



Thrown Out on the Streets: Domestic Violence Survivors and Shelter Homes in Bangladesh

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to

My late mother, Hosne Ara Mannan, whom I lost in 2006 and yet whose spiritual presence has always been a source of inspiration;

My father, Al-Haj Abdul Mannan, who has always been there for me every step of the way, for whom no request was too big. This is for you, Abba, with my love;

My two sons, Shabab and Lovan, the two most precious gifts I have ever been given. You give me so much joy, love, inspiration, strength and encouragement. This comes with love for to you both;

My husband, Didarul Alam, who continuously encourages me to pursue higher education, has been beside me always and believes in my ability, Thank you for your patience and support for my dreams and goals and also believing in me. This is for you, with my love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page no |
|--|---------|
| Dedication | i |
| Synopsis | vi |
| Deceleration | ix |
| Acknowledgements | x |
| Abbreviations & Glossary | xiii |
| Chapter One: Introduction | 1 |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Statement of the problem | 2 |
| Rationale for this study | 5 |
| Research aims | 10 |
| Thesis structure | 10 |
| Chapter Two: Historical and Theoretical Explanations of Domestic Violence | 13 |
| A brief history of domestic violence | 14 |
| Domestic violence and feminist waves and movements | 16 |
| Debates about defining and naming domestic violence | 18 |
| Theoretical underpinnings of the causes of domestic violence | 21 |
| Common effects of domestic violence | 43 |
| Strategies to eliminate domestic violence | 45 |
| Concluding remarks | 51 |
| Chapter Three: The Position of Women in Bangladesh Society | 53 |
| Introducing Bangladesh as an independent country | 54 |
| The 1972 Bangladeshi government's responses to emerging women's issues | 55 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Socio-cultural situation of women in Bangladesh | 59 |
| Women and religion in Bangladesh | 71 |
| Women's access to education in Bangladesh | 75 |
| Women and work in Bangladesh | 81 |
| Policies and responses to violence against women in Bangladesh | 87 |
| Concluding remarks | 95 |
| Chapter Four: Methodology | 96 |
| Feminist research and qualitative approaches in studying domestic violence | 96 |
| My position and role as a researcher in the field | 99 |
| Data collection techniques | 101 |
| The data collection process and interview schedule | 110 |
| Data analysis | 114 |
| Ethical considerations: Consent, confidentiality and safety | 115 |
| Minimizing risks | 118 |
| Limitations of the research | 123 |
| Problems faced during data collection | 124 |
| Concluding remarks | 126 |
| Chapter Five: Revealing the Truth: Women's Voices and Experiences of Domestic Violence in Bangladesh | 127 |
| Definition and perceptions of domestic violence | 128 |
| Factors that cause domestic violence | 138 |
| Other causal factors of domestic violence | 152 |
| Dark skin colour: the hidden truth | 153 |
| Consequences of domestic violence | 159 |
| Concluding remarks | 170 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter Six: Mothers-in-Law: Initiating/Increasing Violence against Daughters-in-Law | 172 |
| Gendered nature of domestic violence | 172 |
| Women’s violence against women | 173 |
| Mothers-in- law and their daughters-in-law | 174 |
| Mothers-in-law’s’ violence against their daughters-in-law in Bangladesh | 176 |
| “Living in a war zone” | 177 |
| Forms of abuse by mother-in-law | 185 |
| Background reasons for mother-in-law’s’ abuse | 195 |
| Importance of a good relationship between two females-in-law | 200 |
| Concluding remarks | 203 |
| Chapter Seven: Women’s Responses to Domestic Violence and Entering Shelters | 204 |
| Women’s responses to domestic violence | 205 |
| Factors retain women in an abusive marriage and barriers in help seeking | 216 |
| The other barriers in seeking outside intervention | 224 |
| Entering shelter as a last resort | 227 |
| Survivors’ experience of women’s shelters: empowering and/or imprisoning? | 232 |
| Concluding remarks | 241 |
| Chapter Eight: The Other Side: Domestic Violence from the Perspectives of Shelter Staff, Women Activists, NGO Executives and Policy Makers in Bangladesh | 242 |
| The respondents | 244 |
| Perceptions about the definition of domestic violence | 245 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Perceptions of the causes of domestic violence | 246 |
| Perceived consequences of domestic violence on women and children | 259 |
| Contradiction regarding perceptions and actions among respondents | 262 |
| Different forms of abuse experienced by some shelter staff and its effect on their service to resident women | 274 |
| Perspectives of shelter staff and other respondents about mother-in-law's' abuse | 279 |
| Concluding remarks | 289 |
| Chapter Nine: Discussion and Conclusion | 290 |
| Discussion and conclusion | 290 |
| New directions: implications for future research | 298 |
| What needs to be done? | 299 |
| References and Bibliography | 305 |
| List of Figures | |
| 1 Integrative feminist model for domestic violence | 43 |
| 2 Female enrolment in education (1980-2008) | 77 |
| 3 Percentage of enrolled students at public universities by sex | 77 |
| 4 Increase in women marrying men of lesser education | 80 |
| Appendices | |
| 1 Bangladesh Government permission for data collection from shelters | |
| 2. Introduction letter | |
| 3. Information letter | |
| 4 Consent form | |
| 5 Circumstances that permit women to apply for right to divorce | |
| 6 List of safety net program of MoWCA | |
| 7 Programs for women by different ministries | |
| 8 National, District, Thana and Union level VAW prevention committees | |

SYNOPSIS

This thesis examines women's experiences of domestic violence in Bangladesh. While significant research has been undertaken on domestic violence against women in Bangladesh, no research examines the issue from the point of view of the women who were brutalized, evicted from their marital homes and now live at state funded shelters. I focus on the experiences of women living in Bangladeshi shelters as they related them. The two main research questions addressed in this thesis are:

1. What are the factors that contribute to domestic violence against women in Bangladesh as drawn from the experiences of a specific group of survivors who are living in state funded shelters? How is domestic violence affecting their lives and well-being?
2. How do these women experience their lives in those state funded shelters?

These questions are addressed against the social, cultural and structural context of gender relations in Bangladesh. Women's position in both private and public domains are delineated and the international literature on domestic violence is reviewed. A discussion follows on the importance of gender relations in areas such as marriage, family, education and employment. The analysis of how domestic violence arises, is perceived, sustained and dealt with, leads to the finding that patriarchal social arrangements are one of the root causes of domestic violence on women perpetrated by their husbands and other family members. Other contributory factors are also investigated. The second major concern of this thesis is to explore the survivors' experience of living in shelters.

The thesis is grounded in interviews with sixteen women who were resident in shelter homes in different locations around Bangladesh during 2012 to 2013. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews explored women's experiences of abuse from husbands and other family members and their experience of living in shelter homes. Survivors were mostly economically dependent on husbands and had typically concealed their experiences of abuse to comply with rigid gender

constructions, even though they suffered physically and psychologically. It was only when the women were thrown out of their husband's house, abandoned or secretly divorced that they sought support from shelters. Interviews with fifteen policy makers, NGO executives, women's activists and government employees (shelter staff) were also conducted to identify their perspectives on issues related to domestic violence. This data was then thematically analysed. I engaged an integrated feminist model that includes consideration of psychological and sociological aspects. The objective of the feminist perspective of this thesis was to give voices to women who were completely voiceless in the patriarchal society, which ultimately caused their suffering.

Through analysis of the data collected, it became clear that there is a strong linkage between domestic violence and the patriarchal social and institutional structures in which gender relations have been socially, religiously, culturally and legally constructed. This thesis identifies how Bangladeshi women survivors, especially very poor women, experience many forms of domestic violence, not only abuse by their spouses but also by their mothers-in-law. Women's dark skin colour is also identified as a risk factor for DV, which has not been previously recognised in Bangladesh. In identifying women's dark skin colour issue and the mothers-in-law's presence and their active role either in initiating violence or supporting their son's violence against their daughters-in-law, new knowledge is generated about the nature and causation of domestic violence in Bangladesh.

In the exploration of the survivors' experience of the shelter homes I found that most of the survivors experienced mistreatment and abuse by shelter staff while they were living in shelter homes though these provided the roof over their head when they had nowhere to turn. Analysis of interviews with shelter staff found that most of them held strong patriarchal values and beliefs that subjugate 'other women', who are viewed as a subordinate class. I argue that the shelter staff adopted the mother-in-law's' position in dealing with survivors in the shelter. As the position of mother-in-law is one of the most powerful positions that women in Bangladesh can aim to achieve, intentionally or unintentionally it offers a model for structuring unequal relations between women in settings outside the family.

With the findings about mothers-in-law's' violence and the shelter homes in particular, the conclusion drawn from this study is that the problem of domestic violence is more complex than has been previously understood and that the solutions, such as shelter homes, are not as simple as they seem. The implications for policy and service provision that arise from my enquiry highlight the need to work from a new paradigm to challenge the existing power structure by redefining the social and cultural construction of women's roles and responsibilities. The findings also alert shelter home staff that they must adopt more 'women friendly' attitudes so that survivors can be best supported to start an independent life free from violence. It is also necessary for policy makers in all sectors to formulate and implement effective, timely and sustainable anti-domestic violence measures both in laws and programs.

DECLARATION

I, Nasima Akhter, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'Thrown out on the streets: domestic violence survivors and shelter homes in Bangladesh' contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief it does not include any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.



(Nasima Akhter)

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a long-term research process. I know it was difficult for them both at times, as I was only able to give them minimum attention during the final stages of writing. But thank you so much for your love and support and for being with me. My sons, Shabab and Lovan, you are a gift and have an undeniable share in this effort as you were my constant inspiration throughout the period. Words cannot express how much I value the togetherness that we had developed over the last few years despite the demands of this PhD.

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Although many people have contributed to this thesis, I alone bear responsibility for its contents, and for all the errors and lack of judgment.

ABBREVIATIONS & GLOSSARY

| | |
|------------|--|
| AD | Assistant Director |
| ATV | Alternative to Violence |
| ASK | Ain o Salish Kendro, a national NGO |
| BANBEIS | Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics |
| BBS | Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics |
| Birangonas | Bangladesh Liberation war raped victim |
| BMP | Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, a national NGO |
| BNWLA | Bangladesh National Woman Lawyer's Association |
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| DFAT | Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade |
| DG | Director General |
| DV | Domestic Violence |
| Dowry | A widely practised tradition; the groom or his parents demand money & gifts from the bride's parents as a pre-condition of marriage. |
| Dower/Mehr | The payment a Muslim groom commits to and actually pays to his would be bride as a token of his willingness to accept her responsibility |
| DWA | Department of Women's Affair |
| DWO | District Women's Officer |
| Fatwa | Religious verdict pronounced by clergies and/or village elders, political leaders |
| FSSP | Female Secondary Stipend Programme |
| GNP | Gross National Product |
| HRW | Human Rights Watch |

| | |
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| IDI | In-depth Interview |
| IGA | Income Generating Activities |
| LG | Local Government |
| LH | Learned Helplessness |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goals |
| MoWCA | Ministry of Women and Children Affair |
| MSPVAW | Multi Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women |
| NGO | Non Government Organisation |
| NORAD | Norwegian Development Agency |
| NOW | National Organisation for Women |
| PM | Policy Maker |
| RMG | Ready-made Garments |
| Salish | A traditional body for conflict resolution through mediation |
| Staff | Shelter workers and officers |
| Upazilla | Sub-district |
| UN | United Nations |
| UN Women | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNIFEM | United Nations Development Fund for Women |
| UNO | Upazilla Nirbahi Officer |
| US/USA | United States of America |
| VAW | Violence against Women |
| WA | Women Activist |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WSP | Women's Support Programme |

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

He wanted to gouge out my eyes with his fingers, dragged me by hair on the floor, bit my face and chewed off part of my nose – my husband, frequently assaulted me during our 10-year conjugal life – I tolerated all sorts of his torture considering the future of my only daughter (Manzur quoted in the Prothom Alo 2011).

This excerpt is from the story of Rumana Manzur, a faculty member of a renowned public university in Bangladesh, who was barbarously assaulted by her husband in 2011 and as consequence, lost her eyesight. Rumana's story shocked Bangladeshi society and raised public awareness to a new level about the supposed effectiveness of some protective factors against domestic violence (DV), particularly the role of women's education and empowerment. The severity of this violence against a highly educated woman indicates that regardless of class, status and power, it is possible for all women in Bangladesh to be brutalised by their intimate partners. However, this study is not about middle or upper class Bangladeshi women's experiences of DV but about women with much lower class status and much less access to resources.

This study explored women's experiences of domestic violence by primarily using the testimonies of a particular group – women who sought refuge in one of the six Bangladeshi DV shelter homes. Most women who seek help from these shelters are from impoverished backgrounds. Unlike Rumana, the women victims/survivors do not have professional careers or paid staff at home to assist with household chores. Most do not get the chance to go to college let alone university. So the group of women represented in this study have fewer life choices, a greater chance of being burdened by disease and much less prospect of drawing public attention and sympathy when subjected to any kind of violence (UNICEF 2000). As this study also focused on the DV shelter homes in

Bangladesh, I investigated the perceptions and experiences of shelter staff and managers, policy makers, NGO workers and activists. I was keen to investigate why large numbers of Bangladeshi women are being abused (HRW 2012; Naved et al. 2006) and how the government funded shelter homes respond to residents' needs and concerns. I explore whether these shelters are helpful in response to domestic violence.

In this Introductory Chapter I outline the rationale for the study and structure of this research. I start with the statement of the problem. This is followed by my rationale for this study. I then briefly present the aims and central research questions. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis.

Statement of the problem

In her relatively small land size of 144,000 square kilometres, today Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the world (Rashid 2010). Currently the official estimate of the total population of Bangladesh is 159.6 million (BBS 2015). The People's Republic of Bangladesh came into existence in 1971 after a war of liberation from Pakistan. The vast majority of the population (about 80%) live in the rural areas (BBS 2015). Poverty is widespread, and approximately 31.5 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line (DFAT 2015). Due to this extensive poverty, funding from international aid agencies and NGOs and their role are crucial to Bangladesh economy. Bangladesh is one of the largest Muslim countries in the world consisting of more than 89.6 per cent Muslim people. Hindus make up 9.3 per cent; other religious minorities including Buddhists and Christians are also present (BBS 2011). It is a conservative and traditional society (Koenig et al. 2003) where domestic violence against women is very common and severe (Afsana, Rashid & Thurston 2005, p. 3; Bhuiya, Sharmin & Hanifi 2003; Koenig et al. 2003, pp. 269-70; Naved et al. 2006; Schuler et al. 1996). According to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) multi-country study published in 2005, 61.7% of rural Bangladeshi women reported being physically abused by their husbands at some stage of their lives (WHO 2005). The first nationwide survey on domestic violence against women, conducted in 2011 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund, of

12,600 women randomly chosen across the seven divisions of Bangladesh drew public attention. The report of the survey claimed that an astonishing 87% of married women in Bangladesh were abused in the previous year by their husbands; of these, 65% were physically abused, 36% sexually, 82% mentally and 53% economically. Around half of the physically abused women had suffered severe injuries and had to go to the hospital. One third refused to visit a doctor despite severe injuries for fear of being thrown out by their husbands (BBS 2014). This survey revealed the terrible truth that the home is not always a safe place for most Bangladeshi married women, contrary to common belief.

The newspaper reports, NGOs' assessment and some of the official statistics reveal an increasing trend in DV in Bangladesh (Haq 2012). This rising scale of DV suggests that it is deeply rooted in Bangladeshi social structures and cultural traditions. As I explain throughout the thesis, social, religious and political institutions permit and sometimes encourage unequal power relations between men and women, thus promoting male supremacy over women (Karim 2006, p. 369; Jahan 1988, p. 200; Save the Children Sweden and UNIFEM 2006, p.10). Historically, government policies and programs about women generally tend to ignore DV, as often it is considered as a very private issue (MOWCA n.d., p.1). For the last two decades, women activists in Bangladesh have opposed the prevailing custom of treating domestic violence as a private matter. Instead, they have argued for it to be understood as a public issue with direct social, political and legal implications (Hossain & Hossain 2004), as understood in the United Kingdom, America and Australia (Dutton & Gondolf 2000, p. 323). Domestic violence against women has been discussed since the 1980s in Bangladesh (Hossain & Hossain 2004), and in 1992 six state run shelters were opened for DV survivors. Though women's organisations and activists have been pushing the government to enact a separate law criminalising DV, it was only in 2011 that the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act was passed. The law defines any physical, emotional, sexual violence or threat of violence by any family member as an action of DV against women. More importantly, this law emphasizes economic loss as an act of DV and recognises the wife's right to live in a 'shared residence'. Women are given the right to seek a protection order

against their husbands (MoWCA 2010a). Nonetheless, the incidences of such crimes are still on rise (Haq 2012) and not efficiently recorded in official statistics. This study, then, is timely as it examined women's experience of domestic violence in Bangladesh and the effects such violence has on women's health and wellbeing in the context of DV survivors living in the state funded shelter homes. As a significant part of the state's response to DV, it is also important to explore the women's experiences of their time in DV shelter homes.

My motivation to conduct this research

I am a married Bangladeshi woman, born and brought up in a Muslim family. I have worked for several years as a magistrate and coordinator in a Violence against Women (VAW) prevention cell and a shelter home for survivors and also in a project named Safe Custody for Girl, Adolescent and Women Victims run by the Department of Women's Affairs under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. My everyday dealings with the different kind of sufferings of women, especially domestic violence issues, developed my interest in identifying why a large number of women continue to be violated by their sexual partners/husbands. Through these experiences, I became aware that many women withdrew their complaints against their husbands, and some were even reluctant to admit to the police that violence had occurred. More than a few believed the violence was their fault.

In my role as a magistrate in a cell, I noticed many women initially hid their abuse. It was when the violence became intolerable, or they were driven away, that they sought formal help. Common reasons for hiding their abuse included maintaining family honour and not wanting to do anything to harm their children. Some survivors who lodged complaints in a VAW cell were scared because they were led to believe that Islam forbids women from disclosing 'private' information about their husbands. This view contradicts my understanding that there is no such provision in Islam.

I have other personal and professional motivations for conducting this research. I am personally committed to the pursuit of social justice and the creation of a non-

violent society. Part of this commitment involves challenging discrimination and violence against women. Domestic violence is a common problem with serious effects on women. I have witnessed the emotional, physical and economic cost of men's violence against women in the community. Yet, this thesis is not just about women's experiences of domestic violence. It is also about their experiences of related services, especially those provided through shelter homes. It is here that my practice and research interests coincide. My professional engagement with survivors complements my interest in researching women's experience of domestic violence who ended up in shelters. As stated earlier, my interest began as I was working with female survivors of DV and it was further fuelled when I started working at the shelter home, which led to a desire to investigate how shelter services contribute in assisting women who have experienced DV. Though my interviewees were a small and select group of women and may not be typical of all women who experience DV, it was important to find what caused these women to make their way to the government funded shelter homes and how these shelter homes responded to their need and priorities.

Rationale for this study

Domestic violence is often a deadly fact of life for millions of women and girls around the world. Globally, of all women killed in 2012, almost half were killed by intimate partners or family members (UN Women 2013). Every day in Bangladesh, there is at least one report of DV in the newspaper. It has often been said that no woman can be found in Bangladesh who has not been a victim of some form of violence at some stage of her life (Karim 2006, p. 368). However, it is difficult to accurately measure the prevalence of DV due to the sensitivity and the cultural framework of the issue (Wilcox 2006, pp. 161-162). In contemporary Bangladeshi society there is still the tendency to judge and stigmatise the victims of DV (Sayem & Khan 2012). Most of the survivors are reluctant to ask for help as they often feel they would not be believed or think that whomever they ask or wherever they go for help they would be blamed for the violence (Naved et al. 2006; Sayem & Khan 2012). As a result, women may be prevented from seeking help or openly sharing their experiences, resulting in an unknown number of DV incidents going unreported.

Reports from NGOs, women activists, print and electronic media indicate that there is a high incidence of DV in Bangladesh compared to other forms of violence against women (Haq 2012). These reveal stories of violent husbands who killed their wives by throwing acid or through serious bodily injury (BNWLA 2006-07). But women are often harshly criticised for disclosing the violence as it is widely viewed as 'direct confrontation' to social expectations (Anwary 2015; Farouq 2005; Wahed & Bhuiya 2007). Similar to other Asian countries, family honour is a most important cultural value in Bangladesh. Many women, believing this construct, become reluctant to disclose violence, thereby putting themselves at further risk.

Domestic violence is a major social problem that causes significant health problems for millions of women and children. Research has shown that Bangladeshi women suffer various immediate and long-term physical and psychological consequences, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, lowered self-esteem, emotional distress, suicidal thoughts, and suicidal attempts (Bates 2004, pp.10-12; Naved et al. 2012; Salam et al. 2006). While working with victims, I also observed that domestic violence can negatively affect women's employment prospects.

Bangladesh, as a signatory to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are a set of statistical and time-bound targets related to key achievements in human development set by the United Nations, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), is committed to reducing violence against women (United Nations 2005) and to improving the status of women. Therefore, researching violence against women is vital if the Bangladesh government is to benefit from the rewards that come with meeting MDG goals (WHO 2005). Meeting MDGs attract more development assistance which accelerate national progress that ultimately helps to build a positive image of Bangladesh to international community. As the elimination of violence against women is central to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, it is important to investigate the main issues surrounding DV and its impact on women

and their wellbeing. Understanding the complex phenomenon of DV is important if women in Bangladesh are to feel empowered to take action against the violence perpetrated against them.

The Bangladesh government has enacted a range of legislation, and women's organisation have developed various approaches to address DV, partly to respond to the MDGs and to fulfil the commitment to CEDAW and partly to attract future donor organisations. Many initiatives and programs for violence against women are taken by Bangladesh Government. Among these, in 1986, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) introduced a Women's Support Program (WSP) to support destitute¹ women and victims of violence. In 1992, with the financial support from the Norwegian Development Agency (NORAD), the MoWCA set up six shelter homes in six divisional cities in order to provide socio-legal support to women victims (DWA 2012). Each shelter is designed to serve up to 50 women and 100 children at a given time. From the establishment of the shelters until January 2013, a total of 5,014 women survivors and 4,666 children were served by these six shelter homes (DWA 2013). From January to December 2012, these six shelters served only 570 women (DWA 2012). The total number of ever married women is approximately 46.5 million in 2011 (BBS 2012a) and 87% of married women were found victims of DV in a recent national survey (BBS 2014). The scenario reflects the truth that these shelters are nothing but a drop in the ocean for Bangladeshi married women.

In western countries, shelter services have usually been founded on feminist initiatives² (e.g. Theobald 2015). However, I did not find any documents about how, or whether, women's rights activists and feminists contributed to the establishment of shelters in Bangladesh. The available information indicated that the Beijing Platform for Action, the commitment to CEDAW and the growing

¹The Bangladesh government officially uses the word 'destitute' for helpless, impoverished women.

²The formation of the women's refuge movement in Victoria, Australia was informed by a range of feminist ideas. The first Victorian women's refuge emerged in 1974 from the radical feminist agenda for social change (Theobald 2015).

incidence of violence against women prompted the Bangladesh government to establish these shelters (CEDAW 2010).

Currently there are six VAW cells and six shelters in six divisional cities run by the DWA under the supervision of the MoWCA. Any woman who experiences any kind of domestic violence can apply for legal assistance in the VAW cells. After lodging a complaint, she attains the right to apply for shelter with two children (aged not exceeding 12 years) for up to six months (MoWCA 2013-14). From the DWA's annual report for 2013-2014, it was found that from July 2013 to June 2014, a total of 1,061 women lodged DV cases in the six divisional VAW cells. This report did not mention how many women were provided shelter in this time period. However, according to the DWA's monthly reports (which I obtained from the MoWCA during my data collection in Bangladesh), in January 2012, a total of 100 new cases were lodged in the six VAW cells, and of these a total of only sixteen women were provided shelter in the six shelter homes (DWA 2013). It is worth to mention that those sixteen were taken in on top of women who were already residents in six shelters. However, the number of shelters is inadequate as part of a response to the massive problem of DV and to support a large number of women who need them.

While identifying the issues of domestic violence in Bangladesh, I explored survivors' experiences of living in the shelter homes provided by the DWA. It is important to discover how and to what extent the shelter homes contribute to meeting residents' needs and priorities. If shelter services are to meet abused women's needs effectively, the experiences and views of the women who are using these services needs to be acted on (Hague & Mullender 2006, p. 573). These women's voices have hitherto been overlooked in Bangladesh, and therefore, it is essential to know whether the provision of these services adequately address survivors' needs. My study of the shelter services by listening to the women residents could contribute to an improvement in the shelters' responses to the concerns and needs of shelter residents.

Some DV research exists in Bangladesh, although much more research is needed. For instance, there is DV research by medical practitioners (see Khanom et al. 2010), which have been general rather than in-depth explorations of issues related with DV academics. Academic research on DV has tended to focus on the patriarchal settings, masculinity and women's subordination, unequal gender relationship and the failure to implement of laws, as causes of DV in Bangladesh (Ameen 2005; Anwary 2015; Chowdhury 2009; Sultana 2003). Some research by women's rights activists, women's organisations and research organisations (Azim 2001; BNWLA 2002, 2004; Mannan 2002; Naripokkho & BMP n. d.; Siddique 2011) provided information about structural inequality, poverty, education, culture, personal laws and misinterpretation of religious teaching as causing and sustaining DV. Several other researchers also documented the issues related to DV, its impact on women and women's help-seeking behaviour and coping strategies (Hadi 2010; Naved & Persson 2010; Sayem & Khan 2012). However, some of these studies were undertaken to collect data on violence as part of larger studies focusing on a broader range of social issues (Naved et al. 2006, pp. 2918-19). In contemporary Bangladesh there is no research that specifically focuses on the experiences of women survivors, who were either abandoned, secretly divorced and/or thrown out of their husbands' houses and who started living in shelter homes. My research aimed to fill this gap by exploring the experience of women who ended up at shelters. Moreover, of the survey and interview research related to DV, most were conducted in mixed family settings where a woman was asked to reply to questions either in front of or surrounded by others. Likely to be subject to many social and cultural pressures not to disclose DV, women would find it very difficult to speak out when surrounded by others. Moreover, lack of privacy in interview settings would compromise the quality of the women's responses, as it is evident that women's disclosure rate was higher when the interview was conducted without other people present (Kelmendy 2013, p.561). This research aimed to develop knowledge of women's experiences of DV by qualitatively interviewing women individually, away from the influence of either the perpetrators or the natal family. It also aimed to develop knowledge from women's opinions about their life and experiences while staying at the shelters.

Research aims

Taking my professional experience as a starting point and extending it to the broader context, I strove to ascertain what the issues are that lead or encourage husbands to abuse wives in contemporary Bangladesh. My study focused on the experience of Bangladeshi women who live in the newly formed state funded shelters for women who are victims of domestic violence. It aimed to explore the factors contributing to domestic violence against these women, the impact of this violence on them, the pathways that have led them to seek support in the shelter homes, and their experiences of the shelter services. The specific research questions are articulated below:

- 1 What are the factors that contribute to domestic violence against women living in the government funded shelters?
- 2 How are women's lives and wellbeing affected due to domestic violence and what leads them to the shelters?
- 3 How do these women experience their lives in shelters?
- 4 How do shelter staff and management, policy makers, NGO executives and activists perceive domestic violence and the needs of women serviced through the shelters?

The overall objective of the research was to explore the factors contributing to domestic violence against women in Bangladesh living in state funded shelters and their experiences of the shelter services. In the process of this study, a form of DV, which has never been researched before in Bangladesh, was identified: DV perpetrated by the mothers-in-law. This is a major contribution to the discussion about DV more generally.

Thesis structure

The thesis is structured in nine chapters, as well as eight appendices. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two briefly highlights the history of DV in western countries. It provides a discussion of the theoretical explanations of domestic violence emphasising three important approaches: individualist theory, social structural and feminist theory. The individual explanations adopt a

psychological perspective, referring to consumption of alcohol consumption and the cycle of violence model. The social structural approach pays attention to the status, income and other issues connected to DV. Feminist perspectives of patriarchy are used to understand how DV is initiated and sustained in Bangladesh

Chapter Three discusses gendered relationships between men and women and existing socio-cultural practices in Bangladesh in the field of marriage, family, education and work. This chapter focuses on how gender identity is shaped by socio-cultural expectations, which in turn is manifested in gender relations. Issues such as women's roles and rights in marriage and family, women's position in religion and education and women's involvement in paid work are discussed and women's lack of power and subordination in the family and the larger society are described.

Chapter Four describes the choice of research methodology and research design. In particular, the chapter argues the merits of the feminist standpoint theory for exploring domestic violence. The chapter also includes detailed consideration of the ethical considerations, the provision of emotional and physical safety for both the researched and the researcher when interviewing in the field of domestic violence, the recruitment of the participants, the interview process and the data analysis.

Chapters Five, Six, Seven, and Eight present the research findings, which were obtained by a thematic analysis of the audio-recorded interview transcripts of individual interviews. The interviewees were sixteen residents of six DV shelters in Bangladesh and seven shelter staff and managers, four policy makers, two women activist and two NGO executives. The thematic findings presented in Chapter Five illustrate the survivors' experiences and perceptions of issues that increase their risk of abuse. Chapter Five also describes how women define DV and identify its causes and implications for them and their children. Chapter Six focuses on a different issue: mother-in-law's' violence against daughter-in-law. Analysis of the interviews revealed that the majority of survivors described the

ways in which mothers-in-law perpetrated DV. They accused their mothers-in-law as much as their husbands for initiating or instigating DV against them. This chapter focuses on how and why mothers-in-law abuse their daughters-in-law. Chapter Seven presents women's diverse responses to DV and also discusses the circumstances that finally led women to seek help from shelters. The chapter also explores women's experiences and expectations about shelter services.

Chapter Eight considers the responses of the women's activists, NGO executives, shelter staff and policy makers with respect to factors, causes and consequences of DV against women. It also analyses the attitudes of shelter workers and the other participants towards DV survivors, particularly the resident women. The chapter also discusses how some of the staff also experienced abuse from their husbands and mothers-in-law in their personal lives and how this experience influences their service to the resident women.

Chapter Nine summarizes the findings and includes a consideration of the psychological and sociological aspects of DV, particularly patriarchy, with the aim of demonstrating the interaction of the patriarchal cultural and the political and social structures that have promoted an environment in which domestic violence occurs and is sustained. The experiences of shelter services provided by the residents suggest that, to date, the Bangladesh government has been providing very inadequate and short-term services. Long-term, integrated and strategic approaches for shelters including practical support for women regarding housing, need based training on income generating activities, and access to employment are needed to meet the Bangladesh government's commitment to eradicating all forms of violence against women, particularly DV.

CHAPTER TWO

Historical and Theoretical Explanations of Domestic Violence

Violence against women appears to be a universal phenomenon, regardless of socio-economic status, educational qualifications, religious identity and geographic region (Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 22; Garcia-Moreno et al. 2015; Levinson 1989; Richardson et al. 2002). Over the last three decades numerous researchers and practitioners have identified domestic violence (DV) against women as a horrifying social problem (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005; Hayward 2000; Jahan 2000; Resko 2010, p. 1). Across the world women, as victims of DV, suffer most (Renninson & Welchans 2000; WHO 2005). DV is related to women's multiple victimisation (Cavanaugh et al. 2012; Morley & Mullender 1994, p. 5), including a denial of women's fundamental human rights (Bond & Phillips 2001, p. 482).

This study focuses on women's lives with a view to developing a thorough understanding of DV. In my view, it is crucial to adopt a feminist perspective that emphasizes the close relationship between patriarchy and DV (Aisyah 2007, p. 23; Anwary 2015; Danmant et al. 2008). This perspective is relevant to the study of DV in Bangladesh because there the patriarchal system operates to subordinate women (Chowdhury 2009).

This chapter is divided into Six Sections and reviews some of the research on domestic violence from Western countries in order to consider how these Western epistemologies might explain DV in Bangladesh. The First Section starts with the history of DV. Addressing the history of female and wife subordination is vital to understanding contemporary domestic violence (Belknap 2014; Dobash & Dobash 1979; Kurz 1993). The Second Section discusses feminists' contribution to bringing DV issues out of the private into the public realm. Critical debates about definitions and terminology of violence in the home are discussed in the Third Section. Exploring the different terms is important so as to identify a wide range of issues related with DV. The next Section is the central focus of the chapter, and

presents my critical analysis of some theoretical explanations of the causal factors of DV. Theories are important in understanding various factors and also in identifying proper strategies for addressing DV problems (Bowman 2003). I critically examine feminist theory and some other family and socio-structural perspectives that seem appropriate in explaining DV in Bangladesh. The consequences of DV on women and others are discussed in the Fifth Section, while the Sixth Section critically reviews a selection of strategies used to address DV and the Seventh Section concludes the chapter.

A brief history of domestic violence

Domestic violence is an ancient problem with a long history (Buzawa, Buzawa & Stark 2012, p. 53). This history is important because it still influences contemporary expressions of domestic violence. According to Ammerman and Harsen (1991), throughout history wife battering has been overlooked and even encouraged through both formal and informal support. Legal and cultural precedents to a degree authorized a husband to chastise his wife. Roman husbands had the right to chastise, divorce and/or kill their wives if they committed certain crimes, particularly adultery (Corbett 1930, pp. 128-9; Gelles 1987; Pahl 1985, p. 3). In the late 1400s, Friar Cherubino of Siena in his 'Rules of Marriage' operationalized the notion that a husband had the right to beat his wife: 'take up a stick and beat her soundly, not in rage but out of charity and concern for her soul, so that the beating will rebound to your merit and her good' (O'Faolain & Martines 1973, p. 177).

The Western Common and Statute law also condoned husbands' right to beat their wives without incurring legal penalty (Phillips 1988, pp. 324-25). The expression, 'rule of thumb' gave legal justification in English Common Law, allowing a husband to discipline his wife with instruments not thicker than the man's thumb (Pahl 1985, p.11; Rutherford & MacKay 2013, p. 8). Similar to ancient Greece and Rome, the British Common Law has historically viewed women as men's property, belonging to their fathers until marriage, and then shifting the ownership to their husbands' (Katz 1974, p. 33). The legal theory 'Coverture' also transformed women's legal existence to the husband during

marriage, considering husband and wife as one person. The real effect of coverture was that married women could not own property, make contracts, and sue or be sued in court. Because a woman did not exist as a separate entity in the eyes of law (Hymowitz & Weissman 1978, pp. 22-23), she could not take legal action against her husband for his abuse.

Compounding the problem was the privacy of domestic homes that was increasingly often officially recognised in the West. During the 19th and the early 20th centuries, with the expansion of suburbia, secrecy and privacy were the major issues. For many the state had no right to peer into people's houses and adjudicate what went on there. One such example can be found in the statement of a North Carolina judge: 'if no permanent injury has been inflicted, nor malice nor dangerous violence shown by husband, it is better to draw the curtain, shut out the public gaze, and leave the parties to forget and forgive' (Roy 1977, p.14). The concept of privacy underpinned men's exercise of supremacy over women in general and the husband's superiority over his wife in particular.

Throughout history in the West, men's violence against women was kept secret by social acceptance (Allen 1990, p. 53) until feminism emerged as a challenger, unveiling this secrecy (Power 1998, p. 3). Feminists were instrumental in putting DV on the public map. As a result, men's right to 'chastise' their wives came to be significantly limited in some countries, particularly in the USA. However, public discussion of wife beating was still considered inappropriate until 1920 (Rutherford & MacKay 2013, p.7). Nevertheless, many researchers argue that DV against women and its consequences still do not get adequate attention (Garcia-Moreno 2000, p. 330; Heise, Pitanguy & Germain 1994, p. 1165; Rutherford & MacKay 2013; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz 1988). Why might this be? In an analysis of social work agencies' approach to family violence in the Boston area, Gordon (1988) claimed that family violence issues usually attracted public attention when feminism was strong and lost public attention when feminism was weak.

In the following sections I review some of the Western literature on DV and its application to Bangladesh. It is important to establish a theoretical position for the thesis and to see which theory and approach might best suit Bangladesh's situation.

Domestic violence and feminist waves and movements

The first wave of feminism spanned from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, while the second-wave spanned from the early 1960s through to the late 1980s. Both waves advocated that the official and unofficial inequalities of women be addressed.

During the first wave, middle and upper class American women asked for changes in many aspects of women's lives (Feder 1999, p. 18). The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 focused on women's experience of abuse in the family. Following the Convention, in 1854, the husband's right to discipline his wife was challenged before the New York State Legislature (Lutz 1940 cited in Feder 1999, p. 19).

The US women's movement of the mid-to late 1880s also drew attention to the subordination and vulnerability of women within the family (Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2010). Later, the women's Suffragist movement of the early 1900s brought light to the issue of marital violence (Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2010). The Suffragist movement in the US primarily emphasised women's right to vote as it was assumed that if women had voting rights they would achieve the power to challenge many injustices, including violence in the family (Ashcraft 2000, p. 3; Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 5).

The second wave of feminism and the women's movement in the West and the rest of the world in the late 1960s highlighted the problem of violence against women in the home (Taft 2003, p. 5). Particularly during the 1960s, the re-energised feminist movement prioritised the problems of subordination and victimization of women within the family (Schneider 2008). However, leading women's organizations, such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) in

the US initially did not focus on the domestic violence problem. In the late 1970s, media coverage again paid increasing attention to domestic violence, which resulted in increased public awareness of domestic violence as a problem for women. By 1976, NOW also recognised 'wife battering' as a priority issue (Schneider 2008).

Throughout the last decades of the twentieth century, the world wide feminist movement of the second wave challenged men's sense of entitlement to 'correct' their wives using physical and other forms of violence (Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2010; Dobash & Dobash 1979, pp. 4-9). Feminists, particularly radical feminists, drew attention to the need for the change of societal attitudes which blamed wives for the violence inflicted on them. Consequently women's organizations, together with the feminist movement, effectively mounted pressure on governments to protect battered women and demanded recognition of DV against women as a social problem rather than a private matter (Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2010; Dobash & Dobash 1979, pp. 6-10). Also during this period, feminist empirical research, the feminist movement more broadly, clinical observations, and media attention forced policy makers to recognise that 'violence within the family' was a common problem of modern society (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Levinson 1989). This recognition demolished the myth that the home is a safe and non-violent space, and established the truth that people are being killed, physically assaulted, hit, beaten, slapped by other family members in their homes in far greater numbers than by anyone anywhere else (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005; Gelles & Cornell 1990, p. 11). This is also relevant to Bangladeshi women who are regularly abused by their sexual intimates (BBS 2014; HRW 2012).

The recognition of violence against women as a social problem became part of the feminist agenda during the 1970s and 1980s in the Western and in some non-Western countries (Stanko 1995 cited in Hoyle 1998, p. 3). In India, issues of DV, especially 'dowry murder', occupied the forefront of the feminist agenda by the late 1970s (Narayan 1997, p. 92). In Bangladesh during the early 1970s, groups of middle class women exhibited a growing feminist consciousness by bringing issues of inequality and discrimination against women into public discourse

(Kabeer 1988, p. 110). Zaman (1999), a Bangladeshi socialist feminist, explained that this feminist movement transformed the problem of violence against women from being seen as a non-issue into being accepted as a social issue. Begum, a weekly women magazine also played a critical role in this transformation through changing women's perception regarding women's issues, such as marriage, family, motherhood, violence etc. This magazine had begun the revolution for Bangladeshi women as a way to pave the path to step out of their shells (Basher 2016).

One of the major contributions of the early feminist movement in the West was to identify men as the primary perpetrators of DV against women (Itzin 2000 cited in Hanmer & Itzin 2000, p. 366). Due to increasing international concern about the condition of women during the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985), different nations took a wide range of actions to reduce violence against women. Zaman rightly argued that it was women's organizations and partially the printed media that drew public attention to the severity of violence against women, both in the domestic and the public sphere, and made it a state concern (1999, pp. 38-40).

The global reach of women's campaigns on violence against women led the United Nations to adopt the first internationally legitimated definition of violence against women in 23 February 1994 as:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. (United Nations 1994)

Debates about defining and naming domestic violence

There are many debates about how to define violence against women. Sociologists Gelles and Cornell, who conducted in depth research on violence, defined violence as 'an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing physical pain or injury to another person' (1990, p. 22). This was a widely accepted 'common sense' definition that is now challenged. For example, Browne

and Herbert identified the limitations of this definition as, firstly, that the consequences of the acts or perceived acts are not taken into account; and secondly, that it focuses on physical violence, ignoring mental or psychological violence (1997, p. 4). There are forms of violence beyond the sexual and physical that are as destructive and frightening (Adams, Sullivan & Bybee 2008).

Feminists Cook and Bessant (1997, p. 9) defined violence as:

- (a) the use of force or constraints (legal or otherwise) to cause harm by commanding obedience to a required set of social or moral values;
- (b) action that denies agency to 'the victim' of that violence; or
- (c) both

This definition expanded the explanation of violence and rightly acknowledged both the effects of individual behaviour and the effects of institutional practices on individual agency.

Different terms have been used to encapsulate the Western women's experience of physical and psychological abuse in the context of intimate relationships. In 19th century Western society the term 'wife battering' was widely used, but in the 20th century the term 'domestic violence' received wide recognition (Bacchi 1999, p. 165). Since then various terms have been used internationally to indicate domestic violence: 'family violence', 'conjugal crime', 'interpersonal violence', 'wife abuse', 'spousal abuse', 'violence between intimates' and 'wife battering' (Hoyle 1998, p. 28; Walker 1990, pp. 34-5). Whilst these terms are often used interchangeably, they have specific political and social implications, sometimes intentional, 'about whether gender is considered as vital to explaining violence in intimate relationships' (Wangmann 2009, p. 22). Most of these terms do not encompass the gendered power relationships that so often characterize domestic violence in Bangladesh.

Debates about terminologies cut across the developed/developing countries divide. The term 'battered wives', for example, could be criticised as it fails to consider the violence between couples who are not legally married or who are already separated or divorced. Many feminists in the early 1980s also pointed out

the passivity implied in the term 'victims' and replacing it with 'survivors' (Kelly 1998). 1980s feminists emphasized women's strategies for coping, resisting and surviving DV (Hoyle 1998, pp. 27-28). Sokoloff and Dupont (2005, p. 55) noted that DV theorists advocate the importance of acknowledging the realities of both 'victimization and agency' among battered women.

However, the common term 'domestic violence' has also drawn some criticism as the word 'domestic' places the violence in the 'private sphere', which is difficult to regulate and punish (Marcus 1994, p. 26). Further, Mullender (1996, p. 8) stressed that it tends to trivialize the violence and fails to recognise the violence against separated or divorced women or violence that continues after women leave their abuser. Moreover, both the law and individual judges are likely to consider 'domestic violence' as disagreements or a 'quarrel between lovers' (Buzawa & Buzawa 2002). Marcus (1994, pp. 310-320) argued that the term 'domestic violence' should be replaced with 'terrorism in the home'.

Different groups of feminists have argued that the name applied to the problem must more accurately reflect the dimensions of the violence women experience. Naming is very important as it also helps to develop better thinking about how to eliminate violence. According to Bacchi:

The problem... is not just the particular phrase which is used to describe the issue, but as the ways in which a particular descriptor is deployed in a specific policy proposal to produce a particular problem representation. The point I am making here is the need to examine the ways in which terms or phrases like 'domestic violence' or 'family violence' function as part of problem presentation rather than analysing them out of context. (Bacchi 1999, p. 165)

There are forms of DV that women will or will not identify as violence, which also restricts their ability to seek formal or informal help. Language use influences help-seeking behaviour. I have chosen to use the term 'domestic violence' not only because I believe it accurately reflects the situation but also because it is the

preferred term in Bangladesh. Domestic violence takes a number of forms, which include physical, psychological, emotional and sexual violence, as well as threats, intimidation and economic deprivation. I use the language of 'domestic violence' almost exclusively, with occasional reference to 'spousal violence', 'wife abuse', or 'intimate partner violence' when I need to quote from other researchers' work.

In this thesis I define domestic violence³ as an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women in familial relationships. It occurs when family members attempt physically, psychologically or financially to dominate and control the other. This definition acknowledges various forms of abuse and correlates the acts with their function: that is to dominate the other person. While domestic violence affects various parties including spouse, parents, children and extended family, only married women in Bangladesh are considered here, in accordance with the objective of the research.

Having defined DV for this thesis, in the following section I consider some of the western literature that provide causal explanations for domestic violence. The section concludes with a discussion of the relevance of these theories to domestic violence in Bangladesh.

Theoretical underpinnings of the causes of domestic violence

Different theoretical perspectives can be adopted to understand domestic violence and to categorize and explain the characteristics of violent behaviour. Various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, criminology, victimology and interdisciplinary feminist research have offered different explanations for the causation of men's violence against women. I follow Jones (2004, p. 58) to categorize these explanations under the following theoretical constructs: individualist and structuralist. This categorization process helps in the primary understanding of the inter-relationship between different approaches and recognizes the possible areas of conflict and contradiction. Usually the disciplines of psychology, psychiatry and criminology tend toward individualist approaches,

³ The definition is partially captured in the definition adopted by the Australian Federal Government's Partnerships against Domestic Violence program (cited in Wangman 2009, p. 20)

whereas, sociology and social work tend to take a more structuralist perspective (Jones 2004, p. 58). Different feminist theories combine both individualist and structuralist approaches

Individualist theories of domestic violence

Individualist theories are concerned with the individual characteristics of perpetrators and victims. This approach places the individual at the centre of the problem and intervention. According to Miller and Knudsen (1999, pp. 709-710), individualist theories propose that violence occurs in a relationship due to the psychiatric disorders of the perpetrator. This approach claims that personality traits and personality disorders are mostly instrumental in initiating violence (Dutton 2006; Gelles, Loseke & Cavanaugh 1993). The central argument is that the psychopathological characteristics of the perpetrators, such as mental illness and abnormalities, low toleration of frustration levels, intolerance, depression, emotional dependency, alcoholism, experiencing or witnessing violence in childhood cause them to be violent (Jasinski 2001, pp. 6-12; Miller & Knudsen 1999, pp. 709-710). This theory is often regarded as the 'psychiatric theory'. Traditional criminologists have the same notion that violent behaviour increases mostly due to pathological or psychiatric illness (Aisyah 2007, p. 26).

In criminology, two categories of violence often are discussed: instrumental and expressive violence (Stanko 1994, pp. 41-2). Instrumental violence refers to the phenomenon of men wishing to establish control over partners and feeling justified in using violence for material gain or profit (James, Seddon & Brown 2002). On the other hand, the term 'expressive violence' focuses on men's espoused inability to control their anger (Stanko 1994, pp. 41-43; James et al. 2002) and generally occurs in intimate relationships (Aisyah 2007). The perpetrator is not blamed for any bad intention; rather the violence is considered to occur mistakenly as a consequence of the individual's psychiatric traits. With these justifications, which pathologies or proffer psychiatric reasons for violence, clinicians as well as criminologists have developed treatment programs especially for offenders, rather than assisting victims. Alternatively, clinicians or

criminologists sometimes recommend more police presence at the place where the violence occurs.

Most of these treatment programs consider that the perpetrator's emotional deficiency is likely to relate to developmental problems (Aisyah 2007). Through different therapies, clinicians often support the offender in order to modify their behaviour towards others (Adams 1990, p.179; Wilson 2013, pp. 394-398). Aisyah (2007) argued that these programs do not compel the offenders to realise the consequences of their violence towards women and children; rather, they often help to excuse perpetrators' behaviour by attributing it to past trauma and/or blaming the women for provoking the violence.

The individualist explanations for men's violence also include 'poor impulse control'. If men lack sufficient self-control, they are at risk of violence 'exploding' from within. This model suggests that if men are able to gain better control over their personality, the violence will cease. The model, however, fails to explain the situations where men are only violent and abusive toward intimates, usually in the home, but are non-violent against others outside the family (DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2011, p. 10). Therefore it would seem that men are able to control their violence and that the 'locus of violence is in the relational context, rather than within the individual' (Anderson & Schlossberg 1999, p. 139). This brings to light, rather than explains, the reality that many men habitually target women, but only within a specific setting, that is, in their home (DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2011, pp. 10-11; Schechter 1982).

Psychological explanations of DV tend to focus on specific interactions within the family, and between family members (Jenkins 1990, p. 24). For instance, 'systems' theory explains DV as one of many problems characterizing a 'troubled marital system' and considers that the abuse is a result of dysfunctional interactions amongst family members (Bogard 1984, p. 560; Huth-Bocks, Levendosky & Semel 2001). The theory argues that as domestic violence is not an isolated event and occurs within a family environment, both partners in a relationship are responsible for the violence. Violence is used for the better

functioning of the family and to reach equilibrium in the relationship (Cook & Frantz Cook 1984; Giles-Sims 1983; Ullman 2003). The feminist movement explicitly criticized the system theory as 'victim blaming' and argued that when women are violent, it is generally to take revenge for, or in self-defence against their 'secondary status in the home' (Ammermen & Hersen 1991, p. 274; Miller 2005, pp. 1-3). In the vast majority of cases, the effect of women's violence on their husbands is not comparable to the effect of man's violence on women (Kurz 1993; Miller 2005).

I think the argument that DV occurs as interaction in the family system needs cautious examination. I do not argue against the importance of systems, as every person in a family acts in relation to each other (Cecchin 2001). However, like James (2001), I believe it is inaccurate to consider the responsibility for men's violence as solely situated in the couple's relationship, or as purely being a man's response to his wife's actions, without considering gender and its broader social contexts.

The individualist approach often suggests chemical substances such as alcohol as instigators of domestic violence, echoing the old and popular explanation that blames alcohol for the violence (Dutton 2006; Mullender 1996, p. 42). However, many studies have contested the claim and suggested that drinking is merely an excuse for DV (Browne & Herbert 1997, p. 36; McMurray 2005, p. 223; Pahl 1985). No empirical evidence supports the theory that alcohol consumption by itself contributes to DV or other forms of violence (Galvini 2006; Scutt 1990, p. 115). A study by Field and Caetano (2003) confirmed the negative relationship between alcohol and violence related attitudes among White, Black and Hispanic couples in the USA. They found that, along with 'impulsivity', alcohol was used as an excuse for violent behaviours (Field & Caetano 2003).

Several researchers argued that men use drinking as an excuse so that they can deny any memory of the attack or can claim to have lost control (McGibbon & Kelly 1989, p. 3; McMurray 2005, p. 223). Levinson (1989, pp. 33-36), in his cross-cultural studies, suggested that the majority of societies in the world deny any

significant correlation between alcoholism and men's violent behaviours. Using data from developing countries, Patel (2007) found that living with an alcoholic abuser increases women's risk of violence. Nonetheless, it is argued that while alcohol cannot be ignored as a factor, most men initiate violence against their wives in full consciousness of their actions (Galvini 2006; de Campos Moreira et al. 2011; Walker 1990, p. 77).

Rather than claim that alcohol is the cause, its disinhibiting effects can be seen to exacerbate violence. Research in northwest Bangladesh has shown that man's alcohol use increased wives' vulnerability to abuse (Karim 2006, pp. 374-75; Salam, Alim & Noguchi 2006, p. 89). In Karim's study women who experienced alcohol-related DV sometimes argued that the abuser was not a bad person, but that he was under the influence of drugs or alcohol (Karim 2006, pp. 373-375). Alcohol can play a role, especially in escalating DV, but itself does not cause the violence.

Social learning theory

Another explanation for DV is the social learning theory or 'sex role theory'. It contends that people learn violent behaviour by observing parental role models (Hines & Malley-Morrison 2005; Levinson 1989). This learning is reinforced through reward, copying and the avoidance of punishment (Fisher & Lab 2010). It is an approach to DV that has received some empirical support. Several studies demonstrated that children, especially boys, who experienced parental violence at home, were involved in higher rates of perpetrating DV in adulthood (Bandura 1973 cited in Browne & Herbert 1997, p. 29; Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2010; Hines & Malley-Morrison 2005; Klein & Orloff 1999, pp. 31-32; Levinson 1989).

Using data from the first national study of violence in American homes, Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1988, p. 101) reported that 'sons of the most violent parents have a rate of wife-beating 1,000 % greater than that of the sons of non-violent parents'. Johnson (1998) found that fathers transfer the powerful message to sons that husbands have the right to expect wives to be submissive and faithful. Boys might be socialised into a belief that men are superior to women and

internalise the justification of violence as a means of power and control when wives do not fulfil their expectations. A study in Bangladesh conducted by Naved and Persson (2005) claimed that the strongest factor associated with DV was witnessing violence in the family in childhood. They reported that men who witnessed family violence were 2.29 times more likely to abuse their wives.

A subject of debate is that girls are not as violent despite having also experienced parental violence. Role modelling after mothers is said to make girls more likely victims of DV in adulthood. Dankoski et al. (2006) argued that girls learn from their mothers' responses that women are powerless to deal with such violence and often become victims in adulthood. It is evident that children who are abused are more likely to behave as perpetrator or victim in adulthood than children whose parents did not abuse one another (Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2010; Gelles & Cornell 1990). Generally both boys and girls tend to adopt their childhood experiences and attitudes in their marital relationship. A recent study in Bangladesh reveals that DV passes from one generation to another; witnessing violence in childhood is positively related with experiencing and/or perpetuating violence in adulthood (Islam et al. 2014).

The 'cycle of violence' proposed by Gelles overlaps with the 'social learning theory'. The central argument is that perpetrators learn social behaviour including violent attitudes from others and apply this learning when they make their own family (Motz 2014 p. 62). However, Gelles and Cavanaugh (2005) warned that while childhood experience of violence is often related with later abusive behaviour, it is not the sole predictor. Having a violent family background does not always lead to violence (Sigal & Denmark 2013, p. 26). Some adults who experienced violence as children are not abusive to partners (Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2010; Daniel & Wassell 2002; Kaufman & Zigler 1993, pp. 209-221).

The cycle of violence theory or social learning theory cannot fully explain violent behaviour. As Aisyah (2007) noted, some people who have been abused or who have witnessed violence in childhood, are less likely to engage in violent

behaviour if they are provided with coping and survival strategies and learn respect for people, especially respect for their wife as a human being.

The 'sex role approach' (Connell 1987, p. 49) emphasises stereotypical conceptions of masculinity and femininity. According to Connell (1987, p. 47) this approach starts with the assumption that in any society there is a set of behaviours for men and women. Dominant sex role constructionists view the female as natural homemakers, emotional, passive, and receptive while the male is constituted as the natural breadwinner, rational, violent and aggressive. This is relevant to Bangladesh where rigid gender specific roles are in place. However, there are a number of contradictions identified in sex role theory. Jones rightly criticised that it fails to justify the situation where men are not abusive and women are not passive and accommodating (2004, p. 61).

The individual and sex role approaches to DV usually produce interventions that underline psychological explanations and prioritise individual behavioural change. Systems theories take a slightly different approach, attributing violence to dysfunctional interactions between family members, and promoting couple if not family therapy. Common to these approaches is a focus on changing the individual's dysfunctional behaviour. Intervention strategies based on individualist and dysfunctional perspectives may also prefer group programs such as anger management or self-help groups, with the aim of teaching new communication skills, and for men, conflict management skills to manage their responses to family members (Keys Young 1999, p. 64).

These programs and interventions have been criticised for blaming women rather than making men take responsibility for their behaviour (Keys Young 1999, p. 64). Psychotherapy and anger management programs have also been criticized by feminists for not being responsive to men's sexism, and for not criticising socio-cultural settings supportive of violence (Stordeur & Stille 1989).

As individual or psychological explanations do not adequately explain the prevalence of DV, structural approaches need to be critically examined. As I will suggest, these approaches offer insights but also contain many limitations.

Structural approaches to domestic violence

Structural theories hold social structures and the social world primarily responsible for the social problems affecting social life and social relations (Johnson 2000, p. 315). The main argument is that social structures and social institutions affect people and their behaviour. Two theoretical explanations, namely resource theory, which is often considered as having developed from social exchange theory (Miller & Knudsen 1999, p. 711; Avakame 1999 cited in Resko 2010, p. 48) and relative resource theory are commonly used to explain violence against women.

In resource theory, the question of power is the main concern when explaining violence in the home (Jasinski 2001, p. 11). According to Resko (2010, p. 48), Goode's work is the earliest application of resource theory. Goode (1971, pp. 624-27) and Gelles (1993, p. 37) contended that when an individual lacks other means of power, and has few or no resources, such as income or educational status, he or she is more likely to engage in violence to exert greater power within the relationship. Goode (1971, pp. 631-33) elaborated that men perceive their social and cultural construction as head of the households. Internalizing this sense of entitlement, men might expect full respect from their spouses. If husbands lack the material resources to claim this in other domains, they will use violence or the threat of violence to ensure their wives' obedience and to maintain their dominant status as head of the households.

Resource theory highlights the power differential between partners rather than their socio-demographic positions. Empirical support for resource theory can be found in studies that indicate men with lower levels of income and prestige tend to be more abusive to their wives (Allen & Straus 1980; Atkinson, Theodore & Molly 2005; Benson & Fox 2004; Demo & Edwards 1994 cited in Resko 2010, p. 49). A few studies in Bangladesh indicated that men with low income or having

no job often perpetrated on violence on their wives (Wahed & Bhuiya 2007). There could be another explanation for this, such as the higher level of policing of this category, making their violence more visible compared to their counterparts in other categories.

However, according to Anderson (1997, p. 657), to agree with resource theory requires a reversal of empirical data. For the argument to be valid it would be the women who are more violent as they usually have far fewer socio-economic resources. But this is not borne out in practice, which suggests that this theory does not satisfactorily explain male violence against women.

Another form of the socio-structural perspective is relative resource theory which states that husbands who have inferior status compared to their wives are more likely to use violence in asserting dominance and power over their wives. For example, if the wife's economic contribution exceeds the husband's contribution, she is more likely to be abused (Resko 2010, p. 49). Singh et al.'s (2014) analysis of the National Family Health Survey–III conducted from 2005 to 2006 in Uttar Pradesh, India, provided some evidence for this proposition. Macmillan and Gartner (1999) also had similar findings from a nationally representative sample of Canadian women. They revealed that women's labour force participation significantly raised the risk of abuse when their male partners were not employed.

In India (Dalal & Lindqvist 2012; Singh et al. 2014) and Bangladesh (Hadi 2005; Ward et al. 2004) several studies indicated a complex relationship between women's employment and the increased risk of DV by husbands. Schuler et al. (1996) and Koenig et al. (2003) revealed that in Bangladesh women with increased status (measured by educational attainment, degree of autonomy, or control over resources) are more protected from violence. Koenig et al. (2003), however, showed that increased autonomy might actually exacerbate a woman's risk of violence. It seems the transition phase in which economic control shifts from men to women, and women's attempt to confront traditional gender roles, such as not wearing the veil, or wanting to expand her social network with work colleagues including men, or simply not listening to her husband's every

command as she formerly did when she was unemployed, or wanting to have sole control over her income, threatened the husband's authority and power and thus caused violence (Koenig et al. 2003; Singh et al. 2014).

To reiterate, resource theory asserts that husbands with least resources tend towards violence, and relative resource theory suggests that husbands with fewer resources than their wives are most likely to abuse their partner (Atkinson, Theodore & Molly 2005, p. 1138). However, there are limitations to both approaches. For example, the research conducted by Anderson (1997, pp. 667-68) concluded that men who have less income and beat their wives usually maintain the traditional gender roles. Atkinson, Theodore & Molly (2005, pp. 1139-46) argued that low-income husbands with strong beliefs in traditional gender ideologies regarding women's employment are more likely to be violent (2005, pp. 1139-46).

Stress theory overlaps with resource theory perspectives, usually foregrounding the causes of social stress in the family. In this approach, DV is understood as a 'stress reaction' to problems that arise in family relationships. Gelles and Cornell (1990) claimed that men become individually abusive in response to social and environmental pressures, such as financial pressure (see also Smith 1989, p. 25). Nonetheless, Mullender (1996, p. 44) contested this, arguing that many men face poverty and unemployment but do not become abusive. And even more women in poverty are not violent. Mahila Samachar, a mouthpiece of the Mahila Parishad (a largest Women's organization in Bangladesh) quarterly publish articles and discussions on important issues related with discrimination and violence against women. In a recent editorial article of Mahila Samachar titled 'violence against women: South Asian perspective' four theoretical assumptions including the above mentioned resource and stress theory are referred for causing violence against women in South Asia. The first theory focuses on the connection between masculinity and violence against women. In South Asian society men often tend to equate masculinity with aggression and violence. By being brutal and violent to women, a man demonstrates his masculinity and power. The second view blames patriarchy as one of crucial factor for violence against women. In patriarchy,

women are considered as unwanted, insecure, and imperfect without men. The South Asian patriarchal society consider men as the supreme member and expect women to be socially, economically, psychologically and in other ways protected by those 'supreme member'. The third view emphasizes men's fear of losing control over women who are financially and educationally more advanced than husbands. Wife's education and work is still seen as a direct challenge to male dominance and authority, wives are considered to be subordinated to their husbands. The fourth view explains men's outside stress and frustration. In a stressful and frustrating living condition, men often subjugate their wives to release their tension (Mahila Samachar 2014, p.32)

However a different notion, raised by Alan Jenkins (1990), should be discussed here to better identify the triggering factors that encourage men to be violent to female partners. Influenced by feminist ideas, Jenkins (1990) described how violent men do not take responsibility for their behaviour; rather they blame external factors or deny that violence occurred at all. Other studies (Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler & Sandin 1997; Paymar 2000) also confirmed Jenkins' assumption that violent men are more likely to blame their wives or external factors for their own use of violence. I argue that men are not naturally inclined to having bad attitudes towards women. Socio-cultural factors that promote and sustain inequality between men and women often provide opportunities for individuals, especially for men, to be violent to wives. However, structural or socio-structural theories of men's violence against women posit the need for change in social structures, cultural norms and ideologies as means of changing individuals (Jenkins 1990, p.30).

Feminists' perspectives on domestic violence

As discussed above, sociological or psychological theories in their standard modes rarely if ever consider DV in the context of institutionalised power inequality. From a structural feminist perspective, DV is rooted in gender and power and men use domestic violence to maintain dominance and control over women (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Loseke, Gelles&Cavanaugh2005). Gelles and Strauss (1988) argued that social inequality contributes to DV and the greater the

inequality between men and women in their relationship, the greater the potential violence. Davar (1999) also contended that DV does not stem from a pathological family or individual nor is violence a clinical problem, but rather a social problem occurring from legitimized unequal power relationships which enforce women's subordination. These feminist perspectives, particularly the radical approach, highlight patriarchal privilege and the oppression of women as key causes of violence against women (Danmant et al. 2008; Yllo 1998, p. 609). Researchers and practitioners with a radical feminist perspective view DV or spousal abuse as an indication of social control that directly comes from the patriarchal structure and the ideology of the family (Anderson 1993; Dobash & Dobash 1998; Sultana 2010-11; Warshaw 1989; Yllo 1993).

