

## VIOLENT DEATHS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN BANGLADESH: INSIGHTS FROM HOMICIDE DATA

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### ABSTRACT

This study is intended to analyze the violent death of women and children and explore the factors associated with these cases. Content analysis from the secondary sources was the main methodology of the study where the homicide data of all over Bangladesh was collected from two renowned newspapers issued between 2011 and 2020. In this study, it is found that most of the violent deaths of women and children were conducted by intimate persons. Analyzing gender related homicide, it is found that most of the female homicide cases are related to domestic violence and sexuality. It is also revealed that most of the homicide of women and children were conducted in city areas. Considering the time dimensions, most of the cases were conducted at night. Gender discrimination and inequality in the society is identified as the root cause violent death of women and children. Comprehensive intervention is required in individual, community, institutional and social level to achieve equity and justice in the society addressing gender-based violence where women are safe and avoid violence and discrimination. Male engagement in gender-based violence prevention and protection program can be an effective prevention policy. Effective criminal justice system and crime control and prevention mechanism with well-equipped law enforcement practitioners can combat all forms of violence against women and children.

**KEYWORDS:** Homicide, Gender, Sexuality, Violence against women and children.

### INTRODUCTION

Death is the most common thing of every living thing in this planet earth. Death is always shocking. But it is extremely sad when it is intentionally conducted by another person. Violent death is the highest form of crime as well. This study analyzed the unlawful killing of women and children. Violence against women (VAW) and children is extremely high in Bangladesh which is a big barrier to achieve equality. Violent death of women is in the highest form of violence against women which is being common and in most of the time those pathetic deaths go beyond the silence.

According to the Report on VAW Survey 2015, about 87 per cent women victimization was conducted by their husband. Violence against women 78 per cent increased in 2015 in comparison with 2014. According to BRAC statistics collected from 55 Districts by the grassroots network of more than 12,000 *pollishomaj* of BRAC, 5,008 violence against women were found in 2015 and 2,873 in 2014 accordingly. The rate of violence against women is found higher (54 per cent) within the poor women in compare with the rich women. In these statistics, it is found that 88 percent perpetrators are man. Most of those males are either family member or the relatives of those victimized women. Highest VAW victimized is found in Comilla, Bogra, Rajshahi, Bagerhat and Satkhira. The VAW incidence mostly occurs in the month of May

where as it is found lowest in January (Fattah, K. N.,& Kabir, Z. N. 2015).

The data of Bangladesh police also supports the increasing trends of violence against women in Bangladesh. According to the Crime Statistics of Bangladesh police, everyday near about 11 people are murdered and 54 women and children are repressed in Bangladesh which is alarming. Year wise crime statistics of Murder and Women and Child Repression in Bangladesh is presented below.

**Table 1: Crime Statistics of Murder and Women and Child Repression in Bangladesh (2011 – 2018)**

Year	Murder	Women and Child Repression
2011	3966	21389
2012	4114	20947
2013	4393	19601
2014	4514	21291
2015	4037	21220
2016	3591	18446
2017	3549	17073
2018	3830	16253

**Source:** Crime statistics of Bangladesh Police, (2011-2018)

The above statistics clearly indicated that the violence against women and children including violent death of women and children situation in Bangladesh is alarming and having gradually increasing trend. The extreme form of this violence is death which should be a grave concern. The limited study on this issue even more limits the initiatives to overcome this unexpected and intolerable incident. It is a demand of time to analysis and identifies the appropriate action to save the valuable life of the potential women to uphold the practice of equity and justice. This study analyzed the current scenario of violent death of women in Bangladesh. The study included but not limited to the demographic attributes of women and children homicide victims, their risk factors and causes of those risks and the victim offender relationships. This study will also recommend the probable solutions to reduce this shocking offence.

