

CONTENTS

Page No

Chapter 1

<i>Background, Objectives and Methodology</i>	1
Background	1
Literature Review	2
Objectives	9
Data and Methodology	10

Chapter 2

<i>Marital Violence in the Study Area</i>	12
Introduction	12
Socio-economic Characteristics of the Study Population	12
Magnitude of Violence	13
The Incidence of Wife-beating	15
Common Situations Evoking Violence	16
Justifying Wife-beating	17
Type of Physical Assaults	19
Summary Findings from FGDs	20

Chapter 3

<i>Role of Dowry in Marital Violence</i>	34
Extent of Dowry and its Sources	34
The Dowry Problem	36
Evidence from Case Studies	38
Reaction of Victims	42
Summary findings from case Studies	43

Chapter 4

<i>Discussion of Major Issues</i>	47
Violence in the Conjugal Home	47
Types of Domestic Violence	50
Theories on Domestic Violence	50
Patriarchy in Bangladesh	51
Culture and Domestic Violence	52
Issues Regarding Dowry	53
Consequences of Domestic Violence	54
Violence against Women and Human Rights	56

Chapter 5

<i>Conclusion</i>	58
Concluding Remarks	58
Recommendation	61
<i>References</i>	63

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:
MARITAL VIOLENCE IN RURAL BANGLADESH**

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Chapter 1

Background, Objectives and Methodology

Background

Gender violence is a daily and often deadly fact of life for millions of women and girls around the world. Violence varies from time to time, place to place and people to people in varying degrees. It is a phenomenon as old as our knowledge goes and the search for its remedy is also very old. The actual and human costs of this violence are tremendous; violence devastates lives, fractures communities and inhibits development.

Gender-violence, i.e. violence against women is now defined very broadly to include any act “involving use of force/coercion with an intent of perpetuation/promotion of hierarchical gender-relations in all social structures: family, community, work-place and society (APWLD, 1990). Defined this way, it includes any violation of women’s basic rights on the ground of gender as an act of violence. An issue related to definition is the variation in definition among the various agencies engaged in actions designed to resist/reduce violence against women.

The United Nations commission on the Status of Women defines violence against women to include "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in., physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women..." [Economic and Social Council, 1992]. The definition is understood to encompass, but not be limited to, physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family and outside it. Gender-based violence, including wife-beating, rape, sexual abuse, and dowry related murder is widely prevalent in Bangladesh. Of these, wife-beating and intimidation are the most endemic and widespread forms of violence. Despite its prevalence, it is because of relentless efforts given by women's organisations, that violence against women in the home has recently received some public attention. Information, thus far, has come largely from mass media reports, and, to a lesser extent, from grossly under-reported crime data. Community-based research on the prevalence and patterns of gender-based violence is sparse, but urgently needed for addressing the issue of violence against women.

Violence against women has been identified as one of the priority areas that calls for undertaking study and action immediately. In the South Asia region, violence has assumed multi-dimensional forms, such as, trafficking in women and girls, domestic violence, sexual abuse, violence at work

* Views presented in this paper are author’s own.

* The author deeply appreciates the comments received from the peer reviewer.

place, forced prostitution, child abuse, etc. Recent addition to the already manifold problems is 'Fatwa'. On the other hand, media reports reveal that incidence of violence is growing rapidly. Not only in South Asia, but also in the world at large, violence against women has become one of the most visible and articulated social issues. The issue was in the Nairobi *Forward Looking Strategies* in 1985 and in the Beijing platform for Action in 1995. Beijing Platform for Action states that, "in all societies to a greater or lesser degree women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture. The violence against women is a matter of concern to all states and should be addressed". Violence has thus been identified as a priority issue on the global basis.

In most of Bangladesh, the family is mainly patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal and the region is well known for the kinds of inegalitarian gender relations that are related with gender violence. Women are defined as inferior; husbands are assumed to 'own' women, and to have the right to dominate them, if necessary by using force. Domestic violence is thus deeply embedded in patriarchal norms and attitudes about gender relations in Bangladesh. These attitudes are reinforced by lack of government attention, either directly through the protection of victims of domestic violence and prosecution of violent husbands, or indirectly, by upholding laws on minimum age at marriage and inheritance. Combination of all these factors serve to both legitimise and perpetuate violence.

Though marital violence is the specific focus of the present study, the growing ubiquity of gender specific violence in public places is evident from statistics and the discourse on rape and sexual harassment at the work place. The sexual violation of women in times of political and communal strife such as partition of India in 1947, Liberation War in 1971 and more recently the after effects of October election in 2001 - has been quite shocking.

Domestic violence, especially wife battering, is perhaps the most widespread form of violence against women. In countries where reliable, large-scale studies on gender violence are available, more than 20 per cent of women are reported to have been abused by men with whom they live (World Development Report, World Bank, 1993). The situation in Bangladesh is even worse where about half of the women are reported to have been abused by their husbands.

In Bangladesh, gender based violence including wife-beating, rape, sexual abuse and dowry related torture and murder is widespread, but is borne silently. Moreover, data remain limited, and little is known by way of community-based research about the magnitude and patterns of marital violence. Even less is known about its consequences for women's lives, their physical and mental well-being.

Literature Review

Domestic violence is a very pervasive, serious social malady in both the developed and developing countries. Severe and ongoing domestic violence has been documented in almost every country in the past decade. In the western data, 21-28 per cent of adult women are battered in marital relationships (Maynard, 1993). Desjarlais et al. (1995) provide statistics from a range of studies showing shocking levels of domestic violence in many countries. Thus, according to Desjarlais et.al: 60 per cent of a random sample of women in Sri Lanka had

been beaten by their husbands, husbands killing wives accounted for 50 per cent of all murders of women in Bangladesh; one out of three women in Mexico is a victim of family violence; 50 per cent of women in Bangkok's largest slum and about 60 per cent of women from both poor and elite groups in Papua New Guinea are beaten regularly. In India, Sriram (1991) reports that 35-60 per cent of women were battered by their husbands in Gujarat. Agnes (1988) reports that up to 30 per cent of women suffer gross assault. She also points out that domestic violence cuts across education and income levels, occurs in both joint and nuclear families. Women are also beaten for being childless or for giving birth to daughters only.

Table 1A summarizes the information available from small-scale studies on the prevalence of wife abuse in selected countries of the South East Asia Region. The vast majority of the studies are from India. The reported prevalence of wife abuse ranges from about 3.4% in Kyauktan, Myanmar and 40% among outpatients in a central provincial hospital in Thailand, to 76% among lower caste women in rural India.

Table 1 A: Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Selected Countries of the Region

<i>Reference</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Findings</i>
Bangladesh		
Schuler et al (1996)	1305 women from four regions (1990-1994)	38% were beaten.
Akanda and Shamim (1985)	270 cases of death in women, (1982-1985) source: from daily newspapers	Causes of death were beating (29%) and use of sharp weapons (18%).
India		
Jeejebhoy (1998)	1842 women aged 15-39 years from two districts, each of Uttar Pradesh in North India and Tamil Nadu in South India	42-48% prevalence reported in Uttar Pradesh, 36-38% in Tamil Nadu.
Rao (1997)	177 women of childbearing age and 130 men in three villages, potter community	22% of women were physically assaulted; 34% of those physically assaulted required medical attention.
Narayana (1996)	6926 married men from five districts of Uttar Pradesh	30% of men reported beating their wives.
Ganatra (1996)	400 villages in Western India (population 686,000) and seven hospitals	15.7% of pregnancy-related deaths in the community clinics and 12.9% in the hospitals were associated with domestic violence.
Mahajan and Madhurima (1995)	115 women from lower caste households in the Punjab, North India	76% prevalence, two-thirds of them reported regular beating.
Bhattacharya and Pratinidhi (1994)	42 childless married women aged 14-45 years, urban slum community	19% were physically assaulted because they were childless.
	120 cases of dowry deaths and 20 cases of intentional injury	Intentional injury included physical violence (59%), mental

Seshu and Bhosale (1990)	related to dowry identified in 50 district court judgements, 1987-1989, Maharashtra, West India	torture (28%), molestation by family members (10%), and starving (3%). Causes of death in women who died: burns (46%) and drowning (34%); 58% of the victims were childless and 22% had only female children.
Mahajan (1990)	109 women and men from one village, scheduled caste and non-scheduled caste	75% of scheduled caste wives reported being beaten, 75% of scheduled caste men and 22% of other caste men reported beating their wives.
Myanmar		
Country profile for Myanmar (1999)	Two townships of Yangon Division (Insein and Kyauktan)	About 9% in Insein and 3.4% in Kyauktan reported physical violence, 19% and 11% respectively reported mental violence.
Nepal		
SAATHI (1997)	1250 respondents from five districts, both urban and rural	88% reported knowing about occasional domestic violence.
Sri Lanka		
Sonali (1990)	200 low-income women from Colombo, convenience sample	60% were beaten; husbands used weapons in 51% of the cases.
Thailand		
Weerawathnodom (1997)	400 women attending the outpatient clinic at a central provincial hospital in January 1997	Over 40% reported suffering physical or mental violence from their husbands, and half reported to have been sexually assaulted by a stranger.
Hoffman et al (1994) [20]	619 husbands living in Bangkok, with at least one child	20% reported hitting, slapping or kicking their wives at least once since marriage. Socioeconomic status was negatively related to the occurrence of physical abuse of the wife.

Sociological perspectives on violence such as resource theory and exchange theory have shown that power is based on resources and that violence is the ultimate resource for securing compliance. In his exchange/social control model of family violence, Gelles (1983) holds that violence will be used when the rewards are higher than the costs. The private nature of abuse, the reluctance of outsiders to intervene, and the low risk of any other intervention reduce the costs of abuse. The cultural approval of violence as both expressive and instrumental behaviour (for instance, in disciplining wives) raises the potential for violence.

But these theories are limited in that they do not take into account that domestic violence occurs in a context of institutionalised power asymmetry. Yllo (1993) argues that without this feminist lens in understanding violence, explanations are incomplete. This coercive control model of violence identifies violence as a tactic of entitlement and power that is deeply

gendered. Support for this is sound. Gelles and Strauss (1988) found in the course of their extensive interviews that events around power and control were most frequently at the core of events leading up to the use of violence in domestic situations in the US.

The underlying explanation for the abuse of women is the husband's perceived right to control his wife and a social structure that legitimises the exercise of this right. Parallel results were found in an analysis of data from 50 US states. Although social disorganisation does contribute to domestic violence, the greater the inequality between men and women, the greater the violence. Similarly, using an ethnogender approach in her study of marital violence against South Asian immigrant women in the US, Abraham (1998) found that the high level of such violence was related to the need of South Asian men to uphold traditional values. To uphold male dominance and female subordination, and to enforce traditional scripts of female roles in terms of perfect and self-sacrificing home-makers and care-givers.

In a recent study in India, Visaria (2000) found that two-thirds (65%) of the respondent women in Gujarat were subjected to verbal or physical violence. Nearly 42% of the women experienced physical violence; the remaining 23% reported absence of physical beating but were subjected to verbal abuse by husbands. They were taunted as 'good for nothing' or threatened to be locked up in the house or not allowed to move out. A few other studies conducted in India (Jejeebhoy 1998; Mahajan, 1990) have also reported a similar magnitude of wife beating/wife abuse.

In summarizing the evidence on violence towards women, Davar (1999) concludes that violence towards women is not a clinical problem but a social problem arising from a context where unequal power relationships and entitlements are legitimised and used to enforce subordination. Male violence generates a climate of fear, which then regulates female behaviour in ways that perpetuate the status quo. An important point she also makes is that in the Indian context, violence towards women is more aptly described as patriarchal violence rather than as male violence towards women. This is because women are victimised by men as well as other women for patriarchal ends. Thus dowry related harassment and murder frequently involves mothers-in-law.

Dowry demand or pressure for dowry is clearly a phenomenon on the increase among all social categories in the countries of the sub-continent. In a study of dowry victims in Delhi, Ranjana Kumari commented, "Dowry has become inseparably inter-linked with the general status of women in our society". Her study shows this in a sample of 150 dowry victims, one fourth were murdered or driven to commit suicide, and more than half (61.3 %), were thrown out of their husband's house after a long drawn period of harassment and torture. Dowry-related killings followed two patterns. First, the young brides were either murdered or forced to commit suicide (18.4 %) when their parents refused to concede to continuing demands for dowry. Second, the murders were committed also on the pretext of complex family relations, extra-marital relationships were alleged in 2.6 per cent cases of death. It was also discovered that the conflicts intensified because of the refusal by young brides to yield to overtures made by father-in-law, uncle-in-law or brother-in-law. There were also cases where wives alleged that the husband was impotent.

According to Kumari (1989) in 69.3 per cent cases, parents sent their daughters back to the husbands while being fully aware of the torment they were undergoing. Of these, 77.9 per cent returned only to be deserted and 11.5 per cent to be murdered. In 72 per cent of cases, "parents were more willing to put thousands of rupees in the hands of men who tortured their daughters than to spend even a fraction (10 %) of the dowry to train the girls to survive independently". Because, they did not consider independent survival of women as respectable. Ranjana Kumari also found dowry giving and taking to be universal across caste, religion and income groups. However, she observed, "while desertion and harassment cases are more among higher income groups, middle income groups show higher dowry death rates". She also found that only 5 per cent of marriages were love marriages while 11 per cent were inter-caste. The rest had married according to the prevailing social norms of arranged matches (Ranjana Kumari 1989; see also Mahajan and Madhurima 1995; Sinha 1989).

There is no satisfactory explanation of why the system of dowry is growing and indeed spreading to communities where it did not exist. Nonetheless, its role in perpetuating violence within the home is substantial. Of particular relevance is the fact that dissatisfaction over dowry payments results in abuse of the wife not only by her husband but by other affines as well. Dissatisfaction over dowry is not the only reason for ill-treatment of married women. Apart from ill-health and stress, a violent home environment can lead to a total psychological remolding such as the internalisation of deception, manipulative techniques and feigning. It can also lead to anticipation and provocation, a macabre expectation and provocation, a macabre expectation of the inevitable (see Flavia Agnes 1988 and Kakar 1990).

In a detailed discussion of wife abuse, Flavia Agnes (1988) has rebutted convincingly the popular myths which surround the phenomenon of wife beating in India such as, middle class women do not get beaten; the victim of violence is a small, fragile and helpless woman belonging to the working class; the wife-beater is a man who is frustrated in his job, an alcoholic, or a paranoid person, aggressive in his relationships. Nor was it true that so-called loving husbands did not beat their wives or that women provoke men to beat them. Yet, many of these myths seem to pervade the analysis of wife-beating and feminine expectations in Indian society. Though there is a dearth of research in this area in our country, the Bangladesh scenario is likely to follow similar patterns as has been found in India.

Violence against women has serious consequences for their mental and physical well-being, including their reproductive health. The World Bank (1993) estimates that rape and domestic violence account for 5 per cent of life lost to women of reproductive age in demographically developing countries. Again in developing countries such as China, where maternal mortality and poverty-related diseases are relatively under control, the healthy years of life lost due to rape and domestic violence account for a larger share (16 per cent) of the total burden. In established market economies gender-based victimisation accounts for nearly one in five healthy years of life lost to women of age 15 to 44 (Heise 1994). The situation of Bangladeshi women is even worse. A study carried out by ICDDR, B in 1994 showed a pathetic picture. It revealed that about 14 per cent mothers in Bangladesh die due to domestic violence, 6 per cent of them are victims of intentional violence.

In the year 2000, some 772 women were killed in 1,109 recorded incidents of repression throughout Bangladesh. Of them, 100 were killed for dowry, stated a report of the

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) reviewing the human rights situation across the country. During the period, the Bureau of Human Rights of Bangladesh (BHRB) recorded 1,120 incidents of suicide, most being the repressed women.

Naripokkha, a non-governmental organization, conducted a Pilot Study on Violence against Women in Bangladesh. The findings show that about 60 per cent of Bangladeshi women are physically assaulted by their husbands. The Naripokkha estimate is based on interviews of a total of 719 women, living with their husbands in the capital city Dhaka and in rural areas, and records available with the police, courts and hospitals.

Over a period of five years till December 2000, a cell under the Women Affairs Directorate named 'Cell to Prevent Repression on Women', registered 13,448 complaints filed by oppressed women in Bangladesh following family disputes, demand for dowry, physical abuse, second marriage or divorce. It may be mentioned here that second marriage and divorce as such, are not violence themselves. These are some of the rights for which violent means are resorted to by men at times. These may be identified as causes or means of violence under certain circumstances, *e.g.* deserting the first wife, using violent means to obtain permission for second marriage.

Like physical beating, the murder of women appears to be carried out by husbands and in-laws. Jahan (1988) and Hartmann and Boyce (1983) suggest that many women are, in fact, driven to suicide by constant beating, harassment and the feeling that there is no escape. Because of socio-cultural norms, women who flee from abusive relationships are not welcome in their parental homes.

Roy (1992) notes from a study carried out by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) in Jamalpur, that most women who are beaten suffer from beatings every week which are severe enough to leave marks on the body and cause pain for several days. Such beatings may be related to dowry, to the perceived failure of a woman, particularly a wife, to fulfil her household duties, or to be properly humble and obedient; or they may serve as an outlet for male frustration. Akanda and Shamin (1983) cite the case of Roushan Ara in Rangpur, who was beaten to death for failing to stitch two buttons onto her husband's shirt. Gardener (1991) describes women in Sylhet being beaten for trifling matters such as the evening meal not being ready on time, or tasting it whilst cooking. Hartmann and Boyce (1983) cite the case of a woman whose husband beat her because the chickens stole a few grains of rice, in a village in Rajshahi Division, north west Bangladesh.

