From Evidence to Policy: Addressing Gender-Based Violence against Women and Girls in Bangladesh

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CONTENTS

INFORMING POLICIES TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN BANGLADESH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is widely recognized as a significant problem affecting women's and children's health and well-being throughout the world. The level of VAWG is very high in Bangladesh. About 60% of ever-married women of reproductive age report lifetime physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by their husbands. The development of effective policies and programmes to address VAWG remains challenging due to a lack of evidence on patterns and correlates of violence perpetration and on interventions that work.

VAWG is a complex issue that requires the identification of individual-, household- and community-level risk factors. In addition, mapping differences in vulnerability to VAWG is an important element of targeting strategies in resource poor settings. This study addressed these needs by:

(1) Identifying correlates of violence against women and girls at the individual, household, community and district levels using two nationally representative datasets;

(2) Mapping vulnerability to VAWG in different districts of Bangladesh through analysis of national data; and

(3) Exploring community perspectives on how to address VAWG.

METHODS

Nationally representative data from 2005 Bangladesh Adolescent Survey (BAS) (n=4,370 for unmarried and n=3710 for married adolescents) and the 2007 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) (n=4,195) were analyzed for the purpose of this study. The BAS data analysis included both married and unmarried adolescent girls, while the DHS analysis included currently-married women, who were asked about experience of violence in the past 12 months. Community consultation was carried out seeking suggestions for addressing VAWG using qualitative research methods. A total of 14 key informant interviews and 24 focus group discussions with women, adolescent girls and men were conducted in two districts of Bangladesh between July and September 2012.

FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

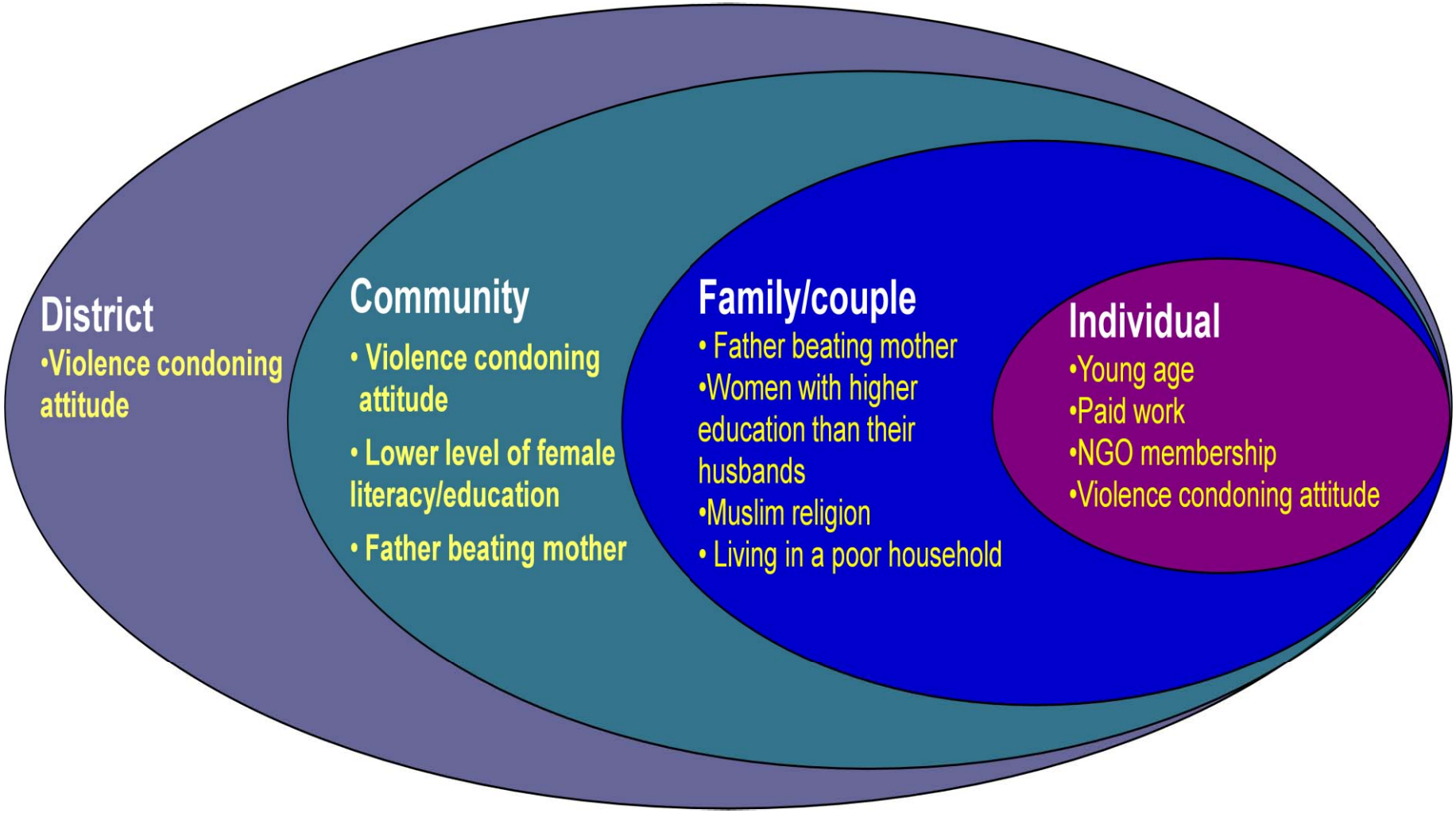
Several targeting strategies have emerged from the analysis. Evidence of districts with high prevalence of violence suggests a regionally targeted approach. There is also evidence suggesting that several socio-demographic characteristics including young age, low level of education, poverty and spousal age difference can inform targeting strategies as specific markers of vulnerability to gender based violence.

Regions of High Violence: Mapping levels of violence against adolescent girls and married women by district demonstrates that districts vary widely in the prevalence of violence. Among married women, the percentage of women reporting being abused ranged from 3 % to 54% across districts. Both maps show that reported violence against women and girls was over one in three women in a number of districts including a concentration in the north-western districts of Bangladesh. Multilevel analysis suggests that household poverty has a strong association with violence and widespread household poverty in the north-western districts may have contributed to relatively high levels of VAWG reported there. These districts deserve to be prioritized for intervention.

Community Level Factors

***Norms and Attitudes*:** Analyses of data from both nationally representative surveys demonstrate that women and girls were more likely to be abused if they live in districts and communities that report high levels of violence condoning attitudes. These correlations suggest that individual women's experience of violence may be influenced by normative factors in their community of residence. The views of community members suggest that they also ascribe to the view that norms influence behaviours, and proposed that VAWG prevention strategies need to work through community mobilization and should involve young men in particular not only as perpetrators, but also as allies.

Figure: Factors increasing the likelihood of violence against women and girls at different levels of society in Bangladesh



***Father beating mother*:** Our findings support intergenerational influences of violence and negative social learning by showing that VAWG is more common in families and communities where women report that as children they witnessed their father beating their mother. These influences were observed at the individual level where women who say they witnessed beating were more likely to be abused themselves. They are also observed at the community level, that is, a woman was at high risk if she lived in a community where a high proportion of other women reported being witness to such abuse. We speculate that such community influences work through setting negative normative standards. These norms need to be addressed by working with men emphasizing the implications of such violence on their daughters.

***Women's Education*:** Our findings also include evidence on more "virtuous circles" of normative influences on violence behaviour. Education was associated with lower violence. Communities that have higher levels of female literacy were found to report lower rates of physical violence against married adolescent girls. Higher levels of female education in the community was also associated with lower likelihood of violence against women. Married women and girls who had more education were less likely to report being violated relative to women and girls less educated than them. These findings suggest that education has a protective effect on women's vulnerability to violence that possibly works both by changing norms and attitudes as well as by changing individual behaviours. Investments in increasing the level of education of women and girls would play a positive role in reducing VAWG.

Household and Couple Level Factors

Poverty: Women from economically disadvantaged families were more likely to experience violence from their husbands. Thus, these households need to be particularly targeted in programmes addressing VAWG. The male community members readily recognized poverty as a risk factor for violence and recommended creation of male employment opportunities. The women and girls went further and suggested remedies not only for poverty in general, but women's poverty, which according to them would ultimately address VAWG. They clearly identified gender inequality as the root cause of VAWG and suggested ensuring gender equality and equity in economic and social life as well as in ideology. For achieving this they suggested encouraging the economic empowerment of women and enabling women to raise their voices and claim their rights.

Young Women and Adolescent Girls: There was wide intra-community variation in the level of VAWG. Younger women and girls were several times more vulnerable to violence relative to women aged 40 to 49. Thus, for example, adolescent girls were five times more likely to be abused compared to the women aged 40 to 49 and young women aged 20-24 were four times more likely to be exposed to violence compared to the same reference category. As low education and low household wealth are also risk factors for exposure to violence it is important to come up with innovative programmes for adolescent girls, targeting particularly those who are economically disadvantaged and are at risk of dropping out of school.

Risk & Protective factors for Physical Violence of Unmarried Adolescent Girls and Physical or Sexual Violence of Ever Married Women

	Unmarried female adolescents	Ever married women
Risk factors	Young age	Young age
	Higher acceptance of physical violence in the community	Violence condoning attitude at individual and district levels
		Muslim religion
		Paid work
		NGO/Microcredit institution membership
		Living in a poor household
		Father beating mother
		Higher proportion of father beating mother in the community
Protective factors		Higher education than husband
		Higher levels of female literacy/education in the community

Women's Work: Women who work reported higher levels of abuse. It is likely that the abuse of women who work is associated and the relatively greater representation of more vulnerable women in the labour force. Although economic empowerment of women is desired for addressing gender asymmetry and addressing VAWG in the long run, our findings show that working women are more likely to experience violence in the hands of their intimate partners. VAWG related interventions may thus be integrated with social protection programmes for the destitute women (e.g., Vulnerable Group Development, Food for Work, etc). Also, programmes need to incorporate strategies to privilege

working women. For example, the choice of venue for setting up services may be important and locations close to women's workplace may be selected for this purpose.

NGO Membership: A similar selectivity is suggested in the influence of NGO membership. Women who are more vulnerable are more likely to belong to membership organizations perhaps because they perceive the importance of social support networks more strongly. The higher concentration of vulnerable women in NGO's suggests that these organizations can play an important constructive and preventative role in protecting women who are at risk of IPV. By making social support structures a salient component of their activities membership organizations can promote social capital and social support. The community members also suggested a role for civil society organizations in responding to the needs of the victims specifically identifying NGO led One Stop Services.

Some Additional Recommendations Based on Community Consultation

Mass Campaign on Laws and Remedies and Ensuring their Implementation: Although Bangladesh may take pride in an impressive legal framework for addressing VAWG, the majority of people are unaware of these laws and remedies. Thus, for improving response to VAWG the community members suggested organizing a mass campaign on all the laws and legal remedies related to VAWG. Proper implementation of these laws was demanded. Corruption at all levels was recognized as an evil impeding appropriate implementation of the legal provisions. Women and girls suggested creating community pressure groups for supporting the government in ensuring good governance in dealing with VAWG. Effective hotline services were also demanded by the women and girls. Given widespread ownership of cell phones (70% of households own them in Bangladesh) and easy access to cell phones on request, hotline services tailored to the needs of the abused women and girls hold a lot of promise.

Addressing Male Dominance in Informal and Formal Justice Systems: Community respondents identified dominance of men in the process of recourse seeking as a specific problem and a deterrent to effective responses to VAWG. They specifically suggested that the involvement of more women and more empowered women can improve the quality of the justice seeking processes through: 1) supporting and increasing female representatives of the sub-district government committee for providing support to victims of violence; 2) involving more women in informal arbitration, which is

usually the first step in dispute resolution; 3) enabling and empowering more women to serve as witnesses in dispute resolution processes in *shalish* and in court.

Evidence based key policy recommendations

Target Vulnerable Groups:

- Young women and adolescent girls.
- Women from economically disadvantaged families.
- Working women through social protection programmes and workplace interventions.
- NGO members through special NGO initiatives for ensuring prevention and response to VAWG.
- High prevalence districts (Thakurgaon, Rangpur, Naogaon, Mymensingh, Netrokona, Kishorganj, Brahmanbaria, Gazipur, Noakhali, Borguna, and Cox's Bazar).

Investments in Sectors Influencing Violence:

- Increase female education.
- Conduct mass campaign on laws related to VAWG and their implementation.
- Address corruption at all levels of informal and formal justice systems by ensuring good governance by state.

Prevention Programs and Strategies:

- Invest in violence prevention with a focus on changing violence condoning attitudes.
- Work closely with men as perpetrators and as allies.
- Strengthen access to information and services for survivors of violence (including One Stop Crisis Centre and hotline).

Challenge Male Dominance:

- Increase female representation in informal and formal arbitration.
- Empower female representatives at the local level for supporting the survivors and preventing VAWG.
- Empower women to serve as witness in arbitration.

Giving victims voice and ensuring victim's safety:

- Create enabling environment.
- Build capacity of the victims in raising voice.
- Ensure victims choice.
- Ensure safety of the victims at all levels.

Create new institutions:

- Create women's collectives.
- Establish women's courts.

Creating new structures: Women and girls suggested forming women's collectives and women's courts for addressing VAWG. This reflects their willingness to actively engage with group-based initiatives for preventing and responding to VAWG. Based on strategic consideration they attached high importance to obtaining support of the powerful men in the community for these groups. They also considered working with young men as key to success. There are several successful examples of women's collectives and women's courts in India that may be adapted to the Bangladesh context.

Paper 1: Community-level Correlates of Physical Violence against Unmarried Female Adolescents in Bangladesh

Kristin VanderEnde[1], Ruchira Tabassum Naved[1], Sajeda Amin[2]

ABSTRACT

While the majority of research in Bangladesh has focused on intimate partner violence (IPV) against women, less is known about the correlates of physical violence against unmarried female adolescents, particularly community-level characteristics that may increase their risk of experiencing violence. We used multilevel logistic regression analysis to assess the variability in physical violence against unmarried female adolescents at the community level and to explore the role of community-level characteristics in explaining this variability. We compared these findings to results of analyses of community-level correlates of physical violence against unmarried male adolescents and physical spousal violence against married female adolescents. The data for this analysis were taken from a 2005 nationally representative survey of 20,000 adolescents aged 10 to 24 living in Bangladesh. Data from 4,370 unmarried female adolescents, 5,197 unmarried male adolescents, and 3,710 married female adolescents were included in final models. Communities in Bangladesh have, on average, high levels of physical violence against unmarried female adolescents, and these levels vary widely across communities. Community-level acceptance of physical punishment against adolescents was related to unmarried female (but not male) adolescents' risk of experiencing physical violence. It is important to find and target communities in which adolescent girls are at higher risk of experiencing physical violence. Programs and policies must focus specifically on changing attitudes regarding treatment of women and girls. As these attitudes accepting of physical violence are found in adolescents aged 10 to 19, school and community-based programs should particularly target this age group.

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[1] International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) Dhaka, Bangladesh

[2] Population Council, New York, NY

1. INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh, violence against women and girls is common (Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain & Mozumder, 2003; Naved & Person, 2005) and has serious health consequences (Asling-Monemi, Naved & Persson, 2008; Asling-Monemi, Naved & Persson, 2009a; Asling-Monemi, Naved & Persson, 2009b; Decker et al., 2008; Johnston & Naved, 2008; Naved & Persson, 2008; Silverman et al., 2009). While the majority of research on violence against women and girls in Bangladesh has focused on intimate partner violence (IPV) experienced by married women (Bates, Schuler, Islam & Islam, 2004; Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain & Mozumder, 2003;_Naved, Azim, Bhuiya & Persson, 2006;), there is a growing recognition of the problem of violence experienced by unmarried adolescent girls (Alam, Roy & Ahmed, 2012; Nahar & Amin, 2006). In Bangladesh, a patriarchal society, violence against women and girls is often considered to be acceptable behaviour (BDHS, 2007; Schuler & Islam, 2008). Girls and young women are the most common victims of acid attacks (Begum, 2004), and are a high-risk group for experiencing violent death (Ahmed, van Ginneken, Razzaque & Alam, 2004). In Bangladesh, where adolescents between the ages of 10 – 19 compose one-fourth of the total population (Bhuiya et al., 2004), and physical punishment of adolescents is common and acceptable (Nahar & Amin, 2006; Nahar, 2007), factors such as low educational levels and physical violence increase the vulnerability of adolescent girls (Nahar, 2007). Despite the magnitude of the problem of violence against adolescent girls in Bangladesh, there is a scarcity of resources available to address this important public health issue. Thus, it is important to identify geographic variation in this violence and the community-level characteristics that place adolescent girls at increased risk. Once high-risk communities and community-characteristics are identified, interventions can be targeted specifically to focus on areas with the greatest need.

Community Context

An ecological framework (Heise, 1998) characterizes violence against women as consequence of direct and interacting influences operating at the individual, relationship, family, community, and societal levels. Historically, the majority of research on violence against women and girls has focused on individual, relationship, and household characteristics, but in the past decade, an increasing amount of research has highlighted the influence of community characteristics on health outcomes, including IPV against women (VanderEnde, Yount, Dynes & Sibley, 2012) and child maltreatment (Coulton, Crampton, Irwin, Spilsbury & Korbin, 2007). The majority of researchers in these areas have

drawn from social disorganization theory and focused on the relationship between aggregate measures of socioeconomic status, such as levels of poverty or levels of education, and risk of violence or abuse (VanderEnde et al., 2012). Other research has examined the relationship between community norms regarding the acceptability of violence, the social connectedness of a community, or particularly for violence against women, community norms regarding gender roles (Coulton et al., 2007; VanderEnde et al., 2012). In India, for example, high levels of community wife-beating norms have been associated with higher levels of male perpetration (Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy & Campbell, 2006) and women's reported experience of IPV (Boyle, Georgiades, Cullen & Racine, 2009). Additionally, in Bangladesh, many of the associations between individual, relationship, and household factors and physical violence against married women have been shown to vary across communities (Koenig et al., 2003). For example, Koenig and colleagues (2003) found that for women living in a culturally conservative area of Bangladesh, individual membership in short-term credit groups and high individual women's autonomy were associated with an increased risk of violence, but community characteristics were not significant. In a less conservative area, however, both community-level measures of women's group membership and high women's autonomy were associated with a lower risk of violence, while individual-level credit group membership and autonomy were not significantly related to IPV (Koenig et al., 2003). In summary, these findings highlight the importance of identifying community-level characteristics that place women and adolescent girls at greatest risk of experiencing violence. Once identified, these research findings can be used to design and implement interventions specifically targeting these community-level characteristics.

In this analysis, we assessed community-level variability in physical violence and explored the role of community-level characteristics in explaining this variability. We drew from feminist perspectives, which view violence against women and girls as stemming from inequality between men and women both within the home and outside of it (Yllo, 2005). We posited that community characteristics that have been explored in relation to IPV against married women are relevant to explain community-level variation in physical violence against unmarried female adolescents in Bangladesh. Additionally, viewing community context in a gendered perspective, we anticipated that community characteristics, particularly community attitudes accepting of violence, will have a distinctly different influence on physical violence experienced by unmarried female adolescents compared to violence experienced by unmarried male adolescents.