## METHODS

Content analysis is used as data collection methods in this study. As data source two popular daily newspaper ‘Prothom Alo’ and ‘Jugantor’ was chosen as judgmental basis. Last decade was selected as the time frame of the study which was from 2011 to 2020. To supplement the findings, Key Informant Interview (KII) was also taken from the relevant experts including human rights practitioners, researchers and police officers regarding the issue of violent death of women and children in Bangladesh.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

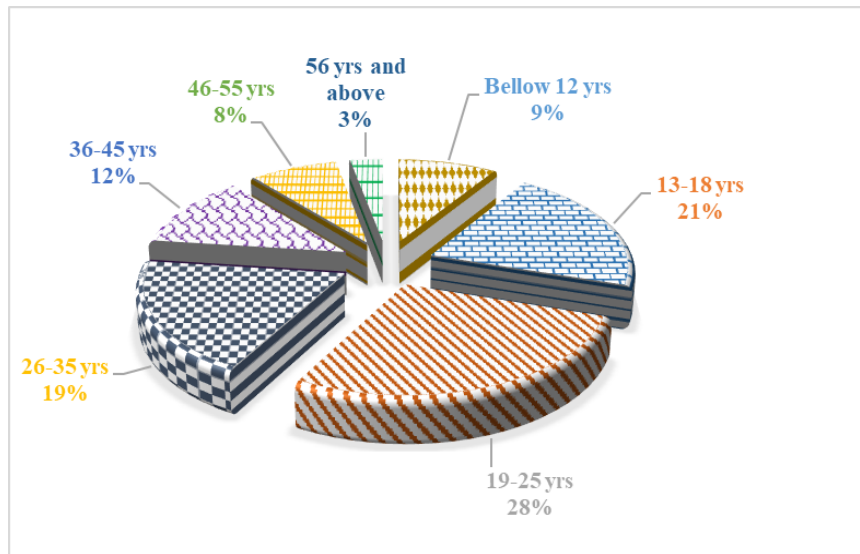
### **Socio-Demographic Attributes of Victims (Women and Children) of Violent Death and the Offenders**

This study revealed the demographic attributes of those women and children who are violently killed in the study period within 2011 to 2020. This data is limited to the reported cases only. Demographic data includes the age of both victim and offender, places, social class etc. The findings are mentioned below:

#### **Age of Victim**

In case of violent death of women and children, it is found that more than three-fourth (77 per cent) of the victims are in 0-35 years age group, where 28 percent of all homicide victims are 19-25 years group and 21 percent are in 13-18 age

group (Figure 1).

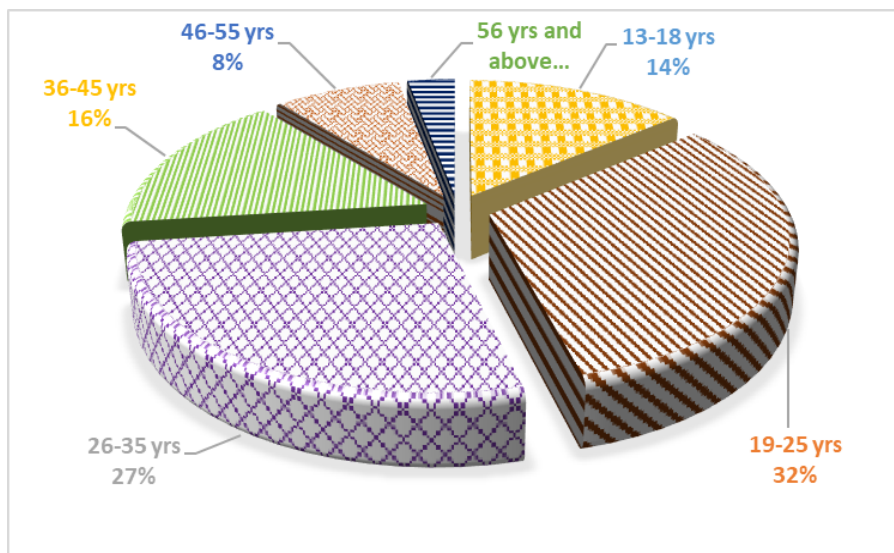


**Figure 1: Percentage of Age of Homicide Victim**

Source: Compiled by the author, 2011-2020

**Age of Offender**

The study revealed that, in the age range between 19 and 35 are more likely (59 per cent) than other age groups tend to be homicide offender of violent death of women and children. Of them 32 per cent are in 19-25 years age group and 27 percent are in 26-35 years age group (Figure 2).



