



## Violence against Women among the Slum Dwellers of Sholashahar in Chattogram

*Research Paper*

\*Al Jamal Mustafa Shindaini<sup>1</sup>, Eshra Faruky<sup>2</sup>

[Citation: Shindaini, A. J. M., & Faruky, E. (2020). Violence against Women among the Slum Dwellers of Sholashahar in Chattogram. *Journal of ELT and Education*, 3(3): 85-92. Retrieved from <https://jee-bd.com/journal/33122020>]

### Abstract

This study focuses on the current scenario of domestic violence occurring against married women within slum dwellers, the extent of the problem, causes behind these kinds of violence against women, and impacts of violence within slum dwellers. In-depth interviewing and focus group discussion were directed to collect the primary data and few articles and books were supportive as secondary data for the study. The research reveals some varied reasons behind the existing forms of violence including poverty, low-level income, and demand for dowry, some social and socio-cultural factors. The subordinate position of women is the fundamental cause of violence against them in our society. The socio-cultural and economic structure of society validates male domination and oppression over women. Since the legal interventions and gender justice issues have arisen and types of machinery taken by the government, the society and position of women are changing day by day for the expected positive upcoming and changes. Thus, the study also explores the challenges to overcome the women's situation as well as to analyze the jeopardized position of gender justice, exploring the current situation of violence against women.

**Keywords:** Violence, women, slum dwellers, domestic violence

### 1. Introduction

In its General Recommendation, No 19 of 1992, the committee on the elimination of all forms of violence against women considers that "the definition of discrimination against women includes gender-based violence that is violence that disproportionately directed to a woman because she is a woman or that affects woman disproportionately" (CEDAW, 1992). Bangladesh is no exception where around the world domestic violence has become a day to day known phenomenon (Das et al., 2016). According to the study, one in two ever-married women of reproductive age reported ever experiencing spousal, physical, or sexual violence in Bangladesh. Levels of this violence are higher in urban slum areas. Only one in five physically abused slum-dwelling women seek help. However, only 2% of them approached formal sources for support. Bangladesh, a country that is directing towards the ultimate prosperous goals for ensuring its

---

\*Corresponding Author's Email: [mustafa.shindaini@bup.edu.bd](mailto:mustafa.shindaini@bup.edu.bd)

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Dhaka, Bangladesh

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Dhaka, Bangladesh

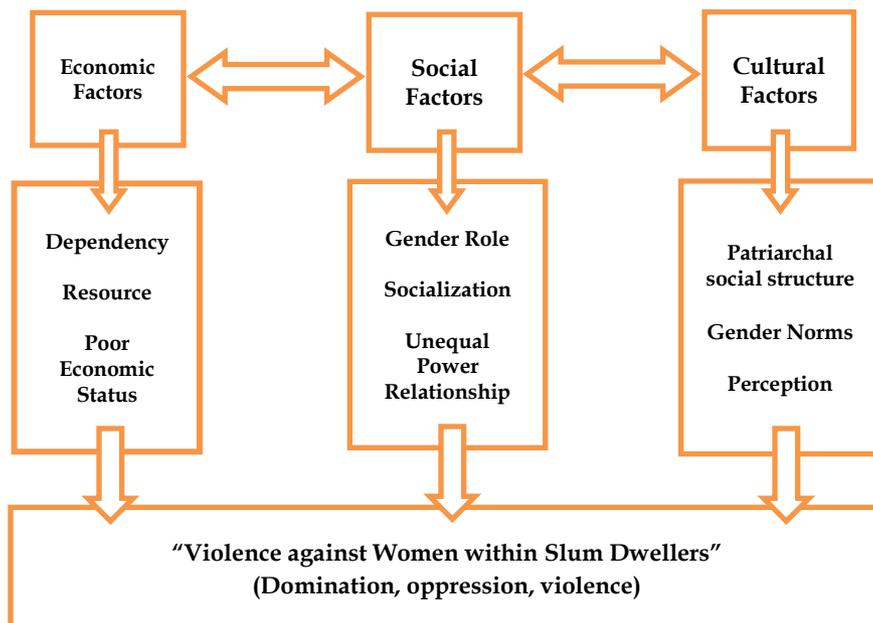
position in the developed and modernized one will face certain problems and barriers if women and their position would not be established in a parallel parameter. The paradox comes up when women face such a violent atmosphere and potential threats while climbing up towards freedom and empowerment.

