

Understanding the Role of Fathers in Rural Bangladeshi Households to Reduce Violence Against Children

Ishrat Khan*
Sayed Saikh Imtiaz**

Abstract

Violence against children (VAC) is a global public health, human rights, and social problem with potentially severe and expensive repercussions that transcend geographical, racial, socioeconomic, and cultural barriers. Its harmful repercussions are detrimental to children in every country, impacting families, communities, and nations, and spanning generations. The most prevalent characteristic of VAC is that it is an accepted aspect of cultural construction in many countries that has received less attention than other social challenges. In Bangladesh, like in many nations of the global South, where the family is widely treasured as a private place, preventing VAC is far more challenging. Follow-up on cases of child abuse committed by family members often exacerbates the difficulty. Fathers are consistently seen as the most influential decision-makers in these countries, where mothers are recognised as the primary caregivers in their children's health, education, and social life (Ball & Wahedi, 2010). This authoritative role of fathers frequently results in violence against their children (VAC) despite the paucity of studies examining the relationship between fatherhood and VAC. This study, therefore, investigates the prevalence of violence against children in the study areas and the ways to prevent violence against children (VAC) by positively incorporating fathers in household chores and childcare responsibilities. Based on mixed-methods research conducted among parents in five Bangladeshi districts, this paper looks into the impact of fathers' positive participation in home duties and childcare on VAC in rural Bangladeshi households. This paper proposes, based

* Assistant Professor, Department of Women and Gender Studies, University of Dhaka.
E-mail: shrat@du.ac.bd

** Professor, Department of Women and Gender Studies, University of Dhaka

on the findings of this research project, that violence against children within families can be significantly reduced by involving fathers in household chores and caregiving practices.

Keywords: *Fatherhood · Violence Against Children · Rural Bangladesh*

1. Introduction

Globally, the art of fatherhood has evolved alongside the emergence of various family structures and living arrangements. Fatherhood is undeniably essential to the formation of masculine identity. Scholarly attention to fatherhood is limited compared to motherhood and has been historically underrepresented in feminist literature (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Therefore, little is known about the factors that lead to changes in a father's engagement with children over time, and a lack of experience and willingness to assume the role typically prevents fathers from connecting effectively with their children (Hoffman, 2011).

The meaning and function of fatherhood have evolved progressively over the decades, yet this is frequently overlooked or not completely acknowledged in specific social contexts (Cabrera et al., 2000). Since the 1970s, a rising body of research on fatherhood in developing countries has highlighted the significance of the father's engagement in children's social, emotional, and intellectual outcomes at all stages of development (Henry et al., 2020). According to recent findings on fatherhood, children are more likely to thrive socially, emotionally, and cognitively when their fathers are positively involved in their lives (Baker et al., 2018). This effect is more evident among children in low-income countries with below-average educational systems (Mathwasa & Okeke, 2016).

Different contextual interpretations of traditional biological fatherhood and other fathering interactions are often reflected in scholarly interest in fatherhood. According to Trip-Reimer and Wilson (1991), different cultural practices and social structures, such as kinship patterns, family structures, and economic systems, may be directly tied to the variations in paternal experiences. Simultaneously, several studies examined the impact of fathers' involvement in children's early lives, even into adulthood. Although, in general, it appears that fathers within families should have more positive interactions with their children, research evidence indicates this is not always the case. For example, Yildirim and Roopnarine (2015) found that biological fathers hardly engage and interact with their children in Southern African countries. On the other hand, Smyth, Spence, and Murray's (2015) research in Australia shows that many unmarried men who are not biological fathers still serve as social fathers to children from other families. In several countries, the concept of co-parenting, in which both parents share and coordinate the degree of support and solidarity as parents, has received far less attention (Feinberg &

Kan, 2008). Although mothers are considered the primary carers in India and Bangladesh, fathers are frequently regarded as the most significant decision-makers about their children's health, education, and social development (Ball & Wahedi, 2010). Such an authoritative role of fathers frequently results in violence against children (VAC). Although statistical information on fathers' control over their children is scarce, it is a fact that globally, children often fall victim to physical and psychological violence by their fathers or stepfathers (Cavanagh et al., 2007). However, in South Asian societies, corporal punishment and many other forms of abuse are not considered by the parents as VAC. Fathers, as the head of the family, not only use but reinforce the practice of VAC.

