VI VIOLENCE AND SAFETY OF WOMEN

6.1 **Context:** The women’s movement in Bangladesh has taken up the issue of pervasive violence against women as its preeminent concern in recent years. This has become the most important cementing non-partisan issue propelling women’s mobilization in Bangladesh. The national discourse on violence against women in Bangladesh is also mature compared to many of its neighbors. In recent years, public violence against women and the notorious rise of acid attacks have captured public attention. There is also rising concern in the women’s movement about extra-judicial *fatwas* issued against women, which make them targets of violence for acts deemed immodest and contrary to established norms. There is some speculation on whether such violence is a backlash arising from “threats to masculinity” in the wake of (especially younger) women’s visibility in schools and factories but there has been little empirical evidence for this.

6.2 In the last few years several NGOs have issued reports on violence against women. These include reports by Mahila Parishad and Naripokkho, Ain-O-Salish Kendro (ASK) and Bangladesh National Women Lawyers’ Association (BNWLA). These organizations file cases and follow them up through the formal and informal justice systems. They also monitor and track reports by the police and the judiciary. Without repeating the documentation already available in the reports this chapter focuses on new analysis in an effort to add to that dialogue.

6.3 This chapter grounds its analysis in the understanding that violence against women is a stark marker of inequality in power relations and addressing it for its intrinsic value has important implications for human rights and gender equality. But it has instrumental value as well – as it has an effect on a range of outcomes for women, their households, their children and society at large. Women who experience violence have worse health and other outcomes.

6.4 This is not to say that women are the only ones experiencing violence – in South Asian, as in many other cultures, violence is an important means of control, enforcement of familial and social norms and means of asserting power. Those lower down in the hierarchy and perceived as weaker are subject to violence by those higher and stronger in the hierarchy. There is also a strong paternalistic view that recognizes the role of the male of head of family as the enforcer of discipline.

6.5 Content analysis of focus groups that discussed the *shalish*, points to the fact the even publicly imposed punishment against violent crimes often takes the form of violence. Violence as punishment is socially accepted but certain types and intensity of violence are considered taboo and open to mediation. For instance, in a focus groups conducted for this report, women said beating was acceptable but beating with sticks was not. Thus, when a *shalish* finds an accused guilty, the punishment can be caning or hitting with shoes. This frequent violation of human rights in fact, is one of the main criticisms of the *shalish* as a dispute resolution mechanism.

6.6 Earlier studies have addressed the issue of violence against women, focusing on spousal violence. The major question they have tried to address is whether women’s autonomy (measured in a variety of ways) has an impact on spousal violence and its “triggers” and determinants. The earliest body

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133 For a discussion of illegal fatwas and acid attacks, see boxes 6.1 and 6.4 respectively.
134 Heise et al, 1994 ; Morrison et al, 2004
135 Informal dispute resolution forum
136 BRAC, 2006
137 For the most part, we use the term “spousal violence” in this chapter. At times we also use “domestic violence” at times to describe the violence women experience from their husbands, in keeping with the terms of the discourse in Bangladesh.
of work was based on the large numbers of women in the micro-credit programs has had inconclusive results to say the least, and this underscores the complexity of studying the issue of violence.138

6.7 The World Bank Survey on Gender Norms (WBSGN) 2006 has a detailed set of questions on violence and asks these questions of both men and women. It also has questions on perceptions of safety and security in the public domain and allows an understanding of the links between the household and the external environment in determining women’s security139. Compared to the BDHS 2004, men in the WBSGN 2006 show a far lower incidence of ever being violent to their wives (43 percent compared to 74 percent). The qualitative evidence for this chapter comes from 32 focus groups conducted in four sites in Bangladesh. It is used to supplement and explain the results from the quantitative analysis. Finally, we draw from a recent analysis based on the BDHS 2004 which for the first time collected data on men’s violence against their wives as reported by men140.

6.8 We disaggregate the analytical issue of violence against women into three parts:

- Occurrence of spousal violence against women, commonly called “domestic violence” in Bangladesh. Using the WBGNS 2006 we analyze the characteristics of men and women who have been violent or experienced violent at any time in their lifetime.
- Attitudes to violence - whether or not a woman believes it is acceptable for her to be beaten if she does not cook a proper meal or for a man to believe that he can hit if his wife does not cook properly.
- Perceptions of safety and security within the community by men about their wives and by women about themselves – whether the woman feels safe going out alone in her village (or urban neighborhood).

6.9 The chapter also addresses coping strategies by women and the government response to increasing awareness about violence. Part A of this chapter addresses the issue of domestic violence or violence against women by their husbands. Part B addresses the issue of safety and security of women. Part C focuses on coping mechanism and institutional support systems available to women and Part D presents a synthesis of the chapter and some key recommendations. Some of the findings may be sensitive to policy interventions and others may not. For instance, we find that ownership of personal cosmetics reduces the likelihood of violence against women. This finding may set off further exploration as to why and what this may be a proxy for, but for this chapter we are unable to link it to policy interventions.

6.10 **Measuring and estimating the prevalence of spousal violence and security public spaces is complicated:** In the context of the discussion on violence against women in Bangladesh, the question is often asked – how prevalent is violence, really? The answer is almost impossible to come upon. This is because there are serious difficulties in measuring something so private and so ingrained in norms as

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138 Hadi (2000) and Bates, et al (2004) reported that women who participated in credit programs and contributed financially to the household were less likely to report sexual or other violence, but Bhuiya et al’s (2003) study showed that members of micro-credit societies had higher odds of being beaten than non-members. Still others showed no effect at the level of the individual but a positive effect at the community level (Koenig et al, 2003), while Schuler et al (1998) showed that participation in credit programs only helped if the woman was contributing significantly in economic terms.

139 For more details on the surveys, see Annex 1

140 Johnson and Das, 2008
spousal violence.\textsuperscript{141} For instance, in one study ethnographic evidence yielded a much higher prevalence of domestic violence than did a quantitative survey\textsuperscript{142}. Similarly another survey which used reports of ICDDR, B field workers showed a much higher prevalence than did other surveys in ICDDR,B areas\textsuperscript{143}.

6.11 The BDHS 2004 module on domestic violence administered to husbands of respondents found that men’s reporting of violence was far higher than women’s reporting in any previous survey. The WBSSGN 2006 found reporting by men to be almost twice as high as that by women, but not as high as the BDHS 2004. The discrepancy in men’s responses between two surveys done around the same time, with the same degree of representativeness (by the same survey agency) indicates yet again that type of questions, method and rapport with the respondents all matter a great deal. Annex table A6.1 gives a snapshot of the major studies conducted recently and the prevalence recorded in them.