We explored these hypotheses through a multi-level analysis of data drawn from a nationally representative survey of adolescents in Bangladesh conducted in 2005. The focus of the current analysis was on unmarried female adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 contrasted with the experiences of young unmarried men and married women. In this analysis, we assessed the variability in the prevalence of physical violence against unmarried female adolescents at the community level, and explored the role of community-level characteristics, such as poverty, female literacy, attitudes towards violence, the percentage of households belonging to a non-governmental organization (NGO), and degree of urbanization in explaining this variability. We also examined whether the relationships between physical violence against adolescent girls and household- and community-level NGO membership varied across communities with different levels of acceptance of physical violence against adolescents. We examined the relationship between characteristics of communities and an individual female adolescent's risk of experiencing physical violence, controlling for factors at the individual, family, and household levels. In addition, we explored whether the community-level factors associated with physical violence against unmarried female adolescents were also associated with violence against unmarried male adolescents and IPV against married adolescent females. We were interested in community-level correlates of physical violence against unmarried male adolescents as a comparison to physical violence experienced by women and girls, and also because boys experiencing physical violence are more likely to perpetrate IPV later in life (Jewkes, 2002; Straus & Yodanis, 1996). Thus, it is important to identify community characteristics that may increase the risk of male adolescents experiencing violence in order to appropriately target interventions aimed at preventing male perpetration of VAWG. For this part of the analysis, we analyzed data from unmarried adolescent males aged 10 -19 and married adolescent females between the ages of 10 and 24.

2. DATA AND METHODS

The data for this secondary analysis were taken from a 2005 nationally representative survey of adolescents, both unmarried and married, between the ages of 10 and 24 living in Bangladesh. The sample was drawn using a sampling frame provided by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The study, which surveyed approximately 20,000 homes, was conducted in the same Primary Sampling Units (PSU) as the 2003-4 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) (BDHS, 2009). The study employed a two-stage probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling technique. Each

administrative division was stratified into rural areas, statistical metropolitan areas (SMA), municipality areas, and other urban areas. A total of 361 PSUs were randomly selected; 277 of the PSUs were in rural areas, 24 were in SMAs, 47 were in municipalities, and 13 were in other urban areas.

There were approximately 200 households in each PSU, or cluster. Sixty households were randomly selected from each cluster following a systematic random sampling method. In this analysis, we measured community-level variables at the PSU-level, a method consistent with the global literature on communities and IPV against women (Ackerson & Subramanian, 2008; Ackerson, Kawachi, Barbeau & Subramanian, 2008; Boyle et al., 2009; Gage & Hutchinson, 2006; VanderEnde et al., 2012). A total of 20,000 households were targeted for participation in the survey. Household information was collected from each selected household within a cluster. The Kish method was used to randomly select one adolescent per household for participation in the adolescent survey. A total of 14,942 adolescents were selected for the initial study. Of these, 4,370 unmarried female adolescents between the ages of 10 – 19 with non-missing data were included in the present analysis. Additionally, we analyzed data from 5,197 unmarried male adolescents aged 10 - 19, and 3,710 married females between the ages of 10 – 24.

The original study maintained a strict set of ethical guidelines, obtaining informed consent and maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants. Verbal consent was obtained from all respondents before each interview, and if the respondent was less than 18 years of age, verbal consent was obtained from the adolescents' parent or legal guardian. The current secondary analysis used only de-identified data.

2.1 MEASURES

Outcome variables

Any physical violence was operationalised as yes = 1, no = 0 for any unmarried female adolescent aged 10 – 19 who reported an experience of physical beating in the past year. We operationalised physical violence against unmarried male adolescents in the same way. For our analysis of married females, the outcome variable, *spousal violence*, was operationalised as yes = 1, no = 0 for any married female between the ages of 10 – 24 who reported an experience of physical beating in the past year and reported that the perpetrator of the most recent experience of violence was her

husband. In our sample, the majority (94.4%) of the 625 women (out of 3710 interviewed) who reported any experience of physical violence in the past year identified their husband as the perpetrator of the most recent experience of violence.

Community-level variables

Wealth ranking

Following the methodology of Filmer and Pritchett (Filmer & Pritchett, 2001), we constructed a household wealth index using information on ownership of household assets, land, and self-assessed measures of sufficiency of food and clothing from the household questionnaire. Considering the differences in types of assets and living standards between urban and rural areas, we used separate rankings for urban and rural measures. To reflect a focus on differences between economic status in poorer, compared to non-poor communities, we created aggregate-level measures by ranking the mean household wealth index for each community, and then created a dichotomous measure by coding the lowest 40% of communities as 0 (poor), and the highest 60% as 1 (non-poor).

Female literacy

To construct a measure of the levels of female adult literacy per community, we used information from the household questionnaire. The measure of female adult literacy reflected the percentage of adult women (>19 years of age) in each community or district who could read and write.

Acceptance of physical punishments of adolescents

We operationalised a measure of community-level acceptance of physical punishment against adolescents as the percentage of unmarried adolescents ages 10 – 19 agreeing that children ages 12 and older "should be beaten up when they do an offence, e.g. stealing, telling a lie, running away from school."

Households belonging to an NGO

Using information from the household questionnaire, we measured households belonging to an NGO as the percentage of households currently belonging to an NGO for each community.

Degree of urbanization

At the community-level, we included a measure for degree of urbanization (urban = 1, rural = 0).

Control variables

Individual controls

At the individual level, we included controls for age (in years) and religion (Muslim, other). *Family/household controls* included a measure for household membership in an NGO (yes = 1, no = 0), and a dichotomous household wealth index (lowest 40% = 0, highest 60% = 1), constructed as described previously for community wealth.

2.2 ANALYSIS

We ran univariate descriptive statistics on all variables, assessing for missing values and normal distributions. We estimated bivariate associations between all covariates to assess for potential co-linearity. Next, we examined the relationship between characteristics of communities and an individual female adolescent's risk of experiencing any physical violence, controlling for factors at the individual, family, and household levels. Following the survey design, in which communities were clustered within districts, we accounted for variation between districts in our analysis, although we did not include any predictors at the district level. We employed three-level logistic models predicting an unmarried female adolescent's likelihood of experiencing physical violence. These outcomes were measured dichotomously, with y = 1 if she reported an experience of violence, and y = 0 otherwise. As patterns of violence against adolescents in Bangladesh have been shown to differ by gender (Nahar & Amin, 2006; Nahar, 2007), we subsequently estimated separate models for unmarried male adolescents. We estimated an unconditional model to assess the total variance of violence between districts, and between communities within districts. Next, after adding control variables at the individual level, we added all community-level variables. We grand-mean centred individual- and community-level variables, allowing for the interpretation of community-level coefficients controlling for individual-level variables. We first constrained the slope of each individual- and community-level covariate to be the same fixed value for each community- and district-level unit. In a subsequent step, we added separate interactions between community-level acceptance of physical punishment of adolescents and household- and community-level NGO membership. We compared models including weights to adjust for the probability of selection at the individual-level to un-weighted models, but no difference was found, therefore, we presented the results of un-weighted models. We employed adaptive Gaussian estimation techniques in HLM 7, which are appropriate for parameter estimation in models with binary outcomes (Raudenbush & Byrk, 2002).

In the last step in our analysis, we included the variables included in the final three-level hierarchical generalized linear models for physical violence against unmarried female adolescents, and examined whether these factors are also associated with spousal violence against married adolescent females interviewed in the same survey.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Characteristics of Sample

Socio-demographic characteristics of unmarried female and male adolescents, and married female adolescents, including age, household wealth, NGO membership, and religion, along with reported prevalence of physical violence, are presented in Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics, including age, household wealth, religion, and NGO membership, were similar for unmarried adolescents regardless of gender. On average, unmarried adolescents were 13.5 years old, and from predominantly Muslim households (86.8%). Over one-third (34.1%) of unmarried adolescents reported living in a household that belonged to an NGO. While nearly half of all unmarried adolescent respondents reported experiencing physical violence in the past year (45.5%), this figure was lower for unmarried female adolescents (37.9%) compared to male adolescents (51.9%) (Table 1). Compared to unmarried adolescents, married female adolescents were older, on average (20.4 years of age), and 15.9% of married female adolescents reported experiencing physical spousal violence in the past year.

Table1. Characteristics of sample

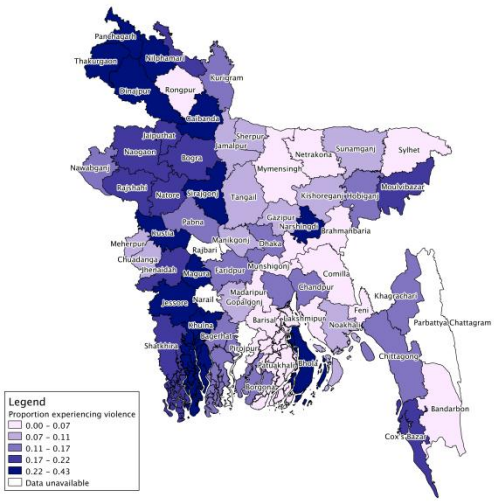
	Unmarried Females n = 4377	Unmarried Males n = 5205	Married Females n = 3710
Any past year physical violence			
Yes	1661 (37.9%)	2700 (51.9%)	590 (15.9%)
Missing	*7 (0.2%)*	*8 (0.2%)*	--
Age in years, mean (SD)	13.3 (2.5)	13.8 (2.8)	20.4 (2.4)
Household wealth			
Poor (lowest 40%)	1698 (38.8%)	2001 (38.4%)	1593 (42.9%)
Religion			
Muslim	3770 (86.1%)	4546 (87.3%)	3307 (89.1%)
NGO membership			
Yes	1445 (33.0%)	1820 (35.0%)	1435 (38.7%)

3.2 Physical Violence by Districts

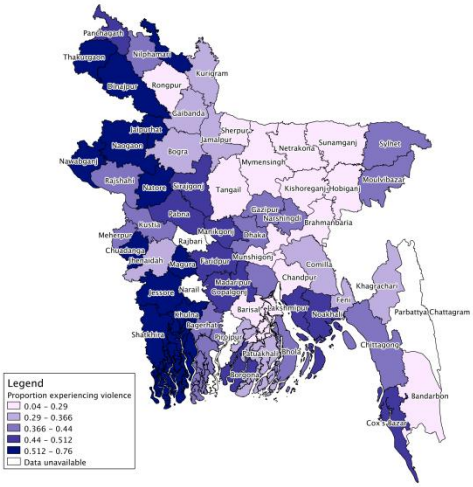
The maps in Figure 1 show districts ranked by reported levels of physical violence separately for unmarried female (aged 10 – 19), married females (aged 10 - 24), and unmarried males (aged 10 – 19). Men's violence is not disaggregated by marital status because few men are married in the sample. As discussed earlier, the highest violence is reported by males, followed by unmarried females, while the level of spousal violence reported by young married women is the lowest among the three groups. The spatial variation shown in the map ranks district level variation where districts are ranked into five categories, from low to high levels, within each gender/marital status group. The pattern of variation by district among the married and unmarried females is similar. For both groups, reported violence against girls and women is higher in the western districts of Bangladesh while the eastern districts of the country report the lowest violence. A similar pattern of district variation is reported for prevalence of early marriage (marriage before age 15 being higher in the western districts) in a World Bank report on gender norms, "Whispers to Voices" (Das, 2008). The spatial variation of violence reported by boys and young men does not follow the same pattern of district level variation as the female violence reports. The highest violence is reported for districts around the capital city in the centre of the country and from districts in the southern part of the country.

Figure 1. Prevalence of physical violence against adolescents by district, Bangladesh, 2005

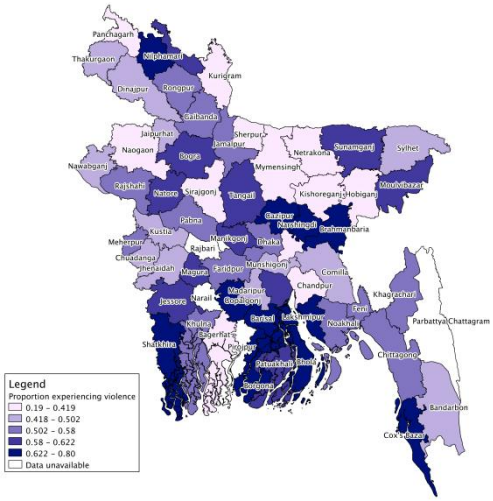
Proportion of Married Female Adolescents (under age 25) Experiencing Violence



Proportion of Unmarried Female Adolescents Experiencing Violence



Proportion of Unmarried Male Adolescents Experiencing Violence



3.3 Community Characteristics

An average of 12 unmarried female adolescents, 14 unmarried male adolescents, and 10 married female adolescents were interviewed in each community. Community characteristics are presented in Table 2. The percentage of unmarried female adolescents in each community reporting any physical violence in the past year ranged from zero to 100%, with a mean of 38.5%. In comparison, the mean percentage of unmarried male adolescents in each community reporting any past year physical violence was 52.0%. The mean community-level adult female literacy was 36.6%, but this varied widely between communities (Table 2). Similarly, there were wide ranges in the percentage of adolescents reporting attitudes accepting of physical punishment at the community level (9 – 95%). On average, 32% of households in a community belonged to an NGO, but this varied widely between communities (0 - 78%). Community-level spousal violence against married women ranged from 0 – 71%, with a mean value of 14.2%. The majority of communities (76.7%) were from rural areas (Table 2.)

Table 2. Characteristics of Communities

	Communities n = 361	
	Mean (SD)	*Range*
Any past year physical violence (%)		
Unmarried female adolescents	38.5 (22.4)	0 - 100
Unmarried male adolescents	52.0 (19.4)	0 - 100
Spousal physical violence (%) - (among married women)	14.2 (14.8)	0 - 71
% literate (adult females)	36.6 (17.7)	5 - 92
% accepting of physical punishment of adolescents	50.6 (17.5)	9 – 95
% households belonging to NGO	32.1 (16.0)	0 -78
Wealth ranking (n, %)	*n*	*%*
Poor (bottom 40%)	144	39.9%
Non-poor (top 60%)	217	60.1%
Area (n, %)		
Rural	227	76.7%
Thana sadar	13	3.6%
Pourashava	47	13.0%
Metropolitan city	24	6.6%

Community characteristics by low, medium, and high levels of any physical violence against adolescents are presented in Table 3. The rates of physical violence were different for each gender/marital status group, and our focus was on identifying the community characteristics related to different levels of violence for each group. Thus, we created different categories for communities with low, medium, and high levels of physical violence for each category of respondents, based on the rates of violence within each category. We characterized communities as having low levels of physical violence against unmarried adolescent females if less than 25% of unmarried adolescents reported physical violence in the past year. Communities with 25 – 50% of respondents reporting any physical violence were considered to have medium levels of physical violence, and communities with greater than 50% to have high levels of physical violence (Table 3). As levels of physical violence against adolescent males were higher, in general, than those for adolescent females, we characterized communities as having low (<40%), medium (40-60%) and high (>60%) levels of physical violence. Lastly, for spousal violence against married females, we characterized communities based on low (0%), medium (≤ 20%), and high (>20%) levels of violence (Table 3).

In general, communities with high levels of physical violence against unmarried females (>50%) had higher levels of acceptance of physical punishment of adolescents and higher percentage of households belonging to an NGO compared to communities with medium (25-50%) and low levels (<25%) of violence. We did not find any statistically significant differences between community characteristics and communities with low, medium, and high levels of violence against adolescent males. Lastly, communities with high levels of spousal violence against married adolescent females (>20%) had lower levels of female literacy, higher levels of acceptance of physical punishment of adolescents, and higher percentage of households belonging to an NGO compared to communities with medium (≤ 20%) and low levels (0%) of violence. These relationships were explored in greater detail in multivariate analyses.

Table 3. Community Characteristics by Levels of Physical Violence (n=361)

Physical Violence Against Unmarried Adolescent Females in Past Year			
	Low (<25%) n=107	**Medium** (25%-50%) n=150	**High** (>50%) n=104
% literate adult females *(mean, SD)*	38.0 (19.9)	37.8 (18.2)	33.5 (14.1)
% accepting of physical punishment of adolescents* *(mean, SD)*	46.0 (17.3)	48.5 (16.2)	58.3 (17.1)
% households belonging to NGO* *(mean, SD)*	29.7 (17.1)	30.6 (14.6)	36.7 (15.8)
Wealth ranking *(n = number of communities)*			
Poor (bottom 40%)	49	51	44
Physical Violence Against Unmarried Adolescent Males in Past Year			
	Low (<40%) n=93	**Medium** (40%- 60%) n=136	**High** (>60%) n=132
% literate adult females *(mean, SD)*	37.4 (18.9)	37.5 (18.4)	35.0 (16.0)
% accepting of physical punishment of adolescents *(mean, SD)*	47.8 (18.8)	52.2 (16.1)	50.8 (17.8)
% households belonging to NGO *(mean, SD)*	30.8 (16.7)	32.2 (16.0)	32.7 (15.5)
Wealth ranking *(n = number of communities)*			
Poor (bottom 40%)	41	55	48
Spousal Violence Against Married Adolescent Females in Past Year			
	Low (0%) n=129	**Medium** (≤ 20%) n=131	**High** (>20%) n=101
% literate adult females* *(mean, SD)*	41.5 (19.0)	36.0 (16.6)	31.1 (15.8)
% accepting of physical punishment of adolescents* *(mean, SD)*	44.8 (15.8)	52.6 (17.1)	55.2 (18.1)
% households belonging to NGO* *(mean, SD)*	27.3 (15.1)	33.6 (15.5)	36.2 (16.2)
Wealth ranking *(n = number of communities)*			
Poor (bottom 40%)	48	47	49

*p <0.01

3.4. Multi-level analyses

Unmarried female adolescents

Results of the three-level logistic models predicting an unmarried female adolescent's likelihood of experiencing physical violence are presented in Table 4, Model 1. After estimating an unconditional means model to estimate variation in physical violence between communities and districts (tau), we added variables at the community and individual levels, first estimating models with a single community-level covariate, controlling for individual-level covariates, (not shown), then a model with all community-level covariates. At the individual level, we found a negative association between age and physical violence, but no relationship between religion, household poverty, or household membership in an NGO and the outcome. At the community level, we found a strong positive association between community-level acceptance of physical punishment of adolescents and any physical violence against unmarried female adolescents (OR = 5.42, 95% CI 2.52 - 11.64). We found no relationship between the percentage of households belonging to an NGO, community wealth, female literacy, and degree of urbanization and past year physical violence in models that control for age, religion, poverty and NGO membership at the household level (Table 4, Model 1).

Unmarried male adolescents

Following the methodology for unmarried female adolescents described previously, we next estimated community-level correlates of physical violence against unmarried male adolescents (Table 4, Model 2). At the individual level, we found a negative association between age and physical violence. We found positive relationships between both household wealth and Muslim religion and violence, but no relationship between household NGO membership and violence. In contrast to the model for unmarried female adolescents, we found no relationship between community-level acceptance of physical punishment of adolescents and physical violence against unmarried male adolescents. We found a strong positive relationship between community-level percentage of households belonging to an NGO and physical violence (OR 2.23, 95% CI 1.10 - 4.51). We found no relationship between other community-level variables (community wealth, female literacy, degree of urbanization) and physical violence against unmarried male adolescents.

