

# Is abusive behaviour a choice?



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**#ResearchResearch**  
I was once called a whore. Chances are, so have you, if you're a woman. And like me, you've probably been called other names too (and I'm sorry that you have), but this is the one I choose to focus on because this one befuddles me.

What is the intent of a statement like this? Who is being debased? Me? Sex workers? Both are problematic, obviously. In the same way it's problematic when the word *chasha*, farmer, is hurled as an abuse. Because these words have political content.

These words, they assume a certain class position, status, and power - perceived or otherwise - over the person(s) that these words are directed towards. They contain the idea of being better than the other, they contain disparagement, they contain misogyny.

In my research, I've found something else as well: status inconsistency, or in regular parlance, a battered ego.

I found that it is when status is threatened (and status inconsistency occurs) that some individuals resort to being abusive. This is more like, I theorise, when the status quo is patriarchal to begin with. And thus I found an answer to why I was called a whore. I was called a whore because that's what men call you when they can't control you, or your thoughts. That's what women call you too, when they buy into the same patriarchy that governs them.

Recent research indicates that 80 percent of a nationally representative sample of women in Bangladesh reported experiencing domestic violence in their intimate relationships. That's a lot of people. And, pretty alarming.

As good citizens what are we to do when we witness or have knowledge of such violence? Ensure that those who are or have been experiencing violence have a safety plan including a safe place to go to. This may be difficult; many individuals remain in violent relationships because they have nowhere else to go, because they're dependent on their partners. "Leaving the abuse" may render them homeless. These are



valid reasons for which many women don't and can't access help. However, there are organisations such as BNWLA and ASK that one can reach out to for help.

At the same time, we have to recognise that individuals who abuse their partners (or others) need various types of therapy - including anger management and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT is a good choice because they need a shift in their mindsets, they need to let go of misogyny

and sexism, they need to reframe their negative and dehumanising ideals about the people that they abuse, they need to stop believing in patriarchy. They need to learn new behaviours to replace the abusive ones. They need to learn what to do when they get angry.

This is to say that people *can* change but success depends on whether they voluntarily seek help or are coerced to, for example by the courts. Research shows that voluntary

participation in interventions is far more likely to be successful than mandatory participation. But how do we know if people have actually changed?

Various scholars have developed guidelines to assess change among those with a history of violence. One that I like is Bancroft and Silverman's guideline which incorporates elements of restorative justice. They propose assessing the following questions when estimating the degree of change:

- Has he made full disclosure of his history of physical, sexual, and psychological and other forms of abuse?
- Has he recognised that abusive behaviour is unacceptable?
- Has he recognised that abusive behaviour is a choice?
- Does he show empathy for the effects of his actions on his partner and children?
- Can he identify his pattern of controlling behaviours and entitled attitudes?
- Has he replaced abusive behaviours with respectful behaviours and attitudes?
- Is he willing to make amends in a meaningful way?
- Does he accept consequences for his actions?

I like this framework because it ensures that there is cognitive engagement on the part of the individuals who want to change, who can then demonstrate that they've unlearned their abusive behaviours, thus distancing themselves from such behaviours, with the understanding that behaviours can change; that it is important to repent, and take responsibility for actions that have harmed others; and that their use of violence is not "who they are."

But individuals with a history of violence aren't the only ones who need to change their mindsets. The society as a whole does. I say this because it's not uncommon for people to brush aside or even condone violence and abusive behaviours, particularly of people they know and love, and against people and groups they don't care for.

I am going to point to a couple of reasons. One, they support individuals who abuse their partners because they don't know what else to do. They feel the need to be supportive, as they perhaps should, but they don't know how to do that and be helpful at the same time, and thus become enablers.

And therein lies the problem; the message that enablers send is that it's okay to abuse people. This is not helpful for anyone involved. Friends and family of individuals who abuse are especially well placed to help individuals recognise the problem with their behaviour, and encourage them to change that behaviour. Such enablers need to understand that being supportive need not equal accepting their behaviours.

Two, they themselves subscribe to the same ideals of misogyny, sexism, and patriarchy that allow the use of violence against women (and others). As such they end up victim blaming and calling into question the reasons for which violence was used in the first place. Indeed, even women believe in patriarchy. It is perhaps inevitable given that patriarchy informs the social order within which we live.

And a third reason is that violence and subjugation of women is normalised. It's so pervasive that it's normal. When it happens, people are no longer shocked. And more times than not, people justify violence against women. Even women.

Fourth, people don't know *who* to blame, as if we have to blame someone. In my interviews with women, I have found many women term it as a problem with their fate, not the men or their behaviours in question. It's one way of coping with the violence in their lives, particularly if they see no way out of it.

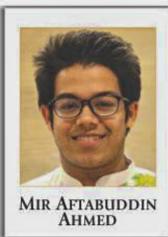
Fifth, women who have withstood abuse in their previous relationship(s) might sometimes bring that same abuse and violence into their new relationship(s), especially when unmitigated through lack of therapy, where they might use violence - physical or emotional - which they have learned as "conflict resolution" which in turn might be reciprocated, resulting in further use of violence.

Violence need not be physical for it to be violent. I will invoke what my colleague Annette Semanchin-Jones recently said: emotional violence may be far more harmful than one instance of physical abuse.

As I recall all the *khota*, jabs, that I've received in my life, many of which I have found difficult to forget, I recognise that that is a form of emotional abuse.

