

Help-seeking behavior among abused women in rural Bangladesh

Fengmin Zhao & Stan Becker

John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Abstract

Encouraging help-seeking behavior in response to domestic violence is very important to protect women from further violence and prevent violence-related injury or death. This paper used the responses from 2,854 currently married women in a baseline survey of an experimental study in rural Bangladesh to test the effects of the features of violence (perpetrator of violence, reasons for violence and severity of violence) on women's help-seeking behavior using a multilevel model, after adjusting for women's socio-demographic characteristics. The results showed that abused women had higher odds to disclose the violence and seek help when the perpetrator was a relative rather than the woman's husband (OR=20.9, 95% CI 7.0-62.2), the reason for the violence was something other than household work done poorly (OR=2.2, 95%CI 1.2-3.9), or the violence was more serious (OR=6.4, 95%CI 3.5-11.6). Implications for prevention of domestic violence against women are discussed.

Keywords: Domestic violence; Women; Disclosure of violence; Help-seeking; Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Physical violence against women has been found to be very common in Bangladesh, with lifetime prevalence of physical violence estimated at between 42 and 67 percent, with 16 to 37 percent of women reporting being beaten in the previous year (Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain & Mozumder, 2003; Naved & Persson, 2005; Schuler, Hashemi, Riley & Akhter, 1996). Many studies have been conducted to examine the determinants of physical violence against women in Bangladesh. Schuler, Hashemi, Riley & Akhter (1996) hypothesized that credit programs reduce women's vulnerability to domestic violence and found that membership in a credit program was a protective factor, as was being older, having more living sons, and having more years of schooling. Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain & Mozumder (2003) expanded existing analytical frameworks by incorporating community-level, in addition to individual-level, determinants of domestic violence. He examined the effect of women's status on the risk of domestic violence, assessing the extent to which the effects of individual- and community-level women's status on violence are conditional on the broader socio-cultural context in which women reside. He found that increased years of schooling, higher socio-economic status, non-Muslim religion, and extended family residence were associated with lower risks of violence, and that the effect of women's status on violence was highly context-specific. In the more culturally conservative areas, higher individual-level women's autonomy and short-term membership in savings and credit groups were both associated with significantly higher risks of violence while community-level variables were unrelated to violence. In contrast, in less culturally conservative areas, individual-level women's status indicators were unrelated to the risk of violence, while community-level measures of women's status were associated with significantly lower risks of violence. Naved & Persson (2005) explored multilevel factors associated with domestic violence in urban and rural Bangladesh, including individual factors, relational factors, factors related to

other family members and social context. They found that dowry or other demands in marriage and a history of abuse of the husband's mother by his father increased the risk of violence. Better spousal communication and husband's years of schooling beyond the tenth grade decreased the risk of violence. In urban areas, women who were younger than their husbands and participated in savings and credit groups had increased risk of abuse. In rural areas, women's earning an income increased the risk of violence.

These studies are very useful in examining why violence against women occurs in Bangladesh and which women are at higher risk of being beaten in their marriages. They provide valuable information for developing strategies for primary prevention of violence against women (prevent the occurrence of violence for the very beginning) in Bangladesh. But for those women who are already in a violent relationship, secondary or tertiary prevention is more important either to protect them from further violence or to prevent violence-related injury or death. Because domestic violence is usually considered a private issue and occurs in private domains, it is unlikely to be known by other people unless the victim speaks out and tries to seek help from formal or informal sources. Active disclosure and help-seeking by abused women are the first steps toward solving the problem and are essential for effective secondary and tertiary prevention of violence against women.

However, there is clearly lack of quantitative studies about violence disclosure and help-seeking behavior among ever-beaten women, especially determinants of help-seeking behavior. Existing studies are either qualitative or based on small sample size or special types of populations (Beaulaurier, Seff, Newman & Dunlop; 2007; Bui, 2003; Busch and Wolfer, 2002; Fugate, Landis, Riordan, Naureckas, & Engel, 2005; Krishnan, Hibert, & Vanleeuwen, 2001; Montalvo-Liendo, 2008; Paranjape, Tucker, Mckenzie-Mack, Thompson, & Kaslow, 2007; Shannon, Logan, Cole &

Medley, 2006; West, Kantor, & Jasinski, 1998; Yoshioka, Gilbert, El-Bassel, & Baig-Amin, 2003). The only study which focused on exploring women's help-seeking behavior in Bangladesh was conducted by Naved, Azim, Bhuiya, & Persson (2006). It found that severely abused women were much more likely to disclose the violence in both urban (OR= 2.5) and rural areas (OR= 8.2). Women who had frequent verbal disputes with their husbands also had higher odds to disclose violence in both urban (OR=5.1) and rural areas (OR=4.8). In rural areas, women who had schooling beyond 10th grade had higher odds to disclose their experience of violence compared to women with no years of schooling (OR=3.4). The rural women who perceived themselves able to count upon their natal family and those who were abused sexually as well as physically by their husbands were almost twice as likely to disclose violence, with odds ratios of 1.8 and 1.6 respectively. The literature on determinants of help-seeking behavior among abused women in other areas of the world, usually in developed regions, show very similar results. Women who were more severely abused and those with higher education and younger age sought help more (Abel & Suh, 1987; Gelles & Straus, 1988; West, Kantor, & Jasinski, 1998). Women who had poor health status sought help less but those who reported being depressed sought help more (Gelles & Straus, 1988).

