

STATUS OF GIRL CHILDREN IN BANGLADESH 2021-22



**NATIONAL GIRL CHILD
ADVOCACY FORUM (NGCAF)**

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National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF)

Supported by





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First Published

September 2023

Published by

National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF)

Advisors

Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar

President

National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

Shaheen Akter Dolly

Vice President

National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

Consultant

Nazmun Zaman Chowdhury

Editorial Board

Nasima Akhtar Jolly, Secretary- National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

Razia Sultana, Head of Education and Health Unit- Good Neighbors Bangladesh

Halima Akter, Manager (Policy & Advocacy)- Educo Bangladesh

Syeda Ahsana Zaman (Anny), Central Coordinator- National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

Cover Design and Graphics

Ashutosh Bhowmik

Print

Pazian International

Abbreviation Explanation

ASPR	Annual Sector Performance Report
AAB	ActionAid Bangladesh
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BILS	Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies
BSAF	Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum
CAMPE	Convention on the Rights of Child CRC Campaign for Popular Education
CRPD	Center for Participatory Research and Development
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women
CWB	Child Welfare Board
CDC	Child Development Centre
DSS	Department of Social Services
DCF	Disabled Child Foundation
Educo	Education and Development Foundation
FY	Fiscal Year
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
GED	General Educational Development
KII	Key Informant Interview
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MoWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
NGCAF	National Girl Child Advocacy Forum
NCP	National Children Policy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
ROSC	Reaching Out- of- School Children
PED4	Primary Education Development Plan
PESP	Primary Education Stipend Project
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SMC	School Management Committee
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VAC	Violence Against Children
WFP	World Food Program WFP
WHO	World Health Organization WHO

Glossary

Enrolment: Number of Students officially enrolled in a given grade or level of education regardless of age.

Dropout Rate: Refers to the percentage of students of any reason leave educational institutions (in any given grade or level) and did not come back to finish the grade or level during that school years of that level of education.

Completion Rate: The percentage of pupils/students in the beginning grade/year of the level of education who finished or graduated from the final grade/year at the required number of years of that level of education.

Gross Enrolment Ratio: Refers to the total enrolment of students in a grade or level of education, regardless of age, expressed as percentage of the corresponding eligible official age- group population in a given school year.

Net Enrolment Rate: Refers to the number of students enrolled in the official specific age group expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.

Corporal Punishment: Refers to as a form of physical punishment or force intended to cause some degree of pain for the sake of discipline, correction, control, and changing behaviour or in the belief of educating the child (Save the Children Alliance 2003: 1). Different forms of physical punishment include slapping, pinching, pulling or cutting hair, locking or tying up the victim, twisting ears, abusing, threatening, pushing, shoving etc.

Violence Against Women (VAW): Refers to any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Refers to violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender. It constitutes a breach of the fundamental right to life, liberty, security, dignity, equality between women and men, non-discrimination and physical and mental integrity.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): Refers to behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors.

Sexual Violence/Sexual Assault: Refers to any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part, or object.

Sexual Exploitation: Refers to any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

Sexual Harassment: Refers to any unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment is intimidation, bullying or coercion of a sexual nature, or the unwelcome or inappropriate promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favors. In some contexts, or circumstances, sexual harassment may be illegal. It includes a range of behavior from seemingly mild transgressions and annoyances to actual sexual abuse or sexual assault.

Child Labour: The term “child labour” is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. Whether or not particular forms of “work” can be called “child labour” depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed and the objectives pursued by individual countries. The answer varies from country to country, as well as among sectors within countries.

Forewords

It is our immense pleasure to present the first ever report prepared on the state of the girl children of Bangladesh. In fact, a long-cherished dream of the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) has been made a reality through this report which explicitly puts forward the status and the overall conditions of the girl children of our country.

Bangladesh has achieved tremendous success in enrolling girl children in schools, ensuring free education, reducing child mortality, providing vaccination, reducing child poverty, undertaking different policies, plans and programs, and enacting laws that ensure a better life for children, specifically girl children, of our country. Yet they are still subjected to widespread deprivation and discrimination in our society.



The discrimination against girls starts from the very birth and continues throughout their entire life. They are fed less as infants. They are also often deprived of education and healthcare during their childhood. Many of these minor girls, who are largely uneducated and in ill health are married off to much older men before they are physically and mentally prepared. They soon get pregnant, giving birth to malnourished babies. Thus a cycle of malnutrition continues caused by the discrimination against the girl children, which not only robs the girls of their childhood, but also perpetuates hunger and poverty in the society. The girls are also subject to various forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, prostitution, rape and denial of their right to protection.

The National Girl Child Advocacy Forum has taken this initiative to capture a real picture of the socio-economic and legal statutes of girl children of the country. The goal of the report is to design advocacy for comprehensive policies which will help ensure the rights of girls, and protect them from abuse and violence. NGCAF also took this initiative to document the incidents of abuse and violence inflicted on girl children (1–18-year-old) throughout the country.

With this comprehensive report, it is hoped that we will be able to bring to the attention of the policymakers and opinionmakers of the country the daunting challenges the girl children of our country faces, which could pave the way for their redressal to make a better and safer society for them. A heartfelt thanks to everyone associated with developing this report.

Being the first report of its kind, it has many limitations. We respectfully request the readers to give their comments and suggestions so that we can make the next report better.

Badiul A. Majumdar

Badiul Alam Majumdar, PhD

President

National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

Acknowledgement

The "Girl Children Status Report 2021-2022" has been formulated through an extensive process involving the analysis of news media, field surveys, Key Informant Interviews (KII), and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). It also incorporates recommendations garnered from Discussion and Sharing Meetings convened at the Upazila, District, and National levels. Additionally, the report draws upon information sourced from reputable websites and publications issued by governmental bodies and esteemed organizations, with corresponding links provided within the report.

The National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) expresses its gratitude for the dedicated efforts of Ms. Nazmun Zaman Chowdhury, the appointed consultant responsible for the preparation of this comprehensive report. We are expressing our special gratitude to Tony Michelle Gomez, Child Rights Specialist and Activist for his valuable feedback in reviewing the entire report.



Educo Bangladesh has been providing financial and technical support to collect Data and develop this report since the beginning. NGCAF is especially grateful to Educo Bangladesh for their continuous support. Also, grateful and sincere thanks to Good Neighbors Bangladesh for providing partial financial support, field-based data collection to develop this report.

Special recognition is extended to esteemed individuals including Mr. Shahiduzzaman, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Social Welfare; Ms. Shabnaaz Zahereen, Child Protection Specialist at UNICEF; Mr. Robiul Islam, Deputy Director of the National Human Rights Commission; Mr. Sharfuddin Khan, Child Protection Specialist and Managing Director of Development Communication Network; Ms. Neela Hasan, Senior Sports Reporter at Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS); Mr. Taskin Rahman, Head of Advocacy and Campaigns for Asia and the Pacific at Save the Children Regional Offices; and Ms. Anami Arsheen, Campus Ambassador at Mindspace, Mental Health Awareness, North South University.

Acknowledgment is also extended to the diligent field-level working team of The Hunger Project Bangladesh and collaborating organizations, including Action for Social Development (ASD), Nari Maitree, Good Neighbors Bangladesh, Room to Read Bangladesh, Islamic Relief Bangladesh, Dalit, and Baptist Aid BBCF. Their active involvement in facilitating Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and surveys to gather primary data within a constrained timeframe is greatly appreciated by NGCAF.

Gratitude is further extended to members of the Working Committee, namely Ms. Halima Akter, Manager of Policy & Advocacy at Educo Bangladesh; Ms. Mausumi Sharmin, Gender Coordinator at Concern Worldwide; and Ms. Razia Sultana, Head of the Education and Health Unit at Good Neighbors Bangladesh. Their insightful feedback during the review process significantly enhanced the report's quality. The unwavering dedication with provide thoughtful feedback of Ms. Syeda Ahsana Zaman (Anny), Central Coordinator of NGCAF in the development of this report deserves special commendation.

Finally, we acknowledge the role and contribution of all NGCAF's members who offered constructive suggestions, playing a pivotal role in enriching the report.

A stylized signature in black ink.

Nasima Akhter Jolly

Secretary
National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

Message

In Bangladesh, a significant percentage of the population is girl child. Children specially girl child experience discrimination, abuses and exploitation, and violence in different forms and in different scales. As revealed in different available literature, sexual violence, kidnapping and missing, trafficking, drug abuse, physical and other forms of violence, child marriage, child labour, and juvenile Justice are the key child protection issues of Bangladesh. Girls living in slums and of different minority groups (religious minority, indigenous groups) remain more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and other types of violence and abuse. Moreover, much of the progress made to date has been challenged by the COVID-19 crisis. Long-term school closure across the country owing to the pandemic has led to an increase in the rate of child marriage.



"Educo Bangladesh" is an international development organisation based in Barcelona, Spain. Since 1999, it has been working in partnership with the government of Bangladesh to support children's education, safety, and overall development. "Educo Bangladesh" emphasises gender equality and focuses on enhancing the skills, leadership, and safety of both boys and girls. We are implementing various projects in partnership with 15 partner organisations in 10 districts to realise these goals. Today's girls are the future women, and ensuring their rights, education, nutrition, and safety is our duty. It is our responsibility to properly take care of them throughout their lives. We can help girls build a beautiful and vibrant relationship, develop their dreams, goals and potential at every level.

The Bangladesh government has taken various steps to ensure the rights, safety, and legal support for our girl child. Apart from availing government services by providing various awareness programs and training, Educo is empowering girl child in various ways. We believe that if the government as well as the development organisations, corporate sectors work together, it is possible to make these children skilled for the future by ensuring the priority of appropriate investment in the family, society and the state, which will help to make them a beautiful future and a good citizen.

We express our heartfelt gratitude to National Girl Child Advocacy Forum for taking steps to prepare a first ever girl child situation report in Bangladesh. Their contribution in preparing the key messages and policy recommendations of this report is highly appreciated. We believe that this report will help child rights based national and international organisations, government officials, researchers, academicians, and students to gather knowledge and evidence. Finally, I express thankfulness to the consultant, and everyone associated with the report. We believe that our united efforts will bring a bright morning for our girl child in future endeavor.

With thanks

A blue ink signature of Abdul Hamid, written in a cursive style.

Abdul Hamid

Country Director
Educo Bangladesh

Message

Dear Colleagues and Partners,

I'm excited to introduce our comprehensive report on the Status of Girl Children in Bangladesh for the year 2021-22. This report provides insights into the challenges and opportunities that our girl children encounter. It also highlights the crucial role played by the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) in addressing these issues.

At Good Neighbors Bangladesh, we've always been committed to empowering our girl children. We recognize their potential as key contributors to our nation's development. Like the visionary Begum Rokeya, we believe that education and empowerment are essential for breaking free from patriarchal norms and driving economic growth.

Our nation has made significant progress, thanks to policies such as the 'National Children Policy of 2011' and the 'Child Day Care Center Act of 2021.' Efforts to combat child marriage and promote girls' education have yielded positive results. However, challenges persist, especially worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a concerning increase in domestic violence, rape, and child marriage.

The NGCAF has been a cornerstone in advocating for the rights of girl children. Established in 2002, they have tirelessly worked to raise awareness and engage communities. Their strategies, including investing in girls' education and advocating for supportive legal measures, have been instrumental in promoting gender equity.

I invite you to explore this report, gain a better understanding of the issues our girl children face, and join hands with Good Neighbors Bangladesh in our mission to empower them. Together, we can work towards a brighter future where girls thrive and contribute to our nation's progress.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,



M Mainuddin Mainul

Country Director

Good Neighbors Bangladesh





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Executive Summary


Introductory chapter sheds light on the basic rights and commitments of the girl children of our country and along with the violations of the same. How NGCAF this been playing a pivotal role concerning the life of the girl children along with their formation, vision, vision and goals have been thoroughly discussed. the objectives and justification of conducting the study have been pointed out along with limitations and the methodologies through which the study has been evolved. The areas in which surveys have been carried out is shown in the geographical representation of the country.

How children became the forefront of international consideration and what are statutes and commitments through which their basic needs and rights have been preserved and protected is widely discussed in Chapter 2 of the Study. Along with that how Bangladesh is committed with fulfilling the rights in line with those International commitments and how the Constitution of Bangladesh has incorporated specific provisions that directly or indirectly related to the girl children of the country is discussed in this chapter.

Bangladesh has achieved tremendous success specially in the field of education, vaccination, reducing child mortality, poverty and put forth considerable efforts to fulfil the rights as enshrined in the CRC through Constitution, international commitments, different plans and programmes, government agenda. Chapter 3 broadly discusses the specific legal statutes, national policies, status of different government establishments, activities under different concerned Ministries, specific strategies that include latest 5th year plans and so forth. How the government tackled the Covid fall out and how the country needs to gear up with commitments and policy reforms to overcome the disparities caused by the pandemic is also discussed in this chapter.

The status of girl children in different sectors of the country are discussed extensively in the Chapter 4 along with recommendations mentioned in the 5th Periodic reports of UNCRC held on Geneva in 2015. The sectors include the status of girl children in education: numerical representation, percentage of girls in different levels, education status of indigenous communities, children in tea gardens, rohingya children, factors behind high female drop-outs and impact of covid on education sector. The status of girl children in health sector highlights child mortality, mental health issues, nutrition, adolescent health care, health in budget and recommendations. Girls in different sports, leisure and cultural activities, girls' involvement in Girl guide association, girl's involvement in debate competitions, girl's participation in STEM, and finally representation of girls' in media are widely discussed in this chapter.

NGCAF started off the first-ever attempt to collect data from across the country on violence perpetuated only against girl children (0-19) years. And for collecting so it takes information from 8 national, 2 online and 14 local newspapers and every 6 months share the information with media. Chapter 5 of the Study revolved around the statistical and graphical representation of the nature and number of abuses and violences occurred against girl children in the years 2021 and 2022. There has been in-depth analysis of different sort of violences like sexual assault, violence against



domestic workers, violence against persons with disabilities, child labour, corporal punishment, child pornography, trafficking, kidnapping, and child sexual exploitation, child marriage, sexual harassment and so forth. The analyses include the nature and number of occurrences, the present statutes/legal framework concerning those violences along with recommendation.

Shortcomings of specific laws and policies with specific recommendations have been clearly outlined in this chapter. Some of them include The Children Act of 2013, Women and Children Repression Prevention Act of 2000 (Amendment 2020), the National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010, Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010, Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy 2015, Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act 2013, Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, Pornography Control Act 2012.

NGCAF along with Narimoitree and DFID conducted a survey on 50 girls from the age limit of 12- 18 years working in different small scale working sectors combining both the formal and informal sectors. The major objective was to understand the environments of working place, the problems they face, the push factor that brought them to work.

NGCAF conducted a country-wide survey on the status of sexual harassment prevention guideline on 255 primary and secondary educational institutions. Out of 255 schools, number of primary schools are 99, higher secondary schools 136, Madrasas 20. It was revealed through the survey that in 53% of schools there is no complain box as per the Guideline on the Prevention of Sexual harassment of 2011.

The human rights of girl children even when protected on paper, are violated in practice in the country. A significant number of girl children continue to grapple with impoverishment, inequality, violence, exploitation through child labour, early marriage and many more. Chapter 6 broadly discusses the factors dominating behind the persistence abuse and girl children that include socio-economic and cultural outlook, poverty, gender discrimination, lack of children-centric budget, safety concerns lack of co-ordination amongst various sectors/departments of the government, lack of separate directorate, lack of child ombudsman, lack of research and disaggregated data and finally disparity in age.

Based on the detailed analytical discussions on different spectrums of girl children status, discussion meetings with relevant stakeholders of the society, in-depth interview with respected officials of respective fields, sharing meetings with respected members of the Forum, the report identified few recommendations. The last chapter identified the most urgent, critical and transformative girl children related issues that require focused and joint advocacy along with government intervention.

Chapter

1

Introduction

1.1 Girl Children: Rights, Commitments, Violations

“We [women] constitute one half of the society, and if we are left behind, how can the society progress?”¹

Prior to Begum Rokeya’s realization, it became evident that inadequate education and low levels of literacy severely constrain access to opportunities. These factors also consistently undermine the confidence required for participation in public life, whether within a village, community, or at the national level. The significance of women’s economic autonomy and the imperative of nurturing a sense of revival within them, empowering them to embrace independence despite prevailing patriarchal norms, cannot be overstated.

The foundational stride towards driving Bangladesh’s economic progress hinges upon the prioritization of empowering girls. The substantial advancement of young women in Bangladesh will undoubtedly introduce a new dimension to the national development agenda. In pursuit of this objective, the government has placed particular emphasis on the Sustainable Development Goals, diligently endeavoring to align with international declarations and action plans. An illustrative instance is the robust link between the fifth Sustainable Development Goal, which centers on eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls, including child marriage, while concurrently advancing the political and economic empowerment of women.

Furthermore, the Government of Bangladesh has enacted specific policies directly aimed at safeguarding the rights of girl children. Notably, the ‘Women and Children Repression Prevention (Amendment) Act of 2020’ now includes the provision for the death penalty, underscoring its commitment to curbing such offenses. Legislative measures have been instituted to combat child marriage and foster primary education. Consequently, the literacy rate among girls has seen an upswing, while incidents of child marriage have registered a decline.

However, despite the government’s proactive measures, several challenges persist that impede the empowerment of girls. A significant number of girls continue to grapple with impoverishment, inequality, violence, exploitation through child labor, and premature marriage. Although strides have been taken over the past 25 years, the year 2020 bore witness to a pandemic that exacerbated pre-existing gender disparities. Vulnerabilities for women and children were laid bare within our social, political, and economic systems. Even after two years since the outbreak of COVID-19, a considerable portion of the population’s livelihoods remains gravely imperiled.

Within the context of Bangladesh’s COVID-19 pandemic experience, instances of domestic violence, sexual assault against women and children, and child marriage have surged to alarming levels, raising urgent concerns.

¹ <https://quotepark.com/authors/begum-rokeya/>

1.2 Girl Child Rights and the Pioneering Role of National Girl Child Advocacy Forum: Formation of the Forum:

The Hunger Project-Bangladesh originally proposed celebrating a National Girl Child Day countrywide to focus attention on the rights of girls and build a social movement in this regard. Fifty-four non-governmental organizations as well as cultural organizations and prominent individuals stepped forward to give strong support to this goal. On 4 June 2000, the group submitted a written proposal to the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs of Bangladesh calling for the declaration of National Girl Child Day on the second day of National Child Rights Week. The government agreed, and declared that 30 September would be celebrated as National Girl Child Day. Since 2000, various governmental and non-governmental organizations celebrate the day across the country in order to focus awareness on one annually chosen aspect of girls' rights, such as education, nutrition or safety. To spread this vision at the grass-root level throughout the country, the group established the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) in 2003 as a sustainable platform committed to this effort.

Structural overview:

- Center Member: 198 (National, International Organization and Personal Member)
- Registered with Joint Stock Company.
- Working in 171 Unions, 52 Upazilas, 30 Districts, 7 Divisions

Strategies of NGCAF:

Strategy I: Invest in girls, their knowledge, skills and participation in society

Strategy II: Increase access to formal education for girls

Strategy iii.: Create an enabling legal and policy environment focus on preventing child marriage and Gender based violence

Strategy iv: Mobilize communities to transform social norms that are detrimental to achieving gender equity

Triumphs of the Activities of NGCAF

- ✓ Social awareness and the rights and need for the well-being of girl children has increased. To date, NGCAF has involved more than one million people in its awareness-building activities.
- ✓ The member organizations of the Forum have succeeded in attaining positive attitude about girl children in the society. The member organizations of this Forum have been successful in developing a positive attitude towards the girl children in the society. For example, any action taken on the girl children issue, gets a positive response from the community level to the policy level and get a positive cooperation from them.
- ✓ The advocacy programs have succeeded in raising awareness among the girl children as well.
- ✓ Many unions have been named as dowry-free unions.
- ✓ Members of the NGCAF have directly halted thousands of child marriages and promoted dowry-free marriages. Child marriage has also decreased in some areas. The unions where the NGCAF is active have seen a 25% reduction in child marriages.

- ✓ Since becoming aware of their rights, girl children and their parents have become more conscious and vocal about protesting against violence and abuses, raising voice to continue their studies etc and have taken legal actions when necessary.
- ✓ Many child laborers are not forced to work without compensation now.
- ✓ This issue is highlighted constantly in the media through programs in television and radio and writings in the newspapers and journals. This has had a significant influence in raising consciousness of the public about the rights and well-being of girl children.
- ✓ Primary school enrollment rate among girl children has increased.

Government Approved/ Ratified some laws in related Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 and Rules 2018, Children Act 2013 and Policy 2011, Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010, Women Development Policy 2011

Meghla Haldar, a native from Bakal Union of Barisal District enlightened herself about the consequences of early marriages and early pregnancies through the HER CHOICE activities at her school implemented by NGCAF. The knowledge gave her the courage to go and talk to one of the teachers of the school who eventually persuade her parents to stop her marriage they were planning to.

This is just one story out of thousands that reflects the initiatives of NGCAF to create awareness and build confidence among girls to stand up against child marriages.

Playing pivotal role in policy influencing:


NGCAF is putting its continuous efforts to reform or enact relevant laws and policies for women and girls, through roundtable discussions, meetings, seminars, human chains (public mass demonstration) and workshops.

In previous Women Development Policies (1997, 2004 and 2008), there was no separate chapter on Girl Children issue, but in 2011, NGCAF was able to successfully include a New Chapter in the National Women Development Policy under Article 08 which is - 'Development of Girls and Children'.



Photo: National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF)

- In 1994 there were 06 Guiding principles in National Children policy and in 2010 there were 05 Guiding Principles, But nothing specific on Girl Child issue. In 2011, NGCAF has successfully persuaded the Government to include a Section on girl child in the 4.4 Basic Principles of the National Children Policy.
- As a result of NGCAF's advocacy, Bangladesh Government has declared September 30 as the National Girl Child Day. Since then, the day is being duly celebrated at Nationwide.



NGCAF has finalized a draft Comprehensive Sexual Harassment Prevention and Remedy Law- 2022 by engaging a team of practitioner Judges and Advocates. The draft acknowledged all kinds of sexual harassment in public places as a crime and prescribed to punish offenders. The Draft law is in the process of being enacted as a full-fledged law under the Legislative Department of the National Parliament on the advice of Hon'ble Deputy Speaker of National Parliament.

