

RESEARCH ARTICLE



The Epidemic of Child Rape, Sexual Abuse, and the Justice System in Bangladesh.

Sanchita Islam Tisha^{*,1}  Kashpia Islam², Md. Kibria Nur³

^{1,2} Department of Law, Khulna University, Bangladesh

³ Department of Law, Southern University Bangladesh

*Corresponding: sanchitaislam65@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh has reached a crucial point of vulnerability regarding child rape and sexual abuse of children. Child rape and sexual abuse portray an increasing constitutional, human rights, and child protection crisis in Bangladesh. It presents both moral and legal challenges, making the social structure fragile and raising serious concerns about legal accountability and social justice. The objective of the study is to address the present situation regarding child rape, physical abuse of children, causes, consequences, legal challenges, and to provide suggestions. Using an analytical approach based on secondary sources, the study explores the socio-cultural and legal dynamics that allow such crimes to persist. Increased access to the internet, misuse of the internet, abuse of authority by perpetrators often known to the victim, a culture of impunity, weak enforcement of laws, a culture of silence surrounding sexual violence, and victim blaming are the main causes of child rape. Although Bangladesh has enacted protective legislation, delays in investigation, evidentiary limitations, inadequate victim and witness protection, and institutional insensitivity often contribute to ineffective prosecution and a broader culture of exemption from penalty. In many instances, the justice process itself may generate secondary victimization through insensitive treatment and repeated interrogation of victims. The after-effects of child rape are more severe because most often the children are unable to get out of the childhood traumas and feelings of guilt. To address these issues, the article suggests strengthening legal enforcement, ensuring child-sensitive investigation and speedy trial procedures, expanding victim support services, and promoting public awareness to challenge victim-blaming attitudes.

Keywords: Child rape; Child sexual abuse; Justice system; Child protection; Bangladesh.



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1. Introduction

Rape and sexual assault, forms of illicit sexual oppression, are now a global problem where most of the victims are women and children. This is a threat to both national and international law, violating fundamental human rights to a person's physical integrity and dignity. Nowadays, Child rape and sexual abuse have turned into the most alarming human rights issues in Bangladesh.

Rape is defined as an unwanted act of oral, vaginal, or anal penetration committed by force. According to the World Health Organization, child sexual abuse (CSA)¹ is “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society”. Research has increasingly focused on the occurrence and psychological impacts of child sexual abuse. A key limitation in this research is that many children who have been sexually abused do not reveal their experiences right away. As a result, a notable number of cases remain unreported to agencies capable of investigating and taking necessary actions, such as imposing legal penalties on the perpetrator. For instance, in Sauzier's clinical study involving 156 sexually abused children, only 39% had ever shared their experiences with anyone (Sauzier, 1989).² Lamb and Edgar-Smith (1994) discovered that the average age for disclosure in their study was 18, with only 36% of participants making their first disclosure before they turned 14.³ Child rape has not only physical consequences but also mental consequences. Child abuse also includes sexual contact, exhibitionism, child pornography, voyeurism, kissing, anal intercourse, frottage, fellatio, and fondling.⁴

In the 13 months till February 2026, 776 rape cases were documented by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).⁵ Just last month alone, 183 cases of violence against women and children were reported by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad. Last month alone saw 183 cases of violence against women and children, according to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad.⁶ The most crucial side of child rape is that the number of abused children is much higher than the number reported.

Mass rape and forced impregnation have been used as weapons of war all over the world. Various studies have researched the mental health needs of victims of rape and have established fairly high levels of symptoms across a wide range of problem areas. Even after many years, the trauma of rape continues to have

¹ 'Violence against Children' (World Health Organization, 14 August 2026) who.int accessed 14 August 2026.

² M Sauzier, 'Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse: For Better or for Worse' (1989) 12(2) Psychiatric Clinics of North America 455.

³ RF Hanson and others, 'Factors Related to the Reporting of Childhood Rape' (1999) 23(6) Child Abuse & Neglect 559.

⁴ Juliann Whetsell-Mitchell, *Rape of the Innocent: Understanding and Preventing Child Sexual Abuse* (Taylor & Francis 1995).

⁵ 'Violence Against Women in Bangladesh | Repression of Women, Children: Protection Promised but Not Delivered' *The Daily Star* (14 August 2026) thedailystar.net accessed 14 August 2026.

⁶ Nilima Jahan, 'Repression of women, children: Protection promised but not delivered' *The Daily Star* (5 March 2026) thedailystar.net accessed 8 March 2026.

a major impact on children's lives.⁷ Also, the effect of secondary victimization of rape on a child is beyond description. Child sexual abuse (CSA) has been shown to negatively impact victims' lives. Meta-analyses and reviews have shown this for physical health, for sexual functioning, for depression, for post-traumatic stress disorder, for suicide, and for self-esteem.⁸ The most concerning issue in our society is that, even after declaring the highest penalty for the rapist, child rape has been increasing rapidly over the last few decades. Society's desire to inflict the death penalty for child rape by enlisting the child victim in a lengthy and wrenching capital case might have the effect of inflicting additional harm on the child victim.⁹ It is also a matter of concern that child rape is being generalized as if it were the rape of a woman, where the severity of the crime is not the same.

