

Md Rafid Abrar Miah
Shah Md Shamrir Al Af
Mashiat Noor Prapti

INTERRELATIONS BETWEEN VAW AND WEP: A HUMAN SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

Violence Against Women (VAW) is one of the most pervasive crimes and human rights abuses threatening safety and empowerment of women around the world. The case of Bangladesh is hardly an exception. It is commonly understood that VAW may be prevented if women are economically empowered as violence against any entity is frequently assumed to be caused by subordination. The study aims to reveal the extent to which economic performance of both men and women is influencing various forms of VAW. It also shows how a human security perspective on women's protection and empowerment can be an effective tool to mitigate violence and ensure their socio-economic emancipation. The results are extracted from secondary data that are acquired through the use of Pearson correlation and Ordinary Least Squares regression. The paper employed numerical data from the World Bank, and the Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) of Bangladesh to accomplish this. The results of this study indicate that unemployment status of men has a proportional impact on VAW (domestic and dowry-induced), while unemployment status of women has an inversely proportional impact. This paper suggests policy intervention before examining causal factors to reduce violence against working women in the case of Bangladesh.

Keywords: VAW, Women Empowerment; Human Security, Gender, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is on the verge of graduating from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category.¹ Development is a broad term and one of the major factors of it is

Md Rafid Abrar Miah is Research Officer, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS). His e-mail address is: rafidabrar@biiss.org; **Shah Md Shamrir Al Af** is Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Faculty of Security & Strategic Studies (FSSS), Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). His e-mail address is: shamriralaf@gmail.com; **Mashiat Noor Prapti** is Lecturer and Coordinator, Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, UCSI University Bangladesh. Her e-mail address is: mashiatnoorprapti98@gmail.com.

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¹ Mahfuz Kabir, Mohammad Jasim Uddin, and Md Rafid Abrar Miah, "Economic Diplomacy of Bangladesh: From a 'Basket Case' to a Middle-Income Country," *Journal of Bangladesh and Global Affairs* 1, no. 01 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.55875/jbga.bd.may22.003>.

women's empowerment. Without shared prosperity between men and women, development becomes fragile especially in countries like Bangladesh where 50 per cent population is women. The paucity of economic opportunities for women restricts women's empowerment. According to Khan et al.,² the absence of economic prospects, educational opportunities, and decision-making authority for women sustains their subjugation to men and increases their vulnerability to violence. It was also anticipated that improving women's economic prospects through loan availability, skill development, and awareness training would lessen Violence Against Women (VAW), they elevate women's standing in the home and alter their interactions with husbands, relatives, and in-laws. However, engagement in economic activities is not the sole indicator of the empowerment of women. Thus, economically solvent women might face violence, when one considers unempowerment of women.³

Although women's employment and empowerment have been achieved in Bangladesh, the country has yet to see a marked decline in VAW.⁴ This employment-empowerment paradox is persistently evident from several studies.⁵ Surprisingly, several studies found that economic advancement not only showed failure to ensure a

² M. R. Khan, S. M. Ahmed, A. Bhuiya, and M. Chowdhury, *Domestic Violence Against Women*, BRAC-ICDDR, Joint Research Project, no. 18 (1998): 320–346, accessed October 23, 2024, <http://dspace.bracu.ac.bd/xmlui/handle/10361/13341>; S. Lahiry, "Gender-Human Security Interface: Critical Perspectives with Special Reference to India," *Discover Global Society* 2, no. 01 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44282-024-00037-9>; Rahman, Mosfequr, Md. Aminul Hoque, and Satoru Makinoda. "Intimate Partner Violence Against Women: Is Women Empowerment a Reducing Factor? A Study From a National Bangladeshi Sample," *Journal of Family Violence* 26, no. 05 (2011): 411–20, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-011-9375-3>.

³ Manila Khisa, Loban Rahman, Md Rafid Abrar Miah, and Shanjida Habib Swarna, "Emergency in An Emergency," *American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research* 1, no. 05, (2020); Md Rafid Abrar Miah, Md. Faruk Shah, Shanjida Habib Swarna, Loban Rahman, "Contemporary Trends of Domestic Violence Against Women in Bangladesh: Unveiling the Growth Pattern and Age-sensitivity," *Rajshahi University Journal of Social Science and Business Studies* 26, (2022): 121–35; S. M. Murshed, "An Economist's Perspective on Human Security," in *Routledge Handbook of Human Security*, ed. M. Martin and T. Owen (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 285–296.

⁴ Anisur Rahman Khan, "Domestic Violence against Women in Bangladesh: A Review of the Literature and the Gaps to fill-in by Future Interventions," *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 18, no. 03, (2015): 57–81; A. Hossain, "The Impact of Domestic Violence on Women: A Case Study of Rural Bangladesh," *Sociology and Criminology* 4, no. 01 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.4172/2375-4435.1000135>.

⁵ Khisa, Rahman, Miah, and Swarna, "Emergency in An Emergency"; Laura Haylock, Rukia Cornelius, Anthony Malunga, and Kwezilomso Mbandazayo, "Shifting Negative Social Norms Rooted in Unequal Gender and Power Relationships to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls," *Gender and Development* 24, no. 02 (2016): 231–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2016.1194020>; Christine Hughes, Mara Bolis, Rebecca Fries, and Stephanie Finigan, "Women's economic inequality and domestic violence: exploring the links and empowering women," *Gender and Development* 23, no. 02 (2015): 279–97, doi:10.1080/13552074.2015.1053216; Mukesh Eswaran and Nisha Malhotra, "Domestic Violence and Women's Autonomy in Developing Countries: Theory and Evidence," *Canadian Journal of Economics* 44, no. 04 (2011): 1222–1263, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5982.2011.01673.x>; Michael A. Koenig, Rob Stephenson, Saifuddin Ahmed, Shireen J. Jejeebhoy, and Jacquelyn Campbell, "Individual and Contextual Determinants of Domestic Violence in North India," *American Journal of Public Health* 96, no. 01 (2006): 132–138, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2004.050872>.

reduction in violence rather in some cases exacerbated it.⁶ Nevertheless, a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature on domestic VAW by Khan⁷ and the problematic pattern found by Khisa *et al.*⁸ accentuated the widely accepted view that poorer households show higher rates of domestic violence and that economic hardship has a direct role in exacerbating VAW. Then, again, VAW is a human security issue and in this backdrop, the authors have analysed the interrelation between VAW and Women's Economic Performance (WEP) in the case of Bangladesh from a Human Security (HS) perspective.

