf>, p.3.

³ The Dowry Prohibition Act 1980. http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=607. Accessed 27 September 2014.

2. Methodology

In April 2014 CLP conducted research on dowry and domestic physical violence against women (to be referred to as VAW throughout this report) on the *chars*. A qualitative research methods approach was used, through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-depth Interviews (IDI). A total of five FGDs were conducted: two with CLP core participants (from previous cohorts 2.1 and 2.2⁴); two with non-CLP women and one with men who had no connection to CLP. An extra FGD had been planned with husbands of CLP participants however, during the discussion, respondents were reluctant to respond and as a result the FGD had to be drawn to a close. This FGD has not been included in this report. Each FGD had an average of eight participants. Four IDIs were conducted: two with CLP core participants (from previous cohorts 2.1 and 2.2) and two with non-CLP respondents (all female). Respondents were selected from women who participated in the FGDs. Selection was based on how vocal they were during the FGDs and their willingness to answer further questions. Results from the FGDs and IDIs will be discussed together throughout this report. Information provided by previous CLP participants will be referenced as 'CLP respondents', 'non-CLP respondents' will refer to women who did not take part in CLP, and 'Male non-CLP respondents' refers to male respondents whose wives did not take part in CLP.

Three CLP Data Entry and Monitoring Officers (DEMOs) were recruited for conducting FGDs; two male and one female. In addition, an external data collector (an anthropology student from Dhaka University) was hired to work with CLP's female DEMO during the FGDs and to conduct the IDIs. One day of training was conducted and subsequently data collection took place over five days, from 29 April to 3 May 2014. Data was collected in Rangpur and Kurigram Districts. All FGDs and IDI were recorded and subsequently analysed.

One limitation of this research related to the sensitive nature of the topics discussed which meant that some respondents were not forthcoming about certain issues raised. Discussions surrounding VAW were less well responded to than questions relating to dowry. One reason for this could be due to male data collectors conducting FGDs. This was noted at the time, however, due to time and resource constraints it was not possible to use all female data collectors.

There were three key research questions:

- 1) What are *char*-dwellers perceptions of dowry and domestic physical violence against women?
- 2) What can be done to prevent dowry and domestic physical violence against women from continuing?
- 3) To what extent has being part of CLP impacted people's perceptions, as well as the presence of dowry and physical violence against women on the *chars*?

⁴ Cohort 2.1 received CLP support between May 2010 and December 2011. Cohort 2.2 received support between October 2010 and June 2012.

3. Key findings

3.1 Perceptions and problems relating to dowry on the chars

“Marriage and dowry are synonymous. Marriage will not happen without dowry.” (Non-CLP respondent)

One key point raised in all the discussions was how ingrained dowry is in *char* society. The majority of respondents described it as something that had to happen in order for marriages to take place. Both CLP and non-CLP respondents saw dowry as the way to ensure that daughters got married and that they were married to the best possible groom. Further, non-CLP respondents said that complying with dowry requests from in-laws would help ensure their daughter’s happiness after marriage and allow her to lay claim to household items bought with dowry money. According to CLP respondents, dowry acts as a way for a woman to maintain her honour and dignity and it gives her a voice in her in-laws’ house.

It was recognised however, that there are many problems associated with giving and receiving dowry, with one CLP respondent describing dowry as a social problem that creates issues for both sides of the family; the grooms and the brides. One of the main reasons for giving dowry is that it provides money to help the groom maintain the bride’s expenses and ensures her well-being during the marriage (CLP respondent). However, the point was raised that, for a number of reasons, dowry does not usually bring about this desired outcome. Firstly, the amount paid through dowry cannot help maintain family expenses in the long term (CLP respondent). Secondly, in some cases, the groom or his parents will spend the money independently and it is often not known where the money goes (non-CLP respondent). This leads to a continual demand for more money in the years after the marriage which, if families cannot provide, can result in wives being turned away and sent back to their parent’s home. Cases such as these usually result in the groom re-marrying.

“It brings misery for families...to give dowry and to take dowry is not good. If anyone takes dowry his family will never be happy.” (Male non-CLP respondent)

Most households on the *chars* are poor or extreme-poor and dowry payments can place immense financial strain on families. Many families are forced to sell assets, such as livestock, in order to pay dowry. This results in a situation whereby families have incurred a huge expense and, at the same time, are left with less assets from which to generate an income. This can have knock-on effects such as food insecurity and mental distress. Other families are forced to spend savings or take out loans to meet dowry demands. On the *chars* there is limited access to formal money lenders and as such when loans are taken they are usually accompanied by high interest rates, which leave *char*-dwellers with large and often unmanageable debts.

