

Prevention of Violence against Adolescent Girls and Women: Use of Popular Culture & Media



Abdul Quayum, Associate Editor, The Daily Prothom Alo Bangladesh has achieved laudable success in terms various gender related indicators. Recently Amartya Sen visited the country and praised Bangladesh's effort in women empowerment. A Bangladeshi women scientist has invented a mat which helps to identify when a pregnant woman should be shifted to hospital. It has contributed tremendously in reducing maternal mortality in the northern area of the country. Both the government and non-government organisations have been working for women empower and gender equality. This is one side of the picture.

On the other side, though we have achieved some success in controlling violence against women (VAW) many VAW related events are still happening in the country. Many of them are reported in the newspapers. In 2011 there was a survey on VAW in Bangladesh which showed that among the recently married women, 87% becomes victim of violence by their husbands and 65% women are tortured physically.

According to police record, in the first nine months of 2012 there were 4563 reported cases while in 2004 total number of cases was 2981. Bangladesh Mohila Parishad's statistics shows that in 2014, from January to December, 4654 women became victims of VAW. There were 939 rape incidents in the same year of which 174 were gang rape and 99 women and girls were killed after rape. In total 898 women and girls were killed in that single year; 431 incidents of violence were happened due to dowry in which 236 women were killed; number of eye-teasing cases was 465 in which 21 women and girls committed suicide. These statistics shows a grim picture of our women's vulnerability.

Media can play an important in reducing violence against women. They can be a great campaigner. We need to change our existing culture of violence against women. We have to create a positive culture through education. We have laws but implementation of these lacks seriously.

As a media we are also sensitizing our journalists. We have started to practice gender related law in our office. We follow particular guideline in reporting VAW related cases. We are also working with acid survivors. We are campaigning against acid related violence.

We need to change our mindset to bring change in the society. We have to build and nurture a healthy society where there will be no violence against women.

Snehal Soneji, Country Director, Oxfam Bangladesh
Here I will briefly discuss about our project titled "Pop culture with a purpose: Edutainment-Violence Against Women". The project ran from March 2013 to February 2015. We tried to discuss the issue of violence against women in a way that is non-confrontational and easy to be understood. We used the tool of entertainment to disseminate VAW related information. And we find it quite successful in reaching the audience and creating impact and bring behavioural change. Clearly, youth were our primary target group. We directly reached 3000 students and 3000 parents. And half a million were reached indirectly through this project. The journey has just begun. VAW is such an issue which has been important for many years and will remain so for many years. So we need constant effort to bring change in the situation.

Finally I want to appreciate the support that we have received from Zonta International and UN Trust Fund to join Oxfam's initiative to End Violence against Women.

Imam Nahil, National Program Officer-Education & Gender, Oxfam and Md. M Bari Chowdhury
Sexual violence against adolescent girls is one of the less-talked issues in Bangladesh. Though it is wide spread in Bangladesh we do not get comfortable talking about it. The particular objective of this project was how we can use popular culture and media in preventing sexual violence against adolescents. In Bangladesh we do not have clear data on sexual violence. Still existing data shows that unmarried women are the worst victim of sexual violence. In Bangladesh, 80% of unmarried women become victim of sexual violence.

We did a situation analysis in the project area, Khulna, before embarking on the project. It showed that 90% adolescent girls were victim of sexual violence. They face sexual violence both inside and outside of home. We identified that in the community there are 46 types of activities that can be called as sexual violence. When we talked about these activities with the community people, male adolescent could identify only 11 types of activities as sexual violence while female adolescents 19, teachers 18 (male teachers 11, female teachers 17) and parents 16 types of activities. The main message of this finding is that there are many practices in the society which make us uncomfortable but we do not identify them as sexual violence. There is a big gap in knowledge and awareness about sexual violence.

Against this background we started our project. It is a multi-country project that is being implemented in 11 countries including Bangladesh. We implemented this project in 10 schools of Khulna. We used Edutainment strategy in this project which was really unique in Bangladesh. We tried to provide education through entertainment. We mixed traditional cultural elements and modern cultural elements. We did drama theatre, pot song, video show, caravan show and other cultural activities to disseminate our messages. We did survey among 280 students among which 66% were girls. We tried to find out the impact of this project on their knowledge level. In the intervention schools our baseline data of awareness about sexual violence 38.1%. Through the project it increased to 98.5%. Now the students have more knowledge about sexual violence and can easily identify sexually violent activities. And, in terms of action, 95% of students said that they would respond positively if any one face sexual violence. 59.5% of them said they would listen to girls. 44% of the girls said that they would not take any suicide attempt. A large number of them said that they would report about sexual violence to the change maker groups, teachers and parents.

