

# **Women's Lifelong Experience on Sexual Harassment**

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March 2009  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We, the participants of the 8<sup>th</sup> batch of the “Gender and Governance Training Program” of Democracywatch conducted the research titled –“**Women’s Lifelong Experience on Sexual Harassment: A Study on Dhaka City**” as part of our training program. In doing this research we came across many people and organizations, without their support this research would not have been possible. As such we would like to thank a number of people for their immense support for and contribution to this whole research work. First of all we would like to thank Mrs. Taleya Rehman for always being so enthusiastic about our research and taking time out of her busy schedule to show interest about our work and to encourage us to do better. We thank Mrs. Tahrunnesa Abdullah for her precious advice and guidance. Without her well-thought ideas and instructions, it would have been difficult to conduct this research. We express our sincere gratitude to **Prof. A. S. M. Atiqur Rahman**, Institute of Social Welfare and Research, **University of Dhaka** for supervising our whole research. It’s due to his excellent teaching on the theoretical aspects of social research that we felt comfortable with those concepts and ideas in the field. We are also thankful to Ms. Mansura Akhter who always extended her helping hand whenever we needed that. We would like to convey our special thanks to Mr. Mohammad Mahmud-un-Nabi, Ms. Anupama Anam and Ms. Syeda Nazneen Jahan for being with us all time during this research. Special thanks to Ms. Tahmina Rahman for assisting us in analyzing the case studies. Thanks to all the respondents for their time and sharing with us valuable knowledge and experience on the study subject.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Background

### 1. Introduction

Sexual harassment against women is a silent but awful crime which is pervasive in the domestic and social arena of Bangladesh. Due to social stigma and lack of awareness, the victims of this crime do not raise their voice against it. But sexual harassment happens to be such a debilitating crime which eats up the very core of a human being. It hurts her dignity, makes her feel powerless, helpless and often she may think of herself responsible to deserve such treatment. The sexually abused person is doubly victimized since they cannot talk about these abusive treatment to anyone and have to bear this pain and trauma all alone. This is one of the reasons which actually encourage further harassment. Because silence makes the perpetrator feel immune to any kind of disciplinary action. Mostly women become victims of sexual abuse here in Bangladesh. In this study an effort has been made to hear the unheard stories of these traumatized victims.

### 2. Literature Review

Sexual harassment is inappropriate, unwanted and unwelcomed conduct of a sexual nature perceived as harassment by the receiver, which has an adverse effect on the dignity of women and men within the workplace and outside. Sexual harassment can be verbal (comments about your body, spreading sexual rumors, sexual remarks or accusations, dirty jokes or stories), physical (grabbing, rubbing, flashing or mooning, touching, pinching in a sexual way, sexual assault) or visual (display of naked pictures or sex-related objects, obscene gestures). Sexual harassment can happen to girls and boys.

Sexual harassment is a social disease which affects the center of our social structure-the family. And by extension it has got wider repercussions for the society as a whole. Because sexual harassment directly or indirectly inhibits the freedom of movement and expression of women and shrinks their options in terms of career, extra curricular activities, entertainment and even education, the impact of this heinous crime is much larger and deeper than the eyes meet. Sexual harassment happens to be one of the most powerful weapons of patriarchy to subjugate women, to destroy their will and ability to assert their rights, to kill their capacity to concentrate on other mental and intellectual faculties as protecting their own body becomes the primary concern for women in such situations. This traumatic experience also affects the normal and healthy growth of relationships with men at home or at workplace or elsewhere as the constant fear of abuse persists everywhere. It hinders the proper and balanced mental development of the victims. It is never easy to carry on the pain of being victimized. It takes toll on the physical and mental health of the victims and as these victims have to play multiple roles in the society such as mother, wife, homemaker, professionals, it will hamper their ability to perform these duties properly and at the end of the day it will affect everyone besides the victims themselves. So this is an issue of grave concern which needs immediate attention and action. This practice is like a disease which penetrates into the society slowly but surely. It is high time that members of this society wake up to this call and try and listen to the victims because these victims are not someone who are strangers, living at some other place or with whom we do or may not have social contacts. These victims are the very members of our family, our neighbors, our friends, our colleagues. And so ignoring these

problems is sure to hurt us sooner or later. This study aims to find out the nature and causes of sexual harassment experienced by the women all through their life.

As a category of violence, sexual harassment encompasses a wide array of degrading activities. From mere verbal abuse or sexually intended physical gesture to rape-everything falls into this category. Unfortunately, in a closed and conservative society like Bangladesh we only occasionally come to know about the grave sexual offences like rape. But other offences like eave teasing, vulgar gesture, unwanted but sexually motivated physical contacts and so many other forms of harassments at workplace, public gatherings, educational institutions and even at home are either ignored or not being reported though all of these affect the power, position, confidence and existence of women. The deep rooted patriarchal values and practices in the society are responsible behind such a situation. The abused female children and women can neither report nor seek redress of the crime committed against them because the society will point finger at the victims and question their family values, their get ups, and their behavior. At the end of the day the victims will be held responsible for inviting the harassment upon them. The reason behind such unfair judgment is that in this patriarchal society women are not treated as complete human beings who can speak and act as they wish. They are still thought to be subordinate to men and men have a de facto legitimate right to violate a woman's privacy. So whenever a young girl is being teased on her way to school or a middle aged woman is faced with the bitter experience of being pushed and touched unnecessarily in a public place, most of the time these things are being considered as normal. If the victim tries to raise her voice, then all hell breaks loose on her. Because it is a men's world and men have a free ride in exploiting women sexually in every possible way. That is why the unbearable crime like sexual harassment of women is taking place everywhere-from home to school, workplace to shopping malls, public bus service to courtyard-everywhere women are being harassed. Only few are raising voice against this miserable situation. To make the situation worse families often overlook such a crime committed to their female members because more often than not, these are usually committed by close relatives.

Social taboos make them believe that public exposure of such incidents will defame the family and also ruin the victim's future prospect of marriage. Educational institutions where sexual harassment is rampant are also reluctant to recognize let alone address such problems because it will tarnish the image of the institution concerned. The same fallacious logic works for the negligence of workplace sexual harassment. So everywhere the unfavorable balance of power between men and women makes the latter group more susceptible and vulnerable to sexual offences. It is like a cycle. The inferior social position of women makes them easy pray for sexual abuses and these very abuses make them more vulnerable and powerless. So it works as a mechanism for deteriorating the subordinate and dependent status of women.

### **3. Rational**

Though sexual harassment has always been a social malice in Bangladesh, of late we are noticing its rise for various reasons. For example, more and more women are now getting out of home for educational and work purposes and facing newer forms of abuse. Also the dark side of digital revolution and globalization is co-modifying women as sex objects. All these add up to the increased vulnerability of women. Recently newspapers are flooded by the reports of suicides committed by harassed women who had no place to take resort to, no one to help. This is indeed an alarming tendency. Those women who have not committed suicide

are not living a normal and healthy life. Most of them grow a habit of distrusting people and feeling insecure all the time. Their balanced mental growth is hampered which affects their married life and by and large it affects the whole family.

To address such menace, it is necessary to have a good look at the whole situation, because identifying the root cause of a problem amounts to winning half the battle. It is important to know and understand the situation through the victim's eyes. It is time to look at the devil directly into his eyes. Its time to break away with the traditional patriarchal values which exacerbates the situation. As such dissecting this social malice is a crying need.

It is a matter of great concern that sexual harassment encompasses the society constantly through different routes or practices. Sexual harassment is such a kind of harassment which abuse/exploit women of all age, race, ethnicity, religion, economic status etc. It not only hurts the person or her life or family; it put obstacles on the way of equality, development and peace. So, it is the high time to find out the nature and reasons behind such harassment to prevent its growth and reduce as well as improve the existing situation of the women. Therefore this research is primarily focused on the nature of sexual harassment, causes behind the crime and suggestions to fight against sexual harassment. The study will work as a base line for further research on this issue and assist in formulation of policy against sexual harassment. It is expected that the findings of this research will help to raise awareness among all the stakeholders about the necessity to protest against such crime.

#### **4. Objectives of the Study:**

The general objective of the study is to reveal the lifelong experience of sexual harassment of selected women: the experience from their childhood till now and find out the root causes of sexual harassment as well as recommendations to fight against the crime.

More specifically:

1. To know about the personal information of the respondents.
2. To depict the nature of sexual harassment.
3. To find out the causes of sexual harassment.
4. To assess the mental trauma suffered by the respondents.
5. To formulate recommendations with a view to reduce sexual harassment.

#### **5. Research Method:**

Available literatures on experience of sexual harassment of women were reviewed to get an overview of the study subject. Two hundred nineteen Case studies related to various types of sexual harassments were collected from female students of Masters and Honors final years of the University of Dhaka. They were asked to share the experiences of sexual harassment either their own or any one they know. A checklist was used for collection of background information of the interviewees, opinion on various issues such as Life Cycle of Sexual Harassment, Predators, and Place of sexual harassments, Causes of Sexual harassments of women, Victim's reaction after sexual harassment as well as case studies on sexual harassments. Background information of the interviewees and their opinion on certain aspects of sexual harassment was tabulated, compiled and analyzed. Case studies were categorized in five groups; sexual harassment by teachers, relatives, friends, people at work places and others. Analyses of selected case studies along with the cases are presented in the report.

## **6. Limitations:**

The researchers faced the following limitations while conducting the research:

- Respondents often felt reluctant to answer some questions which they regarded as sensitive.
- Sometimes it was hard for the respondents to manage time to give in-depth interviews.
- Some of the respondents were reluctant to give interview because of their painful experience and maintaining privacy.

## **8. Presentation of Report:**

The chapter one presents the background of the study which includes literature review, objectives, study methodology and limitations. This is followed by demographic information of the interviewees and their opinion on certain aspects of sexual harassment such as sexual harassment during different life cycles, type of predator, possible place of harassment, causes of sexual harassment, reaction of the victims and steps to be taken to reduce harassment presented in chapter two. Chapter three, four and five presents selected case studies of sexual harassment by three different categories of predators. More case studies were incorporated in the annexure. The concluding chapter contains summary and recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Opinions of the Respondents Related to Selected Issues on Sexual Harassment

As mentioned in the study methodology information were collected on background of the respondents and their opinion on various issues related to sexual harassment, such as Life Cycle of the victims, Perpetrators, Place, Causes and Victim's reaction after sexual harassment. This chapter presents the findings.

Out of 50 respondents, background information received from 39 respondents among whom there were university students, working women and housewives. Age of the respondents varies between 20 to 30 years. Only one respondent is in the age of 35. A little more than half are married. Fifty percent are graduates among whom three fourth have completed post graduate degree. The others are still undergraduate students. Twenty six percent of the respondents are service holder and 10% teachers. There was one business woman, one occupational therapist and one housewife. Sixteen respondents are engaged in full time jobs whose monthly earning varies from Tk.7, 000.00 to 35,000.00. Opinions of the respondents on various issues related to sexual harassment are presented below.

#### 1. Life Cycle of Sexual Harassment:

A total of 50 women were interviewed. Sixty two percent said that teen age girls are more sustainable to sexual harassment which is followed by childhood (50%) and adulthood (46%) harassment. However 42% of the respondents are of the opinion that women of all age faced sexual harassment.

Table 1: Opinion of the Respondent on Life Cycle of Sexually Harassment \*

Life cycle	Number of Respondent	Remarks
Childhood	25	Eight months old baby to age 12.
Teen Age	31	Age 13 to 19
Adulthood	23	Age 20 to 30
Middle age	8	Age 30 to 45
All age	21	

\*Multiple Responses

#### 2. Perpetrators

As reported by the respondents women including girl children are sexually harassed by different types of Perpetrators (table 2). A large number (76%) of respondents mentioned that relatives and some even incest (30%) such as father, grand father and brother as Perpetrators. The girls are even physically abused by the guests (12%) visiting the family. The teachers, both in education institutions as well as private tutors were identified as Perpetrators by 66% respondents. The girls are also molested by Friends (36%) and classmates (30%). Fifty four

percent respondents mentioned higher officials and 34% claimed colleagues in the work place as Perpetrators. Thirty eight percent informed verbal or physical abuse by the pedestrian.

