**Impact of legislation designed to address violence against women in Bangladesh**

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**August 2022**

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# Abstract

There are few laws established in Bangladesh to deal with violence against women effectively. The aim of this research is to analyse if these laws are protecting Bangladeshi women from violence by using Kabeers (2000) theory of empowerment and Luke’s (2005) theory of power. Books, journals, newspapers, and research papers will also be used to demonstrate the present situation for women. I selected a qualitative research design and carried out semi-structured interviews for this research. This provides the researcher with an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, and it is an efficient method to gather cultural-specific information from a particular community. Women are not reporting crimes due to social pressure and stigmatisation. The legislative and judicial body in Bangladesh is corrupted and has previously fabricated a case by providing false witnesses. This leads women in Bangladesh to avoid the legislative system, which results in an increased rate of crimes.

**Table of contents**

**Abstract** ……………………………………… Page 6

**Chapter 1: Introduction**……………………….Page 8

Background of the Study………………………Page 8

Research Question ………………………………Page 10

Aims Of Research………………………………… Page 11

Structure Of the Thesis……………………………. Page 11

**Chapter 2: Literature review………………………..**Page 12

Introduction ………………………………………….. Page 12

Theoretical Framework……………………………….. Page 13

The History and Violence

against women in South Asia…………………………… Page 15

Corruption In

Bangladeshi Legal System…………………………………Page 18

The Return Of Democracy…………………………………… Page 19

Conclusion……………………………………………………..Page 22

**Chapter 3: Methodology**……………………………………… Page 24

Introduction……………………………………………………….Page 24

Choosing the research

Design and methods……………………………………………….Page 25

Interview Questions

for practitioners……………………………………………………… Page 26

Interview Questions

for women………………………………………………………………Page 28

Finding Practitioners

for my research………………………………………………………. Page 29

Finding women

who suffered violence…………………………………………………… Page 34

Conducting Interviews…………………………………………………Page 36

Informed Consent

form and ethical approvals……………………………………………Page 39

Data Analysis………………………………………………………….. Page 40

Conclusion and reflection

on the data gathering process………………………………………...Page 41

**Chapter 4 – Empirical Data analysis**…………………………….. Page 43

Introduction…………………………………………………….Page 43

Women aren’t reporting crimes………………………………Page 43

## Accepting the violence towards them (Suffering, Obedience, Acceptance)………………………….Page 44

Getting help from male

member of the family……………………………………………….Page 48

Financial Crisis………………………………………………………..Page50

## Chapter 5 CORRUPTION WITHIN LEGISLATIVE BODY

## (POLICE HARASSMENT)…………………………………….. Page52

Introduction………………………………………………………Page 52

Violence in police custody………………………………………… Page 52

Victims aren’t reporting crimes……………………………………Page53

Are Police Doing Honest Investigation?..........................................Page 55

## Chapter 6 -BARRIERS IN COURTHOUSE…………………… Page 64

Introduction…………………………………………………………Page 64

Delaying the procedures …………………………………………... Page 65

Not trusting the judicial procedure……………………………… Page 68

Corruption and threat in the courthouse …………………………Page 69

The non-governmental institution and the courthouse…………Page72

**Chapter 7 -Conclusion and Recommendation**………………Page 78

Reference List……………………………………………………..Page 81

Appendix…………………………………………………………..Page103

Word Count- 25,000

I declare this Thesis is a presentation of an original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other university. All sources are acknowledged as references.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This research study has been carried out in order to identify the impact of legislation on violence against women in Bangladesh, such as the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (DVPP Act), 2010; the Acid Offence Prevention Act, 2002; and the Women And Child Repression Prevention Act, 2000. According to one of the surveys made by the statistical bureau of Bangladesh and the United Nations Population Fund, more than 70% of women are subject to abuse in Bangladesh (Human Rights Watch, 2021). According to the human rights protection group of Bangladesh, known as Ain and Salish Kendra, there have been approximately 235 cases where husbands have murdered women during 2020 (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This is a huge crisis for Bangladesh when the country has marked the anniversary of its two-landmark legislation on violence against Women. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (DVPP Act) 2010 has been enacted to protect women from various physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuses. The act has been established to regulate the duties and obligations of the police officers and other authorities in providing remedies to the victims of the violence. The Acid Offence Prevention Act, 2002; and the Acid Control Act 2002 have been enacted to regulate the supply of acid and acidic substances in preventing the misuse of acid, but also to prevent and protect the victims of acid attacks. However, another major law, The Women and Child Repression Prevention Act, 2000, focuses upon the rape, dowry, abduction, sexual assault, and trafficking of women and children.

Bangladesh has also built its national plan on creating a society by eliminating women's abuse and violence against them and their children within 2025 (Human Rights Watch, 2021). It has been found that even though the government has taken initiatives in the prohibition of violence against girls and women, the steps taken by the government are ineffective and have serious barriers to women seeking legal remedy and being able to report the abuses and assaults (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Violence against women has been so prominent that the victims appear to not find abuse or assaults as violence and do not feel that they should be reported to the appropriate authority for any legal remedy (Sifat, 2020: 1).

The Bangladesh Government has taken various initiatives to address the challenge of violence and abuse against women in society by developing a multi-sectorial programme to help eliminate and prevent violence against women, in collaboration with the Danish Government. The programme that has been initiated is named the “MSPVAW” which is the Multi-Sectorial Programme on Violence against Women (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The programme was initiated by the government of Bangladesh to improve the protection of women from violence. This has been done by setting up one-Stop Crisis Centres, and by way of coordination between the district-level government, and district legal aid committee. It also facilitates in improving access to services provided by the legal aid committee and promotes the awareness of development of One-Stop Crisis Centres (Human Rights Watch, 2021). However, this has not stopped the violence against women. It has been found that there has been a surge of 500 cases where women have been the victims of acid attacks. Though the major landmark enactments of the country have crossed a mark of 10 and 20 years, the scenario has not changed (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This is due to the failure of effective enforcement and implementation of the enactments. It has been found that the lawyers who fight for the rights of women state that the police generally refuse to file a complaint or leave the investigation continuing, even the complaint has been reported a year before. This inadequacy and irresponsibility of the government servants has led women to *not* report cases of their assault to the police (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This has resulted in males in society thinking that violence against females is their right, and that nothing will happen to them if they are caught (Banarjee, 2020: 23). The police often ask the female victim to describe the incident repeatedly, which renders the women even more traumatised. According to the Human Rights Watch (2021) where the organisation has interviewed a lawyer and project director for Unit for Body Rights Project at “Naripokkho” (Dhaka, Bangladesh – 2020), it was declared that after the woman is assaulted and comes to the police station to file a report, instead of helping the victims, the police actually delay the process. As such, the victim will have to share their story to the police again and again, which often creates an experience of trauma for the female victim (Human Rights Watch. 2021: 42).

## RESEARCH QUESTION

As the aim of this research is to find out the impact of legislation on a woman’s life; it is intended the following questions will be answered through the research -

* Why has violence against women been increasing in Bangladesh when there are strict legal enactments?
* What are the effects of the legislation on the lives of women in Bangladesh?
* How has current legislation helped to empower women in Bangladesh?
* Do women have easy access to legal remedies in Bangladesh?
* What is the role-played by the police in preventing crime against women in Bangladesh?

# 

# 1.3. AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The main aim of this research is to identify the impact of legislation enacted by the government to protect women against violence, and prevention of violence against the female gender of society, such as the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (DVPP Act), 2010; the Acid Offense Prevention Act, 2002; and the Women and Children’s Repression Prevention Act, 2000. The research aims to find the loopholes within the legislation, which do not help to serve – or hinder the purpose of the legislation. The research aims to find the areas in which the government should take necessary steps to reduce violence against women and provide effective support to the victims in reporting their case, and effective legal assistance in judicial proceedings. The research aims to find the impact of this ineffectiveness and inadequacy and irresponsibility of the government officers and government machinery in preventing crimes against women. The study will identify the laws and enforcement mechanisms that the government applies in implementing legislation to prevent crimes against women. The research also aims to find routes that the government should follow to provide adequate access for women in reporting cases, and who seek legal assistance for the judicial proceedings of the cases. Therefore, this report will identify the areas of concern and provide the effective steps necessary to be followed by the government in preventing corruptive practices and in the effective operation of the machinery of the government in order to support the enactment of the legislation. The research study will provide important recommendations to the government of Bangladesh on the initiates and planning for preventing crimes against women.

**Structure of the thesis**

The first section of the thesis is the theoretical framework, where I will discuss the common law establishment in south Asia; therefore, drawing on history, the aim is to build an argument that today’s patriarchal structure and male domination in Bangladesh is historically constrained by specific rigid religious-cultural norms, which form a patriarchal mind-set. This has had a significant impact on women’s decision-making power, which has led to violence against women (Lal, 2004; Krishna, 1978: 38). The second Chapter is the methodology chapter, where I will chronologically describe the fieldwork process, and the research methods used to gather the data. Then the analysis chapter, where I explore women and practitioners’ views on the ineffectiveness of laws. This chapter has been divided into three sections: i) the root causes of women failing to report the crime; ii) police harassment, and; iii) delay in court procedures. These three sections will describe the current scenarios in Bangladesh and also help me answer my main research question, which is “what is the impact of legislation designed to address violence against women?” Lastly, drawing upon the thesis’s findings, I will present my conclusion and recommendation.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1. INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on the impact of Bangladeshi laws in protecting and empowering women. In order to understand the current context for Bangladeshi women, it is essential to understand how society perceives and treats women in Bangladesh, and what decisions women might make as a result. In Bangladesh it is evident that despite equal rights given by law, women face different forms of violence in society. Moreover, the majority of women do not speak about the violence they face because of the cultural shame attached to it (Chowdhury, 2015). Based on such circumstances, it is quite challenging to apply women’s laws effectively; as Broderick (2009) states, “enforcement of laws are not enough to establish women’s equal rights, as laws are not self-implementing nor are they self-interpreting”. Therefore, to focus on the effectiveness of laws to empower women, it is essential to analyse the root of discrimination and how society at large perceives women’s self-making decisions. For this reason, this chapter will explore and examine the literature relating to Bangladeshi women - from the colonial era up to the position for women in Bangladesh today.

Firstly, I will utilise Kabeer’s (2005) theory of “empowerment”, Luke’s (2005) theory of “three-dimensional view of power”, and Schech et al.’s (2000) theory of culture, to create a conceptualized framework for my analysis. I will begin by examining Kabeer’s (1999) three stages of empowerment where the author argued that to be called “empowered”, a person needs to be in a position to take an independent decision, therefore reaching their desired outcome. Accordingly, I will also discuss Luke’s (2005) “three-dimensional view of power” and Schech and Haggis’s (2000) framework of culture, both of which are interconnected with “empowerment” theory: as Luke (2005) argues, power arises when an individual is prevented from taking a decision. Similarly, Schech et al. (2000) suggest that because of traditional gendered and cultural conservatism, women are not allowed to do certain things, which render them powerless, whereas men have more freedom, or fewer restrictions imposed upon their lives, and are thus more powerful. As a result, men are able to dominate women, women are not able to do anything about it, and this leads to the vicious cycle of a patriarchal society.

My literature review will briefly discuss the common law established in the colonial period, because this is significantly important in the history of south Asia, common law being established in the Indian subcontinent. Drawing on history, the aim is to build an argument that today’s patriarchal structure and male domination in Bangladesh is historically constrained by specific rigid religious-cultural norms, which form a patriarchal mind-set. This has had a significant impact on women’s decision-making power, which has led to violence against women (Lal, 2004; Krishna, 1978: 38). This **“**ritualistic gender discrimination” (Zaman, 1999: 40) is still very much prevalent in today’s Bangladeshi society, which renders women subordinate and metaphorically “powerless”.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Firstly, it is important to discuss the meaning of the term “empowerment” (Kabeer, 2005: 13). Schwerin (1995) frames empowerment as a process through which an individual’s attitudes/self-esteem/agency and capabilities enable them to participate in various fields, which in return empowers them within. However, Schwerin (1995) also argues that a person needs to have specific knowledge and awareness to make use of their agency (Stein, 1997; Zimmerman, 1996). Following this, Kabeer’s (2005: 13 -14) framework of empowerment discusses the “ability to make choices” about one’s own life, while disempowerment, on the other hand, means being denied those choices (Kabeer, 1999). More specifically, Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as “agency”; where a person needs to be empowered as an individual who will be free to achieve certain goals that he/she considers important. In other words, agency is described as “power within” (Kabeer, 1999: 438), in which a person has to be in the right position to negotiate a particular matter, which he/she considers important. Kabeer (1999: 438) refers to Amartya Sen’s work to demonstrate how agency can be used in both positive and negative ways. In a positive sense, “power *to*” refers to people who are making their own choices and pursuing their goals even if they face opposition from others. However, in a negative sense, “power *over*” refers to the capacity of an individual to have control over others’ lives.

The second dimension of Kabeer’s (1999: 438-439) framework is “Resources”, through which an individual can exercise agency. According to Kabeer (1999), in our society, we see clear categorisations; for example, certain people have the authority of decision-making or control over others, and so they have the power to instruct a certain group on how the rules or norms can be interpreted – for example, the head of a household, the CEO of a company, etc. The way in which resources are distributed indicates how a person defines priorities and enforces claims; for example, if a woman’s primary way of getting hold of resources is as a dependent family member in a male-dominated household, then naturally her choice of resources will be limited. Likewise, Kabeer (cited in Alsop et al., 2006: 1) defines the third dimension of empowerment, “achievements”, as a process through which “an individual or group can make purposive choices and transform these choices into desired actions and goods”.

This empowerment framework is particularly important for this present research as it will enable me to answer my research questions. In order to analyse the empowerment framework in Bangladesh it is also vital to examine the reasons which are preventing women to use their agency to the fullest. For this reason, I examine the work of Schech and Haggis (2000: 16), and their framework of cultural domination where they note that culture represents a hierarchical relationship. Cultural and traditional values play a key role in discrimination of certain groups; for example – it is the cultural values and beliefs, which give women a subordinate position in society. Thereafter, men have the power to control and dominate women as they have been given a higher position in society, which is culturally dependent. Moreover, cultural beliefs and values “make violence feel right or at least not wrong” (Galtung, 1990: 291).

Comparably, Luke (1974, 2005) through the lens of Dahl’s (1957) one-dimensional view describes power as “power over decision”; for example, everyone has the right to lead a life where they can make their own choices and therefore achieve their desired outcomes. However, if any situation prevents people from taking a decision about their own life, that indicates they are subject to an unequal power relationship. In the second dimensional view of power, Bachrach et al. (1963) emphasise Dahl’s (1957) theory by arguing that power exists not only when “A” is limiting “B’s” decision-making power, but also when “A” is setting an agenda, which will limit “B’s” political decision. This power will exist when “B” is deliberately excluded from something because of an agenda set by “A”. This form of power imbalance is called non-decision-making because the dominant group sets an agenda, which means that the subordinate group cannot make any decisions regarding a particular matter (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963: 632). To make the theory more relevant, Bachrach et al. (1963) discuss the societal structural imbalance, where “A” by force, pressure, and manipulation exercises power over “B”; therefore, “B” is left with no option but to comply with “A” (Luke, 2005: 21; Bachrach et al. 1963: 636). With this form of power, the powerful have the ability to exploit the structural bias in their favour by setting a new agenda over the non-powerful. However, Gaventa et al. (2008) argue that to challenge this form of unequal power relationship, it is important to identify who is participating in the decision-making processes.

Lastly, the third-dimension view of power demonstrates “power over interest”, where the powerless group is neither aware of, nor able to exercise their rights. In this dimension, Luke (2005) refers to power relations as a “false consciousness”, where the less powerful are unaware of their own interest and the dominant group inherits the power from past structures and cultural beliefs. Furthermore, Luke (2005) argues, power and knowledge are interrelated; for example, people in society believe in certain knowledge, which is patterned in a way that will only benefit a certain group. Moreover, the dominant group shapes issues in a certain way, because of which the unequal social structure appears natural and unchangeable (Luke, 2005).

**The history and the situation of Violence against women in South Asia**

In south Asia (specifically, in Bangladesh, India) women tend to have a lack of economic independence, resulting from low rates of participation in education. This leads women to having no option but be dependent on the male members of their family, therefore, they are unable to make their own decisions (Arends Kuennings et al, 2001)- -. It is arguable that this subordinate situation has put women in a position where they are unaware of their rights, which leads to judicial deprivation (Sharma et al., 2004: 114).

The origin of the south Asian legal system was drawn from British common law. According to Mill (2010), the East Indian Company (1757-1858) and the British Raj (1858-1947) ruled the Indian sub-continent, and they described women in India as “inherently oppressed and unfree” (Chatterjiee, 1989: 622). Colonists claimed themselves to be a force of enlightenment for Indian women, and enacted written laws that were introduced from 1772 to 1947 to justify their claim to protect Indian women from harmful traditional practices (Liddle et al., 1985: 522; Everett, 1981: 144-145). After colonial rule ended, the Indian subcontinent was divided into two nations based on religion, namely India and Pakistan (Ali, 2009). The failure of colonial law to protect women from prejudice was also seen in the postcolonial period: many Indian women were seen to be the victims of domestic violence, and in the name of purity many young girls were the victims of honor killings by their family members (Menon et al. 1993). The Dowry prohibition law and female infanticide law already existed, but proved ineffective, as women did not seem to, or were not able to make use of them.

Between 1917 and 1927, British women Annie Basant and Margaret Cousins set up women’s’ organisations in India (Liddle et al., 1986: 25). Consequently, there is no doubt that the common law was established by the British Raj, which is still followed in South Asia. Contradictorily, it is also argued that only the native elites and those benefiting from the Indian power structure were primary benefactors of the sati and widow remarriage act, which was enforced by the British. And British feminists, without understanding Indian culture and womanhood, forced the English norm upon them.