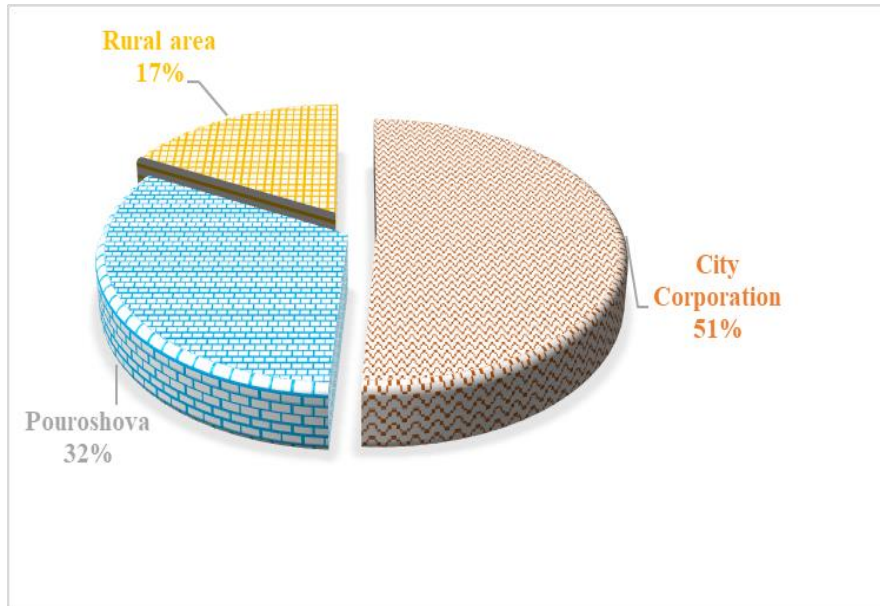
**Figure 2: Percentage of Age of Homicide Offender**

Source: Compiled by the author, 2011-2020

**Location of Homicide Occurrence**

The study revealed that most of the (83 per cent) violent death of women was committed in the urban area where 51 per cent homicide committed in the city corporation area and 32 per cent was committed in the municipality (*pouroshova*)

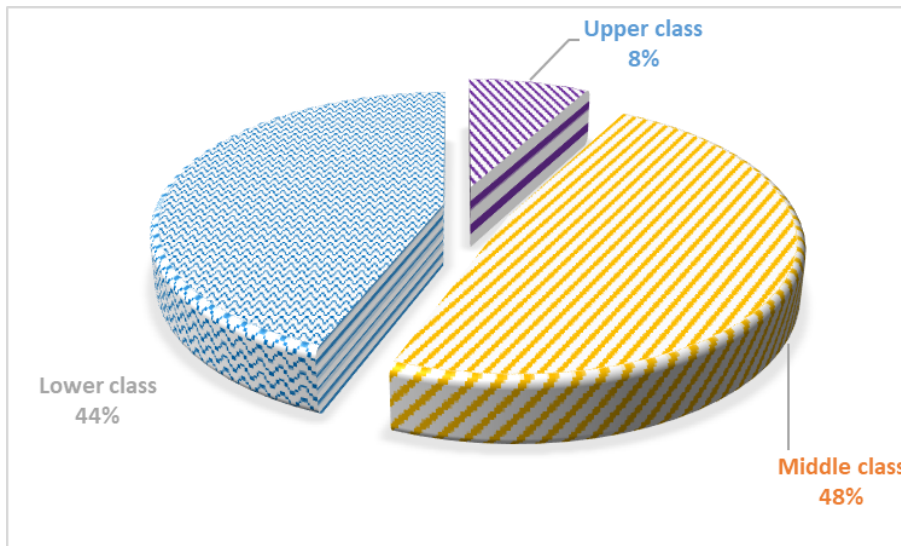
area. Only 17 per cent homicide was conducted in the rural area (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Percentage of Homicide Occurrence by Location.**  
 Source: Compiled by the author, 2011-2020

**Social Class of Homicide Offender**

The study revealed that around half of the (48 per cent) convicted of violent death of women belong to the middle-class family. Accordingly, about four out of ten (44 per cent) of convicted of homicide are from lower class. Very few (8 per cent) convicted of homicide found who are from the upper class (Figure 4).

