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**BRAC's Violence against Women and
Children (VAWC) Initiative**

Synthesis of Action Research Findings

Sidney Ruth Schuler, PhD

BRAC Research and Evaluation Division

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ACRONYMS

VAWC	Violence against Women and Children
IDI	In-Depth Interview
AYG	Adolescent and Youth Group
CAC	Citizens Action Committee
VYE	Volunteer Youth Educator
WHO	World Health Organization
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CEP	Community Empowerment Programme
HRLS	Human Rights and Legal Aid Services
GJD	Gender Justice and Diversity
BEP	BRAC Education Programme
HNPP	Health, Nutrition and Population Programme
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
VAW	Violence against Women
VAC	Violence against Children
RED	Research and Evaluation Division
NGO	Non-Government Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FO	Field Organizers
PO	Programme Organizers
ADP	Adolescent Development Programme
BCUP	Barga Chashi Unnoyan Project
CD	Compact Disc
OC	Officer-in-Charge
GJE	Gender Justice Educator
GCCV	Gender Culture Change Volunteer
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, BRAC designed a comprehensive, evidence-based intervention model to address the problems of violence against women and children through the Violence Against Women and Children initiative (VAWC). The VAWC model is being tested and refined in two districts: Comilla and Gazipur. This report synthesises the results of four action research studies that BRAC commissioned to generate insights to inform this process. BRAC selected four components of the intervention for these studies: 1) Gender attitudes of BRAC field staff, 2) Psychological first aid for women who experience violence, 3) Engaging men as partners to stop violence against women, and 4) Youth action/peer education. The research methods included in-depth interviews with individuals, focus group discussions and direct observation of VAWC activities. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants.

STUDY 1

Attitudes of BRAC Staff Regarding Gender and Violence Against Women

The purpose of this study was to help BRAC assess the current status of its field staff's attitudes regarding gender and violence against women and girls so that further strategies can be developed to better enable them to implement VAWC. Our methods consisted of in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD), with strategies incorporated to encourage frank disclosure of attitudes. Some of the most encouraging findings were that: 1) Virtually all BRAC staff we interviewed endorsed the general principles of gender equality and non-violence; 2) Employment with BRAC has enabled female staff to establish greater equality in their own lives; and 3) Male staff appreciate and support their female colleagues and are willing to accept affirmative action policies to accommodate the needs of their female colleagues, even though this may at times create a greater burden for them. Other findings, however, suggested that in the context of real life social situations, BRAC staff have only halfway accepted the principles of gender equality and women's right to be free from violence. They tend to see a woman's right to live a life free from violence as contingent on the woman's good behaviour. This suggests that they will need additional support to implement VAWC effectively.

STUDY 2

BRAC's Psychological First Aid and Referral System for Survivors of Physical and Psychological Abuse

In this component of VAWC, socially active women, many of whom were already involved in other BRAC initiatives in their villages, are trained to provide psychosocial support, or “psychological first aid” to abused women, refer them to other support services and recourse mechanisms, and work with their families. They are known as Manobondhu or “soul friends”. In this study we interviewed Manobonhu and abused women that they had supported, and found that:

1. The Manobondhu are very successful in gaining trust and providing comfort and psychological support to abused women, who appreciate having someone to confide in in their struggle to come to terms with the domestic violence they experience in their daily lives.
2. For the most part, the Manobondhu do not question violence inflicted by husbands; rather, they try to prevent suicide and preserve marriages by encouraging abused women to conform to traditional gender ideals and endure the violence silently, whatever the cost. They believe this helps to decrease both the incidence and the severity of husbands' violence.

The study team recommends concerted efforts to increase Manobondhu awareness about the role of gender inequality and patriarchal norms in fostering VAW. To promote the philosophy and aims of VAWC, the Manobondhu must take a much more radical approach to violence prevention in which they collaborate with their clients to examine and challenge the gender norms supporting VAW. Manobondhu should be trained to empower abused women to assess their options, tap into available resources, and make decisions for themselves.

STUDY 3

Engaging Men as Partners to End Violence Against Women Initiative

There is wide agreement that men and boys must be engaged in efforts to promote gender equity and reduce or eliminate violence against women. Experience suggests that there is considerable potential for men and boys to actively support a social evolution towards greater gender equity and to cooperate in reducing violence against women. At the very least, men need to be engaged to prevent a male backlash against such efforts. Male Engagement is therefore an important component of BRAC's VAWC strategy. In this study, the research team conducted in-depth interviews with Citizens Action Committee (CAC) and Adolescent and Youth Group (AYG) members, observed a male engagement event that included about 200 people, and interviewed participants in the event. The event highlighted male engagement activities that had been undertaken in nearby communities over the preceding 6 months and included

a staged drama depicting various forms of violence against women and girls, and popular songs on this theme. The study found that:

1. Interest in and comprehension of the VAWC themes among CAC and AYG members was high and, for the most part, articulated attitudes reflecting support for gender equity and condemnation of VAWC.
2. Understanding of the various forms that violence against women and girls takes was comprehensive, reflecting an awareness of the links between gender inequality and violence. Many of those interviewed had participated in individual and group actions to stop violence against women and girls.
3. Further training and, perhaps, audio-visual equipment may be needed to conduct mass events effectively.

The study team recommends further work to a) encourage men and boys to take specific actions against gender inequity and violence and, especially, to intervene when they witness violence against women and children; b) build and strengthen community groups to intervene collectively; and c) make community level events more accessible and effective.

STUDY 4

BRAC's Youth Action/Peer Education Initiative. Youth action is an important component of BRAC's VAWC

BRAC has trained a cohort of Volunteer Youth Educators (VYEs) to promote ideational change among youth and to inspire and organise them to take action against gender-based social injustices, especially violence against women and children. In this study, the research team conducted in-depth interviews with male and female peer educators and peers. The study found that:

1. Interest in and comprehension of the VAWC themes was high. VYE understanding of gender inequality and the various forms that it takes in everyday life was nuanced and comprehensive, reflecting an awareness of the links between gender inequality and violence.
2. The VYEs were moderately successful in communicating this understanding to their peers.
3. The VYE training had been very effective in inspiring young people to take concrete action against gender inequities, including sexual harassment of their female classmates and even violence by husbands against wives. Many had participated in individual and group actions to stop harmful practices affecting women and girls. The VYEs provided specific examples of actions they had taken against child marriage, exploitative dowry demands, sexual harassment, wife abuse, violence against children, drug use, discrimination

against daughters in allocation of family resources, and even sex trafficking.

4. The youth were optimistic about the potential for social change; at the same time, they had a strong sense that they needed to work with others to achieve meaningful results, and wanted support from community leaders, elected officials and police, as well as from BRAC field staff.

Together, the four studies illustrate how strategies to encourage interpersonal communication, alliance building and collective action can protect women and children against violence and contribute to the institutionalisation of gender equality. VAWC represents a logical next step in realising BRAC's social change agenda in Bangladesh. Its success can also serve as a powerful model for responding to violence against women and children in other countries where transitions in gender norms and systems are underway.

INTRODUCTION

The incidence of violence against women in Bangladesh has remained high despite advances in women's empowerment and gender equity, and despite the paucity of research on the subject, it has also become evident that violence against children is a significant problem. In response, BRAC, a widely recognised leader in promoting women's empowerment, has designed a comprehensive intervention to address violence against women and children (VAWC), which it is piloting in Comilla and Gazipur Districts.

The VAWC model was developed in late 2014 based on the "Social-Ecological Framework," widely endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and leading experts in the field of gender violence prevention^{1,2}. Interventions are linked with specific underlying causes and targeted at multiple levels to influence individuals, peers, families, communities, institutions, societal norms and policies. The root causes include: power hierarchies in social relations, a culture of violence against the less powerful as a means to maintain power, institutions that impose stricter restrictions on women and harsher penalties for breaking them, and non-recognition of individual rights.

Consistent with this framework, VAWC is designed to reduce IPV in two primary ways. First, it strengthens, integrates, and incorporates a focus on violence into several existing small-scale interventions that were developed and implemented at various times through separate programmes: The VAWC intervention model refines, integrates and augments several separate prevention and response strategies that were previously implemented through separate programmes: Community Empowerment Programme (CEP), Human Rights and Legal Aid Services Programme (HRLS), Gender Justice and Diversity Programme (GJD), BRAC Education Programme (BEP), Health, Nutrition and Population Programme (HNPP) and the Microfinance Programme.

Second, VAWC has added two additional evidence-based prevention strategies that have been shown to be effective in other settings: namely, engaging men in violence

¹Heise, L., What works to prevent partner violence: an evidence overview. . 2011, UK Department for International Development: London.

²Heise, L., M. Ellsberg, and M. Gottmoeller, A global overview of gender-based violence. *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*, 2002. 78 Suppl 1: p. S5-14.

prevention and altering men's gender attitudes, and linking abused women with resources for income generation. To promote new norms through multiple channels and sectors, BRAC staff and volunteers working at the community level in health/nutrition, education, microcredit, and legal education/services are gradually being trained to speak against gender inequality and IPV, engage community members in violence prevention strategies, and advocate for victims.

Components of the VAWC model are summarised below. All components are evidence-based^{3,4,5} and each incorporates one or more widely-recognised best practices: A) Engaging multiple stakeholders; B) Addressing underlying risk factors; C) Supporting development of nonviolent behaviours⁶.

1. Gender and violence training for men, women and youth for mixed gender "Community Action Groups" and "Youth Action Groups" (10-20 members/ grp/village). Modeled on the Stepping Stones programme in S. Africa^{7,8}, the training focuses on gender and VAWC, promotes alternative, nonviolent models of masculinity and social change leadership, and fosters change agents. Groups meet quarterly to develop VAWC action plans, on which they report at community events (#3, below).
2. Empowerment training for groups of economically disadvantaged women and girls of marriageable age (~15/village) creates "safe spaces" to encourage these especially vulnerable females to speak freely and develop solidarity. Trainers use rights-based approaches in a participatory forum, fostering development of leadership skills as the women examine norms supporting violence against women and gender inequality in nutrition, health, education, work, social participation, age at marriage, access to justice and the right to occupy public spaces safely. The women meet monthly to discuss these issues and organise group actions to support members experiencing IPV and other injustices.

³Ellsberg, M., *et al.* Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say? *The Lancet*, 2014.

⁴Solotaroff and Pande, Violence against Women and girls: Lessons from South Asia. 2014, World Bank: Washington, DC.

⁵Jewkes, R., What works to prevent violence against women and girls? Evidence review of the effectiveness of response mechanisms in preventing violence against women and girls. 2014, UKAID: London.

⁶Arrango DJ, *et al.*, Interventions to prevent or reduce violence against women and girls: a systematic review of reviews. The World Bank. 2014.

⁷Jewkes, R, *et al.*, Impact of stepping stones on incidence of HIV and HSV-2 and sexual behaviour in rural South Africa: cluster randomised controlled trial. *BMJ*, 2008. 337: p. a506.

⁸Wallace, T, Evaluating Stepping Stones: A review of existing evaluations and ideas for future M&E work 2006, ActionAid International: London.

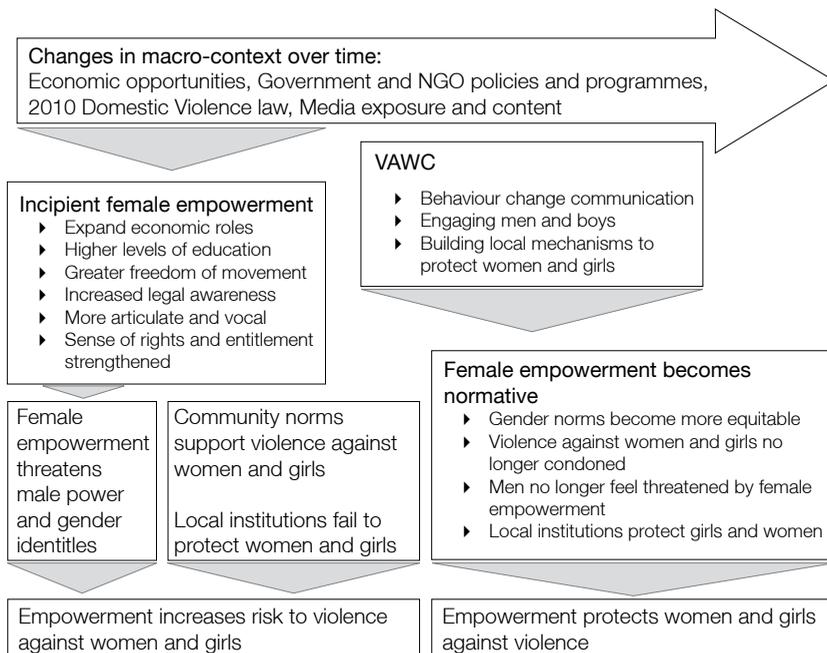
3. Participatory projects engaging multiple stakeholders and addressing gender norms focus on the same issues as #1 & 2 above, but engage a wider section of the community. Community events are held in each village, providing a forum for Action Groups to report their accomplishments. To encourage attendance, trained local theater groups will stage dramas about topics such as IPV, child marriage, and sexual harassment of schoolgirls. Religious figures, teachers and other informal leaders (some of whom participate in Community Action Groups and have attended masculinity trainings) are invited to speak and present awards to role models (e.g., parents who delay marriages of daughters and men who marry without demanding dowry). Police and local government officials speak about laws and recourse mechanisms related to gender violence and encourage community members to request assistance.
4. Victim advocacy, targeted at women experiencing severe abuse, is designed to prevent repeated abuse and undermine the deeply rooted idea that IPV is acceptable. BRAC has created a hotline and a system of coordination to enable programme staff to respond when abuse of a woman or girl is reported. Staff in multiple sectors are trained to identify abuse, collect and record information about the abuse, and intervene directly with perpetrators and/or make referrals for services. Additionally, a new cadre of female volunteers (*monobondhu*) visits the homes of abused women to provide social support and referrals for legal, first aid and other services. One *monobondhu* is recruited from among the health volunteers in her village and receives three days of training in victim advocacy. Legal support is provided through BRAC's HRLSP.
5. Economic empowerment of women is a longstanding pillar of BRAC's programmes. BRAC will combine its standard microcredit, small grants and skills training for women from low-income families with gender equality and VAWC training. An estimated six million rural women in Bangladesh attend BRAC microcredit group meetings every week; thus the future potential to link VAWC interventions with microcredit is vast.
6. BRAC trains and supervises (6) Community Health Volunteers (*Swastho shebika*, *Swastho kormi*) who visit homes of reproductive age women to provide health/nutrition information, encourage health promoting practices such as breastfeeding, child immunisation, improved diets and nutritional supplements for pregnant women, and make referrals for facility-based care. A VAWC module will be incorporated into volunteers' refresher training. The potential of BRAC's ~100,000 health volunteers to promote normative change has been demonstrated nationwide with health interventions, e.g., oral rehydration, immunisation, tuberculosis control.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Traditionally, Bangladeshi women and girls have been vulnerable to violence primarily because of their lack of empowerment, including both economic dimensions such as earning a cash income and controlling money (leaving them dependent on marriage for access to resources), and social dimensions such as knowledge of the laws and legal system, social support, and access to telephones and media. Household-level poverty contributes to violence by husbands against wives both because it causes stress and because it threatens the man's status as provider. Perversely, although an empowered woman's economic contributions to the household may help to alleviate poverty, her empowerment may also trigger an increase her husband's violence against her because she is seen as challenging gender norms. Her enhanced capacities and achievements may threaten her husband's self-image, status in the community, and ability to exercise power. The model below posits that when a woman becomes empowered in an environment where such empowerment is incipient (at an early stage), her risk of IPV is likely to increase and that, when women's empowerment becomes normative (considered to be an ideal to which women aspire) the risk that an empowered woman will experience IPV diminishes. The model further posits that BRAC's VAWC intervention will accelerate the process through which women's empowerment becomes normative.

Conceptual framework:

Hypothesised Role of BRAC VAWC Programme in the Evolving Relationship between Female Empowerment, Masculine Norms and Violence against Women and Girls



VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND UNMARRIED ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Violence against women typically occurs throughout the life cycle and across generations. Like violence against women (VAW), violence against children (VAC) is rooted in cultural norms in which “superiors” have the right, and even the obligation, to control “inferiors” and dependents. As with husbands’ violence against wives, parental violence against children is often seen as a legitimate way to discipline and teach; thus, an underlying function of both VAW and VAC is to maintain hierarchical social relations in social systems characterised by gender and other forms of inequality. Teachers as well as parents frequently use physical violence against their students, older children bully younger children, and boys intimidate girls with sexual threats.

Adolescence is a particularly fraught period, when violence against children (especially girls) becomes linked with sexuality. Just as adult women may be criticised, censured and/or sexually harassed as they become socially and economically empowered and are increasingly present in traditionally male space (the public domain), so are school girls when they reach adolescence and are seen as sexual beings. If only at the subconscious level, the idea persists that aggression against sexually mature females in public is somehow appropriate because they have no right to be there in the first place.

Just as a man will sometimes abuse his wife when neighbours or other relatives make disparaging comments about their presence outside the home and their comportment outside the family, which reflects on him as a man, a father will sometimes abuse his adolescent daughter for this reason. The father is considered to be the guardian of his daughter’s sexuality until her marriage, when this role is transferred to her husband. And, along with poverty, the desire to shed this burden is one of the motives that often leads fathers to force their immature daughters into early marriage, in some cases despite their better judgment. Child marriage itself can be seen as a form of violence against children, as it robs them of opportunities and basic human rights. It also forces adolescent girls into situations where they are likely to face further violence in the forms of sex against their will and physical punishment to “teach” them the behaviors expected of them as wives.

Another aspect of patriarchal societies in which women and girls are kept out of the public eye for their own “protection” is that they become more vulnerable to sexual predation and violence within the family. While sexual abuse and violence within the family occurs to some extent in all societies, it is more easily hidden when women and girls are secluded.

VAWC philosophy of social change

In settings where social change is taking place, there is often a tendency to describe social problems such as violence against women and children as outcomes of a breakdown in social values, as modernisation and globalisation unfold. It is often true that exposure to competing ideas and life styles can undermine shared values and

traditional mechanisms of social control, such as those that existed in Bangladesh's rural villages of the past. On the other hand, various forms of social injustice (such as patron-client relationships, exploitation of the poor and extreme gender-based discrimination) and violence have been well documented in Bangladesh's history. Indeed, BRAC and numerous other Bangladeshi NGOs were initially founded to address such forms of social injustice. Moreover, although violence against women and children has certainly become more visible in recent decades, and may actually have increased, there is no clear evidence to substantiate this. Regardless, VAWC was not designed to turn back the clock. It is poised to help bring about new forms of social consensus and social efficacy based on principles of rights and social justice, rather than attempt to restore an idealised version of what existed in the past.

The action research studies

In 2016, BRAC engaged Sidney Schuler to conduct four implementation studies in partnership with the Research and Evaluation Division (RED). In reviewing them, it is important to appreciate that they are not evaluations of VAWC. If this had been the intent, we would have used alternative methods for site selection and sampling to better capture variations in implementation and impact. Instead, we tried to identify sites where BRAC felt that each component studied had been fully and effectively implemented. In other words, we wanted to assess the potential value of each component of the VAWC intervention model and to identify issues that should be addressed both in the design and implementation of VAWC. This is the reason that (as explained in the methods sections of the individual studies) two of the components were assessed in non-VAWC sites where the interventions had a chance to mature. The CEP team selected four topics for these studies:

1. Gender attitudes of BRAC field staff
2. Psychological first-aid for women who experience violence
3. Engaging men as partners to stop violence against women, and
4. Youth action/peer education.

BRAC has already begun to refine and streamline the VAWC model based on the action research results to make it more implementable, reduce duplication of efforts and focus on the most promising strategies.

STUDY ONE

ATTITUDES OF BRAC STAFF REGARDING GENDER AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

BACKGROUND

BRAC's VAWC team commissioned this study knowing that for VAWC to succeed in transforming gender attitudes, especially attitudes supporting violence against women and children, BRAC must first address the attitudes of its own field staff. Many of these staff have grown up and formed their own gender attitudes in the same social environments that they are now expected to change. When they go home from work they are embedded in social relationships that often are not founded on gender equality. Yet they are being called upon to act as change agents. How can BRAC best support these staff?

BRAC has instituted gender equity policies within the organisation as well as providing a variety of orientations and trainings to familiarise staff with the philosophy, basic concepts and strategies for promotion of gender equality. Some staff have received specific training on VAW and violence prevention. The purpose of this small action research study is to help the organisation assess the current status of its field staff's attitudes regarding gender and violence against women and girls⁹ so that further strategies can be developed to enable the effective implementation of VAWC.

METHODS

Our methods consisted of in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). Our greatest challenge in developing these guides was the likelihood of "social desirability bias", meaning that we expected the interviewees to craft their responses

⁹ We limited the study to violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on men's violence against their wives, since this is by far the most common type of violence against Bangladeshi women and married adolescent girls. We recommend that BRAC undertake further research on violence against both boy and girl children with a focus on parenting norms, teaching norms, norms of masculinity, the belief that adolescent girls must be segregated from boys, access to information on gender and sexuality (please see the author's Scoping Memo, p. 13), as well as violence against working children, and public violence.

to conform with their understanding of BRAC's values. As all staff had received prior orientation and training on gender, we expected them to have a reasonably good idea of BRAC's values in that regard, and some level of sophistication in discussing the topics of gender and violence against women and girls. Therefore, we expected the staff we interviewed to say what they thought BRAC would want to hear. To address this problem, we decided to pursue four lines of questioning in interviewing BRAC field staff:

1. We asked them about people's attitudes in the communities where they worked, expecting that this might shed some light on their own attitudes (and anticipating that, while staff may have been motivated to portray their own attitudes as consistent with BRAC philosophy, this would not apply to their descriptions of attitudes in the community);
2. We asked them to describe cases of violence they had personally encountered, if and how they had intervened, and why they used the strategies they used (expecting that their true attitudes would emerge as they described these events and their own actions);
3. In asking about the staff's own attitudes, we administered a set of questions that we had developed in a prior study on attitudes about intimate partner violence (see appendix). These were specifically designed to tap into strongly held cultural notions about women's behaviour, masculinity, and men's roles in ensuring that their wives behaved properly. Our previous research suggested that even as attitudes about violence begin to change, and people condemn VAW in general, there are some specific situations in which they continue to believe it is justified. (In our experience, the use of carefully designed scenarios, in which the actors motivations as well as their actions are described, can be effective in eliciting the moral judgments that lead people to condone VAW.)
4. We asked the staff to comment on the appropriateness and fairness of BRAC's institutional gender policies as they affect BRAC staff's working conditions. We were particularly interested in finding out whether male staff felt that some of the policies were inequitable in accommodating female staff. (People often appreciate the chance to express grievances regarding their working conditions, especially if they believe there is a chance that unfair policies may be changed.)

The data were collected from staff in four sites under two districts: Kapasia and Kaliganj under Gazipur district, and Comilla sadar and Burichang under Comilla district. On August 23, 2015 the team interviewed 8 individuals: 4 male staff and 4 female staff, and conducted 2 group discussions, one with men and one with women. Five and four participants took part in male and female group discussions respectively. On August 24, the team interviewed 9 staff at Kaligan: 4 male and 5 female staff, and conducted one FGD participated by 5 male staff. Due to shortage of female staff no such discussion could be held here.

On September 8, 2015 the research team conducted eight individual interviews: four with male and four with female staff, and two group discussions, one with male and one with female staff from different programmes. On September 9, the team interviewed 4 male and 5 female staff at Comilla sadar office and conducted one FGD with 5 male staff. In total, 34 individual interviews, 16 male and 18 female, and 6 FGDs, 4 male and 2 female, were conducted. Nineteen male and 8 female staff participated in FGDs.

Table 1. Study participants

	# Male Staff	# Female Staff	Total # Participants
Individual interviews	16	18	34
Focus group discussions	19	8*	27
Total	35	26	61

*Including 4 *Shastho kormi*

Interview participants were from different programmes and projects with different responsibilities. Out of 61 participants, 32 came almost equally from three programmes; Education, Health (HNPP) and Finance (micro and enterprise loan). Other programmes were CEP, Migration, Gender Justice & Diversity Divisions, BCUP (*Barga Chashi Unnoyan* project), Mejin, ADP (Adolescent Development Programme), and HRLS.

The participants held positions at various levels. They included: Field Organisers (FO), Programme Organisers (PO), and their supervisors. In some group discussions, Branch Managers of different programs, trainers, and accountants also participated due to shortage of field-based staff. All participants in one female group discussion were *Shastho kormi* (community based health volunteers) rather than staff.

The interviewers consisted of three RED consultants: two senior woman researchers and one senior male researcher, all with many years of experience in qualitative research on gender and violence against women. The interviews were audio-recorded with verbal permission from the interviewees, then transcribed and/or summarised by the interviewers and by four RED researchers. To respect the privacy of the interviewees and encourage frank responses to our questions, the RED researchers did not go to the field.

Based on the judgment of the research team, in some cases entire transcripts were translated into English while, in others, the interviewers collaborated in preparing short summaries from two or more interviews in the same site. Dr Schuler prepared a draft report based on the translated interviews and summaries. The interview team then reviewed the draft report, adding clarifications and additional illustrative quotes and Dr Schuler finalised the draft. We include both English and Bangla versions of the quotes so that Bangla-speaking readers can grasp the linguistic nuances.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews revealed a variety of attitudes regarding gender and violence against women and girls, some more and some less equitable.