We got some inspiring case stories. One is about Ayessa who was saved from child marriage by her school teacher and friends. Another one is the story of Robin Sir who mobilized his students to fight against VAW.

Rokeya Kabir, Executive Director, BNPS
After liberation when I came back to Dhaka University, I saw many girls got married during the Liberation War. They came to me and asked whether their marriage would remain valid after the war. I told them that if women did not take care of themselves no boy would come to their help. In the early 1990 when I started to work on women empowerment I kept this perspective in my mind and worked on women's role in the Liberation War.

Mr. Snehal has mentioned about avoiding confrontational attitude. But when VAW is politically or religiously intentioned then we have to confront them. For example, with the change of government in 2001, we faced serious obstacle to continue our women empowerment related programmes. Many of female cultural activists became victim of political and religious violence. Even two were killed in a bomb incident in Netrokona. So there is no scope for living in a comfort zone and continue work for women empowerment and gender equality.

We urge our education secretary to start coeducation from the very beginning. Our experience says that when girls and boys grow together their understanding gets better, curiosity gets lessened and they become very supportive to each other. We should also think about contents of advertisements and TV programmes.



The Daily Prothom Alo, BRAC, HASAB, RUPANTOR and WeCan Bangladesh in support with Oxfam, Zonta and UNTF organised a roundtable on "Prevention of Violence against Adolescent Girls and Women: Use of Popular Culture & Media" on February 25, 2015. Here we publish a summary of the discussion -- Editor



Tania Haque, Chairperson, Women and Gender Studies Department, Dhaka University

In Bangladesh perspective, it is often said that women are safe in their house but in reality they are facing serious types of violence inside the house. In educational institutions, also, we see increasing number of VAW cases. What we see in newspapers is only a partial picture. Still our media are not adequately sensitized about VAW issues. If we use gender lens in analyzing newspaper contents we see news about women hardly get space in the front page at par with lead news. Though women are half of the whole population they get very little attention. And where they get attention they are generally treated as object of violence. Even in reporting we see lack of professionalism. I always respect media's role in sensitizing people about gender rights but it is less than adequate. I have some specific recommendations about media's role:

1. Gender balance should be maintained in media content.
2. Women should be portrayed as human being not product.
3. It should be publicised repeatedly that women are not only consumers but also producers.
4. Women should not be depicted as sexual object.
5. Gender sensitization training should be given to different levels of journalists.
6. There should be a weekly review column on women's representation in media.
7. Women should be employed more in journalism.

Journalism should be made women friendly. There should be quota for women in media houses.

In Dhaka University we have Women and Gender Studies department. Every year we organize three important events: International Women's Day, Violence Against Women Day, and Rokeya Lecture. Our students are doing research on gender equality and VAW issues. We are also working on role of media and culture in creating awareness about gender issues among general people.

In rural areas 39% people do not have access to any kind of media. To these people we have to reach through our traditional media like pot song, jatra and so on.

Conor Molloy, Country Program Manager, Oxfam-NOVB
The baseline and end-line statistics presented show an

incredible impact emerging from this intervention. It shows that entertaining ways to engage young people can be useful as a mode of education. Moreover, we also see through the statistics and the stories and case studies from the project that engaging young people through edutainment initiatives and sensitizing them to issues of sexual harassment and violence against women and girls, speaking to them in ways that engage them and that they are interested in can have a real impact not only in raising their awareness, but translating their awareness to behaviour change. I hope we can learn more from this project and take these intervention strategies into other projects to create long lasting impact on people's life.

Tahmina Haque, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Care Bangladesh

There is serious lack of research on violence against women in Bangladesh. Can we have a database where we will get all the information on violence against women? Government can lead the project.

We need to work on sexual violence free educational institution. In many institutions authorities say that we have committee and we have very little reported case. Is it positive? In many cases we have found that authorities are not sensitized enough to identify the cases of sexual violence or the environment is not free enough where girls can open up. I think we should strictly implement the directives of High Court on sexual violence in workplace and educational institutions as long as we can not make an effective law in this regard.

We need to coordinate offline and online campaign. Another important issue is disparity in education system because students of madrassas, Bengali medium and English are taught differently. We need to coordinate their learning processes.

We need to talk about sustainability of the projects so that we can continue our effort even after the project funding ends. We need to collate outcomes of different projects and avoid duplication of projects.

Jinat Ara, National Coordinator, WeCan
We have implemented this project in the field. First, I will identify the challenges. We found it really difficult to work in coalition because we are more concerned about own publicity not about the impact on the field work. We do not have

any effective association. In the field, we see little presence of administration, government organisations and NGO for creating favourable environment for women.