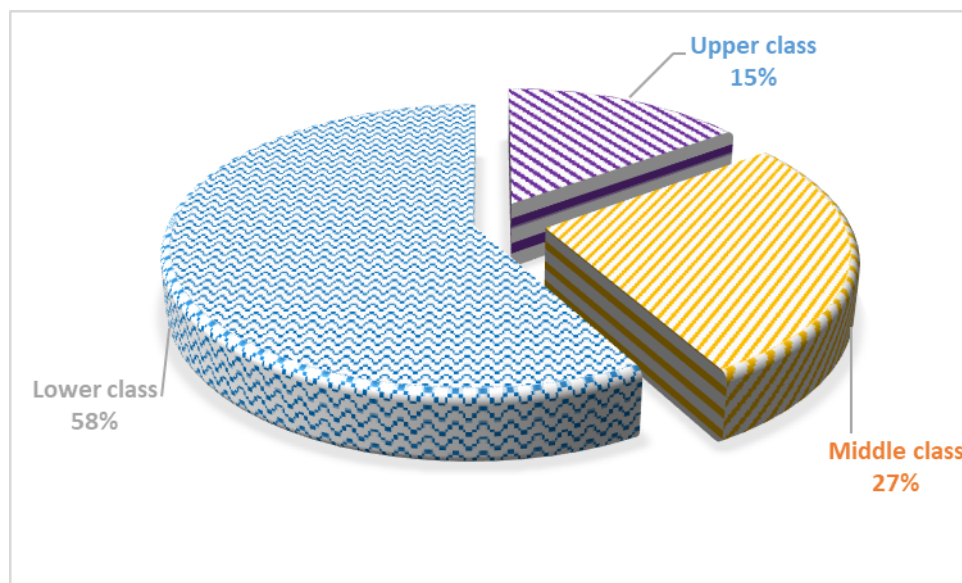


**Figure 4: Percentage Distribution of Social Class of Homicide Offender.**  
 Source: compiled by the author, 2011-2020

**Social Class of Homicide Victim**

The study revealed that around half of the (58 per cent) women who were the victims of violent death are from the middle-class family. According lower number (27 per cent) of victims of homicide who are from the lower-class family and the

lowest number (15 per cent) of victimization of homicide are observed in upper class (Figure 5).



**Figure 5: Percentage Distribution of Social Class of Homicide Victim.**  
Source: Compiled by the author, 2011-2020

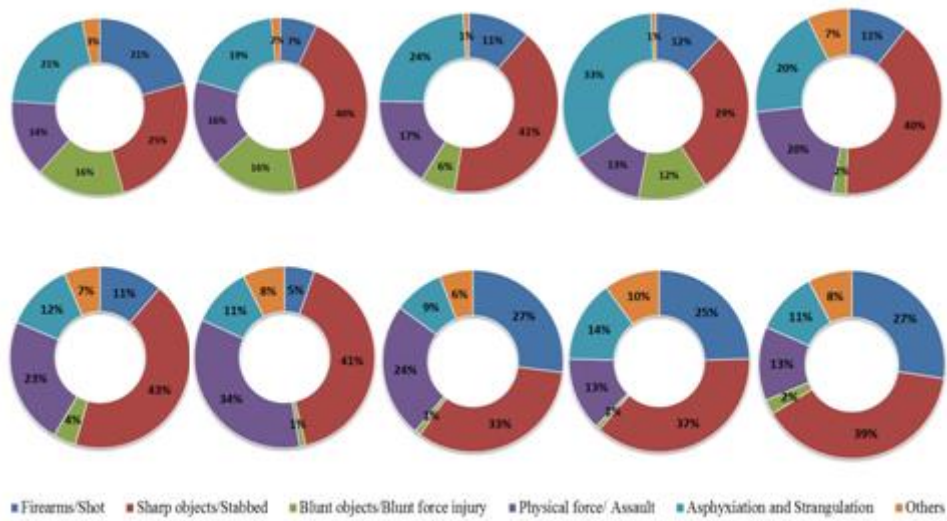
### Trends of Homicide over Time

#### Changing Trend in Use of Weapon to Commit Violent Death of Women and Children

The current study suggests that, use of sharp objects found as the major means of violent death of women in Bangladesh. In last several years, it is found that almost half of the violent death of women was conducted using sharp object (stabbed). For instance, 40 per cent homicide was conducted using sharp object in 2012, 41 per cent in 2013, 40 per cent in 2015, 43 per cent in 2016, 41 per cent in 2017, 37 per cent in 2019 and 39 per cent in 2020. Stabbing as homicide method was relatively lower in 2014 (29 per cent) and 2018 (33 per cent). The percentage of stabbing as method of homicide is almost consistent ranging from 41 per cent to 23 per cent (Figure 6).

