

CHILD HOMICIDE IN BANGLADESH: A STATISTICAL PROFILE

MD. ASHRAFUL ISLAM¹, MD. JAHANGIR ALAM² & MD. T. M. ABDULLAH-AL-FUAD³

¹Assistant Professor (Paediatrics), Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College, Bangladesh

²Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

³Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

In Bangladesh, on average one child every day is a victim of the homicide. It is evident that the provenance of child homicide has upraising trend and children are at increased risk for crime victimization. The purpose of this study is to eliminate child homicide by presenting the latest information about child homicide, including analyses of its risk factors and the way forward. This paper presents a preliminary analysis of more than 6,000 child homicides committed in Bangladesh between 2012 and 2017, from the reports of a daily newspaper. Content analysis was used as the research method of the study. The findings present a clear picture of the risk of child homicide, according to the age, sex, and religion of the victim, seasonal variation, the victim-offender relationship and methods of killing. The study also analyzed the cause of child homicide and pictured some way to eliminate this heinous form of crime.

KEYWORDS: Homicide, Child Homicide, Risk of the victim, Child killing & Victim- Offender Relationship

INTRODUCTION

As many as 28 children are murdered in Bangladesh every month, according to a report by the Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF), a network of non-government organizations. In their annual report, "State of child rights in Bangladesh - 2017," the forum noted that 339 children were killed in 2017, up by 28 percent from the previous year (Straitstimes 2018). Child homicide is the highest form of violence against children and has a serious impact on families and the community. Approximately 95,000 children are murdered each year globally, and being murdered in childhood is strongly associated with age, gender, and geography. The majority of child homicide victims (90%) live in low-income and middle-income countries (UNICEF 2014).

Killing a human being is the most serious forms of crime and killing a child is the most heinous crime of all. *Homicide* is the killing of a human being by another human being (Jason 2017). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989: Article 1) defines a *child* as any individual under 18 years of age (i.e. 0-17 years). *Child homicide*, therefore usually refers to those victims aged less than 18 years. The common perception about the homicide is that it is a random occurrence that could happen to anyone at any time anywhere. Despite these images of homicide, the reality is that homicide most often is not "random violence." That is, there are statistically identifiable, predictable patterns of homicide offending. This study explores these statistical patterns of criminal homicide of the children, primarily in Bangladesh, and offers qualitative accounts of various types of homicide. This study aims to answer the following questions: where homicide occurs and what is the current nature and trend, what are the socio-demographic characteristics of homicide offender and its victim, about who is most at risk, why they are at risk, what are the relationship between victim and offender and exactly how their lives are taken from them. Additionally, homicide patterns over time

shed light on regional differences, especially when looking at long-term trends.

Despite the devastating effect that the killing of a child has on individuals, families, and communities, compared with the amount of attention given generally to adult homicide, there is a surprising paucity of academic research related to child homicide (Roach and Shepherd, 2011). Child homicides are mostly unreported in the underdeveloped countries because of a poor monitoring system. Homicide data are often incomplete, and information on the victim–perpetrator relationship is lacking, seriously limiting the evidence base needed for devising effective prevention strategies. This study is one of the first attempts to explore the nature and extent of child homicide in Bangladesh in criminological perspective.

Since its impact goes beyond the loss of human life and can create a climate of fear and uncertainty, intentional homicide (and violent crime) is a threat to the population. Child homicide data can, therefore, play an important role in monitoring security and justice. Likewise, child homicide data can enable to gain a better understanding of the complexity of homicide and the different ways it affects the population, which is why this study delves deeply into the very nature of intentional child homicide. The influence of crosscutting and enabling factors, such as killing mechanisms are also examined in order to gain a better understanding of the role they play in the lethal violence of children. This study will help governments to develop strategies and policies for protecting those most at risk and addressing those most likely to offend. This study will also support the human rights defendant individuals and organizations. This study’s capacity to show variations, in the intensity of child homicide within the regions of Bangladesh and to enable the identification of homicide “hot spots”, which warrant further monitoring.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature and extent of child homicide in Bangladesh and by presenting the latest information about child homicide, including analyses of its risk factors and the way forward. This study has the following objectives:

General Objective: To examine the nature and extent of child homicide in Bangladesh.

