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Female perpetrated domestic violence against men and the case for Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Whilst domestic violence against women receives significant international attention and prominence within the scholarly, media and policy discourses, much silence and reservation is evident in the case of domestic violence against men by women. The dominant societal notion portrays women as the natural victims and men as perpetrators, making it challenging to contextualize men's experiences of domestic violence in the intimate relationship. Against this backdrop, using Bangladesh as a case study, this article highlights key factors contributing to the silences, subjugations and controversies associated with domestic violence against men in order to present the state of current knowledge for such violence. Currently, there is a paucity of scholarly information on domestic violence against men and policy, legal and social supports available for these victims require attention. It is thus, suggested to break the social prejudice associated with such violence and adopt appropriate policy and legal interventions including gender-neutral laws to protect men at home from violence perpetrated by women.

KEYWORDS

Female perpetrated domestic violence; men; laws

Introduction

Domestic violence, also known as intimate partner violence (IPV), is a serious public health problem worldwide (Kaur & Garg, 2010), and a violation of human rights (Buvinic & Morrison, 2000). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention defines IPV as any physical, sexual, stalking or psychological abuse (including coercive tactics) perpetuated by a current or former partner such as spouse, dating partner (i.e. boyfriend or girlfriend), or ongoing sexual partner (Breiding et al., 2015). Such violence is usually characterized as a means to gain and sustain power and control in the relationship (Enakele, 2019); and it is ever occurring across all settings and present among all socioeconomic background, religious and cultural groups (World Health Organisation, 2012). Nonetheless, for domestic violence it is customarily believed that men's violence against women predominates every society, where an estimated 20% to 50% of women undergo some form of domestic violence at some point of their life cycle (Semahegn & Mengistie, 2015). While there is a good body of knowledge and understanding of the prevalence and risk factors of male perpetrated domestic violence, little has been studied to date about female perpetrated domestic

violence (Kolbe & Büttner, 2020). Available knowledge both from developed and developing countries confirm that the burden of female perpetrated domestic violence could be no less impactful for men as well. Like any other form of violent behavior, such violence holds multifaceted physical, psychological, and emotional consequences for men (Enakele, 2019; Mantey, 2019).

Domestic abuse against men has been described in the literature since the 1950s (George, 1994), where genuine academic works were initiated on the subject in the early to mid-1970s (Hines & Douglas, 2010). One such works on husband abuse include Richard Gelles's "*The Violent Home*" (Gelles, 1974) which empirically captured women's physical aggression against intimate partners in the context of USA. This study identified 7.5% of wives, compared to 2.5% of the husbands, as victimized at least once per month, or sometimes even as a daily incident (McNeely et al., 2001). Then, Suzanne Steinmetz's research on the "*Battered Husband Syndrome*" (Steinmetz, 1977, 1977-78) established that the incidence of husband beating exceeded the occurrence of wife battering. Husband abuse, as per her argument, is a largely underreported and a deliberately ignored form of domestic violence (George, 1994; Steinmetz, 1977-78). Steinmetz's findings were perilously attacked by opponents on contextual and methodological grounds. She savagely received life-threats on herself and threats against her children's safety (Hines & Douglas, 2010; George, 1994).

Whilst male perpetrated domestic abuse is the mainstream academic and policy norm, it is found that female-perpetrated abuse is not only sluggish or limited but often the target of controversy, and deliberate resentment and attacks by feminist and women groups (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Available evidence shows that: a) funding opportunities were terminated, thus preventing researchers from presenting findings before a professional audience; b) there has been false allegations such as sexual harassment; and c) certain publication editors had to provide motivations for specific research interests (McNeely et al., 2001). What is understandable is that female-perpetrated violence remains an irrelevant subject, as has been termed by M. J. George (1994) as "Great Taboo." Male victimization is often disbelieved and not encouraged to be taken up as a serious subject for critical academic and policy discussions and interventions (Corbally, 2014; Morgan & Wells, 2016); instead, it has often been referred to as a strategy by men to maintain the existing patriarchal control (George, 2007). Most cultures positively portray women as the so-called "*gentle sex*," who cannot be involved in violence or destruction (Straus, 2009), and issues related to men's predicaments or that are disadvantaging more men than women are deliberately understudied and underrated (Stoet & Geary, 2019). Upsettingly enough, the effect and extent of domestic violence against men is not properly internalized by society, even though such violence, which is often similar to male abusers may bring multiple forms of physical, psychological, emotional, social, and economic consequences on men including alcoholism, homosexuality, stress, frustration, isolation, extreme control and also suicide in worse cases (Kumar, 2012; Morgan & Wells, 2016).

