



AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH ON
FEAR OF VIOLENCE
AMONG GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN BANGLADESH



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Survey Conducted by
SURCH

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30% women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

(Source: Violence against women Prevalence Estimates, 2018. Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women. WHO: Geneva, 2021)

One of the most widely documented forms of violence in schools is verbal abuse.

An estimated **246** million girls and boys experience verbal bullying each year.

Source: <https://en.unesco.org/news/gender-based-violence-and-around-schools-prevents-millions-children-worldwide-fulfilling-their>

A recent study has found that globally around **39%** people face online abuse on Facebook. One in five (19%) of respondents who had been subjected to online violence significantly reduced their use of social media, while one in 10 (12%) changed the way they expressed themselves online.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/oct/05/online-violence-against-women-flourishing-and-most-common-on-facebook-survey-finds>

GLOBAL AND COUNTRY STATISTICS

Bangladesh is one of the top **10** countries in South Asia to have highest rates of child marriage.

(Source: Ending child marriage- A profile of progress in Bangladesh, UNICEF, Oct 2020)

A study by Plan UK shows that **81%** girls and women in South Asia have experienced sexual harassment in public places.

(Source: <https://plan-uk.org/file/what-works-for-ending-public-sexual-harassment-full-report/download?>)

Out of **189** economies, **59** economies had no specific legal provisions covering sexual harassment at work.

(Source: <https://www.hr-w.org/news/2020/06/18/end-violence-harassment-work>)

BACKGROUND

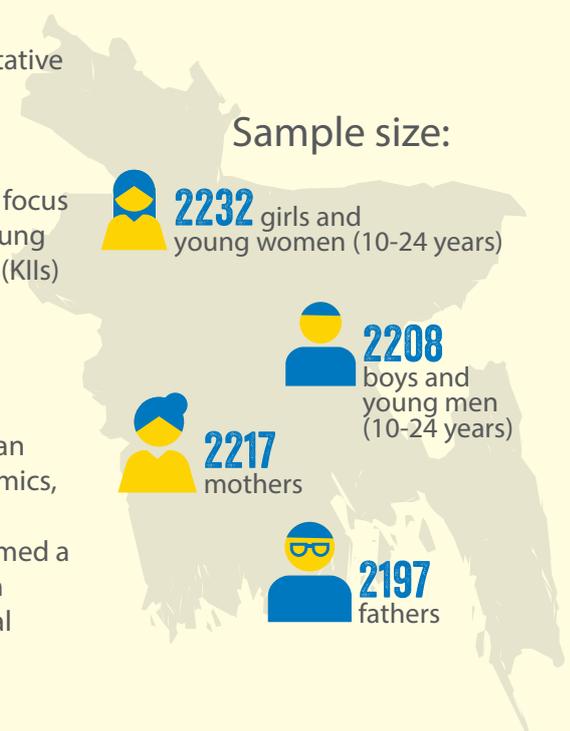
This report has been prepared based on a national level study on different aspects of fear of violence among adolescents and young women at various places in their everyday life. Plan International Bangladesh conducted this national level cross sectional study to understand the overall situation of fear of violence among adolescent girls and young women and their parents at home, educational institutes, workplaces, in public transport and in walking down the street.

Although the country has progressed in social, economic, education, health and nutrition aspects, this study shows that girls and women are still exposed to physical, mental, and emotional harassment in family, educational institutes, society, workplace and even in social media. Violence against girls and women remains a barrier to sustainable social economic development at the individual level and society at large. It is evident that the fear of violence can prevent girls and women from pursuing education, working or exercising their political rights and voice. This has had negative effects on girls' education and their lives in general.

This study identified fear of violence among women and girls, various patterns of violence against girls and women prevailing across Bangladesh including both rural and urban areas, as well as the adverse impact on the lives of women and girls.

METHODOLOGY

A cross sectional survey was designed to produce representative results for the eight divisions in Bangladesh covering both the urban and rural areas. We followed a two stage cluster sampling procedure for quantitative survey. To explore the relevant explanation, 11 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with girls and young women and their mothers and 20 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with working girls, school going girls, their fathers and mothers, members of community based child protection committees (CBCPCs), representatives of local government, school teachers and young men. The research team received approval from Global Hub of Plan International Bangladesh and Department of Health Economics, University of Dhaka. We followed Plan International's Safeguarding Policy and Framework for ethical MER, performed a safeguarding risk assessment, and collaborated closely with safeguarding focal points in the event of concerns or referral needs. Informed consent has been taken from all study participants.



STUDY OBJECTIVES

- ✓ To understand existing situation of fear of violence among different concerns against girls and young women in households, educational institutes, workplace and public places.
- ✓ To know to what extent fear of violence hinders girls and young women to grow to their full potential.
- ✓ To comprehend awareness of parents, girls and young women about existing laws to protect from relevant violence at households, educational institutes, workplace and public places.
- ✓ To know the situation of law enforcement to protect girls and young women from relevant violence at households, educational institutes, workplace and public places.

SPECIFIC STUDY THEMES

-  **Fear of violence and harassment in domestic sphere**
-  **Fear of violence and harassment in educational institutions**
-  **Fear of violence and harassment in public places**
-  **Fear of violence and harassment on online platforms**
-  **Fear of violence impacting career aspirations and choice of professions**
-  **Fear of violence and harassment at workplace**
-  **Fear of violence triggering child marriage**

FEAR OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT IN DOMESTIC SPHERE

Crimes of violence conducted in domestic setting is a common phenomenon in the country. We can see that among the surveyed participants, 86.8% have mentioned that they have faced violence and harassment in domestic sphere. When asked if they have heard about any form of violence surrounding them, 92.6% have said that they have heard about physical* violence. Among other types of violence psychological*, sexual*, and economic* violence prevails. When we explored the activities that girls and women usually avoid due to fear of violence we found out that about 80.1% of the married girls and young women respondents avoid any kind of activities without their husband's permission.

Other significant findings include: to prevent domestic violence, women avoid going outside their homes (26.1%), some leave their studies (13.3%), some avoid talking to boys (10.4%), and some avoid playing outside (7.5%). In order to cope with the situation many adolescent girls and young women protested (39.9%) at home and a considerable number of girls and young women informed their parents, relatives or friends (28.7%), influential people (37.3%) and also reported to the police (16.9%). The knowledge of domestic violence prevention and protection act among girls and young women is highest in Sylhet and Rangpur whereas father's knowledge is higher in Khulna and Barisal. Although there is knowledge about the law, 26.4% girls and young women feel that domestic violence is not a major issue. They fear to take any initiatives against their fathers/brothers or husbands. 5.2% said they do not know about any law for domestic violence prevention which is a worrisome fact.

