

ADVERTORIAL

POPULATION SERIES

16 Days of Activism to End Violence against Women – Making a Lifetime Commitment



At a workshop on preventing gender-based violence in universities, we asked students why women experience sexual harassment on campus. "It's the ones who don't dress conservatively," said one young man, "they are too free." "It's because they talk too much," said another, "they are too open." "No," said one young woman, "that's not true. I'm quiet and I get harassed." "No," said another young woman, "I get harassed when I'm in full hijab and when I wear jeans." "No," said a third woman. "My three-year-old neighbour was raped inside her own home."

Bangladesh is not alone in regulating what women should and shouldn't do to be free from violence. Around the world, countries, cultures, religions, ethnicities, languages prescribe detailed codes of dress, behaviour, speech that prescribe women's lives as if this will prevent violence. Yet, according to a 2013 WHO report, at least 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence. Countries courageous enough to undertake their own surveys have found much higher rates. In 2013, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) with support from UNFPA released a national survey of violence against women that found that 87 percent of ever married women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime with 77 percent reporting violence in the past 12 months. A 2013 study conducted in 8 universities by UN Women found that 76 percent of women students have experienced gender based violence. A 2007 study in Dhaka city that found that 11 percent of office women staff, 29 percent of school teachers, 85 percent of garment workers and 100 percent of day labourers experienced physical, psychological and sexual harassment in their workplace.

These statistics force us to recognise that although Bangladesh has come a long way on several indicators of gender equality, including the reduction of maternal mortality and achievement of



parity in primary and lower secondary school, there is a long road ahead.

Violence against women is an expression of the deep structural inequalities that limit the life chances for women in Bangladesh. It is one of many such expressions such as the fact that less than 40 percent of women participate in the labour force in Bangladesh whereas 85 percent of men do. When women do participate, they earn an average of 52 percent of what men do. Bangladesh has

one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world where today 1 in 3 Bangladeshi girls aged 15-19 are married.

It is easy to think that when we are not perpetrators of physical assault or sexual harassment, it is not our problem. But it is. The fear of violence creates an unequal society where women and girls cannot participate and contribute equally and all of us lose as a result. How many women do you see on crowded public buses? How free are women to bring information

about family needs into discussions of health care, climate change or local budget allocations? How many girls are at the neighbourhood youth centre or football field? How many women join the line of men praying on the street during the evening *namaaz*? How many women stand at the corner tea stall, laughing over a cup of tea? How many women come streaming out of office buildings at evening rush hour? The fear of violence prevents women from being equal citizens.

And it is only in recognising that this is a loss for all of us can we begin to solve this problem. The solution has to be at all levels, involving every actor – institutional and individual.

In 2009, the Bangladesh High Court issued powerful directives directing all workplaces and educational institutions to develop and implement measures to end violence against women, with a focus on preventing violence before it happens. Yet, in spite of strong commitment in many offices and on many campuses, implementation remains weak. This is where we must act as institutions. A draft law sits ready to be discussed and passed in Parliament that will make the country's actions to end violence against women stronger and give guidance to those that would like to see women free to participate in education and economic development. This is where we must act as policymakers, and where citizens must demand answers.

And perhaps most importantly, Bangladeshi civil society has not been silent. The protests against the violence during *Pahela Boishakh*, the vociferous campaigns, marches and social media outrage are all clear indications that Bangladeshis have had enough and want to end violence against women. We must all be part of these protests, we must protest in our own lives, in our own homes and in our own schools, colleges and workplaces. We must speak up when our friends harass women, we must speak up when our aunts and uncles want to marry off their underage daughters and we must play our part in making public spaces safe for women. Laws and policies are essential but ultimately, it will be our own actions that will create a society where every woman and every girl is truly, gloriously, fully free.

Jointly written by UNFPA and UN Women to mark the 16 days of activism against Gender Based Violence campaign taking place between the 25th of November and 10th of December.

The odd shadow lurking between cognition and behaviour

#ResearchMesearch



NADINE SHAAANTA MURSHID

Nationally Representative Survey" published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* found a significant association between men's egalitarian views and perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV) – but not in the direction that I had expected. Contrary to what one may think, the study, based on a national sample of men, revealed that men with egalitarian views were *more* likely to perpetrate violence against their wives.

What this means, in real life terms, is that while men are cognitively able to understand the notions of gender equality and women's right to work, this

understanding does not translate into actionable behaviours (even when the responses are self-reported!). Or, it could mean that they have learned the feminist language and they use it, but they don't actually believe in it. However, that does not explain why they are more likely to perpetrate IPV than men who do not subscribe to egalitarian views. What makes sense, then, in a convoluted way is: patriarchy — based on the idea that patriarchy *protects* women (even while it controls and oppresses them).

Let us now imagine that man with non-egalitarian views – the man who thinks that women should not work outside the house. Why would he hold such views? One good non-misogynist reason to not want your wife to work could be concern for her safety. And, if that is the motivation for subscribing to non-egalitarian views, then, perhaps it makes sense (as my study suggests) that they are less likely to perpetrate violence against their wives (when compared

to men with egalitarian views). This raises the question: is this a question of patriarchy, at all, or is this about safety? And, a counter question: would there be a need for women's safety if the social order were not structured around patriarchy that maintains subjugation and oppression of women? And, a counter-counter question: can we have this conversation at all without talking about intersectionality (particularly, gender and patriarchy, as already discussed, as well as class and other systems of oppression)?