In Bangladesh, as in many countries of the global South, there is a large data gap on how fathers exercise control over their children, but it is evident that physical and psychological violence is a frequent approach. In Bangladesh, where the family is treasured mainly as a private place, avoiding VAC is far more challenging. Follow-up on incidents of VAC done by family members often complicates the situation. Likewise, countries and other human rights agencies frequently view family violence as a personal affair and refuse to intervene. On the one hand, children's dependence on their parents usually exposes them to a vicious cycle of physical and psychological abuse, which is frequently encouraged by the widespread assumption that parents have the right to govern their children. On the other hand, since children are less likely to be seen as trustworthy witnesses, their accusations are typically refused or ignored. In a patriarchal culture such as Bangladesh, ensuring and exercising authority over family members, especially children, therefore is an integral part of being a father.

While it is true that a significant number of men are involved with their children in Bangladesh for a variety of reasons (Chaudhury, 2013), the necessity of involving fathers in positive parenting is frequently overlooked within various social institutions, including the family, which merits feminist attention. Bearing this in mind, the Centre for Men and Masculinities Study (CMMS) in Bangladesh conducted the *Priyo Baba* research project from 2014 to 2016 in an attempt to enhance the role of men in reducing violence against women and children in rural Bangladeshi families. This research sought to better understand the shifts in masculinities and the corresponding gender roles in specific Bangladeshi communities. Through the facilitation of community dialogues, the research also explored how fathers' positive involvement in caregiving activities and domestic chores results in positive changes within families, hence decreasing violence against children. Based on mixed-methods research conducted among parents in five Bangladeshi districts, this paper examines how fathers' positive involvement in household chores and childcare contributes to the reduction of violence against children in rural Bangladeshi families.

2. Justification: Why It Is Important to Engage Fathers in Reducing Violence Against Children

Violence against children (VAC) generally consists of deliberate neglect, verbal abuse, insults, defamation, isolation, rejection, threats, emotional apathy, and humiliation. The definition of VAC is often expanded to include the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a child by an individual or group that causes or has a high chance of causing actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity (Lansdown, 2014). According to Gil (2013), for example, VAC is the intentional, non-accidental use of physical force by a parent or other carer to damage, injure, or destroy the child. United Nations Child Rights Convention (UNCRC) defines VAC as all types of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse (Lansdown, 2014). These definitions include the critical components of VAC and underline the fact that violence extends beyond physical damage to encompass emotional and psychological dimensions and can occur in a variety of contexts and situations.

Being a global human rights and societal issue, violence has destructive and severe consequences on children that transcend geographical, ethnic, socio-economic, and cultural barriers (WHO, 2014). Due to its complexity, multidimensionality, and varied definitions, it is tough to track and analyse the trends, preventative measures, and response strategies to address violence against children. The most ubiquitous reality about violence is that it is an accepted component of cultural construction in many nations that has received less attention than other social challenges. These effects have a significant impact on the ability of children to fulfil their full potential throughout their lives. It incurs substantial economic and social costs and violates constitutional and legal rights against maltreatment, neglect, abuse, and humiliating treatment against children (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014). VAC has extensive intergenerational effects on the physical, social, and emotional health of many children. Its harmful repercussions are detrimental to children in every nation, affecting families, communities, and nations and spanning generations (Hillis et al., 2016).

In addition to physical punishments, it has been widely seen and documented that younger children are regularly subjected to non-physical forms of domestic violence, such as repeated threats, insults, and verbal abuse (UNICEF, 2005). Besides schools, streets, workplaces, entertainment venues, care facilities, and detention centres, children face violence even in their families. It has been demonstrated that violence against children by parents and other family members has escalated in the global South in recent years, regardless of the children's gender, race, ethnicity, class, or social status. Common perpetrators of such violence against children

within their families are parents, relatives, and neighbours. In many countries of the global South, where the family and household are primarily responsible for protecting and assuring the physical and mental safety of children, they often become the sites of physical, sexual, and psychological violence against children. This might not be an obvious consequence, but children exposed to violence are more likely to engage in violent behaviour than adults.

