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8.4.5. Access to justice

As mentioned, many victims refrain from reporting gender-based violence due to the social stigma around the issue.1073 When seeking justice, survivors of sexual violence ‘faced ‘long delays, stigma, systemic neglect, and have no choice but to give up.’1074 Women’s access to justice, especially for gender-based violence, have moreover been described as ‘inadequate’, 1075 with women and girls having ‘little recourse’ to seek protection or access to justice,1076 and insufficient shelter services.1077

According to PhD candidate Subrata Banarjee, whose fieldwork research focuses on access to justice for women in Bangladesh, domestic violence cases come to Bangladeshi courts either via reporting to the police station through the Family and Sexual Violence Unit (FSVU), or by filing directly with district courts.1078 These specialised service desks for women are available at every police station,1079 and there are also specialised Victim Support Centres1080 and so-called One Stop Crisis Centres (OCCs) available for rape victims.1081 The Daily Star, however, described the admission process to access these functions as ‘very complicated’ as victims needed to acquire police referrals or court orders1082 and sources consulted by OFPRA also stated that there were not enough OCCs across the country, that few knew about them, and that there was a lack of resources for the OCCs to be fully operational.1083

Although there are special tribunals in place to process cases of gender-based violence, victims of gender-based violence faced delays in investigations and few cases led to convictions.1084 In March 2025, the interim government passed a new women and child protection law1085 and introduced a provision to establish a special tribunal dedicated to handling child rape cases separately.1086 In 2025, the above mentioned Banarjee stated that women in Bangladesh are still subjected to harassment and discrimination during the medical process after being victims of rape.1087 While the ‘two-finger test’ for rape survivors has been legally banned by the High Court of Bangladesh in 2018,1088 the practice continues ‘due to a lack of awareness among doctors and even lawyers’, according to Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad.1089

In May 2024, the High Court of Bangladesh issued a circular clarifying that victims of sexual assault and other crimes against women may engage ‘personal lawyers beside the public prosecutor to handle their cases’.1090 As reported by Equality Now in April 2025, public prosecutors in Bangladesh ‘are often political appointees, and no accountability mechanism exists to ensure effective performance’, and survivors bribe court officials to track their case status.1091 Banarjee listed a number of challenges to accessing justice for women victims, including: the absence of security for witnesses, lengthy procedures, politicised legal

appointments, dependence on police for referral to court, corruption in the courts, limited court staff, lack of police cooperation to investigate, caseload pressure, and uneven resource allocation between urban and rural courts.1092

In March 2025, without providing information on effectiveness in practice, sources reported that the national authorities introduced a number of initiatives to address and prevent violence against women. For example, the Police Headquarters launched a hotline service to take effective measures against incidents of violence, aggressive behaviour, abuse, teasing, harassment, and sexual assault towards women.1093 In addition, a complaint about violence against women can be submitted by dialling a short code (‘3333’).1094

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