

# Violence against Women in Bangladesh: A Comparative Study on the Factors of Rural-Urban Settings.

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**Abstract:** Violence against women is a lingering social problem in the world. This paper attempts to explore the nature, causes and dimensions of some important forms of violence against women in Bangladesh. This study was conducted based on secondary data from various sources in Bangladesh. To determine what type of violence is increasing and or decreasing against women currently in Bangladesh, some projections were made using a simple mathematical equation. Results exhibit that women in rural areas experience more in the form of physical, sexual and emotional violence compared to women in settings of Bangladesh. This study also theoretically explores some factors which vary between the rural and urban settings in which women experienced violence differently. Finally, the study suggests some policy recommendations to deal with the issue of violence against women.

**Key Words:** Violence, gender, sexism, dependence, empowerment

## I. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a common phenomenon, particularly in the rural regions of Bangladesh. Various types of violence against women occur in Bangladesh, such as acid throwing, rape, sexual harassment, dowry related violence and various forms of domestic violence. Bangladesh is a male-dominated patriarchal society in which norms and values of its inevitably embedded violence against women. In this country, women's prestige, position and socioeconomic status are usually determined and dominated by the male counterpart. Consequently, the subordination of women in Bangladesh tends to be responsible for the violation of basic rights of females by males in a society like Bangladesh (Reilly 2009; McMillan 2007).

Violence against women can sometimes take both physical and nonphysical forms through various religious codes and beliefs, social customs and practices which may be sustained and supported by the society of Bangladesh. The victimized women avoid counsel for fear of shame of their family and stigmatization in society. This is most likely why Bangladesh is under report violence against women. There is no perceived out for the victimized and they continue to suffer.

It is a fact that violence against women is greatly the result of perceived differences between men and women, which is ascribed to norms and beliefs of patriarchy (Hossain, Imam and Khair 2001). The social perspectives on violence imply

that the power or empowerment of women depends on the resources of individuals and that violence is the ultimate resource for securing compliance. Hence, domestic violence by males over females tends to be a natural phenomenon. In this article, the author attempts to deal particularly with the nature, causes and dimensions of some important forms of violence against women in Bangladesh. Although violence against women is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh, this study will be devoted to clarifying the research question; what type of violence is increasing and or decreasing against women and what are the underlying causes of that violence currently in Bangladesh.

## *Objectives of the Study*

This study will be guided based on the following objectives:

- i. To find out the nature, causes and dimensions of some important forms of violence against women in Bangladesh.
- ii. To indicate what type of violence is increasing and or decreasing against women currently in Bangladesh.
- iii. To clarify whether women of rural area experience more violence compared to the women of urban area in Bangladesh and if so, to find out what are the underlying causes?
- iv. To establish some recommendations to eradicate the violence against women from the society of Bangladesh.

## II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### *Theory of Sexism*

The scholars of sexism perspective posit that the ultimate reason of violence against women is asymmetric relation of power between men and women in a patriarchal society. This is because the cultural system of the patriarchal society subjugates women to men directly and indirectly. Violence to women occurs directly when men force to women through cultural norms with the extreme expression of patriarchy. In the male domination of patriarchal society violence to women also occurred indirectly by shaping attitude of women in the primary institution of family which constrain women and ultimately reinforces women's subordination (Kim and Sung, 2000). Scholars of the key term sexism portrait sexism as a quasi-necessary to observe the violence to women. In this

sense, sexism is considered as an exogenous causal factor in social life of human being. Scholars argue that violation to women also come about from some of endogenous factors such as women's socio-economic dependence to male, partner's substance abuse, family's stressful conditions etc that may leads violence to women in an intimate relationship.

### Dependence Theory

The dependence theory explores the socio-economic resources or absolute resources of women on the probability of being violent. It clarifies how low level of opportunities and constrains stemming from women's socio-economic positions which making them dependent on their male intimate partner and raising the probability of experiencing violence in the household. It implies the persistence of patriarchal structure of power that manifests either as a cultural system of male domination which can lead to women's victimization. Hence, this theory views violation to women as a bi-dimensional approach which is cultural and socio-economic expressions and the need to consider both for explaining violence against women in intimate relations (Raj and Silverman, 2002).