Equitable gender attitudes

When asked what changes in women's lives men cannot accept easily, a female staff member said,

“Men can't accept a woman going to another place for her job, leaving her husband behind. But you see, doesn't a woman accept it when her husband--a rickshaw puller, a garment worker, or a man employed in some other job--goes to a distant place leaving her behind? They accept it. As women don't question this, then what prevents men from accepting it?”

“স্বামী ছেড়ে একটা স্ত্রী চাকরি করতে অন্য কোথাও যাবে এটা মানতে পারে না। কিন্তু দেখেন একজন রিক্সাওয়ালা বা গার্মেন্টসে চাকরি করে বা অন্য যে কোন পেশার লোক যদি কাজের জন্য অন্য কোথাও যায় সেক্ষেত্রে স্ত্রী কি মানে না? মানে। স্ত্রীরাতো এটা নিয়ে কোন কথা বলে না, তাহলে পুরুষদের মানতে সমস্যা কোথায়?”

The same staff member added,

“Neither my in-laws nor my husband approves my talking to an unknown man. It pains me. Why should it be like this? Doesn't my husband talk to an unknown woman? All men do so. Then what's wrong with us? Our husbands also don't like us talking jovially with our male colleagues at the office. But they also do it! We talk with men--don't they talk with us?”

“না আমার শ্বশুর শাশুড়ি এমনকি আমার স্বামীও চায় না আমি বাইরের লোকের সাথে যেয়ে কথা বলি। তখন আমার খুব খারাপ লাগে। এটা কেন হবে? আমার স্বামী কি অপরিচিত কোন মহিলার সাথে কথা বলে না? বলে তো। সব পুরুষেরাই বলে। তাহলে আমরা বললে সমস্যা কোথায়? অফিসে পুরুষ সহকর্মীর সাথে আমার কথা বলি, হাসাহাসি করি এটা কিন্তু আমাদের স্বামীরা পছন্দ করে না। তারা কিন্তু একই কাজ করে। কথা কি শুধু আমরা একাই বলি? পুরুষ মানুষেরা কি আমাদের সাথে কথা বলে না?”

Another female staff member said that men generally cannot tolerate boys and girls freely mixing and girls taking part in sports, insisting that taking part in sports supports their advancement. Going against her husband, she managed to get her two daughters to learn karate; her logic is that girls need to move about in the public sphere, and this training will empower them to defend themselves from any physical harassment.

“I want my daughters to move forward; girls should play outdoor games and thus advance themselves. In this age, women lagging behind are more likely to experience violence.”

“আমি চাই আমার মেয়েরা যাতে আগায়ে যেতে পারে। মেয়েরা এখন বাইরে খেলাধুলা করবে। মেয়েরাও আগায়ে যাবে। বর্তমান যুগে মেয়েরা যদি পিছিয়ে থাকে তাদের উপরই নির্যাতন বেশি হয়। যারা প্রতিষ্ঠিত হতে পারো, আগায়ে যেতে পারো তাদের উপর কোন নির্যাতন আসবে না।”

“I like my daughters to play games, freely mingle without fear, and thus move forward.”

“আমার দুই মেয়ে কারাতে শেখে। তাদের আকবুর আবার এগুলো পছন্দ না। বলে তুমি খালি বেশি বেশি কর। ওরা কারাতে শিখবে কেন? আমি বলি, ‘মেয়েদের এগুলো দরকার আছে না? আত্মরক্ষার জন্যও তো দরকার আছে। দেখা যাচ্ছে একজায়গায় যাচ্ছে, বিপদ আসতেই পারে। তাদের জীবন রক্ষার জন্য এটা কাজে লাগাতে পারবে। আমি চাই মেয়েরা খেলাধুলা করবে, সবার সাথে নির্ভয়ে মিশবে এবং সামনে এগিয়ে যাবে।”

The staff generally agreed with shared responsibility for childcare and felt that a man should help his wife with this, not punish her if she fell short. For example, on the question whether a husband can beat his wife for not taking care of her child, one male staff member said,

“Not at all. It is not the wife’s child only; it is also father’s equally. Therefore, the father should bathe the child.”

‘প্রশ্নই আসে না। সন্তান শুধু স্ত্রীর একার নয় স্বামীরও সন্তান। কাজেই স্বামীর উচিত ঐ বাচ্চার গোসল করানো।’

Regarding family planning decision-making, a male staff member explained,

“If I wanted to adopt a permanent birth control method, I would first consult my wife.”

Staff endorsed the issue of equal rights for men and women both abstractly and concretely. For example, the same male staff member said:

“Viewed from legal and religious standpoints both husband and wife have equal rights. The wife will look after the husband if he is in distress and, equally, the husband will do the same.”

“আমরা যদি আইনগত ও ধর্মীয়দিক দিয়ে দেখি তাহলে দেখা যাবে স্বামী স্ত্রীর সমান অধিকার। স্বামীর অসুবিধা হলে স্ত্রী দেখবে আর স্ত্রীর অসুবিধা হলে স্বামী দেখবে।”

Asked which changes in women’s lives men cannot accept easily, a male participant said that women’s increased movement, especially after dark, is unacceptable to most men. But in his own view,

“Obviously a woman can go outside her home in the evening. Women like my sister who have jobs are quite likely to be outside home for specific reasons. Most men think a woman who goes out at night should have a man with her for protection, but this doesn’t fit well with the present reality.”

In some cases, however, participants suggested by the metaphors they used that they endorsed increased but perhaps not full equality between men and women. For example, one male staff member described men as big wheels and women as small wheels in endorsing equality:

“We can visualise the society as a vehicle with two wheels, one wheel representing the male and the other the female, with the male wheel bigger than the female wheel. If men move forward with income and women stay where they are with no income, then the vehicle won't move forward. It will go in circles. The smaller wheel will remain stuck. Although the bigger one rotates, the vehicle will not move forward. There will be no development in the society. In this context, women need to move forward.”

In some cases, BRAC staff noted a positive trend in the communities where they worked, in which social support for men's violence against their wives was decreasing. For example, one male staff member stated,

“The village men now condemn [wife] beating; they blame the husband and question the cause of the beating. Their attitude is no longer like before when [wife] beating would receive spontaneous support [from men]. Suppose I have beaten my wife; people around would give a rancorous look at me as if saying ‘look, here is the man who beats his wife.’”

“না গ্রামের পুরুষ মানুষ মনে মারকে দায়ী করবে আবার যখন সে মারবে তখন স্বামীকেও দায়ী করবে আবার যে এ ঘটনার জন্য আবার মারতে হবে। এখন এ পর্যায়ে চলে গেছে আর আগের ইয়ে (পর্যায়ে) নাই যে মারলেই সাপোর্ট করবে এরকম নাই। “আমি ধরেন মারলাম আমার বউকে, পাশের লোকে বলবে যে এ বউকে মারে ঘৃণার চোখে দেখে আর কি সবাই।

“I knew a man in my area who would play cards. He was reluctant to go looking for work even when there was no rice or *dal* in his house. And this resulted in wife beating. Everyone scolded that man. They challenged him, saying: ‘How could you beat your wife even when you are not working?’”

“এরকম আমি দেখছি আমাদের এলাকায় যে খালি তাস খেলে, কাজ করতে যাইতে চায় না। ঘরে চাল ডাল নেই। এ পর্যায়ে মারামারি হয়। তখন ওই পুরুষটাকে উল্টা সবাই গালি গালাজ করে যে কাজও করবিনা বউকেও মারবি!”

Inequitable gender attitudes

BRAC staff sometimes expressed inequitable gender attitudes in describing the way they dealt with real-life situations they encountered in their work. For example, in response to a hypothetical situation where a woman is neglectful of her children despite her husband's repeatedly asking her to keep them clean, a male staff member talked about the advice he gave to a woman during one visit to a village.

He evokes the threat of husband-on-wife violence in his promotion of child hygiene, apparently not questioning the appropriateness of such violence.

“Finding a young child rolling in the mud I called its parents. When both parents came out, I told its mother, ‘ It is your duty to keep your child well. It is you who is the first teacher and first doctor for your child. If you fail to keep it well and it becomes sick then your husband will get angry with you. Therefore, have a good look at your child.”

“একটি ছোট কাদার মধ্যে গড়াগড়ি দিচ্ছে দেখে আমি তার বাবা-মাকে ডাকলাম। বাবা-মা বেড়িয়ে আসলে আমি মাকে বললাম, ‘আপনার সন্তানকে সুস্থ রাখার দায়িত্ব আপনার। আপনিই সন্তানের প্রথম শিক্ষক এবং আপনিই তার প্রথম ডাক্তার। আপনি যদি আপনার সন্তানকে সুস্থ রাখতে না পারেন তাহলে দেখা যাবে আপনার সন্তান অসুস্থ হলে আপনার স্বামী আপনার উপর রাগ করবে। তাই আপনার উচিত বাচ্চাকে দেখেছেন রাখা।’

Some might argue that this was good advice, given the importance of keeping children clean to protect their health, and given current day realities in rural Bangladesh, where this is considered to be the mother’s responsibility. However, the BRAC staff member himself noted that the father as well as the mother was present in the home. He may, in fact, have been much less busy than his wife.

In other cases, BRAC staff appeared to condone violence against women whose behaviour appeared to be inconsistent with patriarchal norms. For example, in discussing recent changes in women’s lives, a female staff member implied that some women had become “bad” and that their offenses against gender norms were more serious than men’s wife beating:

“A man won’t accept his wife talking to another man. We women are not all good. Before everyone used to say that women were victims of violence. That is not true. Some men are also victimised by their wives.”

“স্বামীকে বাদ দিয়ে অন্য পুরুষের সাথে কথা বলা সেটা পুরুষেরা মেনে নিবে না। আমাদের সব মহিলা যে ভাল তাও না। আগে সবাই বলতো মহিলারা নির্যাতিত হয়, শুধু যে মহিলারাই নির্যাতিত হয় তা না, পুরুষরাও নির্যাতিত হয় মহিলা দ্বারা।”

Another male staff member suggested that traditional forms of femininity were eroding and women were becoming more aggressive toward their husbands, suggesting that a woman’s verbal arguments against her husband were tantamount to physical beating.

“No, they also don’t want to lose in argument now; they want to beat (their husbands) verbally as they cannot beat physically. They want to come out as the winner in verbal encounters.”

“না ওরাও আবার মৌখিকভাবে হারতে চায় না এখন, পিটাইতে পারেনা তাই মৌখিকভাবে হারাতে চায় আর এরা পিটাইয়ে শেষ পর্যায়ে তো... মানে তর্কে জিততে চায় আরকি। আর তাদের মাইন্ড অতটা ব্রড হয় না আর কি তাদের বিকাশটা সেভাবে হয় না, সাংসারিক বুঝার ক্ষমতাটা সেভাবে হয় না এ ব্যাপারটা তাদের মাঝে বিকশিত আগের থেকে না হওয়ার কারণে তারা তালগোল পাকাই ফেলে এজন্য সমস্যার তৈরি হয়।” Asked what reasons justify wife beating, a female staff member said:

“If the woman has dealings with a man without involving her husband, if the woman keeps on doing certain thing her husband does not like, if a woman shows strong disobedience toward her husband in doing something, then beating her would be justified.”

“যদি মহিলা স্বামী রেখে অন্য পুরুষের সাথে কোন কাজ করে তাহলে মারাটা ঠিক আছে। এছাড়া স্বামী যে কাজগুলো পছন্দ করে না সেই কাজগুলো যদি মহিলা করে তার কারণে যদি মারে সেটা তো ঠিক আছে। স্বামীর অবাধ্য হয়ে যদি কোন কাজ করে স্বামীকে না মানে তাহলে মারলে ঠিক আছে।”

Echoing a concern identified in the authors' recent five-year qualitative study, one male staff member said:

“This (mobile) technology has benefited us, but it also has spoiled our girls. Now, girls reading in class VIII or IX have mobiles in their hands; (using mobile phones) they talk to boys on many things or watch movies on them.”

Another male respondent added that,

“Before, girls would maintain *purdah*, wear ‘*orna*’ while walking outside home. Now, they wear skin-tight *salwar* and pant, enough to cause others to look at (them). I myself feel bad also.”

“আগের মেয়েরা পর্দা করত, ওরনা-টরনা গায়ে দিয়ে হাঁটত, এখন তারা স্কিন টাইট জামা পরে, স্কিন টাইট প্যান্ট পরে এটা চোখে পরার মত ভাই, আমার নিজেরও খারাপ লাগে”।

Thus, although female education is now highly valued, and mobile phones are widely used, BRAC staff shared the common perception that social values are becoming compromised as a result of these trends which, they believe, cause young women to deviate from traditional notions of femininity.

In some cases it was not clear whether BRAC staff sympathised with the wives or the husbands when conflicts related to women's use of new technologies led to marital conflict and violence.

“Yes, there are some technology based new additions like Facebook friends. No husband would accept his wife's chatting on Facebook. Nor can any man accept the idea of his wife's having a male friend. These are the reasons for (violence against wives). Some women may talk or have exchange of SMS using mobile phones. Many (husbands) check with call lists (of their wives' mobile phone). If any call comes after midnight, even by mistake, that single call alone can destroy her life.”

“হ্যাঁ বিরোধ হয় তখন যে তুমি অন্য কারো সাথে কথা বলতে পারবানা। সে একই টাইমে বিভিন্ন ভাবে কেন কথা বলবে? কথা বললে সেটা খোলাসা করে বলতে হবে এ আমি আমার অমুক আত্মীয় স্বজনের সাথে কথা বলতেছি, তুমিও তার সাথে কথা বলে দেখতে পার এটা করতে পারে, কিন্তু দেখা যাবে যে বেশিরভাগ ক্ষেত্রেই এটা রহস্যজনক থেকে যায়। মেয়েটাও বলে না যে আমি এর সাথে কথা বলতেছি। এ আর কি”

Asked her opinion on men's disapproval of women's going outside the home and talking on mobile phones, one female health volunteer said:

"I don't see any problem if a woman goes outside and uses a mobile phone to deal with some important household matter, but I don't like any unnecessary movement or talking to other men and having fun."

“একজন মহিলা যদি পরিবারের দায়িত্ব নিয়া বাহিরে যায় তাহলে কোন সমস্যা নাই, তার পরিবারের প্রয়োজনেই হয়তো মোবাইলে কথা বলে এইটা তার দরকার। কিন্তু অযৌক্তিক অহেতুক এইসব করা ঠিক না। অন্য পুরুষের সাথে কথা বললাম মজা করলাম এইটা আমার কাছে ভালো লাগে না।”

In other words, according to her, women should be allowed to deviate from traditional gender norms for reasons of household necessity, but not just because they want to. They should not have fun when they go outside the home.

The health volunteer quoted above also related a personal experience. She visits many villages, and in her in-laws' home village she met a recently married woman whose mother-in-law refused to accept her because she was dark in complexion. The family had inflicted both physical and psychological violence upon the young bride, using various pretexts. Reportedly, she was kept confined in a room for six months. The BRAC volunteer would talk with her when other family members were absent, but the only advice she could give her was to keep patience. She consoled her saying, "Your life has just started. There are many things yet to come, so be patient and don't give up hope." Although BRAC sometimes takes up such cases and tries to intervene, the volunteer did not bring this to anyone's attention, anticipating that this might create conflict between this family and her in-laws' family.

Differences in BRAC staff's articulation of their gender attitudes

In general the more senior staff articulated views that were more gender equitable than the junior level staff. (Thus, junior level staff may need more extensive training.) While we cannot know for sure whether the responses of the more senior staff reflected social desirability responses, we have no particular reason to think that this was a problem. It is likely that the more senior staff have higher levels of education, have had greater exposure to the concept of gender equality and to a variety of social norms, and have worked with BRAC for longer and had more exposure to BRAC's philosophy.

The meaning of employment with BRAC for female staff

Personal experience in being employed by BRAC has had a particularly important influence on the gender attitudes of some female staff, who described their employment with BRAC as a life-changing experience that not only opened their eyes but gave them the resources (social recognition and a steady income) to bring about changes in gender relations in their own homes. Their understanding of gender inequality was very concrete. It was evident that the gender training they had received had taught them how to analyse situations in which gender inequality comes to the

fore. However, it appeared that they could benefit from further guidance on how to respond constructively when confronted with instances of VAW in the communities where they work. Several female staff gave examples of how they had responded effectively when it came to their own situations, but they sometimes found it more difficult to support other women who lacked the advantages they themselves had. For example, asked what changes her job with BRAC had brought about in their lives, one participant said it had brought structure and order to her life:

"I have learned how important time is in one's life. On office days everything I do at home strictly follows a timetable."

"শিখেছি জীবনে সময় কত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। অফিসের দিনে বাড়িতে সবকিছু কঠিন ভাবে সময় মেনে করি।"

Another said that after joining BRAC she realised that she was as competent as a man would be.

"I don't think only men can go out and we can't; neither do I think a man can do a particular job while I can't. I believe whatever a man can do I also can do it."

"আমি মনে করি না ছেলেরা শুধু বাইরে যেতে পারবে, আমরা পারবো না। ছেলে এই কাজটা করতে পারবে আমি পারবো না। আমি এরকম মনে করি না। আমি মনে করি ছেলে করতে পারে, আমিও করতে পারি।"

A third female staff member had been afraid to interact with men and afraid to speak up prior to joining BRAC.

"I would neither go near other men nor talk to them before joining BRAC. My voice was very low, barely audible. Now, my husband says I talk so loud that he understands from afar."

"ব্র্যাকে আসার আগে ছেলেরদের কাছেও যেতাম না কথাও বলতাম না গলার স্বর খুব নীচু ছিলো, বোঝার উপায় ছিলো না। এখন, আমার স্বামী বলে দূর থেকেও সে আমার কথা বুঝতে পারে, এত উঁচু আমার গলা।"

Another staff member noted dramatic changes in many aspects of her life, from her economic circumstances, to her social skills, to her relationship with her husband:

"My job with BRAC has enabled us to live in a rented house in town. No more do my children live in an unhealthy place in the village. Now they wear clean clothes, we live in a decent house, we can mix with better people, and I have learned nicer way of talking. I now know how to deal with other people by controlling my [formerly] harsh way of talking. Finally, I now have the company of my husband much more than I did in those days when we lived in my in-laws' house... "Before, I had no income and no importance. He would say whatever he liked. Now, my job and income has softened his behaviour toward me; now he cannot do anything without me."

“ব্র্যাকের চাকরির কারণে শহরে একটি বাসা ভাড়া নিতে পারছি। আমার বাচ্চারা আর গ্রামের উঠানে কাদার মধ্যে থাকে না। এখন তারা ভালো পোশাক পরে, ভাল বাসায় আমরা থাকি। ভালো মানুষের সাথে মিশতে পারি। কথা বলতে পারছি, আচার-আচরণ শিখতে পারছি। আমি এখন জানি গলায় রাগ না এনে মানুষের সাথে কিভাবে কাজ করা যায়। সবশেষে, শ্বশুর বাড়িতে যখন ছিলাম তার চেয়ে স্বামীকে অনেক কাছে পাই।” “আগে আমার টাকা ছিলো না আমার মূল্যায়ন কম ছিলো। সে হিসাব নিকাশ করে কথা বলতো না। এখন আমার চাকরি এবং ইনকাম আমার সাথে তার ব্যবহার অনেক নরম করেছে। এখনতো আমাকে ছাড়া কিছুই বুঝে না।”

Comparing her present life with her life after joining BRAC, one female staff member said:

“I find a lot of differences between me and my sister-in-law who is a housewife. Since I joined BRAC, I don't need to ask my husband for the clothes I need. Now, I can follow my own rules. Before, I would cook three times in a day, no time for rest even at noon. I couldn't talk freely with anyone—my sister-in-law would warn me about that. Now, my job with pregnant women takes me to people in 11 villages. I give them advice on their medical needs. People don't hesitate to come to me even at 2 am for any service I am supposed to give them. Nobody in my in-law's family gets annoyed with my work; rather they feel proud of me.”

“আমার জা ও আমার জীবনের মধ্যে অনেক পার্থক্য। আমার জা চাকরি করেনা, বাড়িতে থাকে। ব্র্যাকে চাকরী নেয়ার পরে আমার দরকারী কাপড়চোপড় আর স্বামীর কাছে চাই না। এখন আমি আমার নিয়মমতো চলি। আগে দিনে তিন বেলা রান্না করতাম, এমনকি দুপুরে পর্যন্ত একটু বিশ্রাম নেয়ার সময় ছিলো না। কারো সাথে মনখুলে কথা বলার উপায় ছিলো না জায়ের কড়াকড়িতে। এখন গর্ভবতী মহিলাদের নিয়ে আমার কাজ এগারোটা গ্রামের এসব মহিলার কাছে আমাকে নিয়া যায়। আমি তাদের রোগের চিকিৎসার পরামর্শ দেই। রাত দুইটা বাজুক বারোটা বাজুক আমার কাছে অনেক মানুষ সেবা নেয়ার জন্য আসে। শ্বশুর বাড়িতে কেউ আমার কাজে এখন বিরক্ত হয় না। এখন আমাকে নিয়ে তারা গর্ব করে।”

Blaming girls and women for violence against them

Other female staff, as well as some male staff, appeared to be held back by traditional gender norms. Study participants supported men's violence against their wives mainly in response to questions designed to elicit what would be considered egregious faults by the standards of prevailing gender norms. For example, asked who is responsible for the beating in a hypothetical situation where the wife continues talking to another man despite being forbidden by her husband, a male staff member said,

“Since her husband has told her: ‘Do not talk to him any more’, she should not have talked to that man.” (And, by implication, it is therefore her own fault she was beaten.) One male staff member stated:

“Why does [a woman] somehow need to talk at a particular time? She needs to clearly say that the person she is talking to is her some particular relative. She can ask her husband to verify by talking to that person. But in most cases identities of these people continue to remain hidden. The woman doesn't disclose it of her own. This is the problem.”

Many of the staff the team interviewed appeared to be opposed to VAW in general, but when presented with hypothetical scenarios in which women were described as violating traditional values associated with femininity (e.g., willfully neglecting the children, disobeying the husband or disrespecting in-laws), they felt the husband would be correct in beating the wife. For example, one female participant supported a husband beating his wife for all of the hypothetical situations we described that entailed violations of gender norms:

(Women should put their families first, women should obey their husbands.)

"It is right to beat her as she neither takes care of her children nor does pay any heed to husband's word. By disciplining her, husband here has done the right thing."

"এখানে স্ত্রীকে মারা ঠিক কারণ সে বাচ্চাদের দেখাশুনা করে না আবার স্বামীর কথাও শুনে না। তাকে শাসন করে স্বামী ঠিক কাজই করেছে।"

(Women should not challenge their husbands.)

"She is sure to get a beating, for she argues unnecessarily." "অযথা তর্ক করার জন্য সেতো মার খাবেই।"

"Here the woman has some faults, as she couldn't clearly convince her husband that she was sick and not fit for sexual relations. Here, both are guilty but the wife had to endure beating for her failure."

"এখানে মহিলার দোষ কারণ সে স্বামীকে বুঝাতে পারে নাই যে সে অসুস্থ, এরকম সময় স্বামীর সাথে মেলামেশা করা যায় না। এখানে দুজনই অপরাধী তবে স্ত্রীর মার খেতে হলো তার বুঝাতে না পারার জন্য"

(A woman should always be sexually available to her husband unless she can persuade him that she has a very good excuse.)

"Her mother-in-law has asked her to do something but the daughter-in-law didn't pay any heed to that. She should have obeyed her."

"শাশুড়ি তাকে একটা কাজ করতে বললো আর সে তার কথা শুনলোই না। তার মানা উচিত ছিলো।"

(A woman should obey her mother-in-law.)

One female staff member felt strongly that a husband had the right to beat his wife if she failed to look after her children properly, even if she was overwhelmed with other household work. This hypothetical example reminded her of an incident that had occurred in her own family. Her brother's child was found floating in a nearby pond, but fortunately he was rescued. The child had reached the pond unnoticed, crossing five gates, according to her. The mother had to shoulder all the blame for this incident, and the family's anger against her was so intense that her debor (husband's younger

brother) beat her unopposed. Asked if this beating was right the participant smiled and said,

“This beating was justified, for she was not careful.”

Another female staff member, although she did not support wife beating in any of hypothetical situations the interviewers presented, cited the following example when asked to describe a situation in which she thought beating was justified. A three-month old child was crying while its mother was talking to another woman. Her mother-in-law asked the mother to breastfeed the baby but the woman kept on chatting, ignoring her mother-in-law's request. The mother-in-law finally put the crying child on the mother's lap and mildly rebuked her for not breastfeeding it. The problem was that the woman was reluctant to breastfeed her child for fears her body would lose its shape. She had asked her husband to buy canned milk, but citing a doctor's advice, the husband insisted the child should be breastfed until six months of age. Other women nearby also urged her to breastfeed. Finally, subjected to such pressure she did so, but she was in a bad mood and did not behave properly with others. Once when she served lunch to her mother-in-law, her arrogance brought tears to the older woman's eyes. This made her husband angry and he gave her a couple of slaps and thrashed her with a stick.

