

State of Peace 2021



STATE OF PEACE 2021

an initiative of

BPO- Bangladesh Peace Observatory



BPO Advisory Board

Stop Violence Coalition
Bangladesh Police
National Defence College
ActionAid
Society for Environment and Human Development
The Daily Star
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Editor

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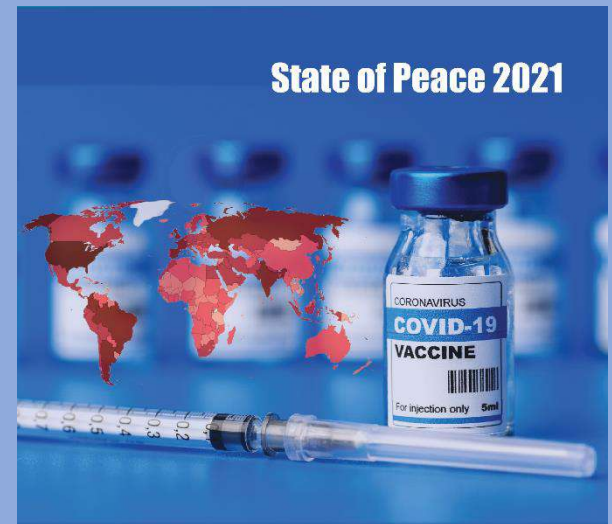
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From the Editor's Desk

Theorising violence has never stopped, and this is more because humans' recourse to violence has found newer pretexts, forms and means. Slavoj Žižek once categorised violence into subjective, symbolic, or systemic.¹ Subjective violence ("violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent") can attract the attention of scholars, the media, policymakers, and activists. On the other hand, symbolic violence ("embodied in language") and systemic violence ("catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems") are invisible and therefore attract little attention. However, the latter two are instrumental, mainly systemic, in reproducing subjective violence. But what about death and injury arising from the dismal state of public health measures as witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic? Should it not be considered equally violent stemming from the singularity of politics, with each state guarding its territorial borders and national state, making the virus no less infectious and deadlier than before? Can it be considered 'systemic'? Or, would it be categorised differently for trying to contain the virus territorially and nationally? With over 6.2 million deaths in the Covid-19 pandemic so far, could it be classified as violence stemming from the politics of singularity? I will certainly hesitate to answer in the negative. This is because the politics of singularity is at fault not only for the failure to keep the Covid-19 pandemic at endemic or epidemic levels but also for making the Covid-19 vaccines a tool of vaccine nationalism.

Vaccine nationalism is no different from other forms of nationalism; it tends to alienate, if not eliminate, those who do not conform to its territorialised form of life and living. In the process, vaccine nationalism, like other nationalisms, makes humans morally repugnant. As Rabindranath Tagore pointed out at the end of the First World War, when reflecting on the nation and nationalism unwittingly celebrated in the West:

A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organised for a mechanical purpose.... This organisation incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming strong and efficient. But this strenuous effort after strength and efficiency drains man's energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative. For thereby man's power of

¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Profile Books, 2009).

sacrifice is diverted from his ultimate object, which is moral, to the maintenance of this organisation, which is mechanical.²

Nowhere has Tagore’s contention become so accurate than in the case of vaccine nationalism. Several countries ended up in a rat race of inventing, producing, distributing, and even profiting from the Covid-19 vaccines, unmindful of its long-term impact on human relationships. Table I is a classical representation of the rat race:

Table I
List of Approved COVID-19 Vaccines

Vaccine	Company	Origin Country	First Authorization Date
Convidecia	CanSino Biologics	China	25 June 2020 ³
Sinopharm BIBP	Sinopharm	China	July 2020 ⁴
Sputnik V	Gamaleya Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology	Russia	11 August 2020 ⁵
CoronaVac	Sinovac Biotech	China	August 2020 ⁶
Pfizer–BioNTech	BioNTech & Pfizer	Germany & United States	2 December 2020 ⁷
Moderna	Moderna, NIAID, & BARDA	United States	18 December 2020 ⁸

² Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1917; Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1992), pp. 51-86.

³ Cited in <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-vaccine-idUSKBN2400DZ> Accessed 23 April 2022.

⁴ Cited in <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-vaccines-idUSKBN2500Z3> Accessed 23 April 2022.

⁵ Cited in <https://www.science.org/content/article/russia-s-approval-covid-19-vaccine-less-meets-press-release> Accessed 23 April 2022.

⁶ Cited in <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-vaccines-idUSKBN2500Z3> Accessed 23 April 2022.

⁷ Cited in <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-medicines-regulator-gives-approval-for-first-uk-covid-19-vaccine> Accessed 23 April 2022.

⁸ Cited in <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-takes-additional-action-fight-against-covid-19-issuing-emergency-use-authorization-second-covid> Accessed 23 April 2022.

Oxford–AstraZeneca	Oxford University & AstraZeneca	United Kingdom & Sweden	30 December 2020 ⁹
Covaxin	Bharat Biotech & Indian Council of Medical Research - National Institute of Virolog	India	3 January 2021 ¹⁰
Janssen	Janssen Vaccines, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, & Johnson & Johnson	Netherlands, Belgium, & United States	11 February 2021 ¹¹
Sinopharm WIBP	Sinopharm	China	25 February 2021 ¹²
Novavax	Novavax and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)	United States	20 December 2021 ¹³

Why was there no effort to produce the vaccines collectively, regionally or globally, knowing fully well that unless the bulk of the world's population is immunised, there is no easier way to stop the mutation of the virus? Why do saving human lives become less critical to countries than making profits or winning a geopolitical mileage, even when the latter has no meaning without the former?

However, more pathetic has been the case, exposing the dark side of humans, when the world found out that several developed countries, including Canada, the US, the UK, Australia and European Union, hoarded the Covid-19 vaccines. They even let them rot or shared them near the expiry date, which could not be used when sent abroad to the developing countries. As the following news media reported:

⁹ Cited in <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/oxford-universityastrazeneca-vaccine-authorized-by-uk-medicines-regulator> Accessed 23 April 2022.

¹⁰ Cited in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-55520658> Accessed 23 April 2022.

¹¹ Cited in https://web.archive.org/web/20210213124358/https://www.gov.vc/images/pdf_documents/SRO-Public_Health_Emergency_Authorisation_of_Covid-19_Vaccine.pdf Accessed 23 April 2022.

¹² Cited in <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-vaccine-idUSKBN2AP1MW> Accessed 23 April 2022.

¹³ Cited in <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-recommends-nuvaxovid-authorisation-eu> Accessed 23 April 2022.

Nigeria has recently had to destroy more than 1.06 million doses of expired AstraZeneca vaccines. Faisal Shuaib, head of Nigeria's National Primary Health Care Development Agency, condemned that "We had developed countries that procured these vaccines and hoarded them. At the point they were about to expire, they offered them for donation." He also announced recently that Nigeria would no longer accept such donations. Previously, some media outlets had disclosed that through the WHO's COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), some of the doses arrived in Nigeria from Europe within four to six weeks of expiry, and could not be used in time.

This is not an isolated case. Reports showed that Senegal is likely to destroy approximately 400,000 doses of expired COVID-19 vaccines by the end of this year. Malawi burned nearly 20,000 doses of expired COVID-19 vaccines in May, and the Democratic Republic of Congo also returned in April 1.3 million doses of vaccines for the same reason.¹⁴

But the point that needs to be flagged is that such hoarding is so self-defeating, even suicidal, that it boggles one's mind as to why countries would resort to such a thing. This is because the more the people remain unvaccinated and with lesser immunity against the virus, the greater the chance for the virus to mutate and make the vaccine ineffectual. The following commentary against vaccine hoarding highlights this well:

Vaccination is currently the strongest weapon if we have to avoid the emergence of new variants. Experts say that only a significant level of global immunity can limit the spread of new variants as well as reduce the opportunity for them to emerge in the first place. It is high time that rich countries start diverting doses to the developing world as inequitable distribution of vaccines will only prolong the pandemic.¹⁵

Our only hope is that countries would heed such warnings and attempt to overcome vaccine nationalism and the pitfalls of the politics of singularity. Looking back at 2021 doesn't give us much hope, but it does push us to think creatively and work more.

¹⁴ "Destruction of expired COVID-19 vaccines in Africa a shame for the West: Global Times editorial," *Global Times*, 26 December 2021. See, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202112/1243364.shtml>. Accessed on 26 April 2022.

¹⁵ Krishna Veera Vanamali & Bhaswar Kumar, "Vaccine hoarding by some countries leading to new Covid-19 variants?" *Business Standard*, 2 December 2021. See, https://www.business-standard.com/podcast/international/vaccine-hoarding-by-some-countries-leading-to-new-covid-19-variants-121120200103_1.html. Accessed on 26 April 2022.

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 2012- February 2022. 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 2021, BPO recorded more than a total of 14682 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>

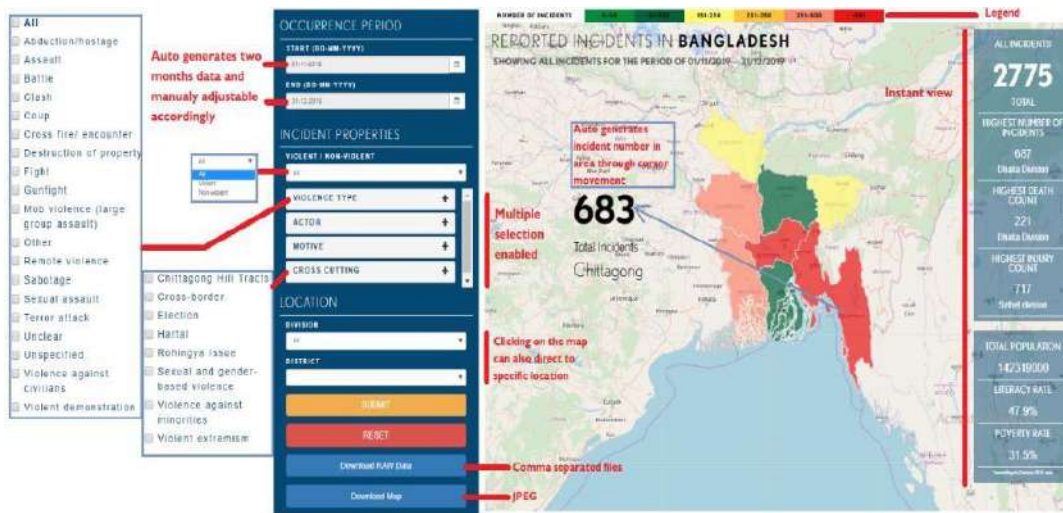


Figure 2: Cluster Map: <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/homecluster-new>

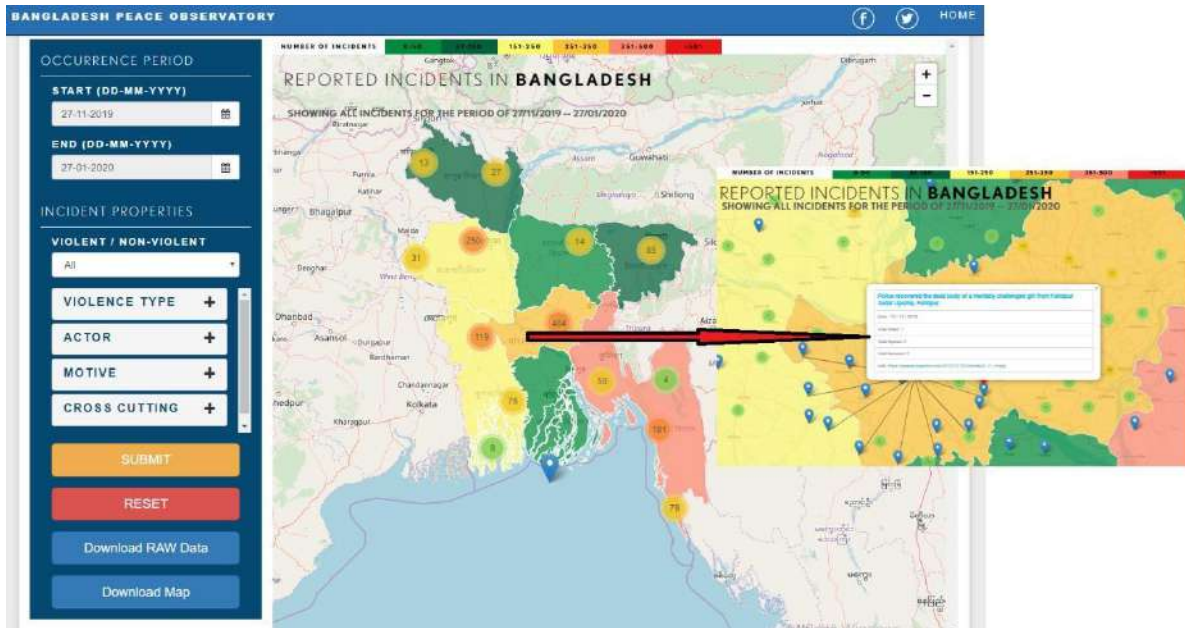


Figure 4: BPO On-Platform Data Analysis

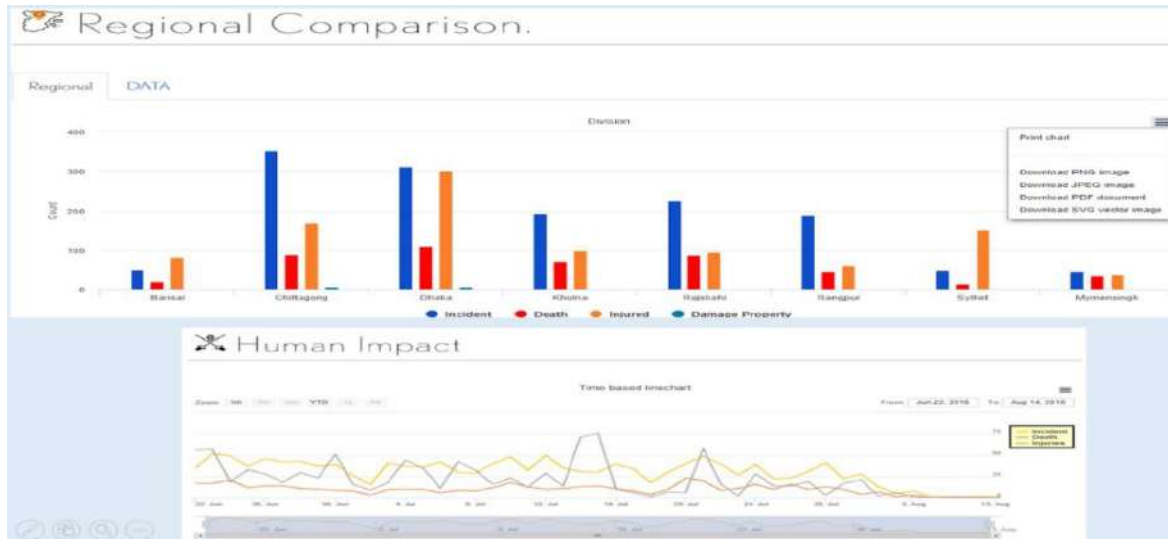


Figure 5: BPO Raw Data

The image shows a screenshot of an Excel spreadsheet titled "peccerawdata Sample - Excel". The spreadsheet contains a large table of data with columns labeled A through Z. The data includes various identifiers, dates, and numerical values. The interface includes standard Excel menus like FILE, HOME, INSERT, and FORMULAS, along with a ribbon for editing and formatting.

CGS Peace Report

As a part of BPO initiative, CGS publishes Peace Report to provide an understanding of thematic situations. Twenty-five CGS Peace Reports have been published so far covering a number of issues. The latest CGS Peace Report focuses on the State of Zero Violence in Bangladesh. In the year 2021, CGS has published a total of Six Peace Reports including a Special Issue on the Return of the Taliban in Afghanistan; available at: http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/peace_report



Crime and Violence in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO
 Prisoners in the throes of coronavirus: the global and the local
 Prisoners released in the COVID-19 pandemic: Regional & Global Overview



COVID-19 Vaccination in Bangladesh: An Overview
 Vaccine Nationalism in the Age of the Anthropocene
 COVID-19 Vaccine Diplomacy: A New Foreign Policy Perspective
 - Ambassador PM. Shahidul Haque



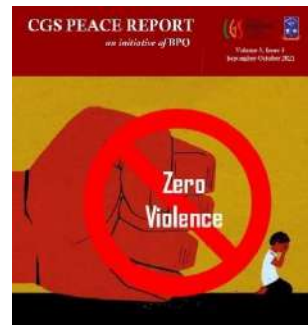
The Return of the Taliban in Afghanistan: a critical assessment



Covid-19 and Women Workers: A Perspective from Bangladesh
 The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Labour Migration and Remittance Income in Bangladesh
 Labour Migration and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Regional and Global Overview



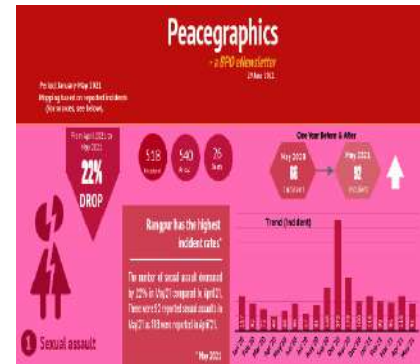
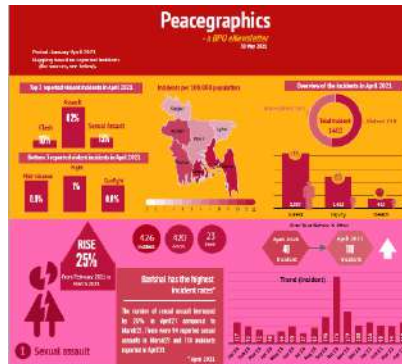
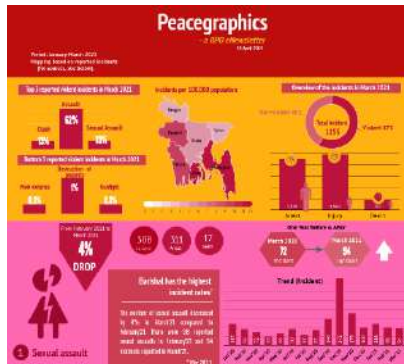
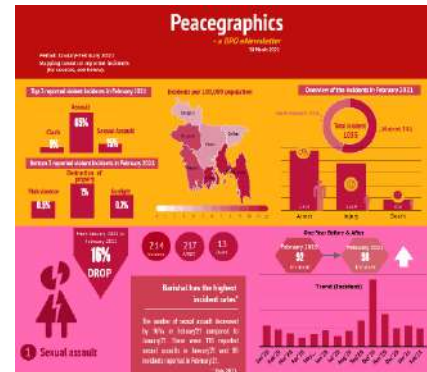
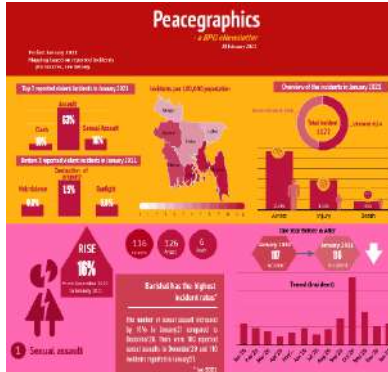
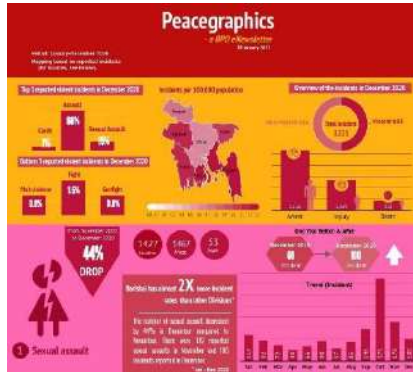
Land, Resource Scarcity and the Health of Violence in Bangladesh
 Land, Resource Scarcity and the Health of Violence in Bangladesh
 Land, Resource Scarcity and the Health of Violence in Bangladesh
 The Gendered loss of livelihoods and the health of violence in Bangladesh



The State of Zero Violence in Bangladesh
 Crime and Violence in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO

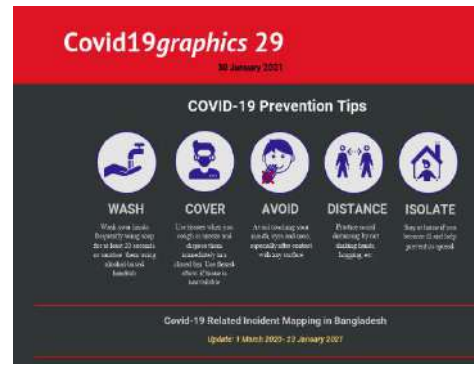
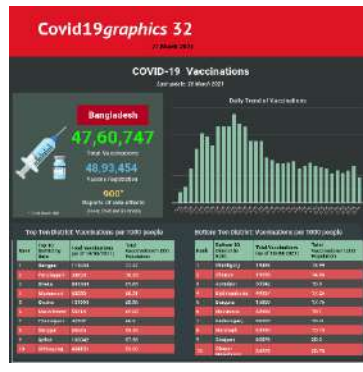
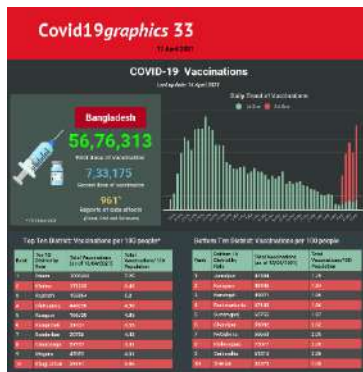
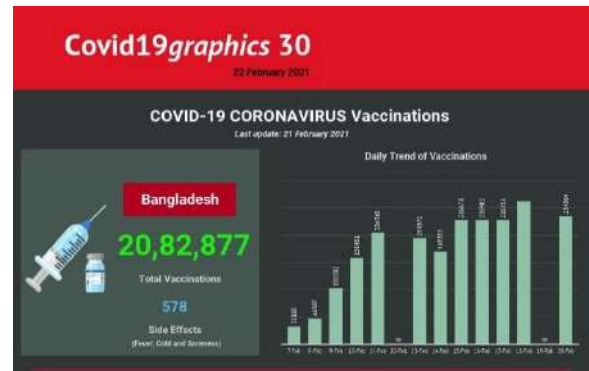
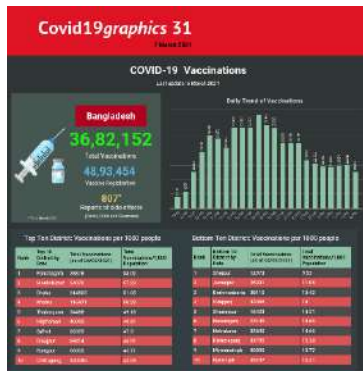
Peacegraphics

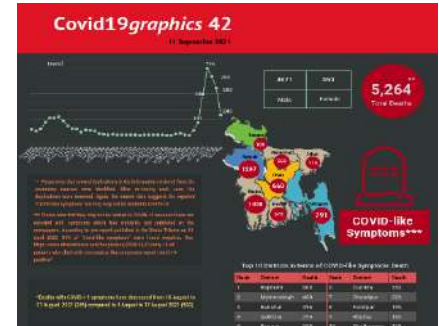
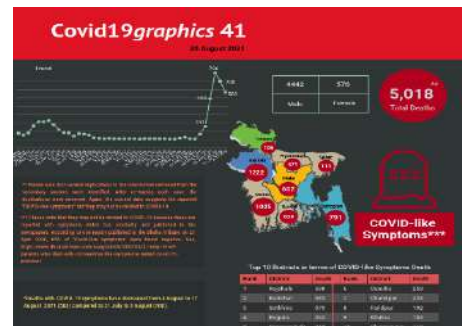
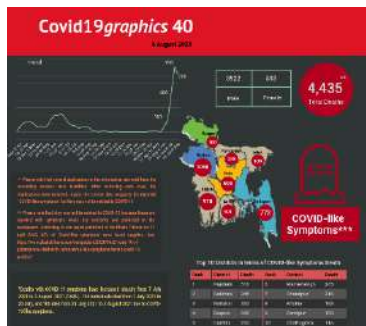
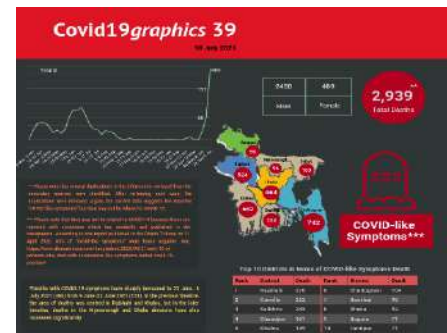
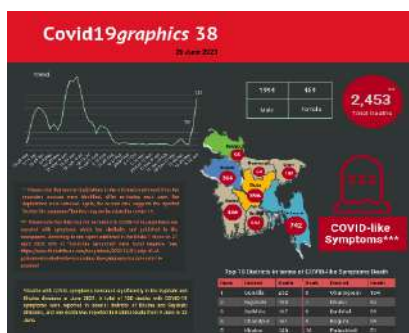
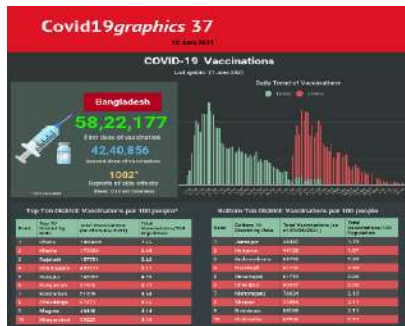
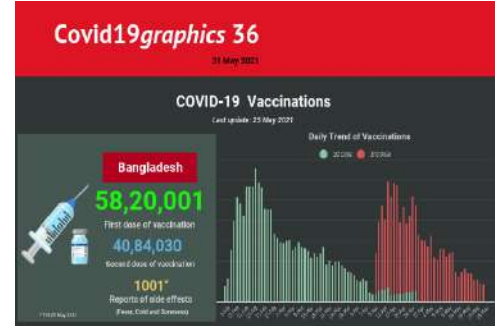
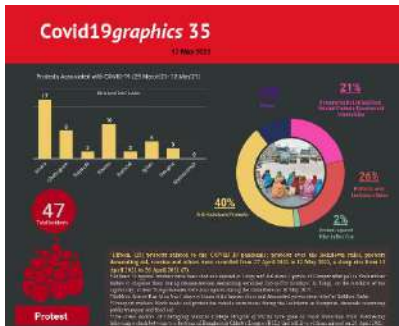
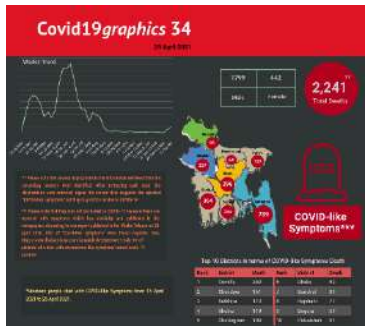
Peacegraphics are published online on BPO website to visually comprehend the monthly and weekly data on violence situation of Bangladesh. In the year 2021, CGS has published a total 9 Peacegraphics over the year; available at: <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/highlights>. A quick look to the latest issues is given for reader's interest.



COVID19graphics

COVID19graphics address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by highlighting data under different categories. On the year 2021, BPO published 15 issues (Covid19graphics 28-42) via COVID-19 mapping on weekly basis; available at: <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/highlights>





Electiongraphics

Electiongraphics 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.

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 regard, 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, seven 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 2021, a total of four researchers were awarded with the fellowship.

Joint Programme with Advisory Board Members

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.



Stop Violence Coalition



Bangladesh Police



National Defense College



Centre for Genocide Studies



University of Dhaka



Society for Environment and Human Development

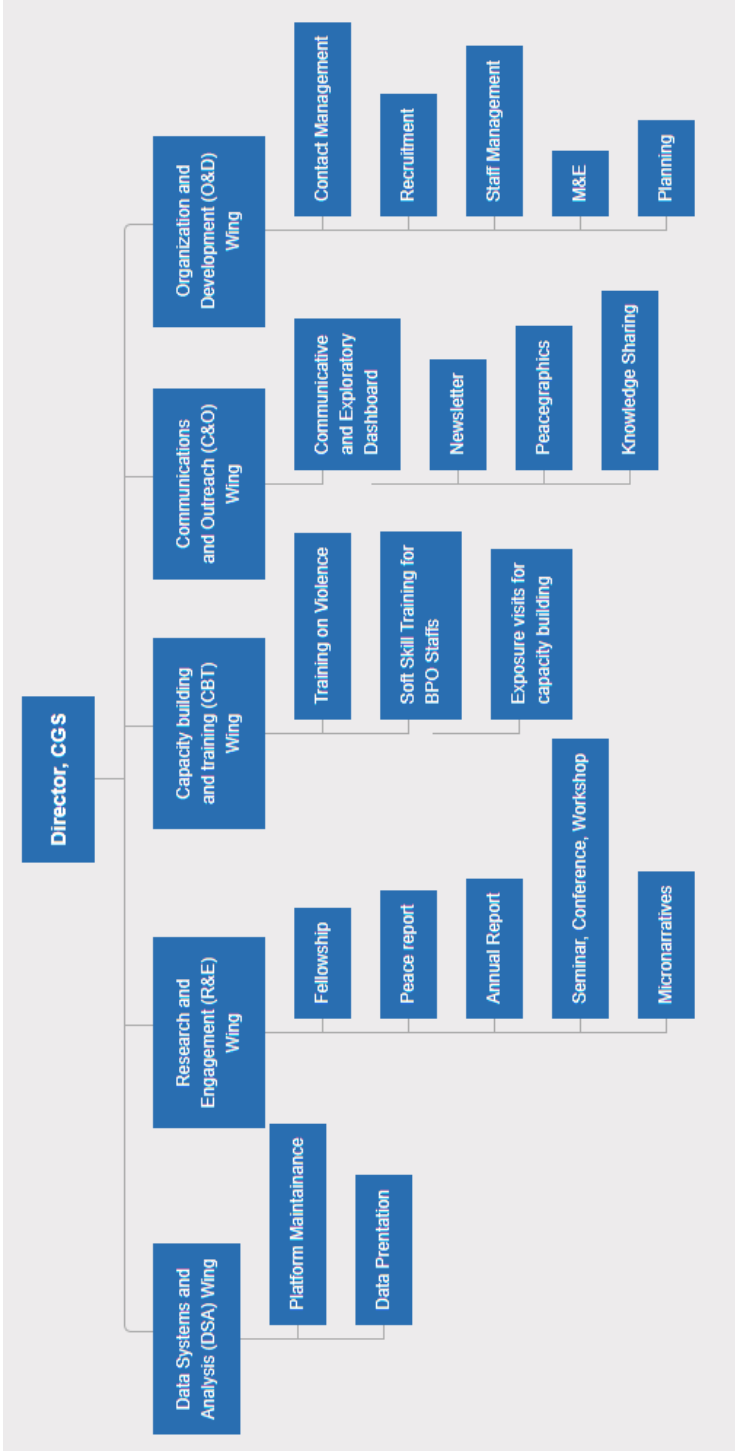


Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Daily Star

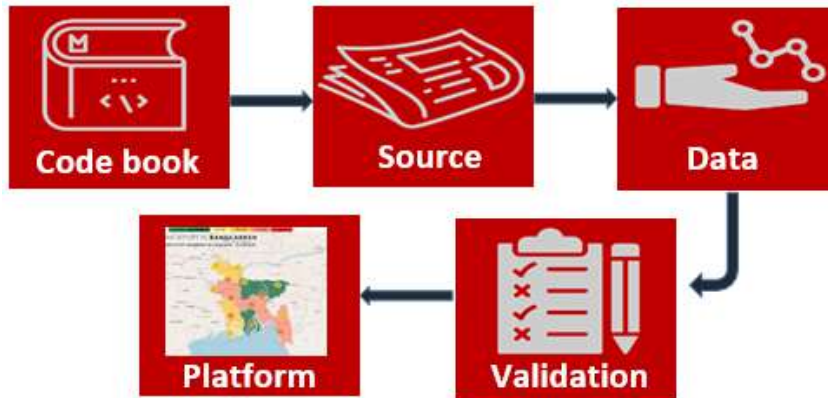
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Bangladesh Peace Observatory: Organogram



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 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*. Eight full-time Research Data Analysts (RDAs) are now working for BPO to collect data from the aforementioned newspapers back and forth.

