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8.4.4. Violence against women and girls

Violence against women is a prevalent issue in Bangladesh,1018 with reports of widespread domestic violence,1019 ‘ubiquitous’ sexual harassment in public space and in the workplace, 1020 and large numbers of women and girls being raped or gang raped.1021 Forced marriage, 1022 as well as dowry-related violence, have also been reported issues,1023 including acid attacks – although acid attacks have significantly decreased during the past decades.1024 More information on legislation and punishments for these offenses is available in the 2024 EUAA COI report Bangladesh Country Focus.

According to a BBS survey from 2024, 76 % of women had experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime, and 49 % had experienced such violence the last 12 months. This constituted a decrease compared to previous years. Physical and sexual violence of non-partners had ‘significantly decreased over time’, from 27.8 % experiencing physical violence in their lifetime in 2015 to 15 % in 2024, and 3 % experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime in 2015 to 2.2 % in 2024.1025 Since the change of government and under the deteriorated law-and-order situation,1026 violence against girls and women has however been on the rise,1027 including attacks in public spaces,1028 and gang rape.1029 A local women's human rights organisation, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, indicated a 27 % increase in cases related to violence against women and children in September 2024, compared to the previous month.1030 ASK data suggested an increase in rape, with 441 rape and gang rape cases recorded in January–June 2025,1031 in contrast to 250 cases recorded in the same period in 2024.1032 There was moreover an increase in underage victims of rape. In January–June 2025, ASK recorded cases in which 48 children under the age of 6 had been raped (in contrast to 14 cases in the same period in 2024), 86 cases of victims in the age range 7–12 years (in contrast to 40 cases), and 94 cases of victims in the age range 13–18 years (in contrast to 50 cases).1033 In 2024, ASK recorded a total of 401 cases of rape and gang rape .1034 It should be noted that certain offences, such as rape and sexual abuse, are associated with shame1035 and social stigma for the victim1036 which make many survivors refrain from reporting such crime.1037

- **(a) Domestic violence, including dowry-related abuse**

According to the 2024 BBS survey most forms of violence had declined over the last 12 months, however sexual, physical, controlling behaviour, and emotional violence remained notably high over a lifetime. As a result, the overall prevalence of any form of violence remained high at 70 % in 2024, compared to 73 % in 2015.'1038 In the period January–June 2024, ASK recorded 269 cases of domestic violence against women,1039 in contrast to January–June 2025, when 302 cases were recorded by ASK.1040

Dowry is known as joutuk,1040and is defined in the Dowry Prohibition Act of 2018 as money or any other asset demanded or given by the family of bride to the groom's family as part of a marriage. While this act prohibits the dowry practice and prescribe a penalty of imprisonment of up to five years and/or a fine of up to 50 000 taka [about EUR 350],1042 the practice still exists.1043

In the period January–June 2024, ASK recorded 33 incidents of dowry-related violence against women, out of which 19 cases had been filed. In 12 of the 33 cases the women died of the violence and another four committed suicide after violence.1044 In the same time frame in 2025, i.e. between January and June 2025, there were 45 incidents, out of which 29 cases had been filed. In 23 of the 45 cases the women died of the violence and there were no reported suicides.1045 In 2024, a total of 77 cases were reported with 52 filed. In 36 of the 77 cases the women died of the violence while another seven committed suicide.1046

○ (b) Rape

Rape, as foreseen in the 1860 Penal Code,1047 is punishable by life imprisonment1048 or death if the woman dies as a consequence of the rape.1049 The law does not apply to marital rape if the wife is over 13 years. The definition of rape, as per the Penal Code, includes a requisite of penetration, and defines it as an act carried out by a man against a woman.1050

A series of incidents of rape and sexual violence against children triggered nationwide student-led protests in February 2025, with protesters demanding 'stricter law enforcement, the establishment of special tribunals for rape cases, increased police presence and enhanced protection for victims.'1051 In March 2025, another case

sparked further outrage as an eight-year-old girl was raped1052 and died due to her injuries. The protesters demanded that the government expedite justice for rape victims and reform laws related to women and children's safety.1053 In response, the Advisory Council [under the interim government] approved amendments to the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act on 20 March 2025, reducing the investigation period of rape cases from 30 days to 15 days and the trial time from 180 days to 90 days.1054 Following the approval, the Council announced the strict and immediate implementation of the law.1055 Further information on implementation in practice could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

○ (c) Sexual violence

In 2024, UN Women reported that incidents of sexual harassment at workplaces and schools remain widespread and normalised in Bangladesh.1056 Women in Bangladesh are subjected to harassment in the streets, in buses and at the workplaces.1057 According to Human Rights Watch, 'women and girls in Bangladesh have little recourse to seek protection or access justice' for crimes related to sexual and gender-based violence.1058 In the period January 2024 – June 2024 ASK recorded 113 cases of women being sexually harassed,1059 while they recorded 119 cases in the period January–May 2025.1060 According to the 2024 BBS survey, non-partner sexual violence was higher among adolescents aged 15-19, with 3.2 % having experienced such violence in their lifetime, and 1.7 % during the last 12 months.1061 In 2024, ASK recorded a total of 166 cases of women being sexually harassed.1062

In January 2025, the EU and UN Women signed a partnership agreement to prevent sexual and gender-based violence in public spaces, workplaces and tertiary educational institutions in Bangladesh, in support of the 2018-2030 Government's National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children.1063

○ (d) Acid attacks

An acid attack ‘involves the intentional throwing of any corrosive onto the face and body of a person to disfigure them’, as described by the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF).1064 The ‘attacks are carried out with the intention of causing harm, inflicting suffering, and in certain instances, taking someone’s life’.1065 In the period January 2024–June 2024, ASK recorded 7 acid attacks against women,1066 while in January 2025–June 2025, there were 3 reported acid attacks.1067 In 2024, ASK recorded a total of 14 acid attacks against women.1068

○ (e) Child marriage

In Bangladesh, marriage of girls under the age of 18 is illegal under the 2017 Child Marriage Restraint Act.1069 According to UNICEF, Bangladesh has the 8th highest prevalence of child marriage in the world and the highest prevalence in Asia, with 51.4 % of women aged 20-24 having married before 18.1070 Moreover, according to the same source, 24 % of women aged 20-24 gave birth before 18.1071 According to Girls Not Brides, poverty is a driver behind child marriage with most of the girls being married before 18 coming from low-income households, although the practice is also prevalent in richer families. Dowry prices generally increase with age according to the source, so poorer households tend to marry off daughters at a younger age to relieve the family economy.1072

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