Socio-cultural analysis and contextualization of 'stalking' as sexual abuse and harassment of female students in Bangladesh: A qualitative study

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ABSTRACT
Sexual harassment and abuse against women is a socio-cultural contrivance, which unfortunately endorse women's subordination in societies. Sexual harassment, abuse and violence affect women negatively through the development of obstinate feeling of self-doubt, and by generating a severe loss of self-esteem. This paper aims to investigate, analyze and contextualize 'stalking', a specific form of sexual harassment, experienced by Bangladeshi female students (adolescent girls and young women) in public places. The study applied qualitative method, which includes focus group discussion, interviews and observation. In spite of having social and cultural taboos, married/unmarried adolescents search for information about sexuality, romance, and erotic pleasure in online videos, mobile phone clips, in pornographic web-sites and magazines that mislead them to the concept of sexuality and gender, and it eventually reinforce sexual abuse, violence, and gender inequality. Stalking is a channel for boys and young men to vent their hidden sexual feelings and desires; a negative way to gain sexual pleasure, and brag their masculinity. In response to 'stalking', girls detest it; get scared of being harmed by men; and ashamed of being blamed by family and society for provoking men. Findings reveal stalking is a result of socio-cultural traditions and norms that restrict and misguide sexuality; lack of access to scientific education on sexuality and reproductive health in Bangladesh.
KEYWORDS: *stalking, adolescents, sexual abuse/harassment, gender discrimination, sexuality-education, Bangladesh*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Stalking in Bangladesh/South Asia includes sexual harassment of girls and young women by boys/men in public places, such as: in carnivals, crowded market places, movie theatres, open musical concerts, public transports; alleys, roads and streets; and at work places. Men abuse women verbally, look down on them, force them to retaliate, touch them inappropriately, and even threaten them with kidnapping (Munā, 2005; Nahar,2010; Talboys, Kaur, VanDerslice, Gren, Bhattacharya, & Alder,2017). South Asian popular culture endorses stalking as a medium of interaction between boys/men and girls/women (Gangoli, 2016; Malhotra & Patil, 2020). For instance, in South Asian (Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani) dramas and movies, the villain and the hero always provoke flirtatious interaction with the heroine or other female characters through various types of negative sexual behaviours, connotations and sexual harassments. In most of the narratives of the movies, moderate sexual harassment/stalking/teasing is accepted as entertaining and romantic elements (Gupta, 2018; Mehta, 2019; Ramasubramanian,& Oliver, 2003). For generations, young boys and men get influenced by such interactions in movies, which shape and define their understanding of having an interaction with girls/women. These forms of interactions become part of social norms, and function as a socio-cultural mechanism, which normalize sexual abuse, harassment and violence against women that ultimately suggest that girls/women can be, or deserve to be harassed (Baxi, 2001; Moffett, 2006; Naved, Rahman, Willan, Jewkes, & Gibbs, 2018).

This article aims to focus on the different ways adolescents and young Bangladeshi girls experience stalking, how they react to it, perceive it, and how it affects them psychologically. The paper also focuses on adolescent boys and young men's views on socio-cultural norms and psychological factors for stalking girls. This paper argues that stalking mostly originates from discriminatory/unequal, negative/toxic, and damaging sociocultural traditions/norms regarding sexuality and gender.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

It was during women's movement in South Asia, the social and public harassment of stalking girls/women was categorized as sexual abuse/harassment (Akhtar, 2013; Donaldson, McCarry, & McGoldrick, 2018, Kohli, 2012). When women started entering into the public sphere for work and social activities, *Eve teasing* a former synonym of the act of stalking was first documented by an Indian female activists in the middle of the twentieth century (Gangoli, 2016, Nahar, 2008, Gagnon & Simon, 2017). Consequently in Bangladesh, in 1980s when education became free for girls, women actively started participating in the garments industry, NGO activities in female health, female education and in other development sectors started flourishing; women activists started becoming vocal about the issue of sexual abuse, harassment, and violence in general; and especially about stalking (World Bank, 2008; Basu, 2016). In Bangladesh, a gradual increase in girls' education helped women achieve improvement in health, economic empowerment and socio-cultural mobility, but gender discrimination still persisted in the society such as unequal wages/pay, early marriage (mostly forced), gender based sexual violence and harassment – both domestic and public (Khosla,2009; Koenig et al., 2003; Rashid, 2007).