Crime and violence update of 2021

Faizah Sultana¹⁶

The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) brings together different streams of publicly available data on violence using news reports from prominent national and regional dailies. From January to December 2021, BPO recorded a total of 7075 non-violent¹⁷ and 7607 violent incidents¹⁸. Figure 1 shows the monthly segregation of the incidents, and figure 2 shows the comparison of the number of violent and non-violent incidents from 2014 to 2021.

Overview of 2021

Covid-19 had dominated the year 2020 with fear, panic and morbidity; and 2021 also experienced the same situation as of 2020. Bangladeshi people experienced many lockdowns and shutdowns in 2020 and 2021 as well. Infection and death numbers were recorded frequently as several variants of Coronavirus spread in the country. The government of Bangladesh imposed lockdowns from time to time till 11 August 2021. After that, normal day-to-day activities were resumed, offices, factories, and businesses were opened.¹⁹ ²⁰ On 7 February 2021, the mass vaccination program for COVID-19 started.²¹ The initiative faced a challenge in the beginning, as

¹⁶ Research Data Analyst, Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), Centre for Genocide Studies, University of Dhaka.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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

¹⁹ 'COVID-19 timeline in Bangladesh', *Better Work*, cited in- <https://betterwork.org/portfolio/covid-timeline-in-bangladesh/> , Last Accessed on- 3 March 2022.

²⁰ 'Lockdown: Govt announces nationwide strict shutdown from Monday for a week' , The Daily Star, 26 June 2021, Cited in- <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/lockdown-2118105> , Last accessed on- 2 March 2022.

²¹ 'Bangladesh starts COVID vaccination drive', *Al Jazeera*, 28 January 2021, Cited in- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/28/bangladesh-starts-covid-vaccination-drive> , Last accessed on- 3 March 2022.

India reneged on the promised shipment of vaccines.^{22 23} Despite that setback, as per the COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard for Bangladesh, almost 73% of the population of Bangladesh have received the first dose of the vaccine, 51% received 2nd dose and 5% people had received the 3rd dose against the 2nd dose as of 7 March 2022.²⁴ The educational institutions were closed for an extended period from 16 March 2020, and as of December, the academic activities were not restored to the previous state. The vaccination of university students and students above 12 years has been made mandatory for them to attend a physical class.^{25 26}

On 21 June 2021, the first phase of the Union Parishad (UP) election started. The elections were primarily scheduled for April 2021 but postponed due to the Covid-19 surge. Till 26 December, the fourth phase of the UP election was complete in a total of 3037 Union Parishads.²⁷

Figure 1 shows the comparison of violent and non-violent incidents in 2021. The violent incidents are more than non-violent ones, and in the first and last three months of the year, non-violent incidents were low. In December, the number of violent incidents was significantly low. Figure 2 shows the yearly trend of incidents. It provides a comparison of 2021 with the previous years. Figure 3 depicts a bi-monthly comparison of incidents between 2020 and 2021.

²² 'India Cuts Back on Vaccine Exports as Infections Surge at Home', *The New York Times*, 25 March 2021, Cited in- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/25/world/asia/india-covid-vaccine-astrazeneca.html>, Last Accessed on- 4 March 2022.

²³ 'COVID: Bangladesh faces vaccine shortage as India halts exports', *DW*, 14 April 2021, Cited in- <https://www.dw.com/en/bangladesh-india-coronavirus-vaccine/a-57200281>, Last accessed on-2 February 2022.

²⁴ DGHS, *COVID-19 Dashboard for Bangladesh*, Cited in- <https://dghs-dashboard.com/pages/covid19-vaccination-update.php> last Accessed on- 8 March 2022.

²⁵ 'Bangladesh to lift Covid restrictions on Feb 22', *The Financial Express*, 21 February 2022, Cited in- <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/bangladesh-to-lift-covid-restrictions-on-feb-22-1645356309>, Last accessed on- 3 March 2022.

²⁶ 'In-person classes to resume 22 Feb except for primary schools', *The Business Standard*, 17 February 2022, Cited in- <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/educational-institutions-reopen-22-feb-dipu-moni-372043>, Last Accessed on- 3 March 2022.

²⁷ '7th phase of UP elections on Feb 7', *The Daily Star*, 29 December 2021, Cited in- <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/elections/news/7th-phase-elections-feb-7-2928281>, Last accessed on- 2 March 2022.

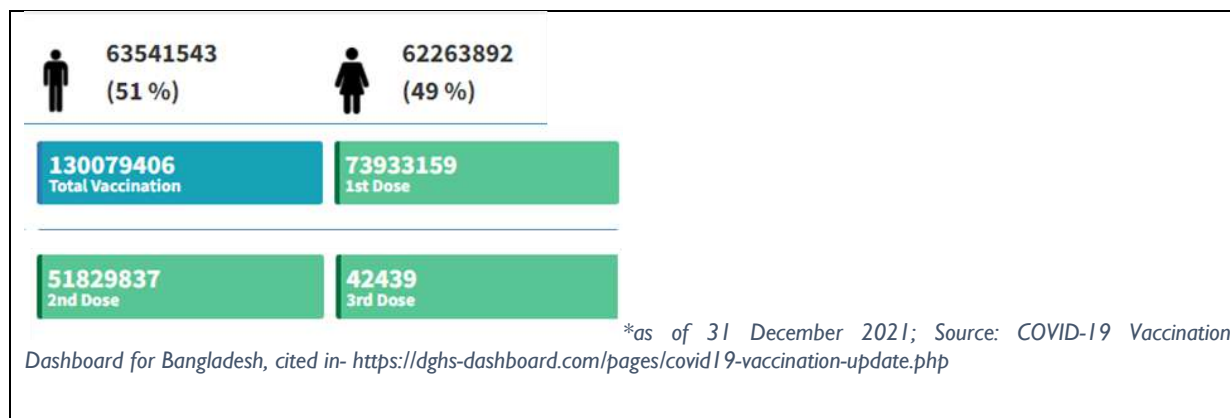


Figure I: Monthly Segregation of Violent and Non-violent Incidents in 2021

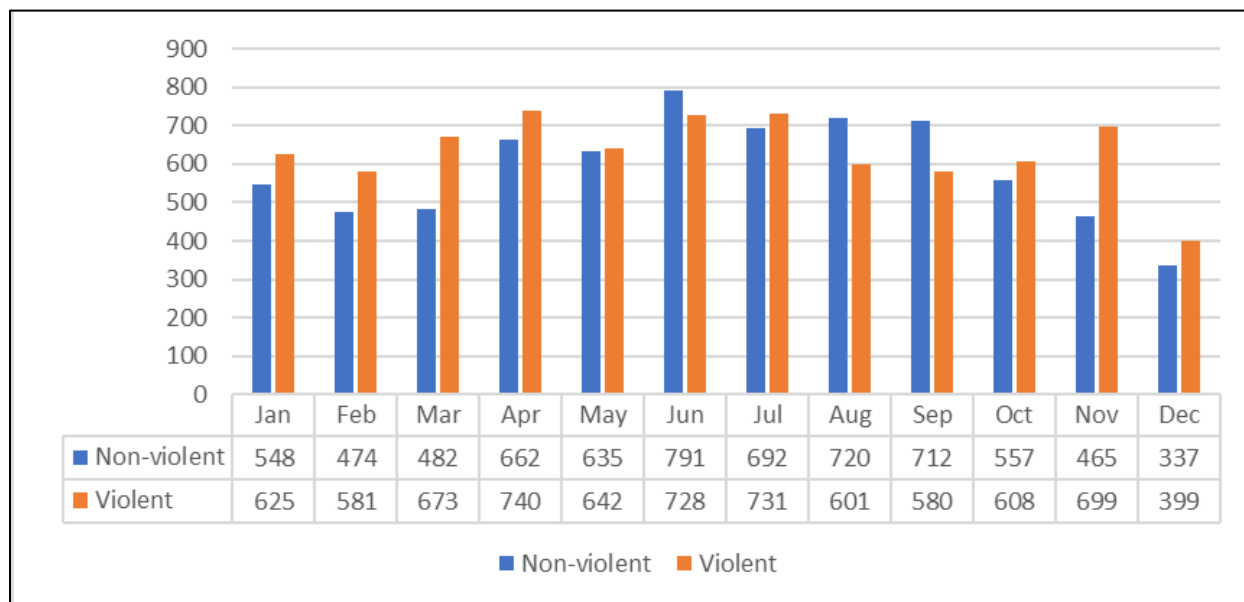


Figure 2: Yearly Trend of Violent and Non-violent Incidents in 2014-21

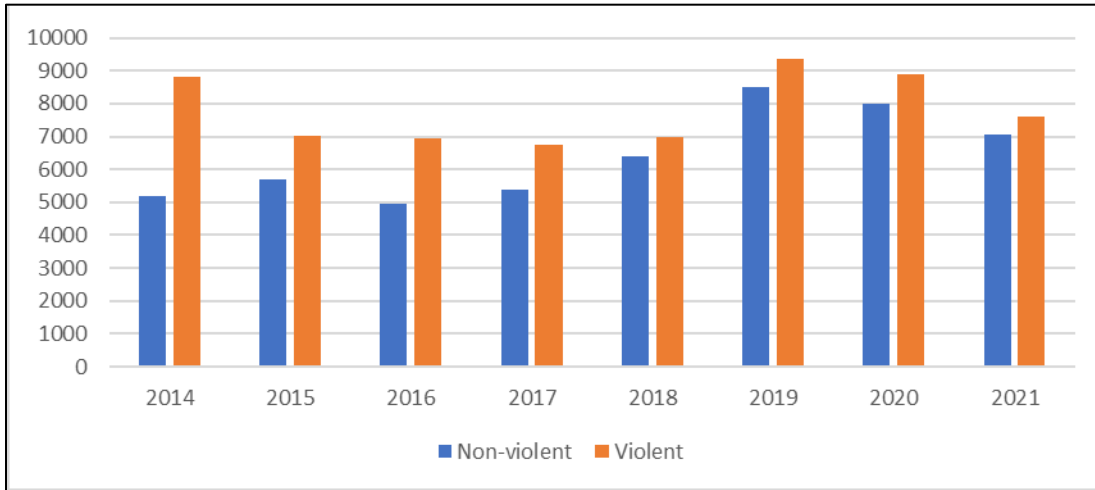
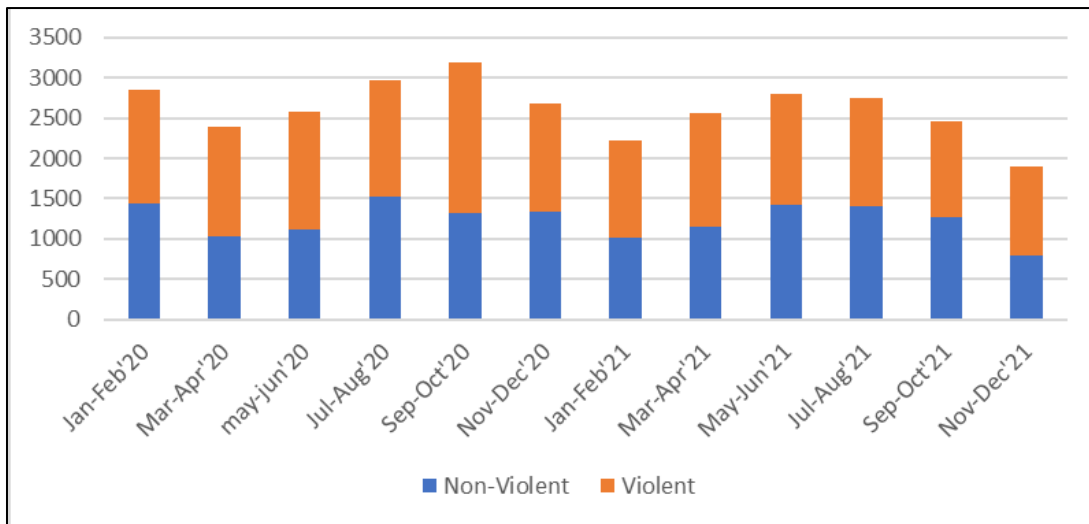


Figure 3: Bi-monthly Comparison of Violent and Non-violent Incident in 2020-21



According to BPO data, the total number of incidents decreased by 13% in 2021 than in 2020. The number of violent incidents dropped by 14.5%, and non-violent incidents declined by 11.4%. Table 1 shows the major categories of violence, which were the primary violence types of the reported violent incidents. The details of the categories are added to the annex. Table 2 shows the increase/decrease in the number of total deaths, injuries, sexually assaults, abductions and arrests in 2021.

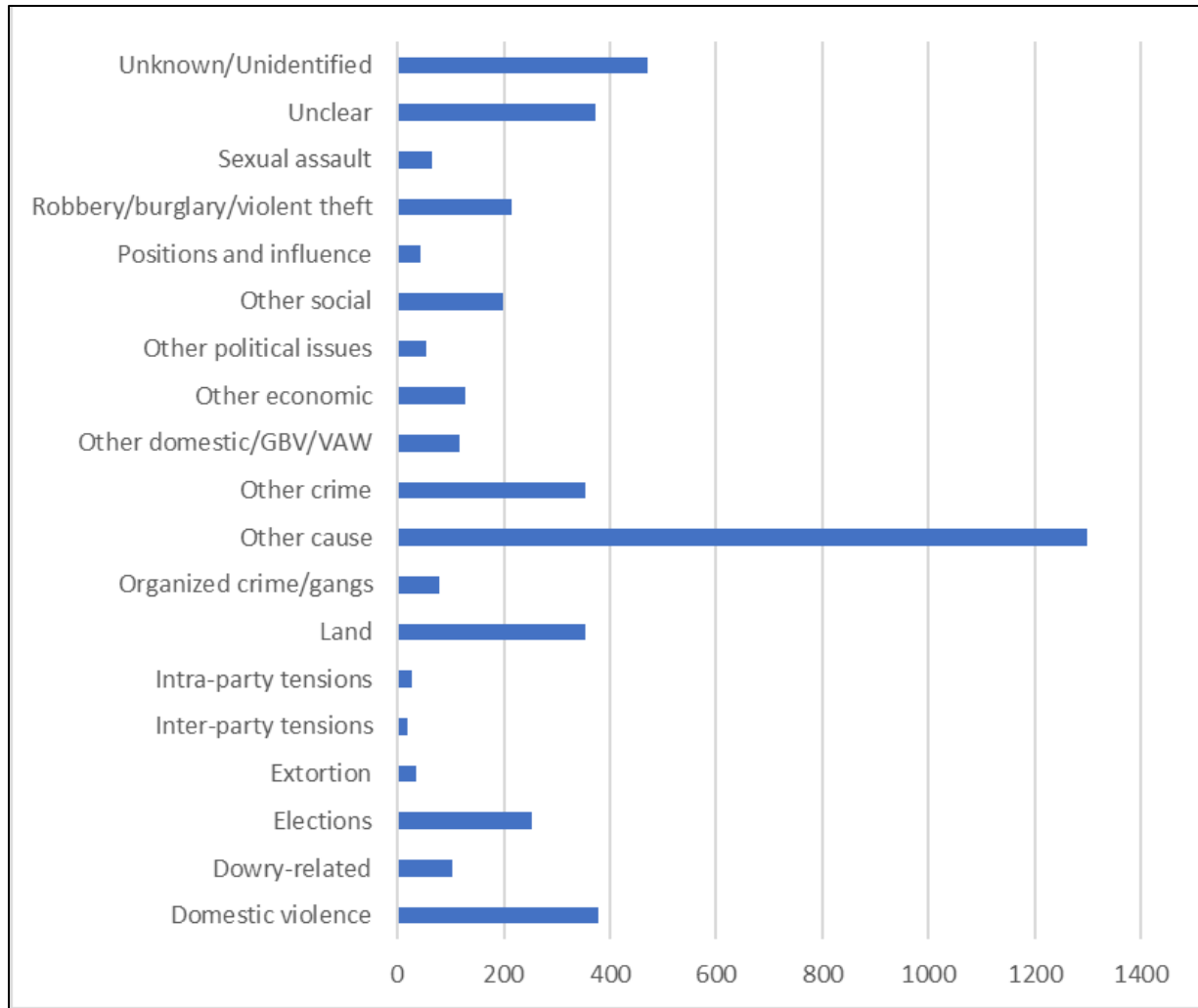
Table 1: Quarterly Segregation of Major Violence Types in 2021					
Types	Quarter 1: January- March	Quarter 2: April- June	Quarter 3: July- September	Quarter 4: October- December	Total
Assault	1193	1344	1079	1073	4689
Clash	200	200	129	285	814
Sexual Assault	278	310	370	155	1113
Fight	59	20	25	33	137
Abduction/Hostage	47	65	57	26	195
Gunfight	10	15	14	11	50
Destruction of Property	26	28	11	64	129
Mob violence	9	17	17	8	51
Other	16	55	194	4	269
Unclear	32	41	3	45	121
Unspecified	2	16	1		19
Violent Demonstration	2	5	5		12

Table 2: Yearly Comparison of Consequences (2020-21)					
Years	Total Killed	Total Injured	Total Sexually Assaulted	Total Abducted	Total Arrested
2020	4935	15332	1448	377	31348
2021	4128	17322	1201	279	35687
Increase/Decrease	-16.4	13.0	-17.1	-26.0	14

Understanding the High Number of Assaults

BPO enlists the inter-personal attacks carried out by different parties against one person/persons by other person/persons for different motives under the assault category. BPO recorded a total of 4689 cases of assaults in 2021. The motives include domestic violence, dowry-related, land and other enmities related to economic factors, social-personal rivalry, attacks with criminal intent, suicide attempts, etc. (see Figure 4). Under the assault category, 2535 suicide and attempted suicide cases were reported, and in those cases, 2543 people were killed, including 1366 women. Besides, the recovery of unidentified dead bodies is also enlisted under this category.

Figure 4: Major Motives of Assault in 2021



Increase in Number of Clashes

The total number of clashes increased in 2021 than 2020 (723 to 814). The fourth quarter of 2021 has seen more clashes than in previous quarters (see Table 1). A total of 10760 people were injured in clashes in 2021, including 45 women. The number of injuries due to the clashes accounts for 60% of the total injured people in whole year. Two hundred thirteen people were killed, including 42 women. There are three reported clashes in the Rohingya camps between the camp dwellers. The major motives of these clashes are election-related violence, political tension within and between groups, social rivalry, control over land or natural resource, economic and business-related feuds, social and personal petty issues etc. From 21 June to 26 December 2021, UP elections were held across the country in four phases. There were 108 clashes which resulted in more than 20 injured persons. The majority of the election-related violence was in Dhaka, Barishal, Chattogram and Rajshahi. Table 3 shows the top 20 districts where most clashes took place in 2021.

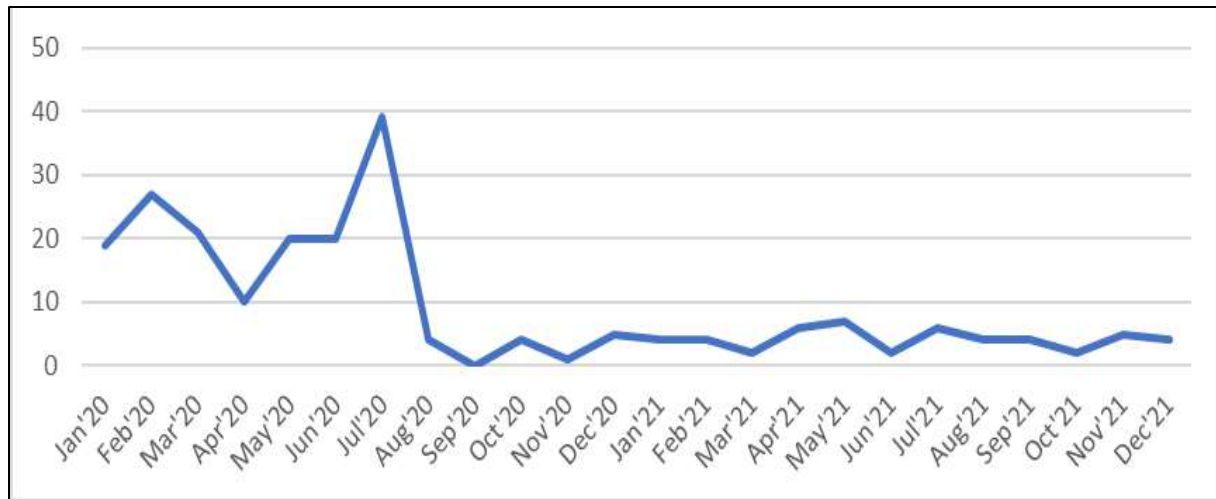
Chattogram	71	Sirajganj	21
Barishal	41	Noakhali	19
Bogura	37	Pabna	19
Patuakhali	32	Pirojpur	19
Narayanganj	27	Sunamganj	18
Habiganj	26	Kishoreganj	17
Madaripur	26	Rajshahi	17
Brahmanbaria	23	Jhenaidah	16
Cox's Bazar	23	Naogaon	16
Dhaka	22	Bhola	15

Low Number of Gunfights Persists in 2021

The number of gunfights was within single-digit per month throughout the year. This trend is very different compared to the previous years. Figures 5 and 6 give a glimpse of the significant contrast between 2021 and previous years. According to BPO data, from 2014 to 2017, most of the gunfights were between law enforcement agencies and different criminals, mostly robbers,

smugglers, local goons, etc. In 2018, not only the number of gunfights more than doubled, the gunfights took place mostly during raids by law enforcement agencies against alleged drug peddlers. In May 2018, a country-wide crackdown against alleged drug peddlers and businesses was initiated, resulting in numerous arrests and many deaths of suspected drug peddlers.²⁸ In 2019, the number declined slightly. But from August 2020, the number of gunfights drastically dropped. In August 2020, a retired Major of the Bangladesh Army was killed in a reported gunfight.²⁹ This event might have influenced the sudden decline in gunfights in the following months of 2020 and 2021.

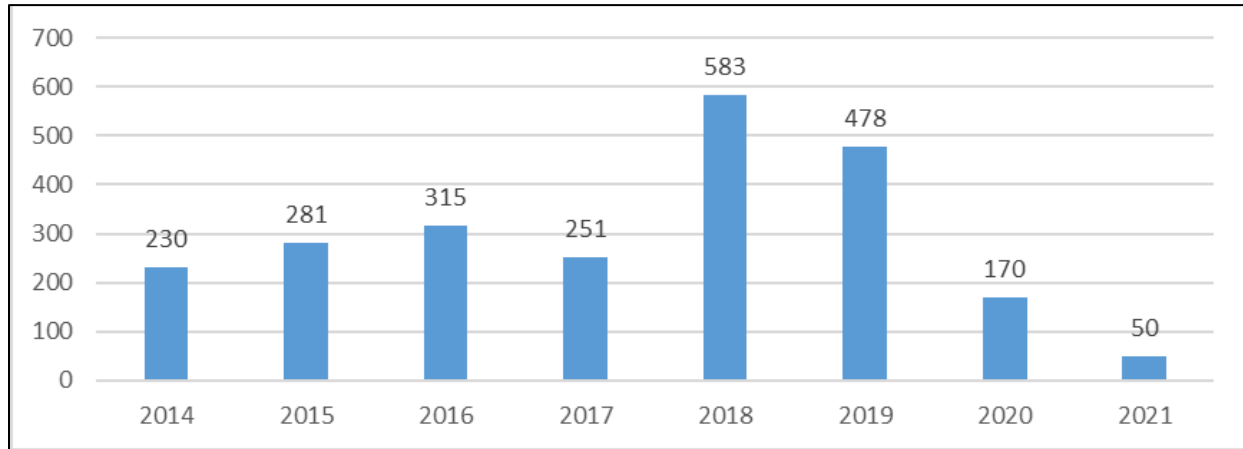
Figure 5: Monthly trend of gunfight in 2020-21



²⁸ 'Crackdown on drug peddlers to continue: Home Minister', *The Financial Express*, 21 May 2018, Cited in - <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/crackdown-on-drug-peddlers-to-continue-home-minister-1526912325> , Last Accessed on- 3 March 2022.

²⁹ 'Sinha killed as he came to know of OC Pradeep's illicit activities' *The Prothom Alo(English)* , 13 Dec 2020 , Cited in - <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/sinha-killed-as-he-came-to-know-of-oc-pradeeps-illicit-activities> , Last Accessed on- 2 March 2022.

Figure 6: Number of Gunfights from 2014 to 2021



Decrease in Sexual Assault

The number of sexual assaults decreased by 12.5% in 2021 than in 2020. Approximately 60% of the victims were minor girls. The number of boys who were victims of reported sexual assaults was 23. Not only young boys were victims, but in 33 cases, minor boys were reportedly accused of perpetrating sexual offences. The perpetrators of the incidents of sexual assaults are men of different ages, family members, teachers, neighbours, local goons, eve-teasers, known or unknown persons to the victims, etc.

Abduction

The number of abduction incidents has decreased slightly compared to 2020. Most of the abductions were for ransom, but sexual assault and personal enmity also played as motives in some reported cases. The majority of abducted were children, especially girls. There were 22 incidents of Rohingya related abductions and in four cases, Rohingyas abducted local people, and, in the rest of the cases, the Rohingyas were targeted.

Destruction of Property

In 2021, the number of incidents related to destruction of property increased significantly (from 91 to 129). In 2021, the election-related vandalism increased during the City Corporation election and UP elections starting from June to December. Also, vandalism and destruction of property triggered by religious motives were also high this year. BPO records 38 incidents of Hindu temple vandalism in 2021 which was 13 in 2020.

Violence-Population Nexus

Figure 7 provides a spatial glimpse through the divisional distribution of the recorded incidents and their consequences. The graph illustrates that Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi are the first, second, and third, respectively, in terms of the death counts, Injury counts and arrest numbers. In addition, these three divisions are the most populous in Bangladesh.

But if the population ratio³⁰ is applied to understand the incident prevalence and its consequences, then a different picture emerges. In that case, the Barishal division has the highest female death rate, female injury rate, sexual assault rate, and second-highest injury rate. The Khulna division ranks 1st in terms of death rates. Chattogram occupies the third-highest position in every category except sexual assault. Sylhet has the highest position in case of injury rates.