Researchers have observed a strong correlation between early exposure to violence and its consequences in later stages of life. There is also scientific evidence that acute stress in response to violence can damage brain architecture, immunological state, metabolic systems, and inflammatory responses (Anda et al., 2010). Not only can such events cause permanent damage to the neurological, endocrine, and immunological systems, but they can also influence the genetic modification of DNA (Danese & McEwen, 2012). Thus, VAC incurs substantial economic and social costs and violates constitutional and UNCRC guarantees for children from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, and degrading treatment (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014). Although the UNCRC and other human rights treaties³⁵¹ guarantee children's right to private and family life within the home, physical, sexual, and psychological violence against children is pervasive in many countries, especially in the global South. While these rights impose a responsibility on the state to take proactive measures to prevent violence against children and to prevent further harm when a child has been subjected to violence, in a country like Bangladesh, there has been a lack of empirical data on the problem's magnitude.

VAC in Bangladesh frequently spreads from the home to the community and vice versa, resulting in multiple and interconnected effects on children. For instance, a son who observes his mother being abused by her father/partner is also exposed to harsh parenting, including the use of corporal punishment as a form of discipline. Consequently, the boy child frequently seeks attention outside the family, is enticed into crime by the local gang, and drops out of school (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014). The lack of empirical research also limits our understanding of such a problem, particularly at the family level, resulting in a lack of initiatives to engage fathers in the prevention of violence against children.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the methods of data collection and analysis, the target areas and population, and ethical considerations. In this research, we collected data using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative methods include a questionnaire-based survey, whereas qualitative methods include Focus Group

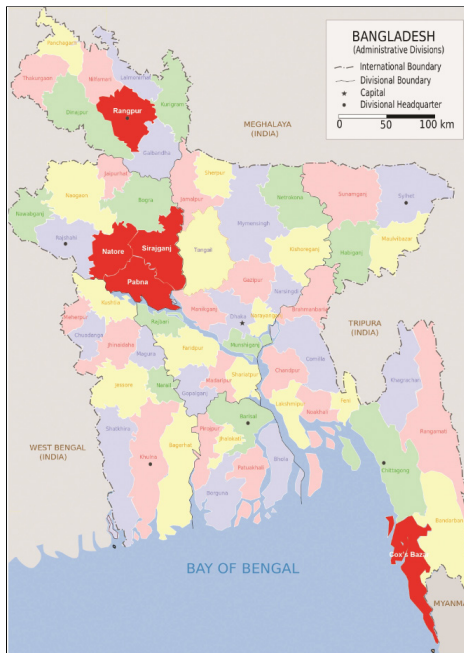
¹ Such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

Discussions (FGD) and Life History Interviews (LHI), which will be briefly discussed in the following sections.

3.1. Study Sites and Population

This research was carried out in five districts, taking into account the geographical diversity of Bangladesh. The districts, including Rangpur, Pabna, Natore, Sirajganj, and Cox's Bazar, are highlighted on the following map. Within these districts, we choose specific research areas. Katanga, Chatmohor, and Narayanpur, for instance, were from Pabna; Borochoa and Rakhainpolli from Cox's Bazar; Biharipara and Gongmochora from Rangpur; Gurudaspur and Boraigram, from Natore; and Tarash, from Sirajganj. Our target populations in this research include ethnic and religious minorities such as Bihari, Bindi, and Mahato from extremely poor communities. We also selected barbers, cobblers, shopkeepers, day labourers, fishermen, rickshaw and van pullers from Rangpur, Cox's Bazar, and Pabna's extremely poor communities.

