

Rape in Rural Bangladesh

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Abstract

Background: Rape is one of the silent brutal sexual offences in Bangladesh. Despite strong laws against it, the evil of rape continues to rise. Increasing trend of the silent cruel sexual offence (rape) represents a major psychopath sexual disorder and public health problem and progress of the country. **Objective:** The aim of the study was to determine the pattern of alleged rape victims in a rural district of Bangladesh with the ultimate aim to create public awareness about the brutal crime. **Materials and method:** This retrospective study was carried out on 330 sexually assailed alleged rape victims' report forms, who reported at Faridpur Medical College, Bangladesh from 2007 to 2011 for medical examination. **Results:** Among the study subjects maximum number (70.0%) of alleged rape cases were under the age of 20 years. More than two-thirds (64.60%) of the assailants were known to the victims, most of the incidents (64.20%) occurred in the victims' houses and nearby places. The study also revealed that minimum number of victims (14.20%) reported within 24 hours for medical examination. Almost one fourth of the alleged rape cases were gang rape and no positive finding in favour of sexual intercourse was found in about three fourth (72.40%) of cases. **Conclusion:** Public awareness about rape would be effective to report in due time with preserving the evidence of crime and modern techniques like DNA diagnosis may be of help to detect the assailant.

Keywords: Sexual offence; rape; victim; assailant.

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Introduction

Rape is prevailing in Bangladesh with an alarming condition. It is the most common and vicious form of violence against woman in Bangladesh.¹ In Bangladesh, police statistics on cases registered on violence against women (VAW) show that rape is the second most commonly reported form of violence against women, following dowry related harassment.² According to Ain O Salish Kendra

(ASK), total 527 incidents of rape or attempt to rape was documented between January and September 2014 in Bangladesh. Among these only 291 cases were filed, 43 victims died after rape and 11 other committed suicide.³

It is one of the silent sexual crimes against women and girls. Many women never report the rapes.

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The victim or family members of the victim remain silent due to the lack of support services or provision of protection for victims and witnesses, social stigma associated with rape and prevailing patriarchal attitudes, protracted court proceedings, inadequate investigations by the police, lacunae in the law, particularly the absence of rape shield provisions, etc. Moreover the rape victim has to undergo severe mental and social constraints.^{3,4}

According to section 375 of Bangladesh Penal Code⁵ a man is said to commit 'rape' who except in the case hereinafter excepted, has sexual intercourse with a woman under circumstances falling under any of the five following descriptions - firstly, against her will, secondly, without her consent, thirdly, with her consent, has been obtained by putting her in fear of death or of hurt, fourthly, with her consent, when the man knows that he is not her husband, and that her consent is given because she believes that he is another man to whom she is or believes herself to be lawfully married, fifthly, with or without her consent, when she is under sixteen years of age.

No age is safe from rape, as children of one year or less and old woman of 85 years have been reported.⁶ In 2013 a total number of 814 females were raped, among them 452 were children below the age of 16 and 127 were victims of gang rape.⁷ In Bangladesh 1,479 women had been raped in six months during January of 2009 to June of 2009.⁸

According to American Medical Association rape is considered the most under reported violent crime in USA.⁹ A 2007 Government report says that 75 and 95 percent of rape crimes are never reported to the police in UK.¹⁰

The aim of the study was to determine the pattern of alleged rape cases in a rural area of Bangladesh which might give a picture representing the countrywide rural scenario with the ultimate aim to create public awareness about the brutal crime (rape).

Materials and method

This retrospective study was carried out in Forensic Medicine department of Faridpur Medical College, Faridpur, Bangladesh. During the period from 2007 to 2011, a total of 330 alleged rape victims' report forms of nine thanas were enrolled. Relevant documents were collected from the preserved copies of the reports in the department with the verbal consent of the reporting doctors. Data were compiled and expressed as proportions.

Results

The age of the alleged victims ranges from 5 years old child to 40 years old woman with the mean±SD age of 14±3 years. The majority (60.0%) of alleged rape cases was in the age group of 11-20 years followed by 21-30 years of age group (20.0%) and 10.0% cases were below the age of 10 years (Table I).