Domestic violence against women is nothing but an example of the potential threat to the continuous development path both for women as a larger portion of the country and also for a community that upholds the need for strong support from this portion to ensure development goals. Therefore, the nature of domestic violence and a wholesome idea must be studied to explore the real problems and potential solutions to the crucial phenomenon. There is a high greater probability of perpetrating violence against wife by the low socio-economic male than the other levels, especially slum dwellers, alcohol and drug user men are more violent to their wives (Khatun & Rahman, 2012). And violence is more endemic in slum areas. This study, thus, aimed at exploring the extent of domestic violence and other violence against women within Sholashahar slum in Chattogram city. More specifically, it sought to establish what is the extent and nature of the violence against women there and how to address it. And to unearth its causes thereof as well as mechanisms people and state should take to address it.

## 2. Objectives

The major objectives of this study were to establish whether violence occurs in slum areas in Chattogram city and the nature or magnitude of the violence against women, to find out the causes behind these kinds of violence and to investigate the impact of the violence against women and coping strategies of women towards gender-based violence. The present study also aimed to examine the legal implications for victims of violence and the issue of gender justice.

## 3. Conceptual Framework



#### 4. Literature Review

Violence against women means simply violating the right of a woman as a human being and as a citizen. Impacts of violence can be long-lasting from physical to psychological and even death can occur, therefore. Trends of violence and tendency to be a victim of violence as women make them feel more subordinate to men and less participatory society. Violence not only has negative consequences for women but also for their families, the community, and the country as well. Still, in the whole world, one of every three women is physically or sexually assaulted. And less than 40% seek help and only 10% seek support from police and even 50% killed by intimate violence. Khan, Rob & Hossain (2000) revealed some of the common violence was identified as scolding 40%, mental torture 24%, slapping 44%, severe beating 19%, and forced sex 15%.

Yee (2015) studied that domestic violence against women and girls who live in slum areas is widespread. Very common offense among the low-income level people is being seen around us-physical and psychological violence. According to a study by Amnesty International (2010), women living in slums are more vulnerable because of both social and economic status. It is also proved that women marrying at a very early age are more vulnerable and 65% of women marry before the age of 18. As the situation is verily implanted in our gender norms and culture, so efforts to improve the situation are going in vain most of the time.

According to the report of *The New Humanitarian* (2013), there is more probability to be a victim as a woman in the slum areas of Bangladesh who are living in Dhaka more than any other region according to the researcher's anticipation. In a survey of 2012, 21% reported being physically abused by their husbands during pregnancy (Wadud, 2013). Nearly one out of four women reported sufferings, injuries from spousal inflicted violence in the year before the survey was conducted. Some affecting variables are remaining behind the violence against women in slum areas: education, household, wealth, attitudes and as slum dwellers are likely to be less educated and poorer with a so-called traditional attitude about gender norms and perception they are more likely to treat women as a burden to the family, to be subordinate and thus condone violence.

Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller (1999) explored that at least one woman in every three has been abused in her life around the world. Solotaroff and Pande (2014) examined the frequency and factors associated with various types of violence against women and girls in South Asia. South Asian women and girls face varieties of violence throughout their lives, starting with the beginning of the life cycle that is in childhood. Violence faced by women is examined in the study such as - child mortality, physical and sexual abuse, sexual harassment, dowry-related violence, and intimate partner as well as domestic violence. Their study concluded that violence against women and girls in South Asia plays out in a historical, social, and political context where weak legal intervention and perception of people may contribute to its continuity.

Owenga (2012) argued that domestic violence must be explored and understood from the viewpoint of culture, historical background, and perception of mass people about the phenomenon.

#### 5. Methodology

In this study, the qualitative method was adopted to get a comprehensive outcome. The study area and target group of the study were selected by using purposive sampling. Empirical field investigations on violence against women were conducted in the Sholashahar slum area in Chattogram city in Bangladesh. The whole study has been carried out through a comprehensive review process including in-depth interviews and focused group discussions with relevant respondents. A semi-structured questionnaire randomly used in the study area. Fifteen respondents from the slum were randomly interviewed. Lastly, available references (books,

journals, articles, (newspapers) have been collected for review and analysis to synthesize the existing knowledge and information.