Table 4. Three-level logistic models for any physical violence against adolescents in Bangaldesh

	OR (95%CI)	OR (95%CI)	OR (95%CI)
	Unmarried female adolescents (Model 1)	**Unmarried male adolescents (Model 2)**	**Married female adolescents (Model 3)**
	n=4370	n=5197	n=3710
Intercept	0.50 (0.41-0.61)**	1.09 (0.94-1.28)	0.13 (0.11-0.16)**
Community-level variables			
Community wealth (poor ref)			
Non-poor	1.28 (0.96-1.72)	1.14 (0.88-1.47)	1.09 (0.80-1.50)
% literate (female)	0.68 (0.26-1.79)	0.76 (0.33-1.77)	0.32 (0.11-0.96)*
% accepting of physical punishment of adolescents	5.42 (2.52-11.64)**	1.20 (0.63-2.29)	1.75 (0.75-4.07)
% households belonging to NGO	1.99 (0.88-4.54)	2.23 (1.10-4.51)*	1.80 (0.76-4.27)
Area (rural ref)			
Urban	0.98 (0.69-1.39)	1.06 (0.78-1.45)	0.95 (0.64-1.41)
Individual-, family-, and household variables			
Age	0.65 (0.63-0.68)**	0.63 (0.60-0.65)**	1.05 (1.01-1.09)*
Religion (non-Muslim ref)			
Muslim	1.20 (0.91-1.58)	1.60 (1.24-2.06)**	1.73 (1.19-2.52)**
Household wealth (poor ref)			
Non-poor	1.00 (0.84-1.19)	1.19 (1.01-1.39)*	0.40 (0.32-0.49)**
NGO membership (non-membership ref)			
Household member of NGO	1.05 (0.88-1.25)	0.89 (0.76-1.04)	1.08 (0.87-1.34)
Random effects tau (SE)†			
Community level	0.53 (0.10)	0.41 (0.07)	0.32 (0.10)
District level	0.43 (0.12)	0.21 (0.07)	0.28 (0.11)

* p< 0.05, **p <0.01 † significance of random effects not estimated.

Married female adolescents

The results of three-level logistic model predicting a married female adolescent's likelihood of experiencing physical violence is presented in Table 4, Model 3. At the individual level, age and Muslim religion were positively associated with women's experience of violence, while household wealth was negatively related to the outcome. Similar to the models for unmarried female and male adolescents, household membership in an NGO was not related to violence. At the community-level, a higher percentage of adult female literacy in the community was negatively associated with spousal

violence (OR 0.32, 95% CI 0.11 - 0.96). We did not find any significant relationships between the other community-level variables and an individual married female adolescent's risk of experiencing spousal violence.

For all three models presented in Table 4, consistent relationships were seen between models estimated with single community-level covariates and the final models, which included multiple community-level covariates. Lastly, there were no significant interactions between community-level acceptance of physical punishment of adolescents and NGO membership at the household- and community-levels in all three models (results not shown).

4. DISCUSSION

Results of this study indicate that Bangladesh is characterized by high levels of physical violence against unmarried female adolescents, but this varies widely across communities. In general, we found different associations between community-level correlates and violence against unmarried female adolescents as compared to unmarried male adolescents. Specifically, our analysis found that community-level acceptance of physical punishment against adolescents was related to adolescent girls' risk of experiencing physical violence after controlling for individual, family, and household factors. In contrast, community-level acceptance of physical punishment of adolescents was not related to unmarried male adolescents' risk of experiencing physical violence. These finding are consistent with the broader literature on violence against women, which suggests that community-level acceptance of forms of violence against women, such as wife-beating, is a strong predictor of women's experience of IPV (Boyle et al., 2009), or male perpetration of IPV (Koenig et al., 2006). In interpreting these findings, we suggest that living in communities with high levels of acceptance of physical violence may disproportionately impact unmarried female, as compared to male, adolescents. This highlights the importance of community context, particularly community norms accepting of violence, in regards to physical violence against women and girls, and also has implications for public health programmes and policy. Programmes and policies aimed at reducing levels of physical violence against unmarried adolescent girls must address community norms accepting of violence in the design and implementation of programmes targeting these populations. Interventions aimed at challenging the acceptability of violence against women and girls, such as school-based programmes or media campaigns, may be an appropriate first step.

We found a negative relationship between the percentage of literate females in a community and physical spousal violence against married women, while these relationships were not significant in the models for unmarried female and male adolescents. The finding for the relationship between women's literacy and physical spousal violence is consistent with the literature, which suggests a protective effect of women's education on spousal violence (Ackerson et al., 2008; Vyas & Watts, 2009). While further research is needed to explicate these results, initially, these findings suggest that community-level women's status, as reflected by levels of female literacy, and levels of gender inequality may influence women's experiences of spousal violence. The importance of community-level women's literacy in relation to physical violence against unmarried female adolescents is less clear, but should be a focus of future research.

The non-significant finding for community-level wealth is consistent with findings from multi-level studies of IPV against women in non-Western settings, which have not demonstrated a relationship between community-level standard of living and IPV against women (Ackerson & Subramanian, 2008; Boyle et al., 2009; VanderEnde et al., 2012). This finding, along with the non-significant finding for degree of urbanization, suggests that future research should focus on more relevant community characteristics, particularly the social aspects of communities such as norms and attitudes accepting of violence, in relation to physical violence against adolescent girls. Interestingly, the percentage of households in a community belonging to an NGO was positively related to physical violence against male adolescents, while the relationship was not significant for physical violence against unmarried or married female adolescents. In addition, we did not find any significant interactions between household- or community-level NGO membership and community acceptance of physical punishment of adolescents. Future research should continue to explore these relationships, as a higher level of community involvement in NGOs, which often focus on poverty alleviation, was hypothesized to mitigate levels of violence against unmarried female adolescents, particularly in communities where physical violence is not condoned. Similarly, in cross-sectional, retrospective research in Bangladesh, women's membership in microcredit programmes has been associated with both increases and decreases in risk of IPV against women (Ahmed, 2005; Koenig et al., 2003; Schuler, Hashemi, Riley & Akhter, 1996). There is a pressing need for longitudinal research to further explicate these relationships, particularly changes in trajectories of risk of experiencing physical violence over time.

While not the main focus of our analysis, our findings also highlight the high levels of physical violence experienced by unmarried adolescent males in Bangladesh. These high levels of violence have implications for violence against women and girls, as boys who experience physical violence are more likely to perpetrate IPV later in life (Jewkes, 2002; Straus & Yodanis, 1996). Programmes and policies targeting the prevention of violence against women and girls must take into account the risk factors for men's perpetration of violence, including men's childhood and adolescent experiences of violence.

This study, to our knowledge, is the first to describe community-level correlates of physical violence against unmarried adolescent females in Bangladesh and suggests important directions for policy and future research. While the cross-sectional design of our study does not allow for causal inferences, our findings highlight the need for longitudinal research in this area. These findings also have implications for public health programmes and policy. Due to overall high levels of physical violence against unmarried adolescent girls, and variation in these levels across communities, it is important to find and target communities in which adolescent girls are at higher risk. Mapping levels of violence by district demonstrates that reported violence against women and girls is highest in Western districts of Bangladesh. At the community level, low levels of female literacy and high levels of acceptance of violence place women and girls at risk. Programmes and policies must focus specifically on increasing levels of female literacy and changing attitudes regarding treatment of women and girls, particularly in districts with the highest levels of violence. As these attitudes accepting of physical violence are found in adolescents aged 10 to 19, school and community-based programmes, should particularly target this age group.

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Paper 2: Mapping Violence against Women in Bangladesh: A Multilevel Analysis of Demographic and Health Survey Data

Sajeda Amin[1], Tareq Ferdous Khan[2], Laila Rahman[1], Ruchira Tabassum Naved[2]

ABSTRACT

This paper maps spatial and demographic variation in reports of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Bangladesh. Data from the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted in 2007 are used in this analysis. In addition to the usual demographic and health questions, the survey administered a special module on violence which included questions on women's experience of physical and sexual violence, attitudes of acceptance of violence towards women and family history of violence. While overall reports of physical and sexual violence among women are high, our analysis is able to capture some telling patterns of demographic and spatial variation using multi-level modelling techniques. Exploring the influences of individual, spousal and community characteristics (normative attitudes, poverty and educational level) we confirm several strong patterns: reported IPV in the past year is highest among the youngest women and declines with woman's own age. While early marriage is not itself associated with IPV reports, large age differences between spouses is predictive of violent relationships. Women's own education and having more education than husbands is strongly protective while poverty and women's work is associated with reports of higher violence. Women who work and are active in non-family institutions report higher violence. The analysis shows that women whose own parents were in violent relationship report higher violence, suggesting common cause may be driving both patterns of behaviour. Similarly, there is evidence that in addition to individual factors there is significant variability of violence across communities. Community characteristics such as the average education level and the prevalence of violence in the community are significant risk factors for individual women's experience of violence.

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[1] Population Council, New York, NY

[2] International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) Dhaka, Bangladesh

1. INTRODUCTION

Several studies have documented high rates of violence against women and girls in Bangladesh. According to the Bangladesh component of the WHO multi-country study (García-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005), husbands are the main perpetrators of physical violence against women. About 42% of ever-married rural women of reproductive age in this study reported experiencing physical assault, and 50% reported experiencing sexual abuse within marriage (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2006). The national rate of physical and /or sexual violence perpetrated by a husband calculated from reports by men was as high as 60% (BDHS, 2009). These high rates are supported by the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2007, as well as other nationally representative surveys, such as the World Bank Gender Norms Survey. Intimate partner violence and its long term intergenerational implications have raised alarm (Asling-Monemi, Naved, & Persson, 2008; Asling-Monemi, Naved, & Persson 2009a; Asling-Monemi, Naved, & Persson 2009b; Jejeebhoy, 1998). In Bangladesh these data have contributed to the introduction of a domestic violence bill in 2010.

Individual as well as household characteristics are associated with violence. Age of women and the difference between partners are noted to be risk factors for domestic violence. Youth is cited as a potential risk factor for intimate partner violence (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012; Jewkes, 2002). Studies in Bangladesh show younger women are more likely to experience certain forms of abuse by husbands (Hadi, 2000; Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain, & Mozumder, 2003; Naved & Persson, 2005; Sambisa, Angeles, Lance, Naved, & Thornton, 2011).

However, a study in rural Bangladesh found older women more likely to experience verbal and physical abuse compared to teenage women (Dalal, Rahman, & Jansson, 2009), and several studies in India found older age of women and longer duration of marriage to be associated with increased occurrence of violence in relationships (Babu & Kar, 2009; Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy, & Campbell, 2006). Another study in India showed no effect of age on intimate partner violence (Jeyaseelan et al., 2007).

Employment can impart greater financial independence which is a protective factor in some relationship contexts (Jewkes, 2002). In Bangladesh, however, higher violence is associated with

women's workforce participation (Bates, Schuler, Islam, & Islam, 2004; Naved & Persson, 2005). Several studies have reported intriguing correlations with membership in civil society organizations (Koenig et al., 2003; Rahman, 1999; Schuler, Hashemi, & Badal, 1998) and social groups (Rocca, Rathod, Falle, Pande, & Krishnan, 2009). Heise (2011) reports that several studies in Bangladesh and India (Bates et al., 2004; Mahapatro, Gupta, & Gupta, 2012; Naved & Persson, 2005) show that women who work to earn an income are more likely to experience violence, but studies in the rest of the world do not always find this association. Capaldi et. al's systematic review of 228 articles from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand found unemployment to be associated with higher intimate partner violence (2012). One study shows an association of employment in blue collar jobs with increased risk of intimate partner violence (Capaldi et al., 2012). Another review of 22 studies in low to middle income countries finds mixed findings for the relationship between variations on economic empowerment (employment, paid cash, housewife status) with likelihoods of physical and/or sexual violence in relationships (Vyas & Watts, 2009). Bajracharya and Amin (2013) find that selective membership of women who are more vulnerable to violence to begin with explains greater violence observed among women who are members of micro-credit institutions. Controlling for selectivity, they show there is no difference between members and non-members who are their peers.

Inequalities between a woman's employment status compared to her husband can contribute to risks of violence. Resource theory suggests men who have fewer economic resources (income, employment, education, etc.) compared to partners use violence as a form of control to strengthen their position in the relationship (Vyas & Watts, 2009). Several research findings in South Asia support these suggestions. Women whose job or income status is higher than their husbands have been shown to be more likely to experience physical violence (Dalal, 2011; Jeyaseelan et al., 2007). Insecure economic standing among partners measured as contributing irregularly to households or borrowing money in the last year for medical expenses also increased risks of physical violence among women (Koenig et al., 2006; Pandey, Dutt, & Banerjee, 2009). With respect to women's work, research shows that women's own education is a protective factor against intimate partner violence despite overall trends of women who work experiencing greater levels of violence (Dalal, 2011).

Socioeconomic status, various variously measured, plays a role in risk for intimate partner violence. Poverty is a common risk factor for intimate partner violence (Abramsky et al., 2011; Jewkes, 2002; Vyas & Watts, 2009). Higher household assets is shown to be a protective factor against spousal physical violence (Babu & Kar, 2009; Koenig et al., 2006; Mahapatro, Gupta, & Gupta, 2012; Oshiro, Poudyal, Poudel, Jimba, & Hokama, 2011; Rocca et al., 2009). Education, another socioeconomic indicator, is often a source of empowerment for women in the intimate partner relationships. Women with higher levels of education have greater resources to draw upon including social networks, ability to access information and services, and often income (Jewkes, 2002). Greater education may also translate to less permissive attitudes about acceptance of violence. Jewkes (2002) finds higher educational levels in both men and women is a protective factor against domestic violence. Low education among women and husbands is cited as a risk factor for experiencing domestic violence in South Asia (Ackerson, Kawachi, Barbeau, & Subramanian, 2008). In African contexts, a recent review found low education to be associated with greater intimate partner violence in Namibia, Tanzania, and Nigeria (Olayanju, Naguib, Nguyen, Bali, & Vung, 2013). However, studies also suggest that differences in spousal education levels is a risk factor affecting relationship dynamics. Higher level of education of wives compared to husbands has mixed associations with intimate partner violence; it has been shown to be both a protective and a risk factor (Ackerson et al., 2008; Rapp, Zoch, Khan, Pollmann, & Krämer, 2012).

Attitudinal measures of violence acceptance in the community are also strongly associated with reports of violence. It is not clear whether high incidence drives acceptance or the other way around and indeed it is difficult to establish causality. Rates of intimate partner violence are higher in settings where violence is condoned (Levinson, 1979). Studies conducted in Bangladesh and North India show that men's attitudes regarding gender and violence against women are associated with perpetration of violence against their wives (Johnson and Das, 2008; Koenig et. al, 2006; Naved, Huque, Farah, & Shuvra, 2011; Sambisa, Angeles, Lance, Naved, & Curtis, 2010). Male attitudes condoning partner violence are prevalent in many countries around the world (Antai & Antai, 2008; Rani, Bonu, & Diop-Sidibe, 2004; Rani & Bonu, 2008). In South Asia, acceptance of partner violence among men ranged from 29% in Nepal to 57% in India (Rani &Bonu, 2008). Female acceptance of mistreatment in relationships can also be a contributing factor. In Bangladesh, 50% of ever married

reproductive aged women and 48% of ever-married men justify violence against a wife in at least one of multiple scenarios presented to them (NIPORT, 2009). A study in India found community-level women's acceptance of violence as justified in particular situations was shown to be significantly related to physical violence in relationships (Boyle, Georgiades, Cullen, & Racine, 2009). Studies that explore the association of IPV with exposure to violence in childhood find strong effects of several different kinds. Social learning theory suggests that children who grow up in abusive environments accept violence as a normative means to resolving conflict. In South Asian contexts, research shows male partners who have experienced abuse themselves are likely to believe violence is justified against women (Zhu & Dalal, 2010), and are more likely to abuse their partners (Naved et. al., 2011); men who witness abusive parents are more likely to be abusive (Naved et al., 2011) and women whose parents were abusive are more likely to be abused by a partner (Jeyaseelan et al., 2007; Koenig et al., 2006; Naved & Persson, 2005). Given the high prevalence of arranged marriages and the role of parents in the selection of marriage partners, this association is likely related to broader strategies of selecting marriage partners. Studies based in more developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia also show childhood exposure to domestic violence is a robust indicator of higher incidence of intimate partner violence in adult relationships (Capaldi et al., 2012; Cui, Durtschi, Brent, Lorenz, & Conger, 2010; Linder & Collins, 2005; Straus, 1991). An important distinction is made in one study that witnessing violence between parents during childhood did not affect levels of marital conflict in adult relationships but did increase the use of coercion and violence during marital conflict (Straus, 1991).

A key question any policy and program needs to take into account is to identify who are most vulnerable to VAWG and to tailor strategies of prevention and response to the specific characteristics of individuals and communities vulnerable to violence. The current paper is an attempt to better utilize available evidence on VAWG to inform programs on designing and targeting interventions in Bangladesh. For example, while reports of VAWG are high there are specific regions of the country (such as the northeast districts and urban slums) that report the highest levels of violence (BDHS, 2009; UHS, 2008). Similarly, the data clearly indicate that women are more vulnerable at certain stages of the lifecycle and at specific reproductive life-stages and in different life circumstances (BDHS, 2009; UHS, 2008).

Conceptual model

The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”. While our approach to exploring covariates of intimate partner violence is descriptive, our choice of variables and methodology is infused by an ecological approach. Rather than attempting to find one or a limited set of factors and mechanisms, we postulate that multiple factors may operate simultaneously and a range of factors may influence the prevalence of violence. First, women and men bring their own attributes and experiences to a relationship which also has its own dynamics with implications for experience of IPV including the influence of extended family members, friends networks and work affiliates. We focus on intimate partner violence because in addition to being the most common form of violence on which there is a considerable evidence base, it probably shares some common characteristics with other forms of violence particularly as it manifests at the community level and in terms of norms and acceptance. We also interpret statistical associations as probabilities rather than determinants.

Our choice of variables such as women’s work, education and age gives prominence to factors associated with women’s state of empowerment, viewed in our conceptual model as an important aspect of vulnerability. We view violence as being determined at multiple levels—while individual characteristics of the partners play a role, so do factors such as the household wealth and the communities in which the woman and her husband reside. Community level aggregates may influence individual women’s experience both by affecting gender related norms of acceptance, as well as through other normative influences that may be protective, such as the ability of women to become members of micro-finance associations or other non-familial institutions. In order to explore the role of community level determinants we assess the variability in the prevalence of abuse in the past year at the community level, and explore the role of community-level characteristics such as poverty, literacy, and aggregate attitudes towards violence in explaining this variability. We accomplish this through a multi-level analysis of data drawn from a nationally representative survey of adolescents in Bangladesh conducted in 2007.

We hypothesize that communities and districts characterized by high levels of poverty, low levels of adult literacy, and low levels of NGO membershipwill have higher levels of reported abuse. In addition, as higher levels of physical spousal abuse against women may reflect community normative environments in which abuse, particularly against women and girls, is tolerated, we hypothesize that married women living in communities characterized by high levels of actual spousal abuse and tolerance of such abuse by other women in the community will be at higher risk of experiencing physical abuse.

2. DATA AND METHODOS

The data used in this study is a sub-sample of the ever married women aged 15-49 who were selected for the domestic violence module in the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2007. The 2007 BDHS survey is a nationally representative survey that covers the entire population residing in private dwelling units in Bangladesh except for the population of two remote districts. The survey covered a total of 361 primary sampling units (PSUs) including 227 rural PSUs and 134 urban PSUs. Throughout the PSUs, a total of 10,996 women aged 15-49 and 3,771 men age 15-54 were interviewed. Among the women aged 15-49, a sub-sample of 4,489 women were selected as eligible respondents to a domestic violence module; of them, 22 women could not be interviewed due to lack of privacy and other reasons. Considering only the currently married women, this study includes a final sample of 4,195 women. After excluding variables for missing values the final models are based on 3565. The selected sub-sample is of hierarchical structure--individual women are clustered within PSUs and the PSUs are nested within districts. The hierarchy of the data follows individual women as level-1, PSUs as level-2 and districts as level-3.