Due to dowry payments resulting in such a loss for households, both CLP and non-CLP respondents spoke of the need to regain money they lost during a daughter's wedding, through the wedding of a son. Dowry payments therefore become a cycle; if you have a daughter you give dowry and if you have a son you take dowry. This cycle makes it difficult to go against the grain. If a family did not demand dowry for their son's marriage but were still expected to pay dowry for their daughter's marriage, they would be left financially worse off. Text Box 1 provides quotes from a CLP respondent who describes the consequences of paying dowry.

"If I pay Tk. 50,000 for my daughter's wedding then I will take Tk. 100,000 during my son's. This will cover the loss I had during my daughter's wedding. Definitely, we should do this and we will do this. If anyone married my daughter without demanding dowry then we will also not ask for dowry during our son's wedding." (CLP respondent)

Text Box 1: "One of my neighbours has five daughters; four of whom are married. For each marriage they had to pay dowry and now, they have nothing to pay dowry for their last daughter. They are thinking of selling their home and land to ensure their youngest can marry. But, if they do, where they will stay? How will they live their lives? This dowry is going to kill them." (CLP respondent).

Social pressures play a large role in the arrangement of dowry on the *chars*; if a girl remains unmarried, their families will experience "social embarrassment." Therefore, there is a sense of competition between families to ensure their daughters get married (CLP respondent). Further, there is competition among families with sons to assert their social status by demanding high dowry payments; a high dowry demand is seen to reflect a higher 'quality' groom. This, therefore, places scepticism among brides' families when in-laws request low or no dowry.

Problems relating to dowry are coupled with another significant problem on the *chars*: that of son preference. This is where families have a strong preference to raise sons rather than daughters. As explained by one non-CLP respondent,

"Sons are important because they bring and daughters destroy. A daughter's family thinks that she will eventually go to her in-laws' house, so why should they spend lots of money on her education?"

In other words, sons are valuable on the *chars* as they can earn a living for the family. They will also bring money to the family through dowry during their marriage. Daughters on the other hand, do not contribute financially to the household and lose their family money during their marriage.

When respondents (CLP and non-CLP) were asked what was needed to reduce the prevalence of dowry on the *chars*, responses fell under four main suggestions:

Implement existing dowry law

There was a strong call from respondents to implement the existing law by increasing the role of authorities on the *chars* and ensuring they enforce the law. Some non-CLP community members spoke of not being aware of any laws relating to dowry. Others who were more aware, as well as CLP participants, described some of the related problems in enforcing dowry law. The point was raised that, in the current situation, only those who can pay for assistance receive help and this must

change: the law should work for everyone. Further, education is needed so that all *char*-dwellers are aware of and understand the existing law.

Raising awareness and mobilise communities against the practice of dowry

A social movement that unites *char*-dwellers would be necessary for people to stop taking dowry. Dowry is deep-rooted within the culture and tradition of the *chars*. This makes it difficult for only a few people to stop it and respondents strongly expressed that everyone must be determined to do so. CLP participants gave an example from when they were part of CLP. They said, when there was a problem in their community a group of people would go and attempt to solve it, *“with increased numbers, we can raise our voices to anyone. This can be a way to stop dowry.”*

Increase girls’ education

Respondents raised the issue of illiteracy and explained that if women were educated there would be greater opportunities to arrange marriages without dowry. Male respondents raised the issue that they are not able to send their daughters to school due to lack of education facilities. As a result, marriage with dowry is seen as the only viable option.

Engage women in income-generating activities

Women spoke of wanting to educate their daughters so they could have opportunities to develop their own livelihoods. Male respondents also spoke of engaging women in income-generating activities as a means of reducing the prevalence of dowry.

“If a woman can contribute to family expenses and if they become educated then there will be a queue of men willing to marry her without dowry. A poor family with an illiterate daughter means trouble. She is useless in her family and also in her in-laws. So why shouldn’t they take dowry for her?” (Male non-CLP respondent)

3.2 CLP’s impact on dowry on the chars

Respondents spoke positively about the meetings they attended during their time with CLP. They felt that CLP had raised awareness on dowry and both men and women, as a result, had become conscious of its negative impacts. CLP respondents believe this has led to both an attitude change and a reduction in the frequency of dowry payments. One women said that, following the meetings she had with CLP, she expressed a desire to arrange dowry-free marriages and an unwillingness to take dowry for her son’s marriage.