The perceived legitimacy of men beating women is further compounded by the absolute poverty and powerlessness of most of the rural population of Bangladesh. Kabeer (1989) suggests that many men vent their own frustration at their poverty and inability to fulfil their role as the male provider, according to gender based norms, by battering their wives. In the words of one of the Katni villagers in Hartmann and Boyce's study (1983), "When my husband's stomach is empty, he beats me, but when it is full, there is peace". Kabeer (1989) notes the seasonality of such beatings - they increased during *kartik*, the hungry season in August-October, and before the main harvest in November-December. None of these studies explicitly discuss whether children are subject to similar violence and if so, whether the extent and severity of such beatings differs by gender.

White (1992), studying a village in Faridpur district, notes that the escalation of dowry demands over the last 40 years has created another manifestation of violence against women. Dowry demands among Muslims and Christians in Bangladesh are a relatively new phenomenon (Rozario, 2001). White notes a tendency for men to explicitly claim that the inadequate dowry they have received gives them a right to abuse their wives.

There is an increasing trend of state failure in providing adequate security to women. More and more women are becoming vulnerable to various forms of violence, both in urban and rural areas. Rape, gang-rape and murder, cruelty related to dowry, domestic violence, physical torture, fatwa, kidnapping, physical and sexual abuse of domestic aid, illegal trafficking, forced prostitution, death in custody --- by members of law enforcing agencies are some of the forms of violence against women. A human rights organisation *Ain O Shalish Kendra* (ASK) has compiled newspaper reports on incidence of violence. According to this report in 1995, the total number of incidents of violence against women was 710, in 1996, it was 696, in 1997, its number rose to the alarming figure of 1613. Of the forms of cruelty, incidence of rape figured the highest followed by domestic violence. In the years 1995 and 1996, 240 and 265 rape, gang rape, rape-murders respectively were reported. The figure jumped to 553 in 1997. Report of human rights coalition *Odhikar* states that between January to September 1998, there were 774 incidents of rape, 37 of these rape victims were aged 5 years and below. The highest number of such crime is committed against children belonging to 6-11 years age group. Recently, a major issue of concern has been the incident of rape and murder in police custody. *Odhikar* report also shows that during January to September 1998, police raped 16 women. About 5,867 women were molested by police or under police custody during the last 25 years.

A recent study (Moshtaque, 1998) shows the nature of growth of violence against women in proportion to population growth. On the basis of police record of 15 metropolitan thanas of Dhaka City, they argued that violence against women has increased ten times from 1988 to 1997. In 1988, 0.52 incidents were reported per 100,000 women. In 1990, it was 0.66, in 1995, 3.96 and in 1997, it sharply rose to 9.55.

During 1998, the number rose further to 2103 while the number of reported cases of violence against women during January to September of 2000 were 1882. Of the various forms of violence against women, incidence of rape figured the highest followed by domestic violence.

In the year 1996, 262 cases of rape, gang-rape and rape murders were reported. The corresponding figures for 1997, and 2000 (January-September) were 753, 648 respectively. Similarly, the reported cases of domestic violence were 234, 273 and 255 during 1997, 1998 and 2000 (January-September) respectively.

In recent years, the government has amended and promulgated several Acts and Ordinances in an effort to safeguard the legal rights of the female population and to improve their social status. The Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, Dowry Prohibition Act, Repression of Violence Against Women and Children Act 2000, among others, all contain provisions punishing those who dare commit any sort of crime against women. The media coverage of domestic violence against women also created active pressure for promulgation of some of

these Acts and Ordinances. Moreover, there were minor amendments to the existing legislation on family law.

Despite these Acts and Ordinances, cruelty and violence against women are showing an increasing trend. Violence against women in the conjugal homes, cruelty to women for dowry and other causes has become a serious issue in Bangladesh. The problem has become so disastrous that torture related to dowry and dowry deaths have become an everyday event in Bangladesh.

Violence committed by family members within the home is the most serious and repugnant of all types of violence. The intimate context makes it difficult for the victim to seek redress. At the same time, the closed family structure makes it possible for the aggressor to repeat the violence.

Though family violence includes child abuse, sibling abuse, parent abuse and in-law abuse perpetrated by male aggressors on female victims, available information indicate that marital violence (wife abuse) is the most serious type of family violence. The gravity of family violence in Bangladesh is indicated by statistics from a study by Jahan (Jahan, 1994).

Objectives

While male domination or patriarchy may explain the subordinate position of women in the family and society, it does not throw much light on how and why violence enters into the husband-wife relationship, why it continues over the years, and the real motives of the perpetrators of violence. Are acts of violence intended to show the woman and others that the husband is in control? Do they establish and prove his supremacy over his wife? If violence disturbs harmony within a relationship, why do men and also women accept or tolerate non-harmonious relationships? Is it because of a hope that the situation would eventually improve? These and similar questions can perhaps be better understood, if one goes beyond explanations which suggest that the "transgression of norms", or 'need to prove one's supremacy' or having 'low esteem' invite violence. The relationship between violence and proximate factors like poverty, inadequate dowries, trivial things like poor cooking, or neglect of children need to be explored both theoretically and empirically.

The main objective of the study is to gather all relevant information regarding forms, nature, extent and intensity of domestic violence. We have attempted to understand why and how violence enters into the husband-wife relationship and the forms in which it is inflicted. Through and in-depth interview of selected women in the study villages, an attempt has been made to identify the most immediate or proximate causes of violence or the factors which trigger the beating. We have also examined the correlates or determinants of violence to understand how some women manage to escape physical or psychological abuse.

The primary focus of the present study is to have an indepth understanding of the phenomenon of wife-abuse and gain insights into the situations that women face on a daily basis and the nature of violence – physical, mental and psychological, endured by them for prolong periods.

Data and Methodology

The data for the present study largely come from the field survey. We selected four villages - two each from Laxmipur and Kushtia districts; for our field survey. To see whether there is any regional variation with regard to domestic violence, we have taken up two villages each from Chittagong and Rajshahi division. The chittagong villages under Laxmipur district include Kawali Danya and Sher Pura (Ramgaonj upazila), while the two villages from Kushtia district under Rajshahi division are Sugribpur and Modhupur (under Kushtia Sadar upazila).

Size of Sample

In the Laxmipur villages, there were 321 households having currently married women below 50 years of age. But despite repeated visits, information from 21 women could not be obtained because of non-cooperation on the part of the respondents. Thus the Laxmipur sample consisted of 300 currently married women. Similarly, there were 317 currently married women in Kushtia villages. But despite several visits, 16 eligible women refused to provide any information. Thus, the final sample consisted of 301 women. However, for the purpose of comparison, we have analysed data for 300 women from Kushtia villages. This implies that there were 600 currently married women in our sample-300 each from Laxmipur and Kushtia district.

This study is a combination of quantitative as well as qualitative research. Data collection was carried out in two different phases. Phase I involved conducting a household survey in the selected villages. All currently married women below 50 years of age were covered by the survey. A semi-structured questionnaire was utilized to obtain information from the eligible women. The qualitative method was used via indepth interviews, life histories and focus group discussion (FGD). In the second phase, a number of case studies have been prepared based on indepth research, somewhat of an anthropological nature. All the case studies are based on major happenings as they occurred to the women after their marriage. The fieldwork started in late September and continued up to mid-November, 2001.

In the household survey data collection covered the following aspects:

A. Demographic Characteristics

- i. Age of the woman;
- ii. Education of woman/husband
- iii. Age at marriage
- iv. Number of times married
- v. Number of children

B. Husband-wife relationship

- i. Frequency of wife beating/abuse
- ii. Reasons for wife abuse
- iii. Nature of wife abuse

C. Dowry

- i. Amount of dowry (cash/kind) at the time of marriage
- ii. Pressure for further dowry
- iii. Dowry as a cause of wife beating/abuse

Case Study

A one-shot survey is usually deficient in many respects for an understanding of the complex issues involved with regard to causes and determinants of violence against women. Thus, a single interview, however in-depth and intensive, may not be able to capture the interplay of factors which cause or lead to violence at the household level. In the 2nd phase several individual case studies were prepared for a deeper understanding of the causes of domestic violence. The case studies provide valuable background on the nature of violence and the reasons behind it. The case studies illustrate the range of variations in domestic violence: they describe the forms of abuse, the characteristics of the aggressor and the prevailing culture in the study villages.

The case studies cover a wide range of issues and concerns including:

- Role of dowry
- Taboos regarding domestic violence
- Role of mother-in-law in causing or aggravating domestic violence
- Nature and extent of violence

Data Limitations

Violence is a broad subject engulfing various types of crimes in different degrees. There is a range of offences that could potentially involve domestic disputes leading to violent behavior. The reasons for violence are often frivolous and it is inflicted in a wide range of forms.

Data limitations as far as an investigation of marital violence is concerned must be acknowledged at the outset. A general problem associated with questions on physical abuse/wife beating (faced during the field survey) is that the woman may be shy, and likely to under-report their experience of violence when asked by an unfamiliar person in a one-shot interview. Keeping this in view, we have selected field interviewers from the same locality who can easily meet the village women, talk with them and listen to what they have to say

Moreover, in some cases, physical abuse might be interpreted to include only very severe abuse i.e. physical beating. Thus, it is likely that the respondents have under reported the extent of violence experienced by them. A substantial psycho-sociological understanding of perpetrators would entail interviews with men as well as women. But, given the sensitive nature of the topic (violence in the conjugal home), a decision was made against interviewing the husbands. Thus, the study took into consideration only the victims of marital violence but not the perpetrators.

Aside from the possibility of under-reporting, another limitation is that responses reflect relatively recent experience of marital violence, not necessarily lifetime experience of marital violence. Despite these limitations, the data do permit an analysis of the extent, reasons and forms of violence experienced by women in their married life.

Chapter 2

Marital Violence in the Study Area

Introduction

Defining violence is extremely difficult. Part of the problem lies of course in the wide-spread and indiscriminate use of terms such as “assault”, “aggression” as synonyms of violence because specialists would like to make subtle distinction. For our purpose, marital violence includes behaviour such as: (i) physical violence, (ii) sexual violence, (iii) psychological violence and (iv) vicarious violence, i.e., violence directed against something/some person held dear by the victims.

Of these, **physical violence** is the most obvious and easily recognizable phenomenon. Indeed, to many people, the term “violence” is synonymous with physical violence. Physical violence includes all aggressive behaviour inflicted on the body of a victim by an aggressor such as pushing, pitching, spitting, slapping, biting, punching, grabbing and pulling by the hair, burning, clubbing, stabbing, throwing acid/boiling water and so on. The injuries caused by these may range from mild to serious and even fatal ones.

Another common form of marital violence is **psychological violence or verbal abuse**. Psychological violence is committed by using psychological weapons such as verbal threats of violence against the victim or a person dear to her. It also includes forcing the victim to degrade herself; excessive controlling, curtailing and/or disruption of routine activities such as sleeping or eating habits, social relationship, access to money, verbal insult and so on. Verbal abuse, directed at the wife (including abuse of her parents and siblings), is the most common and frequent feature of domestic violence. However, in our analysis, we will mainly concentrate on the incidence of physical violence and verbal abuse.

Socio-economic Characteristics of the Study Population

Table 1 presents the salient characteristics of the study population. As already mentioned, out of the four study villages two villages are from Laxmipur district and the other two are from Kushtia district. There are some differences in the socio-economic characteristics of the villages in the two districts. While the Kushtia villages are mainly agricultural, a significant proportion of the males in the Laxmipur villages are engaged in business/trade. Nearly 12 per cent of the husbands of the respondent women in Laxmipur were reported to be salaried employees having regular assured income while in Kushtia villages only 1 per cent of the husbands of the respondent women were salaried employees. In addition, nearly a quarter of the husbands of the respondent women in Laxmipur villages was reported to be in business/trade, as against 11 per cent in Kushtia villages.

It may be mentioned here that in rural areas, a salaried job, even as a school teacher, clerk, or a health worker, when coupled with one's own house, a plot of land and one or two milch animals, raises the economic status of the house substantially.

The average level of education of respondent women was 3.5 years of schooling. The corresponding figure for husbands' education was 5.1 years. The low mean was due to the fact that nearly a quarter of the women were reported as illiterate and about a half of the women had education up to the 5th grade (primary level). The disparity between men and women in

the literacy level was sizeable. The average number of years of schooling for men was 5.1 years, and only about 18 per cent were reported as illiterate whereas 49 per cent had received education beyond primary level.

However, there are some differences in literacy level between the study villages. In the Laxmipur villages, about 13 per cent of the women were reported as illiterate as against 39 per cent in the Kushtia villages. Again, 27 per cent of the respondents had education beyond primary level in Laxmipur while the corresponding figure for Kushtia was only 17 per cent. Similar differentials in literacy levels of respondents' husbands were also found between Laxmipur and Kushtia villages.

The profiles of respondents in Table 2 reflect major differences in the situation of women in Laxmipur and Kushtia villages. Laxmipur women are better educated (27 % of women in Laxmipur with education beyond primary level, compared to 17 % women in Kushtia). They are also more likely to have educated husbands (58 % of women in Laxmipur having husbands with education beyond primary level as against 40 % women in Kushtia having husbands with similar level of education). In addition, Laxmipur women are more likely to have husbands in salaried jobs and in business/trade compared to women in Kushtia villages (39 % vs.12 %). Moreover, a significant proportion of women in Kushtia villages are married to men who are engaged in wage employment as agricultural and non-agricultural wage labours (31 % in Kushtia compared to 14 % in Laxmipur).

Magnitude of Violence

As indicated in Table 3, overall 46 per cent of the respondent women reported that they were subjected to both physical and psychological abuse during their married life. The remaining 54 per cent reported verbal abuse by their husbands. They were taunted as "good for nothing", threatened to be ousted or beaten up, if they did not behave properly.

However, there were some differences in the magnitude of violence between the Laxmipur and Kushtia villages. The incidence of physical abuse/beating was much higher in the Kushtia villages (53%) compared to Laxmipur villages (39%). Our findings suggest that wife beating is almost ingrained in Bangladesh society.

Women knew when and what triggered the first quarrel between them and their husbands. Often the problem started within a few months of marriage and even before the birth of the first child. In the study villages about half of the incidences of physical beating occurred before the birth of the first child and a quarter of the victims suffered physical violence within the first year of marriage.

However, even after the children were born, the situation did not improve substantially for women. As some of the women reported during our case studies, once the initial inhibition was broken, picking a quarrel or beating the wife became a normal phenomenon for men and many husbands became used to abusing their wives.

Although violence cuts across age, level of education and years of marriage; some groups reported higher levels of abuse than others. Our data show that the incidence of violence increases with age and duration of marriage. This goes against the popular belief that

husbands and wives get used to each other over time and become more accommodating or tolerant of each other. Nearly half of the women in both Laxmipur and Kushtia aged 35 and above reported that they were physically abused. Women who experienced physical violence early in their marriage continued to be subjected to it several years after marriage. Women who are married for the last 15 years a significant proportion of them are still physically abused by their husbands (37% in Laxmipur and 53% in Kushtia).

One clear trend emerges from our findings young women are subjected to verbal abuse during early years of their marriage compared to older women who are subjected more to physical beating than to verbal abuse. Women are at highest risk of being psychologically abused between the ages of 15-24 years (72 % in Laxmipur and 57 % in Kushtia). By contrast, older women between the ages of 35-49 years are at greatest risk of being physically abused (46 % in Laxmipur and 63 % in Kushtia).

Nearly half of the recently married women experienced some form of (verbal) abusive behaviour. The newly married brides with few relatives or friends in their husband's villages have virtually no one to fall back on in the event of excessive oppression. The proportion of women experiencing only verbal abuse declined somewhat with the increase in the duration of marriage, while the incidence of physical abuse increased with age and duration of marriage. Since we have collected information on life time experience of violence, it is normally expected that older women would experience more incidences of physical violence compared to younger women or women with shorter duration of marriage. As one respondent in the study villages remarked:

I am married for the last 17 years and I have two daughters and one son. Yet I get beaten up regularly. The frequency or intensity of beating or quarrels has not decreased in our case. My husband has developed a habit of verbally abusing me now and then with occasional physical abuse. Life has not changed for me over the years.

On the other hand, the level of education of both the husband and wife has significant impact in improving the husband-wife relationship. As against nearly half (53%) of the women with no education who suffered physical beating by their husbands, the proportion declined to 18 per cent in the Laxmipur villages among the better educated women and to 17 per cent in the Kushtia villages. Better educated men, who would be generally married to educated women, showed some restraint in abusing their wives. However, for our FGD it was clear that educated women were much more subjected to verbal abuse than to physical beating for failing in their duties towards the husband, children or other members in the family. Our field observation and FGD revealed that educated men view reprimanding rather than beating their wives as a way of teaching them a lesson, to behave properly.

The most widespread violence was reported by women whose husbands are engaged as agricultural or non-agricultural wage labours. About two-thirds of the women in the Laxmipur villages and three-fourths of the women in the Kushtia villages with husbands as 'wage labour' were reported being physically abused by their husbands. It should be mentioned here that in terms of education, income and landholding size, the wage labourers belong to the lowest socio-economic strata in our sample.