This article highlights the contexts of silences, controversies and subjugations associated with female perpetuated domestic violence against men predominately analyzing knowledge from the global North as the available knowledge on this sort of violence seems to be mostly generated from that part of the globe. In addition, this paper also aims to unveil the intricacies of such violence from a South Asian country of the global South, namely Bangladesh which is considered the epitome of male violence against women due to strong patriarchal culture (Moon et al., 2019). It is due to this very context, that oppressive

conditions are adopted not only among women, but men as well. Subsequently, the two aims are juxtaposed as they might give some voice to a hidden and subjugated albeit underrated, and underattended topic and motivate the Bangladeshi academics and interventionists to take up this issue for meaningful academic analysis and policy analysis.

Why silences, subjugations and controversies?

We have explored the following four themes to accordingly classify the complexities associated with silences, subjugations and controversies concerning female perpetrated domestic violence against male.

Symmetry or asymmetry in domestic violence

Ever since research on domestic violence has been grounded, disagreements prevail about its definitions, methods and results when considering the directions and impact of violence between men and women (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). Gender divides underpin these conceptual foundations into symmetric and asymmetric ways. While the former line of thought derives from the family violence perspective (Straus, 2009), the latter emerges from a feminist perspective on domestic violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). The notion of gender symmetry identifies that men and women may demonstrate intimate violence against each other at the same rate and such violence initiate from the same patterns and motivation (Archer, 2000; Johnson, 2006; Kumar, 2012; Straus, 2009). However, the understanding that women are equally as violent as men discredits those who have the set the agenda to empower women against men (McNeely et al., 2001).

On the contrary, gender asymmetry distinguishes men as the principal perpetrators of intimate violence against women and that violence is far inflicting, frequent and escalating (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Johnson, 2006). This notion reproaches gender symmetry as being deliberately spurred by a desire to undermine the initiatives for supporting female victims of domestic violence (Kimmel, 2002), and furthermore, female to male violence is considered conceptually problematic as it is inconsistent with the patriarchal theoretical notion of domestic violence (Douglas & Hines, 2011). Nonetheless, contradictions as such have far-reaching public policy implications. Although domestic violence against men by women have a real-life and social consequence, legislations, criminal justice and social service professionals, policymakers, and community workers worldwide have principally conceptualized domestic violence' as an act that is perpetrated against women by men only and thereby, interventions are wholly designed and promoted exclusively to support and protect women (Dobash & Dobash, 2004).

Feminist activism

The spontaneous actions of the feminist movement (also known as battered women movement) in the late sixties and early seventies (Matthews, 1994) brought many affirmative outcomes including public supports for battered women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Here feminists perceived spousal abuse as a gender issue, perpetrated by men toward women. They used patriarchy as a theoretical model to identify the origin of women's oppression (Carmo et al., 2011; Stacey, 1993). Subsequently, feminists then identified the shortcoming

of the criminal justice system, viewing it as a means to violence, and so advocated to reform the patriarchal criminal codes so that it appropriately addresses the experiences and needs of the victims (Tjaden, 2005). Furthermore, they advocated introducing new laws and procedures to facilitate the prosecution process for violence and render better support services to the victims (Bart & Moran, 1993). In this way, criminal justice systems have made many reforms in public policies across the world.