Table 2: Opinion of the Respondent on Possible Perpetrators\*

<b>Perpetrators</b>	<b>Number of Respondent</b>
Family member	15
Relative	38
Friend	18
Classmate	15
Fellow guest	6
Audience/Listener	6
Co-passenger	16
Colleague	17
Higher official	27
Teacher	33
Pedestrian	19
Woman	9

\*Multiple Responses

### 3. Place of Sexual Harassments

Sexual harassments can take place at any place. Most of the respondents mentioned harassment in market place (60%), public transport (56%), work place (52%), road side (50%), relative's house (46%) and educational institutions (42%). Only 10% mentioned hostels or halls and 14% mentioned hospitals and clinics which show that these places are comparatively safer for women and girls. Thirty percent mentioned police station and prison which is comparatively less than what generally assumed. The type of respondents of the study may not be the group exposed to such situation.

Table 3: Opinion of the Respondent on Possible Place of Sexual Harassments\*

<b>Places</b>	<b>Number of Respondent</b>
Own House	17
Relative's House	23
Educational Institution	21
Hostel/Hall	5
Work place	26
Social function	9
Cultural function	10
Roadside	25
Public transport	28
Market place	30
Hospital/ Clinic	7
Police station / Prison	15

\*Multiple Responses

#### 4. Causes of Sexual Harassments of Women

The respondents mentioned a number of causes for sexual harassment of women which includes deterioration of moral education and social values (72%), timid nature of some girls which prevent them to protest (70%), perverted nature of some men (68%) which might have increased due to easy access to detestable film/ advertise (44%), favorable condition (58%) for the Perpetrators to have access of the girl in an isolated or crowded condition and men know that women are in general blamed by society for such incidents (48%).

Table 4: Opinion of the Respondent on Causes of Sexual Harassments of Women\*

Causes of Sexual harassments of women	Number of Respondent
Favorable condition	29
Timid nature of the girl	35
Pervert nature of Perpetrator	34
Lack of clear Law/ Poor implantation of existing Law	19
Deterioration of moral education	36
Lack of sufficient recreation facilities	8
Easy access to detestable film/ Advertise	22
Influence of Drug	4
Women are in general blamed by society for such incidents	24

\*Multiple Responses

#### 5. Victim's Reaction After Sexual Harassment

Seventy four percent respondents mentioned that victims go through mental trauma, 48% said that they suffer from guilty feeling and 50% said that the victims try to suicide. Seventy percent respondents reported that the victims feel helpless and try to conceal the incidents. This may be due to the fact that women are generally blamed by society for such incidents (48%) as mentioned before. Only a few of the victims react instantly, inform their guardians, complain to authority and seek legal action

Table 5: Opinion of the Respondent on Victim's Reaction after Sexual Harassment\*

Reactions of the victims	Number of Respondent
Feel helpless and tendency to conceal	35
Mental breakdown	37
React instantly	4
Inform to guardian	9
Complain to authority	1
Seek for legal aid	4
Try to suicide	25
Feel guilty	24
Others	9

\*Multiple Responses

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Abused by Teacher**

Out of fifty respondents, eleven narrated stories of abuse by teacher. As distasteful and pathetic as it sounds, teachers at educational institutes, coaching centers and/or private tutors stand as the second largest category of abusers in this study. The case studies indicate the moral bankruptcy prevailing in our society. Teachers in all society are hailed in a very high position. In a conservative society like Bangladesh, teachers are treated as second parents. Unfortunately some teachers take advantage of this trust and respect and use it to satisfy their pervert desires. Even theological tutors whom we call “Huzur” are not devoid of such obnoxious behavior. This study shows that often the victims and their family cannot seek redress of this kind of abuse because of the supposedly higher status or the so-called respectable social image of the teachers concerned. Sometimes the parents of the victims also refuse to believe this kind of complain from their children. In depth interviews with the victims also reveal that when an abused receives moral support from the family in this kind of situation, it becomes easy for her to protest against abuse. But this kind of abuse is rare. Following are a few selected case studies involving abuse by teacher:

#### **Case 1:**

Rina used to be abused by her private tutor during her adolescent period. When Rina was a student of class xii, she had a tutor who always made up some excuses to touch her. From the very beginning it was quite uncomfortable for her. Initially his action was limited to touching and holding fingers. Rina couldn't protest. But very soon the frequency of this uncomfortable touch started increasing. From fingers to wrist and from wrist to upwards. Poor Rina devised her own coping mechanism to protect herself from such abuse. She used to sit at the opposite end of the reading table while studying with that tutor. She tried to enlarge the width of the table by drawing the drawer as outward as possible. But this couldn't stop the tutor from abusing her. Rina was quite helpless at that time as she couldn't talk to anyone about this. Her study was hampered. She couldn't concentrate as she lived with constant fear of being sexually abused. The silence of Rina made the tutor more aggressive. He even went to the point of asking her out on the occasion of Durga Puja (the largest event of veneration of the Hindus). He asked Rina to convince her parents and get permission to go out with him. By that time Rina had had enough. She couldn't take it anymore. She plucked up her heart and consulted with her sister about this problem. From then her sister tried to be around Rina and her tutor while they were studying. Later her mother also came to know about this problem. One day, at the absence of her sister, the tutor grabbed Rina's hand. Rina felt desperate. She did a courageous thing. She screamed as soon as the tutor grabbed her hand. After that incident, she never received tuition from that tutor. But the incident left a deep scar in Rina's mind. Still she cannot stop thinking what would happen to her if she had to go out with that pervert tutor on Durga Puja day. That memory still haunts her.

#### **Analysis:**

What Rina faced was a sort of Physical abuse. It could have continued longer if her family was not supportive. Rina got the courage to scream out loud someday because her mother and sister were informed of the behavior of that tutor and unlike most other cases they didn't blame Rina for it. This indicates that a liberal family culture where these issues can be discussed can help a long way in fighting such silent crimes.

The story also matches the pattern of insecurity and shame experienced by almost all the victims. Though Rina got rid of that tutor and his lust, the experience left a deep scar in her heart. She could never trust a teacher again. Her respect for teachers evaporated with that event. She could never admire a normal teacher-student relationship anymore. And this kind of perception is never healthy for a person's social life.

**Case 2:**

Mahbuba (not her real name) used to take tuition from a very famous teacher of Ideal College when she was a student of class X. He was a very senior and respectable teacher. Mahbuba used to go to his house to study. She admired the teacher and had a very good relationship with him. But this famous and respectable teacher did something to Mahbuba which completely altered her perception about this man. That teacher used to teach his students in a room which was furnished with benches. Those benches were arranged serially. One day Mahbuba was taking an exam sitting in the last bench. There were no other girls in the room. Suddenly the teacher came towards her and on the pretext of checking her answer script bowed down a little from behind. Then he started touching her breasts. Mahbuba became shell shocked. She didn't know what to do. There was no familiar face inside that room at that time. So Mahbuba couldn't ask for help from anyone. She had to swallow the whole humiliating and uncomfortable event. But her morale was totally shattered. After coming home she cried her heart out. She was so upset that she couldn't go to school for the next few days. Mahbuba did share her pain with her mother. Unfortunately the culprit was a reputed school teacher at that time. Mahbuba and her mother feared that exposing the teacher wouldn't bring any fruit for them. It might cause more harm than benefit. So they stopped from seeking justice. Today Mahbuba is a successful medical doctor. She lives in London with her husband. Still Mahbuba gets stiff whenever someone starts a discussion on school days. She cannot participate in that. She becomes sad and thinks that she made a mistake when she didn't fight back and protest against that teacher's behavior so many years back.

**Analysis:**

This story tells us something about the problem of raising voice against socially respectable people when they do something abominating. In this case Mahbuba and her mother had a healthy relationship where they could talk about the incident of abuse. But the power and prestige of that culprit teacher was so high that they dared not utter any word against them. This is also a proof of patriarchal culture which teaches us from the very beginning of our life that whether the abused girl/women is responsible for her grief or not, exposing such event will definitely cause harm to the honor of victim herself and her family. So even when Mahbuba's mother was compassionate enough to console her and took efforts to heal her pain, she was not strong enough to seek justice because she feared that it might become another cause of harassment for her child given the teacher's reputation.

This case tells us how confidence shattering an experience of sexual harassment can become for an adolescent girl. Mahbuba was preparing for her first public examination of her life. She had so many dreams about her future life. She had no idea that life could be so humiliatingly difficult. It shattered her self confidence and trust in teachers to the point that she refused to go to school for the next few days. It definitely took toll on her education. But thanks to her supportive mother, Mahbuba ended up as a successful doctor.

Though she has left those nightmarish days many years ago, she is still haunted by that experience. It has become like a disease for her. It spoiled the fun of school life for her. Unlike other people, she cannot remember anything happy about her school life. All she can remember is that dreadful day when that teacher abused her.

Mahbuba regrets not raising voice against that teacher that day. Probably her education and exposure to a different culture has given her the perception and strength to be vocal about these issues now. This can be considered as a good sign. She can be expected to be a more careful and strong mother when it comes to any kind of abuse done to her children. This awareness which awake in her might save her children from a lot of trouble and help them break away with the demeaning patriarchal values which choke the voices of rebel against sexual abuse in the name of false “honor” and “dignity”.

### **Case 3:**

Ruba (Not her real name) is doing her masters on Bengali at the University of Dhaka. She was blushing out of embarrassment while narrating a particular event. During her undergrads she took this course on literature on the love affair of Radha and Krishna. But the teacher who used to teach this course made it a real uncomfortable task to sit in the class and listen to the lectures. He showed an excessive enthusiasm for detailed depiction Radha’s physical beauty. Radha’s anatomy seemed to be his favorite topic. The language he used is very provocative and vulgar. It is really embarrassing to listen to the thorough analysis of a woman’s physical structure in a co-educational classroom for girls. Especially the comprehensive narration of Radha’s physical change during her puberty was repulsive. The thing Ruba cannot understand is that why the teacher ignored the adolescent period of Krishna. After all it’s a story about both of them. So why skipping Krishna and making girls embarrassed in front of the whole class? Ruba considers it as a kind of sexual perversion-a sick method to satisfy submerged sexual desires.

### **Analysis:**

This is one in a series of cases where teachers teaching at the highest educational institute of the country shamelessly reveal their distorted sexual desire. Though teachers at this level don’t go to the point of physically abusing a student, the verbal attack is enough to make life complicated for students. The experience that Ruba mentioned is shared by all her female classmates. But none of them could ever protest against such verbal abuse. A number of reasons might be working behind it.

The thin line that exists between perversion and the choice of words while teaching a sensitive topic like the love affair of Radha-Krishna might be one of those reasons. Nevertheless a sensible teacher can always draw a line between decent delivery of lecture and over enthusiasm for physical beauty of Radha.

The culture of certain departments of the University concerned which promote a patron-client relationship between teachers and students and where this relationship reflect on the academic result of students, raising voice can be really difficult.

The indifferent attitude of the male students and their silence might also discourage the female students from protesting against this kind of indecent behavior of the teacher concerned.

Most importantly there is no black and white rule describing precisely the definition of sexual harassment and punishments for such behavior in the University of Dhaka. This actually makes it difficult to file formal complaint against any teacher.

This particular incident of verbal sexual abuse tells a lot about the moral decay of our teachers. It also points out the indifference of everyone concerned to the necessity of institutionalizing a code of conduct for teachers and students and enacting laws against sexual abuse in the campus.

