

## Usage of telecommunication technology in perpetration of sexual assault- A study conducted on reported victims in a Tertiary Medical College Hospital OCC

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### Abstract

The sexual assaults and its consequences are increasing along with socioeconomic development of the country. Rise of modern communication technology add fuel to the flame. This descriptive cross-sectional study aimed to evaluate the role of communication technology in sexual assaults in Bangladesh. There were 87 victims included in this study. All were female of 6 years to 40 years of age, mean age was 15.67 ( $\pm$  6.69) year. Most of the victims were below 20 years of age and came from low income families. About 76% mobile used were smart phone. Among them 46% were owned by the victims herself, 26% gifted by the assailants to the victims. Talking through mobile (37%) was the main communication route between the assailants and the victims; followed by direct verbal (31%), mixed verbal and mobile talking (26%) and others (6%). Regarding methods of communication, they only talk in 42% cases and 36% cases used mixed method (talking, SMS and video chatting). The assailant paid all the costs in 62% cases. Mobile phone came as a blessing in communication, but inchoate use makes it a curse to our society. Parents should be cautious about their children's mobile usage (especially smart phone) daily. Government also should make some policy on using mobile technology by the younger citizens.

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**Key words:** Sexual assaults, telecommunication, assailants, victim.

### Introduction

The sexual assaults and its consequences (such as, sexually transmitted disease, teenage pregnancy, abortion, suicide etc.) are in alarming and serious public health problems around the world, especially in developing or under-developed countries. The situation is worsening day by day with the rise of communication technology. Last decades, development in communication technology has developed enormously in Bangladesh.

According to a report by Bangladesh Mohila Parishad (a Non-Government Organization working on women's human rights), the number of rape incidence was 731 from January to June 2019, while the incidence was 942 in 2018 in Bangladesh. There were 592 females were raped, 113 were gang raped, 26 were killed after being raped, and 123 were victims of attempted rape happened in said six months of 2019.<sup>1,2</sup> Development in telecommunication raised dramatically in last decades in Bangladesh. A Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (BTRC) report stated that the number of mobile phone connection has reached 164.17

million at the end of October 2019. Of which, about 90 million are regular internet users.<sup>3</sup> As people increasingly use social networking services and mobile phone technologies to communicate and socialize with each other, their use as vehicles for the perpetration of sexual assault is becoming an issue of significant concerns. This concern relates partly to the way in which such technology opens avenues for sexual victimization. It also relates to a lack of understanding among some groups

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about how these technologies work, what exactly the nature of the problem is and what solutions are required to address perpetration and its impacts.<sup>4,5</sup>

A number of cases have been recently reported in which mobile phone and online communication technologies are connected in sexual abuse victimization in our country. Few researches observed on it and till now no research done in Bangladesh. Hence this study is carried out to evaluate the mode of communication between the assailants and the victims in cases of sexual assault.

### Methodology:

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in the Department of Forensic Medicine in Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College. Data collected from the registry of "One-Stop Crisis Centre" of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, where sexually assaulted victims were brought for medico-legal examination during the period of January 2019 to June 2019. Every victim was examined individually by specialists and their trainee post-graduate students of Forensic Medicine. The data from the registry book was rechecked and recorded in a standard data collection form. Professional standards and confidentiality of the data was strictly maintained. Data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel Software. Descriptive statistics was used. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics committee.

### Results:

There were 87 sexually assaulted victims brought to this institution for medico-legal examination during this period. All of them were female; age ranging from 6 years to 40 years, mean age was 15.67 ( $\pm$  6.69) year. Age distribution of the victims showed in Table 1. Maximum victims 33 (37.93%) lies within 11 - 15 years age group. All the victims observed in this study were female. Regarding monthly income of the victim's families (Figure 1), maximum number of victim's monthly income had 20,001-25,000 taka/month (23, 26.44%) followed by

15,001-20,000 taka/month (19, 21.84%), >25,000 taka/month (18, 19.79%), <10,000 taka/month (15, 17.24%) and 10,000-15,000 taka/month (12, 13.79%).

Table 1: Demographic data of the victims.

Age of victims	Number	%
6 to 10	17	19.54023
11 to 15	33	37.93103
16 to 20	27	31.03448
>20	10	11.49425
Total	87	100
Financial status of victim's family		
<10,000 tk/months	15	17.24%
10,000 - 15,000 tk/month	12	13.79%
15,001 - 20,000 tk/month	19	21.84%
20,001 - 25,000 tk/month	23	26.44%
>25,000 tk/month	18	19.79%

Particulars of the mobile phone used in communication showed in Table 2. Modern smart phone was used in 77.01% cases and normal phone (only usable for voice call and SMS sending) used in 22.99% cases. Regarding ownership, 26.44% mobile supplied by the assailant to the victims and 45.99% mobile phone were owned by victim herself; rest mobiles belonged to the victim's friends (16.09%), relatives (6.89%) and parents (4.59%). Assailant paid the phone charge in 62.07% cases, followed by parent's payment (26.44%) and others (11.49%).