Specific Objectives:

Collect data in order to:

- Know the socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, and religion) of child homicide victim;
- Find out the different types of child homicide and analyze the seasonal variation of child killing;
- Identify the causes of child killing and explore the relationship between victim and offender.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous research has consistently demonstrated the importance of taking a “developmental” approach to understanding child victimization (including child homicide and abduction) as children face different levels and types of risk at different ages (e.g. Crittenden and Craig, 1990; Finklehor, 1997; Adler and Polk, 2008; Daly and Wilson, 1988). Age group up to one year is particularly at most risk of homicide, as they constitute the largest single age group of victims in all countries which publish homicide statistics (Lawrence, 2004; Adler and Polk, 2008; Brown and Lynch, 1995; Daly and Wilson, 1988, 1998). Children aged less than one year being ostensibly most at risk due to their physiological

vulnerabilities, dependence on parents, and inability to escape assaults (Mayes et al., 2010).

The differential risks of homicide, which children appear to face at different stages of childhood are best explained by the relationships that children have with others (Boudreau and Lord, 2005). Daly and Wilson (1998) report on their findings of a study of child homicide that young children are 100 times more likely to be killed by a male step-parental figure. The most likely cause of death of young children has consistently been found to be asphyxiation (Cavanagh et al., 2007), neglect (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988), and shaken-baby syndrome whereby the violent shaking of the child causes fatal head injuries (Stroud, 2008). The main circumstance of the killing being “parental stress” and “child abuse”. (Cavanagh et al., 2007).

Those at the middle stage of childhood (e.g. Five to 12 years) appear to be at less risk of homicide than their younger (e.g. Zero to four years) and older counterparts (13-17 years) (see Daly and Wilson, 1988; Finklehor, 1997; Adler and Polk, 2008). This is primarily because their “routine activities” (Cohen and Felson, 1979) take them out of harm’s way for long periods, with, for example, attending school necessitating that children are away from their main caregivers for at least six hours a day, whereby “parental stress” (an opportunity to harm) is reduced. Older children (including teenagers) appear to be at higher risk of being killed by either an acquaintance or a stranger (Pritchard and Sayer, 2008), in circumstances mirroring those for adult homicide (e.g. feuds, quarrels, and those involving sexual motivation).

Research has therefore consistently shown age to be both the best predictor and explainer of which children are at most risk of being victimized. Finklehor (1997) refers to this approach as “developmental victimology”. Boudreaux and Lord (2005, p. 381) suggest the benefits that employing such a perspective has for those charged with preventing and investigating child homicide. The methodological practice of analyzing childhood crime patterns from a pediatric, age-based perspective has afforded researchers, health care professionals, law enforcement, and social service practitioners the ability to more effectively identify, investigate, and resolve serious child victimization cases.

Despite being consistently identified as an important factor both for calculating the individual risk of homicide and explaining the common relationships found among children and those most likely to kill them, links between victim age and risk of child homicide remains surprisingly undeveloped. Most research on victim age and victim-suspect relationships tends to identify only broad age categories, for example, Finklehor (1997) roughly differentiates between “young children”, those in “middle-childhood” and “late-childhood” (teenagers). Whereby the main risk of homicide identified in young children is posed by family members (particularly parents and step-parents) and the main method of killing is by beating or suffocation’ (Finkelhor and Ormrod, 2001, p. 2). Those in middle childhood have been consistently found to be at considerably less risk of homicide than children in the other two age categories (Daly and Wilson, 1988, 1998; Finkelhor and Ormrod, 2001; Adler and Polk, 2008) but when they are killed it is still parents and family who continue to pose more risk to them. Those in late childhood are at an increased risk of being killed by friends, acquaintances, and strangers, usually with sharp instruments, or kicking and beating (Finkelhor and Ormrod, 2001; Roach and Shepherd, 2011). Indeed, when compared to younger children, the homicides of teenagers closely resemble those of adults (Finkelhor and Ormrod, 2001).

METHODS

The content analysis method is used in this study as a main research method. The study looked at two widely circulated newspapers– the Daily Prothom Alo and the Daily Jugantor issued between 2012 and 2017 (6 years).