Due to such interventions, domestic violence against women began to be viewed as an offense which invariably required positive intervention (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999). Compared to the success of the feminist movement, there has not been any visible affirmative actions with regards to addressing and exploring the issue of domestic violence against men perpetrated by women. Instead, men's rights activism or the position that treats women as equally violent to men is politically portrayed by feminists as tactics of 'anti-feminist backlash' (Dragiewicz, 2008).

Strong supports by the UN

Not only has the feminist movement thrived in raising awareness on domestic violence against women, but it also served at the international level political forum (Antrobus & Sen, 2006). In particular, the UN responded to the efforts and demands of the feminists and women's activists in several ways (Khan, 2015). The *Second World Conference on Women-1980* first adopted a resolution on violence in the family as a health concern (UN, 2006). The *Third World Conference on Women-1985* confirmed violence against women as a societal problem and urged the establishment of policies and legislative measures (UN, 1985). CEDAW's General Recommendation No.19 recognized violence against women as a form of discrimination in terms of enjoying women's rights and freedoms equal to those of men (UNICEF, 2000). Following the World Conference on Human Rights-1993, the UN General Assembly passed the *UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (A/RES/48/104)* to deal with violence against women as a human rights issue (Amnesty International, 2004). The *Fourth World Conference on Women held-1995* included the elimination of all forms of violence against women as one of the twelve areas of concern (UN, 1995). In 1999, the UN designated 25 November as the international day for the elimination of violence against women (UN, 2000), and the *16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence*, taking place from 25 November to 10 December, was initiated in 1991 as part of UN UNiTE campaign (UNWOMEN, n.da.). The Millennium Declaration recognized violence against women as a development concern (UN, 2006), and the Sustainable Development Goals-2015 took prevention of violence against women at all levels as a major imperative (Babu & Kusuma, 2016). Moreover, the creation of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN) in 2010 was an incredible step toward eliminating all forms of violence (UNWOMEN, 2011).

These efforts (not all-inclusive) vividly reflect the commitment of the UN to the demands of the feminists for proactive and powerful actions to curb violence against women. While we see so many explicit interventions on part of the UN against men's violence against women, we do not see any campaign, convention or declaration by the UN to prevent the violence against men. Such pessimism indicates that violence against men by women is yet to be considered as a serious issue requiring global actions and interventions.

Poor male help-seeking and support services

Across studies, it has been noted that gender and sex role orientation are determining variables for help-seeking behaviors. Men report a lesser need for psychosocial support than women (Ang et al., 2004; Galdas et al., 2005), and they are unwilling to share their sufferings and vulnerabilities with friends and family members (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). This tendency is particularly prevalent in marital and relationship discords where male victimization is socially considered as a trivial issue that deters men to report their victimization and seek support (Galdas et al., 2005; Hines & Douglas, 2010). Men encountering domestic violence by their female intimate partners might feel reluctant to seek supports due to fear of shame, embarrassment, and scorning. Men tend to keep this problem hidden and unvoiced in times of need (McNeely et al., 2001; Peate, 2017).

The normative influence of masculinity or 'male socialization' is strongly associated with men's tendency to avert help-seeking or support (Galdas et al., 2005). Due to traditional masculine norms or roles, men often feel discouraged to show their psychosocial weakness and pains to others due to fear of being stigmatized as feeble or soft. Cautious interpretation also suggests that there are marked ambiguities concerning male victimization of domestic violence and social expectations of men's appropriate masculinity role. The victimized men are perceived as weaker and thereby, they deserve such violence as they have failed to conform to their masculine norms (Arnocky & Vaillancourt, 2014). Sometimes men are apprehensive about the likely mistreatments, embarrassment, or revilement they may receive from support providers, police or criminal justice system should they approach them for help (Cleary, 2019; Hines & Douglas, 2010; Khan et al., 2020). Evidence from a global North study noted that even men who sustained domestic violence received gender-stereotypical discrimination by the judicial system and denied custody of the children (Douglas & Hines, 2011). Further, police and hotlines were not proactive to these male victims' needs and requests. The issue of false acquisition by their partners and the burden of proof was extremely worrying for them as well.