Social mobility of women in general has increased over the years, but research shows that only 49% of older women and 38% of younger women consider it safe to go out within their own neighbourhood, and in other public places. (Kabeer, 2012; Kabeer, 2016). In fact stalking female students in public is one of the main reasons for female students dropping out of school; especially in rural areas. Stalking is also one of the reasons for girls being victim of forced early marriages in Bangladesh (Amin, Ahmed, Saha, Hossain, & Haque, 2016; Barkat, & Majid, 2013). In the mid-1990s, a new law was passed in India related to sexual abuse/harassment that included stalking. Since 2010 onwards, stalking has also been considered a crime in Bangladesh, and it is subject to penalty/punishment by the government (Kabeer, 2012). The incidents of stalking and sexual harassment had increased so rapidly that the government had to employ mobile courts to prosecute boys/men who were accused of sexually abusing/harassing girls and women in public places. A convict of sexual abuse/harassment or of stalking is legally to be charged with a fine of 7000 Bangladeshi taka, and a year in jail (Kabeer, 2012).

This article focuses on analyzing and contextualizing the act of 'stalking' as a sexual abuse/harassment, which is gravely humiliating; psychologically damaging, and detestable for young girls/women. Stalking belongs to quite a vague area of sexual violence that includes nonconsensual forceful sexual behaviour and expressions, which violate sexual autonomy; but culturally considered normal under patriarchal sociocultural traditions/norms in Bangladesh (Elliott, Mok, & Briere, 2004, Khan et al., 2017, Manzoor, e Rehma, & Abrar, 2018). There is a constant rise of stalking in Bangladesh, and stalking also incorporates other forms of sexual harassment and violence against girls/women, such as acid burning, abduction, rape, murder; and consequent suicide cases of girls/young women out of humiliation [Gupta, 2018, Mazumder & Pokharel, 2019; Murshid, & Murshid, 2019). Almost more than 90% of Bangladeshi teenage girls and young women aged 12 – 25 experience sexual harassment in the name of stalking (Madan, & Nalla, 2016).

III.   METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method including focus group discussion and interviews was chosen for this study since it is suitable to reveal in-depth knowledge of a multifaceted aspects of a sensitive topic. Eight respondents, from first and second year undergraduate male and female students (four male and four female) of four different universities in Dhaka, participated in the group discussion and interview. First year students were just out of high school (aged 19 to 22 years), and they were able to share the experiences of sexual harassment they have experienced since adolescence and as young women. Male students were also able to share what they had experienced in adolescence and as young men; in terms of men sexually abusing and harassing women. Four students (two female, two male) were from first year and other four (two female, two male) were from second year. After focus group discussion, interviews were conducted in private having one student at a time; and recorded with their consent. Two of the students were from remote areas, two other were from small towns, and other four were from cities. These provided interesting demographic varieties and helped us understand the differences in the scenarios of sexual harassment in rural areas, small towns, and the situation in the cities. The interviewer followed the narrations, paused where needed, and asked for more clarifications when needed.

Both male and female respondents were often nervous and cautious to reveal and share the traumatic experiences, personal feelings, emotions and sexual desires because talking about sexuality is challenging. Sometimes during focus group discussion and interview, they have referred to the experiences of their cousins, friends, neighbours, known adolescents from school. Nevertheless, that did not obstruct the research as the paper focuses on the general patterns of adolescences' experiences of sexual harassment and abuse.