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted based on the secondary data from various sources which are; Gender Statistics of Bangladesh-2018, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics, 2012-2017, Labor Force Survey (LFS), 2016-17 and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Bangladesh- 2019. To determine what type of violence is increasing and or decreasing against women currently in Bangladesh, some projections were made by using the simple mathematical equation as follows:

$$P_t = P_0 (1 + rt)$$

Where,

$P_t$  = Value of the present year

$P_0$  = Value of the previous year

$t$  = Time interval between previous and present year

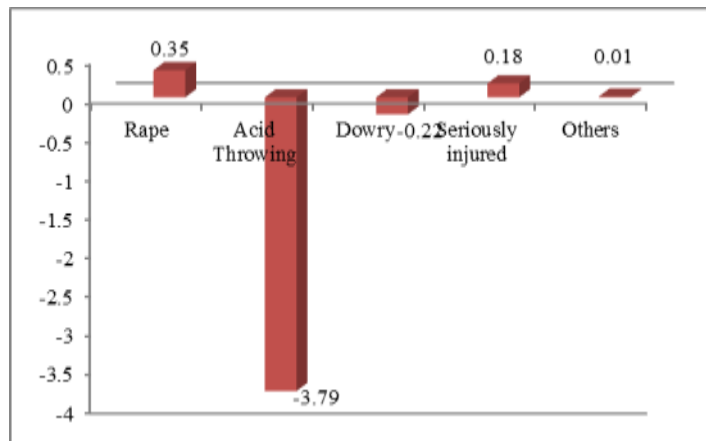
$r$  = Rate of decreasing or increasing

### IV. RESULTS

Results on rape in figure-1 demonstrate that the rate of being raped for women has increased (0.35%) during the period of 2012-2017 in Bangladesh. Numerous factors are contributing for prevailing the rape culture in Bangladesh. Foremost of them is country's judicial system which is feeble in implementing the convictions of rape cases due to several causes, such as critical political situations, complicated trial systems, administrative delays and some intentionally fake lawsuits. The second foremost factor is male domination in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh, where rape is considered as a method of manhood dominance rather than satisfaction, especially for morally twisted men to project their social control over women. The third cause is victim-blaming, which is quite common in Bangladesh. This means, some of the law upholders, religious extremists and community leaders blame indecent dress-up of women to commit rape by men. Consequently, women victims often refuse to disclose the

offence against the rapist, which encourages perpetrators to commit rape repeatedly. The fourth foremost factor is addiction to abusive drugs which acts as sexual stimulation. According to the country's Department of Narcotics Control, 80% of rapes and murders after rapes are connected with drug addicts.

Figure1: Types and Trends of Violence against Women in Bangladesh, 2012-2017.



Source: Author's calculation based upon Gender Statistics of Bangladesh-2018. Data is available in appendix table 1.

### Acid Throwing

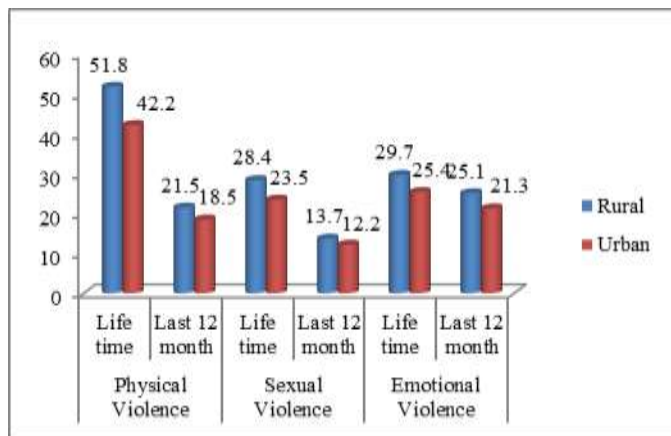
Result on acid throwing shows that acid throwing problem in Bangladesh has been declined preciously during the period of 2012-2017 in Bangladesh. This is because Bangladesh in the past two decades has made a significant stride in the fight against acid violence to women due to taking various initiatives. Acid Control Act-2002 and Acid Crime Prevention Acts-2002 has restricted the sale of acid implemented the laws as death sentence for the attackers. Beside these, extensive social awareness programs against the scourge of acid attacks, media campaigns, and civil society advocacy played important role to reduce the problem. However, though acid attack violence to women has reduced but never stopped and women are still most vulnerable for being victims of acid attack in Bangladesh.

### Dowry

Dowry is itself one kind of women oppression in Bangladesh when dowry payment goes from women (bride) side to men (groom) side in the marriage mating pattern of Bangladesh. According the result on dowry, though dowry payment has been reduced to somewhat, however this problem is still prevailing in the marriage market of Bangladesh and therefore women are still experiencing dowry related violence especially in the rural areas of Bangladesh. In this respect, numerous studies examined the positive association between dowry and violence to women by the husband in Bangladesh (Bates et al., 2004). Therefore, women sometimes may become serious injured in

the household due to incapability of dowry payment in their conjugal life.

