



**Violence is preventable**  
UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women & UNV  
Asia-Pacific regional joint programme  
for gender-based violence prevention

**“The Male Entity of the Self Never  
Dies, It Just Leaps like a Tiger”**

**Masculinity and Gender-based  
Violence in Bangladesh**

**Working Paper 7**

Partners for Prevention is a UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV Asia-Pacific regional joint programme for gender-based violence prevention.

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## Introduction

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### Background

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Gender-based violence has increasingly been recognized as an important but hidden development issue. It contributes to the vulnerability and marginalization of women and provides an explanation for why “domestic violence is the largest cause of morbidity worldwide in women aged 19–44, greater than war, cancer or motor vehicle accidents” (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2008). According to the highly regarded 2002 WHO study of violence and health, close to 50 percent of women report ever experiencing physical assault by their intimate partner in Bangladesh, and in a 2005 WHO report on violence against women 53 percent of women in an urban sample and 61.7 percent of women in a rural sample report ever experiencing physical and/or sexual violence (WHO 2002; 2005). This is confirmed by a recent icddr,b survey conducted with men, among whom between 55 percent (urban) and 57 percent (rural) reported ever perpetrating either physical or sexual violence against an intimate partner (icddr,b 2011). Although some other countries report high levels of intimate partner violence, in a selected sample of ten countries Bangladesh had the highest proportion (68 percent) of women that reported ‘never telling anyone’ about their experience of intimate partner violence, followed by Egypt with 47 percent (Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller, 1999). Moreover, about 60 percent of men in one survey agreed that women at times deserve to be beaten (Parvin et al, 2012). Bangladesh, along with the US, was named as one of the countries where an important cause of maternal death was murder committed by the partner (WHO 2002: 102).

Levels of sexual violence tend to be also very high in the country, especially in the context of conjugal relations. In one study, 71 percent of women between 15 – 35 years of age in Bangladesh reported ever experiencing forced sex in marriage (Khan, D’Costa, and Rahman, 2001). In another study, half of the male respondents reported that it was not necessary for a husband to get a wife’s consent before sex (Fahmida and Doneys, 2013) while a quantitative icddr,b study of gender-based violence in Bangladesh found a lower figure with 10 percent in the urban site and 15 percent in the rural site of men reporting ever forcing their intimate partner into sex (icddr,b 2011: 20). Most of the physical and sexual violence that women experience is caused by men, and a large share is committed by the partner or husband.

In 2008, Partners for Prevention, a UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV Asia-Pacific regional joint programme for gender-based violence prevention, initiated the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence to generate knowledge on how masculinities relate to men’s perceptions and perpetration of gender-based violence. The study was a collaborative, action-oriented and multi-country research project completed in 2013. More than 10,000 men and women across seven countries in the Asia-Pacific were interviewed, to explore the connections between masculinities, gender and power, in order to enhance violence prevention policies and programmes. The study was comprised of three methodologies at the national and regional levels, to build a nuanced understanding of gender-based violence and masculinity:

- quantitative household surveys involving more than 10,000 men and women to understand the scale and scope of violence perpetration and factors associated with men’s perpetration of violence;
- qualitative life history interviews with men who use violence and those who do not, to explore how influences and experiences across a life span shape dominant and alternative masculinities; and
- gender politics of policy research using sociological and ethnographic methodologies to understand how institutional factors and structural conditions enable and prevent GBV.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific, visit [www.partners4prevention.org](http://www.partners4prevention.org).

The qualitative and quantitative methodologies were implemented in Bangladesh. The following report presents the qualitative life history findings from Bangladesh, and complements the quantitative study recently conducted by the icddr,b (2011).

## Laws and policies to promote gender equality and end gender-based violence

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Bangladesh has a strong legal framework to reduce violence against women. The country's penal code criminalizes several forms of abuse and violence directed at women, including acts related to acid attacks and those related to the dowry system. The Prevention of Women and Child Prevention Act of 2000 and the Domestic Violence Prevention & Protection Act of 2010 also provide penalties to perpetrators of rape and other forms of violence against women, including domestic violence. Other acts related to violence include the Cruelty to Women Law of 1983, the Anti-Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 and the Trafficking in Women and Children Act of 1993. Bangladesh is also signatory to many international conventions including the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which it ratified in 1984.

There is, however, no marital rape act or provision and in fact the penal code stipulates that “sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under 14 years of age is not rape”, therefore precluding legal prosecution based on marital rape. As noted above, studies from Bangladesh show that men often reported that they view consent for sex as acquired through marriage, and so the concept of non-consensual sex within marriage is not recognized by many husbands (Fahmida and Doneys, 2013). Findings from the quantitative component of the UN Multi-country Study show that rape is most commonly reported within marriage (icddr,b 2011). Overall, however, the government is taking the issue of gender-based violence seriously in terms of both preventing violence and offering support to victims of gender-based violence. This is evidenced, for example, by the government's initiatives to set up One-Stop Crisis Centers and women's shelters.

In spite of these efforts, it is clear that many of the laws and policies are not fully enforced and there is a lack of capacity to implement existing legal frameworks. Another issue of debate is the gap between the general law on the one hand, including the equality principle stipulated under the Bangladesh constitution, and Muslim Personal Law on the other, especially with regard to marriage and divorce where inequalities are embedded in the law as forms of protection for women (for instance, a Muslim woman is prohibited from marrying a non-Muslim man, while Muslim men can marry a non-Muslim women - Jew or Christian). This is of course a delicate issue and without going into a discussion on the pros and cons of each legal system, the actual inconsistencies between the two systems are found to undermine both the principle of the norms and their actual enforcement.<sup>2</sup>

## Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

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### Masculinities

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In this research we approach masculinities as a relational concept and one that is embedded in social hierarchies. The UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific defines

<sup>2</sup> On gaps between legal frameworks see, Talisma Monsoor, (2009) *Judiciary and Gender on Trial: Reported and Unreported Decisions of Family Courts*, Nymphaea, British Council, Dhaka; Julhaika Hossain ‘Re-thinking Personal Laws and Gender Justice from a Bangladesh Perspective,’ in Ragnhild Lund, Philippe Doneys, Bernadette P. Resurrección (eds.), *Gender Entanglements: Re-visiting Gender in Rapidly Changing Asia*, forthcoming, NIAS, 2014.

masculinities as “‘ways of living for men’, both identities and patterns of practices, associated with the positions of men in various gender systems” (Fulu et al., 2013). This theoretical framework draws heavily on the work of Connell (1995; 2002; 2005) who argues that “masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of an individual” but rather involves “configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 836). This means that there are multiple forms of masculinities and these change across settings and time.

**‘...marginalized and subordinated masculinities are repressed yet they serve as constant reminder of men’s failure to obey hegemonic forms of masculinity in men’s fear of being labeled weak or hijras.’**

The most visible form of masculinity is often referred to as ‘hegemonic’ masculinity. These hegemonic forms of masculinities reflect dominant characteristics of what it means to be a man in any given society. Hegemonic masculinities are used as a marker for men’s individual behaviours and beliefs, but they also shape dominant social norms and values. Hegemonic masculinities are supported and reinforced by complicit masculinities, which sanction hegemonic forms, while playing or enacting some of its characteristics. Thus, some men may enact hegemonic forms of masculinity out of fear, even though they may not share its fundamental premises of domination. As such, hegemonic masculinity is normative, and requires “all other men to position themselves in relation to it” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832).

Hegemonic masculinities are, more often than not, built upon and generate systems of power inequalities and imbalances between women and men. These systems are often referred to as patriarchy. It is this very system – through this notion of hegemonic masculinities – that uses violence as a means to ensure that these power imbalances stay in place. Gender-based violence becomes a means to acquire resources and deny access of these resources to others. It also becomes a means to solidify relations of domination that uphold this “structure of inequality”...“involving a massive dispossession of social resources” (Connell, 2005: 83). All men benefit from these structures of inequality, or patriarchy, but not all men benefit equally.

There are many other forms of masculinities and these (alongside femininity) are often subordinate to a society’s hegemonic form of masculinity. Men who may not relate to or espouse hegemonic forms of masculinities (or may simply be subordinated to them, such as sexual minority or other minority communities) are marginalized by this system of gender relations. This process of subordination is accomplished by social constraints on subordinated and marginalized forms of masculinities, as well as on femininities. These constraints affect both discourses and practices of gender roles and relations. However, as hegemonic masculinities are constructed by societies, so too can they be re-constructed, and thus developing a better understanding of context specific masculinities is critical to identify ways to shape and promote non-violent and equitable discourses and practices around what it means to be a man.

## **Masculinities in Bangladesh**

Although Connell’s theory of hierarchies of masculinity applies to Bangladesh as well as other countries, these hierarchies, including the type of hegemonic masculinity expressed by some men, will take their own contextual form. In Bangladesh, religion and cultural traditions interact with contemporary institutions of male dominance to produce specific forms of masculinities and gender regimes, which in turn affect factors related to perpetration of men’s gender-based violence against women. For women, these patriarchal systems have well-defined consequences, such as restrictions on mobility, fewer educational and employment opportunities, and low representation or participation in power structures (Wahed and Bhuiya, 2007). Women’s position in the domestic sphere also takes a special significance, as wives are expected to be socially, economically, psychologically and in other ways subordinated to their husbands. Women’s economic and overall dependence on their partner is particularly acute and explains to some extent women’s ‘tolerance’

of abuse for fears of being left alone, of their husband finding another woman or being rejected by family and community (Wahed and Bhuiya, 2007; Fahmida and Doneys, 2013). These threats in the context of complete dependence – for example, having effectively nowhere else to go in case of conflict – undermine women’s resilience and increase men’s power and sense of entitlement.

For men, these systems of patriarchy are bolstered by violent and controlling privileges that are accorded to men. For instance, men in Bangladesh often have a sense of entitlement regarding their partner’s actions and mobility as well as body, upon marriage (icddr,b, 2011; Fahmida and Doneys, 2013). Yet, while all men benefit from patriarchy, some men are also oppressed by these masculine norms and social structures in Bangladesh. For example, marginalized and subordinated masculinities – or those that imply a failure to obey hegemonic forms of masculinities – are repressed in this environment, given men’s fear of being labeled weak or *hijras* (Fahmida and Doneys, 2013). This would also include men whose behaviour does not correspond to hegemonic forms of masculinities, such as sexual minorities (gay men, men who have sex with men, transgenders), non-violent and socially/environmentally conscious men, and others who think in terms of different (non-hegemonic) forms of masculinities. Additionally, even within this social environment not all men in Bangladesh follow hegemonic forms of masculinities and not all men use violence against their partner. So why do some men enact extreme forms of hegemonic masculinities, including recourse to violence, while other men reject these attitudes and behaviours, even in the context of strong peer pressure and repression of non-hegemonic forms of masculinities? This research aims to understand these dynamics in more detail in order to identify important and key determining factors that help shape the complex relationship between masculinity and gender-based violence.

## Violence against Women and Gender-based Violence

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The term ‘violence against women’ is sometimes preferred over ‘gender-based violence’ in order to “underscore what each of the abuses has in common, namely its grounding in the fundamental devaluation of women and girls” (Heise 2011). The definition of violence against women is based on the United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (resolution 48/104 of December 1993) and Resolution 2003/45 on the Elimination of Violence against Women (April 2003). The United Nations resolution 48/104 defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (United Nations 1993).”

While ‘gender-based violence’ is often used in the context of discussing the many forms of gendered violence (including sexual violence against children, male violence against other men and homophobic violence), ‘violence against women’ is used to refer to types of violence that are specifically directed against women and girls. The UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence elaborates further on this definition in the study’s regional report, noting that gender-based violence can be conceived as “an umbrella concept that describes any form of violence used to establish, enforce or perpetuate gender inequalities and keep in place unequal gender-power relations. In other words, it is violence that is used as a policing mechanism of gender norms and relations and is intended to result in the subordination of women” (Fulu et al. 2013: 14). Gender-based violence also overlaps with other forms of violence that are used as a tool of oppression such as the violence of racism, ethnicity and class/caste struggles. Therefore, our definition of gender-based violence spans physical, sexual, psychological/emotional, as well as economic violence that is caused by, and embedded within, gender unequal relations and power imbalance. These types of violence can occur within the confines of the home and they can also happen in other spaces and contexts, although research shows that wherever the violence occurs, the perpetrators are often known to, or an acquaintance of, the victim. In the context of Bangladesh, specific forms of gender-based violence include acid throwing, rape, murder, Fatwa/Salish

(punishment tied to decisions of a local all-male customary court), wife battering, sexual harassment (including ‘eve teasing’), dowry-related violence, and trafficking of women, amongst others.