তিন মাসের বাচ্চা কান্নাকাটি করছিলো আর তার মা অন্য এক মহিলার সাথে গল্প করছিলো। শাশুড়ি মহিলাটাকে বলছিলো আগা বাচ্চাটাকে দুধ খাওয়াও। মহিলা গল্প করেই যাচ্ছিলো শাশুড়ির কথায় কান না দিয়া। শাশুড়ি বাচ্চাটারে তার কোলে রাইখা দুধ না খাওয়ানোর জন্য একটু রাগ করলো। মহিলা বাচ্চা কাঁদলেই দুধ খাওয়াইতে চায় না কারণ তার কথায় ‘আমার বডি নষ্ট হইয়া যাইবে এতবার দুধ খাওয়াইলে।’ সে স্বামীকে কৌটার দুধ কিনা দিতে কয় কিন্তু স্বামী চায় ৬ মাস পর্যন্ত বুকের দুধ খাওয়াক ডাক্তারের কথা অনুযায়ী। এরকম চাপে সে দুধ খাওয়ায়। সবার সাথে ভালো ব্যবহার করার মতো মনের অবস্থা তার ছিলো না। দুপুরে শাশুড়িকে ভাত খাওয়ানোর সময় ঝাড়া দিয়ে ভাত দিচ্ছে তাতে শাশুড়ির চোখে পানি ছাইড়া দিচ্ছে। স্বামী রাগ হয়ে যায় এবং তারে কয়েকটা খাঙ্গর মারে, লাঠি দিয়াও মারে।

Asked what changes in girls and women are not approved or liked by men, a female accountant talked about the way girls dress. She observed that men don't find anything wrong with three piece dresses (*shalwar, kameez, dupatta*), but when they wear a shirt and pant without a scarf, she thinks, a girl tends to show her physical features and inevitably invites eve-teasing. (Note that she was asked to tell us what men thought but she actually told us what she thought.)

“Men shouldn't have any objection with girls wearing ‘Three Piece’. But instead of ‘Orna’ (sort of scarf) when she wears pant and shirt, naturally her feminine features would be more distinct. And girls dressed like this are likely to face eve-teasing while they are outside. In other words, aren't we encouraging this?” she asked.

“যেমন খ্রিপিস পরবে, এটা নিয়ে পুরুষের কোনই আপত্তি থাকার কথা না। যখন ওড়না বাদ দিয়ে প্যান্ট-শার্ট পরে বের হবে স্বাভাবিক কারণে কিন্তু মেয়েদের শারিরিক বৈশিষ্ট্যগুলো ফুটে উঠবে। বাইরে চলতে গেলে তখন তো eve-teasing হবেই। তার মানে আমরাই তো এটা ডেকে আনছিনা?”

Another female staff member stated that arguing and keeping things untidy are two reasons for women to be beaten by their husbands. Asked to explain why, she said:

“Men have more anger usually. If he says something out of anger and the woman does the same, this leads to beatings. If she could keep silence then she might be able to escape this beating.”

মহিলা স্টাফ স্বামীর হাতে মহিলাদের মার খাওয়ার দুইটি কারণের কথা বলেন। তাকে একটু ব্যাখ্যা করতে বললে উনি বলেন, “ পুরুষের একটু রাগ বেশি থাকে, তখন একটা কইলো মহিলাও আর একটা কইলো, তখনই কিন্তু মারগুলো দেয়। তখন যদি চুপ থাকে তাহলে মারটা নাও খেতে পারে। ”

In other words, these female staff believed that it was normal for men to get angry (not their fault), and that if a woman is unable to manage her husband's anger she will naturally (and, by implication, justifiably) face violence.

Male staff as well often held the traditional view that the legitimacy of VAW depended on whether or not the woman was behaving badly. For example, one male staff member reported an incident. Two sisters-in-law (wives of two brothers living around a courtyard) were having a fierce verbal battle over their children. At that time one husband appeared from outside. Fearing the battle might heat up further, he strongly asked his wife to stop. But the wife refused to listen. According to the BRAC staff member, the husband had to resort to beating his wife as there was no other way to stop the quarrel. He thinks the wife was partly responsible for her beating.

Another male staff member gave this example

“Men are usually tired when they get back home from work. A husband at such time asked his wife to get him a *gamcha* (towel). The wife told him to get it himself, for she was also very tired of doing many things like cooking food, preparing and sending her son to school and finally bringing him back. This refusal led to an argument. I think the woman is more responsible for the feud because when a man gets back home from office or any other place and orders his wife to do something, the woman has to follow it hundred per cent.”

“কাজ শেষে বাড়ি ফিরে পুরুষেরা খুব ক্লান্ত থাকে। এরকম সময়ে একজন স্বামী তার স্ত্রীর কাছে গামছা চাইলো। স্ত্রী তাকে নিজে নিতে বললো। কারণ অনেক কাজের কারণে সেও খুব ক্লান্ত-রান্নাবান্না, ছেলেকে সাজিয়ে স্কুলে পাঠানো, আবার স্কুলে গিয়ে নিয়ে আসা। এটা নিয়ে তাদের মধ্যে তর্ক-বিতর্ক লেগে গেলো। আমি মনে করি এখানে স্ত্রীর দোষ বেশি কারণ যখন কোন পুরুষ অফিস থেকে বা কোন জায়গা থেকে কাজ করে আসে যদি সে তার স্ত্রীকে কোন আদেশ করে তাহলে সেটা স্ত্রীর শতভাগ মানা দরকার বলে আমি মনে করি।”

And another male staff described the following case: The child was sick; the mother didn't call to let her husband know about it, and when he later asked why, she evaded him by asking what difference it would have made. The husband wanted to take the sick child to a hospital but the wife insisted on seeing a village doctor. This difference of opinion led to a bitter argument, and finally the husband began beating the wife.

The male BRAC staff ended this story claiming that everyone would blame the wife being beaten in this case.

BRAC staff also appeared to condone wife beating when an extra-marital affair was suspected. A male staff member opined that ‘if my wife has a long conversation with any male, then I will suspect her. If she goes outside the home without informing me, I will become angry and punish her’. Note that physical punishment was condoned when the wife gave the husband a reason to suspect infidelity. Whether infidelity actually occurred did not seem to be the point.

To summarise, although there were in egalitarian gender norms that they disagreed with (that the wife should obey the husband even if he was wrong, or that the wife should be punished even for inadvertent violations of gender norms), most staff still appeared to subscribe to the idea that physical violence was appropriate if a wife’s behaviour represented an egregious transgression of gender norms (if she intentionally defied her husband or exhibited selfishness and disregard for the norms).

Male attitudes regarding BRAC gender policies

In general, men understood the need to make special accommodations for female employees (e.g., not sending female staff out to collect loan repayments at night), and supported these policies. The men seemed personally concerned with the well-being of their female colleagues. They did not feel resentful that female staff in some ways had special advantages or argue that “gender equity” in the workplace should be applied when this would make it dangerous or difficult for female staff to do their jobs. As illustrated in the following quotes, they appeared to have a more sophisticated understanding of gender equity, agreeing that some sort of affirmative action was needed to ensure a gender balance among BRAC employees.

Referring to some benefits female staff enjoy like leaving office before it gets dark or doing only desk work during menstruation days, one male staff member was asked if these extra benefits go against the concept of equal rights between men and women. He said:

‘These benefits will encourage more women to join jobs. If maternity leave is confined to 10 days or should they continue work even after evening, then women would not do any job, BRAC or any office.’

সন্ধ্যার আগে অফিস ত্যাগ করা কিংবা মাসিকের দিনগুলোতে শুধু ডেস্কে কাজ করা-এইসব সুবিধের কথা বলে একজন পুরুষ ব্র্যাক স্টাফকে জিগ্যেস করা হয় এই বাড়তি সুবিধা নারী-পুরুষের সমতার ধারণার পরিপন্থী কিনা। তিনি বললেন,

Another male staff member, in talking about female staffs’ extra facilities in posting and leave, explained that if a male staff member has to visit a branch office at a distance 10 to 15 km and it is night when he gets back to his office, it will not be a problem for him, though he may be a bit tired.

“God almighty has created women to be less physically powerful, so female staff will do less hard work than men. It doesn't go against equal rights between men and women.”

মহিলা স্টাফদের পোস্টিং ও ছুটির ক্ষেত্রে বাড়তি সুবিধে নিয়ে কথা বলার সময় একজন পুরুষ স্টাফ এভাবে ব্যাখ্যা করলেন- একজন পুরুষ স্টাফ ১০ থেকে ১৫ কিলোমিটার দূরের কোন ব্র্যাঞ্চ অফিসে কাজ শেষ করে যদি রাতেও ফিরে আসেন তাহলে শুধু ক্লান্ত হবেন, আর কোন সমস্যা হবে না।

Talking about what they learned from gender training, one male staff said that they had learned how to encourage female staff so that they can work at ease alongside their male colleagues.

“We are five male staff and one female staff in Progoti at our office. We always inspire hersaying: Apa, you can do it! Why do you think that you can't? Now, she works better than us.”

পাশাপাশি কাজ করতে পারে এজন্য তাদেরকে কিভাবে উৎসাহিত করা যায় এটা তারা শিখেছেন। ‘আমাদের অফিসে প্রগতিতে ৫ জন পুরুষ ও ১ জন নারী কর্মী। আমরা সবসময় তাকে এভাবে উৎসাহ দেই,’ আপা, আপনি একাজটা করতে পারবেন। কেন ভাবছেন আপনি পারবেন না?’ এখন সে আমাদের চেয়ে ভালো কাজ করে।

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR VAWC STAFF TRAINING NEEDS

Some of the most encouraging findings from this brief action research study are that: 1) Virtually all BRAC staff we interviewed endorsed the general principles of gender equality and non-violence; 2) Employment with BRAC has enabled female staff to establish greater equality in their own lives; and 3) Male staff appreciate and support their female colleagues and are willing to accept affirmative action policies to accommodate the needs of their female colleagues, even though this may at times create a greater burden for them. These positive findings indicate that there is a good foundation for implementation of VAWC by BRAC field staff.

But when BRAC field staff go home at night, the normative context in which they live and breathe is far from gender-equitable. Given this reality, it is not surprising that in the context of real-life social situations, BRAC staff appear to have only halfway accepted the principles of gender equality and women's right to be free from violence. Thus, they may be only half-prepared to implement VAWC effectively. As the authors of this report also found in our previous work, popular support of a woman's right to live a life free from violence is often seen as contingent on the woman's good behaviour. Most people (including the BRAC staff interviewed in this study) no longer support a man's right to beat his wife arbitrarily, capriciously, or for minor mistakes. If a woman is perceived as a sincere and diligent person who tries to do her best for her family, most people would condemn her husband for beating her when she commits an error. In contrast, many of the staff we interviewed supported wife beating in hypothetical or real situations where the wife's failing was considered to be an egregious violation of

prevailing (unequal) gender norms. For example, flagrant disrespect or disobedience to the husband, or extreme neglect of children, was typically considered just cause for beating.

The grave incident of the child who barely escaped drowning, described earlier, is an extreme case. Here the mother's negligence could have caused the child's death. But one might ask who it was who installed the "five gates" the child managed to get through. Perhaps the father failed to make the gates secure. Furthermore, if the child had died, it would almost certainly be his mother who would have suffered most, because of her love for the child. Probably, she was the one who was most frightened and upset by the near-death of her son. Was there really a reason to inflict physical punishment on top of the emotional torment and guilt she inevitably felt?

In some cases women are beaten because they behave badly. But don't we all behave badly sometimes? Why violence against wives and not against husbands? Ideational and behaviour change often occurs in small increments, and BRAC will need to decide how far it is possible to transform its own staff's gender attitudes at this point in time. The key challenge will be to convince BRAC staff, so that they can convince people in the communities where they work, that violence against women and girls is simply wrong. The acceptability of eve teasing should not depend on the way a girl dresses, and a man's right to beat a woman should not depend upon whether various other members of society believe she is behaving well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Call a meeting of senior VAWC staff, other senior BRAC staff, and trusted advisors with expertise in gender and VAW and VAC to consider how radically BRAC should attempt to alter its own staff's attitudes regarding gender and VAWC. This should be considered a necessary first step before revision of behaviour change strategies and messages aimed at the communities where BRAC works. The central question for discussion should relate to the widespread idea that violence against women and girls may sometimes be justified as a method of teaching them to uphold certain behavioural standards. Can BRAC as an organisation endorse this relativistic position? In other words, at this time, is BRAC prepared to promote a complete rejection of VAW, or VAWC?

- ▶ Retrain staff in a way that clearly communicates BRAC's position on gender and VAWC, whether BRAC wishes to take an absolute stand or a more relativistic position that allows for some deeply held inegalitarian gender norms to be remain unchallenged. In either case, the training courses should be interactive and incorporate real life situations that are likely to encounter in their work.
- ▶ Redesign VAWC communication strategies and materials accordingly, so that they convey a consistent message about gender and VAWC. The issue of "victim blaming" should receive special attention.

BRAC's Violence against Women and Children (VAWC) Initiative

- ▶ Conduct research on violence against children in rural and peri-urban areas, and on BRAC staff attitudes on VAC. This should include documentation of attitudes regarding corporal punishment of children by parents, school-based violence (e.g., asking girls to map safe and dangerous spaces—toilets, etc.), and employment-based violence faced by children who work.
- ▶ Undertake further action research on VAWC project components as project implementation unfolds to identify areas for improvement.

STUDY TWO

BRAC'S PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID AND REFERRAL SYSTEM FOR SURVIVORS OF PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Community-based Psychological First Aid and Referral for abused women (“survivors”) and interventions with their families (“psychosocial support”) is an important component of VAWC. There are relatively few formally qualified psychological counselors in Bangladesh, certainly not enough to meet the needs of women who are physically and psychologically abused who, surveys suggest, may comprise more than 50% of the adult female population. Therefore in VAWC, socially active women, many of whom were already involved in other BRAC initiatives in their villages, are being trained to provide psychosocial support, or “psychological first aid” to abused women, refer them to other support services and recourse mechanisms, and work with their families. The model for this initiative was adapted from an earlier initiative of BRAC’s Community Empowerment Programme (CEP).

METHODS

Two senior female members of the research team conducted in depth interviews (IDI) with 11 women: 10 abused women who had received psychosocial support, and one woman who was planning to marry off her daughter at an early age and had also been provided support. All of these women were identified by the *Manobondhu* who had provided support to them. We did not specify that they had to be married women abused by their husbands but all of them were, probably because such women, rather than girls and women facing other types of violence, or male abusers, or other family members, have been the main focus of the *Monobondus’* work. We were not surprised to find this, high incidence in rural communities.

BRAC staff and *Manobondhu* talked to these women and obtained their consent to be interviewed for the study, prior to directing them to the women’s homes. The RED interviewers then conversed informally with the women to establish rapport, and took their permission to audio record the interview. They also made sure that the interview would be conducted in privacy.

In addition, IDIs were conducted with two local BRAC staff who manage the psychosocial support initiative at the district and branch offices, and four *Manobondhu*. One psychosocial support session was observed. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The interviews were then translated into English.

Characteristics of the abused women we interviewed

The survivors interviewed were mostly housewives in their mid-twenties and early thirties who had been married 10-15 years. In addition to household work and childcare, most of the women reared poultry, raised cows and goats and/or grew vegetables in kitchen gardens. One of them was a factory worker and another did sewing at home to earn income. They had been abused for at least one year and often several years or more. In most cases the husband was the sole perpetrator but in one case other family members were also physically abusive.

The women attributed their husbands' violence to various factors, including conflicts with mothers-in-law, husbands' extra-marital relations or desire to take a second wife, husbands' reluctance to work, childlessness or failure to bear sons, and dissatisfaction with the wife because she had a dark complexion. In other words, in some cases women thought they were abused for failing to live up to feminine ideals (light skin, bearing sons) and in others because the husband was sensitive about his failings (infidelity, laziness or inability to work). Most of the women felt strongly that the abuse was unwarranted. In addition to physical violence and verbal abuse, husbands engaged in migratory employment often suspended regular contact to punish their wives. The women often became dispirited and depressed by their husbands' ruthless beatings and negligence, losing interest in their children. Some contemplated leaving their husbands or taking their own lives.

Characteristics of the *Manobondhu* we interviewed

The *Manobondhu* are known as *Manobondhu*, or "Soul Friend". All of those we interviewed had been involved with *Polli shomaj* ("Village Associations"), a grass roots based platform for women, or were *Upazila Parishad* (an elected body at the subdistrict/*upazila* level) members or Popular Theater performers. Most of them had played leading roles in organising this platform and worked either as *Shastho shebika* (volunteer health workers) or teachers in BRAC's Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) programme. They were known in their communities as naturally inclined to support other women at times of suffering. Compared with other women in their communities who were socially isolated, they were more outgoing and engaged in community affairs. According to BRAC staff, such women have always existed in rural communities but with the advent of NGO activities, especially BRAC's '*Polli shomaj*' initiative, they had much greater opportunity to engage in social activism. A common characteristic of these *Manobondhu* is that they were previously known and revered by their fellow women for their accomplishments as BRAC *Shastho shebika*, teachers or informal mediators. Some of them were from moderately well-off families.

One *Manobondhu* had been an elected representative (“Member”) of the UP (Union Parishad—a local administrative unit) for two terms. Here, she describes her long involvement in the work she now identifies as ‘Work of *Manobondhu*’:

“As I have been a member in my area for two terms, I have solved many such family disputes. There was a legal case involving husband and wife. I told the [investigating] police officer that this is my area, my ward and my country. It is up to me to solve the problems of my neighbour, who are you to intervene? I will only go to the Thana (police station) in case I fail. Now, I don't need your help. Then I reconciled the two sides and reached a solution. I submitted the paper of mutual agreement to the Thana. I am used to this sort of work. I have the courage and ability. I have been doing such things for 18 years. Now, for the last two years I know this is the work of *Manobondhu*, which I didn't know before. I only knew I solved such problems as a person of the community.”

“যেহেতু আমি এলাকার মেম্বার হইছি দুইবার, তাই এ ধরনের পারিবারিক সমস্যা আমি অনেক সমাধান করছি। স্বামী স্ত্রীর মধ্যে মামলাও হয়ে গেছে, এই মামলায় দারোগা পুলিশকে আমি বলছি আমার এলাকা আমার ওয়ার্ড, আমার দেশ, আমার প্রতিবেশী আমি মিটাবো আপনারা কে? আমি যখন না পারবো আমি থানায় যাবো। এখন থানার প্রয়োজন নাই যান। তারপর দুইপক্ষকে আমি একত্র কইরা সমস্যার মীমাংসা কইরা আমি একটা সমঝোতার কাগজ নিয়া থানায় জমা দিছি। এই ধরণের কাজ কইরা আমার অভ্যাস আছে আপা। সাহস আছে, অনেক শক্তি আছে। আঠারো বৎসর ধইরা আমি এই কাজটা করতছি। এখন দুই বৎসর ধইরা আমি জানি এই কাজটা করলে এইটার নাম মনোবন্ধু। কিন্তু আগে জানি নাই। জানছি সমাজের একজন হিসেবে আমি সমস্যার সমাধান দেই।”

Here is the profile of another *Manobondhu* in her own words

“First I worked as Inspector cum clerk in the Department of Social Welfare for 5 years. That was a project job, which ended along with the project. Then I did a teaching job for 2 years at a privately owned orphanage. Leaving this, I worked as private tutor for some time while looking for a suitable job. Then I got the job of a teacher at BRAC's NFPE School. My good work was rewarded by a promotion to PO. Fourteen years later I left the job when I got married. Having a strong passion for teaching, I opened a coaching center at home, which I later upgraded to a full-fledged kindergarten school. It has been almost nine years since I established that school. Now, along with my household work, I am busy with my teaching and *Manobondhu* work.”

“প্রথমে আমি কাজ করছি সমাজ সেবা অধিদপ্তরে ইন্সপেক্টর-কাম-ক্লার্ক পদে পাঁচ বছর। সেটা একটা প্রকল্পের অধীনে কাজ ছিলো। প্রকল্পের সাথে চাকরিও শেষ হলো। তারপর আমি একটি ব্যক্তি মালিকানাধীন এতিমখানায় দুই বৎসর মাস্টারি করেছি। এই চাকরি ছেড়ে দিয়ে কিছু দিন আমি টিউশনি করেছি তার সাথে চাকরিও খুঁজেছি। তারপর আমি ব্র্যাকের এনএফপিএ স্কুলে শিক্ষক তার চাকরি পেয়ে যাই। সেখানে আমার কাজ ভালো দেখে আমাকে প্রমোশন দিয়ে পিও পদে নেয়া হয়। চৌদ্দ বছর চাকরি করার পর আমার বিয়ে হয়ে যায় এবং আমি চাকরি ছেড়ে দেই। যেহেতু শিক্ষকতা যেহেতু আমার অভ্যাস তাই বাড়িতেই একটা কোচিং সেন্টার খুলে বসি। পরে সেটাকে পুরোপুরি একটা কিন্ডার গার্টেন স্কুলে আপগ্রেড করি। কেজি স্কুলের বয়স হইছে নয় বছর। আমি এই স্কুলে মাস্টারি করার পাশাপাশি ঘর সংসার করি আর ব্র্যাকের মনোবন্ধুর কাজ নিয়া একটু ঘুরাফিরা করি।”

Recruitment process

In recruiting *Manobondhu*, BRAC staff meet with *Polli Shomaj* members and explain the nature of the work and the intended effect on survivors of abuse. As some *Manobondhu* recalled in their interviews, BRAC field staff told them they would be friends of women in distress, address their suffering with utmost care and tenderness, free them from the clutches of mental agony and help them to regain their lost hopes.

Remuneration

As *Shastho shebika* or teachers the women earn some income, but their work as *Manobondhu* is voluntary. Their only remuneration is in the form of personal satisfaction and social recognition. At the time of their selection, BRAC staff greatly highlighted their past work and let others know they were the right persons to be '*Manobondhu*', whose position is at a bit 'higher level' than others. Thus selected, they take pride in their work. In most cases their families have supported their roles but at some point have raised the issue of remuneration, given the intensity of effort required and the *Manobondhu* also expressed their expectation of receiving some financial benefits to BRAC field staff. BRAC field staff feel that this would have a positive effect on their work which sometimes gets sluggish. Nurturing this expectation, the *Manobondhu* often don't hesitate in spending small amounts of money to reach some survivors. Still, they seemed to be motivated mainly by hearing from BRAC staff that their work places them above others in the *Polli shomaj*, as it is a noble social work.

Role of traditional cultural norms in shaping relationships with clients

It appears that one reason the *Manobondhu* are well accepted is that they follow a cultural tradition in which older women visit younger women to console them when they are in distress. Thus, the *Manobondhu* do not follow a formal protocol in arranging for a psychosocial support session to take place. As a well-known and esteemed person in the community, a *Manobondhu* has easy access to all houses in her work area. She can meet her client whenever she likes and talk freely without any formal approach. Invariably, every survivor interviewed referred to the *Manobondhu* as her *Apa*, *Bhabi*, *Chachi* or *Nani* (sister, husband's brother's wife, brother's wife or paternal uncle's wife, maternal grandmother).

Training

All selected *Manobondhu* in Mymensingh region received three days of training at the BRAC Learning Centre, Mymensingh. A nationally renowned psychologist, who teaches at Dhaka University, conducted the training, with senior BRAC staff assisting her. After that, the *Manobondhu* receive a one-day refresher training at the *upazilla* (sub-district) BRAC office once every three months. (The BRAC District Manager who conducts this training, as part of the Stop Violence Initiative under CEP, had been trained for five days at the BRAC Learning Centre in Gulshan by the psychologist; subsequently, she attended received two day refresher trainings twice.)

According to the psychologist, the main points conveyed in the training are:

What is Psychological First Aid?

- ▶ Early assistance ideally provided by those first on site
- ▶ Initial assessment of the psychological impact of the event
- ▶ Stabilisation of the psychological injuries
- ▶ Prevention of further psychological injuries
- ▶ Maintenance of psychological status until professional mental healthcare is available if required
- ▶ Facilitation of transition and referrals to trained mental health professional when necessary
- ▶ Promotion of faster and better psychological healing

What Psychological First Aid is NOT?

- ▶ „NOT Debriefing
- ▶ „NOT Counseling
- ▶ „NOT Treatment

Psychological First Aid Don'ts

- ▶ Don't force people to share their stories
- ▶ Don't give simple reassurance such as "everything will be all right", "at least you survived" or "I know how you feel"
- ▶ Don't tell people what they should be feeling, thinking or doing
- ▶ Don't tell people how they should have acted earlier
- ▶ Don't make promises that cannot be kept
- ▶ Don't criticise existing services or relief activities in front of people in need of these services

One Manobondhu described her training as follows:

"The trainer wrote down on the board what qualities a *Manobondhu* should have, and we wrote it down in our notes. One of us was instructed to act as a survivor and I played the role of Manobondhu. The trainer then guided me on how I should introduce myself to the survivor, how I should encourage her to talk about her suffering. Maybe she would get angry with me and ask what benefit she would gain talking to me. 'Why have you come to disturb me when you know very well you won't be able to do anything for me?' We should not get annoyed at her dismissive utterance. Rather, keeping utmost patience, we should inspire her to tell her story. While listening to her, we must manifest our sincerest attention with our facial expression. Not for a single moment should we be indifferent to her and she must have a feeling that her sad tale has touched our heart. Only then will she feel a strong attachment toward us and would share her tales in more detail. On my first

day with her I won't say anything about what I will do to solve her problem. I will only say, 'I understand how you feel. Your husband has misunderstood you and wants to divorce you; please don't cry, I will see what I can do for you.'

