How can we overcome violence against women and other social barriers?

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Barriers – working women

- Women workers, entrepreneurs and professionals all face certain barriers SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY ARE WOMEN, whichever their class or occupation.

- Barriers – legal obstacles, social restrictions, cultural bias and moral policing.

- These barriers affect women’s ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES, MOBILITY, RETURNS TO LABOUR, POTENTIAL and SENSE OF OWN SELF WORTH.
About Naripokkho

- Membership based organisation founded in 1983 working for the advancement of women’s rights and entitlements, and building resistance against violence, discrimination and injustice.

Naripokkho’s work is focused on the following six inter-related themes

- Equality and political empowerment of women.
- Violence against women and women’s human rights.
- Reproductive rights and women’s health.
- Gender issues in environment and development.
- Representation of women in media and cultural politics.
- Women’s economic rights.
Violence against women (VAW) is defined as:

‘any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering of women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in private or public life’

UN Declaration on the elimination of Violence Against Women (1993)

‘Gender based’ emphasises that it is rooted in inequality between men and women (Kranz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005)

Gender based violence is defined as ‘any act or threats of acts intended to hurt or make women suffer physically, sexually or psychologically, and which affect women because they are women or affect women disproportionately’
Naripokkho’s position regarding VAW

- Giving voice and visibility to survivors is an important aspect of the fight against violence against women.

- Women subjected to violence are survivors and not victims. This has to be reflected in policies, programmes, attitudes and behaviour as well as in the language we use.

- Violence against women is a crime and does not constitute a loss of honour for the woman, her family or her country.

- The state has specific obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right of women and girls to a life free from violence.
Combating VAW: Naripokkho’s Strategic Framework

**Constituency Building**
- Building Voice
  - Doorbar Network
  - Shonghoti
- Building Conceptual Clarity

**Engagement with the State**
- Participation in Govt. Committees
  - Lobbying
- Monitoring
  - Women’s Health & Rights Advocacy Partnership
  - MSIC - VAW

**Technical Support**
- Formulation of GoB’s MSP-VAW

- Mobilising Support
- Liaison with women & HR organisations, NGOs
- Public Education

**Partnership**
- MSIC - VAW
Prevalence of VAW

- VAW now seen as worldwide phenomenon which cuts across education and income levels

- Similar study findings across many countries

- 60% prevalence rate of VAW among adult married women in Bangladesh, with girls age 11-15 years most at risk to abduction, rape, trafficking and acid attack (Naripokkho, 1996)

- 40-60% of married women in Bangladesh experience physical, verbal or sexual abuse by their husbands (WHO multi-country study 2005)
## Prevalence in Bangladesh in last five Years

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Rape</th>
<th>Murder after rape</th>
<th>Abduction</th>
<th>Trafficking</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
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<td>3387</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2874</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>6326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>3648</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4001</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>4389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16,901</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>17,147</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>31,088</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 21 Jan. 2013, PHQ Naripokkho
Predominant norms and beliefs (prejudice)

• About what constitutes ‘appropriate behaviour’ defines the boundaries of women’s lives

• Notions of chastity and virginity are considered sacrosanct and determine the trajectory of women’s lives

• Non recognition, invisibilisation and stigmatisation of sexual activity outside marriage

• Lack of communication and awareness about sexuality within marriage – desire and lack of desire problematic, dichotomy between ‘good women’ and ‘bad women’

• Consent is problematic – outside marriage unacceptable, in marriage not necessary. Many girls experience intimacy and sexual pleasure through unclear and socially unacceptable relationships (promise of marriage facilitates consent – when promise broken rape is alleged)
Physical constraints

- Perceived and real.
- Used to justify unequal treatment of women and restrict movement
- Fear of rape
- Fear of consensual sexual relations outside marriage

Impacts on mobility, ability to fulfill potential and creates perpetual disadvantage
Legal constraints

Origins in archaic colonial laws
Found in penal code and special legislation to ‘protect women’:

- Control over women’s bodies and sexuality
- Freedom to pursue a sexual life of one’s choice
- Reproductive choice
- Freedom of movement
Moral constraints

• Often arbitrary use and misuse of religion by so-called religious authorities

• Ordinary men (and women) – pronouncements acquire status of edicts
Strategies to overcome VAW: Doorbar

- **Doorbar** – national network of 535 women led organizations all over Bangladesh covering all 64 districts. Convened by Naripokkho.