- NGCAF has been inducted as a member of the Central Abused, Distressed Women and Children Welfare Fund Committee by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.
- NGCAF has been included as the only one non-governmental organization member of the 10-member working committee for Central Cybercrime Prevention by Ministry of Information and Communication Technology.
- National Girl Child Advocacy Forum is a member of the Committee on Child Rights constituted by the National Human Rights Commission.
- Intensive relationship has been developed with different networks to raise a collective voice to pass the draft Comprehensive Sexual Harassment Prevention & Remedy Law 2019 and many advocacy Issues for betterment of Girl Children.
- Strong relationship has been developed with Parliamentarian Caucus on Child Rights and Hon'ble Deputy Speaker of National Parliament on Proposed Sexual Harassment Prevention & Remedy Law 2022. Also developed a very close relationship with MoWCA and NHRC.

Future Goals and Vision

- To strengthen the Forum so that it can initiate a social movement centered around this issue where public will take ownership and lead its actions voluntarily.
- To expand the Forum actions to every union, upazila and district of Bangladesh.
- To involve young people, teenagers and girl children more aggressively in the activities so that they can take ownership and lead this movement in the future.
- To lobby at the state level for policies that will ensure access to education, healthcare and nutrition for girls and women. To advocate for stronger laws in this regard.
- To include the issue of girl children with other activities at the union level through local government officials at workshops, seminars and advocacy events.

Justification of conducting a study on Girl Children:

Since its inception National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) has been working to ensure establish the rights of girl children and eradicate violence against them through advocacy from root level to policy level. With this vision in mind, NGCAF has taken an initiative to collect violence/abuse pictures against girl children from 24 dailies since January 2021 to get an overall picture of girl children with the help of member organizations. On the basis of the statistics gathered NGCAF has undertaken the attempt to publish a comprehensive report on the status of girl children in Bangladesh for the period of 2021 and 2022, the first ever attempt in this regard.



1.3 Objectives of the Report:

- To present and review the general condition of girl children in education, health and labor sector in the country.
- To represent an overall picture of constitutional, institutional and legal rights assigned to girl children of the country along with the obstacles to enjoy those rights.
- To offer an insight into the major activities of the Forum since its inception and that was carried out even during the hostile environment prevalent in the country.
- To identify the most urgent, critical and transformative girl children related issues that require focused and joint advocacy along with government intervention.
- To highlight major international instruments that the country adhered to and a comparative analysis on to what extent the commitments are fulfilled.
- To identify major challenges to tackle violence against girl children in the context of Bangladesh.
- To outline a series of recommendations from grass root to policy level for appropriate interventions required. To Develop a picture of the real situation of girlchildren and Find gaps in existing laws /policies through this Report and present its to various stakeholders and policy makers at the national level.
- To take Advocacy initiatives at the policy level for change of existing laws, rules, policy changes, addition of relevant sections of the law, if necessary, on the basis of various challenges.

1.4 Methodologies:

- The study employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, enriching the depth and breadth of the analysis. The resultant report is an outcome of meticulous curation and analysis of data garnered through both qualitative and quantitative approaches, drawing from primary and secondary sources.
- Primary data was meticulously collected from operational domains of Coalition members and other civil society organizations. This acquisition was facilitated through a comprehensive range of tools, including surveys, focused group discussions, and Key Informants' Interviews (KII), yielding insights into multifaceted aspects of the subject matter.
- Complementing the primary data, secondary data was garnered through a comprehensive review of diverse literary sources, online content, budgetary documents, policies, and institutional reports. This expansive approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the contextual backdrop.
- A comprehensive review was conducted through exhaustive desk and web research, encompassing national legislations, policies, scholarly articles, publications, and books that pertain to the status of girl children in the country. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, pertinent media reports chronicling incidents involving girl children and violence were scrutinized. Furthermore, this desk review extended to encompass relevant international instruments, substantiating the study's global perspective.

The data and information have been sourced from diverse outlets by the researchers. Nevertheless, certain sectors exhibit information gaps stemming from data unavailability. Addressing these gaps may necessitate more comprehensive investigations and engagements, notably through in-depth studies and interviews involving crucial stakeholders, particularly communities, families, and children.



Chapter

2

National and International Commitments

2.1 Introductory Remarks:

Children become the forefront of international consideration of international community that their rights and their voices should be heard, that their basic needs should be met and rights should be preserved and they need to be protected from any kind of abuse and violence through the **Convention on the Right of the Child**: an international agreement on childhood. CRC adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989, is the primary human rights treaty that recognized all children as universal citizens with an innate, unique and inalienable set of human rights by virtue of being under 18 years old. Bangladesh was one of the first two states in the region to ratify the CRC in August 1990, demonstrating the country's early commitment to children's rights.

The Convention explains who children are, all their rights, and the responsibilities of governments. All the rights are connected, they are all equally important and they cannot be taken away from children.

2.2 International Commitments for safeguarding children:

There are a number of international Instruments to curb violence against women. The United Nations General Assembly resolution endorsed the urgent need for the universal application of women's rights of equality, security, liberty integrity and dignity. **Article 55 and 56 of United Nations charter** cast a legal obligation on United Nations organization to promote respect for equality and human rights².

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 5, states that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. There have been three United Nations world conferences on women. One in Mexico in 1975, the second in Copenhagen in 1980, and the third one in Nairobi, wherein strategies were framed to promote gender equality and opportunities for women. These were based on three objectives: Equality, development and peace.

The Vienna Declaration, 1993 calls for action to integrate the equal status human rights of women. It stresses toward elimination of violence against women in public and private life.

The Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1981, to which 166 countries are members, is a landmark document because it framed violence against women within the framework of human rights. It identified female as the primary risk factor for violence and broadened the definition of gender violence (to include all aspects of women's life). Articles 10, 11 and 13, respectively, affirm women's rights to non-discrimination in education, employment and economic and social activities.

² Violence against women: Where are the solutions? - PMC ([nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/))

Finally, An article 16, the Convention returns to the issue of marriage and family relations, asserting the equal rights and obligations of women and men with regard to choice of spouse, parenthood, personal rights and command over property.

Together, CRC and CEDAW guarantee rights throughout a woman's lifetime that can be pursued under the CRC for girls up to the age of eighteen. Both treaties protect the welfare of children.

In November 1990 it has been decided to celebrate the decade from 1990 to 1999 as the "SAARC Girl Child Decade" at the fifth SAARC Summit in Maldives. In view of all these decisions, Bangladesh is also committed to properly observe the 'Girl Child Year' and 'Girl Child Decade'.

In 1995 at the World Conference on Women in Beijing countries unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing the rights of not only women but girls. The Beijing Declaration is the first to specifically call out girls' rights.

On December 19, 2011, United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 66/170 to declare October 11 as the **International Day of the Girl Child**, to recognize girls' rights and the unique challenges girls face around the world.

The International Day of the Girl Child focuses attention on the need to address the challenges girls face and to promote girls' empowerment and the fulfilment of their human rights.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders in 2015, embody a roadmap for progress that is sustainable and leaves no one behind.

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is integral to each of the 17 goals. Unlike MDGs, the SDGs apply to all countries and are based on a principle of 100% achievement of goals and targets, rather than just improvement.

- There is one separate goal (SDG 5) with a focus on women and girls - "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All women and Girls"
- Of 17 Goals, 10 make an attempt to integrate concerns of girl child directly or indirectly. These goals pertain to ending poverty, ending hunger, ensuring health lives, promoting equitable education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, decent work, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and peace, justice & institutions
- Of the 169 targets 20 focus on children/girl children and of the 230 indicators around 40 are relevant to girl children directly/indirectly "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All women and Girls"

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was introduced by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 15 March 2006, by passing the resolution no. 60/2511, which also established the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) itself at the United Nations (UN). It is considered as a unique process since it involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States in every four and a half years. The UPR is one of the key elements of UNHRC which reminds the member States of their responsibility to fully respect and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The ultimate aim of this mechanism is to improve human rights situation in all countries and address human rights.

2.3 Commitment of Bangladesh in line with International Commitments

Bangladesh has already signed the international laws, declarations and policies related to girl child marriage and other related issues and government of Bangladesh committed to proper implementation of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages. It has been noted in Article-16 about the family relationship and the equal rights of marriage, in that case Bangladesh expresses the objection.

Bangladesh has dedicated considerable efforts to fulfilling the rights as enshrined in the CRC over the past three decades, particularly in the areas of health and education. These achievements have complemented in recent years by the development of a child-sensitive framework, based on the CRC, under the Children Policy 2011, and the Children Act 2013, as well as sector-specific legislation in education, health, and protection. In addition, consecutive Five-Year Plans have placed children as one of top priorities.

Bangladesh is committed to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) after Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and formed an inter-ministerial committee to implement and monitoring the progress of the goals. Besides, private organizations have included to develop a platform for considering their importance.

2.4 Constitutional Guarantees:

As with UDHR the Constitution of Bangladesh has incorporated provisions regarding fundamental rights ranging from Article-27 to 47 to protect and promote human rights of its citizens.

Article 15 of the Constitution also makes it a fundamental responsibility of the State to secure for its citizens, including children, basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care and the right to work, reasonable rest, recreation and leisure. The State is categorically responsible for upholding the rights of the girl child through the following Articles:

1. **Article 28(1)** states that “the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.”
2. **Article 28(2)** states, “Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of public life.
3. **Article 28(4)** provides that “Nothing shall prevent the State from making special provisions in favor of women or for the advancement of any backward section of the population.”
4. **Article 29(1)** provides, “There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service in the republic.



Photo: National Girl Child Advocacy Forum



Photo: Educo Bangladesh

Chapter

3

Government Initiatives Attributed to Beneficiary of Girl Children

Bangladesh has dedicated considerable efforts to fulfilling the rights as enshrined in the CRC over the past three decades, particularly in the areas of health and education. These achievements have complemented in recent years by the development of a child-sensitive framework, based on the CRC, under the Children Policy 2011, and the Children Act 2013 (Amended in 2018), as well as sector-specific legislation in education, health, and protection. In addition, consecutive Five-Year Plans have placed children as one of top priorities.

3.1 Legal frameworks and policies:

Legal provisions	National Policies
Penal Code 1860 Women and Children Repression Prevention Act Amended 2020 Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection Act), 2010 The Overseas Employment and Migrants' Act 2013 Children Act 2017 Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 High Court Division's Directives on Sexual Harassment, 2009 Guidelines, 2011 The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013 Pornography Control Act 2012 Domestic Workers' Protection and Prevention Act 2015 Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017	8th 5-year Plan (2020-2025) National Women Development Policy, 2011 Children policy 2011 National Policy on Disability, 1995 National Child Labour Elimination Policy, 2010 Migrant Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy, 2016 National Nutrition Policy 2015 The Non-Formal Education Act 2014 Education Policy 2010 National Health Policy 2008 Child Day Care Center Act of 2021 Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence against Women (MSPVAW) National Labour Policy, 2012 National Occupational Health and Safety Policy, 2013 Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women (MSPVAW) National Occupational Health and Safety Policy (2013) National Action Plan on Violence against Women, 2013–2025

3.2 Status of residential care for children:

An Assessment Report called 'Assessing Existing Alternative Care Situation in Bangladesh' has been done on the alternative care situation of the children living in brothels according to the Children Act 2013. The report mentioned that Department of Social Service (DSS) under the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) operates the following type of institutions to ensure residential care for children:

Chhotomoni Nibash (Baby Home)

There are six Chhotomoini Nibash or baby homes located in six divisional cities to provide shelter, education, training, entertainment and rehabilitation for abandoned, unclaimed, distressed and endangered children aged 0-6 years. It has also room for admission of children with disabilities.

Sharkari-Shishu-Paribar:

There are 85 Sharkari Shishu Paribars (SSPs) located at the district level where 6-9 years old orphans can get admission. Of them, 43 institutions are allocated for boys, 41 (45) for girls, and 1 for both sexes.

Training and rehabilitation centres for the destitute children:

There are two such training and rehabilitation centres in Konabari, Gazipur district in Rangunia, Chittagong districts for boys and 1 for girls in Tungipara, Gopalganj district. These centres are meant to properly rehabilitate destitute children in society through general education as well as various training sessions.

Training and Rehabilitation centre for Socially Disadvantaged Girls:

There are six such centres located in Barisal, Bramhanbaria, Faridpur, Kushtia, Bogra and Sylhet with a total capacity of 600 girls below the age of 18 years. The girl children who were forced into sex work are sent to these centres by Court's order after being rescued by the Law Enforcing Agencies of Government approved NGOs.

3.3 Activities under different Ministries:

- There is an Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee for the National Programs for the Prevention of Violence and Dowry. The committee includes representatives from ministries and civil society. Its objective is to coordinate and review programs of all organizations and committees working on violence against women (VAW). It meets twice a year and reviews the activities of law enforcement agencies. Multi-Sectoral Programme on VAW is being implemented by (MOWCA) aims at reducing incidences of violence against women and children and improving redress through collaboration between relevant ministries and non-government agencies.
- The government has set up 41 new tribunals across Bangladesh to expedite trials in cases led over the torture of women and children. Already 41 posts of district and sessions judges and 205 posts of assistants have been created for the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals
- Government initiated 5,292 clubs in 489 upazilas for building awareness and prevention against gender-based violence
- 67 ONE stop Crisis Cells in 47 in District Hospitals and 20 in Upazilla Health Complexes. 7 Safe custodies for women, girls and adolescents are running under the Department of Social Services³.
- The Rules on Children Act in accordance with Children Act, 2018 (Amended) has been submitted to The Ministry of Social Welfare⁴.

³ Bangladesh: The Role Model in Women's Empowerment, Centre for Research and Information, 2018.

⁴ Department of Social Welfare Report for the year 2021-2022

- Protection of the rights of Abandoned Children (2021) has been formulated and submitted to the Ministry of Social Welfare.
- According to Children Act 2018 the number of children receiving diversion from Thana and Court was as many as 1033 in the fiscal year 2021-2022. The number of children getting leave after getting diversion is 744 in fiscal year 2021-2022.
- As many as 1038 children getting bail and compensation through Virtual Court has been included within/provided with the regular monitoring, follow-up, education, trainings and self-employment opportunities under the supervision of Child Probation Officer.
- The per capita monthly allocation of the children staying in the Government children's homes and institutions have been increased from 3500 to taka 4000 for the fiscal year 2021-2022.
- Till 30 June 2022 the number of calls received by the Child Helpline 1098 is 14 lac 757.
- In the fiscal year 2021-2022 the amount allocated for government child family and baby homes has been disbursed and utilized by 98.82%.

3.4 Mobile banking and the positive impact:

Currently, 350,000 garments workers of 280 RMG factories are getting their salary through bKash⁵. This wage digitization plays a very significant role in women empowerment as the women workers are now in more control of their wages than before. There is a gender gap in access to financial services in Bangladesh and services like bKash are making an impact in narrowing such gap. Given the economic significance of the ready-made garment sector, which is dominated by female workers, digitizing wage payments through MFS can have a significant impact on women's financial inclusion. Most of the girls working in household as domestic workers now send their money through Bkash to be reached to their parents in minutes.

3.5 8 th 5-year plan and strategies related to women and girl children welfare:

The strategy for the children's advancement during the 8FYP will emphasize full implementation of all child protection laws and reduction in child poverty through strengthened social protection benefits based on a reformulated Child Benefits Program as envisaged in the NSSS. The government's eighth five-year plan says more investment will be a priority for every child and all strategic actions are being taken⁶. The plan vastly includes many programmes and policies under the Social Inclusion Agenda, The Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) Programme, Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP): Primary Education Development Programme: Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP): Interventions for Adolescent Girls.

The COVID-19 has further accentuated the urgency of strengthening the social protection programmes and funding. The 8FYP will make this a top priority both as an important instrument to address the effects of COVID-19 on poverty and vulnerability and to increase the growth elasticity of poverty reduction.

⁵ <https://www.bkash.com/bn/news/mobile-banking-provides-lifeline-bangladeshis->

⁶ 8th 5 Year Plan, July 2020-June 2025, General Economics Division, Bangladesh Planning Commission, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, December 2020.



3.6 Tackling the COVID fall-out:

COVID-19 widened existing income and health disparities: the impacts of the virus were disproportionately felt by women and people with disabilities. Analysis by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) found that young Bangladeshi women were three times more likely than young men to be out of work because of the pandemic. There is evidence that lockdowns and education stoppages contributed to a rise in domestic violence, child marriage and related protection concerns – including in the Rohingya refugee camps. Despite Bangladesh's strong economic progress over the last decade, the World Bank reported an increase in poverty for the first time in two decades – recording 24 million 'new poor' in 2021. With 37 per cent of the population below the national poverty line, poverty reduction and income equality remain priorities for Bangladesh⁷.

The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of human health and well-being as the source of all development achievements. It also exposed the underlying shortcomings in the Bangladesh health care and social security systems. Total social protection funding for the poor and vulnerable is only 1.2% of GDP. This is not adequate for a country with 40 million poor and another 20 million who are near poor (1.25 times the poverty line).

3.7 Concluding remarks:

Bangladesh's achievement in many areas including poverty reduction, gender parity in primary education and reduction in maternal mortality have come under threat due to the pandemic. Taking these improvements back up to the pre-pandemic situation and then improving them further will be a humongous task. This will not only require strong commitment and resources but also policy reforms in areas such as education, labour market, gender, tax system, public expenditure, investment, international trade, and accountability of the institutions.

⁷ Report on 2020-2021 Bangladesh Development Programme Progress Report, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government



Photo: Educo Bangladesh



Photo: The Hunger Project Bangladesh

Chapter

4

Status of Girl Children in Different Spectrum

In 2022, the world has commemorated the 10th anniversary of the International Day of the Girl (IDG). In these last 10 years, there has been increased attention on issues that matter to girls amongst governments, policymakers and the general public, and more opportunities for girls to have their voices heard on the global stage. Yet, investments in girls' rights remain limited and girls continue to confront a myriad of challenges to fulfilling their potential; made worse by concurrent crises of climate change, COVID-19 and humanitarian conflict.

With adversity, however, comes resourcefulness, creativity, tenacity, and resilience⁸. The world's 600 million adolescent girls have shown time and time again that given the skills and the opportunities, they can be the changemakers driving progress in their communities, building back stronger for all, including women, boys and men. The pandemic has accelerated digital platforms for learning, earning and connecting, while also highlighting girls' diverse digital realities.

The status of girl children in Bangladesh in different sectors are extensively discussed below with the mention of the concluding observation of the 5th periodic reports of UNCRC held on Geneva in 2015.

4.1 Status of Girl Children in Education:

Making provision of education and other forms of learning to the girls is regarded as one of the most productive investments that can be made by the family, community and the entire country. One of the commendable efforts for fulfilling rights for its girl children that Bangladesh has made over the past decades is in the area of education. It has made high progress in increasing the



Photo: Good Neighbors Bangladesh

numbers of children enrolled in school thereby showing a real willingness to invest 'to the maximum extent of the resources available'. Gender parity has been achieved in both primary and secondary education. progress in improving education quality is also visible.

Numerical representation of female students in education sector:

In the past decade Bangladesh has gained unprecedented success in girl's education. The government has put necessary policies, plans, programs and resources in place to achieve gender

⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/gender-equality/international-day-girl-2022>

equality in the education sector. Concerted efforts from the government, development partners, private sector and NGOs have produced a significant result in the field of girls' education in Bangladesh. The girls' stipend programme is an outstanding effort to address the issues of access, retention and completion of girls' education.

Percentage of girls in different levels of education system:

Type of Education	Number of Institutions	NER of girls
Primary education	118891	97.32%
Junior, Secondary and Higher Secondary Education	20960	54.67%
College Education	3309	50.37%
Madrasah Education	9291	59.48%
Technical and Vocational Education	7761	27.13%
University Education	160	36.30%

Source: Bangladesh Education Statistics, 2021, Bangladesh Bureau of Education and Statistics (BANBEIS).

By 2021 the number of Secondary Schools in the country is 20,960. The irony is to figure out the obstacles that is hindering girls from entering primary education to a striking rate of 97.42% to end up enrolling in the secondary to a declining rate of 54.67%. and in 160 public, private and international universities in the country, the rate of female enrollment is 36.30%.

Although Rupali, 14, is enrolled as a ninth grader at a local high school, she cannot attend school regularly. Her eyes tear up when she states that many children of the Santhal community in her village drop out of school as their families are extremely poor and they are obliged to work as manual labourers.


In the vocational and technical education, the percentage of girl's enrollment is merely 27.13%. It is necessary to engage both the sexes of the new generation in vocational education to best utilize the benefits of Demographic Dividend⁹. Though several pilot projects are ongoing it is necessary to take more initiatives.

Education status of Indigenous Communities:

According to the findings of Network of Non-streamed Marginalised Communities (NNMC) Foundation, a platform for the ethnic communities of the North-West of Bangladesh, the school dropout rate among the ethnic communities at early primary level is 33% and 80% at secondary level.

The Bangladesh government has already introduced indigenous language as a subject in the pre-primary school curriculum for Chakma, Marma and Tripura in CHT in the Southeast and Sadri and Garo in the

⁹ 50 years of Bangladesh for Children, Save the Children and Prothoma, June 2022



Northeast of the country. The students of these indigenous communities learn their own language in the pre-primary phase. Though the government along with development partners and civil society putting efforts to bring the children of ethnic communities to school by overcoming the language hurdles, what remains the salient factor that pushing them is the poor household.

Children in Tea Gardens

Tea garden worker are inter-generational laborers who cannot seek employment elsewhere in the economy due to lack of access and geography. Only 13.7 % of births of children under 5 years are registered, almost 59.8 % girls between 15-19 years are victims of child marriage.¹⁰ It also encourages dropping out from school.

Rohingya children

Over 400,000 Rohingya children are living in refugee camps in Bangladesh following the Burmese military's ethnic cleansing operations in 2017. Rohingya refugee children are not permitted to attend primary and secondary school in Bangladesh, including in private educational institutions, due to their lack of documentation. Only 13% of boys and 2% of girls aged 15-18 are in school¹¹. The government has permitted international organizations, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNHCR, to provide some basic education services to primary school-age Rohingya children, and some university-level students have received scholarships.¹² Aid groups are barred from teaching the Bangla language, using Bangladesh's educational curriculum, or providing accredited education to refugees. However, the Government of Bangladesh agreed to allow international partners to implement the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot, which began rolling out in 2020, but was put on hold due to the pandemic. The pilot, based on refugees' interests, would allow children to follow Burma's educational curriculum and learn the Burmese language with the goal of preparing for their return in the country of origin.

Enrollment and drop-out:

In the year 2021, the rate of female students appeared in the final examination was 52.62% and the rate of passing out the examination was 100%. It is worth mentioning that the rate of female students was more than that of male students (48.38%)¹³.

However, despite better enrolment rates, education outcomes for girls remain inadequate as low and unequal levels of learning persist. Data from the 2017 Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics show that dropout rates for girls are at a high 42% at the secondary school level; completion rates are low, with grade 10 rates bottoming at only 10%, and secondary level completion rates reaching a mere 59%.¹⁴

Factors behind high female drop-out rates:

Child marriage, household responsibilities, high levels of pregnancies, lack of access to appropriate


¹⁰ Assessment of the Situation of Children and Women in the Tea Gardens of Bangladesh: Human Development Resource Centre, September, 2010.