“মনোবন্ধুর কী কী গুণ থাকতে হবে তা বোর্ডে লিখে দিয়েছে। আমাদের খাতায়ও লেখায়েছে। আমাদের মাঝে থেকেই একজনকে ভুক্তভোগী বানাইছে। আমি মনেবন্ধু হলাম। তারপর ট্রেনার দেখালো কিভাবে আমি নিজের পরিচয় দিবো, কিভাবে তার কষ্টের কথা বলার জন্য তাকে উৎসাহী করবো। সে হয়তো রাগান্বিত হইছে এবং বলছে আমাকে বলে তার লাভ কি। ‘আপনেরা আমার কিছু করতে পারবেন না এটা জাইনাও আপনি আমারে কেন বিরক্ত করতে আসছেন?’ এটার জন্য আমাদের বিরক্ত হওয়া যাবেনা। অনেক ধৈর্য নিয়ে তাকে তার কথা বলতে উৎসাহ দিবো। তার কথাই খালি শুনবো আর সাথে সাথে হা হু মানে আমি যে তার কথাটা সুন্দরভাবে শুনতেছি তা চোখে মুখে বুঝাতে হবে। এক মুহূর্তের জন্যও আনমনা হওয়া যাবেনা। তাকে বুঝাইতে হবে যে আমি তার দুঃখে দুঃখিত, তার ব্যথায় ব্যথিত। তখন সে আমার প্রতি আকৃষ্ট থাকবে আর আমার কাছে খুলে বলতেও চাইবে। প্রথম দিন আমি তাকে কতটুকু সাহায্য সহযোগিতা করবো এটা তাকে বলবো না। আমি তাকে বলবো শুধু, আমি বুঝলাম তোমার কষ্টটা, তোমার স্বামী তোমাকে ভুল বুঝছে, তোমাকে এইজন্য তালোক দিতে চায়। আচ্ছা তুমি কান্নাকাটি করোনা, দেখি আমি তোমার জন্য কী করতে পারি।”

The Psychosocial support process

The *Manobondhu* typically live in the villages where they work. They go to a house when they learn that violence against women has taken place. In some cases they actually hear a heated argument going on, or a woman loudly crying when beaten by her husband and they go immediately to the house. Sometimes other women tell them about such incidents happening in other bari (household or small clusters of households, usually occupied by relatives). They meet the woman, privately or in presence of members of adjacent households. They then initiate a series of meetings with the abused woman. The first meeting is most likely to happen in presence of others. The aggrieved woman may not bother about others while outpouring her complaints, anger and frustration against the perpetrator. The following meetings take place in private, either at the survivor's own house or just outside the *bari* or home in a private place. Usually *Manobondhu* come to visit the survivors but the latter sometimes also visit the former at her home. When other people are around, the *Manobondhu* avoid intimate discussions. In many cases the *Manobondhu* also speaks with the couple together.

The *Manobondhu* first listens to the survivor's full account of her experiences and then tries to calm her. Often the abused woman makes strong statements about leaving the husband's house or taking her own life. The *Manobondhu* talks to her in a sympathetic tone, using terms of endearment and gradually becomes accepted as a person who can be taken into confidence and relied upon. Once the woman develops such a feeling and talks about her sad experiences she usually feels better.

Community perception of *Manobondhu* roles

Initially, the survivors of VAW had no idea how a *Manobondhu* could address or end their suffering. People had tried to console them, and spoken to them with sympathy before, but those experiences had no lasting effect on them as they were brief and

casual. Thus, in the beginning, they did not anticipate that this talking could have any lasting effect on them. They talked to the *Manobondhu* not because they believed that their suffering would end, but because it provided a kind of refuge.

There was nothing any of the abused women disliked about the psychosocial support. However, as many of the abused women had hostile relationships with in-laws who lived in the bari, the latter sometimes would get annoyed and suspicious about the visit of a *Manobondhu*. The connection with BRAC had them suspecting that something bad might happen to their family, as many rural people now consider BRAC to have some legal authority regarding domestic violence. This was particularly true for *Manobondhu* who were not well known to them.

Psychosocial support cases as described by three *Manobondhu*

As demonstrated in the following three cases, virtually all of the accounts provided by the *Manobondhu* illustrated how they draw on traditional gender norms and social values in advising abused women. It is also clear that they saw their role as one of giving advice to survivors of abuse and use their influence to solve problems, rather than empowering survivors to assess their options and draw on resources to solve their own problems.

One *Manobondhu* described a dispute involved a married woman, her husband and mother-in-law. The conjugal dispute sharpened to such a level that the marriage was about to break. In trying to help the woman reconcile with her situation, the *Manobondhu* drew an analogy to explain her points. She told the woman that marriage is a one-time event in people's lives and that it is quite natural that life would get stormy sometimes. Allah could have saved the Prophet Mohammad many a time but He put him in dangers quite often to see the extent of his endurance. To be a part of a family, you have to endure such storms. Breaking the marriage will not end this turmoil. You must stay here to overcome this, she told the woman. Why should you allow them to get rid of you? Strongly you should declare that you will eat your rice right here. I will help you learn what to say and do. Have a strong resolve that your life is rooted here. Do not let any beating decide that you won't stay here. Ending this marriage will be followed by another marriage and you don't know that the next husband would be better than this one--he could be worse! So why should you be so hell-bent on getting away from this place? What will happen to your children? Their father would marry again, making their lives miserable. Talking like this from different angles I could "soften her mind", said the *Manobondhu*. The abused woman then tried to follow this advice.

A second *Manobondhu* talked about the case of a girl of class V who got pregnant by a boy of class VII from the same school. The girl's family was very upset; parents and others treated her very cruelly, often threatening to strangle her. She was taken out of school and forced to stay inside the house. The *Manobondhu* somehow managed to get the parents to allow her to talk with the girl. At first, she was reluctant to say anything. Later she admitted it was her fault but said she wanted her relationship with the boy to continue even though he refused to admit responsibility. The *Manobondhu*

urged the girl not to despair, saying something could be done, and promised to talk with the boy's family. She also scolded the girl, saying she had done the wrong thing, otherwise she would not be in this position, but urged her not to commit any grave mistake despite her parents' continued wrath. She spoke about the religious point of view regarding suicide, saying that Islam has no place for a person who commits suicide. This seemed to have some effect on the girl's mind. When the *Manobondhu* assured she would do everything possible even if no one else stood by her, the girl seemed to trust her. Then the *Manobondhu* talked to the girl's parents, asking them to refrain from scolding the girl even though she did something wrong. Any ill treatment at this stage would lead her to committing another mistake. She proposed that the two families sit together to resolve the issue. Later the local UP member arranged a mediation and the issue was quietly settled. Within a week the marriage took place. A third *Manobondhu* described the case of a woman with five daughters. After the first three daughters were born she wanted to stop having children, but her husband wanted a son very badly. He began to beat her often on various trivial pretexts. The *Manobondhu* told the woman that she would not be able to change her husband's desire to have a son, but that she could do something to stop the beating. She advised the woman to develop a skill that would enable her to engage in some income earning activity. Meeting the daughters' upbringing cost would spare her from asking the husband for their expenses. Two more daughters were born but the woman, in the meantime, acquired some tailoring skill and learned to use a sewing machine. She could now take care of major household expenses using her own income and did not need to ask her husband for money. The beatings stopped and, according to the *Manobondhu*, the couple became happy.

There were very few cases in which *Manobondhu* said they referred abused women to other support services. In one case a woman whose husband threw her out of the house was sent to the BRAC office, where staff referred her to the Women's Officer of the local government.

Descriptions by survivors

Almost all of the survivors expressed satisfaction with the way the *Manobondhu* talk to them, and appreciated that they do not talk in presence of others, always maintaining privacy. They appreciated the way that the *Manobondhu* listen to them with earnest attention and express strong sympathy. They valued the opportunity to share their frustration and relate their sad tales to a sympathetic person. Especially if they live with in-laws, many of the women could not find anyone to talk to who could give them some solace and lighten the burden they carry in their minds.

"That she listened to my sad stories gave me a good feeling. Any happy incident doesn't last long in memory but the sad one does. I would feel my mind got lighter when I talked about my pains to her. Those were my happy moments. Apa would come to listen to my sad tales."

"উনি যে আমার দুঃখের কথাগুলো শুনছে এটাই আমার অনেক ভালো লাগছে। সুখ করলে মনে থাকে না, দুঃখ করলে মনে থাকে। তাই যখন দুঃখের কথা বলতাম তখন আমার মনটা হালকা হইতো, বুকটা ভারি থেকে খালি হইতো, তখনই আমার শান্তির সময়। আপা আমার দুঃখের গল্প শুনতে আসতেন।"

"Talking to her (the *Manobondhu*) gave me a very good feeling; it seemed I could release all my suppressed sorrows. I had a feeling of happiness. All the sad tales that I had kept inside my mind I could open up to her, and she understood the depth of my miseries. She gave me advice that I followed. That I could tell her my sad tales has turned my mind peaceful."

"উনার সাথে কথা বলে আমার ভালো লাগতো। ভিতরের কষ্টটা যেন বাইরে আসতো এই রকম মনে হইতো। আমার ভালো লাগতো। মনের সব কষ্টের কথা তার কাছে কইতাম, উনি বুঝতো আমার কত কষ্ট। উনি যা বলতেন তা মানতাম। কষ্টের কথা উনারে বললে মনে শান্তি আসতো।"

Perhaps the most important result/outcome of the psychosocial support, from the survivors' standpoints, was that they gained the psychological ability to cope with the situation.

"The soft, slow way she talked to me calmed my mind and I had a feeling of well-being. I could settle my mind on the *sangsar* (household)."

'নরমভাবে আস্তে আস্তে উনি আমার সাথে কথা বলতেন, মনটায় শান্তি আসতো। আমার ভালো লাগতো, সংসারে মন দিতে পারতাম।'

Psychosocial support did not change the behaviours of husbands or other in-laws but often it helped survivors to find a mental courage, a belief in themselves that empowered them to live with a new conviction toward life. Many of the women had considered leaving husbands and children or even thought of ending their lives. The *Manobondhu* consistently discouraged this sort of thinking, stressing the traditional idea that women should remain in their marriages no matter what, and live for their children, that a married woman's identity lies with her husband and children. These messages resonated with the survivors we interviewed, contributing to their resolve that they would not be cowed by the violent treatment of their husbands.

One survivor had strongly protested her husband's illegitimate relation with another married woman and he beat her severely. Feeling devastated, she seriously consider taking life. Here she describes what the *Manobondhu* said:

"When *chachi* talked to me I told her I would not keep this life. Then she helped me realize saying this: 'never should you entertain the idea of taking your life; then you will lose two lives, this life and the after life. Let the pain of your life meet its end in this world, don't carry it to the other life. You have two children; think of them.'"

"চাচী আমার সাথে কথা কইছে সেই সময় আমি কইছিলাম যে এই জীবন আর রাখবো না। তখন সে আমারে বুঝাইছে যে কোন দিন আত্মহত্যা করবা না। এই কুলও পাবানা সেই কুলও পাবানা। কষ্ট করতেছো তুমি দুনিয়া থেকেই কষ্ট করে যাও। তোমার দুইটা বাচ্চা আছে তাদের কথা ভাবো।"

The same woman had decided to go to her natal home leaving husband's house for good. The *Manobondhu* then pacified her, saying,

"Maiyaa (my daughter), please keep patience. Keeping patience will do you good. Your broken family will be mended. You cannot go to your natal home as here you have two children. If you go, their lives will be ruined"

“মাইয়া ধৈর্য ধরো। ধৈর্য ধরলে তোমার ভালো হবে, একদিন তোমার সংসার জোড়া লাগবে। বাপের বাড়িতে তুমি যাইতে পারো না কারণ এখানে তোমার দুইটা বাচ্চা আছে, তুমি গেলে তাগো জীবন শেষ হইয়া যাবে।”

In another case, immediately after the marriage took place, the in-laws began to demean the young bride because she had dark skin. They spoke openly about dissolving the marriage. The mother-in-law often started on petty grounds, inciting her son to beat his wife. Also, whenever the husband felt depressed, he would beat her up. The *Manobondhu* talked to both the woman and her husband. To her she said,

"Stay here. Master your ability to endure. One day you will have your peace. Marriage happens once in a lifetime. All sorts of miseries will come, but you have to withstand them; that is real virtue. Also call for Allah's help."

‘আমাকে বলছে সহ্য কইরা এখানে থাকো। একদিন সুখ হইবো। মানুষের জীবনে একটাই বিয়ে হয়। সুখ-দুঃখ কত কিছু যাইবো। সহ্য করণ লাগবো। সহ্যটা হইছে বড় কথা, আর আল্লাহকে ডাকো।’

Thus, the *Manobondhu* comfort the abused women and encourage them to adhere to traditional norms.

What impact are the *Manobondhu* having?

It was clear from the interviews that the main effects of the psychosocial support have been to:

1. Reduce survivors' feelings of isolation,
2. Help the survivors to endure physical and psychological abuse, and
3. Support survivors in avoiding behaviours that might provoke patriarchal violence and in conforming to traditional gender norms.
4. Below are a few examples.

One survivor said she had modified her behaviour after the *Manobondhu* told her:

"Before I couldn't stand his scolding; I would protest. I would not let him say whatever he wanted to say to me. [The *Manobondhu*] said to me, 'You know well this is how he talks; don't talk back to him too much. Control yourself.

People will call him bad when he utters foul words. Restrain yourself from scolding him and belittling you.”

“আমারে সে কেন বকবে আগে মানতে পারতাম না। আমি প্রতিবাদ করবই। আমারে যা খুশি কইয়া যাইতে দিতাম না। কাকিমা তখন আমারে কইলো, “জানোইতো সে এরকম কথা বলে; তার সাথে তুমি বেশি কথা কইও না। তোমারটা তুমি কন্ট্রোল কইরা রাখ। খারাপ কইলে মানুষ তারে কইবো, সে বকাঝকা করে। তুমি আর তারে বইকো না, নিজেই ছোট কইরো না।”

Another survivor's husband was an ill-tempered man who used abusive words against her and maligned her parents. When she protested this he beat her severely. Gradually she lost her interest in life and was considering suicide. However, since the *Manobondhu* provided support to her, her husband very rarely beats her and when he does it is much less severe than in the past. She attributes this to her own self-restraint—she no longer talks back to the husband. The *Manobondhu* had convinced her that only this restraint on her part could save her from husband's beating.

In one case, a survivor's husband had an illicit relation with another married woman with two children. He used to stay with that woman when he went to Dhaka for plying auto rickshaw. The survivor, having been tormented by this development and severe beating, was seriously considering taking her own life. She said so repeatedly whenever she met with the *Manobondhu*. Talking about how psychosocial support had changed her mind, she said,

Another woman explained,

“Had I not returned (from my parents' home), it would have created a chaos in my family. It is now intact but it would have crumbled if I had not returned. My children would live at one place while I would live at another. She persuaded me to return.”

‘যদি না আসতাম আমার সংসারে ঝামেলা হইতো। সংসার এখন টিক্কা আছে, ফির্যানা আসলে ভাইংগা যাইতো। আমার ছেলেমেয়েরা থাকতো এক জায়গায় আর আমি থাকতাম আর এক জায়গায়। সে আমারে বুঝাইয়া আনছে।’

Few women claimed that their husband's abuse had stopped, but many said it had subsided in both frequency and intensity. Much of the psychosocial support centered on making them realise that protesting their husbands' cruel behaviour and would only aggravate their miseries, that they should concentrate more on performing their household responsibilities and try not to react to their husbands' behaviour. By conforming to traditional gender norms, they were able to avoid conflict. For example,

“When my husband gets angry with me I keep silence. Before I would sharply respond to him. Now, no more do I say anything. Let me see how I fare in this new way. I would say I am doing well so far.” এখন আর বলিনা। দেখি কেমন থাকা যায়। এখন ভালই আছি।’

Many of the women said their confidence in their ability to endure had become stronger. They had abandoned any illusion of living a happy life and gained the maturity to look more realistically at what could be expected as married woman. One survivor had five daughters and no son, which made her husband deeply unhappy. He would get furious with her for petty mistakes and beat her mercilessly. When she opposed his violence this would aggravate her situation. The *Manobondhu* helped the woman resolve that she would continue her daughters' education at any cost so that they could get jobs. To this end, she reared poultry and saved whatever she could earn. Describing her changed state of mind, she said:

"Now I am much confident. Before I would ask myself why he behaved with me like this! After talking to Bhabi, I realised that this is what life is all about in *sangsar* (marital home, family). Pondering this and looking at my daughters' faces, I could assure my mind.... I don't get anxious that much nowadays. Now, I know this is how *sangsar* is. My daughters would be without their mother if I leave this place. But husband would surely get another wife. If I take them with me, they will lose their father."

"অনেক সাহস হইছে। আমি আগে মনে মনে ভাবতাম যে এরকম কেন আমার সাথে করে। ভাবীর সাথে কথা বলার পর মনে হয় সংসার করতে গেলে তো এরকমই হয়ই। এটা ভেবে আর সন্তানের মুখটা দেখে মনটাকে একটু সান্ত্বনা দেই।... আজকাল চিন্তা ভাবনা কম করছি। ভাবছি এভাবেই সংসার করা লাগবে। আমি যদি এই জায়গা হইতে চলে যাই মেয়েরা মা পাবে না। স্বামী ঠিকই বউ পাইবে। আর মেয়েদের যদি নিয়া যাই তাহলে তারা বাপতো আর পাইবে না।"

"[The *Manobondhu*] said to me, 'Listen, you had better have another child. If it turns out to be a son, he may return to your fold [and give up his designs to take a second wife]. Can you continue your domestic life enduring all these beatings? Stop taking pills and have a child.' For nearly a year he would be good for a day or two and then beat me again.... This went on until the birth of this son. Now he seems to be a better man."

"আমার চাচী শাশুরি (মনোবন্ধু) কইলো, 'বাচ্চা নাও, যদি একটা পোলা হয় তাহলে তোমার কাছে ফিরতে পারে আর বিয়ার চিন্তাবাদ দিবে। মার গুতা খাইয়া কি সংসার করতা পারবা? বড়ি খাওয়া বাদ দাও, বাচ্চা নাও।' এক বছর খাইছি। একদিন দুইদিন ভাল থাকে তারপর আবার মারে। এই রকম করতে করতে এই বাচ্চাটা হইছে। এখনতো দেখা যায় ভাল।"

We found only a few examples in which a *Manobondhu* encouraged the woman to resist her husband's abuse and/or referred her to other support services. In the following case, the woman was childless. She became distraught when her husband talked about marrying again. She cried a lot and, after speaking with a *Manobondhu*, threatened to take legal action against him if he remarried:

"If my husband marries again I'll give him a lesson. Never will I cry again; I have a feeling of new-found courage which I didn't have before. Now, my mind is at peace. I have told my mother-in-law that I will file a case against him if he marries again without my permission."

‘আমার স্বামী যদি আবার বিয়া করে তবে একটা শিক্ষা দিযু। আর কখনও কান্নাকাটি করমুনা। মনে হয় নতুন সাহস পাইছি যা আগে ছিলোনা। মনে এখন শান্তি হইছে। শাশুড়িরে কইছি যদি আমার অনুমতি ছাড়া সে আবার বিয়া করে আমি কিন্তু কেইস করমু।’

In one case a *Manobondhu* talked the parents into abandoning their plans to marry off their daughter in her early teens, and to allow her to continue with her education. She used a variety of arguments, including the danger to the girl's health if she bore children before she was physically mature, the potential for the girl to get a good job if she stayed in school, and the threat of arrest and punishment.

DISCUSSION

As the examples above illustrate, typically, the *Manobondhu* advocate self-restraint when they counsel abused women. They reason that talking back to an enraged husband would only aggravate the women's situations. The other apparent aim of the psychosocial support is that women should not entertain the idea of leaving their marriages or taking their own lives, as these actions would make them failures as women. The *Manobondhu* encourage women to build their capacities for endurance so, that they have the mental strength to live their lives as abused women. The *Manobondhu* stress the traditional idea that a married women's identity is inseparable from that of her *sangsar*, her marital household. They encourage survivors of abuse to accept that there is no escape from this.

The *Manobondhu* have been highly effective in providing emotional support to abused women. They may have prevented suicides and, at the very least, they have successfully helped many abused women to overcome suicidal thoughts. Without question, they are highly valued and provide an important service in the communities where they work. With support of the *Manobondhu*, survivors of domestic violence often are able to overcome their sense of despair and isolation. Following advice from the *Manobondhu*, some women have succeeded in reducing their husbands' violence against them by strategically conforming to traditional gender norms and by stopping themselves from exacerbating conflicts by opposing injustices toward them. The *Manobondhu*, apparently steeped in the same cultural norms as the women they are charged with supporting, are offering very traditional advice. Often they seem to believe that preservation of marriages is more important than ending spouse abuse. Is this what BRAC wants to achieve in its VAWC initiative? We assume it is not, and that the aim of VAWC is to reduce violence against women and children not by reinforcing the patriarchal status quo, but by empowering women and engaging men to transform harmful gender norms. Our main recommendation, then, is a follow-on initiative to redesign the psychosocial support system so that its most valuable features are preserved (abused women continue to receive crucial psychological support) and the tendency to reinforce inequitable gender norms is eliminated. Resources to draw from in this process could include BRAC legal services, community empowerment and income generation initiatives for women, and the evolving practice of community intervention in cases of VAWC, to name a few. It may also be useful to test the idea of

psychosocial support for abusive husbands and in-laws. Finally, a small honorarium for the *Manobondhu* may encourage them to devote more time to the psychosocial support and help them resist family members who may discourage them from working on a volunteer basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Revise the *Manobondhu* scope of work to make it clearer that they should refer clients not only to psychological counseling services, which are nonexistent in most of rural Bangladesh, but to a wide range of services from which they could benefit, including health, legal support, law enforcement, skills training, microfinance, etc. provided by BRAC, other NGOs and government.
2. Provide additional gender training to the *Manobondhu*:
 - a. Explaining the ways in which patriarchal norms foster violence against women and children
 - b. Clarifying the difference between giving advice/direct problem solving and empowering abused women to look at their options and make their own decisions.
3. Help *Manobondhu* to establish personal links with support services by providing introductions, encouraging them to visit or be visited by service providers and exchanging phone numbers, etc.
4. Either provide a small honorarium or honor the *Manobondhu* at public gatherings
5. Encourage *Manobondhu* to work more closely with other VAWC platforms such as Peer Educators, *Polli somaj*, Community or Citizen Action Committees and Adolescent and Youth Groups to strengthen the emerging practice of intervention by individuals and community groups when violence against women or children occurs.

STUDY THREE

ENGAGING MEN AS PARTNERS TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN INITIATIVE

Evidence from a variety of social settings worldwide links men's violence against women with systems of gender inequality and patriarchy. In such settings, men's culturally defined role as provider and protector is often accompanied by the notion that men have the right to control women and teach them proper behaviour. Violence is often seen as a legitimate means of control and instruction as well as an attribute of masculinity in its own right. When the norms related to women's behaviour begin to change, such that they become more economically, socially and/or politically empowered, men may respond by changing their own attitudes and behaviour. In such situations, changes in male attitudes and behavioural norms may evolve in either of two directions:

1. They may become more gender equitable: men may initiate greater communication with their wives, solicit their opinions in developing economic strategies and making household decisions, establish more companionate and collegial relationships, help with housework, and/or change their routines to accommodate their wives' income-generating activities. Fathers may be more willing to invest in the education of daughters.
2. There may be a patriarchal backlash: men may feel that their masculine identities are being challenged, and respond with hostility and violence; boys may feel justified to engage in sexual harassment when they encounter girls in public.

In most societies where women's empowerment is occurring, there is probably a mix between these contrasting male responses. In any case, there is wide agreement that men and boys must be engaged in efforts to promote gender equity and reduce or eliminate violence against women. Experience has shown that there is potential for men and boys to actively support a social evolution towards greater gender equity and to cooperate in reducing violence against women and, at the very least, men need to be engaged to prevent a male backlash against such efforts. Male Engagement is therefore an important component of BRAC's VAWC strategy.

The engaging men as partners to end violence against women initiative

This initiative led by BRAC's Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) was designed to engage men and boys through a broader community engagement framework that enlists both men and women in identifying and addressing issues that have clear implications for the safety and security of women and girls in the community. The initiative involves a variety of social actors, including local elected officials and other political and social leaders. It aims both to encourage joint initiatives of men and women to address violence against women and girls, and to alter the traditional norms of masculinity that perpetuate such violence. Its activities include:

- ▶ Participatory identification of community safety and security concerns
- ▶ Mobilising men, women and adolescents to form Community Action Committees and Youth-Groups to monitor and prevent VAW
- ▶ Developing community action plans to address issues identified
- ▶ Building capacity to act as change agents
- ▶ Training on masculinity
- ▶ Engaging local elites, religious and political leaders and local administration in VAW issues
- ▶ Engaging youth through school-based and community events
- ▶ Promoting alternative norms of masculinity through role models
- ▶ Raising awareness through popular theatre and other behaviour change communication methods

As Implementation of this initiative in the research site began in 2012 with a three-day training of Citizens Action Committee and Adolescent and Youth Committee members at the Pabna BLC. The programme focused on five issues: early marriage, dowry, husband's violence against wife, eve-teasing and pornographic video show at roadside shops. Other key activities implemented between 2012 and the time of the research include:

- ▶ Participatory identification of local safety and security concerns, especially those related to women's safety.
- ▶ Mobilising men and women, adolescents and youth by forming action committees to monitor and prevent VAWC
- ▶ Developing community action plans
- ▶ Building community capacity to act as change agents
- ▶ Training on masculinity
- ▶ Engaging with local elites, political and religious leaders, and administration on masculinity and VAWC issues

- ▶ Engaging with youth through school-centred and other community events
- ▶ Promoting alternative masculinity norms through role models
- ▶ Awareness raising campaigns using popular theatre and other modes of behaviour change communication

STUDY OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study was to document the BRAC's Men as Partners Initiative from the perspectives of local participants so that strengths and weaknesses in both the model and its implementation could be identified and actions taken in a timely fashion to improve its effectiveness.

