



SHAME

Demoralization of
Women in Bangladesh

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A photograph of a protest at night. A large white banner is held up in the center, featuring a portrait of a man and the text 'Justice for Tonu'. Below the banner, many people are visible, holding up lit candles, creating a warm, orange glow. The scene is crowded and appears to be a public demonstration.

INTRODUCTION

A recent BRAC study has found that at least 7,489 women and girls became victims of violence in 2016. The study gets more worrying: 20 percent of the victims of violence against women are children, and that each day, on average, 1.7 children were victims of rape last year. The figures are shameful and disturbing, and paint a dismal combined picture of the numerous individual instances of rape, violence and sexual harassment that we see reported almost every day.

Moreover, women do not find the cities safe and 97% of them feel that sexual harassment is a form of abuse. And 81% of women subject to such abuse are scared to approach the police for help. They feel this will only make matters worse.

In *The Independent* editorial, Assistant Editor of the newspaper Syed Mehdi Momin writes: "The country is becoming a land of predators who stalk women at work, on the transports and then throw her out of a running vehicle. Often the victim finds no way but to walk home alone."

On the other hand, only less than 2 percent of all rape cases filed in the last five years ended in conviction. This is mainly because many perpetrators force the victims to settle the matter outside courts and the legal process is so humiliating that the victims back out.

To add more sorrows to the life of Bangladeshi girls and women, the government has recently passed a child marriage restraint act that allows a rapist to marry the rape victim if the family agree to marry her off without seeking her consent.

This paper has tried to give an overview of the overall situation of women in Bangladesh.



NO SAFE PLACE

NEARLY nine out of 10 husbands abuse their wives in Bangladesh, according to a recent nationwide survey conducted by the government.

Around half of the victims said they had suffered severe injuries and had to go to the hospital.

One-third of them refused to visit a doctor despite severe injuries in fear of their husbands' further actions.

Most of the women who face domestic abuse see the violence culminating into marital rape.

The survey reveals that around one-third of the married women have been raped by their husbands.

Many of them said they had not protested because they were afraid of their husbands.

While on the other hand, women commuters in Bangladesh face consistent sexual harassment when in public, severely limiting their movement, a right enshrined in the constitution.

A recent study called "Freedom to Move: Women's experience of urban public transport in Bangladesh" conducted by ActionAid Bangladesh revealed that 84% of all women commuters surveyed said they were subjected to verbal and physical sexual harassment.

MOST ABUSED AT HOME!

A survey conducted on 12,600 women randomly chosen across the seven divisions says an astonishing 87 percent of married women are abused by their husbands.

“ The reality is that domestic violence exists in almost every household and it is a daily occurrence in Bangladesh. ”

Hamida Hossain

Founder member of human rights body
Ain o Salish Kendra

Around half of the victims said they had suffered severe injuries and had to go to the hospital.



RAPE: GROWING LIKE CANCER

RAPE CULTURE ON THE GO!

It was the night of March 28.

In a hotel owned by **Awami League Member of Parliament Bazlul Huda Haroon** in the capital Dhaka, two university girls were raped before the very nose of the hotel staffs by two men, one an Awami League leader, another the son of an Awami League sponsor.

The incident was kept a secret, the victims were muzzled by the threat of Awami League men for almost a month. But after almost a month, the rape victims managed to gather the courage and went on to file a case against the culprits.

The Police did not take the case initially and **it took 48-hours for the victims**, with the help of a number of Bangladeshi media houses **to convince the police**, who were already sold out to the criminals, **to take the case**.

The above stated incident known as “Banani Rape Case”, raised a huge public hue and cry and led to an in-depth investigation that revealed on that very night, **two more girls were raped** under the same roof.