¹¹ U.S. Embassy- Dhaka official. E-mail communication to USDOL official. July 9, 2020.

¹² 2020 findings on the worst form of child labour: Bangladesh
https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2020/Bangladesh.pdf

¹³ BANBEIS REPORT

¹⁴ <http://data.banbeis.gov.bd>.



information about sexual and reproductive health, mental health issues and school-based violence are some of the main factors and contribute to lost years in schooling.

Quality education:

Inadequacy of qualified teachers, number of schools, classrooms, libraries and playgrounds all contribute to inadequate quality of education. Children in hard-to-reach areas, riverine or hilly areas are more deprived. Lack of teachers in GOB school is another cause of inadequate quality. There is low opportunity for physical activities. If there is play space, they do not have enough equipment or planned extra-curricular programme. It was in the guidance policy that 60% of the teachers at primary education must be female, the goal which has already been achieved. However, there remain few constraints as well that include lack of proper training, inadequate salary scale for the teachers at primary and secondary level and so forth. Moreover, inadequate salary, benefits and lack of positive response to other demands made by the teachers lead to dissatisfaction and adversely affect the quality of performance, claimed the teachers (informal talks, discussion at meeting of teachers' association, workshops¹⁵).

Short falls in facility of education:

inadequate number of schools is directly related to the issue of access. This coupled with distance from the household becomes an obstacle for girls, particularly in areas where the terrain is difficult to access e.g. hilly areas in Chittagong, Sylhet, wet lands and swamps (haor, baor) etc. Parents feel that these increase the threat to the safety and security of their daughters and consequently tend to withdraw them from schools.

Lack of emphasis on Extra-curricular activities:

Today the mounting pressure of achieve academic excellence coupled with technology-based recreation has made our children lose interests in hobbies and other extra-curricular activities. The number of institutions offering alternative activities to conventional educational system like sports, cookery, music, dance, martial arts, art and craft etc. are very rare. And even if they are offered it is only entitled for one class in a week at most. Parents are rarely seen to encourage the younger generation to pursue their dreams and passion in any unconventional career choice

Lack of proper sanitation:

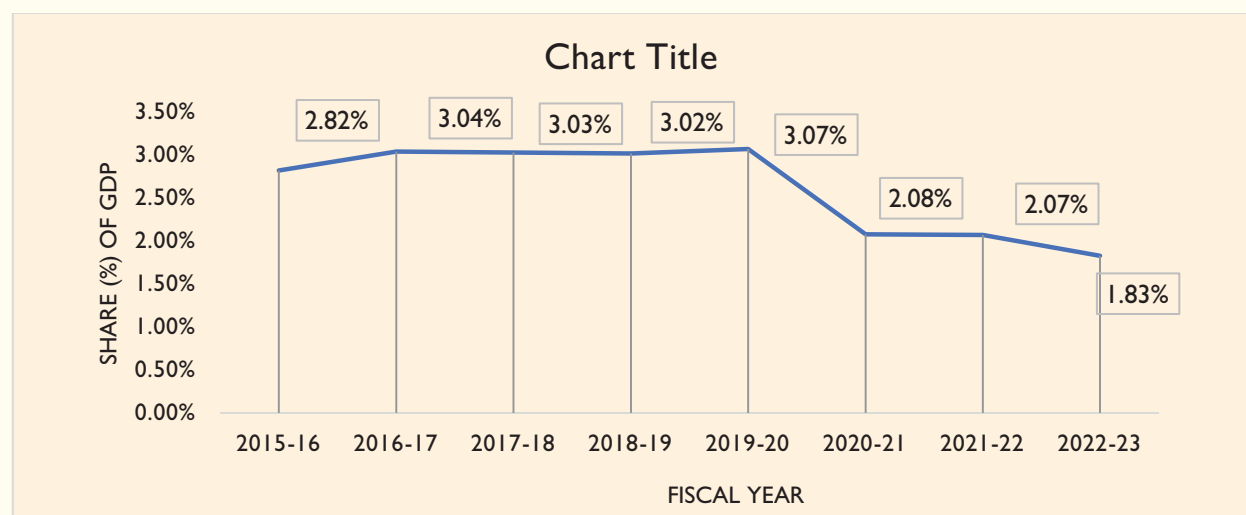
Available, accessible, acceptable and quality water, sanitation and hygiene facilities at schools are integral part of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) for girl students, but they are unfortunately neglected issues in Bangladesh due to lack of MHM-friendly toilets at schools especially in the rural areas.

According to the National Hygiene Baseline Survey 2014, 86 per cent of the female students use old cloths during menstruation. According to the same survey, on average the number of students per school toilet was 187 while the recommended number is 50 as per the Sector Development Plan (SDP) 2011-2025. Although the government has ordered the creation of toilets exclusively for female students in all schools, colleges and madrasas of the secondary and higher secondary levels, in reality the progress in this regard is still a far cry.

¹⁵ (CAMPE, girls education)

Budget still remains inadequate:

Expenditure by Education Divisions as a percent of GDP



As the budget for our education sector shrinks with each passing year, The entirety of the budget allocated for education makes up a mere 1.83 percent of the GDP in the fiscal year 2022-2023, reduced from the previous year, despite the education sector being adversely affected by the pandemic.

Not only are we far from the standard public expenditure on education set by UNESCO, we are also lagging behind compared to other South Asian countries. In 2015, UNESCO set the average public expenditure for education to 4 to 6 percent of GDP, or 15 to 20 percent of total budget. A 2020 report by UNICEF denotes Bangladesh to be the lowest spending country in the region where others such as Bhutan, Nepal, and Afghanistan spent 6.6 percent, 5.2 percent, and 4.1 percent respectively.¹⁶

Impact of Covid on Education Sector:

The education of 37 million children in Bangladesh has been disrupted due to school closures since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, according to the report, 'Situation Analysis on the Effects and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia' (SitAn Report), released on 19 October 2021. A BRAC study (MAY 2020) reveals that 56% of Bangla Medium and Madrsa students did not participate in classes aired through public broadcasting or other digital platforms¹⁷.

Educo Bangladesh conducted a rapid perception survey on 618 respondents to get an overall sense of how children and adolescents in urban slum areas accessed virtual education. It was found that during closure of school 66% of the children passed their leisure time by watching television which was likely to have a negative impact on their development. Children missed the outdoors including school, and psycho-social stress was high among the children¹⁸.

¹⁶ UNICEF (2020). *Social spending in South Asia—an overview of government expenditure on health, education and social assistance*.

¹⁷ http://www.brac.net/program/info_graphImpact-of-COVID-19-on-education-in-Bangladesh-A-rapid-assessment.pdf

¹⁸ <http://drive.google.com/file/d/socbehGOD/view>

Recommendations:

Recommendation made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Concluding Observations on the 5th Periodic Reports provided by Bangladesh on October 2015:

Education, leisure and cultural activities (Arts. 28-31)

Building on its previous recommendations (see CRC/C/BGD/CO/4, para. 75) and in the light of its general comment No. 1 (2001) on the aims of education, the Committee urges the State party to:

- (a) Increase the State budget dedicated to education and the implementation of the National Education Policy;
- (b) Ensure that education is available to all children in the State party, including asylum-seeking and refugee children;
- (c) Address the barriers faced by out-of-school children, particularly the direct and indirect costs of education, violence, in particular against girls, harmful traditional practices and negative attitudes towards children in vulnerable situations, including children with disabilities, children in street situations, refugee children and children belonging to minority groups;
- (d) Take the measures necessary to improve the accessibility and quality of education.
- (e) Provide guarantees that schools remain a safe and secure environment for the educational and personal development of every child, by prosecuting violence against and sexual abuse of children;
- (f) Develop and promote high-quality vocational training for all children and adolescents.

Recommendations:

- Institute a specialized project targeting the provision of education to children residing in remote and underserved regions. Expedite the initiation of an urgent project for developing textbooks in the mother languages of marginalized groups.
- Promptly enact and enforce guidelines for preventing sexual harassment within educational institutions, accompanied by rigorous and consistent oversight. Swift and robust measures, including legal remedies when deemed necessary, must be executed without delay.
- Implement routine programs for comprehensive reorientation, focusing on gender sensitivity, innovative participatory teaching and learning methodologies, and the enhancement of management competencies for all educators, regardless of gender. External support and expertise from non-governmental sources should be strategically engaged as needed.
- Educational practitioners should maintain vigilant attention to safeguarding marginalized and highly vulnerable students from any form of discriminatory behavior within classroom settings and the broader school environment.
- Conduct periodic parent-teacher meetings as an integral practice. Cultivate parental motivation to prioritize girls' education and facilitate their sustained enrollment. Introduce flexible school hours, tailored to seasonal fluctuations and the prevailing circumstances of students' families.

- While outcome-driven education remains pivotal in a student's academic journey, it is equally imperative to underscore extracurricular activities that cultivate practical skills and nurture holistic personal development.
- Establish a framework of consistent and systematic monitoring and evaluation for the stipend program, with a central focus on assessing its impact prior to any expansion. Prudent allocation of resources, based on region-specific requisites, is essential in this context. Moreover, a substantial expansion of the school meal provision should be considered. Provision of school meal should be expanded¹⁹.

4.2 Status of Girl Children in Health Sector:

A large number of policies and legislations exist in Bangladesh which are key to providing healthcare for children and women. Over recent decades, the country has prepared multi-sectoral national strategies for neonatal, children, adolescent and maternal Health. While the National Health Policy 2011 is the guiding document for all health-related issues, strategies and policies like National Strategy for Adolescent Health 2017-2030, the National Immunization Policy 2014, and Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development Policy 2013 are some of the specific policies dedicated to healthcare for children.



Photo: Good Neighbors Bangladesh

Child Mortality:

Bangladesh made commendable progress in achieving the child-health related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) i.e a remarkable 57% reduction in child mortality. A girl child today can expect to live 3.7 years longer than a boy child, which was approximately half in the 1970's. Unfortunately, there are indications that the rate of decline in under 5 mortalities may be slowing down in recent years. To reach the 2030 SDG target, with only 8 years remaining, it is important to understand the reasons for this slow-down and act upon them. Neonatal deaths now account for two-thirds of all deaths among children under the age of five. "A Promise Renewed" declaration was a commitment made by the Government of Bangladesh in 2013 following which they rolled out a number of neonatal health specific interventions hoping to accelerate progress in reducing the neonatal deaths. However, coverage of many of these interventions are still low.

Finally, nearly two-thirds of facility deliveries occur in private facilities, limiting the Government's capacity to ensure the needed quality of care during after delivery.

Mental Health:

A recent survey revealed that 1 out of 8 children in Bangladesh suffer from some sort of mental disorder.²⁰ Government of Bangladesh now considers mental illness as a top priority in the country

¹⁹ The status of un-served children in education: Girl children in Bangladesh, A Situation Analysis, Published by Campaign for Popular Education, December 2011

²⁰ ibid

consistent with its commitment to SDG 3.4 which aims at promoting mental health and well-being. The Bangladesh Parliament approved the Mental Health Act in 2018 and prepared a National Mental Health Strategic Plan 2020-2030.

There are more than 15 Child Development Centres (CDCs) affiliated with medical college hospitals that conduct comprehensive assessment and intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder and other neurodevelopmental disorders.

Mental health issues have become a major area of concern including the rising number suicides in Bangladesh. Social, peer and parental pressure, weak family support mechanism and lack of child-friendly activities are responsible for the suicides of as many as 242 girls in 2021²¹. The linkages to pressure related to school exams is clear and higher for girls.

Table: Prevalence of all mental disorders among children in Bangladesh²²

	2004	2009	2019
All children	15.0%	18.4%	12.6%
Girls	Not reported	Not reported	11.5%
Boys	Not reported	Not reported	13.7%

Source: Nationwide Representative Survey 2019

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has wreaked havoc on the mental health of the Bangladeshi population. One study has found that the prevalence of depressive (57.9%), stress (59.7%) and anxiety (33.7%) symptoms in the adult population is now much higher than pre-pandemic rates²³. Another study found that 28.5%, 33.3% and 46.92% of home-quarantined students, majority of girls, had stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms respectively.²⁴

Nutrition:

South Asia has one of the highest rates of child undernutrition in the world, and Bangladesh has been no different. However, progress in the last 20 years have been significant with sharp decline in chronic malnutrition, characterised by a decline in moderate or severe stunting to 28% in 2019. This has been reported as one of the most sustained reductions in child malnutrition in the world. While this is an

²¹ Annual Report of National Girl Child Advocacy Forum, 2021.

²² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8554893/table/tab02/>

²³ Banna MHA, Sayeed A, Kundu S, Christopher E, Hasan MT, Begum MR, et al. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of the adult population in Bangladesh: a nationwide cross-sectional study. *Int J Environ Health Res* [Epub ahead of print] 2 Aug 2020. Available from: 10.1080/09603123.2020.1802409

²⁴ Khan AH, Sultana MS, Hossain S, Hasan MT, Ahmed HU, Sikder MT. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health & wellbeing among home-quarantined Bangladeshi students: a cross-sectional pilot study. *J Affect Disord* 2020; 277: 121–8.

accomplishment on its own, the fact that nearly 30% of under five children are still stunted raises an issue for concern.²⁵

In August 2017, Bangladesh rolled out the second National Plan of Action on Nutrition (NPAN) 2016–2025 and established the BNNC, whose role is to coordinate nutrition activities in the country. NPAN2, along with the 2015 National Nutrition Policy, outlines the goals of improving the nutritional status of all citizens and reducing all forms of malnutrition, with a focus on children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. By focusing on the first 1,000 days (the period from pregnancy to a child's second birthday), the government aims to ensure universal access to nutrition services, and strengthen human resource capacity and nutrition information systems.

Adolescent health care:

Adolescence (10-19 years of age) is the most critical stage of a human being as it is a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood. This is a dynamic period of cognitive and physical development, which brings opportunities, but also upheavals. Even a portion of this group starts having children before they are emotionally or physically ready²⁶ Therefore, this is a vulnerable stage for the human being as the mental, physical, emotional changes have taken places, which affect the overall health behavior.

Globally, adolescents had been getting priority in the health sector as an outcome of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in 1994 in Cairo. This Cairo conference addressed the need for adolescents' wellbeing, which results in a good investment for the future generation. In the present context, Bangladesh is enjoying the opportunity of demographic dividend. It is defined by the United Nations Population Fund as, "the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older)." Therefore, the investment in the wellbeing of the adolescents will bring a triple dividend of benefits for today, for decades to come, and for the next generation²⁷

In that context, the Government is currently implementing the National Adolescent Health Strategy (NAHS) 2017 to 2030 preceded by the Adolescent Reproductive Health Strategy (ARHS) 2006-2016. The new strategy is focusing not only on the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) issue but also focuses on the holistic approach for the adolescent group, therefore it is termed as a "comprehensive strategy"²⁸

Strategic Directions of NAHS (2017-2030):

- Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health
- Violence against Adolescents
- Mental health of Adolescents
- Adolescent Nutrition

²⁵ 50 years

²⁶ Gates, 2016

²⁷

²⁸ BANGLADESH NATIONAL ADOLESCENT HEALTH STRATEGY, A STEP TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS BY 2030: A POLICY ANALYSIS AND LEGAL BASIS, Article published in International Journal of Legal Studies, June 2019.

Drug abuse:

Rapid urbanization, increase of population, vast development and use of internet and IT, lack of social awareness etc are responsible for the increase of drug problem in Bangladesh. It is estimated that over Tk 70 million every day are spending on illegal narcotics²⁹. Male get involved in drug addiction due to employment crisis, frustration and failure in academic performance. The numbers of female drug users are also increasing in our country due to family feud, frustration caused by failure in love and jobs, bad company and curious female students are taking drug put of fantasy when they are engaged in gossiping with their friends on the college or university campuses. According to government and non-government sources at least 1 lakh and 50 thousand women are drug addicted, 90 per cent of them are young people between ages of 18 to 25³⁰.

The department of Narcotics Control (DNC) has developed a 'Drug Action Plan' (2018) which includes facilities for treatment in hospitals which given the size of the problem is very limited. Over 29000 anti-narcotics committees were formed in educational institutions to carry out a campaign, but its impact is unknown.³¹

Health in budget:

While the overall budget for FY 2022-2023 increased about 14.24 percent, there has been only a 12.62 percent increase for the health sector, which, according to experts, is a consequence of incremental and inflation-related issues. This implies that the growth in the health budget is lower compared to the total budget, despite its share in the total budget increasing from 5.2 percent to 5.43 percent.

In the past several years, around 25 percent of the health budget has been spent on primary healthcare, 39 percent on secondary and 36 percent on tertiary. Allocating more than 60 percent of the health budget for primary care was recommended in the 1998 sector-wide approach (SWAP) for the health sector. meanwhile it was also not clear from the budget.

it has been criticized that as the government spent a lot on tertiary care — making new hospitals and medical colleges — primary healthcare has always been more neglected.

Recommendation:

Health and Health Services:

The Committee draws the State party's attention to its general comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, and recommends that the State party: (a) Allocate sufficient financial and human resources to health services in all regions and upazilas to eliminate regional disparities in the provision of health services;

²⁹ Common Drugs Abused by The Drug Addicted Young People in Dhaka City Farial Naima Rahman, Mushtaq Ahmad, Md Zubaidur Rahman , Mohammad Ali 4. KYAMC Journal Vol. 11, No.02, July 2020

³⁰ Ara R, Mahjabeen T. Moral deviation in young people of Bangladesh. Bangladesh J Bioethics 2010; 1(3):58-62.

³¹ <http://www.the-independentbd.com/post/151915>

(b) Implement and apply the technical guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce and eliminate preventable mortality and morbidity of children under 5 years of age (A/HRC/27/31) and pay specific attention to anaemia and malnutrition, in particular in rural and remote areas and in slums;

(c) Develop and implement policies to improve health infrastructures, and intensify training programmes for all health professionals

Drug Abuse:

The Committee recommends that the State party provide children and adolescents with accurate and objective information and life-skills education on preventing substance abuse, including the abuse of tobacco and alcohol but especially hard drugs, as well as glue and solvent sniffing, through public school programmes and media campaigns, and protect children from harmful misinformation and models. The Committee also recommends that the State party develop accessible and anonymous drug dependence treatments and harm reduction services for children and young people.

Adolescent health:

The Committee recommends that the State party take urgent action to strengthen its efforts to prevent suicide among children and youth, including by increasing psychological counselling services and social workers in schools and communities, and ensure that all professionals working with children are adequately trained to identify and address early suicidal tendencies and mental health problems.

Recommendation:

- The government along with respective ministries and NGOs can initiate emergency needs assessment of school and pre-school level children's state of malnutrition and integrate intervention with school grants system.
- Undertake social sanitation campaign by schools as part of regular duty and integrate with annual performance appraisal mechanism. Schools, Ministry of Education, local government bodies and respective NGOs can support this plan.
- The government along with respective ministry and development partner should revise and expand National Nutrition Policy with focus on adolescent malnutrition, particularly girls.
- Undertake plan to train teachers and caregivers to identify early indicators of deteriorating mental health and basics of mental health care and develop a referral system at the appropriate ties. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Education, respective NGOs and civil society can coordinate plan among themselves to achieve SDG goal 3.
- Introduce mental Health Care Network for psychological first aid/counseling at the school to achieve SDG goal 3. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Bangladesh Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health (BACAM) and the National Institute of Mental Health and Hospital can coordinate efforts.
- School authorities can conduct debate competitions, seminars on the viciousness of drug abuse.



Photo: National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

4.3 Girls in different sports, leisure cultural activities:

Girls in Sports:

French author Simon de Beauvoir said, *'Man is defined as human being and woman as a female- whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male'*. The patriarchal society often encourages a male child to pursue his dream but limits the sphere of a female child within the boundary of home/kitchen. However, overcoming all the obstacles set by orthodox society, the strong-willed women chase their dreams.

Tahura hopes big, she hopes to meet her namesake Argentinian Football Star Lionel Messi someday and will ask him to teach her some tricks...and she has already proved if

you dream it, if you put your fullest effort to it, you can earn it, someday or the other. So as to say the Bangladesh girls win Maiden SAFF football championship in Nepal for the first time making the country proud as ever and putting a smile on the face of every citizens of the country. And interestingly, many of these success stories sprout not just from cities with swanky facilities but from modest small towns and villages, underprivileged places that are sometimes hard to find on Google Maps.

Dolly Katherine was one of pioneers in women's sports as she came into sports defying different social barriers in the 1950s and set examples for the next generation. Dolly started her career as a shot-put and discus thrower before trading her skills in few other sports, including cycling, cricket, hockey, handball, badminton, volleyball and swimming.

Talking about female participation in sports, not to be missed to mention- an 11-year-old girl, Tasmina Akter, is riding a speeding horse, flying hair, and passing fields and she wins over her male contenders as well.

Bangladeshi girls have also bagged medals in *Kabbadi*. They received bronze in the recently held Asian Games and silver in the South Asian Games (SA) hosted in 2010 in events like shooting, taekwondo, karate and wushu.

With a string of positive performances in the last couple of years, which includes a silver medal in the Asian Games, the women's cricket in Bangladesh has travelled a long distance ever since the team's inception in 2007. It is therefore not a surprise to see them dominating the limelight when it comes to women's sports in the country.

Bangladesh Women's Sports Association (BWSA), established in 1972 has been instrumental in promoting women's sport in Bangladesh by unifying women athletes under their support. They helped women to organize themselves, join the board of directors of the BWSA, and mobilize other young girls and women to engage in sports. The association also launched sports training for female students from different schools throughout the country. After developing different district-wide school teams, it organized inter-district and inter-school competitions.

Recommendation:

Rest, leisure, recreation and cultural and artistic activities

In the light of the Committee's general comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts, the Committee reminds the State party of children's right to rest, leisure and cultural activities and recommends that it allocate all necessary human, technical and financial resources to initiatives that promote and facilitate children's playtime and other self-organized activities in public places, schools and children's institutions and at home.

Recommendation:

- Finding players was more difficult earlier, but many more girls are now willing to play and this will definitely help us create a stronger team. However, most women cricket leagues consist of girls from rural areas rather than from urban areas, and that they still have to battle social and economic barriers that arise from conservative views of and limited funding support for girls.
- Several sports analysts concurred and stated that necessary investment is of utmost necessity to encourage and develop sport talent among girls and women in Bangladesh. However, the issue of remuneration must also be addressed as women players get less than male players for the same competition, even in popular sports such as cricket and football.
- Guidelines on Sexual harassment, abuse and violence against women should be more specifically implemented in the case of female sportsperson.
- Government machineries, sports federations or some sponsors should be more considerate for them.
- Equality is of utmost importance to them. They require equal opportunities to play and to be treated at par with men.
- Women /girls sports clubs are very rare which restricts girls' participation in sports as parents do not like their daughters to play with boys.