After the failure of the colonial law process, the struggle to create “new women” continued in the postcolonial era. Saraladevi Chaudhurani, an active participant in both the reform and nationalist movements, was the first to initiate a women’s association. She argued that the National Social Conference (set up in 1887) failed to address women’s rights adequately because men who considered themselves superior were the ones to establish it, thus it was managed by those who treat women as the weaker sex (Sen, 2000: 14; Saraladevi, 1911: 345). Based on these circumstances, Saraladevi launched the first association for struggling women in 1910, which was named the “great group of Indian women”. During that period, following in Begum Rokeya and Saraladevi’s footsteps, other women’s support organizations were launched: the “National Council of Indian Women” (1925) and the “All-India Women’s Conference” (1927) (Sen, 2000: 15). The aim of these organizations was to establish equal rights for women, and they targeted the government for advice or solutions regarding women’s rights (Amin, 1995). For example, enforced child marriage was a great problem for a long time, and these organizations presented a bill to the government to attempt to ban it. However, the government rejected this petition, arguing that the Muslim community did not support this process (AIWC 1931). Nevertheless, Muslim Personal Law was the first women’s right legislation enacted in the post-colonial era, where women secured their own rights (Saigol, 2016: 8-9). With the help of women activists, laws were established in the postcolonial era to change the subordinate position of women; but religious obscurantism and orthodox patriarchal practice remained the same for women. Consequently, the penalties remained minor, and the implementation record was poor.

Following independence, the new constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (1972, article 149) declared that “all existing laws” should continue to take effect (Yeh, 2015: 448). However, Chitnis et al. (2007: 1348) argued that, “Even today, most judges and Indian lawmakers are trained in England, in a legal model that does not have the flexibility to deal with the pluralist traditions of modern India nor with the colonial legacy that remains embedded in the Indian state”. For example - on 16 December 2012, following the brutal gang rape of a girl in India, the accused justified themselves on the grounds that the victim overstepped the prescribed forms of feminine morality. Moreover, the accused’s lawyer defended his client by saying that, “he would burn his daughter alive if she were to behave in a [similar] dishonorable way” (Krishnan, 2015: 256). Furthermore, Krishnan (2015: 256) argued that, rather than blaming the few people accused, instead the westernisation influence on Indian culture was blamed, for provoking the rape. The situation is similar in Bangladesh; For example, Rumana Manzur was the victim of a brutal attack by her husband in June 2011, in her own house and in front of her young child (Ray, 2011). After the horrifying attack, Rumana’s family remained silent and the police treated this matter as another typical case where shame was used as a strategy to hush up the victim. However, due to an initiative taken by Rumana’s colleague, this incident went viral on social media and the TV channels were flooded with the news, which left the whole nation stunned by its brutality. As a result, Rumana’s husband was arrested. Even after his arrest, however, the accused blamed his wife, via the media, of having an affair with another man (Chowdhury, 2015). In spite of being aware of, and conscious of her rights, “cultural domination” coupled with “power imbalance” is highly visible in such cases as this, which is a clear obstacle to women’s empowerment: the laws exist - but neither the women, nor their families are accessing them.

Because of the increasing rate of crimes against women following the legacy of the colonial and postcolonial eras, many women’s rights organisations have recently been established in Bangladesh to empower women more efficiently. Naila Kabeer’s study (cited in Visweswaran, 2011: 151) entitled “The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State in Bangladesh”, described how these organisations were campaigning against violence towards women, and publishing annual reports about the increasing rate of these crimes. Due to the women’s organisations’ campaigns, the government eventually passed major anti-violence legislation in favour of women. Passing these laws was not easy, but the women’s organisations had connections with the political parties in Bangladesh that made them stronger; moreover, the increasing rate of violence against women rendered the legislative bodies with no option but to pass the laws. These organisations not only advocated that the government should welcome the new laws, but they also helped and provided legal support to the female victims of violence. In modern-day Bangladesh women organisations were successful in implementing a number of laws through their campaigns, yet there are still problems, despite steps taken to solve them over the years. It is clear to see that few women were willing to speak up about the violence, yet at the same time many women upheld the myths about superior patriarchy, inferior womanhood, together with false traditional cultural beliefs. This ultimately led to the women opting not to use their “decision-making power” – again, an important indicator of empowerment. The fact that women were not using their decision-making power can be viewed through the lens of Luke (2005): that the dominant group shapes issues in a certain way, in order to make the unequal social structure appear natural. Therefore, because of this power imbalance, women can be seen to be hesitant to use their agency. Moreover, although women may be vocal, nevertheless they held no position in the law-making process. On the other hand, men were held in high esteem in the legal system, again promoting the idea of men’s “power over” or superiority to women. Therefore, men continued to use power to dominate women and fashion the law in a way that solely benefits them.

**Corruption in the Bangladeshi legal system**

Another prominent reason why women are not receiving justice in modern-day Bangladesh is that of corruption within the legislative body. Aman (1999: 40) noted that in Bangladesh, many women are the victims of rape and violence while in police custody. In anti-violence legislation, the duties and responsibilities of police officers are noted; for example, police must immediately respond to and protect every woman who suffers violence (Hamid, n.d., p.8). Despite this however, women were still not receiving justice, and actually, the violence was seen to be increasing. Therefore, in 1993, the government of Bangladesh set up a special cell at the police headquarters, called the “prevention of repression against women” in order to speed up investigation procedures; for example, an inspector would administer the cell, and specific cases relating to violence against women would be investigated (Yusuf, n.d., p.7).

However, it has been frequently observed that the victim’s family often has to pay a bribe or use their political connections to get help. Anyone who lacks money or power is seen to suffer due to a lack of police protection; for example, Zaman (1999: 40) raised the case of one domestic violence victim, who stated, “I wanted to go to the police station to report my husband’s physical torture and verbal abuse. My brother, who is also compassionate, told me that the moment the police were informed, they would contact my husband and outline the charges, then my husband would bribe them not to take legal action and would increase his physical and verbal abuse” (Zaman, 1999: 40). Recently, in April 2016, a 19-year-old university student called Tonu was raped and brutally killed in Comilla Cantonment. Her body was found within this area, which belongs to the Army; therefore, it is considered one of the most secure places to be as a woman. The news spread widely via social media and, the day after she was found, the hashtag ‘[JusticeforTonu](https://twitter.com/hashtag/JusticeForTonu?src=hash)’ became viral (Rahman, 2016). However, even today the perpetrator has still not been caught or punished by the law (Islam, 2016). As such, women are often afraid to access the legal system because they do not think that they will receive justice. Again, we see that corruption and a power imbalance is the often not spoken about reason for women not coming forward, and because of this, women are limiting their agency or freedom of speech.

**The Return Of Democracy**

Currently, a Bangladeshi woman’s position in society is determined by her marital status, or through her husband’s name. As Blanchet (2001) argued, “The selfless devotion of Bengali wives was highly celebrated and women who excel in the role have been compared to goddesses. The myth hides the difficulty many women experience in forgetting their own needs and interests and it conceals the violence meted out to those who are unable to stand on the pedestal on which they have been placed” (Hadi, 2010: 13 - 14). The institutional rule was that men have the legal authority to control, abuse, and treat their property (wife) on their own terms, which included locking them in cupboards (Dobash & Dobash, 1979: 3-6). Their subordinate position renders women to be dependent on men; therefore, if women are dependent, then it is easier to perpetuate violence against them. For example, it has been estimated that more than half (65%) of married men commit violence against their wife and when asked about this, justified the behaviour by saying that their wife had not asked their permission before going out (Hossen, 2011). Domestic violence remains oneof the biggest threats in Bangladesh. UNICEF reports that more than 70% of girls aged 13 -18 suffer physical violence from their husband or in-laws (World Heath Organization, 2005).

Similarly, Kabeer (2005: 16) and Khan (2001: 162) argued that the “systematic reproduction of inequality” is handed down over the years in Bangladesh. Whilst growing up, sons and daughters witness their mothers being oppressed; therefore, this cycle continues, as these children adopt similar gendered behaviours in their own marriages (Kabeer, 2010: 16). The household is a particularly important place in south Asian countries, because people learn about the norms, privilege, and power imbalance within households, which often leads to the fundamental blocking of women’s empowerment. Moreover, taking decisions about one’s own life is another important indicator of empowerment, which is often reflected through how a person is brought up within a household. “Empowerment” will only exist when women are able to choose their own lifestyle, which will contribute to their wellbeing (Khan, 2001).

Likewise, it has been argued (Betancourt and Lopez, 1993) that cultural conservatism, such as values and morals, is misinterpreted in order to protect structural power relations (Habib, 2012), which creates categorisation and domination among certain groups such as women (Campbell et al., 1997; Moss et al., 1997). In the case of Bangladeshi women, 47% suffered physical abuse yet chose to remain silent about it (Mahmood, 2004). In such circumstances, it can be argued that the patriarchal mindset in the name of culture creates barriers to women’s freedom (Mahmud, 2003). Although the legislation of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights for all women (MOWCA, 1997 cited in ADB, 2001), nevertheless, because of cultural misrepresentation, the practice of inequality remains prominent in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2003). In this country, gender inequality is visible through women’s subordinate position in the household and men’s decision-making power and supposed gendered superiority. Moreover, the oppressive behavior of mothers-in-laws towards their daughters-in-laws is a prime example that women’s lesser status in society leads them to discriminate against other women (Chowdhury, 2010).

Another form of discrimination in Bangladesh is religious doctrine (Ahmed, 1992). The majority of the Bangladeshi population is Muslim (Papanek, 1973); therefore, the traditional practice of the Purdah [[1]](#footnote-1)system is enforced on women, which is one of the main reasons for women’s seclusion (Kabeer, 1988; Amin, 1995 cited in Balk, 1997: 153). The religious ideology of wearing *purdah* is again totally misconstrued by the dominant group and has been used as a rigid function, which defines separate spaces for men and women (Adnan, 1989). For example, Bangladeshi Jamaat-e-Islami declared that “women should observe strict purdah and undertake outside activities only if their domestic obligations are fulfilled; a woman’s most important role is transmitting Islamic values to her children” (Ladbury et al., 2008, 17-18). Subsequently, it allows male authority over women in both the public and private sphere(Adnan, 1989 cited in Baden et al., 1994, p.38). This situation was widespread in Bangladesh, where radical Islamists, in the name of women’s modesty, forced purdah practice, which kept women in the household. The economic independence of women was undesirable for this extremist group because it would give women a superior status, and so they would not follow men’s orders. Panda (2008: 48) argues that “it is only the greed-centred people who impose their selfish will on others and treat them as mere tools, to the total negligence of the ideas laid down in sastras”. Therefore, it continues to be the case in Bangladesh that males are justifying certain practices, such as purdah, divorce or violence, in the name of religion and culture, which is clearly increasing the amount of crimes committed against women.

These beliefs lead to women’s educational deprivation. As Coomaraswamy (1999, 2002) argues, because of the purdah system girls face restrictions regarding higher education and, moreover, a few cannot attend college because they are harassed on their way there (Alam et al., 2010). According to a report by the human rights organisation “Ain O Salish Kendra”, the majority of families restrict girls’ education because of this harassment (Sathi, 2013). In Bangladesh, from 2008 to 2012, approximately 2,538 women reported being harassed in public places. These girls were the victims of acid attacks, rape, or other forms of violence. Since 1999, more than 3,000 acid attacks have been reported, and the majority of victims were women (Kalantry et al., 2011). Although the law prohibits dowries, nevertheless, UNHCR (2005) reported that, in Bangladesh, many women were murdered and others were the victims of silent assaults because of dowries. According to the World Bank, (2007), one of the main reasons for acid attacks in Bangladesh is the refusal of marriage or a dowry. Despite the existence of laws on sexual harassment and acid attacks, there has been no noticeable decrease in such crimes, as women still face violence, which shows a failure of the government to implement these newly adopted laws. Moreover, sexual harassment is affecting women’s quality of life and hope of a better future, as it prevents them from accessing education, thereby reducing their empowerment.

By assessing the literature around women’s rights in Bangladesh it is evident that Bangladeshi women have traditionally been dominated by males or customarily defined as subordinate in a relationship. The struggle of Bangladeshi women to define them or create a position in society has been consistently highlighted, due to the continuing adherence to myths about womanhood. This ramification places women in a subordinate position in the social hierarchy and leads to violence being committed against them. However, from the literature it is evident that women in Bangladesh are not empowered within the framework of “empowerment” described by Kabeer, as they lack the right to make active choices about their own lives and so they live under male domination. They also lack the power over decision-making, as described by Luke (2008), and the dominant group (e.g. males), by using specific cultural norms, automatically assuming that subordinates do not have a right to lead an independent life. Most of the studies in Bangladesh about violence against women suggested that the legislative body often abandons charges of violence halfway through, because the woman or her family do not wish to proceed further due to the social stigma attached to the victim/accuser.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has addressed the historical context in Bangladesh, in order to draw connections to the problems that women currently face. The discussion has shown how over time in South Asia, the obstacles to women’s empowerment has been tackled not only socially but also politically. Such problems have been dealt with through the legal system, which sought to pave the way for women’s empowerment. However, the ineffectiveness of such laws in the colonial era has later led to many female social workers standing up to fight for their own rights. Indeed, the early women’s movements in India failed to secure the rights of women. In contemporary Bangladesh, women are neither empowered nor are they receiving justice under current laws. Moreover, Rouf (2012: 27) argues that Bangladesh is a highly patriarchal Muslim-dominant society, where men make all the decisions in the household, which renders women, dependent upon men. People have misinterpreted the cultural and religious beliefs over time to protect their own needs, which has only served to make women more vulnerable day by day. As such, women are often afraid to access the legal system because they do not think that they will receive justice. Thus, the aim of this literature review was to examine the reasons behind violence against women, and explore why women appear to have such poor access to the legal system in Bangladesh.

**CHAPTER 3**

# Methodology chapter

**Introduction**

The main aim of this study is to establish why violence against women in Bangladesh is on the increase, despite the existence of laws to protect them (Farouk 2005). The motivation for this subject stems from being a Bangladeshi woman, and having the passion to examine my culture’s shortcomings. This research aims to answer the following questions: What effects do anti- violence laws have on women’s lives, and how are these current laws helping to empower women? Moreover, do women have adequate access to these laws? In this chapter I will chronologically describe the fieldwork process, and the research methods used to gather data. Firstly, I will explain my research design, and the qualitative research methodologies, and finally, I will reflect back on the data-gathering process and subsequent data analysis. However, it is noted that a large part of this chapter will be dedicated to outlining my own thoughts and observations from the data-gathering process.

# Choosing the Research Design and Method for the research question

‘The choice between different research methods should depend upon what you are trying to find out’ (Silverman, 2001: 25).

My research involves women who have suffered violence, so that I could gain in-depth and detailed information about their life experiences. Moreover, I wanted to gain a good understanding of the perception and views of the higher authorities, who enforce laws and deal with vulnerable women. The higher authorities I interviewed for this research include the police, judicial representatives, and the employees of women’s refuge organizations. By applying Silverman’s (2001: 25) research lens, I selected a qualitative research design. This provides the researcher with an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, and it is an efficient method to gather cultural-specific information from a particular community (Guest et al., 2013). Moreover, Bryman (2008) argues that to study women’s stories, life experiences, and behaviour; a qualitative research methodology is more effective than the quantitative[[2]](#footnote-2) because it enables the researcher to explore complex, hidden, and ambiguous meanings of family relationships (Bryman, 2008: 396; Thompson, 1992: 6). Thereby, the method enables the researcher to discuss other, more complex situations within women’s lives (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002).

In this qualitative research method, I conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions[[3]](#footnote-3). The reasons behind this choice are that firstly, open-ended questions allow the participant to provide detailed information because they are not confined within a rigid framework (Silverman, 2000). Moreover, Kahan and Cannell (1957: 149) have termed the semi-structured interview as ‘a conversation with a purpose’. Secondly, semi-structured interviews allow conversation between two parties, and the respondents can talk freely using their own words (Rubin and Rubin, 2005), which would not be achieved simply through the use of a questionnaire (Walonick, 1993). Thirdly, to achieve an in-depth understanding of a respondent’s stories, semi-structured interviews concentrate on a small sample size (Hesse-Biber, 2007). In this present research, I focus on 20 respondents, in seeking to understand their stories and perceptions. Fourthly, in semi-structured interviews, researchers not only have an in-depth understanding of their participants’ life stories, but they can also gain more pivotal information regarding their personal lives (Oakley, 1981; Hesse-Biber, 2007). However, Denscombe (2010) argues that semi-structured open-ended interviews can be overwhelming for the researcher because they provide huge amounts of data, which is difficult to analyse during a fixed-time frame. Moreover, Kakilla (2021) argues that in order to have a detailed conversation in semi-structured interviews, mutual cultural values shared between the parties are helpful. Nevertheless, despite sharing the same culture as the subjects of my research, few participants felt able to speak frankly on the subject matter. Kakilla (2021) also argues that interviewers tend to lose track from time-to-time, if the conversation is not as lively as hoped. Gillman (2000) and Ritchie et al. (2003) argue that semi- structured open-ended questions allow the respondent to share their problems and thoughts, which provides the researcher with in-depth understanding of a complex situation. Because of the nature of this present research, it is necessary to allow people talk about their experiences, which is possible through semi-structured open-ended questions. Due to the in-depth nature of the research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 respondents from Dhaka. The population consisted of 10 women (18 years and above) who had been abused, and 10 practitioners from legislative bodies and women’s support organisations. Nazemi et al. (2001) advise upon multiple recruitment methods for qualitative research; and subsequently, I have used face-to-face recruitment procedures, targeted emails, and direct referrals to recruit my participants (Dutton, 2003: 5 -6).

