

An overview of sexual assault cases in Bangladesh

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Citation: Sumon MSR, Rashid MS, Mollika FA, Asha MT, Biswas BP, Rahman MZ, Khan MBH. An overview of sexual assault cases in Bangladesh. *Int J Eth Trauma Victimology* 2020;6(1):10-14.
doi.org/10.18099/ijetv.v6i01.2

Article history

Received: June 05, 2020

Received in revised form: June 25, 2020

Accepted: June 30, 2020

Available online: Aug 16, 2020

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Abstract

Sexual assault is defined as any sexual act performed by one (or more) person(s) on another without consent. It may include the use of threat or force. In some cases, the person cannot give consent to sex because he/she is unconscious or otherwise incapacitated. A person may be raped by a stranger, an acquaintance or date or a family member. The purpose of the present study was to find out the medicolegal findings of rape victims in order to point out the visible loopholes of the procedure. This was a cross sectional descriptive type of study which was done in the Dept. of Forensic Medicine, Sir Salimullah Medical College and Mitford Hospital, Dhaka, Bangladesh from January to December 2015 with maintaining ethical issues. Rape cases were sent for medicolegal examination and victims who ultimately agreed to do medicolegal examinations were examined and opinions were given regarding the issues. In this study, majority (70.0%) of the victims was within 11 to 20 years of age and 65.0% of the victims were unmarried. Almost 68.0% of the victims were examined within 7 days followed by 32.0% of the victims after 7 days to beyond one month after rape; however, 48.0% of the victims showed sign of recent hymeneal tear with bruise and abrasion followed by 52.0% showed sign of old hymeneal tear. Spermatozoa were not found in any of the specimen of high vaginal swab. Young adults remain the most vulnerable group, so education related to sex, morality, humanity and different life skills training should be provided to these groups from their school years itself. The benefits of early intervention and comprehensive care of survivors with the use of standardized protocols along with shorter and lesser traumatic period of court processing to the survivors of these cases should be encouraged.

Keywords: Rape; medicolegal; victim.

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Introduction

The word 'rape' is derived from latin term 'rapio' which means to seize. Thus rape literally implies forcible seizure (1). Rape is defined as physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration - even if slight - of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body parts or an object. The attempt to do so is known as attempted rape (2). No age is immune of

rape. But children are more frequently raped due to their less resistance along with the belief that venereal diseases are cured by sexual intercourse with a virgin. Sexual offences are very common, widespread and insidious problem that have serious physical, psychological, emotional and social consequences. An estimated one out of every three women and one out of every six men

will be sexually assaulted at sometime in their life. The United States has the world's highest rape rates of all countries that publish such statistics. The U.S. rape rate is four times higher than that of Germany, thirteen times than of England and twenty times than of Japan (3). Due to many related physical, mental, religious, cultural, age and social factors, only an estimated 15 - 20% of women who have been sexually assaulted report to the police; therefore, the real incidence of sexual assault is unknown and, probably, cannot ever be accurately determined. According to the American Medical Association (1995), sexual violence is the most underreported crime. A 2007 Government report in England says that Estimates from research suggest that between 75 and 95% of rape crimes are never reported to the police (4). Sexual assault is both a common and a very serious crime which is investigated by the police with an intensity second only to that of murder (5). The World Health Organization (Krug *et al*, 2002) defines sexual violence as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting including but not limited to home and work (6). It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object. Rape is a legal term. It can have devastating psychological consequences on victims, culminating in post traumatic stress disorder with an array of symptoms, including sleeping difficulties, poor appetite, flashbacks, feelings of numbness, anger, shame and denial, avoidance behavior, and relationship and sexual difficulties. In the most severe cases, depression can lead to suicidal ideation and suicide (7). Rape is a heinous crime that destroys the hope and aspiration of a victim. It is such a complex issue that cannot be demonstrated easily. Proof of rape depends not only in the physical findings of the victims but also to the subjective intentions of the assailants. Moreover, in many times, negative physical findings along with lack of witness of the incidence, create problems in courts of law to bring out justice for the victims as everybody is innocent until incidence is proved beyond reasonable doubt in the court

Method and Materials

This was a descriptive type of cross-sectional study conducted in the Department of Forensic Medicine at, Sir Salimullah Medical College and Mitford Hospital, Dhaka, Bangladesh from January to

December 2015 with maintaining ethical issues. Rape victims who agreed to do medicolegal examinations were recorded as victims of alleged sexual assaults. Victims of alleged rape cases were sent for medicolegal examinations within the above mentioned period. After physical examination, radiological report and microbiological report opinion was given whether the signs of forceful sexual intercourse were present or not.

Results

A total number of 69 cases were studied. Table 1 showed that 70% of the victims was belonged to 11 to 20 years of age group followed by 21 to 30 years of age 14.0%.

Table 1: Age Variation in Rape Victims (n=69)

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
0 to 10 years	10	14
11 to 20 years	48	70
21 to 30 years	8	12
>31 years	3	4
Total	69	100

Table 2 showed that majority (almost 65%) of the victims was unmarried.

Table 2: Marital Status of Rape Victims (n=69)

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	24	35
Unmarried	45	65
Total	69	100

Tables 3 showed that of them 23% of the victims were examined in second day after rape followed by 22% in 4th to 7th day of rape.

Table 3: Time of examination of victims after rape (n=69)

Time of Examination	Frequency	Percentage
Same day	11	16
Second day	16	23
Third day	5	7
4 th to 7 th day	15	22
After 1 week to 1 month	17	25
Beyond 1 month	5	7
Total	69	100

But majority almost 25 % of the victims was examined after 1 week to within 1 month followed by 7% even beyond 1 month.