METHODS

A site in Pabna district was selected in order to observe the effects of the initiative after several years of implementation. CEP was asked to identify a well-performing site so the researchers could assess the potential effects of the Engaging Men as Partners to End Violence against Women Initiative (MAP) on local attitudes and actions related to gender, VAWC and violence prevention in a place where the intervention was implemented as designed and had a chance to mature. The alternative would have been to choose a site in the VAWC pilot area, but this option was rejected because the purpose of the study is to analyse whether and how the intervention model may need to be refined for use in VAWC. The components of MAP are extensive and cannot all be implemented in the span of a single year, let alone have the desired impact in VAWC communities. Thus, if we had gone to a VAWC area we would have been assessing a partially implemented model.

Our research team, consisting of four female and one male qualitative researchers, collected data at *Santhia upazila* in Pabna during two field visits: November 21-24, and December 13-14, 2016. During the first visit, they senior researchers conducted In-Depth Interviews (IDI) with all members of the local Citizens Action Committee (CAC) and the Adolescent and Youth Group (AYG) in a selected *mowja* (the lowest level governmental administrative unit, which in this case included two villages) to assess their understandings and attitudes regarding gender norms and violence against women and children. A senior BRAC staff member accompanied the team to the project site. With the active support of the local convener of the CAC, he organised the interviews. The two senior female members of the team interviewed the 10 women and girls at their homes and the senior male researcher/team leader interviewed the eight men and boys at the UP office (office of the Union Parishad, the elected representatives of the lowest level administrative unit). The junior team members accompanied the three senior qualitative researchers to the field to observe interviewing techniques for training purposes.

All interviews were done privately. The participants were briefed on the purpose of the research and their verbal consent was taken both for the interview and for audio recording of interviews. As this action research is intended for internal use to refine the programme interventions, and is not intended for publication or wider circulation, formal, signed consent was not taken. Nonetheless, basic principles of informed consent, privacy and confidentiality were followed.

The second field visit was scheduled so the team observed a Male Engagement event, described the event and the roles and reactions of participants through participant observation, and conducted informal interviews with participants (15 in all). The event included about 200 people. It began with reports by CAC and AYG members of male engagement activities that had been undertaken over the preceding six months. This was followed by a staged drama depicting various forms of violence against women and girls, and popular songs on this theme. The three younger members of the research team observed the event and conducted informal interviews with participants.

All interviews were audio recorded, and transcribed by the five female members of the research team. The team leader conducted the first stage of data analysis by synthesising the responses to each question in English and translating observation notes from the event that was observed. The primary author reviewed these to identify main findings and prepared the report. Other team members assisted in identifying differences by type of participant and discussed the findings.

The guide used for in-depth interviews is included in the appendix.

FINDINGS

from interviews with local committee members

How is gender equality understood?

Both men and women articulated a comprehensive and relatively nuanced understanding of what gender equality entails. They noted a wide range of areas in which the concept applies, including education, work inside and outside the home, freedom of movement, freedom to express one's opinions, and ability to make decisions. They also spoke of the need to raise boy and girl children without discrimination and of the desirability of mutuality and mutual support as in spousal relationships. They acknowledged that physical attributes and social realities might constrain gender equality in some circumstances but did not indicate that this invalidated the basic principles. One of the men said that women's insecurity in moving about at night gave them a feeling of inequality and to achieve gender equality women's right to move about freely and safely needed to be ensured. Another said that men could strengthen a woman's sense of equality by showing his confidence in her abilities. Several men said that their views about women's rights had changed after the gender training they received.

Should there be limits to gender equality?

It was quite apparent from the interviews with women and teen-aged girls that they were well aware that current social norms often do not support gender equality. When asked whether there should be limits on gender equality and whether this ever went too far, they spoke both about current social realities that they didn't necessarily agree with, and about their personal convictions. For example, one woman said that male supremacy is so extreme that it is quite unlikely that a woman ever would exceed its proper limits. Another said that, even as they tried to establish their rights, women should keep themselves "a bit lower" than men to avoid provoking a sharp reaction. A middle-aged woman who worked for an insurance company said that men were threatened by the idea of gender equality and would never accept it. A young male committee member noted that men often seemed to feel that women went beyond their limits when they disagreed with men in public. In the following, another young man illustrates this point:

"Many men take part in *shalish* (traditional mechanism for resolving disputes in Islamic societies, usually at the village level). [A man tends to feel that] if a woman takes a leading role then my status in the *para* will fall. [Men think] they would be belittled if a woman were to lead the *shalish*. The man will think his power is declining."

'অনেক পুরুষ বিচার শালিস করে। যদি আর এক নারী এই বিচার শালিসের নেতৃত্ব দেয়, তাহলে পাড়ায় আমার দাম কমে যাবে। এই নারী যদি নেতৃত্ব দেয় তাহলে আমি ছোট হব। এদিক দিয়ে মনে করে আমার ক্ষমতা কমে যাচ্ছে।'

Notably, when asked for their own views regarding whether there should be limits to gender equality, whether it ever went too far, and whether it ever resulted in discrimination against men, the study participants often responded by describing the views of others in the society, rather than their own views, or they mixed them, possibly because they did not want to admit that they themselves felt ambivalent about gender equality. Generally, people said there was greater acceptance of changes in gender norms related to household work as opposed to women's roles in public. Men, they believed, were more apt to see the benefits to themselves when husbands and wives were mutually supportive and women's roles expanded.

There were quite a few statements suggesting that, as reasonable, fair and morally right as the concept of gender equality may seem when presented in an appealing way by BRAC, at some level it still seems bizarre and threatening to the social order. Asked to give an example of a situation in which equality may go too far, a 16 year-old girl said that if girls or women behaved like boys or men, for example by speaking loudly or angrily, they would be exceeding the limit of equality. Several women made similar statements. In some cases, the idea of gender equality brought to mind the prospect of out-of-control sexuality and dishonour. Along those lines, several men said they believed that limits should be put on adolescent girls and boys, especially girls, who should be allowed outside the house as little as possible and should not

be allowed to use mobile phones freely. Adolescent girls needed to be kept under control.

What sort of gender equality is reasonable, what is laughable, weird or just plain wrong?

Behaviour that deviates from prevailing gender norms is not always censured or disapproved. Sometimes it just seems odd, or goofy. To explore the extent to which more egalitarian norms are beginning to be accepted, we described six situations (see appendix) that are somewhat or, in some cases, very inconsistent with current gender norms in rural Bangladesh and asked the CAC and AYG members which of these situations would make them laugh. Among the women and girls interviewed, however, very few saw any of the situations as laughable. The exception was the situation in which a man and his young wife sit in a teahouse, chatting and drinking tea. The responses were mixed. For example, a housewife aged 30 said:

“This is a funny matter. Everyone in the village will laugh seeing a man sipping tea along with his wife at a shop. A wife is to remain at home. If she has tea at a tea stall then there will be gossip. Everyone will laugh and taunt.”

“এটা দেখলে হাসি পাবে কারণ স্ত্রীকে নিয়ে দোকানে বসে চা খাচ্ছে এটা গ্রামের সবাই দেখে হাসবে। বৌ বাড়িতে থাকবে, দোকানে বসে চা খাবে এটা নিয়ে কথা বলাবলি হবে সবাই টিটকারি দিয়ে হাসবে।”

Two of the women, college girls (AYG members), thought it was fine, saying that women were equally entitled to sit in a tea stall. Most found it improper. Most of the men, perhaps more concerned than the women that they might look foolish if they gave the “wrong” answer, mainly commented on how they thought rural society in general would respond to this scenario—that they would see it as abnormal and disapprove. One man said people would describe the man as a “crazy wife-lover”. Those who talked about their own attitudes gave mixed responses: two found it unseemly or unbecoming, two (young men) thought it would be okay “from an equal rights perspective” for an adult married couple but unacceptable for an unmarried couple, and one said that if the two were talking about “necessary” things it would be alright but they should not engage in “light chatting” as boys do.

Virtually everyone found the idea of a man playing with the baby while his wife cooked dinner to be pleasing, and a few said he should help with the cooking so that she could enjoy being with the baby. Most of the women had negative things to say about the opposite scenario (man cooks, wife plays with baby); those who approved noted that they would have responded differently prior to the BRAC training. In contrast, all of the men found this to be fine, but many commented that society in general would not accept such a thing. The interviewer suspected that some of the men actually tended to agree with the perspective they attributed to “society”. Likewise, most of the men said it would be fine, and consistent with the idea of gender equality, if a husband swept the courtyard while his wife chatted with a neighbour. Only one of the

men said such a woman would be “crossing her limit”. Most of the women said the idea made them angry, as this was women’s work, no matter if the husband was idle. Only two said it was acceptable, as men were now starting to do many household chores. None found it particularly funny. Only one of the men and one of the women found it unacceptable for a woman to ask a man to vacate one of the seats reserved for women on a bus. Some saw this as her right from a gender equality perspective, others viewed it more in the traditional sense of taking good care of women. Most of the women saw it from a rights perspective.

From a gender perspective, the most extreme situation we described was when a man slapped his wife and she slapped him back with greater force. Among the women, one found it funny; another described it as one act of injustice followed by another and said the woman should have found a peaceful way to correct her husband; a 16-year old said she would feel sad for the husband, and the rest said it was unacceptable. One said it would be permissible for a husband to beat his wife, but not the other way around, citing religious sermons in which she believed it was said: “Women’s heaven lies under the feet of their husbands”. The men’s responses were more varied, ranging from “two wrongs do not make a right”, to the opposite (e.g., that this would be a good way to teach the man a lesson by humiliating him), to “a woman can never lay hands on her husband”, to “people in the community would see the man as a woman”.

What is eve teasing, who is to blame and what is being done to stop it?

In explaining what they meant by “eve teasing” (sexual harassment) most of the girls and women used the terms “back sound” and “whistling”, sounds that boys make to taunt a girl they see walking along the road. A boy may pull on the girl’s *orna* (long scarf meant to cover a woman’s breasts and sometimes her head), walk toward her (or them, if the girl is in a group) and block her way, ask her to ride on a motorcycle, grab her by the hand or touch her body. If a group of boys is listening to a CD player they may turn up the volume. Boys may sing a popular love song, make rude comments about the girl’s figure, ask her phone number, and react angrily when she refuses to provide it, use crude language and call her a “sex symbol” or “*maal*” (highly derogatory term meaning something to taste). Asked if there was anything girls did to invite eve teasing, a few of the girls and women as well as boys and men mentioned tight and short clothing and provocative ways of walking.

Several of the boys and several girls and women had intervened when they witnessed eve teasing, by appealing to the boys’ better natures and or threatening them. In one case a girl cried out for help and, despite being verbally threatened by the teasing boys, the boy asked the teasing boys to think about their own sisters. He told the main offender that he (the offender) might hurt him physically but that he could face a legal case that would be life-damaging. He advised the girl to complain to the school principal. Asked why he did not back down in response to the threats, he said that being a member of the AYG gave him a feeling of power, and that the local police officer had also promised to help if they contacted him. A one of the female AYG

members defended her friend, whom some boys had called “*maal*”, whether they had the guts to use that word with their mothers and sisters.

Is violence against women ever justified?

In prior qualitative research in rural areas, we found that although husbands' violence against their wives is now widely condemned, there are many people who still consider it to be justified if the wife behaves badly by the standards of traditional gender norms. Often the way a husband's violence was perceived depended not so much on the wife's behaviour but on the presumed intent behind it. Based on this finding, we developed a series of survey questions based on five scenarios that portrayed women as making mistakes but still doing their best to be a good wife, based on prevailing cultural ideals, and another five scenarios that portrayed women as willfully defying gender norms (see questions 13-22 in the interview guide in the appendix). We used these 10 questions in our AR study gender attitudes among BRAC field staff and also used them in the present study. The item-by-item responses are shown in the table below, with the number of each type of participant stating that beating would be justified shown in the last four columns.

Number agreeing beating is justified under various circumstances

	In which of the following scenarios is wife beating justified?	Girls <20 (N=7)	Boys 20-30 (N=5)	Women 30-50 (N=3)	Men 50-60 (N=2*)
1.	A wife is home alone and someone comes to tell her that her mother is very ill. She rushes to her parents' house without telling her husband. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for going out without telling him?	0	0	0	0
2.	What if the wife is over-burdened with work one morning? Normally, she supervises the children's play and keeps them neat and clean. But, one day, it is raining, and while she is working hard to finish her housework, the children play in front of the house and get dirty. She does not have time to bathe them before her husband returns and sees how dirty they are. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for neglecting the children? To be clear, I am not asking you whether you think it is justified to hit or beat your children. I am asking whether you think the husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife in this situation.	0	0	1	0
3.	What if the husband stays home out of laziness for several days, refusing to go out and work. His wife tells him they are running out of food and there is not enough money to buy food - and asks him to please go out and work. The husband tells his wife to shut up, and she argues with him. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for arguing with him?	0	0	0	0
4.	What if the wife is ill and her husband returns home at night and wants to have sex with her? She refuses, explaining that she has a fever and stomach pains. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for refusing to have sex with him?	0	0	0	0

	In which of the following scenarios is wife beating justified?	Girls <20 (N=7)	Boys 20-30 (N=5)	Women 30-50 (N=3)	Men 50-60 (N=2*)
5.	What if the mother-in-law of the woman tells her to sweep the home-yard? The wife disobeys because she is busy caring for her baby. The mother-in-law complains to her son when he returns home. In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for disobeying her mother-in-law?	1	0	0	0
6.	A wife is home alone and goes to her parents' house just for fun without telling her husband? In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for going out without telling him?	3	0	1	0
7.	What if the wife often leaves her young children unsupervised and lets them go around looking dirty? Her husband has asked her many times before to supervise their play and keep them clean, but she does not pay attention to what he asks. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for neglecting the children? To be clear, I am not asking you whether you think it is justified to hit or beat the <u>children</u> . I am asking whether you think the husband is justified in hitting or beating <u>his wife</u> in this situation.	3	1	2	1
8.	What if the wife is quarrelsome by nature? She often disagrees with what her husband says for no reason. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for arguing with him?	4	0	2	1
9.	What if the wife refuses to have sex with her husband whenever she is not in the mood? In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for refusing to have sex with him?	0	0	0	0
10.	What if the mother-in-law of the woman tells her to sweep the home-yard, but the wife ignores this request and spends the morning resting and chatting with her neighbour? In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for disobeying her mother-in-law?	3	0	1	0

* One of the 8 men did not respond.

Among the men, out of seven male study participants, five, all in their 20s, opposed the idea of a husband beating his wife in all 10 situations. All of the five young respondents commented that, instead of beating, the husband should have helped his wife to understand the faults she has committed. A 56 year-old male CAC member said,

“She can’t be beaten but needs to be asked why she disregarded her MIL while chatting with a neighbour. May be there are some reasons; if she did without any reason, then she could be pursued to rectify, but not beaten.”

‘তাকে মারা যাবে না। তবে জিজ্ঞেস করতে হবে শাশুড়ির কথা কেন অমান্য করল কেন গল্প করে কাটাইলো। কোন কারণ থাকতে পারে। যদি বিনা কারণে হয়ে থাকে তাকে সংশোধনের তাগিদ দেয়া যাবে, তবে মারা যাবে না।’

Thus, even among the men and boys who, for the most part, stated that beating was unacceptable under any circumstances, there were a few who clearly still believed that it was the husband's role to correct the wife's behaviour.

The women were less likely to condemn wife beating when they felt the wife had behaved badly. In several cases, even for the scenarios where the young women said wife beating was not justified, they seemed to feel it necessary to qualify their answers by further elaborating the scenarios to make the woman appear blameless. In other words, they did not necessarily condemn wife beating because they thought it was always wrong but, rather, because they imagined the woman might have an acceptable reason for her bad behaviour.

This ambivalent attitude of many toward VAW was aptly expressed by one woman, age 49, in the question of a wife who is quarrelsome by nature. She said,

“Beating is in no way justified. But there are some women who, unless given thrashes once or twice, don't behave properly. Those who, for nothing, make life un-peaceful, they need such treatment. One needs to be brought back to the limit if one crosses it, and for this, a couple of slaps are necessary.”

“ মারা কোনভাবেই ঠিক না। কিন্তু কিছু কিছু মহিলা আছে তাদের দুই একটা না দিলে ঠিক হয় না। যারা খালি খালি অশান্তি করে তাদের মাঝে মধ্যে দরকার হয়। সীমা ছাড়িয়ে চলে গেলে সীমার মধ্যে আনা লাগবে। আর আনতে গেলে দুই একটা থাপ্পর দেয়া লাগবে।”

But on the same question, an adolescent girl was in full support of this 'quarrelsome' woman who, she argued, would not have quarreled much unless her husband was at fault. She said,

“What makes her so argumentative? Certainly the man has also some faults. If no one gives any reply, can she argue alone? Beating is not right; beating would intensify argument.”

“কিসের জন্য তর্ক করবে? নিশ্চয় পুরুষটারও কোন দোষ আছে। কেই যদি সাই না দেয় একা একা কি তর্ক করতে পারে? মারাটা ঠিক না। মারলে তর্ক আরো বেশি বেড়ে যাবে।”

Thus, in essence, she used the same argument, that whether wife beating was justified depended on who behaved acceptable and who behaved badly.

Counter-intuitively, the younger women/girls (AYG members) seemed to condone wife beating to a greater extent than the older women (CAC members).

DESCRIPTION OF MEN AS PARTNERS EVENT AND AUDIENCE REACTIONS

At around noon on the day of the event, announcements were made by loudspeaker telling people that the programme would be about stopping early marriage, dowry,

violence against women, and eve teasing, and that many important government officials would be present. The event was held in the afternoon, making it relatively easy for women to attend, and chairs were provided for them. At around 3:20 pm the programme began. Three sides were enclosed by a long expanse of coloured cloth. At one end a stage had been erected and before it chairs were placed in two sections. About 120 women and 18 adolescent girls and some girl children were present and, on the other side, about 70 men and boys of all ages. There was a banner with the words:

“To prevent violence against women: a six-monthly meeting, people’s theatre and quiz competition, 2015” and two posters, saying “Violence against women is violence against development of people” and “My Daughter is my pride--no marrying her off before age 18, this is my promise!”

The programme started with a speech made by the Senior Trainer CEP, BRAC, who noted that the newspapers were full of stories about VAW. Then the progress report was read out by an AYG member, a college girl. The loud speaker was not working properly and she read the report in a very low voice, and most of the audience could not make out what she was saying. Finally, a BRAC staff member took the paper from her hand and completed the reading. One important activity was the completion of ‘Information Cards’ documenting the birth dates and other information of 48 adolescent girls in the community. The cards were handed over to the girls. The idea behind this was that early marriages could be discouraged by documenting girls’ ages, making it more difficult to bribe marriage registrars and others to falsify ages when parents try to marry off their daughters before they reach the statutory minimum age of marriage, 18.

Next, three couples were given prizes for getting their sons married without dowry, and three men who married without dowry were given prizes. Spectators clapped feebly. The moderator said that about 200 young men had taken oaths not to take any dowry when they married. The UP member said that he neither gave nor took dowry at the time of his two daughters’ and two sons’ marriages and urged his “Muslim brothers” not to demand dowry. Then a girl, whose marriage was broken up because of her and her husband’s young ages was given a prize. She too spoke inaudibly, but a committee member spoke up saying she had not been able to manage what was expected of a married woman, and that her under-aged husband could not work to support them. Then the ex-UP Chairman spoke about the negative consequences of early marriage, added that the giving and taking of dowry was a legal offence and advising Hindus especially to stop this practice. Next, a lecturer from the Degree College talked about violence against women (VAW). Then the Police Inspector gave a speech. He blamed men for perpetrating violence and disturbing female students (“eve teasing”) on their way to school and college, threatening that offenders would receive harsh punishment and boys who did these things would be prohibited from getting government jobs. He said that if all respectable people, Imams and others worked together, VAW could be stopped.

Many people were standing on the road behind the chairs placed in front of the stage, apparently attracted by the bright decorations. At first, most of the audience tried to listen to what was said, but their attention wandered as the discussion rambled on. Young boys were talking among themselves, quite loudly. Children clinging to their mothers were crying, and people were walking right in front of the report presenters. At first, everyone was eagerly awaiting the drama to be staged, but food was served at the end of the speeches, before the drama began, and most of the participants left at that point. When the closing statement was made, only the research team members were sitting in the chairs.

The limitations of the event's staging notwithstanding, at least some of those who had been able to hear seemed receptive to what was being communicated. One of the researchers overheard two married adolescent girls saying,

"If I had known that the police would take steps if informed that an early marriage was about to happen, I would have done something to avoid this" and "Before [I was married] I did not realise what pain I would endure. Had BRAC arranged such meetings then, my life would have been different. I would have known and so would my parents!"

One old woman said to other women that people who demanded dowry should have been put in jail. An old man was asking others when the food packets would be distributed. Another old man sitting beside one of the researchers, talking in an anguished voice about the topics of speeches, said,

"These people only speak in favour of women and girls; why don't they say that women also divorce men, and threaten that they will take legal action against them?!"

Suddenly the drama started. There was a screaming sound, but the reason was unclear to many, whose view of the actors was blocked because the stage was at ground level. The screaming was from the victim of eve teasing in the drama. As no microphone was used, food packet distribution was still going on, and many were leaving, the dialogue was inaudible to most of the audience. Some of those who wanted to listen rushed forward, and there was chaos in the place.

Remarkably, as this was a rather conservative area, some women took part in the drama. A college girl didn't want to go to college for fear of eve-teasers on the way. Another female college student could not pay her tuition. Her father, a rickshaw van puller, earned little income and spent much of his time watching films on the TVs in roadside shops. His income was very low. Then a young boy tried to get him to understand the negative effects of seeing too much video, lecturing at him in the manner of a political leader. A dispute between the husband and wife over his low income was also shown. After much manipulation, the van puller stopped seeing films and began working regularly.

After the drama, a quiz competition was held. Young boys enthusiastically participated and they got all the prizes because, by this time, all the girls and women had left. The questions were all about women: female political figures and poets, minimum age of marriage for girls, the legal punishments for taking dowry or committing violence against women.

RESULTS

from interviews with participants

Responses to what they heard

Despite the difficulties with the audio system, most of the 15 people we interviewed who attended the Men as Partners event (12 were women and girls) were able to describe the content accurately, and they unanimously agreed with what they heard. The speech by the police inspector, in particular, seemed to have a strong impact on the audience, inspiring the younger female participants and giving them hope. If just informing the police would stop payment of dowry, this could be a great benefit for poor people, one unmarried 15-year old girl noted. Another said this was the first time she had heard that informing the police could challenge social practices that harmed young women. She herself would inform the Officer in Charge (OC) at Police station, she said, if her parents tried to forcibly marry her off.

The women and girls also indicated that they knew such social practices were deeply entrenched in their society and suggested that programmes such as the one they had just attended should be held repeatedly and that the point that practices such as dowry and child marriage were punishable should be stressed. In the past, dramas had been staged but they were less effective in conveying the messages they had heard the prior day. Very important people, including college teachers, high level BRAC staff and, above all the Police Officer from the local police station had spoken very clearly about the punishments for these acts, and this had more impact on them than dramas.

One woman provided a rather sophisticated analysis of factors contributing to early marriage, saying that tea shop owners showed pornographic videos for economic reasons (to attract customers), which encouraged eve teasing, which made parents fear for their daughters' security and their own social status and therefore marry them off prematurely. If eve-teasing could be lessened by punishment, it would help both girls and their parents to feel more secure and more open to delaying marriage.

What can be done to stop VAW? What are you doing?

Event participants

One woman was so moved by the programme that she called her husband at night and asked him not to arrange his two sisters' marriages before they reached 18, which her husband's family was trying to do. She also asked him to persuade his

father not to give any dowry in their marriages. Her husband asked her how she had learned all about this and when she told him about the event she had attended, she said, he was very happy with her. Another woman talked to her sons about eve-teasing, cautioning them not to do it. She told them that girls they saw on the roads and pathways were like their own sisters.

Asked what they themselves could do to stop these practices, some of the women said there was nothing they could do against their violent husbands. They also said that girls must be very cautious on the road so that boys will not find an opportunity to annoy them. In contrast, one woman said she would try talking to her husband to persuade him to become less violent and several said they would challenge their husbands. Asked how they could master the courage required, they said that BRAC could be a source of courage.

Several women swore they would not marry off their daughters before 18 and would not give in any dowry demands. Several said they would talk to their husbands and neighbours about these issues. Several married women said that they would concentrate more on their children's education. Some of the teenaged girls said they would talk to eve-teasers and that if warning them did not work they would not hesitate to complain to the police. A young girl said she would not agree to get married early even if her parents insisted. She would not hesitate to complain against her parents to the police if necessary. The girls also said they could send their parents to meetings such as this one so they would know what the legal punishments were for these unlawful practices.

The male school committee president said he had pledged to himself that he would stop such practices; he would call others to join him, and call upon BRAC and the Police station. Since many people in the village know him, it would be easy for him to work, especially with school children. He decided he would hold a meeting in his school to talk with his students about the issues discussed in the previous day's meeting, and invite the convener of the CAC to join him. He thinks students could be motivated in this way.

A doctor said he could discuss the messages he had heard with his patients. He could tell them what the Police Officer and other officers and important people had said.