A common limitation of these studies about determinants of help-seeking behavior among abused women is that they lack a clearly defined conceptual framework to guide the analyses. This is contrary to the studies of determinants of violence, where a consensus has been reached that personal, economic, social and cultural factors combine to cause violence against women. Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Weintraub (2005) recognized this gap and developed a theoretical framework to study the help-seeking process among survivors of intimate partner violence based on some general models for help-seeking behaviors. This conceptual framework explores the individual, familial, economic and cultural influence on women's decisions to seek help and support

in the face of violence, and includes three stages: problem recognition and definition, the decision to seek help, and the selection of a help provider. Based on Liang's work and other study findings about help-seeking behavior among abused women (Beaulaurier, Seff, Newman & Dunlop, 2007; Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Weintraub, 2005; Naved, Azim, Bhuiya & Persson, 2006; West, Kantor & Jasinski, 1998), I develop a new conceptual framework and introduce a new component, the characteristics of violence, to see how it affects help-seeking behaviors among physically abused women. I applied this new conceptual framework to a cross-sectional survey in rural Bangladesh in 2006.

METHODOLOGY

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this conceptual framework, it is hypothesized that whether the abused woman reaches out for help depends on two factors or pre-conditions (see Boxes B1 and B2 in Figure 1). First, the woman has to see the violence as a serious problem that needs to be addressed; she must have the desire to solve it (Box B1). Studies show that one of the main reasons abused women do not seek help is that they think there is no need: these women accept violence to some extent and think that their husbands are justified in beating them when they do something wrong, or that it is not a serious problem (Naved & Person, 2005; Schuler & Islam, 2008). So the essential condition for the abused woman to seek help is that she realizes that the ongoing violence is a serious problem, and that she should not and does not have to tolerate it.

Second, the woman has to have the ability to seek help, which entails there being no great barriers to her seeking help (Box B2). She must know who may be able to help her with the situation and be

able to get access to the source of help. Studies show that some women think it not useful to seek help from outside when their husbands beat them (Schuler & Islam, 2008). This may be due to two reasons: first, some women think that violence against women is accepted in their community and that no one will respond to them if they seek help. Second, some women may have tried to seek help in the past and had a negative experience: the violence did not decline or stop, and it may in fact have gotten worse. In this case, the abused woman may see there is no useful help she can turn to and she may stop seeking help, resigning herself to the violence. In order to enable an abused woman to start to disclose violence and seek help, she has to see that useful help is available. In addition, the abused woman needs to have the mobility to get the help, which entails being able to leave the house and being able to get to a certain location. This highlights the importance of the help source being relatively close and easily accessed. When women consider the violence a serious problem that needs to be addressed; and they know where and how to get useful help, then they may move to seek help and initiate an effort to stop or reduce such violence.

Three groups of factors are hypothesized to affect how women view the violence against them (see boxes A1, A2 and A3 in Figure 1). The first group of factors (Box A1) includes social-demographic characteristics, such as age, education, occupation, decision-making power, mobility, exposure to outside ideas (such as participating in community groups, listening to radio, watching TV, etc), number of children, history of violence between parents, etc. Women with different socio-demographic characteristics may see the violence differently. For example, younger generations are usually more educated and exposed to the concept of gender equality, so they may be more likely to agree that violence against women is not acceptable and adopt active strategies to stop or reduce it.

The second group (Box A2) includes the characteristics of the violence, including the reasons for the violence, frequency of violence, severity of violence and the perpetrator of the violence. The characteristics of the violence affect how abused women see it. Women may justify violence when they think they are really doing something wrong and deserve the beating, but think their husbands go too far in other cases. Meanwhile, if the woman is beaten quite frequently, she may be less likely to tolerate it and has a stronger desire to change it, compared to women who are beaten only occasionally. Severity of violence has been examined in several studies. Severe beating is more likely to cause serious injury and is more intimidating for the woman, so she may see it as an intolerable problem (Naved, Azim, Bhuiya & Persson, 2006). In addition, who beats a woman may affect whether she tries to disclose the violence and seek help. Studies found that in general, women in Bangladesh acknowledge that men are their guardians and have the right to beat them if they behave “unacceptably” (Schuler, Hashemi, Riley & Akhter, 1996). But women’s attitudes and responses toward violence by relatives other than their husbands are rarely studied, even though extended or branch families are quite common in Bangladesh and relatives can be the perpetrators of violence. It is likely that women respond differently to different perpetrators, and may be more tolerant of violence from husbands than violence from other relatives.

The third group of factors (Box A3) which affects how women view violence against them is socio-cultural acceptance of violence and its disclosure. If violence against women is widely accepted in the community, the abused woman may be reluctant to seek help since this would be a break with social norms. If violence against women is strongly condemned in the community, the woman will be more likely to seek help since domestic violence will be considered abnormal and intolerable. In some cultures it is a humiliation for the family and for the woman to tell other people of the

violence, so the woman herself may be blamed for disclosing such behavior (Schuler & Islam, 2008). In other communities, there is no such shame, and women are able to involve other people in solving violence.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

In the published studies about the determinants of help-seeking behavior among ever abused women, the focus is usually put on the woman's characteristics, and the characteristics of the violence are typically ignored. The few exceptions are that the severity of violence and frequency of verbal abuse have been examined and found significant for help-seeking behavior (Naved, Azim, Bhuiya & Persson, 2006).

The main purpose of this study is to explore how the characteristics of the violence affect women's responses to it and their help-seeking behaviors, after adjusting for socio-demographic characteristics. We propose to test the following hypotheses using the above conceptual framework:

- 1) The nature of the perpetrator is a significant factor affecting whether women seek help or not: higher levels of disclosure will occur if the perpetrator is not the husband and/or if the woman is abused by multiple perpetrators, after adjusting for other factors.
- 2) The reasons for the violence affect women's help-seeking behavior: women who are beaten due to housework poorly done are less likely to seek help than women who are beaten for other reasons, after adjusting for other factors.
- 3) Women are more likely to seek help when violence is more serious, after adjusting for other factors.

