

# BASELINE SURVEY ON PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST CHILDREN AT FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND INSTITUTIONS



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## ***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

The Save the Children UK, in its current strategy since 2005, recognizes the need for much greater focus on children's protection, education and household economic security. Bangladesh is amongst the first 192 countries to ratify the Convention of the Rights of Children (CRC) in 1991 and participated actively at the world convention for children to launch the CRC, which defines a child as an individual up to eighteen years of age. The articles of CRC emphasizes non-discrimination, best interest of the child, right to life, survival, development and protection to achieve the full potential of children individually and collectively and right to voice their concern and be heard in those matters. Article 5 of Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has also recognized the interest of children as the primordial consideration in all cases with regard to the common responsibility of mothers and fathers in upbringing and development of their children.

Information on prevalence of violence and abuse against children depicts an alarming situation in Bangladesh society. If these incidences go on unabated, the situation may reach a point of no return which will have a devastating effect on the whole society. Keeping these in view, the overall objective of this study was to set up a baseline on prevalence of violence against children at family, community and institutions and the status of existing formal/informal community institutions to address the violence. The specific objectives were to assess the current status of violence against children irrespective of age, sex, working children, and school going children (formal and non-formal).

**Areas of study:** The areas of study were-

- Accessibility to education among children;
- Violence, abuse, exploitation in family;
- Violence, abuse, exploitation in school;
- Violence, abuse, exploitation in work place;
- Violence, abuse, exploitation on street;
- Child marriage;
- Child trafficking;
- Juvenile offence;
- Relation between police and community people;
- Prevalence of violence and abuse (documented cases), and
- Capacity of various institutions to deal with violence against children.

**Methodology:** This "Baseline Study on Prevalence of Violence Against Children at Family, Community and Institutions" is a multidimensional one.

The data and information were collected using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Field data/information have been collected in all the 3 areas of intervention (Dhaka, Jessore and Kurigram). For qualitative part of the study, 15 KIIs were conducted with Heads of Community Organizations (NGOs), Ward Commissioner/UP Chairman, Social Welfare Officer, and Officials of Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. Twelve FGDs were conducted, with students of secondary section, school teachers, and married females under

age of 18 years. Data were also collected through CPM, from students of primary section. In Case Studies, both 'violator' and 'violated' were interviewed.

**Key Findings:** When the knowledge index was considered the children were found to score the lowest (24.5%) and the employers the highest (55.2%). Parents scored 39.4%. However, the highest knowledge gap (92.5% to 66.1%) was found regarding 'Right to protection from sexual abuse' and 'Right to protection from trafficking' in parents and in children. The Chairman and Ward Commissioners were mostly unaware of the Convention of Child Rights. The teachers felt that the children have the right of freedom and conducive environment for games and sports. But the teachers admitted that they failed to ensure the rights of the children. The children are pressurized for education, which brings stress on them. The employers were most knowledgeable of the children's supplemental educational programmes and working children the least. Although knowledge level ranged from 85% to 96% in employers its practice level for their working children ranged from 6% to 13%. Knowledge of working children was the lowest.

According to 24% of parents, 61% of working children and 14% of employers, boy children (below 17) in their houses didn't attend school. The mean educational status was higher in houses of employers, followed by parents and working children. According to parents dropout was 1 in 4 in boys, and 1 in 5 in girls. In the houses of working children dropout was 2 in 3 in boys, and 1 in 2 in girls. Around one-third of them reported of gender based discrimination in the schools. About two-fifths (39%) of the parents reported of some system for monitoring the quality of schools.

The impact of early marriage on girls imply denial of childhood to girls, curtailment of personal freedom, forced sexual relations, and torture through dowry. Early marriage inevitably denies children of school age their right to education they need for their personal development. Seventy percent working children know about the marriageable age of girls but only 15% know about the marriageable age for boys. The poor and helpless parents are compelled to discontinue their daughter's schooling and arrange early marriage to save them from insecurity including eve teasing.

Dowry related violence has increased 3 times during last 5 years. Dowry is an indispensable part of a girl's marriage. Domestic violence is often related to disputes over dowry demand. Reported sexual violence (rape and molestation) committed by family members are, predictably, directed against girl child mainly. The mother-in-law, emerges more as an instigator and abettor in violence, specially, in cases of dowry deaths and severe beatings.

Adolescent boys tease the young girls using obscene language, throw pebbles, pull the scarf, and insist to take chocolate from them. Some influential and powerful persons of the area tease the girls of poor and helpless people. Eve teasing is common on the streets. Girls face serious problems on their way to school. Some naughty boys tease girls on the street. They throw love letters tied to stones to the girls. They gossip near the entrance of the school and sing songs gazing at the girls.