A child's recovery from sexual abuse requires both immediate response to critical needs and longer-term responses and support. A strengths-based approach to engaging children can identify who they felt safe with before the abuse. Children (and families) will need help to recover and heal from the impacts of sexual abuse on the family and familial relationships. Children have a right to justice and may need support while the legal investigation and the prosecution of their cases occur. Justice systems are often dysfunctional; even in the highest-functioning justice systems, a child may be subjected to victim-blaming attitudes from police, lawyers, judges, and others involved in the system.¹⁰ Only a collective and systematic judicial reform can ensure justice for our future generation and reduce this inhuman activity in our society.

2. Methodology

This study uses the method of qualitative research to collect data and is analytical in nature. In this study, no specific timeframe has been set, as this kind of literature is very limited in number. This research mainly analyses child rape victims, and especially sexually abused girls, in the context of Bangladesh. However, some information from around the world has been added for deeper understanding. No software was used for the analysis of the study materials. The contents and information emerged through a process of open coding and subsequent categorization, following a comprehensive literature review conducted by the authors. In this research, all kinds of research ethics have been maintained, all sources have been properly cited, and all references are included in the bibliography section. Additionally, all the data used in this study are publicly

⁷ Elisa Van Ee and Rolf J Kleber, 'Growing Up Under a Shadow: Key Issues in Research on and Treatment of Children Born of Rape' (2013) 22(6) *Child Abuse Review* 386 doi.org.

⁸ Rinke De Jong and others, 'Transition to Adulthood of Child Sexual Abuse Victims' (2015) 24 *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 175.

⁹ Susan A Bandes, 'Child Rape, Moral Outrage, and the Death Penalty' (2008) 103 *Northwestern University Law Review Colloquy* 117.

¹⁰ UNICEF and International Rescue Committee, *Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse Guidelines* (2nd edn, 2023) unicef.org accessed 9 March 2026.

available secondary sources, and no personally identifying or sensitive information has been used in the text.

3. Objectives of the Study

Main Objective: To analyse the legal, social, and institutional dimensions of child rape and sexual abuse in Bangladesh and to evaluate the adequacy of the existing legal framework in ensuring protection and justice for child victims.

Specific Objectives:

1. To examine the nature, scope, and legal analysis and understanding of child rape and sexual abuse within the context of Bangladesh.
2. To analyse the socio-cultural and structural factors that contribute to the occurrence and underreporting of child sexual abuse.
3. To evaluate the existing statutory provisions and international obligations relating to child protection in Bangladesh.

4. Findings:

a) Nature analysis and recent outbreak of child rape:

Child sexual abuse in Bangladesh exists in several forms; among them, child rape is the most fiendish form. Nowadays, child rape has become a common phenomenon. Child sexual abuse also includes incest, trafficking, exploitation, and harassment, etc. Most of the incidents occur within familiar environments such as homes, schools, and communities, often involving perpetrators known to the victim. A study addresses that most sexual abuse is committed by men (90%) and by persons known to the child (70% to 90%), with family members constituting one-third to one-half of the perpetrators against girls and 10% to 20% of the perpetrators against boys.¹¹ Family members constitute a higher percentage of the perpetrators in child protective agency cases because the mandate of these agencies generally precludes their involvement in extra-family abuse. Around 20% to 25% of child sexual abuse cases involve penetration or oral-genital contact. The peak age of vulnerability is between 7 and 13.¹²

b) Statistical data:¹³

According to data from the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum and Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) cited in

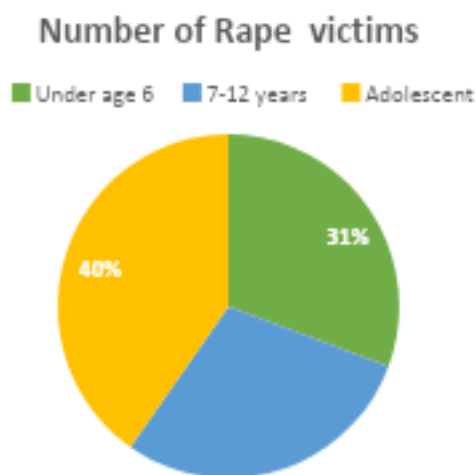
¹¹ 'Child Sexual Abuse Presenting to Police Centers in Khartoum-Sudan: Pattern and Victim Associated Factors' (ResearchGate, 14 August 2026) researchgate.net accessed 14 August 2026.

¹² David Finkelhor, 'Current Information on the Scope and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse' (1994) 4(2) *The Future of Children* 31.

¹³ Md Asaduzzaman, 'Shishu Dhworshon o Bicharer Shonkot' *Samakal* (9 March 2026) <https://samakal.com> accessed 11 March 2026.

the article, child rape incidents in 2024 and 2025 have broken previous records:

Overall, increased girl child rape: 166 in a single year, Time frame: Between January and August, 2024, 224 girls were rape victims; in the same time frame in 2025, the number surged to 390, Age analysis:



c) Prevalence and Types of Child Sexual Abuse:

Across the world, there are several types of rape being committed against children. Based on the international and national standards, here are some types:

1) Custodial Rape:

Rape is committed by a perpetrator, and the child is influenced by the perpetrator's power and trust. It includes authoritative betrayal and breach of legal duty. Children are raped by persons who are obliged to ensure safe custody, such as staff, teachers, doctors, police, etc., by being manipulated and confused so the abuser doesn't need to apply much force during rape.

