

## VIOLENCE AND ABUSE OF CHILDREN AT FAMILY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Mohammad Jamal Hossain \*

### ABSTRACT

*Information on prevalence of violence and abuse against children depicts an alarming situation in Bangladesh society. If these incidences go on unabated, the situation may reach a point of no return which will have a devastating effect on the whole society. Keeping these in view, the overall objective of this study was to set up an analysis on prevalence of violence against children at family and to address the violence. The specific objectives were to assess the current status of violence against children irrespective of age, sex, working children, and school going children. The data were collected by stratified random sampling technique. The data were checked for completeness, coded and entered into a computer and then edited, cleaned, processed and analyzed using SPSS for windows version 17.0. Descriptive statistics (percent, proportions and tables) were used. The study indicates that 80% parents reported verbal abuse and 70% reported physical abuse on children during last one year. 30% of working children reported about incidence of verbal abuse and 20% reported occurrence of physical abuse in the study area. Only taking steps in papers cannot solve the problems of violence against children.*

**Keywords:** *Violence, Abuse, Children, Family*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Family violence takes place when a child becomes a victim of abuse in the family. It may be by the parents, relatives or any other person in the family causing hurt willfully or knowingly. Family violence consists of placing or attempting to place the child in fear of hurt, wrongfully confining or restraining against one's will or continually harassing the child with intention to cause or knowing that it will cause violence. So, the violence in the family includes both physical and psychological violence.

A family is the smallest social unit and extremely hierarchical organization. The common nearly universal instance of socially permitted force are- physical punishment of children by parent, gender based violence in the family, torture on the daughter in law for dowry, etc. Family violence, violate a girl child's human rights and rob her of all human dignity. With the increase in the complexity in modern families, the level of tolerance and acceptance in the family has considerably decreased. As a result, helplessness of children has enhanced, simultaneously increasing violence in the family. So, home or family can be a dangerous place for the children, especially for the girl child. In Bangladesh, domestic violence is faced by a girl-child not only from the husband but also from her in laws. The violence takes the form of mental abuse to physical torture, deprivation from food to hard labour etc. In the study area, high level of family violence has been reported in the Focus Group Discussions and KII. Family violence is rooted in early marriage, dowry related marriage, punishment by the parents, relatives, siblings, etc.

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\* Senior Lecturer in Statistics, Department of Business Administration, Manarat International University, Dhaka.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

### 2.1 General Objective

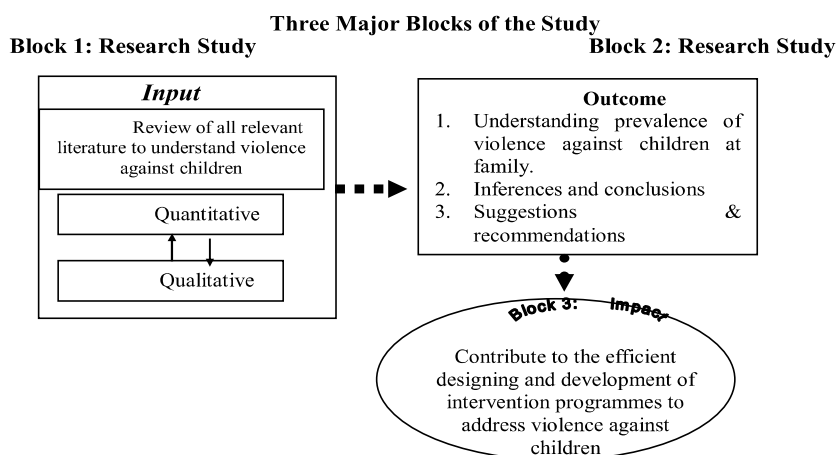
The general objective of this study was to analyze the prevalence of violence against children at family.

### 2.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives were (i) to assess the current status of violence against children in family (ii) to estimate the moods of violence irrespective of age, sex, working children, and school going children.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The data and information were collected using both quantitative and qualitative techniques during the year 2013. Quantitative data have been collected in all the 3 areas of intervention (Dhaka, Jessore and Kurigram). After proportional allocation among study locations, SRS was adopted. Total respondents were 500; **parents** 250 and Children 250. For qualitative part of the study, 10 KIIs were conducted with Heads of Community Organizations (NGOs), Ward Commissioner/UP Chairman, Social Welfare Officer, and Officials of Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted, with students of secondary section, school teachers, and married females under age of 18 years. Data were also collected through Child Participatory Method (CPM), from students of primary section. In Case Studies, both ‘violator’ and ‘violated’ were interviewed. The data were checked for completeness, coded and entered in to a computer and then edited, cleaned, processed and analyzed using SPSS for windows version 17.0. Descriptive statistics (percent, proportions and tables) were used.