“MARRIED WOMEN ARE GENERALLY FACING TORTURE WHEN THEIR PARENTS FAIL TO FULFILL THE DEMAND OF DOWRY. IN MANY CASES, THE HUSBAND DOES NOT EARN. THEREFORE, THESE MEN FORCE THEIR WIVES TO GET MONEY FROM THEIR PARENTS. IF THE WIVES FAIL TO DO SO, THEY FACE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE”

- KII WITH CBCPC* MEMBER, KHULNA

*Physical violence: An act of bodily contact which causes injury or trauma.

*Psychological violence: A form of violence which affect emotionally causing mental distress

*Sexual violence: Sexual violence is the general term we use to describe any kind of unwanted sexual act or activity.

*Economic violence: Economic violence involves controlling a woman's ability to gain, use and sustain economic resources, thereby threatening her economic security and potential of self-sufficiency.

*CBCPC: Community Based Child Protection Committee



Figure 1: Are you aware of any case of domestic violence in your area?

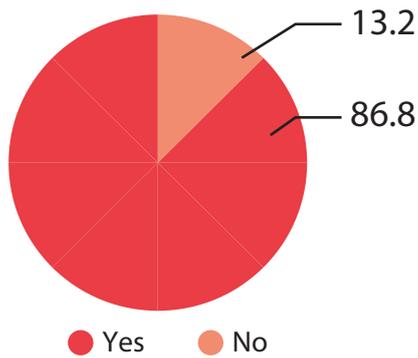


Figure 2: Types of violence as per the knowledge of girls and young women in the area/community

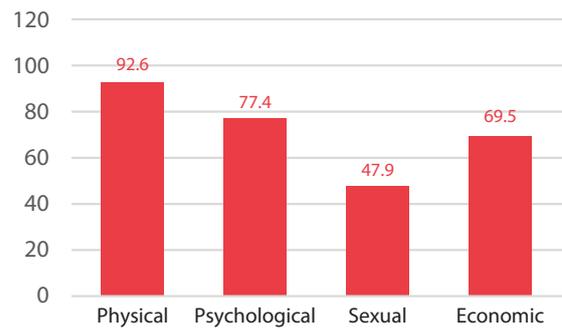


Figure 3: Girls and young women avoided activities due to fear of domestic violence.

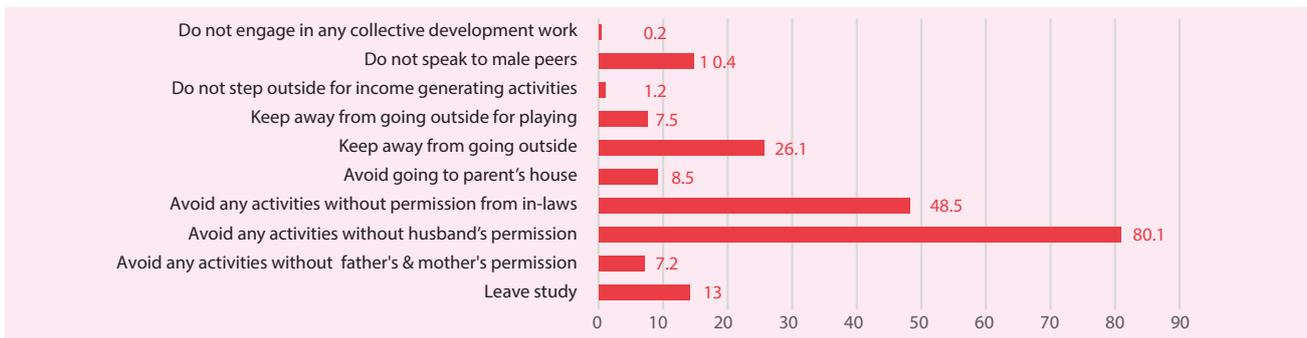


Figure 4: Coping strategy of girls & young woman to combat domestic violence

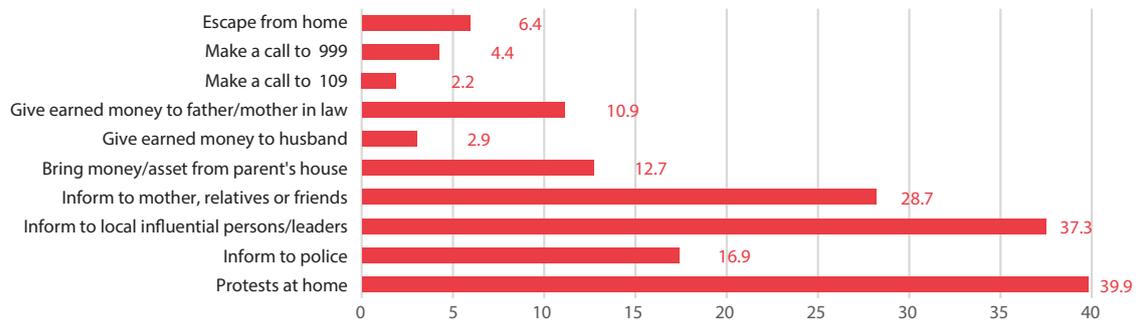


Figure 5: Knowledge of Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act 2010