'Human Security' is arguably the most appropriate analytical tool and operational approach for addressing socio-political problems like VAW.⁹ Although a people-centric and multi-sectoral approach as it aims to understand threats to women's safety, livelihoods, and dignity, Human security calls for 'protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life - whether at homes, in jobs or in communities by addressing both direct and structural violence.'¹⁰ It provides a framework to reorient and expand traditional security approaches, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding the survival, livelihood, and dignity of every individual. According to Hudson,¹¹ human security is best suited to mitigating VAW and upholding women's rights. It looks beyond the statist patriarchal power relations and institutionalized masculinized hierarchy as well as offers a robust and integrative framework for

⁶ S. R. Schuler, S. M. Hashemi, and S. H. Badal, "Men's Violence Against Women in Rural Bangladesh: Undermined or Exacerbated by Microcredit Programmes?" in *Development with Women*, ed. D. Rowan-Campbell and D. Eade (1st ed.; Oxford, UK: Oxfam GB, 1999), 112–124; Aminur Rahman, "Micro-Credit Initiatives for Equitable and Sustainable Development: Who Pays?" *World Development* 27, no. 01 (1999): 67–82, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X\(98\)00105-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(98)00105-3); Manuela Angelucci and Orazio Attanasio, "Oportunidades: Program Effect on Consumption, Low Participation, and Methodological Issues," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 57, no. 03 (2009): 479–506, <https://doi.org/10.1086/596616>; M. Rahman, M. A. Hoque, and Makinoda, "Intimate Partner Violence Against Women: Is Women Empowerment a Reducing Factor? A Study from a National Bangladeshi Sample," *Journal of Family Violence* 26, no. 05 (2011): 411–420, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-011-9375-3>.

⁷ Khan, "Domestic Violence against Women."

⁸ Manila Khisa, Loban Rahman, Md Rafid Abrar Miah, Faria Ahmed, Jarin Musarat Chowdhury Orin, and Shanjida Habib Swarna, "Impact of Covid-19 on Dowry Induced Violence against Women — A comparative study in the context of Bangladesh," *World Vision Journal* 13, no. 01, (2020): 74–84.

⁹ Ruth Rubio-Marín, and Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, "Violence against Women, Human Security, and Human Rights of Women and Girls: Reinforced Obligations in the Context of Structural Vulnerability," In *Gender, violence, and human security: Critical feminist perspectives*, edited by Aili Mari Tripp, Myra Marx Ferree and Christina Ewig, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013): 238–59; Aili Mari Tripp, "Toward a Gender Perspective on Human Security," In *Gender, violence, and human security: Critical feminist perspectives*, by Aili Mari Tripp, Myra Marx Ferree and Christina Ewig, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013): 3–32; Hawre Hasan Hama, "State Security, Societal Security, and Human Security," *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 21, no. 01 (2017): 1–19, doi:10.1177/0973598417706591.

¹⁰ Hama, "State Security, Societal Security, and Human Security".

¹¹ Natalie Florea Hudson, "Gender, Human Security and the United Nations Security Language as a Political Framework for Women," Routledge Critical Security Studies (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010).

advancing women’s socioeconomic empowerment. Sadako Ogata,¹² co-author of the landmark Human Security Now (2003) report, emphasized the role of human security in examining how gender-based inequality and gender-based violence affect the security of women within the household, workplace, and society in general. Recognizing gender as a significant dimension of identity allows for more individualistic and feminist articulations of security. Human security has been crucial in broadening the traditional agenda of security, breaking down the conventional patriarchal model and illustrating the dynamism and complexity of security. It includes the recognition of multiple phenomena, from VAW and gender discrimination to economic deprivation.¹³

Human security has three components – (1) want, (2) fear, and (3) indignity. Underscoring the need for ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’, human security envisages fulfilling their economic potential to get out of the poverty trap.¹⁴ In this regard, Coomaraswamy¹⁵ aptly argued that first tool to ensure women’s rights and empowerment, in the form of economic emancipation or eliminating VAW. In fact, Hudson¹⁶ stated that one of the main reasons for VAW and the lack of women’s security stems from the refusal to recognize their economic independence due to patriarchal norms.

The majority of these reports on VAW in Bangladesh presented significant large-scale datasets and compelling findings. They often failed to acknowledge or put adequate emphasis on some of the critical factors that directly impact VAW, especially the indirect negative role of women’s economic participation due to the traditional patriarchal gender norms. Again, the existing literature put insufficient attention to how community contexts and individual attributes affect the pathways between women’s employment, empowerment, and VAW. Although VAW is usually thought of as an act done by intimate partners, the authors argue that women are also abused by other family members and in-laws. In addition, very few literatures have focused on the human security aspect of VAW in Bangladesh in recent years.

This paper begins with outline of the significance of VAW, WEP, and HS. It then presents a conceptual framework to define these terms and their interrelationships.

¹² Sadako Ogata and Johan Cels, “Human Security—Protecting and Empowering the People,” *Global Governance* 9, no. 3 (2003): 273–282, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27800482>.

¹³ Gunhild Hoogensen and Svein Vigeland Rottem, “Gender Identity and the Subject of Security,” *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 02 (2004): 155–171, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010604044974>.

¹⁴ Rubio-Marín and Estrada-Tanck, “Violence against Women.”

¹⁵ Radhika Coomaraswamy, “Human Security and Gender Violence,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 40 no. 44/45 (2005): 4729–36, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4417359>.

¹⁶ Hudson, “Gender, Human Security”.

The methodology section describes the indicators and measurements used for analysis, including the limitations of the study and the subsequent results. The discussion shifts to the interlinking of WEP and VAW, emphasising their collective impact on human security. Finally, the paper concludes by summarising the findings and implications for policy, supported by an annex that includes supplementary information.