Sampling method and participants

Data for the present study are from a baseline survey of a larger experimental study conducted by Johns Hopkins University and Grameen Bank in rural Bangladesh. The main purpose of the study is to assess the effects of separately and jointly introducing an enhanced microcredit program and essential health services on economic well-being, women's empowerment, contraceptive use and use of health services. The baseline survey was carried out in 128 villages in three divisions (Chittagong, Dhaka, and Rajshahi) in 2006. In each village, all households with ever-married women were stratified into three categories: not eligible for microcredit, eligible and had accessed microcredit, and eligible but had not accessed microcredit. Then a random sample was taken from each of the three strata with sample sizes of 4, 12, and 15 respectively. All ever-married women in the selected households were included in the individual survey. In total, interviews were attempted with 3998 women and 3933 of them had completed interviews.

Preliminary analyses of data quality showed that violence prevalence was significantly lower among women interviewed by three specific interviewers compared with the other interviewers in the same teams, and much higher among women interviewed by one interviewer. It is quite likely that there exists significant reporting bias for these four interviewers. Thus we excluded data for women who were interviewed by these four interviewers (732 women in total) and re-normalized the weight. We restricted our analysis to currently married women in order to eliminate the different exposure to violence for women of different marital statuses. In the end, the analysis was limited to 2854 currently married women.

Measurements

Physical violence within marriage was measured with the following question: “From the time you were married has anyone ever beaten (pushing, shaking, throwing something at you, slapping, twisting arms, punching, kicking, dragging, shoving, attempting to kill, burning) you?” Those who answered “yes” were asked the following question “Can you tell me who has done this to you since you were married”. The occurrence of physical violence in the past 12 months was then assessed by: “Approximately how many times were you beaten in the past one year?” The response to, reasons for, and severity of physical violence and help-seeking behavior after such beatings were asked using the following questions: “What do you generally do when you are beaten?”, “What is the most common reason for which you are beaten?”, “Have you ever been so seriously hurt during a beating that you needed medical attention even if you did not see a doctor?”, and “Have you ever talked to anyone about the beatings to try and get help?” Women’s acceptance of violence by their husbands was also assessed by asking “Sometimes a wife can do things which annoy or anger her husband. Please tell me if a husband is justified or not in beating his wife for each of the following situations”. The six situations were: 1) When she burns the food; 2) When she neglects the children; 3) When she argues with her husband; 4) When she talks to other men; 5) When she wastes his money; 6) When she goes out without telling her husband.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the principles of the WHO guidelines for domestic violence research. All data were collected with oral informed consent of respondents in a private space with confidentiality and anonymity. Respondents could refuse to answer any question or drop out if they wished not to continue at any time. The IRB of Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and the Bangladesh

Medical Research Council gave ethical approval for this study. A trained counselor traveled with the survey teams and was available for abused women who wanted to avail themselves of one.

Variables

For individual-level explanatory variables, woman's age is categorized into seven age groups (<20, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45+); number of sons and number of daughters are numeric variables; schooling is categorized into three levels (no school, primary, secondary and above); and religion is dichotomized (Muslim and others). Property possession is calculated based on the following questions: whether the woman owns any jewelry (yes/no), land (yes/no) or a house (yes/no) under her name; and whether the woman worked and was paid in cash or kind in the past year (yes/no). A woman's exposure to outside ideas is measured by participation in microcredit programs (yes/no), participation in community group(s) (yes/no) and listening to radio or/and watching TV (none, radio or TV, radio &TV).

A woman's mobility is measured by mobility index. The mobility index is calculated based on four questions about whether she ever left the house to go to certain places in the past year ("Did you ever go to the following place in the past year? 1) Meeting/congregation/gathering within the village ; 2) Visiting relatives or friends outside this village; 3) Visiting shops for marketing or shopping for clothes or necessary things; 4) Hospital/health care center/clinic.") If the woman answered "yes", then the following was asked: "The last time you went, did you have to take permission." If a woman never went to any of the four places, she scores 0, if she ever went but with permission, she scores 1, and if she went without permission, she scores 2. The total score over the 4 questions is the woman's mobility index, which ranges from 0 to 8 points.

Women's decision-making power is measured by a decision-making power index, calculated based on 10 questions about the decision-making status of women on family issues. The relative economic status of the household is determined by a wealth index, which is calculated using principle components analysis based on the presence or absence of a collection of assets. The details about how to get the decision-making power index and household wealth index can be found in a paper presented at PAA in 2009 (Mahmud).

Community acceptance of violence was calculated based on individual-level measures, which included the proportion of women in each village who accepted violence by a husband under the six circumstances and the prevalence of physical violence against women in each village, and the prevalence of verbal abuse against women in each village. The average of the decision-making power index, mobility index, and proportion of women with schooling (primary and above) in each village were used to indicate the overall status of women in the village.

For the occurrence of domestic violence against women, if a woman answered that she was ever beaten by someone in the family since getting married, it is coded 1. Otherwise it is coded 0. For the perpetrator of the violence, if only a woman's husband ever beat her, it is coded 0, if only relatives ever beat the woman, but her husband did not, it is coded 1, and if both her husband and relatives had ever beaten her, it is coded 2. Reason for violence is coded 0 if the women answered the major reason for the violence was "household work poorly done", and it is coded 1 for other reasons (i.e. delayed child bearing/no son, financial matters, in laws meddling, not giving permission for second marriage and others). If a woman reported being so seriously beaten that she needed medical care, it is coded 1 for severity of violence, otherwise it is coded 0. Woman's attitude toward violence is coded 1 if the woman agreed that beating was justified under some circumstances; and 0 otherwise.

For help-seeking behavior among all ever-beaten women, if she answered that she ever talked to someone to try to get help, the variable is coded 1, otherwise 0.

Data analysis method

Descriptive analysis is first conducted to see how violence against women occurred in Bangladesh: prevalence of violence against women since married and in the previous year before the interview, women's attitude toward violence by husband, reasons for violence, women's response to violence, severity of violence, help-seeking behavior among ever physically abused women, source of help and reasons for not seeking help. Z test is used for significance test for two proportions.