## Methodology

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### Research Aims and Objectives

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This Bangladesh qualitative study is a national component of the larger UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific. As such, it adapts regionally developed methodology and objectives.<sup>3</sup> This qualitative research component of the study aims to take an in-depth look at individual men’s life histories to explore how masculinities have been constructed throughout their life course and understand how these factors impact men’s practices today, particularly in the context of intersecting and interacting social and cultural institutions. The research also aims to understand the trajectory of expression of (counter) hegemonic practices across and throughout men’s lives. To do this, the research examines the practices and lives of two groups of men: those who display behaviours that run counter to the mould of traditional or hegemonic masculinities (‘gender equitable’ men), and men who are identified as perpetrators of violence against women. By looking at this spectrum we are attempting to develop a deeper insight into the motivations and justifications attached to acts of violence related to social constructions of masculinities, in order to better prevent gender-based violence and build more gender equitable masculinities.

### Research Questions

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The research study addresses the following questions:

1. What influences across the life course operate to shape gender equitable forms of behaviour in men? At what stages across the life course are these expressed, and in what ways? What are the relationships between ‘non-traditional’ practices, the use of violence, and attitudes towards and practices of gender equity in other areas of these men’s lives?
2. What influences across the life course operate to shape the violent behaviour of men? At what stages in the life course are different types of violence expressed by men who are violent towards women, and in what ways? What are the relationships between use of violence and attitudes towards, and practices of, gender equity in other areas of these men’s lives?
3. Are there particular differences in the life histories, trajectories and influences of these two different groups of men and what does this tell us about how to encourage men to be more gender equitable and non-violent?

### Life History Research Methods

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As noted above, this study uses life history research methods to explore gender-based violence and masculinities in Bangladesh. The study adopts Connell’s understanding of life-history interviews, as concerning “the making of social life through time” (Connell 2005: 89). For the purposes of the present study, this data collection tool provided rich narratives that shed light on events, institutions and relations that abet violent behaviour, or, in contrast, support gender-equitable behaviour. This is important for future policy and program recommendations in that the “project that is documented in a life-history story is itself the relation

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<sup>3</sup> To learn more about the regional methodology, visit [www.partners4prevention.org](http://www.partners4prevention.org).

between the social conditions that determine practice and the future social world that practice brings into being” (Connell 2005: 89).

We concur with Hagemaster (1992) in using life-histories by combining a phenomenological approach “that describes the total systematic structure of lived experience and the meanings that these experiences have for the individual who participates in them” (1992:1122) with hermeneutics, which stresses both context and the necessary questioning of the researchers in “establishing a logical relationship with the phenomenon to be understood” (ibid.), a form a reflexivity that must acknowledge the gap in experience and context between the interviewers and participants in life-history interviews.

Qualitative research also provides a different angle on the same subject examined through quantitative research, and thereby either complements or contrasts with data gathered quantitatively. It provides more accurate and detailed answers to the ‘why’ and ‘how’ that may accompany the ‘when’, ‘what’ or ‘which’ usually asked in survey and other quantitative tools. As such, a qualitative approach is preferable when researchers are trying to understand reasoning, thoughts and cognitive processes that may shed light on the area of study, which for this research centers on gender-based violence and masculinities. The following report, therefore, is a useful and complementary additional study to the quantitative study on gender-based violence and masculinities conducted as part of the UN Multi-country Study in Bangladesh by icddr.b in 2011.

The research uses qualitative methods of data collection. The primary tool is life-history interviews (LHI) with two groups of men: one group of men who are known to have committed violence against women (see Table 1), and a group of men who have demonstrated gender-equitable behaviour (see Table 2).

**Table 1 Basic Profiles of Male Respondents (LHI) Perpetrators of Gender-based Violence**

Pseudonym	Age	Location	Occupation	Violence perpetrated
Kaji	46	Dhaka	Food marker dealer	DV/Attempted Rape
Mitul	37	Dhaka	Advertising industry	Domestic violence
Robin	42	Chittagong (Interv:Dhaka)	Doctor	Domestic violence
Ridwan	22	Dhaka	Construction worker	Domestic violence
Abu Ahmad	60	Khulna	Logger	Domestic violence
Intekhab	55	Khulna	Roadside eatery owner	Domestic violence
Liton	24	Tangail	Migrant laborer	Domestic violence
Nurul	40	Dhaka	Cooperative worker	Domestic violence
Habib	36	Dhaka	Trader	Domestic violence
Rajat	28	Sunamgonj	Farming	Domestic violence

In this research, we use the term ‘perpetrator’ to describe the first category of men who are known to have committed violence against a woman. We use the term ‘gender-equitable men’ for the second category of men who display behaviour and express opinions consistent with supporting equal relations, rights and responsibilities between women and men, and more specifically in terms of this study, who do not have recourse to violence in their relations with women and other men. We recognize the limitations of using a single term to define a whole individual, and that these terms are not intended to encompass an entire identity or life experience, but rather are used for ease of communication throughout this report.

**Table 2 Basic Profiles of Male Respondents, Gender-Equitable Men (GEMs)**

Pseudonym	Age	Location	Occupation	GEM activity
Arefin	44	Dhaka	Writer	Articles on equality
Lipu	42	Dhaka	NGO worker	Work to prevent VAW

Shatadru	38	Dhaka	NGO worker	Equality work
Shamim	25	Khulna	Student	Development & equality
Ronnie	41	Dhaka	NGO worker	Development & equality
Dipak	45	Dhaka	NGO worker	Work to prevent VAW
Hamid	35	Dhaka	Academic	Gender & development
Shabab	30	Dhaka	Academic	Gender & Development
Anis Shariff	22	Dhaka	Student	Gender & Development
Rashedul	22	Dhaka	Student	Gender & Development

A brief glance at the interviewee's occupations in Tables 1 and 2 above may suggest that such key considerations as class and rural/urban divides are likely to play a role in differentiating GEMs from perpetrators. Certainly these differences are important and need to be kept in mind. However, it is not so clear-cut as one might imagine. In the study, GEMs were not exclusively from urban and wealthier segments of society and perpetrators were not exclusively from rural and low-income segments of society. Moreover, apart from income and locational considerations, other factors appeared to be important influencers on men's conceptions of masculinity and their attitudes regarding the use of violence toward women.

The study also conducted interviews with key informants to provide context on gender, masculinities and violence in Bangladesh, and contrast with the data received from the life history interviews. The key informants consented to being named in the study.

**Table 3 Basic Profiles of Key Informants (KIIs)**

Name	Location	Position
Prof Maleka Begum	Dhaka	Professor, Women and Gender Studies
Prof Sedeka Halim	Dhaka	Professor, Sociology, Information Commissioner
Salma Ali	Dhaka	Director, Bangladesh Nat. Women Lawyers' Association
Nina Goswami	Dhaka	Deputy Director, Litigation Unit, ASK
Sanyia Ansari	Dhaka	Deputy Director, Gender Unit, ASK
Dr. Mohit Kamal	Dhaka	Psychiatrist
Rawsan Ara Lily	Tangail	Executive Director, Rural Poor Development Organization
Shahanara Akhter	Tangail	Program Officer, Rural Poor Development Organization
Shamima Begum	Dhaka	Deputy Commissioner, Women's Support & Investigation Div.

## Selection of Respondents

The methods used to select respondents for the life history interviews differ between the gender equitable men and the perpetrators of gender-based violence, although both involved purposive sampling conducted through key informants as initial contacts. For the gender equitable men, an assessment of gender-equitable behaviour was originally provided by a key informant or an organization working on gender issues, followed by a record of gender-equitable work demonstrated in the past, and finally a post-interview assessment as to whether the team would keep the respondent as one of the ten in the sample. This method was not fail-proof as it does not ensure that the men interviewed have never committed any form of violence, and gender-equitable behaviour is also a relative term. For example, behaviour such as gallantry could be construed as non-equitable by some while equitable by others. The main criteria was that the respondent was not using violence in his current or recent past, but some of the gender equitable men could still have views of gender roles and relations which could be described as traditional or patriarchal. However, in a country context where gender-based violence

was shown to be pervasive, a record of gender-equitable work and no recourse to gender-based violence could offer important insights into how boys can grow into men without demonstrating violent behaviour against women. The age of the gender equitable men ranged from 22 to 48.

For the male perpetrators of gender-based violence, the selection was done primarily through key informants from organizations working on the issue of gender-based violence, and through crime reporters. However, three of the designated perpetrators were also recruited directly through the networks of the research team (although team members were not personally acquainted with these individuals). We aimed at first to have men who had perpetrated a range of gender-based violence acts. We should note here that the selection of perpetrators was extremely difficult, as for example many potential respondents were afraid to incriminate themselves, while some were uneasy with many of the questions asked, and in a few cases interviewers had to skip questions fearing for their own safety since respondents became agitated or angry. Moreover, although we conducted an interview with a perpetrator in a police station, we did not use the interview as the police officer in the station insisted on attending the interview. In the end, most of our respondents committed forms of domestic violence while one respondent was involved in a rape case. In addition, we had originally planned to divide each of the interviews into two sessions, assuming that discussions of violent events or acts should be kept for the second session. However, we found out quickly that this was unrealistic, as respondents were difficult to contact and although all respondents were free to join and were told about the objectives of the research beforehand, some were still suspicious of our research. In this context, having two sessions seemed too uncertain since we ran the risk of being unable to conduct the second session if the respondents were not contactable or willing to participate again. We also found that, on the whole, we were able to spend several hours and that the respondents were generally willing to discuss even difficult issues related to violence. As such, we kept the life history interviews to a one-time session, though some of those sessions lasted up to 4 hours. The age of the perpetrators ranged from 24 to 60.

## Data Collection and Analysis

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The data was collected in 2012 and 2013 by three members of the research team, all three of whom are gender specialists from the Gender and Development Studies program at the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand with experience in qualitative data collection (two of whom are Bangla speakers). In addition, two of the interviewers underwent training on conducting life-history interviews given by Professor Raewyn Connell.<sup>4</sup> All interviews and discussions were conducted in Bangla (Bengali), and recorded with the prior consent of the interviewees.

We explained the research and introduced the research team, and acquired verbal consent from the respondents. We had originally planned to use written consent forms; however, it became clear very early on that many respondents were not comfortable in signing a form. Nonetheless, verbal consent was accepted and never became an issue of contention with any of the respondents. The respondents were told that they could withdraw at any time or skip any questions they felt were too uncomfortable to answer. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Dhaka City, and some interviews were done in Tangail (a large town in a predominantly rural part of the country, about 77km north west of Dhaka City) as well as in Khulna City (about 135 km south west of Dhaka City), as well as one perpetrator in Sunamgonj District, in the Northeast. Although qualitative methods do not allow for true representative sampling, these sites were selected so that our respondents would come from different areas/contexts: some were urban and peri-urban dwellers, some villagers, some from a very large city (Dhaka), some from a smaller regional city (Khulna), and some from a smaller town surrounded by a rural environment (Tangail). In this way we aimed to select respondents that might represent a larger population. More will be said about these different contexts below.

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<sup>4</sup> A skills-building training, “Qualitative ‘Life History’ Data Analysis in Asia and the Pacific” was hosted in April 2012 by Partners for Prevention and facilitated by Professor Raewyn Connell. For more information on the event, visit [www.partners4prevention.org](http://www.partners4prevention.org).

For data analysis, the audio interviews were transcribed first in Bangla, and then translated into English transcripts, while some were translated into English directly from the audio file. The life history interviews contrast the life history trajectories of men who have committed gender-based violence with men who show more gender-equitable behaviour, to see if patterns emerged in terms of types of masculinities generating a specific kind of behaviour, either violent or gender-equitable. The analysis was led by the principle investigator (Philippe Doney) and supported by members of the research team (Shalini Mitra, Abdul Kader Nazmul and Helal Mohiuddin).