³⁰ The population data is based on the Population & Housing Census 2011, Bangladesh by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Cited in: <http://www.bbs.gov.bd/site/page/47856ad0-7e1c-4aab-bd78-892733bc06eb/Population-and-Housing-Census> , Accessed on- 02 January 2022

Figure 7: Comparison of incidents of consequences in 2021

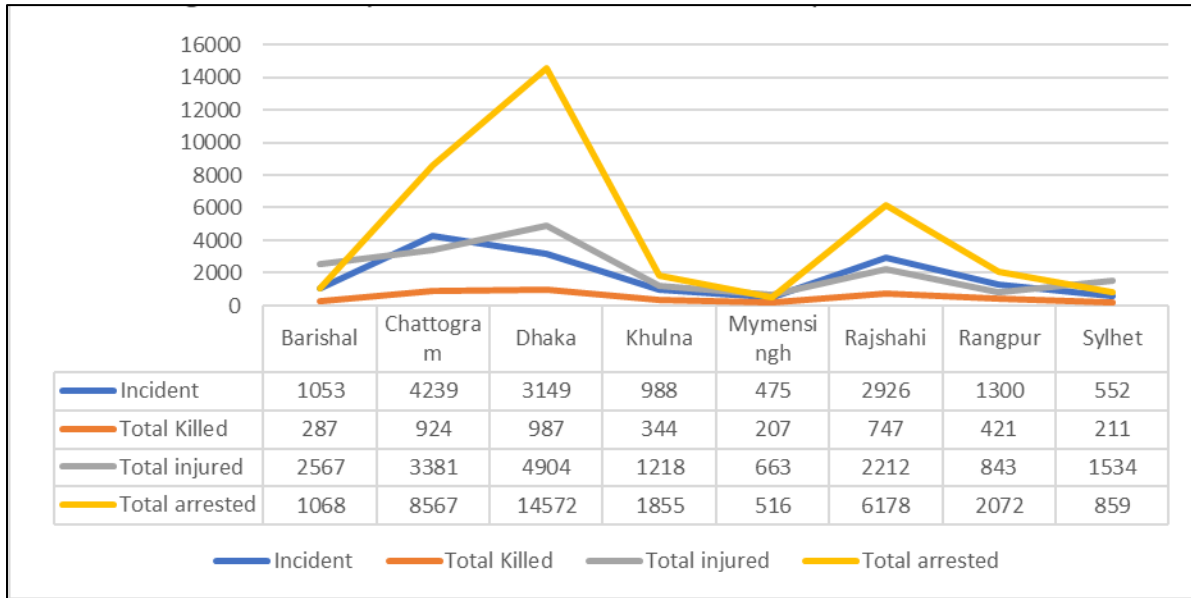


Table 4: Divisional Segregation of The Consequences (Per million)

Division	Avg. death in 1 year	Rate in per Million	Avg. Female Death in 1 year	Rate per Million	Avg. Injury in 1 year	Rate Per million	Avg. Female Injury in 1 year	Rate Per million	Avg. Sexual Assault in 1 year	Rate Per million
Barishal	250	30.06	96	11.50(1 st)	1575	189.14(2 nd)	171	20.58(1 st)	78	9.31 (1 st)
Chittagong	905	31.04 (3 rd)	242	8.31(3 rd)	3698	126.89(3 rd)	270	9.26(3 rd)	146	5.02
Dhaka	1260	25.33	413	8.31(3 rd)	5418	108.95	422	8.49	276	5.55(3 rd)
Khulna	516	32.90(1 st)	129	8.19	1702	108.48	135	8.57	77	4.92
Mymensingh	248	21.78	74	6.53	927	81.50	75	6.59	50	4.36
Rajshahi	600	32.46 (2 nd)	203	10.95 (2 nd)	1692	91.52	177	9.56(2 nd)	113	6.12(2 nd)
Rangpur	346	21.93	128	8.09	985	62.41	118	7.49	78	4.92
Sylhet	243	24.79	66	6.74	2825	288.03(1 st)	83	8.49	42	4.31

Gender Based Violence: An Overview of Trends in the Context of the Shadow Pandemic Phenomenon

Sadia Afreen Proma¹

Introduction: Global Overview

According to WHO estimates, globally about 1 in 3 (30 per cent) of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime, and 18 per cent have experienced such violence in the past 12 months.² In the most extreme cases, violence against women is lethal: globally, an estimated 137 women are killed by their intimate partner or a family member every day.³

These statistics are alarming and a major factor behind it, is the power relations existing within gender relations, where women are perceived to be weaker. Gendered violence is a worldwide phenomenon impacting disproportionately upon women and children. Gender-based violence takes numerous forms, and a broad spectrum has to be taken into consideration while discussing this issue. Intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking for sexual exploitation, female infanticide, and ‘honour’ killings are happening all around the world, with intimate partner violence occurring at staggering rates in every country. Due to the social status that girls and women occupy due to the existing gender construction, girls and women are often deprived of nutrition and education; and preference is given to boy child and male members of the family in these respects.

Specifically, violence against women – most predominantly intimate partner violence and sexual violence has always been a major public health problem and a violation of women's human rights. It is the most pervasive yet least visible and somewhat normalised form of human rights violation.

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² “Violence against women”, World Health Organization, 9 March 2021. Cited in <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/factsheets/detail/violence-against-women>. Accessed on 27 February 2022.

³ *Ibid.*

It includes physical, sexual, mental or economic harm inflicted on a person because of socially attributed power imbalances between genders.⁴ This has a strong correlation to women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health. The UN defines violence against women as "*any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.*"⁵

The entire situation has been exacerbated during lockdowns in the COVID-19 pandemic. Worldwide, women have been exposed to abusive partners and known risk factors as their access to services for remedy had become severely limited. The latter is not surprising as similar scenarios have been observed during armed conflict, natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies.

Home is supposed to be a safe haven for people but in many instances, women and children have become victims of sexual and physical assault by their intimate partners, family members in their own homes. Worldwide, almost one third (27 per cent) of women aged 15-49 years who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.⁶ In many communities, violence against girls and women is expected and even accepted. In Guinea, for instance, 89 per cent of girls and women between the ages 15-24 believe that men beating their wives is justified under at least one condition.⁷

⁴ 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.

⁵ Declaration on the elimination of violence against women, United Nations. New York: UN, 1993.

⁶ "Violence against women", World Health Organization, 9 March 2021. Cited in <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>. Accessed on 27 February 2022.

⁷ "Gender-Based Violence Around The World", Save the Children, 12 August 2021. Cited in <https://givingcompass.org/article/gender-based-violence-around-the-world/>. Accessed on 27 February 2022.

Figure 1: Percentages of Women Who Experience Intimate Partner Violence in Countries Across Asia-Pacific. Source: UNFPA, July 2020.⁸



Percentages of women who experience intimate partner violence in countries across Asia-Pacific. Image: UNFPA, July 2020

Female genital mutilation is becoming less common in some countries, but there are at least 200 million girls and women alive today who have been subjected to this specific form of violence across Africa and the Middle East, where this practice is most prevalent. Cyber harassment is a

⁸ UNFPA Data, July 2020. Available at https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/knowvawdata_regional_vaw_map_july_29_2020_final.pdf. Accessed on 22 February 2022.

new form of VAWG that has become a nuisance since the onset of COVID-19 Pandemic due to the widespread use of social media, coupled with existing prevalence rates of ICT-facilitated VAWG. One in 10 women in the European Union reported having experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15.⁹ The risk is the highest among young women aged 18-29 years. In the U.S., two out of every ten young women, aged 18-29, have been sexually harassed online and one in two say they were sent unwarranted explicit images. In Pakistan, 40 per cent of women have faced various forms of harassment on the internet.¹⁰

This write up will take a closer look at the notion of Rape/Sexual Assault and domestic violence in the context of Bangladesh. It will also explore the recent trends in VAW and GBV during pre-Covid19 lockdown and lockdown periods, primarily based on the secondary data collected by Bangladesh Peace Observatory. It will further shed light on perpetrators that lurk around the corner of victim's own houses, which, otherwise should be a safe space for them.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Violence Against Women and Girls



Source: Observerbd.com

⁹ Violence against women: an EU-wide survey, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014, p. 104.

¹⁰ "Facts and figures: Ending violence against women," UN Women, February 2022. Cited in <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>. Accessed on 27 February 2022.

Evidence confirms that there was intensification of violence against women and girls across the globe during the first state imposed lockdowns. Reports from service-use data in different countries have shown a significant increase in reported cases of domestic violence to helplines, women’s refuges/shelters and the police, linked to COVID-19 as calls to helplines increased five-fold in some countries. In other countries where this pattern did not come up in the report, it was suggested that there might have been accessibility and availability issues. Big data analysis in eight Asian countries showed that Internet searches related to violence against women and help-seeking rose significantly during COVID-19 lockdowns. Searches related to physical violence, including keywords such as “physical abuse signs”, “violent relationship”, and “cover bruises on face” increased 47 per cent in Malaysia, 63 per cent in the Philippines and 55 per cent in Nepal between October 2019 and September 2020.¹¹ Emerging data collected by UN Women confirmed a shadow pandemic through rapid gender assessments on the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women. By October 2021, 52 countries had integrated violence against women and girls prevention and response into COVID-19 plans, and 150 countries have adopted measures to strengthen services for women survivors of violence during the global crisis.¹²

International and Regional Legal Instruments

Women have been discriminated on the basis of gender and have been deprived of several fundamental human rights -from property ownership to freedom from violence, to equal access to education and participation in public spheres. Through their recognition of women, as a vulnerable group, the UN and other human and women’s rights organisations have been trying to provide women their due place and rights in society and state. The UN and regional human rights bodies have adopted several treaties, binding and non-binding legal instruments towards this end. Some of these are: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979), and Optional Protocol to the Convention (1999), Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, (2003), Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages,

¹¹ “COVID-19 and Violence Against Women: The evidence behind the talk,” UN Women, 2021. Cited in: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>. Accessed on 27 February 2022.

¹² COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, UN Women and UNDP, 2021. Cited in: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>. Accessed on 27 February 2022.

(1962), Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (1958), Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), Equal Remuneration Convention (1951), Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949), Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1994), Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergencies and Armed Conflicts (1974), Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1967), UN Human Rights Council: Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences and UNESCO: Human Rights of Women.¹³ CEDAW Convention is the most comprehensive treaty on the rights of women and is often described as an international bill of rights for women.¹⁴ It condemns any form of discrimination against women and reaffirms the importance of guaranteeing equal political, economic, social, cultural and civil rights to women and men.¹⁵ In the Americas, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, known as the “Convention of Belém do Pará,” recognises the rights of women to be free from violence in both the public and private spheres.¹⁶ In Africa, the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, known as the “Maputo Protocol,” addresses issues of particular importance in Africa, such as genital mutilation.¹⁷ The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), which came into force in August 2014; recognises that sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage, honour crimes, genital mutilation, and other forms of violence constitute serious human rights violations and “a major obstacle to the achievement of equality between women and men.”¹⁸ In addition to the protection offered by international and regional human rights conventions, specialized treaties from other areas of international law, such as International Humanitarian Law, International Criminal Law, International Labor & Employment Law, also address gender discrimination and women’s rights. At present, At least 158 countries have already passed laws on domestic violence, and 141 have laws on sexual harassment in employment. However, this does not mean they are always

¹³ “Directory of UN Resources on Gender and Women’s Issues”, *WomenWatch*. Cited in https://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/instruments_treaties_1003.htm. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “WOMEN’S HUMAN RIGHTS”, International Justice Resource Center. Cited in <https://ijrcenter.org/thematic-research-guides/womens-human-rights/>. Accessed on 26 February 2022.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

compliant with international standards and recommendations or are implemented and enforced. In 2020, Kuwait and Madagascar introduced specific and comprehensive legislation on domestic violence for the first time.¹⁹ But, significant gaps are observed in Northern Africa, Western Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where 43 per cent and 35 per cent of countries respectively have not passed such laws.²⁰

Bangladesh: Policies regarding Gender Equality

Bangladesh has topped the South Asian countries in gender equality for the third consecutive year and excelled in women empowerment in the Muslim world, second only to Indonesia.²¹ The Global Gender Gap Report 2018 shows Bangladesh standing in 48th position among 149 countries in the overall Global Gender Index and 5th position in the Political Empowerment of Women Index.²² Bangladesh acceded to CEDAW in 1984 and continues to maintain reservations to Articles 2 and 16(1c). The Constitution recognises equal rights for women and men in the public sphere and there is a reasonably robust legal and policy framework guaranteeing women's rights. The current government has successfully mainstreamed women's issues into key development strategies, such as the Five-Year Plans, Vision-2021 and Vision-2041. The government formulated the National Women's Development Policy and the National Plan of Action. The two documents were enriched through reflecting on the outcomes of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly, the 2030 Agenda for Development and SDG 5. Consistent with these strategies and policies, the government also strove to tackle challenges like child marriage, violence against women, trafficking and other crimes by enacting laws. The National Women's Development Policy 2011 and its National Action Plan provide a base for government action to promote gender equality, and the 8th 5-year plan integrates gender equality issues across a number of sectors with some new sectoral policies addressing gender issues effectively. Currently, gender-responsive budgeting

¹⁹ "Facts and figures: Ending violence against women," UN Women, February 2022. Cited in <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>. Accessed on 27 February 2022.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ M S Islam and S Dogra, 'Women Empowerment in Bangladesh: The Rise of the Other Half', *ISAS Working Paper 119*. Available at www.isas.nus.edu.sg. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

²² Bangladesh National Report for UPR, UN document: A/HRC/WG.6/30/BGD/1, 2018, p. 12.

is institutionalised across 43 ministries.²³ Bangladesh has gained international recognition for its progress on a number of gender indicators including gender parity in primary and secondary education and maternal mortality that has declined by 66 per cent over last few decades, estimated at a rate of 5.5 per cent every year.²⁴ Bangladesh ranks highest in the Gender Gap Index in South Asia achieving 47th among 144 countries in the world.²⁵

Despite the above, the rates of violence against women remain high. Almost two out of three (72.6 per cent) ever-married women in Bangladesh have experienced some form of partner violence in their lifetime, and more than half (54.7 per cent) have experienced it in the last 12 months.²⁶ According to a report from Bangladesh Bureau 2015, 80 per cent of women are victims of domestic violence.²⁷

Legal Instruments and Recent Reforms



²³ T Hossain, A Rabbani, and T H Rifat, “Gender-responsive climate change budgeting in Bangladesh: Exploring opportunities toward an inclusive climate resilient future”, April 2021. Available at <https://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/gender-climate-budgeting-bangladesh-april-2021.pdf>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

²⁴ “Maternal Mortality affects development of a country”, *The Daily Star*, 2 October 2014. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/maternal-mortality-affects-development-of-a-country-44215>. Accessed on 26 February 2022.

²⁵ “Gender Gap Index: Bangladesh stays top in S Asia”, *The Daily Star*, 4 November 2017. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/gender-gap-index-bangladesh-stays-top-s-asia-1486105>. Accessed on 26 February 2022.

²⁶ Report on Violence Against Women (VAW) Survey 2015, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Bangladesh. Cited in https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Bangladesh_VAW_survey_report_2015_compressed.pdf. Accessed on 26 February 2022.

²⁷ N Rahman, “Preventing domestic violence against women”, *The Daily Star*, 24 November 2020. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/preventing-domestic-violence-against-women-2000193>. Accessed on 26

Source: BBC

The 1860 Penal Code stipulated rapes in Bangladesh as a criminal offence punishable. The Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Ordinance, 1983 and the amended Nari O Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain 2000 (Prevention of Women and Child Repression Act) stipulated penalties for this shameful act. The sentence is imprisonment for a term of up to ten years or life imprisonment as per Section 376 of the Penal Code 1860. Government of Bangladesh adopted an amendment in 2020 as Sexual violence against women augmented during COVID-19 and people across Bangladesh came together to oppose rapes in the recent past. According to the Women and Children Repression Prevention (amendment) Ordinance 2020, 'Lifetime, Rigorous Imprisonment' in Section 9(1) of the act is substituted by 'Death or Lifetime Rigorous Punishment'.²⁸ This was adopted following mass movement against rape. This has been contested by the activists as they term this as a temporary solution which does not address the root of the problem. It was seen as a way to curb the protests and hamper the momentum of the movement as well.



Additionally, the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), the Children Act (1974), the Muslim Family Law Ordinance (1961), the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act (1974) and the Dowry

²⁸ S Dhar, "A weapon to combat violence", *The Financial Express*, 22 January 2022. Cited in <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/a-weapon-to-combat-violence-1642788463>. Accessed on 26 February 2022.

Prohibition Act (2002) are some noteworthy specific laws in Bangladesh that help to address the issues of GBV while addressing the structural elements as well.

Bangladesh has a specific law to combat domestic violence, “The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010”, conversely, it does not have a specific policy dedicated to it. In Bangladesh, the policy that is currently being implemented for women is the National Women Development Policy 2011; and only a part of that policy is dedicated to violence against women, including domestic violence.²⁹

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: The Bangladesh Trend

Patriarchy influences the position of Bangladeshi women. In a male-dominated, patriarchal social system in Bangladesh, men hold the power in a family setting as well as in the national setting and dictate the terms of relationships through family, marriage and inheritance.³⁰ Apart from this, other issues, such as early marriage, dowry and religion, also affect women’s development in Bangladesh.³¹ Early marriage contributes to a lower level of literacy among women, as well as a lower level of participation in economic activities. Furthermore, the dowry-based marriage system still victimises rural Bangladeshi women.³² In this practice, the family of the bride often has to pay a hefty amount of money and goods at the time of the wedding and, in many cases, even after marriage. In terms of sexual violence, varying from rape to attempted rape, by an individual or small group against another individual or a different group, an alarming situation prevails. Bangladesh witnessed an average of three rape cases daily in the first eleven months of 2021 which poses a serious security concern for women in Bangladesh.³³ According to a report published by Ain O Salish Kendra, at least 1,247 women were raped in the January-November

²⁹ Op. Cit.

³⁰ S Parveen, ‘Gender Awareness of Rural Women in Bangladesh’, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Vol. 9, 2007, pp. 253-254.

³¹ Concluding Observations of CEDAW: Bangladesh, UN document: CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/7, 2011, p. 3.

³² S Parveen and I Leonhäuser, ‘Empowerment of Rural Women in Bangladesh: A Household Level Analysis,’ a paper presented in Conference on Rural Poverty Reduction through Research for Development and Transformation, Deutscher Tropentag- Berlin, 5-7 October 2004, p. 8. Cited in <https://www.tropentag.de/2004/abstracts/full/382.pdf>. Accessed on 27 February 2022.

³³ M Sultana, “Rape in Bangladesh: 3 incidents logged daily in 2021”, *Dhaka Tribune*, 23 December 2021. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/12/23/rape-in-bangladesh-3-incidents-logged-daily-in-2021>. Accessed on 26 February 2022.

period in 2021, while 286 faced attempts at rape.³⁴ Women do not feel secure while riding public transports or even walking on the footpath anymore as several horrendous incidents of rape unravelled recently. A woman was allegedly kidnapped and gang-raped by three men when she went to Cox’s Bazar with her family on a trip in December 2021.³⁵ A university student was raped near the Cantonment area of Dhaka which is supposed to be a safe place. Domestic violence where the impacts extend beyond the physical, mental and sexual harms of an individual have been here for so long that it has almost become a norm. The following tables provide a glance at the nature of sexual and gender-based violence throughout 2019, 2020 and 2021 by using BPO data.

Table 1: Violence Ratio in Top 15 Districts: 2019³⁶

Rank	District	Incident	Death	Injury	Sexual Assault	Arrest
1	Dhaka	245	100	84	102	215
2	Chattogram	210	60	61	80	203
3	Narayanganj	143	33	62	62	150
4	Bogura	130	31	59	57	93
5	Mymensingh	113	22	39	53	88
6	Gazipur	106	40	45	45	115
7	Jashore	96	17	37	47	90
8	Barishal	84	14	35	35	52
9	Pabna	79	27	22	30	96
10	Noakhali	69	19	30	32	53
11	Pirojpur	66	16	23	21	44
12	Rajshahi	65	19	30	24	40
13	Sylhet	64	13	24	24	64
14	Cox's Bazar	59	14	28	27	65
15	Khulna	59	12	18	30	74

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ “Tourist gang-raped in Cox’s Bazar after husband, son taken hostage”, *Bdnews24.com*, 23 December 2021. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2021/12/23/female-tourist-gang-raped-in-coxs-bazar-after-husband-son-taken-hostage> Accessed on 26 February 2022.

³⁶ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 23 February 2022.

Table 2: Violence Ratio in Top 15 Districts: 2020³⁷

Rank	District	Incident	Death	Injury	Sexual Assault	Arrest
1	Dhaka	327	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	Khulna	77	23	41	26	59
10	Mymensingh	77	30	34	27	72
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

Table 3: Violence Ratio in Top 15 Districts: 2021³⁸

Rank	District	Incident	Death	Injury	Sexual Assault	Arrest
1	Dhaka	228	88	115	91	232
2	Chattogram	167	35	76	63	214
3	Gazipur	118	37	76	59	114
4	Bogura	114	20	69	49	105
5	Narayanganj	105	16	100	66	101
6	Cox's Bazar	70	23	37	19	53
7	Barishal	64	14	59	30	34
8	Rangpur	64	23	27	28	54

³⁷ *Ibid.*³⁸ *Ibid.*

9	Cumilla	63	23	35	26	68
10	Mymensingh	60	23	32	27	38
11	Noakhali	57	13	52	37	49
12	Naogaon	56	15	29	25	61
13	Sirajganj	56	23	22	23	42
14	Natore	53	20	21	19	54
15	Patuakhali	53	9	48	26	50

Figure 2: Top Five Districts Experiencing Incidents of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in 2021.³⁹

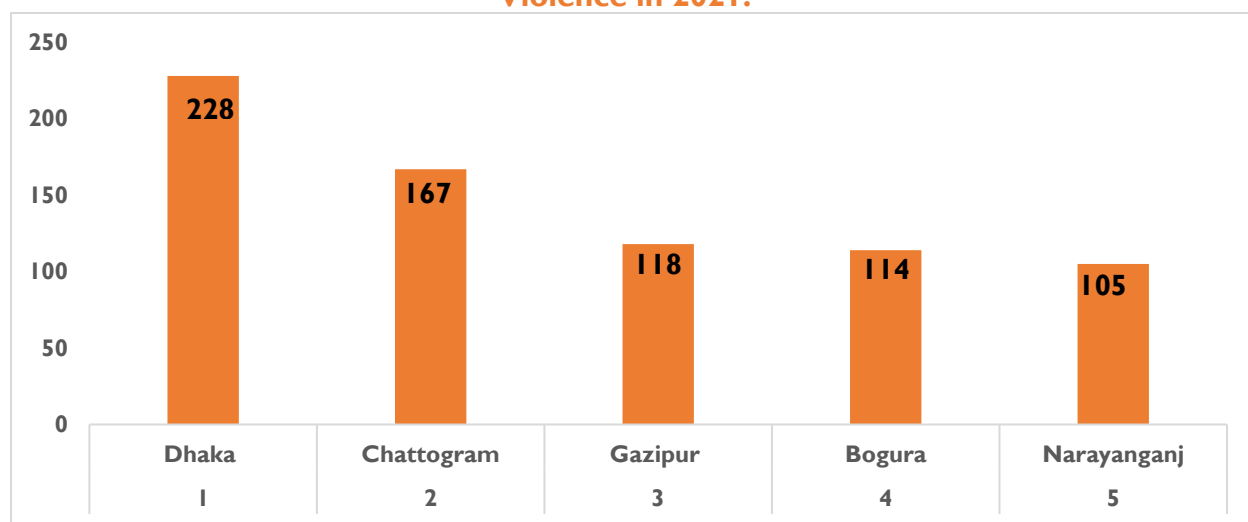


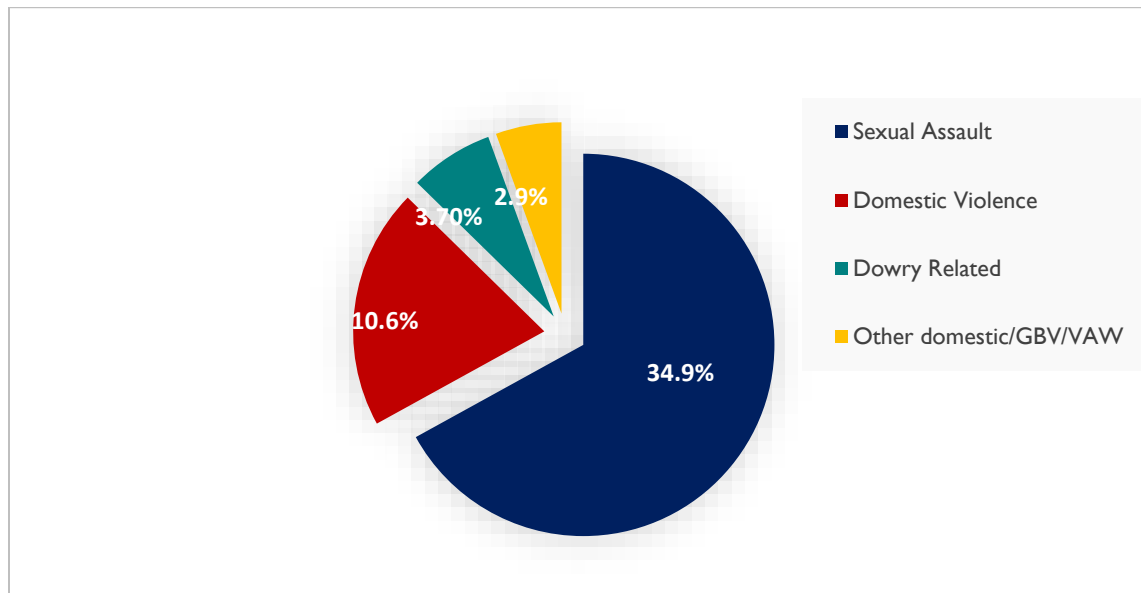
Table 1, 2 and 3, and Figure 2 provide a glimpse of the entire situation where Dhaka, the capital city, has taken the first position with the highest numbers in all parameters. Although one has to consider that it is a megacity with 46 thousand people living in per square kilometre,⁴⁰ still that does not diminish the fact that it is now deemed to be as one of the most unsafe places for women. Furthermore, the notions of violence increase due to the existing inequality, growing

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Population and Housing Census 2011-National Volume 2: Union Statistics, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Dhaka, 2015.

number of slums, an increasing number of floating people with no housing and resource scarcity in the face of inflation and economic uncertainties and Dhaka is overburdened with all these issues. Chattogram, being the second most populous city and the port city, takes second place in terms of almost all the parameters mentioned above. Dhaka and Chattogram are two cities that were particularly vulnerable regions during the Covid-19 Pandemic as they were hosting an indiscriminate number of people compared to the other districts in Bangladesh. Narayanganj is in second place in terms of reported Sexual assault cases, where Chattogram, Gazipur and Bogura take third, fourth and fifth place consecutively in that parameter.

Figure 3: Top Motives Behind Sexual Assault and GBV in 2021⁴¹



⁴¹ Bangladesh Peace Observatory. Cited in <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/#/>. Accessed on 23 February 2022.

Figure 4: Top Perpetrators Behind GBV in 2021⁴²

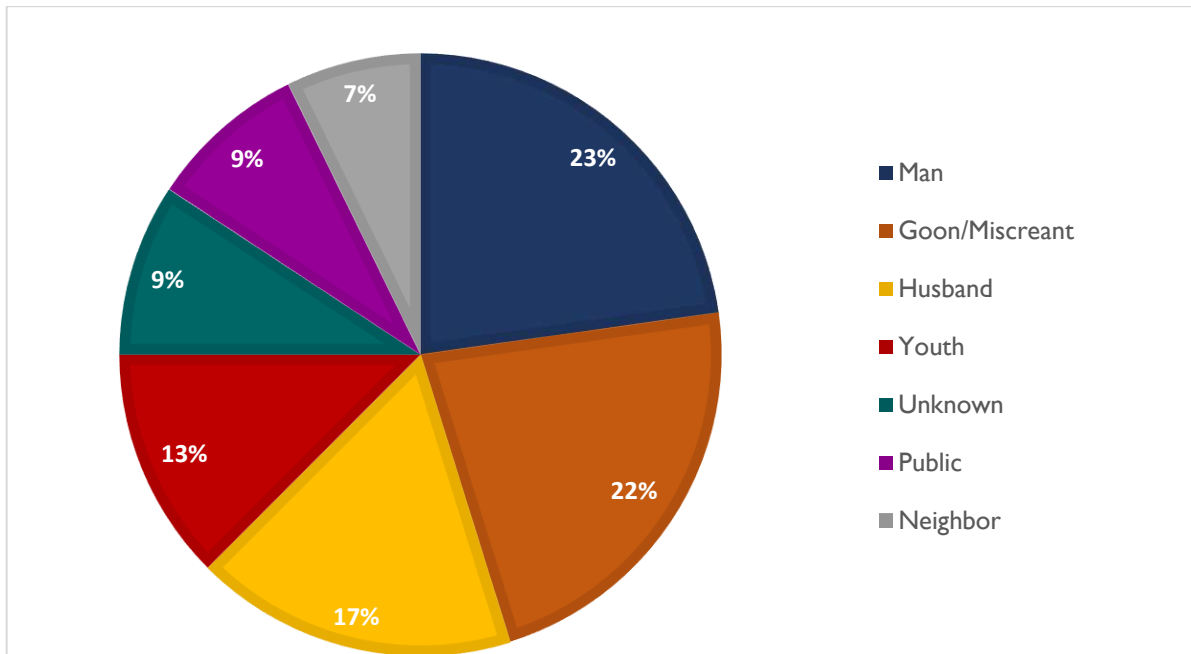


Figure 3 and Figure 4 takes into account the Number of Incidents related to GBV and give a brief but clear view of Primary motives regarding Sexual Assaults and Gender-Based Violence and the percentages of perpetrators behind the crimes. It is to be noted that although Sexual Assault/Rape takes the biggest portion of the chart with 34.9 per cent as the primary motive, Domestic Violence and Dowry-Related violence are in the second and third positions in terms of percentage points in the chart. Figure 4 shows that Man and Goon/Miscreant are two groups of perpetrators that are subsequently in the first and second position, whereas Husband as a perpetrator of a GBV is in the third with 17 per cent. Unfortunately, youths are occupying the fourth place as perpetrators and they are responsible for 13 per cent incidents.

⁴² Ibid.