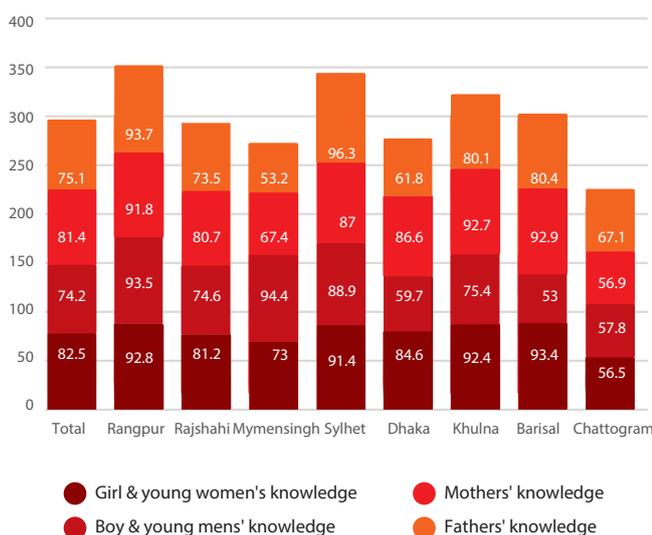
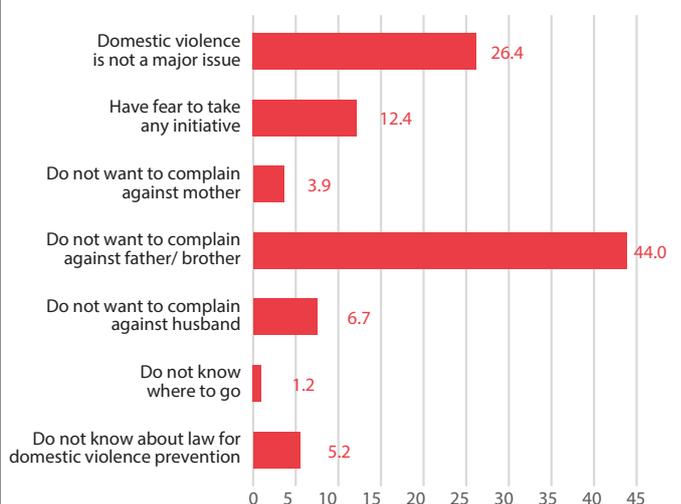


Figure 6: Reasons for not seeking support of the law for prevention of domestic violence



FEAR OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

This study found that 73.8% girls and young women said that they had faced violence and harassment in educational institutions. Among these, Khulna had the highest proportion (89.7%) and Barishal (80%) and Rajshahi (78.8%) also seem to have higher rates of violence. Among the types of violence, insults, criticism, beating, and indecent behaviors from teachers are common (Fig.3). Mental breakdown/depression has been the response of 90.2% girls and young women when asked about the impact and about 55.9% of them cope through remaining silent. Others cope through informing parents (52.5%) or teachers (31.6%) and local police (1.4%). The parents reported that due to fear of violence and harassments, they had imposed some restriction on the girls. About 62% mothers don't allow daughters to participate in school picnics, whereas 54.1% fathers restrict them from attending private tuition.

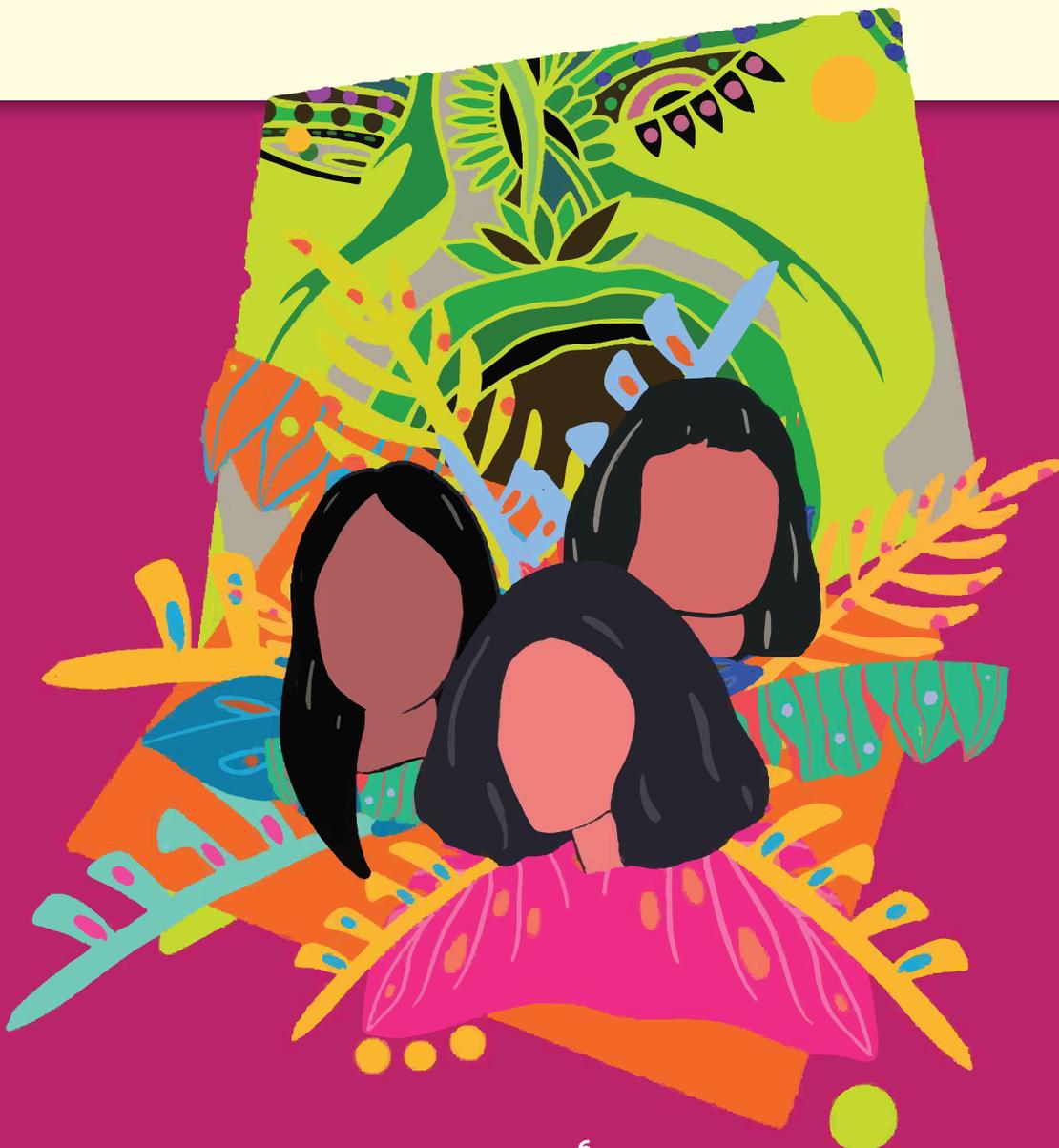


Figure 7: Girls & young women faced any kind of violence and harassment in their educational institutions