**Case 4:**

Jhuma (Not her real name) is a fourth year student of University of Dhaka. From the beginning of her student life as a fresher in her department, she used to hear all sorts of rumor about “Hasan Sir” from senior students. She never had the bad luck to encounter this teacher, infamous for his sexually indecent behavior until she was promoted to fourth year. The experience was indeed a bad one. She couldn’t imagine how a senior teacher could use such an offensive language while talking to the students. She couldn’t believe her ears when she heard him utter those distasteful words. One day he picked up a fellow classmate named Rahat during a class and asked him-“Hey there! When are you getting married?” Rifat replied with due respect-“Sir! I don’t intend to marry before I finish my education and stand on my own feet.” “Hasan Sir” made a face in response to this reply and said a horrible thing-“Well. You will definitely finish your education, get a job and stand on your feet. But by then certain organ of your body will not be erected. Do you understand that?” Finishing this ugly remark he looked at the female students and started a grin full of wickedness.

**Analysis:**

This is one story which reveals that male students are not immune from the verbal abuse of teachers at the University level. This particular teacher went way beyond the normal sense of decency and his right to scold students when he told Rifat “You will definitely finish your education, get a job and stand on your feet. But by then certain organ of your body will not be erected. Do you understand that?”

Clearly it was an unnecessary, unauthorized, unexpected and uncouth behavior. This again tells us how powerful and shameless our University teachers are and how passive the students are. While the students of the highest educational institute of the country cannot protest against such sexual abuse, it is very normal that common people with not so good educational background or cultural exposure would zip their mouth when they experience or see any sexual offence.

This shows that even the male students are also victims of the patriarchal vies. They haven’t been able to shake off the fear and shame associated with sexual harassment. The victim in this case couldn’t do anything to show this teacher his right position.

**Case 5:**

Mitu, Shefa, Khuku and many more students complain that they cannot tolerate “Robiul Sir” of their department. His class is like a mental torture. They complained that this senior teacher who is almost as old as the fathers of his students speak of female body in a very foul

manner. This elderly teacher never misses any chance to humiliate female students by using distasteful and offensive language. Repeated complains of female students to department authority about this haven't changed the situation. It's like going through hell every time they are inside the classroom with "Robiul Sir". You never know what's waiting for you next. With this teacher there is no demarcating line between "should" and "should not". One day he targeted Bindu and said-"Hey you girls! Why do you hide the copies of your notes in those parts of your body which are already pointed? Cannot you see you are making them more pointed? I cannot touch those because if I try to do so you will say "Kuddus is a pervert"? These verbal abuses are a real source of discomfort for the female students.

**Analysis:**

The power and reach of this senior teacher fails all the efforts of students to stop his verbal abuse. In this case the awareness of the students didn't bring any fruit. The indifference of the Department authority actually encourages such undignified attitude of teachers.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Abused By Relatives (Close Relatives, Distant Relatives)**

#### **A. Close Relatives:**

Out of fifty three cases, eight cases of sexual harassment by close relatives were recorded. “Close Relatives” stand as the single largest category of abusers in this study. In a conservative society like ours girl children often become victims of submerged sexual desires of close relatives. Most of the time parents of the victims do not even suspect the ill motives of the perpetrators. The scary part is that sometimes parents or guardians themselves trust the abusers as the baby sitters. Taking advantage of this trust, some close relatives fulfill their distasteful desires. Most of the time parents or guardians react negatively when they come to know about these cases of abuses. Some of them hold their own children responsible for such occurrences. Almost no parent seeks redress or tries to comfort the children after experiencing such abuse. Instead of seeking explanation from the perpetrator, parents try to keep it as a secret fearing dishonor and shame for the family. Following are some of the most striking case studies that were recorded during the course of the study. The rest are depicted in the annexure.

#### **Case 1:**

Masuma was abused by her own paternal uncle when she was just a child. She used to live in their native village with her extended family. It happened on a rainy day. It was raining cats and dogs. She went out to pick mangoes from under the mango trees in the yard. When she was getting back, one of her uncle saw her and called her into his room. He said “hey kid! Come and sit in my room. It’s raining out there. Go back to your room when the rain stops. Come and sit on my bed and lets chit chat for a while”. Then something terrible happened for which Masuma was not prepared at all. That uncle held her tight and started touching different parts of her body. Masuma didn’t know what to do. To make the matter worse, her mother saw this whole thing from another room and called Masuma to their room. When Masuma got back more painful surprises waited for her. This time her mother beat her for that disgraceful event with her uncle as if it were entirely her fault. Poor Masuma didn’t realize what went wrong and what her faults were. She developed a feeling of anguish inside her and she became very upset at her mother’s behavior. She thinks that her mother didn’t do the right thing. She was supposed to comfort and counsel Masuma at that time instead of beating her. It was her uncle who was supposed to be punished for his misdeeds. Instead Masuma gets to be blamed and beaten cruelly. After that Masuma had faced similar situations for many times. But never again she spoke to her mother about these things. Because she had had her lessons. From a very early age she had known that in such situations her mother can never be a good friend of her to whom she can confide her secrets and seek redress. Rather her mother can become another source of pain for her.

#### **Analysis:**

The story is a prime example of patriarchal values still nurtured in our families when it comes to protecting our girl children from sexual abuse. In this case poor Masuma was beaten by her mother for something which she herself loathed. Her mother didn’t even demand explanation from Masuma’s uncle, let alone scolding him. All the blame was put on Masuma’s shoulder who was just a child and had no idea about what was happening to her.

Before she could fully realize the extensity and intensity of the crime done to her, she learnt a terrible lesson and that is no matter by whom or how she is sexually abused, sharing such experience with her mother would mean another round of humiliation and physical torture. Like most other mother in rural area, Masuma's mother perceives that it is the duty of a girl to protect herself from sexual lust of men. The mere fact that Masuma was abused by her own paternal uncle indicated that she was a total failure when it came to protecting her honor.

The repercussion of that event was far reaching. It was not only the experience that scared Masuma so much. She developed a sense of guilt, anger and insecurity inside her at her mother's behavior. She felt that she was misunderstood by her mother. As she mentioned, such incidents of abuse happened in her life for many more times. But she didn't dare talk to her mother about that. May be that is what encouraged the abusers to keep on with abuses. It doesn't matter how noble Masuma's mother's intentions were, her inconsiderate, non empathetic behavior actually made Masuma more insecure.

Masuma kept up with those horrible experiences of abuse all by herself. She didn't talk to anyone, didn't get any help, hold herself responsible for those incidents, hated her mother and not to mention "Men" in the broadest sense of term. It greatly hampered the balanced development of her personality. But the bright side is that Masuma realizes that mothers in general should be more compassionate and supportive in such situations. So she can be expected to be more cautious in case of her girl children when she becomes a mother. But it may also affect how she raises her kid. She might become over protective and end up detaching her daughter from all normal social relationship.

In any case, Masuma's story exhibits the lack of concern among our parents about the consequences of their reaction to this kind of cases of abuse. As it will be discussed in a later chapter, most of the respondents opined that family members can play the most important role in fighting this crime. Without their support, there is little chance of raising voice against the perpetrators of sexual abuse.

### **Case 2:**

Reema had a very sweet, friendly relation with her brother-in-law. Her sister got pregnant when Reema was a college student. Reema's family sent her over to her sister's place. She was supposed to take care of her sister during pregnancy. Reema was happy to do it. But there was one big problem. The apparently decent and friendly brother-in-law of her started showing a very distasteful sense of humor. After a few days, Reema saw another face of her brother-in-law. Late at night she discovered him in her room in the dark. When Reema put on the light, he literally ran away from there. The next day Reema made up the excuse of upcoming exam and left the house. She could have talked to the family members about this thing. But it involves the prestige and future of marriage of her sister. So she decided to keep quiet.

### **Analysis:**

This is a classic case of vulnerability of women; no matter how educated she is, when it comes to facing perpetrators of sexual abuse. Reema was in a dilemma as to whether she would disclose this incidence or save her sister's marriage. She ran the risk of jeopardizing her relationship with her own sister, ruining her sister's marriage with that abuser, being scolded by her family members and other people in the society for getting too close to her

brother-in-law and so on. What started as a traditional, sweet relationship between two in-laws turned into a nightmare for Reema. It is important to note here that although she was getting signal from her in-law through his changing sense of humor, she was in a state of denial at that time unless the brother-in-law sneaked into her room at the middle of the night.

The incident definitely changed her relationship with her sister. She could neither inform her sister that she got married to a pervert whose child she was bearing at that time nor she could swallow the fact that she has to keep this as a secret and be nice and gentle to this man for the rest of her life just for the happiness of her sister.

The brother-in-law is an example of a two faced man who hides his face of lust under his jokes and ill humors. When his wife got pregnant and became unable to sexually satisfy him, he wasted no moment in chasing his sister-in-law. This reflects how narrowly that man perceives marriage and how little value he attaches to mental or spiritual aspects of marriage. It didn't bother him that he was betraying the woman who was carrying his child by hitting upon her own younger sister. The men in our society are socialized in such a way that gives them this impression that being the "better part" of the humanity; they are entitled to commit all sorts of sexual infidelity, without fearing any loss of face.

The free ride that men enjoy in the society and the patriarchal values that sustain such practices are responsible behind such occurrences.

### **Case 3:**

Rebecas's younger sister Monica had a love affair with her cousin Masum. Masum came off a family where parents taught their three sons to do everything they wish without leaving a trail behind. In other words every misdeed was justifiable provided that no proof of that deed can be found. Masum had no sister. He was an educated young man with a promising career as a lecturer of a public University. All in all he was a good catch. Masum and Monica were very close. They were physically involved. Everything went well until Monica found out that Masum had a relationship with another sister of Monica. Monica got furious. He threatened Masum to marry her or she would tell everyone about their relationship. Then they got married at Kazi office. No one in the family knew about it and after marriage they continued living with their respective families. Slowly Monica came to know about other misdeeds of Masum. He had relationships with many other girls. Many of them were relatives. He had this sick obsession for female domestic aides too and had physical relations with them. She came to know about these things through Masum's friends. At certain point Masum's family came to know about Masum and Monica's marriage and they vehemently opposed it. Masum himself said he had no intention to marry Monica. He was forced to do it. Masum got married to the daughter of a distant relative and flew to America. Monica became very shocked and upset at this. Out of frustration she tried to commit suicide. Though she failed at that effort, she is still not mentally stable. Masum's in-laws knew about his and Monica's marriage. Masum never sent any legal notice of divorce to Monica. Monica's family didn't raise their voice against this injustice.

### **Analysis:**

This is another story of the hypocrisy and double standard that patriarchy teaches us, specially the male members of the society. The culprit in this case surely got all the moral support of his family in carrying out his misdeeds. The most shocking part is that in this

case, Masum happens to come off a well off family with a good educational background. The education he received appeared to be a failure in teaching him the difference between right or wrong or developing the courage to take responsibility for his action. The lack of provision for moral and ethical training in our education system creates such hollow scholars.

But the most important training a child receives comes from the family. In Masum's case his parents were indifferent to their son's reckless behavior. For them it is ok for their son to flirt with girls, make false promises to them and then become physically involved and after satisfying his needs dump the girls provided that these incidents do not get public. They even tolerated their son's lust for female domestic aides.

Once Masum fell in trap, he was forced to marry Monica only to deceive her later. Monica got so upset that she even tried to commit suicide. Monica's family didn't extend their helping hand to their daughter. This again proves the blame-it-all-on-the-girl attitude. Also the whole story indicates something wrong in the way Monica and her sisters were raised in the family because both the sisters were involved with the same person.

The importance of family values and the need for ethical training are one more evident from the aforementioned story.

### **B. Distant Relatives and Family friends:**

Out of fifty three cases, seven cases of sexual harassment by distant relatives or family friends were recorded. Often we trust and respect people with whom we don't have any blood relations more than the people in our own family. Not all of them turn out be perverts as in the following cases. But a great many of them exploit this trust to entertain their sick desires. More often than not girl children and even grown up women are abused by those persons with whom they have a lovely relationship, whom they trust the most, who become a part of their family, their happiness, a part of their life. But these people do not appreciate this respect, trust and love for them. They would do anything to satisfy their hunger even at the cost of destroying the relationship cherished by the victim most. Following are some of the most striking case studies that were recorded during the course of the study. The rest are depicted in the annexure.