Male CAC and AYG members

Several male committee members said that the main social factors perpetuating violence against women are the practices of dowry and early marriage. A young married girl failing to perform her duties at her husband's house gets beaten by her husband. They suggested that well-intentioned, conscious men could start a door-to-door campaign to make poor people aware of the importance of girls' education to reduce the incidence of early marriage. They also talked about carrying out mass campaigns against men's drug addiction. At home, men should increasingly take part in household activities, said several of them. Some of the men felt that violent men

should be counseled on the negative effects violence against women. If this does not have any effect, then local leaders should take action with the support of the administration. One of the men also talked about the need for girls and women to be careful and avoid walking alone in isolated places.

They gave the following examples of interventions they had been involved in. Note that in three of these cases the arguments they used with abusers tended to focus on the abusers' own interest. Women's right to be free from violence was not mentioned:

1. A 27 year-old college teacher came to know that in his village a woman was being forcibly kept confined in a room at her in-laws' home and had become ill from beatings by her in-laws. After he contacted the local BRAC office, a group of BRAC staff went to the local police station and informed them of the situation. Police rescued the woman and handed her over to her parents. A case was filed against the perpetrators. One was arrested and sentenced to jail.
2. A 26 year-old unmarried man, a member of the Action Committee, told us about a man in his neighbourhood who beat his wife regularly. He met the man several times and talked about the negative consequences of such beating—for example, that she might fall sick and need medical treatment. Stressing the financial burden of wife abuse, he managed to convince the man, who gradually stopped beating his wife. The same young man intervened when he learned that a girl was being detained against her will and subjected to abuse in a neighbouring village. Accompanied by other senior Action Committee members, he went to the police station to inform them of the incident. Police then freed the girl from her captors.
3. A 28 year-old man told us how he dissuaded one young boy from pursuing a sexual relationship with an unmarried girl. The boy was from a rich family while the girl's parents were poor. He asked the boy if he was willing to marry the girl by making a formal proposal. When he said 'no', the Action Committee member warned him that the consequences for him could be dire, as the government was showing no tolerance for violence against women and if any legal case against him was filed by the girl's father he was certain to be imprisoned. After several such conversations the boy saw his point and thanked him for his support.
4. Another Action Committee member described a man in his neighbourhood would beat his wife until she took her own life by taking poison. The man paid a fine to escape imprisonment. He married again and began beating his second wife. The CAC member began to visit him regularly and talked about the negative of his actions: first his children lost their mother, then he suffered a big financial loss (the cost of the bribe). He reasoned that the second wife might take her life too, adding to his suffering. Gradually the man stopped beating his wife.

Female CAC and AYG members

The women stressed the CAC role in raising people's awareness of negative consequences of early marriage, dowry and eve teasing, saying that members can talk to people individually or in groups. They should highlight the incapacity of a young girl to cope with the demand of managing her husband's as well as her in-laws' demands. When wife beating occurs, the committee members could go to the spot and try to make the husband realise that he cannot treat his wife like this, and also that such beating disturbs peace of the surrounding area.

One adolescent respondent aged 16 said that boys are better placed than girls to protest against VAW. Yet she went on to describe an effective protest incident led by girls only.

1. A recently married girl had been ill treated by her mother-in-law from the first day. She got married out of love and without family consent from either side. The committee members went to the house and talked to her MIL. They emphasised that her son was equally responsible for the marriage; they urged her to treat his son's wife as her own daughter. Several times they went there to talk on this issue. Finally the woman's attitude changed.
2. Another woman described her participation in another such protest. All committee members had gathered at the UP office and together they went to a house where a man had beaten his wife a couple of days before. They asked the man not to beat his wife any more.
3. In another incident, six women (3 adolescents and 3 middle-aged women) went to a house to meet a man who very often would beat his wife. The man got angry with them claiming it was his personal matter. All of them together protested saying that it could not be a personal matter, for it had negative effect on the immediate environment. They threatened to take actions if the beatings continued. In the subsequent six months, the man was not reported to have beaten his wife. Such interventions appear to be very rare, however.

As impressive as these ideas and actual interventions are, the study participants could cite only a few that had taken place in the last three years. The committee members seemed to feel more comfortable with their role of raising people's awareness of negative consequences of early marriage, dowry and eve-teasing by talking with them individually or in groups than to actually intervene.

Barriers to community intervention against VAWC

On the difficulty of working with violent men, one CAC member said that such people use abusive and insulting words to deter people from engaging with them, and they seem unwilling to listen.

One CAC member, discussing what men can do to prevent VAW said: get men free from drug addiction, take action against early marriage and dowry, encourage

husbands to help women in their household chores. Asked to explain what obstacles men face in doing these things, he cited social stigma. When a man does housework take part in household work, others say, ‘

“Hey, he is doing women’s work; has lost his manliness. He is a she-man.”

‘পুরুষ ঘরের কাজ করলে বলবে মেয়েলি কাজ করছে, এর পুরুষত্ব নেই, মেয়েলি পুরুষ।’

On dowry, he gave a description of how people keep this practice alive in the present context. Grooms’ parents instigate them to demand dowry, believing this will help them to be financially better off in the future. In the community, stories are told and retold about successful men, poor before marriage, who got richer by investing dowry money in income generating activities. This inspiration is a big obstacle. People say things like:

“Someone’s son has achieved such thing with the money he had at the time of marriage; he has bought a car; you also take money and buy a cow.’

‘অমুকের ছেলে টাকা নিয়ে বিয়ে করে এই করেছে একটা গাড়ী করেছে, তুইও নে, গরু কেন গাড়ী কেন।’

Others said that the notion that it will be better for a girl if she is married earlier is still very strong. Parents, especially poor parents, find their young daughters burdensome. If any proposal comes along, others will say to hesitant father,

“Such a good proposition! How could you think of not accepting it?”

This peer pressure is very hard for a poor parent to overcome, and CAC members describe this social reality as a big obstacle. The also said that UP members, chairmen and the marriage registrars easily succumb to social pressure to supply false birth certificate that showing 12 and 13 year old girls to be 16 or 17 years of age. (The study participant who mentioned this was under the impression that the government had lowered the minimum marriage age for girls from 18 to 16, which was not the case.)

Another senior CAC member talked about fears that prevent men from opposing violent men. When they threaten to resort to legal measures, the perpetrators, if they are socially powerful, threaten the campaign people, saying to anyone who threatens to file a case against them things like,

“Your whole family would be crushed.”

হুমকি দেয়। ধরেন যে বলবে তোর বংশ শেষ করে দিবো। ভয়ে তাই করে না।’

What facilitates community interventions against VAWC?

The action committee and adolescent committee members have received training and orientation from BRAC. BRAC has facilitated the establishment of a close link

between the local administration, including police, and the CAC members. The committee members feel empowered knowing that the administration is ready to take action if they ask for assistance. In practice, there have been many such instances. In contrast, people from other areas have neither the training nor the connections with the local administration. Many still view wife beating as an internal family matter that no one has right to interfere with.

For example, a man in a nearby village was preparing to marry off his daughter at an early age. Learning this, the action committee members went there to stop the marriage by talking to the man on the negative impact of early marriage. But the man was adamant. Failing to convince him, the committee members informed police, who then stopped the marriage.

In another case, a CAC member was in the local police station when the Officer in Charge (OC) received a call from a girl. She informed him that her friend, a student of class VII, was to be forcibly married off. The OC asked a police officer to go to the place and stop the marriage. The respondent accompanied the policeman, as he did not know the location. They talked to the girl to make sure she was not willing to get married. Then they made a document that said if the girl, before reaching marriage able age, was married off, then her parents and the UP councilor of that part would be brought under law. The girl signed the paper. (The study participant did not say whether they would have allowed the marriage to proceed if the girl was willing.)

DISCUSSION

The findings from this brief study paint an encouraging picture of the Men as Partners to End Violence against Women Initiative. The initiative has been successful in engaging both boys/men and girls/women to work in tandem against VAWC. Its multilevel approach, particularly the engagement of police to support local efforts to deter VAWC, appears to be very effective, giving individuals and community groups who attempt to stop violence psychological support and greater clout than they otherwise would have.

Interest in, and comprehension of, the VAWC themes among CAC and AYG members was high and, for the most part, they articulated attitudes reflecting support for gender equity and condemnation of VAWC. The committee members' understanding of the various forms that violence against women and girls takes was comprehensive, reflecting a quite sophisticated understanding of the links between gender inequality and violence. Many of those interviewed had participated in individual and group actions to stop violence against women and girls.

A few of the committee members however, mainly girls and women, articulated the idea that in some situations a woman's right to be free from violence depended on her behavior, or the intentions behind her behaviour. (Even the appropriateness of a woman sitting in a tea stall with her own husband depended, according to one study participant, on what they were talking about.) In other words, we noted a persistent

tendency to “blame the victim). Our prior research, as well as the findings from the AR studies on BRAC staff attitudes and psychosocial support for survivors of abuse, suggest that this attitude is still very common in the rural Bangladesh setting. However, in this case, the boundaries of what behaviours are acceptable for women may be expanding—a positive sign.

Attitudes regarding violence against adolescent and unmarried young adult women were mixed. Understanding (at least among committee members) of the links between violence and social practices such as child marriage and dowry (and the recognition that child marriage itself can be a form of violence) was well developed. However, when it came to eve teasing, we noted a tendency to blame the victims based on their dress and behaviour, and a pervasive idea that contact between girls and boys this age should be minimised by restricting girls.

While the community event we observed was seriously hampered by problems with the audio equipment, those who were able to hear seemed to be inspired by the messages. Among those we interviewed, many of the women who attended were seriously considering taking action against VAWC, either in their own homes or in the community.

In conclusion, the Men as Partners model, as adapted by BRAC for this initiative, appears to be sound. The main challenge for VAWC is to increase its impact by augmenting and intensifying activities at the grassroots level so that:

- ▶ Progressive social norms related to gender and VAWC become the dominant norms in VAWC communities,
- ▶ Behaviours change on a broader scale to keep pace with emerging ideas,
- ▶ It becomes “normal” for community members to intervene in cases of VAWC, and
- ▶ Linkages with the police and other sources of support and assistance in deterring VAWC continue to be built.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The MAP initiative seems to be working well. Accelerate the positive impact of MAP interventions by doing more of the same with greater frequency.
2. Streamline BRAC’s violence “hotline” procedures so that staff of different programmes can better work together without duplication of effort. Use every opportunity to disseminate the hotline number in communities so that it becomes more widely used.
3. Continue and intensify the practice of linking local officials, especially police, with communities. Inviting officials to speak at community events gives the

anti-violence messages “teeth” and lets people know that these officials can be called upon to enforce the laws protecting women and children.

4. Building on the positive examples that are already apparent in MAP project areas, encourage more men, boys, women and girls to move from talk to action and, especially, to intervene directly or call for help when they witness violence against women or children.
5. Continue to build and strengthen community groups to intervene collectively—again, building on positive actions that are already taking place—by inviting more people to join the groups and perhaps linking them with groups in other communities to share strategies and create a sense of a social movement against violence.
6. Make community level events more accessible and effective through further training and, perhaps, better audio equipment to avoid the kind of situation described in this report. The impact of community theatre will be greater if the performances can be seen and heard by greater numbers of people.
7. Update VAWC awareness raising and training materials to challenge the prevalent idea that female adolescents and young women need to be confined for their own protection and to discourage “victim blaming”. Increase the focus on engaging men and boys to make public spaces safe for girls and women rather than keeping girls and women out of public spaces.
8. Test approaches for working with adolescents and youth that have been found effective in other countries—for example, creating safe, supervised spaces where boys and girls can interact and exchange ideas and experiences.
9. Explore opportunities to increase the focus of VAWC on violence against children and violence against adult women in public spaces. The findings of all four action research studies suggest that, in on-the-ground implementation of the VAWC initiative, has focused almost exclusively on domestic violence against married women and on eve-teasing suffered by school girls. This is not inappropriate, since these are the most common forms of VAWC in rural areas. However, there may be opportunities to expand the focus at little or no extra cost by, for example, encouraging use of the hotline to report other forms of VAWC, including abuse of adults and children in the workplace, such as those employed in domestic service.

STUDY FOUR

BRAC'S YOUTH ACTION/PEER EDUCATION INITIATIVE

“Young health advocates have the energy and optimism to challenge corruption and harmful traditional practices, and drive governance, advocacy and accountability for decades to come.”¹⁰

Evidence from a variety of social settings worldwide links men's violence against women and other behaviours that compromise women's health and rights with systems of gender inequality. Initiatives designed to transform gender attitudes among youth and encourage young people to take action against gender inequitable practices and violence against women and girls have shown promise in diverse social settings. Many of these initiatives use a strategy called “peer education”, in which a group of young people is trained to provide information and promote attitudinal and behavioural change among their peers. The Lancet Commission reports that peer education is one of the most evaluated youth engagement strategies in the health sector. Evaluation results have shown positive results for the peer educators themselves (e.g., increased self-confidence, improved communication, leadership and interpersonal skills, higher aspirations and reduced engagement in health risk behaviours) but there have been few studies assessing the strategy's effectiveness in changing attitudes and health outcomes in the broader populations that the young peer educators are intended to reach.

BRAC's VAWC initiative combines peer education with strategies that encourage youth to take action against gender inequities and violence against women and children. A pre/post evaluation study has been initiated to assess the impact of VAWC on gender attitudes and intimate partner violence against married women and girls. The present action research study documents gender attitudes and actions to stop inequitable gender-based practices and violence against women and girls among volunteer educators and their peers.

¹⁰ Our Future, a Lancet Commission on adolescent health and well-being' p. 50

BRAC's VOLUNTEER YOUTH EDUCATOR INITIATIVE

The Volunteer Youth Educator (VYE) initiative was pioneered, and is now led, by BRAC's Gender Justice Diversity Division (GJD). Prior to VAWC, the VYE initiative was one of three linked interventions addressing gender inequality that were implemented by the GJDD in eight *upazillas* under eight districts. These programmes are: 1. GJE (Gender Justice Educator) 2. VYE (Volunteer Youth Educator), and 3. GCCV (Gender Culture Change Volunteer).

Five unions implemented these three programmes in Gazipur Sadar *Upazilla*, from 2012 to 2015. The five unions in Gazipur were divided into 202 areas, each comprised of approximately 500 households. From each area, 10 Volunteer Youth Educators were selected from the cohort of unmarried young boys and girls aged 15 to 22 years. To recruit the youth volunteers, BRAC field staff ("Gender Justice Apas") who already worked with groups of adults in the areas, made several additional visits to the communities and spoke with informal groups of boys and girls on issues such as sexual harassment of girls, violence against women, dowry abuse, early marriage and other harmful practices related to gender inequality. Through these interactions, BRAC staff made a preliminary selection of boys and girls who expressed interest in joining a group to work against these social practices. Thirty such boys and girls were given a three-day training on 10 issues. At the conclusion of the training the participants took a test. Based on their performance in the test and their eagerness to be involved, 5 boys and 5 girls, all unmarried college students under the age of 20, were selected as "Volunteer Youth Educators". Initially, some mothers were reluctant to allow their daughters to join the groups, but as the Gender Justice Apas had previously worked with many parents on women's rights issues they quickly relented. The training addressed gender discrimination within families and communities in the areas of:

- ▶ Food and Nutrition
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Allocation of Health Resources and Medical treatment
- ▶ Work, Rest and Recreation
- ▶ Ownership, Control and Use of Resources
- ▶ Domestic Violence
- ▶ Women and Children
- ▶ Sexual Harassment
- ▶ Access to Public and Private Services
- ▶ Environment and Women

In each site, the 10 volunteers worked as a group. As group members were recruited from the same areas, the volunteers typically knew each other well and maintained good communication among themselves. After receiving their formal training from BRAC, they met formally once in a month (and informally on other occasions) to discuss the issues they had resolved to address. BRAC provided refresher training annually.

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to get insight into the strengths and weaknesses of a BRAC Youth Action/Peer Education Initiative in order to refine it, as needed, before further scaling up. CEP selected Gazipur Sadar, within the two district VAWC pilot project, as an example of a well-performing site so the researchers could assess the potential effects of the Volunteer Youth Educator Programme on attitudes and actions related to gender, VAWC and violence prevention in a place where the intervention was implemented as designed.

Open-ended interview guides (attached) were developed to elicit information about:

- ▶ How the initiative was being implemented in the sites
- ▶ How the youth participating in the initiative viewed it and responded to it
- ▶ How the fundamentals of gender that were addressed in the VYE training were understood by the participants and the peers with whom they came into contact
- ▶ Actions taken by the VYEs and their peers to address harmful social practices related to gender inequality, and their perceived effectiveness

The research team, consisting of four female and one male qualitative researchers, collected data during three field visits, January 1-2, January 5 and January 16, 2016. In total, six Volunteer Youth Educators (VYE), including four girls and two boys, from four separate areas were interviewed, after being identified by staff of the BRAC field office. The staff had successfully recruited about double the number we interviewed, but some individuals had to leave to attend classes before we were able to interview them. All of the VYEs interviewed were college students. The VYEs identified a total of 16 of their peers from the four areas (10 girls and 4 boys), with whom they had talked about gender and violence after receiving training as peer educators.

All interviews were done privately. The participants were briefed on the purpose of the research and their verbal consent was taken both for the interview and for audio recording of interviews. As this action research is intended for BRAC internal use to refine the programme interventions, not for publication or wider circulation, formal, signed consent was not taken. Nonetheless, basic principles of informed consent, privacy and confidentiality were followed.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the 5 female members of the Bangladeshi research team. The team leader conducted the first stage of data analysis by synthesising the responses to each question in English, using an outline provided by the author. The author then reviewed these to identify main findings, and prepared the report.

FINDINGS

How did the volunteers respond to the training?

The volunteers were unanimous in saying the trainings had transformed their lives. One of the male VYEs emphasised the importance of changing one's own behaviour before asking others to change. Thus, at the outset of the programme, the boys pledged not to sexually harass girls or take drugs, to urge their own parents not to discriminate against their sisters in food distribution, and to protest violence against women in their localities. Several gave examples of how their own attitudes and behaviours had changed. For example, a girl VYE talked about how she was inspired to resist the sexual harassment she was often subjected to on the way to and from college. At first she was too embarrassed to tell anyone about it, then she told her mother, who said she should walk with her head held low.

“Then I began to think that this was not right. Why should I keep my head low? Do I not have the right to move about with my head held high? The things I had learned in the training kept knocking at me. If I held my head high I would not remain a lone victim, others would soon join me. Later I talked to other volunteers but they wondered how we would be able to confront this boy, as we are so young. We spoke to him despite our fear, but he paid no attention and kept disturbing me. After 3 or 4 days I happened to see his younger sister being harassed by the roadside. I went up to him and said, ‘Look what’s happening to your sister! How do you feel now?! Is it right to do this?’ Later he said to me, ‘Truly, I have made a mistake, and I will never do it again.’ He kept his word.”

“পরে ভাবলাম এটাতো ঠিক না। আমি কেন মাথা নীচু করে আসবো যাবো? আমারও কি অধিকার নাই মাথা উঁচু করে চলার। তখন ট্রেনিং এর কথাগুলো খুব মনে হ’তো, যে না আমি মাথা নীচু করে হাঁটলে আজকে আমাকে বলছে, কালকে অন্য আর একজনকে বলবে। এই ভাবে আস্তে আস্তে বাড়বে। পরে আমি অন্য মেম্বারদের সাথে কথা বলি, তারা বলে আমরাতো ছোট, কি ভাবে ঐ ভাইয়ের সাথে কথা বলি। তারপরেও তারা যেয়ে কথা বলে। কিন্তু শোনে না। এরপর আরো ৩/৪ দিন এমন করে। পরে একদিন আমি দেখি ঐ ছেলের বোনকে আমাদের কলেজের একটা ছেলে রাস্তা আটকায়ে কিসব বলছে। ঐসময় আমি দেখি রাস্তার একপাশে ঐ ভাইটা দাঁড়িয়ে আছে। আমি তাকে ডেকে এনে দেখাই এবং বলি দেখেন আপনার বোনকে কি বলছে। আপনার এখন কেমন লাগছে? এটা করা কি ঠিক? পরে ছেলেটা আমাকে বলে আসলেই আমার ভুল হইছে। আর কখনও এমন হবে না। এরপরে আর কখনও সে আমাকে বিরক্ত করে নাই।”

The VYEs expressed confidence that they could discuss gender issues persuasively with their friends and in some cases even with adults. In their view, if other boys and girls could change their attitudes toward gender discrimination, as manifested in practices related to dowry, early marriage, inequitable food distribution among household members and curtailment of education, then the society would become free from these negative practices. They said they felt motivated to transfer their own understanding of these issues to other boys and girls of their age or younger, as many as possible.

Although both girl and boy volunteers noted that they had received training on ten different issues, when asked what issues they were prepared to promote, they typically highlighted five, including prevention of domestic violence, sexual harassment, giving and taking of dowry, keeping girls in school rather than marrying them off at young ages, and promoting awareness of food and nutrition.

In explaining how they transmitted the ideas from the training to their peers, the girls said they spoke with schoolmates on the way to and from college, as well as during their leisure time. One of them talked about how she organised courtyard meetings with her friends, and girls and women from adjacent houses joined the discussions out of curiosity. When they spoke with their friends about gender issues, the VYEs encouraged their friends to speak with others. One girl said she believed she had influenced 11 of her friends. She also spoke with married women in her neighbourhood. One VYE said she had told her friends they should intervene if they learned of a case in which an underage girl was being forced to marry. If they were reluctant to take action themselves, she told them, they should inform her and she would ask BRAC staff or even the police to intervene.

One of the male VYEs said his group periodically organised courtyard meetings at group members' houses and talked about issues of gender discrimination and violence against women. This group had 30 members: 10 Volunteer Youth Educators and 20 Gender Justice Educators. In addition to group members, other people from adjoining housing clusters would join the discussions. They planned to continue the courtyard meetings as well as protest incidents of wife beating, early marriage or sexual harassment. They would share information about such incidents in the meetings, as well as informing one another using their mobile phones.

The VYEs said the training had prepared them to convince parents to send their girl children to school, to reason with boys who engaged in sexual harassment/teasing on the road, explaining its negative impacts on the girls. Girl volunteers no longer felt scared to confront boys who engaged in sexual harassment. Boy and girl volunteers also believed they could work together in talking to abusive husbands about why they should desist from violence at home. They said they knew how to get such men to listen to them by highlighting the negative impacts on household members as well as on the community and speaking knowledgably about legal provisions against domestic violence. Several of the volunteers admitted that because of their youth they felt timid confronting adult perpetrators of dowry, early marriage or domestic violence, but they thought that they could overcome this limitation by involving BRAC staff and threatening to inform law enforcement officials. One group of VYEs worked with adults who had been trained as Gender Justice Educators in organising periodic "courtyard meetings" in which were discussed.

Thus, it appears that the training has inspired and prepared the VYEs to work both as peer educators and, more directly, as activists against gender-based inequities in their communities. In these efforts, the VYEs had a strong sense of being part of a larger network. This finding suggests that the VYE training was designed and implemented appropriately to achieve the objectives of the VAWC. The training

clearly appealed to the intended audience--youth and young adults. Judging from the results, relevant concepts related to gender had been conveyed in ways that made them comprehensible and actionable for this group. The emphasis on action in particular appears to have been readily received by young people.

Perspective of peers

To better understand whether the educators were successful in transmitting ideas to their peers, we asked the 16 peers what they had learned from the educators. One teenage girl explained how she had often felt troubled when she experienced sexual harassment/teasing on her way to college. The peer educator had explained the concept of 'sexual violence', and she had learned that although one girl alone may not be able to protest this violence, girls could do so if they united into a group. She said she also came to realise that to continue their education girls would have to overcome this male harassment.

Another girl said she had been very skeptical whether anything could be done to resist domestic violence, sexual harassment, and early marriage of girls. But when girls gathered to chat, a peer educator kept switching to issues like inequality of boys and girls in the eyes of society, girls getting less food compared to their brothers, and harassment by the rowdy boys in the road. Gradually she realised that these are real matters that affect her life. She began to protest sexual harassment and urged classmates to join her. Another girl said she had taken an active part in stopping an early marriage in her community along with other girls and a peer educator. She agreed with the peer educator that to be successful girls of her age needed to band together.

Another girl said that, like other girls, in the beginning she gave no importance to what the peer educator talked about, but that this indomitable educator was very committed to her work. Every afternoon she would be present in the field where girls gathered and played different games. The educator discussed the gender topics by telling stories, and gradually the girls developed an interest. The girls began inventing plays based on real life characters like abusive fathers and abused children and wives. Parents began coming to the field to watch the plays. Finding them entertaining, they would clap in appreciation, and the girls would feel highly encouraged.

These findings suggest that the VYEs have been creative in adapting their communication strategies to get the attention of their peers. Concepts related to gender inequality were conveyed effectively, along with the idea that girls can better assert their rights by banding together. Both creativity and persistence appear to be important in peer education to overcome initial resistance.

How well did the volunteers grasp the concepts imparted in the gender training?

All of the VYEs we interviewed seemed to have a well-grounded understanding of the concept of gender and the various ways that gender plays out in their society.

They correctly described gender as a set of socially defined characteristics and relationships. One of the male VYEs gave this example:

“Both women and men can cook but we say cooking is women’s work; this is gender. Now if we boys cook then everyone will say we are boys of a feminine type. If a girl does something different in a bossy style then she will be [seen as] a masculine type girl. In any arbitration men always win; now if a woman happens to say something then all will react saying, ‘How dare a woman say all these things!’ This sort of reaction is quite natural, for women are not to say anything. This [discrimination] also falls in the gender [notion]. The society, in fact, is creating all this [inequality].”