Second wave feminists

Second wave feminists have had an enormous impact upon the visibility of men's violence against women and defined it as a serious social problem (Breckenridge & Laing 1999; Charles 2000; Laing 2002). Anne Edwards (1987, p. 16) explained that some of the second wave feminist theorists, such as Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, Juliet Mitchell and Sheila Rowbotham first shed light on the sources of male power and argued that 'power operates in the major institutions of contemporary capitalism' (Jones 2004). However, whilst there are many feminist perspectives on DV, a central idea is that the abuse of women is an expression of and a mechanism for the institutional domination of women (Kirkwood 1993). Feminist and family therapists Bograd (1988, p. 14) identified some dimensions, which are common to all feminist perspective on wife abuse. These are:

- 1) the explanatory utility of the constructs of gender and power;
- 2) the analysis of the family as a historically situated social institution;
- 3) the crucial importance of understanding and validating women's experience

The main argument of structural feminist approaches to DV is that it has to be understood within a framework of gender and power, recognising that power is not gender neutral. Defining gender as an important social construction, feminists want a social order where 'gender does not privilege men as a category

nor give them power over women as a category' (Lorber 2000). Yllo (1993) argued that in family and society, the concept of gender plays the role of creating and maintaining male power in such a way that women are disadvantaged (also Kurz 1993). Lorber (2000, p. 80) contended that binary gender divisions still divide the structure of modern society in which inequality is sustained. Laing (2002, p. 2) argued that men often use violence to maintain their superior positions. Dismissing factors such as intrapsychic problems, difficulties on the job, drink, education, religion, financial stress, or problematic relationships within the family for initiating violence against wives, Golden argued:

Men hit because we all live in a sexist and patriarchal culture which not only allows and tolerates such behaviour, but which historically has encouraged it. A man's home has been his castle, his wife and children have been his property and his duty has been to keep all of them 'in line'.(Golden 1992, p. 29)

Bettman (2005) also contended that men consider their homes as their castles and women as their property when the social system enables them to think so.

In understanding different causal factors related to DV, the radical feminist perspective has mainly focused on the idea of patriarchy (Coward 1983, p. 7). Bonnie Fox (2006, p. 315) used three paradigms to conceptualize patriarchy: a 'collective male dominance' embodied within society, a 'self-contained system', and the 'sex-gender system'. Patriarchy as a 'self-contained system' is related to a 'mode of production' which rationalises male domination and the exploitation of women on the basis of the gender division of labour and women's low paid work. The last paradigm of patriarchy, the 'sex/gender system', deals with the preconceived idea of traditional gender roles. All three approaches overlap and provide some insight into the operation and reproduction of domestic violence in sexually unequal societies. In the 'collective male dominance' paradigm, the emphasis is placed on how social structures reproduce patriarchy, sanction more power and privileges to men and thus allow male domination. This restricts women to the realm of the private, and makes other people supportive to a particular social arrangement. For example, the responsibilities of childbearing

and rearing are always considered women's responsibilities, and men's exclusion from these roles becomes universalized and naturalized (Fox 2006, pp.315-327).

The utility of patriarchy

The concept of patriarchy has been used in different ways by feminists (Mills 2001; Sultana 2012). Gittins stated, 'by definition the family has been an unequal institution premised on paternal authority and power...Patriarchy...is essential in understanding families' (1993, p. 35). In explaining patriarchy Dobash and Dobash (1979) pointed out that DV is associated with male aggressiveness, male dominance and female subordination. They noted two elements of patriarchy: structure and ideology. The structural aspect of the patriarchy through hierarchical organization of social institutions and social relations grants power, privilege and leadership to preferred individuals and groups and relegates others to some form of subordination. The maintenance and continuation of such authority and advantage exercised by the few depend upon its 'acceptance' by the many. 'It is the patriarchal ideology that serves to reinforce this acceptance' (Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 43).

The definition by Pease seems convincing: 'patriarchy is 'an "umbrella" term for describing men's systemic dominance of women' (2000, p. 12). It is characterized by a value and belief system that justifies male dominance. Men exercise power both in the public and private spheres. For example, in a family the senior man exercises power over everyone else in the family (Haj-Yahia & Schiff 2007).

Radical feminists such as Kate Millett saw patriarchy as a system in which men as a dominant and powerful group exercise control and power over women and children (Millett 1970). Millett blamed the family for sustaining patriarchy, which encourages its members to conform to the sexually differentiated roles and maintain women's inferior position (Millett 1970).

Marxist and Socialist feminists sometimes conceptualised patriarchy as a system that is parallel, or similar, to capitalism. Delphy saw patriarchy as a system of oppression with a material base in the 'domestic mode of production'; she argued

that marriage is the institution by which women's unpaid work is 'appropriated by their husbands' (Delphy 1984, p. 95). Delphy argued that patriarchal control is mainly maintained through job segregation by sex, as it enforces women's lower wages in the labour market. As a result, women remain dependent on men and have to perform domestic responsibilities. In this connection, it could be concluded that women's domestic work perpetuates patriarchy and women's role stabilises patriarchal structures (Eisenstein 1979, pp. 4, 27-29; Hartmann 1979, p. 207).

Radical feminist approaches established the concept of patriarchy in which men's power and control encourage them to use the threat of violence against women (Burgess-Proctor 2006, p. 29; Daly & Chesney-Lind 1988; Dobash & Dobash 1990, p. 57). Theorists have generally been in agreement about the identification of the key elements of patriarchy: systemically structured gender inequality, marriage, childbearing and household work, women's economic dependence on men, the state, different cultural institutions, the restriction of women's careers in the public domain, and the encouragement of women to balance their role and responsibilities both in domestic and public realms (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Hartmann 1979, p. 207; Walby 1996, p. 21). Some of the elements, for example, the childbearing situation in Bangladesh, are considerably more complex than indicated by this feminist approach. Motherhood often gives women bargaining power with their husbands and families-in-law. It is observed that, sometimes, when children grow up, they support their mothers in bargaining with their fathers (Chowdhury 2009, p. 604).

The social and cultural practices that maintain and sustain patriarchal ideology (Yllo 1984) tend to consider wife beating as acceptable and perceive wives as accountable for the violence against them (Glick et al. 2002; Haj-Yahia & Schiff 2007). As men are socialized in the gendered roles prescribed by patriarchy (Dabby & Poore 2007), they may violate their partners when they fail to meet the traditional prescribed role of a 'good wife' (Dobash & Dobash 1979, pp. 43-56). Generally, the nature of patriarchal society benefits men and underestimates women. Very often religious institutions, the economic system and the state

legitimise these patriarchal setups (Dobash & Dobash 1979, p. 44; Hester 2003). Chowdhury (2009) contends that in Bangladesh, men dominate, oppress and exploit women through patriarchy. Patriarchy is maintained in the family through misinterpretation of religion and the non-recognition of unpaid work done by women at home. In the Bangladeshi family women are considered as passive dependents and the property of their husbands. Capital accumulation through dowry further strengthens patriarchy in Bangladesh. Men have even increasingly started to use the dowry system for capital accumulation as well (Chowdhury 2009; Naved & Persson 2010).

Broadcasting patriarchy

Patriarchal ideology also circulates through the mainstream media and all forms of mass communication. Communication media are indeed a powerful means of formulating, articulating, and circulating prevailing views of gendered practices (Dempsey 2000; Medrado, Lyra & Monteiro 2001). Television, films, story books, advertising, comics, pornography, newspapers and pop music are the various sources that produce and reproduce patriarchal attitudes to women in many ways. In Bangladesh, too, men's attitudes towards women are shaped by advertisements, films, beauty contests and pornography, where women are used as sexual objects to accumulate capital (Begum 2008). However, there is some 'push back' or reinterpretation of popular media texts, which is changing public awareness of DV in countries such as USA and Australia, as well as, to some extent, in Bangladesh.

Religious institutions also promulgate patriarchal gender regimes that can have abusive consequences for women. Yalom (2001, p. 14) stated that in both Christianity and Judaism females have been portrayed as inferior to males and need continued male guidance and direction. Young (1993) cited how the Catholic Church institutionalizes male domination and violence through promoting stories of the virgin martyrs. Dworkin contended that in all three of the great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, women are thought of as inferior, dirty and polluted (2000, pp. 186-187). Faizi (2001, p. 211) argued that Muslim men in

the US manipulate verses of the Koran and *Sunnah* to justify violence against wives in order to reinforce their own power and control.

Patriarchal ideologies around the world shape the responses of the criminal justice systems, which seem reluctant to enforce and accept domestic violence as a criminal offence. Several findings indicate that criminal justice personnel generally see DV as a product of dysfunctional family interactions and respond leniently (Buzawa & Buzawa 2002; Ferraro 1993, p. 167; Koss 2000). Even though policies and laws have been trying to change attitudes amongst the police, action against male perpetrators of DV still depends upon the attitude of the officers involved, particularly in India and Bangladesh (Chowdhury 2010a, p. 216; Khan 2000; Vindhya 2000).

Several studies and reports globally indicated the difficulties women experience in dealing with court procedures; legal practitioners and the police often do not pay due attention to the survivors' needs. Due to the offensive responses or insensitive attitudes of practitioners and police, DV survivors may feel isolated and reluctant to ask for institutional help (Chowdhury 2010a; Hotaling & Buzawa 2001; Khan 2000; Koss 2000; Ptacek 2010; Scutt 1993). Taylor (2004, p. 19), with a strong feminist voice, argued:

The law may be understood as a legal cartel deliberately designed to promote a male elite class system of power and dominance.

Taylor (2004, p. 290) further stated that the legal system is underpinned by the notion that women and girl children hold a dangerous sexuality that influences them to lie about their victimization. The patriarchal attitudes of legal service providers (e.g., police, judge, and advocate) who often tend to label victims of DV as 'responsible for the violence' have been reported in several studies, including in Bangladesh (Begum 2014; Branscombe & Weir 1992; Buzawa & Buzawa 2002; Pierce & Harris 1993; Ptacek 2010).

Like Beynon (2002), I believe men and women are not free agents; rather they are like actors with pre-scripted roles prescribed by the broader society, including its media, religious beliefs and legal system. So it could be concluded that most aspects of manhood or womanhood are not innate; rather they are derived, shaped and mediated but scripted nonetheless.

Victim blaming

Domestic violence victims who are not tolerant or who are resistant to their partner's violence or confronted their perpetrator (Rhatigan, Stewart & Moore 2011) are generally judged more harshly than females who are tolerant or unresisting (Branscombe & Weir 1992; Eigenberg & Policastro 2015). If victims seek institutional services against husband/partners, they may be perceived as 'deviant' and be blamed for perpetuating the violence against them (Buzawa & Buzawa 2002; Hamberger & Potente 1994; Kristiansen & Giulietti 1990). In their study of black women in America, Harrison and Esqueda (1999) found that a Black woman who resisted a violent partner was less likely to be considered truthful when giving testimony concerning the violence. As the stereotype of the battered woman does not include any resistant behaviour (Walker 1979), the victims who seek help or show any kind of rebelliousness or aggressiveness often are considered as 'bad women'. In Bangladesh, domestic violence victims often face insensitive behaviour from police and judicial staff when seeking help, with police often discouraging them from lodging the case against husbands (Begum 2014, p. 255; Ameen 2005, p. 84)

The medical system is another patriarchal institution that has been identified as structurally and institutionally supportive of violence (Lockhart 2001). Kurz (1993, p. 264) noted that because of patriarchal ideologies, medical practitioners often fail to recognise wife battering and diagnose women as having psychological problems. The medical system itself 'reinforces the patriarchal structure of the family'.

The state itself is a gendered regime according to Connell, who argued that 'the state both institutionalises hegemonic masculinity and expends great energy in

controlling it' (1994, p. 35). He also made the point that the patriarchal nature of the state is not inherent, but rather has been historically created with a selective bureaucracy to maintain its gendered structures (Connell 1994, p. 37). This is also relevant to Bangladesh where the patriarchal state prioritises marriage and motherhood as essential for women when considering any development initiatives for them (Mookherjee 2008).

The concept of masculinity is another feature of men's domination over women. Connell (1987) first publicized the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a culturally idealized form of masculinity that subordinates women. It is 'the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue' (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832). Connell (1995) saw gender and violence as closely connected, with men sustaining their dominance over women through the use of power, authority and violence (see also Courtenay 2000). Based on a content analysis of newspaper articles, Anwary (2015) applied the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' to explain DV against women in Bangladesh, arguing that some husbands use violence in order to validate their identity as men. 'Perpetrators, through their acts of violence, use Bangladeshi cultural norms to uphold and reproduce hegemonic norms – violence against an intimate partner is a form of performance by which violent men present their hyper-masculine identities' (Anwary 2015, p. 38).

Women's potential entrapment and revictimisation

According to Flood and Pease (2006, p. 5), attitudes play an important role in responses to violence against women. These attitudes influence community norms that often restrain women from disclosing abuse and seeking help (Fry and Barker 2001). Patriarchal attitudes can cause many women to internalise 'self-blame' once the violence occurs. In many DV cases, women suffer two psychological dilemmas: feeling 'guilty' or feeling 'trapped' within abusive relationships. Women can feel guilty as the cultural and social system considers violence a women's problem (Dobash & Dobash 1990, p. 57). They are encouraged to blame themselves for provoking the violence or to feel responsible

in that they should have been able to prevent it by changing their behaviour (Lundberg-love & Wilkerson 2006, p.42). This self-blame often damages women's self-esteem and keeps women in a condition known as 'learned helplessness' (Strube 1988, p. 243).

The term 'Learned Helplessness' (LH) was first suggested by Walker (1984, pp. 95-96) who argued that victims normally believe that they are powerless to stop their partner's abuse and therefore very often are reluctant to take the initiative to leave or change the violent situation (see also Walker 1977-78). However, the L model is criticised by feminists for blaming the victims and for its limitation in explaining how some victimized women manage to leave their violent relationships (Lundberg-Love & Wilkerson 2006, p. 41). It also fails to consider the possibility that some victims may be relatively satisfied with their relationships, preferring to remain rather leaving the abuser (Rhatigan, Street and Axsom 2006, pp. 332-33).

The controversy related to the learned helplessness model is not easy to resolve empirically. The most relevant conclusion would be that some women respond to violence with LH and others respond by seeking help. In both cases the response depends on factors specific to the situation, such as safety considerations, and the connections and resources they have while living with perpetrators (Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2010).

In addition to 'guilty feeling', women may feel 'trapped' in abusive relationships for a number of reasons. First, when women seek outside intervention, they are considered to be opposing or challenging the patriarchal ideology, which can threaten their family honour, particularly in developing countries like Indonesia (Aisyah 2007). Secondly, women may face practical difficulties in leaving an abusive relationship, partly due to their lack of economic independence or low incomes. Thirdly, woman may not have any other options of housing or alternative income, except to stay with abusive husbands (García-Moreno et al. 2005). Finally women may also feel trapped when their local communities stigmatise and criticize them (Dobash & Dobash 1990, p. 57; Renner & Slack 2006). Out of 10

countries, except Thailand, a significant number of the abused women in WHO's multi-country study⁴ (García-Moreno et al. 2005) attributed their beatings to various failures to comply with their husbands, such as not completing housework effectively, refusing sex, disobeying a husband, or being unfaithful, interpretations that might support the entrapment model.

The entrapment model suggests that women can become trapped in violent relationships, fearful of the consequences of leaving. Further, some victims/survivors do not end their commitment to abusive relationships, even as the abuse continues, in order to justify their earlier attempts to make the relationship work (Brockner & Rubin 1985 cited in Rhatigan, Street & Axsom 2006, p. 337). To avoid the negative impact (e.g., losing possessions, money, friends etc.) of leaving an abusive husband/partner (Bell & Nuagle 2005, p. 30) or for fear of falling into poverty and/or enduring social stigma with the possible negative effects on children (Fraser 2005) many women become entrapped in violent relationships. There is some empirical evidence to substantiate this model. An investigation of Indian women revealed that being blamed by husbands, in-laws, parents, and siblings pushed DV victims into believing that the husbands' violence was their fault and they had to 'adjust' to it (Purewal & Ganesh 2000). Another study conducted in Sapporo by Weingourt et al. (2001, p. 104) reported that the vast majority of female victims were reluctant to disclose their husbands' abuse to anybody, as they believed that the violence was their fault and they should take responsibility for it. Few studies in Bangladesh identified issues regarding women's entrapment in violent relationships. These commonly cited reasons are: feeling shame, fearing they would not be believed, fearing to face social stigma, concern for family honour (Naved & Persson 2005; Schular, Bates & Islam 2008). These scenarios clearly indicate that there are similarities in women's responses to DV both in the context of Western countries as described by feminists such as Dobash and Dobash (1990) and in Asian countries, as described by Naved and Persson (2005).

⁴ The study collected data from over 24 000 women in 10 countries representing diverse cultural, geographical and urban/rural settings: Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Peru, Namibia, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand, and the United Republic of Tanzania

Feminists' heterosexual and homosexual perspectives

Feminist perspectives based on heterosexual forms of DV have been challenged. It is argued that the 'discovery' of lesbian and gay domestic violence poses a key challenge to traditional feminist views (FitzRoy 2005, pp. 263-267; Letellier 1994). Specifically 'lesbian battering' calls into question the gender inequality theory, as the conventional feminist positioning of abuser as male and victim as female is not supported in lesbian DV. Although there are some similarities between heterosexual and same sex violence in regard to types of violence, factors that trigger violence, and the decision to leave or stay with violent partners, a number of differences compound the severity of domestic violence experienced by gay and lesbian couples.

Society's denial of same sex domestic violence and same sex victims' fear of shame, isolation, and embarrassment keep the violence hidden. The social and cultural issues, particularly the homophobic pressures exerted by heteronormative societies in gay and lesbian communities play a crucial role in perpetuating violence. Moreover, society's neglect of the needs of gay men and lesbians contribute to increasing the incidence of gay and lesbian domestic violence (Peterman & Dixon 2003, pp. 40-46).

It is important that feminist writing validates the experiences of women and the way they have coped in abusive situations. Feminist writing also monitors bias against women as well as being vigilant to ensure that battered women are not re-victimised (Bograd 1990; Laing 2002), whether lesbian or heterosexual. I follow Laing in suggesting that an additional contribution of feminist writings to domestic violence research is their attempt to 'grapple with the "intersection" of gender with other forms of difference in order to more fully understand all the dimensions of the socio-political context in which violence against women occurs' (Laing 2002, p. 2). The intersections between gender and other systems of oppression, such as race, class, national origin, sexual orientation, age, and disability are recognized in the work of international feminists, lesbian feminists, and black and

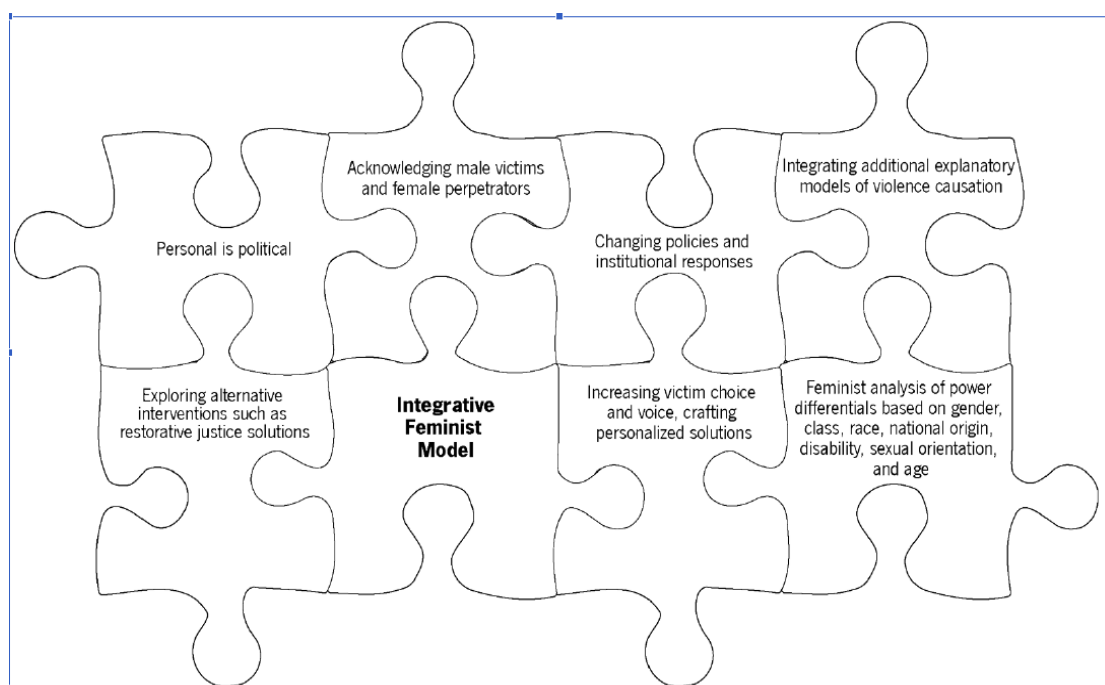
indigenous feminists (McPhail et al. 2007). Bograd (2005, pp.26-28) also emphasised the intersection of gender and power.

Integrating factors other than gender

The Integrative Feminist Model (IFM), in the form of a jigsaw puzzle, for explaining domestic violence considers these intersections:

The structure of the model is that of a puzzle, where interlocking theoretical pieces fit together...the hallmark of the IFM is its commitment to locating the roots of violence within gender (and other forms of) oppression. This feminist ideology forms the central piece of the puzzle, whereas other puzzle pieces provide greater detail and context, helping us understand the many forms that domestic violence can take. (McPhail et al. 2007, p. 825)

Figure 1: Integrative Feminist Model for domestic violence



Source: McPhail et al. 2007, p. 825

In this IFM model, the feminist socio-cultural framework is tightly retained, but at the same time other theories of violence can be included.

In conclusion, I argue that no single theory, or discipline, or factor has been adequate in explaining DV in Bangladesh (Gelbert 1994 cited in Browne & Herbert 1997, p. 35; Goldner et al. 1990; Yllo 1998, p. 609). Therefore, in order to better understand DV in Bangladesh I have moved away from relying on a single factor and have engaged in a multivariate approach that includes consideration of psychological and sociological aspects, particularly patriarchy, with special emphasis on feminism. I have also applied some other approaches.

Common effects of domestic violence

Worldwide, a growing body of research evidences the impact and costs of domestic violence, particularly on women (Campbell 2002; Datta & Monihar 1999; Davidson & Garvais 2015; Ellsberg et al. 2008; Heise et al. 1994; Heise, Moore & Toubia 1995; Heise, Pitanguy & Germain 1994; McKinnon 2008; Murray 2009; Stark 2007; Watson et al. 1997). The fatal outcomes are homicide and suicide. The non-fatal but still serious outcomes are homelessness, physical injuries, chronic pain syndrome, gastrointestinal disorders, unintended pregnancies, pregnancy complications and sexually transmitted infections. Many other physical, emotional and sexual health problems are possible, some caused by domestic violence, others exacerbated by the stress of the violent dynamics before and after violent incidents.

Personal and public costs

Abused women are more likely than others to suffer from depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, eating problems, sexual dysfunction and many reproductive health problems, including miscarriage and stillbirth, premature delivery, foetal distress and low birth weight (Bonomi et al. 2006; Diaz-Olavarrieta et al. 2002; Gazmararian et al. 1996; Heise, Ellsberg & Gottenmoeller 2002; Jejeebhoy 1998; Roberts, Auinger & Klein 2005; Sigal & Denmark 2013; Valladares et al. 2002; World Bank 1993).

The economic cost of violence against women (VAW) is widespread and involves direct medical, health care and legal services and also loss of productivity. A study

conducted in 2010 in Bangladesh found that 2.05% of the country's Gross Domestic Product is spent for VAW, which is almost equal to government spending on the health and nutrition sector (CARE 2012a). Domestic violence often leads to poverty for women (UN Women 2012, p. 52; Murray 2009) and thus affects individuals, families, communities and governments as well as diminishes the economic development of each nation (Wahed & Bhuiya 2007, p.347). The public cost associated with imprisonment, trials, medical expenses, and loss of work renders domestic violence a major barrier to national development and poverty reduction (Lang 2003, p. 10). Not only does DV cause suffering to victims, research also indicates that DV can take its toll on perpetrators. In their study in New England, Rothman and Corso (2008) revealed that male employees (who abuse women) are more likely to 1) be absent from work 2) underperform while at work 3) make mistakes and 4) feel sick while on the job, compared to employees who are not abusive toward partners.

Effects on children

The consequences of DV for children are manifold and can occur when they are in their mothers' wombs. Pregnancy is a high-risk time for many women in terms of exposure to domestic violence (Manzoli et al 2010). Women, who experience DV during pregnancy, are less likely to initiate breastfeeding (Lau & Chan 2007). Studies also indicate that parents who abuse the spouse also abuse their children (Krug 2002). Several findings confirm that children in an abused family are more likely to demonstrate behaviours such as anxiety and depression, and aggression and attention issues (McFarlane et al. 2003; Thackeray, Hibbard & Dowd 2010) and less likely to be attentive to academic performance (Stirling 2008 cited in Chan 2012, p. 289). Domestic violence plays a significant role in compromising child health by impairing child nutrition, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh (Rahman et al. 2012).

Strategies to eliminate domestic violence

There are a number of innovative programs, developed by feminists and others, to combat the structural causes of DV and to assist survivors. It was as early as 1885 that advocacy agencies were created to assist battered women (Roberts

2002). In this period the movement of abused women in Britain and United States also demanded the development of new perceptions in existing interventions for women as survivors of DV.

Dobash and Dobash (2000, pp.187-89) describe three important actions to effectively respond to DV: 1) assisting victims 2) challenging male violence and 3) changing women's position in society. The provision of refuges or shelters and legal advocacy are intended to assist survivors. Challenging men's violence may be in the form of arrest and the availability of programs for perpetrator. The opportunity for community education or the availability of employment opportunities for women may change women's position in the community. This is relevant to Bangladesh where a significant number of women continue in abusive marriages due to their dependency on their husbands (Ameen 2005; Bates 2004).

The feminists' initiative of 'violence control program' or 'Alternatives to Violence' (ATV), which began in 1975 in New York,⁵ mostly gives attention to male perpetrators of violence. These intervention programs are essential as they teach abusive men how to avoid using violence to maintain power and domination and also how to be tolerant and respectful to their wives (Merry 2001, p. 51; Stith & Rosen 1990, p. 88). Facilitators design a 'group meeting' in which men are expected to be aware of gender equality in the marital relationship (Merry 2001, p.51). 'Women's support group' programs (Merry 2001, pp. 49-53) were also launched by feminists.

Batterer intervention programs (BIPs) are designed for abusers who are either sent by court order, attend voluntarily, or on persuasion by their partner. These programs usually consist of educational classes or treatment groups, or involve individual counselling or case management. There are some direct and indirect goals of the 'batterer intervention program', such as a) to provide justice to victims; b) to make the perpetrator accountable; c) to ensure victim safety; d) to change

⁵ The ATV began with a Quaker group working with youth gangs and teenagers at risk in Green Haven Prison. However, they were having difficulty communicating their message about the consequences of violence.

the perpetrator's behaviours through skill building, attitudinal change and emotional development (Bennett & Williams 2001, p.1; Healy, Smith & O'Sullivan 1998). Although court-ordered interventions have become a popular mode of treatment for perpetrators and their families, studies have signalled that these programs fail to significantly change batterers' attitudes toward violence (Maxwell & Davis 2003). There is no such intervention yet in Bangladesh.

Some 'spouse treatment programs' aim to improve the competencies and strengths of both husbands and wives in order to empower them. The couples are taught in three stages: 'contracting for non-violence, teaching anger management skills, and improving marital relationship (Stith & Rosen 1990, pp. 88-97). The positive aspect of the 'spouse treatment program' is that it accommodates both parties in a session at the same time, thus enabling the professional to acknowledge both partners' needs and concerns. However, by emphasising only individual behavioural change, this program remains limited (Michau et al. 2015). If victims are not interested or able to attend, or if perpetrators' attendance is voluntary rather than order by court, this program may not effectively reduce DV, allowing many abusers to deny their responsibility for violence (Crowell & Burgess 1996, p. 133). A study conducted on batterer programs in USA revealed that 'couple treatment programs' were mostly considered inappropriate and dangerous (Austin & Danwort 1999, p. 158). It should be noted that both the 'interventions for perpetrators' and 'spouse treatment programs' require more focus put on general coping and communications skills (Ronan et al. 2004, p. 135). This type of program is needed in Bangladesh but has still not been introduced.

When based on feminist principles, women's support groups and service delivery programs have had some success. The women's support group model provides survivors with legal, health, mental and education support to meet their different needs (Weeks 1994, pp.82-84). Currently, women's support groups work in many countries to assist survivors by providing counselling and advocacy as well as by raising their awareness of their legal rights. They also help build community education activities. Community education challenging the dominant culture and

arguing not to accept violence has also been a common way for feminists to raise women's awareness (Dobash & Dobash 1979, pp. 223-24; Schneider 1994, p. 41).

The ongoing relevance of women's shelters

The first formal shelter for Western women developed out of the feminist movement of the 1970s during which 'consciousness raising groups' namely survivors, community activists and feminists led the women to talk in public about the abuse they experience in their homes (Sullivan & Gillun 2001, p. 247). For instance, the Chicago Protective Agency for Women and Children offered women up to four weeks of shelter at the Women's Club of Chicago (Roberts 2002). However, these temporary shelters, which relied mostly on personal or community funding, were often no more than a private house offering battered women a place to stay.

Western feminists, especially those in the second wave, made it a priority to establish a state based system of shelters rather than charity-based emergency accommodation to ensure that survivors of DV wishing to leave were able to do so (Morley 2000, pp. 226-8; Theobald 2014). While the original shelter was to provide crisis accommodation to abused women (Murray 1988), later shelters started to provide a range of services to victims and their children; a safe location to stay, counselling, advocacy, and educational and preventive community services (Bennett et al. 2004, p. 817; Grossman et al. 2010). Dobash and Dobash argued that most shelter homes assist survivors to build relationships with other survivors and also with activists, enabling them to overcome their feelings of isolation, shame or being alone in their experiences of DV. In a shelter home survivors can get practical and emotional support from staff and fellow survivors that over time might make them stronger both individually and collectively (Dobash & Dobash 2005, pp. 40-43; Critelli 2012). Shelters provide counselling services and resources and teach skills to help women lead more independent lives (Bennett et al. 2004) Shelters also offer the opportunity for individuals to listen to other victims' stories about their own situations (Sullivan & Gillun, 2001; Shostack 2000).

From the very beginning of the battered women's movement, shelter programs have led to DV service provision in the USA, Britain and Australia. However, challenges have been mounted in relation to providing services to women with multiple needs, women of colour and other marginalised women's groups (Theobald 2015). It is important to mention here that while women's shelters were initiated by feminists, not all shelters in the West are now run by feminists. Some shelters today exhibit little or no evidence of feminism.⁶ Others, however, have retained their feminist orientation but have expanded to include services for specific cultural and ethnic groups, such as the Asha family service for African American women and the Manavi for South Asian women (Allen, Laesen & Walden 2011, pp. 245-51). In Bangladesh, responses to DV have been seen as multi-sectoral and co-ordinated, though this is not the case in practice, although many efforts are in place. Under the pressure of women's organisations and the obligation to fulfil the commitment to international communities to reduce VAW, the Bangladesh government has been providing legal support, medication, counselling, skill development activities and emergency shelter to women and children victims. A number of shelter services have been established, of which six shelters are funded and currently running by the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) and one shelter by the *Jatiya Mohila Sonstha* (DWA 2012). In addition, in 2011, seven new shelters have been established under different ministries with the support of a multi-international donor fund. This new 'shelter project' aims to provide temporary accommodation, legal support and skill development training for women victims of DV, to enable them to reintegrate in society as independent women (communication with DG, DWA in 2012). Further, the Police Headquarters has set up a 'Special Cell' comprising female police personnel and a Women's Support and Investigation Division (Mannan & Zohir 2009).

Across the feminist/non-feminist divide, women's shelter workers have learned that victims/survivors often need a more comprehensive response across a variety of community sectors (cited in Allen, Bybee & Sullivan 2004, pp. 1013-

⁶Personal communication with Associate Professor Barbara Baird, Women's Study, Flinders University

15). Allen, Bybee & Sullivan (2004) conducted a research on 278 women, residing at different women's shelters in America and found that among the variety of needs, individual advocacy was identified as most important especially for housing, employment, education and legal issues. Another study conducted by Bennett et al. (2004) on 54 Illinois state DV agencies, found that a combination of services including (a) shelter (b) crisis hotline, (c) counselling, and (d) advocacy were viewed as effective by DV victims (Bennett et al. 2004).

Western countries, such as the United States, England, Canada and Australia have women's support programs including shelter homes but also programs for violent men. This has led to integrated networks between the women's movement, government and other allies to deal with DV. In the 2000s, in the UK, domestic violence services, women's organisations and multi-agency partnerships initiated outreach projects to provide support to the survivors who remain living in the community (Dobash & Dobash 2005, p.33). However, DV law reform still remains crucial.

The ongoing need for law reform

From the early 1970s, women activists advocated for law reform such as strict regulations, police intervention, tougher prosecution and severe punishment, which are important in reducing the incidence of DV (Schechter 1982, p.25). Since then, there has been a considerable improvement in legal reform regarding DV in the United States, followed by other countries. Most states in the United States have passed DV legislation that provides protection orders and remedies for violence (Wallace 2002, p.219; Schechter 1982, p.42).

As part of law reform, some countries, such as Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, Malaysia, Spain, Pakistan, and India introduced a women's room at police stations to deal with cases of domestic violence (UNICEF 2000, p.17). The women's room in a police station is designed to offer a safe and supportive environment so that domestic violence survivors feel comfortable to report and proceed with their cases (Pande 2002, pp. 348-49). Though the women's police rooms in Brazil have raised awareness of violence

against women, concerns have arisen about their minimal success regarding the criminalization and prosecution of such cases. Lack of VAW training for judges and prosecutors, and the financial drawbacks and low prestige besetting women's rooms within the police system have been identified as factors behind their poor success (Thomas 1994).

Mandatory arrest provisions were also introduced in some parts of the world, such as in 21 states in the US, and the District of Columbia (Miller 2004, p. 28). It is evident that arrest, even for a night, can reduce domestic violence (Williams 1990, pp. 335-339). Another study of 150 black, Hispanic, and white women also found a reduction of violence due to court orders (McFarlane et al. 2004). However, with reference to the jurisdiction of Omaha and Charlotte in the US, Wallace (2002, pp. 221-224) contended that although arresting fails to prevent future occurrence, it still seems a very important step in preventing DV. Yet, enacting laws is not sufficient unless they are properly enforced or utilised by women to defend their right to secure protection from abuse. The Bangladesh government has also enacted several laws, the most remarkable being the 'Domestic Violence (Protection & Prevention) Act' in 2010. This is first time in Bangladesh, that the law mandates the relevant court to issue a protection order against the defendant at any stage of proceedings (MoWCA 2010a), which is an important step forward in addressing DV.

'Community-based advocacy interventions' (Sullivan 2000) and 'community education' and 'education for men' are viewed as powerful mechanisms in reducing DV, followed by police intervention and law reform (Ofei-Aboagye 1994, pp. 275-279). Feminist approaches that emphasize legal provision for criminalising DV highlight the focus of structural approaches. The other approaches that have arisen from the feminist movement are education and prevention campaigns targeting the broader community. Although the primary target of these approaches may be individual women, the movement relies on a social action based model and maintains a political presence advocating on behalf of women in ending violent relationships (Jones 2004, p. 65). However, Hayward (2000) suggested an integrated alternative response to manage DV in South Asia.

She rightly pointed out that integrated supports from professionals, community elders, religious scholars and the community as a whole will bring more useful responses in reducing DV. In Bangladesh, the government in collaboration with international and national NGOs have been implementing various community based advocacy programme(MoWCA 2013-14).A coalition called 'durbar network' has been established with 537 NGOs to sensitise and aware people about DV(MoWCA 2010b).

Concluding remarks

DV is widespread around the globe in both developed and developing countries. Many approaches are available to examine the factors contributing to DV against women, but a feminist perspective is the most apposite in studying such violence in Bangladesh. Feminists contend that patriarchy constructs gender relations that support a division of labour in the family and represent men as powerful and superior to women. The following chapter scrutinizes women's positions in Bangladesh society as, according to the feminist perspective, gender relations have particularly contributed to DV against women.

CHAPTER THREE

The Position of Women in Bangladesh Society

Gender relations are a major factor influencing domestic violence, reflective of how women and men's positions in a society have been culturally and socially constructed and practised (Aisyah 2007, pp. 58-60). Subject to a few exceptions, traditional socio-cultural and religious ideologies and conventions still govern the lives of the vast majority of women in Bangladesh. It is therefore crucial to examine women's position in Bangladesh by investigating how these ideologies and conventions have allowed, if not promoted, DV against women. It is also vital to shed light on how women's issues and needs have been prioritised in government plans and programs since Bangladesh's emergence as an independent state in 1971, and since the introduction in 2010 of the anti-domestic violence law, the Domestic Violence (Protection and Prevention) Act. This will help us better understand the preventive measures taken by different government departments to reduce violence, particularly domestic violence, against women.

Chapter Three starts with a brief introduction about Bangladesh as a sovereign state. The subsequent Section provides an outline of governmental responses to women's victimization during the Liberation War period. The socioeconomic and cultural situation of women in Bangladesh are scrutinised in the Third Section, highlighting the positions of women in the private sphere, such as marriage and family. The Fourth Section examines religious attitudes towards women, while the Fifth Section considers women's participation in education and the Sixth Section considers their employment. The interconnection between public and private sphere often leads to the subordination of women (Aisyah 2007, p. 62) and therefore the Seventh Section focuses on the Bangladesh government's responses to VAW. The chapter ends with a conclusion in the Eighth Section.

Introducing Bangladesh as an independent country

As stated earlier, Bangladesh is a densely populated country with relatively small land size. Although women constitute 49.53% of the total population (BBS 2012),

they are the 'poorest of the poor' and bear the marks of a 'disadvantaged minority' in the social, economic and political realms (Mahtab 2007, p. 20).

In 1971, Bangladesh emerged as an independent state having experienced 200 years of British dominance as the 'province of Bengal' in undivided India (Alam 2002). In 1947 the British ruler partitioned the Indian sub-continent into two countries, India and Pakistan, based on religious identity (Siddiqi 1998, p. 207; Sobhan 1994, p. 64). At the time of separation, the 'Bengal province' consisted of two separate provinces: East Bengal and West Bengal.

Following the division by the British, East Bengal became part of Pakistan and West Bengal remained with India. In 1956 East Bengal later became the province of East Pakistan. There were various unresolved problems and vast geographical, cultural, heritage and linguistic differences between West and East Pakistan (Islam 1987, pp. 7-31; Siddiqi 1998, p. 207; Sission & Rose 1994, pp.1-2; Sobhan1994, p. 64). West Pakistan began to monopolise all economic and political power and exercised neo-colonialism on the people of the East. Despite having the larger population and the available resources for foreign earnings, the East Pakistani people were systematically discriminated against in all aspect of their rights. This wholesale discrimination and cultural disparity eventually led the people of East Pakistan to resist the West Pakistan regime. East Pakistan's rebellion was intensified when West Pakistan refused to include the language of Bengali as a national language, rather trying to impose the Urdu language on the Bengali people of East Pakistan (Rummel 1994, p. 316; Sharlach 2000, p. 94).

Such impositions along with other exploitations resulted in the nine-month long Liberation War in 1971. Ultimately, in the name of ethnic Bengali nationalism, Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation state at the cost of millions of lives and the rapes of hundreds of thousands of women and girls (Harun 2005, p. 15; Masceranhas 1971, pp. 6-24; Mookherjee 2006b, p. 73; Saikia 2004; Sobhan 1994, p. 71; Zaman 1999, p. 39).

Bangladesh is known as a highly stratified and class based society (Rozario 2004). However, there is no consensus among sociologists about labelling people in specific classes. For example, Lewis (2011) distinguished three class patterns in post-independence Bangladesh: the elite, the middle class, and the poor. He also discusses how the socio-cultural, economic and political transformation in Bangladesh brings changes in each class (see also Feldman 2009). On the basis of 'economic categorization' recently White (2012) identified three social class categories in Bangladesh: rich, middle and poor. Among these classes, there are vast differences regarding income, wealth, possession of material goods and life chances (BBS and UNICEF 2014; Tappan 2010). In 2010, 31.3% of the population are middle class, 2.7% are rich and 66% are poor (Baraka 2012). The upper class (rich) belongs at the top of social hierarchy while the middle class has some economic independence, social influence or power. The lower class/poor (occasionally described as working class) usually are employed in low-paying manual jobs with very little economic security. Rozario (2004) noted that the Bangladeshi people are very status-conscious. As a result those who are able, are likely to guard their status and honour carefully. In most cases the powerful suppress the powerless (Tapan 2010). Nonetheless, regardless of class inequality, women are discriminated against most in every aspect of life in Bangladesh. Policies and programs in Bangladesh have been shaped by a patriarchal worldview in ways that support men's interests and priorities and women's needs and priorities remain suppressed. In the following section, I have provided details of how gendered attitudes towards women still persist in Bangladesh since its emergence as a nation.

The 1972 Bangladeshi government's responses to emerging women's issues

The 1971 Liberation War was a turning point in awareness of women's subordinate position in society (Pereira 2002). There is much evidence of Bangladeshi women's involvement in the war (Hossain & Hossain 2004). Some women actively participated in helping freedom fighters in different ways. Some women fought side by side with men, while many others risked their lives serving in capacities such as cooking, providing economic support, providing safe shelter

for guerrillas, caring for or nursing the wounded and hiding weapons (Imam 1989, p. 131). Estimates of the number of women across age, class and status raped by the Pakistani army and made sex slaves in Pakistani military camps during the nine months of the Liberation War vary significantly from 200,000 to 400,000 (Debnath, 2009; Mookherjee 2002; Sharlach 2000).

After the war, 25,000 of these rape victims were found to be pregnant (Brownmiller 1975, p. 84). Although the rape victims were formally honoured by the new state as *Birangonas* (female war heroes) (Mookherjee 2007, p. 343), the difficult problem of reintegration into society which those women (especially those who were made pregnant), faced in the post-liberation period indicates the extent to which traditional views of women persisted in Bangladeshi society.

In order to provide a picture of the present status of women in Bangladesh society, it is pertinent here to examine how the state responded in a gendered way to the Liberation War rape victims. After the war, the then government took initiatives to rehabilitate the raped women. By locating the sexual violence within a heroic framework of *Birangona*, the state tried to avoid the possible social ostracism associated with rape (Mookherjee 2007) and also to acknowledge the sacrifice of women for the independence of Bangladesh (Kamal 1998; Mookherjee 2006b; Rozario 1997).

The newly formed state set up rehabilitation centres and took many initiatives, providing abortion and adoption facilities for the rape victims in spite of religious opposition. In order to reintegrate the rape victims into society by returning them to their families or husbands or by finding bridegrooms for the unmarried and widows, the rehabilitation centres offered rewards for men to marry these women (Mookherjee 2007). The abortion facilities were legal and available only during 1972-73 for rape victims⁷ and were considered as a way to ensure *Birangonas*

⁷In contemporary Bangladesh, abortion is illegal but Menstrual Regulation (MR) is permitted in the first trimester. MR involves vacuum aspiration to bring on menstruation and thereby cause a very early abortion. This has been widely practiced throughout the country since 1979 through public, NGO and private facilities (Bhandari et al. 2008, p. 259; Piet-Pelon 1998).

marriage possibilities and their legal motherhood within a legitimate heterosexual relationship (Mookherjee 2007, p. 349).

However, these governmental responses reflected a traditional gender ideology that sees woman as wife and mother. Women's voices were never properly heard regarding abortion or the adoption of children of rape; rather kinship and family norms of purity and reputation were articulated in public discourse (Butalia 1998; Das 1995; Mookherjee 2008, p. 49). The adoption and abortion policies were enacted for the sake of the state's male interest and revealed the gendered attitudes of the state and society (Mohsin 2004, p. 44; D'Costa n.d., p. 6). Women's trauma and distress and their needs were practically ignored as the purity of the state was given the highest priority (Ibrahim 1998, p.18; D'Costa n.d., p. 6). The state was less concerned about the raped women but instead saw rape and pregnancy as threats to Bengali nationality and masculine identity. It is rightly argued that this nationalist construction of identity took shape through the bodies of raped women thus making these raped women 'victims for a second time' (D'Costa n.d., p. 7; Mookherjee 2007, p. 349). I would rather argue that the rehabilitation program in fact pathologised the raped women and aimed to wipe out their experiences by enforcing the cultural stereotypes and norms of subordinate femininity upon them (Mookherjee 2007, p. 342).

The coercive practice of the Bangladesh state (D'Costa, n.d., pp. 10-11), making marriage and motherhood necessary for rape victims, created essentialised stereotypical gender roles for women (Mookherjee 2007; 2008). Raped women were forcedly silenced in the name of the honour of the state (Kamal 1998, p. 276; Mohsin 2004, p. 43). The patriarchal state implemented the concept of justice towards women through rehabilitation programs or arranged marriages for rape victims (Habiba 1998, p. 263). Kotalova (1996, p. 45) rightly pointed out that 'marriage is the ultimate marker of gender relations, adulthood and completeness in Bangladesh'.

In spite of the government's rehabilitation attempts, raped women and girls were not welcomed by the Bangladeshi people, nor by their husbands, father, brother

or neighbours, as they had lost their virginity and purity and had become symbols of shame and outcasts (Brownmiller 1994, p. 181; Rozario 1997, p. 264). Some *Birangonas* later committed suicide (Malik 1972, pp. 140-153), some fled to West Pakistan to live with their rapists in secret and some engaged in prostitution (Razario, 1997, p. 264; Sajor 1998, p. 9; Sharlach 2000, p. 95).

While Kelly (2000) argued that raped women exercised agency by choosing to be silent about their wartime rape experiences, Saikia (2007) argued that in the case of Bangladesh, silence was a state policy, a mechanism for the state's agency, rather than the raped women's own choice. She further contended that 'the male-controlled state could not interact with the rape survivors as human selves but had to hide, disperse, and dismember their memory and speech to regain manly honour' (Saikia 2007, p. 75).

With a few exceptions, the attempt to reduce social ostracism by using the term *Birangonas* and providing access to secure abortion and adoption procedures to enable rape victims' smooth social rehabilitation did not work out (Brownmiller 1975, 1994; Mookherjee 2006b, p. 81). Moreover, throughout the years, the Bangladeshi media rarely use of the title *Birangona* or war heroine to refer to the raped women, rather more often referring to them as *lanhhita*, which means disgraced, harassed, insulted and *biddhosto*, meaning ruined or destroyed, as well as using phrases such as 'women who have lost their all' (Islam 2012, p. 2139).

The whole idea of women having 'lost their all' as a result of being raped reinforces 'the existing traditional norm' - 'that a woman's "all" lies in her virginity when she is unmarried, in her chastity when she is married, and in her sexual exclusivity in general' (Islam 2012, p. 2141). Mookherjee (2006a) analysed the inconsistency between the raped women's national position as 'war heroines' and their local position within the community. Raped women were forced to be silent and to 'resort to a "negotiated survival" in order to avoid further persecution' (Debnath 2009, p. 53).

In 2014, forty-four years after the 1971 Liberation War, *Birangonas* are still not rewarded the same honour and facilities that freedom fighters enjoy. Women's rights activists have raised the demand that the *Birangonas* should be recognised as freedom fighters and given all the same facilities (*The Priyo News* 2011). Nonetheless, due to socio-cultural expectations, raped women are still restricted from sharing their trauma and are forced to forget what they went through in the 1971 Liberation War. The status of *Birangonas* highlights the second-class treatment of women in Bangladesh, and the punitive treatment of women survivors of male violence. The same dynamics occur for domestic violence survivors in contemporary Bangladesh. While women are enduring husbands' violence, the socio-cultural expectation is that they should silently cope with it. This subordination and silencing of women has continuity in Bangladeshi history. The experience of the *Birangonas* is a template for women's experience of DV. Like the rape of women in the war of independence, domestic violence is linked to Bangladeshi patriarchal social cohesion and national identity.

In the next section, the socio-economic condition of Bangladeshi women is discussed briefly. I concentrate on Muslim women's experiences in Bangladesh because all the women who participated in my study were Muslim, from women survivors of domestic violence, to shelter workers, activists and policy makers.

Socio-cultural situation of women in Bangladesh

Women's position in Bangladesh is vulnerable. By custom, Bangladesh features a patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal social system in which the system recognizes the son as the potential supporter and successor of the parents in their old age and as the symbol of family prestige and heredity (ADB 2001; Ameen 2005). Such a system maintains and encourages 'men's supremacy' in economic control and decision making power (Sultana 2003, p. 13). Women are subject not only to domestic violence; rather they face discrimination in all aspects of socio-economic, religious and political rights. So it is important to understand the situation of Bangladeshi women regarding their socio-economic, cultural and religious position that fosters and maintains their subordination and exploitation and prevents them from exercising their rights (Ameen 2005, p. 28).

The overall social structure in Bangladesh is deeply embedded in gender inequality. Existing religious, social, and cultural practices perpetuate these inequalities. Girls and boys are brought up through a discriminatory socialisation process that structures unequal power relationships in adulthood (Ameen 2005; Naripokkho & BMP n.d., p. 22). Socio-cultural discriminatory practices against women start at the time of birth. For instance, it is customary for the Bangladeshi rural Muslim community to announce the birth of a male child by calling *Azan* (call for prayer). In contrast, when a girl is born, in most cases no *Azan* is called; that is, her arrival is not ritually recognized by the family and the community (Jahan 1975; Zaman 1999). In rural areas, a stick is used to first touch a new born male child's body, whereas the new born female body is touched with a glass bangle and a *Lazzavati* vine (a plant whose leaves fold when it comes in contact with other substances) (Rahman 1994 cited in Zaman 1999, p. 41). Metaphorically, this ritual signifies the strength and indestructible quality associated with the male as opposed to the fragile, shy and passive quality of the female.

Though these practices are changing over time, they still exist in some rural areas in Bangladesh. The birth of a son is very much welcomed as he is considered a future earning member of the family as well as the support of his parents in old age. On the other hand, a daughter, especially in poor families, is considered an economic burden to the family (ADB 2001; Ameen 2005; Begum 2009). Rozario notes, 'as a girl grows up, she hears all sorts of comments about her looks and how desirable she might be in the marriage market' (2004, p. 36). Even from the moment of a new born girl, the family and relatives start commenting her complexion, such as whether she is dark or *kalo* [black] or *farsha* [fair skinned]. A girl's complexion has an important role in getting a good marriage in adulthood. It is important to examine girls' position, roles and responsibilities in their natal and in-law family and how women exercise power in family relations because they provide the context within which domestic violence occurs in Bangladesh.

Women and family in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's patrilineal system carries very negative socialization processes for girl children. From childhood, in most cases, a girl becomes fully aware of the fact that her brother is an important asset to the family, whereas she is an economic liability (ADB 2001; Ameen 2005;). Bangladeshi girls experience sex-biased behaviour in the allocation of family food and access to resources and opportunities. From the very earliest childhood, girls are raised to fear independence and are taught that they are physically, intellectually and emotionally inferior to men and unable to protect themselves (Miaji 2010). Very often a girl is treated as 'another property' or 'bird of passage' who needs to be guarded until handed over to the rightful owner [a husband] (Ameen 2005, pp. 26-30; Chowdhury 2009).

In most cases, formal education and caring for a daughter is traditionally considered similar to, 'watering a neighbour's tree' (Raynor 2005, p. 83) or 'you take all the trouble to nurture the plant, but the fruit goes to someone else' (Begum 1993-1994, p. 25; Kabeer 1988, p. 101), attitudes which are still prevalent. Girls are mostly viewed as 'potential mothers' and 'homemakers', and non-formal education within the home is the preferred or sometimes only option for them option, especially in rural poor households. This non-formal education emphasizes women's domestic skills and virtues (Miaji 2010; ADB 2001, p. 4). Society views daughters as mostly non-productive and temporary members of their natal homes.

Most Bangladeshi women have no independent identity beyond wife and/or mother. In most cases, Bangladeshi society prefers a continuous male protection for women regardless of her age (Miaji 2010; Zaman 1999). As a girl, she should be under the protection of father, as a young woman, she is to be protected by her husband, and in old age, her son/s is to be her protectors (Ameen 2005). It is an unwritten law that irrespective of age, a woman has to ask permission of the male guardian to go out of the house (Amin 2001; Islam & Karim 2011-2012), and sometimes is required to be escorted (particularly after sundown) by a close male relative or others (Zaman 1999, p. 41). These social expectations of women still

exist in contemporary Bangladesh, despite the fact that women activists raise their voices in protest.

The traditional roles of women make marriage central for Bangladeshi women. There is a general expectation that young women will be secluded until marriage to preserve their family's honour. Parents fear for their daughter's safety, chastity and reputation, crucial factors in determining her value in the eyes of her potential husband and in-laws. This is one reason why so many parents are reluctant to send their daughters to school. Society's concern about the sexual purity of the bride and the lack of social security for girls pressurizes parents to marry off their daughter as soon as they reach puberty (Miaji 2010). Marriage signifies the adulthood of a girl (Ameen 2005).

Though Bangladesh is a Muslim country, other religions such as Hindu, Buddhism, and Christianity are also practised here. All religions have special rules and customs regarding marriage. Male guardians usually arrange marriages, although sometimes a network of female relatives and informants help parents to find a suitable match. Marriages are controlled by the decisions of family. A woman has very little choice about her marriage partner (BNWLA 2002; Pereira 2002). While some marriages are arranged amicably, very often girls are married off without being consulted and sometimes even by force (Bates, Maselko & Schuler 2007). For a son's marriage, parents mostly seek a bride with a fair or whitish complexion along with her parent's wealth, though in theory moral purity is considered as a highly desirable characteristic (Rozario 2002, p.47).

Women and marriage in Bangladesh

Marriage in Bangladesh is perceived as a social responsibility that normally occurs between a man and a woman in order to legalize cohabitation and ensure the continuity of the future generation, rather than provide companionship. The marriage laws limit the legal age of consent to 14 and the minimum age for marriage to 18 for women and 21 for men (Pereira 2002). As stated above, marriages are largely arranged between families of brides and grooms, with

relatively fewer choices for 'love' marriages (Bates, Maselko & Schuler 2007; Khan 2001).

Reasons cited for early marriage in Bangladesh, in addition to protecting a daughter's chastity and the family honour, are to lower household expenses, to guarantee a daughter a financially secure husband, and to ensure the production of many sons over a long period of fertility (Ali 2004; Ahmed 2005a; Field & Ambrus 2008; World Bank 2008). However, in arranged, forced or early marriages, girls have almost no voice, which is symptomatic of the lack of voice women have throughout their lives. Nonetheless, arranged marriages have been recently undergoing a change as women's education and employment provides them the opportunity to argue for their own choice (World Bank 2008). In arranged marriages, a 'tradition' recently introduced and called 'dowry' has become a universal practice throughout Bangladesh (Ambrus, Field & Torero 2010; Khan 2014).

Dowry is deeply rooted in society as a marital custom and has become an important criterion for any marriage transaction in Bangladesh (Rozario 2002). Usually, dowry refers to donations or gifts, either in cash or in kind, given by the bride's family to the groom or his family during the wedding or later, with the purpose of assisting the newly married couple to start their new conjugal life together in ease (Begum 2014; Kumari 1989, p. 1). Some sociologists explained dowry as 'gift' [*dann*], some as 'female pre-mortem inheritance' [the daughter's share of parental property] and others as 'compensation' (Kumari 1989, p. 3). Others also considered dowry as the 'price' paid for a 'good match' in the marriage market (Dalmia & Lawrence 2005, pp. 71-81). Dowry could also be seen as a symbol of parental affection for the daughter. However, over the years from 1980 to 2000, its symbolic meaning has changed from a voluntary gift to a demand and requirement (Caldwell, Reddy & Caldwell 1983; Chowdhury 2010a; Kumari 1989; Rozario 1992; Billing 1992 cited in Anderson 2003, p. 270; Srinivasan 2005). The cash dowry is usually paid before the wedding and the amounts are often kept secret (Suran et al. 2004). Dowry in the form of furniture and electronics are given on wedding day. Though the payment of dowry begins with the wedding

ceremony, it continues for 10 to 20 years, or even longer. This widespread practice and its social acceptance negatively affect women's lives and overall wellbeing (Chowdhury 2010a; Salam, Alim & Noguchi 2006; Srinivasan & Bedi 2007).

It is worth mentioning that under Muslim law, there is no provision of such a dowry system; rather a marriage consists of four central elements:

1. Consent of both Parties- showing *Ijab*[offer] by one party and *Kabul*[acceptance] by other party
2. Dower⁸ or *Mehr*
3. Two adult male witness or one adult male witness along with two female witnesses
4. Registration of marriage (Khan 2001; Pereira 2002)

Of the four, the most important aspect is the determination of the dower or *mehr*, that is, the money paid by the man to his would-be bride as a mark of respect for her consent to enter the marriage contract. It is sometimes provided in the form of both movable and immovable properties. Dower is usually determined by both parties, and could be any amount agreed upon in the marriage contract. The amount of dower typically is divided in two parts: prompt and deferred. The prompt part is immediately payable if demanded by the wife's side or the wife, while the deferred part is receivable only at the end of the marriage either by divorce or death (Ambrus, Field & Torero 2009; Pereira 2002, p.18).

Generally, once married the woman becomes her husband's property and he is expected to exert his authority from the very beginning of the marital relationship (Bandyopadhyay & Khan 2003). Bangladesh society views married women as service providers with much emphasis placed on her roles within 'motherhood' of childbearing and child rearing (Amin 2001, p. 114). Married women are expected

⁸Dower/*mehr* and dowry are often misunderstood. At the time of the Muslim marriage, the groom commits to pay and actually pays the bride a sum of money called dower/ *mehr*, which is a token of his willing acceptance of the responsibility of bearing all necessary expenses of his wife. On the other hand, the groom or his parents demand money, costly gifts, even property, from the wife's parents as a pre-condition for their willingness to enter into the marriage relationship. This is termed 'dowry' which is illegal in Bangladesh law but still widely practiced as a tradition (Ambrus, Field & Torero 2009; Pereira 2002

to remain confined to the four walls of home doing all the housework in order to keep the family sound (Miaji 2010), yet such work is still unrecognized as 'productive work' (Care 2012b). The role of a housewife is like a 'quiet missionary' where she is to provide for, look after and ensure the welfare of the other family members while there is hardly anyone to take care of her (Amin 2001; Bates 2004; Islam & Sultana 2006). It is understandable that marriage as a social institution often creates powerlessness and subordination of women (Bates 2004).

In marital relationships, a woman is expected to do certain duties: the most important among them is providing sexual services to husband (Amin 2001). Though the rights enjoyed by both parties within marriage are different, the burden of responsibilities seriously weighs on the women (Amin 2001; Pereira 2002). Women generally have no reproductive rights or choices. Most of them, particularly in village, cannot take family planning decisions without the consent of husband (ADB 2001; Kamal 2000). Even related laws ask the husband's written permission: for example if a woman wants to be sterilized or wants to have an abortion (Akhter2005; Amin 2001).

In Bangladesh a strong gender inequalities regarding 'normative sexual practice' widely exist. Bangladeshi society behaves as if there is no such thing as female sexuality. Female sexuality is generally heavily influenced by patriarchal norms and controlled by the husband (Huq 2014; Rashid 2006; Rashid et al. 2011). Even after marriage, women mostly feel ashamed to express sexual desire to their husbands, and they do not participate actively in sexual activity as it is seen as shameful and an unfeminine (Islam & Karim 2011-2012). Sex is still categorised as pleasure for husband but for wife it is about duty to provide sex anytime whenever husband wants it (Rashid 2006). The wife's sexuality is seen to serve only two purposes; 1) satisfy a husband's sexual needs and 2) bear his children (Amin 2001, pp. 131-33; Islam & Karim 2011-2012). As was the case three decades ago, women are still thought of as a passive actor in the sexual act and are expected to provide all kind of comforts for husbands (Amin 2001, pp.131-33; Begum 1988; Islam & Karim 2011-12; Rashid et al. 2011).

Women's sexual pleasure and consent are generally ignored by their male partners (Hadi 2005; Naved et al. 2006). The question of a woman's right over her own body still remains irrelevant (Amin 2001, p. 129). However, a study conducted in 2002 on 54 women from rural and urban areas of Bangladesh claims that, despite normative restrictions, some urban educated women find ways to communicate about sex with their husbands, and most enjoy their sexual life (Khan, Townsend & D'Costa 2002).

A married woman in Bangladesh can expect to be maintained by her husband as long as she is obedient, faithful and fertile (Pereira 2002). Although mothers are the primary caregivers, fathers make the major decisions about children. Children are assumed to belong to the husband's lineage and there are social mechanisms protect this right. Legal guardianship of the child always belongs to the father, but mothers are allowed custody during childhood – up to the age of seven for male children and until puberty for female children (Hossain & Hossain 2004; Kabeer 1991; Pereira 2002). The irony is that during this period she cannot be the legal guardian or maintainer of the child (Tamanna 2014; Pereira 2002, p.32). Furthermore, in order to retain the custody of children, a mother cannot remarry a person of her choice ⁹(Pereira 2002). Though the current court practice favours mothers to have custody, considering the best interest of child, it is very much a temporary right and not necessarily an indicator of the acknowledgement of women's equal legal status under personal laws (Tamanna 2014). The discriminatory custody law is a key factor that entraps women in continuing in violent marriages (HRW 2012).

Women's lower social status and lesser economic participation lead to their poor health, high fertility and lack of access to essential health care, resulting in a high maternal mortality rate (Islam & Sultana 2006). With little exception, Bangladeshi women face discrimination in regard to access to health care facilities affordable within the family. Often only traditional and cheap health care facilities are available for rural women, compared to men (World Bank 2008).

⁹If a divorced mother intends to remarry as well as retain custody, she must marry the child's uncle or blood relative. If she marries another person, she will lose the custody (Pereira 2002)

Bangladeshi social and cultural mechanisms including customs, rituals, media, literature and art promote male dominance and gender role segregation. Through marriage, the authority to control women shifts from a father to a husband. After marriage, women have to seek permission from husband for any activity beyond conjugal duties, such as visiting relatives, further education or seeking employment (ADB 2001; Islam & Karim 2011-2012). A woman is taught to be a 'good wife' by obeying her husband's instruction and satisfying him by every means. Customarily, the word 'woman' is synonymous with 'a docile daughter', 'a compliant wife' and 'a dependant mother' (Begum 1993-1994, p. 24). Moreover, the belief in the traditional cultural practice that allows a man to divorce his wife by uttering the word '*talaq*' [I divorce you] three times still prevails in rural areas in spite of the introduction of legal procedures to secure divorce (Chaudhuri & Abdullah 2014; Pereira 2002).

It is worth noting that a Muslim man can marry up to four wives following some procedural preconditions. The state law mandates a husband to obtain prior permission from his first wife for remarriage obligates local government arbitration councils to approve multiple wives and establishes formal procedures for divorce. But polygamy without the permission remains valid (Ambrus, Field and Torero 2010; Sultana 2004). It is understandable that as long as the husband's polygamy remains legal, he will not bother obtaining the first wife's consent (Rahman, Giedraitis & Akhter 2013). Moreover, the provision that the councils should be convinced that the proposed marriage is necessary and just and has valid reasons seems vague. The law does not provide explanation of what is 'necessary and just' and has only clarified a few circumstances, such as if wife is infertile, is ill, is physically unfit for the conjugal relations, wilfully disobeys a decree for restitution of conjugal rights, or is mentally ill. It is argued that the penalty for not seeking prior permission from the first wife is very insignificant (one year in prison or a fine up to 10,000¹⁰ taka) which encourages husbands to disregard their wives rights in this area (HRW 2012, p.35).