- VAW and the threat of VAW was defined as the biggest impediment to women achieving their POTENTIAL.

- Organisations came together to work on issues of VAW and women’s political empowerment (participation in PUBLIC SPHERE)

- Positive outcome of WOMEN COMING TOGETHER
  - Able to articulate what the issues were.
  - Able to clarify issues – what should not be acceptable or was wrong – before could stand up and fight it.
  - Networking and support of other women, and women’s organizations.
Doorbar – examples

• Protesting Domestic violence – community women rally together to stop a husband beating wife. Reduce abuse by collective action.
• Taking part in government committees at different levels (e.g. Nari Nirjaton Protirodh Committee)
• Collectively lobbying officials (DC, OC police), and standing by women subjected to violence in the community.
• Public visibility of women through various ways.
Doorbar – interventions

• Contact with survivors & their families
• Contact with alleged perpetrators & their families (when required)
• Fact finding of the incidents
• Contact with local administration and law enforcement agencies
• Assist survivors to file cases
• Organise protests - Human Chain, rally & procession
• Mobilise media to build pressure on police and administration
• Memorandum submission to the authority
• Talk to local Parliament Member (whenever possible)
• Assist to organise local arbitration
• Contact local doctors to ensure adequate treatment for the injured women
RMG - example

- Public visibility and movement of women in RMG industry during day and night have had positive outcome for all e.g. Dhaka streets are safer and perceived to be safer – women from all backgrounds and professions have benefited and are more visibly mobile
Acid violence - example

• Naripokkho worked with those who had been subjected to acid attacks. Cases were followed, media campaign, supporting process of victim – survivor – activist.
• Survivor was given confidence and strength by support of others.
• Acid attacks against women have seen a decline.
Naripokkho Research findings: Risk and protective factors for VAW

- Women’s inner strength to fight, resist or negotiate in their own way.
- Women rely on support from family members, neighbours and relatives.
- Women’s perceptions of shame, blame, dignity and their positioning in society ensure a continuation of domestic violence against them.
- Urban women are more likely to be physically assaulted, whereas rural women sexually and psychologically abused.
- No effect of income level on any form of domestic VAW.
- History of physical violence in the husband’s natal family tends to be repeated.
Women with a history of physical violence in natal family are also more likely to be physically abused by their husbands.

Women who can count upon natal family in crisis are less likely to be physically and sexually abused.

Women, whose marriage involves dowry or other demands from the husband’s side, are more likely to be physically, sexually and psychologically abused.

Higher the level of communication between spouses the lower the probability a woman being physically sexually or psychologically abused.

Physical violence is negatively correlated with a husband’s educational attainment (but not that of his wife)

Women’s income earning is not a protective factor but a risk factor for physical violence.

Source: ICDDR,B & Naripokkho, A study on Women’s Health & Domestic Violence Against Women in Bangladesh
Strategies – Engaging with men

Research findings from “Exploring the experiences of male perpetrators of violence” (Naripokkho, 2010)

• Defence against intolerable feelings – struggled with managing or making sense of difficult and uncomfortable feelings.
• Violent behaviour an effective and acceptable method of getting rid of bad feelings.
• Struggle with accepting rejection, therefore justified use of violence as revenge.
• Located responsibility for violent acts in ‘the other’
• Believed women were responsible for sexual violence against them.
• Helpless feeling – use of violence as method of coping.
Engaging with the young/ communities

The main take home message when designing preventive or rehabilitative programmes:

1. Violence against women is not intrinsic, inevitable or acceptable (maintains vaw).

2. Help people to learn to take responsibility for their actions e.g. their violent behaviour (otherwise they will not change if they feel that problem lies in the ‘other’)

3. Enable people to understand and deal with and manage difficult feelings and emotions, (anger, frustration, rejection, apparent betrayal, feeling of revenge, sexual urges and sexuality) in helpful and appropriate ways

Instilling the above at a young age may prevent formation of perpetrators of violence

Anecdotal evidence – men may change with reflection.
Final thoughts

• Though VAW is officially recognised as a problem, domestic violence is still not considered wrong. Rape is all too often seen as a woman’s fault, etc.
• Need to work together to change attitudes.
• Articulate impediments and talk openly about them.
• Women need to gain self confidence.
• More public visibility of women overcoming barriers, and there should be support networks/other mechanisms, to enable women to gain strength and confidence.
• Engage with men to change behaviour, and to bring about accountability of their actions.