



Report of Expert Consultation

Responding to Violence against Women and Girls in the Cyber Age

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List of Acronyms

BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association
BPC	Penal Code for Bangladesh
BTRC	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
CGSRHR	Centre for Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
CLS	Community Legal Services
GD	General Diary
HWF	Hills Women's Federation
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion
RFSU	Riks för bundet För Sexuell Upplysning
RTI	Right to information
TSC	Teacher-Student Centre
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

This report sets out the key points discussed at an expert consultation involving practitioners in the areas of law, media, technology and women's rights and focusing on the nature and scope of online speech and harassment of women and girls in Bangladesh.

The consultation aimed to take stock of the extent and types of online/cyber violence and harassment against women and girls and its impact on daily lives. The reflections and recommendations of experts are expected to inform the development of strategies of response by those dealing with such cases.

Three speakers framed the discussions with brief presentations. Sushmita Preetha, a journalist at the Daily Star, described the nature of online harassment, including recent efforts women's rights activists to demand accountability for the sexual assaults in TSC on Pohela Boishakh and the resulting misogynist abuse and threats faced by those involved. Saraban Tahura Zaman, researcher at BLAST, outlined remedies available under national law as well as the responses of various institutions. Tahmina Rahman, Director, South Asia at Article 19 sets out the scope of protection under international human rights law, and its relevance for Bangladesh, focusing in particular on the experience of women journalists.

The consultation was held as part of a series of discussions being convened by the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) and the Centre for Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (the Centre) at the JPG School of Public Health, BRAC University, to explore how questions of issues of choice and consent are raised or addressed in particular contexts and how these impact on women's and girls' health and rights, and in particular to examine questions relating to access to justice. The consultation was supported by RFSU.

2. Context

The growing reach of the internet, the rapid spread of mobile information and communications technology and the proliferation of social media have presented new opportunities and means for women and girls around the world for interaction, expression, communication and solidarity building. These same technologies have also contributed to harassment and serious harm. Cyber violence against women and girls

(VAWG) is emerging as a global problem with implications for societies and economies around the world and changing women and girl's daily lived experiences, with some 73% of women already exposed to violence online or having experienced it firsthand (UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development, September 2015). Women and girls who do not have access to information technology or are not on online are also vulnerable to such violence or harassment.

Over just two years, from 2013 and 2015, mobile cellular subscription in Bangladesh increased from 74 to 76 per 100 people¹ while the number of internet subscribers reached 56.167 million at the end of January, 2016². A high level commitment to creating a 'digital Bangladesh', the proliferation of online news portals, and the enormous use of social media has resulted in the rapid spread of online communication.

Despite its spread, there is considerable confusion in terms of defining what constitutes 'cyber VAWG' in Bangladesh. The limits of online expression and the legal restraints are not well understood. Similarly the available responses to case where online speech results in harassment or actual acts of violence are also not very clear, even to lawyers, activists, or law enforcing agencies. Social and legal barriers that limit access to justice for many women dealing with violence in private and public spaces, 'in real life', or offline, extend themselves to online spaces.

Under Bangladesh law, online speech which is considered to be false and obscene, or defamatory, hurtful to religious sentiment, likely to hurt the image of the nation, or to constitute pornography is criminalised. Those responsible can be prosecuted for these offences either in the ordinary criminal courts, special tribunals on violence against women, or cyber tribunals, depending on the nature of the offence. Those affected, as well as third parties, may make complaints to regulatory authorities, law-enforcing agencies, and/or to internet service providers or social networking sites. They may also seek blocking of data or websites, punishment of the offenders and compensation. And yet despite this plethora of remedies, there remain a very small proportion of cases that actually result in criminal prosecutions or any form of legal action, and little public information is available about the status or outcomes of such complaints. Information received from RTI is - "From 28.07.2013 to 10.02.2016, there were 520 cases in Cyber Crime Tribunal where number of female victims was 90. Three hundred and 28 cases were disposed of out of 520 cases during the mentioned period."