2) Statutory Rape:

It may involve brutality or consensual sex. In Bangladesh, children between 14 and 18 years old may give their consent for sex, but legally it will be rape because a child's consent is not considered legal consent. A child is mentally and legally incapable of consenting to sexual activity. The elements of statutory rape involve:

1. Commits sexual intercourse/unnatural sexual intercourse,
2. Against the person's will,
3. Through the use of force or threat of bodily injury

3) Aggravated Rape (Brutal Rape):

This category is applied in cases of extreme physical assault and/or factors that make the victim more vulnerable to assault. It causes serious bodily injury when the perpetrator intentionally disfigures the victim, disables an organ, or fractures a bone during the assault. It also involves the use of a Deadly Weapon. The perpetrator uses or threatens to use a weapon, such as a knife or a gun, to instill fear in the child and prevent it from resisting. Sometimes the victims become unable to give birth anymore.

4) Gang Rape:

This is applied in cases where more than one perpetrator is involved in the assault. According to most laws, all parties who are present and who have aided and abetted the crime are held equally liable for the entire act of rape. The legal consequences of this act are the highest possible, as the mere presence of multiple perpetrators instills the highest degree of fear in the victim and places the victim in the greatest peril.

5) Incestuous Rape:

This type of rape happens when the rapist is a member of the family of the raped person. This type of rape is unique because of the mental effects of disrupting family relationships and the long duration of the abuse, especially through a practice called "grooming."

6) Rape that leads to murder (homicidal rape):

This is a one-of-a-kind legal category in which the perpetrator kills the victim to keep them from testifying or because the act was so violent. Laws may treat a death that happens during the act of rape differently from a murder that happens afterward to get rid of evidence. The latter is usually punishable by death. If the child survives, but it is clear that the perpetrator intended to kill them, for example, by strangling them or leaving them in a dangerous situation, it is classified as "Attempted Murder after Rape."

A thousand incidents of child rape can be given as examples of murder after rape. One of the most recent cases was Jannatul Nesha Era, who was raped and brutally murdered by the rapist in Chattogram.¹⁴

d) By whom the children are being raped and sexually assaulted:

The person generally commits rape or sexual abuse against children:

1) Family members or close relatives:

This may include fathers, stepfathers, uncles, cousins, brothers, grandfathers, or other relatives. When abuse happens within the family, it is often described as incest. In 2025, in Asia, an eight-year-old girl was brutally

¹⁴ 'Child Ira's Killer Arrested in Sitakunda; Previously Serving Life for Child Rape, Released From Prison After Aug. 5' *BDDIGEST* (11 March 2026) <http://bddigest.com> accessed 5 July 2026.

raped and murdered by her own brother-in-law and his father.¹⁵

2) Neighbors or known persons in the community:

A child may be abused by someone living nearby, a family friend, or a trusted adult who has regular access to the child. Parents of the children often do not even acknowledge the vulnerability of trusting neighbors and friends with a child, and children are unable to reveal due to unawareness and fear of social status, which results in further rape and sexual assault. Recently, an 18-year-old was arrested for 'attempting to rape' a 4-year-old in Kamrangirchar, and no surprise that they were neighbors.¹⁶

3) Teachers, tutors, or school-related persons:

Sometimes offenders use authority and trust to exploit children. 15 February 2024 Press Releases, Sexual offences West Midlands A former Sheffield teacher who acted as a 'sugar daddy' to a 12-year-old girl has been sentenced for raping a child.¹⁷ It's nothing new. Every day, about 5% of children are being raped by their home or institutional tutor.

4) Religious instructors or institutional caregivers:

Persons responsible for moral guidance or supervision may misuse their position. In Bangladesh, it's a common phenomenon of child rape, sexual assault, and slander in religious institutions like Madrasas.¹⁸ Major news will emerge about child rape by institutional caregivers, and a vast number of incidents have not even been revealed yet.¹⁹

e) Whether the guardians are resorting to legal action:

In many communities, parents worry that sharing certain information might hurt their child's future, especially when it comes to marriage opportunities. They also fear social embarrassment. Sometimes, local mediation led by village leaders can prevent formal legal actions and encourage finding a compromise instead of going to court. However, attending court, traveling, obtaining medical records, and hiring legal help can put a financial burden on low-income families and cause emotional distress to the child and family. Parents may hold back from asking questions repeatedly because it can cause further psychological harm to the child. Anxiety about being blamed as a victim. Families worry that the child might be blamed, questioned harshly,

¹⁵ 'Bangladesh: Fierce Protests as Eight-Year-Old Rape Victim Dies' *BBC News* (11 March 2026) <http://bbc.com> accessed 5 July 2026.

¹⁶ '18-Yr-Old Arrested for "Attempting to Rape" 4-Yr-Old in Kamrangirchar' *The Daily Star* (30 March 2026) thedailystar.net accessed 5 July 2026.

¹⁷ '18-yr-old arrested for "attempting to rape" 4-yr-old in Kamrangirchar' *The Daily Star* (1 February 2026) thedailystar.net accessed 5 July 2026.

¹⁸ 'Madrasar Shishu Shikharthike Shongkotapanno Obosthay Hashpatale Bharti, Jouno Nirjatoner Alamot' *Prothom Alo* (16 March 2026) <https://prothomalo.com> accessed 5 July 2026.