Use of firearms is another common mechanism of violent death of women. In 2011, about 21 per cent homicide was conducted using firearms, followed by 7 per cent in 2012, 11 per cent in 2013, 12 per cent in 2014, 11 per cent in 2015, 11 per cent in 2016, 5 per cent in 2017, 27 per cent in 2018, 25 per cent in 2019 and 27 per cent in 2020. Use of firearm clearly shows an uprising trend of killing mechanism.

Other means of violent death of women and children include blunt force injury, physical force, asphyxiation etc. Of those means, a significant number of homicides were found (23 per cent in 2016, 34 per cent in 2017, and 24 per cent in 2018) where use of physical force as the mechanism of homicide. The use of blunt object as homicide mechanism has decreasing trend. It was 16 per cent in 2011 and 2012. But, in recent years the percent of using blunt object is ranging from 1 to 2 per cent.



2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020

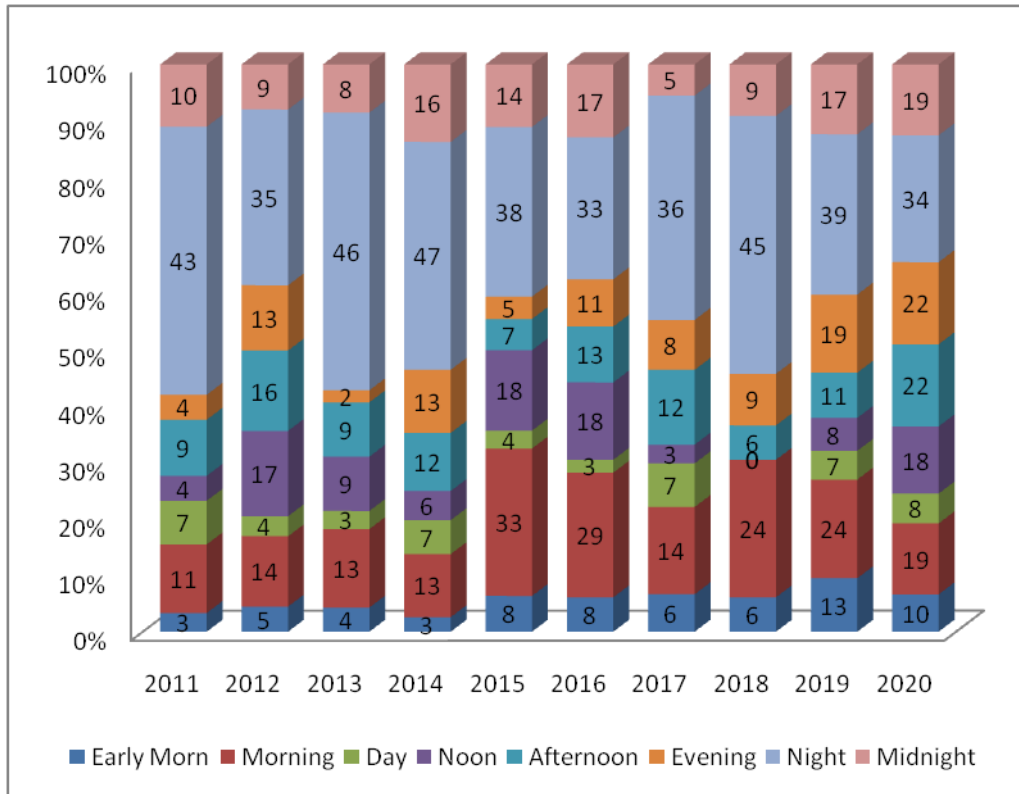
**Figure 6: Homicide Mechanism, by Year (2011 to 2020)**

Source: Compiled by the author, (2011-2020)

**Time of Homicide Occurrences**

The time that violent death of women happens during the day reveals a lot about the mindsets of the perpetrator. It is found that most of the violent death of women were committed (about 34 per cent) at night (9 pm – 12 pm). This is the dark time of the day when offenders get more opportunities to commit crime.

