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Domestic Violence against Women in Bangladesh: An Analysis within the Global Context

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Abstract

Violence against women poses a significant challenge to social justice, human rights and sustainable development in both developed and developing countries. This study examines domestic violence against women in Bangladesh evaluating the local environment within a larger global framework. The paper explores the conceptual foundation of domestic violence, its various forms and underlying causes, as well as the link between socioeconomic level and the prevalence of abuse. It also analyses the corresponding frequency of various forms of domestic violence and provides a description of domestic violence in Bangladesh, including its historical context and the role of women's movements and legislative interventions. Furthermore, the study examines the scope of domestic violence at both national and global levels, as well as worldwide developments and responses to gender-based violence. The study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research approach based on an extensive review of secondary sources, including national surveys, international reports, and existing academic literature. The report takes a comparative and analytical approach, highlighting key similarities and contrasts between Bangladesh and the global situation. Finally, the paper addresses the social, economic, and developmental consequences of reducing domestic violence, highlighting the need of policy reformation, societal awareness, and institutional strengthening in addressing violence against women in Bangladesh and throughout the world.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Gender Inequality, Patriarchy, Socio-Economic Factors, Women's Rights.

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Introduction

Domestic violence against women is a widespread social issue that transcends geographical, economic, and cultural borders. It includes physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse committed by intimate partners or family members, which undermines women's rights, health, dignity, and socioeconomic involvement. Domestic violence in Bangladesh is firmly founded in inequality by gender, patriarchal norms, and sociocultural practices that limit women's autonomy and support male authority. However, the issue is not limited to Bangladesh. Domestic violence affects women at alarming rates across the world, forcing global organizations, governments, and civil society to address its origins, repercussions, and solutions. This study will explore the reasons, situation and consequences of domestic violence specifically in the context of Bangladesh and try to recommend necessary implications for policy development and intervention strategies.

Objectives of the Study

Broad Objective

The objective of this study is to analyze the domestic violence against women specifically in Bangladesh within a global context. It seeks to examine the causes, extent, socio-economic dimensions, and compare the situation of Bangladesh with global pattern to understand its broader implications.

Specific Objective

- To identify the major forms and causes of domestic violence against women in Bangladesh.
- To examine the relationship between socio-economic status and the occurrence of domestic violence.
- To compare the extent and pattern of domestic violence within global context in order to eradicate the problem.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive research design based entirely on secondary data rather than primary data collection- an approach suited to synthesizing existing evidence and appropriate given the ethical risks of direct interviews with survivors. The method applied includes systematic review of national surveys, international reports, and peer-reviewed literature to identify patterns across contexts.

Sources were chosen for relevance to domestic violence against women and credibility of the issuing body.

One of the limitations of the study is reliance on secondary data which means the study cannot verify measurement consistency across sources; national surveys use different indicators, and definitions of violence than international organizations such as WHO or UN Women, which affects direct comparability of prevalence figures. The study also inherits the underreporting bias common to all domestic violence research, since self-reported survey data typically undercounts sexual and economic violence in particular.

Given the sensitive nature of gender-based violence, the gathering of secondary data avoids exposing vulnerable participants to repeated-trauma and social repercussions. Also, it offers an access to large scale, nationally representative samples that would otherwise be resource-prohibitive to gather independently. This also allows the research to analyze the long-term trends in this sector and also evaluate the socio-economic factors contextualizing Bangladesh's localized situation with greater scope and validity.

Literature Review

Domestic violence is widely recognized as a pattern of abusive behaviors used to exert power and control within intimate and family relationships. These behaviors mainly include four types of assaults that include physical, psychological, sexual and economic deprivation. Domestic violence against women received significant scholarly attention in recent decades, as a social and public health issue with long-term implications. Globally, data regularly shows that one in every three women suffer physical or sexual assault from an intimate relationship at some point in their lives (UN Women, 2025). According to World Health Organization (WHO), domestic violence is determined by structural inequalities, societal norms, and power imbalances that favour men's control over women. These data demonstrate that domestic violence is a global phenomenon, despite considerable variations in occurrence and presentation across cultural and geographical contexts.