Police record along with other sources is used to supplement the data. Experts representing law enforcement agencies, human rights organizations, academics and civil society members were also interviewed regarding child homicide in Bangladesh.

From the wide range of national newspapers in Bangladesh, The Daily Prothom Alo and the Daily Jugantor was selected using purposive sampling. The Daily Prothom Alo chose for its wide circulation. Choosing second newspaper for the study, it was looked that which newspaper published crime data mostly. To identify this, the frequency of homicide news about 2 weeks (1st to 15th July 2017) in the top 10 newspapers were counted. It was found that the Daily Jugantor reported the highest frequency of homicide news.

The study area has covered the areas of all over Bangladesh. National newspapers cover the homicide data nationally. National crime statistics (from 2012 and 2017) was collected from the police station including all the Divisional level data. To supplement this study, cross- national data were also used to compare the finding with the child homicide studies of other countries.

RESULTS

The present study found that the death of the children were happening in many ways and many reasons, mostly in the context of power, personal gain, brutality, and sometimes sexuality. It was difficult to categorize those child homicides because there is no uniform classification of child homicide. Neither any study found on the typology of child homicide. Rather a different study made confused to select any typology because they are so different than others. This study analyzed the child homicide reported in daily newspapers and picked some common types of child homicide, such as the children (1) Killed (in general having the intention of killing of the perpetrator), (2) Killed by road accident, (3) Killed by drowning, (4) Committing suicide, (5) Killed by burning, (6) Killed after rape, and (7) Killed by medical negligence. The frequency of different types of child homicide in Bangladesh reported in the daily newspapers from 2012 to 2017 analyzed in this study. Its found that there is a significant uprising trend in the total number of child killing. The study revealed that the child murder rate increased almost triple in last three years compared with the corresponding two previous years. A total of 1516 children was killed in 2017, 1089 in 2016, 1514 in 2015 where it was 532 in 2013 and 540 in 2012 (Figure 1). The recent spate of brutal killings of children is quite enough to send alarm bells to the whole society regarding the severe decay in humanitarian values.

The study revealed that the child killing is increased in all almost all aspects both intentional and accidental. Belonging to the most vulnerable age group, the children are the first victim of a road accident. A total of 1639 children was dying in road accident in last six years where 397 children have died in 2017, 252 in 2016, 480 in 2015, 262 in 2014, 149 in 2013 and 99 in 2012. Highest number of children died in road accident in 2015 which is almost five times more in comparison to 2012 (Figure 1).

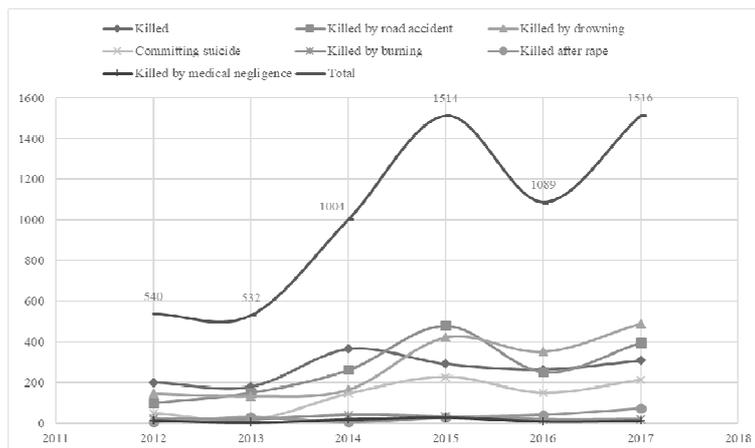


Figure 1: Statistics of Child Killing in Bangladesh Reported in Daily Newspapers from 2012 to 2017

Drowning is another leading cause of unintentional injury, death of children. Children with increased access to water are most at risk of drowning. Drowning is the process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid; outcomes are classified as death, morbidity and no morbidity. Bangladesh is a land of the river and has regular flood affection in a certain part. So that there is a high potentiality of the death of children by drowning. The study found that a total of 1688 children were died by drowning in last six years where 491 children were died by drowning in 2017, 352 in 2016, 423 in 2015, 165 in 2014, 132 in 2013 and 125 in 2012. High number of the child died in road accident in 2017 which is almost four times more in comparison to 2012 (Figure 1).

