

State of Peace 2020



STATE OF PEACE 2020

an initiative of
BPO- Bangladesh Peace Observatory



April 2021

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From the Editor's Desk

COVID-19 pandemic derailed almost everything in this world, even the timely publication of the *State of Peace 2020*. We are three months behind, but that allows us to discuss some developments in the last three months. But before we focus on the current situation, let us quickly reflect on the painful year of 2020. This is the year that the COVID-19 pandemic brought the world literally to a standstill, with infections in millions and deaths of more than 1.8 million people. But then, another one million died in the next three months. The number of COVID-19 deaths now stands at 2,887,039 on 7 April 2021, and the number keeps increasing every day.

This, of course, may not be a very high figure compared to some other pandemics, like the Black Death or the Spanish Flu. The former killed as many as 225 million people in four years in 1347-1351, while the latter killed 50 million people in 2 years in 1918-1919. In recent times, the Swine Flu killed between 151,700 – 575,400 people in 2009-2010, while the Ebola virus killed only 11,300 people in 2014-2016. The Asian Flu (H2N2) killed 1.1 million people in 1957-1958, and the Hongkong Flu (H3N2) killed 1 million people in 1968-1970. Such virus-related deaths otherwise suggest the irregular regularity of pandemics, and since some of the viruses become deadly through mutation, there is no escape from them. They co-evolve and live with other living beings.

But then, with the development of science, humans now have far better knowledge to fight the virus. One cannot help point out that humans did not have the technology to see the virus during the Spanish Flu. In fact, scientists began to see the virus for the first time in the 1930s. This is the time when the electron microscope was invented. Earlier in 1915, just a few years before the Spanish Flu hit the world, Frederick Twort, the English bacteriologist, discovered ‘bacteriophage,’ the viruses that attack bacteria. Since he noticed tiny spots within bacterial colonies, Twort hypothesized that ‘something’ must be killing the bacteria. But Twort did not have the instruments to see the virus, which could have been one of the big reasons for so many Spanish flu deaths. Humans are so much accustomed to the idea of “seeing is believing” that not too many believed that the virus, which humans could not see during the Spanish Flu, was responsible for all the deaths! Science certainly has progressed in leaps and bounds, and that is why having the COVID-19 vaccines, and so many of them, in such a short space of time is not surprising.

One thing, however, remained unchanged from the time of the Spanish Flu. This refers to the dissemination of public health knowledge of how to keep the flu away. In fact, before vaccination, and the knowledge was prevalent during the Spanish Flu, three things needed to be pursued diligently: one, wearing

a mask; two, washing hands; and three, maintaining physical distance, particularly in ill-ventilated public places. This is hardly rocket science, yet few would follow the prescription even today for reasons related to both enforcement and social practices or, rather, the lack of it. Too much of ‘enforcement’ would make the state ‘draconian’ or ‘authoritarian,’ the terms the Western critics used against China and Vietnam for strictly enforcing the lockdowns. But both of them, I believe, succeeded in containing the COVID-19 pandemic relatively well largely because the practice of wearing a mask was prevalent among its citizens even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit them. Humans, after all, are *homo habitus*; they go by ‘practices,’ if we were to follow Pierre Bourdieu on this. The bulk of the world population, including Bangladeshis, never made the practice of wearing a mask a habit or part of their daily life. Indeed, with a lack of enforcement and lack of public health measures, human morbidity and mortality from the COVID-19 pandemic could only rise. Bangladesh did relatively better, at least, during the first wave, but then, not because of ‘enforcement’ and ‘practices’ but more because of weather or different strain of the virus or, maybe, natural immunity amongst the population resulting from too many viruses flowing around!

Vaccination is supposed to make a difference, but since it is a pandemic, only global cooperation in the development, production and distribution of the vaccine can guarantee its success. Unfortunately, some of the countries that are engaged in developing, producing and distributing the vaccine have opted for the politics of singularity or ‘vaccine nationalism,’ and are now engaged, quite sadly, in ‘vaccine diplomacy,’ without realizing, however, that the virus, which has attained the status of a pandemic, can never be contained territorially or nationally. Such ‘vaccine diplomacy’ is also engaged in maligning the Other, indeed, keeping truthful to the profession of diplomacy, as Henry Wotten, the English diplomat, remarked while travelling through Augsburg in 1604, “An ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country.” Nothing can be sadder than this, particularly when the vaccine is required to save human lives and not for getting a supersonic plane or travelling to outer space!

Are we then still residing in the seventeenth century? Or, is Wotten’s remark an outcome of an imperial ascendancy, which is now not only out of place in the twenty-first century but also self-defeating to the cause of vaccination and development of the country. Any country pursuing ‘vaccine nationalism,’ particularly in production and distribution, is bound to face three things: (1) The alienated country would start looking for other options, thereby minimising the goodwill the vaccine-nationalist country had with the affected country's people; (2) The global community would start working on an urgent basis to break the monopoly in producing the vaccine, indeed, to the point of having the vaccine produced in as many countries as possible. In the long run, or more precisely in the post-pandemic period, this would impact the production and distribution of other vaccines that are now a monopoly of the vaccine-nationalist country; and (3) Since no country is fully self-sufficient, there would always remain the fear of facing a tit-

for-tat policy, which itself would drain out the vaccine-nationalist country, and that again, even without the policy ever being carried out!

What should Bangladesh do? Before we take this up, it is important to point out that the COVID-19 pandemic is not yet over! Mutation of the virus has made it deadlier, particularly in infecting people. Moreover, there have been reported cases of ‘double mutation’ of the virus both in India and the U.S., which has made one commentator to point out that “It sounds like something from a ‘Ninja Turtles’ movie, but the ‘Double Mutant’ strain of the coronavirus is no laughing matter.” Put differently, COVID-19 is deadlier than ever! Those who are trying to ignore the second wave, even not trying to get vaccinated willfully, are fooling themselves and bringing danger to the rest of the people in the community, including near and dear ones.

Two things Bangladesh must do urgently, both of which are critical and pressing in the midst of ‘vaccine nationalism’: (1) Political mobilization is required to restrict, if not to contain, the possible high mortality during the second wave. Policing alone will not do. This is because ‘trust’ in the police is very low in South Asia, including Bangladesh, partly because of the colonial legacy and partly because of the state of misgovernance in this part of the world. (2) Bangladesh must keep all the doors open to get vaccines. This is precisely what our time-tested foreign policy principle mandates us to do: “Friendship towards all; malice towards none.” Bangladesh indeed has good relations with some countries more than others, but that should not in any way preclude it from getting vaccines from different sources. This is a matter of saving human lives and not the time to be engaged in politicking with vaccine nationalism!

7 April 2021

Imtiaz Ahmed
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University of Dhaka



BANGLADESH PEACE OBSERVATORY



To advance the understanding of peace and tolerance

THROUGH

DATA INSIGHTS

**HOSTED BY THE CENTRE FOR GENOCIDE STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA**

Bangladesh Peace Observatory: An Overview

University of Dhaka was the epicenter of genocide during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. The University lost many of its eminent teachers, academicians, students, employees and their family members during the Liberation War of 1971. After 41 years of the massacre, University of Dhaka established and launched the Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS) on 25 March 2012. CGS recognises that in the past 150 years, tens of millions of people have lost their lives in genocides and mass atrocities across the world. Millions have been tortured, raped, and forcibly displaced from their homes. At present, more than 60 countries are involved in armed conflicts around the globe. There are more than 40 situations of protracted conflicts. CGS aims to address the issues of genocide, mass atrocities, violence and crime in order to move towards a peaceful world. In an attempt to attain the objectives of addressing the larger questions of humanity, CGS is involved in a number of activities, which among others include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project titled "Partnerships for a Tolerant and Inclusive Bangladesh" (PTIB). BPO is a component of PTIB. Accessible at www.peaceobservatory-cgs.org, BPO is a research facility established in 2016 and housed at the CGS in partnership with UNDP. BPO seeks to support government institutions, academia, civil society organisations, and the media - in formulating effective public policy decisions, tailored interventions and programming, enhanced research, and effective advocacy campaigning for social cohesion and peace based on data, evidence, research, and critical analysis.

This virtual platform of Open Access Data (OAD) was officially launched on 13 April 2017 to advance the understanding of peace and tolerance through data insights. Since the beginning, BPO is offering facility of online mapping and data analytics technology that informs users on the state of violence in Bangladesh. BPO is collecting different streams of publicly available data, regularly updating the platform with newer incidents, conducting research and providing education opportunities to better understand the state of violence in order to promote peace. Currently, BPO is updated with new outlook, user-friendly search options and real-time data of the running month at any given point of time.

BPO offers a virtual open data platform equipped with GIS-based mapping and data analytics technology that informs users on the state of violence, crime and other information based on timelines, geographic distribution, and type of violence. Each administrative level (division, district, and upazila) has its own automatically generated profile page on violence with a click, which is fed by BPO datasets. Users can view trends, rankings, agents, and impact of violence in terms of death, injury, arrests and property damage. The data can be filtered and downloaded from the BPO, and used in any third-party tools to garner in-depth insights and visualisations on the incidence of violence. Till date, BPO contains openly accessible data from January 2015- December 2020. Besides the real-time, BPO is also collecting data from the year 2014 and aims to continue going backwards simultaneously with the real-time update. Over time, BPO has come up with a developed outlook, new search options, and advanced filtering features. These new updates are results of rigorous brainstorming, trials and opinions from the advisory group and platform users.

Bangladesh Peace Observatory: Key Activities

Designing effective responses to public policy challenges is heavily dependent on evidence. Evidence is dependent on good data. In the present day "Open Data" is the future. More data has been produced globally in the last two years than in the previous 3000 years of human activity. Most of this data is openly accessible. The future challenge for decision-makers therefore is not the unavailability of data: the challenge is efficiently managing and digesting the explosion of public data. BPO is a response to the challenge. Therefore, BPO offers a number of programmes and activities to promote its goal to advance knowledge and the understanding of peace in the country.

Open Access Data: BPO brings together different streams of publicly available data on violence, analyses and visualises them in a useful and interactive way for decision makers, civil society and media to understand, consume, and debate. During January-December 2020, BPO recorded more than a total of 16836 incidents all over Bangladesh. These incidents are entered into an online dashboard and goes through a rigorous validation process to become publicly available. More information on this is available in the Methodology section.

Figure 1: BPO Heat Map: <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/homeheat>

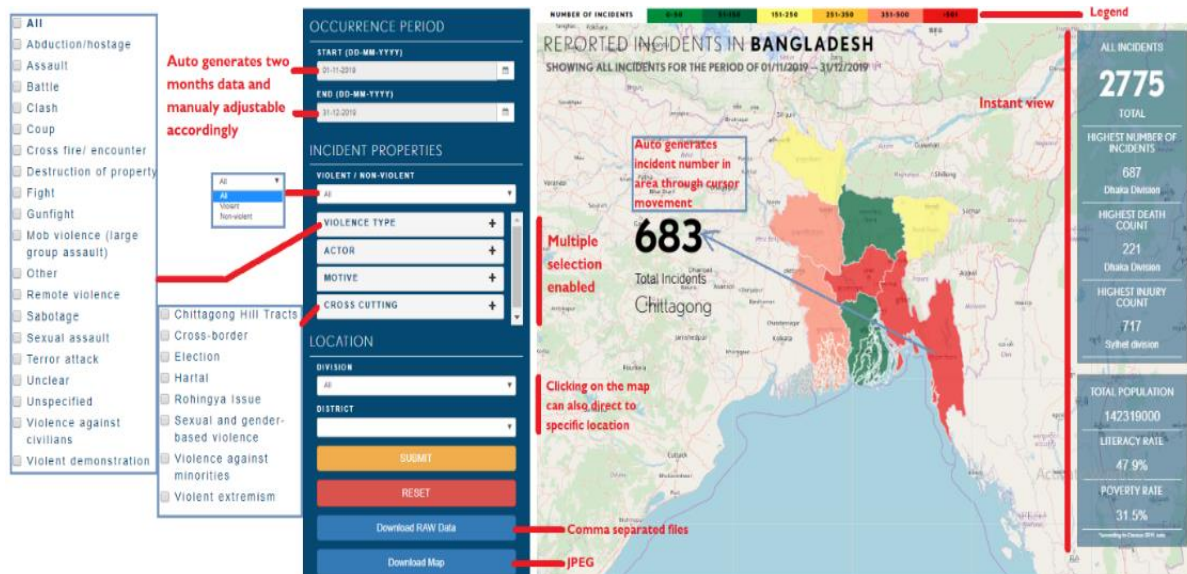


Figure 2: Cluster Map: <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/homecluster-new>

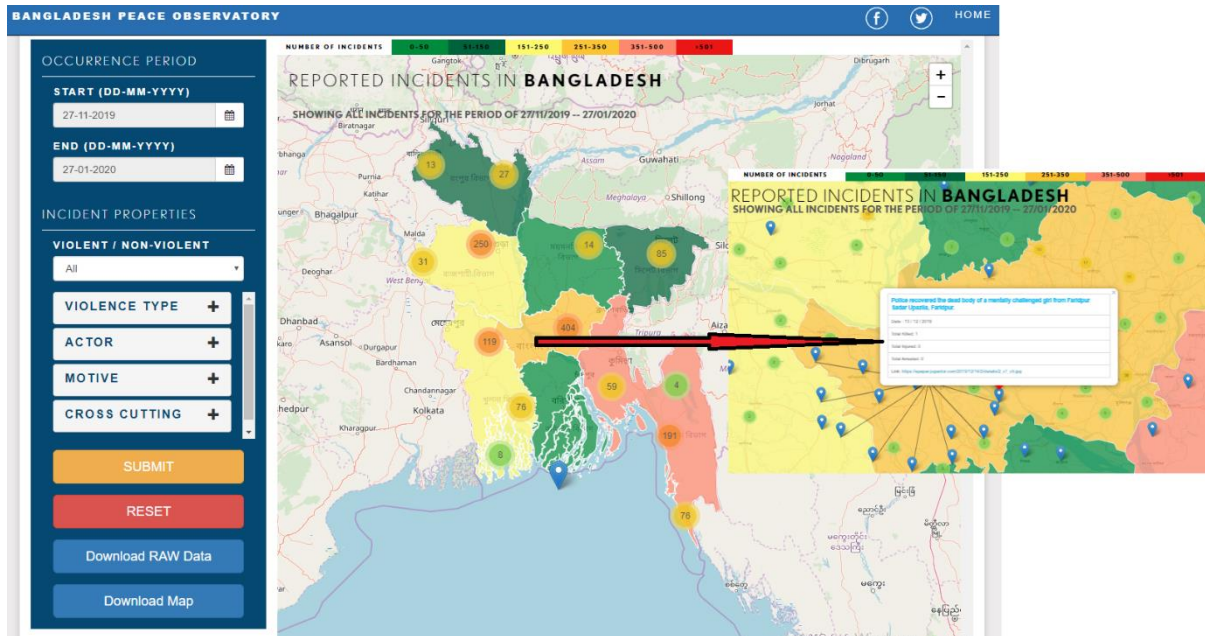
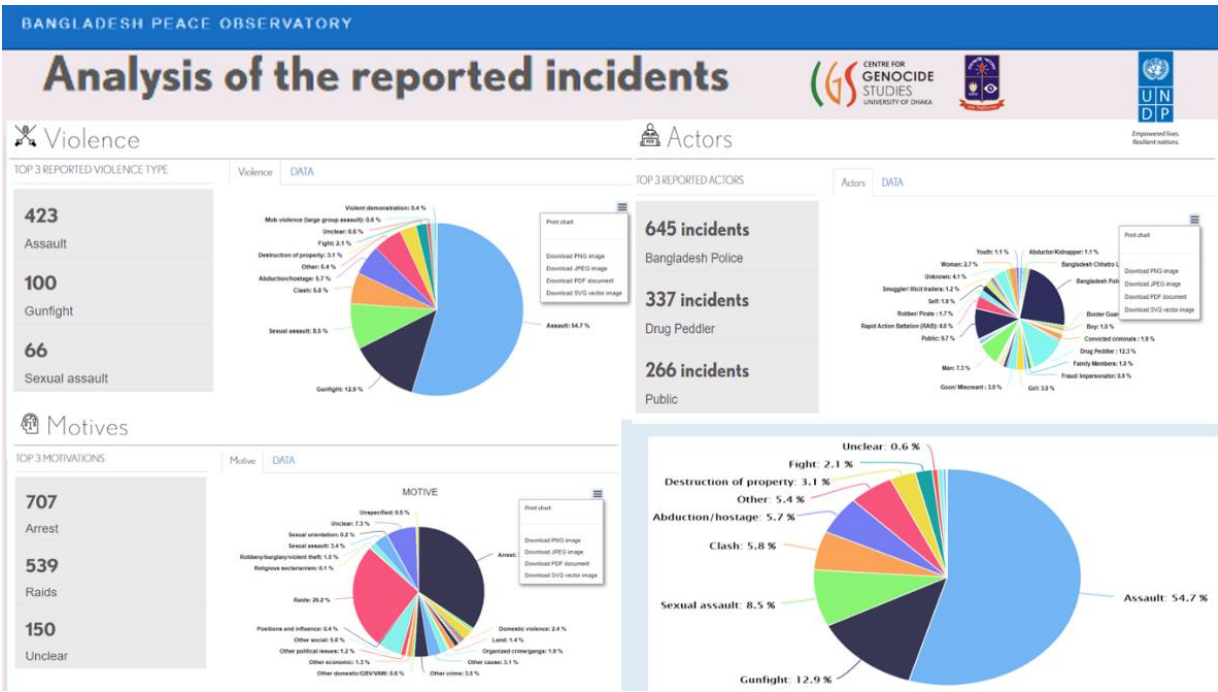


Figure 3: BPO On-Platform Data Analysis



Regional Comparison.

Regional DATA

A bar chart titled 'Regional Comparison' showing the count of incidents, deaths, injuries, and damage property across eight divisions. The y-axis represents the count from 0 to 400. The x-axis lists the divisions: Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Sylhet, and Mymensingh. The legend indicates: Incident (blue), Death (red), Injured (orange), and Damage Property (teal).

Division	Incident	Death	Injured	Damage Property
Barisal	50	20	80	0
Chittagong	350	90	170	10
Dhaka	310	110	300	10
Khulna	190	70	100	0
Rajshahi	220	90	100	0
Rangpur	190	40	60	0
Sylhet	40	20	150	0
Mymensingh	40	30	30	0

Print chart

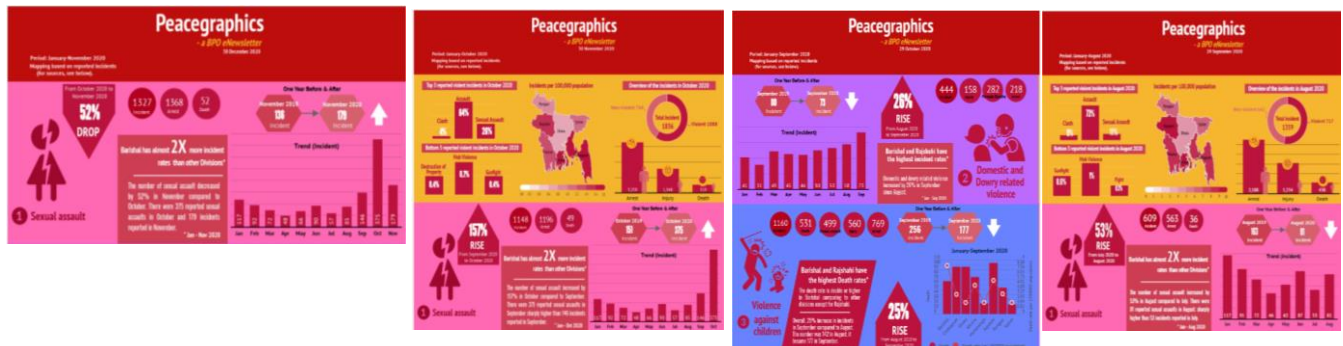
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- Download JPEG image
- Download PDF document
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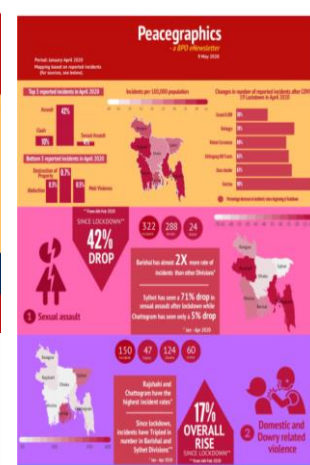
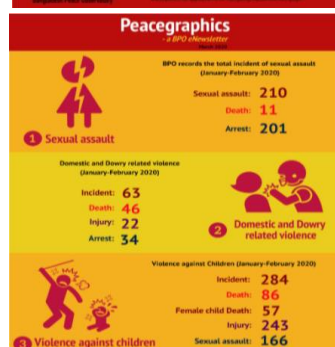
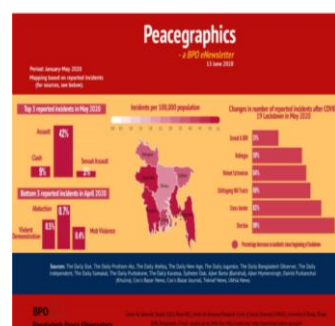
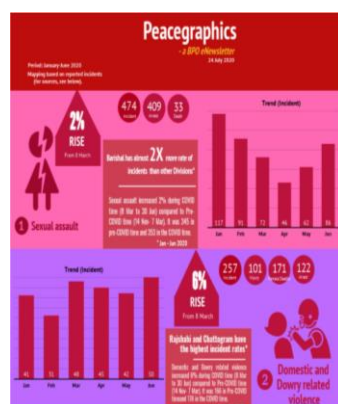
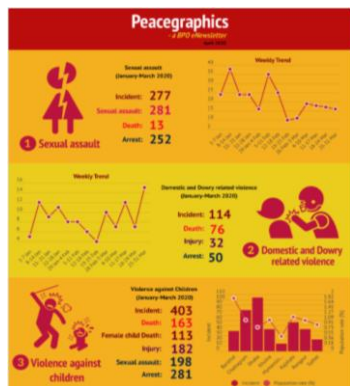
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2	14-09-18	New App Khala	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
3	14-09-18	New App Khala	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
4	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
5	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
6	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
7	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
8	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
9	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
10	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
11	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
12	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
13	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
14	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
15	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
16	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt
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18	14-09-18	Daily-18	Chikla	2	Parabolu	Y	2	Chuk	Annath	Blatt	Blatt	Blatt</							

CGS Peace Report: As a part of BPO initiative, CGS publishes Peace Report to provide an understanding of thematic situations. Twenty CGS Peace Reports have been published so far covering a number of issues. The latest CGS Peace Report focuses on Fine/Penalty related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the year 2020, CGS has published a total of five Peace Reports; available at: http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/peace_report



Peacegraphics: Peacegraphics are published online on BPO website to visually comprehend the monthly and weekly data on violence situation of Bangladesh. In the year 2020, CGS has published a total 10 peacegraphics over the year; available at: <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/highlights>. A quick look to the latest issues are given for reader's interest.





Covid19graphics 27
27 December 2020

Daily Reported Cases

- Maharashtra (14.2%)
- Karnataka (10.2%)
- Gujarat (9.2%)
- West Bengal (8.2%)
- Tamil Nadu (7.2%)
- Kerala (6.2%)
- Andhra Pradesh (5.2%)
- Odisha (4.2%)
- Punjab (3.2%)
- Haryana (2.2%)
- Rajasthan (1.2%)
- Uttar Pradesh (1.2%)

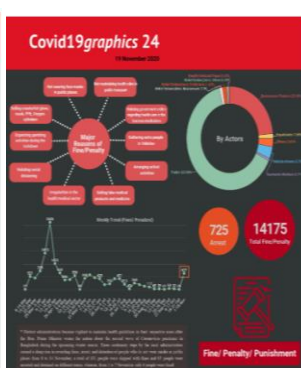
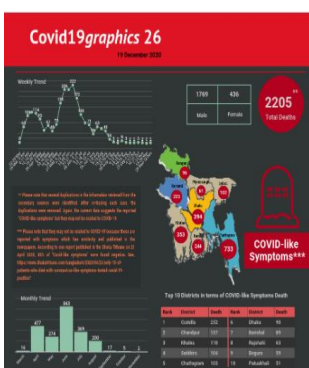
By Actors

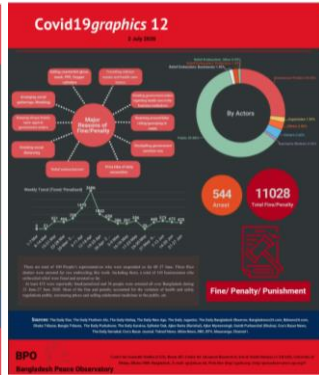
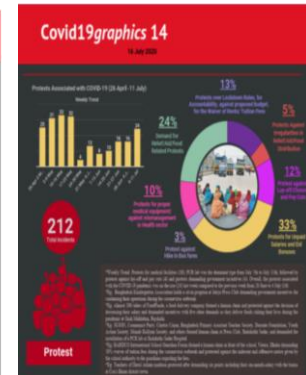
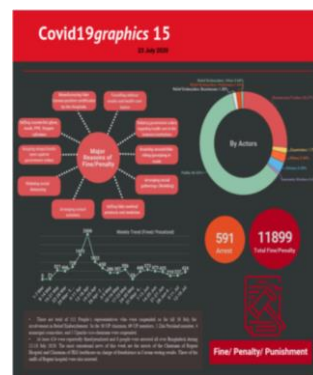
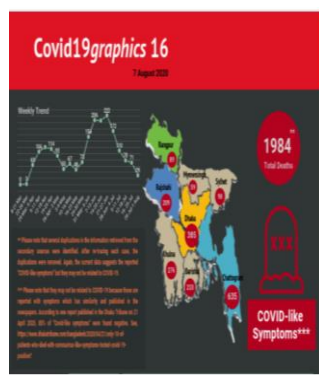
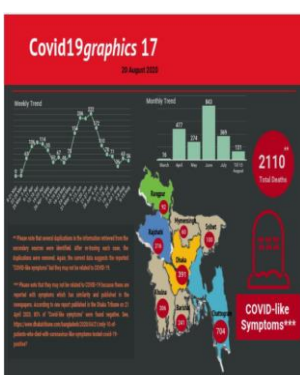
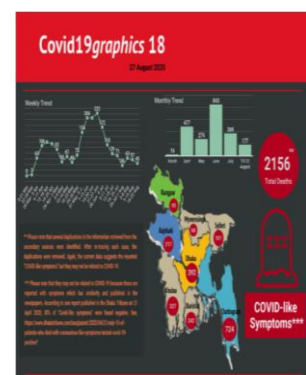
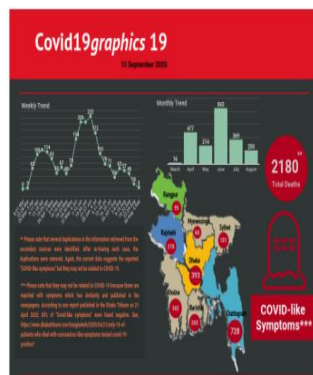
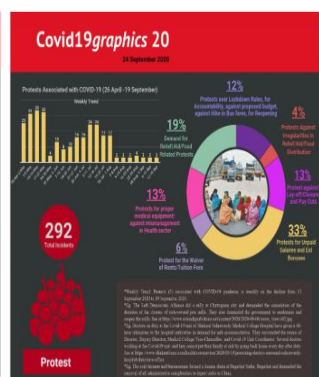
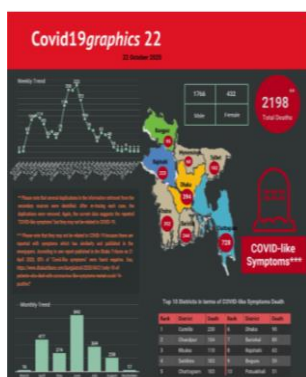
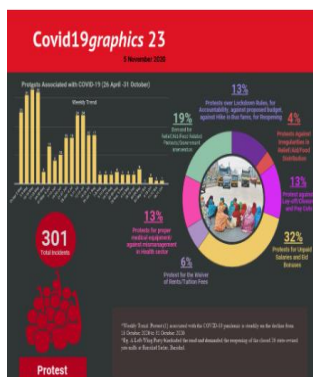
Total Actors: 1000000

Total Cases Reported: 1000000

World Time Series of Reported Daily Deaths

March 2020 - March 2021







Electographics: Electographics are produced for in-house consumption to visually comprehend electoral violence in Bangladesh.

International Conference: CGS annually organises International Conference on Genocide and Mass Violence, in which a panel is exclusively designated to violent extremism.

Joint Research and Programmes: CGS in partnership with UNDP, conducts joint research and collaborative programmes with different stakeholders and government offices from time to time. This activity includes the mapping facility of BPO to prepare initial mapping and data support to conduct advanced research, educating stakeholders to research with open access data insight, and identifying crucial areas of academic and policy inquiry. In 2020 BPO collaborated with UNDP in a Book project titled "COVID-19: The other side of living through the pandemic". The book included narratives from twenty-four authors of their lived experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors are from different

countries of the world, including Bangladesh, India, Japan, Madagascar, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, UK and USA. To further explain the COVID-19 data and Covid19graphics, BPO organised an e-seminar series consisting of six e-seminars titled "Understanding COVID-19 Pandemic: The Power of Data" on social tension and social cohesion related to COVID-19 and COVID-19 response in Bangladesh. In addition, BPO arranged nine e-Seminars with journalists of all the eight divisions of Bangladesh to get an overall picture of the implications of COVID-19.

International Exchange: To brand BPO internationally and enhance the team's capacity, CGS and UNDP offer exchange opportunity.

Micronarratives: One of the effective ways of understanding the dynamics of peace and violence in a country is through collecting micronarratives on the issue. In this regards, CGS carries out a number of qualitative research work on violent extremism and electoral violence under the umbrella of UNDP's 'Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)' programme in Bangladesh. BPO uses micronarratives collected from CGS's qualitative research works and incorporates these in its peace reports and discussions.

Professional Certificate Course/Training: As a part of the BPO initiative, CGS offers an intensive course to understand the underlying factors behind the violence, including practices in various countries for preventing/countering. The Professional Certificate Course on PVE is designed mainly to initiate discourses on violence and formulate practices for combating violent extremism and promoting society's tolerance. The training covers critical issues on preventing violent extremism with reference to Bangladesh and beyond. Prominent faculty members, scholars, practitioners, as well as foreign experts on the issue of PVE conduct the sessions of the course. So far, six Professional Certificate Courses on PVE have been offered under this activity.

Course Topic

- Understanding violent extremism
- History of violent extremism
- Psychology of violent extremism
- Major violent extremist incidences: investigation methods and techniques
- BPO platform: Open access data
- Forensic science related to violent extremism
- Violent extremism: discourse on religions
- Dealing with suicide bombings: global best practices
- Women, children and violent extremism
- Fighting extremist finance
- Civil society, offender treatment & Human Rights
- Role of intelligence in PVE
- Cyber security and violent extremism
- Media and violent extremism
- De-radicalization: theories, methods and techniques

Fellowship: For the first time in 2018, Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS), University of Dhaka, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), offered one CGS-UNDP Fellowship on Peace. BPO as a repository of data on violence, violence prevention, and social cohesion, is the basis of research under this fellowship. It also aims to engage the researcher with the BPO Platform for disseminating the evidence through sophisticated analytical work. The fellowship was awarded to one scholarly researcher who can contribute to theoretical and empirical research through using the data from the BPO and relevant sources. The findings of the research will be presented in the upcoming International Conference on Genocide and Mass Violence. In 2019, a total of four researchers were awarded with the fellowship.

Joint Programme with Advisory Board Members:



Stop Violence Coalition



Bangladesh Police



National Defense College



Centre for Genocide Studies



University of Dhaka



Society for Environment and Human Development



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Daily Star

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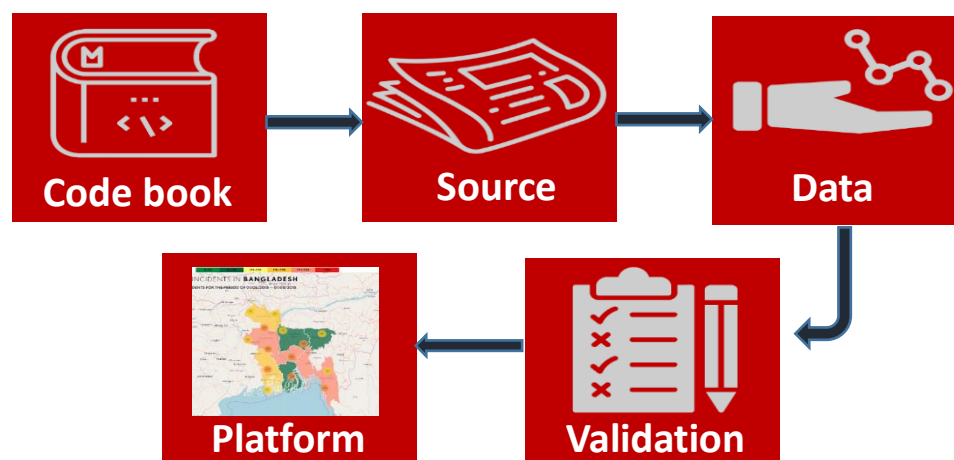
BPO advisory board is one of its kind comprised of government agencies, defense, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions and media. The board meets regularly, suggests and supports on data validation, academic research, fellowship selection board formation, participating in training programmes and contribution by issue-centric point of view for the improvement of BPO from time to time. The board also helps to cross check the state of crime and violence with the help of different datasets and sets out targets for micronarratives. The group is also engaged in conducting joint research and programmes on the basis of BPO data. In 2017, CGS organised two professional certificate course programmes with the officials from different defense forces and different media houses. In 2018, CGS conducted joint research with the Bangladesh Police and jointly organised two seminars with ActionAid (Seminar on Violence and Resilience) and Society for Environment and Human Development-SEHD (Seminar on Minorities: Life and Living). In 2019, Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs joined the advisory board.

Bangladesh Peace Observatory: Organogram



Bangladesh Peace Observatory: Data Collection, Verification and Validation Method

BPO uses an online data collection platform developed by a website developer organisation, namely Zeteq System. This online system of data collection follows the BPO codebook to categorise and record incident. After data entry of an incident, the submitted entry goes for an intensive validation process in the back-end and published in the platform.



Since January 2018, BPO has extended its data collection capacity and incorporated new sources (The Daily Purbokone and The Daily Karatoa) along with the existing sources (The Daily Star, The Daily Prothom Alo, The Daily Ittefaq, The

Daily New Age). By the end of 2018, the BPO platform contained data sourced from 13 daily newspapers including The Daily Bangladesh Observer, The Dainik (Daily) Bangla, The Daily Bhorer Kagoj, The Daily Janakantha, The Daily Jugantar, The Daily Sylheter Dak (Sylhet), and The Daily Ajker Barta (Barisal). The data collection method was also updated in 2018 with elaborated description of incident and also actor-wise segregation of victims in violence on the basis of reported data. This is now available in the downloadable raw data on BPO. For proper validation and to avoid duplication, a new duplicate identification feature was introduced in the back-end to mark the same incident reported from different sources. By the end of 2019, three more sources Ajker Mymensingh, Dainik Purbanchal (Khulna), and The Daily Samakal were added. In the year 2020, BPO extended its data source with seven new sources, including two online newspapers. The Independent, Cox's Bazar Journal, Cox's Bazar News, Teknaf News, Ukhiya News along with two online newspapers Bdnews24.com and Banglanews24.com. Fifteen full-time Research Data Analysts (RDAs) are now working for BPO to collect data from the aforementioned newspapers back and forth.

COVID-19: The Power of Data¹

Nahian Reza Sabriet²

Different schools of Social Sciences have tried repeatedly to trace the ideal form of research and the use of data at its optimum level. At the end of the day, one may argue that there is no such thing as an “ideal” or “accurate” form, rather, the goal is to find out what is “more applicable” in a particular context. Despite the divergences, there is no denying of the importance of evidence and records. The pandemic came as a shock to the world, after the initial shock wave, people in general tried to adapt to the pandemic in varied ways. The use of technology was a major mode of this adaption. Had the pandemic not been there, the web based research tools, webinars and a whole set of “new normal” module of knowledge sharing might not have been utilised. In this backdrop, the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) team of the Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS), University of Dhaka came up with the idea of COVID-19 data mapping and COVID-19graphics to record, analyse and visualise the countrywide data being mapped and validated regularly.

This write-up is not a linear or one-sided manifestation of a yearly picture of Bangladesh. It aims at utilising the dataset to bring out the nuances and critical anecdotes. The “power” of data, therefore, depends on who is looking at it and how s/he is utilising those resources to make a holistic analysis. BPO’s COVID-19 dataset incorporates a number of key issues including rumours, verbal abuse/social stigma, protest, fear, paranoia, fine/penalty/punishment and resilience. In the following sections, these issues are elaborately discussed along with regional and global contexts.

¹ The term “data” has been used as a singular noun throughout the write-up.