¹⁹ 'Madrasay Shishu "Bolatkar", Shikhok Polatok' *News Bangla 24* (30 March 2026) <https://newsbangla24.com> accessed 30 March 2026.

or become socially isolated. Long court delays are also a legal constraint in the way of seeking justice and facing the court. Fear of retaliation and threats from the offenders is also a cause of their hesitation. Furthermore, strengthening institutional capacities and fostering collaboration among stakeholders are critically important to ensure justice and the well-being of rape survivors.

f) Psychological and Social Impact of Child Sexual Abuse:

Child rape and sexual abuse can seriously harm a child's mental health and emotional stability. Victims often experience persistent fear, anxiety, sadness, and feelings of insecurity, which may continue long after the abuse has ended. These traumatic experiences can damage a child's self-confidence and make it difficult for them to trust others or feel safe in everyday environments.²⁰ In social life, many victims withdraw from friends and avoid social interaction. They may also face stigma, misunderstanding, or negative attitudes from society, which can increase feelings of shame and isolation. Such types of reactions further harm their emotional development and make their recovery more challenging.²¹ Over time, these psychological and social pressures may affect a child's education, personal development, and ability to build healthy relationships in adulthood.

g) Legal Framework for the protection of Children from sexual violence:

Bangladesh has an elaborate legal framework for the protection of children from rape, sexual abuse, exploitation, and other forms of sexual assault. These matters related to children are generally discussed in the constitutional provisions, specific substantive laws, children's protection laws, evidential provisions, and Bangladesh's international human rights treaty obligations.

1) The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 1972:

The protection of children from rape and other forms of sexual assault is mentioned in some of the provisions of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Such as Article 27 provides for equality before the law, and Article 28(4) permits taking special measures for children.²² In addition, Articles 31 and 32 provide for the rights to legal protection, liberty, and security of the person.²³ Collectively, these provisions recognize that children are entitled not only to protection from crime but also to dignity, security, and respect for their personal integrity. Therefore, preventing sexual violence against children is both a criminal justice concern and a constitutional responsibility.

²⁰ JH Beitchman and others, 'A Review of the Long-Term Effects of Child Sexual Abuse' (1992) 16(1) Child Abuse & Neglect 101.

²¹ S Ali and others, 'Examining the Short- and Long-Term Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse: A Review Study' (2024) 4 SN Social Sciences.

²² Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, art 28.

²³ Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, art 32.

2) Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000:

Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 is one of the most important statutes in Bangladesh, which criminalizes rape and other forms of sexual assault. Such as, Section 9 of this Act provides for punishment for rape, which may be extended to causing death.²⁴ Section 10 criminalizes sexual harassment,²⁵ and Section 14 seeks to protect the victim from disclosing the identity of the accused. Investigation into rape complaints may be done in accordance with Section 8, which requires the police to conduct an investigation in consultation with the victim and to take her to the hospital for forensic and DNA tests. The Act further provides for expedited trial of rape cases in accordance with Sections 18 and 20.²⁶ Consequently, the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 provides for comprehensive legal remedies for victims of rape and other forms of sexual assault.

3) Children Act, 2013:

Children Act, 2013 is another important statute which applies to all children irrespective of gender. According to the Children Act, a child refers to a person who has not attained the age of eighteen years (18). In relation to Article 28(4) of the Constitution, Section 13 provides for Child Affairs Desks and Child Affairs Police Officers.²⁷ Moreover, Section 16 provides for Children's Courts, which try cases involving children in accordance with the procedures provided in the Act.²⁸

4) Penal Code 1860:

The Penal Code, 1860, provides for punishments for various sexual offences committed against children in Bangladesh. Rape is punishable under Sections 375 and 376 of the Penal Code, 1860. However, there is no separate provision for child rape. In addition, the Penal Code, 1860, indirectly provides punishments for kidnapping or abducting a child with intent to subject him or her to sexual assault.²⁹

5) Evidence Act 1972:

The Evidence Act, 1872 has provisions relating to the protection of the rights of a child who is a victim of sexual assault during trial. After the 2022 amendment, Section 146 of the Evidence Act restricts questions about the sexual behavior or reputation of a person accused of committing rape.³⁰ Moreover, through cross-examination by the defense counsel, a child victim of sexual assault often undergoes secondary victimization.

²⁴ Prevention of Oppression Against Women and Children Act 2000, s 9.

²⁵ Prevention of Oppression Against Women and Children Act 2000, s 10.

²⁶ Prevention of Oppression Against Women and Children Act 2000, s 20.

²⁷ Children Act 2013, s 13.

²⁸ Children Act 2013, s 16.

²⁹ Penal Code 1860.

³⁰ Evidence Act 1872, s 146.

6) Pornography Control Act, 2012:

The Pornography Control Act, 2012 prohibits the making, distributing, circulating, selling, and viewing of any type of pornographic material. This Act further criminalizes any kind of exploitation of children in making pornographic materials.³¹

7) Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012:

Section 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 prevents trafficking with intent to physically abuse persons in accordance with the definition contained in the Act. From the perspective of Bangladesh, this act remotely addresses the sexual exploitation and rape of children.³²

8) Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010:

The Domestic Violence Act, 2010 is relevant where sexual abuse of a child occurs within a domestic or family setup. Section 3 of this Act recognizes sexual abuse as a form of domestic violence that can be committed through physical torture against a child by her own family members.³³ Section 10 provides for protection orders, allowing the court to take measures to protect victims from further violence. Section 11 deals with residence-related protection, while Section 13 provides for compensation for the victim.³⁴ These provisions are important because children experiencing sexual abuse within the family may require not only criminal prosecution of the offender but also immediate protection, a safe living environment, and appropriate remedies.

