

End gender based violence



Recently UNFPA and The Daily Star organised a roundtable on "End gender based violence". Here we publish a summary of the discussion

-Editor

Dhiraj Kumar Nath, Former DG, Family Planning

According to UN Declaration, any act 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 deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life is gender based violence (GBV).

Here we present some national facts to show severity of GBV in Bangladesh. According to BBS VAW Survey 2011, 87% of married women have ever experienced any types of violence by their current spouse. It also shows that only 2.36% of women took legal action against the current husband who is perpetrator. Regarding child marriage Bangladesh ranked 3rd globally and 1st in Asia. BDHS 2011 shows that 65% of women age between 20 to 24 were married before age 18.

Now if we look at the causes of GBV we will see deep rooted structured inequality, lack of same perceived value as boys, unequal gender norms granting men control over female behaviour, acceptance of violence as a way to resolve conflict, rigid gender role, low socio-economic status, unemployment, dowry and so on.

GBV has intergenerational and socio-economic consequences. Children of women who experience abuse suffer from physical injury, behaviour problems, anxiety, depression, suicide, poor school performance, increased likelihood of experiencing and perpetrating violence as adults. It also affects families by reducing work ability, wages and family function. Socio-economic effects of GBV are child marriage, higher rates of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity, obstacle in accessing family planning methods, costs of services incurred by victims and their families, loss of workplace productivity and perpetuation of violence.

Currently we have various laws regarding GBV. These are Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Rules 2013, The Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013, National Children Policy 2011, National Women Development Policy 2011, Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) 2010 and High Court directives on sexual harassment in educational institutions and at workplace.

Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed, Managing Editor, The Daily Star

We have very well articulated laws regarding GBV. But we lack proper implementation. This is the basic problem. GBV is basically a societal issue not a technical or health issue.

Dr. Md. Enamur Rahman, Honourable MP and Chairman, Enam Medical College Hospital

Violence against women is an embarrassing issue for human civilization. In our country we also see a depressing picture of violence against women. It continues unabated due to legal gaps, unusual delay in implementation of laws, prevalent culture of impunity and weak protection of victims. So we need proper implementation of laws. But law alone cannot solve all the problems. We need to make people aware about the issue. We need massive campaign about ill effects of GBV. All the agents should work to achieve this goal in tandem with the government. We need political commitment against violence against women.

Argentina Matavel Piccin, Representative, UNFPA Bangladesh

Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world. There is no country in the world that is 100% free of gender-based violence. Bangladesh is not an exception. A vast number of women and girls in the country are experiencing physical, sexual and psychological violence throughout their lives.

Victims of violence suffer not only physical and long-lasting psychological pain, but also many forms of sexual and reproductive health consequences including forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, traumatic fistula, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and even death.

The Government should and can facilitate the minimization of gender-based violence, but the laws and systems themselves alone cannot eradicate violence. We have to start by making our home free of violence, then our schools, streets and other public spaces, and workplace violence-free. Women and children have the right to live with dignity and safely, in all places at all times, inside and outside their homes, schools and workplaces.

Therefore our challenge is to get into the root causes of what makes the country vulnerable to gender-based violence. Addressing inequitable gender norms and resulting "culture of silence and impunity" is at the heart of tackling violence against women and girls. We need a transformation in norms and behaviors.

UNFPA is one of the UN's lead agencies working to further gender equality and women's empowerment, and is supporting the Government of Bangladesh to create a society where people can live free of gender-based violence and abuse.

Dr. Jahir Uddin Ahmed, former DG Family Planning, adjunct faculty, AIUB and Member SMC

Right to sexual and reproductive health services is one of the fundamental rights. But people are not very aware about this right. There must be awareness building and information sharing programmes about this right.

In Bangladesh, maternal mortality has gone down to 170. But we have to continue our effort to bring it down to 140. The issue of Skill birth attendants is a crucial one in this regard. Only 30% of deliveries take place in health facilities and 70% are unattended or attended by traditional birth attendants. In 100 pregnancies 15 will suffer complications. Out of 15, 5% will require caesarian operation. So who will deal with this? If anti-natal care coverage is 50-55% what happens to other 40-45% mothers? Therefore, 100% of women should be taken under anti-natal care to make motherhood safe. Another important point is the right to contraception. It can reduce 25% of deaths of women.