Data Analysis

All recordings and notes from focus group discussions and interviews were analyzed by applying qualitative content analysis. The texts were read several times. The analysis was done following three steps: firstly, forming all meaning units; secondly all meaning units were condensed. The process of shortening of the text without losing its meaning facilitates the overview of the content, and leads the next step of the analysis. Thirdly, all condensed meanings were pooled into sub-categories based on similarities and differences in their content.

IV.   RESULTS

Demographic profile

Table 1 Demographic profile

Sub groups	Number of respondents	Reported cases of stalking and sexual harassment
19 – 20 years:	3 (all female)	■ All 3 female (victim of stalking and sexual harassment)
		■ All 4 male (all witness, 2 took part in stalking), 1 female (victim)
21 – 22 years:	5 (4 male, 1 female)	
From City:	4 (2 female, 2 male)	■ 2 female victim of stalking, 1 male stalked female, 1 male witnessed sexual harassment and abuse of females
From Small Town:	2 (1female, 1 male)	■ Male witnessed, and female are victim of sexual abuse, female also victim of stalking
From Rural:	2 (1 female, 1 male)	■ The female is a victim of stalking, male took part in stalking, and abuse

This section begins with an analysis of the demographic profile of the respondents. The table above describes the age group of the respondents, 19 to 22 years old. All female (all four) respondents are victims of stalking, sexual harassment or abuse in any form. Among the male respondents, two of them have actively taken part in stalking girls/women, and the other two have witnessed female being victims of stalking, sexual harassment and abuse. Female respondents were stalked and became victims of sexual harassments regardless of their location (city, small town or rural area), whereas male respondents from city and rural area took active part in stalking; and the other two respondents (from city and small town) witnessed female being victim of stalking.

Themes

The study exposes how the socio-cultural traditions/norms designate different positions and ranks for boys/men and girls/women in our society. It reveals that if girls/women do not conform to the strict socio-cultural norms of sexual behaviour, they run the risk of getting socially stigmatized (much more than boys/men), has least chances to get married to a suitable groom, and they are also often blamed for bringing humiliation to their families. For example, socio-cultural restrictions of premarital sex is imposed only on girls, and that is why they are advised to stay indoors, and not to have much social interaction with boys/men. The socio-cultural restrictions reduce girls'/women' social mobility; and their social interaction with boys/men during adolescent. It is also a taboo for adults, guardians, parents and children to have a healthy discussion about puberty, sexuality in a healthy and friendly manner. Gender segregation and taboos/stigma surrounding sexuality make it difficult to offer a comprehensive sexuality education, assistances and services to adolescents in Bangladesh.

Table 2 Summary of Themes

Number of Themes	Emerging new Themes
Theme 1:	Understanding sexuality
Theme 2:	Influence of movies (Bangla, English & Hindi romance or adult movies) – (restrictions do not prevent unwarranted incident)
Theme 3:	Adults do not provide any education or counselling on sexuality
Theme 4:	Adolescents' insecurity of sexuality
Theme 5:	Stalking or sexual harassment: female experiences and perceptions
Theme 6:	Stalking or sexual harassment: male perceptions

Theme 1: Understanding sexuality

Regardless of having social taboos, restrictions, and obstructive traditions/norms, adolescents and young boys frantically find ways to discover, understand and experience erotic pleasure and romance. Girls usually like to discuss romance and sex with their friends and older cousins. Some girls like to learn from internet. Young boys/men with access to mobile phone, computer, and internet (at home or at cyber café) seek information and pornographic materials in the internet. Mobile phones are extensively used (mostly by boys) as a tool for watching pornographic materials. Pornography is downloaded and shared by using social media apps/tools or *Bluetooth* for free; and adolescents have access to local, international, and sub continental (especially erotic Hindi movies) erotic movies, music, uncensored videos and movie clippings. Printed version

of (cheaply) erotic pictures, magazines, and texts are also quite popular among boys from the rural areas. Boys (4 boys) mentioned that they love to have erotic chat, and often get engaged in erotic discussion with other boys over their mobile phones; three girls mentioned that they had such conversation with other girls. Though, some of the girls revealed that they know about some other girls who like to get engaged with such erotic conversation with boys and young men as well. Boys stated that boys and young men usually masturbate to get sexual pleasure that starts in adolescence; but none of the girls have admitted to doing it. They have mentioned that girls restrict themselves from doing it as they mostly have the fear of losing virginity out of it.