6.12 \textbf{Estimating trends is even more difficult:} Just as it is difficult to estimate prevalence, perhaps even more challenging is to answer the question whether spousal violence is on the increase. It is clear that reporting of violence and discussion about it is more acceptable now than before, but at the household or even the community level, we rely on perceptions about the trends.

6.13 Our qualitative findings indicate that communities perceive that domestic violence has declined over the last twenty years or so. In focus group discussions, participants were asked about changes in their villages in the last 20 years and also asked to identify some key trends. In all four focus groups with elite women in the community, the consensus was that wife beating had declined - certainly among richer and educated families - but also among the poorer families. It would have to be a “grave mistake” for a woman to be beaten by her husband (for examples of what constitutes “grave mistakes” see box 6.2). Answers from poor women’s focus groups were not as clear.

“These days there are not that many cases of wife beating. Because husbands of middle and upper classes think it’s a matter of prestige, so they do not beat their wives. Poor people now think their wives are earning, getting loan from NGOs etc. and are now like “geese which lay golden eggs” (“mahilara sonar dim para hass hoyechay”) so wife beating is rare now.” (Elite woman in Satkhira during focus group discussions, but the group did go on to add that if a grave mistake had been committed, it was natural that a wife would be beaten)

“Children protest when husband and wife quarrel and villagers protest as well.” (Poor woman in Sunamgonj during focus group discussions)

“Earlier, wives, sisters, daughters were seriously beaten, but now they are counseled...if they still do not correct themselves, then they are given a warning or threat.” (Elite man in Mymensingh during focus group discussions)

“I used to beat my wife but now my children have grown up. They forbid me from doing so” (Elite man in Mymensingh during focus group discussions)

6.14 While this is not a robust indication of whether spousal violence is declining or not, it is consistent with another recent study by Schuler and colleagues\textsuperscript{144}, who in turn cite other empirical

\textsuperscript{141} Naved et al (2005) have laid out some of the challenges in measuring and getting reliable data on domestic violence.

\textsuperscript{142} Schuler et al, 1996

\textsuperscript{143} Bhuiya et al, 2003

\textsuperscript{144} Schuler et al, 2006
evidence of a declining trend. In our focus groups too there was no indication of spousal violence being on the rise. We can tentatively conclude increasing levels of education, and the presence of more educated children seems to be a restraint on the violence inflicted on mothers and wives.

6.15 Men do not regard actual harassment or spousal violence to be as high as women do. Figure 6.1 indicates that one third of the women believe that it is usual in their community for a woman to be beaten if she neglects the home and family. Men and women diverge dramatically in their perceptions of whether women are usually beaten for not taking care of the home or not cooking, or going out without telling their husbands, with a far smaller proportion of men reporting such violence at the community level to be usual. It is on suspicion of having an extramarital affair that a woman in the community is most likely to be beaten and here men and women have almost identical response, indicating that this is the norm.

Figure 6.1
Perception of occurrence of spousal violence in the community
Based on the question “Is it usual in your community for xx to happen”

6.16 While there is no indication from focus groups that spousal violence is on the increase, almost every focus group said it was acceptable to use violence as a last resort. Perhaps, violence against women at the will of husbands may have decreased, but as a “last resort” it is quite common. Yet, the same focus groups also corroborate the view that violent behaviors that are often idiosyncratic and unpredictable and that households are heterogeneous in their relationships and this to a large extent determines the variations. Quotes below from focus groups conducted for this report are indicative of this as well.

“They should be made understand. If they make a mistake despite repeated advice, then they may be beaten or divorced.” Male UP member during focus group discussions

“It is (beating wives) quite normal. Sometimes it becomes essential.” Young girl’s father from poor background in Satkhira during focus group discussions

“Under no circumstances should women and girls be beaten by men.” Elite woman in Dinajpur during focus group discussions
“Beating wife is bad, but if wives do wrong, for example (if the) wife does not respect husband’s mother or father the husband should beat his wife”. Elite woman in Satkhira during focus group discussions

“We do not like to beat our sister under any circumstances, rather we prefer giving them advice to do right thing”. School going adolescent boy in Satkhira during focus group discussions

“Torturing (physically hurting) wives is a coward’s job. Besides, Hadis does not permit such behavior” Poor man in Dinajpur during focus group discussions

Box 6.1: Illegal Fatwas in Bangladesh

The understanding and application of fatwa in Bangladesh is far from its original intent and history. The right to issue fatwa purely as an edict as understood under Muslim law, vests only on those recognized specifically as muftis, those persons who have the jurisprudential capacity to issue fatwa. That, according to Muslim jurisprudence, fiqh, even muftis cannot arbitrarily interpret Muslim laws but must follow the most meticulous and detailed grounds of public policy, justice and good conscience. The manner in which fatwa is decreed and carried out in Bangladesh betrays a gross misunderstanding and misapplication of Muslim jurisprudence. Such misapplication in the hands of vested interest groups against vulnerable sections of society blatantly violate human rights norms and go against existing statutory laws of the country, including criminal, civil and evidentiary. Fatwa is essentially a decision or decree on a complex jurisprudential issue touching upon human reality and thus, cannot be violating or degrading.

According to records of reported cases of illegal fatwas and their contexts maintained by the Documentation Unit of Ain-o-Salish Kendro (ASK), it appears that most persons in Bangladesh are unaware of the illegality of fatwas. These records also indicate that in most cases the victims of illegal fatwa are poor, illiterate, socially vulnerable, rural persons, and almost always women, while the perpetrators are men – who are either rural elite or those protected by vested interest groups.

The types of punishments decreed by fatwa range from subjecting their targets to social disgrace, and in the most extreme cases, to inhuman treatment, which includes physical mutilation or even death. The forms of inhuman treatment also include shaving the victims’ heads, or parading them around the village, or ostracizing them from a particular locality. In several cases victims have been tied around trees and beaten, or subjected to 101 lashes or pelted with stones.