About 39 per cent of women living in nuclear families in the Laxmipur villages reported some form of physical abuse while a similar proportion of women living in joint families also suffered physical abuse. The incidence of physical violence among both types of families was more or less the same. However, in Kushtia villages there were some differences in the incidence of wife abuse between nuclear and joint families. In the Kushtia villages more than half (54 %) of the women living in nuclear families suffered physical violence as against 36 per cent of women in joint families who were physically abused.

In spite of the popular myth that mother-in-law and other members of the joint family instigate a man to abuse his wife, our data suggest that joint family in some cases offers some sort of protection and acts as a deterrent to husbands' using physical force to discipline their wives and subdue them. In most of rural Bangladesh where a vast majority of the marriages are arranged by parents and guardians, mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law in certain situations do play a supportive role towards the abused women in the household. Mothers-in-law in such situations try to prevent their sons from doing excesses and ill-treating their wives.

The Incidence of Wife-beating

Our data suggest that violence against women is widespread in both the study areas. Our findings show that about 39 per cent of women in Laxmipur and 53 per cent in Kushtia villages reported being physically beaten by their husbands. It may be mentioned here that these figures are likely to be under estimates of real incidences which we have observed in our findings from the qualitative data. During our field work, some of the women in the study villages were physically beaten by their husbands. But in response to our question, the very same women did not say that they had been physically abused.

This may be partly explained by the fact that there is wide societal tolerance of wife abuse in Bangladesh. The "odd slap" or "blow" is regarded as routine 'husband like' behaviour. It is only if beatings are very severe women perceive of themselves as being abused. In our FGD, we found that disputes over dowries, a wife's sexual infidelities, her neglect of household duties, and her disobedience of her husband's dictates are all considered legitimate cause for wife-beating. Observations during field work and FGD also confirmed a high degree of acceptance of male violence; it was only when the torture became unbearable or the women became ill that most women talked about being beaten by their husbands.

Our data suggest that wife beating is widely prevalent in both the study areas. For the sample as a whole, as many as 46 per cent women -- 39 per cent in Laxmipur and 53 per cent in Kushtia - report having suffered beatings from their husbands. Table 3 shows that wife-beating experience do not vary substantially by age, duration of marriage, family type or occupation of husband. However, better educated women or women with better educated husbands experience wife-beating to a smaller extent compared to illiterate women or women having husband with minimum education. In Laxmipur area, proportions of women who ever suffered beating by their husband range from 53 per cent for illiterate women to 18 per cent for women with secondary education. The corresponding figures in Kushtia for the lowest and highest education categories are 67 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. Similar differentials by levels of education of husbands also persist in both the study areas.

We have already noted from Tables 1 and 2 that women in Kushtia villages are worse off compared to women in Laxmipur villages with respect to education, landholdings and occupation of husband. This differences in the level of education of the respondents (and their husbands) and the occupational structure of respondents' husbands may be partly responsible for the differential incidence of wife beating and wife-abuse in the two regions.

The findings in Table 3 indicate that lifetime experience of marital violence (verbal and physical abuse) remain fairly steady over the three age cohorts aged 15-24, 25-34 and 35-49 years. Unfortunately, this study did not enquire about recent experiences of marital violence. Studies that have examined recent experiences, however, commonly find that older women experience less violence, since age confers a certain amount of power that allows women to protect themselves against spousal violence. For example, a study in Bangladesh observes that married women aged 30-39 and 40-49 years are only about half and one-third as likely to have been beaten in the previous year compared to women aged 20-29 years (Schuler et al. 1996).

Our findings clearly suggest that women are victims of substantial abuse of physical, psychological and emotional nature. In part, this abuse is caused by the life situation of women where they are raised as dependents - first they are dependent on their fathers, then on their husbands and finally on their sons. Apart from the psychological and emotional suffering, women are often subjected to beatings and physical abuse including denial of food in a range of situations.

Common Situations Evoking Violence

A central question in understanding and addressing abuse is how and why violence enters a relationship. The evidence suggests that marital violence occur in a range of situations. Women in the study area frequently attributed violence to proximate causes like "mistakes" in running the household, disobedience to the husband's orders or failing to meet her husband's expectations. Disobedience ranges from failure to serve a hot meal on time, to quarreling with the mother-in law or behaving improperly with outside men.

It is evident that violence against women is a widely accepted form of behaviour, viewed as a woman's due and her husband's right. Tables 4A and 4B show that the respondents listed the reasons why they were verbally abused or hit by their husbands. The average number of reasons for violence was estimated to be 3.6 for Laxmipur and 3.1 for Kushtia.

As shown in Table 4, the major reasons for violent behaviour of husbands related to meals not being served on time (reported by 52 % in Laxmipur and 53 % in Kushtia) or not prepared to their taste/satisfaction (reported by 23 % and 41 % in Laxmipur and Kushtia respectively). A priori, these reasons appear quite trivial, but men found fault with these minor "mistakes" and abused their wives for their faults.

There was considerable agreement, in focus group discussions, that this was a common motive for violence. For example, views from FGD included:

If there is some mistake that the woman has committed, then he beats her; if the woman hits her children, then also the man may beat her or strongly abuse her. If his wife fights with his

mother, disobeys her husband's words, or misbehaves, then she is abused. The wife is likely to be beaten or verbally abused for minor mistakes like: food not being cooked as per husband's taste or meals not being ready on time.

If a woman is disobedient to the husband or the husband's family, she gets beaten for it. A second common event precipitating domestic violence is failure to bring sufficient dowry on the part of the wife and asking husbands for money. If the husband has an affair with someone else, then he comes home and beats his wife. Women consider this as unfair but few express this sentiment because beating is husband's right and wife's due.

Our findings show that women from different age groups with different levels of education, married for varying duration reported different reasons for abusive behaviour by husbands. However, among all the reported reasons, poverty was stated to be the predominant reason for violence (reported by two-thirds of the respondents in both the areas). However, among better educated women (beyond primary level) or women with better educated husbands, poverty or financial constraints was not at all an important reason for violence (mentioned by one-sixth of the women in both the areas).

Failure to serve meals on time was a major reason for violence among women whose husbands are day labourers. When the women failed to serve meals on time to their husbands after days of hard work, the males got very angry and the women became victims of their violence. However, it may be mentioned that women from the poorer socio-economic strata also contribute substantially to the family sustenance by working for pay or by their expenditure saving activities - not to mention about their daily household maintenance activities. Based on our field observation and the consensus among women from FGD, there is societal tolerance of wife beating to a great extent; like:

If it is a great mistake, then the husband is justified in beating his wife. Why not? When the wife disobeys, the husband has the right to beat her for disciplining her.

Beating is for the woman's own good. If she does something wrong, loses something or hits children in anger, the husband must use force to teach her.

Men should not beat their wives but if the wife fails to bring fresh dowry or if her parents can not give him presents occasionally, then the husband has got the right to be angry and misbehave with his wife.

Justifying Wife-beating

Table 5 also indicates that severe and frequent beating is rarely viewed as a reason for leaving the husband. No more than 9 per cent from each area express the view that a woman should leave her husband if she is beaten excessively. For one, wife beating is perceived so strongly as a woman's due and a husband's right that it is seen as no more than a normal part of womanhood, and rarely as a cause for separation. And second and more realistically, women are acutely aware of the socio-economic realities that offer them few alternatives to the life of violence. Most of the parents will not be able to keep their daughters for long because of sheer poverty, once they go back to their parental homes. Moreover, for most of the parents prospects for second marriage of their daughters are bleak.

The survey also enquired of women whether they considered it right that a man beats his wife in a variety of situations. The question was phrased to refer to beating "as a last resort". Despite questions about the reliability of these attitudinal questions, nevertheless, it is evident that violence against women is a widely accepted form of behaviour in the cultural context of the study villages. Table 5 shows that well over three in four women consider wife-beating a justifiable form of behaviour. Wife beating is not only considered an acceptable, but a 'right' form of behaviour in a variety of conditions including the neglect of household chores, and failure to obey her husband. Focus group discussions underscore the extent to which women accept domestic violence as an undisputed aspect of marriage. Women in both the areas recognise and accept beating as the right of the husband; the general impression is that women who 'misbehave' deserve an adequate lesson.

Although wife beating is justified, in every setting, in focus group discussions, women seemed more likely to qualify their support for wife-beating with such terms as "if it is a great mistake", "if she doesn't listen to her husband", "if she continues even after her husband has explained to her". However, in our FGDs participants emphasized on greater understanding and less use of force.

Nearly three-fourths of the women reported that they went away to their parental home after a confrontation at the in-laws house (as shown in Table 6). However, a majority of them went in the initial years of marriage, before children were born. The frequency of going away to natal home in the event of dispute declined over time, with the increase in age and duration of marriage. During the in-depth interviews, women listed reasons such as parent's poor economic condition, social traditions requiring women to endure some discomfort and hardship, and unwillingness to depend on married brothers for not going off to the parental home as often as they would like to. Compounded with this there was also the apprehension that a return to the in-law's house would be humiliating for them, especially when husbands or some other members of the conjugal family do not come to fetch them back. In fact, a majority of the women who went to their parental home after a serious altercation, reported that they did not even tell their parents or brothers what the real reason of their sudden or unscheduled visit was. They allowed their anger or feeling of hurt to cool off for a few days and returned to their husbands' home on their own as if nothing had happened. During the in-depth interviews, one woman expressed her predicament in the following words:

I do sometimes go off to my parental home but one has to always return back. My own family is not well off to keep me, they have their own problems so what is the use of burdening them with mine? Even when I go, I do not tell them why I have come. I stay at my parental home for several days and once my anger cools down I go back to my in-law's house. Sometimes my husband or one of his relatives comes to take me back but sometimes I go on my own. Because, I know I have to carry on with the relationship.

Another woman said:

If I narrate my grief to my parents and brothers they would feel bad and worry about me. So, when I go to my parental home I normally do not tell them the real reason of my visit. This is because I am quite aware of the limitations of my parents. So even if my husband does not come to take me back, I have to return to my in-law's house on my own. In the past I visited

my parental home after being abused by my husband. But I had to come back every time in view of the prevailing socio-economic constraints. Considering all these, I have decided to remain at my conjugal home despite all the harassment and psychological abuse. In the early years of our marriage, I used to go off to my parents' house quite frequently after a conflict, even four or five times a year. But after I have my own children, I don't go to my natal family after a confrontation with my husband. Even though I make occasional visit to my parental home, but that is for a change only.

Type of Physical Assault

The most common and frequently experienced physical assault is “slapping” followed by “pulling by the hair”, “hurling objects at wife”, “beating with a stick”, etc. The other types of violence are: punching in the nose or face, banging head against the wall, hitting in private parts, kicking, pushing and shoving. In general, when physical violence is severe or physical assault occurs, it is accompanied by psychological violence.

It is evident from Table 7 that wife-beating cuts across age, family type, duration of marriage and occupation of husbands. Our findings suggest that wife beating is widely prevalent in both the study areas. However, there was some variation in the incidence of wife beating in the two areas - 39 per cent in Laxmipur compared to 53 per cent in Kushtia. Older women or those married for longer duration were punished more severely compared to younger or recently married women. Again, it is evident that women with a secondary level education or women with better-educated husbands were less likely to be victims of wife battering. It is observed that women educated up to and beyond secondary levels were largely reprimanded for their "misdeeds" or "mistakes". Only one sixth of them experienced physical assault in both the areas compared to one-half and two-thirds of illiterate women who suffered physical assault in Laxmipur and Kushtia respectively. While it is evident that irrespective of educational levels, all women are victims of 'slapping' by husbands, it is also evident that with at least ten years of education, a significantly lower proportion of women suffer other (severe) forms of physical assaults compared to women with minimal education. Similarly, women with better-educated husbands are less likely to be victims of marital violence.

In addition to physical violence, use of abusive language was the most common form of violence reported by an overwhelming majority of abused women. Verbal assault was in the form of calling names, using foul language, blaming parents of the wife for her inability to manage the house efficiently or not being able to cook food properly. Many women were victims of abusive language for not attending to the needs of the children or mother-in-law or other members of the family. Again, many women did not get money from their husbands and some women were doubted for adultery and were sarcastically remarked upon.

However, most of our respondents viewed milder forms of violence, such as occasional slapping or use of abusive language as parts of married life and were rather willing to ignore it for smooth continuation of conjugal life. Unfortunately, many men use abusive language in the presence of in-laws and children. Most women tolerated verbal abuses in the presence of their in-laws, however, they view physical beating in their presence as demeaning and corroding their sense of self worth.

Most of the abused women suffer in silence as one of our respondents pointed out during indepth interview:

Whenever my husband is angry, he starts abusing me or hits me with a stick or pulls my hair. Slapping is a routine thing what he does most of the times. In the event of a conflict with me, sometimes he also beats my children mercilessly. But I have no other alternative but to suffer this in silence.

Many women perceive family members or neighbours as instigators or spectators. Still most often they try to derive solace or emotional support from mothers in-law, husband's sisters or husband's brothers' wives. However, women who have close relatives in the neighbourhood can easily unburden themselves and elicit sympathies. Our field observation and indepth interview of respondents reveals that informing members of the natal family (fathers, brothers) takes place with a time lag because visits to parental home are not as frequent as domestic quarrels. By the time they visit parental homes, the rage or feeling of hurt (because of abusive behaviour by husbands) subsides to a great extent. In the process, most of the women do not report to parents about incidence of quarrels and even when they do it, they describe it in a much more mild way.

Our study does not support the view that age would help women to get rid of violent relationship or bring relief from physical abuse. Our findings suggest that older women are somewhat more likely to be physically abused than the younger ones. Further, from our FGD and field observation we have found that the husband-wife relationship does not improve or the frequency and intensity of violence do not decrease substantially even after the birth of children. During our FGDs participants mentioned that the causes of violence are frequently related to control of women by their husbands and in-laws (denial of food, shelter and visit to relatives). Financial abuse, as a specific form of violence, was noted even otherwise with reference to failing to support the children, controlling family money and throwing the women out of the house.

Table 8 summarises the reasons given by women for being repressed in the conjugal homes. Although there are various reasons, respondents are more likely to mention reasons like: "if the wife disobeys her husband's directives", "if she demands equal rights", "if there is not enough money for running the family" and "wife's inability to meet dowry demand". Thus, economic constraints, male authority and control of decision-making in the family and women's lack of autonomy emerge as major reasons of violence against women in the conjugal life. The reasons for staying in a violent relationship varied from social pressure, social customs, poverty of parents and lack of resources to no other place to go.

Summary Findings from FGDs

Our findings suggest that there is a great deal of conflict in gender relations at the household level. Women describe a variety of abuses against them by their husbands, from being denied food or permission to visit parental home to being verbally abused and beaten. Women in the study villages portray wife battering as both pervasive and accepted.

Three main circumstances are said to trigger violence against women in the study villages: (a) parents' failure to provide dowry as agreed, (b) wives' failure to take care of their husbands

when the men return from work, and (c) women's failure to complete their household duties on time. Women are likely to be abused if dowry demands are not met or if household duties are not performed properly or if the husband or children are not properly taken care of. Women in the study villages associate the rising rate of violence with growing poverty in the area. They indicate that men are always bad tempered because they cannot eat a full meal after a hard day's of work. Women also report that their own income-earning activities are interfering with their ability to finish household duties, for which their husbands sometimes beat them and deny them food. Difficulties in managing their increased work burdens are reported by women in many poor families.

Men's increased difficulties in earning a living are also said to cause turmoil and violence in gender relations. Women in the FGDs explain that tension in the family arises when men cannot provide for household needs, and this may lead to "dissatisfaction, quarrels, and beatings." A young woman asserts:

It's because of unemployment and poverty that most men in this community beat their wives. They have no money to look after us. As a result of endemic poverty, men assault us and also abuse us psychologically.

It is true that now-a-days women are participating in greater numbers in income-earning activities. Women now play a much more important role in family budgeting than they were used to. In the rural setting, women have been increasingly taking up new challenges, accepting non-traditional work. During the last 15 years, rural credit programs of many NGOs (Grammen Bank, for example) have made women literate, conscientized and trained. They are much more involved in activities like handicrafts, cane products, rearing silk worms, spinning and weaving. Loans from Grameen Bank and other NGOs have enabled women to run petty trade, set up small shops, involve in agriculture and social forestry, nursery and fish cultivation.

In the informal sector, the two predominant forms of wage employment for women are domestic service and construction work, the latter employing the poorest of women in arduous tasks such as brick-breaking. Informal manufacturing units also employ women but in unskilled and in low paid activities. In rural areas, the major source of female employment in the manufacturing sector are rural industries, comprising a large number of cottage industries where women and girls are mostly employed as unpaid family workers.

Bangladeshi women's lives have undergone substantial changes since 1971. The NGO activities, structural adjustment programs, industrial employment, and population control policies, among other things, have transformed the horizon of possibilities tremendously. These changes have taken place in an increasingly polarised and globalising environment.

But women's increasing economic role is not always seen as bringing them greater security. Domestic abuse against women, ranging from belittling and mocking to physical assault, persists. A college-educated woman says that violence occurs when "the husband is not ready to accept the increasing awareness, exposure, and participation of the wife in spheres outside the household and as a result beats the wife to demonstrate his supremacy." On the other hand, an illiterate woman reports, "on return after a hard day of work, if immediate attention is not paid to the man, it invites his wrath."