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I. Rumours and Social Stigma

Rumours and social stigma are often intertwined. Michel Foucault in 1975 annotated the phrase “plague towns” to address the way rumours are spread – by taking advantage of “spatial partitions” and “segmented, immobile, frozen space.”³ The ‘space’ here is both geographical and psychological, and rumours spread through those spaces by using “collective irrationality.”⁴ Similar to rumours, stigma also thrives on elements like irrationality, uncertainty or paranoia, and the impacts are more interactive or social than physical. Although it is hard to conceptualise stigma in an absolute sense, scholars consider it to be rooted in social power relations, fear, reaction to fear, othering and psychological responses.⁵

While discussing “rumour”, one has to think twice before saying “the more, the merrier”. In an oral society like Bangladesh or any of its South Asian neighbours, rumours circulate quite fast among a huge number of people across different districts and divisions of the country. The intensity of rumours related to COVID-19 during the early days was quite high and a phrase called “infodemic” (information pandemic) became popular among the internet users. Even the former president of the United States was found to be falsely claiming cures of COVID-19 and blaming China for deliberately spreading the virus.⁶ There were also anti-maskers all over the world providing false evidence and information on the use of mask. In South Asia, the rumours were mostly focused on the means of cure. These included one of the famous Bollywood stars tweeting corona-cures like “blowing conch shells”⁷, a group of Pakistani citizens believing

³ Michael A. Peters, "Philosophy and pandemic in the postdigital Era: Foucault, Agamben, Žižek." *Postdigital Science and Education*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2020), pp. 556-561.

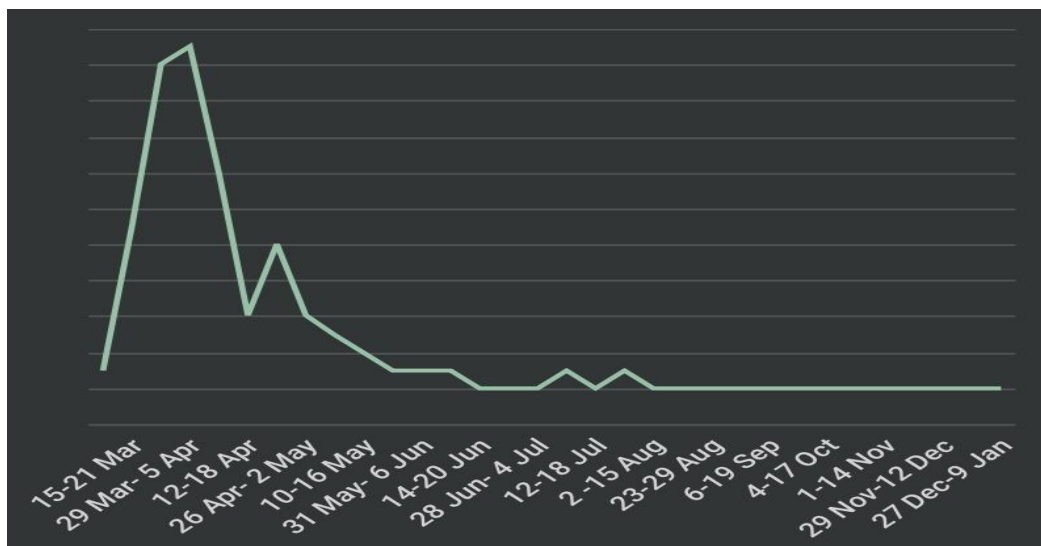
⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Bruce G. Link, and Jo C. Phelan. "Conceptualizing stigma." *Annual review of Sociology*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2001), pp. 363-385.

⁶ “Trump faults China for coronavirus' spread, says U.S. investigating,” *The Hindu*, 28 April 2020. Cited in <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/trump-faults-china-for-coronavirus-spread-says-us-investigating/article31450135.ece>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

⁷ Sheikh Saaliq, “Rumors hampering fight against coronavirus in South Asia,” *ABC News*, 28 March 2020. Cited in <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/rumors-hampering-fight-coronavirus-south-asia-69849815>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

the doctors were killing patients by injecting poisonous liquids⁸, Bangladeshi rural people collecting certain herbs to cure the virus etc.⁹



However, looking at the BPO dataset, it can be seen that the volume of rumour in Bangladesh was disproportionately high during the early stage of the outbreak, around the last two weeks of March 2020 and the first week of April 2020. Given the intense level of rumours, CGS also decided to publish its 19th Peace Report on the issue of “Rumours.”¹⁰ Government, non-governmental organisations, media and other volunteering bodies came up with different activities to combat the spread of the rumours including imposing charges and arresting citizens under the Digital Security Act.¹¹ A total number of 87 people were

⁸ Secunder Kermani, “Coronavirus: Rumours, fear and rising Covid deaths in Pakistan”, BBC News, 5 June 2020. Cited in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52925286>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

⁹ “Fake health tips that claim to fight against coronavirus,” *The Daily Star*, 11 April 2020. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/toggle/news/fake-health-tips-claim-fight-against-coronavirus-1891666>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

¹⁰ CGS *Peace Report*, vol. 4, no. 3, July-August 2020. Available at <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#!/peace-report-viewer>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

¹¹ “6 arrested in Dhaka for spreading coronavirus rumours”, *The Daily Star*, 29 March 2020. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/spreading-coronavirus-rumours-6-people-arrested-in-dhaka-1887274>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

arrested in between 15 March 2020 and 27 January 2021 and the highest number of arrested had been in Dhaka (35).¹² Since August 2020, the number of rumour-related incidents have been significantly low.

Similarly, in the wake of a pandemic, there is a sudden shock and insecurity, which made the citizens consciously or subconsciously prone to stigmatisation and abuse. In between March and December of 2020, the BPO dataset recorded a total number of 245 incident related to verbal abuse and social stigma. In the earlier days, around March and April, the number of incidents was high, which eventually started to decrease. Among the sources of abuse and stigmatisation, the highest number belonged to the incidents of ignorance of medical professional or reticence to treat non-COVID patients (70), next to which was the denial of burial (63) and abandonment from family members or colleagues (47).¹³

The elements of stigma were not Bangladesh-specific as well. For example, in the case of India, as Chang, Nair and Sundarmurthy have noted, the outbreak of COVID-19 lead to new terms like “corona-street” or “corona-house” and people who were having symptoms of COVID-19 stopped taking tests being



¹² For further information, see “Peacegraphics 28”, 16 January 2021, Bangladesh Peace Observatory, Centre for Genocide Studies, University of Dhaka. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/##highlights>. Accessed on 24 March 2021.

¹³ *Ibid.*

scared of labels.¹⁴ In Bangladesh, similar cases were found as well. Around the earliest days of March 2020, when COVID-19 tests were not available in every part of the country, both COVID and non-COVID patients had to deal with stigmatised attitudes from the society as well as the health professionals. A few examples can be given – in March 2020, a woman with gastrointestinal complications died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital due to the doctor's negligence who suspected her as a corona positive patient. An old man in Mymensingh (63) died of asthma but local people spread rumours about him being infected with COVID-19. Later, the local administration tested him and result showed negative. In the first week of April, a Dhaka University student who had been suffering from lung problems for several years, died at his own residence without medical treatment being suspected as a Covid-19 patient.

Any sudden crisis like a pandemic or disaster makes the erstwhile vulnerable population the worst victims of stigmatisation. The scenario is true in the case of COVID-19 as well. The returnee migrants, women and labourers were some of the groups that had to face even a crueler face of stigma and verbal abuse. On the second week of June 2020. A woman in Gaibandha had to give birth to her child on the streets after she was not allowed to get admitted to the Mother and Child Welfare Centre.¹⁵ According to her relatives, the victim was told to go elsewhere without any examination upon her arrival at the Centre. Later, the mother and the child were admitted to Gaibandha Sadar Hospital with the help of the police. On the other hand, according to BRAC, around 2,00,000 migrants returned from foreign countries only between mid-February and mid-March of 2020.¹⁶ Besides isolation and quick shift to the quarantine zone at the Ashkona Hajj Camp, seals were imprinted on the forearms of the migrants and their houses were flagged with red pieces of clothes which, according to Zaman and Rahman, both 'formalised' stigma and gave communities' stigma power'.¹⁷ The migrants were verbally abused, prohibited from entering local markets and restaurants and denied burials/funeral rituals by local communities.¹⁸

¹⁴ Divya Bhanot, Tushar Singh, Sunil K. Verma, and Shivantika Sharad, "Stigma and discrimination during COVID-19 pandemic," *Frontiers in Public Health*, vol. 8 (2020), p. 829.

¹⁵ "Refused by hospital, Gaibandha woman gives birth on street", *Dhaka Tribune*, 12 August 2020. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2020/08/12/refused-by-hospital-gaibandha-woman-gives-birth-on-street>. Accessed on 22 March 2021.

¹⁶ "Bangladesh braced to receive hundreds of thousands of returnee migrant workers", *Arab News*, 29 June 2020. Cited in <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1697046/world>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

¹⁷ Shahaduz Zaman and Sumon Rahman, "Fear and stigma in the context of corona epidemic in Bangladesh," *Prothom Alo English*, 15 May 2020. Cited in <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/analysis/fear-and-stigma-in-the-context-of-corona-epidemic-in-bangladesh>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

"Julekha Begum, from the district of Bogura, 196 Kilometres from the capital city Dhaka returned from Saudi Arabia at the end of February and doesn't know when she can go back to work.

...Since her return, Begum has been confined to her home even before the government-imposed lockdown. "I have to survive and live my life as a regular human being. I need to go back overseas again. But right now, I cannot even get out of my home because of social pressure," she said. "When I got back here, my health condition was good. Still, the neighbours are suspicious about me, they think I will spread the virus. I don't know when this will end and when will I be able to move freely."

Source: *UN Women*¹⁹

The power of data shows how with the gradual increase of awareness and availability of treatment or healthcare support, the severity of stigma could be mitigated. Up until the mid-May of 2020, the number of stigma related incidents was increasing and then started to drop. In the second week of May, there was a 42 percent rise in the incidents and the following week had a 43 percent drop, eventually leading to 54 percent decrease in the number of incidents in the next week. Between the mid of August 2020 and the last week of December 2020, there was only one stigma/verbal abuse related incident recorded by the newspapers and the BPO dataset.

2. Protest

"Protests" during the COVID-19 outbreak took multifarious dimensions. Paolo Gerbuado referred to these protests as a revealing factor of the COVID-19 emergency as "a moment of political suspension" and "heightened social tension."²⁰ The general momentum of protests was mainly motivated by the social class that might depend on blue collar jobs for their daily earnings as well as the jobless immigrants in different parts of the world.

¹⁹ "Far from the spotlight, women workers are among the hardest hit by COVID-19 in Bangladesh," *UN Women*, 27 April 2020. Cited in <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/feature-women-workers-hardest-hit-by-covid-19-in-bangladesh>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

²⁰ Paolo Gerbaudo, "The Pandemic Crowd," *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 2 (2020), pp. 61-76.

Public demonstrations against lockdown were very common in all parts of the world. Anti-mask and anti-lockdown protests began since the early days of January 2020 and are still going on. Even countries like New Zealand, despite receiving accolades for its COVID-19 measures and subsequent success had series of protests in the months of August, September, October of 2020 and January of 2021.²¹ It is interesting to note, how terminologies can sensitise the demand for protest, one example is the protest against the Dutch government on 23 January 2021, where the citizens were protesting against the “curfew” highlighting the fact that the country had never imposed a “curfew” on its people after the second world war.²² The riot lasted for around three days, being supported by seven out of ten Dutch citizens, turning the movement into the worst riot of the Netherlands since the 1980 coronation crisis.²³ The case of Hong Kong was somewhat different. Citizens of Hong Kong instead of protesting against lockdown, demanded for strict rules so that any potential COVID-19 patient cannot enter from the mainland China.²⁴

In Bangladesh, 303 incidents related to protest were recorded in the BPO dataset in between 26 April 2020 and 9 January 2021. Following the weekly trend of the protests, one can easily see that the number of incidents were high around the first three weeks of May 2020 and then again around the second and third weeks of July 2020. Among the reasons behind the protests, the top three reasons were owing to –

(a) Protests for Unpaid Salaries and Eid Bonuses (32 percent)

(b) Demand for Relief/Aid/Food Related Protests/Government Intervention (19 percent)

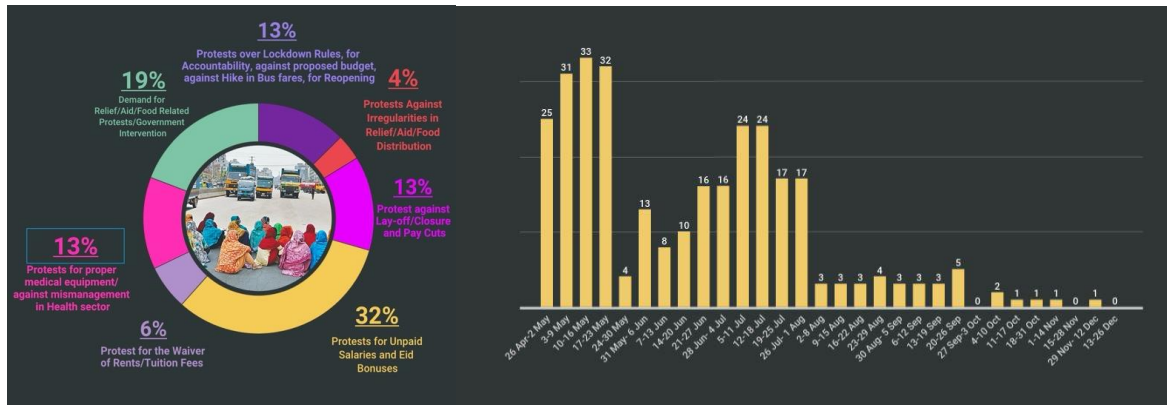
(c) Protests over Lockdown Rules, for Accountability, against proposed budget, against Hike in Bus fares, for Reopening (13 percent); Protests for proper medical equipment/ against mismanagement in Health sector (13 percent) and Protest against Lay-off/Closure and Pay Cuts (13 percent)

²¹ From content analysis of *The New Zealand Herald*, June 2020 – January 2021. Cited in <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/>. Accessed on 22 March 2021.

²² “Covid: Dutch crisis as court orders end to Covid curfew,” *BBC News*, 16 February 2021. Cited in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56084466>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

²³ “Netherlands proposes first curfew since World War Two, flight bans,” *Reuters*, 20 January 2021. Cited in <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-netherlands-idUSKBN29PI70>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

²⁴ “Coronavirus and the Hong Kong protest movement,” *The Interpreter*, 23 March 2020. Cited in <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/coronavirus-and-hong-kong-protest-movement>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.



Hence, it can be deduced from the data that the basic drivers of protests were the economic needs. This was also seen in other parts of the world. COVID-19 protests that got mixed up with economic and governance-related issues had broader impacts. Take the case of Thailand for example. A riot by 2500 protesters took place in Bangkok on 18 July 2020.²⁵ The protest was heightened by the failure of economy after the COVID-19 outbreak and the leaders who organised the coup demanded change in lockdown rules and amendments in the constitution.

Finally, the social dimension of protests can never be ignored. In Bangladesh, the first kind of protest that caught media attention was the protests by the workers in the Ready-made Garments (RMG) sector. Initially the protest took place as the workers were first given a notice of “general holiday” in the beginning of the lockdown and all on a sudden they were asked to come back. Most of the workers in this sector belong to a socially deprived class, migrated from rural or peri-urban areas. There is also 60 percent of female workforce currently leading the garment industry.²⁶ A study by Plan International in May, September and October 2020 found that 90 percent of the workers did not get any incentives for COVID-

²⁵ “Thousands in Bangkok Rally Against Thai Government,” *Voice of America*, 18 July 2020. Cited in <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/thousands-bangkok-rally-against-thai-government>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

²⁶ Centre for Policy Dialogue, *Ongoing Upgradation in RMG Enterprise: Preliminary Results from a Survey* (Dhaka: Centre for Policy Dialogue, 2018).

19 and 43 percent of them were in “severe struggles.”²⁷ Moreover, a number of pregnant women were cut off of their job with no maternity benefits.²⁸ Eventually, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) ordered 46 factories that could not provide wages to their workers to shut down in May.²⁹ While the country was already expecting an additional 25 million “new poor” population³⁰, this could not satisfy the protesters or mitigate the condition of the suffering citizens.

3. Fear & Paranoia

Fear and paranoia are two less likely talked about issues when it comes to a sudden crisis or pandemic. However, BPO’s dataset portrays that both fear and paranoia should be taken seriously illustrating that a pandemic is not only impactful on the physical health but the mental health too. Adrian Schimmenti, Joël Billieux and Vladan Starcevic have identified four domains around which the “fear” factor occur during a pandemic: the bodily domain, interpersonal domain, behavioral domain and cognitive domain.³¹ While the first two domains represent the fear of contracting the disease and infection/death from more physical and social sense, the last two domains bring in the psychological aspect where knowledge, information and communication can have both positive and negative effects.

²⁷ “Covid-19 lockdown takes a toll on RMG workers,” *Dhaka Tribune*, 10 December 2020. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2020/12/10/covid-19-lockdown-takes-a-toll-on-rmg-workers>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

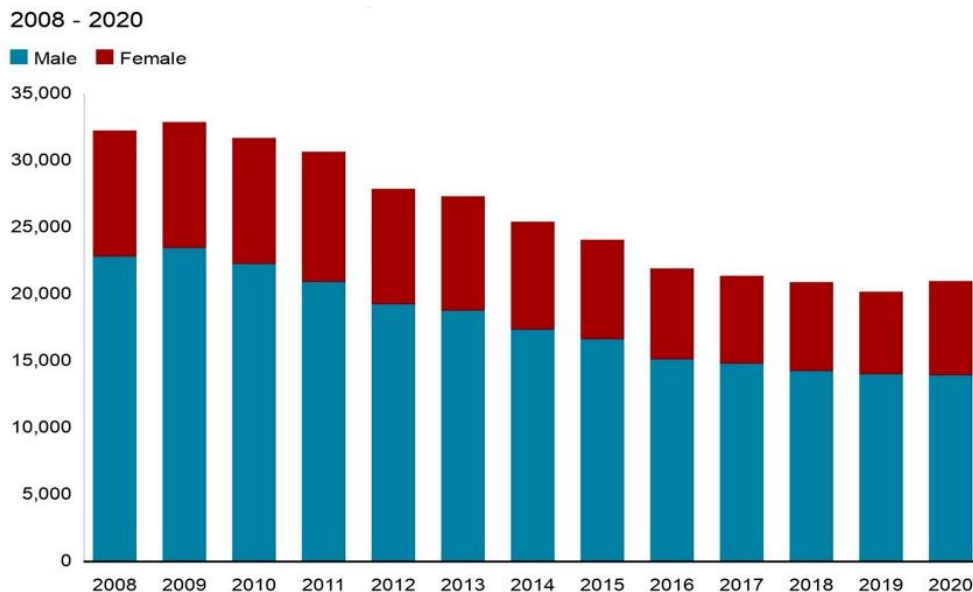
²⁸ “‘We are on our own’: Bangladesh’s pregnant garment workers face the sack,” *The Guardian*, 9 July 2020. Cited in <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jul/09/we-are-on-our-own-bangladeshs-pregnant-garment-workers-face-the-sack>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

²⁹ “Failure to Pay Wages: BGMEA asks govt to close 46 factories”, *The Daily Star*, 19 May 2020. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/failure-pay-wages-bgmea-asks-govt-close-46-factories-1903900>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

³⁰ Binayak Sen, Zulfiqar Ali, and Muntasir Murshed, “Poverty in the Time of Corona: Trends, Drivers, Vulnerability and Policy Responses in Bangladesh”, *Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies*, June 2020, p. 51.

³¹ Schimmenti, Adriano, Joël Billieux, and Vladan Starcevic. “The four horsemen of fear: An integrated model of understanding fear experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.” *Clinical Neuropsychiatry* vol. 17, no. 2 (2020), pp. 41-45.

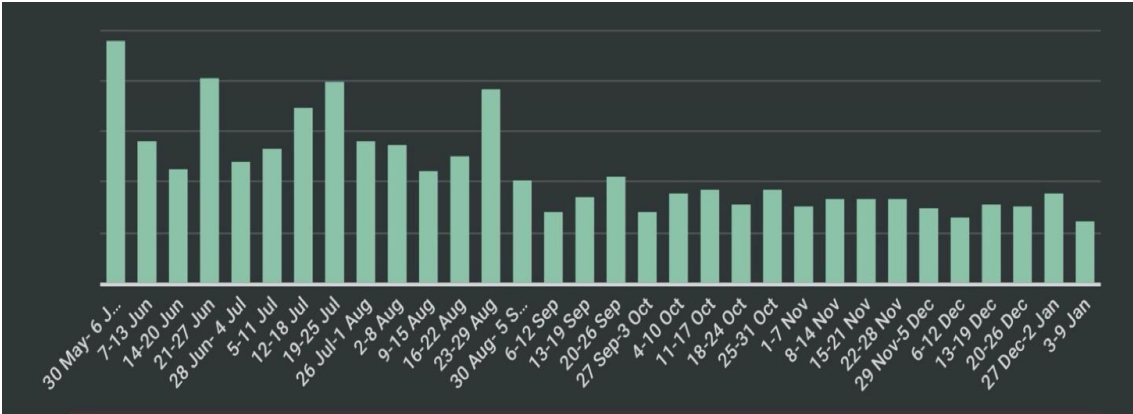
One of the earliest manifestations of worldwide fearmongering incidents was when there was news all around that supermarkets in the United States and other parts of the Western world were having shortage of toiletries as people were rushing and storing them for a prolonged period of time. The “power” of (quantitative) data stands out as it is only the numeric value which can show the scary side of this issue and illustrate the factor to a larger audience. Take for example the case of Japan, in generic sense, Japan’s notorious suicide rate is not unknown. However, the COVID-19 situation changed the pattern of the vulnerable groups in this regard. Although traditionally men in Japan would comprise the highest number of suicide-related deaths, since the outbreak of the pandemic, there is a dramatic shift in the suicide rates of the female Japanese citizens. On the one hand, for the first time in 11 years, the suicide rate went up instead of going down; and on the other hand, female suicide rate went up by 15 percent.³² According to analysts, women already being exposed to more precarious environment than men coupled with the vulnerabilities brought in by the pandemic led to the changes.³³



³² “Covid and suicide: Japan’s rise a warning to the world?”, *BBC News*, 18 February 2021. Cited in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55837160>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

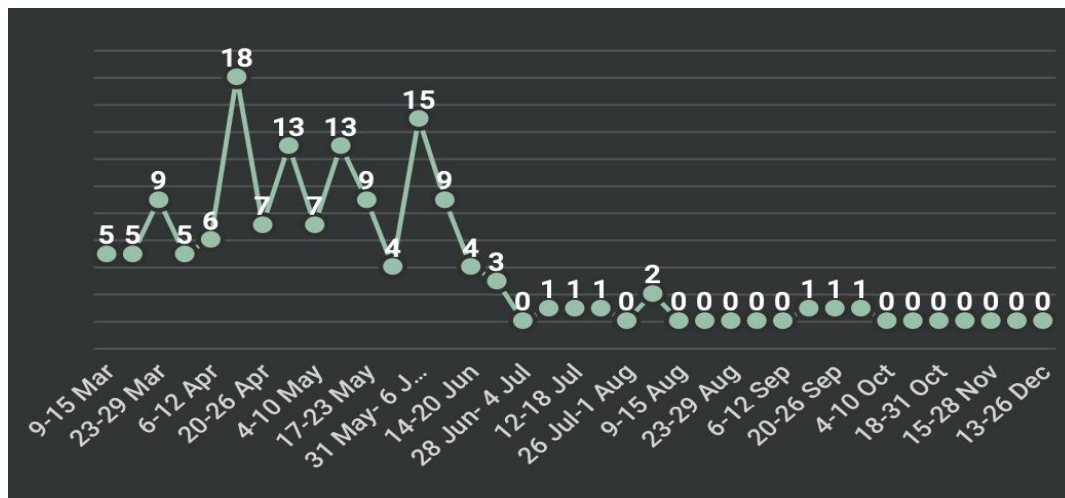
³³ *Ibid.*

When it comes to South Asia, mental health is already a neglected and undervalued. Rangaswamy Thara and Ramachandran Padmavati have addressed both the lack in the number of specialised psychiatrists and medical professionals as well as less involvement of community level workers, volunteers and family members resulting in a broken community level success in psychosocial healthcare.³⁴ The BPO dataset counts 1420 incidents related to fear that took place in between 30 May 2020 and 9 January 2021, and 140 incidents of paranoia that happened during the March to December period of 2020 in Bangladesh. Around the initial days of the outbreak, most of the fear related incidents would fall into a general pattern of stereotypical prediction of Bangladesh’s performance in controlling the infection/death rate. ‘Data’, in this case, made it worse by depending more on generalisation and prediction rather than empiricism. For example, a June 2020 study of the World Health Organisation noted that, for five consecutive days, Bangladesh remained one of the top ten worst COVID-19 affected countries in the world.³⁵ The news got heavily sensitised and was picked up by both news and social media. However, it was less circulated that the number only represented the “new cases” and not any recovery or death rate.



³⁴ Rangaswamy Thara and Ramachandran Padmavati. "Community mental health care in South Asia." *World Psychiatry* vol. 12, no. 2 (2013), p. 176.

³⁵ COVID-19graphics 10, Centre for Genocide Studies, 19 June 2020.

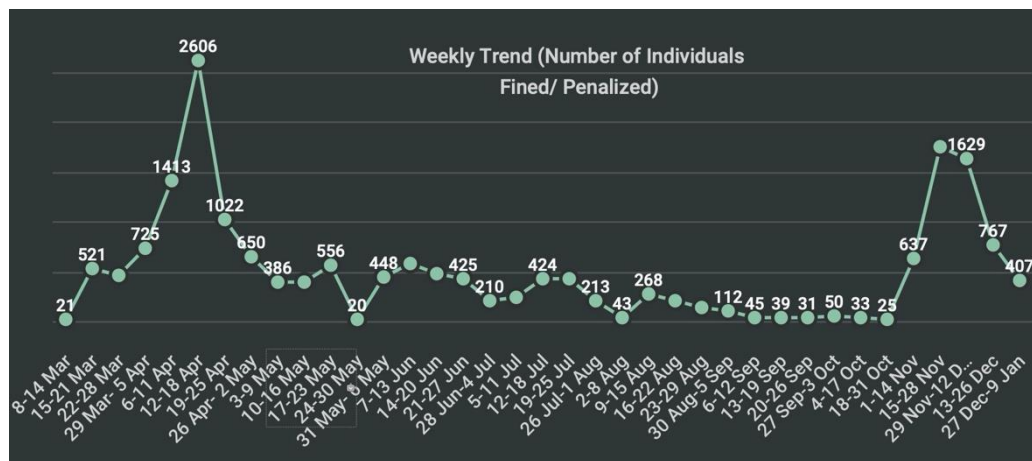


There were significantly four types of paranoia related incidents in the dataset: fleeing after being tested positive (patients/relatives of the patients), fleeing from COVID-19 -infected areas, Institutions being forced to close after employees tested positive, & reported suicide occurred from paranoia. Nonetheless, one crucial element to be mentioned is the mental health of the frontline warriors. N. Kapilan did a thorough research on the “suicide cases among nurses in India” after one nurse committed suicide “due to extreme stress and mental disturbance”.³⁶ A Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) official’s picture also went viral on social media as public spotted him crying and stressing out after not being able to maintain the lockdown measures and save the community. However, one can see that although fearmongering incidents continued throughout the year, people were gradually coping up and learning to reduce the level of paranoia. There was no paranoia related incident from October 2020 to December 2020 in Bangladesh which tells an untold success story in the realm of mental health vis-à-vis the COVID-19 outbreak.

³⁶ N. Kapilan, “Suicide cases among nurses in India due to COVID-19 and possible prevention strategies,” *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 54, December 2020,. Cited in <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102434>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

4. Penalty and Resilience

Penalty and resilience indicate the reactive or counter-measures by different actors during the pandemic. There was hardly any country which did not have to take strict measures and impose fines/penalties on the citizens during the early period of the lockdown. The 20th CGS Peace report had a detailed analysis of fine-penalty across different parts of the world, South Asia and Bangladesh.³⁷ One common aspect was the need for prompt deterrent mechanisms and adaptiveness. Be it the case of Chandigadh, India where a cricket stadium had to be converted into an ad-hoc prison or the case of Australia where the state of Victoria utilised the Emergency Management Act 1986 to impose effective lockdown.³⁸ In the case of South Asia, the countries took their own forms of penalties based on their erstwhile legal documents. India fined more than 25,000 people only in its capital till the mid of June 2020 along with off and on “Janta Curfews.”³⁹ The Maldives resorted to a night-time curfew, Pakistan followed “community intelligence” system and Bhutan took a sustainable “Our Gyenkhu” or citizen empowerment approach.⁴⁰



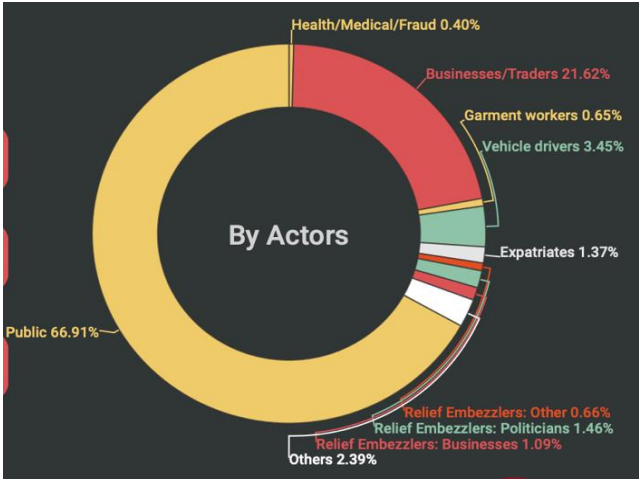
³⁷ See *CGS Peace Report*, vol. 4, no. 4, September-October 2020.

³⁸ ASM Ali Ashraf, “Fine and Penalty during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Effectiveness and Challenges,” *CGS Peace Report*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 20-22.

³⁹ For more, see Mansura Amdad, “Fines and Penalties during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A South Asian Exploration,” *CGS Peace Report*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 43-46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

In Bangladesh, there were 18,730 cases of fine and penalty from 8 March 2020 to 9 January 2021.⁴¹ The major reasons of receiving penalty were: not wearing face masks in public places, not maintaining health rules in public transport, violating government orders regarding health care in the business institutions, carrying extra people in vehicles, arranging school activities, selling fake medical products and medicine, selling counterfeit gloves, masks, PPEs, oxygen cylinders, irregularities in the health/medical sector, violating social distancing and organising gambling activities during the lockdown.⁴² One interesting aspect can be noted by looking at the weekly trend. The number of individuals slapped by fined or penalties went extremely high around one month after the first and second wave. This also indicates that the law enforcement agencies were more active and careful about the infringement of COVID-19 related laws when there is a possibility of upsurge in the infection rate.



Different groups of people were penalised. However, the highest among them consisted of either public in general (66.91 percent) and Businessmen or traders (21.62 percent).⁴³ Among the business institutions, most of them were penalised either because of price hike or not maintaining proper safety measures. The amount of fines varied from region to region and institution to institution; nevertheless, fines on individuals would remain usually in between BDT 5,000-10,000 and fines on institution would hardly cross the BDT

⁴¹ CGS COVID-19graphics 28, 16 January 2021.
⁴² Ibid.
⁴³ COVID-19 raw data mapping (March 2020 – March 2021), collected from BPO Team Members.

1,00,000 range, except for a few cases. Interestingly, a different kind of trend could be seen around the months of March and April 2020 when the largest section among the “public” would be the expatriate-returnees who came around the early stage of lockdown and were ordered to maintain home quarantine.⁴⁴ Hence, the *right vs responsibility* debate also came in as several of the returnees were seen protesting in different places demanding that it was their right to move freely inside the country.⁴⁵ Although those videos went viral on social media and they were gaining some support, the people eventually realised the rationale of the law enforcers and supported their activities.

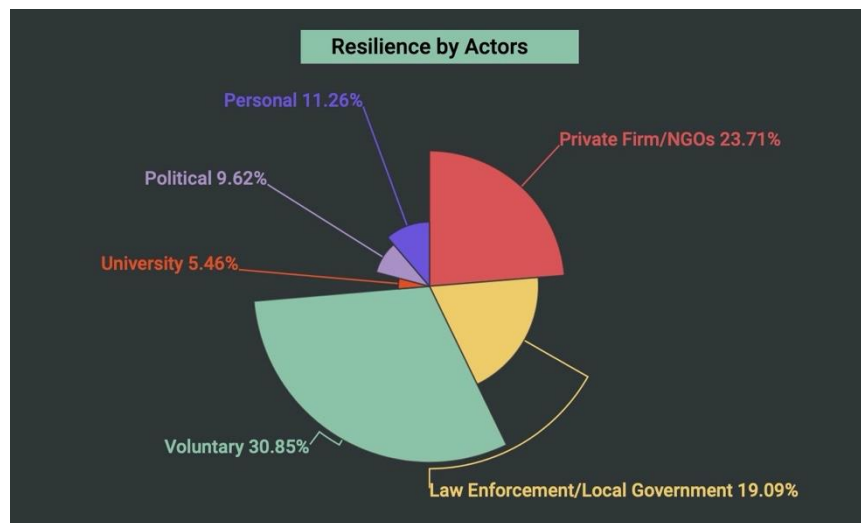
Although small in percentage, the group “relief embezzlers” exposes the layers within the society. Among the cases of relief embezzlers being fined, only one incident took place in Dhaka and the rest happened in most peri-urban or rural areas.⁴⁶ In those places, a socially or politically dominating group have unparallel control over resources and even during the COVID-19 situation, citizens were unable to go beyond this structure.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ “Italy returnees protest, unwilling to stay quarantined,” New Age, 14 March 2020, Events took place on 2-Jun-20 [//www.newagebd.net/article/102180/italy-returnees-protest-unwilling-to-stay-quarantined](http://www.newagebd.net/article/102180/italy-returnees-protest-unwilling-to-stay-quarantined)

⁴⁶ Collected from BPO Covid Mapping Raw Datasheet, January 2021.

The resilient factors, on the other hand proved how the societal essence came strong for the community as a whole and worked against the spread of the pandemic. Globally, the initial talk about resilience revolved around the making and distribution of masks. Around the early days, the Oxford University's project of AstraZeneca vaccine since February 2020 became popular. By July 2020, the third phase of its test run went successful and the clinical run began. Other companies like the United State's Pfizer and China's Sinovac followed the same route. However, an interesting element that arose in the middle of this situation was the issue of "vaccine diplomacy." The last example can easily give a hunch of how the Sino-American global rivalry could intersect with invention and export of vaccines and other elements. It was noted by the global analysts that even though around 27 percent of the global vaccine production was controlled by US, it had a 0 percent market share in terms of exports.⁴⁷ On the other hand, China is currently providing vaccine to 97 countries including 10 million to only developing countries via the World Health Organisation's (WHO's) COVAX programme.⁴⁸ India introduced "*vaccine maitri*" (*vaccine alliance*) for its South Asian neighbours and beyond – covering 49 countries, which also aimed at competing



⁴⁷ Dave Lawler, "Biden's next challenge: Vaccine diplomacy," 22 March 2021, AXIOS. Cited in <https://www.axios.com/us-coronavirus-vaccine-diplomacy-china-exports-4a5c7bbd-32fb-468a-add5-9b1689bf5ce3.html>. Accessed on 23 March 2021. Also, see "Unable to get U.S. vaccines, world turns to Russia and China," *Politico*, 25 February 2021. Cited in <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/02/25/global-vaccine-public-relations-war-471665>. Accessed on 22 March 2021.

⁴⁸ "India, China rivalry shifts to vaccine diplomacy," *Anadolou Agency*, 1 March 2021. Cited in <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/india-china-rivalry-shifts-to-vaccine-diplomacy/2160364>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

with the Chinese influence in the Asia Pacific region.⁴⁹ Several regional organisations have been caught up in these vaccine-games including the European Union (EU) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and resilience through vaccine has become a bargaining chip for both competition and rapprochement for the countries as well as the organisations.⁵⁰ Bangladesh's Beximco Pharmaceutical's initiative to invest in bringing in the Oxford vaccine to Bangladesh⁵¹ and collaboration with the Serum Institute of India⁵² brought rays of hope and made an affirmative shift in the public psyche.

In Bangladesh, there were a total number of 210 incidents recorded in the BPO dataset which would belong to this criterion. Definitely, legal and administrative initiatives played a major role here, but notably highest percentage also goes to voluntary services (30.85 percent). However, in this case, the qualitative information can provide the varied dimensions of resilience. One of the initiatives was the decision of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education's decision to provide online and television lectures of lessons for the students.⁵³ The renovation of remote-classroom definitely opened up opportunity for the students to keep their learning process un-breached. However, it also unmasks another harsh reality. The International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in its International Telecommunication Union (ITU) report found that around 63 percent of the school-going students did not have any internet access at home.⁵⁴ To quote Dr. Amena Mohsin here, "de-class" (in spatial sense) itself has a class (in sociological and economic sense) dimension to it.