Can we imagine, **if in one night, under one roof, four girls can be raped in the capital, what could be scenario of the entire country?**



RAPE: GROWING LIKE CANCER

SPATE OF RAPE

NUMBER OF VICTIMS ON RISE THROUGH YEARS

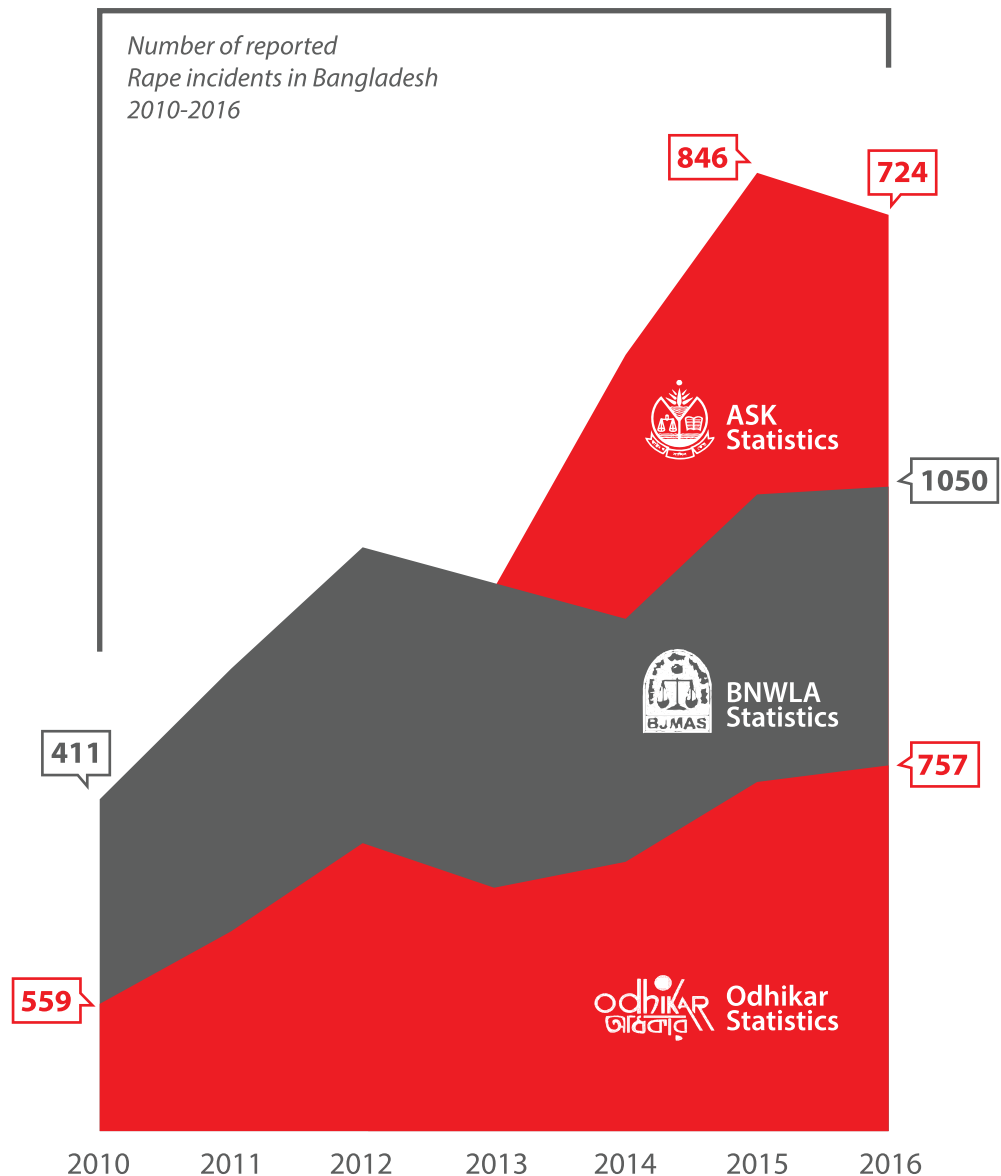
One thousand and fifty women were raped in the country in 2016 according to the Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers' Association.

Of the rape victims, **166 women were gang raped** while 44 women were killed after being raped.