‘নারী ও পুরুষ দুই জনই রান্না করতে পারে। কিন্তু আমরা বলছি রান্না করা মহিলাদের কাজ। এইটাই জেন্ডার। এখন যদি আমরা ছেলেরা রান্না করি তাহলে বলবে মাইয়া টাইপ ছেলে। যেমন বিচারের মধ্যে সবসময় পোলারাই জিতে মাইয়ারা যদি একটা কথা কইয়া ফেলে তাহলে সবাই বলবে মহিলা মানুষের এত কথা, এটা হয়ই, কারণ অনেকে মনে করেন মহিলা মানুষের কোন কথা নাই। এটাও একটা জেন্ডারের পর্যায়ে পরে। যেগুলো আসলে সমাজ সৃষ্টি করছে।’

When asked to describe some of the common characteristics of boys and girls their age, the female VYEs listed the following. Note that, although not directly asked to do so, in most of the cases the VYEs added qualifying comments to make it clear that these “characteristics” are typically defined and enforced by an inequitable gender system:

- ▶ “Girls are shy and hesitant to speak in public; boys are restless and noisy.” “মেয়েরা একটু লাজুক থাকে,সবার সামনে সবকথা বলে না, ছেলেরা চঞ্চল থাকে, চিল্লাচিল্লি করে।”
- ▶ “Girls talk softly and fear many things because of the way they are socialised.” “মেয়েরা নীচুস্বরে কথা বলে, সামাজিক কারণে একটু আতঙ্কিত থাকে।”
- ▶ “Girls can’t express their opinions; if they do, most likely those opinions will get less importance than those of boys.” “নিজের মতটা বলতে পারে না, যদি বলে কম গুরুত্ব পায়, ছেলেরদের কথার গুরুত্ব বেশি দেয়।”
- ▶ “[Girls can’t go wherever they please because] they are afraid of boys/ men who may get cruel with girls. Such things are common in this country, creating a threatening atmosphere for girls.” “মেয়েরা যেখানে খুশি যেতে পারে না; তাদের ভয় থাকে ছেলেরা যে কোন সময় হিংস্র হয়ে উঠতে পারে মেয়েদের সাথে। দেশেতো এই রকম অহরহ ঘটছেই, মেয়েদের জন্য ভয় থাকে।”
- ▶ “Girls are not able to move about freely while boys can spend time chatting with friends even at night. Parents fear for their daughters’ safety if they happen to remain outside home after early evening. Girls can’t go far from their homes.”

“মেয়েরা খোলামেলা চলাফেরা করতে পারে না, কিন্তু ছেলেরা সন্ধার পরেও বন্ধুদের সাথে আড্ডা দেয়। মেয়েরা সন্ধার পরে বাইরে থাকলে বাবা মা ভয়ে থাকে। মেয়েরা বাড়ি থেকে বেশি দুরে যেতে পারে না।”

- ▶ “Boys can play in the fields in their leisure time but girls have to stay inside their homes.”
“ছেলেরা অবসর সময়ে মাঠে খেলা করে, মেয়েদের বাড়ির মধ্যেই থাকতে হয়।”
- ▶ “Girls can't wear clothing that exposes their bodies, while boys move about freely wearing shirts with buttons carelessly undone. Girls can't wear boys' clothing.”
“মেয়েরা খোলামেলা পোশাক পরতে পারি না, আর ছেলেরা শার্টের বোতাম খুলে চলাফেলা করে। মেয়েরা ছেলেদের পোশাক পরতে পারে না।”
- ▶ “Girls rarely go to the daily bazaar as they are discouraged by parents who think they can't make their way by pushing others in the crowded market place whereas boys are quite capable of pushing.”
“মেয়েরা খুব কম বাজারে যায়, বাবা মা চায় না। তারা মনে করে ছেলেদের মতো ধাক্কাধাক্কি করে তারা বাজারে চলতে পারবে না।”

A female educator explained the origin of female characteristics by combing through her daily life experiences. She said,

“The family makes a girl learn household chores from her early days. She learns how to prepare foods, tend household items. [She learns] that women are to live inside the home and be afraid of men. Mother, father, brother and sister--every family member says repeatedly that boys are bad, they will do such and such bad things to you. The fear that is born inside her lasts all through her life. As she grows, the fear grows too.”

“পরিবার থেকেই একটা মেয়েকে জন্মের পর থেকে ঘরের কাজ শেখায়। কিভাবে রান্না করতে হবে, কিভাবে ঘর গুছাতে হবে, মেয়েমানুষকে ঘরে থাকতে হবে, ছেলেদের ভয় পাইতে হবে। পরিবারের ভিতরই মা, বাবা, ভাই বোন তারাই বুঝাবে যে ছেলেরা খারাপ, তারা এই করবে সেই করবে। তখন থেকেই তার ভিতর যে আতংকটা সৃষ্টি হয়, সেই আতংকটা সারা জীবনই থাকে। সেও বড় হয় আতংকটা বড় হতে থাকে।”

The male VYEs' remarks on this topic focused less on the social limitations that girls face and more on differences they had observed in boys' and girls' natures and behaviour. For example, they described boys as restless, emotional, rash and confused, but with a strong sense of entitlement, and girls as more patient and able to concentrate on their work, but at the same time lacking in self-confidence.

In response to some questions, some of the VYEs articulated traditional gender scripts. For example, when asked what were the characteristics of an ideal husband and an ideal wife, two of the girl volunteers said a wife should follow her husband's words. However, two other girls said a husband should be committed to the rights of

his wife, facilitate her working outside the home, and participate in household work. The two male volunteers said an ideal wife would not conform to the ideas of the past. She would not have the attitude that a woman's paradise was under the feet of her husband or feel that she had to remain without food until her husband had eaten his fill and then eat whatever was left. She would be more like the ideal husband. One girl said it was the husband's role to earn income and support the family, but after thinking further she said that women could also earn if they were able, adding that a household where both husband and wife earned incomes would be better off. All of the volunteers supported the idea that it was beneficial for women to work outside the home, and the girls said this was a way women could earn respect and dignity, increase their awareness and knowledge of the world, and become self-reliant. All of the VYEs approved of husbands doing domestic work. They justified this on the grounds of fairness, domestic harmony and prosperity, as well as saying this would create a healthy environment for children. Asked about the situation in their own homes, all described a greater degree of gender-based hierarchy than they thought was ideal. All of them said they expected their own marriages to be different. For example, one of the boy educators said he and his wife would have a relationship based on mutual understanding. He would live an "independent life" and would "gift" a similar life to his wife. Asked whether he really saw this as a gift, he corrected himself and said it would be her right to have such a life.

The topic of violence against children appeared to be less well understood. Several volunteers commented that their parents' and teachers' use of corporal punishment was appropriate and beneficial in teaching children important lessons.

Significantly, all of the volunteers emphasised the idea that, although socially engrained and reinforced in children's socialisation and familial relationships, gender attributes are not "natural" and can be changed. The boys in particular said that for girls to acquiesce to their subordinate status in society was not right, and that they needed to overcome their shyness and defeatist attitudes and protest the injustices they face. Perhaps most importantly, the VYEs seemed optimistic about the potential for change in gender relations and their own potential roles in social reform.

In summary, this evidence too suggests that the VYE training as designed and implemented by VAWC has the potential to be very effective in conveying the basic principles of gender equality in concrete and practical terms, in ways that appeal to youth, and which they perceive as actionable.

Gender attitudes of peers with whom the VYEs had contact

Like the youth volunteers, the peers they had identified articulated a conceptually accurate and well-grounded, culture specific understanding of gender and gender inequality. They talked about how gender inequality is instilled and acted out in families and they understood that violence against women and girls is rooted in gender norms. Both the boys and the girls were able to describe many ways in which the lives of girls are shaped and limited by gender inequality in their society. They said, for example, that:

- ▶ Boys are louder and more unruly, while girls are taught to be shy and discouraged from running, and talking and laughing loudly.
- ▶ Boys are allowed to roam farther and to linger and socialise with their friends in public while girls are supposed to go about their business and return home.
- ▶ Girls are expected to account for themselves and their expenditures, while boys are not.
- ▶ Boys' opinions are given more weight in the home, while girls do more work.
- ▶ Boys harass girls.

The peers' concepts of the ideal husband and wife reflected a mix of traditional ideas and principles of gender equity. For example, the girls said that an ideal husband should look after his wife's needs and take good care of her during pregnancy and illness (the traditional ideal of husband as provider) and also uphold her rights and autonomy, such as the right to express her opinions and her claim on family assets (non-traditional rights). The boys were somewhat more traditional than the girls, but not entirely so. They emphasised the husband's roles in providing for women's basic needs and described the husband as having "custody" over his wife, but also mentioned women's autonomy and their right to participate in decision-making and be free from violence. Both the girls and the boys described the ideal wife as one who caters to her husband, children and in-laws. The boys said she should know how to please her husband by talking sweetly, preparing his favorite dishes and giving him small gifts. The majority of the peers said that corporal punishment of children by parents and teachers was appropriate.

There was some variation in the degree to which these young people thought gender norms could be changed. Some they tended to see as "natural", albeit in some ways unfair. In others they saw more scope for change. One girl said many gender norms had "become natural" over the ages. The general tendency was to describe norms related to personal characteristics as natural: e.g., bold vs. cautious, loud vs. quiet and shy, brash vs. gentle and modest, undisciplined vs. disciplined. Norms related to privileges, activities and accomplishments they tended to see as malleable: e.g., attending school, doing housework, working outside the home, having a voice in important decisions. As with the VYEs, asking about ideal types tended to elicit more traditional ideas and values, while asking specifically about "gender" (an imported term) elicited concepts of equity and social justice.

As one might expect when using a "trickle down" strategy to expose people to new ideas, the VYEs, who were trained by experienced BRAC trainers, generally exhibited a deeper understanding of gender than their peers did, and they were more excited about their own potential roles in promoting gender equity. Yet there was a noticeable positive impact on the gender attitudes of the peers with whom the VYEs communicated.

How have the volunteers and their peers put their ideas into action?

Asked in what areas their campaign had achieved good results, volunteers emphasised early marriage, sexual harassment and violence against women. The most difficult issue (not one of the official 10 issues), most felt, was drug addiction (not on the list of 10 issues in the curriculum but perhaps added spontaneously by the trainers). Merely talking to addicts about the negative impact of drugs did not work, one male volunteer noted. The VYEs provided specific examples of actions they had taken against child marriage, exploitative dowry demands, sexual harassment, wife abuse, violence against children, drug use, discrimination against daughters in allocation of family resources, and (impressively) sex trafficking. Notably, despite the relatively short duration of the programme, the study was able to document cases in which the influence of the training clearly extended beyond the cohort of trainees such that they were able to inspire their peers to take action against harmful practices rooted in gender inequality. For example, a young woman talked about the changes she had experienced as a result of her association with one of the peer educators:

“(Now) I ask my college friends to confront boys who engage in eve-teasing because I now believe there is no difference between boys and girls. We are all equal, and he has no right to harass me. If needed, I can go to the court. Before, I would feel scared but no more now. Now, if I see a boy is trying to talk to a girl in a bad way I go and talk to him. I ask my friends to protest; otherwise we will remain in danger.”

“বন্ধুদের বলি যে যদি কোন ছেলে ইভটিজিং করে তার প্রতিবাদ করতে হবে কারণ ছেলে আর মেয়ের মধ্যে কোন পার্থক্য নাই। আমরা সবাই সমান; সে আমাকে বিরক্ত করতে পারে না। প্রয়োজনে আইনের কাছে যাইতে পারবো। আমি আগে ভয় পাইতাম এখন আর পাই না। আমি এখন যদি দেখি কোন ছেলে কোন মেয়ের সাথে কথা বলার চেষ্টা করে খারাপ ভাবে আমি আগায় যাই কথা বলি। আমার বান্ধবীদের বলি প্রতিবাদ করতে হবে তা না হলে বিপদ আমাদেরই।”

Following are additional examples in which young people either stood up for their own rights or defended the rights of others:

▶ A youth educator decides to stand-up for herself

“Like other girls I used to feel scared of boys. I would silently move away when boys said anything to me. Now, I don't fear anymore. I can move about on the roads all alone. However, distant the place, I can go, and I have learned how to protect myself from a rowdy boy. If a boy comes close and shoves me in a crowded place, I ask him, ‘*Bhaiya*, why have you shoved me?’ He then denies by asking back when he had shoved me. One day I struck the boy with the scale I was holding in my hand. He then asked me, ‘Hey girl, why have you struck me? How dare you!’ I told him, ‘There is no proof of my striking you, just as [you may] claim there no proof of your shoving me. I have slapped you and how you felt has no proof.’ Others present there believed me and said, ‘Right it is; right it is. Can a woman tell a

lie?’ They all wanted to give him a beating but I didn’t allow them to. Thus, I became more courageous after joining this programme. Before that, I lacked courage.”

▶ A group of girls intervenes in a case of dowry violence

The educator’s cousin was married with lot of pomp. No dowry demand was made at the time of her marriage, and it seemed to be a happy marriage for the first couple of months. Then the educator noticed her cousin began coming back to her natal home frequently without her husband. She would stay for an unusually long time. Curious, the educator kept asking her why she was spending so much time there and she finally explained. Her husband had demanded money to start a business and her family was unable to comply. He became more and more violent, and this time he had told her to get the money before returning to his home. The female educator consulted with two friends, one girl and one boy educator. They asked the dowry victim to tell her husband to come, and said to him, ‘*Bhaiya*, you didn’t take any money at the time of your marriage but now you want to get money for doing business. This is a bad thing--is this not dowry? Why are you demanding it?’ He then said, ‘You are still young; you would not understand. After you marry you will understand why this money is needed.’ They responded, ‘The income will support your whole family, including your parents, so why not get this money from your own father? Why are you claiming it from your wife’s father?’ After this an exchange of words he started misbehaving with them, but the educator and her friends were not ready to give up. They talked to three BRAC staff from the gender justice program and took them to the man’s house. The staff tried their best to make him realise that demanding dowry is unjust and unlawful, but he was adamant. The BRAC people then asked them to bring both sets of parents. The “Gender Aunties”, as they are popularly known, said, ‘Your demand for dowry is an unlawful act; moreover, you have beaten your wife and sent her back to her natal home. This is also a crime. Do you have any idea regarding legal matters? You will be sentenced to imprisonment and also fined.’ At this, the husband kept silent but his parents later admitted they had wronged their daughter in law. They asked forgiveness for ill-treating her and promised to treat her as they would their own daughter.

▶ Female students protest sexual harassment by male classmates

A female college student who was a friend of one of the volunteer educators talked about how she had organised a group of girls to resist sexual harassment by their male classmates. She said that many of the boys made rude and obscene remarks and gestures in their presence. She used to protest and would ask other girls in her class not to leave it unchallenged. She would confront the boys, saying: ‘Why are you behaving with us in this way? We are here to study like you. We are your friends, don’t you want us to do well in school?’ When this didn’t work, the girls would ask male

classmates with whom they were on good terms to make the aggressive boys realise that they were doing harm to the girls. These strategies were effective, according to her.

▶ A group of young people stops an early marriage

The girl was 14 years old, a student of class VI. The narrator, who was a friend of one of the female peer educators, learned that her parents had decided to marry her off. Accompanied by the peer educator and a couple of other girls and boys, she went to the girl's house. The young people told the parents that the girl should not be married so early, as it would damage her health, and she would get sick and experience violence by her husband. The parents paid no heed and spoke rudely to the young people. They appealed to several prominent community men, saying that the girl was only in class VI and she was too young to marry, that this would have a detrimental effect on society, but the men ignored them. Then they asked the 'Gender Justice Apa' (member of BRAC field staff) to speak with the girl's parents, but she failed to have any impact. The parents told her that the preparations had already been made. Finally, other female staff from BRAC were requested to intervene. They told the father that he was committing a crime and that, if the police were informed, they would arrest the groom during the wedding party. They reminded him that there was still time left to stop the marriage, but he was unmoved. The girl educator then made a fake call to the police in front of them, and this scared the parents. Finally, the father said he would stop the marriage and asked the female BRAC staff to explain to the groom's party why the marriage could not be held. The girl was in class VIII and still unmarried at the time of this interview, in February, 2016.

▶ A girl educator protests an incidence of domestic violence and outsmarts the perpetrator

"Once I went to visit my aunt's house at Mawna Chowrasta. In a house very close to my aunt's, a tenant was beating his wife with doors shut from inside. I could hear the sound of beating. I was a stranger there, and I wondered how I could go to that house alone. I told my aunt and her husband to accompany me, but they refused. They told me not to poke into other people's affairs, saying: 'You're a child, keep quiet. These people are bad, they do things like this.' I said, 'This must not be allowed to go on. Following his example, other men will beat their wives. How would you feel if *khalu* (aunt's husband) beats you?' In this way I tried to make her understand my points, and finally she agreed to go with me. When we got there and asked the man to open the door, he yelled at me from inside, saying, 'Little girl, where have you come from? Why are you talking so much? Just leave this place.' Then I threatened him saying, 'Do you know who I am? If I inform the police right now, you and fourteen generations of your offspring will be bundled and taken away. How dare you talk so big?' He didn't dare to open the door and continued the beating. The woman fainted but he kept on. I

then confronted the house owner. 'This man is your tenant and you are not saying anything against his wife-beating. Are you just like him, do you also beat your wife?' He promptly replied, 'No, never. Why should I?' Then I told him, 'Your tenant is beating his wife. If she dies the police will also arrest you for being a witness to such a heinous act happening in your home.' He said, 'What can I do? He does not respond to me!' I retorted by saying, 'What do you mean by 'not responding--break open the door, get him outside, tie him up and call some respectable people from the area! Let me call the police and get him arrested! Why should he beat that woman? If he doesn't like her he should divorce her and let her go back to parents.' The house owner then said, 'What can I do? What can I say to you, a young girl? People say these outsiders are like this.' Feeling annoyed I said, 'What is the difference between local and outside people? They are all human beings. What would you have done if your son-in-law had beaten your daughter like this?' He said, 'What could I have done if she was killed?' I angrily said, 'Are these words worthy of you? You a senior person and we are to learn from you. It is a matter of shame if we have to teach you!' At this stage the abuser came out and started talking to me roughly. My aunt and her husband were pulling me toward their home. I stopped them and made a fake call to the police station, holding the phone against my ear and imitated talking to police. I said, 'OC (Officer in Charge) of Joydebpu, please come here to Mawna Chowrasta; I have caught hold of a man who has almost killed his wife by beating her mercilessly. She seems to be dead already. Come here to arrest that man; this is a murder case!' The man thought I had really called the police and was asking me repeatedly 'Who have you talked to?' At one stage he ran toward me and grabbed my feet saying, 'Apa, Apa, please pardon me, don't hand me over to the police, I won't beat her again!' I asked him, 'You have beaten your wife to this extent--now what will you do to heal her sufferings?' He was quick to say, and said several times, 'I will take her to hospital right now'. I told him that he had ignored me as I was a little girl. 'Now I have called the police and they are coming. I said, 'Should I ask them not to come here?' He feverishly requested me to do that. Later he said, 'I did know that a young girl could know so much!' I replied, you were beating your wife to death and as a girl I would definitely feel pain witnessing her pain.' Later, my *Khalu* (aunt's husband) slapped him couple of times, saying, 'You didn't realise before; now you get it because of your fear of the police. Will you do it again in your life?' I then made him sign a paper on which I wrote: 'I will be sentenced to life term in jail if I ever beat my wife.' I left the signed paper with the house owner."

‘আমি মাওনা চৌরাস্তায় আমার খালার বাড়ি বেড়াতে গেছিলাম। ওনার বাড়ির পাশে এক ভাড়াটিয়া ঘরের দরজা দিয়া বউকে খুব পিটাইতেছে, পিটানোর শব্দ পাচ্ছি। আমি ওখানের কাউরে চিনি না, একা একা কিভাবে যাবো। আমার যে খালু খালু তাদেরকে বলছি তারা যাইতে চায় না, বলে অন্যের ব্যাপারে তোর যাবার দরকার কি, তুই ছোট মানুষ চূপ কইরা থাক। এইগুলো খারাপ, এইগুলো এইরকমই করে। আমি কই- না, এই রকম করলে চলবে নাতো। তার দেখাদেখি আপনাদের এলাকার তো আর একজন মারবো। এখন যদি খালু আপনাকে মারে কেমন লাগবো। এই রকম কইরা বুঝাইছি। পরে

কয় আছা চল্ ।পরে গেছি কয় এই মেয়ে কোথেকে আইছে, এই মেয়ে কোথেকে আইছে । এই মেয়ে যা, যা, কোথেকে আসছোস তুই এত কথা কস । আমি কই আপনি জানেন আমি কে? আমি যদি এখন পুলিশেরে ফোন দেই আপনার চৌদ্দ গুষ্ঠিরে বানদিয়া নিয়া যাইবো । আপনে আবার বড় বড় কথা বলতাহেন । পরে ভয় পাইছে । দরজা খোলে না । অনেক পিটাইছে । পিটানোর পরে মহিলা অচেতন হইয়া পইরা আছে । তারপরেও পিটাইতেই আছে ।

তারপরে বাড়িওয়ালারে বললাম, আপনার বাড়িতে এই রকম করে মারতেছে আপনারা কিছু বলতাহেন না, আপনারাও কি ওনার মতো? আপনি কি আপনার বউরে মারেন? কয় নাহ, কথখোনো না, কেন মারবো? আমি কই ভাড়াটিয়া যে এইভাবে মারতেছে মেয়ে এখন যদি মারা যায়, পুলিশ তো আপনাকেও ধরবে আইসা । আপনার বাড়িতে এই রকম আপনি দাঁড়িয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে দেখতেছেন । পরে বলতেছে কি করবো আমি, কথা শুনে এই যে ডাকতেছি কথা শুনে । আমি বলছি , কথা শুনে না মানে প্রয়োজনে দরজা ভাইঙ্গা বাইর করবেন, বাইর কইরা ওরে বানবেন, পরে এলাকার যারা মান্যগম্য লোক আছে তাদেরকে ডাকবেন । আপনি আমারে বলেন আমি এখখনি পুলিশ ডাইকা ওনারে পুলিশে ধরাই দেই । মেয়েটাকে উনি মারবে কেন পছন্দ না হল ডিভোর্স দিয়া দেউক । যার সস্তান তার কাছে ফিরাইয়া দেউক । কি মাইর মারছে যে অচেতন হইয়া গেছে । তারপর উনি বলতেছে কি করবো বলো তুমি একটা ছোট মাইয়া, তোমার কাছে আর কি বলবো আমি । ওনারা এমন করে বলতেছে যে বিদেশী মানুষ এমনই থাকে । বিদেশী মানুষ আর দেশী মানুষ মানে, মানুষ তো মানুষই । পরে আমি বলছি যে আপনার মেয়েরে এমন করে মারলে আপনি কি করতেন আপনার জামাইরে । কয় কি আর করতাম মাইরা ফেলাইলে কি আর করমু । আমি কই এইডা কি কোনো কথা হলো । আপনারা বড় মানুষ আপনাদের কাছ থেকে আমরা শিখবো । আপনাদেরকে যদি আমাদের শিখতে হয় তাহলে তো লজ্জার ব্যাপার আছে । পরে যে লোকটা বউকে মারলো সে আইসা আমার সাথে বাগড়া শুরু করছে । তখন আমার খালা খালু আমাকে টাইনা নিয়া বাসায় যাইতাছে । আমি কই দাঁড়ান দাঁড়ান ফোন দেই, ফোন না করে শুধু ফোন কানে দিয়ে পুলিশের সাথে কথা বলার ভান করছি, বলছি যে জয়দেবপুরের ওসি আপনে আসেন । মাওনা চৌরাস্তায় একটা লোক ধরছি, সে তার বউকে পিটাইতে পিটাইতে একদম মাইরাই ফেলাইতেছিল । মাইরাই ফেলাইছে মনে হয় । আপন আইসা ধরেন, মার্ডার কেইস । পরে কইতেছে তুই কারে কি কইছস, বুঝছে সত্যি সত্যি পুলিশেরে ফোন দিছি । পরে দৌড় পাইরা আইসা আমার পায়ে পরছে আপা আপা আমারে মাফ কইরা দেন, আমারে পুলিশে দিয়েন না । আমারে পুলিশে দিয়েন না । আমি আর মারমু না, আর মারমু না । আমি বলি এখন যে আপনার বউরে মাইরা এই রকম করছেন এখন এইডার কি করবেন । কয় এফ্কুনি হাসপাতালে নিয়া যামু, এফ্কুনি হাসপাতালে নিয়া যামু । পরে আমি বলছি যে এই কথাটা যদি আগে শুনতেন আমি ছোট মামুষ দেইখা আপনি আমারে অগ্রাহ্য করলেন । আমি তো পুলিশেরে ফোন কইরা দিছি এখন তো পুলিশ আসতেছে । এখন আমি কি বলবো, আমি কি চইলা যাইতে বলবো । কয় হ্যাঁ আপা চইলা যাইতে বলেন, চইলা যাইতে বলেন । আমি কই আমাদের ঐখানে র্যাবও আছে, র্যাব মনে হয় সাথে নিয়ে আসতেছে । আপনে তো আগে আমার সাথে বাজে বিহ্যাব করছেন । পরে বলতেছে আপনি যে ছোট মানুষ এত কিছু জানেন এত কিছু বুঝেন আমার তো তা জানা ছিল না । আমি কই বুঝি মানে, আপনার বউ আপনি মাইরা ফেলাইবেন আমিও একটা মেয়ে মানুষ ওনার কষ্ট দেইখা তো আমার কষ্ট লাগবেই । পরে আমার খালু ছেলেটারে দুই চারটা খাপ্পর লাগায় দিছে যে আগে বুঝলি না তুই । এখন পুলিশের ভয় দেখানোর পরে তুই ভয় পাইছস । আর জীবনে এই রকম করবি । পরে খাতায় আমি লেখছি, আর জীবনে যদি আমি আমার ওয়াইফকে মারি তাহলে আমি যাবজ্জীবন জেল খাটবো । সাদা কাগজে আমি লিখে তার সিগনেচার নিছি । নিয়া ওর বাড়িওয়ালার কাছে দিয়ে আসছি ।

- ▶ A female educator organises a group to help a victim of domestic violence start a new life

A man in a neighbouring village used to beat his wife frequently, on any pretext. The woman knew about BRAC's work. In desperation, she approached a female youth educator. Weeping, she described her suffering. The educator talked to members of the 91 member committee that had been organised in her locality, and was able to organise some 20 to 30 members. Together, they went to the woman's house and asked her husband what his problem was with his wife. He told them he would not live with his wife. At one stage he got angry and was about to beat his wife in the presence of all the volunteers. Sensing the situation might get out of control, they left the house. Later they talked to several respected senior of the village and persuaded them to join their effort. Together they went back to the man's house but the seniors were unable to influence him. The volunteers then brought a senior female organiser from BRAC but she too failed to have any effect. Then they took the woman to the RAB (Rapid Action Battalion, a specialised police force) training centre. After hearing her story, several RAB personnel went to meet her husband. He was uncooperative, and the RAB were about to arrest him, when the woman said, 'Please let him go; I won't 'do *sangsar*' (continue conjugal life) with him anymore, I won't live with him.' The RAB left and the volunteers asked the man to stay for a few days at his brother's house while they helped her find a job. After they found her a position in a garment factory and a rented room nearby, the woman divorced her husband and began living on her own.