9) International Human Rights Instruments:

Bangladesh has ratified several international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, to which it is a State Party.³⁵ For this reason, Bangladesh is obligated to uphold children's rights as provided in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. Children's best interests outlined in this convention are meant to be primarily considered in all actions carried out by States concerning children. Under Article 19 of the same treaty, States are required to undertake measures to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, including sexual violence. Child sexual exploitation is strictly forbidden under Articles 34 and 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, and States must provide remedial assistance to children who have suffered from sexual exploitation. However, as mentioned earlier, having this detailed legal framework does not automatically ensure the right to protection from sexual violence. Investigations and prosecutions of sexual violence cases often encounter many

³¹ Pornography Control Act 2012.

³² Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012.

³³ Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010, s 3.

³⁴ Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010.

³⁵ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990) 1577 UNTS 3.

challenges, including delays in investigations and trials, lack of forensic expertise, limited victim support services, social stigma, and various forms of institutional torture. Legal scholars emphasise that while strong laws exist, gaps in implementation and social stigma can make justice difficult for many victims without proper support systems.³⁶ If the accused is convicted, penalties, including imprisonment and fines, are enforceable, and the legal system also aims to provide support services for the victim, such as counselling, psychological care, and social assistance through child welfare programs, then it may protect the children and help them to recover.

h) Legal Loopholes in Child Protection Laws in Bangladesh:

Although Bangladesh has laws to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, several legal loopholes weaken their impact in practice. One major problem is the slow pace of investigation and trial, which can leave cases unresolved for a long time and worsen the trauma of victims. Much research on child rape in Bangladesh highlights that despite laws prescribing severe punishment, the justice system has not prevented abuse effectively due to these procedural delays and systemic weaknesses. Another significant gap is the lack of child-friendly procedures during police questioning and court hearings. Many victims face repeated or insensitive questioning without proper support, which discourages reporting. This absence of effective child protection mechanisms at the ground level hinders justice and protection for children.³⁷

Loopholes in enforcement also occur because of limited coordination among authorities, resource shortages, and insufficient training for law enforcement officials. Besides these, the societal stigma and weak support for reporting sexual abuse often allow offenders to escape accountability. Studies of child protection networks in Bangladesh note that although structures are legally required, these often do not function properly or lack active child representatives, reducing the effectiveness of protection systems.³⁸ Raising public awareness is also crucial. Awareness campaigns and education programs can reduce stigma, encourage reporting of abuse, and make communities more supportive of victims. Training police officers, prosecutors, and judges on handling child abuse cases can also improve the quality of legal responses.³⁹ So, to prevent this problem, the government should strengthen legal definitions, close gaps or ambiguities in statutes, and monitor compliance with child protection laws.

³⁶ MA Uddin, 'Impediments to the Enforcement of Child Protection Laws in Bangladesh: Legal Framework Gaps and Reform Approaches' (2025) 6(1) *Jus Corpus Law Journal* 403 juscopus.com.

³⁷ MT Mia and others, 'An Analysis of Regulatory Framework of Child Protection in Bangladesh' (2022) 8(1) *Journal of Asian and African Social Science and Humanities* 44 aarcetre.com.

³⁸ MR Islam and MII Towhid, 'Factors Contributing to Online Child Sexual Abuse in Bangladesh: A Qualitative Inquiry' (2023) 12 *F1000 Research* 1364.

³⁹ MII Towhid, R Nuzhat and MA Haque, 'Protecting Children from Online Sexual Abuse in Bangladesh: A Policy Brief' (2023) 16(2) *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Journal* 111 doi.org.

5. Cause analysis:

a) Generalizing child rape and family irresponsibility:

Most of the families are not that careful about security in the domestic environment for a child. Children have the right to be brought up in safe environments. This right is often infringed upon by people who are supposed to provide love, care, and protection to children. The home is the most common place where incidents of child sexual abuse occur. Literature and various finalized court cases reveal that children have been, and continue to be sexually abused by the very same people, who are inter alia uncles, biological fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, and brothers. A study emphasizes that “The act of rape by itself is heinous, but it is more dreadful when a person the child is expected to run to is the one who betrays the trust by breaking her right to dignity in the privacy of their home”.

b) Culture of silence and non-implementation of penalty:

In Bangladesh, the offenders often avoid punishment due to social, political, and monetary influence. Also, the weak infrastructure of law implementation institutions, loopholes in law implementation, unnecessarily delay in investigation create an assumption that crime can be committed without serious consequences.

c) Access to the Internet and Problems of Pornography Addiction:

The rapid development of internet services and digital technologies has resulted in several challenges in ensuring that children are not exploited sexually. The ease of accessing pornography and other explicit content on the internet, which is not well-regulated, may result in a biased perception of sexuality and consent for some people. In some cases, exposure to aggressive and exploitative sexual content may influence a person to engage in violent sex, which may eventually result in several sexual offenses against vulnerable groups such as children. The internet is also used to share SABML and to engage in interactions with potential victims of exploitation using social media platforms. This way, a lack of effective regulations and digital literacy may indirectly influence the rise of child sexual exploitation cases.⁴⁰

d) Lack of awareness related to sexual education and fear of identity disclosure:

