



Understanding Gender Ideology on Attitudes towards Violence against Women in Rural Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT: Gender ideology in the context of attitudes and views concerning violence against women (VAW) is a crucial global issue, particularly in Bangladesh. This study explores gender ideology toward violence against women in rural Bangladesh. This study followed a mixed-methods research technique, conducting two focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviewing 400 rural people (200 men and 200 women, aged 18 to 50) from eight cluster villages in Paba Upazila of Rajshahi District, Bangladesh. The findings indicate that people were traditional in their attitudes toward women's empowerment and violence, victim-blaming, men's power over women, and acceptance of male dominance but liberal in their views on the relationship between hijab/veil and violence against women. This study argues that patriarchal adherence is represented among people's gender ideology in rural Bangladesh. The findings of this study imply that improving awareness about gender and violence could help to promote liberal thinking among individuals in rural Bangladesh, hence preventing widespread attitudes toward violence against women.

KEYWORDS: Gender ideology, Quantitative and Qualitative, Rural Bangladesh, Violence against women.

INTRODUCTION

Gender ideology has been discussed in the explanation of violence against women (VAW) worldwide (Dey et al., 2021; Dasgupta et al., 2018; Kim, 2017; Miller et al., 2020). It is a system of ideas about the roles, rights, and responsibilities that men and women should have in society (Cheung & Choi, 2016; Dasgupta et al., 2018; Kroska, 2007). Based on individual gender ideology, there are different types of people in a society; some may maintain traditional/conventional gender ideology, while others may uphold liberal or transitional gender ideology (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016). On the other hand, VAW is a violation of human rights and is a serious public health issue worldwide (Council of Europe, 2017). Studies reveal that conventional/traditional gender ideology is often regarded to be a significant contributing factor to violence against women in many countries especially low- and lower-middle-income countries (Karim et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020). Therefore, this study aimed to understand and explore people's gender ideology in the context of violence against women in rural Bangladesh.

According to the World Bank (2021), Bangladesh is a lower-middle-income country where around 61% of people live in rural areas. Previous studies revealed that Bangladesh is largely a traditional patriarchy, where male supremacy is considered a societal norm and values, and women are disproportionately submissive to men in society (Karim et al., 2017; Mahatab, 2007; Hossain, 2012). Few studies conducted in Bangladesh mention that people's gender ideological variances influence an individual's behaviors in turn, liberal or traditional attitudes toward others (Dey et al., 2021; Biswas et al., 2017; Karim et al., 2020). In this regard, exploring people's gender ideology in the context of VAW is an important issue to take the initiative for the stakeholders, policymakers, and educators for the transformation of gender ideology from traditional to liberal, in turn reducing gender-based violence, wife abuse, and sexual harassment in rural Bangladesh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding gender ideology toward violence against women is an important issue worldwide, particularly in Bangladesh. Studies have shown that patriarchal gender ideology, for example, usually encompasses roles and characteristics such as power, control, and dominance, all of which may be demonstrated through violence against women (Jeekes et al., 2015; Zhang & Liu, 2022; Karim et al., 2017; Cheung & Choi 2016; Tonsing & Tonsing, 2019). A recent study by Dey et al. (2020) stated that 55.0%, 31.3%, and 13.7% of men were traditional, transitional, and liberal gender ideology, respectively, in the explanation of wife abuse in rural



Bangladesh. Likewise, studies in China show that conventional gender ideology is widespread in Chinese society, which favors male domination and female subordination (Zahan, 2019; Q. Xu & Anderson, 2010). Gender ideology in the African continent is also patriarchal (Kyoore & Sulemana, 2019).

In rural Bangladesh, traditional gender ideology is widely prevalent. Male dominance is usually seen as societal norms and values, and women are excessively submissive to men in both public and private domains (Dey et al., 2021; Karim et al., 2020). In this system, men are supposed to be confident and challenging, while women are modest and gentle. As a result, men are viewed as the head of the family, while women are responsible for taking care of the family (Karim, 2006; Karim et al., 2020).