#### **Case 1:**

Lima is doing her masters on Political Science. The first experience of sexual harassment that she can remember happened in her life when she was a student of class four. There was this guy whom she used to call uncle. He was a good friend of his parents. He used to visit Lima's house frequently. He had a way with words. He was a very good narrator and loved to chat with his parents. He was nice enough to bring little gifts like chocolates or toys for Lima and her little brother. Soon he became a very favorite family friend. Everyone in the family liked him. He became Lima's favorite uncle. One day he came to visit them when Lima's parents were not around. Lima became very happy seeing him because she was expecting presents. But that day uncle came without any gifts. But he had this inappropriate plan to compensate for that. He said to Lima-"sorry dear! I forgot to bring you any present today. But don't worry. I'll make it up to you. Come on. Come here. Let me caress you." Saying this he put his hand beneath Lima's frock. Lima was scared and shocked. But as a reflex she screamed out loud and told him to take his hands off her body. Luckily the house maid was present in

the house at that time. Hearing her scream, she rushed to the living room where that “sweet uncle” was trying to abuse Lima. Seeing the maid uncle let Lima go from his grip. After the incident he never faced Lima again. The frequency of his visit to Lima’s house also reduced. Lima was hesitant to share this experience with her mother at first. But later she decided to talk to her mother about this.

### **Analysis:**

Taking advantage of a child in the absence of her parents testifies to the shrewd and sick mentality of the perpetrator of this crime. He was well organized too. He made his steps slowly and cautiously beginning with sweet words, kind behavior, and beautiful presents. At first he made an image of him as being a very nice and kind hearted fellow who is really good with kids and loves to spend time with them. He shows all the signs of being a pedophile. He gained their trust at first only to shatter it later to please his sick obsession with children.

Good thing is even though Lima was just a child back then; she could realize that what was being done to her was not good. So she screamed and the domestic aide came to rescue her. It scared the “favorite” uncle away. Another positive sign is the existence of a normal, healthy relationship between Lima and her mother. Though she was hesitant to talk about it at first, she nevertheless broke the ice and talked to her mother about this incident. It was a great comfort for her. Her mother’s awareness about the issue ultimately helped her lot to recover from that trauma and to be careful about these situations in future.

### **Case 2:**

Rupali is a village girl. When she was about 16/17 years old, a horrible experience of sexual harassment changed her whole life. There was this guy named Kamal who used to visit Ruplai’s house very often. He was a distant relative of Rupali’s family. As he was a relative, he had unquestioned access to the house. One day Kalam took Rupali to another relative’s house. She had no idea about the sinful plan Kalam and that relative had about Rupali. She went there having good faith on Kalam. But Kalam and his partner in this evil mission took the worst advantage of her trust. They tried to fulfill their distorted sexual desire with poor Rupali in that empty house. She was extremely lucky to escape that situation. She was totally demoralized at this event. She couldn’t talk to anyone about this. But it was hard to keep this little secret a secret in the village. Soon people started to know about this incident and rumors spread their branches. In a closed village society such circulation of rumor for a young unmarried girl was very deadly. So her parents wasted no time and got her married as soon as they could. Ruplai’s student life was finished right there and right then. All her dreams to get higher education and stand on her own feet were shattered due to that terrible incident.

### **Analysis:**

In the rural areas of Bangladesh, public disclosure of an incident of sexual harassment can be deadly for the victim. In our conservative rural society there is little scope of free mixing between men and women. Young, uneducated or poorly educated men mostly have no jobs and no provision of entertainment. They are not engaged with any productive work and have to spend their time idly by playing cards or watching Hindi movies, thanks to the spread of satellite television even to the rural areas of the country. So there is ample scope for these

young men to go to the dogs. Kalam is one such example. Having no meaningful thing to do, being deprived of decent entertainment and having easy access to a distant relative's house where there is a young unmarried girl, he plotted an evil design to have some fun. He didn't even think about the consequences of his action.

Poor Rupali could escape from that situation securing her much cherished and valued honor. But it didn't save her in the end. In the small village society, secrets are hard to keep. Though Ruplai herself didn't talk to anyone about this incident out of fear and shame, it went public. She became a big embarrassment for her family. She was doubly victimized. Now her parents were busy marrying her off to a good family because when things like this happen to a girl it becomes difficult to find a good husband for her. To save family honor and to seal the fate of Ruplai, her parents got her married. The girl who had all these dreams and ambitions about getting higher education and doing something for herself in life was shoved in to traditional domain of domestic life against her will and for a crime which she didn't commit, but which she suffered. Only because her gender identity, she didn't receive a fair verdict from this male dominated society.

### **Case 3:**

Mrs. Lubna Zaman lives in an apartment in Green Road all by herself. Her husband is stationed abroad. One of his friends took the advantage of this situation and under the pretext of keeping an eye on friend's wife used to come to her apartment very often. Apparently it seemed like a friendly gesture of care and kindness. One day when Mrs. Zaman's children were at school, that friend came to see her. Noticing that the house was empty he held her hand and touched her breasts. He then made a really vulgar proposal. He offered her to have an extra marital affair. He said that it will remain a secret between two of them and not even her husband would know about their illegal physical relation. Mrs. Zaman was taken aback by this improper behavior of her husband's friend. She couldn't understand how can decent man made such heinous proposal to his friend's wife behind his back. Though she refused that sick man, she still cannot get over that traumatic experience.

### **Analysis:**

This is again another story of a woman whose legal 'male guardian' is stationed abroad. Mrs. Zaman becomes only a sex object, not a respectable woman in the eyes of men in absence of his husband. In this case, her husband's friend tried to take advantage of the situation totally forgetting the repercussions of his actions. He didn't care much about how his friend would view him after knowing this incident. He thought Mrs. Zaman was an easy catch. He concluded that being separate from the husband for such a long time, Mrs. Zaman must be as willing to have an immoral secret affair as he is. But he made a small mistake in this calculation. His friend's wife was not a cheap, vulnerable woman without any sense of self esteem and honor. She boldly refused that fiend of her husband. But she couldn't talk to her husband about this because there is likelihood that she would be blamed for provoking such situation. So she found it wiser to swallow the whole humiliating event silently. Otherwise her married life could get more complicated.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Abused By Immediate Family Members**

Abuse by family members is the most alarming kind of abuse since in these cases the victims are being tortured by the very people who are supposed to protect them, shelter them from all kind of abuses. This is really sickening that even the closest family members like father or grandfather sometime turn out to be vicious monsters with perverted sexual desires. But the research finds that this type of abuses is not rare and the victims who suffer such abuses have to live a traumatic life for the rest of their lives. This once again proves that in this patriarchal society, women and girl children are not safe anywhere and from anyone. They have to live with the constant fear of being physically violated by their near and dear family members. Marital rape by husbands is another but common type of sexual abuse faced by women who are wives of so called educated men. This implies that after all those slogans for equality of women with men, all those efforts to educate women, all those endeavors to establish women's right over their body, women are still largely treated as sex objects and private property by men. Following are some of the most staggering cases of abuse by family members. The rest are depicted in the annexure.

#### **Case 1:**

Monwara is a doctor. She is a married woman with a little daughter. Her father-in-law used to live with her. As she is a working mother, she had to leave her 8 months old baby at home and go to work. The father-in-law and the domestic aide used to baby sit for her. She noticed that her child cried most of the time. At first she thought that the baby must be suffering from some kind of illness. So she concentrated on her medical treatment. But no illness was diagnosed. It was fishy. The baby didn't stop crying. Monwara couldn't figure out the problem. But she could understand it very well that something or someone was disturbing her child. She decided to keep an eye on the residents of the house secretly. One day she left home saying she was going to workplace. But she actually planned to see what happened in the house in her absence. So she secretly looked into the house and saw the most horrifying scene of her whole life. Her father-in-law was pushing his penis inside that infant's mouth and the baby was crying out loud. Monwara couldn't live with that demon anymore. She immediately informed her husband of it. But the husband didn't trust her. He blamed Monwara for making up stories to kick his father out of the house. The tension rose between husband and wife. Monwara knew what she saw with her own eyes and her husband was not ready to accept the fact that his father was the worst kind of child abuser. This psychological tension culminated in a divorce. Monwara was not ready to sacrifice the safety and security of her baby daughter. Luckily she got the custody of her baby.

#### **Analysis:**

This case study really shakes our widely believed and deeply respected notions of family bondage, values, and appropriateness of relationships. What could have been a sweet, loving, caring relationship between a grandfather and her little grand daughter turned out to be a relation of abuse and exploitation. The grandfather in this case took advantage of the mere infancy of the child, its inability to speak for itself and the trust and respect its parents devoted to him like all other ordinary parents to fulfill his sick needs. Surely he betrayed not

only the trust of these parents, but spelt a deadly blow to the age old conception of sanctity of relationships.

In this case the educated mother was smart enough to enquire into the problems which kept her child crying. This is a good sign. It proves that education raises consciousness among mothers about the safety and security of their children. She was brave and bold enough to fight with her in-laws' family regarding this matter. Poor Monwara had a really hard time convincing her family members that her own father-in-law could do something so awful to her child. None believed her. Not even her husband-the father of the child. This was normal given the nature of the accusation and the status of the accused in the family. It also denotes that even educated fathers are not always ready to open their eyes to the family problems which are most disturbing. In this case the father of the child was in a state of denial. Cognitive dissonance saved him from realizing the bitter truth that his beloved and respected father is a sadistic child abuser.

But being a mother, Monwara couldn't swallow the fact. She fought and fought unless she realized that to save her child from this demon the only option available for her to get a divorce. It was no doubt a difficult decision to take given the status of divorced women in our society. But Monwara made it for the sake of her child. She made a major sacrifice regarding her social status to save her child. But one thing for sure –she will never view the traditional sweet family relationships in the same way and she will teach her child not to trust even the closest relative. This will greatly hamper the normal social development of that child.

### **Case 2:**

Lamia is a student of class nine. Her little sister Laboni is in class three. Both of them go to the same school, but attend different shifts. Lamia is in day shift and Laboni is in morning shift. Lamia's mother usually takes Laboni to school in the morning. At that time she is all alone in the house. Her father is an independent businessman. He has no hard and fast rule of staying at home. He comes and leaves home whenever it is necessary. There is no fixed schedule for her father. Suddenly Lamia's father starts staying home in the morning. He starts leaving home when Lamia's mother comes back from school. But he doesn't do it out of care or security concern for her elder daughter. Not an inch of parental love or affection is involved in this apparently harmless, innocent, new grown habit of staying with the daughter in an empty house. But as a matter of fact it is an excuse of her father to remain close to Lamia and use her to satisfy his perverted sexual desires. Day by day her father's presence at home becomes intolerable to Lamia. When she reaches her limit she asks her mother not to leave the house when father is home. Lamia's mother couldn't understand the problem at first. She couldn't believe what Lamia told her about her father. It was beyond her imagination. How can a father sink so deep in the quicksand of lust and sexual desire that he tries to hold, kiss and touch his own daughter? Is it possible? She tries to keep Lamia in her protection. But how long can she do this? Here the source of insecurity for her child is not an outsider, not a stranger, but the very part of the family. It is the father of the child himself who is abusing her. Lamia's mother is having a hard time swallowing the fact that she has to live with this two faced demon who has no respect and love for proper human relationships.

## **Analysis**

Abuse by a family member can not go worse than this. The father whose very blood is running through Lamia's vein, molested Lamia in absence of her mother at home. This is such a reprehensible, dishonorable and sad incident. The damage done to Lamia can not be measured in any scale or by any attribute. Her morale, her faith in people, her self confidence and most importantly her wish to live are totally shattered. Poor lamia who is in her adolescent period needs the care and support of her family the most to protect herself from all evil eyes and hands of the world out there. But who knew that devil resides in her own home in the disguise of her father? Lamia is already a teenager and as such having tough time understanding her physical and mental changes. To add insult to this injury she gets this pervert father of her. One can only imagine how miserable life has become for this young girl in her own home.

