

# The long, winding road to remedy for spousal violence



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WHILE covering a discussion on domestic violence last year, like many others in the audience, I was deeply touched by Rahela's story of helplessness. Rahela (not her real name), a domestic violence survivor from Atgharia upazila of Pabna, had been abused by her husband ever since she got married 15 years ago. Although initially her husband, a drug addict, would torture her occasionally, it became more frequent as time went by, she said, wiping her tears. But one day, during the Covid-induced lockdown last year, the 28-year-old mother of two could not bear the torture any longer. The man beat her severely with a stick, which landed her in a local hospital.

Later, when I contacted her personally, Rahela said that she had gone to the local UP chairman to complain about her husband's history of violence, but she was advised to go to the police station. After taking treatment at the hospital for two weeks, she went to the Atgharia Police Station, where the duty officer asked her to file a complaint, and that was all.

According to Rahela, police did nothing about her complaint, rather, after a month and a half, she was forced to return to her abuser as her parents could not bear the extra costs of keeping her two daughters and herself, while her in-laws and neighbours made a mockery of their situation saying, in Rahela's words, she "had to return eventually, even though she went to the police to teach him a lesson."

Although spousal violence is the most prevalent form of violence facing women in Bangladesh—according to a 2015 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics survey, 73 percent of ever-married women reported having experienced violence from their husbands in their lifetime—an overwhelming majority of them have to endure a similar scenario while seeking remedies. They have to go through a myriad of other challenges including social stigma.

Data obtained from the national emergency helpline 999 also shows that the number of complaints against spousal violence has increased by 174 percent during the past two and a half years, with 3,348 complaints recorded in 2021, 1,123 in 2020, and 388 in 2019. In 2021, such complaints were almost half (47 percent) of the gender-violence-related calls attended by 999. However, in only a few instances, cases were filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000, as most survivors do not want to file a case, instead they want to see the matter resolved internally. Unlike Rahela, who at least showed the courage to go to the local UP chairman and police to seek remedies, victims mostly keep silent about the bodily harm and emotional abuse suffered.

Speaking up or taking action against an abusive husband is not an easy decision, as I have discovered while interviewing many survivors of domestic violence. Many think they have little choice in this regard, with social and familial pressures always hanging over their heads. They are advised to comply and endure silently, or risk losing it all. The shocking death of Elma Chowdhury Meghla—a student of Dhaka University's

Department of Dance—at the hands of her in-laws is a perfect example of how lack of support can force women to keep silent until their deaths.

Furthermore, in the absence of proper institutional support including shelter, psycho-social counselling, medical services and livelihood opportunities,

violence she had faced from her husband. During her eighth month of pregnancy, she said, she discovered that her husband was cheating on her, and when confronted, beat her severely. He also threatened to kick her out of the house, so she couldn't take any action against him.

district courts in the past 10 years, while the Barishal Chief Judicial Magistrate Court recorded only one in 2020, and that too was still pending disposal. A lawyer with 25 years of experience at the Metropolitan Magistrate Courts in Dhaka said that no one had approached him to file a case under the Act in the last 10