Figure 1-Map of Bangladesh
(Five districts under study)



3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Sampling and data collection in this research occurred in two phases. The first phase involved the survey using purposive sampling to understand the prevalence

of violence against children in the studied locations. In this phase, a structured questionnaire was administered to randomly selected fathers from the selected communities. The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine fathers’ views, attitudes, and behaviour about parenting and violence against children. We were able to survey around 300 fathers throughout five districts. Key explanatory and outcome variables were chosen to code the collected data from the survey. Using SPSS, the survey data were classified into numerous categories to assess similarities, differences, and patterns and were then grouped. Instead of pre-coding, this strategy was utilised to determine how variable data functioned in its context. The graph below represents the sample population in each district according to their ethnicity.

The graph below indicates the ratio of fathers based on their religious background. 57.5 percent of the fathers sampled in five areas were Muslims and 42.5 percent were Hindus.

Graph 1- District-wise distribution of the sample population according to ethnic background

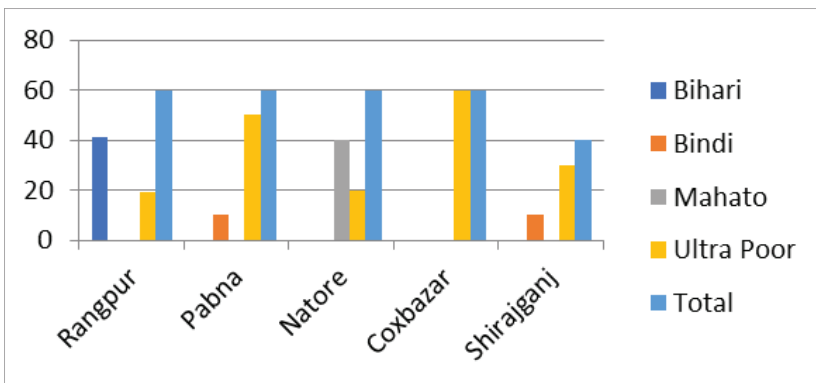


Table 1: District-wise distribution of the sample population based on religion

District	Religious Status		Total
	Islam	Hindu	Total
Rangpur	60	0	60
Pabna	8	52	60
Natore	20	40	60
Cox’s Bazaar	48	12	60
Sirajganj	26	14	40
Total	161	119	280

The second phase comprises the collection of qualitative data using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Life History Interviews (LHIs). First, 45 FGDs were conducted with fathers from both nuclear and extended families to determine the current fatherhood practises within the family. Positive fatherhood cases were selected from the FGDs for Life History Interviews (LHI). The LHIs helped us understand the lifelong experiences, motivational factors, and impacts of fathers' engagement in household chores and child-rearing practices that result in a reduction in family violence against children.

Word-for-word data was transcribed into a narrative format for qualitative data analysis. Numerical or textual codes were used to identify data matching specific themes. Data were also triangulated multiple times to confirm their reliability and internal validity. The data triangulation also took into account nonverbal cues from participants. Text, image, audio, and video source materials collected for data analysis were utilised effectively.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

In social science research, ethical concerns merit special consideration. Following that, considerable thought has been given to the question of ethics in this research. Respecting the rights, interests, values, and wishes of the participants, as has been repeatedly emphasised by social scientists, we took their position and institutions into account (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Locke et al., 1982; Spradley, 1980). In this study, research objectives and a description of how data will be utilised were given. A consent letter was developed to obtain the participants' formal permission to share their personal information. Prior to conducting the interviews, their written and, in some cases, verbal (for individuals with low literacy) consents were obtained. The form was read aloud to assist participants in understanding the whole data collection procedure and accompanying devices. In recognition of the participants' rights, their anonymity, wishes, and interests were kept confidential.

4. Findings and Analysis

This section summarises the findings and analyses of the research. This section is an examination of the prevalence of violence against children (VAC), particularly by fathers, in the research locations. This section contains three subsections. In the first subsection, we discuss the existing status of violence against children in light of the survey conducted among fathers in the places under study. Then, we describe the factors leading to VAC based on the narratives gathered from the focus group discussions (FGDs) and life history interviews (LHIs) with fathers. From there, we identified some examples of fatherhood in which the father's participation in childcare and household chores resulted in a decline in VAC.