⁴⁹ "India Beats China at Its Own Game in Vaccine Diplomacy Fight," Bloomberg, 25 February 2021. Cited in <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-25/india-beats-china-at-its-own-game-in-vaccine-diplomacy-battle>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

⁵⁰ See "Coronavirus: Why EU lags behind China and Russia in ASEAN vaccine diplomacy," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 March 2021. Cited in <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-china-asean-covid-vaccines/a-56960283>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

⁵¹ "Deshe Oxford er Vaccine Anbe Beximco", *BanglaNews24.com*, 28 August 2020. Cited in <https://www.banglanews24.com/health/news/bd/808529.details>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

⁵² "Beximco, Serum India Joins Hands against COVID-19", *New Age*, 28 August 2020. Cited in <https://epaper.newagebd.net/detail/241087/142>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

⁵³ "Television e chalu hocche bikolpo pathdan", *The Daily Jugantar*, 23 March 2020. Cited in https://epaper.jugantor.com/2020/03/23/3/3_r2_c2.jpg. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

⁵⁴ Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, "Bangladeshi children share experiences of remote learning and the challenges they face," *UNICEF*, 8 December 2002. Cited in <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/stories/bangladeshi-children-share-experiences-remote-learning-and-challenges-they-face>. Accessed on 22 March 2021.

A number of organisations came forth with their own ways of donating masks and sanitisers, either by directly producing them or through the donation of money. Among these providers, there were clothing and tailoring factories, pharmacies, youth organisations, politicians, local political and students' wings. Government's decision to provide stimulus packages worth USD 12.11 billion (19 packages in total) was appreciated countrywide.⁵⁵ However, going back to the "penalty" conundrum, it can be understood how some of those relief initiatives were under the hands of corrupted groups and why many of the actual victims did not get enough support. Apart from institutional manoeuvres, there were also notable individual efforts. For example, on 24 March 2020, A policeman in Khulna distributed leaflets to aware the people about coronavirus⁵⁶; on 28 March 2020, a house owner in Narayanganj waived rent for 22 tenants amidst of COVID-19⁵⁷; On 27 April 2020, A boy of class one donated money that he saved from his tiffin-money to help 11 poor families buying groceries.⁵⁸ A number of Bangladeshi cricket players donated good amount of money and auctioned their items to collect the amount for donations.⁵⁹

The trend in resilience also shows the timeline and story of a people's fight against the virus. Primarily, until April 2020, the concerns were mostly economic – the quest for survival against the attack of the virus and the likelihood of "economic depression" to be bought by it. After July 2020, as lockdown in the nation started to take its edge off the nerve of the community, the focus shifted to durable solutions and long-time goals, i.e. building awareness, increasing options for medical services in public and private healthcare facilities etc. After November 2020, the core focus shifted towards the distribution and rollout of vaccine. Following this change, CGS also revisited its COVID-19graphics and brought in new variables including vaccine rollout, vaccine assurance, fear related to vaccine and vaccination challenges since the last week of February 2021.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ "Govt so far announces \$12.11b stimulus to combat COVID-19", *The Financial Express*, 4 June 2020. Cited in <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/govt-so-far-announces-1211b-stimulus-to-combat-covid-19-1591280638>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

⁵⁶ *The Daily Purbachal*, 24 March 2020. Cited in <https://epaper.purbanchal.com/uploads/epaper/2020-03/5e7a507e27ac5.gif>. Accessed on 24 March 2021.

⁵⁷ *The Daily Observer*, 28 March 2020. Cited in https://epaper.observerbd.com/2020/03/29/3/details/3_r2_c4.jpg. Accessed on 24 March 2021.

⁵⁸ *Dhaka Tribune*, 27 April 2020. Cited in <https://bangla.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2020/04/07/21989>. Accessed on 24 March 2021.

⁵⁹ Collected from BPO Covid Mapping Raw Datasheet, until December 2021.

⁶⁰ For more, see "COVID-19graphics 30" and future publications. Available at CGS Highlights, <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#!/peace-highlights-infogr-viewer>. Accessed on 23 March 2021.

5. Conclusion

When the title of the topic was first decided in the BPO weekly meeting, I remember humorously telling one of my colleagues, *with great “power” comes greater responsibility*. While composing the write-up, I eventually came to realise that this simple phrase could not have been more true. In the age of technological revolution, one must be grateful that there is an abundance of data. However, the power of data depends on its portrayal. CGS’s COVID-19 mapping shows a bigger picture with nuances that might often be ignored. Yes, data never lies, but data does not have its own voice. If anything can be learnt from the aforementioned discussions on rumours, stigma, protest, penalty and resilience vis-à-vis the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh, it is the importance of responsibility that lies within the process of data mapping and data visualisation. There had been shifts in trends, there had been accurate predictions and unexpected or dramatic shifts. However, it is the *people* that come first. COVID-19 taught (or should have taught) us all that every single piece of data matters, given how within a year or so, the world had to embrace and cope with 0 to 2.75 million totally unexpected set of deaths. Again, there will be changes in trends the future, and data will always be there to manifest those trends and changes. Nevertheless, the purpose and power of this data will be fulfilled if it can bring researchers together to fight against the plight of the people and map out a path for prosperity.

Impact of COVID-19 on Rohingya population and Repatriation: An Assessment of 2020

Faizah Sultana⁶¹

Introduction

The Rohingya refugee crisis dominated the global political scenario of 2019 until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 virus thrives among the dense population. Since the Rohingya refugee camps are the most congested place in the world, their vulnerability is at peak. Since the pandemic was looming, the refugees were a major concern for the international community. As the host of the largest refugee population, Bangladesh is not free of this concern. This pandemic has not changed the life of the host community only; it has also put the Rohingya people living in the camps in an inhuman situation to face an uncertain future in their life.

State of Rohingya Camps during the pandemic

On 14 May, the first COVID-19 case was identified in the Rohingya camp; on 31 May, the first Rohingya death was reported due to COVID-19. As of 3 January 2021, there are 367 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the camps and a total of 10 deaths were reported.⁶² Being the residence of almost one million distressed Rohingya people, the world's largest refugee camp was a concern of the humanitarian community. Experts made grim projections of rapid infections, considering the poor hygiene among the highest population density. The weather factor added and worsened the situation. Still, the young population which constitutes most of the Rohingya refugees gave the experts some hope that the

⁶¹ Research Data Analyst, Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), Center for Genocide Studies.

⁶² 'Rohingya Crisis Situation Report #37', World Health Organization, 3 January 2021, Cited in-

problem may not go far out of hand. Aid agencies set up facilities and treatment centres inside the camps.⁶³ The provision of 3G and 4G mobile network was banned in the camps, which fuelled the rumours among the confused people. Rohingya leaders urged the Bangladesh government to lift the ban to stop the misinformation floating in the air.⁶⁴ The internet and mobile network ban was lifted in August.⁶⁷ Local NGOs and INGOs informed the camp dwellers about the Health Guidelines and general instructions of maintaining hygiene and social distancing. Still, the concern of the effectiveness of such awareness-raising measures remained high as the people inside the camps had to share basic hygiene facilities, such as toilet.⁶⁸ The demand was raised for increasing the testing and treatment capacity. The residents in the camps are not interested in testing Coronavirus due to the fear of separation from their family. Therefore, the actual number of infected people remained unclear.⁶⁹

⁶³ 'Coronavirus in the Rohingya camps: Five key issues to watch', The New Humanitarian, 15 May 2020, Cited in- <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/05/15/coronavirus-rohingya-camps> , Accessed on 1 February 2021.

⁶⁴ 'Aid workers race to stop coronavirus spreading in world's largest refugee camp', Thompson Reuters Foundation News, 15 May 2020, Cited in- <https://news.trust.org/item/20200515161011-ze7v1/> , Accessed on- 10 February 2021.

⁶⁵ Homaira N, Islam MS, Haider N. COVID-19 in the Rohingya refugee camps of Bangladesh: challenges and mitigation strategies. *Global Biosecurity*, 2020; 1(4), p.None. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.31646/gbio.84>. Cited in- <https://jglobalbiosecurity.com/articles/10.31646/gbio.84/> , Accessed on- 1 February 2021.

⁶⁶ ' Bangladesh Urged to Lift Rohingya Internet Ban as Covid-19 Rumours Swirl', The Guardian, 11 June 2020, Cited in- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/11/internet-ban-sparks-covid-19-rumours-in-rohingya-camp> , Accessed on- 3 March 2021.

⁶⁷ '3G, 4G internet restored in Rohingya camps', Dhaka Tribune, 28 August 2020, Cited in - <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/rohingya-crisis/2020/08/28/3g-4g-internet-restored-in-rohingya-camps> , Accessed on- 1 March 2021.

⁶⁸ 'Aid workers race to stop coronavirus spreading in world's largest refugee camp', Thompson Reuters Foundation News, 15 May 2020, Cited in- <https://news.trust.org/item/20200515161011-ze7v1/> , Accessed on- 10 February 2021.

⁶⁹ 'Covid-19 in Rohingya refugee camps', Dhaka Tribune, 24 August 2020, Cited in - <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/rohingya-crisis/2020/08/24/covid-19-in-rohingya-refugee-camps> . accessed on- 1 March 2021.

	Host Community	Rohingya refugees
 Total confirmed COVID-19 cases in Cox's Bazar	5 407	367
 Total cases in isolation in Cox's Bazar	18	1
 Total number of tests conducted	49 386	23 398
 Total deaths due to COVID-19	73	10

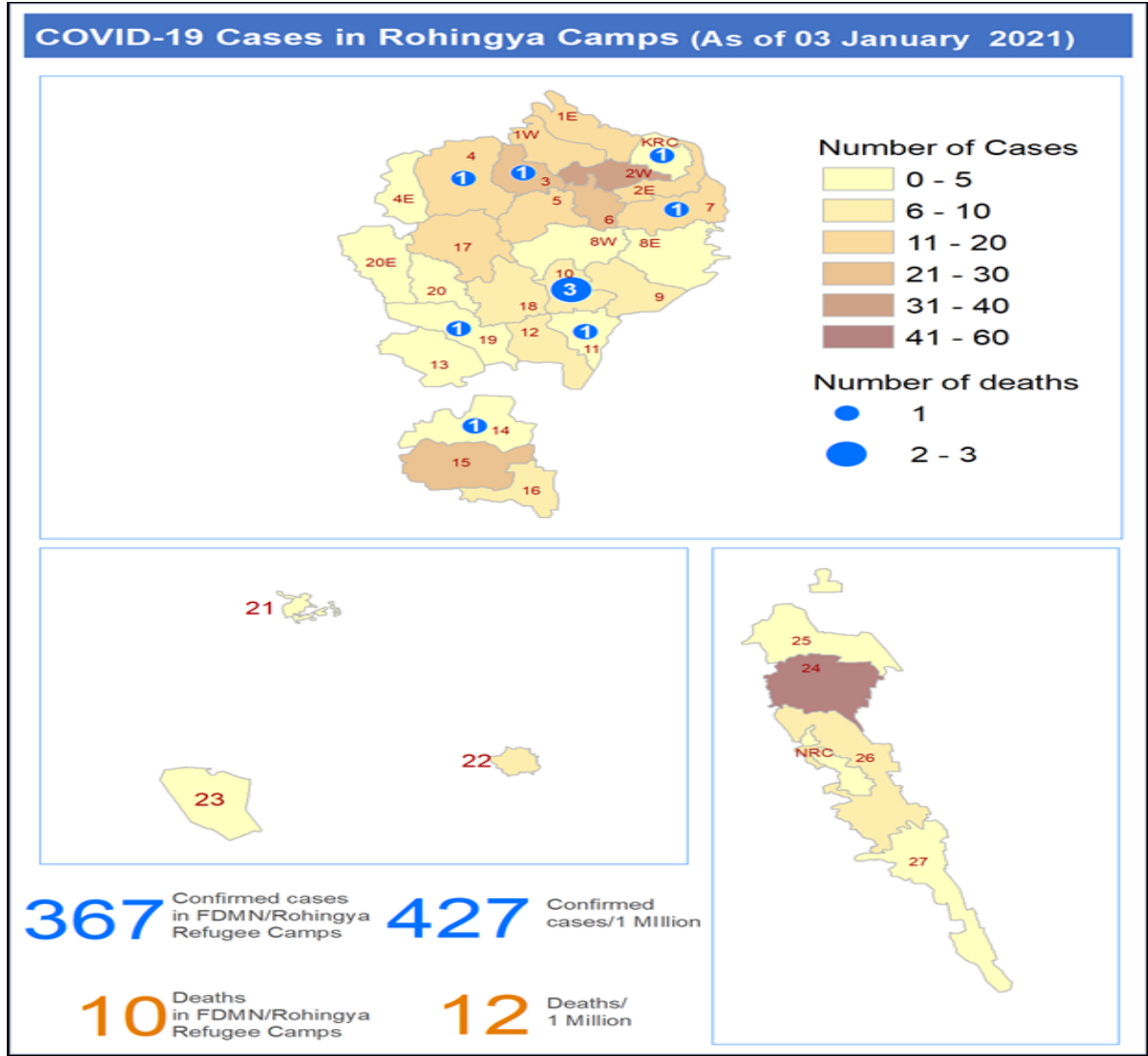
Source: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/searo/bangladesh/bangladesh---rohingya-crisis---pdf-reports/sitreps/2021/who-cxb-situation-report-37.pdf?sfvrsn=acfea92_7

Measures taken by the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) to fight COVID for its citizen and Rohingya Population

Bangladesh government declared a public holiday from 27 March to 31 May to contain virus infection.⁷⁰ At the district level, the local administration was careful and discouraged people from roaming around unnecessarily. Also, there were restrictions imposed on the entry and activities of the Aid agencies in the Rohingya camps from 23 March to protect the dwellers from infection. The scope of activities also narrowed from 8 April 2020 when a district-wide lockdown was initiated.⁷¹

⁷⁰ 'Govt decides not to extend general holidays further', 10 May 2020, The Business Standard, Cited in- <https://tbsnews.net/coronavirus-chronicle/covid-19-bangladesh/general-holiday-not-extend-further-state-minister-85870> , Accessed on- 1 March 2021.

⁷¹ Relief Web, '2020 Covid-19 Response Plan: Addendum to the Joint Response Plan 2020 - Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis (April - December 2020) – Bangladesh', 22 July 2020, Cited in- <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/2020-covid-19-response-plan-addendum-joint-response-plan-2020-rohingya> , Accessed on- 10 March 2021.



Source: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/searo/bangladesh/bangladesh---rohingya-crisis---pdf-reports/sitreps/2021/who-cxb-situation-report-37.pdf?sfvrsn=acfea92_7

Rohingya repatriation issue in 2020

The first month of 2020 was a milestone for the Rohingya community as on this month, the ICJ granted the provisional measures sought by the Gambia in November 2019. Bangladesh also showed enthusiasm urging their support for the repatriation.^{72 73} However, the due repatriation process did not start as the Rohingya people were unwilling to go back without some level of guarantee that they would not be persecuted again. Meanwhile, China reaffirmed its position in favour of the repatriation process. In November, the new government was elected in Myanmar, calling it a 'landslide victory for the National Democratic Party (NLD).⁷⁴ It made the international community and Bangladesh hopeful for easing the repatriation process. In a secretary-level meeting between Bangladesh and Myanmar in January 2021, it was decided that repatriation would start in June 2021.⁷⁵ In February 2021, the army staged a coup and took control of the country, detaining the winning party's Head, Aung San Suu Kyi. Experts showed a mixed reaction about how this event might influence the repatriation process. Some fear it might worsen the situation, while others maintain that it will not change the scenario as the army was always playing the central role from backstage.⁷⁶

Amid this situation, Bangladesh has shifted some of the Rohingya refugees to a new area in Bhashan Char, which is an island under the Noakhali district. The Bangladesh Navy has prepared this site to relocate the refugees from Cox's Bazar to a much more organised and planned accommodation. Almost 3500 Rohingya refugee moved to their new shelter by December 2020, and more are scheduled to move in January and

⁷² 'Bangladesh seeks Australia's support to speed up repatriation process of Rohingyas', The daily Star, 5 January 2020, Cited in- <https://www.thedailystar.net/rohingya-crisis/bangladesh-seeks-australia-support-for-rohingya-repatriation-1849819> , Accessed on- 10 March 2021.

⁷³ 'PM seeks continued EU support for Rohingya repatriation', The Daily Star, 6 February 2020, Cited in- <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/rohingya-repatriation-pm-seeks-european-union-support-1864255> , Accessed on- 10 March 2021.

⁷⁴ 'Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi's party wins majority in election', BBC News, 13 November 2020, Cited in- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54899170> , Accessed on- 10 March 2021.

⁷⁵ 'Bangladesh Expects to Start Rohingya Repatriation to Myanmar in June', Voice of America, 20 January 2021, Cited in- <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/bangladesh-expects-start-rohingya-repatriation-myanmar-june> , Accessed on- 10 March 2021.

⁷⁶ 'Rohingya Refugees: Is repatriation now up in the air?' The Daily Star, 2 February 2021, Cited in- <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/rohingya-refugees-repatriation-now-the-air-2037573> , Accessed on- 10 March 2021.

February 2021.⁷⁷ Bangladesh's decision to move the refugees to a new place was not welcomed by the international community. International Organisations expressed concern about the location and other facilities at the new place.^{78 79}

Source: The Daily Star, 25 August 2020



⁷⁷ 'Rohingya Relocation: 3rd batch goes to Bhasan Char on Jan 29-30' The Daily Star, 26 January 2021, Cited in- <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/rohingya-relocationthird-batch-goes-bhasan-char-jan-29-30-2033889> , Accessed on- 10 March 2021.

⁷⁸ Deutsche Welle, 'Bangladesh Rohingya relocation to isolated island criticized by rights groups', Cited in- <https://www.dw.com/en/bangladesh-rohingya-relocation-to-isolated-island-criticized-by-rights-groups/a-55822366> , Accessed on- 10 March 2021.

⁷⁹ 'Bangladesh begins moving Rohingya families to remote island', The Guardian, 4 December 2020, Cited in- <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/dec/03/bangladesh-begins-moving-rohingya-families-to-remote-island> , Accessed on- 1 March 2021.

A LOOK AT ROHINGYA CRISIS

FROM PAGE 1

Aug 26, 2017

As fighting spreads between the army and ARSA, thousands of Rohingyas flee to Bangladesh.

Sept 2, 2017

More than 2,600 houses are razed in Rohingya-majority areas in the week following the Aug 25 attack, the government says.

Sept 11, 2017

The UN human rights high commissioner calls the military operation "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing".

Sept 19, 2017

Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi vows to punish the perpetrators of rights violations but does not address UN accusations of ethnic cleansing.

Oct 12, 2017

Rohingya Muslims are not natives of Myanmar, says the army commander-in-chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, during a meeting with US ambassador Scot Marciel.

Nov 2, 2017

Suu Kyi urges people "not to quarrel" on her first visit to Rakhine since the crackdown.

Nov 27 to Dec 2, 2017

Pope Francis visits Myanmar and Bangladesh, avoiding the word "Rohingya", which is rejected by Myanmar, until meeting refugees in Bangladesh.

May 27, 2019

A military spokesman says Myanmar has granted early release to seven soldiers jailed for the Inn Din killings.

June 22, 2019

Authorities order telecoms companies to shut internet services in the conflict-torn west, an operator says, where government troops are fighting Arakan Army rebels.

Aug 20, 2019

The UN refugee agency and Bangladesh authorities launch a new repatriation bid, but it fails after no refugees agree to return.

Nov 11, 2019

Gambia files a genocide case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Nov 14, 2019

The International Criminal Court approves a prosecution request to investigate crimes against humanity against the Rohingya in a separate case.

Nov 26, 2019

Myanmar begins a military investigation into killings of Rohingya at Gu Dar Pyin village during the 2017 crackdown. The army later announces soldiers have been punished.

Dec 11, 2019

Suu Kyi appears at the ICJ in The Hague and rejects accusations of genocide against the Rohingya as "incomplete and misleading".

Dec 21, 2017

The United States imposes sanctions on 13 "serious human rights abusers and corrupt actors" including the general who oversaw the crackdown against the Rohingya.

Jan 10, 2018

The military says its soldiers murdered 10 captured Muslims in Inn Din village in Rakhine during insurgent attacks.

Feb 23, 2018

Myanmar has bulldozed at least 55 Rohingya villages that were emptied during the violence, Human Rights Watch says.

March 12, 2018

Myanmar's military is building bases where Rohingya homes and mosques once stood, Amnesty International says.

April 11, 2018

Seven Myanmar soldiers are sentenced to 10 years of hard labour for the Inn Din massacre.

Sept 13, 2018

Suu Kyi says in hindsight her government could have handled the situation in Rakhine better.

Nov 15, 2018

A Rohingya refugee repatriation effort stalls amid protests in camps.

Jan 4, 2019

Rakhine nationalist Arakan Army insurgents kill 13 policemen as Myanmar marks Independence Day, setting off more conflict.

March 18, 2019

Myanmar's army says it has set up a military court to investigate its conduct during the 2017 crackdown.

Jan 20, 2020

Government-appointed panel investigating allegations of abuse say they had found no evidence of genocide but war crimes were possible.

Jan 23, 2020

The ICJ orders Myanmar to take urgent measures to protect the Rohingya remaining inside Myanmar.

Jan 25, 2020

Two Rohingya women are killed and seven people wounded when shells hit a village. The army rejects accusations it was responsible from a lawmaker, a villager and Arakan Army rebels.

Feb 21, 2020

Myanmar's army says it will court-martial soldiers over abuses against Rohingya in two more villages during the 2017 crackdown.

April 16, 2020

Bangladesh rescues 396 Rohingya from a boat adrift for weeks after failing to land in Malaysia. At least 32 die on board. Several other boats adrift for months before landing in Indonesia and Malaysia.

April 29, 2020

The UN envoy to Myanmar says it is committing war crimes in Rakhine after civilians are hit with air and artillery strikes in the conflict against insurgents. Myanmar says the allegations are "biased".

May 25, 2020

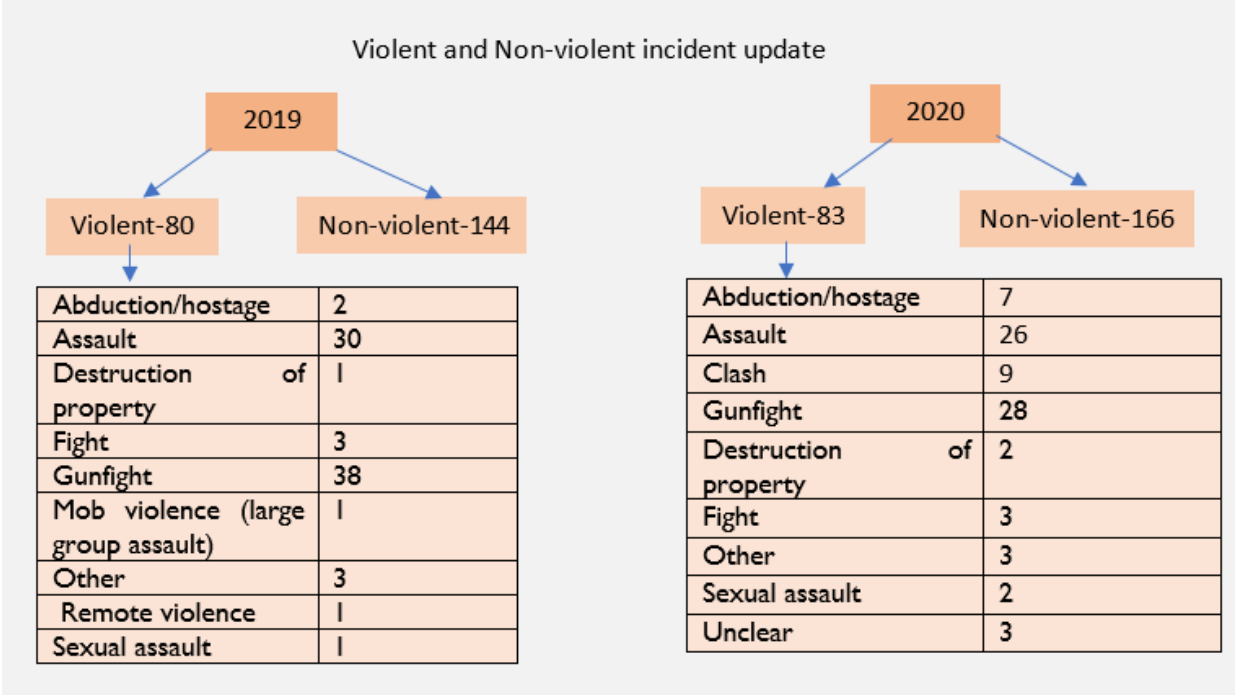
Myanmar files a report on its adherence to measures to protect the Rohingya to the ICJ. Details are not published.

Source: The Daily Star, 25 August 2020

Overview of BPO data: Violent and Non-Violent incidents

According to BPO data, there are a total of 249 incidents in 2020. There are 83 violent and 166 non-violent⁸⁰ incidents. In 2019, the number of incidents was 224, comprising of 80 violent and 144 non-violent incidents. So, the number of total incidents increased by 11.2%. In 2019, see the figure below for a breakdown of the incidents into violence types.

The total number of reported gunfights has declined from 38 to 28 in 2020. 25 of the reported gunfights were with law enforcement agencies; the rest three gunfights have taken place inside the camps between the Rohingya miscreants over establishing supremacy. The counterpart of the law enforcement agencies



⁸⁰ **Violent Incident:** According to BPO Codebook: The reported incident involved the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property.

Non-violent Incident: According to BPO Codebook: The reported incident did not involve the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property, e.g. Arrest, Peaceful Protest, Rescue and Recovery.

were drug peddlers (13), robbers (10), and yaba smugglers (2). In most of the cases, large consignments of yaba tablets were found next to the deceased.

There are 26 cases of assaults in 2020; seven of these assaults were targeted at Bangladeshi locals, NGO workers and law enforcement agencies; ten incidents were targeted and carried out by Rohingyas both inside and outside the camps. In three reported incidents, two Rohingya women committed suicide, and one attempted to. In one case, a Rohingya auto-rickshaw driver was murdered by local hijackers. The motives of these one-sided attacks are mostly domestic feuds, internal tension between the camp dwellers, possession of land/resources/valuable materials, criminal activities, etc. There was zero number of clash in 2019, but in 2020 nine clashes took place. Establishing supremacy inside and outside the camps is the primary motive for these violent confronts. A total of 166 non-violent incidents related to Rohingyas was reported in 2020. BPO registers incidents of arrests, detentions, raids, eviction drives, rescue cases, etc., under the non-violent category. There are 107 reports where Rohingya drug peddlers and nationals were held with drugs, yaba pills. There are seven reports of arrests of Rohingya individuals with fake Bangladeshi NIDs, passports and SIM cards. Several reports mentioned the arrests of Rohingya robbers and arms dealers. Law enforcement agencies reportedly arrested 17 human traffickers and prevented at least 537 people from trafficking. Few Rohingya people were detained outside the Chattagram division.

The impact of COVID-19 on the Rohingya community in Cox's Bazar is profound. Not only it delayed the already slow repatriation process, it also put the population who suffered from persecution at a significant health risk. The vaccination and aid distribution among the Rohingya community is hindered due to the restriction on entry in the camps. Therefore, the health workers fear another epidemic breakout in the camps like measles.⁸¹ Also, the nature of the prevention of Coronavirus requires maintaining social distance and isolation from family if contracted. In the world's largest refugee camp, where ten people live per square metre, maintaining social distance is a luxury. Also, the idea of isolation from the family creates psychological stress for the persecuted people. Although the contraction is slower than anticipated, there is no guarantee that it would not turn into a horror scene inside the camp. The last quarter of the year was eventful as the relocation of Rohingya people to Bhashan Char started amid the mixed opinion of the international organisations. Despite the Bangladesh government's large expenditure and massive effort to create for the Rohingya group a decent living environment, the security issue gave rise to suspicion among

⁸¹ 'Bangladesh: Covid-19 Aid Limits Imperil Rohingya', Human Rights Watch, 28 April 2020, Cited in- <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/28/bangladesh-covid-19-aid-limits-imperil-rohingya>, Accessed on- 9 March 2021.

the human rights organisations. The election in Myanmar, the victory of the NLD and the events that followed the coup in February 2021 are also critical for determining the future of this issue.



This aerial view of Bhasan Char shows a portion of the housing facilities that has been built on the island to relocate the Rohingyas from Cox's Bazar. Photo: Star

COVID-19 Pandemic and Labour Migration: A Perspective from Bangladesh

Nadia Nur⁸²

Introduction

Migration is a decade old phenomenon that connects source, transit and destination countries. Human migration is people's movement from one geographic location to another, which could be inside and outside the territory of the country of origin. International labour migration is the movement of people from one country to another, popularly known as economic migration. Millions of people are moving within and across borders in search of decent work. This movement has become a reality to improve living standards in countries prone to natural calamity, violent conflict, ethno-religious division and underdevelopment. Contemporary advancement in communication technologies and modes of communication has made migration easier, cheaper and faster for people on the move. On the other hand, population growth, unemployment, social unrest, political instability, poverty, inequality, gender-based violence, lack of safe working environment and sustainable livelihoods compel people to seek a better future abroad.⁸³ Notably, a large of migratory movement is recorded from those developing countries where population growth is faster than job opportunities.⁸⁴ Here, Bangladesh is not an exception. The number of migrant workers going abroad from Bangladesh has been increasing every year except in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented crisis in the migration sector.

⁸² Research Manager, Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), Centre for Genocide Studies, University of Dhaka

⁸³ J. Edward Taylor, "The New Economics of Labour Migration and the Role of Remittances in the Migration Process", *International Migration* Vol. 37, No. 1, 1999, p. 64.

⁸⁴ Asian Development Bank Institute, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and International Labour Organization, 2018, Labor Migration in Asia: Increasing the Development Impact of Migration through Finance and Technology

In 2020, most of the countries in the world imposed restrictions on travel and entered into state-of-emergencies or issued nationwide lockdowns to prevent the coronavirus spread. These restrictions have had an enormous impact on migrant workers across the world.⁸⁵ The pandemic is expected to have a long-term impact on the labour market.⁸⁶ Being a source country of migrant workers, Bangladesh has always struggled to ensure safe, decent and orderly migration. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the struggle at pre, peri- and post-migration stage. Undoubtedly, the pandemic has had a profound effect on migrant workers working abroad. Many migrant workers have returned to Bangladesh owing to the closure of numerous businesses. In February and March of 2020 alone, more than 200,000 workers returned to Bangladesh from Saudi Arabia and Malaysia.⁸⁷ Besides, many migrant workers became unemployed and lived uncertain lives.

This write-up is based on secondary sources of information. It reviews a diverse range of academic literature on migration in Bangladesh. It grasped seminar, workshops, conferences, reports, research papers, books, reported manuals, journal articles, and newspapers as secondary sources. The write-up has also used the statistical report of different government and non-government organisations to draw the migration sector's overall scenario amid the pandemic.

Given the contextual overview, this write-up intends to articulate the pandemic-generated disruptions in the Bangladeshi migration sector. Subsequently, it will scrutinise the impact of COVID-19 on aspirant migrants, migrant workers working abroad and returnee migrants. Then, it highlights the existing challenges and mechanisms for ensuring safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration during the pandemic followed by the conclusion.

COVID-19 and Labour Migration Scenario of Bangladesh:

COVID-19 has put additional pressure on the Bangladeshi migration sector. The year 2020 has witnessed a sharp rise in unemployment and return from the destination. There is a lessening trend of overseas

⁸⁵ ILO (2020). Policy Brief. *Protecting Migrant Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Geneva: ILO. Cited in https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_protect/-protrav/-migrant/documents/publication/wcms_743268.pdf Accessed January 15, 2021

⁸⁶ Papademetriou, D.G., and Hooper, K. (2020). Commentary: how is COVID-19 reshaping labour migration? *Int. Migr.* 58, 259–262. doi: 10.1111/imig.12748 Accessed January 15, 2021

⁸⁷ Anadolu Agency, 2020. Cited in <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/bangladesh-on-verge-ofdouble-whammy-amid-virus/1847595> Accessed January 20, 2021

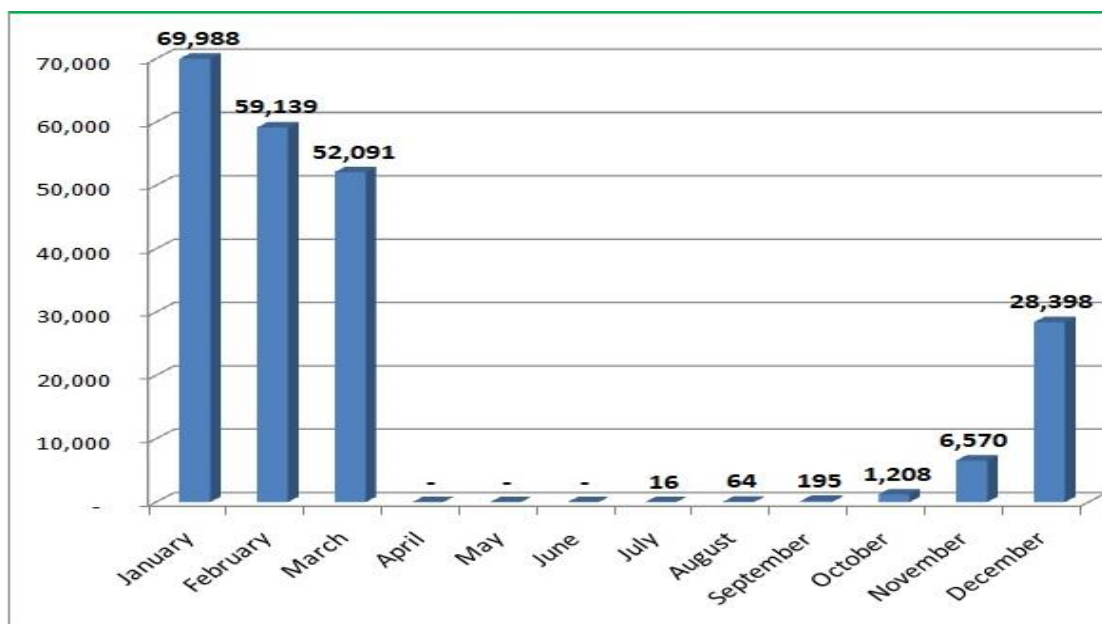
employment in Gulf Countries. According to the data of the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), overseas employment in 2020 decreased by 221.66% than in 2019.⁸⁸ It is the lowest number of overseas employment in the last 15 years.

Figure I: Overseas Employment from 1976-2020



⁸⁸ Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), Statistical Report 2020, Cited in <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=16> Accessed February 5, 2021.

Figure 2: Month Wise Overseas Employment in 2020.



In Bangladesh, COVID-19 was detected on 8 March 2020. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on Bangladesh's labour market. As represented in Figure 2, in 2020, there was a dramatic fall in the number of workers going abroad since April, and this trend continued till June. The number of migrant workers who went abroad has been on the rise since July 2020, with a maximum of 28,398 in December 2020.⁸⁹

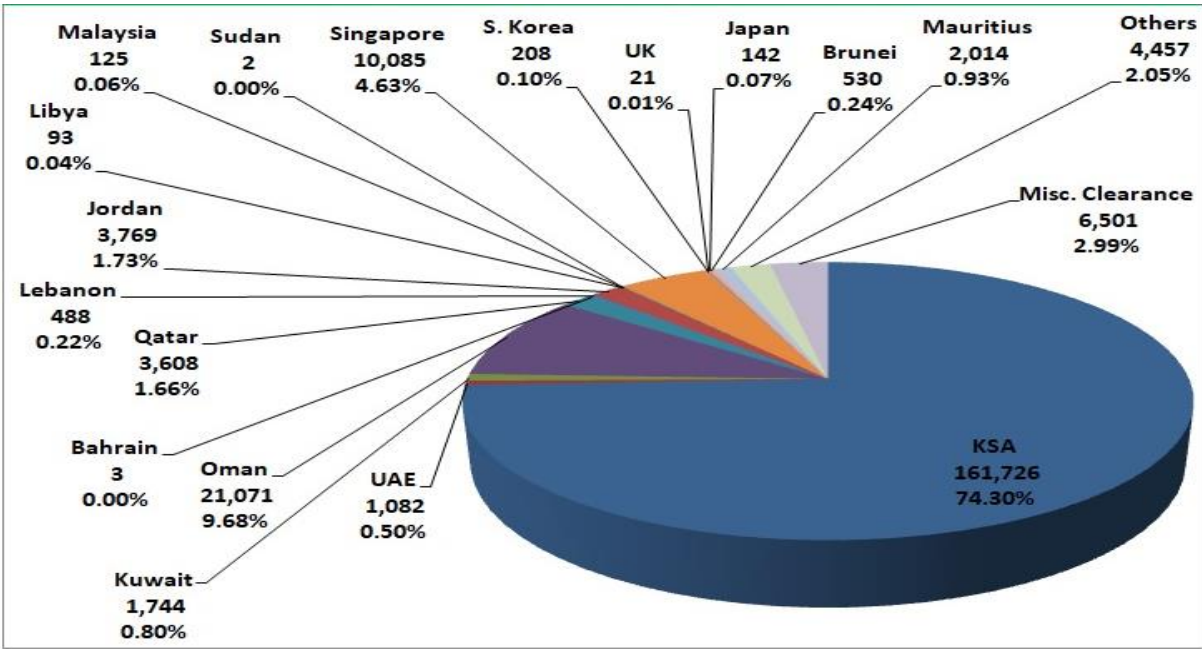
Ratio of Overseas Employment from Bangladesh

Soon after lifting up the embargo on less-skilled and semi-skilled migration in 2003 the dynamics of overseas employment ratio has changed dramatically. With time the joining of female migrants in the workforce has increased. In 2017 (1,008,525) the rate of overseas employment from Bangladesh touched

⁸⁹ Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), Statistical Report 2020, Cited in <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=39> Accessed February 5, 2021.

its topmost bunch, although it fell down dramatically in 2018 (734,181). The ratio of overseas employment went down both for male and female migrant workers. Numerically, the male employment proportion has fallen by 28%, while the percentage of female migrant workers fell to 16%.⁹⁰ Depending on demand, employment opportunities are mainly confined to some specific occupations. Female migrants often join nursing, cleaning, baby-sitting jobs, beauty parlours, domestic works, while male migrants work in factories, the construction sector, and the manufacturing company.