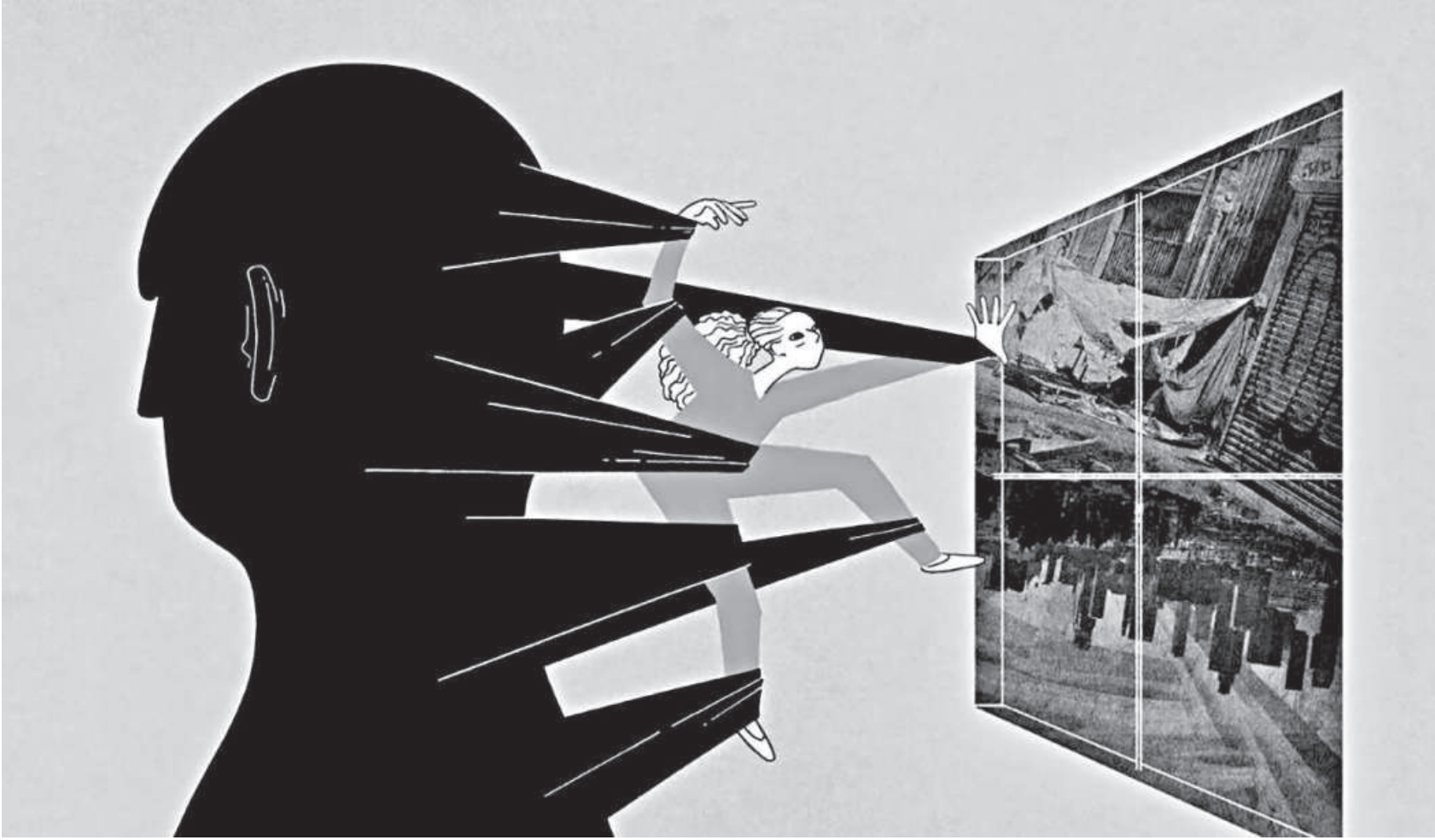


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**In order to prevent domestic violence, which went up alarmingly during the pandemic, we must make the DVPP Act successful by employing designated paralegals or separate desks at the Upazila Women Affairs offices to efficiently coordinate among the various implementing agencies.**

According to Mehroo, based on her experience of working with her organisation, she found that the road to remedy under the DVPP Act is also uneven, complex as well as time-consuming, as the implementing authorities are not well aware of these progressive provisions. In her case, it was simply impossible to pursue a prolonged legal battle as she was heavily pregnant, unable to walk properly, let alone run to courts.

A 2020 study conducted by Prof Taslima Yasmin, an associate professor of law at Dhaka University, also found that 19 of the 20 survivors interviewed had never heard of the DVPP Act. Even when they went to law enforcement agencies or administrative officers, they were not informed that they could get remedy under the law. Clearly, there is a lack of orientation and training on the provisions and usage of the law.

Taslima's study also found that victims only seek remedy when physical torture reaches a severe level, or after they were denied access to their marital residence or the husband remarried.

Another shocking discovery was that although the study found case records from the Chief Judicial Magistrate Courts in over a dozen districts, it found no case filed under the law in Bhola and Sherpur

years; he saw only one case being heard in a court during this time. Similarly, the Judicial Magistrates in Gazipur, Narsingdi, and Mymensingh informed that they rarely saw any case being filed under this law.

According to the Act, the upazila women affairs officers have been made responsible as Enforcement Officer (EO) for reporting incidents of domestic violence to the court, accessing legal aid under the Legal Aid Act 2000, referring victims to safe shelters, if necessary, and much more. However, some organisations working on preventing violence against women said that the enforcement officers remain unavailable for immediate support, as they are overburdened with duties and under-equipped in the absence of any budget.

In order to prevent domestic violence, which went up alarmingly during the pandemic, we must make the DVPP Act successful by employing designated paralegals or separate desks at the Upazila Women Affairs offices to efficiently coordinate among the various implementing agencies. At the same time, there must be a mechanism (involving shelters, psycho-social counselling and medical services) for the survivors who literally have nowhere to go to escape the violence.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**  
1 Pottery piece  
6 Elephant of stories  
11 Become narrower  
12 Chosen few  
13 Parts of hearts  
14 Critical asset  
15 Plug parts  
17 Smidge  
18 Cariou of "Blue Bloods"  
19 Game quests  
22 Harris and Asner  
23 "Gunsmoke" marshal  
24 Like some verbs  
25 Beethoven's first

27 Rap's — Nas X  
30 Prompts  
31 Early hour  
32 Pharaoh's symbol  
33 Black Sea port  
35 Act the coquette  
38 Indian, e.g.  
39 Ready for bed  
40 Petulant sound  
41 Garden starters  
42 Famous

**DOWN**  
1 Basic need  
2 Enmity  
3 Kitchen coverings  
4 Horse halter  
5 Severely

burdens  
6 Track act  
7 Imitating  
8 Café's cousin  
9 Reach  
10 Oboe parts  
16 Tied the knot  
20 Hails  
21 Maximum amount  
24 1501, in old Rome  
25 Caron of "Gigi"  
26 Worker at home  
27 Blow one's top  
28 Preposterous  
29 Inclined  
30 River vessels  
34 Cave sound  
36 Danger signal  
37 Six-pt. scores

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Memo No. 45.02.0000.293.18.001.2022-337  
Date: 13.01.2022

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Sl. No.	Tender ID	Last selling date & time	Closing & opening date & time
01	02	04	05
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GD-85