Theme 2: Influence of Bangla, English and Hindi romance or adult movies

Boys and girls both like to watch romantic Bangla, English and Hindi movies, and some get into romantic relationships during adolescence. Boys and girls who are in relationships mentioned that it is not easy to date in a conservative Bangladeshi society as there are social restrictions; especially for adolescent girls/young women. They are con stantly afraid of getting caught by their family members; acquaintances, friends of their parents; neighbours; and relatives. Some boys have admitted getting engaged into sexual activity, and some have shared that they know other boys/young men who have had experiences of going to the professional sex workers, and even getting involved into violence against women, such as physical torture and rape. Girls also mentioned that some adolescent girls and young women end up with unwanted pregnancy and experience unsafe abortion, and suffer from the severe social stigma related to that. Respondents have agreed on getting influenced by the narratives of these movies and get ideas about gender stereotypes from these movies. These incidents prove that strict social laws, traditions, and norms cannot restrict people (mostly adolescent boys and girls) from unwarranted situations; rather it leads to more distortion, and secret perversion regarding sexuality.

Theme 3: Adults do not provide any education or counselling on sexuality

All eight boys and girls have admitted that their parents do not know anything about their children's involvement in hidden activities of sexual pleasure. This is a consequence of sexuality being a social taboo for adults to discuss with adolescents, and young unmarried children. Young boys search in the internet, get motivated by street canvassers and herbalists (whose advice on sexuality is openly available in Bangladesh) to find answers for their curiosity and questions. The information they receive from this sources are usually distorted, incomplete and incorrect, which lead to misconceptions, anxiety, fear. These misconceptions eventually endorse the cultural norms of gender roles, and strengthen the supremacy of masculine power. Therefore when adolescent boys and girls feel sexual desire or engage in activities, they fear, feel guilty, and become ashamed of their sexual identities.

Theme 4: Adolescents' insecurity of sexuality

Respondents (4 boys and 4 girls) have mentioned that they believe romance and pleasure are natural and important for them to achieve self-esteem, and grow up to be masculine and feminine. However the social norms do not allow them to accept it naturally, they have to keep these feelings hidden from everyone, especially from adults. The girls/young women are mostly afraid of getting social punishment and stigma if they are caught by the adults. Most of the girls mentioned the adults in their families are always suspicious, and they suspects romantic relationships to necessarily be sexual relationships. Adults are usually more concerned, and scared of the sexual chastity and security of the girls. Hence girls suffer from severe social restrictions within family, and have less social mobility in the public sphere. Most of the times girls/young women are tortured by their family if their relationships and affairs are revealed. Adults blame them for bringing humiliation to the family, and, punish them by imposing forced early arranged marriages on them. Sometimes in rural areas, and in uneducated families, girls are taught (by grandmothers, mothers) to fear the heavy menstruation flow, which might consequently make them unable to prove virginity on wedding night. Boys also shared their insecurities about becoming sexually weak and develop timidity about their sexual power. Both adolescents (boys and girls) fear the loss of family reputation if caught doing something bad (sexually), or sinning against their religious faith.