Girls' involvement in Girls Guide Association:

Bangladesh Girls Guide Association, active since 1928, became a member of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in 1973 and is now the country's largest national organization offering leadership training to girls and young women. The aim of the association is to develop the full potential of girls and encourage them to actively participate in the life of their community.



Photo: National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

The educational programme of Girl Guide is divided into four groups on the basis of age of the girls:

- (i) Yellow Bird (6-10 years), motto: to help others;
- (ii) Girl Guide (10-16 years), motto: to get always ready;
- (i) Ranger (16-24 years), motto: social service; (iv) Leader Guide (24-30 years), motto: love for the Creator and devoted practice of religious behests.

As a part of this meritorious work the members of the Bangladesh Girls Guide Association contribute through the implementation of various projects to social development, preservation of healthy environment, service to old age, income augmentation programme and health services.

Girls' involvement in debate competitions:

With the tagline, 'Future is Female', a two-day online inter-school debate tournament, BDC Fempowerment 2020, was organised by Bangladesh Debating Council (BDC) recently. BDC Fempowerment is the first ever debate tournament, organised by women for women.

The young bunch of powerful and talented debaters has been rapidly taking Bangladeshi debate to greater heights at the world stage. However, this change is mostly driven by males, as females still have to overcome several obstacles to participate in debates as an extra-curricular activity³². Even though female debaters are working wonders on their own, the need to recognise and acknowledge the struggles of a female debater is ever more present. This tournament was organised to give female debaters a platform to demonstrate their talents.



Photo: National Girl Child Advocacy Forum

4.4 Female participation in STEM: Going with the trend

Dr Firdausi Qadri of ICDDR,B, Dr Salma Sultana of Model Livestock Advancement Foundation and Prof Samia Subrina of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET)—three Bangladeshi women scientists have recently made the country proud. They were included in the sixth edition of the Asian Scientist 100 list, which is a Singapore-based science and technology magazine. The list was published to celebrate the success of the region's "best and brightest, highlighting their achievements across a range of scientific disciplines."

These achievements are significant, as underrepresentation of women and girls in the workforce and in higher education with regard to the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) remains a serious problem.

As it is shown from the BANBEIS statistics, Total girls' students were 316060 (27.13%) of total enrollment at the vocational and technical education sector, the gender parity index was 0.37 (37%), much behind the national target of Equal or 100%.

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the global use of technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)³³. It accelerated the pace of its adoption via cyber-physical infrastructure in education, health service, social interactions, environmental monitoring and other sectors. Therefore, to enter into the labour market and moreover to empower themselves girls need to prepare themselves and grab the opportunities.

³² <https://www.thedailystar.net/star-youth/news/bdc-fempowerment-debate-competition-women-women-1964441>

³³ Dr. Latifa Zaman, 50 years of Bangladesh for Children, Published by Save the Children, Prothoma Prokashon, June 2022

The global trends are changing very fast and along with that Digital Bangladesh has put utmost emphasize on digital connectivity and is quite close on its vision for 2041. But to achieve that, closing down the gender disparity in this field is indispensable. Moreover, focus should be given on both rural and urban young people to be equipped with the latest technologies and revolutions. The private, public and development sectors need to work altogether to build Bangladesh as a developed nation.

Fatima: A trendsetter

Fatema, a child maid for a middle class family, was called back to her village. Not to reunite with her family, as she first thought, but to be married. At the wedding ceremony, just as the vows were about to be taken, a representative from a local nonprofit that teaches digital skills to empower rural girls, intervened and snatched her away. Fatima started learning digital skills through learning the basics of Word, Excel, PowerPoint and how to apply these to skills for literacy, numeracy, CVs and letter writing. Fatema pieced together her own life curriculum driven by the instinct that this was the way out of a life of enslavement. With the strength and confidence to fight against four more attempts to marry her early, she was able to return to school to finish her secondary education. The non-profit organization Ashar Alo Pathshala soon got national attention for their brave act.³⁴

Converting a traumatic event into a well of strength to fight for girls' rights, Fatema now teaches digital literacy to girls in her village. Taking her role further, she has become an advocate and campaigner against child marriage in Bangladesh.

4.5 Representation of women in media:

In Bangladesh women do take part in education, labour force, agriculture, farming, banking, politics, judiciary, business, medical profession, even in media. Yet most of the media depiction keeps women isolated and like to eliminate them from economic force. In this 21st century, advertisements are still restricted and questioned to reflect the image of modern women in Bangladesh. This sort of representation encourages girls and boys, both the sexes to believe that women are ought to be weak, mindless and needy. It also has an impact on the attitude of men to perceive that women are mere sex objects.

Some of the characteristics attached to women that only allow the audience to understand female personals as submissive, naive, beautiful objects, good mothers, excellent cooks, perfect housewives. This certainly constructs a traditional women image by deliberate negligence of freedom and potential of a woman as a human being³⁵.

In a study conducted in 2021³⁶, it was found that females are mostly assigned in the role of a beauty conscious Bangladesh Advertisements. It is the most prevalent female character role in Bangladeshi television commercials, with the major percentage (26.9%). Then the role of mother secures the second most prevalent with percentage of (26.1%). The role of a housewife holds the third position with a

³⁴ <https://news.microsoft.com/apac/features/crossroad-one-bangladeshi-girl-used-technology-springboard-empowerment/>

³⁵ Role Portrayals of Women in Bangladeshi Television Advertisements and It's Changes with The Context of Time Kazi Kamrun Nahar International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research Volume 10, Issue 7, July-2019 158 ISSN 2229-5518

³⁶ A critical study on female roles in television commercials of Bangladesh Moriom Begum Mim, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2021), pp. 249-266 doi: <http://doi.org/10.21831/informasi.v51i2.42903>. 249-266



Photo: ATN Bangla

percentage of (14.1%). The role of the other category secures fourth position (11.6%) and spouse character gets fifth position (10.8%).

Though internet and smartphone technology took spectacles beyond the standby television, yet television is the easiest accessible visual for almost every class and age. Television engages, psychologically connects people with the visuals and evokes real emotion by what is shown on the TV³⁷. Few years back (July to August 2014) Bangladesh “resulted in at least three deaths and one divorce” for “Pakhi” dress that was popular around originated from an Indian Bengali serial *Bojhe Na Shey Bojhey Na*.³⁸ “Pakhi” is the heroin of the serial and before Eid festival there was a huge hype to buy an expensive dress as “Pakhi” wears in the drama. Television could promote the consumer culture so strongly that those girls preferred to commit suicide rather than not having that dress.

The flood of television serials (especially leading Indian ones) “are influencing the cultural sphere of Bangladesh” by systematically feeding “obscenity, nudity, arousal of sexual instincts, or premarital sexual relations.”³⁹

But this stereotype is breaking with time. Mainly Ispahani Mirzapore tea advertisements are trying to break this stereotypical barrier. In 2016 to 2018 this brand showed male characters are making tea in 6 advertisements.

Where Ispahani Mirzapore Tea advertisements are trying to break this barrier, there Radhuni Masala advertisements are always showing only women in the kitchen. But overall, in comparison with men as helping hand the scenario is changing.

³⁷ Ahmed, A. (2012). Women and soap-operas: Popularity, portrayal, and perception. International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, 2, 1-6

³⁸ Feroze, “Pakhi’ dress, three deaths, and a divorce” Dhaka Tribune).

³⁹ Islam, Atikul. “Hindigenization of Bangladeshi Culture through the Penetration of Satellite TV: Paradigm of Modernization vs. Dependency Theory.” iiste.org, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. New Media and Mass Communication Vol.18, 2013. ISSN 2224-3275

Chapter

5

Violence Against Girl Children

The violent acts on girl children of our country are growing alarmingly day by day. The girl children both in the high or lower society are the victims of this violence. The violent acts occur everywhere whether in railway stations, inside a bus or bus stations, secluded places or street, empty houses, slums, etc. Side by side child girl marriage is also growing alarmingly in the villages.

Most of the girl children are victims of sexual harassment, acid attack, kidnapping, rape, etc. from childhood even where the family is supposed to be a safe haven for the girl child, their safety is often questioned. Due to various discrimination and oppression, many people become helpless in their own families.

There are laws regarding oppression a girl child in the country. But despite the law, child sexual abuse is increasing day by day. Moreover, victim's family is often subjected to social censure while seeking justice as those who commit this crime, are relatively dominant. As a result, they are able to obstruct the judicial process or take it in their favour.

Poverty, social exclusion or gender discrimination, widespread illiteracy, lack of awareness and poor governance are the key factors contributing to child marriage, forced labour, trafficking in persons in Bangladesh.

5.1 Monitoring of Violence against Girl Children:

A total of 3,703 incidents of torture and sexual violence against children and women took place across the country between January and December 2021, revealed a report of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad. Meanwhile, a report of Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association (BNWLA) found that 2,588 incidents of torture and sexual violence against women and girls took place across the country at the said year⁴⁰. Non-government organisation Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) has reported with news published in nine newspapers and some online media that 3,184 reports of violence against women and children have been published in 11 months of 2022. And, 64 per cent of the news is of rapes.

Online violence against women has increased as well. According to data of the Police Cyber Support for Women (PCSW), in between January to November 2022, 8,715 women have complained of issues like fake ID, ID hacking, blackmailing, harassment over phone and spreading of offensive content.

⁴⁰ <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/rights/news/2021-violent-year-women-2931911>

NGCAF took the first ever initiative of collecting data on violence perpetrated only against girl children (0-19) years. And in this regard information was taken from 08 national, 02 online & 14 local newspapers.

5.2 Statistical representation of Violence against Girl Children (2021-2022):

Sexual Harassment and Abuse

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Sexual Harassment	83	88
02	Pornography	28	19
03	Sexual Harassment (Disabled Girls)	05	01
Total		116	108

Child Marriage

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Child Marriage	23	19
02	Rescued from Child Marriage	87	62
Total		110	81

Dowry

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Victims of Dowry	06	11
02	Murdered for Dowry	09	07
03	Suicide Caused by Dowry)	02	03
Total		17	21

Rape

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Victims of Rape	723	508
02	Raped Disabled Girls	100	67
03	Raped Domestic Worker	04	04
04	Gang raped	155	142
05	Rape Attempts	161	131
06	Death Caused by rape	05	01
07	Murdered after Rape	45	38
08	Suicide after being raped	04	07
09	Raped by Trapping (love/Trapped in cheating)	71	79
10	Raped at Educational Institutions (Madrasah/Mosque)	10	10
Total		1117	987

Torture of Domestic Workers

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Abused Domestic Workers	12	09
02	Murdered of Domestic Workers	05	03
03	Physically Tortured Domestic Workers	18	06
04	Suicide of Domestic Workers because of abuse/torture	00	01
Total		35	19

Corporal Punishment at Educational Institutions

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Victims of Corporal Punishment in Educational Institutions	04	13
02	Victims of Sexual harassment in Educational Institutions (Madrasah/Mosque)	04	10
Total		08	23

Acid Attacks

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Victims of Acid attacks	10	04
Total		10	04

Kidnapping and Trafficking

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Victims of Kidnapping	83	97
02	Murder of Kidnapped Children	08	02
03	Victims of Trafficking	06	02
04	Rescued after Kidnapping	106	97
05	Rescued after Trafficking	03	09
Total		206	207

Domestic Violence

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Victims of Domestic Violence by Husband	06	04
02	Victims of Domestic Violence by in-Laws	09	07
03	Victimized Girl Children of Domestic Violence at own home	18	07
Total		33	18

Eve Teasing

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Victims of Eve Teasing	47	65
Total		47	65

All types of Suicides

SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Suicide due to Family Disputes	36	50
02	Suicide because of Domestic Violence	06	02
03	Suicide due to Disagreement with Parents or Family Members	56	49
04	Suicide because of Love Affairs	61	57
05	Suicide due to Torture by Husband or In-laws	12	10
06	Suicide due to Ridicule or Reprimand by Family Members, Teachers, Classmates or Others	28	39
07	Suicide Provoked by Others	37	24
08	Suicide caused by Dowry *	02	03
09	Suicide after being Raped *	04	07
10	Suicide of Domestic Workers because of Abuse/Torture *	00	01
Total		242	242

All types of Murders

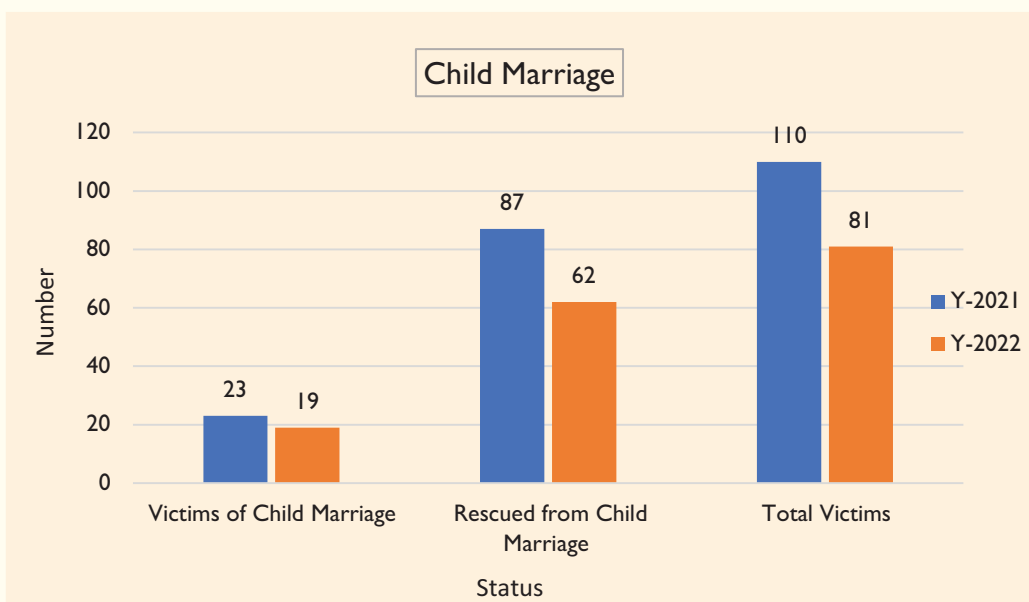
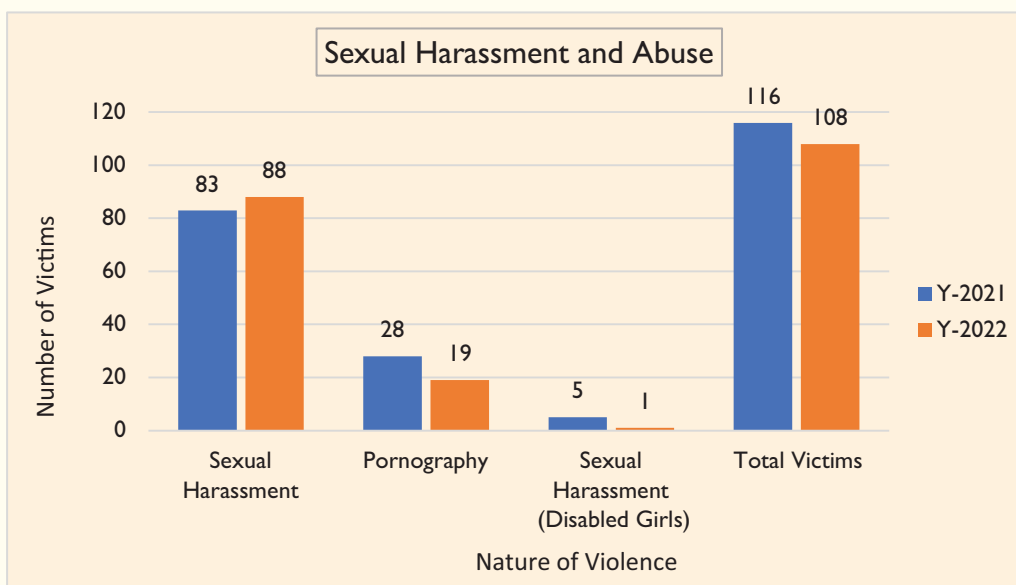
SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Murdered due to Previous Hostility	37	61
02	Murdered in Family Disputes	134	111
03	Murdered because of Love Affairs	27	26
04	Murdered for Knowing Secret Information	07	06
05	Murdered for Not Providing Information	00	00
06	Murdered for Dowry *	09	07
07	Murdered after being Raped *	45	38
08	Murder of Domestic Workers *	05	03
09	Murder of Kidnaped Children *	08	02
Total		272	254

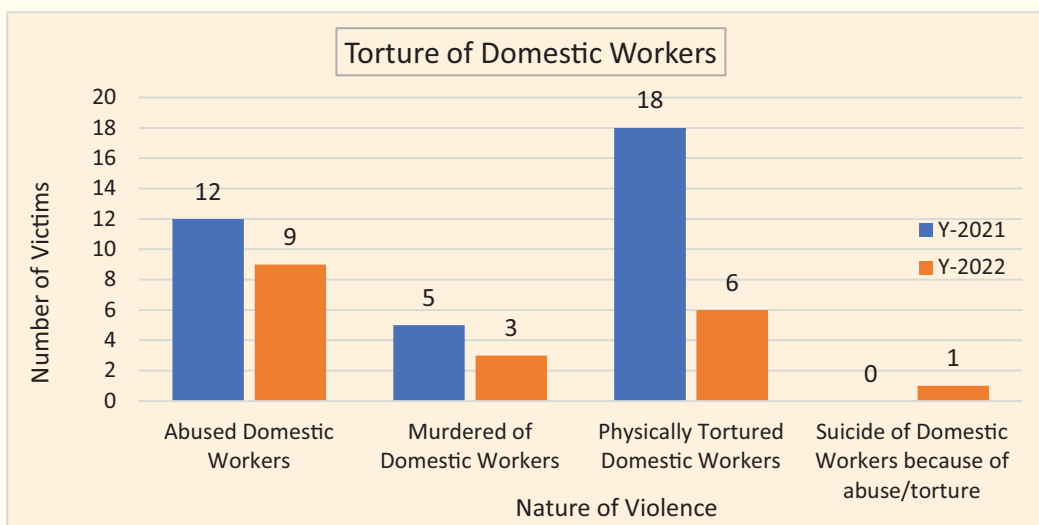
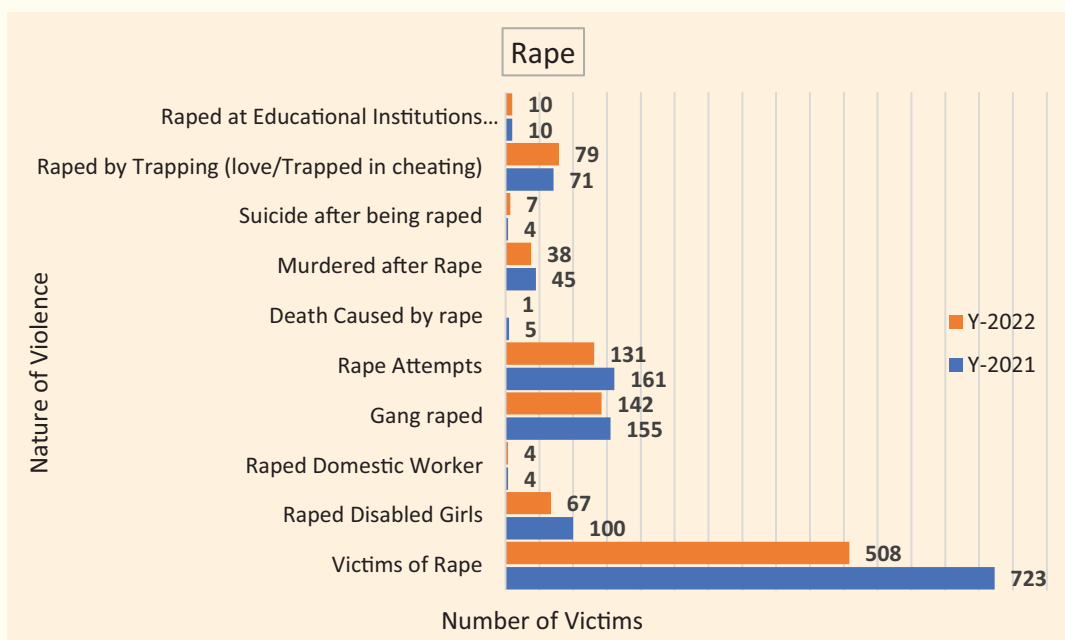
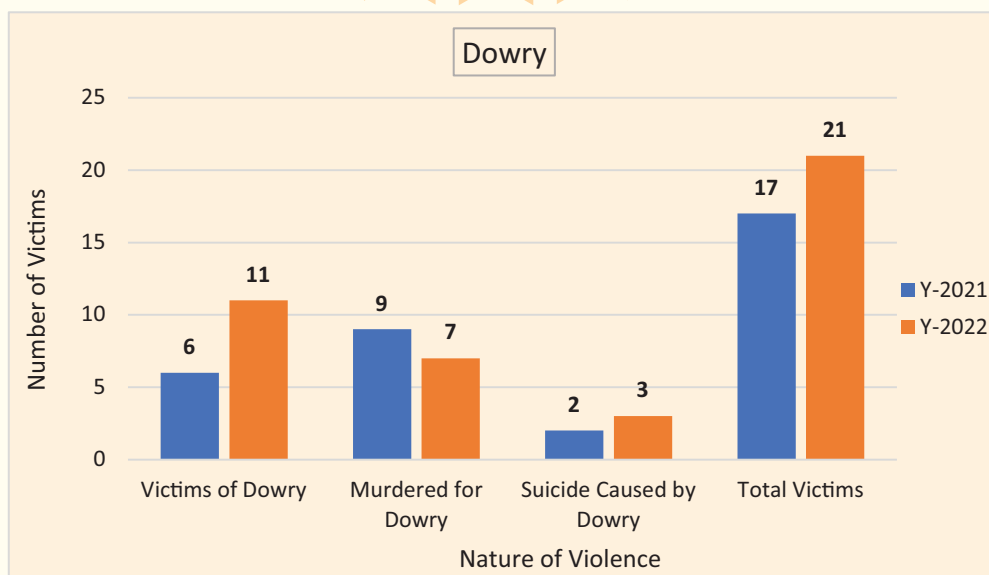
Neglect towards Girl Children