4.1. Prevalence of Violence Against Children in Researched Locations

Our research indicates that, regardless of the gender, race, religion, or ethnicity of the parents, violence against children is highly prevalent in rural communities. Among the ethnic and Bengali communities where we conducted fieldwork, the most frequent perpetrators of VAC are family members such as parents and close relatives, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings. In these areas, fathers were frequently observed shouting, slapping, threatening, and assaulting their children. The table below depicts the percentage of fathers committing VAC within ethnic (such as Bihari, Bindi, and Mahato) and Bengali communities.

Table 2: Percentage of the parents across ethnic groups who use different forms of VAC (Results are based on multiple responses; Cumulative responses regarding the answer 'Sometimes, Rarely and Always' counted.)

Ethnic Groups	<i>Shouting/ Scolding</i>	<i>Slapping</i>	<i>Threatening</i>	<i>Beating with sticks</i>	<i>All</i>
Bihari	90.2	58.5	60.9	39	52
Bindi	80	80	60.9	55	40
Mahato	100	99.5	87	85	88
Bengali	93.9	81	81	47.5	45.6

As indicated in the table above, the rate of violence against children by fathers is very high across all ethnic groups. The survey reveals that VAC is most prevalent in the Mahato community. In both ethnic and Bengali communities, slapping, scolding, and shouting were the most often reported types of VAC. In addition to yelling, scolding, and slapping their children, data reveal that parents in the three ethnic groups of Bihari, Bindi, and Mahato primarily employed beating and threatening to discipline their children. Participants from Jalesshor para, Katenga Uttor para, Chaikola Khara para, Boraigram, Cholonnali Nishipara, Bihari Camp, Alamnagar, Shangcardaho, and Gangachara reported that whenever children cause a problem or ask for something beyond their means, they are either beaten, chastised, or threatened both verbally and non-verbally.

Our research demonstrates that family privacy and other societal constraints prevent the disclosure of these incidents, devastatingly impacting children. Some parents, particularly fathers, believe they have the authority to regulate their children by whatever means. As a result, they regularly scold, threaten, or beat their children for any offence. This piqued our interest in the primary causes of

VAC by fathers in rural communities. We employed qualitative methods such as focus group discussions and life history interviews with fathers during the second phase of our data collection. The following section presents the narratives gained from the LHI and FGDs.

Why do fathers commit violence against children?

This section examines the causes of fathers' violence against their children. The first reason was fathers' socioeconomic status, and the second was to discipline and cultivate good human beings in children. The final cause we identified was men's reluctance to share household chores and violent behaviour towards their wives, which ultimately led to an increase in family violence against children, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

4.1.1. Socio-economic Status of Fathers as a Cause of Violence Against Children

The socio-economic status of fathers is one of the primary reasons why they are abusive to their children. In rural poor communities, fathers' low incomes and inability to provide their children with the necessary food, clothing, and toys frequently lead to unhappiness and despair. Over time, such dissatisfaction and frustration lead to rage and violence against children. In a focus group discussion, fathers of Gangachara Thana in Rangpur stated that their failure to meet their children's needs leads to dissatisfaction and conflict between parents and children. According to the fathers, such emotional tension can frequently manifest itself as rage, improper behaviour, and violence against children. According to the fathers of Jaleshshorpara, Gonaigacha, it is frequently intolerable for parents to endure their children's whining over toys or food they want or their refusal to eat or sleep. The majority of them believe slapping or shouting at nagging children is appropriate.

In addition to socio-economic factors, it has been observed that the level of education of fathers is a crucial determinant of their parenting knowledge and their child's psychological development. At Jaleshshorpara, Gonaigacha, and Nishipara in Natore, where child abuse was rampant, the vast majority of fathers were illiterate. Rouf's father from Gurudaspur claimed, "Most people in our village cannot read or write. They do not have any institutional knowledge or training about how to raise a child properly. They cannot manage their anger and believe that the only way to discipline and assert control over children is to beat them". In contrast, he claimed that his exposure to both primary and secondary school had taught him about the negative repercussions of physical violence. As a result, he does not physically abuse his children.