Theme 5: Stalking and sexual harassment: female experiences and perceptions

***Table 3** Types of stalking and sexual harassment*

Types of stalking and sexual harassment
1. Verbal Abuse: (sexually insinuating comments, insult, spreading rumours about the girl/women, sending explicit sexual voice sms & video clippings)
2. Physical Assault: Touching, hurting sexually without consent (by force); exposing body parts,
3. Blackmailing girls/women: Making unwanted phone calls, sending sexually provocative sms, mms, videos, threating girls with sexual abuse
4. Unwelcome gestures: by using fingers, signs, body parts, teasing

5. Threatening girls with abduction, rape, murder

Female respondents (all 4) pointed out stalking or sexual abuse/harassment as the most common concerns related to sexuality by the adolescent girls/young women. Most of the girls in this study, during their adolescences, faced severe or moderate sexual harassment by boys in public places, especially through erotic gestures and vicious comments while simply passing by the street, or being in any public places. Most of the comments refer to the physical attributes of girls/women such as: "look at her body, her hip, breasts"…"what is her size"… "oh the size of her buttock is 40 and breast is 36" … "such an awesome maal (piece)". "Hey sexy…how did you grow such full breasts? Walking and dancing breasts". Sometimes they would refer to the breasts to the shapes of different fruits. In reaction to that adolescent girls would be so ashamed of their body, press her books/notebooks/files, school bag to their chests. Boys/young men would keep on commenting: "I wish I could be the books/bag, I could be closer to her chest….her heart". For sensitive young adolescent girls these comments are horribly fearful, degrading, and traumatic; they feel utterly humiliated. In rural areas, where girls have to walk/ travel a long distance to reach school; they not only face verbal abuse, but also physical abuse and violence. Girls mentioned that boys would even propose a girl passing by the street verbally or just by throwing a note; and the most dangerous part is the boys would expect the girls to agree right away. If the girl does not respond in positive, then the boys would intensify their level of sexual harassment through physical abuse, blackmailing, threatening to prove their masculine power.

Girls have pointed out that boys also express their aversion quite violently if they do not like the look of a girl. For example, they will call a thin girl "lathi" which means stick, they will call a tall girl a bamboo stick or a pillar, and a fat girl would referred to be an "elephant". They will sing vulgar erotic songs, whistle, blow kisses or make nasty erotic gestures to the girls. Most of the girls would pass by silently without retaliating while being harassed in the street, or in any public places because adolescent girls are shy and not very confident about their sexuality.

Sometimes girls ask their elder brothers, male cousins, reliable neighbourhood brothers, brother's friends, or friends' brothers to help them; but most of the girls are afraid of sharing their abusive experiences with their adult guardians, uncles, aunts, parents because guardians mostly blame the girls in return – without caring for them or trusting them. Some girls would start wearing hijab (head scarf), burkha (an attire covers the whole body) or nequb (an attire covers the whole face except eyes) to protect themselves from being stalked, but most of the female respondents mentioned that even those girls (that wear hijab, burkha or nequb) get stalked, teased, abused and harassed. Eventually, these attires cannot protect them, as they get harassed by being called "sexy/exotic Arabian nights' girls" or they would try to snatch away their nequb (face cover). In addition to verbal abuse girls also suffer physical abuse when boys or men pinch them, push them, stand close to them, try to kiss them in crowd, touch their breasts, waist or buttocks in a crowded bus, train, market or in any carnival or fares. All female respondents have also mentioned cases where boys would throw acid on girls, in some cases kidnap or rape her for rejecting or saying no to the boys' proposal of a prospective relationship.

Undeniably, in Bangladeshi society, girls are threatened in the public places during adolescence. Girls/women do not desire for such unwanted attention from unknown boys or men; rather they detest it. Respondents have stated that girls unfortunately grow up bearing this feeling of fear and insecurity while being in public places; especially alone. Apart from that ironically, girls also face the unjust criticism, humiliation, and pressure of being blamed for provoking boys, as if it is the girls' fault that boys or men harass them. So literally when a girl becomes a victim of sexual harassment, she gets double trauma for being blamed for such unwanted experiences. People label that girl as bad or someone with flaws. Girls sometimes do not share it with their parents or relatives for not to be labelled as a bad girl (even within the family). When the situation gets worse, when the girl fails to take it anymore (inside house or outside), some girls commit suicide. Both male and female respondents mention about the trauma girls go through after being abused or harassed within and outside their family; and the vulnerability of not getting much support or justice from their family or society.