## Research Ethics

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The Asian Institute of Technology does not have an Institutional Review Board, and thus we could not receive such endorsement. However, we followed accepted ethical standards with regards to behavioural, violence and sex-related research, and received the approval of the National Working Group in Bangladesh for the initial research protocol. We also followed the UN Multi-country Study Ethical and Safety guidelines which adhere to and are informed by the following documents: WHO, Putting Women First: Ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women 2003, and Jewkes, R., E. Dartnall and Y. Sikweyiya (2012). *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on the Perpetration of Sexual Violence*. Sexual Violence Research Initiative. Pretoria, South Africa, Medical Research Council.<sup>5</sup> The information was treated confidentially and anonymously (key informants however agreed to be named). We did not collect the real names of the interview participants but kept a brief description of the respondent with information on area, job, religion and age. We audio-recorded the interviews with the prior consent of the respondents and held the interviews in their preferred location, ensuring safety and a place supportive of confidentiality for interviewees, whether they were perpetrators, gender equitable men or key informants. None of the interviewers has any relationship to the respondents, or with their communities since this could lead to over-identification with interviewees (Hagemaster, 1992, p. 1123).

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on the ethical and safety guidelines of the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific, visit [www.partners4prevention.org](http://www.partners4prevention.org).

## Findings

### Childhood, Families and Schooling

#### Key Findings

- Most participants identify changes in their perception of gender relations in the transition from childhood to adulthood.
- Boys and girls played together in early years, but segregation, usually in teenage years is commonly imposed by their families together with the end of the co-ed system in schools
- However, more of the GEMs experienced work or study in late teens or in their twenties that reestablish a context where both women and men mixed again, whereas perpetrators, for the most part, rarely experienced a mixed environment again (in the sense of the casual mixing of unrelated women and men).

#### Case Study:

Ridwan, a construction worker grew up in a village. He recalls playing with three aunts who were the same age as he was as a kid. ‘During childhood, we played together naked, ate whatever food my mom cooked’ he says. He also remembers playing with girls from the same neighbourhood ‘Yes, we played many games like Kanamachi. Many girls played with us.’ But over time, as he grew older, societal norms discouraged such playful mixing. Ridwan became self-aware, adding ‘I used to feel ashamed as I grew up. Slowly I became shy regarding girls...slowly the barriers became insurmountable’. Ridwan didn’t mix with girls again till late in his teen, his father disapproved of a relation he developed with a woman at work, and selected a bride for him at the age of 17.

The respondents’ backgrounds differed in many ways: some come from a poor background, others from a more middle class upbringing; some were raised in rural areas, others in urban centers; and some were children half a century ago while others were only a decade ago. Some themes reoccur throughout the interviews, shared by perpetrators and gender-equitable men alike, and at times more specific to one group. Most of the participants identify changes in their perception of gender relations in the transition from childhood to adulthood, mostly because of segregation imposed by schools and their own families or communities.

Interaction between girls and boys seem rather common in early childhood. Although this is more often the case with gender-equitable men, some perpetrators also reported playing with girls who were sometimes but not always relatives. Ridwan, a perpetrator, for instance recalls when “we played many games, like Kanamachi [a game played with a person’s eyes covered]; many girls played with us.” But this carefree behaviour changed over time as the men report feeling embarrassed or ashamed as adolescence sets in. Ridwan adds further, “I used to feel ashamed as I grew up. Slowly I became shy regarding girls. I had many cousin-sisters too, and we played together. But slowly the barriers became insurmountable.” The school system is often described as supporting this segregation as co-ed education was standard in early grades (usually up to grade 5) and then boys and girls were separated. Nurul, another perpetrator, argues that “when I attained grade six, our school teachers were strict about this too. They did not tolerate us speaking with girls. In high school the vigilance on this was more stringent.” Kaji echoes this transition from early childhood when girls and boys “played a lot of *hadudu* [a type of tag game involving two teams], volleyball and football and had a lot of fun together with our childish mischief. After that, when we were in class nine or ten, girls were separated from us.” Mintul, one of the perpetrators, reported that a girl was his best friend in childhood, and that he resented attempts to separate them:

We used to be together all the time, in the classroom and outside. I played a lot of games with her. Both of us were eleven years old at that time and studied in the fourth grade. [...] Her parents were furious about our friendship, and threatened both of us that this couldn't continue anymore. They wanted to end our beautiful relationship.

Another GEM remarked that he had little awareness of the difference between boys and girls, but that eventually appeared in the context of other people's behaviour:

Absolutely there were no differences in our [to him and his male friends'] minds. That feeling of being different came much later when I entered teenage years – I started noticing that young women who were older to me in age would start fixing their clothes [maintaining an appropriate appearance] in my presence. Initially I felt quite odd and wondered whether there was something in my appearance or whether it was my gaze. But gradually I started understanding that it is just a normal behaviour in the presence of men...it was only then that I realized the differences between the two sexes.

Although both perpetrators and GEMs report attending segregated schools, few of the perpetrators mention playing or spending time with girls, although these norms are now more fluid than they were few decades ago. One GEM echoes the lack of interaction this way:

We had female classmates in primary schools, but we did not mix with them much. If we saw feminine characteristics among boys, we used to call them names like *Magi*, or *Maigga* [when used for men, it implies being unmanly or 'like a girl'] which was not a matter of pride. After moving to high school at Rangpur Jila School, there were no girls. But at (grade six) I used to feel very shy when cousin-sisters would come. In Carmichael College, we had no female classmates. Thus I did not expect that I would have very healthy relations with females in the future.

It could be argued that the act of playing with girls would be seen as breaking social norms that teach segregation early, and that young women were generally not to be left alone with men. To a question about whether he had played with girls as a boy, Liton, a young perpetrator (age 22) answered that “no, no I have never looked at girls with greedy eyes. That would be really degrading for my sister and mother.” The question had no negative connotation and followed a question regarding whether his teacher had been a role model. Yet the young man seemed to equate interaction, or the act of playing (with the possibility of ‘greedy eyes’) as breaking a social taboo that somehow would degrade his sister and mother. This follows a division of labour and occupation of social spaces between women and men, where girls and young women are often confined within the home while boys and young men are freer to move around. An older perpetrator responded to a question on whether his sisters went to school when he was a boy this way:

**‘No, my sisters did not go outside much. They used to stay inside the home most of the time.’**

No, my sisters did not go outside much. They used to stay inside the home most of the time. Now, these days many children, boys and girls, roam around, and so problems arise these days. In the past it was like few girls were around. Not so much scope was provided for boys and girls to mingle.

Some respondents mentioned that girls were allowed to play out until they were about 8 or 9 years old, and from then on they would then be kept at home: “My sister—she is my younger sibling—used to help my mother at home. She was also allowed to play outside until she was 8-9 years old. Then she was barred from playing outside,” said a perpetrator.

Another perpetrator echoed this change between childhood and teenage years when asked about his experience of mixing with other kids:

[I mixed with] Both boys and girls at early childhood, only boys as I became a teenager. This is because of familial and social rules and expectations that we must stay away from girls at the growing age. The boys or girls who play together at the growing age are considered derailed or 'gone to the dogs'.

So overall, the opportunities for mixing, at least for older respondents, were very limited, and in this context men and women arrive at the age of marriage with little experience of interaction with the opposite sex beyond that provided within the family. Yet many of the GEMs seem to have had an opportunity to reconnect with female peers late in their teens or early twenties, particularly in the context of college or university. One GEM explained the sudden change:

My mindset about girls changed in college; the reservations that I had about them slowly disappeared... The environment was also very liberating...men and women could mix freely...later things changed a bit, but when we were in university boys could stay at the girls' hostel till 10:30...Girls were also very active in student politics [...] I started respecting girls and mixing with them freely...I stopped exoticizing them

Another GEM was in a Madrasha in early years, and thus only had the opportunity to mingle with boys, but then in preparation for the board exam he "had to attend many coaching classes as preparatory measures. There were many girls who studied with us. It was just normal socialization." He continued:

Well, surely college provided a new experience, as it was co-education. We started becoming closer to girls, discussed issues with them and moved freely in pairs. We went to coaching together and frequented girls' residences. So things became very casual and easier...Thus, girls started becoming good friends.

More of the GEMs had a college education where co-education was the norm, so the difference may simply be one of education level. However, it might also be too simplistic to conclude that this experience of mixing with women was simply a reflection of a new co-ed environment. As the next section argues, many of the GEMs were exposed to more respectful forms of gender relations in childhood, with a particularly strong and active role of the mother in many of the GEMs' lives, thus allowing GEMs to transgress strict gender segregation norms when the context or environment exposed them to female peers.

It appears significant that segregation seemed to have contributed in many of the respondents' lives not only to a physical distance between women and men but it also removed opportunities to humanize relations with women, fostering a view instead of women as the 'other', as exotic, and for some, as unequal beings.

## Relations With and Roles of Parents

### Key Findings

- Parents can act as role models for more equal gender relations. The role of mothers as decision-makers and income earner seems important in shaping these men's views of gender relations later in life
- Fathers who are supportive of their wives' non-conformist gender roles also provide counter views of masculinities that can be both reaffirming of manhood while contributing to more gender equal relations in their sons' lives.

### Case Study:

Dipak's story is emblematic of some of the men interviewed who gained respect for women through their own relations with their mothers. Because of the war, Dipak spent years in the camp and his mother was the head of the family, having to struggle to feed her children. Dipak recalls with pride how his mother 'used to make *bidis* [local form of cigarette] out of leaves, sometimes she used to bring work at home. She fed us all selling those *bidis*.' He also tells of learning from his mother not to discriminate against anyone, no matter their differences; 'Actually it was Ma who helped us grow up this way'. His relation with his mother shaped his own views and practice of gender relations later in life, encouraging his children to get an education, and sharing the story of his mother's life to empower other women he met through his work.

Most of the respondents have expressed respect for their parents, and parents were often described as role models for the respondents. However, there is a clear difference between perpetrators and gender equitable men regarding whether their mother or father was closer to them or most admired. Many of the perpetrators described their relation with their father in more detail, while their narratives are generally sparse regarding what their mothers would do or how they related to them. Perpetrators in this study generally expressed respect for their mothers but their descriptions of their mothers tend to reflect an expected division of labor and the reproductive tasks accomplished by their mother. Perhaps one of the most interesting contrast between the two groups of men is the type of relationship that the gender equitable men reported having with their mothers. Many of these interviews portray fathers as a respected parent but someone who has spent a significant part of their youth away from home. One gender equitable man, Anis Shariff, said, "during childhood I was scared of my father. I didn't see him for a period of six years till I was 10, as I told you he left for Saudi Arabia. So I found my mother more affectionate and until today I am closer to her than my father". The mothers are often described as hard-working and invested in their sons' future, and some described being emotionally close to their mothers. Another gender-equitable man, Dipak, talks of his mother who had to struggle raising children in the camp during the liberation war, and after returning destitute and without their father who had just died, in this way:

We were undergoing such a financial crisis that there were days when we could only manage to eat one meal a day. But Ma aspired for all of us to have a good education though she was not even literate. I later taught her how to sign her name. But she was always enthusiastic that I continue my studies; she gave the same inspiration to [my elder brother] and to all of us. My personality was shaped greatly by Ma and in fact the two of us are quite similar.

Another gender equitable man, Shabab, says that his "mother provided [him] with more space" and "that was a big reason why [he] was closer to [his] mother". He also highlights how the absence of the father can lead to the mother making key decisions for the entire family:

My mother took the decisions. My father was busy earning a living for the family. Once he received his salary, he handed it over entirely to my mom. She managed the finances and had to take the decisions. Now, regarding health, education and buying essential commodities, my mother called the shots. My father never poked into these matters. Nor did he ever express any dismay over them.

Many of the men confirmed the respect they have for both parents (one perpetrator says he respects his mother the most). In contrast with perpetrators, however, the GEMs seem to spend time describing events involving their mother that have had a lasting impact on their understanding of gender relations. One gender equitable man recalls the bravery of his mother at length during the War of Independence:

Once we heard that the army was coming, so we all started running. We crossed a small lake located behind the house. My mother was suddenly reminded that she forgot to lock the door. So she, alone, went back, locked the door of our house and saw a guy walking near our house, then she asked him, ‘Why are you here?’ – ‘In case you need any help,’ he replied. Then she asked him to leave the place. She was very brave. This is how my mother used to be, very bold.