Pie Chart-I : Country Wise Overseas Employment in 2020.



⁹⁰ Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), Statistical Report 2020, Cited in <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction> Accessed February 5, 2021.

The above pie chart shows that approximately 74% of migrant workers went to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the pandemic.⁹¹ While Oman was second, and Singapore was the third preferred country for the expatriates.

Figure 3: Year Wise Overseas Employment of Female Workers 1991-2020

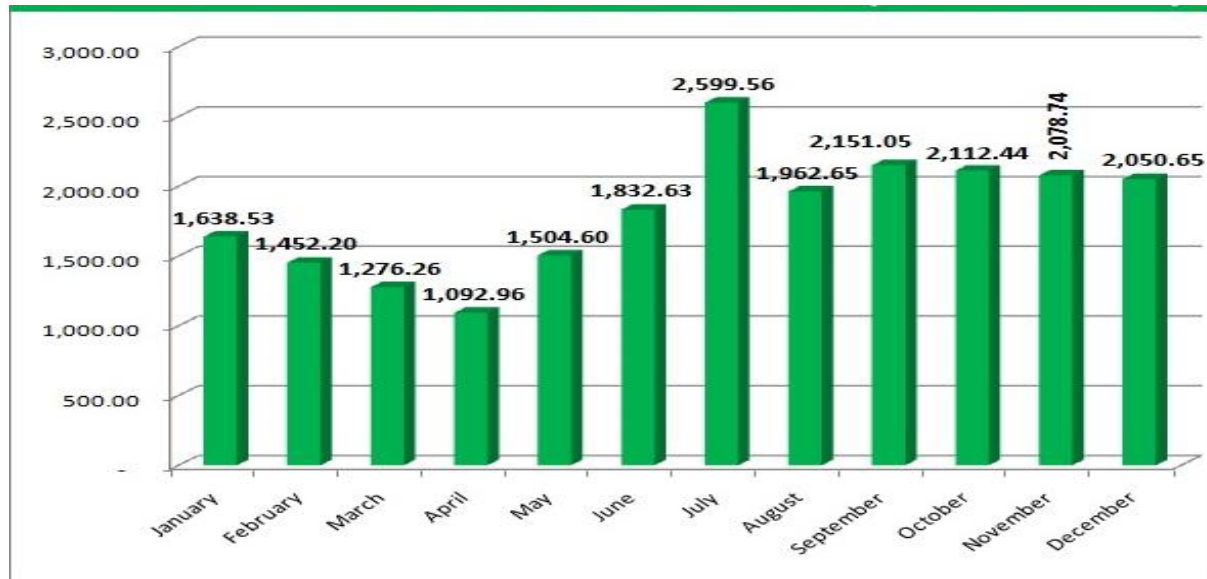


According to the statistical data of BMET, overseas employment of female migrant workers in 2020 decreased by -99.5% than in 2019.⁹² It is the lowest number of overseas jobs for female migrant workers in the last 10 years.

⁹¹ ibid

⁹² Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), Statistical Report 2020, Cited in <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=25> Accessed February 5, 2021.

Figure 4: Month wise Remittance inflow in 2020⁹³



⁹³ Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), Statistical Report 2020, Cited in <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=9> Accessed February 15, 2021.

Figure 5: Month wise Remittance inflow in 2019⁹⁴



Referring to the Finance Ministry's latest statistics, Financial Express, in a report stated that the remittance inflow jumped to \$ 21.74 billion in 2020 from \$ 18.33 billion in 2019.⁹⁵ However, the flow of remittances was much higher in 2020 than at any time in the past.

COVID-19: Profound Impact on Bangladeshi Migrant Workers

The Bangladeshi migration sector is already plagued with multi-faceted problems. Migrant workers encounter countless challenges at the pre-departure, post-departure and post-return/ reintegration phase. These challenges include but are not limited to high costs of migration, deception regarding the terms and conditions of employment, limited access to information on safe recruitment and employment options, abuse, and unethical recruitment practices by the sub-agents. The outbreak of the pandemic has made this

⁹⁴ Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), Statistical Report 2020, Cited in <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=10> Accessed February 15, 2021.

⁹⁵ The Financial Express, Cited in <https://www.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/remittance-inflow-tops-21b-in-2020-1609687724> Accessed February 5, 2021.

problem more acute. According to 'International Migration Report 2020' COVID-19 has slowed global migration nearly by 30%.⁹⁶

Analytical Framework: COVID-19 and The Migration Phase

South-Asia is considered a significant source of migrant workers and the second remittance-receiving region in the world.⁹⁷ Bangladesh is one of the major labour-sending countries. Currently, 13 million migrant workers are working abroad.⁹⁸ COVID-19 has had a severe impact on both domestic and international travel. It has impacted the low-skilled and seasonal workers. Noticeably, the effects of COVID-19 exist at every stage of the migration process from the beginning to the end.

This part of the write-up aims to scrutinise the contemporary migration scenario through different stages. It aims to analyse the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the migration cycle from beginning to end. The entire process of migration is entangled in a cyclical process. In every stage of this migration cycle, migrant workers become victim of cheat, distress, manipulation, harassment and discernment. COVID-19 pandemic has made this situation more complex. The whole labour migration process can be sorted into four dissimilar phases that include migration environment, pre-departure, post-arrival and return/reintegration. In this part of the write-up, attempts will be made to shed light on the impact of COVID-19 in four different stages.

Migration environment:

By analysing the existing secondary sources, the very basic issue that comes to mind is that there should be an environment conducive to migration. COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching impact on the migration environment of Bangladesh. Even those who were interested in going abroad before the pandemic are now reluctant to go abroad. No single reason can be held responsible for this. The factors accountable for this includes lack of social protection, dismissal from a job, sudden return from the destination, sudden

⁹⁶ The Business Standard, Cited in

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20201012_acaps_thematic_series_on_migrant_vulnerability_in_south_asia_0.pdf Accessed February 15, 2021.

⁹⁷ Acaps, Thematic series: Migration (October 2020), Migrant vulnerability in Bangladesh, India and Nepal, Cited in <https://tbsnews.net/world/world-migration-down-30-percent-due-pandemic-un-186541> Accessed February 5, 2021.

⁹⁸ Karim M.R., Islam M.T. COVID-19 and the Vulnerability of Overseas Bangladeshi. The Khabarhub. 2020 4 May. Cited www.english.khabarhub.com, Accessed February 5, 2021

pay cut and lack of returnee reintegration policies. Ensuring the protection of migrant workers is one of the predominant concerns in the international labour migration sector. Only government can push to create a conducive migration environment. The existence of migration friendly environment can encourage people to make migration a choice, not a necessity.⁹⁹ Therefore, migration friendly environment refers to the government to government agreement which must be worker-friendly. The government of the source country needs to have good diplomatic engagement with the destination country. Both countries can share responsibilities for the designated worker in case of emergency, illness and death. It is the responsibility of the destination and source country to ensure the safety and security of labours as migrant workers contribute in the development of both countries. Both governments can take conducive approach to foster the synergies between labour migration and development. The government can formulate new policies to ensure an effective protection system and assist migrant workers for the greater sake of society.

Considering the context of Bangladesh, ILO's fair migration agenda may be useful for creating a responsible migration environment.¹⁰⁰ The following issues can be taken into consideration to ensure a migrant friendly environment in Bangladesh:

- To consider migrants rights as human rights
- To prevent exploitation against migrant workers
- To step up for formulating fair migration schemes in the regional integration process
- To develop bilateral agreements with destination country besides the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

⁹⁹ Setting an ILO Agenda for fair migration <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/fair-migration-agenda/lang--en/index.htm>

¹⁰⁰ ibid

BOX-I : Chronological Development of Migration Laws and Institutions Regulating Labor Migration from Bangladesh.¹⁰¹

Chronological development of migration laws and institutions regulating labor migration from Bangladesh	
1976	Establishment of Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)
1982	A new Emigration Ordinance replaced the 1922 Emigration Act
1990	Establishment of Welfare Fund for Migrant Workers
1998	Signature of the UN's International Convention on Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
2002	Government starts to grant licenses to agencies for recruiting overseas employment
2003	Government relaxes restrictions on female labor migration
2011	Establishment of Migrant Welfare Bank (Probashi Kallyan Bank)
2012	Memorandum of Understanding between Bangladesh and Malaysia on sending and receiving workers
2013	Enactment of the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013

¹⁰¹ Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Cited <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/laenderprofile/216106/migration-policies> Accessed February 5, 2021.

Pre-departure stage:¹⁰²

Formal and informal sectors that simplify the migration process were closed or partly open during the pandemic. Due to which many could not start the initial process of going abroad. At the pre-departure stage migrant workers go through some legal formalities including obtaining the necessary documents like passport, job contract, visa, medical certificate, and 3 days pre-departure orientation training from the BMET or District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO). This training is mandatory to get the smart card for working abroad. In this stage, sub-agents or Middlemen play a critical role as most migrant workers are originating from rural areas. Somehow, they get connected with the middlemen who have communication with recruiting agencies. In such cases prospective migrant workers depend on sub-agents for the entire process, from passport collection to visa processing.

Post-arrival Stage:

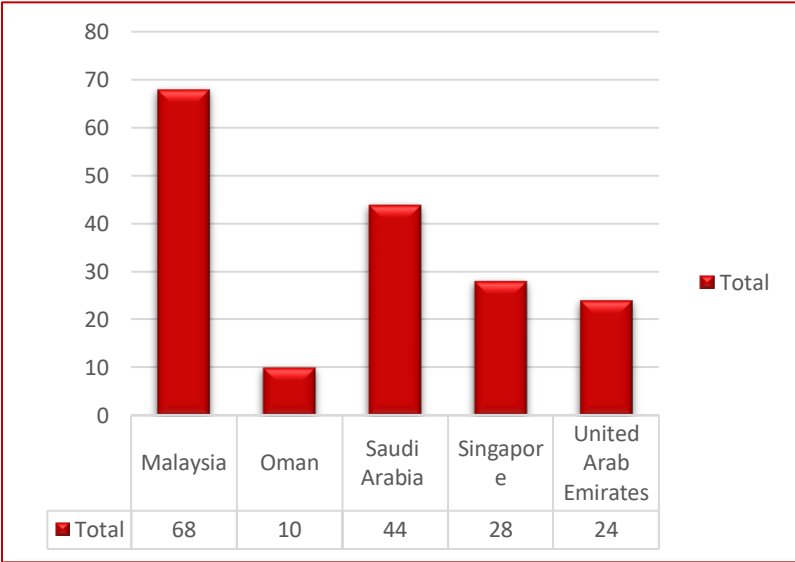
To get overseas employment, aspirant migrants use both official and unofficial channels. Government and private recruiting agents are the official channels of migration while unofficial recruitment systems include migration via brokers, middlemen, friends or family members. Due to the vibrant nature of the unofficial recruitment process, still it is not clear that how widespread is the network of the brokers in migration sector. In practice, working abroad has both positive and negative impacts. The major challenges faced by the migrant workers are low wage occupation, unhealthy and unsafe working environment, lack of decent working hours, physical abuse, forceful labour and adverse living condition.¹⁰³ Most often domestic migrant workers become victims of torture, isolation, physical exploitation, sexual abuse and rape by their employer. Most of the time workers become victim of forceful work as their passport is taken from them by their employer. If they try to find work outside or leave the working place they become undocumented. Considering all these issues, they have to continue their works at the same place. Both male and female workers face the problem of wages lower than promised. The most alarming thing is undocumented workers are forced to work at a low wage or without any payment. Due to COVID-19 pandemic migrant workers face several difficulties at the post-arrival stage in the destination country specially the low-skill migrant workers. Pandemic-induced challenges faced by the migrant workers include joblessness, fear of being sent back, short working hours, poor quality of living, overcharging of fees, forced labour, underpayment of wages, contract substitution, lack of freedom of movement and association, inadequate

¹⁰² http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Review-Report_REV_RMMRU_ILO-PDOS-Project.pdf

¹⁰³ Jolly, S.; Reeves, H. 2005. Gender and migration: Overview report (Brighton, Bridge Institute of Development Studies).

information about job contract and living condition abroad. The dependents of the migrant workers are going through economic crisis due to the reduced flow of remittances. So, it is clear that COVID-19 has intensified numerous socio-economic hardships to the family members, destination and source country. Understanding the ongoing hardships is essential for Bangladesh to develop effective strategies to lessen the pandemic’s impacts. To reduce the vulnerability, it is important to ensure legal support for the migrant workers at the destination country. It is important to have related information on job contract salary, job responsibilities, complaint mechanism process, legal recruitment process, labour laws and cultural diversity at the pre-departure level. ¹⁰⁴

Return and Reintegration:



In the country of destination migrant workers are not covered by the social safety nets. During the pandemic, most of the migrant workers, including Bangladeshi migrants, have lost their jobs. It caused great difficulties for the migrant workers and their families. The pandemic-induced challenges faced by migrant workers are large-scale job loss, wage reduction and increase in deportations from the destination country. The countries from which expatriate Bangladeshis returned after losing their jobs during the coronavirus are Malaysia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates

Figure-6: Primary countries of Return During Covid-19
and Oman.¹⁰⁵ According to the United Nations, the suspects of COVID-19 have gone through several

¹⁰⁴ file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Post-arrival%20PolicyBrief.pdf
¹⁰⁵ USAID, WINROCK INTERNATIONAL, Series Paper 2: Bangladesh July 2020, ‘ Situational Assesment of Labor Migrants in Asia: Needs and Knowledge During Covid-19’ Cited in

stigma and prejudice by their surrounding in the host country.¹⁰⁶ To ensure basic human rights of migrant workers, it has now become mandatory to include them in the social and judicial protection system of the destination country. The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) can include protection measures in the migration policies to address the gaps.

Currently, Bangladesh government does not have any data on returnee migrant workers. After returning to the source country, migrant workers face challenges like socio-economic difficulty, adaptation and skill recognition. There is no well-established mechanism for returnee reintegration and skill recognition. The only existing mechanism is the 'Rehabilitation and Reintegration Loan' provided by the Probashi Kalyan Bank (PKB). Currently, the reintegration of returnee migrants is one of the major challenges. In April 2020, the PKB created a special loan fund of 200 crore to support the returnee migrants.¹⁰⁷ To ensure sustainable reintegration of the returnee migrants, the government created another scheme of BDT 500 crore.¹⁰⁸ Simultaneously, the Bangladesh government is also exploring the available scope of migration in Europe and Africa, given declining job opportunities and low wages in Southeast Asia and Gulf countries.¹⁰⁹ Approximately 200,000 illegal Bangladeshi migrant workers are living in Malaysia. Notably, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bangladesh government approached to the Malaysian government to regularise the undocumented migrants.¹¹⁰

file:///G:/ANNUAL%20REPORT/Annual%20Report%202020/Reading%20Materials/Bangladesh_migrant-study-.pdf Accessed February 5, 2021.

¹⁰⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 'COVID-19: an uncertain homecoming for Bangladeshi Migrant Workers', Cited <https://www.bd.undp.org/content/bangladesh/en/home/stories/covid-19--an-uncertain-homecoming-for-bangladeshi-migrant-worker.html>, Accessed February 5, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ The Daily Star, Cited <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/news/only-9cr-200cr-disbursed-till-now-2015277> Accessed on 22 February, 2021

¹⁰⁸ The business Standard, Cited <https://tbsnews.net/first-anniversary/future-migration-overseas-employment-and-reintegration-should-get-priority-190606> Accessed on 22 February 2021

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 'COVID-19: an uncertain homecoming for Bangladeshi Migrant Workers', Cited <https://www.bd.undp.org/content/bangladesh/en/home/stories/covid-19--an-uncertain-homecoming-for-bangladeshi-migrant-worker.html>, Accessed February 5, 2021.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*

Existing Legal Framework to Protect the Rights of Migrant Workers:

The government of Bangladesh has approved numerous laws, policies and Act to safeguard the well-being of the Bangladeshi migrants.

- Overseas Employment Policy 2006
- Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012
- Overseas Employment and Migration Act 2013
- Domestic Worker Protection and Welfare Policy 2015
- Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016
- Wage Earner Welfare Board Act-2018.

Among these legal safeguarding instruments Bangladesh government has also ratified a number of international treaties which are related to the welfare of migrants. The country acceded to the CEDAW in 1984 with some reservations. Correspondently, the government has ratified nine of the core international human rights treaties. Beside the existing laws insurance is one of the most important issue that should be made mandatory for every migrant worker. In order to bring all the migrants under insurance, the Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority has developed a draft law.¹¹¹ If it is implemented properly, it may help the migrants to reduce their burden.

¹¹¹ MEWOE Annual Report 2017-18, p. 32.

As described in the Wage Earner Welfare Board Act-2018 the activities of WEWB includes:

- Supporting migrant workers in case of emergencies like war, natural disaster and lay-off of employer. Considering the situation, the WEWB will help the migrants to return to the country of origin.
- The board also holds the responsibility of saving the expatriates from accident, exploitation, sickness and vulnerable situation by providing the victim with legal, fiscal, medical and transport facilities.
- Benefits a migrant worker gets from the WEWB after death are the board will bear the cost of bringing back the dead body of the expatriate and its funeral, to ensure the realisation of his/her due salary, service benefits, demerage and insurance benefits.
- Running help-desk and safe-home for female migrants
- Helping returnee migrants financially and also in social integration process.

So far, the activity of WEWB has been largely limited to arrangement of bringing back the dead bodies of the expatriates. With the enactment of the law, the expatriates hope to see the Board more active in welfare activities aimed at helping the wage earners in their time of emergency like COVID-19 pandemic.

Migration Diplomacy Amid the Pandemic: Global Overview

The informal politics of labour migration came to the fore amid the pandemic. Migration diplomacy has mainly been fueled by formally or informally controlled labour force transfer between countries in the region.¹¹² At the global level, patterns of worker mobility arranged along the lines of regional and international politics have been a key to understand what could be called migration diplomacy. Migration policy is indeed an indirect instrument of foreign policy. Regional logics, bilateral conferences and dialogues between bureaucrats, government representatives and recruiting agencies contributed to engineer the pattern of labour migration. Even the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced a new dimension in migration diplomacy. Overlooking the COVID-19 restrictions, Canada has continued to issue Invitations to Apply (ITAs) through the Express Entry scheme. In 2020, Canada issued approximately 92,000 ITAs to prospective skilled worker immigrants.¹¹³ Moreover, in August 2020, the Canadian government announced that asylum seekers who worked in care homes and hospitals are eligible for permanent residence.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Ahmed Galal and Bernard Hoekman, eds., *Arab Economic Integration: Between Hope and Reality* (Washington, DC, 2003)

¹¹³ Canadian Immigration Policies and Covid-19 in 2020, Cited <https://www.immigration.ca/canada-immigration-policies-and-covid-19-in-2020>, Accessed February 25, 2021.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*

Key Recommendations

1. To re-examine the existing policies and mapping the effectiveness at the policy level. To map out protectionist policies and re-examine the effectiveness of these policies.
2. To allocate budget for migration in order to assess the emerging challenges and opportunities in the existing labour market. Based on the assessment government should restructure the training curriculum of Technical Training Centers (TTC)
3. To monitor the services provided by DEMO and TTC
4. To ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 and its supplementing Recommendation No. 201 to protect the rights of domestic workers.
5. To ensure sound working environment for migrant workers through Clause specific Bilateral and multilateral agreements with the country of destination
6. To employ lawyer in each labor wing for providing legal assistance to the migrant workers
7. To adopt standard employment contract for domestic migrant workers. Members of the Colombo Process and Abu Dhabi Dialogue can come forward to ensure this procedure
8. Middlemen/sub-agents should be brought under legal framework to reduce visa cheating
9. To ensure decent working hour and wage, showing contract paper might be made mandatory for issuing smart card for reducing fraudulence practices
10. To build well equipped 'safe houses' for female migrant workers in the destination country by the government of source country. So that they can take enough rest and maintain decent working hours.
11. Mutual recognition of skill is important to utilise the skills and expertise of returnee migrants.
12. To collect returnee data at the airport
13. In coalition with international governing body Bangladesh should stand against the Kafala system in regional and international forums

Bangladesh is well-known as a labour sending country in South Asia. With the passage of time, migration from Bangladesh is increasing, most notably among women. In many instances, at different stage of migration, they become victim of physical and sexual violence. Although government has developed different mechanisms to reduce the vulnerability of migrant workers still the existing policies need to be revised and upgraded to fit the contemporary context. In order to ensure safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration, strong commitment from the government of destination and source country to implement the existing policies is a must. The government should introduce short-term and long-term strategies to mitigate the contemporary impacts of Coronavirus pandemic. As a part of short-term strategy government may support the returnee migrants by providing financial support and develop a

comprehensive plan by creating a database of returnee migrants to address the returnee reintegration related problems in future.

Conclusion:

The main reason for promoting overseas employment for the citizens of Bangladesh is not only to engage them in income-oriented employment opportunities but also to reduce their condition of unemployment and poverty.¹¹⁵ Better salary and improved lifestyle attract people to migrate abroad. For Bangladeshi migrant workers, migration and vulnerability are two sides of the same coin. In the source, transit and destination country, the violation of human rights is no sporadic event. In order to eradicate the culture of impunity and reduce further violation of migrant workers right, it should be considered as human rights. To achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, it is important to address the pandemic-induced challenges including abuse of migrants in destinations, forcible displacement of people and forced dismissal of migrant workers. These challenges may be addressed by collective global effort. No single country would be successful to solve this alone. Collective approach and collaboration among government, non-government organisations and multi-level stakeholders can ensure safe, orderly and dignified migration. The global governing system needs to work in a coordinated manner to mitigate the challenges of international migration raised by the pandemic. To alleviate the sufferings of the migrant workers, comprehensive and well-defined policies are required in this interconnected world. The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) can include more protection measures in the migration policies in order to protect the migrants during COVID-19. Safe migration and sustainable reintegration need synergistic action from government, non-government and national-international stakeholders.

¹¹⁵ Buchenau, J. 2008. Migration, remittances and poverty alleviation in Bangladesh: Report and proposal (Dhaka, UNDP).

Violence against Women

Mansura Amdad¹¹⁶

Violence against women (VAW) is one of the most grossly violated human rights in the world, and the gravity of the violence has both physical and psychological dimensions.¹¹⁷ Often understood as one of the most under-reported and diverse human rights violations, the perpetration of this particular form of violence is devoid of racial, socio-economic, ethnic, class- or age-based contours as it takes place at every nook and cranny of the world.¹¹⁸ In a basic form, the hindrance from opportunities in the socio-cultural sphere is one of the critical aspects of VAW, as such acts impede the progressive and participatory actions of women.

Any form of violence begets concern, as ‘... it is increasingly understood that violence occurs along a continuum and involves physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuses of power at the individual, group and social structural levels.’¹¹⁹ For this particular paper, the tangible, physical notion of violence against women will be considered. Although violence against women takes into consideration both violence against women and violence perpetrated against girls (aged 2-17 years, in particular, are addressed as girls by the World Health Organisation [WHO]), this

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¹¹⁷ Roger-Claude Liwanga, “The Meaning of Gross Violation of Human Rights: A Focus on International Tribunals’ Decisions over the DRC Conflicts,” *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy*, vol. 44, no. 1 (April 2020), pp. 67-81.

¹¹⁸ Nadia Nur and Ashique Mahmud, “Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG),” *State of Peace 2019* (April 2020), pp. 13-29.

¹¹⁹ J. Kenway and L. Fitzclarence, “Masculinity, Violence and Schooling: Challenging ‘Poisonous Pedagogies,’” *Gender and Education*, vol. 9, pp. 117-134.

write-up will mostly focus upon the cases of violence against women.¹²⁰ Primarily based on the secondary data collected by Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), this write-up will triangulate the evidences seen in Bangladesh by dint of similar data of other organisations within the country, with suitable international examples brought forth for the firm grounding of logic. However, before delving into the myriad forms of violence against women, a quick glance at gender-based violence is imperative.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

International treaties use the term ‘gender-based’ to illustrate that violence against women is ‘shaped by gendered arrangements of power in society.’¹²¹ These acts of violence are akin to an ‘expression and maintenance’ of the socially prevalent ‘unequal power relations.’¹²² In this paper, violence against women is highlighted in particular because ‘gendered violence is a worldwide problem impacting disproportionately upon women and children,’ where the notion of violence is, paradoxically, one of the most common phenomena, and yet, the most overlooked.¹²³

The 1993 United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted a non-binding Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), which describes violence against women as:

“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”¹²⁴ (UN doc, A/RES/48/104, 1993)

¹²⁰ Violence against children, World Health Organization, 8 June 2020. Cited in <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

¹²¹ S.R. Montesanti and W.E. Thurston, “Mapping the Role of Structural and Interpersonal Violence in the Lives of Women: Implications for Public Health Interventions and Policy,” *BMC Women’s Health*, vol. 15 (2015), p. 100.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Nancy Lombard (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Violence* (Oxon and New York: Routledge 2018), p. 2; Nadia Nur and Ashique Mahmud, *op. cit.*

¹²⁴ “Violence against Women,” UN Women. Cited in <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/v-overview.htm#:~:text=The%20Declaration%20defines%20violence%20against,public%20or%20in%20private%20life>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women definition is broad, encompassing both physical and psychological harm as well as making provision for the context and arenas of violence against women. GBV could include physical, sexual and psychological abuse by a person with whom the victim has had an intimate relationship or by a stranger.¹²⁵

Violence against Women (VAW)

For understanding the rights which are suppressed by dint of violence against women, there are several binding and non-binding legal instruments in place, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW).¹²⁶ While these legal measures focus on the rights which are to be enjoyed by women, the landmark for VAW among them, in particular, is the CEDAW, which had entered into force in 1981.¹²⁷ Although CEDAW had not created a stance in the realm of violence, it had created a definitive breakthrough from the past human rights declarations and legal instruments by specifically addressing the issue of women.

The CEDAW definition of gender violence as a violation of human rights became the international standard applied to woman abuse, as it linked gender equality and the elimination of violence against women by recognising that rape and domestic violence are causes of women's subordination (rather than simply its

¹²⁵ Preye Kuro Inokoba, "Violence Against Women: Why Men and Women Should Unite," *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2011), pp. 53-59.

¹²⁶ "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993," *United Nations*. Cited in https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.21_declaration%20elimination%20vaw.pdf. Accessed on 25 January 2021.

¹²⁷ "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women," UN Women. Cited in <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/history.htm>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

consequences).¹²⁸ Therefore, gender violence is a form of discrimination that ‘seriously inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men.’¹²⁹

The Council of Europe Convention (also known as the Istanbul Convention) describes the phenomenon of VAW as a ‘manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women.’¹³⁰ Incorporating acts from peacetime, war, and armed conflict alike, VAW espouses common and uncommon forms of violence in both public spheres and private settings.¹³¹

This write-up looks at the notion of rape (interchangeably used with sexual assault in this paper as the physical form of violence is taken into consideration) and domestic violence in the exploration of VAW in the Bangladeshi setting. In this regard, rape constitutes a form of violence that violates the well-being and rights of women in what can be dubbed as one of the most humiliating forms of physical and sexual violence. Rape is forcing somebody to have sex when she or he does not want to.¹³² Women are more likely to be killed, injured or physically attacked in their own home, by someone known to them, than in any other social context, making the family the most dangerous place for women and children.¹³³ Often mentioned as ‘family violence,’ or ‘intimate partner violence,’ it refers to ‘Direct violations of [women’s] . . . physical and mental autonomy’ – which deny them ‘liberty and dignity.’¹³⁴

¹²⁸ CEDAW(1992), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation 19, Violence against Women (Eleventh session, 1992), UN Doc. A/47/38 at I (1993), reprinted in Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies, UN Doc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6 at 243 (2003).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Council of Europe. *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2011).

¹³¹ “Gender-based Violence against Women,” *The State of African Women Report 2018*, p. 127. Cited in <https://rightbyher.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/SOAW-Report-FULL.pdf>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

¹³² Okolo GU, *Violence Against Women* (Calabar: Baye Communications, 2004).

¹³³ R.J. Gelles, “An Exchange/Social Control Theory,” in D. Finkelhor, R.J. Gelles, G.T. Hotaling and M.A. Straus (eds.), *The Dark Side of Families: Current Family Violence Research* (London: Sage Publications, 1983), pp. 151–165.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

Setting the Normative Context: International Legal Instruments

Internationally, the instruments of international law are utilised in the national legislature of various countries. The UDHR ideated the freedom and dignity of all human beings and firmly established their right to life, liberty and security.¹³⁵ Countries of the world took into cognisance the ICESCR and the ICCPR, and gradually moved towards addressing the discriminatory violence faced by women through the CEDAW. To put a firmer grip on the ensuing violence against women, the DEVAW in 1993 proclaimed the policy of eliminating violence against women as a state responsibility, and allowed the pursuit of all appropriate means in the fastest manner to ensure justice.¹³⁶ Furthermore, states were prompted to ‘not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration’ to avert the responsibility.¹³⁷ Furthermore, the gradual shift from gender neutral notions of human security towards a gendered approach of non-traditional security was observed through the adoptions of several United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) on Women, Peace and Security.

The UNSCR 1325 called upon the member states to increase the participation of women for the ‘maintenance and promotion of peace and security.’¹³⁸ The UNSCR 1820 promulgated the deployment of women in peace operations for the ‘prevention and resolution of conflicts,’ and recognised the necessity of training for the peace troops for preventing and responding to sexual violence.¹³⁹ Fostering the notion that sexual and gender-based violence comprise tactics of war, the Resolution prompted the end to the impunity of the perpetrators by identifying the horrid acts as war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocidal crimes in a conflict zone.¹⁴⁰ The UNSCR 1888 prescribed the role of leadership for addressing sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-prone areas, and disseminated the importance of deploying experts to such areas as a preventive measure – all as a coordinated strategic effort.¹⁴¹ The subsequent

¹³⁵ “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” *United Nations*. Cited in https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf. Accessed on 2 February 2021.

¹³⁶ “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993,” *United Nations*. Cited in https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.21_declaration%20elimination%20vaw.pdf. Accessed on 25 January 2021.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ “Security Council Resolution 1325,” *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-1325>. Accessed on 25 January 2021.

¹³⁹ “Security Council Resolution 1820,” *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-1820>. Accessed on 25 January 2021.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ “Security Council Resolution 1888,” *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-1888>. Accessed on 25 January 2021.

UNSCR 1889 called upon the development of indicators for measuring the implementation efforts of the UNSCR 1325, and affirmed the role of women in every single stage of peace processes.¹⁴² The UNSCR 1960 emphasised the importance of ending conflict-related sexual violence, the UNSCR 2106 strengthened monitoring and preventive facilities, while the UNSCR 2122 took forward an integrated approach to sustainable peace.¹⁴³ Last but not the least, all the spheres of the society were called upon through the UNSCR 2242, as the civil society organisations were incorporated in cooperating for the implementation of strategic measures, and finally through the UNSCR 2272 addressed the notion of sexual exploitations and abuses within the peace operations.¹⁴⁴

A Regional Stance: South Asia

In South Asia, the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) created an inter-governmental regional body for ending VAW in the region. The South Asian Coordinating Group for Ending Violence Against Women and Children (SACG) attempts to ‘prevent, address and end violence against women,’ as well as putting a halt against the violence against children in the member states, through their own legislations.¹⁴⁵ The Association has brought forth a convention in 2002, where the key elements constituted of preventing and combating women and children trafficking vis-à-vis prostitution.¹⁴⁶

However, South Asia has a long way to go in terms of tackling violence against women, as per the Global Gender Gap Index. It provides a glimpse at the structural problem regarding gender. The 2020 Global

¹⁴² “Security Council Resolution 1889,” *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-1889>. Accessed on 25 January 2021.

¹⁴³ “Security Council Resolution 1889,” *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-1889>. Accessed on 25 January 2021; “Security Council Resolution 1960,” *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-1960>. Accessed on 25 January 2021; “Security Council Resolution 2106,” *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-2106>. Accessed on 25 January 2021; “Security Council Resolution 2122,” *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-2122>. Accessed on 25 January 2021.

¹⁴⁴ “Security Council Resolution 2242,” *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-2242>. Accessed on 25 January 2021; “Security Council Resolution 2272,” *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-2272>. Accessed on 25 January 2021.

¹⁴⁵ “Core Partners,” *South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children*. Cited in <https://saievac.org/about-saievac/core-partners/>. Accessed on 25 January 2021.

¹⁴⁶ Rajini R. Menon, “Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls the SAARC Way: Combat Human Trafficking,” *Oxfam India*, 7 December 2016. Cited in <https://www.oxfamindia.org/blog/addressing-violence-against-women-and-girls-saarc-way-combat-human-trafficking>. Accessed on 2 February 2021.

Gender Gap Index puts South Asia in the third rank from the bottom, with 66.1 per cent progress in the year 2019.¹⁴⁷ Without a concrete regional convention regarding the core modes of VAW such as sexual assault and domestic violence, the convention may not be effective in dealing with the overall regional issue.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: The Bangladesh Trend

In Bangladesh, the myriad forms of sexual and gender-based violence are mostly one-sided in nature, varying from rape to attempted rape, by an individual or small group against another individual or a different group. It covers any form of sexual harassment, rape, gang rape, sexual abuse and forceful prostitution, BPO mapped the trends over the years in terms of sexual and gender-based violence. In terms of domestic violence, the effects of violence extend beyond the plains of physical, sexual and mental harm, and gnaws at the family, community and national levels by hindering women. The following tables take a glance at the nature of sexual and gender-based violence throughout 2018, 2019 and 2020.

¹⁴⁷ “Mind the 100 Year Gap,” *World Economic Forum*, 16 December 2019. Cited in <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>. Accessed on 2 February 2021.

Table 1: Violence Ratio in Top 15 Districts: 2018¹⁴⁸

Rank	District	Incident	Death	Injury	Sexual Assault	Arrest
1	Dhaka	183	91	67	84	137
2	Chattogram	141	66	93	46	116
3	Bogura	104	37	66	34	67
4	Narayanganj	86	40	40	27	43
5	Gazipur	53	39	14	12	18
6	Pabna	52	19	25	22	43
7	Cox's Bazar	47	25	18	16	17
8	Rangpur	42	22	17	11	22
9	Rajshahi	41	14	17	15	36
10	Gaibandha	40	15	20	17	17
11	Sirajganj	40	24	11	8	18
12	Dinajpur	38	21	17	11	18
13	Mymensingh	38	21	15	6	31
14	Natore	38	15	8	15	30
15	Jashore	37	20	20	13	8

¹⁴⁸ Nadia Nur and Ashique Mahmud, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Table 2: Violence Ratio in Top 15 Districts: 2019¹⁴⁹

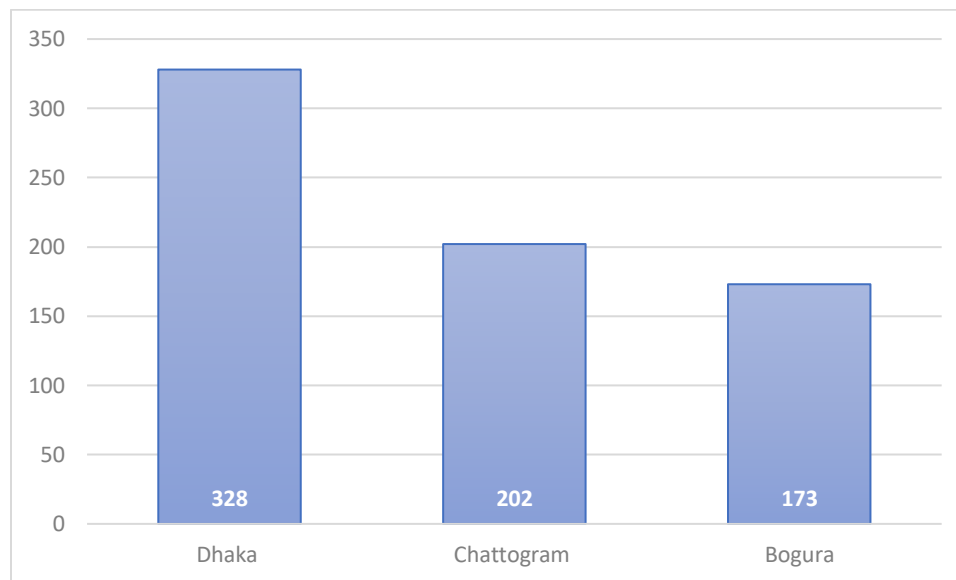
Rank	District	Incident	Death	Injury	Sexual Assault	Arrest
1	Dhaka	203	75	79	90	187
2	Chattogram	162	46	38	61	155
3	Narayanganj	128	33	53	56	130
4	Bogura	109	31	54	44	79
5	Mymensingh	103	22	32	50	76
6	Gazipur	88	33	38	36	83
7	Jashore	76	11	32	41	71
8	Barishal	70	13	26	29	44
9	Pabna	65	24	16	26	64
10	Rajshahi	59	18	28	23	36
11	Noakhali	56	13	20	29	49
12	Khulna	54	11	17	27	67
13	Pirojpur	54	14	18	19	31
14	Sylhet	53	7	20	20	56
15	Rangpur	50	9	18	21	48

Table 3: Violence Ratio in Top 15 Districts: 2020¹⁵⁰

Rank	District	Incident	Death	Injury	Sexual Assault	Arrest
1	Dhaka	328	110	179	158	292
2	Chattogram	202	45	104	71	226
3	Bogura	173	34	93	65	144
4	Barishal	154	47	70	51	127
5	Gazipur	147	53	79	62	136
6	Narayanganj	131	32	117	60	122
7	Cox's Bazar	105	36	81	33	62
8	Noakhali	86	30	44	35	86
9	Mymensingh	77	30	34	27	72
10	Khulna	77	23	41	26	59
11	Jashore	76	21	44	35	65
12	Naogaon	75	32	31	19	62
13	Sylhet	75	17	34	30	82
14	Dinajpur	71	16	32	25	78
15	Rajshahi	70	18	34	37	67

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 20.¹⁵⁰ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 23 February 2021.

