

## When homes become houses of horror

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reporting abuse by husbands.

The toll-free 24/7 National Helpline Centre for Violence Against Women & Children - 109, run by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, does not record domestic violence as a separate category. But between January and July, it received 29,161 calls reporting physical assault and 19,584 calls relating to mental abuse.

The latest Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) Violence Against Women Survey 2024, based on interviews with 27,476 women, paints an equally alarming picture.

Women are three times more likely to face physical abuse and 14 times more likely to suffer sexual violence from their husbands than from others.

Of the surveyed women, 70 percent reported experiencing at least one form of abuse -- physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or controlling behaviour. More than half (54 percent) said they had faced physical or sexual violence from their husbands.

Yet most victims remain silent -- 64 percent never disclose the abuse, and only 7.4 percent seek legal action.

Experts say victims' silence is rooted in fear of damaging family reputation, concern for children, and the societal normalisation of abuse. A lack of shelters, counselling, medical care, and livelihood support leaves many women trapped.

The lack of respect and recognition for

women remains glaring in our society. Within households, women are still not treated as equals, and their contributions often go unacknowledged. What is most troubling is that violence has become socially normalised," said Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation.

She added, "When a husband raises his hand against his wife, unless the injuries are severe, the incident often goes unreported.

Family members rarely see it as something to protest, as the husband is regarded as head of the household and primary provider. Women from poorer families are even more vulnerable; many parents, fearing social stigma and financial hardship, are unable to bring their daughters back home."

Bangladesh has been a signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). In line with these commitments, the government passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010.

The law provides for protection orders, residence orders, compensation for harm, and even temporary custody of children. But despite these provisions, enforcement has been weak," said Supreme Court lawyer Ayesha Akhter, legal specialist for the Gender Justice and Women Empowerment Cluster at Bangladesh Legal Aid and

Victims are often directed towards informal mediation or other laws, such as the Penal Code 1860, the Women and Children Repression Act 2000, or the Dowry Prohibition Act 2018, instead of remedies under the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010.

Moreover, the scarcity of shelters and livelihood options forces many survivors to return to abusive homes, undermining the law's effectiveness.

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"We are yet to get any allocation for it," he said.

He claimed that even if the encroachers return, they would not be able to reoccupy the land, as fencing work would begin once the budget is approved.

"And if any new structures are built, we will

demolish them again," he added.

Meanwhile, many individuals, including some from the list of previous encroachers, have already applied to lease portions of the reclaimed land, sources said.

But Tareq said they have no plan to lease out the land at this time.

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