Rural women, in general, face well-known restrictions on employment opportunities, relating, inter alia, to the gender division of labour. These include lack of access to productive assets; weak bargaining power vis-a-vis male partners in economic transactions; limited access to institutional credit; and the burden of domestic work. Thus, social restrictions and economic exploitations go hand in hand. The changing economy and increased breadwinner responsibilities for women have created enormous strain on households. A poor woman in our FGD says:

Women have more responsibilities because they have dual functions, managing the household and also generating income. And when their work outside the home is done, women have to cook meals, clean its compounds and wash its clothes. And they bear and care for its children. They are the chief health providers for children and the family. Besides, women must obey their husbands as well. These are the multiple burdens of womanhood.

In most of our FGDs, discussion about violence encompasses injustices of all kinds against women. Women list types of injustice including beating, verbal abuse, cheating, and lying; women may be thrown out of the house, abandoned, or divorced, and left to bring up children alone. In our study villages both old and young women acknowledged frequent incidences of domestic violence. An old woman summarised women's experience of violence in the following words:

When a woman made a mistake, or even made no mistake but the husband was upset, she would be the target of her husband's anger. Women could be beaten, abusively shouted at, tied up with a rope, or given no food. When a woman ran to escape, seeking refuge at her parents' house, her parents would simply tell her to go home, since such a situation was a common thing in every household. The woman's parents would be embarrassed because their daughter had brought shame and dishonor for her parents, brothers and sisters.

Another woman observed:

Women are harassed in all sorts of ways and wife battering is quite common. Women have no status in their husbands' families. Many husbands consider wives to be a necessary evil; existing just to cook, clean and bear children.

According to many of our respondents, deepening poverty also fuels violence. One woman explains:

Children are hungry, so they start to cry. They ask for food from their mother and their mother doesn't have it. Then the father is irritated because the children are crying, and he takes it out on his wife.

In our FGDs where the sensitive issue of domestic abuse has been discussed openly, most acknowledge that it occurs almost in every family. Many women associate domestic violence with traditional norms. A woman expresses her dismay in the following words:

A woman must obey her husband, as the man is head of the household, father of the children. Older people say, don't look upon your husband, don't threaten your husband, or else you

will go to hell. Girls are taught from their childhood to be obedient, dutiful and not to protest the husband. I always obey my husband; even though he is good for nothing.

Domestic abuse of women is said to be common, and discussion groups in all the study villages indicate that level of violence against women is worse than ever. Our FGD participants maintain:

The women here do not live well. Their lives are full of fights with their husbands, beating by them. Sometimes a salish is arranged and the husband and the in-laws are advised to stop abusing the wife. But things do not improve for the helpless wife.

According to a woman in the FGD there is large-scale societal approval of wife abuse. She expresses her anguish as follows:

We have a neighbor who calls his wife a whore and beats her up if she doesn't have his food ready on time or his clothes are not properly cleaned. She cries quietly, but everybody knows. He has total control and beats her over any little thing.

A female schoolteacher says:

The main consequence of poverty is violence, particularly in the home. If a man is out of work, he doesn't help around the house, but he does get in the way more than ever. He's fighting and squabbling, blaming things on his wife.

A young woman with a minor daughter says:

I've always done everything at home—prepare the food, wash the clothes, mop the floor, sweep the yard, fix things when they break, take care of the children and domestic animals. And still I must endure my husband's insult and beatings whenever he comes home angry. I remember my husband beating me up for no fault of my own when he came home in a bad mood or when I had done something wrong. Then later everything would be fine again and we would have lovemaking. I am used to all of it.

One indicator of continuing gender inequalities is the widespread domestic abuse of women that is reported. During discussion on trends in gender violence, the groups indicate that women are verbally and physically abused and that this is frequently associated with economic stress, inferior status of women and norms that seem to sanction violence against women. A young woman, who suffers beatings regularly, maintains:

Some men mistreat their wives physically, verbally and psychologically to the point of sending the wife to the hospital. Once my husband treated me badly, humiliated me with his words and threw me out of the house. But I had to come back to my husband's family. I stay because I have nowhere to go with two minor children.

The sense of desperation, fear and helplessness is more pronounced in the victims who suffer severe beatings (measured by both frequency and nature of injuries sustained) over a long period of time. But there is no escape from this "cage", as one woman narrated her experience as follows:

The first time my husband hit me, I was stunned! I did not know what was happening! I was a new bride, married only for two weeks, so, I just whimpered in shame and pain. I did nothing and told nobody. Because to me, marriage is forever—happens only once. God has created me for this man and I have to live with him till death. So, I have to suffer these indignities in silence.

Given this scenario, can Bangladeshi women choose to marry someone of their own choice, or divorce him, if the marriage does not work out satisfactorily or opt for another marriage or a career? For the vast majority of illiterate women living in rural areas, these options are virtually non-existent. While divorce or separation is relatively easy option, the question remains where they would go after the divorce. Going to the natal family after birth of children is not a feasible solution in most cases. Although remarriage of women is socially accepted, there is no guarantee that by marrying another person, they would not end up with similar types of problems. More importantly, however, arranging a second marriage for a daughter is a difficult task for parents – both financially (higher dowry demands) as well as socially (social stigma about divorced women). Cultural norms, the economic and social status of the natal family and economic constraints make this option very difficult for most women. Thus, women try to adjust and adapt themselves with the hostile situation in the conjugal homes.

Table 1: Salient Characteristics of Study Population

<i>Category</i>	<i>percentage</i>
Number of respondent women	600
Averages	
Age of respondents	29.4
Number of years of schooling of respondents	3.5
Number of years of husband's schooling	5.1
Duration of marriage (in years)	17.3
Landholding per household (in decimals)	57.3
Per cent of Population	
Living in nuclear family	83.0
Living in joint family	17.0
Men having salaried jobs	6.6
Men engaged in business/trade	18.7
Number of children	4.1
Male	2.1
Female	2.0

Table 2: Distribution of Women by Socio-economic Characteristics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Laxmipur Village</i>		<i>Kushtia Village</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
All	300	100.0	300	100.00
Age of Women				
15-24	74	24.7	56	18.7
25-34	152	50.7	144	48.0
35+	74	24.7	100	33.3
Duration of marriage (years)				
0-5	46	15.3	48	16.0
6-10	68	22.7	52	17.3
11-14	52	17.3	46	15.3
15+	134	44.7	154	51.3
Type of Family				
Nuclear	248	82.7	250	83.3
Joint	52	17.3	50	16.7
Women's Education (years)				
0	38	12.7	118	39.3
1-5	180	60.0	130	43.3
6-9	60	20.0	40	13.3
10+	22	7.3	12	4.0
Husband's Education (years)				
0	50	16.7	56	18.7
1-5	76	25.3	124	41.3
6-9	152	50.7	86	28.7
10+	22	7.3	34	11.3
Husband's Occupation				
Agriculture	130	43.3	156	52.0
Business/Trade	80	26.7	32	10.7
Service	36	12.0	4	1.3
Day Labour	42	14.0	92	30.7
Others	12	4.0	16	5.3
Husband's Landholdings (acres)				
00	34	11.3	24	8.0
.01-.50	172	57.3	158	52.7
.51-1.50	76	25.3	82	27.3
1.51-2.50	14	4.7	22	7.3
2.51-5.00	4	1.3	8	2.7
5.01+	0	0	6	2.0

Table 3: Types of Abuse faced by Women

(%)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Laxmipur Village</i>		<i>Kushtia Village</i>	
	Verbal Abuse	Physical Abuse	Verbal Abuse	Physical Abuse
All	61.3	38.7	46.7	53.3
Women's Age				
15-24	72.3	27.7	57.1	42.9
25-34	59.2	41.8	37.5	62.5
35-49	54.1	45.9	50.0	50.0
Duration of Marriage (Years)				
0-5	53.3	46.7	49.0	51.0
6-10	64.0	36.0	42.3	57.7
11-14	47.0	52.9	39.1	60.9
15+	63.4	36.6	46.8	53.2
Type of Family				
Nuclear	61.0	39.0	46.0	54.0
Joint	61.5	38.5	64.0	36.0
Women's education (years)				
0	47.4	52.6	35.4	64.6
1-5	56.7	43.3	50.8	49.2
6-9	68.5	31.5	45.0	55.0
10+	81.8	18.2	83.3	16.7
Husband's education				
0	41.7	58.3	35.8	64.2
1-5	57.9	42.1	51.4	48.6
6-9	73.0	27.0	57.1	42.9
10+	90.9	10.1	58.3	41.7
Husband's occupation				
Agriculture	67.7	32.3	57.7	42.3
Business/trading	70.0	30.0	56.2	43.8
Service	66.7	32.3	50.0	50.0
Wage Labour	32.3	66.7	23.9	76.1
Others	50.0	50.0	37.5	62.5

Table 4A: Reasons for Violence by Socio-economic Characteristics in Laxmipur Villages

(%)

<i>Reasons /Characteristics</i>	<i>Meals Not Ready on Time</i>	<i>Meals Not Well Prepared</i>	<i>Children Not Well Cared for</i>	<i>House Not Well Cared for</i>	<i>Others Instigate</i>	<i>Economic Constraints</i>	<i>Dowry Demands</i>	<i>Husband's 2nd Marriage</i>	<i>Suspicious</i>
All	52.0	23.3	52.7	22.7	28.0	65.3	45.3	16.0	52.7
Age of Women									
15-24	45.9	10.8	40.5	18.9	43.2	59.4	56.8	-	60.8
25-34	60.5	25.0	55.3	28.9	27.6	63.1	46.1	17.1	37.8
35+	40.5	35.1	62.3	16.2	16.2	75.7	35.1	21.6	25.0
Duration of marriage (years)									
0-5	47.8	4.3	8.7	4.3	30.4	43.5	47.8	4.3	52.2
6-10	58.8	17.6	29.4	11.8	35.3	47.1	47.1	14.7	67.6
11-14	38.5	15.4	26.9	15.4	34.6	38.5	42.3	19.2	46.1
15+	55.2	35.8	89.6	37.3	20.9	92.5	44.8	19.4	47.8
Women's Education (years)									
0	63.2	36.8	63.2	31.6	57.9	73.7	42.1	36.8	42.1
1-5	57.8	22.2	53.3	22.2	24.4	71.1	46.7	14.4	52.2
6-9	36.7	20.0	46.7	20.0	23.3	60.0	53.3	13.3	60.0
10+	27.3	18.2	36.7	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	-	54.5
Husband's Education (years)									
0	64.0	24.0	64.0	32.0	32.0	64.0	48.0	28.0	40.0
1-5	65.8	18.4	50.0	26.3	39.5	81.6	57.9	15.8	63.1
6-9	44.7	26.3	52.6	15.8	22.4	65.8	42.1	13.2	53.9
10+	27.3	18.2	36.4	36.4	18.2	9.1	18.2	9.1	36.4
Husband's Occupation									
Agriculture	52.3	23.0	58.4	32.3	27.7	66.1	44.6	12.3	52.3
Business/Trade	50.0	20.0	57.5	15.0	27.5	57.5	42.5	12.5	50.0
Service	44.4	22.2	38.8	16.7	27.7	66.7	50.0	16.7	44.4
Day Labour	61.9	28.5	47.6	14.3	28.5	76.2	52.4	28.5	57.1
Others	50.0	33.3	16.7	16.7	33.3	66.7	33.3	33.3	66.7

Table 4B: Reasons for Violence by Socio-economic Characteristics in Kushtia Villages

(%)

<i>Reasons/ Characteristics</i>	<i>Meals Not Ready on Time</i>	<i>Meals Not Well Prepared</i>	<i>Children Not Well Cared for</i>	<i>House Not Well Managed</i>	<i>Others Instigate</i>	<i>Economic Constraints</i>	<i>Dowry Demands</i>	<i>Husband's 2nd Marriage</i>	<i>Suspicion</i>
All	52.7	40.7	32.0	17.3	29.3	66.7	26.7	11.3	29.3
Age of Women									
15-24	32.1	39.3	10.7	10.7	42.8	71.4	14.3	3.6	42.8
25-34	62.5	41.7	38.9	23.6	27.8	66.7	36.1	16.7	18.1
35+	48.0	40.0	36.0	12.0	24.0	64.0	20.0	8.0	38.0
Duration of marriage (years)									
0-5	37.5	33.3	12.5	12.5	41.7	66.7	16.7	-	29.2
6-10	61.5	50.0	42.3	23.1	46.1	76.9	19.2	11.5	30.8
11-14	52.2	39.1	30.4	30.4	43.5	69.6	43.5	26.1	21.7
15+	54.5	40.3	35.1	13.0	15.6	62.3	27.3	10.4	31.2
Women's Education (years)									
0	54.2	49.1	44.1	20.3	33.9	76.3	30.5	15.3	33.9
1-5	53.4	32.3	26.2	15.4	30.8	67.7	24.6	9.2	29.2
6-9	45.0	35.0	20.0	15.0	15.0	50.0	20.0	10.0	20.0
10+	33.3	33.3	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	33.3	-	16.7
Husband's Education (years)									
0	64.3	53.6	57.1	35.7	32.1	67.8	35.7	17.9	57.1
1-5	56.5	38.7	29.0	14.5	40.3	75.8	30.6	12.9	25.8
6-9	44.2	37.2	23.3	11.6	18.6	62.8	18.6	7.0	20.9
10+	41.2	35.3	23.5	11.8	11.8	41.2	17.6	5.9	17.6
Husband's Occupation									
Agriculture	51.2	38.4	38.4	17.9	26.9	67.9	19.2	10.2	32.0
Business/Trade	43.8	31.2	31.2	12.5	25.0	43.7	12.5	12.5	43.7
Service	50.0	50.0	50.0	25.0	25.0	50.0	25.0	25.0	50.0
Day Labour	60.9	47.8	21.7	25.0	36.9	76.0	41.3	13.0	19.5
Others	37.5	37.5	25.0	37.5	25.0	66.7	50.0	25.0	25.0

Table 5: Attitudes to Wife-Beating: Per cent Agreeing that Wife-Beating is Justifiable in Selected situations

(%)

<i>Per cent of women agreeing that husband is justified in beating his wife if she:</i>	<i>Laxmipur (N=300)</i>	<i>Kushtia (N=300)</i>
(I) Beats/Neglects children (ever) even after husband has advised/warned against it	22.3	23.7
(II) Is disrespectful (ever) even after husband has advised/warned against it	25.7	27.0
(III) Neglects household chores (ever) even after husband has advised /warned against it	44.0	45.7
(IV) Is disobedient (ever) even after husband has advised/warned against it	61.7	63.3
Per cent of women agreeing that husband is justified in beating his wife in at least one of the above conditions (ever) even after husband has advised /warned against it	72.3	76.0
Per cent of women agreeing that the woman is justified in abandoning her husband if husband beats wife frequently	7.7	9.0

Table 6: Women Who Reported Going to Parental Home After Conflict

<i>Reasons/ Area</i>	<i>Laxmipur Village</i>		<i>Kushtia Village</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Not gone to parental home	76	25.3	91	30.3
Gone to parental home after conflict	224	74.7	209	69.7
During early years of marriage	179	79.9	172	82.3
Whenever there is a problem	45	20.1	37	17.7

Table 7A: Physical Assault to Women by Socio-economic Characteristics: Laxmipur Village

(%)

<i>Reasons /Characteristics</i>	<i>Slapping</i>	<i>Beating with a stick</i>	<i>Hurling objects at wife</i>	<i>Pulling by hair</i>	<i>Banging head against the wall</i>	<i>Hitting in private parts</i>	<i>Others</i>
All	100.00	44.0	51.7	68.1	25.0	13.8	14.7
Age of Women							
15-24	100.00	30.0	50.0	65.0	20.0	20.0	15.0
25-34	100.00	45.1	51.6	69.3	25.8	19.3	19.3
35-49	100.00	50.0	52.9	67.6	26.4	0	5.9
Duration of marriage (years)							
0-5 years	100.00	30.0	50.0	50.0	15.0	10.0	20.0
6-10 years	100.00	34.8	52.2	65.2	21.7	17.3	17.3
11-14 years	100.00	50.0	53.8	69.2	23.0	15.3	15.3
15+ years	100.00	51.1	53.2	76.5	31.9	12.8	10.6
Type of Family							
Nuclear	100.00	41.7	47.9	63.5	25.0	12.5	12.5
Joint	100.00	55.0	70.0	90.0	25.0	20.0	25.0
Women's Education (years)							
0	100.00	65.0	65.0	85.0	35.0	35.0	20.0
1-5	100.00	42.3	51.2	67.9	24.3	7.6	12.8
6-9	100.00	35.7	42.8	57.1	21.4	7.1	14.3
10+	100.00	0	25.0	25.0	-	-	25.0
Husband's Education (years)							
0	100.00	63.9	61.1	83.3	38.8	22.2	19.4
1-5	100.00	40.5	54.0	70.2	21.6	16.2	16.2
6-9	100.00	29.2	41.4	51.2	17.0	7.3	7.3
10+	100.00	12.5	25.0	50.0	12.5	-	12.5

Husband's Occupation							
Agriculture	100.00	41.3	54.3	71.6	23.9	13.0	8.7
Business/Trade	100.00	33.3	41.7	58.3	16.7	12.5	8.3
Service	100.00	33.3	25.0	50.0	16.7	-	8.3
Day Labour	100.00	58.1	67.7	77.4	41.9	22.6	25.8
Others	100.00	66.7	33.3	66.7	33.3	33.0	66.7