Figure I: Top Three Districts Experiencing Incidents of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (2020)¹⁵¹



The aforementioned tables (Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3) and Figure I provide the glimpse of Dhaka district bearing the most of the brunt of sexual and gender-based violence, with the highest numbers in terms of incidents, deaths, injuries, arrests as well as sexual assaults. The key issue in this consideration is the ever-increasing number of people in the capital, resulting in the maximum recorded number of sexual and gender-based violence in Dhaka. Furthermore, the notions of violence are increased due to the existing inequality, increasing number of slums, increasing population density and associated resource scarcity. Chattogram, being the second-most populous city of the country as well as being the port city, also faces a high number of incidents in terms of sexual and gender-based violence. Although the number of deaths had decreased in Chattogram, it could be affiliated to the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic (Chattogram was one of the worst-hit regions vis-à-vis the pandemic, resulting in tighter regulatory measures) rather than awareness among people about the perils of sexual and gender-based violence.

¹⁵¹ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 23 February 2021.

Bogura has seen the third most number of sexual and gender-based violence, whereas Gazipur has seen the second highest number of deaths followed by Barishal (Table 3).

Figure 2: Trend of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence:
Violent Incidents in Bangladesh (2018-2020) [Based on BPO Data]¹⁵²

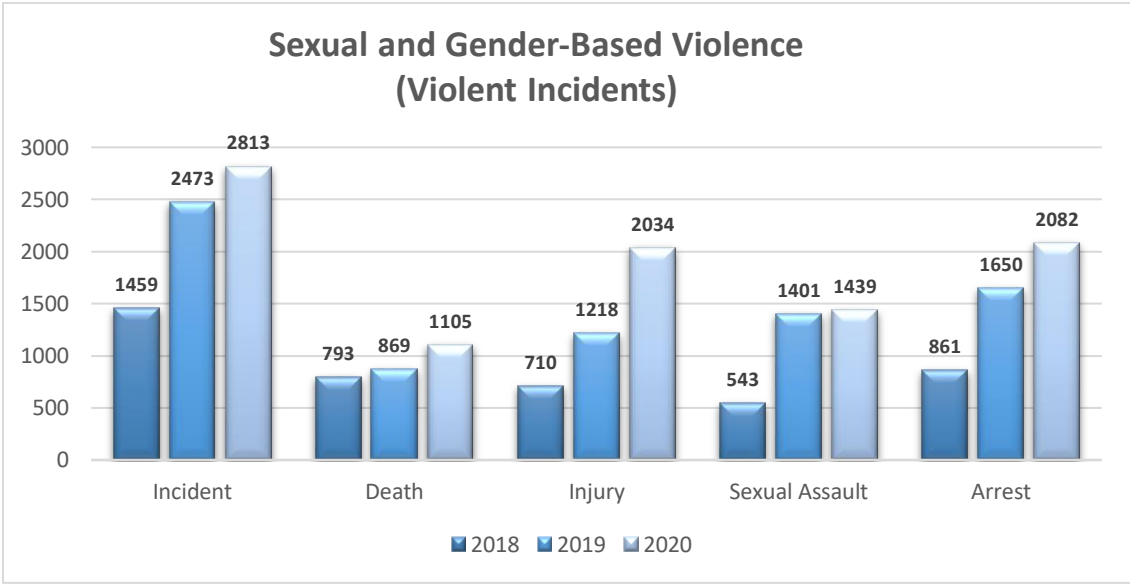


Figure 2 shows that the violent incidents regarding sexual and gender-based violence are on the rise over the years. In 2020, the number of violent incidents regarding sexual and gender-based violence has risen 13.75% than 2019, and a sharp 92% increase than that of 2018. In terms of the number of deaths, 2020 has seen a 39.34% rise than 2018 and a 27.16% increase compared to 2019. If injuries are taken into account, a 67% rise has occurred in 2020 vis-à-vis 2019, whereas a sharp 186.48% rise from 2018 has

¹⁵² Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 23 February 2021.

taken place in 2020. The number of sexual assaults has increased in 2020 by a meagre 2.71% if 2019 is taken into consideration, however, the number propels to 165% if 2020 is compared to 2018.

Figure 3: Trend of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence:
Non-Violent Incidents (Arrests) in Bangladesh (2018-2020) [Based on BPO Data]¹⁵³

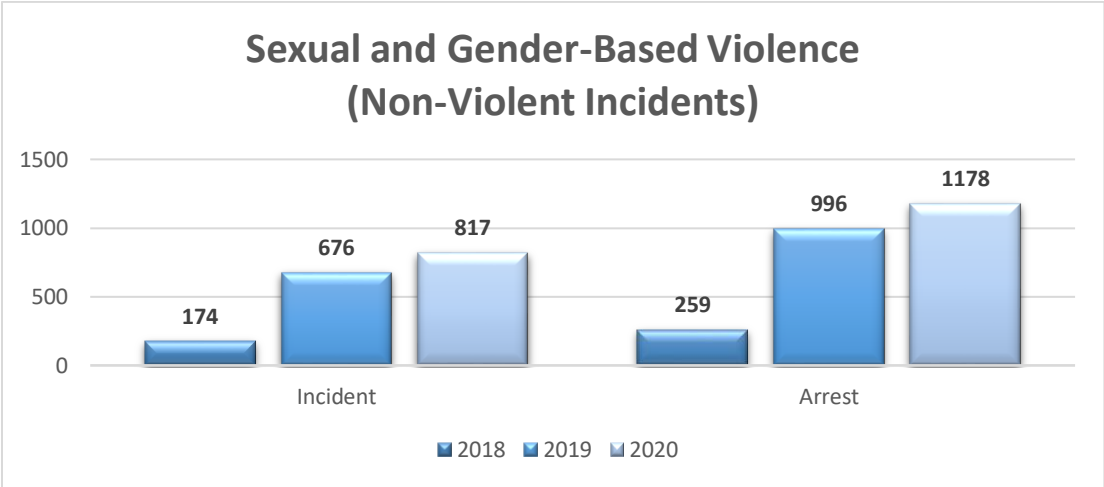


Figure 3 demonstrates the increase in the non-violent incidents pertaining to sexual and gender-based violence. Compared to 2018, the non-violent incidents vis-à-vis sexual and gender-based violence has increased a sharp 369.54% in 2020, whereas compared to 2019 the increase in 2020 is 20.86%. In terms of recorded arrests, 2020 saw a massive 354.83% increase than 2018 and a 18.27% increase compared to 2019.

¹⁵³ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 23 February 2021.

Figure 4: Ain O Shalish Kendra Data on Gender-Based Violence (2018-2020)¹⁵⁴

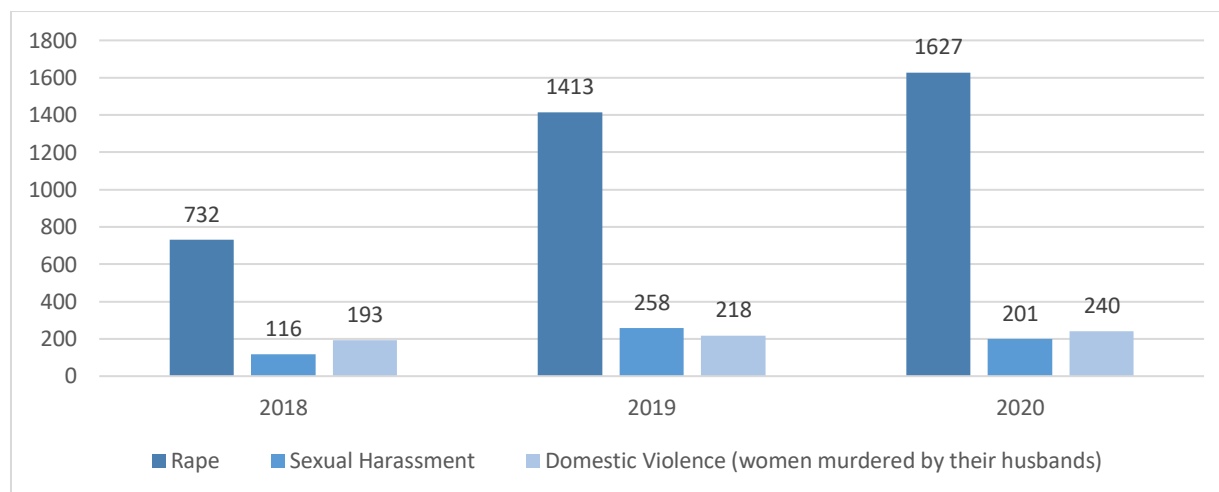


Figure 4 showcases the *Ain O Shalish Kendra* data for 2018, 2019 and 2020, where incidents pertaining to rape and domestic violence has increased in 2020. However, a decrease is noted in 2020 from the 2019 number of sexual harassment – which can be contributed to the lockdown efforts due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4: National Human Rights Commission Data: Violence against Women (2019)¹⁵⁵

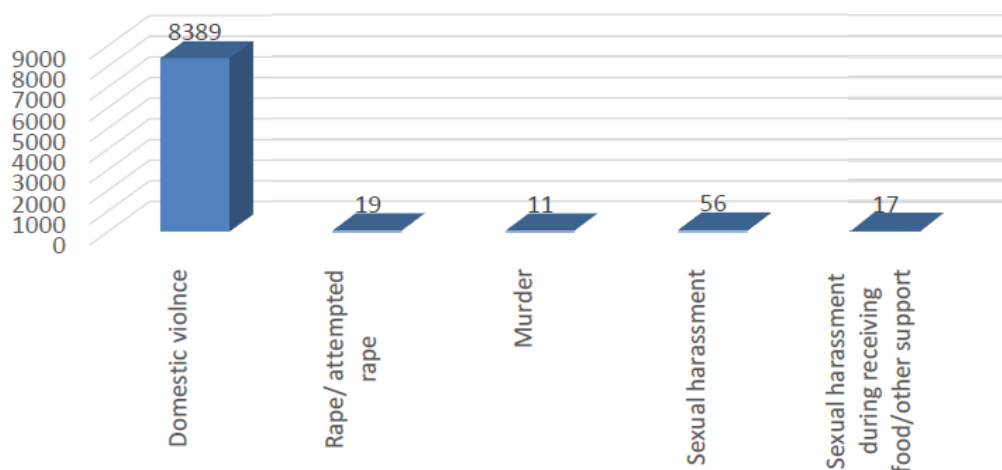
Year	Type of Violence	Settlement of Complaints	Pending/ Under Process	Total
2017	Violence against Women	28	28	56
2018	Violence against Women	71	10	81
2019	Violence against Women	69	52	121

¹⁵⁴ Data derived from the E-Bulletins of *Ain O Shalish Kendra*. Cited in <http://www.askbd.org/ask/e-bulletin-archive/>. Accessed on 23 February 2021.

¹⁵⁵ For 2017 and 2018n data, see: “NHRC Annual Report Archives,” National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh, <http://www.nhrc.org.bd/site/page/74b9f308-8a25-4e28-a8cb-fb26daf7d93e/>. Accessed on 12 January 2021; For the 2019 data, see: National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh, *Annual Report 2021* (Dhaka: National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh, 2020).

This write-up considered rape, torture for dowry, sexual harassment, domestic violence, violence against women and conjugal problems (i.e. divorce and maintenance issues) as issues pertaining to violence against women in the National Human Rights Commission 2020 Annual Report.¹⁵⁶ In table 4, it is noted that in 2019, although a lesser number of complaints were settled vis-à-vis the previous year (marking a 2.81% decrease in 2019 than 2018), the increased number of pending or under process cases (420% increase in 2019 than 2018) indicate that the incidents regarding violence against women have, in general, risen.

Figure 5: Manusher Jonno Foundation Data on Gender-Based Violence (July 2020)¹⁵⁷



In 2020, *Manusher Jonno* Foundation (MJF) conducted quick telephone surveys over 63968 people of 53 districts, to get a picture of violence against women and girls during the pandemic.¹⁵⁸ Among them, 44875 were women.¹⁵⁹ The survey found out that 8389 cases of domestic violence were reported in July 2020,

¹⁵⁶ National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh, *Annual Report 2021* (Dhaka: National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh, 2020), p. 20.

¹⁵⁷ *Manusher Jonno* Foundation, *Violence against Women and Children: COVID 19 – A Telephone Survey* (Dhaka: *Manusher Jonno* Foundation, 2020), p. 5.

¹⁵⁸ *Manusher Jonno* Foundation, *Violence against Women and Children: COVID 19 – A Telephone Survey* (Dhaka: *Manusher Jonno* Foundation, 2020), p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 4.

with 19 rape or attempted rape incidents, 11 murders, 56 sexual harassments and 17 incidents of sexual harassments during reception of food or other support.¹⁶⁰

Existing Legal Measures in Bangladesh

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh takes into cognisance the internationally acclaimed legal binds, and the structural issues related to the empowerment of women. Article 10 of the Constitution promulgates the participation of women in the national life, whereas Article 27 grants equality before the law.¹⁶¹ Article 28 is crucial in the aspect of women's rights, for it emanates the principle of zero discrimination on racial, religious, sexual or place of origin – as well as promulgating equal opportunities for men and women.¹⁶² Article 29 guarantees equality in terms of opportunities, and Article 65 allows the reservation of parliamentary seats for empowering and encouraging women participation in the highest echelon of national politics.¹⁶³

Furthermore, the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), the Muslim Family Law Ordinance (1961), the Children Act (1974), the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act (1974), the Dowry Prohibition Act (1980), the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act (2000), the Acid Crime Control Act (2002) and the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (2010) are noteworthy examples of specific laws to address acts of violence as well as laws addressing the structural elements. The National Action Plan of the country of 2018 (to be implemented for 2019-2022) focuses upon the participatory action of women, and brings grassroots women's organisations with civil society organisations closer to each other.¹⁶⁴ All of these legal steps are held in place with the supervision of the Penal Code (1860).

Several specific laws address the notion of rapes, sexual assaults, domestic and dowry-related violence in Bangladesh. Article 375 defines rape in the Penal Code (1860), whereas the subsequent Article describes

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹⁶¹ "The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh," *Laws of Bangladesh*. Cited in <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-367.html>. Accessed on 4 January 2021.

¹⁶² *Ibid*.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁴ "National Action Plan: Bangladesh," *PeaceWomen*. Cited in <https://www.peacewomen.org/action-plan/national-action-plan-bangladesh>. Accessed on 23 February 2021.

the punishment in regard to this crime.¹⁶⁵ In 2020, the country has finalised the anti-rape law with an ordinance supporting death penalty for the rapist.¹⁶⁶ Although the country does not have a direct law for penalising sexual harassment, Section 509 of the Penal Code penalises the sexual offenders who ‘outrage the modesty of a woman’ by dint of words, acts, and gestures.¹⁶⁷ The Section 10 of the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act (2000) also criminalises ‘sexual oppression’ and ‘violation of a woman’s modesty.’¹⁶⁸ Although doubts shroud over the definition of marital rape in the country (as any form of sexual offense by a husband to his wife over 13 years of age would not be counted as rape), and considerable queries arise at the definition of ‘modesty,’ the laws regarding rape and sexual assault are established in the country to set normative standards.¹⁶⁹ The country had also updated the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 with a new Dowry Prohibition Bill 2018, which penalises the dowry recipient with five years in jail and BDT 50000 for falsely charging individuals.¹⁷⁰ However, as explored from the BPO data, it is the area of implementation of the law where the concerns arise.¹⁷¹ Despite the increase of arrests and introduction of the new laws, the number of crime is yet to be curbed down.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ “The Penal Code, 1860,” *Laws of Bangladesh*. Cited in <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-11/section-3231.html>. Accessed on 4 January 2021.

¹⁶⁶ Md. Kamruzzaman, “Bangladesh finalizes anti-rape law with death penalty” *Andalou Agency*, 13 October 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/bangladesh-finalizes-anti-rape-law-with-death-penalty/2005265>. Accessed on 23 February 2021.

¹⁶⁷ Taqbir Huda, “Sexual harassment and the law: Where’s the problem?” *The Daily Star*, published on 27 June 2019. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/human-rights/news/sexual-harassment-and-the-law-where-the-problem-1762759-~:text=Unfortunately%2C%20there%20is%20no%20legislation,that%20we%20need%20to%20acknowledge>. Accessed on 5 February 2021.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ “Bangladesh passes law with five-year jail term, Tk 50,000 fine for false dowry charges,” *bdnews24.com*, 17 September 2018. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2018/09/17/bangladesh-passes-law-with-five-year-jail-term-tk-50000-fine-for-false-dowry-charges#:~:text=Parliament%20has%20passed%20an%20anti,fine%20for%20falsely%20charging%20individuals.&text=In%20the%20old%20law%2C%20the,Tk%205%2C000%20fines%20or%20both>. Accessed on 15 February 2021.

¹⁷¹ “I Sleep in My Own Deathbed,” *Human Rights Watch*, 29 October 2020. Cited in <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/29/i-sleep-my-own-deathbed/violence-against-women-and-girls-bangladesh-barriers>. Accessed on 8 March 2021.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

The Pandemic and Violence against Women: A BPO Analysis

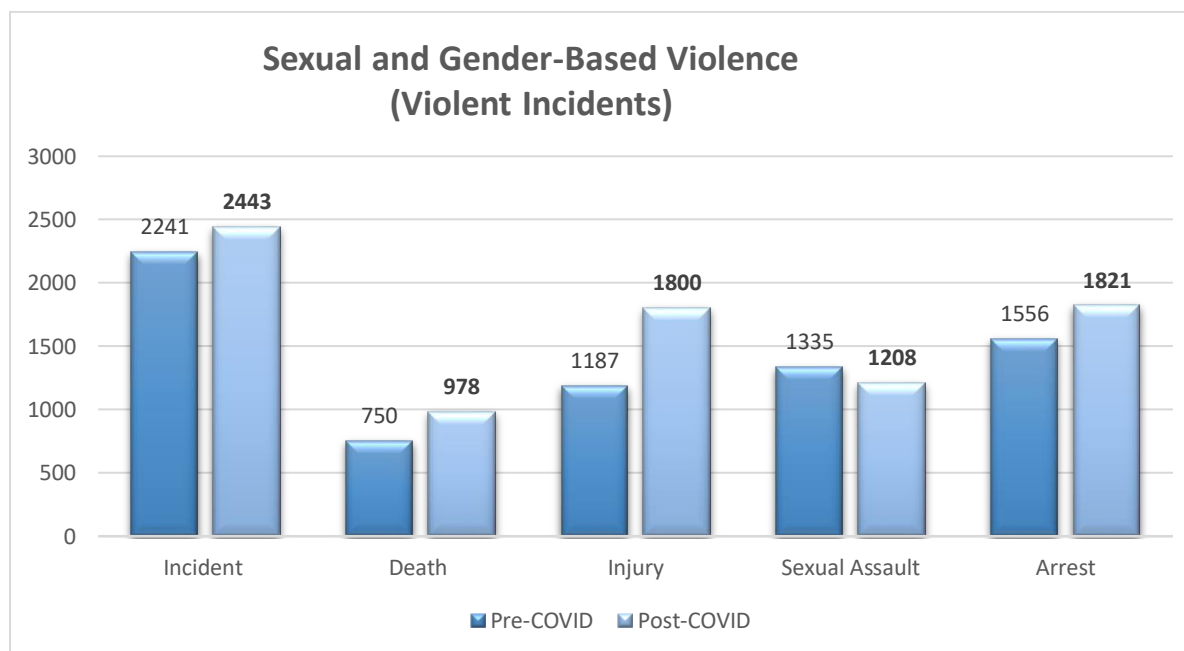
The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the world since the late 2019 and the whole of 2020 was engulfed within the shroud of the deadly novel Coronavirus. The pandemic was not only problematic in terms of being a public health crisis, but also because of bringing upon other horsemen of the apocalypse such as the ‘infodemic’ (the dissemination of fake news and misinformation in a rapid speed and in huge numbers) and the ‘shadow sexual violence pandemic’ – which begs description.¹⁷³ The pandemonium is continuing to leave the imprint on human societies worldwide, and Bangladesh is also facing challenges in curbing down crimes – and the picture is palpable from the BPO data.

This write-up considers the seven months between May 2019 and February 2020 as the immediate pre-COVID timeline, whereas the March 2020-December 2020 timeline is considered as the post-COVID period. The trend analyses of these periods are shown below in terms of comparison between violent incidents (Figure 6) and non-violent incidents (Figure 7) pertaining to sexual and gender-based violence before and after the pandemic.

¹⁷³ For ‘infodemic,’ see: “UN tackles ‘infodemic’ of misinformation and cybercrime in COVID-19 crisis,” *United Nations COVID-19 Response*, 31 March 2020. Cited in <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/un-tackling-%E2%80%98infodemic%E2%80%99-misinformation-and-cybercrime-covid-19>. Accessed on 4 February 2021. For the ‘shadow sexual violence pandemic,’ see: María-Noel Vaeza, “Addressing the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violence Against Women and Girls,” *UN Chronicle*, 27 November 2020. Cited in <https://www.un.org/en/addressing-impact-covid-19-pandemic-violence-against-women-and-girls>. Accessed on 8 March 2021; Jannat Adib Chowdhury, “Battling the shadow sexual violence pandemic,” *The Daily Star*, 1 July 2020. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/battling-the-shadow-sexual-violence-pandemic-1923009>. Accessed on 8 March 2021.

Figure 6: Trend of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence:

Violent Incidents in Bangladesh in Pre-COVID (May 2019- February 2020) and Post-COVID Timelines (March 2020 – December 2020) [Based on BPO Data]¹⁷⁴



In Figure 6, it can be observed that although the number of sexual assault has taken a slight plunge in the post-COVID timeline, all of the other indicators have seen a rise. It can be attributed to the fact that during the nationwide lockdown in mid-2020, rape and sexual harassment took a downward turn – thereby contributing to the lesser number of sexual assault while other forms of VAW remained high. However, after the gradual release of lockdown, the notion of sexual assault also increased. One incident in particular rattled the entire country, after a video of a group of men severely assaulting a woman went viral – resulting in an eruption of nationwide protests in October 2020.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, the BPO-recorded

¹⁷⁴ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 23 February 2021.

¹⁷⁵ “Bangladesh: Protests Erupt Over Rape Case,” *Human Rights Watch*, 9 October 2020. Cited in <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/09/bangladesh-protests-erupt-over-rape-case>. Accessed on 8 March 2021.

increase is also backed by the data collected by *Ain O Shalish Kendra*, as they claimed that 907 women or girl children were sexually assaulted in the first nine months of 2020.¹⁷⁶ To summarise the violent incidents pertaining to sexual and gender-based violence, BPO recorded a nominal 9.01% increase in the number of incidents, a 30.4% increase in the number of deaths, a 51.64% increase in injuries, a 9.51% decrease in terms of sexual assault and a 17.03% increase in the post-COVID period (vis-à-vis the pre-COVID period).

Figure 7: Trend of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence:
Non-Violent Incidents in Pre-COVID (May 2019- February 2020) and
Post-COVID Timelines (March 2020 – December 2020) [Based on BPO Data]¹⁷⁷

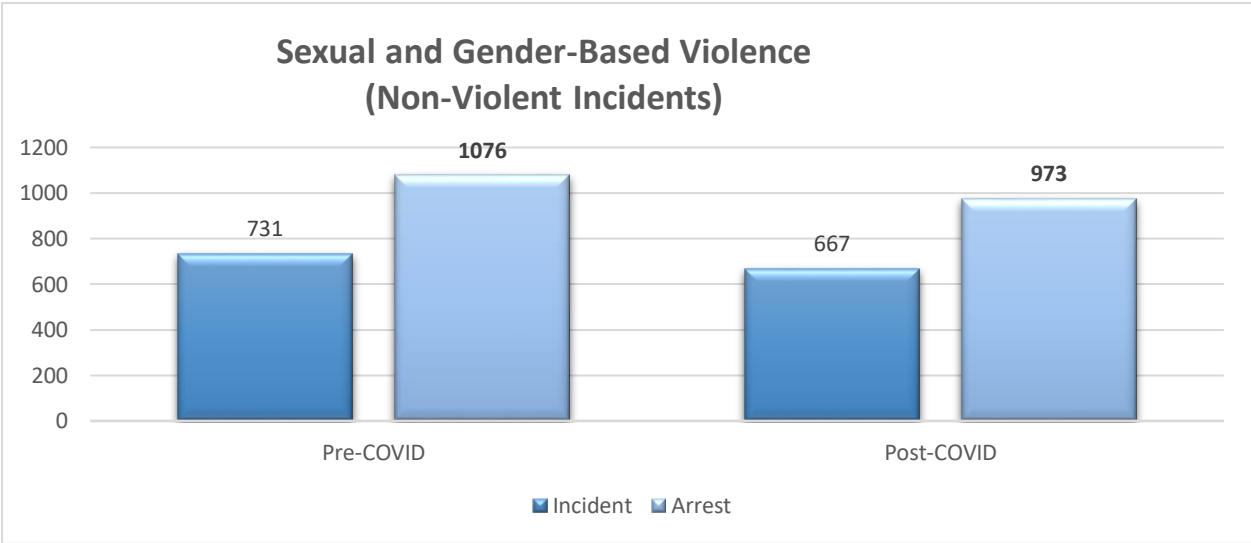


Figure 7 notes that the number of non-violent incidents as well as arrests regarding sexual and gender-based violence decreased in the post-COVID period. Compared to the 731 pre-COVID incidents, the 667 post-COVID incidents mark a nominal 8.76% decrease, whereas the pre-COVID 1076 arrests were

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 23 February 2021.

9.57% higher than the post-COVID 973 arrests. This may be a consequence of the law enforcement agencies being caught up in the responsibilities pertaining to public health support during the pandemic.

Concluding Remarks: Is There Any Light at the End of the Tunnel?

The rationale behind sexual and gender-based violence is manifold and multi-dimensional. From the perpetuation of dominance to political, social, economic, cultural or even ethical derogation of another human being for sheer biological difference, the reasons of sexual and gender-based violence are gradually perpetrated by existing social practices. Furthermore, the pandemic has demonstrated the hardships that women face in accessing judicial mechanisms, and the culture of impunity continues in this regard. Even when violence against women takes a plunge in the socio-cultural clime, the house becomes the deathbed for women, as in most of the cases, the continuation of violence is propagated by the family members of both the perpetrator and the victim. The augmentation of the pain is often a result of the combination of family breakdowns, religious practices and lack of education. Curtailed economic freedom, along with the powerlessness in physical, familial or even virtual spaces, are haunting for the proper flourishing of a woman's existence. It is almost as if the notion of women's invisibility is doused with the beatings of blue when they are alive and the dye of red when they are dead.

The phenomenon of Bangladesh is not alien to the global trend, where one in every three women experience physical or sexual violence inflicted by an intimate partner or non-partner at any juncture of their lifetime.¹⁷⁸ The pandemic had exacerbated the notion of violence against women and girls, prompting the UN to call this 'the shadow pandemic.'¹⁷⁹ The lockdowns and stay-at-home orders in various countries had led to a sharp increase in emergency calls, showing the dominance of the perpetrators in the unequal distribution of power and control.¹⁸⁰ This is occurring in the backdrop of women comprising a significant portion of the frontline workers in the battle against the disease and the subsequent scenario.

¹⁷⁸ María-Noel Vaeza, "Addressing the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violence Against Women and Girls," *UN Chronicle*, published on 27 November 2020. Cited in <https://www.un.org/en/addressing-impact-covid-19-pandemic-violence-against-women-and-girls>. Accessed on 8 March 2021.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Therefore, it is high time that the world took cognisance of the looming shadow pandemic, and design better policies for more effective implementation, so that women and girls all over the world can lead a better life in a better future. The physical, structural and psychological well-being of women must be taken into account by all. The under-reported gross violation of rights must come to a halt, and the due recognition of women for all of their works – be it in the domestic corner or in the wide open world – must be ensured. Awareness among every sphere of civilisation is an imperative for the survival of human beings as a whole, for building a better future.

Children and Violence: An overview

Mashiat Jafrin Heea¹⁸¹

Rifat Islam Rupok¹⁸²

Introduction

Violence against children is prevalent in all parts of the world. It is not confined to a particular gender, class, socio-economic status or ethnicity. Perpetrators of such violence might include parents, family members, teachers, caregivers, law enforcement authorities and even children. Globally, it is estimated that up to 1 billion children aged 2–17 years have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year.¹⁸³

International Law has affirmed children's right to protection from all forms of violence. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), 'violence against children' refers to "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse."¹⁸⁴ According to various reports, this form of violence has increased manifold during the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁸⁵. Hundreds of millions of children worldwide will likely face growing threats to their safety and well-being – including mistreatment, gender-based violence, exploitation,

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¹⁸³ Violence against children, World Health Organization, 8 June 2020. Cited in: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>. Accessed on 24 January 2021. Past year refers to the timeline from 01 January 2020 till 31 December 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Preventing Violence Against Children and how this contributes to building stronger economies, UNICEF. Cited in: https://www.unicef.org/Preventing_Violence.pdf. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

¹⁸⁵ Pandemic caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome SARS-CoV-2 Virus.

social exclusion and separation from caregivers – because of actions taken to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁸⁶

This write-up focuses on different aspects of violence against children prevalent in Bangladesh, based on secondary data collected from various sources. These include 17 newspapers which Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) uses to accumulate violence data in Bangladesh, and corresponding data from other sources. In the first section, the paper tries to portray the different aspects of violence against children, followed by a comparative study of the pre-COVID and the post-COVID situations in Bangladesh.¹⁸⁷ The writeup will then try to show the position of Bangladesh in addressing violence against children based on the reports of international organisations. The last part of the writeup will focus briefly on the sexual violence aspect of violence against children – which is more prevalent in Bangladesh.

Settings in which children experience violence ¹⁸⁸
• At the individual level: gender, age, disability of the child, education level, income, mental health, unwanted pregnancy on the part of the mother;
• At the interpersonal level: domestic violence, substance abuse, family stress, family structure, quality of parent-child relationships, quality of teacher-child and peer-to-peer relationships;
• At the community level: high levels of crime, social and gender norms, harmful cultural practices;
• At the institutional level: weak law enforcement, poor housing/social services, lack of social protection for economic shocks, poor school governance, harmful cultural and religious beliefs, negligible child protection systems; and

¹⁸⁶ COVID-19: Globally Children at heightened risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence amidst intensifying containment measures, UNICEF, 22 March 2020. Cited in: <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/covid-19-globally-children-heightened-risk-abuse-neglect-exploitation-and-violence>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

¹⁸⁷ For this paper, the pre-COVID timeline follows 1 May 2019 – 29 February 2020, and the post-COVID period is 1 March 2020 – 31 December 2020.

¹⁸⁸ Preventing Violence Against Children and how this contributes to building stronger economies, UNICEF. Cited in: https://www.unicef.org/Preventing_Violence.pdf. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

- At the structural level: gender inequality and discrimination, class and caste structures, economic and social policies that may inadvertently increase poverty, inequality and migration, socio-political histories of violence.

Phases of Violence Against Children

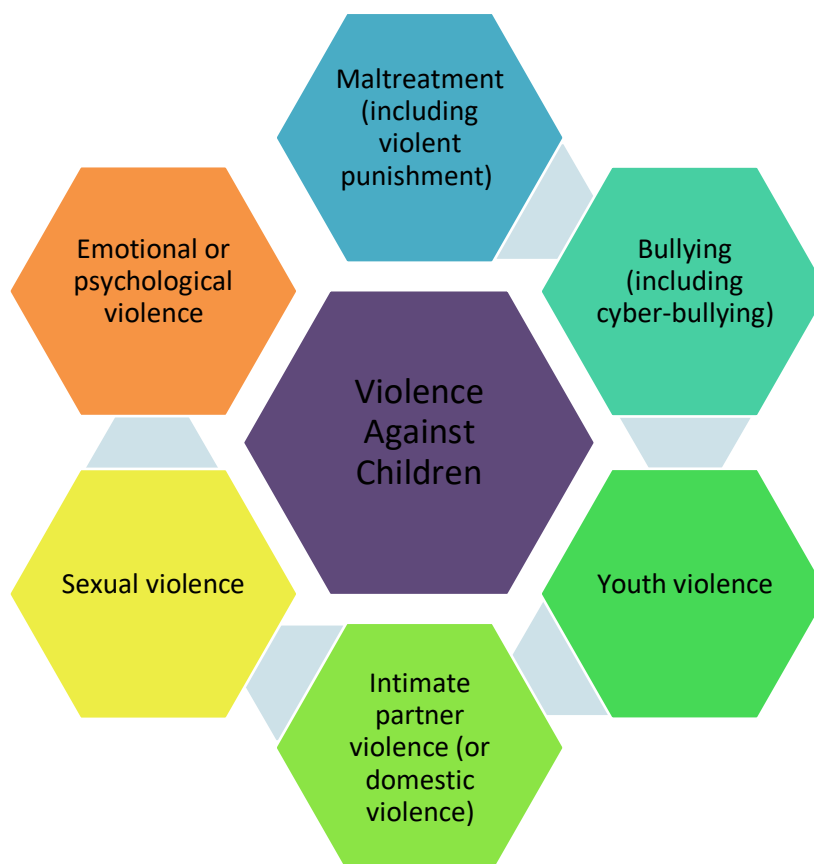
Throughout life, a child may face different types of violence in her/his life. Most violence against children involves at least one of the six main types of interpersonal violence that tend to occur at different stages in a child's development.¹⁸⁹

- **Maltreatment (including violent punishment)** involves physical, sexual and psychological/emotional violence and negligence of the parents and caregivers towards their infants/children.¹⁹⁰ Mostly seen in homes, this form of violence can ensue in the settings of schools and orphanages as well.