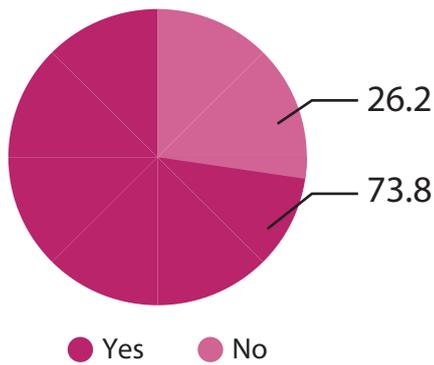


Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who believe that girls and young women face violence at educational institutions

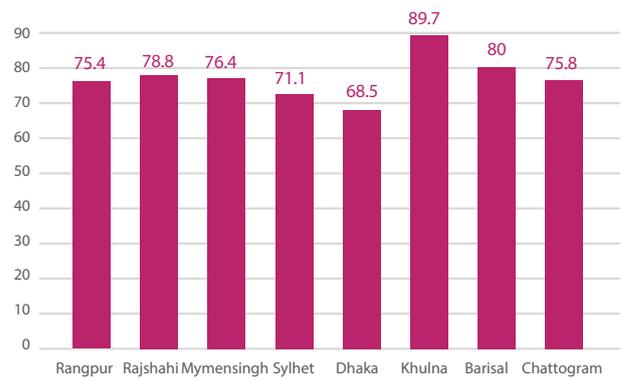


Figure 9: Types of violence or harassments that girls/young women face in educational institutions

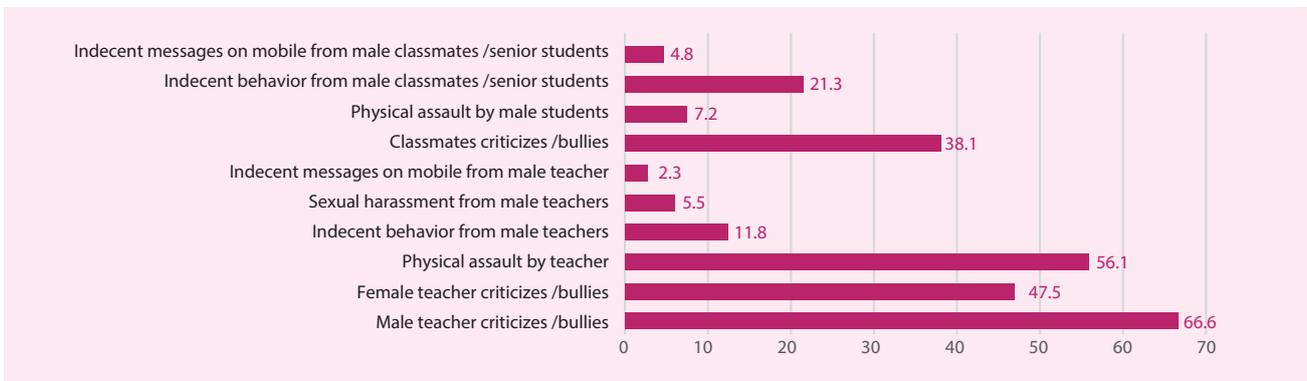


Figure 10: Impact of violence/harassments on girls & young women at educational institutes

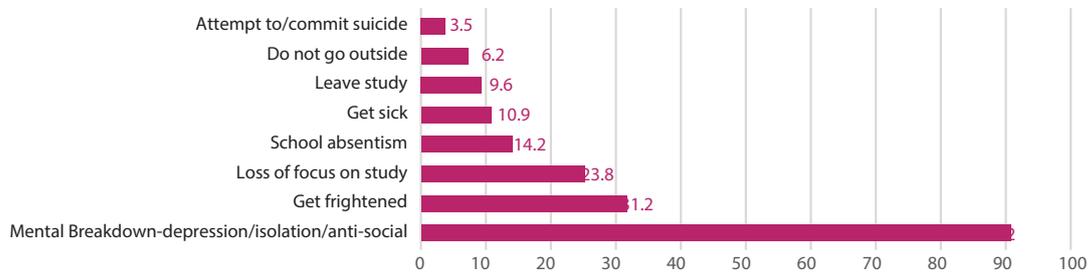


Figure 11: Coping strategy of girls & young women to deal with violence/harassments at educational institutes

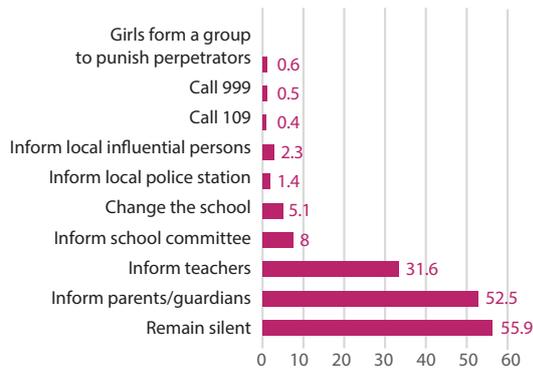
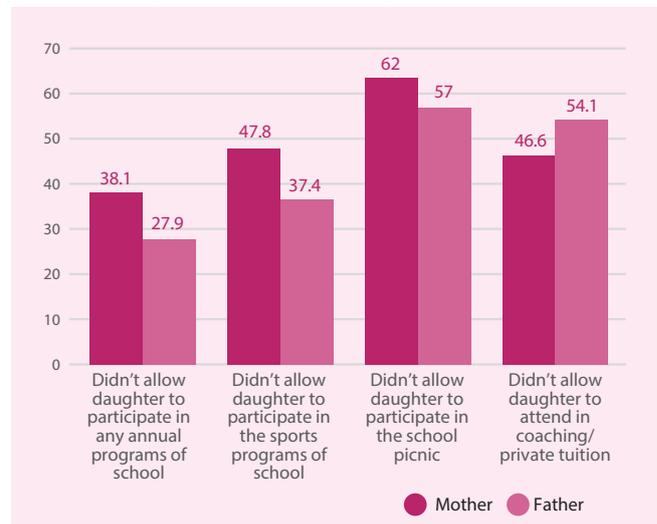


Figure 12: Measures taken by parents to prevent violence against girls and young women

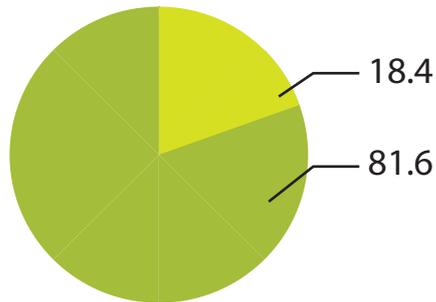


FEAR OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC PLACES

Women and girls' freedom of movement in Bangladesh is very much associated with the reality that 81.6% girls and women (of the survey respondents) have mentioned that they face harassment in public places. Looking at the impact here, we found that 72.4% girls and young women said that they got mentally traumatized whereas others suffered from lack of self-esteem, felt scared, got sick, lost focus from study and failed examinations. The coping strategy for most of them remains raising voice, informing parents/relatives or people around them and remaining silent.