A survey of some of the fatwas issued in Bangladesh demonstrate how the fatwa has been misappropriated and abused as a weapon against the weak and vulnerable by obscurantists, powerful local vested interest groups, and self-appointed moralists. One of the first cases to be reported on fatwa was that of Nurjahan’s in January 1993. Nurjahan, a woman of 21 years of Chatakchhara, Sylhet was found ‘guilty’ by a self appointed fatwa giver, Moulana Mannan, for contracting, according to him, an illegal second marriage. Moulana Mannan instigated a local ‘shalish’ to determine her fate and decreed by fatwa that Nurjahan and her second husband were to be stoned to death and her parents, who arranged the marriage, be sentenced to 50 lashes each. Nurjahan was buried waist deep in the ground and stoned 101 times. Although Nurjahan survived the stoning, the humiliation drove her to commit suicide soon after. Since then ASK has meticulously monitored cases of illegal fatwas and in

The Bangladeshi courts have taken cognizance of these fatwas and a popular movement against fatwas is in the offing.

Source: Ad verbatim from Faustina Pereira & Deena Nargis, 2000 with minor editorial changes
A Spousal Violence: Its Correlates

Summary:

- Twenty-four percent of women in the 45-60 age group and 30 percent of women in 15-25 age group reported ever experiencing violence by the husbands. In contrast, over 43 percent of male heads of households reported ever having been violent to their wives.
- When women accept violence and report more conservative views on other gender norms, they are less likely to experience it, but when men believe it is acceptable to be violent they seem to practice it as well.
- Poverty is associated with an increased risk of spousal violence against women.
- Women who have been married at a younger age are at higher risk of violence.
- Purdah seems to have no association with violence.
- In keeping with the popular perception, women whose families have paid dowry have a higher likelihood of experiencing violence.
- Certain geographical areas are associated with a much higher level of violence against women.
- WHO reports that Bangladeshi women are among the least likely to seek help against violence and when they do, they go to informal institutions.

6.17 Several studies globally suggest that perceived “threats to masculinity” or transgression of entrenched norms incites spousal violence against women. In addition, the WHO multi-country study (2005) indicates that in comparison to other countries in the study, rural Bangladeshi women are among the most likely to condone violence for what are considered role transgressions by women (Figure 6.4). Other qualitative evidence and survey data from Bangladesh also suggest that violence by men is used when women do not play out their expected roles. However, the extent to which change in norms and women’s status are accepted by the community may also be a factor that determines the extent of violence.

6.18 Complexity of norms and regional variation. At the bivariate level it looks as though region would be a powerful determinant of violence. As the map in Figure 6.2 shows, women in Khulna report the highest incidence of ever experiencing violence, followed by Dhaka, Barisal and Chittagong, while Rajshahi and Sylhet display low levels of women reporting violence. This at first instance appears contradictory to those who visualize Sylhet as being the most conservative area. However, this relationship does not hold at the multivariate level and there is no statistical significance of individual regions and the experience of violence by women. Only Khulna still shows up as being a determinant of violence. It is also likely that those regions where women have greater voice are also regions where they would report violence in surveys more readily and vice versa. Therefore this is an important caveat to keep in mind when interpreting results on violence.

6.19 As we see in following sections, attitudes to violence are highly correlated with actual experience and regional norms seem to play out more in attitudes than in actual experience at the multivariate level.

6.20 Acceptance of violence by women differs across regions and this predicts actual experience of violence as well. Studies globally and from Bangladesh have shown that it is only when women begin to challenge power relations by showing more autonomy they experience violence. Our results are in

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145 See box 6.2; also Duvvury et al, 2002 for similar findings from India and Blanchett, 2001 for Bangladesh.
147 Koenig et al (2003) found that while an individual level autonomy had only borderline significance showing slightly elevated risk, yet community level autonomy was a protective factor.
keeping with these findings. Women who espouse more liberal attitudes are more likely to be hit. When compared to Dhaka, older women in Rajshahi are 4.6 times more likely and younger women almost three times more likely to condone violence by husbands for small infractions. Perhaps as a result, they are also only half as likely as women in Dhaka to have ever experienced violence.

6.21 We find even more dramatic results when we look at Sylhet. Here older women are ten times more likely and younger women six times more likely than women in Dhaka to condone violence by husbands; but living in Sylhet does not translate into higher likelihood of experiencing violence. The magnitude of the odds in Sylhet is in keeping with the notion that the region is conservative, and if women do not challenge the norms, they are safe from spousal violence. Conversely in Khulna, where younger women do not condone violence, they also have slightly higher odds of being beaten but these odds do not hold once other factors are controlled for.

6.22 Other studies have found a similar correlation between women having conservative attitudes and being protected from violence148. It appears that when women's autonomy becomes more accepted at the community level, it does not spark the same level of violence against individual women. It is however also likely that those women who do not condone violence have a lower tolerance for it and would be more likely to report it in surveys than those who think violence is acceptable.

6.23 When men believe it is acceptable to be violent, they seem to practice it as well. While women say it is acceptable to be hit, they seem to invite less violence, but when men say it is acceptable to hit, they also carry it out. Analysis from the BDHS 2004 bears this out. Men who believe that wife-beating is unacceptable are 26 percent less likely to report a violent act against their wife in the past year, while those who agree that beating a wife is justifiable under most circumstances are the most likely to have been violent towards their wife149. This is confirmed by analysis from the WBGNS 2006. Men in Rajshahi are almost six times more likely to consider violence acceptable and twice as likely as their counterparts in Dhaka to have been violent. Similarly, men in Khulna are about seven times more likely than those in Dhaka to believe that wife beating is acceptable, and also twice as likely to have been violent.

6.24 Men’s violence against their wives seems to be a means of asserting control. When men think that women are able to resist, they seem to be more violent to them, almost as a measure of enforcing control. Analysis of BDHS 2004 data indicates that the more a man believes that a woman has a right to protect herself from her husband’s sexually-transmitted infections the more likely he is to report having been violent towards his wife in the past year.

6.25 **Attitudes to other measures of gender equality are also significant.** Regressions based on the BDHS 2004 indicate that men who have a preference for sons are more likely (than men who have no preference or who want equal numbers of sons and daughters) to report having been violent to their wives. Men’s behavior in still other realms is also a significant determinant of their propensity to be violent to their wives. Thus, men who report having been unfaithful to their wives are much more likely to report recent violence. Further, most Bangladeshi men say that they take their wives’ opinions into account in making large household purchases or deciding about visits to family members or friends; but those who do not, are also much more likely to also report that they have been violent toward their wives in the past year. Later we discuss the effects of egalitarian attitudes on education on violence.

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148 Koenig et al (2003) found that in more conservative areas, greater autonomy was a risk factor indicating a potential destabilizing effect of autonomy. Schuler et al’s most recent study (2006) indicates that women who accept violence as normal are less likely to experience it.
149 Johnson and Das, 2006
Education has a mixed and complex relationship with violence: If indeed violence is primarily the result of ignorance, then we would expect education to have a positive effect on men’s behavior and for women not to tolerate it. There could be two pathways through which education may have an impact on domestic violence - through educated men’s restrained behavior and “enlightened” attitudes, and educated women’s ability to resist. But the empirical results are far from clear on this.