In addition, the religious and cultural origins of fathers also influenced their violent behaviour towards their children. In Hindu Namashudra cobbler

communities, where class and caste problems take primacy, it was noticed that daughters were beaten more frequently than in Bengali Muslim families. Parents in traditional Namashudra families rarely allow their daughters to deviate from the arranged marriage pattern. Thus, fathers are pretty restrictive about their daughters' mobility, marital concerns, and partner selection choices. To preserve the family's honour and standing, fathers continually monitor their daughters and use force or threats to persuade them to adhere to family norms and ideals so as.

The practice of the caste system hinders the education of girls and the enforcement of equal rights in some countries. As members of a lower caste, members of the Nishi group claimed discriminatory caste practices and severe treatment. Given the fact that children from the Nishi community, particularly girls, are not permitted to attend the same school as other Hindu children from more affluent families, fathers typically limit their investment in their daughters' education. Since that dowry is a prerequisite in traditional Hindu marriage, fathers typically save for their daughters' weddings. As such, fathers are highly anxious about their daughters' mobility and violation of family norms or standards.

4.1.2 To Discipline Children and Raise them into Decent Human Beings

According to our fieldwork, a common perspective among fathers regarding violence towards children was that it is necessary to discipline their children in order to raise them to be good human beings. The majority of fathers believe that fear and physical punishment are essential for child management. Some believe mentoring children is the most effective way to help them understand positively. However, most believe training them to follow parental rules and regulations is more important. Fathers in Rangpur, for instance, noted in group conversation that disciplining children involves rearing them, scolding or slapping them when they misbehave, and yelling at them when they do not study adequately. Asad, in an FGD, stated that, 'Slapping or beating can make children understand what is right or wrong. If we fail to control our children from the very beginning, they will go rogue, derailed and wicked.' [Asad, FGD participant, Gangachara, Rangpur, 2016]

Two important causes of child abuse were identified in FGDs involving fathers. Children's disobedience towards their parents and other adults is one cause, while their refusal to attend school and learn lessons is another. Participants in FGDs reported that fathers endeavour to control their children to instil respect for their parents and elders. Men in Natore, Pabna, and Sirajganj were confident that mothers should be solely responsible for the care and upbringing of their children, while fathers' role should be limited to disciplining. Young fathers in Rangpur expressed that their children should be raised like their upbringing. Since they were regularly subjected to slapping, chastising, and beating by their parents, they viewed VAC as a regular form of childrearing.

In various FGDs, fathers shared that physical punishment is useful for deterring children from disobedience and managing their reckless behaviour. Some fathers believed that children must be disciplined and controlled so as not to deviate from the route to success and learn right from wrong. They felt that because children of their age were unruly, they must be disciplined and trained from birth to respect their elders. At FGDs in Mandalpara, Chaikola, and Gonaigacha, fathers frequently beat or punished their children for creating a disturbance. In another FGD, fathers identified hitting and slapping as the most effective methods for disciplining disobedient children. Momin, a father from Chaikhola, said, ‘Na mairli ki jait hobi? (Will they be disciplined if not beaten?’. [Momin, FGD participant, Pabna, 2016]

There is a strong tendency among children not to go to school in the areas studied. Due to their remote locations, most villages lack schools in their catchment areas. Hence, children from the villages frequently lack motivation to attend school. However, parents were found to be interested in their children’s education because they desire an educated and literate generation. Therefore, parents frequently scare, slap, and threaten children that they will stop feeding them if they do not continue their schooling. In several Muslim communities, parents pressure their children to attend Maktab’ for Islamic education and punish them if they refuse to attend.

4.1.3 Fathers’ Reluctance to Share Household Tasks and Childcare Responsibilities

In a traditional society like Bangladesh, patriarchal beliefs imply that a father’s primary responsibility is to provide for his family financially. Fathers in remote areas, in particular, have difficulty understanding how their little efforts might benefit their families. Childrearing, for instance, is primarily viewed as a feminine work within the researched areas. It was usual and anticipated that women would be solely responsible for child care and other caring responsibilities. In addition, male participants also firmly believed that only women are responsible for performing routine domestic tasks. Since men are primarily responsible for earning a living, they consider taking part in household responsibilities a “waste of energy and time” unless their wives become ill.