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# How state intervention can boost our economy



MIR AFTABUDDIN AHMED

**E**CONOMIC interventionism, or state interventionism, is a policy perception favouring government involvement in the free market process with the aim of correcting market failures and promoting the general welfare of the nation. The idea generates from the notion that free markets are inherently inefficient and require the support of the state in order to promote national growth, increase employment levels, encourage income equality, control price levels and broadly stimulate a sustainable economy. In addition to the fundamental monetary and fiscal policies of the government, there exist several avenues for the AL administration to support Bangladesh's commercial progress, whilst ensuring the viability for businesses to prosper.

Bangladesh is at a transitional phase in its economic journey and if statistics are to be trusted, then the country is on its path to development. What needs to be addressed however is whether Bangladesh wishes to be a strong yet unequal economy, or one which is equitably prosperous for all sections of the country. To strike a balance is difficult, yet a conversation pertaining to this needs to begin in the first place. State interventionism in the economy has always been an issue of grave concern between economists. The idea of governments intervening in the free market seems ill-motivated at first. Yet it is this very system which has helped countries like Canada, Sweden and Denmark, amongst others, to reach their output potential. On the other hand, a capitalist-based American market has indeed ensured the USA's path to being the largest economy in the world, yet questions pertaining to the American social systems remain the focal point of many in the political-left.

If one were to assess the Bangladesh economy, the tenants of our recent progress have been a flourishing garments sector, high levels of remittance inflow and a stable agricultural sector. To ensure the continued performance of such, the government of Bangladesh has initiated several macroeconomic procedures to support these sectors. Yet it is unwise to be overly-dependent on these for long-term prosperity. It is here where state investments in the unlikely avenues of solar energy, a growing IT sector and the alternative ship-building industry, are needed.

In the case of solar energy, production cost and accessibility to land is a cause of concern. Traditional views of market interventions favour increased red-tape or bureaucratic barriers; however, in the case of renewable energy sources, the Bangladesh government would do well to provide potential investors with land and other capital resources in the northern parts of Bangladesh. Growth of the technological sector is a long-term aim of the current government, and one hopes tangible

subsidies to this sector remain in the years to come. The ship-building industry has low labour costs and enhanced potential in the production of medium-ocean going vessels. What it needs from the government is further technical support and research funding to increase its competitiveness in the region.

The biggest areas of market failure in Bangladesh have stemmed from the health and education sector, whilst high levels of pollution from businesses always remain a cause of concern. Budgetary allocations for the health and education industries have increased substantially this past fiscal year, yet the qualitative nature of services in both these sectors remains a worry. For countries like Canada and Sweden, the areas where the government pushed for reforms most in regards to these sectors were in research and technological development. As such, it may be well-advised for the AL government to provide financial and scholarly support to enhance research and development capabilities. The quantity of education and healthcare services is

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an issue which is on its way to being addressed. Nevertheless, without state-based support, it would be nearly impossible to develop a quality education and healthcare system.

Pollution levels from chemical factories and other businesses have already had a grave impact on our water bodies and quality of air. Although there is wide-ranging consensus regarding the importance of environmental protection amongst the larger firms in Bangladesh, this is an idea which is yet to be internalised by the majority of small and medium sized businesses. Government regulations to protect the environment are in place, yet lack of information, understanding and ignorance amongst many firms have been detrimental to Bangladesh's economic sustainability. Rather than simply increasing the environmental tax and imposing regulations, the government must improve its oversight and enforcement measures. Whether this be through the Ministry of Environment or some other institution is a matter for Sheikh Hasina's administration to figure out immediately. Yet

what is certain is national resources have to be, in no uncertain terms, guided towards ensuring the environmental future of the country.

All of the above, however, are dependent upon a high-performing labour market. The term 'human capital' refers to the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population, viewed in terms of their value or cost to an organisation or country. For far too long has investment in human capital remained an ignored issue in Bangladesh. The country has been so concentrated in developing its business potentials that it has forgotten its responsibility of enhancing individual potentials. Low human capital numbers tie into a low rate of post-secondary graduates and immobile workforce. Yes, a Bangladeshi garment worker is highly-skilled. Yes, a young boy from a village can fix car problems without any education. Yes, we have a resilient workforce. Yet it is certain that this workforce is surely underutilised and unused in many cases. It is here where the government needs to direct resources in mobilising human capital through training schemes across all occupational sectors, and thereby improve both geographical and occupational mobility of labour. Government internships, collegiate programmes, and specialised workshops and scholarships are some of the tried and tested ways to achieve the above. Otherwise, if history stands true, 20 years down the line we will have a strong but stagnated economy.

In summary, without the tangible support of the government, it is impossible for a country like Bangladesh to achieve its output potential. In addition to the above, large-scale reforms are required in decentralisation mechanisms, a strong environmental policy and tackling bureaucratic corruption, whilst maintaining the feasibility of the Bangladeshi market. The sad truth is our political establishment is too busy arguing with one another regarding issues which only they are concerned with. Dialogue, discussion and debate regarding policy matters seem to have been ignored for too long. Big and bold projects like the Padma Bridge are good in the sense that it adds high-value to GDP figures whilst enhancing connectivity, but most importantly for those defining this policy, it makes the AL government look good on paper.

It is only normal for one to disagree on state interventionism. Those favouring it emphasise on national institutions playing a supporting, rather than distracting, role to private businesses in this regard. But let us at least start having conversations regarding such policies, rather than ignore the plight of the common man. Let us look forward to what this country will look like three decades from now, rather than prioritising short-term gains for political points. If Bangladesh is to be a sustainable and equitable economy, then there is no alternative to highlighting the long-term trajectory of our country.

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