Figure 13: Response of girls and young women about their experience of harassment/violence in public places in last 1 year



- Experience harassment/violence
- Experience no harassment/violence

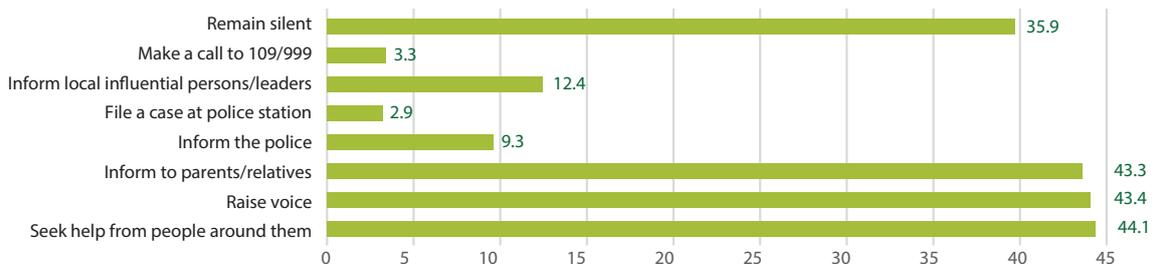
“WHEN I GO TO THE MARKETPLACE EVEN THE VEGETABLE SELLER THROWS BAD COMMENT AT ME BECAUSE HE THINKS IT’S OKAY TO DO THAT TO A WOMAN. HE TALKS ABOUT MY BODY SHAPE, WHETHER I GOT FAT OR SLIM AND THIS IS VERY EMBARRASSING FOR ME.”

– A MOTHER, DHAKA

Figure 14: Impact of public place violence/harassments on girls & young women



Figure 15: Measures taken by girls and young women to deal with violence and harassment at public places.



FEAR OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT ON ONLINE PLATFORMS

Online gender-based violence is an expression of the deeply rooted gender inequalities in our society. Findings have shown that girls and young women were exposed to online violence through social media platforms. About 56.6% girls have reported that they received offensive comments which violated their rights on digital platforms. Others also suffer from multiple problems such as threats, offensive messages, indecent videos, fake account publishing, etc. It has resulted in mental pressure among 78.3% of the surveyed girls and women. Many of them have profound psychological trauma, stopped using the internet/social media, lost self-confidence, or stopped talking to people. Among the actions taken, most of them informed their parents (20.8%) and blocked the abuser (20.8%).



Figure 16: Types of harassment and violence faced by girls and young women on digital platforms

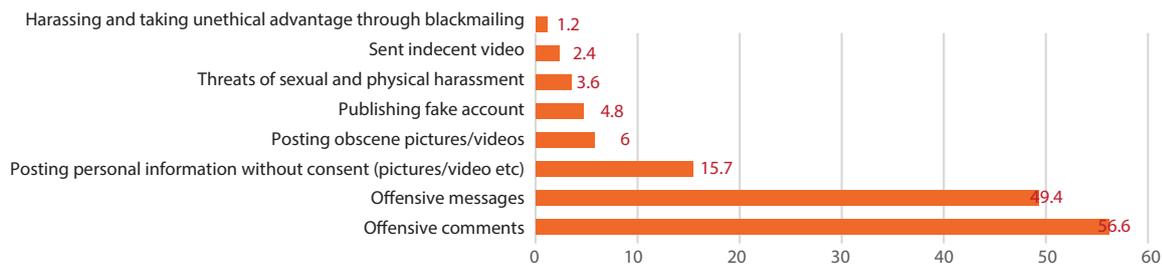


Figure 17: Impact of online harassment and violence on girls and young women

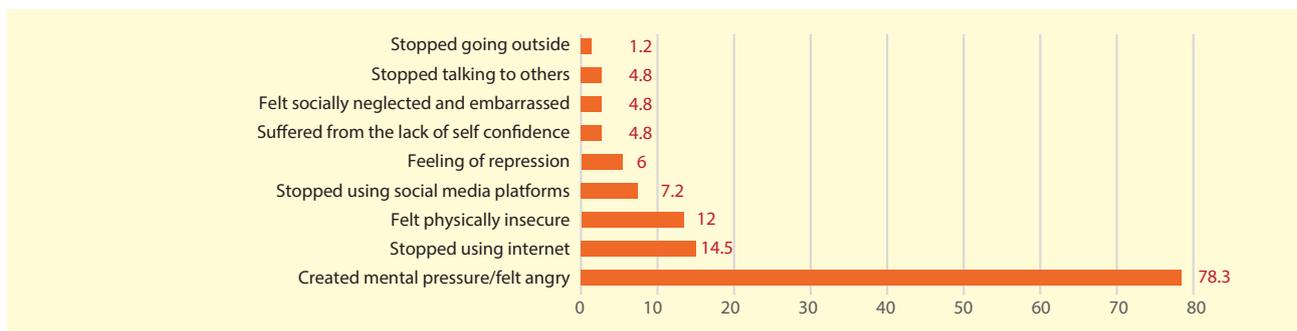
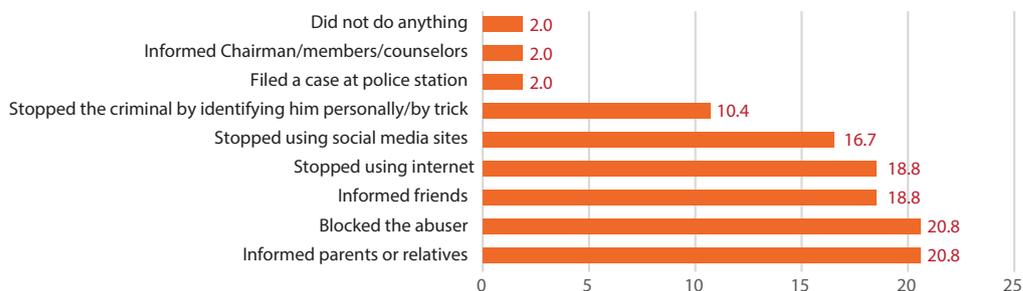