¹⁸⁹ "Violence against Children," World Health Organization, 8 June 2020. Cited in: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Figure 1: Interpersonal violence that tends to occur at different stages in a child's development.¹⁹¹



¹⁹¹ Violence against children, World Health Organization, 8 June 2020. Cited in: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

- **Bullying (including cyber-bullying)** is unwanted aggressive behaviour by another child or group of children who are neither siblings nor in a romantic relationship with the victim.¹⁹² It also involves repeated physical, psychological, or social harm in schools and cyber-bullying.
- **Youth violence** is concentrated among children and young adults aged 10–29 years, occurring mostly in community settings between acquaintances and strangers.¹⁹³ It includes bullying and physical assault with or without weapons (such as guns and knives) and may involve gang violence.¹⁹⁴
- **Intimate partner violence (or domestic violence)** involves physical, sexual and emotional violence by an intimate partner or ex-partner.¹⁹⁵ Although boys can also be victims, intimate partner violence disproportionately affects girls. It commonly occurs against girls within child marriages, and early/forced marriages.
- **Sexual violence** includes non-consensual completed or attempted sexual contact, acts of sexual trafficking committed against someone unable to consent or refuse, and most often online exploitation.¹⁹⁶
- **Emotional or psychological violence** includes restricting a child's movements, defamation, mockery, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection and other non-physical forms of cruel treatment.¹⁹⁷

When directed against girls or boys because of their biological sex or gender identity, any of these types of violence can also constitute gender-based violence.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

2020 Overview of Bangladesh

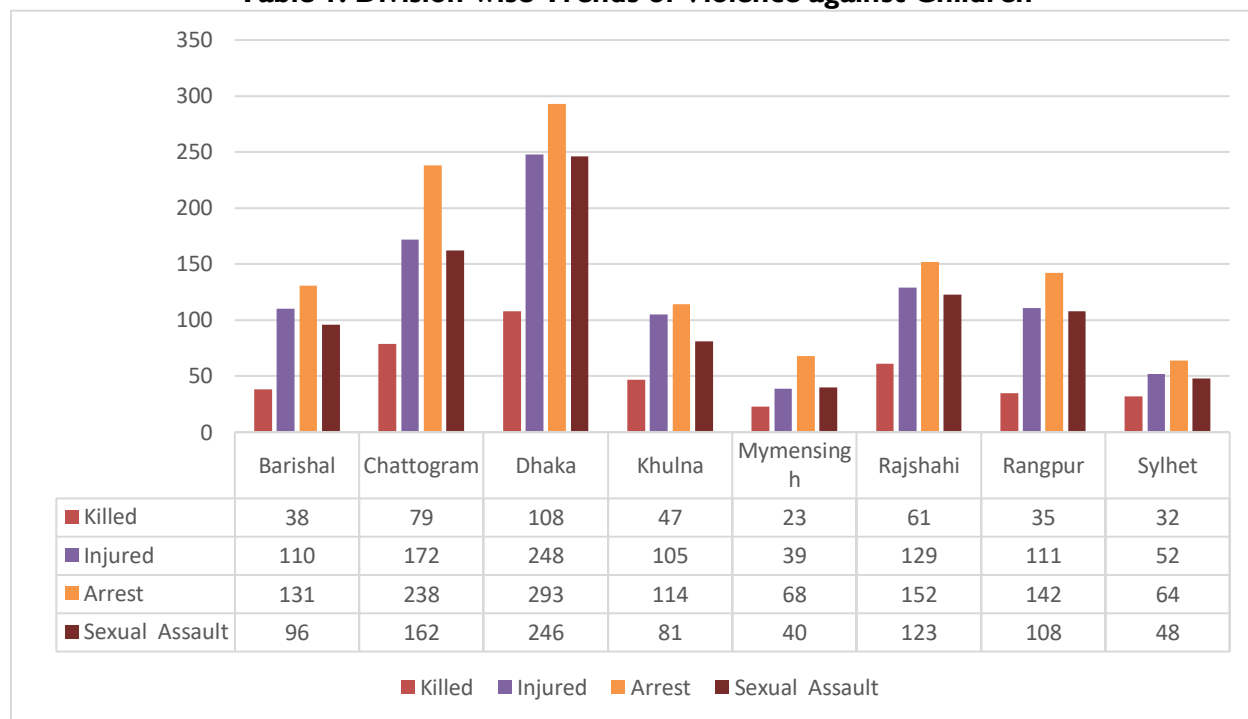
COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health crisis but also a human crisis. COVID-19 has come up with unprecedented challenges for humankind. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), suggests that the coronavirus pandemic is quickly turning into a “broader child rights crisis.”¹⁹⁹ The UN agency’s Socio-economic Impact Survey of COVID-19 Response revealed that 104 out of 136 responding countries reported interruptions or suspensions of services such as case management, referral services and home visits by child welfare and social workers to children and women at risk of abuse.²⁰⁰ Bangladesh has also faced the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this report, the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) data is used as the key source for analysis. The actors considered for the study are boy, girl and newborn/child. As described in the BPO codebook, violent incidents are related to sexual assault including rape, attempted rape, and other forms of sexual assault, domestic violence between intimate partners and/or members of the same household, regardless of the gender of the victims, gender-based human trafficking incidents, dowry-related incidents, sexual orientation or incidents related to discrimination towards sexual minorities and other domestic/Gender Based Violence (GBV)/Violence Against Women (VAW). The non-violent incidents include arrest pertaining to any sexual and gender-based violence.

¹⁹⁹ “Comprehensive Response to COVID-19 Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Recovering Better,” September 2020. Cited in: https://www.un.org/pga/75/wp-content/uploads/sites/100/2020/10/un_comprehensive_response_to_covid.pdf. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

²⁰⁰ UNICEF: Covid-19 disrupts child protection services in over 100 countries, Dhaka Tribune, 18 August 2020. Cited in: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2020/08/18/unicef-covid-19-disrupts-child-protection-services-in-over-100-countries>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

Table I: Division-wise Trends of Violence against Children



Source: Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO)

The above table shows the number of incidents happening in each of the divisions. Dhaka division has the highest rates of killing, injury, arrest and sexual assault, whereas Sylhet division has the lowest rates. Dhaka being a megacity and the capital of Bangladesh, many underlying and interconnected factors are there for the highest rates of incidents. It can also be concluded from the table that sexual assault has the highest rate compared to killing, injury and arrests.

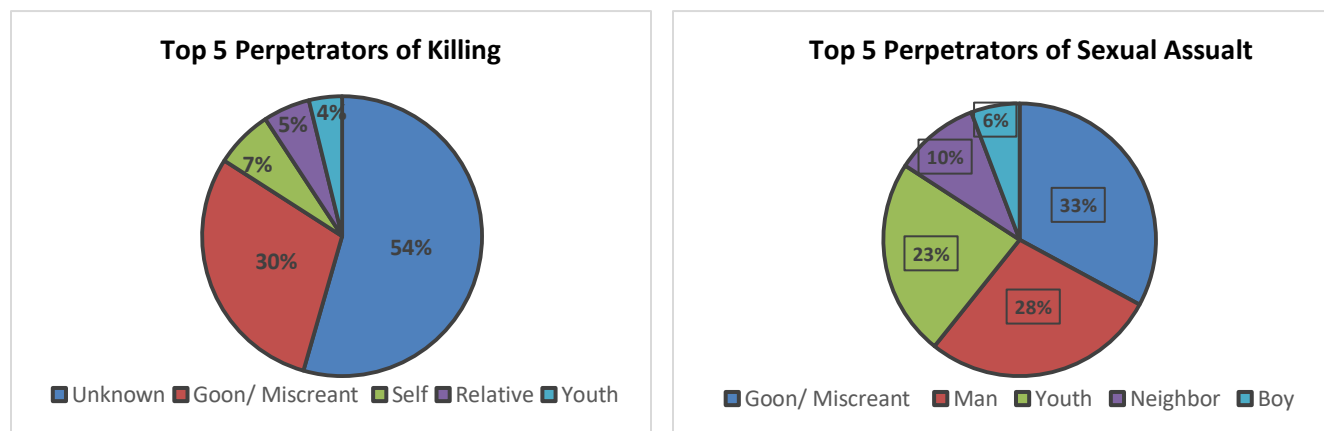


Figure 2: Top 5 perpetrators of Killing²⁰¹ Figure 3: Top 5 perpetrators of Sexual Assault ²⁰²

The top 5 perpetrators of child violence (for violent incidents like killing and sexual assault) can be identified from these data sets. Figures 2 and 3 show the percentage of the top 5 actors. It is seen that children become more prone to murder by unknown actors (constituting 54% of the actors) whereas goons and young boys carry out a more significant number of sexual assaults. In both cases, goons/miscreants are responsible for a higher number of killings and sexual assaults, indicating the decline of social values, lack of safety for children and lack of law enforcement.

In another study conducted by *Polli Shomaj*, BRAC's community-based women's groups, it is reported that there is a 24% rise in incidents of violence against women in 2020 compared to 2019.²⁰³

²⁰¹ "Bangladesh Peace Observatory." Cited in: <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Data underscores that gender-based violence is rising with COVID-19, BRAC, 22 December 2020. Cited in: <https://www.brac.net/latest-news/item/1298-data-underscores-that-gender-based-violence-is-rising-with-covid-19>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

Table 2: Comparison of the number of child marriage incidents by Polli Shomaj²⁰⁴

Months	Number of Child Marriages that Polli Shomaj prevented in 2019	Number of Child Marriages that Polli Shomaj Prevented in 2020
January-March	96	79
April-June	109	75
July- September	166	492
Total: 9 months	Total: 371	Total: 646

Based on their reports, table 3 shows a quarterly comparison of the number of child marriages prevented in 2019 and 2020. The number of child marriages reported by *Polli Shomaj* in the first ten months of 2020 grew by 68%, compared to the same period in 2019.²⁰⁵ With the spread of COVID-19, the number of child marriages prevented increased almost four times in the third quarter than in the first two quarters of 2020. The number of child marriages prevented was 219% higher than the same period in 2019.²⁰⁶ This trend analysis shows that child marriage incidents are increasing alarmingly, as child brides are more prone to gender-based violence.

Analysis of Violence against Children in Pre-COVID and during the COVID-19 Pandemic

For this analysis, the pre-COVID timeline is considered from 1 May 2019 - 29 February 2020 and during COVID timeline is from 1 March 2020 - 31 December 2020.

The table below tries to portray a comparison of the different types of assault among the actors. Except for the total injury numbers, all other crimes decreased during the COVID times. It can also be concluded

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

that girls become victims of most of the violent crimes, compared to boys and newborns/children. The sexual assault count is the highest in the pre-COVID time, which decreased although the sexual assault towards the newborn/child increased significantly during the COVID time. During the COVID period, violent incidents towards infants/children have increased considerably, as per the table below.

Table 3: Violence against children during the pre-COVID and COVID period based on BPO data

Victims	Total Arrest		Total Abduction		Total Injured		Total Killed		Total Sexual Assault
	Pre-COVID	During COVID	Pre-COVID	During COVID	Pre-COVID	During COVID	Pre-COVID	During COVID	Pre-COVID
Boy	207	113	34	11	60	74	155	121	17
Girl	827	698	101	78	505	592	253	92	784
Newborn / Child	111	196	12	24	78	170	97	131	92
Grand Total	1145	1007	147	113	643	836	505	344	893

Figure 4: Violence against Children during COVID Period

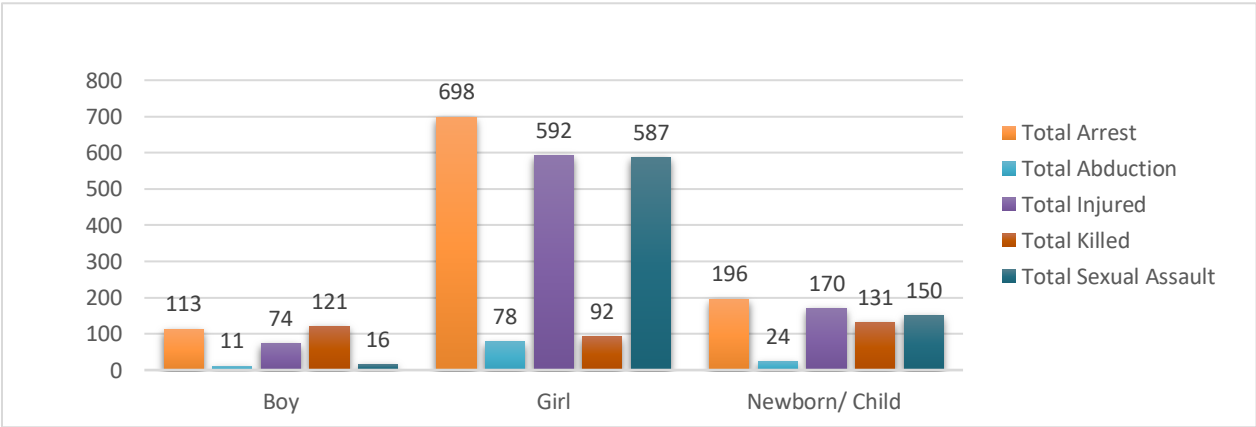
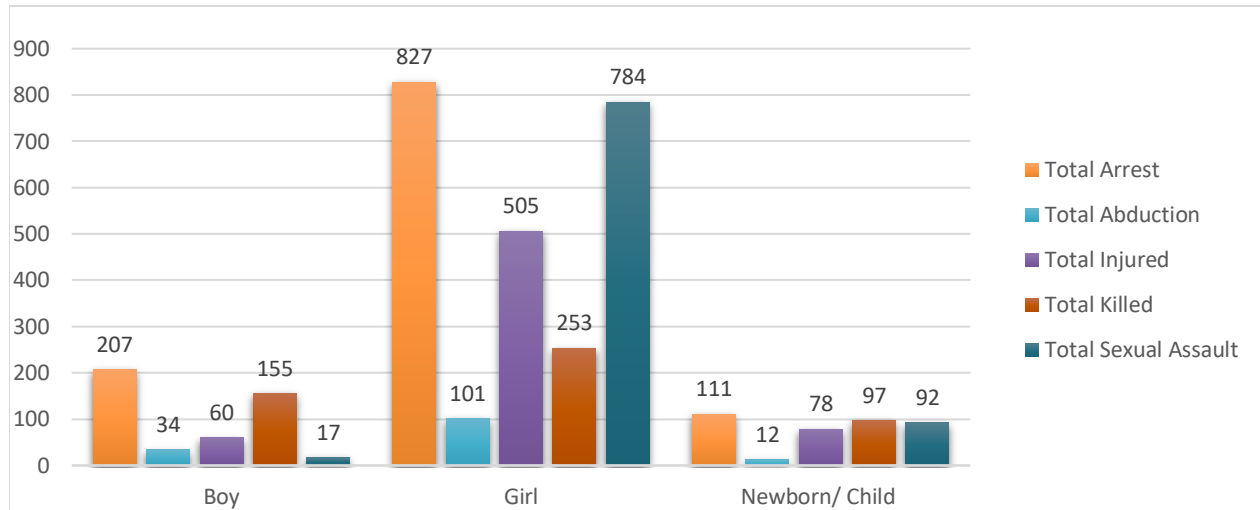


Figure 5: Violence against Children during pre-COVID Period



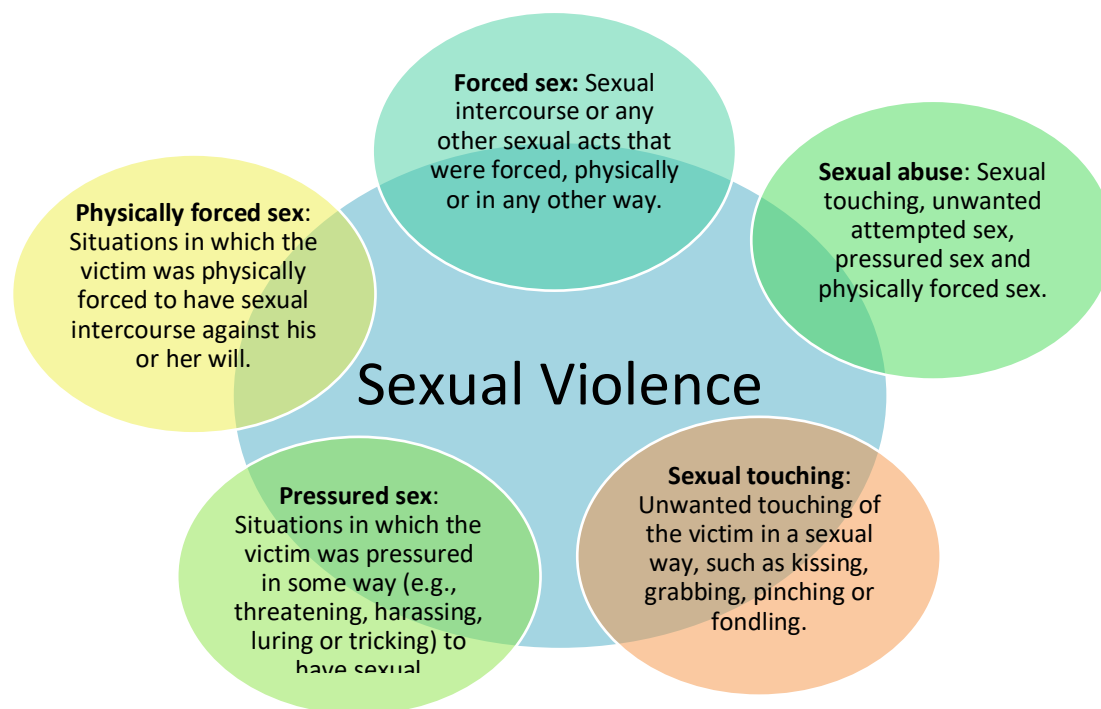
Gender-based violence of Children

Sexual violence is defined as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.”²⁰⁷ Boys and girls alike can become victims of sexual assault. It has a significant impact on physical and mental health, leading to both immediate and long-term effects.

Children can be sexually assaulted in various ways. The following figure depicts various forms of sexual assault.

²⁰⁷ Sexual Violence, *World Report on Violence and Health*, p. 149. Cited in: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap6.pdf. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

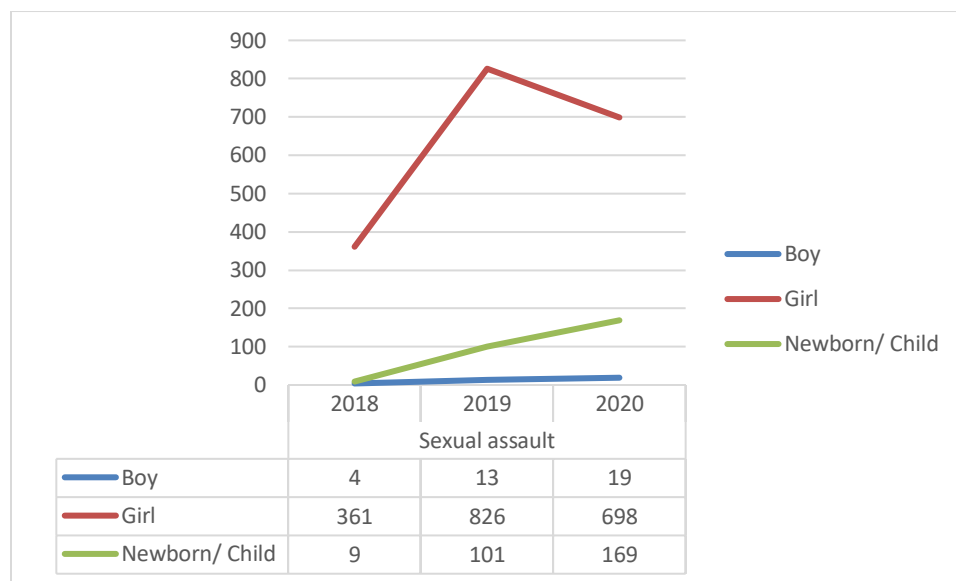
Figure 6: Various Forms of Sexual Violence²⁰⁸



Sexual assault refers to one-sided sexual violence, such as rape or attempted rape, by an individual or small group against another individual or small group, as per the Bangladesh Peace Observatory entries. Any kind of sexual harassment, rape, gang rape, sexual abuse of boys or forceful prostitution also falls in this category. The graph below shows the rate of sexual assault incidents victimising the children from 2018-2020.

²⁰⁸ Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser, “Violence against children and children’s rights,” Our World in Data, Last updated on: November 2019. Cited in: <https://ourworldindata.org/violence-against-rights-for-children#sexual-violence-against-children>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

Figure 7: Sexual assault trends of three years²⁰⁹



It is seen that the count of sexual violence incidents against newborns/children has increased rapidly within the timeframe. Although girls are mostly victims, many boys also become victims of sexual assault, as is evident from the graph above. In the latter half of 2020, there has been an increase in sexual assault against male children in religious schools in Bangladesh.²¹⁰ From a global perspective, this type of violence seems to be stagnated in many countries.²¹¹ However, it should be mentioned that Bangladesh has seen a rapid normalisation from the COVID-19 restrictions and related lockdowns than most other states. Thus, more data from Bangladesh is available, which could have skewed the results.

²⁰⁹ “Bangladesh Peace Observatory.” Cited in: <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

According to the tele-survey, conducted by *Manusher Jonno Foundation* (MJF) on 53,340 women and children in May, 2,171 children were subjected to domestic violence in 53 selected districts of Bangladesh.²¹² Of them, 1,319 children experienced violence for the first time in their life.²¹³ The survey was not limited to physical abuse only as it included mental, economic, physical and sexual torture.

As all educational institutions were closed from mid-March 2020 in Bangladesh, a surge in teenage gang activity also increased in Bangladesh in the latter half of the year. These gangs caused violence against other teenagers, and in many cases, against adults.²¹⁴ This trend is unique to Bangladesh, as spikes in teenage gang-related violence have not been widely reported elsewhere.

The Global Perspective

As the global COVID-19 pandemic continued through 2020, data gathering and reporting operations have been severely hampered.²¹⁵ Most data collection was done through remote means such as over the phone and the internet.²¹⁶ As most cases of violence against children happen in their immediate surroundings, the available data for the year 2020 might severely be skewed and disproportionate. This fact has been considered when analysing the datasets to determine the global situation. The most comprehensive dataset on violence against children is provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The Global Status Report on Preventing Violence against Children 2020, comprises data collected from 155 United Nations (UN) member states. This dataset has been selected as the primary guide for this analysis because it includes data from all over the world.

²¹² Kohinur Khyum Tithila, MJF: 13,494 women, children faced domestic violence during Covid-19 lockdown, Dhaka Tribune, 10 June 2020. Cited in: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/health/coronavirus/2020/06/10/mjf-13-494-women-children-faced-domestic-violence-during-covid-19-lockdown>. Accessed on 24 January 2021.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ “Bangladesh Peace Observatory: Heat Map.” Cited in: <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/##all-division-heat-map>. Accessed on 12 January 2021.

²¹⁵ “COVID-19 has disrupted data collection as well...” 14 July 2020. Cited in: <https://blogs.griffith.edu.au/asiainsights/covid-19-has-disrupted-data-collection-as-well/>. Accessed on 17 January 2021.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Table 4 gives an overview of the estimated numbers of children who face violence, who are killed and girls who face sexual assault.

Table 4: Global Overview of Violence against Children²¹⁷

Number of Children facing Violence	1,000,000,000
Number of Deaths	40,150
Number of Girls facing Sexual Assault	120,000,000

The number of children estimated to be victims of violence is almost half the total estimated population of children (aged 17 and below) on earth.²¹⁸ So, it can be seen that 1 in 2 children face some sort of violence in a given year.

The number of deaths is around 40,150; among them the number of boys is 28,160 and girls is 11,990.²¹⁹ The numbers indicate that violence against children is much more likely to be fatal for boys than against girls. However, girls are more likely to be sexually assaulted.²²⁰ Though there are no credible estimates available on the number of boys who face sexual assaults during their childhood, some data from mostly

²¹⁷ Global Status Report on Preventing Violence against Children 2020, World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240004191>. Accessed on 19 January 2021.

²¹⁸ “Children in the World.” Cited in: <https://www.humanium.org/en/children-world/#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%20more%20than,live%20in%20a%20developing%20country>. Accessed on 18 January 2021.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

wealthy countries puts the number between 3% and 17%, though it is difficult to estimate the global counts as sexual assault against boys is one of the most underreported forms of crime all over the world.²²¹

Bangladesh has a homicide rate of around 2.4 (2018) per 100,000 inhabitants.²²² This rate is far below the global average, which is around 6 per 100,000 inhabitants.²²³ So, in the case of fatal violence, Bangladesh is one of the safer countries of the world – which holds true both for fatal violence against children and fatal violence against adults.

The global homicide rate is calculated on the number of homicides per 100,000 people in the region. If the homicide rate for children across the world is considered (Figure 6), the Americas have the highest child homicide rate; while Europe, South East Asia and Western Pacific have the lowest homicide rate against children. Globally the rate of homicide is higher against boys than against girls. The global homicide rate suggests that most of the violence against children worldwide is non-fatal in form. Children are less likely to be victims of fatal violent incident against them, compared to adults.²²⁴

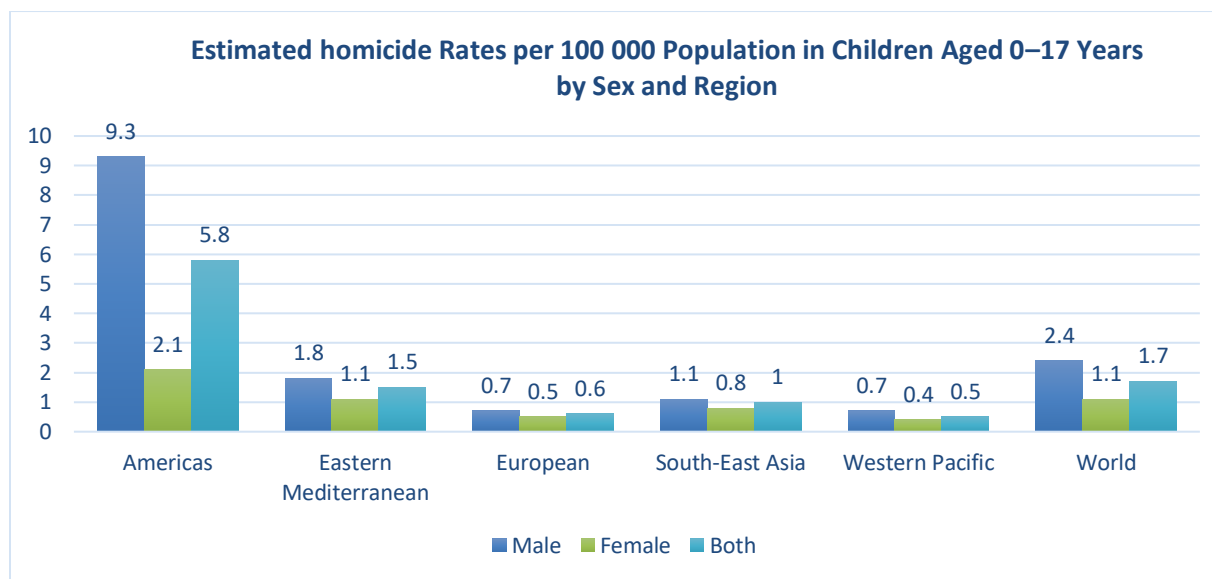
²²¹ “I’ve Talked with Teenage Boys About Sexual Assault for 20 Years. This Is What They Still Don’t Know,” *TIME*, 15 January 2019. Cited in: <https://time.com/5503804/ive-talked-with-teenage-boys-about-sexual-assault-for-20-years-this-is-what-they-still-dont-know/>. Accessed on 17 January 2021.

²²² “Crime Statistics 2018” No Date. Cited in: https://www.police.gov.bd/en/crime_statistic/year/2018. Accessed 19 January 2021.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

Figure 8: Estimated homicide rates per 100 000 population in children aged 0–17 years²²⁵



All over the world, children face violence at the hands of their caregivers, such as mother, father and close relatives. In different cultures, it is a socially acceptable norm to use violence against children to discipline them.

The WHO estimates that up to 300 million children worldwide aged 2–4 regularly experience violent discipline by their caregivers.²²⁶ This phenomenon is especially problematic because as the COVID-19 lockdowns began, many children were in the hands of the very same people who abuse them. A meta-analysis of 18 research papers focusing on the amount of violence against children, conducted by Amber Peterman, Megan O'Donnell of the Centre for Global Development found that 12 papers spotted an increase in violence against children. However, the findings are not consistent. One researcher found no

²²⁵ Global Status Report on Preventing Violence against Children 2020, World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240004191>. Accessed on 19 January 2021.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

difference with the violence in pre-COVID levels and four researchers found that there was a decrease in violence against children during the COVID-19 pandemic.²²⁷

From the above analyses, it can be said that the capital city seems to be the main hub of the crimes. Among all the crimes, sexual assault has the highest rates. Men are usually the perpetrators who commit the sexual offenses. Both in pre- and post-COVID-19 times, mostly girls were the victims of the sexual and other crimes. However, the number of victimised boys is also increasing day by day.

Conclusion

Though violence against children in Bangladesh is very low compared to many other states, children in Bangladesh face difficulties in other spheres. The Government of Bangladesh, along with many national and international communities, is working relentlessly to mitigate the violence against children. However, the pandemic of COVID-19 is said to be reversing decades of progress, according to the United Nations (UN).²²⁸ To ensure that the well-being of most vulnerable children is not compromised, on behalf of the children, Joining Force Bangladesh appeals to Government of Bangladesh, international communities, business sector, media and civil society to take the measures, such as:

- i. Adopting policies and allocating fund for COVID-19 response plans that holistically address the secondary impacts of the pandemic on children and families, particularly concerning child protection, gender-based violence, education, water and sanitation, food security, and livelihoods;
- ii. Disseminating information to keep children safe from COVID-19 and all violence against them by using TV, radio, social media, mosque and local government institutions²²⁹; and,

²²⁷ “COVID-19 and Violence against Women and Children: A Second Research Round Up” 23 September 2020. Cited in: <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/covid-19-and-violence-against-women-and-children-second-research-round>. Accessed on 19 January 2021.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

- iii. Adopting a policy guideline for childcare during COVID-19 for the children who are staying under various alternative care settings.²³⁰

This policy needs to ensure mechanisms for awareness, prevention, timely reporting and effective responses. Child Welfare Board can also play a pivotal role to mobilise the mechanism.²³¹ By taking the above-mentioned steps, violence against children can be alleviated to a large extent.

²³⁰ Joint Appeal for effective response and mitigation of impact of COVID-19 on the children in Bangladesh, Joining Forces Bangladesh: Child Rights Now, 5 April 2020. Cited in: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Joint%20Appeal%20of%20Joining%20Forces%20Bangladesh%20April%205%20202020.pdf>. Accessed on 25 January 2021.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

Violence against Minorities (VAM) in Bangladesh: A Situation Analysis

Tithy Mondal²³²

Ashique Mahmud²³³

Bangladesh is a multi-cultural country with significant religious and ethnic diversity. The Hindu population is the largest religious minority with 8.5 per cent, followed by Buddhist (0.6 per cent) and Christians (0.3 per cent).²³⁴ According to the 2011 Census, approximately 1.8 per cent of the population are indigenous 'Adivasis', making Bengali, an ethno-linguistic group, the major ethnic community, comprising 98 per cent of the Bangladesh population.²³⁵ Bangladesh has recognised 27 distinct ethnic communities, where Bihari and Chakma comprise 0.3 per cent each, followed by Meitei, Garo, Santal, Khasi, Oraon, Munda, Rohingya, each comprising 0.1 per cent of the total population.²³⁶ However, the exploitation of marginalised minorities is not an entirely new phenomenon in Bangladesh. Considering the historical context of minority persecution in Bangladesh, the trend continued since the riot of 1964, through the liberation war in 1971, the dictatorship regime in 1980, and electoral violence in 2001 and 2008 to date.

The seeds of violence against the minority community are inherent within the structures of the majoritarian political culture which has

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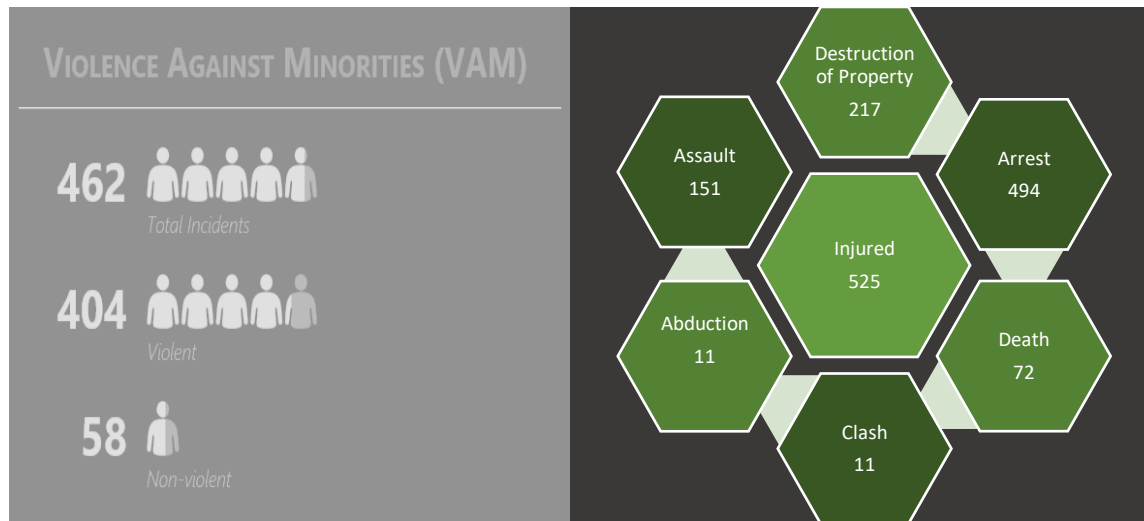
²³⁴ "Minority Rights Group International: World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous people," *Minority Rights*, June 2019. Cited in <https://minorityrights.org/country/bangladesh/>. Accessed on 8 February 2021.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh, *World Atlas*, July 2019. Cited in <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-in-bangladesh.html>. Accessed on 8 February 2021.

turned human beings into vote banks and vote constituencies.²³⁷ With time the situation got twisted in such a manner that normalises the violence against minorities as a sporadic matter. This write up will try to analyse the violence against minorities (VAM) situation and focus on the trends of VAM in recent years, with an insight of the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on the state of VAM in Bangladesh.

Figure 1: Overview of Violence against Minorities in Bangladesh from January 2015 – December 2020



BPO records and maps reported incidents, including violent and non-violent incidents related to violence against minorities in Bangladesh. According to the BPO database, from January 2015 to December 2020, a total of 462 minority-related incidents were recorded. The majority of these incidents were violent. The incidents comprised of issues ranging from religious sectarianism, land grabbing, displacement and forced migration, power and political dynamics, hatred and communal tension etc. A total of 525 people were injured in VAM related incidents. Many people lost their personal belongings through the destruction of property. A total of 217 cases of property vandalism was recorded in the BPO dataset where properties

²³⁷ Ahmmed, M. (2014). "Violence against the Minorities in Bangladesh." *Himalayan Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 6, pp. 112-118. Cited in <https://doi.org/10.3126/hjsa.v6i0.10712>. Accessed on 6 February 2021.

ranging from houses, business entities and religious places were ransacked. The fundamental causes of such violence are structural, political, cultural, and socio-economic factors.

Religious Radicalisation and Violence against Minorities (VAM)

The 2017 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom report documented violence against religious minorities in 37 countries, including Bangladesh. Rising religious radicalisation in Bangladesh fumes the flames of hatred based on religious ideologies to create communal disharmony. Falsely accused of insulting Islam, Hindu households and temples have been looted, ransacked and set into the fire in some cases. The events of Nagarkanda in Faridpur (2015)²³⁸, Nasirnagar in Brahmanbaria (2016)²³⁹, Bandar in Narayanganj (2016)²⁴⁰ are just a few examples where angry fanatic mobs attacked the Hindu homesteads, looted and set houses on fire over allegation of blasphemy against Islam. In Nasirnagar incident, a series of attack took place within a week. Several houses, temples and idols were torched and set on fire over an alleged Facebook post share that may be defamatory to Islam. Besides, many cases of temple and idol vandalism across the country, particularly in the time of religious festivals, are often seen in daily newspapers. Sometimes political parties or influential local people use this communal tension for their gain. A local political leader led an attack on a Hindu temple and vandalised 5 idols in Naogaon following his feud with the Hindu community over irrigation.²⁴¹ Similarly, in Goplanganj, 20 idols in three temples were vandalised following an enmity over setting up a shop in that area.²⁴²

Meanwhile, the rise of Religio-centric extremist groups in recent years, evidenced by the brutal killings of intellectuals, bloggers, foreigners and members of clergy belonging to the minorities by such fanatic groups, suggests that state-mechanism has somewhat failed to ensure freedom of religious expression to the minority groups in Bangladesh. Vandalising a Buddhist idol by the militant outfit, Jamaatul Mujahideen

²³⁸ “Seven idols vandalized in Faridpur temple”, *The Observer*, 18 December 2015. Cited in http://www.eobserverbd.com/2015/12/19/11/details/11_r3_c3.jpg. Accessed on 17 February 2021.

²³⁹ “নাসিরনগরে বাড়ি-ঘরে আগুন”, *The Daily Ittefaq*, 4 November 2016. Cited in http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2016/11/05/images/01_100.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁴⁰ *The Daily Star*, 15 May 2016. Cited in http://epaper.thedailystar.net/contents/2016/2016_05_15/content_zoom/2016_05_15_16_2_b.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁴¹ “নগুগাঁয় মন্দিরে প্রতিমা ভাঙচুর, আওয়ামী লীগ নেতাসহ আটক ৬,” *The Daily Ittefaq*, 17 November 2017. Cited in http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2017/11/19/images/01_106.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁴² “20 idols vandalized in 3 Goplanganj temples,” *The New Age*, 5 January 2017. Cited in <http://epaper.newagebd.net/detail/22107/4812>. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

Bangladesh men at Lama, Bandarban; brutal killing and attack on Hindu priests in Panchagarh, Jhenaidah; and a crude bomb attack on a religious festival gathering in Dinajpur²⁴³ are few examples to understand the prevailing intolerance regarding religious practices in Bangladesh. The issue of religious sectarianism was also found. An incident took place in Panchagarh where thousands of anti-Qadiani people vandalised houses and shops of Qadiani community, demanding the ban of annual religious gatherings of the latter group.²⁴⁴

Displacement/Forced Migration

Major political parties, irrespective of their political ideologies, use the minorities to achieve their personal and political gains both at national and local levels. On the other hand, the minority population also fall victim to the threat of displacement as a part of political violence. The best examples could be the incident of Chitalmari in Bagerhat²⁴⁵ or Dinajpur²⁴⁶ and Govindaganj's²⁴⁷ cases of grabbing Santal communities' land, or Thakurgaon's²⁴⁸ incident where houses of Hindu communities were set on fire prior to the election. In the Chitanmari incident, miscreants brutally attacked Hindu families by setting fire to the households after locking them inside, which was suspected as an attempt to grab their land. In Govindaganj incident, a clash broke out between the local Santal people and Sugar-mill owner who had a prior dispute regarding the possession of 1,842 acres of land. A statement from the 'Bhumi Uddhar Songram Committee' regarding this incident says that the minority community resisted as the later tried to displace them from their own land. Violence against Santal people in the northern area of Bangladesh is another common phenomenon. The conflict here is mainly between ethnic majorities and minorities. In a case in Dinajpur, at least 12

²⁴³ "Bomb attack on crowd on temple premises," *The Observer*, 10 December 2015. Cited in http://www.eobserverbd.com/2015/12/11/16/details/16_r2_c3.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁴⁴ "পঞ্চগড়ে আহমদিয়াদের বাড়িঘর ও দোকানপাট ভাঙচুর – অগ্নিসংযোগ," *Dainik Karatoa*, 12 February 2019. Cited in https://ekaratoa.com/2019/02/14/1/details/1_r9_c3.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁴⁵ "চিতলমারীতে সংখ্যালঘুদের ঘরে তলা লাগিয়ে আগুন", *The Daily Ittefaq*, 15 November 2017. Cited in http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2017/11/16/images/01_106.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁴⁶ *The Daily Star* (2015), *The Daily Star*, 25 January 2015. Cited in http://epaper.thedailystar.net/contents/2015/2015_01_25/content_zoom/2015_01_25_16_8_b.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2020.