According to the same source, in 2015, as many as **1,007 women were raped** in the country including 199 who were gang raped.

18,668 rape cases were filed across the country between 2012 and 2016.

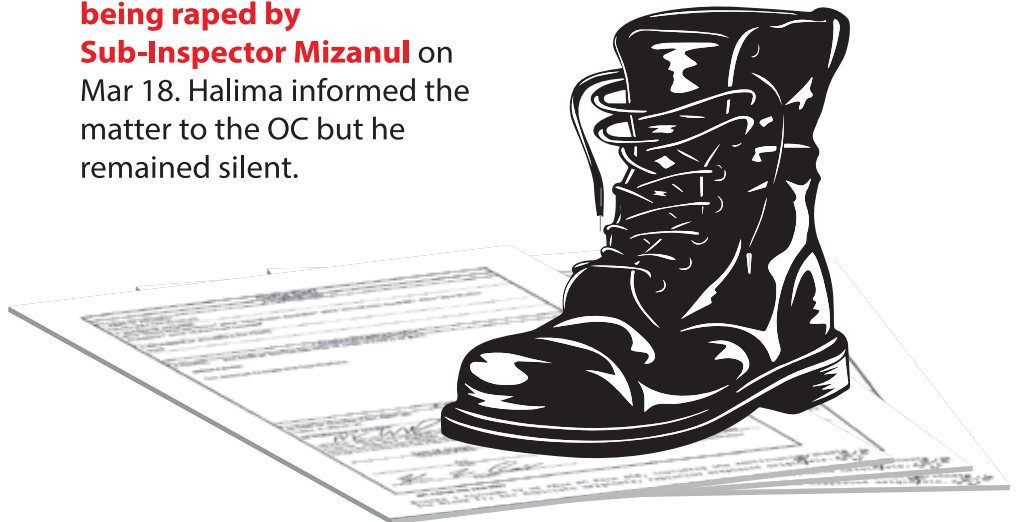
In 2013, out of **998 reported incidents of rape**, only **553 complaints** were filed.



RAPE: GROWING LIKE CANCER

FROM TONU TO AYESHA

- **Sohagi Jahan Tonu**, a student of Comilla Victoria College, **was killed after rape** inside highly secured Comilla cantonment area. **Tonu's parents demanded grilling of Army Sergeant Jahid, and soldier Jahid**, who used to disturb Tonu on a regular basis, to solve the case. The case even after more than a year is yet to be solved.
- Hazrat Ali, 55, along with daughter Ayesha Akhter, 8, **committed suicide by jumping before a running train** near Sreepur Railway Station on April 29, after being frustrated with no response from police and local representative to his complaints about an attempt to **violate the minor girl**.
- **Sheuly Akter** from Shariatpur, **was raped by Babul** on May 8. In order to cover up the crime, Babul along with his aides forced Sheuly to marry the boy, alleging that they had an "illicit affair". **Sheuly, who was not ready to marry her rapist took her life**.
- On April 2, **Constable Halima Khatun** of the police station **burnt herself to death** at a barrack in Gouripur after **being raped by Sub-Inspector Mizanul** on Mar 18. Halima informed the matter to the OC but he remained silent.
- **Rozina**, the 16-year-old daughter of a farmer in this district of Bangladesh, **is married to the man who raped her**. Trapped by the dictates of village elders, threatened by the rapist's family, and finding themselves powerless to resist, Rozina's parents crumbled under the pressure.



RAPE: GROWING LIKE CANCER

HARD TO GET JUSTICE!

Less than 2 percent of all rape cases filed in the last five years ended in conviction.

This is mainly because many perpetrators force the victims to settle the matter outside courts and the legal process is so humiliating that the victims back out.

Data for Dhaka metropolitan areas paint an even grimmer picture. Just 1.06 percent cases saw convictions in the last 15 years, according court and prosecution sources. A key barrier identified to get justice for the rape victims is Section 155(4) of the Evidence Act 1872, relating to character evidence in rape cases.