Figure1: Types of Violence against Women and Comparison in Rural-Urban Settings of Bangladesh, 2012-2017.



Source: Author’s calculation based upon Gender Statistics of Bangladesh-2018. Data is available in appendix table 2.

Table:1 Factors of Violence against Women and Comparison in Rural-Urban Settings of Bangladesh.

SL	Factors	Rural	Urban
I.	Adult literacy rate of age 15+ ( 2012-2017)	56.37	73.01
II.	Earning status of women (%)	11.35	20.05
III.	Rate of working women, aged 15 or older (2016-17)	67.6	70.5
IV.	Employed women aged 15 or older by economic Sector (%):		
	Agriculture	72.6	19.9
	Industry	11.5	33.5
	Service	15.9	46.6
V.	Dependency Ratio (youth & old age)	58.6	48.5
VI.	Early marriage status of women:		
	% of women married before age 15	20.4	17.6
VII.	Attitude of wife-beating of women by the intimate partner (%):		
	If she goes out without telling him	14.9	10.1
	If she neglects the children	16.0	13.1
	If she argues with him	22.0	17.0
	If she refuses sex with him	10.0	7.5
	If she burns the food	6.7	5.5
	For any of these five reasons	26.5	21.6

Sources: I: Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2012-2017, BBS.II: Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2005 and 2010, BBS.III & IV: Labor Force Survey (LFS), 2016-17, BBS. V & VI: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Bangladesh- 2019

Table 1 exhibits that adult literacy rate, earning status and rate of working women in Bangladesh are low in rural area (56.37,11.35 and 67.6 respectively) compared to urban area (73.01,20.05 and 70.5 respectively). This finding is also supported by the finding of Naved (2013); examined that the

primary and foremost factor of violence against women is low level of education for the women. He argued that magnitude and nature of the violence against women vary as per locality (rural- urban) in Bangladesh. Mahapatro et al., (2012) found that women in India who have lower income level she has a high risk of experiencing domestic violence. This finding is also supported by Cools & Kotsadam, (2017) and they have found that women living with poverty are more provable to be experienced domestic violence when poverty and violence has a psychological link.

Regarding the employment status of women by economic sectors, data indicate that women of rural areas are employed more in the agricultural sector (72.6) compared to women of urban areas (19.9). In fact, the agriculture sector of Bangladesh is an informal sector in rural areas in which most women without payment in their households do and or with nominal payment outside of the household. Therefore, despite doing agricultural activities, women do not become benefit economically much and consequently the employment status of women in agricultural sector does not make empowerment economically to the women whose are employed in agricultural sector usually. When considering the industry and service sectors, it is observed that the rate of rural women employed in these sectors is much lower (11.5and15.9respectively) compared to the rate in urban areas (33.5and 46.6 respectively). Khawaja et al., (2008) examined how those women who have permanent employment status have less experience of becoming victims of domestic violence. Cools &Kotsadam (2017) also found that this type of occupation for females has a positive relationship with violence against women.

Data on early marriage and dependency status of women reveal that rural women have a higher early marriage and dependency rate (58.6 and 48.5 respectively) on intimate partners compared to the women of urban areas (20.4 and 17.6) of Bangladesh. In fact, there is a great link between early marriage and the dependency status of women on their intimate partner. Studies examined that child marriage is a risk factor for intimate partner violence, Nasrullah et al. (2014) and Oshiro et al. (2011).Naved (2013) also noticed that women with no income directly become economically dependent on their intimate partners, which makes them less empowered and able to negotiate which consequent physical violence for them. Scholars have explored that having fewer resources among women could lead to more violence due to dependency (Davis & Greenstein, 2009).

Data from this study on attitudes of wife-beating of women by their intimate partners demonstrate that women of Bangladesh have a positive attitude to wife-beating by their intimate partners in the household and this rate of women is higher compared to the rate of urban areas. Compared to the women of urban areas, rural women more strongly believe that husband has a right to beat his wife in some cases, if women; goes out without telling their husband, neglects the children, argues with husband, refuses sex with husband and burns the food. Studies of (Rahman et al., 2011) observed that women’s

positive attitudes toward wife beating reflects the belief that a husband is justified in beating his wife as she considers herself a low status and economically dependent on her husband.

## V. DISCUSSION

Violence against women usually takes place in the family, in the community, workplaces and educational institutions as well. Although various types of factors account for violence against women, however one of the root causes is the disparity in resources and power between men and women in Bangladesh. In fact, this kind of disparity creates and enhances patriarchal stereotypical attitudes regarding the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Most men and women still accept wife beating as the right of a husband and this attitude bears in mind, especially the rural people of Bangladesh.