Another gender equitable man notes how his mother made most of the decisions and that his wife continues this pattern, although the gender division of labor remains traditional:

My mother used to take all household decisions on her own. She used to save our scholarship money and used that to construct a house [in the city]. She purchased the land in her name. All decisions in our family, from going to a movie to reading a book, were all made by my mom. When we were going to write exams, even our dad did not know [how to help]. Mom used to teach me. Now in my own home, we have made a convenient arrangement. My wife makes most of the household decisions. I never get involved in any domestic issues. Even if I do, she would not like that; for example, concerning the everyday menu, I know nothing of it. Two domestic helpers are there. I never involve myself in this. She runs it and she makes me hear that she does grocery shopping and all. Sometimes whenever I have time, I also go for grocery shopping. I’m not very sure if my involvement in household issues makes her happy, but she quite enjoys her independent authority in the household area. But big decisions, like purchasing a flat or a car, are my decisions. Even though I ask her, she would not come along [to help make these decisions, leaving them in the husband’s hands].

Of course, that women make decisions on household matters is commonly accepted. What is more unusual is the way this gender equitable man’s mother took the decision to build a house (using scholarship money) and was able to buy land in her name (in a country where most of the land is owned by men).

Lipu, another gender equitable man, also said his “mother took decisions for the family, and I have never seen my father interfering here...[...] in fact my mother had more financial contribution to the family than my father.” The strong role played by these mothers is highlighted in many GEM interviews along with fathers who are either absent, unconcerned by their wives’ decision-making role, or in some cases clearly supportive of such a role.

The theme of the absent father (already mentioned above in the case of Anis Shariff, whose father was working in Saudi Arabia), is repeated in many interviews. Rashedul, a university student, described being closer to his mother because “father left early for work and returned late” and thus “mother was the home manager, my father was busy earning for the family. He came, took his meal and left for work”. Shamin’s mother was similarly in charge because his “father became seriously ill two-three years after he started his business. He was bed-ridden and had to undergo long-term treatment. My mother was never a housewife. She’s one of the most active persons I have seen in my life.” Another gender equitable man, Hamid, argues that because his father was working away from home, he socialized closely with his mother and sisters and “as the only male member in my family at that early age, I had to perform many family-related tasks.” He added that his father had started a second family and so would come home only after many months away so

all the decisions at home were made by his mother. He also recalled one event when he tried to propose to his second cousin to match his friends' fake stories of love and sexual prowess. When the cousin complained to his mother "then my mother told me to ask pardon from her. At that age it was a huge shame for me. Nevertheless, I understood by that lesson my mother taught me to give respect to women." Dipak who spent time in refugee camps recalls with pride how his mother "was alone without my father being around, and it was only her alone who protected us and kept us alive in the camp."

This experience of women making decisions, and managing household and financial affairs gave several of the gender equitable men an early view of gender power relations that was more equitable. Some of these women had the support of their husbands. Lipu, for instance, had a mother who had married at 14 while his father was 33, yet after their marriage "she completed her education [...] and my father's support was immense here"..."My mother had a bachelor's degree which was not so common for rural women in those days."

Thus although the gender equitable men's fathers were not generally around, the respondents had both mothers who were making important decisions for the family and fathers who were more accepting or supportive of their wife practicing less traditional gender roles. This seems reflected in the men having a more flexible understanding of gender roles and relations (though one might argue that these may not be described as gender equal), especially one in which the man is not expected to be the sole provider, or lose face because his partner has more mobility or professional opportunities than might be true of most women, particularly those in a more 'traditional' contexts.

The perpetrators did not expand much on their relations with their parents, and when asked about their parents would provide a brief description of their work or responsibilities. Some of the fathers were also absent. One perpetrator said his 'father was knowledgeable but a vagabond type' while another described his closer relationship with an uncle because he 'gave me a lot of time which my father failed to do as he had to visit the districts for business purpose'. A single perpetrator said that he admired his father 'he was my idol, I followed him. Still I admire his personality. We had a huge house comprising of 35 rooms. It's still there'; the quote suggests that the father was someone who provided for his family, and that the son wanted to follow in his footsteps. On the whole however, there was not enough details in the narratives of the relations between the perpetrators and their parents, and although most men, whether gender equitable men or perpetrators, had spent more time with their mothers, since the father tended to be away or absent, the relations with the mothers seems to provide a stark contrast between the two groups of men.

Although the difference could be one of class or social background, the contrast is found between the case of Dipak, a gender equitable man, who grew with an illiterate mother and without his father, but who reported tremendous respect for the parent who raised several children on her own, and Robin, a perpetrator who is a medical doctor, whose father was involved in politics, who said the only woman he knew as he grew up was his mother, and offered little description of his father beyond couple severe beatings he received.

The question of why some men seem to develop stronger bonds with their mothers while most men acknowledge spending more time with them can be unpacked in several ways. One main theme emerging from the data seems to be the more flexible approach taken by respondents' fathers, even though their fathers were also relatively absent from their daily lives (in some ways their absence also led to the mothers having more freedom, including the opportunity to play income earnings roles). However, in a context where men are seen as the main decision-makers, the support or approval of the fathers may help explain why some mothers have been able to sell lands, earn an income, or make key decisions in the household, but also why these households seemed more supportive of the daughters' education or general equality with the sons.

## Relationships with Women, Marriage and Conjugal Life

### Key Findings:

- Most of the perpetrators entered into arranged marriage, however many did not consent or approve of their bride
- The husbands tend to blame their wives for the violence they commit onto them, either because they didn't 'obey' or because of perceived disrespect for their parents, especially their mothers.
- Men justify their own violence against their partners but tend to disapprove of their wives hitting their children (in some cases this led to further violence against the wives)

### Case Study:

Rajat was in love with a girl he wanted to marry but he could not wed her 'because my family never accepted this relationship. I did marry the girl suggested by my parents – it was not my choice.' He blames this situation for the poor and turbulent relationship he has with his wife.' Yet Rajat adheres to very traditional notions of gender with a wife he forbids to go out and earn money for the family ('actually no man should allow it' he says). However he blames his 'most bitter relationship' on the fact that his wife 'cannot go along with my mother's will and command.' He feels that his wife does not try to create 'a feel-good or pleasing environment', and so he feels angry at times. One time the baby had made a mess on the floor, Rajat recalls how 'I was instantly enraged. I woke her up and told her to clean the floor. She reacted angrily and insultingly hurled words and told me to clean it if it bothered me that much. So she deserved a good lesson and I beat her until my anger dropped.' Rajat justified his acts through both his wife's insolence and his right as a man to have authority over his partner. 'She must do as ordered, she has to comply with my expectations and must suffer if she doesn't act properly.'

Due to the nature of the study design and sampling, the study found overall that the gender equitable men tended to have more equal perceptions of gender power relations than men within the perpetrator sample. This may have something to do with satisfaction within their marriages, as opposed to some of the resentful or bitter attitudes expressed by perpetrators regarding how their marriages took place. Although the sample is too small to draw a conclusion based on comparative assessment, one notable difference between gender equitable men and perpetrators is whether or not marriage was arranged previously by the parents (or family members). Seven out of ten perpetrators were in arranged marriages, as compared with a single gender equitable man. Perpetrators discuss marriage very briefly on the whole as being instigated by someone else. One young perpetrator (22) reported that he was married off at the age of 15 with a woman ten years older than he was. He was so young that he said he did not understand that he was getting married and at the beginning he was not attracted to his wife. Another perpetrator described his marriage arrangement in a matter-of-fact way; although it was not pre-arranged as such, he agreed to marry someone he had never met after discussing with a driver who was interested in setting him up with his sister:

He was very interested to make me his elder sister's husband. My wife was in class 9 at that time. I went to their home. After discussing this with my elder brother I married that girl.

One perpetrator was in love with a woman but could not marry her because his family did not approve:

I am married, but not happy at all. I was shown my wife at my maternal grandparents' home, but did not like her. She is not as beautiful and loving as my fiancée whom I could not marry because of family disapproval. It was a traditional marriage. We did not pay bride-price, but we took the

dowry<sup>6</sup>. The bride's family had to pay. I consented to marry her because my parents convinced me that I would get quite a good amount of cash and kind as dowry.

For most of the perpetrators marriage (at least the way in which it was carried out) was not an option they were happy about. In some cases, as in the one cited above, it led to resentment, particularly when a love relationship was denied. While the debate over arranged or love marriages is not the scope of this report, it is worthwhile to note the contrast between the two groups. The gender equitable men tended to be from social groups that encourage marriage out of love or out of choice. The following quote contrasts sharply with those of perpetrators:

We knew each other and went to lunch as colleagues for some time. I asked her to join me in marriage. Then we used to roam around by rickshaw and I told her that we hardly have time to waste in a love affair, so we decided to marry. After one year we got married.

Another GEM recalls how a friendship with a woman eventually evolved: "I met my wife through my hostel roommate...she was my roommate's girlfriend's friend and that is how we met for the first time. We became friends and eventually fell in love with each other and decided to get married."

Relationships between the respondents and their wives tend to be quite different between the two groups, which is not that surprising considering that most of the perpetrators were involved in domestic violence. Some perpetrators, though, seem to have limited interaction with their wives. One perpetrator argues:

We are not very closely romantically attached, but sometime I feel good to ask her something politely; but we rarely get lengthy friendly chatting-time or romantic exchanges. She is also a naive girl, and cannot create a feel-good or pleasing environment.

Some others have a rocky relationship, which in this respondent's full narrative was linked, according to him, to the mother-in-law creating a rift between him and his wife:

...that girl [the respondent's wife] never listened to what I said to her. I told her, you do not go; but she goes. The fact is we were a little poorer compared to them [her family]. Her family has a higher social status. Later, I complained to her uncle about her. Her uncle started scolding her mother and brother. He would not indulge the bad behaviour of my wife. Thus, during two days, three days, one month, we stayed happy. We have no unmet needs in the family. We have enough to eat, enough to wear. But she would not stay happy. She would not behave properly within the family. I asked her "Why are you like this? What kind of woman is your mother?"

This conflict between the husband and his in-laws – and his mother-in-law in particular – seemed to stem in part from the arranged nature of their marriage and their unequal social standing (his wife's family does not think he provides for her adequately). Another common source of conflict among the respondents was the tension between the man's wife and his mother, with perpetrators tending to side with their mothers against their wives who are seen as not obeying their mother-in-laws sufficiently. One argument is that patriarchy enforces strict behaviour on women and provides limited access to resources, putting women in conflict with one another, a situation which was noted by one of the gender equitable men:

Conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is very common once they stay in the same house. Their fight may center on dominating the kitchen and many other issues which can make the son very helpless.

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<sup>6</sup> Although dowry is officially illegal in Bangladesh, it is in some cases still practiced by rural Hindu families. One key informant notes that this practice is increasing and remains a main reason for gender based violence in rural areas (Nina Goswami, Deputy Director, Litigation Unit, ASK).

In explaining their actions, perpetrators often put the blame on the woman or her family, saying that they provoked such a reaction because of their ‘bad behavior’. Perpetrators often justified the violence they committed as a form of punishment to ensure that proper behaviour would follow and that the wife would obey the authority of her husband (and often his mother as well). One perpetrator did not see a problem with this approach:

I have the most bitter relationship with my wife because she cannot go along with my mothers' will and command. Otherwise, she is good and resilient, and very compassionate. Still, I do not like her because she is not that lovable. But I have no other choice but to carry on this relationship because of my son and daughter. If I am angry, I prefer to teach her a quick lesson. There's no way for her except getting the punishment she deserves. I have 'zero-tolerance' policy. She must know that making me angry would cause her to pay. Although I sometime feel a little bad for my conduct, it's not a big deal. If she disobeys, she must be punished. There's nothing wrong at all.

In two other cases perpetrators claimed to have used violence against their wives because their wives had been violent toward their children (indicating that using violence against wives is justifiable, but using any form of violence against children is not):

My wife is an angry woman. Sometimes I became so worried with her. Actually, I slapped her one day. Without any reason she actually beat my daughter. So I gave her 2-3 slaps.

The other perpetrator also seemed to be at a loss in explaining his wife's use of violence:

Then again, what she used to do...My youngest son is six months old. She would slap him. Does the baby have any understanding? He is just six months. But she would slap him and beat him. Both the babies. I observed this during two days. Then I asked her, ‘Are you out of your mind? Haven't your parents taught you about how to raise children?’

This suggests that these men condemn some forms of violence, including violence committed against children (though some perpetrators also physically punished their children) while condoning violence against their partner. To some extent this is consistent with a view that men have a right as men, but especially as husbands, to control and punish; but it also suggests that these men are not necessarily violent in all relations, but that violence against their wives and partners is justified when the man is provoked or disobeyed.