The case: Bangladesh

Using the theoretical standpoint, where aspects of domestic violence against men are undermined, we now turn to Bangladesh, as a case example to view how such violence is premised and to explore the availability of interventions. Bangladesh is one of densely populated countries in the world, the population of the country was estimated 162.7 million in the year 2017, comprising 81.3 million females and 81.4 million males (Akhter & Islam, 2019). The major religious faith in Bangladesh is Islam with Muslims comprising 90.4% of the population (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Bangladesh is known to be a typical patriarchal society. Patriarchal norms and values in Bangladesh society are strongly attached to female subordination and subjugation (Sultana, 2011). Many discriminatory practices against women are strongly prevalent both at public and private spheres (Moon et al., 2019). In particular, violence against women remains as a serious problem in Bangladesh. It is estimated that approximately two of every three Bangladeshi women experienced some form of gender-based violence during their lifetime (Khan & Ratele, 2020; SDGF, 2017).

The first author is a Bangladeshi male national who seeks to promote the well-being and rights of men. Through observation and academic exposures, it became evident that due to the patriarchal nature of Bangladesh's society there is a huge social antipathy associated with discussing and intervening the issue of female perpetrated domestic violence against men. For many, domestic violence against men sounds surprising, hard to believe and an unnecessary discourse. It is this very belief that deters men from seeking help as they fear that they may mistakenly be labeled as the aggressor instead (Moon et al., 2019). Society is yet to be prepared to accept such violence as a fact and take actions against it. This is of grave concern, especially where an array of policy interventions is available for domestic violence against women in Bangladesh. Against this backdrop, similar to the call of Carmo et al. (2011), it is imperative to consider the characterization of domestic violence against men in order to better understand this phenomenon and to assess the need to develop policy prevention interventions.

Since the interpersonal or intimate relationships at the micro-level (e.g., family or domestic level) is strongly shaped by the broader social (gender) structure (Shah, 2016), the male patriarchal norm (broader) essentially dictates the course of intimate relationships in South Asia. This structure however does not necessarily mean that women are powerless, without right, uninfluential or resourceless (Srivastava & Roy, 2011). Although half of the population in South Asia is men, the existing socio-cultural context in South Asia makes it challenging to believe that men can also be victimized by women at the domestic level (Munirkazmi & Mohyuddin, 2012).

Research on the prevalence and nature of such violence in the neighboring South Asian countries is very limited, excepting a few examples (see, Deshpande, 2019; Khan et al., 2018; Kumar, 2012; Malik & Nadda, 2019; Moon et al., 2019; Munirkazmi & Mohyuddin, 2012; Rathnaweera, 2017; Sarkar et al., 2007). Most of these studies were conducted in India and have captured a grim picture of the nature and prevalence of female perpetrated domestic violence against men. Due to social and cultural affinity, findings from the aforementioned studies can provide some insights about the likely extent of such violence in Bangladesh in the event of a dearth of academic knowledge on the topic. A very early survey conducted by Sarkar et al. (2007) found that 1 650 Indian men encountered physical, emotional, sexual and economic abuse by their wives; where emotional (32.79%) and physical abuse (25.11%) were most prevalent. Malik and Nadda (2019) however found their sample of 1 000 men reporting emotional abuse (51.6%) to predominate, and physical violence (6%) was in the minority. Kumar (2012) further estimate that 40 out of 100 cases of domestic violence in India are perpetuated by the females against men. Such reporting of male victimization tends to be in the minority within a male-dominated Indian society as men face fears of being shamed and they fear the resulting pressures from the family (Dasgupta, 2019). Moreover, as the laws in Indian society grossly favor women as victims of violence, men are afraid of getting trapped in false accusations. In the event when Indian men tend to report domestic abuse and violence, they are most likely not to be believed, listened to, and mocked at (Kumar, 2012). As previously mentioned, this furthers the double standard society forces upon men. The study conducted by Khan et al. (2018) in a district of Pakistan reported that psychological violence was found to be the most prevalent form of domestic violence against men, followed by sexual and physical violence. This study also identified several health effects of different forms of domestic violence against men such as substance abuse, anger, shame, fear, sleeping disorder, suicidal ideation and suicidal attempt.

