

Helpdesk Research Report: Gender Inequality in Bangladesh
30.05.08

Query: What are the key characteristics of gender inequality in Bangladesh?

Enquirer: DFID Bangladesh

- 1. Overview**
- 2. Key Documents**
 - General Trends
 - Health
 - Education
 - Employment and Livelihoods
 - Marriage Customs
 - Violence against Women
- 3. Additional information**

1. Overview

In the past thirty years, Bangladesh has undergone profound social changes, many of which have impacted gender inequality. Fertility rates have been halved, the gender gap in infant mortality, as well as in primary and secondary schooling, has been narrowed or closed altogether, the availability of micro-credit has boosted the solidarity of women as well as their earning potential, and large numbers of young women are leaving their villages to work in garment factories. These developments are mutually reinforcing. They are also interacting with pre-existing cultural norms and traditional practices, and creating new dynamics and trends in gender relations. Some commentators argue that the 'intrusion' of women into traditionally 'male' spaces has, in some of the more culturally conservative settings within Bangladesh, led to marital and familial conflict, and increased levels of domestic violence. In addition, early marriage remains common amongst women and some studies have noted the increasing practice of dowry payments in some parts of the country. The public safety of women is also a matter of increasing concern.

Even in those areas where progress has been made, challenges still remain. Many of the improved gender indicators mask significant economic disparities. Poor women still lack adequate access to reproductive health, and enrolment levels of girls in higher education remain low. Furthermore, there is evidence that the tremendous success of government and donor female enrolment initiatives has resulted in boys now lagging behind on some educational indicators. However, there is also evidence that the importance of girls' education is perceived more in terms of better marriage prospects and not job aspirations – a reflection of the poor quality of schools and continuing labour market discrimination. Women's employments levels remain low, even by South Asian standards. Where women are employed, this role is still largely seen as supplementary and inferior to that of men. Traditional perceptions about the role of women as home-makers persist.

2. Key Documents

General Trends

- Das, M. B., 2008, 'Whispers to Voices: Gender and Social Transformation in Bangladesh', World Bank Publications, Washington DC
http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2008/03/25/000334955_20080325105524/Rendered/PDF/430450NWP0BD0gender0Box0327344B01PUBLIC1.pdf (you may have to copy this link and paste this into your browser)

This paper highlights that Bangladesh has made great progress in achieving gender equality and enhancing the status of women. However a number of challenges remain:

- While gender inequalities in children's health have diminished, Bangladeshi women still lack adequate access to reproductive health.
 - While the government's concerted long-term goal of enhancing female education, combined with a number of innovative NGO programs, has been a startling success, boys now lag behind.
 - There are also serious gaps in educational attainment between the rich and the poor. Despite rises in female enrolment, poor children of either gender rarely stay in school through to the upper grades. By Grade 9, when nearly 100 percent of children from rich families are enrolled, less than 20 percent of children from the poorest households are still in school. At the secondary level, less than 10 percent of children from the poorest two quintiles enrol, compared to some 70 percent from the richest quintile.
 - Women's employment rates have increased dramatically but are still very low, even by South Asian standards (it comes second only to Pakistan).
 - Unlike other parts of South Asia however, urban-rural differences in employment rates in Bangladesh are very small. Also unlike other countries, urban women tend to be employed more than their rural counterparts.
 - In terms of property ownership, only 3.5 percent (0.62 million) of the 17.8 million agricultural holdings were female owned. Without property and other durable assets, women's voice becomes even lower.
 - Regarding violence, 24 percent of older women and 30 percent of younger women have experienced spousal violence at some point. Only 49 percent of older women and 38 percent of younger women feel safe going out alone even within their village or neighbourhood.
- Raschen, M. and Shah, F., 2006, 'Bangladesh Gender Profile', KfW Bankengruppe, Frankfurt
http://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/DE_Home/Service_und_Dokumentation/Online_Bibliothek/PDF-Dokumente_Diskussionsbeitraege/AMD_42_e.pdf