Table 4: Findings of Rape Victims after Physical Examination (n=69)

Genital findings	Frequency	Percentage
Recent hymen tear with bruise and abrasion	32	47
Old hymeneal tear with no bruise and abrasion	37	53
Total	69	100

Table 4 showed that recent forceful sexual intercourse was found in 47% cases. But majority (almost 53.0%) of the victims did not show any positive physical findings of forceful sexual intercourse.

Table 5: Microbiological Reports Regarding Spermatozoa Found or Not (n=69)

Report of spermatozoa	Frequency	Percentage
Not found	69	100
Fond	0	0
Total	69	100

Table 5 showed that no spermatozoa were found in any specimen of high vaginal swab.

Discussion

The magnitude of rape or sexual harassment is high all over the world. However, it comes a little in front of us most of the times. In the majority of countries with available data; less than 40% of the women who experience sexual assault seek help of any sort. Among who do, most work to family and friends and very few look to formal institutions and mechanisms, such as police and health services. Less than 10% of those women seeking no help for experience of volume sought help by appealing to the police 5. The under reporting of cases of sexual assaults are mainly due to social stigma; prejudice with regard to the chances of marriage, publicity in press, embarrassment in court, doubt in local law enforcement, risk of losing the love and respect of society⁶. In this study, it has been found that majority (70.0%) of the victims was 11 to 20 years of age and 65.0% of the victims were unmarried. It reflects that young,

unmarried girls are usually targeted for rape; 46.0% of the victims were examined within 3 days after rape.

According to table 3, majority, almost 47.0% of the victims were examined after 3 days to within one Month after rape, followed by 7.0% beyond one month. That is why, signs of forceful sexual intercourse were supposed to be absent in majority cases; 53% of the victims presented with old hymeneal tear with no signs of abrasion and bruise and 47% of the victims showed recent hymen tear with abrasion and bruise. Spermatozoa were not found in our study in any of the specimen of high vaginal swab. Other study reported that 53.94% of the victims' age was within 16 to 20 years followed by 26.32% belonged to 11-15 years. So, majority, 80.26% of the victims were 11 to 20 years of age and 71.05% victims were unmarried (8). Majority of the victims (65.79%) had the signs of recent hymen tear. One of the study showed that majority (60.0%) of the victims was within 11 to 20 years of age and 64.8% of the victims were unmarried. Significant percentage (59.0%) of the victims was sent within 3 days of rape for medicolegal examination. But positive physical findings were found only in 27.5% cases (9). Majority (72.4%) had no signs of forceful sexual intercourse. Another study by Al Azad et al reported that majority (69.57%) of the victims were within 11 to 20 years of age and 78.69% victims were unmarried. 38.69% of the victims were sent for medicolegal examination within same day of rape (10). However, as a whole half (50.0%) of the victims were sent within 3 days for medicolegal examination. The rest half were sent beyond 3days to 4 weeks. In a study showed that 60.8% of the victims were within 11 to 20 years of age and 70.9% of the victims were unmarried. 24.3% of the victims were presented for medicolegal examination within 24 to 48 hours of incidents but as a whole, only 45.1% of the victims were sent within 3 days of the incident and the majority, 55% were sent after 3 days to more than 1 month. Majority of the victims (77.6%) showed old hymen tears. Spermatozoa were found in 18.2% of the cases (11). 43% of the victims were 12 to 16 years of age followed by 16 to 20 years 21%. So, majority (64.0%) of the victims were within 12 to 20 years of age. Only 29.0% of the victims were sent within 3 days of incident for medicolegal examination. Significant percentage (71.0%) of the victims were sent after 3days to beyond 1 month of incident for medicolegal opinion (12). Another study showed that 83.6% were below 19 years and over 60.0% of victims presented after 24 hours of assault (13). Spermatozoa were not found in this present study

in any cases among the high vaginal swab. Absence of spermatozoa in the high vaginal swab does not mean that sexual intercourse has not taken place. These may be due to non-emission, aspermia, previous vasectomy, very old age or poor technique by the examining doctor (14). Moreover, ejaculation outside vagina, using barrier method can be the factor of failure of detection of spermatozoa in high vaginal swab. Spermatozoa were found in 17.6% and 30.3% cases reported by respectively (15) (16).

Conclusion

The violence against women is a global pandemic and there has been dramatic increase of sexual assault, and especially of acquaintance rape. Globalization, modernization and communication have quickly and radically transformed the traditional societies which pave the way for changes in traditional values embodied in culture. The anti-rape protests and legal reforms had a diverse effect on our society. The vulnerable group of sexual assaults belonged to 11-20 years indicating that young women and children are usually to be more at risk. The victims shared information pertaining to an assault to family and friends only due to some psychological barriers, stigma and other social reactions that contribute to victim feeling of shame and embarrassment. Thus to define rape or attempted rape is difficult. There were some evidences of forceful sexual intercourse observed at the time of medical examination. Due to delay in medical examination and reporting of cases resulted in loss of vital physical evidences. The success of the efforts aimed at curbing violence against woman relies on the implementation of an integrated strategy with proper monitoring regarding laws, government policies, and role of civil society and the media.

Conflict of Interest

None declared

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Correction

Citation: Shekhar S. Analytical study on oil and gas field occupational injuries for high incidence of fatality, bodily injuries and measures of prevention. *Int J Eth Trauma Victimology* 2018; 4(2):23-26. doi.org/ 10.18099/ijetv.424

This paper was received on September 22, 2018 and not on September 22, 2019