Figure 18: Coping strategy/ Action taken against online harassment and violence by girls and young women



AFTER FACING ONLINE HARASSMENT, A YOUNG WOMAN FROM RANGPUR SAYS,

“IF MY FAMILY LEARNS ABOUT THESE, THEY WILL SIMPLY BLAME ME FOR THE INCIDENT. THEY WILL QUESTION WHY I MUST EVEN OPEN A FACEBOOK ID.”

FEAR OF VIOLENCE IMPACTING CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND CHOICE OF PROFESSIONS

Despite continuous increases in female literacy, girls still have a long way to go in terms of choosing careers. 67% of girls and young women said they wanted to be a teacher and 49.5% said they wished to be a doctor. Through qualitative findings we may suggest that self-reliance, environment of workplace and mostly social and family acceptance pushed them towards some profession rather than some others. According to the report, 56.2% females are unwilling to work to help their families due to family disapproval, and 52.3% believe that they should not work to get money for themselves. Due to social constraints, 18.8% of interviewees have difficulty moving into gender stereotyped professions, followed by 12.5% parental restrictions. According to the report, 59.4% of respondents desired to push beyond gender stereotypes in their careers since they were children, and 40.6% wanted to demonstrate their potential.



Figure 19: Career aspiration of girls and young women

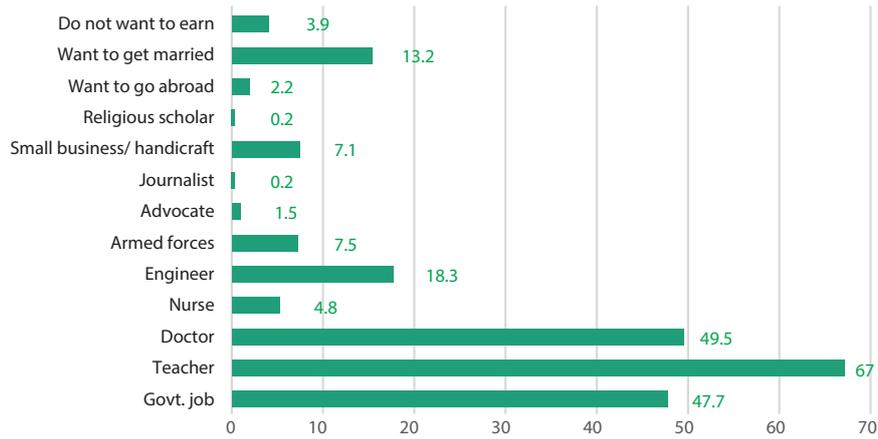


Figure 20: Challenges to move beyond professions stereotyped for girls and young women

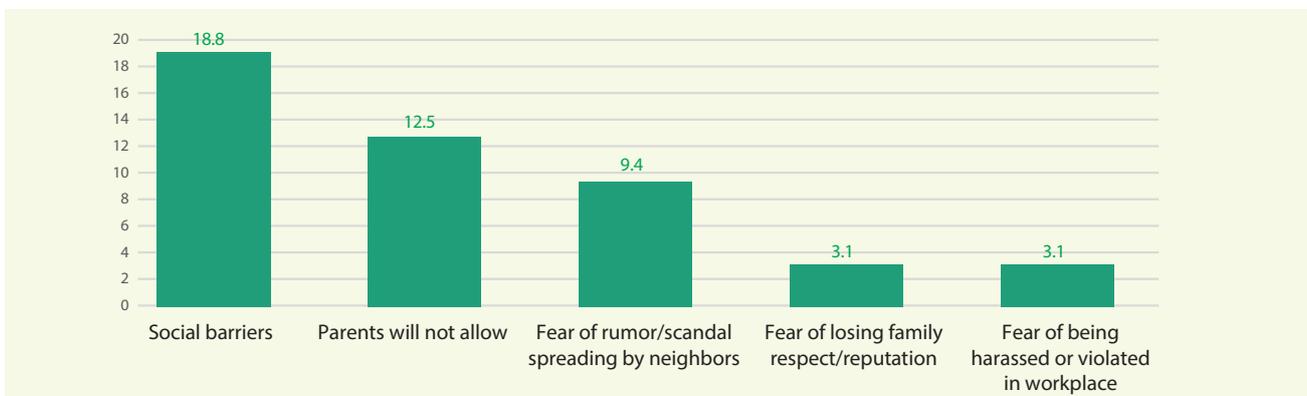
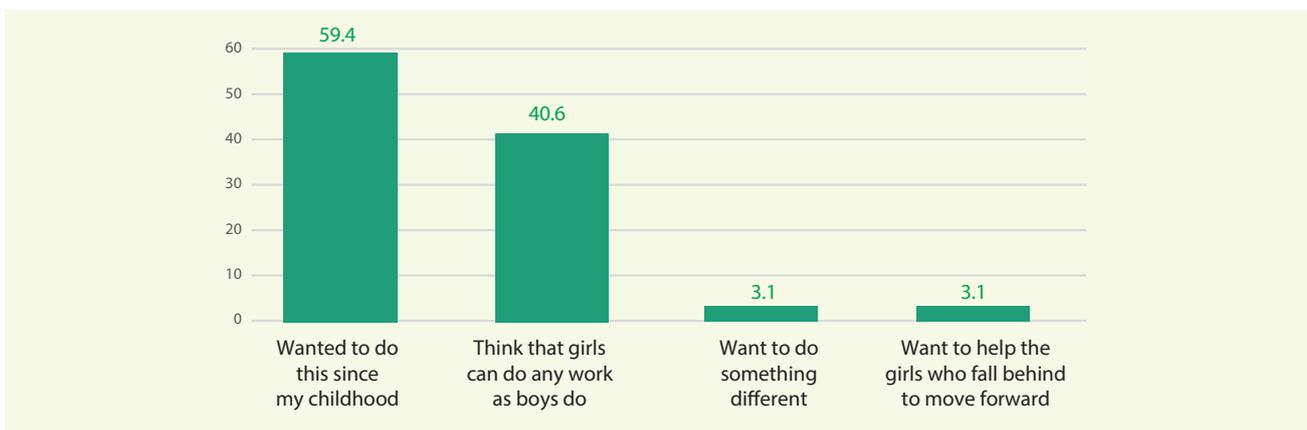