Table 2: Particulars of the mobile phone used in communication

Types of phone used	Frequency	Percentage
Normal mobile phone	20	22.99%
Smart phone	67	77.01%
<b>Ownership of the phone used</b>		
Assailant	23	26.44%
Victim	40	45.99%
Parent	4	4.59%
Friends	14	16.09%
Relatives	6	6.89%
<b>Payment for the phone usage</b>		
Assailant	54	62.07%
Parents	23	26.44%
Others	10	11.49%

Modes of communication and methods used in communication between the assailants and the victims showed in the Figure no. 1 and 2 respectively. Writing letter as a mode of communication and using of MMS as methods of communication was absent in this study. Communication through mobile was the major mode (37%) followed by direct verbal mode (31%), mixed verbal and mobile (26%) and other (6%) in this study. Others modes of communication included broad-band based social networking system (such as Messenger, Imo, WhatsApp, Viber etc.). Major method of communication was Talking (42%). Video chatting and SMS used in 13% and 9% cases respectively. Mixed method (talking, SMS and video) used in 36% cases.

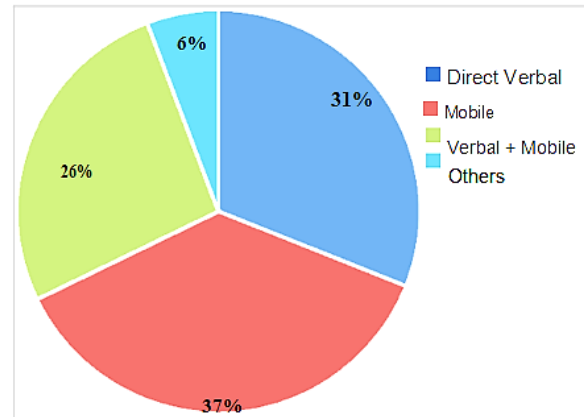


Figure 1: Modes of communication

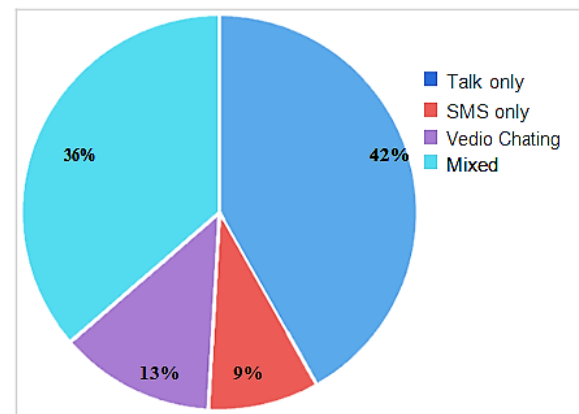


Figure 2: Methods used in communication

**Discussion:**

The occurrence of unwanted sexual interaction (sexual violence and sexual abuse) among young people is increasing rapidly throughout the world, especially in rapidly developing countries. Young people, particularly young women, comprise "at-risk" group for the sexual violation.<sup>6</sup> And in most of the cases, both the offenders and the victims are known to each other.<sup>7</sup>

It has been reported in many studies that most of the sexually assaulted victims were females.<sup>8-11</sup> In this study, female was found to be affected in all the cases (100%) during the study period. About 70% of the victims were of teenager age groups; mean age was 15.67 (±6.69) years. Result of our study is consistent with several previous studies.<sup>7,8,10,12-14</sup> In our study group, almost 80% of the victims were from low socioeconomic group. Ganguly *et al*<sup>15</sup>

reported 60% of the victims were from poor families and 43% were illiterate. Similar findings also reported by Sarkar *et al.*<sup>7</sup> Smart phone was used in maximum cases (77.01%) observed in this study. Smart phone of variable quality and price are easily available now-a-days. So that, people with low socioeconomic status also able to buy easily those mobile, and gift to those teenagers to convince them initially. In this study, victims owned mobile set was in 45.99% of cases, those were gifted by their parents or they bought themselves by saving money of their daily expenses. Assailant also gifted mobile set to victims in about one fourth of cases (26.44%). Verbal communication (either direct or via mobile phone) was the commonest communication method used. Perpetrator of victim's own family member or close relatives are usually communicating through direct verbal way. Communication method between the victims and the assailant was talking in 42% cases, using SMS in 9% cases and performing direct video chatting in 13% cases; MMS is almost obsolete in this present time. Cost of mobile phone charge as well as internet using is very low in Bangladesh. Moreover, mobile companies provide different low-cost package talk-time and/or internet for using different social networking site regularly (especially for the night times), which further tempting such teenager girls to make new friends from unknown area. Assailants use this way to communicate with victims initially and the fate of such relationship ends with a kind of sexual assault. Therefore, parents should be careful about their children of using mobile phone, especially in using smart phone from where they have that. Educating parents as well as young users about the threats of sexual assaults and other criminal offenses through mobile phones would be worth fully. Every parent should carefully monitor when their children are using social site in mobile phone, especially about their friend list as it makes them more comfortable to come in contact with strangers. At the same time health education targeted on vulnerable groups

regarding sexual behavior, legal aspects of sexual and partner relationship in an organized way is important for primary prevention of sexual assaults.

## Conclusion

It appears that the unhindered access to mobile phones by the young individuals and technological advancements in the mobile telephony had facilitated the commission of sexual offences. The parents and guardians should be extra vigilant about the unfettered usage of mobile phones by the youth. Both the government and mobile networking companies should rethink about usage of mobile phone (especially smart phone) by teenagers.

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