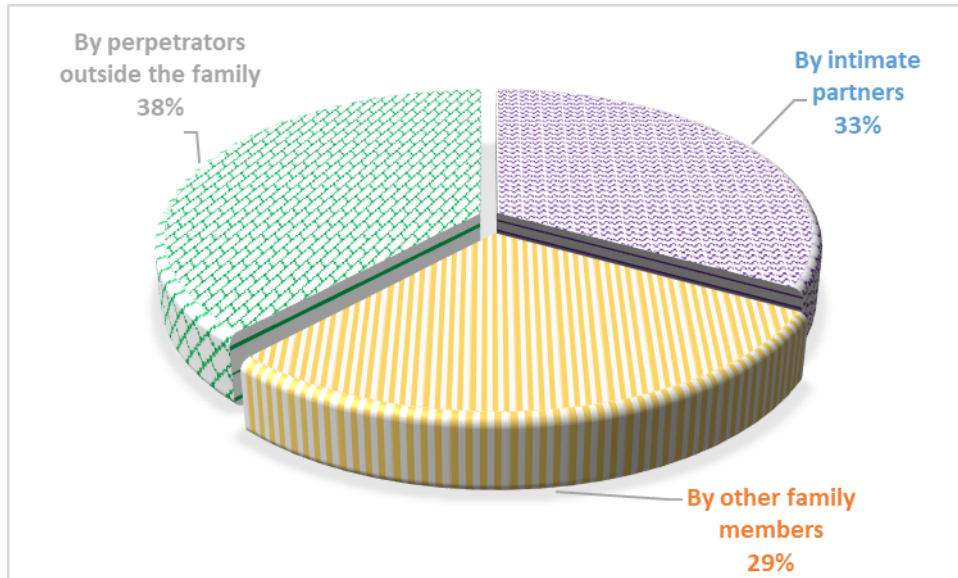
As occurrences at this time (9 pm – 12 pm) remain dark and invisible, the situation is favorable for the motivated offenders. Again, offenders face limited or no resistance at this time, so this is the high time for commission of crime. According to routine activities theory, a crime may be committed in the presence of some factors, i.e., motivated offenders, potential victims, and absence of capable guardian. So, in times when there is presence of an offender who wants to commit crime and is also an individual who is potential to be victimized, and again if there is an absence of capable agency to protect the victim (e.g., police, neighbors, family members, house owners, etc.), then a crime will be committed. From figure 7, it is found that the above data is also supported by the routine activities theory. In times when the above three factors are predominant, crimes are more likely to occur. The second significant death frequency is 194 which acquire 17 per cent of total incidents and were committed at morning (6am – 9am). The above table also indicates that fewer incidents were committed at day (9am to 12pm) (only 4 per cent).



**Figure 7: Time of Homicide Occurrence in Bangladesh, (2011 To 2020).**  
 Source: Compiled by the author, (2011-2020)

**Victim Offender Relationship in Case of Violent Death of Women and Children**

In criminological point of view, identifying the relationship of victim and offender is crucial to understand crime causation and further crime prevention. In case of violent death of women and children, it is commonly caused by the known person and even intimate partners. This study revealed that, the women who were violently killed, were mostly killed by the intimate partners or other family members. Among all the women and children were intentionally killed, almost six out of ten (62 per cent) were killed by the intimate partners or other family members, where around one forth (33 percent) were killed by intimate partners and another one forth (29 per cent) by other family members. Almost four out of ten (38 per cent) killed by perpetrators outside the family.



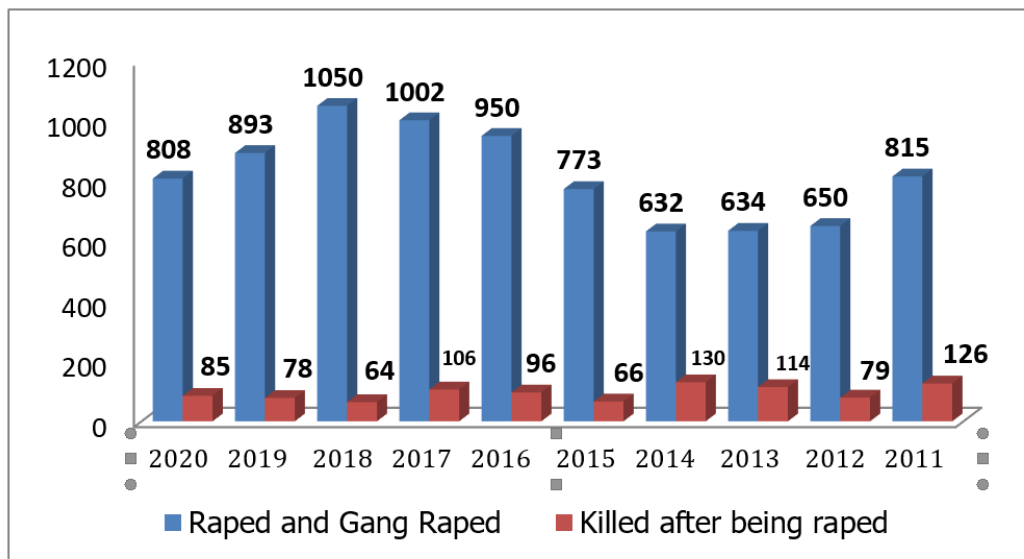
**Figure 8: Killing of Women and Children by Intimate Partners.**