The lack of knowledge about sexual education and the idea of autonomy in children is one of the major factors that contribute to child abuse. In most communities around the world, it is considered socially unacceptable to discuss sexual issues. This makes it difficult for children and parents to access relevant knowledge about child safety and how to identify child abuse. This means that children may not be aware that they are being abused or may not have knowledge of how to report such cases. In addition, victims and

⁴⁰ Fabian M Saleh, *Sex Offenders: Identification, Risk Assessment, Treatment, and Legal Issues* (Oxford University Press 2009).

parents may feel apprehensive and fear social stigmatization and exposure of their identities. This fear of exposure makes people not report cases of child abuse, and abusers escape unpunished. Therefore, the lack of knowledge about sexual education is one of the major factors that contribute to child abuse.⁴¹

e) Systemic Investigative Flaws:

The police investigation is often faulty, and there are considerable delays in presenting the charge sheets, which is a major impediment in securing convictions.⁴²

f) Victim Blaming & Lack of Support:

The phenomenon of victim-blaming in cases of rape has become entrenched in the culture of contemporary society. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding a rape incident, victims are often subjected to blame. Consequently, victims may internalise this blame, leading them to perceive themselves as responsible for the assault and, thus, worthy of condemnation. This pervasive mindset can result in victims viewing themselves as burdensome, guilty, or even deserving of their plight, particularly in instances of child rape.⁴³ The underprivileged do not have the financial and social wherewithal to engage in a long-drawn-out legal battle. Moreover, victim-blaming is also a major cause of victim suffering instead of being protected.

6. Consequences of Child Rape and Sexual Abuse:

Child rape and sexual abuse have profound and long-lasting consequences that extend far beyond the immediate act of violence. The impact of such abuse affects not only the physical well-being of the child but also their psychological, emotional, and social development. These consequences often persist throughout the victim's life, shaping their mental health, education, relationships, and overall sense of security. The following points highlight some of the major consequences experienced by victims of child rape and sexual abuse.

a. Severe Psychological Trauma:

Child rape and sexual abuse often lead to profound psychological trauma that may persist throughout the victim's life. Survivors of child rape and sexual abuse often experience depression, anxiety, chronic fear, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It can also make the victims feel ashamed, guilty, and emotionally insecure. This can really hurt their stability and mental well-being and it can stay with them even when they

⁴¹ Sau Nguyen Thi Ut and Hoi Huynh Tan, 'Consequences of Neglecting Sex Education in Families and Schools' in *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Education Technology and Computers (ICETC '20, ACM 2021)* 230 doi.org.

⁴² Office of Justice Programs, 'Child Sexual Abuse: Investigative Problems' ojp.gov accessed 11 March 2026.

⁴³ Subrata Banarjee and Lucky Akter, 'Child Rape against Girl Children and Its Impacts on Survivors and Their Families in Selected Rural Areas of Bangladesh' (2026) 183 *Children and Youth Services Review* 108821.

are adults.⁴⁴

b. Disruption of Emotional Development and Loss of Trust:

When children are sexually abused, it can deeply affect their psychological development. Children who are the victims of child rape and sexual abuse often have trouble trusting people especially if the person who hurt them is someone they know. After that, survivors may fear developing any relationships with others, which may hinder their ability to develop stable social relationships later in life.⁴⁵

c. Physical Injuries and Reproductive Health Risks:

Child rape can cause serious physical injuries and long-term health complications. Due to their physical vulnerability, children may suffer reproductive health problems and exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In certain circumstances, victims may also face unwanted pregnancy, which intensifies both the physical and psychological burden on the child.⁴⁶

d. Social Stigma and Victim Blaming:

In most of the communities, victims of child rape and sexual abuse are treated poorly and blamed for what happened instead of being supported and helped. Families may be afraid of being judged by others, which can stop them from reporting what happened to the authorities. This can make it even harder for victims of child rape and sexual abuse to get the help they need.⁴⁷

e. Secondary Victimization within the Justice System:

The legal system is supposed to help victims of child rape and sexual abuse. But sometimes it can make things worse. During investigations and trials, victims may be subjected to repeated questioning, insensitive treatment, and a lack of child-friendly mechanisms, which can intensify psychological suffering and discourage victims from seeking legal remedies.

f. Threat to Social Stability and Human Rights Protection:

The prevalence of child rape undermines the fundamental human rights, dignity, and safety of children.

⁴⁴ David Finkelhor and Angela Browne, 'The Traumatic Impact of Child Sexual Abuse: A Conceptualization' (1985) 55(4) *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 530; Gail Hornor, 'Child Sexual Abuse: Consequences and Implications' (2010) 24(6) *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 358.

⁴⁵ Susan Clancy, *The Trauma Myth: The Truth about the Sexual Abuse of Children* (Harvard University Press 2009); Kathleen A Kendall-Tackett, Linda M Williams and David Finkelhor, 'Impact of Sexual Abuse on Children: A Review and Synthesis of Recent Empirical Studies' (1993) 113(1) *Psychological Bulletin* 164.

⁴⁶ Cathy Spatz Widom and Sally J Czaja, 'A Prospective Investigation of Physical Health Outcomes in Abused and Neglected Children' (2009) 33(8) *Child Abuse & Neglect* 541; World Health Organization, *Responding to Children and Adolescents Who Have Been Sexually Abused: WHO Clinical Guidelines* (WHO 2017) who.int accessed 8 March 2026.

