

No law to bring eve teasers to task

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Farhana Nazneen and with a few other students of Eden College live in a hostel. But they are confined to the walls of their room as they cannot open the window or stroll in the verandah.

A middle-aged man hanging about the place keeps his eyes glued to their window and in case of any eye contact, he sends indecent signs.

"We live on our own in this hostel. And even when the urge for fresh air is great we dare not go out in the open," said Farhana. "The man hovering around the place sends shudders down our spines," she added.

This was said at a press conference organised by Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association (BNWLA) on Saturday, at the National Press Club.

Farhana is just one example of eve teasing lots of girls and women are facing in the city everyday.

A new trend of eve teasing was highlighted at the conference. Boys have begun to send indecent SMS (short message service) and picture messages through mobiles in an effort to disturb girls.

"The press conference was organised to create mass awareness of such nuisances," said Salma Ali, executive director of BNWLA.

"We have to stand up against eve-teasing by forming a social

movement," she added.

Salma Ali said eve teasing was one of the worst forms of abuse from which women regardless of class, profession and age, suffer.

Speakers also said the eve teasing has created social insecurity for young girls and paved way for many school dropouts, eventually leading to early marriage.

"Though eve teasing is a punishable offence according to Bangladesh Penal Code law 509, it is difficult for a victim to prove such allegations in court," said Advocate Kohinoor Begum, member of BNWLA.

As it is not possible to prove eve teasing in court, women do not file cases in this regard, she added.

"Dishonest people misinterpret existing laws. Therefore law does not become a solution to resist eve teasing," said Salma Ali, and demanded an amendment to the existing law.

Salma Ali mentioned various incidents where girls leave their lodgings, and in some commit suicide on different occasions because of eve teasing.

She presented the example of eve teasing in Banani that was published in The Daily Sangbad on May 5, where an army person eve teased a girl and faced mob beating for doing so.

Salma Ali told the Star City that this kind of reaction of the general public would help reduce such indecent actions.

Other ways of reducing eve teasing is through research, case

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study, demonstrations and workshops, Salma added. BNWLA hopes to launch a campaign against harassment of women soon, as the organisation feels that this form of abuse to women cannot be completely wiped out by law said speakers at the conference.



Speakers at a press conference on 'eve teasing' at the National Press Club.

BNWLA has already formed a committee in Mirpur, called *Shabash Nari*, and have invited like-minded organisations and people from other social strata to join hands with them.

"We are trying our best within our limits to resist sexual abuse in

the area with the help of BNWLA and police," said Shahnaz, chairperson of the committee. "Plans are underway to resist eve teasing in the area," she added.

The speakers emphasised on counselling boys who tease girls. "Those who usually eve tease

need family and community counselling for mental development," said Salma Ali.

Two female students from Dhaka University and Eden University College, while sharing their experiences, challenged the social myth that women's dress-

up provoked the eve teasers.

"Eve teasing is an expression of male chauvinism; the women's dress has no role," said Farhana.

Two garment workers, Selina Ahmed and Aklima Begum, said they were teased everyday on their way to work, but their

protests were futile.

Eve teasers are from all classes of males.

"If a rickshaw puller or some man from this level teased me I will not be so disappointed as they are illiterate; it is the literate and educated who are doing it regularly, paying no heed to its consequences," said Sumaiya Zaman, a university student.

"We cannot accept such attitude from any educated person. We hope they will assist us to resist eve teasing and raise their voices in this regard. All this comes out of the level of literacy," said Sumaiya.

"As a teenager, I had teased a lots of girls, inspired by my friends," said a university student preferring anonymity.

"But as I grew up and I realised I insulted those who did no harm to me. Moreover I put my sister in the place of a victim, and completely stopped," he added.

"So we too have to stand up against eve teasing for ourselves and for the sake of others," he said.

Selina Begum, BNWLA's Vice President, Jahanara Haque, Secretary General and Shahina Akhter, Consultant among others also spoke at the conference.

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