Suicide is one of the main causes of mortality in young people and for families, its impact is especially traumatic. Many antecedents lead those suicides such as Family environment and relationships, Abuse, Bereavement, Bullying, Social isolation, Suicide-related internet use, Concerns about sexuality, Academic pressures and so on. A 13-year-old Bangladeshi school girl had committed suicide in October 2017 after allegedly fell victim to the sinister 'Blue Whale' game, which is responsible for many teenagers' suicide around the globe. The study found that there were 799 suicides by children and young people in Bangladesh in the last six years (from 2012 to 2017). A number of 213 children were committed suicide in 2017, 149 in 2016, 228 in 2015, 145 in 2014, 15 in 2013 and 49 in 2012. High number of the children suicide was found in 2015 which is almost fifteen times higher in comparison to 2013 (Figure 1). The suicide rate in this age group is low overall, but is highest in the late teens. The majority of deaths were in females (62%).

Risk of Child Homicide According to the Age, Sex, and Religion of the Victim

In the cause of death for a known child and youth homicides under the age of 18 during the 6-year period 2012 to 2017, a total of 1,516 children and youths were victims of homicide. The mean age of the victims was eight years (SD=7.01 years, range 0-17 years). Homicides according to victim age are summarized in Figure 2. As can be seen, the age of victims of child homicide is not evenly distributed, but instead follows at U-shaped probability distribution with younger children aged 0-3 years and older, children aged 14-17 years over -represented as victims of homicide when compared with those aged 4-13 years. Translated into the risk of homicide, young and older children appear to be at greater risk than their middle childhood counterparts, of being victims of homicide. Infants under -1- year old are the most vulnerable.

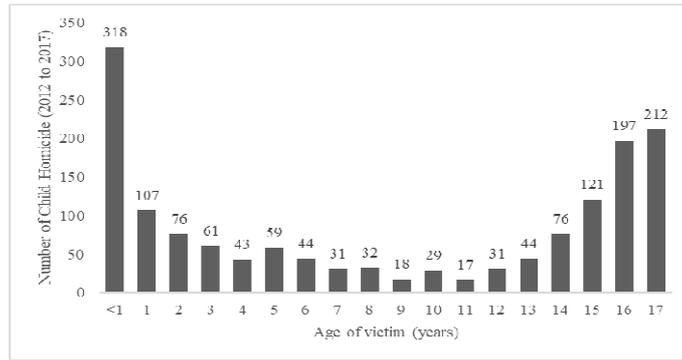


Figure 2: Age of Child Homicide Victims (2012-2017)

With regard to the victims, female children constituted 64 percent of victims (male=543, Female=973), so that the study found that in case of child homicide, the female children are more at risk. Because of being girl child they are at risk of sexually violated and its highest form is killing after rape. From 2012 to 2017 a total of 107 girls was killed after being raped.

For religion, 92 per cent (n=1395) was recorded as being Muslim; followed by 5 percent (n=76) victims of child homicide were found Hindu, 2 percent (n=31) were Christian and 1 percent (n=14) were Buddhist. Bangladesh is constitutionally a secular country. Islam is the largest religion of Bangladesh; Muslims constitute 90.2% of the population, followed by Hindus, who constitute 8.2%, and Buddhists, Christians, those who practice other religions and those who do not are the remainders. Bangladesh only recognizes Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. So proportionately with the population, the Muslim child is more at risk of the child homicide.

Intentional Killing of the Children at Various Seasons

The study revealed that within the total number (1643) of intentional killing of children in last 6 years (2012-2017), the highest number of the child is killed in 2014 (366), followed by in 2017 (339) and the lowest number of killing is recorded in 2012 (201). Routine activity theory has proven most instructive for understanding temporal patterns in crime. The most prominent of the temporal crime patterns investigated is seasonality. In case of the intentional killing of the children, this study found a weak relationship between child homicide and the seasonality. In last 6 years (2012-2017) the highest number of child homicide occurred in July to September (429) which is mostly the Rainy Season and the beginning of the Autumn.