Researchers have found a number of factors that indicate of domestic violence worldwide. Heise proposed an ecological framework in which individual, relational, communal, and societal elements interact to determine the likelihood of violence (Heise, 1998). Low educational attainment, economic stress, drug misuse, and past childhood exposure

to violence have all been associated to greater perpetration and victimization in a variety of circumstances. Furthermore, gender norms that legitimize aggressive behaviour and tolerate male domination play an important role in explaining cross-national disparities in domestic violence frequency. Jewkes emphasized how ingrained patriarchal views, combined with insufficient legal safeguards can create cycles of abuse even in middle- and high-income nations (Jewkes, 2002). A considerable collection of literature in South Asia emphasises the widespread incidence of domestic violence and its profound linkages to patriarchal norms. Studies from India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh show high incidence rates as well as distinct links to socioeconomic hardship, early marriage, and restricted female autonomy. Researchers from the region have also noted how socio-cultural norms frequently normalize violence and prevent reporting. For example, Naved and Persson's longitudinal study in Bangladesh found that many women accept controlling behaviors and physical punishment from their spouses as normal, making it harder to detect and oppose abuse in the home (Naved et al, 2010).

In Bangladesh, national surveys and scientific studies have revealed concerning rates of domestic abuse against women. According to the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), a significant proportion of married women have experienced physical or sexual assault at the hands of their husbands. Qualitative research in rural and urban settings shows that cultural acceptance of male authority, dowry-related stress, and economic reliance all increase the risk factors. Women with lesser levels of education and those living in poverty are at greater risk because they lack the resources to seek help or leave violent situations in an abusive relationship.

Overview of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is defined as behaviors employed by one person in an intimate or family relationship to exert power and control over another. Domestic violence is classified by the World Health Organization as a violation of human rights and a major public health problem due to its widespread incidence and substantial effects on survivors' physical and mental health. Domestic abuse in Bangladesh has been reported in a variety of ways, including physical assault, marital rape, forced isolation, and economic domination. Although Bangladesh has laws to protect women from domestic violence, enforcement is inconsistent and many incidents go unreported because of shame and taboo, fear of retaliation, or a lack of access to legal assistance.

Reasons for Domestic Violence

Domestic violence against women is the result of a complex combination of interpersonal, socio-cultural, economic, and institutional variables, not a single cause. One of the most important factors is the persistence of patriarchal societal norms that place males in positions of power within the home and justify control over women. In many communities, including Bangladesh, conventional gender roles depict men as decision-makers and women as dependent caregivers, which can normalize dominance and excuse violent behaviour when women are thought to challenge these positions.

Economic considerations can play an important role in causing domestic violence. Poverty, unemployment, and financial uncertainty can all contribute to home stress, resulting in conflict and aggressive behaviour. At the same time, women's economic reliance on their male partners limits their negotiating power and capacity to fight or leave abusive marriages. Dowry-related conflicts continue to be a major source of domestic violence in Bangladesh, as unmet dowry demands frequently result in physical and psychological abuse of women by spouses or in-laws.

Low levels of education among both men and women are closely linked to increased cases of domestic violence. Limited education frequently limits understanding of legal rights, dispute resolution skills, and gender equality principles. Women with little or no education are more likely to accept violence as a normal aspect of marriage, but males with lower educational attainment may be more likely to use violence to maintain power. Early and forced marriages increase vulnerability because young women often lack maturity, social support, and economic independence.

Drug addiction is another cause and widely identified as a risk factor for the violent behavior. Usually, people who are related with drug abuses are also more connected with the violence. The misuse of drugs frequently reduces self-control and escalates angers and the intensity of abuses. Also, people who experience domestic violence and drug addiction in the younger ages are more prone to repeat those as adults, prolonging the cycles of abuses.