## 4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### 4.1 Corporal Punishment and Abuse of Children at Family Level

Corporal punishment and abuse of children (5-17 years) at family level was important issue in this study. Table-1 indicates that 85.6% parent, 80.3% working children, and 75.1% employers are aware of corporal punishment of children in the families. Overall, 55.0% parents know about violence on children happening in neighbouring families.

**Table 1: Knowledge on corporal punishment and abuse on children of the parents, working children and employers**

Knowledge on corporal punishment and abuse on children	Parents (%)	Working Children (%)	Employers (%)
Aware of corporal punishment on children in families	85.6	80.3	75.1
Aware of corporal punishment and abuse on children in neighboring families	55.0	-	-

Source: Created by Author using DCI- 1, 2, and 3

**4.2. Punishment by Family Members**

In order to understand the extent of prevalence of violence on children the parents were asked to provide information on the neighbouring 5 households during last 1 year. The issues asked were verbal abuse, physical abuse, neglect/discriminatory behaviour, emotional abuse to child, eve-teasing, incidence that causes sexual arousal in child, etc. (Table 2).

**Table 2: Parents knowledge status about the violence on children (5-17 yr.) in their surroundings**

Types of violence	Parents knowledge status about violence			
	Own children		Working children	
	Don't know	Know	Don't know	Know
Verbal abuse	4.5%	35.2%	65.9%	35.1%
Physical abuse	17.9%	35.1%	68.2%	20.3%
Discriminatory behaviour	60.0%	25.0%	69.8%	26.8%
Engage child in risky job	80.1%	13.4%	72.1%	25.1%
Emotional abuse to child	60.6%	21.5%	60.9%	22.3%
Eve-teasing	5.0%	15.1%	3.2%	20.9%
Incidence that causes sexual harassment	98.3%	1.8%	91.6%	1.0%
Sexual abuse/rape with child	100.0%	-	95.0%	-

Source: Created by Author using DCI-1

Table-2 reveals that while 80% parents are not aware of existence of children engaged in risky job in their surroundings, more than 35% parents are known the prevalence of verbal abuse and physical abuse of own children, while 35% and 20% parents are aware of prevalence of verbal abuse and physical abuse respectively on working children. 15% of parents are aware of eve-teasing and about 2% acknowledge the incidence that causes sexual harassment of own children, while about 21% and 1% parents are aware of prevalence of eve-teasing and incidence that causes sexual harassment respectively on working children.

**Table 3: Violence on children (5-17 yrs.) during last 1 year reported by parents**

Types of violence	Own children	Working children
Verbal abuse	80.2%	30.1%
Physical abuse	70.1%	20.3%
Emotional abuse to child	40.4%	23.1%
Eve-teasing	10.0%	5.0%
Incidence that causes sexual harassment	5.5%	11.0%
Sexual abuse/rape on child	-	3.0%

Source: Created by Author using DCI-1

Table-3 indicates the number of violence on children (5-17 years) reported by parents during last one year. 80% parents reported about verbal abuse on their own children whereas only 30% parents reported verbal abuse on working children which implies that parents are conscious about the ideal upbringing of their children so that they consider verbal abuse is a normal necessity to apply desired control over their children. But as regards the working children, people may have some reservation to speak publicly about verbal abuse. Either they do not feel inclined to rectify them through verbal abuse or they conceal the reality.

The same thing appears about the number of physical abuse. 70% parents reported about physical abuse on own children during last 1 year. But in case of working children it is only 20%. The number of incidence that causes sexual harassment, is about 5% in own children as against 11% for working children. The incidences of sexual abuse seem to be rather low. It is a social taboo in our society to not to disclose the case of sexual abuse or rape of the children to outsiders which may bring further insult or humiliation to the children.