# Interview questions for Practitioners

As mentioned in chapter 2, Bangladesh appears to have failed to protect women’s rights despite enacting a number of laws. The failure to prosecute the perpetrators is an indicator that prevalent gender bias exists in the legal and judicial structure of Bangladesh (Reilly, 2009: 78). Due to government negligence, several independent women’s organisations have been established in Bangladesh, who lobby with government and the legislative body in order to protect women rights. Rowshan Jan is the founder of the *Women-to-Women* organisation: she mentioned in a recent speech that, although Bangladesh has laws, because of their strict application crimes are actually increasing (Wiegand, 2012). Therefore, it was vital that I spoke with the legal and judicial administration in order to discover why this happens. I prepared a list of questions, endeavouring to discover the root cause of the problems (See Table-1).[[4]](#footnote-4)

Table 1 – Questions prepared for the practitioners

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Topic | Sub -topics |
| Participants’ backgrounds, and the support they provide | What kind of investigations or cases do you handle?  What kind of services do you provide?  Do you provide support women facing violence who come to you for support? And their families? |
| Finding out the reason behind | From your own experience, what do |
| violence against women | You think are the most common forms of violence against women? |
| Women’s (victims’) knowledge about the laws in Bangladesh | The constitution of Bangladesh has introduced some important laws to protect women from violence. Do you think women are aware of the anti-violence laws? Do women seek help from constitutional or legal bodies? |
| Access to the judicial body | Are women getting proper support from the legal bodies? If not, what is the reason behind this? |
| Improvement | What you think needs to be done to change the situation? |

# Interview questions for women

The second part of my interview was designed for 10 female victims, who have either faced sexual harassment, acid attacks, domestic violence, or any other kind of violence. As I am seeking to find the answers in relation to the **effectiveness of laws** to protect women, it was a vital part of my research to figure out the reasons behind violence, and laws’ effectiveness by talking to the women.

# Table 2 – Questions prepared for women who faced violence

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Topic | Sub topics |
| Background | Can you Please tell me a little bit  about yourself? |
| Psychological and Physical Violence | Can you describe the violence that you have experienced?  Has it had a great effect on your physical well-being?  How has it affected your feelings about yourself? |
| Perception and response to own violence | How did you deal with these things that happened?  Did you feel there was anything you could do to stop it or to protect  Yourself? |
| Support after the abuse | Have you ever discussed your problems with police or anyone from the judicial body or women’s rights/ support organizations?  How did they respond?  Are you aware of the legal rights of women in Bangladesh? |
| Effectiveness of the Legal and Judicial Body (Accessibility) | Do you think the judicial body is ineffective, or not easy to access? |
| Cultural and Religions domination | Do you think cultural, traditional or  religious values play a role in violence against women? |

**Finding Practitioners for my research**

Initially, I contacted a family member who is a retired Army officer and currently running a human rights’ organization in Bangladesh. Being able to make contacts through personal relations facilitated this process. The next step was to conduct snowball sampling[[5]](#footnote-5) on my existing participants. Snowball sampling is applied when it is difficult to find research targets. In this process the existing participants of the research help to recruit future accomplices among their acquaintances (Burns et al., 1993). Moreover, Polit-O’Hara and Beck (2006) argue that one other name for the snowball method is the “chain method” and this makes finding research participants cost effective. Without such methods, it might have been difficult to find a targeted, specialized audience for this particular research. As my project was based on an important (and urgent) subject, snowball sampling helped me to reach a larger audience. Therefore, with the help of snowball sampling, I was able to make contact with the study’s first participant; a practicing senior lawyer from the Bangladeshi Supreme Court. He also put me in contact with another experienced colleague working in the same field.

I contacted both individuals via email and sent them the necessary information.[[6]](#footnote-6) They were very cordial with the reply. The second step was to arrange a suitable time to conduct the interviews. Due to the time difference, both interviews were conducted early in the morning via Skype, which was both cost-effective and allowed me to record the interviews. Both of my interviewees agreed to have the interviews recorded. However, as I took the interview over Skype I was not able to record the data properly, but I listened carefully and noted down their responses. When I conducted my first interview with a practitioner, I observed that my participant was very cordial although rather hesitant and anxious when asked certain questions. An example of such a question was, ‘do you think there is any corruption in the legislative bodies?’ Some answers were very short, for example:

**Interviewer**: How effective do you think the judicial administration is at punishing criminals?

**Interviewee**: The judicial administration is very effective at punishing criminals.

Despite assurances on my part that full anonymity would be maintained, I was unable to obtain more detailed answers to my questions, which would have been able to assist me in the research. This could be because the interviewees were aware that their answers were recorded and were frightened of the consequences. Therefore, it became clear that I would have to use different participants, as the quality of the initial responses would not be helpful for the research. As a result, I improvised my plan and attempted to recruit participants from my own personal connection.[[7]](#footnote-7) I contacted friends who work in the Bangladeshi judicial administration, through social media, in the hope that they would be able to assist me in finding more participants to use for snowball sampling. My contacts suggested names of their seniors, teachers, and colleagues, who they thought might be able to help. I then contacted a number of them via social media, and others via email. Finally, I conducted two interviews with police officers. One of the respondents was the assistant commissioner of police who deals directly with cases of violence against women. Another respondent was a police inspector, who has been working with female victims for a long time. Making initial contact with these respondents took longer than anticipated. The police officers I initially interviewed provided me with the name of a colleague who is a senior advocate of the Bangladeshi Supreme Court. I emailed him and gave my details; and he willingly agreed to participate in my research. I conducted a total of four interviews by January (2017), two of them via Skype, one by phone, and one by Facebook messenger.

When I finished the four interviews with my existing participants; I specifically asked them if they might be able to give me any details of other potential participants who handled cases involving violence against women. This resulted in another four interviews (by March 2017) and each of these interviewees gave me further detailed information about the judicial administration, and the situation for women in Bangladesh. In terms of acid violence victims, I contacted the Acid Survivor Foundation (ASF). I received a favorable response, and went to the ASF headquarters in Dhaka, to see if I could find participants for my research. I found two participants, and in January 2018, an ASF administrative officer Mr K, greeted me and asked me to wait in the conference room. Around 11:00 am, my first participant Mr. A entered the room. Mr. A works in the legal department, handling acid victims’ cases. The second interview later that day was with Mrs. S, the ASF’s executive director. I also went to the women’s support and investigation department of Dhaka metropolitan police to see if they could arrange any interviews for me with the victims. There, I came across Mrs. F who is a deputy police commissioner, directly related to investigations into violence against women. Mrs. F also arranged an interview for me with Mrs. A, the senior police commissioner. It took two days in total to conduct the interviews.[[8]](#footnote-8)

I undertook an online search for books, which focus on violence against women. Thereafter, I came across the National Center of Gender-based Violence and the group Ain O Salish Kendra, who distribute their publications. I contacted them and went to visit their organizations in the middle of January 2018. I met with Dr A,[[9]](#footnote-9) who showed interest in my research. I politely asked if he would be willing to be interviewed due to the fact that he has worked in this field for a long time, which he agreed to. Next, from January 20th - 22nd, I went to the headquarters of Ain O Salish Kendra to purchase some books, and there I met Mrs. N[[10]](#footnote-10). She was willing to help, and was interviewed on the same day due to her availability.

All the interviewees willingly took part, but did not consent to the interviews being recorded as they felt like it would be a conflict of their privacy. However, the respondents allowed the use of their name and position held within their organization.

**Table 3. Demographic data of ten participants**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Profession | Field Of Work |
| Mr A | Assistant  Commissioner of Police | Criminal Cases |
| Mr B | Inspector Of  Police | Criminal Cases |
| Mrs C | Female activist | Women’s  Support Organization |
| Mr D | Lawyer | Senior Advocate of Bangladeshi  Supreme Court |
| Mr A | Activist/help with the legal  Department | Acid Survivor foundation |
| Mrs F | Deputy Police Commissioner | Women violence  Victim support (police) |
| Mrs A | Senior Deputy Commissioner | Women and Child Investigation  Department |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mrs S | Female activist/director a  ASF | Acid survivor foundation | |
| Mrs N | Advocate Of Supreme Court and senior director of Ain O Salish Kendra) | |
| Dr A | (Director - Nation Centre of gender based violence, Ministry Of Women  And Child Affairs) | |

# Finding women who suffered violence

When I went to Bangladesh for the fieldwork my first priority was to find women who had been subjected to violence. I made a list for the women’s support organizations whilst I was still in the UK, and as soon as I arrived in the country[[11]](#footnote-11) I emailed and phoned all of the potential respondents to ask for their help. Coincidently, the first person I interviewed in Bangladesh Ms. R[[12]](#footnote-12) who I found through one of my relatives. Afterwards at the ASF, I spoke with Mr. K[[13]](#footnote-13) and he arranged a meeting for me to visit the organization. In the arranged time I went there, he greeted me and gave me a brief overview of how the organization runs. Next, he took all my details including my university letters and told me to allow him some time. After several days he contacted me and explained that he manages five acid survivor victims who would speak to me, but I would have to interview them together in one day. We therefore fixed a suitable date[[14]](#footnote-14) over the phone.

At the set time, I went to the ASF, and Mr. K advised me to wait in their conference room. After waiting for several minutes he returned with the five interviewees and introduced us all. The women I was about to interview were Ms. S1, Ms. S2, Ms. N, Ms. S3 and Ms. A. They all sat together and took it in turns to be interviewed. I outlined my research aims and purpose to the group of women, who appeared happy and did not have any objections to sharing their stories with me. When I asked if they have any questions for me, they did not ask me anything about my study, but rather they were interested in my experiences of living abroad. This was the longest interview of the entire research procedure, because I was handled five interviews altogether, one at a time. Nevertheless, we took breaks in between each interview to keep our minds fresh. When the interviews were complete, I was very satisfied because I had generated a significant amount of data.

# Table 4: How I found my research participants

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Participants** | **How I found them** |
| Ms R | I made contact with her through one  Of my relatives. |
| Ms S, Ms.A, Ms. N, Ms.P and Ms J | Mr K from the ASF helped me to make contact. |
| Ms T, Ms M, Ms X, Ms.Y | I contacted them through a lecturer in  a Bangladeshi university |

Additionally, a friend - a practicing lawyer who I studied alongside in Bangladesh - had heard about my research and wanted to help. Several days later, he called and gave me a lecturer’s contact details, who teaches at a government university in Bangladesh. My friend told me that if I contacted him, he might able to help as he teaches law and may have interesting connections. I contacted him via email and gave him details about my research project. I also gave him the details of my university, so that he could verify my details if he wished to. He gave me his number, and told me he as MSc law students, who were currently conducting their own interviews – he said they might be able to pass on some recommended respondents who would fit my research respondent criteria. Several days later, he contacted me again to say he had arranged five interviews, and that I could use his office to interview them. I agreed to all the interviews, but did not take all the interviews in his office. Out of the five, I took three in the office, which also doubled-up as a conference room. I conducted two of the interviews in the participants’ homes. From all five interviews I obtained sufficient data to enable me to respond to the research questions.

# Conducting interviews

In 2007, Liamputtong argued that researchers who investigate sensitive topics often enter peoples’ lives when they are in deeply stressful circumstances or facing crisis. Sometimes, interviewing vulnerable people and asking them to speak about sensitive topics, is harder for the researcher because they need to build special trust with their subjects. I therefore followed distress protocol (Dempsey et al., 2016: 486) while conducting the interviews.

# Table 6 – Distress protocol (Dempsey et al., 2016: 486)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The interview will be stopped | If the participants don’t want to talk  Anymore and suddenly changes their mind. |
| The researcher will step forward | If the participant shows symptoms of anxiety and distress. Therefore, the researcher should stay with the participants until they are calm and  Composed. |
| The researcher depends on the participants’ consent | The researcher should call them later  To find out how they are, and if necessary, provide them with helpful |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Support group or organizations’  Contact details. |

In many studies about violence against women, feminist researchers have observed the interviewer’s responsibility to respect the feelings of their subjects (see Kvale 1996; Maynard and Purvis 1994; Finch, 1984). Some researchers (Dunn 1991; Burr, 1996: 176) have argued that lengthy, emotive interviews can have an emotional and physical effect on the interviewer; which can leave them emotionally drained or traumatized for a long time (Gerrish 1991). This present research is highly sensitive, because I interviewed ten women who have faced violence. I sought to hear their stories - why/how did the violence happen? Who did it? What process did you go through to get help? These all are emotional questions, which led my participants to revisit the darkest periods of their lives. However, the emotional part of the research is viewed as part of the job (Sampson et al. 2008: 923) and cannot be escaped by researchers investigating such sensitive subjects (Denzin 1984).

Knox and Burkard (2009) argue, that interviews in sensitive research requires for the researcher to ensure they have allowed the participant to feel at ease so that they are content to discuss sensitive details about their lives, with a stranger. I started the interview keeping in mind that investigation of a sensitive topic might lead to participants’ intense emotions. I took precautions accordingly, for example, I let my participants choose the interview location, a place that would be comfortable for them. I also informed them that if they did not want to discuss anything in particular they could decline, and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. During my interviews with the female victims, this did happen: the traumatized respondents started to weep uncontrollably while sharing information: I therefore stopped the interview and tried to comfort them. When they felt at ease again, I continued the interview, making sure the respondents were aware that I could terminate the interview at any time. However, in this case all of the participants willingly took part and were content to finish their interviews. Sometimes during the interview process it felt impossible to maintain good rapport with the research participants, however I found that chatting and sharing my personal experience helped. The majority of my female participants asked me about my marriage, children, and husband - when I shared my personal information with them, they also talked about theirs.

To encourage my participants to take part in my research I assured them that I would only do one interview, and there would be no further contact. During the interviews I made handwritten notes, which the participants said they were happy with, and were content to wait patiently while I finished my writing. Moreover, at an early stage I assured them that their identity would not be disclosed. By doing that, I was able to put them in ease (Dickson-swift et al., 2007; Reinharz, 1992), however, most of my participants were keen to keep in touch with me so that they could be updated on my research findings. My female participants even mentioned that they would be happy to meet up when I next visited Bangladesh.

Elmir et al. (2011) argue that interviewing for sensitive research requires detailed planning. Additionally, the location of the interview needs to be safe and comfortable for the participants. As I started planning for my research whilst still in the UK, I had a detailed vision of what I wanted to achieve from the interviews. While taking the interviews I always kept in my mind that I had to be flexible and agree to go to interview the participants at a location of their choice (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Therefore, all the interviews I conducted for this research took place at participants’ homes, cafés and places of work.

All the interviewees spoke a mixture of Bengali and English; and I took hand- written notes during the interviews, which were transcribed when the interviews were completed. The transcription was challenging at times due to the difficulty in translating some common Bengali expressions, for example, one participant used the word “Mansomman”. I was unfamiliar with the precise English meaning of this term but I translated it into “family honor” in my transcript. Before translating the interviews from Bengali to English, I consulted fellow-Bengali speakers and academic experts from Bangladesh about the actual meaning of the word. They assured me that this is the most appropriate translation. Throughout the interview process I showed respect to the participants and validated their stories (Lee, 1993; Renzetti & Lee, 1993). This helped me greatly because by showing respect and listening to their stories, I was able to earn their trust.

# Informed consent forms and ethical approval

At the interviews, I provided the informed consent form for the participants to sign, together with an information sheet containing details of the research aim, confidentiality, and other research details. My research involved women who have suffered violence, together with practitioners who are dealing with these sensitive issues. I obtained ethical approval from the University Of York ethics committee in early 2015. Before conducting the interviews, I described the purpose of the research clearly to the participants, and said I would only carry on if a participant has willingly agreed to take part. Finally, I explained that the data would be anonymous, once it had been collected, unless the respondents explicitly stated otherwise.

# Data Analysis

Dickson et al. (2007: 337) suggested that transcribing powerful stories could be an emotional experience for the researcher, and that is exactly what happened with me during the data processing and writing up stage. The first step of my data analysis was reading, listening, and transcribing the interviews that were taken on location. I had to examine my interviews many times, which made the data collection process somewhat hectic. The process of writing up the data was long and tiring, however, I understand that the transcribing phrase is tiring and exhausting for every researcher (Darlington and Scott, 2000). However, Kelly (1988) suggests that the meaning of the spoken word is very often described by gesture, voice, or facial expression. I went through my interview transcripts several times to double check if I had overlooked anything. I had assumed that researchers start to analyse data while conducting interviews, however, transcribing the data was another pivotal stage for me.

I structured the data by eliminating digressions and repetition based on the purpose of my study. To achieve this I followed three steps: condensation, interpretation, and data structuring (Parvez, 2011: 41). In condensation, I rewrote the participants’ longer statements into short statements (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This interpretation provided new data insights, which contributed to producing new knowledge of the topic researched. Also in the data structuring and analyzing process, I created concept driven categories such as cultural misogyny, and corruption in legislative bodies, which provided a systematic organized structure to the study. Moreover, secondary data was also examined in the data analysis chapter.

# Conclusion and Reflection on the data gathering process

I originally started planning my fieldwork in September 2016, but the entire process took much longer than I had anticipated. I had planned to go to Bangladesh in November 2016 and made all relevant arrangements, but unfortunately was forced to change my plans due to personal circumstances. I began conducting the interviews from home in the UK. I contacted a number of women’s rights organizations in London via email. However, I was very surprised that women’s rights organizations in Bangladesh did not reply to my emails, or answer any of my queries. One of the most renowned and longstanding women’s support organizations actually refused to conduct any interviews with me – this came as a surprise. They were aware of my research topic, as I had sent all my research information and objectives. They did not reply to my emails despite follow-up emails being sent for almost a month. This made me question whether the organization was even fully committed to helping women.