Dr. A J Faisal, Country Representative, Engender Health

There are different levels and natures of violence. Violence is an extreme situation. There are other simpler situations that lead to violence like abuse of girls and women particularly in education institutions, workplaces and street. These issues need to be taken care.

Worldwide there is a movement to educate and empower girls and women to form partnership and alliances. We know this partnership has to be made with elected representatives like the MPs. Union parishad and upazila parishad are countrywide networks of elected local level representatives. They are recognized government entities and they can play an important role. Professional bodies can also be included in the alliance. Within these alliances we can effectively address GBV issues.

Dr. Halida H. Akhter, Chief of Party, NGO Health Service Delivery Project

We need to involve all the ministries to end GBV. UNFPA can take the lead. If we make an action plan regarding what a particular ministry will do then we can move forward. For example, denmohar (contract amount) is given to women but they never get it in their

PARTICIPANTS

 Dhiraj Kumar Nath	 Enamur Rahman	 Argentina Matavel	 Jahir Uddin Ahmed
 A J Faisal	 Halida H. Akhter	 Kafil Uddin	 Suraiya Sultana
 Ferdousi Islam	 Tania Nusrat	 Mohiuddin Babar	 Rahatul Ashekin
 Ikhtiar Uddin	 Ruchira Tabassum	 Rahima Begum	 Md Abdur Rahim
 Laila Khondkar	 Shahana Nazneen	 Zahirul Islam	 Nurul Islam
 Parvez Babul	 Shimul Koli Hossain	 Shabira Nupur	

hand. If they can get it they can have some savings. If the ministry of religious affairs takes the initiative we shall be able to ensure this.

Raising awareness a little bit does not hold good in terms of achieving something. To achieve something we need specific action, time bound responsibility and commitment. It can be hosted in the health ministry. Similarly NGOs can build a coalition to end GBV.

Nari Nirjatan Cell is there but what are they doing? Whether the ministers are fulfilling their operation plan? To whom they are accountable? Do they have any annual report? Media can play a big role in ensuring accountability of these institutions. They should highlight achievements of women and their success in ending GBV.

Kafil Uddin, Line Director (FSDP), DGFP

Stalking is a major crime and in many cases it leads to death of girls. We should take special measure to stop this crime. In rural areas there is a system of village arbitration. But it does not deliver. This needs to be made effective so that GBV issues can be addressed within shortest possible time through this institution. There should be special female duty officer in police station, lady magistrate in judiciary and special lady doctor in hospital to attend the cases of GBV.

Quazi Suraiya Sultana, Executive Director, RHSTEP

We are working on reproductive health in schools. We are disseminating messages of reproductive health through our eight week programmes. In this programme, we address parents whose children are growing up. These children are going through various changes. They need guidance. We inform parents and encourage them to talk these reproductive health related problems with their children. We also address the boys and girls directly. First we start talking about the changes of different organs of bodies and at the final stage talk about sex. We have found this programme very effective. They are interested to know about these issues.

There is a specific chapter on reproductive health in our school curriculum. But teachers often ask students to read this chapter at home. They do not want to discuss it in class. This is a major problem. Teachers can be good guides. We have started to counsel them about the importance of making students aware of the reproductive health issues. I hope it will work tremendously.

Dr. Ferdousi Islam, Head, Obst/Gynae, Dhaka Medical College

I want to focus on obstetric fistula. It happens mostly to young girls. It is more a social problem than a health problem. Women suffer a lot due to negative social attitude to fistula

patients. We need to include this issue in our campaign. We also need to develop a mechanism for rehabilitating women suffering from fistula.

Mahfuz Anam, Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star

Eradicating GBV is central to the development of the country. We are fully committed to this issue. You should go to specific media, build relations with the journalists and convince them about the importance of this issue. It will work better than generally addressing media.

Tania Nusrat Zaman, Deputy Chief of Party, Protecting Human Rights Project, Plan Bangladesh

Women do not opt for police station or court because these are not women friendly. We need to make these institutions women friendly.

Marriage registrars can play a crucial role in fighting against GBV because they are often involved in manipulating marriage documents. We have to make them aware and engage in our campaign. We have an interactive model of teaching students about gender equality. In this model we teach them that boys and girls are just differently constructed but same as human being.