Whilst much has been researched and analyzed on women's experiences of domestic violence against women in Bangladesh, the opposite is true for men's victimization of domestic violence. Hardly any academic work has been conducted on female perpetuated domestic violence against men in Bangladesh. One study partially captures male victimization in the rural Northwestern region of Bangladesh. In this study, 41 couples were interviewed on their domestic violence experience. Here 26.8% of males reported that they hide the violence experienced by their partners out of fear of being shamed (Moon et al., 2019). Upsettingly, due to paucity of scientific knowledge it is not possible to estimate the prevalence and grasp the extent and gravity of such violence in Bangladesh. Therefore, the following case analysis in the context of Bangladesh is particularly based on newspaper sources in order to provide a brief but complex glimpse of such violence. It must be noted that only extreme examples of such violence sometimes come to light in the form of newspaper reporting.

The legal and policy framework

Legal protection for women in Bangladesh is seemingly very impressive (Afrin, 2017; Khan & Ratele, 2020). Whilst several legal and policy frameworks such as the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000; the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010; the Dowry Prohibition Act 2018; the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance-1961; Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal; Multi-sectoral Programme on Violence against Women; National Helpline Center for Violence against Women; Violence against Women Cell; Bangladesh National Action Plan for Violence against Women 2013–2025; One-Stop Crisis Center; One-Stop Crisis Cell, Safe Custody Home for Women, Victim Support Center, amongst others, are specifically targeted at protecting women from male perpetrated violence and to provide support the victims. On top of that, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and its associated agency Department of Women Affairs is closely supervising and implementing the country-wise activities and interventions opposing violence against women (Khan & Ratele, 2020). Upsettingly, very limited government or non-government agencies adequately assert men's rights or protect them from female perpetrated violence within the home. This is alarming as these agencies are familiar with acts of violence against men as well (Moon et al., 2019).

False accusation

The prevailing prejudice and discrimination against male victims, and social belief of women's claims provide women the opportunity to manipulate support services against their male partners; thus further enhancing the probability of double standards (Ayodele, 2017; Moon et al., 2019). For example, women in Bangladesh often misuse the available legal and policy frameworks in order to take revenge against men. Framing a false case against the husband as a means of revenge after dissolution of marriage is considered a common phenomenon (Ahmed, 2019). The majority (80%) of dowry-related cases are known to be false; and sensitive cases such as torture, rape, and attempt to rape are often found to be false as they are underpinned by harmful intentions (Akter, 2016). For example, several judges heading the *Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals* jointly

asserted that many of the women abuse cases files are false and is recommended as best settled outside the legal process through arbitration (Khan, 2016). Examples of newspaper reporting on false case filing of domestic abuse is presented below.

“False rape case against former husband”

In 2011 a woman from Dhaka district, Bangladesh lodged a complaint against her former husband for raping her after the dissolution of their marriage. Following the complaint, the husband served seven months in prison and fined under Section 17 of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act. The woman also filed 16 other cases against him and accepted approximately 600,000 Bangladeshi Taka as a promising settlement. After reviewing the case's facts, the husband was acquitted from the charges as they were proved as fabricated and baseless. Finally, she was sent to prison for lodging false accusations of rape. “She has destroyed me. “She’s wasted my money and my time. I want her punished in accordance with the law,” the husband said (Bdnews24.com, 2016).

Dynamics of domestic violence

The dynamics of male to female or female to male use of domestic violence in terms of reasons, purposes and motives may vary significantly (Kumar, 2012). Since there is a near paucity of systematic study or statistical records on domestic violence against men in Bangladesh, it is not possible to precisely tap into the underlying dynamics of such violence. There seems to be a strong impression of silence associated with domestic violence against men in Bangladesh, labeling it as a taboo and unimportant for academic and policy discussions. Due to the complex social image associated with manhood, men are generally ashamed of sharing and reporting their experiences of domestic violence in Bangladesh. Yet, at times extreme and unique forms of domestic abuse against men emerge through media coverage. Four such cases are presented in the following.

