

An overview of the surge of rape incidents in Bangladesh during COVID-19 pandemic

Tasnim R¹, Suján MSH², Hossain S³, Amin M⁴, Hasan ATMH⁵, Islam MS⁶

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic left impact on domestic violence, sexual assault and increases the pandemic related rape cases in Bangladesh. The present study aimed to give an overview COVID-19 related rape cases so that awareness can be created among public in the outbreak. Three English and Bangla online news portals were selected purposively to include in the study and news of 'Rape Case' were searched. Search was conducted by the word "rape news". After removal of the repetitions news, we select ten news that reported detailed rape cases during the country wide lockdown. From ten rape cases, age of victim ranges from 8-23, the victim of eight rape cases were below 18 years (In some cases the age of the victim were not mentioned). In addition, there were five incidents of gang rape, one rape attempts and among ten cases seven of the rape were general types. Additionally, the majority of rape cases occurred at rural areas. Women of all ages are at risk of rape during the pandemic and particular attention should be given to rural areas, as most cases of rape are registered there. Public awareness about rape would be effective to report in due time with preserving the evidence of crime.

CBMJ 2021 January: vol. 10 no. 01 P: 43-49

Key words: COVID-19, rape, gang rape, mental health problems.

Introduction

The earth is facing a serious public health emergency situation caused by COVID-19 outbreak.¹ Pandemic problems along with social distance, isolation, and quarantine and cultural - financial consequences have also triggered psychological moderators such as heartbreak, anxiety, fear, resentment, irritation, frustration, remorse, hopelessness, monotony and panic. These are the common elements of modern mental health problems experienced by many people during and after the crisis.² Because of this marginalized state of people, uncertain economic circumstances and sitting at home 24/7 people had indeed begun to lose oversight of own selves. Long-term stay at home has caused dissatisfaction, anxiety and increasing rage among people.³ Since the pandemic has started to escalate in Bangladesh, there has been a gush of sexual assault, abuse, gang rape, child abuse and domestic violence against women and children.

Crime rate has been increasing, especially on women and child abuse including rape and gang rape and domestic violence.⁴

Since March 2020, after covid-19 has attacked Bangladesh, several incidences of rape, gang rape had occurred. According to a recent report there are at least 4 women have been raped daily (overall 13 rapes daily throughout the country amid the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh).⁵ Between April and August this year, a total of 632 rape incidents occurred and this is not finished by this time 142 attempt to rape incidences have been reported, which includes, acid attack cases,

1. Rafia Tasnim, Department of Public Health and Informatics, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka.
2. Md. Safaet Hossain Suján, Department of Public Health and Informatics, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka.
3. Sahadat Hossain, Department of Public Health and Informatics, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka.
4. Munia Amin, BioTED, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
5. Dr. A T M Hasibul Hasan, Department of Neurology, National Institute of Neurosciences & Hospital, Dhaka.
6. Muhammad Sougatul Islam PhD, BioTED, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Address of correspondence:

Email: msis201@gmail.com

Mobile: 01854940118

rape cases, dowry cases and kidnapping.⁶

Rape has been risen in Bangladesh to a certain degree that one district of the country had faced 50 rape cases in ten months.⁷ And within 6 months (January to June, 2021) a total 731 women were raped throughout the country.⁸ It is the most common and vicious form of violence against woman in Bangladesh.⁹ In Bangladesh, police statistics on cases registered on violence against women (VAW) showed that rape is the second most commonly reported form of violence against women, following dowry related harassment.¹⁰ It is one of the silent sex crimes committed against women. There are also women who never report the incidence of rape. The perpetrator's perpetrator, or family members hold silent because of a shortage of community supports or providing victim and witness protection; public shame associated with and the prevalence of rape, patriarchal behavior, prolonged trials at trial, inadequate police inquiries, lacunae in the law, in particular the lack of a rape shield settlements, etc. Moreover, the rape victim has to undergo severe mental and social constraints.^{11,12}

Due to unpredictable financial future and living at home all day long people had already begun to lose control of themselves. Which making an individual depressed and frustrated and increasing rage among people where anger is another cause of sexual violence.^{3,36} Due to social-isolation people may show personality disorder, which is associated with depression, narcissistic personality lens, antisocial personality is also a cause of sexual violence and rape.^{36,37} Sexual sadism disorder is another important reason of rape (due to feeling of power).³⁸ In Bangladesh, we live in a male dominated society and male thought that they are more powerful than women (sexual gratification), and this tendency also increasing rape during the quarantine period.³⁹ Men in Bangladesh blame women for their dressing as a risk

factor for rape.⁴⁰ They feel that women's dressing provokes male and is a potential determining factor for rape, and another study also reported that many rapists were drawn to women's wear.⁴¹

There is currently no known research on rape and sexual assault in Bangladesh related to COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, women constitute more than half part of the population and their reproductive rights must be ensured. This is especially true with the uncertainty around an epidemic of this incomparable nature. This is the first study that aimed to give an overview of rape during the outbreak of COVID-19.