For hypothesis testing, cross-tabular analysis using chi-square tests is carried out to test the overall association between the selected covariates and help-seeking behavior. The outcome of interest is a binary variable, so logistic regression is the appropriate model for the analysis. Multi-stage sampling was used in the study, which means that the individuals are not independent within clusters (i.e. villages). Also the explanatory variables come from different levels (individual and village), so a multilevel logit regression model with appropriate weighting is used in the study (Chantala, Blanchette & Suchindran, 2006; Pfeffermann, Skinner, Holmes, Goldstein & Rasbash, 1998). A sequential modeling strategy is adopted for hypothesis testing. Models 1, 2, and 3 examine the crude effect of the nature of the perpetrators, reasons for violence, and severity of violence on women's help-seeking behavior separately. Model 4 examines the adjusted effect of the three violence related predictors after introducing all of the individual-level predictors into the model. Model 5 further adjusts for community-level factors based on Model 4. The random effect of the three features of violence and the cross-level interactions between the features of violence and the

community factors are explored using Model 5 and kept if significant. All data analyses are carried out using the statistical package Stata 11.0 (StataCorp, 200z) with gllamm command with robust measures and two levels of sampling weights (individual-level and village level).

The logit of the probability of help seeking is modeled as follows:

$$\text{Log}(\text{Pr}(Y_{ij}=1 | D_{ij}, W_{ij}, C_j) / (1 - \text{Pr}(Y_{ij}=1 | D_{ij}, W_{ij}, C_j))) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * D_{ij} + \beta_2 * W_{ij} + \beta_3 * C_j + \mu_j$$

Where i and j index, respectively, are the level 1 (individual) and level 2 (community) units; D_{ij} refer to the three characteristics of the violence, W_{ij} refer to women's socio-demographic variables, C_j refer to the community level variables; Y_{ij} is the help-seeking behavior for woman i in community j , $\text{Pr}(Y_{ij}=1 | D_{ij}, W_{ij}, C_j)$ is the probability of seeking help for women i in community j ; the β_s are the fixed coefficients (log odds ratio) for the above variables; $\mu_j \sim N(0, \sigma_j^2)$ shows the random effects for the j^{th} community.

RESULTS

Descriptive analysis results

Prevalence of violence against women

Among the 2,854 currently married women, 60.9% (1,783) reported ever being verbally abused, 31.3% (893) women reported ever being physically abused, 30.9% (882) of the women reported both verbal and physical abuse, and 30.0% of the women suffered verbal abuse only. Among women who reported physical abuse, 85.6% (764) were beaten only by their husband, 5.9% (53) were beaten only by other family members, and 8.5% (76) were beaten by both the husband and

other family members. The reported prevalence of physical abuse against women was 10.7% (312) in the year before the interview. Among women who were ever beaten in the past year, 69.3% were beaten 1-2 times, 17.8% were beaten 3-5 times, and 12.9% were beaten 6 or more times.

Women's attitudes toward violence by husband

Overall, 63.7% (1790) of the women agreed that a husband can beat his wife under some circumstances. The proportions differ by the circumstances being asked. Many women felt that punishment was justified for wasting money (39.5%), going out without telling their husband (37.2%), talking to other men (36.7%), and arguing with their husbands (26.5%). But only a small minority felt that their husband was justified to beat them for issues surrounding housework, such as neglecting the children (8.6%) and burning the food (1.7%).

Reason for, response to and severity of violence and help-seeking behavior among abused women by perpetrator

“Household work is poorly done” was the most common reason reported for physical abuse (61.5%), followed by financial matters (13.4%), in-laws meddling (12.5%) and “for no reason/for any reason” (9.6%). When the perpetrator was not the husband but relatives (i.e. other family members), women were more likely to report the beating was for no reason/for any reason (24.7% vs. 8.3%, $P < 0.001$) while household work was more likely to be reported as the reason for violence when the perpetrator was the husband (64.9% vs. 31.0%, $P < 0.001$).

As for women's responses to beating, most of the women said they just cried (61.2%) and/or did nothing (39.2%) when being beaten. A few women adopted active actions against beating: 4.6% of

the women threw things, 7.8% yelled/screamed at the perpetrator, 2.5% screamed for help, and 2.5% hit back/beat him. When the perpetrator was the husband, the respective percentages were lower compared to when the perpetrator was a relative.

Among women who were ever beaten, 27.1% had ever been beaten so seriously at some time that the woman needed medical treatment. The percentage was 22.0% if the perpetrator was only the husband, and 70.8% if the perpetrator was another relative ($P < 0.001$). Among women who suffered physical violence from both husbands and relatives, 48.3% reported that they needed medical treatment.

Among ever physically abused women, 20.9% had ever talked to someone about a beating to try to get help. If the perpetrator was not the husband but a relative, 82.9% of the women had ever talked about it to seek help from outside, but if the perpetrator was the husband, the corresponding percentage was only 14.0% ($P < 0.001$).

Women who had ever tried to seek help for the violence usually turned to informal sources, mainly their immediate family members, such as mothers (36.4%), fathers (26.3%), brothers (21.3%) and other relatives (30.2% to male relatives and 28.0% to female relatives). When the perpetrator was a relative, some women also tried to get help from their husbands. As for formal sources, very few women ever talked about the violence with doctors, but many of them did try to get help from their community leaders, especially when the perpetrators were not their husbands--20.5% when the perpetrator was the husband and 44.8% when the perpetrator was a relative ($P < 0.001$).