Outcome Variables

The key outcome variable of the study is a measure of whether a woman has experienced any form of physical or sexual violence from her husband in the last 12 months preceding the survey. The variable is generated based on a number of questions asked to women regarding incidence of violence in the last 12 months by their husband. The questions used as the indicators of different forms of violence are listed below:

a) Push you, shake you, or throw something at you?

b) Slap you?

c) Twist your arm or pull your hair?

d) Punch you with his fist or with something that could hurt you?

e) Kick you, drag you or beat you up?

f) Try to choke you or burn you on purpose?

g) Threaten you with a gun or a knife

h) Physically force you to have sexual intercourse with him even when you did not want to?

The domestic violence variable is coded as "1" if the women have experienced any form of the listed violence in last 12 months and "0" otherwise.

Fixed Effect Explanatory Variables

A number of fixed effect explanatory variables are used in the model to explore their effect on the outcome variable. The individual, family and household characteristics of the respondent are defined as individual level i.e., level-1 variables. All individual level variables measuring women's characteristics in the analysis are categorical. The age groups considered are 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39 and 40 or more. A categorical variable to capture age at first marriage is used with three categories--married at age less than 15 years, 15-17 years and greater than 17 years. A four category education is constructed from completed years of schooling measuring no education, primary, secondary and higher education.

To explore the impact of women's work status a dummy variable is generated based on whether women were involved in any work in 12 months preceding the survey. The variable is coded as 1 if they were involved in any work in last 12 months and 0 otherwise. Religious affiliation of the respondent is also taken into consideration by coding Muslims as 1 and all other religions were coded as 0. As discussed above, membership in microcredit institutions is high in the country and several studies have hypothesized a causal link between IPV and membership. In order to measure the effect of membership status of women in microcredit organizations on domestic violence, a dummy variable is constructed. It is based on whether a respondent belonged to organizations such as Grameen Bank (GB), Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB), Association of Social Advancement (ASA) or any other organizations with a microcredit component in its operation. We coded this dummy variable 1 if the women answered "yes" that they belonged to any one or more of the mentioned organizations.

Autonomy or decision making score of women is generated by principal component analysis (PCA) on the basis of a series of question asked in BDHS 2007. The questions were asked to determine who usually made decision in the following cases:

a) Own health care;

b) Major household purchase;

c) Purchase of daily household needs;

d) Visit to family or relatives;

e) Child health care.

Five different response options to each of the above questions were available to the respondent. The options were respondent, husband, respondent and husband jointly, someone else, respondent and someone else jointly; and corresponding codes were 1 through 5. Every variable is recoded to 0 if decision is made by husband or someone else, 1 if decision is made by respondent and husband jointly or respondent and someone else jointly and 2 if respondent alone can decide. Finally, a principle component analysis is done to generate a single score for each woman based on five

variables having values 0, 1 and 2. This generated variable is used as autonomy or decision making score for women and it ranges from -2.96 to 3.71.

Another score variable called women's attitude towards violence is employed in this study. Similar to the autonomy or decision score this variable is also generated from answers of a number of questions. Every respondent was asked whether hitting or beating by husband in the following situations is justified:

a) if she goes out without telling him?

b) if she neglects the children?

c) if she argues with him?

d) if she refuses to have sex with him?

e) if she does not obey elders in the family?

The answers were either "yes" or "no" or "do not know" having coding 1, 2 and 8. In this study, we generated five variables based on answers from the listed questions by recoding 1 as 0 as it indicates women agree violence is justified and 2 as 1 as it indicates the positive attitude of women disagreeing with violence being justified in specific situations. If the answer was "do not know" then it is recoded to missing since the answer is not certain. Thus, we generated five dummy variables where 0 indicates the wrong attitude towards violence and 1 indicating right attitude towards violence of women. Principal component analysis on these five dummy variables gave us the score of women's attitude towards violence. It ranges from -4.99 to 1.03.

To capture the influence of a family history of violence in the household, the survey asked whether the respondent's mother was hit by her father. A dummy variable is generated and takes a value 1 if the woman has ever seen her father beat or hit her mother and 0 otherwise.

Several characteristics of husband of the respondent are taken into consideration in this analysis. In addition to current husband's age and education, several other variables are constructed based on the information of both women and their husbands. These include spousal age difference and spousal education difference. Husband or partner's age is employed as a continuous variable in the model.

Husband or partner's education is used as a categorical variable using the same categories as women's education. Spousal age and education difference are also employed as categorical variables in this study. The differences are calculated for women from their husbands' levels. The spousal age difference variable takes three categories differ by "4 years or less", "5-9 years" and "10 or more years." Spousal education difference is categorized into three groups: "equivalent" which indicates highest years of educational attainment are same for both husband and wife; "women lower" indicating highest years of educational attainment is lower for the woman compared to her husband; and "women higher" which indicates highest years of educational attainment are higher for the woman compared to her spouse.

The socio-economic status of the households is represented by the wealth quintiles in this study which are categorized as poorest, poorer, middle, richer and richest households. Family size of the selected women's household is another explanatory variable in this study. The variable is generated from the household characteristics and asset information collected through the household questionnaire in Bangladesh DHS 2007. An urban dummy variable is used to explore the effect of type of residence area on occurrence of violence. The variable is coded as 1 if respondents live in urban areas and 0 if the respondents live in a rural area.

Two community level variables are used to examine whether individual-level domestic violence is associated with characteristics at the level of the PSU. One of the variables is mean education of women by PSU and the other one is mean score of whether the women have ever seen that her father hit or beat her mother by PSU. These PSU level variables are non-self means calculated as the average of the responses of all individuals within PSU excluding the response of that individual from the mean. There are some other PSU level variables used in the model which were found to be non-significant. As a result these variables were excluded from the final model. The excluded PSU level variables are husband's education, household wealth, women's autonomy or decision score, and score of attitude towards violence. In the district level, only the non-self mean score of attitude towards violence variable is found to be significant and has been used in the final model.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the pattern of violence reported by the currently married survey respondents by their husbands. Overall 24% of them reported experiencing some form of violence in the 12 months prior to the survey. Overall 19% reported violence of a physical nature while 10% experience sexual violence. Approximately, 52% of the respondents reported ever experiencing some form of violence in their lives.

Table1. Distribution of outcome variables

Variables	Frequency (Percentage) (*n* = 4,195)
Main Outcome	
Experience of any physical or sexual violence in last 12 months	
No	3,187 (75.97)
Yes	1,008 (24.03)
Other Outcome	
Experience of any physical violence in last 12 months	
No	3,382 (80.62)
Yes	813 (19.38)
Experience of any sexual violence in last 12 months	
No	3,757 (89.36)
Yes	438 (10.44)
Experience of both physical and sexual violence in last 12 months	
No	3,952 (94.21)
Yes	243 (5.79)
Ever experienced any violence	
No	2,022 (48.20)
Yes	2,173 (51.80)
Ever experienced any physical violence	
No	2,185 (52.09)
Yes	2,010 (47.91)
Ever experienced any sexual violence	
No	3,485 (83.08)
Yes	710 (16.92)

Table 2 shows the distribution of women's characteristics. The average age of respondents was 30 years. Their mean age at marriage was 15.45 years and 44% reported they were married before the age of 15. On average, women had only 2.2 years of education. Approximately 32% of women had no education and 31% had some primary education. About one-third of the respondents said they worked for cash in the past year. About 90% of the respondents are Muslim reflecting that the sample is representative of the national distribution on religion. About 39% of the women belonged to a micro-finance institution and 30% reported that their father exhibited violent behaviour towards their mother.

Table 2. Characteristics of the sample

Variables	Frequency (Percentage)/ Mean (SD)* (*n* = 4,195)
Age of the Respondent	30.28 (8.77)*
Age Category of the Respondent	
15-19	450 (10.73)
20-24	827 (19.71)
25-29	847 (20.19)
30-34	696 (16.59)
35-39	648 (15.45)
40 & More	727 (17.33)
Mean Age at First Marriage	15.45 (2.83)*
Category: Age at First Marriage	
<15	1,830 (43.62)
15–17	1,569 (37.40)
>17	796 (18.97)
Women's Average Years of Education	2.23 (1.98)*
Category: Women's Education	
No Education	1,337 (31.87)
Primary	1,280 (30.51)
Secondary	1,258 (29.99)
Higher	318 (7.58)
Missing	2 (0.05)
Working Status in Last 12 Months	
No	2,842 (67.75)
Yes	1,353 (32.25)
Religion Dummy	
Islam	3,795 (90.46)
Others	400 (9.54)
Membership Status of NGO/Microcredit Institution	
No	2,561 (61.05)
Yes	1,634 (38.95)

Autonomy/Decision Making Score	1.99 (1.22)*
Score on Attitude Towards Violence	1.84 (0.65)*
Father Beating Mother	
No (0)	2,936 (69.99)
Rarely (1)	255 (6.08)
Sometimes (2)	614 (14.64)
Often (3)	144 (3.43)
Missing	246 (5.86)

Tables 3, 4 and 5 show bivariate associations between a range of respondents', husbands' and community characteristics shown separately by violence in the past year. At the bivariate level, all of the variables listed in the Tables are significantly associated with the outcome variable and have been considered in the multi-level analysis. Table 5 shows bivariate associations with community characteristics at the PSU and district levels. The mean value of district level violence is significantly different across districts and there are significant bivariate associations with village (PSU) characteristics including husband's average education, women's average education in the village, mean wealth score of households, mean autonomy and attitude towards violence score and whether the community is urban or rural. In general, the district characteristics are not significantly associated except for mean wealth and mean score of attitude towards violence against women. For purposes of multilevel modelling we consider the village, which corresponds approximately to PSU in the sample, to be the relevant reference community whose characteristics might influence women's violence outcomes.

Table 3. Women's Characteristics by Experience of Any Violence in Last 12 months

Variables	**Experience of Any Violence in Last 12 Months Frequency (%)/ Mean (SD)***			**Chi-square / t-value* (p-value)**
	No	**Yes**	**Total (*n* = 4,195)**	
Average age of the Respondent	31.16 (8.84)*	27.49 (7.94)*	30.28 (8.77)*	11.77 (0.00)*
Age Category of the Respondent				
15-19	292 (9.16)	158 (15.67)	450 (10.73)	136.39 (0.00)
20-24	563 (17.67)	264 (26.19)	827 (19.71)	
25-29	613 (19.23)	234 (23.21)	847 (20.19)	
30-34	549 (17.23)	147 (14.58)	696 (16.59)	

35-39	532 (16.69)	116 (11.51)	648 (15.45)	
40 & More	638 (20.02)	89 (8.83)	727 (17.33)	
Mean Age at First Marriage	15.60 (2.97)*	14.99 (2.24)*	15.45 (2.83)*	5.93 (0.00)*
Category: Age at First Marriage				
<15	1,337 (41.95)	493 (48.91)	1,830 (43.62)	
15–17	1,181 (37.06)	388 (38.39)	1,569 (37.40)	37.34 (0.00)
>17	669 (20.99)	127 (12.60)	796 (18.97)	
Women's # Years of Education	2.30 (1.99)*	203 (1.96)*	2.23 (1.98)*	3.71 (0.00)*
Category: Women's Education (n = 4,193)				
No Education	981 (30.78)	356 (35.32)	1,337 (31.89)	
Primary	952 (28.89)	328 (32.54)	1,280 (30.53)	31.01 (0.00)
Secondary	974 (30.58)	284 (28.17)	1,258 (30.00)	
Higher	278 (8.73)	40 (3.97)	318 (7.58)	
Work Status in Last 12 Months				
No	2,212 (69.41)	630 (62.50)	2,842 (67.75)	16.72 (0.00)
Yes	975 (30.59)	378 (37.50)	1,353 (32.25)	
Religion Dummy				
Islam	2,846 (89.30)	3,795 (94.15)	3,795 (90.46)	30.85 (0.00)
Others	341 (10.70)	59 (5.85)	400 (9.54)	
Membership Status of NGO/Microcredit Institution				
No	2,561 (63.10)	550 (54.56)	2,561 (61.05)	23.47 (0.00)
Yes	1,176 (36.90)	458 (45.44)	1,634 (38.95)	
Autonomy/Decision Making Score	2.02 (1.12)*	1.93 (1.11)*	1.99 (1.22)*	1.97 (0.0485)*
Grand Mean Centred Score of Autonomy/ Decision Making	0.02 (1.12)*	-0.06 (1.11)*	0.00 (1.22)*	1.97 (0.0485)*
Non-condoning Attitude Towards Violence, Score	1.87 (0.63)*	1.74 (0.71)*	1.84 (0.65)*	5.81 (0.00)*
Grand Mean Centred Score on Non-condoning Attitude Towards Violence	0.03 (0.63)*	-0.10 (0.71)*	0.00 (0.65)*	5.81 (0.00)*
Father Beating Mother (n = 3,949)				
No (0)	2,378 (79.51)	558 (58.25)	2,936 (74.35)	
Rarely (1)	178 (5.95)	77 (8.04)	255 (6.46)	31.01 (0.00)
Sometimes(2)	354 (11.84)	260 (27.14)	614 (15.55)	
Often (3)	81 (2.71)	63 (6.58)	144 (3.65)	

Table 4. Husband/Partner's, Union and Family Characteristics by Outcome Variable (Women's Experience of Any Violence in Last 12 Months)

Variables	Experience of Any Violence in Last 12 Months			Chi-square / t-value* (p-value)
	Frequency (%)/ Mean (SD)*			
	No	Yes	Total (*n* = 4,195)	
Husband/Partner's Characteristics				
Age of Husband	40.64 (10.52)*	36.78 (10.29)*	39.71 (10.59)*	10.18 (0.00)*
Grand Mean Centred Age of Husband	0.93 (10.52)*	-2.93 (10.29)*	0.00 (10.59)*	10.18 (0.00)*
Husband's Average Years of Education (n = 4,187)	2.40 (2.06)*	2.03 (2.04)*	2.32 (2.06)*	4.99 (0.00)*
Category: Husband's Education (n = 4,189)				
No Education	1,005 (31.59)	400 (39.68)	1,405 (33.54)	62.12 (0.00)
Primary	841 (26.44)	304 (30.16)	1,145 (27.33)	
Secondary	822 (25.84)	228 (22.62)	1,050 (25.07)	
Higher	513 (16.13)	76 (7.54)	589 (14.06)	
Category: Husband's Occupation (n = 4,179)				
Agriculture	843 (26.57)	269 (26.74)	1,112 (26.61)	45.70 (0.00)
Semi-skilled Worker	1,265 (39.87)	475 (47.22)	1,740 (41.64)	
Professional	228 (7.19)	21 (2.09)	249 (5.96)	
Business	718 (22.63)	212 (21.07)	930 (22.25)	
Unemployed	60 (1.89)	15 (1.49)	75 (1.79)	
Others	59 (1.86)	14 (1.39)	73 (1.75)	
Union Characteristics				
Spousal Age Difference	9.48 (5.29)*	9.32 (5.67)*	9.44 (5.38)*	0.83 (0.40)*
Category: Spousal Age Difference				
4 or Less	418 (13.14)	137 (13.63)	555 (13.26)	0.66 (0.72)
4 – 9	1,362 (42.83)	440 (43.78)	1,802 (43.06)	
10 or More	1,400 (44.03)	428 (42.59)	1,828 (43.68)	
Spousal Education Difference (n = 4,173)	0.11 (2.21)*	-0.003 (2.30)*	0.08 (2.23)*	1.39 (0.16)*
Category: Spousal Education Difference (n = 4,173)				
Women Lower	1,044 (32.96)	310 (30.82)	1,354 (32.45)	3.12 (0.21)
Equivalent	1,164 (36.75)	400 (39.76)	1,564 (37.48)	
Women Higher	959 (30.28)	296 (29.42)	1,255 (30.07)	
Family Characteristics				
Mean Wealth Score	9350.58 (104644.10)*	-29746.35 (73895.14)*	-43.86 (99542.57)*	11.02 (0.00)*
Family Size	5.50 (2.45)*	5.12 (2.06)*	5.41 (2.37)*	4.48 (0.00)*
Grand Mean Centred Family Size	0.09 (2.45)*	-0.29 (2.06)*	0.00 (2.37)*	4.48 (0.00)*
Location (19 Old Districts)				
Bandarban	27 (0.85)	8 (0.79)	35 (0.83)	58.35 (0.00)

Barisal	416 (13.05)	164 (16.27)	580 (13.83)
Bogra	96 (3.01)	21 (2.08)	117 (2.79)
Chittagong	194 (6.09)	69 (6.85)	263 (6.27)
Comilla	198 (6.21)	49 (4.86)	247 (5.89)
Dhaka	387 (12.14)	94 (9.33)	481 (11.47)
Dinajpur	106 (3.33)	44 (4.37)	150 (3.58)
Faridpur	88 (2.76)	13 (1.29)	101 (2.41)
Jamalpur	47 (1.47)	16 (1.59)	63 (1.50)
Jessore	178 (5.59)	58 (5.75)	236 (5.63)
Khulna	186 (5.84)	68 (6.75)	254 (6.05)
Kushtia	128 (4.02)	33 (3.27)	161 (3.84)
Mymenshing	146 (4.58)	79 (7.84)	225 (5.36)
Noakhali	125 (3.92)	50 (4.96)	175 (4.17)
Pabna	95 (2.98)	33 (3.27)	128 (3.05)
Rajshahi	155 (4.86)	47 (4.66)	202 (4.82)
Rangpur	146 (4.58)	57 (5.65)	203 (4.84)
Sylhet	426 (13.37)	92 (9.13)	518 (12.35)
Tangail	43 (1.35)	13 (1.29)	56 (1.33)

Figure 1: District Average Proportion of Women Who Experienced Violence in the 12 months Prior to the Survey, Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey, 2007