Results of this study also show that violence differs in rural-urban regions of Bangladesh. Compared to the urban people, the attitude of the rural people is more traditional, more religious, more conservative and in this sense, also more identifying itself with tabooing of violence against women. Rural areas usually vary by some specific geographic characteristics and the rural environment can be defined as an area of low population density though this criterion has different value in different countries (Sandberg, 2013). In Bangladesh, violence against women has specific and mutually differing characteristics in the case of rural and urban environment as well.

Certain factors may be involved in the fact that cases of violence in the countryside are reported to a lesser extent than in the urban area. Studies also refer to specific attributes of rural areas which may promote violence against women as well as increase the probability of returning to the violent partner in cases of women trying to escape (e.g. Thurston, Patten and Lagendyk 2006). Another problem faced by women experiencing violence in rural areas is acceptance of violence as a part of life, or even its tolerance by the community. Obviously, this is not a flat-rate approach. However, due to the persisting traditional views and a higher degree of conservatism, influenced also by a different religious structure compared to the urban population, it is not rare that it is indeed rural women experiencing violence who do not find understanding.

There may be a prime belief that family problems should remain and should be dealt with in the close family circle and that it is not desirable that intimate issues be brought out and discussed outside of the family. However, one of the most significant problems of rural women experiencing violence is geographic isolation. Such isolation is accompanied by several adverse facts. For instance, poorly constructed or no network of social care facilities for women experiencing violence. The geographic unavailability of certain rural settlements also facilitates social isolation of women experiencing violence and easier hiding of violent behavior. Insufficient education is also connected to poor awareness of

assistance services for women experiencing violence. Studies also show that a lot of women are not aware of the existence of shelters for abused women. When analyzing the rural environment in relation to the issue of violence against women, it is necessary to mention questions of unemployment or poverty and low living standards. Several of the studies also prove that a poor social-economic situation is one of the factors in the case of women experiencing violence as well as in the case of offenders.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Violence against women is a deeply rooted problem in the society of Bangladesh due traditional attitudes, customs and norms towards women at both the rural and urban areas. Resource and power are unequally distributed between men and women in Bangladesh and this disparity more appeared in the women of rural society compare to the women of urban setting of Bangladesh. Therefore, women of rural area experience more oppression compared to the women of urban area. The recommendations can be taken into consideration to control and prevent violence against women as follows:

- It is important to reform and implement robustly the existing legislation and regulatory provisions and if requires, introduce new laws as well on violation against women
- To eradicate child marriage completely it is important to take proper initiatives by establishing existing legislation and regulatory provisions on child marriage.
- Establishing laws and policies that promote gender equality in society.
- To take initiatives to improved men's attitude toward women and eradicate gender serotype role from the society.
- Every level of people should stand against rape culture and social environment that allows sexual violence.
- Government should take steps to access in education and occupation more for the girl children especially in rural area improve their empowerment.
- Raise awareness regarding the harmful norms, traditions and culture which encourage to violence against women.
- More research on the field of gender violence is needed in Bangladesh.

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## APPENDIX

Table: A1. Violence against Women in Bangladesh, Types and Trends, 2012-2017.

Year	Women Oppression (%)									
	Rape	Rate of Increasing	Acid Throwing	Rate of Decreasing	Dowry	Rate of Decreasing	Seriously Injured	Rate of Increasing	Others	Rate of Increasing
2012	18.79	-	0.50	-	34.70	-	0.68	-	45.33	-
2013	20.17	0.07	0.39	-0.22	31.60	-0.09	1.01	0.49	46.84	0.03
2014	18.87	-0.06	0.25	-0.36	35.13	0.11	0.94	-0.07	44.80	-0.04
2015	20.15	0.06	0.24	-1.96	33.82	-0.03	1.42	0.51	44.37	-0.01
2016	22.23	0.10	0.12	-0.50	31.56	-0.07	0.87	-0.39	44.14	-0.01
2017	26.19	0.18	0.03	-0.75	27.15	-0.14	0.56	-0.36	46.07	0.04
Total	-	0.35	-	-3.79	-	-0.22	-	0.18	-	0.01

Source: Author's calculation based upon Gender Statistics of Bangladesh-2018

Table: A2. Types of Violence against Women and Comparison in Rural-Urban Settings of Bangladesh, 2012-2017.

Locality	Physical Violence		Sexual Violence		Emotional Violence	
	Life time	Last 12 month	Life time	Last 12 month	Life time	Last 12 month
Rural	51.8	21.5	28.4	13.7	29.7	25.1
Urban	42.2	18.5	23.5	12.2	25.4	21.3

Source: Gender Statistics of Bangladesh-2018