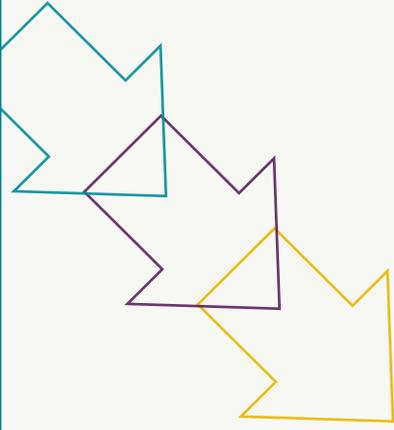
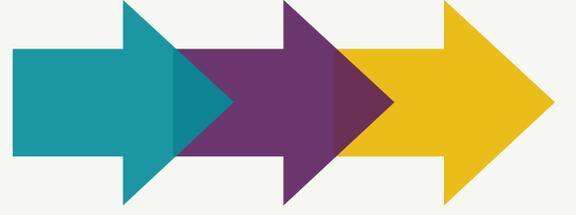


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Covid-19 Learning, Evidence
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অ্যান্ড রিসার্চ প্রোগ্রাম



Research Briefing

Violence Against Women in Bangladesh and the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

April 2022

Violence Against Women in Bangladesh and the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

This briefing summarises priority areas for future research and key stakeholders with whom to engage, as identified in the scoping paper ***Violence Against Women in Bangladesh and the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic*** by Maheen Sultan, Pragyna Mahpara and Fariha Tasnin from the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD). The scoping paper and this briefing were commissioned for the Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh (CLEAR). CLEAR aims to build a consortium of research partners to deliver policy-relevant research and evidence for Bangladesh to support the Covid-19 response and inform preparation for future shocks.

Violence against women in the context of Covid-19

The consensus across multiple sources is that since the outbreak of Covid-19, all types of violence against women and girls (VAWG), particularly domestic violence, have intensified. However, available data regarding cases are scattered and provide an incomplete picture of what happened. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted legal and welfare services for survivors of violence – low numbers of cases were filed and redress mechanisms were slow. Qualitative studies show that during the pandemic, domestic violence survivors had to navigate a complex system, inefficient for their needs. A more systematic review of the existing data and evidence is therefore important to have an overall understanding of VAWG during the pandemic and to identify the scope for future research and policy interventions.

The scoping paper provides an overview of the existing research and evidence available on the status and trends concerning VAWG during the 2020–21 Covid-19 period in Bangladesh. It looks at domestic violence, rape, violence in public spaces and on public transport, online gender-based violence, workplace sexual harassment, violence against women in marginalised groups (women with disabilities; minority ethnic groups), and violence faced by adolescents. The paper includes an analysis of the key stakeholders and opportunities for CLEAR to influence decision-making and practice through its research.

Existing data gaps and research opportunities

While several studies were conducted on violence against women during the Covid-19 period, there remain critical evidence gaps in terms of understanding the reality on the ground and any progress or constraints in the implementation of policies and programmatic interventions:

- There are gaps in the evidence available on sexual violence within intimate partner relationships as well as on sexual violence from other family members which are often not recorded due to social stigma.
- There is a lack of robust national-level or agency-wide data on the constraints of access to services during the pandemic. What evidence exists was generated by alternative sources – such as rapid assessment and surveys from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or media houses.
- Data on violence against women cases from courts and other government institutions including police stations, health centres, and virtual courts were not regularly updated during the pandemic and are not accessible to the public.
- No research has been conducted on the intersection of gender-based violence and people with disabilities, those identifying as transgender, and ethnic minorities during the pandemic.
- Data collected during the Covid-19 period were constrained by limited access and travel restrictions so tended to be mainly urban-centric and reliant on phone surveys instead of in-person surveys. Other methodological limitations for the research included lack of comparable definitions and methodologies due to Covid-19 restrictions.
- There is no national baseline after 2015 with which to compare results and substantiate claims of increases or decreases in incidence of violence against women in Bangladesh. There is also a lack of pre-Covid-19 data on issues such as the relationship between mental distress and violence against women and this suggests that there should be a better and more systematic collection of good data on these issues longitudinally.