¹ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2>

² <http://www.btrc.gov.bd/content/internet-subscribers-bangladesh-january-2016>

3. Aims

The consultation aimed to:

- Understand the *extent and nature of online/cyber violence and harassment* in Bangladesh;
- Discuss the *challenges* faced in defining, reporting and responding to such cases;
- Identify *good practices* in this regard;
- Reflect on the *experiences shared and strategies being undertaken* to address the issue, including through proposed law reforms.

4. Extent and Nature of online VAWG

Professor Sabina Faiz Rashid, Dean, the JPG School of Public Health (the School), BRAC University commented that those who work at the School and the Centre in areas of research and/or advocacy are familiar with many offline issues that women face, including violence, but we do not know enough *the landscape of online expression or of violence or harassment*. Noting that while rights are universal, their application and understanding is not, she also mentioned the lack of clarity as to what is considered a crime or what is acceptable as well as understanding of the **language used** when expressing these issues.

Sushmita Preetha, Current Affairs Analyst, Daily Star speaking from her experience of working as a journalist, activist and researcher shared her experience and understanding of the media and types of harassment through social media. The Internet can be an empowering tool and platform for women but this can also be a platform of abuse. Violence against women in general is not addressed or discussed properly in Bangladesh. Within this, online VAWG is even less discussed and ignored area. One of the problems is that many people think it is okay if someone makes offensive comments.

In interviews with women conducted formally and informally, many examples of such online harassment and abuse were identified. After inviting women friends on Facebook to share their stories, she received intense and diverse accounts. It turned out from these that too often the perpetrators are not necessarily strangers, but friends, meaning that violence can be perpetrated by someone we know, none of us is safe and anybody can be a perpetrator.

Common Forms of Cyber VAWG:

“We don’t know what sexual harassment in the cyber world really looks like” said Sushmita Preetha.

- **Offensive comments and images online** targeting women in general or any particular woman are common. For instance, after the sexual assaults on *Pohela Boishakh* (1st day of the Bangla year) in the Teachers Students Center (TSC) area in Dhaka University, there were many comments not only justifying the acts and also direct threats of rape and similar forms of violence against those raising their voices for accountability.

Preetha mentioned remarks made by someone on facebook stating, “*I believe in direct action. If you (women) show your skin on the street, I will touch you.*” She emphasised the need to draw a line between ‘free speech’ and ‘hate speech’.

- **Hate speech** is often directed to women who hold a particular political ideology or are active in public space. Increasingly social media has been a site for regulating women’s bodies and women’s movement. For example, Lucky Akhter and Sharmin, who were very active during Shahbagh movement, were subjected to sexual harassment as well as verbal attacks, online and offline, beyond imagination. On the Daily Star opinion page there were a lot of abusive comments regarding Lucky; about her body, her sexuality and imagined sexual relations. There were morphed photos of her naked body, including showing people molesting her with images of their penises. And there were comments like, ‘*We will fuck you.*’ ‘*We will rape you.*’ ‘*We will teach you.*’

There has been a lot of hate speech in general in the wake of the Shahbagh movement. But hate speech against women often uses very particular and distinctive language with sexual undertones, including slut shaming, body shaming, the use of terms like ‘bad women’. It has been a useful tool for trolls to harass women particularly those who are active either in social media or in outside world, so that people can see it.

- A person may **take or use pictures of another person without the latter’s consent** and share them on social media or through the net or on mobile messages. For example, one person’s facebook profile picture was downloaded and then put on a porn website. When the woman found about this, she reported

it to facebook and got a response saying that no community rules were being violated. So, she basically had no recourse. The problem is that anyone's profile picture is open to the public, or sections of it and the user has consented to this. But this consent does not mean that she has consented to use that picture in all circumstances. What actions can be taken against such activity?