Table I: Age group of victims (N = 330)

Age groups in years	Frequency	Percentage
0-10	33	10
11-20	198	60
21-30	66	20
31 -40	33	10

In the study majority of the victims (64.8%) were unmarried. More than two-thirds (64.60%) of the assailants were known to victims. The place of incidence of offences was highest (64.2%) in the victim's houses and nearby fields. Majority (85.80%) of the alleged rape cases were reported for medical examination after 24 hours. A total 94 (29.0%) cases were gang rape participating by two or more assailants. No positive finding in favour of sexual intercourse was found in maximum (72.4%) of cases (Table II).

Table II: Frequency of studied variables (N = 330)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Marital status		
Unmarried	214	64.80
Married	15	4.60
Divorced	101	30.60
Pattern of assailants		
Known		
Acquaintance	106	32.00
Neighbors	33	10.00
Relatives	44	13.30
Friends	31	9.30
Unknown		
Strangers	94	29.70
Others	16	5.70
Place of occurrence		
Victims' houses and near by places	212	64.20
Relatives' houses	40	12.10
Assailants' houses	44	13.30
Other places	34	10.40
Time interval for medical exam.		
Within 24 hours	47	14.20
Within 3 days	148	44.80
More than 3 days	135	41.0
Numbers of assailants		
Single	234	71
More than one	96	29
Opinion		
Negative	239	72.40
Positive	91	27.50

Discussion

In this study majority of the victims of alleged rape cases were below the age of 20 years who were children and young women. Similar findings were observed by Sarker et al.¹¹, and Hossain et al.¹², where they reported that most of the victims were young, below the age of 20 years. This result is a bit higher than that of report of Odhikar where they stated that 55% of the rape victims were below the age of 16 in 2013.⁷ It is to be noted that Odhikar use to conduct these types of survey with more resources on a vast study population.

In the study about three-fourths (64.60%) of the assailants were known to the victims. They were either acquaintance, friends, neighbours, relatives

and others. This finding is in line with that of the research done by Growing Up Safe and Healthy (SAFE) project² and studies of Sarker et al.¹¹, Islam et al.¹³, and Al-Azad et al.¹⁴ The study also revealed that highest number of incidence occurred in either victim's house and/or nearby places and similar scenario was revealed in research by SAFE.² But Sarker et al.¹¹ reported a little bit lower rate (more than 41%) in this issue.

The study found that only 14.2% alleged rape cases reported within 24 hours for medical examination, whereas the remainders reported after 24 hours of the offence, which ranged from within 3 days to even after more than 7 days. This delay pattern is almost similar with that of SAFE project research.² This delayed and variation of reporting time might be due to lack of awareness or due to variation of distance of different thanas with the district head quarter.

We found that about one third cases were gang rape, committed by two or more assailants. But in 2013 Odhikar recorded a total number of 814 female who were raped out of which 127 (15.6%) cases were gang rape.⁷ Their finding is also consistent with statistics of Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR)-2010 where gang rape findings were 17.7% though differs with that of ours.¹⁵

The study showed no positive finding in favour of sexual intercourse in majority cases. Hossain et al.¹² found that 70% cases had been given negative reports which is similar with our finding. Sarker et al.¹¹ found spermatozoa were positive in only 5.5% cases. The comment of negative opinion may be due to washing of the genitalia after incidents, in case of married women, sexually habituated women and in cases where the victims could not restrain. Presence of spermatozoa in vagina is the proof of sexual connection, but not rape and absence of spermatozoa in the vagina is not proof of sexual connection has not taken place. Another important cause of negative finding is the delay in reporting for medical examination. So the result of negative evidence does not exclude rape and positive evidence does not confirm rape.

Accusation of rape is easy to be made, very hard to prove and harder to disprove. Young women and children are the most vulnerable group for sexual offence maximum being under the age of 20 years.

Majority of the victims report after 24 hours of sexual assault after washing their genitalia, which is the common cause of negative findings of medical examination. Early reporting without washing the genitalia and applying modern diagnostic techniques like DNA testing might help to detect the assailant.

Limitations

Though attempt was made to reveal a comprehensive scenario of rape in rural Bangladesh the findings might not be fully representative because the study place and sample/were selected by choice, done only on the preserved and supplied record books considering the statement of the victims and opinion of the reporting doctors, so evidence might not be collected, preserved or supplied properly. There might be technical fault in the semen collection and laboratory examination. But we can conclude that findings of this study are not too far away from the reality.

Perpetrators of rape must be prosecuted and punished to the fullest extent of law. Public awareness about rape, expanding counseling and advocacy services for the victims, would be effective in increasing willingness of victim to report to proper place in due time with preserving the evidence.

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