Lamia's mother is an example of economically dependent woman who is afraid of society and can not disclose this blameworthy attitude of her husband and protect her child. No doubt people in the neighborhood and relatives alike will be more than interested to hear the stories of incest. But none would raise their voice against it or try to protect the family from the father. There is a strong possibility that the blame will be shouldered on the mother and the suffered daughter at the end of the day. Though lamia's mother wishes to keep her daughters away from her husband for their safety, she can not do it because she has to live under the same roof with this monster. Had she any other option to raise her children and had the people of the society be more understanding and kind, she wouldn't have to keep up with this creature she has to accept as her husband and the father of her children.

### **Case 3:**

Jahanara is a mother of three sons. Unfortunately she never had any say regarding her reproductive role. It has always been a case of her husband's choice. She never gets to decide whether or not she will bring a new life to this world. The most awful thing happened when she was 10 months pregnant with her third issue. Her husband was so inconsiderate that he forced her to have sexual relations even during such extremely sensitive and risky days of pregnancy. The husband was so thoughtless that he did it to her even the night before she delivered her third son. This poor woman does not have any right on her body. It's more like her husband's property. He gets to decide when and how to use it. That's why when the man was supposed to act as a caring husband and be the safest shelter for her wife, he turned into a vicious monster and treated his wife as a slave. Jahanra is still being the victim of the patriarchal attitude of her husband.

### **Analysis:**

This is one of the most common but unreported case of family abuse. Marital rape is still justified in this society. Reproductive decisions are largely made by husbands. But this is an extremely inhumane case where the husband of the victim didn't even care for the baby in the womb. The mother and the baby could both be hurt as a result of that unthoughtful and barbaric act of the husband. Their life could have been jeopardized. Poor Jahanara was truly helpless. She still is. Because her husband never changed. He still abuses the body of her wife whenever he feels like. The social taboo related to the sacred right of husband over his wife is still persistence despite the legal recognition of the act as a crime. Marital rape is still

considered to be too private a matter to be publicly discussed. Out of fear for social criticism and shame, Jahanara couldn't do anything about this physical abuse by her husband just like most other victims of marital rape.

**Case 4:**

Tama's parents found her a very good husband. Shanto-her husband was young, good looking, comes of a good family and an established banker by profession. Apparently he was a very nice, well educated, cultured young man-a very good choice as a potential groom. Tama had very little chance to know about her husband before marriage. This is nothing surprising since it was an arranged marriage. The groom's family came to see the potential bride. They like Tama very much and decided to get them married to each other right then and right there. So Tama got married to a complete stranger. That was not the problem. The problem was that this complete stranger whom she thought would be cultured enough to ease her up on her first night acted like a pervert sex freak. On the very first night before they can get a chance to know each other and warm up their lifelong bondage, Shanto ordered her to get undressed in front of him and then forced her to have sex with him. At that moment Tama felt like she was nothing but a piece of flesh to her husband. She was a mere sex object. It broke her heart. She couldn't talk to anyone about this because everyone in her family viewed her husband as an ideal one. It was such a shameful event that she couldn't manage to talk to anyone about it. Her family and friends know that Tama is a happily married girl. But Tama can never forget that awful memory of her first night of married life. She never feels happy.

**Analysis:**

In our society while parents are looking for bride they prefer those who are good looking, comes of a good family and established by profession. But this case depict that the people whom we thought would be cultured enough are not always what they seemed to be. When a girl gets married with a stranger one she must need time to acclimatize with that situation. But if at the very first night of marriage she feels that she is nothing but a sex object, the endearing relationship of husband and wife become vulnerable. This kind of marital rape is so common in our society, which people don't really though as a sexual harassment.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Abused By People at Work Place**

So much for the slogans about equal access to and participation of women in income generating activities. Even well educated working women having jobs at so called reputed private organizations are not immune from the filthy desires and attitudes of their male colleagues. 17 respondents narrated incidents of sexual harassment at workplace. This is an alarming tendency. If women have to concentrate more on protecting their body, securing their much honored 'chastity' in this male dominated professional world, then there will be little scope for them to ensure upward mobility in their profession because most of the time they will be preoccupied with protecting their honor than with their work. Following are two most stunning stories of sexual abuse at workplace. The rest are depicted in the annexure.

#### **Case 1:**

Benu works for a private firm. But the office environment is really not gender friendly over there. She is a divorced woman. Her male colleagues always make up excuses to harass her. Under the pretext of having coffee or some other thing they keep annoying her. Sometimes she thinks it's her marital status as a divorced woman which actually encourages men to disturb her in that way. Just because she is a single woman, her male colleagues find it convenient to call her up late at night and use very foul language. They are not afraid to make indecent proposals to her. But Benu cannot protest against these men as they are her colleagues. She has to face them everyday in the office. One day a colleague asks for her help saying that her wife is very sick and he could use a helping hand. He actually forces Benu to go with him to his house. But his house was empty. No one was there. The colleague made up that story so that he could bring Benu to his house and abuse her. She escapes from there luckily. That's not all. Her senior officers often come up with filthy proposals. When she refuses those proposals they withhold her salary and bonus. When she informs the superior authority about this, she is rebuked and held responsible for these situations. Instead of getting justice, she is being blamed for her own misery which is actually brought by her spoiled colleagues. They start tarnishing her image by propagating rumors about her character. The whole situation becomes unbearable for Benu and she quits her job.

#### **Analysis:**

This story shows how this society and particularly its male members view a single, divorced woman. A woman who plucks up the heart to bring an end to an unhappy married life on her own is blamed for not being compromising enough. She is often branded as a characterless woman. And without a legal male guardian like that of a husband, a woman of Benu's age is considered as a free public good for males. As there is no male guardian to watch over Benu she is treated as an unprotected woman by her male colleagues who are always ready to take advantage of this supposedly vulnerable situation of Benu. That's why they do not feel hesitant to call her up at the middle of the night to make foul proposals. To them, this kind of 'bad woman' deserves this kind of treatment.

Benu's misery also testifies to the fact how gender insensitive our private sector is. Even her superior officers refuse to believe that she was being harassed absolutely for no reason.

Instead they followed that age old blame-it-on-her approach and accused her of provoking such attitude of her colleagues. Moreover the absence of any legal mechanism to check this kind of sexual harassment makes the situation more difficult for independent woman like Benu.

Ultimately even a strong, self confident and qualified woman like Benu is forced to give up her job to get rid of sexual harassment at workplace. If women are being met with this type of hostility and perversion at workplace, there is little hope that more women will come forward in the job market and turn themselves into skilled manpower instead of dependent segments of the society. As unfortunate as it sounds, patriarchy in this case becomes successful again in driving a courageous woman to drive off the public sphere and shove into the domain of 'private'.

### **Case 2:**

Pipasa works at a private farm. Faisal is his colleague. They have very friendly relation. Over time it turns into a romantic relationship. They decided to get married shortly. One day Pipasa goes to the hostel where Faisal resides. There they have physical relation and soon it becomes like a routine. Suddenly Pipasa comes to know that Faisal is already married to some other woman. She becomes heartbroken. He trusted this man with her everything and this is the reward she gets in return. She decides to break up with that cheat. But Faisal had something else in his mind. He starts blackmailing Pipasa. He threatens to expose her little secret to public. Moreover he says-"you have already gone physical with me. So it doesn't matter any more whether we get married or not. There is no point in ruining the physical pleasure. What do you say?"

Pipasa is still suffering for this one huge mistake she made blindly. She wants to get rid of this immoral, illegal relation. But the man doesn't want to let her go. She requested Faisal to get a divorce. But Faisal doesn't want that either. Pipasa has had to abort her illegal child for a number of times. Life has become like a hell for her. She is locked inside her own prison.

### **Analysis:**

A moment's mistake, an emotional blindness, an unexplained faith can ruin a person's life forever. Pipasa is a prime example of it. Had she been more inquisitive about her boyfriend and more cautious about the consequences of her action, she wouldn't have to see these days. She is entrapped in her own cage. It is interesting to note here that even though Pipasa is considering it the end of her life, Faisal is not having the same thoughts because in this society woman's honor is fragile and depends on her sexual purity. But men are allowed to have sexual pleasure at their will and immune from any kind of social criticism or condemnation let alone punishment. So when Pipasa is facing an intolerable moral dilemma regarding this illegitimate relationship, Faisal doesn't even bother about the consequences Pipasa has to face for the consecutive abortions.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Abused By Others**

Out of fifty nine cases, five cases of sexual harassment by others were recorded, which includes people as van driver, friend's father, baby-sitter or neighbors to the next door. In a conservative society like ours girl children often become victims of submerged sexual desires of people whom the parents thought as care-giver. Most of the time parents of the victims do not even suspect the ill motives of the perpetrators. The scary part is that sometimes parents or guardians themselves trust the abusers as the baby sitters. Following are some of the most striking case studies that were recorded during the course of the study. The rest are depicted in the annexure.

#### **Case 1:**

Tumpa was seven years old. She used to go to school in school van. Tumpa's physical growth was better than other kids who were her co-passengers. So she looked a bit older than that. One day the van driver did a strange thing. He suddenly pulls over near an alley. Then he bought all the kids chocolates. Then He asks all of them to step down from that van except Tumpa. She told Tumpa to sit on that van and have her chocolate. He also sat beside her and touched her private organs. Tumpa couldn't understand his intention. But she felt uncomfortable and getting back home she told her mother about this. Her mother rushed to the school and reported it to the authority. The authority called for that van driver. But suspecting punishment he fled. Nobody could trace him again.

#### **Analysis:**

The incident surely freaked out a seven year old Tumpa. One can only imagine how helpless she felt when that van driver molested her on that van in an alley where nobody could come to her help. This again reminds us the necessity to make proper background investigation before appointing someone as caretaker of children in any designation-be that a baby sitter or a school van driver. If the school authority had proper information about that driver, they could have caught him and taken necessary disciplinary actions. It's a good thing that Tumpa's mother realized the gravity of the situation and hurried to the school to teach that culprit a lesson. It indicates her awareness which is very necessary for a mother to protect her children from any kind of abuse.

#### **Case 2:**

Keya had a terrible first day at school. She was just a kid and went to school for the first time with her mother. Her mother herself was a teacher of that school. A man took her to his lap under the pretext of cuddling her. As her mother had duty in the school, she left Keya with that man. The man was familiar to her mother. They knew each other from before. When her mother left them together, he started kissing her neck unnecessarily. Little Keya didn't like that touch. Then the man made up this excuse of buying her something and took her away from that place. Finding a relatively quiet place he placed Keya's hand on his penis. This incident had a very negative impact on Keya. After that incident whenever he saw that man around the school or saw any other man cuddling any other child she used to have a panic attack. But she never talked about this incident to anyone, not even her mother. At the age of 22 she first disclosed this experience to the interviewer with tears in her eyes.

### **Analysis:**

Keya's mother surely was not conscious enough about child molestation though she was an educated working woman. Her indifference to the safety of her daughter, made her first day at school the worst day of her life. She trusted a man who was neither her family member nor a friend with the task of babysitting her little daughter. He was only a familiar face and Keya's mother thought it was enough to trust this man. No doubt Keya had a terrible first day at school. The worst part is she could never talk to anyone –not even to her mother about this. She kept that secret inside her and carried this intolerable pain and fear all by herself until the investigators of this study asked her to open up. It indicates that Keya never had a friendly family environment where these kinds of incidents can be talked about. It surely damaged her self confidence, self –esteem and always made her feel unprotected and vulnerable.

### **Case 3:**

Lutfia Zaman is a working mother. She has a two year old girl child. To baby sit her she appointed a male domestic aide. He was about 14/15 years old. One day she notices that her daughter was probably suffering from a urine infection. So she takes her to a doctor. Doctor immediately recognizes that this child was not a patient of urine infection. Something else was bothering her. He then explained to Lutfia that her child might be a victim of sexual abuse. The symptom the baby was showing indicated something like that. The doctor advised her to keep an eye on the people who took care of her baby. Lutfia fired her aide right away. Now her baby daughter is ok.