Studies in rural Bangladesh have also found that patriarchal ideology influences people's gender ideology, which is developed and manifested in a variety of societal structures (Sultana, 2010; Karim et al., 2020; Dey et al., 2021). Although there are many studies on women's empowerment and gender equality, few studies mention men's gender ideology as an explanation for wife abuse or sexual harassment (Zhang & Liu, 2022; Karim et al., 2017; Cheung & Choi, 2016; Tonsing & Tonsing, 2019). A gap exists in research on understanding gender ideology in viewing violence against women among people in rural Bangladesh. Thus, this study attempts to explore people's gender ideologies toward violence against women in rural Bangladesh.

METHODS

Study Sites

This study was conducted in eight villages from Paba Upazila of Rajshahi District in Bangladesh. The purposefully selected villages were Maligasa, Dharmahata, Thakurpara, Ghipara, Tetulia, Uttar Luxmipur, Modho Dharmahata, and Huzri Para. The villages were located in the northwestern part of Bangladesh and around 12-15 km from the headquarters of Rajshahi District. Before selecting the study villages, people's socioeconomic status and other demographic characteristics were considered to study.

Study Participants

Using a mixed-methods approach, we interviewed 400 rural adults (200 men and 200 women) aged 18 to 50 from carefully selected study villages. Data were collected using the cluster approach, with each village represented as a cluster of 50 individuals (4 for males and 4 for women). First, we identified the centre of the selected cluster village and gathered relevant data from its surrounding families. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were held (one for both males and females and another for only males) to gather in-depth information and triangulate the research. The availability of participants in a FGD was around 8-10. Both the FGD participants ranged in age from 19 to 50 years.

Data Collection

The data collection period was held between May 2022 and October 2022. We collected data from various sources, such as interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and literature reviews (Yin, 2003). In order to collect data, an organized questionnaire was developed for interviews. Moreover, two FGDs were conducted in the study villages by the study's first author (DH) and one facilitator, who took notes, which lasted between 50 and 60 minutes. The focus group participants were asked to discuss their views and opinions regarding violence against women in rural Bangladesh. Face-to-face interviews and FGDs were conducted in the local vernacular (Bengla) and translated into English with the assistance of a skilled bilingual speaker. All of the discussions and interviews were digitally recorded with the participants' permission.

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used in the data analysis process. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0 (SPSS Inc., 2016), while qualitative data were coded and grouped (Islam & Walkerden, 2015; Schutt, 2011). We employed qualitative data to aid in interpreting quantitative results, and this triangulation improved the validity and reliability of the findings.

Measures of Gender Ideology

An individual's gender ideology was measured using Gelles and Straws' (1979) attitudes toward women scale (AWS), as well as a 25-item short version of Spence et al. (1973) and Spence and Helmreich (1978). Although this scale is generally used to measure men's gender ideology in the West, it is also used to measure men's gender ideology in rural Bangladesh (Karim & Law, 2013; Goldson, 2005). Based on this scale and our research context, we developed five questions to assess gender ideology toward violence against women of rural Bangladeshis. Table 1 presents the items (questions) in the following ways:



Table 1. Items of gender ideology toward violence against women

No.	Items: Violence against Women (VAW)
1	Freedom of women or women empowerment is the cause of sexual harassment, i.e., the increase in violence against women.
2	Women actually fall victim to sexual harassment for their own faults.
3	If someone harasses a woman for not wearing Hijab/veil, in that case, the oppressor is not to blame.
4	A husband can abuse his wife, but it is inappropriate for the wife to make use of slight filthy words/abusive language.
5	In some cases, a husband can use his power to control his wife.

Note: reverse items

However, gender ideology toward violence against women was measured from conservative to liberal and coded as 1=Agree Strongly, 2= Agree Mildly, 3= Disagree Mildly, and 4=Disagree Strongly.