Figure 5: Trend of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: Violent Incidents in Bangladesh (2019-2021) (Based on BPO Data)⁴³

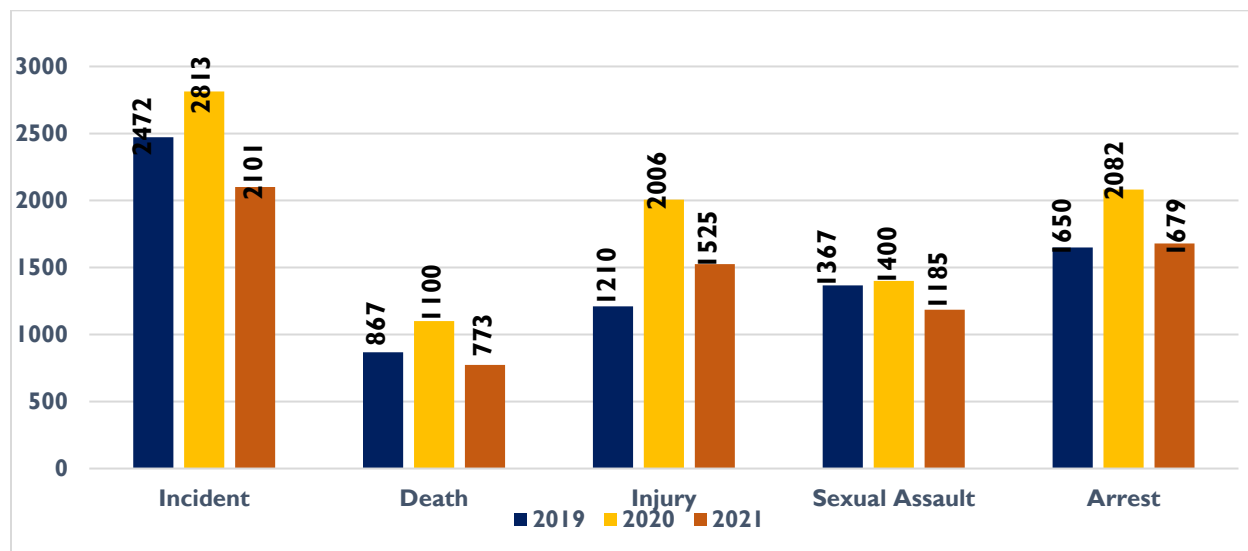


Figure 5 shows that the violent incidents regarding sexual and gender-based violence increased at the height of the pandemic and later subdued a bit. In 2020, the number of violent incidents regarding sexual and gender-based violence rose up to 13.75 per cent than 2019, but later decreased by 33.9 per cent in 2021. In terms of the number of deaths, 2020 has seen a 27.16 per cent increase compared to 2019, whereas the number of death decreased by 29.7 per cent in 2021 compared to 2020. This trend is seen through all the parameters. Thus, it is not likely that the situation has got worse since the pandemic, the trend was already on the rise from 2019, which became worse in 2020, and now the parameters are getting back to the pre-Covid numbers. But it has to be noted that although sexual assault and gender-based violence declined in 2021 compared to the previous year, 2020, these are still concerning issues to be dealt with.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Figure 6: Trend of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: Non-Violent Incidents (Arrests) in Bangladesh (2019-2021) (Based on BPO Data)⁴⁴

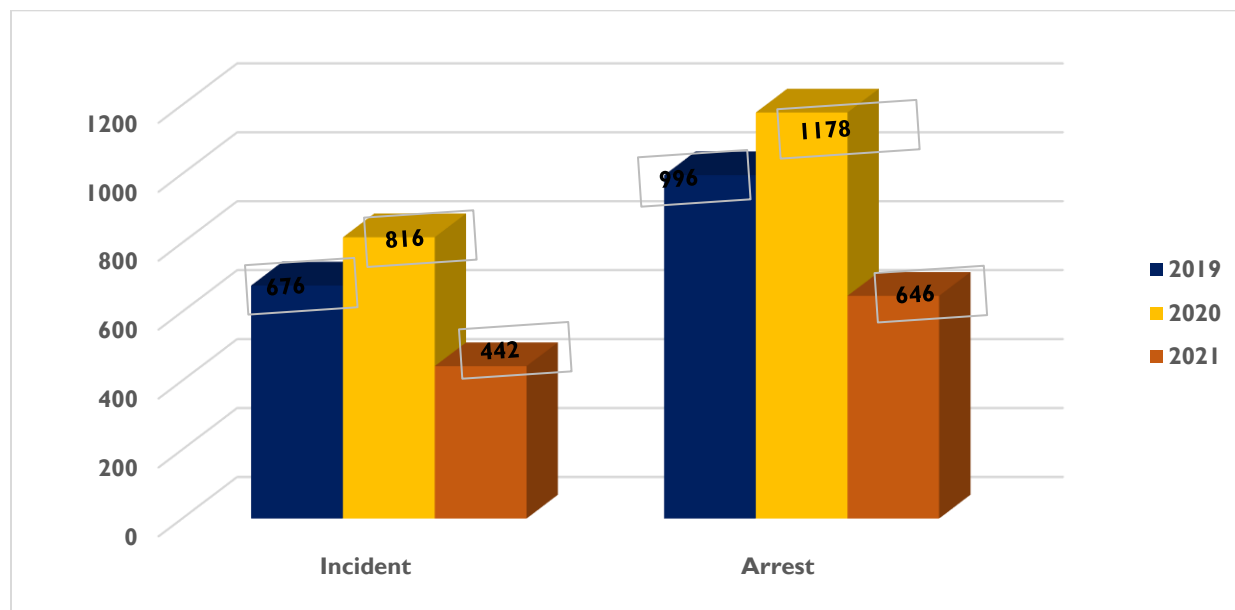


Figure 6 depicts the trend in the non-violent incidents pertaining to Sexual and gender-based violence, which initially rose by 20.86 per cent from 2019 to 2020 and later fell by 45.8 per cent in 2021 compared to 2020. In terms of recorded arrests, 2020 saw a 19.27 per cent increase compared to 2019, while in 2021, the number of recorded arrests indicates a decline by 45.16 per cent compared to 2020.

Ain O Salish Kendra revealed in a report that at least 1,321 women were raped or gang-raped across the country; of them 47 were killed after rape and nine died by suicide.⁴⁵ In 2020, the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ “2021 was wrapped in a veil of fear: ASK”, *The Daily Star*, 31 December 2021. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/2021-was-wrapped-veil-fear-ask-2929586>. Accessed on 26 February 2022.

number of raped or gang-raped were 1,627 and 1,413 were victims of such incidents in 2019.⁴⁶ Besides, 640 women faced domestic violence and of them, 210 were victimised for not paying the dowry. Of them, 372 were killed and 142 committed suicide.⁴⁷

According to a report by rights body Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, a total of 3,703 women and girls were subjected to different forms of violence including rape and murder in 2021.⁴⁸ Again the report indicates that 1,235 females were raped in 2021.⁴⁹ Of them, 1,028 females including 629 girls were raped, 179 females, including 62 girls, were gang-raped and 31 females, including 22 girls were killed after rape.⁵⁰ Besides, acid attacks were carried out on 22 women, including five girls, while four of them died due to burn injuries.⁵¹ The report also noted that 138 females, including a minor were subjected to physical torture for dowry and of them 45 were killed for dowry.⁵² The cases of early marriages in Bangladesh during the pandemic period has increased during and after the lockdown period, nullifying almost all the achievement in this sector. There were incidents of 327 child marriages across the country while 63 females including 23 children were victims of cybercrime.⁵³ There were 260 incidents of child marriages in Kishoreganj district alone while 1,242 incidents of child marriage were reported from Tangail in the past one and half year.⁵⁴

According to the Shishu Poristhiti Protibedan 2021, prepared by Manusher Jonno Foundation, in 2021, 818 children were raped while 94 children were the victim of attempted rape which is more than 31 per cent than 2020.⁵⁵ Most of these were perpetrated by family members. They have mentioned 43,054 cases of child marriage in 2021, while in 2020, the number was only 101.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ “Over 3,700 incidents of violence against women reported in 2021”, *Dhaka Tribune*, 3 January 2022. Cited in: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2022/01/03/over-3700-incidents-of-violence-against-women-reported-in-2021>. Accessed on 26 February 2022.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ “এক বছরে শিশু ধর্ষণ ৮১৮ হত্যা ১৮৩”, *Daily Somoyer Somikoron*, 23 February 2022. Cited in: <https://dailysomoyersomikoron.com/archives/185351>. Accessed on 26 February 2022.

Furthermore, it was mentioned that 38 children who worked as house helps were raped, 12 of them died afterwards.

Conclusion

It is quite common to victim-blame or alienate survivors of GBV from their families and communities due to societal conventions that render women's positions vulnerable in a society, putting them at danger of poverty, isolation, and further violence. Bangladesh is not exempt from this practice as well. Some survivors are forced to marry their perpetrators which clearly cannot be a solution. Others face retaliation for reporting their experiences or seeking support from the community— including at the hands of family members. Many victims avoid filing a case in fear of social stigma and further harassment from offenders. The perpetrators do not face severe repercussions in the absence of exemplary punishment, and they usually get out of prison by leveraging political and economic influence. But recently, it seems that women have become more aware of their situation and they are taking a stance for their dignity. At this point, it should be mentioned that official available data shows that over the past seven years, women's acceptance of being beaten by their partners decreased in almost 75 per cent of countries, indicating a positive change in the attitude.

Bangladesh has some effective legal instruments in place and some good support services in both government and non-government sectors, including, shelter homes (government and non-government), victim support centres, apart from general police activity, One Stop Crisis Centre, and a national helpline. However, all these services are scattered, lacking coordination, and the number is far too low compared to the population. Moreover, general people are not aware of these services due to a lack of publicity. In addition to that, the criminal justice system is deemed to be ridden with issues that hinder the implementation of laws and lengthen the process of serving justice to the victims. Consequently, women are not getting the full benefits of the support services and the legislation. Effective and doable measures need to be taken by the government to create a favorable environment for women seeking remedies and justice for violence perpetrated against them.

Status Report: Violence Against Children

Mashiat Jafrin Heea¹

Introduction

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child.² Children are considered as the epitome of innocence; yet children are victims of violence in every part of the world. This victimization takes place due to their gender, class, socio-economic status or ethnicity. Perpetrators of such violence might include parents, family members, teachers, caregivers, law enforcement authorities and even children themselves. Such kind of violence not only inflicts fear, pain and humiliation but it also impacts on the mental well-being of the children. All children have the right to protection from violence, regardless of the nature or severity of the act and all forms of violence can cause harm to children, reduce their sense of self-worth, affront their dignity and hinder their development.³

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights treaties and standards guarantees the fundamental right to the protection of children from all forms of violence. However, violence is still prevalent around the globe, having both immediate and long-term consequences. 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. According to various reports, violence has increased manifold during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hundreds of millions of children worldwide will likely face growing threats to their safety and

¹ Research Data Analyst, Bangladesh Peace Observatory, *Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS)*, University of Dhaka

² "Convention on the Rights of the Child," *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)*.

Cited in: <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/professionalinterest/crc.pdf>. Accessed on 21 January, 2022.

³ "Violence against children," *United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)*, December 2015. Cited in: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/#:~:text=Violence%20against%20children%20takes%20many,community%20and%20over%20the%20Internet>. Accessed on 21 January 2022.

well-being – including mistreatment, gender-based violence, exploitation, social exclusion and separation from caregivers – because of actions taken to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴

This paper tries to shed light on different aspects of violence against children. The paper is based on secondary data collected from various sources. These include 17 newspapers which Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) uses to gather violence data in Bangladesh, and corresponding data from other sources. The reasons of violence against children are briefly discussed.; then an overview of Bangladesh in 2021 is discussed followed by a brief discussion on the physical violence in South-Asia region.

Reasons for Violence Against Children

There are many reasons for inflicting violence on children and it is important to understand these in order to mitigate violence against them. The reasons are briefly discussed below-

1. Lack of Awareness about Child Rights among Adults and Children

Adults do not have adequate knowledge about the rights of children. In many cases, adults' behaviour towards children is not always supportive of their welfare and overall development.⁵ Children often cannot protest against their violation of rights as they are not empowered to do the same.

2. Adults' Negative Attitude and Discriminatory Behavior Towards Children

Children in most cases are not considered as responsible opinionated individuals who can contribute in household decision making process. Adults often fail to recognize their individuality and consider them as fully dependent on others for their basic needs. Also one observes discriminatory behavior of adults towards children in a family or in the society.

⁴ "COVID-19: Globally Children at heightened risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence amidst intensifying containment measure," *United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (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 21 January 2022.

⁵ "Violence Against Children," *Odhikar*. Cited in: <http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2002/01/publication-violence-against-children-2001-eng.pdf>. Accessed on 21 January 2022.

3. Lack of Opportunity for Children to Express Opinions

The right to express opinions is one of the fundamental rights of human which is recognized internationally. But in reality, children's opinions are not taken into consideration, though this might affect their lives directly or indirectly. Adults tend to think that children are not capable enough to form their opinions regarding good and bad things and thus impose decisions on children., which might constitute to be an act of violence against children.⁶

4. Lack of Proper Implementation of The Laws Relating to Children

Bangladesh enacted the Children Act in 1974, quite early compared to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was adopted in 1990. The Children Act 1974 provides almost all necessary rules and regulations in order to protect the rights of the children of Bangladesh. However, it is unfortunate that the clauses are yet to be fully implemented. There is a strong link between violence against children and proper implementation of the laws that are supposed to protect the children.⁷ It is seen that in most cases, the long judicial process enables the perpetrators to have an easy escape. As most of the child victims belong to the marginal section and middle-class section of the society, the family cannot afford the cost (in terms of time and money) of the long judicial process.

5. Poverty

Due to the economic instability at family level, many children become victim of abusive behaviour and physical torture by their parents or family members. In some cases, when parents are unable to pay for their children's basic needs, they often compel their children to engage into income earning activities from a very early age, which in turn exposes the children to various violent situations.

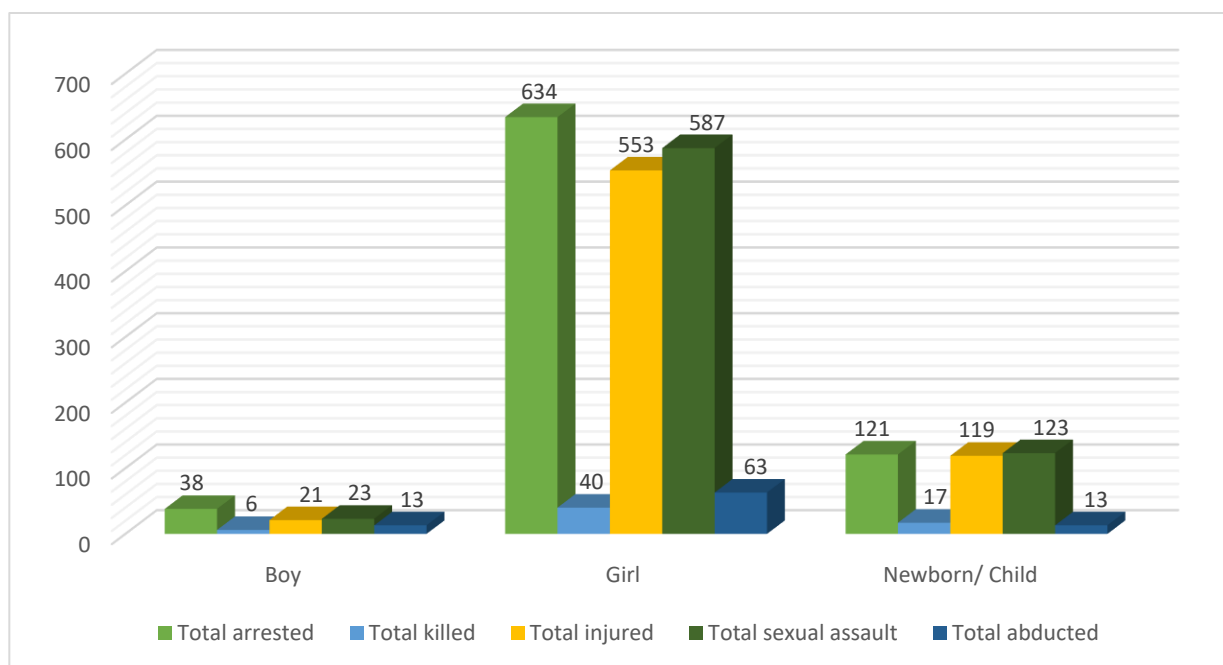
⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Bangladesh Scenario in 2021

According to World Health Organization (WHO), over half of all children aged 2 to 17 are estimated to have experienced emotional, physical and/or sexual violence.⁸ Despite the increasing condemnation of violence by the international community and a growing body of legislation, policy and institutions to protect them, violence remains a harsh reality in the daily lives of many children.⁹ The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted the situation. The post COVID-19 analysis is important to understand the effect of the pandemic.

Table I: An Overview of Incidents in 2021



⁸ "The Right to Protection: Ending Violence Against," *SOS Children's Villages International*, March 2017. Cited in: https://www.sos-usa.org/getmedia/8832e501-9d31-4519-b0e3-491cf663445a/TheRightToProtection_EN.pdf. Accessed on 21 January 2022.

⁹ *Ibid.*

To understand the situation in Bangladesh, 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.

The above table represents the total number of incidents like arrest, killing, injury, sexual assault and abduction took place in the year of 2021. From the table, it is evident that compared to the boys and new born babies, the incident rate is quite high in case of girls. The BPO data shows that 634 arrests took place where girls are the victim. 587 girls were victim of sexual assault compared to 23 boys and 123 newborn/child who were victims of sexual assault. The counts of abduction and killing are less compared to that of sexual assaults and in this case also, girls are the preferred target.

Table 2: Top 10 Districts of Sexual Assault

District	Total sexual assault
Dhaka	52
Narayanganj	37
Chattogram	34
Gazipur	33
Bogura	31
Noakhali	23
Barisal	21
Naogaon	19
Mymensingh	18
Netrakona	17

Table 3: Top 10 Districts of Abduction

District	Total abduction
Gazipur	9
Chattogram	8
Dhaka	8
Cox's Bazar	7
Noakhali	4
Cumilla	4
Mymensingh	4
Bogura	3
Sirajganj	3
Rajbari	3

The two tables above, shows the top 10 districts with sexual assaults and the top 10 districts with abduction. If we compare the two tables, we can see that the sexual assaults are committed way more than abduction. Dhaka is in the top three in both the tables. Dhaka being the capital city and having the largest population, has higher number of incidents of sexual assault and abduction. Noakhali, Chattogram, Gazipur and Mymensingh are also common in both the lists, which indicated that sexual assault and abduction are prevalent in these districts.

Table 4: Total Number of Incidents Occurring from 2014-2021

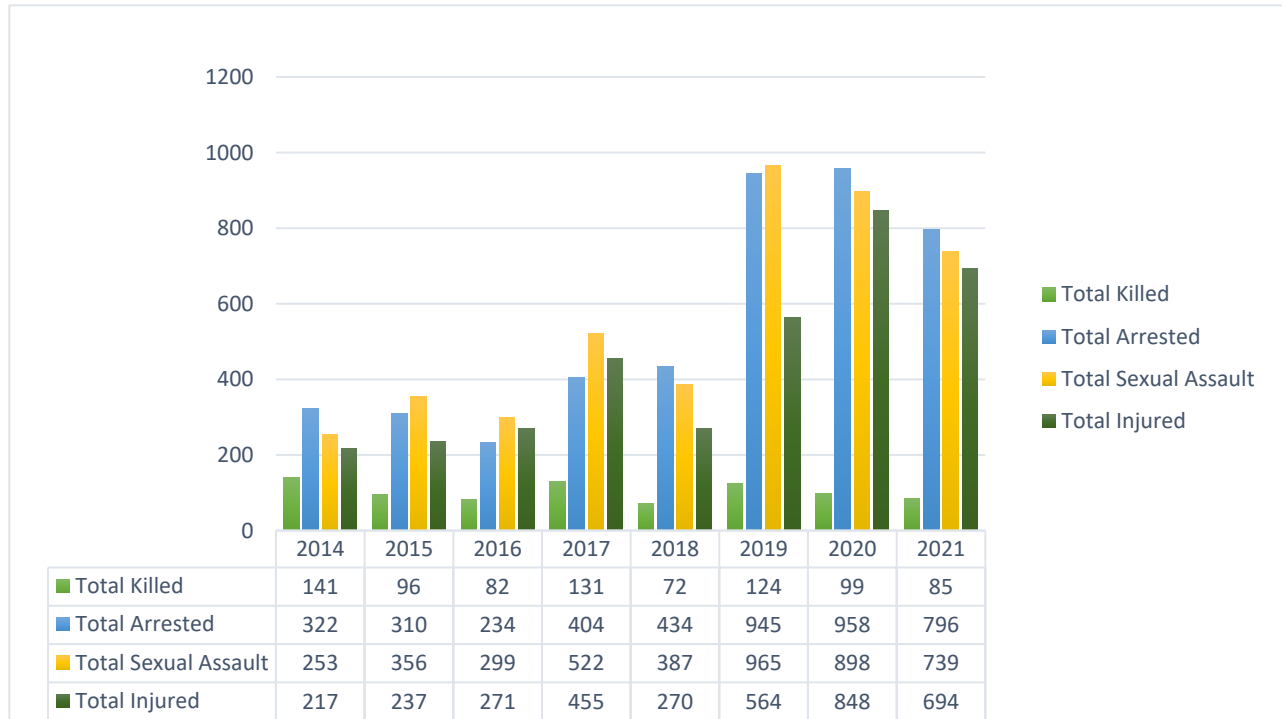


Table 4 shows the total incidents of killing, arrest, sexual assault and injury across the country in a span of eight years from 2014-2021. The total number of killings show an upward trend, peaking in 2017 and then gradually the number decreasing in the following years. In case of total injury, it gradually increased from 212 to 694. However, it can be observed that sexual assaults and arrests (mostly related to sexual assault) had a sudden increase in 2019. Three possible reasons for the increase are:

- The judicial system of Bangladesh is very slow and complex and also ineffective in a sense that prosecutors do not get conviction easily in rape cases due to various reasons like political intervention, intentionally false lawsuits, corrupt administration.

- Bangladesh is a patriarchal society and Susan Brownmiller asserts that in patriarchal society, rape is used as a medium of male power projection for social control.¹⁰ By the nearly same token, rapists in interviews taken by the Crown Prosecution Service have stated that they rape to enjoy the sense of feeling dominant, not for sexual satisfaction.¹¹
- The availability of yaba, a nerve-stimulating drug, might be a reason for the increase in violence as this drug makes a man rape-prone by making him feel manlier, wilder, and sexier. An estimation of Bangladesh government's Department of Narcotics Control shows that 80 percent of incidents of rape and rape-murder are perpetrated by drug users in the country.¹²

Again, if we observe the table, we can see that the incident rates remained high 2019 onwards although the number decreased during and post-pandemic times. The numbers decreased during pandemic because the victims were most likely in lockdown with the perpetrators and incidents of sexual assaults were under reported due to lack of proper communication system.

Physical Violence in South-Asia

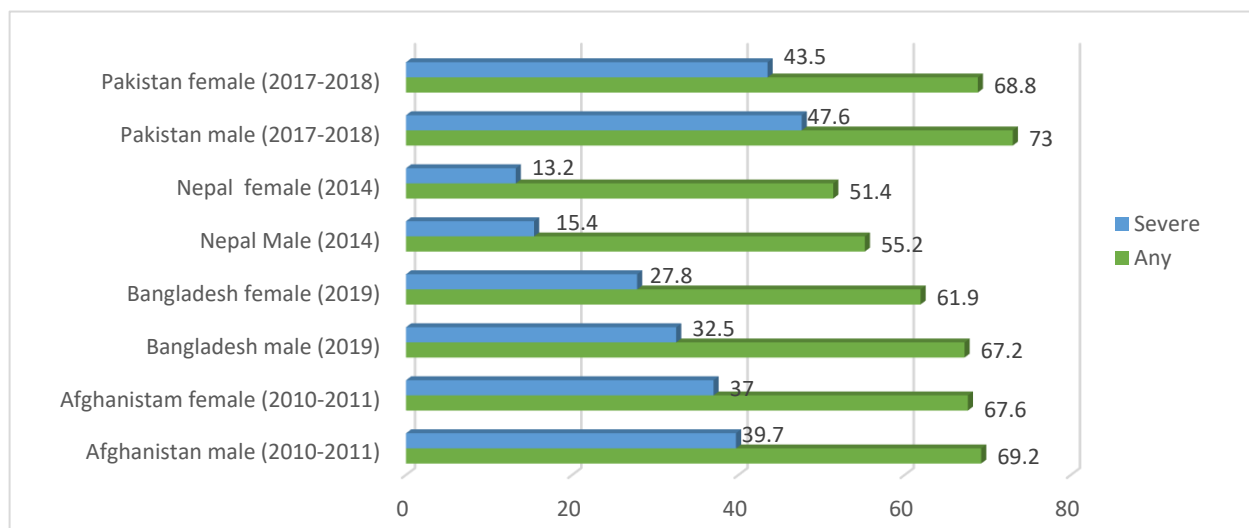
In 2015, the countries of South Asia adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a view to eliminating all form of violence against children (VAC) and minimizing death rates.

¹⁰ Shuva Das, "Rape in Bangladesh: An Epidemic Turn of Sexual Violence," *Harvard International Review*, 11 January 2021. Cited in: <https://hir.harvard.edu/rape-in-bangladesh-an-epidemic-turn-of-sexual-violence/>. Accessed on 21 January 2022.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

Table 5: Prevalence (%) of Children Aged 1–14 Who Have Experienced Physical Punishment (Any and Severe), In Four South Asian Countries, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data 2010/11–2019¹³



Source: Violence against Children in South Asia: A systematic review of evidence since 2015

A systematic review was conducted by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to find the prevalent factors and consequences of violence against children since the adoption of SDGs (2015-2020). According to the findings, children in this region are more likely to become victims of physical violence. The situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF ROSA estimates that as of May 2020, 418 million children are restricted to homes where violent discipline is practiced (UNICEF 2020a).¹⁴ Over a quarter (27.8%) to nearly half (47.6%) of children experience the more severe forms of physical punishment called 'violent discipline' by caregivers/mothers in three out of four countries where this is comparably measured.¹⁵ Physical

¹³ "Violence against Children in South Asia: A systematic review of evidence since 2015," *United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)*, September 2020, Page-IX. Cited in: https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/VAC%20Report_Web%20Version.pdf. Accessed on 21 January 2022.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, page-2

¹⁵ *Ibid*, page-23

punishment is measured in two parameters in Table 5: ‘Any’ physical punishment, which includes general physical punishment, and being hit or slapped on the face, head or ears or being hit repeatedly is described as ‘Severe’ punishment. It can be seen that over half of all the children (including boys and girls) in countries like Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Afghanistan experience some form of physical punishment. It is seen that Pakistan has the highest percentage of physical violence whereas Nepal has the lowest percentage of physical violence. There is a difference of more than 20% in prevalence of physical violence between Pakistan and Nepal. While conducting the review in Bangladesh, parents were asked if the use of physical punishment is a necessity and 35% of parents favoured the statement. However, if we observe the table, 27.8% and 32.5% report using it against their girls and boys, respectively. At least more than 60% children become subject to any kind of physical violence in Bangladesh.

Legal Framework of Violence Against Children in Bangladesh

The Bangladesh government has taken a number of initiatives and passed significant legislation to address violence against children, actions that are key to fulfilling the government’s commitment to meeting the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁶

- The Acid Offense Prevention Act, 2002

The Acid Offense Prevention Act and Acid Control Act enacted in 2002 were significant, not only in establishing a regulatory framework for the sale, distribution, and use of acid, but also, in holding perpetrators of acid violence to account and putting in place provisions for social services.¹⁷

- Nari-o-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain, 2000

The Nari-o-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain (Women and Children Repression Prevention Act), 2000, is a landmark piece of legislation aimed at addressing a wide range of violence including

¹⁶ “I Sleep in My Own Death bed, Violence against Women and Girls in Bangladesh: Barriers to Legal Recourse and Support,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 2020. Cited in: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/10/bangladesh1020_web.pdf. Accessed on 21 January 2022 ; “Bangladesh seeks to graduate from the UN’s list of Least Developed Countries list in 2024 and to become an upper middle-income country by 2031,” *The World Bank in Bangladesh “Bangladesh overview,”* April 13, 2020. Cited in: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bangladesh/overview>. Accessed on 21 January 2022.

¹⁷ “I Sleep in My Own Death bed, Violence against Women and Girls in Bangladesh: Barriers to Legal Recourse and Support,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 2020. Cited in: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/10/bangladesh1020_web.pdf. Accessed on 21 January 2022.

trafficking, abduction, burning, rape, dowry violence, and other crimes that disproportionately impact women and children.¹⁸

- Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017 (CMRA)

Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage involving girls under the age of 15 in the world—nearly 40 percent.¹⁹ According to UNICEF’s most recent data on Bangladesh collected in 2014, more than half of girls are married before the age of 18.²⁰ Bangladesh authorities are committed to developing a National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Marriage for 2015-2021 but that has not materialized despite being nearly at the end of the proposed timeline.²¹

Conclusion

By creating proactive policies for children, Bangladesh has taken the initial steps for preventing violence. However, there are significant gaps between implementation and coordination of these policies. The government requires a holistic strategy to prevent all forms of violence against children that employ educators to prevent violence, through anti-bullying policies, safe school policies, mechanisms in schools to report violence, clear measures in place to respond to violence and training to educators to implement these policies.²²

¹⁸ “I Sleep in My Own Death bed, Violence against Women and Girls in Bangladesh: Barriers to Legal Recourse and Support,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 2020. Cited in: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/10/bangladesh1020_web.pdf. Accessed on 21 January 2022; “Women and Children Repression Prevention Act,” Nari-o-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain, No. VIII of 2000.

Cited in: http://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/prevention_act_bangladesh.pdf

¹⁹ “I Sleep in My Own Death bed, Violence against Women and Girls in Bangladesh: Barriers to Legal Recourse and Support,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 2020. Cited in: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/10/bangladesh1020_web.pdf. Accessed on 21 January 2022; “Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects,” *United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)*, 2014. Cited in: https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child_Marriage_Report_7_17_LR..pdf. Accessed on 25 January 2022.

²⁰ “I Sleep in My Own Death bed”, Violence against Women and Girls in Bangladesh: Barriers to Legal Recourse and Support, *Human Rights Watch*. Cited in:

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/10/bangladesh1020_web.pdf. Accessed on 21 January 2022; “Data Warehouse,” *United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)*, Cited in: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/>. Accessed on 25 January 2022.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² “BANGLADESH Policy Progress to End Violence against Children,” *World Vision*, November 2019. Cited in: <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Bangladesh%20Report.pdf>. Accessed on 21 January 2022.

Youth Violence in Bangladesh: Current Trends in Light of BPO Data

Arefin Mizan¹

Introduction

The youth of today are the torchbearers of the future. They are humanity's hope for a better future in this world. It is a stage of life during which individuals have limitless possibilities and nurturing them can help them reach their full potential. The right training, motivation, legislation and a favourable social and legal environment may help harness the potential of youth to become leaders, innovators, and agents of change.