However, I went to Bangladesh in December 2017 and finished my field work in February 2018. Reflecting on the whole process, I had considered that having a shared culture with the participants would encourage greater openness. However, after the first few interviews, I came to the conclusion that although I am from Bangladesh - for many people who work in women’s rights/human rights organizations or in judicial administration - I am still very much an outsider. As a result, the participants hesitated to answer some of my questions. However, with the female participants, the interview process took a different and positive turn when they perceived me to be an insider. For example, the women participants were very happy to share their stories in their own spoken language. Moreover, when I relayed to them my own personal experience, they became more confident and this allowed for more openness. However, as previously mentioned, being a researcher in the realm of sexual violence or abuse can be traumatizing for the researcher because of frustration with not being able to help the victim (Connolly and Reilly, 2007). This became apparent after a few of the interviews, and moreover I also felt the fieldwork process did not always go as I planned because it was hard to find participants for such a sensitive topic as this. Nevertheless, it is envisaged that this chapter has provided a detailed description of the project’s fieldwork methodology. In the next upcoming chapter, I discuss the data analysis methods in chronological order.

# CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL DATA ANALYSIS

## 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Violence is happening against women in every society, especially in South Asian countries where physical and mental violence against women is a daily occurrence (Niaz, 2003). Women remain quiet about their sufferings because of cultural domination, religious values or stereotypical societal beliefs (Ashrafan, 2018). Because of this, south Asian women are seen to suffer multiple forms of violence, such as – rape, dowry death, acid attack, suicide, forced marriage or other forms of psychological and financial oppression[[15]](#footnote-15). However, acknowledging all these facts, the constitution of Bangladesh has introduced various legislation to protect women. Although Bangladesh took many initiatives to ensure women’s rights, the country nevertheless still lags behind in giving women justice because the initiatives they took have failed provide justice for women (Ganguly, 2020). To explore women’s and practitioners’ views about the ineffectiveness of laws, this chapter has been divided into three sections: i) what are the root causes of women not reporting the crime; ii) police harassment, and; iii) delays in the court procedure. These three sections will describe the current scenarios in Bangladesh and also help to answer the research question, which is “what is the impact of legislation designed to address violence against women?

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## 4.2. WOMEN ARE NOT REPORTING CRIME?

Women are not reporting crimes and there are many reasons behind it – this became apparent whilst I was examining the interview material. One of the main reasons women are not reporting abuse is because they wanted to protect their family reputation and in some cases protect their children, thereafter they suffer in silence. It was clear that families have patriarchal structural beliefs (Ashrafan, 2018); and men justify violence by saying the housework has not been adequately completed, for refusal of sex, for disobeying one's husband, or the element of unfaithfulness. For these reasons, violence is increasing: for example - since 1999, more than 3,000 acid attacks have been reported, and the majority of victims were women (Kalantry et al., 2011). Although the law prohibits dowries, nevertheless, UNHCR (2005) reported that in Bangladesh, many women were murdered and others were the victims of silent assaults because of dowries. Social stigma and reputation are the fears of women, that might prevent them from reporting a crime (Dhaka Tribune, "Fear of stigma keeps women from reporting abuse", 2016 p.1). From the interview taken of **Nina Goshawmi**[[16]](#footnote-16), she mentioned most of the cases go unreported due to social stigma and people’s fear of their social reputation in the society. As a result, women fear reporting cases within the judicial system.

## Accepting the violence towards them (Suffering, Obedience, Acceptance)

This section will discuss the fact that in Bangladesh women suffer in silence; which leads them accepting violence from men in society. I found from the interviews that women tend to accept that violence will occur in marriage, and the women have justified the abuse by saying that it is acceptable for men to hit them sometimes, for example – **Ms.R** stated in her interview - *“As my husband he has the right to control me but he has no right to torture me. If I was doing any wrong, he can slap me once or twice. I don’t mind”.* She mentioned her husband has the right to slap and control her. She wants to protect her family and children, therefore, she did not think beating or controlling behaviour from her husband is wrong. It can be analysed that in some cases Bangladesh women are accepting violence and taking permission from their husband for going outside, therefore; the struggle of establishing justice for women will be useless if at the end women are forced to take permission first from their husband and being submissive to men (Kabeer, 1999 p. no. 45). Moreover, according to Farouk (2005:6) “an international report published by the United Nations in September of 2000 ranked the country first in wife beating and found that nearly half of the adult female population surveyed reported physical abuse by their husbands". This could be an alarming statistics because in Bangladesh the domestic sphere is considered private and thus violence is rarely reported. Women tend to accept violence from men, which is dealt privately at home. Farouk (2005: 5) argued, "Bangladeshi women, as a part of a patriarchal society, are from an early age taught to be submissive, tolerant, and self-sacrificing". This makes it extra hard for women to speak up about their domestic violence; moreover, in the case of rural women their socio-economic status makes it impossible for them to leave their husband and, therefore, they just endure the beatings. Nevertheless, the situation of urban women is not much better either as fear of family reputation can force them to stay in an abusive marriage.

In the interview given by **Mrs. M**, a domestic violence victim, she said and I quote *“My husband doesn’t earn well. He spends the earning in betting and taking drug. I have to live helpless with my children. I always tell my husband to abandon his bad habit and to earn well. But instead of this he tortured me. As well as he married another women behind me. After his new marriage he started to torture me very badly. Now he doesn’t take any care of me. Sometimes he comes to me. But If I tell him anything he tortures me badly” -* the violence experienced by her is from her husband who is addicted to taking drugs and involved in betting. She has been tortured badly since early in her marriage and the husband often scares and threatens her. But Mrs.M has not discussed the problem with anyone and has never gone to the police or any judicial body. She has no idea of protecting herself or taking certain action for the sake of protection although she reports that she is aware of women’s legal rights in Bangladesh. The fear of becoming a social outcast as well as pressure from the family has stopped her reporting the case. She claims that her neighbours saw the physical torture she was going through; nevertheless, she has not received any help from the family and neighbours, rather the community pursued her saying that because she is a women, she has to be obedient towards her husband.

Here a perception of the victim Mrs. M is controversial as she stated that “*No. I don’t think he had the right to use violence against me. But he had the right to overrule me when I was wrong”.* Here by overruling, Begum means that her husband has power over her regarding family decisions and he can occasionally beat her, because he’s a man. Although she perceives that violence against women is offensive, nevertheless she also accepts the patriarchal mind-set. Luks (2005), in the third-dimensional view of power, demonstrates “power over interest”, where the powerless group is neither aware of, nor able to exercise their rights. In this dimension, Luke (2005) refers to power relations as a “false consciousness”, where the less powerful are unaware of their own interest and the dominant group inherits the power from past structures and cultural beliefs. This reflects upon **Mrs. M** interviewwhere she readily accepts the violence towards her. In Bangladesh, women are taught that their self-worth is directly linked to their marital status. However, in chapter 2 in the colonial and postcolonial period it was seen that with the help from women activists, laws were established in the postcolonial era to change the subordinate position of women; but religious obscurantism and orthodox patriarchal practice remained the same for women. Chitnis et al. (2007: 1348) correctly argued,

“Even today, most judges and Indian lawmakers are trained in England, in a legal model that does not have the flexibility to deal with the pluralist traditions of modern India nor with the colonial legacy that remains embedded in the Indian state”.

Similarly, Director advocate Salma Ali of BNWLA (Dhaka Tribune, 2016) has stated, women and girls are not reporting crime due to the fear of losing the family reputation sometimes with their utmost shame. This has become a great reason for not reporting the crimes by the women (Dhaka Tribune, 2021: 4). According to a WHO report, more than 60 per cent of women in Bangladesh accept men’s rights in beating their wives, which is why; many women do not feel it is justified in lodging a complaint against the crimes happening to them[[17]](#footnote-17). The story of **Mrs. T** is another in the long list of women suffering from despair, hopelessness, and struggle to fight for a cause. She was quick to respond that her partner has no right to commit violence against her, yet she has been tortured both physically and mentally for her father's money. As she mentioned and I quote “*I silently bear all the torture all the pain because I don’t want to get divorce. What will happen to my daughter and me if I get divorce? I bear this pain silently for 17 years”.* However, she mentioned that after a few years of silence she tried to leave her husband, but she faced obstacles from her own family. **Mrs T** mentioned in her interview and I quote *“I don’t have any support as my father was saying I should live with my husband. He thought if I come back to his house his reputation will destroy. He was thinking about what the family will say? What will the community say? But he’s not thinking about me”.*

**Mrs. T** has endured pain for a long time because she fears that she will not be socially accepted if she is divorced, and will be abandoned by her own family. Here in these cases the third-dimensional view of power is applicable (mentioned in chapter 2) which demonstrates “power over interest”, where the powerless group is neither aware of, nor able to exercise their rights. In **Mrs. T’s** case, although she is aware of her legal rights; nevertheless she’s in no position to exercise those rights. In this dimension, Luke (2005) refers to power relations as a “false consciousness”, where the dominant group inherits the power from past structures and cultural beliefs. Furthermore, Luke (2005) argues, power and knowledge are interrelated; for example, people in society believe in certain knowledge, which is patterned in a way that will only benefit a certain group. Moreover, the dominant group shapes issues in a certain way, and because of which the unequal social structure appears natural and unchangeable (Luke, 2005).

Similarly, in the case of **Ms. S** (an Acid victim), the family pressured her to marry a man much older than her because the person had a stable position in society. After the marriage she endured both physical and mental trauma. When the torture became unbearable, she wanted to return to her father’s house, but her family pressured her to go back to her husband’s house, because they believed it was not appropriate for a married woman to live with their parents. Moreover, her in-laws suggested she was having an affair with another man, to explain why she was running away from her husband. In these circumstances, when her family members were putting pressure on her, **Ms. S** was prevented from using her agency. Kabeer (1999: 438) describes agency as “power within” in which a person has the right to negotiate a particular matter, which he/she considers important. In this case it is quite evident that both families resist and even deny **Ms. S** rights to decide, and instead give the power to the man. In the end, the husband threw acid on her and disfigured her for life.

This is as a similar case to that of Rumana Manzur, whom I mentioned in Chapter 2 where the husband beats his wife viciously after discovering she is having an extra marital affair. This reflects men’s attitude towards women as “by virtue of being a husband, he has authority over his wife’s body” (Anwary, 2015: 37). As Butler (1990) argued, men use their heterosexual male privilege as the father and husband. Butler’s views can be placed specifically in Bangladeshi society where masculinity is linked with aggression. However, divorce initiated by women is shameful for men in Bangladesh as the man is seen as “incapable of living up to the normative conception of hegemonic masculine ideas” (Anwary, 2015: 42). Therefore, pouring acid or disfiguring the victim is shown as the ultimate dominance from men. In a country where marriage is the only strategy for women to survive, her leaving her husband’s house is treated as a shameful act. Therefore, it can be argued that although women in Bangladesh have legal rights to divorce or file a case against their perpetrator, they tend not to do it and ultimately suffer in silence.

**Getting help from male members of the family**

In chapter 2, I described how in the colonial and postcolonial era, few women earn justice from the help of their father or husband. In other words, women tend not to get help from the male members of their family. In south Asian countries the situation is similar, for example, in the interview with **Mrs. P**, another case of violence against women was revealed. Mrs. P was the inheritor of her father's property, but after the death of her parents two brothers acquired the parental property and she was unaware of the matter. She is quite aware of the legal situation for women in Bangladesh and takes shelter under this. She claims the majority of women are not aware of the anti-violence laws in Bangladesh, and fail to go for legal support. In the interview, **Mrs. P** mentioned that she has dealt with psychological violence, and that the injustice that happened since is quite normal. This is a case of property acquisition by domestic people. Here, **Mrs. P** expresses the physical violence whilst saying: *“I went to them [her brothers], but they captured me in the house and violated me physically[[18]](#footnote-18)”*. In this case, she has got an active companion, which is her husband to go against the offenders who are her two brothers. Here her experience of the police’s behaviour towards her is decent, and she has received help from the court. From the analysis of the interview it can be stated that even though women may know their rights, it can take the support of other family members for the case to be reported. In fact, this case was unusual in my dataset because for the most part the women disclose having little or no support, and indeed that family members instead tend to pressurise *against* reporting.

Similarly, in the interview with **Ms. N** (**acid victim)**, she had been asked to narrate her story and she responded that, the uncle living next door harassed her in her early childhood; and she refuses their marriage proposal. However, once again she came to her father's house, and the offender continued to physically abuse her as she stated and I quote “*However, after few days I went to my fathers house again at school holidays and I saw them (accused), they were walking in front of me and saying, “I will change your face” I didn’t understand what they meant by that.”* In the night that the attack happened, **Ms. N** was sleeping in her room and she felt a burning sensation suddenly. The accused put acid on her face. **Ms. N** father decided to launch a police FIR (First Information Report); therefore, the police came and heard the entire case from **Ms. N**. The police assured her of justice and in the meantime **Ms. N** found out that one of her relatives had provided the offenders with an option to escape. However, the offenders denied having done anything, so they stayed put. Later the suspect in **Ms. N** case was arrested. **Ms. N** lives in a village and everyone knows her story. The powerful members[[19]](#footnote-19) of the village were pressuring her family to withdraw the case and make a settlement with the accused. Moreover, later on, the police were less supportive because they reportedly received bribes from the accused family; therefore, instead of giving the criminals punishment the police were also pressuring **Ms. N** family to arrive at a settlement with the accused. However, as **Ms. N** father helped her, she took the case to the court and two of the accused among three, got life imprisonment; however, one of the accused escaped the legal punishment by giving money to the police.

As mentioned in chapter 2, Schech et al. (2000) argue that because of cultural conservatism, women have certain restrictions, which renders them powerless. Conversely, men have more freedom or fewer restrictions imposed upon their lives, and are thus more powerful. However, this ultimately leads to the vicious cycle of a patriarchal society. In **Ms.N** case, the society (in the form of her local community and police force) attempted to subjugate her, which is a clear scenario of a patriarchal society, which blames women and protects men. In **Ms. N** case with her father help she was using her “agency” however, patriarchal beliefs coupled with ineffectiveness of the police delayed the procedure for her, as Zaman (1999:40) mentioned “anyone who lacks money or power is seen to suffer due to a lack of police protection”. However, in both Of the cases above it is evident that through support from male members of their family, they were able to achieve some justice.

A similar scenario was visible in colonial times, aforementioned in chapter 2: in colonial times, men made an ironic representation that obedient wives and good mothers were the empowered women in Indian society (Sinha 1995). This ironic representation of women has had long-term consequences; for example, the idealisation of women as mothers firmly located women in the domestic realm, where the only responsibilities bestowed upon them were domestic childcare and housework, while males were seen as the undisputed heads of the family (Sen 1999b). Between the 1820s and 1850s, Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj were among the few organizations in favor of female emancipation and the colonist movement. Elite urban men led these movements and challenged the traditional practices that subjugated females. As fathers and husbands, these males succeeded in helping a significant group of women (Joshi 1975; Borthwick 1984; Engels 1996). Nevertheless, women tend to earn their “freedom” at the cost of social harassment and ridicule (Karlekar 1991). On the basis of my participants’ experiences, it can be argued that the situation for some women is still the same, and in some cases women tend to report a crime only if they are able to receive active help from the male members of their family.

**Financial Crisis**

Besides gender stereotypical subordination, there are many other reasons limiting access for women in the justice system, “such as – poverty, economical, illiteracy and lack of official knowledge and awareness” (Marchiori, 2015: 6). Thus, all factors tend to affect women more than men in the Bangladeshi context. In the interview given by **Mrs T**, she describes the violence as taking place due to dowry demands from her husband's side. Not fulfilling all the demands of dowries, her husband tortures her physically and mentally and ultimately marries another woman. Tara agrees that her husband has no right legally for inflicting violence upon her. After intervention is carried out by the Women's Rights Support Organisation, her husband does not change his conduct and legal action has been taken for this reason. But due to lack of financial support, Mrs T cannot afford her case, and no one supports her financially. In the interview, when she asked if she considers this as violence and whether or not her husband has the right to inflict violence on her, she replied “*No, he hadn’t the right to me violence against me”.* I asked her *“Are you aware of the legal rights of women in Bangladesh? She replied, “Yes, I am aware of the legal rights of women in Bangladesh”.* Here Mrs T knew all the actions she could take and how to get support from the relevant organisation. She is aware of all the help available, from law enforcement centres to police and court procedures. She said she decided to go with legal actions and she has received counselling and the required information for filing a report against the violence. The financial support, which she has access to, is not sufficient for reporting a case of violence against her husband. The kind of expenditure the courts and the civil suits take is not available to Tara. Again, in this case, it has been seen that Tara has agreed on the support of the authorities of the organisation though it takes two months - and the authorities were happy to help her. However, the perpetrator was released from jail and got re-married. On the other side, Tara is still struggling without any financial support from anyone.

Similarly**, Mrs L** is a domestic violence victim who has experienced violence from her mother-in-law. Her husband is also involved in the case as he claims a motorcycle as a dowry. Mrs L thinks her husband has no right to torture her, as it is crime against her. The landlord and the neighbours have rescued her often. She has taken the case to the police. From the interview of Mrs. L, it appears that legal action was taken against the perpetrator. This is shown as a positive sign because women have clearly started reporting cases of violence. However in most of the cases, women have to face various constraints and as a result they are unable to support the case for long periods due to financial crisis. Therefore, it can be argued that financial could lead a woman to not reporting a crime.

I went to meet with Mr. **A,** who is the Assistant Legal Manager at the Acid Survivor Foundation. The manager of the acid survivor foundation told me certain bitter truths. Women who experienced cases like dowry claims, rape threats or rape, or any sexual assault - are mostly the victims of acid attacks. He also agreed on the fact the violence against women tended to start with women's dominance in the domestic environment, by other domestic members. He stated that the Bangladeshi government enforced anti-violence laws, but that women are less aware of these laws. The incidents have become so routine in the existing social structure of Bangladesh, that survivors often feel that violence perpetrated against them is not something that can be reported or taken seriously (Human Rights Watch, 2021). From the interviews it can be stated that women tend not to report against violence because their perpetrators pressure and harass them. Further, the victims are hampered by not receiving any financial as well as mental support from their family and friends. Similarly, The NGO “Naripokkho” a feminist organisation that has worked on research for Bangladeshi urban violence has revealed the lack of intention of women to file or report a complaint about the crimes inflicted upon them. The women are not reporting crimes due to societal stigma, cultural deprivation, and economic dependence (Naila Kabeer 1999 p. 21.). Besides this, corruption within the legislative body is another reason women are not getting justice. The next section will elaborately analyse the corruption within the legislative body.