As a consequence, in every phase of getting justice -- from investigation to medical test to trial -- victims have to prove that they were raped, which is very humiliating and quite difficult.

And then the comes the political pressure, which is sometimes paramount and often force the rape victim either to go for a settlement of to commit suicide.



***“Investigation officers
say, remain silent!”***

Anwara Begum

Mother of sensational Comilla Cantonment
rape victim Sohagi Jahan Tonu

UNSAFE CITIES, UNSAFE COUNTRY

HARASSMENT KNOWS NO BOUND

According to the survey on safety in cities conducted by non-government organisation *ActionAid Bangladesh* women in Bangladesh are subject to sexual harassment in almost all public places.

Fast Facts

85% of the women are victims of insulting remarks

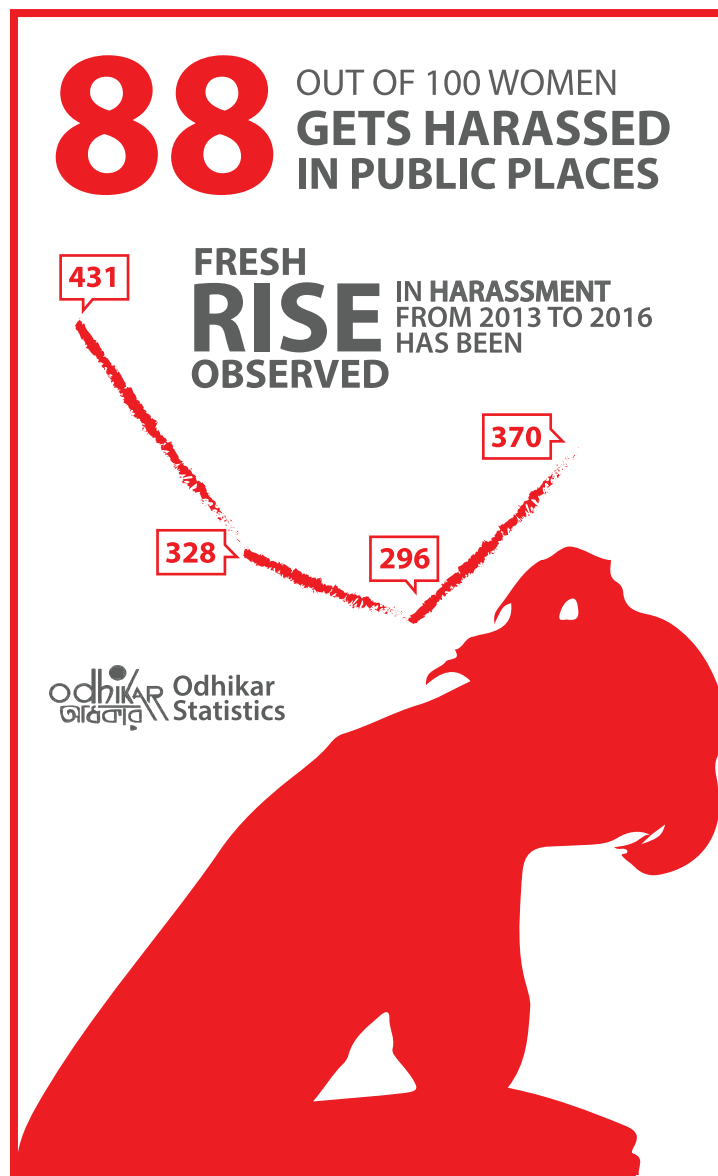
46% have faced obscene language with sexual implications

81% women do not want police assistance due to the negative image of the force

62% women do not go out at night

According to the survey, women are most vulnerable to sexual harassment in public transport, on the streets, in markets and in shopping centres. Such harassment occurs more in the early hours of the morning, midday and in the evening.

The risk in this regard is higher for women from deprived and poor families. Firstly, they are victims of such incidents. Secondly, they themselves are blamed for the incident.