Table 7B: Physical Assault to Women by Socio-economic Characteristics: Kushtia Village

(%)

<i>Reasons /Characteristics</i>	<i>Slapping</i>	<i>Beating with a stick</i>	<i>Hurling objects at wife</i>	<i>Pulling by hair</i>	<i>Banging head against wall</i>	<i>Hitting in private parts</i>	<i>Others</i>
All	100.00	41.2	83.1	47.5	38.7	28.7	8.1
Age of Women							
15-24	100.00	29.2	87.5	45.8	50.0	37.5	12.5
25-34	100.00	43.0	80.2	46.5	34.9	29.0	6.9
35+	100.00	44.0	86.0	54.0	40.0	24.0	8.0
Duration of marriage (years)							
0-5 years	100.00	33.3	87.5	41.7	33.3	20.8	12.5
6-10 years	100.00	39.3	82.1	42.9	35.7	25.0	10.7
11-14 years	100.00	42.9	82.1	46.4	35.7	28.6	7.1
15+ years	100.00	43.8	82.5	51.2	42.5	32.5	6.2
Type of Family							
Nuclear	100.00	41.4	82.8	45.7	36.4	27.1	7.1
Joint	100.00	45.0	85.0	60.0	55.0	40.0	15.0
Women's Education (years)							
0	100.00	54.0	89.4	61.8	48.7	31.5	10.5
1-5	100.00	32.8	81.2	39.0	35.9	26.5	4.7
6-9	100.00	22.2	66.7	16.7	22.2	22.2	5.5
10+	100.00	-	50.0	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5

Husband's Education (years)								
0	100.00	60.0	87.5	57.5	55.0	45.0	12.5	
1-5	100.00	42.3	85.6	46.2	41.0	26.9	7.7	
6-9	100.00	21.6	75.7	40.5	29.7	10.8	5.4	
10+	100.00	25.0	60.0	40.0	20.0	-	-	
Husband's Occupation								
Agriculture	100.00	42.0	82.6	47.8	40.6	24.6	7.2	
Business/Trade	100.00	28.6	71.4	35.7	21.4	14.3	7.1	
Service	100.00	25.0	50.0	25.0	25.0	25.0	25.0	
Day Labour	100.00	44.3	87.1	52.9	44.3	34.3	7.1	
Others	100.00	40.0	80.0	40.0	40.0	40.0	20.0	

Table 8: Reasons Given by Women for Being Repressed at Husband's House: by Area

<i>Reasons/ Area</i>	<i>Laxmipur</i>		<i>Kushtia</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Not have enough money	204	68.0	176	58.7
Unable to meet dowry demand	146	48.7	154	51.3
To protest against abuse of husband/in laws	94	31.3	82	27.3
To demand equal rights	244	81.3	172	57.3
To disobey husband's directives	226	75.3	172	57.3
Not serving in -laws adequately	84	28.0	86	28.7
Quarrel with sister/brother In laws	18	6.0	10	3.3
To ask for money for treatment of children	84	28.0	98	32.7
Others	48	16.0	74	24.7

(Multiple Response)

Chapter 3

Role of Dowry in Marital Violence

Dowry and dowry-related violence, in the highly coercive and often horrific forms we see today, appear to be of fairly recent origin in Bangladesh. The demand for dowry and pressure for further dowry plays an important role in understanding and addressing the issue of marital violence. According to our data, the most common causes of domestic violence are: rows over housework, including quality of food prepared; disputes over children, jealousy and suspicions, arguments over money and dowry demands. Millions of women in Bangladesh face serious harassment due to unfulfilled dowry.

In view of the crucial role of dowry in domestic violence, it is important to provide the relevant data on dowry related issues in order to understand the havoc that dowry plays in the lives of married women. Tables 9 to 14 throw some light on the extent and practice of dowry in the study villages.

Extent of Dowry and its Sources

From Table 9 it is clear that an overwhelming majority of the women (88 per cent) had to pay dowry at the time of marriage. The mean amount of dowry-both cash and kind - was tk. 22, 481 in case of Laxmipur and Tk. 7,932 in the case of Kushtia villages. It is evident that mean amount of dowry was almost three times (287 per cent) more in Laxmipur than in Kushtia. The major reason for this differential is the fact that a significant proportion of households in Laxmipur villages receive regular remittances from migrants working mainly in the Middle Eastern countries. Again, the level of education is much higher in Laxmipur compared to Kushtia villages. Thus, while the Kushtia villages are typically agricultural, a substantial number of households in Laxmipur are engaged either in business or in salaried jobs. The prosperity of Laxmipur over Kushtia is reflected in the educational level of respondents and occupational structure of their husbands.

However, it is clear that the practice of dowry is widely prevalent in both the areas. According to Section 2 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1980; dowry is defined to mean any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given at before or after the marriage as consideration for the marriage. From the FGD and from our field observation we have found that women whose dowries are perceived to be inadequate suffer more from harassment in the husband's home compared to women whose dowries are substantial.

Table 10 provides the relevant information about various sources utilized to arrange the dowry money. About two-fifths of the households (62%) in Laxmipur and less than a half (47%) in Kushtia utilized past savings for arranging dowry. About one fourth of the households had to sell property, one fifth had to mortgage property and about 30 per cent had to borrow money from moneylenders to arrange for the dowry money.

The data in Table 11 points to an unfortunate part of women's lives regarding pressure for further dowry. Irrespective of the amount of initial dowry and its jewelry content, a significant proportion of our respondents had to face pressure for bringing in further dowry from their

parental homes. The proportion of women who are under constant pressure to bring in more dowries was as high as 45 per cent in Kushtia and 41 per cent in Laxmipur. However, demand for further dowry decreases with increase in the age of the women as shown in Table 12.

Findings from Table 12 show that a vast majority of women belonging to the age group 15-24 years have to face constant pressure for further dowry. However, the demand for further dowry decreases sharply with the increase in the age of the women. Thus, while 73 Per cent of the women aged 15-24 years in Laxmipur villages (compared to 84 % in Kushtia villages) are being harassed for further dowry, the figure drops to less than 10 Per cent for older women in the age group 35 years and above.

We have also enquired about the reasons for demanding further dowry. Table 13 gives the various reasons for which husbands/men demand further dowry. However, as we have already mentioned that the two areas are quite distinct in their occupational structure, this is also reflected in the various reasons cited for demanding further dowry.

About two-fifths of the respondents in Laxmipur were being pressurised to bring in money for financing their husband's migration (ticket/fees) abroad; the corresponding figure for Kushtia was less than 2 per cent. One in seven respondents in Laxmipur and more than one-third in Kushtia were asked to bring in money from their parents for the purpose of land purchase. About 43 per cent of the respondents in Laxmipur and about 58 per cent in Kushtia were under pressure to bring in money for investment in business by the husband, while 12 per cent of the respondents mentioned purchase of consumer durable as the reason for demanding further dowry.

The findings from Table 14 suggest that about two-thirds of the women (62 % in Laxmipur and 69 % in Kushtia) have to suffer violence and physical abuse because of their inability to meet dowry demand. The finding also points to an unfortunate aspect of married life in rural Bangladesh where a significant majority of women are being constantly abused - both physically and mentally- for their inability to bring further dowry from their parents.

Women face severe forms of harassment both psychological and physical due to unfulfilled dowry demands. All these foster a deep and inescapable sense of dependency in women who are left with no alternative but to continue to live with or depend on abusive partners. Additionally, women constantly need to negotiate their space and contend with abuse at their conjugal homes. An important fact is that a woman may experience violence either once in one of her life cycle phases or be continually exposed to multiple instances of violence at various points in time.

Our findings indicate that a vast majority of women, during their early years of marriage, suffer tremendously because of repeated pressures for dowry. Young wives whose families cannot meet their husband's dowry demands may be abandoned, divorced, tortured, attacked with acid or even murdered. Others may be pushed to the point of taking their own lives. Another adverse effect of the dowry system on young girls is that their parents think it is costly to have girls, thus potentially leading to their abuse or neglect (Amin and Cain, 1997).

The Dowry Problem

The modern phenomenon of dowry may be regarded as a groom-price, which is distinguished from the traditional *kanyadan* (gift of the virgin) or bride-wealth. This modern feature of dowry means the transmission of large sums of money, jewelry, cash and other goods from the bride's family to the groom's family. The emergence of dowry and the switch from bride price have been explained by some authors as the cause of the decline of the earning capabilities and productivity of women. According to this view the system of dowry is closely linked with women's role in productive activities. Where women are regarded as an unproductive burden, a dowry is given to the bridegroom's side to compensate them. However, the present spread of dowry cannot be explained only with variables like non-participation of women in economic activity. There are authors who refute this claim altogether, viewing the spread of dowry as parallel to developments elsewhere in the world, identifying it with class formation under capitalist development.

Some authors in Bangladesh are claiming that dowry has become an essential criterion for marriage in every community and is near universal in Bangladeshi society. Even poor men are taking this chance of exploiting the bride's family to improve their fate from poverty and unemployment. This is making marriage a commercial transaction, giving more value to property and money than the bride herself.

Thus, the recent emergence of dowry among Bangladeshi Muslims is more due to simple greed and commercialisation of marriage than the impact of traditional culture, the urge of hypergamy and the undermining of the women's productive role. Some people maintain that the present dimensions of the dowry evil are the result of increasing industrial culture and the fascination for material prosperity, i.e. to get rich overnight, to possess the latest gadgets of comfort and luxury and the display of wealth. The impact on men coming into contact with a wider cash economy by going abroad has also been shown to be a significant variable for their raised expectations in marriage.

Dowry deaths are a common phenomenon in South Asia. These deaths of women are usually caused by the same persons who are legally and socially enjoined to protect them, i.e. their husband or in-laws. It has been rightly pointed out that dowry deaths are a gruesome reminder of the authoritative nature of patriarchy. In several studies, dowry demands have been identified as one of the major causes of murder of Bangladeshi women.

Akanda and Shamim (1985) have shown that almost 50% of all murders of women in Bangladesh in the years 1983-84 were because of dowry. The largest number of murders, 26 out of 60 in the year 1983-84, were demands for dowry. In reality the percentage of murder for dowry is even more if one includes the murders related to dowry which are dressed up as accidents or suicide or which are hidden under 'family quarrel'. The findings also suggest that dowry deaths by fire are not as common in Bangladesh as in India.

As to the methods of killing women for dowry, 54 per cent was accounted for by beating and 34 per cent by physical torture which add up to a gruesome 88 per cent of deaths by direct physical violence. The remaining 12 per cent of deaths were caused by use of acid and poison.

According to Dina Siddiqi (2002), dowry related violence against women appears to have intensified and increased greatly in the past few decades in 'Hindu' as well as non-Hindu communities in South Asia. In the case of Bangladesh, media and human rights reports on violence against women are horrifying, and seem to be multiplying at an exponential rate. However, despite the plethora of such reports, it is not always clear what is dowry related violence and what is domestic violence in general.

Recent study by groups such as Vimochana in Bangalore (quoted in Siddiqi, 2002), suggest that the anti-dowry movement has been a little too 'successful' in that domestic violence cases are often inaccurately classified as 'dowry deaths'. Moreover, trying to squeeze women's accounts of violence into the box of dowry harassment can result in defendants being easily acquitted in court. In a survey of Indian women carried out by the International Center for Research on women in Washington DC, researcher Nata Duvvury found that dowry had been overemphasized as a cause of abuse and that the dowry focus distorted responses to the problem of domestic violence. The Research Center for women studies in Bombay found that even investigators in all female police units set up to handle crimes against women, often took only dowry related cases seriously and avoided other 'private family matters'. The cases related to 'domestic violence' they felt were not a concern for law enforcement officials (quoted in Siddiqi, 2002).

Social commentators are all too willing to attribute 'rampant consumerism and rampant social greed' for the new prominence of dowry demands, without delving too deeply into causes. According to Siddiqi (2002) the link between marriage, money, social mobility and social polarization gains support from a number of studies, which show that the lower ranks of the middle classes and women from poorer families are especially vulnerable to dowry and its demands. Taking account of social and material polarization throws light on the heightened consumerism and greed that are taken to underlie middle class dowry demands.

In this respect, it is critical to locate the question in a larger structural framework of social and economic pressures. Again, in the context of Bangladesh, we see that it is only in the post-independence period, especially the 1980's and 1990's that dowry deaths emerge as a serious problem. A 1996 UNDP study of dowry observed that in previous surveys, respondents rated dowry as their third most pressing problem but by 1996, both rural and urban respondents in Bangladesh felt that dowry was their most significant problem (cited in Siddiqi, 2002). The study goes on to state that dowry seems to have started only after independence and that has increased dramatically since the 1980s. This is also the period of increased social differentiation and disenfranchisement, especially in rural areas. It is also marked by highly visible demonstrations of wealth and the possibilities for capital accumulation, especially through migration to the Middle East.

Rozario (2001) maintains that although dowry has emerged in all communities in Bangladesh, among the Christians it is often indirect, such as sending the groom to the Middle East, helping him with his education or with the wedding expenses. Rozario further states that among the Muslims, marriage has become impossible without paying some form of dowry, even among the poor.

According to Rozario (2001), the shift from *pon* (bride wealth) to *dabi* (dowry) in Bangladesh is linked to the socio-economic changes, i.e. the shift from an agricultural pre-capitalist economy to an urban based capitalist cash economy. However, perpetuation of the dowry system has to be understood by referring to the economic interest of both the groom's family and the bride's family. The groom's family is interested in improving their economic position by recouping some of the investments they make in educating their son or simply by taking advantage of the changed situation in which the focus is on desirable grooms rather than the brides. On the other hand, the bride's family may either voluntarily pay a large dowry to display their wealth or are obliged to meet the dowry demands because they want their daughter to marry an educated man with an urban occupation.

As the root causes of the problem of dowry appear to be socio-economic, remedies can only be achieved by changes of attitude in society. This can be attempted by legislation, but will need to be supported by education and legal awareness. The parents of a bride should understand that by giving dowry they might not be giving their daughter any happiness: it has been claimed that it is only increasing her misfortune. The parents of the bride are not in fact giving the dowry to their daughter but to their son-in-law and his family; this increases greed for more dowries. Parents should rather safeguard their daughters from economic deprivation and violence by educating them about their rights within marriage.

Evidence from Case Studies

In order to understand the reasons why women are abused in the conjugal homes and to provide a composite picture of the interplay of socio-economic and cultural factors; we have prepared several case studies based on our intensive fieldwork.

There are real life experiences of few women from our study villages belonging to different socio-economic groups. All the case studies are based on major happenings as they occurred to the women over the years after their marriage. We have used fictitious names of the women in the case studies because some of the respondents have experienced or suffered violence in such a manner that it would be highly embarrassing for the respondents (and their husbands) if real names and addresses were disclosed. Again, before collecting information for the case studies, we have repeatedly assured our respondents that it would be used only for research purposes and in no way their identity would be disclosed.

The Case of Jamuna

Jamuna Khatun, now aged 35 years, was married at the age of 15. Her husband Shirajuddin is a cultivator having one acre of land. Their conjugal life was happy during the initial months. But misbehaviour and ill treatment by husband started after one year of marriage.

Jamuna's father gave Tk. 15,000 as dowry at his daughter's marriage. But after one year, her husband asked her to bring Tk. 5,000 from her father to buy a plot of land. The poor father was unable to fulfil his son-in-law's demand. At this, her husband got very angry and started to harass and humiliate her. Frequently she was beaten by her husband, was not given food on time and sometimes she had to remain hungry. After two years of their marriage, one day she was beaten severely by her husband and was ousted from the house. She went back to her parental home and decided not to come back. But her father and brothers persuaded her to return to her husband's house.

The main consideration for sending her back to her husband's house was that she had to be married again if she stayed back. This would cost her parents much more money than the earlier dowry because the prospect for second marriage for a woman is much lower compared to that for a man. Again, there is no guarantee that after the second marriage, things would substantially improve in her husband's house. In fact, the situation could even be worse.

Considering all these things, her parents sent her back after four months. One of Jamuna's brothers had been working in the Middle East and he arranged the money for Jamuna. After her husband got the money he demanded, his anger cooled down. Though there are occasional quarrels now a days, use of abusive language and physical assault by her husband has reduced significantly.

Now they have three children - two sons and one daughter. Her eldest son is about 16 years old and according to Jamuna, in the event of a conflict with her husband, her son always supports her. As the son is grown up, her husband does not try to physically abuse her nor does he use abusive language. According to Jamuna, her bad days are over, there is no more violence from her husband. But the bitter memories of earlier years seem like bad dreams to Jamuna. She maintains:

Men should not beat their wives even if they are unable to fulfil the dowry demands. But being born as females, we are helpless and have to depend on their mercy for our sustenance. What choice do we have? We have no where to go. This total dependence on men is mainly responsible for all sorts of abusive behaviour by husbands. But this should not be allowed to continue. The society must put an end to it.

The Case of Tahera

Tahera Khatun was married with Khaleque Molla of the same village at the age of 15. Tahera developed an affair with Khaleque Molla and ultimately they got married. Tahera's father did not pay any cash money as dowry but he gave his daughter gold ornaments and clothing, worth about Tk. 50,000. Initially, both the sides gladly accepted this love marriage. But Tahera's mother-in-law was not happy with the marriage mainly because her daughter-in-law did not bring in any (cash) dowry. Her husband was a primary school teacher and Tahera was a candidate for the SSC examination at the time of their marriage. At the beginning, her husband had no desire for dowry but being frequently instigated by the mother-in-law, her husband gradually started to change his behaviour towards Tahera. After one year of their marriage, Tahera became a victim of physical and mental torture by her husband. She was increasingly being pressurised for bringing in dowry from her parents.