## **6. Data Analysis and Findings**

### **6.1. Socio-Demographic Background of the Respondents**

The respondents of the study were married women with scattered age group residing in an urban slum, in Sholashahar, in Chattogram. Using purposive sampling and through the house to house visits, 15 respondents were interviewed face to face, using a semi-structured questionnaire after obtaining their informed consent. And focused group discussion with a five-member team was also undertaken to do the analysis. The questionnaire included information about the socio-demographic parameters and experience of domestic violence in the marital life and the factors influencing violence against women etc. utmost care was taken to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

Findings of the study revealed that domestic violence is prevalent mostly in almost all families living in urban slum areas and they are suffering from poverty. All the respondents in the study, aged between 18 and 50 years of age, belonged to the lower socio-economic strata with an average monthly family income of nearly TK. 4,670. Out of 15 participants, only 2 women had crossed the secondary level of education, 4 had passed the primary level, while the rest were all illiterate. Their husbands were almost all illiterate. Therefore, the research showed that the scale and prevalence of different types of domestic violence, occurring within slum dwellers and the similarity of the violence among all respondents.

In Bangladesh, the early marriage of girls is still prevalent and common. Among 15 respondents, 5 were married before 15. And all of the respondents were married when they were below 20 years old. So, the study shows that the average early marriage and age gap between husband and wife may be one of the leading causes of violence against women with the dominant cause of poverty in the slum areas.

### **6.2. Nature and Types of Domestic Violence against Women**

Domestic violence and abuse happen to them approximately but yet the problem is overlooked, or denied by the women, themselves. Strange but still true that, almost all the respondents didn't find it relevant and that much important issue to be studied in a broader perspective since they almost have taken violence, especially violence in conjugal life or in-laws as a granted issue.

The study found that domestic violence in slum areas is most worsened as it has become a daily occurrence in their lives. Their husbands were the most common perpetrator, sometimes in-laws. The most dominant form of domestic violence is physical abuse and torture. Especially women face psychological abuse which is more dangerous and fatal than physical violence. And respondents agreed that they face verbal abuse from dawn to dusk, but they don't mind it at all. They even laughed at the question as they were asked what if they protest violence and oppression.

One responded, 'women are for serving men and family' and society made them perceive the issue as normal as a daily routine. Nature and specific forms of violence occur, therefore, are verbal abuses, economic, physical, psychological, the threat of giving divorce, throwing out from the house, dominating, not giving space to make decisions, marital rape, harassment, humiliation, torture and so on.

Hence, we can infer that there are principally three forms of domestic violence found throughout the research. These are physical violence, psychological violence, and economic violence.

### 6.2.1. Physical Violence

The multiple forms of physical violence they experienced in their daily lives since marriage included slapping, pushing, shoving, hitting with fists, kicking, dragging, beating, punching, choking, burning, pulling hair, threatening to use or using a weapon against her. Remarkably, some victims shared that, their husbands even kicked them during their pregnancy and sometimes hit them by throwing different objects at them which is nothing but the reflection of sick mentality and brutality.

Rahima (22) shared her experience like this:

*"My husband beat me frequently and mostly he uses slangs. A few days ago, he pulled me by the hair and kicked me till his anger removed".*

This situation tells what exactly happens to slum-dwelling women in their daily lives. And clearly, these findings and statements showed that battered women underwent unbelievable horrors. Despite obeying all restrictions and rules and fulfilling other needs they are the victim of violence in different manners.

Amina (18) added her sufferings:

*"Whenever I want to go out of the home such as to my father's house I have to take permission and they don't want to let me go there anyhow and try to stop me by any means of violence such as physical assault, beating, slapping. And if I get angry and try to protest, they got even more furious and beat me with a bamboo stick".*

In-laws of battered women also provoke more violence against them. Not supporting their daughter-in-law, they either mistreat with them directly or instigate their son to do so. And they, even more, dominate and try to control the daughter-in-law's life. One of the respondents was compelled not to respond in the middle of interviewing by her mother in law.

Another woman named Khatun (35) stated that,

*"My in-law extremely dominates me rather than my husband. My mother in law provokes my husband so that he got furious and violent towards me. From the beginning, she continuously abused me physically and I remained silent".*

Some women acknowledged that they want to protest against physical assault and abuse but they cannot do that as they fear more abuse and battering then. Some women said that their husbands refused to provide them with daily essentials, especially food and clothes and husbands do not give even pocket money or money to run family expenditure. Health and malnutrition problem is the most common phenomenon among married women within slum dwellers. Some working women have no chance even to spend their earnings and mostly their husbands spend that money lavishly in buying their local drugs and alcohols.

Rashida (28) said that,

*"I am a garments worker and earn as much as to contribute to my family, but my husband doesn't even let me touch the money and especially I cannot oppose by any chance in fear of beating and more assault".*

The study reports that some women are not allowed even to eat before their husbands and in law's members.