## CORRUPTION WITHIN THE LEGISLATIVE BODY - (POLICE HARASSMENT)

**Introduction**

“I wanted to go to the police station to report my husband’s physical torture and verbal abuse. My brother, who is also compassionate, told me that the moment the police will be informed, they will contact my husband and will mention the charges lay. Then my husband will bribe them to be silenced and will increase his physical and verbal abuse”. (Zaman, 1999: 40).

The corruption in the legislative body is very high and the victim of violence has to face much trouble to getting justice in a timely manner[[20]](#footnote-20). In my data, it is evident that, although relevant laws were established, women were nevertheless reluctant to take legal action because of the corrupt legislative practices in Bangladesh. As one of my interviewees Ms. **T** mentioned, *“I didn’t go to the police because I was afraid that I am not going to get the justice I want and in the process my family will lose their reputation”.* However, a few have tried to seek justice and failed because of the dysfunctional legislative system, for example - Aman (1999:40) stated, in Bangladesh, numerous women experience assault and viciousness whilst in police care. In this chapter, I discuss the different aspects of the legislative body and its impact on women who have faced violence.

**Violence in police custody**

According to the police code of conduct if a female comes to a police officer, he/she has to show the highest courtesy in manner towards the victim. The police need to cooperate with a woman, who could bring complaint of either physical or sexual abuse to the fore. Therefore, if any women come to a police station, complaints regarding domestic violence or unlawful entry or verbal abuse or dowry violence or marital rape or threat or prostitution - the police must deal with their cases with trust and sensitivity. Moreover, the police are ordered to treat these complaints as valid, even though they may have happened in the domestic sphere. The police Code of Conduct also elaborates that they shall response immediately and give protection to every woman who suffers or is threatened with domestic violence (Hamid, P.8)[[21]](#footnote-21). Although complete protection of the victim is mentioned in the code of conduct, in the current scenario crimes against women are increasing and the conviction rate is decreasing. There are different reasons for this, which became apparent through my research on police unprofessionalism, and corruption that leads to violence against women (Huda, 2006).

**Violence in Police Custody[[22]](#footnote-22)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Complaint of Violence | 90,000 |
| Investigation Completed | 11,923 |
| Judicial Trial completed | 212 |
| Convicted | 223 |
| Died (due to torture in police custody) | 321 |
| The judicial trial is done | 3 |
| Charge sheet not submitted | - |
| Violence against women including rape | 5867 |

The table demonstrates that out of 90,000 complaints lodged, 11,923 cases succeeded in a complete investigation. This suggests a significant failure of the legal administrative body. Moreover, Haq (2012) and Bakker (2013) argued in recent times that the numbers of sexual violence incidents against women is increasing, however, due to increased rates of under reporting, it is difficult to determine the actual statistics (Banarjee, 2019). One reason for under reporting is that, as stated in a WHO study (Wahed and Bhuiya, 2007; 345-346) 53.3% and 79.3% of women in urban and rural area respectively, believe that under certain circumstances, a man has a right to beat his wife. Furthermore, when these cases go to the police, they try to stop the victim by stating that wife beating is normal behaviour in marriage (Banarjee, 2019).

**Victims aren’t reporting crimes**

Rivhard et al. (2005) demonstrate that victims of sexual or domestic violence are less likely to report a case to the police because, firstly, they believe the police are not trustworthy. Secondly, the victims fear that the police would not believe them. Thirdly, the victims sometimes receive life threats from the perpetrators. Lastly, fear of receiving shame and embarrassment from society. Despite legislation, these reasons cited in the early 2000s are echoed in my data collected in the 2020s. For example, one of the interviewees Mrs. **S** **(Executive director at Acid Survivor foundation)** stated

*“The major causes which are associated with for delaying legal procedure and punishment are: ignorance, inefficiencies, misconduct and lack of support from relevant duty bearers including law enforcement personnel, PPs, (Public prosecutors) court officials, community people etc.”*

Thus, the actions of police and other agencies can be a major challenge to enacting justice. This was alsoreflected among the victims as **Ms. T (domestic violence victim)** one of the participants stated in her interview "*I think there are many groups who are unfairly treated by the police. As the women are poor and helpless, they are treated unfairly"*. Another participant, Ms. **S**, was asked a few questions relating to her experience of partner violence, she explained that financial inequalities play a significant role in getting justice:

“*Police didn't respond to my FIR (First information report) I feel like if someone has money and power their cases are dealt quickly compare to us. Look I don't have any money or power my case didn't go anywhere. If money is provided then the cases work promptly. Yes, women are treated differently and these aspects are responsible for violence against women”.*

In one part of Ms. **S** interview, she claims that the police never responded to the report she filed. Though she claimed to have informed the police that, her husband poses serious life threats to her but the response was inaction. She further claims, that one of the police officers told her “*Hundreds of people like you come to the police station every day, we don’t have enough time to deal with you all’ go home and solve the problem with your husband*”. The story of Shima reveals just one single element, the unwillingness, and callousness of the administration to effectively tackle offenses of violence against women. This is a common narrative throughout the state, just the name changes every time.

In 2007 it was evident that 72.5% people were victims of corruption by the police (Suddle: 2006). Moreover, Chowdhury (2003) reported that more than 70% of households have to give bribe to the police to get action taken. Similarly, Rahman (2010) argued that in Bangladesh, public confidence in the police is associated with social hierarchy and economic dependence. Besides, according to a baseline public survey conducted by the UNDP (2007) the main obstacles to achieve justice in Bangladesh are bribery, negligence of duty and bad behaviour with less powerful citizens (Ray et al., 2019). This is quite prevalent from Ms. Tand Ms. S interviews as they were hesitant to go to the police because they are afraid that they will not get justice due to their lack of wealth. Additionally, they are considered lower in social hierarchy; therefore, instead of justice they will be harassed during the process. In this kind of situation it can be argued that women are suffering in silence and some are dying because they are hesitant or fail to go to the police station to report a crime.

In the light of Kabeer’s (2005: 13-14) empowerment framework, a person needs to be in a position to make choices about one’s own life, while disempowerment, on the other hand, means being denied those choices (Kabeer, 1999). In the case of Ms. T and Ms. S, both were in need of police protection as they were suffering physical violence, however, they were not making a purposive choice because they did not believe in the legal system. In the second dimension Kabeer (1999: 438 439) mentioned “Resources”, through which an individual can exercise agency. Again, Ms. T and Ms. S both wanted justice for themselves; however, they were not willing to make use of their agency to access the resources (in this case the police) because they thought the police would not help them to reach a desired outcome. This leads to Kabeer’s (cited in Alsop et al., 2006: 1) third dimension of empowerment: “achievements”, as a process through which “an individual or group can make purposive choices and transform these choices into desired actions and goods”. Therefore, it could be argued that in Bangladesh, some women, especially poor women, are not in a position to make a purposive choice about their life, therefore; the resources which they can access to achieve a goal is unreachable, this means they lack empowerment.

**Are the Police carrying out an honest investigation?**

Jahan et al. (1997) argued that most of the dowry or domestic or acid attack cases are committed in the secrecy of the women’s in-laws’ houses. In such circumstances there may be no direct witness or evidence to collect which might prove the crime. The fate of these cases fundamentally depends on an honest investigation from the police officer.[[23]](#footnote-23) For example, the majority of violence against women cases in Bangladesh law allows the police to arrest the accused without any warrant. However, in the majority of cases it is evident that the police seldom arrest the accused. In multiple instances the police have refused to arrest the criminals and failed to register a case bought by women or their family, blaming the victim to provocation of the incident (Jahan et al., 1997). Likewise, corruption, for example - taking bribes and manipulation of a case by the police has serious barriers for Bangladeshi women to achieve a favourable remedy for themselves (Carroll, 1985). Besides, in some cases no action has been taken for years, which leads to loss of valuable evidence in a crime. This failure of the police to investigate and take proper actions helps many offenders to go unpunished. Conversely, there are hardly any procedures present in Bangladesh through which the police can be investigated for failure to perform their legal duty. Even if the investigation method is mentioned in constitutional books, in reality political power and bribes allow the police to simply release the offender.

Several of the difficulties women faces are illustrated by my research interviewee **Ms. T**, **(the dowry violence victim**). When she was asked questions relating to her experience, her response was:

“*No, I don’t think he (Perpatrator) has the right to commit violence against me. I went to a women's rights organisation in 2010 and they assured me that they would support me in every step; however, because of my father, I didn't get any support. No, I am not aware of any legal rights or laws in Bangladesh. Yes, I went to the police but they didn't help me. I don't think many women are aware of the anti-violence laws”.*

Nevertheless, she later went to the police to launch a FIR (first information report), but she reported that the response from the police was, “*It’s a silly matter try to adjust with your husband”.* The police *refused* to help her when she received threatening warnings from the perpetrator. Her father being the chairman cared more about his reputation and prevented her from filing a case. Her mother supported her and eventually with the help from few influential people in the community, she launched a FIR. She admits that she has no knowledge about the existing legal rights, which again reflects the failure on the part of the state to spread awareness within women in general. She admits, since childhood she has witnessed that women keep violence shut within the four walls of their home, due to which it becomes almost an accepted fact of life.

Another participant from my research Ms. **M** was living a miserable life with her children as her husband used to beat her regularly. However, she never sought help from any judicial body, saying “*I used to take help from my neighbours during abuse, but I didn’t go to the police or law enforcement authorities, because to be honest what I have heard from families and neighbours police isn’t helpful at all”.* Therefore as Zaman (1999) stated, police in Bangladesh have often outright refused to file a first information report, a charge sheet or refused to conduct an investigation; especially, if the claims are related to domestic violence or the offender belong to an influential family. For example – in 26th April 2021 a woman named Musarrat Jahan was found hanging from a ceiling in a residential area of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Later it was discovered that she was the girlfriend of the managing director of the Basundhara city group, Sayem Sobhan; one of the influential families in Bangladesh. Much evidence came along, for example, phone conversations and pictures. The victim’s family (elder sister) filed a rape and murder case against Sayem Sobhan; however, up until the present day the accused has not been arrested and it is quite evident that this is due to the fact that he belongs to a influential family and has bribed the police[[24]](#footnote-24).

Hence, Rahman (2019) has argued that the prominent causes of corruption within the police community are linked with lack of accountability, discretionary power and influence from powerful families. Therefore, in Bangladesh, the term ‘police’ is associated with terror and ferocity (Haque, 2006). Furthermore, Luke (1974, 2005) through the lens of Dahl’s (1957) one-dimensional view describes power as “power over decision”; for example, everyone has the right to lead a life where they can make their own choices and therefore achieve their desired outcomes. However, if any situation prevents people from taking a decision about their own life, that indicates they are subject to an unequal power relationship. Here in Ms. S and Ms.B cases, the police hold the power and therefore they are using this power to discriminate against women; therefore, woman cannot access the relevant legislative body.

Rahman (2010) and Huda (2006) further argue that the impolite behaviour from the police creates a fear amongst the general population; therefore, they do not wish to cooperate with the police. The police appear to be reluctant to engage fairly during arrests, interrogation, and investigation (Rahman and Hossain, 2014). It is prominent practice in Bangladesh that police officers perform corruption by misusing their power, taking bribes, adopting misuse of resources and negligence of duty (Ahmad, 2005). This leads to more suffering for the victims because of this reputation it has been observed in many cases that witnesses have not come forward because no one wants to deal with the police. Moreover, the majority of victims feel it is better to suffer in silence rather than to report a crime. This is raising the number of domestic violence cases together with those of murder and acid crimes in Bangladesh. In the series of studies carried out by Kashem (2005), they argued that in general people in Bangladesh are dissatisfied with police work and 80 to 85% of Bangladeshi citizens rate the police’s work as inadequate. Furthermore, Zaman (1999) argues that the discriminatory attitude towards women starts from the day they were born and this leads to legitimate the violence against them in the name of culture and tradition, for example, one of my interviewee Ms. **N** mentioned in the interview and I quote “*Our culture always protects the men and blame women for everything. Women are treated differently then men in society”.* Schech and Haggis (2000: 16), in their framework of cultural domination observed that cultural beliefs and values “make violence feel right or at least not wrong” (Galtung, 1990: 291). In Ms. N case it is quite prevalent that society discriminates against women based on traditional cultural beliefs that leads a women to not getting justice in time.

Jahan (1983) argued that gender inequality and gender violence are embedded in every sphere of Bangladesh, be it in socio economic or political structures. Gender inequality is not only practiced, but demonstrates unequal power relations between sexes, which protects the patriarchal order. Therefore, although constitution guarantees equal protection under law, nevertheless because of the ineffectiveness of the police, this is not applied in reality. Rather it creates a subordinate position for women in society, therefore, it could be argued that enacting laws without understanding the patriarchal mind-set and impact of laws on victims; the crime is increasing rather than providing the required justice. Furthermore, Jahan (1994) describes women’s socio economic powerlessness and argues that ignorance of legal rights limits their chances to protection under law. She further argues that in many cases full implementation and enforcement of existing laws, proper support from the legal judicial body, excessive expense and the time-consuming process prevents many women - especially the poor ones - to take support from the criminal justice system, for example – one of the acid victims, the interviewee Ms. **S** went to the police with her father to file a report against her ex-husband, who threw acid on her. The police suggested and I quote *“don’t file a case just forgive your son in law, after all you have to think about your daughter? Who will marry her? Where will she go”?* However, with the help of her family Ms **S** pursued the case, but the process was shattering as her in-laws threatened her with court and she received no support but pressure to withdraw the case. However, after so many years of struggling Ms. S was eventually successful as the court gave life imprisonment to the criminals. However, it is only in very few cases that women are successful in punishing the criminals: either the criminals get bail or it is a long tiring process on the part of judicial administration that leads many women not to take help from the legal administration.Therefore, Chowdhury (2007) argues, although laws exist in Bangladesh, nevertheless, because of the ineffectiveness by the judicial body such laws have failed to punish the perpetrators. Consequently, these laws are nothing but an ornamental addition in the statute book. It is clear from my data that the situation has not improved for many women since Chowdhury made these observations.

Holy et al. (2008) have argued that social attitudes towards sexual violence puts pressure on the police that leads them to prioritise certain types of cases. This prioritisation makes many victims inclined to withdraw a case during a criminal justice process. One of my interviewees Mrs **F** (Deputy Police Commissioner, in the women’s violence investigation department) said –

“*There are other frustrating thing happens as well, for example; victims field a dowry violence case and we do the investigation and the perpetrator. However, when we are successful and arrest the perpetrator in the middle of an ongoing case wife (the victim) come and say she wants to withdrawal the case and release her husband. This is so frustrating because we give time and energy to a case and there is no result”.*

In these kinds of cases the patriarchal mindset and social pressure plays a vital role. Many women in Bangladesh believe their husband has the right to beat them, therefore, when they suffer extreme violence they come to the police, later, when the husband ask for forgiveness they withdraw the case. This puts extreme pressure on the police in Bangladesh. Having said that, corruption from the police also plays a significant role here as, sometimes the victim has been threatened by the perpetrator and made them withdraw a case. Therefore, it could be argued that the police need to investigate further down the line to find out the truth behind each case.

Women’slack of agency in the face of unjust legal practices is illustrated by **Ms. S (Rape victim)** who said in her interview with me –

“ *I didn’t go to police because I have seen people who go to police and didn’t get anything in return. The police harassed them. My neighbour in my colony; a woman whose husband beat her daily; she went to the police. Therefore police arrested him after one day he was released from the police station because he paid bribe. After his released he came back to home and beat his wife dangerously and broke her hand. After few days he divorced her. She went to the police again but didn’t get any justice. In fact the police said to her it’s her fault that her husband divorced her. This complicated situation in our judicial body made me not to go to the police again. In this country people like us who doesn’t have money, don’t get justice. In fact access to the judicial procedure is hard, for example, how will I go to court and run my case? I need lots of money to do that, who will give me money? This whole situation makes me afraid to go to the police”.*

In this example, it is clear that Ms. S explanation for not going to the police is shaped in terms of her neighbour’s previous poor experience. Hence, whatever the law says, some women do not have faith that they will be protected because they have witnessed not just the failure of justice for others but also the terrible consequences of even attempting to seek justice. Shapla also cites the limits of her financial capacity to follow through her case. In Kabeer’s (2005: 13 -14) framework of empowerment she discusses the “ability to make choices” about one’s own life. However, in Bangladesh women are reluctant to make life choices; therefore not using the resources available for them because they see the corruption in the legislative body. The victim also fears that if she goes to the police it will involve a handsome amount of money, which she will not be able to provide. Therefore, although the law is there, women aren’t accessing it. According to Banerjee, (2020), in the vast majority of the cases justice has been denied and when women go for justice in the legislative body, a significant number of them are pressured for revealing the case or compelled to drop the case (Banerjee, 2020: 3). Moreover, it is evident that the police are less keen on researching these cases and a large portion of them are debased and accept bribes from the accused.