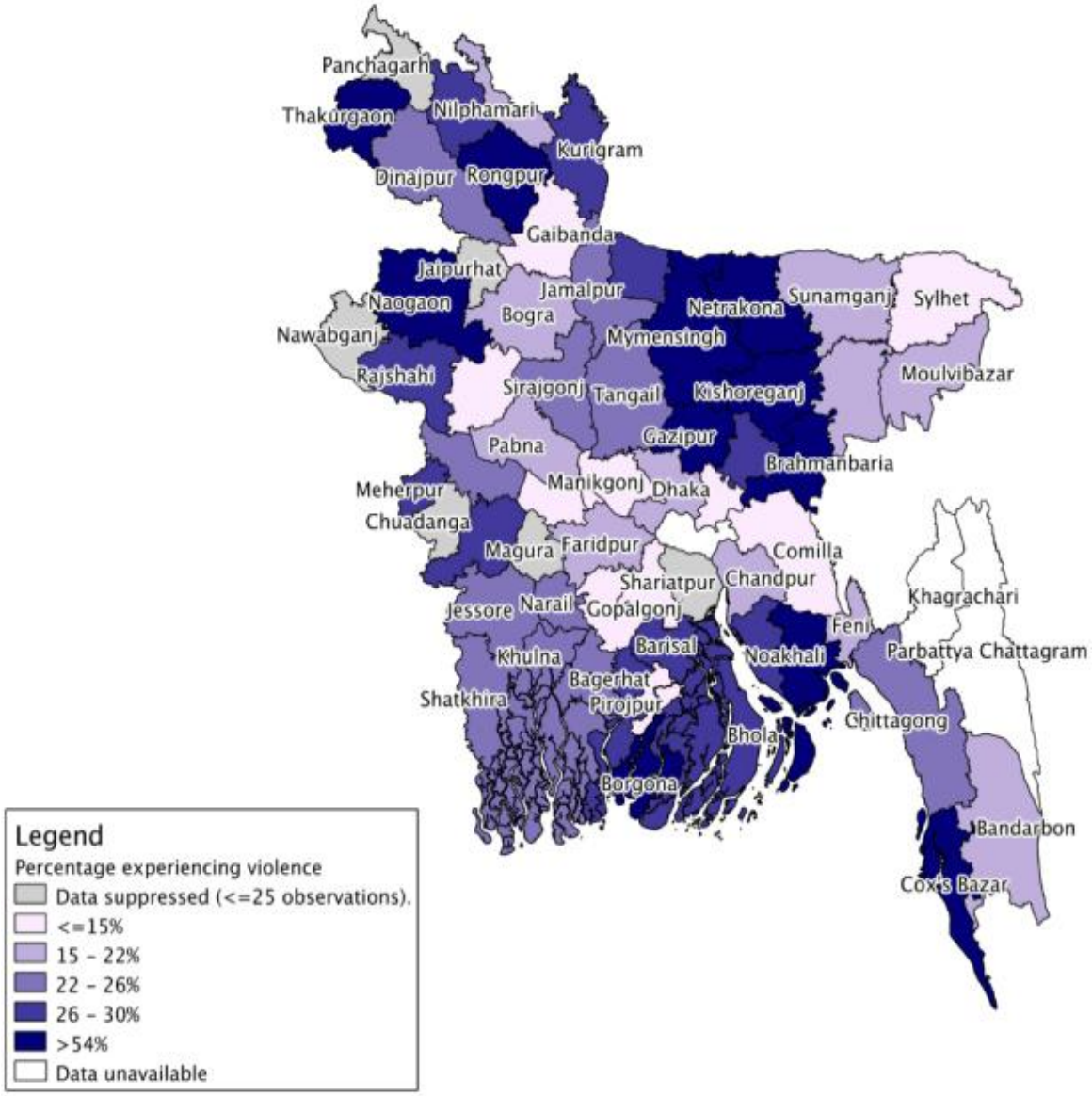

Table 5: PSU Level and District Level Characteristics by Outcome Variable (Women's Experience of Any Violence in Last 12 Months)

Variables	Experience of Any Violence in Last 12 Months Frequency (%)/ Mean (SD)*			Chi-square / t-value* (p-value)
	No	Yes	Total (*n* = 4,195)	
PSU Level Characteristics				
Husband's Average Years of Education	2.36 (0.93)*	2.16 (0.89)*	2.32 (0.92)*	6.30 (0.00)*
Women's Average Years of Education	2.28 (0.85)*	2.10 (0.80)*	2.23 (0.84)*	5.83 (0.00)*
Mean Wealth Score	5556.27 (84309.88)*	-17749.84 (64957.19)*	-43.86 (80697.24)*	8.05 (0.00)*
Mean Score of Autonomy/ Decision Making	2.01 (0.44)*	1.96 (0.43)*	2.00 (0.44)*	3.10 (0.00)*
Mean Score on Non-condoning Attitude Towards Violence	1.85 (0.26)*	1.80 (0.26)*	1.84 (0.26)*	5.72 (0.00)*
Dummy: Urban				
Rural	1,968 (61.75)	669 (66.37)	2,637 (62.86)	7.00 (0.01)
Urban	1,219 (38.25)	339 (33.63)	1,558 (37.14)	
District Level Characteristics				
Husband's Average Years of Education	2.31 (0.26)*	2.32 (0.27)*	2.32 (0.26)*	-1.45 (0.15)*
Women's Average Years of Education	2.23 (0.29)*	2.24 (0.31)*	2.23 (0.30)*	-1.31 (0.19)*
Mean Wealth Score	853.17 (38554.09)*	-2880.03 (36634.44)*	-43.86 (38130.73)*	2.71 (0.01)*
Mean Score of Autonomy/ Decision Making	2.00 (0.18)*	2.00 (0.17)*	2.00 (0.18)*	-0.05 (0.96)*
Mean Score on Non-condoning Attitude Towards Violence	1.84 (0.096)*	1.83 (0.099)*	1.84 (0.097)*	2.04 (0.04)*
Dummy: Division				
Barisal	416 (13.05)	164 (16.27)	580 (13.83)	17.99 (0.003)
Chittagong	544 (17.07)	176 (17.46)	720 (17.16)	
Dhaka	711 (22.31)	215 (21.33)	926 (22.07)	
Khulna	492 (15.44)	159 (15.77)	651 (15.52)	
Rajshahi	598 (18.76)	202 (20.04)	800 (19.07)	
Sylhet	426 (13.37)	92 (9.13)	518 (12.35)	

Figure 1 and Table 6 show districts by prevalence of violence against women in the last 12 months in Bangladesh ranked into five groups by level of reported violence. Districts within Bangladesh range between 3% and 54% in the reported average level of violence. There is a discernible pattern of high violence reporting in a stretch of contiguous districts along the western borders. There is a similar set of high prevalence areas in Barisal division in the south, and a cluster of high prevalence areas in the north-east. A total of twelve districts report violence rates of over 30 percent.

Table 6: Distribution of District by Prevalence of Domestic Violence By Quintiles

Lowest (<=15%)	Low to Middle (16-22%)	Middle (23-26%)	Middle to High (27-30%)	High (>30%)
Comilla	Bandarbon	Bagerhat	Barisal	Borgona
Gaibanda	Bogra	Chittagong	Bhola	Brahmanbaria
Gopalgonj	Chandpur	Dinajpur	Jhenaidah	Cox's Bazar
Jhalakati	Choua Danga	Jaipurhat	Kurigram	Gazipur
Madaripur	Dhaka	Jamalpur	Lakshmipur	Kishoreganj
Manikgonj	Faridpur	Jessore	Meherpur	mymensingh
Munshigonj	Feni	Khulna	Narshingdi	Naogaon
Natore	Hobiganj	Kustia	Nilphamari	Netrakona
Nawabganj	Lalmonirhat	Magura	Patuakhali	Noakhali
Rajbari	Moulvibazar	narail	Perojpur	Panchagarh
Shariatpur	Narayanganj	Shatkhira	Rajshahi	Rongpur
Sylhet	Pabna	Sirajgonj	Sherpur	Thakurgaon
	Sunamganj	Tangail		

Table 7 shows the characteristics of districts categorized into three groups—low (<15%), medium (15-25% and high (> 25%). Districts with high levels of spousal violence had lower levels of female literacy, higher levels of acceptance of physical punishment of women and lower levels of decision making autonomy of women. They also report higher percentage of households belonging to an NGO and women working for cash compared to communities with medium and low levels of violence. These relationships may be correlated with each other and were explored in greater detail in multivariate analyses.

Table 7: Distribution of Explanatory Variables by Low, Medium and High Prevalence District

	Level of Violence in Last 12 Months			
	Low (<=15%)	**Medium** (15%-25%)	**High** (>25%)	**Total**
Basic Distribution				
Number of District (n, %)	10 (16.13)	23 (37.10)	29 (46.77)	62 (100.00)
Number of PSU (n, %)	46 (12.74)	159 (44.04)	156 (43.21)	361 (100.00)
Number of Ever Married Women (n, %)	523 (12.47)	1,833 (43.69)	1,839 (43.88)	4,195 (100.00)
Individual, Family and Household Variables				
% Worked in Last 12 Months	21.80	32.52	34.96	32.25
% Muslim	88.53	89.31	92.17	90.46
% Member of NGO/Microcredit Institution	33.84	37.04	42.31	38.95
Autonomy/Decision Making Score (mean, SD)	0.10 (1.87)	0.05 (1.65)	-0.08 (1.63)	0.00 (1.67)
Score of Attitude Towards Violence (mean, SD)	0.11 (1.69)	0.10 (1.64)	-0.13 (1.80)	0.00 (1.72)
% Father Beating Mother (SD)	19.38	22.65	30.35	25.65
Husband's Age (mean, SD)	40.63 (10.41)	39.98 (10.61)	39.19 (10.59)	39.71 (10.59)
Family Size (mean, SD)	6.05 (3.04)	5.32 (2.32)	5.32 (2.16)	5.41 (2.37)
% Living in Urban Area	35.76	44.90	29.80	37.14
Community (PSU) Level Variables				
Non-self Mean of Women's Highest Year of Education (mean, SD)	2.36 (0.85)	2.21 (0.89)	2.22 (0.82)	2.23 (0.86)
Non-self % of Father Beating Mother (mean, SD)	0.19 (0.14)	0.23 (0.16)	0.30 (0.17)	0.26 (0.17)
District Level Variables				
Score of Attitude Towards Violence (mean, SD)	0.11 (0.26)	0.10 (0.38)	-0.13 (0.39)	0.00 (0.39)

Table 8 shows results of multi-level multivariate regression models. Model 1 is the base model and includes only PSU and district identification variables as fixed effects. Both these effects are significant. Model 2 shows the effects estimates from a range of individual, household, community and district characteristics associated with violence outcomes with the individual and household characteristics nested within the PSU level; and the community level characteristics nested within the district level.

Table 8: Three-level Logistic Models for Women's Experience of Violence in Last 12 Months

	Model 1 (unconditional)		Model 2 (Three Level Logistic)	
	Odds Ratio	**CI**	**Odds Ratio**	**CI**
Experience of Violence in Last 12 Months	n = 4,195		n = 3,565	
Individual, Family and Household Variables				
Age Category				
15-19 (Reference)				
20-24			0.94	0.67-1.27
25-29			0.80	0.55-1.16
30-34			0.58**	0.36-0.91
35-39			0.59*	0.34-1.02
40-49			0.42**	0.21-0.84
Age at First Marriage				
<15 (Reference)				
15-17			1.01	0.84-1.22
>17			0.83	0.63-1.11
Women's Education				
No Education (Reference)				
Primary			0.93	0.71-1.21
Secondary			0.91	0.68-1.22
Higher			0.98	0.56-1.70
Any work in last 12 months			1.21**	1.00-1.45
Religion (Non-Muslim Reference)			1.54**	1.10-2.14
Member of NGO/Microcredit Institution			1.19**	1.00-1.42
Autonomy/Decision Making Score			1.00	0.95-.106
Score of Non-condoning Attitude Towards Violence			0.92***	0.88-0.97
Father Beating Mother			2.44***	2.04-2.94
Husband/Partner's Age			0.97**	0.95-0.99
Husband/Partner's Education				
No Education (Reference)				
Primary			0.93	0.71-1.20
Secondary			0.97	0.73-1.28
Higher			0.86	0.56-1.32
Spousal Age Difference				
4 or Less (reference)				
5-9			1.17	0.88-1.55
10 or More			1.45**	1.01-2.10
Spousal Education Difference				
Equivalent (Reference)				
Women Lower			0.92	0.72-1.16
Women Higher			0.73***	0.57-0.92
Wealth Quintile				

Poorest (Reference)				
Poorer			0.88	0.69-1.11
Middle			0.67***	0.52-0.87
Richer			0.64***	0.49-0.85
Richest			0.43***	0.31-0.61
Urban (Rural- Reference)			0.97	0.79-1.18
Community (PSU) Level Variables				
Non-self Mean of Women's Highest Year of Education			0.87**	0.78-0.98
Non-self % of Father Beating Mother			1.86**	1.08-3.21
District Level Variables				
Score of Non-condoning Attitude Towards Violence			0.74**	0.57-0.96
Random Effects *tau*				
Community level	0.23	0.14-0.40	0.04	0.003-0.60
District level	0.09	0.04-0.22	0.04	0.01-0.19

Note: *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

There is a very strong age gradient with older women being considerably less likely to report experiencing violence in the past year. While early age at marriage is not predictive of violence experience, the age difference with husband of greater than 10 years is associated with significantly higher violence. Neither the woman's own education nor her husband's education is significantly associated when educational differences are taken into account. Women who are more educated than their husbands are significantly less likely to report being physically abused. On the other hand women who work are more likely to report violence relative to women who do not. Relative to households in the poorest wealth quintile, respondents living in households with higher levels of wealth are less likely to report violence. Women's autonomy/decision making score is found to be non-significant and their non-condoning attitude towards violence is found to be negatively associated with violence both at the individual and district levels. Two community level measures at the PSU level are significant—these are the overall level of education of women in the community and the proportion of women reporting their father beat their mother. Once these individual, household, community and district characteristics are taken into account in the model, the PSU or village level effect is no longer significant while the district level effect is only marginally significant.

4. DISCUSSION

Our analysis suggests that there are important variations in reports of violence that could be taken into account to identify vulnerable groups. Among them are young age of women, large age differences with their husbands and parental experience of violence. Working women and women from the poorest households are also more vulnerable as are women who live in communities that have low levels of women's education. Among individual characteristics young age of women and large age differences in marriage are important characteristics associated with vulnerability. As with past studies of violence our study confirms that women who are poor and work for cash are likely to report greater violence as are women who belong to micro-finance institutions. While early marriage per se is not significantly associated, large spousal age differences is strongly and positively associated with violence, and suggests that violence is symbolic of women's compromised status associated with their young age. Thus, we find some support in our analysis for a range of influences – at the individual level there is support for empowerment as an underlying dynamic. Both at the individual and community levels measure associated with women's non-acceptance of intimate partner violence is negatively associated with their own experience of violence. Thus, attitudes of acceptance suggest normative factors are at work. Finally, women's educational achievement at the community level suggests a positive role for the promotion of girl's education to combat violence that may work to reduce normative influences on violence.

Community characteristics in addition to individual characteristics matter. If both are included, the community level measure proved to be more strongly predictive in terms of education suggesting a normative influence.. The two factors that are important to consider are women's education in the community and the prevalence of parental experience of abuse. The percentage of literate females was negatively related to physical abuse. These results are similar to findings from another study of determinants of violence against adolescent girls and highlight the important role of community norms, particularly in relation to abuse perpetrated against adolescent girls (VanderEnde, Yount, Dynes, & Sibley, 2012). Acceptance of physical punishment of adolescents was strongly associated with an increased risk of physical abuse against unmarried female adolescents, but not associated with an increased risk for males. Similar associations between community norms accepting of partner

mistreatment and IPV against women have been found in India (Boyle et al., 2009; Koenig et al., 2006), and community gender norms have been identified as an important area of focus for research on IPV against women (VanderEnde et al., 2012). Programs and policies aimed at reducing levels of physical abuse against women and adolescents must address women's education, gender inequality and community norms in the design and implementation of programs targeting these populations. Greater awareness and efforts to prevent children's witnessing violent relationship and experiencing violence are warranted. Similarly, the response to violence programs should include mitigating measures to prevent intergenerational transmission of violence.

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Paper 3: Community Perspective on Addressing Violence against Women and Girls in Bangladesh

Ruchira Tabassum Naved[1], Aloka Talukder[1], Nur Newaz Khan[1] Shahriar Mohammad Farhad[1]

Abstract

High rates of violence against women and girls (VAWG) prevail in many countries despite the fact that VAWG is well recognized as a significant problem affecting women and children's health and well-being throughout the world. Addressing VAWG remains challenging as the evidence on effective interventions is thin worldwide. The proven interventions, which are scanty, need to be tailored to the particular needs of the context involving the community members for ensuring effectiveness and sustainability. This study carried out in two districts of Bangladesh between July and September 2012 explored community perspective on ways to address VAWG. Data were collected through 14 Key Informant Interviews and 24 Focus Group Discussions with males and females.

The community members prioritized primary prevention suggesting as well strategies for improving response to VAWG. Engaging men, and the youth, in particular, was highlighted by all categories of study participants as an essential strategy. The women and the adolescent girls clearly identified gender inequality as the root cause of VAWG and suggested ensuring gender equality and equity in economic and social life as well as in ideology. For achieving this they suggested economic empowerment of women; enabling women to claim their rights; and changing gender inequitable attitudes in the community and beyond. Poverty was recognized as one of the predictors of VAWG and accordingly poverty reduction was suggested.

Other suggestions included mass campaign on laws regarding VAWG, restructuring and strengthening existing institutions for providing appropriate services to the victims, and formation of women's collectives and courts. Male dominance throughout the recourse seeking system was identified as an important deterrent to effective response to VAWG. In addressing this, they suggested

[1] International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) Dhaka, Bangladesh

empowering female representatives at the sub-district government committees for providing support to the victims; ensuring greater representation of women in informal arbitration; ensuring women's right to serve as witness*;* and ensuring voice and safety of the victims and the witnesses. Role of good governance and community pressure groups and setting up of hotline services for complaints were emphasised for addressing corruption at all levels.

While NGO activities were appreciated more active role of NGOs was desired. Creating new structures such as NGO run One Stop Crisis Centres close to the village was suggested. Women's collectives and women's courts were also suggested reflecting readiness of the women and girls in actively engaging with group-based initiatives for addressing VAWG.

1. INTRODUCTION

High rates of Violence against women and girls (VAWG) prevail in many countries (Garcia-Moreno et. al., 2006) despite the fact that VAWG is well recognized as a significant problem affecting women and children's health and well-being throughout the world (Cook-Craig, 2012; Ellsberg et al., 2008; Flood and Pease, 2009; Morinaga, 2012). Development of efficient policy and programme remains challenging due to lack of evidence on interventions that work. In order to be effective and sustainable the interventions need to be tailored to the particular needs of a community (Bowen, Gwiasda, & Brown, 2004; Kelly, Lesser, Peralez-Dieckmann, & Castilla, 2007). Most of the literature available on this comes, however, from the developed world (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante,Banyard, 2007; Foshee et al., 2004; Mihalic, Irwin, Elliott, Fagan, & Hansen, 2001; Rispens, Aleman, & Goldena, 1997; Taal & Edelaar, 1997) making it impossible for developing countries with very different cultures and levels of socioeconomic development to draw directly from them. While some programmes have been designed in resource-poor settings in response to VAWG, only a few of them have been rigorously evaluated leaving policy makers and programme implementers without concrete evidence on how to address VAWG.

Although domestic violence dominates in VAWG it is widely seen as a private problem not warranting any community intervention (Sukhera, Cerulli, Gawinski, & Morse, 2012; Sullivan, Bhuyan, Senturia, Shiu-Thornton, & Ciske, 2005). However, it is important to consider the community in addressing both domestic violence and non-domestic violence for some important reasons. First, community factors

substantially contribute to VAWG (Hindin, Kishor, & Ansara, 2008; Koenig, 2006; Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain, & Mozumder, 2003). The community environment can act as both a risk and a protective factor for VAWG victimisation.

For example, violence condoning attitudes in the community and poor social networks were found to be associated with higher rates of violence (Amin, Khan, Rahman, & Naved, 2012; VenderEnde, Naved, & Amin, 2012), while strong community ties were reported to be associated with fewer reports of VAWG and increased help seeking behaviours (Bowen et al., 2004). Second, it is in the interest of communities to address VAWG to prevent its adverse consequences affecting the community and its members. VAWG is associated with child maltreatment (Gage & Silvestre, 2010), poor health, nutrition, growth and mortality of children (Asling-Monemi, Naved, & Persson, 2009; Asling-Monemi, Naved, & Persson, 2008; Silverman et al., 2009). Male children who witness violence are more likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence (IPV) and other violent acts in their community as adults (Abramsky et al., 2011; Hawkins et al., 2008; Malik, Ward, & Janczewski, 2008). Further, the community can play a critical and active role in the preventing and responding to VAWG both within and outside the home (Bloom et al., 2009, Bowen et al., 2004, DeGue et al., 2012, Hawkins et al., 2008, Malik et al., 2008, May and Law, 2008; Sabol, Coulton, & Korbin, 2004; Sukhera et al., 2012; Sullivan et al., 2005; Wilson and Chermak, 2011).