- **Malicious impersonation** occurs where a person uses someone else's profile picture to open a fake facebook account and post different things on facebook.
- The **posting of rape videos and photographs** on someone's timeline or sending messages threatening a woman by giving an impression that the same could be done to her is another common form of harassment. This can also be a form of blackmail insisting a woman or girl continue a relationship and that if she does not do so, such images would be made public.

Where two individuals are in a relationship they may exchange photographs consensually. These may be intimate photos or videos shared between the two persons. When the relationship ends or even while it continues, the man may threaten the woman that he would expose the photos and videos unless she responds to his demands. It is particularly difficult for women to take action due to the huge stigma involved, where the woman would be considered a 'bad woman', 'slut' for having shared or allowed the making of her images in the first place.

Beyond social stigma there is also the problem of how 'consent' is understood. In one case when a university student lodged a complaint about her images having been disseminated through a mobile phone by a fellow student, the university not only expelled her from her course and her hall of residence, but considered her the 'culprit', and as the one to blame. Although the High Court gave her some protection it ultimately decided that as she gave consent to take the photographs she must have given consent for distribution. But that was not correct, and she had not given consent to distribute her photos. The notion that consent is not implied for all acts but must be separately sought and taken does not seem to be well understood.

Professor Sabina Faiz Rashid reiterated the same. She said, "We need to talk about stigma and gender which is a critical reason why young women - married or unmarried, don't come forward with complaints... The stigma around such issues is that women are deserving of the crime against them and she has asked for it. There is a lot of judgment and lack of knowledge, from legal and health practitioners. We have our own ideas on

what is good and what is bad. Social and cultural structures result in subjective interpretations of what is acceptable and what is not, further reinforced by a conservative environment. We all have ideas of who is a woman, what is her role and we pass judgment based on that.

Open Discussion

Rowshon Ara, Project Director, Naripokkho, gave an example of an incident in Jhenaidah district where a young man videotaped a girl while she was taking bath and then started to blackmail her. The girl went to one of Naripokkho's partner organizations and they took her to police who asked her to make a general diary (GD). After that the police arrested the boy and got a signed bond from him stating that he would not harass the girl any more. They also made him delete the video from his phone. However, some teachers of his college assisted him to secure release on bail. This is one instance where a girl raised her voice, but there are so many others who cannot share their problems with anyone. The blackmailing may be so extreme that a girl commits suicide.

There are many examples of abuse of girls through facebook. For instance, a girl may accept a friend request coming from a stranger. After sometime, a kind of friendship or relationship develops between the two through chatting. The blackmail starts when one of them plays on or exploits these emotions and feelings. In the beginning the girl does not realize the consequence of entering into a relationship with a stranger. When this happens, in most cases the girl doesn't know what to do and where to go. Some girls don't want to seek help from law enforcing agencies because of the resulting social stigma. Even lawyers don't know what needs to be done and how to ensure protection of women and girls in such cases.

Chanchana Chakma, President, Hill Women's Federation spoke about an incident where an *adibashi* girl from Rangamati fell in love with a boy she met through facebook, and who was from a neighbouring place in India. At one point the girl went to meet the boy but after visiting him he refused to marry her. That girl was gang-raped and killed by the boyfriend and his friends and her dead body was later found underneath a culvert. Her parents or the society did not press any charges. However, the Indian government pressed charges and tried to arrest the perpetrators.

Another form of online violence is common. Sometimes when couples stay in the hotel they do not realize that their intimate videos are shot using hidden cameras or

webcams. Even married couples are blackmailed with sex videos. Both young unmarried girls and married couples can become victims of such cyber violence.

Shahana Siddiqui, Coordinator, Maya.com shared her experience of BRAC-Maya, an online platform which allows women to anonymously post questions about legal, health and social issues. They also run an app called Maya Apa with support from BRAC, where BLAST is a partner providing advice and responding to queries on legal issues including about cyber crime. Maya Apa provides answers from a specialist within a couple of hours. Questions on cyber crime have significantly increased over last one year, with one or two cases on cyber crime per month initially having gone up to 10 or 12 per month now. Over the period the Maya team has learned how to respond to questions better, learning about which number to call, and agencies from which to seek support. When there are critical questions about cyber crime, which Maya cannot answer, they seek advice from BLAST.