Figure 21: Reasons for girls and young women not aspiring to be involved in income generating activities



Figure 22: Reason to go beyond gender stereotyped profession



FEAR OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

We all believe that working in a safe environment is a woman's right. We can observe that among our respondents, 66.7% of whom were garments factory workers. According to the findings, 77.2% of those interviewed experienced verbal abuse at work, while 55.7% experienced sexual harassment. According to 51.6% of respondents, such harassment and violence has resulted in mental breakdown, despair, and anti-social and isolating behavior. However, 54% attempted to cope by alerting their parents and guardians, and 41.7% spoke out against workplace violence. 73.5% girls and young women are aware of the law protecting women in workplace, yet 27.4% are unaware of the High Court verdict. Despite the fact that 16.8% of workplace harassment reports were filed, just 0% of them were investigated and dealt with.



Figure 23: Types of workplaces for our respondents

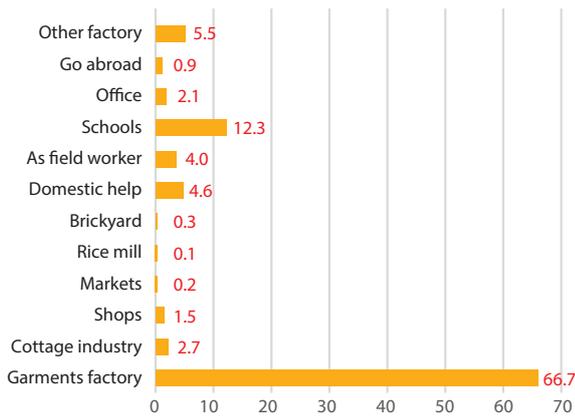


Figure 24: Types of violence/harassment girls and young women have experienced in their workplace



Figure 25: Impact of workplace violence/harassments on girls & young women



Figure 26: Coping strategy of girls & young woman to combat workplace violence

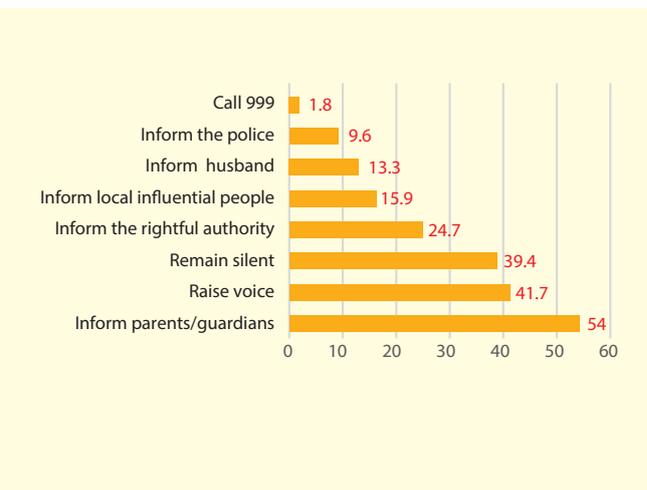
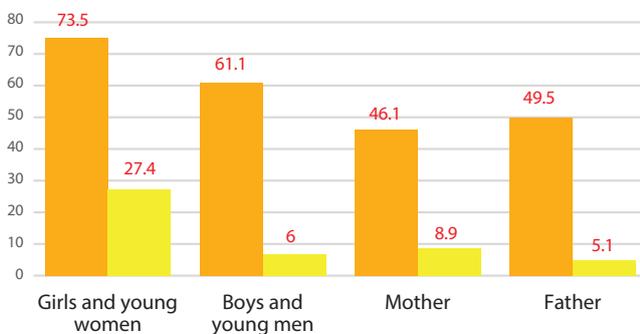


Figure 27: Girls' & young women's knowledge regarding laws on sexual harassment at educational institutes and workplace

Knowledge about Women and children repression and prevention act 2000 (amended 2003) and High Court verdict for protecting girls & young women from harassment or violence in workplace



- Knowledge about Women and children repression and prevention act 2000 (amended 2003)
- Knowledge about High court verdict

Here we should mention that there has been self-report of 6.8% violence at workplace yet 0% have gone for any legal action.

“THE PERPETRATORS ARE POWERFUL. WITH THEIR POWER AND MONEY THEY CAN ESCAPE FROM PUNISHMENT. THE GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN ARE AWARE OF IT, SO THEY USUALLY KEEP QUIET WHILE THEY FACE HARASSMENT. IF THEY RAISE VOICE AGAINST HARASSMENT THAT MAY CAUSE MORE VIOLENCE. THEY ARE AFRAID OF THIS.”

FEAR OF VIOLENCE TRIGGERING CHILD MARRIAGE

The current state of the child's early and forced marriage reflected the country's despair. According to the exploratory study we found that at the divisional level Mymensingh and Chattogram have the highest percentage of child marriage which are 57.5% and 50% respectively. On average 28.7% of those aged 18 and under and 18.7% of those aged 16 and under are married off. According to the study, the average age of the girls who marry in the area is 28.7% for those aged 18 and under, and 18.7% for those aged 16 and under. The study found that 35.3% of girls' parents' fear of sexual harassment is a main cause for their children's marriage, and roughly 25.6% of girls' parents' concern of societal divisiveness is a big factor for the child's marriage.