Theme 6: Stalking or sexual harassment: male perceptions

Table 4 Types and ways of stalking and sexual abuse

1. Boys from all social background (rich, middle class, poor) often get involve in sexual harassment and abuse against girls/women
2. Boys/men prefer public places to harass or abuse girls (open park, crowded market places, cinema halls, running buses, carnivals)
3. Boys/men believe by stalking and harassing girls/women they grow up and gain masculine power
4. Boys/men believe unmarried men have natural right over any unmarried girl/woman in Bangladeshi society
5. Boys/men believe they get a sense of superiority by harassing girls/women

Four male respondents have admitted that they know many boys/young men who harass girls/ young women verbally, and often harass physically too. Respondents reveal from their experience   that adolescent boys from slums, poor families, or even from very rich families or from broken families get involved in rape, physical abuse and assault or even in gang rape. Boys admitted that many men, they personally know, wait for a chance in public places to touch a girl inappropriately, for example: in carnivals, fares, theatres, market places, in crowded places or in buses and trains. They mentioned, "… when the light goes off in cinema halls, I press my hands on female breasts and buttocks". Boys have admitted that they do it to get pleasure, to show off their masculine power to other boys or men; sometimes they do it out of peer pressure. For example, one boy shares his experience when he was in high school. A boy from a neighbouring school was asked by his friends to show his valour by touching a girl's breast during the end of school hours. The boy ran up to a passing girl in the street and pressed his hands on her breasts in front of everyone. Even some of the other boys were shocked to see such open humiliation of a girl, but remained silent out of fear. Stalkers have the image to be violent, aggressive, and powerful so boys who do not stalk refrain from protesting against it; as if they would lose their masculinity if they do so.

Male respondents have stated that boys/young men mostly grow up, in Bangladeshi society, thinking it is okay to meddle with girls in public places because girls are weak and vulnerable; and an easy target. Most of the stalkers believe that attacking girls verbally or touching them inappropriately in public places do not do any harm to the girls; they are not getting pregnant after all; and adults would not know about it. Boys mentioned that most of the stalkers believe that every unmarried man has right over any unmarried girl in the society, even if they are unknown or unrelated to each other. Finally, all four male respondents said that boys grow up without being sensitive towards girls' or women' feeling about it or how female, especially adolescents, deal with such public humiliation, and traumatic experiences.

V.   DISCUSSION

The paper analyzes and contextualizes 'stalking' as sexual abuse and harassment, experienced by adolescent girls and women in Bangladeshi society that portrays and objectifies girls and women as mere sexual commodities. Gender inequality is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural structure of Bangladesh, and that eventually leads to sexual harassment and violence towards women. (Wronska, 2018; Mazumder & Pokharel, 2019). Bangladeshi society patronizes and upholds patriarchy, traditional stereotypical gender norms mostly against women, and that makes girls experience discrimination at domestic, social and cultural level. These social and cultural discriminations function as decisive factors that compel girls and women experience sexual abuse and harassment at unwarranted length. Bangladeshi laws and judicial procedures also discourages girls/women to seek justice (Bagley, Shahnaz, & Simkhada, 2017; Brackett & Downing, 2017). The government has introduced mobile courts to prosecute boys and men who are accused of sexually abusing/harassing girls/women; but in reality this procedures remain less effective than expected. In addition to that, it is also not possible to change and modify cultural practices overnight just by introducing mobile courts to eradicate sexual abuse and harassment (Basu, 2016).

