

CASE STUDY

BANGLADESH

Understanding the Cost of Gender-Based Violence and the Importance of Engaging Men and Boys

Bangladesh faces one of the highest rates of domestic violence worldwide: Nearly one in two women will experience physical violence in the home.¹ Women's vulnerability to violence is pervasive and endemic in Bangladesh, driven by a patriarchal social structure and by conditions of poverty and social inequality. Male domination permeates all segments of society, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status, creating a context in which domestic violence and discrimination against women and girls are accepted.

A number of initiatives have been implemented in Bangladesh to combat violence against women, with most interventions focused on supporting survivors or raising community awareness of violence. An innovative project implemented by CARE with funding from USAID has sought to highlight the costs and consequences of domestic violence.

The study found that the cost of domestic violence represents about 12.5% of Bangladesh's national annual expenditure, or about 2.1% of gross domestic product.²

The Cost of Violence against Women

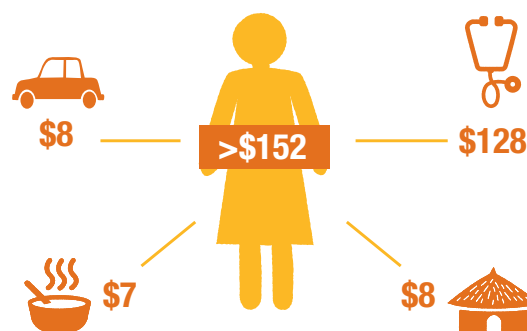
CARE's Cost of Violence against Women (COVAW) initiative, sought to change community norms, practices and behaviors that contribute to violence and discrimination against women in Bangladesh. Key activities included:

- Community education and analysis activities led by trained facilitators to increase the understanding

of the causes and consequences of violence against women and identify solutions and action to address the problem. These included activities aimed at engaging men and youth.

- Research to assess the economic and social costs of violence against women. COVAW conducted a study which found that domestic violence has many monetary costs at all levels from individuals to family members to whole societies. Major costs included lost wages, medical bills, legal fees and relocation expenses.
- Using data and evidence on the social and economic cost of violence against women to design behavior and social change campaigns and to conduct advocacy with policy makers at the local and national level to advance action to address violence against women.

FINANCIAL COSTS TO A WOMAN AND HER FAMILY



AVERAGE FAMILY INCOME = \$3 A DAY³

Engaging Men and Boys

The COVAW initiative used a combination of research, capacity building and educational strategies to encourage transformative behavior amongst men and women. One aspect of the initiative was focused on engaging men and boys as partners and allies against violence and to better understand and promote equitable and non-violent behaviors towards women and girls.

CARE's experience indicates that challenging society's expectations for men to act in controlling, aggressive or violent ways, is key to progress on gender equality and violence prevention efforts. It is important to work with men constructively as partners for positive change. Many of these men can be agents for change as community leaders, family members, service providers and advocates.

The COVAW initiative worked with local communities to identify men who had demonstrated positive change in their behavior. These changes were confirmed by the community volunteers. These men worked as role models in the community, facilitating discussions and activities aimed at promoting an alternative, more equitable narrative of masculinity.

Stopping violence requires that all of society understands that there is a cost to all rather than an action without consequence.

—Nick Southern, CARE Bangladesh Country Director

Hasan (not his real name), 40, is one example of a man who benefited from participation in COVAW. He is a day laborer who lives in Pathalkaandi Village with his wife of almost two decades. His wife has never been to school and is a housewife. They have two sons and a daughter.

Hasan admits he used to physically beat his wife. At one point in their relationship, he said anything minor would cause him to become upset and start hitting his wife. His wife suffered injuries that were so serious she sought medical treatment and could not complete daily household tasks.

While the decision to give up violence was a gradual process, Hasan credits his participation in the COVAW project to this change. He said his experience talking to a COVAW volunteer triggered a process of reflection in him. As he started to think over the points raised in the discussions, he began to pay more attention to the implications of violence against women, including the social and economic costs to families.

"I do not beat my wife now," he says. "Now I try to understand her."

Hasan says that this process has had positive outcomes for him. He now feels comfortable discussing his problems with his wife, which he was unable to do earlier. Hasan also thinks that his relationship with his wife has improved. There is now intimacy and closeness in their relationship that was not there before.

U.S. Support

The global prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) requires a strong response. CARE urges the United States and its partners to integrate efforts to prevent and respond to GBV across their foreign assistance programs in health, governance, education, economic growth, humanitarian assistance and security. Such assistance must be sustained over time, as the cycle of GBV can only be broken through long-term, multilevel action to empower women and girls and change community norms that perpetuate violence. Congress can solidify the United States' commitment to combating GBV by supporting ongoing efforts to respond to GBV and by urging the Obama administration to continue efforts to address GBV throughout the full spectrum of U.S. foreign assistance programming.

¹ Farouk, S.A. 2005. Violence against women: A statistical overview, challenges in and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them. Expert Group Meeting

² CARE Bangladesh and USAID. 2011. Domestic violence against women: Cost to a Nation. Dr. Kaniz Siddique.

³ Rate of exchange between U.S. Dollar (USD) and Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) accurate as of February 20, 2013



CARE USA Headquarters
151 Ellis Street, Atlanta, GA 30303
404-681-2552 | www.care.org

Washington, D.C. Office
1825 I Street, NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC, 20006
202-595-2800 | can.care.org