Contradictorily, the officer **Md. A** downplays the facts of various abuses and the low levels of action taken by the police officers in support of the female victims. **The Assistant Commissioner** of Police told me about the nil dependency of the women victims who come to file a report. The officer stated that they take sensitive action depending on the nature of the cases to the victims. The police officer also discussed the matter in reference to the cases where the public often don’t trust police officers and their actions. While undertaking the interviews I summarised my participants’ experiences, suggesting that the “*police are not doing their jobs properly because of which women’s violence is increasing, also people are afraid to come to the police station because they think they might not get justice…"* The police officer replied,

"*Yes I agree general people sometimes don’t trust the police and women are also mistreated by police officers in the police station…but the police who are doing this kind of corruption are very few in number, I guess and if we heard of this kind of situation we take immediate action and if any police officer is found responsible for such a kind of crime he or she becomes suspended immediately from their job, you can’t blame a whole organisation for this…”*

The police officer admitted they were under a lot of pressure at work. Since the period of their early training, workload is increasing; there are entry fees and tougher competition for the job. So the connection of corruption to a police officer happens during the period of their joining the service while certain examinees have the connection to the local MPs and without even having the qualification of being a police officer, the examinees literally become officers. Therefore, as Islam (2010) suggests, briberies exist at different levels of police administration, moreover, recruitment and posting procedures’ are complicated in the police force because junior officers have to pay a large sum of money to the senior officers or local MPs. Bribes are lucrative not only among politicians, but also bureaucrats of the home ministry who also take bribes - and they are the final hurdle in Bangladesh in giving approval for police officers’ promotions (International Crisis Group, 2009).

The current scenario and clarification from an assistant police commissioner is similarly responsible for the post of a government servant – which creates doubt as to the capability of the current government in Bangladesh. If the corruption is happening under the eyes of the government, then it is a very dangerous matter that needs to be taken seriously. I asked the police officer if he receives pressure to commit corruption from the upper level and what needs to be done to improve the situation in the country. He explained his experience of handling such types of situations, for which he thinks society should be changed: the upper political level must be changed for the situation’s improvement. Without any stringent action and legislation, it is impossible to remove corruption from the country - from political people, or from police officers or other government employees who serve the public.

Bangladesh is currently out of line with other countries. For example, Harvey (1994) argued that several states in US have enacted mandatory arrest for domestic violence perpetrators if clear evidence exists. The failure to comply with this legislation policy leads the judicial department to take legal action against the police responsible. Moreover, if police fail to take reasonable action regarding the violence, the liability is then bestowed upon the state. Some legislation has narrowed the police community clause and put emphasis on early intervention of domestic violence cases. This mandatory arrest in women’s violence cases are regarded most effective in many parts of US. Under this, mandatory training and guidelines for the police to deal with violence against women is also mentioned. Under the same jurisdiction special laws have been introduced to provide special training for the police, which will help the police to understand the dynamics of violence against women, and also educating them about how the statutory law will be applied in practice. In Australia, the domestic violence crisis service incorporates volunteers and social workers with the police investigation. This coordinates support and provides victims with extensive support including assistance in obtaining protective orders and immediate shelter. Similarly, some states in Canada have developed the wife/partner assault protocol, which provides a detailed investigation step-by-step process for domestic violence cases, also detailing responsibility of the criminal justice system. In India, the national and state police academies carry out gender violence training programmes at all levels in the judicial administration and police have a mandatory duty to investigate every death that happens in a suspicious circumstances.[[25]](#footnote-25)

However, in following the protocol of these other countries, for Bangladesh to improve the violence victim’s situation, separate police training should be introduced and regularly monitored. This mandatory police training should provide a clear idea to the police officers of how to help a victim who has suffered violence, and how to collect proper physical evidence in rape or domestic violence cases. It should also mention the consequence of inappropriate behaviour by the police. However, having said that it is also important to state that in Bangladesh the quality of training currently received by the members of the law enforcement agency is poor and those at the lower level (e.g., constables) only receive six months’ basic training which isn’t enough. There is a major challenge in the Bangladeshi police community where the police officers have to pay a bribe if they want to be promoted. Although the constitution of Bangladesh has set up special cells under which women and child repression cases need to be investigated promptly, nevertheless, because of lack of accountability in the police coupled with corruption, this makes the initiative taken by the government an ornament without any effects.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The situation in Bangladesh remains a male centric country, where marriage is still considered everything for a woman; it is normalised for women to resist reporting a crime against their husbands or family members (Banarjee, 2019). For example one of the domestic violence interviewees for my research Ms. R said “*Initially I didn’t discuss my problem with police or anyone from judicial body or women’s right support organisations. I wanted to protect my “songsar” (family). I have silently tolerated all his physical and mental torture”*. Another interviewee of mine, Farida yasmin (Deputy Police Commissioner) stated “*In most of the dowry violence cases what happens is, women don’t come to us unless its too late, for example, we receive two cases this month where the victim is already dead or suffering in the hospital in a critical condition.”* Nevertheless, some people go to the police, however, they didn’t get the desired outcomes they wanted. Therefore, although the crime is increasing, the conviction rates of the criminals are decreasing in Bangladesh (Ahmad, 2005).Richard et al. (2005) have showed that the South African Law Commission criminal case research report states that the high conviction of criminal cases is a way of telling its citizens, how well a country’s criminal justice system is working. However, it is particularly important for a victim of violent crime to see that their attackers are convicted and punished. A legislative body that consistently fails to provide punishment to the criminal has little credibility; therefore, it creates a risk that the victims may give up on reporting a crime (Richard et al. 2005).

## BARRIERS IN THE COURTHOUSE

**Introduction**

“Limited resources, poor infrastructure and the limited number of trained judges and lawyers, among others, have had a negative effect on women’s capacity to seek redress through the judicial system. Despite constitutional guarantees with regard to the due process, the Special Rapporteur was informed that law enforcement agencies often fail to uphold the relevant legal standards when dealing with cases of violence against women” (Home Office, 2014: 19).[[27]](#footnote-27)

It is almost a decade since Bangladesh gained independence and was established as an independent nation on the world map. As a result, Bangladesh has introduced a number of laws to establish women’s’ rights and end violence against women from society, such as – dowry, rape, sexual harassment, acid attack, divorce, maintenance and so on. The judicial system has the strength to give more effective remedies to the victims, and capital punishment to the offender. Unfortunately, research shows that still many women face sexual abuse and violence in the society[[28]](#footnote-28) (Acid Survivor Foundation, n.d., p.13 – 14). In addition, the law-enforcing agencies are seen to bias against some particular groups. People who have political power and money seem to get justice more easily, but the majority of people in Bangladesh are poor and cannot get justice from the judicial body. On the same note, the UN human rights council (2014) argued that, many laws are implemented in Bangladesh but poor implementation and partiality by the legal and judicial body raises cases of violence against women.[[29]](#footnote-29) Moreover, Anderson (2003a) identified some of the barriers for victims to access the judicial procedures, which includes, non–transparency and delays in court procedures, corruption among law enforcing personals, negative attitudes to the poor (from lawyers, judges and police), lack of judicial independence and abuse of political authority undermines the fair hearing. In this chapter I will discuss the barriers faced by the victims in chronological order.

**Delaying the procedures**

In the year 2001 to 2021, it has been seen that the number of violence cases are increasing and the courts are unable to provide justice to such large numbers of cases (Krishnan 2015: p. 256) - and most of these crimes occur against children, women, and females of unidentified age. One of the biggest concerns of women violence cases in Bangladesh are that the cases remain in open investigation for years because of insufficient evidence. This is often a result of poor police work, public prosecutors’ misconduct, failure to secure witness statement timely manner. The constitution of Bangladesh states, a case should be disposed within a minimum of 60 to 180 days. However, in reality the cases go on for years. In a 2016 justice audit[[30]](#footnote-30) survey of one stop crisis centres, the course worker states that in a court house a case takes a minimum of 5 to 6 years - or in some cases the waiting is even longer. On the other hand an illegal settlement can be achieved within a matter of months. Therefore, it could be argued that because of the emotional toll combined with threats from the offender often forces the victim to resolve a case outside the court. Thus the remedy fails to reflect the harm that the victim has been through. My interviewee **Ms. T (Domestic violence victim)** stated in her interview*“the court process is long and I have to pay lots of money. My mother was helping me but it was hard for her to pay money for over a year. I was working in school and my salary was minimum and it was impossible for me to bear the cost. It was impossible to get a hearing from the court. As my husband also got money and he belongs to a rich and influential family he was able to manipulate the case by paying money to the lawyers. My case was hanging in the court for two years and I spent lots of money. However, I withdrew the case because I could see it was going nowhere”.*

Majumder (2019) argued that another big problem the courthouse recently faced which actively delayed a case is non–appearance of the witnesses including victims. In Bangladesh there is no witness protection law and no reliable access to safe shelters guaranteed before participating in a court procedure. So, it could be argued, participating in court procedures as a witness can be extremely dangerous. Additionally, the public prosecutors who run the cases on behalf of victims are not properly trained in criminal law, and often fail to contact witnesses or ensure safe travel for witnesses in the court. It can be said that the delay in the trial procedure causes violence on women in Bangladesh to rise. One of my interviewees Ms.**N (Acid victim)** stated in her interview with me **“***The culprits got life imprisonment, which I am happy about. They ruined my life and they got the punishment that is all I want. When my case was running in the court it took several years before the final decision came out. When I went to the court to give my testimony the culprit’s lawyer told me withdraw the case. They gave me threat and warnings”.* Throughout the legal procedure the survivors face pressure from the perpetrator or from their family members. Ms.**N** also mentions her family, together with her community - pressurise her to marry the person who threw acid on her.

Khan (2015) and Sheikh (2017) have argued that existing legal procedures in Bangladesh are elaborated, time consuming, expensive and often pressurise women to withdraw a case. Mrs **N (Advocate Of Supreme Court and senior director of Ain O Salish Kendra)** stated in her interview with me*“Our court doesn’t run in a systematic way. Most of the time hearing take ages because the witness or the victim family fail to come to the court on time. Our judges and magistrates sometimes delay the case by saying they have lots of cases to review. The hearing process can sometime be very long and frustrating. Our constitution ensures equal rights and fair trail for everyone; however, the judiciary can’t always uphold equal rights because of corruption and institutional capacities”.*

Therefore, because of these complexities, victims are forced to take an outside court settlement (Sourav, 2017). When a perpetrator sees justice is not served and he is free from the trial he may go on to commit the crime again. This delay in the trial procedure has in fact given him encouragement to commit the crime again[[31]](#footnote-31). The delay in the trial’s procedure is intentional in the majority of cases; so that the perpetrator can easily move freely. This has been reflected through my interview process with the participants, where Ms. **M (domestic Violence victim)** mentioned, *“I didn’t go for any legal procedure, however, I have heard that court procedures can take a long time”.* A lawyer from Bangladesh National Lawyers association mentioned that as the trial goes on, because of the lengthy process the victim’s family are unable to keep moving forward with the case. Moreover, witnesses and evidence can drop out over time; therefore, it is not wrong to say, “Justice delayed is justice denied” (Majumder, 2019: 45). On the same note, Mr. A **(Assistant legal manager at Acid Survivor foundation)** mentioned in his interview, *“Moreover, when a case goes on trial a witness doesn’t want to come to testify because the police threatens them. Police takes money from the accused and tries to withdraw the case from the court. In these circumstances who will come to testify before the court? You see everyone has family and children; they don’t want to risk it. It is also seen judges or magistrates take bribe from the accused and don’t send a letter to the witness to testify before court. If the witness didn’t get the letter on time they can’t come to testify. Therefore, because of this reason a case got delayed and the accused got bail from the court. When accused got bail from the court they can threaten the victim and their family to withdraw the case. This is happening - a criminal got bail from high court on a non–boilable case and threatens the victim’s family. Moreover, it is also happening that after getting bail from court the criminal kills the victim or throws acid on her face. Still there is no justice. There is no regularity in our judicial system; courts are dealing with the cases. Police are corrupted and witnesses don’t come on time. All these factors are related in delaying a case, which makes the victims and their family frustrated”.*

Luke (1974, 2005) - through the lens of Dahl’s (1957) one-dimensional view - describes power as “power over decision”; for example, everyone has the right to lead a life where they can make their own choices and therefore achieve their desired outcomes. However, if any situation prevents people from taking a decision about their own life, that indicates they are subject to an unequal power relationship. In the above quotes presented from my interviewees, it is evident that, although they want justice; however, in the judicial administration lawyers, judges, police and public prosecutors holds the ultimate power; therefore, cases are deliberately delayed and justice delayed is justice denied

**Not trusting the judicial procedure**

Hussain (2016) and Lonsway (2001) have stated that in Bangladesh many women who face sexual assault or domestic violence are scared to go to the police station because they fear social judgment. The parents of a victim also encouraged their daughter to adjust to an abusive marriage because divorce is considered a social stigma. Majumder (2019:49) has argued that Bangladesh has a conviction rate of 10%, which is terribly low compared to many developing countries. This is one of the main reasons that make people mistrustful of the judiciary system. Therefore, a question arises, why has the low conviction rate arisen in Bangladesh? Majumder (2019) suggest that in general, people have a lack of trust in the judiciary system, and corruption coupled with the inefficient government officials; all play a role in the low conviction rate. This leads an accused to getting bail in the court; which puts the victim under risk of further threats. Therefore, victims don’t believe that they will get justice in the court, but rather that the problem will be emphasised. However, few victims go to the court but earn justice after many years of struggle and hardship. As, Ms. **S (Acid Victim)** stated in her interview with me *“My family and me we went through so much trouble just to get through the case. The culprit was arrested and I filed a case against him and I got support from my family. The public persecutor was running my case and even in the court my in laws came and threat me. They told me to withdraw the case. I didn’t go to the police because I know they are not going to help me. I just silently endure all the pain while the case was running on the court. Ultimately after so many years struggle I win as the culprit received life imprisonment”.*

Furthermore, Mohila Parishad (2016) and Mia (2013) state that in the majority of sexual violence cases the court requires medical evidence from the victim. The police are responsible for providing the evidence to the lawyers; who later can represent them in the courthouse. However, in many cases it is evident that police or the medical officers have taken bribes from the accused party and provided false evidence. Therefore, in some circumstances lawyers, judges or the public prosecutor take money and fabricate a case in court. This results in the victim losing the case or making a settlement outside the court. This situation leads a victim and her family not to trust the judicial body, as mentioned by one of my interviewees Ms. **R (domestic violence victim)** who stated in her interview *“I went to the police but I didn’t get any help. Therefore, I am afraid to go to the police now. I went to the elder person of our colony (area). She is a reputed person and everyone obey her I told her my problems. Therefore, she suggested me to have patience and try to manage with my husband. She further suggested me that, don’t go to the judicial body its better you deal with your problems outside court”.*

It is observed that in certain cases when the victim approached the judicial system for help, they faced brutality by the law enforcement agencies. The lawyer asked inappropriate question in the court, which made the victim uncomfortable. There have been 32 deaths up until present in police custody - from January to June 2021 -where the reason for this death is not provided. The court has not been able to provide any justification or punishment to the police for custodial death of these people. This has created a fear among victims to *not* go to court (Khisa et al., 2017, p.3-4).Gaventa et al. (2008) argue that challenging unequal power relationships, it is important to identify who is participating in the decision-making processes. In the case of Ms. A and Ms. S it is evident that police have the right to take the ultimate decision of investigating a case, however, as the police are misusing their power, both of the victims are afraid to go to the police because they know they will not get the justice they want and it may backfire on them.

**Corruption and threat in the courthouse**

Majumder (2019:50) has argued that another great evil haunting the lower courts and prosecution system in Bangladesh is corruption. Zafarullah et al. (2001), the judiciary and police have both considered the most corrupted department in Bangladesh. Bribery is considered the most damaging factor of corruption and nothing can be done without bribery. Pahis (2009) has argued that judicial corruption could be understood as selling and purchasing the legal decision. Judicial bribery occurs when existent parties or lawyers purchase a decision and judges sell it to them. This has been observed in the Bangladeshi judiciary, where a powerful or influential person in society wins a case or gets bail by giving a bribe, even if he’s the one who wronged a woman. My interviewee has mentioned this; Shapla **(rape victim)** said in her interview “*In this country people like us who don’t have money, don’t get justice. In fact access to the judicial procedure is hard, for example, how will I go to court and run my case? I need lots of money to do that, who will give me money? This whole situation makes me afraid to go to the police or the judicial body”.* In a survey (Majumder, 2019:50) it was apparent that very few households (6%) and courts (10%) agree that the judiciary is free from corruption. This has established the fact that the majority of people believe corruption exists in every part of the judicial infrastructure.

According to Zafarullah et al. (2001), irregular procedures, transparency of a case, and no accountability on the part of government officials makes the case processing slow and this all links back to corruption. How? Because judges and public prosecutors have taken bribes from the accused and fabricated the evidence, which makes irregular procedures and damages the transparency of a case. In Bangladesh judges, police and public prosecutors hold the ultimate power based on their position, therefore, they don’t have any accountability towards anyone except high political officials.My interviewee **Mr A (Assistant legal manager at Acid Survivor foundation)** mentioned in his interview that they took several cases of acid victims to the public prosecutors to run the cases in court, however, he mentioned and I quote “*In Bangladesh the ruling government appoints the public prosecutor and they basically act like political goons. As the governing party appoints them they think they are the kings and don’t care about anybody else. Unlike foreign countries Bangladesh doesn’t have any independent mechanism to appoint a PP, therefore an insufficient person can become PP by using his political connections. The majority of public prosecutors want to earn quick extra money and how they will do it? Corruption”.* Therefore, it could be argued the poor and vulnerable suffer the most, as they do not have the means to run a case. Thus, public prosecutors take money from the accused party and lose a case in the courthouse intentionally. However, as mentioned in the earlier chapter even if the victim’s family has money, they try to bury the case because of social reputation and stigmatisation.

Corruption and threat in the courthouse could be linked back to Luke’s theory (1974, 2005) of the one-dimensional view, which describes power as “power over decision”; for example, everyone has the right to lead a life where they can make their own choices and therefore achieve their desired outcomes. However, if any situation prevents people from taking a decision about their own life, that indicates they are subject to an unequal power relationship. Here it is evident that the victim or the NGO worker cannot achieve their desired outcome because of the unequal power structure in society. The higher authorities hold the ultimate power; therefore, they can manipulate a case in their favour.