2. VAW, WEP and HS: A Conceptual Framework

VAW is commonly understood as an act performed by intimate partners, any family member and in-laws. This means, any sort of abuse whether it is physical or psychological, and whether conducted either face-to-face or via virtual medium falls within the domain of VAW. As such, the domain of VAW is quite large comprising a vast number of sub-types like rape, eve-teasing, sexual harassment, online bullying, workplace harassment, dowry-induced violence, and others. Given the scope of this research, the authors have considered two very specific types of VAW i.e., (a) domestic VAW (DVAW), and (b) dowry-induced domestic violence (DoVAW) because this study specifically aims to understand the familial dynamics of VAW among earning women. Apart, it is also argued that women who have participated in economy are most likely to face violence from their husbands or in-laws.

Here, the term “DVAW” specifically denotes physical assault experienced by women. DVAW here comprises of seven types of physical abuses i.e., (a) physical abuse by husband, (b) physical abuse by in-laws, (c) killing by husband, (d) killing by in-laws, (e) killing by own family, (f) physical abuse by own family, and (g) suicide. On the other hand, the term DoVAW indicates only the physical violence faced by women for ransom issues asked by the intimate partner or in-laws and sometimes, both. It encompasses four distinct categories of physical assault i.e., (a) physical abuse, (b) evaded by the family of the spouse, (c) suicide due to physical abuse, and (d) execution following physical abuse. The reason behind selecting these specific types is the availability and accessibility of data. ASK collects these types of information in Bangladesh and this study has used this data as secondary information.

One very important aspect that is associated with VAW is the financial independence of women. What commonly understood phenomena in this context is that women’s vulnerability is mostly because of their financial dependency on their husbands. As such, the economic freedom of women is considered a panacea for DVAW. It was also perceived that dowry-induced violence will also be reduced if women start engaging in income-generating activities. With such an understanding, the Bangladesh government started promoting women’s economic participation. One

of the major ways to involve women in income-generating activities is through microloan schemes. These initiatives are spearheaded by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and have significantly increased the participation of women in the workforce. The influence of these credit programmes on VAW has been demonstrated in numerous studies. In one such study, Khan¹⁷ observed that the frequency of physical maltreatment experienced by participants in the credit and savings programme of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee was slightly higher than that of nonparticipants.

Schuler¹⁸ and his colleagues conducted an ethnographic study and found that the in-laws may view their wives' participation in credit programmes as a violation of conventional patriarchal standards, leading to an increase in VAW within the family. Consequently, it is demonstrated that microcredit has a measurable impact on stress. Bates and his associates further elucidated and substantiated this aspect of society¹⁹. In another research project, they reported that the effects of individual-level factors are significantly influenced by normative factors and context. The findings of Bates²⁰ to a larger extent rejects the findings of the earlier two sets of scholars. Bates claimed that there is no correlation between domestic violence and the increasing prevalence of women's participation in microcredit programmes. Consequently, it is not considered objectionable and does not increase the likelihood of VAW. Bates then contested by a later study by Koenig²¹ in 2006 and lately by Bajracharya and Amin in 2013.²² They surveyed 4,195 women and found that those who received microcredit experienced a significantly higher incidence of physical domestic violence.

Instead of examining the role of microcredit, a few groups of scholars investigated the role of women's participation in the economy, perceived autonomy, and empowerment in comparison to DVAW and GBV. This approach deviated from the conventional approach. Menon and Johnson²³ analysed data from the Indian National Family Health Survey (NFHS) to determine that none of the previous findings were accurate. This is a rather perplexing discovery, as women who have a

¹⁷ Khan *et al.*, "Domestic Violence Against Women".

¹⁸ Schuler *et al.*, "Men's violence against women in rural Bangladesh."

¹⁹ L. M. Bates, S. R. Schuler, F. Islam, and M. K. Islam, "Socioeconomic Factors and Processes Associated with Domestic Violence in Rural Bangladesh," *International Family Planning Perspectives* 30, no. 04 (2004): 190–199, <https://doi.org/10.1363/3019004>.

²⁰ Bates *et al.*, "Socioeconomic factors and processes".

²¹ Koenig *et al.*, "Individual and contextual determinants of domestic violence."

²² Ashish Bajracharya and Sajeda Amin, "Microcredit and domestic violence in Bangladesh: an exploration of selection bias influences," *Demography* 50, no. 05, (2013): 1819–43. doi:10.1007/s13524-013-0226-0.

²³ N. Menon and M. P. Johnson, "Patriarchy and Paternalism in Intimate Partner Violence: A Study of Domestic Violence in Rural India," in *Recent Studies on Indian Women: Empirical Work of Social Scientists*, ed. K. K. Misra and J. H. Lowry (Jaipur, India: Rawat Publications, 2007).

higher degree of autonomy are more likely to experience spousal abuse. Two further sets of researchers discovered related results—Eswaran and Malhotra²⁴ and Rahman *et al*²⁵ who demonstrated that women’s empowerment does not necessarily equate to a reduction in the risk of domestic violence. The data revealed that as the woman had more choices, her husband began to physically and sexually assault her more regularly.

Although women’s empowerment and gender equality are critical for fostering inclusive and safe societies and achieving sustainable development, intricate challenges such as misogyny, patriarchy, and gender inequality continue to obstruct women’s economic participation and security. The aforementioned analyses and review of the existing literature illustrate that despite increased participation by women in the economy, their freedom from want and freedom from fear i.e., human security and right to live with dignity are far from the expected level. In this regard, Hughes²⁶ found that more economically empowered women had two different types of experiences as far as VAW is concerned. On one hand, they may be less vulnerable to abuse on account of their enhanced financial contributions to their households but on the other, it cannot decrease the chances of being abused by their partners. In the long term, physical and emotional abuse rates do not significantly vary between beneficiary and non-beneficiary families. One such example is rural Mexico where it was found that in the long run, physical and emotional abuse rates do not differ significantly between earning (by social protection schemes) and non-earning women.²⁷ Such prevalence of VAW calls for special focus to be recalibrated by addressing the complex factors that overshadow the success of women in the labour market.

Given this dualist impact of WEP, it was argued that to support women’s security to live free from violence and their struggles for and access to the rights to economic participation, it is imperative that promoting WEP and combating VAW are seen as connected in multifaceted ways.²⁸ In this regard, the human security approach can help understand the multiple factors associated with these issues and help to bridge the gap by focusing on education, strengthening women’s rights-based laws and

²⁴ Eswaran and Malhotra, “Domestic violence and women's autonomy”.

²⁵ Rahman, Hoque, and Makinoda, “Intimate Partner Violence Against Women”.