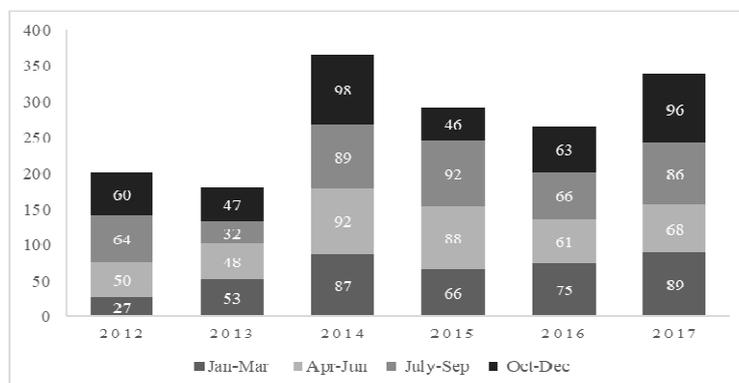


Figure 3: Quarterwise Scenario of Child Killing in Bangladesh (from 2012 to 2017)

Among dozens of studies on the correlation between weather and crime, not a single one shows a relationship between rain and crime, according to criminologist Ellen G. Cohn of Florida International University, who analyzed the research. Understanding the relationship between rain and child homicide is challenging since it doesn't rain all day long and police departments don't track the exact weather when a particular crime occurred. But in general, it can be said that its time of rainfall with thunderstorm the sound of uttering does not spread which may create a suitable environment for a homicide offender to kill a child. The study found the lowest frequency of child killing in the season of January to March (397) in last 6 years (2012-2017) which is winter and the beginning of the spring. According to Cohn, though the rain won't keep crime away, the cold might, that means colder temperatures equals less crime. The present research finding supports this statement and found a lower rate of child homicide in winter.

The present study also found that the sexual homicide of the children is found high in summer in comparison with another season. It can be explained that people get longer daylight in summer and enjoy most of the time out of the home. The potential victims also stay longer time out of a home. The proprietor may take this advantage. On the other hand, in case of rape and murder after rape, it can be noted that most of the time in newspapers we see, girls came out early morning to response the call of nature and raped or murdered after the rape. This case has mostly occurred in summer because the perpetrator used to stay outside early morning more frequently in compare to the winter.

Method used Killing Children and the VictimOffender Relationship

The present research represents a tentative advance on previous research by clarifying for Bangladesh, by identifying the most likely relationships they have to those most likely to kill them and further, provides some insight into how the offenders killed the children. Children aged between one- and under two-years are at most risk of homicide at the hands of a parental figure (including step-fathers), whereby male parents will kill them by battering and mothers by suffocation/asphyxiation. The younger children, mostly found died as a result of battering or suffocation.

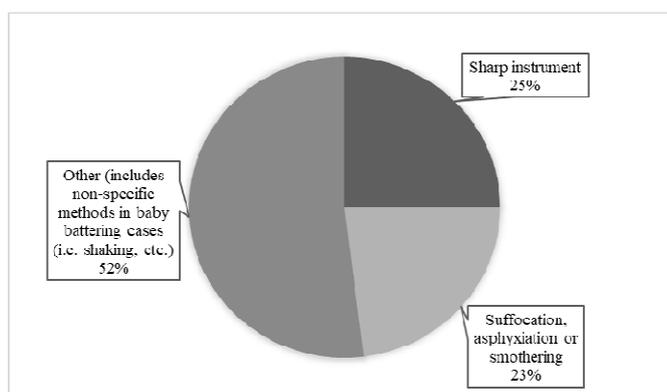


Figure 4: Method used Killing Children in Bangladesh (from 2012 to 2017)

The children mostly the boys aged between 14 and 15 years are at most risk from considerably older male friends or social acquaintances that kill them with sharp instruments. The caveat here is that in a significant percentage of these cases, as the circumstances of the homicide are unknown, the implication of this finding for professionals is somewhat limited. All that can be said at this stage is that without sufficient data on the circumstances in which 14-year old boys are killed, then little help can be given to prevent it.