“CLP has made a great contribution in creating consciousness among people on this char. They arrange meetings and discuss various social problems with us. Despite this, they may still practice it, but day to day, people are becoming conscious about dowry.” (CLP respondent)

Importantly, respondents said that they had been made aware of the law that exists regarding dowry, whereas before CLP they did not know that there was such a law in place. It was however raised that, even though they now know about the law, many were not aware of anyone acting according to it. This was similarly articulated by those non-CLP respondents who were aware of dowry law.

One key way in which CLP has helped influence the practice of dowry is through the provision of income-generating opportunities for women and increasing women’s empowerment. This has provided a space for women to meet others and speak confidently about the teachings they have learnt. Respondents also spoke of the collective initiatives made by community members to prevent dowry. An example is given in Text Box 2. Previous research by Haneef et al (2014) on CLP’s Village Development Committees (VDCs) support results for CLP’s positive influence on community

mobilisation and the success this has had in addressing social problems on the *chars*, such as dowry.⁵

Text Box 2: “One family wanted to sell the assets given by CLP in order to give dowry. We went to the family and talked with them. They did not have any other assets except for the cow so if they sold it they would be extreme-poor again. The parents stopped the marriage. After a few months another marriage proposal came, this time without dowry demands. Now the daughter is living happily with her husband and in-laws. Sometimes she visits her parents, and although her husband is not rich, he never demands that she bring anything back from her parent’s house. This case really encourages us.” (CLP respondent)

One problem raised, was the issue with the practical application of the knowledge women learnt during CLP’s Social Development meetings. A key barrier to this is the strong social pressures and expectations from others. One example was provided by a CLP respondent who explained that after she joined CLP her mother-in-law took her cow and the money she received from CLP and sent her back to her parent’s house. The difficulty of the *char* context in relation to reducing dowry is supported by findings in previous CLP research by Barrett et al (2013).⁶ The research found that dowry payments were the second highest reported reason as to why some CLP households fall back into extreme-poverty. This highlights further that, despite education through CLP’s Social Development meetings, in reality, paying dowry remains a necessity for some marriages to occur.

Another problem raised related to the way dowry is exchanged. Some said that the situation is changing slowly and some people now see dowry as harmful. However, this has led to those who see dowry as less acceptable finding other ways to give or take dowry. One way is by not asking directly, although the expectation on the groom’s side remains high. Another way is to present dowry in the form of jewellery, ornaments or cattle, so that it can be classed as a gift, therefore being more acceptable than a cash payment.

Some CLP respondents did seem hopeful that the practice of dowry could potentially stop in the future. However, they felt that the only way this could happen would be for people on the *chars* to be well educated. Currently not everyone is aware of the law and negative consequences of dowry and, due to it being heavily ingrained in society, the practice will not stop overnight.

3.3 The influence of dowry on domestic physical violence against women

Throughout the research, the strong link between dowry and domestic physical violence against women (VAW) was apparent. When discussing issues relating to dowry, VAW was one of the most commonly cited problems, with brides experiencing mental and physical torture, such as being scolded and beaten by their husband and in-laws. This takes place both in situations where families are unable to pay dowry by the agreed date (payment can be completed after the marriage takes

⁵ Haneef, C., Pritchard M., Hannan M., Alam Z & Rahman, M. (2014). A study into the effectiveness and sustainability of Village Development Committees. <http://clp-bangladesh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/a-study-into-the-effectiveness-and-sustainability-of-village-development-committees.pdf>

⁶ Barrett, AT, McIntosh RA, Pritchard M, Hannan M, Alam Z, and Marks M. (2013) Asset Values: Why are some households doing better than others. http://clp-bangladesh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/asset_values_why_are_some_hhs_doing_better_than_others_final.pdf

place) or when the agreed dowry has been paid, but additional demands after the marriage cannot be met. Making a direct link between the two, one male respondent said,

“When they exceed the due date (for dowry payments) the violence gradually starts....Once they promise to give (dowry) somehow they have to manage it, otherwise they torture the girl to create pressure for her family. There are many people here who do not have the ability to give apart from selling his own house. But there is no way to save the girl from being tortured.”