Community based research eliciting recommendations regarding ways of addressing VAWG is an important method for formulating strategies to combat VAWG. Women are often reluctant to voice their opinions about IPV for fear of judgement, punishment, and inaction (Sukhera et al., 2012; Sullivan et al., 2005). Community based qualitative research, however, may build mutual trust and respect between the women and the researchers, empowering women to express themselves and discuss their thoughts and opinions (Bowen et al., 2004; DeGue et al., 2012; Hawkins et al., 2008; Mason and Clemans, 2008; May and Law, 2008; Moore and Connolly, 1999; Sukhera et al., 2012; Sullivan et al., 2005). Using the format of focus groups also allows women to network with other survivors of violence, use their shared experiences to help interpret and understand their own experience, and recommend strategies for eliminating or reducing violence (Mason and Clemans, 2008). Such research is useful because it allows the formulation of the most culturally appropriate and acceptable interventions (Kelly et al., 2007; Sukhera et al., 2012; Sullivan et al., 2005). This is

important because interventions that are not tailored to the particular needs of a community will be less effective and are unlikely to be sustainable in the long term (Bowen et al., 2004; Kelly et al., 2007).

The past decade has seen an increase in the use of this approach in formulating strategies to prevent IPV (Mancini, Nelson, Bowen, & Martin, 2006). Sullivan and colleagues (2005) conducted a study with nine cultural groups within the United States. The study generated culturally appropriate results which could be disseminated by advocates who participated in the study, increasing their impact and credibility.

A study of IPV in a rural community in Honduras used a community based participatory research approach to examine how two different groups within the community defined and responded to IPV (Sukhera et al., 2012). It was found that perceptions varied between men and women highlighting the need to include in such research people from different backgrounds and both males and females (Sukhera et al., 2012).

A number of suggestions for prevention programmes were made in this study, including education programmes for men, women, and children, IPV training for pre-existing women's support groups and support through pre-existing health facilities (Sukhera et al., 2012). Changing community attitudes was extremely important to women and affected whether they sought help, with many women not reporting IPV as they were afraid of further abuse, community condemnation and stigma, and punishment or inaction from the authorities (Sukhera et al., 2012).

Hawkins and colleagues (2008) used such research to design a number of successful strategies to address and raise awareness about violence in a community in the United States. The strategies included: sponsoring safe Halloween parties; holding community play about dating violence; domestic violence themed art installations; specialised clinical support programmes for children who had witnessed severe interpersonal violence; and training of teachers and other care workers on how to help children who have witnessed severe IPV.

In the Bangladesh component of the WHO multi-country study, 42% of ever-married rural women of reproductive age reported experiencing physical assault, and 50% reported experiencing sexual abuse within marriage (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006). These reports of high prevalence rates were supported by nationally representative studies in Bangladesh (BDHS, 2009; World Bank & AusAid, 2007; Nahar, 2007). These findings have raised alarm and have resulted in several legislative efforts including the introduction of a Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 in Bangladesh. The current study is part of a larger study to inform evidence-based policy on VAWG in Bangladesh. It is inspired by the National Women Development Policy 2011 of Bangladesh and the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010. The National Women Development Policy emphasizes elimination of all forms of abuse of women both through prevention and response. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 provides a framework for protection of women from domestic violence.

The larger study reviewed existing evidence on correlates of VAWG and interventions addressing VAWG; explored correlates of VAWG in Bangladesh using nationally representative data; and undertook qualitative research in two districts for exploring the strategies recommend by the community members for addressing VAWG. The current paper reports on the last component of the study. Specific objectives of this component of the study were to explore: (1) The ways in which VAWG is currently addressed in the study sites; and (2) The strategies the community people suggest for preventing and responding to VAWG.

2. DATA AND METHODS

This study was carried out in Jamalpur and Faridpur districts. Selection of the districts was guided by relatively high rates of lifetime and current wife abuse in Jamalpur (69% and 24%) and relatively low rates of the same in Faridpur (40% and 13%) (Amin, et al., 2012).

Data were collected through 14 Key informant Interviews (KII) and 24 Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Table 1 shows the number of KIIs and FGDs by category of informants. Eight KIIs were conducted in Jamalpur and six in Faridpur. Among the key informants (KIs) seven were men and the other seven were women. Key informants were selected on the basis of their knowledge about the community and the research themes. Informal discussions with the NGO workers and the community

members helped the research team in identifying the key informants. We ended up having local leaders (i.e., *matbor*s, Union Parishad or UP members), NGO staff, teachers, and people who engage in community-wide social welfare oriented activities as our key informants.

Thirteen FGDs were conducted in Jamalpur and 11 in Faridpur. FGDs covered both male and female groups. It was considered important to elicit suggestions from both married and unmarried females considering their different life experiences and needs. Thus, female FGDs were conducted separately with married women aged 15 to 39 and unmarried girls aged 15 to 19. Involvement of young men in preventing VAWG has proved to bear positive results (Barker, Ricardo, & Nascimento, 2007). This is why we recruited relatively experienced, but young men aged 25 to 35 for FGDs. FGDs were also conducted with the local leaders. All the FGD participants were identified in consultation with the NGO workers and key informant interviews.

Two female and two male researchers with Masters Degrees and experienced in collecting sensitive data were involved. Interviews and FGDs were tape recorded upon receiving informed consent of the participants. The data were transcribed verbatim and the tapes were erased after the data were coded using atlas/ti following a coding scheme developed based on the research themes.

Table 1: Number of Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Category of informants		***Key Informant Interview (KII)***	***Focus Group Discussion (FGD)***	***Total***
Female	Unmarried	1	6	7
	Married	6	9	15
	Community leaders	-	2	2
Male	Married	7	5	12
	Community leaders	-	2	2
Total		**14**	**24**	**38**

The data were retrieved and analyzed by site and by codes. Data were triangulated using different sources of information (male-female; married-unmarried; local leaders) and types of data collected (KII and FGD) for ensuring reliability. Pseudonyms were used for ensuring anonymity of the villages and the community members. This study was approved by the Ethical Review Committee (ERC) of icddr, b.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Study sites

In Jamalpur, the study was conducted in Borogram about 16km away from Jamalpur town. Two villages from Faridpur, Goaldi and Torika were included in this study. Goaldi is about 16km and Torika is about 14km away from Faridpur town. Paved roads connect the district towns to these villages. All the roads inside the villages are unpaved. Electricity is available in all three villages. While there are no bazaars (markets) in Borogram, each of the study villages in Faridpur has a bazaar in the village. The nearest bazaar to Borogram is 1km away.

According to the BRAC conducted census there are 650 households in Borogram, 453 households in Goaldi, and 860 households in Torika. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood and rice is the major crop in all the study villages. Faridpur is well known for plenty of jute production. Apart from agricultural employment, men are mainly involved in auto-rickshaw driving, small or medium size business, service sector, and wage work in Borogram. As reported due to unavailability of appropriate employment opportunities many men with graduate degrees are earning their living by driving auto-rickshaw. In Goaldi and Torika, driving an auto-rickshaw is considered as a low occupation for an educated man. Labour migration beyond the country has flourished in these villages making remittances an important contributor to their economy.

As in other villages of Bangladesh, women are primarily engaged in unpaid work at home. Women from economically disadvantaged families are often involved in wage work. Poultry and livestock rearing help women to earn small incomes that they can control more or less. A few women are working as NGO staff. In Borogram, a number of women are engaged in sewing and embroidery work, supplying products to BRAC affiliated Ayesha Abed Foundation. Some of the unmarried adolescent girls in Jamalpur work as private tutors. There are many jute mills in Faridpur, where some of the women are employed. A few women are working as life-insurance agents in Faridpur villages.

There are no schools in Goaldi, while Borogram has one primary and one secondary school, four BRAC schools for non-formal education and one religious school or *madrasa*. In contrast to Borogram there is a college in Torika, but there are no *madrasas*. According to the primary school teachers, the rate of completion of primary education in Borogram is almost 100%. In Torika, educational

achievement is higher and a number of boys and girls are reported to attend college. The level of education is much lower in Goaldi in general and of the females in particular. The villagers send their children to a school two kilometers away. During the data collection period only five to seven girls were reported to have completed secondary school in Goaldi.

BRAC and Grameen Bank are the NGOs operating across study sites. ASA, Ahsania Mission, Social Development Forum, Dishari, and Progress are the other NGOs active in Jamalpur. World Vision is the only NGO besides BRAC and Grameen Bank working in the study villages of Faridpur. Most of these NGOs have microcredit and poverty reduction programmes. Some of them are also working in the education, agriculture, and water and sanitation sectors. BRAC is the only organization engaged in awareness raising for reducing VAWG and providing medico-legal services for the victims. There is a youth club in Borogram, which actively engages in awareness building regarding VAWG.

The power structure and the social hierarchies are well defined in Borogram and Goaldi. Financially strong men are the village leaders commonly known as *matbors*. *Matbors* have strong political affiliation and they nominate candidates for the UP election. They hold *shalish* (informal arbitration) for dispute resolution at the village level. The community is used and manipulated to the advantage of the village leaders or *matbors*. However, while the economically disadvantaged people are almost completely dependent on the community and the *matbors* for dispute resolution, the solvent villagers do not necessarily depend on these mechanisms for solving their problems. There are three *matbors* in Borogram and four *matbors* in Goaldi village. The situation in Torika is a bit different from the other two study villages as it has many more *matbors* (12-15) most of whom are self declared and lack support from the community. People in Torika tend to rely more on two *matbors* from the neighbouring village. The *matbors* from Torika are well connected to the authority and are reputed to be extremely corrupt.

3.2 Existing services

3.2.1 Health services for victims of violence

No health care providers specialized in serving or caring for abused women and girls in the studied villages or in the district towns were known to the villagers. In case of physical assault, medications for reducing pain are commonly used. These medicines are generally obtained from the local shops. The women and girls may receive treatment for minor injuries from the local pharmacies. The district hospital or private clinics and hospitals located in the district towns are considered ideal for treatment of grievous injuries. However, the doctors are often unavailable and treatment is delayed in the public facilities. Sometimes, health services are not provided to victims of violence when the case is not reported to the police. This is why those who can afford often seek services from a range of private health care providers available in the district towns.

Generally, rape victims with life threatening conditions are taken to the district hospitals. According to the informants, the quality of service is not satisfactory in these hospitals. There are delays and sometimes the providers give in to the pressure from influential people defending the interest of the perpetrator. BRAC is supposed to provide health services to abused women and girls. However, the villagers could not cite any such examples of such support in the study villages. The informants mentioned that despite adverse mental health consequences of violence there are no mental health services available for abused women and girls in these villages or even in district towns.

3.2.2 Bichar-shalish and legal services

The informants made it clear that recourse seeking is rare in cases of violence by husband. The severity and frequency of violence, in combination with the resource mobilizing capacity of the woman and her family underlie recourse seeking.

Married women are most commonly exposed to domestic violence, while non-domestic violence is mostly inflicted against unmarried girls. There is a relatively set sequence in recourse seeking for unmarried and married women. In case of non-domestic violence, a girl usually shares her problem with her mother. The parents try to resolve the problem at first by discussing it with the perpetrator's parents. If the violence still continues, the parents of the girl may seek intervention from the local leaders, who may or may not hold a *shalish* depending on perceived seriousness of the violence and

the leaders' stake in it. If a *shalish* is held and the man/boy is found guilty, he may be slapped or beaten in public. In rape cases, the *shalish* may charge a fine and/or the perpetrator and the victim maybe forced into marriage.

An abused married woman would first try to resolve the problem through *aposh* (compromise, mediation) and would first ask help from the in-laws living in the same household or *bari* (compound). If this does not work, she may involve her natal family. If negotiations between the two families do not resolve the problem and the natal family is strong enough to push this further the matter would be raised at the community level. If this is still not resolved the Ward Member would be approached. If they fail to resolve the matter through informal discussion, they are supposed to hold a *shalish*. The *shalish* is an age-old informal system of community-based dispute resolution. The arbitration is typically a public event in which local influential figures play the role of mediator, arbitrator, or judge. A typical *shalish* involves two to three meetings of the disputing parties with six-to-seven members who negotiate the conflict.

In case of marital violence, the *shalish* attempts to carry out mediation. Scolding, threats, and reasoning are commonly used during such mediation. The perpetrator is advised and instructed not to resort to violence and the abused woman is instructed to adhere and conform to the wishes of the husband for avoiding victimization. Sometimes the parents of the perpetrator and the abused woman are also scolded to ensure the couple behaves. On some occasions, the in-laws of the victim may even experience ***kan mola*** (ear twisting), which is considered an insulting punishment. In the process of the mediation, patriarchal gender norms are reinforced by treating and reemphasizing that violence is normal, blaming the woman for causing the violence and making her to ask forgiveness from the husband. The following narrative by an FGD participant illustrates this well.

"Nargis would have died if he (her husband) continued to press on to her throat with his leg two minutes more. …She was thrown out of the house. She returned to her natal family and told (her relatives) 'I will not stay married to this man anymore. …His beatings are so severe that I would have died if the neighbours did not intervene. I would not go back to that house anymore.' Her parents kept her for 15 or 16 days and they tried to reason with her. Then a shalish was arranged. The man said, 'I

found fault with her. I forbade her to talk to certain persons and forbade her to go to some places. (She did not adhere). So, I beat her.' Considering the future of the two children, we had no other option than to make a compromise and make her go back to her (marital) home. This is what parents usually do. In the Shalish, the woman is usually told that men are like this. So, you have to abide by his wishes and instructions. Whether or not the woman is at fault, she has to ask forgiveness of her husband touching his feet and only then, she can continue the relationship. …

A woman has no way to say a word upholding her head. A woman has to cook his rice even if a husband breaks her bones and she has to apologise touching his feet."

FGD_Married women

In most of the cases, holding *shalish* may provide only temporary respite from violence. As the women in an FGD session said:

Participant 1: No matter what happens in a shalish the man remains bad.

Participant 2: So, after a few days the violence starts again.

FGD_Married women

When the outcome of the *shalish* is a divorce, the woman's side demands back the dowry paid. However, a large portion of this recovered amount is usually goes to the members of the *shalish*. The FGD participants told the research team the following.

Moderator: Does the shalish help in getting back the dowry paid?

Participant 1: If the man's side pays Tk. 20,000 the matbor would take Tk. 10,000 and give the woman's side Tk. 10,000.

Participant 2: (Sarcastically) Wouldn't they need tea and snacks?

FGD_Married women

If the perpetrator is a powerful person or a person with good connections, even grievous crimes of VAWG may not yield any *shalish*. The *matbor*s usually try to stop people going to a level beyond the village with a complaint regarding VAWG. As the male participants of an FGD explained:

Participant 1: This case does not go to the administration.

Moderator: I did not understand what you said about administration?

Participant 2: The matbor of the man's village does not let the case go to the administration as he is aware of the implication of processing a case of violence against women through the administration. …Either they resolve it themselves or

they go to the Union Parishad Chairman. The village court decides what to do.

FGD_Men

The informants mentioned that there is a committee for dealing with VAWG at the UP, but they added that only a few know about this cell. If the complaint is brought to the notice of the UP Chairperson, the process is more or less similar to the one followed by *shalish* with the only difference that all parties sign the resolution.

NGOs like BRAC and Taranga Mohila Shongshtha a local NGO in Jamalpur provide women and girls with legal aid in case of violence. BRAC charges Tk. 50 for the service, which is considered relatively cheap by the villagers. Economically disadvantaged women abused by their husbands sometimes take these services. Another advantage of using BRAC's legal services mentioned by the female informants is that a BRAC member can easily go to a BRAC office for filing a complaint without raising any suspicion. The confidentiality maintained by BRAC also helps to avoid pressure to stop the process at an early stage. BRAC also provides legal support to unmarried girls who are rape victims. However, in most of the cases BRAC's intervention involved dealing with marriage problems such as abandonment of a wife or remarriage, divorce, etc. Informants reported that these NGOs encouraged the community leaders to use their services for addressing VAWG.

For relatively financially strong families, unsatisfactory outcomes of *shalish* may lead to a decision to access legal services. However, such cases are extremely rare in cases of violence perpetrated by a husband. One case described by a key informant from Jamalpur suggests that these measures do not always help in stopping the violence. The woman in question was severely physically abused by her husband and in-laws frequently. When she could not endure it anymore, she requested help from the community leaders. The community leaders were unable to stop to the violence. So, she left her marital home. Her natal family filed a case. The marital family then started pleading with different community leaders and the woman's family to drop the charges. Finally, they were successful in convincing the community leaders and the woman's family that they would take the woman back and would never abuse her again if the charges were dropped. The charges were dropped and the

woman returned to her marital family. The informant added, “She gets beaten again. …But she does not complain to the *matbor* anymore.”

KII_Female

The police and the lawyers are corrupt and victims rarely see justice. Thus, recourse seeking at different levels proves to be futile in most cases, discouraging engagement in this process.

3.3 Barriers in help seeking

3.3.1 Barriers in help seeking cutting across village and upper levels

The data illustrate how factors at different levels such as individual, household and family, community, and society separately and in interaction with each other produce multiple barriers in help seeking for the abused women and girls. Patriarchal structures and ideology create some generic barriers in help seeking. For example, the notions of *lojja* (shame), *kolonker (disgraceful incidence that tarnishes a woman or girl’s character), loss of maan-shomman or ijjat (respect, prestige)* and blaming of the victim intervene with help seeking at all levels.

Patriarchy prescribed gender roles, endorsement of VAWG and the culture of silence

Being part of a violent incident as a victim is adequate for labelling the woman or the girl concerned as “bad”. The notion that the victim must be bad and she must have invited the violence somehow underlies loss of “*maan-shomman”* or “*ijjat”* (respect) of the victim and her family. As one of our key informants mentioned,

> *“She (the victim) would not be able to show her face if people come to know of this (the incident of sexual harassment or rape).”*

KII_Female

Another key informant mentioned that consequences of such disclosure include *thutu dibey* (people would spit on you). According to our informants, protecting *ijjat and maan-shomman* is more important than receiving monetary compensation for sexual harassment or rape. These attitudes, beliefs, values and reactions discourage the family members and the victim from disclosing the experience of

violence. The family members often put pressure on the victim to keep such incidents confidential. Internalization of such beliefs often precludes disclosure of violence by the affected families.

In case of sexual harassment and rape, concealment of violence is reinforced by the notions of "*kolonkar"* and *lojja.* Both of these are imposed on the victim. Disclosure and recourse seeking for sexual harassment and rape damage the marriage prospects of unmarried girls and threatens the marriages of married women. A "good" girl is not supposed to have any knowledge of sex and even if she knows or experiences something sexual, she should have the sense of decency to be ashamed of talking about it. Thus, a girl experiencing sexual harassment or even rape is bound to be silent from the very outset.

As a key informant explained, the silence of a girl in the face of sexual harassment begins immediately. When she starts being harassed, she cannot protest for fear of drawing attention, making other people aware of it and also for fear of escalation of violence. However, the paradox is that her silence encourages the perpetrator(s) to continue and even increase the violence, which sometimes escalates into rape.

The notions of *Lojja, kolonker,* loss of *maan-shomman* or *ijjat* were linked to victim blaming. A woman/girl is also supposed to be "bad" otherwise men cannot access her for abusing. As one female FGD participant said,

"The girl (victim) is marked as 'bad'. …People would say he/they couldn't do it if she wasn't bad.