²⁴⁷ "গুলিবিদ্ধ এক সাঁওতাল নিহত, ৩৫০ জনের বিরুদ্ধে মামলা," *The Daily Ittefaq*, 6 November 2016. Cited in https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2016/11/08/images/20_107.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁴⁸ *The Daily Star*, 26 December 2018. Cited in http://epaper.thedailystar.net/contents/2018/2018_12_26/content_zoom/2018_12_26_12_4_b.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

houses of Santal people were gutted into the fire and other properties were vandalised by the Bengali community over the same issue.

The issue of violence against minorities took a different political turn since the advent of electoral democracy in Bangladesh in 1991. It is evident that during significant political events like national elections, religious minority people are often abused, threatened, displaced and even killed. In an electoral violence incident during the 2016 Union Parishad (UP) election, some cadres of a defeated candidate attacked a Hindu man for campaigning in favour of the Awami League backed candidate in Sherpur.²⁴⁹ A similar incident happened in Cox's Bazar during the same year where at least 10 Hindu minority people got injured and 50 houses were vandalised by the supporters of the defeated candidate.²⁵⁰ Incidents from Faridpur, Dhamrai, Manikganj, Madaripur and other parts of the country were also recorded during the time.

Most events, including religious suppression and conflicts, have a political motive. In his book "Vote and Violence", Wilkinson argued that "Politicians both cause them and, more importantly, have the power to prevent them, through their control of the state governments responsible for law and order."²⁵¹ Thus, political parties use the pro-minority trump card to gain their political interest where minorities are counted as nothing but a vote bank. Amidst the rising insecurity, being socially and culturally vulnerable, many among the religious minorities are forced to migrate.

Digital Disinformation and Communalism

Bangladesh is one of the fastest growing countries of internet users in Asia, among which Facebook is the most popular social networking platform with around 50 million subscribers. But some opportunist groups are misusing cyberspace to manipulate religious sentiments and fume communal riots. The series of violent

²⁴⁹ “নির্বাচনী সহিংসতায় বারে গেল আরো ২ প্রাণ, আহত ১০৬,” *The Daily Ittefaq*, 5 June 2016. Cited in https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2016/06/07/images/02_108.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁵⁰ *The Daily Star*, 30 May 2016. Cited in http://epaper.thedailystar.net/contents/2016/2016_05_30/content_zoom/2016_05_30_16_4_b.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁵¹ S. Wilkinson, “Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India,” *Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

attack on Hindu-Buddhist shrines at Ramu in 2012,²⁵² Homna (2014)²⁵³ and Muradnagar (2020)²⁵⁴ in Cumilla, Thakurpara in Rangpur (2017)²⁵⁵ are some of the examples where digital disinformation initiated the communal tension. In Ramu, the religious attack was triggered by a Facebook posting allegedly defaming the Quran where a mob rampaged through a village of the Buddhist community. The assailants looted more than a hundred homes and set fire to at least six Buddhist temples and nearly 20 houses in this hate attack. The incidents of Homna and Muradnagar in Cumilla indicates the trend of growing intolerance in this region. In 2014's incident, rumours centring the Prophet Mohammed's defamation (PBUH) on Facebook led to a violent mob attack against the religious minority population, in which at least 28 houses and temples were ransacked. Leaflets were circulated and a call was made to gather people and launch the attack using the loudspeaker of a local madrasa. In the recent incident of Muradnagar that took place amidst the COVID-19 crisis, the same tactics were repeated. Two Hindu households consisting of five houses were vandalised and torched after calling the general people through a loudspeaker and flaring the anger using the sentiment of religious uniformity. The incident occurred after a man reportedly showed support for France defending cartoons that defamed the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) on Facebook.

In the Thakurpara incident, hundreds of people torched eight houses, leaving one killed and 25 injured following an alleged religious derogatory social media post by a local Hindu man. Sirajul Islam, an Imam of a mosque in a nearby village and a trader, filed a case against Titu Chandra Roy, accusing him in this regard.²⁵⁶ Like other cases of this category, perpetrators used microphone of mosques for spreading hatred and carrying out the attack. All these aforementioned incidents follow a particular pattern. It starts with blaming a member of a religious minority for demeaning Islam, circulating the fake news to create

²⁵² "Buddhist temples, homes burned, looted in Ramu," *bdnews24.com*, 29 September 2012. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2012/09/29/buddhist-temples-homes-burned-looted-in-ramu>. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁵³ "Hindu houses attacked on Facebook rumors," *The Daily Star*, 29 April 2014. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/hindu-houses-attacked-on-facebook-rumours-22087>. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁵⁴ "Unidentified assailants were called through loudspeaker for Muradnagar attack on Hindus," *bdnews24.com*, 4 November 2020. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2020/11/04/unidentified-assailants-were-called-through-loudspeaker-for-muradnagar-attack-on-hindus>. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁵⁵ "Thakurpara Mayhem: Influential locals spread hatred," *The Daily Star*, 13 November 2017. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/thakurpara-hindu-was-framed-1490338>. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

agitation and then mobilising the angry mob to the street to carry out the violent attack. As the National Human Rights Commission observed, the main motive behind such attacks is "to grab Hindu property."²⁵⁷

Violation of Minority Women

Women from the minority communities are doubly marginalised and are systematically subjugated to multi-faced violent incidents. It is reported that during and after the violent incidents against minority groups, the female members of the families were sent away to distant places to save them from rape and sexual abuse. A number of cases project that women belonging to the minority community become victims of sexual assault. Women have been raped as a part of the political strategy to terrorise them to leave the place and humiliate the communities. In a case, two minor girls of the Tripura community were violated and killed in Sitakunda.²⁵⁸ In another case, a Garo woman was gang-raped by two miscreants who stormed into her house by introducing themselves as members of law enforcement agencies in Sherpur.²⁵⁹ A pregnant woman of a Hindu minority community and victim of a communal clash gave birth to a dead child following an altercation over setting off firecrackers during Laxmi Puja in Feni.²⁶⁰ In Rangamati, two indigenous women were sexually assaulted.²⁶¹ In another case in Manda, Naogaon, a Hindu woman was tortured and violated over a land-related dispute.²⁶²

²⁵⁷ "Attacks on minorities in Bangladesh: No longer a 'communal issue'," *The Daily Star*, 22 November 2016. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/stranger-fiction/attacks-minorities-bangladesh-no-longer-%E2%80%9Ccommunal-issue%E2%80%9D-1318237>. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁵⁸ "ধর্ষণ শেষে হত্যার অভিযোগ, সীতাকুন্ডে দুই ত্রিপুরা কিশোরীর লাশ উদ্ধার," *Dainik Purbokone*, 18 May 2018. Cited in https://www.edainikpurbokone.net/content/2018/2018-05-19/zoom_view/11.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁵⁹ "Minority community woman gang raped in Sherpur, I held," *The New Age*, 9 November 2018. Cited in http://epaper.newagebd.net/images/11_11_2018/regular_37433_news_1541881102.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁶⁰ "Attack on Hindu family, Victim gives birth to dead child," *The Observer*, 31 October 2015. Cited in http://www.eobserverbd.com/2015/10/31/3/details/3_r9_c2.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁶¹ "কাপ্তাইয়ে আদিবাসী নারী রাউজানে স্কুলছাত্রী ধর্ষিত," *The Daily Samakal*, 3 May 2015. Cited in https://epaper.samakal.com/uploads/epaper/2015/05/05/images/08_103.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁶² "মান্দায় সংখ্যালঘু নারীকে পিটিয়ে জখম," *Dainik Karatoa*, 25 November 2018. Cited in https://www.ekaratoa.com/2018/11/25/8/details/8_r13_c8.jpg. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

Pre-COVID and COVID-Time Overview of Violence against Minorities:

Incidents of violence against religious minorities in Bangladesh have shown no sign of drastic improvements in 2020, even amid the coronavirus pandemic. According to Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian *Oikya Parishad*, at least 17 people from religious and ethnic minorities have been killed between March and September 2020, as communal attacks continued even amid the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁶³ Twenty families were asked to change their religion during relief distribution by a non-government organisation, according to the *Oikya Parishad*. Communal hatred has been at the root of many incidents of violence in places across the country this year, including Bhola's Borhanuddin and Cumilla's Korbanpur.²⁶⁴ In the Bhola incident, four people were killed, and over 200 were injured.²⁶⁵ A violent attack against Hindu minorities took place when a Hindu man reportedly circulated messages with derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) via his Facebook account. A similar kind of incident took place in Korbanpur, Cumilla, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

²⁶³ "Communal attacks: At least 17 killed during pandemic," *The Daily Star*, 4 November 2020. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/communal-attacks-least-17-killed-during-pandemic-1988849>. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁶⁴ "Bhola temple attack: 400 to 500 unknown persons accused in case filed," *Dhaka Tribune*, 24 October 2019. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2019/10/24/bhola-temple-attack-400-to-500-unknown-persons-accused-in-case-filed>. Accessed on 18 February 2021.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

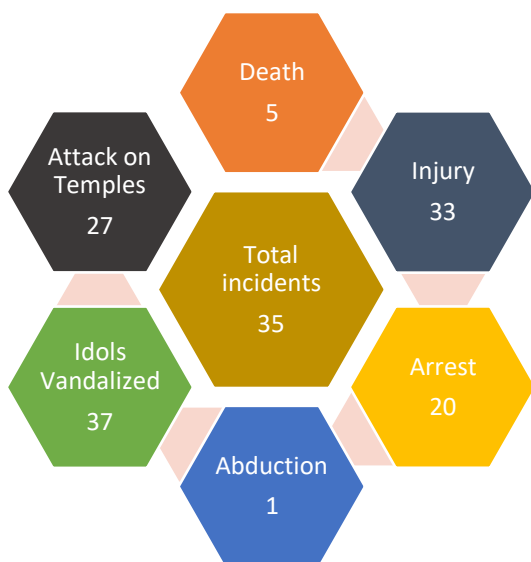


Figure 2: Pre-COVID Data (May 2019- February 2020)

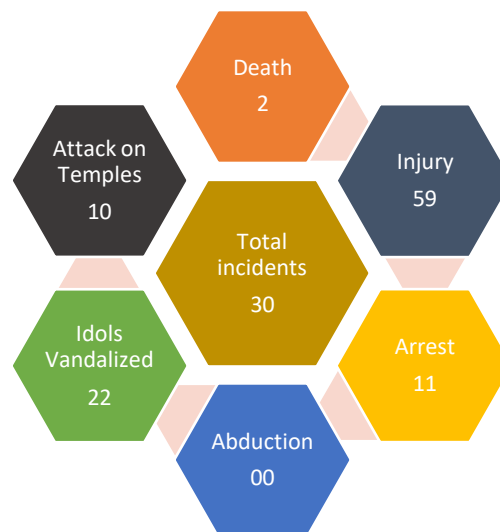


Figure 3: COVID Time Data (March 2020- December 2020)

BPO data demonstrates that before the pandemic hit Bangladesh, a significant number of incidents occurred against the minority people. A total of 35 incidents were registered in the BPO dataset between May 2019 and February 2020, where five people died, and 33 people were injured. It records several attacks against religious minorities during this time, where 27 temples were stormed and 37 idols were vandalised in outrage of communal intolerance. The scenario did not improve during the COVID crisis, either. There was a slight decline in the total number of incidents during the timespan of March 2020 – December 2020, which was 30. The number of injuries was higher during the COVID period than before, with 59 cases of injuries and two deaths. Comparatively fewer number of religious places were attacked, where 22 idols were vandalised in total. However, significantly, there was no case of abduction during this time. The nationwide imposed lockdown due to COVID-19 might be a reason in this case.

Some major incidents of 2020

- Miscreants looted 60 ounces of silver ornaments and vandalised an idol from a Hindu temple at Dhamrai Upazila of Dhaka capital district.²⁶⁶
- Seven members of a Hindu family were injured in an attack by an influential person over forcefully grabbing their land at Mongla, Bagerhat.²⁶⁷
- A music room of a Baul was torched by miscreants at Derai, Sunamganj.²⁶⁸
- Miscreants in Narayanganj district vandalised an ancient Hindu temple. Nine people were injured when they tried to protect the temple.²⁶⁹
- Four youths demanded extortion from a Hindu wedding party and assaulted a man physically as he denied giving them extortion in Palash, Narsingdi.²⁷⁰

Religious misunderstanding and communal attack are prevalent in the present societal context of Bangladesh. Politicisation encircling religious binaries existed from the pre-independence period, as different incidents of riots and sectarian violence were documented in the history of the subcontinent. However, it is a matter of concern that still in the 21st century, different elements of religious fanaticism are injected through political entities. These lead to violence amongst various religious groups, resulting in displacement and forced migration. Other ethnic minorities, alongside religious minorities, are also subjugated to the oppression of majoritarianism. To ensure the safety of the ethnic and religious minority population in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian *Oikya Parishad* demanded a special Act titled "Bangladesh Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations)." Even if a special Act cannot be enacted to prevent communal violence, a robust strategic state-mechanism is needed to be deployed to ensure the safety of the minorities and to prevent violence against them in Bangladesh.

²⁶⁶ *The Daily Prothom Alo*, 4 March 2020, p. 7.

²⁶⁷ *The Daily Purbanchal* (2020). Cited in <https://epaper.purbanchal.com/uploads/epaper/2020-04/5ea331026e4ac.gif>. Accessed on 8 February 2021.

²⁶⁸ "Baul Ranesh's Music Room," *The Daily Star*, 20 May 2020. Cited in <https://epaper.thedailystar.net/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=ca3f82f9&imageview=1>. Accessed on 8 February 2021

²⁶⁹ "রূপগঞ্জ মন্দিরে সন্ত্রাসীদের হামলা, ফাঁকা গুলিবর্ষণ আহত ৯," *The Daily Ittefaq*, 27 December 2020. Cited in https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2020/12/27/images/20_105.jpg?v=1. Accessed on 8 February 2021.

²⁷⁰ "পলাশে বিয়েবাড়িতে চাঁদা দাবি, চার যুবক গ্রেফতার," *The Daily Ittefaq*, 12 December 2020. Cited in https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2020/12/12/images/15_118.jpg?v=1. Accessed on 8 February 2021.

Contraband Drug-Related Violence

Hazera Khanam²⁷¹

Sadia Afreen Proma²⁷²

The uninterrupted flow and abuse of contraband drugs globally causes physical, mental, and social stress among the people. The rate of criminal activities associated with illicit drug trade and drug consumption enhanced parallelly in every part of the world. The analyses below will trace the national and transnational nature of organised crimes related to the depletion and trade of contraband drugs. The write-up provides an overview of global trends of drug-related violence in 2019 and 2020, as well as the national one.

At the advent of the COVID-19 crisis, the global trends of contraband drugs have changed drastically. Not only the patterns of the abuses of illicit drugs have aggravated, but also the nature of crime and violence has augmented. The write-up will also discuss the patterns of illicit drug-related violence through a comparative analysis of consumption, trade, and violence in different countries. The next section analyses the national trends with a particular focus on legal-institutional response by highlighting the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) data on contraband drug-related incidents of crime and violence amidst the COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, this segment also observes the necessity for more awareness and intervention in waning the transnational nexus of drug-related crime and violence in Bangladesh.

Global and Regional Overview on Contraband Drugs

According to the World Drug Report 2020 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), about 35 million people worldwide suffer

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from drug addiction/drug use disorders. 269 million people abused drugs in 2018, which represents a 30% jump up from 2009.²⁷³ Globally, an estimated 192 million users consumed contraband drugs (mainly cannabis) in 2018.²⁷⁴ This substance is responsible for more than half of all drug offences registered till now. Opioids are considered the deadliest misused drugs, as there is an accelerated death rate (with 71% deaths over the past decade).²⁷⁵ The abuse increased particularly among women by 92% and among men by 62%.²⁷⁶ Adolescents and young adults from developing countries constitute the largest share of drug users, where it grew by 16% for the period 2000-2018.²⁷⁷

Approximately 585,000 deaths had occurred due to the abuse of illicit drug substances in 2017, with almost half of them being accredited to liver cancer, cirrhosis, and other chronic liver diseases akin to hepatitis C. Deaths attributed to drug abuse disorders (167,000) accounted for 28% of all deaths, a dire

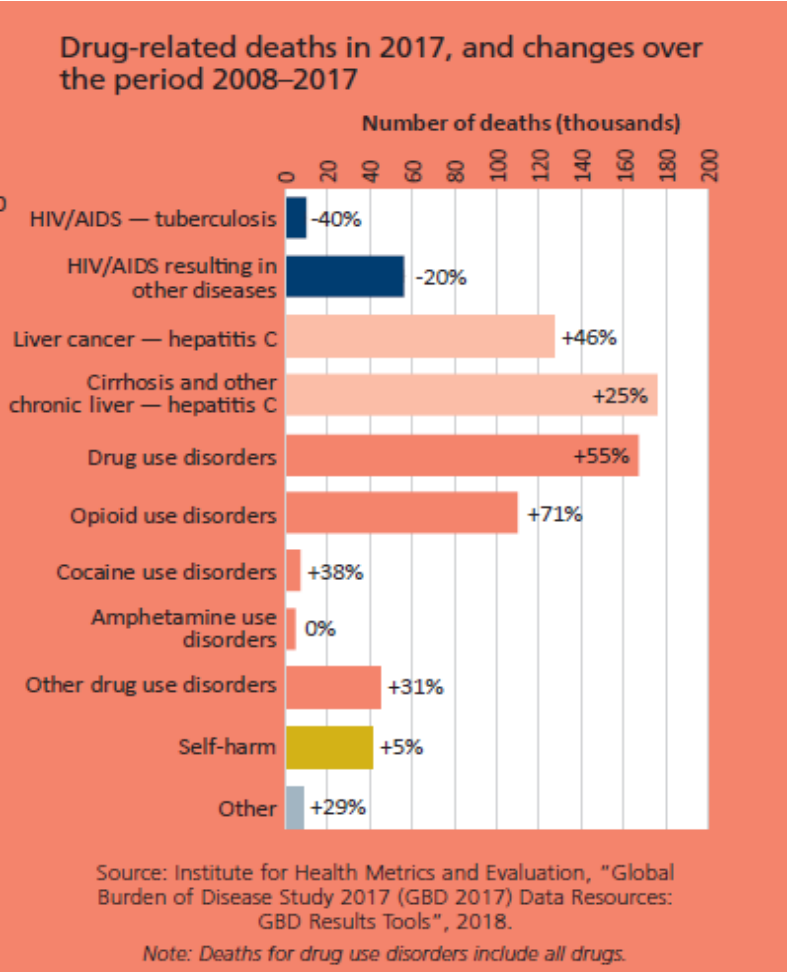


Figure I: the contraband drug-related deaths of about a decade started from 2008 to 2017.

²⁷³ World Drug Report 2020: Executive Summary, UNODC Research, June 2020. Cited in https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/field/WDR20_BOOKLET_1.pdf. Accessed on 26 January 2021.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

consequence from an excessive amount of contraband drug abuse. Crudely 66% of those deaths are caused due to opium overdose.²⁷⁸

Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic and Consequences regarding the Restrictive Measures

From March 2020, an increase in the number of illegal activities via 'darknet', maritime trafficking (South America to Europe) and shipments by mail is observed globally. Since mid-2017, some major darknet markets have been closed due to law enforcement actions, but the number of people buying drugs (mostly cannabis) on the darknet in 2020 has risen dramatically, mainly in Europe – thereby backing the previous statement.²⁷⁹

As for the increase in drug trafficking by shipments via mail, Iran, Morocco, Egypt, and Nigeria have reported large and mid-scale drug seizures, indicating that a continuing significant quantity of drug trafficking saw a plausible surge in the use of postal services.²⁸⁰

The Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) estimates that heroin trafficking overland has become riskier in Central Asia for the drug traffickers, and this estimate points towards a more plausible, alternate way of drug trafficking via maritime trafficking.²⁸¹ A recent surge in heroin seizures (along with other drugs) in the Indian Ocean denotes the fact that traffickers are changing their strategy and resorting to maritime routes via Africa to evade controls along the Balkan route – a consequence of the COVID-19 constricting measures.²⁸²

Moreover, there are strong indications that air traffic reduction to Europe has already led to an increase in direct cocaine shipments by sea cargo from South America to Europe.²⁸³ Similarly, reports from Colombia strongly second that maritime drug trafficking is on the rise while heroin/cocaine trafficking by

²⁷⁸ World Drug Report 2020: Drug Use and Health Consequences, *UNODC Research*, June 2020. Cited in https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/field/WDR20_BOOKLET_2.pdf. Accessed on 26 January 2021.

²⁷⁹ World Drug Report 2020: Executive Summary, *UNODC Research*, June 2020, p. 19. Cited in https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/field/WDR20_BOOKLET_1.pdf. Accessed on 26 January, 2021.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 24.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 25.

²⁸² *Ibid*.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 26.

land is waning.²⁸⁴ Europol supported a cross-border investigation, led by the Spanish Civil Guard (*Guardia Civil*), along with the Dutch Police and US Homeland Security Investigations and Border and Protection. This resulted in the dismantling of an organised crime group trafficking approximately six tonnes of cocaine from South America to Europe.²⁸⁵ They also arrested eight drug traffickers.²⁸⁶ Now, this might be interesting to observe that due to the restriction imposed on movement linked to the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020, organised criminal groups previously associated with drug trafficking in Italy, Niger and some Central Asian countries have changed their illicit activities (i.e. cybercrime and trafficking in falsified medicines).²⁸⁷

Another concerning issue in this pandemic period is the increase in alcohol consumption, sedative, and the use of intravenous injection. Manufacturers are allegedly relying more and more on precursor chemicals due to the shortage of pure methamphetamine in the market during the movement restriction period amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been observed that in Mexico and the USA, methamphetamine prices showed a rise due to the scarcity of methamphetamine (supposedly imported from East Asia).²⁸⁸ However, In the first six months of 2019, 657 kgs of methamphetamine were seized from Afghanistan, indicating the rapid increase of production of this particular drug.²⁸⁹

It might be worth mentioning that neither an economic downturn in the pandemic nor a fall in the cultivation of illicit crops halted the flourishing trade of contraband drug. Instead, it amplified amid this global crisis worldwide. Poppy cultivation took place in Afghanistan from March to June in 2020, just like the previous decades, whereas the entire world, including Afghanistan, was battling with the endemic situation.²⁹⁰ Women and people who lost their job in the pandemic were heavily engaged in poppy cultivation.²⁹¹ Initially, the closure of the border with Pakistan led to a shortage of poppy lancers, which

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ "Cocaine Cartel Shipping from South America Busted in Spain and the Netherlands," Europol, published in 16 October 2020. Cited in <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/cocaine-cartel-shipping-south-america-busted-in-spain-and-netherlands>. Accessed on 26 January 2021.

²⁸⁷ World Drug Report 2020: Executive Summary, *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

²⁸⁸ World Drug Report 2020: Executive Summary, *UNODC Research*, June 2020. Cited in https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/field/WDR20_BOOKLET_1.pdf. Accessed on 26 January, 2021

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ World Drug Report 2020: Drug Supply, *UNODC Research*, June 2020. Cited in https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/field/WDR20_BOOKLET_3.pdf. Accessed on 26 January 2021.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

abrupted the flow for a few months. However, cultivation and trade continued smoothly shortly. In Myanmar, before the onset of the pandemic, the opium harvest was finished.²⁹² However, the market faced a shortage of buyers because of movement restrictions.²⁹³ In Mexico, pandemic or restriction measures had apparently no impact on opium production.

National Overview of Contraband Drug-Related Violence

At present, in Bangladesh, about 8 million people are reportedly addicted to contraband drugs and 50% of the drug abuser youths are allegedly involved in criminal activities.²⁹⁴ The increasing number of female and children drug abusers are quite shocking, and it has been quite noticeable in the last 2/3 years. This situation poses quite a challenge for Bangladesh. According to the current statistics, the lavishness and diversities of contraband drugs have created an enormous drug consumer base here who allegedly take cannabis more than yaba. Due to the availability and easy accessibility, drugs are nurtured and proliferated by the manufacturers and buyers, and crime range from state-level to domestic arena increased profoundly even during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the flow of methamphetamine continued without much disruption (despite the hard line of the law enforcement agencies and the sheer nightmare of violence originated by the criminal gangs and the abusers alike), the Government of Bangladesh is thinking about launching another nation-wide anti-narcotic drive in 2021.

Trends of Drug-Related Violence

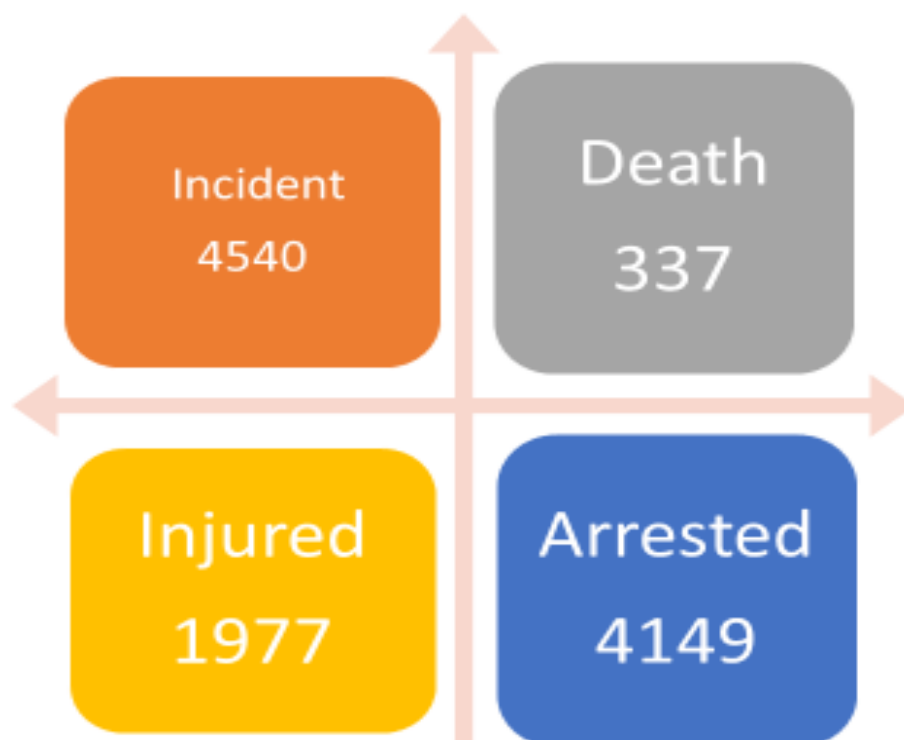
BPO recorded a total of 4,540 drug-related incidents across Bangladesh from May 2019 to December 2020 (Figure 2). The divisional distribution of drug-related incidents of the same timeline reflects the total number of drug-related incidents mentioned above, and the total number of arrest incidents is 4149, along with 337 recorded death incidents. Drug trafficking, anti-drugs drives, alleged gunfights, clashes among the miscreants involved with drug trafficking, assaults, sexual assaults and domestic violence, and other types of crimes associated with drugs had occurred throughout the year. Arrests, assaults, domestic violence and purported gunfights are the major reported occurrences of 2019-20, according to the illustrated BPO data.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ 'Saving Bangladeshi children from drug addiction.' Cited in <https://www.ucanews.com/news/saving-bangladeshi-children-from-drug-addiction/87164#>. Accessed on 25 December 2020.

Figure 2: BPO data on Drug-Related Reported Incidents of May 2019-Dec 2020.²⁹⁵



²⁹⁵ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 12 January 2021.

Figure 3: Quarterly Distribution of BPO data on Drug-Related Reported Incidents of May 2019-December 2020.²⁹⁶

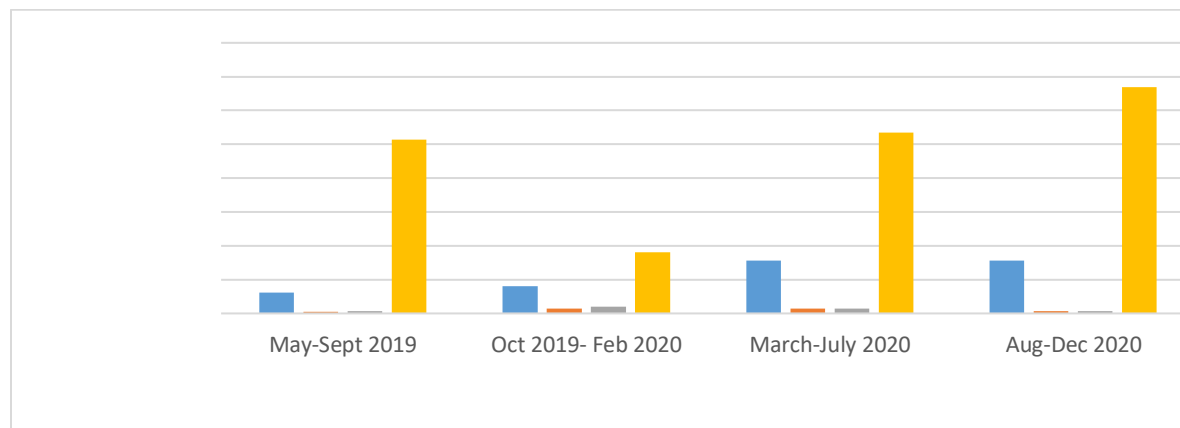


Figure 3 shows the quarterly distribution of drug-related incidents where the total number of incidents were almost doubled after the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. This significant increase in the number of drug-related incidents of 2020 (1563,1554) in the last two quarters denotes that contraband drug trading and smuggling had been rampant in 2020.

Moreover, the arrest rate ominously reached a peak in the months of Aug-Dec 2020, where a total of 6,696 offenders were arrested.²⁹⁷ The months March-July 2020 followed the suits and recorded as the second highest regarding the number of arrests (5,355). On the other hand, the incident trend quite fluctuated throughout these two years in terms of the number of killed and injured ones. However, the first half of 2020 saw an upscale surge of violent incidents that caused the death of 145 people (March-July 2020), as the trend began at the second quarter of the previous year that documented the death of 137 people (Oct 2019-Feb 2020).²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 8 January 2021.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Table I: Divisional Distribution of the number of incidents related to contraband drug smuggling May 2019-December 2020.²⁹⁹

District	Total Incident	Total Killed	Total Injured	Total Arrested
Dhaka	808	10	47	725
Rajshahi	1041	32	21	1001
Chattogram	1158	105	74	979
Khulna	681	30	21	648
Rangpur	385	14	17	354
Sylhet	136	7	6	125
Mymensingh	91	17	5	90
Barishal	247	1	8	238

Table I shows that the highest number of violent incidents (1,158), the total number of death (105), and injury (74) – all happened in the Chattogram division, whereas the Rajshahi division stayed on the top place in terms of the number of arrests (1,001). Due to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of reported arrests and the cumulative sum of incidents of all the division had fallen from the previous year, as country-wide lockdown continued for months. The table also shows that the Mymensingh division is performing better than the rest of the divisions with the lowest number of incidents (91) and total injured ones (5) associated with contraband drug-related crimes.

²⁹⁹ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 14 January 2021.

Table 2: Top ten districts distribution of contraband Drug-Related Violence May 2019-December 2020.³⁰⁰

Sl. No.	District	Total Incident	Total Killed	Total Injured	Total Arrest
1	Dhaka	463	28	20	*7582
2	Chattogram	*491	21	83	983
3	Cox's Bazar	468	*135	*114	621
4	Narayanganj	94	15	36	214
5	Rajshahi	215	7	15	2551
6	Khulna	254	2	14	1247
7	Rangpur	81	4	6	342
8	Satkhira	101	2	3	354
9	Jashore	112	11	10	182
10	Dinajpur	113	8	10	394

Table 2 shows the top ten district's drug-related violent incidents, deaths, injuries, and arrests documented by BPO. Chattogram, Dhaka, and Cox's Bazar districts were the top three regarding death, injury, and arrest incidents in 2019-20, which is relatively similar to the previous year's trends. The highest number of death occurred in Cox's Bazar district (135), where 114 were injured. The Cox's Bazar district is identified as the epicentre of contraband drug smuggling, where constant surveillance of the law enforcement agencies accelerated the number of raid incidents and alleged gunfights to control the criminal activities in this district. In the meantime, the Dhaka district was at the peak in terms of arresting drug peddlers and carriers (7582) in 2019-20. BPO recorded the highest number of drug-related incidents (491) that occurred in the Chattogram division.

Contraband Drug Smuggling Routes used by the Smugglers before and during COVID-19

Most recently, Bangladesh has been found as a transit route for manufacturing drugs.³⁰¹ Apparently, Bangladesh is notoriously labelled as a consumer state, as a huge number of people abuse contraband drug

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ 'Dhaka being used for transnational drug smuggling,' *The Business Standard*. Cited in <https://tbsnews.net/bangladesh/dhaka-being-used-transnational-drug-smuggling-145198>. Accessed on 8 January 2021.

substances smuggled from neighbouring countries via sea-routes and land-borders.³⁰² Smugglers and drug peddlers clandestinely trafficked drugs like yaba, heroin, phensedyl and marijuana, mostly through sea routes, despite strict surveillance of the law-enforcement agencies. The drug lords mainly finance and secure the routes through breaching the security surveillance guarded mainly by the Border Guards Bangladesh and Bangladesh Police in border districts.

The Chattogram division is being used by the smugglers regularly, and this route is considered the most common route that the drug peddlers use for transporting methamphetamine and cocaine based substances; it can also be called the gateway of the transnational drug route.³⁰³ In 2018, the Government of Bangladesh launched an anti-narcotics raid and approximately 53 million yaba pills were seized and destroyed by the law enforcement agencies combined, and 25,000 alleged drug peddlers had been arrested.³⁰⁴

However, the 2018 anti-narcotic drive of the government and the firm stance against anyone dealing with any kinds of contraband drugs reduced the overall amount of drug smuggling into the country. Nevertheless, the usual routes have been changed quite a few times amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The customs intelligence officials of Shahjalal International Airport seized a heavy package loaded with 12.30 kilograms of amphetamine powder in a passenger's luggage during the COVID-19 period.³⁰⁵ Utilising airways as the alternative means of transportation for bringing drugs inside the country is a new phenomenon, as the whole country went under lockdown. Moreover, all the border territories were placed under heavy scrutiny to avoid mass infection of COVID-19, which barely halted the flow of contraband drugs inside the country.³⁰⁶

Additionally, the Department of Narcotic Control found that Bangladesh is regularly used as a transit route for smuggling drugs to North America and the Middle East by a transnational network active here

³⁰² 'Bangladesh as a transit for drug smuggling,' *The Daily Star*. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/editorial/news/bangladesh-transit-drug-smuggling-1978765>. Accessed on 27 December 2020.

³⁰³ *Ibid*.

³⁰⁴ 'Drug trafficking and Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh,' *Observer Research Foundation*. Cited in <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/drug-trafficking-and-rohingya-refugees-in-bangladesh-49005/>. Accessed on 2 January 2021.

³⁰⁵ 'Dhaka being used for transnational drug smuggling,' *The Business Standard*. Cited in <https://tbsnews.net/bangladesh/dhaka-being-used-transnational-drug-smuggling-145198>. Accessed on 8 January 2021.

³⁰⁶ "Unstoppable Yaba: New route, new colour," *The Daily Star*. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/unstoppable-yaba-new-route-new-colour-1960297>. Accessed on 15 January 2021.

for over five years.³⁰⁷ Meanwhile, dispatching illicit drugs across the country became harder for the aforementioned reason amid the pandemic, and, as an alternative for using public transport like train and bus, the drug peddlers started loading pick-up vans, trucks and private cars with drugs where they hid the drugs among other goods and covertly transported drugs from district to district.³⁰⁸ Furthermore, the drug peddlers also used street children, the female population, and the Rohingya community as carriers transporting drugs from one place to another across the country amid the pandemic.³⁰⁹

Every now and then, the controversial involvement of the members of law enforcement agencies was also found related to assisting the drug dealers. However, those culprits were held responsible by their respective department in a stringent manner. On 15 June 2020, a sub-inspector (SI) was arrested in the capital's Mohammadpur area with 11,000 yaba pills.³¹⁰ Even small traders were used as the transporter of illicit drugs during the COVID-19 lockdown as vehicles only loaded with agricultural goods were allowed roaming freely around the country 24/7.³¹¹

The routes continued evolving over time during the second wave of the pandemic, though the law enforcement agencies are trying to track down the notorious routes and the illicit traders as well as attempting to comprehend the pattern of their actions and motives through initiating more frequent raids in the highly debatable drug shipping zones.³¹²

³⁰⁷ "We cannot allow Dhaka to become a drug trafficking route," *Straits Times*. Cited in <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/we-cannot-allow-dhaka-to-become-a-drug-trafficking-route-daily-star>. Accessed on 13 January 2021.