Thus, although the trigger for gender-based violence varies across the perpetrators, there is often a sense of resentment toward a wife who is not fulfilling her proper role as wife, mother and daughter-in-law, with slapping or beating as a means of controlling her behaviour. Perpetrators also seemed to have a strong sense of their own social role and ‘social image’ (likely due to their own insecurities or sense of inferiority and need to feel superior in a home context), and any violation of the roles their wives were meant to play or any denigration of the man's authority may be dealt with quickly through physical violence, particularly if the women have nowhere else to go.

Some of the interviews also suggest that the respondents were unable to understand or properly deal with their partner's emotional or psychological problems such as depression, problems that can also be conceived as outcome of unequal and violent relations. In some cases men responded to these problems with further violence. For instance, in one case where a respondent's wife was dealing with mental illness, in response to a question regarding whether his acts of violence would cause him to repent, he answered, ‘Not really, what else could I have done? The way she used to talk sometimes would clearly make someone understand that she is insane.’ Yet this respondent was also aware that this cycle of violence was fruitless in a later comment where he said ‘I did beat her, the more I would beat her, the more she would become uncontrollable and insane.’ This narrative illustrates the consequences of domestic abuse, including depression and mental disorders, and this was also noted by a key informant, Dr. Mohit Kamal, a psychiatrist who works on domestic violence cases, as a common factor that contributed to the cycle of violence.

Some perpetrators expressed some regret regarding their violent behaviour. One respondent who was asked whether he felt guilty after hitting his wife responded this way: ‘Yes, you see, if you pet a bird in a cage, and then if you hit the bird and the bird flies away from the cage, it feels very bad isn’t it?’ Another perpetrator replied that: ‘Yes I did [repent]. I apologized often to her. I told her things happened just because I lost my temper for a moment!’

Thus, the main themes related to the nature of relationships with women suggest the perpetrator respondents tended to believe they had a responsibility to ensure that their wives obeyed. This was presented as a reason for using violence at times described as inevitable although not the preferred means of guaranteeing a prescribed behaviour.

One key informant, Shahanara Akhter, from the Rural Poor Development Organization argues that much of this violence happens because men know that their partners have nowhere to go: ‘women don’t have any income which means they don’t have power or capacity. They remain dependent on others, at different stages...women will follow whatever is prescribed for them because they don’t even have ten taka, they don’t have ten decimal land on her their name, a house to stay...’

Thus the power men accumulate is both an outcome of men’s authority over women which is socially prescribed, and the dependence of women on these men, due to limited options or recourse to alternative living arrangements.

## Work and Community Life

### Key Findings:

- For many perpetrators, women's entrance into the labor force clashes with the men's own sense of masculinity, which is built upon being the sole breadwinner.
- The public sphere is still perceived, especially in rural areas, as a men's space which is why some men disapprove of women's public or leadership roles. It is also why they see guardianship as a male responsibility which is challenged by women, and particularly daughters.
- GEM however tend to have more flexible views on space and income, that are compatible with their own sense of masculinity, and as a result allowing women in the household more freedoms.
- The community and peer group have an important influence on accepted behavior, and particularly how masculinities manifest themselves. This is why for many perpetrators a challenge to their responsibilities and duties is conceived as a challenge to their own sense of masculinity.

### Case Study:

Abu Ahmad has had little exposure to women in his life. He doesn't recall playing with girls and his work as a logger was in a male dominated world. He doesn't disagree with women working outside the home but it is clear to him that men have a primary responsibility for sustaining the household. In response to why he gave his sons longer education than to his daughters (one was married off at 12 years of age), he said 'should I be managing meals?' Women have the primary responsibility for housework but his responsibility was to 'manage bread and butter for my children'. His wife is mentally ill but his 'bigger tension has been money and how to arrange that apart from the concern that she was ill.' Still his wife's behavior was a concern, and he felt he had no choice but to beat her when she was mentally ill, adding 'what else could I have done?'

Few of the perpetrators (but none of the gender equitable men) reported believing that women should not work outside the home or be in position of authority above men, although some had no problem with women taking these roles. One perpetrator suggested he would have been fine if his wife worked in a factory but that it was not an option where they lived: "If she went out to work as a housemaid, the neighbours would have insulted me at the market for sending her. She would also have felt dishonoured." He believes that his would have created a social stigma for both of them (especially considering the low social position of housemaids), but it is clear that in the respondents' view societal norms would see the husband as failing in his duty to sustain his family, which in turn would create a loss of honour for both of them. Abu Ahmad didn't see a need for giving his girls education beyond early levels, arguing "if a girl works outside, and the groom stays at home, how could that bring peace to the home?" Echoing this view Intekhab, based in Khulna, sees in work a place where women learn bad manners, foregoing their traditional roles, and especially the duty of taking care of their husband:

Often women learn indecent behaviour in the work place. They become disobedient and desperate, I don't like them. I prefer women who take special care of their men while they return from work, not the working ladies who ignore their husbands and duties.

This view however reflected a more rural norm. One Dhaka-based perpetrator (Kaji) who hired a woman as cashier argued that "a woman is more efficient at this [cashier], as well as honest. No doubt she works in

tandem and I can rely on her accountability. A man wouldn't have been reliable as far as accounts are concerned." He added that "boys are more susceptible to squandering their father's wealth in the name of starting a business or having fun. Women are occupying top positions in offices throughout the country too...in the banks and corporate offices. And the girls care more for the parents than male children." His more progressive view of women may have been shaped by having two daughters and having to rely on his children in old age, but it is clear that it also reflects a perception of gender roles with women as care givers. Similarly, the respondents who were accepting of women working for pay would still expect them to do house work, as Nurul who works in a cooperative with women as co-workers, observes in response to a question about what characteristics an ideal woman should have: "She must be obedient to her husband; and a good housekeeper who can look after her children properly. Infidelity isn't permissible. Perpetually, she must remain loyal to her husband."

Some of the perpetrators are engaged in jobs that provide little to no opportunity for interaction with women. One perpetrator explained it this way:

No, I do not have experience of working with women. This is why I can't say much [about working with women]. Women can never be men's bosses. I do not accept this, it should not happen. It is against the rule of nature. Our Prime Minister, and the opposition party leader—they are all women, and you see how they have together destroyed this country.

In contrast, the gender equitable men had no reported objection about women working, being colleagues or working for a female boss. In part this may also be linked with these men's perception of gender roles, learned from their parents, that are more fluid, seeing no threat in men doing housework, hence there is no argument for leaving women in the reproductive (private) sphere. It is clear that gender equitable men, because they were often involved in development work, or more specifically activities that aimed at gender equality, were functioning in an environment where both women and men work together, and many of these respondents had women as bosses.

This often reflects a similar upbringing, or at least one into which mothers play key decision-making roles. Dipak, another GEM and NGO worker, even use his mother's example to talk to other women in his work:

I used to talk to them [local women he would meet at work] using narratives from my life stories – stories of my mother – how she struggled through the many odds of life. Even now, in my present job, when I address women I have used my mother's story at times, and this has encouraged women.

Just as perpetrators often had a specific – and often rigid – 'social image' in mind, the gender equitable men sample may also have desired to conform to a social image that was more liberal in many ways. However, their desire to be gender equitable sometimes conflicted with more conservative social norms of men as dominant, and a 'divided mind' may be one result as they are pulled in different directions, as will be discussed below. Nonetheless, the gender equitable men appeared in general to be much more flexible than perpetrators in terms of what they expected of women as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law, resulting in fewer cases of outright conflict and an antipathy toward using violence as a way to come up with 'solutions' in cases of conflict.

In the interviews very few respondents suggested that women took an active role in community life. Some of the men saw the idea of women participating in prominent positions in community life as incompatible with social norms, as this quote from one perpetrator suggests:

In the community it's same as in my family—men are men, and women are women. There are a lot of mishaps these days like premarital and extramarital affairs, kids engaging in affairs and physical relationships. But our community is so cautious, careful and watchful that every misdeed gets detected at an early stage. We get *shalish* (customary communal court), hear arguments of

both the complainers and defenders, and make judgments. Many hassles are resolved that way. Men assume the power in *shalish* as judges, and hold the most powerful positions in every respect. Women are not allowed to come out of the home. Even for women's statements about anything, we go to their homes to collect the statements. They are not allowed to come to *shalish* in person. Leaders are also all men. Women can't be leaders.

One gender equitable man, Rashedul, argued that women could not possibly be leaders in his community, not because of their capacity but because restrictions on their mobility would make it unworkable: "No, how can it be possible? Women can't come out freely in front of men in rural areas. The space for leadership isn't there." We should note, however, that evidence on spaces available or activities for women's leadership role in the public sphere was limited in these interviews, and not a topic on which differences could be drawn out between the two groups.

To some extent, the gender equitable men's view of women in the workplace became an extension of the role women, and particularly their mothers, played in their household while growing up. This public role is also more compatible with their understanding of gender relations in that it doesn't undermine these men's sense of honour, or masculinity. These may be key to comprehending how, in the gender equitable men group, masculinity or manhood is not threatened, therefore interrupting a cyclical pattern found with the perpetrators whereby the characteristics of men as decision makers and breadwinner are subverted or discredited by women's behaviour, a situation they attempt to rectify with the use of violence.

Violence reported in many of the interviews was also the outcome of family and community relations in which the couple was located. Violence was often explained in terms of the role in-laws played in the lives of the perpetrators' wives. It was also explained in the context of defending family honor, especially if a wife was seen to have insulted or disobeyed the husband's mother. Beyond this, perpetrators also embedded their justification for violent acts in terms of broader social approbation or disapprobation. This might explain in part the strong dislike by respondents, including perpetrators, for expressing personal issues in the public sphere. One perpetrator for instance recalls:

In my case, if she insulted me in front of others, I never responded to her in front of them. But at night, she had to face the consequences [...] I never hit my wife in front of others! I kept things confined within my wife and I, in a closed personal domain.

Indeed, it was this transgression of social norms on how to conduct oneself in public that led to violence in the private sphere. This transgression included expected behavior of boys and girls in public as the following comment where a perpetrator recalled a time when girls obeyed their parents:

Nowadays children commonly disobey their parents. In the past, when there were fewer houses and it was less crowded. Girls had fear in their mind that if they talk to boys or have any affair, that would ruin their parents' social prestige.

This lack of control also reportedly undermined a man's sense of guardianship in the community's eyes. One man, referring to girls, said 'if I cannot manage my cow properly and it walks around here and there, then who can I blame?'

That the private sphere was more appropriate for acts of violence was not something only perpetrators seemed to support. This same theme was suggested by two of the gender equitable men, in response to a question on whether violence could justifiably be used against someone. With regard to violence against women, one gender equitable man argued that, although violence is not justified, "there are special cases, like a husband may accidentally commit it when he learns his wife is having an extra-marital affair". Another gender equitable man responding to a question on violence against men, recounted an event where a woman hit a man, and he (the interviewee) responded to her: "Careful, you can hit him but only in your home, not in public." In both cases these were seen as private issues that spilled over into the public sphere. They were perceived as bad

enough in the private sphere, but the possibility of entering into public view made them particularly dangerous. The first case suggested that women who transgress the norm of fidelity may cross a threshold where a man can't contain his anger any longer. In the cultural context of Bangladesh, a woman having an extra-marital affair would have a serious impact not only on the relationship with her husband, but also on her husband's reputation. Thus, respondents argued that such behaviour in the private sphere could also have a serious impact on the man's public image and therefore could provoke a violent response. The second scenario also reflects a case where the private sphere has spilled over into the public sphere and involves a public show of anger and violence that is seen as unacceptable, particularly as it involves a woman hitting a man. From a gender perspective, this raises several issues. One is the still-prevalent difference in the way men and women's sexuality is understood and/or accepted, since violence is seen as 'understandable' if not acceptable as a reaction to a wife's extra-marital affair. Similarly, the view of the home as a private space where the rules of public behaviour with regard to violence do not apply contributes to an enabling environment where violence is condoned or at least tolerated.