⁴⁷ Rebecca Campbell, 'The Psychological Impact of Rape Victims' Experiences with the Legal, Medical, and Mental Health Systems' (2008) 63(8) *American Psychologist* 702; UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence Against Children* (UNICEF 2014) unicef.org accessed 8 March 2026.

Failure to address these crimes effectively may weaken social stability and broader human rights protections.⁴⁸

7. Suggestions and Policy Recommendations:

To address the growing problem of child rape and sexual abuse in Bangladesh, a comprehensive and coordinated effort from the state, legal institutions, and society as a whole is necessary. While legal frameworks exist to protect children, their effective implementation and the development of child-sensitive mechanisms remain crucial. The following recommendations highlight several practical measures that can strengthen legal accountability, protect victims, and help to prevent child sexual abuse in Bangladesh.

a. Strengthening the Enforcement of Existing Laws:

Although Bangladesh has enacted several legal instruments to combat sexual violence against children, the effectiveness of these laws largely depends on proper implementation. Authorities should ensure strict enforcement of existing legislation, including the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, and the Children Act, 2013. Besides these, strong monitoring mechanisms, accountability of law-enforcement agencies, and effective prosecution of offenders are necessary to ensure that perpetrators are punished without delay.⁴⁹

b. Establishing Child-Friendly Investigation and Judicial Procedures:

The judicial process should be restructured to make it more sensitive to the needs of child victims. Specialized child-friendly police units, trained investigators, and dedicated court procedures should be introduced to ensure that victims are treated with dignity and respect. The use of in-camera hearings, video testimony, and specially trained professionals can reduce the psychological pressure experienced by children during legal proceedings.⁵⁰

c. Ensuring Speedy and Effective Trial Mechanisms:

One of the most common problems in this field is the delay in delivering proper justice. This delayed justice often discourages the victims and their families from pursuing legal remedies. Therefore, the government should strengthen special tribunals and fast-track judicial mechanisms to ensure the timely resolution of child rape cases. Speedy trials not only provide justice to victims but also serve as a deterrent against potential

⁴⁸ World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children 2020* (WHO 2020) [who.int](https://www.who.int) accessed 8 March 2026; UNICEF, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents* (UNICEF 2017) [unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org) accessed 8 March 2026.

⁴⁹ UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, *Child Protection Systems in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Responsibilities of the State* (UNICEF 2019) [unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org) accessed 5 July 2026.

⁵⁰ Laura S Abrams, 'Child-Centered Justice: Forensic Interviewing and Courtroom Practices for Child Victims' (2018) *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* [doi.org](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-018-9311-1) accessed 5 July 2026.

offenders.⁵¹

d. Expanding Comprehensive Victim Support Services:

Child victims require extensive medical, psychological, and social support to recover from the trauma of abuse. The government and relevant institutions should establish integrated support centers that provide counselling, healthcare, legal assistance, and rehabilitation services. Access to trained psychologists and social workers is essential to support the victims throughout the recovery process.⁵²

e. Introducing Age-Appropriate Sexual Education:

In most societies, children lack basic knowledge about personal safety and bodily autonomy. Introducing age-appropriate sexual and safety education in schools can help children to understand their rights, and also help them to seek help when necessary. Such education should focus on building confidence and awareness rather than creating fear or stigma.⁵³

f. Strengthening Institutional Capacity:

Law-enforcement agencies, judicial officers, and social service providers should receive specialized training on handling cases of child sexual abuse. Besides this, capacity-building initiatives can improve investigation techniques, evidence collection, and victim-sensitive procedures. Strengthening institutional capacity is also essential for ensuring an effective and responsive child protection system.⁵⁴

g. Encouraging Community Participation in Child Protection:

Communities play a critical role in preventing and addressing child abuse. Local institutions, civil society organizations, and community leaders should be actively involved in child protection initiatives. Community-based monitoring and reporting mechanisms can also help to identify risks and prevent abuse before it occurs.⁵⁵

h. Promoting a Culture of Zero Tolerance toward Sexual Violence:

Ultimately, preventing child rape requires a broader transformation of societal attitudes. A strong culture of zero tolerance toward sexual violence must be promoted through legal reforms, education, media engagement, and community awareness. Protecting children's rights, dignity, and safety should remain a

⁵¹ David Finkelhor, *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research* (The Free Press 1984).

⁵² Rebecca L Can't, 'Using a Public Health Approach to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse by Targeting Those at Risk of Harming Children' (2022) 5 International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice.

⁵³ Milosavljević and others, 'Effects of School-Based Sexuality Education on Children's Knowledge and Attitudes: A Meta-Analysis' (2017) Journal of Adolescent Health doi.org accessed 5 July 2026.

⁵⁴ Susan K Martin, *The ETS Issues Brief: Training Law Enforcement to Respond to Child Sexual Abuse* (Educational Testing Service 2019) ets.org accessed 5 July 2026.