### **Analysis:**

This is a common problem faced by working woman. Abuse by babysitters-be that a mental, physical or sexual abuse-goes unreported but happens every, now and then. In this case the parents forgot to make the very necessary background check of the domestic aide. Of course only background check sometimes is not enough. But the baby's parents were quick to identify the problem talking to the doctor and they did the right thing firing the aide right away.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **Summary and Recommendations**

In this study, the two hundred nineteen case histories of women victims of sexual harassment were collected from 50 respondents. Out of which analysis of nineteen selected cases are presented in the report. These cases showed how the women of our society sexually harassed both physically and mentally in different phases of their life cycle, how problems are dealt with, resolved or left unresolved, and the consequences such situations entail for the women, their families and their work. Our women, girls and girl children became victims of this unbearable crime like sexual harassment in place everywhere-from home to school, workplace to shopping malls. Even they are victimized by their family members, close relatives and friends.

#### **Teachers**

The study indicates the moral bankruptcy prevailing in our society. It presents a number of cases of sexual harassment of women and girls of different ages by different categories of people such as teachers, relatives, friends, pedestrians etc.

Teachers in all society are hailed in a very high position. In a conservative society like Bangladesh, teachers are treated as second parents. Unfortunately some teachers take advantage of this trust and respect and use it to satisfy their pervert desires. As distasteful and pathetic as it sounds, teachers at educational institutes, coaching centers and/or private tutors stand as the second largest category of abusers in this study.

The victims abused by teachers could never admire a normal teacher-student relationship and this kind of perception is never healthy for a person's social life, can shatter the confidence, and becomes a nightmare for the victim which may haunt her for years together. There is a pattern of insecurity and shame experienced by most of the victims. However, liberal family culture where sexually harassed girls can freely discuss the incidence can help a long way in fighting such silent crimes. In the case of Mahbuba, Mahbuba and her mother had a healthy relationship where they could talk about the incident of abuse. Yet there is problem of raising voice against socially respectable people when they do something abominating. The power and prestige of that culprit teacher was so high that they dared not utter any word against him. This is also a proof of patriarchal culture which teaches us from the very beginning of our life that whether the abused girl/women is responsible for her grief or not, exposing such event will definitely cause harm to the honor of victim herself and her family. So even when Mahbuba's mother was compassionate enough to console her and took efforts to heal her pain, she was not strong enough to seek justice because she feared that it might become another cause of harassment for her child given the teacher's reputation.

However for a supportive mother, Mahbuba ended up as a successful doctor. Now Mahbuba is vocal on this issue because of her education and exposure to a different culture which has given her the perception and strength. This awareness might save her children from a lot of trouble and help them break away with the demeaning patriarchal values which choke the voices of rebel against sexual abuse in the name of false "honor" and "dignity".

Moreover, the culture of certain departments of the University promotes a patron-client relationship between teachers and students. Any kind of protest against teacher might reflect on the academic result of students, for which raising voice can be really difficult. Most importantly there is no black and white rule describing precisely the definition of sexual harassment both physical and verbal and punishments for such behavior in the Universities. This actually makes it difficult to file formal complaint against any teacher.

### **Relatives**

A considerable number of relatives were identified as abusers in this study. Girl children are often become victims of submerged sexual desires of relatives both within and outside the house. Parents are in general unaware of such situations that close relatives can be perpetrators for their girls and do not even suspect the ill motives of them. Sometimes parents or guardians themselves trust the abusers as the baby sitters. Taking advantage of this trust, some close relatives fulfill their distasteful desires. Most of the time parents or guardians react negatively when they come to know about these cases of abuses. Some of them hold their own children responsible for such occurrences. Instead of seeking explanation from the perpetrator, parents try to keep it as a secret fearing dishonor and shame for the family.

In situations where religiously and socially sex relationship is prohibited, the case studies revealed incidents of incest sexual harassment. The father, whose very blood is running through Lamia's vein, molested Lamia in absence of her mother at home. This is such a reprehensible, dishonorable and sad incident. The damage done to Lamia can not be measured in any scale or by any attribute. Her morale, her faith in people, her self confidence and most importantly her wish to live are totally shattered. Lamia's mother is an example of economically dependent woman who is afraid of society and can not disclose this blameworthy attitude of her husband and protect her child.

There is another story of the hypocrisy and double standard that patriarchy teaches us, specially the male members of the society. The most important training a child receives comes from the family. In Masum and Monica's case Masum's parents were indifferent to their son's reckless behavior and provided all the moral supports for carrying out his misdeeds. On the other hand Monica's family didn't raise their voice against this injustice and neither extended their helping hand to their daughter. Thus patriarchal values still nurtured in our families when it comes to protecting our girl children from sexual abuse.

Like most other mother in rural area, Masuma's mother perceives that it is the duty of a girl to protect herself from sexual lust of men. The mere fact that Masuma was abused by her own paternal uncle indicated that she was a total failure when it came to protecting her honor. The lack of concern among our parents about the consequences of their reaction to this kind of cases of abuse may lead to silencing of raising voice against the perpetrators of sexual abuse. The repercussion of that event was far reaching. Masuma developed a sense of guilt, anger and insecurity inside her at her mother's behavior. Such incidents of abuse happened in her life for many more times. But she didn't dare talk to her mother about that. May be that is what encouraged the abusers to keep on with abuses.

The men in our society are socialized in such a way that gives them this impression that being the "better part" of the humanity; they are entitled to commit all sorts of sexual infidelity, without fearing any loss of face. Reema's case reflects how narrowly that man perceives marriage and how little value he attaches to mental or spiritual aspects of marriage. It didn't

bother him that he was betraying the woman who was carrying his child by hitting upon her own younger sister. The traditional sweet relationship between brother-in-law and sister-in-law is common in our society. Taking advantage of this relationship the girls are often abused verbally and physically by their brother-in-laws.

Public disclosure of an incident of sexual harassment can be deadly for the victim and the family. In the case of Rupali the parents got her married to avoid social embarrassment. The girl who had all these dreams and ambitions about getting higher education and doing something for herself in life was shoved in to traditional domain of domestic life because of sexual harassment by one of her relatives.

### **Husband:**

Marital rape is still justified in this society. Reproductive decisions are largely made by husbands. The social taboo related to the sacred right of husband over his wife is still persistence despite the legal recognition of the act as a crime. Marital rape is still considered to be too private a matter to be publicly discussed. Out of fear for social criticism and shame, Jahanara couldn't do anything about this physical abuse by her husband just like most other victims of marital rape.

### **Workplace**

Women also face physical and verbal sexual harassment at workplace. Benu's misery testifies to the fact how gender insensitive our private sector is. Even her superior officers refuse to believe that she was being harassed absolutely for no reason. Instead they followed that age old blame-it-on-her approach and accused her of provoking such attitude of her colleagues. Moreover the absence of any legal mechanism to check this kind of sexual harassment makes the situation more difficult for independent woman like Benu. If women are being met with this type of hostility and perversion at workplace, there is little hope that more women will come forward in the job market and turn themselves into skilled manpower instead of dependent segments of the society. As unfortunate as it sounds, patriarchy in this case becomes successful again in driving a courageous woman to drive off the public sphere and shove into the domain of 'private'.

The free ride that men enjoy in the society and the patriarchal values that sustain such practices are responsible behind such occurrences. Sometimes the perpetrator prepares the ground for sexual abuse of the victims with pretension of love and false promises of marriage. Young girls are often fall into such traps and get into trouble. It is interesting to note here that even though Pipasa is considering it the end of her life, Faisal is not having the same thoughts because in this society woman's honor is fragile and depends on her sexual purity. But men are allowed to have sexual pleasure at their will and immune from any kind of social criticism or condemnation let alone punishment. So when Pipasa is facing an intolerable moral dilemma regarding this illegitimate relationship, Faisal doesn't even bother about the consequences Pipasa has to face for the consecutive abortions.

In our society even married women cannot stay alone when husband is abroad. Because male associates of the family and friends think her as an easy object for sexual abuse.

## **Recommendation**

- There should be an institutionalized code of conduct for teachers and students and enacting laws against sexual abuse in the campus.
- There should be a code of conduct against sexual abuse in the offices incorporated in the gender policy.
- Friendly family environment is more required for the sexually harassed victims where these kinds of incidents can be talked about. Without the support of family the victim will surely lose her self confidence, self –esteem and always made her feel unprotected and vulnerable
- The importance of family values and the need for ethical training should be promoted.
- Support of the family members is essential for the victims to share their agonies and protest against the crime.
- Mothers in general should be more compassionate and supportive in such situations.
- The parents should be cautious in protecting their children even though the perpetrators maybe their close relatives or friends.
- The importance of informing adolescent boys and girls about sexuality and making them aware about gender relations cannot be over emphasized. Some of this teaching/awareness raising should take place at school. With boys, constructions of aggressive masculinities should be questioned. Human rights, women’s rights, children’s right - the right to respect and personal integrity – even among married couples - should be taught at school and messages should be transmitted to the different age groups of the children.
- More research should be carried out to get a better grasp of problems, analyze causes, uncover what is hidden, silenced, misnamed. It could provide useful resources to be used in the politics of nomenclature and considerably enrich the discourse on violence against women.
- Awareness on sexual harassment should be created through mass media.
- Women should represent as respectable individual and not as sex commodity in mass media.
- The primary education curriculum should include Moral education so that sexual harassment may consider as a crime.
- Introducing sex education through curriculum and text book.
- Create social awareness through seminar, workshop and cultural program.
- Immediate attempt should be taken for enactment of essential laws and implementation of existing law.

- There should be a separate government department to ensure implementation of laws and deal with eradication of sexual harassment.
- Generally the perpetrators use the environment in order to leave no evidence of sexual harassment. As such the authority should investigate and assist on the basis of the verbal report of the victim and take necessary action.
- Easy access to detestable film, advertisement and books should be prohibited.
- Girl's participation in education should be increased in order to build them as self confident, self aware, self dependent and respectable individual of the society.
- Men should be come forward to join in the movement to eliminate sexual harassment.
- Messages on elimination of sexual harassment against women should be presented through Billboards.
- The perpetrators should be socially exposed and segregated.
- Social values regarding respect for women should be improved.
- Mindset of the people of the society especially the men should be changed.
- There should be organizations at various levels from local to central with mandate to protect women and girls against sexual harassment.

## **Annex-1**

### **Women's Lifelong Experience on Sexual Harassment**

#### **ADDITIONAL CASE STUDIES**

##### **Abuse by teacher:**

##### **Case 6:**

This story was narrated by a respondent whose roommate had this terrible experience of being abused by her private tutor for quite some time during her adolescent period. Her roommate's name is Rina (not her real name). When Rina was a student of class xiii, she had a tutor who always made up some excuses to touch her. From the very beginning it was quite uncomfortable for her. Initially his action was limited to touching and holding fingers. Rina couldn't protest. But very soon the frequency of this uncomfortable touch started increasing. From fingers to wrist and from wrist to upwards. Poor Rina devised her own coping mechanism to protect herself from such abuse. She used to sit at the opposite end of the reading table while studying with that tutor. She tried to enlarge the width of the table by drawing the drawer as outward as possible. But this couldn't stop the tutor from abusing her. Rina was quite helpless at that time as she couldn't talk to anyone about this. Her study was hampered. She couldn't concentrate as she lived with constant fear of being sexually abused. The silence of Rina made the tutor more aggressive. He even went to the point of asking her out on the occasion of Durga Puja (the largest event of veneration of the Hindus). He asked Rina to convince her parents and get permission to go out with him. By that time Rina had had enough. She couldn't take it anymore. She plucked up her heart and consulted with her sister about this problem. From then her sister tried to be around Rina and her tutor while they were studying. Later her mother also came to know about this problem. One day, at the absence of her sister, the tutor grabbed Rina's hand. Rina felt desperate. She did a courageous thing. She screamed as soon as the tutor grabbed her hand. After that incident, she never received tuition from that tutor. But the incident left a deep scar in Rina's mind. Still she cannot stop thinking what would happen to her if she had to go out with that pervert tutor on Durga Puja day. That memory still haunts her.