These days the numbers of people who can afford digital devices and access the internet, facebook and other social media has grown exponentially. However, people are not conversant about **digital literacy**. It is every individual's responsibility to know how to use digital devices. It's important to educate people about digital literacy and that should be done proactively. In several countries students receive orientations or information packages on this. In Bangladesh internet means facebook, but the privacy settings in facebook are all written in English, which makes it difficult to understand. This context requires a much bigger conversation around digital literacy.

It's also important to be aware that while responses to such cases are relatively manageable in urban spaces with the help of NGOs and service providers, they are much more difficult in local/rural areas where people have very little understanding of cyber crime. Local NGOs for instance do not even know what the relevant digital platforms are.

Those who provide services through online platforms may also be victims of sexual harassment and cyber crime. Two examples need to be noted. First, as these are anonymous platform, **people send content using sexually abusive language**. As 'Maya Apa' symbolizes a female character, many users post suggestive words and comments directed to 'her'. As the questions are read by women, this puts a massive strain on them. Second, in some cases **online confessions are made by perpetrators**. In one case, a man confessed that he had raped a woman and asked if he had impregnated her. This created a serious ethical dilemma for the Maya team

which is a non-judgmental, advice and information platform and doesn't have a clear policy on how to respond to such questions.

Shirin Lira, Capacity Development Manager of the Community Legal Services Programme spoke about the making of threats through cell phones including from anonymous numbers. How many nuisance callers can you block? Children are at risk as they can access cell phones and through these can access games and videos. There is no control. Adult sites may pop up when anyone is using the internet.

Najrana Imaan, Research Coordinator, BLAST pointed out that children particularly girls make friends on facebook with people they don't know personally. Adults 'groom' or build a relationship of trust with a child, who may be a facebook friend. The adult may even use the anonymity of the internet to conceal his/her age, giving the child a false sense of security. When they meet in person, the child will be vulnerable to violence, including physical/sexual abuse. In addition, vulnerable children may be persuaded to share graphic/sexually explicit photos of themselves, which can be used to subsequently blackmail the children, and coerce them into sending more photos, or even to force them into unwanted sexual activities. Children should be made aware of internet safety, the potential ways in which their safety could be at risk, and the importance of securing their privacy while using public and online platforms like facebook.

Tasaffy Hossain, Founder/Coordinator, V-Day Dhaka shared her own experience of cyber violence. She has many facebook friends, many of whom are just acquaintances met through work or workshops/seminar that she attended. She is very strict about her privacy settings. Despite that an incident happened with her. Her photos, some from public events, some from her own profile pictures were posted in a different facebook page with a derogatory title. She got friends to report the page multiple times until FB started to take notice and had the page closed down since it also had pornographic images on it. Awareness is very important regarding the fact that this is common and more importantly that this is not the woman's or girl's fault. This is not the end of her life.

Farida Begum, Project Coordinator of Bandhu Social Welfare Society, who works with people with different sexual orientations, mentioned that they do not necessarily want to disclose their identity. But incidents have occurred where a person attended an event and later their videos were circulated without even asking their consent. She gave an example of a recent BBC Bangla news story about a 'lesbian' woman whose photo and detailed personal information were provided, revealing her identity and exposing

her to personal reprisals. It's important to learn how to prevent such breaches of privacy and confidentiality by the media.

5. Reporting of Complaints and Challenges Faced

Saraban Tahura Zaman, Researcher, BLAST: The Cyber Crimes Tribunal runs a helpline. Victim Support Centres can also refer victims to the police and to various legal services organisations, including that run by the government and others by NGOs. In most cases, victims do not want to go to the police who may be reluctant to take up such cases; in such cases, reference to the HC directives on sexual harassment and existing laws may be helpful.