Structural and institutional inadequacies are contributing in women's domestic violence. Whenever the violence happened, women are discouraged from reporting abusing due to inadequate law enforcement, restricted access to justice and societal stigma associated with the

marital disagreement. Fear of social isolation, harm to family honor, and a lack of faith in judicial systems sometimes force women to endure assault in silence. These structural constraints support criminal's impunity and keep domestic violence as a normalized social problem.

Socio-Economic Status and its Relationship with Domestic Violence

Socioeconomic position has a substantial impact on the frequency and severity of domestic violence. Poverty, a lack of education, and economic dependency can trap women in abusive relationships, while economic stress increase tensions and lead to violence. Women with low financial autonomy have fewer alternatives for seeking assistance or escaping abusive circumstances. On the other hand, women from the upper-class think about the reputation and socio-economic position while confronting about the domestic violence. In Bangladesh, rural women and low-income households are disproportionately affected since economic uncertainty raises tensions that might lead to violence. Globally, similar trends occur, with data demonstrating that women in lower socioeconomic categories endure greater rates of violence and have less access to protective measures. Addressing socioeconomic gaps is consequently essential for minimizing domestic violence and enhancing women's empowerment.

Domestic violence in Bangladesh has various characteristics influenced by cultural, legal, and socioeconomic issues. The majority of cases are between married couples, and violence frequently starts early in marriage or during pregnancy. Patriarchal beliefs that undervalue women's roles outside the home, along with strong familial demands to maintain marital peace, lead to the normalization of violence. Although institutional support systems exist, such as gender-based violence desks at police stations and legal aid clinics, many women rely on informal networks, such as family or community leaders, because they distrust authorities or are afraid of social shame. Public awareness campaigns and community mobilization activities have raised knowledge of the problem, but significant gaps in service delivery and accountability persist.

Comparative Frequency of Different Incidences of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence against women takes many forms, and existing research demonstrates that the incidence of these forms varies greatly depending on social, cultural, and geographic situations. Physical violence is the most often reported kind globally, and it includes acts like slapping, pushing, kicking, punching, and beating. Physical violence is more obvious and so more commonly reported in surveys

and police reports. In Bangladesh, research regularly show that physical abuse by spouses is common, especially among ever-married women, and is frequently precipitated by home tensions, perceived disobedience, or dowry-related arguments. Globally, similar trends emerge, with physical violence continuing one of the most often experienced and reported types of domestic abuse.

Psychological or emotional violence, which includes verbal abuse, humiliation, intimidation, threats, and controlling behaviors, is frequently cited as the most common type of domestic violence, but receiving far less attention owing to its non-physical component. According to research, emotional abuse is commonly associated with physical violence, although it can also occur on its own. In Bangladesh, emotional violence, such as continual criticism, limitation of movement, and isolation from family or friends, is generally accepted and frequently not seen as abuse by victims. Comparative studies demonstrate that emotional violence is also widespread over the world, particularly in civilizations where visible physical violence is less socially acceptable but control over women's behaviour is still strong.

Sexual assault in intimate relationships is one of the most underreported and serious kinds of domestic abuse. It includes forced sexual intercourse, marital rape, and coercive sexual practices. Sexual violence inside marriage is mostly unseen in Bangladesh because of strong cultural taboos, a lack of legal acknowledgement, and societal norms that view sexual access as a husband's privilege. As a result, the recorded frequency is much lower than the real prevalence. Globally, intimate partner sexual abuse is underreported, however certain places with greater legal safeguards and awareness channels have higher disclosure rates.

According to comparative studies, while the total frequency of domestic violence is higher in low- and middle-income nations, the proportional distribution of different types of violence is rather comparable across regions. Physical and emotional violence dominate reported incidents globally, whereas sexual and economic violence are considerably underreported. Variations in legal definitions, societal acceptance, reporting procedures, and research methodology all have an impact on frequency differences, in addition to actual occurrence. Rural residency, lower education levels, early marriage, and socioeconomic reliance all contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence in Bangladesh. When contrasted worldwide, Bangladesh displays many of the same tendencies seen in patriarchal countries,

however the severity and normalization of violence are frequently more severe due to fewer institutional support mechanisms. Overall, the relative frequency of different incidents emphasises the importance of comprehensive measurement strategies that capture both apparent and hidden forms of domestic abuse, allowing for more effective policy responses at the national and global levels.