³⁰⁸ "Cattle drug smuggling linked-near Bangladesh border," *Times of India*. Cited in <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/shillong/cattle-drug-smuggling-linked-near-bangladesh-border/articleshow/79337549.cms>. Accessed on 12 December 2020.

³⁰⁹ "Drug trafficking and Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh," *Observer Research Foundation*. Cited in <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/drug-trafficking-and-rohingya-refugees-in-bangladesh-49005/>. Accessed on 2 January 2021.

³¹⁰ "Dhaka being used for transnational drug smuggling," *The Business Standard*. Cited in <https://tbsnews.net/bangladesh/dhaka-being-used-transnational-drug-smuggling-145198>. Accessed on 8 January 2021.

³¹¹ "Drug trafficking thrives in Bangladesh amid coronavirus pandemic," *The Financial Express*. Cited in <https://www.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/drug-trafficking-thrives-in-bangladesh-amid-coronavirus-pandemic-1590551317>. Accessed on 23 December 2020.

³¹² "Drug smuggling unimpeded by Covid-19 pandemic," *Dhaka Tribune*. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2020/07/18/drug-smuggling-unimpeded-by-covid-19-pandemic>. Accessed on 23 December 2020.

Actors involved in Contraband Drug Trafficking

Contraband drug trafficking and its sale are structured in manners much similar to maintaining an actual business. Currently, the drug trade is booming globally with the help of advanced technology that follows a real business model and the highly profitable outcome from this venture labelled as 'Narconomics' introduced by Tom Wainwright, the editor of *The Economist*.³¹³ Globally, private networks mainly involved in illegal transactions among buyers and sellers routinely cooperate in arranging transactions that occur in some private locations, such as homes, apartments, or cars. Many dealings are settled over the phone.³¹⁴ Such a secluded complex mechanism of businesses is less familiar to and hardly penetrated by the police/law enforcement agency. These networks are specifically shared among the middle class, with fixed consumers for selling illegal drugs.³¹⁵

Figure 4: The hierarchy of drug trafficking networks

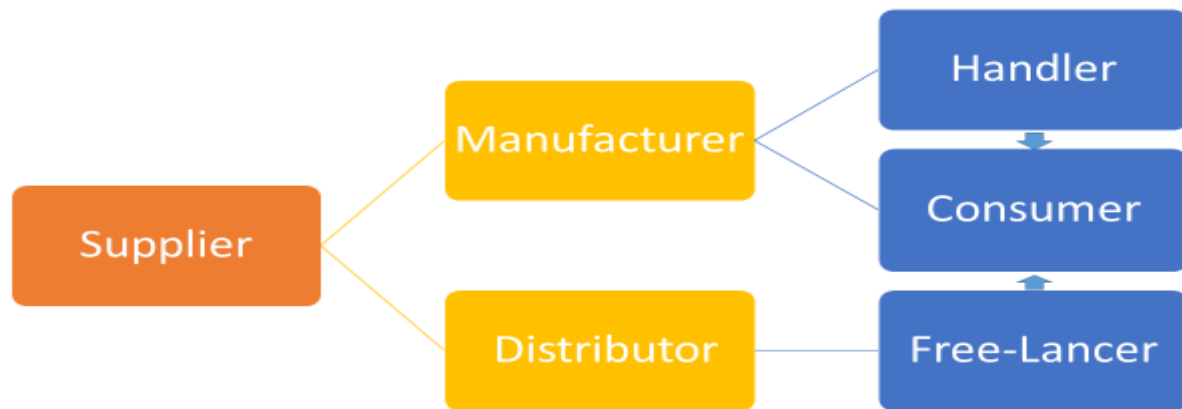


Figure 4 demonstrates the hierarchical relationship observed among the suppliers, manufacturers, handlers and drug consumers. The illicit drug manufacturers maintain regular communication with the

³¹³ "Narconomics': How The Drug Cartels Operate Like Wal-Mart and McDonald's," NPR. Cited in <https://www.npr.org/2016/02/15/466491812/narconomics-how-the-drug-cartels-operate-like-wal-mart-and-mcdonalds>. Accessed on 10 December 2020.

³¹⁴ Bruce D. Johnson, "Patterns of Drug Distribution: Implications and Issues," *National Center for Biotechnology Information*. Cited in <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1975811/>. Accessed on 19 December 2020.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

suppliers who produce drugs in the laboratory, or with the farmers who grew the plants for cocaine, heroin, and other powder-based drug substances.³¹⁶

The price of the drugs is highly dependent on the pattern of farming and production. For this, drug cartels continuously keep an eye on raw material flow to keep the price of synthetic drug stable even when crop production is disrupted. After the primary harvesting and processing into the laboratory/factory, it comes down to packaging and disbursing among the distributors by the upper administration who handle the cartel business.³¹⁷ Furthermore, many prefer working as low-level freelance distributors working on their own in many public settings like streets, parks, pubs and alleys.³¹⁸ The handlers mainly operate at the field level, contact the customers individually and collect money after confirming the purchase.³¹⁹ A minimum number of contacts is maintained between the vendors and consumers due to the jeopardy of being caught by law enforcement agencies.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ NPR, *Op. cit.*

Micro-narratives

Ridwan Hasan

(age 31, local drug supplier)

I have been involved in this business only for three years. It is a side business of mine, as I am also working in a private firm. One of my close friends was involved in this dealing, as it is a profitable route of income without sweating too much. As he left the country for good, I replaced his place, gladly working as a local dispatch. Doing business in the capital city is getting riskier day by day due to the stringent position of the law enforcement agency. However, we also have alternative ways to handle the purchase and delivery procedure despite going through all the hassles. At first, I need to buy drugs (cannabis, yaba) from a drug dealer or a retailer as whatever people wish to label them, and this has to be done in a certain 'zone,' a particular area controlled and handled by one specific person or a group who maintain a territory to run the

Shafakat Ahmed

(age 27, cannabis consumer)

I am currently studying in a well-known university. I started taking cannabis-based drugs out of curiosity. Gradually, I became quite dependent and continued taking them for over seven years. I have tried a few other variants of drugs for recreational purposes. However, I stick to the hemp-based ones, as they seem more suitable to me rather than yaba or other kinds of drugs. Generally, I collect this from a local drug supplier. Most of the purchases are confirmed over phone. Often, one needs to place an order, as spot purchasing cannot be always possible due to

New developments in contraband drug consumer base and related violence

It has been noticed for the last few years that a new variant of substance is being used as a form of cheap drug, which became an addiction among the street children aged ranging from eight to sixteen.³²⁰ Particularly in Dhaka, children from low-income communities living in the streets (e.g. child labours) are addicted to sniffing a glue called 'dandy.' Commonly, homeless teenagers are addicted to various kinds of drugs, including dandy used for repairing leather or rubber products. They purchase dandy from hardware stores with cheap bargaining. Children and teenagers are often observed sniffing gums huddled in a corner from plastic bags openly, typically in Karwan Bazar, Shahbagh and Tejgaon areas in Dhaka.³²¹

Drug abuse among children in Bangladesh reached 2.5 million in 2018.³²² Children collecting scraps, plastics or working as hawkers are also the noticeable ones using this drug. Street dwellers often involved in various kinds of crime like robbery, stealing or even hijacking passerby at night time across the capital have shown addiction to this gum. On 2 January, a 16-year-old boy was stabbed to death, and two others were injured in an attack by their rivals in Dhaka's Mohakhali area near the kitchen market.³²³ Police arrested two street orphans, including a girl, on the charge of killing the boy for the drug-related dispute.³²⁴

Though the government's rehabilitation centre for street children is near the railway station in Kamalapur and Karwan Bazar in Dhaka, children barely live there.³²⁵ Besides, those facility centres do not have any mechanism and are unfortunately inadequately equipped for handling drug-addicted children.³²⁶ Along with the rise of homeless child drug addicts in Bangladesh, the country has also been witnessing an increasing number of female drug abusers, which is disturbing.³²⁷ Women addicted to drugs are among the most vulnerable communities of the population, just like the street-dwelling child drug addicts.

³²⁰ "Glue-sniffing: childhood lost on the streets," *The Daily Star*. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/stories-of-street-children-in-dhaka-1863751>. Accessed on 9 December 2020.

³²¹ "Saving Bangladeshi children from drug addiction," *Union of Catholic Asian News*. Cited in <https://www.ucanews.com/news/saving-bangladeshi-children-from-drug-addiction/87164#>. Accessed on 15 December 2020.

³²² "Bangladesh: Drug use among Bangladeshi children reaches 2.5million," *The Muslim News*. Cited in <http://muslimnews.co.uk/news/south-asia/bangladesh-drug-use-among-bangladeshi-children-reaches-2-5million/>. Accessed on 29 December 2020.

³²³ *Prothom Alo*, 3 January 2021, p. 3.

³²⁴ *Ibid*.

³²⁵ "Glue-sniffing: childhood lost on the streets," *op. cit*.

³²⁶ "Saving Bangladeshi children from drug addiction," *op. cit*.

³²⁷ "Female drug addict numbers on the rise," *Dhaka Tribune*. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2017/02/23/female-drug-addict-numbers-rise>. Accessed on 27 December 2020.

To date, there is no specific mechanism to track down the female drug addict population. According to anti-narcotics organisation *Madok Drobbo O Nesha Sangstha* (Manas - 2016), Bangladesh has about 1.1m female drug abusers, covering 16% of the entire addicted population (whereas only 5% females were addicted to drugs in 2011). In 2017, only 20% of the total drug-addicted population were female, but this ratio changed in upward notion as years passed. The male-female ratio changed upward in 2018, and roughly 20.6% are females, whereas about 79.4% of drug users are males.³²⁸

Women from the top tier of the society consume an excessive amount of sheesha, alcohol, cocaine, yaba pills and heroin or cannabis-based drug substances (which are costly), whereas women from lower-income group prefer cigarette, sleeping pills, marijuana and heroin.³²⁹ The reasons behind abusing drugs and being addicted to them are diverse. Many are influenced by their friends, while a few might be struggling with family issues, but mostly they abuse drugs for recreational purposes.³³⁰ From sex workers to school-standard teenage girls, women are now using contraband drugs around the country.³³¹ However, the ratio of female drug abusers has shot up, considering the total number of the consumer in the capital city.³³² Due to this upscale condition, families and the abusers themselves suffer from severe psychological damage while also causing social tension and thereby intensifying the probability of domestic violence and criminal activities.

³²⁸ "Female drug abuse on the rise," *New Age*. Cited in <https://www.newagebd.net/article/32066/female-drug-abuse-on-the-rise>. Accessed on 27 December 2020.

³²⁹ "Female drug abusers most vulnerable among addicted population," *Dhaka Tribune*. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/special/2018/04/01/female-drug-abusers-vulnerable-among-addicted-population>. Accessed on 29 December 2020.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ "Female drug abuse on the rise," *New Age*. Cited in <https://www.newagebd.net/article/32066/female-drug-abuse-on-the-rise>. Accessed on 20 December 2020. Accessed on 21 November 2020.

³³² *Ibid.*

Figure 5: Drug-Related Gunfight Incidents before and during the COVID-19 period.³³³

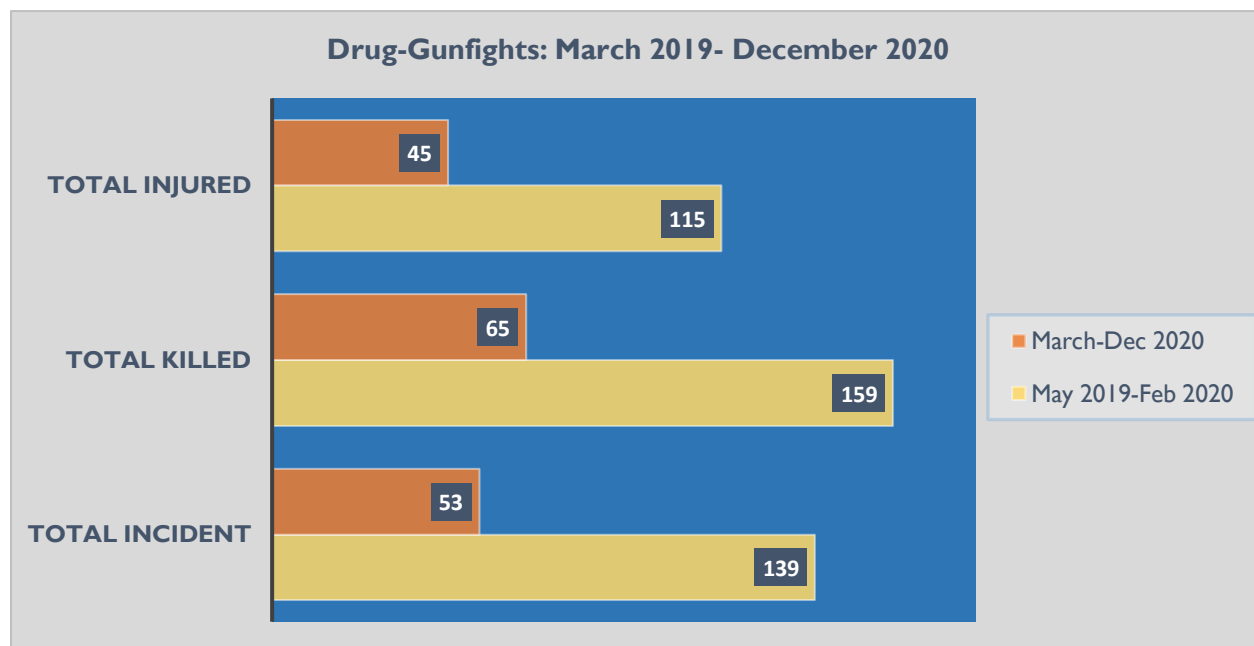


Figure 5 illustrates the total number of violent incidents pertaining to alleged gunfights in 2019 and 2020. Before the COVID-19 period, the gunfight incidents were relatively higher (139) than those recorded during the pandemic time in 2020 (53). Total 159 alleged drug peddlers had been killed between May 2019 - February 2020, whereas 65 were killed during the pandemic. A similar pattern prevails in terms of injured ones, comprising only one-third of the incidents of 2019 (March to December). Most of the alleged gunfights occurred between law enforcement agencies and drug peddlers during anti-narcotics drives and organised criminal groups involved with illicit drug smuggling, particularly near the border territories.

³³³ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 25 November 2021.

Figure 6: Divisional Distribution of Drug-Related Gunfight Incidents of May 2019 – December 2020.³³⁴

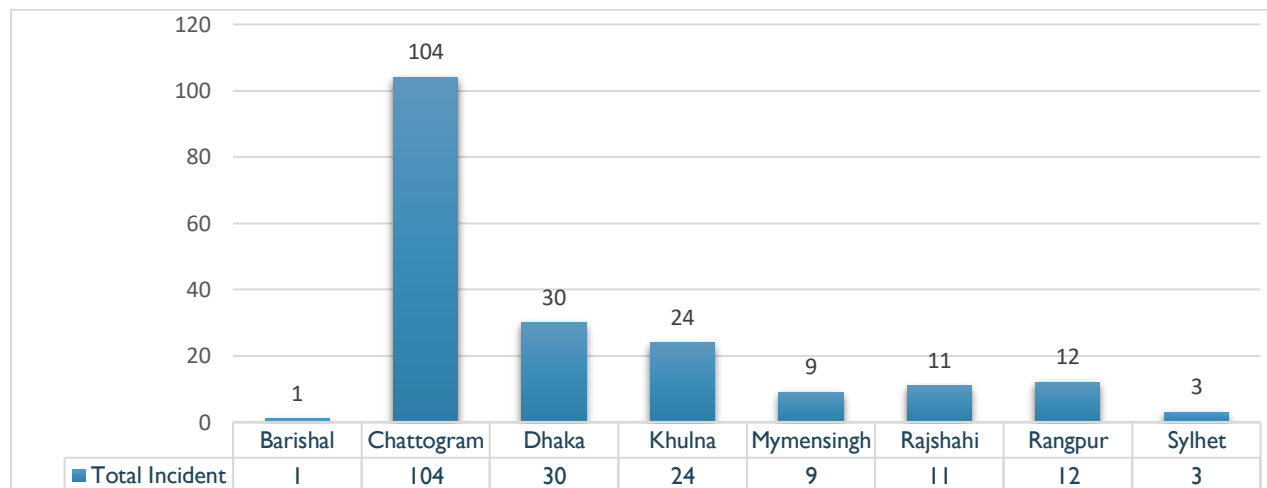
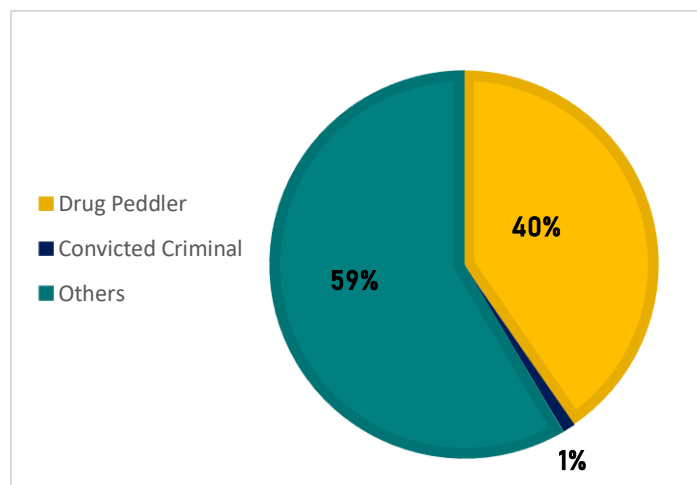


Figure 6 depicts the total number of alleged gunfights that occurred from May 2019 to December 2020 at the divisional levels. Chattogram division topped with 104 gunfight incidents. According to BPO data, most of the reported gunfights had taken place in Cox's Bazar (85) district of the Chattogram division. The Teknaf Upazila of Cox's Bazar might be considered the hot-spot for alleged gunfights due to frequent gunfights regularly. A total of 69 incidents out of 104 gunfight incidents of the Chattogram division happened there in 2019-2020. Dhaka division stands at the second position (30), and the Barishal division barely makes the place in the list with only one reported incident in 2019-20.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

Pie-Chart 2: Top three perpetrators of contraband drug-related incidents between May 2019-December 2020.³³⁵



Pie-chart 2 denotes the top three reported actors, including drug peddlers, convicted criminals, and others (e.g. goon/miscreants, smuggler/illicit traders and hijackers) in the year 2019 and 2020. The BPO data indicates that almost half (40%) of the incidents that aggravated drug-related crimes were committed by the national and trans-national drug peddlers and smugglers. The ‘Others’ category symbolises ranges of actors intensely entangled with drug-abusing and trading, like robbers, hijackers, thieves, drug-addicts, and miscreants.

Concluding Remarks

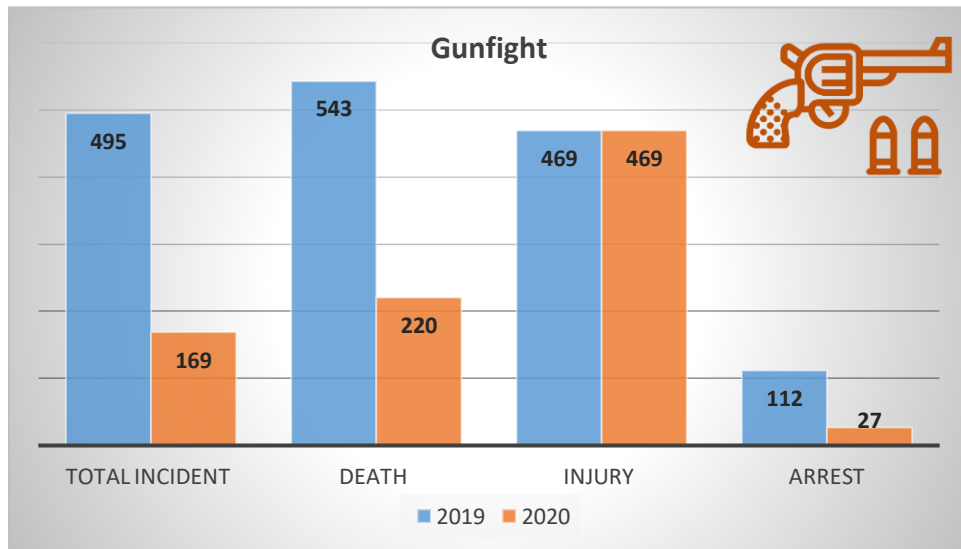
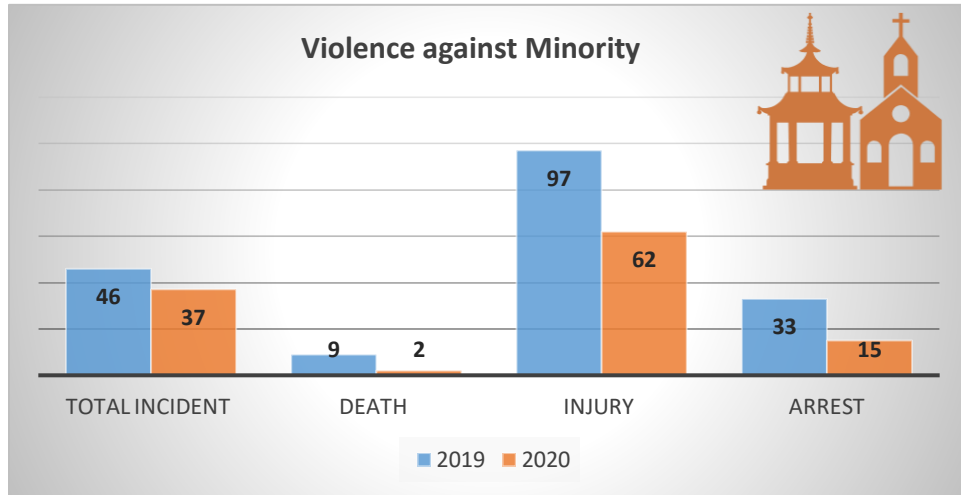
From the above analyses, it may be concluded that the contraband drug-related criminal activities have noticeably decreased (compared to the year 2019) on an overall basis. However, the number of drug abusers have sped up alarmingly across the country. Though the number of overall delinquency has fallen due to the nation-wide lockdown, the rate of domestic violence and sexual assault against women has accelerated amid this COVID-19 pandemic. Sadly, there has been a humungous amount of violent incidents, especially domestic violence initiated by the drug-abusers. Due to the mass consumption of illicit drugs, the escalation of the drug-addict population is a matter of concern for the country. The young generation is inclining towards drugs more than ever before. Unfortunately, the rehabilitation centres for drug-addiction recovery is inadequate, and the mechanism of building more resilient infrastructure for the addicts is insubstantial.

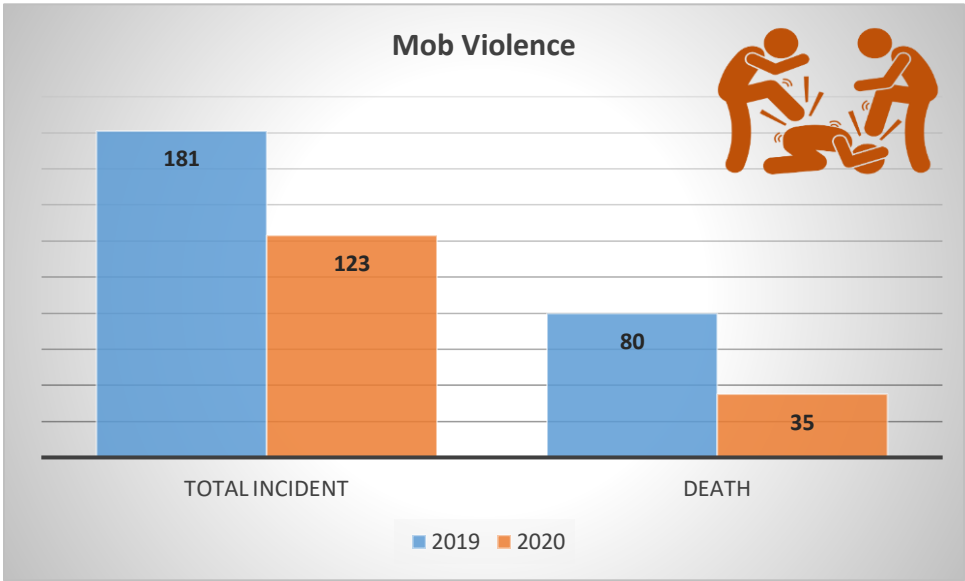
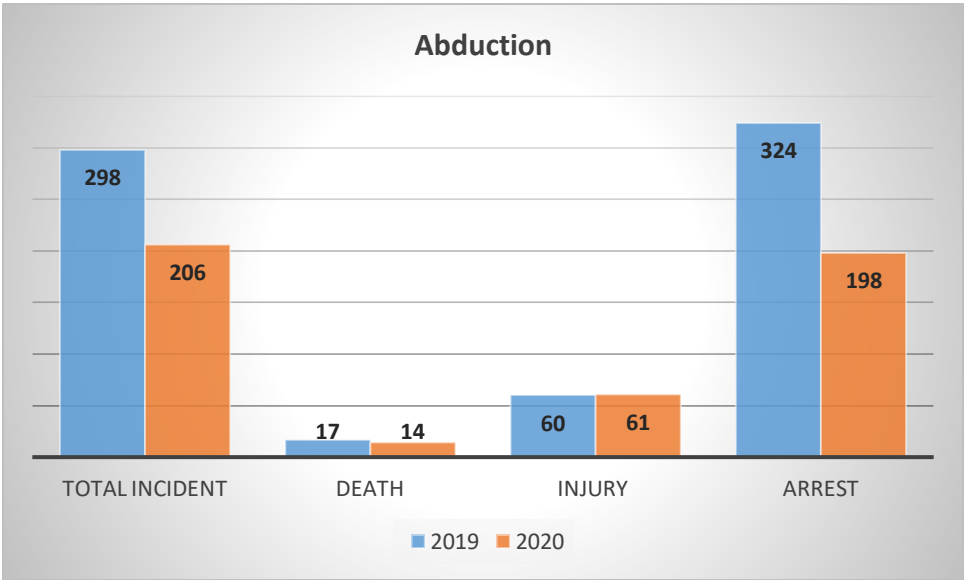
³³⁵ Bangladesh Peace Observatory, Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 14 November 2021.

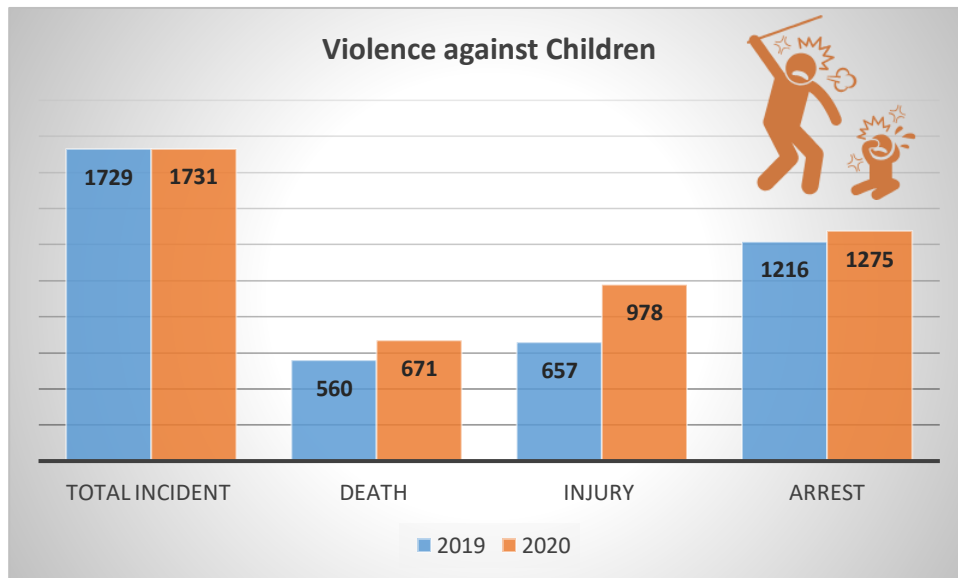
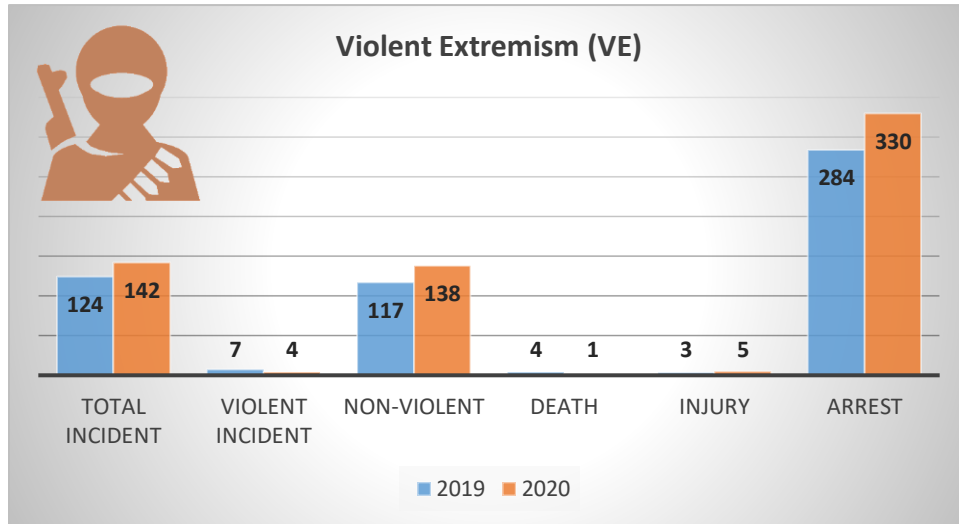
According to a report of the National Institute of Mental Health, Dhaka, in 2016, 42% of addicts seeking treatment in rehabs and hospitals across the country were hooked on yaba as this is the most phenomenal and easily accessible form of drugs. To look after and support this fragile addicted populace, professional help is urgently needed. Though wearing off drug-addiction is quite difficult, it is not impossible. The write-up analysed the drug-related incidents to elucidate the nature of violence so that the probable solution can be discussed and suggested by the concerned key actors of the country to help build a peaceful society by identifying the root problems.

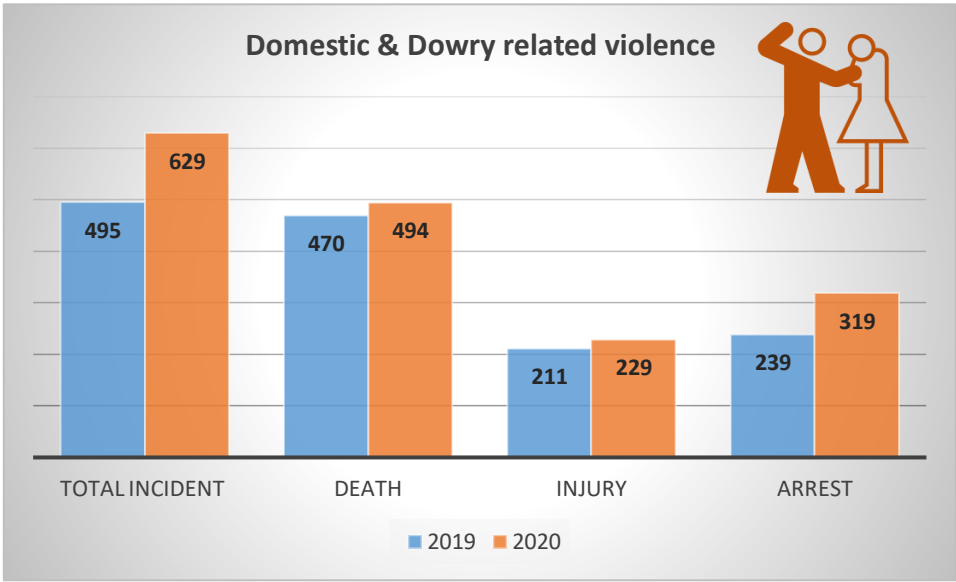
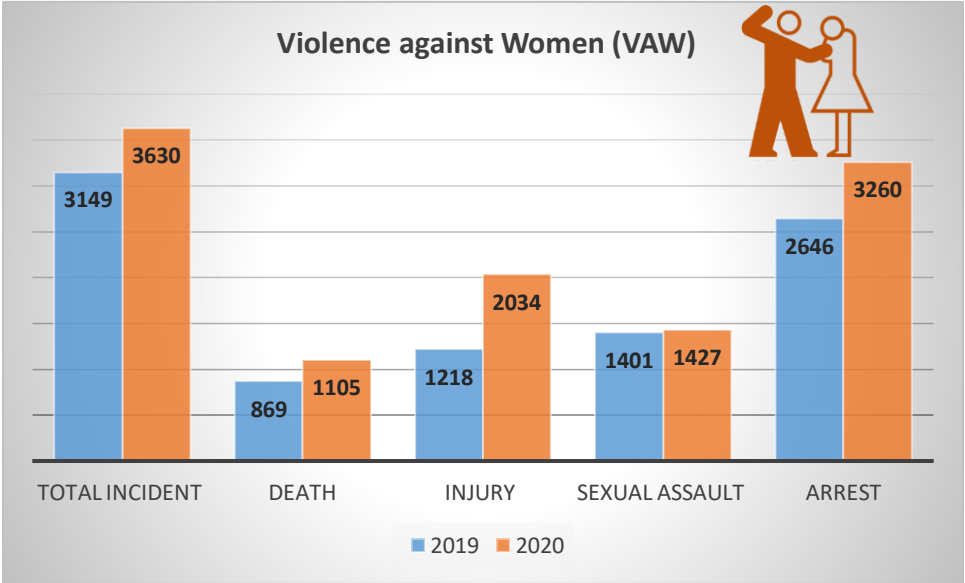
Appendix I

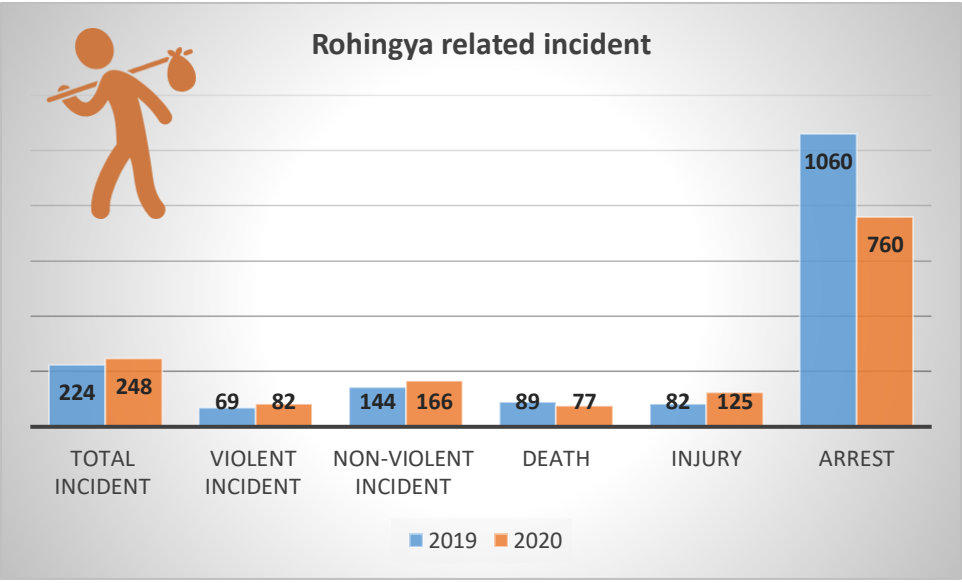
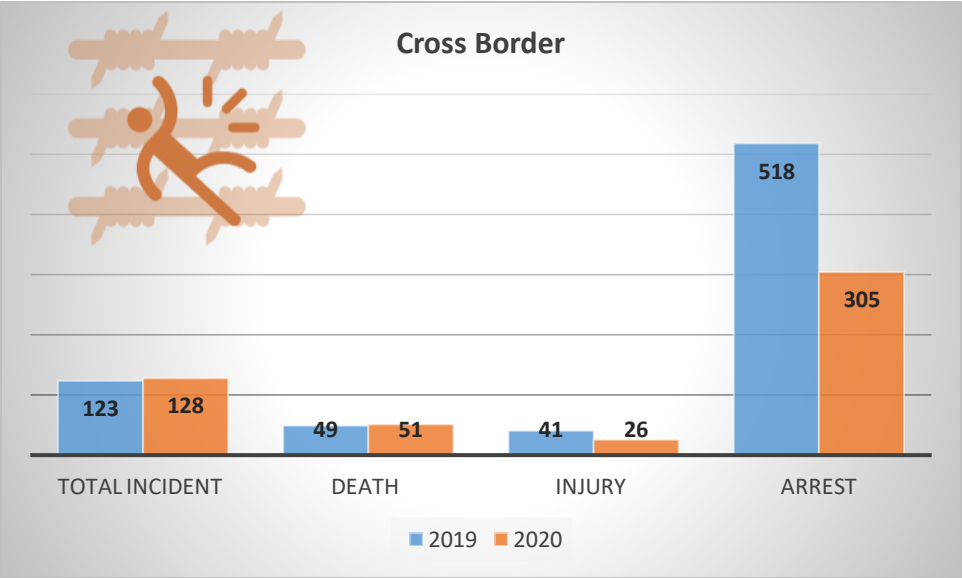
2019-2020 Data













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