This paper argues that while overall poverty in Bangladesh has decreased in recent years, poverty continues to have concrete gender dimensions. Significant disparities in employment and wage rates persist which, combined with considerable gaps in asset ownership, severely limit women's economic opportunities. Unequal access to services continues to be a key issue in the health and education sectors despite significant improvements in recent years. This is reflected in poor nutrition, maternal morality and child mortality indicators - as well as in gaps in primary and secondary enrolment versus completion rates, low achievement levels and high levels of adult female illiteracy. Whilst quota-based efforts have been made to increase the number of women in the public sector, there are still few women in decision-making positions and even fewer in positions of political leadership. Gender-based violence is also increasingly becoming a serious problem in Bangladesh. Further, female poverty and the vulnerabilities it produces is reflected in the sizable numbers of women and children trafficked each year to neighbouring countries and beyond.

- Hossain, M. A. and Tisdell, C. A., 2005, 'Closing the Gender Gap in Bangladesh Inequality in Education, Employment and Earnings', International Journal of Social Economics, vol. 32, no. 5, pp.439-453

This article is available for purchase from IngentaConnect:

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/mcb/006/2005/00000032/00000005/art00004>

This article assesses trends on the status of women in Bangladesh based on key macro level indicators: women's labour force participation, educational attainments and earnings vis-à-vis men. It finds evidence of growing commercialisation of women's work in Bangladesh. Although most women in the workforce are self-employed or employed in low-skill jobs, women's participation in high skill and entrepreneurial jobs as well as policy-making bodies is increasing. While gender wage differentials have been considerably reduced in many industries, in general, women still tend to be paid less than men. There have also been remarkable improvements in women's educational attainments, and female education is found to be positively correlated with their workforce participation. Overall, the findings indicate an improvement in women's status in Bangladesh.

- Nazneen, S., 2004, 'Gender Relations in Bangladesh: The Household and Beyond. Dowry, Women's Property Rights and Salish – A Literature Review', CARE Bangladesh

<http://www.carebd.org/Gender%20Relations%20in%20Bangladesh.pdf>

This literature review looks at how gender relations are constructed in Bangladesh and how women's agency or power to take decisions and make choices is exercised within the rural household, the more extended circle of family and friends and the wider community. It also explores existing literature on institutional arrangements that undermine women's ability to gain greater agency over their lives. These include the emergence of the dowry system, women's property rights, and *salish* (an informal, traditional system of justice). Some of the key points are:

- Women's access to resources and social networks is mediated by men, leaving women no choice other than marriage. Increased economic opportunities for women in recent have enabled them to begin challenging patriarchal social norms.
- Spontaneous protests by women at the grassroots level have been recorded, to demand better services or to attain a specific social goal. The formation of women into groups represents significant change, because women did not previously have extra-household relations, other than with relatives and kin groups. These groups can be key sources of information and forums for the expression of dissent. Women belonging to such groups have dealt with domestic violence and the threat of divorce.
- Access to credit has improved women's sense of self-worth, decision making power and status within the household. However, credit interventions have not changed the sexual division of labour. Further, they may contribute to violence against women, when women resist male control over how credit is used or ask their husband for repayment instalments.
- Virtually all women in Bangladesh are landless; very few own property under their own name, and only a small fraction receive their legal share of inheritance. Most women give up their claim voluntarily to ensure their brothers' support in the case of marriage breakdown. A systematic analysis of the connection between inheritance law, land ownership and women's bargaining power is required.