“Girls who are illiterate and without academic qualification are more exposed to verbal and physical repression (abuse) in in-laws’ houses or by their husbands. Even if they are beaten regularly, they cannot leave and take refuge in their parents’ houses. Because girls think they are liabilities on their parents. But an educated girl does not tolerate this kind of repression (abuse). She thinks, I will work on my own and can take care of myself, why should I bear with such repression”. Elite man from Dinaipur during focus group discussions

In our analysis based on the WBSGN 2006 we find it sobering that the effects of education after controlling for household wealth, attitudes and region, are very small for women. However, post-primary education makes younger women slightly less likely to both condone violence and experience it, but the statistical significance of this finding is weak. More worrying is the result that primary educated men tend to report a higher likelihood of ever having been violent to their wives compared to uneducated men. When we use the BDHS 2004 we get slightly more encouraging results - men with secondary or higher levels of education are 40 percent less likely to report having been violent toward their wives in the past year.

Spousal education has some positive effects. Even when their own education does not have statistically significant effects, women who have more educated husbands tend to be less likely to experience violence.

While some studies from Bangladesh have found both men’s education and women’s education to be important (Hadi, 2000; Koenig et al, 2003), others have shown only women’s education to be important (Schuler et al, 1996; Bates, et al, 2005). And still others have found education at higher levels to have a positive impact.

We conducted the analysis without the attitude variable (acceptable to beat wife if she does not cook properly) in case it diluted the effect of education. Since it did not, we included both attitudes and education in the model.

Johnson and Das, 2007
violence. Similarly, wives’ education lowers the odds of a husband condoning violence; but otherwise, both uneducated and educated individuals have similar responses to whether a husband can hit his wife if she does not cook properly. It is likely that men who marry more educated women are also those who are more “enlightened” themselves.

6.29 Other attitudes to gender equality have unexpected effects. We would expect that men who believe in equality of education among spouses would be less likely to be violent. But our findings are to the contrary. Men’s belief that husbands and wives should have equal education is associated with has significant and dire consequences for their wives and this seems to defy interpretation. Why would men who believe that wives should be as educated as husbands also be more likely to beat their wives? This needs further exploration and perhaps is a proxy for some other norms, and presents yet again the complexity of measuring and understanding norms and their effect on outcomes. However, women who believe in equality of this kind are probably also those who challenge norms in other ways. Thus, women are on average 130 percent more likely to have experienced spousal violence if they say they believe in equal education among spouses, though the statistical significance is low.

6.30 Does violence decline with age? We find that few demographic characteristics are significant determinants of violence. Let us consider age. In South Asia, women’s age and place in the life cycle are of critical relevance to their health status, well-being, and access to services\textsuperscript{153}. Older women, especially those with children, older sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law have greater power in the household than new wives, unmarried daughters, widows or women who cannot have children. In extended families, this has greater importance, since everyone lives under the same roof. Age and place in the life cycle also determine how likely a woman is to experience violence. Thus, many studies have found that older men are less violent to their wives and older women experience less violence than their younger counterparts\textsuperscript{154}.

6.31 We find age to be an important predictor of violence, but not always in the direction we would expect.\textsuperscript{155} For men, the relationship of age with inflicting violence is weak when we use the WBSGN

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\textsuperscript{153} Das Gupta, 1995

\textsuperscript{154} For instance, Bhuiyan et al (2003) show that the odds of beating among women with husbands aged less than 30 years were six times higher than of those with husbands aged 50 years or more. Similarly, older women tend to experience violence less than younger ones, the exception being the study by Koenig et al (2003) which seems to point to fact that older ages are risk factors.

\textsuperscript{155} Age does not seem to matter for older women’s experience of violence, but in another puzzling result, we find that for younger women (15-25 age group), being older - or closer to 25 than to 15 - is associated with higher odds of experiencing violence. Perhaps families and husbands tend to treat much younger wives better, but as they settle into the household, they also become more liable to be treated worse.
2006, but our results from the BDHS 2004 indicate that 57 percent of husbands in the youngest age-group (15-25 year-olds) report having been violent to their wives in the past year. This proportion declines with age, yet remains high at 20 percent even among the oldest husbands. Perhaps with time and development of the marital relationship, spousal violence decreases.

6.32 More in keeping with conventional wisdom, we find that women who marry later are less likely to experience violence as well as to justify it.

6.33 Purdah does not seem to affect women’s reporting of violence. Purdah and women seclusion is implicated in so many notions about women’s status, that we subjected some of these to empirical test.

6.34 There could be two competing hypotheses about the effect of purdah on violence. The first would arise from the stereotype that women practicing purdah are “oppressed” and so would perhaps be more vulnerable to violence. The competing hypothesis would suggest that if women practice purdah they adhere to a norm and would be less likely to invite violence.

6.35 We do not find strong effects of purdah in one way or another. Older women are slightly less likely to report ever experiencing violence if they practice purdah but this is not a robust relationship. For younger women there seems to be no effect of purdah on the experience of violence. Purdah also does not influence whether or not women think violence is justified if a woman does not fulfill her role as a cook.

6.36 Men do have a reduced and statistically significant likelihood of inflicting violence if their wives practice purdah. Men whose wives practice purdah are 66 percent less likely to consider wife beating acceptable and 37 percent less likely to report having ever inflicted violence. These results seem to confirm other results in this chapter that if men perceive women to be conforming to accepted norms, they are less likely to inflict violence.
6.37 Familial support to women has confusing effects. Research from India has shown that cultures that practice village endogamy (marry girls to boys within the village) have more support systems for married women. Bangladeshi marriages though exogamous, do not have the same premium on exogamy that Indian marriages do. In spite of this, in the WBSGN 2006, less than 10 percent women have ever returned to their natal family due to an estrangement. Family honor and reputation of the marriage are of utmost importance and women would only go to their natal families (or be accepted there) under extreme duress. Multivariate analysis of violence seems to bear this out. While distance to the natal family makes women on average 60 percent less likely to condone violence, it has no effect on the actual experience of violence. Therefore, if their natal family is close-by women seem to have the support to regard violence as being unacceptable, but this is not a deterrent to violence.