“Wife kills husband, dismembers body into six pieces”

In January 2019, a woman named Jibonnahar, aged 24, living in Gazipur district was arrested for murdering her husband and then dumping his body. The couple was married for five years and served as garment workers. They had a history of marital dispute which eventually resulted in the gruesome murder. Following an argument over the issue of their salaries, her husband, Rafiqul, slapped her and this outraged her. At nighttime, when he fell asleep, she beat his head with a brick several times, leaving him unconscious. Afterward, she strangled him with a scarf and then hid his body inside the wardrobe. The next day, she continued to work, as usual, returning home around 11pm. She decided to dispose his body by dismembering it into six pieces. She dumped his severed head and limbs at a nearby drain. She also placed the torso in a sack and dumped it at a nearby bamboo grove. The locals saw the bloodied sack and informed the police. After recovering the mutilated body parts, police detained Jibonnahar for questioning and she confessed to killing her husband (Akand, 2019).

“The wife disabled her husband”

On December 04, 2020, a woman named Subarna from Khulna, Bangladesh amputated her husband's (named Al-Amin) penis and cut his throat with a knife after she had intoxicated

him with sleeping pills. Al-Amin's screams were heard by neighboring people who rushed him to hospital. Subarna's husband provoked her as he delayed taking leave when he came home from work. It is reported that she regularly perpetuated violence against her husband over the issue of his second marriage (Kelerkantho, 2020).

“Physician commits suicide over wife’s infidelity”

In January 2019, a 32-year-old medical practitioner named Akash killed himself in Chattogram city, following an altercation with his wife over her infidelity. Before committing suicide, by injecting a poisonous substance in his veins, he shared photos of his wife on Facebook and accused her of having an affair with another man before and after their marriage which caused a rift in their conjugal life. Akash wrote, “A few days before the marriage, I came to know that my wife was cheating on me. I could not cancel the marriage, as I am a familiar figure in Chattogram. I resorted to the path of eternal peace since there is no punishment for cheating in love in our country. Stay well my beloved with your lovers.” (Alo, 2019; Bangladeshpost.net, 2019; Daniel, 2019).

“A banker was tortured by shaving his head as per his wife’s plan”

On December 4, 2020, Raushan hired people from a local drug rehabilitation center to pick up her husband that evening and torture him throughout the night as a means of punishment. The couple, employed as bank officials, had been married for three years and had two sons, but as of recent, their relationship had deteriorated. Shahadat's younger brother called the Emergency Services Service 999 on Sunday morning to inform them about the incident and the police rescued him. After the rescue, her husband, Shahadat, complained, ‘I am not addicted to drugs. Why did the people of the drug treatment center pick me up from my house, beat me severely and shave my head? I want justice for this. They forced me out of the house and into a microbus’. He continued that they also questioned him on how much money he has in assets and at the bank. As it was too late to answer their questions, they beat him with sticks in different parts of the body. At one point they tied his hands and feet and tortured him the whole night. According to Shahadat's relatives, his wife Raushan was behind the incident. She had made a deal with the people of the drug rehabilitation center and planned to kill him. The whole matter will come out if investigated (Samakal, 2020).

Men’s rights movement in Bangladesh: a tiny shred of light

Bangladesh maintains a prominent landmark in realizing the rights of women. Over the years, a plethora of national and international NGOs, civil society organizations, feminist activists and women's rights organizations have mobilized themselves to protect the rights of women and providing socio-legal supports in the event of all forms of violence against women, gender equality in economic activities/opportunities, equal representation in politics, reproductive rights, legal reforms and gender mainstreaming in public policies (UNWOMEN, n.db.). Space and scope of this article will not allow us to highlight those activities. Bangladesh Men's Rights Foundation (BMRF), formerly known as “Prevention of Male Torture Movement Bangladesh” is the first organization working to protect the rights of men. BMRF was formally registered with the government in 2018. Henceforth, this organization is being operated with the objectives to: a) eliminate social and state discrimination against men; b) end domestic and social violence against men; c) establish men's

legal rights; and d) provide legal assistance. BMRF has put forward a 21-point demand including specific law for domestic violence against men and establishing a Ministry for Men's Affairs, among others (Bangladesh Men's Rights Foundation (BMRF), 2020).

