

Unheard Stories: Violence Against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Selected Areas of Bangladesh



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Current Situation of Adolescent Girls with Disabilities

Global Context

- UNICEF estimated that globally 28.9 million (4.3%) children aged 0-4 years, 207.4 million (12.5%) children aged 5-17 years have moderate-to-severe disabilities (Bolajoko et al., 2022)
- Research studies have found that 31.7% of children with disabilities have at least once experienced some form of violence during their childhood (Bawden, 2022)
- They are twice as likely as children without disabilities to experience exclusion and/or sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. They are also far more likely to face peer bullying (Bawden, 2022).

Bangladesh Context

- 7% of children under the age of 17 are estimated to have one or more disabilities (UNICEF, 2022)
- 96% of women's with disabilities are likely to be victims of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse in Bangladesh during their lifetime (Prothom Alo, 2017)
- Gender-based violence can take many different forms, including intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and so on



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Research Study

Baseline Study to Assess the Current Situation of Women and Girls with Disabilities Facing Violence in Selected Areas of Bangladesh

The study has the following research objectives:

Objective 1: To conduct primary research among women and girls with disabilities in selected areas of Bangladesh to examine their level of knowledge and awareness on issues related to SRHR and violence.

Objective 2: To quantify levels of violence experienced by women and girls with disabilities, including the nature and perpetrators of violence.

Objective 3: To explore the coping strategies adopted by the women and girls with disabilities who have suffered violence and their help-seeking behavior.



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Methodology

An explanatory sequential mixed method design was used to conduct the study.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 10 unions in five sub-districts of the Bogura district (Bogura Sadar, Gabtoli, Sherpur, Sonatola, and Kahaloo). Both lifetime and current (within 12-months) prevalence of violence were estimated.



1539 Survey Respondent



- 16 in-depth interviews with women & girls with disabilities
- 08 in-depth interviews with men & boys with disabilities



03 focus- group discussion



13 key informant interviews

Different forms of violence experienced by the women and girls with disabilities

Childhood Abuse

- 47.2% study respondents reported experiencing at least one act of abuse during their childhood
- Perpetrators included: family members, relatives, friends, neighbours, education providers, service providers, and strangers
- In 87.3% of the cases, neighbours emotionally abused the participants for their disability.
- Additionally, family members were found to slap, and threw objects at the study participants in 86.7% of the cases.



Different forms of violence experienced by the women and girls with disabilities

Emotional Abuse

- More than half of the research participants reported suffering at least one act of emotional abuse during their lifetime and in the 12 months preceding the survey
- Most prevalent forms of emotional and verbal abuse were being treated differently, mocking, cursing, or being looked down upon for working differently and/or slowly.
- Family members, neighbors, service providers, and even strangers have been identified as perpetrators of such emotional abuse. .



Photo credit: Global Disability safe week

Different forms of violence experienced by the women and girls with disabilities

Physical Violence



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- 41.8% and 16.2% reported experiencing at least one act of physical abuse during their lifetime and within the last 12 months prior to the survey.
- Study respondents reported experiencing physical violence like slapping, hitting with fists, kicking, or dragging by the perpetrators.
- Oftentimes participants' parents were found to blame their children for their violent behaviour and thus do not take any steps against the violence their children experience in return.
- One-third of the qualitative participants also revealed that they were physically tortured by their husbands or in-laws due to their inability to fulfil their expected gender roles such as doing household chores properly.

“You are coming to seek for justice, whereas she is the one who does the wrong/foul work...” (Caregiver of two, 11 years old & 6 years old, intellectual and speech disability, lower middle class, rural, IDI)

Different forms of violence experienced by the women and girls with disabilities

Sexual Violence

“When I heard that (rape incident of her daughter) I was feeling that I was not in myself! I fainted! I felt suicidal.”
 (Mother of Sheuly, 16-year-old girls, unmarried, cerebral palsy, poor, rural, IDI)

- 5.3% and 1.8% of respondents reported having experienced at least one occurrence of sexual abuse in their lifetime and with the last 12 months, respectively.
- Using sexually abusive comments/speech/mockery was the most common form of sexual abuse encountered by study respondents.
- Women with disabilities and their family members oftentimes were found to not report the occurrences of sexual abuse or take action against the perpetrators out of fear of losing their "honor."
- However, gender was found to be a crucial factor in experiencing abuse.
- Men with disabilities informed that they were more likely to experience bullying and physical and emotional abuse, but they did not report sexual abuse.

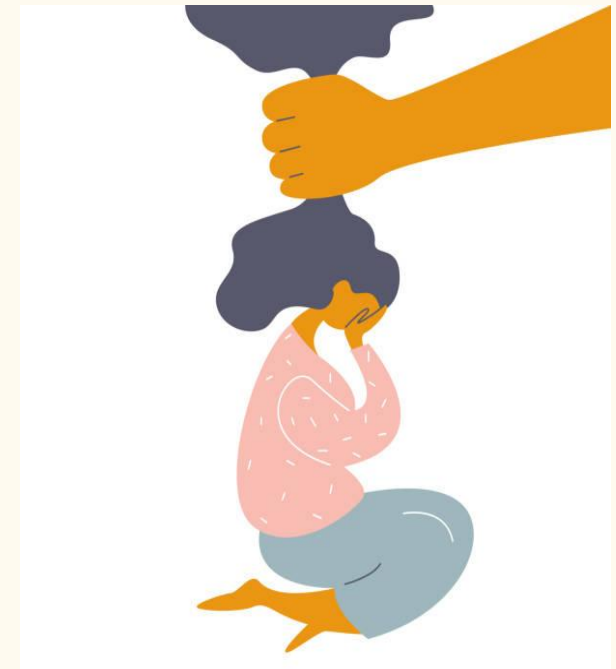


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Conclusion

Society manifests multiple layers of stigma, discrimination, and violence against persons with disabilities, which even amplifies if the individuals are women and girls with disabilities.

There is a need for a holistic approach wherein individuals, including parents/caregivers, community members, stakeholders, and changemakers must work together in order to end the violence against women and girls with disabilities.



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Thank you for your patience!

Any Questions?



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