### 6.2.2. Psychological Abuse

The frequency of psychological violence is even more than physical violence; sometimes, both are committed simultaneously. Scolding, using slangs, insulting in front of other family members, verbal aggression, using the silent treatment, destroying possessions, constant criticism, scolding, and using slang languages by husbands and in-laws were common. Husbands also call names of wife's parents whether dead or alive and it happens mostly for monetary issues and dowry related demands.

*"Often my husband calls me a bitch, stupid, descendent of a lower-class family in front of in-laws, children and also neighbor": Said Fatema (27)*

Mostly it was seen that wives are reluctant to take the responsibility of luck of their in-laws. And husbands and in-laws are more likely to blame wives as misfortunate if by any chance anything bad happened that the family had gone through.

The common forms of psychological abuse are threatening such as a threat to divorce, threat to kill, threat to kill parents of wife, threat to throw out of home, marry again, and so on. Most women stated receiving threats from their husbands, especially when they failed to listen and follow their commands.

Shamima (34) shared her sufferings,

*“Often he threats me that he would throw me out, or, divorce or marry again. Frequently he got angry and said that get out of my home”.*

Other facts that can be noted as psychological violence are- Not appreciating at all despite completing household chores as efficiently as possible, making complaints about making food bad, mocking, teasing, insulting for being unable to do tasks perfectly, scolding for not earning and spending, etc. Few husbands verbally offended their wives by using slang words for being dark-skinned, taunting them for being short, etc.

### **6.2.3. Economic Deprivation**

Controlling money, not letting do any job and earn, not letting know about his income, spending wife’s income, recklessly spending, destroying property or valuables are some forms of economic or financial hinders and violence that occurred as violence against married women by husband and in-laws within slum dwellers.

### **6.3. Causes behind Domestic Violence against Women**

An essential part of this study was to understand violence against women as a social problem with the facts and figures as well as the reasons behind.

#### **6.3.1. Existing Patriarchal Culture**

Women face violence for very trivial matters. Key findings of the study suggest that because of the existing patriarchal structure and culture men oppress and look down upon women. And most women tolerated the level of violence and violence increases because of their tolerance. The very subordinate position of women gave space to allow their husbands to continue acts of violence. One woman acknowledged, “If I am wrong and I disobey, then he has the right to beat me and I tolerate as I want peace and I cannot leave my children here alone”. Socialization process of boys and girls in our society and the way they are brought up through inequitable processes that result in an asymmetrical power relationship in their later life.

#### **6.3.2. The Practice of Dowry**

Demands and harassment for dowry in cash or kind young wives by their husbands and in-laws are common within slum dwellers. Findings show that women were mostly abused due to dowry demands from husbands and in-laws. And poor family demands more as dowry as they hope for an economic change of family.

#### **6.3.3. Women’s Subordination**

Again, it is the very result of the study which shows that women’s status and subordinate position compared to men are implanted in our cultural norms and it paves the way towards violence against women. Violence is a means of strengthening this subordination. Such occurring of violence has led to domination over and discrimination against women by men.

#### **6.3.4. Social Stigma**

According to religious superstition, women should not go out of the home, they are not allowed to earn or get involved in occupations, etc. Social stigma and cultural misconceptions such as want of male child, polygyny also make women vulnerable and oppressed. Few women

were humiliated and blamed for delivering girl child and women cannot give children are more cursed women in a patriarchal society.

### **6.3.5. Economic Factor**

Financial constraints topped the list as a cause of domestic violence. Violence against women especially domestic violence is perpetrated through the low economic status and unemployment of husbands. Women face a higher risk of violence when they don't work or earn, and their opinion is not considered worth as well as they remain dependent on male members of the family.

### **6.3.6. Early Marriage**

Early marriage of girls is too prevalent and common mostly within slum dwellers. Among 15 respondents, 5 were married before 15. And all of the respondents were married when they were below 20 years old. The study shows that the average early marriage and age gap between husband and wife may be one of the leading causes of violence against women with the dominant cause of poverty in the slum areas.

### **6.3.7. Lower Rate of Literacy**

In our society, illiterate people are more likely to be culprits of violence against women. Illiteracy multiplied the socio-economic dependency of women, which created opportunities for the male to control over females. Findings reveal that husbands become more violent as they know that their wives will not leave them and children and will not remarry to start lives.