Moreover, Zafarullah et al. (2001) further mentioned negligence by public sector employees is another form of corruption in Bangladesh. The negligence among the judicial body is quite prevalent, which adds to the suffering of people. There is social hierarchy in the court system in Bangladesh, where judges hold the most power then chronologically lawyers, public persecutors and the police. They abuse their power by neglecting a case, which results in suffering to the people. Zafarullah et al. (2001) further argue that the overall quality of judicial administration has deteriorated. They do not have any morals and ethical values.Similarly**, Mr. A (Assistant legal manager at Acid Survivor foundation)** mentioned in his interview with me *“The prosecutor has an important role to pay in a case and they deliberately manipulate witnesses and sometimes don’t proceed with the important documents. All these things they do to make money and they don’t have anyone to hold them accountable for their actions. Most of this corruption is happening in women’s violence cases because government has launched special speedy tribunal in women’s violence case and public prosecutors are dealing with these cases. When a case goes to trial the public persecutor contacts the accused and take money from them. Then they deliberately delay a case by not submitting the papers or submitting false or insufficient papers. As a penal lawyer from ASF we face this challenges on regular bases. Sometimes in women’s violence cases a doctor needs to testify before judges but they can’t on time because the Public persecutor delays a case”.*

Islam (2010) has argued that in recent years, politically motivated judicial appointments have increased; therefore, there is no accountability on the judge or lawyer’s part. The higher-up officials and influential political persons are responsible for judicial officials’ promotions and transfers. Therefore, they have to listen to the politicians who are working for their own benefits as they have taken bribes from an influential. This leads the judges and lawyers to take the bribe as well. According to the Transparency International Bangladesh, 2010 survey, the Bangladeshi law enforcement agency was declared the second most corrupted sector in Bangladesh, for example - 79.6% of households who have received support from the law enforcement agency were subject to corruption and harassment. The corruption rate was higher in rural areas compared to urban areas (84.4% v/s 73.1%) (Nawaz, 2012: 6). Similarly, **Dr. A (Director - Nation centre of gender-based violence, Ministry Of Women and Child Affairs)** stated in the interview with me *“Laws are ineffective because our legislative body is corrupted. Not all are corrupted but most of them are because they want money, if you can’t give them money then they will not work. Most of these officials be it police officer or lawyer their children study abroad; they have to send them lots of money, so they don’t have any option other then corruption I guess. Some of them have to buy expensive jewellery for their wives (laughter) so they stole money from common people and delay a case. So it is not just making laws; we have to make sure our legislative body is corruption free”.*

**The non-governmental institution and the courthouse**

The NGO tries to address the issue where due to lack of financial support women are not provided a proper justice path; and as a result, women are forced to live with their perpetrator even after filing the case (Khisa et al., 2017). As per the BNWLA, the NGO is focused on the creation of equal opportunity for every woman and child in Bangladesh. The focus is to promote the rights and the women's status, as a lawyer alongside fighting for access to justice. Under this the NGO fight for the deprived children and women in Bangladesh. BNWLA are working with the victim to deliver justice to the victim as quick as possible (Ali and Ibrahim, 2020, Pg. 1). Therefore it could argued, they are successful to some extent as confirmed in my interview with Ms. **T** who stated “*Yes. I talked with the women’s rights support organisation. They called my husband and forbade him to violate me. They warned him. If he again do it. So, legal actions will be taken”.*

As per the Acid Survivor Foundation, there have been 3,422 incidences of reported cases of occurrence where violence against women has happened by throwing acid on them. The victims of these acid attacks number 3,802, out of this 2,781 are adopted, and out of them, 10,203 are still in Hospital[[32]](#footnote-32). The NGO has received support from UK Aids, UNICEF, Interterm, and the "ManusherJonno" Foundation for delivering justice to the victims, but the success rate is very low in most of the cases because justice has been denied. The organisation is working for delivering justice and as the majority of the victims are not able to stand for themselves in court, therefore, the organisation plays a crucial role in providing completely free legal services that are going to be benefiting more than 700 victims of acid attacks annually for representation in court when justice has been delayed (Sultana, 2018, Pg. 25). From the interview of Ms. **N**, it can be said that when she was faced with the trauma of the acid attack, she has suffered mental and physical pain. 75% of her body has been damaged and it can be said that hospitals like ASF play a crucial role. The doctors and nurses have helped her to recover and to mentally prepare her for the future. When asked did she have justice, she said that village people and police have not helped her a lot and were forcing her not to lodge a case. The offenders were arrested when the NGO pressurised the court for justice. She received no support from her family as they were also pressuring her to drop the case.

The interview and the understanding of the article showed that even though the victim knows about their right, the judicial system has denied them justice and tried to delay their case as much as possible. This suggests that victims always require the support of women’s organisations for representing themselves in the judicial system. As per Khanikar, (2018), the judicial process does not work for supporting the justice for the victim; in most of the cases justice is denied. Initiative has been taken by the NGO and other public campaigns, which were able to address the issue of justice denied. Affluent people also joined the campaign for putting pressure on providing justice (Khanikar, 2018, pg. 68).

Anderson (2003b: 2) stated that access to justice needs more then a case to present in front of the court; it indicated a process where the right of a person is translated into reality. Thus access of justice is associated with fair hearing and effective remedy for the victim.However, because of the corruption in the judicial system many victims have suffered unimaginable pain and many have even died. However corruption is not only visible in the judicial body as Hasle (2003) argued - in many cases it is evident that pressures from the powerful perpetrators or their allies are bestowed upon not only victims but also on their legal professionals. In a 2016[[33]](#footnote-33) justice audit carried out on legal professionals, over half of the public prosecutors, magistrates and judges mentioned they fear for their life safety. The higher authority, for example – people from government officials sometimes put pressure on the judicial body to get their work done. The non-government organisation is trying to help women in Bangladesh; however, if the root of corruption doesn’t get eradicated then it will be hard for women to get justice.

Holy et al. (2008), have argued that social attitudes towards sexual violence, puts pressure on the police that leads them to prioritise certain types of cases. This prioritisation makes many victims withdraw a case during a criminal justice process. One of my interviewees Mrs. **F** (Deputy Police Commissioner, women’s violence investigation department) said – “*There are other frustrating things that happen as well, for example; victims field a dowry violence case and we do the investigation and the perpetrator. However, when we are successful and arrest the perpetrator in the middle of an ongoing case, the wife (the victim) comes and says she wants to withdraw the case and release her husband. This is so frustrating because we give time and energy to a case and there is no result”.* In this kind of case, patriarchal mindset and social pressure plays a vital role. Many women in Bangladesh believe their husband has the right to beat them, therefore, when they suffer extreme violence they come to the police, later, when the husband ask for forgiveness they withdraw their case. This puts extreme pressure on the police in Bangladesh. Having said that, corruption from the police also plays a significant role here as, sometimes the victim is threatened by the perpetrator and made them withdraw their case. Therefore, it could be argued that the police need to investigate further down the line to find out the real reasons behind these instances.

**Ms. S (Rape victim)** said in her interview with me - “ *I didn’t go to police because I have seen people who go to police and didn’t get anything in return. The police harassed them. My neighbour in my colony; a woman whose husband beat her daily; she went to the police. Therefore police arrested him after one day he was released from the police station because he paid bribe. After his release he came back home and beat his wife dangerously and broke her hand. After a few days he divorced her. She went to the police again but didn’t get any justice. In fact the police said to her it’s her fault that her husband divorced her. This complicated situation in our judicial body made me not to go to the police again. In this country people like us who don’t have money, don’t get justice. In fact access to the judicial procedure is hard, for example, how will I go to court and run my case? I need lots of money to do that, who will give me money? This whole situation makes me afraid to go to the police”.* Similarly, from the interview of Mrs, **N (Advocate of supreme court and senior advocate of Ain O salish Kendra)** it is evident that, police are less keen on researching these cases and a large portion of them are debased and have accepted bribes from the offender. According to Banerjee, (2020), in the vast majority of the cases justice has been denied and when women go for justice in the legislative body a significant number of them were pressured for revealing the case or compelled to drop the case (Banerjee, 2020: 3).

Contradictorily, **the Assistant Commissioner** Of Police told me about the nil pendency to the women victims who come to file a report. The officer stated that they take sensitive attention depending on the nature of the cases to the victims. While taking the interviews I told the police officer, many victims mentioned “*police are not doing their jobs properly because of which women violence is increasing also people are afraid to come in the police station because they think they might not get justice…"* The police officer said they face obstacles while working and stated that since the period of their early training, the work is much harder and they have to pass many examinations, there are entry fees and tougher competition. So the connection of corruption to a police officer happens during the period of their joining the service while certain examinees have a connection to local MPs and without even having the quality of being a police officer the examinee is able to become an officer. Therefore, according to Islam (2010), briberies exist in different level of police administration, moreover, recruitment and posting procedures are complicated in the police force as the junior officers have to pay a large sum of money to the senior officers or local MPs. Bribes are lucrative not only among politicians, also bureaucrats of the home ministry also take bribes and as previously stated, they are the final hurdle for police officers to gain approval for promotion or posting (International Crisis Group, 2009).

The current scenario and clarification from an assistant police commissioner is similarly responsible for the post of a government servant, and clearly this creates doubt in the reliability of the government in Bangladesh. If corruption is happening under the eyes of the government then this is a very dangerous matter that needs to be taken care of seriously. I asked the police officer if he receives pressure to commit corruption from the upper level? And what needs to be done to improve the situation of the country? He explained his experience of handling such types of situations, and agreed that society should be changed. The upper political level must be changed for the situation’s improvement, but again this is subject to individual agreement. Without any stringent action and legislation is it possible to remove the corruption from the country - from the political persons or from the police officers or other government employees who serve the public.

Harvey (1994) has argued that several states in the US have enacted mandatory arrest for domestic violence perpetrators if clear evidence exists. The failure to comply with this legislation policy leads the judicial department to take legal action against the police responsible. Moreover, if police fail to take reasonable action regarding the violence, the liability is then bestowed upon the state. Some legislation has narrowed the police community clause and put emphasis on early intervention of domestic violence cases. This mandatory arrest in women’s violence cases is regarded as most effective in many parts of the US. Under this, mandatory training and guidelines for the police to deal with violence against women is also mentioned. Under the same jurisdiction special laws were introduced to provide training for the police, which will help the police to understand the dynamics of women’s violence and also educate them about how the statutory law will be applied in practice. Nevertheless, the domestic violence crisis service in Australia incorporates volunteers and social workers with the police investigation. This coordinated support provides victims with extensive support including assistance in obtaining protective orders and immediate shelter. Similarly, some states in Canada have developed the wife/partner assault protocol, which provides a detailed investigation step-by-step process for the domestic violence cases and also details responsibility of the criminal justice system. In India, the national and state police academies carry out gender violence training programmes at all levels in the judicial administration and police have a mandatory duty to investigate every death that happens in suspicious circumstances[[34]](#footnote-34).

In following the guidance of different countries, it is clear that to improve the violence victim’s situation in Bangladesh, separate police training should be introduced and regularly monitored. This mandatory police training should provide clear guidelines to the police officers in how to help a victim who has suffered violence. It should note how to collect proper physical evidence in rape or domestic violence cases. It should also mention the consequence of inappropriate behaviour by the police. However, having said that it is also important to say in Bangladesh the quality of training received by the members of law enforcement agency is poor and at the lower level (e.g., constables) who only receive six months basic training, which is not sufficient for them. In the Bangladeshi police community police officers have to pay a bribe if they want a promotion. Although the constitution of Bangladesh has set up special cells under which women and child repression cases need to be investigated promptly, nevertheless, because of no accountability in the police coupled with corruption makes the initiative taken by the government appear to be an ornament without any effects[[35]](#footnote-35).

This is the situation in Bangladesh now, a male-centric country, where marriage is considered everything for a woman; it is normalised for them to resist reporting a crime against their husbands or family members (Banarjee, 2019). Another interviewee of mine Mrs. F (Deputy Police Commissioner) stated “*In most of the dowry violence cases what happen is, women didn’t come to us unless its too late, for example, we receive two cases this month where the victim is already dead or suffering in the hospital in a critical condition.”* Therefore, although crime is increasing the conviction rate of the criminals is decreasing in Bangladesh (Ahmad, 2005).Richard et al. 2005 observe that the South African Law Commission criminal case research report states that, the high conviction of criminal cases is a way to tell its citizens, how well a country’s criminal justice system is working. However, it is particularly important for a victim of violent crime to see that their attackers are convicted and punished. A legislative body that consistently fails to provide punishment to the criminal has little credibility; therefore, it creates a risk that the victims may give up or fail to report a crime (Richard et al. 2005).

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

It has become evident that violence against women in South Asia is a common occurrence; however, the majority of women did not speak about the violence they face because of the cultural shame attached to it. In South Asia women suffer multiple forms of violence, such as, domestic, acid attack, sexual harassment, dowry violence etc. These different forms of violence put women’s lives at great risk; therefore, it is evident that acknowledging all the factors, Bangladeshi government needs to introduce different laws to protect women. The common law, which is still followed in Bangladesh today, was established in the colonial era. However, the ineffectiveness of such laws in the colonial era has later led to many female social workers standing up to fight for their own rights. Indeed, the early women’s movements in India failed to secure the rights of women. In contemporary Bangladesh, women are neither empowered nor are they receiving justice under current laws People have misinterpreted the cultural and religious beliefs over time to protect their own needs, which has only served to make women more vulnerable day by day. It is evident that although the law was indeed established, women are reluctant to stand up for themselves because of the endemic corrupt legislative practices in Bangladesh. However, a few women have stood up for justice - and failed, because of the dysfunctional judicial system - not to forget the power held over them by men, who still think women should behave in a certain way. If women fail to behave according to prescribed norms set by society, then it is believed they should be punished. This stereotypical thinking still leads many women in Bangladesh to not using their own decision-making power, and even if they do they fear their case might be treated insensitively, and that they might be humiliated rather than helped.

During analysis of the interviews I have realised that Bangladeshi women resist filing a case. One of my interviewees experienced violence from her husband who is addicted to taking drugs and involved in betting. She has been tortured badly since early in her marriage and the husband often scares and threatens her. But she didn’t discuss the problem with anyone and has never gone to the police or any judicial body. She has no idea of protecting herself or taking certain action for the sake of protection although she reports that she is aware of women’s legal rights in Bangladesh. The fear of becoming a social outcast as well as pressure from the family has stopped her reporting the case. She claims that her neighbours saw the physical torture she was going through; nevertheless, she has not received help from the family and neighbours rather the community pursued her saying she is women and she have to be obedient towards her husband. This represents the everyday phenomenon from Bangladeshi women who suffer violence in silence. They didn’t go to the legislative body to ask for help because most of them are scared of their social reputation or they wanted to stay with their husband even if the husband hurt them occasionally. Nevertheless, the data shows that these women are indeed making choices but in fear, under threat and conscious of their subordination. It is not just police that have power over these women, but all men and patriarchal institutes have power over these women.

However, the police are the most important wing of the Bangladeshi legislative body. The fate of a case fundamentally depends on the honest investigation from the police officer, for example – the majority of women’s violence cases in Bangladesh laws allow police to arrest the accused without any warrant. However, in the majority of cases it is evident that police seldom arrest the accused. In multiple instances police refused to arrest the criminals and failed to register a case brought by women or their family, and blamed the victim in provocation of the incident. Another biggest concern of women’s violence cases in Bangladesh are that cases remains in open investigation for years because of insufficient evidence. This is often a result of poor police work, public prosecutors’ misconducts, and failure to secure witness statements in a timely manner.

The participants of my research discussed their suffering with the legislative body. One of the participants mentioned that she fought for a long time to get justice; however, her case was in the court for a long time. At the beginning when she went to file a first information report with the police; they suggested she adjust things with her husband. After many years’ struggle and with the help from her mother she finally filed a case but didn’t get the desired outcome. The case was running in a court for a long time; therefore, she withdrew the case because she didn’t have enough money to run a case. There are many other reasons, for example - corruption in the judiciary, delaying a trial procedure, no accountability of the legislative officers - lead to low conviction rate in Bangladesh. This makes the perpetrator think they can do whatever they want and this is exactly what is happening in today’s Bangladesh. Coupled with corruption patriarchy plays a vital role for women subordination; as my research data concluded that women are making choices to go seek help from the legislative body; however, in fear, under threat and conscious of their subordination. It is not just police that have power over these women, but all men and patriarchal institutes have power over these women. The crime rate is increasing and people don’t trust the judicial administration. If the situation stays like this then many women will face violence in future.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that consulting with the judicial, legislative and NGO organizations would enact two new laws, such as, witness and victim protection laws. These should be introduced and the government must hold the police accountable for their act under these laws. It is important the victims or witnesses do not have to live in any fear.

It is recommended that there is a need to focus on the application of laws, as Bangladesh already has strong laws protecting women, but their application is weak. For stronger application of law, there is a need to establish factual circumstances based on objective reliability.

Improve access of services for the victims by providing safe shelter, financial support housing, legal assistance and mental health services.

Implement on going campaigns so the majority of people in Bangladesh are aware of the anti violence laws and the support available for them.

Increasing the number of civil servants in the judicial system is recommended, it have been seen that people in the judicial system are so overburdened with the increasing cases, that they are unable to give sufficient time to each one. Due to pressure from seniors and politicians to reduce the cases they often try to not record the cases of the victim. If the number of civil servants in judiciary as well as police force will be increased quick delivery of justice will also be possible. Moreover, ensure proper training to the judicial body so they can serve the victims more efficiently.