Killing by family members and intimate partners is not just a random violence. Rather there have certain common dimension and motives of perpetrators for killings intimate partners. By differentiating those motives, we can understand the underlying dynamics of violent death of women and children performed by their intimate partners and family members. The study found that majority of the perpetrators tended to blame the homicide on alcohol intoxication. A large number of perpetrators blamed that they were having been victimized by their intimate partners from longer period which was intolerable for them. This study revealed that gender relation mostly with two different types of homicide such as domestic homicide, and sexual oriented murder. Data shows that most of the (68 per cent) female homicide victim was killed for domestic reason. Right next to domestic homicide about one fourth (28 per cent) female homicide victimization is related to sexuality in Bangladesh.

#### **Rape and Murder after Rape**

This study revealed that the highest (1050 women and children) rape victimization is found in 2018 and in 2011 highest (126) number of women were killed after being raped. This victimization is consistently increasing. In contrast with rape, murder after rape is shown in the figure where it is found that the 10-40 percent women were murdered after rape every year (Figure 8).





**Figure 9: Frequency of Rape and Murder after in Bangladesh from 2011 to 2020.**

The study found that 8,207 women were victimized of rape, attempt to rape, gang rape, murder after rape or suicide after rape from 2011 to 2020. Statistics showed 808 rapes reported in 2020 where 85 women and children killed after being raped. Followed by 893 rapes reported in 2019 where 78 women and children killed after being raped, 1002 rapes in 2017 where 106 killed after being raped, 950 rapes in 2016 where 96 killed after being raped, 773 rapes in 2015 where 66 killed after being raped, 632 rapes in 2014 where 130 killed after being raped, 634 rapes in 2013 where 114 killed after being raped, 650 rapes in 2012 where 79 killed after being raped, 815 rapes in 2011 where 126 killed after being raped.

Law has the provision of the highest punishment in this regard. According to Bangladeshi law (Prevention of Oppression against Women and Children (Special Provisions) Act of 1995) the court can give death sentence to the offender who has proven guilty to perform 'murder after rape'. But the execution of this law is very limited. Among 4,427 women who were victimized of rape in last six years, only 2,734 cases were filed. About 50 percent incidents were not even officially recorded. In last six years 508 women were killed after rape where only 280 suits were filed. In most of the cases their family were not filed formal suit. 168 suicides were conducted after rape where only 113 were suit was filed.

But very few cases are goes up to verdict. Most of the cases are pending from the years or negotiated outside the court though the cases are non-negotiable by law. In such cases most of the complainant parties are weaker than the accused party. By showing power or offering money mighty criminals somehow manage the victim's party. So, the legislations become helpless to bring the offenders to justice. If the complainant and the witnesses do not come to the court, the case automatically goes weak. When the offenders of such heinous crimes go unpunished, the other potential criminals become encouraged to do more offences in future. Setting example of justice is essential to control such crime. It is undeniable fact that law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh are not well equipped. Lots of improvement is required for timely response of incidence.

#### **Factors associated with Violent Death of Women and Children**

Women and Children are at risk at every level including at individual, family, community and wider society. To reduce

those risks, we need to address those risks and then take preventive strategies to minimize those risks. Following factors are associated violent death of women and children:

- Lower level of gender equality and justice including discriminatory laws
- Social norms that access higher status of man and subordinate position of women and girls
- Masculine attitude of men dominant patriarchal society
- Increasing prevalence of dowry
- Narcotics and drug addiction and uses of alcohol are uncontrolled
- Limited education and poor education quality
- Unemployment and frustration
- Limited women's access to job and poor payment
- Family dispute and marital dissatisfaction
- Male dominant attitude towards their wife
- No place to go since place at paternal home lost at the time of marriage
- Social stigma to broken marriage
- Weak legal sanctions and limited implementation of laws

From the above discussion, we can say that the root cause of violent death of women and children is gender discrimination and inequality in the society. Established social norm make women perceive violence as acceptable, and as they do not have any places to go, they tend to believe that violence is the only destiny of females, which they cannot escape until death.