Methods

Three English and Bangla online news portals were selected purposively to include in the study and news of 'Rape Case' were searched. Search was conducted by the word "rape news". Data were aggregated initially and after removal of the repetitions news, we select ten news that reported detailed rape cases during the country wide lockdown.

Result

The following rape cases occurred at the time when Bangladesh was battling against COVID-19 and rape were not a particular concern. Hence, here we briefly presenting 14 rape cases that took place during COVID-19 outbreak.

Table-I: Distribution of rape cases among types, ages, place and time

Case No.	Types of case	Age of victim	Age of criminal	Date of incident	Place of incidence	Time of incident
Case 1	Gang Rape Case	14	NR (not reported)	March 13,2020	Dhaka	Around 2:30am
Case 2	Rape Case	12	25	March 14, 2020	Jashore's Keshabpur Upazila	Morning
Case 3	Rape Case	16	28	March 15, 2020	Thakurgaon's Haripur Upazila	Morning (around 12.00pm)
Case 4 and Case 5	Gang Rape Case	19 and 23	23 and 27	March 18, 2020	Bandarban	Night
Case 6	Rape Case	15	45	April 6, 2020	Bagerhat Sadar Upazila	After 8.00am
Case 7	Gang Rape Case	NR (child)	14 and 15	April 7, 2020	Kurigram	Around 5.30pm
Case 8	Rape Case	10	50	May 15, 2020	Tangail	Evening
Case 9	Rape Case	8	15	May 24, 2020	Netrakona	Evening
Case 10	Rape attempt	NR (Child)	NR	May 24, 2020	Dinajpur	NR
Case 11	Gang rape	NR	NR	September 25, 2020	Sylhet	Night (10.30pm)
Case 12	Rape Case	16	NR	September 25, 2020	Rangamati	NR
Case 13	Rape Case	11 and 15	NR	October 5, 2020	Narayanganj	Night (10.00pm)
Case 14	Gang rape	NR	NR	September 2, 2020	Noakhali	Night

Case 1: In March, 2020, a 14-year-old girl was, who was impoverished and lived in a train station, forcibly taken to an isolated place and raped by a gang of delinquents at night.

She was later taken to the hospital.¹³

Case 2: In March, a minor (12-year-old) was raped by a 25-year-old man, when she was in route to her madrasa at morning. The perpetrator might took her to a nook and raped her.¹⁴

Case 3: In March, 2020, a minor girl (sixteen-year-old) was raped by her private tutor (28-year-old) at a coaching center in the morning.¹⁵

Case 4 & 5: In March, 2020, an incident of gang rape occurred with two girls from the ethnic community at Bandarban at night, when they returned home from work. The victims were in a local vehicle and were taken to a different location from their destination by two men (age 23 and 27) and being raped.¹⁶

Case 6: In April, 2020, a minor girl (fifteen year old) was raped by a 45 year old man, at her (victim's) house, when her father and mother were not at home, and she was all alone, An adult man raped her.¹⁷

Case 7: In April, a child was taken by two boys (teenagers) from the school into an isolated place and raped her. As she screams, the local people rescued the child and took her to a hospital, due to her critical

situation (hemorrhage) later she was shifted into another hospital.^{18,19}

Case 8: In May, 2020, a 10 year old girl was raped by her relative (uncle), who was trying to harass the girl sexually for several days, and at last he brought her to an abandonment place and raped her.²⁰

Case 9: In May, 2020, an eight year old girl was raped by her teenager (15 years old) neighbor when she was alone at evening he took her to a quiet spot and raped her.²¹

Case 10: In May, 2020, a step grandfather tried to rape his grandchild when she was sleeping, as she (victim) shouts the locals rescue the child and the girl's father reported a case against the perpetrator.²¹

Case 11: In September 25, 2020, a young girl with her husband were roaming around in a college in Sylhet. Somewhere in the night, a group of young men snatched their vehicle. The criminal took the women inside the college premises after pulling her husband from the car and tied him down. Nine people raped that women and was rescued by the local police in the same night.²²

Case 12: In September 25, a 16 year young girl was raped by her college headmaster, while she was in the school. At one point the headmaster not only called the girl in his room but also intimidated the girl with disastrous results if she told someone about the matter.²³

Case 13: In October 5, 2020, at midnight when two garments worker were returning their home from work, aged 11 and 15 respectively, the caretaker of a house took advantages of the situation and raped the minors. Furthermore, the man threatened to kill them if the incident was reported to someone.²⁴