FGD_Married women

The FGD participants mentioned that the guardians of the victim keep silent in fear of *kolonkar,* getting the girl labelled "bad" and damaging her marriage prospects. This inhibits community and family members from taking any measures against violence and facilitates perpetuation of the perpetrators. According to the study participants, lack of punishment encourages and perpetuates sexual harassment and rape of unmarried girls.

The issues raised in this sub-section are portrayed in the following discussion in an FGD with unmarried adolescent girls.

Moderator: *How does a sexual harassment case get resolved?*

Participant 1: *No. That does not happen much in our locality.*

Moderator: *You mentioned earlier that mediation happens between families.*

Participant 2: *The girl's family wants to cover up the girl's* ***kolonko*** *and tries to resolve it limiting the discussion within the two families. If this spreads…*

Participant 3: *You know, what would happen to a girl if this spreads.*

Participant 2: *If this damages maan-shomman or* ***attoshomman*** *(self-respect) then it becomes a pain.*

Participant 1: *There would be no other alternative than to die.*

Participant 2: *She does not have any way out other than committing suicide. …*

Participant 3: *Most of the people avoid shalish. …*

Participant 2: *As this only spreads her bad name. The people wonder why she was harassed …may be her character is loose. … Before sending a marriage proposal, the neighbours are usually asked about the girl. If they find this out her marriage gets delayed. …*

FGD Unmarried adolescents

As mentioned by the women community leaders in Faridpur, local leaders also want to cover up incidents of sexual harassment or rape.

Participant 1: ***Matbor*** *says, please wait and see what happens next.*

Participant 2: *Keep silent and see what happens.*

Participant 3: *Beware! Your* ***maan-shomman*** *(reputation/respect) will be damaged and you'll lose* ***ijjat*** *(respect). Good that you came to me and told me. Don't you dare to leak this to other people!*

FGD Women community leaders

The reasons for such reluctance of a *matbor* in addressing sexual harassment and rape have been elaborated later in the paper.

Fear of violent repercussion at different levels

Many of the perpetrators of VAWG are gangsters owning some kind of weapon or firearms or powerful people in the community. Their affiliation with political parties accrue them power. Fear of repercussion very often inhibits intervention by the family, the community members and sometimes even by the NGO workers. Informants cited examples where the people who tried to stop the violence were actually victimized (See Case Study 1). Even the parents of the boys who sexually harass girls are often unable to discipline them, fearing worsening of the situation. Fear of repercussion is so great that rape by powerful men commonly go unpunished. Sometimes the perpetrators are so strong and threatening that the community leaders avoid arranging a *shalish* fearing repercussion. One of the male key informants mentioned,

"An abused girl/woman cannot demand recourse due to social barriers. Usually such violence is perpetrated either by the sons of the influential people or by extremely bad elements (in the community). Now, if I want some measures against such a boy he can cause me great harm."

KII_Male

If a woman seeks shelter in a neighbouring house during a beating episode, the relationship between the husband and the neighbouring family may be jeopardized as people are not supposed to intervene in private matters. Also, there is a high possibility that giving shelter to an abused woman/girl may be interpreted as an indication of romantic relationship between woman/girl and her protector regardless of marital status of the woman or the girl. Thus, fear of being unjustifiably blamed deters helping an abused woman.

Dependent status of women and girls, patrilocal marriage, village exogamy

The sociocultural norms make women vulnerable and dependent on others for addressing violence. Women's mobility is restricted and they need to observe *purdah* curtailing their ability to seek recourse independently. As one female key informant said, "*She needs a guardian (in the process of seeking justice*). Moreover, recourse seeking involves costs. Most of the women do not earn an income. Thus, they have to depend on their natal family members for financial support. Poverty is rampant and natal families often do not have resources to support the women. It might not even be in favour of a natal family having adequate resources to invest in recourse seeking for a married abused woman as this can lead to marriage breakdown making the woman completely dependent on the

natal family. The women pointed out these circumstances commonly preclude any attempt at addressing violence and make them accept it.

Marriages are patrilocal in Bangladesh and village exogamy is widely practiced making women lose their social network in the village of origin. This weakens her ability to draw upon support in case of violence. As mentioned by the informants, the villagers in her husband's village usually take his side regardless of their knowledge of what actually has happened and who is to blame. As a key informant explained,

"Why would the villagers be on the woman's side? This is her husband's native village. She doesn't have her people here."

KII_Female

3.3.2 Barriers in achieving appropriate response to VAWG at the village level

Patriarchal notion of justice

Although *shalish* offers some advantages to women over a formal justice system, such as being closer to women's homes and women's familiarity with the members of *shalish*, some major problems remain when it deals with VAWG. The inherent concept of 'justice' or fairness in a *shalish* is shaped by patriarchy, which does not necessarily favour an abused woman or a girl. The judgment at *shalish* is influenced by patriarchal notions of gender roles and responsibilities and acceptability of VAWG. They treat domestic violence as a private matter and try to keep the family intact at any cost. Due to patrilocal marriages a *shalish* for a woman abused by husband is usually arranged in the marital village. As the legitimacy of *shalish* is drawn from the community itself, its decisions are influenced by community sentiments favouring the perpetrator and his family, the natives of the village.

The class dimension: Rich versus poor or perpetrator versus victim

The *shalish* is governed by influential and economically advantaged people from the village. As mentioned by the informants, the perpetrators (particularly of non-domestic violence) are very often economically powerful men, while the victims commonly come from economically disadvantaged families. Thus, there is often solidarity between the members of the *shalish* and the perpetrator's side, dividing this group from the victim's side along the line of wealth.

Case study 1: Kulsum

Kulsum came from a poor family in Faridpur. Her parents used to work as daily labours in the road maintenance programme of the government known as Food for Work. Kulsum had two sisters and a younger brother. When Kulsum reached her teens she started being regularly harassed by a man from a well-to-do family on the street. The family sought help from the neighbours to stop this harassment, which resulted in Kulsum being blamed for it. Kulsum could hardly take this anymore. One day when the man was after her she could not control herself anymore and slapped him. The man threatened to abduct her and proceeded with planning it along with his friends.

Kulsum and her family were apprehensive of a serious repercussion. So, Kulsum had to stop going to school. The family considered this inadequate for protecting Kulsum. So, she had to leave her home and seek shelter at her sister's house in the same village. The boy continued harassing her by sending his friends to her sister's. So, Kulsum had to move to a neighbouring village to live with her aunt. The boy continued to disturb her there with the assistance of his friends. So, the neighbours of her aunt beat up the man and his friends. After a while Kulsum came back home expecting an improved situation.

One day, when Kulsum was returning home from her sister's house she was captured by the man. He forcefully took her to the bamboo cluster and raped her. Kulsum's paternal uncle's wife witnessed the rape. She informed Kulsum's mother of the rape and arranged a civil marriage. Kulsum had to agree to the marriage as she thought nobody else would marry a raped girl.

When the man's family came to know of the marriage they physically assaulted Kulsum's parents. The village leaders put pressure on the man's family to accept the marriage. The man's family demanded a dowry of Tk. 50,000 in cash and one piece of gold jewellery. The villagers negotiated with the man's family convincing them that Kulsum's family can never pay such a huge amount. Finally, they agreed to the marriage in exchange for Tk. 10,000 and one piece of gold jewellery. Kulsum's parents took a loan and went begging for the rest of the amount from the villagers and settled the due.

Kulsum's experience of violence, however, was not over with the marriage. Her marital family kept demanding more and more money from her parents. So, Kulsum's parents had to sell their land and give them about Tk. 30,000. The father-in-law and brothers-in-law used to beat Kulsum. They also tried to rape her on several occasions. If she complained about this her husband used to beat her.

One night Kulsum's elder brother-in-law raped her. The next day Kulsum left her marital home. Her in-laws came, severely abused her and took her back. Her hair was torn and she lost her tooth. Kulsum's father and uncle were also beaten when they tried to protect her. All of them had to go to the hospital for treatment of their injuries. A case was filed with financial support from Kulsum's maternal uncle. The village leaders started to put pressure on Kulsum's family to withdraw the case promising to resolve the issue at the village level. They even arranged the money for covering the case withdrawal cost. Kulsum's family had to give in to this pressure. The village leaders arranged a divorce and made the man's side pay back Tk.10,000 given to them as dowry.

Kulsum attempted suicide twice. One of her neighbours encouraged her not to commit suicide and arranged a job for her in a garment factory in Dhaka. Kulsum was working at this factory for two months at the time of the data collection.

Corruption

Sometimes, the village leaders are bribed for not arranging a *shalish*. Even if a *matbor* arranges a *shalish* the outcome does not necessarily go in favour of the victim due to bribing of the *matbor*. Lack of justice, therefore, discourages people from seeking recourse.

Although conventionally a *matbor* cannot earn an income from arranging a *shalish,* in reality he demands money for arranging a *shalish*. According to the female community leaders, the *matbor* starts collecting money from both the parties even before a *shalish* is arranged. Usually the perpetrator's side is more resourceful than the victim's and they easily supass the victim's family in bribing relevant authorities. One female key informant from Faridpur said,

"There is a matbor here who is extremely wicked. He takes bribe from both the parties. He would tell (the perpetrator's party) you just see I would not allow any shalish for this. If the victim's party enquires about the shalish he would say how can you discuss this in front of others? You have to hang your head further if that happens. You just keep silent and I'll see what I can do."

KII_Female

When the *matbor* cannot avoid arranging a *shalish* he tries to gain as much money as possible from the situation. This was described by participants of an FGD as follows:

Participant 1: *They arrange a shalish if they gain something from it.*

Participant 2: *Suppose they calm down the father of the girl and the boy somehow. Then they demand money.*

Participant 3: *Matbor wanted money for cha-biscuit (tea and biscuits) from me. Then, …Is Tk. 50 required to come this far?*

Participant 4: *Right. The fare is Tk. 5 only.*

Participant 3: *He said, "Why aren't you giving me the conveyance? How would you see justice then?" I did not give him the conveyance. I said, "I'll give you Tk. 700 (for the shalish)". But he demanded Tk. 800.*

Participant 2: *We don't like the matbor. … We have to give him money.*

Participant 1: *He wouldn't come if you don't give him conveyance.*

Participant 2: *Suppose I convened a shalish. The party that I have convened shalish against would give money to the matbor. I'd try to talk to (the matbor) and would go to him two-three times. But he received money (from the other party). So, I won't find him.*

Participant 1: *I wouldn't see his tail. I would find him if I gave him money.*

Participant 3: *Yes, I'd find him in that case.*

Participant 1: *I went to him five times, but I did not give him any money. They went to see him once and they gave him money right away.*

Participant 2: *What did he do then? …He did not come (to the shalish). I called people. What would it be like if he did not come? It would be embarrassing. So, I went to him again. I pleaded with him touching his feet and finally made him come.*

Participant 3: *I couldn't give him money and he (the perpetrator) could. …The outcome (of the shalish) was determined by the money. He sent me away saying this and that.*

Participant 1: *Money! O money!*

Participant 2,4: *This is what happens in a shalish.*

FGD_Women community leaders

If the perpetrator is powerful, his family tries to silence the case by bribing the *matbor*. The men participating in an FGD described this as follows:

Participant 1: *If the boy's party is strong they would try to hush it up.*

Participant 2: *by giving money.*

Participant 3: *They try to cover it up.*

Participant 4: *They have money. So, they can give the matbor Tk.500 instructing him how to proceed with the case. You would prove that it is a lie that I beat her. So, they would give the matbor Tk. 500 or Tk. 1,000 or Tk. 2,000. There are five matbors in the village and they would bring them on their side in that way.*

FGD_Men

Not only the *matbor*, but also all the members of the *shalish* and the *shalish* as an institution may derive financial benefits from such mediation, which had been illustrated in the following case from Jamalpur.

A man entered a house and raped the woman taking advantage of her husband's absence. The husband suddenly returned home to find what was happening. The rapist fled. The husband blamed the woman, thrashed her severely and threw her out. The husband's family joined him in blaming the woman saying that you cannot clap with one hand implying that she must have a relationship with the rapist. The woman's natal family took her back home. A *shalish* was arranged. The couple got divorced and the rapist was charged a fine of Tk. 30,000. The *shomaj* received the money. The money was used for buying crockery and mats for the *shomaj.* The key informant narrating the incident was using these as part of the *shomaj*.

Male dominated Shalish inhibits women's access

Due to the practices of patrilocal marriage and village exogamy a *shalish* is usually arranged in the marital village or in the village of the perpetrator. A *shalish* is a male dominated institution. Only recently have the female UP members been expected to participate in a *shalish.* However, they are sometimes not invited to take part in *shalish*. Even if she is present, they are often not sensitive to a victim's problems and they master little power for making a case. The members are reported to usually side with the perpetrator and more so when they are bribed. Women rarely have the capacity to compete with men in bribing these community leaders. Usually the women are not allowed to serve as witness at a *shalish* despite the fact that they stay home and usually witness VAWG at home and in neighbouring houses. Thus, a combination of male witnesses and male decision makers in the perpetrator's village preclude attaining a satisfactory judgement for the victim.

A *matbor* bribed by the perpetrator's side navigates the course of *shalish.* He does not allow the victim's side to present relevant evidence against the perpetrator, and scolds or uses body language that reinforces the victim's fear in speaking out at such a gathering. Thus, he ensures that the outcome of the *shalish* does not go in favour of the victim. Married women participating in an FGD vividly describe what usually takes place in such *shalish*.

Moderator: *Can a woman talk at a shalish? Is she allowed to talk at a shalish?*

Participant 1: *She is allowed.*

Participant 2: *Even if she wants to talk, the matbor would give her a stern look and her heart weighing 5 seers would shrink to 1.5 seers (in fear). She would not talk anymore.*

Participant 3: *He would get and demand, "Hey, hold your tongue! Respond to my question only." He would start scolding like this.*

Participant 4: *He would say, "Say this (what she was talking about) later" or "You don't need to say what happened".*

Participant 3: *This is what he does.*

Participant 2: *Such scolding makes the woman forget half of the truth.*

Participant 4: *Such scolding in public makes her humiliated.*

Participant 5: *She was humiliated to begin with and she gets more humiliated.*

Participant 6: *If he said, "Okay. Don't be afraid. Tell us everything without holding anything back." Only then, can one talk. We do not have any way to make the woman overcome her fear.*

Then a participant gave a concrete example.

Participant 7: *My aunt's hair was torn (by her uncle). Whenever she wanted to mention that....*

Participant 1: *wanted to show that the place from where the hair was torn off, he (the matbor) would say, "Drop that (description)." …*

Participant 4: *Nobody wanted to know how much pain she had.*

Participant 5: *He (the uncle) beats her during sexual intercourse.*

Participant 1: *He (the uncle) beats her during sexual intercourse. He says a lot of abusive things such as: "I didn't have any peace marrying you. You get me another wife. You arrange a marriage for me." …If she wants to report these, the matbor stops her by saying, "This is the next topic."*

Participant 2: *"Say what you are supposed to say now."*

Participant 3: *I witnessed how she tried to report these but he didn't let her. He said, "Be quiet! Be quiet!"*

FGD_Married women

Thus, participants from this FGD clearly identified lack of opportunity to defend herself and lack of a woman's skills in presenting a case of violence in *shalish*. According to the participants, knowledge of existing laws and legal provisions is not sufficient for achieving a favourable outcome for an abused woman when she lacks these skills.

Adverse consequences of *Shalish*

Potential adverse outcomes of *shalish* often discourage people from seeking justice in VAWG. The verdict may not necessarily go in favour of the victim; it may not appropriately address the victim's concerns and well-being; it may as well stigmatize the woman/girl and her family isolating them from the village community and sometimes uprooting them from the village (See Case Study 2).

3.3.3 Barriers in seeking legal support from formal institutions

As mentioned above, only in a very few cases individuals seek help from formal institutions to address VAWG. The main barriers in accessing these services mentioned by the informants were poverty, corruption, lack of power and social network, and lack of justice. Important dimensions of these such as pressure from the perpetrators; the *matbor*s and UP chairperson not filing a case or dropping a case linked to corruption; and lack of knowledge of the victim's side regarding laws and the legal system have been repeatedly mentioned by the informants. Participants of an FGD said the following:

Participant 1: *If the girl's family has good financial condition, they may go to seek legal support from the state.*

Participant 2: *One in ten cases go (to formal sources) if they come from the upper class. … Those with power see justice, others do not. …The bottom line is in the words of a villager the one who owns five sticks can achieve this. Those who do not have any money or supporters have to sit idle and be victims of violence.*

FGD_Men

Two FGD participants described high cost of seeking justice from a higher level as follows:

Participant 1: *How would they file a case? ... The police are also very wicked. They do not come if money is not given….If I don't give money I wouldn't be secured. If I can give money a case would be filed. But it needs a lot of money. So, I have*

to remain the person who is blamed whether or not I did anything wrong.

Participant 2: *Don't you know that even the bricks and the walls of the police station and the court extend their hands asking for money?*

FGD_Women community leaders

A key informant from Jamalpur described the following scenario:

"I have to go to the lawyer through a broker. Suppose I pay the lawyer Tk. 3, 000 I have to pay the broker Tk. 2,000. …If I go to the police station and if I don't have any leader to back me up the police would tell me you have this paper, but you don't have that paper and finally he would take a lot of money from me. (The police) would say, "Okay we are doing the job, but you have to pay Tk. 10,000." Gaining some confidence from the police, I'd sell my goat and take the money to the police station. In my presence, the police would receive a phone call instructing them not to take the case, as the perpetrator is a relative of a big shot. Then the person seeking justice would lose from both the ends. The proceeds from sale of the goat are spent without seeing any justice."

KII_Male

There seem to be three main reasons why the *matbor*s and the UP chairperson put pressure on the victim's side not to file a case or to drop a case. First, they may be pressurized and bribed by the perpetrator. Second, there is monetary gain (sometimes from both the parties) for the *matbor* if the case is handled at a *shalish.* Third, the political leaders of the area may not want to see cases of VAWG reflecting badly on them (as in Faridpur). The participants of an FGD elaborated these points as follows:

Participant 1: *Once a case is filed the perpetrator's party gets scared of arrest. It is not possible to prevent arrest without money. Once the police arrests him there is no way out without money. No matter how much money they have, it may be inadequate. Then they go to the matbor again and squeeze him (giving money). Then the matbors come to the woman calling, "Sister! O sister! This is a matter of our village. Why go such a distance for resolving it. I'll give you money. Go and withdraw the case. If I remain determined, he would plead me touching my feet three times a day. The money would pour in from that corner (the perpetrator's side) and the matbor would try to convince me. …*

Participant 2: *If this does not work, he (the perpetrator) would go to the gangsters and tell them that the case has been filed and there is nothing to do about it. You*

make sure that the police cannot touch me. He would give three of them three handful of money. These three would go together to the X, relative of the high government official. No case is accepted in this union without his permission. …Let me tell you, which is the source of the problem. If a case is brought to the police station the police would ask, "Do you have X's permission?" "Call X". He says over phone, "…A case has been brought from this place. Should we take it?" If the police Officer and the inspector call him, the OC (Officer in Charge) would go to him in person to double check. If X says no, the case would not be recorded. (He'd say), "You lodge complaint at the Union Parishad and arrange a shalish."

If the case is already filed then the three gangsters tell X to see that everything is okay. X, then tells the inspector and the OC, "Don't you go for arresting him. …I know him and I have witnessed the event."