Sara Hossain, BLAST: The Bangladesh Penal Code of 1860 is more than 150 years old. Newer laws which deal with online content, and allow the use of electronic evidence have been framed very recently from the 2000s onwards. There is no law that is entirely appropriate or suitable for the kinds of online harassment that have been identified. Beyond the law, it is important to look at the applicable regulatory measures, for example applications to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) which has powers to block any website or content quickly. There are also law enforcing agencies that may and do take action when they receive such complaints. However, she mentioned, *“Most important of all is actually the power that is in the hands of the internet providers and those who run various social media platforms; because they choose whether or not and how to regulate these kinds of spaces.”* It is also essential to be aware of the scope for making complaints directly to various social media platforms such as twitter and facebook. It is not possible for the court to keep pace with the speed at which these incidents occur and multiply.

Online harassment also has no territorial limits. It is essential in dealing with such actions interact, whether we like it or not with global platforms and in the context of global laws which protect our right to speech, and privacy rights.

As **Sushmita Preetha** mentioned that when it comes of reporting, first of all, women do not know where to go to report. If it is in facebook or twitter, it is difficult to identify the facilitator or administrator. Women and girls may be reluctant to go the police because there is lot of 'slut shaming' and due to lack of trust.

Chanchana Chakma, HWF said that in most cases women, whether married or unmarried, do not seek legal support due to *lojja* (shame) and/or fear of further harassment by the police.

Sara Hossain, BLAST, referred to a recent RTI by BLAST, which found that less than 5% of cases filed under the ICT relate to complaints of harassment by women. In some instances, cases are filed under Pornography Act. The fact that so few people are seeking remedies is indicated by the fact that none of the participants, who include women active in addressing vaw, have ever had to deal with such a case going to court.

Shahana Siddiqui, Maya.com mentioned as sources of support the police run victim support centres, forensics departments, and BTRC's tracking system to track the IP address of the phone or Internet connection and its help desk where people can lodge complaints. The ICT division's cyber crime cell works directly with BRAC and the police. But the problem is that people don't know about these services.

Ishita Dutta, BLAST: There are measures one can take once an unwanted photo is circulated online. Online service providers like Google and Facebook are more amenable to maintaining copyright laws rather than entertaining complaints of abuse. Therefore, in cases where a person's photo that they took themselves and published online is used elsewhere, a complaint can be filed with Google and Facebook under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (as both these companies are registered in the US) and they can be requested to take down the photos. The point being, that there needs to be greater awareness of all kinds of tools to protect yourself, including but not limited to criminal law.

Rowshon Ara, Naripokkho: The police sometimes don't take up such cases seriously and try to resolve them through *aposh-mimangsha* (mediation). Although of course in such cases, the police have no right to carry out mediation.

Sushmita Preetha, Daily Star: Once when the Daily Star opinion page was hacked, the facebook authority was informed but after two years they failed to resolve it, and the newspaper had to open another facebook page. When an institution fails to get redress, it is easy to understand how difficult it is for any individual woman to do so.

Rita Das, a development worker, shared her experience of online violence where her facebook account was hacked twice and she was so traumatized and was so down that whenever she woke up in the morning she would think, "*What happened to me?...May*

be it wasn't end of my life, but it was something...gradually I got back to my life again." When Rita shared this incident with one of her colleagues, that person suggested her to deactivate the FB account. Eventually she contacted RAB and meanwhile reported the issue to facebook which promptly responded and closed the accounts.

6. Laws Addressing Online VAWG

6.1 Current legal framework in Bangladesh: merits and demerits

Saraban Tahura Zaman, Researcher, BLAST talked about the current legal framework in Bangladesh and how to secure legal remedies against online harassment. She started with few basic characteristic of cyber violence. Firstly, the perpetrator may not be present at the time and place of violence and can perpetrate the violence anonymously. Secondly, the victim may not be online, use a smart phone or modern technology or have facebook or twitter. Thirdly, online harassment may provoke or result in physical harm including murder and suicide.