### **6.3.8. Poor Socio-economic Status and Emotional Dependency**

Despite being the victims of violence by husbands and in-laws, some women don't ask for legal or informal help to protect the honor of family and privacy. However, emotional dependency on institutional marriage and a lack of support from family members also discouraged women not to protest and raise their voice against violence. And the factors give more chances to males to be more violent and dominant over women.

## **6.4. Coping Strategies of Victim Women & Impacts**

These abused women tend not to complain against their husbands or other offenders immediately while some women stated that, they tolerated abuse for the sake of conjugal relationships and the future of their children.

Amina said that,

*'I tolerated my husband's beating as there is no option and to some extent, it is right for the well beings of my family and children'.*

Sometimes they are sheltered by neighbors while battered by husbands, but they cope up with the situation and try to adjust with their in-law's family. They try to convince their husbands after fighting, beaten up as well as brutally abused. They cope up with the situation being silent and by tolerance as they don't want to divulge the confidential matter for reasons of shame, guilt, or simply being afraid of beating again and they perceive the idea that nothing can improve the situation, so it is better option to cope up with and be quiet. Responding to the question of the cause behind not protesting; the focused points can be noted as- now where to go, children's future, society, shame, economic dependency, and societal perception, etc.

## **6.5. Impacts of Domestic Violence on Women**

Violence against women has a direct effect on the women's physical and psychological state with their perception about the surroundings starting from family relationships to community and society. The experience of domestic violence causes physical injuries and harm to mental disorders with certain psychological stress like fear, self-degradation, sense of isolation, anger,

shame, sadness, and powerlessness. Women and their children are the direct sufferers of violence as they feel lower in family status as well as violence beget more violence further. Children may extract them from the idea of a family relationship; suffer from affective development and emotional problems.

## 7. Conclusion

In our traditional-cultural norms, attitudes, and socialization process, women are always expected to be soft and obedient; which makes women more vulnerable in some cases. Although there are several existing laws in Bangladesh to combat the heinous issue of domestic violence against women, those are not being implemented properly due to insufficient and ineffectual mechanisms. Besides the strategies, the present mindset and attitude of the male members of the society must be reformed. Therefore, the government, as well as the non-government organizations (NGOs), should work together to make the society more peaceful, serene, and placid without any incidence of domestic violence where women can lead their life upholding their own identity with utmost dignity. The findings of the research will give positive stimulus for further research on the mitigating current scenario of violence, implication of policy, practice, and strict law for ensuring equal human rights as well as freedom for all.

## References

- CEDAW. (1992). General recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. No. 19, 11<sup>th</sup> Session, Retrieved 16 May 2020 from <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm>
- Das, T. K., Bhattacharyya, R., Alam, M. F., & Parvin, A. (2016). Domestic Violence in Sylhet, Bangladesh: Analyzing the Experiences of Abused Women, Sage publication. *Social change*, 46(1), 106-123.
- Heise, L., Ellsberg M., & Gottemoeller, M. (1999). Ending Violence Against Women. *Population Reports*, 27(4): 01, Gale Academic OneFile, Accessed 16 May 2020.
- Amnesty International. (2010). Insecurity and Indignity: Women's Experiences in the Slums of Nairobi, Kenya, Retrieved from <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1251921.html>
- Jahan, R., (1994). *Hidden Danger: Women and Family Violence in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Women for Women.
- Khan, A. R. (2015). Domestic violence against women in Bangladesh: A review of literature and gaps to fill in by future interventions. *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 18(3), 57-81, Khazar University Press.
- Khan, M.E., Rob, U., & Hossain, S.M. (2000). Violence against women and its impact on women's lives-some observations from Bangladesh. *Journal of Family Welfare*, 46(2), 12-24.
- Khatun, M. T., & Rahman, K. F. (2012). Domestic violence against women in Bangladesh: Analysis from a socio-legal perspective. *Bangladesh e-journal of Sociology*, 9(2), 19-29.
- Owenga, M. A. (2012). Problematizing Domestic Violence within Soweto slum in Nairobi country in Kenya. Dissertation of Masters in Women's Law, University of Zimbabwe.
- Wadud, M. (2013). Bangladeshi slum dwellers face higher risk of domestic violence, *The New Humanitarian*, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/fr/node/253877>.
- Solotaroff, J. L., & Pande, R. P. (2014). Violence against women and girls: lessons from South Asia. The World Bank. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0171-6>
- Yee, A. (2015). In Bangladesh Grassroots Efforts to End Violence against Women. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/bangladesh-grassroots-efforts-end-violence-against-women>