##### **Case 7:**

Mitu still feels embarrassed talking about this teacher in her school who had a habit of unnecessarily touching female students. This particular teacher was really shrewd. He used to address almost all the female students as "Maa" (mother). He actually used it as a way to come closer to female students so that no one can question his intentions. He would come to the class and move his hands in the back of the female students and say "have you learnt your lesson Maa?" One day he asked Mitu to come forward and recite a poem in front of him. As Mitu was reciting the poem, the teacher ran his hands in her back. Then the hand started going down. At that point Mitu felt so uncomfortable and scared that she moved away from him. Mitu says that like her many other students also suffered the same harassment by that teacher in her school.

**Case 8:**

Sonia used to be a somewhat inattentive student. Study never featured in her list of favorite tasks. Her mother used to scold her all the time for this when she was a student Eleventh standard, a private tutor was appointed for her. After the first few days the teacher started acting differently. One day he intentionally touched Sonia's feet under the table with his own feet. At first Sonia thought it was just an accident. Later she came to realize that her teacher tries to make physical contacts on purpose. She notified her mother of this. Her mother didn't trust her. She thought Sonia was making up these stories to skip her lessons. As she had a reputation of a "not-so-good" student, Sonia's mother thought that the complaint was just another excuse of Sonia to avoid studying. Instead of getting any help from her mother, Sonia was rebuked for her behavior. Things started getting worse after that. The tutor got even more outrageous and tried to grab Sonia's hand on different pretexts. This was hard for teenager Sonia. She was saved after shedding a lot of tears on this issue. She thinks that if her mother had helped her, the tutor couldn't be so extreme and continue harassing her like that.

**Case 9:**

This is the story of a respondent's mother. That poor woman had to sacrifice her student life due to a horrible experience she had right after she started her school life. As a child, she used to receive affection behavior from her teachers. There was a Hindu teacher. He would take the respondent's mother in his lap and touch her sensitive organs. Nobody would realize his intention. It would look like an innocent act of affection. The poor child could understand that what was happening to her was not good. She felt uncomfortable. She tried to avoid the teacher everytime he called for her. She got so scared that she left school and never resumed her study. She grew up with a feeling of anguish and hatred towards teachers.

**Case 10:**

As Sonali was getting prepared for her junior scholarship exam, her parents decided to appoint a tutor for her. That tutor used to give tuition at this own home. He was a very famous elderly teacher. But he had this disgraceful habit of touching the breasts of little girls in front of everyone while tutoring. The same thing happened to Sonali. When the tutor came towards her, he would invariably touch her breasts and he would do it in front of the little boys who were also his students. He had no shame or a minimum sense of decency. She still cannot forget that horrifying experience of her childhood. It still haunts her. Whenever she remembers this, she becomes hurt and insecure all over again.

**Case 11:**

Ruma (Not her real name) was sexually abused by her Huzur (a title for a teacher who teaches the Holy Quran) at mosque. When she was a little girl, she used to go to mosque with her brother. One day the Huzur said-"What a sweet girl! Come! Sit on my lap and study". Ruma was around 6/7 years old then. She sat on his lap and felt that Huzur was touching her private organs. Ruma was hurt. She felt physical pain. She couldn't properly understand what was happening to her. But she really got scared. She stopped going to mosque. When she grew up she came to realize the true intension of that Huzur. If she didn't stop going to the mosque, God knows what would happen to her!

**Abuse by close relatives:****Case 4:**

Mina was raised in an extended family. She spent her childhood amidst cousins. There was this cousin who was about 13/14 years elder than Mina. The problem started when she was only a student of class one. That cousin used to disturb her in many ways. He used to call her or make vulgar gestures. It was really painful for Mina. Though she was just a child then, she could feel that her cousin's motive behind this attention was not innocent. She felt helpless. She couldn't ask for help from anyone. Not a single person in that large extended family was caring and trustworthy enough to take care of this situation. Things were more complicated since Mina's mother used to like that cousin very much. She was very affectionate to that boy who was source of constant insecurity to her own daughter. She couldn't suspect any evil drive in that boy. So Mina couldn't talk about this problem to her mother either. Whenever that cousin called for her, Mina got terrified. That terror still haunts her. She has left behind those terrible days of childhood. Nonetheless the memory is still fresh in her mind. It is just like yesterday. The scar still hurts. Mina could never get over those agonizing memories. She still cannot trust men although she knows not all men are equally evil like her cousin. She still maintains a distance from men because that keeps her comfortable.

**Case 5:**

Runa decided to get admitted into Kustia University after getting her higher secondary degree. To take the exam she had to live in an aunt's house for sometime. On the day of admission test she went to Kustia with her cousin. In Kustia they boarded on a relative's house. It was a small family. Both husband and wife were service holders. So they went to their workplace early in the morning leaving Runa and her cousin in the house. There was no one else. The cousin made the worst use of that empty house. He raped Runa. Runa became unconscious while she was being raped. When she woke up, she found out to her horror that her clothes were all drenched in blood. She couldn't talk to anyone about this. Not even to her parents. It was too shameful an event to describe to anyone. But she had to talk to someone to get relief from this pain. So she talked to her cousin about this. She still carries the wound of that horrible memory in her mind.

**Case 6:**

Mukta's father is a landlord. This is the story of one of their tenants. A girl named moni, her brother and her paternal uncle rented that apartment. The girl used to live there for the purpose of her education. Late at night when the brother was asleep, the uncle would come to Moni's room, lie on her bed and hold her. Moni got really scared. She came to Mukta's apartment and told her mother about the problem. She requested mukta to let her sleep in her room. Mukta and her mother kept mony in their apartment under their protection as long as they could. Moni never talked to her brother about this. But she couldn't take this anymore. She quit her study and got back home.

**Case 7:**

Rebeca was a teenager when she encountered this situation. He was about 14 or 15 years old. She went to her aunt's house and stayed there over night. She was sleeping alone in a room putting off all the lights. Late at night she woke up realizing that a man was sitting next to her on her bed. The man was touching her body. Ruhi was so scared that she ran away from that room and stormed into her cousin's room. She slept on her cousin's bed for the rest of the night. She came back home in the morning. So who was that mystery guy? Who was that pervert? Ruhi could identify him the very moment he touched her that night. It was none other than her uncle himself.

**Case 8:**

Joya was a little girl (about 8/10 years old) when this cousin of her used to come to their house. At first it was an innocent gesture of affection like hugging. Later it extended to touching sensitive parts of her body. Little Joya couldn't understand these things. She thought these were touches of affection. The most amazing part is that she came to realize that it was an act of sexual harassment only at the time of giving this interview to the researchers.

**Abuse by distant relatives and Family friends:****Case 4:**

Nina was a student of class four when she first encountered an abuser. Her parents and some family friends decided to take a tour to Teknaf that year. The family accompanying them had a young man with them. The man was 20/22 years old. When the two families were getting back to Dhaka, Nina had to sit on the lap of that man in the car. They sat on the front seat beside driver. In the next row Nina's parents were sitting. They made the return journey at night. It was very dark. Everyone inside the car was sleeping. Suddenly Nina woke up having an uncomfortable feeling. At first she couldn't figure out what was wrong. Then she realized that the man on whose lap she was sleeping was relentlessly touching her breasts. Though she was too young to understand that she was being abused, her guts told her that something awful was happening to her. She had to go through this torture for about two and a half hours. The man didn't stop touching her even for a minute. It is interesting enough to note that Nina felt so scared that she couldn't talk to her parents about this.

**Case 5:**

Nadia was a very little girl when she first experienced an incident of sexual harassment. She was about 6/7 years old. That year she went to the village to visit her grandparents with her family. She was having a very good time over there visiting lots of relatives and family friends. One day her aunt took her to a relative's house. The old man who was the head of that family was like a grandfather to her in relation. They treated her very well. When they were returning to her grandparent's house, that grandfather accompanied them. Nadia and that old man whom she called "Nana" took the same rickshaw. Nadia was enjoying this little "journey by Rickshaw". But suddenly "nana" said-"sweetheart! This is going to be a bumpy ride. You might fall from rickshaw. So why don't you come closer to me and sit tight?" saying this he held her tight and persistently pressed her private parts. Nadia couldn't ask for help from anyone as other rickshaws carrying her relatives were far behind their one. She had to put up with this pain as long as she was on that rickshaw. She wanted to get down but couldn't do so. As the abuser was a respectable senior relative she couldn't dare to say anything about him to anyone.

**Case 6:**

Neetu was a student of higher secondary level when she faced an awful experience of sexual harassment. She was about 16/17 years old. As both of her parents were service holders, they were not home most of the time. Neetu and her little sister used to be all by themselves in the house. One day Nadia was sitting in their living room and her sister was in her bedroom. At that time a relative whom she used to call uncle knocked at the door. Neetu welcomed him happily. After all it was a familiar face. When the uncle came to know that her parents were not around, the apparently gentleman uncle showed another face of him. He pulls Neetu

towards him. Neetu tried to get away from him sensing his evil motives. She started calling her sister. As the sister rushed to the living room, the uncle left their house. She hadn't been able to talk about this to anyone out of shame. She still feels mentally disturbed whenever she remembers that incident.

**Case 7:**

Mr. Hasan left his newly married wife to resume his job in the U.S.A. He planned to bring his wife later when necessary paper works are done. But in his absence one of his friends started to disturb his wife. This man would make up excuses to come to his house and talk to his wife for hours. His actions were not limited to making small talks. He used to make slang all the time. One day there was no one else in the house. That wicked friend started kissing the wife. Later she told everyone in the family about this. The family was quite supportive and they quickly came forward to help her out. That's how she was rescued from the evil grips of that annoying man.

**Abuse by family members:**

**Case 5:**

Neela is preparing for her upcoming S.S.C. exam. She is working hard for this. She studies late at night. She finds it conducive to study when her parents along with her two siblings go to bed and the whole house becomes quiet. Neela has an older brother. He has earned his reputation as a bad boy in the family. He has totally gone to the dogs. He gets back home at midnight. Since Neela is the only person who keeps awake at that hour of night, she opens the door for her brother. One night someone knocks at their door. Neela immediately recognizes it as her brother. Opening the door she goes back to her room and resumes study. Suddenly she feels the presence of someone behind her. She looks back and finds her elder brother standing behind her. Before she can understand what is going on, her brother holds her indecently and tries to take her to bed. Neela screams out loud. Her parents rush to her room and found Neela in the grip of their eldest child. They saved Neela from that monster that night.

**Case 6:**

Mallika Zaman is a 54 year old married woman. She lives in a luxurious apartment in a residential area of Dhaka. Her husband is stationed in Japan. He comes back home after long periods of time. Their only daughter Tusi is a student of class nine. Her neighbors know that she works for some N.G.O. For office related purposes, her male colleagues visit her frequently. But as time passes by, Mrs. Zaman's neighbors come to realize that she is a shrewd woman who is physically involved with many guys in the absence of her husband. She encourages all her lovers to visit her apartment. She even encourages her teen age daughter to go physical with older men. Tusi is not comfortable with these things. She actually hates this kind of behavior. Whenever she protests, her mother tortures him mentally. She even beats Tusi for this. Poor Tusi has nowhere to run, no place to go.

**Case 7:**

Mrs. Dilruba Zaman is a middle aged married woman with one daughter named Nadi. She works for a multi national corporation. Her husband is a businessman and has to spend most of his time abroad due to business purposes. Their daughter Nadi is in class nine.

Rabeya is Dilruba's colleague at work and a very good friend in personal life. They socialize at the family level. Rabeya's son Rahat is in eleventh standard. He frequently visits Dilruba's house. Rahat is crazy about "Aunty Dilruba". Dilruba also likes this kid a lot. At certain point both Rabeya and Dilruba decides that when their children grow up they will get them married to each other.