Health

- Collin, S. M., Anwar, I. and Ronsmans, C., 2007, 'a Decade of Inequality in Maternity Care: Antenatal Care, Professional Attendance at Delivery and Caesarean Section in Bangladesh (1994-2004)', International Journal for Equity in Health, Vol. 6

<http://www.equityhealthj.com/content/6/1/9>

This paper looks at progress made towards improving access to emergency obstetric care in Bangladesh. It analyses data from four demographic and health surveys conducted between 1993 and 2004. It finds that during this period utilisation of antenatal care increased from 24 per cent to 60 per cent; professional attendance at delivery increased by 50 per cent, and caesarean sections trebled. However, within these trends there were huge inequalities: 86 per cent of live births among the richest urban women with secondary or higher education were attended by a health professional, compared with only 2 per cent of live births among

the poorest rural women without formal education. The paper concludes that there has been progress in improving uptake of antenatal care and in equipping health facilities to provide emergency obstetrics care; however, the very low utilisation of these facilities, especially by poor women, is a major impediment to meeting the Millennium Development Goal 5 in Bangladesh.

- Anwar, A. T. M. I. et al, 2004, 'Inequalities in Utilization of Maternal Health Care Services: Evidence from Matlab', World Bank, Washington DC
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/HEALTHNUTRITIONANDPOPULATION/Resources/281627-1095698140167/RPP2Bangladesh.pdf>

This discussion paper investigates the implications of introducing a facility-based maternity care strategy in rural Bangladesh. The study examines the extent to which poorer women in the community used emergency obstetric care (EOC) services and what factors determine the use of these services. The main findings include:

- Women from poorer households used EOC much less than women from better-off households;
- Overall facility use increased, although economic disparities continue; and
- Non-economic factors which contributed to use of maternity care included area of residence, number of antenatal visits, birth order, maternal education and age and year of delivery.

The findings suggest that providing free services does not ensure equity. To reduce maternal mortality rates, the authors argue that there needs to be a focus on efficient and effective programmes. In addition, services must be client focused, needs based, of high quality and within the reach of the poorest. Other access barriers also need to be explored and addressed to ensure that maternal health care services are equitable, efficient and effective.

Education

- Ahmed, M. and Chowdhury, R., 2005, 'Beyond Access: Partnership with Quality and Equity', Global Campaign for Education
http://www.campaignforeducation.org/resources/Feb2005/bangladesh_beyond_access_paper.doc

This paper critically examines the concepts of gender parity, gender equality and gender equity as used in Education for All (EFA) discourse and practice. It looks at the experience of Bangladesh where parity has been achieved but where challenges that remain. It recommends key action points for shaping the strategy and practices for building partnerships to advance girls' education. The authors discuss some of the ways that Bangladesh has achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education in the last decade. They also highlight, however, that overall, large-scale deprivation characterises primary education in Bangladesh as a result of poverty and disadvantage. Over 40 percent of the children eligible for primary education do not participate in a full cycle of primary education. Furthermore, enrolment and participation rates are not reflective of the quality of education that children are receiving. The paper reports that:

- One-third of the children remained non-literate or semi-literate after going to school for five years.
- Women lagged 12 percentage points behind males for population 11 years and above and 14 percentage points behind for 15 years and above.
- The proportion of female teachers remains low at all stages and types of education.
- The representation of girls in higher technical and professional education as well as general tertiary education remains low with a slow pace of increase in female participation.

The paper suggests a number of key principles to shape the strategy for building a partnership for girls' education, including:

- a recognition of inequity and deprivation in primary education as a serious problem and a commitment to deal with it: for example, through adopting equity

and affirmative action in favour of disadvantaged groups as a key criteria in the allocation of resources and budgets for education programmes ; and subjecting education policy and programme decisions as well as resource allocation and budgets to poverty impact analysis;

- decentralisation, local planning and management: initiate the development and trial of decentralised planning and management in a few districts. This should include decisions about personnel, resources and the academic programme.
 - a greater voice of stakeholders at all levels: periodic sharing of information and plans, and monitoring of progress; building strong Parent Teacher Associations and encouraging them to take an active role.
- Shafiq, M. N., 2007, 'A Reversal of Educational Fortune? Educational Gender Gaps in Bangladesh', Indiana University Working Paper
http://search.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1014512

This study finds evidence that educational gender gaps for children have reversed in favour of girls. In urban Bangladesh, boys are:

- less likely to be enrolled in school (between 7.4 percent and 27.4 percent);
- likely to have fewer years of schooling (between 0.4 and 1.5 years); and
- less likely to be fully literate (between 9.7 percent and 20.8 percent).