### 4.3 Case Studies: Domestic Violence

Case stories: Victim of Family Violence
“My father is an addict. He used to beat my mother. He does not give money. In this turmoil my mother arranged my marriage on an urgent basis. Dowry of Tk.50,000 was decided by the bridal party. But my father has given only Tk.15,000. So, my husband beat me for that dowry-money and drove me away from the house”-- Rukhsana, age 16, married at the age of 14, husband is a Van driver, Lalbagh, Dhaka.
One girl said, “My aunt quarreled with my mother and being irritated with her she beat me severely out of anger”, Sumy, CPM, Jessore.
“Parents scold and beat me, if I do not go to school. Teacher also scolds and abuses me”, Rana, CPM, Rajibpur, Kurigram

“I come to the school every day. But one day I was absent, my mother beat me severely, I can never forget that pain”. Beauty, Brac School, Lalbagh.
“I could not prepare my studies properly. My father whipped me”, Sristi, Jessore
“I don’t like to study in the evening. But my mother forces me to read at that time. I was beaten for not reading in the evening”. Rocky, Jessore
“My father ordered me to sow seeds in the field. As I refused to go to the field he beat me severely”, Nazrul, Rajibpur, Kurigram

In KII Ward Commissioner, Jessore admitted the prevalence of violence against children in the family. He said for strict enforcement of law against violence against children.

#### 4.4 Case study of a Violator (Male): Victim of Family Violence

The following case studies of the violators and victims indicate that family problems primarily drive persons to involve in the world of violence.

<i>Case studies: Violator victim of family violence</i>
<p><b>Case Study 1:</b> Sohag is a sixteen year old boy. He lives in Lalbag. Father is a businessman and mother is a house wife. He was arrested by police several times because he throws bombs in the procession and meeting during <i>hartal</i>. But, there is a ‘godfather’ behind him who rescues him from the police. Factors responsible for his anti-social behavior reveal that there is constant quarrel between his father and mother at home. His father has a second wife. Being frustrated and irritated by the conflict in the family, once he left the family and started mixing with some friends who instigated him to join the political meeting, procession and <i>hartal</i>. For these activities he used to get some money. Day by day he became interested to get more money. He became greedy for money and dared to carry bombs and arms. Then he started to throw bomb. Police arrested him. He was released at the blessing of a godfather.</p> <p>Sohag had family and social problems and he became the victim of political gambling. Now he is totally trapped by the political godfather. He tried to leave this deadly profession. But the terrorist godfather would not allow him to quit this risky job. Sohag is now helpless. He may be killed at any time due to bomb explosion. But he cannot come out of the death-well. He did not join this risky game willingly. First, he has a troublesome family. Secondly, his friends and godfather induced him to join this profession.</p> <p>Nari Maitry Child Education Centre engaged him in a self-employment programme. But still he has to carry bomb at the instruction of the godfather. Otherwise his survival will be at stake.</p>
<p><b>Case Study 2:</b> Rizvy of village Shuvarkuty of Rajibpur, Kurigram comes from a poor family. He used to beat his wife frequently for dowry. He explained his conduct that his father is very old and unable to work. He himself is a rickshaw puller who can ill afford to maintain his family with a meager income. Some of his friends who are really bad people, used to put him to shame because he could not yet bring dowry from his in-laws. These induced him to coerce his wife to bring dowry from his in-laws house.</p>

#### 4.5 Dowry Related Violence

Dowry related violence has increased 4 times in last 10 years. Until now, it is going to be indispensable part of a girl's marriage. Dowry is a major reason behind violence against a girl child. Incidents of dowry-related torture and murder are regular and are a regular item in the national and local dailies. It is a brutal practice in Bangladesh society. In Bangladesh law, dowry has been defined as whatever is presented whether before or after marriage under demand, compulsion or social pressure as consideration for the marriage. Domestic violence is often related to disputes over dowry demand. According to an *Ain-O-Shalish* Kendra (ASK) survey of twelve national newspapers, in 2004, an estimated 352 women were subjected to torture, acid burns, expulsion from the marital home and divorce for non-payment of dowry. Seventeen women were reported to have committed suicide. The enactment of Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 (Act No. XXXV of 1980) which was amended by the Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Ordinance, 1982 (Ordinance No. XLIV of 1982) and Amendment, 1986 prohibited both taking and giving of dowry in marriage. Similar to other crimes of violence against women, weak enforcement, corruption, indifference, lack of gender sensitivity and discriminatory social and cultural practices have allowed dowry related violence to go unpunished ].