²⁶ Hughes *et al.*, “Women's economic inequality and domestic violence”.

²⁷ Gustavo J. Bobonis, Roberto Castro, and Juan S. Morales, “Conditional Cash Transfers for Women and Spousal Violence: Evidence of the Long-Term Relationship from the Oportunidades Program in Rural Mexico” (IDB, 2015), accessed October 23, 2024, <https://publications.iadb.org/en/conditional-cash-transfers-women-and-spousal-violence-evidence-long-term-relationship-opportunidades>.

²⁸ Hughes *et al.*, “Women's economic inequality and domestic violence;” Bobonis, Castro, and Morales, “Conditional Cash Transfers for Women”.

gendered policy frameworks, addressing the patriarchy, and enlightening the society to increase the acceptability of women's employment.²⁹ In the Human Development Report of 1994,³⁰ UNDP also identified seven core areas of human security threats: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, political security, and personal, and community security.

The idea of human security calls for the protection of vulnerable individuals from threats and dangers posed by their surrounding socio-cultural, political, and economic environment. The concept is holistic, interdisciplinary, and has a distinct normative bias in favour of the individual in a similar way as human rights, with an added layer for safeguarding the rights and freedoms. In the UNDP Report, the whole range of human security ideas is encapsulated in two basic concerns: 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear.'³¹ The first idea promotes the probable way out from key concerns such as socio-economic deprivation and marginalization, health insecurity, environmental threats, etc., and the second one stresses the safety and well-being of individuals by getting rid of violent conflicts. It is evident that these concerns are 'interlocked and enmeshed'.³²

Freedom from fear is a fundamental component of human security that entails elimination of violence, intimidation, and threats to the physical and psychological well-being of individuals. In the context of domestic violence, freedom from fear is intimately connected to women's security within the household and workplace. The acts of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that entail a different form of VAW instil fear and undermine women's sense of security. Freedom from want refers to the ability to access and avail essential resources and opportunities necessary for individuals to live a life upholding their dignity. In the context of women's economic participation, freedom from want is crucial in addressing the economic disparities and inequalities that contribute to domestic violence. Human security perspective plays a crucial redistributive role in responding to economic inequality, including addressing VAW. In this regard, Hudson³³ contended that calling for gender mainstreaming in human development and human rights frames and attaching the label 'security' to women will allow for greater state resources to be allocated to this concern. The Copenhagen School of Securitization suggests that by placing gender in the human

²⁹ Rubio-Marín, and Estrada-Tanck, "Violence against Women, Human Security"; Tripp, "Toward a Gender Perspective on Human Security".

³⁰ UNDP, *Human Development Report 1994*, (New York: 1994), <https://doi.org/10.18356/87e94501-en>.

³¹ Abdur Rob Khan and A.K.M Abdus Sabur, *Human Security Index for South Asia: Exploring Relevant Issues* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2011), 2.

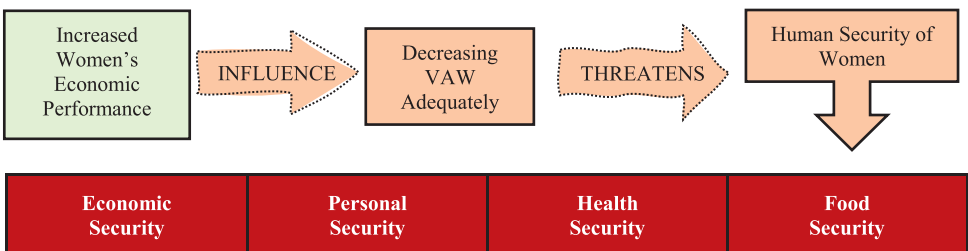
³² Khan and Sabur, "Human Security Index".

³³ Hudson, "Gender, Human Security".

security framework, the importance of gender would be elevated in policy agenda because of the power-laden nature of the term ‘security’.³⁴

The recent focus on freedom from fear stresses preventing violence by working with policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and men, as well as women’s organizations, and youth groups, to dismantle stereotypes and discriminatory and misogynistic attitudes. It identifies women not only as victims but as an influential actor, giving them more agency to address the prevalence of discriminatory gender norms and practices.³⁵ It supports services for survivors of VAW, including safe spaces and psychological counselling in humanitarian and fragile contexts and calls for higher inclusion of women in the decision-making process. It also conveys the message that sexual and gender-based violence is never acceptable, and it is destructive both to societies and individual potential and is a detriment to economic prosperity and development. Freedom from want, on the other hand, underscores the need for changing the attitude regarding women’s participation in the economy, so that women have more financial autonomy and increased control over resources, allowing them stronger voice in the family.³⁶ By aiming to bring transformative shift in the patriarchal control over the economy, this approach, enables more women to join the workforce. Along with that it addresses the fear and stigma held by men, about their unemployment or lesser income compared to their female counterpart. Bringing all these concepts together, the authors propose the following conceptual framework for this study which somewhat challenges the conventional notion regarding the WEP and VAW.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework³⁷



³⁴ Lene Hansen, “The Little Mermaid’s Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 02 (2000): 285–306, doi:10.1177/03058298000290020;

Laura J Sheperd, *Gender, Violence and Security: Discourse as Practice*. (London, UK: Zed Books, 2008).

³⁵ Hama, “State Security, Societal Security”.

³⁶ Mary Martin, and Taylor Owen, *Routledge handbook of human security* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).

³⁷ Authors’ creation.

To address existing gender norms and inequalities, adopting a holistic approach combining efforts from three levels: influencers, community workers, and institutions - both private and public is essential. By engaging influencers, community workers, and institutions, one can create a comprehensive support system that addresses the root causes of VAW and promotes gender equality at all levels of society. This lens helps understand how gender roles and violence are related, thereby allowing to bring gender dynamics in formulating policies and offer opportunity to guarantee women's rights codified in 1979 United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Promoting women's economic participation and security through a human security lens requires identifying the multifaceted nature of women's lives. It involves tackling gender disparities in terms of access to education and vocational training, ensuring equitable opportunity for women in labour market and promoting women's entrepreneurship and leadership. By adopting a human security approach, societies can address the underlying causes of gender inequality and create an enabling environment for women's economic empowerment.

