

**INTIMATE PARTNER
VIOLENCE AND
BRAVEMEN CAMPAIGN
ON COVID-19 IN
BANGLADESH
MARCH 2021**



INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has restricted people movement, has confined everyone within home. Despite all its negative impacts it could be a good chance for all to spend good time with the beloved family members. But with all other negativities of this pandemic, rate of intimate partner violence was also in rise during this pandemic. Forms of intimate partner violence have been found to be diverse, which come with massive long run effect.

METHODOLOGY

Research was conducted using the online social platform of Funtaseum (a Facebook-based feminist group with 40,000 active members), Share-Net Bangladesh, UNYSAB Facebook page (a volunteer youth organization with around 200,000 members), and BraveMen Campaign Facebook page (currently has 4,000 followers). Online data collection (using both survey and interview methods) on intimate partner violence at the households, status and forms of perpetration of online violence and violation of the rights in accessing SRHR services during Covid-19 crisis ran for 6 months. Quantitative data was collected from 450 people (both male and female and between the age of 15 - 60). From these participants, using a purposive snowball sampling 10 people (an equal number of male and female) were interviewed via telephone, Zoom and skype. Five more participants from the marginalized group were interviewed over the phone who shared their experience during the lockdown. These research findings were presented during the webinars to initiate policy discussions.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Center for Men and Masculinity Studies (CMMS) ensured strict anonymity of the participants in the online data collection. It took informed consent from all the participants of the data collection process and the webinars. The principle of 'doing no harm' based on age, sex, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or sexual identity was the core of the guideline of the data collection and webinars.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Here is some overview of survey data regarding online violence during COVID-19 pandemic.

Firstly, when asked "do you see any physical/mental abuse around you?", almost half of the respondents, 49.66% said yes. Among them, there was almost equal number of women and men who answered yes. Most of the respondents answering this question were between 20-24 years old (119) and 46% of them said yes, they have observed physical/mental abuse around them during COVID-19.

During interviews, both men and women were seen reluctant to talk about the problems in their relationship. Especially women themselves feel obligated to come out with their stories because of conservative societal norms. Saddening thing about the victim blaming culture, is often pressure comes from family and relatives. Speaker mentioned about the culture of silence which starts from home. Husbands and wives can also be sexually violent toward their spouses but that isn't recognized by the current law.

Secondly, when asked, who is abusing, both men and women answered that it's mostly men who is abusing. But a considerably percentage of both men (42%, 30 men) and women (29%, 20 women) said that women are abusing as well.

Speakers addressed this study findings and the fact, women can also abuse - abuse is not recognized based on gender. But there are misunderstanding revolving around the definition of violent behavior when it comes to women. Women are expected to show endurance in all cases. Like if women break the structural societal norms of women behavior, even if a little of her expression of frustration, society tends to think she is being violent.

Thirdly, when asked, how has the relationship been between you and your partner during COVID-19 situation, Almost 7% said that their relationship has become more friendly/harmonious than before during COVID-19 situation. But 23% said that their relationship has deteriorated than before during this pandemic. 20% said they are having light arguments/misunderstanding. 5.56% said the partner beats, 5% said the partner tortures mentally, and 6.57% said they are fighting frequently. Those who responded about physical abuse, they mostly (36%) mentioned of slapping, 17.22% said of battering and 14.35% said of kicking.

Speakers pointed out, due to lockdown, movement of men was restricted and for some of them it was the first time experiencing this; on the other hand, societal practice of women restriction is nothing new. They were confined at homes for a long time that created scope for more interaction and in the worst case their relationship deteriorated. At one point of the discussion speaker mentioned the lacking of grooming on how to be involved at households chores, how to strengthen family bonding in our upbringing of children, particularly boys and girls. In comparison with other form of violence, intimate partner violence is seen to be. Husbands and wives can also be sexually violent toward their spouses but that isn't recognized by the current law, for example marital rape is not recognized by the law, which is a big loophole. Speakers acknowledged about increasing mental and psychological abuse, rather than physical ones.

Fourthly, when asked, if such acts (mental / physical) have occurred during the COVID-19 situation, what were the reasons of being violent, the highest responses (23.38) were for financial crisis. Then, 13.77 mentioned consumption of drug/alcohol, 10.39% mentioned of depression while other 10.39% mentioned of anxiety over corona. 10.91% said that aggressive/rude personality is responsible for that, 6.23% said about extra workload in household, 5.71% said of extra restrictions/difficulties in day to day activities, 5.45% said that it is because of not getting enough attention from the partner.

While discussing about this issue, speakers pointed to the financial crisis result in mental frustration, and it makes people aggressive to some extent.

Fifthly, when asked, if you have seen or faced any sort of violence (physical/mental) or betrayal, what was your response, the highest responses were for nothing (29.43%). But positively 24.68% said they protested and 1.90% said they even filed case. Some tried to mitigate with the help of family members (6.01%) or friend (4.11%). 5.38% said of communicating/visiting mental health experts.

Addressing this finding, speakers talked about women who are not reporting the violence in workplaces because of lack of safety and accurate reducing measures of harassment. This study suggests more vulnerable people are still not breaking the silence. Questions asked on interrogation period by local police are inappropriate, for which women tend to retreat from filing cases of sexual violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended Strategies for Combatting Intimate Partner Violence:

1. Dualism of patriarchy and feminism needs to be demolished
2. Women should be treated with equal respect and as a human being, not as a "goddess"
3. Legal actions can be taken against physical, mental, sexual and financial violence as per our law recognizes
4. Societal taboos against women should demolished
5. Attention should be centered upon working women of informal sectors and indigenous groups collaterally formal sectors
6. 'Charity begins at home' - misogyny should be unlearned from an early age, from all walks of life and age
7. Malpractices and social stigmas should be demolished and rejected
8. Counselling to be done through the process of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) - a practice where a person with knowledge of Law resolves disputes between two parties without anyone reporting to the police or judiciary system
9. To inform police whenever any violence takes place
10. Break the silence
11. To have knowledge on essential acts like - Marriage act, Domestic Violence Prevention act etc.