Figure 28: Divisional distribution demonstrating status of child marriage in Bangladesh

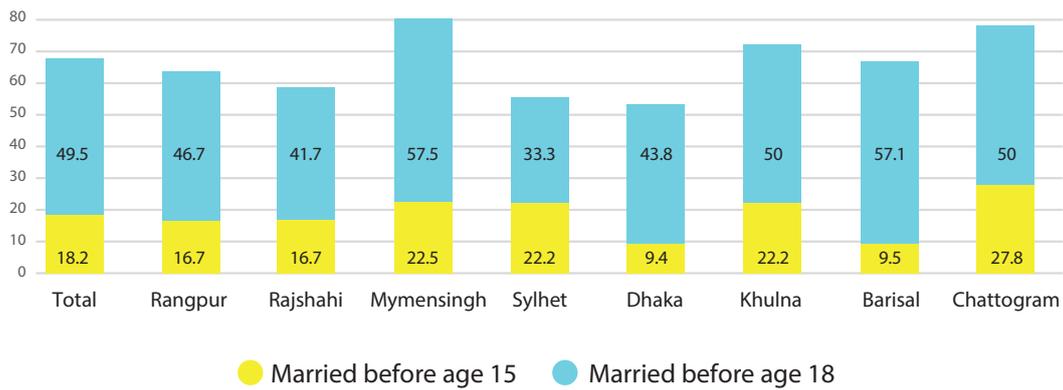


Figure 29: General age of girls' marriage in the surveyed locations as reported by girls and young women

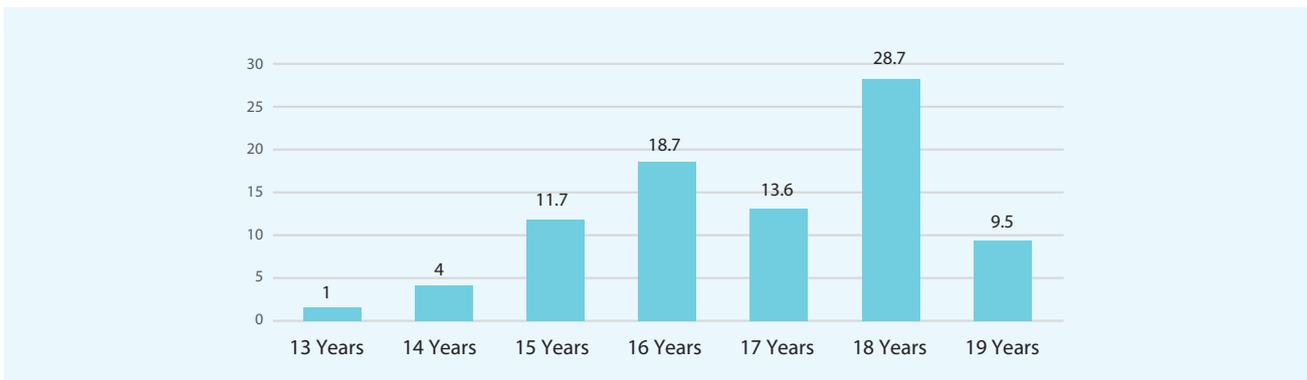
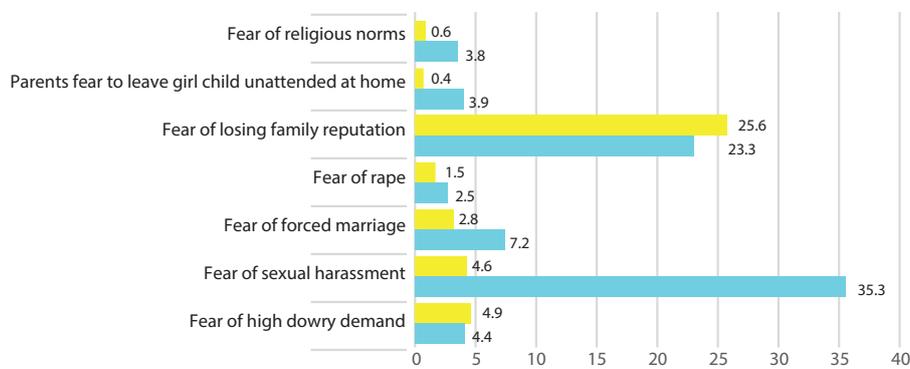


Figure 30: Reasons of child marriage in study areas



“I DON’T WANT TO SPOIL MY LIFE BY MARRYING AT AN EARLY AGE. I WANT TO SUPPORT MY FAMILY. BUT DUE TO FEAR OF HARASSMENT AND LOSS OF REPUTATION OF MY FAMILY, MY PARENTS MIGHT CONSIDER MARRYING ME OFF WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY SHATTER MY DREAMS.”

– ADOLESCENT GIRL PARTICIPANT AT FGD

● Parents
● Girls & young women





CALL TO ACTION

The growing concern about 'fear of violence' especially where girl and young women are compromising their potential, **requires proper attention within the policy discussion.**

The **policy-making discussions and strategy development processes on gender-based violence to ensure that the voices of girls and young women are heard** as it can make an impact to overcome the fear of violence and gender norms.

Reporting mechanisms to be secured and established in schools, health clinics, CBOs and alternative care institutions. We will push those capacity-building initiatives of the relevant professionals to report violence cases and refer accordingly to response services.

A national database to track violence cases against women and girls so that it can reinforce policy decisions on the prevalence of violence & fear of violence and impact of services.

The Government should provide budgets to fund services, personnel and trainings to implement laws and policies to end violence against women and children especially girls. Government must set up monitoring and evaluation plans to ensure accountability and transparency of funding and allocation.

Influencing the **amendment of discriminatory laws** that discourage violence survivors from reporting and hampering women's access to justice. Amend the Penal Code by changing the discriminatory definition of Rape and pushing for a 'Comprehensive Sexual Harassment' law.

Influencing the establishment of **inclusive and multi-sectoral coordination** of response (violence, including health, legal, livelihood and psychosocial support) at national, district and subdistrict levels.

All government **orders, policies, directives and referral pathways concerning prevention and response should be widely disseminated** to ensure children and young people, especially girls, are aware of and empowered to claim their rights.

Mass awareness through print, electronic and social media platforms to break the culture of silence and impunity, as it can make a difference to change the narrative of violence & fear of violence, including the patriarchy, power imbalances, toxic masculinity, and gender inequality.

We will focus on increasing our influence with Government to invest in gender transformative and inclusive environment for the girls to thrive in. We believe that child marriage is a major setback for girls to access freedom and from a utilitarian perspective, the violation of laws might enable punishments but it's implementation is the most important part. Hence, our work will include advocacy for stronger legislative and policy frameworks and its proper implementation to prevent GBV as well as to raise awareness to end fear of violence against girls and women in Bangladesh.





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