Box 6.2: What constitutes transgression enough to invite violence?
Results from focus group discussions

“A major mistake means mistake which is intolerable for a man.” Elite man Sunamgonj
“If wives make a major mistake slapping by husband may be tolerated.” Young girls’ mothers from poor backgrounds in Dinajpur

Situations where violence is acceptable

Elite men in Mymensingh
- If wives disobey husband
- If they enter into arguments
- If they are disobedient or talk to other males even after warning
- If sick husband is not taken care of

UP chairman in Sunamgonj district
- If a wife does not respect elders in the family
- If she does not follow the direction of her husband.
- If a wife likes other men

Young girls’ mothers from poor backgrounds in Dinajpur
- When wives do not listen to a repeated “order”
- If husband works outside and does not get food when he comes back home
- If the wife does not wash the husbands’ clothes before he needs to go out

6.38 It has also argued that household size may be either a “stressor” leading to violence or a source of support, but our analysis does not find any significance of household size once household wealth is controlled for.

6.39 Women’s employment status and assets: Women’s economic worth should make them more immune to violence or to be able to resist it, but like participation in credit programs, women’s employment does not always show up as a deterrent to violence. In fact, evidence points in both directions and is wholly inconclusive. In our analysis too, employment does not come across as a significant determinant of either attitudes or experience of violence.

6.40 Ownership of cosmetics seems to confer some kind of status. One of the major changes in Bangladeshi society is the increased use of cosmetics like lipstick and a skin whitening cream generically called “snow”. Face powder has for the last several decades been in use by women. When we look at

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156 Dyson and Moore, 1983
157 WHO, 2005
158 While some studies (Hadi, 2005) suggest that employment protects women, there are others that suggest the opposite – that when women contribute significantly in economic terms to the household they may be at greater risk of violence (Bates, et al, 2004) and their enhanced economic worth itself places them at risk of violence.
permission to own any of these three cosmetics, we find that the likelihood of experiencing violence gets cut by half, with larger effects for younger women. Also, men whose wives can own these items are about 30 percent less likely to have ever been violent. These results seem to point to permission to own assets like personal cosmetics as a proxy for women’s value in the household even after controlling for income quintile (or ability to purchase them). This is also significant predictor of decision-making as we have seen in a previous chapter. Here we have to distinguish between variables that policy can influence and those that it cannot. In this case, we have no recommendations based on the results.

6.41 **Socioeconomic status is an important predictor of violence.** The all-too-often idiosyncratic and unpredictable nature of violence indicates that men use it as a coping mechanism in the face of frustration. This can be exacerbated by pressures of poverty. In our analysis, controlling for attitudinal, regional and demographic characteristics, younger women from rich families are half as likely as their poorest counterparts to be hit.

6.42 For men, as household wealth increases, the probability of their reporting violence against their wives decreases. Men from the two richest quintiles are each half as likely as the poorest men to have ever been violent to their wives. The effect of poverty also comes out in focus group discussions. Therefore anti-poverty measures and swifter poverty reduction may have salutary effects on violence as well. But it is also likely that richer and higher status women (and men) underreport the experience of violence due to the stigma and shame associated with it.

6.43 Other studies have found household landownership as a protector against violence. The pathways are not clearly understood, but perhaps in predominantly agrarian societies, where land is the primary asset, its ownership may confer on women a status that protects them from violence. Else, households that own land also have a higher value on female labor and would be less likely to abuse women. We did not find any significance of landownership in our analysis whether from the BDHS 2004 or the WBSGN 2006.

6.44 There is a difference between household ownership of land and a woman’s ownership of land. It is not often that we can measure the latter, but a recent study from India indicates that land owned by women, and not any other asset is the most important protector against violence.

6.45 **There is a strong dowry-violence link.** There is general agreement in Bangladesh of a strong relationship between dowry and violence and dowry related crimes are regularly in the news. There are also reports of women’s murder when dowry expectations are not fulfilled. Yet the empirical literature based on Bangladesh has not addressed the issue in any depth, until recently. The WBSGN 2006 asked questions on dowry in the same module as spousal violence and allows for an empirical investigation of the links.

6.46 It is fairly conclusive from this analysis that if dowry was paid, the odds that a woman experiences violence are higher, with the largest effects for younger women. Men whose wives have brought in dowry are twice as likely to have been violent to them. This is consistent with the results of

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159 see also Schuler et al, 1998; Blanchett, 2001
160 For instance, see Bates, et al, 2004
161 Koenig et al, 2003; Hadi, 2005
162 Land ownership was therefore dropped from the WBSGN 2006 model.
163 Panda and Agarwal, (2005)
164 Bloch and Rao (2003) show this link to be strong in India
another recent study\textsuperscript{166} and is perhaps due to two reasons – dowry payments signify a relationship of dominance by the husband and his family and second; where dowry has been paid there are increased expectations of future payments in the course of the marriage. Since dowry agreements are usually unwritten, expectations often change in the course of the marriage, especially in the early years.

B Women’s Safety and Security

Summary

- Forty-nine percent of older women and 38 percent of younger women feel safe going out at any time within their settlement (village or urban neighborhood).
- Men perceive the external environment to be more unsafe for women. But they do not regard actual harassment or domestic violence to be as high as women do.
- Urban areas are more unsafe and geographical area is one of the most important determinants of feelings of safety among women.
- Women who in some way challenge the conventional norms of “appropriate behavior” and thought are also more likely to feel unsafe in the community.

6.47 The Dhaka-based discourse on safety of women and girls and the increased reporting of incidents of crime against women has been in the forefront for the last several years. The media has taken a proactive role in documenting such incidents. However, the issue of public violence is difficult to understand empirically. The WBSGN 2006 therefore addressed it through perceptions of safety and security of women and girls as recounted by themselves and by men as well as through focus group discussions.

### Box 6.3: Acid Attacks in Bangladesh

In 2004, 228 cases of acid burns were reported in the media, while 88 cases were filed. Of these, 25 girls and women, including two under the age of six, were burnt because of family disputes, and a total of 36 girls and women were burnt because of land disputes. Twenty one cases were a result of vendetta, for woman’s refusal to accept a man’s proposal of love/marriage or sexual relationship. The Parliament enacted two legislations, the Acid Control Act, 2002 and the Acid Crime Control Act 2002, but enforcement remains weak. Perpetrators are still able to procure acid from the open market and local doctors are not sufficiently trained identify acid burns for treatment.