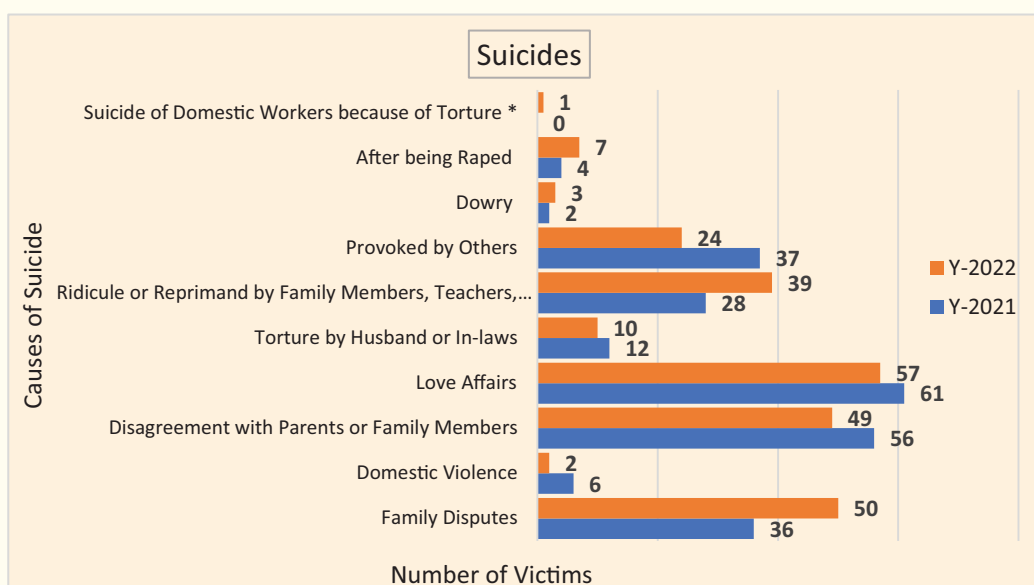
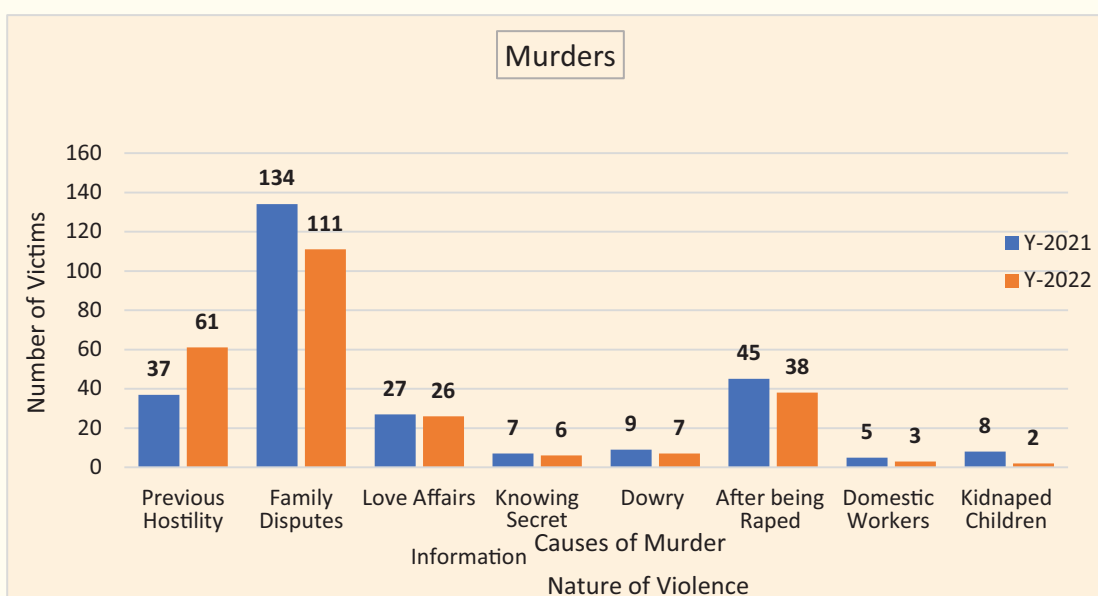
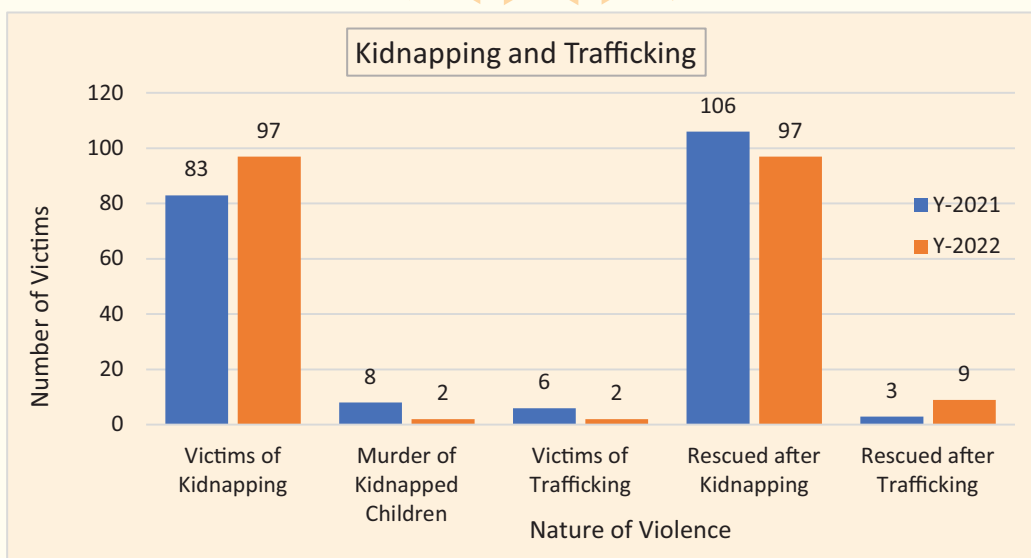
SL	Particulars	# Of Victims (Year wise)	
		2021	2022
01	Abandonment of girl children	33	10
02	Selling of Girl Children	02	03
Total		47	65

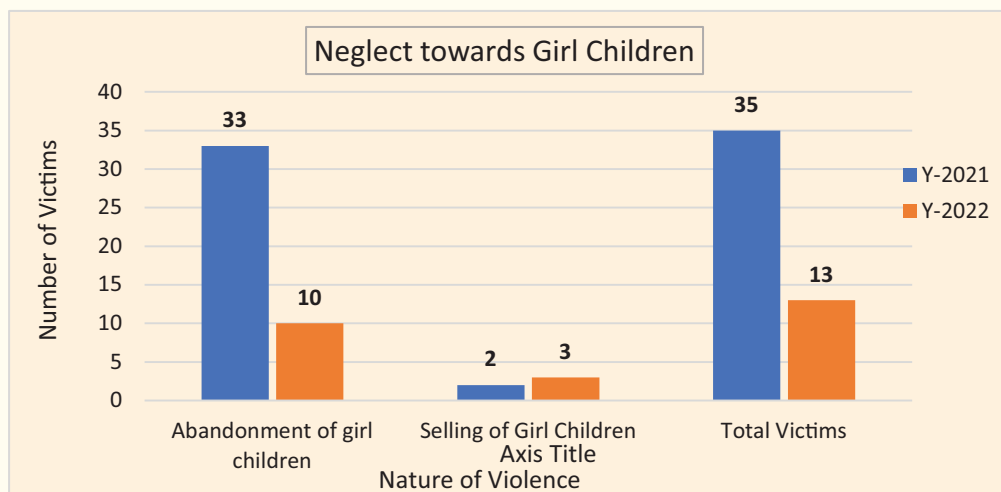
MONITORING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRL CHILDREN

(Age: Up to 19 Years) January 2021 to December 2022









5.3 Complications with children related violence:

Reform of the child justice system has started with the enactment of the Children Act 2013 in Bangladesh. The Act adopted a number of institutional setups for child-friendly justice i.e. child help desks in the police station, separate children's court, child development centres, national child welfare board etc. These all are interlinked and the responsibilities of concerned authorities have been focused on the law. In practice, most of the children are deprived of their fair justice in different phases i.e. police arrest, prosecution, court hearing, and correctional treatment as there is a lack of professional ethics of concerned personnel⁴¹.

However, under the Women and Children Act, girls under 16 are treated like children and receive certain special benefits. The Labor Act, the Child Act also provides equal opportunities for girls like other children. Only the Family Law provides specific provisions for keeping Girl Child until marriage.

All court proceedings require financial resources. In this case, the child must be dependent upon the elders of the family. Children do not speak properly, the area will be stigmatized, the complexity of legal procedures and the lengthy process of settling cases are major obstacles in the implementation of laws.


5.4 Child Labour:

Children in Bangladesh are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including forced child labor and in worst case scenario are forced to take up works to earn a living for the poor household. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics estimated that there were 1.28 million children working in hazardous sectors before the pandemic, and one NGO has observed a 33 percent increase in child labor after the onset of Covid 19. As per



Photo: Educo Bangladesh

⁴¹ Nahid Ferdousi, Justice for children in Bangladesh: Legal and Ethical Issues, Bangladesh Journal of Bioethics, June, 2020.



findings of a study titled “The Impact of COVID-19 on Working Children in Dhaka City” conducted by Action for Social Development (ASD) in 2021, more than one-third of the surveyed children said that currently, they have no work because of the pandemic followed by the lockdown. Approximately 86.6% reported having suffered economic losses because of coronavirus.

Children, mostly girls, work as domestic servants in private households in Bangladesh. In 2018, a survey by an international organization found more than 400,000 children in domestic work in Bangladesh⁴².

On the other hand, the garment industry is the largest employer of child labour in the formal sector. The majority of labourers in the garment industry hired are girls and women. Bangladesh garment factories have been accused of forcing girls as young as 13 to work up to 11 hours a day to produce garments for western retailers and they are also being accused of not providing proper sanitation facilities and as well as harassment free working spheres. Though with severe efforts from all the relevant stakeholders, export-oriented garments sector has made quite free from child labour⁴³.

How children are forced into labour:

- Children having no place to live are often called street children. Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) reported the number of street children in Bangladesh was 1.5 million in 2015 and may reach 1.56 million in 2024⁴⁴. In the past these street children usually lived by begging, hawking various items on the street (flowers, chocolates, water-bottles, newspapers etc.) and by selling one time labour. Reports say that the shutdown has exposed these children to a variety of vulnerabilities and made them more susceptible to crime.⁴⁵ Throughout Bangladesh, street children are coerced into criminality or forced to beg, and begging ringmasters sometimes maim children to increase earnings.
- Some girls are forced into domestic service, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and are abused by their employers.
- Children throughout Bangladesh are sexually exploited through the country’s legal and illegal brothels, and child commercial sexual exploitation remained widespread⁴⁶.
- Women and children living on the street or struggling economically and children fleeing abusive child marriages, are especially vulnerable to being sold to brothels for commercial sexual exploitation. Some children of sex workers are also put to work in brothels and made to take steroids to appear older. In addition, children are trafficked to India where they are forced into labor or commercial sexual exploitation.

⁴² Child abuse in Bangladesh: Farzana Islam and Gulshan Ara Akhtar, Department of Forensic Medicine, Ibrahim Medical College, Shahbag, Dhaka, Ibrahim Med. Coll. J. 2015; 9(1): 18-21

⁴³ Abdullah Al Mamun, ‘Stop Child Labour: Let children’s life be filled with dreams’, 50 years of Bangladesh for Children, June, 2022

⁴⁴ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2018/04/04/a-rough-life-exploring-the-involvement-of-street-children-in-organised-crime-in-dhaka/>

⁴⁵ <https://tbsnews.net/coronavirus-chronicle/covid-19-bangladesh/street-children-doubly-vulnerable-amid-shutdown-72919>

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report- 2020:

Bangladesh. Washington DC. June 25, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/bangladesh/>

- Research has found that Internet-based trafficking in persons increased during the pandemic, with traffickers adapting to technology by using popular apps to connect with victims⁴⁷.

GO/NGO initiatives:

After ratification of the ILO C 182, the GoB enacted/ amended child labour related laws and policies over the last two decades in order to make the national legislation consistent with the international child rights instruments, including ILO C 182. The Labour Act, The Children Act 2013, the National Child Labour Elimination Policy (NCLEP) by 2025, National Plan of Action (NPA) on Child Labour, the list of hazardous work for children, the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy (DWPWP), the five year plans and so forth. Moreover many public and private projects have been implemented in the last 20 years regarding the elimination of child labour. The MoLE has taken an initiative to revise the NPA and new target has been set to eliminate hazardous child labour by 2021 and all forms of child labour by 2025 in alignment with SDG targets, which is really a big challenge for the government⁴⁸.

The GoB and the NGOs have applied a good number of strategies and implemented numerous activities over the last two decades to prevent and eliminate child labour with special focus on hazardous child labour. Many of these strategies and activities brought positive results, however, some of the strategies either partially worked or did not work at all. Therefore, it is crucial to design appropriate interventions based on the experience gained from the previous experiences.

Many NGOs are working towards ensuring the rights of the domestic workers. For instance, Nari Moitree under the project 'The Securing Rights' tells the stories of domestic workers such as Laily, Nasima and Shahida in social-media posts designed to change attitudes toward household employees. The awareness campaign has included an 8-part miniseries called "Tales of Home" that ran on national television in the summer of 2021. The primetime "edutainment" serial depicts the role of domestic workers in families and the need to pay and treat them humanely.

Loopholes in the implementation of laws and policies:

- The penalty for a child labor law violation, which can only be imposed by a court after a lengthy process, and the low number of penalties imposed are inadequate to act as deterrents. Research has found that the maximum penalty for a child labor law violation is approximately \$59 (5,000 taka), which is insufficient to deter violations.
- The government's social programs often align with the priorities of various funders, and lack coordination among relevant ministries to address the cross-cutting nature of child labor issues. According to the findings of the Educo conducted study in 2020 titled 'Child Labour in Bangladesh: Looking Back and Way Forward', approximately 64.32% of working children do not have access to any type of education. Only 35.68% of working children are attending schools, mostly NGO-run NFE centres. These figures indicate that the school attendance rate among the working children is far below the national school attendance rate (98%).

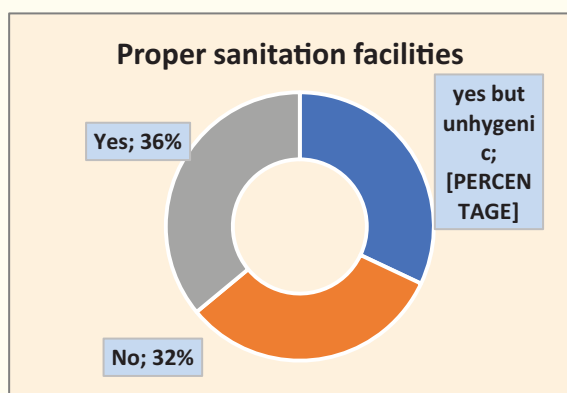
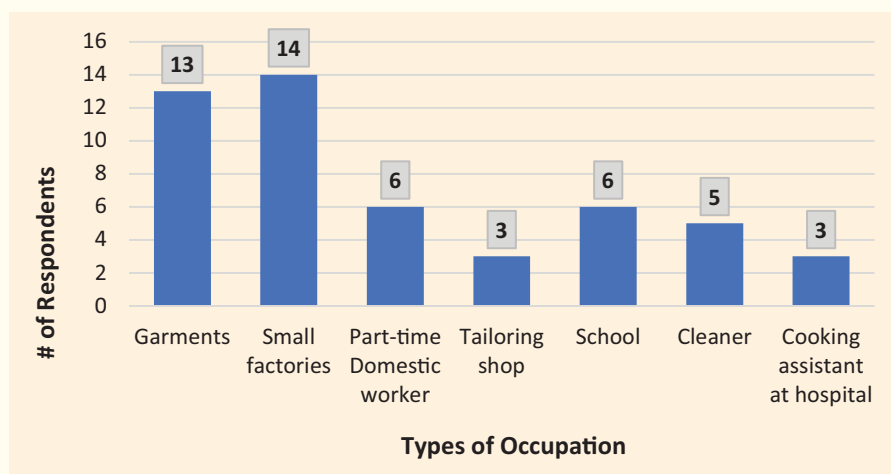
⁴⁷ U.S. Embassy- Dhaka. Reporting. February 15, 2021.

⁴⁸ Child Labour in Bangladesh: Looking Back and Way Forward', Educo, June 2021

- MOLE is not effectively coordinating the implementation of this policy. Research has also found that, at local levels, corruption and a lack of legal understanding were obstacles in implementation.

Survey on the status of girl child labour:

NGCAF along with Narimoitree and DFID conducted a survey on 50 girls from the age limit of 12-18 years working in different small scale working sectors combining both the formal and informal sectors. The major objective was to understand the environments of working place, the problems they face, the push factor that brought them to work.



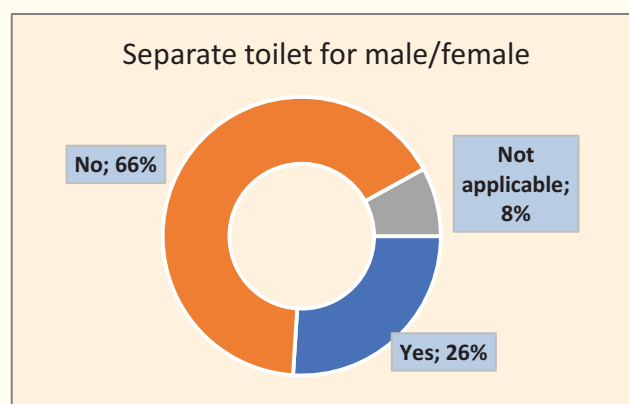
When asked about the sanitary facilities as much as 32% responded that they do not have any separate toilet while 36% affirmed of having separate toilets, Few complained that even if there are separate toilets, sometimes male co-workers use the female toilets because of the inadequate number of toilets as compared to the number of workers.

Most of the respondents opined that the toilets are too unhygienic to use.

The respondents unanimously opined the need of a separate washroom for female works.

When asked whether they have been sexually or verbally abused or harassed ever at the workplace remained silent.

During the interview it was found that actually they are scared of giving an honest reply. 16% of the respondents opined that they have been



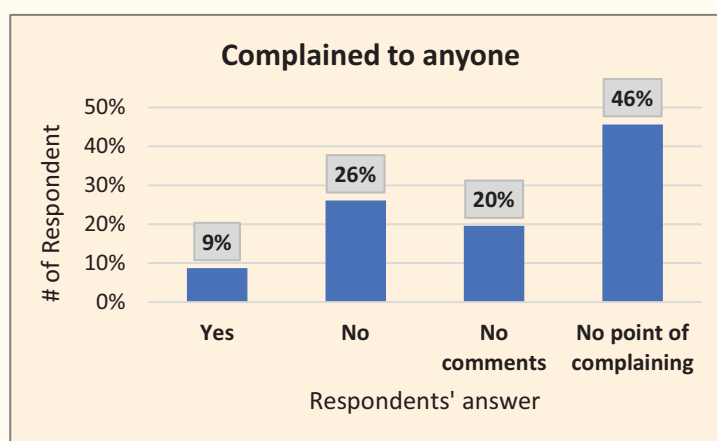
abused. and mostly replied that have been harassed by a co-worker.

44% of the respondents replied that they have a decent working environment in this regard and that they have not ever been harassed. 22% preferred to make no comments in this regard while 18% were reluctant to give any answer.

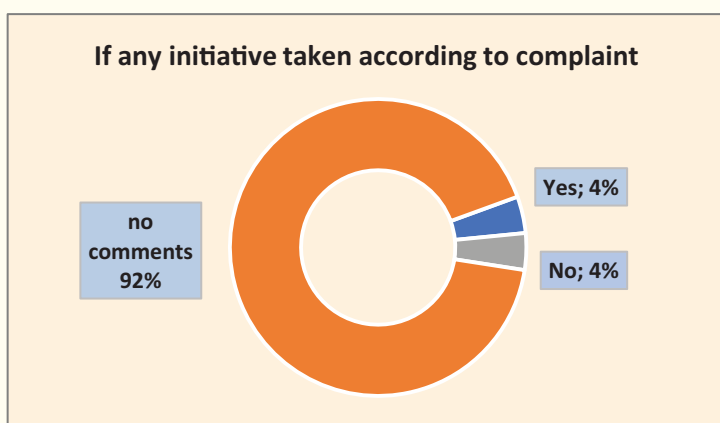


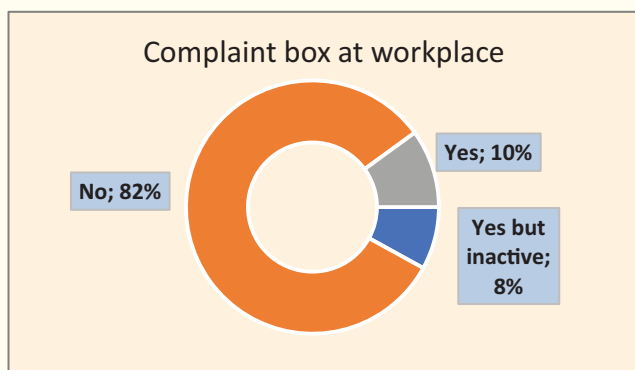
They were asked if they made any complaint to anyone ever about any unexpected incident, on which 46% respondents replied that there is no point of complaining. That their voice will not be heard. that they prefer to keep shut because the job is too essential for their survival.

Only 9% made a complaint and 26% answered that they haven't. 20% respondents replied that they will not make any comment.



when asked if any initiative was taken according to the complaint, 4% replied in affirmative. As usual 92% chose to remain silent.