Global Scenario of Domestic Violence

International research consistently recognizes domestic violence as one of the most common types of gender-based violence and a major violation of human rights. According to global statistics, a large percentage of women worldwide have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological abuse from an intimate partner at some time in their life. These findings show that domestic violence is a worldwide issue caused by gender inequality and power inequalities, rather than being limited to certain locations or cultures. Domestic violence rates are greater in many low- and middle-income nations, notably in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America, due to entrenched patriarchal institutions, limited educational access, and women's economic reliance. Cultural traditions in these areas frequently support male leadership and normalize the use of violence as a disciplinary tool in marriage. However, high-income nations also record significant levels of domestic violence, demonstrating that economic growth alone cannot solve the problem. In certain situations, violence may be less socially acceptable, but it can nevertheless exist in more subtle forms, such as emotional or economic abuse. Even in areas with strong regulations, survivors frequently encounter challenges to reporting, such as fear of revenge, distrust in institutions, and societal pressure to maintain family unity. These problems contribute to a global incorrect estimation of domestic violence prevalence. International organizations such as the World Health Organization, UN Women, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime have all highlighted the serious health, social, and economic implications of domestic violence. Survivors are at a higher risk of physical injuries, mental health problems, reproductive health complications, and decreased involvement in school and work worldwide.

The global approach to domestic violence has changed significantly over the last several decades. International legal frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5.2, have established a normative framework for

preventing and responding to violence against women (Reddock, 2022). Several countries have implemented domestic violence legislation, developed support services like shelters and hotlines, and included gender-based violence into national development plans. Despite these developments, implementation gaps persist, especially in countries with limited resources.

Historical Background of Violence against Women & Movements

Violence against women is not a new phenomenon. It has strong historical origins in patriarchal societal structures that have shaped family relationships, legal systems, and cultural values over generations. Historically, women in many countries were perceived as dependents or property of male family members, and domestic violence was frequently thought of as private and beyond the reach of legal action. Traditional practices, religious interpretations, and colonial legal frameworks typically affirmed male power over women, legitimizing domestic abuse and restricting women's access to justice. This historical normalization of violence set the groundwork for its continued presence in modern civilizations which includes Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, the history of violence against women is inextricably tied to sociocultural practices, economic reliance, and patriarchal power dynamics. Child marriage, dowry and restrictions on female mobility have traditionally made women more vulnerable to abuse in marriage and family life. Domestic violence was notably absent from public discussion throughout the colonial and early post-colonial periods, since societal standards emphasized family honor and female dependence. During this time, legal institutions provided little protection for women, and domestic abuse was rarely recognized as a criminal offence. During the liberation war of 1971, widespread sexual violence against women was utilized as a weapon of war, marking the turning point in Bangladesh's history of gender violence (Kabir, 2024). Women's experiences throughout this time period raised national and worldwide awareness of gender-based violence, emphasizing the importance of women's rights and safety.

Women's movements in Bangladesh gained momentum in the late 1970s and 1980s, because of the rise of feminist activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society groups. Organizations related with women's right, legal aid societies, and grassroots movements started keeping track of domestic violence instances and issues, assisting survivors, and advocating for legislative

reform. These campaigns were essential in confronting patriarchal conventions, increasing awareness, and convincing the government to recognize domestic abuse as a violation of women's human rights.

Global initiatives and legal processes have contributed to international recognition of violence against women. Subsequent global conferences, such as the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights (1993) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), explicitly recognized violence against women as a violation of human rights and advocated for comprehensive legal and policy reforms. These worldwide movements pushed national governments, including Bangladesh, to alter legislation and create institutional structures to combat domestic violence.