With regards to domestic violence against men, BMRF estimates (based on messages and phone calls from men seeking help) that around 80% of married men in Bangladesh have faced mental abuse by their spouses (Islam, 2020). Although as a new intervention BMRF is yet to make any border imprints in establishing men's rights and protecting men from women's abuse at home, its impetuous and initiatives bear potentials for bringing much-needed changes in the existing gender order. In this regard, what is important for BMRF is to make efforts to gain more visibility and public focus.

Conclusion

Throughout decades, it remains clear that men continue to underutilize help-seeking behaviors, particularly where female perpetrated violence in the home is concerned. International literature highlights that non-Caucasian ethnic groups, namely Asians, are of particular concern as this is not reflection of adjustment difficulties, but they continue to resort to informal channels of support in these instances due to: a) lack of trust; b) unfamiliarity with available services; and c) the associated stigma related to formal support (Ang et al., 2004; Yeh, 2002). Further reinforcing this behavior is the community's social stigma attached to help seeking behavior in the context of sex role orientation. Of paramount importance is that these gender socialization and differences are not restricted to age (Garland & Zigler, 1994); thus, making it more pertinent to explore to mitigate risk factors to help seeking behaviors.

This article neither intends to make any anxious calls against women's rights nor expresses an anti-feminist idea, but highlights some gruesome realities in the existing gender relations. While there is a stereotypical and common misconception that men are the natural perpetrators of domestic violence and women are the natural victims, various evidence confirms that women may also perpetrate such violence (Ojilere et al., 2019). Specific to Bangladesh, men's natural tendency of non-reporting, absence of agency or legal supports and a growing gender-blind focus on women's issues have undermined and sidelined the problem of domestic violence against men.

Such violence warrants serious attention both at academic and policy levels. A massive social mobilization is needed to transform this "taboo" or "stigmatized" topic into public discourse as a social problem. In particular, it is important to frame gender-neutral laws that would indiscriminately protect both men and women from violence at home. Unfortunately, domestic violence laws and policy interventions are exclusively for women in Bangladesh, even though men are also victims of such violence. More specifically, further exploration is needed on the cultural orientation of gender and sex roles so that male positionality on formal health help seeking behaviors can be revealed. In that way, appropriate and sensitized interventions are required to be floated in more open and supportive ways. This might pave the way to establish culturally appropriate therapy services. Overall, female perpetuated domestic violence in Bangladesh must be recognized as an important social and public health issue. Thereby, appropriate legal and policy interventions must be formulated, and implemented accordingly.

This analysis, although retrospective, may open up some roadmaps of how future research on female perpetuated domestic violence against men should be carried out in the context of Bangladesh. Firstly, a broad-range country-wise survey on the prevalence of men's violence ought to be considered as the most important research priority. Based on the understanding on the prevalence of violence, relevant empirical work should be carried out. In this regard, small scale qualitative research with a view to tapping the diverse lived experience of victimized men including the trouble associated with help-seeking could be of worth. The health-related consequences of such violence on men should also be assessed. It is imperative to assess the perception of male of victimization of domestic violence, particularly from the perspective of feminists/women activists. While feminism broadly fights for gender equality, prevalence of male violence is also a pediment to achieve equality, and that should be recognized. Standing against men's rights movement or non-recognition of the existence of female perpetrated domestic violence will only create imbalances between the standpoint of men and women in the society in terms of the principle of gender equality.

Declaration

The article is original, has not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere.

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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