In rural areas, the study finds that boys are:

- less likely to be enrolled (between 7.7 percent and 23.4 percent);
- likely to have fewer years of schooling (between 0.4 and 1.0 years); and
- less likely to be fully literate (between 9.7 percent and 30.8 percent).

The paper suggests various hypotheses for the reversal of the gender gap, including economic growth, trade, improvements in labour market conditions, information campaigns, compulsory schooling laws, a child labour ban, educational cost-reduction interventions, low indirect costs of education, favourable marriage markets, access to birth control and microfinance. The author points out that more qualitative and quantitative research is needed to assess the validity of these hypotheses.

- Amin, S. and Huq, L., 2008, 'Marriage Considerations in Sending Girls to School in Bangladesh: Some Qualitative Evidence', Population Council, New York
Please see attached: 'AminHuq'

This paper explores decisions about girls' school attendance through case studies in two rural areas of Northern Bangladesh, and analyses decisions about schooling in the context of marriage. The data show that the rise of dowry demands, a relatively recent practice among Muslims in this area, asserts an important and independent influence on marriage decisions and indirectly influences decisions about schooling. The authors argue that the influence of programmes such as the secondary school scholarships for girls are best viewed in the context of familial concerns about marriage and dowry. Although higher school achievement does not seem to influence levels of dowry paid, there appears to be a long lasting effect of scholarships for girls that reduces the gap in education between spouses.

Employment and Livelihoods

- Amin, S., forthcoming, 'Selective Inclusion or Active Discrimination? Women and the Labour Market in Bangladesh', in Osmani, S. R. (ed.), 'Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development: 2005-2006', Center for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka
Please see attached: 'AminLabour'

This chapter explores the nature of women's participation in the labour market (as measured by work for pay) to assess evidence of selective inclusion and discriminatory practices within the labour market. Using secondary data from labour market surveys as well as new analysis of data from a series of Demographic and Health surveys, the paper concludes that while there is evidence of increasing women's participation in the workforce, the nature of their participation is vastly different from men. Women's participation in the labour force is highly selective. Women with education are less likely to engage in paid work compared to women with no education. The

paper also finds that women who are married to men more educated than themselves are less empowered than women married to men of equal or less education. Differential rates of participation by men and women continue to play a part in determining earning differentials. In general, the main difference between women's and men's participation is that while men of all social and economic status are in the labour force, high social or economic status for women is associated with a withdrawal from workforce participation for women. Through analysis of correlates of work for pay, the paper concludes that women are increasingly engaged in economic activity within the home. Such participation occurs through self-employment and is facilitated by micro-credit programs. This pattern of workforce engagement calls into question the traditional dichotomy of the public and the private spheres and concludes that labour policies need to reach far beyond labour laws that are essentially premised on formal employment.

- Gibson, S. et al, 2004, 'Breaking New Ground: Livelihood Choices, Opportunities and Tradeoffs for Women and Girls in Rural Bangladesh', IDL Group, Dhaka
<http://www.theidgroup.com/downloads/New%20Women%20and%20Girls.pdf>

This report, based on interviews with women and girls from eleven villages in rural Northwest and Southeast Bangladesh, focuses on the trends, broad directions of change and new opportunities and threats that were emerging as a result of the changing rural context. The main findings of the report are:

- More women are working for pay – especially poor women. However, often this work is poorly paid, insecure, and seasonal. Women's employment is also often seen as necessary only in so far as it contributes to the household income. However, individual women still benefit from increased opportunities to work.
- There is reduced maternal mortality and an increase in the acceptance and availability of skilled attendance at birth.
- Women and girls have been able to take up new transportation options.
- The introduction of cash for school and stipend programmes in the education sector have resulted in a widespread appreciation of the importance of girls' education. It is now considered normal – essential even – that girls attend secondary school. However, completion to Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) levels is less common, and is a source of concern.
- Marriage patterns are affected by the increasing attendance at school, and expectations for 'what a girl can do' have changed. However, there has been an increase in the incidence of violence against women – particularly young girls. This restricts their livelihoods choices.