Implications of Reducing Domestic Violence

Reducing domestic violence against women has far-reaching consequences, including larger social, economic, and developmental results. At the individual level, reducing domestic violence benefits women's physical and mental health, lowers injury-related morbidity, and boosts overall well-being. Women who live in free from abuse environments are more likely to seek education, engage in economic activities, and participate in social decision-making, all of which contribute to resources building (Heron et al., 2022). Reducing domestic violence can improve household stability and economic output. Domestic violence frequently impairs women's ability to work regularly, lowers household income, and raises healthcare costs. Preventing violence in Bangladesh, where many women work in both informal and formal jobs, can lead to increased labor force participation, higher productivity, and lower economic reliance. These achievements not only benefit women, but also help to reduce poverty and build economic resilience at both the family and national levels.

Addressing domestic violence as a public health issue supports collaborated solutions that include medical professionals, social agencies, and legal institutions, resulting in more effective and long-term effects. Survivors of domestic abuse usually require treatment for physical injuries, mental health issues, and reproductive difficulties. Preventing violence can alleviate pressure on health systems and enhance service efficiency in Bangladesh and other low- and middle-income countries with limited healthcare resources.

Domestic violence reduction has intergenerational effects. Children raised in violent families are more likely to endure anxiety, low educational performance, and behavioural issues, and they can

perpetuate cycles of violence in adulthood (Doroudchi et al., 2023). Preventing domestic violence is essential to establishing healthy relationships with families and ending the cycle of abuse across generations. Addressing domestic violence prevention promotes long-term social stability and sustainable development in Bangladesh as well as throughout the world.

Recommendations

In case of developing countries like Bangladesh, addressing domestic violence against women requires comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach combining legal reforms, socio-economic empowerment, strengthening related institutions and a massive social transformation. First and foremost, the implementation and enforcement of existing laws related with domestic violence. Even though there are legal frameworks to prevent violence against women, there are certain gaps in the system, delays in the judicial processes and limited accountability mechanisms which undermine the effectiveness. Strengthening law enforcement and timely execution of the law are essential to ensure prevention of violence and protect the victims.

The socio-economic empowerment of women should be prioritized as a key strategy to reduce violence. Access to education, vocational training, be part of culturally rich environment and focusing on the skill development are necessary ways to empowering women. Government and non-government initiatives should be taken on skill development program, employment opportunities and access to the financial services. Economic empowerment programs should be integrated with the initiatives to promote financial autonomy and building decision-making power within households.

Institutional support mechanisms must be enhanced in order to offer comprehensive care to survivors of domestic violence. This involves increasing access to shelters, counselling services, medical treatment, and legal assistance. Establishing well-coordinated referral processes between police, healthcare professionals, social agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) helps ensure that survivors receive comprehensive and timely assistance. Furthermore, increasing community-based support systems can help reach women who are afraid or hesitant to seek formal institutional treatment because of stigma.

Improving collecting information and study on domestic violence is another important concept. Reliable, segmented statistics are required to determine the full scope of domestic abuse and implement evidence-

based solutions. Regular national surveys, enhanced reporting procedures, and qualitative research focusing on under-represented groups can all assist detect hidden forms of abuse. Improving monitoring and evaluation methods will also enable policymakers to analyze the efficacy of current initiatives and make informed changes.

Long-term prevention of domestic violence requires raising public awareness and changing social norms. Community-based education initiatives, media campaigns, and school curriculum should question patriarchal traditions while promoting gender equality, mutual respect, and nonviolent dispute resolution. Engaging men and boys in preventative programs are essential because changing perceptions about masculinity and power can help lessen acceptance of violence in intimate relationships. Religious leaders, community leaders, and local influencers can all play important roles in changing societal attitudes and deterring violence.

Conclusion

Despite legal and policy advancement, violence against women persists due to gaps in implementation and social resistance to change. Domestic violence remains deeply rooted with the perceptions of the people with patriarchal norms, gender inequality, economic dependency and weak institutional enforcement. Similar patterns are being observed globally which indicate domestic violence a universal problem with contextual variations. For Bangladesh, eliminating domestic violence isn't only a moral and legal obligation but also a critical prerequisite for achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development.

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