Another important factor in shaping the behavior of these men is the group of friends and peers. Many of the respondents recalled watching porn in their teenage years with their male friends, at a time when many of them had little access or relations with girls or women beyond their immediate family. Although boys were much freer to roam around and express themselves, their behavior was regulated by masculine norms within the peer group, and any feminine traits were frowned upon or ridiculed. One perpetrator claimed that he followed the 'trend, behavior, manner and thinking patterns of other boys, as any other boy would do. This is because there is no family of social barrier as to how boys should behave as boys. I would not think of behaving differently...for fear of being treated as girlish or something like that!' One gender equitable man remembered a boy 'who didn't want to play with the boys...he was taunted by the Muhalla (community) people. They used to call him 'meye marka chele' (girly boy)'.

Many of the respondents recall engaging into fights with their friends or peers ('a difference of opinion regarding a petty issue led to a quarrel...we both suffered minor injuries'; 'while playing Hadudu, a disputed decision sparked tension. A fight broke out, blood oozed out of my forehead. The scar still remains'), and sometimes there were violent clashes between rival peer groups. Some of the violence directed at women, when it was not committed at home, was perpetrated by men usually in groups or pairs. One of the respondents recalls both an attempted rape he committed with a cousin on a woman at a cinema ('we did everything but rape her') and witnessing a brutal gang rape involving six men.

Yet peer groups can also be an influence for good or respectful behavior. Many of the gender equitable men worked in development NGOs, some fighting against gender-based violence. They had clearly learned to rethink gender relations and the role of men through their work and co-workers. One gender equitable man recalled how it was his friends and seniors who suggest that he take 'an uncommon subject' instead of the more common options of political science and sociology, and so, after a recommendation from a senior brother he admired, he applied to study in the gender studies department of his university.

## Experiences of Violence

### Key findings:

- Most men in this study have witnessed some forms of violence but the perpetrators have experienced more violence perpetrated against them and have witnessed severe forms of violence, including gender-based violence
- Violence was committed by parents, peers, in-laws but also in context such as schools, in addition to political forms of violence

### Case Study:

Kaji used to fight as a boy with his peers; he still has a scar on his head. He has also witnessed many violent clashes in his youth, particularly between two businessmen trying to control local markets. He argued ‘that evolved to a violent battle between two groups of lumpens. Many corpse were buried.’ His own father was attacked in the conflict and rushed to a doctor. He experienced violence later on in his life during election times when ‘many people died.’ Even today, in his own business, ‘there is severe intolerance among retailers [...] but I have to manage, overcome the threats, avoid the clashes, though often it’s not possible. [...] You have to survive the goons and carry on.’ He added ‘People force us for donations, extortionists are quite active there, and often people are stabbed due to such intergroup squabbles.’ However, perhaps the most severe form of violence he witnessed was the gang rape of a woman, on which he says ‘I felt the brutality of the act.’

The vast majority of the respondents, both perpetrators and gender equitable men, reported having experienced or witnessed acts or episodes of violence, and in many cases these acts included murders, attempted murders, gang or mob violence. All the perpetrators, except for one who used to be beaten by his father, experienced extreme forms of violence: four witnessed killings and assassinations, one witnessed a gang rape where the rapists tried to burn the victim’s body with kerosene, and the rest experienced physical violence outside the context of their home.

Among the older respondents some of this violence manifested during the War of Liberation<sup>7</sup>. They recalled the turbulent years before and after Independence where people were summarily killed or disappeared, and remembered the hardship experienced during that period. Dipak, for example, recalled how his father was finally able to rejoin his family in the camps after being tortured by the army:

Though he survived the torture and walked across the border to reach us, he passed away eight or nine days after reaching the camp. [...] After this, when Bangladesh won the war on the 16th of December, we returned home immediately. In the meantime, our house and our shop – everything – was burned down.

Another respondent recounts how families were split over the conflict:

Some people worked as traitors. One of my cousins was in the traitor group. I could have joined the freedom fighters but I had a position against them, for not joining them. The traitors perpetrated many massacres. They looted people’s wealth, torched houses and all.

<sup>7</sup> The War of Liberation was the 1971 war after which Bangladesh (formerly Eastern Pakistan) gained its independence from (Western) Pakistan.

Yet as it has been argued regarding conflicts in other countries, these are times of change and disturbance when the gender order can be altered or more easily transgressed. This appears to also have been the case during this period in Bangladesh, based on the respondents' memories. For instance, a gender equitable man explained:

...women and girls had taken training during the War, and participated in guerilla operations, I know from what others have said [...] People say, you know, how my mother, or that sister, has contributed during the war, how their sister spoke boldly, when the military came to search for me.

This same GEM was from a family who joined the cause of freedom fighters and he recalls hearing about gender-based violence at the time:

We knew about violence against women. We learned this from the radio. In games, we used to say that we have to protest violence against women, though we had no idea about details regarding this kind of violence.

Beyond the context of war, many of the perpetrators in particular reported having experienced acts of violence committed against them, or having witnessed extreme forms of violence. Some of the respondents also reported having been threatened or described events when they thought they would be executed, lynched or killed. Younger respondents described being beaten or slapped by gangs, in-laws or even their own partner or wife. The omnipresence of violence and coercion is striking across the life history narratives.

One perpetrator recounts an episode that he had not shared with anyone else because "I would not like private things such as this to become known to my parents." In his story, his brother and father-in-law beat him in front of his wife and mother-in-law, because of how he was treating his wife:

My father-in-law picked up that stick. He got angry with me. He told me, 'You are talking back to me?' (since I was protesting his abusive behaviour to me). [...] Then my brother-in-law came and pushed me. He is around my age [...] In front of my wife, my brother-in-law pushed me and I fell on the ground. My wife was standing there. I asked my brother-in-law, '[Name], you are like my younger brother, why are you behaving to me like this?' He replied, 'If I do not push you – then how shall I treat you? You don't feed my sister properly. You don't provide her maintenance properly. You often beat her up. You don't earn!' [...] After listening to her call [his wife], her father dropped the stick. But still my brother-in-law did not stop beating me. I thought, they are more in number. I would not be able to save myself. I thought of running out of the house while being beaten by them.

Witnessing violence was not specific to perpetrators, and many gender equitable men also recalled times when they saw fights or acts of violence. However, overall more of the perpetrators than the gender equitable men were victims of violence themselves, and in some cases, the violence was extreme.

Some respondents experienced violence within their home. Several of the respondents recalled that their parents beat them as children. A gender equitable man mentioned that although his father had two wives (he was born to the second wife as the first was not able to have children), he "was a Porhesgar, extremely pious, religious person. He taught child psychology. He established the rule in family that none of the children at home will be beaten up." However the same respondent later admitted that his mother had beaten him and his siblings. Across the life history narratives, mothers were often noted by both gender equitable men and perpetrators as perpetrating physical punishment against their children. One perpetrator mentioned that, "as a kid, I got slapped and seriously beaten so many times by both my father and mother."

Some of this violence was also sanctioned in schools. Many respondents mentioned being beaten, caned or physically assaulted by their teachers or instructors. One perpetrator (Mitul) mentioned how he

was beaten up on the first day [of school by a schoolmaster] [...] I didn't wear the school dress or carry any books. But he wasn't ready to consider [my reasons] and I became a victim of corporal punishment the very first day. Later I was beaten up by him a number of times. He caned us ruthlessly, he was really a torturous master.

Many respondents reported witnessing gender-based violence committed by their father towards their mother. One perpetrator reported being particularly saddened by the violence his mother experienced:

I only felt bad at times when my father mercilessly beat my mother. I used to cry, and sometime felt like I would teach my father a good lesson once I grew up. I used to feel like being rebellious and retaliating on my mother's behalf.

Another perpetrator recounts this experience growing up: "I saw most adult family men in my *para* [neighbourhood] punish their wives for disobedience or not behaving according to their expectations." In response to a question about the pervasiveness of domestic violence another perpetrator (Rajat) replied "Yes, I do think this happens everywhere, quite a normal outcome of our social structure. Apart from a woman being physically assaulted, I saw a lady killed for her disobedience." Another perpetrator recalls witnessing

a brutal gang-rape [...] That woman was beautiful; good in studies too, had six or seven kids. Five to six men took her to the nearby rice plantation, raped her repeatedly. They thought she was dead. They took her to a latrine and poured kerosene over her entire body to burn her. But unexpectedly she started shouting and survived! I saw everything. One of the rapists was my cousin. I didn't protest; it wasn't possible. But I felt the brutality of the act.

Overall, violence was present across the lives of both perpetrators and gender equitable men. Men from both groups also endured beatings inflicted by their parents. Yet there is an unmistakable difference in the level of violence experienced or witnessed by perpetrators, including extreme forms of violence such as murder, heavy beatings, and rape, as well as the violence many perpetrators saw their fathers inflict upon their mothers. Rowshan Ara, the executive director of the Rural Poor Development Organization (RPDO), argues that part of the problem in Bangladesh is that violence is accepted or that physical forms of violence are not acknowledged as violence or forms of torture: 'Physical violence is a common occurrence for most people. People don't see this as violence, this is true of both women and men. A man can beat his wife – this is a kind of outlook. Even a man's mother, sisters and his wife bears the same attitude, that a husband can beat.'

This violence may not entirely explain the violence against women presented in the other chapters, but it sets a background with violence as a recurring and accepted event and as a way to deal with or solve everyday problems.

## Masculinities, Femininities and Gender Discourses

### Key Findings

- Perpetrators have a particularly strict view of gender relations, one in which men's sense of masculinity is defined by their ability to get obeyed by their partners; this is less so of GEMs.
- Perpetrators also have a strong sense of entitlement as men and as husbands that clash with gender equality and women's rights, whereas GEMs more readily accept the notion of equality of rights.
- Perpetrators tend to feel victimised by changing gender relations, and the erosion of the old system triggers violent responses in order to control their status and role as men.

### Case Study:

Anis Shariff is a young man who grew in a household where his mother 'called the shots' as his father lived abroad. He didn't interact with girls much but a female teacher he admired inspired him to apply to university. One of his senior brothers suggested gender studies as political science and sociology were common and not 'thought provoking'. He says that since joining the gender studies department, he has come to believe in principles of non-discrimination, and he has no problem showing that he cares in his work with street children. He adds further 'I think I can manage my share of housework. A woman can freely carry on with her career.' Today he believes that women and men 'sociologically must be treated equally, especially in terms of honour, decision-making and respect. Society can create a division of labour but the division shouldn't create any hierarchy in gender terms.' One could argue that it all started at home. Anis Shariff says of his mother 'Amma has a huge influence in my life.'

Most of the perpetrators seemed to believe in a strict gender hierarchy. They saw this order, with men as decision-makers, as both natural and traditional, and that the breakdown of this order was what led to problems, including gender-based violence. They expressed a strong sense of duty regarding right and wrong, but this moral framework tended to be based on women respecting the authority of men, whether as husbands, fathers or sons.

When asked about what an ideal woman or man may be like, perpetrators in our samples were clear that men have a primary duty to be breadwinners and that he "has to earn hard. Once he is married, he has to take care of his family, parents, and shall treat relatives properly." On the other hand, one perpetrator saw a woman's role as follows: "when her husband goes for work, a woman will manage his meal, do household, and babysit. The responsibility of the children is a wife's matter. She should think about that." To some extent, this reflected their own experiences as children. One perpetrator described his mother's role as doing the entire housework: 'the home management was her department'. Another perpetrator described his father as 'hardly contributing to household chores', that 'he did manly tasks while mother did women-friendly tasks'.

Another perpetrator was clear that this division of labour did not require any change:

Look, my wife must handle family issues and keep everyone in my family happy. She needs to cook well, show obedience and respect my parents and me, not go against my mother's order, and take care of children and poultry and animals. This is because God assigned women these tasks. These can never be the father's. There's no point doing these tasks together. Our roles and responsibilities are different and not exchangeable. I do my tasks, she does hers. There's no point of task-sharing or exchanging. She knows what to do, and I know my tasks too.

It is important to note however that both perpetrators and gender equitable men did not describe their beliefs of an ideal man based on physical prowess or strength. Men were respected if they could feed their families,

protect them from harm and ensure that their sons, and especially daughters, followed socially prescribed roles.