Socio cultural tradition persistently tend to blame girls and women for being sexually abused and harassed. Social norms make it difficult for women to report sexual abuse, violence and harassment, which they experience since childhood/adolescence (Brackett & Downing, 2017; Naved & Akhtar, 2008). Research (Naved & Akhtar, 2008) on 'workplace sexual abuse and harassment' in Bangladesh show that working women are immensely reluctant to reveal their experiences of abuse and harassment as they fear being stigmatized, tabooed, targeted, and threatened with vengeance or being labeled as problematic, and even being dismissed from jobs.

Gender inequality, in Bangladeshi society, also dictate how boys and girls should perceive their individual roles in men-women/sexual relationships. Girls/Women are taught, trained and expected to be submissive and subjugated in any man-woman relationship. Research in South Asia (Dutt, 2018; McCarry & Lombard, 2016) have shown that sexual abuse, violence and harassment functions as a tool or mechanism of social control, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal social-power structures. The patriarchal power structure obstructs and prohibit to address the issues related to sexual violence, abuse, harassment, and sexual exploitation of Bangladeshi girls and women. Some research (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 2016;, Leung & Chan, 2014) reveal that socio-economic transformation of female professionals develops inferiority complex in men who suffer from a crisis in their traditional concept of masculinity, which is one of the main reasons for harassing women in open public places. Traditional norms and values of patriarchal society (related to) sexuality play a vital role to let men believe that they have a dominant right to abuse or harass women even in public places.

Culturally the concept of sexuality is puritanical, repressive and tabooed in Bangladeshi society. For example, dating, pre-marital sex or social interaction of men and women are traditionally and culturally a big taboo in Bangladesh (Morokoff, 1985; Connell, 2013). Different sources of research studies (Morokoff, 1985; Connell, 2013) argue that sexuality segregation among men and women, and the repressive nature of society towards sexuality eventually results in gender discrimination. The consequences of such repressive attitude of

the society leave adolescents with superficial, inadequate, and fearful information and misconceptions regarding sexuality. Consequently the concept of sexuality is usually distorted, and adolescents learn to attach sexual connotations and meanings to any social interaction between male and female. These misconceptions eventually hamper the capability of having a more natural or spontaneous interactions among boys and girls/men and women; and it prevent them from developing non-sexual understanding/intimacy with the opposite sex (Barkat & Majid, 2003). Adolescents (boys and girls together) are deprived to grow up in a healthy environment because in Bangladeshi social structure, there are few public places/platforms where adolescent boys and girls (not related to each other) can meet and have a healthy social and cultural interaction.

Moreover the increased access to internet, innumerable pornographic websites, different kinds of sexually induced video games, mobile-apps increase, and reinforce certain stereotypical sexual and gender norms (male dominance and pressure), identities (male: powerful, women: frail, weak) and expectations (women being a sexual object, submissive, subordinate, subjugated) that have already been embedded in the society. For example, research reveal (Gupta, 2018; Mehta, 2019) that the mainstream movies in the subcontinent (Bangladesh/India/Pakistan) promote subjugation of women and sexual violence in South Asia. Sexual harassment as stalking, eve teasing are encouraged in these movies as accepted social norms. Onscreen representations of sexual abuse and harassment of female, as something culturally common and social norms, in return endorse and encourage the presence of those forms of violent behaviour and sexual harassment in the society.

The restrictions and discouragement on social interaction/mixing among boys/men and girls/women (in general), having romantic relationships/dating eventually intensify boys/men's negative attraction towards women; intensify interest in pornography and in other distorted forms of sexuality. Socially and culturally, in Bangladesh, adults have absolute power to regulate and control adolescents' formation of sexual identity and sexual behaviour. Adults tend to apply social and cultural norms (concept of chastity, arranged marriage; by restricting the growth and development of interaction-skill of adolescents by segregating boys and girls) to regulate, shape and control adolescents' sexuality (Gagnon & Simon, 2017). Whereas, essentially, the interaction skill between male and female, behaviour related to sex/gender, sexuality of adolescents meaningfully depend on healthy and natural socialization of boys and girls (John et al.,2017). Furthermore, socialization among boys/men and girls/women is ingrained in many non-sexual features/aspects of social life that are unfortunately restricted for Bangladeshi adolescents. For example, developing natural/spontaneous interactions between boys/men and girls/women involves sensitivity, basic social communication skills, and behavioural strategies. In absence of these natural social interaction among boys and girls, negative social interactions such as eve teasing, stalking, sexual harassment awfully flourishes.