Ethical Issues

The data collection period of this study was conducted by recommendation of the Ethical Committee of the Institute of Education and Research, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh (ref. no 2022/2381(2), dated 17.5.2022). After obtaining oral consent for each interview, we briefed them about the study's goal and procedures. This procedure is also followed in audio recording for FGDs. Furthermore, they ensured that all information would be kept secret while maintaining anonymity.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Study's Participants

The mean age of the respondents (n=400) was 34.84 years. Table 2 shows that most respondents were Muslim (92.5%), and 80.2% had single families. Of the participants, 15.8% had no schooling, and only 4.8% had a degree or above education, indicating educational disparities in Bangladesh's rural population. Most respondent's occupations were housework (46.0%, mainly women) and agriculture (28.0%, mainly men). The study showed that 45.8% of respondents' monthly income was 0 Tk. (women 41.25% and men 4.5%), while 34.0% earned 5000-15000 Taka. Interestingly, a huge majority (82.5%) of women do not have a monthly income, although doing a lot of work within and outside the home is considered unpaid.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Characteristics	Percent (%)
Religion	
Muslim	92.5
Hindu	4.5
Christian	3.0
Family Types	
Single	80.2
Joint	19.5
Extended	0.2
Educational Status	
Illiterate	15.8
Primary	18.8
Junior high school	31.0
SSC	16.8
HSC	13.0
Degree or above	4.8
Occupational Status	
Housework	46.0



Agricultural work	28.0
Business (small or medium)	9.8
Job (govt. or private)	2.7
Students	6.2
Others	7.2
Monthly income	
No Income	45.8
< 5000	9.2
5000-15000	34.0
15000-25000	9.0
25000-35000	1.8

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Understanding Gender Ideology Toward Violence Against Women (VAW)

In this study, understanding gender ideology among people toward violence against women is an important issue in preventing gender-based violence in rural Bangladesh. The findings of the study are presented below in five different sub-titles to understand gender ideology toward violence against women in rural Bangladesh.

(a) Women's empowerment and violence

The study result shows a majority of participants (55.8%) in the study held views that align with traditional perspectives on women's freedom/empowerment and its connection to violence against women in rural Bangladesh (Table 3, item 1).

In the focus group discussion, a woman (40 years, FGD-2) said:

"Now, the violence is increasing. Women don't want to veil (wear hijab) now. Men also engage in anti-social activities to exercise their freedom. As a result, women in society have to accept more or less torture for the anti-social freedom and promiscuity of some women. Therefore, the abuse of women's promiscuity and empowerment is responsible for the oppression of women."

One of the male respondents of the same focus group agreed with the previous statement and said (45 years, FGD-2): *"Although women's empowerment has reduced violence, many women are abusing their empowerment to the point that all women are equally humiliated or abused."*

(b) Victim-blaming

According to the findings, the majority of participants (37.2%) strongly agreed, and 31.0% agreed mildly with the statement that women are subjected to sexual harassment because of their own faults, which aligns with the participants' traditional beliefs (Table 3, item 2).

In a focus group discussion, a male (30 years, FGD 1) stated:

"In some cases, women are also guilty of violence against women. However, if we find any fault in the woman, instead of torturing her, we should solve the problem through discussion or with the help of the laws prevailing in the country. Violence against women can never solve any problem."

Another male in FGD 2 (27 years) stated:

"It's not just girls' fault. Boys are also at fault. Many boys disrespect women needlessly and do all sorts of bad things. So not only girls but boys are responsible most of the time."

(c) Hijab/veil

The study found that respondents were surprisingly liberal, with 60.2% strongly disagreeing with the notion that if someone harasses a woman for not wearing a Hijab/veil, the oppressor is not to blame. (Table 3, item 3).

One female (33 years, FGD-2) said: *"A veil or hijab is a private matter of a woman. It is hard to believe that it has anything to do with sexual harassment or torture of women."*

A man (40 years, FGD-2) disagreed with the previous statement of 33 years older woman, and he said that:



"According to the rules of Islam, women must wear a hijab (veil/Islamic dress). If they do not do this, and women are harassed, women have a significant portion of the blame for not wearing hijab or veil. As a result, men could not be faulted in all situations. Women are also guilty."

(d) Acceptance of male domination

This study reveals that a significant proportion of respondents (37.2%) strongly agreed with the assertion that a husband can mistreat his wife. Nonetheless, it is unacceptable for the wife to use tiny, filthy remarks or abusive language (Table 3, item 4).

A woman (33 years, FGD-2) said:

"Many boys harass girls for unnecessary reasons. They make various nasty comments. Especially the less educated youth and middle-aged people sexually harass women in multiple ways."