These acts of violence usually culminate in: the groom’s family threatening the bride’s family; the bride being sent back to her parent’s house; or the husband divorcing his wife and re-marrying. The quotes in Text Box 3 provide an example given by a CLP participant of her experience.

Text Box 3: “During my wedding my father gave a bicycle to my husband along with Tk. 3,000. My parents wanted to give me gold earrings and a necklace during the wedding but unfortunately they could not provide these. As a result I had to suffer a lot and I experienced a great deal of torture from my husband and in-laws. My mother-in-law even took my child away from me just five days after my delivery because my parents could not provide the things they promised. My husband kicked me out of the family and I got sick. I had to undergo treatment for which I had to borrow money. Somehow I survived but now I have lots of loans and I am struggling.” (CLP respondent)

3.4 Perceptions and problems relating to domestic physical violence against women on the chars

It is clear that VAW is a common occurrence on the *chars*. One women said, *“I can assure you that every women who participated in the FGDs has been a victim of violence...I myself have been a victim of it every month since my marriage”* (non-CLP respondent). Male respondents spoke of verbal arguments not having the desired outcome and the fact that *“physical torture works well.”* Male respondents also expressed the fact that they would not afford women the same rights that they themselves enjoy, *“women do not earn, so why do they need rights.”*

Both CLP and non-CLP respondents provided similar reasons for the occurrence of VAW (in addition to those related to dowry). Poverty was seen as a big driver of violence. Due to the majority of men being the breadwinners for a family, if a woman needs money for household expenses e.g. to buy food, clothes or toiletries, she will have to ask her husband. If there is a shortage of money then her husband could turn violent. Further problems mentioned, that can lead to violence, relate to: men’s reluctance to work; alcohol addiction; gambling; and adultery, particularly when wives question their husbands about these issues. Another reason can be attributed to the lack of value placed on women’s traditional role within the home. Women spoke of men thinking their role was *“simple and easy”* and therefore if women make mistakes or cannot complete the housework to the expected standard, they are punished. A lack of education was also suggested as a cause of violence. An example was given of men blaming their wives for only giving birth to daughters and as a result, women can experience violence because it is thought that it is their fault for not giving birth to a son.

Although VAW was discussed as being very common, it was seen among many as being negative and CLP respondents spoke of the shame it brings when people speak about it. In a few cases, mentioned by CLP participants, when mothers have seen their daughters suffering from violence, they will try and approach the elders in the village. However, usually, community members tend not to interfere or prevent violence as it is regarded as a family matter. The quote in Text Box 4 provides an example of one non-CLP female respondent and her experience of violence in the home.

Text Box 4: “Violence is very common to me. Last night (my husband) threatened to send me back to my father’s house because I asked him to explain where he had been for the whole day. He lost money through gambling and blamed me for his bad luck. He slapped me. If I go to the court or police station, maybe I will get help, however if I go, he will divorce me. I am not educated and I do not have any way to bear a livelihood.” (Non-CLP respondent)

When asked what ways VAW on the *chars* could be reduced or stopped, responses from CLP and non-CLP respondents could be grouped in five key areas:

Engaging women in income-generating activities (IGAs)

Non-CLP respondents said that by engaging women in IGAs would allow their husbands to believe in their capacity. It would also provide them the opportunity to contribute a source of income to the family. This is closely linked with the next point, of reducing poverty. A recent study was conducted by CLP on women’s entrepreneurship and the impact having an independent income has on women’s empowerment.⁷ This research provides support for the reduction of violence within the home, as a result of women earning an income.

Poverty reduction

As described above, many violent attacks occur when women are asking for money to provide basic households needs for the family. If families were more secure financially it is believed that violence would reduce. Further, if women were contributing to the family finances, there would be greater income and women would have more control over the money and how it was spent.⁸

Increased authority of village elders

CLP respondents expressed the importance of the role of elders in stopping VAW in their society. In extreme cases of violence, it had been known for elite members of the community to be alerted, however non-CLP respondents said that, in the past, men have usually won the cases.

Education

This included education to increase awareness about the negative consequences of VAW within communities. It also related to increased education of women on the whole.