On the child trafficking, authentic information is not available. But on the basis of information from different NGOs and international organizations the number of trafficked women and children is 10,000 every year. According to BNWLA, about 30,000 children are annually trafficked to brothels of India. According to ADB report 2002, 13,220 children were trafficked during last 5 years. Of this, only 4,700 children could be finally rescued. According to newspaper report 3,248 children (below the age of 16) were rescued after trafficking between 1990 and 1998. According to the US State Department, Trafficking in Persons

Report, 2004, Bangladesh is a country of origin and transit for women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation, involuntary domestic service, and debt bondage. An estimated 10,000-20,000 women and girls are trafficked annually to India, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. The report stated that women and children from rural areas in Bangladesh are trafficked to urban centers for commercial sexual exploitation and domestic work. Community violence against women is effected in the name of traditional and customary practices or beliefs. Conservative sections of society tend to comply with punitive edicts issued by religious extremists to oppress women. Although *fatwa* is not legal in Bangladesh the tradition is often abused particularly in village mediations to suppress women's mobility and choice.

Physical environment at school is not conducive. In most class rooms there is only one electric fan. Sometimes they have to attend class in the darkness. There is no proper ventilation in the class room. There was severe scarcity of drinking water and only one tube well in the school (South Kharki, Jessore). They also suffer from sound pollution. There is no playground, no science laboratory, and no library in most schools. If the electricity fails classes are suspended in the school. Punishment in school includes – pulling the ear, whipping, beating with duster, putting the head under the bench, pencil put within the fingers, kneel down, slapping, standing under the sun, etc. Some teachers take special care of the students who keep them as private tutors. Overall, 85% parents, 80% working children, and 88% employers know that corporal punishment is inflicted on the children of the school. This indicates prevalence of violence against children in the school. Physical torture is followed by psychological torture. The teachers even use filthy languages to the students.

Sexual harassment is undergone by the male teachers on the girl students. If the students do not join the private coaching class of the teachers they misbehave with the students. The healthy and beautiful girls are molested by the male teachers. They cause physical and psychological torture on them. It reveals that violence against children at school may lead to a number of deformities in the personalities of the students at the formation stage. Ill-effects of corporal and psychological punishments create a sense of inferiority complex among students, which is inimical to education.

Department of Social Welfare handles cases of juvenile offence through “*Kishore Unnyan Kendra*”. Ministry of Women Affairs deals with cases of violence against children and women through ‘Nari Nirjatan Damon Cell’. Department of Social Welfare works with NGOs to try to motivate the parents so that they have empathetic attitude towards children. They discourage dowry, and encourage vaccination and micro-credit for the children. They work against the violence against children. They have regular advocacy programme. There are three Kishore Unnyan Kendra (Juvenile Development Centre) or KUK ; Tongi KUK, Jessore KUK and Konabari (Gazipur) KUK. The first two are for boys and the one at Konabari is exclusively for girls.

Department of Women and Children Affairs deals with the cases of separation, family dispute, divorce, depriving the wife from her ‘*moharana*’, etc. The Ministry also tries to work on child-trafficking issues. Women Affairs Officers reported that if any kind of violence against children is reported to them, the office rushes to the spot and tries to solve the problem. If they fail to solve, it goes to police. There is a positive relationship with local government. They help to arrest the violator. Department of Social Welfare renders co-operation for the mentally retarded children and juvenile offenders. If anybody is involved in anti-social activities using children the violator is caught and is handed over to the police. The cases of early marriage and dowry are settled through ‘Shalish’ by them. The NGOs are working in the study area to reduce violence against children.

According to an analysis of the grass root level NGOs, household heads and other members of the households, 474 were victims of intimate violence. Forty cases were reported by NGOs about psychological abuse. An estimated 300 rapes occurred in last two years. Only 16% of rape victims reported to the juvenile court. Most of the rape occurred before age 18. Most harmful violence against children found were-- early marriage and dowry; eve-teasing ; carrying bomb by children ; quarrel of the parents in front of the children ; and work in *bidi* and welding factories. Most harmful and risky jobs are the jobs in the factory and workshop which hamper the physical and psychological development of the children.

The steps taken by the government and non-government organizations to reduce violence against children are-- arrange meetings with the owners of the factories ; guide the victims for getting legal support ; settle issues of violence against children through *shalish* by local government ; advocacy programmes on VAC ; provide medical support to the victims; provide credit facilities to the victims for income generating activities; counseling, arbitration, legal support, protection, vocational training ; and non-formal education.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

- Violence, especially the issue of eve-teasing should be addressed to the community people. Knowledge and practice level of free or supplemental education among working children need to be addressed. Gender based discrimination in the schools need to be addressed through proper training to the teachers. Law enforcing agencies should be involved in ensuring the rights for children and stopping violence against women.
- The problem of early marriage can be combated through poverty alleviation by introducing skill training for income generating activities. Education efforts of girls may be strengthened by improving and increasing stipend and scholarship for girls.
- Consciousness level of the society has to be raised against eve teasing, early marriage and dowry. Law enforcing agencies to be motivated for implementation of laws on early marriage, dowry, eve teasing and sexual harassment.
- The traditional notion of the virtue of physical punishment should be discarded and replaced by counseling and psychotherapy for the children. Experiences and lessons learnt for children with NGOs, should be shared through their networking.
- The owners of the factories should be conscious about deprivation of child workers of the minimum remuneration.
- Parents should be careful and cautious to bring up their children, so that they are not sexually assaulted.
- Parents, teachers, guardians, local government, influential persons, GOs and NGOs should work in concerted way to stop juvenile offence. Awareness campaign for all people about juvenile delinquency is needed.