¹⁰10,000 taka is equivalent to 2.5 months income of a rural poor family in Bangladesh

Muslim wives in Bangladesh are also devalued in respect of divorce. A Muslim husband has unilateral right to divorce. He can divorce his wife any time he wants to. But women have only the delegated right to divorce, which has to be passed on by their husband in writing in the marriage contract. If the right has not been conferred, a woman can seek court intervention for divorce in certain circumstances.¹¹ The due court's processes are not very costly but hidden charges are expensive and time consuming and mostly out of reach of many poor women (Pereira 2002). Thus when the husband exercises this divorce right, a wife literally has no remedy (Amin 2001; Ahmed 2007; Hossain 2003). However, men who desire divorce/*talaq* or utter *talaq* three times, he must notify the arbitration council in written form about his decision to divorce his wife. He is also obligated to provide a copy of the said notice to his wife (Ahmed 2007; Monsoor 1999; Sultana 2003). Divorce will not be declared until ninety days from the day of providing the notice. Within this period the arbitration council will try to arrange reconciliation between both parties. If the reconciliation process is unsuccessful, after 90 days, the divorce will be effective. But in case of wife's pregnancy, the divorce will not be effective until the birth of the child (Ahmed 2007; Pereira 2002).

Women and violence in the family

In many Bangladeshi households, especially in rural settings, beating wives is a common phenomenon, as husbands are socially permitted to use violence against wives in the form of physical chastisement. In this setting, a man is considered spineless if he does not beat his wife. In most cases, women are advised to endure and be tolerant and patient with their husband's violence at any cost, to avoid trouble in the marriage. Seeking help and justice to end the husband's violence is generally considered disloyal, and ultimately labels her 'guilty'. Societal perceptions often encourage the wife to suffer in silence and consider the violence her 'destiny' (Ameen 2005, pp. 35-6; Miaji 2010, pp. 97-102).

¹¹ The circumstances are provided in Appendix 5

These gendered and stereotyped societal attitudes promote women's dependency in marriage and place them at great risk of violence (Rahman et al. 2013). The first nationwide survey (see Chapter One) revealed that one-third of the 87% of married women who reported being regularly abused refused to visit a doctor despite severe injuries for fear of being thrown out of the home by their husbands (BBS 2014). Women's acceptance of a certain level of physical abuse clearly reflects their *helplessness* as well as their positioning within religious teaching and socialization processes. In spite of continuous efforts by women's rights activists as well as government and NGOs to raise women's status in the family and society, Bangladesh cultural norms still socialize girls to silently endure any abuse from their husbands or in-laws. They are encouraged not to disclose their husbands' and in-laws' violence to others, and not to leave their husbands' houses, as it would harm the family's name and honour (Ameen 2005, p.33).

In Bangladeshi patriarchal society, after marriage a son brings his bride to his parents' household and the couple live there at least during the initial years of their marriage (Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneen 2011, p. 3). Using the 1974 census data of the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR) in the study area of Matlab, Andrew Foster estimated that, on average, a woman lives in the father-in-law's household for about 4.2 years. There is significant variation in the duration of co-residence (Foster 1993) but very few couples start their new life in their own place.

Married women are widely considered physically and morally bound not just to their husbands but also to their in-laws. Irrespective of economic status, marriage subordinates most new brides under the control of their mothers-in-law, and sometimes [senior] sisters-in-law, with the daughter-in-law's position in the family generally considered lower than her mother in-law's position (Miaji 2010, p.100). The new bride's relationship with her mother-in-law is probably more important for her wellbeing than her relationship with her husband (Rahim 1989) and new brides are expected to quickly adjust to living with her in-law family, where she has little or no say in decision making. A general belief in Bangladesh is that when a son gets married it is the first time in her life that a mother-in-law sees herself in

a powerful position. Mothers-in-law can abuse this power by mistreating their daughters-in-law (Ameen 2005, p. 29).

South Asian including Bangladeshi mothers-in-law, especially from rural areas, exercise power and control over daughters-in-law and often subordinate them (Bulancea 2010). Cain, Khanam and Nahar (1979) stated, 'the extent and duration of subordination varies; however, even after the son and daughter-in-law have established a separate household, the mother-in-law's authority continues to be felt.' Balk (1997) found that in Bangladesh, the position of a daughter-in-law often limits her mobility and decision making authority. Varghese (2009), using the data of 4,053 married women of Matlab, also found that in co-residence, mothers-in-law can adversely affect the decision making capacity of women and their access to economic resources. Their participation in poverty eradication and empowerment activities, such as microcredit organizations is also curtailed. As in India (Bloom, Wypij & Gupta 2001), most Bangladeshi mothers-in-law negatively affect the decision-making capacity and limit the autonomy of their daughter-in-law compared to the situations where the spouse is the head of the household (Bates, Maselko & Schuler 2007; Cain, Khanam & Nahar 1979; Dyson & Moore 1983). Mothers-in-law can even have a detrimental effect on the daughter-in-law's health (Varghese 2009, pp. 84-215). In India (Char, Saavala & Kulmala 2010) and Pakistan (Kadir et al. 2003) many mothers-in-law significantly influence the family planning decision of their daughters-in-law. Foster (2013) identified the lower level of nutritional investment in daughters-in-law who live in joint households in rural Bangladesh. This has significant effects on their wellbeing, as is discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

In summary, under the strong traditional division of work roles, men and women in family relations are compelled to exercise different rights and obligations. In most cases, all authority and decision making powers are under the control of the men in the family. Women are subject to the control of men in the family in various ways and most women, whether unmarried or married, are likely to be dependent on a male relative. Though it cannot be denied that some women in contemporary Bangladesh achieve or are likely to achieve economic independence and

significantly contribute to the family income, the traditional customs which govern gender relations in the family have not necessarily yet moved forward in tandem with this trend.

While the life patterns of most Bangladeshi women are determined by patriarchal attitudes and authority, there has been some change, ironically due to increasing landlessness and impoverishment (Sultana 2003, p.14). Particularly in urban areas, women's roles, responsibilities and mobility are changing, with some women even from rural areas coming out from seclusion in search of paid work outside the home (Ameen 2005, p. 32). Persistent poverty and the gradual erosion of the agricultural economy have prompted such moves by women (ADB 2001; Banks 2013). However, even the significant number of women who work as workers, teachers, lawyers, journalists, government employees and with the NGOs still face various problems in their daily lives due to patriarchy, purdah (the veil) and religious fanaticism (Guhathakurta 2003; Riaz 2005, p. 171).

Women and religion in Bangladesh

Muslims comprise 88% of the population of Bangladesh (Begum 2004, p.66), followed by Hindus, Christians and Buddhists. The major religions espouse rigid, gender stereotypical attitudes towards women, which play an important role in the context of social life (Ameen 2005; Hossain & Hossain 2004; Pereira 2002). Though the Bangladesh constitution guarantees equal fundamental rights to every citizen (Minlaw 1999), women have been restricted from enjoying these rights as family laws (religious laws) still govern some of their personal matters, such as marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance.

Bangladeshi women are discriminated against in inheritance rights in all the religions. Muslim women are entitled only to a half share compared to their brothers' full entitlement to parental property (al-Faruqi 1988). A Muslim wife is entitled to one-eighth of the deceased husband's property if there is a child, and one-fourth if there is no child.¹² However, Bangladeshi tradition discourages

¹²A Hindu wife inherits the same share as a son, but her inheritance is limited to a life interest (i.e. on her death, the property reverts back to the next heir of the husband). According to Hindu law,

women from claiming their inheritance rights from their brother/s, despite legal mechanisms designed to enshrine women's rights (Amin 2001; Scalise 2009).

Personal or family laws restrict women's personal power (Pereira 2002; Amin 2001, p. 45) and create discrimination, confusion and inequality between men and women of the same religion. In conjunction with family laws, customary beliefs and practices legitimate the humiliation of Bangladeshi women (Amin 2001, pp. 45-49). However, for the majority of the Muslim population, the state prioritises the Sharia law (Muslim Personal Law), which is based on the Quran (The Holy text), the Sunnah and the opinion of learned Islamic scholars (Begum 2004, p. 66).

Sometimes Muslim leaders misinterpret religious texts in order to confine women and deny women's rights and choice (Chowdhury 2009). There are a variety of interpretations of the holy text of Quran in Muslim countries; some are more respectful of women than others. Challenging patriarchal interpretations of Muslim holy texts is an important strategy of feminists. I think it is important that the meanings of the texts are contested so that it can be determined whether they are 'true interpretations' or 'misinterpretations'.

Subject to a few exceptions, the socio-cultural and religious values strictly govern women's life style in Bangladesh (Chowdhury 2009;Goswami 1998, p.45). From their very infancy, many women, especially rural women, are taught '*Shamir-*

unmarried and married daughters with sons can inherit, while childless widowed daughters or daughters having no son are excluded. The Buddhists in Bangladesh are also governed by Hindu laws. The inheritance rights of indigenous women in Bangladesh are also governed by Hindu laws and differ from one tribal community to another. In the matrilineal *Gharo* and *Khasiya* tribes, women have exclusive inheritance rights, transferring from mother to daughter (Zeller & Sharma1998). Among the *Khasiyas*, women are the main property holders, with the youngest daughter inheriting three-fourths of the assets and no man can ever inherit property (Agarwal 1994, p. 103). Among the *Gharos*, if a woman leaves no daughters, her sisters and nieces inherit her property. In some patrilineal tribes, for example, the *Chakmas* and the *Santhals*, daughters can only inherit in the absence of sons. Inheritance for Bangladeshi Christians is governed by the Succession Act of 1925, which provides equal inheritance rights for men and women. In the presence of a male child, a Christian widow inherits one-third of her husband's property; in the absence of a male child and the presence of her husband's male relatives, the wife inherits half of the property, whereas in the absence of both children and relatives, she inherits all the property(Pereira 2002).

payer niche maeyder behest [woman's heaven lies underneath the feet of her husband] (Miaji 2010, p.108). These sorts of misinterpretations of religious principles not only specifically contribute to the preservation of male supremacy but also contribute to violence against women. Bangladeshi social structure, especially in rural settings, under the misinterpreted religious sanction permits husbands' violence against wives in the form of physical chastisement. Girls are taught and are widely expected to accept some form of violence from their husband and not to be rebellious (Islam et al. 2015; Begum 2004). Not only misinterpretation of Islamic texts, but also some religious dictates (*fatwa*) which have been developed through the unrestricted exercise of personal opinion, have become customary in nature. For instance, there are some myths persistent in the rural areas that 'the parts of women's bodies beaten by their husbands would go to heaven' (Schuler, Hashemi & Riley 1997). Many women accept this myth and bear all sorts of violence to gain access to heaven (Begum 2004, p.67).

Women in Bangladesh, especially rural women, are still the regular victims of stereotypical cultural attitudes and *fatwa* (religious judgments). In 1971, it was thought that the policies of the new nation might be more liberating for women than the Islamist ideology of the then Pakistani state. But the new nation of Bangladesh did not fundamentally alter existing gender relations. Within three years of independence, the founding father and the president of Bangladesh was killed, which contributed to the rehabilitation of local collaborators with Pakistan, allowing them to develop a new Islamic hold on the country (Kabeer 1991, pp. 122-126; Riaz 2005, pp. 171-174; Sobhan 1994, pp. 72-73). As a result, Islam re-emerged as a significant force in the country both socially and politically. Islamic politicians, who opposed the Liberation War, collaborating with the Pakistan occupation forces, and who work against women's basic rights, have been sponsored directly or indirectly by every government since independence.

Women become serious victims of this 'fake' Islamization of politics (Feldman 1998, p. 46). Islamic lobbies in Bangladesh are against women's rights and pursue an agenda of confining women to a domestic role and imposing a ban on their mobility (Ganguly 2006; Kabeer 1991, p. 135). The nation's original basic

principle of 'secularism' has changed under the influence of the Islamic connection (Kabeer 1991. pp. 126, 131). Islam was declared the state religion in 1980 (Ganguly 2006; Kabeer 1991 p. 132; Shehabuddin 1999, p. 1015; Sobhan 1994 p. 73). This ideological change in politics began promoting 'Islamization', which resulted in increasing fundamentalism (Kabeer 1991, pp. 121-126).

Islamic fundamentalists along with the clergy consider women as a potential threat to the male-dominated society. They have been showing increasing aggression against women, from renowned celebrities to NGO workers, even to village women (Guhathakurta 2003, p. 2). In order to establish their authority across Bangladesh, fundamentalists began to use the traditional social institutions such as *salish* [village arbitration] and *fatwa* with brutal punishments, especially against women (Riaz 2005, p.171). Rural poor women have been reportedly subjected to the cruelty of *fatwa*, accused of adultery or transgression against the 'moral code of Islam' (Shammy 2002). In 2011, even with a secular government in power, many *fatwas* were issued against women throughout Bangladesh. For example, in 2011, Hena Akhter, a 14 year-old girl was whipped to death following a *fatwa* for allegedly having an illicit relationship with a married man (*The Guardian* 2011).

Recently a fundamentalist Islamic group named *Hefazat-e-Islam* banned women from public appearances and also wanted to scrap the first National Women's Policy that has ensured equal representation and participation of women in all walks of life (*The Guardian* 2013). Islamic groups deny women are the equals of men in any aspect of life. Their heinous agendas for subordinating women were clearly reflected when some supporters of *Hefazat-e-Islam*, a fundamentalist Islamic group, brutally beat a female TV journalist, who was covering news of the Long March programs on April 6, 2013. The alleged reason for the assault was that she was not wearing a *hijab* and was working only in the presence of men (Odhikar 2013, p. 42). It is not surprising that their demands have angered women's groups in Bangladesh. Women activists and feminists have raised their voices against Islamic fundamentalism including *fatwa* against women.

This is the overall socio-cultural and religious context in which women try to navigate their way through violent family relationships. The next section outlines women and education in Bangladesh. Women's subordination continues and affects the decisions many Bangladeshi women are able to make in relation to education.

Women's access to education in Bangladesh

Education usually acts as a catalyst between human resources and economic development for both women and men. It is evident that many development processes have not been fruitful due to the large numbers of women who are illiterate (Velkoff 1998 cited in Akhter 2012, p. 21).

Briefly, the education system in Bangladesh consists of three streams: the general education system, the Madrasah education system (religion based) and the technical/vocational system, with large diversification in curriculum. Different mediums of education coexist and people have the liberty to choose from three different options: the English medium, the Bengali medium and the religious branch. The general education (BANBEIS 2006) is mostly offered by the government of Bangladesh, especially at the primary and secondary levels (BANBEIS 2005; CPD 2001). The three tiers of education are: Primary level: grades I-V, Secondary level: grades VI-XII,¹³ and Tertiary level: grade XIII and above (BANBEIS 2005)

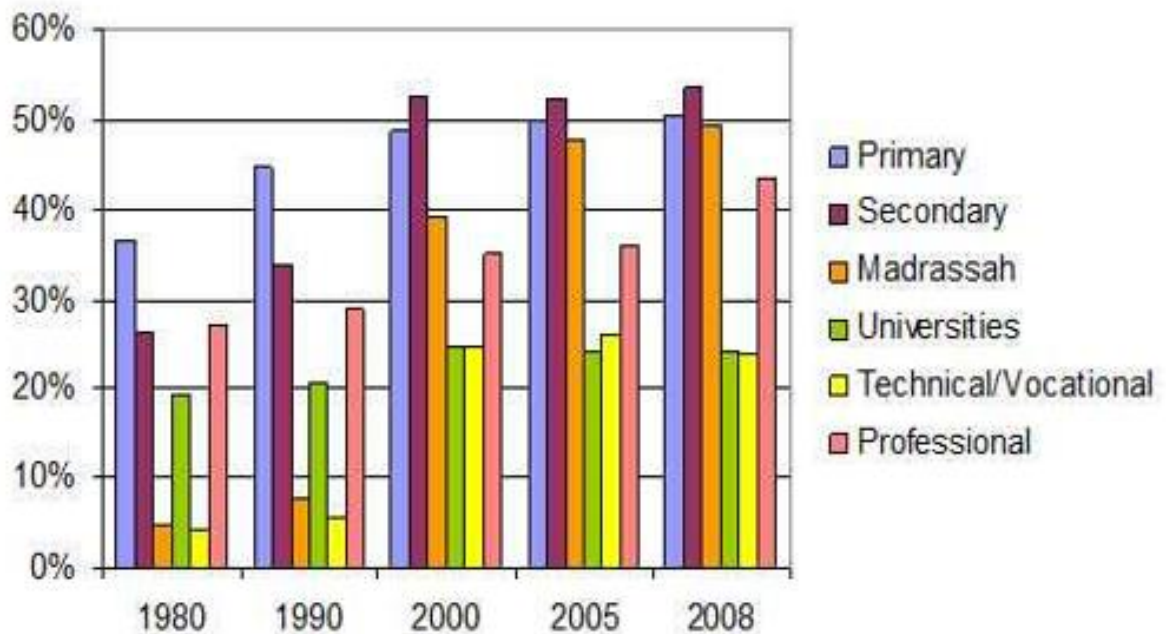
Women remain in a subordinate position in all education tiers. Literacy rates are approximately 55% for women, compared with 63% for men (BBS 2011, p. 434). Access to the university and technical or vocational levels of education is 12% of females compared to their counterpart males at 36% (BANBEIS 2012). When choosing subjects at the tertiary level, the 'gender-science stereotype' still discriminates against female students, who are likely to choose 'soft' subjects such as social sciences, economics and humanities, rather than the more

¹³In Bangladesh the secondary level is divided into three stages: Junior Secondary (VI-VIII), Secondary (grades IX-X), Higher Secondary (grades XI-XII);

esteemed 'hard' subjects of mathematics and the physical sciences (UN Women 2011; BBS 2011).

Contemporary female enrolments in engineering and technology in Bangladesh are increasing (Safiuddin, Dyke & Rasouli 2013, p. 189) but male students still predominate. Figure 2 shows that from 1980 to 2008, the trend of female student enrolments increased gradually at all levels of primary, secondary and Madrassah except in tertiary and technical education, where the progress is unremarkable (Hussain & Naumi 2015).

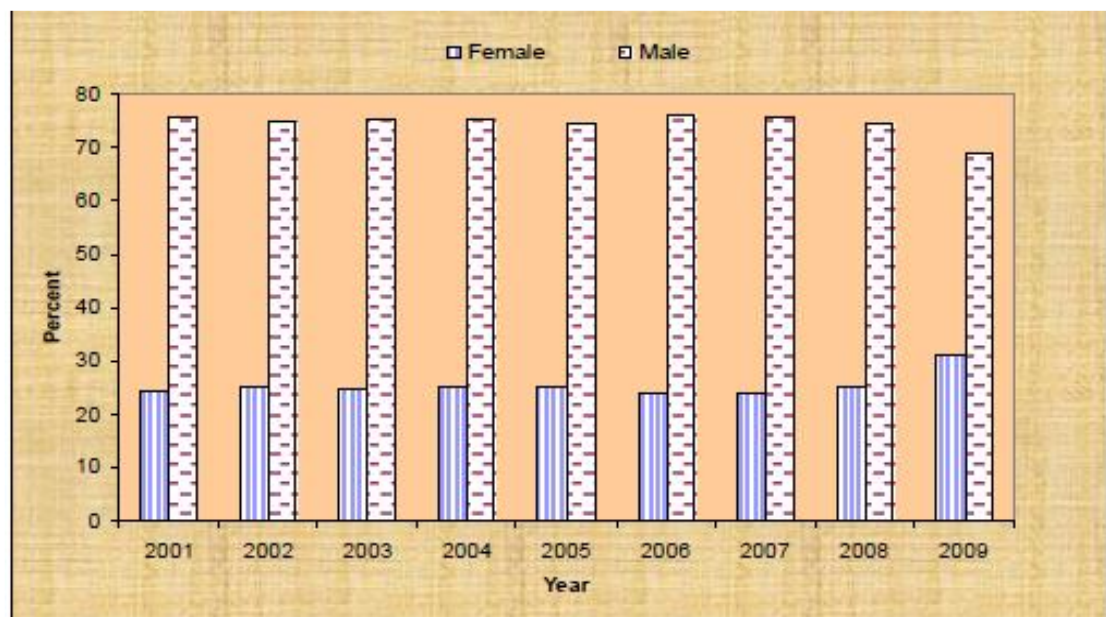
Figure 2: Female enrolment in education (1980-2008)



Source: Hussain & Naumi 2015, p.1

While the rates for women in universities are rising, as shown in Figure 2 above, Figure 3 shows that the rates for enrolment of male students are growing fast compare to their female counter part.

Figure 3:Percentage of enrolled students at public universities by sex



Source: Ferdaush and Rahman 2011, p.11

The lower rate of female enrolment at the university level indicates a strong preference for the education of sons over daughters. As 40% of Bangladesh's population lives at the absolute poverty level, poor families cannot afford the cost of all their children to complete their education (BBS 2007, p. 58), prompting most to privilege their sons' education over their daughters'. This preference arises partially due to poverty and illiteracy, as well as socio-cultural realities of parent's dependency on the male child in their old age (ADB 2001, p. 4). To address this obstacle, the Bangladesh government declared primary education as 'universal' (Akhter 2012, p. 9) and introduced a female secondary education enhancement policy through the Female Secondary Stipend Program (FSSP) in the early 1990s. This policy¹⁴ aimed to increase female enrolment in secondary school (Ali 2010, p. 2) and to improve the female secondary school completion rate as well as to increase female age at marriage (Hove 2007, pp. 15-16; Khandker, Pitt & Fuwa 2003, p. 2). As a result the average ratio of female secondary enrolment rose from 40% during 1991-95 to 53% during 1996-2000. Most importantly, the total average number of female secondary students exceeded the total number of male students during 1999-2003 (Ali 2010, pp.4-5). The FSSP has been largely credited for achieving gender parity in female secondary enrolment, delaying girls' early marriages (Amin & Sedgh 1998) and increasing social acceptance of girls' higher mobility (Heissler 2011, p. 734). The World Bank (2008, p. 8) also documented that education has empowered Bangladesh girls with decision making ability, and built girls' confidence to speak out and to be heard within the family and communities.

However, the FSSP has not proved successful in retaining schoolgirls from the poorest background. The FSSP has also been unable to ensure quality education for girls, resulting in a higher female dropout rate and failure in examination (Ali 2010, p. 8; Banu 2011, pp. 115-6; Heissler 2011, p. 734; Hove 2007, pp. 63-64; Raynor & Wesson 2006).

¹⁴The policy, the first nationwide Female Stipend Programme (FSSP), launched in 1994, provides girls with a monthly stipend and free textbooks and tuition.

Several studies were conducted to find the causes of female student drop out. These causes are: poor school quality and poverty, family and social pressure, parent's ignorance of the importance of education, the demand for child labour, the practice of dowry, and the high value placed on female chastity, and early marriage, in which young women are expected to focus on serving their husbands not their own education (Hove 2007, p. iv; Banu 2011, pp.118-28). A contemporary social problem, known as 'eve teasing', is an added new problem that leads many parents to marry off their daughters as early as possible. Eve-teasing¹⁵ is a euphemism for the sexual harassment of girls and women in public places, such as on the streets, in public transportation, and in the workplace and educational institutions. One of the worst consequences of eve teasing is the increasing rate of girls dropping out of school. In order to protect their daughter's chastity and honour, some parents withdraw their daughters from school and keep them at home, and in some cases, marry them off at a very early age (Islam 2013). Thus, eve teasing contributes to maintaining the low educational status of women in Bangladesh.

Some poor girls are dropping out of school due to old marriage-related practices based on beliefs such as, 'a husband should have a higher education level than his wife'. It is evident that some years of schooling sometimes work as an obstacle instead of an advantage for a girl and her family in arranging her marriage, as her status would be too high compared to her would-be husband (Del Franco 2010, p. 153). The government initiatives for girls' educational bring them new hopes and aspirations, but complications also arise when traditional marriage practices challenge the new educational outcomes. With the FSSP, more young girls are becoming educated, resulting in an increasing number of women facing disadvantage in achieving marriage. Some women are marrying 'down' (to a man with less social status), creating what is known as educational hypogamy, as reflected in Figure 4 below. The tradition in Bangladesh was the hypergamous

¹⁵A report published by Ain-O-Shalish Kendra (ASK), a legal and human rights organisation, documented that due to eve teasing, 28 women committed suicide in 2010 and another seven attempted suicide to escape from regular sexual harassment (Khan 2012).

marriage that involved women marrying men higher in status ('marrying up') (World Bank 2008, p.48)

Figure 4: Increase in women marrying men of lesser education



Source: World Bank 2008, p. 48

This anxiety about hypogamy, combined with early marriage and dowry practices still discourages girls from high achievement in school (Heissler 2011, p. 738). Furthermore, in some cases, girls' educational attainment and their age put their parents at risk of having to pay a higher dowry (Sultana 2005, p. 183). In rural areas, secondary school completion does not assign a better and secure future for most girls; rather their marital prospects suffer as their level of education increases (Novoryta 2008, p. 78).

In my view government initiatives for female education are positive but not as significant as expected. Undoubtedly a bridge has been built for women who were previously deprived. The government should replicate its successes in gender parity for females at the primary and secondary levels at the level of tertiary education. Bangladeshi women need strong support and encouragement to continue their education. The high illiteracy rate is associated with strong social stigma, and the lack of sustainable income keeps women ignorant of their rights

which ultimately results in their not seeking remedy for the discrimination and violence they regularly experience. However it worth noting that while any woman may experience domestic violence regardless of her class, education or employment status, limited access to education puts her in a disadvantaged position in the family, workforce and the broader society.

Women and work in Bangladesh

As discussed previously, men and women have culturally specific roles in the family, women's primary responsibilities being mothers and domestic carers. Although women represent almost half of the total population (BBS 2015), unfortunately, they have been classified as economically unproductive (Bose, Ahmad & Hossain 2009; Wallace et al. 1987, p. 1) with women's contribution to the Gross National Product (GNP) unacknowledged (Ahmed, Siwar & Idris 2011, p. 805).

The socially constructed roles and responsibilities of women create barriers for women's participation in the market economy and generally confine women to non-monetised household activities (Cain, Khanam & Nahar 1979; Feldman 2001, p. 1099; Kabeer 1997; Hossain & Tisdell 2005, p. 443). However, traditional patriarchal values and lifestyles are contested from all sides as poverty and economic necessity push large numbers of lower, middle and upper middle class women into the labour market.

Many factors have contributed to the entry of women into paid employment. Women's activism, women's protests, the forces of globalisation and the UN, the NGOs, the INGOs, as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) push the government to undertake special provisions for women's employment. Foreign aid and government development efforts are also positively contributing to women's participation in the labour force (Afsar 1990, p.1; Banks 2013; Mahmud 1997, p. 245), although women are still under-represented compared to men. According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) of 2010, the total labour force is 56.7 million, of which only 17.2 million are female (BBS 2011). Of employed women, the highest proportion at 92.3% is engaged in informal sectors, with only

7.7% in the formal employment sector. 56.2% of total employed women are working as unpaid family workers compared to 7.1% of men (BBS 2011).

As stated earlier, women are engaged in different kinds of jobs in both formal and informal sectors: non-marketable production, cash income from family businesses or paid jobs outside (Banks 2013; Khandker 1988, p. 111). Large numbers of women are also engaged in sex work, though there are controversies about their numbers. While the World Bank reported that the number of female sex workers is over 105,000, a women's organisation, the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), a prominent organisation working for women and girls, declared that there are only around 2500 registered sex workers in Bangladesh (BNWLA 2002, p. 44; World Bank 2006). Unfortunately sex workers are also excluded from the labour force census. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics does not yet recognise 'sex work' as a profession; rather, sex workers are categorised as 'destitute' (Hauque 2011, p. 5).

However, several developments have contributed to women's increasing participation in income earning activities. The expansion of microcredit programs, the rapid growth of NGOs and particularly the massive expansion of the export garments industries (Banks 2013, p. 96; Chowdhury 2010b; Khundker 1997) have opened job opportunities for women. Especially in urban areas, the landscape of female employment has changed dramatically over the last 20 years. There are approximately 3.6 million workers in the readymade garments (RMG) sector, of whom nearly 80% are female (BBS 2011).

The RMG sector has reduced the marginalisation of women who were previously excluded from the formal job sector, even though they are confined to very limited occupations in the sector (Haque & Itohara 2009; Paul-Majumder 2001; Ward et al. 2004; Zaman 2001, p. 145). Women workers are usually assigned poorly paid jobs and cannot enjoy their legal entitlements if employed informally. In the absence of a formal appointment process a combination of long working days, excessive production targets, frequent night shifts, insignificant wages, widespread discrimination in granting leave and promotion, and a lack of labour

law enforcement are all discriminatory against women in comparison to men (Mahmud 2000; Zaman 2001, p. 145) and severely affect their health and family life (Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneem 2011, p.10). Women's increasing participation in the RMG sector is a positive step towards women's emancipation but has occurred 'in a highly exploitative context' (Alam, Blanch & Smith 2011, p. 4).

Women workers usually face sex discrimination, mistreatment and sexual harassment in most work places, particularly in the RMG sector (Alam, Blanch & Smith 2011; Begum et al. 2010; Jahan et al. 1998 cited in Saifuddin, Dyke & Rasouli 2013). They are mostly deprived of equal wages, equal dignity, equal rights and equal promotion prospects (Mridula & Khan 2009, p. 17; Paul-Majumder 2000). Discrimination and injustices are still in practice, though decreasing recently after the High Court in 2009 ruled that sexual harassment in the workplace and in educational institutions is a crime and provided guidelines for prevention and prosecution until the appropriate law is enacted.¹⁶

Women's contributions to family and society through paid employment are significant and multifaceted (Salway, Rahman & Jesmin 2003) and give women economic identity, reducing their dependency on their husbands. Women can now exert power both within their household and their wider kin group and invest in their own interest and benefit (Bhachu 1998; Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneem 2011). Nonetheless, along with many gains, paid employment also brings some pains for women and their families (Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneem 2011). Sometimes women, particularly rural unmarried women, are labelled as 'bad women' due to their work involvement, with society questioning their sexual purity/morality which also makes it difficult for them to get married (Ahmed 2004, p. 40). Moreover, the

¹⁶Landmark steps were taken by the High Court to reduce sexual harassment of women and children in work places, educational institutions and on the streets. The divisional action should be taken by the employer against those responsible for sexual harassment at workplace. The punishment for sexual abuse can be both a fine and imprisonment. This directive was pursued by a writ petition filed by BNWLA, following an incident of sexual harassment against a teacher of drama and dramatics at Jahangirnagar University in 2009. Even more encouraging was the High Court's order to the authorities that a five-member harassment complaints committee should be formed at every workplace and organization and headed by a woman. The committee must include a third party who might be from a NGO or other relevant body, in order to avoid influence from employers (Begum 2004, p.163).

entrenched cultural norms, which are yet to be overcome, force many working women to also shoulder the burden of unpaid domestic work. The domestic division of labour is still heavily weighted against women which, together with their paid work, takes a toll on their health (Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneen 2011; Ward et al. 2004, p. 69).

A woman is considered 'very good' if she can combine work and family successfully. Although some upper class women employees in the public sector (still a small minority) can engage domestic servants to help with household chores, child rearing and education are still regarded as mother's duty. Low income women work from early morning to midnight, having to bear multiple burdens in managing work and family (Salway, Jesmin & Rahman 2005, pp. 344-45).

In the discussion about women and paid work, it is important to examine what control women have over their hard-earned income, as it has been identified as a critical variable in family power (Blumberg 1984). Traditionally Bangladeshi women exercised very little economic autonomy, and yet, even many economically independent women today still have no control over their earnings. In most cases, husbands control their wives' earnings directly or indirectly. Married working women often are restricted from spending their earnings for their own parents (Chowdhury 2007). Overall only a small number of the women workers have full control over their wages and most women's wages have no significant influence in the family decision making process and women's intra-household bargaining position except providing them some opportunity to spend part of their earnings as they wish (Ahmed 2004, p. 34; Chowdhury 2010b; Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneen 2011).

For some married women, paid work contributes positively to changing their husband's violent behaviour (Hadi 2005, p. 181; Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneen 2011). Further, with economic independence, some working women defy patriarchal beliefs and ideologies by exercising personal choice in marriage (Rozario 1998, pp. 263-264), and separation and divorce (Ahmed & Bould 2004,

pp. 1336-1337). Nevertheless, separated women have to cope with the social stigma attached to single status and divorce (Rozario1998, p. 267).

Women's financial contribution is significant for the family but a negative attitude towards their employment still persists. Ameen (2005) rightly remarked that the societal attitude to a wife's employment has remained the same as 30 years ago. She wondered if a highly educated urban woman faces a negative attitude from husband, how frightening the reality must be for rural working women with conservative husbands. The paradox of women in paid employment is that while most men are aware of the necessity to family survival of their wives working, they are not willing to accept any kind of challenge to existing patriarchal structures. The wife's paid work is still seen as a direct challenge to male dominance and authority, especially when she takes part in decision making, as this tendency is often viewed as 'disobedience' (Banks 2013, p. 106). Men's unwillingness to accept any additional challenges to their authority often leads to various negative behaviours such as physical violence, threats of violence, abandonment or taking an additional wife (Banks 2013, p. 99; Salway, Jesmin & Rahman 2005, pp. 344-345).

The struggle with longer working hours and the burden of domestic work as well as marital tension within the household leaves many women facing a complex balancing act between managing the household, their jobs and the marital relationship. Moreover, working women are now exploring job opportunities and changing jobs more, thereby challenging the stereotype of obedient women (Ward et al. 2004, p. 89). That is why they are considered a potential threat to the male-dominated society (Guhathakurta 2003, p. 2).

The rapid social change over the last 30 years since the early 1980s has significantly transformed the conditions of women's lives in Bangladesh. While some women now enjoy greater access to resources with little decision making capacity, others meet with increased vulnerability to harassment and sexual abuse in their workplaces (Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneen 2011; Jahan et al. 1998 cited in Saifuddin, Dyke & Rasouli 2013). As Khan (2005, p. 229), a researcher on

women's work in Bangladesh argued, 'there has not been adequate institutional preparation for the arrival of women into the public sphere'. She is right to argue that current development policy in Bangladesh has increased the economic welfare for women but ignored the new and often intensified forms of violence in the work place.

Women's involvement in paid work is challenging and slowly changing traditional patriarchal ideologies and cultures as well as slowly transforming gender roles. However, a large number of women are still clustered in stereotypical female work. The number of women in decision making positions in the public service is still very insignificant (Jehan 2011), which shows how much the patriarchal tradition still operates in social settings. Despite the 10% quota in civil service and the 15% quota in other services (e.g. peon, clerk, assistants) (Afsar 1990, p. 9), women hold around 10% of the positions in the first grade public service (cited in Jahan 2007, p. 52), but the ratio is higher in third grade jobs (Ferdous 2014, p. 180). At the upper executive level, from Deputy Secretary to Secretary, women hold 6% and 2% of position respectively (Jehan 2011). The scenario is still the same in 2013. Of 71 Secretaries (the highest executive body), only 3 were female and of 242 Additional Secretaries, 12 were female (Khan 2013). Working in an environment where 'equality' exists only in theory, low level and low paid jobs, gender discrimination in the workplace, and lack of government efforts to create a 'level playing field' are seen as both causes and effects of women's subordination and dependency upon men (Begum 2004).

Overall, education and paid employment have not made much difference in gendered ideology. Women's status is still defined in terms of traditional gender rules such as subordination, dependency on males, the universal nature of marriage and so on (Nasrin 2011, p. 44). However, the empowerment of women through education and paid employment is still considered a significant strategy to combat violence against women. The following section outlines the various policies and responses of the government and NGOs to violence against women through the promotion of education and employment.

Policies and responses to violence against women in Bangladesh

As discussed in Chapter Two, in the early 1970s, some middle class women formed a group with feminist consciousness, which brought violence against women into the public discourse (Hossain & Hossain 2004; Kabeer 1988, p. 110). After independence, there occurred a period of lawlessness, and violence against women involving armed Bengali gangsters. The brutal victimization of women led many women to unite and start fighting against women's oppression. This feminist consciousness was further fuelled by two important developments at that time: 1) United Nation's Declaration of the Women's Decade (1976-85) and 2) newspapers and the publicity by various women's rights groups against the abuse of women (Hossain & Hossain 2004; Jahan 1994; Zaman 1999). There are three major features of the feminist movement in Bangladesh: the women's rights activist groups which raise feminist issues in national policy, feminist research and advocacy organisations which raise public awareness, and the non-government organisations which work for raising awareness and for mobilising grassroots level women (Hossain & Hossain 2004). Feminist contributions to national policy, women right groups' continuous efforts to raise public awareness, along with different NGOs' activities through mobilisation of grassroots women, all together aroused public interest in violence against women. The combined efforts were successful in recognising violence against women as one of the most visible social issues in Bangladesh (Hossain & Hossain 2004; Jahan & Islam 1997).

Feminist organisations and women's rights activists have kept the pressure on the Bangladesh government to enact tough laws and to undertake programs to address violence against women. During the 1980s, women's organizations and a strong public movement pressured the Bangladeshi government to enact the following laws: The Family Court Ordinance 1985; The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 (amended in 1984); Cruelty to Women (Deterrent and Punishment) Ordinance 1983; and the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 (BNWLA 2004; Naripokkho & BMP n.d.). Later, in 2000, the government promulgated The Prevention of Oppression of Women and Children Act and in 2005, recognizing the vulnerability of women in providing marriage certificates, the government

amended The Muslim Marriages and Divorces (Registration Amendment) Rules, 2005, which obligates the bridegroom to register the marriage (CEDAW 2010, p. 27).

The government has set up a number of institutions for women's advancement. These are the National Council for Women and Development,¹⁷ the Women's Development Implementation and Evaluation Committee, the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, the Department of Women's Affairs, *Bangladesh Mahila Parishad* (National Women's Organization), Women in Development (WID) Focal Point Mechanism, and WID Co-ordination Committees at District and *Upazilla* [Sub-district] levels. To implement the international commitments of CEDAW, Platform for Action (PFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), under the coordination of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs (MoWCA), the government has adopted the National Plan of Action for Women's Advancement,¹⁸ and the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR) I and II. These two important government instruments have emphasized various strategies and activities to eliminate discrimination against women (MoWCA 2013-14).

Since the Beijing Platform of Action 1995, violence against women has been identified as a priority by the government (BNWLA 2004, pp. 9-17; Naripokkho & BMP n.d. pp. 2-10). In 1989, the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs (MoWCA) formed a central cell, known as the Violence Prevention Cell.¹⁹ It

¹⁷The National Council for Women's Development (NCWD) was established in 1995 consisting of 49 members including Ministers and Secretaries, representatives of civil society, women's organizations, with the Honourable Prime Minister as the Chair. The government adopted the National Policy for Women's Advancement (NPWA) within the framework of the CEDAW and as a follow-up to the Beijing Conference on Women. The policy goal is to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women by empowering them with abilities to be equal partners with men in the development process (CEDAW 2010, p.21)

¹⁸ The National Women's Development Policy, which was announced in 2008, reserved one-third of parliamentary seats for women and proposed direct election of these reserved seats including appointing women in highest level and administrative and policy making positions. This women's policy was revised in 2011 by the current Awami League government, which emphasized ensuring gender equality in society (WHO n.d.).

¹⁹ According to the revised Business of Allocation of 1996, the MoWCA has been given the mandate to manage the issues related with VAW and children. The MoWCA have VAW Suppression Committees at each district, Upazilla/Thana and union level (see Annexure 8). Each

receives information on violence against women from various sources including the Department of Women's Affairs and the *Jatiyo Mohila Sonstha* (an agency of the MoWCA) and takes necessary measures for their remedy. An Inter-Ministerial Committee on Preventing Violence against Women and Children (headed by the Honourable the State Minister of MoWCA) reviews and monitors the functions of the Cell (Mannan & Zahir 2009, pp. 60-62; MoWCA 2010b).

Under the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, Bangladesh and Denmark, have initiated a joint program, the Multi Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women (MSP-VAW), which has set up several one-stop crisis centres, forensic laboratories, women's support centres that provide food, medicine, clothes, legal aid and rehabilitation for female victims and also runs public awareness campaigns (MoWCA 2013-14). Moreover, the MoWCA and its two agencies (Department of Women Affairs and *Jatiyo Mohila Sangstha*) implement various programs aimed at poverty reduction, employment creation and the provision of social safety nets for women and a total of seven shelter homes for female victims.²⁰ As this thesis examines women's experiences of shelter home, an outline of the history of shelter homes is provided below.

A brief history of the shelter services in Bangladesh

The shelter home initiative is a program designed to reduce discrimination and violence against women in Bangladesh (DWA 2012). The personal communication I had with officers and my review of the Annual Report of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (2008-09), informed me that under the Women's Support Project (WSP) of the Department of Women's Affairs, Violence Prevention Cells and shelter homes were set up in six divisions in 1992 in order to provide legal support to women survivors. The Women's Support Project (WSP) started in 1986 and had three separate components: the Legal Aid Cell, the Employment Information Centre and the Sales and Display Centre. The VAW Prevention Cells were formed from the Legal Aid Cells. This project was intended

Committee sends reports to the central VAW cell in MoWCA. The central cell of the MoWCA presents these to the inter-ministerial coordination committee.

²⁰ The details of safety net program appear in Appendix 6.

to 'provide legal aid to domestically abused women; to protect and create awareness about their human rights; to create a marketing channel in order to sell products made by the survivors, a sale and display centre was introduced; and to foster women's employment opportunities' (DWA 2003; MoWCA n.d.). The WSP was suspended in 1991 and a new project was initiated called 'Creating economic opportunities and providing legal support to women'. In addition, in July 1992, NORAD (the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) financially supported a Women's Shelter Project, which aimed to provide temporary accommodation, legal support and skill development training for female victims of domestic violence, to enable them to reintegrate in society as independent women (DWA 2003).

Later, in 1994 the Planning Commission decided to merge both projects ('Creating economic opportunities and providing legal support to women' and the 'Women's Shelter Project') as they shared similar objectives and activities. The Legal Aid Cell and the Women's Shelter Project were then integrated in one program, called *Mohila Sohiyota Kormosuchi* (Women's Support Program). This program continued from July 1995 to June 2000. The financial support of NORAD then ended. After the successful completion of the project, as claimed by the government, the program was implemented and is still functioning as a revenue budget program²¹ in the form of VAW cells and shelter homes (DWA 2012).

The VAW cell operates as an alternative or precursor to the Family Court, receiving complaints from survivors, mediating conflict resolution through counselling, settling dowry disputes, ensuring that maintenance for wives and children is paid, and overseeing child custody arrangements. The VAW cell arranges procedure for departmental punishment of an accused, who has a regular job, particularly those who are in government service. However, not all cases can be resolved by a VAW cell. Unresolved cases are sent to the Family Court (DWA 2003).

²¹The Government budget in Bangladesh has two parts: revenue budget and development budget. The former is concerned with current revenues and expenditures, such as maintenance of normal priority and essential services. The development budget is prepared for development activities.

Several other ministries have ongoing services or are undertaking activities related to VAW: (i) Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, (ii) Ministry of Social Welfare, (iii) Ministry of Health, (iv) Ministry of Home Affairs and (v) Ministry of Law and Justice. Within these ministries there are several directorates, departments, divisions and agencies that are also providing services and support to VAW (see Appendix 7).

Several others projects and programs, initiated by collaboration between the government and several Development Partners, are jointly working to eliminate VAW and improve the status of women.²² A number of women's non-government organizations (NGOs), such as the *Bangladesh Mahilla Parishad* (Bangladesh Women's Organisation), the *Bangladesh Mahila Ainjibi Samiti* (Bangladesh Women's Lawyers Association), and the *Naripokkho* (On Women's Side) are active in eliminating violence including DV.

The main strategies employed by these women's organizations in Bangladesh include: publicizing and organizing around particular cases; legal and paralegal services and legal awareness work; providing medical and other logistic support; raising community awareness on issues of domestic violence; providing women's shelters, rehabilitation centres, and counselling services; and providing training for women who have experienced DV to gain access to employment.²³ Moreover, other prominent NGOs, such as the *Manusher Jonno Foundation*, *Ain-O-Shalish Kendra*, *Odhikar*, Steps towards Development, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, *Naripokkho*, Action Aid Bangladesh, and BRAC have implemented various programs ranging from rights to welfare in order to address gender based violence in Bangladesh (Mannan & Zohir 2009) .

²²For example, gender responsive community based policing (funded by GTZ and EKN), promotion of legal and social empowerment of women in Bangladesh (GTZ funded); advocacy to end gender based violence (UNFPA funded); The Police Reform Project (UNDP funded); Moreover USAID, DFID, EC, CIDA, CARE, OXFAM and Action Aid have major programs with different NGOs on VAW (Zahir & Mannan pp.81-83). In addition to the government's initiatives, Development Partners, NGOs and CBOs have their own programs to address VAW in Bangladesh.

²³NGOs such as *Aparajeyo Bangladesh*, National Women Lawyer's Association, and Bangladesh *Mahila Parishad* are operating shelters, drop in centres and halfway homes where legal and psychological services are available.

The most noteworthy step taken by the government was to enact the Domestic Violence (Protection & Prevention) Act in 2010 (MoWCA 2010a). There was great effort by many actors behind the introduction of this act. On the one hand, women's organisations, women's right activists, NGOs, civil society were successful in creating awareness about the necessity for enactment of a separate law for DV against women (Khatun & Rahman 2012). On the other hand equally important was the government's commitment to the international community, specifically to aid organisations and CEDAW to improve women's situation (MoWCA 2013-14). These two impulses, which came from quite distinct quarters, led the government to enact this separate law to consider the DV cases. The law defines domestic violence as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, as well as financial damage, inflicted on a woman or child by any member of the family (MoWCA2010a). The court has the power to issue, at any stage of the proceedings while an investigation is pending, a protection order against the defendant that enables the victim to remain in her place of residence; it may also make arrangements for the victim to be relocated to a shelter (at the expense of the perpetrator, if deemed appropriate), or temporarily evict the perpetrator if no convenient safe shelter is available (MoWCA 2010a). The law has retained authority to reasonably compensate a victim for any personal injury (including trauma and psychological damage), property damage and financial loss as a result of domestic violence. If the defendant violates the interim order, he will be subject to six months in prison, a fine not exceeding Taka 10,000 or both. The court may also grant temporary custody orders for the victim's children. The court proposes shelter homes must be made available to victims, and the Act specifies a woman may never be placed there without her consent. All trials must be completed within 60 working days from the issuance of the notice to the respondent.

The DV law is no doubt a very promising law put in place to deal with DV in Bangladesh. However, questions arise about some of its content and proper implementation. Although it was introduced in December 2010 it had not been enforced, as the government has to formulate the rules/guidelines crucial for its

implementation (New Age 2011). The rules were finally articulated in 2014. Moreover, Article 8 of the Act orders the concerned officer to arrange shelter for the victim. But the Act is not well informed about the available shelter homes (run by the government). Further, one journal article has claimed that the government shelters mostly work as a sub-jail and lack any effective empowerment programs (Khatun & Rahaman 2012). There are doubts about the effectiveness of the provision of the Act for victims residing in the marital home because Bangladeshi married couples usually live in the in-laws house. Thus, a protection order against the husband may not bring the expected outcome, as he does not own the house.²⁴

Moreover criticism arises that the DV law does not prohibit marital rape (The US 2011). It is ironic that the legal system of Bangladesh fails to recognise 'marital rape' as an offence (BNWLA 2004, p. 25; Schuler & Islam 2008a, p. 328). While 'marital rape' has been criminalized in many countries in the Asian region, for example South Korea, Japan, Philippines and Taiwan, it is still widely justified by Bangladeshi tradition (Farouk 2005, p. 14; Hadi 2000, p. 790). It is only considered an offence in Bangladesh when the wife is under fifteen years of age. It can be argued that this legal system provides men a 'license to rape' if he marries a woman older than fifteen years (Naved 2013). Enacting DV law is a notable attempt, but, like some of the government's previous reform strategies, this law also remains instrumentalist, patriarchal and urban middle class biased. Why is there so much inconsistency in the state policy regarding women? The underlying concern of the male dominated state was to preserve patriarchal social order and gender relations (see also Hossain & Hossain 2004).

The Bangladesh Constitution and laws ensure equal rights to employment for women but ignore the fact that in order to enjoy that right the two sexes should have equal positions in society and family. In a situation where most poor parents are reluctant to invest in girls' education and society mostly considers women in their traditional reproductive roles, the constitutional guaranty of 'equal

²⁴Personal communication with a women activist, whom I interviewed for this project

employment rights' appears meaningless as it fails to recognize the existing unequal and underprivileged status of women (Begum 2004, p. 116, 332). Begum rightly argued that the Bangladesh constitution should treat men and women equally when they are 'similarly situated' (2004, p. 121). To achieve a 'similarly situated' condition for women, the state must take appropriate steps to promote better education and better economic facilities for women and pay proper attention to various awareness raising and educational programs, especially sharing the burden of family work and other socio-economic issues.

There is no doubt that the government with the collaboration of NGOs, INGOS, and Development Partners is reforming laws and changing policies to eliminate violence against women. Such reforms and their implementation will not be enhanced until the government revokes the reservations against Articles 2 and 16.1.c²⁵ of the CEDAW which oblige state parties to eliminate discrimination against women in all legislation, public institutions and existing laws or practices, including marriage and family relations. The women's organizations and activists have been pressurizing the government to change the discriminatory family law and to introduce a uniform family law (Begum 2009; HRW 2012; Pereira 2002). But the Bangladesh government still refuses to change family laws arguing that these changes conflict with Sharia law based on the Holy *Koran* and *Sunna* (Pereira 2002).

Concluding remarks

Understanding government laws and policies to change women's vulnerable position in the public and private sphere is vital as it is the failure to properly implement these instruments that helps to sustain and promote violence, specifically DV, against women. Gender relations in the private sphere are not merely based on individual beliefs and thoughts, rather they should be considered

²⁵Article 2 refers to the complete elimination of discrimination through all possible constitutional, legislative and legal provisions; Article 16-1 (c) refers to the equal rights in marriage and at its dissolution; Articles 2 and 16 are considered by the United Nations to be the core providers of the Convention.

as institutionalised because they have power to dominate public opinion and thus influence policy.

The Bangladeshi social and cultural attitude still limits women's roles to 'motherhood,' which includes caring for the elderly and children and doing household chores, even if they have achieved an important career or make a high financial contribution to family. Women's education and participation in the workforce do bring a change in their position though it is not always 'positive' and transformative. Women are still expected to conform to community norms that often constrain them from seeking outside help in the case of DV; rather, women are encouraged to blame themselves. Thus, the socio-cultural construction of gender relations significantly contributes to the prevalence of DV in Bangladesh. Within this context, it is now important to discuss the methods, approaches and strategies that I applied to collect field data about domestic violence perpetrated against women in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

In the previous chapter, the socio-cultural constructions of gender relations in Bangladesh were discussed. This chapter describes the research design and methodology that were used in this study in order to address its main objectives, which were twofold:

- 1) Explore the experiences of DV of women who were living in shelter homes and the attitudes of the cluster of professionals whose work brings them into contact with female survivors
- 2) Examine women's experiences of living in shelter homes operating in Bangladesh

This chapter is divided into Seven Sections. The First Section outlines the methodological framework. My role as a researcher and issues raised from the face-to-face interviews are discussed in the Second Section. The sampling methods used to recruit participants and making contact are presented in the Third Section, which also covers the data collection process, learning from the pilot study, length of the interviews and issues with self-disclosure. The Fourth Section details the process of data analysis, introduces the respondents and discusses issues related to the transcripts. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and the physical and emotional safety of the participants and the researcher are outlined in the Fifth Section. The Sixth Section discusses the limitations of the research and the problems I faced during fieldwork in Bangladesh, while the Seventh Section presents the concluding comments.

Feminist research and qualitative approaches in studying domestic violence

This is a feminist study committed to correcting the 'invisibility and distortion of female experience' (Lather 1991, p. 71) in a patriarchal society. Feminists emphasize the historically situated structures that influence the life chances of

individuals (Hatch 2002, p.16). According to Reinharz (1992, p. 175), feminist perspectives help to generate new relationships, better laws and institutions. Avoiding the *androcentric* research framework, feminist perspectives also encourage women to judge their problems according to external and objective criteria (Harding 1991, p. 116). It also contributes to changing women's lives in ways that promote their empowerment and challenge oppressive circumstances. From a feminist perspective, the best way to empower disadvantaged women is to explore their problems and experiences with them (Pitman 2010).

Feminist researchers argue that focusing on 'women's experiences' helps to a better understanding of 'mechanisms of domination' in order to facilitate better living conditions for women (Jaggar 1997, p. 193). Being committed to investigating women's perspectives, feminism has provided the most important explanations of DV, drawing attention to the structural, class and gender inequalities (Coorey 1988). However, because feminism is not a singular category or perspective I need to explicate my approach. Among the various feminist epistemologies, I used feminist standpoint theory for this qualitative and exploratory research (Harding 2004).

Feminist standpoint epistemology observes the world through the 'eyes and experiences of oppressed women and this knowledge is applied to social activism and social change' (Brooks 2007, p. 55). To better understand DV, feminist standpoint theorists argue that it is necessary to listen to those who are oppressed, that is, those who experience the social phenomenon under examination and are therefore likely to understand the dynamics of oppression relating to this phenomenon. Standpoint research aims to disclose the information about the 'mechanism of oppression' in which domination may be sustained despite women's protests. This data can then be used to challenge and correct the injustices related to oppression (Pitman 2010). Standpoint feminists normally prefer to use qualitative methods. Michael Patton demonstrated how qualitative methods echo with the aim of feminist research:

A qualitative approach to measurement seeks to capture what people have to say in their own words. The data are open ended in order to find out what people's lives, experiences and interactions mean to them in their natural settings. Qualitative measures permit the researcher to record and understand people in their own terms. (Patton 1980, p. 22)

Qualitative feminist researchers emphasize an exploration of the meanings people attribute to experience (Brooks 2007; Cavanagh & Cree 1996). They/we argue that quantitative research methodologies can ignore the voices of respondents and may reiterate existing power inequalities in the research process (Cavanagh & Cree 1996; Oakley 1999).

When used to research DV, qualitative research pays attention to women's own explanations of abuse and violence within their intimate relationships (Berg 2001; Pitman 2010, p. 82). Quantitative methods, which are concerned with measurement, prediction and generalisation are unable to capture 'uncountable or immeasurable' issues such as 'suffering, insight, misery, anguish and emotion' (Herdman 2004, p. 98; Grbich 2000). Searching for wide generalisations can be a futile affair, especially for qualitative feminist researchers who are interested not just in socio-economic and political patterns of experience but experiences that are emotional and individually embodied. While doing research on DV, Oakley (1999) identified the inaccuracies of having only the 'black and white' answers commonly associated with statistics (see also White & Epston 1990). In Bangladesh, Schuler, Lenzi & Yount (2011, pp. 21-28) also described how women's initial answers in questionnaires about condoning violence differed when asked the same questions in face-to-face interviews.

In this research, I wanted to hear and share stories about domestic violence that are narrated by women victims/survivors of abuse, women's shelter staff, policy makers and activists, rather than produce percentages and graphs of behaviours. As my focus was on women's lived experiences of abuse and violence, qualitative research methods were more appropriate. Several writings (James 2001; Karner 1998; Oakley 1999; Strauss & Corbin 1998; White & Epston 1990) influenced me

to employ qualitative research methods in this study. Oakley (1999, p. 5) provided further justification for the use of qualitative research methods. She mentioned that 'quantitative researchers seldom are able to capture the subject's perspective because they have to rely on more remote, inferential empirical materials'. This does not mean that quantitative methods have no place in domestic violence and/or feminist research; just that my study focused on the textures of embodied and richly described experiences, not a numerically based representation of them. Feminist researchers can value both methods (Kelly, Burton & Regan 1994; Reinharz 1992). In terms of questions about validity and trustworthiness, both qualitative and quantitative research can be used to distort or misrepresent women's experiences of domestic violence. Research that reiterates even implicitly the patriarchal values may use either qualitative or quantitative data to substantiate its claims. The same logic may apply to qualitative feminist researchers in domestic violence, that is, that they/we are too emotional, too close and too partisan to produce trustworthy analyses. The difference can be the declaration of interests and subjectivities made by feminist researchers involved in studying social phenomena such as domestic violence. They/we do not pretend to be neutral or outside our fields of study. I have been using 'I' to acknowledge myself as an active part of the research, not as a 'value neutral' outsider. I do this in contrast to the usual academic convention that calls for scholars to maintain a clear distinction between the researcher and the researched, often taking the word 'I' out of written text (Berg 2001). My intention is to acknowledge my presence, my role and my influence in this study. Ultimately I accept the impossibility of separating myself from what is being researched.

My position and role as a researcher in the field

I am a middle-aged Muslim, Bangladeshi woman, married with two sons and a large extended family. Other than when I am studying, I live and work with the government in Bangladesh. Prior to conducting the research, I worked with female survivors of violence for nearly 10 years. My journey began in the Bangladesh civil service, starting in 2001, working as an administrator and judicial magistrate. Since then, I have worked in different workplaces and capacities both as a cognizance and trial magistrate, where my major responsibilities were judicial in

nature.²⁶ In 2009, I was posted as a magistrate and divisional head in the Violence Prevention cell (called VAW), where I had the opportunity to work with female survivors of family violence. I heard their complaints and followed other judicial steps to dispose of their cases. Concurrently I worked as a coordinator of shelter homes, assisting survivors in government funded shelters by providing them accommodation, food, clothing, legal support, counselling and income generating activities (IGA) training, so that they could rebuild their lives. In some respects, this involvement, participation and exposure to the personal and systemic issues of domestic violence, made me an insider in the research process.

'Insider research' refers to researchers who conduct research with populations of which they are also members (Asselin 2003). The researcher's situatedness and context are carefully considered. As Vygotsky (1962) argued, social and cultural embedding is vital for the development of intelligence. The insider holds a unique position to study a particular issue with special and in-depth knowledge of many complex issues; he/she has easy access to people and information that further progress the knowledge; and he/she sometimes can challenge an issue from his/her situated and informed perception (Asselin 2003). My familiarity with the policies of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, rules, regulations, culture and customs, and my insider identity as a magistrate and coordinator gave me privileged access. This study was possible because I had easy access to the shelters and was able to make trustworthy relationships with survivors. My identity as a married woman also provided comfort to survivors in sharing stories about their lives and sexuality. My multiple identities as a magistrate insider, female researcher, a married and an educated woman helped my participants to be more responsive to me, as some of them informed me later.

To the best of my understanding, the survivors and others respondents participated enthusiastically in this study. However, since my insider identity was of the immediate past rather than current with the research, perhaps I am better

²⁶ My main responsibilities were: filling /rejection of cases /appeals/applications, bail hearing, pass instruction/court order to the police and local government, issue summons (notice)/ bail-able warrants or non-bail-able warrants, trial and hearing the cases, providing judgments and many other judicial responsibilities.

described as an 'isolated insider' (Saleheen 2013). Being isolated from the day-to-day politics of the system, I could see things differently. Not being responsible for resolving them, I was mostly able to avoid conflicts of interest. This space helped me to better understand government funded shelters designed to address DV by offering women a practical pathway out of homelessness. My personal experience of Bangladesh and my work with and for women victims/survivors of violence enabled me to understand how to occupy these roles within the different socio-cultural contexts of Bangladesh. Yet, this familiarity could also have limited my view, a possibility I repeatedly reflected on. Living and studying in Australia and travelling back to Bangladesh also helped to give me a sense of clarity and distance so that I could see and hear the experiences primarily as a researcher not as a coordinator or magistrate.

My approach to this work as a researcher involved incorporating aspects of the three roles that Blaikie (2000, pp. 52-54) described: 1) the 'empathetic observer', who focuses on 'grasping the subjective meaning used by social actors' aiming to understand their actions; 2) the 'faithful reporter' who tries to allow participants to have their voice and ensures participants are recognized in research reports; 3) the 'mediator of languages' who interprets the accounts of participants while ensuring his/her own voice is still visible. I bore this in mind throughout the research processes, from design to analysis to publication. I strove to be an empathic, faithful mediator in this research.

Data collection techniques

Qualitative research allows for explanations to be given for specific cases or actions (Neuman 2004, p. 137), but also possible explanations for multiple social patterns of experience. In-depth understanding and richness of data is sought rather than representativeness (Padgett 1998, p. 50). Data collection techniques vary but in-depth and key informant interviews are common. Feminist researchers, such as Reinharz, prefer to use methodological multiplicity, 'sometimes singularly and sometimes in combination' (1992, p. 244), because a combination of multiple methods can expose the previous unexamined or

misunderstood experiences. It also increases the likelihood of obtaining credibility and research utility (Reinharz 1992, pp. 147, 243).

As stated earlier, this study was conducted with Bangladeshi female DV survivors who were staying at state funded shelter, and shelter workers, NGO executives, women activists, and policy makers, using in-depth interview (IDI) techniques. Respondents were selected purposively for in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. Both purposive and snowballing strategies were designed. Purposive sampling is considered a 'handpicked' strategy to select specific people or events intentionally in order to produce the most valuable data (Denscombe 1998). By snowball sampling methods, the chains of referral are made from one person to the next, a strategy helpful when trying to engage hard-to-reach groups, especially women who are at risk when disclosing violence experience (Penrod et al. 2003). In snowball sampling, each informant is asked to nominate some other informants who would be relevant for the purpose of the research.

To conduct this research I used a mix of methods including library research, field observation and in-depth interviewing (IDI). I used semi structured interview schedules while conducting the in-depth interviews with 16 women victims/survivors of DV and 15 stakeholders from domestic violence service provision. Hilary Graham stated, 'the use of semi-structured interviews has become the principle means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives' (1984, p.112). In-depth interviewing may be the most appropriate if seeking insights about feelings, emotions and experiences relating to very sensitive topics such as domestic violence (Denscombe 1998). It provides individual respondents with the chance to reflect on their experience of violence and its effects on their lives. IDI helped me to understand the women's life stories.

To understand the interaction between shelter staff and survivors, I visited six divisional shelter homes in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet, and Barisal. My IDI of women survivors ran concurrently with the interviews I undertook with other key stakeholders. To get different perspectives, for example,

to understand how others may perceive survivors, or how they understand about the system, I interviewed a selection of policy makers, women's activists and NGO's executives. My intention was to use the data from these interviews to help better design programs and policies responding to the DV many Bangladeshi women are facing in their daily lives.

Throughout the research process I was also immersed in secondary sources, such as research reports, journal articles and books, Bangladesh government publications, UN and NGO reports, publications and policy documents, online documents and Bangladeshi newspapers. I also used case studies and reports. Again, I used these multiple methods to enrich my research findings, reduce the possibility of skewed findings in data collection, while seeking to illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experiences (see Reinharz 1992, p. 197).

Size and participation criteria

In 2012-2013 I conducted a total of 31 in-depth interviews for this study. As explained above, using qualitative research methods, such as IDI, I listened to the very personal stories of 16 female survivors who were currently staying at government funded shelter homes, and the perceptions of 15 staff associated with DV service provision in Bangladesh. Of this second group I recruited seven shelter staff, four (women's) policy makers, two activists and two senior personnel from related non-government organizations (NGOs).

As per the pre-conditions of the Flinders University Human Ethics approval process, I had to submit formal written permission from the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs before proceeding with data collection. The letter outlined my research objectives and was circulated in the 6 divisional VAW cells and shelter homes so that related stakeholders could be informed (see Appendix1).