This report begins with a brief look at some of the important changes that have characterised rural Bangladesh in the last decade and introduces a framework for understanding change from a women and girls' perspective (Sections 2 and 3). Sections 4-6 look at the nature and impact of change in three realms: on the economic front, in the social-cultural context and on the human capital front. Section 7 reflects on the relationships between these different dimensions of change. The report concludes, in Section 8, with some broad conclusions and implications for DFID Bangladesh.

- Cartwright, J., Khandker, S. R. and Pitt, M. M., 2003, 'Does Micro-Credit Empower Women?: Evidence from Bangladesh', World Bank, Washington DC
http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/04/11/000094946_03040104075225/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf

Based on the results of survey carried out in rural Bangladesh in 1998-99, this paper examines the effects of men's and women's participation in group-based micro-credit programmes; as well as issues of women's autonomy and gender relations within the household. The results are consistent with the view that women's participation in micro-credit programmes helps to increase women's empowerment. Credit programme participation leads to women having a greater role in household decision-making, greater access to financial and economic resources, greater social networks, greater bargaining power compared with their

husbands, and greater freedom of mobility. Female credit also tended to increase spousal communication in general about family planning and parenting concerns. The effects of male credit on women's empowerment were, at best, neutral, and at worse, decidedly negative. Male credit had a negative effect on several arenas of women's empowerment, including physical mobility, access to savings and economic resources, and power to manage some household transactions.

- Salway, S., Jesmin, S. and Rahman, S., 2005, 'Women's Employment in Urban Bangladesh: A Challenge to Gender Identity', *Development and Change*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 317-349

This article is available from the DFID Library. Please email: library@dfid.gov.uk

Drawing on survey and ethnographic data, this article presents empirical evidence regarding the impact of work participation on poor women's lives in urban Bangladesh. Working for pay is common among poor, married women in Dhaka and working women commonly make an important contribution to household income. There is evidence that working women are more likely to manage money, shop for household provisions and move about outside the home than non-working women. Working women also appear better able to accumulate personal assets and take steps to secure their own well-being. Despite such signs of challenge to 'traditional' gender identity, the authors argue: "The meaning of women's work is constructed across household, community, labour market and even global economy, in such a way that it retains an inferior, secondary, and temporary status. This in turn means that the challenge posed to gender identities is contained, and the superiority of men within the family and wider society is maintained, despite changes in the balance of financial contributions. Within the household a very rigid division of responsibility persists. Though women may contribute to meeting the household's daily requirements, they are rarely designated as responsible for this. Men meanwhile contribute very little in the way of domestic labour. Furthermore, the high prevalence of verbal abuse within marriage among both working and nonworking women testifies to the persistence of male dominance. The mutually reinforcing effect of the inequalities within the family and those in the wider society is readily apparent. As long as gender ideologies continue to define women primarily as housewives, their work is perceived to be supplementary and therefore their lower remuneration is legitimized. Their low and insecure earnings in turn make it difficult for women to be economically independent and so reinforce their identity as dependent minors...Though discrimination against women is multifaceted, physical insecurity stands out as a particularly severe constraint on women's options. In common with several recent studies...fear of robbery and rape was a common theme in women's narratives. Violence against women remains endemic and marriage is seen as the only means of obtaining a degree of protection." (pp. 344-345)