It has been widely noticed that men are typically uninterested in assisting their partners with post-natal care concerns. To them, it is primarily the responsibility of women, as they are preoccupied with making a living. Even those who remain at home contribute nothing to this function. Rahim, a father from Gunaigacha, said, ‘I did not even notice when and how my child grew bigger.’ Gopal Miah of Baraigram stated, “I go fishing extremely early in the morning and return late at night. Is there time to look after my child?” Alternatively, Azad of the Aziznagar

Bihari camp stated, “I make money for my family. Isn’t it sufficient? If I perform chores, what are wives expected to do?”

Field observations in Rangpur, Natore, Pabna, Sirajganj, and Cox’s Bazar indicated an alarmingly high incidence of physical and psychological abuse by fathers against their children. In certain areas, fathers’ authoritarian attitudes have presented themselves through beating, slapping, and threatening. Owing to a lack of parenting understanding, fathers frequently saw traditional child-controlling measures, such as beating and slapping, as means of restraining unruly children. While some fathers were involved in childrearing, most were observed playing with their children according to their preferences and time availability. This frequently resulted in family disputes regarding the gender-based division of labour between parents. As women are primarily responsible for childcare, their inability to manage children frequently results in their husbands’ committing acts of violence against them. As a result of this conflict, violence against women in rural poor areas became widespread. Seeing their mothers being abused by their fathers caused stress to the raising of young children, which ultimately resulted in psychological or emotional distress among them. Children who grew up witnessing their mothers being the victims of domestic violence frequently had a terrible upbringing that culminates in psychological issues in adulthood.

4.2. Ways to Prevent Violence Against Children- Some Positive Examples of Fathers’ Engagement within Families

Although violence against children is frequent among Bangladeshi fathers, our study interventions indicate that significant changes can be made to reduce VAC by involving fathers in household chores and childcare responsibilities. During our regular interactions with fathers to understand the need for positive parenting, following the end of the study, we observed some positive changes among a few fathers. In this section, we bring those narratives of positive fatherhood to show how their gradual engagement in child-caring roles generated visible changes in household dynamics as well as reducing both violence against women and children. To most fathers, consulted engagement with children during playtime is worth mentioning. They think buying toys for children or taking them out are possible ways to fulfil their duties after returning from work. To show a caring attitude towards wives, they often buy clothes or any food item during pregnancy, but fathers are seldom found to support their wives in the daily household chores.

Mominul from Katanga stated that parents should never hit or harm their children because they are the “true gifts from heaven”. The unbearable difficulties he witnessed his wife endure during her entire pregnancy helped him recognise the importance of having children in their lives. Therefore, he promised never to punish his child for whatever reason.

When asked, one of the participants, Sumon from Rangpur, said he only takes care of his child when his wife falls sick or cooks for the family. While his wife was pregnant, he took care of her and took her to the local hospital for regular follow-up. Like him, there were a few more positive cases of sharing household work and parenting with wives. Such cases must be highlighted to set examples for others in the same communities.

After finishing high school, Habibur worked as a cleaner in Chatmohor Thana of Pabna. His family is regarded as a “happy family” by the entire community. In addition to sharing the childcare obligations, Habibur also shares the household tasks. He says, “There are no feminine or masculine tasks in our house”. Habibur assisted his wife in preparing dinner. In addition to cleaning and cutting vegetables, Habibur frequently prepared meals for his family and washed dishes and family members’ clothing. Following in his footsteps, his children also shared daily chores. This family was regarded as a role model for their exemplary behaviour.

As a farmer, Bacher Molla struggled all day in agriculture to support the upbringing of his children. He also spent considerable time with his children to make them educated, self-sufficient, and family-oriented. One of his sons, Fakhrul, married Dipa, who was 14 when she was married off owing to poverty. Dipa had a lifelong desire to attain a higher education, which she told her father-in-law despite her belief that it would be in vain. Bacher took full responsibility for Dipa’s continued education and persuaded his wife and son, Fakhrul, to enable her to complete her education. As a result of such dedication and familial support, Dipa achieved exceptional grades on her Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC). However, when she was admitted to the Bachelor’s programme, she gave birth, making it difficult for her to continue her studies without family support. Bacher again intervened and inspired his wife and son to cooperate in childcare and cooking so Dipa could accomplish her dream of becoming a civil servant. While asked in the interview about the positive role of Bacher Molla in parenting, he replied that “a father is not someone who needs to be strict on their children but rather be friends with them to offer them a comfort zone. This is what every decent individual should do.”