This study is unique since it brings a human security lens to discuss and analyse VAW in Bangladesh. This study highlights that VAW in Bangladesh occurs in multiple settings – family, workplace and community, where various influencers intersect - particularly poverty, misogynistic patriarchy, and gender inequality, which lay foundation for women's vulnerability. The dominant factors can be analysed through the lenses of human security perspectives, whereby 'freedom from want' addresses the economic aspects of poverty, employment, and marginalization of both men and women and 'freedom from fear' focuses on tensions surrounding gender roles and hegemonic masculinity in the family and society in general. Under this framework, this study also emphasizes the role and appeal of human security to uplift the image of working women and fight stigmas, and negative portrayals associated with women's contribution to the labour market.

There is a lack of literature that talks about interrelation between WEP and VAW in the case of Bangladesh, let alone from a human security perspective. To realise this, the study tries to have contribution to existing knowledge offering fresh insight on VAW to policymakers. Through a comprehensive analysis, it underscores necessity of integrating human security principles into policy-making to combat VAW and support women's economic and social empowerment.

3. Methodology: Indicators, Measurements and Results

A mixed method approach is used in this exploratory investigation. For the qualitative study, 10 interviews are taken. The sampling method followed is ‘snowball’ and the respondents are dissimilar by profession, education, and social status. Two of them are academicians working in different universities, one is a mid-career NGO professional working at Friendship International Bangladesh at Gaibandha, one is serving as a deputy secretary at the Ministry of Women and Children affairs, one is serving as a UNO in an upazila of Rajshahi division, one is the upazila women and children affairs officer at an upazila of Sylhet division, one is an entrepreneur, one is an ASP appointed in a district of Rangpur division, one is a psychiatrist practicing in Dhaka, and rests of two are housewives – one is a postgraduate, one respondent can write her name only.

In terms of quantitative examination, it was mainly performed to understand the correlation between WEP and VAW. Here, the data are accumulated from Ain O Salish Kendra, (ASK) (See *Data source* section). ASK has data available from 2013 to 2022 which limited this study to 2013 – 2022. From the ASK data, the total number of cases included in this study was around 15000. All this data can be found on the ASK website per year, as shown in the data source section. The authors applied simple growth model and year-over-year (YOY) growth model by using the following formula to identify growth pattern on sorted data sets. The formulas are as follows -

Simple growth model = $\{(Current\ Year - Base\ Year) / Base\ Year\} * 100$

Year-Over-Year growth model = $\{(Current\ Year - Previous\ Year) / Previous\ Year\} * 100$

After identifying the growth pattern, the authors ran Pearson correlation to understand the interrelation between VAW and WEP. Here, WEP data is taken from different economic performance indicators i.e., unemployment rate of men, and unemployment rate of women mostly collected from World Bank’s open data bank³⁸. Table 1 denotes the classification of the independent variables and operations followed in this study.

³⁸ “World Development Indicators,” Data Bank, accessed October 24, 2024, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>.

Table 1: The variables for correlation in brief

VAW variables	WEP variables	Operation performed
Domestic violence against women	Unemployment, male	Pearson correlation
	Unemployment, female	
Dowry-induced domestic violence against women	Unemployment, male	Pearson correlation
	Unemployment, female	

3.1 Limitations of study

The study includes a few limitations as well. It had to make some very minor compromises with the study’s quality in terms of literature research, data collecting, and analysis due to time restrictions. In addition, as mentioned in the data source section, the inability to get data prevented the integration of other dimensions and samples beyond those used in this study, e.g., sexual harassment. The analysis is limited to secondary publicly accessible data because authors lacked resources, particularly financial ones, which prevented them from accessing several data sources.

3.2 Results

The Pearson correlation results among various variables are presented in Table 2. There are four correlation analyses conducted in this investigation. The authors conducted two correlation analyses using DVAW: the first with the unemployment male variable and the second with the unemployment female variable. The unemployment male variable yields a moderately positive result, while the unemployment female variable yields a very feeble negative result. This refers that DVAW is impacted strongly by unemployment of men but very weakly by employment of women.

Table 2: The results of correlation analysis

Dependent variable	Independent variables	Magnitude	Relation
Domestic violence against women	Unemployment, male	0.48	Moderately Positive
	Unemployment, female	-0.14	Very Weak Negative
Dowry-induced domestic violence against women	Unemployment, male	0.8	Strong Positive
	Unemployment, female	-0.35	Weak Negative

Source: Authors’ analysis

The authors conducted two correlation analyses in relation to dowry-induced cases: the first with the unemployment male variable and the second with the unemployment female variable respectively. The unemployment male variable yields a significant positive result, indicating that when men are unemployed, they are requesting a dowry. However, the female variable is weakly negative in the context of unemployment, indicating that there is a tenuous correlation between the employment of a wife and the induction of domestic violence by dowry.

This finding portrays a clear picture that women’s economic performance is not much impactful to VAW rather it is more associated with the unemployment of men. However, this provides a very generic understanding which does not consider other important variables like socio-economic status, attributes of their neighbourhoods, and educational background of the males. To understand this, ten interviews are taken as mentioned in the methodology section.

Through the three interviews with three field administrative officials³⁹ appointed in different rural areas of Bangladesh, it is found that those women who are involved in IGAs are more prone to intimate partner violence whose husbands are either addicted to drugs, or involved in gambling, or jobless and poorly educated or both or all of the above. MoWCA official from Sylhet division said that because of higher religious concentrations, men of poorer section of rural Sylhet remain very skeptic about their wife’s economic engagement. They are less likely to allow their wives to interact with other men. If women do not comply, they face brutal consequences from their intimate partners and sometimes from in-laws. Almost a similar picture is

³⁹ An UNO, an ASP, A women and children affairs officer of a Upazilla.