In contrast, some of the gender equitable men recalled more flexible household division of labour when they grew up. Two respondents reported that their fathers would help with washing and ironing clothes, some recall their fathers helping cook, while others reported helping with house chores when they were boys. Overall, though, it is clear that by far, most of the household chores were done by female members of the family. What distinguished the gender equitable men's stories of childhood was the greater flexibility in distribution of roles, with family members occasionally helping with tasks traditionally assigned to the other gender. One gender equitable man mentioned how the equal division of work between him and his wife was something he learned from his mother:

I learned to cook while helping Ma. I used to sit around her when she used to cook – do you know something? I can make good *pitha* [local desert]. Back then I used to light the evening lamp. Though we did not have any deity we but we had the *Tulsi* [holy basil plant worshipped by the Hindus]. I still have the habit of lighting the evening lamp [a religious ritual among the Hindus to light clay lamps in the evening, to drive the evil away – the lamp can be lit in front of the deity or holy basil – a ritual that is commonly performed by women]

On the other hand, female members within these families tended to be granted more freedoms and opportunity to study or work. One gender equitable man, recalled his sisters during the 1970s: 'My sisters were also very outgoing. Not many women in those days would come out of their house and take part in cultural activities – not from small towns or districts.'

In contrast, many of the perpetrators complained that their partner was not respecting the existing gender order by questioning their authority. One perpetrator (Abu Ahmad) recalls older times when women would respect that authority:

Previously wives used to obey their husbands much more than today. Obedience towards the elderly was also higher among wives in the old days. That has also changed. Now girls don't care to cover their heads in front of older people. In the old days, girls would hardly go to places where men would gather, but these days they no longer care about these things. This is not how things should be. Good women are careful not to even walk in the shadow of a man.

The erosion of this unequal system was seen as a problem and one that could also explain gender-based violence. One perpetrator mentioned that he was against equal rights between women and men. He argued, "when girls have equal rights then they have to work in an open space but this open attitude sometimes makes men crazy...If we give equal rights to man and woman then gender-based violence will increase." Later in the interview he added, "If girls wear short dress then violence will increase." So women were perceived as breaking traditional rules that were in place to mitigate violence and ensure that men are not tempted. Blaming women for violence committed against them is not new, of course, and it repeats findings from other studies where men put part of the blame on women for the rape committed against them.

**'If we give equal rights to man and woman then gender-based violence will increase.'**

On the other hand, men also described themselves as victims of change in gender and marital relations and a particularly humiliating narrative that is echoed by many perpetrators is described in the following quote:

I know one man who actually worked in a government office. He did not have good relations with his wife; they even slept in different beds. His wife sometimes hit him. I think 80 percent of husbands in this society are neglected or ruled by their wives.

This view that they were victims of changing gender relations ran across many interviews with perpetrators. One perpetrator deplored that "these husbands are not only governed by their wives but frequently become a

victim of mental torture. When they realize that the wife they trusted have changed, it's too late. They have already lost their authority to their wives." One perpetrator reported that 'in many families men are tortured mentally and physically by their wives'. Another perpetrator claimed 'well, from my personal experience, I can tell you at every domestic problem, the man never has any initial responsibility, but ends up being a victim' and adds later 'See, the man never initiates things but gets involved inevitably and becomes a victim. You know under the pressure once I tried to commit suicide.'

The change in women's behaviour was also understood as undermining one's manhood. Abu Ahmad disapproved of girls joining village fairs: "No it's not right. Girls should not be joining those events. A man who manages his wife to follow him is right. The one unable to manage his wife or who walks behind his wife is more like a donkey." Later in the interview, and in response to a question of who is to blame for rapes, Abu Ahmad responds: "If I cannot manage my cow properly, and she walks around here and there, then who can I blame?" This last comment suggests quite clearly that he believed that a woman must be controlled by a man, and that a guardian would be to blame for violence against women, particularly a man unable to control his wife or daughter. This was not necessarily an extreme view. One gender equitable man used a very similar argument when asked during the interview who is to blame for rape, he answered:

Guardians are responsible. [...] You might have heard of a girl who was raped few days ago in Modhupur [...] The girl who was raped was not accompanied by her guardians. She was not taken away forcibly from her guardians to be raped. She was instead with a friend. As a guardian myself, I would say that this incident has happened because of the girl's guardians. If the guardians were good, this girl would not have gone outside the home.

This gender equitable man did not once mention the responsibility of the rapist. It was somehow understood as a given that men will prey on innocent girls. Here again the breakdown in social norms was seen as contributing to gender-based violence by exposing women to men's uncontrolled urges. Supporting these norms becomes paramount, even though the men's behaviour, one could argue, is in part condoned if not tolerated by this strict gender order. It is also in this context that violence against women can be understood, since men need to enforce this order, even if that means using physical violence, in order to prevent female members of the household to be exposed to gender-based violence, particularly sexual forms of violence.

This is also why to some extent one can explain the respondents' reluctance to give up authority or decision-making power. One perpetrator's view clearly link decision-making to income, and income earning is understood as a man's task:

First, I can't think of allowing my wife to go out or earn for my family. Actually, no man should allow it. I earn, so the decisions are mine. Moreover, my wife does not understand money matters, or have any idea how money can be earned or utilized in a meaningful manner.

**'If a man has some work to do, then violence against women will be reduced.'**

The concept here is that a 'real man' earns an income and should therefore make decisions and not be ruled by his wife. However, the man's breadwinning role could be undermined by the vagaries of the labour market, and some perpetrators understood this as a root cause of men's violence. To a question regarding how we can stop violence against women, one perpetrator put it plainly:

The main problem is financial. Unemployment is the main reason. If a man has some work to do then violence against woman will be reduced. The husband must be able to protect his wife.

This suggests that when financial conditions are more secure, there are fewer opportunities for frictions to arise, whereas financial problems may leave a man in a situation where he fails to provide for his family, and he will be criticized for it. The respondent quoted above saw the protection of his wife as one of the purposes of having employment, and failure to bring in an income would imperil this role. The respondent did not explain how the lack of proper income leads to violence, however we can assume that he is referring to a

sense of despair from a lack of income and opportunities. In that scenario, the man did not blame his partner, but she became an accidental victim of his alienation. The underlying assumption was that a man may become violent when he faces adversity, that he can't control his frustrations and anger that come because he is not able to fulfill his role as provider/protector.

Interestingly, many respondents saw themselves as having rights as husbands or even as men in terms of deciding or controlling women. The notion of women's rights or equality was strongly objected to by many perpetrators. One perpetrator notes,

I think women should do their job and men should do theirs...Women cannot do the job that men do... 'Men's jobs' means they will earn, they will marry...After a day long's work and returning to one's home, a wife should cook for her husband. She should prepare water for his shower...Then taking meals and sleeping together... Some affection... Etc... I always want this.

In another perpetrator's view, men's entitlements were clearly articulated:

To be the 'family head' and 'being obeyed' are two of men's rights. As I said before, men are entitled to be respected and obeyed by their women.

One perpetrator was also against equality, arguing that gender equality is against both God's will and nature in a metaphor where women were described as a land to be sown:

No, Eeshwar (God) clearly made men and women unequal. Relations are simply unequal. Men are givers, women are takers. Men give 'seed' (sperm), women must take that to develop, like the land. Land itself is nothing, of no value, if we do not sow the seeds on them. Women are the same – in a completely dependent relationship.

The metaphor is quite telling, in this perpetrator's view: like the land, the value women possess is gained through reproduction. It is in that unequal relationship in which women must be dependent on men.

Overall the gender equitable men tended not to use a language of entitlement as much and more readily used language of rights when it comes to women's well-being and especially in terms of decisions and mobility. "A woman can freely carry on with her own career path," says one gender equitable man. Again, overall these beliefs tended to originate in childhood. Their own upbringing exposed these respondents to more flexible gender roles, one in which men, usually their father, had more equal notions of gender. One gender equitable man recalled how, instead of dividing his property among his sons, his father gave it all to his mother "empowering her to distribute". Several gender equitable men mentioned that their fathers would treat their children equally. Many also reported wanting their daughter to get an education. A gender equitable man recalled how his "father was absolutely fond of them [his sisters]. He used to take pride in telling people that one of his two daughters completed a Master's degree and the other a Bachelor's degree." Another gender equitable man remembered that there was no discrimination in his home. He added 'my sister also asked for an equal share in the meal and workload, she also talked about it in the early years of school. She is now working as a cardiologist in a big hospital.'

**'...the male that stays inside, comes out whenever it gets the chance. The male entity of the self never dies. It just leaps like a tiger.'**

However, as mentioned earlier, this did not mean that their conceptions of masculinity were based on equality. One gender equitable man was quite honest in this regard:

I tell my wife [name], I can say I am a feminist, but at one point, the male that stays inside comes out whenever it gets the chance. The male entity of the self never dies. It just leaps like a tiger. I admit this openly. Whenever I have a verbal fight with my wife, within some time I start shouting, but she does not. This shouting means I want to oppress her. This shout means the rise of the power of the male residing inside. Or I start banging stuff around me.

This echoes feedback from key informants, including Dr. Sadeka Halim, a sociology professor at Dhaka University and Information Commissioner, who said ‘I don’t know of any man who never abused women...even in the NGO sector. Men who have worked for NGOs for a number years...women changed, men do not change...they change only for a number of hours, from morning till afternoon promoting equality, but at home or with friends, when it comes to marriage...NGO men would never marry NGO girl, because she is mobile, she is working beside men...’

This was a common argument across several key informants. Salma Ali, director of the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers’ Association argued that “even educated men think of women as commodity not human beings.” These interviews suggest that men who advocate for equality in Bangladesh may not always be or practice the same in the private sphere. During this study’s data collection, it became clear that some of these men still espoused stereotypical roles, yet we would argue that the men we identified as gender equitable men had overall less strict gender norms learned from their parents shown for example through friendships they developed with both women and men.

In the end, it was clear from the interviews that the way masculinities, femininities and especially gender discourse were understood among the respondents was drastically different across the two groups. Those differences were condoned, or even encouraged, by the social context in which these men lived. This difference explains to some extent how the perpetrators’ strict view of gender relations were supported by their own community, whereas the gender equitable men found a more equal treatment rewarded by their community and family as proper behaviour, and therefore their practices did not challenge their understanding of what it meant to be a man.

## Discussion and Recommendations

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Can we draw any conclusions from these life-history interviews? Are there patterns that can be discerned from the individuals' lives, and the context in which they grew into adults? Many themes emerging from the findings were shared by the majority of respondents – both perpetrators and gender equitable men. At other times, conflicting evidence would suggest clear differences between these two groups. The study highlights some interesting differences that provide insight into understanding key patterns in life events that seem to be associated with violent or non-violent behaviour. Certain themes seem to emerge, but we should treat these with caution, aware that more formal and explanatory research would be needed before more definitive conclusions can be drawn and policy responses designed. The following section provides discussion on key themes and presents a set of policy recommendations after each sub-section.

### Violence as Background

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It is clear in the case of those interviewed in Bangladesh that violence is often part of the context or background in which these men lived, from the War of Liberation to social conflicts and the brutality of local goons for hire, to violence committed by teachers, peers, their own family members, and finally violence inflicted upon themselves. Although it may be hard from this omnipresence of violence to see patterns that would separate one group of men from the other, these forms of violence reported in interviews span the three broad categories set in the WHO report on violence and health as 1) self-directed violence; 2) interpersonal violence; and 3) collective violence (WHO 2002). They also fit within an ecological framework that suggests that 'factors that influence behaviour – or which increase the risk of committing or being a victim of violence' happen or originate on four levels, namely society, community, relationship, and individual (WHO 2002:9).

The interdependence between these four levels would suggest that the more pervasive violence is, the more it is embedded in a context that may strengthen, condone or tolerate it. Yet we should be careful in assuming that the respondents were tolerant of, or generally condone, violence. Most respondents, including some perpetrators, voice their dislike for violence, many having suffered from personal experience of violence. Violence against children for instance was often discussed as wrong, yet gender-based violence particularly in the context of one's home or household is understood as something that men do or engage in, as a form of social control and means of ensuring obedience.