Recruitment procedures

Just after arriving in the field, I started contacting shelter staff, officers and VAW colleagues to recruit the informants. For recruitment of the respondents, I primarily followed the strategies adopted by previous domestic violence researchers (Keys Young 1998; Patton 2005). In particular, I planned and followed two strategies:

- 1) I arranged meetings with the Secretary of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs and the Director General²⁷ (the head of the Department of Women's Affairs). These meetings were designed to provide information about my research and to allow for questions and clarification across the VAW field and beyond.
- 2) More locally, I also sought permission to get up-to-date information and for frequent visits to the shelter homes in the six divisional offices, and talk and circulate research objectives among prospective respondents. I made phone calls to relevant government officers working in the six divisional shelter homes in Bangladesh. I also sent other respondents (such as the activists and policy makers) the information package about the study.

To select the survivors and staff/workers living and working in six government shelter homes, first I met with the six shelter home coordinators and explained the purpose of the study, the process of selection of respondents and the data collection methods. Two of the six coordinators were previously known to me from past work experience. Each coordinator was provided with an information sheet, an introduction letter, the respondent selection criteria, and the format for preparing an eligible respondents list and my address and phone number. Coordinators were then requested to prepare a list of eligible respondents residing in each shelter home, based on the following selection criteria:

- a) Self-identified survivors or survivors of domestic violence over 18 years and under 50 years of age.
- b) Survivors who had been staying at shelter homes for more than 3 months.
- c) Survivors who had been experiencing DV for more than 6 months.

²⁷Through the Department, the Ministry provides accommodation and other support for 6 months shelter for women who are in a violent relationship or have left an abusive relationship.

- d) Survivors who were willing and able to discuss their experiences with a researcher.
- e) Survivors who were prepared to allow the researcher to audiotape or take notes through the interview.

Consideration and comments made by Ethics Committee of Flinders University that some potential survivors may feel pressured to participate in the research if: a) they are directly approached by me, as I am held in high esteem as a former magistrate, Australian Leadership Award (ALA) holder and Senior Assistant Secretary to the Bangladesh Government; b) survivors could be known to me due to my previous employment as a magistrate; and c) survivors may perceive that refusal to participate may impact on services they need from the shelter despite assurances given to potential participants. Upon considering the Ethics Committee's suggestions to minimize differences in social status between (some) participants and me, a third-party / intermediary was used to recruit potential participants from survivors and staff working at shelters.

The third party I employed to assist me in this project was a female freelance researcher, Ms. Nowrin Nusrat, who had completed Honours and Master's degrees in Sociology and had sound experience in data collection, report writing and ethical issues²⁸. Her role in my study was to explain the research objectives, the interview process, the risk, benefits, confidentiality and guarantee to potential respondents from survivor category.

After the initial verbal consent by potential participants, the third party handed them an information package about the research handed (in cases of two survivors with minimal level literacy, a verbal orientation was given and the information packages was read out loud). The package comprised an introductory letter (Appendix 2), an information sheet (Appendix3) and a consent form (Appendix4) and a list of free counselling services. The third party then requested them to put the small sealed envelope which was in the big packet into the locked

²⁸Nowrin Nusrat has worked as a research assistant with several international organisations, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNHCR.

box inside the shelter home if they were interested to participate in the study. The potential respondents were briefed that the sealed envelopes contained a separate secret number against each of them, given by the Assistant Director (AD) of the shelter homes without the name or identity of the individuals, so that nobody would know who the participant is except the AD. Respondents from the survivor category were chosen in two ways – from the list of eligible respondents made by the AD, and from the few survivors who contacted me directly. Within four days of distribution of the information packages, with the help of the AD, I was able to draw up a final list of 60 interested respondents.

Once the participants received the package they were invited to contact me directly by face to face conversation or by telephone to organize a time and setting for an interview, or simply to discuss the interview process. I communicated with the interested respondents and further explained them the research objective, interview procedure, risks and benefits and confidentiality issues. We set a date, time and venue for the interview, convenient to both of us, but particularly to the respondent.

The third party also contacted shelter staff and followed the same procedure, explaining the purpose of this study. After obtaining a list of interested respondents in these two categories, I then communicated with the interested shelter staff and further explained the research objective, interview procedure, risks and benefits and confidentiality issues with each of them.

The government officers and staff working at the shelter homes and the NGO executives were purposively selected according to their positions in the provision of different kinds of services to DV survivors. Policy makers and women activists were also chosen from their expertise in this field, as having been actively involved in managing DV programs and/ or making policy for more than one year. The suitability of these respondents was judged on their working experience of not less than one year in the various areas of domestic violence. Before conducting the interviews, I personally contacted each respondent from the group of policy

makers, NGO executives and women activists, explaining the aim of the study and related issues and made appointments for their interviews.

As noted earlier, the research was conducted in six shelter homes across six divisional cities in Bangladesh. It covered the whole geographical area of Bangladesh and I needed to travel extensively to interview the respondents. These regions vary with respect to area and population size, cultural and socioeconomic conditions. Rajshahi is the largest division, followed by the Chittagong and Dhaka division, and the smallest division is Sylhet. However, the Dhaka division has a higher number of richest households while Sylhet has the poorest quintile (BBS & UNICEF 2014). Of the six divisions, the Chittagong and Sylhet divisions are the most conservative division regarding women's roles and mobility, which is manifested by the high fertility and women's lower participation in paid activity and marrying older spouse (BBS & UNICEF 2014; Kabeer 2002, p.195).

Making contact

Like Pitman, I was directed by Patton's (2005) approach in their research on women and domestic violence. This covered the following issues:

- a) Provide clear and brief information about myself and the research.
- b) Establish a trustworthy relationship around the sensitivity of the topic.
- c) Respond properly when any concerns are raised by survivor/respondent, particularly linking the possible referral service and extension of shelter stay period considering situations.
- d) Clearly explained the importance of their participation in benefiting other women and effecting change in DV program. (Patton 2005, pp. 103-104).

I also negotiated methods and locations for contact with each participant to maximize their safety and anonymity. Only one survivor refused to complete the interview, while another survivor completed the interview with very rich information and explanation but later requested me not to use her interview in my study. I respected her wish and had to exclude her from my study for ethical

considerations. I found it very interesting in a different case, when a survivor wanted to be mentioned by her real name and refused to use a pseudonym. The survivor said, 'I do not care about risking myself; rather, I feel honoured that by using my case, you could encourage others to seek justice to end violence'. However, according to the ethics rules, I was not permitted to use any respondent's real name.

Introduction of the respondents

Each of the women's stories and experiences was unique and women were aware how issues circumstances created conflict with their husbands. The following description briefly provides portraits of the women survivors with pseudonyms as well of the other respondents. All the survivors and the other respondents were Muslim.

Survivors (shelter residents)

The sixteen women who participated in this study were drawn from six shelter homes in six divisions of Bangladesh. Their pseudonyms are Basona, Jahanara, Jomila, Morjina, Nazma, Nazmun, Panna, Rahima, Ramisa, Saima, Saleha, Shaheena, Sharmeen, Shamema, Shanta and Taslima, All women were from poor backgrounds. Of the sixteen women, two had no formal education, three had primary and the rest had secondary level education and only one had completed higher secondary level.

As a group, the women participants provided important information about their relationships with their husbands, ex-husbands and in-laws and shared the ill treatment received from some of the shelter staff. Each woman appeared to speak freely with me about her experiences. They said they wanted to share their lives with me in order to help other women. They also said that they felt secure that I would preserve their anonymity. I do not identify the shelters that the women were living in to protect their anonymity. I was privileged to have their trust and have tried to honour it in the way I handled their stories and their experiences for positive social, cultural and organisational change (see Chapters 5 and 6).

At the time of interviews, the ages of the women in this study ranged from 21 to 39 years and nearly all were mothers. Six women were in their twenties and ten women were in their thirties (ages ranged from 30 to 35 years). The duration of their marital life varied greatly, with the shortest being under three years (one woman) and the longest twelve years (one woman). Six women had lived with their husbands between three to five years, seven women had lived with their husbands for six to eight years, and one for eight and half years. Seven out of the sixteen women were divorced, while the rest were abandoned. 15 of the 16 women had children. In total, there were 30 children, ranging in age from 8 months to 13 years. Five women had one child, six women had two children, three had three children and one had four children.

Of the sixteen survivors who participated in this study, everyone described physical violence perpetrated by their husbands as occurring on a regular or an occasional basis. Except for one woman, all were also abused by their mothers-in-law. Five women were also abused by their sisters-in-law (brother's wives) after they moved from their violent marital home to the assumed safety of living with their brothers.

Other respondents

I interviewed 15 respondents from shelter staff, women activists, NGO executives and policy makers. Seven shelter staff were interviewed, working in different capacities in shelters. Two were assistant directors, one was a physician, one was a lawyer, two were social welfare officers, and one was a matron cum day care officer. All of them were in the age group between 36 to 45 years. To protect their privacy, I do not identify in which shelter they were working. I used pseudonyms of Staff 1, Staff 2, Staff 3, Staff 4, Staff 5, Staff 6 and Staff 7.

I interviewed four policy makers: one was the then secretary of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, the second was the Director General (DG) of the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) and the third was the Project Director of Multi-Sectoral Program on Violence against Women (MSPVAW). The fourth respondent of this group was a high-level ministry officer, concerned with shelter

management. I used their pseudonym as PM 1, PM 2, PM 3 and PM 4. They were aged between 50 to 54 years.

I also interviewed two women activists and 2 NGO executives, who had vast knowledge and experience of managing domestic violence programs. I identified them by using the codes WA 1 and WA 2 for two women's activists (who were 47 and 51 years old) and NGO 1 and NGO 2 for NGO executives (who were both in their late forties).

The data collection process and interview schedule

Before conducting interviews, I prepared a semi-structured interview schedule for data collection in order to elicit comparable responses and discussion of interrelated issues following a sequence of open-ended questions (Alston & Bowles 2003).

In my interviews with women survivors we generally talked about: 1) life before and after marriage; 2) their perceptions of domestic violence; 3) what it felt like to leave their abusive relationships and stay in a shelter home; and 4) their present and future possibilities. For the interviews with staff our conversations focused on: 1) what made the husbands abusive; 2) what are the consequences of DV on women; 3) what are the barriers women faced in seeking formal help; and 4) how could shelter services be improved to address survivor's concerns.

These semi-structured interview schedules encouraged the respondents to develop their ideas and elaborate on issues raised in the interview. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted in the place the respondents felt most comfortable. Following the Ethics Committee's suggestion, all except two of the interviews with survivors took place in the district women's office. Two survivors refused to come to the women's office and instead chose to be interviewed in the front room of my residence. The interviews I conducted with shelter staff, policy makers, NGO executives and women activists were held in their respective

offices. In each setting I provided food, water and tissues, and also ensured easy access to the toilet.

I conducted the first two interviews as a pilot study. These were arranged with two women who were eligible to participate in the research. I followed Stanford's six reference points (Stanford 1999 cited in Pitman 2010) to further evaluate the research design and methods:

1. The relevance, flow and adequacy of the interview schedule;
2. The effectiveness of the questioning techniques;
3. The adequacy of interpersonal and interviewing skills to achieve rapport;
4. The relevance and quality of the data gathered;
5. The method and effectiveness of recording data; and
6. The 'legitimacy' of the research question.

During my pilot study I realized that there was the opportunity to obtain rich information from each stage of the interview process, including the initial inquiries. This was noted by Australian feminist researchers such as Patton (2005) and Power (1998). Power commented that she tried to keep the research process clear but added that 'once I had invited women to contact me for the specific purpose of telling their story about violence in their lives, the story telling began' (1998, p. 50). Like Pitman (2010, p. 93), I was mindful to take notes from the first contact with a participant because I was aware from my pilot interviews that the rich information I would hear might come when I least expected it.

In my design, I projected that each interview would take between one and one and a half hours but found in the pilot study that each interview lasted between three and four hours. This excessive time made me worried about its effect on the women. I tried to be more specific about the questions to reduce the time length but it did not work. The emotional content of women's stories did not allow a concise, well-ordered interview. Moreover, a few survivors even contacted me later to provide additional information or clarify their points of view. In fact, like Power (1998), I found that my concerns regarding the length of time had no effect

on the women, who expressed their gratitude and thankfulness that I was a patient listener without interrupting or rushing them. I was motivated to allow women as much time as they felt they needed. As a result, I had to inform all the survivors that the interview may take three or four hours, not just one or two, to allow them to schedule it sensibly.

From my pilot interviews I understood that I had to abandon the expectation of a well-ordered and consistent description of the interviewees' experiences. Like Power (1998), I also found women sometimes became worried about not being methodical. Thomas also noted, 'people do not tell stories and narrate their lives in a linear fashion – in neat, tidy sequences; they move back and forth, revisiting, reframing, adding and altering. This is part of the sense making process' (2009, p. 120). I learned to clearly explain to every participant that I would ask the first question, and that although I had an interview schedule ready in my hand, they did not need to be worried about being linear or methodical. I assured them that it was their stories for telling and sharing, not that they had to follow any recommended sequence. This set the scene very well and the women became more relaxed in spite of the potentially emotionally overwhelming topic. I agree with Karp that the 'artfulness' of the interview was not so much in my interview guide but in knowing how and 'when to follow up on what a person is saying in the moment' (Karp n.d. cited in Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 122).

Self-disclosure is described as a way of encouraging mutual reciprocity and trust between researcher and participants (Johnson 2002, p. 190). Directed by the argument that self-disclosure might help lessen the distance between researchers and participants (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007), I initially disclosed my observations and work experience relating to DV, along with aspects of my own familial relationships. Initially I did this to the extent that it seemed relevant, useful and interesting to the women I were interviewing. However, I found this was not as important to the women as showing my sensitivity to their stories of abuse and trauma. Later, I did less self-disclosure. The women knew I had been working in the area of domestic violence and that I had a practical understanding of domestic violence. Interestingly not all of the survivors were interested to know more. As

Pitman (2010, p. 96) suggested, I tried to minimize the potential power differentials by responding with empathy, care and insight to the women's stories of trauma. I gave the women as much time as they needed. I wanted them to feel 'listened' to without feeling 'ashamed'. However, I cannot claim that I fully overcame the power imbalance between myself and survivors, and the imbalances and political sensitivities between myself and the shelter staff and policy makers as these could not be easily resolved. There is no magic formula for fully overcoming the power issues but I tried my best to minimize the differential.

It is challenging in researching subjects such as violence, to convince people to talk frankly and honestly about their very personal lives. In part, it depends on the study's design, such as whether questions are well worded and easy to understand, as well as the degree of comfort felt during the interview. I tried to be an empathetic listener. I wanted respondents/survivors to feel that I was genuinely interested in their stories without making judgments, without embarrassment or shame (see Ellsberg et al. 2001, p. 3). To enhance the disclosure of respondent's personal experiences of DV, I was led by two feminist researchers' strategies: (1) within the course of interview I provided the participant several opportunities to disclose her experience of violence and (2) I frequently asked behaviourally specific questions rather than asking general and subjective questions (Ellsberg et al. 2001, p. 3). For instance, rather than asking, "have you ever been raped by your husband?" I asked, 'have you ever been forced to have sexual intercourse while you did not agree?'

Data analysis

Transcribing the interviews was the first step of the data analysis. The interviews were conducted and audio taped in the local language. I transcribed them in the local language and then translated some of their responses as direct quotes into English. As I did this I considered the relevance to key themes. I was very aware about the difficulties of translating from one language into another. I revisited translations to check for accuracy and I included Bangladeshi phrases or terms when no English version could be found.

I structured the data by noticing and then eliminating repetitions, making distinctions between important and less important parts of the data, combining on the basis of the purpose of the study and the theoretical presuppositions. I compressed respondent's longer statements into a more concise excerpt, on occasion rephrasing in a few words (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009), as I needed to translate some of the material from Bengali to English.

My goal of interpretation was to generate new and insightful meanings to the data presented to me, with the view of contributing new knowledge about DV. As I interpreted the data, I used the pseudonyms rather than a number to personalise their testimonies. For data presentation, I made different concept-driven categorizations based on the themes. The concepts were taken based on responses provided by survivors. When the data was thematically organized consistent with the research questions and coding was completed, the coded information was reviewed. For instance, in response to the question about the causes of DV, I first went through the responses of several respondents. Then, based on their responses, I prepared a list of causes, such as patriarchy, dowry, poverty and extended family structure etc. I then reviewed transcriptions of every individual respondent and put code number (e.g., R1, R3, R15 etc.) of the person mentioned dowry as a cause of DV under the heading of dowry. During analysis, I used this coded information along with the detail responses noted in the transcriptions.

Issues related to transcription

There are various complex issues associated with transcription (Hossen & Westhues 2010, p. 1194). Like Mishler (1986), I was wary about the unavoidable consequences of transformation of speech transcribed into written texts, whereby the feelings and flow of speech can only be partially represented in written form. The complexity of transcription becomes more difficult when some of the issues needed to be translated from one language into another with the lack of similar words between the two languages (Twinn 1997). As indicated, participants sometimes used words that reflected symbolic meanings within the Bangladeshi culture. Whenever they used Bangla words or sentences that have no literal

meaning but have symbolic cultural meaning, I made every effort to check and uncover their meaning with all its richness. For example, one participant informed me that if she sought help the first time that her husband beat her, it would damage '*pariberer izzat*' and '*choto korto*' of her natal family in the community. She meant that if she asked for police or other formal help, it would harm the image and status of her natal family, and everybody would begin to belittle her family because they had failed to educate their daughter how to be patient in conjugal conflict. This process helped to identify the symbolic meaning of the participants' expressions, as they themselves saw it, and therefore ensured that my efforts remained honest to the data and to the experience of the participants.

Ethical considerations: Consent, confidentiality and safety

As stated earlier, this study was conducted with the approval of the Flinders University Social Sciences Human Ethics Research Committee. The ethical requirements for researchers are to ensure that:

Participation is both voluntary and informed;

Provision of confidentiality and anonymity should be strictly maintained; and

Strong commitment of non-maleficence or 'doing no harm' to participants (Alston & Bowles 2003, p. 21).

This section outlines the procedures undertaken to address those issues, with particular focus on maintaining the physical and emotional safety of both the participants and the researcher when interviewing on the topic of domestic violence.

Participation in this research was entirely voluntary which was clearly stated by the third party who initially communicated with participants. I also shared with participants that they will not gain any personal or financial benefit from participating in this study. The information packages, which were handed over, included details outlining the right of participants to withdraw at any time over the duration of the research without any coercion, which I also reiterated at the

beginning and end of the interview. Participants were requested to bring both copies of the consent form²⁹ to the interview so that they could be signed. I made it clear to each respondent that she/he has the right to refuse to answer any of my questions. I made them understand that if any discussion brings discomfort or is upsetting, she also maintains the right to terminate the interview at any time. Two respondents were unable to read or write, and put their 'thumb marks'. In that situation I read out the information and introduction letters and consent form, thus assuring them of confidentiality.

Confidentiality and anonymity are influencing factors for a person to participate in research, particularly research of a sensitive nature (Patton 2005). I thoroughly discussed with participants the research objectives, the interview processes, the potential positive and negative consequences of participating in this research, along with the guarantees of privacy and anonymity. Details of the steps taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity were outlined in the information sheet. I did not proceed until I was confident that the respondents clearly understood their rights. Then, I again asked the participants whether or not they wanted to participate. I did not make attempts of any kind to persuade, encourage or cajole potential participants into any agreement. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity I followed the strategies below.

Via the letter of introduction potential participants were informed that no identifying information will be published in the thesis or any other published text stemming from the research. All participants, including shelter staff/workers, professionals and survivors, were assured that the information they provide would be handled with respect and sensitivity. I tape recorded the interview only when the respondents permitted, I took notes instead of tape recording 4 policy makers' interviews and one women activist's discussion as they did not give permission to be taped.

²⁹The consent form was handed over at the time of recruitment and collected at the time of interview

During the interview, the identity section was recorded on a separate sheet with a code number and I kept these secret in a locked cabinet while I was in Bangladesh and also in Adelaide. I used the same number on the interview tape or on the notes sheet so that after reading the notes or listening to the tape, it would not be possible to identify the respondent. Identifying information was also deleted from the transcripts, and the reporting and analysis of findings; only my PhD supervisors and I had access to the raw data collected. I transcribed interviews in a private location (office space in my own residence and my study room at Flinders University). In addition to code numbers, I used pseudonyms during data analysis and interpretation and when writing research reports, so that no one would discover the identity of the actual respondent.

For the other category of respondents, I followed the same procedure. As more than the actual numbers of participants were invited initially, the final participants were not known by the group since they were directly contacted by me. Pseudonyms were also used for them during data analysis and interpretation and writing research reports. At the end of each interview, a verbal summary of the interview was shared with the respondent and the respondent was able to verify what was said, or have something deleted if they felt it might compromise their anonymity. I acknowledge that these solutions to meet ethical standards were limited, but these were the best solutions I could offer. However, none of the respondents changed their views or responses when I asked them for confirmation.

Participants were provided with the contact details for both the supervisors and the ethics committee on the information sheet, as required by the Ethics Committee. However some of the ethical requirements which are standard for Australia, were very hard to apply in the Bangladeshi context. For example, providing the contact details of supervisors made no sense to participants who had no access to email and phone. Also due to language barrier, even staff, who might have the scope for making a phone call to Australia, would be unable to inform my supervisors of any of their concerns. However, according to ethics obligations, I had to notify them of their options and request them if they have any

concerns, to write in Bangla and ask the third party to translate it into English and send it via post or her email.

There were other procedures undertaken to protect the participants and researcher from physical or emotional harm arising from any part of the research process. The safety of the participants and the researcher were addressed in order to meet the ethical requirement of non-maleficence.

Minimizing risks

As the respondents were staying at state funded shelter homes, away from any contact with their husbands or in-laws, there was no risk at all of being beaten by husbands or suffering any other physical harm from husbands for disclosing the violence. But there was still some risk. Some of the respondents were emotionally upset when remembering their husband's violence. I was more concerned to address the emotional distress that participants may experience during the interview process. Recounting their experiences potentially exacerbated the effects of the trauma of their abuse. To minimize the risk of emotional harm:

- 1) I ensured at the beginning of each interview that participants could ask for a break or terminate the interview or their involvement in the research at any time. Six women requested a break but none of the women took up any of the other options.
- 2) I asked permission to audiotape the interview but also showed them the 'off' button and invited them to turn the tape off, or ask me to, if they felt uncomfortable or overcome with emotion. I was considerate of the survivors' feelings and emotional trauma while recounting their violent experience. For instance, several women became upset while sharing their experiences, and stopped talking on the record and took turned off the tape. I only restarted the interviews after survivors had full control of their emotions.
- 3) I prepared and handed over a list of relevant referral agencies and specific people with whom the women could make contact for debriefing and counselling or any other support if needed.

- 4) At the beginning of the interview I discussed with the respondents the types of questions I was going to ask, so that the participant was fully informed and comfortable rather than taken by surprise.

While interviewing, whenever I came to know of any urgent medical or any administrative need of any survivor, I arranged free medical facilities and other services. For example, a survivor informed that she was not interested to return her daughter to the abusive husband but she was too poor to raise the girl herself. She was desperately looking for government or other help to give her girl a safe place and secure future. She was refused by an orphanage as her husband was alive.³⁰ The survivor was not able to work, as there is nobody to look after her daughter. As she sought my help to organize a secure place for her daughter I enquired at several state funded orphanages but was refused. However, with the help and support of an influential policy maker, I organized a place for her daughter in a state funded girls' orphanage, considering the case as exceptional.

However, in order to ensure the participants' safety, I advised them not to disclose/ provide their address to anyone in the place that the interview was held. I locked all access points of the interview room so that no incidental people suddenly enter the room. I myself arranged taxis for survivors to return to their shelter homes or appropriate places at the end of the interview.

For the other category of respondents, such as the policy makers, shelter staff, women activists and NGO executives, there was some risk for them for being misquoted. In order to minimize this risk, I tape recorded some interviews with their permission and in other cases I took notes. Moreover, at the end of each interview, I summarized the interview findings with the particular respondents, to ensure conformity, and double-checked their statement, so that the respondents would not feel that there was a risk of being wrongly quoted. Admittedly, this was not a strong approach to checking for accuracy.

³⁰In Bangladesh an orphan whose father died and whose mother is unable to provide support or with both parents deceased and aged 6 can get shelter in a government -funded orphanage

Through my magisterial and administrative work, I was well aware of and had witnessed some of men's nasty and revengeful behaviour towards women. I knew the risks and the relevant literature. In this context, my own physical and emotional wellbeing as a researcher was just as important for me to address as that of the participants (Skinner, Hester & Malos 2005, p. 15). There was little possibility for any kind of physical harm to me caused by survivors' husbands, but I was careful and managed the threat of this risk by not being seen with the women in public places.

Talking about someone's experience of violence is not an enjoyable activity in any society. While conducting interviews with DV survivors, I made every effort to obtain comprehensive interviews in every possible way. During interviews, many of the participants became upset and started crying as they recounted what they had gone through. I tried to comfort them as best I could, within the confines of a research interview. At the same time it had a great effect on me. Though I have been working with DV survivors for many years, I sometimes became frustrated. Even now I sometimes feel as if I am carrying their pain and trauma with me. I struggled many times to manage the emotional transitions as a researcher and a fellow-feeling woman.

Even though I thought I was accustomed to hear DV stories, I experienced trauma after listening to the survivors' painful stories, which featured multiple and ongoing victimization. At every stage, I can now see that I was depressed and horrified by the trauma and injustice contained within the women's stories, and some of my fundamental beliefs were changed. I came to know some of the most cruel and terrible things that human beings can do to their nearest and dearest. My experience has been differently referred in previous research as vicarious traumatisation (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Morrison, 2007), an 'unmanaged heart' (Power 1998, p. 53), burnout or compassion fatigue (Figley 1995), and countertransference (Sabin-Farrell & Turpin, 2003; Dunkley & Whelan, 2006). I even sometimes felt the fear that such a society is no longer a 'safe place' for any woman. But I convinced myself that I should keep my focus on the women's strength and how they had defended themselves against oppression and were

redeveloping their lives. I understood the truth that, regardless of my best efforts, the pain associated with the stories could negatively affect my interviewing capacity. I relied on my counselling skills and work in the area of DV to mitigate this trauma and pain. I went through severe emotional reactions, such as depression, worry, helplessness and above all powerlessness, before, during, and after the interview process, experiences that have also been recognized by other feminist researchers (Power 1998; Patton 2005). The entire research process, including the preliminary reading, designing, recruitment, interviewing, transcribing and analysing phases 'guaranteed exposure to endless waves of pain' (van Dernoot Lipsky 2009 cited in Pitman 2010).

Reinharz argued that 'the unveiling of women's stories causes more pain in the women's lives than the researcher had suspected and that the shock of such discovery may eventually force her to confront her own vulnerability' (Reinharz 1992, p. 36). I would agree with this in the way that after every interview I felt tension for the women I knew – my housemaids, working class female staff in my office, and above all, my female relatives and friends who are currently married. I especially can't help thinking of my younger sister, who recently married at only 18, and is still a 2nd year university student in 2015, living with her in-laws. I struggled with 'the ambiguities and contradictions' (Power 1998, p. 119) in deciding whether I should leave the participants as they were or whether I should take a role to provide them extra assistance and how I could do this (Pitman 2010, p. 111).

My emotional distress was fuelled further by being mistreated and harassed while travelling by public bus during the data collection period. The thesis would be incomplete if I did not honestly share my experiences regarding public transport during my data collection. While in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, I travelled by private taxi or public bus to meet with the Ministry's officers, shelter home staff, and NGO personnel. Usually the public buses in Dhaka are inadequate and overcrowded. These local buses are often reluctant to take women passengers, and in most cases bus conductors/helpers and male passengers obstruct female passengers from getting on buses, as they are slow

movers, have more security problems and take more space. However facing all these hazards, one day when I was able to get on a bus, I found two young men occupying the seats reserved for women.³¹ I politely asked them to leave those seats but nobody cared. Above all they were laughing and criticizing at a female in Bangladesh grasping an opportunity. They started arguing with the ugly logic that since Bangladeshi women are claiming equal rights in every respect, there should not be any seats reserved for women in public buses. I felt dishonoured and humiliated. But my experience had not yet reached its peak! All of a sudden, I feel someone touching my hip and pushing me awkwardly but it was very hard to locate who was doing this. I felt embarrassed. While getting off from the bus, the research assistant sympathized with me, saying 'I know what happened. Don't be upset, it is the everyday truth for women who ride on public buses'. She showed me a safety pin in her palm. She said, 'Previously I struggled a lot with the problem, but no matter how hard you try, very often somebody will try to touch you on the bus. Therefore, when I find any hand touching me on any part of my body, I don't bother to find the nasty men. I just use this pin'. I feel embarrassed, and harassed about having been born in a country where most men are socialized to harass women, even in a public bus. At 41 years of age, I learnt how overcrowded buses provide opportunities for sexual harassment.³² I feel scared to think how a teenage girl faces this experience! Though I was born and brought up in Bangladesh, my class privileges, my hostel life during my tertiary studies, and my employment in the most respected civil service have saved me from this harassment in the public buses. I came to know why many women become so embarrassed that they silently ignore harassment rather than fight back. After that incident my younger brother, who was a 2nd year university student in 2012 and 19 years younger than me, accompanied me every time I had to travel by bus

³¹ After long standing demands from women's groups in Bangladesh, the government enacted the provision to reserve 25% of seats for women in local city buses, and in most case 9 reserved seats are indicated for women, children and the disabled in any public bus. In reality most buses have 3 to 5 seats reserved for women but often men take them, demanding 'equal rights' to them (Zohir 2003, p. 30).

³² My experience was in 2012, but the scenario is still the same in 2015. A recent study has brought to light the sexual harassment against women in public buses. 48% of women (total respondents of 800 girl and women) who are regular users of public buses confirmed that they faced harassment and offensive language in public buses. 3% of them keep weapons for self-defense while riding in a bus. The study was undertaken from May to June 2014 (Hussian 2015).

in Dhaka city or helped me to rent a taxi or micro for the whole day. He took the role of my protector on the road. I found that in Bangladesh, the power of masculinity is still widely in place. I realized with all the support and assistance for reducing violence against women, different kinds of violence are still pervasive in Bangladesh.

Limitations of the research

As an effort to achieve in-depth understanding of domestic violence, this research has several strengths. However some limitations are also acknowledged. The study is relatively small and interviews were conducted only once due to the significant geographical distance between the respondents and myself. Time was a critical issue for this research, as much time was needed to build rapport with the survivors/survivors. In order to conduct interviews with survivors, I had to spend a lot of time waiting, even though they gave consent. Some of them took time to start talking. A few of them changed their schedules several times. I do not claim my findings are generalizable to whole populations of women in Bangladesh. The findings should be seen as indicative of, and providing the basis for, further research in this area. The other limitation of the research is related to the method of data collection, which did not include focus group discussion due to the concerns raised by the Ethics Committee about respondents' safety and anonymity. The last limitation pertains to the fact that the voice of male perpetrators was not sought or heard. Therefore male voices and views about abusing their wives were absent in this study.

Although my insider status helped me a lot during the interviews, it affected my fieldwork in one way. I found a few shelter staff were less expressive on some issues. For instance, they were reluctant to share their true views on how to improve shelter homes activities. Some of them were worried about the future implications of the study, if any shortcomings of services were identified, or any official mismanagement. For instance, some of them had been working in one working station in Dhaka continuously for 8 to 10 years,³³ and if that was

³³The Bangladesh government provision for working in a same duty station is three years.

mentioned, they might be transferred to another city. The staff working at the Dhaka shelter, especially, were not very spontaneous about improving shelter activities.

Problems faced during data collection

During my fieldwork, I faced many practical challenges, especially struggling to find a house at Dhaka. As my fieldwork was less than 1 year in duration, I faced difficulties to rent a secured house. Most house-owners preferred at least a 1-year lease. Moreover, as my two children were with me during the fieldwork period, it seemed a bit risky to leave them only with a housemaid. Considering all these circumstances, I decided to live close to one of my sisters' workplaces, which was in a nearby *Upazilla* in central Dhaka. My sister was a great help and took responsibility for my two boys while I was travelling or busy.

Moreover, while conducting my fieldwork, the whole country was on the holy 'Ramadan' (one-month Muslim prayer) and the biggest religious festival '*Eid-ul-Fitr*'. In this festive season, Dhaka city usually becomes more crowded and faces extreme traffic jams. It was mostly impossible to visit one office or do more than one task every day. Furthermore, most of the survivors took a long vacation from the shelter homes in order to celebrate *Eid ul Fitr*, so I had to wait for them to return to shelter. It is worth to note that while residing in the shelter it was hard for residents to leave. With permission they could go out for 2/3 hours and were usually allowed to take leave the shelter for maximum five days to visit family members and relatives' house. For some survivors, the shelters are their last chance for a roof over their heads; however, they also have relatives or siblings with whom they spend 4/5 days. During religious festivals most of the shelter staff also enjoy holidays in this season, and residents usually are given holidays, if they want to (communication with Staff 1). I was worrying whether I would be able to finish my fieldwork in time or not.

The political situation of Bangladesh put a great constraint on my data collecting activities. During the period of data collection (August 2012 – March 2013), key figures from the main Islamist party *Jamaat-e-Islami*, were charged with war

crimes by the government tribunal investigating alleged collaboration with Pakistan during the 1971 independence movement (*The Prothom Alo* 2013). *Jamaat-e-Islami* supporters called strikes and *hartal* and had ongoing confrontations with the police in protest against the trial. Frequent political demonstration against the judgments made by the war crime tribunal created difficulties in maintaining my fieldwork schedule. The country faced demonstrations and counter demonstrations³⁴ with every verdict of war crime(ABC News 2013; BDnews24.com 2013). Furthermore, the opposition leader also called several strikes demanding a caretaker government in the upcoming election (*The Prothom Alo* 2013). It seemed judicious not to delay completing the fieldwork because the circumstances indicated the possibility of a worsening political situation.

My research assistant and I both had to face several other problems regarding transport, especially travelling in Dhaka city. This travel was time consuming and physically exhausting. We had to wait 2/3 hours to catch a bus or rent a taxi. Along with the extreme traffic jams, the poor and gender-biased transport system burdened me with the heavy financial costs of renting a private vehicle most of the time. I learnt that in modern and secular Bangladesh, where the prime minister and the opposition leader were both female for about one decade, there are still many places where women are in a secondary position compared to men, particularly in public transport and in public places.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has discussed the methodological and research design framework of this study. The use of a qualitative method using feminist standpoint theory was justified as an appropriate framework for fulfilling the objectives of this research. Non-probability purposive and snowball recruitment were discussed, along with the qualitative feminist interviewing methods that were applied in order to obtain

³⁴There were two camps in the demonstrations: the first one sought immediate execution of the people convicted of alleged war crimes; the others believed the war crimes tribunals were 'show trials' for the purpose of eliminating the leaders of an Islamic political party who were considered threats to the government's re-election in the 2014 elections(BDnews24.com 2013; Haque & Arom 2014)

an in-depth understanding of women's experiences of domestic violence. A discussion of the ethical commitment to the principles of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and safety protocols guiding the research process was presented. I also considered the problems I faced during data collection. I discuss the findings generated from this research and the data analysis in the next chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

Revealing the Truth:

Women's Voices and Experiences of Domestic Violence in Bangladesh

My husband usually beat me for a number of simple reasons. If I asked him where he was been the whole afternoon or to help the kids in their study or I suggested he save money for the children's future, he started yelling and sometimes got very angry and beat me, sometimes with his belt or a stick or whatever he found near. Once he beat me with a stainless steel plate so hard that I had three stitches in my forehead. But it was not always that I asked him for doing something that caused him to be violent. Even when I had disagreements and fights with his mother, he always listened and believed her complaints. It was always me whom he yelled at, scolded, shouted at if the meal was not served on time or even if the children did something wrong, it was me who was beaten. Last one year he did not make any sexual contact with me. I endured this insult for the future of my children, but a few months ago finally he threw me out of his house and told people that he divorced me. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

Panna offered her testimony to explain why her husband beat her but also to reveal the sheer mundane regularity of the abuse. Enmeshed in the story is the mother-in-law, a subject of discussion in Chapter Six. In this chapter, the first of several chapters presenting data and analysis, I focus on the research question, 'What are the underlying factors associated with domestic violence against women in Bangladesh?' I start by reporting the survivors' experiences of domestic violence, specifically from their husbands. The First Section details the women's perceptions and definitions of DV, including physical, emotional, sexual, and economic violence. Sections Two and Three examine the causes of DV, based on the opinion and experiences of survivors. The consequences of violence on women and on their children, family and community are discussed in Section Four. The chapter ends with some concluding insights in Section Five.

Definition and perceptions of domestic violence

Defining violence is difficult but necessary for an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of DV, as definitions vary according to the views and values of the person making them. Understanding how victims/survivors define DV is important to understanding how to provide assistance. Of the 16 women survivors of DV I interviewed, most did not have adequate literacy skills, so the definitions they offered me related to their own experiences of abuse, while some also defined DV from the information they gained from the media and surroundings, such as physical, emotional, economic and sexual abuse including forced sex against wives by husbands. The women I interviewed revealed different forms of mistreatment, cruelty and negligence, physical assault and threats, financial hardship and forced sex by their husbands, as identified below.

Physical violence

Women, interviewed in this study, reported physical violence as slapping, beating, punching, arm twisting, choking, kicking, dragging, burning with a cigarette, pulling hair, choking, hurling objects, banging her head against the door, hitting her private and sensitive parts and threatening with weapons. The most common types of physical violence committed by husbands were hitting using hands or weapons such as a bamboo *lati* [stick], a metal piece or leather belt, slapping, and pulling her hair.

Nazmun described physical violence she suffered whilst pregnant:

He used to kick and punch me in the stomach. He sometimes even pushed me down. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

The majority of survivors (12) defined beating or torture as physical violence only when it was severe, but the 'odd slap' or 'sudden blow' or 'hurling dishes at wives' was not considered as physical violence, as women widely accepted these as 'husband like' behaviour and as a normal feature of married life. Taslima clarified this:

I never consider his [my husband's] once off kick or slap as violence. It is very usual in our life. (Taslina, interviewed 27 December 2012)

Fifteen survivors joined Taslima in viewing the milder forms of violence, such as 'slapping' or 'abusive language', as part of married life; they were willing to overlook these actions for the smooth continuation of family life. For most of the survivors, the physical violence did not occur at particular times. For some it occurred in the morning or at noon while for others it occurred in the evening or at night. Thirteen survivors stated that husbands' use of physical force with or without external weapons was not isolated, but rather a part of continuing abuse.

Fifteen of the sixteen respondents reported that they were injured by their husbands' beatings; fourteen were badly injured and needed medical treatment. Eight of the fourteen women sustained severe injuries on one occasion but six needed medical treatment for their injuries on several occasions. Notably, three women were rendered unconscious from their husband's beatings on one occasion and four were made unconscious on several occasions. Fourteen of the sixteen victims/survivors told me that both the 'not so severe' and 'the severe' forms of violence occurred regularly. All the women related that the physical violence was not necessarily an outburst of anger or tension; rather it was often intentional and premeditated.

Emotional violence

According to survivors, emotional, mental or psychological violence are tortures, verbal abuses, insults, humiliation, intimidation, swearing, belittling, yelling, undermining, name calling, using foul language, threats of divorce or threats of remarriage which husbands or in-laws family member usually levelled against them. Thirteen of the women reported severe verbal abuse such as insults was a daily matter. For the other three, it happened occasionally. Whether it happened occasionally or on a daily basis, most of the time, verbal abuse meant demeaning and foul language used against wives and their parents, especially the wife's mother. Some women identified other types of emotional violence such as withholding food or being given very little food, sleep deprivation, being denied

medical treatment, being threatened with physical harm and being spat at. Still other forms of emotional violence which the women identified included their spouses having illegal affairs with other women, being deliberately locked out of the house in the middle of night, being called a prostitute, being told they were worthless, blaming their parents for their perceived failure in managing household and children, withholding care of children and above all not believing wife in quarrels with the mother-in-law. Ten survivors reported their husbands would throw shoes at them, which in Bangladesh is a very serious insult, akin to being spat at in the West.

The most devastating abuse, which involved their husbands having sexual affairs or hiding polygamy, was reported by the overwhelming majority of women. For some, this followed their husbands' expressed dissatisfaction about their wives' dark skin and his subsequent refusal of future sexual interaction. Eight of the survivors that I interviewed revealed that most of the time they tolerated their husband's physical violence in silence. However, when new sexual relationships with other women were formed it was often the point they took decision to let other people know. Four women reported having no sexual relationship by husbands for 6 months to a year, their husbands having either remarried or were maintaining other relationships. Rahima illustrated some of the dire consequences when their husbands no longer sought sexual relationships with them, whereas Saima described some of the vitriol levelled at women who initiate sex with husbands who no longer desire them:

I assured him I would never lodge complaint to the court that he remarried without my permission but I want to have my right with him. It was decided initially that one night in a week he will sleep with me. However, after one month, he never came to sleep with me as his second wife objected. I fought, quarrelled and called salish³⁵ to get my due share of him. I was

³⁵Salish is the traditional body for conflict resolution; this traditional dispute resolution presumes a settlement through mediation. Though this local arbitration is widely practised and accepted in Bangladesh, it has no legal base(Hossain 1997).

secretly divorced and was driven away forcibly with two daughters. They kept my only son. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

He stopped sleeping with me for more than six months. One night when I requested, he shouted loudly saying if I need man for sex, I can enlist myself in prostitution.(Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Saima and Rahima did not indicate that they have a strong desire for sex but wanted attention from their husbands. They understood that without any sexual interaction, their status as wife was threatened. Wanting sexual intimacy was actually an attempt to have their position as wife reassured by their husband. Their requests for sex were intended to gain their husband's recognition of their status as 'wife'.

Another dimension of emotional violence reported by four other women, was to be sent to their natal families ostensibly for a normal *nior*³⁶[visit] but then experiencing the humiliation of neither their husbands nor in-laws coming to bring them home. They explained that these types of negligence and abandonment could not be hidden from their relatives. In an attempt to save face, they returned to their in-laws without any welcome, knowing that their return would be humiliating. This type of emotional abuse, women thought, was the most severely humiliating abuse they experienced.

Eight of the sixteen women I interviewed reported that they were emotionally tormented when their spouses and in-laws denigrated their parents. They were reminded again and again that they were quite worthless as choice of wife but were chosen in spite of their dark complexion because of the big dowry. One woman said:

³⁶Some survivors termed the annual visit to natal home for 5 to 15 days as *nior*. Usually in Bangladesh, married girls visit the natal family once or twice on a year and stay a few days with parents.

He was yelling at me with very bad words, like prostitute, whore [khanki]. I felt ashamed but when he started those bad words to my mother, I felt like cutting his tongue. Several times he shouted at me, 'I fuck you and your mother, bloody whore'. Nothing seems more insulting than these words. (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

Five women revealed that husbands emotionally abused them by denying things they wanted. Sharmeen explained:

He never bought me any Snow,³⁷ powder or lipstick, not even one 'Fair and Lovely cream'³⁸ during six years of our marriage, though occasionally he bought this for his unmarried sister. I might forget his beatings but can never forgive him for this neglect. (Sharmeen, interviewed 24 December 2012)

As with Sharmeen, another four women revealed how their husbands' intentional neglect of their very personal wishes, like buying Fair and Lovely, cosmetics, *sari* or other clothes caused them mental stress and depression. Though one might argue that being denied cosmetics cannot be a form of abuse where physical beatings are a regular phenomenon, these women were enigmatic in the sense that they somehow tolerated physical beatings but for them denying cosmetics was similar to ignoring their 'wifely rights'. This issue seems more complicated in terms of the prevailing cultural expectations of women's beauty practices, according to which Bangladeshi women consider such items as their husband's 'token of love'. Thus, deprivation of those items seemed more devastating than the physical beatings for the majority of them. Taslima explained:

The mark of beatings or bodily injury can be cured one day, but the deep mark of neglect, injustices and insults never will be forgotten. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

³⁷ Snow is a face moisturising cream, widely used by Bangladeshi women

³⁸ Fair and Lovely is a skin whitening cream, produced and marketed by Unilever. The fairness cream is used by nearly 80% of the households of Bangladesh (Unilever Bangladesh 2015)

Sexual violence

Sexual violence and sexual coercion within marriage were common among the women participated in this study. Most of the women reported that husbands forced them many times to have sex, when they were unwilling or sick or not in a good mood, during menstruation or pregnancy, immediately after giving birth or immediately after the death of parents or siblings. Some women also revealed being forced to participate in sex they considered unusual, such as having sex in the presence of an unmarried sister or brother. Three women reported being forced by husbands to participate in sexual activities on the day while they were mourning for the death of their parents. They perceived it the worst sexual experience that they had ever with their husbands. Husbands' excessive sex demands were identified by seven women, especially in earlier period of marriage, when they were young brides. Ramisa's voice was remarkable, thanking God that a man has a daily limit of sexual intercourse:

His excessive [demands for] sex caused me a lot of depression and difficulties, soon after the marriage. Sometimes he forced me to have sex three times a day; gradually he normalized, though he sometimes wanted two times. I just thank God that a man can have sex only once or twice a day. If they were able to do it 5 or 6 times, I can't imagine myself in such a situation! (Ramisa, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Women's responses varied as to what constituted sexual violence, as they were unsure whether it would be considered violence. A significant number (10 out of 16) reported that their husbands took the decision in any sexual matters, with the women never asked whether they were feeling good or comfortable or whether they had any sexual interest. Most of the time, the women disagreed if they were sick or their children were sick. However, often having no interest for sex did not matter to their husbands who coerced them to have sex or engage in unusual sex. Rahima conveyed her feelings:

He [husband] severely beat me. I did not eat anything the whole day. At night when he wanted to be sexually intimate without saying

sorry I did not agree, then he forced me. I do not know whether I should call it, rape or not,³⁹ but it happened many times. I just feel this is my bad luck! (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

Ten out of sixteen women revealed they were sexually insulted and had non-consensual sex or sex out of fear. They submitted because they considered it was their duty to fulfil their husbands' sexual needs to save their marriages. Shanta revealed the fear of the consequences of not complying with her husband's sexual demands:

I know that he married me only for his sexual need. If I do not provide him the sex he needed, then why would he keep me? He will then remarry. (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

All but two of the sixteen women believed that they should not say 'no' to their husband's sexual needs unless they were seriously ill, as they perceived that they were married and provided a living by husbands only for the purpose of fulfilling this need. Women were more likely to accept sexual violence rather than physical or emotional violence. Some women, such as Saima, noted that this was a cultural pattern of behaviour among husbands, not just specific to her own situation:

[It is] not only my husband, every man considers his wife nothing but a sex organ, a vagina, which he bought through marriage and gained power to use any time he wants. So it does not matter if I feel sick or I am in grief or mourning, I have to give him my vagina, whenever he wants, otherwise I will be beaten or thrown out. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Nazmun differed from other participants by identifying her own pleasures and noting how her husband missed the opportunity to develop a rich and reciprocal sexual relationship with her:

³⁹After joining the shelter, Rahima became aware that a husband's forced sex be described as marital rape.

He never thought of my satisfaction. Whenever he got excited took me to the bed; most of time he forced me to show his 'purushotto' [manhood] that he could do anything, knowing well that whatever happens I can never leave him. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

This is how Morjina, who was abandoned by her husband, perceived sexual violence in her marriage:

He forced me for sex because he considered me as his slave, as his purchased property. It was not that I was not willing to provide. How dare I deny him when he is in need of sex? (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

Arguably Morjina conducted her own feminist analysis of sexual relations in marriage by using the terms 'slave', explaining how she was commodified ['purchased property']. Nazmun noted that her options to leave were extremely limited, if at all possible ['I can never leave him']. These survivors had their own understanding of their husbands' forced sex. They mostly theorized this as a power imbalance and gender construction in marriage. This confirms that they were not just victims of DV.

Most of the survivors reported that forced sex and sexually demeaning words by their husbands were patterns of recurring behaviour rather than one off events, and that this form of violence sometimes overlapped with physical violence. However, while survivors defined the actions that constituted forced sex they were reluctant to use term this 'marital rape'. Rahima's perception reflects a wider attitude about husbands' rights to have sex with their wives in Bangladeshi culture:

There should be nothing like the concept of 'marital rape'. I only know if he wants sex, I have to agree – this is what he married me for. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

This statement illustrates how traditional views of marriage justify marital rape and even encourage wives not to criminalize husbands' forced sex against them. Like the findings of Fahmida and Doney (2013), my interviewees also complied with forced sex as a strategy to save their marriages, sometimes to keep husbands from polygamy. It is significant that twelve out of sixteen survivors disclosed experiencing forced sex in conjunction with physical violence. Yet, because they believed that sex was their husbands' right within marriage, they never wanted their husbands to be punished for sexual violence. Whether this is common to most Bangladeshi survivors of DV I do not know, as data does not currently exist and my qualitative study meant that I only interviewed a small segment of all the Bangladeshi women who have been enduring DV.

Economic violence

Another type of violence that six survivors mentioned was economic abuse. This violence took place in the form of deprivation of personal spending, reluctance to provide financial support to the family, allowing the wife little or no control of the family budget, and restrictions and control over her earnings. Four women reported that they were facing economic violence as their husbands and in-laws took decisions about how their earnings would be distributed in the family. Saima spoke:

I had no job but I borrowed money and bought two cows and started selling milk. But every time my husband took my earnings and spent it. Sometimes I requested him to allow me a small amount so that I could buy a Horlicks drink⁴⁰ for my sick father, but he just ignored me! (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

However, economic abuse was often related to the husband's financial hardship. But Rahima's case is an illustration of economic abuse suffered when a wife deviates from gender norms. Since her marriage, Rahima's husband worked occasionally but somehow was able to provide a minimum living. When the family expanded with two children, his income failed to support their needs. Instead of

⁴⁰Horlicks is a popular energy drink in Bangladesh

looking for a permanent income, he stopped working and asked her to bring cash from her parents to start his new business. When she failed to bring any cash, she was so severely beaten that she was admitted to hospital for three days. Starving with two children, Rahima asked her husband to allow her to get a paid job too but he refused to allow her to engage in any work outside the home, as it would undermine his 'purushotto' [manhood].

He threatened if I go for work without his permission he would divorce me. Living with a wife's income would be a shame for him, as it would undermine his purushotto [manhood]. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

This experience revealed that their husbands' gendered ideology prevented some women from engaging in income earning activities, despite living in poverty. Survivors, like Rahima, understood men's attitudes, that demanding a dowry is an indication of 'manhood' but allowing his wife in a paid job is shameful for the so called 'manhood'. She was aware of the 'politics of manhood', which encouraged men to dominate their wives and deprive their wives of all personal freedom (see also Anwary 2015).

While discussing different kinds of violence, survivors clearly opined that different kinds of violence overlapped: sometimes economic violence led to severe physical beatings; sometimes, physical beatings led to a situation of forced sex. The majority of the women who participated in this study had experiences of violence almost identical with the experiences of participants in other studies in Bangladesh, but they were unique in their understanding of DV. All of the women perceived their husband's violence to be a very private issue that brings shame and dishonour if discussed with others. Bangladeshi society usually consider wife's help seeking is a matter of shame and indignity. A recent research on community attitude towards DV, most community leaders opine that wives who sought help against husbands' beatings or tortures, are the lower class women who lack sense of shame (Khan 2014). However, provocation was also a common defence of the husband. It did not matter with whom and when they were talking about their husband's abuse, the first question always asked was what was the

mistake they had made that led him to become violent. Thus for them, DV was an extremely personal matter which should be concealed as much as possible. As the incidence of DV is high in Bangladesh, it is necessary to scrutinize possible reasons for DV in order to effectively address it. The following section examines why and how DV occurs in Bangladesh.

Factors that cause domestic violence

In addressing DV, a central question is why and how violence enters a marital relationship. This section presents survivors' voices and experiences with respect to the circumstance that lead to violence. The women who participated in this study identified various factors that caused the violence against them.

Patriarchal ideology and men's superiority

Patriarchal beliefs and ideologies about manhood were identified as a major reason by the majority of survivors. Twelve out of sixteen women articulated various cultural, more specifically, patriarchal ideologies to explain their husband's domination and controlling authority over them. Shaheena, Taslima and Shamema explained:

He beat me because he is entitled to – he is all in all in the house. I should be ready at all times for his every command. I was never allowed to do anything without his permission. (Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

He found many faults in my behaviour, in my skin colour, in my domestic skills – even when my son fought with others, he blamed me. Actually, he thought he was my provu [master] who can do whatever with me, it did not matter what wrong I did. He had to show his power and shamitto [husband hood] to me and to others. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

I objected to his illegal relationship. He beat me mercilessly and warned if I object further, then he would divorce me. He believed I should be thankful

to him that he was still living with me. (Shamema, interviewed 5 December 2012)

Shamema's acceptance of the situation revealed the helplessness that bound her to accept husband's adultery. The other experiences of DV were widespread and also identified by previous research in Bangladesh (Anwary 2015; Chowdhury 2012). My interviews further confirmed the pervasiveness of the problem, as well as indicating the survivors' good understanding of the patriarchal domination that led their husbands to continue abuse against them.

Challenging the husband's authority is identified as another vital factor causing DV. Morjina reported that her husband did not beat her for three years after the wedding, though he showed anger by verbally abusing her, breaking utensils and sometimes not returning home until after midnight. However, tension arose when he began maintaining an illegal relationship with a woman; whenever Morjina wanted to know 'what is going on', he always denied it. For the sake of children's future, she advised the husband to leave the illegal relationship:

But he refused to admit that he was maintaining a mistress. Being desperate, one day I followed him and found him at that woman's house. After returning home he beat me mercilessly with a thick bamboo stick because I had dared to follow him. (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

Such experience is not unique to Morjina. Three other survivors also related that challenging male power and authority is a common precursor of violence. Men often beat wives to reaffirm their own authority and control when challenged. Challenging male supremacy in this context includes the wife asking her husband to spend money wisely or to seek a job or to save money for future security. Five survivors informed me that violence occurred when they raised their voice or advised the husbands to do or not do certain things or if they made any argument or responded to their husbands' words during a confrontation. Saleha, who was first kidnapped and raped and then forced to marry the rapist, shared her experience as follows:

Whenever I advised him to follow the religious way of life he beat me and replied that as long as he was providing me food, I should not dare to suggest what should he do. (Saleha, interviewed 28 November 2012)

This statement conveyed some husbands' belief that wives should not have any voice whatever happens. When a wife wanted to know how he spent his earnings or asked him to quit smoking or drinking alcohol or suggested using a condom, all these scenarios were interpreted as challenging his authority and undermining his 'maleness' and consequently deserving beatings. This was because a wife was mostly considered as having no right to advise; rather, she should be an ever-obedient follower; she has to obey his command, whether sexual, or financial or social. Dobash and Dobash (1998, p. 153) also contended that men do not believe that their wives have any right to argue, negotiate or discuss issues in a conflict situation as it threatens their power and supremacy. In such situations men often use physical violence to silence their wives' voices.

Another issue related to patriarchal domination and contributing to husband's violence revolved around the wife's reluctance to accept or lack of respect for their husband's power and domination. This may be by not asking her husband's permission before going out or not listening to his direction about what to wear. Nazma described her resistance to her husband's control:

While I was working in garment factory, he clearly set the boundaries not to go anywhere, only make my way to and from the factory. But I did not listen to his order. Rather, I sometimes went shopping with other colleagues. Unfortunately, I was caught one day and this caused me a physical beating with several stitches in my forehead, as I had dared to fail to listen to his command. (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

This experience was evidence of her resistance to the dominant gender norm that demands obedience to the husband. As any resistance brought severe

punishment, women had to compromise with gendered norms and had to be submissive to the control of their husbands.

The husbands' possessiveness and indirect domination also were identified, when Shaheena and Nazmun were refused permission to contact their family:

He did not like my parents or siblings visiting me. Even if I talked with them it made him angry – I was not even allowed to choose my dress.

(Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

Three other women also had similar experiences. Their experiences were clear indicators of their husbands' traditional attitude in considering the wife as 'subordinate', which perpetuates and sustains DV. These experiences also reflect some men's efforts to restrict their wives because of possessiveness. Although not many women shared this form of abuse, it is necessary to consider that men's possessiveness contributes to abusive behaviour.

The husbands' patriarchal attitude regarding their wives' sexuality is also identified as an issue causing DV (see also Naved et al. 2012). In interviews, several women revealed that their husbands never believed that they could have opinions or rights about sexual acts. Some of the women provided important insights about the interplay between gender relations and sexual coercion within the marital relationship. The majority of survivors disclosed that refusal of sex often caused them to be slapped or physical beaten. When they were not responsive to their husbands' sexual intimacy, particularly intercourse during pregnancy, it created tensions, and ultimately turned into scolding and occasionally beatings.

Domestic division of labour and household responsibilities

Violence and confrontation sometimes enter into the marital relationship with regards to domestic labour including the question of how women perform their domestic responsibilities. Women interviewed in this study were often physically and verbally abused for numerous reasons, such as their child's behaviour and

mistakes or their child's injury, the meal not being tasty, chatting with others, or going out without the husband's consent. Shamema described how the husband beat her because the curry was not tasty and accused her of not being careful with the cooking, blaming her by saying *'What guys are you thinking about fucking you while you are cooking?'* Shamema felt distressed that her husband never appreciated her cooking, and spent no time looking after the children.

The majority of survivors (14 out of 16) shared that their husbands thought cooking, producing children, raising and taking care of children and his elderly parents were only women's responsibilities. When women failed to comply with these prescribed roles or failed to do these in a proper way, physical and mental violence were often used against them in order to teach them to be more submissive or to behave as the 'perfect wife', although, in practice, it is quite impossible for women to conform to 'perfect wifely behaviour'. Saima gave an example:

He called me a 'lazy whore' for wanting help in pumping water from the tube well. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

The majority of the women were beaten for trivial reasons or often for no reason, often out of his frustration, mostly in circumstances for which the women were not responsible. Taslima spoke of being beaten for no reason:

Whether he was in a bad mood, or had fights with friends or other siblings, in every situation I was his easy target to hit, as he knew I would never dare to hit back because of my economic survival. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

Wives were beaten for no reason, which can be seen as explicit demonstration of women's subordination in Bangladesh patriarchal society. The patriarchal nature of the society supports men and whenever anything goes wrong, family and society find fault with women (Nahar 2010).

Dowry: the ultimate culprit

The patriarchal tradition of demanding a dowry was perceived as a highly influential factor causing DV against women. Most of the women interviewed for this study shared that their husband's violence directly or indirectly had a connection with dowry. Eleven out of sixteen women informed me that their parents were compelled to pay a dowry during marriage as a precondition. In two cases a dowry was paid voluntarily and only three marriages took place without a dowry commitment. Rahima stated:

My husband abused and abandoned me as I failed to meet his demand of dowry. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

The majority of survivors were aware of rapid changes occurring in marriage transactions over time with the dowry system becoming reinforced and sustained. Taslima said:

I heard that previously, bride's jewellery and clothing were provided by the groom's father. But times have changed. My father gave 35,000 taka⁴¹ cash to my in-laws as a precondition of my marriage. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

Survivors' experiences also echo with other research findings that in the last few years the major expenses and responsibilities in marriage have been transferred from the groom's family to the bride's family and now appear as the 'precondition of marriage' (Chowdhury 2010a; Rozario 1992, pp. 132-137). Saima continued:

My parents sold the only land we had to provide my dowry of gold ornaments and cash. The very next day of the wedding, I had to hand over all my ornaments to his mother and whenever I wanted them, they scolded me, arguing that as my father did not pay the full cash, I had no more rights

⁴¹In Bangladesh 35000 taka (AUS\$615) equals to 7 or 8 months income for a typical rural poor family.

to these ornaments. When I argued I was beaten. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

The experience that wives mostly have no control over their dowry resonated with another research in Bangladesh (Suran et al. 2004). Studies (Begum 2014; Suran et al. 2004) included stories of dowry dealings which were made privately and amounts were often kept reasonably undisclosed. Four women informed me that they did not even know how much their parents had to pay until after the marriage ceremony.

Survivors described different underlying social, cultural, economic, demographic, and other factors connected with the dowry system. Two women shared that though there was no precondition, parents gave dowry, such as a colour TV or furniture in order to ensure their daughter's smooth entry into the husband's family. For two other women, the dowry was a form of 'voluntary gift'. No coercion or demand came from the groom's family.

Though there was no direct demand, on different occasions his family expected gifts from my parents. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

There were many issues behind the demand for a dowry. A husband's unemployment, aim to start a business, or a husband's intention to work in the Middle East, pushed women to bring a dowry. Sometimes wives even had to obtain cash from parents or brothers or even elder sisters to buy a bullock for cultivating land or to take lease of land. Nazma fell in love with Rafique when both of them were working in a garment factory. They got married without their parents' consent. After marriage Nazma had to leave the job, as the parents-in-law disapproved of her working outside. Though the in-laws were unhappy from the beginning, Rafique loved her very much until he lost his job. Urged on by his parents, particularly by his mother, Rafique asked Nazma to bring 85,000 taka from her parents to go to the Middle East for work. She was beaten several times, deprived of food by her mother-in-law, and even forced to stay separate from Rafique. Later, when the in-laws nearly finalized a second marriage for Rafique

as a condition for a visa, Nazma's parent organised *salish*⁴² with the help of an influential political leader. It was decided that as Nazma's parents did not give dowry, they had to give Rafique 45,000 taka⁴³ in order to pay for his visa. Consequently, in order to protect the daughter's marriage, the parent managed the money by taking a loan with high interest.

The participants of this study and other research in Bangladesh also confirmed that dowry is generally considered an easy means and opportunity to improve the economic condition of a poor husband (Chowdhury 2010a; Monsoor 2003; Rozario 1992; Saleh 2004). Some survivors were coerced into bringing dowry even after several years of marriage:

As a precondition of dowry, my parents gave a black and white TV, furniture and 15000 tk, though several times I was forced to bring cash on different occasions, such as, when we were establishing a tube well, and leasing a pond. But after six years, when a next-door neighbour got a colour TV as dowry, he demanded a 36-inch colour TV with remote. (Jomila, interviewed 12 October 2012)

Four other survivors joined Jomila in describing the pressure to provide dowry they experienced even after several years of marriage. These experiences indicated that wives were abused about dowry even after few years of marriage not because of a financial crisis, but rather out of simple greed and to show off status to other people.

Inability to full pay the committed dowry also put women at risk of violence. Five survivors talked about their parents' failure to pay the full committed dowry, which dissatisfied their husbands. Later, their husbands practised polygamy to bring cash and kind through additional dowry. Taslima stated:

⁴²*Salish* is the traditional body for conflict resolution; this traditional dispute resolution presumes a settlement through mediation. Though this local arbitration is widely practised and accepted in Bangladesh, it has no legal base (Hossain 1997).

⁴³Approximate AUS \$662 and one year's total income of Nazma's family.

I had to pay dowry even after seven year of marriage to stop him from marrying again. (Taslina, interviewed 27 December 2012)

Divorce and abandonment of wives were common due to dowry violence. Thirteen out of sixteen women claimed that non-fulfilment of the demand for dowry⁴⁴ caused conflict within marriage.