Raising awareness and mobilising communities

If everyone is brought together, change can occur. Respondents believe that if one person sets an example then others would follow. One woman (non-CLP respondent) said *“Education and unity of all villagers is important. When all people become conscious and unite to remove it from society, only at that time will it reduce.”*

⁷ Haneef, C., Pritchard, M., Hannan, M., Kenward, S., Rahman, M., & Alam, Z. (2014) *Women as Entrepreneurs: The impact of having an independent income on women’s empowerment.*

⁸ Further supported by results in Haneef, C., Pritchard, M., Hannan, M., Kenward, S., Rahman, M., & Alam, Z. (2014) *Women as Entrepreneurs: The impact of having an independent income on women’s empowerment.*

3.5 CLP's impact on domestic physical violence against women on the chars

Respondents were asked if, in their opinion, there has been a change in the level of domestic physical violence in their relationships since they joined CLP. Every woman replied yes. One important change CLP participants noted after taking part in CLP related to the economic empowerment of women. As a result of CLP, wives are less dependent on their husband's income to fulfil small household needs and they are more conscious of ways in which to generate income. This brings financial benefits to the family, as well as increasing husbands' respect for them. During an interview, one respondent said,

“The main lesson I have learnt from being part of CLP is, if I can contribute to the family income then violence will reduce day by day. Poverty is the root cause of everything. If I can eliminate poverty from my family then violence will no longer exist.”

As a result of CLP, both men and women, have become conscious of the negative impacts of dowry and this is thought to have led to a reduction in domestic physical violence against women. Following CLP, relationships between husband and wife improved and they would discuss family matters together. When women began earning, respondents said that their husbands also felt more encouraged to work hard and keep bringing in money. Women highlighted the Couple Orientation meetings as a positive initiative that increased understanding and respect between husband and wife. Women said that their husbands' attitude towards them has changed a lot and now they make decisions together.

A number of respondents said they were hopeful that one day violence in the home would stop. One CLP respondent said *“(violence) will stop if we become conscious and if our husbands become conscious. If we can set an example in the community, other people will be encouraged.”*

4. Conclusion

CLP and non-CLP respondents had similar perceptions of dowry. There was an understanding of the negative consequences of dowry and a collective agreement about the ways in which dowry could be reduced on the *chars*. These fell under four main suggestions: implementing existing dowry law; raising awareness and mobilising communities against the practice of dowry; increasing girls' education; and engaging women in income-generating activities. There was a difference between CLP participants and non-CLP community members in their awareness of dowry law, with CLP participants demonstrating more awareness. There did remain a sense of doubt, with both CLP and non-CLP respondents, that dowry would be eradicated completely. However, it is clear that CLP's teachings have helped raise awareness of dowry and importantly have created a space where groups within a community feel able to work together to prevent the occurrence of dowry.

One of the biggest ways it seems dowry can be reduced is by continuing to increase social capital among *char*-dwellers. Further, enforcing the existing law is extremely important. In the last 18 months of CLP, it is essential that the Programme continues working with influential leaders in the community and teaching core and non-core participants about dowry law to emphasis its message.

It is clear that VAW is a common occurrence on the *chars*. There was a strong link, throughout the research, between dowry and VAW, with VAW being one of the most cited problems when discussing dowry. Although some male respondents felt that some form of physical violence was necessary within a marriage, on the whole it was not widely accepted.

CLP and non-CLP respondents had similar perceptions on VAW, the problems associated with it and ways in which VAW could be reduced. The five key ways proposed by respondents included:

- engaging women in IGAs;
- poverty reduction;
- increased authority of village elders;
- raising awareness and mobilising communities; and
- education of women on the whole.

The fact that laws are not in place to protect women within the home, coupled with communities not feeling able to interfere with matters of the home, leaves women in a very vulnerable position and provides impunity to perpetrators of violence. Although this makes it difficult to hold people accountable for violence, results suggest that CLP has had an influence on the level of VAW occurring within the households it works with. Specifically, respondents highlighted three main ways in which CLP has helped reduce the incidences of VAW: through poverty reduction; by engaging women in income-generating activities; and through education.

Although some CLP respondents felt hopeful, on the whole many CLP and non-CLP respondents expressed doubt that VAW would stop completely. If women continue to generate an independent income and households remain out of extreme poverty, this could have a lasting impact on the level of violence in *char* communities. With 85%⁹ of CLP's core participant households graduating, the Programme's interventions are making a contribution to reducing VAW.

⁹ CLP datasets

5. References

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