

Break the silence on domestic violence

New BBS survey reveals alarming prevalence of intimate partner abuse

A major survey carried out by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in collaboration with the UNFPA has confirmed our worst fears: that women are three times more likely to face physical abuse and over 14 times more likely to suffer sexual violence from their husbands than from others. According to the Violence Against Women Survey 2024—based on interviews with 27,476 women—54 percent of the respondents reported experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse by their husbands at some point in their marital lives. Moreover, 70 percent experienced at least one form of abuse—physical, sexual, emotional or economic—at some stage. These figures are staggering, even if not entirely surprising, given the silence enforced on intimate partner violence (IPV) in our typically conservative society.

To understand how widespread this has become, it is sufficient to note that 41 percent of the respondents reported being abused by their intimate partners during the 12-month survey period alone. And the fact that 76 percent of women in rural areas and 75.6 percent in urban areas faced such abuse—with smaller margins of difference among divisions than one would have expected—shows how this has transcended geographical divides. This may come as a surprise since urban households are often thought to be more educated. The types of abuse experienced by married women are also diverse, with the most common being controlling behaviour and emotional abuse, which underscores the severity of psychological violence in relationships.

This landmark national survey—the third of its kind—offers comprehensive insights into the scale and impact of violence against women. Only the other day, we raised alarm about the frequent incidents of rape and sexual violence being reported across the country. Among such crimes, IPV is one that deserves to be particularly highlighted because of the silence around it, with many frowning upon even the mere acknowledgment of abuse within marriages. The survey's finding that 64 percent of the victims never share their experiences—and only 7.4 percent seek legal action—is a stark reminder of how deeply ingrained this silence is. It may stem from a desire to protect family reputation, concerns for children's well-being, and the perception that such abuse is "normal." Whatever the cause may be, the culture of silence and denial only enables the perpetrators, helping perpetuate domestic violence through generations.

There is, therefore, no alternative to raising awareness and encouraging married women to speak out without fearing stigma and judgement. Equally importantly, men must be engaged in this effort—through education, community programmes, and stricter accountability—to end the impunity that allows such abuse to persist. At the same time, the government must act on the findings of the BBS survey and implement its recommendations so that there are greater protections against all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence.

Kidney patients need support at CMCH

Comprehensive action needed to ensure viable kidney treatment for all

We are concerned about the crisis of space and resources at the nephrology ward of Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH). According to a report by this daily, despite increasing demand for kidney treatment, this unit remains overcrowded, forcing many patients to receive treatment on the floor. Established with 25 beds in 1991, it now has 40 beds, but this is too inadequate considering the huge number of patients that flock to the facility from Chattogram and the neighbouring districts.

The bed shortage is not the only problem here, however. Dialysis facilities at the CMCH are also quite inadequate. There are nine haemodialysis machines that can serve only 32 patients twice a week. A public-private partnership initiative, comprising 31 machines, has extended services to more patients, but the number of patients seeking dialysis is still almost three times the hospital's capacity. While private clinics offer haemodialysis, their cost is prohibitive for most. Unfortunately, dialysis is the only viable treatment for end-stage kidney failure (ESKF) patients, so a lack of access can have devastating consequences for them. Moreover, a kidney transplant initiative launched at the CMCH in 2008 was later suspended due to a lack of resources and trained personnel.

The CMCH case sums up the overall experience of kidney patients in Bangladesh: lack of treatment options as well as their exorbitant costs. According to a BIDS study unveiled in December, 93 percent of the families of kidney patients experienced financial distress in accessing dialysis across public, private, and NGO-run hospitals. In a country where an estimated 200-250 people per million develop ESKF every year and require dialysis, the average monthly treatment cost of Tk 46,426 is too high, given that our average monthly household income is just Tk 32,422. As per the BIDS study, 19.5 percent of the surveyed kidney patients received fewer dialysis sessions than medically recommended because of the high cost, jeopardising their health further.

This situation deserves to be addressed with the highest priority. Given the dependence on the CMCH in the broader region of Chattogram, the nephrology ward there must be expanded to accommodate more patients, while new specialised kidney care facilities should also be established. Given the growing number of kidney patients in Bangladesh, a similar approach should also be adopted across the country.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

World's first national park established

On this day in 1872, Yellowstone National Park, situated in the western United States and designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1978, was established by the US Congress as the country's—and the world's—first national park.