Scholars have produced a large body of work to understand rape. Some have studied "forced copulation" among other species (Lalumiere, Harris, Quinsey, & Rice, 2005) to conclude that Homo sapiens have characteristics that overlap with other members of the animal kingdom as a tactic to increase reproduction. Similarly, it has been argued that rape is "the behavioral expression of a mechanism which has evolved to

enable men of low mate value to circumvent female choice" (Apostolou, 2013, pg. 1). This is because women are seen as a scarce reproductive resource over which men (attempt to) gain sexual access (Trivers, 1972); which in turn provides women with the ability to choose. Women, argues Buss (2003), do not choose randomly; instead they choose men with high(er) social status, "good" genes, and ability to obtain and control resources, which leave out men who do not have these desirable characteristics. These men, as such, suffer reproductive costs because they are left out of the "market" and choose rape as a mechanism through which they produce their offspring. However, a new body of literature contends with this idea given that women's mate selection was (and in many cases still is) controlled by their parents during human evolution which means women's choice had little to do with the selection process. As such, it is unclear as to what exactly led to the

evolutionary adaptation of rape, if at all – women's choice, parental choice, or something else (Apostolou, 2012)? And to learn what constitutes "something else" we can look at the body of work that focuses more on the individual perpetrators of rape, where rape is seen as a byproduct of characteristics such as high libido, desire for novelty in sexual partners, and willingness for causal sex (Thornhill & Palmer, 2000).

Evolutionarily derived or not, violence against women in general, and rape in particular, is a problem. It is arguably the most dehumanising problem we have today, one that has become commonplace, normalised, one that continues to be a weapon of war. Indeed, it is one of the cruelest weapons of oppression and dominance used by a wide variety of offenders and enabled by associated enablers. However, the shame, taboo, and (perhaps) limited understanding about rape has rendered it a problem that receives various levels of

empathy ranging from "there can be no rape within a marriage" to "she provoked her rape by wearing the kinds of clothes she was wearing" to "let's hang all rapists" and anything in between.

Recently, several men were sentenced to death in Bangladesh for various cases of rape (specifically, stranger rape) with the intent to instill the fear of death into people as a way to prevent them from committing such crimes in the future. But I do wonder: if men have to fear death in order to stop themselves from raping women, is it good enough? Don't we want them to not *want* to rape women? If so, how should we teach men not to rape? How can they cognitively understand that it's not okay to rape women? And based on my own study, I have to ask: is cognition really a predictor of behaviour?

And, I am left at a loss, because, my own study shows that it may not be so.

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A WORD A DAY



JANIFORM [jan-uh-fawrm]

having two faces

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

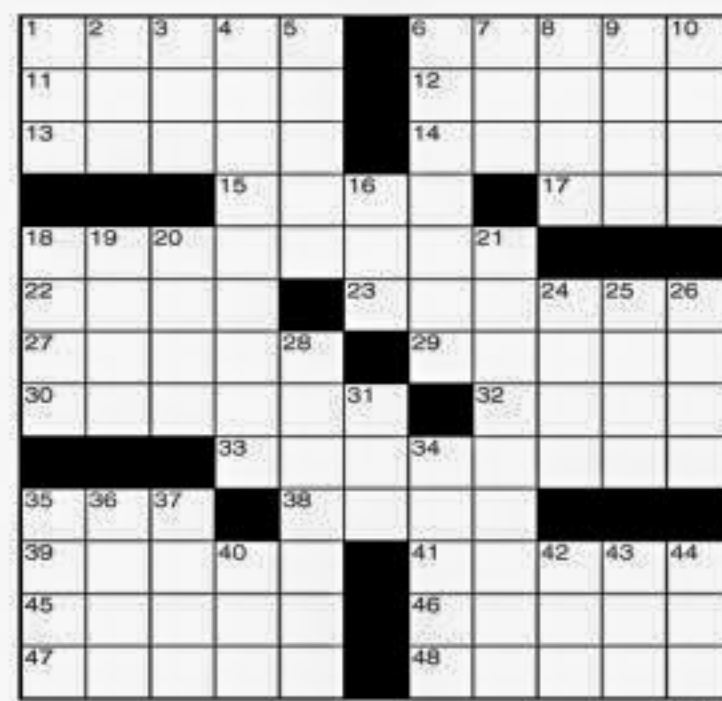
ACROSS

- 1 Small grove
- 6 Orlando team
- 11 Bring forth
- 12 Without help
- 13 On a cruise
- 14 Barbra Streisand movie
- 15 Canyon sound
- 17 Procured
- 18 Strews
- 22 Angel's instrument
- 23 Showed boredom
- 27 Come into
- 29 Go out of
- 30 Set upon
- 32 Divisible by two
- 33 Paints like Pollock
- 35 Baseball need
- 38 Company bigwig
- 39 Visitor from space
- 41 Relocation pro
- 45 Do a Thanks giving chore
- 46 Excellent, in slang
- 47 Kicked, in a way
- 48 Promptly, in a way

DOWN

- 1 Robert E. Lee's org.

- 2 Make a choice
- 3 -- de deux
- 4 Climbing flowers
- 5 Make law
- 6 Like some local elections
- 7 Pub beverage
- 8 Big ringer
- 9 Obsessed with
- 10 Boston cager, for short
- 16 "You there!"
- 18 Former home of the Mets
- 19 Soup buys
- 20 Liberal study
- 21 Summer veggie
- 24 Church part
- 25 At any time
- 26 Bears' lairs
- 28 Turned red, perhaps
- 31 Indulgent
- 34 Musical pace
- 35 Browser button
- 36 Country star Jackson
- 37 Bike part
- 40 Adam's mate
- 42 Singer Damone
- 43 Australian bird
- 44 Sturgeon eggs



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