Among 10 participants in Kurigram, 8 girls admitted that their parents had to give a bi-cycle as dowry along with cash money ranging from Tk.50000 to Tk.100000. Most of the parents failed to give the money at a time. As a result, the brides had to suffer constant scolding from the husbands, sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law, which is the source of constant mental torture to them.

##### ***Case story: Torture due to non-payment of dowry***

"I am pregnant. My parents could not give the bi-cycle as dowry as promised earlier. My mother-in-law does not feed me well. I have to do all hard labour at home. Most of the time my husband, mother-in-law, sister-in-law scold me for any silly matter." (Bijli, Age-13, husband, rickshaw puller, Rajibpur, Kurigram.

In Jessore, FGD participants informed that cash money ranging from TK.50,000 to TK.100,000 and about 10 decimals of land were given as dowry. Out of ten girls in FGD, only two girls reported that no dowry was demanded at their marriage. Parents of a girl failed to pay the money of dowry. Her husband and father in-laws had driven her away after severe beating. Marriage of a girl was cancelled on the spot for non-payment of cash money as dowry.

One of the housewives of neighbourhood informed that a girl committed suicide in Barisal by hanging because her parents could not meet the dowry demand of Tk.50,000 in cash. Her husband along with father-in-law and mother-in-law used to torture her inhumanly and regularly.

The poor and helpless parents are compelled to stop the study of the girls and arrange early marriage of their daughter to save them from eve teasing. Most of them are aware of the Dowry Act. But they told that it was difficult to implement it in reality. Because they realized the fact that marriage without dowry is a punishment to the girls.

In Jessore, the victim of violence never complained to any NGO or *Nari Nirjaton Damon Cell* because they are afraid that if they lodge complaints against the husband, husbands would divorce them. All of them said that though they knew that dowry is prohibited but still it is unavoidable. They heard that there is a provision for punishment for dowry but they have never got any evidence of the same. They heard that bridegrooms are even burnt by acid for non-payment of dowry.

In Lalbagh area the girls do not know where to go and how to go for lodging complaint against violence. They are unaware of “*Nari Nirjation Domon Cell*” of Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs. Usually, if there is any problem, of eve teasing, they lodge complaint with the community center nearby.

#### **4.6 Key Findings**

- The highest knowledge gap was found regarding ‘Right to protection from sexual abuse’ and ‘Right to protection from trafficking’ in parents and in children.
- 80% parents reported verbal abuse and 70% reported physical abuse on children during last one year. 30% of working children reported about incidence of verbal abuse and 20% reported occurrence of physical abuse in the study area.
- 10% parents reported of incidence of eve teasing in their locality.
- Around one-third of the children reported gender-based discrimination at the family.
- Reported sexual violence (rape and abuse) committed by family members are, predictably, directed mostly against girl children.
- The mother-in-law emerges more as an instigator and abettor in violence, especially in cases of dowry, deaths and severe beatings.
- Certain socio-cultural factors which mandate women’s subordination and contribute to increased vulnerability of girl child.

### **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Conclusion**

Only taking steps in papers cannot solve the problems of violence against children. The study based on findings of the study, discussions with the key informants and FGD participants and analysis of the findings forwards the following important suggestions for initiating activities as immediate steps. Disseminate revealing findings to broader audience on the issue of ‘prevalence of violence and abuse against children’. The audience shall include Government and Regional level organizations (ministries of women and children affairs, homes, educational institutions, health, social welfare, and law affairs) including politicians, civil society, relevant NGOs, professional bodies and people at large.

#### **5.2 Recommendations**

Considering the deplorable situation of violence against children in family especially child abuse, physical violence, psychological torture, child marriage, sexual violence, eve teasing, child trafficking and violence at family and its dealings in the court, law enforcing agencies and local government system the study puts forward the following suggestions and recommendations:

- The issue of violence against children should be discussed at the family level.
- Gender based discrimination in the family need to be addressed through proper training.
- Law enforcing agencies should be involved in ensuring the rights for children and stopping violence against children.

- Family life education should be introduced for good parenting and for proper, healthy and positive handling of the children. A healthy relationship between husband and wife is the cornerstone of healthy family atmosphere.
- Social mobilization may be initiated for fighting eve teasing, early marriage and dowry. Consciousness level of the society has to be raised against these issues.
- The traditional notion of physical punishment should be discarded and replaced by counseling and psychotherapy for the children.
- The children and their parents should be made aware of child-rights.
- Strict enforcement of law is needed to stop early marriage.

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