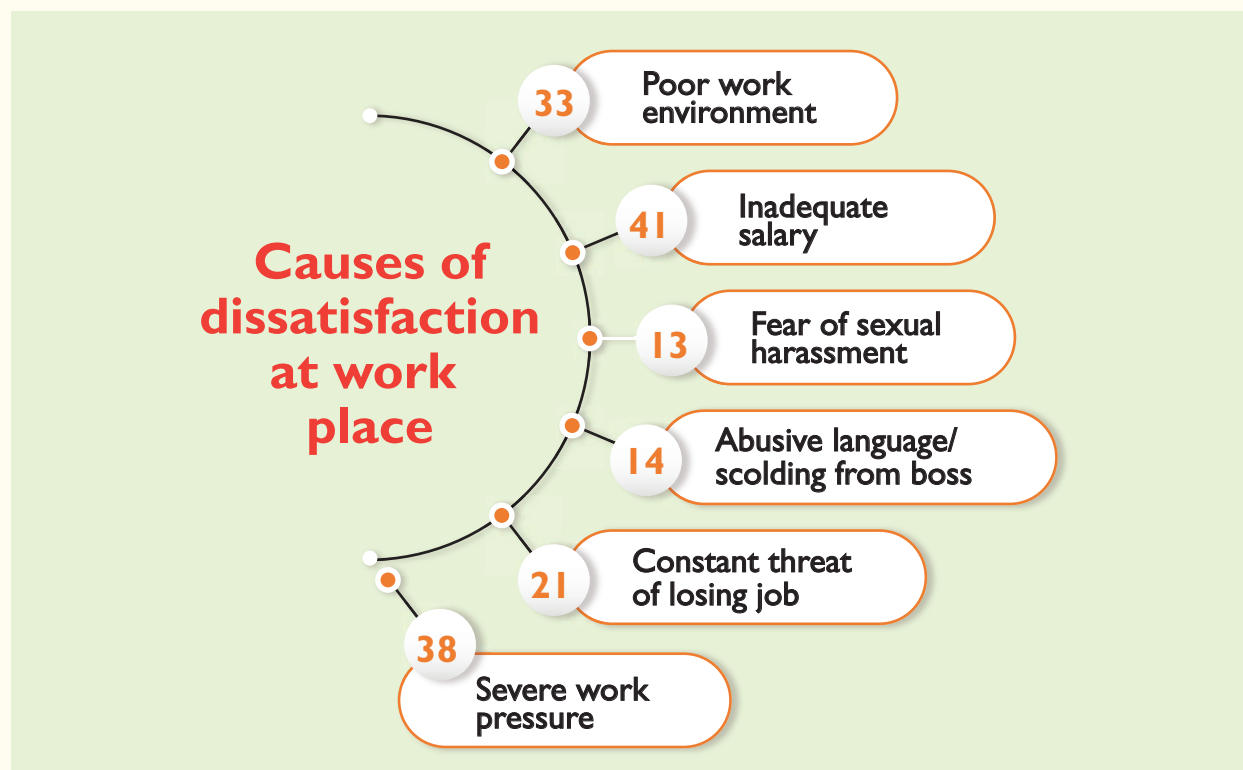
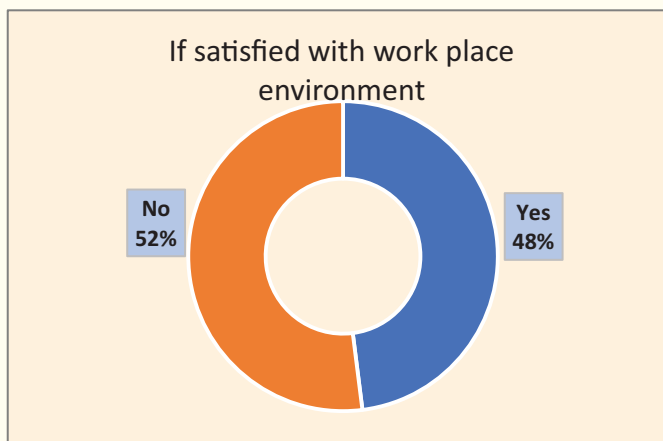





the key observation from the survey was revealed when as much as 82% respondents replied that there is no complain box at their respective workplaces. Moreover 8% replied even there is a box it is inactive. 10% respondents replied there is complain box.

in the question whether they are satisfied with the environment of their respective workplaces, the answer was somewhat equal.

When asked about the obstacles they face in the work they were allowed to answer giving multiple options. Almost majority replied that salary is quite inadequate and that they are overburdened with work. The other complains include constant threat of losing the job, severe work pressure, that they face fear of sexual harassment both in their way to the workplace and also inside the working sphere.





As the vicious cycle of poverty is the foremost factor pushing these girls into work was identified through the question that whether the salary is a source of income for their household. And the response was as unanimous and as spontaneous as it could be. 100% of the respondent replied that their family is more or less dependent on their salary. And that the work they do is not a matter a choice, rather it's a compulsion.

Recommendation

Economic exploitation, including child labour

the Committee remains concerned about the weak and insufficient implementation of the legislation on child labour. It is further concerned about the significant number of children being engaged in labour, many of them in hazardous conditions, and in domestic work where they are vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse. The Committee urges the State party to enforce its national legislation to ensure that child labour, including in the informal sector and family businesses, is in full compliance with international standards in terms of age, working hours, working conditions, education and health, and to ensure the full protection of children against all forms of sexual, physical and psychological harassment. The Committee also recommends that the State party:


- (a) Establish programmes to reintegrate into mainstream education children who have been involved in labour, seeking the assistance, among others, of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour of the International Labour Organization;
- (b) Strengthen the implementation of labour laws by establishing labour inspections, including in the informal sector, and ensuring that anyone violating legislation on child labour be held accountable;
- (c) Address the root causes of economic exploitation by increasing poverty eradication efforts;

5.5 Corporal punishment:

Despite the impressive number of enrolments in primary schools, the proportion of children in secondary schools in Bangladesh is the lowest in South Asia. GAGE (Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence) found that poverty, the high cost of educational resources, early marriage or child marriage, corporal punishments, peer violence, distance to schools and poor school infrastructure are some of the contributing factors to school dropout. Among these, one of the most unaddressed is corporal punishment.

NGCAF documented 8 victims of corporal punishment obtained from the newspaper sources when the schools were closed for 10 months.

In 2011, the High Court division of The Supreme Court issued a ruling prohibiting “all types of corporal punishment upon pupils”, declaring it illegal and unconstitutional. Despite the official ban, in many schools, adolescents face corporal punishments on a regular basis. Beating is a very common phenomenon in Madrasa in our country, when the severity is quite extreme only then it comes to the newspapers. An upsetting fact is that many teachers as well as parents consider physical punishment acceptable and normal as a “method of discipline”.



Rita (pseudonym) is an 11 year old girl. She said she doesn't go to school anymore, because "the teachers beat the students." So, she has stopped going to school even though she wants to. She is not even aware of the fact that physical punishment is banned in the country.

According to NGCAF 3 cases of corporal punishment were filed against teachers last year. All three cases were also settled. Initially the teacher was arrested and brought to the police station. The teacher was later released after negotiating with the victim's family through the School Management Committee (SMC).

Recommendation:

In the light of its general comment No. 8 (2006) on the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, the Committee urges the State party to promote positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and discipline, conduct awareness-raising programmes on this prohibition and create mechanisms for its fulfilment. The Committee also recommends strengthening the training of officials responsible for law enforcement on children's rights

- Insert a provision in the Children Act 2013 which specifically and categorically prohibits the use of physical and humiliating punishment (PHP) on children in all settings: home, educational institutions, workplace, residential institutions and communities, in line with the directives of the High Court and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education.

5.6 Rape:


In an incident in Satkania, Chattogram, A next door neighbour asks the mother to give him the 1 year and 10 months old infant to cuddle and takes the baby along with him. When he did not return even after half an hour mother started searching for the baby outside the house and finds her near a culvert, where her mouth was tightly closed and her genital was bleeding profoundly. When the parents screamed loudly the pervert perpetrator along with 2 others threatened the parents to keep silent. They immediately took the child to OCC and was kept admitted there for 7 days.⁴⁹

The reality can be that much cruel, can be that much horrific and can sound that much unreal.

Statistical information:

Despite nationwide protests for the past few years and stringent law, the incidents of rape of women of all ages are nowhere to stop. Just in 24 September at the eve of elimination of Violence against

⁴⁹ Konnashishu Yearly publication, issue 2019



Women Day, the Police Headquarter revealed that just in 7 months of the 2022 as many as 3523 cases of rape have been filed amongst total 7035 cases of all cases related to violence against women. It is worth mentioning the percentage of filed rape cases (48%) has already surpassed the 41% cases of rape cases throughout the year 2021. It is to be noted that for the past 5 years the rape cases are on the upper trend.⁵⁰ According to NGCAF statistics, as many as 1117 and 987 girls were raped in the period 2021 and 2022 respectively.

Situation Analysis:

Amid waves of anti-rape demonstrations across the country followed by few brutal incidents of rape the Government approved the death penalty as the highest punishment for rape on 20 October 2020 in Article 9(1) of the Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act 2000. It was also reaffirmed that rape case trials will be held before the Speedy Trial Tribunal and the verdict must be completed within 180 days. Moreover, Referring to Section 15 of the existing act, the cabinet secretary said compensation for rape victims from the convict or convicts will be prominently taken into consideration in the trial process.

It was argued on the other hand how far capital punishment would pave the way for eliminating the social menace and the recent increasing trend of rape incidents are a probable answer to the disagreement and also an issue to ponder that what really needs to be done.

Contingent on contextual characteristics and the victim's personal and social resources, exposure to child sexual exploitation usually results in a variety of other long-term, deleterious mental and health effects, such as depression and anxiety disorders.⁵¹ These kinds of abusive behavior towards children may have immense influence on their mental, social and psychological development. In addition, experience of being sexually abused in childhood can also become a main barrier against maintaining a balance in children's future life considering their adjustment and relationship with broader communities⁵².

Problems with rape cases:


The trial of rape is one of the criminal justice system mechanisms which can take years to prove. And in Bangladesh, only three percent of cases relating to violence against women and children result in a conviction. But as soon as a girl or woman has been raped brutally and/or hospitalised and her health is in critical condition, the state has a positive obligation to rehabilitate and compensate the victim so that the victim doesn't feel alienated from the state mechanism⁵³. Anyone can recall rape victims like Sohagi Jahan Tonu, who was found dead in Cumilla Cantonment in March 2016, and Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, who was raped and murdered in her own Gulshan house when she was a student of class nine in 1998. It took more than one-and-a-half decades for the Supreme Court to deliver the final judgment in the case of Shazneen, daughter of late Latifur Rahman, chairman of Transcom Group, and Shahnaz Rahman. Tonu's case is still in limbo.

⁵⁰ <http://www.prothomalo.com/amp/story/bangladesh/xee2isc8q9>

⁵¹ Blanksby & Barber, 2006, p. 177

⁵² The effects of childhood sexual abuse on children's psychology and employment Md. Abdul Wohaba *, Sanzida Akhterb a Economics and Social Sciences , BRAC University, Dhaka-1212, January 1, 2010;

⁵³ 'The case for compensation to rape victims' by Md Tasnimul Hassan available at <https://www.sconline.com/blog/post/2021/06/16/compensation-to-rape-victims/>



A 2020 study by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) looked at 44 reported rape cases filed under the law between 2000 and 2019, and found that the court ordered the amount of the fine to be converted into compensation for the victims in only three cases. Even in cases where compensation is ordered, there is little indication that any victim or their family ultimately receive this money timely and without hassle. Out of the 46 reported rape cases under Suppression of Violence against Women and Children (Special Provisions) Act 1995 (Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Domon (Bishesh Bidhan) Ain 1995) analyzed in the report⁵⁴, the Court imposed a fine as part of the sentence in less than 20% of the cases but awarded compensation in none of these cases. The statistics as obtained from various NGOs including NGCAF and Government sources has already proved that death penalty is no way deterring the potential perpetrators. Sexual assault crimes are underreported, but even when survivors take the brave step of reporting the crime, their cases are rarely properly investigated or prosecuted.

Recommendation:

Activists are also calling on the government to pass a witness protection law which the Law Commission first drafted almost 15 years ago. Women's groups helped draft a sexual harassment law years ago, but this too hasn't moved forward.

Sufficient number of forensic DNA labs with all modern amenities has not been established in Bangladesh. As per section 24 of the DNA Act, the government is required to establish a National DNA database with crime scene index, convict criminals' index and unknown person's index. Database of this kind could have been used in identifying the perpetrators who repeatedly involve in crimes⁵⁵. But no initiative has yet to be undertaken to establish such database. Consequently, it becomes difficult to maintain the record of DNA profiles prepared in lab by analyzing DNA samples collected from various sources. The Rape Law Reform Coalition – which brings together many women's rights groups, and explicitly opposes the death penalty for rape – drafted a 10-point to-do list that the Bangladesh government could start on today. This includes changing the definition of rape to include all victims, regardless of gender identity or marital status, prohibiting the use of character evidence in rape trials, training police and court officials on sexual and gender-based violence, and providing sexuality education to all children.

Also, in case of any rape or any custodial rape against woman/girl children, the accused should prove that he didn't cause the incident, instead of the victim woman/girl children.

The youth group should be made aware of all forms of violence against girls and women and should be included in the struggle for the promotion of any human rights.

Political and administrative asylum should be stopped for girlchildren abusers.

Vigilance by the administration and law enforcement agencies should be increased. As well as increase social and nationwide campaign on it and implementation of the law. Also, exemplary punishment should be given at the earliest.

⁵⁴ No Justice without Reparation: Why Rape Survivors Must Have a Right to Compensation; Taqbir Huda, Rape Law Reform, Research Reports, No.2, December 2020.

⁵⁵ 'Challenges in Using DNA Evidence', Southeast University Journal of Law Volume: 02, Issue 01, January – December 2016

5.7 Violence against Women and Children with Disabilities:

Worldwide, young women and girls with disabilities face up to 10 times more violence than women and girls without disabilities, and Bangladesh is no exception. As per the Government defined categories of disability, among the people of Bangladesh 2.80% have at least one disability, this is 3.29% among male and 2.34% among female population⁵⁶.

As many as 100 girls with disabilities were raped in the year 2021, the NGCAF report reveals the veracity of the statement. According to data from the Women with Disabilities and Development Foundation, 96 percent of women and girls with disabilities face physical, psychological, sexual and emotional violence.

However, incidents of violence against this vulnerable group mostly go unreported because of family, administrative and social barriers, as almost 99 percent of women with disabilities live below the poverty line, while only 1 percent of girls with disabilities have access to education and an overwhelming majority of them do not know sign language.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in its consideration of the initial report of Bangladesh on its implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 22 August, 2022 concluded that persistent, multiple and intersectional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities, and wide-spread stigmatisation and exploitation of children with disabilities. He called on the State party to take immediate measures to address the grave violence and abuse against women and children with disabilities.

Problem with law:

- The Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act 2013 does not specify how a girl child or young woman will get remedies if they are raped.
- Human Rights Watch's research published in 2020 found that police, prison, and court officials often are not sufficiently trained in disability rights and necessary accommodations. Some courts and police station Victim Support Centers have Bangla sign language interpreters, but these interpreters are not always available, the study found.
- Bangladesh courts are rarely accessible for people with physical disabilities—the lack of wheelchair accessibility, ramps, elevators, or adapted seating in courts act as barriers for many in seeking justice. Those with sensory disabilities are often left without any way to communicate with police officers when reporting violence or when giving evidence in court because the government has failed to provide promised support for communication and other forms of reasonable accommodations.
- In Section 32 (1) of the Disabilities Rights and Protection Act 2013 mentioned for seat reservation in public transport. As per the law, 5% seats will be reserved for the disabled in every public transport. Also, the said law has said to have special provision for accessibility in public buses for disabled people. But the reality is different.
- According to Section 34(1) of the said law that, public architecture must be adapted for the disabled to climb and move. Still In most of the places no ramps for Persons with Disabled.

⁵⁶ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (NSPD), 2021.

Recommendation:

- Ensure that courts, public hospitals, police stations, prisons, Victim Support Centers, and One-Stop Crisis Centers are accessible according to stipulations under the 2013 Disability Act, including both physical accessibility and access to an interpreter or support person (of the same gender when requested). Ensure that witnesses with hearing or speech disabilities are able to provide evidence through an alternative means as provided by the Evidence Act, 1872.
- Ensure that all police, prosecutors, and court officials undergo training on disability rights and disability-related accommodation according to the stipulations under the 2013 Disability Act.
- Implement the Legal Aid Services Act, 2000 which requires that all women and girls with disabilities have access to free legal services.
- Ensure healthcare buildings are accessible in accordance with the CRPD, the Disability Act, and the 2008 National Building Code, including by making adequate safe wheelchair ramps, wide corridors and entryways, and accessible bathrooms.
- Train healthcare workers in providing inclusive care to people with disabilities, including related to sexual and reproductive health.
- Ensure all healthcare facilities make interpreters (of the same gender when requested) available for people with sensory disabilities.

5.8 Violence against Domestic Workers:

The miseries and agonies the domestic workers face can be the most pathetic ones because their rights and protection mechanism are not enshrined in particular anywhere: neither they are recognized in any labor law, nor they have any particular legal framework for them. According to the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), there are around 30 lakh domestic workers in different cities of the country⁵⁷. Most of this class are comprised of young girls starting from 10 years onwards. The image of violence against domestic workers that is visible in the newspapers is not the complete picture as those are only cases of torture or hospitalization. The actual picture is much more brutal. According to another study of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, over the past 15 years, 578 domestic workers had died in Bangladesh and 442 were injured in their workplaces⁵⁸.

The COVID 19 has had a devastating effect on the domestic workers' sector, making 90 percent female domestic workers unemployed and most of whom experienced abuse at their A recent assessment conducted by Oxfam's Securing Rights project showed that since the COVID-19 lockdown, more than 90 per cent of female domestic workers are now experiencing abuse in their home from their in-laws or husbands because they can't bring home money. The assessment also showed that 95 per cent of domestic workers have not received their salaries for the last four to five months.

⁵⁷ <https://www.tbsnews.net/coronavirus-chronicle/covid-19-bangladesh/pandemic-renders-millions-domestic-workers-jobless-101917>

⁵⁸ <https://scroll.in/article/1004607/why-violence-against-domestic-workers-in-bangladesh-largely-goes-unreported-and-unpunished>

Problems with law:

- The aggrieved party can file a case under Women and Children Repression Prevention Act if an employer held a female or child domestic worker captive in his house and asked for ransom. This act is also applicable to workers who have been raped or if their sexual organs are injured. If the action of an employer does not fall under the category of “sexual torture”, charges cannot be brought against them under this law.
- the Labour Act (Amended) 2013 and the National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010 kept domestic workers under the informal sector. So, this sector remains outside all government regulations and monitoring mechanisms. Therefore, a charge cannot be brought under The Labour Act.
- It is neither possible to bring any charge under the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 as house help is not counted as a family member.
- In most cases of domestic worker abuse, charges can only be brought under the “cause harm” section of the Penal Code of 1860, the maximum punishment under such section is usually 10 months-16 months of jail.
- As being dealing with the cases related to violence against domestic workers it has been largely found that the lack of the evidence is the most pertinent obstacle to book the perpetrator because inside the house definitely no one is going to give any witness.
- The percentage of out of court settlement rate is very high. The affluent employers’ convince the poor employees’ family with money and power quite convincingly.
- Weak investigation is another issue, most of the time the family or political influence creates hurdle to take a complaint reach to the Court.
- In the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy-2015, children below the age of 14 cannot be engaged in domestic work. However, children aged 12 to 14 can do easy work. There is no definition of easy work in the Labor Act.

Recommendation:

- A dedicated legislation should be crafted in alignment with the policy objectives. The presence of such a law would significantly streamline the process of addressing instances of violence, allowing for swift action. Additionally, it would empower individuals to step forward under legal protection if they witness acts of abuse.
- Essential measures involve the implementation of a registration system for domestic workers across police stations and ward commissioner’s offices. This mechanism would facilitate efficient coordination between the administration, local governance, and governmental bodies, particularly during times of emergencies. Furthermore, it is imperative to codify legal safeguards specific to domestic workers, distinguishing between full-time and part-time roles, to enhance their legal protections within both legislation and policy frameworks.
- The comprehensive realization of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy of 2015, their incorporation into the Labour Law, and the endorsement of ILO Convention-189 titled “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” are of paramount importance.

- Parallel to their counterparts in the institutional sector, domestic workers must be furnished with employment contracts, stipulated working hours, and assured remuneration packages

5.9 Child pornography:

The increased global connectivity, however, has also brought about the possibility of numerous new global crimes and criminal activities. One of the most destructive among them is online child sexual abuse and exploitation, which includes child pornography, the commercial sexual exploitation of children, cyber enticement, solicitation, grooming, cyberbullying, cyber-harassment, and cyberstalking. As Bangladesh becomes increasingly connected through the Internet and more mobile devices and connections are being added, all these different forms of online child sexual abuse are rapidly growing. NGCAF documented as many as 28 cases of child pornography in the year 2021.

Recently, this type of virtual pornography has been spreading at an alarming rate. For years, sexual predators in Dhaka City have been targeting young schoolgirls, harassing them by threatening to share their explicit pictures. Additionally, cyberbullying and harassment increased due to the rise in children's internet usage during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to data collected by Ain o Salish Kendra, four children faced online sexual harassment through explicit content in 2020, but only three cases were reported to the authorities.


Salient features:

- According to the US-based National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), Bangladesh ranks fifth in the world in making children work for pornographic content, taking pictures and videos of them being sexually abused and sharing this content.
- According to NCMEC, Bangladesh's IP (Internet Protocol) address has been used over 550,000 times to share child pornography. NCMEC's website carries information of the year 2019 in this regard.
- Bangladesh Police has formally inaugurated a service named Cyber Support for Women on 16 November, 2020 and within one week of the inauguration the unit received as many as one thousand nine hundred and sixteen complaints majority of which is comprised of women and children. According to the officials of cyber police centre of CID, approximately 68% women are subjected to any form of harassment at the cyber space.
- According to the statement of Cyber Crime Division of DMP, Bangladesh has a high rate of cyberbullying and 80% of the victims are girls and women (14-22)⁵⁹. The cases of suicide is on surge because the menace of online harassment. They are hacking the IDs, and getting the personal information and pictures through which blackmailing and harassing people, mostly young women.

Legal framework and policy initiatives:

The law pertaining to pornography in Bangladesh is the Pornography Control Act 2012- this Act however does not include any provision about online sexual violence against children specifically.

⁵⁹ http://www.police.gov.bd/en/crime_statistics/year/2019



Apart from Pornography control Act, Digital Security Act, ICT Act, Telecommunication Act provides redress for online harassment in some respect. Suggestions have been made for investigation of such crimes to be conducted under Children's Act 2013 but no such change is made yet. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) as the primary law enforcement entity in the capital, enforcing national and local statutes starting a common hotline 999 for protecting the Bangladeshi people from and incidences.

If anyone in Bangladesh is a victim of online violence and cyber harassment, help can be obtained from the Cyber Crime Investigation Division of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime, Cyber Police Center, Hello City App, Report to RAB, 999 and Facebook pages of each.

Moreover, the hotline number 10921 of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs is protected by providing all kinds of help directly and with advice.

Recommendation:


1. Strengthen Cyber Crimes Tribunal: Consider enhancing the capacity and jurisdiction of the Cyber Crimes Tribunal to effectively address the surge in online crimes, particularly those involving child exploitation. Additionally, establish an Emergency Response Team specialized in addressing online child sexual abuse and exploitation cases.
2. Mandatory Identification for Cyber Café Users: Explore the feasibility of mandating photo identification, such as a national ID or photo ID card, for individuals using cyber cafes. This directive would necessitate cyber cafe proprietors to collect user identity details, including names, addresses, login times, usage durations, and computer serial numbers, ensuring traceability of online activities.
3. Integrating Sex Education in Secondary School Curriculum: Integrate comprehensive sex education into secondary-level school syllabi, treating it as a formal subject. The inclusion of such education would impart crucial knowledge and awareness to students, empowering them to navigate complex aspects of relationships, sexuality, and online safety.