Youth is also a life's stage of unmatched sensitivity on the one hand and the rapid adjustment on the other; as it requires a shift in priorities, an ability to negotiate between the conflicting demands of society and the family, dealing with peer-group pressure and the consequences of early exposure to unfamiliar environments like schools with different social milieu. It is difficult for a young person to cope with the conflict between the two on their own without the support of society and their surroundings. There are multiple factors in society ranging from abusive family and partners, failure of the community to provide a friendly and healthy environment for the youth, lack of economic empowerment, strong institutions and opportunities for the young etc. that are currently posing challenges to the youth community in the developing world.

This adverse environment for the youth is thought to be the main leading cause behind the rising trend of youth violence in the world. Youth's involvement in anti-social and violent activities is on the rise. They are also increasingly becoming the target of violence. Bangladesh is also facing problems of youth violence in the recent years, with the emergence of teen gangs, violent student politics, increased availability of drugs and arms. The multidimensional nature of youth violence has to be understood in terms of its correlates and causes, in order to develop functional policy and plans to create a better social environment for youths; and to deter them from engaging in violence. Likewise they also need to be protected from acts of violence.

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This report delves into the definition of youth violence, various typologies of youth violence, analysis of the current state of youth violence. The report has used the data from the Bangladesh Peace Observatory for its analyses.

Definition of Youth

“For youth, the single story [of adolescence] is one of raging hormones, rebelliousness, and defiance of authority.”

-The Danger of a Single Story, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009)

The quote above talks about the dangers of confining the definition of youth in the constraints of a ‘single story’, or a stereotype. Trying to generalize the concept of youth to universals strips away the complexity of the experiences of youths, their individual needs and potentials. It leads to a fallacy that there is an ‘age’ associated with youth. And modern researchers of youths recognize this problem of defining youth through age.²

Universally agreed definitions of youth are lacking. But necessity of generalizations prompted various international bodies and researchers to define a ‘range’ of age based on statistical and developmental features of youth commonly held to be true. Without prejudice to any other criteria adopted by member States, the United Nations defines ‘youth’ as people aged 15 to 24 years.³ This definition of youth is still not without its caveats; for example, a legal incongruity arises with the UN’s definition of ‘Children’ according to the Article I of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines Children as persons under the age of 18.⁴ The Asian Development Bank defines youth as those aged 15-24, while the Commonwealth Secretariat defines youth as those aged 15-29.⁵ In Bangladesh, according to the National Youth Policy 2017, ‘Any citizen between 18 and 35 years of age is regarded as Youths’.⁶ This definition takes young adults (Aged 20-35) under the umbrella term ‘youth’. However, the Bangladesh Bureau of

² Wallace, C. & Kovacheva, S. *Youth and Society*, (London: Macmillan. 1995)

³ “Youth”, Cited In: <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>, Accessed on: 27 February 2022.

⁴ “Convention on the Rights of the Child”, 2 September 1990, Cited In: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>, Accessed on: 27 February 2022.

⁵ Mamun, A & Afrooz, N., *Unemployment Outlook-A Challenging Time for the Youth of Bangladesh*, EmerginRating, May 2017

⁶ “National Youth Policy 2017”, Cited In: <shorturl.at/ehG24>, Accessed on: 28 February 2022.

Statistics' (BBS) youth data is based on the age range of 15-29 years. As this particular report largely discusses issues specific to Bangladesh, we will use this definition for the sake of simplicity. For standardization and analysis of youth violence, we use the following categories of offenders and victims - Boys, Girls, Students, Students group, Youth, Youth group, Bangladesh Chhatra League, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, and Islami Chhatra Shibir; this is in accordance with the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) Codebook, which is available at the Bangladesh Peace Observatory website.⁷

Under this definition, there are currently 2.4 billion youths in the world, almost 30.3% of the total world population⁸. Median age varies across the world, and data shows that North America, Europe and East Asia and other higher-income countries across the world tend to have a higher median age (> 35 years old).⁹ Conversely, this also implies that developing and lower-income countries have a larger youth population. Asia and the Pacific are home to the biggest concentration of young people in the world. 60% of the world's young reside in Asia; 15% in Africa; 10% in Latin America and the Caribbean; and the remaining 15% are in developing nations and regions. It is estimated that almost 85% of the world's youth reside in developing countries. Some 45.9 percent of the population lives in low-income countries, respectively, while another 34.1 percent of the population lives in lower middle-income countries.¹⁰

Defining Youth Violence

Violence is typically characterized as hostility with the intention of causing serious bodily harm, such as injury or death.¹¹ Consequently, Youth violence refers to acts of violence committed by young individuals who are not considered to be completely matured in terms of age.

As youth violence has largely been described in terms of psychological and developmental perspective in academic and professional sectors, available definitions of youth violence predominantly come from a medical point of view. According to the Center for Violence Prevention, Youth violence is *“the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual,*

⁷ Cited In: <http://peaceobservatory-cgs.org/> Accessed on: February 28 2022.

⁸ Queried from UN Population Data at: <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>, Accessed on: February 28 2022.

⁹ Queried from Age Structure Data at: <https://ourworldindata.org/age-structure>, Accessed on: February 28 2022.

¹⁰ “YOUTH and the State of the World”, Cited In: shorturl.at/hpFHK, Access on: February 28 2022.

¹¹ Bushman, B. J., & Huesmann, L. R., “Short-term and long-term effects of violent media on aggression in children and adults” *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 2016.

against another person or group that results in high likelihood of injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation among persons ages 10 to 24.”¹² World Health Organization (WHO) describes youth violence as a global public health problem.¹³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also considers youth violence as a public health problem and an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE); CDC characterizes youth violence as the deliberate use of physical force or power by young people aged 10-24 to threaten or hurt others. Youth violence may take the form of fights, bullying, weapons threats, and gang-related violence. A young person might be a victim, an offender, or a witness to youth violence.¹⁴

But there is little understanding or consensus even among youth researchers about the causal factors of youth violence. To make predictions and deterrent strategies to curb youth violence we need proper definitions that capture the multidimensionality of the problem. For example, research findings implicate that for a subgroup of people, violent incidents rise in frequency throughout adolescence and early adulthood and then swiftly and constantly drop throughout life.¹⁵ But researchers still are not very sure of what causes this rise and fall in behavioral shift and violent incidents in individual’s lives in certain ages.¹⁶ According to social scientists, there are underlying socioeconomic factors that have largely been neglected by academics till now.¹⁷ That is why the above definitions, while useful from a therapeutic and preventive lens, are not sufficient to fully capture the complexity of youth violence in its entirety.

State of Youth Violence in Bangladesh

Recent years have seen an alarming spike in youth violence in Bangladesh. A number of documented incidents of youth violence drew public attention to the subject. There are about

¹² “TYPES OF VIOLENCE INVOLVING YOUTH” Cited In: <https://violence.chop.edu/types-violence-involving-youth>, Accessed on: 27 February 2022.

¹³ “Youth violence”, Cited In: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/youth-violence>, Accessed on: 27 February 2022.

¹⁴ “Preventing Youth Violence”, Cited In: shorturl.at/isQTU, Accessed on: 27 February 2022.

¹⁵ Loeber, R. & Farrington, D., *From Juvenile Delinquency to Adult Crime: Criminal Careers, Justice Policy, and Prevention*, (US: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Asamani, J. et al., *Understanding Youth Violence in Kumasi: Does Community Socialization Matter? A Cross-Sectional Study*, (Urban studies research, 2017).

¹⁷ Bushman, Brad J et al. “Risk factors for youth violence: Youth violence commission, International Society For Research On Aggression (ISRA).” *Aggressive behavior* vol. 44,4 (2018).

70 juvenile gangs operating in the capital city of Dhaka alone, committing crimes such as mugging, extortion, drug trafficking, and even murder. According to one unofficial estimate, 40% of arrested offenders are under the age of 18.¹⁸ It is increasingly easier for young individuals to get rifles and other lethal weapons. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, around 44% of street children in the country are involved in drug selling, 35% in picketing, 12% in mugging, 11% in human trafficking, and 21% in other illegal acts.¹⁹ Advent of cyber technologies has made it easier for youth to engage in criminal activities, get access to contrabands and criminal networks.



Source: *The Independent*

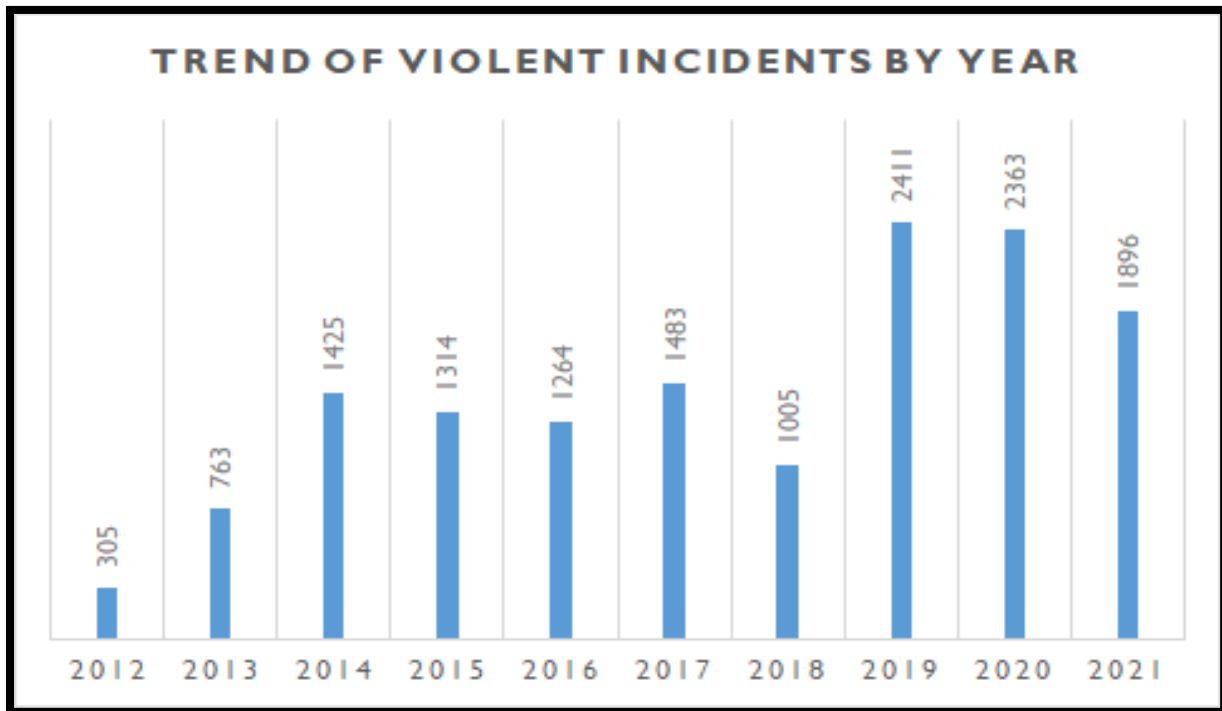
¹⁸ Haque, Israt, et al., Young Age and Crime in Society: A Study on Youth Prisoners in Bangladesh, *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, Redfame publishing, May 2020.

¹⁹ "Children's involvement in crime on the rise", 1 October 2016, Cited in: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/10/01/childrens-involvement-crime-rise> , Accessed on: 27 February 2022.

Youth as Offenders

The number of violent incidents where youths were involved has increased alarmingly over the years. According to BPO data, the year 2019 saw 2411 cases of incidents of youth violence in total, and 2363 cases in 2020; almost double than the previous recorded years. Figure 1 shows a slow rising pattern from 2012 to 2018, then a sudden spike of incidents in 2019 onwards. Recorded incidents from 2021 show a decrease in incidents, but the cause behind the decrease might be attributed to COVID-19 lockdowns.²⁰

Figure 1: Yearly Trend of Violent Incidents Where Youths Were Involved

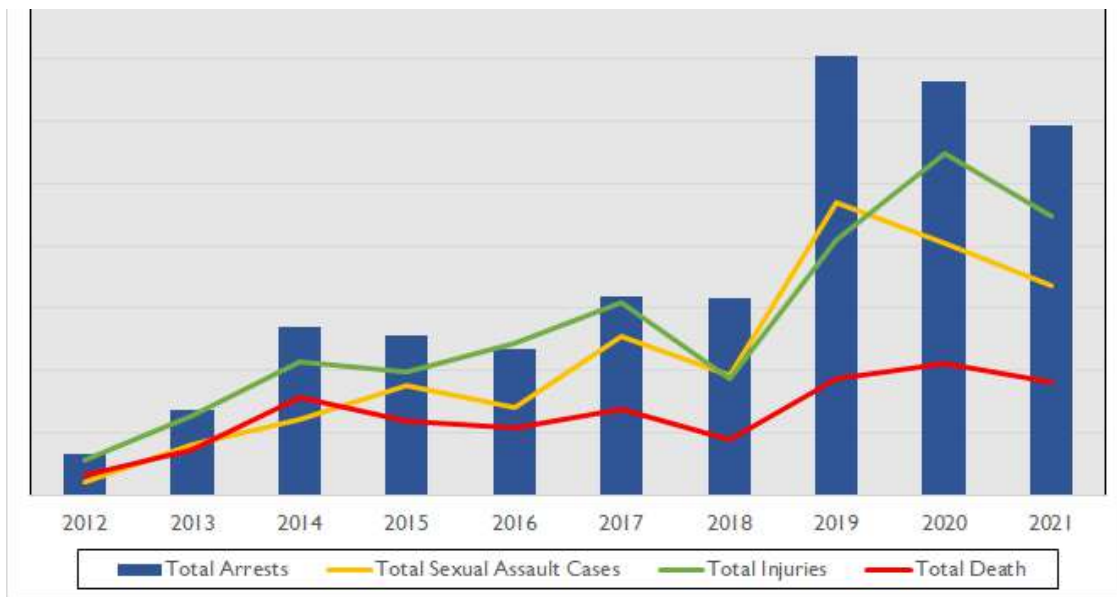


Source: BPO Data

²⁰ Rashid, S., Impact of COVID-19 on Selected Criminal Activities in Dhaka, Bangladesh, *Asian Journal of Criminology* (2021).

According to BPO statistics, the number of people injured and killed as a result of youth-led violence is also increasing (Figure 2). Youth participation in sexual assault cases has risen drastically in recent years, with at least 940 incidences of sexual assault and sexual violence committed by youths reported in only one year (in 2019). The number of juvenile arrests has also increased in recent years, with at least 3922 arrests of adolescents who were involved in violent and criminal acts occurring in the previous three years alone.

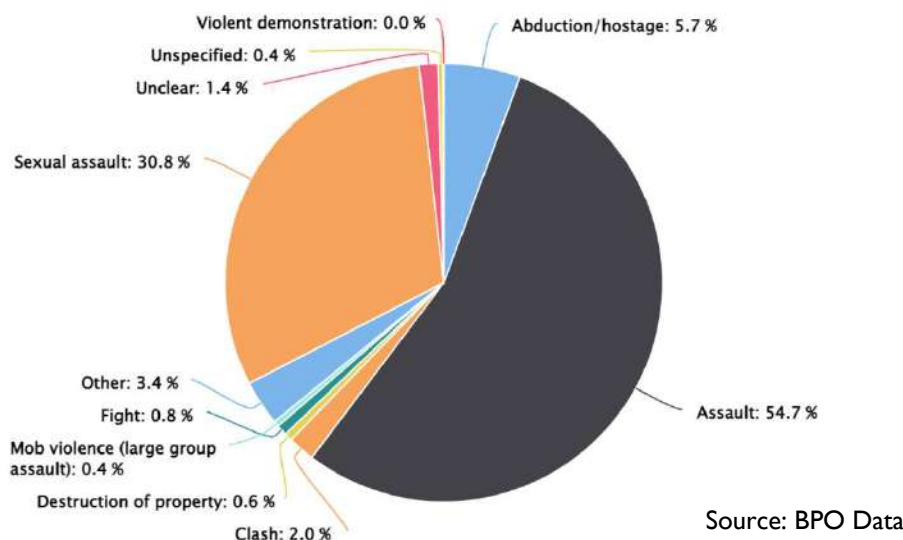
Figure 2: Number of Deaths, Injuries, Cases of Sexual Assaults by Youths and Arrest Data of Youth in Bangladesh.



Youth violence usually takes the form of assault, sexual assault/harassment, vandalism/destruction of property, fights, group violence, threats with weapons, kidnapping and abduction. In the year 2021, majority of youth-led or youth-related violence were cases of assault and sexual assault (Figure 3). Surprisingly, vandalism or destruction of property, which is one of the most common

reasons for juvenile arrest in the developed countries²¹²² is very low in Bangladesh, with only 16 cases from year 2019-21, most of which are done by student wings of political parties.

Figure 3: Youth-led Violence Types (According to BPO Codebook) and Frequency of Each Type of Violence for The Year 2021.



While assault is the primary type of violent incident youths are engaged in, assault is a broad terminology of offence²³, that does not explain the motivations behind youth violence very well. BPO presents a robust database with many factors, which makes it simpler to understand the dynamics of violence in Bangladesh, where teenagers committed the crime, as well as their motives for committing acts of violence. From the Figure 4 we can see the main motivations behind youth-led violence in the year 2021. A combined analysis of figure 3 and 4 tells us that cases of assault can comprise political violence (inter/intra party tensions, election violence, land

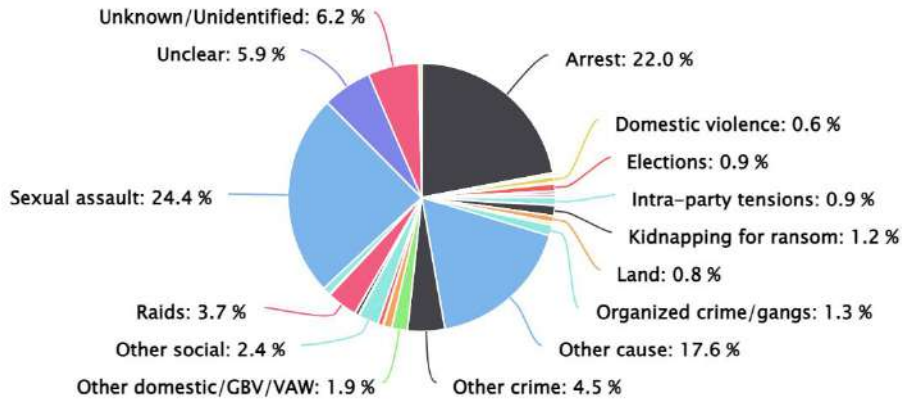
²¹ “Statistical Briefing Book, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJDP)”, May 2019 Cited In: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/qa05101.asp> , Accessed on: 28 February 2022.

²² “A STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT OF YOUTH AT RISK AND YOUTH OFFENDING IN CANADA”31 January, 2018, Cited In: <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/ststclsnpshst-yth/index-en.aspx>, Accessed on: 28 February 2022.

²³ “Law of Bangladesh, The Penal Code, 1860, ACT NO. XLV OF 1860”. Cited In: <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-11/section-3204.html>, Accessed on: 28 February 2022.

related violence, organized crime etc.). Sexual assault is the most frequent motivation for youth-led violence according to the data. Most researcher think, the hushed-up approach regarding sex is causing the youth to involve in such a crime.²⁴ Be it their curiosity or lack of understanding of the criminal offenses or sense of power dynamics, youth, mainly boys are violating their counterparts sexually. While studying the characteristics of juvenile sex offenders, it comes out that youth who target peers or adults shares certain similar characteristics. Both groups show a pattern of neurodevelopmental disorders, presence of behavioral or health problems and history of substance abuse.²⁵

Figure 4: Motives of Youth Violence in 2021



Source: BPO Data

Youth as Victims

According to the BPO database, youths are more often than not victims of violence rather than the offender. The data suggest that (Figure 5), girls were victimized in greater numbers than any

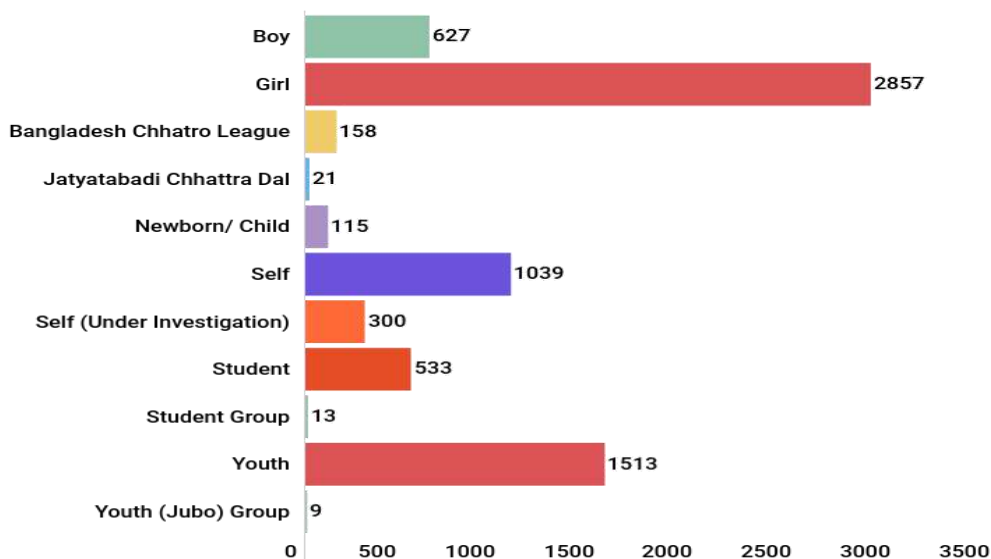
²⁴ Lussier, Patrick, et al. "A Developmental Taxonomy of Juvenile Sex Offenders for Theory, Research, and Prevention: The Adolescent-Limited and the High-Rate Slow Disaster." *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, vol. 39, no. 12, Dec. 2012.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

other group. Sexual assaults disproportionately affected girls. While the data on male victims are not conclusive, sexual assaults on boys appear to be very rare except in the case of childhood abuse. This does not imply that boys do not experience sexual violence, rather the case might be that sexual assaults on boys go unreported or underreported. Incidents where boys were the victim typically include assault and murder due to land related or previous enmity related incidents.

Another interesting observation is the victim category 'self', which BPO Codebook uses to describe incidents of suicide or self-inflicted violence. From 2019-2021, there are 1339 cases of violent incident under two categories (Self, Self Under Investigation) in total. Victims in incidents under the 'self' category are also predominantly girls, which tells us that young female suicide is on the rise in Bangladesh. In the context of violent attacks leading to death by suicide, boys are more prone compared to girls. These types of incidents involve assault on family members and later committing o suicide.

Figure 5: Victims in Youth-related Crimes



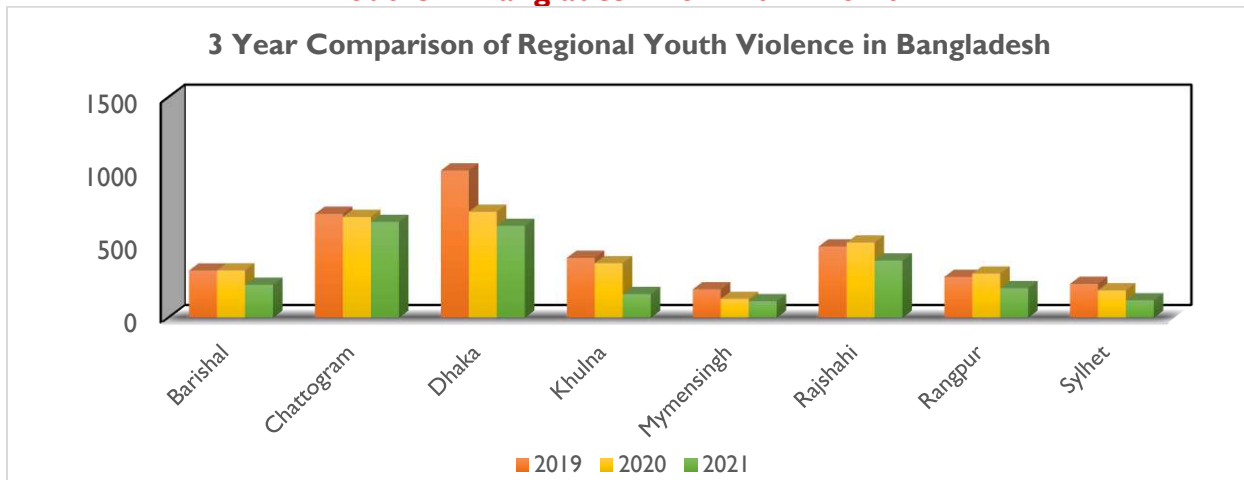
Source: BPO Data

Figure 5 also shows us that youth themselves are victims of violence in a very high number of cases. In 3 years (2019-21), BPO recorded 1513 cases of incidents with youths as victims. Incidents of this type are often under ‘Unclear’ or ‘Unknown’ category; cases of dead bodies of youths being found after murder or assault on youths by unidentified miscreants. These murders and assaults are related to organized crime and political violence in most cases.

Regional State of Youth Violence in Bangladesh

BPO data project that divisional trend of youth violence is similarly downward for 3 years (Figure 6). The administrative division Dhaka and the economically important division Chattogram show the highest number of cases of youth violence for all years, while Mymensingh and Sylhet have the lowest. This can be attributed to geographic conditions-based clustering, and terrain distributions in the regions, which can influence patterns of criminal activities.²⁶ All districts have followed the downward trend of youth violence, which tells us that frequency of youth violence in all regions were similarly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

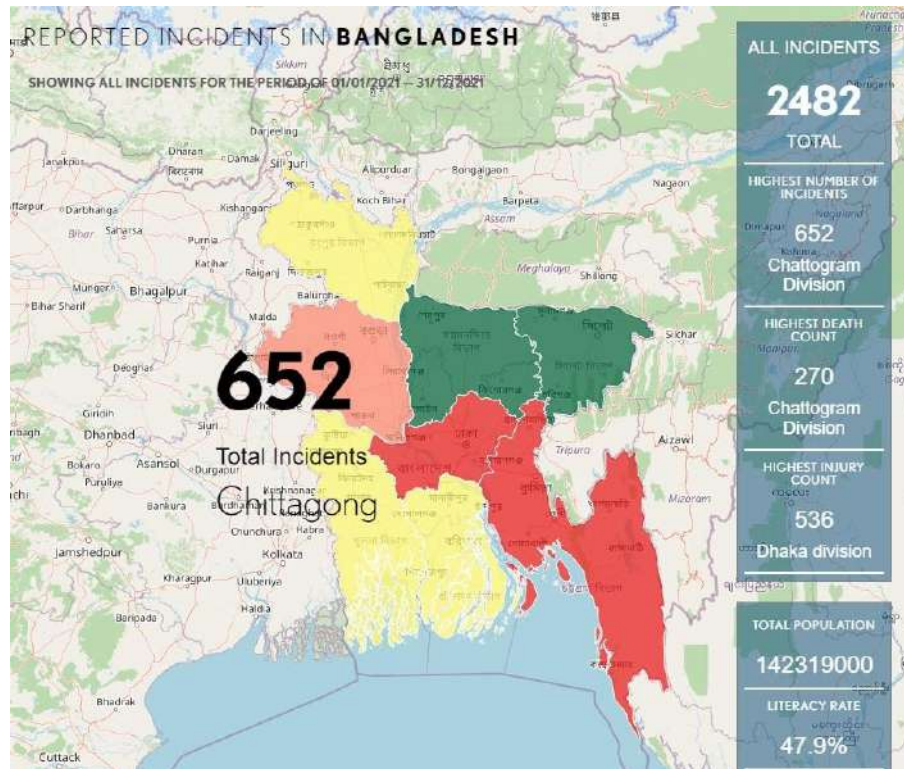
Figure 6: Regional Comparison (by division) of Violent Incidents Perpetrated by Youths in Bangladesh from 2019 To 2021



²⁶ Khan, Md. Bashir Uddin, and Md. Ishtiaq Ahmed Talukder. “Spatial Distribution of Crime in Bangladesh: An Analysis.” *Journal of Penal Law and Criminology*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2021.

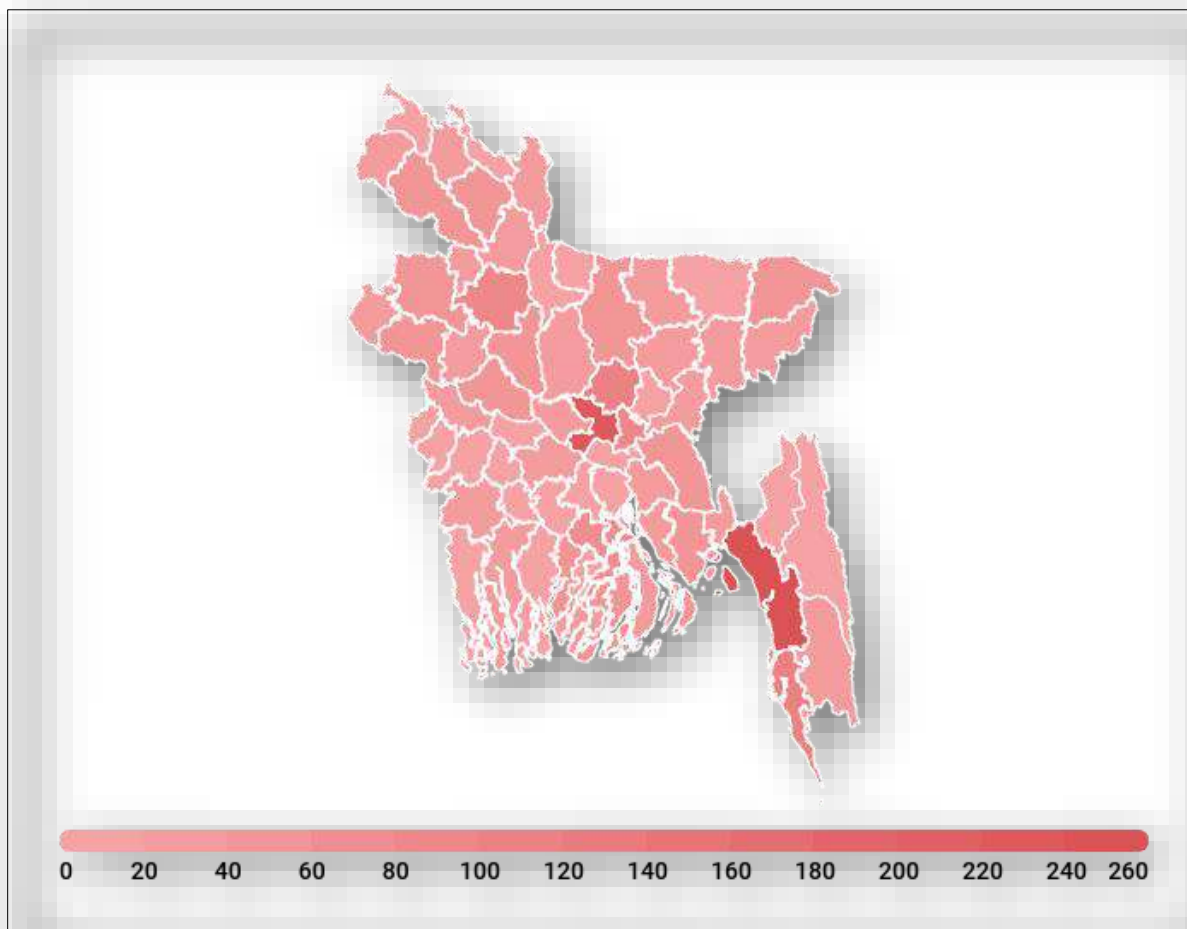
Figure 7 reiterates our point that youth violence is spatially clustered through a heatmap, which shows the count of youth-led violent incidents in 2021 for all districts. This similarly shows Dhaka and Chattogram are red zones in terms of violent incidents, and Sylhet and Mymensingh are green zones with 118 and 112 incidents each, respectively. Chattogram has the highest number of incidents (652) and highest death count (270), while Dhaka has highest number of injuries (536). Figure 8 zooms in even more to a district-wise violent incident count, showing that Dhaka and Chattogram city is where violent incidents involving youths are most concentrated. It also shows a trend of rough terrains or large cities having a higher violence rate than plains or rural regions of Bangladesh.