Basona's story is revealing. Her parents gave 75,000⁴⁵ taka (AUS \$1102) cash as a precondition of marriage. Her husband and his parents asked her to bring extra cash. Basona disagreed. As a result, she was occasionally beaten by her husband. One day while they were fighting and using abusive words to each other, he threatened to kill her:

I protested, 'Why? What did I do wrong?' He replied, 'Hey khanki (you prostitute), I will do whatever I want – I earn money'. I also answered, 'Don't forget that my father gave you cash to start your business. He got furious and said 'What? How dare you talk back to me?' He immediately started punching my face and kicking me and saying 'I will return the money to your father but I must kill you tonight'. He went to look for the iron rod that we used to lock the door. I got scared when he hit me once with the iron rod, and I started screaming for help. (Basona, interviewed 11 September 2012)

This experience showcases the risk, whether the dowry was paid in full as committed did not matter, many women were still beaten when they failed to meet continuing extortionate demands to bring more cash. Many husbands, like Basona's husband, feel humiliated when their wives reminded them about the dowry payment, as they consider dowry as their privilege. This study included women's stories about the pressure to pay dowry beginning with the engagement,

⁴⁴ In Bangladesh many marriages were agreed with the condition of a dowry but in some cases, parents failed to meet the commitment.

⁴⁵ 75,000 taka equals to a total of 13 months family income of Basona's family.

continuing through the marriage ceremony and even more relentlessly 7 to 10 years into the marriage. Failure to fulfil the commitment is often considered as a reprehensible insult to the in-law family, which causes suffering for women. This study resonates with other research in identifying that women were used only as a 'vehicle' to bring capital in the form of dowry from her parents and relatives to the groom's family. Unfortunately women have minimal or no control over the dowry. It is controlled mainly by the in-law family members (see also Chowdhury 2009; Kumari 1989). Thus in all respects, the dowry system, sustained through patriarchal tradition, has turned into a life-long curse for many Bangladeshi women, increasing their insecurity, and threatening their wellbeing and even their lives.

Childhood learning

Witnessing violence in childhood is another important factor in causing violence within the marital relationship. Seven survivors provided examples of the history of violence in their spouses' families:

He beat me sometimes for very minor reasons or for no reason. He had witnessed his mother regularly beaten by his father and believed a husband has the absolute right to beat his wife. Sometimes when I shouted for help to the neighbours, he said a good woman, like his mother, never cried for help. I am afraid my son might beat his wife because of watching his father! (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Saima's experience is similar to the experiences of six other survivors in suggesting a generational transmission of violence against women (Islam et al. 2014). Their articulation of their experiences further confirmed that they had a good understanding of DV and could theorize their own experiences.

Preference for a son

Inability to produce children, specifically male children, was an issue identified by some survivors as increasing the risk of DV. Ten women informed me that after 5 or 6 months of marriage, they were pressurized by their husband and mother-in-law to become pregnant. Two women were even sent back to their natal family in

the belief that they were unable to conceive. However later they gave birth. Shaheena story is unique. She was very attractive⁴⁶ and married at 17 years with a 30,000 taka⁴⁷ cash dowry and other furniture.⁴⁸ The first night Shaheena was very sad and was completely unwilling to have sex, but was forced, which caused her to fear having sex altogether. Her non-cooperation caused tension with her husband, which was exacerbated when she failed to conceive after six months of marriage. The husband and his mother started blaming Shaheena as ‘baza’ [infertile] and his mother urged her son to remarry. When she conceived, tension and fighting between them decreased but she had to face her husband’s forced sex during her advanced pregnancy. She went on:

I was in labour pain for two days in the in-laws house; the head of the fetus half came out but I was not taken to hospital. By the time my parents took me to hospital, the baby boy was dead inside me, and the doctors made a Caesarean operation to take the stillborn boy out. After this incident, I was forced to conceive again and again two times for a son and consequently had two girls. The last time when he expressed the intention to have a son, I reminded him of the doctor’s advice. I was then beaten and forced to return my parents with the two girls. He remarried again with huge cash. (Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

I was humiliated for giving birth to two daughters. He always threatened that if I failed to produce a son, he will remarry. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

These statements were also echoed by three other women who identified that preference for a son is deeply rooted in the Bangladeshi socio-cultural setting. In most cases, having a son means parents need not worry about his marriage and

⁴⁶According to stereotypical Bangladeshi beauty standards, Shaheena considered herself beautiful

⁴⁷ 30000 taka equals this family’s 7 months income

⁴⁸ According to Shaheena, other furniture included colour TV, steel cabinet and sofa, dining table, Tape recorder, cooking utensils, dinner set and much more.

security. Further, in most cases a son means security for the parents' old age; that is why survivors are often abused for not being able to give birth to sons.

Poverty and women's economic dependence on men

Family poverty and unemployment are clearly issues that cause domestic violence. Nine women shared that their husbands' insufficient income brought violence upon them. Panna and Shanta clarified the situation:

He could not earn money and so we could not spend much and had to eat less but he often beat me about why rice ran short at mealtime. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

When I asked him to do the daily shopping, he got angry and abused me. (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

The majority of women confirmed that in the absence of any income, when they reminded their husbands about money, they generally got annoyed and often scolded and beat their wives. Previous research also identified unemployment or inadequate income as often increasing tension (Bhuiya, Sharmin & Hanifi 2003). When the wife asks for money, harsh quarrels and physical beatings sometimes follow.

Nine out of sixteen women suggested that dependency on husband's income is a crucial issue in triggering and sustaining DV.

He beat me because he feeds me. If I could earn, then he would think first before abusing me. If I had education and a job, I would rather leave him. (Saleha, interviewed 28 November 2012)

However, such an optimistic view seems less realistic when other respondents, such as shelter staff, provided examples of being abused even though they had high education and a job, as I discuss in Chapter Eight. Saleha's statement also illustrates women's entrapment in that they know they will be beaten as long as

they depend and live on their husband's income. Another study also noted similar helplessness among DV survivor in Bangladesh (Schuler & Islam 2008b).

Extended family

The extended family structure was also identified as a major factor for violence against wives. In the Bangladeshi social structure, after marriage, a bride usually stays with her husband's family. This tradition sometimes becomes a constant source of conflict and triggers violence against the wife, as believed by most survivors. Several women confirmed their mother-in-law's instigation as a triggering factor initiating husband's violence. Nazma shared:

My mother-in-law was horrible! She deprived me of food, compelled me to do all the household chores; I had to obey all of her orders. Whenever, my husband bought something for me, she became very angry and blamed me for asking for it. Even if I took morning shower⁴⁹ for 2 or 3 days she called me khanki [prostitute] who needs a man every night, though she well knew it was her son's desire, but she only blamed me. Even when my daughter was born, she complained that I brought bad luck to this family by giving birth to a girl – that caused me to fight with her. My husband believed every one of her complaints against me, never investigating who was in the wrong – just started shouting and slapping me. (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

When she [mother-in-law] is no longer in the world, only that day will my husband stop abusing me. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

Only one out of sixteen women revealed the opposite picture that her mother-in-law saved her several times from her husband's beatings. Her mother-in-law even gave testimony against her son in *salish*. In Chapter Six, I elaborate how and why mothers-in-law act as instigators of violence against their daughters-in-law.

⁴⁹Mandatory shower after sexual intercourse. In rural areas, it is believed that after intercourse, a woman needs to be pure and has to take a shower before starting the daily activity.

Laws regarding inheritance and marriage

Women's lack of inheritance rights was identified by a few survivors as an issue that triggered their husband's violence.

My father died and my brothers were of no help. My husband became more violent and remarried without my consent. If my brother had allowed me to have my due share of our father's property, I could have left long ago and earned my own living. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

Taslima's experience was similar to findings in previous studies of Bangladesh (HRW 2012; Pereira 2002). Five women confirmed that it was the unequal property rights which forced them to continue in abusive marriages, as they had nowhere to go.

Marriage related laws, particularly the legal aspects of divorce law, were blamed for encouraging DV by a significant number of survivors. As the process of divorcing a wife is easy, the husbands use their rights of divorce as a DV weapon any time. In Chapter Three, I related that a husband has to notify the arbitration council in written form about the decision of divorce. Five women informed me that they did not receive any such notice but only received the final divorce order. In practice, some husbands influenced the local arbitration council staff not to send or to hide the first notice from wife so that she could not be present for reconciliation. When women are abandoned or are struggling to minimize their husbands' violence, all of a sudden the divorce order comes like a 'thunderstorm without clouds'. This shortcoming in divorce proceedings helps husbands to secretly divorce their wives whenever they wish. This failure in the legal proceedings needs urgent attention, if DV is to decrease.

Another factor responsible for causing DV identified by survivors was the husband's disloyalty to the commitment of marriage by practicing polygamy. Eight (out of sixteen) survivors had polygamous husbands. They mentioned different reasons for their husband's polygamy:

My poor parent was not able to meet his unlimited demands – consequently he remarried and got cash. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

As I failed to give birth to a son, he remarried. (Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

Shanta and Morjina informed me that their husband was dissatisfied with their beauty, more specifically, their skin colour, and therefore remarried and drove them out. The women interviewed in this study asserted that they disliked their husband's sexual affairs with other woman when they already had a legal wife and children. Nonetheless, whatever the reasons behind polygamy, it undoubtedly exacerbates the already disadvantaged position of the women by bringing violence or limiting their economic survival after divorce or abandonment.

Other causal factors of domestic violence

Alcohol

The question of whether alcohol or other drugs trigger violence found contradictory answers in this study. Four women reported that they were beaten even when their husbands had not consumed alcohol. Panna and Shaheena provided examples:

It is not alcohol that prompts him to beat me. Rather my argument to stop him drinking made him mad. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

When he drank, he went crazy for sex, but the bad smell of alcohol coming from his mouth made me vomit, so sometimes I protested. He got angry and sometimes beat me and forced me for sex. (Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

These two experiences indicated the truth that the husband's violence was not triggered by alcohol consumption. When his wife did not allow him to have sex or when she argued with him when he was drunk, that behaviour fanned his anger.

Presence of family members

The presence of the wife's relatives living in the husband's village or town or the presence of the wife's family member was also sometimes identified as relevant to the DV perpetrated against her. Six survivors revealed that when their family member actively and powerfully looked after their issues, such as whether the husband was treating them well or badly or whether the in-laws were belittling them, the abusive behaviour of the husband or in-laws somehow was limited. Powerful parents or brothers of the wife contribute a lot to decreasing violence.

When my brothers were of no help, his beatings doubled. He started beating me ferociously about very minor issues, saying, 'Now who will save you'? (Basona, interviewed 11 September 2012).

Women informed me that when parental support decreased, the husbands' violence increased in proportion to the wife's lack of support. The community belonging to husband's area constantly blamed the wife as encouraged by the husband and his parents. This is an important finding and needs further investigation, as this phenomenon has not yet been discussed in the literature.

Dark skin colour: the hidden truth

This study has uniquely identified an aspect largely ignored in previous research regarding causes of DV: the wife's appearance and more particularly skin colour and its contribution to the risk of being abused by husbands. No previous research has discussed the wife's skin colour as an issue for domestic violence. I found only one explorative analysis, conducted by Santi Rozario (2002), which discusses the predicament of poor dark girls and the stigma associated with dark skin colour in Bangladesh. In two illustrative case studies, Santi Rozario passionately described how some poor and dark girls were treated badly from childhood and as adults were marked by society as unmarriageable. Her discussion about the different vocabulary of skin colour which Bangladeshi people generally use to categorize the levels of beauty was somewhat similar to the explanation of my respondents: *farsha* [light], *shemla* [not too dark but not light]

and *kalo* [black]. Bangladeshi people define beautiful [*shundor* or *shundori*] as synonymous with *farsha* [fair skin], whereas 'dark skin' is labelled with a whole set of negative stereotypes. As a Bangladeshi and working with underprivileged women, I observed a girl born into a poor family usually brings unhappiness, and if she has dark skin then the unhappiness turns to boundless tension for parents as the darker a daughter, the more dowry parents have to pay.

Eight out of sixteen survivors confirmed that dark skin colour along with other issues played a major role in causing suffering in the marital relationship. Shanta stated:

You never imagine the toll of being dark! My parents had to pay a large dowry – but on the very first day some of his relatives passed humiliating comments about my colour, 'Hey how could you find this petni⁵⁰ as a bride?' They also teased my mother-in-law that she took good dowry from my parents but one day she might have to pay 1000 times more dowry once I gave birth to another petni. (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

Several survivors blamed the society for favouring fair skinned brides, which ultimately trapped their husband into abusing his dark-skinned wife on different occasions. Rahima explained:

I should not only blame my husband's desire for fair skin. Rather, his friends and neighbours humiliated him for marrying me, a dark-skinned woman; over the course of time, he started hating my colour and as a result, for minor reasons he shouted and beat me! I felt detested, inadequate and always pressured to look fair. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

⁵⁰*Petni* literally means monster or bogey, a person or thing that causes fear or alarm, and this term usually is associated with dark skin.

This statement showed that the negative societal attitude ridiculing dark-skinned women actually encouraged some husbands and others to abuse these women. In Chapter Three I discussed how Bangladeshi women gain status through marriage and motherhood. However dark-skinned girls usually have fewer marriage prospects compared to their fair-skinned counterparts. Nonetheless, class and family financial circumstances sometimes help dark-skinned girls to overcome the negative stereotype of dark skin (Rozario 2002, pp. 42-44). Though for a girl's marriageability her moral purity, shyness and appearance are important, in her 2001 study Santi Rozario found that skin colour becomes the primary concern and dominates over other factors (Rozario 2002). This trend has continued to date. This current study also confirms the same trend in marriage and most notably identifies that skin colour has been a dominant factor in increasing the risk of DV by husbands and sometimes by mothers-in-law. In South Asia, particularly in India, the idea of 'beauty' is mostly coupled with 'fair skin', and people generally prefer white skin. Dark-skinned people, more particularly women, are harassed, or at least, have to put up with being the object of people's jokes and teasing (Hussein 2010). Bangladesh might not be much different from India in favouring 'fair skin' over dark skin. I remember, for example, in my childhood, we, the siblings, often called my dark-skinned younger sister bad names such as *kalin*⁵¹ and *petni*.

Interestingly, due to their dark skin, women experience discrimination not only from husbands and in-laws, but also sometimes from their own parents and extended family, as evidenced by Nazmun and Morjina:

I got scolded for very trivial matters while my fair-skinned sister was excused. You know, every of the scolding started with 'You are a kalo petni [black witch]– how can you behave well!' From childhood, I was hated, humiliated and teased for my black skin, though people mentioned I have a nicer face than my fair-skinned sister. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

⁵¹Kalini is a derogatory term, generally refer the terrible blackness of someone's skin colour

I was always treated as a burden – my grandmother abused my mother for giving birth me – a dark-skinned daughter who needs more dowry to be married off. (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

These statements indicated the family's insensitive behaviour towards their dark-skinned daughters. In Bangladesh dark-skinned girls and boys are exposed to discrimination from early childhood. It may not be obvious but a fair-skinned daughter or son gets preferential treatment in the family over a dark-skinned child (Jensen 2013). As a Bangladeshi, I have also observed that some parents' responses to naughty behaviour by their *farsha*[fair] and *kalo*[dark] girls are different, showing tolerance for *farsha* girls but harsh scolding *kalo* girls for the same mistake.

The prejudice for fair skin leads a dark girl to growing up thinking she would always be perceived as unattractive and a burden (Jensen 2013). Jomila mentioned her birth as a 'birth sin' as she was born with dark skin in a poor family.

After 3 or 4 months of the marriage, I was regularly harassed and sometimes beaten for my kalo chehara [ugly appearance]. My in-laws expected my parents would compensate for my dark colour with big cash. When their greed was not satisfied, my dark skin became the issue for abusing me; I suspect that even if my family could pay a large dowry, he would still continue his abuse for my black skin. (Jomila, interviewed 12 October 2012)

Jomila's suspicion seems have practical grounds as husbands often looked for excuses to demand dowry. In some cases, even if the demands are met, the women are finally either thrown out or divorced. Moreover, the majority of survivors informed me that the co-wives [husbands' second wives] were somehow more beautiful than them, revealing that some husbands' preference for fair skin occasionally brought violence and suffering to women.

All eight women felt insulted when they were called derogatory names by their husbands and in-laws due to their skin colour, especially in front of others:

'Hey kala maghi [black slut], haven't you seen your face in the mirror? Even a beggar will not sleep with you anymore – you should be grateful that I am still providing for you, the kala kutti [black bitch]. (Saleha, interviewed 28 November 2012)

They never called me by my name or daughter-in-law [bou].⁵² They always called me offensive names like kalini [dreadful black], sometimes petni [female evil spirit]. When my daughter was born, I was afraid that she might have my colour but thank God that she has fair skin. (Basona, interviewed 11 September 2012)

Seven women also were in line with Basona in describing the cruel realities of discrimination and abuse based on skin colour existing in Bangladesh. Ramisa's story is a testament to the terrifying truth that a wife's fair skin is a very real obsession for some husbands in Bangladesh:

I have been tormented and teased for my skin colour since my marriage. This has increased after 5 years [already two children were born] when my younger sister reached puberty and appeared as very fair-skinned and beautiful. My husband often asked me to bring her to our house, frequently bought new dresses and fashion items for her and often took her to the cinema. I did not understand his intention, but when I came to know, it was too late. My sister was raped by him repeatedly when I was away. She was frightened and did not disclose her sufferings, as she was threatened if she disclosed anything, he would kill me and the children. (Ramisa, interviewed 28 November 2012)

⁵²Usually in Bangladesh daughters-in-law are called by their names. In rural areas they are called 'bou', and when a child is born, the daughters-in-law are then called 'mother of someone' for example 'mother of pinky or pinky's ma'

People came to know this incident from the clinic where Ramisa's husband arranged an abortion for her sister. In a *salish* meeting, instead of being afraid for the heinous crime of raping a minor girl, the man and his family rather sought as remedy to marry the younger sister and divorce the elder. For Muslims in Bangladesh, two sisters cannot be co-wives at same time, so the *salish* people decided to save the elder's daughter marriage considering the future of two children. They asked the man and his family to apologise for the crime and be nice to the elder sister and her two offspring, only then might he be excused. The husband and his family had no recourse but to go along with *salish* decision. But at night he wanted to kill Ramisa, the elder sister, saying only her death will make his dream come true of marrying the younger sister. Ramisa somehow fled with wounds and filed a case against him. She was unsure how she could maintain the relationship with a man who raped her younger sister! She did not know whether he would get punishment as nobody had been punished so far. It was also very costly for her family to bear the cost of the legal procedure. The in-laws asked for her mercy to drop the case for the sake of her two children. She was worried that one day her husband would get bail and become even more enraged. Ramisa asked me a question '*What is the difference between the vaginas of dark and white skinned women?*' She wondered if the structure of female genitalia [like breasts, vagina] could be options for choice, but she was quite unable to grasp the tendency for colour preference – as these two organs were covered from early infancy, and even black girls might have fair organs!

There were many issues in Ramisa's story, but the husband's obsession with fair skin was the prime reason for the DV. Such experiences provide the cruellest evidence of how the discourse of women's 'beauty' (generally signified by light skin colour) contributes to increasing the risk of DV against Bangladeshi women, a factor which has not previously been recognized. Ramisa's story also proved that a growing girl is not safe with her elder sister's husband.

This study identified that the factors of DV stem not only from one source, but rather, interactions among different embedded contexts create situations where DV occurs. The causes of DV are interrelated and complex and no stand-alone

cause was identified so far. DV is pervasive, concealed and justified, so it is important to discuss the consequence of such abuse on men, women, children, and society.

Consequences of domestic violence

A growing body of research in South Asian regions has carefully documented the negative implications of DV. Violence takes different forms, such as bride burning, disfiguring the wife, rape, beating, acid throwing, forced suicide and homicide (Farouk 2005, Shiroupa 2015). Sometimes the husband or in-law family beats the bride to death and publicizes this as voluntary suicide (Noorullah 1999), though the brides are being murdered or forced to commit suicide because of the inability of paying dowry (Shiroupa 2015). Several studies demonstrated a positive correlation between intimate violence and women's suicidal ideation (Taft 2003; Mezey et al. 2005; Simon et al. 2002; Bailey et al. 1997; Counts 1987). Bangladeshi women suffering husband's violence sometimes commit suicide as a last alternative. ASK, a rights-based NGO, documented [of the cases that came to their attention] that from January 2013 to September 2013, 21 domestic violence victims committed suicide, 128 were killed and 109 were abused in dowry related violence (ASK 2013).

Impact of domestic violence on women

Most of the survivors who participated in my study reported experiencing physical and psychological problems. They reported a number of physical injuries including broken arms and knees, scratched forehead, *matha fata* [stitched head], bruising, injured eyes, head injury, broken skull and bones, cracked hips, hearing loss and headaches.

Rahima, who had been physically violated almost on a regular basis, had permanent hearing loss and a broken spine due to severe beatings by her husband.

Despite his abuse I had to continue in the marriage as I had two unmarried sisters – I felt humiliated, frustrated and deserved to be beaten, as I had

no other way to confront him. I was living with the constant fear of being killed. One night my fear was transformed to real danger when I was asleep. I was awakened by my hands being tied behind my back and found he was trying to stop my mouth with a pillow. I resisted and groaned, which woke my daughter. He might have killed me that day if my daughter had not screamed. He left me almost unconscious. This happened six months ago, but I still can't sleep soundly. That terrifying nightmare is always with me. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

Some women conveyed their feelings of depression, betrayal, anger, humiliation, isolation and hopelessness. These are just some of the feelings mentioned to me in the interviews. The following quote provides testimony of their sufferings:

I felt helpless and isolated when I was beaten and sexually molested. I was treated like a housemaid, as my parents did not keep their word and pay dowry. They asked me to do all household chores. I got scared that one day I might be killed. I couldn't disclose the violence to my parents, because they already had many things to be worried about. I just endured it and it made me physically sick. Several times I got fever and I always felt tired. (Sharmeen, interviewed 24 December 2012)

Several women reported frequent sickness due to DV. This may happen, as women have no other way of resisting or showing their anger than refusing to eat, and this causes them to be physically weak and dizzy. Panna explained:

Whenever I was brutally beaten, I stopped taking food. I know this was actually harming me, but, you know, this way I punished them, because if neighbours come to know that I have not eaten, they would criticize my mother-in-law and my husband and this gave me a bit of satisfaction. One day I fainted, which caused my husband to call a doctor to inject saline liquid as I refused food. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

These experiences indicate how in the absence of direct forms of power, sometimes refusing food is acted out as resistance and as a strategy to influence their surroundings. Similar stories of resistance were also described in Gammeltoft's (1999, pp.230-236) study on women in the Philippines, which show that sometimes being physically weak, some women use this technique to exert control over their situation.

Most of the women I interviewed provided statements about experiencing more than one psychological problem, such as humiliation, hopelessness, jealousy, powerlessness, shame, mental imbalance, growing hot-tempered, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal tendency, becoming abusive to children and other members, impatience and feeling unworthy and powerless.

Jomila's husband abandoned her. She suffered permanent psychological distress as the parents pushed her to give her children away to the father. She said:

It is very difficult to give away my child to someone I know does not love him. Every time when my parents tried to persuade me not to keep my son with me, I feel humiliated, isolated and traumatised. I sometimes worry that my parents might send him to his father when I am not at home. (Jomila, interviewed 12 October 2012)

This woman was going through the experience of what Finkelhor, Hotaling and Yllo (1998, p. 75) define as 'betrayal of trust'. This feeling of 'betrayal of trust' ruined her mental peace and psychological wellbeing. This finding is consistent with other research, which suggested that abused women often feel isolated due to lack of support from others (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Markowitz, Polsky & Renker 2004).

The women's isolation was also evident in their parents' unwillingness to support them. Six out of sixteen women informed me that their parents were reluctant to support them as it might diminish their other daughter's marriage prospect and/or bring shame on their family.

My parents and brothers thought it was my fault that he was not maintaining me. They wanted me to stay with him for the sake of my life. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

I can't initiate a divorce as I have two children to raise. I feel humiliated to seek help from my brothers because they were against my choice to marry him. When I desperately asked their help, I was refused – that ripped me emotionally. (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

Nazma and Taslima provided examples that leaving an abusive husband proves difficult when they are unable to get support from the natal family. The feelings of powerlessness and isolation are internalized when some of their natal family fail to be a protective factor.

It was also common for many women to feel guilty and question their own ability. Sharmeen and Shanta wondered if the violence were their fault:

I feel ashamed and guilty that I did not bring much dowry for my husband, which threatens his position in his family. I deserved to be beaten. (Sharmeen, interviewed 24 December 2012)

Sometimes I thought the fault is mine, I can't be the one he likes! I can't do anything perfectly! (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

These experiences showed that husbands' and in-laws' constant criticism diminishes women's self-confidence. The chronic self-doubt negatively affects women to make them think they are the problem.

The women all detailed how DV negatively affected their sense of self. The detrimental impact on their sense of self led to a situation of constant hopelessness. Some of the women attempted suicide. Panna explained:

His torture and beatings made me so frightened and frustrated that two times I attempted to take rat killer poison but survived somehow. I feel ashamed that I am unable even to kill myself. If I had the opportunity to get sleeping pills, it would be easier to kill myself. I can't bear the burden!
(Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

Some of the women became suicidal but did not want to leave the children. The following statement was typical of this dilemma:

If I had no kids, I could have died. I did not understand how I could keep living like that – every day I was dying slowly. (Taslina, interviewed 27 December 2012)

Several women emphasized the anger, hostility and bad temper they felt. For example Rahima had planned to kill the co-wife out of anger.

When he remarried and started to live with the second wife, I could not handle the mental distress; I tried to secretly put poison in the dishes of the co-wife but unfortunately she sensed something wrong in the dish and threw away the food. I threw hot water in her face. On another occasion I destroyed the plants of his nursery, which was the source of our family income. Later I poisoned two Australian cows which were our income source. I was always overcome with devastating jealousy and the desire to take revenge on him and his second wife for the humiliation and distress they inflicted on me. One day I will either kill my co-wife or cut his penis.
(Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

Rahima's responses to polygamy often resulted in harming the co-wife or the husband. Given the circumstances, the actions sound justifiable but she was unaware that this psychological distress might have life-long legal consequences.

Another dimension of anger and retaliation was found in a woman when she was deprived of sex. Jahanara, a divorced woman, was living independently. As a single woman, there were bad rumours around her character:

I jumped into the marriage for the second time to avoid the rumour and also to have sex in a socially sanctioned way (Jahanara, interviewed 4 October 2012)

The couple had a fine sexual relationship immediately after the marriage but then slowed down, even once in a month.

He was excited at the beginning but gradually I learnt that he lasted merely five minutes and that caused me to feel inadequate. He could not be aroused many times, and was not able to perform – that caused me to verbally abuse him for his impotence. Within two years he completely lost sexual interest. If I asked for sex, he called me a prostitute and beat me. We had fights, where I also hurt and bit him in return for his beatings. I was shocked that I literally wanted to kill him every time he was unable to enter me. However, when he realized that his purushotto [manhood] and power were dominated by me, he started telling people that I am obsessed with sex, a sex fanatic. This rumour and bad talking completely let me down. People started gossiping, ridiculing and laughing at me. Feeling betrayed and embarrassed, my anger was fuelled, and when my own brother labelled me a sex maniac, it drove me to be firm to teach him a good lesson. One night when he came back home and was preparing for bed, I attacked him with a da,⁵³ and both of us were injured. Still I can't excuse myself for not being able to disable the person who destroyed my social life. (Jahanara, interviewed 4 October 2012)

This is an interesting and exceptional interview, because so much of it contradicts all the other stories. While women in Bangladesh feel ashamed of talking about

⁵³Da is a kind of strong chopper, usually used to chop meat with bones

sexual matters, Jahanara opened up with her voice and struggled to establish sexual rights in a male dominated society. Bangladeshi society still does not accept the notion that women also have equal sexual rights with their husbands (Islam & Karim 2011-12) which could be one reason behind the humiliation and rejection Jahanara faced from society, neighbours, and even her own brother.

Consequences of forced sex

Forced sex caused the women to suffer from vaginal irritation, hurt feelings, discomfort, bleeding, lack of secretion, and bruising and torn muscles. Morjina related:

I felt ashamed to talk about it – sometimes I can't urinate – there were scratch and biting. (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

The women noticed DV increased during pregnancy. Sharmeen shared her traumatized experience of forced abortion by the husband, which caused her to still be suffering from chronic pelvic infections.

When he knew about my pregnancy, he beat me and brought homeopathic medicine for abortion. I did not take it. When the evidence of my pregnancy became visible he became mad and beat me up. At night he forced me to have sex; he tried to pour ayurvedic medicine⁵⁴ into my vagina. I tried to protest with all my heart and was able to throw away the glass bottle - it broke and all the liquid spilled onto the floor. Seeing this, he became ferocious; he put his whole hand inside my vagina and tried to pull it out. I kicked him but he was pulling my inside hard. His paw ripped my vagina and all of a sudden I started bleeding. Though my face was covered, I screamed so loudly that my heart-rending cry worried his sister who called her brother to open the door. I was left unconscious for almost 10 hours. Later I was taken to hospital by his family where I was aborted and the doctor sewed up my vagina with 8 stitches. It took 6 or 7 months to heal

⁵⁴ *Ayurvedic* is an Indian health practice thought to be more than 5000 years old. It consists of a number of disciplines, including aromatherapy, diet, herbal medicine, acupuncture, yoga, massage, meditation and balancing of energies.

fully. Every episode of intercourse, I felt pain and distress but I was never excused; he threatened me that if I protest, he would remarry. If only I could have the opportunity to take off his penis and chop it into a thousand pieces. (Sharmeen, interviewed 24 December 2012)

Sharmeen's experience is not common, but indicates that a husband might have felt deprived as women are less productive and are less interested in sex during pregnancy (Leifer 2014, pp. 67-69).

Economic consequences

Some of the women were concerned about the financial consequences of DV. Basona entered the in-law family with a large cash dowry of 75,000 taka that required her poor parents to sell their agricultural land. But their misery started when the husband continuously made demands for more cash to buy a Saudi visa. Basona's parents' failure to provide further cash caused her physical and mental torture. When the in-law family tried to drive Basona away, her father organized *salish*, though he lived 100 km away. To every *salish* Basona's father needed to bring 4 or 5 local government members including elderly people from his locality to support and negotiate in favour of Basona so that the in-laws and husband would stop abusing her. He had to bear all travel, meal and accommodation costs. This cost her father a lot but there was no successful outcome despite *salish* being held three times. The parents were overwhelmed with huge loans, in addition to providing the living costs for Basona and her daughter.

All the women conveyed that DV pushed them into poverty and homelessness.

Though I was beaten, I had a roof over head. I am nobody now, no food, no home. (Taslina, interviewed 27 December 2012)

These statements confirmed that DV consumed parents' wages and threw the natal family in financial crisis. Taslima's experiences reverberated with other

research in Bangladesh (HRW 2012) and Australia (Murray 2009) in identifying that due to DV, women's poverty and homelessness increased.

Impact on children

The consequences of DV on children were not directly identified by children themselves, but the mothers provided evidence of the diverse effects on children witnessing father's violence. All but two women⁵⁵ confirmed that crying and screaming were the most common forms of children's responses when fathers beat their mothers.

Morjina summed up the responses:

Children often were frightened, distressed and became unconscious and hysterical when witnessing their fathers' violence. (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

Several women informed me of their adolescent children's angry, antagonistic and destructive behaviour due to witnessing their fathers' abuse of their mothers:

My elder son became very angry, often disobeyed and hated his father so much that often he did not respect him. Once he broke his father's mobile and threw his watch into the pond. (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

One illustration of child hostility was that a boy of 12 years old stopped talking with his father.

When his father scolded him, he dared to confront his father by making the comment, 'I learn it from you, if you behave wrong with my mother, I will do the same with you'. His father asked him to apologize but he shouted and refused and straight away pushed him back and ran away. (Jomila, interviewed 12 October 2012)

⁵⁵Two survivors had no child when I interviewed them, one was seven months pregnant.

This example illustrates how children became traumatized witnessing violence in the family. Their powerlessness to protect their mothers often forced them to run away from home or show disobedience to their father.

Some women spoke of their children's abnormal behaviour, depression and wariness:

My elder daughter always tried to find whether any marks of beating were visible or I had weeping eyes. If she found any marks or wounds she became hysterical and cursed her dad. (Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

Morjina indicated that children often worked as a referee:

My daughter understood that her father actually hated my dresses and my skin colour, so she persuaded me to wear good clothes, cosmetics and lipstick to attract her father. (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

Shaheena also echoed Morjina in describing how children played the role of referee to stop the beatings or quarrels between parents. The daughter most often acted as a parent to younger siblings and mothers. Sometimes daughters even took on the household responsibilities, preparing meals, and putting young siblings to bed. This role often caused them to drop out of school. Similar to the findings of my research, other research both in Bangladesh and elsewhere recognised different forms of behavioural problems among children due to witnessing their father's violence to their mother (Khan 2015; UNICEF 2000).

All the women noticed that their children often faced difficulties making friendships and mixing with peers, relatives and others. Shanta was concerned that her son was becoming less capable and more frightened to mix with people. He never wanted to go to any relative's house, and even sometimes prevented his mother from sharing her sufferings with others. To comfort her son, Shanta shared:

When he beat me, I never made a sound, never cried in front of my son, as he became distressed when I was upset but felt better when I was okay.
(Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

The damaged emotional development of children was also addressed by the women:

My son became violent towards friends or neighbouring children, and even sometimes fought with older boys. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

But Taslima noticed quite the opposite behaviour from her daughter who never felt happy, was always sad and living in fear:

She did not like to play or talk with others out of fear of being bullied. Even when her father beat me behind the closed door, she injured herself.
(Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

These experiences are examples of the intergenerational transmission of violence and indicate that girls learn submissive attitudes from mother. Women informed me that their children's unusual behaviour created a double burden on them; other family members criticised their mothering, which encouraged them to believe themselves unfit parents. Saima shared a different story of how her husband's violence represented her as a 'worthless mother' to the children:

Very often the elder son disobeyed my parental authority, and didn't follow my rules. If I asked him to mind his study, he shouted and said, 'Everybody knows you are a worthless mother, you can't do anything properly, that's why my father beats you. I can do whatever I like'. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Though not many women echoed Saima's experience, it conveyed how DV can interfere with children's respect for their mother. Three women informed me they

were often accused of failure to properly teach their children, which doubled their feelings of helplessness.

Disruption in children's schooling was another concern of women. Sometimes they had to send their children to work as a child labourer.

My elder daughter dropped out of school. When I was left with injuries, she usually looked after the family; she also had to meet village elders to explain my injuries, which made her an enemy to her father who put restrictions on her attending school. (Taslina, interviewed 27 December 2012)

I was struggling with feeding the children and then took them out of school and sent my eight-year-old daughter to work as a housemaid. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

The above stories resonate with recent research in Bangladesh (HRW 2012) in describing how due to DV, mothers fell into poverty that restricted their ability to spend on their children's education, though they had the intention to send the children to school.

Concluding remarks

Using a particular group of women's experiences, this study revealed that DV is closely associated with the husband's socially approved domination over his wife, with cultural and institutionalized patriarchy, with women challenging men's power and authority, with dowry and with dispute about household labour. DV sometimes is exacerbated by family poverty, experiencing family violence in childhood, men's extramarital affairs or practice of polygamy, men's longing for a fair-skinned wife and unsupportive in-laws, particularly mothers-in-law, as well as the unequal gendered division of power in the family. Witnessing violence in the family of origin, educational background, failure to conceive, failure to give birth to a male child and suspected sexual relation with others are also factors found in this study. Alcohol abuse is also identified, but it is not considered a predominant factor.

Survivors mentioned about 34 reasons for being beaten by husbands. Apart from the mother-in-law and dark skin issues, the women's experiences of DV in this study are similar to previous research findings in Bangladesh (Chowdhury 2010a; Bhuiya, Sharmin & Hanifi 2003; Hartmann & Boyce 1983; Islam et al. 2015; Khatun & Rahman 2012; Naved et al. 2006).

Domestic violence is widespread in Bangladesh and has direct consequences on women's health and emotional wellbeing as well as on their children. My interviewees further confirmed this pervasiveness of DV, but this study's originality lies in its documentation of how women think about their own victimization, which has not been undertaken in previous research. The women in this study had their own thoughts about DV. They offered an understanding about what happened to them and they were able to theorize their own experiences. They were not just victims of DV, but rather had a clear understanding that DV is related to patriarchy, manhood and gender inequality in the family and in society.

Acknowledging the high prevalence of DV and its dreadful consequences on women and children, it is now crucial to understand why a large number of women blamed other women, particularly their mothers-in-law, for initiating and/or instigating violence against them. The next chapter focuses on mother-in-law's violence.

CHAPTER SIX

Mothers-in-law: Initiating/Increasing Violence against Daughters-in-law

My mother-in-law was such a witch – always guarded me so that I could not be intimate with him [husband/son], as if she gave birth to him without any sexual contact! I failed to understand why he married me, instead of her! (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

The previous chapter discussed the underlying causes of DV and indicated that mothers-in-law play an important role either by initiating violence or encouraging their sons to be violent to their wives/daughters-in-law. This chapter discusses daughters-in-law's experiences of abuse by their mothers-in-law. I start with a discussion about the gendered nature of domestic violence. The Second Section focuses on women's violence against other women in familial relationships. A general discussion about mother-in-law violence against daughter-in-law follows in the Third Section, while the Fourth Section introduces the theme of the Bangladeshi phenomenon of mother-in-law violence against her daughter-in-law. The survivors' views on their experiences of mother-in-law violence are recorded in the Fifth Section, while the Sixth Section provides details, according to the survivors, of the various forms of abuse perpetrated by their mothers-in-law. Some of the background reasons for mother-in-law's abuse are explored in the Seventh Section. The Eighth Section offers some observations on the importance of a good relationship between in-laws within a family and the last Section concludes the chapter with some general insights.

Gendered nature of domestic violence

In many parts of the world, especially in Anglo-American dominated cultures, DV is generally, and sometimes exclusively, tied to the heteronormative family life, where men abuse women and sometimes their children. Thus, DV has a gendered face and is seen as perpetuated against women by men (Hester 2009). Women's engagement with violence, especially women who kill their violent male partner has been discussed in the West, though it has often been conceptualized as

retaliatory in response to male violence (Ahluwalia & Gupta 1997; Ballinger 2000; Walker 1989 cited in Gangoli & Rew 2011, p. 420). Violence against women by women is normally considered unusual, as women are typically portrayed as victims, rather than agents of violence. Consequently, women's violence against other women has had less attention in the literature.

Women's violence against women

The frequently used and my own theoretical model of feminist explanation of DV, which holds that patriarchy is the main source of power, covers up the possibility that women can be perpetrators of violence, including violence directed at other women, through their different roles as superiors, which are often built on racial/ethnic, class, generational, and other hierarchies (Fernandez 1997). Women's violence against women causes significant uneasiness among some feminists, especially those who prize the ideal of solidarity between women across age groups and social classes (Rew, Gangoli & Gill 2013, p.148). Another concern relates to the possibility of women's violence being used to distract attention away from men's violence against women, which occurs far more frequently in women's lives overall. For all this discomfort, feminist research into women's violence has occurred. Current feminists have surveyed the issue that some women perpetuate violence in same-sex and also in heterosexual relationships, though such cases are significantly low (Donovan et al. 2006 cited in Rew, Gangoli & Gill 2013, p. 148). Some have considered other acts of violence perpetrated by women, such as infanticide, and many have turned their attention to abuse perpetrated against daughters-in-law.

In South Asia, mostly in India, there is some evidence of women's violence against women in diverse situations including female infanticide and sex selective abortion of female fetuses, where the mother and other female relatives are the principal perpetrators. Jeffery also identified violence against women by women in the cases of 'the bullying of a bride by her husband's sisters or the squabble between women married to one man' (1979, p. 168). There is some literature on women subordinating other women from both India (cited in Fernandez 1997) and

Bangladesh⁵⁶ focussing on women exploiting female domestic workers or house maids. Having class privileges, such as economic independence, autonomy and self-esteem leads some middle and upper class women in India to exploit female domestic workers or grab the benefits not available to other women (Liddle & Joshi 1986).

Yet few studies are concerned with conflict, abuse and violence in family relationships formed through marriage, beyond that which can occur between husbands and wives. In many cultures, such as Bangladesh, mothers-in-law can yield considerable power in domestic households (Ameen 2005; Chowdhury 2012). Particularly problematic is the relationship between many mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law, as documented in anthropological research (cited in Linn & Breslerman 1996, p. 292).

Mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law

A significant body of literature demonstrates how mothers-in-law are understood to be competitors with their daughters-in-laws, such as in the Indo-Fijian (Lateef 1992), Indian (Miller 1992), Taiwanese (Gallin 1992, 1994) and Iranian (Hegland 1992) cultures. Rivalry and competition rather than cooperation and collaboration can occur between these different generations of women who may pull at their sons' or husbands' affections. In this triad abuse may occur, as indicated by Haj-Yahia's (2000) study of Arabs in Israel, Oates' (2008) study in Afghanistan; Sheridan and Ghorayeb's (2004) study in Lebanon, Haarr's (2007) study in Tajikistan, Fernandez's (1997) study in India and Leung et al.'s (2002) study in Hong Kong.

The respect afforded elders can mean that mothers-in-law are positioned to dominate the young women whom they often have chosen for their sons. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the women I interviewed described how they, as daughters-in-law, experienced being dominated and abused by their mothers-in-law, with whom many shared their residence. Fifteen of the sixteen women

⁵⁶ A study conducted on 849 domestic workers in three thanas in Dhaka city revealed that 52% were abused regularly, 95% verbally, 17% were abused sexually while 83% were abused physically by the family members of their employers (Islam 2011).

interviewed described how their mothers-in-law could instigate or directly participate in the violence against the young daughters-in-law. Several studies from different countries demonstrated the role of mothers-in-law as instigators of conflict between couples or as directly perpetuating violence against a young daughter-in-law (Chan et al. 2009; Hyder, Noor & Tsui 2007). For example, in Mexico, quarrels with the mother-in-law often initiated conflicts between the respondent and her husband (Agoff, Herrera & Castro 2007). In Lebanon, conflict with in-laws, more precisely, play as a background factor in initiating violence between couples in low-income families (Keenan, El-Hadad & Balian 1998). Hyder, Noor and Tsui's (2007) study on Afghan refugees in Pakistan found that in-laws often provoked conflicts between couples by encouraging their son to beat his wife, or by misrepresenting his wife's behaviour in their reports to the husband, or by directly quarrelling with her. Research in Trinidad and Tobago also reported occurrences where mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law encouraged violence against their sons'/brothers' wives (Hadeed & El-Bassel 2006).

There is a growing body of literature showing that many Indian married women are regularly abused by their mothers-in-laws (Dave & Solanki 2000). However, mother-in-law's violence against her daughter-in-law, either as instigator or perpetrator, has not received proper attention from academics and policy-makers (Rew, Gangoli & Gill 2013, p. 148). Though some Indian feminists have recognized mother-in-law's violence, in Bangladesh no significant effort has yet been made to explore the implication of such violence in relation to DV. Very few studies in Bangladesh identify the details of extended family members in relation to instigating violence against daughters-in-law (Ameen 2005, p. 75; BNWLA 2004, p. 23). No thorough discussion was found about how other family member's participation could potentially increase the risk of the husband's violence.

This study finds that the extended family system is an important domain for violence perpetrated against daughters-in-law. In the Indian subcontinent, particularly in India and Bangladesh, a marriage does not mean that adjustments and understanding need to occur only between husbands and wives. Wives have to adjust to a different set of relationships, such as the relationship with their new

mothers, fathers and siblings-in-law (Stein 1988 cited in Rew, Gangoli & Gill 2013, p.152). In the early stage of adjustment, a new bride may confront much more trouble than the bridegroom in terms of cultural expectations. Bangladeshi society emphasizes that a woman's honour is achieved through being 'a good wife' while the men do not need to be 'a good husband' (Ameen 2005, p. 75).

As the central point of marriage in Bangladesh lies in the women's capacity to maintain good relationships in the extended households, new brides are expected to work hard and 'keep the peace' in the household. Problematically for new brides, the allocation of power and authority relates mostly to gender, kinship and age, none of which works in their favour. Extended households usually practice the gendered division of rights and responsibilities along with the operation of a power hierarchy in which fathers or adult sons sit at the top, followed by mothers-in-law at the top of the women in the family (Fernandez 1997). In India a daughter-in-law's mobility and behaviour, even her access to her own husband, and the occasional visit to parents and other relatives, are often interfered with by their mothers-in-law (Varghese 2009, p. 91). Currently there is no research on this phenomenon relating to Bangladesh. My personal observations growing up and working in Bangladesh lead me to believe that this pattern may be common in Bangladeshi households as well.

Mothers-in-law's' violence against their daughters-in-law in Bangladesh

As I have indicated above, while DV perpetrated by men against women is a significant social problem in Bangladesh and across the world, other forms of DV are also important. Violence perpetrated by mothers-in-law against their daughters-in-law is a good example, and one that emerged strongly in this study. In this study, in-laws, particularly mothers-in-law, were the most cited instigators of violence and in some instances directly perpetrated the violence. Of the women, I interviewed, the vast majority (15 out of 16 women) experienced violence by their in-laws, more specifically, by their mother-in-law, while only three survivors had complaints against their father-in-law as well. Of the 16 victims, 14 had been living permanently with their parents-in-law (prior to their move to the shelters), and the other two women were regularly visited by the in-laws.

In the majority of cases, the mothers-in-law participated in and/or supported the abuse against their daughters-in-law. Sometimes they did so with their daughter's or other son's assistance. Two of the women I interviewed reported that their brothers-in-law had beaten them up on more than one occasion. For example, one of the sixteen participants, Nazmun's relationship with her husband deteriorated after the younger brother-in-law moved in with them (interview with Nazmun 2012). When such a conflict with other male and female in-laws occurs the situation between the married couple can become more prone to violence. This is an important finding given that this aspect of violence in the family has not been explored before in Bangladesh.

The following section outlines the different forms that mother-in-law violence against daughter-in-law can take. It is beyond the scope of this qualitative thesis to generalise that the patterns of abuse described below are widespread. The group of women survivors that I interviewed was limited specifically to women who were literally or metaphorically thrown out on the street, alone, and in many cases destitute. Further studies in this field need to be undertaken of the wider female population of Bangladesh.

“Living in a war zone”⁵⁷

Just as they experience DV perpetrated by men, in Bangladesh women can experience different kinds of abuse by mothers-in-law, ranging from emotional, financial, or verbal to more indirect forms of control. The most frequently cited forms of abuse that my participants mentioned were emotional and psychological. For them, these forms of abuse were more pervasive than any other and involved many forms of control. Saima started by pointing out:

It was an arranged marriage – for about 4 months, the in-laws were happy. As their expectation of a Middle East visa from my brother did not materialize, he along with his mother started abusing me. The mother-in-

⁵⁷The quote came from Rahima, a survivor, living in a shelter and interviewed on 22 November 2012

law blamed [me and said] I was worthless to do any housework. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

In Saima's case, her husband and mother-in-law started to be abusive when the visa 'did not materialize'. For Morjina, the situation was just as demoralising when her relationship with the in-laws soured. She explained that she worked hard to please her mother-in-law. She did this by sacrificing her belongings, such as new saris, ornaments and by working all day without rest. But this was not enough:

I was trying my level best to be accepted...I was behaving more submissively but when I failed to do all the chores, she started taunting me. (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

Morjina went on to describe how her mother-in-law criticised her character and domestic skills, a common complaint other women made of their mothers-in-law. As Morjina and Saima illustrate, the reasons identified for the abuse varied. Yet, in amongst this was the complaint that their mothers-in-law often verbally abused them without any reason at all:

Without any reason, the mother-in-law hated me. She has been harrassing me on very minor issues – like I am dark skinned, my cooking was not tasty, I could not get up early morning, I am always late in making breakfast, my dress was not modest and so many shortcomings. It is nearly impossible to name all the situations for which I was scolded by her. (Basona, interviewed 11 September 2012)

Basona's reference to modesty and dress length is significant. The sexual relationship the women have with their husbands is an important point of difference, and for that reason, is sometimes resented by mothers-in-law who may be envious of the couple's intimacy and the power this intimacy can afford the daughters-in-law. Saima's situation had similarities with other women I interviewed, where the mothers-in-law treated their daughters-in-law as competitors, even as the opposition or enemy:

She [mother-in-law] was always in an invisible war with me, never accepted the practical fact that her son is sleeping with me. Whenever we got closer, she became angry. Actually she wanted equal attention from him, and considered me as a competitor. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Another woman, Shamema, informed me that her mother-in-law became jealous of the connection she and her son had together. She said that her mother-in-law questioned how she had managed to hypnotise her son. Why was he so crazy about her? The fact that Shamema's husband loved her in spite of her apparently dark skin colour was a sore point for her mother-in-law. According to Shamema, her mother-in-law had very fair skin, a source of great pride and sense of superiority. Yet, instead of being loved like Shamema she was beaten by her husband.

Shamema was one of four women who complained about their mothers-in-law's assaults, criticisms and harassment, which were caused by having dark skin.

She [mother-in-law] insulted me saying that I should wear a veil to hide my black colour.(Sharmeen, interviewed 24 December 2012)

She [mother-in-law] teased me frequently – 'why is my son still keeping you, I don't understand – about your colour even I feel ashamed, how could he tolerate you?' (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

As Sharmeen and Shanta indicated, the words are very cruel. And these are just some of the ways described to me in the interviews about how some Bangladeshi mothers-in-law try to poison their sons' marriages by giving high importance of daughters-in-law's fair skin colour. A recent research also echoes with my findings that many mothers-in law often tease their daughters-in law for not being 'beautiful' (Das et al. 2016, p.114).

Most of the daughters-in-law described a fretful relationship even immediately after the first day of the marriage. Several talked about their hard efforts to build

a positive relationship with their in-laws, including their mothers-in-law. Nazmun described how:

I never felt comfortable – I did everything to persuade them to like me, but nothing worked. Their behaviour indicates that I am ‘lower class’ compare to them, like a methor [scavenger]. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

For Nazmun, class was attributed to the prejudice her in-laws displayed against her. Being called a scavenger and treated like a low class scavenger creates difficult living conditions that are hard not to internalise.

Nazma would relate to Nazmun’s sense of torment. Nazma conveyed how the mother-in-law’s jealousy ruined her relationship with her husband:

She [mother-in-law] was very jealous that he fell madly in love with me: love at first sight. She never forgot that I was not their choice, but rather, his. She made my life very difficult from the very first day. She did not allow me to go ‘firti’⁵⁸ to my parents. Even after 5 or 6 days she did not allow us to sleep together – being frustrated, when my husband did not return home one night, the father-in-law intervened, scolded her and ordered her to allow her son to sleep with me from that night. I was so constrained by her different orders and activities that I was not able to manage few minutes to chat with him – he became angry with me but did not say anything to her. Not only this, she [mother-in-law] compelled me to take showers at 3 am in the night so that nobody can see me in my ‘impure situation’!⁵⁹Even though we had not had intercourse every night, I had to take a shower. She poisoned my husband’s mind, who started doubting my character. She accused me of having the power of black magic to make him mad for me.

⁵⁸ *Firti* means the return visit by bride to her natal home on the 2nd or 3rd day after marriage.

⁵⁹ In rural Bangladesh, taking a shower after sexual intercourse is considered mandatory for the couple; generally women need to shower early morning or midnight before anybody wakes up. Most of the households have no attached shower, people use shared pond to take shower. It is considered as shame if anyone sees the wife taking such ‘mandatory shower’, whereas the husband can take shower in front of others in any time.

I hate her [mother-in-law]. When she dies, I will not shed one teardrop.
(Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

In this excerpt, the frustration, indignity and a growing sense of coldness towards her abuser are expressed by Nazma. Her story is one of dirt and decay. She must shower to wash away her [sexual] sins, even though she is married and to a large extent, compliant with her in-laws instructions. Nazma was not alone in this experience, even if she felt like she was at the time.

In the interviews I heard how many mothers-in-law obstructed their daughters-in-law's efforts to forge sexual and romantic bonds with their husbands. Like Indian middle class married women (Rew, Gangoli & Gill 2013, p.153), Bangladeshi newly married women also want to build a romantic knot with their husbands through sexual attachment and companionship. But in many cases, as cited by ten survivors I interviewed, this conflicted with the in-laws' expectations that they should not interfere with existing relationships. For instance, Sharmeen informed me:

When my husband and I were becoming closer, my mother-in-law became afraid that our intimacy was separating her from son, as if I was snatching her son. Thus she always tried to destroy our love. (Sharmeen, interviewed 24 December 2012)

Inattention, *upohash* [ridicule] and derogatory comments to daughters in-law's about their parents was another common form of abuse. The majority of survivors I interviewed described enduring criticisms and insults about their natal families, sometimes without reason, sometimes for insufficient or unmet dowry claims. Derogatory references to physical appearance, including skin colour was sometimes part of the abuse, as Shanta indicated earlier.

Panna spoke about her mother-in-law's behaviour that led her to feel disheartened and alienated. When Panna's parents joined the social gathering

[*mezban*]⁶⁰ at her in-law family, the mother-in-law refused to greet them, although she warmly greeted the other daughter-in-law's parents [who had given enormous dowries]. She was friendly with everyone but ignored Panna's parents, to which Panna responded with great sadness:

I feel disappointed and ... rejected ... angry. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

Basona also shared with me that once her dad came to visit her but none of her in-laws came out to greet him, not even to offer 'a glass of juice or a cup of tea or *ak killi paan*'.⁶¹ She felt so frustrated that in the presence of her dad she cried.

Questions may be asked about whether feeling disappointed, insulted and frustrated equate with abuse. Where do we draw the line? What do we take into consideration? Unlike women in other situations, many of the women describing these hurtful situations feel locked into arrangements that they cannot control but are deeply affected by. For many of women that I interviewed, they had insufficient income to walk away and find a new place to live. Socially and culturally the pressures to make their marriages work are intense. Living with in-laws or having regular contact meant dealing with ongoing conflicts and tension that left them with lasting distress. It was not often easy or possible to reduce or sever contact with conflicting parties. Being under the same roof as extended kin who you experience as abusive was not easily discussed or managed. Ongoing humiliation can be physically, intellectually and spiritually disabling, destroying the individual's feelings of belonging to the community. Having one's family members humiliated can generate equally powerful negative effects. Yet, such acts can also engender resistance. Nazmun provides an example of this.

⁶⁰*Mezban* literally means 'community feasting', a tradition that originated in the Chittagong region, Bangladesh. *Mezban* is usually hosted by rich people on many occasions including the death anniversary of an individual, the birth of a child, any special achievement by someone, inauguration of a new business, or celebration of the entrance to a new residence.

⁶¹*Paan* means betel leaf. In villages people usually greet senior guests and neighbours by offering *paan*.

Nazmun recounted her mother-in-law's humiliation of parents and relatives. Her father brought several food items, *porota*, beef, *pitha*,⁶² and fruits in the month of Holy Ramadan:⁶³

She [mother-in-law] did not meet him, did not look at the items. Although it was near iftar⁶⁴ time [evening], my dad was not offered any iftar. As my parents were not able to send the 'iftar' at the beginning of Ramadan, my mother-in-law was angry. My dad apologised for being late. But she did not come out. Being insulted and humiliated, my dad left. It was so insulting that after this incident I stopped talking to her [mother-in-law] for a few days and later started to disobey her commands. Eventually this caused tension between us, and he [my husband] scolded and forced me to be respectful to her. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

As Nazmun remembered the indignities she and her father experienced from her in-laws she also recalled how she pushed back by stopping 'talking with her' and starting 'to disobey her commands'. Nevertheless, the 'tension' between her and her husband escalated as, over time he turned against her too. These statements convey how powerful mothers-in-law can be and how their behaviours can have significant implications for both sets of families brought together through marriage. Rather than occupying a quiet, modest and demure space, mothers-in-law often have the power to disrupt and then terminate their son's marital relationships. Making sense of this power was part of many interviews I conducted with survivors. It is worth to note that these stories are self-reports, hence one-sided. I had no chance to crosscheck with their husbands or mothers-in-law. However, I had no reason to doubt the truthfulness of those survivors' perspectives.

⁶²In rural areas *pitha* means a type of patty cakes. The wife's family usually send different kinds of *pitha* to her in-laws in different occasions.

⁶³It is a cultural norm to send food items to the in-laws house of the daughter; it is like a feast, and all food items are generally distributed to neighbours and close relatives.

⁶⁴*Iftar* is the meal eaten by Muslims after sunset during the month of Ramadan.

Six survivors believed mothers-in-law's major source of power lies in the practice of *jadutona*⁶⁵['black magic']to ruin their relationship with their husband and deprive them from his love and intimacy. They strongly believed that their mother-in-law's black magic turned their husbands' minds against them. Saima said:

I found pieces of my sari cut out and a tabiz⁶⁶ under my pillow and after few days, surprisingly, he started hating me, finding fault with my every step. You would never believe how much he loved me. Once he blamed his mother for being abusive to me and then she applied black magic.
(Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

'Black magic' is neither new nor unusual in the Bangladesh socio-cultural context. People often, if not usually, explain that their personal failures, hardship, misfortunes and prolonged illness are caused by someone's harmful agenda or sorcery. It is also the most commonly discussed issue in every household, especially among village people, and about relationships that are not working between siblings, parents, husbands, wives or in-laws. Very few empirical studies identify how black magic affects family life, and of those that do consider black magic, most only partially touched the theme as a curious phenomenon (Rytter 2010). It might be tempting to believe that faith in black magic is restricted to lower socio-economic demographics in Bangladesh, especially to people with a 'rural mentality'. However, the obsession and suspicions of black magic were also identified among three highly educated urban shelter staff that I interviewed.

Forms of abuse by mothers-in-law

The women I spoke with identified different forms of abuse, which are described below:

⁶⁵ *Jadutona*['black magic'] is the negative use of energies and powers by jealous or malicious human beings who seek undue advantage over people around them, which is perceived to harm and hurt people.

⁶⁶ *Tabiz* [talisman] is a small locket or amulet containing *Arabic sura* (verses from the Quran).

Verbal abuse and harassment

Verbal abuse, intimidation and harassment were common forms of abuse by their mother-in-law, as confirmed by 15 survivors:

She often call me bad names and swore at me when I can't do work the way she likes ... Once she threw away my cooked vegetables because the taste was not good. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

Nine survivors reported experiencing very manipulative behaviour from their mothers-in-law. Basona vowed never to repeat this behaviour if she became a mother-in-law:

She [mother-in-law] cleverly restrained me from household work while he [husband] was home, but, when he went out she compelled me to do all the cooking, washing, even preparing dinner. It took me the whole day but when he came home in the evening, she pretended to work in kitchen and complained to him that I did not help her in any work and rather, misbehaved when I was asked what to do. He got angry and shouted and scolded me. When I tried to argue, most of the time he beat me. I swear to god that I will not behave with my future daughter-in-law the way my mother-in-law treated me – she is a witch, I have no language to describe her bad characteristics. (Basona, interviewed 11 September 2012)

It is significant that while it was her husband who beat her, it was Basona's mother-in-law that she held most responsible for the violence.

Two more women shared that their mother-in-law behaved unbelievably nicely in front of the sons but then 'made bad comments when he was not around'. These experiences suggest that mothers-in-law can deliberately manipulate the situations to undermine their daughters-in-law and in the process, forge stronger bonds with their sons.

Control of freedom

The women I interviewed also told me how many limits were placed on their freedom: the freedom to sleep, to eat or go out, even freedom to spend money [given by their own parents or brothers or sisters]. Nazma said:

If I need anything I have to ask my husband. It is more likely that he has to seek permission from his mother, if she says 'yes' – only then it is 'yes'.
(Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

Rahima also described how her voice was overshadowed by her mother-in-law's. This extended even to the choice of Rahima's clothes and whether she took an afternoon nap:

I had no opinion in buying my clothes, what colour or design; it is always my mother-in-law who decided when I need something. If any day I slept after lunch, she started insulting me. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

Many of the survivors spoke about the various ways their mothers-in-law belittled and isolated them, controlled their contact with parents, and how and with whom they spent their time:

I could not invite my parents, or my siblings. I was not even allowed to talk over the phone. I always looked for the chance to talk to my parents when she was not home. My parents gave us a colour TV as dowry but the TV is under the in-law's control, they rarely allow me to watch. (Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

Domestic servitude

Many survivors also mentioned that they were forced to do heavy domestic work in a way that made them feel as if they did not belong to that family but were

strangers, or, as some said, a 24 hour unpaid maid. Some mothers-in-law prevented their daughters-in-law from getting proper rest:

I often became exhausted with heavy domestic work, like washing, collecting drinking water from a hand-pump tube well. I felt like taking a rest but she [mother-in-law] insulted me. I felt so humiliated, continuously being treated like I was their maid or servant. Many times, I complained to him [husband] but he never said anything to them [his parents], rather, he indirectly supported them. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

After 5 or 6 days of my marriage, she (mother-in-law) asked me to do the cooking with no powder spices. The chilli, coriander, turmeric were all raw. When I told her that my mother used powder spices, that she never ground them at home, she advised me to forget those practices. I feel like crying. I had to grind all of the spices manually everyday though she had previously used powder spices. I complained to him [husband]. Although he sympathised he did not dare say anything to his mother. Rather, he advised me to be more 'enduring'. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

Nazmun felt that her mother-in-law was deliberately spiteful by making her hand grind fresh spices every day, a practice she had not done before Nazmun's arrival. While her husband sympathised he ultimately told her to submit to his mother's wishes.

Shanta is another woman whose experience shows how women's lives can be made more difficult by the rigid expectations governing their behaviour, especially their public interaction. Sometimes religion and other aspects of conventional morality are used to justify the restrictions placed on women's lives. Even though there was a shared pond in Shanta's village, she was not permitted by her in-laws to use the pond water because neighbouring men could see her. Her mother-in-law ordered Shanta to wash her clothes, take showers and clean the household

utensils by using their family hand-pump tube well,⁶⁷ situated beside the kitchen, in an area well covered.

I had to press the handle down and up to draw water. It was very tough to pump the tube well to have enough water for washing clothes. I was never convinced that she did it for a religious reason, rather to show her power and control in order to subordinate me. (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

Domestic servitude sometimes included compelling daughters-in-law to do very nasty jobs. Sharmeen explained this to me:

I had to wash my unmarried sister-in-law's stained menstrual cloths/napkins. When I showed dissatisfaction, my mother-in-law complained to him [husband] that I purposely did not do the things and in the way she asked me to do. (Sharmeen, interviewed 24 December 2012)

In Bangladesh, getting married can mean servitude for women, not just to their husbands but to his family members too. This servitude can extend into years and even decades. Saima described her domestic servitude, including the times when she had chicken pox and high fever and was still denied rest and forced to do household chores.

A few survivors I interviewed also experienced coercion from their mothers-in-law to perform heavy work during the advanced stages of their pregnancies. Nazmun provided an example of this:

She [mother-in-law] compelled me to do all household work for the whole day, but was never satisfied. I never understood how a woman could ask so much heavy work from another woman knowing it is so hard in pregnancy. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

⁶⁷In rural areas in Bangladesh most well off household has 'wells', with a hand pump.

These experiences indicate that mothers-in-law often misused their generational authority and privileges. It is unclear as to how much mothers-in-law controlled daughters-in-law to conform to internalised patriarchal values or whether it was more related to the personal satisfaction they derived from not being on the bottom of the hierarchy, and/or the personal benefits achieved from having a servant.

Food control and food denial

Food and its access can be a powerful source of control. The majority of the women with whom I spoke reported incidents where they were denied food or given inadequate amounts of food. Many of the women stressed that when mothers-in-law did this to them it was a form of abuse that cut very deep. Some of the women conveyed that they were denied access or had their access to food delayed even though they had cooked the food. In conjunction with their role as housemaids, most of the women I interviewed described how they were not allowed to join the rest of the family at meals. Instead, they had to wait until they were given permission to eat after all family members had finished their meals.