Case 14: One video got viral in this country after being released on September 2, 2020 with violent content. Women in the video is being sexually harassed by some men as if they own her.²⁵

Discussion:

Rape and sexual abuse are the most common violence against women globally.²⁶ Rape in Bangladesh is an ignored public health problem as in most developing nations where an even lower proportion of incidents of rape and sexual abuse are reported to occur. Majority of rape cases are not reported in Bangladesh due to social stigma and fear of losing good marriage proposal, honor and social status in the society.²⁷ Which could make the crime more potent. According to a report in 2019, every day an estimated 13 women and girls were raped.²⁸ Children also fall prey to this catastrophic crime as it is relatively simple for a rapist to make a child hostage since they are vulnerable and therefore cannot physically protect themselves.²⁹ On an average, three children become victims of rape every day in Bangladesh.³⁰ And the incidence of rape is rising day by day, also in the country's lockdown phase due to COVID-19.

Rape is a heinous crime that leaves a devastating physical consequences on its victims. Survivors may face incredible complication including serious injury, bleeding, walking difficulty, sexually transmitted disease (STD), and unwanted pregnancy with reproductive health issues.³¹ Moreover severe psychological problem including depression, anxiety, traumatic feelings, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleeping problem, and Victims also may attempt suicide.³² Study focused on attempted suicides revealed that individuals who are subject to sexual and physical violence seem to be more likely to attempt suicid.³³ And theses have both short and long-term consequences.³⁴ Several research showed that rape can have long-term effects for children, involving depression, anxiety, developmental problems, low self-esteem, and suicidal tendencies, which can also affect adulthood and impair psychological adaptation.³³

In the present study, there were three gang rape (more than two rapist were involved), and most of the victims were teenagers and one was child and one was young adult. A study conducted in rural Bangladesh found that the majority of the victims of rape were young and under 20 years old,³⁵ and the majority of these cases did happen in the morning.

Conclusion:

Rape is one of the secretly violent sexual crimes in Bangladesh which is rapidly increasing. In this situation of COVID-19 pandemic sexual assault like rape is emerging as a major problem for public health and safety. Though holding COVID-19 at bay is of prime importance, however, government, and concerned stakeholders should also prioritize women's wellbeing and security with a view to safeguarding and guaranteeing citizens' protection and well-being.

Declaration of competing interest

None

Funding

Self-funded

Ethical approval

Not applicable

Acknowledgements

We are thankful to Shahidul Rony, Mofazzal Hossen Kawsar from Jahangirnagar University, Shabnoor Binte Dayem from East West University and Samiha Tasnim. They helped by collecting relevant information.

References:

1. WHO. COVID-19 Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) Global research and innovation forum [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 30]. Available from: [https://www.who.int/who-documents-detail/covid-19-public-health-emergency-of-international-concern-\(pheic\)-global-research-and-innovation-forum](https://www.who.int/who-documents-detail/covid-19-public-health-emergency-of-international-concern-(pheic)-global-research-and-innovation-forum) [Accessed on July 15, 2020]
2. Banerjee D. The COVID-19 outbreak: Crucial role the psychiatrists can play. *Asian J Psychiatr* [Internet]. 2020;50:102014. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102014>
3. Brooks SK, Webster RK, Smith LE, Woodland L, Wessely S, Greenberg N, et al. The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. *The Lancet*. 2020.
4. Mizan AS. Domestic violence during the time of corona [Internet]. [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/human-rights/news/domestic-violence-during-the-time-corona-1888192>.
5. NewAge. Bangladesh sees nearly 13 rapes everyday [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Oct 14]. Available from: <http://www.newagebd.net/article/72764/bangladesh-sees-nearly-13-rapes-every-day>
6. DhakaTribune. 4 women raped every day on average in Bangladesh amid Covid-19 pandemic [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Oct 14]. Available from: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2020/09/29/4-women-raped-every-day-on-average-during-coronavirus-pandemic>.
7. Star TD. Sexual violence rampant [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/editorial/sexual-violence-rampant-1497772>
8. 731 women raped in 6 months [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/731-women-raped-in-bangladesh-in-6-months-1768477>
9. Fahmina T. Violence against women: Statistics of the last 5 years [Internet]. 2007 [cited 2020 May 29]. Available from: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/law/2007/03/02/investigation.htm>
10. Evidencerape E, March C. MEDICAL EVIDENCE IN RAPE CASES. 2012;(March):1–44.