Being unable to tolerate any more, she went back to her father's house. After several sittings (between the two families) to work out a solution, her father agreed to give his son-in-law Tk. 30,000 to purchase a plot of land. The situation improved for a while and Tahera passed the second year of her married life without facing any major problem. In the meantime, she gave birth to a son after two years of marriage. She was dreaming of good days ahead but unfortunately for her that did not happen.

Since Tahera was the daughter of a well-to-do person, her husband started using various pleas to exact money from her father. Her husband again demanded Tk. 5,000 to buy a tape

recorder. Initially, Tahera was unwilling to bring in the money but then her husband started misbehaving with her again. He used to beat her on the slightest pretext. After passing her SSC examination, she got herself admitted in a college. At this stage, a new phenomenon was added: her husband and mother-in-law alleged that she was having extra-marital affair with one of her classmates. Because of their suspicion, the scale of torture went up - both the frequency and intensity of physical assault increased alarmingly. Being unable to bear any more torture, Tahera along with her son went to her parental house.

This was a real shock for her parents and they became extremely concerned for the well – being of their daughter. Their neighbours and influential members of the village tried to settle the issue. After several sittings it was decided in the *salish* that Tahera's father would give 50 decimals of land (registered in Tahera's name) to be cultivated by Tahera's husband. Otherwise, her husband threatened to divorce her. For the sake of his daughter's future, Tahera's father reluctantly agreed to give the land to his son-in-law. Finally, after six months Tahera went back to her conjugal home.

However, the allegations of Tahera's having illicit relation with a college student were totally baseless. In fact, it was part of a well-designed conspiracy to harass Tahera's father and the reputation of the family and in the process to grab a portion of his property. Over the years, her husband had put pressure on her several times to bring in money from her father. If she failed to satisfy her husband's unlawful claim, she was beaten and harassed and was threatened to be ousted. Now she is mother of two children – one son and one daughter. She has learned to adjust and adapt with the violent situation of conjugal home. Like many rural women, Tahera thinks that once her children are grown up, her husband will not be able to mistreat and dominate her in ways he has been doing since her marriage. She adds:

I know my parents love me dearly and would not want my husband to misbehave with me. I can go back to my parental home. But I can not think of leaving my children in my husband's house. Who will look after them, feed them? Thus, despite all the harassment, ill treatments and injustices on me, I have been continuing the relationship for the sake of my children.

The Case of Sabina

Shabina Khatun was married about ten years back. Her husband is a rickshaw puller. They have two minor children, the son is one year old and the daughter is five. They are both illiterates though Fakhrul, husband of Sabina, can sign his name. Sabina was physically abused for the first time by her mother-in-law within one month of her marriage. Then her husband started abusing her both verbally and physically. The initial harassment started for non-fulfillment of dowry.

Sabina's father gave his son-in-law Tk. 4000 as dowry and promised to pay Tk. 1000 more after some time. But Sabina's father was a marginal farmer and because of bad harvest he could not keep his promise. Since, her father was not able to pay the rest of the dowry money, her husband and in-laws started misbehaving with her in all conceivable ways.

After she delivered her first baby, a daughter, the torture reached its peak. Her husband used to beat her mercilessly every now and then. Fakrul also threatened her to send her back to her

father's home. But Sabina had to tolerate all sorts of abusive behaviour at her husband's home. She did not think of going back to her father's home because according to the existing norms, husband's home is the ultimate destination of a married woman. Besides, Sabina's father is poor and would not be able to maintain an extra mouth.

Sabina's husband could not tolerate his daughter because he wanted the first child to be a boy. Sabina sent her daughter to her parental home for the safety of her life. Still there was not adequate food for Sabina. She was abused frequently by her husband for ordinary mistakes. One day while her husband was beating her, one of her eyes was hit and she had to take medicine for several days. Unfortunately, her husband neither took her to the doctor nor gave her any money for her treatment. After the incidence she went to her father's house and her parents took her to the Upazila Health Complex and arranged for her treatment. She stayed about 15 days at her father's house for the purpose.

Sabina opined to us explicitly about the reasons of her being repressed. Her husband has a habit of gambling and he has wasted enough money for this purpose. When he returns home with empty pocket, he gets angry whenever he is asked to give money for daily necessities. Frequently, he strikes his wife with whatever he gets near his hand. Their neighbours and close kin tried to resolve their conflict but with no success. The misbehaviour and ill treatment of her husband has not changed. Close neighbours told us that the violence against Sabina continues mainly for three reasons: (i) poverty, (ii) greed for dowry, and (iii) gambling habit of her husband.

Regarding her experience of her married life Sabina says:

I can not stand the physical and mental abuse in my conjugal home. But my father is poor, I have my younger brothers and sisters. How can I impose my children and myself on them? Again, I can not think of going back to my parental home because it will be embarrassing for my parental family. They have to marry off my other sisters, and my separation or divorce will have negative impact on their marriage prospects. So, I have no other option but to carry on with this abusive relationship.

The Case of Khaleda

Khaleda Akhter was married at the age of fourteen. Abul Kalam, her husband, is a small trader. She gave birth to her first daughter within two years of marriage. Now they have two daughters and two sons. Their eldest daughter was married at the age of fifteen. Khaleda is illiterate but her husband, Abul Kalam, has passed class five. Khaleda is about 32 years old and has completed 18 years of their conjugal life.

At the time of marriage, Khaleda's father paid Tk. 7000 out of Tk. 10,000, which he promised to pay as dowry. Because of extreme poverty, Khaleda's father was not able to pay the rest of the dowry immediately after the marriage. But Khaleda's husband demanded the rest of the money within three months of the marriage. He always looked for an opportunity to raise the issue of dowry and used to harrass his wife by using abusive language. Sometimes, he used to beat her for the dowry money. But because of economic constraint, Khaleda's father could not pay the rest of the dowry. With the passage of each day, torture and violence to Khaleda went on increasing. She used to be verbally abused regularly, physically beaten occasionally and

sometimes she was even denied food. Being unable to tolerate her husband's torture, Khaleda went to her father's home several times. But each time her parents sent her back after a few days.

Frequently, Khaleda's husband threatened to divorce her. She became so much disgusted about life that she even thought of committing suicide to get rid of the torture and harassment of her husband. But she did not do so because of her children. As Khaleda said:

What would happen to my children if I were dead or I go back to my parental home leaving my children? The stepmother would make their life hell. The children would remain hungry, uncared for and would be abused by their stepmother in all possible ways. It is for the welfare of my children that I have been continuing the relationship.

In addition to being physically beaten once or twice a month, verbal abuse became a daily routine for Khaleda. After 6 years of their marriage, one day her husband started to beat her mercilessly. In the act of beating, her husband threw her on the floor and placed his feet on her neck. She was about to die out of suffocation. Then her neighbours came and rescued her. Khaleda then went to her parental home with her two daughters. Finding no other alternative, Khaleda's father sold a small piece of land and paid Tk.5000 to his son-in-law. In fact, he had to pay Tk.2000 more as penalty for his inability in paying the remainder of the dowry on time.

After that her husband's misbehaviour and torture has reduced significantly. Now although there are misunderstanding and quarrels between them, the frequency and intensity of physical assault has reduced substantially.

Reaction of Victims

The common reaction of a victim is to leave the husband's house and stay for a time with her natal kin. The duration of such stays varies. The visit following the first beating in all the cases was a short one. In a vast majority of the cases, the visit lasted less than a week. In all such cases soon after the wife left the house, the husband or his representative tried to convince the guardians of the woman that no injustices would be done to her in the future. Being persuaded by her parents and relations, the wife returns to her husband's house. But most often, the husband fails to keep his promise and the victim would leave the house again. This pattern of behaviour is common among the very young victims. Generally, these women are less than twenty years of age, have been married for less than five years and have one or two children. However, women who are beaten less frequently and not that severely, very few of them leave husband's houses.

Socio-economic condition of the parents' family influences, to a large extent, the pattern of their behaviour. From our field observation and FGD, it was found that women who had more than two children and whose natal family was not rich, very few of them chose to leave the husband's house. This was true even when the beating was frequent and severe. As one respondent who had several children said:

My parents love me and have all the feelings for me, but they are very poor. I can not go back to my natal home because it will be a torture on them both financially and psychologically. So, I have no other option but to carry on with this abusive relationship despite the pain and

ignominy. Frequent abuse and repeated beatings have produced a state of helplessness and dependence on me but I have accepted this as an inevitable part of marriage. I can not dissolve the marriage because the alternative is an undesirable or a non-viable option, given the objective condition of my life.

Some of the severely beaten or abused women informed us that the situation became so hopeless to them that there were times when they wanted to kill themselves to end the misery. But thinking about the well-being of children, they had to give up the idea. Some of them also thought of seeking divorce. But the thought of losing the children (guardianship of children goes to the father), the fear of social stigma and loss of face, prevented them from taking any step towards divorce. Moreover, a few of the women were too afraid to initiate any action. They were terrified that any counter measure by them would add to their husband's anger and the situation would be even worse. They have become rather pessimistic about life. From our FGD we have observed that many abused women believe that all their suffering was because of their bad luck. They are suffering in their conjugal life not because of any fault of their own but they are paying the price for being born as 'women'. "Allah must be punishing me for reasons He knows better"- observed one woman.

However, some of the victims are not always passive, sometimes they also participate quite actively in the verbal abuse. A few of the victims admitted biting the hands of their husbands in an attempt to free themselves from the assaulters's hold. All these women insisted that they resorted to these tactics only from motives of self-defence. Research elsewhere also found that most of the wives, instead of remaining inert and passive, actually try to protect themselves and their children by running away or throwing things at husbands.

Summary findings from Case Studies

The case studies are not stories but realities of life, not for these women only but for the majority of women in Bangladesh to a lesser or even greater extent. From the different cases studies it is clear that a poor farmer or a day labourer does not hesitate to demand money or land after years of marriage. In arranging the dowry money the father or the brother of the woman has to resort to various sources including sale of property or taking loan on high interest rates. This will further push the family of the bride into indebtedness and pauperization. But if dowry demands are not fulfilled the unfortunate bride has to face the brutal consequences of inhuman torture and physical assault at her husband's house. Frequently, the bride is sent back to her parent's house to bring back the dowry as promised or to bring fresh dowry.

It may be mentioned here that the demand for dowry money may not be very large, even as negligible as Tk.1000. But for her failure to bring in the dowry money, the kind of torture the young bride has to undergo is beyond human comprehension. She is regularly abused, frequently beaten and intimidated, and she is even threatened to be ousted from the house. To make matters worse, to arrange adequate dowry money for a daughter's marriage is a difficult task for most of the parents in Bangladesh. Even for well-to-do families, it may be difficult to satisfy the demand of the son-in-law (demand for a TV, for example). But if the wish of the husband or his family cannot be gratified immediately, the wife is likely to suffer cruelties, mental as well as physical. The dowry system is a real social problem and should be

addressed by researchers, planners and decision-makers. There is a great urgency to come out of this social menace.

During our FGDs participants identify dowry as a serious problem facing their communities. In the past, only well off families gave dowry as a gift, but slowly this practice has become a tradition expected of poor people as well. Poor women in our study villages report that burdens of dowry have grown worse because as girls become more educated, it is impossible to find literate husbands for them without paying high dowries. The social pressure for dowry is great. Our FGD participants claim that if they cannot arrange a timely marriage for their daughters, the family runs a very high risk of being stigmatized and their daughters become vulnerable.

Anxieties over marriage and the demands of dowry are widespread, with many families drastically reducing their consumption in order to save for dowry. For many parents across Bangladesh, saving is impossible because of the diverse risks people face, and families become indebted and must sell their land and other assets to cover dowry expenses. An old woman from our study village says, “Every poor father becomes destitute after giving his daughter in marriage. Sometimes parents have to sell out all their belongings, even their cattle or small plot of land, to give dowry.”

Most of our respondents regard dowry as quite a serious problem because of its potential to affect the well-being of two families at the same time. When dowry is given, it drains the bride’s parents financially, but if her father fails to meet the dowry demand, the bride may be beaten or abandoned. In some cases, grooms demand dowry over and over again, with the meeting of each demand followed by a new demand.

A decrease in physical violence against women follows as a result of increased dowry payments, but this is not always the case. We have come across cases where the incidences of violence against women continue even after the fulfillment of dowry demands. Again, most of the poor parents do not have the ability to provide dowry. But families yield to the demand in order to save their daughters from violence and repression.

Many respondents state that only greater public awareness can solve the problem of dowry. The government has already enacted laws to stop the practice, but participants in our Focus Group Discussion (FGD) feel that laws alone will not solve this problem. They suggest that the government should broadcast through various media not only the punishment for taking dowry, as it currently does, but the effects of the practice on poor families. Participants also state that they would like to see the government strictly enforcing the laws to stop dowry. They say that NGOs should take further steps to increase awareness in the society against the practice of dowry.

Table 9: Amount of Dowry (cash and kind) During Marriage: by Area

<i>Amount</i>	<i>Laxmipur villages</i>		<i>Kushtia villages</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
None	36	12.0	34	11.3
<5000	18	6.0	108	36.0
5000-10000	54	18.0	84	28.0
10000-15000	50	16.7	48	16.0
15000-20000	28	9.3	16	5.3
20000-30000	38	12.7	2	0.7
30000-50000	44	14.7	8	2.7
50000+	32	10.6	0	0
Mean	Tk. 22,841		Tk. 7,932	

Table 10: Sources of Money for Dowry: by Area

<i>Sources</i>	<i>Laxmipur villages</i>		<i>Kushtia villages</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Savings	164	62.1	126	47.4
Sale property	80	30.3	66	24.8
Mortgage of property	56	21.2	56	21.1
Taking loan on High interest	74	28.0	84	31.6
Taking loan without interest	94	35.6	72	27.1
Others	4	1.5	36	13.5

Table 11: Pressure for further Dowry after Marriage: by Area

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Laxmipur villages</i>		<i>Kushtia villages</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Pressure for further dowry	122	40.7	136	45.3
No. pressure	178	59.3	164	54.7

Table 12: Demand for Further Dowry by Age of Women: by Area

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Laxmipur Villages</i>		<i>Kushtia Villages</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
15-24	54	73.0	47	83.9
25-34	63	41.4	80	55.5
35+	5	6.8	9	9.0
All	122	40.7	136	45.3

Table 13: Reasons for Demanding Further Dowry: by Area

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Laxmipur villages</i>		<i>Kushtia villages</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Money for going abroad	76	62.3	2	1.4
Purchase of land	18	14.7	34	37.0
Money for Business	52	42.6	84	57.5
Purchase of consumer durable	14	11.5	18	12.3
Others	38	31.1	72	49.3

Table 14: Cruelty to Women for Further Dowry: by Area

<i>Violence for dowry</i>	<i>Laxmipur villages</i>		<i>Kushtia villages</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	76	62.3	92	68.7
No.	46	37.7	44	32.3
	122	100.0	136	100.0

Chapter 4 Discussion of Major Issues

Violence in the Conjugal Home

Violence against women and girl children as a global phenomenon varies only in its manifestations and severity. Gender violence has existed from time immemorial and continues up to the present day. It takes covert and overt forms including physical and mental abuse. Violence against women, including wife burning, dowry-related violence, rape, incest, wife battering, female feticide and female infanticide, trafficking and prostitution, is a human rights violation and not only a moral issue. It has serious negative implications on the economic and social development of women and society, and is a reflection of the societal gender subordination of women, an expression of misuse of power.

This misuse of power is found within the community, the workplace, as well as the household. Like the rest of the world, Bangladesh also has its share of violence against women and children. This includes dowry deaths, acid throwing, domestic abuse, and community *fatwa*. Paradoxically, the most common manifestation of violence against women occurs within the family, where one would actually expect love and support.

Bangladesh tops the world charts when it comes to violence committed against women by men, according to a United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) report of September 2000. Bangladesh women were the most battered in the world, according to the UNFPA report, with 47 per cent of women assaulted by men. Bangladesh was closely followed in the world ranking by India, where 40 per cent of women were assaulted by men. Western countries were not exempt-29 per cent of women in Canada were assaulted, followed by 22 per cent in the United States and 20 per cent in South Africa.

“The situations of women is really deplorable,” the UNFPA report said, adding, “gender-based violence was endemic”. The State of the World Population Report, 2000, warned, “the price of inequality is too high to pay” and that inequality and discriminations against women violated human rights and damaged the prospects of the country’s development.

Domestic violence is a very pervasive, serious social malady and a major health problem. It bluntly strips women of their basic human rights, the right to safety in their homes and community and, carried to the extreme, it may kill. Despite its cost in lives, health, emotional well-being and work productivity and its impact on other socio-economic variables, domestic violence tended and still tends to be a ‘crime of silence’. This implies that information about domestic violence is sketchy and, as a consequence, the perpetrators often escape accountability and continue to commit violent acts. But violence against women is a serious social issue, it affects all family members while those most affected are women and children. It has a deep effect on any community as it can be physically and psychologically damaging.