FGD_Women community leaders

The *matbor* becomes especially active when a case is filed and the perpetrator's party bribes him. At this point, a *matbor* concentrates his efforts in making the victim's family withdraw the case offering them either false hope that justice will be done at the village level (See Case Study 2) or threatening them with *ekghorey kora (*social isolation) (See Jomila's example) or even with eviction from the village. The married women participating in an FGD described this as follows:

Moderator: *Suppose the woman was not satisfied with the outcome of the shalish. Does she then resort to any legal measures?...*

Participant 1: *She may go. But if the matbor of my village or the chairman says, "This is my problem and I'll see what to do." Then the police station would not accept the case anymore.*

Participant 2: *If they say, "Don't you file a case. We'll see what we can do."*

Participant 3: *"We'll see what we can do."*

Participant 4: *But nothing is done in reality.*

Participant 5: *Then she won't go any further. She would withdraw the case and it would stay that way.*

FGD_Married women

This is also clear from Jomila's case. Jomila came from an extremely poor family. She was raped at six. The 17-year-old rapist came from a wealthy and influential family. Jomila's grandmother found him raping Jomila in the cowshed. The grandmother's scream drew people to the spot and the rapist was caught. Jomila was bleeding profusely. She was taken to the Jamalpur General Hospital for treatment. A *shalish* was arranged immediately. The *matbor*s were bribed and so they charged the rapist with only Tk. 20,000 fine. A member of the local youth club could not accept this decision and asked advice of an advocate. As per the advocate's suggestion and with support from the youth club member Jomila's mother filed a case in the category of *Nari o Shishu Nirjatan Domon Ain*. An arrest warrant was issued against the rapist. Several *matbor*s from Jomila's native village and the neighboring villages threatened to kill the girl and to ostracize and isolate the family (ekghorey). They demanded that Jomila's family drop the case in exchange for the amount negotiated in the first place. In order to prevent further damage Jomila's father had to withdraw the case.

Case Study 2: Komola

Komola was the daughter of a poor farmer in Jamalpur. She and her sisters used to have a tutor named Korim, who made her pregnant. When she told her parents about the pregnancy and who was responsible for it the parents went to see Korim's family. Korim came from a financially strong and influential family and when the family came to know of the incident they made it clear that Korim is not going to marry Komola. Failing to achieve an optimal solution, Komola's family turned to the community leaders. The family wanted to file a police case. But the community leaders discouraged them saying this would be a futile exercise. They suggested a settlement through *shalish.* The *shalish* convened charged Korim with a fine of Tk. 30,000. After the *shalish* everybody started to tease Komola saying that her price is Tk.30,000. The family could not cope with this and had to leave the village.

3.4 Recommendations

3.4.1 *Prevention of VAWG*

Transforming patriarchal attitudes and perceptions favouring VAWG

In general, key informants and FGD participants across gender and age emphasized the importance of preventive actions such as conscientization and attitude change regarding gender and VAWG. The target has been defined as the general population, the potential perpetrators, village leaders and groups that may serve as allies in preventing VAWG. The informants considered it important to target the schoolteachers and the students for prevention of sexual harassment of girls.

The local government, NGOs, local male and female youth clubs, schools and mosques were identified by the informants as potential actors in carrying out conscientization. Having men on board was mentioned by many informants as an effective strategy. The importance of having young men as allies was emphasized, as was the importance of solidarity among different groups and working collectively in this endeavour.

The informants suggested that conscientization be carried out in different ways, one of which was to use the present group structures of the NGOs. They also suggested organizing meetings, seminars, camps and discussion in informal gatherings and in schools. Informants suggested the use of skits, street plays and film shows in the community to bringing about attitudinal change. People suggested miking (i.e., going all over the village spreading messages using a loud speaker) the in the village for information campaign regarding VAWG related laws. Media campaign for conscientization was recognized as a potential effective tool for campaign. Interestingly, while misuse of technology such as cell phone, memory stick, photo editing software, etc in abusing women and girls have been pointed out by the community members the potential use of technology (e.g., text messaging using cell phones or hotline, etc) for addressing this problem was also mentioned across sites.

Ensuring equal rights to women and men

The female informants emphasized ensuring equal rights to women and men as a way of addressing VAWG. Some of them also mentioned the importance of ensuring equity and not only equality. Some desired to address misinterpretation of the notion of equality by men emphasizing equality in earning

the same amount of income, disregarding equality in other spheres accruing women the burden of double day.

Some women suggested that ensuring women's right to divorce may reduce violence. They were, however, concerned about abuse of this right by husbands who want to end the relationship without having to pay the *denmohor* (dower).

Economic empowerment of women and poverty reduction

Some male FGD participants and male key informants related poverty and male unemployment to the perpetration of violence. In line with this, they recommended creating better economic opportunities for men and poverty reduction as strategies for addressing VAWG. Female key informants also suggested poverty reduction as an important strategy for reducing violence, but they emphasized employment of women and women's economic empowerment as critical for addressing violence.

Strengthening school education and addressing substance abuse

In Faridpur, the informants mentioned addressing substance abuse, offering proper education in schools, and increasing the workload of students so as not to allow them to engage in sexual harassment as a way of addressing VAWG.

Implementation of laws

The informants also mentioned the preventive role of legislation, exemplary punishment and measures taken by the community to address VAWG.

3.4.2 *Response of VAWG*

Laws and their implementation

There was consensus about the need for laws to respond to VAWG. Although the men and the women were aware of existence of a law against *Nari Nirjatan* by which they referred to the *Nari o Shishu Nirjatan Domon Ain* (2000) and the law against sexual harassment, they were unclear about the content of the law. Also, they were completely unaware about the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010. Some female informants were sceptical about exercising their right to file a complaint while staying in the marital home according to this bill. One female key informant said,

"What law are you talking about? We couldn't complain even when we went to our father's home. If we file a complaint, while staying in the marital home they would kill me before I see the next day. My in-laws wouldn't leave me alive if I file a case, while I eat his rice and live in his home."

KII_Female

Once they were informed about the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010, they felt that a wide campaign needs to be initiated for making people aware of the Act through newspapers, radio, television, and text messaging. According to them, the main responsibility of this campaign needs to be shouldered by the government and the NGOs. The informants underlined the importance of implementation of these laws.

The community people put forward some concrete suggestions for responding to VAWG. These suggestions may be broadly divided into: 1) Strengthening and modification of the existing structures; 2) Creating new structures.

Strengthening and modification of the existing institutions for improved response

All informants strongly suggested corrective measures for the elements of the existing system that hinder appropriate response to VAWG. As shown above, concerns regarding corruption at all levels of the system were high. A range of recommendations were put forward for addressing corruption of the *matbor*, which included careful selection of a *matbor*, putting pressure on the *matbor* to stop corruption and bypassing the *matbor*.

The unmarried adolescents suggested careful selection of a neutral person as the *matbor* and a government assigned committee for dealing with arbitration at the village level. The women were more pragmatic and considered no villager as capable of being neutral. Therefore, they contended that some sort of monitoring system or vigilance on part of the government (e.g., similar to what is done during elections) would be useful. The male key informants suggested empowering the local government for addressing corruption by the *matbor* and forming investigating committees, when needed. The female informants recommended empowerment of the women UP member, employing female police force recruiting women from the same village for addressing VAWG. Many informants

suggested creating pressure on the local government by the local youth clubs, educated rural people and the masses for stopping corruption of the *matbor*. Overall, both male and female informants desired strengthening systems of accountability of matbors.

An innovative suggestion made by the female informants for addressing corruption of the *matbor* was stigmatizing the *matbor* for taking bribes. Posting of satirical cartoons in market places and arranging street plays were suggested by women. Most of the informants also emphasized the need for a system that allows bypassing the village recourse seeking mechanism when the victim wants to access the services of the police or the lawyers. Some male informants suggested keeping a complaint box, handled, not by the village leaders, but by the law enforcing authorities.

Strengthening of gram police (community police) for executing an effective surveillance and establishment of strong liaison with local police station for shortening lengthy legal procedures were recommended.

The informants demanded that the government take effective measures to address corruption among the law enforcement agencies and the legal system. The suggested measures were: charging a fine, suspending, sacking, and imprisoning the corrupted employees.

The female informants emphasized the importance of educating the *matbor*s and the representatives of the local government in dealing with VAWG following the existing laws and legal provisions and holding them accountable in case of deviations.

It is noteworthy that the women recognized male dominance at all levels as an important deterant to achieving effective response to VAWG. They underlined the centrality of woman's voice in the process, which was expected to ensure women's choice at the same time. The female informants believed that an abused woman could better defend herself and could have a better chance of attaining what she wants if she could speak out and could collect the courage to face the powerful men who try to silence her. One female key informant emphasized this as follows:

"If the women could speak out they wouldn't die here and there in such numbers."

KII_Female

Therefore, the women recommended adequate representation of women in *shalish,* empowerment of the female UP members, having women *matbors*, empowerment of women and development of women's skills in being vocal, allowing women to serve as witness not only at the village level, but also at higher levels. Safety of victims and witnesses was considered important for ensuring recourse seeking.

Participant 1: *Ensure that the women can serve as witnesses.*

Participant 2,3: *Yes, yes.*

Participant 3: *Let the government ensure equal rights for men and women and give the women the right so that…*

Participant 1: *they can go to the court.*

Participant 3: *and speak out with courage. I mean so that she can serve as a witness. …*

Participant 1: *so that she can say what she has to say. …so that the matbors listen to her and base their judgement on her deposition.*

FGD_Women community leaders

Participants of a female FGD recommended that resource poor victims access the services free of cost. NGO interventions were highly desired in ensuring justice in VAWG related cases. So, some women demanded that there are more NGOs like BRAC, where abused women could go for help.

Participant 1: *Let there be organizations like BRAC so that we get support.*

Participant 2: *There should be a place where women can go and the men would realize that they cannot beat their wives anymore. A man would get that he will be tried and punished if she goes there.*

FGD_Married women

Developing new structures

Some informants suggested forming a village committee for addressing VAWG with representation from all the social groups. Involving the youth was emphasized in ensuring justice for the victims of violence at the village level mediations. The female informants suggested women's *shalish* have the power to charge a fine and lock-up a perpetrator. According to them, this would ensure a woman's right to be a witness and enable a victim and her family to directly present their case, leading to justice for the victim. They speculated that once such a system based on equal rights of women and men to present and deal with violence cases is established and recognized, justice to victims of violence would be ensured. *"Only a woman understands the pain of a woman."* According to these women,

there are such organizations (e.g., Nari Kallyan Shongstha) in some villages. They suggested the government set up similar organizations.

Pointing out to fear and inhibition of the victims to go directly to the police one key informant suggested an additional layer of services between the victims and the police for enabling greater service uptake. Both male and female informants suggested establishing a service centre hosted by NGOs for providing all relevant services to abused women and girls either at the level of clusters of villages or at the union level. It needs to be pointed out that informants from none of the study villages in Faridpur were aware of the One-Stop Crisis Centre (OCC) initiative of the government located in Faridpur district hospital.

Some of the informants suggested establishing women's centres or clubs or collectives at the village level. The women and girls suggested several membership options for these clubs or collectives. One option was to include married and unmarried women under the leadership of strong women from the community. The other option was to include young sensible (who support women in case of VAWG) men from the community. The rationale put forward was it would be easier to work having men as allies. Some women and girls suggested, as a strategy, including local respectable and powerful men in this group, as vocal women are usually disrespected and disregarded in the community and it would take time to change people's attitudes. These collectives were supposed to function as pressure groups for ensuring appropriate response to VAWG. A suggestion was to hold women's court, which will be sensitive to the needs and choice of the victims in dealing with the complaints, investigating the case, getting testimonies, judging the case and issuing a verdict.

One female key informant from Faridpur suggested a hotline. She said,

"Out of fear many women cannot say what they witness. If I (for example) say anything they (the people from perpetrator's side) will hit me, beat me and kill me. There is no protest against such things. We could provide information if the government gave us a mobile phone number, which could be used to contact government people or we could tell them that we are in danger and you need to come and help."

KII_Female

4. DISCUSSION

This study shows that addressing VAWG remains challenging as patriarchal structures and ideology create a culture of silence around VAWG. The situation is worsened due to lack of resources, power dynamics within the village and beyond favouring of the perpetrator(s), and corruption at all levels. VAWG is a complex issue and addressing it necessitates engaging with different levels of the patriarchal society (Naved, & Persson, 2005). Thus, solutions offered by the community people embraced all the levels of the ecological framework (i.e., individual, couple, family, community, and society) and covered both prevention and response to VAWG.

The study participants provided us with insights and innovative suggestions for addressing VAWG. Informants emphasized the need for prevention work involving gender equality, equity and attitudinal change. While both men and women talked about community campaigns in general, women suggested as well targeting the potential perpetrators and men and boys as allies. They felt that it is important to involve the local people, particularly boys and men, youth clubs, schools, mosques, NGOs, the government at the local and higher levels. They suggested multiple ways of infusing this change such as informal gatherings, meetings, workshops, seminars, sessions of NGO group members, skits, street plays, film shows and text messaging using mobile phones.

While men talked about poverty reduction and particularly mentioned employment opportunities for men as a VAWG prevention strategy, the women recommended women's economic empowerment and empowerment in other dimensions for the prevention of VAWG. This recommendation may appear to contradict the finding from our quantitative study that working women are more likely to be exposed to violence (Amin, Khan, Rahman, & Naved, 2013). It needs to be understood that economic empowerment is suggested up and above the existing level and along with many other measures. The recommendations made by the women are in line with the recent review of 14 interventions in different developing countries showing that a combination of economic empowerment of adolescent girls with interventions for building self-efficacy and other skills reduces violence against adolescent girls (Blanc, Melnikas, Chau, & Stoner, 2012).

Though the *shalish* is not a legally mandated institution, according to the ICRW-UNFPA study (2009) nearly 70% of local disputes are resolved through this process in Bangladesh. About 53% of rural

shalish meetings and 43% of urban *shalish* meetings were related to intimate partner violence cases. This, however, is the tip of the iceberg as only 3% of the rural and 1% of the urban women physically abused by husbands ever seek help from the local leaders (Naved, Azim, Bhuiya, & Persson, 2006). According to our data, poverty of the victim and her family, corruption, fear of repercussion, and the victim's lack of skills to make her case hamper seeking services. Arranging *shalish,* reporting to the police, filing a case or getting a lawyer involve costs, social network and negotiating skills. The resource poor population cannot afford this cost and thus are automatically excluded from the process of recourse seeking. Due to multiple barriers, even the resourceful families are convinced that the negative consequences of recourse seeking outweigh the advantages. Thus, VAWG remains underreported and under-prosecuted.

A few measures for restructuring and strengthening the system of informal and formal justice were suggested for addressing VAWG and re-victimization or re-traumatisation of victims in the process of recourse seeking. Women and girls identified ***male dominance throughout the system*** as an important deterrent to responding appropriately to VAWG. They suggested: empowering female UP members for defending the abused, having greater female representation in *shalish*, having woman *matbors* lead the *shalish*, allowing women to serve as witnesses at all levels, creating an enabling environment for the victims for presenting their case and voicing their needs. Good governance accompanied with stringent measures of penalty (e.g., charging fines, suspension or firing) and reward were recommended for addressing corruption among the community leaders, the police, and the lawyers. Stigmatizing the corrupted village leaders through skits was also suggested.

Referring to lack of control of women over the recourse seeking process in both the informal or formal justice systems the women and girls highlighted the importance of ***giving victims voice***. The notion of giving voice is in line with the feminist standpoint approach that begins with the idea that less powerful members of society experience a different reality as a consequence of their oppression (Belknap, 2007). Presenting and understanding this perspective is important for designing and undertaking social action on behalf of the victims.

People at the community level were ignorant of Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010. Once they received information on it from the study team they considered it important to

conduct mass information campaign on the Act and other relevant laws related to VAWG. The protection order system rests on the assumption that all survivors wish – or should wish - to exit their abusive relationship (Goodman & Epstein, 2008). The women, however, have numerous reasons for choosing to stay in such a relationship (Garcia-Moreno et. al., 2005), while they just want the violence to stop. Thus, provisions in the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 could not adequately take into account the risks of the women in using it. The women in our study rightly pointed out that in the current situation it is extremely risky for a woman to request protection order staying at her marital home. This needs to be taken into account in implementing the Act. Ensuring safety to abused women should be the cornerstone of interventions. Strategies devised for this needs to be implemented during and post help seeking periods so that the victim is not harmed again.

Feminists are divided in the question whether or not justice for VAWG needs to be sought within or outside the judicial system. Some of them caution against seeking justice for VAWG outside the judicial system as it may create a second rate justice system for VAWG (Coker, 2002). Others welcome restorative justice for dealing with VAWG. In Bangladesh, it is challenging and often not even desirable to address VAWG using only the criminal justice system. The high level of VAWG (Amin et. al., 2013; VanderEnde, Naved, & Amin, 2013) and low level of service uptake (Naved et al., 2006) in Bangladesh raise questions regarding access of women and girls to this system and the capacity of this system to cope with potential case load even if the issue of access was resolved. In Bangladesh, domestic violence is dominant in VAWG with wife-abuse being the most common type of violence. The victims of such violence are usually financially, emotionally and socially dependent on the perpetrators. Solving the problem is commonly a greater concern here than punishing the perpetrator.

Thus, it seems that restorative or transformative justice, which applies a victim-centred approach and aims for reconciliation rather than punishment, healing rather than retribution seems more appropriate for most of the VAWG cases in Bangladesh. “Transformative justice” models address the structural inequalities that frame the battering experience of men and women, provide material and social support for battered women, and hold men who batter responsible for their violence (Coker, 2002). Several NGOs in Bangladesh are actively using elements of restorative or transformative justice for addressing VAWG. However, caution must be taken in allowing application of such justice without

guidance from advocates working against VAWG, which may lead to reinforcement of male control of women (Rubin, 2003). Also, restorative processes may not be appropriate for all situations (van Wormer, 2009). More research is needed for understanding for whom, and for which type of perpetrators this justice would be effective.

The informants highlighted the positive role of NGOs and particularly of BRAC in addressing VAWG. However, a greater engagement of NGOs with VAWG was desired. Female key informants suggested that NGOs provide free health and legal services to resource poor victims. NGO support was recommended in filing a case in villages, where people faced pressure from the powerful people to stop seeking any legal remedies. Both men and women were unaware of the government hosted One-Stop Crisis Centre (OCC) and suggested NGOs set up similar services at the village level or at the union level.

The women demanded hotline services for lodging complaints and consultation regarding VAWG. According to a recent survey 70% of the households in rural Bangladesh own cell phones (Ahmed et al., 2013). Given widespread cell phone ownership and access in Bangladesh appropriately implemented hotline services may largely benefit the victims of violence. It is clear from our study that the information on the available hotlines (e.g., hosted by OCC and by some NGOs) did not reach these women, highlighting the need for proper information campaign.

Women suggested forming women's collectives and women led *shalish* for addressing VAWG. According to them these collectives would give women voice, allow focusing on women's needs and help bypass the traditional system of dispute resolution and the formal justice system. Women and girls were conscious of the fact that these collectives would need support for challenging patriarchy. Therefore, they suggested working closely with local powerful elites and mobilizing young men for supporting activities of the women's collectives. It is noteworthy that such collectives and courts, functioning in different parts of India show promise (ICRW, 2002). Our findings suggest that women and girls from rural communities are ready for similar initiatives. It would be important for Bangladesh to nurture development of these institutions and to examine their impact on VAWG.

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