The existing laws in Bangladesh under which a victim can seek remedies are as follows:

- Section 57 of the **Information Communication Technology Act 2006** penalises publishing fake, obscene or defamatory information in electronic form. The Act covers both men and women. The punishment under this is a maximum fine of taka one crore, and a maximum jail sentence of 14 years.
- Section 509 of the **Penal Code, 1860** penalises *whoever, intending to insult the modesty of any woman, utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or that such gesture or object shall be seen, by such woman, or intrudes upon the privacy of such woman, with one year's imprisonment, a fine, or both.*
- Section 500 of the **BPC 1860** imposes a penalty for defaming any person.
- Section 8 of the **Pornography Control Act, 2012** penalises the acts of manufacturing or agreeing to supply participants for the purpose of producing pornography, or forcing any person to participate in the production of pornography. This is a non-bailable offence. The offence is punishable by a maximum of 5 years imprisonment and a fine of two lakh taka. In addition production of pornography is also punishable by a maximum of 7 years imprisonment and a fine of two lakh taka.
- Section 69 of the **Bangladesh Telecommunication Control Act, 2001** penalises the sending of any obscene or indecent message.

- Section 10 of the ***Nari O Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain 2000*** penalises ‘sexual oppression’ including any indecent gesture, while Section 14 penalises the publication in the media of the identity of a victim of any offence under the Act.
- Section 76 of the ***Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance 1976*** penalises any person *who wilfully and indecently exposes his person in any street or public place within sight of, and in such manner as may be seen by, any woman, whether from within any house or building or not, or wilfully presses or obstructs any woman in a street or public place or insults or annoys any woman by using indecent language or making indecent sounds, gestures, or remarks in any street or public place* with imprisonment for a maximum of one year, or a fine up to two thousand taka, or both.
- The drafting of the ***Cyber Security Act 2015*** is underway. This provides punishment for cybercrimes. However, the Draft Act is being criticised for including draconian provisions, including a maximum 20-year sentence for ‘cyber-terrorism’ and allowing for the arrest of the suspects without warrant including persons abroad.
- In its 2009 judgment in ***BNWLA v. Government of Bangladesh***, the High Court defined “*sexual harassment*” in the workplace and educational institutions in both the public and private sectors to include certain forms of online speech. There are 11 directives under this judgement. In the absence of a statute being enacted by parliament, these directives are binding on everyone.

Professor Sabina Faiz Rashid noted that different sectors work separately and there is a growing need of understanding the laws and the connection they have with health. The project is bringing about dialogues and short courses to address the connection and enhance knowledge.

Dr Md. Mahbubur Rahman, Associate Professor, Law Dept, from Dhaka University spoke about laws regarding online VAWG and reminded the audience that online materials are not considered as ‘documents’ under the Evidence Act. As they are not considered as ‘evidence’ they cannot be presented in a court of law. The Pornography Act it addresses the making of pornography but does not say anything about uploading it. In a Cyber Tribunal case regarding online VAWG, a picture was taken of a woman taking a shower and shared through a mobile. Although the person was punished the question is whether this conviction can be sustained given that it may well be questioned on appeal on procedural grounds. The ICT Acts requires that the speech in question be ‘fake *and* indecent’ but in this case, it was indecent but not fake.

There is another problem which is increasingly common in our country which concerns ‘**revenge porn**’. In some countries, there are laws regarding ‘revenge porn’. We should

have a separate law for this as it cannot be dealt with under the Pornography Control Act. There needs to be assessment and evaluation by an independent body of the BTRC's activities.

Asma Binte Shafiq, Assistant Professor, Chittagong University spoke about the limits of existing laws, regarding the kind of material that can be admitted as evidence to prove an offence. In the UK, the Telegraph Act has been interpreted as applying to telephones reflecting technological evolution, although of course telephones did not exist when the act was first framed or adopted. In India, for instance, video conferences are admissible as evidence. Courts may undertake liberal interpretations of statutes to deal with the growing changes in technology. Further, courts may demonstrate 'judicial activism' in dealing with cyber violence.