The Acid Survivors Foundation and the Burns Unit at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital are two initiatives that are based on strong support systems for acid burn survivors. BRAC has provided logistic support to transport victims to the curative centres in Dhaka, and several legal aid organizations, such as Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) and Bangladesh Women Lawyers’ Association (BNWLA) have provided legal aid. Prothom alo, a national newspaper has been in the vanguard of a citizens’ movement against the crime. Naripkkho and Mahila Parishad have been following the cases of acid attacks and have published the results of their follow-up in the baseline report on violence.

Source: D’Costa, 2004

6.48 There is considerable coherence among different groups regarding the general level of safety in the village: Questions were posed in the WBSGN 2006 as to whether respondents had ever heard of or knew of incidents of insecurity or criminal activity in the last year in their village. There seems to be remarkable coherence among all categories of individuals interviewed – women and men, as to the security situation in their villages. This excludes perception of rape in the village, where men tend to have lower perception of incidents; and politically instigated violence where men tend to have a higher perception of incidents. Moreover, as table 6.1 shows, prevalence of criminal/unsafe incidents is

\textsuperscript{166} Bates et al (2004)
relatively low (except for violence due to political reasons) if we go by these reports. Certainly, there
appears to be little resistance to women’s movement outside the home for the purposes of employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.1: Knowledge of incidents of lack of safety/criminal activity in the community in the last year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Anyone’s money taken away against their will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone opposed women working outside the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against anyone outside the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone harassed while traveling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman raped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against anyone for political reasons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


6.49 Less than 35 percent of the women believe that women and girls are not harassed in the community. Men perceive the external environment to be slightly more unsafe for women. Less than half of older women and about 38 percent of younger women feel they can move alone in their village at any time. However, this question is also tied up with whether it is acceptable for women to go out at any time, where they are going, who is accompanying them, the purpose for which they are going out, that it can only be seen as indicative and not a marker of safety alone.

6.50 Responses from focus groups indicate that apprehension of harassment and social norms of mobility are so tied up that it is difficult to distinguish the two. There seems to be a slight improvement in perceptions of safety of women, which is probably encouraged by the increased mobility of women going to school and work. Other responses indicate that wearing a borka enables women to move more freely. Thus, even feelings of safety can change when opportunities change.

“Women and young girls can move alone up to 8 p.m. They are safe when they go out alone, but sometimes rowdy boys tease (harass) them.” Poor man in Dinajpur during focus group discussions

“There are problems for women and young girls in moving alone on narrow roads; wide roads are not problematic.” Poor man in Dinajpur during focus group discussions
“It is not safe for women and girls to outside alone at night........about 15 years ago, women did not go outside alone even by day. Now they can go nearby if necessary”. Elite man in Mymensingh during focus group discussions

“It is not entirely safe for girls to go out alone in the evening or night, and through narrow passages during daytime, as rowdy boys disturb (harass) them.” Out of school adolescent girls in Dinajpur during focus group discussions

Who feels safest? Multivariate predictors of women’s physical safety in Bangladesh:

6.51 This sub-section is based on the regressions conducted using the dependent variable – do you feel safe going out at any time within your village or urban settlement? Detailed results are in annex table A6.5. Very few variables other than region are significant determinants of women feeling safe in their external environment. This in turn could be a proxy for not just norms but also law and order situations as well as confidence in the police and judiciary. It is also important that neither their own nor their spouses’ education, nor even for the most part socioeconomic status have any relationship with perceptions of safety. This points to the importance of community level rather than individual factors as being the important determinants of safety.

6.52 Urban areas are more unsafe. In keeping with the conventional wisdom on the subject, women in urban areas are half as likely as those in rural areas to feel safe in the community at any time. The negative effects of urban areas are expectedly higher for younger women, but whether urban or rural, region again emerges as one of the most important predictors of feelings of safety.

6.53 Sylhet and Rajshahi stand out as inspiring the lowest levels of safety among women even at the multivariate level (Figure 6.7). Women in Sylhet feel about 85 percent less safe than their counterparts in Dhaka. In Rajshahi, older women feel half as safe and younger women about 60 percent less safe than their counterparts in Dhaka. This seems to have a relationship with attitudes to violence in Sylhet and Rajshahi as well, where women are so much more likely to condone violence. Clearly, a mix
of factors which include norms of mobility and seclusion, acceptability of seeing women in public spaces and general law and order situation are responsible for women in Sylhet and Rajshahi to be so much more intimidated by the external environment. On the other hand, women in Chittagong do not feel so intimidated. Older women in Chittagong are twice as likely and younger women about one and half times as likely as those in Dhaka to feel safe in their environment. But this is not statistically significant. Barisal shows no significant effects, and nor does Khulna for younger women. Older women in Khulna however have a lower feeling of safety than their counterparts in Dhaka.

**Figure 6.7**

*Women in Sylhet & Rajshahi Most Intimidated by their Physical Environment (compared to Dhaka)*

Source: Based on logistic regression controlling for background characteristics

(World Bank Gender Norms Survey 2006)

Older women (45-60) are more likely to feel unsafe than younger women (15-25). Barisal and Khulna do not show significant effects for younger women.

6.54  **More liberal attitudes are associated with feeling unsafe.** We saw in the previous sub-section that women who challenge conventional norms are more likely to experience violence. We find the same thread to continue in women’s feelings of safety. Controlling for regional and urban-rural characteristics, we find that women who in some way challenge conventional norms of “appropriate behavior” and thought are more likely to feel unsafe in the community. Thus, older women who are allowed cosmetics are also more likely to feel unsafe. In South Asian rural areas in particular, older women are slotted in stereotypical roles of mothers, mothers-in-law and grandmothers and those that defy that role through independence, dress, movement or use of cosmetics are in some way questioning the normative standards for older women. This perhaps explains why having cosmetics is associated with a 40 percent lower likelihood of also feeling safe in the community at any time for women in the 45-60 age group, while it has no effects for younger women (among whom use of cosmetics is accepted).

“My daughter is going to high school; we (parents) have advised her to wear a borka. She is following our advice. Borka is good for young girls, as they can be teased (harassed) by rowdy boys on their way to school.” Male UP member in Sunamgonj district during focus group discussions

“Borka is essential for young girls. Boys want to tease (harass) girls, want to accompany them on their way to school. Borka is the best solution to all such bad things.” Male college teacher in Sunamgonj district during FGD
Box 6.4: Voices from Sylhet

We have focused on the special situation of Sylhet with regard to several gender-related outcomes throughout the report. In keeping with the thread, we report below voices of participants of focus group discussions conducted for this report.