Figure 7: Divisional Heat Map of Youth Violence in Bangladesh for 2021



Source: BPO website

Figure 8: District-wise Heat Map of Youth Violence in Bangladesh for 2021



Source: BPO Data

For a more exhaustive analysis of the present status of youth violence on a regional level, see Table I, which details the overall number of arrests, abductions, sexual assaults, injuries, and deaths in each division for the year 2021, according to BPO data. The figures paint a bleak picture

of youth violence in Bangladesh. There seem to be a disproportionate number of arrests, deaths, and injuries in youth violence-related incidents, as well as an excessive number of sexual assaults.

Table 1: Regional State of Youth Violence in 2021

Division	Total Arrests	Total Abductions	Total Injuries	Total Deaths	Total Sexual Assaults
Barishal	115	6	150	92	72
Chattogram	586	42	438	270	153
Dhaka	780	34	536	261	200
Khulna	136	7	74	80	52
Mymensingh	75	8	97	47	49
Rajshahi	243	16	175	200	103
Rangpur	128	12	72	98	57
Sylhet	101	11	51	49	44
Grand Total	2164	136	1593	1097	730

Source: BPO Data

Correlating Factors of Youth Violence in Bangladesh

Economic Factors

Economic conditions, political instability, lack of resources, proper education and strong institutions of the developing and low-income countries often cannot cater to the developmental needs of youths, which in turn drives them to a life of violence and crime. Youth violence is a major challenge in the current world. Bangladesh is similarly facing the challenge of youth violence in the form of teen gangs, assault, battery, young thieves, young sexual offenders etc. There are currently 59 million youth in Bangladesh, almost 35% of the entire population of Bangladesh.²⁷

²⁷ Queried from UN Population Data, Cited In: <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>, Accessed on: February 27, 2022.

But compared to the rising population, Bangladesh is still positioned low in various metrics of development, growth and socioeconomic progress, which are vital in terms of analyzing youth violence.

Table 2: Youth at a Glance in Bangladesh²⁸

Categories	Female	Male
Labor force participation (ILO 2017)	26.4%	54.9%
Unemployment (ILO 2017)	16.8%	10.8%
NEET (ILO, 2017)	44.6%	9.8%
Net enrolment (UNESCO, 2017)	66.55%	56.78%
Literacy Rate (UNESCO, 2017)	94.38%	91.54%
Out of school (WEF-GGGR 2018)	53.3%	55.5%

Factors like participation in the labor force, unemployment rate, NEET ("Not in Education, Employment, or Training") percentage of the population, literacy rate etc. are highly important metrics to determine the economic state of a country's youth as well as their potential for both good and bad actions. We can take a glance at some of the Economic factors that are thought to correlate with youth violence and deterrence in Table 1 and Table 2.

²⁸ *Country Youth Profile, Bangladesh*. Islamic Development Bank, Dhaka, 2019, <https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2020-09/Bangladesh%20Youth.pdf>. Accessed on: 28 Feb 2022.

Table 3: Labor Market Profile of Youths in 2016-17²⁹

	Male	Female	All
Youth (% of total employed)	27.4.	35.0	29.5
Youth labour Force (% of total LF)	30.1	35.0	31.6
Youth Unemployed (% of total unemployed)	80.2	79.0	79.6
Youth Unemployed (% of total youth)	5.4	5.2	10.6
Youth Unemployed Rate (%)	8.2	15.0	10.6
Youth NEET (% of total youth)	8.1	49.4	29.8

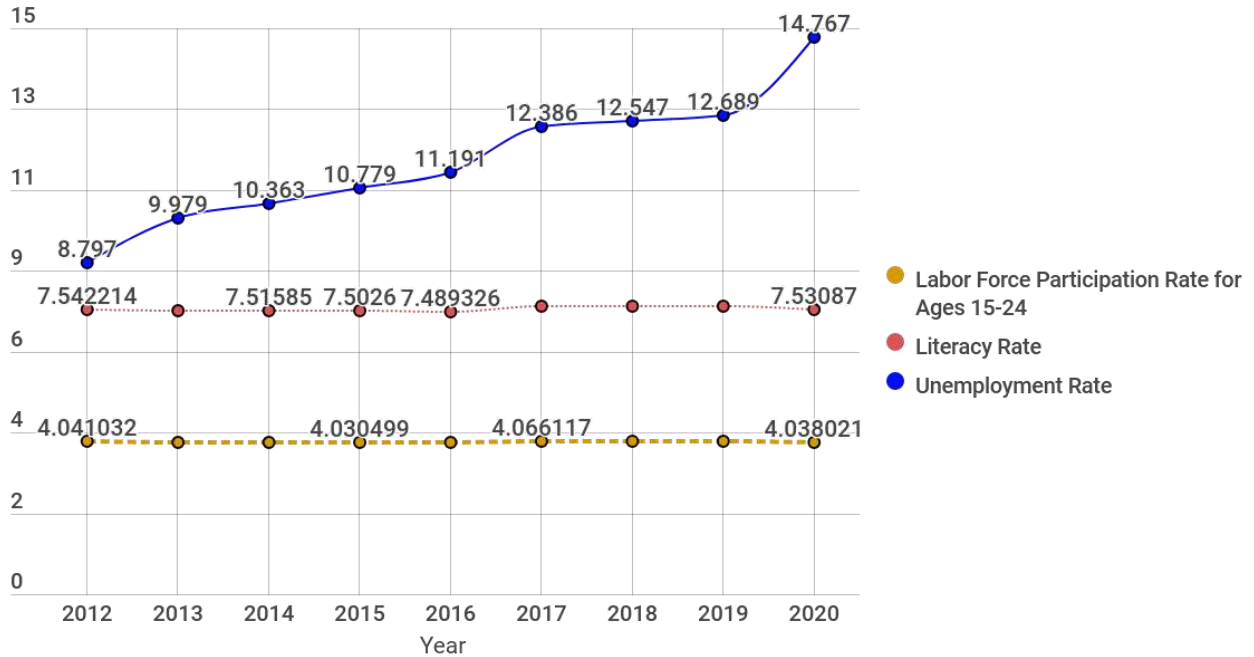
Source: Labour Force Survey Report 2016-17

The Tables 1 and 2 data show a noticeable discrepancy between young males and females regarding economic factors (Unemployment, NEET, Labour Force Participation) opposite to skills and education (Literacy rate, Net Enrollment, Out of School). In terms of literacy and enrollment, females have a slightly higher percentage than males, but females are still overwhelmingly behind males in terms of economic empowerment, self-sufficiency and participation. This can be an explanatory factor for increased violence on young females in recent years in the forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) as noticed in our analysis of BPO data. A large body of research also supports this; there are statistical evidences that Female NEET ratio and economic insolvency leads to more cases of domestic violence and GBV across countries and cultures.³⁰

²⁹ Maria, Amima Najnin. "Youth in Bangladesh: Demographic Dividend or Demographic Disaster." *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development* (2019).

³⁰ Eggers del Campo, Isabel, and Janina Isabel Steinert. "The Effect of Female Economic Empowerment Interventions on the Risk of Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, Dec. 2020.

Figure 9: World Bank Estimates for Youth Labor Force Participation, Literacy Rate and Unemployment Rate



Source: World Bank Data

Table 1 and Table 2 shows that compared to the rising literacy rate in Bangladesh, there are still less than satisfactory participation of youth in the labor force. World Bank estimates in Figure 9I shows an increasing unemployment rate over the years. Log transformation was applied to Labor force participation data and square transformation was applied to the literacy rate data to avoid right-skewing. This data indicates youth participation in the labor force are almost stagnant for almost 10 years with little improvement, compared to the unemployment rate which is increasing steadily over the years. The inherent factor behind this trend of rising unemployment is the rapidly increasing population and increased life expectancy in Bangladesh. This is leaving a large demographic of educated and skilled youths who are unable to sustain themselves economically and potentially are leaning towards a life of crime and violence. Lack of employment,

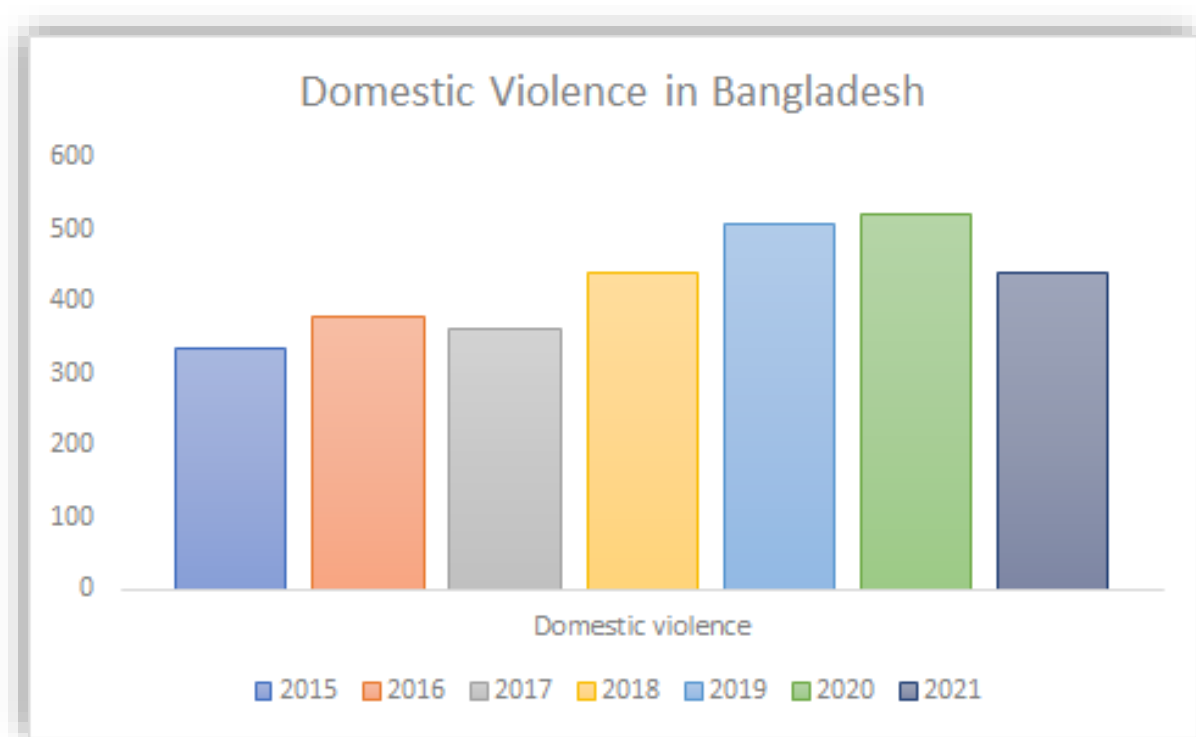
economic opportunities and environment for financial growth have all been linked to the increase of violence and deviance in society.³¹ It can be inferred that rapid population growth of Bangladesh is also a very important significant factor behind the rising trends of youth violence.

Social Factors

Youth Violence is a social issue, and often youths develop a great deal of delinquent behavior in response to the opportunities available in their community and social settings. In this aspect, parental care is the most critical factor in ensuring children's appropriate physical and mental development. The family is the primary environment in which personality development begins. However, in households where there is a lack of parental supervision over the children, there is a risk that the youngsters may engage in delinquent behavior. While a healthy marital life has a significant impact on the lifestyle and thinking of their children, a lack of harmony in the parent's relationship severely disrupts the mental stability of the children and lead them down the wrong road. Insecurity within the family, miscommunication, and quarrels between siblings all have a negative effect on children's emotions, since they often fail to pay respect to elders.

³¹ Chan, Gloria Hongyee. "The Effect of Employment on Delinquent Behavior Among Youth in Hidden Situation." *Frontiers in psychiatry* vol. 10, 229, 23 April 2019.

Figure 10: Yearly Trend of Domestic Violence in Bangladesh



Source: BPO Data

Domestic violence is on the rise in Bangladesh at the moment (Figure 5), and this is another important contributory factor of youth violence.³² Children from such families do not get the love they deserve from their parents. Absences of mother or father due to divorce or death, as well as parental miscommunication, all contribute significantly to youth violence. There are certain families with a large number of children, and if some of them encounter disproportionate discrimination in terms of love and opportunity, they develop a delinquent propensity unconsciously. Companionship has a significant impact on adolescents, but violent companionship transforms adolescents into young offenders. Gradually, these youngsters join gangs within the

³² Molina, Julian & Levell, Jade., "Children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality: A literature review", 2020.

community, and the severity of their misbehavior increases. Parental criminality may be a crucial factor in youth violence, since some studies indicate that when one of the parents engages in criminal activity, their children often become criminals as well. Such parental criminal behavior encourages their children to do crimes. Additionally, some children develop such delinquent habits by mimicking criminal relatives. The probability of delinquency for such family's children is quite significant, as the youths are susceptible to fascination to a life of crime, especially if their relatives or close ones are engaged in it.

Current Policies to Curb Youth Violence

Taking care of children and teenagers requires tact and delicacy since they are at a point in life when they are both fragile and full of promise. Quite often, they are influenced by their peers to engage in criminal activities without fully understanding the implications. There are various available strategies of deterrence for youth violence. Based on research and data, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has produced a preventative action package to combat escalating teenage violence.³³ It is critical to concentrate a lot of the treatments on children's needs based on their behavior and to create an environment that promotes emotional development, high quality education, easy access to health care, and a supportive network of adults and safeguarding measures.

³³ "Infographic about Youth Violence Prevention", Cited In: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/communicationresources/infographics/yv.html>, Accessed on: 28 February 2022.

6 Strategies to prevent youth violence from decades of research



Source: CDC Infographics

There have been attempts to improve the lives of young people in Bangladesh, including measures aimed at reducing the incidence of youth violence. Most government policies and programs include youth in their scope, but not all of them basically place youth at the center of their efforts. Several governmental policies have an impact on the lives of young people, even if they are not directly aimed at them. Policymakers who successfully address youth issues make a statement about the country's commitment to this generation by ensuring that issues affecting youth are addressed in a variety of policy areas. When it comes to developing a national strategy, it is important to concentrate on the empowerment of young people via political, social, and economic engagement.

To better meet the requirements of today's youth, the government has implemented many policies in the last several years, including the National Education Policy 2010³⁴, National Youth Policy 2017³⁵, and Seventh Five-Year Plan (2016-2020). In addition to the HEQEP, Micro-Credit Program, and the development of National Youth Training Centers (NYTC)³⁶, there are many additional programs that have been implemented in Bangladesh. A few of the policies and programs cited above engage in significant youth development activities, such as providing high-quality educational opportunities, training and providing financial assistance to those who have completed their education and training, encouraging job-seeking among the unemployed, addressing issues of gender equity, and involving rural youth in participatory development. Youngsters, especially women, are encouraged to get more involved in community development through these programs. They are also given training in many areas of study to boost their employability and help them organize youth clubs.

Bangladesh enacted new legislation, the Children Act, 2013, repealing the previous provision for the benefit of the children. In this Act, extra emphasis has been given to the establishment of Child Welfare Boards at the national, district and upazilla levels. The 2013 Act introduces the concept of "restorative justice" that proposes compensation to a child who is a victim of crime.³⁷ In order to restore the child to her/his previous position, the court may order any person found guilty of an offense committed against a child victim to pay compensation to the child. There are

³⁴ "National Education Policy", 2010, Cited In: shorturl.at/jFHT0, Accessed on: 28 February 2022.

³⁵ "National Youth Policy (Draft Version)", 2017, Cited In: shorturl.at/jDI0U, Accessed on: 28 February 2022.

³⁶ *Government Policies And Practices On YOUTH*. BRAC, Dhaka, 2018. Accessed 1 Mar 2022.

a number of ways through which a judge might compel a parent to pay child support, including in whole or in installments. In addition, the Act recognizes and details the obligations of a number of organizations and individuals involved in safeguarding the best interests of children.

The policies and projects discussed in this section are only those that are already in place to help youth. It is expected that government will update their policies on youth and children with new ideas as plans for their empowerment and betterment.

Conclusion

When it comes to addressing the growing problem of youth violence, the government of Bangladesh is not moving fast enough. On the flip side of that, however, there is a growing trend of young people in Bangladesh who are innovative and creative in fields such as sports, the arts, science, and entrepreneurship and who are serving as role models for their peers. These promising youths are the ones that will guide tomorrow's society to a brighter path. However, preventing all forms of youth violence and reaching the goal of "zero violence" would need the concerted efforts of society, government, and non-governmental institutions. Tackling youth violence requires dealing with a variety of socioeconomic problems, such as unemployment, drug abuse, lack of education and literacy, poor parenting and bad living conditions. Also, as suggested in the beginning of the writeup, we must strive to understand the youth through an inclusive and broad lens, be careful not to stereotype them and their behavior, if we want to come up with effective strategies.

Mob Violence in Bangladesh: Analyzing Trends, Motivating Factors and Ramifications

Shah Muhammad Salahuddin¹

Introduction

In the last quarter of 2021, Bangladeshi media was overwhelmed by the news of mob violence, which started from a Hindu temple attack at Cumilla. Later, it spread across the country and fueled other violence; among them, the most brutal incident was the killing of *Jatan Kumar Saha*, who was brutally beaten and hacked to death in Begumganj, Noakhali, by the angry mob on 15 October 2021. Prior to this, *Shahidunnabi Jewel* was allegedly beaten and burnt to death by the angry mob on 29 October 2020 at Lalmonirhat. Although religious sentiments were attached to mentioned incidents, mob violence occurred in Bangladesh for many other reasons as well. For example, the killing of *Taslina Begum Renu*, an innocent single mother, on the premises of a primary school in Dhaka city by an angry mob who mistakenly took her as a child lifter. She did not even get an opportunity to defend herself in front of the cruelty of the crowd. Renu is not the only innocent person who had to die without committing any crime; seven other persons had to lose their lives due to a false allegations of child lifting. According to Quarterly Human Rights Monitoring Report on Bangladesh, at least 20 persons were killed in public acts of lynching only between the third and fourth quarter of 2019.² These brutal incidents indicate that people are becoming more intolerant. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to identify the ongoing trends, the anger factors and the ramifications of mob violence.

The writeup is primarily based on desk research. The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) data has been used as the prime source of information, the time period is from 2016 to 2021. Besides, a number of books, articles, journals, videos, and newspapers were also analysed from print and

¹ Shah Muhammad Salahuddin, Research Data Analyst, Bangladesh Peace Observatory, Centre for Genocide Studies, University of Dhaka.

² Odhikar, "Quarterly Human Rights Monitoring Report on Bangladesh," *Odhikar*, 2019.

online sources. The paper limits its focus to investigate incidents that have widespread impacts on the citizens, community as well as state.

Conceptualising Mob Violence

Mob violence is not unique to a particular nation or the modern era or belongs to the past. Throughout history, many societies have confronted the challenge of mob violence. For instance, England and France suffered from mob violence throughout their long histories. Many European countries passed laws limiting the rights of ordinary citizens to public gatherings, fearing that demonstrations or protests could quickly get out of hand and turn into a riot. However, mob violence remains a largely understudied area, and academicians, policymakers as well as practitioners define the concept differently. Recently, sociologists and anthropologists have tried to critically analyse the concept of mob violence.

The term “mob” originates from the Latin word *mobile vulgus*, which means “the movable common people” and was used as the “fickleness or inconstancy of the crowd”. The term has a negative connotation and is usually portrayed as being uncontrolled, unorganised, angry, and emotional people.³ Indeed, there is a significant difference between mob and crowd, which was first explained by LeBon. He attempted to explain the seeming transformation of reasonable individuals into seemingly out-of-control and violent people when in a mob.⁴ Later the work of Gustave LeBon was further expanded by Herbert Blumer. He argued that the transformation of a crowd into a mob had taken place in three-stages. At the first stage, an interesting and exciting event occurred that can draw people together. In the second step, the crowd focus on a common element as emotions strengthen; finally, people unite around an object or issue, individual behaviour may escalate into violent behaviour that will quickly be mirrored by other

According to Alex Alvarez and Ronet Bachman mob violence is a type of collective violence in which a group of individuals overreach the law and punish individuals for real or imagined crimes. Usually non-lethal in nature, such as whippings and tarring and feathering, however, gradually it evolved as much more deadly form —one which typically included torture, mutilation, hanging,

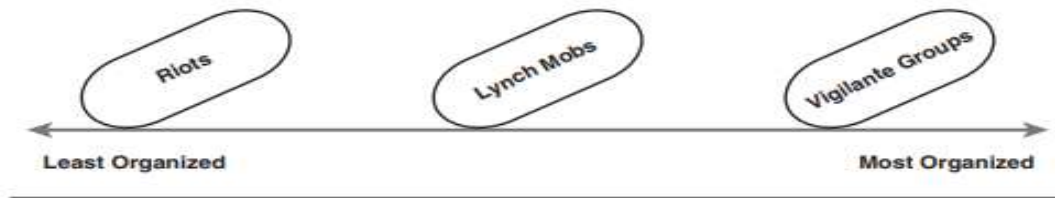
³ Alex Alvarez and Ronet Bachman, *Violence: The Enduring Problem* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008)

⁴ Gustave LeBon, *The Crowd* (London: Ernest Benn, 1952), 32.

and burning”.⁵ Bhattacharjee defined mob violence as modern tribalism, where enemies are differentiated based on caste, creed, colour, religion, and/or ideology.⁶

Unlike Alvarez, Bachman and Bhattacharjee, Heal identified three forms, e.g., riots, lynch mobs, and vigilante groups of mob violence that are relatively spontaneous, unplanned and unorganised. Each form can be differentiated by its level of organisation. Riots are the most spontaneous and the least organised in nature; lynch mobs fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum, whereas vigilante groups are often the most planned and organised.⁷ This categorisation is best understood as a continuum of collective behaviour that ranges from the most violence-prone to the least. He emphasises that these are generalisations, and there are many exceptions to the rule. Besides, any particular incident of mob violence can involve varying levels of the organisation, and the nature of riots, lynchings, as well as vigilantism are virtually indistinguishable. Many riots include lynchings, and lynch mobs often define their actions as a form of vigilantism.⁸

Figure I: Continuum of Mob Violence



Source: Sid Heal, “Crowds, Mobs and Nonlethal Weapons.” *Military Review*, March/April 2000.⁹

Sid Heal also studied the psychology of individuals who come to participate in these types of mob violence. He identified eight specific psychological factors, e.g., novelty, release, power, justification, suggestibility, stimulation, conformity and deindividuation, that serve to lower or

⁵ Alex Alvarez and Ronet Bachman, *op.cit.*

⁶ Aiswarya Dutta, “Human Rights Violation in India: WhatsApp and Mob Lynching,” *IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science*, September 2020.

⁷ Sid Heal, “Crowds, Mobs and Nonlethal Weapons.” *Military Review*, March/April 2000.

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*

remove our prohibitions against violent behaviour and thus facilitate individual participation in mob violence.¹⁰

Table 1: Psychology of Mob Violence

Novelty	Some people may come to participate in riots and other group behaviour simply because they are bored and see in the collective action a break from routine and a sense of excitement and novelty.
Release	Even though an individual may not be very concerned with a specific grievance or cause, they may participate because they find in the violence and aggression a release for a more generalised hostility, anger, and/or frustration.
Power	Mobs feel empowered by the violence and the destruction they unleash. Participating in large-scale violence can confer upon somebody intoxicating feelings of control, domination, and supremacy.
Justification	The sense of power engendered in group destruction can also lead to feelings of righteousness and legitimacy.
Suggestibility	Many individuals in a mob may not be fully aware of what is going on or why and so may be open to the answers provided by others who may appear to know better or understand the situation.
Stimulation	The emotions and sentiments of crowds can be infectious, and individuals caught up in the group can easily find their own emotions aroused and stimulated.
Conformity	Not only do individuals have a natural tendency to conform to the demands of a group, rioting mobs also have a tendency to attack and victimise those who resist or do not conform, which tends to increase the pressures toward going along with the mob.
Deindividuation	In groups, individual identity tends to be diffused into the larger collective identity. When combined with feelings of anonymity, participants may feel released from normal constraints on their behaviour.

Source: Sid Heal, "Crowds, Mobs and Nonlethal Weapons." *Military Review*, March/April 2000.¹¹

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Likewise, Mullen and Leader analysed the psychology of mob violence by the concept of deindividuation. Deindividuation is the psychological process in which individuals lose their sense of selves.¹² Deindividuation theory suggests that groups affect the psychological state of their members, reducing individual agency and increasing behaviours that break social norms, including violence.¹³ According to the theory, rising deindividuation decreases adherence to social norms. As individuals submerge themselves into a collective identity, they lose their individual identities and self-control.¹⁴ With individuals having lost norms that emphasise order, the group becomes increasingly violent. The more deindividuated the members of a lynch mob are, the greater the atrocities of the lynch mob. In contrast, considering mob violence to be more rational, Clark McPhail asserts that people are not driven by irrational crowds, nor do they lose cognitive control; instead, it is a rational attempt to prevent some kinds of social change.¹⁵

Indeed, mob violence includes diverse kinds of elements and activities. In the context of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) defines mob violence as one-sided violence by a mob or large group against an individual or a comparatively small and/or defenceless group. To analyse the trends and patterns of mob violence in Bangladesh, the paper in the subsequent sections follow the definition of BPO.

Mob Violence Situation in Bangladesh

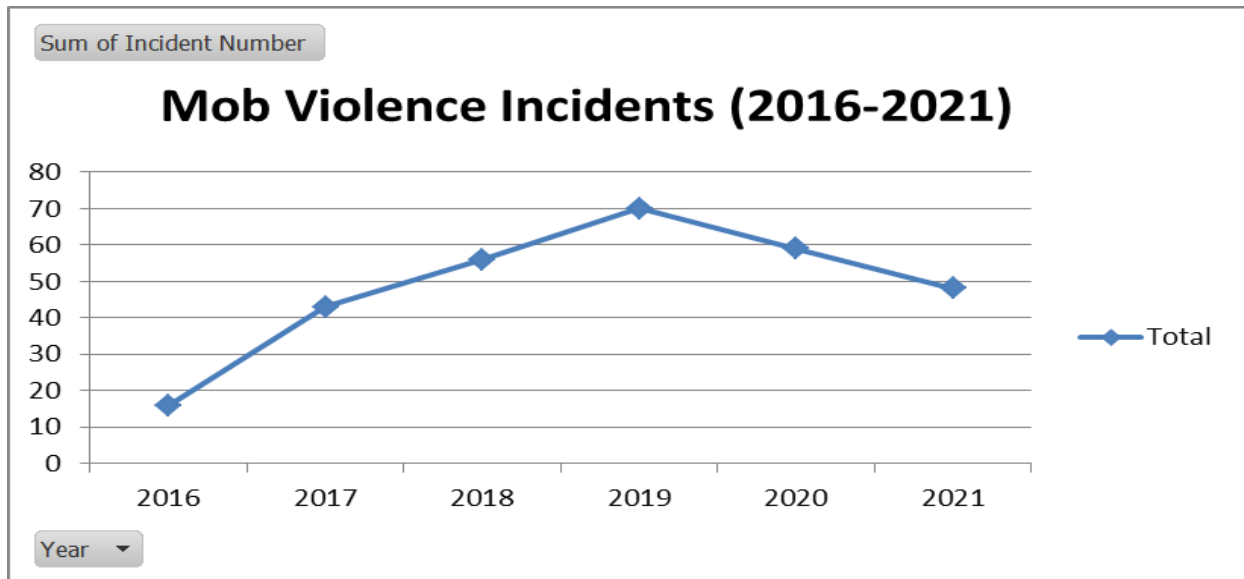
This section aims to analyse the current trends and patterns of mob violence scenarios in Bangladesh from the BPO data between 2016 to 2021.

¹² Mullen, B, "Atrocity as a function of lynch mob composition: A self-attention perspective," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 1986; Leader, T., Mullen, B., Abrams, D. (2007). "Without mercy: The immediate impact of group size on lynch mob atrocity." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2007.