The main reasons for abused women not seeking help were “shame” and “trying to keep the family together” (47.0% and 51.4% respectively). However, when the perpetrator was not the husband, fewer women chose these two reasons and more women listed “fear” as the reason compared to when the perpetrator was the husband. Eight percent of the women chose “beating was justified” as their reason for not seeking help when the perpetrator was the husband, while no woman thought so when the perpetrator was a relative.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis testing results

Bi-variate analysis

All three characteristics of the violence (perpetrator of the violence, reason for the violence and severity of the violence) were significantly associated with help-seeking behavior ($P < 0.001$). Among ever-beaten women who never sought help, only 6.9% of them reported that they were ever beaten by relatives with or without husbands, compared to 42.8% among women who ever sought help. For reason for the violence, 68.6% of women never seeking help reported “Household work poorly done” as the reason, while the comparable percentage was 34.9% among women who ever sought help. Women never seeking help had a lower proportion of serious injury from violence compared to women ever seeking help, 34.1% vs. 83.1%. Among socio-demographic factors, only women’s age was significant at 0.05 level-- the proportion of women younger than 25 was higher among women ever seeking help than among women never seeking help, 34.9% vs. 14.0%.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Multivariate analyses

Models 1, 2, and 3 in the logistic regression analysis estimated the total effects of perpetrator, reasons for violence and severity of violence on help-seeking behavior. Compared to women beaten by husbands only, women had 30.0 [95% CI: 11.5-78.2] times higher odds of seeking help if they were beaten by relatives, and 5.6 [95% CI: 2.0-15.0] times higher odds of seeking help if they were ever beaten by both the husband and relatives. The reasons for the violence were tested in Model 2, where women had 4.7 [95% CI: 2.3-9.6] times higher odds of seeking help when they were beaten for reasons other than housework issues. In Model 3, the odds ratio was 8.8 [95% CI: 4.2-18.3] if the woman had ever been seriously hurt from the violence.

In Model 4, the individual-level covariates were introduced into the model. The perpetrator variable still showed a highly significant association with help-seeking behavior. The adjusted odds ratio was 20.6 [95% CI: 6.3-67.2] if the perpetrator was a relative, and 6.4 [95% CI: 2.7-15.2] if the woman was beaten by both her husband and any relatives, compared to when woman was beaten only by her husband. The reason for the violence and the severity of physical violence remained significant too: the adjusted odds ratios were 2.8 [95% CI: 1.5-5.2] and 5.7 [95% CI: 3.0-11.0] respectively. Age, education and earning an income were also significant predictors. Women older than 25 years, with primary education, working and earning an income had higher odds to seek help than women older than 25 year, with no schooling, with no income. Women from richer households also had higher odds to seek help compared to women from the poorest households. A woman's individual attitudes toward violence and other characteristics were not significantly associated with help-seeking behavior.

Community-level factors were introduced in Model 5. The perpetrator variable, the reason for the violence and the severity of physical violence were still significant. Women's individual attitudes toward violence became marginally significant. Among women's demographic indicators, age and earning an income remained significant, but other variables were not significant. Among the community-level factors, the prevalence of physical violence was highly significant [OR=0.03, 95% CI: 0.0-0.4], i.e. women from communities with higher prevalence of physical violence had much lower odds to seek help from outside. Other community-level factors were not significant.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

A new conceptual framework is developed and utilized in this study. It incorporates the characteristics of domestic violence in predicting help-seeking among physically abused women. The results show that the features of the violence do affect how women see the violence and whether they consider it as a problem that needs to be addressed, and hence significantly affects whether women reach out for help. In Bangladesh, women are more accepting of violence from their husband: some consider this behavior is justified and see no need to seek help from other people. But they are less accepting of violence from relatives (i.e. other family members), and more likely to see it as occurring for no reason. In these cases they respond more actively and aggressively while the beating is occurring, and are also more likely to disclose it and seek help from other people to protect them, such as their husbands and community leaders. This implies that women in Bangladesh generally categorize domestic violence into two groups: acceptable violence and unacceptable violence. Mild violence from their husband is acceptable when they feel they are

doing something wrong and are being deservedly punished for their misconduct. When the violence is more serious, other family members beat them, or they think they are being beaten for no good reason, they tend to categorize such violence as unacceptable and are more likely to turn to other people for help. It indicates that women can take actions to fight against violence when they find it unacceptable in Bangladesh. This suggests that it is very important to educate women and the public that violence against women is not justified under any situation, no matter who beats them or for what reason, or how mild or serious the violence is, and that they should always speak out and actively seek help from relevant sources to protect themselves from any kind of violence.

Meanwhile, women overall tend to keep silent about violence. Those who do seek help usually go to relatives rather than medical personnel, even when seriously injured. This indicates that violence is still considered a family issue in Bangladesh, and adequate support systems are still lacking or operate poorly.

There are several limitations of this study. **First**, the study is cross-sectional, which only allows investigating the association between two variables instead of causation. For example, we find a strong association between the severity of the violence and the help-seeking behavior among ever physically abused women, but we can not tell for sure whether it is because the women try to seek help and cause more serious violence (punishment for disclosing the situation to other people), or because the violence is so serious that the women choose to seek help. The former explanation is however, much less likely than the latter. For the association between perpetrator and help-seeking and association between reasons of violence and help-seeking, temporality is less problematic. **Second**, the frequency of violence during the whole course of marriage is not asked in the study, hence the effect of frequency of violence on help seeking behavior is not tested in the analysis.

