Original Article

Study on Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Alleged Sexual Assault Cases in Rajshahi District in 2020

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Abstract

Introduction: Rape is a neglected public health issue in Bangladesh. Here, the incidence of rape is reported almost every day. However, this study was designed to analyze and explore the statistics of alleged rape cases in the Rajshahi district in 2020.

Materials and Methods: This cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted in the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology (DFMT), Rajshahi Medical College (RMC), Rajshahi, Bangladesh, from January 2020 to December 2020. A total of 101 study subjects were included in this study. The data were collected from the alleged rape victims who were sent to the DFMT for medico-legal examination. Informed written consent was signed, and a thumb impression was taken by the victim with her legal guardian when the apparent age of the victim was under 12 years status before data collection. This study explores age, marital status, the pattern of assailants, place of occurrence, religion, opinion based on a physical or genital examination, and corresponding police station with another expert investigative organization such as the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) of Rajshahi district.

Results: Most of the victims were under 20 years old. Among all victims, 46.53% were unmarried, and 42.57% were married. In maximum cases, the victims were sexually assaulted by the known assailants. Almost two-thirds of alleged rapes occurred in the victim's house and the nearby place of the victim's house. Only 11.88% of victims were examined with positive signs regarding sexual intercourse. Maximum victims (98.02%) were Muslim. Rape cases were frequent in Godagari, Belpukur, and Chndrima police stations.

Conclusion: The findings of this study may work as baseline information and would be constructive in raising social awareness.

Keywords: Rape, place of occurrence, victim, assailant.

Introduction

The term 'rape' is generated from the Latin word 'rapio,' which means to seize.[1] Therefore, rape literally means forceful seizure.[2] Rape has been defined as the illegal sexual intercourse by a male with a female without her permission, against her will, or with her consent achieved by force, fear, or fraud, or with any female with or without her permission, or under sixteen years old.[3,4] The Bangladesh Penal Code 375 (BPC-375) identified

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six different aspects associated with rape.[3,4,5] The incidence of rape is increasing at an alarming rate. Around 14,718 rape cases were reported from 2001 to 2019 in Bangladesh.[6] In 2020, 13-rape cases per day were reported in the first four-month, and the number increased in later months.[7] At the end of 2020, 1627 rape cases were reported.[7] In Bangladesh, according to the statistics of police stations, rape is the second most frequently reported form of violence against women, following harassment associated with the dowry.[5,8] The usual punishment for rape is imprisonment either for life or for ten years with a fine.[4] Female of any age are experiencing sexual assault like rape. Children are the common victims of this unwanted incident because of their less resistance.[1] Rape affects almost every aspect of women's quality of life, including reproductive health, mental health, and behavioral health.[5,7,9]

In many cases, failure to find positive physical signs is not possible in the alleged rape. It is believed that rape can arise without any injury.[1] The doctors are responsible for mentioning only the negative facts but can not offer their opinion that rape has not occurred. Substantiation of eye witness or incidental proof is compulsory in such a situation.[10]

In Bangladesh, rape cases usually are ignored due to their socio-cultural values.[11] It has a profound impact on the social aspect of individuals, law enforcement authority, and community health.[11] The daily newspapers occasionally publish news of rape incidences, but the maximum cases are settled through negotiation either by force or by compensation.[11]

However, Rajshahi is one of the major districts in Bangladesh. However, there is a lack of statistics regarding the alleged rape cases in this district. Therefore, this study was designed to analyze and explore the statistics of the alleged rape cases in the Rajshahi district in 2020.

Materials and Methods

This study was carried out in the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology (DFMT), Rajshahi Medical College (RMC), Rajshahi. In 2020, a total of 465 alleged rape case victims were examined in DFMT, RMC. Here, we are presenting only the data on sexual assaults that occurred and were reported in the area of the police stations of Rajshahi district in 2020. However, a total of 101 sexually assaulted victims from different police stations in Rajshahi district were reported to the DFMT of RMC for medico-legal examination. Examination of all victims was carried out by the expert doctors of DFMT. Details about age, marital status, the pattern of assailants, place of occurrence, religion, and opinion based on physical or genital examination were noted. Data were collected in a structured sheet from the record book of DFMT, RMC. Before the medical examination, informed written consent and thumb impression was taken from all victims with their legal guardians when their age remained under 12 years before examination.

Results

According to the data (Table I), all of the victims were within 40 years old. Maximum victims (55.44%) were between 11 and 20 years old. 27.72% and 13.86% were 21 to 30 and 31 to 40 years old, respectively. The lowest number of cases (2.97%) was observed among those within ten years old.

Among 101 victims, 46.53% were unmarried, 42.57% were married, 9.90% were divorced, and the rest (0.99%) were widowed (Table II). Only 6.93% of assailants were unknown to the victims. The known assailants (93.07%) included acquaintance (64.36%), neighbor (10.89%), relatives (6.93%), friends (5.94%), ex-spouse (0.99%), and teacher (3.96%). Maximum rape cases (35.64%) have occurred in the victim's house. The percentage of rape cases that occurred in a nearby place of the victim's house (25.74%) and a relative's house (2.76%) were remarkable. According to the expert opinion, positive signs regarding sexual intercourse were found only in 11.88% of victims.

We found that 99 (98.02%) victims were Muslim and only 2 (1.98%) were of other religions (Figure I).

The maximum alleged rape cases (13.86%) were from the region of Godagari police station. The second-largest percentage (9.90%) was recorded in Belpukur and Chandrima. 8.91% of cases were from the Boalia region. Puthia and Rajpara police stations contributed 7.92% separately. 5.94% of cases were observed both in Baghmara and Charghat areas. Durgapur and Motihar regions shared an equal percentage (4.95%). Bagha and Paba contributed 3.96%, individually. We found 2.97% of cases in both Damkura and Kashiadanga police station areas. Karnahar, Shahmakhdum, and Tanore shared 1.98% each. The lowest percentage (0.99%) was observed in the Mahanpur region. The Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) also handled a case (0.99%) that was from the Kajla region. No case was recorded in the Airport, Katakhali, and Railway police station areas.