existent in the northern Bangladesh reported by the ASP interviewed. When asked about the situation of the comparatively educated and richer section of the society, all of them said that the situation is better. In fact, in recent years, women are more encouraged to perform IGA specially by different NGOs. For ensuring women empowerment, poverty alleviation, and inclusive citizenship, a good number of NGOs are nowadays conducting different activities. Friendship is one such NGO which mostly operates in northern Bangladesh with a special focus on chars. One high official of Friendship's Inclusive Citizenship (IC) project argued that women's economic engagement is not a driver towards VAW rather it is the outcome. Whenever males of families remain unemployed for some time, they used to engage in different anti-social activities like taking drugs, involving in gambling etc. They as such force their wives to give money. Needless to say, wives protest and as a result of that, husband beats. She (Friendship official) said that this is the picture of those regions where male employment is low. She flagged the issue of dowry and child marriage. She said that these young girl victims are often found ill-educated and belong to poverty-stricken families. In those families, girls are treated as a burden due to dowry issues. As such, parents want to remove the burden as soon as possible. They are compelled to send 'gifts' as much as they can to the grooms but often fails to meet the demands. As such, the girls face immense torture both from the spouse and his family. Sometimes, it ends up to murder. The study thinks the number is much higher in real than the reported ones. Spousal families take advantage that the bride's family cannot complain to the law enforcement agencies as they will be at first charged for child marriage. Further, those families are often found unaware of their rights as well. As a result, they remain helpless, and the girls become frustrated. Out of such mental agony, they commit suicide though this may not be the sole cause of the high percentage of suicide among the girls of this early age. Moreover, evidence of such early aged women as victims is a direct threat to inclusive and sustainable development of the society.

The interviewees from academia said that, among the illiterate or ill-educated population, wife beating and even murder are more prevalent. Men of these societies perceive wife-beating as a matter of prestige and depiction of masculinity. These men always remain indulged within a cluster of fallacies like alcohol consumption, polygamy, and gambling. They are often found non-prudent in terms of life and livelihood. If wives raise their voices against such wrongdoings, it hurts the superiority feelings of males. Then, husbands show their masculinity, practice more brutal physical torture, and, to some extent, end up with murder. However, at that juncture, wives perform mostly informal activities to earn their livelihood, but the husbands want to snatch all the earnings to fulfill their fallacies. Such incidents put

the families under a debt trap, especially the women involved in the micro-credit programme. When women deny giving the money to their spouses, they face brutal physical torture. When these troubles are at some breakeven point, women commit suicide. The rate of suicide is highest among the younger women and then to the young adults. All the factors in summation made these two age groups most vulnerable in terms of domestic violence in contemporary Bangladesh.

4. Interlinking WEP and VAW: The Impact on Human Security

The objective of this paper is to investigate whether persistent VAW in Bangladeshi society is associated with the participation of both males and females in economic activities. If it does, what is the source of this effect and to what level, and why human security could be the most appropriate approach to mitigating the challenges faced by women towards their emancipation and successful economic participation. The interpretation of the publicly available ASK data provides a clear indication that the treatment of women in their environment is directly correlated with their involvement or absence of involvement in any activity that generates income. In summary, the results indicate that the level of violence directed at women in Bangladeshi society is exacerbated by the unemployment of males. On the other hand, female employment sometimes challenges men's control and status in the family, and this sometimes causes VAW. The results of male and female employment activities and the repercussions of these activities, which are in stark opposition to conventional wisdom, raise concerns about the roles that men and women play in this society.⁴⁰

The subordinate position of women in this society is the fundamental characteristic of the VAW tendency. Men are perceived as the breadwinners in traditional patriarchal Bangladeshi society, while women are considered the child-carers. Money is contributed to the household by males, while women are responsible for the home. Men were led to believe that they were in a superior position of power as a result of this division of labour, which led to a worldview in which women run the household and men rule the world. Nevertheless, in the contemporary, modern, and mobile world, women are increasingly stepping outside and working alongside men. They are making a significant contribution to their households and to the national economy – indeed essential for achieving sustainable growth. Conversely, the situation is bleaker. It is perceived as a threat to the masculinity of males when

⁴⁰ Seema Vyas and Charlotte Watts. "How Does Economic Empowerment Affect Women's Risk of Intimate Partner Violence in Low and Middle Income Countries? A Systematic Review of Published Evidence," *Journal of International Development* 21, no. 05 (2008): 577–602. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1500>.

women emerge from their homes and exhibit their capabilities.⁴¹ Thereby, it suggests that the entrenched patriarchal structures within families and society, coupled with the regressive attitudes of many men, pose major barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment.⁴²

There is a growing sense of doubt among men over their perceived superiority over women. Due to this rationale, men often exploit their position of authority by engaging in VAW as a means of asserting their dominance and undermining the achievements of women. When a woman becomes self-employed, she is likely to achieve independence. Consequently, she is likely to have subjective views the way to spending her earnings—granting women the ability to make judgments regarding household spending. This is frequently unpalatable to the so-called alpha male ego in this society, and men choose violence to make women submissive and subservient. Another aspect of women working outside the home is men's jealousy and mistrust. When a woman is a housewife, her acquaintances are few and largely known to her husband. A working woman, on the other hand, must communicate with many individuals at her workplace as part of her profession. As a result, a working woman's husband is unfamiliar with her professional network. This highlights men's insecurity, producing envy and uncertainty among couples, which can lead to various sorts of VAW.

From another lens, unemployment status of men increases the VAW. When a man loses his job, it hurts not only him but also the whole family's finances. Because of the economic crisis, a man may become angry and then turn that anger toward his wife by hitting her. By altering the relative income of the man, it can contradict gender preconceptions, and domestic violence may appear as a sign of 'male backlash'.⁴³ A 2020 study conducted in India found that the probability of a guy engaging in violent behaviour increases by up to 30 per cent when he becomes unemployed.⁴⁴ Moreover, the husband's incapacity to engage in employment pushes him to spend more time at home, thus heightening their susceptibility to abusive behaviour.⁴⁵ Consequently, unemployment among men results in the trauma of lost money, negotiation, and

⁴¹ Haylock et al., 2020; Lahiry, 2024.

⁴² Koenig et al., 2005.

⁴³ Macmillan and Gartner, 1999.

⁴⁴ Sonia Bhalotra, Uma Kambhampati, Samantha Rawlings, and Zahra Siddique, *Intimate Partner Violence: The Influence of Job Opportunities for Men and Women*, (World Bank Group, 2020); M. R. A. Miah and R. I. Sifat, "Economic Dimensions of Violence Against Women: Policy Interventions Needed," *Journal of Social and Economic Development* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40847-024-00368-y>.