Third, women's acceptance of violence from husbands is asked directly in the study, but women's attitude toward violence by relatives is not asked directly, which is useful to verify the multivariate results in this analysis. **Fourth**, the study asks the women how they respond to the violence, but has little information about why they respond in that way. We find that the majority of women keep silent about abuse and do not defend themselves when being beaten, but we do not collect information about the reasons for those behaviors, which would be very important information for planning interventions. Qualitative studies may be conducted to collect this information. **Fifth**, as noted in the methodology section, there is reporting bias about violence in the study. Even though we exclude the three interviewers who significantly under-report the occurrence of violence relative to their teammates, this study finds a relatively low prevalence of physical violence against women compared to other studies in rural Bangladesh (Bangladesh DHS, 2007; Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain & Mozumder, 2003; Naved & Persson, 2005; Schuler, Hashemi, Riley & Akhter, 1996). A possible explanation for such low prevalence may be that the study is not an exclusive study about domestic violence, but a module in a large questionnaire about microcredit and women's reproductive health. Thus the interviewers may have failed to give adequate attention to collect the violence information, and the interviewed women may have felt tired and impatient after already answering so many questions. **Lastly**, the villages in the sample are not representative of rural Bangladesh. Grameen bank by 2006 had established 31 rural health centers in these 3 divisions (Chittagong, Dhaka, Rajshahi) of Bangladesh. The 16 centers with the lowest reported coverage of microcredit are selected for the study, and the 8 villages with the lowest household participation rate in microcredit and with only government health programs are selected around each health center. The study areas included are relatively less developed compared to other rural areas in Bangladesh.

In order to better understand women's help seeking behavior and help the abused women reduce or stop the violence, some future studies should be conducted to examine: 1) When do women start to seek help from other people? Do they start to seek help after the first few incidents of violence? Or do they wait until a later time when they have experienced lots of abuse? 2) Does seeking help from other people actually reduce violence? If so, does it make the violence less frequent or less serious? 3) How does frequency of violence affect help-seeking behavior among abused women? 4) How do community-level factors (such as availability and quality of governmental and non-governmental organizations which can help women suffering from abuse, and people's attitudes toward disclosure of violence to outsiders) play a role in women's decisions to seek help?

Acknowledgement

The original research on which this article is based was funded by "National Institute of Child Health & Human Development. The authors also thank the women who participated in this study.

References

- Abel, E.M. & Suh, E.K. (1987). Use of service police by battered women. *Social Work*, 32, 526-528.
- Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey report (2009)*. Available at <http://www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FR207/FR207%5BApril-10-2009%5D.pdf>
- Beaulaurier, R.L., Seff, L.R., Newman, F.L. & Dunlop, B. (2007). External barriers to help seeking for older women who experience intimate partner violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22(4): 747-755.
- Bui, H.N. (2003). Help-seeking behavior among abused immigrant women: a case of Vietnamese American women. *Violence against women*, 9(2): 207-239.
- Chantala, K., Blanchette, D. & Suchindran, C. M. (2006). *Software to Compute Sampling Weights for Multilevel Analysis*. Available at http://www.cpc.unc.edu/restools/data_analysis/ml_sampling_weights/Compute%20Weights%20for%20Multilevel%20Analysis.pdf
- Fugate, M., Landis, L., Riordan, K., Naureckas, S. & Engel, B. (2005). Barriers to domestic violence help-seeking: implications for intervention. *Violence against women*, 11(3): 290-310.
- Gelles, R.J. & Straus, M.A. (1988). *Intimate violence: the causes and consequences of abuse in the American family*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc.
- ICDDR,B. (2006). Domestic violence against women in Bangladesh. *Health and Science Bulletin*, 4(2): 1-6.
- Krishnan, S.P., Hibert, J.C. & Vanleeuwen, D. (2001). Domestic violence and help-seeking behaviors among rural women: results from a shelter-based study. *Family community health*, 24(1):28-38
- Koenig, M.A., Ahmed,S., Hossain, M.B. & Mozumder, A.B.M.K. (2003). Women's status and domestic violence in rural Bangladesh: individual- and community-level effects. *Demography*, 40(2):269-288.
- Liang, B., Goodman, L., Tummala-Narra, P. & Weintraub, S. (2005). A theoretical framework for understanding help-seeking process among survivors of intimate partner violence. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 36: 71-84.
- Montalvo-Liendo, N. (2008). Cross-cultural factors in disclosure of intimate partner violence: an integrated review. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 65(1): 20-34.
- Naved, R.T. & Persson, L.A. (2005) Factors associated with spousal physical violence against women in Bangladesh. *Studies in Family Planning*, 36(4):289-300.
- Naved, R.T., Azim,S. Bhuiya, A. & Persson, L.A. (2006). Physical violence by husbands: Magnitude, disclosure and help-seeking behavior of women in Bangladesh. *Social Science & Medicine*, 62:2917-2929.
- Paranjape, A., Tucker, A., Mckenzie-Mack, L., Thompson, N. & Kaslow, N. (2007). Family violence and associated help-seeking behavior among older African American women. *Patient education and counseling*, 68: 167-172

- Pfeffermann, D., Skinner, C. J., Holmes D. J, Goldstein, H. & Rasbash, J. (1998). Weighting for Unequal Selection Probabilities in Multilevel Models. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series B, 60, Part 1*, 23-40.
- Schuler, S.R., Hashemi, S.M., Riley, A.P. & Akhter, S. (1996). Credit programs, patriarchy and men's violence against women in rural Bangladesh. *Social Science & Medicine, 43(12)*:1729-1742.
- Schuler, S.R. & Islam, F. (2008). Women's acceptance of intimate partner violence within marriage in rural Bangladesh. *Studies in family planning, 39(1)*: 49-58.
- Shannon, L., Logan T.K., Cole J. & Medley, K. (2006). Help-seeking and coping strategies for intimate partner violence in rural and urban women. *Violence and victims, 21(2)*: 167-181.
- West, C.M., Kantor, G.K. & Jasinski, J.L. (1998). Sociodemographic predictors and cultural barriers to help-seeking behavior by Latin and Anglo American battered women. *Violence and victims, 13(4)*: 361-375.
- Yoshioka, M.R., Gilbert, L., El-Bassel, N. & Baig-Amin, M. (2003). Social support and disclosure of abuse: comparing South Asian, African American, and Hispania battered women. *Journal of family violence, 18(3)*:171-180.