The study also identified a number of potential opportunities for future research:

Service delivery, accountability, and governance

- **Online gender-based violence:** How has the scope, nature, and consequences of online gender-based violence been affected by the pandemic? Are the strategies taken to counter the violence and protect freedom of expression and personal security adequate? What is the role of state policies and legislation?
- **Public space harassment (including public transport):** What are the constraints, including harassment and insecurity in public spaces and on public transport, that constrain women's free and safe access? What are the rural/urban needs of different age groups and occupational groups? Which actors can have a role in changing the situation? What are the strategies that work?
- **Workplace sexual harassment (WSH):** What is the situation in different sectors, formal and informal, for different job categories and age groups? How are prevention and redress mechanisms for women working (or not)? What are the factors that enable women to voice their complaints or protest? What are the factors that constrain them from doing so? What are the consequences for the individual who are experiencing WSH and the different sectors they are employed in?
- **What are the mental health consequences** of VAWG and how is this affected by situations such as the pandemic? How adequate and accessible are existing services and support systems?
- **What are the institutional, social, and community-level mechanisms and practices that are effective in preventing VAWG**, in the everyday context as well as in times of crisis?
- **What are the gaps and challenges in providing access to emergency services to women and girls facing violence?** What are the institutional capacity issues and implementation challenges? Where are the coordination gaps between different agencies? What are the strategies that work best to increase access?
- **Can women and girls who are experiencing violence access justice?** What are the opportunities and challenges on the side of the women and girls and on the side of those in formal institutions, and informal mechanisms, in responding to the needs and priorities of women and girls?

- **How can government sources of data gathering, processing, and dissemination be strengthened?** What strategies are effective for the sharing and coordination of data and research findings between government and non-government agencies?

Rights of the marginalised population and disadvantaged groups

- **How has intersectionality (intersecting disadvantages) affected the incidence and nature of VAWG** from disadvantaged groups and their access to services? How is this aggravated in times of crisis (such as Covid-19)? What are the implications for the post-Covid-19 period?
- **What are the forms and extent of domestic violence outside intimate partner violence**, against children, the elderly, those with disabilities, or with diverse gender orientation or sexual identity, as well as its long-term economic, social, and psychological effects on the family?

Innovations

- **During the Covid-19 period, how far has digital technology been able to increase access to services for persons experiencing violence?** For example, virtual courts, online mediation, online counselling, use of hotlines.
- **How effective are interventions with adolescents** in bringing about changes in norms around gender-based violence?

Key stakeholders

The primary responsible ministry for handling issues relating to VAWG in Bangladesh is the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) while the Ministry and Department of Health and Family Welfare is responsible for policy formulation and provision of physical and mental health services for women and children affected by gender-based violence. The Ministry of Labour and its Inspection Directorate (the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, DIFE) are responsible for workplace protection. Legal aid and services are provided to survivors of gender-based violence through NGOs and government legal aid organisations. Apart from these, there are research organisations and development partners working on different aspects of VAWG in Bangladesh.

Reference

Sultan, M.; Mahpara, P. and Tasnin, F. (2022) *Violence Against Women in Bangladesh and the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic*. Dhaka: BRAC Institute of Governance and Development

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This Research Briefing was written by Aurin Huq and edited by Alan Stanley at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) based on original work by Maheen Sultan, Pragyna Mahpara and Fariha Tashin from the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD).

The Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh (CLEAR), coordinated by IDS, is building a consortium of research organisations in Bangladesh to generate policy-relevant research and evidence to support Covid-19 recovery and increase resilience to future shocks. CLEAR is funded by the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

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DOI: [10.19088/CLEAR.2022.004](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLEAR.2022.004)



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