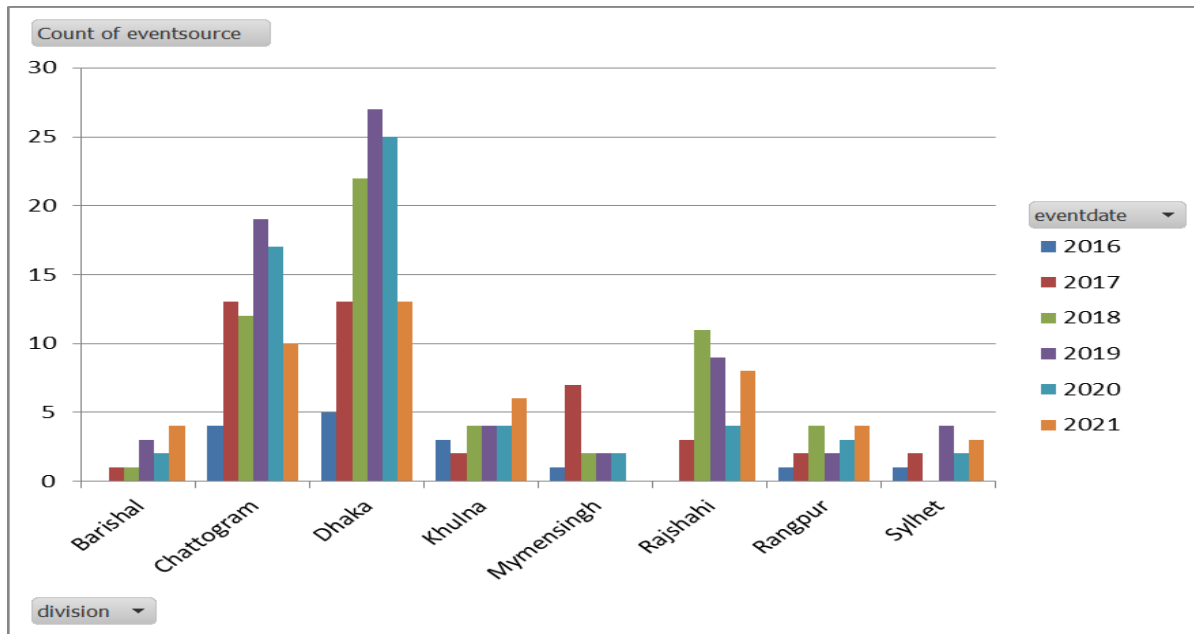
¹³ Diener, E, "Deindividuation: The absence of self-awareness and self-regulation in group members," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* In Paulus, (1980); P. B. (E), *Psychology of group influence*, (1980).

¹⁴ Festinger, L., Pepitone, A., Newcomb, T, "Some consequences of de-individuation in a group," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, (1952); Le Bon, G. *The crowd: A study of the popular mind*. (London, 1895).

¹⁵ Clark McPhail, *The Myth of the Madding Crowd* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991).



BPO data recorded 15 incidents of mob violence in 2016 which was the lowest in the chosen timeline. It increased around threefold within one year; it was 43 in 2017. The number of incidents continued an upward trend in the following year with 56 incidents. It rocketed in 2019 when it peaked with the highest recorded number of mob violence incidents - 70. Later, it showed a downward trend with 59 and 48 incidents of mob violence in 2020 and 2021, respectively.



Regional analysis of mob violence trend drawn from BPO data suggests that throughout the last five years, the highest number of mob violence occurred in the Dhaka division (105), which is around one-third of all incidents across the country. At least five mob violence incidents occurred in Dhaka division between 2016 and 2021, whereas at the same time Barishal, Sylhet, and Rangpur divisions observed minimum number of incidents. The highest number of incidents for all these three mentioned divisions was 4, while no mob violence occurred in Barishal and Sylhet divisions in 2016 and 2018, respectively. Rajshahi and Mymensingh also did not experience any such incidents in 2016 and 2021. However, the Chattogram division shared around a quarter of the total incidents. The number of incidents was below 35 for all other divisions except Dhaka and Chattogram throughout the five years, and 35 incidents occurred in the Rajshahi division. The Khulna division saw 23 mob violence incidents. On the other hand, Rangpur, Mymensing, Sylhet and Barishal witnessed 16, 14, 12 and 11 incidents from 2016 to 2021 as per BPO data.

A total of 262 incidents of mob violence took place during these five years. As a consequence, around 145 persons, including two women, lost their lives in the hands of the mob without having

a chance to prove themselves innocent. The cruelty of the crowd left 371 persons injured; among them, 30 were female. Some properties, including residences, religious establishments, business settings, and vehicles, were also vandalised by the mob. According to BPO data, 279 people have also been arrested by law enforcement agencies for their alleged involvement in mob violence.

A careful examination of the data suggests that the nature and target of mob violence has changed gradually. Previously some common forms of mob violence, i.e., lynching to thieves, robbers, rapists and other criminals, were prevalent. However, nowadays, new dimensions are being added to the existing list, such as lynching suspected strangers, enemies, religious minorities, ideological and political opponents, etc., arising from intolerance and resulting in mob violence. Certainly, some factors are triggering this intolerance. The following section aims to discuss the instigating factors behind this crime.

Motivating Factors

The trends and patterns of mob violence in Bangladesh reveal that in such kind of violence, involvement of mob is certain, and the process and the type of violence is also the same. However, after closely examining incidents, the write-up found that the motivating factor is not the same in all cases. The following examines the diverse triggers.

Social Media, Rumour and Misinformation

Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing internet user countries in Asia. Around 28.8 per cent of its population actively uses the medium.¹⁶ Facebook is most prevalent among social media sites. A total of 45 million people use social media in Bangladesh, which accounted for 27.2 per cent of its entire population.¹⁷ A Global Digital Statshot of Q2 report published in 2017 estimates that Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is the second city globally with the most active Facebook users.¹⁸ It is rare to find people having an android phone without a Facebook account. However, in Bangladesh, people not only use Facebook for getting and sharing information, social communication, online marketing and studying purposes but also to propagate and spread rumour

¹⁶ Datareportal, "Digital 2021 October Global Statshot Report," *We Are Social and Hootsuite*, 2021.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ "Dhaka 2nd among top cities with active Facebook users" 16 April 2017. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/bytes/dhaka-2nd-among-cities-largest-active-facebook-users-1391377>. Accessed on 13 January 2022.

and misinformation intentionally and/or unintentionally. It is reported that at least 25 YouTube channels, 60 Facebook pages and ten websites accused of spreading rumours were shut down in 2019.¹⁹

The rumour spread out through social media, Facebook posts. For example, mob violence in Ramu in 2012 began from the reaction to sharing an image from a fake Facebook account similar to a Buddhist male name depicting the desecration of a Quran. In case of Padma Bridge rumour, the rumour was spread through Facebook posts that human head would be needed to construct the Bridge. The posts on Facebook circulate that “child abductors are on the prowl to collect heads and blood for the construction of Padma Bridge”.²⁰ As a result, at least eight people were killed by a vigilante mob. Hence, social media, through spreading rumour and misinformation, triggered lynching incidents, and people’s lack of trust in the law enforcement agencies make the rumours worth believing in Bangladesh.

Lack of Confidence in Law Enforcement Agencies and Legal System

Lack of confidence in law enforcement agencies leads to the development of a sense among the public that criminals would go unpunished, and hence they support ‘instant justice’ by the mob. According to Jürgen Habermas, there is an understanding of the law and justice inherent in society known as communicative rationality, where “society gathers an understanding of what it ought to and what not”. When the state laws and activities fail to reflect that social understanding, people get frustrated with the system resulting in taking laws into their own hands, as seen in mob lynching incidents.²¹

In Bangladesh, some of the cases of mob violence revealed that people had lost their confidence in the legal and law enforcement agencies. Two reasons can be identified for losing credibility. First, the lengthy and complicated process of the legal procedure keeps people waiting for many

¹⁹ “Human sacrifice bridge rumours spark Bangladesh lynchings,” 24 July 2019. Cited in <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2020342/human-sacrifice-bridge-rumours-spark-bangladesh-lynchings>. Accessed on 16 January 2022.

²⁰ ‘No-one listened to what she said’: Witnesses recount lynching of a mother in Bangladesh” Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2019/07/24/no-one-listened-to-what-she-said-witnesses-recount-lynching-of-a-mother-in-bangladesh>. Accessed on 19 January 2022.

²¹ Mathieu Deflem, *Sociology of Law: Visions of a Scholarly Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

years to get their case determined by any court of justice in the land. A study conducted by Mizanur Rahman and Akram Hossain found “a constant fluctuation in citizens’ confidence in the police department of Bangladesh.”²² The study suggests around 52% of people had confidence in police in 2002 which decreased to 37% in 2008, and it eroded more than half portion by the following year, 2009, when the police could retain only 16% of people’s confidence.²³ Another study found that over 17,000 cases are pending in seven tribunals of labour court alone. Secondly, the prevalence of clientelism, bribery, corruption, failure to identify and punish the guilty in a number of cases and police’s apathy to register cases makes people lose faith in them.

Political Rivalry

Political conflict between different groups in many cases led to mob violence in different parts of Bangladesh. In October 2016, a violent mob attack on the Hindus of Nasirnagar Upazila, Brahmanbaria vandalised, set fire, and looted at least 150 residences and temples. The victims suffered twice, repeatedly from arson in the same area. Investigations proved that the originating point of this mob violence was a Facebook post from an account named ‘Rasraj Das’, son of Jagannath Das at Haripur Unions Harinberh village that allegedly “hurt the religious sentiments of Muslims”. Immediately after this incident, police arrested Rasraj, and a court then ordered him into prison. Later, the investigation found that a local Awami League leader Faruk Mia, had some personal issues with the Fishermen Union leader Rasaraj Das as he did not help Faruk at the time of the last Union Parishad elections. Hence, Faruk opened a Facebook account in the name of Rasaraj Das and posted a picture of Kaba juxtaposed with Hindu deity Lord Shiva with the help of his brother Kaptan Mia in the timeline of Rasaraj.²⁴

Major political events, for example, national elections, have also served as a hotspot for mob violence. In the 2014 national election, Jamaat-e-Islami activists spread false rumours against Hindus regarding large scale attacks and killings of Muslim community in Malopara that instigated

²² Md. Akram Hossain & Mizanur Rahman , “Exploring the Factors that Affect Citizens’ Trust in Bangladesh Police,” in Democracy and Governance: Contemporary Issues in Bangladesh (Research Volume - 2), Dhaka: Public Policy and Governance Program, North South University, 2017.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Md Sumon Ali, “Uses of Facebook to accelerate violence and its impact in bangladesh,” *Global Media Journal*, August 2020

mob violence in Gopalpur village. As a result, an estimated 500 Hindu families lost their homes in that violence.²⁵

Religious Intolerance

People who do not follow the actual teachings of religion are easily motivated by rumour and are more prone to intolerant behaviour. Lack of proper knowledge about religious teachings resulting in religious intolerance contributes to mob violence. For example, a Vice President of Jamaat-e-Islami named Delwar Hossain Sayeedi was convicted on 16 charges, including murder, looting, arson, rape and forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam, and sentenced to death on two counts on 28 February 2013. Immediately after the announcement of judgement, many Hindu houses, trading centres, and temples were vandalised and set on fire by his supporters. Soon, the violence against Hindus spread across the country, leaving 50 temples and at least 1,500 residences destroyed.

Personal Rivalry

Personal conflict between two persons can also instigate mob violence. For example, in 2014, a Muslim teacher allegedly posted offensive remarks against Islam from a fake Facebook account to take revenge against his Hindu colleague. Around 1,000 locals became angry and served the Muslim teacher's interest by attacking the Hindu community leaving ten injured and 32 homes destroyed.²⁶ Similarly, in the Nasirnagar case, a man used a pseudo name on Facebook and posted questionable remarks to serve his interest and harm his personal enemy by fuelling an angry mob.²⁷

²⁵ Minority Rights Group International, "World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Bangladesh : Hindus," *UNHCR*, July 2018.

²⁶ Minority Rights Group International, "Under threat: The challenges facing religious minorities in Bangladesh," *Minority Rights Group International*, 2016.

²⁷ Md Sumon Ali, *op.cit.*

Understanding the Ramifications

Law and Order

Mob violence leads to the breakdown of law and order as mobs take the law into their own hands to punish the accused without following the criminal justice system. On 13 October 2021, allegations of defaming the Muslim holy book Quran emerged from a makeshift temple in Cumilla district when reports of finding a copy of the Quran on the lap of an idol was circulated through social media platforms. Soon, an angry mob started attacking local temples in Cumilla. Besides, violence spread across nearby areas within a short period, and the temple committees had no other options but to call police and fire brigade teams.²⁸ This tension soon spread to other districts of Bangladesh. Following mob violence incidents in the Noakhali district, authorities issued prohibitory orders, banning public gatherings from dawn to dusk. Likewise, in Chandpur's Hajiganj, authorities-imposed Section 144, prohibiting public gatherings. The local government had to deploy the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) to restore law and order. In Dhaka, protests turned violent after an angry mob clashed with the police outside Baitul Mukarram mosque following the Jumma prayers. As a result, in addition to the police, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), BGB, and different intelligence agencies were deployed. To ensure law and order, BGB personnel were also deployed in Cumilla, Narsingdi, Munshiganj, and 19 other districts. The internet was also shut down to quell the unrest.²⁹

Security

Mob violence ignited by religious intolerance, rumour, distrust resulting in killing, injuries, and clashes has had implications for the country's security. For instance, more than 100 people were injured during a mob attack at Nabinagar Upazila of Brahmanbaria district in 2016.³⁰ Likewise, a mob violence incident triggered by a Facebook post at Horkoli Thakurpara village of Rangpur in

²⁸ "Unrest After Cumilla Incident: Security beefed up, 100 held," 15 October 2021. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/unrest-after-cumilla-incident-security-beefed-100-held-2198526>. Accessed on 20 January 2022.

²⁹ "BGB deployed in 22 districts to ensure security for Durga Puja," 14 October 2021. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/bgb-deployed-22-districts-ensure-security-durga-puja-2198176>. Accessed on 17 January 2022.

³⁰ Md Sumon Ali, *op.cit.*

2017 left one dead and 20 injured including seven policemen, it also destroyed around 30 Hindu residences. ten injuries of around 30 people.³¹ Similarly, at least 50 people were injured in Cumilla, four people were killed, and 60 people, including journalists and police, were injured in Chandpur as mobs attacked the temple and vandalised the idols following the alleged desecration incident of the Holy Quran in October 2021 in Cumilla. In Noakhali mob beat up and stabbed Jatan Kumar Saha, a member of the temple's executive committee, Bijoya Durga Temple, on College Road. In Dhaka, outside Baitul Mukarram mosque, following the Jumma prayers, a clash between the angry mob and police resulted in the injury of five policemen.³² The security impact of the subsequent mob attack during the Durga puja can be understood from the statement of a victim, "When we heard that the mob was coming, I ran with my two young children to save ourselves, and we were hiding in a paddy field. From there, we could see the mob setting fire to our house. It is totally destroyed. We are now living in tents."³³

Communal Harmony

Bangladesh has a long-standing reputation for maintaining communal harmony. This is exemplified by the celebration of all religious festivities, such as Eid, Durga Puja, Buddha Purnima and Christmas by the whole population. However, several mob violence incidents have created increasing pressure on the peaceful co-existence of all religions.

In 2012 the local mob torched and vandalised a Buddhist village in Cox's Bazaar's Ramu Upazila. It was triggered by a Facebook post allegedly defaming the Quran. The violence later spread to Ukhia Upazila and Patiya Upazila in Chattrogram District, where Buddhist monasteries, Sikh Gurudwaras and Hindu temples were targeted for attacks.³⁴ A further round of violence occurred after the Ramu incident between 29 July and 3 August 2013 in Taindong, when Bengali Muslims

³¹ "Mayhem over Facebook post," 11 November 2017. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/mayhem-over-facebook-post-1489402>. Accessed on 19 January 2022.

³² "Communal Cauldron Bubbles Over in Bangladesh," 19 October 2021. Cited in <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/communal-cauldron-bubbles-over-in-bangladesh/>. Accessed on 16 January 2022.

³³ "Bangladesh's Hindus living in fear following mob attacks," 22 October 2021. Cited in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58999047>. Accessed on 17 January 2022.

³⁴ "Buddhist temples, homes burned, looted in Ramu," 29 September 2012. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2012/09/29/buddhist-temples-homes-burned-looted-in-ramu>. Accessed on 19 January 2022.

launched several attacks against various Buddhist villages. Two Buddhist temples were also actively targeted.³⁵

In 2014, mob violence was sparked on 27 April following a Facebook post at Bakhsitarampur village in Homna, Cumilla. Hundreds of people from Panchkipta village swooped upon Hindu families after a call was made from the loudspeakers at Jamia Arabia Islami Emdadul Ulum Madrasa at Rampur village nearby to launch the attack on Hindus.³⁶ In October 2021, the mob violence incident in Cumilla had significantly stirred up communal tensions across the country as it spread to 22 districts. In Noakhali, an ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) temple was vandalised, and a devotee was killed. Around 10,000 demonstrators again gathered outside the prime mosque in the capital and shouted, “Down with the enemies of Islam” and “Hang the culprits”.³⁷ In Chattogram, local Muslims started throwing bricks at the Jemson Hall temple, which hosted the Durga Puja celebrations, during a protest immediately after Jumma prayers.³⁸ The mob attack on the ISKCON temple at Noakhali stunned the Hindu community, leading to protests on the streets. The incidents also prompted the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council to announce a sit-in and hunger strike in protest.

Human Rights

Bangladesh has signed most of the international treaties, declarations and covenants, e.g., Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child, International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, International Covenant Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, etc., that uphold human rights. Moreover, the constitution also recognises and translates the provisions of the international agreements to ensure the human

³⁵ Minority Rights Group International, *op.cit.*

³⁶ Md Sumon Ali, *op.cit.*

³⁷ “ Bangladesh: Muslims, Hindus protest amid religious unrest,” 17 October 2021. Cited in <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/bangladesh-muslims-hindus-protest-amid-religious-unrest-7576245/>. Accessed on 18 January 2022.

³⁸ Communal Cauldron Bubbles Over in Bangladesh, *op.cit.*

rights and dignity of the population. However, these mob violence incidents have grossly violated the human rights, e.g., survival, liberty and security of the citizen.

Indeed, mob violence has violated several provisions of the constitution of Bangladesh³⁹, e.g., right to life and right to personal liberty (Article 32), right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of race (Article 28), right to freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 35{5}), right to profess, practise or propagate any religion and the right of every religious community or denomination to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions (Article 41), right to seek and obtain redress for the violation of rights (Article 44) and right to social security (Article 15) of the constitution thus, hampered the human rights situation of the country.

Economic Impacts

In South Asia, the economic impact of violence rose to 6% more than the previous year and reached \$1.27 trillion in 2019. The 2021 Economic Impact of Violence report found that since 2013, the economic impact of violence in South Asia has increased almost every year. Percentage changes in the economic impact from 2018 to 2019 in Bangladesh were 4.30 per cent.⁴⁰ In the Ramu incident in 2012, the mobs destroyed 18 Buddhist temples and monasteries and 50 houses.⁴¹ On 2 June 2017, more than 1,000 Bengali settlers gathered in the Langadu sub-district in the eastern Chittagong division and torched at least 300 residences belonging to Indigenous people.⁴² After beating a man to death on allegations of hurting religious sentiment, a mob on Burimari Union Parishad also torched the Union Parishad building and vandalised the National Bank office and some other nearby establishments in October 2020.⁴³ At least 30 Hindu houses in the village were destroyed in a mob violence incident in Horkoli Thakurpara village, Rangpur,

³⁹ Laws of Bangladesh,” *The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh*,” Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 4 November 1972.

⁴⁰ Vision of Humanity, “Economic Impact of Violence in South Asia at Highest Level,” *Vision of Humanity*, 2021.

⁴¹ Minority Rights Group International, *op.cit.*

⁴² Md Sumon Ali, *op.cit.*

⁴³ “ Mob beats man to death in Lalmonirhat for ‘hurting religious sentiment’,” 30 October 2020. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/mob-beats-man-death-hurting-religious-sentiment-1986573>. Accessed on 20 January 2022.

in November 2017. They also looted and vandalised a good number of houses in that village. It is estimated that 13 temples were desecrated, and 40 businesses belonging to people of the Hindu community were vandalised in five districts due to the mob violence incidents that took place during the Durga puja in October 2021. Only in Noakhali 10 temples and over 50 businesses of the Hindu community were vandalised. According to Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), around 3,679 attacks, including mob attacks on the Hindu minorities, took place between January 2013 and September 2021, resulting in the burning of 559 houses, 442 shops and businesses, 49 temples, monasteries or statues.⁴⁴ Mob violence has significant economic impacts as it destroys property- both public as well as private.

International Image

Majority of the people in Bangladesh believe in peace and religious co-existence. Occasionally, Bangladesh has faced a series of mob violence incidents targeting, among other groups, its religious minorities, which posed a threat to its international image.

In response to the mob violence incidents in Ramu, in September 2015, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief reported that ‘none of the perpetrators of the Ramu violence has been brought to justice as of now’. The European Parliament passed a resolution on 26 November 2015 urging Bangladesh’s government ‘to offer sufficient protection and guarantees to minorities such as Shi’a Muslims, Ahmadiyya, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians’. Likewise, mob attacks in the temples during the Durga puja also triggered protests in several parts of the world, demanding the protection of Hindus in Bangladesh. The hashtag #BangladeshiHinduWantSafety trended on Twitter. For instance, following the mob attack at an ISKCON temple in Bangladesh and the killing of an ashram devotee in 2021, the vice-president of ISKCON in Kolkata, Radharaman Das, requested the United Nations to send a delegation to Bangladesh to look into the matter. Reports in the international newspaper were also published. In this respect, two reports of BBC News and The Diplomat titled “Bangladesh’s Hindus living in

⁴⁴ “ With 3,679 attacks in 9 years, Bangladesh’s Hindus at ‘regular threat’ of violence: ASK,” 18 October 2021. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2021/10/18/with-3679-attacks-in-9-years-bangladeshs-hindus-at-regular-threat-of-violence-ask>. Accessed on 20 January 2022.

fear following mob attacks” and “Communal Cauldron Bubbles Over in Bangladesh” can be highlighted.

Conclusion

The write-up tries to identify the triggering factors behind one of the heinous crimes- mob violence in Bangladesh. It is found that believing in misinformation, spreading rumours through social media sites is one of the major driving factors of mob violence. Among others, lack of trust on law and order, personal rivalry, political rivalry, and religious intolerance instigate mob violence. The ramifications of mob violence are widespread leading to insecurity and rights violations. The economic consequences of mob violence is also huge. Mob violence also tarnishes the image of the society and state at the international level.

Violence Against the Minorities in Bangladesh: Role of Digital Disinformation, Rumors and Hate Speech

Tithy Mondal¹

Bangladesh has a fairly homogenous population— being Bengali majority and a majority being Muslim (90.4%)² with other religious and ethnic minorities. According to the 2011 census, Hindus are the major religious minority (8.5 per cent); the remainder of the population is predominantly Christian (0.3) and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist (0.6). Though the population has maintained harmonious social relations based on cultural and national identity; however, problems exist on the role of religion in politics and national identity. People are divided on the “foundation myth of the nation”— one side sees national identity tightly related to religion (Islam). The other side sees national identity as tied to ethnicity and the use of the Bengali language.³ This division has been contended since independence and has become more polarised after the declaration of Islam as a state religion in 1988, dropping its secular status.

Though the constitution designates Islam as the state religion, it upholds the principle of secularism, guaranteeing the ‘neutrality of religion’ as a fundamental right of its citizens. It is seen as a mainstay of upholding religious diversity in Bangladesh. However, there has been a resurgence of violence against minorities in Bangladesh in recent years. Many secular writers, bloggers, LGBTQ community people were attacked and brutally killed, and other religious and ethnic minorities were targeted as well. These attacks, and the more widespread threats against religious minorities and secular actors, can be seen as a trend towards the ‘Islamisation of public life’ in Bangladesh.⁴ Digital information system and uncontrolled access to the internet has expedited the process in multiple layers.

¹ Research Data Analyst, Bangladesh Peace Observatory, Centre for Genocide Studies, University of Dhaka.

² Minority Rights Group International: World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous people, June 2019, Cited in <https://minorityrights.org/country/bangladesh/>. Accessed on 8 February 2022.

³ Rahman, T. 2019. “Party System Institutionalization and Pernicious Polarization in Bangladesh.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 681(1), 173-192.

⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung (BTI) (2018) Country Report — Bangladesh. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018. Cited in https://www.btiproject.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2018/pdf/BTI_2018_Bangladesh.pdf. Accessed on 8 February 2022.

Social media has become a primary source of news and information for a significant population. In social media, it is easy to mobilise the people for a certain cause— be it social or political. Though many users of social media have influenced the mass for a greater cause, there is no denying of the misuses as well. Along with cybercrimes like bullying, stalking, and harassment on social media, it is concerning that people are taking real-life actions based on social media posts or ‘fake news’ circulating on social media. Facebook was accused of aiding genocide in Myanmar and labelled as a ‘beast’; activists claimed that the social network site was used to widely disseminate inflammatory, anti-Muslim speech in Myanmar.⁵ In India, there were a series of incidents of mob lynching and brutal killing across the country in 2018, following a false rumour of child-kidnapper gangs circulated on social media.⁶ It is noteworthy that, in Bangladesh also, there have been reports of sporadic violence against religious minorities, sparked mainly by rumours spread on social media. This paper would discuss and analyse some case studies of violence against minorities that have been incited by social media posts in recent years and try to focus on the trends of violence against minorities with BPO data analysis.

Understanding Violence Against Minorities

The term ‘minority’ cannot simply be explained in its literal sense. The word minority is a compound of the Latin word ‘minor’ and the suffix ‘ity’, which means *inter alia* – the smaller in the number of two aggregates. The most common description of a minority in a given ‘State’ can be summed up as a non-dominant group of individuals who share specific national, ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which are different from those of the majority population. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, the minority is defined as “a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group living within a larger society. When used to describe such a group, the term carries with it a web of political and social implications”⁷ The institutional attempt to define minority began in

⁵ Monzur, P. 15 October 2018. “A Genocide Incited on Facebook, With Posts from Myanmar’s Military”, *The New York Times*. Cited in <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/technology/myanmar-facebook-genocide.html>. Accessed on 24 February 2022; McKirdy, E. 7 April 2018. “When Facebook becomes ‘the beast’: Myanmar activists say social media aids genocide”. *CNN*. Cited in <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/06/asia/myanmar-facebook-social-media-genocide-intl/index.html>. Accessed on 24 February 2022.

⁶ “Fake social media messages fuel latest mob lynchings in India,” *National Herald*. 27 June 2018. Cited in <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/opinion/fake-social-media-messages-fuel-latest-mob-lynchings-in-india>. Accessed on 24 February 2022.

⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Cited in <https://www.britannica.com/topic/minority>. Accessed on 23 February 2022.

1977 when the UN Sub-Commission appointed Francesco Capotorti to study the implementation of the principles set out in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with a special emphasis on the concept of minority.⁸

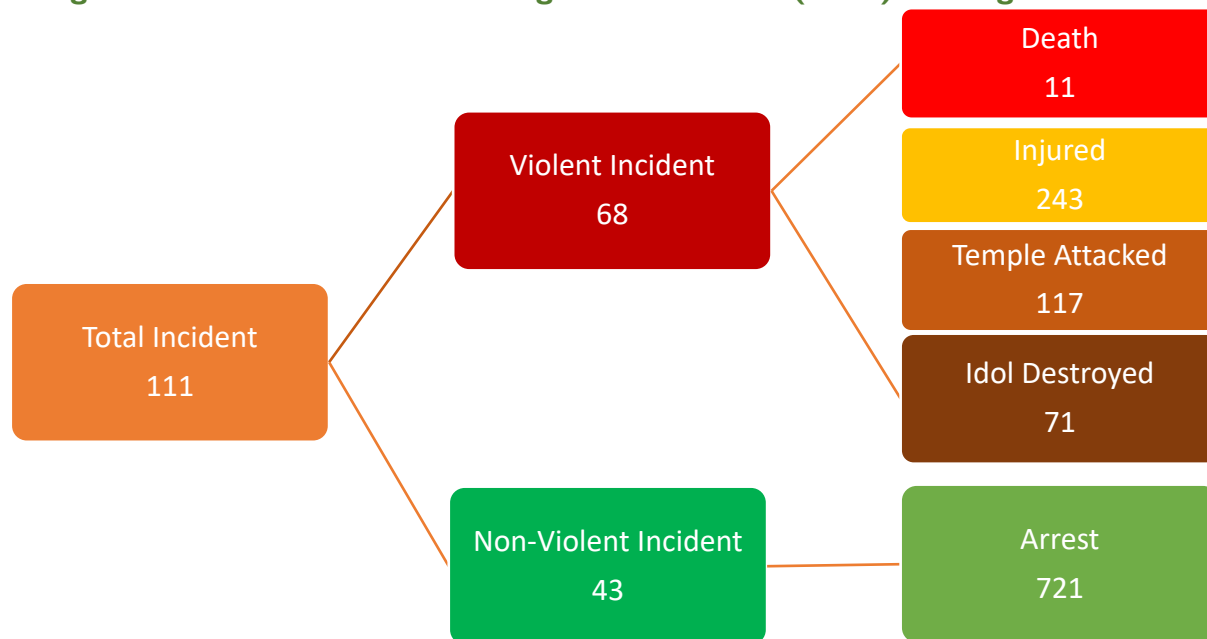
The minority communities, in general, remain in a state of insecurity and fear. Societal abuse and discrimination based on religious, ethnic and sexual affiliation, belief, or practice are prevalent in a polarised society. Structural factors nurture and sustain a vicious cycle of hegemony and intolerance towards the minorities. Minority women remain more vulnerable because an attack upon them is regarded as an attack on the community.

Violence Against Minorities in Bangladesh: Overview of BPO Data

In recent years, many socio-political factors provoked a number of violence against the minority community of Bangladesh. Despite constitutional guarantees for religious freedom, religious minorities experience discrimination and have faced societal pressure to migrate out. Most of these cases often happened as a byproduct of broader political instability. In this section, we will analyse BPO data to understand the trend and motives of violence against minorities in Bangladesh.