Marriage Customs

- Mahmud, S. and Amin, S., 2006, 'Girls' Schooling and Marriage in Rural Bangladesh', in Hannum, E. And Fuller, B. (eds.), 'Research on the Sociology of Education, Volume 15: Children's Lives and Schooling across Societies', JAI Elsevier/Science, Boston, pp. 71-99

See attached: 'Mahmud'

This paper argues that in Bangladesh, the ability of girls to complete schooling is compromised by poverty and the practice of early marriage. Although most girls enrol in school, dropout rates are high around puberty. Gross enrolment ratios at the secondary level are not only much lower than at the primary level, they also decline the older the girls are. More than one third of girls entering secondary school drop out before completing grade 10. This means that, although nearly all parents are investing in girls' schooling at the younger ages (under 12), many are less inclined to do so for older adolescent girls. Clearly, despite financial incentives for girls' secondary school attendance, the schooling of adolescent girls presents a more difficult cost-benefit trade off to parents, especially those under resource constraints. An important element of the cost-benefit tradeoff for parents is the marriage market. This paper uses a panel survey (2001 and 2003) of nearly 3000 adolescent girls in

rural Bangladesh to predict schooling outcomes. The analysis explores household and community factors to explain school enrollment, dropout and marriage. It finds that girls in poor households are more likely to drop out before reaching secondary school. Girls in wealthier households are more likely to drop out later, because of marriage, and having more siblings increases this possibility. Both of these are constraints to further expansion in girls' school attendance. "Getting girls to school was the first step; keeping them there and ensuring that they learn are logical consequences that must follow. That this is not happening represents the difficulty of 'adapting to success', because programs and interventions will have to be different and better delivered, raising issues of resources and governance. However, fairly low cost strategies like campaigns and slogans that change norms and perceptions about the value of education can still go a long way to increase enrollment in villages where school practices continue to be unfavorable to girls." (p.25)

- Amin, S., 2007, 'Variations in Marriage over Time and Space in Bangladesh', Background paper prepared for the World Bank Country Gender Assessment
Please see attached: 'AminMarriage'

This paper highlights that marriage in Bangladeshi society is characterised by universality, early marriage for women, the increasing practice of dowry, village exogamy and arranged marriages. The author notes that some studies have shown that the practice of dowry payments is on the rise, and in some parts of the country these have been reported to be as high or higher than the entire household's annual income. While these characteristics describe the average practice, this paper documents significant diversity in these practices depending on region, education group and religion. It reviews new data on marriage collected in 2006 to explore this diversity in an attempt to understand the forces of change shaping marriage and the role of marriage change in shaping the lives of women in Bangladesh. The paper states: "While there is increasing awareness that marriage practices have profound implications not only for the lives of women and men but also for how society is organized, relatively little known about what constitutes getting marriage right or how one goes about influencing evolving practices that are harmful." (p.2) The author argues that policy efforts which have to date been directed at changing early marriage practices should also focus on dowry trends.

Violence against Women

- Khan, F. C., 2005, 'Gender Violence and Development Discourse in Bangladesh', International Social Science Journal, Vol. 57, Issue 184, pp. 219-230.

This article is available from the DFID Library. Please email: library@dfid.gov.uk
This article argues that rapid social change over the last 30 years has dramatically altered the conditions of women's lives in Bangladesh. While women now enjoy greater access to resources and the capacity to act, this has also made some highly vulnerable to sexual violence, repression in workplaces, and religious persecution. The author argues: "There has not been adequate institutional preparation for the arrival of women into the public sphere. In a society where women have remained invisible for generations, economic development through private and public initiatives has very quickly thrown them outside their protected, albeit discriminatory private settings. The exploitation of their vulnerability and powerlessness in the marketplace as well as the backlash from the traditional patriarchy have left them with little safeguard and, hence, agency" (p.229). She concludes that current development policy in Bangladesh is seen as providing increased welfare for women through the process of economic development when, in fact, women are subjected to new and intensified forms of violence during these changes in the economy and society. These are urgent issues which are largely being ignored.