⁴⁵ Laura Dugan, Daniel S. Nagin, and Richard Rosenfeld, "Exposure Reduction or Retaliation? The Effects of Domestic Violence Resources on Intimate-Partner Homicide," *Law & Society Review* 37, no. 01 (2003): 169–198, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5893.3701005>.

exposure, all of which aid in the overcoming of men's propensity to use VAW as a coping mechanism. The dowry-induced violence is also significantly influenced by the unemployment of men.⁴⁶ A jobless man inevitably experience financial difficulties leading him to ask for a dowry. Wives are very improbable to put financial pressure on her parents despite the pressure from the husbands.⁴⁷ As a result, he begins using violence to demonstrate his masculinity, force her to obey him, and force his in-laws to agree to his demands.⁴⁸

The academicians and government officials interviewed for this paper said that VAW in Bangladesh is contextual. The situation has been improved to a great extent, but the improvement mostly took place in the urban setting. In rural Bangladesh, the situation can be improved through effective policy-making followed by implementation. Employment of women is very much positively perceived in urban Bangladesh whereas in rural settings, it is seen as the incapability of the husbands to run their families. This hurts their 'masculinity pride' and thereby often leads to VAW. One deputy secretary of MoWCA in this regard thinks that VAW cannot be stopped only by engaging women in IGAs. Adequate focus on the males is simultaneously necessary. Proper awareness, education, implementation of laws and regulations, and most importantly organising proper employment of males will significantly reduce the rate of VAW in Bangladesh. Involving the local communities in raising awareness is highly beneficial in this regard, says the deputy secretary. She thinks, security of poor women of rural Bangladesh engaged in informal economy will not be ensured only by such economic engagement. Rather a comprehensive approach is essential to address these challenges and human security would play the crucial role in this regard as it acknowledges the multi-layered connections between VAW and WEP. From the very beginning, empowerment has been one of the important components of human security agenda and empowerment comes with the power of decision making. Decision making within family is a matter of acceptance and recognition and to ensure that, proper awareness, and education of the males of a society is a must. Human security emphasizes this particular aspect, whereby it focuses on holistic well-being and agency of every individual i.e., not only the

⁴⁶ R. I. Sifat, *Gender Indicators Report* (2021), Figshare, dataset, <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.15156885.v1>.

⁴⁷ M. Khisa, L. Rahman, M. R. A. Miah, F. Ahmed, J. M. Orin, and S. H. Swarna, "Impact of COVID-19 on Dowry-Induced Violence Against Women: A Comparative Study in the Context of Bangladesh," *World Vision* 13, no. 01 (2020): 74–84.

⁴⁸ Miah and Sifat, "Economic Dimensions of Violence Against Women"; Bhalotra, Kambhampati, Rawlings, Siddique, "Intimate Partner Violence".

vulnerable women and their economic empowerment but also the fragile male insecurities behind VAW.⁴⁹

Policies to address gendered insecurities that will ensure true inclusion necessitates a broadening of the concept of security beyond just economic or physical realm, it must also embody the nuanced psychological and familial issues. Human security incorporates multidimensional analysis and comprehensive assessment of risks and impacts across its seven dimensions to understand the interconnectedness and intersecting nature of vulnerabilities and threats faced by women. Thereby, it can identify effective entry points for policy interventions and multi-sectoral solutions for eliminating VAW and enhance women's participation in the economy. Such efforts to combat VAW call for going beyond merely addressing the symptoms of physical violence. Instead, given the complex power dynamics of traditional Bangladeshi households, it must tackle the root causes of gendered discrimination and diverse nature of insecurities faced by men and women alike.

Additionally, the case studies and KIIs conducted for this paper suggest that the four specific dimensions of human security i.e., economic, personal, health and food are directly hindered because of VAW; and WEP fail to not only adequately reduce VAW but also to ensure these security dimensions. As such, the paper calls for specific measures to properly address these four aspects of human security for both women and men. Such an initiative will not only add to the WEP initiative but also tackle other factors that can enhance the security of women. Interventions aimed to improve the economic and financial woes of families can mitigate the issue of male vulnerability and toxicity toward women's job incomes, erasing the scope of VAW caused by frustration due to fragile male ego. These measures will try to alleviate the financial status of women as well as men, so as they do not feel inferior to their spouses. Besides, dowry based VAW can be mitigated if unemployed males are given a stable source of income. Community and social worker level regular engagement, networking, dialogues and confidence building measures can further contribute to the personal security of women through proper monitoring. Alongside these measures, for VAW to be eliminated addressing the other two dimensions of human security – food and health – are also crucial. Monitoring of these two dimensions can offer insights into the prevalence of VAW and the ensuring of access to food and health services to any vulnerable woman. If seen holistically and if the security of women

⁴⁹ Aluko Yetunde, "Gender-based violence and human security: Implications for development in Nigeria," *Nigerian Institute of Social & Economic Research (NISER)* (2015), <https://uaps2015.popconf.org/papers/151380>.

and also their spouses along these four dimensions can be ensured, it can be possible to bridge gap often left by WEP in mitigating VAW.

For successful implementation of the aforementioned-steps, human security perspective allows for context-specific solutions that engage local communities with civil society organizations and grassroots stakeholders, which ensures productive collaboration. As the issue of VAW and the complexities associated with bringing in income by a female member was found to be more prone in rural settings, incorporating community-based local actors aware of the underlying structural and socio-cultural stereotypes will enable them to have more direct intervention. A gendered, rights-based, and integrative framework founded on human security principles and backed by human rights provisions will have the necessary tools for the stakeholders to solve the broader socio-economic dynamics interconnected with VAW and IPV as evident by the ASK dataset. Such policies will be a game changer in these scenarios because of its intersectional focus on women's plights as well as economic potentials.

5. Conclusion

This study offers a distinct insight into a less explored area of VAW. It is imperative that it identifies strategies which will enhance positive impacts by building partnerships and collective actions focusing on individual needs and crises. Moreover, the paper suggests multi-stakeholder involvement that embraces human security perspectives throughout the entire mechanism to address all forms of VAW. Mutually reinforcing responses that combine legal, policy, and institutional measures with capacity building and community-based interventions will be crucial for transformative solutions about these alarming issues which impact the daily lives of millions of women and girls around the world. Human security approach provides the optimum tools in this regard because of its holistic approaches toward safeguarding women from gendered inequalities and violence. Addressing VAW through a human security lens can help promote a safer and more inclusive environment for women. By ensuring women's safety and security, societies can unlock their full potential, contributing to sustainable development and economic prosperity. This holistic approach recognizes the interconnectedness of personal well-being, economic stability, and social progress, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to combat gender-based violence and support women's empowerment. Importantly, it also acknowledges the concept of intersectionality, recognizing that women's experiences of violence and inequality are shaped by multiple, overlapping social identities, including race, class, and ethnicity. In this regard, along with the government institutions, it is also necessary to strengthen the NGOs and civil society

organizations that deal with VAW and gender issues to advance human security. Additionally, the paper urges the involvement of men in the awareness-rising activities and engage with them as partners in combating VAW and discrimination.