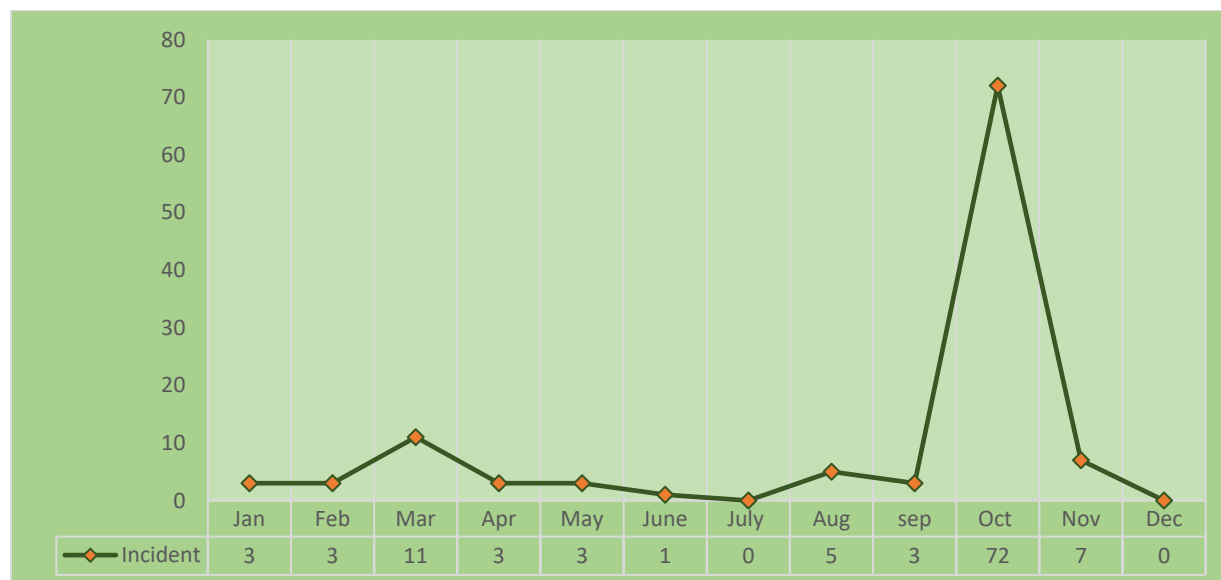
⁸ "Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation," United Nations Human Rights. New York and Geneva, 2010. Cited in https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/MinorityRights_en.pdf. Accessed on 24 February 2022.

Figure I: Overview of Violence Against Minorities (VAM) in Bangladesh in 2021



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 2021 to December 2021, a total of 111 minority-related incidents were recorded, among that, 68 were violent incidents, and 43 were non-violent incidents. These violent incidents comprised issues ranging from religious sectarianism, land grabbing, displacement and forced migration, power and political dynamics, digital disinformation and rumours, hatred and communal tension etc. A total of 243 people were injured in VAM related incidents. Many people lost their personal belongings as the destruction of property is a common phenomenon in minority issues. A total of 69 cases of property vandalism were recorded in the BPO dataset, where properties ranging from houses, business entities and religious places were ransacked. Figure I demonstrates that a total of 117 temples were attacked, and 71 idols of Hindu deities were vandalised from January 2021 to December 2021. The fundamental causes of such violence are structural, political, cultural, ideological, and socio-economic factors.

Figure 2: Monthly Trend of Violence Against Minorities Incidents (January-December 2021)



Bangladesh has become the headline in many national and international dailies after the recent attacks on Hindu communities across the country. Figure 2 demonstrates that throughout the year, violence against minorities was persistently low, except significant rise in March and October. There was a substantial upsurge in VAM-related incidents in October 2021 with a record number of incidents. In October 2021, BPO recorded a total of 72 incidents. It has to be noted that the Hindu community of Bangladesh celebrated their biggest festival, ‘Durga Puja’, during this time. Throughout the festival, local extremist groups wreaked havoc on Hindu community, causing loss of life and property, trying to impede traditional proceedings and rituals.⁹

⁹ Yousuf, M. & Nazrul, B. Khalid, “Cumilla mayhem: A chronicle of hate unleashed”, *The Daily Star*. 18 October 2021, Cited in <https://online.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/chronicle-hate-unleashed-2200801>. Accessed on 20 February 2022.

Table I: Segregation of October 2021 BPO Data on Violence Against Minorities

Month	Death	Injured	Temple Attacked	Destruction of Properties	Arrest
October 2021	9	223	84	Idol and Pandal Vandalized- 45 House- 147 Shops- 72	626

Table I shows that October has the highest number of death counts comprising 81 per cent of the total death number from January – December 2021. It also has the highest number of injuries with 223 people injured simultaneously. A significant number of property vandalism cases were also recorded. Approximately 147 residents were ransacked, 84 religious places were attacked and vandalised, and 72 business entities were stormed and burnt down during the communal attacks in October 2021. According to Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, the number differs. In a press release, they have asserted that 117 temples and pandals were attacked, 301 houses and business institutes were ransacked and blazed during the consecutive attacks on the Hindu population in 27 districts.¹⁰ Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) data shows that 301 people were injured, 184 houses and 204 temples and monasteries were attacked in January-December 2021.¹¹ Despite the differences in numbers, it is evident that communal attacks throughout this month have caused many lives and property, creating fear and trauma for the Hindu community members. The continuous violence against the minorities has created a fear psychosis leading to their exodus to the neighbouring states of India.

¹⁰ Press Release, Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, 6 November 2021, Cited in <https://web.facebook.com/bhbcop.org/photos/pcb.1233193030507370/1233192710507402>. Accessed on 21 February 2022.

¹¹ E-bulletin January 2022. Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). Cited in <https://www.askbd.org/ask/2022/01/13/violence-against-religious-minorities-jan-dec-2021/>. Accessed on 21 February 2022.

Figure 3: Divisional Segregation of Violence Against Minorities Incidents

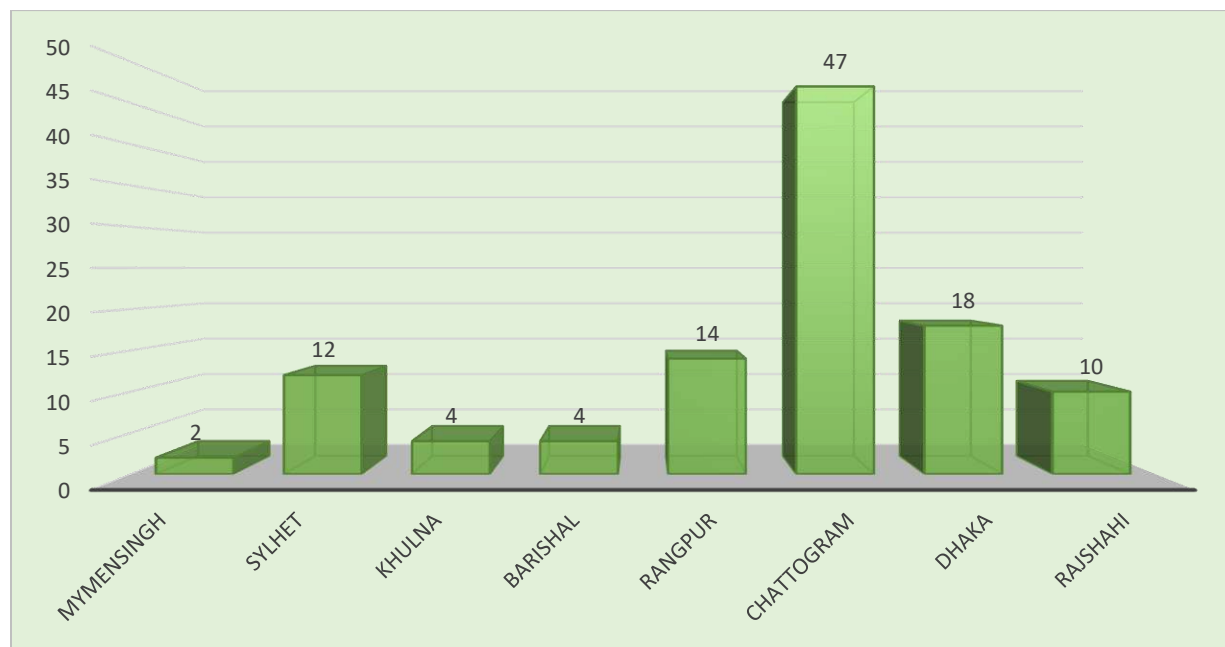


Figure 3 demonstrates that most of the VAM-related incidents occurred in Chattogram during January-December 2021 timeline. Chattogram is a home for religious and ethnic diversity. But in recent times, it has become a more violent prone region, be it other criminal activities like drug-related violence, human trafficking, or communal unrest. In October 2021, religious fanatics clashed with police and attacked Hindu temples and Durga Puja venues in Cumilla after inflaming communal tensions on Facebook with allegations that the Quran was dishonoured at a puja pavilion in Nanua Dighir Par.¹² Following this incident, a series of violent attacks broke out throughout the division and soon, similar incidents took place in different parts of the country. For instance, approximately 700/800 rioters attacked the houses of Hindus located at

¹² Mortuja, G., "They desperately pleaded for help. But police were slow to respond to Cumilla temple attacks," *Bdnews24.com*. 15 October 2021. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2021/10/15/they-desperately-pleaded-for-help.-but-police-were-slow-to-respond-to-cumilla-temple-attacks>. Accessed on 21 February 2022.

Ramnathpur Union of Pirganj, Rangpur. More than 67 houses were burnt, looted, and destroyed by the rioters centring a defamatory post on social media by a Hindu community member.¹³

Figure 4: Divisional distribution of Incidents and Population Ratio

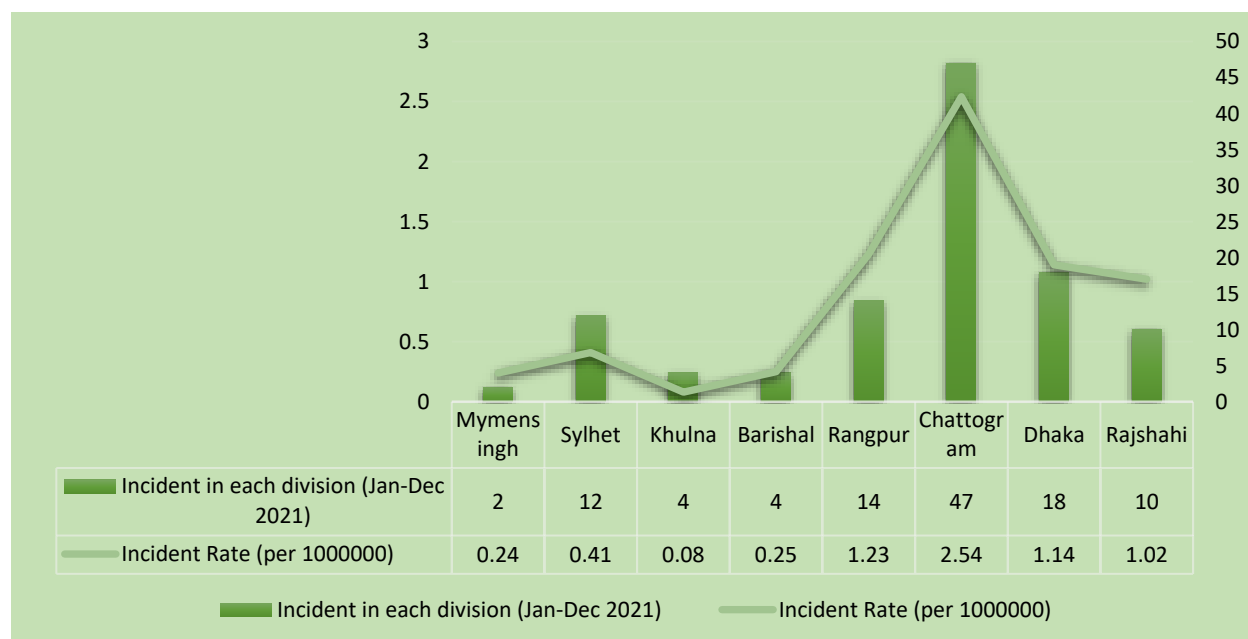


Figure 4 provides a spatial preview through the divisional distribution of the recorded incidents and population nexus. The graph illustrates that Chattogram, Dhaka, and Rangpur are the first, second, and third, respectively, in terms of violence against minorities related incidents. Chattogram and Dhaka divisions are the most populous in Bangladesh among these three. If the population ratio is applied to understand the incident prevalence and population nexus, then a different picture emerges. In that case, the Chattogram division remained unchanged with the highest incident rate. Rangpur division occupied the second-highest position, followed by the Dhaka division. Khulna has a lower VAM related incident rate in comparison to other divisions.

¹³ “৩০ মিনিটের তাগুবে তাঁরা নিঃস্ব,” *Prothom Alo*, 19 October, 2021, cited in <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-10-19&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>. Accessed on 20 Feb 2022.

Figure 5: Yearly Comparison of Violence Against Minorities Incidents

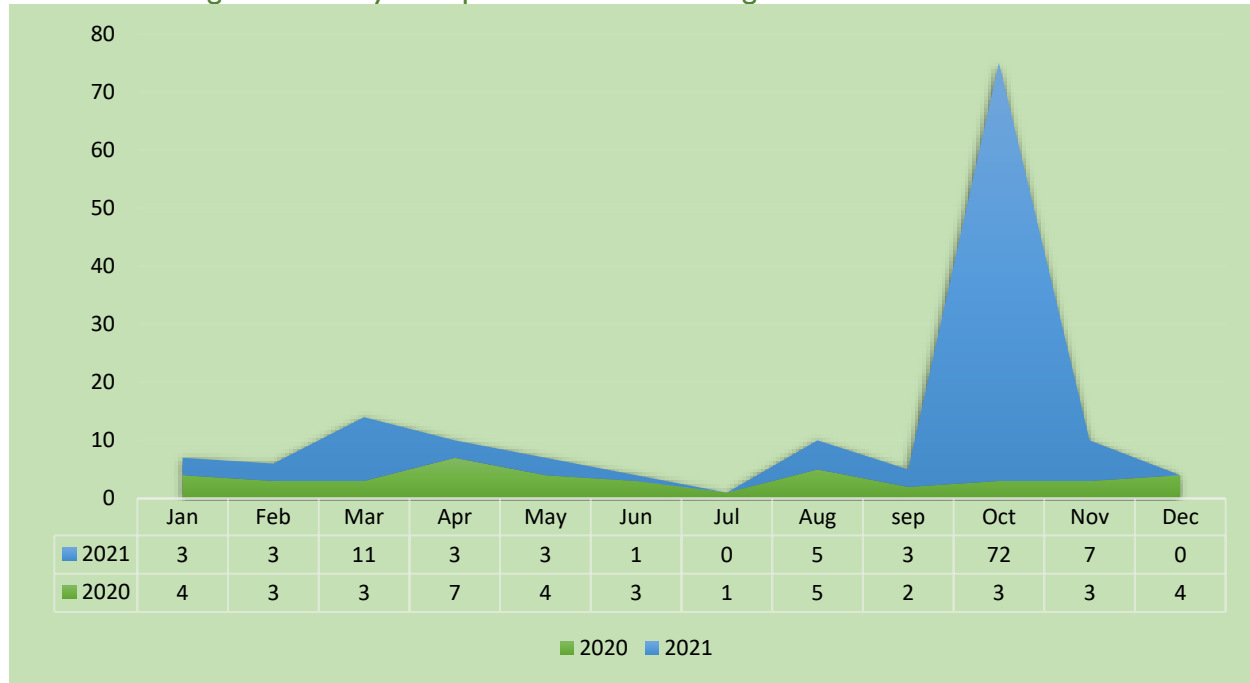


Figure 5 shows that year 2020 was more vigilant in comparison to 2021 in case of violence against minority issues. There were 42 VAM-related incidents in 2020, which doubled in a significant number in 2021 with 111 incidents.

Digital Disinformation, Rumors and Hate Speech in VAM: An Overview of Cases

The inception of digital media has opened a vast territory of information, and people are often unable to differentiate between ‘fake’ and ‘real’ news and get misguided. Besides, rumour is used as a tool of information in digital media. Rumours can be so powerful as to destroy an establishment. A receiver of a rumour tends to: (a) carry the essential parts of the rumour,

dropping off the irrelevant; (b) detect misinformation in the rumour and eliminate it¹⁴; (c) transmit the rumour without changing it if he can detect no irrelevant or false information.¹⁵ In Bangladesh, the impact of rumours is seemingly high because of this third feature. Following the same strategy, communal harmony can be distorted— that Bangladesh is experiencing.

According to a compilation of annual reports by human-rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK),¹⁶ as many as 3,710 attacks on the Hindu community took place in the last nine years, between January 2013 and September 2021. The attacks included vandalism and arson attacks on Hindu temples, houses, and shops, killing Hindu, Buddhist, Christian priests, and incidents of land grabbing from minority communities. For the last five to six years, many violent incidents incited by social media posts have occurred in Bangladesh. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, it has seen an alarming rise in violence against religious minority groups by people belonging to radical Islamist groups. In most cases, social media have been used to spread hatred, rumours, and incitement of violence against minority groups on flimsy grounds such as ‘insulting religious sentiments, ‘insulting Islam’, and ‘insulting the Quran’ or ‘blasphemy’. Such rumours have led to mob attacks on religious minority groups, their places of worship, religious idols, and vandalism of their houses and setting properties on fire. In this section, we will discuss and analyse some VAM related incidents that happened through digital disinformation, rumours and hate speech.

Brahmanbaria, 2016

In October 2016, a violent mob carried out a synchronised attack on the Hindus in Brahmanbaria’s Nasirnagar Upazilla over an alleged Facebook post. Destroying and setting fire to more than 150 homes and at least 15 temples and looting valuables provoked by the Facebook

¹⁴ Buckner, HT (1965). A Theory of Rumor Transmission. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 29 (1), 54 -70. doi 10.1086/267297.

¹⁵ Schachter, S, & Schachter, S, & Burdick, H. (1955). A Field Experiment in Rumor Transmission and Distortion. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 50(3), 363-371. Doi: <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0044855>

¹⁶ “3,710 attacks on Hindu community in last 9yrs”, *The Daily Star*. 19 October 2021. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/3710-attacks-hindu-community-last-9yrs-2201861>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

post insulting Islam, as shown in the photo.¹⁷ At least 20 people, including several temple devotees, were wounded in the attack. Later, two more attacks were carried out on Hindus setting their houses on fire.



Image 1: Brahmanbaria Attack Provoked by a Facebook Post, 2016 (Star Photo archive)

The violence was triggered by a Facebook post purportedly from the account named 'Rasraj Das', son of Jagannath Das at Haripur Union's Harinberh village for "hurting religious sentiments of Muslims", as the locals said.¹⁸ Police later arrested Rasraj for denigrating Islam through his post on social media. A court then ordered him into prison. It was later exposed that Awami League leader Faruk Mia, the District Union President of

Nasirnagar had some problems with the local Fishermen Union leader Rasaraj Das.¹⁹ Hence, Faruk opened a Facebook account in the name of Rasaraj Das. Then, Faruk posted a picture of Kaba juxtaposed with the Hindu deity Lord Shiva with the help of his brother Kaptan Mia in the timeline of Rasaraj.

¹⁷ "10 temples destroyed in Brahmanbaria, over 100 injured", *Dhaka Tribune*. 30 October 2016. Cited in <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2016/10/30/least-10-temples-demolished-brahmanbaria>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

¹⁸ "Brahmanbaria Burning", *The Daily Star*. 7 November 2016. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/interviews/brahmanbaria-burning-1310491>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

¹⁹ "Brahmanbaria proves Facebook as a Jihadi tool in Bangladesh to destroy Hindus!" *Hinduexistence.org*. 7 November 2016. Cited in <https://hinduexistence.org/2016/11/08/brahmanbaria-proves-facebook-as-a-jihadi-tool-in-bangladesh-to-destroy-hindus/>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

Rangpur, 2017

On 10 November 2017, a clash broke out in Thakurpara, Rangpur, triggered by a Facebook post. This resulted in 1 killed and 20 hurt, including 7 police officers.²⁰ At least 30 Hindu houses were burned and vandalised in Horkoli Thakurpara village of Rangpur, as shown in image 2.



Image 2: Rangpur Attack Provoked by a Facebook Post, 2017 (bdnews24.com photo archive)

This incident was triggered by a Facebook post. On 5 November 2017, Titu Chandra Roy from Rangpur, Bangladesh who was recently living in Narayanganj, Bangladesh, shared a Facebook status said to be defaming religion.²¹ Similar to Ramu violence in 2012, a group of arsonists put fire on

the property of the Hindu minority at Horkoli Thakurpara village of Rangpur. The controversial Facebook post being defamatory to the Prophet Muhammad, triggered the communal attack on the Hindu houses by an irate mob in Thakurpara village of Rangpur. The Facebook account resembling Titu Roy is named as MD Titu, was opened a few days before the incident to create communal chaos targeting the next general election and creating strife in Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations.²²

²⁰ “Locals protesting Facebook post torch Hindu homes, clash with police in Rangpur; 1 dead,” *Bdnews24.com*. 10 November 2017. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2017/11/10/hindu-homes-torched-in-attack-over-facebook-post-in-rangpur>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

²¹ Badal, A. Liakat, & Hasan, K., “Rangpur Attack: FB post uploaded from Rangpur, Titu lives in N’ganj”, *Dhaka Tribune*. 12 November 2017. Cited in <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/2017/11/12/controversial-facebook-post-uploaded-from-rangpur>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

²² “Rangpur attack to harm relation with India,” *The Daily Star*. 19 November 2017. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/rangpur-attack-harm-relation-india-1493413>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

Sunamganj, 2021



Image 3: Sunamganj Attack Provoked by Social Media Post, 2021 (Dhaka Tribune photo archive)

An attack was carried out on at least 89 Hindu houses and 8 temples by several hundred Hefazat-e-Islam supporters in Sunamganj's Noagaon village on 17 March.²³ Hefazat supporters from adjacent villages gathered at a bazar in Noagaon village around 9 am and started the attack by carrying locally made weapons. The motive for the attack apparently was a Facebook post by one of the village residents, who

criticised one of the Hefazat leaders for condemning the celebration of Bangabandhu's birth centenary and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit.²⁴ However, the mayhem continued for an hour as the police did not reach the spot before 11 am. Neither did they arrest anyone nor file any case over the attack.

²³ Islam, S., "Attack on Sunamganj Hindus: 89 houses, 8 temples damaged," *Dhaka Tribune*. 22 March 2021. Cited in <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2021/03/22/communal-violence-in-sunamganj-89-houses-8-temples-damaged>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

²⁴ "Attack on Hindu homes shameful: Punish the perpetrators and provide immediate support to the victims," *The Daily Star*. 19 March 2021. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/editorial/news/attack-hindu-homes-shameful-2062961>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

Cumilla, 2021



Image 4: Cumilla Attack Provoked by Social Media Posts, 2021 (bdnews24.com photo archive)

On 13 October 2021, a brutal attack on Hindu temples broke out in Nanua Dighir Par, Cumilla. The trouble was sparked by videos and allegations that spread across social media that a Qur'an, the Muslim holy book, had been placed on the knee of a statue of the Hindu god Hanuman, in a shrine set up for the Hindu holy festival of

Durga Puja.²⁵ After the video went viral on Facebook earlier this week, mobs of more than 500 people gathered in Cumilla and neighbouring districts over the alleged blasphemy. About 10 Hindu temples and shrines were attacked and vandalised by the crowds, who threw stones and smashed statues of the Hindu gods. In Cumilla, police shot teargas and fired on the public. Dozens were injured, including several police officers. The anti-Hindu violence continued for two more days, and more than 80 special shrines set up for the Durga Puja festival were attacked, with about 150 Hindus injured and two killed.²⁶ Locals alleged that the police and local government had taken no action to halt this horrific attack on Hindus and have even turned off electricity and internet access to prevent local Hindus from communicating with one another and sharing documentation related to the incident.²⁷

²⁵ "Seven dead after violence erupts during Hindu festival in Bangladesh," *The Guardian*. 16 October 2021. Cited in <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/16/four-die-after-violence-erupts-at-hindu-festival-in-bangladesh>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ "Brutal attack on Hindus in Comilla town, Bangladesh," *The Hindu Press*. 14 October 2022. Cited in <https://thehindupress.com/brutal-attack-on-hindus-in-comilla-town-bangladesh/>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

Rangpur, 2021

A group of 700/800 rioters attacked the houses of Hindus located in Ramnathpur Union five days after spreading the news of the demeaning Holy Qur'an incident that caused severe communal unrest across the country.²⁸



Image 5: Rangpur Mayhem Following a Facebook Post (bdnews24.com photo archive)

The incident occurred after a Hindu teenager had allegedly written something to defame religion on Social Media in Pirganj, Rangpur. At least 67 houses were burnt, looted, and destroyed by the rioters. The Fire Service Control Room says their report from the scene indicates that 29 residential houses, two kitchens, two barns and 20 haystacks belonging to 15 different owners were

torched in Pirganj's Majhipara.²⁹ The incident occurred amid rising communal tension after the alleged dishonouring of the Quran at a Durga Puja venue in Cumilla led to attacks on Hindu places of worship and clashes between vandals and police in Cumilla, Chandpur, Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, Moulvibazar, Gazipur, Chapainawabganj, Feni and other districts.³⁰

All these incidents have something in common— the violence was provoked by social media, especially Facebook. And most importantly, hatred was spread through social media against the minority community, and the attackers were assembled through social media posts and messages as well. The motives of these incidents mainly were political agenda and propagated to create communal disharmony and tension that can influence the general election process. This can be

²⁸ Prothom Alo, 19 October 2021. *op.cit*

²⁹ "In anger over alleged blasphemy, arsonists burn down Hindu homes in Rangpur," *Bdnews24.com*. 18 October 2021. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2021/10/18/brutality-against-hindus-continues-homes-torched-in-rangpurs-pirganj>. Accessed on 25 February 2022.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

seen as a systematic cleansing of religious minorities to establish the ‘Islamization of the public life in Bangladesh.’³¹

Concluding Remarks

Religious misunderstanding and communal attacks are prevalent in the present societal context of Bangladesh. Our history records, politicisation surrounding religious binaries was there from the pre-independence period; however, it is concerning to see the continuation of the same. Different religious and ethnic minorities are subjugated to the oppression of majoritarianism. The free flow of information and access to the internet makes the process more complex and defies easy resolution. The case studies and BPO data analysis discussed in this write-up illustrate the alarming phenomenon of communal violence provoked by Facebook or other social media posts in Bangladesh. In most cases, the posts were fake, or someone intentionally misused the social media for their personal or political interests. To ensure the safety of the ethnic and religious minority population in Bangladesh, it is needed to deploy a strong strategic state mechanism and justice system. Authority needs to be more vigilant about the misuse of cyberspace, and perpetrators should be taken into account for their alleged actions.

³¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung (BTI) (2018) Country Report. *op.cit*

Appendix

CGS-BPO Publications in 2021



Peace Report Issues Covered

Volume 5, Issue 1 - Protest

Volume 5, Issue 2 - Covid-19 Vaccine Diplomacy

Volume 5, Issue 3 - Covid-19 & Labour Migration

Volume 5, Issue 4 - Land Related Violence

Volume 5, Issue 5 - The State of Zero Violence in Bangladesh



CGS-BPO Key Events in 2021

A Year Full of Online Events!!



Webinars - 6

- . Ensuring life without terror: Responses to terrorism in Bangladesh
- . Understanding COVID-19 Pandemic: The Power of Data
- . Understanding Asian Transformation: Civilization Linkages
- . Understanding Asian Transformation: Migration Narratives
- . Understanding Asian Transformations: Language and Cultural Binds
- . Language in the time of COVID-19 Pandemic

E-Seminars - 2

- . COVID-19: Social Tension, Cohesion and Response in Bangladesh (e-Seminars with journalists of all the eight Divisions of Bangladesh)
- . e-Assembly on Covid-19 Pandemic and Higher Education: Challenges and Beyond

E-Workshops - 3

- . CGS-UNDP Fellowship E-workshop
- . COVID-19: The Otherside of Living Through the Pandemic
- . BOOK PROJECT on 'Imagining Post-Covid Education Futures'

E-Conferences - 3

- . International e-Conference on 'Connecting the Rohingya Diaspora: Highlighting the Global Displacement'
- . 4th International Conference on Genocide and Mass Violence in the Twenty-first Century
- . 5th International Conference on Genocide and Mass Violence in the Twenty-first Century

And many more!

BPO Social Media



Facebook Analytics

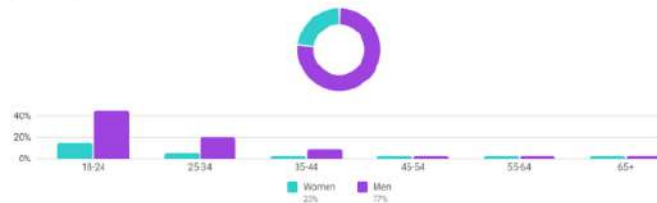
Audience

Current audience Potential audience

Facebook Page Likes

41,791

Age & Gender



Top Cities



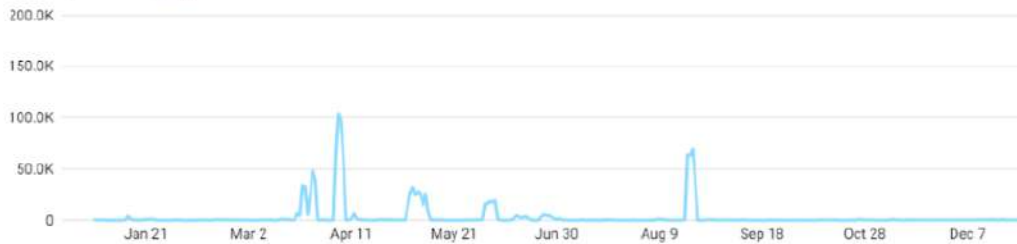
Top Countries



Results

Facebook Page Reach

848,303 ↑ 33.9%



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