Mohiuddin Babar, Vice President CSR, Robi

Cyber crime is becoming a threat for women. We should take care of this issue.

In CSR programmes we have to focus on ensuring occupational health and safety. Harassment at work place can also be put under this theme. In South Africa some companies have already taken this initiative.

Rahatul Ashekin, Secretary General, BRIT

One third of our population is youth. So they should be engaged in the campaign against GBV. In urban areas, we can easily connect with them through social media. In rural areas we can engage youth organization to reach rural youths. We should also engage celebrities in our campaign. Their endorsement of this issue will work fantastically.

Dr. Ikhtiar Uddin Khandaker, Health Adviser, Plan Intl. Bangladesh

In Bangladesh we have more than 13,000 community clinics. In each community clinic there are 30-70 members and three support groups. Each of this group is comprised of 15 members. So we have a large number of work force who can work effectively on GBV if they are trained properly on this issue.

Ruchira Tabassum Naved, Senior Scientist, icddr,b

Our researches have shown that integrated intervention model where GBV issue is addressed with other issues like microfinance works better than single issue intervention model.

We have developed urban model for fighting GBV but we do not have similar model for rural areas. Now we are working on it.

Professor Rahima Begum, Head, Obst/Gynae, BIRDEM

I want to focus on safe abortion. A woman should have the right to decide whether she wants the child or not. If she does not want it she has the right to safe abortion. Due to unsafe abortion women have to suffer a lot.

Dr. Mohammad Abdur Rahim, Secretary General, Bangladesh Thalassaemia Foundation

Our personality gets shaped within six years of birth. So we should start with children. They should be trained in gender sensitive way. In many cases families break up due to a sick child and the mother becomes victim. We should also work on this issue.

Laila Khondkar, Director, Child Protection, Save the Children

Gender sensitive parenting is very important to bring up children in gender sensitive way. That's why we need to teach our parents about gender sensitive parenting. Media have an important role to break stereotyping of women. Awareness building is not enough. We need to train people with social skill so that they can prevent GBV. Our women should be trained in such way that they do not feel as victim rather they think of them as survivors and fight for justice.

Dr. Shahana Nazneen, Programme Director, Save the Children

We should start our awareness campaign from family because we get our moral values from family members. In our campaign we should engage educationists. They will be able to present information related to GBV in a communicative way.

Dr. Zahirul Islam, Program Officer, Embassy of Sweden

I would like to focus on male involvement which is less discussed. Unwillingness of men to surrender male privileges is triggering more domestic violence despite the increasing level of education and economic independence among women. We also need to understand male vulnerabilities to perpetrate including poverty, lack of education and anger management skills. ICDDR,B study shows that men with secondary and higher education are half as likely than men with less or no education to perpetrate violence against an intimate partner. Moreover, men are also in crisis due to the gender stereotyped roles. Beyond this structural causes there are incidental risk factors including alcohol and drug abuse, gambling which enhance male vulnerability to perpetrate. Finally I will propose International Men's Day (IMD) which is celebrated on 19 November can be celebrated as a vehicle to promote positive masculinities based on gender equality.

Dr. Nurul Islam, Former Vice Chancellor, Eastern University

A woman must be aware about her dignity and self respect. She should have such moral empowerment that she can stand up against any sort of violation. It is the duty of educational institutions to impart this education to female students. In our country there is a culture of impunity that restricts a woman from seeking justice. It happens due to overall degradation of democratic culture and good governance. In this culture of impunity any weak group is vulnerable. So we have to come out of this culture and create a culture of accountability.

Parvez Babul, Journalist

To stop GBV, we have to ensure property rights of women.

Dr. Shimul Koli Hossain, Programme Manager, Adolescent and Reproductive Health, DGFP

We are empowering women by providing free maternal and reproductive health services. But we see lack of awareness about these rights among women, particularly rural women. They do not consider GBV as offence. We can mobilize our community support groups that exist in the community to create awareness among rural women. We have included violence against women in our national maternal health strategy and standard operating procedure. Soon we will get it approved.

Shabira Nupur, Advocacy Manager, Child Protection Education, World Vision

We have national action plan for fighting GBV. But we should also have district level action plan incorporating specific GBV features of the district. Besides CSR activities, Corporate bodies like Telcos can sensitize their clients about GBV issues.