#### Recommendations:

- Implement school programs – particularly with younger students – at the national level on non-violent ways of solving and managing problems and conflicts
- Address root causes of violence such as youth and adult unemployment through life skill development
- Engage communities and set up community programs on violence prevention, both that target boys and men directly, and also that engage men and boys within programs addressed to women and girls

## Hegemonic versus Complicit Masculinities

Few of the men seem to espouse behaviour associated with clear characteristics of hegemonic masculinities, although they could be described as harmful. For instance, the men do not seem to highlight their physical prowess (none of the respondents see muscle power as a man's quality) or describe a belief in the superiority of their sex (although some perpetrators rejected the notion of equal rights). Some of the more rural respondents appear to have more traditional or stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity, but these tend to be closely associated with gender roles assigned within the context of marital relationships or the family structure. The respondents who voiced opposition to women working as paid workers never raise any doubt as to their aptitude or capacity to accomplish a task. Their concern is usually that exposure to the public space undermines women's sense of family duty, potentially dishonouring the husband, and the woman herself. Some of the perpetrators mentioned that they disapprove of their own violent behaviour, but justify the act in the context of a crisis, a loss of honour or a normative transgression they claim that their partner committed. In effect, most of the perpetrators have more rigid notions of gender norms they tend to follow for fear of losing honour, or being ridiculed by their neighbour, their peer group or the community in which they live. One could even argue that it is the fear of having one's masculinity questioned that drive these men to abide by the rules, and therefore to be complicit in harmful forms of masculinities, to the point where they will inflict violence in the process.

Can we therefore describe their behaviour as hegemonic? Are they proud and secure in their own sense of masculinity and use of violence? The interviews do not seem to support those assumptions given the disapproval expressed by the majority of respondents, including those who use violence. Yet it is clear that the forms of masculinities espoused are harmful when they lead to inequality and violence, and that complicit masculinities are particularly expressed or made manifest in the context of social disapprobation.

There appear to be other factors that distinguish those who use violence from those who do not. In the following section, we will argue that one such factor is the role parents have played, altering early on in these men's lives a strict gender order.

### Recommendations

In this study, men tended to commit violence to re-establish a gender order in which they earn respect as breadwinners and authority figures. The breakdown of this gender order exposes them to a loss of respect by their family and peers. Policy and programme recommendations could take three different paths towards redefining *what it means to be a husband and father*:

- Work with the community, and train community leaders (identified to be more open to gender-sensitive programs and respected by the community), to promote new positive forms of masculinities, particularly in terms of what it means to be a good husband and a good father, that support co-management of households, including sharing breadwinning duties, welcoming joint decision-making, and accepting equality of authority between husband and wife
- Set up a media campaign targeting men themselves as husbands and fathers, commending the roles built upon equality and joint decision-making, while dissuading gender unequal practices as antithetical to what it means to be a good husband and father
- Promote curricula at schools supportive of gender equal conceptions of husband-wife relations

## Parents as Role Models

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That parents are important role models for their children is not new. Both perpetrators and gender equitable men generally had respect for their parents and closely followed what their parents expected them to do. In fact several respondents whose parents arranged their marriages accepted their parent's decision, even if it was not one they agreed with (one respondent, for instance, had been having a relationship based on love but had to discontinue this relationship when his father chose a bride for him, because his brother had already married out of love against the wishes of his father.)

Yet there is an unmistakable difference between the two groups, which is the type of gender relations that were the norms in their family when growing up, and especially the role mothers had played (often as a result of a distant or absent father). In both groups women are often described as having the main responsibility for household affairs, including making financial decisions about household consumption. However, in the gender equitable men group, mothers' decision-making power often went beyond a strict responsibility for household affairs; they would contribute to the household income, sell land, make decisions regarding their children's education or help children learn how to perform Namaz (prayer). These more flexible forms of gender relations extended to the way children, boys and girls were treated by their parents, usually with a more equal distribution of resources, a support for their daughters' education, or even professional career.

Why that is so is not always clear. Some families, such as Dipak's, were poor yet the mother played an important role, and even though his mother was illiterate, her lack of bias and discrimination towards others left him with a strong sense of equality between people that extended to gender relations. What some of these cases share to some extent is a closer relationship between the son and the mother, in part because the father was away or rarely present. However, the presence or not of their fathers was not a strong distinguishing feature between the two groups, although one could argue from a few interviews with gender equitable men that the father was at least supportive of their mother's higher level of decision-making power. If correct, this would indicate the importance of men's support for more equal gender relations, particularly in a context where patriarchy is still deeply entrenched. Moreover, in the case of perpetrators, mothers as well as sisters, fathers and other relatives (e.g., uncles) often appeared to be described in terms of their roles in relatively stereotypical ways. In comparison, among the gender equitable men, their mothers, sisters, friends who are girls, and others were described more in terms of their individual qualities, or as full human beings, rather than in terms of the roles they played. This closeness on a 'human' level may have allowed the gender equitable men to see both women and men more as individuals rather than as persons that have to play certain roles and adhere to rigid social expectations.

**Recommendations:**

The findings suggest that early exposure to more equal gender relations and flexible gender roles in the family setting may help men resist unequal gender norms in their own relations with women throughout their lives, and more specifically with their wives. The policy and programme recommendations are to address the behaviour of both parents and children, and women's and men's (and boys' and girls') *social roles and responsibilities*:

- Schools and local institutions should try to expose children – particularly younger children – to situations where women and men enact more flexible roles and responsibilities in the family and community (i.e. school plays, inviting NGOs and set up programs to discuss gender-equal relations and the elimination of gender-based violence, etc.), and more equitable examples of men's and women's behaviour are explicitly promoted
- Promote the acceptability of more flexible gender roles and responsibilities through the school curriculum would help children see men and women not in a rigid and stereotypic way, but rather as full human beings with their own individual personalities and strengths
- Engage sympathetic local religious and other institutions in discussing these issues with children may be helpful in order to counter gender-based violence in the future (Identifying and training a coordinated and sympathetic group of religious leaders, ideally across different religions, would be important in this)

## The Role of Segregation

The debate over co-education or segregated classes in North America or Europe is often focused on performance in the presence or not of students of the other sex. The language found in the interviews rarely had anything to do with performance, but usually reflected a means to enforce sex-segregation, mostly to protect the girls' honour. Yet relations between girls and boys are often key to breaking down differences. Many of the respondents told of having no perception of difference between boys and girls until school divided them. Similarly, several of the gender equitable men mentioned following traditional gender roles until their education, usually at the university level, put them in a co-ed environment. Some of these men took gender courses not because of initial belief in gender equality but to access a non-traditional space to question authority and relations of power. Students with leftist or progressive political beliefs saw gender courses as offering that space whereas traditional social science fields, such as political science or sociology, no longer provided room for progressive thinking.

Particularly once they were in a teenage or adult setting, the gender equitable men and perpetrators appear to have developed different 'peer groups' to which they responded. In other words, as they matured they appeared to have been increasingly influenced by the social images that reflected the general norms or at least ideas of tolerable ('understandable') behaviour of those around them. Although most of the perpetrators reflected a more conservative view of how a patriarchal society should function, the gender equitable men tended to develop a more 'liberal' view of how men and women should behave within a changing social context. As adults, the two groups tended to reflect very different walks of life and peer groups (including rather different social strata and occupational groups), and responded to very different influences out of the wide range of social images and ideas that currently prevail in Bangladeshi society. All of this had a clear impact on their conceptions of gender roles and hierarchies and the limits of "acceptable" behaviour, including those regarding the use of violence as a means of maintaining gender norms.

### Recommendations:

Some of the GEMs in this study were exposed to co-education environment later in their teenage years or twenties, and in the process had an opportunity to relate with girls and women after experiencing a period of segregation in their early teens. Most of the perpetrators did not have this opportunity for mixing again with women in this way. The recommendation is therefore as follows regarding providing socially-acceptable ways in which such unpressured *co-educational activities* can take place, particularly in the teenage years:

- Encourage co-educational opportunities throughout girls' and boys' education as much as would be socially acceptable, in order to maintain a sense of familiarity without promoting stereotypes of the opposite sex
- For the same reason, provide opportunities for co-educational activities in a relaxed and unpressured context (e.g., through community service activities)
- Discuss influences, such as highly stereotypical films (e.g., from Bollywood or Dhallywood) that are particularly influential during the teenage years, with teenage boys and girls; promote television serials and advertisements that show men and women as 'normal' individuals, as opposed to those that glorify violence and stereotype men as rough and aggressive and women primarily as sexualized beings. (These latter images are likely to influence both perceptions of what is 'normal' and 'acceptable' and could lead to an increase in gender-based violence in the future.)

## Men as Providers and Guardians

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Most of the perpetrators seem to have had difficulties meeting their own expectations and the expectations their friends and family have of them as fathers, husbands and sons. Several of these men mentioned the financial problems they had and the failure to provide for their families, which is a tremendous blow to their self-image, a process reinforced by family, social or community disapprobation. The economic failure as men is underpinned by challenges to their sense of manhood and masculinity posed by what they see as women's lack of obedience, which further erodes their role as protectors and guardians. The men fear being blamed for their partner's or daughters' social transgression, and at the same time having their masculinity questioned since their authority is challenged or viewed as ineffective. The perpetrators seem to use violence as a way to reassert their authority and re-establish control in a sphere or context where they can still have such power.

Closely related to that, is a theme that emerged in the interviews whereby men see themselves as victims or misunderstood agents. One perpetrator mentioned how men never start a fight but that in the end they are eventually pulled in and left with no choice but use violence. However this sense of victimization seems to be related to the conflict that is generated in their home when social norms they espoused are transgressed, or when their role as providers and guardians is undermined.

### Recommendations:

Men expressed frustration at not being able to meet their role as breadwinners. Several policy options regarding *livelihood activities and shifting existing gender norms around men as financial providers* should be considered to address this:

- Promote communications campaigns or community programmes that redefine income earners as either women or men, and encourage the idea of dual incomes as positive for family welfare
- Provide income generation opportunities to both women and men (including skill development, vocational training, marketing and other forms of assistance)
- Work with local government officials and other authorities, from the community to national levels, to provide social protection mechanisms or programs to ensure that certain basic security needs are met

## Men's Sense of Rights

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Another interesting theme that transpired from the interviews, which was also linked to the respondents' sense of victimization (since their rights appeared to be 'violated') is the language of rights perpetrators use to explain their authority or to justify different treatments between women and men. This understanding of rights comes first from being a man, with the privilege this entails in terms of leadership, freedom and decision-making. It is then reinforced through matrimony since many of the perpetrators believed that marriage gives them special rights as husband, including sexual access to their partners. Eventually this authority was extended to control they have over their family members' whereabouts and behaviour, especially their daughters'.

In some ways this reflects a strong sense of duty the perpetrators have as men, husbands and fathers. It also reflects dominant social norms around the role of men in Bangladesh society. This rigid framework and careful balance between duties and rights could be viewed as providing a certain background for violence to

happen when this framework starts to come apart and men feel they fail to meet their obligations and thus they try to re-establish their rights and their authority so that they once again fulfill those roles.

This appropriation of a rights discourse is important to understand, especially as programs to fight gender-based violence often use a rights-based approach, which to those men may be viewed as antithetical to their own framework and system of beliefs. This is not to discourage a right-based approach from being used against gender-based violence but that it may suggest that if we are to change men's perceptions of their rights, we may also need to alter their strong sense of duty, often based on unequal gender relations, as men, husbands and fathers, which seems to feed violence when those expectations are not fulfilled. It also suggests, as one key informant shared (Sanyia Ansari, Deputy Director, Gender Unit, ASK) that awareness of current laws is also needed, both for men who may perpetrate gender-based violence, and for women who may not know what legal recourses they may have.

### Recommendations

The policy efforts on the *legal front* (including implementation of existing laws and regulations) should focus on the following recommendations:

- Implement legislation that criminalizes marital rape and underscores rights of women within marital spaces
- Promote stronger enforcement of current laws through capacity building of law enforcement and judicial institutions
- Raise awareness of current laws and rights to both women and men
- Enable victims of gender-based violence to come forward to local community-based organizations and authorities, and provide alternatives for victims and their dependents, particularly where no such viable alternatives exist at present; ensure that victims are able to seek help and that it is socially acceptable for them to do so

Further efforts should also be made to drive larger social norm change in Bangladesh and promote healthy, non-violent and gender equitable forms of masculinity. The above recommendations address different avenues through which social norm change – and changing notions of what it means to be a man in Bangladesh society – can be fostered. To complement these initiatives, further programme recommendations could also include:

- Implement programmes that work with young boys and men to critically engage with notions of gender, masculinity and violence within communities and relationships (e.g. school-based interventions with young children ages 11-13)
- Promote media campaigns targeted at communities that discuss alternative ways of being a man in Bangladesh society
- Conduct rigorous evaluation of programmes that work with religious leaders and other community gate-keepers to respond to and prevent violence, in order to build the evidence base of what works to address violence against women in Bangladesh.

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