Table 1: Reasons for and responses to violence among currently married women who suffer physical violence, by nature of perpetrator, Bangladesh 2006 (n=893)

| Variable and categories | Perpetrators | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| | Only husband (n=764) | Only other family member (n=53) | Both husband and other family member (n=76) | All physically abused women (n=893) |
| Most common reasons for violence | | | | |
| Household work poorly done | 64.9 | 31.0 | 48.6 | 61.5 |
| Delayed child bearing/no son | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.3 |
| Financial matters | 12.0 | 14.8 | 16.1 | 12.5 |
| In-laws meddling | 13.2 | 5.6 | 21.1 | 13.4 |
| Not giving permission for second marriage | 1.3 | 1.1 | 1.4 | 1.3 |
| Went to father's home | 0.0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | |
| Land related | 0.0 | 7.2 | 0.0 | 0.4 |
| For no reason/for any reason | 8.3 | 24.7 | 12.4 | 9.6 |
| Other | 0.0 | 15.6 | 0.0 | 0.9 |
| Injury due to violence | | | | |
| Severely injured needing medical care | 22.0 | 70.8 | 48.3 | 27.1 |
| Never severely injured | 78.0 | 29.2 | 51.7 | 72.9 |
| Women's response to beating | | | | |
| Nothing | 39.3 | 43.7 | 34.3 | 39.2 |
| Just cried | 62.4 | 33.2 | 68.4 | 61.2 |
| Hit back | 0.6 | 0.6 | 10.9 | 1.5 |
| Yelled/screamed at perpetrator | 7.0 | 13.9 | 11.9 | 7.8 |
| Beat perpetrator | 0.0 | 17.1 | 0.3 | 1.0 |
| Screamed for help | 2.0 | 6.3 | 5.1 | 2.5 |
| Threw things | 4.8 | 0.0 | 6.4 | 4.6 |
| Beat children | 0.2 | 0.0 | 1.1 | 0.3 |
| Talked to other people or sought help | | | | |
| Yes | 14.0 | 82.9 | 47.7 | 20.9 |
| No | 86.0 | 17.1 | 52.3 | 79.1 |
| Person from whom help was sought | | | | |
| Friend | 0.2 | 2.4 | 3.0 | 1.2 |
| Mother | 40.9 | 40.6 | 18.2 | 36.4 |
| Sister | 2.6 | 1.9 | 10.0 | 3.8 |
| Husband | 0.2 | 22.2 | 3.5 | 6.0 |
| Father | 33.4 | 22.8 | 9.7 | 26.3 |
| Brother | 23.8 | 21.3 | 13.9 | 21.3 |
| Other male relative | 27.1 | 21.1 | 50.5 | 30.2 |
| Other female relative | 31.7 | 17.7 | 29.7 | 28.0 |
| Doctor/medical personnel | 1.1 | 0.4 | 4.6 | 1.6 |
| Elected person | 20.5 | 44.8 | 29.0 | 27.8 |
| Reasons for never talking about violence | | | | |
| Shame | 47.0 | 38.6 | 48.5 | 47.0 |
| Afraid people will talk | 1.6 | 13.2 | 0.8 | 1.7 |
| Fear of repercussion | 0.8 | 14.2 | 3.1 | 1.1 |
| Felt beating was justified | 8.0 | 0.0 | 5.2 | 7.8 |
| Sympathy | 8.4 | 3.1 | 5.3 | 8.2 |
| To keep family together | 51.2 | 34.2 | 59.0 | 51.4 |

Table 2: Distribution of selected covariates by help-seeking status among ever-abused women, Bangladesh 2006

| Variables | Abused women never seeking help (n=706) | Abused women ever seeking help (n=187) | All abused women (n=893) |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------|
| Demographic characteristics | | | |
| Age | | | |
| <20(ref) | 3.9 | 12.5* | 5.7 |
| 20-24 | 10.1 | 22.4 | 12.6 |
| 25-29 | 28.9 | 16.8 | 26.4 |
| 30-34 | 13.0 | 13.1 | 13.0 |
| 35-39 | 12.4 | 12.2 | 12.4 |
| 40-44 | 9.4 | 4.8 | 8.4 |
| 45+ | 22.4 | 18.3 | 21.5 |
| Social economic status | | | |
| Education | | | |
| No schooling (ref) | 53.0 | 41.7 | 50.6 |
| Primary+ | 47.0 | 58.3 | 49.4 |
| Religion | | | |
| Islam (ref) | 95.7 | 98.2 | 96.2 |
| Others | 4.3 | 1.8 | 3.8 |
| Property possession | | | |
| Own 0 (ref) | 48.7 | 51.2 | 49.3 |
| Own 1 | 48.7 | 43.5 | 47.7 |
| Own 2 or 3 | 2.5 | 5.3 | 3.1 |
| Money which can be spent by women | | | |
| No (ref) | 76.2 | 83.8 | 77.8 |
| Yes | 23.8 | 16.2 | 22.2 |
| Earn an income | | | |
| No (ref) | 90.5 | 86.1 | 89.6 |
| Yes | 9.5 | 13.9 | 10.4 |
| Exposure to outside ideas | | | |
| Participation in community group | | | |
| No (ref) | 98.4 | 98.8 | 98.5 |
| Yes | 1.6 | 1.2 | 1.5 |
| Participation in microcredit program | | | |
| No (ref) | 60.3 | 51.4 | 58.4 |
| Ever | 5.2 | 7.7 | 5.7 |
| Never | 34.5 | 40.9 | 35.9 |
| Mass media exposure | | | |
| No (ref) | 31.3 | 26.5 | 30.3 |
| Listen to radio or watch TV | 46.6 | 43.5 | 46.0 |
| Listen to radio and watch TV | 22.1 | 30.0 | 23.8 |
| Household wealth | | | |
| Poorest 20% | 18.8 | 17.3 | 18.5 |
| 20-40% | 18.7 | 26.1 | 20.2 |
| 40-60% | 27.2 | 13.8 | 24.4 |
| 60-80% | 12.1 | 26.3 | 15.1 |
| Richest 20% | 23.2 | 16.5 | 21.8 |
| Violence characteristics | | | |
| Perpetrator of physical violence | | | |
| Only husband (ref) | 93.1 | 57.2*** | 85.6 |
| Other person | 1.3 | 23.5 | 5.9 |
| Other person and husband | 5.6 | 19.3 | 8.5 |
| Reasons for physical violence | | | |
| Household work poorly done(ref) | 68.6 | 34.9*** | 61.5 |
| Others | 31.4 | 65.1 | 38.5 |
| Severity of physical violence | | | |
| No (ref) | 83.1 | 34.1*** | 72.9 |
| Yes | 16.9 | 65.9 | 27.1 |
| Attitude toward violence | | | |
| Never (ref) | 29.4 | 34.5 | 30.5 |
| Under some condition | 70.6 | 65.5 | 69.5 |