### **Policies, Programs and Criminal Justice Responses to Combat Violent Death of Women and Children**

To combat violent death of women and children it is required to develop and enact such laws and policies which can eliminate all forms of violence against women and children and eliminate discrimination. Violent Death of Women and Children have been mentioned in many policies and programs and they have criminal justice responses. Some initiatives are existing in both international and national level to address gender related killing of women and children. In 2008 first declaration on "femicide" is made by Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) which declared that "femicide" is most heinous manifestation of discrimination and violence against women. In 2013 and 2015, United Nations General Assembly approved two resolutions on gender-related violent death of women and children. Besides those initiatives many treaties also adopted to ensure protection framework of women and children free from all forms of gender-based violence.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) supports the equal rights and opportunity of man and women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol women and girls also addressed violence against women and children. Though CEDAW did not mention

specifically about domestic violence. However, General Recommendation No. 35 and 19 mentioned that discrimination restricts women to enjoy rights and make them potential victim of violence.

Bangladesh has the legal obligation, as a state party of CEDAW, to comply with the requirements heaving in the convention. Many human rights organizations are advocating enhancing social awareness regarding discrimination and gender-based violence, but still there are no special laws on domestic violence against women. Besides these limitations, a huge amount of violence against women and children's cases are unreported which is called the dark figure of crime. The violent death which are reported, most of them are not properly convicted. For an instance when a father or a husband is accused, it is difficult to run those cases. Because the accused is the ultimate source of economy of victim. Without proper witness, evidence and persuasion from the plaintiff side, the cases do never see the light of judgement.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION**

Though violent death of women and children is one of the most serious offences, but combating this offence is absolutely critical. When people who are supposed to be the caregiver of his family become the culprit, the conventional legal framework become helpless. Gender based homicide is not just a random violence rather it is closely connected with gender discrimination and inequality which leads by the patriarchal attitude in the male dominant society where women and girls are always hold a subordinate position in the society. Women are being killed by their current and former husbands, fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters and other family members because of their role and status as women. Last few decades it is observed some feminist movement lead by some national and international NGOs, human rights institutions and civil societies. But their ultimate success towards equity is questionable. Remarkable development in both defending and saving the lives of female victims from their husband or family related killing has not been made. Women are still unsafe and criminal justice systems are helpless or incapable or unwilling to respond efficiently.

Efforts required to improve in all level including local, national and international institutions to prevent and protect women and children from all forms of violence. National strategies also need to improve where the law enforcement agencies are well trained and equipped to address the gender-based violence and the legislation should be rapid and effective so that the potential offender have enough fear to be convicted and the rule of law should be upheld. Access to holistic support is required for women and girl child where law enforcement agencies, criminal justice system, education, health and other social services become integratory supportive for them and all the agencies should be well coordinated and sustainable. Women need to be well capacitated as they can leave violent relationship and have alternative place to go. Alternative support services like safe house, legal support and counselling should be available and accessible for them. Women engagement in economic role should be enhanced as the women can be self-dependent and self sufficient whenever they face any abusive circumstances. It should be taken in consideration that women empowerment should be healthy and equity based keeping social harmonization and maintain male female relation well balanced.

Another crucial aspect is men and boy engagement gender-based violence prevention and protection program. Intervention is required where male can come out from the violent masculinity and gender stereotypes as a result, they can avoid violent killing within and outside the family. Problem is in cultural norms, believes altitudes and practices not in men. Proper socialization can relief men from the burden of masculinity. Effective intervention is required to address the underlying discriminatory social norms that makes a suitable environment for man choosing violent killing as the exercising power and control mechanism. Promoting rights-based and gender-responsive approaching individual, community, institutional and social level engaging men and boys to transform gender norms can be effective intervention

to reduce not only violent death of women and girls, but also control gender-based violence in Bangladesh.

Effective criminal justice system and crime control and prevention mechanism to response violence against women can reduce the risk of victimization and make this crime less suitable to the potential perpetrators. Comprehensive laws and policies are required to eliminate gender discrimination. Law enforcement practitioners including police, prosecutors, judges and other judicial officers should be well capacitated and equipped for successful apprehension, prosecution and conviction of offenders can minimize this offence.

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