“It is safe to go out. But we do not like to go out alone......I am working with an NGO, so I go out alone. I came here alone. But I use borka; only my face is open” Young woman from Sunamgonj

“It is safe for girls to go outside by day because most girls go out wearing a borka. But it is not safe at night. And society does not accept it.” School girls in Sunamgonj

“There are two coaching centers at Tawa Bazar. Six girls work as teachers. They are seen going to work without borkah but they use umbrellas and go together. Local people do not consider them bad. But if female students commute without borka, they would be criticized.” Young girls’ mothers in Sunamgonj

“Women can go out alone and it is safe, but we guardians prefer girls not to go out alone especially to a distant place......when women go to Sylhet or Sunamgonj (town), they need company. We think it is safe for girls to take their brother or a close relative when they are going far away.” UP member in Sunamgonj

Sunamgonj: Elite women in a focus group discussion

“If girls are sent to school alone, there is possibility of being harassed. That’s why girls go to school in a group.”

“Girls or women are not usually sent to shop or market or school.” The group gave the following reasons:

- Women and girls do not need to go to the market, as husbands take the responsibility.
- They visit relatives’ houses with somebody else.
- Girls are not sent to school alone due to fear of being disturbed by boys (although this does not happen).
- Elderly people criticize girls if they go to school or market alone.
- Boys try to talk to girls if they go alone to school.

“If a woman moves alone, the family of that woman faces criticism. As a result girls may have a problem in getting married. And so, girls do not move alone. But two women together may go to market together, they can even go up to Chhatak thana.”

6.55 Women who believe in spouses having equal education are also more likely to feel unsafe. Older women with egalitarian views on marriage are 43 percent less likely and younger women 27 percent less likely to feel safe compared to those who do not have egalitarian views. It appears that their very views make them perceive themselves as potential targets for attack within the community.

6.56 Proximity to the natal family is associated with greater perceptions of insecurity. This is completely contrary to our expectations. Proximity to natal family may also be a proxy for enforcement of norms or be perceived as a threat to the external environment, but these are merely speculations. Larger family size also lowers the probability of feeling safe for older women.
6.57 **Purdah** is associated with a slightly lower likelihood of younger women feeling safe. Younger women who practice purdah are about 30 percent less likely to feel safe but this has a low level of statistical significance. Younger women who feel unsafe probably wear the borka to ward off unwelcome attention or to circumvent opposition to their appearance in public spaces. This is evidenced from a number of responses from the qualitative field work and reported elsewhere in this chapter. It is also in keeping with a growing notion in Bangladesh that although purdah is on the rise, it probably signifies greater mobility among younger women.

C  **Women’s Coping Behavior and the Government Response to Increasing Concern about Violence**

6.58 In comparison to other countries, women in Bangladesh are among the least likely to share their experience of violence with anyone. The WHO multi-country study based on one urban and one rural site found that, 66 percent of women who were physically abused by their husband/partner never told anyone about the violence. The rest told either family or neighbors. Only 5 percent of physically abused women in Dhaka and 7 percent in Matlab ever sought help for the violence. Local leaders were most commonly appealed to (by 2 percent of abused women in Dhaka and by 6 percent in Matlab), followed by the police (2 percent in Dhaka and 1 percent in Matlab)\(^{167}\). For the most part, therefore, even community based mechanisms are solutions of the last resort for women experiencing domestic violence and formal systems are seldom appealed to. A focus group in Dinajpur gave the following example of how a marital conflict was resolved.

*There was a couple in Kamalpur village. The husband used to take drugs, leading to daily quarrels after which he would regularly beat his wife. The wife retaliated one day by hitting him. When matter escalated and the husband threatened to stab the wife, she wanted to separate from him. A shalish took place in the village. Fathers of both husband and wife, UP Members and elite - as many as 60 people were present. The shalish recorded their argument.*

**Verdict:** Both were pronounced guilty. Father of the accused husband beat him with shoes and the same way, father of the accused wife beat her in presence of all in the shalish. The couple committed in the shalish not to do such things in future.

*As told by out of school adolescent girls in Dinajpur during focus group discussions*

6.59 There are a number of acts and administrative rules that theoretically protect women from domestic violence. These are laid out succinctly in the Mahila Parishad/Naripokkho Baseline Report on Violence against Women (2004) and in a number of publications by the BNWLA and ASK. However, in practice, most cases go unreported and when violence escalates women either resolve it within the family or through informal dispute resolution mechanisms, such as the shalish. The government has responded to the women’s movement’s clamor for more action to prevent violence both in public spaces and in the home and taken a number of recent steps.

\(^{167}\) WHO, 2005
6.60 **State initiatives to address violence against women:** The GOB has established several cells for the prevention of violence against women. The violence prevention cell exists in both the Department of Women’s Affairs and the Jatiyo Jahila Sangastha-MWCA’s two implementation agencies. In addition, a “Special Cell” for Women is located at police headquarters, and in several police stations. A 15-member Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee to monitor and review the activities of the Central Cell in MWCA was set up. Committees for the Prevention of Violence against Women also exist at the district and upazilla (sub-district) levels. These committees provide legal, medical, and psychological counseling to women who experience violence.

6.61 Through its implementing agency—the Department of Women’s Affairs (DWA)—the MWCA, with assistance from the UNFPA, has launched a project to mobilize communities against violence and to change male family members’ and in-laws’ attitudes about violence. Another initiative in this series of steps taken by GoB is the “Multi-Sectoral Program on Violence against Women”. This project is a joint initiative of the GOB and Denmark under the MWCA. The program is being implemented in collaboration with the Ministries of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Information, Social Welfare, Home Affairs and Health and Family Welfare. The Program is now in its first phase, and will continue until December 2007. The objectives of the Program are:

- Improved public services such as health, police assistance, criminal justice and social services (counseling, rehabilitation)
- Increased public awareness on all forms of violence against women.