I usually cooked three to four items but I would not get it. When at last she [mother-in-law] allowed me to eat, she mentioned only one item for me to take. Sometimes she served me with a very little amount. Listening to this, my husband sometimes played tricks to manage to get a few good items for me like a piece of chicken or fish. He acted like he was not hungry at mealtime and wanted to have it later in his room. When I brought his food, he usually gave some to me. But after a few days, his mother understood his tricks and brought his food herself and waited until he finished. He sometimes got annoyed and told her to leave but she wouldn't listen. (Shamema, interviewed 5 December 2012)

This is another case of mothers-in-law dominating not just daughters-in-law but also their sons. This exercise of power has important effects, as suggested by

Shamema's story about her husband feeling the need to lie to his mother and hide food to assist Shamema to eat properly.

In Nazma's story, the surveillance of her food intake by female in-laws generated in her feelings of shame, disconnection and worthlessness:

She [mother-in-law] or her daughter [sister-in-law] were always watching me while I was eating. I felt very awkward! Sometimes I was not given enough food, but she would tell me that 'if the amount is not enough, don't feel shy to ask more'. But you know, I felt disgraced to have to ask for additional food. I shared with my husband the worst feelings about being served like an 'outsider'? He requested that his mother allow me to have my meal as I liked. After this, I was permitted to take my own food, but very little was left for me in the cooking pot. (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

Some of the women also complained to me about frequent denial of craved foods during pregnancy:

My mother-in-law rarely allowed me the food that I wanted while I was in the early stage of pregnancy. I wanted to have sour food like mango or tamarind pickles or chutney. She hid these[from me].(Saleha, interviewed 28 November 2012)

The majority of survivors who were living in the shelters at the time of the interview experienced humiliating behaviours from mothers-in-law, and especially when they were sick. Six survivors informed me that when they were sick and in need of medical treatment, their mothers-in-law were reluctant to permit them to visit a doctor. Even at home the mother-in-law rarely took care of them. Though these survivors made important points about their mother-in-law's cruelty and negligence, their comments also indicated their gendered expectation about the female responsibilities in family. I observed that social perceptions about taking

care of a sick family member automatically fell on the female member, be she a daughter or mother-in-law.

For some women, it was especially hurtful when their mothers-in-law refused to provide them with care when they were ill:

When I was with high fever, the mother-in-law never came to me to pour water but a neighbour helped. (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

Sometimes when an illness like malaria, typhoid, chicken pox, or whooping cough became serious and demanded urgent medical treatment, the women described becoming bedridden. Some of the women described how their in-laws then asked their parents to take them to the doctor so that they would bear the costs and burden of taking care of the sick person and paying for medical expenses. Saima said:

When we [daughters-in-law] are in good health and active, we are absolutely their daughter-in-law, and are forced to forget our parents. But if, unfortunately, we get sick, we no longer have the 'so called daughter-in-law identity'. Rather we become our parents' daughter again, and are sent back to parents for care so that they can quickly return the 'able' daughter-in-law. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Sometimes the delays the women experienced getting medical treatment carried significant risks. Occasionally their husbands are also abused for helping them. Two women shared that their husbands brought them to see the doctor about serious illnesses but had to face shouting and anger from their mother-in-law upon their return home. A few survivors disclosed how their in-laws refused to allow them to go to any health centre during their pregnancies. They were only able to access treatment when outsiders or health visitors intervened. Only then were they allowed a few medical visits. Nazmun narrated:

We returned from doctor. She [mother-in-law] shouted at us, saying that my husband gave too much importance to my pregnancy. [It was] 'as if I was the only one who became pregnant'. Then [they] started insulting him[husband], saying that 'he had become a sex-slave, an ostroino⁶⁸[limp-dick] who does what I asked him to do. After this I never dared to go to the health centre for a check up. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

In this excerpt Nazmun's husband's masculinity was called into question by her in-laws and then protected by her not 'daring' to go for check-ups during her pregnancy. This experience shows how mothers-in-law can negatively affect the decision-making capacity of daughters-in-law, sometimes through exerting pressure on their sons/husbands. Being denied medical treatment is a serious problem with potentially negative effects on women's health and wellbeing.

Abuse during and after pregnancy

A few women I interviewed experienced psychological abuse from their mothers-in-law during their pregnancies, deliveries and post partum periods, abuse that had physical and emotional consequences. Forced excessive domestic work, the denial of food, or not allowing timely meals and not permitting medical care were identified by the women as common acts of abuse during this period. Three women spoke about the pain of not getting support, cooperation and care from their mothers-in-law during the delivery period:

Hearing from midwife that it [baby] was a girl, she [mother-in-law] immediately left the labour room even though the midwife asked her to hold the newborn, as she was struggling to take out the placenta. I was not cleaned, and the new born was not given any clothing until a neighbour intervened. Even my father-in-law did not call any Azan [celebration]. The baby was crying, but my mother-in-law did not come to give her a drop of honey.⁶⁹ When the pain and bleeding was beyond my control and I started

⁶⁸ Literally 'limpdick' means a derogatory expression to call a husband who does what his wife tells him to do all the time, such as lapdog, flunkey, pushover.

⁶⁹ In rural areas in Bangladesh, immediate after birth, elderly women give half a drop honey to the new born.

crying loudly for warm clothes, my husband entered the labour room and seeing this, he started shouting at his mother. (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

Nazma's physical and emotional distress is evident. What was meant to be a joyous occasion, that is, giving birth to a healthy baby, became filled with shame, pain and conflict.

Panna and Shanta were also left in the middle of their deliveries because they were giving birth to girls. Their mothers-in-law's rude behaviour is rooted in the wider socio-cultural and patriarchal setting where sons are preferred. Shaheena's experience was even worse. Her mother-in-law did not permit her to go to hospital for her delivery, even after suffering ten hours of labour pain without progress. By the time Shaheena was eventually taken to hospital, her baby had died.

Some of the women also conveyed stories about post partum neglect by their mothers-in-law. Again, during these periods women felt vulnerable, entering into motherhood and trying to recover from labour. Rahima told me:

I was given a 'straw bed' as I was bleeding. My mother-in-law did not enter the labour room because she believed my blood was impure and polluted. For three days, she forced me to eat only once, that was only bitter vegetables, such as karala, in the belief that it would lead to a quick recovery. The irony was that after two or three months when her daughter gave birth, the bitter gourd was not given. Rather, she got very nutritious food, like chicken and pigeon soup, noodles and rice. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

These experiences suggest that mothers-in-law used traditional views about women's inferiority to control and abuse them. The inconsistency was not lost on Rahima, who could see how her mother-in-law's behaviour created divisions among the daughters-in-law.

There were also indirect forms of abuse perpetrated by mothers-in-law. One survivor, Sharmeen shared that her mother-in law constantly criticized her and praised another daughter-in-law, though these praises and compliments were motivated by that daughter-in-law's access to her father's money.

It was like a live radio, endlessly comparing me with the other – I just can't emotionally take this comparing. (Sharmeen, interviewed 24 December 2012)

The mother-in-law's abuse often trapped women into tolerating sexual abuse by the father-in-law. Three women revealed abuse by their father-in-law. Rahima and Shaheena experienced sexual advances made by their fathers-in-law. Rahima's father-in-law, a farmer, often knocked at her door in the middle of night when his son was on night shift duty. Once, when Rahima was returning from the toilet outside, her father-in-law forced her down on the floor and tried to take off her blouse, threatening her that if she shouted, she would be risking divorce. Rahima cleverly saved herself by shouting 'Ghost! Ghost!' The mother-in-law and others came out and the father-in-law then behaved as if he had just come out having heard a strange sound and had fallen over her in the dark.

Shaheena and Jomila also experienced sexual abuse by their father-in-law:

My father-in-law wanted me to massage his body every night; whenever he got the chance he touched my breast as if it was 'unintentional'. (Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

The father-in-law touched my private parts whenever he got the chance; once when my husband kicked me and I had fallen down my father-in-law pretended to pull me up but intentionally pressed my vagina from the back – I felt he was poking his finger, but cleverly disguising it as helping. (Jomila, interviewed 12 October 2012)

These women had their own explanations for such sexual abuse. They felt as if they were already abused by their husbands and mothers-in-law and the fathers-

in-law used their vulnerability as an opportunity to take sexual advantage. This type of violence confirms the fact that once a woman is abused in the family, her risk of experiencing further abuse multiplies.

In Chapter Five, several survivors shared that their mothers-in-law's' abuse and their husband's violence reinforced each other, one leading to the other. If the husband's violence started first, the mother-in-law would slowly turn into an abuser as she observed that she had no influence over him. But when there were no problems between the couple, and they had a strong bond and relationship, that fact also upset a few mothers-in-law. They tried hard to destroy the good relationship by instigating their sons to violence, or by manipulating situations. Eventually the husbands also became abusive, though initially they were protective of their wives. Here the question arises – why in particular are mothers-in-law abusive of their daughters-in-law?

Background reasons for mother-in-law's abuse

More attention needs to be paid to the phenomenon of the mothers-in-law who perpetrate abuse against younger women, including those that they chose for their sons to marry. There were many reasons cited by the respondents for the difficult behaviour of their mothers-in-law. The majority of survivors explained that the relationship with the mother-in-law was made difficult by her intention to spoil the intimacy between the son and his wife. Existing cultural values and gendered division of rights and responsibilities in family were also identified as other most important factors.

Kandiyoti's (1998, p. 278) explanation of mother-in-law's abuse in her study of patriarchy could be applied to the phenomenon in Bangladesh. She pointed out that in a classic patriarchy newly married brides move to a household where the head of the family is the husband's father. Although structurally and culturally, men usually subjugate all female members including older ones, in most cases, they delegate the supervision of younger daughters-in-law to older women, particularly to mothers-in-law. Thus in the in-laws' homes, usually the brides are not only under the control of all the men but also subordinate to and controlled by

mothers-in-law (Kandiyoti 1998, p. 278). In the extended family system, the mother-in-law in particular often blocks the daughter-in-law from developing a sexual and romantic bond with her son, and thus tension often arises (Rew, Gangoli & Gill 2013, p. 152). In her study of the Indian family, Fernandez highlighted the issue of generational hierarchy and how it interrelates with gender in shaping women's experience of violence. She also argued that generational superiority along with the daughter-in-law's economic vulnerability creates the context in which domestic violence occurs, involving not only the husband and wife, but also female in-laws (Fernandez 1997)

In South Asia (Fernandez 1997) gendered division of rights and responsibilities are extensively practiced, along with the operation of power hierarchy in which the mother-in-law belongs at the top. This current study, similar to research in India, identified that on the basis of gender and age, mothers-in-law own the intra-household allocation of power and authority and often control their daughters-in-law's mobility and behaviour, even intervening with their access to and contact with the husband and denying visits to their parents and other relatives (Bloom et al. 2001; Cain et al. 1979; Jejeebhoy 2000). Moreover, the existing social and cultural expectations of women's behaviour most often are used to rationalize abuse against daughters-in-law. For instance, the survivors in their role of daughter-in-law in the joint family system were expected to be subservient and unconditionally obedient to their in-laws. These cultural expectations often overburdened them with domestic labour which ultimately created tension and caused the violence against them (Rew, Gangoli & Gill 2013). It is also worth noting that most of the survivors were from rural settings, in which men usually go farming or to industrial jobs, leaving their wives with their mothers'-in-law for the whole day. In such circumstances the likelihood of conflict arising between the two women in house together is greater than a conflict with a father-in-law.

The majority of survivors were unable to comprehend how a woman who had been abused by her mother-in-law and well knew the suffering and pain of the role of daughter-in-law could still follow the same tradition and treat her daughter-in-law in the same way. Nazmun explained:

My mother-in-law said, 'I had to suffer a lot, so why not you? I did not get any opportunity, so why should I allow you to get any?' (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

Nagpal termed this dominating mother-in-law as a 'demi-matriarch' who had once suffered the trials and troubles firstly as a daughter, and then as a daughter-in-law, and is unwilling to surrender her opportunity to exercise a dominant role in subjugating daughter-in-law (Nagpal 2000, p. 299). Being currently in ascendancy, she favours the same traditions for her daughter-in-law, though in her youth these practices had oppressed her. Nagpal's perception resonates with Kandiyoti's insight (1988, p. 275) that the mother and daughter-in-law dynamic is culturally structured and cyclically reproduced by a model of patriarchy that places emphasis on 'corporate male-headed entities' (see also Ahmed-Ghosh 2004). According to Kandiyoti 'the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law' (1988, p. 279). I agree with Kandiyoti's (1988) argument that like India, the main source of 'classic patriarchy' in Bangladesh lies in the continuation of the patrilocally-extended household and the traditional ordering of relationships in those households. The mother-in-law plays a key role in continuing their arrangement.

The psychoanalytical explanation of the Oedipal nature of the mother-son relationship could be useful to explain mother-in-law violence against daughter-in-law, while the father-in-law is less of a threat. Silverstein (1992, p. 409) argued that female in-laws develop difficulties with each other because of an Oedipal type of competition for the man's attention, who is at same time son and husband. Competition and jealousy regarding his money, attention and affection can easily lead both female in-laws to manipulate situations, as we have seen from several survivors' statement. They indicated that their mother-in-law felt threatened and often became jealous, which created tension between them.

In her discussion on Indian families Nagpal's (2000, p. 299) argued that the mother often feels threatened by the sexual presence of her son's wife. In a ground-breaking study on South Asian societies about female autonomy, Dyson and Moore said:

The fact that the in-coming female comes from another group means that in some ways she is viewed as a threat: her behaviour must be closely watched; she must be re-socialized so that she comes to identify her own interests with those of her husband's kin; senior family wives tend to dominate young in-marrying wives. (Dyson & Moore 1983)

This scenario is still widely present in Bangladesh. Furthermore, because sexuality is considered inferior to motherhood, daughters-in-law deserve less value and respect than the mothers-in-law (Kishwar 1997). Several survivors also confirmed that they had to face a very negative attitude because of their sexual contact with their husbands, as if they were committing a great sin, although everybody knows why the marriages take place. Ten survivors complained of their mother-in-law not letting them have any opportunity or privacy to be intimate with their husband. Rather, they were often kept overburdened with household chores.

I found Rew, Gangoli & Gill's (2013) argument illuminating – young women often do not feel comfortable about revealing their own flaws or their desire to live separately from their in-laws, so they prefer to explain the DV as a conflict with their mother-in-law, as it is socially acceptable to complain about mothers-in-law. Some young women may not want to speak directly and some may complain about mother-in-law as a way of expressing their desire to live separately. Instead of direct complaints against their husbands they may exaggerate the mother-in-law's abuse. However, it should not provide impunity for mothers-in-law who subordinate their daughters-in-law. Moreover, due to the socio-cultural settings in which women are not encouraged to raise their voice and have any choice, they might need to mask the real scenario. If a woman revealed that she was beaten because she demanded to live separately, free from the influence of the in-laws,

most likely she would be harshly ostracised. I think these might be the reasons for some survivors masking the real situation. However, this study finds it difficult to foreground reasons for women blaming their mothers-in-law more than their husbands when both were abusing them. I think it is easier for women to blame another woman for abuse rather than a man, as they were taught that their husbandsexclusively retain the right to abuse in any situation.

Kandiyoti's explanation could be useful to understand mother-in-law's abuse against daughters-in-law in Bangladeshi society. She explained the phenomenon as a culturally specific form of 'patriarchal bargain' between mother-in-law and the extended household. The concept of 'patriarchal bargain' provides some clue as to why women participate, either actively or passively, in perpetuating their own and other women's oppression. Women remain subordinate to men and also participate in perpetuating violence against other women (Kandiyoti 1988, p. 275) in order to secure the economic, physical, and emotional support and to attain the status and power that patriarchy theoretically offers women, who do not directly oppose it. Kandiyoti (1988, p. 280) observed cyclical fluctuations in a woman's power and status in a patriarchal household: as a young bride, she often endures hardship and deprivation, later becoming the mother of a son. She then adopts various interpersonal strategies to maximize security for her old age by manipulating the son's affections and, later still, to acquire power and authority over her daughter-in-law. It is also argued that patriarchal bargains are not explicitly planned arrangements; rather they are temporary, unspoken and unwritten agreements, which men and women are socialized to accept and practice (Ahmed-Ghosh 2004; Fernandez 1997). Although Indian and Bangladeshi feminists have succeeded in representing VAW as a social problem, mainly focusing on violence of men against women, Kandiyoti (1988) and Fernandez (1997) are exceptions, as they explain women-to-women violence in the family. They seem right in articulating that woman-to-woman violence actually serves male interests in dividing women, and older women often are used to control younger ones. But this justification fails to explain the mothers-in-law's dual role in relation to her daughter and daughter-in-law.

Three survivors also experienced their mother-in-law's contradictory behaviour when it came to her daughter, which often became a source of conflict between them. The majority of respondents conveyed that Bangladeshi mothers-in-law want daughters-in-law to be submissive and obedient to them and not have any control over the husband's income but they do not want this patriarchal control for their daughters.

Importance of a good relationship between two females-in-law

A good relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is very important for both, particularly for the daughter-in-law.

The majority of survivors expressed their psychological distress due to mother-in-law abuse as evident from Panna:

It is very unfortunate that I did not feel any sorrow, did not shed a teardrop when my mother-in-law died, rather I felt relieved and happy that he is just mine, no other sharer. You may think I am selfish but I always wished for her death ... I sometimes even thought to poison her. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

If someone read my mind, obviously I could be identified having the 'killer motive'. From my bottom of my heart, I always wanted to strangle her; I had to fight with her to win my husband's love. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

Some women shared about losing their peace of mind, and always being worried and tense due to the conflict with their mother-in-law. Moreover, their frustration doubled when husbands perceived this conflict as the wife being disrespectful to his parents. In this way, stress and conflict increased between couples. Conflict between two female in-laws frequently leads to quarrels between couples, sometimes even causing divorce. Three survivors blamed the conflict with their mother-in-law for finally driving their husbands to secretly divorce them.

Survivors shared that mothers-in-law's abuse often encouraged husband's violence. In-law's and husband's violence sometimes reinforced one another, a phenomenon which was also identified by other researchers who described this reinforcement as reciprocal support for each other's entitlements (Raj et al. 2006, p. 945). Four survivors, who were not initially victims of their husbands' violence, first experienced emotional violence from their mothers-in-law.

Split loyalties: relationships between the son, his mother and his wife

The accounts of survivors about the various ways a mother-in-law demonstrates her power by abusing her daughter-in-law raises the question: where are the husbands? The majority of survivors revealed that their mother-in-law's abuse continued, as their husbands were unwilling to take a hard line to stop his mothers' rude and abusive behaviour.

He could not believe that his mother forced me to clean his sister's sanitary napkin. (Sharmeen, interviewed 24 December 2012)

My husband accepted his mother's complaints as 'absolute truth'; he never realised that his mother could lie to him and compelled me to do all chores while he was not home. (Basona, interviewed 11 September 2012)

He never listened to my complaint. Rather, he shouted at me that I manipulated situations. (Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

The above experiences indicate that the mother-in-law's abuse continued, as survivors did not get any support from husbands. Most of the survivors considered themselves victims of in-laws' violence as well as husbands' silent compliance. Some survivors felt that sometimes their husband did not abuse but he was reluctant to mediate between his mother and wife; if he would effectively intervene, the mother-in-law would not be abusive. I think some of the husbands did not think that their mothers could be so cruel as to abuse their wives, so they

did not believe their wives' complaints. The following statement indicated a husband's reaction:

He [my husband] seemed surprised and frustrated to witness his mother's cruel and heartless behaviour. He shouted at her [his mother]. (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

However, some men were very attached to their mothers, and were unable to support their wives, as it would hurt their mothers. From the interviews, it was found that when the two women were fighting or competing with each other, the man, regardless of class or status, would take his mother's side, whatever was going on. However, not all the husbands always favoured their mothers:

After 2 or 3 months of our marriage, when she complained about my cooking, my husband asked her not to complain so much. (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

He requested her to engage a housemaid as I had to do all chores and became exhausted. (Basona, interviewed 11 September 2012)

Two other survivors also claimed that in the early stage of marriage, their husbands supported them in a fight with their mother-in-law, but after a certain period of time, they always took the mother's side. Further research is needed to investigate the reasons.

Nonetheless not all the daughters-in-law's experiences were bad. Taslima is the only interviewee who had a good relationship with her mother-in-law. She felt very fortunate to have her mother-in-law in her life, as she sometimes protected Taslima from her son's abuse.

Concluding remarks

The discussion of the issue of mother-in-law abuse reveals that there is no such thing as a 'typical' mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. Although abuse

from mothers-in-law was widespread among the shelter residents, I found each individual respondent was different and each followed their unique style of adjusting with other members of the family they had married into. The study underscores the need to obtain information on the mother-in-law's presence as a facilitator of DV. Mother-in-law's abuse is accepted as reinforcing a familial culture in which violence is justified to resolve conflict. Therefore, I agree with Chan et al. (2008, p. 1309) that the failure to eradicate mother-in-law violence undermines the successful eradication of domestic violence.

I believe this is the first in-depth study that contributes to the knowledge of the mother-in-law's potentially causal role in initiating or increasing the risk of DV. The study reveals the urgent need for rethinking existing domestic violence programs in Bangladesh, both interventions and preventions. The current shelters programs, legal aid and other forms of assistance including preventive measures primarily focus on male violence against women. This chapter reveals that women who are in a superior position by gender and generational hierarchy also participate in abusing other women in the family, which means that programs and policies should be directed at redefining the position of women, and domination in familial hierarchies, whether male or female, should be eradicated (see also Fernandez 1997). However, I also agree with Fernandez (1997) that if fear of losing economic security is a reason for abusing daughters-in-law, then programs need to be developed that ensure a social safety net for parents in their old age.

I return to the subject of mother-in-law abuse in Chapter Eight where I consider the views of the respondents who shelter staff, policy makers, women's activist and NGOs Personnel. The next chapter surveys how women responded to the violence initiated by their husbands and/or in-laws and examines the circumstances that led women to seek help from a shelter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Women's Responses to Domestic Violence and Entering Shelters

Bangladeshi women are regularly abused in many forms. The previous chapters discussed women's vulnerability to abuse by husbands and mothers-in-law. Bangladesh's patriarchal social structure and high levels of poverty have meant the continuation of women's subordinate position in society. The difficulties women face obtaining legal remedy and neighbourhoods of lawlessness exacerbate this vulnerability.

This chapter explores the diverse responses to domestic violence (DV) of the women that I interviewed. I detail the circumstances that influenced their ability to ask and receive formal help, including the help they needed to enter the newly established women's shelters. The First section discusses the women's various responses to DV. The Second Section highlights the factors that encourage women to persevere in abusive marriages, including their internalisation of justifications for the DV being perpetrated against them. The barriers and problems women face in their help-seeking attempts for services are discussed in the Third Section, while the circumstances that push women to ask to enter a shelter are detailed in the Fourth Section. Finally, I survey survivors' experiences and perceptions of shelter services in the Fifth Section and provide concluding remarks in the Sixth Section.

Women's responses to domestic violence

Bangladesh is a patriarchal society that expects women to be submissive and loyal to husbands in any situation. Women are encouraged to tolerate their husbands' violence, rather than challenge it (Miaji 2010). As I have indicated in Chapter Three, there is widespread expectation in Bangladesh that wives should not disclose their husbands' violent behaviour. The cultural background makes it difficult for women to identify and speak out about DV. This study finds that disclosure of violence, help-seeking and subsequent utilization of services are

often obstructed by socio-cultural, religious, economic and institutional factors that blame women for, or implicate them in the violence perpetrated against them.

The social stigma associated with the 'bad wife' who complains against her husband or his family is strong in Bangladesh. Rahima described the negative community attitudes towards women reporting domestic violence:

The neighbours and others often blame me, as I was unable to adjust to [violence being] a 'normal feature' of marriage. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

The women often hid the abuse they were subjected to in their families in an effort to protect their reputations as 'good wives'. Eight survivors emphasized how their childhood experiences and existing social and cultural attitudes discouraged them from disclosing domestic violence and seeking outside help. Shaheena showed how growing up female in Bangladesh did not equip her with adequate self-defence skills:

On the first day of his abuse if I would hit him back in return, I thought he will not dare to hit anymore! But the irony is that we were not taught to protect ourselves, but rather encouraged to endure and to save family values at any cost. (Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

Eleven out of the sixteen survivors I interviewed spoke of the shame associated with seeking help either from the local community or from formal support services. Morjina provided a clear picture of how socially, economically and culturally desperate the women's situations can be:

Whom should I tell? On the wedding day, I was advised that I am stepping into my husband's house wearing a red saree [attire] and I could only leave his house wearing a white kafon,⁷⁰ – that means that my husband is the

⁷⁰Akafonis is a white shroud – a length of white cloth in which a Muslim dead person is wrapped in Bangladesh

only destination for me whatever happens! What is the use of seeking help?(Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

The above quotes reveal the background scene that makes it difficult for women to be pro-active in responding to violence from their husbands and in-laws. However, notwithstanding these cultural pressures, women did respond to DV. I asked the women residing in six shelters dedicated to women escaping domestic violence how they responded to their husbands' and/or in-laws' violence. A variety of responses emerged in relation to help-seeking attempts, from seeking help from their natal families, temporarily leaving their marital home, organizing *salish*, seeking formal help from the police and/or NGOs and local leaders. Some women sought and attempted to take revenge. Some asked for separation and divorce.

Nine out of the sixteen women indicated an inability and sense of hopelessness in dealing with their husbands' violence. These women internalized the belief that it was their fault that they were beaten. Consider for instance, these disclosures by Sharmeen:

While I was regularly beaten and forced to overwork, I never tried to seek outside help as I thought it was the 'normal'. Moreover, I was afraid that people would criticise and blame me for provoking him. I just tried hard to adjust to the abuse at any cost. (Sharmeen, interviewed 24 December 2012)

Sharmeen is not alone; the majority of the survivors I interviewed tried their best to endure their husbands' violence after being unable to stop it. Similar to recent research on women's help-seeking behaviour in Bangladesh conducted by Sayem and Khan (2012), I found survivors engaged in a number of strategies as they responded to their husbands' or in-laws' violence. These responses could be categorized as personal, informal and formal, and occurring in different phases of the violence (Sayem&Khan 2012). Women reported using personal strategies, such as trying to explain her side of the problem, defending herself, avoiding contact with her husband, arguing with him or answering him back. Many

physically resisted the violence, sometimes by attacking their husbands back, harming themselves and/or trying to commit suicide.

Even the women who persevered in abusive domestic situations were not passive. Many strategies, both spontaneous and carefully thought out, were used to negotiate their way through the violence. Informal help-seeking strategies included asking for support from family members and relatives, friends, neighbours and local community members, or from NGOs and social services. The women's formal responses to DV comprised of reports made to the police, courts, their local councils and local administrative bodies, including their Upazilla Nirbahi Officer.⁷¹

I also followed Sayem and Khan's (2012) categorization of women's different responses to DV according to three stages of the violence: 1) pre-violent phase 2) violent phase and 3) post-violent phase. Ten survivors reported that in the pre-violent phase they often tried to defend themselves or argue back, and some even became verbally abusive to their husbands and mothers-in-law. Consider for instance, Nazma, who used the threat of public disclosure to constrain her abusive husband, or Jomila, whose discovery of verbal retaliation had success shutting down her husband:

One day it seemed that the verbal scolding might quickly turn into physical assault, I warned him if he hit me, I will shout and call people ... suddenly he left the room. (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

While he was threatening, I scolded him back by pointing out his faults – to my surprise he stopped bad mouthing and left the room. (Jomila, interviewed 12 October 2012)

⁷¹In Bangladesh the Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (often abbreviated UNO) is the chief executive of an Upazilla [sub-district]

Using verbal retaliation and pointing out their husbands' faults in presumably an aggressive manner is not without its risks and limitations. Sometimes they worked to prevent an attack escalating. Other times it brought physical beatings.

In the violent phase, women responded in a similar way to the pre-violent phase. This included leaving the scene, keeping silent while being blamed and scolded, protesting the abuse and/or seeking help from others. In this period, the survivors mostly tried to take immediate solace from parents or siblings-in-law. Most of the women whose mothers-in-law joined in the perpetration of abuse left the scene. Getting away was not always easy though, as Morjina explained:

He punched and kicked me, I just kept silent... then he hit me with a bamboo stick. I asked for help from a neighbour who snatched the bamboo.
(Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

For Saima, the challenge was to seek refuge in her sister-in-law's bedroom:

He kicked me again and again. I realized any protest would make him more furious. I silently left the room and entered his sister-in-law's [his brother's wife] room. He also followed and tried to pull me out by my hair... his sister-in-law protested. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

During the violent phase the women applied diverse strategies in response to their husbands' beatings, based on the level of severity of violence. If it was just once off pushing, kicking or slapping or pulling hair, most of the survivors were likely to remain silent, sometimes protesting or sometimes just leaving the scene. But when he hit her severely with a bamboo stick or a belt, or if there were continuous beatings, the women sought help from others, such as neighbours, in-laws or friends. Only two of the sixteen survivors I interviewed reacted to the violence with violence, sometimes using physical force, sometimes scolding and shouting. Jahanara said:

He hit me with a bamboo stick, I tried to grab the stick, he kicked me so badly that I fell down, but I stood up, punched him back, bit his hand – as he was physically stronger, I was injured more – one of our neighbours got him out of the house. (Jahanara, interviewed 4 October 2012)

Nine out of sixteen survivors confirmed that when physical attacks were severe and intolerable, they usually screamed and sought help either from a neighbour or sometimes an in-law family member or sometimes even from children. Taslima described:

Usually I never made sound when he hit as my children get scared and feel ashamed but when he became very violent, I tried to run away... he took a belt and hit me again and again; finding no other way, I screamed and called my son, he embraced me and asked his father to leave (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

This experience represents the pressure felt by mothers to protect their children from exposure to violence. Women were often put in a bind: not to make noise and disturb the children, or keep silent and collude with the abuse. But when physical beatings became unbearable, children were informed, if not exposed, with some becoming hostile to their fathers. I elaborated on this issue in Chapter Five

Women identified that the post-violent phase mainly consisted of going to their natal family and/or temporary leaving the household, or arguing with other family members. Panna provided examples:

He beat me. I left his house and went to my parents...I came back three days later. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

In the post-violent phase, women sometimes stopped talking to their husband for a few hours, even for a few days. Every survivor I interviewed applied the 'no-talk' strategy with her husband and in-laws several times in their lives:

I stopped talking and made separate beds for few days. (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

However, most of the time the 'no-talk' strategy only applied when violence was limited to once off punching or kicking. When physical assaults caused women to seek medical treatment, they were more likely to go to their natal home or to other relatives' houses for few days. Saima presented a detailed view of temporary withdrawal, returning to her birth family's home, with her birth relatives encouraging her to return to her husband:

I went to my parent's home with the children. After few days, he came to take us back, but I refused. Then my father-in-law came and promised that he will not beat me anymore. My parents asked me to return. For few more days I stopped responding to his order or needs and slept in separate beds. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Silence and removing themselves from the marital bed were identified as powerful moves against their husbands' violence. However, caution had to be exercised in relation to rigidly applying these commonly experienced phases. The women varied in their responses, based on the specificities of their situations and nature of abuse. Ten out of the sixteen women got support from natal family, friends, neighbours and relatives to cope with the violence. Several other studies also confirm this pattern of response (Leone et al. 2007; Mannan 2002; Naved et al. 2006; Sabina & Tindale 2008; Sayem & Khan 2012). Positive and supportive help from family and community often encourages survivors to seek formal help. Pressure to return to violent spouses usually results in a reversal of help seeking. For instance five women I interviewed wanted to leave their husbands due to severe physical beatings but their parents and local community members advised

them to stay in the marriage. In three cases, the survivors fled their marital homes but their parents pressured them to return.

The most favourable strategies that twelve women reportedly applied was to ask for help from informal sources, such as neighbours, in-law family members, especially brothers and fathers-in-law, parents, siblings, and sometimes children. Seeking help from immediate family members or neighbours is also documented in other research in Bangladesh (Bhuiya, Sharmin & Hanifi 2003; Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005). When the women faced repeated violence that continued in spite of all their preventative efforts, and/or when violence became intolerable or threatened their lives or their children, they initiated help seeking from natal family members or friends. Survivors sometimes asked for other assistance from the family networks, community elders, women's organizations and government departments, especially the Department of Women's and Children's Affairs. Single acts of violence were often ignored and left undisclosed.

Some survivors, and in some cases the families of origin of the survivors, sought *salish* mitigation, which was hoped to be a source of formal help from informal community members. But many survivors and their family members experienced some dirty politics in the process. In most cases *salish* was held in the groom's residential area, most often in his parental home. As local people usually attend and facilitate the *salish*, they tend to favour perpetrators or his family for various vested interests. Jahanara explains:

Though the local government's representative better knew him as a wife abuser, but he was not accused, because they are source of votes for the LG representative. I was an outsider in this locality; my parents lived in another area, so we are not source of votes... moreover I am woman and poor so it is easy to put the blame on me. (Jahanara, interviewed 4 October 2012)

However, a few of the survivor's families were powerful in some way, and they obtained some remedy for their daughters by arguing with the *salish* people. There was always the possibility that the well-off family could go to court if they were not satisfied with the *salish* decision. Poorer families did not have this option. Half of the women shared that their birth families were financially better off than their husbands' families.

Thirteen women out of sixteen sought help from *salish*. Eight women shared that they were blamed for the violence at *salish*. Only two survivors described the changing nature of *salish* in the sense that a few of the mediators tried to ascertain the facts and criticized the perpetrator and his parents for the violence. Shamema indicated some of the difficulties getting justice from *salish*. When her parents brought his polygamous relationship to a *salish* meeting, her husband was warned and fined 4500taka⁷² for his adulterous acts. In order to pay the fine,⁷³ the husband sold family resources, such as paddy and goats. But this was not justice for Shamema; rather it caused her double sufferings:

We wanted his punishment for his illegal relations with a woman, but the fine imposed financial hardship for us. If I had known the decision might be like this, I would never have sought help from salish. (Shamema, interviewed 5 December 2012)

Similar situations were observed by Odero et al. (2014, p. 797) in rural Kenya, where punishment inflicted on the offender by the local council often imposed greater difficulties for the economic security of women and their children. This necessitates rethinking punishment by *salish* decision which should take into consideration the impact on the wife and children.

Survivors I interviewed accused the *salish* decision-making process of bias, favouring the most powerful people who influenced or threatened the mediators. Yet, two women survivors informed me that, although they were poor and their

⁷² 4500 taka is equivalent to nearly 1.5 months income of this family.

⁷³ The fine would be payable to *salish* or sometimes to the local government office.

families were not influential, they got justice from *salish*. Abusive husbands and mothers-in-law had to provide a written commitment to cease being physically violent to their wives. My observation is that in both these cases, the perpetrators' families may not have been sufficiently powerful to influence the mediators.

When the informal arrangement from *salish* failed to bring satisfactory outcomes, a few survivors or their families sought help from Bangladeshi women's organizations or NGOs. Some of them went on to seek help from the police or lodge court cases. Seven survivors I interviewed asked for support from police. One of them was denied this support as she was unable to meet their *chanasta korosh*.⁷⁴ With the help of an NGO, she filed a case in the court⁷⁵ but did not get any remedy. Her husband and his family threw her out of the house for having the audacity to lodge the case. Two survivors sought help from the police after being kicked out of the marital home nursing severe injuries and without the custody of their children. Taslima describes how this occurred after her husband married a second wife and cost her most precious possessions:

As I was not giving consent for his second marriage, he injured me and forcibly drove me away from his house, but kept my children. With financial support from my brothers, I went to court and lodged a case against him. With the court order, the police rescued my kids. But this process cost me lot of money, which eventually led to selling my gold ornaments and also taking few loans. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

The costs and risks go some way to explain why so many survivors were not interested in lodging formal complaints to police or the court(see also Shehabuddin 2008). An important factor obstructing women's access to legal rights is poverty. Women's financial impoverishment often forces them to be silent about abuse at least where the law is concerned.

⁷⁴In Bangladeshi corruption style bribe is often labelled as *Cha nasta khorosh* (cost of tea and biscuits), a gentle form of asking a bribe.

⁷⁵In Bangladesh, if someone fails to lodge his or her complaint at the police station, he/she can go to court to lodge the complaint.

Violence in households can escalate and extend into other familial relations. For the survivors who had husbands that pursued extra marital relationships, hid their polygamy or openly took on another wife, the temptation was to use retaliatory violence against their husbands but also against incoming girlfriends or wives. Some women fantasised about harming if not killing their husbands while others went further and instituted premeditated violent plans. Basona described:

There was a clear sign of his infidelity, such as he was reluctant to have sex with me. I confronted him, but as usual he denied. Being desperate I followed and found him in that woman's house. In return I was beaten severely. He did not feel guilty, rather suggesting he just having fun; I was lucky that he had not married her yet. I got so heated that I planned to kill him. One day while he was sleeping, I tried to kill him with a pillow covering his mouth but he woke up and pushed me back and ran away. (Basona, interviewed 11 September 2012)

Due to her challenge, Basona was beaten the very next morning and subsequently divorced by her husband who now feared for his safety. Although their husbands' insults and beatings led some women to use retaliatory violence, most women were not aware of the risks of doing so, especially the legal consequences. The irony is that when women used [retaliatory] violence it often gave their husbands the chance to blame them for their eviction and requests for divorce, bypassing their responsibility for initiating violence in the first place.

Some women I interviewed described how they tried to fight back at the time that the abuse or violence was happening, not just verbally or through silence or absence, but on occasion by physically defending themselves. Seven survivors confirmed that sometimes they vigorously participated in verbally abusing their husbands and mothers-in-law. They either pushed him or threw objects at him when he started to perpetrate physical violence. Three survivors corroborated that they resorted to violence as a self-defence strategy, pushing him back and biting his hands in an attempt to stop his beating, but not meaning to hurt him. Other

studies (Jahan 1994; Mannan 2002) also identified this self-defence strategy among Bangladeshi women. In most cases among my interviewees, arguing back, verbally scolding and especially hitting back were risky strategies that led to the escalation of physical assaults against the women and the likelihood of incurring more serious injuries. Jahanara provided a good example of this. She hit her husband back but in return was left with a severe head injury, a broken arm and bruised spine. It is important to note that most often survivors did not directly hit their husbands but endured the abuse as long as possible, until outside intervention became available.

Economic independence can offer survivors more options, including the option of externalising the violence and/or retaliating. Jahanara provided a concrete example of this in Chapter Five. Having an independent income, she dared to ask her husband to fulfil her sexual needs. When she was accused and beaten for his sexual failure, she also beat, bit, slapped and kicked him. Angry and frustrated, she blamed her husband for the violence while he called her a 'sex maniac'. Jahanara's sexual confidence is not common in patriarchal Bangladeshi society, which would portray her as improper and 'rebellious'. In the cultural context of Bangladesh, women are expected to be submissive, especially to their husbands. They/we are meant to endure violence, adapting and/or correcting them/ourselves to avoid further violence. But Jahanara was the first woman I met who had the moral courage to assert her own sexual interests in marriage. As many women are beaten for refusing their husbands' sexual demands, Jahanara's actions are radical in so far as they challenge patriarchal conventions governing women's sexual behaviour in marriage.

Factors retaining women in an abusive marriage and barriers in help seeking

Women participating in this study identified various reasons for staying with their abusive husbands. Fifteen out of sixteen survivors were reluctant to seek outside intervention in the belief that their home situations might change in the near future. The second most cited reason for the women not disclosing abuse was for their children. Leaving their children behind was not a feasible option for most mothers,

so instead they tried to tolerate the abuse. The third most likely reason to continue silently in an abusive relationship was the attempt to save their family's honour by blaming themselves.

Thirteen out of the sixteen I interviewed had internalised the belief that it would be shameful if she asked for outside help. They primarily believed that it was their own shortcomings that invited violence, so they tried to make adjustments to their husband's violence. In Chapter Five, I described how several women indicated their economic dependency contributed to their risk of DV. This dependency can also encourage the internalisation of shame. I follow Jewkes' (2002) argument that economic dependency can burden survivors with a great wariness of divorce. To manage the potential internal conflict it can be easier to live with the violence if they blame themselves rather than the perpetrators. More pragmatically, three survivors said they did not see their situation improving if they sought help, which bound them to live with abusive husbands.

Earlier in this chapter I explored how asking the police for help with domestic violence or lodging court cases would risk the continuation of the marriage and could worsen the situation. This study has also found that inadequate police intervention can push the women to believe that their husbands' violence was 'normal', and that violence was a normal part of marital life. Twelve survivors questioned the integrity of police and judicial staff in dealing with DV, particularly in providing effective punishment for perpetrators. Four survivors reported how police demanded bribes (see Chapter Five) to note their complaints or to take further action. The costs can be multiple and a great burden, as Taslima explains:

I had to spend a lot to give tea cost to the court staff to gain a court warrant [arrest order] against him. But the police did not rescue my son and arrest him [my husband] with the excuse of having no vehicle to go with police force. I had to give 2000⁷⁶ taka to hire a microbus for the police patrol to rescue my children. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

⁷⁶2000 taka is the equivalent of the cost of two months of meals for Taslima.

Taslina is not alone, Saima also had to bribe 800 taka⁷⁷(\$11) as a form of *cha nasta korosh* [cost of tea and biscuits] to the duty police to file her complaint. These experiences revealed the usual police practices about DV cases towards poor women. They provided examples that most of the time police were reluctant to take action, when the demanded bribe was not paid. Not being able to afford bribe was another simple but powerful reason preventing many women from seeking help from the police when they experienced domestic violence. I think it is not always because of the bribe that the police are inactive; rather I suspect that they use the 'bribe' to discourage women from lodging a case, as the law enforcing agency still sees DV as a normal feature of married life (BNWLA 2006-2007).

Changes to police station settings and practices relating to taking domestic violence reports seem to be needed. Four women I interviewed informed me that they felt uncomfortable in the physical settings of the police stations they attended but also with the police message that they should 'compromise with their husbands'. Bribery and collusion must be eliminated as they obstruct the judicial process. Seven women strongly argued that when any case was lodged, police profit from both sides: asking for bribes from the plaintiff to advance the case and taking bribes from perpetrators to leak information or delay a court order. Morjina described:

Following my application, the court ordered police to arrest them. Though they were in the locality they were not arrested but informed by the police to leave the place before the proceeding...He [violent husband] threatened me, 'I bought the local police, and they will never arrest me'. (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

Situations like this provide further insights into why so many Bangladeshi women are abused in their homes and feel trapped by the actions or inactions they pursue. Staying with abusers sometimes occurred as a result of the women's fear

⁷⁷ 800 taka is the equivalent of the meal cost of 15 days.

that the police would not help them; that they might be harassed by the police if they sought help; and that the police would consider the case as not serious. Jahanara said:

The duty police advised me that it's natural to be beaten in a marital relationship and I should be more enduring and that the police had other serious crimes to deal with. (Jahanara, interviewed 4 October 2012)

This study resonates with criminologist Mooney's (2000, p. 95) finding that many abused women did not report their husbands' violence to police for a number of reasons: further repercussions and embarrassment from the perpetrators, and police attitudes to DV as a private issue and insignificantly important to lodge a case. The judiciary including police's response to domestic violence has been, and continues to be the subject of extensive criticism by researchers and women activists in Bangladesh (and elsewhere in 'developed' and 'developing' countries). Making the situation worse for women survivors of domestic violence is police corruption and a lack of understanding of the law and/or improper implementation of laws, as well as the lack of gender sensitivity among many. Some of the women I interviewed reported that police sometimes act as violators rather than protectors.

Moreover, police reluctance to provide support to survivors was often based on the belief that the charges were likely to be dropped so the time and effort involved were not warranted. It was evident that the majority of survivors primarily lodged a case or came to police to frighten the husband so that he would stop the abuse or take her back. Some women were later disinclined to continue the case against their husbands; even when police arrested the husband, it was the wife who asked for his bail (HRW 2012). Taslima and Morjina speak to this:

I withdrew the case for the future of my children, as he was the only earning source. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

I was forced by my parents to drop the charge against him, as this would destroy my other sister's marriage prospect. (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

There is a lot of social and cultural pressure not to pursue domestic violence charges against perpetrators. Moreover, the survivors I interviewed mostly want to stop the violence but not the relationship, therefore at one stage they would withdraw their charges. Panna shared a heart-breaking story of betrayal by her brother:

When I was injured and thrown out of his house, my brother supported me in lodging the case against him [her husband]. After few months, all of sudden he persuaded me to drop the case doubting I could ever win the case...I later learnt that my brother had been compromised by him with cash 30,000 taka.⁷⁸(Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

This experience suggests in Bangladeshi society, women's desires and voices are often ignored. Women's justice seeking behaviour depends on others, and they can only continue their complaints as long as their families or relatives keep providing support. This is one manifestation of the patriarchal attitude that considers women as 'subordinate' to and 'dependant' on men and their families, natal and married.

Most of the women I interviewed primarily tolerated abuse because they believed that their husbands had the right to use violence. Twelve out of the sixteen women in this study initially preferred to endure the abuse and not seek divorce or lodge a police complaint, believing and/or being advised that their husbands' abuse was not a crime. The women stopped short of condemning the men's violence outright. Twelve women believed the beatings were not justified if the wives were not at fault or had not made a mistake, but they were justified if:

- Wives repeated the same mistakes;

⁷⁸30,000 taka is equivalent to six months' income of her husband.

- Wives failed to meet their husbands' expectations;
- Wives committed adultery or were sexually unfaithful;
- Wives constantly disobeyed their husbands, did not listen to them, or otherwise challenged their husbands' authority;
- Wives ignored or did not take care of her in-laws, quarrelled with them or only cared for her own parents and siblings;
- Wives kept telling others about their husbands' weak points;
- Wives who flaunted their beauty to others, especially other men;
- Wives who did not pray five times a day after their husbands had asked them to do so;
- Wives who regularly refused to have sex with their husbands, except if they were seriously ill or injured.

Significantly, the majority of the women who participated in this study provided so many caveats that allow men to beat their wives that it is clear that spousal violence is still considered a 'normal' part of bridal life. Internalising their inferior status, these women accepted the often brutal penalties levelled against wives seen to challenge their husbands' authority, refuse to have sex, or flaunt their beauty. Only three of the sixteen women supported the view that husbands never have the right to beat or abuse their wives. The need for a growing consciousness of the problem of men's violence and women's basic rights to safety and protection is still evident in Bangladesh.

I found justifying violence is a coping strategy women followed, similar to the Arab Muslim women reported by Haj-Yahia (2000), who had no or minimal legal or social protection and who also tended to justify abuse by husbands. To the question of whether a husband had the right to beat his wife, like Schuler, Yount and Lenzi (2012, p. 1184), I found women were very likely to reply with descriptive answers that fit with community norms rather than expressing more candid and assertive opinions. It can be hard to know how much the women who justify their husbands' violence adhere to these beliefs or mouth them in the view that to do otherwise would risk being stigmatised for challenging gender norms. However, I

also wondered whether the difference in status and the power imbalance between me and the survivors might encourage them to conform to conventional opinions.

It is worth noting that when these survivors finally disclosed the violence to external agencies, including the abuse associated with being thrown out of their marital homes and needing to take shelter in a state organised residence, sometimes against their birth families' support, they changed their views. When they started living at shelters they no longer defended their husband's right to abuse them. Even in the interview, when they went to the part of the story where they described violence, they opposed the husband's right to abuse his wife. This is interesting as it illustrates the contradictory views and multiple discourses they hold and how the view that 'my husband was justified' doesn't stand up when it comes to describing his violence and abuse.

The women's justification of some level of husbands' violence can be explained by Kandiyoti's discussion of 'classic patriarchy', which offers some benefits to women (Kandiyoti 1988). Through marriage women first gain an approved personal and social identity and social prestige in the community (Alam 2007, p. 41). The second benefit women gain from this system is when she gives birth to a son. Once their son's marriage is arranged they too can become a 'controlling authority' over their own daughters-in-law (Kandiyoti 1988). To obtain the benefit from the classic patriarchy women must conform to its rules and norms or risk being punished for their transgressions and stigmatised if they get a divorce. One of the ways this manifests is through justifying and/or complying with their husbands' violence (Kabeer 1988). Taslima explained:

Though I was regularly beaten, I had a social identity as 'someone's wife'; it is better to be beaten rather than getting divorced. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

Taslima's statement was a calculated assessment of her limited options. Preferring to be beaten than divorced is a compelling statement for a woman to make. Women's economic dependency on men and the negative social attitudes

related to 'divorced women' encourage many women to accept the violence and stay in their marriages.

As I have indicated, the Bangladesh socio-cultural context discourages women from seeking outside help to avoid dishonouring their families. Of the sixteen women, two women left their husbands, eight were kicked out, but none of them sought divorce. Most of them considered the label 'divorcee' as one that brings stigma and shame to them and their birth families. As in Indonesia (Aisyah 2007), divorced women in Bangladesh are often considered as 'bad and provocative'. They often have limited or no opportunity to mix with men after they are divorced, even to talk to them or go out with them. Basona detailed her situation that reflects how divorced women can be treated as suspect:

My female neighbour was suspicious whether I was talking with her husband. She considered me as a 'potential threat' to her marriage.
(Basona, interviewed 11 September 2012)

Divorced women are not only distrusted, but sometimes are considered cheap and easy to approach for illicit sexual relationships. Saima also experienced an illegal sexual proposal from a distant male relative immediately after her divorce, which eventually caused her to leave that secure home.

To avoid those negative social connotations, even economically independent women were often reluctant to seek divorce. I found that social and cultural stigma discouraged women from seeking divorce or the possibility of re-partnering. But it is not only cultural norms and traditions that prevent women from seeking divorce. Women's restricted right to instigate divorce also obstructs them, as Panna describes:

I wanted to win him over, and let him down at least once in my life by divorcing him so that people can laugh at him! When I contacted the local government office, I came to know that my husband did not delegate me

the right of divorce. I was advised to go to the court to claim the right.
(Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

Panna conveyed the difficulties many women face if they want to get divorce, which ultimately compel them to continue in abusive marriages.

However economic, social and cultural obstacles are not always insurmountable. Two women responded to DV by applying for divorce with the support of their parents. Family intervention still plays a significant role in women's responses to DV, whether it is deciding to stay in an abusive marriage or seeking outside intervention

The other barriers to seeking outside intervention

Various obstacles fall upon on survivors when they want to end the violence in their lives. Rahima described the toll it took on her mental and physical health:

It takes a lot of time, heartache and hard work to come to a shelter. His disloyalty, his mother's complaints about my domestic skills left me with a legacy of degradation and feeling useless. These all damaged my ability to even think of asking for outside help and it was ultimately his decision to leave me and the children. (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

While some services are available for survivors in Bangladesh (see Chapter Three), women rarely used them. Very few women were aware of the services. Of those that did, they still faced significant challenges accessing such services. For example, women needed to travel to the city to ask for help from VAW cell. Or they needed to travel to new locations, such as the Women's Affairs Office, to police stations, or to the *Upazilla Nirbahi Office* (UNO), which provides legal and counselling services and sometimes provides steps to mediation. Like other countries described by Odera et al. (2014), Bangladeshi women's access to domestic violence services are complicated by governmental policies and societal norms that hold victims largely responsible for the abuse perpetrated against them.

Obtaining legal services to press charges against their husbands was difficult for the women I interviewed. Saima explained how one government authority did not work with another to promote her case:

I went to lodge a criminal case against him for severe beatings. Police asked me for a medical certificate. Though I got treatment from the Upazilla health complex they did not provide me any medical record. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Sometimes government authorities deliberately omit to undertake work so as to avoid future work likely associated with domestic violence court cases. Mostly health providers are reluctant to provide medical certificates (MC) for fear of further involvement such as being called as witnesses in court or being compromised by the accused to provide a defective MC (Mia 2013). Seven women informed me that the village paramedics and sometimes the doctor [health professional] ignored their injuries if they did not involve grievous physical harm. Panna explained that even needing stitches does not necessarily result in obtaining a medical certificate:

His beatings caused three stitches in my forehead, but the doctor did not consider it serious when we asked him to provide a certificate. (Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

Obtaining evidence of the injuries women incur from domestic violence is not easy in Bangladesh. Morjina reported how she was informed about her husband bribing the village doctor not to give her a medical certificate, as her husband knew that this certificate could be provided as evidence in the court. Saima explained how her neighbours were not prepared to serve as witnesses for her in court for fear of her husband's retaliation:

Although some of the neighbours were sympathetic to me they were not coming to give evidence in court as they were threatened by him. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Vexatious claims by men charged with domestic violence against their wives were not uncommon (HRW 2012). This is another deterrent to women stepping forward and trying to press charges against their violent husbands and/or in-laws. Nazmun explained:

When I petitioned the family court for maintenance, he got angry and filed criminal charges of 'theft and trespassing' against me, claiming that I unlawfully entered his home and stole jewellery, cash and clothes. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

Because she dared to seek help from a NGO worker to divorce her husband, Sharmeen was blamed for adultery. The husband then threatened Sharmeen's parents that he would go to court for 'restitution of conjugal rights'. In Bangladesh, such a complaint is enough to ruin the wife's family's name, especially those who have unmarried daughters. In some cases, after a few days or months the husbands dropped the criminal charges knowing they were pursuing false cases that were designed to stop their wives from proceeding with charges of domestic violence against them. This pattern was noted in research by Human Rights Watch (HRW2012), which also reported the practice of husbands harassing their [ex]wives who seek justice.

For many of the reasons described in the discussion above, domestic violence victims are often unsure of how their friends and family members will react to a disclosure. The culture of hiding domestic abuse and projecting the face of a happy marriage restricts the possibility of family and friends supporting survivors' attempts to stop the violence and/or end their relationships. There is also the possibility of being blamed for the violence and forced to return to one's perpetrator. In Basona and Nazma's cases, their parents vehemently opposed their desire to get divorced, even though both women experienced violence within

their first year of marriage. Rahima was in a similar situation to five other survivors, who wanted outside intervention but had parents who discouraged them from seeking it. Their parents compelled them to stay with their abusive husbands. Shanta said:

My parents asked me not to go to lodge a police case, as this will destroy the marriage prospects of my two unmarried sister. (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

Bangladeshi women's experiences of domestic violence are different from many Western women's experiences, most of whom will not have to fear that their sisters' marriage prospects will be jeopardised if they report abuse. Because of the socio-cultural tendency to blame victims and stigmatise the families from which the victims came, the pressure on women victims can be intense. Assumptions are made that if an elder sister's marriage is not going well it is a 'danger sign' to prospective bridegrooms of the younger sisters. Often parents compel their married daughter to hide the abuse and continue on in the marriage at least until their sisters are married. This was an important reason why many of the women I interviewed came to live at the newly formed government shelters. In all cases except two, seeking refuge in these shelters was a position of last resort, an action taken if they were thrown out of their marital homes and/or abandoned or divorced.

Entering shelter as a last resort

The women I interviewed entered one of the six government-funded women's shelters for a variety of reasons, including the desire to stop the violence; wanting to reinstitute conjugal rights; to obtain maintenance and child custody; to start living independently; to lodge a case against her husband and in-laws; to overcome a food and shelter crisis; and to reduce harm to their children. At the time of the interview (22 October 2012) Morjina was with two children and had been married for seven years to a man forced by his family to marry her. Before marrying him Morjina had not been informed of this or about his affair. On their wedding night he revealed that he had married her only because his parents

pressured him to do so, to obtain cash in exchange for the marriage. After the wedding she was physically and mentally abused. Her husband made additional demands for dowry and when her impoverished parents were unable to meet these demands he threw her out of the house. Morjina came to the shelter primarily for housing as her natal family pressured her to remarry an old man, and legal support to lodge her case against her husband. Five of the women I interviewed entered the shelter system to get legal support to end their husbands' violence. They were also hoping to gain access to training with a view of earning a livelihood in the future.

Food insecurity and housing difficulties were also identified as important reasons for seeking shelter by women.⁷⁹ After her husband left them, Saleha, a mother of three, could not afford both food and rent in Dhaka city. She started working as a domestic help in three different households and earned only 1500 taka (\$24) in a month, spending 800 taka (\$12) for rent. The grind of the poverty and hunger brought her to the shelter with her children:

I can't even provide them [children] two meals. Almost every day I begged the employers to give their leftovers of food to my children. Very often I was given left over phanta bath [dampened white rice]. I had to skip my meals to feed my children and I got sick and sacked from jobs. That brought me to the shelter. At least we are getting three meals. (Saleha, interviewed 28 November 2012)

The dilemmas of trying to be a good mother while dealing with domestic violence were described by some of the women I interviewed. For instance, when Saima's husband remarried, she was kicked out of her marital home with the children. As she had no means to pay rent, she returned to her parents. But she was not welcome there. After three months her father asked her to leave the two children or find her own way of living. She informed:

⁷⁹Important to note – these women were poor. Occasionally some of them had food insecurity even in their husbands' homes.

My father made it clear that he should not have any responsibility to feed my children. But as a mother I could not send back my children where they will not be safe. (Saima, interviewed 28 November 2012)

Birth family members' poverty, shame, negligence and selfishness pushed some survivors into the government shelters. In Bangladeshi culture, a wife gets value and status by other family members when the husband treats her well. The reverse also applies, that is, poor treatment or rejection of wives is taken to mean low value. Five survivors described that while they were beaten or abused they held onto the idea that they had value and status in front of others because they were 'someone's wife'. Post-divorce or separation most of the women lost their value and status, even with their birth family members. Patience for the women's situation soon passed. Taslima described the process of being ostracised:

Being kicked out from his house, I returned to my siblings. After a few months I noticed my siblings and their spouses were not feeling comfortable if I attended any social functions. They behaved as if I am an outcaste, a fallen woman! (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

Taslima and other survivors faced yet another problem. In most cases, their brothers' wives – sometimes even the brothers themselves – detested them returning with children. Brother's wives often considered them a threat to household resources. They often faced harsh criticism from their brothers' wives, many of whom verbally abused them and their children. Tension in the household can escalate quickly, often making survivors of violence homeless for the second time. Basona related:

The whole day I worked for my brothers' family, cooking, washing, taking care of cattle and drying up crop. But my sister-in-law was always unhappy that I and my two children were eating their rice. Being humiliated, one day I dared to remind them that I also have a share in parent's property. My brother asked me to leave the house and go to court to claim the share. (Basona, interviewed 11 September 2012)

Five survivors indicated that they came to the women's shelter after experiencing psychological abuse from their brothers' wives, to get legal support against their husbands' violence. Indicating how painful such abuse can be Jomila concluded:

I endured his [husband's] physical and sexual violence for more than six years. But I never thought my siblings could hurt me more than he did!
(Jomila, interviewed 12 October 2012)

Shanta reported a similar level of desperation. She came to the shelter when her parents and neighbours pressured her to go back to her marital home. Her husband and mother-in-law's violence became so unbearable that she felt desperate enough to come to the shelter.

How the shelter works

When a survivor lodges a case in the violence prevention cell (VAW cell) and applies for accommodation in a shelter, the committee, which is comprised of four members working in VAW cell and shelter,⁸⁰ examines the survivor's situation and then recommends whether she can have a place in a shelter. If offered a place, the survivor has to sign an agreement that describes the rules and norms for residing at the shelter (DWA 2003). Women also need to bring a family member to confirm their situation and address. A combination of many factors is prioritised before a place in a shelter is allowed. The committee makes its decision based on the woman's personal circumstances, if she has no other place to stay or her security is threatened, if she lives in the locality or she needs urgent legal or medical help (DWA 2012).

Survivors who lodge a case in VAW cell are only eligible to stay at a women's shelter for a maximum period of six months, along with two children if they are aged under twelve. This is the only pathway into the shelter. A woman with two children is likely to be assigned a bed in a shared bedroom with three or four other women. Bathrooms are shared, and the women are expected to do household

⁸⁰The four members are assistant director, doctor, lawyer and social welfare officer; all of them are working in the respective shelter.

chores, like making their own beds, cleaning and tidying their rooms and the toilet. During their stay at the shelter, food, medical treatment, clothing, legal help and other essentials are supplied free of cost (MoWCA 2008-09).

While women stay at a shelter, the magistrate of a VAW cell first issues a notice to the defendant, based on the information provided by the survivor. In most cases this notice is issued to husbands and in-laws who are required to appear before the VAW cell. Ordinarily, when the accused appears, mediation takes place. Sometimes the mediation continues for 2 or 3 sittings. If the husband and in-laws agree to allow the wife to return to the marital home, an agreement or bond needs to be signed by the accused assuring the VAW cell that they will not abuse the survivor anymore. If the accused does not agree to continue the marriage and proceeds for a divorce, the VAW cell initiates the divorce process, assuring dower [alimony] and proper maintenance for the wife, defining the process of dower payment and settling the custody of children. If the husband/ accused does not communicate or does not appear after three notices are served, the VAW cell sends the notice to the police station for them to take action. The notice serves as a warrant, and if the accused still does not appear, the case is sent to the family court by the VAW cell lawyer.

The MoWCA's efforts aim to provide safe accommodation and a violence-free life to survivors and their minor children. What is the evidence of how well the services do this? It is now time to discover whether DV survivors themselves are happy with the services that have been provided.

Survivors' experiences of women's shelters: empowering and/or imprisoning?

Different sources were mentioned by survivors for finding out about shelters. Three women I interviewed learned about the shelter program from their District Women's officer, four from their NGO workers, and three from neighbours who had previously used the shelter services, two from their local administration and another two from lawyers. Only one woman found out about the shelters from her police station. To get to the shelter, most of the women needed to travel at least

three to four hours on the bus and rickshaw and pay 100-125⁸¹ taka fare, making their way in a large strange city, often with children and no other money.

Shelters are being sought by some Bangladeshi women survivors of domestic violence sometimes as a last resort. Shelters offer them the chance to share stories and experiences with others survivors (also see Krishnan, Hilbert & VanLeeuwen 2001, p.30). Though it is part of the shelter's explicit purpose to facilitate and encourage discussion among shelter residents and with other staff, it is not fostered purposively. All the women I interviewed commented on this opportunity to talk with other survivors, but they initiated the discussion among themselves and found solace. A very insignificant number of staff showed interest to listen to their stories. Similar to the experience of shelter residents in Pakistan (Critelli 2012), while in the shelter, Bangladeshi women also gained both positive and negative experiences in sharing their stories and re-thinking themselves.

Shelter services encouraged some of the women to reassess their circumstances. After two years of believing she had no other options than working for her brother's family and begging for their pity to continue, Rahima finally came to the shelter:

When I came to know about shelter, I felt like there is still chance to think of separate living. It's better to work for myself rather than as an unpaid housemaid for brothers. Why should I continue to suffer mentally at the hand of sister-in-law and unkind siblings? (Rahima, interviewed 22 November 2012)

Morjina also reflected on how much suffering she might have avoided had she known about the shelters earlier:

I started thinking if I had come to know shelter information earlier, I wouldn't have had to suffer all the physical and mental torture year after year. (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

⁸¹ This amount is worth a lot to a survivor as with it they could buy 4 days meals.