- ▶ A volunteer stands-up for an abused child employee in a restaurant

The boy VYE had gone to a nearby restaurant to have some food. All of the servers who worked there were young boys. When the manager beat one of the boys for making mistakes, the educator asked the manager angrily, 'Why have you beaten him? You will suffer for this! Why have you beaten him? If his work doesn't satisfy you, fire him!' He then asked other boys working there to tell him whenever they were beaten and told them not to fear their employers as he would find them other work. He claimed that raising his voice like this worked very well. The manager/owner pledged not to beat the boys anymore. Asked if he was alone there, he said, 'Yes, I was all alone. It doesn't matter if you are alone. If there is truth in your words, the important thing is to raise your voice and look into the person's eyes. You can explain how big the punishment is for committing violence against children.'

- ▶ A male volunteer saves a girl from being trafficked

One day, a boy volunteer was wandering in a park where sex workers often solicit clients. He noticed an adult man with a young girl. She was poorly clad. The man was leading her to a secluded place and she kept asking him where he was taking her. The man only said that she would earn a lot

of money. The girl asked him why he had switched from the more respectful to the less respectful form of 'you'. At one point, the man started beating the girl to force her move ahead. The boy followed them, keeping a safe distance. He saw the man hand over the girl to another man and heard him say, 'This is a good *'maal'* (very derogatory term). She will earn you a lot of money.' The first man then took 30,000 Taka from the purchaser. The boy went to two of his friends and proposed that they try to save the girl. At first they were frightened to get involved, imagining the men could chop them to death with knives, but they followed the man. When he boarded a tempo (passenger vehicle that runs on natural gas), the boys got in behind him. The boy volunteer had the RAB's phone number in his phone. He tried repeatedly to call them, speaking in a low voice. After he finally got them to listen, the RAB intercepted the tempo and arrested the man. Then they all went to the park and the RAB police rescued the girl.

These examples of young people taking initiative by intervening in specific cases of gender-based violence provide the most persuasive evidence of the potential impact of VAWC's Youth Action/Peer Education strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the study found that young people were very receptive to BRAC's VAWC Youth Action/Peer Education Initiative. Their interest in, and comprehension of, the VAWC themes was high. After receiving training, most VYEs' attitudes strongly supported gender equity and all of them strongly condemned violence against women and children. Their understanding of gender inequality and the various forms that it takes in everyday life was nuanced and comprehensive, reflecting an awareness of the links between gender inequality and violence. The VYEs were moderately successful in communicating this understanding to their peers, who exhibited somewhat more traditional gender attitudes but nonetheless recognised the unfairness of prevailing gender norms. In contrast, both volunteer educators and their peers often seemed to approve of corporal punishment of children by parents and teachers, although they were sensitive to the problem of child abuse in workplaces.

The VYE training was very effective in inspiring young people to take concrete action against gender inequities, including sexual harassment of their female classmates and even violence by husbands against wives. Many had participated in individual and group actions to stop harmful practices affecting women and girls. The VYEs provided specific examples of actions they had taken against child marriage, exploitative dowry demands, sexual harassment, wife abuse, violence against children, drug use, discrimination against daughters in allocation of family resources, and even sex trafficking.

The youth were optimistic about the potential for social change; at the same time, they had a strong sense that they needed to work with others to achieve meaningful

results, and wanted support from community leaders, elected officials and police, as well as from BRAC field staff.

It should be noted that the curriculum used to train VYEs covers gender issues and general knowledge on 10 topics: Food and Nutrition, Education, Allocation of Health Resources and Medical treatment, Work, Rest and Recreation, Ownership, Control and Use of Resources, Domestic Violence, Women and Children, Sexual Harassment, Access to Public and Private Services, and Environment and Women. This action research study focused on issues related to violence against women and children and therefore did not explore how well information and ideas on all 10 topics had been transmitted. Little or nothing emerged spontaneously from the interviews on several of the topics, and the examples of youth action against injustices virtually all focused on incidences of violence against women and children. BRAC therefore has an opportunity to increase the impact of this intervention by streamlining it--either eliminating some of the topics or better integrating them into issues of gender inequality and violence. Notably, too, the issues of sexuality (apart from sexual harassment) and family planning are missing from the list. It might be fruitful to address healthy as well as unhealthy sexuality and its manifestation in sexual harassment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study team recommends:

- ▶ Expand the VAWC Youth Action/Peer Education Initiative to additional sites.
- ▶ Intensify the programme by encouraging more young people to attend meetings and events organized by the VYEs.
- ▶ Continue to encourage young people to take specific actions against gender inequity and violence.
- ▶ Streamline the curriculum and frame the issue of sexual harassment in the contrast to healthy sexuality.
- ▶ Provide further assistance in building linkages between youth groups, local officials and police and other power holders.
- ▶ Highlight the accomplishments of youth activists at community events.
- ▶ Compile detailed case studies of actions taken by the VYEs and their peers to promote gender equity and reduce violence against women and children; incorporate these into training materials for use in replication of the initiative.
- ▶ Hold discussions within BRAC on violence against children to formulate a set of realistic, concrete objectives to be promoted through VAWC; specifically, agree on whether BRAC should oppose all corporal punishment of children by parents.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

VAWC is an initiative whose time has come. It was designed based on recent syntheses of global evidence regarding what works to prevent violence against women and girls, as well as on BRAC's own experience from an array of pilot projects. It takes advantage of knowledge, systems and relationships created over many years through BRAC's multi-sectoral programmes. It is being implemented in the context of a gender transition that presents new opportunities to:

- ▶ Accelerate positive change (for example, by engaging youth to take action against social injustice),
- ▶ Counter tendencies to reinforce patriarchal norms (as when *Monobondhu* encourage women to endure rather than protest abuse), and
- ▶ Normalise female empowerment to reduce male backlash and engage men to support it and appreciate its advantages.

Studies one and two on gender attitudes among BRAC staff and psychological first aid identify persistent notions about women, marriage and family that must be addressed head-on to accelerate positive social change and women's perceived right and ability to live lives free from violence. Studies three and four on BRAC's male engagement and youth action strategies document effective models for working with men, youth and mixed-gender community groups to accelerate positive change in gender norms and move from ideational change to action. These studies also illustrate how strategies to encourage interpersonal communication, alliance building and collective action can protect women and children against violence and contribute to the institutionalisation of gender equality. VAWC represents a logical next step in realising BRAC's social change agenda in Bangladesh. Its success can also serve as a powerful model for responding to violence against women and children in other countries where transitions in gender norms and systems are underway.

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APPENDIXES 1. Interview guides for study of BRAC staff attitudes

Questions for group discussions with field staff (do not include senior /managerial staff)

1. What changes in women's lives in the recent years does the community, especially menfolk, approve and disapprove? Why? What is your own opinion?
2. How do community people assess the special government and non-government facilities for girls and women? (Stipends, certain percentage of jobs preserved for women, women more likely to get NGO jobs and such things). Do you agree at all with their point of view? Why/why not?
3. Why does violence against women still persist despite all the efforts made by the Government and NGOs? [Ask them to make a list of factors contributing to domestic violence. Then ask them to elaborate those where women are deemed to be responsible for their beating.]
4. In your office, do male and female staff receive different facilities? (Please give details.) How do you feel about this? Are these policies consistent with the principle of gender equality? Are male staff disadvantaged? How? Should anything be done to rectify this? What?
5. Did you ever receive gender training? What did you like? What did you dislike or disagree with?
6. What would you say is BRAC's policy on gender? What would you suggest BRAC should change about this policy?

Questions for individual interviews

1. What changes in women's lives in the recent years does the community, especially menfolk, approve and disapprove? Why? What is your own opinion?
2. Why does violence against women still persist despite all the efforts made by the Government and NGOs?
3. Low education and poverty were reasons for wife beating in the past. What are some of the "new" reasons? Do you think VAW is justified in these situations?

4. [Ask them to make a list of factors contributing to domestic violence. In which cases is the man responsible for the violence and in which cases is the woman responsible? Then ask them to elaborate those where women are deemed to be responsible for their beating. Find out if he/she agrees.]
5. In your office, do male and female staff receive different facilities? (Please give details.) How do you feel about this? What is fair and what is unfair? Are these policies consistent with the principle of gender equality? Are male staff disadvantaged? How? Should anything be done to rectify this? What?
6. Did you ever receive gender training? What did you like? What did you dislike or disagree with?
7. What would you say is BRAC's policy on gender? What would you suggest BRAC should change about this policy?
8. [Ask him/her to describe the situations under Community Norms survey question in Section 8 and asking probing questions whether he thinks people would approve or disapprove husband's beating wife in those situations, and why. For each one, ask if she/he agrees.]

1	A wife is home alone and someone comes to tell her that her mother is very ill. She rushes to her parents' house without telling her husband. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for going out without telling him?	YES 1	NO 0
2	What if the wife is over-burdened with work one morning? Normally, she supervises the children's play and keeps them neat and clean. But, one day, it is raining, and while she is working hard to finish her housework, the children play in front of the house and get dirty. She does not have time to bathe them before her husband returns and sees how dirty they are. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for neglecting the children? To be clear, I am not asking you whether you think it is justified to hit or beat your children. I am asking whether you think the husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife in this situation.	YES 1	NO 0
3	What if the husband stays home out of laziness for several days, refusing to go out and work. His wife tells him they are running out of food and there is not enough money to buy food - and asks him to please go out and work. The husband tells his wife to shut up, and she argues with him. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for arguing with him?	YES 1	NO 0
4	What if the wife is ill and her husband returns home at night and wants to have sex with her? She refuses, explaining that she has a fever and stomach pains. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for refusing to have sex with him?	YES 1	NO 0
5	What if the mother-in-law of the woman tells her to sweep the home-yard? The wife disobeys because she is busy caring for her baby. The mother-in-law complains to her son when he returns home. In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for disobeying her mother-in-law?	YES 1	NO 0
6	A wife is home alone and goes to her parents' house just for fun without telling her husband? In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for going out without telling him?	YES 1	NO 0

7	What if the wife often leaves her young children unsupervised and lets them go around looking dirty? Her husband has asked her many times before to supervise their play and keep them clean, but she does not pay attention to what he asks. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for neglecting the children? To be clear, I am not asking you whether you think it is justified to hit or beat the <u>children</u> . I am asking whether you think the husband is justified in hitting or beating <u>his wife</u> in this situation.	YES 1	NO 0
8	What if the wife is quarrelsome by nature? She often disagrees with what her husband says for no reason. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for arguing with him?	YES 1	NO 0
9	What if the wife refuses to have sex with her husband whenever she is not in the mood? In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for refusing to have sex with him?	YES 1	NO 0
10	What if the mother-in-law of the woman tells her to sweep the home-yard, but the wife ignores this request and spends the morning resting and chatting with her neighbour? In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for disobeying her mother-in-law?	YES 1	NO 0

Extra questions for female staff

1. What has it meant to you personally to be employed by BRAC? What challenges/reactions/ situations have you encountered in your family due to your formal employment. How have you coped with these challenges?
2. Female staff riding motorbike: How does she feel or has felt about men's reaction to her breaking traditional women's image? How did she overcome initial bad feeling if there was any? What exactly did you say to disapproving people either at home or in the community to make them accept your riding motorbike?

Additional questions for health staff

1. Why has men's participation in family planning not yet significantly increased? What social norms are obstructing it? How does s/he feel about these norms?

Additional question for microcredit programme staff

2. Are women borrowers the primary decision makers in deciding on credit amount, its uses and repayment? Why/why not? Is this a problem to be overcome or is it OK? Why?

3. How do community people look upon the few empowered women who play the dominant roles in their micro-credit transactions? What are your own views of these women?

APPENDIX 2. Interview guides for study of psychosocial support

Guide for interviews with *Manobondhu*

1. What do you aim to achieve by providing psychosocial support to abused women?
2. What is your coverage area and schedule? (Does she cover several different communities?) Where does the psychosocial support take place?
3. How long have you been doing this work in this location? Where did you work previously?
4. How many women have you provided support to so far? Please show us the records you keep of the women who come in. Do the women come only once or do you have follow-up sessions with them? How many sessions?
5. How are violence victims selected for psychosocial support —are they referred by someone or do they hear about you and come on their own?
6. How is information about the availability of a counselor disseminated in the community?
7. What barriers do you face in encouraging women to come in for psychosocial support? What prevents more women from coming? What is being done to break down these barriers?
8. When women come to you for psychosocial support, what challenges do you face?
9. To what extent do you think the women are really helped by the psychosocial support? Given the realities of their lives, what is the potential for psychosocial support alone to enable them to change their situations?
10. Do you think community understands your work? Do you have any idea what they understand about the psychosocial support?
11. What do you like and dislike about this work?

Guides for interviews with abused women

1. What events made you seek psychosocial support? What happened?
2. How did you decide to come for psychosocial support? Was it your decision? Did someone suggest it to you?
3. Did you face any barriers in coming for psychosocial support? (Please describe).
4. What was your expectation before you came for psychosocial support? Was the psychosocial support different from what you expected? In what ways?
5. What was the room like? What did you like the room/environment? What did you dislike? What sort of place would have been better? Did you feel it was a private place?
6. What was the psychosocial support like? What was talked about? What did the counselor say to you or ask you to talk about? What did you talk about? What did the counselor say to you?
7. Did you feel at all shy or uncomfortable? What made you feel that way?
8. What did you like about the psychosocial support? What characteristics of the counselor did you like?
9. What did you dislike about the psychosocial support? What characteristics of the counselor did you dislike?
10. Do you think the psychosocial support helped you in any way? In what ways?
11. Has any change happened in your life after this psychosocial support? (Please provide details.)
12. Did you make any decisions during the psychosocial support that you were able to implement? Did you make any decisions that you were unable to implement? What obstacles prevented you from implementing these decisions?
13. Do you think you need more such psychosocial support? Why or why not? (If yes) what do you hope to gain from the follow-up sessions?
14. Would you suggest that other women seek this sort of psychosocial support? For what sort of women do you think it would be helpful? For what sort of women do you think it would not be helpful?

15. Do you find any change in your relationship with your husband since you received psychosocial support? Do you think that his violence against you increased or decreased? Has the type of violence changed its form (for example, physical, psychological, economic; more or less severe)?
16. In your opinion how could this psychosocial support be changed for you to get more benefit?

APPENDIX 3. Interview guides: Men as partners against violence

For Citizens Action Committee (CAC) and Adolescent and Youth Group (AYG) members

Introductory discussion on why and how the participant got involved, and his/her background.

1. We hear a lot about gender equality these days. What does this mean?
2. What are some of the ways in which you think that boys and girls, or men and women, should be equal?
3. Many people believe there should be limits on equality between men and women. Please give me an example of a situation in which you would say that equality has gone too far.
4. Do you think this 'gender equality' discriminates against men? If so, please explain in what ways.
5. Which of these situations would make you laugh? (Why?)
 - ▶ A man plays with the baby while his wife cooks dinner.
 - ▶ A man cooks dinner while his wife plays with the baby.
 - ▶ A man sweeps the courtyard while his wife sits on the *verandah* chatting with her neighbour.
 - ▶ A man and his young wife sit in a teahouse, chatting as they drink their tea.
 - ▶ A woman gets on a bus. She finds that the seats normally reserved for women are all occupied by men. She asks the men to give her a seat.
 - ▶ Man slaps his wife. She slaps him back with greater force.
6. What are some common characteristics of men?
7. What are some common characteristics of women?
8. What rights do men have that women do not have?
9. What rights do women have that men do not have?

10. What do you understand by “eve teasing”? What reasons do you think lead to this “eve teasing”? What do girls do that may encourage eve teasing?
11. Suppose a girl is walking along a road; seeing her some boys start singing. Now, do you think they are harassing the girl or is it normal for boys to sing while some girls are around? Please, explain.
12. Have you ever seen any boy or man teasing a girl? If yes, please narrate the experience. Did you do anything in this situation, or did you just watch? Why? If yes, what did you do? If no, what might you do next time you witnessed eve teasing?

13.	A wife is home alone and someone comes to tell her that her mother is very ill. She rushes to her parents' house without telling her husband. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for going out without telling him?	YES 1	NO 0
14.	What if the wife is over-burdened with work one morning? Normally, she supervises the children's play and keeps them neat and clean. But, one day, it is raining, and while she is working hard to finish her housework, the children play in front of the house and get dirty. She does not have time to bathe them before her husband returns and sees how dirty they are. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for neglecting the children? To be clear, I am not asking you whether you think it is justified to hit or beat your children. I am asking whether you think the husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife in this situation.	YES 1	NO 0
15.	What if the husband stays home out of laziness for several days, refusing to go out and work. His wife tells him they are running out of food and there is not enough money to buy food - and asks him to please go out and work. The husband tells his wife to shut up, and she argues with him. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for arguing with him?	YES 1	NO 0
16.	What if the wife is ill and her husband returns home at night and wants to have sex with her? She refuses, explaining that she has a fever and stomach pains. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for refusing to have sex with him?	YES 1	NO 0
17.	What if the mother-in-law of the woman tells her to sweep the home-yard? The wife disobeys because she is busy caring for her baby. The mother-in-law complains to her son when he returns home. In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for disobeying her mother-in-law?	YES 1	NO 0
18.	A wife is home alone and goes to her parents' house just for fun without telling her husband? In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for going out without telling him?	YES 1	NO 0
19.	What if the wife often leaves her young children unsupervised and lets them go around looking dirty? Her husband has asked her many times before to supervise their play and keep them clean, but she does not pay attention to what he asks. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for neglecting the children? To be clear, I am not asking you whether you think it is justified to hit or beat the <u>children</u> . I am asking whether you think the husband is justified in hitting or beating <u>his wife</u> in this situation.	YES 1	NO 0

20.	What if the wife is quarrelsome by nature? She often disagrees with what her husband says for no reason. In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for arguing with him?	YES 1	NO 0
21.	What if the wife refuses to have sex with her husband whenever she is not in the mood? In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for refusing to have sex with him?	YES 1	NO 0
22.	What if the mother-in-law of the woman tells her to sweep the home-yard, but the wife ignores this request and spends the morning resting and chatting with her neighbour? In your opinion, is the husband justified in hitting or beating his wife for disobeying her mother-in-law?	YES 1	NO 0

- 23. What can men do to stop violence against women? (Probe for as many answers as possible)
- 24. Have you ever protested, physically or verbally, any incidence of VAW? Why/why not? (Only for trainees)
- 25. What prevents men from doing these things (ask this for every response given above)

Citizen Action Committee members: Ask same questions as above, then ask

- 26. What do you understand by VAW? How many types of VAW do you know about?
- 27. What can the CAC do to prevent VAW? Has the committee ever taken any preventive/protesting actions against any incident of VAW? If yes, how have you been involved in that action?
- 28. What are the existing legal provisions, punishments for each type of VAW?
- 29. What are Village Courts, their power, how do they work, what is their area of jurisdiction? What limits their effectiveness in preventing VAW?
- 30. What is the traditional *Shalish* system, what offences against women can it mediate and which are beyond its authority? Why? What limits its effectiveness in preventing VAW?

APPENDIX 4. Interview guides for study of peer education initiative

Peer educators

1. What is your age?
2. What is peer education?
3. Please tell us about the youth forum
 - ▶ How many members? Male? Female? Ages? Married or unmarried?
 - ▶ How were you selected?
 - ▶ How often do you meet?
 - ▶ What kind of training did the members receive? When?
 - ▶ This training has prepared you to do what?
 - ▶ What are the activities of the forum?
 - ▶ Does the youth forum have an action plan? What is in the plan?
 - ▶ What promises did you make? Which were you able to carry out? Which were you not able to carry out, and why?
 - ▶ In general, who is more active, the male or the female members of the forum? Why? Whose work is more difficult? Why?
4. What do you think you have accomplished? (get details, not just generalities. Push him. He should give you EVIDENCE of impact—not just activities and general statements like: I changed their attitudes)
5. How many other young people have you talked to and tried to influence as a youth forum member? How did you do this? please give examples.
6. What kind of support would help you to do your job better?
7. Attitudes and experiences:
 - ▶ what does “gender” mean
 - ▶ what are some common characteristics of boys your age/girls your age?
 - ▶ where does (each of) these characteristics come from? Which ones are natural? -Which ones can change and which cannot change? -(if you have a sibling of the opposite sex) what are the differences between you?
 - ▶ what are the most important things for a boy child/girl to learn?
 - ▶ what are the characteristics of an ideal husband? Wife?

- ▶ what work is most appropriate for a husband/wife to do in the family? Why?
- ▶ what do you think about women working outside the home? Good or bad and why?
- ▶ should men do domestic work? Why/why not?
- ▶ In your family who makes most of the important decisions? Why?
- ▶ which is better: for the husband to use condoms or for the wife to use contraceptive pills? Why?
- ▶ Which is better, for a man to have vasectomy or his wife to have tubal ligation? Why?

- ▶ do both men and women feel sexual desire?
- ▶ when you think of the relationship between your mother and your father, how do you expect your own relationship with your husband/wife to be different?
 - what is "eve teasing"? why do boys engage in this? What are the consequences?
 - at some time in your life you may have seen your father hit your mother. If you have never seen this happen, have you seen another one of your relatives or neighbors hit his wife. Please think about that. What are the situations in which a man hits his wife? Is the man ever justified in this, for example, if his wife is disobedient or often argues with him in a loud voice?

- ▶ have you ever been physically punished by your parents or teachers? Do you think this punishment was justified? Why or why not?
- ▶ what can you and your peers do to help stop VAW? Which of these things have you ever personally done (ask him/her to tell you the story)
- ▶ what can you and your peers do to help stop VAC? Which of these things have you ever personally done (ask him/her to tell you the story)

ASK HIM/HER TO IDENTIFY 4-5 “PEERS” HE HAS TALKED WITH OR HELPED IN SOME WAY.

Peers

- ▶ what does “gender” mean
- ▶ what are some common characteristics of boys your age/girls your age?
- ▶ where does (each of) these characteristics come from? Which ones are natural? -Which ones can change and which cannot change? -(if you have a sibling of the opposite sex) what are the differences between you?
- ▶ what are the most important things for a boy child/girl to learn?
- ▶ what are the characteristics of an ideal husband? Wife?
- ▶ what work is most appropriate for a husband/wife to do in the family? Why?
- ▶ what do you think about women working outside the home? Good or bad and why?
- ▶ should men do domestic work? Why/why not?
- ▶ In your family who makes most of the important decisions? Why?
- ▶ which is better: for the husband to use condoms or for the wife to use contraceptive pills? Why?
- ▶ Which is better, for a man to have vasectomy or his wife to have tubal ligation? Why?
- ▶ do both men and women feel sexual desire?
- ▶ when you think of the relationship between your mother and your father, how do you expect your own relationship with your husband/wife to be different?
- ▶ what is “eve teasing”? why do boys engage in this? What are the consequences?
- ▶ at some time in your life you may have seen your father hit your mother. If you have never seen this happen, have you seen another one of your relatives or neighbours hit his wife. Please think about that. What are the situations in which a man hits his wife? Is the man ever justified in this, for example, if his wife is disobedient or often argues with him in a loud voice?

- ▶ have you ever been physically punished by your parents or teachers? Do you think this punishment was justified? Why or why not?
- ▶ what can you and your peers do to help stop VAW? Which of these things have you ever personally done (ask him/her to tell you the story)
- ▶ what can you and your peers do to help stop VAC? Which of these things have you ever personally done (ask him/her to tell you the story)
- ▶ Please tell me what you learned from x (peer educator)

About

BRAC Research and Evaluation Division

The Research and Evaluation Division was established in 1975 as an independent unit within BRAC to provide research support to strengthen BRAC's multi-faceted development programmes. Although RED concentrates on BRAC programmes, its analytical work goes beyond and includes research on various development issues of national and global importance that contributes to evidence-based policy dialogue and discourse. For more information, please visit, research.brac.net

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