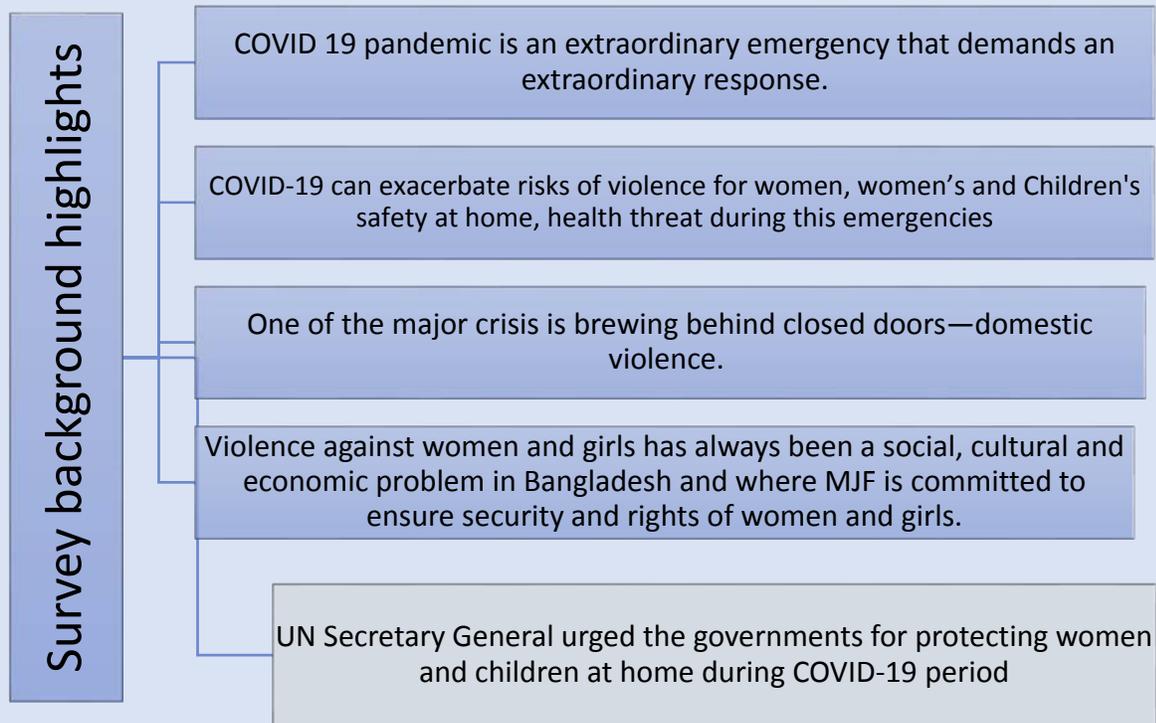




A Telephone Survey: Initiative of Manusher Jonno Foundation
Violence against Women and Children: COVID 19
Survey period: April 2020

No introduction is needed to explain about COVID 19 pandemic. Rather it is necessary to highlight its gender impact, because most of the time gender perspective are overlooked during natural disaster, public health emergencies, reproductive health needs and conflicts situation or any other emergency. Women, girls and other vulnerable/marginalized socially excluded women face discrimination, inequalities and exploitation differently than men. Other than that, they are more vulnerable to sexual violence/ abuse and torture. So, the same is going on due to recent COVID 19 pandemic and is further worsening the existing inequalities and discrimination against them. COVID 19 pandemic affects everyone, all are involved in preventing corona virus spread, which has emerged as public health outbreaks. It is also exposing extreme global inequalities. COVID impact will also hit directly at SDG achievements. Considering this background Manusher Jonno Foundation did a quick telephone survey to find the reality of present violence situation against women and children during lockdown at home.



There is no doubt COVID 19 has created disorder in everyday life and lives of millions of people, mostly on health, economic and social impacts irrespective to class, gender and ethnicity. Where women, girls and children are facing all the COVID impacts differently, which is alarming. It is not happening only in Bangladesh rather whole world are almost in same position depends on different country context. Where domestic violence and unpaid care and household work burden is common. It is difficult to bring a sense of gender equality and a supportive attitude towards women. Due to a lack of sensitivity and an increasing rise of disrespect towards

them, violence against women have increased in general. MJF examined the situation of domestic and other forms of violence against women and children during the month of April 2020 through its partner NGOs to find the domestic violence and other forms of VAW situation in country during COVID-19. Basic idea of this survey was to convey a message to the female beneficiaries of MJF that they are not alone in this lockdown situation.