6.62 The MWCA has also initiated *One-Stop-Crisis Centers (OSCC)* in Divisional level Medical College Hospitals mainly to deal with acid and rape victims so as to facilitate quick investigation and medical and legal services. The OSCC provides health care, police assistance, social services, legal

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168 For details on agencies mentioned see chapter 2.
assistance, psychological counseling and shelter services etc. Two OSCCs have been established in Dhaka and Rajshahi Medical College Hospitals during the pilot phase of the project. Four new OSCCs in Sylhet, Chittagong, Khulna and Barisal Medical College Hospitals were established in 2006. Until January 2007, 262 cases had been treated in four new these centers. Table 6.2 indicates the usage figures for Dhaka and Rajshahi which were the first two to be established. The dramatic increase in the of the OSCC in Rajshahi and a more modest increase in Dhaka indicate that the demand of this service is high. Strengthening and expanding services under these centers and enhancing community outreach would go a long way in providing women with alternatives in case of attack.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month/Year</th>
<th>Dhaka</th>
<th>Rajshahi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug-Dec. 2001</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-Dec. 2002</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-Dec. 2003</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-Dec. 2004</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-Dec. 2005</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-Dec. 2006</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 2007</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DWA 2007

6.63 The establishment of National Forensic DNA-Profiling Laboratory (NFDPL) in January 2006 at Dhaka Medical College has been another major activity to ensure speedy and smooth trial of cases of Violence against Women (VAW). Five more divisional screening laboratories have been established in the divisional Medical College Hospitals in order to make DNA Screening service available across the country. The project has also established links with local organizations to provide counseling and rehabilitation services. As part of the public awareness campaign booklets, brochures and posters on the OSCC activities are published and distributed among the District and Upazilla Government officials and collaborating ministries. Several training programs on counseling, orientation on OSCC concept, DNA screening have been organized for the OSCC, DNA lab staff.

6.64 Finally GoB has established a permanent Law Commission to review all laws related to the protection of women’s rights and to provide recommendations in cases where laws need to be amended. However, the impact of these initiatives has not been evaluated nor is there a clear idea of the demand for services and the extent to which the demand is being met.

D Synthesis and Conclusion

6.65 This chapter presents a complex picture of norms and values and their relationship with outcomes related to women’s safety and security both within the marriage and outside. While we have argued in the report that norms and culture act in tandem with a host of external factors that together constitute behavior and affect outcomes, we are unable to clearly separate these for outcomes like spousal violence and feelings of safety among women. Certainly at the individual level, spousal violence is known to be idiosyncratic and unpredictable, but once we see the importance of attitudes in the actual experience of violence we wonder what drives these norms and what policy levers can be used to create incentives for change. One of the biggest drawbacks we have is not being able to draw on literature that discusses regional variations in the Bangladeshi context. We believe that this work should be carried forward through much more in-depth study of regional patterns.
The institutional architecture responsible for upholding laws clearly can play a major role in ensuring women’s safety and punishing infractions. While laws and procedures in Bangladesh are secular and forward looking, their enforcement in deterring violence is constrained by the same norms that allow violence to take place. The police, lower judiciary and custodial institutions are all responsible for women’s perceptions of safety and the inability to report violence. Many of these can be directly influenced by policy and programs. Countries in Latin American and the Caribbean, which also have very high incidence of violence against women, have a number of successful interventions that focus on the multi-sectoral nature of violence (see Box 6.5). These include working through different sectors and designing cross-sectoral strategies. Learning from some of these and linking GoB and NGOs to countries which have had successful interventions elsewhere could be an important step in the direction of designing effective large scale strategies.

From this analysis and from other work on violence in Bangladesh, the following pointers for policy and programs emerge:

**Step up poverty reduction efforts:** It is important that poverty is a significant correlate of spousal violence. While it is likely that there is some underreporting among richer quintile due to the stigma associated with spousal violence, we argue that reduction of poverty will have important effects on spousal violence, especially when combined with awareness campaigns against violence and its correlates.

**Design region-specific interventions:** One of the recurring themes in this report is regional variations. In the case of violence and public security too, region emerges as an important predictor at the bivariate level. Targeted education and awareness campaigns in certain regions would serve to draw attention to issues of violence and in time, to prevent it and thereby protect women.

**Design more prevention programs that focus on men:** The importance of men’s attitudes on violence has been established by this analysis based on nationally representative surveys and by other micro-studies. That being so, programs still tend to focus on women’s awareness drives and other programs aimed at women, when the need is to also focus specifically on programs that create incentives to change men’s attitudes and behaviors. In addition, focusing attention on community leaders including religious leaders is likely to have an impact.

**Send tough messages to law enforcement agencies:** Too often the police and judiciary become extensions of the same environment that women try and escape, by discouraging them from bringing domestic issues into the public realm or by trying to effect a “reconciliation”. While there are some initiatives that attempt to make the police more sensitive to these issues, they are small and sporadic. If government from the highest levels sends tough messages to the police in addition to investing in their training, it would supplement these efforts.

**Increase access to secondary education:** While education has mixed effects on both attitudes and experience of violence, on balance secondary school education seems to have a positive effect on violence and security. One of the recurring themes in the report thus, is to ensure secondary school education for all – men and women and especially men from lower socioeconomic strata.

**Focus on safety and security in urban areas:** In keeping with the conventional wisdom, urban areas show up as being more unsafe for women and this is one area where interventions such as sensitization for police and ensuring women’s safety in other ways can have a positive effect on
safety and through it on other outcomes like women’s increased participation in the public domain.

Box 6.5: Ecuador: Integrating violence into a judicial reform project

The first World Bank judicial reform loan in Latin America to explicitly deal with “gender-based violence” was the Ecuador judicial reform project, approved in 1996. Among many other activities, the project funded legal aid services for poor women in the cities of Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca. During the project’s execution, the two NGOs hired provided services to more than 20,000 women, frequently on family violence cases. They also provided referrals to complementary services such as medical and psychological treatment, and support groups for survivors of family violence were created. Legal education was provided to judges in the use of international conventions on violence against women, such as Belem do Para and CEDAW. An evaluation (using interviews with beneficiaries and a control group of non-beneficiaries, as well as focus groups) showed that the legal aid activity has produced several notable results for beneficiaries: women were better off legally and economically, had a better knowledge of their own and their children’s rights, and their children were more likely to stay in school. Of course, sustainability of service provision after project completion is a concern. It hinges on both political commitment and fiscal health, since cost-recovery possibilities are limited.

Source: Morriston, et al, 2004

Increase options for women to report and seek help in violent situations: Two thirds of the women who experience violent situations do not seek help in Bangladesh. Part of the reason lies in the lack of options for professional help, such as shelters, counseling centers and help lines. Those that do exist are overloaded and confined to urban areas. Programs that allow for such services within the mainstream health and education systems would go a long way in providing options to women.

Strengthen informal dispute resolution systems: Results from the qualitative survey and the WHO report show that women usually resolve violent conflicts through informal mechanisms like the shalish. NGO initiatives providing “legal empowerment” through these mechanisms have shown that such interventions could be an important in providing options for women. While such activities have increased significantly in the last few years, they still cover a very small proportion of all women.

Support awareness campaigns and NGO networks: Awareness campaigns against domestic violence targeted at different groups, especially in schools, are also an important way of influencing behavior change.

169 WHO, 2005