Barochara is a remote village in Cox’s Bazaar where the majority of men are illiterate, and girls’ education is unimaginable. Md. Nasir from this village encouraged his eight children, including boys and girls, to meet the educational obstacles and shine. His unwavering support for his children and his willingness to transport them by boat to school in a nearby village influenced others in the neighbourhood. Due to his commitment and participation in household tasks, his children grew up with a basic understanding of sharing the burden of family responsibilities and caring for others.

5. Conclusion

For proper development, children need the support and guidance of their parents. Children with a loving, involved father are thought to have more pleasant childhood memories and stronger self-esteem. It is meant to enhance family peace and well-being when fathers participate in household duties and child-rearing. So, the goal of this study was to investigate how fathers' involvement in childcare work may help to lessen violence against children. In order to include fathers in caregiving at the household level, CMMS in Northern Bangladesh conducted a community dialogue session with fathers from the rural community. The research examined this session using a mixed methods approach to data collection. This research concludes that fathers' involvement in household chores and child-rearing responsibilities defies traditional fatherhood standards and diminishes the incidence of violence against children in rural households.

In this research, we tried to understand the current situation of violence against children (VAC) and how fathers' involvement can help reduce VAC in rural households. In a patriarchal society like Bangladesh, where fathers enjoy utmost control over family decisions, it is understandable that they will have the final say on the children's upbringing. The general practice of disciplining children dictates that fathers use strategies that can easily be regarded as VAC. Fathers seem to internalise such practices of disciplining children using corporal punishment as a generational practice. Most of the fathers reported that when they were children, they faced similar punishments from their parents. Unfortunately, these kinds of practices are not even usually considered by society as violent; instead, they also reinforce such abusive practices as an effective way to control and discipline the children, mainly the boys.

In the study area, we found that fathers not involved in caring for their children are more prone to commit VAC. All the households that reported that VAC is minimal at the household level have fathers involved in the children's early childhood care. The same observation also applies to fathers who regularly participate in household chores. In both cases, fathers are reluctant to admit at the societal level that they are engaged in household chores or care for their children regularly. However, they admitted they had better spousal relationships and mental peace than other fathers. They are also reluctant to admit socially that they regularly participate in household chores or care work. This indicates the strict patriarchal social rules and norms associated with the construction of masculinities and fatherhood that segregate the household as a private domain and the domain for women to take care of where men's entrance is taboo. So, these findings indicate the need for targeted intervention to create social awareness to engage men in commonly perceived deficiency areas, from providing less child support to limited involvement in domestic chores.

According to interviews with fathers engaged in household chores and childcare activities, the majority of fathers in the study locations, except a few, were unaware of the significance of their involvement in childcare. Through their participation in child-rearing tasks such as feeding and playing with children, men demonstrate an understanding of the father-child bond. Without external interventions at the societal level, it appears that it will be challenging to shift patriarchal norms, as men generally view women as accountable for domestic responsibilities.

To overcome their reluctance to share household responsibilities, they must understand how their participation might improve the family's well-being. The husband's conviction that he is morally and religiously forbidden from performing housework should also be questioned. Men should also learn to understand their partner's needs and to share the weight of household tasks and childcare responsibilities, according to our findings. Considering socio-economic class, religion, and educational level as significant determinants, women in every community studied for this research anticipated men's engagement in the family. Positive masculine figures were therefore encouraged and welcomed to serve as role models and mentors for the child in order to properly nurture and lead young children and contribute to their development in all areas. It has been emphasised that parents should discipline their children in a friendly manner as opposed to using force or threats. The ultimate responsibility for protecting children from all sorts of violence rests with family members, specifically fathers.

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