Quick telephone survey



Total respondent: 17203



*Survey area: 27 districts,
58 Upazilla, 602 villages*



*Data collected by 24
Partners of MJF*



*Grassroots women leaders, Social
support gr and project staff collected
information*

Basic idea:

*Violence victims and survivors are
not alone:*

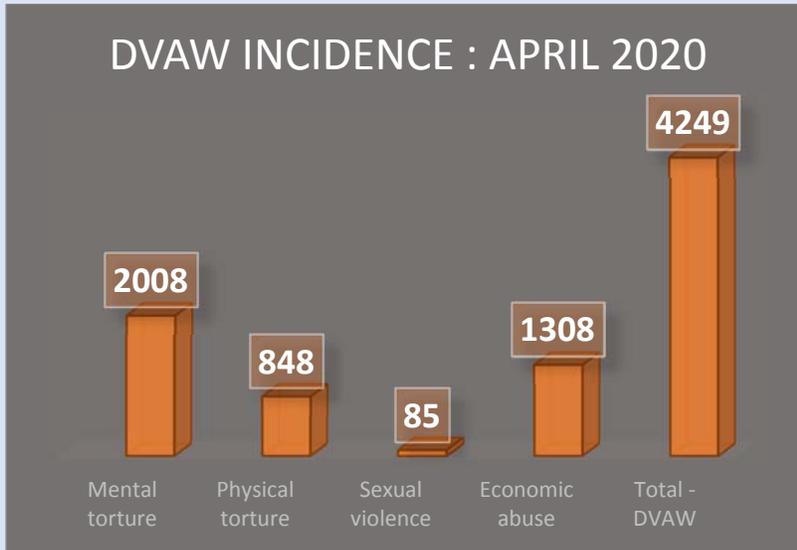
- To let them know MJF and Partners are standing there to support*
- Provide counseling support*
- Liaison with government for service*
- Ensure that Partners and women leaders keep close contact with them*

Methodology:

Very simple methodology MJF followed to analyze the collected quantitative data and qualitative information. Quick telephone/mobile communication with the female and children of the catchment areas of partner NGOs of MJF was the undertaken. Sample size was 17,203 women and children to get information on VAWG. The survey was conducted in 602 villages of 58 upazilas under 27 districts by 24 partner NGOs of MJF's "Excluded People's Rights" project funded by Department for International Development (DFID) and "Strengthening civil society and public institutions to address combating gender based violence and build community resilience to climate change" project funded by The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

Major finding of the survey

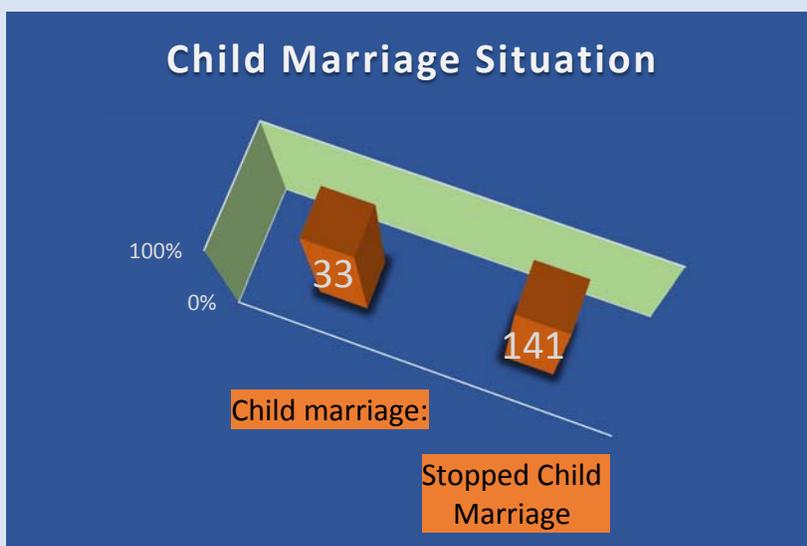
Women and children, amid the above-mentioned challenges, managed to provide the partners with information on different forms of violations they faced during the COVID-19 period. Following are the major finding of the survey in brief:



Home should be the safest place for everyone. But home is now the most unsafe place for most women and girls who may suffer differently and severely from this social distancing and home quarantine, the victims /survivors of domestic violence and child sexual abuse

Domestic violence trend has been increasing, as reported by partners. Generally, in most of cases women feel insecure to complain, as all family members are at home and they might be followed or heard during conversation, so, they keep reluctant and sometimes silent. It is very difficult for grassroots women leaders and project staff to keep close contact with them. Project staff, women leaders, social support group leaders are passing difficult time and doing counselling over phone.

Child Marriage:



In country context it is the reality that girl child is at risk as potential child bride. MJF started to receive information from partners that child marriage incidences are happening. Actually, many complex factors that drive child marriage in stable environments are exacerbated in emergency settings. COVID pandemic situation includes challenges like loss of household income, higher risk of VAW, lack of access to schooling, going out for play, overall community structure breakdown.

Children face violence:



Manusher Jonno Foundation strongly urges government to ensure justice and punishment to perpetrators.