Causes of Increasing Trend of Child Homicide

Children are being targeted as they can be victimized easily. The major cause of increasing trend of child homicide is given below:

Lack of Child Safety and Security

There are policy lacks relating child safety and security in our country. Bangladesh is one of the first countries to ratify the United Nation as Convention of the Right of the Children (UNCRC) in 1990. But there was a lack of political will for policy/law formulation and policy implementation and enforcement for the successful realization of the Conventions on Rights including the rights of the children. For this reason, the violence against children is increasing notably.

Weak Criminal Justice System

There is lack of initiatives to take preventive measures to stop child repression in the country. The criminal justice system in Bangladesh is not sufficient enough to bring the perpetrators of child homicide in the rule of law so that most of the time they remain unpunished which leads an increase of such occurrences. The child homicide is increasing because the people do not see perpetrators getting punished. Perpetrators do not even get arrested in many instances. Sometimes the charge sheet submitted by the police is so weak that criminals get out through the loopholes of law. In some cases, delayed submission of charge sheets in the cases of brutality against children also denied justice. A government of Bangladesh should do everything within its power to bring perpetrators to justice and help to end such violence against children. Ministry of women and child affairs is corresponding with the ministry of home and ministry of law to push for the speedy trial of child murders.

Law Status of Children in Society and Child Maltreatment

Children have a low status in society and within the family. Female children are valued less in society than males, where female children are considered to have less social and economic potential. Physical punishment is an acceptable or normal part of rearing a child. To prevent violence, we must, first, stop perpetrating violence on children. This means no spanking or hitting. Communities adhere to harmful traditional cultural practices such as child marriage. Children are powerless. A section of people who are perverted and brutal are turning children into easy targets.

Culture of Impunity and Break-Down of the Rule of Law in the Society

The Pervasive culture of impunity is one of the major reasons for growing incidents of brutal murders of children. Cultural and social norms are highly influential in shaping individual behavior, including the use of violence. Break-down of the rule of law in the society is another reason to foster violence against children which sometimes turns into the violent murder of children.

Conflicts Between Individuals and Groups

Cultural intolerance the intense dislike and stereotyping of different groups within society. In our society have a high level of tension between the interests of individuals and the interest of the group as a whole. Conflicts may arise between individuals because of a clash of personalities or difference of opinion. Conflict may arise between groups because of team rivalry, disagreements or resentment. The children are becoming the innocent victims of those conflicts as

they are less powerful and it is comparatively easier to victimize them. To get revenge for such conflicts, the children become an easy target and get killed.

Property Disputes

Property dispute remains a serious issue in Bangladesh which sometimes led to murder children. Almost one in every five households in the country suffers from land disputes and one in every four households with land disputes had bribed arbitrators. The social changes in different periods, mostly in 1947 and 1971, has been the major reason for the land conflict and problems. In case of property dispute, there are many examples, where the children become the ultimate victim and sometimes they had to die for this. As the children are the succession owner of the property, the opposition kills that child to get that property.

Kidnapping for Ransom

Kidnapping is the unlawful aspiration and confinement of a person against will. Kidnapping for ransom is common in Bangladesh where children are the most suitable target. Lots of time the guardian cannot manage ransom in proper time, as a result, the kidnapped child is killed.

Family Feuds

In Bangladesh violence becomes an acceptable way of resolving conflict contribute to violent or aggressive behavior towards the children. Family feuds are another reason of the violent death of the children. Often, a conflict which may have started out as a rivalry between two individuals or families became further escalated into a clan-wide feud. As the children are weak, they become victim easily in such case and sometimes lose life.

Tolerating the Brutalization

Children were becoming an easy victim due to decreasing norms and values and increase in perversion and brutality in society. Brutality has increased in the society that is resulting in the rise of child murders. A number of cases are observed the brutal nature of child killing. Criminal violence emerges from social experience, most commonly brutal social experience. Tolerating the brutalization is one of the responsible factors to increase child homicide.

Lack of Parental Control

Families are the primary incubators of violence today, as they have always been. The study found the clear indication of lack of parental control and supervision of their children which is one of the major causes of child homicide in Bangladesh. Close supervision and parental control can save the life of adolescent by avoiding the criminogenic environment and at the same time reduce delinquent behavior which can cause another adolescents to be victim. Social control and strong bonding can minimize not only homicide rate but also the overall crime rate of a society by establishing social ethics and moral social norms.