Working in schools is not so easy. Without government paper you cannot work in school. In many schools authorities even did not allow us to enter. Now amid this political turmoil working in the field has become really risky for the activists.

In our time, we saw different types of inter and intra school competition in the school. But now a day there is very little scope for holding such programmes in the school. These programmes can be used as an important avenue for disseminating information about gender equality. Our local cultural organisations should work closely with schools.

Another problem is that people generally think that women issue is an NGO issue. Even in media, senior staffs think women issue as NGO issue. It should be established as a mainstream issue.

We should activate committees on violence against women in schools and monitor it regularly. The present government has done many positive works for women for example government has issued that a perpetrator can not be given loans, women have to be included in SMC and so on. But we do not find proper monitoring of these directives.

The issue of school dress is very important. Schools should strictly follow girls' dress code.

Nazrul Islam Khan, Secretary, Ministry of Education

Creating awareness is very important. We need sensitization at all the levels of the society. Few years ago, in a programme a college teacher told that by punishing eve teaser we were destroying a creative art like love. This type perception is a serious hindrance to reducing VAW.

I think cases of violence against women are not increasing in the country. We see more news in media because our media are more conscious about the issue. Now people have more exposure to sexual contents which creates more demand. People's sexual behaviour has also changed due to exposure to modern amenities.

In many cases we see that tribal attitude of teacher community or school management hinders proper trial of perpetrators. We have to deal this issue seriously.

I welcome this study. It has found innovative ways of communicating with youth people. Still it is a big challenge how we can disseminate our messages on sexual violence. If we can create electronic content keeping in mind our social reality and disseminate in schools then it will work. Many educated people even opposed the content of physical change of girls and boys in curriculum. We can not do it overnight. We can upload these contents in the net and issue a circular so that people become aware of these contents and download these contents.

There is also a gap between government and non-government organisation. We should interact more on such important issues.

Kalpana Basu, Director, BLAST

It is new information to me that there are 46 types of behaviours that can be termed as sexual violence. You should disseminate this information.

There are important questions to be resolved to reduce violence against women. Do we talk about personal laws? Have we achieved the constitutional right of equal rights of women in property? For the last 30-35 years we have been working with women but we have paid very little attention to men.

Now the problem of sexual violence is that if we say sexual violence we become silent. Still it is a stigma in the society. People are dealing with physical violence but they are very sensitive about sexual violence.

Now everyone has access to digital content at least every one has mobile. People respond more to education through entertainment. But we have to know how can we do that effectively. What type of content should be communicated? Now many women know about harassment but do they get proper support? Our existing judicial process is very lengthy. We should work on these issues.

Recently we had a meeting with MOWCA where we reviewed text book contents on reproductive health. There is too much information amid which basic information get diluted. There should be some direct content. Now young generation communicate more in net than reading book. We should understand these changes. We need to find innovative ways to communicate them.

Habibur Rahman, Programme Head, Gender, Justice and Diversity, BRAC

In this project our main focus was school. We have achieved some success in creating awareness among students. It has created leadership among students where girls and boys are working together. Special committees have been activated to stop violence against women. Entertainment tools tried to create awareness where we promoted girls voice and aware people to listen to girls. Engaging men and boys actively have created situation where students now feel comfortable to share their views with their teachers. We have big programmes on adolescents. We have 7624 adolescent clubs. Now we are thinking how we can use these edutainment tools in these clubs. We would also like to request other organisations to disseminate the findings of the research through their programmes.

In our schools, the government has various initiatives on reproductive health. Special training will make our teachers comfortable in talking about these issues. We can also discuss these issues through extra curricular activities. Government should give directive in this regard. We should also think of how we can implement high court directives.

We have also created some digital contents and apps like mayalogy where young people can ask any question and get answer with 24 hours. Donors should also help to create long term impact through these projects.

Dr. Ranjit Kumar Biswas, Secretary, Social Welfare Ministry

There is social resistance against it. If we communicate more with opposite gender it will lessen our unusual attraction to them. I have requested our education secretary to introduce coeducation in the future educational institutions.

Media can play a big role in disseminating information about VAW. But they should maintain artistry. Some of them are doing counterproductive activities for business interest. Some are not sensitive to gender issues. So I think our journalist should also be made sensitized about gender issues.

Our young generation does not like lectures. We have to reach them creatively. We have to give communicate them through entertainment.

We have to work collectively and make our people aware that the perpetrator who is harassing a girl can have his own sister or children who might face same kind of violence. Then he will think twice before doing such acts of violence.

Abdul Quayum

Gender discrimination happens when we treat a woman only as a woman not a human. Only when we will treat them as a human we will be able to create a better civilization. We have to be creative in this effort.