11. (ASK) AOSK. Incidents of Rape Between January and 30 September 2014 [Internet]. 2014 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <http://www.askbd.org/ask/2014/10/13/incidents-rape-third-quarter-2014/>
12. News U. DR Congo: UN report details suffering of rape victims, recommends reparations [Internet]. 2011 [cited 2020 May 29]. Available from: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/03/36803> 2-dr-congo-un-report-details-suffering-rape victims -recommends-reparations
13. Star TD. Homeless minor gang-raped in Dhaka [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 31]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/news/homeless-minor-gang-raped-dhaka-1880671>
14. Star TD. Man arrested for raping madrasa student in Jashore [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 31]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/madrasa-student-rape-in-jashore-man-arrested-1881598>
15. Asians S. Rape of Thakurgaon SSC examinee sparks protests [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 31]. Available from: <https://southasiansnews.com/2020/03/16/rape-of-thakurgaon-ssc-examinee-sparks-protests/>
16. Star TD. 2 RMG workers from 'ethnic minority' community raped in Bandarban [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 31]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/2-rmg-workers-ethnic-minority-community-raped-in-bandarban-1882984>
17. Star TD. Case filed over rape of minor in Bagerhat [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 31]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/girl-rape-in-bagerhat-case-filed-over-1890547>
18. DhakaTribune. Teenagers held over child-rape [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 31]. Available from: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2020/04/08/teenagers-held-over-child-rape>
19. Star TD. 2 teenagers arrested for raping a child in Kurigram [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 31]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/child-rape-in-bangladesh-2-teenagers-arrested-in-lalmonirhat-1890844>
20. DhakaTribune. A Child was raped by her uncle (In Bangla) [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 31]. Available from: <https://bangla.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2020/05/19/23494/ভাতিজিকে-ধর্ষণ,-ফুপা-গ্রেফতার>
21. DhakaTribune. 2 held over rape charges in Netrakona, Dinajpur [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 31]. Available from: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2020/05/25/teen-held-for-raping-child-in-netrakona>
22. DhakaTribune. Woman gang-raped in Sylhet's MC College [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Oct 14]. Available from: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2020/09/26/woman-raped-by-chhatra-league-men-in-sylhet-s-mc-college>
23. Star TD. College girl raped at school in Rangamati, headmaster sued in rape case [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Oct 14]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/college-girl-raped-school-rangamati-headmaster-sued-rape-case-1974021>
24. Star TD. Man arrested for raping two minors in Narayanganj [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Oct 14]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/man-arrested-raping-2-sisters-in-narayanganj-1977237>
25. Star TD. Noakhali Gang Rape Victim: Delwar raped her several times before [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Oct 14]. Available from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/noakhali-gang-rape-victim-delwar-raped-her-several-times-1973669>
26. Islam MN, Islam MN. Retrospective study of alleged rape victims attended at Forensic Medicine Department of Dhaka Medical College, Bangladesh. *Leg Med.* 2003;5:351–3.
27. DhakaTribune. Fear of stigma keeps women from reporting abuse [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/10/27/fear-stigma-keeps-women-reporting-abuse>
28. Bangladesh N. Bangladesh sees nearly 13 rapes every day [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <http://www.newagebd.net/article/72764/bangladesh-sees-nearly-13-rapes-every-day>
29. Sarkar SC, Lalwani S, Rautji R, Bhardwaj DN, Dogra TD. A Study on Victims of Sexual Offences in South Delhi. 2002;029(January 2001).
30. DhakaTribune. 3 children raped daily in 2019 [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2020/01/09/three-children-raped-daily-in-2019>

31. Foundation JH. Effects of Sexual Assault and Rape [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/learn/sexual-assault-rape/effects-sexual-assault-and-rape>
32. RAINN. Effects of Sexual Violence [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <https://www.rainn.org/effects-sexual-violence>
33. Fattah KN, Kabir ZN. No place is safe: Sexual abuse of children in rural Bangladesh. *J Child Sex Abus.* 2013;22(8):901–14.
34. Bows H. Sexual violence. *A Companion to Crime, Harm Vict.* 2016;205–8.
35. Ali N, Akhter S, Hossain N, Khan NT. Rape in Rural Bangladesh. *Delta Med Coll J.* 2015;3(1):31–5.
36. Wikipedia. Causes of sexual violence [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_sexual_violence
37. Joffe RT, Regan JJ. Personality and depression. *J Psychiatr Res.* 1988;22(4):279–86.
38. Today P. Sexual Sadism Disorder [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/conditions/sexual-sadism-disorder>
39. Haque F, Druce SC. Gender Disparity in Bangladesh: The Study of Women's Vulnerable Situations in Patriarchal Society and The Rise of Gender Equality According to SDGS. *Integr J Conf Proc.* 2019;1(2):1–10.
40. Momin SM. The culture of blaming rape victims must stop [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2020 May 28]. Available from: <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/223340>
41. Lisak D, Roth S. Motivational Factors in Nonincarcerated Sexually Aggressive Men. *J Pers Soc Psychol.* 1988;55(5):795–802.