5.10 Trafficking, Kidnapping and Child Sexual Exploitation:

Child trafficking as a component of human trafficking is now on the rise in Bangladesh. Child marriage is also used as a way to carry out child trafficking. When sex of children is considered, sexual abuse and exploitation is the most occurred form of violence for girls while kidnapping and missing takes the second spot for boys.

According to NGCAF statistics, 9 girls were reported to be trafficked amongst which 6 were rescued and there were as many as 197 cases of kidnapping occurred in the year 2021 amongst which 106 girls were rescued.

Often street children, disabled children and girls are more vulnerable. Isolated or impoverished regions are also more attractive to gangs of traffickers because it is both harder for parents to seek law enforcement but also easier to sell the idea of "lucrative jobs" to impoverished parents. Indigenous children are disproportionately subjected to abduction and trafficking. Indigenous



children who have been abducted are often forced to convert to Islam, outright or through deceptive educational programs⁶⁰. In general, services for exploited or abused children are scarce, but it is even more so in these areas. Children who have a lack of economic opportunities and poor education are also more at risk of being trafficked, abused or exploited.

Salient features:

- Hundreds of impoverished rural Bangladeshi women are trafficked through the porous Indo-Bangladesh border by illicit criminal groups to countries such as India, Pakistan, and the Middle East. The estimated number is about 5 to 15 million—majorly young girls who are forced to work in Indian brothels⁶¹. The Benopole border crossing is often regarded as the south-west transit point for transporting the victims from Jessore and Satkhira to Gojadanga and Hakimpur in Bangladesh. The border point here generally remains unmanned and unfenced making the process easier. The other districts of Bangladesh that have rampant trafficking are Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Naogaon, Chapai Nawabganj, and Rajshahi.
- Every year, at least 20,000 Bangladeshi women and children are trafficked to India and Pakistan, and to the Middle East. According to another report, 50,000 Bangladeshi girls are trafficked to India every year⁶².
- Both internal and cross border trafficking exist in Bangladesh. In case of internal trafficking, women and children are often taken away from their homes, on false promise of a better life with good employment or by using various other criminal acts and means by the traffickers who sell them to brothels. One organisation estimated that 30,000 girls are sexually exploited in Bangladesh. Experts estimate that 20,000 children are both growing up in and exploited in commercial sex in Bangladeshi brothels.
- Traffickers are exploiting Rohingya children from refugee camps in sex and labor trafficking both within Bangladesh and transnationally. Traffickers transport Rohingya girls within Bangladesh to Chittagong and Dhaka and transnationally to India, Malaysia, and Nepal for sex trafficking, sometimes using false promises of jobs or marriage; some traffickers “trade” these girls over the internet.


Legal and policy framework:

While addressing the increased number of human trafficking, the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (PSHT), 2012 has come into effect for restraining and suppressing human trafficking at the earliest possible time and ensuring protection of victims of the offence relating to human trafficking. Cases are also filed under The Prevention of Repression Against Women and

⁶⁰ Chakma, Bablu and Manik Soren. “Breaking the Silence: Situation of Indigenous Children in Bangladesh.” *Survival Under Threat*. 125-126.

⁶¹ Human trafficking across the BBIN subregional borders: Awaiting a concrete framework, Sohini Nayak, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/human-trafficking-across-the-bbin-subregional-borders/>

⁶² <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/the-notable-supreme-court-decisions-held-last-year-2929941>



Children Act, 2000 (Amended 2003, 2020). Seven Tribunals for the Anti-Human Trafficking Offence have been established with a view to ensuring speedy trial within 180 days after filing the complaint under section 24 of the PSHT Act, 2012. The government continued implementing its 2018-2022 anti-trafficking National Action Plan (NAP). Government harmonized the NAP implementation with funded Sustainable Development Goals to cover costs associated with 95 percent of the plan.

Problem with law:

- According to an analysis by BRAC Migration Programme, 4,529 cases were filed under the law between 2012 and February 2019, but only 103 were settled — demonstrating the extremely low rate of conviction⁶³.
- In trafficking related cases the investigation is quite poor most of the time, leaving the masterminds of trafficking gangs remain untouched.
- Police and prosecutors often did not collaborate well with one another during the law enforcement process, which led to delays and the formation of weak cases for prosecution, the report stated.
- In registered brothels, some police charge bribes to ignore abuse within the establishments, to forego checking for the required documentation that each individual was older than 18, and to procure fraudulent documents for girls as young as 10 years old⁶⁴.

Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Establish a comprehensive and systematic data collection mechanism on the sale, trafficking and abduction of children, and ensure that the data are disaggregated by, inter alia, sex, age, national and ethnic origin, geographical region, rural or urban residence and indigenous or socioeconomic status, with particular attention paid to children living in the most vulnerable situations; (b) Conduct awareness-raising activities in order to make parents and children aware of the dangers of internal and external trafficking; (c) Further strengthen its cooperation with South Asian countries to combat trafficking in children across States, including through the conclusion of bilateral and multilateral agreements.

5.11 Child Marriage:

A rapid Survey from NGCAF's working areas at 136 Unions, there are reported 2788 Cases of Child Marriage have occurred from August 2020 to August 2021. As many as 1319 child marriage information have been collected from NGCAF and 06 Member Organizations in 2022 through FGD and In-Person Interview in 119 unions, 45 upazilas of 26 districts.

⁶³ (<https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/human-trafficking-special-tribunals-ensure-speedy-trials-1868497>)

⁶⁴ 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) Bangladesh: US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/bangladesh/>



Photo: Collection from website

(Member Organizations are: Good Neighbors Bangladesh, Room to Read Bangladesh, Islamic Relief Bangladesh, Dalit and Baptist Aid BCBF, The Hunger Project Bangladesh).

It should be noted that the 804 victims' details are in hand of NGCAF including their name, father/mother name and full address.


According to the statistics of Mohila Porishod, published in the Daily Prothom Alo on 30 September 2021⁶⁵, 7 thousand child marriages took place in 9 districts of the country. There were incidents of 327 child marriages across the country while 63 females, including 23 children, were victims of cybercrime.

Bangladesh is home to 38 million child brides, including currently married girls along with women who were first married in childhood. Of these, 13 million married before age 15⁶⁶. Nearly 5 in 10 child brides gave birth before age 18, and 8 in 10 gave birth before age 20⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2022/01/03/over-3700-incidents-of-violence-against-women-reported-in-2021>

⁶⁶ <https://bmjpaedsopen.bmj.com/content/5/1/e001328>

⁶⁷ UNICEF, Bangladesh At A Glance [http://www.unicef.org/Bangladesh/Cbg_\(18.10.08\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/Bangladesh/Cbg_(18.10.08).pdf), last visited on 18 December



Child marriage, especially involving female teenagers or adolescents to much older male counterparts, has been a long-standing socioeconomic crisis in Bangladesh with the highest rate in Asia and fourth highest globally⁶⁸. Child marriages can have severe impacts on the lives of girls and their families in Bangladesh, including the discontinuation of secondary education, serious health consequences including death as a result of early pregnancy, abandonment, and domestic violence from spouses and in-laws. Deeply entrenched cultural norms and religious beliefs, poverty, worries about family reputation and opinions of others in the community, dowry, and parents' desire to secure the safety of the girls-all perpetuate the safety of child marriage⁶⁹.

One of the most devastating effects of COVID on girl children of our country was the sudden spike in child marriages throughout the country. During the COVID period around 47,414 female students became victims of child marriage⁷⁰.

In the pre-COVID-19 era, Bangladesh had invested tremendous efforts in preventing child marriages. Subsequently, over the decade of 2007–2017, child marriages reduced nationally from 66% to 59%, whereas marriage before 16 years of age plummeted from 46% to 32%.⁷¹ Despite the transient progress, thousands of child marriages are regularly occurring in the country, particularly in the rural and underdeveloped regions.

The National Emergency Service (NES) 999 has prevented 3,685 child marriages in 2020. One of the noticeable achievements in this regard is that many marriage attempts are also foiled either with the initiative of the would-be bride herself or the local people, influential personalities, local administrative officials.

The case study from NGCAF can be cited here where a child marriage attempt was stopped.

Mst. Hira Khatun, a tenth grader at Pannapara School in the Charghat Upazila of Rajshahi profoundly disagreed to a marriage with an unemployed boy that her family was planning to. She got the confidence from her training on sexual and Reproductive Health Rights that she got from the Hunger Project. Not only she stopped her own marriage, with the help of members of the Youth team, they are trying to explain the consequences of child marriages to other families as well.

Legal and policy initiatives:


The current law in Bangladesh that addresses child marriage is the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017 (CMRA) repealing the earlier British law of 1929. The Act sets the minimum age of marriage for a male as 21 years and for a female as 18 years and also criminalizes contracting, allowing, or solemnizing of a child marriage. In 2018 the Child Marriage Restraint Rules (the Rules) had been

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ *The Tipping Point Project, A Policy Brief on The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, Care Bangladesh, 2018.*

⁷⁰ <https://www.ittefaq.com.bd/610519/%E0%A6%8F%E0%A6%95-%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%9B%E0%A6>

⁷¹ <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/marital-rape-killed-child-our-country-why-it-still-legal-1986265>



also formulated. The National Action Plan (2018-2030) to Eliminate Child Marriage has been formulated by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, the final goal of which is to eliminate child marriage by 2041 as promised at the London Girl's Summit on 2014 by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. However meeting the SDG target to end child marriage by 2030, or the national target to end child marriage by 2041, will require a major push. Progress must be at least 8 times faster than the rate observed over the past decade to meet the national target, or 17 times faster to meet the SDG target.

Challenges in preventing child marriage:

Eliminating child marriage has been a major issue in all of the major international commitments that Bangladesh has adhered to. Even then marital rape of wives above the age of 13 is specifically excluded from the offence of rape in section 375 of the Penal Code 1860, which defines rape. Furthermore, according to section 376 of the Code, which originally set out the punishment for rape, marital rape is only punishable if the wife is under the age of 12, and there can only be a maximum of two years' imprisonment or even just a fine.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 allows for child marriages under special circumstances via section 19. This provision does not prescribe a minimum age for such marriages. One of the major criticisms against this provision was that almost anything could come within the purview of the wide domain of 'special circumstances'. It could bring marriage of a child who happens to be a rape survivor with the rapist within its purview as well.

Though in a study conducted by NGCAF and Plan International it was found that the application of special provision (Section 19) is very rare. Most of the respondents have partial knowledge about the child marriage law, though the survey was conducted in Barisal district only it represents the actual insight of the most of the districts of the country.

It was found at the KII that most of the officials at district and sub-district levels assigned to take steps to prevent cases of child marriage lack logistical support like transport and staff facilities.

Being illegal, child marriage cases are not registered by the Kazis and in many poor families they pressurize the girl to say 'kabul' in front of the elders.

It is a very common practice to provide false birth certificates in some cases to prove legal age.

Recommendation:

The Committee urges the State party to ensure that the minimum age of marriage set in the Children Act is applied. It also recommends that the State party: (a) Develop awareness-raising campaigns and programmes on the harmful effects of early marriage on the physical and mental health and well-being of girls, targeting households, local authorities, religious leaders and judges and prosecutors; (b) Establish protection schemes for victims of child and forced marriage who file a complaint; (c) In the light of joint general recommendation

No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices (2014), take active measures to put an end to harmful practices against children in the State party

5.12 Sexual Harassment:

There would be hardly any woman of any age who can deny the fact that she has been harassed in any form of other at any span of her life-time. The most common domain for the girls to be harassed starts from her own house, by known people, by an uncle or son of a uncle, or friend of a brother and furthermore. And consequently, at that tender most often they keep silent or even unable to apprehend what happened to them. But carry the psychological trauma throughout the life.

In 2020 during high flow of COVID with fully lock down, NGCAF conducted a study “Exploring Sexual Harassment Condition: Working Women in Formal Sector in Covid-19 Situation” on SH over phone and found that, 100% of the 135 women who participated in the survey were sexually harassed in different ways at their workplace. Among them 41.48% were sexually harassed 2-3 times, 25.93% 4 to 10 times and 22.96% women were sexually harassed 1 time. That is the concern, 8.89% of these women have been sexually harassed 6 to 10 times.

New research reveals that young female workers, primarily aged between 18 and 24, in Bangladesh often experience sexual harassment at work, but their concerns about it are ignored. Worryingly, their online survey among university students and teachers revealed that almost half of the 250 respondents did not know what had been done to resolve incidents of sexual harassment to which they had been witnesses.


The survey, titled Harassment on Public Transportation in Dhaka City and its Effect on Women's Mental Health, was conducted on 805 girls and women aged between 13 years and 35 years from different schools, colleges, universities and companies from March to May in 2022.

The most intensified consequence of such crime is psychological humiliation and it can also lead to child-marriage, school drop-out, hurt, grievous hurt, acid throwing, rape, murder, rape and even forced suicide. One of the main reasons of sexual harassment becoming a social menace is that the offence almost never meets with the defense⁷².

Legal and policy framework on sexual harassment

Legal framework is inadequate in addressing sexual harassment in Bangladesh. The Penal Code of 1860 under Section 503, and Section 9, section 9(A) and 10 of Women and Children Repression Act 2000 amended (2003) and Section 76 of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance encompass few acts of sexual harassment as a punishable offence.

⁷² Eve Teasing, The Social Menace: Let not the offenders go away, Published by BNWLA, June, 2000.



The Labor Law contains important provisions prohibiting discrimination based on sex and disability, including equal wages for equal work. However, the Labor Law Amended (2013) includes no measures to tackle sexual harassment of women, who make up the vast majority of workers in the ready-made garment sector. In offering amendments to the labor law, the government has missed an important opportunity to carry out 2009 High Court guidelines against sexual harassment in the workplace.

Bangladesh High Courts contribution against sexual harassment:

The High Court in April, 2010 directed the Ministry of Education to take immediate steps to implement the Guidelines on Sexual Harassment declared earlier in *BNWLA v Bangladesh*, and to ensure that no woman working in any educational institution, public or private is forced to wear a veil or cover her head, and may exercise her personal choice whether or not to do so. The Court also observed that Section 27A of the Government Servants Discipline and Conduct Rules 1979, must be read alongside these Guidelines, to ensure that public officials are held to account for any acts of sexual harassment.

The Court observed “It is the personal choice of a woman to wear a veil. If any person tries to compel a woman to wear a veil against her consent or will that amounts to a violation of her fundamental rights as enshrined in the Constitution”.

Existing Rules⁷³ on Sexual Harassment and Discipline of Government Officers

- The High Court’s Guidelines on Prevention of Sexual Harassment earlier laid down on 14.5.2009 in *Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association v Government of Bangladesh* (2009) Bangladesh Law Chronicles directed the Government to enact legislation to address the issue immediately pending which the Guidelines would have the force of law.
- Guidelines, Rule 4(i) Sexually colored verbal representation; Rule 4(1)(f) Sexually colored remark or gesture;
- Government Servants Discipline and Conduct Rules 1979, Rule 27A. Conduct towards female colleagues- No Government servant shall use any language or behave with his female colleagues in any manner which is improper and goes against the official decorum and dignity of female colleagues.

From the year 2018, NGCAF has been conducting advocacy activities to enact a comprehensive law to protect women and girls from sexual harassment at every levels. To this end, NGCAF has developed a draft law titled “Sexual Harassment Prevention and Remedy Law-2019” and the draft law has already been handed over to Late Hon’ble Deputy Speaker Adv. Fazle Rabbi Miah, MP through the Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights Committee. He entrusted the Parliamentary Legislative Department to finalize the law. That Division had made some progress, but all activities were put on hold during the Global COVID Pandemic. Now, NGCAF wants to move forward with this law and undertaking various activities.

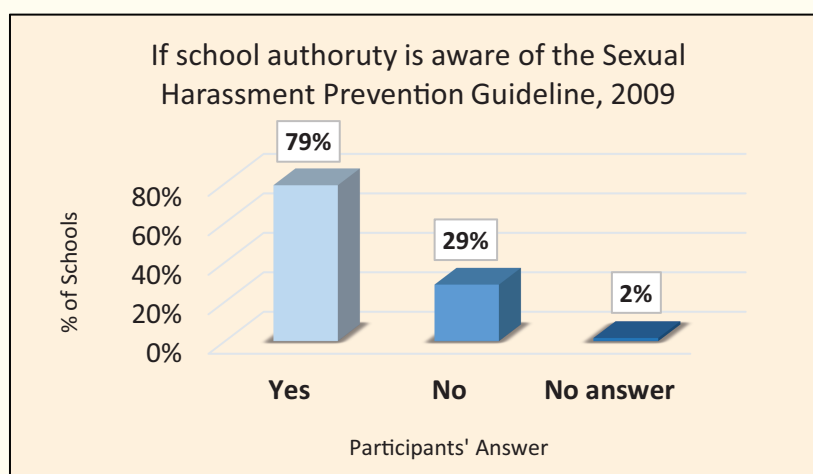
⁷³ <http://www.lawyersnjurists.com/article/what-is-sexual-harassment-in-bangladesh%2%80%>

Survey of NGCAF on implementation of sexual harassment guideline:

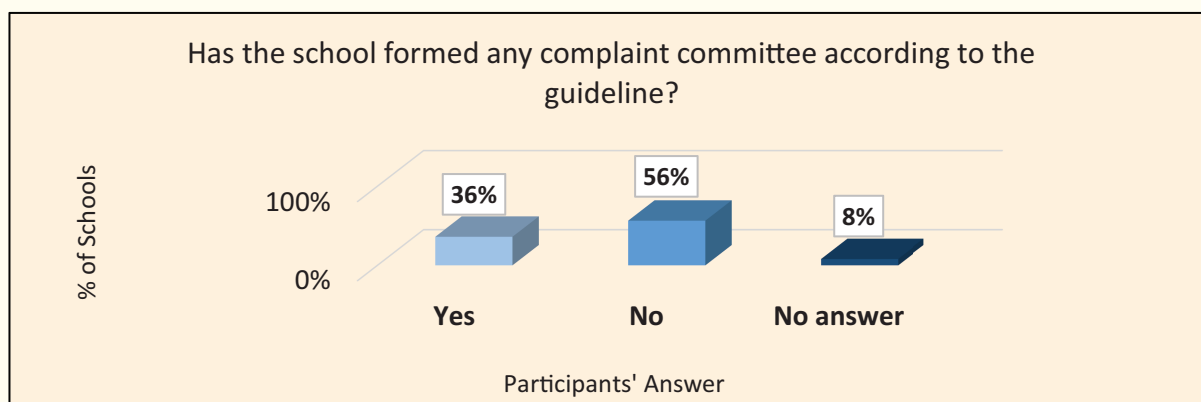
Yet over a decade later, these guidelines are rarely implemented, and the Government has yet to finalize the draft Bill. A very recent study of Action Aid Bangladesh showed that 87% people had no knowledge on 2009 High Court Guideline.

NGCAF conducted a country-wide survey on the status of sexual harassment prevention guideline on 255 primary and secondary educational institutions. Out of 255 schools, number of primary schools are 99, higher secondary schools 136, Madrasas 20.

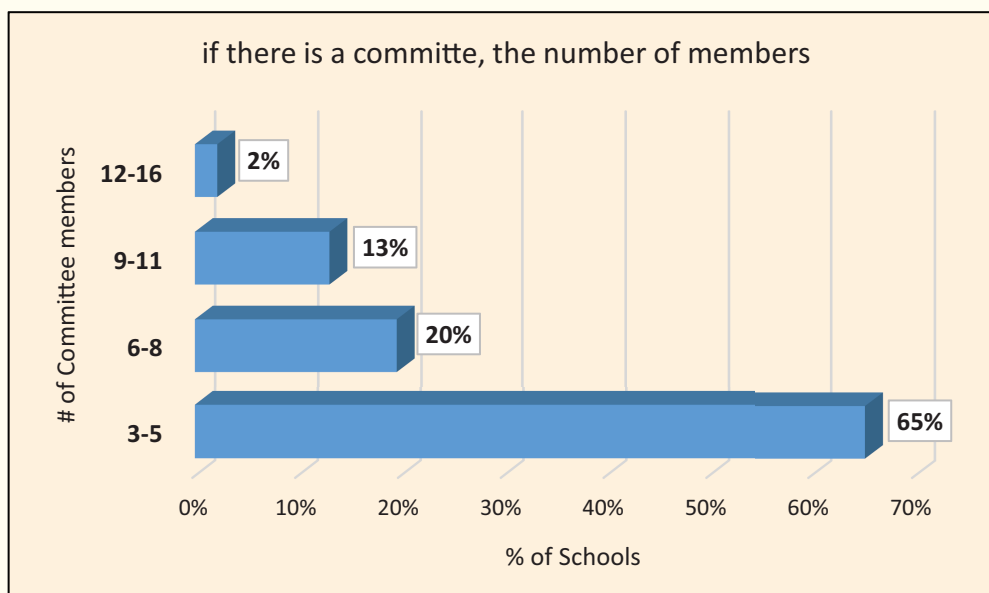
At the question if the school authority is aware there is a guideline on the prevention of sexual harassment, almost 79% answered they know while 29% answered in negative. 2% refrained from giving any answer. It was sought from the survey that mostly the secondary schools gave answer in affirmative.



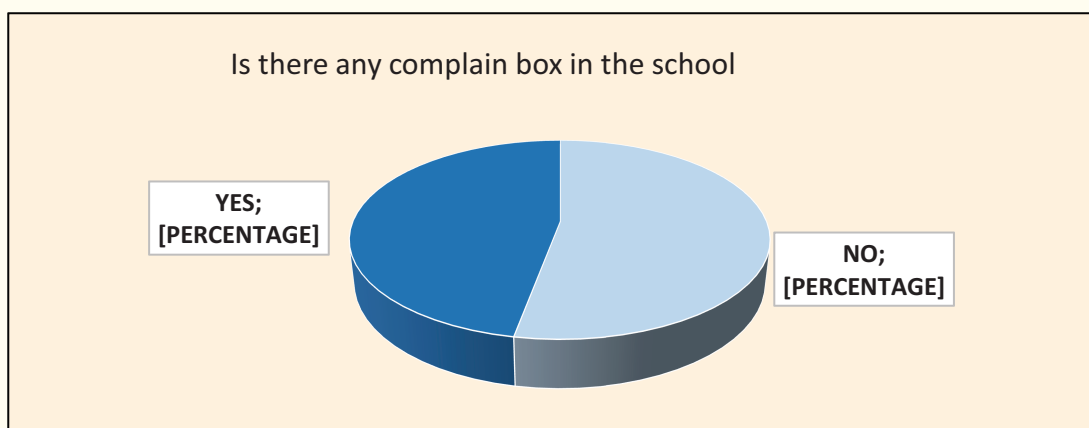
The next question was asked to reveal if the school authority has formed as it is guided by the guideline. Majority of the school (56%) denied that they haven't, whereas 36% answered that they have. Few schools refrained (8%) didn't give any answer.