⁵⁵ Public Health England, *Child Sexual Exploitation: How Public Health Can Support Prevention and Intervention* (PHE 2017) www.gov.uk accessed 5 July 2026.

fundamental priority for the state and society.⁵⁶

8. Discussion and Implications:

This study underscores a deeply concerning escalation of child rape and sexual abuse in Bangladesh, revealing both individual and systemic vulnerabilities. Child sexual abuse in the country is not merely a legal violation but a profound societal and human rights crisis, fueled by cultural norms, institutional inefficiencies, and social stigma. The findings demonstrate that perpetrators often exploit familial, educational, or community relationships, while systemic weaknesses in law enforcement and judicial processes perpetuate a culture of impunity.⁵⁷

Child sexual abuse in Bangladesh has escalated into a deeply concerning societal issue, exposing both systemic and individual vulnerabilities. Despite the existence of protective legislation, such as the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, and the Children Act, 2013, enforcement gaps remain significant. Delays in investigations, inadequate protection of victims and witnesses, and procedural insensitivity frequently result in ineffective prosecution and secondary victimization. These institutional failures not only fail to deter offenders but also reduce public confidence in the justice system, discouraging reporting and reinforcing societal tolerance of abuse.⁵⁸

Cultural and social factors also compound these challenges. Patriarchal norms and pervasive stigma around sexual abuse intensify the trauma experienced by survivors. Victim-blaming attitudes, societal silence, and the marginalization of children, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, create environments of social isolation, family stress, and community discrimination.⁵⁹ This societal response deepens psychological harm, discourages disclosure, and contributes to cycles of abuse. The psychological and emotional consequences for survivors are severe and long-lasting. Child sexual abuse is associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, guilt, and emotional insecurity. Survivors often struggle with trust, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance, while repeated interrogations and insensitive treatment by authorities exacerbate these impacts. Evidence from longitudinal studies emphasizes the urgent need for trauma-informed interventions and psychosocial support mechanisms to aid recovery.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Council of Europe, *Protecting Children from Sexual Violence: A Comprehensive Approach* (Council of Europe 2011) coe.int accessed 5 July 2026.

⁵⁷ Monira Nazmi Jahan, 'Analyzing Child Rape in Bangladesh: A Socio-Legal Perspective' (2020) *International Annals of Criminology*.

⁵⁸ Afrida Nawar Evana and MM Enamul Aziz, 'Child Sexual Abuse and Effects of the Trauma in Adulthood: A Qualitative Study via Contemporary Sociological and Psychological Research on the Stigma around Childhood Sexual Abuse' (2023) 9(9) *Social Science and Humanities Journal* doi.org accessed 5 July 2026.

⁵⁹ Jacques-Etienne and Briere, 'Examining the Short and Long-Term Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse: A Review Study' (2024) *SN Social Sciences*.

⁶⁰ Arun Kumar Singh and others, 'Justice for the Voiceless: Evaluating the Efficacy of Criminal Justice Mechanisms in Combating Child Sexual Abuse' (2025) 6(1) *Journal of International Commercial Law and Technology*.

This study highlights the urgent need for trauma-informed and victim-sensitive justice and support systems to prevent re-traumatization and uphold the rights of rape survivors. Law enforcement agencies should establish mandatory gender-sensitive and trauma-informed protocols for handling sexual assault cases, while expanding victim support centers nationwide to provide safe shelters and comprehensive care. The judiciary and prosecution can create dedicated sexual offence dockets with clearly defined timelines to ensure prompt and fair trials. Strict implementation of the Evidence Act 1872 (by the 2022 amendment) is essential to safeguard the privacy and security of victims throughout legal proceedings. Alongside legal and institutional measures, psychological interventions, including family group counseling, mindfulness-based therapies, and community-based support, can mitigate the long-term emotional and psychological harm experienced by survivors. Mass media campaigns and educational initiatives can raise awareness about secondary victimization, while local leaders such as imams, teachers, and Union Parishad members can be trained to provide psychological support at the community level.⁶¹ Ultimately, comprehensive and coordinated efforts by all stakeholders, law enforcement, judicial authorities, healthcare professionals, civil society, and the broader community are critical to effectively prevent and respond to secondary victimization, ensuring that survivors receive the protection, justice, and dignity they deserve.

9. Conclusion:

Bangladesh and its children are seriously susceptible to rape and abuse. Further exacerbated by weaknesses in legal enforcement and persistent social stigma. Although laws are available to protect children, the situation becomes more difficult because of weak law enforcement, delays in investigations and trials, and a lack of proper support for victims. Survivors may suffer from fear, sadness, guilt, loneliness, and other emotional problems for a long time. To protect children, it is important to ensure quick legal action, child-friendly treatment by authorities, proper counseling, and strong support services for victims. At the same time, victim-blaming and social stigma should be alleviated. Community participation is needed to create a safer environment for children. Comprehensive coordination among law enforcement, judiciary, mental health professionals, and civil society is vital to safeguard children's rights, well-being, and access to justice. Ultimately, the prevention of child rape and the mitigation of secondary victimization in Bangladesh demand both systemic legal enforcement and broader societal transformation. Protecting children's physical and psychological well-being, ensuring access to justice, and promoting accountability are critical not only to heal survivors but also to foster a society where children can grow safely and with dignity. Without comprehensive interventions that integrate legal, social, and educational measures, these crimes will continue

⁶¹ Akinyemi and others, 'The Long-Term Impact of Childhood Sexual Assault on Depression and Self-Reported Mental and Physical Health' (2024) *Frontiers in Psychiatry* frontiersin.org accessed 5 July 2026.

to threaten the future of vulnerable children and undermine the moral and legal fabric of the nation

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