Influence of Media

Criminal aggressiveness originates in exposure to the mass media when people joined eager crowds at public executions. We need to protect children from violent scenes on television or videos. We must change the messages about violence that we give to boys, and expect the same standards of nonviolent behavior from boys that we expect from girls. In recent days, the media message including TV, social media and print media are full of violent content which is

influencing overall violence situation of the society. Child homicide is a by-product of such violent society.

Overall Degradation of Social Values

In recent times, Bangladesh has been witnessing a sharp and steep decline in social and moral values that dignify and distinguish a society. A homogenous nation as we are with rural root and common culture, the society is now in the process of gradual disintegration into a fragmented, greed oriented, selfish entity. This gradual degradation of values makes our society less humane and we become poorer in social capital. We are aghast to notice the pervading cruelty and callousness, the deviant behavior in the society. The increased homicide rate of the children is also a result of such social deviations is the loss of respect and values in the society.

Way Forward to Reduce Child Murder

Although this sort of incidents happened in the past, the number of such incident is now on the alarming rise and the nature of torture is also turning to be the worst. People think the main reason behind it is that perpetrators are not punished properly. In many cases, the offenders are not even arrested. Even if the wrongdoers are brought to trial, the lengthy legal process erodes public interest in the case. Sometimes the charge sheet submitted by the police is so weak that criminals get out through the loopholes of law. Punishment has to be visible and cases of violence against children should be brought under the speedy trial tribunal.

Abnormal delay in disposal of cases relating to brutality against children is also a major reason behind the recurrence of such crimes. More importantly, an impression has been created among a section of people that after committing such crimes, the offenders may easily go scot-free taking the advantage of slack in the legal process. This also encourages the perpetrators to take law into their own hands.

The alarming rise in incidents of violence against children across the country has triggered grave concern among the people both at home and abroad. Drastic slide in law and order and fast decay in moral values among a section of people create the ground for such barbaric acts. Lack of awareness and proper monitoring are also responsible for rape and sexual harassment of female children. Moreover, some of the culprits have a strong link with political high-ups who always try to protect them.

The law enforcing agencies should be sincere in taking appropriate action against the persons involved in child murders and rape, ignoring pressure from different quarters. As a tool to prevent child abuses, the trial process should be more prompt and visible to resist potential child abusers. People from all walks of life should also come forward to resist such crimes. Otherwise, such brutal killings and rape of children will continue to rise at an alarming rate.

CONCLUSIONS

The present research added knowledge by clarifying the nature and extent of child homicide in Bangladesh. This study explored at which ages children are most vulnerable to being killed and identifies the most likely relationships they have to those most likely to kill them. The study also revealed the gender bias and the religious affiliation of child homicide. The study also analyzed the season's variation and the method of killing in case of intentional killing of the children. The study identified the probable cause of child killing and ended up with some recommendation to the way forward. Although unavoidably any findings must be considered tentative at this stage, due to both the considerable amount of missing data and the ambiguity of recording categories in the newspaper reports.

Although the findings presented here go some way to enriching the detail on basic child risk profiles (e.g. beyond broad age categories) these are still not detailed enough, or indeed strong enough as they stand, to be of optimal use to those professionals charged with preventing and investigating child homicide. On a more optimistic note, we believe that the advancement of Bangladesh Police through various police reform initiatives such as One-Stop Crisis Centre (OCC), Victim Support Centre, Model Thanas etc. focusing citizen friendly police in Bangladesh to be a major step in the right direction and will facilitate more complete and useful research in this area. This study will be a pathfinder of those starting careers in child protection or criminal investigation. There is a lack of knowledge child homicide pattern and risk patterns. Research informed training in this area would be of most value to relevant practitioners. It appears that research of this nature, however, rudimentary, holds a great practical utility for those charged with keeping children safe and those investigating the death of a child. With access to better data, research such as that presented here, then the effect could be much more impactful. The present paper ends with a call for further child homicide focused research.

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