A large percentage of available data on violence against women locates the family as a major place of repression of married women. This study of marital violence has been undertaken to throw some light on the extent, magnitude, nature and determinants of marital violence which

women suffer in silence. While inadequate or non-timely payment of dowry may be one of the underlying causes of marital violence, there are other causes of abusive behaviour. For example, immediate 'short comings', negligence or failure in performing duties expected of wives or daughters-in-law also lead to violence. These causes may reflect the deep-rooted gender inequalities that prevail and persist in Bangladesh society.

We have limited knowledge on domestic violence. In Bangladesh, there has been very little research done on the subject of domestic violence. Not much research has been done for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the semi-sacred nature of the family in our society makes research into family violence a taboo. Secondly, research into the family has been largely devoted to the study of the joint family which diverted attention from family conflicts in general and physical violence in particular. Thirdly, paucity of research on family violence can be attributed to the apathetic attitude of society which has relegated intra-family violence to a form of individual pathology and has led members of the family to believe that physical conflicts in conjugal life do not constitute violence.

The study primarily focused on obtaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of wife abuse and gain insights into the situations that abused women face on a daily basis and the nature of violence---physical and psychological---endured by them for prolonged periods. Our findings show that wife abuse and beating of women by their husbands is widespread in Bangladesh. This is associated both with the escalation of dowry demands and with absolute poverty and powerlessness of rural women. It has been found that women are abused and beaten for a variety of reasons: if dowries are inadequate; if the woman is disliked by her husband, or his kin; if her household skills are perceived to be lacking; or even if her skin is too dark.

From our FGD and field observation it has been observed that in the majority of cases, regular beating is a fact of life. Besides manual beating, some women are assaulted with instruments, while some are thrown out of their husband's house after a long drawn out period of harassment and torture. It is important to bear in mind that both at the national and local levels, statistics specifically on wife battering as a crime is conspicuous by its absence.

Domestic violence is a phenomenon, which is not talked about, because it is still classified as a private matter. In rural Bangladesh domestic violence is not identified as abuse and is considered a normal part of married life. It is hidden behind social acceptance, burdens and pressures are put on women to remain silent and maintain the family unit no matter what they have to suffer and sacrifice in the bargain. It is up to the women to manage efficiently or effectively their family relationships.

Thus the dominant ethos of marriage and family as being sacred and the helplessness of women to escape from abusive relationships render the silence around domestic violence pervasive in rural Bangladesh. In the majority of cases women continue suffering within abusive relationships because they have no place to go, they do not know where to seek help and also because they are afraid of complaining against their husband because of the fear of more torture for their disobedience. A combination of cultural and structural constraints inhibits them from seeking help and making complains.

Our findings show that wife abuse and wife beating was common among all social classes as “it is a reflection of the power relationship between a husband and wife”, which mirrors a woman's secondary social status. However, the pattern of violence differs from one class to another, with the whole neighbourhood being witness when a day labourer beats his wife to the extremely private nature of a middle class professional's physical oppression of his spouse.

In Bangladesh, marriage continues to be universally regarded as essential for a girl irrespective of class, religion and ethnicity. Control of her sexuality and its safe transference into the hands of the husband is of primary importance. Concern over the conduct of the sexually vulnerable girl is an important cause of early marriage. According to latest official figures, about 30 per cent of women in the ages of 15-19 were married; as the official age for marriage is 18 for girls, it is possible that a large percentage of these marriages were of under-age girls. Though the age at marriage is rising gradually, it is important to note that girls are barely out of their teens when they leave their natal homes for another unknown residence. The exception is the familiarity characterising cross-cousin marriages. Subsequent expectations and relationships impose a considerable load on those who are as yet girls, ill-equipped to adjust to a totally new environment and a set of unfamiliar relationships. For, in Bangladesh marriage establishes a network of interacting individuals: it is rarely a highly personal relationship between a man and a woman.

An important part of the power relationship between spouses and indeed their families relates to dowry and its ramifications. In the Bangladesh context the preference for structural asymmetry between the two families and the consequent burden of gift-giving on the bride's family strengthens inequality. Anthropological studies, particularly of north Indian marriage and kinship patterns indicate that hypergamous unions establish a permanent asymmetry in gift-giving and presentations. Here the notion of property in marriage acquires another meaning: not only is the in marrying girl viewed as the property of her husband if not of the conjugal family, but also the event marks the unequal flow of goods and even property between the two kin groups.

Based on her fieldwork in north India, Ursula Sharma has argued persuasively that dowry, or what the bride's family is giving to the groom's family at the time of marriage is "a concrete form of property in which members of the household, both men and women, have different kinds of interest and over which they have different kinds of control" (Sharma 1984). Important for later analysis is the repeated demands for dowry. Nor is it a one time transaction: ritual occasions, festivals and indeed any minor pretext result in more demands being made on the daughter-in-law's family.

In Bangladesh, there is a tendency to club most marital violence under the overall heads of 'dowry', 'dowry deaths' and 'dowry violence'. This categorisation glosses over the other causes of violence, which pervade the familial context. However, to argue that dowry is not always the cause behind marital discord is not to ignore the fact that it is one of the major factors responsible for domestic violence. While keeping this fact in mind it is necessary to work towards a fuller understanding of the institution of dowry and its impact on inter-family relationships. Oppression of wives for bringing inadequate dowry is only another excuse for

using violence against them: in other words - even without the additional 'attraction' of dowry, inter-spousal violence is endemic. It should be also pointed out that dowry payments in themselves do not transform girls into burdens but rather "dowry makes daughters 'burden-some' only because daughters are unwanted to begin with". Because of strict sexual division of labour, the custom of *purdah* and patriarchal structure of the society, parental preference for sons over daughters is a predominant reason for under- valuation of women's work and consequent low status of women.

Types of Domestic Violence

Family violence or domestic violence is directed primarily against women. These include physical, sexual, mental and emotional or psychological violence. Threats of violence are also included. The violence may be life threatening, systematic and long term. The range of physical injuries that women suffer or are threatened with is enormous. These injuries are often accompanied by emotional, psychological and sexual abuse. Physical violence is just one part of domestic abuse, not necessarily even the main part. Women often experience several different types of physical attacks and injuries.

Physical Violence

The physical violence that women experience comprises many types of physical attacks and injury. Physical violence by men against women may involve anything from threatening behaviour, slaps and being pushed about, through black eyes, bruises and broken bones, to extremely serious incidents of multiple assault. It can be life-threatening resulting in internal injuries, permanent handicaps, and disabilities or death. Many women in our sample have described being hit against the walls or with pieces of furniture, being repeatedly kicked and punched and being stabbed or sometimes cut with knives/sharp weapons.

Psychological and Emotional Abuse

It is very rare for women to experience physical violence, which is not accompanied by emotional abuse and threats. The use of intimidating threats of injury, beating up, a broken arm, harm to children, and sexual violence, are used by men to exert control. Emotional abuse takes other forms apart from verbal threats, and very often involves degradation and humiliation. Women are persistently insulted, or subjected to continuous intimidation or verbal aggression. Mental and psychological abuse of women can often be financial-being denied money for children, or having their own money being taken away. Isolation from friends and family is another cruel form of control. All these different forms of violence leave women terrified, deeply distressed and violated to the core.

Theories on Domestic Violence

Once abusive behaviour begins, it generally does not continue as an every day occurrence. Instead, it repeats itself in cycles. The battering cycle consists of three distinct phases: (a) tension-building; (b) the explosion or acute battering incident; and (c) the calm, loving stage (walker 1997,1997a; D Moore 1979).

The tension building phase surfaces when a woman notices her partner becoming edgy or reacting negatively to a minor frustration. He may cause minor, quick violent episodes. The second phase appears when heightened tension develops into blind rage that is realised

through an uncontrolled severe violent incident. The final phase occurs afterwards when the man attempts to win back his partner by showering her with gifts and attention.

At the sociological and structural level of analysis, domestic violence theory, subculture of violence theory and feminist theories of wife abuse have been used to explain violence against women. The domestic violence theory considers physical attacks on a spouse as tactics in response to conflict of interests inherent in family life (Strauss Gelles and Steinmetz 1980). In this perspective power can be held equally by the husband and the wife. Wife abuse occurs more in families in which husband has more power and husband abuse occurs more often in wife-dominant families. The family is also viewed as an area where violent behaviour is learned and transmitted across generations.

The feminist perspective considers male domination as a key element in violence against wives (RE Dobash and RP Dobash 1979; Kurz 1993; Schechter 1982; YIIo 1988, 1993). The subordination of women to male authority is held to be institutionalised in the structure of patriarchal societies, which consist of a social structure that gives women an inferior status, and a culture that serves to reinforce the acceptance of this order (RE Dobash and RD Dobash 1979). This assertion has been supported by research demonstrating correlation between patriarchal social structures and rates of violence against women (YIIo 1983; YIIo and Starus 1984). Specifically patriarchal beliefs of husbands were found associated with wife beating (RE Dobash and RP Dobash 1979; Smith 1990). Cross cultural studies have also suggested that wife abuse was a common practice in many patriarchal societies where cultural values, including social mores and religious beliefs, dictated male dominance in gender relationships, condoned violence against women, and created separate codes of conduct for men and women (Counts 1992; Gallin 1992; Hegland 1993; Lateef 1992; Miller 1992; Swirski 1991). On the contrary women's economic power and domestic authority were found to be associated with low levels or absence of wife battering (Levison 1989; Mitchell 1992). The feminist approach also sees sanction against battering and sanctuary for battered women as concomitant with family power and antithetical to a strictly patriarchal society (Campbell 1992).

Patriarchy in Bangladesh

Different analysts (Kabeer, 1988; Chen, 1986) have identified patriarchal, patri-lineal and patrilocal character of the Bengali family to be one of the important sources of women's subordination. Pre-marital chastity and post-marital fidelity are considered to be important values of women (Kabeer, 1988, 1989). Any compromise on these would bring about dishonour to the family concerned and hence an elaborate network of social control on the movement of women was required. Child bearing and child rearing were, and still are, the principal tasks that the society imposed on women, and they were generally denied any access to the monetised public sphere. In exchange of such elaborate control, family and society had offered women protection and support throughout various stages of life.

The systems of patriarchy in Bangladesh are commonly identified by patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence (i.e. the practice of women living with their husband's kin after marriage). Descent in Bangladesh is mainly organized along patrilineal lines. This patrilineal descent system has direct relevance to the place of women in society. A boy is the perpetuator of the patriline; he will continue the family name. By contrast, a girl is of no use in this respect. Her contribution in this sphere will have to be made in some other house. "A bird of passage",

"another's property", "a guest in the parent's house", "a thing to be preserved for an outsider", or "a thing which has to be given away" are some of the common descriptions of a daughter. There is a well-known Bengali saying to the effect that educating your daughter is like watering another man's fields.

In the general population of Bangladesh, according to one anthropologist's interpretation, whereas the birth of a son is heralded with the cry of "God is great", the arrival of a daughter brings only the whisper of the Quranic prayer in her ear. Moreover, one goat is sacrificed in the naming ceremony of the daughter, which is known as *akika*, but two goats in the case of a son. This difference in response to the sex of a new-born baby is but the foreshadowing of the sharp differences in roles and behaviour patterns that the child will learn and act out later in life. It is evident that mothers frequently exhibit a strong preference for sons because of the realization that their status within the family and future security, if widowed or divorced, depends upon their sons. As a consequent of this, we find differential treatment of children according to sex. Probably for lack of food and care, the mortality rate for girls under 5 ranges from 35 to 50 per cent higher than that for boys in the same age group.

The social arrangements for patrilocal residence further undermine women's autonomy. After marriage, a woman is effectively cut off from the potential support of her own kin. She is suddenly thrust into a strange environment with people whom she does not know, as marriage is usually arranged by the guardians. A leading writer reports that the bride often becomes little more than a servant to her in-laws and she may not even be given adequate care in her childbearing period. High maternal mortality results from poor diet, repeated pregnancies, unhygienic environments and physical abuse.

Paramount to the consolidation of women's identity and status amongst her in-laws is the socio-biological role of reproducing the patrilineage. Thus, while the status of women is enhanced by the birth of a male child, the failure to bear any offspring or a male child has many negative effects and may be considered grounds for divorce.

Women's dependency upon and subordination to men is conditioned by a whole range of institutional practices embedded in the family and the kin-group. It is these aspects which provide the constituent elements of the well-documented system of patriarchy in Bangladesh, which institutionalizes subordination of women and their structured dependency on men. It appears that the main problem of female subordination is not really religion or tradition, but patriarchal influence and authority.

Culture and Domestic Violence

Gender based violence is perpetrated at many different levels, *i.e.* at the family, community and state levels and in many different forms. Violence against women at the family and community levels may be tacitly approved, or even actively promoted by prevailing patriarchal social norms. Violence against women is accepted, tolerated and in certain prescribed forms and given contexts, it is legitimated. Jahan maintains that gender inequality, leading to gender violence, is deeply embedded in Bangladeshi social structure. According to Jahan, all social institutions in Bangladesh permit, even encourage the demonstration of unequal power relations between sexes (Jahan, 1988). Whilst the physical dimension of gender violence may be the most readily identifiable, psychological abuse, the deprivation of

resources for physical and psychological needs are also important dimensions of violence against women.

Many of our sample women expressed fears of dispossession and displacement and of being ostracised by the community if their situation became public. Many believe that as women it is up to them to make all the sacrifices and adjustments within their marriage. The ideology of being a good wife and mother has been inculcated strictly and internalised by all these women. They have accepted their status as subservient and secondary entity to maintain the family that they have learned in childhood.

During our FGD, many women expressed a strong desire to be true to their culture, which does not welcome disintegration of marriage. Thus even when the spouses were abusive and the marital relationship was obviously dysfunctional, the women felt that they had to preserve the conjugal bond at all costs. Maintaining conjugal status included the obligation of not shaming the natal family. Most of our respondents spoke of the need to ensure the status and prestige of their natal families. They believe that a divorce in the family would taint it disqualified other siblings from getting married. In view of the extreme poverty of their parents, lack of income earning opportunity on the part of the women and the prevailing socio-cultural norms, women are bound to continue an abusive relationship. Women enter into the husband's family as strangers, gain respect mainly via their sons and later in life acquire power as mothers-in-law. Over their life cycle, their dependence shifts from father to husband and finally to son.

Issues Regarding Dowry

Dowry payments and dowry demands were the core concern of most of the participants in our FGD. Classified on the basis of education, occupation and primary sources of income, all households irrespective of socio-economic class were victims of this menace. The respondents did not hesitate to admit that they were aware of the fact that the practice was punishable by law. However, while few pointed out of the flaw in the existing Dowry Prohibition Act, which punishes the taker as well as the giver, the majority of perceived it as a dominant practice of their culture and even part of tradition.

It has been observed from our FGD and case studies that the cash received as dowry by the groom's family is used to set up small business, to purchase rickshaw/van, or to set up small shops such as tea stalls, or vegetable stall or to buy ticket for going abroad (mainly to the Middle East). The dowry transactions involve extreme steps resorted to by the girls' families. Many have to sell their owned land with standing crop to meet the dowry payment.

Our findings clearly shown that a battered woman's natal family is under tremendous pressure to submit to her husband's continuing dowry demands. Selling precious land or taking out loans at exorbitant interest are measures natal families are frequently 'forced' to take, either to get a daughter married or, more poignantly, in an attempt to protect her from further abuse. To many activists, this situation calls for the urgent revision, rather than a strict enforcement, of the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980. The Act punishes both those who demand and those who give dowry; that is, it calls for the equal punishment of potentially unequal parties.

Because of the dowry system, the birth of a girl child is seen as a curse for most the peasant families, as they feel it will result in loss of land and lead to their further impoverishment. From this fear arises the attempt to marry off their daughters young. On being asked about early marriage we were told that the amount of dowry demanded is lower for the teen aged girls; and that this was a trade-off for less dowry. Also early marriage means less investment in their education. The more educated the girls are, the higher is the price of dowry, as the groom's family tries to recover: (a) their investment in their educated son, and (b) the dowry payment is like a premium for a secured future for the daughter. As a result, when married daughters return home on being deserted or divorced (there are other reasons than demands for more dowries), they have no future except to be married again. The other options are limited, especially employment, as most of the women have no training of any kind in most situations.

In general, rural Bangladeshi girls are married off early and parents tend to invest in training/educating the sons rather than the daughters. Further, once daughters are married and dowries have been paid, women generally do not have any stake in the family property any more and they do not have the right of residence in their family home. This right to deny married daughters residence in their parental home is widely practiced in rural Bangladesh. Whenever a married sister comes back to her parental home to stay, the brothers reluctantly allow her to live in the house with reservations. Thus in spite of all the harassment and abuse in her husband's house, the woman has no other option but to endure the hardship.

Consequences of Domestic Violence

Violence against women forms the core of gender-based inequalities, with far-reaching consequences for women's development and well-being. This is clearly expressed in paragraph 117 of the Beijing Platform for Action: "... The fear of violence, including harassment, is a permanent constraint on the mobility of women and limits their access to resources and basic activities. High social, health and economic costs to the individual and society are associated with violence against women. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into subordinate position compared with men...." (United Nations, 1996)

Domestic violence impacts on women's health because of the many ways in which it restricts their overall development. An act of physical violence may or may not result in bodily injuries but it is certain to leave an impression on the mind of the victim. Indeed, in the memorable words of one of the victims of marital violence, "the body mends soon enough, but the scars remain".

The consequences of violence against women extend from the physical to psychological, social and economic realms. Violence can cause enormous psychological suffering to victims, most often seen in the form of anxiety and depression. It can also severely restrict their capacity and desire to participate in social and economic life. The cost of violence-related damage to significant numbers of young females is a slower pace of development at personal, family and national levels.