Manusher Jonno Foundation strongly feels, there should be psychosocial support, sexual and reproductive health services for all girls under 18. It is also very important to give priority on how adolescent girls, particularly those at risk of marriage or already married girls will be affected in the short- and longer-term. Plan International research shows that, in crisis settings, girls live in fear of violence and are not only concerned about the constant presence of armed men, but also about gender-based violence (GBV) within families. Other than that school closures will also have long-term impacts on girls' futures – particularly for poorer and more remote families – if they are unable to return after prolonged absence, as education may become unaffordable due to economic distress or due to girls being married or becoming pregnant.

Manusher Jonno Foundation also believes that the scenario of domestic violence found during the survey was also same in other part of the country.



1672 women admitted that they experienced violence incidents first time in their life

Survey also revealed that four women were also raped and 20 were subject to sexual harassment and one murder during this survey period. It is very agitating information that women are admitting that they never experience domestic violence before. Before worsening the violence situation MJF urges to all relevant department and Ministry to put women and children's safety first as they respond to the pandemic. MJF also raised the urgency to take immediate measures to handle the accelerating risk of domestic violence caused by the COVID-19 home quarantine. As this crucial measure helps flatten the curve, it is inadvertently leading to a rise in domestic violence. It is an urgent call for Bangladesh to take immediate steps to protect women and children by expanding the appropriate support services.

Gender equality and rights of women and children are essential to get through this pandemic together, to recover faster, and to build a better future for everyone.

Support service by Partners:

<p><i>Counselling, referral service and health support: 2202</i></p>	<p><i>The most common requirements for survivors/victims is support service, which is very poor and absent in some area. The effects of violence are very often long-lived. Violence – in all its forms – can have an impact on a woman’s well-being throughout the rest of her life. This is unacceptable, and the risks of violence that women and their children face during the current COVID-19 crisis cannot be ignored. Need coordinated and collective effort to reduce DVAW &C and other forms of violence against women and children. Project staffs are maintaining constant close communication with community and targeted households over phone.</i></p> <p><i>Source: findings from series of dialogue with MJF partners.</i></p>
<p><i>Constant follow up with survivors: 2000</i></p>	

Limitations/challenges of collecting information:

Data collection was not easy during this period due to a number of factors. The husbands are at home due to lockdown and the children are also stuck in houses as their schools are closed. As a result, the partners faced a number of challenges that led to the limitations of the survey. Some of the challenges are:

COVID Situation	Social norms/traditional attitude & behaviour
<i>The respondents could not be contacted in person due to social distancing factors</i>	<i>Most of the cases women were reluctant to talk about violence issue</i>
<i>Husbands are at home due to lockdown</i>	<i>It was not easy to talk in front of husband or other family members</i>
<i>Children's are at home due to schools closing</i>	<i>Don't have time to talk due to care work and domestic work responsibility /over burden</i>
<i>Need to provide frequent service to their husbands</i>	<i>Survivors are mostly poor and don't have own cell phone</i>
<i>Attending phone calls could also increase the vulnerability of the women and children</i>	<i>Women were under threat of being further tortured or thrown out of the houses if they disclosed information regarding domestic violence</i>

Recommendations:

Tension of living in confinement maintaining social distancing is inevitable and understandable. Apart from the constrained of socializing caused by lockdown there is economic hardship making lives difficult for the lockdown families. Both the aspects must be attended for making life easy for the most vulnerable ones and efforts both at social and government levels are required.

- MJF urges the concerned ministries and law enforcing agencies to prioritize protecting women and children during COVID-19 period
- Speedy arrest and trial of the perpetrators
- Accelerate OCCs and ensure health, legal, counseling, food, livelihoods and other supports by the government
- Take measures to make effective “Virtual Court Ordinance” to ensure uninterrupted activities of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals during COVID-19 period
- Increase awareness raising initiatives all over the country to reduce domestic violence
- Government should be more alert to stop child marriage issue
- Accelerate OCCs and ensure health, legal, counseling, food, livelihoods and other supports by the government
- Need to make safe home functional as victims enter into the safe home through court order (virtual court ordinance may help)
- MJF urged the government to take effective measures by prioritizing issues of violence against women and children in official COVID-19 National Response Plan.

Reinforcing
helpline numbers
like 109, 999 and
16430, 1098

Voices to be heard from survivors:

12376 women respondents were reluctant, as domestic violence is way of life for many women in Bangladesh. With entire family being stuck down in houses many women and children are being used as tools to vent anger and thrashed. Locked in home we do not want any women and children to be subjected to physical, mental, sexual, economic abuse including other forms of violence, though sometimes they cannot express. Bangladesh Government should acknowledge the increase risks of domestic violence during isolation and making continuous announcements about helpline and support service for VAW &C victims and survivors.

In partnership /association with:



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