There is no comprehensive sexuality education in Bangladeshi school curriculum yet. Initially international NGO, BRAC initiated education on sexuality only in BRAC rural schools for adolescents. Later, some other NGOs became part of the process of developing comprehensive education on reproductive health and sexuality for high school students in Bangladesh. A lack of access to sexual and reproductive health education, information, and services in Bangladesh; and the absence of proper education on sexuality and gender-interaction in educational institutions result into several misconceptions about sexuality among the adolescents. Adolescents, especially girls, develop pointless insecurities and anxieties concerning their bodies and sexual feelings. In this study, adolescents have expressed their fear, hesitations, anxieties, insecurities, and confusions about their bodies, gender identities, and sexual feelings. These findings confirm the necessity for young people to have access to comprehensive education on sexuality that goes beyond only focusing on health issues; but also addressing on gender discrimination/inequality, and helps developing effective skills for socio-sexual interactions.

In conclusion, the paper emphasizes on an urgent need of access to positive, correct, healthy, and comprehensive information on sexuality, for Bangladeshi adolescents, to counterbalance the misconceptions, misinformation, and distorted messages they get from senior brothers/men, friends, street canvassers, the internet, pornography, and from many other different unwarranted sources. Even after having strict norms and social punishments, as part of natural sexual development, adolescents/young people look for pleasure, information on sexual feelings, erotic experiences mostly through backdoor; by going outside the control of adults. If the society and adults want to protect and guide adolescents, the best option would be to equip them with right information, proper sexual communication skills, and confidence regarding their sexual identities.

VI.   LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has some limitations that might have significant propositions on further research in the similar area. Respondents are mostly limited within the universities in Dhaka city, inclusion of respondents from universities of other cities would bring a wider level of depth in research. Respondents from different other universities will also add more variety regarding socio-cultural norms and practices prevalent in Bangladeshi society. This research has been conducted by applying qualitative method. A mixed method (both qualitative

and quantitative) would also add a different dimension to any further research. More research should be conducted in this area so that more updated, detailed research could enrich gender-research in general in Bangladesh and in South Asia.

VII.   CONCLUSION

The key themes emerged from the data are conscientiously interconnected. The themes reflect how only strict social norms, rules, sexual-reproductive health education or services are not enough to assist and guide adolescents regarding their sexual identities, feelings, and behaviour. Focus needs to be given on proper counselling of young people, caring for the sensitivity regarding the feelings and concerns of the adolescents. Particularly education on sexuality needs to be incorporated in academic curricula where adolescents can discuss their insecurities and fears regarding sexual abuse, violence, and harassment; such as stalking, acid throwing, forced marriage, sexual harassment and the stigma related to these experiences. Moreover, adolescents need to be facilitated in reporting harassment without any hesitation, prejudice or fear. At the same time parents, guardians, teachers, and adults need to realize that the social facilitation of a proper environment for boys and girls is needed to make them aware and more respectful of their own/opposite sexual identities and rights. Guardians, parents and adults need to realize that they have a big role to play in preventing any type of sexual abuse and sexual violence; not tacitly supporting those abuse and violence. More healthy, natural, and spontaneous form of interaction between boys/men and girls/women is essential for adolescents to grow and be comfortable with their sexual identities and feelings. The strict and severe gender segregations between boys and girls needs to stop. The media, education sector, different social welfare institutions can play an important role in changing the social perspectives/norms, and in encouraging people to collectively discuss and prevent sexual abuse and violence.

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