Measuring the effect of violence, therefore, is a difficult issue. From our FGD and field observation it was found that about two-thirds of the physically abused women were injured

at least once in their married life. About half of these women suffered bruises and scratches only. Some had lesions and cuts but very few had wounds which were deep. Some women also lost consciousness and received medical attention. However, majority of physical injuries suffered by women were bruises and welts which healed quickly without any medical attention.

However, the psychological effect on the other hand, was much more profound and damaging. All the victims reported that the first beating produced feelings in which pain, shame and surprise predominated. With repeated beatings over time, surprise wore off but fear, pain, shame, helplessness and resentment against the abuser deepened.

Again, women who are beaten are most likely to be the most powerless women. They have little autonomy - in terms of decision-making authority, mobility, or control over resources - in caring for themselves or for their infants. As a consequence, their health-care seeking and nutrition are compromised, and they are more likely than other women to experience fetal mortality, to deliver babies of low birth weight (whose survival is generally uncertain), and to have less decision-making authority or confidence in caring for their infants. Thus, they are more likely to experience infant loss.

Finally, there is an intergenerational impact: girls who witness violence against their mothers are more likely to go on to accept violence in their own marriages. A number of studies found that batterers had been abused as children or they had witnessed their fathers beating their mothers (Ceasar 1988, Straus et al 1980).

From the intimate, emotion-filled conversation during FGDs and case studies with women belonging to different age groups, two patterns emerged regarding domestic violence. First, despite all the efforts by the government and the NGOs to improve the situation of women gender inequity within households and in society remains deeply ingrained and results in women's heightened insecurity. Second, when women are abused and parents are in stress, children are extremely vulnerable.

Violence between parents affects children in many ways. It frightens them to see the father beating the mother or the mother being abused and harassed by the father. Childhood lived struggling against the pain of hunger, humiliation and violence often turn into adulthood spent in similar patterns of survival.

Violence during Pregnancy/Motherhood

We have also observed that pregnant women are not spared from violence. Farida Begum, married 12 years ago, has three daughters. Her husband, Rafiq, is a day labour. Farida has been abused by her husband in many ways, including threatening her with physical violence, punching her and kicking her. Farida said that during her third pregnancy (the first two children are daughters) her husband refused to buy medicine for her when she fell sick and had high fever. There were some heated arguments with her husband and in a fit of rage he physically assaulted her including hitting her at the stomach. Fortunately, she was not severely hurt, otherwise the child in her womb would have been dead.

Findings from other studies also show that pregnant women are mistreated and abused. A study by Heise, et. al. (1994) suggests an association between wife beating experience

and increased mortality in Bangladesh. The findings are summarised below:

- Bangladeshi women 15-19 who are pregnant or have recently given birth are nearly three times more likely to die from violence than women of the same age who are not pregnant.
- Battered pregnant women are twice as likely to suffer miscarriage and four times as likely to have a low-birth weight baby.
- Children born to battered women are 40 times more likely to die in the first five years of life than children whose mothers are not battered.

This kind of evidence would suggest that women who suffer violence during pregnancy may indeed experience higher rates of fetal and infant loss than do women who are better off, for such reasons as delayed seeking of health-care services, neglect, and powerlessness.

Violence Against Women and Human Rights

Development is about protection of human rights of the concerned population. It pre-supposes active participation of the populace in the decision-making processes while social justice remains one of the most important and cherished goals of development. However, contradictions do remain as a result of various processes not only among nations at a global level, but also significantly within sections of population, within a country. People continue to be marginalised on the basis of class, religion, ethnicity, colour and sex.

Discrimination and exploitation on the basis of gender constitutes a serious issue which effectively means that half the human race is unable to realise its potential and condemned to sub-optimal standards of existence. Women's access to education, health, employment and political spaces still remain distant goals in many nations of the world. However, one of the most serious impediments to women's development is the phenomenon of continuing and increasing violence against them. Needless to say, this constitutes a serious violation of women's human rights. Violence against women is one of the most significant, yet little understood and acknowledged factor instrumental in the phenomenon of marginalisation of women in the development process. Gender violence manifests itself in various forms-female foeticide and infanticide, sexual abuse, incest, molestation, sexual harassment at work and on the streets, marital rape and marital violence in the form of wife assault and beating.

Violence against women is considered as a violation of human rights. Bangladesh Constitution has given equal rights to women. Article 27 of the Constitution says, "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law". The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, to which Bangladesh is a signatory, guaranteed women's rights. It states, "All people are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reasons and conscience and should act with each other in a spirit of brotherhood".

But contrary to these laws and declarations, violence against women is going on at an alarming rate in Bangladesh as in many other developing countries. A large percentage of available data on violence against women locates the family as a major cause of repression.

Cruelty related to dowry, domestic violence and physical torture are some of the major forms of marital violence against women.

The vulnerability of poor women to being overworked, poorly paid, abused, and stripped of their property merely deepens their powerlessness and lack of voice in the family. Along with the many other disadvantages of living in poverty, these processes undermine women's position and contribute to their sufferings in conjugal homes. There are no easy answers or solutions to the problem of domestic violence. In searching for the most effective strategies, fundamental problems of women's exclusive dependence on marriage, their inferior status in family, lack of economic independence, etc need to be addressed.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

The present research has highlighted the prevalence and seriousness of marital violence within the four walls of home in the study villages. Far too many women suffer too much from abuse, ill treatment and physical, verbal, sexual and economic abuse. Home is too often the place where woman's security and safety are mostly at threat. Our findings show that women are at the greatest risk in the home. Injuries, aggression, psychological and verbal abuse are mainly perpetrated by the husbands in the context of marital relationship. It is a life-threatening problem for individual women and it is a costly problem for the society as well.

From our findings it appears that about a half of the rural women are victims of family violence. The number of women who suffer from beatings and torture inflicted by husbands and in-laws are really very large. Our data suggests that domestic violence occurs in a range of situations: from "failure" to serve a hot meal, take care of children, maintenance (or up keep) of the house; jealousy and suspicion, quarrelling with the mother-in-law or failure to bring in enough dowry.

However, wife beating is rarely viewed as a reason for leaving the husband. When the woman goes back to her parental home because of domestic violence, she is taught to be more patient, accommodative and submissive to her husband. This is because wife beating is strongly perceived as a woman's due and a husband's right, that it is seen no more than a normal part of married life. Secondly and more realistically, women (and their parents) are acutely aware of the socio-economic realities that offer them few alternatives to the life of violence.

There are really very few options for a woman to fall back upon in case the maternal family is not supportive or financially sound, when the woman decides to come out of an abusive relationship. Women, cutting across class barriers, find themselves at the receiving end of the gender system. The superior-subordinate hierarchy established on the basis of sex differences grant men access to land holdings, inheritance, skills, productive employment and the associated high status, while women receive poor nutrition and medical care, inferior education and suffer atrocities such as eve teasing, rape, wife beating etc. Again, if the woman (and her parents) wants to fight back, the legal battle is a long one, and too painful, burdensome and exhaustive mentally, physically and more importantly, financially. Women are forced to opt out midway, lose interest or lose a support system. Also as to what kind of weightage or importance given to offences related to women, especially domestic violence, is a question we need to reflect on. Thus, the husband beats his wife and abuses her on the smallest pretext and in most cases the abused woman suffers in silence.

In our society women are considered as a binding force of the family. Therefore when a marriage does not workout, the expectations for her reconciliation are heavily relied upon. The support from the maternal family is very crucial when a woman decides to come out of an abusive relationship. There are a number of reasons for which the family hesitates to

support her: family honour and prestige, negative consequences on the siblings and financial compulsions.

Although documenting the different manifestations of violence is important, we also need to understand the deeper causes of violence in order to address this problem in Bangladesh. There are, for example, many seemingly superficial reasons given why husbands beat their wives, including giving birth to a daughter, becoming more active in the community, or serving cold food. The underlying reasons are, however, both more profound and difficult to understand. The deeper causes of violence against women and girl children are found in a psychological and cultural context, which favours boys and men while suppressing and devaluing girls and women. Many girls are brought up on the idea that they are less worth and less capable.

The rosy dream of having a loving husband disappears at the touch of grim reality. The husband and in-laws (in some cases), are biased against her, the children are sources of constant worries, and additional work and tension are part of her every day life. She has to render various services but with no appreciation. And any failure on her part in rendering these services brings about physical beating or verbal abuse. She has to suffer all these in silence because she has no alternative to fall back upon. Being a “good housewife” is the only career socially acceptable to herself, her family and the society at large. Unaware of any rights, deprived of all human considerations and under constant scrutiny of her work performance, she lives in a house where she is considered as a stranger (if not enemy), at least during the early years of her marriage.

The ever-present fact of violence, both overt and covert, physical and non-physical has an overwhelming influence on feminine identity formation. Domestic violence against women is a difficult and intractable health and social problem in Bangladesh. The overwhelming conclusion of this study, drawn from analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, is that wife-beating is not only deeply entrenched, but also that attitudes uniformly justify wife-beating and few women would opt out of an abusive marriage. The general notion is that the husband has a right to a certain level of force to be used against the wife.

Our results suggest that while levels of violence are widely prevalent in the study villages, relationships are powerfully conditioned by the level of education of the respondents. Notably, factors such as women's education and autonomy appear to have a far greater protective influence against violence in the study villages. Education and occupation of husband remain significant factors enabling women to avoid beating and intimidation by their husbands.

The resounding policy conclusion of this study is that strategies to combat violence are urgently needed, and that these must address not only the immediate needs of battered women, but must also attack the root causes of violence---women's powerlessness. We have seen that secondary level of education and occupation of husband have an important bearing on protecting women, and efforts to enhance these aspects of women's situation must be pursued. Breaking the cycle of violence will require concerted efforts across several sectors; education, mass media, and credit facilities for distressed women. It will also require diverse indirect efforts, such as enforcing minimum age at marriage, laws addressing dowry issues.

These conclusions highlight the need to raise awareness of women's rights in the area of domestic violence. Also important are efforts that directly address social attitudes and beliefs that legitimise male violence and the notion of male superiority, at the family level among women, their husbands, family elders and society at large.

Our FGD participants frequently identified economic stress, women's changing roles and prevailing norms as important causes of domestic violence against women. Unfortunately, for women who are beaten or abused in their homes, keen and neighbors often turn a blind eye, and help from the authorities is virtually absent. Typically, the police and the community are loath to interfere in "family affairs". Most people choose not to intervene because the disputes between husband and his wife are seen as internal family affairs in which the 'outsiders' are not expected to interfere. An act of exposing the husband and thus his family, by seeking help from governmental or non-governmental organisations may have the effect of shaming him and his family. It requires a lot of courage and a lot of continuous support to women.

Marital violence is not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh but has existed in our society since the patriarchal values took over to rule over the social norms and functioning. It is a weapon used to maintain the unequal power dynamics between men and women. With systematic marginalisation of women, institutionalization of violence and all pervasive oppressive patriarchal values, there remains a vicious circle of victimization for women. And contrary to the myths it is often resorted to cutting across class and creed, by males to silence, dominate and suppress the womenfolk. Violence within marriage is the most widespread violation of a human's worth and dignity. It is the least talked about issue and further it is the least action-substantiated issue.

Women constitute about 50 per cent of the country's population. Unless gender justice is done and ensured, there can be no real justice. Violence against women is a major human rights issue, which can not be pushed aside or trivialized. It is the responsibility of the government, the community and the civil society organization to understand and address the nature and effects of marital violence and set up program of action for its elimination. The law enforcing agencies, too, has a major role to play. The police, judges, magistrates as well as all those involved in decision making need to be gender sensitized and be conversant with the main UN, WHO, UNIFEM and the UNICEF conventions, declarations and policy decisions about violence against women.

Gender-based barriers affect all aspects of women's lives and undermine their ability to improve their own and their families' well-being. The silence that surrounds domestic violence against women is not a private affair, but a matter of public policy. Victims need direct support and legal aid to protect them. State institutions need to formulate policies and investment decisions based on sound gender analysis. In almost every instance, there are important reasons to gather, analyze, and present both quantitative and qualitative data.

Our analysis has provided a glimpse of only the 'tip of the iceberg' and the iceberg itself consists of a complex set of issues relating to domestic violence. Violence against women must be seen as an integral part of the broader battle against gender inequalities. The results of this empirical study clearly depict the severity and endemic nature of marital violence and

help to enhance our understanding of the social and economic pressures that limit the power and options of women in violent relationship.

This study also points to the dearth in research on the correlates, determinants and consequences of domestic violence in Bangladesh. What is needed on the research front is more work that examines the situations and contexts in which violent incidents occur and women's reactions and attitudes towards violent incidents, and options available to protect themselves from violent incidents. Equally important is community-based information on the health consequences of domestic violence. Finally, what are also required are greater insights into the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the perpetrators of domestic violence, that is, men.

Recommendation

1. Domestic violence represents a serious abuse of power within family trust, or dependency relationships. It undermines the basic rights of women who, because of their gender, are most vulnerable to abuse. But in Bangladesh domestic violence or wife abuse is not recognized as a criminal offence. There is no separate legislation for domestic violence. The absence of this legal recognition i.e. the gap in the formal response to domestic violence is a matter of grave concern and should be addressed to without any delay. We would strongly recommend the following: **Wife battering and wife abuse will have to be given legal recognition as criminal offence.**
2. Violence within the family is primarily considered as a “private affair” of the family. The society refuses to acknowledge the existence of a female as an individual with an independent entity. Women are most often considered as a property to be owned by men. The family is always glorified irrespective of it being the most oppressive institution at times. According to existing norms marital violence is considered as a private issue, not discussed outside the home. This attitude should go and the victims of violence must be encouraged to break the silence, to speak up about their experiences. **Victims need to be provided with direct support, counseling and legal aid.**
3. We emphasize that in rural settings, solutions to domestic violence will have to be found within the family or the community setting. One obvious strategy is expanding education among women and girls. Women can acquire courage and a sense of independence when they are educated and have opportunities for sustained livelihood. Another strategy is to find solutions within the institution of family and addressing the men in the family. **Some form of counseling for men is needed to raise their awareness on human rights.** Men should be motivated to consider that gender is not an issue of conflict but an issue of immense importance that merits mutual understanding and respect for men and women who complement each other as partners in their efforts to live a life of dignity and self worth.
4. A good way would be to strengthen the existing community set up such as *Salish* and *Bichar* for wife beating. Agencies working in the rural areas should try to protect the interest of the women victims of violence by providing support during the *Salish* and *Bichar*. This is especially important as traditionally in the rural areas, *Salish* and *Bichar* are all-male affairs and therefore likely to condone, or be lenient to, violence against the wife by a husband. At the same time, immediate needs include the provision of shelter, economic support and legal assistance for battered women who do opt out of abusive marriages, on the one hand, and active prosecution of

offending husbands on the other. **We strongly recommend for the integration of services to identify, refer and treatment of victims of domestic violence in the primary or reproductive health programme of the country.**

5. The issue of violence against women should be included in school curricula, at all levels, from primary to tertiary and vocational training. The educational curriculum should not only be gender-sensitive but should encourage discussions at a very early age about equality between sexes in all matters. **Both the print and electronic media can play important roles and instead of picturing stereotypical roles of men and women, they can promote more balanced and healthy perceptions of male-female relationship.**
6. Demanding, giving and accepting dowry are illegal in Bangladesh. The cases of rapacious dowry demands leading to violence can hardly be avoided. The incidence of violence against women who fall prey to such demands are on the increase. Dowry is a general demand of the rich as well as the poor. Non-payment of dowry is one of the main reasons for domestic violence and wife abuse in rural Bangladesh. There is a great urgency to come out of this social menace. **Dowry Prohibition Act should be strictly enforced with the provision for stringent punishment for offenders.**
7. The existing gender ideology, based on male domination and female subordination, need to be replaced by one of gender equality. The society and the community should be made aware that discrimination between children on grounds of gender is not only unjust but also dangerous for girls' future. It is only when women and girls gain their place as strong and equal members of society that violence against them will be viewed as a shocking aberration rather than an invisible norm. Parents should be made aware that in the rapidly changing socio-economic context, marriage on no account guarantees security for women, as the increasing rate of desertion and divorce demonstrates. Economic empowerment of women is an important means to fight back at violence and injustice as it raises self worth and supplement with resources to fight her battle. **Therefore, girls will have to be given the necessary skill training and education so that they are capable of supporting themselves.**
8. Socio- cultural reasons and legal loopholes are sources of violence against women. The so-called social and cultural norms, discriminatory and defective laws, denial of appropriate property rights of women have created a negative environment for women. These factors render women vulnerable to various forms of violence and exploitation. Appropriate measures should be taken in this regard. There is also an urgent need to raise awareness regarding women's rights in the area of domestic violence. Measures should also be taken to change social attitudes and beliefs that legitimize male violence and the notion of male superiority. Education and mass media can play an important role in this regard. **Community education efforts—directed to women, men and family elders—must forcefully convey (i) women's rights in the area of domestic violence, and (ii) the likely consequences of domestic violence on women and children.**

The above measures though not exhaustive could contribute towards the elimination of gender-based violence. As women's health, security, life and indeed that of families and society are at stake and undermined by the existence of violence, all of us must refrain from invoking tradition, cultural or religious norms to avoid working towards the elimination of violence within families and the community.

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