- Koenig, M. A., 2003, 'Women's Status and Domestic Violence in Bangladesh: Individual- and Community-Level Effects', Demography, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 269-288
This article is available from the DFID Library. Please email: library@dfid.gov.uk

This article explores the determinants of domestic violence in two rural areas of Bangladesh. The research found that higher socioeconomic status, non-Muslim religion, and extended family residence were associated with lower risks of violence. It also found that higher education for women is strongly inversely related to domestic violence in highly conservative rural settings in Bangladesh. However, the relationship between women's empowerment, at both the individual and community levels, appears to be much more nuanced and context specific. In the more culturally conservative areas, higher individual-level women's autonomy and short-term membership in savings and credit groups were both associated with significantly elevated risks of violence. "The nature of this relationship, appears to hinge, to a considerable degree on where, on the continuum of gender relations and women's status a particular setting is situated...Women's greater overall mobility, decision-making power, and control of resources may instead reinforce or solidify nascent normative changes in gender relations...These changes bring with them attendant changes in men's behavior vis-à-vis women, including the unquestioned right of husbands to resort to physical violence with their wives. Participation in savings and credit groups by women may similarly act to enhance solidarity among women and reinforce changes in gender relations - including the right of men to resort to violence - which may already be under way". (p. 285)

- Schuler, S. R., Bates, L. M. and Islam, F., 2008, 'Women's Rights, Domestic Violence and Recourse Seeking in Rural Bangladesh', *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 326-345

This article is available from the DFID Library. Please email: library@dfid.gov.uk

This article aims to understand why abused women in a resource-poor rural setting rarely seek recourse and, when they do, have so little success. It uses data from in-depth interviews and group discussions to explore the range of responses to domestic violence (DV) and to examine barriers to recourse seeking. The findings of this research illustrate how the combination of poverty and gender inequality, inequities in the legal framework, and patriarchal attitudes and corruption in both formal and informal institutions at the local level discourage abused women from seeking recourse and decrease the likelihood of a favourable outcome when they do. The authors state: "...women are vulnerable to DV because few alternatives are open to them. Their access to economic and social resources primarily derives from marriage, and they have virtually no viable life options outside marriage. When violence occurs within marriage, women typically feel they have nowhere else to go; poverty undermines the ability of families to provide sanctuary and alternative living arrangements for abused daughters and sisters, particularly when family resources have already been stretched to pay dowry. Abused women's lack of options puts them in a weak bargaining position so that they cannot easily prevail on others to stop the abusive behaviour. Scarcity of resources, at both the national and local levels, also limits the institutional resources that might be used to provide the range of medical, psychological, legal, and material support that abused women typically need, and gender inequality is one reason that DV is not given greater priority in allocation of resources. Inequities in the legal framework (e.g., fathers have more rights over their children than mothers do) and weaknesses in formal and informal institutions at the local level that foster patriarchal attitudes and breed corruption discourage abused women from seeking recourse through the shalish or court system" (pp. 340-341).

6. Additional information

Author

This query response was prepared by **Seema Khan**: seema@gsdrc.org

Contributors

Dr Sajeda Amin, Population Council, New York
Maitreyi Bordia Das, World Bank

Websites visited

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, CARE, Center for Policy Dialogue Bridge, Eldis, Google, Google Scholar, GSDRC, IDL Group, Ingenta journals, IDS, Population Council, Siyanda, UNDP, UNESCO, World Bank

About Helpdesk research reports: Helpdesk reports are based on 2 days of desk-based research. They are designed to provide a brief overview of the key issues; and a summary of some of the best literature available. Experts are contacted during the course of the research, and those able to provide input within the short time-frame are acknowledged.

Need help finding consultants?

If you need to commission more in-depth research, or need help finding and contracting consultants for additional work, please contact consultants@gsdrc.org (further details at www.gsdrc.org/go.cfm?path=/go/helpdesk/find-a-consultant&)