Shanta mentioned that the shelter helped her and others in the same situation to think about their circumstances from a different point of view. Shanta explained how she was encouraged not to think of herself as a helpless survivor:

I found some of the staff are very good at inspiring us that since we showed the courage and strength to leave the abusers, nobody could abuse us easily in future! (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

For many of the women, the shelter provided them with their first opportunity to speak openly about their experiences with other women in similar circumstances – *without being judged*. Talking with other women and being informed about other available help, women gained the strength to negotiate with their husbands, or in some cases, with shelter staff. Counselling from another project named the Multi-sectoral Project on VAW (MSPVAW) is designed to help (re)build their self-confidence. Shaheena, who had been at the shelter for five months with her two children, reflected on the positive changes in herself:

Since I came here I have changed a lot in a sense that I no longer believe that a husband has any right to beat a wife even if she makes mistakes. Now I think I am not as helpless as previous days! (Shaheena, interviewed 3 December 2012)

Access to women's shelters can empower women to become aware of their rights. This provides new thinking to reframe their previous experiences of isolation, shame, stigma and disempowerment to rights. Saleha and Jahanara were very confident about raising children on their own and facing the upcoming challenge to start an independent life if the shelter provided the loan to buy a sewing machine as they had received sewing training.

However, more than half of participants shared negative experiences of the shelter services. Some women continued to feel helpless, especially financially. They felt the shelter service failed to provide them with the proper support,

especially financial support to meet their need to come to grips with the economic and social hardships they would face after leaving the shelter. They also needed emotional support, non-judgemental behaviour and counselling while they were in the shelter; income generating training and the provision of loans to start an independent life; legal support during and after their stay at shelters to pursue their complaints; support for their children's education during and after shelter stay; support to link to other safety net and job opportunities and follow up their situations when leaving shelter. Above all they want freedom of movement while in shelter. Nazma felt so overwhelmed that she hoped to return to her husband. She wanted him to agree to provide separate living arrangements and give written consent not to be violent in future:⁸²

I have endured a lot but I still want to go back, as I have no other option. The shelter has not provided me any skill to undertake independent living with the children. There is really nothing... entering the shelter rather jeopardized my chance to return to him! (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

Several survivors were also unhappy with the management of shelters. Once inside the shelters, the women are under surveillance around the clock. They were forced to curtail any communication with any male well-wisher whether friend or relative. If a survivor is known to maintain contact with such men she is harshly criticized and risks having her place at the shelter terminated. Saima revealed that she had a male well-wisher who might have married her had he not been so constrained in communication. She said, *'the shelter is a jail with many suspicious mothers-in-law, who constantly judge us'*. Saima's comment is poignant. In her experience going to the shelter felt like a re-enactment of the kinds of control, domination and abuse she suffered at the hands of her mother-in-law. It may indicate the conventional and patriarchal values of the workers, which have never been challenged. Their mother-in-law's behaviour is consistent with these values, not something that has 'infiltrated' their otherwise feminist views. These

⁸²These kinds of no violence contracts have been widely used to good effect in Bangladesh over the years

patriarchal conservative societal values encourage some women to subjugate other women whom they view as members of a 'subordinate class'. Similar judgmental attitudes of shelter staff were documented in Pakistan state funded shelters when a survivor tries to become involved in an affair or even when she wants to return to her husband (Bari 1998). This indicates that in this subcontinent class-based discrimination is still in place.

Panna also found living in the women's shelter hard, particularly in relation to the insensitivity and negative judgements by shelter staff:

We came shelters to find solace but every moment we were judged very insensitively. We do not want to return but living here also not peaceful. It is like wherever we go, our misfortune follows us.(Panna, interviewed 19 November 2012)

Several survivors shared how the staff ignored their needs; how they were rarely asked what kind of remedy they wanted, with staff deciding on the course of action based on the resources immediately available to them. Five women reported that shelter staff initiated divorce, rather than listening to their voices. Nazmun told me:

Most of us were not interested to seek divorce. We came here to end the violence in the relationship but shelter staff were interested in us ending the relationship. (Nazmun, interviewed 1 November 2012)

In most cases, the survivors sought shelter support to return to conjugal life with help from others to persuade their husbands to stop their abuse. Taslima remarked that shelter staff failed to understand that each survivor has her own unique concern. Two survivors were very unhappy with shelter management, specifically the type and amount of food and the speed of criticism. They also drew links between the abuse they received from their mothers-in-law and the shelter staff:

We thought we could get legal help in the shelter, but...they were not providing any such support. We get morning breakfast at around 11 am,

lunch around 3.30 pm. Though the children were crying for breakfast since early morning, we are not given anything for the children. (Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

In our husbands' house we only have one mother-in-law. Unluckily in the shelter, we have many mothers-in-law who looked for our mistakes. Those people who are meant to be supportive, in many instances they accused us! (Nazma, interviewed 5 November 2012)

The women in this study were particularly critical of the jail like atmosphere, the untrained staff and the inadequate support for the women to rebuild their lives. Poor hygiene, lack of cleanliness and overcrowding were other problems. Residents usually do their own cooking, cleaning and minding children. Although staff and residents confirmed that they cleaned rooms regularly, my own inspection of the rooms that I visited showed many adults and children living close together, often in messy and filthy rooms. Previously in my capacity of coordinator of shelter and also currently in my capacity as a researcher,⁸³ I had the privilege that allowed me to 'inspect' the rooms. However, the physical environment of the shelters was very unhealthy, except for one. Each of the room has 5 or 6 semi-double beds, which covered the whole room's surface, so there was barely any place left for keeping survivor's possessions or walking through. Their clothes were usually hung on the two or three single clothes' stands, while the women's personal belongings (like their suitcase, bag, umbrella, soap, oil, creams or other items were stored under the beds). No bedside table or chest of drawer was seen. Taslima was unhappy that her two school-aged children were also locked with her in a room, with no space to play, treated as if they were criminals, and not allowed to play outside.

The majority of survivors that I interviewed were dissatisfied with the management of children at the shelter. Ramisa informed me that when she requested one of the staff to mind the children while they were in sewing training, she was scolded

⁸³As this research has received permission from the government of Bangladesh, I was allowed to physically visit the shelters; in addition, my previous work with DWA granted me the privilege of 'inspecting' also the rooms.

and advised to do it herself. She said the staff member added, *'While you were in husband's house, did you have a child carer?'*

Another problem relating to shelter life and children involved prohibiting children over twelve years old from accompanying their mothers. This often created tension and worries among mothers. For instance, Taslima had to leave her older boy with other relatives. Some even lied about their children's ages so that they could accompany them in the shelter. For instance, Shamema lied about her son's age. Later when it was found the boy was actually thirteen years old, she was asked to send the son elsewhere immediately. She had no reliable place to send her son. Later a distant relative provided shelter for her son in exchange for his labour.

While in the shelters, the women said that they were often labelled 'melodramatic' and were sometimes accused of provoking domestic violence. Twelve survivors complained of this and said that most of the shelter staff had no sympathy. The women said that staff often accused women of being 'ill tempered' and judged them for 'such ill-motivated and bad behaviour' that they were 'thrown out and abandoned'. Shanta said:

We often face insulting comments from staff, such as 'what wrong have you done that made him violent?' *'A man can never beat wife without any reason – there would be "no smoke without fire".'* (Shanta, interviewed 10 December 2012)

The women's experiences highlight on-going societal attitudes towards survivors who asked for shelter service. In Bangladesh, many people including service providers still consider that domestic violence should be resolved within families, not relying on outside intervention. Class differences are also evident. Survivors' help-seeking attempts, particularly requests to live in a shelter, are still viewed as a 'lower class' phenomenon. This might be one reason why some shelter staff devalue and undermine survivors. It is worth noting here that the workers are from different socio-economic status, ranging from low-middle income to middle

income groups. They also have educational qualifications ranging from Secondary School Certificate (SSC) to a Master's degree.

The women residents told me that shelter homes often proved ineffective in providing legal support and facilitating the women's involvement in income generating activities. Morjina, who joined the shelter after her natal family pressured her to remarry an old man, filed a case against her violent husband to claim maintenance and dower. After six months at the shelter there was no significant improvement in her case. She was very unhappy with what she saw as minimal legal assistance:

I was like a paposh[bathroom mat]everybody just used but hated me. When I was with my husband, he abused me. When I was with my brother his wife tortured me. And when I sought help from shelter, staff also misbehaved. Where could we go? (Morjina, interviewed 22 October 2012)

Morjina did not get any training except the irregular (and very stereotypically gendered) sewing training. According to Saleha:

The only difference between shelter and the in-law's house was that in the shelter we were not beaten physically, but other mental abuse still following us here! (Saleha, interviewed 28 November 2012)

The women survivors who participated in this study were also not satisfied with the arrangements for school-aged children. Four survivors with school-aged children said they did not receive education. Taslima and Ramisa said these children were 'the worst sufferers'. For them, securing their children's future was one of the main reasons for entering the shelter:

My daughter was in grade four when I came to shelter. She was not provided any schoolbooks. She and the other children, only play and fight with each other all day. I do not know how children will continue study when we return.(Taslima, interviewed 27 December 2012)

There is a designated position of day carer and teacher for the children⁸⁴ who is meant to provide basic education to children and literacy to adult survivors in each shelter. However, in practice I was told that only basic literacy help was given to children who are under five years, and very infrequently. The women said that their children were not provided with the chance to attend local schools nearby, even though there are government primary schools within walking distance of every shelter.

The women who participated in this study were also dissatisfied that there was no separate bedroom for adolescent girls and boys. They said that adolescent girls and boys often share same room with 3 or 4 other mothers and children. Six years ago, a rape occurred⁸⁵ in one shelter but still no precautions or other arrangements have followed, only a warning to the girl's mother so that she could prevent the girl mixing any further with the boy accused of the rape. Now whenever staff observe a boy and girl chatting together the young people are immediately sent back to their mothers, with the girl's mother scolded for not minding her adolescent girl. This attitude further confirms the patriarchal approach that only a girl should be under surveillance, not a boy, and that she should maintain an image of modesty and chastity, irrespective of her intentions or desires.

All survivors faced practical difficulties in maintaining their personal hygiene during menstruation. No sanitary napkins were provided in any of six shelters, except one shelter buys some sometimes. Before coming to the shelter, the women used old cloths⁸⁶ for blood absorption during menstruation, and washed and reused them. There was no supply of such old cloths in the shelters. Most survivors (except for three) did not bring such cloths to the shelters. During menstruation, when eight survivors asked for napkins, the shelter staff scolded

⁸⁴The position is named day carer cum teacher who minds the children during the time when survivors are on training and also provides basic education to children and literacy to adult survivors,

⁸⁵One of the staff shared the rape incidence with me; however it was not a public incident.

⁸⁶ This practice of using old cloths for blood absorption during menstruation is common in the poor class in rural areas in Bangladesh

and insulted them, asking whether they previously used sanitary pads at home. Sometimes they were provided with nylon cloths, which were mostly unsuitable for absorption. Menstruating survivors were often asked by co-residents and few staff to clean the toilet again and again, as some of them considered (women's) bodily excretions as polluting and impure.⁸⁷ I found this treatment of menstruating survivors disturbing and it forced me to discuss the issue with the highest authority of the DWA. It is important to mention here that my previous position granted me the privilege and power to ask workers and senior officials why certain things have not been done. From the discussion with the Director General (DG), DWA, I realised that the situation is such because when the shelter homes initiatives were undertaken, no women's activist, or women's NGO was consulted. However, I was assured that this issue would be taken care of from then on. It is worth mentioning here that recently (from December 2014) most of the shelters provide sanitary pads upon getting requests from residents.

According to the government's policy, shelter homes offer multiple services: advocacy, legal support, counselling, and income generating training, literacy, medical treatment, children's education and referral to other social services. However, this study found that in practice very few of these services were offered, and those which were offered were not in standard forms, such as the age-old sewing training. There was very limited follow-up information for women who left shelters, though there is provision for follow-up. Though the government is committed to end DV, not every survivor was able to experience these desirable outcomes from shelter. Some women had very negative experiences of shelters due to lack of opportunities and resources, caused partly due to the shelter's insufficient financial capacity and partly due to some shelters' staff insensitive and autocratic attitudes.

The ideal, which the survivors also wished to see, of a shelter home is that the staff and shelter management should work in reshaping the survivors' views from

⁸⁷ In Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, during menstruation women are considered as polluted and particularly Muslim women are prevented from carrying out their daily prayers and reading the holy Koran. In rural areas, sometimes women are also not allowed to prepare food or work in rice fields, or even to share a bed with their husbands (SOS children villages 2014)

a perspective of shame and stigma to a perspective of strength and entitlement to rights. Worryingly, they failed to do so, rather, authoritatively following patriarchal tradition in defining survivors as 'bad characters' or 'melodramatic'. I feel that it may be because none of them realized that working with survivors is not merely a paid job: it also helping a woman to start a violence-free life, like other workers who work in support of women in feminist NGOs. When women and children simply had nowhere to go, they found the shelter opportune, though finally it proved ineffective for most of them. When a woman decides to leave an abusive family and enter a shelter, she has to walk against tremendous obstacles. She leaves everything familiar for the sake of a better future for herself and her children, and the shelter worker should ease this transition by providing a warm, supportive and nurturing environment.

As stated earlier, my inquiry as a researcher had some extra advantages allowing me to look into some of the issues and seek clarification due to my previous involvement with shelter home management. However, the interviews with residents and workers and visiting the shelters were very confronting for me. I was part of this system and had significant investment in it in the near past. I could now see the things from a different perspective and this actually led me to rethink my previous position in order to provide effective and need-oriented services to DV survivors in shelters.

Concluding remarks

When other support services proved inadequate, women entered the shelter. Unfortunately they faced abuse by some shelter staff who saw them as melodramatic and unworthy. Analysing the experiences of survivors, I found some shelter staff adopted a critical if not abusive mother-in-law position in dealing with survivors in the shelter. They played the role of 'surrogate abusive mother-in-law', subjugating survivors who are lower in the power relationship. This is not surprising given that the mother-in-law seems to be one of the most powerful positions that a woman in Bangladesh can aspire to.

The government shelters in Bangladesh have a number of problems: inadequate funding, lack of skilled and motivated staff, lack of coordination, lack of referral services, a strong bureaucratic system, and patriarchal mind-sets of some of the staff creating significant barriers to survivors' endeavour to seek justice and live an independent life. There is no alternative to shelter services in Bangladesh to deal with DV, but in order to eliminate DV, the government should undertake action to make shelters enabling environments.

Having detailed the women's responses to DV, and their experiences of living at shelters, it is now time to look at how other respondents defined and responded to DV. The next chapter discusses domestic violence from the perspective of shelter staff, policy makers, women's activists, and NGO executives.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Other Side: Domestic Violence from the Perspectives of Shelter Staff, Women Activists, NGO Executives and Policy Makers in Bangladesh

Just as in other countries, Bangladesh acknowledges that domestic violence is pervasive and a public concern, though initially it was considered as a very private issue. As I illustrated in Chapter Five, domestic violence (DV) is difficult to define because competing views exist in relation to how to best understand this complex phenomenon. Thus, perceptions of DV vary according to the views and values of the person defining it. The understandings and definition of DV held by staff working in shelter homes and by women activists and policy makers are important, as they are the people providing support to the survivors of domestic violence. The observations and understanding of women activists, shelter staff, NGOs personnel and policy makers draw on experiences beyond those of the women in the shelter and thus have the potential capacity to improve the services of DV in Bangladesh. It is important to consider the views of staff and other respondents because of the very critical accounts that the residents provided about their attitudes and services.

This chapter firstly provides details about the respondents, which could be seen to influence their perceptions. The Second Section examines their perceptions about the definitions of domestic violence, while the Third Section discusses the respondents' perceptions about a range of causes of DV from patriarchy and gender inequality, women's dependency on their husbands, religious misinterpretation, dowry, and the personal laws. The perceived consequences of DV on women and children are examined in the Fourth Section. The Fifth Section surveys shelter staff's attitudes towards DV survivors who are living at shelters. It is interesting to identify the very damning accounts of shelter workers given by the residents. Why, according to the residents, are the shelter staff so unsympathetic towards them and how does the staff exhibit this attitude? It is also interesting to find out if shelter staff and policy makers' views are always different or sometimes similar. The Sixth Section describes how some of the staff also

experienced abuse in their personal lives and how this experience affects their service to the resident women. The subsequent Section discusses the perspectives of the shelter staff, NGO executives, policy makers and women's activists regarding mother-in-law's abuse. It also discusses the relationship between skin colour and domestic violence, as some of the respondents experienced prejudice on the basis of skin colour. The chapter concludes with some overall insights in the Eighth Section.

The respondents

The fifteen respondents who participated in this study were drawn from different categories, but all were working in the area of DV. Seven were shelter staff from six shelters, four were policy makers from the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) and the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA), two were women activists and the two were NGO executives who had involvement and in-depth knowledge of management of various DV programs. Of the seven shelter staff, two were assistant directors, one was a lawyer, one was a doctor, two were hearing officer cum social welfare officer and one was a matron cum day carer. These respondents, five men (four policy makers and one shelter staff) and ten women, were not a homogenous group in reference to their socio-economic background. They differed in their views and provided significant information about some of the range of understandings of DV in Bangladesh among those who devise and implement government policy and deliver support services.

All of these respondents were educated: thirteen have Bachelor and Master degrees, one policy maker had a PhD degree. Two shelter staff had only Bachelor degrees. However, they were different in economic, social and professional power and status. The shelter workers generally received modest payment according to their position, and had less power than the policy makers who were highly paid and powerful. The women's activists and NGO executives also were highly paid and holding status and power though not as high as the policy makers. Of the four categories, only the shelter staff had day-to-day involvement with the survivors of DV. The respondents from the other categories had ideas about shelters but did not have direct engagement with the shelter residents. The policy makers were

involved with survivors in that they formulated policy and allocated the budget for shelter residents and staff. Compared to the policy makers, the NGO executives and women's activist had less contact with survivors of DV who were residing in state funded shelters. As noted in Chapter Four, I listed the pseudonyms of the seven shelter staff as: Staff 1, Staff 2, Staff 3, Staff 4, Staff 5, Staff6 and Staff 7. The four policy makers are identified as PM 1, PM 2, PM 3 and PM 4. The two women activists are represented as WA 1 and WA 2 and the two NGO executives are labelled NGO 1 and NGO 2.

Perceptions about the definition of domestic violence

The respondents from the four categories exhibited a very comprehensive general understanding of DV. They opined that DV is widespread in Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas, and because of socio-cultural views towards DV victims, women are reluctant to seek any formal help. Their views echo the survivors' explanations about the definition DV (see Chapter Five).

Staff 1 offered a broad definition of DV:

Any form of physical and psychological abuse towards any family member can be defined as DV – the restriction of the right of one's personal freedom is another pattern of DV. (Staff 1, interviewed 24 November 2012)

A women activist spoke about the specific abuse against women:

Any kind of violence against women in a familial relationship perpetrated either by husbands or in-laws or other family members. (WA 1, interviewed 18 March 2013)

These understandings are similar to the definitions appearing in the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010, which included any kind of violence against women perpetrated by any family members (MoWCA 2010a). Most of the respondents from each category knew and were able to repeat the official definition of DV.

An interesting definition of DV, provided by a shelter staff, was 'social isolation'. This included putting restrictions on the wife's mobility, imposing barriers on mixing and chatting with neighbours, and not allowing the wife to visit her natal home alone. A NGO executive also shared her working experience:

The woman was encouraged and pressurized by the husband to bring her parental share... Brothers and sisters of the woman protested to her, arguing that if she sells the property, there will not be anyone to give her shelter in future if she needs it. She did not care what her siblings suggested; rather, she sold the parental share of land and gave him all the money to start his business. The husband established his own poultry farm and both husband and wife tried hard to make a success. But the irony is that the improved economic condition changed the husband's mind and he yearned for a fair skinned wife, which caused the wife lots of beatings and tortures. Several times she was thrown out of his house. Her brothers were of no help, as she was isolated from them for selling the parental share. (WA2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

The 'social isolation', which three other respondents also identified, pushed women to believe they have nowhere to go and nobody to seek solace from. The women activist further elaborated that eventually many women become overcome with a feeling of helplessness and believe that getting beaten or discriminated against is their ultimate fate.

Perceptions of the causes of domestic violence

Like the survivors (see Chapter Five), these respondents identified different factors that lead to DV in Bangladesh. Eleven out of fifteen respondents stated that no single reason is responsible for DV against women, and not all reasons are responsible in same degree for all women.

Patriarchy, gender inequality and domestic violence

Patriarchal ideologies were identified as the predominant factor initiating and sustaining DV. A NGO executive argued:

The main factor of DV is patriarchy, in which men are given power over their wives. Whatever the husband's economic position, either poor or rich, either educated or non-educated, he has gained unlimited rights over his wife. A husband thinks he is the master of his wife. This attitude encourages him to abuse his wife, if she has done something wrong or if she questions any of his domination. (NGO 1, interviewed 27 February 2013)

This statement confirmed the survivors' experiences and the literature, as described in Chapter Five, revealing the extensive social and cultural acceptance of DV. Ten out of fifteen respondents opined that the patriarchal Bangladeshi culture's view that a wife is the 'man's property' authorizes men to feel entitled to do whatever they wish.

Patriarchal domination through gendered belief and ideologies, which also causes trouble in marital relationships, was described by nine respondents:

In most cases, a wife was usually overburdened with lots of work. If she failed to do any job perfectly, such as not washing and ironing her husband's shirt properly, that caused arguments and fights, and later she would be beaten. Husbands and in-laws expect 100% perfection from the wife in every responsibility. If children made any mistake or children failed in exams, wives were beaten or verbally abused. (WA 1, interviewed 18 March 2013)

These statements emphasized the theme of domination and control, which was fundamental in causing DV against women. The respondents understood that this patriarchal domination was sustained through the gendered belief about the wife's role and responsibilities in the family. There were repeated expressions by women

activists and NGO executives that a chronic power differential within the relationship mostly created an atmosphere in which the wife is beaten or scolded. They argued these gendered roles are nothing but patriarchal domination over a woman.

The majority of respondents also spoke about negative societal attitudes to victims, which promoted DV:

We found many cases where wives were ostracised and blamed as 'a bad wife' for disclosing violence and also fail to adjust with marital disagreement. When a wife was regularly beaten, the same neighbour who showed sympathy for her became antagonistic when this wife resisted DV in her own way; if any woman dared to seek 'divorce' due to DV, society became suspicious about her moral character or blame her.(WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

The narratives conveyed how women were badly treated and blamed because of the violence inflicted on them. They further confirmed how this varied group of respondents understood that the patriarchal society encourages women to be silent about their experiences. They were critical of the role of society, that instead of accusing the perpetrators, it rather ostracises women when they disclose their husbands' violence. All these respondents, except two policy makers, opined that most survivors are afraid of being labelled 'bad wife', and therefore remain in the abusive marriage. They claimed that this is how patriarchal attitudes fuel the fire of DV. These feelings were common among women activists and NGO executives.

Women's dependency on husbands

All respondents considered women's financial dependency increases their risk of DV. An activist said:

A woman's powerlessness compels her to live with her husband's violence and encourage her to conceal this. Moreover as she lacks money she

cannot go to an agency to obtain justice. (WA 1, interviewed 18 March 2013)

This type of explanation was common to all the respondents. They argued that women's dependency on their husbands increased their risk of DV as they have no viable alternative to live, and therefore the husband feels entitled to dominate them through beatings and other injustices. This is not a new issue in domestic violence discourse, and was also raised by the survivors (see Chapter Five). However, these respondents could not explain why empowered and educated women, like Rumana Manzur (see Chapter One), still experience DV. It seems that while analysing the factors of DV, most of the respondents fall back on the dominant thinking which emphasises poverty and women's economic disadvantage and dependence on men or mostly cite the theoretical explanations of DV.

Ten out of fifteen respondents described how patriarchal attitudes regarding women's sexual behaviour also work as a factor of DV. A women activist conveyed:

Sexual violence in marriage is never identified as violence in Bangladesh because a wife is expected to be available for her husband's sexual need. If any woman disagrees with her husband or somehow discloses his sexual violence, it is highly likely she will be blamed for violating gender norms, and that puts her at risk of DV. (WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

This argument indicates that how these respondents realized that the failure in acknowledging the wife's sexual abuse as a problem reflects and also sustains the cultural beliefs about masculinity and femininity. This understanding is consistent with that of prior studies conducted in Bangladesh (Naved 2013).

A male policy maker, a senior authority in the DWA had explanations for the prevalence of DV in Bangladesh. He specified several factors influencing the occurrence of DV:

There are many reasons for a husband's violence against his wife, but I will place importance on the intergenerational transmission of VAW. If a boy sees his father dominating and beating his mother and she is doing nothing but tolerating the violence, he will follow his father's behaviour in his treatment of his wife. On the other hand, a girl sees mother's submissiveness and tolerance of her father's violence, so she learns to be tolerant and enduring her husband's violence when she grows up. But in recent years, some women are not as submissive as their husband's expectation, sometimes even questioning his behaviour, which seems to threaten his authority; he never witnessed this attitude from his mother. Thus, husbands became mad when they find any deviant behaviour from wife. I think that's the primary factor for the cause of violence in many families, though other factors are also there. (PM 2, interviewed 12 March 2013)

This interviewee provided an interesting and unique theory, as this type of explanation has not been backed up by any literature yet. But he did not explain why some women dared to question their husband's authority. The attitudes of this policy maker seemed problematic as he intelligently pointed out the intergenerational transmission of violence but also partly blamed the women's behaviour for DV, and rather ignored men's unjustified act. His statement demonstrates the common patriarchal attitudes of Bangladeshi society towards women.

Religious misinterpretation

Many examples provided by shelter staff, women activists and NGO workers referred to religious misinterpretation as justifying violence against wives, especially in Islam where men were considered as head of household. A women activist argued:

Bangladeshi rural people internalised some religious misinterpretation such as a husband can beat his wife but she should not challenge his

authority. In such a situation, when a wife accuses him, her husband mostly counters the allegations by portraying her as 'disobedient of religious commands'. When a woman is labelled as 'disobedient of religious commands', the neighbour and community deny her the right to ask for justice for her husband's violence, but rather blame her. (WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

This statement illustrated the respondents' understanding how religious misinterpretation along with patriarchal beliefs are used to support and also sustain violence against wives. The respondents also argued that Islam does not allow husband's violence towards his wife. They shared that the Quran asks husbands to be kind and considerate to their wives even if they are not liked anymore. But patriarchy in Bangladesh endorses men's authority to oppress their wives by using misinterpretations of Islam (see also Chowdhury 2009, p. 611). Five respondents out of fifteen said it is the custom and religion that have shaped women's beliefs in such a way that it is a wife's obligation to sexually satisfy husband. Finkelhor and Yllo (1985) name such justification as 'social coercion' which refers to the pressure women suffer as a result of social expectations. These expectations keep women worried whether others are judging them as inadequate. Referring to a woman as a 'bad wife' is society's often unsympathetic criticism of the woman who refuses to surrender to her husband's domination.

Dowry and domestic violence

All respondents identified men's supremacy and their greed for cash through dowry demand as an important factor of DV in Bangladesh. An activist opined:

Many girls' parents offer a big dowry for obtaining a good bride-groom. If the bride has dark skin, the dowry payment obviously becomes larger. The big dowry offers have persuaded the potential groom and their families to marry the dark-skinned girl, though they may feel uncomfortable with her dark skin. The problem arises when the flow of cash and kind diminishes over the course of time. The in-law family then starts abusing the bride. (WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

These statements indicate one reason among many for dowry escalation. These respondents detected a crucial aspect for escalating dowry violence – the devaluation of women in Bangladesh society. Some of the issues have been identified in other research (Chowdhury 2010a; Nasrin 2011). The women activists' opinions reflected others arguing for reducing dowry violence:

As long as a girl is considered a 'liability' to the family, dowry violence cannot be reduced at all despite the law. There should be a change in people's attitude to girls. (WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

All the respondents felt that urgent action needs to be taken to achieve attitudinal change in society about girls, as well as to promote women's empowerment to address dowry problems. Several respondents argued that dowry violence is escalating despite the law because of the corruption of police and judicial staff and the lengthy procedure for case disposal, as well as the weak implementation of law. All respondents provided reasons for dowry-related violence, which were similar to the survivors' accounts (see Chapter Five).

Media and domestic violence

Ten out of fifteen respondents recognised the influence of the media, particularly the patriarchal domination of the media, as a powerful factor in the persistence of DV. A women's activist contended:

The male dominated Bangladeshi media industry portrays women predominantly either as inferior to men or the stereotypical 'good woman' who is submissive to the demands of the husband. Though men ignore many other messages from TV, they enthusiastically accept and follow this. (WA1, interviewed 18 March 2013)

She and also several other respondents gave examples of how the Bangladeshi media helps to reinforce a patriarchal system whose structures and doctrines require women's subordinate position to men; women are mostly portrayed either

as docile housewives or as mothers (see also Begum 2008; Hamid 1996). This factor, discussed by two activists, one NGO executive and three shelter staff, reflected their feminist concerns in identifying the role of the media in problematic representations of women. They argued this stereotypical representation encourages gender-based violence, which has been an issue in feminist studies for many decades (Mattelart 2003). These respondents suggested government action to challenge the stereotypical representation of women in the media. A NGO executive recommended:

The government should pay due attention in identifying and also effectively monitoring the biased projections of women, if DV is to reduce. The media must broadcast programs or stories relating to the improvement of women's status, not just portraying them as victims of violence or as the obedient wife or sexual object. (NGO 2, interviewed 8 March 2013)

Personal laws and domestic violence

Several respondents criticized the law, particularly personal laws on marriage, divorce, custody and maintenance, as contributing factors for DV (see Chapter Three for details):

*Though registration of Muslim marriages is compulsory, I found many marriages were done orally, without a paper document recording any dower. In most of the cases the bride's consent was not heard at all. Rather, she was forced. I witnessed that some brides even did not utter the word *kobul* (I agree)⁸⁸ when asked for consent. (WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)*

Thirteen out of fifteen respondents indicated that marriage practices (see Chapter Three) often were not followed in the proper way, and consequently women's

⁸⁸The Bangladeshi Muslim marriage ceremony usually contains four parts – 1. *gaye holud* [turmeric ceremony], 2. *akhd*, 3. *mala bodol* [exchange of vows] and 4. *bou bhat* [wedding breakfast]. Of these, the *akhd* is the legal declaration of marriage where two witnesses first ask the groom about his consent and then the bride is asked for her consent. In front of witnesses the bride and groom have to utter three times *kobul* [I agree] (Whyte & Yong 2009). The usual scenario is that the bride is asked to say *kobul*, and in most cases women usually say it in a very low shy tone. As long as the witnesses confirm that they heard the bride say *kobul*, the marriage is valid.

sufferings increased when marriages broke up. The women activists and NGO personnel questioned the process of dower payment:

We found there was a lot of hidden politics in determining dower [mehr] – to display as status symbol to others, some grooms' parents record a big amount of dower/mehr in a marriage contract. However, in consideration of the future uncertainty of the marriage, they cleverly reduce the deferred amount by recording the major amount of dower as already usul [paid] or prompt. But when the marriage falls apart, the wife cannot claim anything as the dower money has already been recorded as paid. (WA 1, interviewed 18 March 2013)

The activists and NGO personnel illustrated the hidden truth of dower payment which encourages husband to abuse his wife and finally thrown her out, as he has to pay nothing. Another important aspect of 'the misuse of dower' was identified by a shelter staff member:

Whenever husbands do not want to continue the marriage, they misuse the provision of dower in paying a lump-sum amount of this dower in order to be excused from the legal obligation arising from divorcing his wife for insubstantial reasons. (Staff 6, interviewed 3 January 2013)

From the interviews and informal discussions, several respondents provided thorough accounts of the complexities of dower and gave examples of how the big amounts of dower/*meh* existed mostly only on paper. They were also aware that the dower has recently been misused when divorcing the wife though it was supposed to safeguard women from their husband's polygamy and provide them with economic security (see also Pereira 2002). The two women activists and the NGO executives argued that the dower amount is still determined by the price value when the marriage took place, but after several years, when the marriage breaks down, the dower amount has lost its value due to inflation and the increased cost of living (see also HRW 2012). A women activist contended:

I think, as the dower is payable only to women, the patriarchal Bangladesh society is reluctant to pay the dower at its value at the time of the marriage. I am sure if the husband were allowed to get something from wife, the money depreciation issue would definitely be considered. (WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

This statement demonstrates society's intentional unwillingness to consider women's issues seriously; with the consequence that many women have to face struggles to live. I would also argue that the devaluation of dower over the years is not getting proper attention as it is mostly payable to women, and women's issue still are not paid much attention. Previous research on dower (HRW 2012; Pereira 2002) did not pay much attention to this matter, though they recorded women's difficulties to claim dower.

Personal laws regarding husband's polygamy were recognized as a key aspect of DV. According to a NGO worker:

We deal with a lot of cases lodged by women whose husbands took additional wives. None of these women was asked for permission. I think the insignificant penalties indirectly encourage husbands not to ask their existing wife's permission. The law is there to safeguard his interests, not his wife's. (NGO1, interviewed 27 February 2013)

Like the survivors, ten respondents from this group blamed men's unilateral right to divorce as a factor for DV. The women activists, NGO executives and the other staff all described how Muslim personal laws discriminate against women and double their vulnerability to violence. They argued that a Muslim's wife limited right to maintenance also increases women's vulnerability. Two respondents described:

Upon divorce, women are not allowed any maintenance – they are just thrown out like discarded useless utensils. (NGO 2, interviewed 8 March 2013)

In most cases, when claiming maintenance, the victim failed to provide proof of her marriage, which is a marriage document [kabin] or witnesses. In my 19 years of experience, I found only one woman successfully claiming mehr from the Family Court after four years of court hearings. But, in 2013, three years have been passed since she got the court orders, but she is still waiting for the execution of the order. The law asked her to provide the ex-husband's documents of assets, which is mostly difficult for a divorced woman – I am sorry to say, the law is just a mirage. (Staff 2, interviewed 26 November 2012)

The above statements show the respondents' strong feminist sense of injustice and irony at the fact that Bangladeshi women have inadequate protections regarding maintenance and these are often not duly implemented. In the consideration of maintenance upon marriage break down, women's hard work is not paid due attention. Eleven out of fifteen respondents contended that most of the married women spent their marital life in household work, caring for sick in-laws and rearing children, but the legal procedure fails to consider women's decades of hard work when marriages fall apart (see also HRW 2012).

The fear for losing custody of the children or risking the loss of their parents' support also keeps women in abusive marriages year after year. A staff conveyed:

I dealt with a survivor, name Leena⁸⁹ who was divorced with two children and was living with her parents. After six months, she got another marriage proposal from a good man; but when Leena was informed by a NGO worker that she may lose custody of her children due to marrying a stranger, she became worried and said 'no' to the marriage proposal. Consequently her parents got annoyed and asked her to look after herself. In desperation, Leena came to shelter. (Staff 2, interviewed 26 November 2012)

⁸⁹Leena is a pseudonym which the staff used for describing the case

Thirteen other respondents agreed that women's fear of losing child custody ultimately forced them to remain in the abusive marriage. Women's lack of rights to marital property was also extensively discussed as part of their suffering with DV. A women activist shared:

We dealt with many cases, where women failed to establish any right to marital property; these actually pushed them to struggle hard to survive. The burden doubled when they had children to care for. In most cases when a husband remarried, he kept the homes and other marital property like cows, goats, duck, land, furniture and fisheries, poultry. Many women literally found themselves as fulltime live-in domestic workers in their brother's family. (WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

Banu,⁹⁰ a victim, sold her gold ornaments and savings to buy a land in his name and then took a loan to buy and plant teak trees. The trees grew bigger with her hard work. When she was divorced, she got nothing. The family court asked Banu to provide evidence/receipts that she supplied the money and bought the plants. Banu asked the court how she could know that one day she might get divorced and will need to provide receipts. How could she provide the record of the many hours she spent working for family survival? (Staff 1, interviewed 24 November 2012)

These statements indicate that the limitation of the personal law in not recognizing women's share in marital property causes women's suffering. Six staff informed me that none of the survivors were able to claim anything when their marriages broke down; they were even unable to bring furniture or other gifts that they had received from their parents or relatives during the marriage. A recent report by the Human Rights Watch (HRW2012) also documented that the patriarchal Bangladesh society washed away decades of wives' hard work in a moment when marriages broke down. During the interview, a NGO executive rightly pointed out:

⁹⁰Banu is a pseudonym which the staff 1 used to narrate the story

If women could have equal rights to marital property upon divorce, the husband would think twice before divorcing his wife. He would not even dare to abuse her. (NGO 2, interviewed 8 March 2013)

Women's limited inheritance right is another concern that was also raised by survivors. Five shelter staff, two women activists and two NGO executives had the common perception, blaming religious principle regarding inheritance as triggering women's suffering:

When survivors were kicked out of their husband's house, some of them wanted to build a home in the natal home, but most often the brothers did not allow this and informed them that their share in the parental property was sold for paying the dowry. Brothers challenged them to claim their share from the court, which is not easily accessible for many survivors. This made them homeless for the second time. (Staff 6, interviewed 3 January 2013)

Domestic violence is caused by many factors and is wide spread and often concealed, so it is important to highlight the implications of such abuse from the perspective of those who support survivors in their different capacities.

Perceived consequences of domestic violence on women and children

Chapter Five reported the survivors' description of the negative effects of DV on them and their children. Shelter staff voices were mostly in accord with the views of the survivors. All respondents emphasized the monetary costs of DV that affect the whole society on top of the social and psychological cost to survivors. A NGO executive and a policy maker detailed the scenario:

From my working experience, I observed victims' natal families had to pay medical costs, legal fees and relocation expenses for abused daughters. They also spent their hard earned money on arranging salish and attending courts. Community people also suffered financially by losing working hours

to attend salish meeting – all these have economic effects. (NGO 1, interviewed 27 February 2013)

In order to control DV, the government has to make a big budgetary allocation to manage the revenue and development programs for reducing DV. (PM2, interviewed 12 March 2013)

Though these statements are about quite different things, they emphasize the respondents' concern about the effect of DV on the individual, society and the state. The NGO interviewee was thinking about the burden on the family while the policy maker could think about the costs to the government of a social problem.

The majority of these respondents opined that survivors' suffer physical injuries, mental trauma as well the erosion of their self-esteem and self-confidence. Powerlessness to challenge their husbands' violence compelled women to live with abuse, believing that their husband's violence is normal in conjugal life. Several staff indicated that some abused women felt ashamed to mix with others as they had internalized 'the feeling of inferiority' as a result of being abused.

Several respondents also indicated that due to DV, abandonment or divorce, women's poverty increased which places them at risk of ill health or restricts their ability to spend on health care. This inability led many survivors to turn to traditional treatments. A shelter staff detailed the scenario:

When women were divorced, they were devastated with poverty – we found several women and their children coming to the shelter with a bottle of pani pora,⁹¹ and wearing tabiz [amulet], poverty compelled them to seek religious healing as it cost them very little. (Staff 1, interviewed 24 November 2012)

⁹¹ In Bangladesh, especially in villages many health problems are explained in terms of *kharap batash* or *jiins* or evil eye, caused by an evil spirit, and the cure was believed to be by *pani pora* [consecrated water], *tabiz* [amulet], given by a Muslim religious healer, such as a *Mowlana* (clergy).

It is understandable that financial inability encourages women to desperately seek religious healing and to believe in *kharap batash* and *jiins* ['black magic'] causing the illness. To my surprise, three staff reported that in many instances of sickness, they also sought *pani pora* and *tabiz* along with medical treatment. It struck me that faith in religious healing is not only based on financial circumstances but is also a psychological phenomenon.

Eleven out of fifteen respondents communicated the negative impact of forced sex. The vivid description resembled the survivors' stories and feelings, which indicates that these respondents were well aware of the impact of their husbands' sexual violence on individual women.

These groups of respondents pointed out that women were not the only sufferers as primary targets of abuse. The effects on children were also raised. Like the survivors, the policy makers and other respondents were highly concerned about the detrimental effect of DV on a child's physical, cognitive and social development. A staff argued:

We found several victim mothers, who were not able to breast feed in a timely manner, so most of the children had poor health and severe malnutrition. (Staff 5, interviewed 28 December 2012)

The majority of these respondents provide examples of how DV negatively affects children's physical social and cognitive development either by being directly abused with their mother or indirectly through the neglect of care and nourishment. As victim mothers were often depressed due to beatings or mental abuse, they were unable to take proper care of their infants, which affected the child's growth and nutrition. Their voices vibrated with previous research (Rahman et al. 2012) in understanding that partner violence plays a significant role in compromising child health by impairing child nutrition. This suggests that for improving child nutrition, it is vital to strengthen the support program to reduce DV against women.

Policy makers and activists were also concerned about the devastating long-term intergenerational impact of living with DV, explaining:

A child learns about the world from his/her surroundings: if they see the father violent to the mother, then this is what a child will think a relationship should be; they will know no different. (WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

Thirteen out of fifteen respondents noticed that due to DV at home, children face difficulties in making interpersonal relationships. The shelter staff were concerned about the disruption in a child's education, which echoed with survivors' concern (see Chapter Five). Three staff also described cases where daughters were withdrawn from school and sent to work as housemaids. When a mother was abandoned or divorced, she along with minor children literally became homeless and struggled hard to live. Inability to receive any cash or kind from the marital property forced some mothers to take the children out of school. It is very upsetting to know that more often the daughters were pulled from school and engaged either taking care of the younger siblings or as child labour. This further confirms the sex preference of parents in allocating family resources and suggests that DV may affect the daughter more than the son or at least have gendered effects.

Contradictions regarding perceptions and actions among respondents

The reasons for and background factors of DV as well as its impact, as explained by these respondents, mostly resonated with the survivors' descriptions. The women activists and the NGO executives enthusiastically explained the role of personal laws regarding marriage, divorce, maintenance and marital property in sustaining and increasing DV. Their opinion regarding women's right to the dower and marital property went beyond the established knowledge of DV in Bangladesh, and added further depth and specificity to what is broadly known. As discussed in Chapter Three, Muslim women in Bangladesh generally inherit less than men. But often society encourages women to give up even this limited right (Pereira 2002; HRW 2012). However, I would say that these interviewees have stories that add personal complexity to what is already known, for example, the

complex machinations of family life and how the Bangladesh bureaucracy governs women's lives. What is valuable here is, not so much the broader point about women's rights, which is already known, but the richness of insight and the micro-detail that the workers' stories offered. In light of these micro-insights of women's lives, narrated by staff, policy makers, women activists and NGO executives regarding maintenance, divorce and custody, and marital property rights, I agree with the HRW (2012) argument that rather than offering protection, Muslim personal laws often trap women in abusive marriages, and increase their poverty and homelessness.

However, while most of the respondents emphasized patriarchy as the predominant factor for DV, some of their attitudes towards survivors were problematic and patriarchal too. For example, a high-level Ministry officer, in an extensive discussion on the series of factors resulting in DV, indicated that the wife's behaviour provokes the husband to be violent:

Many factors are at work initiating violence against women. Poverty, the socialization process, lack of education, and dowry demand are mostly responsible for violence against women. I also think, the lack of communication between spouses also sometimes causes violence. For example, some women do not realize that their husbands also have many pressures earning the livelihood for the family; when he returns home exhausted, if a wife asks him to check the children's study, it makes him irritated; or sometimes the wife even accuses her husband with rude words for not bringing the things for the children that she mentioned. It is very usual for a husband to get angry and sometimes venture on violence. I also think poverty is a crucial factor for causing DV, as the husband has no money and the wife asks for shopping, which causes her to be beaten. However, DV can occur in the rich class too, but it is very low compared to the poor class. (PM 3, interviewed 15 February 2013)

The policy maker was well informed about the DV rate of rich families and mentioned 'ego clash' as the factor in that situation. Although he considered that

both men and women can contribute to the occurrence of DV, throughout the discussion he mostly blamed women for provoking their husbands to beat them, clearly revealing his patriarchal mind-set which sympathised with abusive men. Furthermore he accused the socialization process but was not interested to mention the role of patriarchal ideologies in fostering DV; rather, without any critical reflection, he pointed out that men's traditional beliefs cause domestic violence. It is not surprising that none of the male policy makers that interviewed blamed patriarchal domination and attitudes, preferring to blame the traditional mind-set, poverty, socialization, dowry and others factors. They were reluctant to question the basic structure of gender relations and their own position of patriarchal authority. Now arises the big question: if the position holders, who are responsible for formulating policy for eradicating DV, themselves mostly ignore or are not interested in removing the principal causes, preferring to emphasize the secondary causes, how will the increasing trend of DV will be stopped?

The patriarchal attitudes towards DV survivors were not only prevalent among the policy maker but also among shelter staff. The shelter residents reported that some of the staff were unsympathetic and rude to residents (see Chapter Seven).

As detailed in Chapter Four, I interviewed seven staff from six shelters. They had their own opinions about the residents, to whom they were providing service. This direct relationship with the residents was evident in the specificity of many of their views about the women they worked with. The women activists, NGO executives and two policy makers who were not directly involved in shelter managements, had no problems sympathizing with the residents. But some shelter staff had negative attitudes towards the shelter residents. Many blamed the survivors for their difficult predicaments. Five staff claimed that nearly half of the survivors lodged false cases of dowry. They also accused survivors of provoking the violence, before and during their stay at the shelters.

Below are the statements made by some of the staff members, showing varying degrees of disbelief, distrust and in some cases, open contempt for their women clients:

These survivors often manipulated situations while in the shelter. They maintained hostile attitudes toward each other; they often quarrelled with each other and office staff on different issues. We have to engage most of our time to stop their fights. Most of the women who came shelter were stubborn – they often lodged false cases. (Staff 3, interviewed 29 November 2012)

The majority of survivors are jealous, ill-tempered and crooked. These women wanted to control their husbands as a ‘remote control doll’. They often pressure husbands not to feed his parents and to live without in-laws present. Most of them provoked the fight – they were abandoned because of their jealousy and bad temper. (Staff 2, interviewed 26 November 2012)

The above attitudes and beliefs of the workers reflect the survivors’ claims of receiving bad treatment (see Chapter Seven) while in shelters. These attitudes convey the prevalent victim-blaming attitudes among most of the shelter staff I interviewed. The staff’s biased and unsympathetic attitudes indicate a patriarchal relationship to the residents in most shelters, which was further energised by the class difference between residents and staff that caused some staff to oppress the women whom they view as a subordinate class. But one staff objected to the distrust and criticism of victims/survivors, saying:

Although some survivors have behavioural problems it should not be generalized. Whatever the reason behind the violence, survivors came to the shelter for help. Staff should not be condemnatory. (Staff 6, interviewed 3 January 2013)

Staff 6 who is senior shelter worker, seems more sympathetic towards residents, unlike most of the shelter workers. He did not provide any background to his ‘feminist’ attitude in understanding survivors’ difficult struggle.

Residents' stories of inadequate services were reported in Chapter Seven. Most of the staff defended themselves for not being able to meet residents' demands in a timely manner. Six out of seven staff said that being overburdened with work was often one of the reasons for failing to provide timely and effective services to residents. They argued for recruitment of more staff to run the shelter more smoothly.

In every shelter there are twelve positions (officer and supporting staff) (DWA 2012). However, not all the positions were filled in every division. While conducting the interviews in 2012, I found some of the shelters appeared to be under-staffed while others seemed to be over-staffed. But during my visit I did not find any shelter full with the designated number of fifty residents. In two shelters I found staff and survivors in equal numbers. During the interview, I found only one assistant director against new staff recruitment in the shelter. He opined:

The government should not recruit any more staff. Rather, this budget could be spent on survivors. I believe only two supporting staff could run a shelter, as no shelter yet had twenty survivors at a time. (Staff 6, interviewed 3 January 2013)

However every shelter authority except the above one was asking for more staff, which roused my interest to find out more. One of the assistant directors claimed that due to nepotism and the partisan recruitment process, the shelter management were often unable to get staff to properly perform the work:

I have a few staff working in shelter who often dare to ignore my authority as supervisor; they were recruited from relatives of the Ministry or are DWA officers or had been politically recruited – hence providing timely and effective services were often interrupted. (Staff 3, interviewed 29 November 2012)

Another assistant director linked the failure to provide timely services to the residents to poor pay and lack of devotion of some staff:

A few of the staff want to work, but despite their best efforts, they can get no cooperation from others, who are not interested to do any work. This latter group have no sense of devotion and are here to pass their time towards retirement. However, some staff are also poorly paid and struggle hard to live with a limited income and mostly lose motivation for work. (Staff 6, interviewed 3 January 2013)

The above statements revealed many issues, such as the poor pay, nepotism, lack of motivation and a biased recruitment process, which make a complex work environment. It is quite understandable that when some of the staff frequently ignore the chain of command, the overall work culture is affected. It might lead to an atmosphere of uncertainty and chaos, which might disturb the morale of all staff in the shelter and ultimately disrupt services for the survivors. It should be noted that poor pay, nepotism, corruption and politicisation are not only prevalent in the shelters but have been continuing problems in all public service work places in Bangladesh since independence (Farazmand 2009; Islam 2014). The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation identified that because of these problems, the service providers in Bangladesh are noticeably failing to fulfil their responsibilities (NORAD 2011).

Some of the staff also reported that they faced limitations of material resources while serving the survivors, such as lack of training equipment, lack of budget for medicine costs and no budget for any recreational activities for survivors. They also questioned the monitoring and evaluation system by DWA in fulfilling survivors' needs. One Assistant Director commented:

We often needed further allocation of money to keep up in face of increasing price hikes or to meet accidental costs, such as hospital costs. The authority does not provide anything. We were not even provided the trade instructor [essential skilled person] to conduct training. (Staff 6, interviewed 3 January 2013)

In my visit to different shelters, I found that in three shelters there was no trade instructor to provide income-generating activities (IGA) training to survivors. In one shelter the trade instructor was on extended leave and not replaced, leaving residents with no training during their six months stay in the shelter.

I found the quality of shelter service delivery varied greatly. While in some shelters training was not provided due to the absence of the particular trainer, in another shelter I witnessed more positive engagements with the residents, with service provided enthusiastically. They also had no recruited trade instructor but the management contacted the District Women's Officer (DWO) to link the survivors with the DWO's ongoing training programs. Based on the women's interests, they were given training in embroidery, flower making and mobile phone repairing. In another shelter I heard about shelter staff's difficulties and their reluctance to coordinate with other government offices, even where other training had been ongoing for women in the same building.⁹² During my visit at this shelter, the DWO officer informed me that she requested the shelter management to send some interested survivors to her office in order to get them training in block boutique and sewing. Initially some survivors were allowed to come to the DWO office, but after a few days, they were restricted. A staff provided this explanation for the women having their training access revoked:

Survivors often misuse the training opportunity to go out and pass time with 'male friends'. (Staff 7, interviewed 8 January 2013)

This statement indicates that some shelter staff did not believe the residents. It is ironical that most shelter staff identified that patriarchal domination caused DV against women in Bangladesh, but unfortunately they themselves held patriarchal attitudes when serving the residents.

Another staff provided a different explanation for not allowing residents to go for training to the DWO office. She said:

⁹² The shelter home and the District Women's Office are the two subordinate divisions of the DWA.

Managing their children was very difficult while survivors were in training sessions. (Staff 5, interviewed 28 December 2012)

When I queried the day care staff regarding their ability to look after the children while survivors are in training I received no response. All the survivors except two that I interviewed complained that without childcare they could not properly attend the training. This often cost them the training. When I raised this issue in the interview with the Director General of DWA, he expressed surprise that nobody had informed him of the problem earlier. He said that he would take necessary action so that survivors could get income generating training:

I am sending instructions to all shelters to send interested survivors to the nearby DWO office until instructors are appointed to the shelter. (PM 2, interviewed 12 March 2013)

I was not able to follow up his commitment to do this, nor any outcomes such an instruction might have had.

Regarding the issue of the supply of sanitary pads (discussed in Chapter Seven) all female staff failed to identify survivors' practical needs. Staff 3 shared:

When victims come shelter, they start behaving like upper class women, some of them ask for sanitary pads, as if in their home they usually used sanitary pads! (Staff 3, interviewed 29 November 2012)

This statement indicates the staff member's concern was to guard her status in the sense that poor women should know their place and should not ask for anything like sanitary pads. Surprisingly enough, the need for sanitary pads was discussed by a male staff who was sympathetic to residents. He shared:

Getting sanitary pads is as necessary as other basic needs for women who come to the shelter. Though we have not got any direct allocation for

buying these, I managed to buy them from the miscellaneous allocation of the budget. (Staff 6, interviewed 3 January 2013)

Not only did he prioritise this need of survivors, but he also requested me to raise this issue with the highest authority if I had the chance so that there would be a sufficient supply of sanitary pads. When I sought suggestions from the staff about what support they thought important for residents, none of the female staff mentioned the need of sanitary pads for the residents. Five female staff out of seven were against allocating funds for this item. One possible explanation might be the class hierarchy between these two groups. Some people, like Staff 3 and others who were able and powerful, might want to protect their status. Resident women's request for sanitary pads might be perceived by the female educated staff as 'crossing the boundary' of class. Further in-depth research is needed in this area. Moreover, according to the residents, most of the workers act like abusive mothers-in-law (which I discussed in Chapter Seven); clearly this is not a position of sympathy, rather a position of power in which the powerful repress the powerless in order to maintain their status. Even for something like menstruation, the powerful cannot think outside their class and status. The female staff made all kinds of judgements about the women's bodies, including their inability to manage their bleeding. Sadly, I was confronted by this very blatant instance of lack of solidarity and sisterhood between women.

The gender make up of shelter staff was an issue of concern. A high-level Ministry officer commented on the unkind behaviour towards survivors of some female shelter staff:

We often received complaints from victims about shelter staff's rude behaviour. Most often the complaints are lodged against female staff. Initially it was thought that women will better understand women's issues, and considering this, the majority of the posts in the shelters were filled by women. (PM 3, interviewed 15 February 2013)

The expectations that female staff would be more compassionate were not borne out in the accounts of the residents I interviewed. During interviews, I rarely noticed sympathetic attitudes from female staff towards survivors. Being born and brought up in a patriarchal society, where female survivors are regularly blamed for the violence inflicted on them, it seems to be difficult for some staff to think and work beyond these stereotypes. Similar Bari's (1998) reports about shelters in Pakistan, patriarchal ideologies are often manifested in the shelters in Bangladesh, where survivors are often judged badly and face hostility, sometimes even reminded that 'good women never leave their husbands'. Five out of the seven staff I interviewed were not sympathetic about the causes that residents described. In some cases, they rather justified the men's behaviour and sometimes even implied that the men need to be understood and sympathised with too. These attitudes might come from their socialization in patriarchal settings in which they were taught men's needs should be given priority over women's, but it might also indicate, how being in 'positional hierarchy', these staff intentionally or unintentionally reproduced patriarchal domination over women. Also it might be because in their personal life, most of the female staff had to prioritise men's needs. However, two staff, one male and the other female, were sympathetic and supportive, and in the shelters where they worked most of the residents mentioned them as kind. During the interview, I also found them very accommodating. Undoubtedly they are the signs of the way forward but they did not provide backgrounds about their analyses and perspectives that enabled them to be compassionate to survivors.

The lack of sympathy of staff also could be attributed to their professional backgrounds. The majority of staff working at shelters did not have any former knowledge or experience working with female survivors of DV. Staff 3 described:

We were not provided any training prior to joining about how to deal with victims.(Staff 3, interviewed 29 November 2012)

The other six staff also confirmed that they were not provided with any prior training. Even after joining, they were not given any introductory sessions about

the relevant legal provisions available to victims/survivors of domestic violence. All these practical difficulties, along with a very tough budget, made things worse to manage. It is plausible to conclude that this lack of preparation further contributed to the staff's lack of tolerance and patience in dealing with survivors. Their lack of knowledge about services and related legislation also sometimes made them look as if they were hostile to residents' women. The DWA through MoWCA has various safety-net programs (see Appendix 6) for disadvantaged and very poor women. Most of the shelter staff did not seem to know about these services and did not refer residents to them. During my professional work with DWA, even when I conducted interviews with workers, I found very poor coordination among the different agencies, even between different sections of the DWA that made the process of efficiently serving the survivors' time consuming and confusing and above all less effective.

No research or study has yet been done to identify the problems or improve the current situation of shelters in Bangladesh. Each survivor is allocated 2000 taka every month only for food, which goes to the shelter management for her upkeep. Medicinal costs are not covered by this, though the treatment is free to the women. Very often shelter staff faced difficulties managing the costs of medicine. Until 2012 there were no surplus funds to meet emergency medical needs such as ambulance costs or the cost of hospital treatment (interview with Staff 6). It was only in 2013, that 10,000 taka was granted each year to each shelter for emergencies. But this amount is not enough for some shelters. These shelters often service survivors of sexual assault with specific medical needs. They are also responsible for residents with chronic health conditions that require ongoing medical attention. Staff 1 informed me:

Survivors often come into the shelters during pregnancy, requiring more resources for their delivery, hospital admission and also treatment and vaccination for the new born, which often causes budget deficiency. We have requested several times for funds for these activities but the head office did not reply positively. (Staff 1, interviewed 24 November 2012)

Although the budget for essential services is limited and quality is not satisfactory, the government is in the process of establishing five new shelters (interview with PM 2). Moreover, I came to know from my interview with a policy maker (PM1) that no impact study has yet been done and no women's organization or expert opinions have been consulted. The survivors' needs have not even been studied yet, while expanding the new shelters. It seems the government is emphasising the quantity of shelters rather than quality of services to survivors.

I asked all the participant shelter staff, activists, NGO workers and policy officers to suggest how to better meet the survivors' needs. Five of the seven shelter staff did not even recognise that there was any need for any further assistance to residents. They argued only for recruiting more staff and providing transport facilities for them. Even though most of the shelter staff recognised that the children were dropping out of school because they were at the shelter with their mother, none of staff identified initiatives to send these children to a nearby school. However, two staff, one policy maker and also the activists and NGO executives, thought that the government should take the initiative to provide more budgetsto the shelter homes and to arrange relevant training for staff. A women activist recommended:

The government should provide residents with financial support through interest free loans, as well as adequate legal support, modern livelihood and skill training, create job opportunities, link residents with other safety net programs and in addition, provide mandatory schooling opportunities for the children of survivors. (WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

Several respondents also urged the government to extend the period of shelter stay from six months to one year or until the case is resolved. The most important thing a shelter staff recommended was that the shelter should not be like a jail:

A shelter should be a home, where a survivor would feel comfortable, have peace and freedom and also have the right to say how the shelter life could

be improved according her needs and concerns. (Staff 6, interviewed 3 January 2013)

Improving the living conditions and increasing the up to date training opportunities were also suggested by the resident women as well as the women activists, NGO executives, and two shelter staff. However, the other five staff, who had day-to-day contact with the residents, failed to make any suggestions for improvement. More importantly they were not even interested to suggest any more facilities for resident women. Their attitudes went beyond my explanation about class difference and socialization. It further proved the difficulty of theorizing, particularly when some of these staff revealed experiences of abuse in their own lives.

Different forms of abuse experienced by some shelter staff and its effect on their service to resident women

While elaborating what constitutes domestic violence, a small number of female staff revealed that they too were abused by husbands and mothers-in-law and detailed the various kinds of abuse that suffered from their own lives. Given the high rate of DV in Bangladesh (BBS 2014), this might be expected. However, Staff 7 spoke about economic violence, she suffered:

Though I am earning the same amount as him, I have no control on my income – I have to send money to my parents. When I told him this, he did not object directly but in the next month he withdrew the full amount of my salary from the bank and sent it to my parents. The insult was: ‘I do not need a ‘wife’s earning’; rather, your poor parents need a ‘daughter’s earning’. I got the message as he is well ‘educated’ (!). He cannot snatch my earning but knows how to cleverly put mental pressure on his wife.
(Staff 7, interviewed 8 January 2013)

From that experience, she became strategic so as not to risk the smooth relationship with him. Rather, she managed to send some of her extra earnings [from attending seminars, workshops, training] to her parents secretly. She felt

extremely embarrassed when requesting her old mother not to disclose or never to share these issues with him. These indirect abuses caused lots of depression, anxiety and humiliation for her.

A different kind of mistreatment and mental abuse was also reported by Staff 3:

I never was asked whether I would like to celebrate the two religious festivals Eid ul Azha and Eid ul Fitr, with my parents or in-laws. He always took the decision to go his village home. Once I wished to go to my parent's home and he got very angry and responded straight forwardly that I could go to my parents but without my two children. He was not such a type of idiot bargoyge⁹³ that he would spend time with me according my wish. As I am educated, and know how to hide abuses from others, I did not react, but this kind of behaviour is clearly the dominant mentality of men. It caused me a lot of stress and disturbance. (Staff 3, interviewed 29 November 2012)

Staff 7 also provides a description of how she was mentally abused:

When we visited his village home, he never came to me at night, projecting himself to his mother and other siblings that he is a real man ignoring his wife. The scenario was quite opposite when we stayed the night at my parents' home. He demanded that we should be given a separate bedroom. I feel humiliated, as my three sisters would have enjoyed the night staying together with me in bed. Sometimes I thought not to take him to my parents, but I was worried this might send a message to my parents and others that I have a problem with him, and that will definitely hamper my 'happy image'. I provide counselling to hundreds of abused women, but whom should I tell about my suffering in silence? (Staff 7, interviewed 8 January 2013)

⁹³ *Bargoyge* is used in local Bengali language to describe a husband who is excessively submissive to his wife.

The above experiences indicate that the husbands of some of the shelter staff also hold to the traditional gender norms that consider wives as a subordinate class that does not have the right to any personal freedom. These husbands are highly educated and belong to a higher position than that of the uneducated village husbands of resident women. But both groups of men hold the same attitudes about the wife as a devalued class. These female shelter staff did not report any physical aggression by their 'educated' husbands; however, they did not overtly resist their husbands' hegemonic gender norms when they were treated as inferior. This again confirms the fact, as discussed in Chapter Three, that women's economic empowerment generally does not confer on women the power to challenge patriarchal authority in the family. Irrespective of their wife's education and employment, most husbands still consider her as lower class than themselves. When I discussed the DV issue in the interviews with this group of educated and empowered women, a NGO executive opined:

Given the widespread nature of DV in Bangladesh, it is not surprising that some of the staff, who have been providing support to abused women, are also victims themselves.(NGO 2, interviewed 8 March 2013)

However, I did not find any research in Bangladesh that found that shelter workers have often been, or still are victims of DV. Sexual coercion was also a prevalent experience in this group. Staff 4 described the intimidation by her husband:

There was sexual coercion from the beginning of my marriage. Whenever he felt the sexual need, he expected that I should participate. Sometimes I refused. He did not force me but stopped talking with me and came home late and became unusually rude to others. I realized that whenever he wants sex, I have to agree, no matter how I feel. I have forgotten what sexual pleasure is. It is just a one-sided game; I have just been used. (Staff 4, interviewed 17 December 2012)

This experience resonated with the survivors' experience and reflects the fact that whatever their education, class and power, wives are still considered by many

husbands as not have the right to have a say in sexual matters. This experience further emphasises the importance of enacting a law criminalizing the husband's sexual violence in Bangladesh (see also Naved 2013; Sambisa et al. 2010).

Staff 4 also revealed the physiological consequence of forced (non-consensual) sex, which was damaging to the genitalia:

He usually wanted sex 3 or 4 times a week. I thought it is quite normal, though I would be happy if it happened once a week. However, when I was not in the mood and was forced, my vaginal secretion also failed and that caused vaginal irritation and pain. As suggested by a female doctor, I asked him to buy external lubricant or gel that makes smooth entering, but to my surprise, he never bought this, arguing that it may make him ridiculous in front of the shopkeeper. In his view no husband buys those items, only men who go to sex workers need those external things. His attitudes upset me. It is worse than beating ... his offensive words often led me not to belong to myself. (Staff 4, interviewed 17 December 2012)

Her experience indicated the crude truth that the issue of forced sex is not only limited to poor and uneducated classes; even apparently empowered women are also coerced to have sex when they are unwilling. This staff member had genital scarring, which her husband completely ignored. This experience actually represents many wives' stories of being ignored in sexual pleasure. Regardless of their position and status, many Bangladeshi husbands still consider that their wives should only play a passive role in the sexual act.