Tables and Figures

Table I: Age group of victims (N = 101)

Age groups in years	Frequency	Percentage
0-10	3	2.97
11-20	56	55.44
21-30	28	27.72
31-40	14	13.86

Table II: Frequency of studied variables (N = 101)

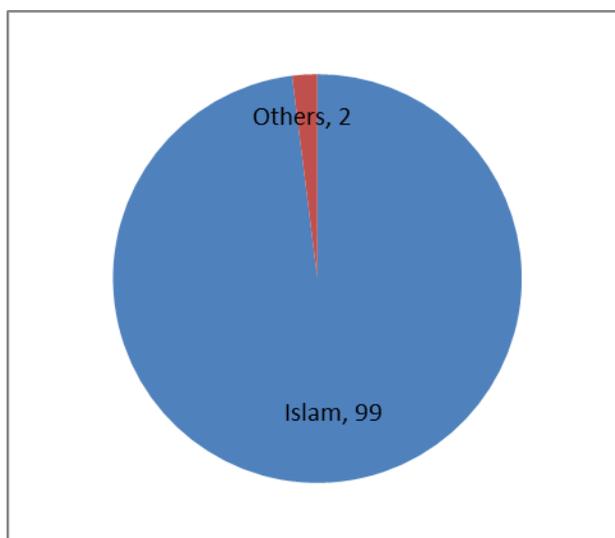|		Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Marital status		Unmarried	47	46.53
		Married	43	42.57
		Divorced	10	9.90
		Widow	1	0.99
Pattern of assailants	Known	Acquaintance	65	64.36
		Neighbor	11	10.89
		Relatives	7	6.93
		Friends	6	5.94
		Ex-spouse	1	0.99
		Teacher	4	3.96
	Unknown	Stranger	3	2.97
		Others	4	3.96
Place of occurrence		Victim's house	36	35.64
		Nearby place of victim's house	26	25.74
		Relative's house	24	23.76
		Education/working place	3	2.97
		Other places	12	11.88
Opinion		Negative	89	88.12
		Positive	12	11.88

Figure I: Distribution of the victims according to the religion

Table III: Distribution of cases according to the police station and other investigative organizations

Police station/organization	Frequency	Percentage
Airport	0	0
Bagha	4	3.96
Baghmara	6	5.94
Belpukur	10	9.90
Boalia	9	8.91
Chandrima	10	9.90
Charghat	6	5.94
Damkura	3	2.97
Durgapur	5	4.95
Godagari	14	13.86
Karnahar	2	1.98
Kashiadanga	3	2.97
Katakhali	0	0
Mohonpur	1	0.99
Motihar	5	4.95
Paba	4	3.96
Puthia	8	7.92
Rajpara	8	7.92
Railway	0	0
Shahmakhdum	2	1.98
Tanore	2	1.98
PBI	1	0.99

Discussion

Sexual assault is a neglected public health issue in most developing countries, and there is likely to be an even smaller percentage reporting sexual assault (Martin, 2002).[12] It is well known that young females are more prone to be assaulted sexually. In this study, we found that all the victims were under 40 years old, and the majority of the victims were between 11 and 20 years old. A similar finding was also observed in Dhaka[4] and Faridpur[5]. Al-Azad et al. (2011) analyzed the alleged rape cases of 2006 in Dhaka city.[4] Ali et al. (2015) presented data from 2007 to 2011 of Faridpur.[5]

According to the result, 93.07% of assailants were known to the victims. Indeed, this result is consistent with prior studies conducted in Dhaka[4,13] and in Faridpur,[5,14] but the percentage is too high compared to those. The known assailants comprise of acquaintance, neighbor, relative, friend, ex-spouse, and teacher.

We did not find signs in favor of sexual intercourse in the maximum cases (88.12%). This finding is consistent with previous studies.[5,14,15] Hossain et al. (2009) observed 70% of cases without any signs of sexual intercourse.[14] Ali et al. (2015) found 72.40% of cases to be negative.[5] According to Sarker et al. (2005), in South Delhi of India, 5.5% of alleged rape cases were detected as positive having sperm in the vagina.[15] Again, Bose et al. (2017) did not find the existence of sperm in the genitalia of any victims in Dhaka, Bangladesh.[1] However, the negative outcomes are usually due to washing the genitalia after an incident, in case of married or knowledge of sexually experienced women, and in cases where the victims could not restrain.[3,5] However, the existence of sperm in the vagina is not always indicative to rape; similarly, absence of sperm in the vagina does not mean rape has not occurred.[5] Again, the result of negative evidence does not exclude rape, and positive evidence does not always confirm rape.[5]

The majority (98.02%) of the victims were Muslim by religion. This is acceptable because Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country.

However, according to the analysis, the maximum alleged rape cases (13.86%) were from the Godagari police station area. The frequency of the alleged rape cases was found to be second in Belpukur and Chandrima. Boalia police station was third in terms of the number of alleged rape cases. The lowest percentage (0.99%) was observed in Mohonpur. However, rape cases were reported in almost all police stations except the Airport, Katakhali, and Railway police station areas.

Conclusion

To our knowledge, this is the first study focusing on the region where the alleged rape cases have occurred in the Rajshahi district. The corresponding social workers may consider this study the baseline information and will take proper initiative to stop or minimize rape-like heinous incidence in Rajshahi.

Conflict of interest: None declared.

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