After reaching this decision, Dilruba becomes kind of aggressive. Every time Rahat comes to their house; she sends him to her daughter's room straight instead of treating him in the living room. She puts them together in Nadi's room and locks them in. She encourages the children and creates a situation conducive to make physical relations. One day one of Dilruba's relatives comes to her house and finds Nadi and Rahat in a very indecent situation. He becomes astonished to see that these two minors are doing all these things under the nose of a mature and responsible parent in the house. When he charges Dilruba about the situation, she freaks her out with another shocking revelation. Dilruba believes that it is important for her daughter to go physical with Rahat to awake the sexual desire in her. She also believes that without this her daughter's youth and tenderness and physical beauty will not blossom. That's why she is Pushing Nadi-her own teen age daughter to a dangerous path of illegal, perverted, immoral sexual relations. She doesn't care about the repercussions.

### **Abuse by Husbands:**

#### **Case 8:**

Ranu was lucky enough to marry the man she loved. Asif was a very caring boyfriend before marriage. She defied her parents and got married to him. But soon after her marriage she realized that she did not know her husband anymore. He was like a completely different person. Ranu found that her husband was a hard core drug addict. At first she tried to counsel Asif and encourage him to get rid of that deadly addiction. But Asif paid no heed to her. Asif became so addicted to drugs that he quit his job. As Ranu left her family for Asif, she couldn't ask for their help in that situation. She was on her own. She had to fight all alone to bring back her husband to a normal healthy life and a responsible relationship. But the task was harder than she thought. He started to extract money from Ranu to buy his precious toxics. When he came back at night, he would devour on Ranu's body just like a beast. One day Ranu's neighbor noticed black bite marks on her face. At last Ranu found someone with whom she can share her pain. The next door neighbor was kind enough to manage a seat in the Working Women's Hostel for Ranu. Ranu could never again love anyone. Now she is a fifty year old woman. She is single and she lives all by herself. One single mistake made her whole life messy.

#### **Case 9:**

Jaba's parents married her off right after her Higher Secondary examination. As it happens in most other cases of arranged marriage in this country, Jaba and her husband didn't get the opportunity to know each other well before marriage. Though Jaba saw her husband a few times before, they couldn't move beyond courtesy conversation. She was really scared about her married life. She was concerned about the demands her husband might make on her on the very first night. How could she ask for some time to her husband and request him to go slow in this new relationship? She kept thinking and thinking. Suddenly a plan hit her. On the wedding day she was taken to a beauty parlor to make the necessary preparations. At that time she went to the washroom and put on a trouser underneath her petticoat. She made five

or six very tight knots with the ribbon of the trouser so that her husband could not put it down. At last came the dreadful night. Just as Jaba feared, her husband was quick to undress her. But he could not untie the knots of the trouser with his bare hands. Then he tried it with a blade and failed again. Then he did something awful. He took her to bed and even being a husband physically abused her. That night was like a nightmare for her. That long terrible, painful night ended at last, but left the scars not only in her body but also in her mind. She couldn't share this pain with anyone. Not even with the family members. She had to bear with that terrible physical pain for a number of days. Though the physical pain went away, the mental trauma was still there. After a really long time she decides to talk to a very close friend about this. Talking about it was a kind of comfort to her. But the perverted sexual lust of her husband is still a cause of heartache for Jaba.

**Case 10:**

It's been only 10 days since Farhana has got married. Her In-laws house is full of relatives. They have come on the occasion of wedding. This is a whole new environment for Farhana. She doesn't have much idea about married life. She is learning new things each day. These 10 days have passed only by getting introduced to new relatives. The whole house seems to be set on a festive mood. But one barbarous act of Farhana's husband ruined the whole thing for her. He has this bad habit of calling Farhana to bedroom in front of everyone in the house. Then he shuts the door and forces her to bed. After 2-3 hours, her husband gets out of the room leaving Farhana in an embarrassing situation. In front of so many guests and relative she cannot get with devastated look like that. Besides how can she take shower for a second time while her hair is still damp from the previous one? What would the family members and guests think? Besides she has a cold problem. What would she do now? She sheds tears alone sitting on her bed for sometime. Then she gets up and gets out of the room and goes into the bathroom for a shower. She keeps asking to herself-“Is marriage really a pleasant, happy thing in life?”

**Case 11:**

Rokeya Sultana and Shafique Haider are both medical doctors. They practice privately 4 days a week. Their chambers are also in the same place. One day a 40 year old man comes with his 32 years old wife. The couple was quite uncomfortable talking to him about their problem. After sometime all Dr. Haider could make out from the man's babbling is that it might be his wife's problem. So he requested the couple to go next door to his wife's chamber. Dr. Rokeya Sultana couldn't also figure out what was wrong with the wife. All she could understand that the woman felt uncomfortable talking about it in her husband's presence. So Dr. Sultana asked him to retire from the room. Then she examines her patient. What she found out was really horrible. The patient unbuttoned her blouse and to her horror the doctor saw that the left breast of the patient was badly injured and infected. It was on the verge of catching gangrene. Dr. Sultana enquired about the causes of this problem. The patient was reluctant to give any answer and tried to avoid it. At certain point Dr. Sultana couldn't help herself and directly asked “Did that happen due to bite?” The patient blushed and nodded affirmatively.

**Case 12:**

Nazma's husband works as a soldier in Bangladesh Army. He doesn't have permission to live with his family inside the camp. So he rented an apartment and kept his wife and his daughter

over there. On weekends or other holidays he visited his family. Sometimes he stays overnight and sometimes he gets back to camp before dusk.

Suddenly Nazma became really ill. She was taken to bed. Her neighbors took care of her. But without seeing any sign of improvement, she had to go to the hospital. Then came out the real story. It was revealed that a few days back Nazma's husband visited her. Nazma was having her period then. But her husband demanded to have sex with her. He tried to blackmail her emotionally. He even forced her to take pills to stop period artificially. Nazma had to do it to satisfy her husband who stayed for the next two days. But Nazma had to suffer terribly next month for arbitrarily stopping a natural biological process. She was bleeding really bad and had this terrible pain in her waist. She tried to swallow the pain for two days. But she had to rush to the doctor for help the next day.

### **Abused by Friends**

#### **Case 1:**

Farzana's next door neighbors were their good family friends. Their son-Nazmul was also farzana's good friend. So he had easy access to Farzana's house. She knew him since both of them were just children. When Farzana was in class seven, this close of friend of her started changing. One day he came to her house and tried to kiss her. Farzana was too shocked to resist it. Then Nazmul forcibly took her to bed and started kissing her. After that incident Farzana never hang out with that friend again.

#### **Case 2:**

Shefa was a student of class four when she was abused by her friend Babu. Shefa's father used to work in ship. So he was away from the house most of the time. Her mother was mentally instable. Babu used to live in the next door. He was in class five. They used to play together at Babu's house. The frequency of his visit suddenly started increasing. Babu's parents lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the building. They had a south facing balcony. They hanged a drape over there. There was a single bed in that balcony. Shefa and Babu used to play on that bed. One day their neighbor was watching them from her bedroom. She became surprised to see that Babu was lying on bed holding Shefa. In the afternoon she charges Shefa about this. Shefa reveals more disturbing information. She claimed that Babu used to play other "bad games" with Shefa. He insists that Shefa played with him in the afternoon as other kids are around in the morning. He tried to touch and kiss her. The neighbor was really shocked when Shefa said that Babu told her "Shefa I'm doing it with you using condom. Don't worry. Nothing will happen to you. I saw my father keeping this with him. If we do it using condom, you will not conceive." The neighbor then forbade her to play with Babu or go to his house ever again.

#### **Case 3:**

Zuthi experienced early puberty. So her physical growth was different from most other female friends of her. Her clothings were different as well. Zuthi had this friend named Mridul. One day Mridul stunned Zuthi by saying-" Zuthi! Will you let me touch your breasts?" Zuthi was dazed and she rushed back home and told her mother about this.

**Case 4:**

Laboni and Mithun are good friends. Mithun lived in bachelor's mess. One day he invited Laboni to his mess. Laboni was happy to accept the invitation. She was actually having a good time over there until Mithun started acting strange. In his territory he became aggressive and touched Laboni indecently and that without her permission. Laboni screamed to the top of her lungs. She fought back to get out of that hell. Later her Mithun tried to justify his behavior as a friendly one. He on the other hand blamed Laboni for misunderstanding her. But Laboni was grown up enough to understand what was in Mithun's mind.

**Case 5:**

Back in the school days Simu had a crush on a senior student named Sohag. Soon they become good friends. Sohag was very cooperative. She used to help out Simu in many situations. One day Sohag takes her to the boarding house where he used to live. There he raped her. Simu had no other option but to swallow that pain. Sohag promised to marry her later. But he didn't keep his promise. Very soon Simu's family came to know about this incident. Everyone blamed Simu. Why couldn't she be more cautious? How did she believe him and make such a big mistake? Family members started to torture her physically and mentally. They married her off soon after that incident.

**Abused by People at Workplace****Case 3:**

Sharmin and Faisal works at the same office. One day Faisal tells Sharmin that he loves her. Over time Sharmin also becomes weak to Faisal. She starts to like Faisal. One day on an opportune moment Faisal touches her and makes a filthy proposal. Sharmin becomes shocked and terrified at this. She says-"first you marry me and then we can do these things." After getting such a straight forward answer, Faisal starts avoiding her. He breaks up with her saying-"I never truly loved you. I did all those things only to have fun. Nothing more than that."

**Case 4:**

Kona badly needs a good job. One of her friends knows a big shot that happens to own a company of his own. She gets introduced to that man through her friend. She gets a job in his firm. She gets a very handsome salary for this job. But things are not bright and shine as they first appeared. A few months later Kona tells another friend of her that she has a big secret to share. On the condition of strict confidentiality she discloses that the owner of the firm tries to take advantage of Kona using many excuses. For example, she calls Kona to her room to discuss business matters and then he shows his real face. He tries to sexually abuse her. Kona has totally changed after this incident. Now she hates every man. She is indifferent about herself. She doesn't trust anyone anymore.

**Case 5:**

Hasina became a widow at a very young age. She had a son and to raise him properly she needed to become a service holder. But her boss at workplace was a very wicked man. He used to make dirty proposals to her and tried to touch her inappropriately. Hasina refused all those proposals. One day the boss called her into his chamber. When she got inside that

room, the boss held her forcefully. Hasina was in a dire situation. She couldn't scream that day because she badly needed the job. But she couldn't take this torture for long. She had to quit her job soon after that incident.

### **Abused By Others:**

#### **Case 4:**

Mrs. Karim saw this incident with her own eyes from her kitchen. She used to live with her mother in Chittagong then. The incident she described took place in the house next door. One day she was working in her kitchen. Suddenly she noticed that on the roof of the house next door the most obscene event took place. There was a small room on that roof. On that particular day, she saw a man entering into that room. A few minutes later a 10/12 years old girl came there. She had a broom in her hand. Probably she came upstairs to sweep the room. She entered the room and the doors closed behind her. After 10/15 minutes a woman appeared at the door. Then she starts banging the door. She kept doing so for about 20 minutes. But the door was not opened. Then she went downstairs. After 10 minutes she got back with an old woman. She banged the door of that small room for another 20/25 minutes. Then the door opened. The little girl came out of the room. She seemed injured and couldn't walk properly. Even after seeing that condition, the younger woman who was probably the wife of the man started beating the girl. She took her downstairs. The man came out of the room. He was sweating. He put off his shirt and hanged his shirt to dry. Later that younger woman came again on the roof. Both of them have some sort of conversation. Then both of them went downstairs.

#### **Case 5:**

Beena was a student of class five. One day she went to a friend's house. The friend's father seemed like a nice gentleman. But he tried to touch her sensitive parts and make vulgar gestures. Beena felt so uncomfortable and insecure. She never visited that friend's house again. She was unable to talk to anyone, even her parents about this. Many years later when she grew up and came to University she told it to her cousin.

## **Annex-2**

### **The list of Participants**

1. Mukti Chakma
2. Md. Ershad Ali
3. S.M. Rokshana Alam
4. S.M. Papia Alam
5. Taslima Akhter
6. Umme Rumana
7. Mohammad Yeasin Arafath
8. Mohammed Tareq Samsuddin Chowdhury
9. Musammet Tulba Marifa
10. Minara Begum
11. Subrina Jahan
12. Soma Joarder