There is no dedicated course on cyber VAWG at the tertiary level. She suggested including this issue in law courses so that future lawyers are aware of it, know the relevant laws and implement these.

6.2 Remedies

Shirin Lira, CLS emphasised with regard to the laws on cyber crime that general people are not aware of these or how to address them, including how to deal with threats made on mobile phones. Many organizations are working in the field but they have almost no activities on raising awareness on the nature and scope of cyber violence and remedies.

Marzia Rahman, Lecturer, University of Dhaka referred to the example of Prova, a media personality, whose ex-boyfriend distributed their intimate videos on social media. She mentioned that it is important to know how Prova dealt with the situation, whether she sought any legal support and if the perpetrator was punished.

6.3 Right to freedom of expression

Professor Sabina Faiz Rashid asked participants to reflect on the links between freedom of expression and right to privacy and right to protection from violence.

Tahmina Rahman, Director, Bangladesh and South Asia at Article 19 outlined key international human rights laws that protect freedom of expression, focusing particularly on the threats faced by women journalists. The organisation receives lots of complaints

about discrimination against women journalists, as well as about censorship, particularly online censorship. When women journalists do well at the district level they face a lot of talk about their characters; but the most common method of stopping a woman's progress is through online comments. In one case, a young woman journalist working in a very remote area was very successful, and broadcast many stories on the electronic media. She applied for and got membership at the local press club. When the elections were held, she put herself forward as a candidate for an office bearer's position. And found one of her male colleagues disseminating photos of her online to abuse her reputation. She sought advice from one of Article 19's lawyers but was unable to get any effective relief.

Globally, women journalists experience thrice as many online attacks than their male counterparts and one quarter of those attacks are online abuse. Online violence against women journalists should be seriously addressed in the same way that physical violence against women is addressed.

From the perspective of the right to freedom of expression, when such violence is perpetrated against a woman journalist, the consequence sometimes is that she stops writing. She stops being a successful journalist or anchor. In human rights language this is called a 'chilling effect', of silencing women from speaking out on vital public interest issues.

More and more states, including Bangladesh, are taking initiatives to frame laws to address this issue. Social media companies also try to address this. For instance, facebook community standards are an attempt to guide their members on how to be safe. Civil society organizations, are exploring the issue in-depth and in detail with the purpose of finding remedies for such violations.

There are international laws, legal regimes and non-binding treaties that clearly provide protection to female journalists. It is the primary duty of state to provide protection for those who exercise freedom of expression. The other obligation is to prosecute and prosecute those responsible and ensure journalists and media workers who are subjected to attack have appropriate remedies. This is the overall HR framework for who work in media including women journalists.

The obligation of the state must be to ensure that police investigations are done properly and that they are provided adequate training, prosecutors are provided guidance on the applications of legislations to tackle gender-based attacks and online

abuse. States are obliged to formulate preventive measures. Some states have formulated comprehensive prevention strategies or adopted a public policy framework for the prevention of online attacks against female journalists. Also there is guidance for business organisations, which require corporate bodies to meet their responsibilities around internet and social media protecting human rights.

7. Strategies of Response

1. Ensure digital literacy including by providing an information package in Bangla for women's rights groups and the public at large on privacy settings and security measures, and courses on digital literacy at school and university level.
2. Hold more discussions on online speech and expression and its possibilities and limits, including on cyber crimes, successful examples of dealing with such incidents, as well as positive stories of addressing issues of pleasure and sexuality
3. Undertake legal research on the application of existing laws enabling online expression, and on addressing cyber violence, and examining comparative experience
4. Undertake legal research on the admissibility and use of electronic evidence, including under the Evidence Act 1872, and special laws
5. Call for public consultation on the Draft Cyber Crimes Act, and the draft Digital Security Act.