Though some of the shelter staff identified DV in their life experience, these women described their own experience as different to that of the women who are staying at the shelter. Staff 7 reflected the contradiction:

He never believed I also have some freedom to spend my salary. I wanted to bear one of my niece's education expenses. He opposed, saying, 'A good wife is one who prioritizes her husband's family interest on top of

everything else'. I was verbally abused sometimes when I spent my salary without asking his permission. (Staff 7, interviewed 8 January 2013)

In spite of this situation, she did not introduce herself as a 'victim of DV'. Rather, she kept 'violence' as a term to refer to physical violence. She went on to say:

It's very natural that a man must do something to show his power and control. I think for the smooth continuation of the marriage, women have to overlook this. (Staff 7, interviewed 8 January 2013)

The experience further confirms that irrespective of class or educational attainment, women sometimes accept their husband's irrational behaviour in order to save the marriage. This is likely to be related to the stigmatisation of divorced women Bangladesh society. I found that the three staff who disclosed experiencing violence slipped between justification, explanation, defence and disclosure, these type of behaviour also is identified by another research on abused women in Bangladesh (Yount et al. 2012). The shelter staff, who well knew the official definition of DV but who also experienced verbal abuse and economic violence by husbands, still lacked sympathy for the residents and expressed patriarchal views. Perhaps by showing hostility and disbelief towards the residents, in their own mind, they were actually protecting themselves from becoming 'just like the shelter residents'.

The small number of shelter staff who suffered DV did not include this in their understanding of the women in the shelters and other matters. When considering the survivors' experiences, shelter staff mostly perceived domestic violence as referring only to 'physical' violence and did not recognise emotional or psychological or other types of violence. Despite being able to recite the official definition of DV, most of them failed to bring this more sophisticated understanding to their relationship with residents. Some did not even believe the survivors' stories of DV as discussed earlier in this chapter. Some of them also were doubtful to residents' account of mothers-in-law's violence. I think class difference encouraged them to see violence differently for poor women. The

question of epistemological authority (whose story is believed, who undermines other people's stories) is an important one here and necessitates further research.

Perspectives of shelter staff and other respondents about mother-in-law's' abuse

Other respondents, such as shelter staff, NGO executives and women's activists also described problematic mothers-in-law. Some of these respondents, in common with the women who ended up in the shelters, identified in-laws, specifically mothers-in-law as an important factor in the daughters-in-law's well being and happiness. Some shelter staff and other respondents even identified as victims of their own mother-in-law's abuse and described the different kinds of techniques used by mothers-in-law to subordinate and undermine them.

Insulting and derogatory comments, and controlling and competitive attitudes were cited by some shelter staff and other respondents. A female staff shared that the mother-in-law often took control of the kitchen. As she realized that her mother-in-law was purposely undermining her by showing her husband/the mother-in-law's son how important his mother is, she reacted to this underhandedness with a quarrel.

Like the survivors, several respondents explained the nature of mother-in-law's indirect domination. A staff shared her experience:

My mother-in-law did not dare to abuse me directly, but often made bad and offensive comments, such a 'working women cannot be either a good wife or a good mother'. When my son got sick, she enthusiastically took care but never forgot to mention that a mother's priority should be the children. I can't count the times she reminded me 'career should not be my priority'. If I was late from the office, she became very worried and that made my husband feel awkward and ultimately caused tension between us. There were many times that we silent sat across the dining table with only the children talking. Actually, I realised her feelings of inadequacy

often exaggerated the jealousy and competition and drove her to make bad comments. (Staff 2, interviewed 26 November 2012)

Whenever my mother-in-law visited us, she manipulated situations, mostly untrue things and always made situations what she wanted them to be. Sometimes when acting like she was feeling sick, if he ignored her, she would keep reminding him that 'a son remains a mother's son until he marries'. She always tried to be his first priority and that gave me the creeps I just can't bear this! Her visit was hard on my nerves. (Staff 7, interviewed 8 January 2013)

These statements further endorse the mothers-in-law's indirect control, domination and manipulative behaviour to undermine their daughters-in-law. These acts often were calculated to draw more attention from sons. Like the survivors living in the shelters, Staff 3 also experienced severe discrimination by her mother-in-law because of her dark complexion. Although the mother-in-law never said anything directly about her appearance, she cleverly commented negatively, for example, if she wore a red dress or colorful sari, her mother-in-law would indirectly insult her with the advise:

this bright colour matches with fair-skin, you had better choose a light colour. (Staff 3, interviewed 29 November 2012)

These experiences are examples of the gendered power relations that situate mothers-in-law as women with some power, indeed quite significant power, which is rooted in Bangladeshi patriarchal society. Holding the power, a mother-in-law often considered herself superior to her daughter-in-law, and to demonstrate and implement this, she often undermined and belittled her, if she was not able to directly abuse her.

All respondents from shelter staff, policy makers, NGOs executives and women activists recognised that there is not much social progress visible in the

relationship between women and their mothers-in-law, which is like it was 30 years ago. Some of them shared how they dealt with a difficult mother-in-law:

Actually, we two women are vying for the first place and are always in an unseen war like 'he is either hers or mine'. When she [mother-in-law] made special things for him [my husband], I felt uncomfortable, my husband adding fuel to the fire by buying her a Horlicks. When returning from the office, I feel somehow ignored. I hate the idea of competing with her; however I convinced myself that both of us love the same man and she is the reason I got a nice husband. I stopped competing with her and after few weeks I found our envy had turned into a healthy relationship. (NGO 2, interviewed 8 March 2013)

However, these are the cases of educated and professional class. Moreover their mothers-in-law do not live permanently with them, so they could think and act differently. But the majority of survivors had to live with their mother-in-law, and were often directly abused by her without any valid grounds. It is interesting that the above activist and four other respondents tended to give their accounts greater authority than the accounts of the survivors and generally interpreted the mother-in-law's abuse from their perspectives. Their descriptions contained an inference that the survivors were from a low economic status and not highly educated, and therefore were unable to employ any effort to improve the relationship with their mothers-in-law, whereas, being of the professional class, they easily could do this.

All of the respondents had their own explanation for mother-in-law's abuse. Five shelter staff indicated women's powerlessness in the wider society often encouraged them to exercise power over others in the domestic sphere, particularly over family members or housemaids, thus generating stress and tensions in their relationships. Their opinion seems to resonate with Cotterill's (1993) observations. In her book, *Friendly Relations? Mothers and their*

Daughters-in-law, Cotterill argued that in the English city Stoke-on-Trent,⁹⁴ women's general lack of power and influence in the public sphere mostly generates the conditions for conflict between two female in-laws of different generations (Cotterill 1993).

Several respondents, one policy maker, two shelter staff and one NGO executive, were of the opinion that the mother often became very possessive of the son, as society and family preferred a male child. Moreover, as the son helped to overcome his mother's subordination, the mother developed a very strong, affectionate and intimate relationship with him. After his marriage, the new woman, his wife, somehow appeared as a competitor. A NGO executive explained:

His mother developed and nourished a very emotional attachment to her son, which tended to become problematic when she wanted to continue this even when her son got another woman in his life; his mother found difficulties in sharing him with other women. (NGO 2, interviewed 8 March 2013)

A similar observation, noted in India by psychoanalyst Kakar (1978) and in Korea by Chung, Crawford and Fischer (1996), was that having developed a very close tie with her son, very often a mother finds it 'difficult, if not impossible' to separate herself from her son after his marriage.

Control over income was also identified as reasons for abuse by mother-in-law. A policy maker argued:

A young married woman usually does not like that the whole family lives on him; she wants to live without the in-laws' control; this is often a primary source of conflict between mother and daughter-in-law. On the other hand,

⁹⁴ Cotterill interviewed 35 women living in Stoke-on-Trent, a city located in Staffordshire, England. She completed a total of 106 interviews with 25 daughters-in-law and 10 mothers-in-law at intervals over a period of 18 months in 1985 and 1986.

some mothers-in-law consider the young bride [if she is attractive] as a potential threat to her family's economic security, and therefore she tries her best to deprive her daughter-in-law of any opportunity to be intimate with the husband [her son]. In some cases she even manipulates situations so that there would be no romantic bond between the couple. (PM 2, interviewed 12 March 2013)

His statement resonates with the views of two women activists that in a resource poor situation, there is always competition about who has sole control over the earning male. Competition and jealousy regarding his money and attention can easily lead both female in-laws to envy each other's. A NGO personnel and three shelter staff argued that tensions also arise between these two females as daughters-in-law seek independence, freedom and autonomy and mothers-in-law strive to influence (see also Turner, Young & Black 2006, p. 589).

The stereotyping of the interfering, domineering or possessive mother-in-law is also blamed for the difficult relationship between mother and daughter-in-law. A staff explained:

The stereotype of controlling mother-in-law leads some women to name her as an abuser while discussing the husband's violence. Some women cannot mention the main reason for the conflict; for instance, a wife wants to have full authority over his income. While she pressurizes husbands to overlook his responsibilities to his parents, most often she is abused and the women make the mother-in-law liable for this abuse. (Staff 4, interviewed 17 December 2012)

I found these kinds of comments from shelter staff particularly problematic and not respectful to the survivors. It is interesting that they had a tendency to want to interpret the women's stories of violence from the mother-in-law's viewpoint.

Some of their explanations sometimes also justify the mother-in-law's abuse, which seemed to question the truthfulness of the survivors' testimony.

A policy maker talked about the mother-in-law's mysterious behaviour in subordinating her daughter-in-law but demanding liberation for her own daughter:

My mother-in-law became very happy to see my wife controlling my income and household decision making and also subjugating my mother. However she often complained that her daughter-in-law had full authority and control over the husband [her son] – several times she referred to her son as 'henpecked', one who has no control on his earnings. (PM 3, interviewed 15 February 2013)

His statement echoed the account of survivors in indicating a mother-in-law's double standards in the treatment of her daughter and daughter-in-law. Why the mother-in-law makes different rules for a daughter and a daughter-in-law in the same family needs further research.

All respondents were well aware about the husbands' reluctance to interfere between his mother and wife. A shelter staff explained why husband mostly chooses his mother's side:

There is no doubt that he loves both the women, but he has to choose his mother sides, risking his relationship with his wife to prove he is not an 'ostraino' [henpecked]. (Staff 4, interviewed 17 December 2012)

The comments of the women's activists and two policy makers echoed with the Staff 4's statement. Their comments revealed that in most cases supporting his wife might have compromised the husband's 'manhood', and so he always took his mother's side in a fight between his two beloved women, even when he knew whose fault it was. A policy maker opined that the Bangladeshi culture and tradition encourage husbands to value and look after parents over their wives' wellbeing (PM 1, interviewed 8 April 2013).

All respondents opined that a smooth relationship between the two female in-laws is crucial for the wellbeing of both and also of other family members, as most couples live with in-laws in joint households for the first few years of their marriage. They indicated the pressure and effects of a mother-in-law's abuse on women's health. A women activist argued:

A mother-in-law's direct and indirect abuse always causes tension and anxiety which is detrimental to daughter-in-law's health and family's wellbeing. In some instances it ruins the marriage itself (WA 2, interviewed 21 March 2013)

The woman activist argued that any tension in this relationship creates discomfort and stress for daughter-in-law, which ultimately affects all other family members. She was also concerned that a bad relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law sometimes cause marital break down, which echoed the survivors' experience.

In discussing mother-in-law's abuse, shelter staff and other respondents suggested strategies to minimise tensions with the mother-in-law:

We as daughters-in-law mostly do not value the relationship between our husband and his mother, forgetting that he has social obligations to her too. To establish her own space and freedom, some daughters-in-law tend to ignore what the mother-in-law wanted to say. If the daughter-in-law accepts any of her good advice, it might reduce tension between them. (NGO 1, interviewed 27 February 2013)

Her intention is to wield superiority, to do things her own way. If someone could tolerate this superiority, the relationship would not be abusive. (Staff 5, interviewed 28 December 2012)

Sometimes problems arise initially from merely a misunderstanding or a relatively trivial issue but these become the cause of division and concern between two female in-laws. However we found some cases where the daughter-in-law first started the division that led the mother-in-law to be abusive to them. (WA 1, interviewed 18 March 2013)

I found these words were not direct but rather obscure as I felt they were not telling the whole story. These comments by the NGO workers, shelter staff and others were to some degree justifications of mother-in-law's violence. They were more interested in explaining how the daughter-in-law could have avoided the mother-in-law's abuse. Their accounts echoed Terri Apter's (2010, p. 139) observation that the daughter-in-law often put boundaries around the mother-in-law that puts the mother-in-law in 'fear of exclusion' and makes things worse and more complex for both of them. Although the staff recounted a few cases of daughters-in-law who were dominating and abusing their aged in-laws (interview with WA 1 and Staff 6), these should not justify mother-in-law's violence. Both types of abuse are harmful for the women themselves and for other family members, regardless whose fault it is.

However, the three staff who identified husbands' and mothers-in-law's abuse in their lives, along with two staff who were not sympathetic to survivors as well as other respondents, all had same opinion regarding one of the factors that led to discrimination, abuse and, in extreme cases even violence, that is women's dark skin colour. Some staff and NGO executive respondents shared their experiences of prejudice because of their dark skin colour.

Like many survivors (see Chapter Five), respondents from the four categories, shelter staff, policy makers, activists and NGO executives also considered skin colour as an issue causing violence against women. They were well informed that dark skin colour sometimes brings discrimination for women in wider society. Two respondents described their life experience:

Dark-skinned people, particularly women, face many problems from the family to neighbours, to school to marriage. People often castigate them and call them with derogatory terms. You would be surprised, in high school, I had difficulty finding friends, as everybody wanted to be friends with fair skinned girls. (NGO 2, interviewed 8 March 2013)

I was discriminated against many times for my dark colour. When any training opportunities came, good looking women officers got them first before me. I just think as I was dark, I have to pay for it by being discriminated against by authority. If I were a woman like the survivors in shelter, I might be beaten too for my non-fair skin. (Staff 3, interviewed 29 November 2012)

Both respondents experienced discrimination for their skin colour in their childhood, which pushed them to try 'looking white'. It is not surprising that looks still retain an important place for women in Bangladesh. A women's activist argued that the way the community perceives or behaves with the dark-skinned girl is important because the girl's perception about herself depends on that. A NGO executive shared:

If you read women's magazines in Bangladesh, you will find most of the main discussion concentrated on how girls could look brighter/fairer. These media actually reinvented the age-old misconception about fair skin and socialize people to embrace fairness as 'beauty'. In such a situation if a wife has dark skin, it is highly likely she would be harassed. (NGO 2, interviewed 8 March 2013)

This last argument resonates with McRobbie (1999 cited in Sangar 2009, p. 138) though she was not writing about Bangladesh. She pointed out how the magazines actually 'naturalise and universalize meanings and values which are in fact socially constructed'. Though not found in academic literature, if any one analysed the advertising contents in Bangladesh, most would be identified as creating and also reinforcing a preference for fair skin. Research conducted in

India by Kavita Karan (2008) also analysed how Indian TV commercials and product advertisements connect fairness with other achievements in life for women, such as marriage, job, success, empowerment, and confidence. It could be argued that the media is making 'fairness' an obsession which pushes people into believing 'skin fairness' is the ultimate beauty, a belief which results in some husbands abusing a dark-skinned wife.

Our TV serials and drama indirectly tell people that a wife or daughter-in-law should be fair-skinned' – as if no dark-skinned girls exist in Bangladesh. Our family members, relatives, friends and others praise fair-skinned girl, which assigns a 'subordinate' status to dark skin. I remember when I was nine years old, one of my aunts teased my mother that she should buy fairness cream for me otherwise it would be difficult to get a good groom for me. My grandmother often felt embarrassed for me as if 'it is my choice to be dark'. I don't know when I started hating my colour. All I remember is going out with a chalky and powdery face to hide my real colour. (NGO 2, interviewed 8 March 2013)

As NGO 2 indicated, some of her family members were trying to point out that she was a dark-skinned girl, which pushed her to think she is somehow a burden and lower than others. She thought her educational background and other skills were less valued in her marriage, as she had to marry a man who was not well established at that time. Most of the respondents were aware about the need for mass level awareness to make the people realize that in this time or era, complexion should not be a matter of quality for women or even any men. A policy maker described a comprehensive scenario for people's fair skin fascination:

We had complaints from some women who were abandoned for having dark skin. I observed that some parents became obsessed with fair skin when it comes to choosing a would-be daughter-in-law, though they might have a dark-skinned daughter. The girl's education, position, job, status and manner all take back seat. Most of all a man wants a fair-skinned wife to

show off his pride as well as manhood. (PM 4, interviewed 8 February 2013)

His statement resonates with other research findings that in a patriarchal society, feminine beauty matters because it acts to uphold masculinity; in other words, sexual access to 'beautiful' women's bodies' turns into a symbol of a man's masculine power (Chancer 1998, pp. 114-116). It seems Bangladeshi people have not emerged from the colonized attitude and perception that fair skin is better, and dissatisfaction about the wife's dark skin might lead a husband to abuse his wife in many ways.

The majority of respondents from shelter staff personally thought fairness should not be an indicator of beauty. However, three of them admitted their efforts to look fair and bright as there are socially and culturally approved advantages of being fair. I found similar thoughts among many survivors, that if they could somehow make themselves fair, they might not experience violence from their husbands and in-laws. Staff 3 desperately shared:

If I have the chance and ability, I must alter my dark skin. I would like to be fair-skinned and I think every woman does her best to look fair. If anybody denies the truth, she is definitely lying. (Staff 3, interviewed 29 November 2012)

These interviewees' discussion of skin colour is important, firstly, because it is in accord with the survivors' accounts of discrimination and sometimes DV on the basis of dark skin, a factor that has not hitherto been identified in the literature. Secondly, some of these respondents had this experience themselves. They experienced discrimination and prejudice, if not necessarily violence. However, it is not clear whether the staff who had experienced prejudice themselves also understood how it worked for the residents who had experienced violence because of this kind of prejudice. On the other hand, the NGO executive had a clear understanding of how poor dark-skinned women are abused in the family and wider society.

Concluding remarks

This chapter reported respondents' experiences about DV in Bangladesh, which they gained by working with DV survivors or by being engaged in programs and policies related to DV. These respondents had a clear understanding about the official definition of DV and theoretical knowledge in identifying causes and consequences of DV in Bangladesh. Most of their views resonated with survivors' experiences. They identified the cultural attitudes, media influence, lack of effective enforcement of laws and above all women's lack of rights in marriage, custody, maintenance and marital property and put special emphasis on patriarchy for causing DV against women. However some of them also had contradictory attitudes while sharing their views about the survivors. Some (five out of seven staff) retained hostile and unsympathetic attitudes towards shelter residents, which indicated that they just parroted the dominant theories of DV rather than believing them. On the other hand, the activists and others acknowledged that DV survivors find themselves trapped in a violent marriage due to structural disadvantages. The patriarchal attitude of some staff clearly reflected these disadvantages, encouraging women to believe that living with an abusive husband is better than seeking help from shelters.

This chapter also discussed the tension for the staff who revealed that they too experienced abuse by their husbands. But they were reluctant to regard this violence similar to 'domestic violence' as experienced by the residents. They clearly defined DV for residents as physical aggression, while about themselves, as educated women, they reported mostly emotional or economical abuse. They were not able to apply their own experience to the shelter residents, which had the effect of distinguishing them from the women seeking residence in the shelters who were identified as victims of DV. Most of the staff lacked sympathy towards residents, distrusted them and, more importantly, held the patriarchal attitude of victim-blaming. Their patriarchal attitude and antagonistic behaviour explains why the residents were harshly critical of them. The staff who had day-to-day contact with survivors, enthusiastically described the situation of DV in Bangladesh. Those descriptions mostly proved theoretical as most of the shelter residents

reported experiencing hostility from these staff. The staff rarely applied what they knew from their own experiences to the shelter residents. I argue that their lack of empathy and their patriarchal attitude are the result of class hierarchy and socialization in a patriarchal society. This might be one reason why the staff cannot think beyond their surroundings where a victim is usually blamed for the violence. Moreover, I argue that as Bangladeshi women, they also had to prioritise the men's needs and concerns in their family, which might be the reason they were more concerned about the resident women's husbands' needs rather than prioritising the women's needs.

In such a situation, altering the acceptance of patriarchal authority in the shelter system is urgent if the DV survivors are to have better experiences of this service. The MoWCA and DWA should ensure proper training for those who are serving the survivors in different capacities so that the survivors are encouraged and feel comfortable to seek support from these formal services and so that their experience is beneficial and perhaps improves their further life beyond the shelter. As there was great dissatisfaction about the management of shelters among survivors the government should address the issues raised by the residents, as for some, entering a shelter is literally a matter of life and death.

CHAPTER NINE

Discussion and Conclusion

The narrative of nearly being killed by a husband, as told in the opening quotation of this thesis, showcases one cruel manifestation of the hundreds of thousands of domestic violence (DV) incidences in Bangladesh every year. DV against women in familial relationship is complicated and the existing shelter services have failed to effectively respond to the complexities of DV as the women's experiences tell us. This chapter summarizes the overall findings of this study and its implications are then discussed.

The study was motivated by my working experience with female survivors and their children in Bangladesh as a Magistrate in VAW Cell and Deputy Director in Shelter Homes, Dhaka Division under the supervision of MoWCA. There are six government run shelters, each of which are assigned to serve 50 survivors along with their 100 children. In shelters women are supposed to be provided with free accommodation, food, clothing, medical treatment, basic literacy instruction, legal and income generating activity training for six months (MoWCA 2013-14). I became concerned with the immeasurable suffering of survivors due to DV and the apparent inability of the existing DV services to support women who had experienced DV. I felt frustrated to see women leaving shelters with virtually no financial or legal remedy. One of the main objectives of this qualitative study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of DV against women in order to identify the underlying factors and their impacts on women's wellbeing. The focus was on survivors who were living in government shelter homes in six divisional cities in Bangladesh. The second objective of this study was to explore the survivors' experiences of living at shelters. Sixteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with survivors to cast light on their understanding and experiences of abuse from their husbands and other family members and their experience of living in the shelter homes. Interviews with fifteen policy makers, NGO executives and women's activist and government employees (shelter staff)

were also conducted to ascertain their perspectives on issues related to domestic violence.

In this thesis I adopted an Integrated Feminist model in which feminist ideology forms the central approach along with other perspectives to provide greater detail and context regarding DV against women in Bangladesh. Further, feminist standpoint theory directed the data collection process in such a way as to properly understand women's subjugation. This standpoint theory fits with the belief that the subjugated women should be asked directly about their lived experience. Each of the survivors gave descriptions of concrete examples of being abused by husbands and by in-laws, particularly by their mother-in-law. Some of them were also mistreated and abused by shelter staff.

This study gives an account of gender relationships in Bangladesh using the literature on women and gender, and found that in most cases, women's voices are still ignored in the family irrespective of class and status. The exception for some women is the power they have in the family as mother-in-law. In most cases, the husband is still the decision maker whether regarding contraceptive use or planning for a holiday or the freedom of spending family income. Though Bangladeshi women's participation in education and employment is increasing, large numbers of women are still found in subordinate positions, particularly in marriage and the family. Women's status is still defined in terms of traditional gender rules such as subordination, dependency on males, and the universal nature of marriage and so on. Except for a few, women's increased participation in education and work does still not translate into any transformative agency for many women (Nasrin 2011, p. 44).

Four forms of DV are identified in this study: physical, mental/psychological, sexual and economic. The majority of women who shared experiences of forced sex did not define it as 'rape in marriage'. These women did not want their husbands punished for sexual intimidation/ violence. The majority of the women considered it is their marital responsibility to fulfil their husband's sexual need as he provides the money and their meals.

The structural and institutional patriarchy in Bangladesh plays a major role in allowing men to control and dominate their wives. In the experience of survivors living at shelters, this study found that when gender relations were contested – either women made demands or did not act according to their husband’s ideals – some men responded with violence. This is because women’s voices, for whatever reason, seem to undermine men’s power and threaten their position. The social and cultural attitude about domestic division of labour and responsibilities and how these operate was also identified as a major issue in DV. Wives were often physically and verbally abused for their child’s misconduct or mistakes or their child’s injury. Patriarchal beliefs and ideologies about manhood stemming from existing gender inequality were also behind the violence against wives, as identified by women and other respondents. Exercising adultery or polygamy, as an expression of manhood, and the wife’s objection to this behaviour, were also factors.

Another feature of patriarchal tradition, the dowry, was found to be a very significant factor for DV. Dissatisfaction about the dowry amount or non-fulfilment of committed dowry or failure to bring further dowry brought tension, which later led the husbands to use violence. This study correlates the demand for dowry as a product of women’s perceived ‘secondary status’ in the society. The patriarchal society still considers a woman as a liability to parents when she is young and to her husband when she is married.

The findings of this study confirm existing research on women’s experience of domestic violence in Bangladesh. The variety of reasons for DV against women as reported in the interviews with shelter residents include: the husband’s dominating attitude, the perceived failure by the wife to fulfil her wifely duties and responsibilities, the husband’s social entitlement to beat his wife, the dispute about the division of labour in the family, the demand for dowry, men’s possessiveness and greed, men’s practice of polygamy and their lack of commitment in marriage, family poverty, wife dependency on husband’s earning, husband’s unemployment, history of violence in the husband’s family of origin.

Other respondents, including shelter workers, gave similar accounts of the issues behind DV. They also emphasized the cultural and institutionalized patriarchal norms, men's socially sanctioned power and authority to dominate the wife and women's lack of rights in inheritance, marriage, divorce, maintenance and marital property.

This study is unique in its exploration of two issues that have not been investigated elsewhere. It finds that women's dark skin colour is an important issue in DV. Several women who were survivors and had dark skin reported that being abused because of their skin colour was part of their experience of DV, though parents had paid a big dowry as a compensation for their dark skin. The majority of survivors experienced harassment from husbands due to their dark skin, and some had experienced this hatred since childhood. Respondents from other categories (policy makers, women's shelter staff etc.) also reported that the 'skin colour' of women plays an important role in marriage in Bangladesh.

The other vital factor for DV against women identified in this study which extends our knowledge is the abuse of women by other women in the familial relationship. The presence of the mother-in-law and her role was described as an important aspect of DV by the women survivors interviewed for this project. The majority of survivors accused their mothers-in-law of perpetrating violence against them, sometimes directly and sometimes in cooperation with the son. Survivors described different kinds of abuse by mothers-in-law: from insults for unmet dowry, criticism of the daughter-in-law's physical appearance, particularly skin colour, verbal insults and degradation, calling bad names, denying or delaying access to food and other necessary items, denying freedom to wear particular clothes, and domestic servitude. This list reflects the very domestic nature of the methods of abuse that mothers-in-law use. Though the mother-in-law retains a powerful position over her daughter-in-law, her power is confined to the home and family and it is this power that she uses against her daughter-in-law. This study finds that in-law's abuse and husband's violence reinforced each other: one leads to the other. This finding resonates with the views of feminists Kandiyoti (1988) and Fernandez (1997), who articulated that 'woman to woman violence' is a

manifestation of a model of patriarchy in which male interests are served by intentionally dividing women so that older women are used to control younger women. However, this study identified a contradictory attitude among survivors towards their abusers: some women put more blame on their mother-in-law than their husband when both were abusing them, either together or following each other. I think women's more critical response to their mother-in-law's abuse was because most were socialized to accept their husband's violence at any cost.

This study documents the various examples of the consequences of DV on women and children. Some of the women I interviewed experienced attempted murder, some had attempted suicide [drinking insect poison], and all had permanent or temporary physical injuries, such as broken knees and bones, hearing loss, bruises, injured eyes and, above all, ongoing ill-health. Psychological outcomes were also widely discussed, such as fear, anger, hopelessness, isolation, unworthy feeling and being traumatized, depression, low self-esteem and 'betrayal of trust'. This study also documents the outcomes of forced sex, such as miscarriage, injured genitalia, fear, helplessness and isolation, humiliation and embarrassment. The broader economic cost of DV was also reported in this study: cost of injury and legal remedies, reduction in parents' [both natal and in-law] paid work, which often led families to take loans to survive and family impoverishment. Children's suffering is significant. They also experience the father's violence along with their mother and are thrown out into the street with their mother. This study documented that some children often became hostile mostly to their abusive father and sometimes to their mother, while some even became violent to their peer groups. Children's malnutrition and dropping out of or being withdrawn from school also raised concerns.

This study identified that the majority of survivors primarily concealed the violence from the natal family and others and were reluctant to seek help from government/non-government agencies due to the cultural stigma that blames women for DV. Most of the survivors endured violence while they were financially supported by their husbands until there was a risk of being killed or severely injured. Women often did not seek outside help because to them family honour

came before their physical or mental health or safety. Furthermore, initially they hoped things would change, and took into consideration their children's future. In the Bangladesh context, as elsewhere, leaving the children behind is not an easy option for a mother. Moreover women greatly feared being blamed and not being believed, especially given the inadequate legal service, their lack of information and lack of financial ability. The fear of further repercussions often compelled them to stay in the abusive marriage. The majority of survivors expressed fear of displacement and being stigmatised by the community if they disclose violence. A combination of these cultural and structural constraints inhibited women from seeking help, and this was confirmed by the other respondents.

However the survivors in my study applied different strategies to resolve DV. Their early strategies involved being more adaptable and changing their behaviour according to their husbands' or in-laws' expectations and demands. When those strategies failed, most often women first asked for help from their natal families. Some women reached out to their families for support, while others felt they could not. Unfortunately the natal family did not always prove helpful for women, who were pressured to continue in their abusive marriage at any cost. However, with or without natal family support, women sometimes asked for help from the local *salish*, the local government council, NGOs or the local administration. In a few cases women sought help from the police and court. Some of the women finally sought help in a shelter when they held great fear for their own life or the lives of their children and/or were abandoned or had nowhere to stay. Some women even came to the shelter in order to get legal support to establish conjugal rights. Inadequate family support and their birth family's pressure on them to remarry, as well as the promise of access to income generating training and more generally, the support to start an independent life, also led women to come to shelters.

From the interviews I conducted with women living in the shelters I learned that they often received a judgmental response from staff who often did not believe them. The majority of the women felt that their desires and needs were neither carefully considered nor properly met in the shelter. They reported being treated by staff in stigmatizing ways because they had experienced abuse. The majority

of survivors said that the shelter staff treated them as though they were prisoners, not allowing them freedom of movement and not permitting them to talk to male friends. They were also unhappy about the training they received while in residence, which they said was mostly out-dated. The many women needing legal support said it was inadequate and that there was no counselling service. Above all, they described the absence of an environment that was friendly to women.

For the majority of the women residents, the shelter was not a good place to be. They said it felt like a jail, ironically a place full of judgmental mothers-in-law. They considered the shelter staff like abusive mothers-in-law because they were constantly guarded with mistrust, their morality doubted, and criticized for their attitudes and behaviour and, above all, not believed about their experiences. Their metaphoric reference to shelter staff as mother-in-law is particularly significant, as it indicates that the power relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law seems to be a model for relationships between women. From the women's testimonies it appears that the shelter home services are less than effective in supporting women. Perhaps most striking is the patriarchal underpinnings of much of the services provided by the shelters staff. This study finds that most of the shelter services operate within a patriarchal environment. The entire system, instead of easing the sufferings of survivors, in most cases increases their mental sufferings. The majority of shelter staff had a very good understanding about the prevalence and issues related with DV but also held the patriarchal attitude that the woman's role is to make adjustments within an abusive marriage at any cost.

Government funded shelters in Bangladesh mostly provide short-term accommodation and very limited medical and legal services. There is a need to offer medium or longer-term housing, ongoing income support and practical training for re/employment. This is vital for women, particularly poorer women, in order to enable them to initiate the termination of violent marital arrangements (spouses and mothers-in-law included), or to rebuild their lives if they are expelled from their marital homes. While the women residents I interviewed had many criticisms of the shelter system, a few still believed the shelter had provided vital support for them, at least a roof over the head during a time of crisis. Despite the

inadequacy of resources in legal support and training in income generating activities, respondents desperately want the shelters to continue as they have nowhere to go. If these shelters were not available, their only option would be to stay with violence. Some women feared they would become violent to others or be killed or attempt suicide to end the abuse if the abuse continued. Some hoped that if the government reformed the women's shelter system and initiated more programs, victims/survivors could more effectively rebuild their lives after DV.

Bangladesh has a long road to travel where the elimination of violence against women is concerned, specifically violence perpetrated against women in family homes, sometimes by other women relatives. My feminist examination of the women's experiences of violence by spouses and mothers-in law has connected personal experiences to political systems and structures. Providing shelter to survivors is only one response among many needed to address domestic violence. A better articulation of laws, policies, programs and practices designed to address women's subordination in Bangladesh is required for real inroads to be made in domestic violence. Knowledge building is needed to understand how Bangladeshi women survive violence and what they face in their attempts to get help and/or leave their marital homes. More research is required to understand how to respond to abuse by mothers-in-law and how to work towards a future where dowries are no longer expected and therefore no longer sources of inter-family disputes. More research to understand how poverty impacts on women's experiences of family violence is also required. Further action research is required to modify the traditional attitude of middle class shelter staff who serve poor DV survivors in different capacities.

This thesis cannot solve the problem of DV in Bangladesh. This study reveals the necessity for an urgent reform of shelter management in order to provide a women friendly environment in shelters where survivors of DV are not judged by patriarchal attitudes and are able to get practical and long term support to start a new life. Women should not have to experience similar patterns of psychological and material abuse once leaving violent family homes. Believing survivors and

assisting them to develop their full potential as human beings, not just as wives or mothers, is crucial to social and sexual equality.

New directions: implications for future research

This study is important because the findings represent new and finely detailed insights about how a group of Bangladeshi women experienced family conflict and violence once marrying and moving into their husbands' homes that often included live-in arrangements with in-laws. Even for women with mothers-in-law who do not live with their sons, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is crucial, particularly for the daughter-in-law's wellbeing. When I started this research I did not expect to uncover such extensive abuse by mothers-in-law. I now believe it should be taken as seriously as spousal abuse, as the two forms are often overlapping and interconnected for women in Bangladesh. As a more complex view of patriarchy including women's power over other women is unfolded, future research is needed to explore details.

This is not the first study exploring the different dimension and consequences of DV in Bangladesh, but it provides several original contributions to the topic. It adds voices from the most impoverished women and identifies abuse by mothers-in-law. This study sheds light on this issue but future research is still needed. I hope others will deepen this knowledge by continuing to examine and research violence perpetrated not just by men over women, but also by women over women. Another important new finding of this thesis was the relationship between the women's skin colour and their increased risk of domestic violence. The likelihood of discrimination based on skin colour cannot be ignored in this dynamic. Dark skin was often seen as a deficit for the Bangladeshi women I interviewed, something they needed to compensate for once they were married. In-depth research on the complex interplay between women's skin colour and its relationship to the risk of DV is needed. Attitudes of shelter workers and consequent atmosphere and approach in shelters and their inadequacy in providing support information and training also need to be addressed.

My hope about this study is that it will benefit women and their children who try to escape from DV and start new lives. What would immediately benefit women currently living in shelter homes would be a change of focus in intervention and prevention programs. Research can discover how to eliminate punitive, disbelieving and controlling attitudes of staff and organisational cultures productive of such approaches. Positive, respectful and supportive staff-resident relationships need to be fostered. There is also the need to rethink and modify DV interventions and prevention initiatives to include in-laws, particularly mothers-in-law. As I discovered from the women I interviewed, not all perpetrators of violence are men. Hierarchies in the family should be addressed (Fernandez 1997), particularly hierarchies that devalue, demean and degrade so many women. Research initiatives need to reflect the multiple possibilities of domestic abuse.

What needs to be done?

This is not the first study exploring issues of wife abuse, but it does provide a distinctive contribution to the topic examining the factors, responses, and also exploring women survivors' experience about government shelter services. The research identifies insights provided by the survivors in order to improve the quality of shelter homes. Although the study has not focused on the technical details of the laws, the stories told by the shelter residents and those who work in the area of DV, point to the many inadequacies of the law.

The respondents, including survivors, shelter staff, policy makers, women's activists and NGO executives suggested that women should be provided the equal rights in marital property acquired after marriage. All marriages should be registered along with every gift given by both parties. If a record of gifts given by both parties could be stored in a local government office, then the couple, either the husband or the wife, could claim which furniture or household item belongs to whom if the marriage breaks down. In this way women could be protected from impoverishment after separation or divorce.

The legal provision for a husband's remarriage should be changed in such a way that if any further marriage has taken place without taking prior formal permission

from the first wife, the second marriage will be void. The divorce law should be changed in terms of making mandatory the presence of both parties in the arbitration council. A new provision should be introduced such that until and unless both parties and their representatives appear, the divorce decree will not be declared. In this way, women could be protected from their husband's secret divorce.

There are also measures at the local community level that could be implemented. When asked what needs to be done to reduce DV, such as in the study of Schuler, Bates and Islam (2008, p. 340), most survivors, I interviewed argued for outside intervention rather than that they themselves have to report the abuse or seek help, as this jeopardizes their chance to continue the marital tie. For example, women I interviewed proposed that the government should deploy people to go from house to house inquiring about incidences of DV or that an influential aged local elder should be given the responsibility to report any such problems to the local government office. They also proposed that a sealed box should be placed in front of the local mosque, church or temple or grocery shops, where anyone could drop a note about the incidence of DV. The responsible person from the local government office would open the box weekly and then investigate the issue. This would be a good strategy for reporting DV cases in a way that may reduce the risk of the repercussions women would suffer if they reported the abuse themselves.

The NGO executives and women's activists I interviewed suggested that if women's unpaid domestic work could be considered 'productive', or women could be given a 'housework' allowance, they could gain some negotiating power in family, thus minimizing the risk of DV. Program and policies should be in place to re-create the image of women as productive, equal and valuable members of society, just like men. Gender equality can be achieved through cooperation between women and men, empowering women through income generating activities, strong advocacy and raising social awareness from the household to the community.

A woman-friendly environment should be introduced in all DV programs including government-funded shelters. There is no doubt that the presence of shelter homes builds confidence among survivors. They were not absolutely helpless: they had somewhere to stay and to seek support. But the presence of strong patriarchal attitudes in shelters means that life in the shelter does not deliver what it could and this should be addressed. Such attitudes should be eliminated in all other services for women. It is time to review and reform the shelter homes in the light of new knowledge of the current situation identified by this research. New approaches are urgently needed which respond effectively to the unique needs of women and children. This study documents three critical issues that should be addressed in the shelter homes urgently. The first is to ensure effective legal support so that women can have the justice they want, as it is found that shelter staff were ruled by judgmental attitudes and were more interested in initiating divorce, which was not always the preferable remedy for women. Some women wanted to stop the abuse but continue the marriage. Women's voices and demands should be given the highest priority. The second is to address women's desire to get modern training and financial support to start an independent life and raise and protect their children in the face of obstacles. Shelters should be a place where women can stay with the right to free movement and to search for jobs and other facilities. The third concern is the children. Shelter homes should take urgent action to continue the schooling and learning progress of children who are living in shelters with their mother. In general, programs and policies should be redefined and refined from the perspective of survivors. The shelter systems should be structured in such a way that survivors can visualize the benefits of using these support services. Survivors often complained that at the end of shelter stay they have nothing in hand to start an independent life. Shelter programs should demonstrate how women can start an independent life, rather than continue in an abusive marriage.

Specific training and motivational workshops should be conducted aiming to sensitize government officials, including shelter workers, who are and will be involved in the enforcement of law and the provision of services to DV survivors. Programs for attitudinal changes for professionals, such as judges, magistrates,

police personnel, and medical practitioners and media personnel should be in place. A formal campaign about gender issues and DV through electronic and print media and the inclusion of women's issues in the curricula of the secondary and intermediate (higher secondary) school levels should urgently be undertaken.

It is undeniable that enacting DV law is a vital step to prevent violence against women but in order to provide basic rights for women and enforce the law for offenders, a holistic approach is needed. DV is still continuing for a number of complex reasons. The factor that enables men to continue abusive and stigmatizing behaviour and that women are blamed for such violence is societal attitude. Efforts should be made to address existing cultural values and social attitudes that sanction male supremacy. To change the social and cultural attitude to DV, there is an urgent need for widespread public education. A coordinated action needs to be in place to uproot DV where men's superiority over women needs to be challenged. Each time a survivor is told by police to be more enduring, each time a survivor is judged in a shelter home, each time parents pressure a daughter to return to an abusive husband, DV continues. It is high time to adopt zero tolerance for violence and initiate community wide support for survivors and address women's powerlessness in the family and the larger society. Only then will the social norms that today ignore men's violence, condemn such violence tomorrow.

It is clear that the state and community are increasingly recognizing the extent and consequence of DV against women. This happened mostly because of the continuous effort to pressurize government by women's activists and women's organizations, and partly because of the government's commitment to CEDAW and other international treaties. Political will to minimize and prevent DV was reflected in the introduction of the Domestic Violence Law 2010. The social and cultural attitudes that condone men's violence against women in the familial relationship are much more difficult to change. The other important strategy is to ensure the effective implementation of laws, prioritizing accountability and monitoring. This is more important than enacting new laws. A holistic approach will be needed both to address the practical needs of women who are in shelters

or are suffering in silence and to change the general structure of gender inequality which promotes DV (see also Schuler, Bates and Islam 2008, p. 341). Until the prevailing cultural attitudes which tolerate and promote husband's violence are confronted and eliminated, men will continue to abuse wives and women will have to endure. The social norms which encourage other family members, particularly mothers-in-law to dominate and abuse their daughters-in-law should also be challenged. If woman to woman violence has a background in the older women's fear of losing economic security, or if it is mostly associated with the social and cultural subordination of women, programs and policies need to ensure a social safety net for aged parent as well as redefining the position of women (Fernandez 1997). Like Raj et al. (2011, p. 712), I firmly believe that comprehensive action for social change is necessary to effectively address socially and culturally sanctioned behaviour, norms, beliefs (such as the inferiority of daughters-in-law, women's inferiority to men and the superiority of sons) and practices (such as dowry or preference for fair-skinned brides), otherwise interventions on in-law's abuse or husband's violence will simply be like a Band-Aid on a broken arm.

The overwhelming conclusion of the study, drawn from the qualitative data, is that the concept of patriarchy should be refined, as it is not just exercising power by men over women; it is also women being in position to dominate other women. This problematic notion of patriarchy was further complicated in the light of female staff who identified abuse in their own lives yet behaved horribly and in a patriarchal way to female victims. Thus the deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes that justify and condone DV must be challenged. Reducing domestic violence requires changing societal attitudes and behaviour at every level, from state systems and judiciary, police and laws through to organizations such as schools, workplaces and support services, local communities, right down to individual relationships and behaviours, changing the traditional view of the girl as a burden. There needs to be various strategies to eliminate the main cause of violence – women's subordination in the society. There needs to be a broad cultural change. A strong political will is needed to address poor implementation of laws. The findings of dark skin prejudice and the mother-in-law's abuse, the two new avenues for future research add extra dimensions to the picture of the

need for cultural change. This study argues that policies and strategies must meet the practical need of survivors. This includes addressing the patriarchal attitudes of some of the service providers. The focus of this study has been the experience of women who are resident in shelters. Its most important implication is the immediate change required at the more micro level shelter homes – the understanding of staff's attitude that is expressed by the mother-in-law analogy.

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Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Women & Children Affairs
Admin-3
Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.

No. MOWCA/ Admn-3/w. support/8/2004 (part-2)- 1640

Date: 7/6/2012

✓ To: Ms. Nasima Akhter
Ph.D Researcher
Department of Social Work
Room No. 235, Social Science
Flinders University, South Australia.

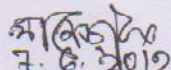
Subject : Permission to Collect Data from Victims of domestic violence and Officer/staff working in the Shelter homes run by Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

Ref: Your application, date: 19th March 2012 .

Madam,

With reference to your application, dated 19/3/2012 regarding to collect data from victims of domestic violence in Bangladesh, I am directed to inform you that Ministry of Women & Children Affairs has no objection to take interviews and collect data from the domestic violence victims living in the six shelter homes & the officers/staff working under shelter home.

Sincerely yours,


7. 6. 2012
(Laila Jesmin)

Deputy Secretary
Phone: 9559527

C.C.

Director General
Directorate of Women Affairs
37/3 Eskaton Garden Road
Dhaka.

Introduction letter

Spousal Violence in Bangladesh: ‘Problem Wives’ and Shelter Homes

You are invited to participate in the research project ‘**Spousal violence in Bangladesh: ‘problem wives’ and Shelter homes and** by Nasima Akhter, a PhD researcher at Flinders University. The goal of the study is to understand the phenomena of domestic violence against women in Bangladesh. Your part in this study will involve taking part in approximately a one and half hour interview.

A brief description of the study:

Research has shown that domestic violence against women is very common and severe in Bangladesh and affecting the lives of women and children. However, there is a lack of information on how socio-cultural attitudes to survivors influence the casual factors of domestic violence. This doctoral study will explore the factors associated with domestic violence perpetrated against women in Bangladesh. The main focus is on spousal abuse and the negative consequences for women victims/survivors’ wellbeing. To better understand some of the complexities surrounding spousal abuse in Bangladesh, the researcher will examine the stereotype of ‘problem wives’ and how it is used to justify spousal abuse. Insights derived from this qualitative study will be used to inform policy-making and program delivery of shelter homes in Bangladesh.

A total of 18 survivors (who are staying at any shelter home and also self identified as being abuse by husbands), 7 government officials, 4 NGOs personnel and few policy makers will be interviewed in this study.

Discovering the causes and effects of spousal violence the study will generate some know knowledge and understanding in this area and will also draw attention of policy makers, programmers and organizations to take effective measures in reducing domestic violence severity. However, the researcher cannot guarantee any personal benefit to any individuals/group participating in this research.

Procedure for interview:

If you are more than 18 years, belonging to any of the category of survivor mentioned above and interested to participate in this study, you will be welcome by Nasima Akhter. She will contact you and will make an appointment for interview (In-Depth Interview or Key Informant Interview) that may take more or less 60-90 minutes. The date, place and time of interviews will be based on your suitability. The interview will consist of your personal experiences with domestic violence. This interview provides you the time and space to talk about your thoughts. This discussion may bring you comfort or it may be upsetting. You have the right to refuse to answer any question (s). You also maintain the right to terminate the interview at any time. This interview allows you to share your experiences without being judged. Your words and experiences will teach others about real life truths behind domestic violence. Referrals for counseling will be offered. The interviews will be a very open conversational type and will be tape recorded. But if you don’t prefer tape recording, she will take notes instead. If required she may request you for a follow up interview for 20-30 minutes following above procedure.

Your participation in this study is strictly on a volunteer basis. You have the absolute freedom to refuse to answer any question(s). You also maintain the right to terminate your participation at any time for any reason.

Confidentiality and Guarantees:

Your identity in this research will remain confidential. Your privacy will be respected and upheld in all written documents resulting from the study. Your name and identity will not be recorded in tapes. You will be referred to by a fictitious name in transcripts and other written documents. You will be given a code number from where only the researcher can identify you, so that she may contact you if needed. you are also free to refrain answering the questions or discussion on issues which you don't prefer. Even you can withdraw from interview anytime before December 2013 when the researcher is expected to complete preliminary data analysis. There will no need of explanations or no consequences on you, if you decide not to contribute in this research. Records and files related with your interview will be kept in secure locations.

Concerns and Further Information:

If you have any concerns regarding this interview or if you are not comfortable communicating with the researcher, you may contact confidentially with **Associate Professor Heather Fraser**, Department of Social work, Phone: +618 8201 5302, email: h.fraser@flinders.edu.au or with **Associate Professor Barbara Baird**, Department of Women's Studies, phone: +618 82013437, email: Barbara.baird@flinders.edu.au

This research project has been approved by The Flinders University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any question/s about the research, you are more than welcome to contact Nasima Akhter or her supervisors- Dr. Heather Fraser and Associate Prof Barbara Baird in the address above.

Contact address of the researcher:

| | |
|--|--|
| In Australia: Nasima Akhter Department of Social Work Room no 235, Level 2, Social Science South Building, The Flinders University, Sturt Road, Bedford Park, GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001 Phone: (618) 82012738, email: akht0002@flinders.edu.au | In Bangladesh: Nasima Akhter 25 Islambug, Lalbug, Dhaka Mobile: 01912935525 email: nasima1972@yahoo.com.au |
|--|--|

Contact Address of the Supervisors

| | |
|--|---|
| Dr. Heather Fraser Senior Lectures, School of Social Work and Social Policy Faculty of Social & Behavioural Sciences Flinders University GPO Box 2100 SA 5001 Phone: +618 8201 5302 email: h.fraser@flinders.edu.au | Barbara Baird Associate Professor, Discipline of Women's Studies & Chair, School Research Committee School of Social and Policy Studies Faculty of Social & Behavioural Sciences Flinders University GPO 2100, S A 5001 Phone (+61 8) 8201 3437 email barbara.baird@flinders.edu.au |
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Appendix - Information Sheet



School of Social Work and Social Policy

Information Sheet

Title of Project: Domestic violence in Bangladesh: shelter homes and ‘problem wives’

Who is involved in this study?

My name is Nasima Akhter and I am a Senior Assistant Secretary of Bangladesh government. Currently I am doing PhD in Social Work at Flinders University. I have chosen this area of research because of my interest in it and my magisterial and administrative work with women who have experienced domestic violence by husbands. The research is being completed under supervision of Dr, heather Fraser , and associate prof Barbara Baird

Why is this research being done?

I am very interested to explore the factors associated with domestic violence perpetrated against women in Bangladesh. My main focus is on spousal abuse and the negative consequences for women victims/survivors’ wellbeing. To better understand some of the complexities surrounding spousal abuse in Bangladesh, I will examine the stereotype of ‘problem wives’ and how it is used to justify spousal abuse. Insights derived from this qualitative study will be used to inform policy-making and program delivery of shelter homes in Bangladesh.

In contemporary Bangladesh little is known about the experiences of women victims/survivors of domestic violence living in shelter homes. I would like to investigate with women how leaving abusive husbands affects their lives. I am doing this research so that community and service provider as well as relevant programmes and policies can be improved.

What does this research involve?

If you would like to be involved in the research I will be asking you to participate in an interview with me of around 1 or 2 hours duration. The location and the time of the interview can be arranged to suit us both. The questions I will be asking you about your idea and experience . However, in interviews, the questions often get answered in no particular order as the person is telling their story. These questions and the interview both aim to give you time to reflect on issues, so that you can tell your own story of life . With your permission, your interview will be audio recorded. This will be typed up and a copy will be sent to you to check if there is anything you would like to add, change or remove before I use it in the research. I will also provide you with a summary of the final report when it is completed.

Who is eligible to participate in this research?

You are welcome to participate if:

1. You feel you were subjected to abuse that may lead you to leave husband and staying state funded shelter home
2. You feel you were struggling with husband's violence for more than 6 months, but still staying with him
3. For other participants: government officials, NGOs executive, Women activist, Journalists, policy maker

Please be aware that participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without having to explain why.

How to express interest in participating

I will visit 6 divisional shelter homes and violence prevention cell and will circulate information among you and will invite you to participate in this research. I will describe the selection criteria and purpose of this research and outline the interview procedure, risk and benefits, confidentiality and guarantees during invitation to participate. respondents have understood these issues clearly. Then I will ask you whether you want to participate or not. From those who volunteer to participate I will randomly select individuals until the target number is reached. If you feel happy to participate, we can organize an interview place and time that is safe and convenient for you. Your contact with me will be treated respectfully and with confidentiality at all times. You can ring me on my mobile or send me any message to discuss the research further or clarify any concerns.

For contacting of you who are outside shelter and cell, I will try to make contact with you through my own network with NGOs, local government representative and violence prevention cell connection and also using the information will be provided by the survivor who already left the relationship or lodge complain. After getting information, I will communicate with you and will be ensure whether you are being abused by your husband or if you will be voluntarily admitted being abused in the process of attending NGOs monthly gathering or sharing with local government representative or came to have some advice from violence prevention cell, then I will brief you about the research project and if you voluntarily want to participate I will select you and organize an interview place and time that is safe and convenient for you.

What are the possible risks?

This research is concerned with some possible risks to you. These are; the protection of your confidentiality as a participant so that the information you give me is kept private; the protection of your anonymity so that the information you give me cannot be identified by anyone who reads or hears about the research findings; your safety from husbands who may detect your involvement and object to it and finally, any feelings of distress that you might experience during the interview when you are telling your story or after the interview process as a result of telling your story.

Protecting your confidentiality and privacy

I will be conducting all of the interviews myself. The majority of the interviews will be transcribed in the privacy of my place of residence. Only my supervisors and research assistant will view the raw data collected. If a transcriber is used for your interview, she will provide me with a confidentiality agreement. All transcripts, recordings of interviews and discs will be kept in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer. All raw data will be wiped or shredded and destroyed after five years.

Protecting your anonymity

I will take several steps to ensure that no one will be able to identify you as a participant and that you will remain anonymous. Your interview and transcript will be given a false name, or you can choose one. Your consent form will be kept separately from your transcript. All of your identity will be stored and reported separately from your transcript. To prevent any one being able to identify you when either reading the completed thesis or future articles, or by hearing about the findings such as in a conference, any identifying information such as names, and incidences will be removed from the transcripts and you are invited to further edit and omit data you think may identify you. The final report will be written so that no individual accounts are directly used but a list of the main themes from all the participants will be selected and presented. Short individual quotes will also be used to support these themes.

Safety from a violent husband

If there will be any risk for you being beaten up for participating the project, I need to address this and will take proper care to avoid the risk. I will make every effort to obtain sufficient information from you prior to carrying out interviews about the possible danger from your husbands or in-laws. If there will be any risk at all, the interview will be carried out at a secret (from husband) and safe place, rather than a public place. To minimize your risk, I will not interview any of you in your home. Interviews may be safer in a NGO's office or Local representative office or Upazilla women's Officer office. Safe procedures for any further necessary telephone contact, a way for you to have access to your transcript for comment when completed as well as the summary of results will be negotiated together. If you think the transcript is safe to be sent to you, it will be important for us to consider how to keep the transcript private for the length of time that you take to check it and make your comments before sending it back to me. but if your husband is particularly dangerous or intrusive and there will be potential negative ramifications for participating, I will rather advise you not proceed at all.

Feelings of distress

If you do feel uncomfortable, anxious or upset in the interview, you are welcome to stop the interview and turn off the recorder. You can then decide whether you just need a break, would like to change the topic, finish the interview or even withdraw from the research. I work as a magistrate and as a coordinator in shelter homes with many women affected by domestic violence and I am sure I can interview you in a sensitive and respectful manner where you feel supported and safe if you do feel any distress or strong emotions.

Statement regarding approval

Ethics Approval was granted for this research (Reference No:) from the Human Research Ethics Committee, Flinders University.

Who else can I contact if I have any queries or concerns?

If you have any concerns regarding this interview or if you are not comfortable communicating with the me, you may contact confidentially with Dr. Heather Fraser , Department of Social work, Phone: +618 8201 5302, email: h.fraser@flinders.edu.au or with Associate Professor Barbara Baird, Department of Women's Studies, phone: +618 82013437, email: Barbara.baird@flinders.edu.au. Or if you are interested to contact anyone who are not involved with this project, pls contact with Ms Andrea Mather , Executive Officer, phone : (08) 8201-3116, email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Thanks for taking the time to read this information

Nasima Akhter

PhD Candidate , School of Social Work and Social Planning,

Flinders University

The Flinders University human Research Ethics Committee

Consent Form

1. I,(please print name) consent to take part in the research project entitled: ‘Spousal Violence in Bangladesh: ‘Problem Wives’ and Shelter Homes’

- 2. I acknowledge that I have read and understood the attached Information Sheet
3. The objective of the project, interview procedure, my risk, rights and guarantees related with participation in this project fully explained to my satisfaction by Nasima Akhter. I understood all these clearly and giving consent freely to participate in this study.
4. Although the purpose of this research project is to improve the quality of knowledge and understanding in this area by identifying the causes and effects of domestic violence in Bangladesh, it has also been explained that my participation will not bring any personal benefit to me.
5. I have been informed that, while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and this will not affect me anyway now or in the future.
7. I am aware that I should retain a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Recording of interview:

- I am agreeing to allow tape recording of my interview/FGD
Please only take notes of my interview/FGD

(signature)

(date)

WITNESS

I, Nasima Akhter, have described tothe nature of the research to be carried out. In my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature.....Date:.....

Appendix 5: Circumstances that permit women to apply for right to divorce

Under the provision of Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939, a Muslim woman is entitled to dissolve her marriage on any of the following grounds:

1. the whereabouts of the husband have not been known for a period of 4 years;
2. the husband has neglected/failed to provide for her maintenance for a period of 2 years; Where a husband fails to maintain his wife, she can seek redress through the Courts: Criminal Courts if the maintenance amount is below Tk. 500, or Civil Courts if the maintenance amount is more than Tk 500. Due to purdah, however, she is required to be represented by a male guardian such as a father, brother, husband or son (Huda 1983).
3. if the husband has taken an additional wife in contradiction to the provisions of the Muslim Family Law Ordinance 1961;
4. if the husband has been sentenced to imprisonment for a period of 7 years or more;
5. the husband has failed to perform without reasonable cause his marital obligations for a period of 3 years;
6. the husband was impotent at the time of marriage and continued to be so;
7. the husband has been insane for a period of 2 years or is suffering from leprosy or virulent venereal diseases;
8. the wife was given in marriage by her father or other guardian before she attained the age of 16 years and rejected the marriage before attaining the age of 18 years;
9. if the husband treats her with cruelty; that is to cite:
 - a) if he habitually assaults her or makes her life deflated, even not hurting physically
 - b) if he associates with infamous women or ill reputation women
 - c) if he prevents her to exercise her legal rights of any property
 - d) if he puts barrier or obstacle in her religious practice
 - e) if he does not treat her equitable with any other co-wives or any other ground which is recognized as valid for the dissolution of marriage under the law (Pereira p.24; Haque 1989 cited in Subramanian, 1998)

Appendix 6: List of safety net program of Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)

1. Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) covering 750,000 distressed and ultra poor women who receive food assistance and development package training.
2. Vulnerable Group Development for Ultra-Poor (VGDUP) covering 80,000 women who are provided with life skills training on income generating activities, nutrition, primary health, human rights, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, gender and rights issues, environment etc.
3. Micro credit programs for poor and distressed women to develop their socioeconomic condition through self-employment.
4. 18 Day Care Centres in Dhaka and five other divisional towns.
5. Grants to women volunteer social welfare organizations – could be a point to tag women's survivors to any income generating activities training the organization is providing.
6. Monthly allowance for destitute and widowed or abandoned women and children. Once off financial assistance of min 500 to maximum 5000 taka are given to financially distressed, disabled, widowed, helpless, destitute, women abandoned by their husband, and divorced women to meet any emergency treatment cost, or for a sewing machine or starting a business (DWA 2008-2009).
7. Widows allowance covering 0.9 million distressed widows and divorced women in 2008-2009
8. Maternity Allowance covering 60,000 poor pregnant women in 2008-2009 with the objective of reducing mortality rate of mother and child, and increasing breast feeding.
9. Hostels for working women in Dhaka and four divisional towns accommodating 1,403 women.
10. Distribution of sewing machines to poor and trained women to make them self-reliant.
11. Sales and Display Centre in Dhaka to promote marketing of products produced by women entrepreneurs.
12. Safe custody for women, adolescent girls and children during their trials in courts.
13. Employment Information Centre for educated, skilled and unskilled women.

14. Residential training programs on agriculture, horticulture, poultry, fishery, cooking, *nakshikatha*, readymade garments, screen print, soap and candle making, computers at different training centre (MOWCA 2008-09).
15. Provide ongoing vocational and technical training programs in different trades for disadvantaged women in DWA headquarter, district and upazilla level offices. Various training such as sewing, embroidery, block boutique and tie-dye, computer training, candle, food processing, mobile phone servicing, show-piece making, beautician, packet making and candy preparation are provided to disadvantaged groups of women) in Dhaka. Furthermore, in every district and upazilla DWO office, all year some kind of training for women has been ongoing. (MOWCA 2011, p.10)
16. Provide legal support and accommodation through VAW cells and shelter for helpless female victims. Legal support, food, treatment, basic literacy and clothing and IGA training for rehabilitation are provided to victims free of cost.

Appendix 7: Programs for women by different ministries

1. The Ministry of Law and Judiciary has started a Legal Aid Fund through the formation of the National Legal Aid Committee to provide legal aid and counsel to financially insolvent or helpless justice seekers, mostly disadvantage people.

2. Under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the police head quarter has established a VAW prevention cell, which collects and compiles monthly reports of VAW cases from each police stations (total 597 police stations), then sends the reports to the MOWCA cell. Furthermore, Bangladesh police under the supervision of the ministry has also set up a victim support centre through the Police Reform Project with the collaboration of 10 NGOs in order to provide integrated services to victims of violence, particularly women and children. The primary role is to comfort victims in the immediate aftermath and assist and link them to long-term remedial services (Mannan & Zohir 2009, p.76). The MSW has specific programs on VAW, and has been running six safe homes for adolescents, girls, women victims and witnesses, who can stay at the safe homes if sent by court orders. The safe homes provide free accommodation, food, psychosocial counselling, and life skill development training.

3. The Ministry of Health in with collaboration of UNICEF has taken the initiative of establishing women friendly hospitals in order to reduce maternal mortality and as well as to provide effective support to women survivors of violence (Mannan & Zohir 2009, p.74).

Appendix 8: National, Districts, Thana and Union level VAW prevention committees

a. National committee on prevention of violence against women and children (32 members)

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Honourable Minister, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs | President |
| Secretary, Cabinet Division | Member |
| Female MPs(no. 7) | Member |
| Secretary, Prime Minister's Office | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs | Member |
| Secretary (Finance Div), Ministry of Finance | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Education | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs | Member |
| Secretary, Local government Division, Ministry of LGRD | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Information | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Primary & Mass Education | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Religious Affairs | Member |
| Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Manpower. | Member |
| IG, Police | Member |
| Divisional Commissioner, Dhaka | Member |
| ED, Jatiya Mohila Sangstha | Member |
| NGO representatives (no. 3) | Member |
| Educationist | Member |
| Joint secretary (Admin & Cell) , MoWCA | Member Secretary |

b. District committee on prevention of violence against women and children (8 Members)

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Deputy Commissioner | President |
| Civil Surgeon | Member |
| Police Super | Member |
| Public Prosecutor/ a member of bar council | Member |
| President, District Press Club | Member |
| Representative, Jatia mohila Songstha | Member |
| District Women Affairs Officer | Member |
| Assistant Commissioner (Female), DC Office. | Member Secretary |

c. Thana/ Upazilla committee on prevention of violence against women and children (6 Members)

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (UNO) | President |
| Officer in Charge (OC, Police) | Member |
| Police Super | Member |
| Representative, Jatia mohila Songstha | Member |
| Upazilla t Women Affairs Officer | Member Secretary |
| Upazilla Public Prosecutor/ a member of bar council | Member |

d. Union committee on prevention of violence against women and children (7 Members)

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Chairman, Union Parishad | President |
| Female MUPr- Ward-1 | Member |
| Female MUP- Ward-2 | Member |
| Female MUP- Ward-3 | Member |
| Head Master, of a High School within union. | Member |
| Family Welfare Assistant | Member |
| Secretary, Union Parishad | Member Secretary |