UNSAFE CITIES, UNSAFE COUNTRY

SEXUAL HARASSMENT PROTESTERS MET THEIR FATE!

- Bangladesh **Police gunned down four people** who protested the sexual harassment of a mid-aged women in northern district of Tangail on September 18, 2015. Deceased are: Faruk, Kabir, Shyamol Chandra Paul, and Rubel Hossain.
- Sonatan Chandra Modok, was **stabbed to death** when he tried to help his brother-in-law Ratan, who was protesting four to five youths as they were teasing some girls in Adikalibari area of Bogra.
- A freedom fighter and school teacher Md. Jinnat Ali was **stabbed to death by the stalkers** for protesting stalking of his daughter and informing the police about it. The incident took place at Barisal.



SAVIOURS, OR PREDATORS?

ROLE OF LAW-ENFORCERS

- On April 29, 2012, at around 9.30 pm, Rehana Yeasmin Dolly (40), general secretary of Jatiyotabadi Mohila Dol of ward no.74 was picked up by police force of 7-8 male members. They handed her to Detective Branch where a male police official Mehedi Hassan ordered to **rip off her clothes and tortured her** relentlessly stepping on her hand.
- **Five police Constables raped an adolescent girl** in their custody at Gaibandha's Govindaganj Police Station in October 2013.
- Several policemen during a protest in May 2015 against sexual assault on women, cornered a female political activist of Chhatra Union who was identified as Ismat Jahan in the daylight and

kicked on her abdomen. When she tried to flee, the police officials chased after her and **caught her by the hair**. Then manhandled her till she fell down, and then repeatedly **kicked her in different parts of body**.

POLICE IN BANGLADESH ARE BLAMED FOR RESORTING TO BRUTAL TORTURE IN CUSTODY REGARDLESS OF GENDER.



Rehana Yeasmin Dolly
a BNP women leader
lying on the stairs of a
Dhaka court with
torture marks visible
on her body

STEPPING BACKWARD

LEGALIZING CHILD MARRIAGE

Bangladesh continues to have one of the highest child marriage rates worldwide and the highest rate of marriage involving girls under 15. 52% of girls are married by their 18th birthday, and 18% by the age of 15.

Child marriage is more prevalent in rural areas where 71% of girls are married before the age of 18, compared to 54% in urban areas.

Drivers of Child Marriage in Bangladesh

With the newly adopted *Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017* that allows to marry off a girl at any age under "special circumstance" without her consent, Government itself is a major driver of child marriage in Bangladesh. This act

Moreover, deeply embedded cultural and religious beliefs, drivers of child marriage include poverty, and the **perceived need to protect girls from harm, including sexual harassment** which is prevalent in Bangladesh as stated above.

Dowry is also a driving factor with prices often increasing the older a girl gets.

The worst Child Marriage law ever!

Bangladesh government has passed a law that would allow for child marriage to occur in "special circumstances".

While the government maintained the legal marriage age for children, there is a new provision in the act which would allow child marriage to take place under "special circumstances" - with parental consent and with permission from the courts, deemed in the "best interest of the underage female or male".

The consent or permission from the child, however, is not required, and no definition of

these "special circumstances" are yet given.

There are fears that such a provision will legitimise statutory rape and encourage child marriage.

Government suggests allowing marriage would be a solution to "special circumstances" such as unwanted pregnancy,

But in Bangladesh marriage does not protect girls at least in Bangladesh where nine out of ten girls face frequent abuse at home and often dies in violence.