The speedy trial court is to be formed for quick delivery of justice. It has been seen that victims of violence have to wait for long years to get justice and during this time, their perpetrators are free to roam and commit crime again. In order to protect women from violence there should be speedy trials formed.

It is recommended to increase the salary of the judicial system so that people employed do not get tempted to become involved in corruption. Due to low salaries, people are forced to take bribes in order to give verdicts against the victim. This will also help in bringing back the trust of people on the judicial system. This will also increase the motivation of the people to work in a ethical manner and deliver justice quickly.

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**Appendix (Sample Interviews)**

**Questionnaires for Women, who suffered from Violence**

**Background**

Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself? (Where are you from? Where did you grow up?)

*I am Mrs. Momtaz Begum, age 25 years. I live in DarusSalam Society, Mirpur, Dhaka. Parmanent address is Village- Kalma, P.o- Dahuri, P.S- Lalmohon, Dist- Vhola. I have grown up in Bhola District.*

**Relationship: Psychological and Physical Violence**

Can you describe the violation that you have experienced?

*My husband doesn’t earn well. He spends the earning in betting and taking drug. I have to live helpless with my children. I always tell my husband to abandon his bad habit and to earn well. But instead of this he tortured me. As well as he married another women behind me. After his new marriage he started to torture me very badly. Now he doesn’t take any care of me. Sometimes he comes to me. But If I tell him anything he tortures me badly.*

Do you know the perpetrator? If yes, what kind of relationship do you have with the perpetrator/s?

*Yes. I know the perpetrator. I came to know through our marriage. Our relationship is husband and wife. We first met by marriage. He is a driver. Yes, he scared and made threats me sometimes. Yes, he talked down to me. I couldn’t meet with anyone while he tortured me. But after that I could meet. No, he didn’t isolate me. I was happy till 5/6 months after the marriage. After that the perpetrator started the problem. It continued for the last four years. No, this has never improved. It has had a great effect on my physical well-being. He had hit me here and there. He broke the bone of my jaw. He hit me by iron rod, stick etc. Then my body becomes sore. Yes it has affected me feelings of myself. I become senseless.*

**Perceptions on Own Experiences**

Do you think he had the right to use violence against you?

*No. I don’t think he had the right to use violence against me. But he had the right to overrule me when I was wrong.*

Do you think that what he did to you was a crime? Did you know it is a crime?

*Yes. I think that what he did to me was a crime. Yes. I know it is a crime.*

**Responses to Own Experiences**

How did you deal with these things that happened?

*I started Crying while he tortured me. My neighbor came to save me. I told the matter to my family.*

Did you feel there was anything you could do to stop it or to protect yourself?

*I think I have nothing to do to stop it or to protect myself.*

**Support**

Have you ever discussed your problems with police or anyone from judicial body or women right support organizations? How did they respond?

*No, I have never discussed my problems with police or anyone from judicial body or women right support organizations.*

Are you aware of the legal rights of women in Bangladesh?

*Yes, I am aware of the legal rights of women in Bangladesh.*

As far as you know, what are the legal options that you can take to address the abuse or violence that you experienced? Are you informed of the legal processes you may undertake?

*The legal operation that I can take to address the abuse that I experienced is firstly I can try to solve the problem with the local judge. Then I can go to the law enforcement agent. Finally, they can take steps to make a case file in the court. Yes I was informed of the legal process I may undertake.*

*I made decisions to be self-reliant, to educate my children. I didn’t think about the filing case.*

**Effectiveness of the Legal and Judicial Body (Accessibility)**

What results did you get from your actions? How did the relevant authorities (police, lawyers)?

Respond to your actions? Do you have to push the authorities to get your work done?

*I used to take help from my neighbors during abuse. But I didn’t go to the police or law enforcement authorities because to be honest, What I have heard from families and neighbors police isn’t helpful at all.*

Was there more that you would have liked them to do? What sort of things would have helped?

*No, there was nothing to do from my family or neighbors. They saved me several times from being abused.*

How effective do you think the courts are in dealing with cases promptly?

*I didn’t go for any legal procedure, however, I have heard that court procedures can take long time.*

**Perceptions on Violence**

Do you think this happens to other women?

*Yes I think this may happen to other women.*

Do you think violence against women is common? If yes, Why?

*Yes, I think violence against women is common. Because they are poor and helpless.*

Do women accept violence? If yes, Why? How do women think about violence against women?

*No, women don’t accept violence. Women think that every woman can be happy in their family and be able to avoid violence with their rights.*

**Culture and Religion**

Are women treated differently? Do you think cultural, traditional or religious values are responsible for violence against women?

*Yes, women are treated differently. Our cultural, traditional & religious values are responsible for violence against women.*

Looking back at your situation, what advice would you give another woman who has just started to have these sorts of problems with her husband?

*Yes I advice the women who has just started to have these sorts of problems with her husband that they should be aware about their rights of law. One woman should come forward in other women’s danger and strike against any kind of violence.*

**Name: Mrs. Momtaz Begum**

**Profession: Housewife**

**Address: 25, DarusSalam Society, Mirpur, Dhaka.**

**Phone Number:**

**Email Address:**

**Date:**

**Animesh Chandra Sarkar (Assistant legal manager at Acid Survivor foundation)**

What kind of investigations or cases do you handle? What kind of services do you provide?

I have been working with Acid Survivor foundation for few years. I work in the legal department and I do the entire correspondent with the lawyer on behalf of the victim.

According to you what are the most common forms of violence against women? What do you think is the reason behind violence against women?

I work in an Acid survivor foundation, where I mostly received cases of acid violence victims. Nevertheless, I want to mention that in my past experience in working with different other NGOs I have seen that women suffer, rape, dowry violence, sexual assault etc.

The root of violence against women can be traced in our society, which tends to keep women dominated. To be honest, if you see the pattern of the women violence cases then you will see most of the cases are dowry related cases. In the acid crime as well; it is either lover or husband. Most men do it out of revenge to punish women. They have the mentality that women are subordinate to them, therefore, they should follow whatever they are instructed. When a men see that it is not happening then they took the revenge. In our society (Bangladesh) men are holding power and position in both family and outside. Over the years this situation doesn’t change much. In our country social norms, culture, religion, employment all maintained patriarchy. From the childhood women live in a situation, which accept and permits violence against them. I am a man and I have sisters; even in my family what I see is my mothers, sisters always obey their partners. I expected the same from my wife. This is going through generations and will take a lifetime to change.

How do you provide support women facing violence who come to you for support? And their families?

Most of the times it either father or brother came to our office and seek help from us. Our main priority is the victim; therefore we provide all the help to the victim to deal with the aftermath. Our organizations have a 20-bed hospital where we provide care for the burnt victim including reconstructive surgery in a limited setup. Moreover, we provide excessive amount of service and assistant in legal case, psychological counselling and financial or economic support for rehabilitation. We also run national and local awareness campaign to educate people what do? And where to come? If they suffer any forms of violence.

What kinds of protection are given to the victim?

We give every protection to the victim they need. We are connected with different other organizations and police force. Therefore, we look into a case and assist the victim until the accused is punished.

The constitution of Bangladesh introduces some important laws to protect women from violence. Do you think women are aware of the anti-violence laws? Do women seek help from constitutional or legal body?

Although Bangladeshi government have enacted some of the powerful anti violence laws in favor of women; nevertheless, not all women are aware of this laws. Majority of women who are unaware of the laws are rural area women. However, we are trying to reach as many women as possible through our organizations. There are several other organizations as well who have been working actively in this field. There is leaflets distribution, Social awareness campaigning in different districts and other projects are ongoing to make women more knowledgeable about laws.

Yes women come forward and seek help from the legal organization. The number is increasing and more women are coming out and asking for help.

Are they getting proper support from the legal body? If not what are the reason behind this and who is to blame?

This is a good question thank you for asking. Although there are laws nevertheless women are not getting proper justice. The judicial body doesn’t have men power and not giving sufficient money to the lawyers. As a legal advisory group we only got three months training, which are not sufficient. When we receive a case we have a acid tribunal lawyers /penal lawyers we then proceed with the case and present it to Public Prosecutor. Public prosecutor doesn’t help at all. When a penal lawyer from acid survivor foundation go to a case trail then the PP asked him inappropriate questions, for example – Public prosecutor asked our lawyers –“I am already here what are you doing here, you don’t have anything else to do”.

In Bangladesh the ruling government appoints the public prosecutor and they basically act like political goons. As the governing party appoints them they think they are the kings and doesn’t care about anybody else. Unlike foreign country Bangladesh doesn’t have any independent mechanism to appoint a PP, therefore an insufficient person become PP by using his political connection. Majority of this public prosecutor wants to earn quick extra money and how they will do it? Corruption. The prosecutor has an important role to pay in a case and they deliberately manipulate witnesses and sometimes don’t proceed with the important documents. All this things they do to make money and they don’t have anyone to hold them accountable for their actions. Most of this corruption is happening in women violence cases because government has launched special speedy tribunal in women violence case and public prosecutors are dealing these cases. When a case go to trial the public persecutor contact the accused and take money from them. Then they deliberately delay a case by not submitting the papers or submitting false or insufficient paper. As a penal lawyer from ASF we face this challenges on regular bases. Sometimes in women violence cases a doctor needs to testify before judges but they can’t on time because the Public persecutor delay a case.

I would like to say we have good anti violence laws in Bangladesh but there is no implementation of this laws because of the corruption in judicial system. I would like to mention not only public persecutor police are corrupted as well. The police have a time frame set by the constitution to finish a case but police doesn’t submit a report of a crime on time. Police are fully corrupted; sometimes they didn’t take the FIR. When a Victim goes to police station to file a case they didn’t even arrest the criminal. So tell me if police doesn’t arrest a criminal “where will we get justice”? Then the victims come to us then we call the police department on behalf of them, they promise us that they will arrest the criminal. But month goes, a year passes but police doesn’t catch any criminal.

Moreover, when a case go on trial a witness doesn’t want to come for testify because police threatens them. Police takes money from the accused and try to withdraw the case from the court. In this circumstances who will come to testify before the court? You see everyone has family and children; they don’t want to risk it. It is also seen judges or magistrates take bribe from the accused and didn’t send letter to the witness to testify before court. If the witness didn’t get the letter on time they can’t come to testify. Therefore, because of this reason a case got delayed and the accused got bail from the court. When accused got bail from the court they can threat the victim and there family to withdrawal the case. This is happening a criminal got bail from high court on a non – boilable case and threatens the victim family. Moreover, it is also happening that after getting bail from court the criminal kill the victim or throw acid on the face. Still there is no justice. There is no regularity in our judicial system, court are dealing the case. Police are corrupted and witness doesn’t come on time. This all factors are related for delaying a case, which makes the victims and their family frustrated.

No is responsive for his or her work and you can’t hold anyone accountable. If they tell you they are responsible then ask them –“If the lawyers or barristers are reliable then why people are not getting justice? Why all this cases are pending on the court?”. As I told you before when we go to a Public prosecutor relating to a case they insult us and as they are holding a powerful position we can’t tell them anything. Police takes money and silent the victims. Powerful person doing the crime and by giving bribe they stop their court cases. This are the big challenges we are facing continues.

Now question is how do a person get bail on a non-boilable case? The answer is simple; the investigation report submitted by the police is weak because police are not giving all the information. The public persecutor isn’t presenting the case properly with true facts. Therefore, when the case go to high court for trail the accused got bail because the investigation report is unclear. Some speedy tribunal judges are corrupted as well; they took huge amount of money and release a criminal who was sentenced death penalty by the lower court. There are lots of cases like this, for example, Farzana from Noakhali district, the accused throw acid on farzana, when her younger sister went to court to testify that she saw the crime happening; the accused throw acid on her face as well. Police still didn’t catch the accused. There are 14 death penalty sentenced cases presents in ASF where the accused is either on bail or nowhere to found.

So I would like to say there are three main reasons because of which women are not getting justice under the law, For example -

1) A victim doesn’t show up on a case trial out of fear. Because the victim and her family believe that if they testify in front of court the accused may haram another family member.

2) Insufficiency in the investigation process.As I told the police aren’t doing there jobs properly. Approximately 90% police are corrupted.

3) Laws are being misused - High court requires time-to-time connection with public prosecutor to update a case. This is not happening as the PPs are corrupted. Sometimes people file false cases under women and child repression act, which delay many important cases.

Thank you for your detailed answer. Do the victim’s families help and do the communities also help?

Yes the victim’s families help. In most of the case we receive in ASF are reported by either father or victims siblings. As far I saw the families are supportive, however, there are some cases where the victims don’t have anyone to support her. The communities don’t help much.

Would you like to add anything else that we might have missed? Please also give your kind suggestion to improve the women situation in Bangladesh overall?

Thank you but I think I have mentioned everything. To change the overall situation in Bangladeshi judicial system the people needs to change. The public prosecutor needs to more supportive. The police needs to be more supportive. Therefore, to do that it is important to hold each and everyone accountable for their actions. Only this way the judicial system will improve.

1. Purda or veil is a religious dress code followed by Muslim women all around the world (Papanek, 1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quantitative data is expressed and measured using numbers, and qualitative data is descriptive and expressed based on characteristics. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I wanted to obtain the best research data which is why I choose semi-structured, open- ended questions, as Gottlieb (2012: 303) argues that in using open-ended questions, respondents are not confined with limited responses, but rather they have the chance to answer based on their individual understanding, experience, and knowledge. My questions were semi-structured and open-ended; therefore, the participants were able to reflect upon and discuss their unique experiences. However, as a researcher I was still able to maintain control over the questions (Hesse-Biber, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I have prepared the questions chronologically however; when I conducted the interviews I wasn’t able to ask the questions in order because sometimes my participants responded unprompted when I asked them to tell me about themselves. Sometimes the questions overlapped. However, I managed to get my topic covered and gathered ample amount of data. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Through snowball sampling, a researcher initially contacts suitable respondents for the study and ‘these sampled participants propose other participants who have the experience and characteristics relevant for the research’ (Bryman, 2012: 424). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For the purpose of this research, this includes an informed consent form, an information sheet etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Through peers, friends, colleagues, managers, family members and spouses. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I conducted these interviews in the first week of January, the interviews being very in-depth, as they were done face-to-face [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Director of the National Centre of Gender-based Violence. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Advocate of the Supreme Court, and senior director of Ain O Salish Kendra. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. December 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. By profession she is a domestic worker and one of my relatives in Dhaka heard about my research and advised me to interview her. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Administrative assistant and Research Worker at the ASF. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The date was in the middle of January 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Violence against women: A statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them (Available at - <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-stat-2005/docs/expert-papers/Farouk.pdf>) (P.3). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Supreme Court lawyer by profession and also actively involved with Ain O Salish Kendra (Non – governmental organization) in Bangladesh. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Who.int. 2021. *WHO | WHO Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/violence/mc\_study/en/> [Accessed 12 August 2021]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Here by violated physically the participant meant the accused hit her physically by slapping and kicking. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Local MPs and chairman. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Chowdhury,H.,A. (2000), Transnationalism Reversed women organizing against gender violence in bangladesh [https://uh.edu/class/ws/\_docs/asia-to-houston/Elora-Chowdhury-Transnationalism-Reversed-Prologue-and-Introduction.pdf]. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Hamid, S., S., Police system of Bangladesh: A study, south Asian journal of multidisciplinary studies, 2 (2), [Available at – sajms.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/police-system.pdf]. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Khan, A.A., 2014. Violence against women in Bangladesh-laws and reality. *World Vision*, *8*(1), pp.116-126. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Pierce, L., G. and Spaar,S. (1992),Identifying household at risk of domestic violence, in ES Buzawa & C G Buzawa (ed), Domestic violence – the changing criminal justice response (1992), London : Auburn House at 67 & 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Case filed against Basundhara MD for instigating suicide (27th April, 2021)[<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/case-filed-against-bashundhara-md-for-instigating-suicide>] [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Platform for action five years after an assessment (2000), Department of women and child development, government of India, at 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Overview of corruption within the justice sector and law

    Enforcement agencies in Bangladesh [https://www.u4.no/publications/overview-of-corruption-within-the-justice-sector-and-law-enforcement-agencies-in-bangladesh.pdf]. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Home Office, December 2014, Country Information and Guidance Bangladesh: Women [Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/390325/bgd_cig_women_2014_12_22_v01.pdf>] (Accessed on 04/05/2019) (P.19). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Dhaka based organization Acid Survivor Foundation reported that in the year of 2006 and 2007 approximately 130 to 150 girls are victim of acid violence. Moreover, in the south Asian context still women are face subordination in society compare to men. Early marriage, son preference, domestic violation, disfiguration of body by beating, female infanticide is common in many parts in South East Asia (P.13 – 14). Chapter 2 – Violence against women and girls: A Silent global pandemic. [available at - <http://samples.jbpub.com/9780763756314/56314_CH02_MURTHY.pdf>] (Accessed on 04/04/2019]. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Addendum: Mission to Bangladesh (20– 29 May 2013), 1 April 2014, A/HRC/26/38/Add.2, paragraph 53, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/539831154.html>. (Accessed on 04/03/2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/29/i-sleep-my-own-deathbed/violence-against-women-and-girls-bangladesh-barriers. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Odhikar.org. 2021. Odhikar | Violence against women. [Online] Available at:

    &lt;http://odhikar.org/violence-against-women/&gt; [Accessed 26 July 2021]. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Acidsurvivors.org. 2021. Welcome to ASF | ASF. [Online] Available at: https://acidsurvivors.org/media-and-news/ [Accessed 27 July 2021]. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/29/i-sleep-my-own-deathbed/violence-against-women-and-girls-bangladesh-barriers. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Platform for action five years after an assessment (2000), Department of women and child development, government of India, at 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Overview of corruption within the justice sector and law

    Enforcement agencies in Bangladesh [https://www.u4.no/publications/overview-of-corruption-within-the-justice-sector-and-law-enforcement-agencies-in-bangladesh.pdf]. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)