Another female (28 years) in the same focus group stated: *"Husbands can speak, but wives cannot. However, if the husband is drunk or unemployed, wives can speak or protest."*

One male (27 years, FGD 1) said:

"The husband may speak to his wife. But, the husband's perspective is not always correct. Wives should be patient. However, the wife should not abuse her spouse."

(e) Men's power over women

According to the findings, the majority of respondents (46.0%) believed that a husband can use his power to dominate his wife, indicating the high prevalence of patriarchal standards (Table 3, item 5).

One male (34 years, FGD 1) said:

"In some cases, a husband may use minimal force to discipline his wife. But that does not mean that the husband will beat his wife or abuse him physically and mentally."

One female (25 years, FGD 2) stated:

"Yes, in some cases he can. For example, if the wife does not perform her household activities or doesn't perform her domestic roles unless she is unwell, then the husband can force her to do her duties. There are also some other reasons why a husband can scold his wife. But the husband can never be brutal to his wife."

Table 3. Gender Ideologies Toward Violence against Women in Rural Bangladesh

Items N=400, F (%)	Agree Strongly	Agree Mildly	Disagree Mildly	Disagree Strongly
Item 1	223 (55.8)	89 (22.2)	15 (3.8)	73 (18.2)
Item 2	149 (37.2)	124 (31.0)	47 (11.8)	80 (20.0)
Item 3	54 (13.5)	45 (11.2)	60 (15.0)	241 (60.2)
Item 4	149 (37.2)	76 (19.0)	65 (16.2)	110 (27.5)
Item 5	184 (46.0)	91 (22.8)	48 (12.0)	77 (19.2)

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

DISCUSSION

The current study's findings provide a complete grasp of people's gender ideology in expressing their views and attitudes toward violence against women (VAW) in rural Bangladesh. The result shows that there is variation among people in their views on violence against women, where people were traditional in women's empowerment and violence, victim-blaming, acceptance of male domination, and men's power over women domains in rural Bangladesh. The results were surprisingly liberal, with opinions that if someone harasses a woman for not wearing a Hijab/veil, the oppressor is not to blame (discussed in the results section).

The study's findings align with the previous of Hossain & Islam (2023), Zhang (2019), and Karim et al. (2017), indicating that, without considering masculine issues, women's outdoor activities are not secure in a male-dominated culture. Men's gender ideology has been widely addressed in relation to women's standing around the world (Cheung and Choi, 2016; Dasgupta et al., 2018; Kim, 2017; Miller et al., 2020; Karim et al., 2017). Men are deemed to have greater power and privilege than women in the patriarchal ideology structure (Hashemi et al., 1996). Earlier studies in rural Bangladesh have shown that traditional gender ideology prevails,



with male privilege viewed as the prevalent cultural norms and values and females viewed as excessively submissive to men (Dey et al., 2021; Karim et al., 2020).

Previous research found that the majority of men in rural Bangladesh embraced conventional ideas, particularly about marital violence and women's empowerment. (Islam & Karim, 2012; Dey et al., 2021; Cheung & Choi, 2016; Karim & Law, 2013; Hossain, 2012; Karim et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2020; Karim et al., 2023). To some extent, the findings are similar to prior studies by Dey et al. (2021), which found that the majority of men were conventional and abused their wives.

CONCLUSION

Traditional attitudes are the main challenge in rural Bangladesh (Dey et al., 2021). This study followed a mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative) approach. The current study shows that people's attitudes were traditional in women's empowerment and violence, victim-blaming, acceptance of male domination, and men's power over women domains in rural Bangladesh. However, people were surprisingly liberal with disagreeing that if someone harasses a woman for not wearing a Hijab/veil, the oppressor is not to blame.

The findings have significant implications for stakeholders, educators, and gender researchers to rethink the gender ideology and violence against women of rural people in Bangladesh. This study's findings suggest that raising awareness about gender and violence could help the promotion of liberal thinking among individuals (both men and women) to prevent prevalent attitudes toward violence against women in rural Bangladesh.

Acknowledgment

The authors acknowledge the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh for the PhD Fellowship.

Statements and Declaration Conflict of Interest

On behalf of all the authors, the corresponding author states there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

The authors declare that no funds were given to prepare this manuscript.

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