The paper explores the connection between economic participation by both males and females in Bangladesh and the prevalence of VAW. It reveals that male unemployment in Bangladesh increases violence towards women, while female employment sometimes challenges men's control and status in the family, leading to VAW. VAW has its roots in the subjugation of women in traditional patriarchal societies, when women are viewed as caregivers for the children and men as the breadwinners. But in the present era, women are employed alongside males, boosting household incomes and the GDP of the country. This shift in power dynamics can lead to men becoming insecure about their superiority to women, leading to abuse of power through VAW and IPV. When women become self-employed, they frequently have opinions on how their earned money should be allocated, which can result in women making decisions regarding domestic expenditures. This is frequently deemed unacceptable by the dominant male ego in this society, resulting in violence directed at them. Furthermore, various forms of VAW may result from uncertainty among spouses.

Unemployment among men increases VAW, as it brings financial crises to the household and can drive frustration, leading to violence towards women. This contradicts gender preconceptions and can result in domestic violence as a sign of "male backlash". Unemployment also contributes significantly to dowry-induced violence, as men may demand dowries from their in-laws to demonstrate their masculinity and force their wives to obey him. VAW in Bangladesh is a complex issue that has been largely addressed in urban settings. However, in rural areas, the situation can be improved through effective policy-making. In urban areas, women's employment is seen positively, while in rural areas, it is seen as an incapability of husbands to run their families, leading to increased VAW. Child marriage is also a major reason for VAW. To combat VAW, a comprehensive approach is needed, including human security, which acknowledges the multi-layered connections between VAW and WEP. Empowerment is crucial, and proper awareness and education of males are essential for ensuring their well-being and agency. Human security encompasses multidimensional analysis and comprehensive assessment of risks and impacts across its seven dimensions to understand interconnectedness and intersecting nature of vulnerabilities and threats faced by women.

Efforts to combat VAW must go beyond merely addressing physical violence symptoms and tackle the root causes of gendered discrimination and diverse

insecurities faced by men and women alike. This research strongly argues that gender security i.e., women's safety is intrinsically linked to the seven dimensions of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. While men generally have better access to these forms of security, women remain the most vulnerable and marginalized, with their access to human security is often overlooked and not given the due importance in Bangladesh. To achieve gender security and foster an egalitarian society, it is essential to empower women through social engineering and politico-economic measures. This empowerment should start from the grassroots level, gradually extending to women in higher positions of power. This study has showed the four specific dimensions of human security – economic, personal, health, and food – are directly hindered by VAW, and WEP not only fails to adequately reduce VAW but also cannot ensure these security dimensions. To address these issues, specific measures should be implemented, such as improving the economic and financial woes of families, providing stable income for unemployed males, and addressing the other two dimensions of human security – food and health. It must be acknowledged that gender-based domestic violence extends beyond personal suffering, imposing substantial social and economic burdens. Women and their families endure the brunt of this violence, facing shame, stigma, and barriers to education, employment, civic participation, and access to resources. These challenges deepen poverty and inequality, hindering efforts to achieve gender equality. By ensuring the security of women and their spouses along these dimensions, the gap can be bridged, often left by WEP in mitigating VAW.

In conclusion, the paper highlights the importance of human security in mitigating the challenges faced by women in Bangladesh, particularly in terms of VAW and the impact of gender roles on women's economic participation. VAW is not a unified concept, and there is no single solution. Each sort of violence necessitates a particular type of intervention before knowing the underlying causes and driving forces. At this point, this article calls for additional research into each category of violence to uncover the core reasons and demonstrate how human security can help solve these concerns more effectively, mirroring individual components of safety, security, and economic empowerment. Context-specific solutions that engage local communities with civil society organizations and grassroots stakeholders are essential for successful implementation. A gendered, rights-based, and integrative framework founded on human security principles and backed by human rights provisions will have the necessary tools for stakeholders to solve the broader socio-economic dynamics interconnected with VAW and IPV.

6. Annex

Table 3: Year over Year Analysis of DVAW in Bangladesh

Year	Domestic VAW	Trend based on YOY Analysis
2013	385	-
2014	488	26.75
2015	373	-23.57
2016	394	5.63
2017	442	12.18
2018	409	-7.47
2019	423	3.42
2020	554	30.97
2021	357	-35.56
2022	255	-28.57

Source: Authors’ compilation from data sets of the WB and ASK

Table 3: Year over Year Analysis of DoVAW in Bangladesh

Year	Dowry Induced VAW	Trend based on YOY Analysis
2013	314	-
2014	296	-5.73
2015	298	0.68
2016	239	-19.80
2017	303	26.78
2018	195	-35.64
2019	167	-14.36
2020	188	12.57
2021	210	0.53
2022	174	-17.14

Source: Authors’ compilation from data sets of the WB and ASK

Table 5: Women in Labor Market Data

Year	Unemployment, female (% of female labour force) (modelled ILO estimate)	Trend of Female Unemployment
2013	7.609	-
2014	7.522	-1.14
2015	7.467	-0.73
2016	7.379	-1.18
2017	6.745	-8.59
2018	6.623	-1.81
2019	6.204	-6.33
2020	5.977	-3.66

Source: Authors' compilation from data sets of the WB and ASK

Table 6: Men in Labor Market Data

Year	Unemployment, male (% of male labour force) (modelled ILO estimate)	Trend of Male Unemployment
2013	3.232	-
2014	3.192	-1.24
2015	3.161	-0.97
2016	3.128	-1.04
2017	3.347	7.00
2018	3.26	-2.60
2019	3.306	1.41
2020	3.345	1.18

Source: Authors' compilation from data sets of the WB and ASK