Note: *<0.05 **<0.01 ***<0.001 for chi-square test of independence between two variables

Table 3: Odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals from logistic regression analysis of determinants for ever beaten women seeking help, Bangladesh 2006 (n=893)

| Variables | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Features of violence | | | | | |
| Perpetrator of physical violence | | | | | |
| Only husband (ref) | 1.0 | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Only other person | 30.0 (11.5-78.2)*** | | | 20.6(6.3- 67.2)*** | 20.9(7.0- 62.2)*** |
| Both husband and Other person | 5.5 (2.0-15.0)** | | | 6.4 (2.7- 15.2)*** | 6.7 (2.9- 15.5)*** |
| Reasons for physical violence | | | | | |
| Household work poorly done(ref) | | 1.0 | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Others | | 4.7(2.3- 9.6)*** | | 2.8 (1.5- 5.2)* | 2.2 (1.2- 3.9)* |
| Severity of physical violence | | | | | |
| No (ref) | | | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Yes | | | 8.8 (4.2-18.3)*** | 5.7 (3.0- 11.0)*** | 6.4 (3.5- 11.6)*** |
| Acceptance of violence | | | | | |
| Not justified in any situation(ref) | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Violence can be accepted in some situation | | | | 0.7 (0.4- 1.4) | 0.5 (0.2- 1.1) |
| Women's socio-demographic characteristics | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| <20 (ref) | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| 20-24 | | | | 0.6 (0.3- 1.6) | 0.7 (0.3- 1.7) |
| 25-29 | | | | 0.2 (0.1- 0.6)** | 0.2 (0.1- 0.7)** |
| 30-34 | | | | 0.4 (0.1- 1.0) § | 0.4 (0.1- 1.1) § |
| 35-39 | | | | 0.2 (0.1- 0.7)** | 0.3 (0.1- 0.9)** |
| 40-44 | | | | 0.1 (0.0- 0.4)** | 0.1 (0.0- 0.4)** |
| 45+ | | | | 0.1 (0.0- 0.3)** | 0.1 (0.0- 0.4)** |
| # of sons | | | | | |
| # of daughters | | | | | |
| Education | | | | | |
| No schooling (ref) | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Primary | | | | 2.1 (1.1- 4.1) | 1.7 (0.9- 3.4) |
| Primary+ | | | | 0.9 (0.3- 2.5) | 0.9 (0.3- 2.5) |
| Religion | | | | | |
| Islam(ref) | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Others | | | | 0.3 (0.1- 1.1) § | 0.3 (0.1- 1.0) § |
| Property possession | | | | | |
| Own 0 (ref) | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Own 1 | | | | 0.7 (0.4- 1.3) | 0.6 (0.3- 1.1) |
| Own 2 or 3 | | | | 2.5 (0.8- 7.5) | 1.8 (0.5- 6.3) |
| Money which can be spent by women | | | | | |
| No (ref) | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Yes | | | | 0.7 (0.4- 1.4) | 0.7 (0.4- 1.4) |
| Earn an income | | | | | |
| No (ref) | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Yes | | | | 2.6 (1.2- 5.6)* | 2.7 (1.2- 6.0)* |
| Participation in community group | | | | | |
| No (ref) | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Yes | | | | 1.3 (0.1- 12.7) | 1.2 (0.1- 14.2) |
| Participation in microcredit program | | | | | |
| Never (ref) | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Ever | | | | 1.3 (0.6- 3.0) | 1.7 (0.7- 4.1) |
| Current | | | | 1.6 (0.9- 3.0) | 1.6 (0.9- 2.8) |
| Mass media exposure | | | | | |
| No (ref) | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Listen to radio or watch TV | | | | 1.3 (0.7- 2.7) | 1.4 (0.7- 2.8) |
| Listen to radio and watch TV | | | | 1.1 (0.5- 2.3) | 1.3 (0.6- 2.8) |
| Decision-making power (1 unit) | | | | | |
| Mobility (1 unit) | | | | | |
| Household wealth | | | | | |
| Poorest 20% | | | | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| 20-40% | | | | 2.5 (1.1- 5.5)* | 2.6 (1.2- 5.4)* |
| 40-60% | | | | 1.2 (0.6- 2.3) | 1.2 (0.6- 2.3) |
| 60-80% | | | | 1.7 (0.7- 4.1) | 1.5 (0.6- 3.6) |
| Richest 20% | | | | 1.6 (0.4- 6.7) | 1.9 (0.5- 7.1) |
| Community-level factors | | | | | |
| Prevalence of physical violence in the village | | | | | |
| Prevalence of psychological violence in the village | | | | | |
| Average score of decision-making power | | | | | |
| Average score of attitude toward violence | | | | | |
| Average score of women's mobility | | | | | |
| Proportion of women with secondary and above education | | | | | |
| | | | | | 2.1(0.4-10.5) |

Note: §<0.1, *<0.05 **<0.01 ***<0.001

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Help-seeking Behavior Among Physically Abused Women in Bangladesh