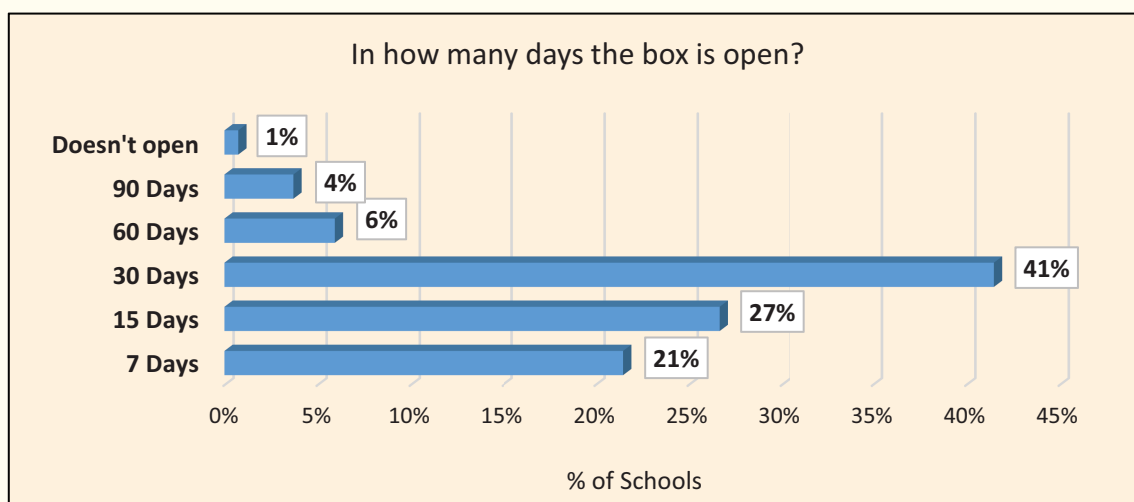
The following question was asked to know if there is a committee what is the composition status. As many as 65% head of the institute replied that the number of committee members is in between 3-5. 20% replied that the number is 6-8, in 20% school the number is 9-11. Surprisingly, 2% school replied that the number of members in complaint committee is 12-16.



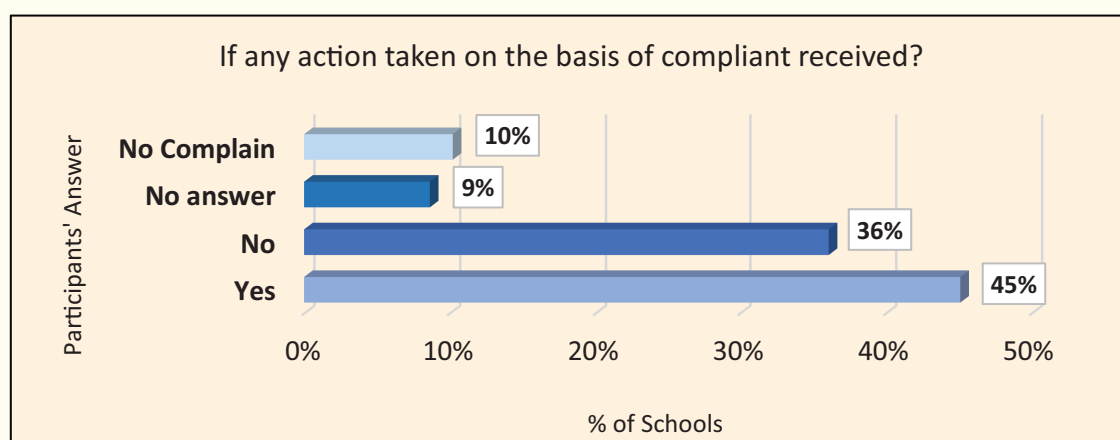
The next question was is there any complain box in the school, as much as 53% replied there is no complain box and 47% replied there is.



Next questions were asked to schools that have complain box, in how many days the box is open, most of the schools (41%) in which replied that in every month. 27% opens the box in 15 days, 21% in every week. Some said in every 2 months, some answered in 90 days. Few schools (1%) refrained from giving any answer.



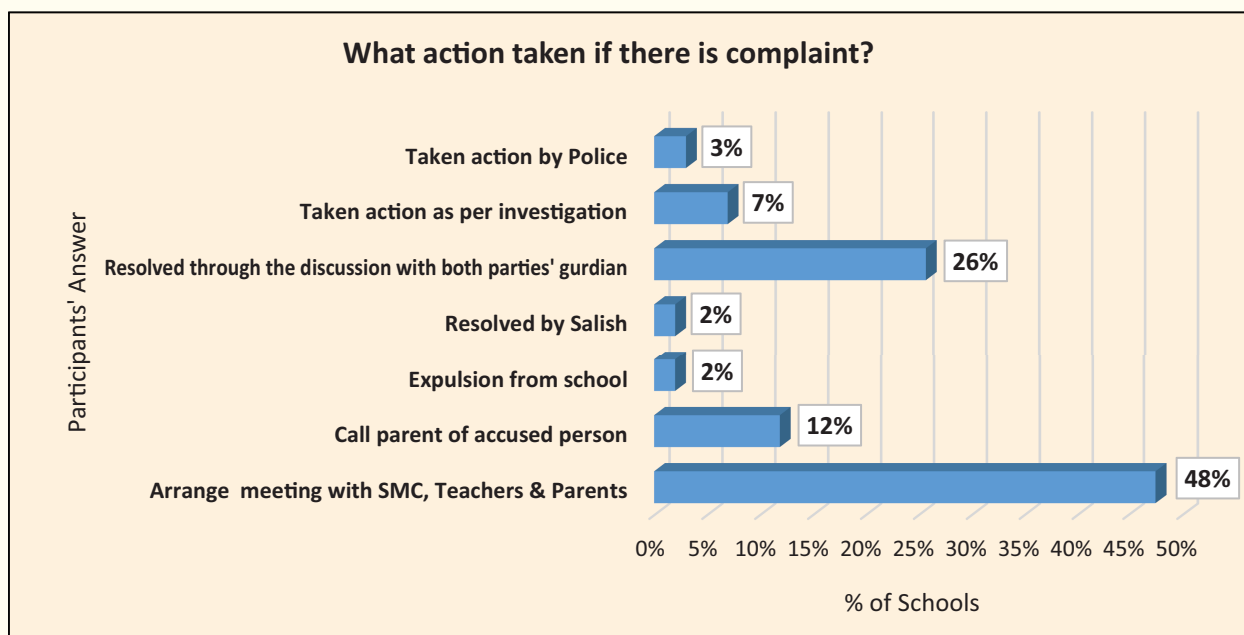
When asked if any action was undertaken on the basis of the complaint received 45% replied that they have taken actions. 36% answered no action was taken, it was resolved automatically. 9% did not give any answer, 10% answered that no complaint was made



When asked whether the school authority has received any complaint 67% replied they haven't received any complaint. 26% replied they have received complaints at times but not specifically of sexual harassment. 7% refrained from giving any answer.



The following question was if there is any complaint, what actions the authorities have taken, the nature of the answer was miscellaneous. That included solved the matter by arranging meeting with SMCs, teachers and parents, resolving the issue through discussing with the guardians of both the parents, calling the parents of the accused person and so forth.



Chapter

6

Dominating Factors Behind the Persistence Abuse/Violence

The society, family members, specially the male members etc. cannot avoid the incidents of oppression, torture on the infant/daughters. The first and the foremost step to stop the oppressions on the girl children depend on the women members of the concerned family largely. The only way it can be minimized is by encouraging women to retaliate against the culprits.

The abuse of girl child mainly occurs due to the interrelated factors like entrenched patriarchal value systems, the perpetuation of traditions and practices that identify girls as inferior to boys identification caution of girl children as a burden or liability and as a sex object or commodity, and prevalent illiteracy, poverty and negative parenting life style patterns. Other factors include the low status of women, the reduction in human and spiritual values and the rise of consumerism and corruption. In the modern-day society, indecent messages/ obscene phone calls from unknown numbers, specially from mobile phones have become common method of luring the Girl Child. This advancement is a dominant factor behind the increasing rate of abuse of the Girl Child who have no or any protection.

As it has been discussed widely about the laws existing in the country for the curbing of abuse of Girl Child. But despite the law, child abuse is increasing day by day. The victim's family is subjected to social censure while seeking justice. And those who sexually harass, are relatively dominant. As a result, they are able to obstruct the judicial process, or take it in their favour.

Violence, in any form, carried out by the perpetrators infringes on the constitutional right to protection of Right to Life and Personal Liberty. It is clear therefore that acts committed by the perpetrators of violence can be determined as a violation of constitutional rights.

The human rights of Girl Child even when protected on paper, are violated in practice in the country.

Our girl children are the future of our country. They must be allowed to grow safely. Also, all their rights must be ensured. They deserve proper nutrition, quality education and above all safety. Only then they can grow as earning and independent woman of the future.



Photo: Educo Bangladesh

6.1 Socio-economic and cultural outlook:

Among various socioeconomic factors, poverty, lack of education and awareness of parents, and socio-cultural values affect the perpetuation of several forms of violence and exploitation of children including child labour, child marriage, trafficking and child discipline in Bangladesh.

6.2 Poverty:

There is no denying the fact that poverty can increase violence. Particular groups of women, including women and girls living in poverty, face multiple forms of discrimination, and face increased risks of violence as a result. Studies show that poor girls are 2.5 times more likely to marry in childhood than those living in the wealthiest quintile⁷⁴.

Women and girls living in poverty are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, including trafficking. And those who experience domestic or intimate partner violence have fewer options to leave violent relationships, due to their lack of income and resources. A report reveals that Child brides are somewhat more likely to reside in rural areas and to live in poorer households, and are less likely to have more than a secondary education.

⁷⁴ (UNWOMEN official webpage: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/end-violence-against-women/2014/poverty>)

⁷⁵ Customary Laws, Norms and Practices in Bangladesh, Perspective: Gender Based Violence, Published by Girl Power Project, Plan International Bangladesh, 2015.

6.3 Gender discrimination:

Though the conventional wisdom acknowledges family as a safer place for its members, but cultural practice in Bangladesh consents to using force as a mean of upbringing girls and disciplining dependents. Especially women and girls reside in the most defenseless position in the family in terms of wealth, power and status. Thus, family often becomes a potential place where GBV thrives in the shadows of privacy and secrecy. The practices embedded into these circumstances influence physical assault, sexual assault, child marriage, forced marriage and confinement⁷⁵.

NGCAF conducted a Study on the Situation of Child Marriage in Barisal in 2020. Amongst the 320 respondents, almost 95% (298) respondents of The FGD unanimously agreed that most child marriages held in their locality within the poor, low-income class and uneducated parents due to their poverty, illiteracy and superstition. Most of these families are not aware about the health risks of the child marriage. Daughters are considered as a 'burden' of the family and poverty, social insecurity and lack of education trigger such thinking process.

6.4 Distribution of inherited property:

In Bangladesh, under Islamic law a daughter, who is an only child, inherits half the estate of her late father or mother. If there is more than one daughter and no son, then the daughters jointly inherit two-thirds of the estate. However, if there is a son, then the daughter's share will be equal to half of the son's share. In all cases, men inherit more than the women do. It is found that the majority of the women are marginalized from their property in the social practice. On the other hand, in the Islamic solution, the property is fixed for all classes of women and is based on a property sharing system called *fara'id* that takes into account the roles and responsibilities of man and woman in the society.


In reality majority families does not give women inheritance rather provide cash or kind in lieu of their actual shares. Even our society consider dowry as substitute of women right of inheritance.

6.5 Lack of children budget:

It has been acknowledged by the government that one of the best ways to increase the country's future productivity is to ensure the desired level of government investment in children.

Just like the previous three year's proposed budget, no special mention on budget thoughts for children was announced in fiscal year 2022-2023 allocation. Although the child-centric budget allocation was increased over the last two fiscal years by 13.3 percent, it dropped from 2.78 to 2.63 percent in terms of GDP. From the government's child budget report for FY 2019-20, it is found that only 2.78 per cent of the country's GDP was budgeted for children. However, child budget reports for the last two fiscal years (FY2020-21 and FY2021-22) have not been prepared. As a result, it is difficult to say how much the government has actually spent on children during this period.

Generally, children budget is disbursed through various department and ministries of the country. From 2015 to 2019, the Government published a child budget report, which tracked progress towards its target of increasing investment in children to 20 per cent of public expenditure. But for the last three years investment in child sectors stagnated at around 15 per cent, therefore a



reintroduced child budget report would provide an important planning tool.

Lack of resources or shortage of budgetary allocation has been the major issue behind the non-implementation of many of the policies or projects that the government has undertaken. The same thought or observation was echoed by varied sectors of the society that was contacted for the purpose of the study, from infrastructural to human development index, from adolescent health issues to access to justice, from education to sports facilities and the profound impact is on the girl children needless to be mentioned. Though child budget is particularly important for addressing the adverse impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the country's children, it is an utmost priority to ensure the overall development of the children of the land.

6.6 Abuse and violence/safety concerns

A girl child is an easy target and is usually at the receiving end of abuse and domestic violence, which more often than not goes unreported. In rural areas, parents are reluctant to send their daughters to school fearing their safety. The increasing trend in sexual offences - beginning with sexual harassment (eve-teasing), criminal assault, molestation and finally rape - in public places, especially on the way to and from schools has created considerable anxiety among parents about the lack of safety and security of their daughters. The anxiety deepens as many instances (reported in newspapers) show that legal recourse and social protest have proved ineffective in redressing the wrong.

6.7 Conditions of the Judicial Development Centres:

There are three JDCs in Bangladesh – National Juvenile Development Centre, Tongi, Gazipur (for 300 boys); National Juvenile Development Centre, Konabari, Gazipur (for 150 girls); and Juvenile Development Centre, Jessore (for 150 boys). But According to the Ministry of Social Welfare, at present 1236 children are residing in those centres, double than that of the capacity. Despite centres being present for “correction” and not for “punishment,” the scenario at the centres is different as inmates are tortured on a daily basis. Those who raise their voice against irregularities are the ones mostly punished. On August 13, 2020 three inmates were killed and 15 injured in the Jessore JDC due to torture by its officials.⁷⁶

According to the guardians, their children are treated as criminals instead of being considered as juveniles with special needs. There are huge irregularities in serving food, medicines, and other essentials. And, the minors are often tortured for protesting the said irregularities. There are also allegation of giving special privileges to those who are influential among the inmates or loyal to the authorities.

The Child Welfare Boards (CWBs) have reportedly remained ineffective in monitoring of Child Development Centres (CDCs) and other certified institutions to ensure protection of children in need. Moreover, absence of the National CWB is has been hampering the monitoring of all CWBs, CDCs and other certified institutions

⁷⁶ Dhaka Tribune




Photo: Educo Bangladesh

6.8 Lack of coordination:

Child protection issues are usually cross-cutting and multi-sectoral in nature which requires action from a multiple number of government and non-government actors and agencies. While the MOWCA coordinate all issues related to children, safety and protection of children are ensured and enforced by several other departments and ministries of the government. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs (MoLJPA), The Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), and The Ministry of Local Government, Rural development, and Co-operatives (MoLGRC) are some of the most important ministries involved in child protection. However, the loose coordination among the implementing agencies have been blamed as a core reason behind the lack of proper implementation of the relevant policies and legislations relating to child protection in Bangladesh.

6.9 Lack of Separate Directorate:

Currently there are 19 ministries and departments that work with matters related to children. (minister, discussion meeting) it has been long demand from the NGO sector for the establishment of a separated Directorate for the children that will be solely responsible for children issues and to focus more on their rights. Though it was argued that for a separate directorate Government expenditure will definitely increase. Establishment cost can hamper the operational services since the Government has limited budget along with overburdened sectors to supervise on. And even



if there is a separate department or directorate for children only, it will certainly require referral services from MOWCA, from Law Ministry, from Labor Ministry and so forth. Separate ministry cannot oversee the entire aspects concerning girl children. (KII)

6.10 Lack of Childs Ombudsman:

In the context of the rapidly changing needs worldwide and according to the recommendations of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the government of Bangladesh has already updated the National Child Policy in 2011, originally enacted in 1994. Though appointment of a child ombudsperson is binding by Section 10.3 of this policy, the appointment has not been made till now. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) considering the situation of children in the country has formed a committee to review the draft act on the establishing of a National Human Rights Commission on the Rights of the Child, but the progress it has not been made clear yet.

6.11 Lack of research and disaggregated data:

In-depth research work in the field of the status of children, let alone the status of girl children is relatively inadequate. It has been found out that there is a severe lack of children-centric data and whatever is available that is not gender disaggregated. Gender-disaggregated data on many critical aspects is not available readily. The process of updating is slow. This is a matter of concern because reliable, up-to-date statistics and data is a must for appropriate policy formulation, meaningful policy research and suggestions to planners. Simplify data communication. The overwhelming majority of people in a position to help children – from allocating resources to providing better services – are not data specialists. They need data tools that allow them to quickly understand how data about children apply to their jobs and what action they can take in response.

6.12 Disparity in ‘age’:

There exists discrepancy in different national laws regarding the definition of children. For example, the age of the child has been defined as 18 years in the Children Act of 2013 and also in the National Child Policy (NCP) of 2011. But the National Child Labour Elimination Policy (NCLEP), 2010, which has been adopted to prevent and eliminate child labour, especially hazardous forms of child labour, has defined the child as a person below 14 years of age and as an adolescent who is 14 years old but falls below 18 years. Therefore, there is a necessity for harmonization between the Children Act, NCLEP and NCP.

Chapter

7

Overall Recommendation

Based on the detailed analytical discussions on different spectrums of girl children status, discussion meetings with relevant stakeholders of the society, in-depth interview with respected officials of respective fields, sharing meetings with respected members of the Forum, the report identified following recommendations.

Recommendations for immediate action:

1. **Strengthening Oversight of Religious Institutions:** Propose comprehensive measures to enhance oversight procedures for imam academies and related governmental bodies. Given their influential role, religious leaders, including imams, could effectively contribute to either curbing or perpetuating child marriage. Ensuring appropriate monitoring mechanisms could help address this concern.
2. **Enhanced Resource Allocation and Transparency:** Address the impediment of resource scarcity or inadequate budget allocations that hinder the execution of numerous government policies and projects. To ascertain the actual spending on children, it is imperative to publish separate child budget reports for fiscal years 2020-21 and 2021-22. This transparency would provide insights into the government's financial commitment to children's welfare.
3. **Expedite Legislation for Harassment Prevention:** Accelerate the enactment of the "Sexual Harassment Prevention and Remedy Law," a proposal that NGCAF submitted earlier. This law is vital to prevent harassment, sexual harassment, and all forms of abuse, safeguarding the rights and well-being of individuals.
4. **Implementation of Harassment Prevention Guidelines in Education:** Promptly enforce the guidelines for preventing sexual harassment within educational institutions, accompanied by regular monitoring. Stringent measures, including legal recourse, when necessary, should be applied to maintain a safe learning environment.
5. **Enactment of Witness Protection Law:** Respond to activists' appeals by expediting the passage of the witness protection law, a draft prepared by the Law Commission nearly 15 years ago. This law would provide crucial safeguards for witnesses in legal proceedings.
6. **Capacity Building for Law Enforcement Agencies:** Prioritize comprehensive capacity-building training for law enforcement agencies, equipping them to effectively handle the technical intricacies inherent in cases of cyberbullying.


7. **Harmonization of Child Age Definitions:** Establish alignment among definitions of ‘child’ across legislations, including the Children Act, NCLEP, and NCP, ensuring clarity and consistency in legal interpretations.
8. **Inclusion of Child Marriage Risks in Curriculum:** Integrate the risks associated with child marriage into school curricula, emphasizing strategies to seek assistance and prevent child marriage. Establishing a centralized database would offer a comprehensive overview of violence against girl children.
9. **Modernization of Marriage Registration:** Revise the marriage registration process to effectively prevent child marriage. The introduction of a Unique Identification Number within marriage registration can facilitate this modernization effort.

Long-term recommendations:

1. Implement regular re-orientation programs aimed at fostering gender sensitization, innovative participatory teaching and learning methods, and the enhancement of management skills for all educators, regardless of gender. When necessary, seek support services and expertise from non-governmental sources.
2. Collaborate with relevant ministries and NGOs to conduct emergency needs assessments of malnutrition among school and pre-school level children. Integration of interventions with the school grants system can prove effective in addressing this concern.



Photo: Educo Bangladesh

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3. Establish a Mental Health Care Network to provide psychological first aid and counselling services within schools, aligning with SDG goal 3. Coordination efforts between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Bangladesh Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health (BACAM), and the National Institute of Mental Health and Hospital are essential.
 4. Address the pressing need for investment to nurture and promote sports talent among girls and women in Bangladesh, as emphasized by several sports analysts. Concurrently, rectify gender-based disparities in remuneration, where female players receive less than their male counterparts, even in popular sports like cricket and football.
 5. Enforce specific guidelines concerning sexual harassment, abuse, and violence against women, particularly within the context of female sportspersons.
 6. Referencing BANBEIS statistics, it's evident that total girls' enrolment in the vocational and technical education sector is 316,060 (27.13%), with a gender parity index of 0.37 (37%)—far below the national target of gender parity. Addressing this disparity is pivotal to realize the goals outlined in Vision 2041.
 7. Address the critical need for establishing an adequate number of modern forensic DNA labs in accordance with section 24 of the DNA Act in Bangladesh.
 8. Ensure comprehensive accessibility, as stipulated by the 2013 Disability Act, to courts, public hospitals, police stations, prisons, Victim Support Centers, and One-Stop Crisis Centers. This includes both physical accessibility and access to interpreters or support individuals, with attention to gender considerations when requested.
 9. Prioritize the complete implementation of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy of 2015, integrating their rights within the framework of the Labour Law. Concurrently, introduce a registration mechanism for domestic workers in police stations and ward commissioner's offices to expedite communication and assistance during times of crisis.
 10. Promote awareness and understanding of the Provision of Legal Aid Act, which offers free legal aid to the vulnerable and victimized. Extensive publicity campaigns are necessary to ensure wider knowledge of this resource.
 11. Underlining the significance of a comprehensive understanding of the situation of girl children, advocate for the annual publication of the Status of Girl Children report. This pivotal document serves as a foundation for informed action to uphold their rights and security.

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Mirpur Road, (Top of National Bank Ltd.), Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207