THE LAST OPTION

SUICIDES ON RISE

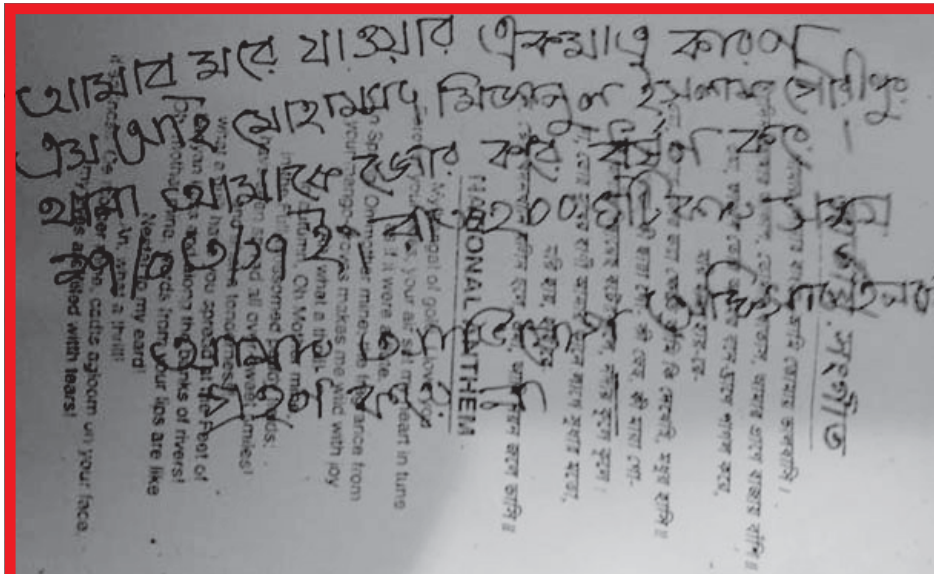
According to the 2014 World Health Organization (WHO) report, Bangladesh scored 10th place in the list of high suicide-prone nations. The number of suicidal deaths is increasing in the country with around 514 people taking their own lives in the last year alone.

According to Police Headquarters, nearly 60,000 cases of suicides were recorded from 2008 to 2013 six years, while 1,029 such cases were recorded in 2013 alone.

Statistics of the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR), a human rights organisation, shows that 514 people committed suicide in 2016 while the figure was 349 in 2015, 565 in 2014, 293 in 2013 and 305 in 2012.



BSEHR
Statistics



FROM A SUICIDE NOTE

Suicide note of Constable Halima Khatun reads:

The reason behind my death is Sub-inspector Mizanul Islam who raped me on 17/03/2017 in Gouripur Police Station. The Officer-in-Charge did not take my case.

CHALLENGES FOR CHANGE

WHERE IS AWAMI LEAGUE LEADING BANGLADESH TO?

In 2014, a police officer in Bangladesh blamed the clothing choice of women for causing rape.

The police commander, in charge of a regional police station in Sylhet division, blamed Bollywood films for encouraging women to wear “revealing” outfits, which he said would in-turn lead to them being raped.

“That’s the issue. We follow Islamic laws and rules here. I think if girls cover themselves up, I would be far less attracted to them and they towards me,” he told a reporter from US magazine Vice News.

And this is not an isolated opinion of a local police official. Almost the entire police department, the country including the prime minister of the country to some extent share similar views.

It is a matter of fact, Awami

League Prime Minister and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who claim to have championing the secular thoughts in Bangladesh, herself maintain quite radical views.

For example, in 2012 while condemning a justified movement of the Bangladesh’s top engineering college BUET students, she described the taking blood of a girl by a boy as a disgusting act and called them perverts!

According to the September 9, 2012 edition of *The Daily Star*, she said: “What a disgusting kind of agitation! A boy collected blood from a girl’s body and poured it on the floor. I don’t understand how such a perverted idea came to their minds.”

The stance of Bangladesh’s high-ups regarding women and their freedom, their role in recent times has created an

“ We follow Islamic laws here. I think if girls cover themselves up, I would be less attracted to them. ”

Mohammed Shahjalal Munshi
Commander of Sylhet District Police Force in Bangladesh

environment of fear among the women.

Bangladesh’s 65 percent women think that police instead of the perpetrator, blame the women!



The paper has been prepared by Professor **AKM Wahiduzzaman**, member of *Human Rights Defenders Network, Bangladesh*, with the help of Bangladesh based journalist **Satth-El-Arab** in June, 2017.

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